

Western MA Regional Casino Task Force Meeting

November 28, 2007

Attendance: Edward Harrison, Timothy Brennan, Gerry Grasso, David Whitney, Paul Burns, Lynn Arnold, Raymond Korny, John Pearsall, Richard Green,, Diane Panaccione, Carol DelNegro, Bob Souza, James Mazik.

Mr. Harrison provided a recap of activities to date organizing the region relative to the proposed legalization of casino gaming in the Commonwealth and the prospect of the construction of a destination resort casino somewhere in the area, including potential sites in Palmer, Warren, Chicopee and Holyoke. He recounted the presentation by Mr. Brennan at the first official meeting of the organization on the need to scrutinize the legislation filed by the governor, as well as the overview of the MEPA process. It was stressed that the MEPA review process does not begin until a proposed project with specificity is presented. It had been agreed that the MEPA process would be times so as to be past any point where towns could influence their destiny relative to the project. He also confirmed that the PVPC was willing to help towns in the process of being prepared for the potential impacts of casino development in the region. Mr. Harrison also reviewed correspondence sent to and from the office of the governor relative to the concerns of the region, and it was agreed that everyone, including the regional task force operating in the Middleborough region, had received the same letter.

Mr. Harrison presented a very rough proposal for a mission statement and asked for feedback from the members. Mr. Whitney noted it did not include the need to consider positive impacts. This was discussed in detail. It was suggested to use the Middleborough mission statement as it was written. This was discussed at length and it was agreed to use the Middleborough Regional Task Force's mission statement, substituting Western MA for Middleborough.

Mr. Brennan again addressed the role of the MEPA process, reinforcing that it kicks in only when a specific project for a specific proposal and location is identified. Any new legislation will either help or hinder any affected communities, and he suggested that any ability by the region to influence the legislation could be impacted by the anticipated robust debate statewide about casino gaming.

Ms. DelNegro explained that representatives from Brimfield had traveled to towns near casino development in CT. She stated that the one thing they heard repeatedly was to get the legislation in order before any casino development is planned, and not to wait for a proposal to appear. There was general discussion regarding the legislation and the need to review and to react to it. The Southeastern Regional Planning Agency's review of the legislation had been photocopied and it was acknowledged that they had done a rather comprehensive review already.

Mr. Green stated he thought the committee should focus on infrastructure issues only and not take "subtle jabs" at social issues. Mr. Harrison noted that the legislation recognized

social issues. Ms. Kathleen Norbut requested permission to comment, and noted that the reality of mental health services, including those designed to treat addictions, were fairly limited in the area to the Griswold and Valley Health and Human Services, and that this could impact local communities regarding those facilities will need an accommodation as far as their physical infrastructure.

After some discussion, it was agreed to focus on the analysis of the proposed legislation first and foremost.

Discussion of governance of the committee was discussed. It was agreed through consensus that Edward Harrison should be Chairman and Gretchen Neggers as Vice-Chairman. It was also discussed and agreed that votes, when they would be taken, would be limited to one vote for each town.

There was also discussion as to the make-up of the group, with various proposals reviewed. Mr. Brennan acknowledged this to be a judgment call and that the group should agree on those communities who they think will be impacted, and invite them to attend. There was a desire expressed to keep the group small in order to be effective. It was noted that the proposed legislation considers only those towns immediately abutting a host community to be part of the region. Ms. Neggers suggested that the legislation might need to better define region, as different factors, such as transportation routes, could create impacts to towns that are not immediately abutting. Mr. Brennan agreed that this was additional reason to focus on the legislation and where it needs to be changed. He also explained his efforts to get a representative from the state to come and meet with the group and walk through the legislation.

Other business taken care of included accepting the offer of the PVPC to provide some space on its website in order to keep the public informed as to activities. Also, as the group is a public group, there was an agreement reached to limit public input to a specific time in the meeting, and to vest the chair with the power to place a time limit on public discussion in the event it seemed necessary.

Discussion of the name of the Committee ensued. IT was agreed to call it the Western MA Regional Casino Task Force. It was agreed to try and meet at least monthly, with hour-long meetings the target with ~fifteen minutes for public input.

Discussion of methodology for review of the legislation commenced. After reviewing various proposals, it was agreed to break it into sections, with the first six sections set for review at the next meeting. It was agreed to meet again on December 19, 2007 for purpose of reviewing the legislation's first six sections, establishing a quorum and setting the next meeting date. It was also agreed that Ms. Neggers would contact the towns of Sturbridge and Wales relative to participation.

Mr. Pearsall questioned previous discussion not to discuss social impacts. He noted that the legislation sees the social impacts of gaming – both positive and negative. If you are unemployed and get a job, which is a positive impact, if increased gambling creates more

crime, which is a negative social impact. Mr. Burns suggested the cost of the impact be examined.

At 8:35 p.m. the meeting adjourned.