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Gambling Alert -February 10, 2023



STATE REGULATORS APPROVE MEDINAH TEMPLE LANDLORD OF PROPOSED TEMPORARY CASINO

State regulators dealt their first card to Mayor Lori Lightfoot's Chicago casino plan on Thursday, issuing early approvals to the landlord of her proposed temporary gambling site in River North, where city officials are ambitiously hoping the first bets will be taken by summertime.

The Illinois Gaming Board unanimously approved initial supplier licenses for the politically connected owner of the historic Medinah Temple at 600 N. Wabash Ave., which is slated to serve as Bally's temporary casino for at least two years while the Rhode Island company builds its permanent structure at Chicago Avenue and Halsted Street in River West.

The board — which has to sign off on suppliers of everything in the state's casinos from chips and cards to air conditioning and maintenance systems — gave the OK to Medinah Building LLC, an entity representing the site's physical structure, and Medinah Holdings LLC, which covers the land where it sits.

Both are controlled by Friedman Properties, which has collected

nearly \$77,000 in rent related payments since 2019 as the landlord for the offices of Lightfoot’s campaign fund, the Sun-Times has reported.

Friedman Properties’ chairman and CEO is developer Albert Friedman, a longtime client of former Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan’s law firm, which has appealed the property taxes for many Friedman properties.

State regulators are still evaluating Bally’s overall casino proposal, which was submitted last August.

Lightfoot has said she wants the temporary casino to open and start generating revenue — eventually up to \$200 million a year — for the city’s depleted police and firefighter pension funds by early this summer.

But that would seemingly require an expedited timeline from the chronically understaffed Gaming Board. The agency has taken at least a year to vet each of the five other new casinos that were authorized under a massive statewide gambling expansion signed into law by Gov. J.B. Pritzker in 2019.

“Just as we did with those applicants, the IGB is evaluating, vetting and investigating the Bally’s Chicago casino application in an ethical, efficient, independent and thorough manner that satisfies our statutory obligations and safeguards public trust and confidence,” said Marcus Fruchter, the board’s administrator.

Fruchter said his agency’s investigation is “moving forward and that Bally’s is cooperating with IGB staff,” but wouldn’t say when a determination of “preliminary suitability” might be decided.

A public presentation will precede that decision, which would allow the company to start setting up shop.

Last spring, Lightfoot abruptly named Bally’s as her casino operator from among three finalists without any substantial input from a Chicago City Council committee that had been ostensibly convened to handle all matters related to the long-coveted gambling mecca.

Bally’s plan is staunchly opposed by River North Ald. Brendan Reilly (42nd), who has predicted a rise in crime and traffic

around the temporary casino at Medinah — a location selection he has also lambasted as an eleventh-hour “switcheroo.”

Bally’s officials have said in public meetings that they initially wanted to build their temporary casino near the permanent location at the site of the Chicago Tribune printing plant. But sources have said Lightfoot instead encouraged Bally’s to use the Medinah Temple site.

Lightfoot’s office has said it had “no involvement” in the Medinah site selection. The mayor’s office also backed Bally’s traffic and public safety plans while touting the \$40 million upfront payment the company made to the city after receiving City Council approval. [READ](#)

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