

Tribal members get the facts at community meetings; 68% of those surveyed support project SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. — Sixty-eight percent of those attending informational meetings on the proposed Lansing casino project held across the state in the past five weeks said they support the proposal, according to surveys filled out by Sault Tribe members, employees and some community members who were at the meetings.

The Tribe held 20 informational meetings across the state between Jan. 31 and Feb. 29 for members to learn more about the proposed Lansing casino.

Sault Tribe Chairman Joe Eitrem, who attended all of the meetings, said tribal members asked many “good and tough questions” about the project. Meetings were held in Sault Ste. Marie, Munising, Marquette, Kinross, Midland, Lansing, Sugar Island, Brimley, St. Ignace, Dearborn, Escanaba, Newberry, Cheboygan, Grand Rapids, Hessel and Naubinway.

“We are grateful to all members who took the time to attend the informational meetings,” Eitrem said. “Based on the surveys the members who attended filled out a questionnaire, most members said they support the project, some are opposed. We received many good and tough questions from many members, who are right to be concerned and even skeptical about this type of project.”

Eitrem said the meetings were held to make sure tribal members understand that “the Lansing casino is not another Greektown Casino, and that the tribe assumes no financial risks for the project unless and until it is approved by the federal government.”

“There is really no comparison between the Lansing casino project and what the tribe went through in Greektown,” Eitrem said. “We have no financial risks in Lansing until the land is taken into trust, while in Greektown we assumed all of the financial risks before, during and after. If we succeed, the tribe will be 100 percent owners and managers. The casino will be regulated by the Kewadin Casino Gaming Authority and National Indian Gaming commission, not the state of Michigan. We will pay 2.5 percent to the City of Lansing, versus paying nearly 30 percent in taxes and fees to the state, city of Detroit, and Gaming Control Board. Most tribal members who thought Lansing might be another Greektown came away from the meetings understanding Lansing could not be more different, I believe.”

If the plan moves forward, 10 percent of the annual income the tribe receives from the project will go directly into the tribe’s Self-Sufficiency Fund. This fund supports programs and

services that benefit elders and provides resources to explore future economic development opportunities.

Another 3 percent of the annual revenues will be distributed among and deposited in the following funds: the Elder Health Self-Sufficiency Fund, the Elder Employment Self-Sufficiency Fund, the Funeral Assistance Self-Sufficiency fund, and the Education Assistance Self-Sufficiency Fund.

Another 2 percent of the annual income to the Tribe from this project will be deposited into a fund to establish a college scholarship program for tribal members regardless of blood quantum, similar to what the City of Lansing is doing with its 2 percent.

“Many people asked questions about what we are going to do with the money we receive from this casino,” said Eitrem. “We have earmarked, by resolution, where 15 percent of the annual income from Lansing will go. The rest of the annual income we receive will be used to reinstate membership services that we have had to cut over the years due to budget constraints.”

Eitrem noted that the board also hopes to create new membership services, to bring parity in wages to employees in the seven-county service area, pay off debt and allow for upgrades and renovations at the five northern Kewadin Casinos with income from this project.

While not a scientific sample of the opinions of tribal members, the surveys filled out by members who attended the information meetings indicate a good understanding of the project, Eitrem said. An average of 14 people attended each meeting, 279 total for all meetings. Over 65 percent of those attending support the project.

“After what we went through in Greektown, I and all of the board members were absolutely against getting into another Greektown,” Eitrem said. “Lansing is not another Greektown, and I believe most of the members who attended the informational meetings now understand that, too.”

More information about the Lansing casino is available at saulttribe.com or lansingkewadin.wordpress.com.

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