

Lawmakers squash plan to explore third Massachusetts casino

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Sports betting was not the only gambling-related matter left on the cutting room floor when the final economic development bill emerged from five months of negotiations early Wednesday morning. Negotiators also scrapped plans to have the Gaming Commission take a serious look at the circumstances around the one casino license left unissued.

The state's 2011 expanded gaming law gave the Gaming Commission the power to grant up to three resort casino licenses. So far, two have been awarded – to MGM Springfield and Encore Boston Harbor in Everett. Region C – the commission's name for Bristol, Plymouth, Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket counties – has been an unsettled matter for the commission for years. Ever since the Gaming Commission rejected a commercial casino proposal in Brockton in 2016, questions have lingered over whether a developer would put up the minimum \$500 million for a casino that would face competition from the three gaming facilities already open here and nearby casinos in other states. Adding to the complexity of the situation is the possibility that the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe could revive its plan for a \$1 billion casino in Taunton regardless of whether the Gaming Commission decides to reopen the process to license a third resort casino in Massachusetts.

Rep. Carol Doherty, a Taunton Democrat, co-sponsored language that was included in the House's economic development bill in July that would have required the Gaming Commission to produce "an evaluation of economic conditions within region C and

surrounding areas with respect to the region's ability to sustain" a resort casino and an evaluation of the likelihood that a resort casino applicant could submit an application that would provide value to the region before 2024.

The Gaming Commission has addressed Region C in fits and starts in recent years, but in early 2020 sought answers to specific and business-related questions around a potential market analysis of Region C through a formal request for information. The pandemic upended the commission's plans to review the feedback it received, but the commission has said it still intends to delve more deeply into the matter.