

# Commission and city may be coming to terms

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SPRINGFIELD — The city and the State Gaming Commission are close to an agreement that would allow Springfield to move forward with its process to chose a casino developer.

Chief Development Officer Kevin Kennedy told Reminder Publications the city and the commission have been discussing the issues brought up at the commission's meeting on Sept. 11 and will be working out certain details this week.

Although some observers might have seen some tension between the city and the commission, Kennedy said, "I thought it was a pretty healthy exchange."

He said that he believes he commission now understands the city's point of view about the importance of moving forward, while the city sees the commission's emphasis on the financial and legal vetting of the casino operators.

Kennedy said that Springfield's situation is unique in the state. It is the only city at this time in which more than one operator has expressed interest. It is also the only site that has faced the economic development issues of being hit by a tornado, a Nor'easter and a tropical storm in one year, he added.

On Sept. 11, the commission met at Springfield Technical Community College to discuss two issues that directly affected the city: the pace of the city's search for a casino developer and whether or not the city's legal consultants of Shefsky & Froelich had a conflict of interest by representing the city, while at the same time representing casino developers.

Commission Chairman Stephen Crosby called the meeting on Sept. 11 a "fact finding mission."



**The question raised at last week's State Gaming Commission meeting was which body was going too fast through the process or too slowly. The Commission's chairman, Stephen Crosby, said the state might be going too fast and make decision that could affect whether or not the city is picked as a site for a casino. Kevin Kennedy, the city's chief development officer, believes the issues between the two governmental entities will be worked out.**

Several times during the meeting, commissioners noted that Springfield was out-pacing the commission. Commissioner James McHugh said the commission wouldn't have determined until January 2013 all of the elements it would require in a host agreement between a city and a casino operator, but Springfield officials are planning to have finalized a host agreement with at least one of the proposed four operators by December.

Crosby explained the \$400,000 fee casino operators must pay to the state with their application is in part being used to undertake the legal and financial investigation of the company. This vetting would start in January 2013, but won't be completed until July 2013.

Members of the commission warned that Springfield might craft a host agreement that doesn't meet the commission's expectations and select an operator that fails the vetting process.

Mayor Domenic Sarno and Kennedy maintained that under the casino legislation the city has the right to proceed as it has been.

"Crosby said, " We believe you do, but we think we can override that authority."

McHugh added, "It will only work for Springfield with the commission's approval."

Sarno said, "It is very tedious for residents and taxpayers to tell them to wait, wait, wait."

Kennedy said, "From all perspectives, we need to slow down or you need to speed up."

McHugh replied, "a little both."

Members of the commission questioned whether or not the city knew Shefsky & Froelich also represented two of the developers interested in the city. City Solicitor Edward Pikula that state legal and ethical regulations were examined and no conflict of interest was determined. Crosby was told the City Council was not involved in the decision and did not know of the connections with casino developers.

The State Ethics Commission is reviewing the issue and Pikula said the city would review the commission's decision if it were different than its own assessment of a conflict of interest.

"This may be a place where reasonable people disagree," Crosby said.

Members of the commission stressed the need for complete transparency in the selection process.

McHugh said of the question of conflict of interest, "There is extraordinary sensitivity to this particular issue."

City Council President James Ferrera III attended the meeting and told *Reminder Publications*, "I would not want Springfield in a situation that jeopardizes not getting a license."

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