

Execs unveil plans for USD 1 billion New Bedford casino

A USD 1 billion destination resort casino would take shape on New Bedford's waterfront under plans laid out by a group of local business executives.

Northeast Resorts wants to build a huge casino, shopping and housing complex on a key stretch of the old port city's harborfront, previously home to the now shuttered Revere Copper plant.

In honor of the old Revere Copper, the project is being dubbed "Revere Landing."

Meanwhile, in a major boost to the proposal, Gov. Deval Patrick's administration has designated the 35-acre site and the area around it as a "growth district." That could mean everything from a fast-track permitting process to money for marketing.

Still, Northeast Resorts, headed by business executive Leon Dragone of East Longmeadow, acknowledged its plans depend upon a major shift on Beacon Hill, which over the years has rejected several proposals to expand gambling in Massachusetts. Other investors in Northeast Resorts include Peter Picknelly, president of Peter Pan Bus Lines, and Steve Norton, a veteran casino industry executive.

With the state's budget crisis deepening, Northeast Resorts is getting in position to take advantage of an expected surge in activity in the Legislature on gambling early next year.

With the city having approved by a large margin two previous casino plans, New Bedford provides a solid base for such a project.

“The locations that ultimately will rise up as casino destination locations are those that have strong local support in host communities and that have layers of regional support,” Dragone said.

Northeast Resorts is now turning an eye to potential partners. One possible alliance would be with the Wampanoag tribe of Martha’s Vineyard, which had previously proposed a casino of its own on the New Bedford waterfront.

Separately, Northeast Resorts has an agreement with Mohegan Sun to build a large casino in Palmer if Massachusetts were to legalize casino gambling.