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Cowlitz Plans for Casino and Resort to be Explored by Environmental Impact Statement

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian affairs (BIA) has posted a Notice of Intent to begin gathering information for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) concerning plans by the Cowlitz Indian Tribe to develop a first-class casino and resort on 152 acres of land at La Center's I-5 interchange. The BIA will select an independent third-party contractor to prepare the EIS.

The Tribe asked the BIA to conduct an EIS based on the comments and concerns of the neighboring communities. The Tribe has also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Clark County that calls for it to reimburse the County for the property tax the County would receive if it were private property and to abide by environmental and development ordinances. The tribe will also pay state sales tax on most sales at the casino/resort and pay for government services.

"We recognize that the development of our property needs to be done responsibly and we are committed to paying our fair share," said John Barnett, the Cowlitz Tribal Chairman. "That's why we've gone beyond the letter of the law to conduct an EIS and to build a partnership with the community."

The EIS will be based on a plan to use the site for gaming and related entertainment facilities, tribal government and tribal housing. According to the Notice of Intent, "The purpose of the proposed action is to create a tribal land base which would enable the Cowlitz Indian Tribe ... to provide government services and perform governmental functions, provide jobs and career opportunities for tribal members, improve the tribal economy and tribal housing, and develop programs that would assist tribal members to attain economic self-sufficiency."

The EIS will explore what the tribe feels will be the maximum possible build-out of the property, although a smaller project may be built. The project will be phased over

several years. The maximum build-out includes up to 160,000 square feet of gaming floor, 210,000 square feet of restaurant and retail space, 150,000 square feet of convention and entertainment facilities and a 250-room hotel. Space would also be developed for tribal government offices, a tribal cultural center and between 10 and 25 tribal housing units. In addition, parking structures for about 8,500 vehicles and an RV park for 200 recreational vehicles would be built.

“Rest assured that, whatever the final project, our commitment is that it will be a source of pride because of its quality and superior attributes,” Barnett said. “It will be designed for tourists as well as our own regional population and it will create thousands of family-wage jobs.

“We have had talks with City officials and business leaders around the county to see how we can better work together. We firmly believe that the Cowlitz casino and resort will be an asset to both the Tribe and surrounding communities.”

The BIA will be holding a scoping meeting for the EIS on December 1 from 6-9 p.m. at Hudson’s Bay High School, Commons Area, 1206 East Reserve Street, Vancouver, WA. The entrance is off of East McLoughlin Boulevard.

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