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From the Los Angeles Times

## Garden Grove council rejects casino plan

**Unanimous vote followed emotional public comments, especially from Vietnamese, against the proposal. A hotel complex is OKd for the land instead.**

By Dave McKibben

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

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The Garden Grove City Council voted unanimously late Tuesday to kill a casino proposal that promised \$70 million in annual tax revenue and college scholarships to every high school graduate, forcefully ending the central Orange County city's three-year dance with casino backers.

"We made a very strong statement with that 5-0 vote," said Councilwoman Dina Nguyen. "It will give the casino developers a hint that it will not be that easy to get into Garden Grove again."

In bypassing the Gabrielino-Tongva Indian tribe's proposal for a 40-acre Harbor Boulevard parcel near Disneyland, the council instead will offer most of the land to a Colorado-based developer. The project would include an upscale hotel with an indoor-outdoor water park, meeting space, two parking garages, shops and restaurants.

"I am still intrigued by the casino, but it is a long way off," said Councilman Mark Rosen. "We needed to start producing revenue on that land now. The hotel project is not going to get off immediately either, but at least we can start moving on it."

The McWhinney Enterprises project was approved for 25 acres, leaving the door ajar for a casino in the future.

"I think there's still room for other things, including a casino if they can get over all their hurdles," Rosen said.

Much of the emotional and critical testimony during the three-hour hearing came from Vietnamese Americans. Many warned of potential dire social effects of a casino, such as increased crime, more traffic and even more suicides. There were also some subtle -- and some not so subtle -- reminders of the potential voting power of the Vietnamese community.

"The Vietnamese community realized they can vote, and now they're simply going onto the next level," Nguyen said. "They are understanding their constitutional rights and the responsibility that goes with that. I think the result last night gave the Vietnamese community a lot of faith in the democratic process."

Councilman Bruce Broadwater said he believed the strong showing by the Vietnamese community was a factor in the 5-0 vote.

"You have 200 or 300 Vietnamese people screaming at you," he said. "You can only take that heat for so long."

Broadwater said he was convinced the casino was unrealistic because the Gabrielinos had too many obstacles to overcome. There are about 2,000 Gabrielinos in the state, but the tribe is not federally recognized and is split into at least five factions, complicating and possibly dooming efforts to build a casino. Because the Gabrielinos have no land, the tribe would have to have a statewide ballot measure passed allowing state-recognized tribes

to build casinos.

"There was nothing there, nothing tangible to touch," Broadwater said. "They had a dream, but there was nothing to go with it."

Jonathan Stein, chief executive of the Gabrielino faction pushing the casino, argued that the tribe could open a casino in Garden Grove with proper legislation and a negotiated compact with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

This is the second time Garden Grove has considered a casino. Three years ago, city officials met with a different tribe and Las Vegas casino mogul Steve Wynn about building a casino-hotel, but the plan quickly fell apart.

Garden Grove Mayor William Dalton said he had considered the Gabrielino proposal, but he ultimately decided the economics of the project were "too pie-in-the-sky." Dalton said he believed a casino would never be built in Garden Grove.

"I don't think you'll ever get the majority of the residents to go along with it," he said.

Councilman Steve Jones said he was bothered that the casino proposal overshadowed the hotel-water park plan.

"We're getting a 1,200-room, high-end themed hotel around a water park; this project alone could put Garden Grove on the map," he said. "It's an awesome deal and hardly a consolation prize. I think parents are going to have a hard time pulling their kids out of this water park to go to Disneyland."

david.mckibben@latimes.com

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