

Phase 1 of project should be done by the end of next year - Annapolis Capital

Written by Administrator

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Joe Weinberg, director of development for the Baltimore-based Cordish Cos., which plans to build a 4,750-slot machine casino at Arundel Mills mall, said the machines will go on the first level of the casino's parking garage.

"To expedite the project, we looked at a lot of different options," Weinberg told the state's Video Lottery Facility

Location Commission. "We've been using the word temporary, but this is really a phasing in of the permanent project."

The Maryland Live! casino will be built in two phases, he said. The first phase will be the multilevel parking garage. Once the ground level is finished, the first 2,000 slot machines will go there.

The first phase "should be open by the fourth quarter of next year," Weinberg said.

The whole complex should be open the year after that. During phase two, workers will build the rest of the garage and the permanent casino.

The first installation "will have the feeling of a permanent casino," Weinberg said, adding that patrons will be able to buy food and drinks inside the temporary structure, "sort of like an expanded Starbucks." The temporary casino will be about 60,000 square feet, he said. Once the real deal is built, Cordish will convert the first level of the garage to parking spaces.

"We anticipate no longer than a one-week period for us to shut down the first phase and convert to the second," Weinberg said. "We'll have the first phase of the casino going right up until we open the second phase."

He said after the meeting in Annapolis that he'll submit his plans for the temporary casino to the county "shortly," but doesn't anticipate any problems. There will be little change from what Cordish already has submitted, he said.

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Plans unveiled by the company earlier this year call for a single-story casino with about 200,000 square feet and a six-story garage with about 4,000 parking spaces.

The plans also include a 300-seat music venue operated by Rams Head, a restaurant operated by celebrity chef Bobby Flay, and the Cheesecake Factory, a Ruth's Chris Steak House and a branch of Obrycki's Crab House and Seafood Restaurant.

Commissioner Linda Read asked how many workers Cordish would need to open the first phase of the casino.

"We're still doing a final count on that," Weinberg said.

Donald Fry, chairman of the casino location commission, said the panel looks forward to Cordish moving ahead with its plans "as expeditiously as possible."

"We would have loved to have seen you under way prior to this," Fry said.

The casino at the Hanover mall has been in the works for nearly two years.

After the County Council approved the zoning for the casino a year ago - following nine months of debate - casino opponents launched a petition drive to get a referendum added to the November ballot.

Fifty-six percent of county voters eventually approved the referendum on Nov. 2.

"It's a relief to be able to talk about this outside of a campaign," Weinberg told commission members.

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