

Lawmaker fears tribal casino pact could stiff neighboring towns

Written by Administrator
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A Lakeville lawmaker is raising concerns that a new pact for a proposed tribal casino in Taunton could drastically slash surrounding towns' cut of the potential windfall.

State Rep. Keiko Orall, a Lakeville Republican, told the state gaming board today that she's worried a new deal being hashed out between Gov. Deval Patrick and the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe could leave little for Lakeville, Middleboro and Berkeley. A deal that would have given the state a 21 percent cut of the Taunton casino cash was rejected by the federal government as too rich.

"I feel that they're going to be going for an amount that is less," Orall told the Massachusetts Gaming Commission today. "So that means there's going to be even less money for mitigation."

Many states get miniscule cuts from tribal casinos, with some getting just 1 or 2 percent. In rejecting the Massachusetts deal, the feds said the pact struck with Patrick violated the spirit of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which was designed to legalize casinos as reparation for tribes.

Gaming Commission Chairman Stephen Crosby said he's spoken with the Patrick administration about having board members join the negotiations, specifically to ensure surrounding communities are not left out of the deal.

The board has given the tribe until March 15 to strike a new deal. The commission will meet in Taunton March 21 and could vote that day to open the southeastern Massachusetts region to commercial casino bids.

Tribal officials say they expect to strike a new deal that will win federal approval.

The state gaming law gave the Mashpee Wampanoags exclusive rights to seek a southeastern Massachusetts casino, but set a July 2012 deadline. The gaming board gave the tribe an extension after the feds rejected the deal.

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Orrall asked the board to look out for the three rural towns, noting that none has been provided funds to analyze the potential impact of the Taunton casino. Towns next to potential commercial casinos can tap funds for impact studies and also must strike deals with the developers as part of the licensing process.

“The surrounding communities are in a very different scenario with the tribal casino than they are with the commercial casinos,” Orrall said. “We haven’t had the safeguards that have been put in place for the commercial licenses. I would ask for special consideration for the communities of Lakeville, Middleboro and Berkeley.”

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