

Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force Meeting

MINUTES – JUNE 24, 2009
MONSON TOWN OFFICE BUILDING

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 7:10 PM

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

A. 1. Attendance:

Belchertown	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gerry Grasso	<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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kathleen C. Norbut
Palmer	<input type="checkbox"/>	David E. Whitney	<input type="checkbox"/>	Paul Burns
Sturbridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Arnold Wilson	<input type="checkbox"/>	Steve Halterman
Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	Michael Valanzola		
Ware	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gerald Matta	<input type="checkbox"/>	Steven Boudreau
Warren	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bob Souza	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Peter Krawczyk
Wilbraham	<input type="checkbox"/>	John Pearsall	<input type="checkbox"/>	Robert Weitz

2. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission:

Timothy W. Brennan
 James M. Mazik

3. Others:

Bruce Spiewaroski (Warren)
Kathy Bassford (Warren)

1. Approval of the Minutes of May 27, 2009

Motion: B. Souza **Second:** R. Korney **Vote:** All in Favor **Opposed:** None

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

Before discussion of the draft letter to Senators Brewer and Rosenberg, there was a brief conversation on the status of Casino Task Force membership, and Mr. Mazik stated that he would send emails to Sturbridge and Ware members as well as David Whitney of Palmer to confirm their participation.

Mr. Edward Harrison noted that the main topic of discussion would be the review of the letter to Senator Brewer and Senator Rosenberg. Mr. Harrison said that the one- page letter that was initially submitted would not satisfy Senator Brewer's request for a comprehensive list of requests that the Task Force wanted addressed in the legislation. Mr. Harrison noted that he and Ms. Kathleen Norbut pulled together a list of items that they wanted the Task force to make modifications to and perhaps get approval to mail it to the Senators. The group decided that the best approach would be to review the letter one paragraph at a time.

Mr. Harrison noted that the opening paragraph was basically what was in the first letter although some minor edits were made. Mr. Harrison also explained that the intent of listing the concerns on the first page of the letter was to show the topics that would be expanded upon on the second page, and he proposed that this list be removed in the final letter. Ms. Lynn Arnold asked that a definition of the “bull’s eye” zone, specifically, the host, abutting and the communities two towns away from the host communities be mentioned earlier in the letter. She further stated that this section should be a separate paragraph preceding the discussion on the Task Force’s specific concerns. Mr. James Mazik proposed that the following wording be added before a paragraph on definitions: “We want the legislation to address the impacts on the host, abutting communities and the region, and it is our interpretation that these are defined as follows.” Ms. Kathleen Norbut suggested that Mr. Mazik’s sentence could be added before the sentence, “The following list has been developed by members of the Task Force as high priority concerns for our communities.” Mr. Harrison suggested that perhaps there should be a section in the letter entitled “Definitions” and Ms. Norbut volunteered to work on the wording for this section to make sure that it had some prominence. Additionally Mr. Harrison suggested enclosing the “bull’s eye” map that had been previously distributed to the Task Force with the letter.

The group agreed that Section A, Comprehensive Cost-Benefit Analysis of Slot Parlors and Mega-Casinos, was fine as is and moved on to discuss Section B, Establish a Mitigation Trust Fund (MTF). The group then discussed whether the review of the MTF should be annually or bi-annually, and the consensus was that it should occur on an annual basis. There then ensued a discussion on the percentage of regional representation on the MTF Oversight Committee, and Mr. Mazik suggested that the following revision to the second sentence of Section B be made: “For the western region, an MTF Oversight Committee, which includes 30% regional representation as recommended by the Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force, will oversee the allocation/dispersal of MTF Funds...” Ms. Arnold stated that the Task Force should propose a specific number for the membership of the MTF Oversight Committee in their letter, such as ten members, to get adequate representation for the host abutters and the region. Additionally, Ms. Norbut suggested that the regional representation be raised to 70%. Ms. Norbut also added that having a group of ten MTF members for this purpose may be too unwieldy and suggested decreasing the proposed number of members to five to seven. Mr. Harrison also asked the group if they thought the oversight committee should be for all three regions or for each region, and the group agreed that it should be an oversight committee for each region.

It was also agreed that the words, “For each region” should be added to the sentence beginning with, “The Legislature will establish...” Additionally, the Task Force added the words, “The regional” after “MTF Oversight Committee...” in the second sentence of Section B so that the entire second sentence would read, “The regional MTF Oversight Committee which includes 70% fair and equitable regional representation as recommended by WMCAT with a Task Force from each region should be comprised of five to seven individuals.” Mr. Bob Souza also suggested that it should be noted in this section that the Task Force will oversee the allocation and dispersal of funds.

Mr. Harrison stated that the terms, “slot parlors,” “mega-casinos” and “class III gambling” are used liberally throughout the letter and wondered if this terminology needed any revising. It was agreed that the text “class III gambling” should be removed. Additionally it was agreed that references to “mega-casinos” and “class III gambling” should be replaced with the text, “expanded gambling/gaming” throughout the letter.

The group then turned to the discussion of Section C, Local Representation on Gaming Commission(s) & Oversight Committees. Ms. Arnold wondered if the text in the section should note that votes should be fully weighted. Mr. Mazik suggested that the word “equal” should be added to the sentence, “Local representation will ensure that host regions have *equal* voting power...”, and the Task Force agreed to this revision. It was also noted by the group that Section D needed the language updated to “expanded gambling/gaming” as necessary.

There were no changes to Section E, Environment. Regarding Section F, Infrastructure, the group added the word, “utilities” after “facilities” at the end of the paragraph. Mr. Mazik also suggested adding “but are not limited to” after the text, “Examples in this category include...” so that it reads “Examples in this category include but are not limited to...” Regarding Section G, Education, it was noted that the language needed to be updated. Ms. Norbut suggested adding “facility” after “...proposed gambling/gaming” so that it reads “...proposed gambling/gaming facility...” The group also revised the first sentence to read, “All enrollment costs for new students due to worker surge...”

During the discussion on Section H, Zoning, Ms. Norbut wondered if there should be something added about the need for a regional planner. Mr. Mazik suggested that a bullet on Planning and Enforcement be added and that this bullet should state the need for funding resources for local planning consultation and enforcement. Regarding Section I on Work Force Development, Mr. Mazik suggested the following wording for the third sentence: “‘Union’ wages and fair, open and competitive procurement will apply” since Massachusetts General Laws is very specific as to what the term “prevailing wages” means.

Regarding Section J on Housing, Mr. Mazik suggested that the first and second sentences read as follows: “The legislature will act to immediately reform the egregious 40B ‘Affordable Housing Law’ that currently does not grant full credit to affordable non-publicly funded housing and manufactured housing as affordable housing stock. Each of these types will count as 1.0 as an affordable housing unit.” There were no changes to Section K on Smart Growth Development and Section L, Transportation.

Regarding Section M, Marketing, several Task Force members expressed concern that casino organizations would use gift giving as a form of marketing to the student population. Mr. Mazik then suggested adding the word “direct” at the beginning of the last sentence starting with, “Gifts to schools...” Ms. Arnold asked that text be added regarding restriction of persons under 21 entering casino facilities. Ms. Norbut suggested that text be included in Section T on Social and Public Health Costs stating that “Legislation will prohibit access to proposed expanded gambling/gaming to anyone under 21. Separate entrances for entertainment venues will be required.”

Regarding Section N, Ownership, Mr. Mazik suggested that the second word in the paragraph “should” should be changed to “will” to keep it consistent with the other sections. For Section O, Courts, “bi-annual” was changed to “annual.” There were no changes to Section P, Ethics, with the exception of updating the language where appropriate to “gambling/gaming” or “gambling/gaming facilities.”

Regarding Section Q on Regional Voting the group agreed that there should be a reference in this paragraph to the enclosed “bull’s eye” map and definitions section. The Task Force also agreed to strike the text, “local (host) and regional” and change “slot parlor or mega-casino” to gambling/gaming.” The title for Section R on Casino Expansion was changed to

“Gambling/Gaming Expansion” and the rest of the text was updated to “gambling/gaming” and “gambling/gaming facilities” where necessary. In Section S, Protection of Taxpayers and Region from Profit Loss, Bankruptcy and Reduction in Lottery Receipts and Local Aid, the one reference to “bi-annual” was changed to “annual.”

Ms. Arnold requested that the “bull’s eye” map that is to be included in the mailing to show the abutter communities and 30-mile radius, and Mr. Mazik stated that he will work with PVPC staff to create this graphic. Mr. Harrison then stated that Ms. Norbut will work on another revision of the letter, will send it to Mr. Harrison for his review and then will forward it to Mr. Mazik to distribute to the Task Force for review and comment. Ms. Arnold then made a motion for the group to email their approval of the amended letter and Mr. Souza seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. The next meeting was then scheduled for Wednesday, July 22nd, 7:00 p.m. Mr. Harrison then asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Souza made the motion which was seconded by Mr. Ray Korney.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:45 p.m.

Motion: B. Souza **Second:** R. Korney **Vote:** All in Favor **Opposed:** None