

The Day - Tribes putting off East Windsor casino project indefinitely

Written by Administrator
Wednesday, 09 December 2020 16:51 -

After a Zoom meeting with state and local officials representing East Windsor, the chairmen of the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan tribes announced Wednesday they will continue delaying development of the state's third casino in the north-central Connecticut town, a project the state authorized in 2017.

"The past seven months have presented our organizations with unprecedented challenges, and for the foreseeable future, we need to focus our efforts on the successful operation of our existing facilities," the chairmen, whose tribes are the respective owners of Foxwoods Resort Casino and Mohegan Sun, said in a joint statement. "Every day brings new challenges and we're doing our best to navigate these waters because we know how important our businesses are to the surrounding communities, our employees and the state as a whole."

Rodney Butler is the Mashantucket chairman; James Gessner Jr. chairs the Mohegans.

Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun have struggled to withstand downturns in the casino business amid the coronavirus pandemic. Both shut down in mid-March, partially reopened June 1 and continue to operate at less than full capacity. Just last week, Foxwoods moved to temporarily close some hotel rooms and gaming areas and [furlough 130 employees](#) .

The tribes joined forces in 2015 to pursue a "satellite" casino as a buffer against the competitive impact of MGM Springfield, a \$1 billion resort casino that opened in 2018 in Massachusetts. MGM Resorts International succeeded in delaying the East Windsor project, dubbed Tribal Winds, through a series of maneuvers and lawsuits, including an active suit that contends the U.S. Department of the Interior erred in approving amendments to the tribes' gaming agreements with the state.

In their statement, the tribes said that while they couldn't have foreseen the pandemic's impact, "we still believe Tribal Winds is a viable project that will come to fruition once markets improve and we've taken concrete steps toward restoring normal business operations."

Participants in Wednesday's meeting included East Windsor's first selectman, Jason Bowsza, state Sen. Saud Anwar, D-South Windsor, state Rep. Carol Hall, R-Enfield, and state Rep.-elect

The Day - Tribes putting off East Windsor casino project indefinitely

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 09 December 2020 16:51 -

Jaime Foster, D-Ellington.

"I want to thank the chairmen for being forthright and honest at every step of this project," Anwar said. "While the cause of this recent delay was beyond their control, their clear desire to move forward when conditions improve is evident."

Hall said she has "complete confidence" the tribes eventually will move forward with the East Windsor casino.

"We have been assured by the tribes that this is the number one project on their radar once they can get their home base operations in good stead," she said.

It was not immediately clear what, if any, effect delaying the East Windsor project might have on gaming legislation during the upcoming session of the state legislature. The tribes have been in talks with Gov. Ned Lamont over their push to secure the legalization of sports betting and online gaming, and the governor [this week indicated](#) he wants to move forward with sports betting.

In the past, Lamont had urged the tribes to abandon the East Windsor project.

b.hallenbeck@theday.com

Read more <https://www.theday.com/article/20201209/NWS01/201209432>