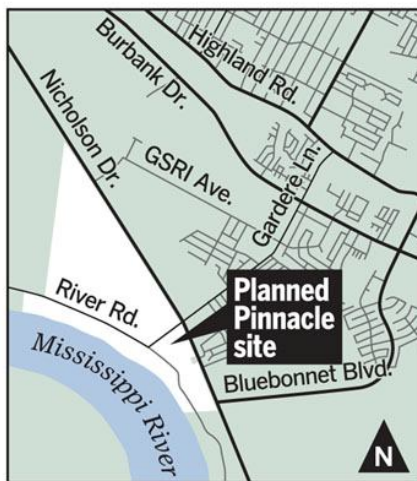


Board approves plans, design for Pinnacle's BR boat



Graphic/The Advocate

Pinnacle Entertainment released this artist's rendering, left, of its planned casino resort for Baton Rouge in September 2007. It will be built on more than 550 acres along the Mississippi River south of the LSU campus.



Advocate map

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The Gaming Control Board on Tuesday approved the plans and design elements for Baton Rouge's third riverboat casino.

But officials from Pinnacle Entertainment and the state refused to reveal the details on the \$250 million project to the public.

State Assistant Attorney General Leonce Gautreaux said the board's approval means Pinnacle now has 120 days — or until Feb. 18 — to submit construction contracts for the board's review.

Pinnacle refused to publicly release the blueprints, citing confidentiality laws.

The state Attorney General's Office agreed with Pinnacle saying the blueprints are exempt from the state's public records law.

The blueprints will not become available to the public unless a court orders that they be released, Gautreaux said.

Gautreaux cited a part of state law that exempts a record that "consists of proprietary architectural construction, schematic or engineering plans, blueprints, specifications, computer programs or software."

Jack Godfrey, general counsel for Pinnacle, reiterated that the plans are confidential under Louisiana law. He said the company considers the plans to be a trade secret.

However, he said the plans are similar to what Pinnacle presented to voters earlier this year.

The new casino will include a restaurant and a hotel with at least 100 rooms. It will be built on more than 550 acres along the Mississippi River south of the LSU campus near Gardere Lane and River Road.

Pinnacle's Web site describes the project as "a modern, single-deck riverboat casino with approximately 1,500 slot machines and 50 table games."

The artist's rendering shows a sprawling complex on the river.

The original timeline called for the casino to open in 2010. The schedule laid out Tuesday during the meeting suggested it could be 2011 before the casino is open for business.

Gaming Control Board member Ayres Bradford complained that he has seen very little on the project.

He said the artist's rendering is the only construction-related document he has seen.

Bradford wanted to know whether Gautreaux has seen "actual construction documents."

Gautreaux assured Bradford that he has.

Voters in East Baton Rouge Parish agreed to the project in February. Pinnacle would be the third riverboat casino in Baton Rouge.

Godfrey estimated it will take 18 months to complete construction.

He said the company is keeping an eye on the national financial crisis.

Last month, Pinnacle dropped plans to build a casino resort and hotel in Kansas because of the financial markets. Plans for a \$2 billion casino on the Atlantic City boardwalk also are on hold.

The company said it would focus on the Baton Rouge project instead.

Pinnacle also owns L'Auberge du Lac in Lake Charles. Another casino, Sugarcane Bay, is under construction there.

The Baton Rouge riverboat was supposed to be called Rivière, but the company may still drop the name in favor of something else.