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CLEVELAND — A casino developer wants to slim down Cuyahoga River shipping lanes at Cleveland to make room for more parking — a proposal that has some shippers concerned and that federal officials say would require an act of Congress.

The idea emerged in talks between the Rock Ventures casino company and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which controls navigable waterways, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer reported Tuesday.

Rock Ventures, controlled by Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert, proposed pushing out the river bulkhead, similar to a seawall, by about 29 feet to make room for parking and as a buffer for the casino complex, which in places comes within feet of the river wall, the newspaper reported.

Rock Ventures is scheduled to open in 2013.

The navigation channel was established by an act of Congress and only Congress can modify it, said Bruce Sanders, a corps spokesman in the agency's Buffalo, N.Y., office.

The proposed site is adjacent to a 180-degree turn in the river that cargo carriers must slowly traverse, and some vessels now come within 30 feet of the bulkhead, said Alan Sisselman, who oversees Ohio permit applications for the corps.

"You can do the math. You take away 28 feet and you're down to two feet," he said.

The proposal has caused some concern among shippers.

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Glen Nekvasil, spokesman for the nonprofit Lake Carriers' Association, said that even under ideal conditions navigating the twisting river is difficult.

Companies in the steel, construction and fuel industries rely on the channel, and getting ships up and down it can be a challenge, he said.

"The problem is that conditions are rarely perfect and ships don't run on rails," said Nekvasil, whose group represents the 18 companies operating U.S.-flagged ships on the Great Lakes.

Rock Ventures spokeswoman Jennifer Kulczycki described the Oct. 21 meeting her company had with state and federal officials as "preliminary discussions." She said no decisions have been made.

"We would certainly work with the right community stakeholders to make sure that it's safe," she said.

The casino is one of four approved by Ohio voters. Gilbert also controls the Cincinnati casino. Penn National Gaming, a Pennsylvania-based company, controls the Columbus and Toledo sites.

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