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Who are the Gabrielinos?

The Gabrielino-Tongva Indian Tribe has several factions in greater Los Angeles, who all claim this region as aboriginal land. The tribe, though not recognized by the federal government, received recognition from the state of California in 2004. The tribe's ancestral lands stretch from what is now Laguna Beach to Los Angeles and is one of two tribes, along with the Juanenos, to have roots in Orange County.

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Garden Grove considers casino

Gabrielino-Tongva Indian tribe approaches city officials about property on Harbor Boulevard.

By DEEPA BHARATH
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

GARDEN GROVE – City officials are in talks with members of the Gabrielino-Tongva Indian tribe about building a casino resort in what is being envisioned as the entertainment hub of the city-designated resort area on Harbor Boulevard.

Casino resort discussions have been a source of friction in Garden Grove since 2004, when city officials' talks with the Mesa Grande tribe about a casino on Harbor ended with public outrage over closed-door discussions with a Las Vegas developer.

Details of a meeting last month between Councilmen Mark Rosen and Steve Jones and Jonathan Stein, chief executive officer of the Gabrielino tribe, were discussed toward the end of the City Council meeting late Tuesday night.

The city was approached by the tribe, whose members seem "very interested and motivated" to put a casino at the former Fire Station Motel site on Harbor, Rosen said. The city's redevelopment agency paid \$5.5 million for the 5-acre site in 2003.

"I hope they are successful," Rosen said. "They have a lot of hurdles to cross. But if they do, it'll be good for the city."

Stein, who is also the tribe's senior investor, said Wednesday that his group would pay the city \$100 million up front for infrastructure and \$70 million per year for the next 30 years, a percentage of the casino's expected profits. The resort would be along the lines of the Bellagio in Las Vegas, with an amphitheater, restaurants, retail and about 2,500 slot

machines, Stein said.

The city has asked the tribe to submit a request for proposal. The deadline for proposals for the site is July 31.

Stein said the tribe is also talking to Inglewood city officials, but prefers Orange County to Los Angeles because of less competition from other Indian tribes.

The city has struggled over the last five years to find a theme park or resort to anchor hotels, restaurants and retail for the planned InternationalWEST. Ideas for a film studio-based theme park, a Riverwalk entertainment area and even a Las Vegas-style casino resort have failed to go forward.

City Manager Matthew Fertal said a casino could complement other components of the entertainment hub, such as shops, restaurants and comedy clubs.

The disclosure Tuesday about city talks with the Gabrielino tribe was the result of a policy created in 2005 after the outcry over a Brown Act violation in connection with closed-door discussions with Las Vegas developer Steve Wynn.

Stein and council members said that would not happen again. Jones said residents will have the opportunity to express their views.

But the council has the obligation to hear out developers or entrepreneurs, he said.

"We need something big on Harbor Boulevard – whether it's a theme park or a casino resort," Jones said. "We need to stay open to ideas."

The council has traditionally been split on the casino resort proposal. Former council members Janet Nguyen and Mark Leyes were against the idea. Rosen initially opposed it but later became more open to the idea, as has Mayor Bill Dalton.

Councilwoman Dina Nguyen said she opposes a casino.

"We have other ways of raising revenue," she said. "We see other communities that grapple with traffic and crime problems because of casinos and we don't want to invite those problems to Garden Grove."

Rosen and Jones said their discussion with Stein was "very preliminary."

"I heard a lot of numbers," Rosen said. "But numbers don't stick with me. We need to wait and see how much of that will become a reality."

Timeline

April 2003: Fountain Valley-based Southern California Indian Center Inc. proposes a plan for a casino resort and introduces city officials to the Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians in fall 2003.

May 2004: Four City Council members meet with resort mogul Steve Wynn in Las Vegas to discuss a casino project. The following month, in a closed meeting, Councilmen Van Tran, Mark Rosen and Bill Dalton sign a confidentiality agreement that bars them from speaking

about the project.

August 2004: City officials abandon the plan after angry community response to the closed-door talks.

July 2005: A budget committee formed by Dalton recommends city officials take another look at the casino resort idea to help offset a projected \$12.7 million budget deficit in 2007.

January 2006: City officials announced there would be no deficit in 2007, but that they will still consider casino proposals.

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