

How big a gamble is Garden Grove casino plan?

The Gabrielino-Tongva Indian Tribe plans two upscale casino resorts with promises of huge dividends to the city, but some wonder if it will become a reality.

By DEEPA BHARATH
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GARDEN GROVE – Fantastic as \$70 million a year for the city and a college scholarship for every Garden Grove high school graduate may sound, city officials say they have no idea whether the grand plans of a local Indian tribe to build a casino will ever crystallize.

Members of the Gabrielino-Tongva Indian tribe of Santa Monica submitted their proposal to the city Friday to develop two 1-million-square-foot upscale casino resorts as part of the 35-acre parcel on Harbor Boulevard designated by the city as the “entertainment hub” of the InternationalWEST resort area.

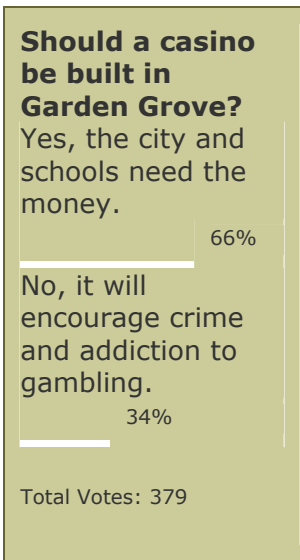
Jonathan Stein, chief executive officer of the tribe, said the city stands to benefit enormously from his proposals, which would have casino resorts like the Bellagio and Paris on the Las Vegas strip. He envisions from 2,500 to 7,500 slot machines, upscale hotels starting at \$300 a night, stadiums featuring concerts and sports events, theaters of all sizes, night clubs, shops and movie theaters.

Stein said the project would bring in about \$5.1 billion in 30 years. The money, he said, would be shared with the School District to provide college scholarships for every student who graduates from Garden Grove high schools. Stein said the tribe would also pay \$100 million to the city for infrastructure improvements.

“This development holds so much for the city and we’re optimistic it will work,” he said.

Garden Grove Unified School District spokesman Alan Trudell declined comment saying that the project is still at a “very preliminary stage.”

But some city officials are questioning how the tribe will ever get the required approvals at the state level, and more importantly whether Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger would sign off on it. The tribe, recognized by the state as a tribe indigenous to Orange County, has not yet been recognized by the federal government. Stein said that doesn’t matter. All it takes, he said, is for the state Senate and Assembly to pass a bill that would allow the development in Garden Grove.



That is no easy task, said Councilman Bruce Broadwater.

“I certainly don’t support it and think their revenue projections are astronomical and unbelievable,” he said.

But city staff members are open to the casino concept, said Economic Development Director Chet Yoshizaki. His department is considering two other proposals, from Orange-based Vision Maker Worldwide and another Colorado-based developer, who have both suggested a mixed-use development with hotels, restaurants, shops and entertainment elements.

Yoshizaki said the city will continue to accept more proposals for the entertainment hub.

Harry Krebs, who supported the idea of a casino as a former councilman, says he is skeptical.

“If it sounds too good and looks too good, it’s probably too good to be true,” he said. “I still support it, but whether it happens remains to be seen.”

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