



Penn National, MGM Resorts tout Springfield casino projects and their differences



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SPRINGFIELD — For a second consecutive day, two companies vying to build a [casino in Springfield](#) laid out their plans on Tuesday to bring economic vitality to the city, while also responding to city councilors' concerns ranging from their record on local and minority hiring to their ability to keep their promises.

Representatives of [Penn National Gaming](#) and [MGM Resorts International](#) met for three hours on Tuesday at City Hall with city councilors, the council's Casino Site Committee and residents.

Just 24 hours earlier, both companies made a similar presentation lasting 2 1/2 hours at CityStage on One Columbus Center, attended by approximately 200 people.

"It was very positive," Council President James J. Ferrera III said following Tuesday's meeting. "You have two great companies in the city of Springfield. It was clear that both companies have pros and cons, and both companies want to make a commitment here in Springfield."

"It was very informative," Councilor Timothy J. Rooke said. "The process has been very open to the residents and to elected officials. That helps to educate all of us."

Both Ferrera and Rooke said there were many similarities to the companies and their presentations, but also a number of differences.

While Penn National promoted itself as the ideal company for a regional casino and the most active casino developer in recent years, MGM officials promoted the company as a worldwide leader in entertainment, able to bring the best shows to Springfield.

MGM estimated it would bring 8 million visitors to Springfield while Penn National estimated it would bring 4 million.

And while MGM stated it was committed to hiring 35 percent of its workers from Springfield, Penn National stated that its goal would be to hire 90 percent from Springfield. Both companies said they have strong records on workforce diversity.

Both companies said they will deliver on their promises, as shown by their records in other communities across the nation, their local partnerships and their current and future written agreements.

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

In addition, casinos are proposed in Palmer off the Massachusetts Turnpike and in West Springfield on the grounds of the Eastern States Exposition.

Representatives of MGM and Penn both said that increased traffic resulting from their casinos will be beneficial to the city and the downtown area, and can be accommodated by Interstate 91 and 291.

William Hornbuckle, representing MGM, described a project that would include a mix of entertainment including high end theaters, a bowling center, and "A list" acts affiliated with MGM.

Jay Snowden, representing Penn National, described the company's agreement to lease and help refurbish the Paramount Theater in downtown Springfield, and to directly tie in with Union Station across the street and with Peter Pan Bus Lines. Peter A. Picknelly, who is a partner in the Penn National project, is chief executive officer of the bus company.

MGM said it too would tie in to Union Station redevelopment.

Both MGM and Penn officials said their projects will tie in to existing entertainment venues in Springfield, promote local attractions, and provide local trolley service.

Both companies urged the City Council to approve the proper zoning ordinances that will be needed to allow their casino construction plans, saying that issue needs to be finalized before the Massachusetts Gaming Commission considers approving one casino in Western Massachusetts.

The zoning ordinances will guide development of a casino, such as height, special permits, and off-street parking requirements.

The gaming commission will consider approving up to three casinos in Massachusetts and one slots parlor.

Any casino in Springfield will need approval from Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, the City Council, city voters and the state Gaming Commission.

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