



Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe loses exclusive casino rights

By **George Brennan**
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PALMER – The Massachusetts Gaming Commission today voted unanimously to open Southeastern Massachusetts to commercial bids, ending the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe's exclusive hold on the region and creating yet another hurdle for the tribe to overcome.

After taking two weeks to hear more public comments on the decision, commissioners said they heard nothing new to change the decision.

Ultimately, commissioners concluded that the tribe's proposal for a \$500 million Indian casino in Taunton is too unpredictable and threatens to leave the region behind in the jobs and revenue that a casino would create.

Commissioners said the tribe can continue with its federal process and if it gets its approvals in the time line predicted, it will be in the game before a commercial license could be awarded. By accepting bids, the commission has a fall back plan.

More than a dozen tribe members made the 130-mile trek off-Cape by bus to the Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School in Palmer for the meeting. Tribe members outnumbered other members of the audience in the tiny Western Massachusetts town.

After the meeting, tribal council Chairman Cedric Cromwell called the decision "misguided."

The decision comes after a media blitz by the tribe against the commission and goes against the opinion of Gov. Deval Patrick, who recently renegotiated a compact with the tribe.

Patrick has said on multiple occasions over the past week that he thinks the commission should at least give the compact time to be acted on by the Legislature and the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The commission received hundreds of comments, many of them typical what the commission has been hearing for months. One of them that stood out was a letter from an MGM Resorts executive who said he believes opening the region could have "significantly alter" the gaming market in other regions of the state, especially if four casinos are ultimately up and running.

"At this point we do not believe it is reasonable to determine 'that the tribe will not have land taken into trust,' and that is the standard that the commission is required to apply," Bill Hornbuckle, president and chief marketing officer for MGM Resorts International, wrote in a letter to the commission.

MGM has proposed a resort casino in Springfield.

KG Urban Enterprises, a developer that hopes to build a commercial casino in New Bedford, was also represented at the meeting, but had no immediate comment after the commission's decision.

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