



MGM Resorts, Penn National pledge local jobs, boost to business, traffic solutions in Springfield casino presentations



Jim Murren, Chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International, makes a presentation on the company's MGM Springfield proposal during a public forum at CityStage in Springfield on Tuesday evening. *(Photo by Dave Roback, The Republican)*



By [Peter Goonan, The Republican](#)

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SPRINGFIELD — Representatives of [MGM Resorts International](#) and [Penn National Gaming](#), two companies competing to build a [casino in Springfield](#) said during public presentations on Tuesday that they are committed to local hiring, providing a boost to local business and tourism, and solving traffic concerns raised by the public.

An estimated 300 people attended the forum conducted at CityStage at One Columbus Center, and many more

watched the proceedings from home, streamed live on MassLive.com and CBS3 Springfield, and other venues.

MGM Resorts is proposing a casino project in the South End, while Penn National is proposing a project in the North End of the downtown district.

Both companies provided 45-minute presentations of their proposed projects, highlighted by videos of their plans and other projects which was immediately followed by a question-and-answer period involving dozens of local residents and business people. Many of those asking questions praised the presentations and the roughly \$800 million investment offered by each company.

Residents raised concerns, however, that traffic would worsen along the Main Street corridor, particularly from casino traffic on Interstates 91 and 291. Residents also sought details about how the companies would deal with labor and hiring, partnerships with local theaters and attractions, and with issues such as problem gamblers and crime.

A third company, [Ameristar Casinos](#), recently withdrew from the Springfield competition. Ameristar had proposed a casino in East Springfield

Casinos are also being proposed in [Palmer](#) and [Holyoke](#).

Both Springfield casino operators said they are confident that expert traffic studies and resulting plans will resolve traffic issues.

William J. Hornbuckle IV, president and chief marketing officer for MGM and president of MGM Springfield, said an extensive traffic study is required by the company, and the city will also have a traffic consultant.

“Ultimately, we will be responsible for mitigation (of any traffic issue),” Hornbuckle said.

Timothy J. Wilmott, president and chief operating officer of Penn National Gaming, also cited the company’s traffic study, and said 90 percent of the traffic will come from the highways, and will be spread out. There is also consideration of a “ring road” when traffic exits the highways, Penn officials said.

The traffic tends to be like the shopping malls where it is not concentrated at one time, Wilmott said. The traffic is the number one issue to address, he said.

Both MGM and Penn National said they also will be working with public transportation, such as the Pioneer Valley



[Enlarge](#)

[Dave Roback, The Republican](#)

12/11/12-Springfield-Republican Photo by Dave Roback- Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno makes opening remarks at the Penn National and MGM Springfield casino presentations at City Stage in Springfield on Tuesday evening.

[Springfield Casino Presentations at City Stage](#) gallery (9 photos)

Transit Authority to deal with traffic. MGM and Penn National are working on shuttle service plans.

Wilmott said that a major focus of Penn National will be on creating a “ripple effect” for local businesses.

Both Penn National and MGM pledged that most of their jobs will be local, and said they are committed to diversity and minority hiring.

James J. Murren, chairman and chief executive officer of MGM, said the company will bring entertainment to the MassMutual Center and will build strong partnerships with the local theaters and attractions.

A key component of the South End plan is an entertainment area ranging from free outdoor events to movies and bowling, officials said.

Penn National officials said they will also have partnerships with local entertainment venues including the Paramount Theater. Their partner, Peter A. Picknelly, chairman of Peter Pan Bus Lines, gives the company a strong tie to bus travel, and they will also have close ties to the nearby Union Station, they said.

Both Penn National and MGM spoke of plans to beautify and make use of the riverfront along the Connecticut River.

Both companies also spoke of their commitment to giving back to the community, both in generating business and tourism, and making charitable contributions to local causes.

MGM officials said there has been community engagement including over 200 meetings with various stakeholder groups. Penn National also promised a strong community engagement and welcomed residents, businesses and civic groups to contact them.

Robert McCarroll, a resident of Mattoon Street, urged both companies to preserve as much of the city’s history as possible.

Downtown resident Carol Costa asked both companies if they were committed to a positive campaign, without attacks, and both said they will run positive campaigns.

Under state law, up to three casinos will be permitted in Massachusetts including one designated for Western Massachusetts. Any casino project will need approval from voters in that community and the Massachusetts Gaming Commission.

In Palmer, Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority is planning a casino on 152 acres off Exit 8 of the Massachusetts Turnpike to complement its casino near Uncasville, Conn

In Holyoke, Paper City Development, a limited liability company, has proposed a casino resort for Wyckoff Country Club on the Mount Tom Range and near Interstate 91. Eric Suher, a Holyoke native who owns three performance venues in Northampton, wants to put a casino resort at Mountain Park, which he also owns, on the Mount Tom Range.

Wilmott said [Penn National has "full site control" of its casino location](#) in the North End of the downtown district.

The Penn National casino in Springfield will include both The Republican newspaper headquarters and Peter Pan Bus Lines properties, and other properties owned by those two companies.

The parent company of the Republican [has signed a contract](#) with a Penn National for an option to sell the newspaper's properties to the casino company.

The sale would only take place if Penn National wins the sole license in Western Massachusetts to open a casino. Nothing has been sold to Penn National at this point.

George Arwady, publisher and CEO of The Republican, said it's a good deal for the newspaper. He declined to provide terms of the agreement, but it includes the relocation of the newspapers offices at 1860 Main St., to a central downtown location, and to build a new production facility at an industrial park off Interstate 291 in Springfield.

Staff writers [Dan Ring](#) and [Robert Rizzuto](#) contributed to this report.

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