



West Springfield casino project developer pledges to meet with Town Council as often as it wants



By [Sandra Constantine, The Republican](#)

on February 11, 2013 at 10:00 PM, updated February 11, 2013 at 10:01 PM

[WEST SPRINGFIELD](#) - The developer proposing a \$500 million to \$800 million destination casino resort for the [Eastern States Exposition](#) fairgrounds pledged Monday night to come back before the [Town Council](#) as often it wants to keep councilors updated on the project.

Mark Rivers, president of the Bronson Companies, made the pledge following about a half hour of questions from councilors during a special council meeting on the project. Speaking before the council for about 45 minutes on the proposal were Rivers, Eastern States Exposition Chief Executive Officer and President Eugene J. Cassidy and Nelson Parker, head of development for North America for Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos.

Hard Rock International would like to build a [casino complex](#) near gate 9 at the fairgrounds on Memorial Avenue.

Town Councilor John R. Sweeney said there is a need for "improved communications" as there is talk about secret meetings that are not open and transparent.

"You have to communicate to the council what is happening," Sweeney said.

Rivers responded that he is happy to speak to the council at any time.

"We cannot track the nuances of City Hall politics every day," Rivers said.

Town Councilor Lida M. Powell used the occasion to complain that there is now no representation from her District 2 neighborhood now that councilors have been removed from the mayor's advisory council on the casino project.

Town Councilor Brian J. Griffin questioned if casino proponents can get a proposed host agreement together in time to meet such benchmarks as a referendum vote by residents on whether they will accept a casino, projected for September.

Rivers touted the project as one that would have a \$100 million a year payroll and offer lots of opportunities for local businesses whether it is by buying food or clean linen.

Rivers also assured the council that developers are working on a plan that will alleviate some of the current traffic woes in the area, traffic being a big concern by local people. They have wondered if a casino will worsen congestion

during the 17-day Big E annual agricultural fair that drew more than 1.3 million last fall.

Rivers said creating a secondary access from the Route 5 traffic circle at the Memorial Bridge via Agawam Avenue Extension is under consideration. Traffic improvements along Memorial Avenue such as improved signalization are also possible, according to him.

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