

Nassau Legislature approves lease for potential \$6B Las Vegas Sands casino-resort



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One step closer to casino in Nassau

Nassau legislators approved County Executive Bruce Blakeman's request to grant a 42-year lease to Las Vegas Sands, the Nevada-based corporation

hoping to build a \$6 billion casino-resort on the site of the Nassau Veteran's Memorial Coliseum. Credit: Vincent Matula; Photo Credit: The Sands Corp.

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Updated August 6, 2024 4:14 pm

Las Vegas Sands is now the official operator of the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum as it bids for a state gambling license to build a proposed \$6 billion casino-resort on the county-owned property.

Nassau legislators at the end of a 10-hour meeting on Monday approved County Executive Bruce Blakeman's request to grant the 42-year operational lease to the Nevada-based corporation and restart an environmental review on the 72-acre Uniondale site for the purpose of eventually entering into a longer-term agreement that would allow for the casino-resort development.

In exchange, Sands will pay the county a \$5 million security deposit and a \$1 million non-refundable fee within two business days of signing the lease.

For the first three years, the company will pay \$10 million in annual rent and a \$900,000 public safety fee, which rises to \$936,360 by the third year. In year four, Sands would continue to pay a rising public safety fee but the annual rent would drop to \$5 million, unless the company wins the gambling license and builds the \$6 billion project.

WHAT TO KNOW

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- **Nassau legislators at the end** of a 10-hour meeting on Monday approved County Executive Bruce Blakeman's request to grant the 42-year operational lease to the Nevada-based corporation and restart an environmental review on the 72-acre Uniondale site.
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The vote on the operational lease was 18-1 with Minority Leader Delia DeRiggi-Whitton (D-Glen Cove) casting the lone nay vote. Legislators unanimously approved restarting the state-mandated environmental study known as SEQR.

The vote brings to an end eight months of Sands using the Coliseum on a temporary basis, applying for periodic certificates of occupancy with the county. Sands officials said the more permanent agreement to operate the arena allows them to book events months in advance and secures hundreds of jobs for employees who currently work there.

The state gambling license is needed for the company to build a casino with live table games such as poker, blackjack and roulette, in addition to video terminals and slot machines.

Control of the property likely bolsters Sands' application to the state for the license and puts the proposal ahead of a competitor project pitched by Mets' billionaire owner Steve Cohen at Citi Field, where a local politician refuses to introduce a bill in the state Legislature to grant control of more than 50 acres in Queens.

Sands Vice President Tracey Edwards said in a statement after the vote that "the 400+ employees and management of the Coliseum will sleep better at night knowing their jobs are safe. We are also deeply grateful to the many hundreds of supporters and community leaders that have turned out to share their voice on this project and the opportunities it holds."

Sands officials said the company will bid for one of three highly-competitive state gambling licenses expected to be awarded late next year, in hopes of building an "integrated resort" on the venue.

The company has proposed reconfiguring the site to include a casino, celebrity-chef restaurants, live performance venue, entertainment complex and retail, public open space and a day spa.

Many local residents are opposed to the 24/7 entertainment center based on environmental concerns including air, water, noise and light pollution. Along with Hofstra University President Susan Poser, opponents have said it is not an appropriate location given the two colleges and a Catholic high school nearby.

The Say No to the Casino civic group, which had been rallying against the casino-resort project, speaking at public meetings and circulating a petition, said in a statement: "History will remember that this legislature squandered our future."

The statement continued: "This lease is a dangerous example of the power of money in politics and the pay-to-play system at work in Nassau County."

Labor leaders and business groups support the proposal as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revitalize the county's last tract of developable real estate, adding

thousands of jobs to the economy. Sands has previously announced about 8,500 temporary and permanent jobs would be created at the site.

Matthew Aracich, president of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Nassau and Suffolk Counties, lauded Monday's legislative votes, saying the approvals "demonstrate the willingness of Nassau County's leaders to look for solutions that provide responsible economic opportunities for the surrounding communities in spite of Hofstra's misguided opposition."

Hofstra University, located down Hempstead Turnpike from the Coliseum, won a lawsuit that voided the May 2023 votes of the Nassau legislature initially granting a 99-year lease to Sands that would have allowed the company to operate the Coliseum and develop the surrounding land.

A Nassau judge sided with the university, voiding that lease in November 2023. State Supreme Court Justice Sarika Kapoor ruled the county legislature was wrong to forgo an extensive environmental review and ordered the process to start over.

The county is appealing the decision in the Appellate Division, Second Department.

Hofstra University spokeswoman Terry Coniglio told legislators before the vote that granting the operational lease ensures that Sands' casino-resort would be the only project proposed for the property.

"Control of the property allows them to promote their proposed casino development on county property and apply for a New York State casino license next spring," Coniglio said. "...Here, Nassau County and Sands have made clear their intentions to proceed with a massive casino."