

## City lists five West, South Side sites for casino review

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 17 July 2019 13:03 -

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The city of Chicago today released a list of five sites it wants to get a close financial look at as the possible location for the city's new casino—the first real indication of where Mayor Lori Lightfoot may be headed on the highly competitive and potentially controversial issue.

The five all are in outlying South and West Side neighborhoods and each has been previously considered for a prospective casino or other major development. None is in or near downtown, though one is relatively close to the McCormick Place convention complex, and four of the five sites are publicly owned.

On the list: the former Michael Reese Hospital complex at 31st Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, the former U.S. Steel parcel at 80th Street and the lake; property that now is a publicly owned Harborside golf course at 111th Street and the Bishop Ford Expressway; former industrial property on a 23-acre North Lawndale site at Roosevelt Road and Kostner Avenue, and 19 vacant acres owned by the Chicago Housing Authority at Pershing Road and State Street.

In issuing the list, city officials insisted it is absolutely not final and that any decision about a location for the 4,000-position gambling facility will not be made without substantial public hearings and other input.

“We want to be transparent,” Deputy Mayor Samir Mayekar told me in a phone interview. “This is not the final list of sites. This study is designed to undertake a financial feasibility review. There will be a separate site selection process.”

But Mayekar conceded that any site that's eventually selected first will be subject to a financial review on what kind of gaming-tax revenues it would produce. As such, the city may conduct a separate financial review of more than these five sites, he said.

Nonetheless, the list is consistent with Lightfoot's stated position during her campaign that the facility would best be located not downtown or too close to the city's convention center but in areas that are economically struggling and close enough to existing Indiana casinos to pull Illinoisans and their money back on this side of the border.

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The list is included in a statement assenting to a decision by the Illinois Gaming Board to retain consulting firm Union Gaming to study revenue projections about specific possible Chicago casino locations and deliver its findings to the city and state within 45 days.

The law authorizing the new Chicago casino required the city and state to jointly agree on the consultant before any firm was retained.

In the statement, Lightfoot said today's announcement is a sign that "we are moving forward to ensure the new casino is viable for Chicago and all of its communities."

The Union Gaming study "will analyze the economic viability of a Chicago casino within the legislative framework established by the new legislation," she said.

Lightfoot noted that the city's share of casino profits, one-third of the net, will be used to shore up underfunded police and firefighter pension plans.

**UPDATE, 2 P.M.**—Lightfoot's new move is likely to get a mixed reaction, for both political and economic reasons.

Politically, Ald. Sophia King, 4th, whose ward includes the Reese site, has been outspoken against locating a casino there, saying her constituents are opposed to the idea.

But Ald. Susan Sadowski Garza, whose 10th Ward includes the Harborside site, has strongly urged that it be considered for a casino, hoping it will jump-start development on the long-vacant property.

Economically, the question is how well any of the South or West Side locations would do in drawing visitors to areas that now are either isolated or in some cases suffer from high crime rates. Some industry experts have argued that, just as a matter of money, tourists and other visitors are far more likely to visit a downtown location than one in a distant part of the city.

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