

By [DOMENIC SARNO](#) | Mayor of Springfield



Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno

On Aug. 27, I announced that [Springfield was beginning its selection process for a destination resort casino](#) project pursuant to the Commonwealth's recently enacted gaming legislation. This legislation is unique in that it places strict limits on the number of casinos permitted in the Commonwealth and requires each gaming licensee to make a minimum capital investment of \$500 million in its project. The creation of a regional monopoly is a powerful incentive for prospective developers to take a hard look at locating in the Commonwealth. Similarly, the economic impact generated by a project of this magnitude means that a city must seriously consider acting as a host community. As mayor, one of my responsibilities is to attract, encourage, and foster new businesses in our city, from the family-owned shops to large, nationally known manufacturing companies. It goes without saying that hosting a destination resort casino is both a once in a lifetime opportunity as well as a daunting challenge.

In the current economic environment, mayors face the unenviable task of constantly being compelled to cut city budgets, resulting in layoffs and potentially fewer city services for residents. [Springfield](#), like many other cities in our region, has been hit hard by the loss of

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traditional manufacturing jobs. The new reality is that cities must work harder than ever to stretch their existing revenues and seek new sources of revenue that don't impose further burdens on existing taxpayers.

A large-scale casino project, carefully considered, planned, and implemented, can provide a broad spectrum of benefits to a community. Certain benefits of hosting a major casino project are obvious: new jobs, both in construction and ongoing operations; increased property tax revenues (which we currently estimate at \$15 million-\$20 million annually for a Springfield casino), and increased tourism. Not so obvious are the benefits that can be generated from a well-crafted agreement between the host community and the project developer, such as purchases from local vendors and suppliers, utilization of local educational institutions to train prospective employees for new career paths in casino employment, workforce development programs for the disabled and the chronically unemployed and underemployed, and partnerships with local entertainment venues.

The old-style casino development, essentially an inward-looking "box" designed to keep patrons focused on slot machines and table games and set in a sea of surface parking, would not be compatible with our city's history or its vision for its future. Our city's economic development team and consultants believe urban casinos can adapt to changing tastes and demands of local communities by integrating themselves into the urban environment, becoming more outward looking, and providing linkages to key entertainment venues. In addition, forward-looking developers are also beginning to think about how they can incorporate market-rate housing into their developments - a new and novel approach which has the positive effect of stimulating needed additional economic activity in an urban landscape by attracting young adults interested in living in a vibrant location. These factors all led me to conclude that the opportunity to vie to become a host community for a destination resort casino project was something that Springfield must pursue.

Our city is in the enviable position of having [multiple casino companies interested in locating in Springfield](#). Our selection process has asked all project proposers to address how their project will assist the city in achieving the following principal goals: making a significant and lasting contribution to the city and the Commonwealth and increasing sustainable economic benefits from tourism and conventions; being a catalyst for additional economic development in the city; creating good-paying jobs and new employment opportunities for city residents; utilizing local and small business suppliers and vendors, including minority, women, and veteran business enterprises; utilizing the city's existing entertainment venues; mitigating any adverse impacts of the project on the city and surrounding communities, and providing additional revenues for the city.

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We expect that the high caliber of developers attracted to Springfield will bring creative ideas to achieving these goals, such as providing seed capital to worthwhile local start-up companies that will serve as vendors to the casino, and become active in the city's philanthropic community.

By selecting a project that best fulfills these goals, and by having a host community agreement with a developer that clearly outlines the developer's responsibilities, Springfield residents will be assured that they will be in a position to take advantage of the significant economic opportunity presented by the commonwealth's gaming legislation.

We understand the profound impact that hosting a destination resort casino project will have on our city and its residents. Increased traffic, possible wage inflation, public safety issues, impacts on our educational system, and compulsive gambling are a just of the few of the concerns expressed by our community. This project will affect generations to come. No city can proceed with a game-changing project presented by a destination resort casino without applying as much scrutiny and deliberation as needed on these issues and without seeking input from all city constituencies affected by such a project. Each potential adverse impact must be studied, understood, and addressed before the first shovel hits the ground.

However, our city is realistic. We recognize that this project will not be an economic panacea, but must be combined with other development projects in our city's effort to revitalize itself. Currently, our city has more than \$300 million of new developments either being planned or underway. Among these are four new schools, including the brand new \$114 million Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy that formally opened in August. A major redevelopment of Union Station, which will create a vibrant new transportation hub downtown, continues to move ahead, as do road projects throughout the city. These projects move forward while the city continues to recover from last year's unprecedented natural disasters, which included an early Nor'easter, a major tornado that carved a six-mile path of destruction through several of our city's neighborhoods, an earthquake tremor, a microburst, and an early October snowstorm that left many Springfield residents without power for more than a week.

To attract an experienced and financially viable casino developer that will bring its best and most creative ideas to a project, a city must demonstrate its enthusiasm for the project and provide a fair, understandable, transparent, and certain selection process. This can only be accomplished with the full support of a city's residents, its business community, and legislative branch. By communicating to all interested parties through public meetings and maintaining a dedicated website, we will place ourselves in the best possible position to take advantage of the unique opportunity offered by the new gaming legislation. We are determined to work hard and

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in a professional manner with all parties, and particularly the Massachusetts Gaming Commission, to bring a destination resort casino project to Springfield.

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