

Suffolk Downs acknowledges city can prevent casino development from being done in phases - Metro

Written by Administrator

Monday, 03 September 2012 10:00 -

Responding to complaints about plans to develop its proposed \$1 billion casino resort in phases, Suffolk Downs has acknowledged that the host cities control when the resort could open, and that the project cannot be done in phases without the support of local officials.

Track officials would not comment further, but they continue to make the argument to public officials that it would make sense to open in stages — to begin to provide tax revenue and jobs — while construction continues on the more time-consuming aspects of the development, according to Revere Mayor Dan Rizzo.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino of Boston [publicly objected](#) this month to plans from Suffolk Downs to open a gambling floor first, and then a hotel and amenities in a second phase. Menino said a piecemeal project would lack the “wow” factor to draw visitors and drive additional economic development.

The committee Menino named to advise the city on casino issues urged the track to submit plans “that complete the project in a single phase.” As of Friday, Suffolk Downs had not yet submitted those plans, according to the mayor’s office.

But in a written response to Menino’s committee, Suffolk Downs noted that “the timing of the opening of our project is dependent on independent decisions made by the city, the Gaming Commission,” and state environmental officials — an acknowledgment that public officials, especially mayors, hold vast leverage under the state’s 2011 casino bill.

Suffolk Downs straddles the municipal line between East Boston and Revere. If Menino or Rizzo did not like the development plans, either mayor could indefinitely block the project by refusing to negotiate an agreement with the developers to host a casino. No casino project can apply for a state license without a signed agreement with its host community, or, in this case, the two communities in which the track sits. Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse effectively [forced the casino company Hard Rock International](#) out of his city by refusing to negotiate. The Foxborough Board of Selectmen similarly [stonewalled a gambling resort](#) proposal in their community.

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Suffolk Downs spokesmen will not say if they have abandoned plans to build in phases.

But track officials have assured Rizzo that, should they win a casino license, they intend to begin construction on the hotel and resort amenities at the same time they begin construction of the casino floor, the mayor said.

The casino portion of the development is expected to take less time, and Suffolk Downs has argued that it would make sense to open the casino to patrons while work continues on the hotel, Rizzo said.

“I would be open to that,” Rizzo said, as long as he sees significant construction underway on the planned hotel and the rest of the project.

He said he is satisfied that Suffolk Downs, in partnership with the casino company Caesars Entertainment, is committed to building the full project that track officials outlined in June, which would include a hotel and restaurants, a spa, and entertainment venues.

Caesars chief executive Gary Loveman [described the plans](#) for a two-stage development in a Globe interview published in July.

In the first phase, taking about 12 months, “you’d see casino, slots and tables, the usual casino services, and some restaurant services,” Loveman said then. “And then you’d get the hotel, spa, more restaurants, and retail in the second phase.” That second phase would take an additional year, he said.

The racetrack is currently the only applicant for the sole casino license created by state law for the Greater Boston and Worcester region.

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