

***Testimony of Anthony W. Ravosa, Jr.,  
Managing Member, Silver Lane Partners***

***Public Safety and Security Committee  
Public Hearing March 9, 2017***

***SB 957 "AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF GAMING AND THE  
AUTHORIZATION OF A CASINO GAMING FACILITY IN THE STATE"***

Co-Chairmen Larson and Guglielmo, Chairman Verrengia, Ranking Member Sredzinski and Honorable Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, I am Anthony W. Ravosa, Jr., Managing Member of Silver Lane Partners, LLC. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this committee regarding SB 957, "AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF GAMING AND THE AUTHORIZATION OF A CASINO GAMING FACILITY IN THE STATE."

I begin by thanking you for the time you've invested in considering the complexity and importance of approving the State of Connecticut's first commercial casino. I am also especially appreciative of the invitation this committee extended to me to appear at the Informational Forum on Gaming on February 23. I was gratified by the supportive and complimentary remarks committee members made following my presentation. What I said at that time, and what I wish to state again today is that East Hartford presents the single most compelling opportunity to develop a transformative entertainment and gaming destination in the Greater Hartford area.

In general, we are supportive of SB 957, with one very important and rather obvious exception. The bill as drafted specifies that the casino be located at a specific site in the town of East Windsor. We believe that for several reasons it is premature to include the name of a proposed host community in the bill. In addition to our ongoing efforts to demonstrate the merits of the East Hartford proposal, we also feel the committee should consider the significant opposition by many East Windsor residents to siting a casino in their town and their very public efforts to secure a town referendum on this matter. As these issues are presently unresolved, we would respectfully ask the committee to pass this bill as amended by striking Section 13 (b), and determining the final location at a later date.

Indeed, we recognize that, ultimately, any decision to move forward with opening a third casino will involve a negotiated agreement between MMCT and the General Assembly, as well as considering the desire of a municipality to host a casino. While the residents of East Windsor grapple with the issue of conducting a referendum—which could lead to the defeat of the casino proposal, we urge the committee to advance this bill without designating a specific location.

Additionally, we believe it is incumbent on the members of the General Assembly to ask the hard questions that need to be asked so that you can come to your own conclusions about where a Greater Hartford casino should be located and to make your own judgment call about which site will yield the greatest economic benefits for the Greater Hartford region as a whole. Consider these key questions:

*Which location can deliver the highest revenue return to both the state and tribes?*

*Which location can best demonstrate that it has the fewest obstacles to win local approval and can also be the quickest to build out when it comes to “speed-to-market?”*

*Which location is best positioned to drive ancillary economic development?*

*Which location can be most impactful when it comes to linkage with the region’s other key economic drivers – the Connecticut Convention Center, XL Center, and Pratt and Whitney Stadium – all of which were funded at considerable taxpayer expense – in the hundreds of millions – are costly to maintain and operate, and remain dark far too many nights with little or no activity?*

*And, which location is best positioned to help combat urban unemployment by providing both the opportunity and a seamless transition to work for the folks in Hartford County’s most vulnerable communities that need it most (through enhanced public transportation and job training)?*

In this context, we are confident that East Hartford reigns supreme as the most compelling location to site this development.

With the state having a major seat at the table in making this decision, it also has to be about achieving a greater public purpose as well. In our view, casino development should, and must be viewed in the context of the larger picture regionally and that only East Hartford can achieve the vision outlined.

Our proposed site offers an opportunity to revitalize and transform a highly-visible segment of Silver Lane long marred by abandoned and dilapidated buildings, vacant storefronts, deteriorating retail facades, desolate asphalt-covered wastelands, and general commercial decay. With Pratt and Whitney’s new World Headquarters and UTC’s new Global Research Center quickly rising – and a groundbreaking for the new Horizon Outlet Shoppes at Rentschler Field and anticipated \$7-8 million renovation of the old Ramada Hotel located at the Roberts Street exit off I-84 (to be reflagged with a Marriott brand) not far behind – a casino built at the Showcase Cinemas site will bring continued momentum to the resurgence of Silver Lane as a vibrant commercial corridor and another important catalyst for the renaissance being seen in East Hartford.

This location has attributes like no other. . .

- There is a 40-year history of entertainment and amusement activity at the Showcase site

- This site has the most superior location when it comes to interstate highway frontage and visibility – simply put, it’s “unmatched!”
- More than 131,000 vehicles a day pass by this site on I-84 – that’s 36,000 more vehicles a day than seen on I-91 North and 75,000 more than what is seen daily on the Route 20/Bradley Connector – thereby enabling the best opportunity for impulse “patron capture” along one of the two primary east-west thoroughfares between Boston and New York City
- This site sits approximately 4 miles away from the I-84/I-91 interchange in downtown Hartford – at 283,000 vehicles a day, the most heavily trafficked interchange in the state of Connecticut
- Traffic studies commissioned by Silver Lane Partners yield that this site has minimal anticipated infrastructure costs needed to accommodate a casino development – and those are primarily related to signalization. In addition, last July, the town received a \$12 million grant commitment from the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) to improve the Silver Lane and Rentschler Field corridor. Silver Lane is a four-lane state roadway that routinely accommodates tens of thousands of people for UConn Football.
- This site has the least number of local land use approval hurdles of any of the competing communities and is essentially “shovel-ready.” There is no need for a zone change; the existing zone is sufficient for the proposed gaming use. And, in September 2015, our request for a special permit encompassing the vast majority of activities that would occur on-site with operation of a casino was unanimously approved by the East Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission.
- Reuse of the existing Showcase building enables a “speed-to-market” scenario that is second-to-none – with a construction completion target of 15 months “start-to-finish.”
- This site is located 12-15 miles closer to the state’s population hubs than any of the sites north of Hartford logically yielding greater trip frequency
- When it comes to combating urban unemployment in Hartford County – along with expansion of CT FasTrak east of the river and a job training partnership with Goodwin College – a casino built at this location will have the greatest impact, enabling a “seamless” transition to work for vulnerable populations in close proximity that need the jobs most.
- With the largest police and fire departments east of the Connecticut River, East Hartford is unequivocally the best equipped community to ensure policing and public safety both essential to its residents and patrons of a third Connecticut casino. The East Hartford Police Department is a full-service department with a complement of 125 sworn officers making it one of the two largest police departments east of the Connecticut River.

- East Hartford is the focal point for every major interstate and state highway flowing into the Greater Hartford area (Interstates 84, 91 and 291, Routes 2, 5 and 15) enabling easy and convenient access from all points with ample existing off-ramp capacity both east and west of the site.
- This location is best suited to mesh with the primary, but significantly underutilized economic drivers of the region: the XL Center, Connecticut Convention Center, and Pratt and Whitney Stadium (UConn Football)
- This site offers an unrivaled opportunity to be a catalyst for ancillary economic development and leveraging private investment like no other.
- No other location presents a stronger case for direct linkage with our capital city of Hartford, including potential revenue sharing.

Ideas like these are rooted in the belief that, as Hartford goes, so goes the region. They also answer Congressman John Larson's call to "think big." "Without vision, there is no victory," the Congressman recently told the *Hartford Courant*. He added, "You have to go bold, and you have to think about the future." For Silver Lane Partners and East Hartford, this has been our mindset from day one.

In an interview with sports columnist Jeff Jacobs in the *Hartford Courant* recently, CRDA Executive Director Mike Freimuth discussed the future of the XL Center. He said, "*Mohegan is eating our lunch. Bridgeport is nibbling at our backside. Springfield [referring to the \$950 million MGM casino under construction] is about to take the rest of it.*" While Mr. Freimuth was talking specifically about the XL Center, the XL Center could be a metaphor for Hartford and the region.

And, as it relates to the potential development of a third Connecticut casino, Mr. Freimuth was even more direct in January 2016 telling me and others, "*Any [casino] site chosen other than one in Hartford or East Hartford does absolutely nothing for us in terms of our ability to sell Hartford.*" Needless to say, we could not agree more.

In conclusion, we respectfully ask the members of this committee to support SB 957 with one change to strike Section 13 (b). We again thank the members for their time meeting with me and my representatives to discuss the strengths and merits of the East Hartford proposal. This bill still has a long way to go during this Legislative session before it may become law. We look forward to continuing to work with each of you as this bill moves along. We urge your support in establishing Connecticut's first commercial casino in Greater Hartford and hope you'll ultimately agree that no site is better positioned for mutual success than our East Hartford proposal. Thank you. Please feel free to contact me at 860-918-4222 if you have any questions or wish to discuss further. I would welcome your call.