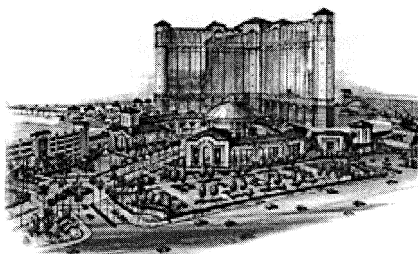


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A rendering of the proposed casino and hotel.

COURTESY OF THE GABRIELINO-TONGVA INDIAN TRIBE OF SANTA MONICA

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Tuesday, August 14, 2007

Vietnamese American leaders protest casino

Little Saigon community leaders voice their opposition to proposed casino resort in Garden Grove.

By DEEPA BHARATH
The Orange County Register

GARDEN GROVE – Local Vietnamese American city officials and community leaders are expressing their disapproval for the proposed Indian casino on Harbor Boulevard in the city-designated resort area.

About 200 people are expected to show up at tonight's City Council meeting to express their opposition during the public comments section of the meeting.

Five elected officials signed a letter sent to Mayor Bill Dalton Monday voicing the community's objection to the casino project, which is yet to receive city approvals. The letter states that a casino would be a bad idea for Garden Grove because "it brings about social problems such as addicted gambling, family breakdown, domestic violence, child abuse or

neglect, financial bankruptcies.”

The letter is signed by Lan Nguyen and Trung Nguyen, both Garden Grove Unified School District trustees; Andrew Nguyen, Westminster School District trustee; Westminster City Councilman Tri Ta, and Truong Diep, one of the board of directors of the Midway City Sanitary District.

Jonathan Stein, chief executive officer of the Santa Monica-based Gabrielino-Tongva Indian Tribe, has proposed two casino resorts along the lines of Bellagio and Paris on the Las Vegas strip, with 2,500 to 7,500 slot machines, upscale hotels starting at \$300 a night, stadiums featuring concerts and sports events, theaters, night clubs and shops.

Stein, who held an Aug. 2 meet-and-greet with Vietnamese-American community leaders, said today he was shocked by the letter. He said he was warned about the political conflict in the local Vietnamese American community.

“This letter is a political hit piece and we're sorry to see it mar what has otherwise been a very professional response from the city, residents and the business community,” he said.

Bernie Acuna, one of the tribe's council members, said he was “outraged.”

“Why don't they understand that we don't want people's rent money,” he said. “We're only hoping to attract tourists.”

Stein has promised giant dividends for the city and the school district if the casino is approved, including \$100 million upfront for city infrastructure, \$70 million a year from slot machine revenues and a college scholarship for every high school graduate in the Garden Grove Unified School District.

Lan Nguyen dismissed those offers as unrealistic.

“One must realize that the casino operator must make many times of those amounts in gambling profits to be able to deliver that much money to the city,” he said in the letter to Dalton.

Diep, one of the officials who signed that letter, said he read the proposal carefully and believed it to be filled with empty promises.

“We have many concerns that are not addressed in the proposal,” he said. “It's a proven fact that casinos attract a variety of criminal activities.”

Some are also concerned about what a casino so close to Asian communities would do to families. Asians' tendency to gamble is not a myth, said Timothy Fong, co-director of UCLA's Gambling Studies Program. Fong is specifically studying Asian populations' gambling habits.

“Certain communities, especially the Vietnamese American community, are very vulnerable,” he said. “Most Asians who gamble are not addicts, but those who are addicted are very severely addicted.”

Fong said families and communities suffer in these populations because the barriers to get help are many, including language, denial and shame. He said a recent unpublished study done at the Commerce casino showed that 30 percent of casino-goers were of Asian origin.

Stein, however, maintains that the Garden Grove casino would exercise caution in handing out casino cards and will execute a program to keep out addicts.

“These casino cards are like credit cards and if we get a letter from a customer's family members that their gambling addiction is out of control, we will cancel their casino cards,” Stein said.

Members of the local Vietnamese American community and religious groups are expected to speak on the issue during tonight's City Council meeting at 6:30 p.m. in council chambers, 11300 Stanford Ave.

Council members Dina Nguyen and Bruce Broadwater have said they would not support the casino.

City Councilman Mark Rosen said the letter sent out by Lan Nguyen and other officials is “disgraceful.”

“It shows that the Vietnamese community is divided and fractured,” he said. “These five officials who have signed this letter don't represent the will of the community. I don't think they've even read the casino proposal.”

Contact the writer: 714-445-6685 or dbharath@oregister.com