



Citizens Against RESERVATION SHOPPING

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REGIONAL BIA AND CASINO DEVELOPERS COOK BOOKS TRYING TO SAVE LA CENTER SITE

Two key reports that the Cowlitz casino developers should have released nearly a year ago were quietly issued last month to cooperating agencies by the regional office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). They were included in the preliminary Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The casino project's Business Plan and so-called "Unmet Needs Report" contain highly controversial needs and numbers, and are being used by regional BIA in an attempt to justify its dismissal of a site for the proposed Cowlitz casino in the tribe's aboriginal homeland. The report says a northern site would not make enough money to fulfill what the tribe calls its "unmet needs"—which add up to \$113.6 million a year.

The Final EIS says that the BIA compared the tribe's stated economic objectives and needs with revenues projected at sites in Lewis County by three separate studies that anticipated annual revenues of \$76.4 million to \$79.4 million. The Final EIS concludes that, "the northern sites would not adequately meet the financial objects, goals and needs of the Tribe."

The Cowlitz Tribe's unmet needs include such items as:

- a horse program (cost: \$22.6 million initially and \$655,125 annually)
- two medical facilities plus wellness centers (cost: \$41.1 million initially and \$30.2 million annually).
- a library (cost: \$1 million to acquire core holdings and \$500,000 in acquisitions annually)

In written comments to BIA, Vancouver City Manager Pat McDonnell called the Unmet Needs Report "exaggerated."

Public comment avoided

The Unmet Needs Report appears to have been held back until now, so without public scrutiny it could be used to provide a rationale for not considering a site in the Cowlitz Tribe's aboriginal homeland. Vancouver City Manager McDonnell wrote, "Since the

Business Plan has been used to avoid consideration of feasible alternatives, more time should be provided for public and agency comment on this document.”

La Center City Attorney Daniel Kearns wrote, “The late inclusion of this Plan, and the failure to obtain public comment on the Plan or its claimed economic ‘needs’ for the Tribe strongly suggest that a Supplemental (National Environmental Policy Act) document should be prepared.”

When it was discovered that the Cowlitz Tribe had submitted a revised fee-to-trust application last June, in the midst of the comment period on the Draft EIS, Rep. Brian Baird supported calls for BIA to extend the public comment period. Rep. Baird wrote to the Department of the Interior, “Since the amended application was filed partway through the public comment period for the draft EIS, I can understand the concerns of some members of the community and appreciate their desire to review and understand the contents of that application before the comment period is closed.”

The Business Plan, which includes the Unmet Needs Report, was missing from the June application and continues to be unavailable on the Cowlitz Casino Web site.

Document ‘fatally flawed’

The Final EIS completely neglects to explore how a Lewis County site could alleviate environmental pressures—such as heavy traffic burdens on Interstate 5 and the Columbia River Bridge—and would put the casino and related facilities, such as elder housing and a community center, near the greatest concentration of current tribe members. The Final EIS only considers the bottom line: whether a Lewis County site would make enough to satisfy what the tribe calls unmet needs.

Vancouver City Manager McDonnell calls the document “fatally flawed” for not considering sites to the north.

The conclusion of the tribe’s Unmet Needs Report says, “A staggering \$223,329,859 in initial funding and \$113,572,316 in annual funding is needed to provide for the general welfare of the Cowlitz Tribe and to create economic opportunities”

What is even more staggering is that the BIA has allowed the casino developers to keep this information secret and allow it to set the criteria for what sites are considered for the proposed casino project.

The Cowlitz Tribe had 1,482 members when it was federally recognized in 2002. The recently released Business Plan says the tribe has 3,544 members. According to the 2000 census, the tribe had a lower unemployment rate (3.8 percent) than Washington state as a whole (6.2 percent) and a median household income (\$43,654) just below that of Washington state (\$45,776).

[See selected items from the “Unmet Needs Report”](#)
[See why CARS urges a northern site.](#)