

A casino-resort would stunt development in southwest Washington

Located along I-5 from Salmon Creek to La Center, the "Discovery Corridor" has been considered by the Columbia River Economic Development Council (CREDC) as a prospective growth area, reminiscent of the Port of Vancouver and the Columbia Business Park. The area has the space, infrastructure, access and amenities to make it appealing to developers.

The Cowlitz Tribe has proposed putting its mega-casino and resort on the northern border of this corridor, and the presence of such a development would prevent it from being used to its fullest capacity. Here's one reason why: The proposed casino-resort would sit on 152 acres of sovereign trust land, an untaxable land base that could be expanded.

The Tribe did offer to make payments in lieu of property taxes to compensate for revenue lost due to removal of the 152-acre site from local property tax rolls. But this offer is part of the Tribe's unilateral ordinance and might not even be enforceable, according to the National Indian Gaming Commission, which is overseeing the ordinance. Clark County said in an Aug. 2009 resolution that the Tribe's unilateral ordinance and waiver of sovereign immunity "do not alleviate or fully mitigate the significant concerns that serve as the basis for the County's lack of support for the Tribe's trust land acquisition, reservation designation and opposition to the proposed casino."

Many other development-related issues are not covered by the Tribe's agreement, including what could happen to contiguous lands, which could be taken into trust at a later time.

Additionally, consider the loss of local tax revenue: The Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) estimates the proposed casino would bring in \$415 million in gaming revenue a year. Much of that \$415 million would consist of disposable income (and, in some cases, income that should be used for basic needs) that would not be spent in locally owned and managed stores, restaurants and facilities. Gaming revenue is not taxed, so counties and other local jurisdictions would lose taxes that would have been collected had that money been spent in other pursuits. Moreover, existing businesses would close and new ones would be hesitant to open within the casino's sphere of influence.

The casino would not bring a knowledge-based industry to the I-5 corridor. It would not produce goods and services to draw revenue from outside the region. And it would cause traffic congestion that could make the rest of The Discovery Corridor an unattractive location for other potential businesses.