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Springfield casino seeks to blend into historic downtown

By **Sean P. Murphy** | GLOBE STAFF MAY 31, 2016

SPRINGFIELD — When it opens in 2018, the MGM Resorts casino will make a historical claim hard to imagine amid thousands of flashing, whirling, slot machines: two pre-Civil War US presidents slept here.

Most casinos, including the two other gambling resorts slated for Massachusetts, are built on open land, set back from their neighbors. But MGM is bringing a \$950 million casino and hotel to the heart of a city with nearly four centuries of history, including the overnight stays of President James Polk and his secretary of state, James Buchanan, who became president in 1857.

Prodded by local history buffs, MGM has pledged to integrate its 14-acre development into the downtown cityscape by preserving all or a portion of several treasured buildings, including the Union House, a four-story hotel stylish enough in its day — 1847 — to attract a sitting president.

The goal of blending an outsized casino into a traditional downtown seems a tough needle to thread, but industry specialists say it could signal a broader trend — casinos that seek to blend into an urban environment, not stand apart.

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