

Wilmot proposes Seneca County casino

Written by Administrator

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Tom Tobin, Staff writer 12:23 a.m. EST December 13, 2013



If the owner of the Rochester area's top shopping malls has his way, a casino will be operating in a small Seneca County town sometime in 2016.

Local developer and shopping mall magnate Thomas Wilmot Sr. has proposed building a \$350 million hotel and entertainment project in Tyre — population 981, according to the 2010 Census.

The project is to include a casino, hotel, spa, restaurants and entertainment venues. It would be located directly off Thruway exit 41 on farm property about 53 miles east of Rochester. Wilmot said Thursday purchase of the land is under contract.

Wilmot said he will apply for one of four upstate New York casinos approved by state voters in a Nov. 5 referendum. The ballot initiative approved the construction of seven casinos in total. No awards have been made yet.

Wilmot said Thursday he expects the awards to be made by the state Gaming Commission by the end of 2014.

Tyre is east of a point upstate where, under a compact with the Seneca Nation of Indians, no private, non-Indian casino is to be located.

Wilmot is chairman of Wilmorite Corp., which owns and operates four of the Rochester region's

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largest shopping malls: Eastview in Victor, Marketplace mall in Henrietta, The Mall at Greece Ridge and Pittsford Plaza.

Wilmot was involved in an effort several years ago to locate an Indian-run casino in downtown Rochester. The city objected, and the plan never got off the ground.

"There's no Indian involvement with this project," Wilmot said Thursday. The location was selected, he said, because it is in an area in which state-sanctioned casinos are permitted. The proposed location is about halfway between Rochester and Syracuse.

Lee Park, a spokesman for the state Gaming Commission, said Thursday that the Eastern Southern Tier zone, which includes Tyre, extends from Lake Ontario in Wayne County south to the Pennsylvania border.

"I expect there will be competition with the Turning Stone (Native American) casino," Wilmot said. "But the idea is to attract people from Rochester and Syracuse."

In August, the Seneca Nation of Indians announced it had hired local developer David Flaum to help locate a casino near Rochester. The statement did not name a specific site.

For years, the Senecas have sought a casino in the Rochester region. It would be their fourth in western New York. Among the sites considered were downtown Rochester, with Wilmot as the proposed developer; a Henrietta property between East River Road and the Genesee River; and a location in Gates.

Adding another Seneca casino would require local, state and federal approvals.

Flaum was unavailable for comment Thursday on the Wilmot plan and its possible effect on the casino site search in the Rochester area.

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Wilmot said the casino-hotel project, once completed, will create 1,800 permanent jobs. Construction of the complex, he said, will create about 1,200 construction jobs.

Mark Peterson, president and CEO of Greater Rochester Enterprise, said that, while the project is welcome, it doesn't fit the classic definition of economic development.

"I expect there will be some employment benefits for those in Rochester and Syracuse, but this sort of thing isn't ordinarily a driver of economic growth," Peterson said.

Seneca County officials were positive about the project, which requires approvals from the county and the town of Tyre. No votes were held after a public hearing Wednesday night in Tyre.

"The proposed Wilmot casino is over and above the minimum requirements that I proposed the day after the casino proposition passed," Seneca County Board of Supervisors Chairman Robert Hayssen said.

The state Gaming Commission is an agency created this year to award casino locations as well as oversee lottery and horse racing. The governor appoints five of the seven members.

The commission is required to create a Gaming Facility Location Board. It is a five-member board whose members won't be named until after Jan. 1. Those in public office or with ties to the gambling industry cannot serve.

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How the state will decide

The state Gaming Commission has released the criteria by which they will judge applications like Wilmot's:

70 percent: Economic activity factors

20 percent: Local impact factors

10 percent: Workforce enhancement factors

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