

## Ho-Chunk Nation exploring major development near Madison gaming facility



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The Ho-Chunk Nation is exploring a major development that could include a sports complex, museum, regional entertainment venue and more near the tribe's casino on the Southeast Side.

The tribe is working with city officials, neighboring property owners and others to identify and shape potential uses for almost 48 acres adjacent to Ho-Chunk Gaming Madison,

near the interchange where the Beltline meets Interstate 90-94.

"We're very excited about exploring these opportunities," said Missy Tracy, municipal relations coordinator for Ho-Chunk Gaming Madison. "We feel this is an important project. The location is at the gateway to the city of Madison."

It's too early to estimate a cost or a set timetable, Tracy said. "Right now, they're just ideas," she said.

Mayor Paul Soglin said the city is interested but that discussions are at an early stage.

"It's an interesting project," Soglin said. "We will take a look at it. After thorough examination we'll have answers to questions."

The city has considerable holdings in the area, including the 36-hole Yahara Hills golf course on 451 acres and two undeveloped sites: 82.2 acres envisioned for a community park and a 43.5-acre parcel with no identified use.

In 2014, the tribe hired a local planning firm, Urban Assets, to help identify potential uses for the property, which includes two parking areas for the gaming facility and 44 open acres, Tracy said. The process included meetings with Soglin, city planning and parks staff, the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Madison Convention and Visitors Bureau, she said.

The leading options — sports complex, cultural attraction/museum, entertainment venue — are not mutually exclusive and could also include retail, lodging and ecotourism, Tracy said.

The Madison area lacks adequate, comprehensive sports facilities to serve a growing number of athletic teams, organizations and events, a memo from the Ho-Chunk to the city says. A sports complex, however, would require public and private partnerships, it says.

“We’re not trying to be competitive with anything,” Tracy said. “What does the city of Madison need?”

Madison Parks Superintendent Eric Knepp said the city has taken no position on that piece of the tribe’s concept but added that some needs are greater than others.

He said the area could use destination facilities for soccer, lacrosse, ultimate (aka ultimate Frisbee) and other field games, but that the region has facilities for baseball and softball in Mauston and the Wisconsin Dells.

The Ho-Chunk, the tribe’s memo says, lacks a permanent location to commemorate its cultural heritage and history and that the property could host a museum or exhibits. The tribe’s heritage could be a focal point or theme running through the development, it says.

There is also “significant potential” for entertainment uses, the memo says. The destination could draw people from across the region and presents the opportunity to include a “unique music venue, lodging, ecotourism or a combination of these and other entertainment attractions,” it says.

The tribe is unable to expand its gambling facility but could remodel or improve it as part of the larger redevelopment, Tracy said.

“They have been good partners with us,” Convention and Visitors Bureau president Deb Archer said. “We’re interested in having conversations with entities interested in developing sports venues. We’re eager to see what their plans are.”

The Department of Planning, Community and Economic Development is listening but has taken no position on the preliminary concepts, acting director Natalie Erdman said.

The tribe is now interviewing design firms to help produce a concept master plan and is moving to the second phase of the project, which includes further research on uses, engaging Ho-Chunk stakeholders, and developing partnerships with the city and private sector, Tracy said.