

***Testimony of Anthony W. Ravosa, Jr.,
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Connecticut General Assembly
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Co-Chairmen Larson and Guglielmo, Chairman Verrengia and Honorable Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

I appreciate your invitation to appear before the Committee this morning. In the short time I am here, I'm intent on making the case to you that East Hartford presents the single most compelling opportunity to develop a transformative entertainment and gaming destination in the Greater Hartford area. Simply put, the supporting evidence and rationale for East Hartford as the premier location for this project is overpowering.

While MMCT has recently indicated that they are focusing their attention on two other municipalities to develop the third Connecticut casino, the fact is that the East Hartford site proposed by Silver Lane Partners, LLC, in partnership with the town of East Hartford, is far superior in offering a broad-based economic development vision for the region. Most importantly, if a third Connecticut casino is to be built in the Hartford area, I am here to tell you that East Hartford presents the absolute highest and best opportunity to generate maximal revenue return to the state's coffers.

We recognize that, ultimately, any decision to move forward with opening a third casino will involve a negotiated agreement between MMCT and the General Assembly – beginning with this Committee, which has jurisdiction over gaming matters. With this in mind, we are respectfully asking the Committee to review the proposals submitted by all municipalities that have expressed interest in hosting a casino, to independently determine the best location, and to then negotiate with MMCT to reach a mutually-beneficial conclusion – one that works well for both the state and the Tribes. We firmly believe that, if this Committee undertakes such an independent analysis of all the proposals, the opportunity presented in East Hartford will vastly surpass all others under consideration. It is for this purpose that we are thrilled to be here with you today to demonstrate the merits of our proposal.

We believe it is incumbent on the members of the General Assembly to ask the hard questions that need to be asked so that you can come to your own conclusions and make your own judgment call about which site will yield the greatest economic benefits for the Greater Hartford region as a whole.

Among the key questions:

Which location can deliver the highest revenue return to both the state and tribes?

Which location can best demonstrate that it has the fewest obstacles to win local approval and can also be the quickest to build out when it comes to “speed-to-market?”

Which location is best positioned to drive ancillary economic development?

Which location can be most impactful when it comes to linkage with the region’s other key economic drivers – the Connecticut Convention Center, XL Center, and Pratt and Whitney Stadium – all of which were funded at considerable taxpayer expense – in the hundreds of millions – are costly to maintain and operate, and remain dark far too many nights with little or no activity?

And, which location is best positioned to help combat urban unemployment by providing both the opportunity and a seamless transition to work for the folks in Hartford County’s most vulnerable communities that need it most (through enhanced public transportation and job training)?

In this context, we are confident that East Hartford reigns supreme as the most compelling location to site this development.

In addition, before I’m a developer, I’m a Connecticut taxpayer. In making their case for the development of a Hartford area casino, MMCT has long done so under the banner of “CT Jobs Matter!” – they absolutely do and I couldn’t agree more. But I also believe that “Maximizing Revenue Return to the State of CT” matters as well. If it is to approve an expanded gaming monopoly for the tribes, the General Assembly also has a fiduciary duty to taxpayers of the state to seek maximal revenue return to the state’s coffers.

With the state having a major seat at the table in making this decision, it also has to be about achieving a greater public purpose as well. In our view, casino development should, and must be viewed in the context of the larger picture regionally and that – of the potential site locations that have been discussed over many months – only East Hartford can achieve the vision that I’ve outlined.

Our proposed site offers an opportunity to revitalize and transform a highly-visible segment of Silver Lane long marred by abandoned and dilapidated buildings, vacant storefronts, deteriorating retail facades, desolate asphalt-covered wastelands, and general commercial decay. With Pratt and Whitney's new World Headquarters and UTC's new Global Research Center quickly rising – and a groundbreaking for the new Horizon Outlet Shoppes at Rentschler Field and anticipated \$7-8 million renovation of the old Ramada Hotel located at the Roberts Street exit off I-84 (to be reflagged with a Marriott brand) not far behind – a casino built at the Showcase Cinemas site will bring continued momentum to the resurgence of Silver Lane as a vibrant commercial corridor and another important catalyst for the renaissance being seen in East Hartford.

This location has attributes like no other. . .

- There is a 40-year history of entertainment and amusement activity at the Showcase site
- This site has the most superior location when it comes to interstate highway frontage and visibility – simply put, it's "unmatched!"
- More than 131,000 vehicles a day pass by this site on I-84 – that's 36,000 more vehicles a day than seen on I-91 North and 75,000 more than what is seen daily on the Route 20/Bradley Connector – thereby enabling the best opportunity for impulse "patron capture" along one of the two primary east-west thoroughfares between Boston and New York City
- This site sits approximately 4 miles away from the I-84/I-91 interchange in downtown Hartford – at 283,000 vehicles a day, the most heavily trafficked interchange in the state of Connecticut
- Traffic studies commissioned by Silver Lane Partners yield that this site has minimal anticipated infrastructure costs needed to accommodate a casino development – and those are primarily related to signalization. In addition, last July, the town received a \$12 million grant commitment from the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) to improve the Silver Lane and Rentschler Field corridor. Silver Lane is a four-lane state roadway that routinely accommodates tens of thousands of people for UConn Football.
- This site has the least number of local land use approval hurdles of any of the competing communities and is essentially "shovel-ready." There is no need for a zone change; the existing zone is sufficient for the proposed gaming use. And, in September 2015, our request for a special permit encompassing the vast majority of activities that would

occur on-site with operation of a casino was unanimously approved by the East Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission.

- Reuse of the existing Showcase building enables a “speed-to-market” scenario that is second-to-none – with a construction completion target of 15 months “start-to-finish.”

We have long maintained that “speed to market” matters in responding to the competitive threat posed by MGM. To reiterate, we believe it would be a mistake for MGM to have an unchallenged initial foothold in the Greater Hartford market – even for a brief period of time. The analysis undertaken for us by PKF Consulting USA (now CBRE’s Hotels Group) – one of the most respected gaming consulting firms in the country when it comes to undertaking gaming demand studies and economic impact analyses – reaffirms this.

- As you will see in the package of materials that we have provided, led by Mayor Marcia Leclerc, this site has overwhelming strong support in the community among elected officials, civic and business leaders, and the public “at-large.”
- This site is located 12-15 miles closer to the state’s population hubs than any of the sites north of Hartford logically yielding greater trip frequency
- When it comes to combating urban unemployment in Hartford County – along with expansion of CT FasTrak east of the river and a job training partnership with Goodwin College – a casino built at this location will have the greatest impact, enabling a “seamless” transition to work for vulnerable populations in close proximity that need the jobs most.

According to the most recent Labor Force Data posted by the Connecticut Department of Labor, the communities with the highest unemployment rates in Hartford County are Hartford (7%) and East Hartford (4.8%). I ask then, geographically and in the context of casino development, where is the greatest need for job creation?

- With the largest police and fire departments east of the Connecticut River, East Hartford is unequivocally the best equipped community to ensure policing and public safety both essential to its residents and patrons of a third Connecticut casino. The East Hartford Police Department is a full service department with a complement of 125 sworn officers making it one of the two largest police department east of the Connecticut River.

Game day operations at Pratt and Whitney Stadium for UConn Football present tangible evidence of the Police Department's capabilities and experience in the areas of crowd control and traffic operations, in addition to regular interface with both private security forces and other policing agencies.

Putting it in proper perspective. . .with 10,000 projected gaming patrons a day and upwards of 5,000 vehicle day trips daily, "Policing and Public Safety Matter!"

- East Hartford is the focal point for every major interstate and state highway flowing into the Greater Hartford area (Interstates 84, 91 and 291, Routes 2, 5 and 15) enabling easy and convenient access from all points with ample existing off-ramp capacity both east and west of the site.
- This location is best suited to mesh with the primary, but significantly underutilized economic drivers of the region: the XL Center, Connecticut Convention Center, and Pratt and Whitney Stadium (UConn Football)
- This site offers an unrivaled opportunity to be a catalyst for ancillary economic development and leveraging private investment like no other.
- No other location presents a stronger case for direct linkage with our capital city of Hartford, including potential revenue sharing.
- And finally, and most importantly, according to CBRE Hotels Group, East Hartford will produce a higher level of gaming revenues and higher revenue return to the state than any 1-91 North location based on several factors – *A STATEMENT WE HAVE MADE CONSISTENTLY FOR TWO YEARS THAT HAS NEVER BEEN REFUTED BY MMCT OR TRIBAL OFFICIALS.*

Relative to Hartford linkage, the stakes couldn't be higher as competitive forces require us to respond with a comprehensive, broad-based economic development strategy for both the Capitol City and the region as a whole, of which a casino development should be key cornerstone. That's why we have strived to be innovative and imaginative in our thinking by proposing the repositioning of Hartford Radisson Hotel into a newly renovated, tribal-flagged hotel adjacent to Dunkin Donuts Park with dramatic LED signage reminiscent of Times Square that makes a statement on the city's skyline and provides another needed, first-class host hotel option for convention goers.

Ideas like these are rooted in the belief that, as Hartford goes so goes the region. They also answer Congressman John Larson's call to "think big." "Without vision, there is no victory," the Congressman recently told the *Hartford Courant*. He added, "You have to go bold, and you have to think about the future." For Silver Lane Partners and East Hartford, this has been our mindset from day one.

In an interview with sports columnist Jeff Jacobs in the *Hartford Courant* last week, CRDA Executive Director Mike Freimuth discussed the future of the XL Center. He said, "*Mohegan is eating our lunch. Bridgeport is nibbling at our backside. Springfield [referring to the \$950 million MGM casino under construction] is about to take the rest of it.*" While Mr. Freimuth was talking specifically about the XL Center, the XL Center could be a metaphor for Hartford and the region.

And, as it relates to the potential development of a third Connecticut casino, Mr. Freimuth was even more direct in January 2016 telling me and others, "*Any [casino] site chosen other than one in Hartford or East Hartford does absolutely nothing for us in terms of our ability to sell Hartford.*" Needless to say, we could not agree more.

Finally, to the best of our knowledge, East Hartford is the only community to have strictly adhered to what was requested in MMCT's original RFP – reflecting the stated will of the General Assembly in the legislation it passed in June 2015 when it came to municipalities participating in the process.

Further, when it comes to transparency and openness throughout the entirety of this process, no community and no developer has been more transparent than myself and the town of East Hartford – **THAT'S A FACT**. Nothing about East Hartford and our proposal has been conducted behind closed doors or in executive session, nor have we been coy in releasing information publicly. It's all been out since day one. Our initial proposal to MMCT and all subsequent information and materials have consistently been posted to the town of East Hartford's website. When it comes to openness and transparency, I can emphatically say that Silver Lane Partners and East Hartford stand all alone.

In conclusion, for all the reasons cited in my testimony this morning, I view East Hartford as being the most superior location for this development. I hope you share my position. With the General Assembly's role being paramount in the site selection process for the third Connecticut casino, I urge your support for the concept that a vibrant urban core is absolutely essential to the health and vitality of the entire region. I urge your support for East Hartford. Thank you.

