



Eastern States Exposition considering casino options for its West Springfield fairgrounds



By [Sandra Constantine, The Republican](#)

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[WEST SPRINGFIELD](#) — The chief of the [Eastern States Exposition](#) acknowledged Thursday that the organization is looking into the possibility of siting a [casino](#) on its fairgrounds here on Memorial Avenue.

“We are enthusiastically exploring all of our options, and may have a major announcement in the near future,” Eugene Cassidy, the organization’s president and chief executive officer, said in a statement released Thursday evening.

The press release did not touch on reports saying [Hard Rock International](#) is interested in setting up a casino here, although West Springfield officials confirmed that is the case.

A spokeswoman for Hard Rock International on Thursday dodged questions about whether its officials have expressed any interest in siting a casino on the grounds of the Eastern States Exposition.

Jennifer Jackson of The Zimmerman Agency, a public relations concern in Tallahassee, Fla., representing Hard Rock, released the following statement:

“Hard Rock International remains highly interested in new casino development opportunities in Massachusetts and has evaluated a number of prospective locations.

“If Hard Rock proceeds with development, further detail will be provided at that time, and we would expect to meet all deadlines and requirements of the Massachusetts Gaming Commission.”

The statement was in response to questions about whether Hard Rock has spoken with Cassidy about developing a casino at the fairgrounds.

However, two West Springfield officials confirmed Thursday that Hard Rock has expressed some interest in locating a casino in their community, but that there have not been any concrete proposals.

Mayor [Gregory C. Neffinger](#) said Hard Rock has talked to him casually about West Springfield, but no one has made a formal proposal.

Town Councilor Brian J. Griffin, who heads that board's Casino Mitigation Study Committee, confirmed that the Hard Rock has talked to Cassidy about possibly siting a casino at the Eastern States Exposition fairgrounds. Griffin cautioned that there has not been any formal proposal or presentation. He said it would be premature for him to comment on whether he would be for or against such a development.

Griffin initiated formation of the committee to study how a casino, if one were to be built across the Connecticut River in Springfield, would affect West Side. Among the issues he has raised are concerns about traffic, law enforcement and housing as well as the effect on West Springfield school enrollment and businesses.

There are currently two proposals on the table to site casinos in neighboring Springfield. One is by [MGM Resorts International](#) for the city's South End and the other is by [Penn National Gaming](#) for a site in the North End of the downtown district that would include the current headquarters of The Republican.

Cassidy, in the statement, called the Eastern States Exposition fairgrounds the "number one tourist attraction in Western Massachusetts and New England, strategically located at the crossroads of New England, with a 175-acre campus and millions of visitors ..." The organization is "continuously engaged in the discovery of economic opportunities that will enhance the entertainment options we offer to the public. Consequently, we have in recent weeks embarked on an investigation as to whether-or-not it would be feasible for the Eastern States Exposition, as a nonprofit organization, to pursue the concept of citing a regional resort entertainment destination casino on our grounds, that would benefit the entire Western Massachusetts region."

Noreen Tassinari, the exposition's marketing director, said her boss, who could not be reached for comment, had no more to say right now.

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