

## West Springfield asks \$200K in casino mitigation funds for police, fire, EMS

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 21 July 2020 05:40 -

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WEST SPRINGFIELD — Saying calls to police jumped 15.5% and motor vehicle accidents rose 24% in the first year MGM Springfield was open, the town of West Springfield is asking the Massachusetts Gaming Commission for \$200,000 for public safety.

There were 11,936 police calls in the year prior to the casino's opening in August 2018, compared with 13,789 in the subsequent year, according to the application.

The request to the Gaming Commission's Community Mitigation Fund is expected to come up at an agenda-setting meeting Wednesday in Boston.

If approved, the grant would follow a \$1 million award earlier this summer that will go toward a \$3.16 million plan to put a 10-foot wide bicycling and walking path around West Springfield's Park Street Green to accommodate [ValleyBike](#) and a general increase in traffic through West Side since MGM Springfield opened, said Mayor William C. Reichelt.

West Springfield already receives \$375,000 a year from MGM in the form of a surrounding community mitigation payment.

The state created the Community Mitigation Fund when it legalized casino gambling to compensate surrounding communities for costs related to the MGM Springfield, Encore Boston Harbor and Plainridge Park casinos.

It's the same fund that awarded Springfield \$300,000 to help convert part of the CityStage performing arts venue into a new home for [Focus Springfield Community Television](#) .

West Springfield received \$150,000 in 2017 to plan the Park Street Green project, which will include changes to parking, the addition of bus pull-offs for the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority and some tree planting.

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“We want to reroute the sidewalk and improve access and pedestrian flow,” Reichelt said.

The project is not yet out to bid and will probably be built in the spring of 2021 if not sometime this fall, Reichelt said

As for the public safety grant application, the town said the West Springfield Fire Department received 11,033 calls in the first 18 months the casino was open, of which 9,115 were calls for emergency medical service. For the 18 months prior to the casino opening, there were 10,308 calls, of which 8,591 were for EMS.

That’s an increase of a 7% for overall calls and 6% for EMS calls.

“With more people there are going to be more calls. We’ve seen that increase,” Reichelt said.

In 2018 West Springfield added four dispatchers to its pre-casino staff of five, four police officers to its pre-casino staff of 60 and eight firefighter/EMTs to its pre-casino staff of 48.

West Springfield got a federal Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant to pay for the \$660,000-a-year expense of those staffers.

But that grant is winding down, paying a smaller percentage of the cost in fiscal 2020 and 2021 and putting all \$660,665 on the city in fiscal 2022.

In its paperwork, West Springfield says it will put all its \$375,000 surrounding community mitigation payment toward the public safety costs. The \$200,000 grant would reduce the municipal budget impact to \$486,736 in fiscal 2021.

On Monday, Reichelt said MGM has not asked West Springfield to reduce that \$375,000-a-year

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surrounding community mitigation payment.

The casino, which closed in March due to the coronavirus and only reopened a week ago, is negotiating smaller or at least delayed payments to Springfield. So far [Springfield expects to receive](#) its full amount but has accepted smaller payments for now.

Reichelt said West Springfield's payment was set in an arbitration process with MGM, [which wanted a lower amount](#). He said that makes it unlikely West Springfield would revisit the arrangement.

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