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GAMBLING

Masiello threatens casino suit

Decries site choice in Cheektowaga

By BRIAN MEYER
News Staff Reporter
4/13/2004

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HARRY SCULL JR./Buffalo News
The Interior Department still must approve the Seneca Nation of Indians' plan to locate a casino in Cheektowaga's Airborne Business Park, across Holtz Drive from Buffalo Niagara International Airport.

casino.

"This region keeps making terrible decisions," Franczyk said. "The casino isn't a magic bullet, but it would create synergy and jobs. If it's going to be built, it should be located in the city."

Responding to the latest criticism from city officials, Seneca Nation President Rickey L. Armstrong Sr. issued a harsh written rebuttal, insisting that "every attempt" was made to locate the casino in Buffalo.

Buffalo officials are seriously considering legal action to try to block plans by the Seneca Nation of Indians to build a casino in Cheektowaga.

"I'm not deterred in my resolve to oppose any effort to put a casino outside the city of Buffalo," Mayor Anthony M. Masiello said Monday. "We'll explore every option available, including litigation. That's how strongly I feel about the issue."

Masiello and some Common Council members reiterated their stands that the Tribal Council is legally bound to negotiate with the city on locating the Senecas' next casino in the city. The mayor said he was "extremely disappointed" that the Tribal Council voted Saturday to purchase 57 acres near Buffalo Niagara International Airport.

Council President David A. Franczyk said he will file a resolution for consideration at today's Council meeting that would commit the city to vigorously lobbying in Washington against the Cheektowaga project. The Interior Department still must approve the




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"But our advances were rejected at every turn," he wrote. "The city wanted a casino, but only on (its) terms."

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Armstrong faulted city officials for demanding that the Senecas reach a separate agreement with the city, arguing that it is "legally precluded" from doing so.

"They tried to tell us where to put the casino and how to run our business. We tried to make it work in Buffalo, but it just was not possible," Armstrong wrote.

Masiello insisted Monday that his office did everything it could to advance the project.

"I personally showed them (Memorial Auditorium), the Statler Towers and the DL&W Terminal," he said. "We also had numerous conversations about (other sites), but they were never really responsive in terms of telling us what they wanted from the city."

Franczyk said he even visited the Seneca Nation reservation in Irving a year ago to make a pitch for turning the long-vacant Central Terminal into a casino.

"Frankly, I don't think they wanted to come to Buffalo in the first place," the Council president said. "They're trying to find a million reasons why Buffalo wasn't picked, when I think their plan all along was to try to find open land so they could build a cash machine as quickly as possible."

Armstrong downplayed city officials' threats to lobby against the Cheektowaga project.

"As politicians, the leaders in Buffalo need to appear as if they are still fighting for the casino," he wrote. "But they know as well as I do that the compact is clear and that the Tribal Council's decision will be supported at the federal level."

If the city takes legal action, it won't be alone.

Downtown business leaders disclosed last week that they have started legal efforts to block a casino in Cheektowaga. Developer Carl P. Paladino and other business owners have retained the law firm Phillips Lytle to lobby state and federal officials to halt the plan. If the lobbying effort fails, Paladino warned that a lawsuit will be filed.

The Senecas plan to purchase the Airborne Business Park, owned by Uniland Development Corp. of Buffalo. The property is located directly across Holtz Drive east of the airport on Genesee Street. Plans call for a 185,000-square-foot casino that could be open as early as New Year's Eve, although some say next spring is more realistic.

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