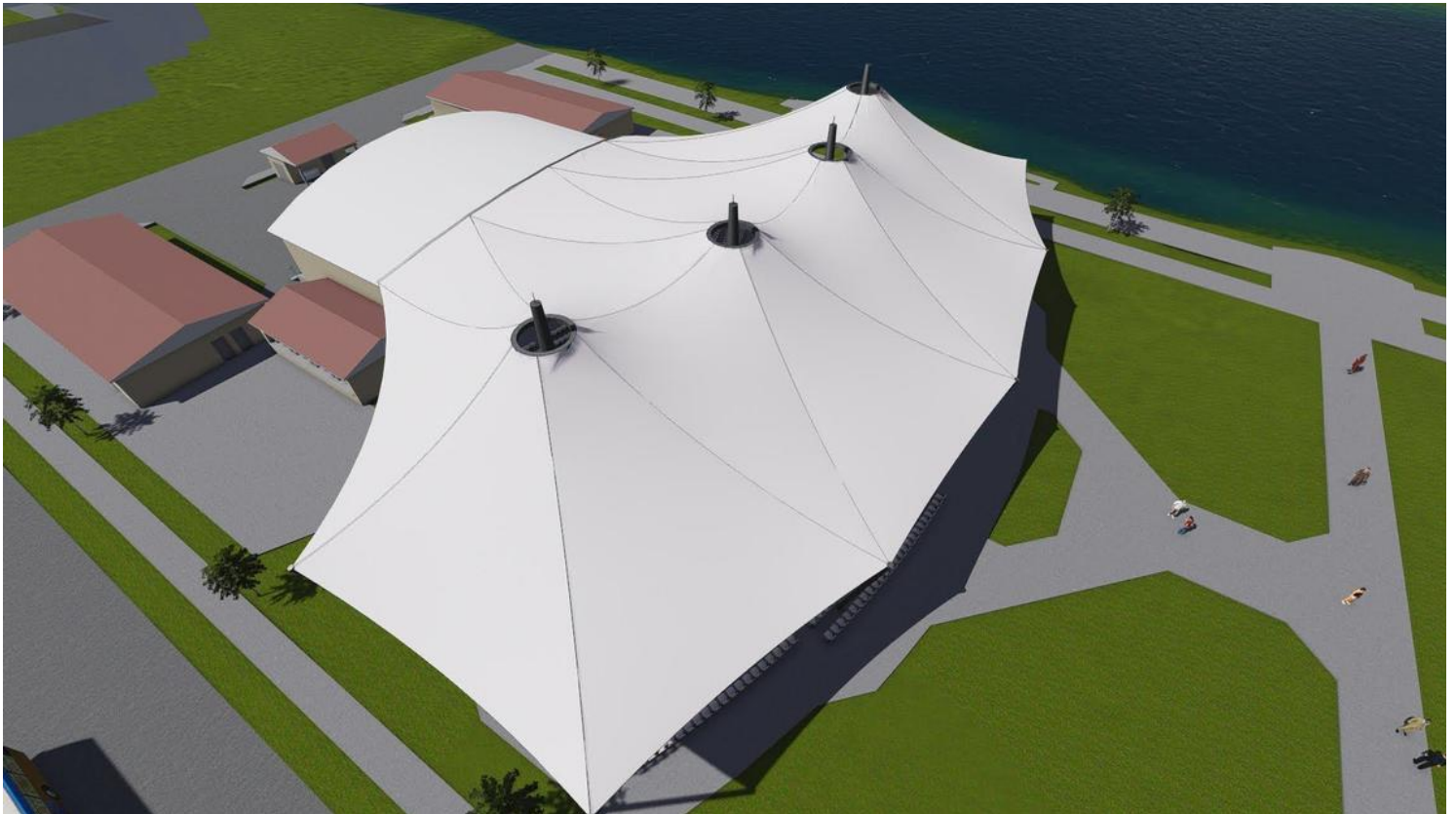


# Grand Victoria hopes for concert pavilion, ponders sports gambling



A drawing of a concert pavilion in Festival Park. Elgin's Grand Victoria Casino would like to work with the city to build the venue. (Thalden Boyd Emery Architects)



By **Mike Danahey**

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**T**he Grand Victoria Casino is taking a look at working with [Elgin](#) to have a concert pavilion built in Festival Park adjacent to its facility, but is taking a wait-and-see approach to pursuing the means to have sports gambling.

"This really would be the city's project and could become an asset for Elgin," Grand Victoria Casino General Manager Jim Thomason said.

However, local officials as well as Thomason note that there are quite a few hurdles to clear for either idea to move forward.

Thomason said he has been talking with vendors and potential corporate sponsors and looking for other available resources to help fund a facility. He is planning to meet with Mayor Dave Kaptain and City Manager Rick Kozal about the project and to discuss a community impact study from Aug. 10 he said has been made available to Elgin.

The documents states the project would take "a shared investment of approximately \$12 million to construct a pavilion with permanent staging, covered seating, concession stands and restroom facilities."

The construction plan calls for a portion of the park to be converted into a pavilion with a stage, lighting and sound systems, covered seating for 3,000 the ability to transform the lawn area of the park into 4,000 additional seats, the report states.

This was the fifth summer the casino has held concerts in the park, with all but the Fourth of July show in 2016 having paid admission.

The first concert held in 2013 with Joan Jett as the headliner, drew 3,573 patrons, according to the casino. The biggest draw of the 22 casino concerts held in Festival Park has been Boston on in 2015, which brought in 4,372 patrons. Of the four concerts this summer, the one with the largest crowd was Yestival, featuring Yes, [Todd Rundgren](#) and Carl Palmer, on Aug. 19, which drew 3,192.

Thomason said the casino has been renting stage and other equipment to hold the shows, which has made it difficult to turn a profit. Having a roof over seating would allow concerts and other events the city might have to plan a season from April through September.

The report noted that the Incentis Group and Silverlode Consulting Corp. conducted an economic and fiscal impact study, dated July 30, 2015, for a proposed pavilion in Elgin's Festival Park.

"Assuming the construction begins in 2016 and using a 15-year useful life for the pavilion, the study found the pavilion throughout its useful life in 2030 will generate an estimated \$42 million of direct, indirect, and induced labor income, \$136.3 million of economic output, and \$4.4 million of taxes in the city," the document states.

The casino had been looking at having a pavilion built and was floating the idea a couple years ago, but the project went on the back burner when the state went without a budget. Thomason said while he expects finding funding from Illinois may be difficult that Aurora's RiverEdge park and its music venue received state money.

According to reports, the \$13.28 million RiverEdge Park music pavilion's first phase was funded through a combination of grants and donations from the State of Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Fox Valley Park District and the Dunham Fund. The park is being operated by the Aurora Civic Center Authority.

State Rep. Anna Moeller (D-Elgin) said that she had talked with Thomason about a year ago about the concert pavilion.

"I don't think the state would have any money for the project right now," Moeller said. "Any funding would most likely have to come through a capital plan."

Moeller said she may be supportive of having the pavilion built as it could help revitalize downtown Elgin, but she'd have to see details before pursuing anything at the state level.

Elgin Mayor Dave Kaptain said he had yet to see the recent report, was willing to listen to what Thomason and others behind the project might have to say, but wondered where money could be found for the project.

That city most likely will be facing its own budget issues for 2018, Kaptain said — a point Thomason acknowledged.

Other obstacles could arise with if the Illinois Environmental Agency or the Army Corps of Engineers found issues with any plans, per the park being next to the Fox River, Kaptain said.

Politically, an issue could arise for any government money coming the project's way because of the Pritzker family's part ownership of the casino. [J.B. Pritzker](#) is running to be the Democrat's nominee to face Bruce Rauner in the fall 2018 governor's race.

"The Pritzker family are wonderful people, and they don't get involved in the day-to-day operation of the casino. Nick (Pritzker) is the gatekeeper," Thomason said.

Thomason said he sees a next step for any pavilion plans coming in the first quarter of 2018.

"Let's get it started with a commission," Thomason said.

Thomason said the casino is keeping an eye on a case before the U.S Supreme Court brought by the state of New Jersey to allow sports gambling at race tracks and casinos there. Federal law prohibits gambling on sports everywhere but in Nevada.

If the court's decision paves the way for legalized sports gambling in Illinois, Thomason said it could be a small part of the casino's operation and use a space that at one time held a small cineplex on the south end of the casino's building.

Former downtown Elgin restaurant owner Mike Butirro has been an advocate of Las Vegas-style gambling on sports at the Grand Victoria. Legalizing such gambling at the state's casinos could bring revenue to Illinois and to Elgin, Butirro said.

State Sen. Cristina Castro noted that there is a bill that would allow legal online gaming in Illinois, provided it is operated through the state's casinos. She has talked with Butirro about that.

"I told him it still has more work to be done," Castro said. "It still has a long way to go."

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