

Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force Meeting

MINUTES – JULY 22, 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:

1. Attendance:

Belchertown	<input type="checkbox"/>	Michael Reardon	
Brimfield	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Diane Panaccione	<input type="checkbox"/> Carol DeNegro
Brookfield	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rudy Heller	
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	
Monson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Edward S. Harrison	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kathleen C. Norbut
Palmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paul Burns	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> George Backus
Sturbridge	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	Michael Valanzola	
Ware	<input type="checkbox"/>	William Braman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mary Tzambazales
Warren	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bob Souza	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peter Krawczyk
Wilbraham	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	John Pearsall	<input type="checkbox"/> Robert Weitz

2. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission:

Timothy W. Brennan
 James M. Mazik

3. Others:

Kathy Bassford, Warren, MA
 Lauri Germain, Thompson, CT
 Linda E. Groh, Thompson, CT
 Edmund Mahon, Philadelphia, TN
 Nancy A. Mahon, Philadelphia, TN
 Judy Sessler, Brimfield

1. Approval of the Minutes of July 22, 2009

Motion: D. Panaccione **Second:** K. Norbut **Vote:** All in Favor **Opposed:** None

2. Chairman's Call to Order and Discussion to Finalize Draft Letter to Senator Steven Brewer and Senator Stanley Rosenberg

Mr. Edward Harrison called the meeting to order and noted that he wanted to accomplish two things: 1) Finalize the draft letter to the state legislators so that it can be mailed as soon as possible; and 2) to determine if any Task Force members would be interested in attending the sessions that had been scheduled on Monday, July 27th with Senator Gale Candaras and Senator Karen Spilka. Mr. Harrison noted that both he and Ms. Kathleen Norbut will be attending. Ms. Norbut noted that Senator Spilka chairs the Senate Committee on Emerging Technologies and Economic Development and explained that she hoped that there would be an opportunity to ask the senators if someone from the Task Force could be one of the speakers or panelists as the legislature begins to have hearings on casino legislation. Mr. Harrison asked if anyone from the PVPC would be able to attend one of the sessions with the Senators, and Mr. Tim Brennan stated that either he or Mr. Jim Mazik would attend. Mr. Harrison then

introduced new Task Force Member Ms. Mary Tzambazales, Town Manager from Ware to the group and stated that she is replacing Steve Boudreau.

Mr. Harrison then began the discussion on the draft letter to the state legislators and asked if the group had any additions or corrections. Ms. Norbut wondered if in addition to addressing the letter to Senators Brewer and Rosenberg if it should also be addressed to Senator Candaras. Ms. Norbut also noted that the group may want to consider sending this letter to the state legislature, the Patrick Administration and Attorney General Martha Coakley and other parties. Mr. Tim Brennan suggested it would be wiser to target the Western Massachusetts Delegation. The group then agreed that the letter should be individually addressed to the Western Massachusetts legislators.

Mr. Harrison then asked for comments on the draft letter. Mr. Paul Burns was concerned about the language in Section B on establishing a regional mitigation trust fund and noted that the text describing the task force was vague. He suggested the following text: "70 % of the members will be elected by an existing task force or a task force created by the host community and the immediate abutters." A Task Force member further suggested that the text specifically cite the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force in this sentence. Mr. Mazik then suggested the following language: "The committee will comprise of 5-7 members 70% of which will be elected by a vote of a local task force (such as the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force) from each region with consistent representation from the host and abutting communities to assure fair and equitable regional representation." Ms. Norbut then suggested the following language that combined Mr. Burns' and Mr. Mazik's suggestion: "...70% of which will be elected by a vote from the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force or a regional task force created by the host community and abutters to assure fair and equitable regional representation." Mr. Burns further added that language should be inserted that it is applicable to the state and not geared specifically to western Massachusetts.

Mr. John Pearsall expressed concern over the length of the letter and noted that this document was attempting to address every possible concern. He thought that it would be better to focus on which concerns would have the most impact on this region and that these concerns should be prioritized. Ms. Norbut explained that Senator Brewer asked the Task Force to provide him with a complete list of concerns, and she stated that this is what the group should accomplish as soon as possible since this is the third meeting in which time has been spent on crafting this letter. In order to bring closure to the discussion on Section B, Ms. Norbut proposed the following version of the sentence that had been causing concern: "...70% of which will be elected locally by a vote from the region such as the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force to assure fair and equitable regional representation." Mr. Mazik also suggested that the beginning of the above mentioned sentence be amended to "These regional committees..."

Mr. Mazik suggested that the exact date of the Task Force's meeting with Senator Brewer be noted at the beginning of the third paragraph on the first page of the letter which was April 22, 2009. Mr. Pearsall thought that Section J on Housing should be taken out of the body of the letter and added as a postscript as an issue that may be impacted by casino development since housing may not end up being an amendment to the legislation. He concluded that referring to housing in the body of the letter would minimize its importance. Ms. Norbut disagreed and stated that she thought that the impact of casino development on housing was a critical concern and felt strongly that it should not be put at the end of the letter. Mr. Harrison suggested that a sentence should be added to this section to tie it into the casino business and Mr. Mazik suggested the following revision: "Due to the impact from new private housing construction from the development of a potential expanded gambling/gaming..."

Regarding Section G, Education a Task Force member suggested that language be inserted to state that there will be a regular reassessment of the impacts of a worker surge on education in the region. The group then agreed that an assessment of impacts on education should be made annually and added the sentence, "Legislation will provide annual assessment of education impacts to the region."

A Task Force member expressed concern regarding Section Q, Regional Voting, because there was a reference to the 30-mile radius that includes the abutters. Specifically he noted that 30 miles encompasses many towns and he objected to any community determining what another community can or cannot have. Ms. Norbut noted that gambling and gaming is a unique industry in that it does have a negative impact on a whole host of communities in the region. She stated that having host communities only vote on something such as casinos that would affect the abutting communities would not be fair to the abutters. She noted that the region as a whole should have a voice in what it will need to live with for a long time to come. Mr. Mazik then proposed that the wording for Section Q be changed to "Legislation should consider ballot approval of any proposed expanded gambling/gaming facility by host and butting communities" thereby eliminating the reference to the 30-mile radius. Mr. Harrison then explained that the intent of this letter is not to prohibit towns from having casinos, but rather to make sure that the abutting communities would be compensated for the negative impacts. The group then agreed to the wording, "Legislation should consider ballot approval of any proposed expanded gambling/gaming facility for host and abutting/neighborhood communities." The group also added a Section W, Expanded gambling/gaming Proposal Selection/Approval Process to request regional representation during this approval process.

Regarding the map to be included with the letter, Mr. Brennan suggested constructing the map so that it synchs with the definitions listed in the letter so that the communities and how they are impacted are indicated on this map. The group also agreed to change the definition of "region" in Appendix A to read, "The area including a host and abutting/directly impacted communities to any proposed expanded gambling/gaming facilities." The reference on the map to the 30-mile radius was also eliminated.

Ms. Norbut then made a motion to approve the letter as amended, to redistribute it to the Task Force, and to have the letter sent to Central and Western Massachusetts legislators. Mr. Brennan suggested the letter only be sent to the legislators representing the impacted areas on the map that will be included with this letter. Mr. Norbut amended her motion to reflect Mr. Brennan's suggestion, and Diane Panaccione seconded this amended motion. In addition, Mr. Harrison suggested that the letters to Senators Candaras and Spilka be hand delivered on July 27th when Task Force members are scheduled to meet with them. Mr. Harrison then called for a vote.

Motion: K. Norbut **Second:** D. Panaccione **Votes in favor:** 6 **Opposed:** 1

Mr. Harrison then asked for input from the audience. One attendee thought that the Task Force gave the issue of housing more prominence than education in their letter. 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. Then a representative from a Native American group asked for ten minutes of the group's time to express their concerns regarding the Mohegan Sun's intent to establish a casino in this area, and this time was granted to them. Mr. Harrison then stated that the next meeting of the Task Force will be Wednesday, August 26th, 7:00 p.m. at the Monson Town Office Building. The meeting was then adjourned without objection.