

Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force Meeting

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 2009
MONSON TOWN OFFICE BUILDING

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 7:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Kathleen Norbut, with the following Task Force members present:

- A. 1. Attendance:
- | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Belcherown | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Gerry Grasso | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Michael Reardon |
| Brimfield | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Diane Panaccione | <input type="checkbox"/> | Carol DeNegro |
| Brookfield | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Rudy Heller | <input type="checkbox"/> | Richard R. Green |
| Hampden | <input type="checkbox"/> | John D. Flynn | <input type="checkbox"/> | Raymond P. Korny |
| Holland | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Lynn Arnold | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mike Szlosek |
| Ludlow | <input type="checkbox"/> | Darlene Cincone | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Kathleen C. Norbut |
| Monson | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Edward S. Harrison (arrived at 7:50 p.m.) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Paul Burns |
| Palmer | <input type="checkbox"/> | David E. Whitney | <input type="checkbox"/> | Steve Halterman |
| Sturbridge | <input type="checkbox"/> | Arnold Wilson | <input type="checkbox"/> | Steven Boudreau |
| Ware | <input type="checkbox"/> | William Braman | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Warren | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bob Souza | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| West Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> | David Eisenthal | <input type="checkbox"/> | Tom Long |
| Wilbraham | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | John Pearsall | <input type="checkbox"/> | Robert Weitz |

2. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Timothy W. Brennan |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | James M. Mazik |

3. Others:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Representative Brian Ashe (arrived at 7:20 p.m.) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Senator Stephen Brewer | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Jeffrey Doyle | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Douglas Farmer, Journal Register | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Peter Kaawczyk, Warren | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Leo Malley, Amherst | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Stephen Sears, Palmer | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Katie Skillman, Monson | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Wendy Skillman, Monson | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

SECTION I: MINUTES

See Section II: Discussion of March 4, 2009 minutes	<u>Motion</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Opp.</u>	<u>Abs.</u>
	D. Panaccione	G. Grasso	7	0	0

SECTION II: GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Introductions (New Members) and Approval of the Minutes of the March 4, 2009 Meeting
2. Discussion of Meeting with Senator Stan Rosenberg
3. Discussion with Senator Stephen Brewer
4. Discussion of Action Steps Regarding Continued Lack of Evidence that Local Officials/Concerns Are "at the Table"

SECTION II: GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Introductions (New Members) and Approval of the Minutes of the March 4, 2009 Meeting

Ms. Kathleen Norbut began the meeting at 7:00 p.m. since Chairman Ed Harrison would be late. Ms. Norbut then read the revised mission statement of the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force and noted that the Task Force has been meeting to discuss the issue of gaming in the region for the past 1 ½ years. The group first formed in the fall of 2007 and in the first year the Task Force reviewed the proposed legislation that Governor Patrick had submitted and reconvened in the spring. She thanked Tim Brennan, Executive Director, and Jim Mazik Deputy Director, of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, for their administrative and technical support of the Task Force's work. Ms. Norbut further stated that the Task Force consists of elected and appointed officials from member communities located in the Quaboag and Eastern Hampden County regions. Additionally, Ms. Norbut acknowledged that the State Senator Stephen Brewer was in attendance to have a dialog about the Task Force's concerns regarding gambling in the region.

Ms. Norbut then asked all meeting participants to introduce themselves. Following introductions Ms. Norbut noted that there will be some new Task Force members due to recent elections. Mr. Mazik also mentioned that the Town of Wales and the Town of Sturbridge and have been contacted regarding appointees to the Task Force. Ms. Norbut then asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the March 4, 2009 Task Force meeting. A motion was made by Diane Panaccione, seconded by Gerry Grasso to approve the minutes of the March 4, 2009 Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force meeting and the minutes were unanimously approved. However, Ms. Norbut observed afterward that the above mentioned minutes will have to be voted on again because the meeting notice was not posted in a timely fashion. She further stated that any other votes taken during the meeting will have to be revisited at the next Casino Task Force meeting.

2. Discussion of Meeting with Senator Stan Rosenberg

Mr. Norbut said that several members of the group met with Senator Stan Rosenberg in Amherst on March 20, 2009. Ms. Norbut stated that the Task Force had requested a meeting with Senator Rosenberg because he was designated by Senate President Therese Murray as the point person on the issue of extended gaming and gambling in the Commonwealth. At the meeting Mr. Rosenberg stated that he will be one of the negotiators regarding casino legislation and will try to include local impact, which Ms. Norbut observed was a positive for the Task Force since it is the mission of this group to protect its communities from all impacts resulting from casino development. Ms. Norbut noted that Mr. Brennan made a comment that a feasibility study would take at least 1 ½ years. The group also emphasized with the Senator that a feasibility study examining the pros and cons of casino gaming should take place before legislation or approval of a site, but Senator Rosenberg observed that it is unlikely that this would happen. Instead, he believed that the enabling legislation would be passed first, and then the concerns of the Task Force would need to be taken into account or that within the enabling legislation a feasibility study would be included which would specify that these studies would be funded by the local developer, not the local community.

Ms. Norbut also mentioned that the Task Force expressed concern that there were insufficient mitigation funds for the region in the Governor's bill, and Senator Rosenberg responded by saying that the Governor's current proposal had the highest level of mitigation funding that had been proposed to date. She also noted that there was a discussion on negative impacts on abutting communities on such issues as education, local business losses, and workers migrating to the region thus creating housing and infrastructure stressors. She also said that the following other impacts which were not accounted for in the previous legislation

were noted at the meeting: high turnover of workers in the industry; lack of accounting of education and law enforcement costs to local and state government; and a lack of accounting of new residents on state mandated and tax funded health insurance. Ms. Norbut also mentioned they discussed that the previous legislation was unclear regarding the host communities' level of authority to negotiate with developers. Specifically, there is no explicit language as to whether it is the host community or the gaming commission that has the power to negotiate with developers.

Additionally, Ms. Norbut mentioned that Senator Rosenberg commented that, given Speaker of the House DeLeo's support of racinos and slot parlors, there may be some legislation crafted that would include beginning with a developer starting with slot machine parlors who commits to building up to a large-scale casino over a five-year period of time. She concluded her presentation by noting that Senator Rosenberg did not know the exact number of gaming facilities created in enabling legislation.

Mr. James Mazik stated that there was also a discussion regarding the impacts on communities and assessing existing conditions so that a baseline on the current conditions of the community could be established before an evaluation is done. He also noted that Mr. Brennan raised the idea of a mitigation trust being established with the surrounding communities to address the impact assessments. Mr. Mazik also noted that Senator Rosenberg said at the meeting that it is possible the racinos could be up and running as quickly as 30 to 60 days. Senator Rosenberg estimated that it would take approximately six months to develop regulations on racinos. Ms. Norbut added that there was a discussion on how to protect communities during economic downturns, and stated that perhaps this could be accounted for in the mitigation trust fund component.

Ms. Norbut said that the group also discussed with Senator Rosenberg the negative impacts of gaming on housing foreclosures, addiction, bankruptcy and impact on local youth. Mr. Brennan observed that there was also a discussion on the lessons learned from the State of Connecticut's experience with gaming, specifically the lack of planning regarding how this would impact abutting communities. There was also a discussion on anticipated crime impacts, and Mr. Brennan also recalled that Senator Rosenberg said that since there is a strong security presence at casinos, criminal activity could migrate off site.

3. Discussion with Senator Brewer

Ms. Norbut then introduced Senator Stephen Brewer and thanked him for attending this meeting and for his willingness to listen the group's suggestions and concerns. Senator Brewer began his presentation by stating that out of the 40 members in the Senate there will be 11 to 15 members who will vote against the gaming legislation and observed that the Senate has had the votes for any form of expanded gaming for several years. The legislature is desperate for money so the proposals for gaming look appealing given the current economic situation for the Commonwealth. Senator Brewer also mentioned that it is his belief the state legislature will discuss casino gaming and that some sort of legislation that will end up on the Governor's desk. However, he also thought that it's not going to be enough legislatively to say, "no" if you are against gambling in the region and walk away from it because work needs to be done on perfecting amendments. He also noted that he agreed with Senator Rosenberg's assertion that it is unlikely that the Commonwealth will fund a feasibility study on an unknown, unlicensed and uncontracted entity. However, he believed that the concerns regarding the impact of expanded gaming on abutting communities' needs to be communicated to the legislature early while the bill is still being molded and while amendments can be made. He also noted that he liked the concept of a mitigation trust fund that takes into consideration unforeseen consequences. Finally, Senator Brewer

encouraged the group to continue to express their opinions and give feedback because he wanted to address these concerns via amendments to the enabling legislation. Senator Brewer then asked if the meeting participants had any questions or comments.

Mr. Paul Burns raised the issue of local aid. He observed that this subject has not been addressed in any of the legislation and noted that no one knows about how casinos will impact communities and how much revenue will be raised via taxes. Ms. Norbut expressed concern that a host community may be classified as affluent given the fact that it would have a casino located in their area which can be considered a huge asset. She speculated that this may affect Chapter 7 funding and yet the community will still have to deal with the challenges of additional students and special education needs that the community did not have previously. Mr. Burns also raised the issue of a fund for an independent study which the group had asked to be included in the last legislation and noted that most small communities would not be able to pay for such a study themselves.

Ms. Lynn Arnold noted that even though her town of Holland may not be an abutting town, her community will be affected by gaming in the area because towns like hers do not have the infrastructure to accommodate the large work force that will be needed to staff a full-scale casino. Ms. Norbut noted that one of the subjects raised at the meeting with Senator Rosenberg was a discussion about special fines on casinos regarding drunk driving. Specifically, she wondered if legislation could be crafted to specify that if a drunken patron is gets in an accident the casino or the casino operator will be fined. Additionally, Mr. Paul Burns raised the issue of the "free drink" practice in casinos and wondered if there was a way to incorporate wording in the legislation to either limit or ban this practice.

Ms. Norbut expressed her concern regarding the environmental impact of casinos on communities since air quality will be adversely impacted due to the increased traffic that casinos would create. She wondered how this impact could be measured, mitigated and revised. Senator Brewer stated that the environmental community has not expressed its concerns to the legislature about this issue but they would do well to do so. Additionally, he noted that his main concern is "night lighting" which can turn an entire valley into day. He noted that the casino communities would have to take this into consideration. Ms. Norbut also wondered if communities would be able to have a say regarding "night lighting" or will there be wording in the legislation that will empower host communities in this area.

4. Discussion of Action Steps Regarding Continued Lack of Evidence that Local Officials/Concerns are "at the Table"

Ms. Norbut then moved to the next agenda item which was the discussion of action steps. She noted that the group wanted representation from their region at the decision making table and stated that the Task Force has a body of information to share with legislators and the Patrick Administration. Senator Brewer said that he would be happy to receive any materials and suggestions from the Task Force and noted that the group should try to get their materials to him by June at the latest.

The group then scheduled the next meeting of the Casino Task for May 27, 7:00 p.m. Ms. Norbut then asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 8:15 p.m.

MOTION: P. Burns SECOND: G. Grasso VOTE: 8 - 0 OPPOSED: 0

WMCAT Western MA Casino Task Force
April 22, 2009, 7pm
Monson Town Office Building
110 Main Street Monson, MA 01057

Mission Statement

To assure that the economic, social and quality of life interests of communities within the Western Massachusetts Region are protected and all impacts resulting from the potential development of expanded gambling/ gaming within the Region are recognized.

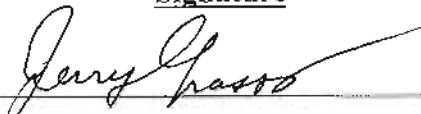
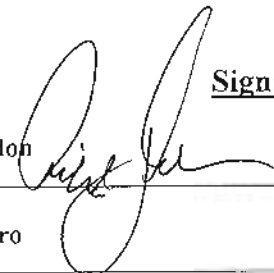
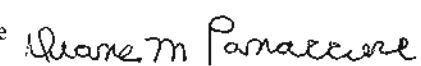
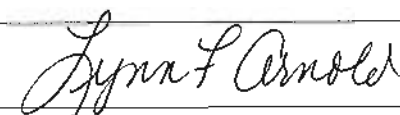
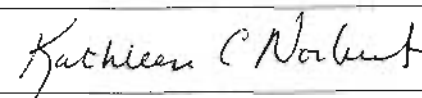
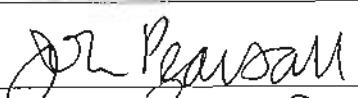
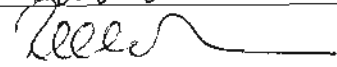
Agenda

1. Introductions (new members) and Minutes of past two meetings (5 min)
2. Discussion of meeting with Senator Rosenberg (10 min)
3. Introduce Senator Brewer (45 min)
4. Discussion of action steps regarding continued lack of evidence that local officials/concerns are "at the table" (15 min)

Adjourn 8:15pm

**Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force Meeting
Wednesday, April 22, 2009**

Sign-in Sheet

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>
Belchertown	Gerry Grasso		Michael Reardon	
Brimfield	Diane Panaccione		Carol Del Negro	
Hampden	John D. Flynn		Richard R. Green	
Holland	Lynn Arnold		Raymond P. Korny	
Ludlow	Darlene Cincone			
Monson	Edward S. Harrison		Kathleen C. Norbut	
Palmer			Paul Burns	
Sturbridge	Arnold Wilson		Steve Halterman	
Ware			Steven Boudreau	
Warren	Bob Souza			
West Brookfield	Tom Long		David Eisenthal	
Wilbraham	John Pearsall		Robert Weitz	
Brookfield	Rudy Heller		Senator Steve Brewer	
	Tim Brennan, PPR		Rob Brian M. Ashe	Jan M. Magik, PPR

Audience / Public Attendance

WMCAT

4-22-09

Name	Town
Katie Skillman	MONSON
Wendy Skillman	MONSON
PETER KRAWCZYK	WARREN
Stephen Sears	Palmer
Rudy Heller	Brookfield
Douglas Farmer	Journal Register
Ally Purple	
Leo Malley	Amherst