Georgians Could Reap Significant Benefit from Casino Resorts

*Potential legalized gaming is on the minds of legislators as well as major casino operators and developers with potential sites already under consideration in rural Georgia.*

Even before the Georgia General Assembly convenes in January, several well-known casino operators are scouting Georgia for potential sites to develop destination resorts that would include casino gaming. Rick Lackey of City Commercial Real Estate recently announced that more than 5,000 acres of potential resort sites are currently under listing agreements with the company.

Legislative leaders are poised to introduce legislation again in the upcoming session of the Georgia General Assembly. Rep. Ron Stephens (R-Savannah), chairman of the House Economic Development and Tourism committee, has been a champion of gaming legislation in years past and plans to sponsor similar legislation in 2021.

“There has been a groundswell of support for legalized gaming throughout the state,” said Stephens. “Georgians support the economic opportunities presented by casino resorts, especially jobs and revenue that they would bring to local communities.”

Resorts would be strategically located adjacent to interstates around the state to attract drive-to and drive-through tourism. Thousands of tourists stop in Georgia every year to either change planes en route to destinations around the world, or to buy gas as they travel by car to vacation destinations in Florida and other areas. Casino resorts would seek to capture the business of those tourist as well as serve as planned vacation destinations.

“Designers of The Battery, the mixed-use development and home of the Braves, have master planned a mixed use development in the Columbus on the Chattahoochee River front, in Lavonia on Lake Hartwell and just south of Savannah in Midway that include retail, water taxis, civic buildings, RV resorts, family entertainment, senior living, workforce housing, luxury hotels and casinos,” added Lackey. “Developments of this magnitude will require capital investments of between $500 million and $1 billion and create between 3000 and 5000 local jobs each.”

“While it may seem that metro Atlanta would be an obvious location, rural Georgia may very well have better locations,” says City Commercial Real Estate’s Lackey. “Some of the very best sites in Georgia are in rural Georgia. Generally, successful destination resorts with casinos draw customers that can easily travel by car and are within 2-to-5-hour drive times of major population centers.”

The Lavonia site on I-85 at exit 177 is located between Atlanta, Greenville and Charlotte and has 5 miles of frontage on Lake Hartwell. Population within a 2-hour drive is 8.6 million and within a 5 hour drive the population jumps to 37.6 million. During college football season the property is within a 1-hour drive of both the 93,000 seat Sanford Stadium in Athens and Death Valley's 81,000 seats in Clemson.

The sites in West Georgia and on the river in Columbus are attractive to local metropolitan Atlanta residents and travelers that currently pass through the area driving to the gulf coast beaches.

The coastal Georgia sites all are located along I-95 adjacent to exit ramps and are strategically located in Savannah, Midway and Kingsland. Population within a 2-hour drive for all three sites is up to 5 million, and within a 5-hour drive the population jumps to between 30 - 35 million. The intersection of I- 95 and I-16 clocks traffic counts second only to Atlanta intersections. The Kingsland site offers access to Jacksonville and its amenities including an international airport.

Gaming legislation requires passage by two-thirds of legislators and the governor’s signature before being placed as a referendum on the ballot for Georgia voters approval.

“Legalizing gambling brings many benefits, but it requires heavy lifting and heavy lifting always requires bipartisanship,” said Rep. Calvin Smyre (D-Columbus), the longest-serving member of the Georgia General Assembly. “I think we have that muscle right now.”

“Tax revenue from proceeds is one thing, but there are a lot of general economic development benefits including new hotels, restaurants and entertainment that bring in jobs and local taxes,” said Rep. Alan Powell, (R- Hartwell), Chairman of the Regulated Industries Committee. “There is more at stake than just gambling, and it’s up to the people of Georgia to make the final decision.”

“Change is inevitable and there are a lot of things I thought I would never see in Georgia that I have lived long enough to see,” said Representative Al Williams (D- Midway). “We have to believe enough in the people to give them the right to decide.”

**About City Commercial Real Estate**

City Commercial Real Estate, Inc. is a boutique commercial real estate brokerage and advisory company based in Atlanta. The company offers more than 35 years of experience in all types of commercial real estate transactions and unparalleled relationships in the commercial real estate and development industry throughout the country. For more information, visit [www.CityCRE.com](http://www.CityCRE.com).