

Casino bidders keep cards close to vest at conference

Written by Administrator
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Casino bidders appeared at a conference Wednesday in Albany. (Photo: Albany Bureau)

It was a high-stakes poker game -- and no one wanted to show their hand.

Few questions were asked, few details were released and the guessing continued over who would win four lucrative casino licenses the state will give out likely by late fall.

"I was kind of surprised how short it actually was," said Bill Walsh, who wants to build a \$150 million destination called Traditions Resort & Casino near Binghamton.

The state Gaming Commission required all the bidders for the four casino licenses to come to Albany for Tuesday's conference to ask questions about the process.

The state Legislature and Gov. Andrew Cuomo last year adopted a law that allows four privately owned casinos to be built in three locations in New York: the Southern Tier, Catskills and Albany area.

Each potential bidder a week ago had to submit a preliminary application and \$1 million fee.

The \$1 million fee is reserved for investigating the applicants and their proposals, and it's fully refundable until the state board announces the minimum total investment required for a license. The requirement is expected to be released early next month.

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The minimum requirement may whittle down the field, some of the bidders said. The formal applications are due by June 30.

“We feel like we are the kids who’ve done their homework. We’ve been at this for almost three years preparing to build a casino resort destination,” said

Charles Degliomini, executive vice president for Empire Resorts, which is looking to build a casino in Sullivan County.

There are three proposals for the Southern Tier, and at least three for Orange County – which is the closest to New York City. Others are looking at other parts of the Catskills, and there are about six in the Albany area.

Some bidders haven’t disclosed their proposals and the locations where they want to build.

Rochester-area commercial developer Wilmorite is one of three companies looking to build a casino in the Southern Tier.

James Wilmot, the company’s chief operating officer, said their site in Seneca County in the Finger Lakes makes the best sense.

“We have no reason not to believe that on the merits we have the best proposal,” Wilmot said. “We feel very comfortable right now.”

But Jeff Gural, owner of Tioga Downs, the racino in the Southern Tier, said his proposal is the best for the region. He said since he already has the gaming facility, he would be up and running with an expanded casino with table games within months.

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"I think we have the best location, simply because we are in between Binghamton, Elmira and Corning.

Another Rochester-area developer, David Flaum, came to an agreement last week with casino giant Caesars Entertainment for a proposed facility near Woodbury Commons in Orange County, 50 miles north of New York City.

Flaum is also pursuing a \$350 million casino in the city of Albany. He hasn't said who the operator of the Albany casino would be.

Flaum said he would only be the developer of the casinos. In a separate deal, he's working with the Seneca Nation of Indians for a casino in Henrietta, Monroe County.

"I'm not a casino operator. I know who I am and I know who I'm not," Flaum said.

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