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WZZM13 News Coverage

Wayland Casino Closer to Reality

Keith Baldi

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Wayland- A casino is one step closer to coming to West Michigan now that the federal government has placed land in trust for the Gun Lake Band of the Pottawatomi Indians.

The tribe first introduced the idea of a casino in Allegan County in 2000.

They've faced organized opposition ever since.

But five years later, it appears they may get what they want.

There are 19 Indian casinos operating in Michigan right now and they are making a ton of money.

Each tribe that runs a casino entered into an agreement, or compact with the state, before the chips hit the table.

The compacts call for each tribe to give two percent of their slot machine revenues to local governments.

At Little River Casino in Manistee, a casino roughly the size of the Gun Lake proposal, they gave local municipalities about 2 million dollars in 2003.

Over the past ten years all of the Indian casinos have given nearly 118 million dollars to local governments.

To many people in downtown Wayland Thursday night, that revenue sounded pretty good.

"We could use a new fire station, more police officers, it would only be a plus for this area," said Mary Loui Belka.

But it doesn't seem like such a sweet idea to Joel Diekevers and his wife.

"I just wish everything didn't have to revolve around the almighty dollar," Joel says.

Joel works in education and realizes the money would be useful, but worries about the side effects.

"I can see the town losing priorities, getting hooked on it not being able to pay the bills, that type of thing," Joel says.

But Thursday night Joel was in the minority of the people we spoke with.

Most said they need jobs and something to jump start the economy.

But before that happens there are more steps to go through - like working out a deal with the state.

Once things are in motion the tribe can demand the state deal with them.

If Michigan refuses, then the tribe could get a casino anyway without a compact.



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It's one reason, according to spokeswoman Liz Boyd, the governor says she now "...favors negotiating a compact, before she can no longer negotiate."

That might mean no money for Wayland.

The federal government still has to work some things out, then the tribe can demand a negotiation with the state.

After that it's up to Michigan lawmakers.

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