

Amid support for casino proposals, neighbors decry plans

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HTING FOR a casino in the city is a team sport.

Supporters of the six groups seeking to win the city's second casino license gave an earful to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board yesterday at a public hearing at Lincoln Financial Field.

A letter from City Council President Darrell Clarke praised developer Bart Blatstein. James White, former city managing director, endorsed PHL Local Gaming's Casino Revolution.

Work ethic and track records were cited, community dedication was touted. Economic growth and the revitalization of neighborhoods became a recurring theme for the speakers.

Professional poker player Michael Noda, one of about 60 speakers, said he wanted a casino in Center City.

But among the scores of endorsements came doses of dissent for specific casino locations.

South Philadelphia representatives challenged the three projects proposed for one stretch of Pattison Avenue near the sports complex.

"We have Xfinity Live! - which has turned out to be very, very live," said Barbara Capozzi, a director with the Sports Complex Special Services District. She said the neighborhood has already made sacrifices for the city.

Judy Cerrone closed her eyes and rested her head in her hands as proponents of the projects spoke of issues like highway accessibility.

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"My hairs were standing up on my neck," said Cerrone, who lives near Broad Street and Packer Avenue and is a director with the district. Cerrone said traffic and noise have left neighbors "prisoners" in their homes.

A calendar of venue events is distributed to 4,100 houses, she said.

"We live with that on our fridge so we know when we can get to our home," she said. "Life is more important than money. We have four venues in one small area on top of us."

The need for the city's other proposed casinos was contested, too.

"When you hear there is nothing going on in our neighborhood, we beg to differ," said Dena Herrin, of Congregation Rodeph Shalom, which is a couple blocks north on Broad Street from Bart Blatstein's proposed casino, the Provence, at Callowhill Street.

Rory Kramer, who lives near that project, wants to buy a home in the area, but he said he would move out of the city if the Provence opens.

"I've put those plans on hold until after your decision," Kramer told the board.

The input of the people who live in the respective projects' neighborhoods is important for consideration, said Gaming Control Board chairman William Ryan Jr.

"They're the people who are going to be affected most by it," Ryan said. "Everybody who comes here and speaks carries weight."

Another hearing is slated for the Linc from 9 a.m. to noon today. Ryan said he hopes a decision can be made by the end of the year.

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