

Norfolk casino to be the catalyst for citywide transformation

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 10 November 2020 04:30 -

Last week voters in four Virginia cities elected to approve a new era of gaming for the state, as a number of referendums were passed to ensure the construction of a series of multimillion dollar casino resorts.

Previously lauded as a win for the city, commonwealth and community, the \$500m **Norfolk Resort & Casino**

is to become a reality after voters gave the go-ahead to the project by an approximate 2:1 margin.

The decision to allow casino gaming was also made in Danville, Bristol and Portsmouth, with operating partners on those developments to be **Caesars Entertainment, Hard Rock International** and **Rush Street Gaming**, respectively.

Following the culmination of the referendum, [CasinoBeats](#) once again caught up with **Jay Smith, spokesperson for the Norfolk Resort & Casino**, who summed up the feeling in the camp during the weeks and months leading up to the crucial vote: “The Pamunkey Tribe’s team has been working around the clock to make sure every voter in Norfolk knows the benefits of this project.

“COVID-19 certainly altered what we thought our referendum campaign would look like, but we held virtual meetings with civic leagues, business organisations and other groups to share details about the project and answer their questions.

“Once early voting began a few weeks ago, we started to get a true sense of the level of excitement for the project. Our polling station volunteers would report back the level of support they were seeing from voters each day and that kept us motivated.”

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Like any such referendum, however, it was not a foregone conclusion that things would go the way of the Pamunkey Indian Tribe, selected as preferred developer in Norfolk.

“There were several indicators leading up to Election Day that told us that we were on a path to winning a majority of the vote,” Smith continues when addressing confidence leading up to the referendum as well as feelings when it became clear what the result was to be.

“The positive responses on our social media channels, the feedback from people as they participated in early voting for the weeks leading up to Election Day, the responses to our digital ads and the number of people reaching out to us to request yard signs and bumper stickers were all signs that people were embracing the [Norfolk Resort & Casino](#) and what it could mean for their city.

“But like any good campaign, we kept running until the last polling station closed on Election Night. As soon as we started getting vote counts from a handful of precincts, we knew we had won.

“What’s most exciting about this win, is that it was by such a large margin and the fact that support was widespread across the entire city. Not only did we win with a 2:1 margin, we won 45 of the 48 precincts.”

With the green-light secured, attention now turns to obtaining the necessary permits from the city and announcing the construction team. As projections stipulate that construction is expected to create 2,000 jobs, with approximately 2,500 permanent more expected once operations begin, what exactly will the casino resort itself include?

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“The Norfolk Resort & Casino will be built on the north bank of the Elizabeth River next to Harbor Park – home to the Norfolk Tide baseball team,” Smith continues.

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“Planned amenities of the \$500m resort include a four-diamond 300-room full-service hotel, a high-end steak and seafood restaurant, sports bar and grill, café, as well as 5-7 other dining options. Other features will include a luxurious spa and pool and an entertainment venue.”

The Pamunkey Indian Tribe, whose ancestors lived, farmed and hunted across much of central and eastern Virginia for much of its 10,000-year history, is striving to transform Norfolk’s riverfront and serve as a catalyst for economic growth.

In addition to the aforementioned employment figures, \$850m in total economic impact is expected annually for the Commonwealth, with \$100m in annual employee earnings to be derived, visitors number to reach 6.2 millions per year and \$92m in goods and services purchased annually.

Furthermore, a minority outreach and hiring plan has also been rolled-out, which sees the tribe set a goal of having 90 per cent of the resort and casino’s workforce be residents of Norfolk or surrounding localities, and 50 per cent from minority groups.

Smith examined what the projects means to the city of Norfolk, as well as what the long-term benefits are envisaged to be: “This project represents opportunity for Norfolk and its citizens,” he says. “First, the location of the casino is in an area of the city that is ready for redevelopment. It is currently a vacant lot that the city has wanted to have developed.

“...this is going to be a boost to the entire region”

“This will help continue to transform that riverfront area and serve as a catalyst for economic growth for the city and the region. The estimated 2,500 jobs will make it Norfolk’s fourth largest private employer.

“It will provide more than \$30m annually in new city revenue that can be used to support schools, neighbourhoods, streets, housing and other core local services.

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“It will mean an opportunity for other area businesses to take advantage of the more than six million people that will visit the casino and then venture out to see what else Norfolk has to offer.”

To conclude, Smith acknowledged the other aforementioned projects given the nod elsewhere in Virginia, in addition to looking at how the project will transform the region: “Voters approved four casinos across Virginia, with the potential for a fifth casino in Richmond if approved by voters in that city next year.

“While casinos are something new to Virginia, I don’t anticipate the Norfolk Resort & Casino to fundamentally change the feel of Norfolk.

“Norfolk has a diverse economy, a thriving tourism industry and a strong military presence. Those attributes which make Norfolk a great place to live and visit will remain. But make no mistake, the new casino will add to that excitement and provide the city with a new source of tax revenue that they can use to further strengthen the city.

“With the additional infusion of new visitors to the region, the creation of 2,500 new jobs and the estimated \$850m in total economic impact annually for Virginia, this is going to be a boost to the entire region. And I believe the other casinos that were approved will have similar positive effects in their regions.”

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