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Twin River hotel proposal moves forward through council



The proposed hotel at Twin River Casino can be seen on the far left of the property in this artist rendition.

By **BRITTANY BALLANTYNE**, Valley Breeze Staff Writer

LINCOLN - Despite some public opposition, the Town Council unanimously voted to approve an application for a comprehensive plan amendment and zone change application proposed by Twin River Casino for a prospective hotel.

Mark Russo, attorney for Twin River, said the company has been working with neighbors since the last public hearing to address their concerns, which involve trash and litter problems, saying debris has landed in their yards from the casino.

According to Russo, Twin River has spent \$85,000 on the matter and has begun operations to limit trash after adopting highway pickup routines. Russo also confirmed that landscaping would begin this week along buffer zones, including Twin River Road and the yard of Lincoln resident Harold Perry, where trees will be planted.

Previously, Perry, of 21 Twin River Road, who was quoted in The Breeze after a planning board meeting, said he is the "most impacted" by these changes, as his home rests on higher property than

the casino grounds.

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Rachel Baboian, Au. D.



He said he worried he would "have 300 new neighbors" if and when the hotel is constructed. Perry confirmed that Twin River Casino representatives have been communicating with him about his concerns.

Lincoln resident Jim Spooner, who worked at Lincoln Park for 18 years, said while he believes Twin River Casino has been a beneficial business in the town, "I can't rationalize and I can't understand why a hotel is so important to this community."

Spooner mentioned vacant hotels along Route 116 and others nearby in Smithfield, and said he doesn't think the town of Lincoln has the clientele

that is needed to make a hotel successful. He questioned, "Do you need a hotel when there's others around not even near capacity in the same community?"

Council member Arthur Russo explained his reasoning of voting in favor of the applications, and said he sees the business as a good corporate neighbor.

"A healthy Twin River leads to a healthy town," Russo said, adding that statistics prove more jobs will be created that will hopefully be given to Lincoln residents. Additionally, he said, revenue will continue to increase through permit fees and property and sales taxes.

Russo said people who enjoy a night out at the casino may be more inclined to stay the evening rather than go back onto the road after a few drinks, making the hotel a safe alternative.

Cynthia Schwartz came forward during the public hearing and said she wanted to see a "commitment" to Lincoln residents with new hires for the hotel, offering full-time positions with benefits.

"I think that's important for the town to address," she said.

Twin River's attorney Mark Russo said that Twin River has supplied 1,670 jobs in the surrounding area, not including local safety personnel.

Showing support for the hotel was Michael Sabatoni, president of the Rhode Island Building and Construction Trades Council, who said he wished he had more employers like Twin River, a company that has charitable endeavors and has been competitive in the New England area.

Russo further stated Twin River representatives felt the casino has been competitive while being respectful of its surroundings.

Town Council President Keith Macksoud said he'd received phone calls from concerned residents wondering where, "in close proximity," the hotel would be built.

The current north entrance would serve as the entry point for the proposed hotel, which would be built where there is now extra employee parking, and extend to the south. This would create an L-shaped cove with a service entrance for the hotel, which would be buffered from existing

neighborhoods.

Council member Kenneth Pichette asked where loading docks would be located, to which Russo explained they would be past the employee parking, tucked between the hotel and existing casino. Russo also said there would be no trucks running overnight on the casino grounds after council member Bruce Ogni raised that question.

Linens for the hotel would be the primary delivery, and there are no plans for a restaurant, said Ronald Fraser, director of facilities.

Amy Archer, who completed Twin River Casino's traffic assessment, presented results from two studies to the council. The first study was completed for the 2007 expansion, to which Archer said, "Those volumes projected were never met."

The studies were done during peak times at the facility, and Archer stated she anticipated the majority of people using the hotel services would already be planning a trip to the casino.

Town Solicitor Anthony DeSisto explained that a few steps must happen prior to the construction of the hotel. The applicants must go back to the planning board before going further toward the preliminary plan stage, which, if passed, would then send the proposal to the final plan stage.

He further explained that the amendment proposed that evening would make the hotel an accessory use in this particular CR2 zone, which would allow a hotel on this site as an accessory use in subordinate to the gaming facility.

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