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*The new casino on Delaware Avenue could leave the community in a bad shape.*

Philly loves

a winner,” is the motto for the city’s latest addition, the SugarHouse Casino, which made its grand opening Sept. 23 at 1001 North Delaware Ave. in Fishtown. Promoters have relentlessly advertised the glitz and glamour of the casino:

Thousands of windows offer a view of the Delaware River, the Benjamin Franklin Bridge and neighboring communities. But that is where the glitz ends.

SugarHouse takes pride in the fact that it is right in Philadelphia – a local casino located between Fishtown and



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— Northern Liberties.

But when the Philadelphia Inquirer asked Project Manager Terrence McKenna how neighbors felt about the casino’s design and location, he said, “What neighbors?”

McKenna must know who those neighbors are now, as they are some of SugarHouse’s biggest opponents. Various neighborhood organizations voiced concern about SugarHouse. The casino puts Philadelphia’s crime, violence, traffic and social welfare all at risk.

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SugarHouse, however, sees itself impacting the community in a good way.

“We want to be a good neighbor. We are a part of this community,” General Manager Wendy Hamilton said in a Sept. 20 Inquirer article.

SugarHouse plans to use local businesses to supply its casino to work as a stimulus for neighboring communities.

SugarHouse also created a Community Benefits Agreement, which donates a percentage of the casino's profits to local organizations. The Inquirer reported that the first payment of \$175,000 benefitted several sports, arts and veterans organizations, as well as schools and playgrounds, including Hetzell's Playground, which received a new sprinkler system.

“It is a question to whether they will actually continue participating and helping the community,” said Dan Hajot, a spokesperson for Casino-Free Philadelphia. “What and how they plan to continue putting money toward the community is unknown. I'm not really sure what or how they're doing anything.”

Hajot and other Casino-Free Philadelphia members are concerned with casinos throughout Pennsylvania, but their “Reclaim the Riverfront” campaign focuses on the opening of SugarHouse and the effects on the community. Casino Free-Philadelphia not only focuses on the economic impact of casinos, but also looks at the social impact.

In preparation for its opening, SugarHouse hired more than 900 full-time employees, a majority of whom are from neighboring districts. But SugarHouse's job creation isn't central to Philadelphia. Hajot said SugarHouse employees are not just coming from neighboring districts.

“I would say it's about 20 percent Philadelphians and 80 percent from outside of the Philadelphia, local area,” he said.

Though job creation in general is positive, if SugarHouse is serious about helping its community, it should reconsider the locale of the people it employs.

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Concerns about crime, violence and the effects on society still remain. But Hamilton said that “fears had been overblown, and the casino would be good for the city and the community.”

Hajot disagrees.

“The problems with the casino are real,” he said. “The overall impact of a local casino is being overlooked.”

Hajot said that while SugarHouse does attract tourists and middle-aged upper-class residents, it also attracts poorer citizens, whose families already face financial problems. The prospects of gambling addictions are bleak, as Hajot points out that nearly 20 percent of the population develops gambling addictions when a new casino opens.

Starting Oct. 1, SugarHouse’s premier shuttle service, Sugar Express, will begin its runs to the casino from stops in Center City and Old City.

“Where exactly is the money coming from?” Hajot said.

This question is one many people seem to forget. While the people gambling are the glamorous, middle-class adults, Philadelphia also has lower-income residents to consider.

A Mohegan Sun casino in Connecticut recently cut hundreds of wages and fired just as many employees after the casino’s profit drastically dropped. CEO and President Mitchell Etes announced the Mohegan Sun’s first cuts in 14 years of business just one week before SugarHouse’s grand opening.

And while SugarHouse casino remains confident that its profit will not be a problem, SugarHouse fails to see its impact on the community. The casino’s initiatives, such as the Community Benefits Agreement, only cover up that the money is coming from future gambling addicts and lower-income residents of Philadelphia. The 24-hour casino encourages behavior

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that does not help unstable community members.

Besides the Casino-Free Philadelphia's Casino Town Watch – which is modeled after traditional town watches to allow people to see what goes on in the early hours at SugarHouse and what condition people are in as they enter and leave SugarHouse – community members are left to do just one thing: wait to see what happens.

“There's really nothing more we can do right now,” Northern Liberties Neighborhood Association President Matt Ruben said. “We're going to closely monitor it and hope the worst predictions of the impacts won't come true.”

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