

UPDATED: Pamunkey Tribe's \$350M casino would rise on 36 acres near Manchester

Written by Administrator
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A rendering of the proposed Southside casino complex. Courtesy Pamunkey Indian Tribe.

Making a big bet on the city's Southside, the Pamunkey Indian Tribe announced plans last week to potentially build a \$350 million casino on the outskirts of Manchester.

The development would rise on 36 acres near the intersection of Ingraham Avenue and Commerce Road in Manchester, and would feature a 275-room hotel with various dining options and a 1,000-space parking garage. Height and other specs for the casino were not disclosed.

Pamunkey Chief Robert Gray said the Richmond casino has been in the works for about a year.

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"We didn't really look around elsewhere (in Richmond)," Gray said. "Land availability was our primary concern."

The tribe is under contract to purchase three parcels of land at 1401 Commerce Road, 1120 Gordon Ave. and 1260 Ingram Ave., where the casino would sit.

The Ingram Avenue and Commerce Road parcels are currently owned by City Central LLC, an entity tied to local development firm Harper Associates. The Gordon Avenue property is owned by an entity tied to RJ Smith Cos., another development and construction firm.

The three parcels were cumulatively assessed at \$10.4 million, per city property records.

The tribe's efforts are [backed financially by a variety of outlets](#), Gray said, including Jon Yarborough, an investor who backed the Pamunkey's \$3 million purchase of 600 acres in New Kent County.

"We're still considering uses (for the New Kent property)," Gray said. "Richmond and Norfolk have taken most of our attention."

The Richmond announcement comes within a week of the tribe [signing a deal with the City of Norfolk to build a casino near Harbor Park Stadium](#)

The Pamunkey have two avenues to take to have the legal authority to build the casinos.

On the state side, the General Assembly last year passed legislation that allows the Pamunkey to pursue commercial gaming in Richmond and Norfolk, provided the localities passed a referendum that supports it.

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That bill included a reenactment clause, meaning that it needs to pass again during the current General Assembly session. There are more than a dozen casino-related bills going through the General Assembly this session, and the tribe anticipates at least one will pass.

The second path the Pamunkey can take would be through their status as a federally recognized tribe with the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. That allows them to apply to the U.S. Department of the Interior to place all the land the tribe has acquired in a trust, and if approved, that land would become part of the Pamunkey's reservation and its own sovereign nation.

The Pamunkey are planning to take the General Assembly route for the Norfolk casino. Gray said they have no preference on which route they'll take in Richmond, and that their next steps are to follow how the casino-related bills in the General Assembly pan out.

Gray said the tribe has been in talks with Richmond about the project and that the city has been supportive.

That sentiment was echoed by Mayor Levar Stoney's spokesman Jim Nolan, who said in a statement, "The mayor is excited about the opportunity to bring a resort-style casino to Richmond. We'll wait to see what happens in the General Assembly and what it means for the city."

The Pamunkey's announcement came a day after [state legislation was filed that would drastically change the way the proposed Navy Hill project would be financed](#)

Regardless of what comes of the Navy Hill project, Gray said the Pamunkey want to integrate their project with what the city already has.

"We don't want to build out something that directly competes or impedes with projects Richmond wants to do. We see it as complementary," he said.

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