

Written by Administrator
Saturday, 13 July 2013 22:00 -

SPRINGFIELD — A new MassLive.com/CBS 3 Springfield poll released today concludes that a majority of residents in the city are supportive of [MGM Resorts International's proposal](#) to build an \$800 million resort casino in the South End of the city.

According to the telephone survey of 401 likely voters, 55 percent are for the MGM casino; 35 percent are against it and 8 percent remain undecided.

When calculated without considering people who are leaning one way but not entirely firm in their conviction, the numbers shift more than the margin, with 51 percent supporting MGM and 32 percent opposing.

In terms of determining certainty, 85 percent of respondents said they are very sure about their choice while 13 percent said they could still change their mind before hitting the polls on Tuesday. That small percentage of people who say their mind can still be swayed will be the focus as the pro- and anti-casino groups use advertising and traditional outreach to push their respective messages ahead of the vote.

When attempting to gauge whether the pro- or anti-casino lobby was doing a better job at getting its message out, people by a margin of about 3-1 said the pro-casino proponents were the most active. Of those polled, 31 percent said someone of the pro-casino mindset had contacted them in the past month while only 9 percent said the same about the anti-casino groups.

[Campaign finance disclosure reports](#) released last week revealed that MGM has contributed more than \$1 million to the pro-casino "Yes for Springfield" effort. The anti-casino group led by attorney Michael Kogut has had a fraction of that amount to work with, but maintains a significant street presence with yard signs and public demonstrations at places like the "X" in the Forest Park neighborhood.

Both pro- and anti-casino groups have been targeted by Springfield code officials as their respective signs have been found in places barred by city ordinance. (Republican file photo)

The pro-casino "Yes for Springfield" group, in a full-page advertisement scheduled to run in the Sunday Republican, touts endorsements of the MGM proposal by the [paper's editorial board](#) ,

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local

[public safety unions](#)

, and groups representing the local black and

[Hispanic communities](#)

With a large picture of Springfield Mayor [Domenic Sarno](#) below the "Yes for Springfield" banner, the mayor is quoted as calling the MGM proposal a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dramatically improve quality of life in our city."

Meanwhile the "Citizens Against Casino Gaming" group is spending money on direct mailings to households in the city.

Reiterating skepticism of the promises made by MGM, the group writes in one such mailing that casinos "send long-term residents fleeing- replacing them with transients whose primary tie to the community is the casino, itself."

But despite efforts on both sides of the equation to sway public opinion, the poll also concluded that of the people contacted by one side or the other in the past month, just 6 percent said they were more likely to support MGM as a result and 10 percent said they were now more likely to oppose it.

The most cited reason for people supporting the casino project was the prospect of it bringing jobs to a city with a seemingly stagnant double-digit unemployment rate. Nearly 67 percent said the promise of 3,000 permanent jobs swayed their decision, while additional revenue for the city budget was a distant second with 14 percent citing that factor.

Among the top reasons for opposing the MGM casino proposal were a fear of increased crime, 25 percent; and that gambling is immoral or sinful, 13 percent. It is worth noting that 12 percent of those who oppose the casino said they actually like casinos, but simply do not want to have one in Springfield because they live there.

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Of the likely voters, 41 percent said they were at least somewhat likely to visit a Springfield casino to gamble while 56 percent were not likely to do so. At the same time, 68 percent were at least somewhat likely to patronize the facility to see a show or concert, indicating that the gaming portion of the casino venue simply isn't as big a draw for locals as having another entertainment option.

The poll, commissioned by the newspaper and WSHM TV through the Western New England University Polling Institute and [Braun Research](#) of Princeton, N.J., carries a 5 percent margin of error.

The MGM proposal is the only of the three Western Massachusetts projects that would bring a casino into a predominately residential area.

MGM is the sole casino operator still looking to develop in Springfield since [Ameristar walked away](#) after clearing much of the Westinghouse site on Page Boulevard and the [city rejected a proposal by Penn National Gaming](#).

The [Hard Rock International](#) pitch for a casino would place that project at the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield. [Mohegan Sun](#), wants to build a \$1 billion resort casino project in Palmer off Thorndike Street (Route 32) near the Massachusetts Turnpike.

Each project must be approved by its respective host community before the proposal is sent to the [Massachusetts Gaming Commission](#), which will ultimately choose which company gets the sole Western Massachusetts casino license.

After several companies presumably spend millions in planning, marketing and land acquisition or agreements, only one will get the license to build a resort casino in Western Massachusetts. Two other resort casinos can be awarded in the eastern part of the state.

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Barring any unforeseen kinks in the process, the Massachusetts Gaming Commission is expected to grant its one slot parlor license in late 2013, with the resort casino licenses potentially not being issued until early 2014.

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