

# Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force Meeting

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**MINUTES – January 9, 2008**  
**MONSON FREE LIBRARY**

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 7:00 p.m.**  
**MEETING ADJOURNED: 8:35 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Lynn Arnold (7:12 p.m.)     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Raymond P. Korny (7:12 p.m.) |
| Ludlow      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Darlene Cincone (7:08 p.m.) | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Mike Szlosek                 |
| Monson      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Edward S. Harrison          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Kathleen C. Norbut           |
| Palmer      | <input type="checkbox"/>            | David E. Whitney            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Paul Burns (7:12 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                   |                                     |                              |
| 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:
- |  |  |  |                                     |  |
|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
|  |  | Charles T. Kuss, Policy Chief, Brimfield | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |  |
|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|

**SECTION I: MINUTES**

	<u>Motion</u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Opp.</u>	<u>Abs.</u>
11/28/07	J. Pearsall	K. Norbut	9	0	0
12/19/07	K. Norbut	B. Souza			

**SECTION II: UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

	<u>Motion</u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Opp.</u>	<u>Abs.</u>
1. Quorum Discussion	J. Pearsall	K. Norbut	9	0	0
Motion passed: Established a quorum of six Task Force Members to conduct official business					
2. Vice Chairman	G. Grasso	K. Norbut	9	0	0
Motion passed: appoint Darleen Cincone as Vice Chairman of the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force					

### **SECTION III: NEW BUSINESS**

#### **1. Comments from the Staff of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission**

Mr. Harrison noted that this was an opportunity to ask for comments from PVPC staff. Tim Brennan noted that he is continuing to pursue the state to get a knowledgeable person from the administration to do a regionwide briefing about this legislation that would be open to all municipalities regardless of whether they are affected. The Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) assigned two staff members to take this on. He checked again on the status, and unfortunately the earliest possibility for a briefing would be March or April. Furthermore, Mr. Brennan noted that after the general briefing these EOHED representatives agreed that they would meet with Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force to address the group's specific concerns and answer questions. Mr. Harrison asked if Mr. Brennan knew when the state legislators would take this legislation up and Mr. Brennan stated that it would most likely be late summer.

It was asked what needs to be done if the legislature has to restart the process in 2009. Mr. Brennan stated that the legislation would have to be re-filed, and everything would have to be started all over again. A task force member noted that there was a discussion about the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) at the November 28<sup>th</sup> meeting and she wondered if this was a topic that Mr. Brennan would present. Mr. Brennan noted that there are plans to do a MEPA briefing. Mr. Brennan further noted that there was a change to MEPA that came to his attention on Friday regarding large projects and their complexity. This new MEPA initiative which is supposed to be announced this month would begin on a demonstration basis. However, he noted he didn't think this initiative would have an effect on a project like this one.

Mr. Harrison asked about the status of the Task Force web site, and Mr. Mazik said that there would be a place on the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission's site for the Task Force where items could be added such as minutes and other items. He further noted that there were updates made to the contact information and email list for the Task Force. He asked if Task Force members wanted to have this kind of information posted on the web site. After a lengthy discussion, the group agreed that a general email box should be established and put on the web site, and individuals could choose to list their own individual email addresses next to their names and phone number listings. The emails received in the general email box would be distributed to all task force members by a PVPC staff member.

There was a discussion as to whether the Patrick Administration intended to provide funding for the support that the PVPC is lending to the Casino issue. Mr. Brennan said that this topic has been raised by other regions and stated that he is advocating for a model where there would be state funding for the host and abutting communities. However, in order to have this kind of support there would have to be a change to the legislation as currently proposed.

#### **2. Continued Review of Governor Patrick's Proposed Legislation**

Mr. Harrison noted that the minutes of the last meeting identified specific items in the legislation without mentioning specific chapters and pages. The group raised the following concerns and questions regarding Section 2:

- There is not balanced representation on the proposed board of directors and advisory committee and no regional voice among the representation.

- There was a discussion as to whether the Board of Directors should be appointed or elected. However, Mr. Brennan noted that the model for regulatory body for casinos would be similar to the Board of Education in that the board is appointed by the governor, and these appointees have set terms.
- There was concern that the legislation appears to give the state all the power to promote bringing casinos forward. Mr. Brennan noted that the legislature gets to decide whether there is going to be legislation that enables casinos to go forward. Whatever the legislation is, the Governor has the option to either sign it into law or veto it. Once the legislation is passed, the casino authority has to do all the seeking of applications regarding the various licenses needed. He suggested that the task force could ask for one regional representative from each of the host areas. He noted that the task force may not get everything they ask for but they might be asked to identify several candidates that can be given to the governor to choose from.

Additionally, Mr. Brennan observed that the task force could propose that the composition of the board and advisory committee as defined is flawed. Mr. Mazik also noted that the proposed bill states that any discussion of a commercial or financial nature shall be held in executive session with no opportunity for individuals to provide input.

There were also concerns voiced regarding Section 11, specifically:

- The Community Mitigation Trust Fund has several passages in the text where it refers to, “The Secretary of Administration and Finance shall ...expend monies in the fund, without further appropriation ...” It sounds as if the Secretary has complete control over the dispersal of these funds.

There were concerns raised regarding Section 4, specifically:

- Eligibility: the proposed bill states several criteria that must be met before a person is eligible to bid on a casino license, and item (7) states there should be a certified and binding vote on a ballot question at an election in the local host community in favor of such a license, provided this vote take place after the effective date of the chapter. Task force members question why would there be a need for a signed agreement with a bidder on a casino license before the passage of the ballot question. Mr. Brennan stated that it is important to note that first the legislation gets passed, the ballot vote is taken, and only after the ballot vote is taken can a license be issued. One task force member stated that that he was uncomfortable with the ballot vote coming 60 days after the execution of the signed agreement. There was also concern expressed regarding the execution of an agreement with a casino first and going to the voters afterward. There was also an observation that the bill’s executive summary contradicts the actual bill.
- There was general concern expressed that there is a lot of non-specific information regarding the budget.

Mr. Harrison concluded that that the next meeting needs to be devoted to discussing the legislation in more depth. There was also general agreement that by the next meeting the group could come up with preliminary concerns regarding the legislation that could be shared with state officials. Mr. Brennan confirmed that it would be good idea to create a list of concerns that could be addressed by the state. He also noted that here are two wild cards, the first one being the huge hole in lottery income. What can be done if the lottery income goes lower than expected? The second concern was that the budget for the new fiscal year looks pretty grim. Mr. Brennan speculated that if there is not enough funding for casinos, it will be dropped from the budget. A task force member noted that there should be public discussion regarding this legislation. Mr. Brennan noted that these questions and concerns should be taken up between the task force and the administration first. He urged the group not to start out with a big public forum because it can turn into a spectacle.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

The next two meeting were set for January 30 and February 27. Thereafter, the task force meetings would take place on the last Wednesday of the month. The group also agreed that the next two meetings would focus on further discussion on the proposed legislation.