

Master Plan Betrayal: What Kenosha Residents Were Never Told About the Proposed Hard Rock Casino

MASTER PLAN

The original master plan that was adopted by the City of Kenosha when Bristol entered into its Cooperative Plan with Kenosha designated the area that abuts the casino as a low-density commercial use that would support the surrounding residential developments. These uses included grocery, gas station, fast casual restaurants, and retail. It did not include a large casino development that would attract well over 25,000 cars per day.

The surrounding neighborhoods were designed to feed off the commercial users on the projected site. That is why there are doctors' offices, restaurants and other localized retailers developed between I-94 and Hwy. 50 (75th Street) and Hwy. K (60th Street). It was never planned that a large entertainment complex that attracts significant out of state traffic would be a good fit for a neighborhood surrounded by residential developments to the east and west.

There are thousands of homes that are either occupied and/or planned within 1 mile of this site. Studies show that residential dwellings within 1 mile of a casino will have a significant negative impact on home values. There are more than 300 homes that have been approved and now being built less than 1 mile from this casino development in the last 2 years since the original IGAs were approved that have been ignored.

The light and noise pollution from this large casino development will have a significant negative impact on the surrounding residents.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

This project abuts a significant environmental corridor, the Des Plaines River Water Shed, located immediately east of this proposed project and there are significant wetlands that border this site. The drawings provided to the County and included in the EA submission show extensive concrete and zero attention to how the wetlands will be protected, stormwater will be addressed and the surrounding community will not be negatively impacted by this massive change from farmland to a casino development. There are no plans that have been shared that show that storm water facilities that must be built on site will be sufficient to meet watershed requirements.

The large wetland areas around this site can be observed with significant flooding especially during the recent spring rains we have had, yet there has been no review of the impact on water quality, water quantity, and other protections to the surrounding property owners. It appears from the limited plans provided that the Menominee Tribe will fill in large areas of lowlands and that will cause negative environmental impacts on the surrounding property owners. There is no mention in the EA that the proposed casino site development will comply with Des Plaines Rier watershed criteria so there is no flooding of the surrounding

The EA states that electric vehicle (EV) use will help reduce air impacts, but we have seen a significant drop in EV use given the cost and slow adoption in our community. The high price of acquisition and low mile range of use of EV's (compared to traditional combustion engine vehicles) have caused EV adoption to not grow as projected. In addition, the removal of habitat that is currently being used to help the environment has not been studied. Moreover, there are federally protected wetlands on the projected site that are not included on Menominee Tribe's report even though they are identified on the certified survey map of the site.

TRAFFIC CONCERNS

The draft EA fails to adequately address the negative traffic impacts the proposed casino will have on the existing businesses and homeowners that surround the development. Moreover, the EA assumes that a majority of the traffic for the casino will come from the south (from Illinois) but it ignores all of the traffic congestion that already exists on Hwy. 50 & I-94 as it illogically assumes that all northbound traffic will drive right past the Hwy. 50 exit and simply travel 2 more miles to the north to exit on Hwy. 158, and then back track another mile back south in order to eventually pull into the casino development. The traffic analysis provided is absolutely flawed.

Furthermore, this old Traffic Impact Assessment ("TIA") fails to take into consideration the significant development that has taken place, been approved, under construction and planned for the surrounding area through 2038. Instead, the TIA states that there is only going to be a 1% annual traffic growth in the area. There are more than a dozen new developments that have taken off in the area since the TIA that the Tribe submitted was completed and those additional projects will exceed the proposed 1% annual traffic growth. Moreover, local area residents have already expressed significant concerns over current traffic problems in the Hwy. 50 and I-94 area, and the 24-hour nature of this proposed casino will drastically exacerbate the current traffic problems. Even now, traffic in this area during peak times comes to a complete traffic jam as there are too many vehicles in this area for the road network to support.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Crime and related negative impacts are not compatible with the master plan of residential housing plans that are targeted for the open lands that exist within 1 mile from this casino development. There has been no involvement of the local surrounding communities during the period when the terms of the IGA were being discussed and negotiated. Several local communities provide backup support for fire and police protection, yet none of them were included in the process. Any project of this magnitude will clearly impact the surrounding communities as traffic issues, crime and accidents will invariably occur within a short distance of this development.

As a result, the EA fails to evaluate how this project will impact fire and police departments in the adjoining communities; most notably the Villages of Somers and Pleasant Prairie, with the jurisdiction of both communities located only blocks away. Somers has a jurisdictional agreement with Kenosha to provide fire and police protection, and this project will clearly and significantly impact that agreement. Moreover, Pleasant Prairie has their own police and fire departments, and their jurisdiction will be impacted as a majority of the traffic will drive right through their community, yet they have not been involved, nor has that impact been investigated.

FEASIBILITY & ECONOMIC IMPACT

There are more than a dozen new developments occurring in the area around the proposed casino site including several less than 1 mile that will impact not only the traffic but also the economics. Yet, the EA only shows a small sampling of projects and none of the new projects that have been approved and are progressing since their list was created more than 2 years ago.

Moreover, the promises made by the Menominee Tribe were based on the premises that a majority of the customers would be traveling from the south. Obviously, the feasibility and economic impact analysis completed in 2023 failed to include all of the changes that have occurred in the surrounding communities and certainly ignored the major gaming developments since then. For example,

1. American Place received approval and has begun construction of a \$375 million casino project less than 20 minutes away from Kenosha.
2. Hard Rock Casino in Rockford announces a massive expansion in February of 2026 that will include a new 250 room hotel, retail space, family attractions, and other destination amenities.
3. The brand new \$705 million Ho-Chunk Casino is opening in 2026 with the hotel opening in 2027.

A new study with current date needs to be completed in order to determine that this casino project in Kenosha is even feasible.

CONCLUSION

The Menominee Tribe's proposed casino project should be denied as there are too many unanswered questions and the studies completed are outdated. The BIA should demand that a complete Environmental Impact Statements study should be completed before any action is taken on this project.