

SFGate.com <http://www.sfgate.com/>

[Return to regular view](#)

SAN PABLO

Tribe shows plans for smaller casino

After 43% cut, it still includes 2,500 slots

- [Patrick Hoge, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

Thursday, February 10, 2005



The Lytton Band of Pomo Indians unveiled long-awaited revised plans Wednesday for Casino San Pablo that would fill a 4-acre building and include a five-story garage for 4,000 automobiles.

Appearing at special meeting of the San Pablo City Council, Lytton Chairwoman Margie Mejia said the tribe had cut its original plan by 43 percent after "we listened and we heard" area residents' fears about traffic and other impacts of the proposed casino.

The current casino plan still includes 2,500 slot machines.

"There will be nothing Las Vegas about the look of our project," said Mejia, who showed an artists' rendering of the design, a stone and brick structure with a large arcing entrance to shelter arriving guests.

While the proposed casino development is 342,000 square feet, nearly five times the size of the tribe's current 70,000-square-foot cardroom, Mejia said the two-story, 50-foot-tall building would not have a nightclub, spa or shopping center and would not host large events.

The City Council and many residents support the plan, including Mayor Joseph Gomes, who believes the casino would keep the small city economically viable.

"I don't want the city to be unincorporated down the line if this fails," Gomes said Wednesday.

Some version of the Lytton Rancheria's compact with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, signed last summer, must be approved by the state Legislature to allow slot machines at the San Pablo site.

But opponents, most notably state Assemblywoman Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley, did not change their minds even after the new plan was presented.

"The project remains the same with all the problems associated with urban gambling, and it is a bad deal for the East Bay," Hancock said.

Hancock said it was unlikely the tribe would be required to pay for the casino's impacts, particularly to the crowded interchange of San Pablo Dam Road and Interstate 80, which

she estimated would carry an extra 30,000 cars a day.

A traffic study released this week, funded by Bay Area cardroom and racetrack interests opposed to Indian casinos in the area, estimated the casino would generate 34,000 trips a day on I-80, based on the number of slot machines in the plan.

City Manager Brock Arner dismissed the study, saying the Lytton Band's presentation Wednesday provided "the first concrete proposal to review and evaluate."

The casino plan will ultimately be reviewed by the National Indian Gaming Commission under the federal Environmental Protection Act, and the city will conduct its own traffic and circulation studies, Arner said.

The tribe has pledged to give an unprecedented 25 percent of its gaming profits, which it estimates at \$155 million a year, to the state and local governments. How much would go to the city, county and state has yet to be decided.

The Lytton Band now pays 5.4 percent of gaming revenue to the city, or about \$2.6 million this year, which is about 20 percent of the city's budget.

To attempt to ameliorate traffic impacts, the 200-member tribe has purchased an abandoned building near the casino in order to donate the property to the city to build an access lane to speed traffic in an out of nearby Doctors Medical Center.

Some people who attended Wednesday's meeting, including City Councilman Robert Lieber from neighboring Albany, said urban gambling would hurt poor people who cannot afford to lose money.

The opposition surprised San Pablo Chamber of Commerce President William "J.R." Erwin Jr., particularly because the city of Albany has the Golden Gate Fields Racetrack.

"Their complaints are ridiculous," Erwin said. "I think they're worried they're going to lose a few bucks."

E-mail Patrick Hoge at phoge@sfgate.com.

Page B - 5

URL: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2005/02/10/BAGR9B8G471.DTL>

[©2005 San Francisco Chronicle](http://www.sfgate.com)