

There's been a lot of Encore casino news. Here's what you may have missed.

Written by Administrator
Wednesday, 29 May 2019 05:00 -

It's been a busy fortnight of news for Encore Boston Harbor, and things will only get busier.

Wynn Resorts, the developer of the soon-to-open Everett casino, announced Tuesday that it had paid a \$35 million fine imposed on the company by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission in the wake of sexual misconduct accusations against its former CEO and founder, Steve Wynn. The news came after two weeks of relative uncertainty about the state's second full-scale resort casino.

Here's a look at the flurry of recent developments and what it means for the casino's opening.

Where do things stand now?

Encore officials say the \$2.6 billion casino will be ready to open on June 23 — even if they still have much work to do.

Matt Maddox, the CEO of Wynn Resorts, [had suggested earlier this month](#) that the planned opening date could be delayed a week or two, as they put the finishing touches on the property. That uncertainty is no longer the case, according to Bob DeSalvio, the president of the Everett casino.

"I wouldn't lie to you, there are quite a few things I'm worried about," DeSalvio told state regulators during a Gaming Commission hearing last week, as the State House News Service reported.

"But I think we have them all under control," he said, adding that "everything's on track."

DeSalvio said the casino will be "ready to go June 23 at 10 a.m.," as had been previously scheduled.

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But it's more than just a casino. Sitting on 33 acres along the Mystic River, the resort includes a 27-story hotel with 671 rooms; 15 food and drink options, from Dunkin' to luxury nightclubs; a spa, salon, and fitness center; meeting rooms; and an array of clothing and jewelry shops. The 210,000-square-foot casino floor itself includes 242 table games and 3,158 slot machines.

[According to The Boston Globe](#), some of the casino's 5,800 employees begin training as early as this week. During the two weeks before its opening, Encore will host several soft launches of its restaurants and, eventually, gaming floor — open only to employees, their family and friends, and a select group of customers who expressed early interest in the casino.

DeSalvio says the eight-hour test openings are necessary to fine-tune service based on feedback from Gaming Commission officials, who observe the soft launches.

"Because literally, once we open the door to the public, the place will be open 24/7/365 — forever," he told the *Globe*.

Why is the fine important?

Wynn Resorts took one more step toward opening Tuesday by paying its \$35 million fine to the Gaming Commission, including \$500,000 that the state fined Maddox for not doing more to investigate the complaints against his predecessor. Wynn, the 77-year-old casino mogul, was forced to resign last year [amid dozens of accounts of his decades-long pattern of sexual misconduct at the company](#), including pressuring employees to perform sexual acts.

In April, the Gaming Commission delivered a scathing report that said former Wynn Resorts executives helped cover up the allegations against Wynn. State officials ruled that the company could only keep its license for Encore Boston Harbor if it paid a \$35 million fine by the end of May.

In a statement Tuesday, the board of directors of Wynn Resorts said they disagreed with a number of the commission's findings, particularly that Maddox should have done more. However, even though the company expressed confidence that it would win an appeal of Maddox's fine, it said it would not take that route for the sake of a timely opening.

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“That appeal would delay the final conclusion of this matter, and therefore we appreciate Matt’s decision to forego an appeal in order to allow closure for the Company,” the board said in a statement. “The Company will pay the fine imposed on him and has today delivered payment of that, and the Company’s fine, to the Commission.”

Wynn officials reiterated that they look forward to working with state officials to open Encore on June 23.

Who owns this place anyways?

Wynn’s name was dropped from the Everett development [shortly after his resignation last year](#), though the casino remains licensed to his eponymous company — at least for now.

The *Globe* [reported on May 17](#) that Maddox and Mike Murren, the CEO of MGM Resorts, which runs the state’s other resort casino in Springfield, had met earlier this month in Las Vegas to discuss a possible sale of the Everett casino. In a statement, the two companies confirmed the conversations.

“They are very preliminary and of the nature that publicly traded corporations like ours often engage in, and in fact when opportunities such as this are presented, we are required to explore,” they said at the time. “We cannot say today where these conversations will lead, however we can reaffirm our commitment to the communities where we operate today.”

The stunning news came with an added complication: Massachusetts law prohibits companies from holding more than one casino license, so MGM would have presumably had to sell its \$960 million Springfield property, which [opened just last year](#). Local officials also expressed concerns about a potential sale’s impact on the two casinos’ host communities and their thousands of workers.

However, less than a week later — and before the backlash gained any more momentum — MGM [announced it was pulling out the talks](#) and doubling down on Springfield.

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"We have noted the anxiety raised by various stakeholders regarding a transaction and this troubles us at MGM," the company said. "We only wish to have a positive impact on communities in which we operate. We think the best course of action is to discontinue discussions concerning this opportunity."

One more twist: MGM apparently wasn't the only potential buyer. On May 23, the *Globe* [reported](#) that John Henry, the principal of the Boston Red Sox and owner and publisher of the *Globe* and Boston.com, had looked into buying Encore with a group of investors last year, as well as again earlier this month. Henry told the *Globe* that an acquaintance raised the idea to him and then he checked with Maddox about the possibility. Each time, Maddox said Wynn Resorts was committed to moving forward with the casino themselves.

"While we were serious, we had minimal conversations with Wynn [Resorts]," Henry told the *Globe*. "It has to be in everyone's interest to see Encore open just as it is scheduled to do, without any internal or external disruption, and see first-hand the value of this project to the region."

Read more <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2019/05/29/encore-casino-opening-everett-news>