

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 24, 2017

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich.

Roger Martin, APR: Office (517) 485-6600, Cell (517) 290-2330

rmartin@martinwaymire.com

U.S. DOI Agrees tribe's trust land applications for Lansing and Huron Township are mandatory

DOI also requests further information

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. — The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) has agreed that the Sault Tribe's trust land applications for the City of Lansing and Huron Township are mandatory under the Michigan Indian Land Claims Settlement Act but has asked the Tribe for more evidence to show the proposed parcels qualify under the act.

In a Jan. 19 letter to Sault Tribe Chairperson Aaron Payment, the DOI said it "will keep the tribe's applications open so that the tribe may present evidence" to support that the parcels of land meet federal legal requirements. Payment said the tribe "remains absolutely confident in our legal theory and committed to pursuing the success of these projects." He said the tribe will decide how to respond to the Jan. 19 letter "in the very near future."

In June 2014 the tribe filed applications to take land into trust in downtown Lansing and in southeast Michigan's Huron Township. The land in Lansing will become the location of a new gaming resort first proposed by the tribe and Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero in January 2012. The land includes two parcels totaling about 2.7 acres at Michigan Avenue and North Cedar Street adjacent to and near the Lansing Center, the city's convention and events facility.

The tribe anticipates the land in Huron Township, totaling 71 acres at 36181 Sibley Road and I-275 southwest of Metro Airport, will also serve as a gaming location. The scope of the gaming project in Huron Township will be determined by an economic impact study.

A 1997 law passed by Congress called the Michigan Indian Land Claims Settlement Act (MILCSA) requires the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to approve the trust land applications. The tribe used revenues from its "Self Sufficiency Fund" to purchase the lands. The MILCSA states that "[a]ny lands acquired using amounts from interest or other income of the Self-Sufficiency Fund shall be held in trust by the Secretary for the benefit of the [Sault] Tribe."

"The law is clear: the Secretary is required to accept these parcels in trust," Payment said. "It is a clear, plain-language legal argument. Our tribe is within federal law and our legal rights to pursue these opportunities to create thousands of new jobs and generate millions of dollars in new revenues that will benefit our members, the people of Lansing, public school students in Lansing, the people of Huron Township, and the entire state."

Three federal court developments cleared the way for the tribe to file the applications:

On Dec. 18, 2013, the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that the Sault Tribe had the right to pursue approval of its Lansing casino.

On May 27, 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a somewhat similar case that the state of Michigan could not block the Bay Mills Tribe from opening a casino on land not part of its gaming compact with the state. Also in 2014, Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette withdrew from the U.S. Supreme Court a lawsuit that effectively blocked the filing of the applications.

Payment said the Huron Township land is a "perfect casino location," with easy access to I-275, I-75 and Metro Airport. The land already includes a large, unfinished building that could easily be converted to gaming use and tribal offices. The casino would create jobs and generate revenues to provide services to tribal members who live in Metro Detroit.

The 125,000-square-foot Lansing casino would create 1,500 permanent jobs and 700 construction jobs. It would also generate revenues the City of Lansing would use to fund the Lansing Promise Scholarships, a program to fund four-year college scholarships for graduates of the city's high schools.

The tribe said both casinos could feature either Class 2 or Class 3 gaming. Class 3 gaming includes electronic and table games normally associated with most large casinos (slot machines, poker, blackjack, craps and roulette). Class 2 gaming is typically defined as games of chance such as bingo, pull tabs and others. To casino customers, many electronic Class 2 games look and play just like traditional slot machines, even though they are not.