

Beacon Hill Byline - By Mary Rogeness

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Does Boston really need a Megaplex?

In the month of September it's back to school and back to work. It's time to relegate vacation days to memory. For me, it's back to Boston, dealing with two related issues that have been raised over the summer months: a megaplex for Boston and expanded state-sponsored gambling.

Gov. Weld first linked the issues when he proposed building a \$700 million Boston complex containing both a convention center and football stadium for the Patriots. Costs of the projects would be funded by income from riverboat casinos. The governor has now removed his required linkage for the proposals and the legislature will look at the megaplex and casino gambling separately. Here are the issues as I see them.

First the megaplex. It is difficult to find benefits for our western Mass. region when Boston expands. That city needs additional modern convention space if it is to compete for business with the large markets in the nation. But many of us would like to see the expansion occur without statewide support. It would be hard to support a megaplex if there is no backing for the Springfield Civic Center. Concerning the Patriots, I really believe that a winning team will help the franchise more than a fancy new stadium. In fact the megaplex could be built without the sports stadium component.

Next, the issue of gambling. Gov. Weld withdrew the linkage between casinos and the megaplex, but the legislature is still considering several bills to expand legalized gambling. The experience of the Pequot Indian Casino in Connecticut is cited as proof that unlimited wealth is awaiting casino approval, but one should also consider the casino excursion boat that recently sailed out of New London \$100,000 in debt. Gambling carries social costs of compulsive gamblers and crime, though its isolation on riverboats claims to balance those factors.

When I write about these topics I tend to wind up with a lot of "on the other hand" statements. As you can tell, I am still looking at both sides of these issues. If you would like to weigh in with arguments on one side or the other, I hope you will call or drop me a line.