Written by Administrator
Friday, 04 June 2021 09:30 -

News reports Wednesday indicated that Manhattan state lawmakers have thwarted plans to greenlight a casino for the New York City borough, but plans are still proceeding to eventually award three casino licenses to downstate communities.

The next step in that process would be for the New York State Gaming Commission to issue a request-for-information solicitation. Lawmakers approved that when they passed the state budget in April.

Lawmakers will wrap up the 2021 session this month.

"If nothing else happens over the next four session days, the RFI goes forward," state Sen. Joe Addabbo, D-Queens, told The Center Square on Thursday.

A message to the Gaming Commission was not returned.

The purpose of the RFI is to gauge interest in the downstate licenses and determine the potential size and scope of the new facilities.

Currently, under state law, the downstate licenses are not to be awarded until 2023. That was designed to let the four upstate casinos become established before full-fledged casinos in and around New York City were opened.

Addabbo had tried to get the downstate licenses expedited as part of the 2021 budget process, citing a need to spur job growth and development coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Wednesday, the New York Post reported downstate casino negotiations leading up to the April 6 budget deal fell apart at the last minute. It said Gov. Andrew Cuomo had concerns about a proposal that would have given Manhattan officials the ability to reject a casino proposal for

the borough.

Manhattan is not guaranteed to receive a casino license. However, a study done by industry consultants Spectrum Gaming Group for the state showed that a Manhattan casino, along with upgrading existing racinos at Aqueduct Race Track in Queens and Yonkers Raceway, would produce more gaming tax revenue than if the third casino resort license was awarded to Brooklyn or Queens.

The report projects a Manhattan-Aqueduct-Yonkers scenario to generate $1.31 billion in gaming tax revenue. That's $46.7 million more than a Brooklyn-Aqueduct-Yonkers scenario and $58.7 million more than under a Queens-Aqueduct-Yonkers scenario.

Resorts World currently operates the racino at Aqueduct, and MGM Resorts International operates Empire City Casino at Yonkers. Both gaming companies have expressed interest in pursuing full-fledged licenses and expanding their current operations.

Addabbo, who chairs the state Senate Committee on Racing, Gaming and Wagering, said a casino anywhere in New York City would do extremely well.

"Generally speaking, licenses go to where you need an economic boost in terms of construction jobs, post-construction jobs … for New Jersey, they were placed on a boardwalk that was a blight prior to the casinos getting there," he said. "Even in our state, the first four full-fledged casinos were placed upstate in areas that needed an economic boost. So I can see there's an argument to be made that you don't need it in Manhattan. Manhattan already has its economic boost. But I would think anywhere in the five boroughs, it's going to be lucrative."

**Original Location:** Despite reports that NYC casino plans were blocked, key lawmaker expresses optimism

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