

# Western Massachusetts Casino Task Force Meeting

## MINUTES – March 19, 2008 MONSON TOWN OFFICE BUILDING

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 7:15 p.m. (No quorum)

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 type="checkbox"/>	Diane Panaccione	<input type="checkbox"/>	Carol DeINegro
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 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
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 type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	James M. Mazik	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Others:

Suzanne Lepage, CMRPC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Chris Dietz, Monson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

### SECTION I: MINUTES

February 27, 2008: No action because of lack of quorum

Motion    2<sup>nd</sup>    For    Opp.    Abs.

### SECTION II: GENERAL DISCUSSION

1.

2.

### SECTION II: Continued

### SECTION III: UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1.

**SECTION IV: NEW BUSINESS**

1.

**SECTION V: ACTION ITEMS**

**Motion    2<sup>nd</sup>    For    Opp.    Abs.**

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

**Meeting adjourned:**        8.45 p.m.

**MOTION:**                                **SECOND:**                                **VOTE:**                                **OPPOSED:**

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Mr. Tim Brennan began the meeting by stating that he had attended a public forum in Connecticut last week that was held by a group linked to the University of Massachusetts. The forum was held at Quinnipiac College, and there were two panels. The first panel had Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Dan O’Connell; Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal; a staff representative from Foxwoods Resort Casino; and a professor from the University of Massachusetts who has a worldwide reputation for studying the social negative effects of casino gaming on communities. One of the topics discussed was what could Connecticut tell Massachusetts regarding the effects of gaming on communities after ten years of experience with casinos in its state. The Attorney General noted that one issue the Commonwealth did not address was the impact of gaming on adjacent communities. The Attorney General further emphasized that Massachusetts should make sure that there is legislation from the beginning that provides funding and other kinds of assistance for these adjacent or abutting communities. Additionally, the professor from the University of Massachusetts discussed at length about doing baseline studies particularly on social effects such as problem gambling. She noted that these social problems do not manifest themselves immediately, so good data is needed at the outset.

Mr. Harrison noted that the Task Force wants to make sure that the impact studies to be undertaken as well as certain protections for communities are included in the legislation if it is passed. Mr. Brennan then stated that he recently asked Michael Widmer of the Massachusetts Taxpayers to do a presentation at another forum. At this presentation Mr. Brennan asked him about the work his organization had done with regard to rechecking the governor’s prediction on revenue streams from casinos. Mr. Brennan also asked if he thought the legislation would pass. Mr. Widmer indicated that he thought the House would vote it down. Mr. Brennan then inquired if this turns out to be an accurate assessment, does this mean Mr. Widmer believed that the topic of casinos would disappear for a long time. Mr. Widmer stated that although it is gone for 2008 it will likely come back again in a different fashion in 2009. Furthermore, Mr. Widmer thought that a new casino proposal would be a compromise between Governor Patrick’s first proposal and the legislators.

Mr. Harrison noted that he is sure that it is not a dead issue and said it was critical for the Task Force to keep pursuing its work. Mr. Brennan then provided background information on how casino gaming came to Connecticut. He noted that because Connecticut allowed Las Vegas nights in firehouse and churches, Native American tribes got their proposal on gaming to move forward. Connecticut fought it and lost twice. When the state lost the second time, it decided that it needed to get an agreement with the tribe to gain some monetary benefit.

Mr. Brennan then noted that embedded in the Connecticut legislation were comprehensive studies that would look back every five years on the effects of gambling. It was discussed at the forum that the studies were not done, so one was commissioned with a \$700,000 contract to do a comprehensive assessment of Connecticut ten years out from the inception of gambling. But the subject was also raised that this same firm, namely Spectrum Gaming, received a \$189,000 contract from the State of Massachusetts to do an economic impact and social impact analysis for Massachusetts. The timeline for the Massachusetts study is that it needs to be completed in the next 60 days.

Mr. Mazik then mentioned that Beatrix Research and Consulting, who is working with Spectrum Gaming, would like to meet with the Task Force to get their views and concerns on the legislation and the impact on its communities. Mr. Brennan noted that this is the data collection phase for Spectrum Gaming, and if the study is done in 60 days the recommendations from the study could go into a different version of the legislation.

Mr. Brennan further noted that another unanticipated consequence that was discussed at the Connecticut forum was the impact on schools because the special programs that had to be offered which drove the state's costs up. As a result of this impact, there is now a revenue sharing agreement with about five or six of the communities near the host community to help pay for these special programs.

The discussion then turned to the letter to the legislators that the Task Force had drafted and whether the letter could be approved since there is no quorum at this meeting. It was determined that the letter should be discussed and the revised letter would be distributed via email to all Task Force members for their input. After the group agrees on the final version it would be mailed to the legislators. There was also discussion on when to schedule the meeting with Beatrix, and the group agreed that they should meet on April 9<sup>th</sup> with these consultants.

Suzanne Lepage of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) noted that she attended the Southern Maine meetings when casinos were proposed for that area and CMRPC did some impact studies on this region. She volunteered giving to the Task Force a slide presentation that reviews CMRPC studies. Additionally, she asked Mr. Brennan who was paying the \$189,000 for the Massachusetts study. Secondly, she wondered if Mr. Brennan's impression from the Connecticut panel was that, if the economic impacts are taken care of monetarily, would there still be lingering concerns regarding the effect of casinos. Mr. Brennan noted that both the Connecticut and Massachusetts studies were put out to bid, as this is required by each state's procurement rules, and the costs will be paid by each state. As to her second question, Mr. Brennan noted he felt that Connecticut is now realizing that the casinos are bringing in revenue that it cannot do without now. He also noted that the state learned after the fact about the various impacts and as a result made some fixes by forming agreements with some communities to share casino revenue.

The discussion then turned to revising the letter to the legislators. Mr. Mazik noted that the group agreed to have a "first" letter end after the mission statement followed by a "second" letter which would list the Task Force's specific concerns on the legislation. However, because of the accelerated timeline, Mr. Mazik wondered if it still makes sense to create two letters. The group then agreed that there should only be one letter given the time constraints. Mr. Brennan noted that the letters should be formatted so that each one is individually addressed to each legislator. Mr. Mazik also suggested that Mr. Harrison sign each letter and that the end of the letter should state that it is being sent on behalf of the Task Force members' communities.

Mr. Mazik further noted that at the last meeting the group approved inserting the word, "potential" was inserted into the opening paragraph of the mission statement in the first version of the letter and suggested that this be inserted into the current draft. He further

noted that as discussed at the February 27<sup>th</sup> meeting, the following statement should be added after the mission statement: “We, as a group are neither pro-casino nor anti-casino. However, as duly elected representatives of our respective communities we feel it is our duty just like it is yours as the elected representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to examine all sides of the issue.”

Mr. Harrison then asked for other comments on the letter. The group made the following changes:

- Change the punctuation of the sentence previously cited so that it reads, “We, as a group, are...”
- Correct the second sentence of the paragraph beginning with, “The WMCAT recognizes that ...” on the last page, from “There and limited law enforcement, judicial and...” to “There are limited law enforcement, judicial and...”
- Remove the comma after “appropriations” in the bullet point that opens with, “The Gaming Authority and the Secretariats...” so that it reads, “...casino revenues ‘without further appropriation’...”
- Remove shading from the mission statement paragraph
- Add semicolons after each bullet point listed after the sentence, “The following concerns are raised as mitigation factors...”

The discussion then turned to the sources of revenue that are supposed to come to the host towns and the surrounding communities.

Mr. Brennan noted that the state is the receiver of revenue so an agreement has to be established to share revenue with a subset of communities. One Task Force member noted that it could be stated in the letter that the legislation lacks a shared revenue agreement between the state and non-host communities.

Mr. Harrison noted that the list in the letter regarding mitigation factors was too short, and so he offered a list that he has developed for a hearing presentation. The group agreed to use Mr. Harrison’s list that covers impacts on public safety, transportation, education, housing, infrastructure, the environment, the economy, personal property and quality of life.

The discussion turned to the tone of the letter, specifically whether the letter should be positive or negative. One Task Force member noted that the letter should start out with a concern and then follow with a positive recommendation.

Other revisions to the letter included:

- Revise the bullet point, “The cost of impact studies should not be paid by the town” to reflect that the Task Force recommends that periodic future state-funded impact studies should be funded by the legislation and not paid by the municipalities.

Mr. Mazik offered to put the letter into final form for Mr. Harrison’s review. Mr. Harrison asked for other comments, and Mr. Brennan noted that the letter should be sent to the entire Western Massachusetts delegation including Worcester. Mr. Harrison asked if Mr. Mazik could send to the Task Force the list of this delegation and asked that that the mailing include Senate President Therese Murray, Speaker of the House of Representatives Sal DiMasi, and that Governor Deval Patrick be sent copies of the letters to Ms. Murray and Mr. DiMasi.

Mr. Harrison noted that once the letter is finalized, a copy of the letter should be sent to the press. There was also agreement to share the letter with the select board. Chris Dietz of Monson asked if at some point the group was planning to eventually make a statement that it is for or against casinos and if there were any plans to visit the offices of legislators in person. It was noted that the group had discussed inviting legislators to their meetings, but the consensus at the time was to approach them by sending letters initially.

Mr. Mazik then distributed a handout of the proposed format of the Casino Task's Force section on the PVPC web site. Mr. Brennan noted that one section of the Task Force's web page should be devoted to relevant links to various resources on this issue. Mr. Mazik then wondered if the Task Force's web page could be approved since there is not a quorum. The general consensus was to move forward with getting the Task Force's section posted on the web site. Mr. Harrison then adjourned the meeting with no objections from the Task Force members.