

Written by Administrator
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With [Michelle Jarboe](#)

Developers of Cleveland's downtown casino have purchased for \$85 million the 16 acres between Huron Road and the Cuyahoga River where they plan to build their \$600

million casino.

And Thursday, developer Rock Ohio Ceasars will announce what part the historic Higbee building will play in their plans for the downtown casino. Local officials had asked the developer to consider opening a first phase of the Casino in a location like Higbee because the permanent Huron Road casino wouldn't open until at least 2013.

Tuesday, word that a press conference had been called by Cleveland Cavaliers majority owner Dan Gilbert and Ceasars Entertainment Corp. Chief Executive Officer Gary Loveman came within hours of the news that the pair's joint venture had finalized the purchase of the Huron Road property, including the air rights, from Forest City Enterprises Inc.

According to invitations sent to local leaders, the developer will host a "celebratory lunch" at Bridges Restaurant inside Gilbert's Quicken Loans Arena following Thursday's 11 a.m. press conference in the Higbee building.

Matt Cullen, a partner in Gilbert's gaming company, described the land purchase as "critical," both because it was the final land purchase for the casino and because it signaled the developer's commitment to getting the Huron Rd. casino built.

"It's a complicated site, and as you can see it's an expensive site," Cullen said.

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"But we thought it was the best site in the city to create the kind of environment that we've been talking about -- this very interactive, very well connected facility in the heart of the downtown," Cullen added.

Rock Ohio Ceasars paid \$11 million cash at closing and will pay the balance in installments in late 2011 and 2012.

"This sale is a milestone in the process of bringing a first-class casino to Tower City, and the start of an exciting new future for downtown Cleveland entertainment," David LaRue, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Forest City, said in a news release.

The property is adjacent to Forest City's Tower City Center, an office, hotel and retail complex on Public Square.

And the casino is among several large downtown developments, including a medical mart and new convention center, a \$275 million office-and-hotel development on the east bank of the Flats, a new Inner Belt Bridge and an aquarium on the west bank of the Flats.

Cullen said that it's easier to develop a casino outside the city where you don't have as many problems dealing with existing infrastructure, tying into long established traffic patterns, and creating parking for 8 million annual visitors.

To add parking at the casino, the developer had looked filling in about 29 feet of the Cuyahoga River near Collision Bend, which drew sharp criticism from the public. He said yesterday that changing the river is no longer on the table.

Cullen said building downtown is at the center of his company's vision for both its Cleveland and Cincinnati casinos, or its "big bet," as he described it.

"We believe that if you create 2,000 casino jobs out in a corn field, then you've got 2,000 casino

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jobs," Cullen said. "If you create them in the heart of a downtown, then you can become much more of a district that allows growth and jobs for all the surrounding facilities.

"People will say, 'Hey, this is a great area.'"

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