

Wynn Resorts bows out of Philadelphia casino plan

By **OSKAR GARCIA**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Casino operator Wynn Resorts Ltd. said Thursday it is dropping its bid to rescue a troubled waterfront casino project in Philadelphia, saying the project isn't appropriate for the company.

The long-stalled Foxwoods Philadelphia project along the Delaware River has faced financial difficulties and neighborhood opposition since winning one of two state casino licenses set aside for the city in 2006.

"We are fascinated by the legalization of full gaming in Pennsylvania and stimulated by the opportunity that it presents for Wynn Resorts," CEO Steve Wynn said in a brief statement. "This particular project did not, in the end, present an opportunity that was appropriate for our company."

The Las Vegas-based company, which runs two casino-resorts in Sin City and expects to open its second property in Macau later this month, said it has terminated agreements and negotiations for a possible investment in the Foxwoods project.

The announcement surprised Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, who had met Monday with an eager Wynn to discuss the project that supporters had hoped would boost the economy and redevelop the waterfront.

"This is a stunning turn of events," Nutter said. "I've never seen anything like this before."

Nutter said Wynn was as enthusiastic a developer as he had met. On Thursday afternoon, Wynn's counsel told Nutter that the decision was solely related to the transaction and nothing to do with the city itself, Nutter said.

Without a developer to take over the project, opponents plan to call anew for state regulators to yank the license from the site.

Wynn met with Pennsylvania state gambling regulators in March to persuade them to let the company take over the project and build a \$600 million casino.

Under the plan, the state and city would take more than half of the casino's slot revenues and 16 percent of its table game revenues.

Wynn would have taken a 51 percent stake in the project, while a partnership including the Connecticut Indian tribe that owns Foxwoods Casino and the charities of three wealthy businessmen, Lewis Katz, Ron Rubin, and Ed Snider were to remain aboard with smaller shares.

Wynn later provided renderings of the proposed casino and had until later this month to provide construction and design details.

Pennsylvania lawmakers legalized table games in January, which Wynn has said will help it attract gamblers from farther away and compete with gambling industries in nearby states.

Associated Press Writer Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pa., contributed to this report.

Complaint against Pa. jurist mishandled

By **MICHAEL RUBINKAM**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

For the first time, a board that investigates and prosecutes ethics complaints against Pennsylvania judges has disclosed that it ignored a 2006 complaint against a judge now facing federal racketeering charges because that same judge was expected to testify for the board's prosecutors in another case.

The state Judicial Conduct Board said it put off an investigation of then-Luzerne County President Judge Michael Conahan at the request of its chief counsel because Conahan was scheduled to testify against his colleague, Judge Ann Lokuta, whom the board had charged with misconduct. Based partly on Conahan's testimony, Lokuta was subsequently convicted and removed from office.

The conduct board made the admission April 5 in a letter to the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice, a panel investigating the "kids-for-cash" scandal in which Conahan is accused of taking millions of dollars in kickbacks to place juveniles in for-profit detention centers. The letter was released Monday during the last of the commission's public hearings into the scandal.

Under questioning by commission members, Joseph

Massa, chief counsel for Judicial Conduct Board, conceded that he mishandled the complaint against Conahan and said that a full investigation of the judge should have been conducted immediately to determine whether the board had a "bad witness" on its hands. "I'll hold myself accountable," he testified.

The eight-page complaint contained numerous allegations of cronyism and nepotism, accused Conahan of having mob ties, and, notably, mentioned his close friendship with an attorney who co-owned a Luzerne County detention center where thousands of juvenile offenders were being placed.

Conahan and another former Luzerne County judge, Mark Ciavarella, face federal racketeering charges for allegedly taking \$2.8 million in payoffs from the attorney, Robert Powell, and from the builder of the detention center. The former judges have pleaded innocent and await trial.

The September 2006 complaint against Conahan was sent anonymously by a staffer of Lokuta, who at the time was the subject of a conduct board inquiry into allegations that she failed to perform her judicial duties, terrorized courthouse workers, and had employees run personal errands.

Lokuta and her attorneys, who attended Monday's hearing, said the conduct board's disclosure bolstered their argument that her

trial was tainted. In December 2008, after the longest and most expensive judicial ethics probe in state history, the Pennsylvania Court of Judicial Discipline ousted Lokuta and barred her from future judicial service. She is appealing.

"I think they were more concerned about preserving the integrity of their witness then getting at the truth," Lokuta's attorney, Ronald Santora, said Monday.

But Massa testified the board's failure to investigate Conahan had as much to do with a lack of manpower. He said at the time the board employed only two investigators.

"There was nothing nefarious in terms of subterfuge at all," he said.

Monday's hearing wrapped months of investigation by the interbranch commission, which was created by the Legislature, governor and state Supreme Court in August to examine the causes of the Luzerne County juvenile court scandal and to recommend changes to prevent it from recurring. Thousands of juvenile convictions were thrown out in the wake of the charges against Conahan and Ciavarella.

The commission's report and recommendations are due in late May.

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