

Muskegon County Casino in Fruitport Township

Proposed by Little River Band of Ottawa Indians (LRBOI)



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Contact

Glenn C. Zaring

231-398-6872

The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians Muskegon Casino Project Moves Forward

Band submits application to BIA



Little River Band of Ottawa Ogema Larry Romanelli and Tribal Council Speaker Virg Johnson with Bureau of Indian Affairs officials Diane Baker (l) and Diane Rosen (r) at the BIA offices in Minneapolis where they submitted paperwork yesterday requesting 60 acres of land in Fruitport Township be taken into trust for economic development and a proposed casino.

Muskegon, Mich. — The approval process for the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians (LRBOI) to develop an Indian gaming facility in Muskegon County is advancing to the next step. The LRBOI late yesterday filed its application at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) regional office to take land into trust for a proposed casino and economic development project to be located on 60 acres of the former Great Lakes Downs racetrack site in Fruitport Township.

“This marks another step forward for the Band and the Muskegon region,” said Tribal Ogema Larry Romanelli, Ogema of the LRBOI. “For the past seven years, we have worked with the Muskegon region to bring viable economic development to both of our

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communities. This project would jumpstart the local economy and help provide support for expanded tribal government services for our tribal members.”

LRBOI will invest \$180 million to build the new casino and economic development project. The project is expected to generate more than 1,200 new jobs in Muskegon County.

The Great Lakes Downs racetrack in Fruitport opened in 1999 and closed in 2007. LRBOI purchased the property in 2008 with plans to build a casino and economic development project. As proposed, the economic development project would include:

- Approximately 69,000 square feet of gaming floor space
- 1,700 slot machines
- 35 table games
- 220-room hotel
- Conference and meeting room space
- Dining and entertainment options

LRBOI opened the Little River Casino Resort in 1999 in Manistee as a tool for economic development and self-sufficiency. The income from the casino has enabled the Tribe to fund numerous important programs for tribal members and to provide employment opportunities for those members residing near the Tribe’s Manistee reservation. But over time, as Michigan tribes have expanded their gaming operations, with half of Michigan tribes operating more than one casino, competition has eroded LRBOI’s income.

“The Band acknowledges this is a long-term investment and we plan to continue to work with the community, state and federal officials to pursue the casino and economic development project to provide much needed jobs and investment in the Muskegon region along with providing revenues to service the needs of our members,” said Tribal Council Speaker Virgil Johnson.

“Our proposed Muskegon casino would provide revenues to help our Tribe meet the unmet needs of its members by providing services that are either lacking or have been diminished over the past 15 years,” added Speaker Johnson. “This project would provide the Tribe the ability to better the lives of tribal members through enhanced tribal government operations and infrastructure, including housing, education, and social services.”

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For further information, contact the Office of Public Affairs for the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians at 2608 Government Center Drive, Manistee, MI 49660. Office phone: 231-398-6872. E-mail: gzaring@lrboi-nsn.gov

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