

CASINO ADVANCE PROJECTED

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Luther

BELOIT - Officials involved with the Ho-Chunk Nation's Beloit casino/resort development say the plan could see movement as soon as May, setting the stage for a long-awaited federal ruling on the project.

Beloit City Manager Lori Curtis Luther said a trip she took last week to Washington D.C. with Forward Janesville to meet with federal leaders "reaffirmed optimism for the plan," suggesting a May date for the tribe's project to net a final environmental impact statement (EIS).

The document is needed before land can be transferred into public trust as part of the project, and before federal officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at the Department of the Interior support or deny the plan. If the plan is approved by BIA, the proposal would come before Gov. Tony Evers, who as a candidate told the *Beloit Daily News* he would support the project. In December, BIA hosted a public hearing in Beloit on the proposal, marking a key point for Ho-Chunk.

"There aren't any current obstacles to meeting that date short of another government shutdown," Luther said, noting the previous shutdown pushed back when the EIS was originally expected, this spring, before stalling.

Ho-Chunk officials previously said the tribe hopes to break ground on the \$400 million complex in 2020, with an estimated opening in 2021. The optimism for the plan's success is in direct contrast with a state report obtained and published by the *Beloit Daily News* on Feb. 8 that cites the Department of Administration's Division of Gaming as estimating the plan "is four years from approval."

Nevertheless, Ho-Chunk Nation Public Relations Officer Collin Price said the tribe expected the final EIS document to be completed "in the next few months," confirming the only steps left following the final EIS would be the recommendation from BIA before potentially heading to Evers.

"We're patient and persistent so whenever the approval process wraps up, we will be ready," Price said.

Price also pointed to development growth around the casino along Interstate 39/90 and Willowbrook Road, if approved, noting it was "something we're really excited about." Price said Ho-Chunk was in contact with consultants and development firms from across the country "to round out the best fit and business opportunities that will compliment the property."

Price added he expected more details about ancillary developments to be released in the coming months alongside the proposal's progress.