

## Chicago casino: Where will it go? Handicapping possible sites

Written by Administrator

Monday, 18 January 2021 06:30 -

---

Chicago's business and government leaders have a lot on their plates, but there's an impertinent pertinent question to ask them.

What are you going to do about a casino?

It seems like a long-term issue, but the city and state need money fast and sportsbooks are the new frenzy. Planning and construction take time, so it behooves everyone to work on this pronto. The first order of business is picking a site.

Where, oh where, to put this thing, a singular destination that depending on the execution can abet or degrade everything around it? It's a topic batted around for years before the city got authorization to have a downtown casino. For guidance, it helps to review the answers casino operators and developers gave the city when it issued a "request for information," basically a call for ideas, last year.

The respondents, according to the city's summary, strongly favored putting it in or near downtown. They wanted generous space, maybe 10 to 25 acres, with room for parking, a hotel, entertainment and whatnot. They wanted it easy to get to and close to everything the city can offer post-pandemic.

There aren't a lot of fitting, centrally located spots but there are options. Here are a few; see which way you think the wind will blow.

**THE BOX-CHECKER:** Lakeside Center at McCormick Place. Little used even before the pandemic knocked conventions flat, it has the cavernous, dark floor space casinos covet, plus parking, hotels next door, a lakefront setting and it's already built. The cons: Little interaction with downtown crowds and the convention trade here has always thought slot machines would be a distraction. A spokeswoman for the agency that runs McCormick Place said it has had no recent discussions about a casino.

## Chicago casino: Where will it go? Handicapping possible sites

Written by Administrator

Monday, 18 January 2021 06:30 -

---

**THE BLANK SLATE:** It's The 78 in the South Loop, 62 open acres running southwest from Roosevelt Road and Clark Street and ready for all the money magnets you can cram there. "This is clearly the site that would make the most revenue for the city and the state," one source said. "You can build a product there that's interesting and cool." It's got highway access. But the developers have a deal with the University of Illinois to put a tech research center there. Will quants take a study break to count cards?

**THE CURIOSITY:** The Chicago Tribune's Freedom Center printing plant at 777 W. Chicago Ave. encompasses 30 acres. Two developers who responded to the city, James Letchinger of JDL and Matt Garrison of R2, used the same word to describe it to me: "Interesting." Access could be improved. You could use part of it for a temporary casino while the permanent attraction is built next to it. Nexstar Media Group owns it but the Tribune has a long leasehold on the property, where it also prints the Sun-Times, and would have to be bought out.

**THE SLEEPER:** The Palmer House, in foreclosure and temporarily closed due to the pandemic. Garrison cited it when he said in an email, "We think infill sites are more interesting, that are walkable and part of the urban fabric, and would ultimately become a bigger entertainment destination because it needs to be about more than gambling."

**THE FALLBACK:** Navy Pier. The crowds and attractions are there, but access can deter the high-rollers and conventioners. Can a casino fit with what's essentially a family destination? But it's already government-owned and has the waterfront and skyline. A casino could thrive where a lot already is happening. Some insiders see it as an alternative for temporary gaming, but one source said, "There's not a lot of evidence that temporary sites work well."

**THE OUTLIERS:** There are many. The state's unwanted Thompson Center has been proposed. Too much is against it. "There would be so much irony there to put it right in the seat of government," an insider said. The old Michael Reese Hospital site has a community dead set against a casino. The One Central development planned to span the railroad tracks near Soldier Field is too far off. The Old Post Office once was a logical pick, but it's doing fine as corporate offices. Southeast Side sites have been touted but are remote from downtown and so are non-starters.

What have you got when you add it up? Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who plans to issue a call for specific casino proposals during the first quarter, will be hard-pressed to look beyond Lakeside Center. It can get started quickly, there's no fuss with private landowners and it would inject

## Chicago casino: Where will it go? Handicapping possible sites

Written by Administrator

Monday, 18 January 2021 06:30 -

---

vigor into a convention complex that might be impaired even when business revives.

As for downtown access, remember that reserved busway for ferreting conventioners between Randolph Street and McCormick Place? Rahm Emanuel called it “the Bat Cave.” It became a bypass for the connected in classic Chicago fashion. Take the clout conduit and make it a tram turnpike.



Part of the 62 acres southwest of Roosevelt Road and Clark Street slated for the development called The 78. Sun-Times file

**Read more** <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2021/1/18/22231785/chicago-casino-possible-sites-gambling-lakeside-center-navy-pier-south-loop-palmer-house>