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Palmer casino detailed \$1B plan sees 4,000 slots, 600 hotel rooms

By Jay Fitzgerald, Boston Herald General Economics Reporter

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The operators of the Mohegan Sun casino in Connecticut are looking at spending about \$1 billion on a new gambling resort in Palmer that could include up to 4,000 slot machines, a 600-room hotel and a giant retail center, according to town and Mohegan tribe officials.

Bruce "Two Dogs" Bozsum, chairman of the Mohegan Tribe, said yesterday that the Mohegans realize any gaming resort in Palmer would cost in the vicinity of \$1 billion. He touted the creation of possibly thousands of construction and resort jobs. In a statement, he said a major gaming, hotel, restaurant and retail resort would employ as many as 5,000 people permanently in the region.

Bozsum's remarks marked the first time the tribe has offered details of its Palmer casino plan, which is contingent on Gov. Deval Patrick and the Legislature one day deciding to allow casino gambling in Massachusetts.

The Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority last month signed an exclusive development deal with Northeast Realty and Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust, a developer of retail, housing and office projects, to explore building a casino resort on about 150 acres of land just off the Mass Pike.

Richard Fitzgerald, town manager for Palmer, said officials have met with Mohegan-backed development representatives "on a couple of occasions."

Preliminary talks have centered on a casino with 2,000 to 4,000 slot machines, a 600-room hotel and a major retail facility, Fitzgerald said.

There have been no discussions about any annual payments or taxes that the tribe might pay for the right to build in Palmer, Fitzgerald said.

Town councilors are keeping an open mind about a possible casino resort one day being built in Palmer, Fitzgerald said.

Details of the Mohegan group's plans came on the same day that the Wampanoag tribe applied to put land in Middleboro into a federal trust for another proposed casino. Leon Dragone, president of Northeast Realty denied that the Mohegan group was crashing the Wampanoag's party.

But the Mohegans, who have their own highly profitable casino in Connecticut, are clearly trying to put themselves in the position of building a new resort in Palmer to compete against any future Mashpee Wampanoag tribal casino in Middleboro.

The issue of a casino resort is slated to be addressed at the Palmer town council's Sept. 10 meeting.

Opinions in Palmer are divided over the issue, Fitzgerald said.

But he noted that voters approved a non-binding town referendum in the late 1990s that called for allowing a general casino-resort within town limits.