

Lake County betting on economic development

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■ Commissioners come up with plan for use of casino revenue distributions

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Lake County commissioners plan to use casino revenue distributions to the county for economic development and they have crafted a new line item in their budget to reflect that policy decision.

Casinos in Cleveland and Toledo have been operational since May and in July the county received its first distribution of \$200,668 from the state's Casino Tax Revenue Fund. Payments are likely to fluctuate and are provided quarterly.

Commissioner Robert E. Aufuldish said these dollars could help the Lake County Port Authority.

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Commissioners talk more about economic development plans.



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"We felt that with this new revenue stream, known as casino dollars, we would set up a special economic development line item, and probably in the near future will be transferring some, if not all, money into that line item," Aufuldish said. "This will get the Port Authority a better handle and more opportunity for economic development."

Port Authority Executive Director John Loftus said the agency is enthusiastic about the commissioners' decision and hopes to put that money to good use.

"I can see this as good news and we appreciate the fact the commissioners have the confidence that they feel we're doing a good job," Loftus said.

Commissioner Raymond

E. Sines said the decision is one commissioners have talked about for a while and the dollars also could be used to help communities with their distressed properties.

The line item will be designated as outside the county's general fund, Sines said.

"So, there is any number of ways we can use this fund to help out and move the county forward," he said. "It's a good approach that way it's not confused with general fund dollars, it's set aside for economic development."

In other action, commissioners amended the county's policy for payouts of accrued unused sick hours when an employee no longer works for the county.

Effective April 1, employees who are not part of collective bargaining units and who have less than 10 years

employment will no longer be eligible to have their unused sick time paid out when they stop working for the county, said County Administrator Jason Boyd.

Employees with more than 10 years of service will be able to have 50 percent paid out up to a maximum of 480 hours, Boyd said.

Previous policy established a maximum payout based on a graduated scale commencing with the fifth year of service with a maximum payout of 35 years of service allowing 100 percent of accrued sick time paid out up to a maximum 960 hours.

Employees who work 40 hours per week are provided sick time equal to about 15 days per year, Sines said.

"We felt it was the right direction to go to cut it in half over a period of time and a decision we looked

hard at and long at," he said.

The Ohio Revised Code provides commissioners the option to make the approved changes, Aufuldish said.

"I'm sure we'll be speaking with our union folks to get everyone on the same page," he said.

Also, commissioners established Christmas Eve as a paid holiday this year only for employees who are under the commissioners' authority.

Aufuldish and Sines asked for other county elected officials and department heads to notify the commissioners of their intent regarding whether Christmas Eve will be a paid holiday for their staffs because it falls on a Monday.

Commissioners said that would help determine whether to have county buildings and offices open that day.