

Muskegon area casino takes ‘significant step forward’ toward approval

Written by Administrator

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MUSKEGON COUNTY, MI -- Plans for a new casino in Muskegon County have taken what tribal leaders call an “incredible step forward” as the federal government is soon expected to publish a document critical to the project.

Leaders with the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians on Thursday, Oct. 22 said the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs is expected to publish a final environmental impact statement on Friday.

The document will be open for public comment for 30 days, followed by a federal ‘record of decision’ sometime after that.

“This is an incredible step forward in our process to build the Muskegon County Casino Project,” said Larry Romanelli, chief of Ogema of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians (LRBOI).

The move by the Bureau of Indian Affairs is important because the agency reviewed four alternatives to the LRBOI’s full project, but selected the full project as the preferred alternative.

The other options include a reduced intensity alternative, a non-gaming alternative, a Custer site alternative, and a no action/no development alternative.

The LRBOI began working in 2008 on plans for a new casino in Fruitport Township. The location is the former Great Lakes Downs horse racing track.

Planned for the intersection of U.S. 31 and I-96 on more than 60 acres, the casino would include about 69,000 square feet of gaming floor space with 1,700 slot machines and 35 table games, a 220-room hotel, conference and meeting room space, and dining and entertainment options.

According to the LRBOI, the project would create 1,500 new jobs directly related to the casino.

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Tribal leaders project another 1,500 jobs would be created in construction and ancillary jobs.

If the LRBOI receives a favorable decision following the public comment period, the project would still need further approvals.

Those include a federal ruling that the project “would be in the best interest of the Tribe and its members and is not detrimental to the surrounding community,” then a decision by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on the proposal, followed by a final federal decision to transfer the physical property into “trust” status.

The final environmental impact statement will be available for review at the Fruitport Public Library located at 605 Eclipse Blvd, Fruitport, and online at www.littlerivereis.com.

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