

Everett mayor takes aim at Menino over casino site - Metro

Written by Administrator

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The battle between backers of Boston-area casinos became unusually personal Friday, with the mayor of Everett accusing Mayor Thomas M. Menino of being a bully, prompting a quick retort from Menino and then a remarkable accusation by the developer who wants to build in Everett.

The sharp rhetoric began to unfold Friday morning, when Mayor Carlo DeMaria Jr. of Everett held a press conference to promote his efforts to bring a casino to his city.

"It is no secret that Mayor Menino, a man I hold a deep respect for, holds a great deal of power and influence," DeMaria said, standing on the spot in Everett where Las Vegas mogul Steve Wynn hopes to build a \$1 billion resort casino.

"But for him to attempt to bully the city of Everett, the [Gaming Commission](#), and state officials into submission to gain a political advantage for Suffolk Downs is something that I could not stand idly by and allow to go unchecked."

Menino, an early and ardent supporter of a casino at Suffolk Downs, struck back a few hours later, declaring that he was standing up for Bostonians.

"I'm not bullying," Menino said, asked about DeMaria's comments during a senior citizens event in Roxbury. "I'm just trying to protect the residents of our city, especially Charlestown. If that's bullying, then too bad."

DeMaria's press conference drew scores of residents and officials who belong to Everett United, a procasino group funded by Wynn.

Everett common councilor Jason Marcus, speaking to WBZ radio, raised some eyebrows when he said that his city's casino would be a big draw for Asian visitors.

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“All the colleges in this area; MIT, Harvard, Boston University have many, many Asian students,” Marcus said, according to WBZ. “And their families are well-to-do. They’re paying cash. And they are very big gamblers.”

Marcus could not be reached for comment Friday night.

The exchanges reflect the increasingly heated competition between two rival casino projects: an Everett casino, proposed by Wynn for a 37-acre site on the Mystic River, and a \$1 billion casino planned by Caesar’s Palace and Suffolk Downs in East Boston.

The state’s casino law gives vast power to “host communities,” requiring developers to negotiate lucrative agreements promising revenue and addressing impacts such as traffic. Communities must also hold a referendum for residents to approve locating a casino in a city or town.

As he tries to [hammer](#) out a host community agreement for Boston’s Suffolk Downs proposal, Menino believes that Boston should be named a host community for the Everett casino because, he says, the property lies partly in Boston, and local streets provide access to the site, located off Routes 99 and 16.

“The plans I’ve seen have the city of Boston in them, so by definition, we’re a host city,” he said Friday.

Not so, DeMaria said Friday.

“Let me be clear,” the Everett mayor said, his back turned to the Boston skyline. “Everett is the sole host community for this development.”

If Boston were declared a host community, Menino could thwart the development, giving Suffolk Downs a clear path to win the coveted casino license, DeMaria said.

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“Basically, what he wants is for Mr. Wynn to say, ‘Ok, you’re a host community,’” he said. “And then never negotiate anything. And then that kills our plan. It’s all politics.”

Menino should accept Boston’s status as a surrounding community, a provision of the gambling law that requires developers to negotiate agreements to address the impact of traffic and other issues, DeMaria said.

“Boston, as a potential surrounding community should . . . engage Wynn Resorts to talk about the real impacts, positive or negative, of this development on the city of Boston,” he said.

But Menino said Wynn has given him a cold shoulder.

“I’ve been asking for weeks for information from the developer of the casino, but they have not been forthcoming,” Menino said.

Friday night, a spokesman for Wynn disputed Menino’s account, questioning his veracity.

“The mayor’s ongoing disruption of the process and his insistence that our resort is somehow located in Boston is clearly a political ploy and an embarrassing attempt to benefit his preferred project,” Michael Weaver, a senior vice president at Wynn Resorts, wrote in an e-mail to the Globe. “If and when he acquaints himself with the facts, he will hopefully cease the need to rely on inaccurate rhetoric.”

Everett residents overwhelmingly approved a local referendum backing the casino in that city in June.

In April, DeMaria announced a host community agreement with Wynn that would generate up to \$30 million in annual revenues and give employment preference to city residents.

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“It’s a game changer,” said DeMaria.

In his remarks Friday, DeMaria did not just take aim at Menino.

He also admonished Mayor Joseph Curtatone of Somerville, who has joined a statewide effort to [repeal](#) the state’s expanded gambling law.

“I am disappointed that Mayor Curtatone seeks to derail a project that could revolutionize my community,” DeMaria said.

Curtatone, a Democrat mulling a bid for governor in 2014, dismissed DeMaria’s criticism.

“I understand my good colleague from Everett and his sense of urgency to develop that site,” Curtatone said. “I am just as against the Suffolk Downs proposal as I am the Everett one. . . . It is not good, sustainable economic development.”

Stephen Crosby, chairman of the state Gaming Commission, said the panel will not be influenced by politics.

“Elected officials will do their duty to advocate for their constituents, and we will do our duty to decide issues on the merits and the merits alone.”

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