

Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force Meeting

MINUTES – April 9, 2008 MONSON TOWN OFFICE BUILDING

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 7:05 p.m.; quorum 7:25 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Edward Harrison, with the following Task Force members present:

- A. 1. Attendance:
- | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Belchertown | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Gerry Grasso | <input type="checkbox"/> | Michael Reardon |
| Brimfield | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Diane Panaccione | <input type="checkbox"/> | Carol DelNegro |
| Hampden | <input type="checkbox"/> | John D. Flynn | <input type="checkbox"/> | Richard R. Green |
| Holland | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lynn Arnold | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Raymond P. Korny |
| Ludlow | <input type="checkbox"/> | Darlene Cincone | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mike Szlosek |
| Monson | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Edward S. Harrison | <input type="checkbox"/> | Kathleen C. Norbut |
| Palmer | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | David E. Whitney 7:25 p.m. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Paul Burns 7:25 p.m. |
| Sturbridge | <input type="checkbox"/> | Arnold Wilson | <input type="checkbox"/> | Steve Halterman |
| Ware | <input type="checkbox"/> | Gerald Matta | <input type="checkbox"/> | Steven Boudreau |
| Warren | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Bob Souza | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Wilbraham | <input type="checkbox"/> | John Pearsall | <input type="checkbox"/> | Robert Weitz |
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2. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission:
- | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--|
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | Timothy W. Brennan | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | James M. Mazik | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
-
3. Others:
- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| | | Randi Cohen, Beatrix Research and Consulting | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

SECTION I: MINUTES

None	<u>Motion</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Opp.</u>	<u>Abs.</u>
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SECTION II: GENERAL DISCUSSION

1.	<u>Motion</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Opp.</u>	<u>Abs.</u>
1. Send letter to legislators	G. Grasso	D. Whitney	7	0	0
2.					

SECTION III: UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- 1.

SECTION IV: NEW BUSINESS

- 1.

SECTION V: ACTION ITEMS

Motion 2nd For Opp. Abs.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Meeting adjourned: 8:20 p.m.

MOTION:	<u>G. Grasso</u>	SECOND:	<u>D. Whitney</u>	VOTE:	7	OPPOSED:	<u>0</u>
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Mr. Ed Harrison began the meeting by asking Task Force members and guest Randi Cohen of Beatrix Research and Consulting to introduce themselves. Ms. Cohen said that Secretary Daniel O’Connell of the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development asked her to speak with the Task Force and further explained that Beatrix is part of the team conducting independent research on casinos in Massachusetts. She observed that while the specific bill is dead for now, the research continues. Ms. Cohen further noted that Beatrix is working with Spectrum Gaming on producing a research study which will probably get to the Governor’s Office by the end of May. Beatrix’s role is to help Spectrum gather the various perspectives from elected officials and others who have a stake in gaming in Massachusetts. She also said that Beatrix is trying to find out if there are any questions or assumptions that are being made that perhaps the research can address and would be helpful from a public policy perspective. The Task Force members then introduced themselves and stated the roles they play in their respective communities.

Mr. Harrison explained that the Task Force was created in late fall 2007 in response to Governor Patrick’s proposal to bring gaming to the state. The Task Force is comprised of select board representatives or their “appointee” from eleven (11) western Massachusetts communities. He also stated the mission of the Task Force, which is to assure that the economic, social and quality of life interests of the communities within the Western Massachusetts region are protected and that all impacts resulting from the development of Class III casino gambling within the region are recognized. Mr. Harrison further explained that the Task Force wants to make sure that its members have a voice at the legislative table on behalf of their communities. He also stated that the Task Force wants to make sure that the state commits to funding an unbiased study of the potential impacts of gambling on western Massachusetts communities, both positive and negative. Additionally, he said that any proposed casino enabling law should ensure that the region is protected and receives adequate mitigation funds to lessen the negative impacts of gambling on communities. Ms. Cohen noted that it is Spectrum’s intention to conduct a regional study and to not lump the whole state together in one report. She further noted that she will let Spectrum know that it should contact the Task Force for additional information for their modeling predictions.

Mr. Harrison then reviewed Mr. Brennan’s comments from the March 19th meeting about the presentation Mr. Brennan had attended at Quinnipiac College at which Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal had observed that the biggest mistake Connecticut made regarding casino gambling was that they did not take into account the effect of gambling on the surrounding communities. Mr. Mazik added that there are two levels of impacts to consider: One is the legislation itself and the holes in it; the other is the impacts on communities that occur after the casino is built. He also explained that there is approximately \$350 million in construction projects that need to be accomplished in the region based on current conditions and usage, but there is inadequate funding for these projects. If a casino is built in the area, the amount of additional construction that would be needed would be significant due to increased traffic and related infrastructure needs. A Task Force member also expressed concern regarding the impact that casinos would have on local

businesses. He stated that he would like to receive any information on the potential impacts on small businesses due to casinos and ways to mitigate it.

Mr. Mazik said that another concern was the need for increased housing for casino employees and noted specifically that there are many old mill buildings in several communities that have the potential of being converted into apartments or dormitory-type settings. Converting these buildings would be a huge expense. Mr. Harrison also observed that there are other ongoing operating costs that need to be considered such as increased law enforcement, fire protection, ambulance services, etc. Another Task Force member noted that the increased education cost for the children of casino workers is another concern. Other Task Force members expressed interest in getting regional representation on the boards and committees that oversee the distribution of mitigation funds and concern regarding the environmental impact of casinos on communities, namely the waste that these businesses generate that needs to be disposed.

Ms. Cohen asked what the group thought would be the longer term impacts of casinos on communities. One Task Force member said that the various impacts on communities would change over time. For example, in the beginning there would be an increase in construction jobs to build the casino and hotels. But then construction employment would fall off as construction needs would inevitably decrease.

Mr. Harrison expressed concern regarding the mitigation funds and noted that if the casino legislation is passed, over time the number of casinos will increase, the revenue will dip, and as a result there will be less mitigation funds for the surrounding towns on an ongoing basis. Mr. Mazik stated that another concern was what would be the burden of proof regarding mitigation funds to communities. Another Task Force member also expressed concern on the cost of studies to a community to justify receiving mitigation funds.

Ms. Cohen asked wondered what group's perspective was on the population for the jobs that casinos would bring. One Task Force member noted that there are people in the region who, although unemployed, would not apply for casino jobs because the pay is too low and they would not want to lose benefits such as Medicaid. Mr. Mazik wondered if there could be study that could look at the regional and sub-regional labor pool for the low-end and mid-level jobs and what the impact would be on the local businesses that rely on this labor pool. Will casinos deplete the pool of candidates for small businesses so that they would have a tough time filling their job openings? Another Task Force member requested that Beatrix may want to look at where people are coming from when they give their opinions. He speculated that homeowners with secure jobs would not be in favor of casinos, whereas those who are unemployed and struggling may be in favor of them because they need jobs.

Another Task Force member stated that the studies that are being done by Spectrum Gaming should educate the public about the pros and cons of casinos in the region. Mr. Harrison then reiterated that the position of the Task Force is to be neutral. In fact, the purpose of the Task Force is to look out for the best interests of the communities its members serve.

Dr. Cohen thanked the Task Force for its time and stated that she would speak with her contact at Spectrum Gaming about this meeting.

The discussion then turned to approval of the letter to the legislators. It was agreed that the letter would be sent to the legislative leadership and the Western Massachusetts delegation. Governor Patrick and Beatrix Research and Consulting would be copied on the letters to the legislative leadership. There was also discussion on meeting with the *Springfield Republican* approximately one week

after the mailing of the letter, and Mr. Mazik offered asking Ashley Shea, PVPC's Communications Manager, to help write a press release based on the letter. The letter and how it will be disseminated were then unanimously approved.

The question was then raised as to what direction the Task Force should take now. Mr. Mazik noted that until the Spectrum Gaming study is completed, nothing is going to be done regarding casino legislation. He suggested that when the study has been released to the public the Task Force should review the study and then reconvene.

Mr. Harrison suggested that the next meeting should be tentatively scheduled for May 28th. The meeting then adjourned.