



Local Community Mitigation Advisory Committee Region B Meeting Minutes

Date/Time: April 24, 2019 – 2:00 p.m.

Location: Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
60 Congress Street, Floor 2
Springfield, MA 01104

Members

Present: Jill McCarthy Payne, Chair Ellen Patashnick
Kate Kane Steven Marantz
Lori Tanner Timothy Brennan
Jennifer Bonfiglio Judith Theocles

Members

Absent: Denise Menard

Attendees: John Ziemba Mary Thurlow
Joe Delaney Bruce Stebbins
Jill Griffin Seth Stratton

Call to Order

2:00 p.m. Jill McCarthy Payne, Chair, called the meeting to order and the members introduced themselves.

Ombudsman John Ziemba informed the members that the purpose of the meeting today is to establish the items to work on throughout the summer that will be addressed in the fall:

1. Transportation – Should construction costs come out of the Community Mitigation Fund?
2. Gaming Economic Development Funds – As the Gaming Commission (MGC) has no authority over these funds, should the MGC continue to work to acquire funds out of appropriation, or divert and go through the Community Mitigation Fund?
3. Public Safety – Studies will be analyzed, focusing on interim data in Springfield. There will be statistics for Encore as well. We will have some information to utilize for both communities, such as housing issues having either a negative or positive impact (prices, displacement).

Approval of Minutes

2:15 p.m. *Kate Kane of the Chamber of Commerce moved to approve the minutes from the meeting of November 13, 2018. Tim Brennan of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.*

Workforce Programs Update

2:16 p.m. Jill Lacey Griffin, Director of Workforce, Supplier, and Diversity Development reviewed activity from the Workforce Development programs. Overall, almost 600 individuals have enrolled in training programs, and 127 have received Community Mitigation Fund scholarships. Ms. Griffin then reviewed statistics of individuals who are employed by MGM after completing the programs, as well as individuals who have received their GED as well as certifications due to these programs. She noted that scholarship recipients have a very good completion rate.

Ms. Griffin provided the members with an overview of the Workforce Development Programs, to include Dealer School at Massachusetts Casino Career Training Institute, Line Cook training at Holyoke Culinary Arts Institute, Springfield Public Schools (Ahead of the Game) program, and the STCC (Hampden Prep) program.

An additional Workforce Training Program Funded by the Gaming Commission is a new non-credit Foundations of Hospitality and Hotel Operations program at Holyoke Community College MGM Culinary Arts Institute called the Welcome Pioneer Valley (WPV). She described the program, explaining that it will seek to train 60 job seekers or non-hospitality/hotel workers, as well as 30 supervisors/managers. She added that the program is designed for anyone interested in starting or developing a career in the hotel industry including housekeepers, front desk personnel, valets, stewards, porters, environmental service workers and more. Funding allocated for the Welcome Pioneer Valley program is \$45,000 for 2019.

Ms. Griffin added that she is looking forward to getting local community members trained and employed in this industry, as there is a current need for culinary professionals, creating many opportunities.

Commissioner Bruce Stebbins addressed filling the need for hospitality and culinary jobs in the area, stating that there are a lot of scholarship recipients graduating from the gaming school. He acknowledged that there is a three-year maturity period after the opening of a casino, and he advised the members to consider that the employee turnover issue will subside. He noted that people coming to the valley will generate more jobs.

MGM Springfield Update

2:30 p.m. Seth Stratton, Vice President and General Counsel of MGM Springfield, said that overall the month of September was the best month they have had. March was very strong also. The Food and Beverage category remains very strong, and they see very high demand. Restaurants have been very strong. He also commented that the hotel is at 90% occupancy range currently.

Mr. Stratton reported that the Red Sox is currently involved in a partnership with MGM resorts at the corporate level. The Red Sox have been a great partner and are looking to expand to reach an untapped fan base and grow fan loyalty. Any proposal that MGM has, they will be out in Massachusetts more and use MGM Springfield to expand their marketing. This strategy will benefit western Massachusetts and the region on an economic development standpoint.

He then described Roar! Comedy Club, stating that it has received positive feedback and that the cost per ticket is only \$20.

MGM Springfield is seeing fluctuations month to month based on seasonality. Currently, they are strategizing around the development, or lack thereof, around the property. As much as MGM Springfield would like more traffic coming in, there is more opportunity there for development.

Mr. Stratton stated that MGM Springfield would like to increase the numbers of students enrolling at the dealer school. He noted that it should be considered that the price point may be a disincentive for aspiring students. He raised the prospect of reduced fees.

Next, he reported that in the next six months, there will be a ramp-up of entertainment that is expected to increase vibrancy in downtown Springfield. Cher will be performing at the MassMutual Center and has sold out four shows already. Mr. Stratton expects that it will be a huge week for the city of Springfield. He also mentioned concerts in the plaza, Food Truck Fridays, and more that would activate the outdoor space to bring people in for those events, and then they may go inside the casino.

Andrew Smith of Holyoke asked if this would be a weekly occurrence, and he suggested that it should be consistent to draw people in. Mr. Stratton answered that they are giving it a significant push to see how people react. He stated that the goal is to make the plaza a destination. MGM Springfield is considering putting a cover over the Armory so the plaza can be used on rainy days. There will also be a bar that will service the plaza.

MGM Springfield is taking over Symphony Hall. Mr. Stratton opined that this will help reactivate the venue. The City of Springfield is willing to contribute money to improve Symphony Hall. MGM Springfield is working on some rebranding of the logo. He stated that there will be increased programming and visitation of Symphony Hall.

Mr. Stratton then reported on the 31 Elm Redevelopment project. He stated that it is being converted into residential and retail space, and is steadily moving forward.

Mr. Stratton is preparing to analyze lookback studies from the first full year of operation. He was involved in the negotiation of the surrounding community agreements and addressed concerns. So far, the MGM Springfield team does not see a lot of negative impact on the community, and Mr. Stratton commented that it will be interesting to see if there are opportunities for mitigation.

The Chair asked Mr. Stratton to speak to any security issues MGM Springfield has experienced after being open for six months. He answered that they were pleasantly surprised that the numbers of incidents were low, except for one incident that was in the media. There have been no real instances of violent crime, plenty of state and local police onsite and a large security force. There have been arrests, as it is a vast bar with troopers at it, and the folks in the GEU and AG's Office have also been prosecuting mostly gaming offenses such as cheating, chip stealing, but in terms of violence there have been very few instances of it.

Steven Marantz of Longmeadow asked for thoughts and strategies regarding the casino surfacing in Connecticut. Mr. Stratton addressed strategy regarding the legality of allowing a commercial casino off the tribal land.

Ms. Kane asked if there was any kind of ripple effect for local businesses in the area. Mr. Stratton stated that he is disappointed that there are not more people using the Loop. He added that he is not surprised, as the residents of Springfield are not inclined to take public transportation due to being accustomed to ample parking, and being in the habit of driving. He opined that if there were more activities and events happening on Main Street, people might use public transit more.

Carmina Fernandes of Ludlow asked if the Boston casino has affected MGM Springfield. Mr. Stratton stated that some employees have been lured to Boston. However, the cost of living in and around Boston will affect them adversely. The team at MGM Springfield does not believe it will lose business because of Boston, as they have good business relationships.

Next Steps

2:52 p.m. MGC Ombudsman Ziemba recommended that the Committee should have a meeting to pursue the laundry list that he reviewed. He informed members that Mark Vander Linden, Director of Research and Responsible Gaming gave a presentation and directed them to the website. He advised that information will be forthcoming, such as baseline reports and studies from Plainridge Park Casino, and there will be statistics from MGM Springfield, such as housing impacts from the construction period, etc. Consideration of providing housing assistance was mentioned.

He then raised the following two questions for the members:

1. What else should we be looking at for the fall?
2. What resources should we be looking at to help us with our homework?

Lori Tanner of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission stated that Holyoke would be too far of a commute for culinary students. However, the Gaming Commission wanted to make sure all grants are regionally based grants. The Commission is trying to work with its partners, as there are transportation challenges, and are looking at what can be done.

Ms. Kane stated that she thought that there would have been a bit of an uptick in the museum's attendance for families. Ombudsman Ziemba stated that perhaps more marketing could work. There was discussion around marketing for the Loop busses as the ridership is lacking.

It was established that the Committee will meet again on Tuesday, September 10th at 1:00 p.m. and will have Mr. Vander Linden provide a presentation on Research and Responsible Gaming. The Committee will need to have at least three meetings in the fall. The first meeting will be for all questions raised, the second and third meeting will be for reviewing the initial draft, and the fourth meeting will talk about needs for December. Ombudsman Ziemba stated that he will keep everyone up to date about the research activities (SEIGMA research event) and that he will email this information to the members.

Ombudsman Ziemba will send out the Regional Tourism Plan to all the members that will identify how they are going to work on all the tourism issues.

The question of the potential impact that MGM Springfield has had on Plainridge race track was raised. Ombudsman Ziemba answered that there has been very little impact. In fact, Plainridge has just had its best month since it opened in March.

3:16 p.m. *There being no further business, the Chair made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Kane seconded the motion.
The motion passed unanimously.*

List of Documents and Other Items Used

1. Notice of meeting and agenda, posted April 19, 2019
2. Meeting Minutes from the meeting of November 13, 2018
3. Workforce Programs Update Documents

/s/ Shara N. Bedard
Secretary