Written by Administrator
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SYRACUSE, N.Y. - Because of a promise of jobs, the Onondaga County Legislature almost waded into a debate two counties away over a proposal to build a casino in the Finger Lakes.

New York state has already agreed to give exclusive gaming rights in Onondaga County to the Oneida Indian Nation in exchange for an annual payment to the county.

Still, the Onondaga County Legislature briefly considered voting Tuesday on a resolution in support of developer Tom Wilmot's proposed casino for the town of Tyre - 47 miles away. Legislature Chairman Ryan McMahon said the developer has agreed to hire 60 percent of the workforce from labor unions in Onondaga County.

The resolution said the proposed casino is a $350 million project with a hotel, spa, restaurants and entertainment. It would create 1,200 construction jobs and 1,800 permanent jobs with a $50 million annual payroll.

McMahon pulled the resolution from the meeting agenda Tuesday after there was not enough support in a private Republican caucus. The current Legislature has been consistent in its opposition to gambling and previously did not approve of a Wilmot proposal for a racino in Onondaga County, McMahon said.

McMahon said, however, Tuesday's resolution was not about whether to allow gambling. Voters have already approved it.

Voters across New York approved a referendum last November to allow up to 7 non-Indian casinos across the state. Wilmot and two others have applied for the first round of licenses, which will be awarded to one casino in a region that includes Broome, Seneca, Tioga and Tompkins counties and portions of Chemung, Schuyler and Wayne counties. The other two proposals are expected to come from Traditions at the Glen Resort in Johnson City and Tioga Downs in Nichols.

Residents of the town of Tyre traveled Tuesday to the Onondaga County Legislature's meeting to protest, saying the casino will ruin the rural character of the town.

Desiree Dawley, spokeswoman for the group Casino Free Tyre, said the town of 900 people is not the place for a six-story casino.

"It's a farming community complete with Amish and horse and buggies along with large tractors, farm implements and multi-generation families," she said. "We want to keep it this way."

McMahon said he was approached by lawyers and lobbyists for Wilmot's company, Rochester-based Wilmorite Inc., who asked for his support because of the promise of jobs in Onondaga County.

He said Tyre residents were muddying the issue with a fight they have already lost.

"They're looking at it from the merits of how it impacts them," he said. "We were looking at it from a standpoint of how this affects our constituents from an economic standpoint and it clearly would have been good as far as jobs go."

McMahon said the Legislature will not vote on the resolution and will miss the June 30 deadline for the developer to submit an official application and show support from various municipalities and other parties.

Wilmot did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment.

Lee Park, a spokesman for the state Gaming Commission, said the labor agreement is not with the state. It would be between the company and labor unions and would be included in the application to the state.The state will make the applications available online in early July.

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