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Initial casino proposal has been made

Proposal features hotel, convocation center and restaurants – Burzynski wants public hearings to be held

By **Diane Strand**
The MidWeek

The Prairie Band Potawatomi/Shab-ey-nay Band continues to negotiate with the state of Illinois for land in DeKalb County— which could become a massive casino and resort. Former DeKalb

County Judge John Countryman, who represents the tribe, has said the Native American group's claim to reservation land in Shabbona has been ratified by the U. S. Department of the Interior. However, others such as Sen. Brad Burzynski, R-Sycamore, have said the federal government is still looking at the Shabbona claim. In a recent call for a series of hearings, Burzynski pushed for formal input by residents who would be affected by a casino or resort. The Prairie Band's initial proposal, submitted in 2003, could generate as many as 15,509 DeKalb County jobs, and 18,929 total for the state. Annual earnings for the state could reach as much as \$642 million, proponents said.

At the same time, the Prairie Band outlined adjacent land development that could include a lodge, more hotels, RV park, convenience store, indoor amusement and water park on 30-50 acres, several restaurants, independent nightclub, indoor ice skating complex and a retail mall. The Prairie Band's wants the casino and resort on 128 acres of its "option property," located in Shabbona Township, DeKalb County, on U.S. 30, nine miles east of its intersection with I-39. About 60 percent of the reservation is in Shabbona State Park and the County Forest Preserve; 10 percent comprises the option property—5 percent occupied by the local country club and the balance, 26 percent, is by individuals.

The tribe hopes to acquire the balance in the reservation lands by negotiating agreements with those occupying the land.

The proposal states, "Both the state park and forest preserve will be maintained and open to the public, with the tribe bearing the cost of upkeep and improvements."

DeKalb County Board Chairman Dennis Sands, R-Shabbona, has been very concerned about the possible ecological effect on Shabbona, the county forest preserve there and the Shabbona State Park.

If the tribe isn't satisfied with what Illinois offers them, they can bypass the state and go directly to the federal government.

Several months ago, Sands said he met with county Administrative Aide Ray Bockman and State's Attorney Ron Matekaitis about the Prairie Band claim. He also sent letters to U.S. Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, R-Yorkville, and Gov. Rod Blagojevich. Sands said he also talked to the mayor of Shabbona, the police chief and others.

At the time, Sands said he talked with an individual who lives near the Ho Chunk Casino in Wisconsin. Sands said that individual's advice was, "If the county and the village don't get a seat at the table...that's your only chance to have any role."

County board members are extremely concerned about the impact of a casino and/or resort on local, state and county government and finances, police and fire protection, water and sanitary needs, traffic control, road maintenance, Shabbona State Park and the county's Shabbona Forest Preserve.

"Two wrongs don't make a right"

State Sen. Brad Burzynski, R-Sycamore, wants at least a seat at

Initial casino proposal items

The following are just some of the items in the tribe's initial proposal:

- 4,750 slot machines, 180 table games, 40 poker tables, two live keno games and
- a "state of the art" racebook;
- a 600-room, first-class chain hotel, a 300-unit mid-class, chain all-suite hotel;
- a 1,500-seat combination bingo hall and show theater with tiered seating;
- a 1,500-seat dinner show theater offering "Las Vegas" quality shows.
- a 350-seat buffet restaurant, a 200-seat, 24-hour coffee shop, a 150-seat fine dining restaurant, a 125-seat sports bar and grill, two ethnic restaurants and a food court;
- three 75-175 seat bars with live entertainment on each of the casino's gaming floors, a plush cigar bar and a lobby lounge in the 600-room hotel;
- a 75,000 square foot convention center and 22,500 square feet of meeting space in the 600-room hotel;
- a 100-lane

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the governor's table and said a battery of hearings is needed to discuss proposed Native American casinos and resorts in Illinois.

Burzynski offered a senate resolution last week, urging Gov. Rod Blagojevich to form a legislative committee that will hold public hearings.

The senator referred to four Native American proposals: 1) the Potawatomi Nation's claim on land in the Shabbona area; 2) the Ho-Chunk Nation and the Ottawa Tribe proposals, each looking at possible casinos in the south suburbs; 3) the Miami Nation, eyeing 13 counties in East Central Illinois—where they have already purchased 25 acres of land. Burzynski said the Miami Nation has denied the land will be used for gambling.

"I urge the Governor to act now and give these communities a voice in the process," Burzynski said. "The Indian tribes who have asserted claim to this land say it was originally taken without due process, without shining light on the negotiations. That is exactly what's happening to the communities where they are claiming land now. Two wrongs don't make a right.

"This time we should make sure the negotiations include input from the public," Burzynski said. He called specifically for an eight-member committee, with two members appointed by each Legislative leader. At least four of the committee members should represent districts within 35 miles of the territory proposed for the casinos.

However, if the governor doesn't establish the committee, Burzynski said he will work with lawmakers on his own to hold independent hearings and give local communities a voice in the Indian gambling proposals.

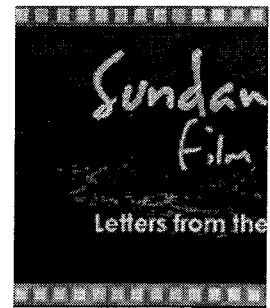
championship bowling complex;

- a health club and full-service spa;

- retail space totaling 75,000;

- a 7,500 square foot supervised child entertainment center and 10,000 square foot non-gaming video arcade;

- covered parking for at least 3,500 vehicles, with total parking for 6,000 vehicles and 100 buses.



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