

Many from Chinatown protest 2d Philly casino

Written by Administrator
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Gambling foes filled the audience at Wednesday's hearing before the state Gaming Control Board, silently standing to strongly protest the building of another casino in Philadelphia.

About 75 people, mostly from Chinatown, held anti-casino signs during back-to-back testimony from gaming opponents at the end of the fourth and last day of public input on a second license.

The protesters represented a coalition of community groups called No Casino in Our City.

While most of the earlier speakers were endorsing one project or another, the 11 people to testify at the end of the hearing denounced gambling as bad public policy that was promoting addiction.

Many came from Chinatown and told commissioners that the advent of gambling in the city and state was fraying the fabric of their community.

Casinos target some of their marketing toward Asian customers. Just this week, officials of SugarHouse Casino told commissioners they would add an Asian Gaming Center if they were permitted to expand their casino floor.

"A casino is poison to our community, to our families," said Steven Mac, a representative of the Hip Sing Association in Chinatown, which includes many immigrant members. "We don't need any more casinos. It is enough."

As part of the review process for a second license, the gaming board invited public input on the six proposals. More than 150 people testified over two days last month at the Convention Center and two days this week at Lincoln Financial Field.

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While casino critics dominated Wednesday's hearing, the scene was much different than a few years ago, when Gaming Control Board hearings often turned into shouting matches.

Without so much as saying a word, some protesters held signs that read "Philly Gets. . .," with others offering the replies, "Suicides," "Bankruptcy," "Crime," "Child Neglect," and "Poverty."

Half the projects are proposed for South Philadelphia. They are Casino Revolution, Hollywood Casino Philadelphia, and Live! Casino & Hotel.

The other three are the Provence on North Broad Street, Wynn Philadelphia on the Delaware River in Fishtown, and Market8 in Center City.

Among casino boosters, several urged commissioners to select a project with the most potential to revitalize the cityscape. Two local developers - Bart Blatstein of Provence and Ken Goldenberg of Market8 - received the most support on that front.

Vegetable wholesaler Joseph Procacci got an endorsement from the Whitman Council neighborhood group for the Casino Revolution project, while Las Vegas developer Steve Wynn received the backing of the painters' union.

But the Rev. Robin Hynicka, pastor of Arch Street United Methodist Church in Center City, called gambling "a menace to society."

He recounted the plight of a young Philadelphia couple who left their two young children alone at home in the middle of the night while they went to a casino to gamble away a \$300 bonus from work.

"I would like for you to consider that there is no good location in Philadelphia for a casino," Hynicka said.

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