

Final hearings are scheduled next month before the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board, as casino competitors will try to convince the seven-member panel to award them the state's lone remaining Category Three slots resort license.

The state's Gaming Control Board announced Tuesday that final "suitability hearings" are

planned Nov. 16-17 on the four projects seeking the license, including Gettysburg businessman David LeVan and his proposed "Mason Dixon Resort & Casino" in Cumberland Township.

LeVan is partnering with casino investor and former state legislator Joseph Lashinger, as they aim to convert the existing 300-room Eisenhower Inn in Cumberland Township into a \$75 million gaming resort, operated by Penn National with 600 slot machines and 50 table games.

Groups in Mechanicsburg, western Pennsylvania and the Poconos are also competing for the license.

The hearings, held at the Pennsylvania State Museum in Harrisburg, aim to "determine the eligibility and sustainability" of the four applicants vying for the license. No public comment is being taken, although the public is invited to attend.

Presentations are planned by each of the applicants, although the order of appearance has not been set. The hearings are scheduled from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. and 4-8 p.m. on Nov. 16, as well as 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and 3 -7 p.m. on Nov. 17.

The board intends to "question applicants about their character, operational and financial suitability, diversity plans, community impact, plans for the prevention of compulsive gaming and other issues" during the suitability hearings. Additionally, the hearings provide the board an opportunity to "hear directly from the applicants on their eligibility for a Category Three license, suitability to gain licensure, and why their project is better than the other applicants."

A final decision on the license is tentatively planned later this year, or early in 2011. "Nothing

has changed,” Gaming Control Board spokesman Doug Harbach said Tuesday regarding the licensing process. “The board is working toward being in a position to consider a license before the end of the year,” Harbach added.

The board reopened the application period for the state’s lone remaining Category Three license in January, when lawmakers expanded gaming as part of the budget approval process. LeVan and Lashinger submitted their application in April, as well as the Holiday Inn Mechanicsburg and Nemacolin Resort near Pittsburgh. An application from the Poconos, by the Bushkill group, was already filed.

To qualify for the license, a resort must have no fewer than 275 guest rooms under common ownership, be more than 15 linear miles from any other Pennsylvania-licensed slots parlor, and offer “substantial year-round guest amenities” on the premises.

Since the state legislature legalized gambling six years ago, there are no Category Three resort casinos open in Pennsylvania. The Gaming Board awarded a license to a Valley Forge project last year, but it is under litigation, and has not opened.

State gaming law restricts patronage at a Category Three facility, limiting visitation to “registered overnight guests and patrons utilizing one or more of the resort-offered amenities.” Guests may also possess a “board-approved and valid seasonal or year-round membership.”

Public input was fielded Aug. 31-Sept. 1 on the Mason Dixon application, at the Comfort Suites near Gettysburg. The two-day public hearing was the largest ever in Pennsylvania, since state lawmakers legalized gambling in 2004-05, drawing five government agencies, 29 community groups and 200-plus speakers. According to data released by the state, there were 392 registered speakers, although only 225 appeared. Out of those speakers, 135 supported the project while 90 opposed.

Written testimony on the proposal is being accepted through the end of the month by the Gaming Control Board.

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