

# Wind Creek casino application moves closer to license OK

BY ERIC CRUMP  
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The Illinois Gaming Board voted unanimously on Wednesday, Dec. 8, to name Wind Creek Illinois as the winning applicant for the south suburban casino license. In a separate motion, the board also found the company to be preliminarily suitable to receive the license.

Wind Creek prevailed over one remaining finalist, South Suburban Development LLC, which had planned to open a casino at the site of the former Lincoln Square Mall in Matteson.

IGB Administrator Marcus Fruchter explained that the approval of Wind Creek as the final applicant does not mean the company has received the license.

The board's action is "not guarantee of final licensure. This is not the final act in this play. It does not render licensure an inevitability," Fruchter said. "The licensure process will continue."

Fruchter reminded the board that its timeline for awarding the license was expected to conclude in January. The

board's next meeting is scheduled for Jan. 27.

Wind Creek President and CEO Jay Dorris welcomed the board's decision.

"Wind Creek Illinois is honored to have been found preliminarily suitable for the south suburban casino license by the Illinois Gaming Board today," Dorris said. "Throughout this process, we have reiterated the belief that we offer the best location in and for the south suburban region – and will deliver on our commitments to job creation, community and economic investment, sustained operational excellence, and a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion in all phases of construction and operation."

Dorris said the casino is expected to open in 2023, assuming the license is granted.

Wind Creek Hospitality, of Alabama, hopes to build a casino on 24 acres of land near the interchange of Interstate 80 and Halsted Street.

At a 2019 informational meeting, Javier Millan, of engineering firm KLOA, discussed projections for traffic. He said during peak hours, about 600 vehicles

would be in and out of the casino with about 70% to 75% of that traffic heading north.

"The analysis has shown that traffic will be disbursed in an efficient manner," Millan said. "It's substantial, in terms of traffic, but it can be accommodated."

The initial phase would include a \$275 million, 64,000 square foot casino. It could be followed later by a hotel. Wind Creek COO Brent Pinkston told residents at that meeting that it would be the only four diamond facility in Illinois, as rated by AAA.

Homewood Mayor Rich Hofeld said he was cautiously optimistic about the outcome prior to the meeting.

"What was most telling to me was the independent analysis of the different sites as to the revenue that would be generated," he said. "Three different analysts said this would be the preferred site."

Hofeld said the casino would benefit not only Homewood and East Hazel Crest but the south suburban region. He cited the expected influx of jobs as the primary benefit. Wind Creek expects to

create about 800 jobs when the facility is complete, not counting as many as 600 construction jobs.

Hofeld also expects a boost to local businesses that will support casino and hotel operations.

Area communities will also receive a share of casino revenues. Homewood and East Hazel Crest will split 2% of the revenues, with Homewood getting 45% of that income because a larger portion of the property is in East Hazel Crest.

He also noted that the two villages have agreed to contribute their proceeds for the first two years to a create a fund that will provide health care and education benefits to south suburban residents. Wind Creek will also contribute to the fund.

Another 3% of casino revenues will be distributed among 43 other south suburban communities.

"I would like to thank the Illinois Gaming Board and their staff for this decision," Hofeld said. "I'd like to acknowledge the efforts of Calumet City, Lynwood and Matteson. They were formidable competition."

## D161 board approves contract for summer asphalt repairs at 2 schools

BY BILL JONES  
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After delaying asphalt replacement at Flossmoor Hills and Heather Hill elementary schools in summer 2021 because no one bid on the project, Flossmoor School District 161 is getting ready to move forward with work — though only one company bid on the work the second time around.

The school board unanimously approved a contract with Advantage Paving Solutions of Joliet for \$393,805 to seal-coat and perform asphalt repairs at both schools.

Assistant Superintendent Fran LaBella told the board in November that an early estimate was roughly \$350,000 for the project, but noted the higher cost could be

because "asphalt is an oil-based process, so we expected some of that."

The work was originally put out for bid in July 2021, but LaBella said bidders did not think they could meet the district's substantial completion date of mid-September, citing a shortage of manpower and delays in obtaining materials. The district opted to handle anything dangerous with in-house staff and rebid the remaining work.

Advantage has worked with other districts, met schedules and has no litigation pending with other districts, according to Wold Architects' Mike Eichhorn. The company's bid also matched other projects of the same scope in the district's analysis.

### Playground equipment

Heather Hill and Serena Hills may

get new playground equipment in early 2022. District 161 is eyeballing Feb. 1, 2022, as the latest date to order equipment if the school board wishes to move forward with new playgrounds at the two elementary schools.

During the summer, the district performed emergency repairs at playgrounds across the district with the intent of coming back to a full plan to address replacement structures for school playgrounds determined to be in "poor shape."

Originally, the board intended to revisit that plan in the winter, but LaBella told board members in November that because of supply chain issues and worker shortages, experts have recommended the district push up its timeline.

LaBella said the three playgrounds

across the district in the worst condition are the two at Serena Hills and the north playground at Heather Hill. If the board wishes to see new playgrounds installed there by the summer of 2022, as originally discussed, contracts and equipment orders should be in no later than Feb. 1, LaBella said.

Team Reil and Wold Architects are working with committees at both schools to determine the type of equipment students, parents and staff want to see installed. LaBella said estimated costs for installation would be presented after those discussions, but the plan is to get the playgrounds from Sourcewell — a national purchasing contract cooperative that does the bidding and allows districts to purchase equipment through it.



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