

Community eyes jobs, revenue from proposed casino

Written by Administrator
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FRUITPORT TOWNSHIP, Mich. (WOOD) — Hundreds of people attended a meeting Wednesday to weigh in on a long-discussed casino and hotel south of Muskegon.

When discussed at a community hearing [three years ago](#) , a majority of people in the area supported building the casino. On Wednesday, the feedback was much the same.

"It would enhance the great progress we've made in areas such as downtown Muskegon as we work to transform Muskegon into a destination to play, work and live," said one representative from the Muskegon County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians wants to [build the resort](#) at the former site of the Great Lakes Downs racetrack, which is off Harvey Road south of the US-31/I-96 interchange in Fruitport Township. Tribe officials say it have 69,000 square feet of gaming space and would create more than 1,100 jobs.

Dale Nesbary, president of Muskegon Community College, said that students from several of the school's programs, including graphic design and entrepreneurship, could greatly benefit from those jobs.

"We probably have 20 programs out there that fit exactly what they need right now, so that makes me very happy," Nesbary told 24 Hour News 8.

The hearing at Fruitport Middle School was hosted by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. The public was invited to comment on the [draft environmental impact statement](#) for the project. Made public at the end of last month, the study looked at potential effects the casino would have on soil, traffic, cultural resources, public services and more.

It also offered alternatives to the proposal by the tribe, mostly focusing on reducing the size of the project. One alternative did away with any gaming. Another would move the casino to

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Mason County.

"Personally, I'd like to see the project as it is proposed," Nesbary said.

"It doesn't often happen that a program comes along or an institution like this comes along that works so well with what we do as a college and vice versa," he added.

An overwhelming majority of the more than 30 people who spoke favored the casino. Representatives from local school boards, elected officials, and many other agencies touted the benefits to the local economy and infrastructure.

"The tax revenue out of this project is going to benefit tremendously the county coffers, township coffers and also the local businesses," Muskegon County Treasurer Tony Moulatsiotis said.

"This development will be good for the tribe, good for Muskegon County residents, and good for business in West Michigan," one Fruitport school board official said.

It has taken years to get to the drafting of an environmental impact statement, but tribe leaders say they've been working behind the scenes all along to get the casino open. They're excited to move forward.

"This was the big hump that we needed to get over," Tribal Ogema Larry Romanelli said.
"We've been waiting for three years. It's not the end of the line, but it's absolutely a major step."

One local pastor said at the meeting that he fears the casino would fuel gambling addictions. He would like to see the tribe donate more of the proceeds to local mental health organizations.

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There's no timeline on when the final environmental impact statement will be done nor when the feds will make a decision on the proposal.

The public comment period is open until Jan. 7. Instructions on how to provide feedback can be found [online](#) .

Read more <https://www.woodtv.com/news/muskegon-county/community-input-sought-for-proposed-casino/1656310521>