

Published May 20, 2008 06:41 pm - COLUMBUS, Kan. — Officials with the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma on Tuesday presented proposals to the Cherokee County Commission to improve county roads near the tribe's Downstream Casino Resort.

Tribal officials propose road improvements near Downstream Casino

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COLUMBUS, Kan. — Officials with the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma on Tuesday presented proposals to the Cherokee County Commission to improve county roads near the tribe's Downstream Casino Resort.

John Berrey, chairman of the tribe's business committee; Jack Brill, the tribe's attorney; and Alan Mauk, a tribe consultant, appeared before the commission.

"It would also be a step forward in us working with you guys," Berrey said.

Berrey said the tribe wants to widen Stateline Road leading to the Tri-State Monument so the road is the same width as the boulevard that will lead to the casino and hotel. The entrance road crosses Stateline Road, he said.

Berrey said officials in Newton County, Mo., have agreed to the proposal for that side of the road.

He also said the tribe would like to build a cul-de-sac, curb and guttering, and lighting for the monument.

"We just think it's going to be a pretty cool place to fix up," Berrey said.

The tribe also would like to use County Road 110 for heavy truck traffic for deliveries. Berrey said the tribe would agree to maintain the road if the commissioners allow the tribe to use it. The road, which is west of the casino and hotel and runs north and south, links to U.S. Highway 166 to the north.

"We would provide the maintenance dollars to upgrade it and maintain it," Berrey said.

He said tribes are eligible for federal money for road improvements, something the Quapaws have done previously in Ottawa County, Okla.

"We've built several roads with those funds" in Ottawa County, Berrey said.

Penn plan

Berrey also said if Penn National Gaming were to begin using the road for its casino in the future, the Quapaw Tribe would like to establish an agreement with the county to share the cost of maintenance with the competing casino.

Commissioners said Tennessee Prairie Friends Church and a few property owners are along the road. They suggested that tribal officials talk with church officials and property owners about their plans as a courtesy. Commissioners said they also might schedule a public hearing about the proposal.

“It might ease the pain,” Commissioner Pat Collins said.

“I think that’s fair,” Berrey said. “I don’t see that as an issue at all.”

County Counselor Kevin Cure said he needed time to research the legal aspects of the proposal.

“You might give us a little time to digest this,” added Commissioner Charlie Napier.

Commissioners agreed to visit the casino and hotel construction site on the afternoon of June 9.

The casino is set to open July 5, with opening of the hotel set for fall. The \$301 million project includes the casino with a 70,000-square-foot gambling floor and a 12-story, 222-room hotel. Berrey told the commissioners that the tribe is considering retail possibilities for the Kansas side of the project.

The Kansas Lottery Commission this month approved Penn National Gaming’s contract to build a state-owned casino in Cherokee County. The contract allows the company to initially invest \$125 million in the project, plus a \$25 million privilege fee to the state. The company would invest an additional \$100 million in future years. A 200-room hotel is included in the plans.

The Kansas Lottery Gaming Facility Review Board will vote on the contract during a meeting Aug. 21 and 22.

Penn National plans to open its Hollywood Casino north of Downstream Casino Resort by May 5, 2010. Cherokee County would receive 2 percent of the state-owned casino’s gambling revenues under state law.

Lawsuit

The Cherokee County Commission had filed a lawsuit in federal court against the U.S. Department of the Interior, alleging that the federal agency didn’t require the Quapaw Tribe to perform necessary environmental assessments before starting construction on its casino and hotel. It also sought to halt construction at the site. Commissioners on Tuesday said the lawsuit remains active.