

White Earth anti-corruption team points out problems in casino plans

Written by Administrator

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Several months ago, the White Earth Tribal Council launched the Other Governmental Project to investigate possible tribal government corruption and according to a news release from White Earth, the team presented its initial findings to the Tribal Council.

White Earth Secretary-Treasurer Alan Roy, who was elected earlier this year, is the moving force behind the effort.

“Our tribe must move forward and hold folks accountable for our resources at the same time,” Roy said in October.

The White Earth Tribal Council voted in August to abandon the idea of a casino on Star Lake in Otter Tail County but that project was included in several of its findings:

“There appears to be no logical rationale to pay that type of inflated purchase prices for that property,” Leech Lake-area attorney Michael L. Garbow said in a letter to the Tribal Council, adding that he has “grave concerns” about the investigation’s findings so far.

“The ability to have the property zoned for casino use was very much up in the air,” Garbow said in his letter to the council. “The fact that the land was not held in trust added numerous layers of regulations that were outside of the band’s jurisdiction and were controlled by both the state and federal governments.”

“It appears that numerous unknown investors were having to get involved and (a nationally-known tribal financing expert’s) commission was going to jump to over \$2 million,” Garbow wrote.

“Again, land purchased for that project came at a severely bloated cost that far exceeded the appraised value of the property,” Garbow wrote.

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“Further, the secretary-treasurer at that time was operating a micro-loan program for hand-picked constituents,” Garbow wrote. “The problem with the micro-loan program was that she did not have (Tribal Council) approval and she was co-mingling her personal funds with (tribal) funds and dispersing those funds to people she personally decided should get the money without any type of oversight by the RBC (Tribal Council).”

Mason could not be reached for comment.

In addition to the findings, investigatory team members expressed their concerns over their safety.

In an interview, Roy said that when the investigation is complete “there’ll be a report published” and made available to the public. “The evidence speaks for itself, that’s all I can say,” he said.

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