

## **East Windsor to have town meeting on casino proposal**

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EAST WINDSOR — In the latest move in the debate over a proposed \$200 million to \$300 million casino in town, the Board of Selectmen voted grudgingly Thursday to schedule a town meeting that could jeopardize the project.

Casino opponents last week submitted a 20-signature petition that, according to selectmen, required the board to approve a town meeting under the town charter. The petition included a proposed ordinance that would set up a regulatory structure in town governing the licensing of casinos.

The ordinance would prohibit gambling facilities within 2,500 feet of a children's center, which, given the proposed casino's proximity to the Albert J. Solnit Children's Center, would block the casino's development.

East Windsor already has entered into a development agreement with MMCT Venture, a partnership between the Indian tribes that own Foxwoods Resort Casino and Mohegan Sun, to move the casino forward at the site of the abandoned Showcase Cinemas.

MMCT was formed specifically to develop a casino in northern Connecticut to compete with a \$950 million gambling facility being developed in Springfield by MGM Resorts International.

While the General Assembly must approve the development of gambling facilities off tribal land for the agreement to move forward, it has received universal support from the Board of Selectmen.

The development agreement would bring in \$8.5 million in revenue for the town, which is anticipating serious cuts to municipal services in next year's budget.

However, a grassroots movement in town backed by the Coalition Against Casino Expansion in Connecticut — a group that includes 14 religious organizations and is

funded by the United Church of Christ — has said a casino would bring a number of negative consequences to East Windsor, including crime, increased traffic, and gambling addiction.

While the group's petition appears to require that the Board of Selectmen move forward with a town meeting — during which the public would vote on whether to bring the proposed ordinance to a referendum — some selectmen disagreed.

“This is not for the better of the people and it's not for the better of the town,” said Selectman Steven Dearborn, an early and ardent supporter of the casino. “There's no way I am voting for this, because I think this is going to push for a referendum, and this is a private deal. I don't care how you look at this, we don't have to go to a referendum.”

First Selectman Robert Maynard said he does not believe the ordinance, which organizers say was written and submitted by a local businessman who remained anonymous for fear of retaliation, is properly written or in conformity with existing laws.

Both selectmen voted against holding a town meeting, but were outnumbered by three reluctant selectmen who felt legally obligated to vote affirmatively.

“We don't know that the contents of the ordinance are even necessary,” said Selectman Jason Bowsza, noting that the General Assembly has yet to act on the proposal. “It seems to be that the subject matter contained in the ordinance is premature because we don't know that the legislature is even going to act; we don't know how they're going to act.”

Bowsza said passing gambling regulations in town when gambling is still illegal outside tribal land would be overreaching the town's authority.

“I can't in good conscience vote against it,” said Deputy First Selectman Richard P. Pippin. “I do believe there are parts of that petition that do appear to be flawed, but I'm not a lawyer.”

Selectwoman Dale Nelson concurred with Pippin and Bowsza, but said the board was being forced into “allowing 20 people to manipulate the process.”

Selectmen subsequently voted unanimously in favor of a motion put forward by Pippin stating that Town Attorney Joshua Hawks-Ladds would decide before the town meeting whether or not the proposed ordinance is properly written and in conformity with existing laws.

A vote can only be held at the town meeting if casino opponents present 200 additional signatures to the Board of Selectmen. Leading casino opponent Brianna Stronk said Monday that well over 300 signatures had already been gathered.

The town meeting is scheduled for Thursday at 7:30 p.m., and officials are still working to determine a location.

[http://www.journalinquirer.com/public/east-windsor-to-have-town-meeting-on-casino-proposal/article\\_176d2be4-2693-11e7-bb0a-0f90df1953b5.html](http://www.journalinquirer.com/public/east-windsor-to-have-town-meeting-on-casino-proposal/article_176d2be4-2693-11e7-bb0a-0f90df1953b5.html)