

Jan. 30, 2009
Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal

Plans filed for first new downtown hotel-casino in 30 years

By ALAN CHOATE
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Plans have been filed for a 47-story hotel-casino in Union Park. If it's built, it would be the first new casino downtown since 1979.

Construction is not imminent because the developer, Forest City, must build a new city hall before it gets access to the 6.4-acre parcel in Union Park where the casino would go.

The new city hall, however, faces a challenge at the ballot box later this year, and a powerful local union and candidates for the Las Vegas City Council are saying that a new municipal building is too risky a project to take on when the economy is in the dumps.

A Forest City spokeswoman did not respond to a request for comment today. Next week, the City Council is scheduled to consider a zoning change for the Union Park parcel, the proposed building's height and a site plan.

The new resort would be 1.6 million square feet, with 120,000 square feet of casino space and 1,000 hotel rooms, as well as a restaurant, meeting rooms, and a spa and health club. A city fire station also would be on the site.

The casino is part of a glittering and complicated pitch that Mayor Oscar Goodman makes frequently about downtown. After Forest City, with co-developer LiveWork Las Vegas, builds the new city hall at the corner of First Street and Clark Avenue, he has said, it will swap the land underneath it for the Union Park parcel, which is city-owned.

"They build it, they do the swap, they do the casino," said city spokesman Jace Radke.

The blocks around the new city hall are planned for office development. The current city hall site would be joined with 12 city-owned acres across the street from the current City Hall for further commercial development.

That, along with the new casino and other planned downtown projects, would bring in revenue to pay for the new city hall while creating more than 13,000 jobs, Goodman has said repeatedly.

The debt incurred for building a new city hall has been estimated to be \$150 million to \$267 million.

Chris Bohner, research director for Culinary Local 226, said the city should simply sell the Union Park land to a developer and forgo the new city hall.

"There's no reason whatsoever that they can't sell that land right now and get cash into a budget

that is in deficit," he said. "We reject the premise that you have to build a brand-new city hall to have a new casino downtown."

The union has filed two ballot measures related to the new city hall. One would require voter approval of "lease-purchase" financing agreements for city projects, thus challenging the financing method being considered for the new city hall.

The other asks voters to say yea or nay to the current redevelopment plan, which offers incentives to development in blighted areas.

Union officials have said the city shouldn't be pursuing an expensive project at a time when many basic public services are being reduced or eliminated.

Goodman's response is that the union's real agenda is getting the council to pressure the developer into labor contract talks.

The mayor said he thinks the project is protected from any kind of ballot challenge because a de facto contract exists with the developer.

City officials hope that city hall construction will start this year.

Though there have been many expansions, remodels, and re-namings in the last three decades, the last new casino to open downtown was Sundance in 1979, according to a time line compiled by the Architecture Studies Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

It was renamed Fitzgeralds in 1987.

Contact reporter Alan Choate at achoate@reviewjournal.com or 702-229-6435.

Find this article at:

http://www.lvrj.com/news/breaking_news/38734422.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1997 - 2008

Go Green! Subscribe to the electronic Edition at www.reviewjournal.com/ee/