



MGM wins Springfield casino vote

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UPDATE, 10:20 p.m.: This article has been updated with final reporting from the Yes for Springfield headquarters.

07.16.2013 | SPRINGFIELD -- MGM President Bill Hornbuckle, third from right, and Jim Murren, MGM chief executive officer, right, gather with supporters in front of the Rebecca Johnson School voting location on Tuesday.

Photo by Mark M. Murray / The Republican

SPRINGFIELD — Voters on Tuesday

approved the host community agreement between the city and **MGM Resorts International**, a major victory for the company as it pursues a state gaming license for its proposed \$800 million resort casino complex to be built in the South End.

The MGM agreement was approved by a vote of 58 to 42 percent, and will now be forwarded for consideration by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission. Under state law, the commission will consider granting up to three resort casino licenses in the state, including one in Western Massachusetts.

"Today is the dawn of a new era," said James Murren, MGM chief executive officer, after announcing the victory during a celebration at the Lyman & Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History at the Quadrangle. "Today, the people of Springfield and the people of MGM carry the same flag. We are taking this flag to Boston. We are taking this flag to the Commonwealth. We're saying it's no longer okay to turn away from Springfield."

"Springfield deserves this opportunity," Murren said. "Springfield needs this opportunity. There is no community in Western Massachusetts that deserves this more."

MGM has pledged its project will generate 3,000 permanent jobs and 2,000 construction jobs. The host community agreement also includes a provision that MGM will provide \$25 million in annual payments to the city including taxes, and millions of dollars in annual business to area vendors.

Casinos are also being proposed by Mohegan Sun in Palmer off the Massachusetts Turnpike, and by Hard Rock International in West Springfield on the grounds of the Eastern States Exposition.

MGM came to Springfield last August, "and you let us into your neighborhoods, you let us in your homes, you let us in your hearts, and you told us what you wanted for Springfield," said William Hornbuckle, president of MGM.

"We have won every ward and every neighborhood," Hornbuckle said, to the cheers of the crowd. Such a margin of victory, in any election, "is a landslide," he said.

The process now continues, and will continue first thing Wednesday morning, he said.

Michael Kogut, chairman of the Citizens Against Casino Gaming, said his group gained a moral victory, as MGM was unable to get 60 percent of the vote, despite an overwhelming financial advantage over the anti-casino group.

His group remains fundamentally opposed to an urban casino, and will provide information to the gaming commission in making its decision.

Mayor Domenic J. Sarno praised the supporters and volunteers for their efforts, and said there is "no better deal" than the casino agreement negotiated with MGM.

The celebration at the museum had about 200 people and included music by "Ozzy and the Marion Street Band," a Springfield-based Blues and Motown band.

According to the city's website, with all 64 precincts reporting 13,973 voters (57.66 percent) cast Yes ballots and 10,260 (42.34 percent) voted No. There were 24,278 ballots cast from 98,115 registered voters for a 24.74 percent turnout.

» ***Precinct-by-precinct vote totals***

Voters such as Nim Donovan said they voted for the casino because of the good it will bring.

"The city needs an insurgence of positive energy," Donovan said. "I want Springfield to be an attraction, not a drive-through city."

Opponents such as Clive Ryan said a casino is "just like some thief coming into the city in the middle of the night and taking my stuff."

Clarence Smith, 82, voting at the Riverview polling location in the North End, said he voted for MGM because it will "bring a lot of jobs."

"It's dead downtown," Smith said. "Ain't like it used to be."

Miguel Rivas also cited jobs for his "yes" vote.

"I just think if we're going to create jobs, this is the opportunity for it," Rivas said. "We need to make sure that MGM keeps its word as far as creating jobs."

Rivas said he is also pleased with the revenue that would come to Springfield.

Gaming Commission Chairman **Stephen Crosby said that the margin of victory** in Springfield would be a factor when the commission evaluates competing casino proposals early next year. The commission, however, will be especially interested in factors such as economic development and jobs, revenues and finances generated, site design, community mitigation and "the wow factor," he said.

Murren, during a mid-afternoon rally at MGM's downtown headquarters, urged supporters to help Springfield send a strong message to the Gaming Commission.

"Let's send a message to Boston that we don't want to just win. We want to win big," Murren said hours before the polls closed. "We want to send a message to the chairman of the Gaming Commission, to your governor, that this deserves to be in Springfield."

Kogut said, prior to the results, that his group did its best to get the vote out and expected a close vote.

Crosby said the Gaming Commission encourages public input from Springfield in the months before a decision is made regarding where a casino will be located in Western Massachusetts.

A Mohegan Sun spokesperson said the company is targeting July for a signed host community agreement, and discussions are ongoing with the town manager and representatives from Palmer.

The Connecticut-based casino operator wants to build a \$1 billion resort casino across from the Massachusetts Turnpike exit 8 off Thorndike Street (Route 32) in Palmer.

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino New England and the city of West Springfield **signed a host community agreement** last week for a proposed \$800 million casino project in that city.

In Springfield, Election Commissioner Gladys Oyola had hoped for a turnout of at least 25 percent, and the final turnout was 24.7 percent.

Proponents of the MGM casino in Springfield said it will create thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in revenues for the city and state, along with millions of dollars in revenues for area vendors.

Opponents said a casino will hurt small businesses, increase problem gambling, and worsen traffic.

CBS 3 Video: MGM President Bill Hornbuckle speaks at victory rally

Several hundred people celebrated the winning vote in a city-wide election to approve a casino and hotel complex called MGM Springfield. The event was held at the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History.

A voter who would only provide his first name, Manny, said he is supporting the MGM proposal because of the promise that

it will come with new jobs.

"I'm born and raised in Springfield and I can remember back in the 1980s and '90s when you could walk out your door and trip over 10 jobs. That just isn't reality here anymore," he said. "There is no new manufacturing, and there are no new businesses opening up. So you have someone offering 3,000 new private industry jobs – how do you say no to that?"

A **poll commissioned by MassLive.com and CBS 3 Springfield** last week concluded that out of the people who supported the MGM proposal, the No. 1 reason cited for support was overwhelmingly the prospect of new jobs. That poll also concluded that of 401 likely voters, 55 percent were for the MGM casino; 35 percent were against it and 8 percent were undecided.

At the Springfield Boys and Girls Club polling site, casino opponent Dennis Fenton, called out: "Vote no! Don't ruin your children!"

Fenton, a retired teacher and coach who has lived in Hungry Hill nearly his entire life, was wearing a chalkboard-style sandwich board. The board warned of what he considers the ills of a casino: "housebreaks, empty bank accounts, child neglect, prostitution."

*Staff writers **George Graham, Stephanie Barry, Lori Stabile** and **Robert Rizzuto** contributed to this report.*

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