

Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force Meeting

MINUTES – AUGUST 26, 2009
MONSON FREE LIBRARY

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 7:05 P.M.

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

A. 1. Attendance:

<u>Members</u>		<u>Alternates</u>	
Belchertown	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michael Reardon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brimfield	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gerry Grasso	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brookfield	<input type="checkbox"/>	Carol DelNegro	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hampden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rudy Heller	<input type="checkbox"/>
Holland	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Richard R. Green	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ludlow	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Raymond P. Korny	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Monson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Darlene Cincone	<input type="checkbox"/>
Palmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Edward S. Harrison	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sturbridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Paul Burns	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	Michael Valanzola	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ware	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	William Braman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Warren	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bob Souza	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wilbraham	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	John Pearsall	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission:

<input checked="" 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:

Joe Turek, Palmer Economic Development
 Lori Stabile, *The Republican*
 Douglas Tanner, *The Journal Register*

SECTION I: MINUTES

Mr. Harrison called the meeting to order and asked if there were any corrections to the minutes of the July 22, 2009 meeting. Diane Panaccione made a motion to correct the attendance list to reflect that Bob Souza and Lynn Arnold did not attend this meeting. Mr. Harrison then called for a vote to make the above-mentioned amendment to the July 22nd minutes.

Motion: D. Panaccione **Second:** K. Norbut **Vote:** 8 **Opposed:** None

Ms. Kathleen Norbut made another motion to add, “Ms. Norbut stated that education costs are largely driven by housing which is why she felt so strongly about including housing as a category in the letter to legislators” to the last paragraph of the last page after the text, “One attendee thought that the Task Force gave the issue of housing more prominence than education in their letter.” Mr. Harrison then called for a vote to make the above-mentioned amendment to the July 22nd minutes.

Motion: K. Norbut **Second:** D. Panaccione **Vote:** 8 **Opposed:** None

Mr. Paul Burns made a motion to amend the total vote count to seven for each action item in the July 22nd minutes because even though ten members attended, each community gets only one vote if the member and alternate from any one community are both present. Mr. Harrison then called for a vote to make the above-mentioned amendment to the July 22nd minutes.

Motion: P. Burns **Second:** K. Norbut **Vote:** 8 **Opposed:** None

Mr. Burns then expressed concern regarding the map that was mailed out with the letter to the legislators and stated that the map was not the same map that was presented at the July 22nd meeting. He also stated that although there was a discussion on neighboring and abutting communities at the July 22nd meeting, there was no resolution regarding which communities were to be indicated as the affected communities on the map. Mr. Mazik explained that the construction of the map was discussed, agreed to and voted on, and this action was documented in the July 22nd meeting minutes. Mr. Burns then stated that although there was discussion regarding the content of the map, he thought that the revised map that was mailed to the legislators did not reflect the discussion that took place on July 22nd. In particular, he was concerned that Springfield and Chicopee were included in the map as directly affected communities. Another Task Force member also expressed concerned that Pelham, Amherst and Granby were coded as directly impacted communities as well.

After a lengthy discussion, Mr. Harrison asked Mr. Burns if he would like to propose a motion to amend the map for the Task Force to vote on. Mr. Burns moved to identify the following communities on the map as directly impacted communities: Holland, Wales, Sturbridge, Brookfield, West Brookfield, Hampden and Amherst. He also moved to eliminate as directly impacted communities Hardwick, Granby, Springfield, and Chicopee, and Pelham. Mr. Mazik then explained that Hardwick would be impacted due to its close proximity to Palmer and Warren with access to Route 32. Mr. Burns then amended his motion not to code Granby, Springfield, Chicopee, and Pelham as directly impacted communities. Mr. Harrison then called for a vote.

Motion: P. Burns **Second:** K. Norbut **Vote:** 8 **Opposed:** None

Mr. Mazik then asked the group to review again which communities are to be eliminated from the map as directly impacted communities for the record, and then he asked the voting member of each community to raise their hand to be counted to confirm that there is not an excess number of votes. For the record, Mr. Harrison then stated that the following communities would be eliminated from the map:

- Pelham
- Granby

- Chicopee
- Springfield

Those voting members in favor of the motion were as follows:

- Michael Reardon, Belchertown
- Diane Panaccione, Brimfield
- Lynn Arnold, Holland
- Darlene Cincone, Ludlow
- Edward Harrison, Monson
- Paul Burns, Palmer
- William Braman, Ware
- John Pearsall, Wilbraham

With no one opposed the motion was passed.

Mr. Burns then said that this group needed to acknowledge that there are two competing proposals for a casino in this area, one for Palmer and the other for Warren, and these two different proposals would each have a different set of impacted communities. Mr. Burns then shared with the group an alternate map that had Warren indicated as the host community instead of Palmer. Mr. Harrison stated that with future communications with legislators the Task Force could include the two maps reflecting the two different sets of impacted communities.

SECTION II: GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. General Discussion re: Impacts of Comments to the Media

Mr. Harrison then said that he was asked to briefly discuss the impacts of Task Force member comments to the media and noted that as a selectman and representative for several committees he attempts to preface the comments he makes to the media by noting which “hat” he is wearing. He further commented that if he makes any comments either against or in favor of casinos, these comments should not be interpreted as speaking for the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force because he is not the designated spokesman for the group. He further explained that a great strength of the Task Force is that it maintains a neutral stance on this issue and gives the group a collective voice that is needed to protect its cities and towns. He then asked if Task Force members had any other thoughts to share on this topic. Mr. Michael Reardon said that he found the Task Force helpful in that the facts regarding casinos and its impacts can be discussed within the group so that these facts can be disseminated to the respective communities. Mr. Reardon then observed that a recent newspaper article seemed to pit one group against another and he further emphasized that it is very important for this group to maintain its neutrality regarding the casino debate. He noted that in order for the Task Force to maintain its cohesiveness, it is important to emphasize that the comments of individual Task Force members are not a reflection of the group. Mr. Burns noted that he has an obligation to his community first, then secondly to the Task Force and stated that if the Task Force takes a position that is not in the best interest of Palmer, he has an obligation to speak against it as a representative of his community. Another Task Force member stated that going forward when making comments

to the media about the casino debate, specific towns should not be mentioned to avoid the appearance of “pointing fingers” at other communities.

2. Update on Current Status:

a. Visit to Senators Candaras and Spilka:

Mr. Harrison noted that he, Ms. Kathleen Norbut and Mr. Tim Brennan, met with Senators Gale Candaras and Karen Spilka at the State House and delivered to them the letter from the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force that was mailed to Western Massachusetts legislators. He also said that they delivered copies to Senators Stan Rosenberg and Stephen Brewer. Mr. Harrison then invited Ms. Norbut to say a few words about their visit. Ms. Norbut said that Senator Candaras is the state senator representing some of the communities that comprise the Task Force and Senator Spilka chairs the Senate Committee on Emerging Technologies which will be the key committee that will hold hearings on casinos. In the meeting with Senator Candaras, the Senator noted that she was impressed with the thoroughness of the Task Force’s work. However, she deferred to Senator Brewer on this issue and noted that potential casinos appeared most likely to be in his district. However, she also explained that she was concerned with economic development and would like to see jobs created in this region. Ms. Norbut noted that during the meeting with Senator Spilka the Senator asked some very thoughtful questions and stated that she thought a cost-benefit analysis would be prudent. Additionally, Ms. Norbut stated that they asked about getting a Task Force member at hearings but Senator Spilka didn’t make a commitment to honor this request.

Mr. Harrison also reviewed the letter from Mr. Tom Jones, Deputy Director/General Counsel of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and stated that this letter was the only response that the Task Force received from their last mailing. The letter states that a number of legislators have filed casino related bills and that many of the issues mentioned in the Task Force’s letter are likely to be part of the legislative debate. Mr. Harrison asked if the group had any other comments, and Ms. Norbut said that she would like to ask Representative Todd Smola to attend one of the Task Force’s meetings. Another Task Force member stated that Representative Anne Gobi should be invited as well.

3. Next Steps

a. Redacted Letter to Legislators – Content, Timing:

Mr. Harrison then opened the discussion regarding a redacted letter to the Legislature and sending it to a broader audience potentially and possibility expanding upon some of the issues originally raised. A Task Force member suggested that the group should come to a consensus as to which issues are the top five areas of concern to be presented the letter and to attach the full list of issues. Ms. Norbut then asked that each Task Force member should state their top areas of concern and see if they can come to a consensus afterward. Mr. Brennan suggested that a letter which includes the 23 areas of concern that were listed in the letter mailed earlier in the month to the Western Massachusetts legislators should be sent to the men and women who serve on the committees that craft the legislation. A letter that underscores the Task Force’s five or six areas of concern should be sent to the individuals who show up when the legislation comes to a vote.

The group then went around the room to list their primary concerns. They were as follows:

- Michael Reardon: Housing, education, establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, zoning

- George Backus: Housing, education, public safety, fire and police
- John Pearsall: Establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, infrastructure
- Gerry Grasso: Establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, infrastructure, education, housing
- Paul Burns: Establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, infrastructure, education, workforce development, housing
- William Braman: Public safety, environment, education, housing, establish regional mitigation trust funds
- Mary Tzambazkis: Public safety, environment, education, housing, establish regional mitigation trust funds
- Darlene Cincone: Establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, infrastructure, education, housing
- Diane Panaccione: Establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, housing, education, housing, expanded gambling/gaming proposal selection/approval process
- Lynn Arnold: Establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, public safety, education, housing, infrastructure
- Raymond Korney: Establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, public safety, education, housing, infrastructure
- Kathleen Norbut: Cost benefit analysis, establish regional mitigation trust funds, housing, education, environment
- Ed Harrison: Cost benefit analysis, establish regional mitigation trust funds, local representation, education, workforce development

Mr. Harrison then stated that the list will be compiled and that it appeared the group was in general agreement. Mr. Harrison then asked for consensus that the entire first page would remain the same and would be followed by a bulleted list, and the group agreed to this suggestion. Furthermore it was agreed that the revised letter should be mailed out as soon as possible. Ms. Norbut then made a motion to send the letter via email to the appropriate parties after there is consensus amongst Task Force members on the letter, and Mr. Burns seconded this motion. Mr. Harrison then asked if there were any comments and asked for a vote.

Motion: K. Norbut **Second:** P. Burns **Vote:** 8 **Opposed:** None

b. Statewide Referendum:

Mr. Harrison noted that he wasn't sure if the statewide referendum will happen but he wondered if the Task Force should take a position on this issue. The group agreed by consensus not to support the statewide referendum.

c. Participation in Public Hearings:

Mr. Harrison noted that the Task Force may be called upon to participate in public hearings at some point. He suggested that the group should give some thought to who should be the Task Force representatives at these hearings. One Task Force member suggested that the previously discussed letter should be transformed into a PowerPoint presentation that could be used by Task Force members to a variety of groups. Mr. Brennan then walked the group through the mechanics of testifying and stated that when a hearing is scheduled very short notice is given. Secondly, you can be kept waiting for a very long time. Mr. Brennan suggested that a way to get in the queue would be to link up with the committee chair people and propose that you can bring forward a panel to testify. This oftentimes will get you a spot on the agenda that

is predictable. Mr. Mazik noted that for the next meeting the group should identify and vote on who should sit on the panel that will participate in public hearings and prioritize this list to reflect who should be called first to attend these hearings.

d. Mohegan Sun Request for Future Agenda Time:

Mr. Harrison noted that Mohegan Sun representatives asked if they could have an audience with the Task Force at a future meeting, and he wondered if the group would be amenable to this. One Task Force objected to letting them attend a meeting because it gives the appearance to the general public that the Task Force may support the Mohegan Sun's actions. Another Task Force member noted that dialogue is a good thing and the Task Force might gain some insight and valuable information by meeting with them. However, another Task Force member stated that once the Task Force invites casino developers into its meetings it loses its focus since the group's emphasis has always been on guiding legislation. Mr. Harrison then called for a vote to meet with representatives from the Mohegan Sun at a future Task Force meeting.

In favor: 1

Opposed: 1

4. Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 23, 2009

There being no further business to discuss Mr. Harrison asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 PM. The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, September 23, 2009.

Motion: K. Norbut

Second: P. Burns

Vote: 8

Opposed: None