Written by Administrator
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William Kenney, chairman of the Redevelopment Authority, employed a phrase Friday similar to the one Mayor Will Flanagan has used to describe a proposed new casino resort agreement they expect to receive today that would include a quicker — and substantial — funding payment.

Those funds would enable the Authority to purchase more property in quick order, ostensibly to line up a

site for the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth to locate its $26 million biomanufacturing complex near the Advanced Technology Manufacturing Center — if the university chooses that option as expected.

“There are a lot of moving parts,” Kenney said of the pieces he hopes will fit together in the coming weeks and months.

Kenney’s five-member authority has scheduled a meeting for Oct. 12 at 3 p.m. in the Fall River Office of Economic Development conference room at Government Center.

“The meeting is specifically so we can discuss a new form of proposal,” Kenney said. “I think it’s going to be a proposal for a purchase of a portion of land. I don’t know what the terms are going to be.”

He called the new objectives and timing “a good thing.”

He said it would give his board a week to review the latest Indian tribe casino proposal.

Flanagan has appointed three new members to the Authority this year — Dylan Ferreira, Ronald Rheaume and Thomas Martin Sr. They comprised the 3-2 majority that in July approved the prior agreement with the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe. Ann Keane is the fifth board member.

The agreement called for a $21 million sale of 300 acres near the Freetown line and a new Route 24 egress under construction.

All but $200,000 of that payment would have come at the closing down the road. It remains unsigned.

The deal was spurred by the Mashpees bringing international investors to the table to build a $500 million resort casino. Kenney said he was aware the new proposal would be for the tribe to make “a straight purchase of part of the land with an option to purchase an additional part of the 300 acres later on.”

Kenney, a city lawyer appointed to the Authority by the governor’s office, said he’d be looking closely at wording on “a reverter clause” if casino plans fall apart. “There ought to be contingency if it’s not used for the intended purpose.”

Their progress siting a casino resort would impact the full land sale, Kenney indicated. That would include the tribe’s success to place the land in sovereign land trust through the U.S. Department of Interior and its Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The deal with the Mashpees created widespread controversy because it included land that was under consideration for a state-supported SouthCoast biomanufacturing park, with the UMass Dartmouth center as its anchor.

In a city with 13 percent unemployment, Flanagan and FROED Executive Vice President Kenneth Fiola Jr. have touted the 4,500 decent-paying, permanent jobs and 1,000-plus construction jobs the casino could bring over 3 to 5 years once the casino was approved. Flanagan has maintained since the spring announcement that the city “can have both.”

Fiola and other officials detailed and debated for 2½ hours some of the moving parts with the City Council last week.

Among conditions of the sale included a stipulation the state legislature legalize casino gambling by Dec. 31, which Flanagan and Kenney have said the past few weeks seems unlikely to happen by the agreement's target date.

Kenney also spoke about how the new deal might impact working with UMass on its biomanufacturing plans.

"The money makes it possible for us to do what we're supposed to do, which is buy land and redevelop it," he said. "The injection of funds will open up opportunities that we would not otherwise have.

"…If we have some funds," he said, "then we'd be happy to work with UMass to help them assemble parcels that would be appropriate for them to develop."

Asked if he expected that to happen in the area of the ATMC and Brayton Avenue, Kenney said, "I don't want to speculate on that. I haven't seen the proposal."

UMass Dartmouth says it continues to review all its options with hired development consultants that included proposals from New Bedford and Fall River to use large land tracts in business parks in the Whaling City and in Freetown.

But the vice chairman of the university system board of trustees, James Karam, said Thursday a decision had been reached to use property at or near the ATMC adjacent to Meditech on Martine Street as the preferred option. A second option would be to build on the Dartmouth campus, he said.

Karam said university consultants told him the concept of clustering life sciences spin-off businesses within a single land tract is not necessary, although Karam, a regional real estate developer, said it might be preferable.

“That’s good,” Kenney said of Karam’s assertions, “because I’m sure his opinion carries a lot of weight.”

Fiola said his office was “finalizing a draft” over the weekend to present to Kenney today. It would take precedence over the old one, he said, declining to discuss any particulars.

Fiola said he and city Corporation Counsel Steven Torres have been meeting with the Authority’s consulting lawyers in Providence to put together the latest proposed agreement. He said authorized Mashpee Wampanoag tribe representatives have reviewed it.

When Fiola, Kenney and Torres discussed with the City Council the combination of a casino and the UMass research and training center as a draw to the life sciences sector, one testy exchange erupted over where to site a casino.

Fiola noted that a deed restriction needed to be lifted from the 300 acres because the agreement with the state when the land was purchased said specifically it could not be used for a casino or a landfill.

“Do you favor lifting the restriction (for a casino)?” Fiola asked council Vice President Linda Pereira.

“I’m not in favor of lifting it for any of them,” Pereira said. She said she favored putting a casino “by the waterfront” and on a smaller parcel.

“It’s easy to say, ‘Let’s put it here, let’s put it there,’” Fiola shot back.

Pereira said the funded proposal to remove the Route 79 ramps and remove the controversial liquefied natural gas project proposed at Weaver’s Cove would give the city other options.

"When do you think that project will occur?" Fiola said. "It's white noise because there's no certainty what you're discussing." He said a plan to build a waterfront casino is "not realistic."

Kenney and Fiola said Friday they were unsure whether the new tribal proposal issued to the RA would be available for public consumption or remain confidential until the authority discussed it at an open meeting.

When the Authority discussed the last agreement in July, with Fiola, Torres and Flanagan present, board member Ferreira cut off review of its contents after seven minutes. The same three members that approved the agreement agreed to end that discussion and questions from the audience on another 3-2 vote.

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