

The Cordish Companies wants to build a casino with 4,750 slot machines near the Arundel Mills Mall. But to move forward, it must have a majority of county voters check "yes" on Question A on Election Day. Recent polls suggest that Question A has support from area residents, but not by a wide margin.

The debate over Question A has gotten intense, with Cordish battling anti-slots

groups, including Against Slots at the Mall. Many of the issues surrounding the debate are still unclear to many residents, so we'll try to break it all down in a friendly "five for Friday" format.

What is Question A really about? – The interesting thing about Question A is that it does not mention Arundel Mills and does not mention the Cordish Companies. The question centers on a zoning law passed by the county council, and makes no reference to a specific site or company. Voters are being asked to approve or reject a zoning change that would allow for slots in certain kinds of industrial zones and commercial complexes. The material effect of a "yes" vote on Question A is that the area near Arundel Mills would be permitted to have slot terminals. Cordish would be able to build its casino quickly because it has a conditional license for slots. (The license kicks in with the zoning change.) But approval of Question A would, in theory, also allow for slots at some other sites in the county if Cordish changed its mind about the whole project.

Is the casino in the mall or not? – If there is one point the Cordish Companies and pro-slots groups have wanted to hammer home, it's that the planned casino would not be located inside Arundel Mills Mall. Rather, it would be a separate standalone structure located about where the current parking lot to the food court is. It appears they are correct, based on the most recent plans or the site. Anti-slots folks, on the other hand, have pointed to planning documents from January that feature the words "in the mall" when referring to the casino's location, suggesting that developers did not plan a standalone structure. They also recently quoted a county planning and zoning official as saying the casino would be "connected" to the mall, but that official said his comments were used in a wrong and misleading way. Regardless, there are many slot opponents who don't like the location, whether it's inside or outside the mall.

Would a vote against Question A kill slots for good in Anne Arundel County? – This question brings to mind the scene from "The Princess Bride," in which the character Miracle

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Max offers a monologue about the difference between "dead" and "all dead." A vote against Question A would amount to a flat rejection of zoning laws that would allow for slots in the county. But the issue could always be resurrected, albeit not easily or quickly.

A move to Laurel Park, as some have suggested, would require Penn National to unload its majority ownership of the racetrack, since it already owns a slots facility in Maryland. And the new owner would have to somehow obtain a slots license from the Maryland Lottery Commission.

Perhaps the biggest question is whether, after years of debate already, there would be enough public and political support to re-raise the issue in order to place slots at a different location.

Isn't the Against Slots at the Mall group funded by Penn National? – Yes. The Against Slots at the Mall group is largely funded by Penn National Gaming, which owns 51 percent of Laurel Park and has casinos in Perryville, MD and Charlestown, WV. But anti-slots groups said they have never hid that fact, and are quick to point out that most of their campaigning has been performed by concerned volunteer residents.

"I don't have any financial connection to this other than living a third of a mile from the mall," No Slots at the Mall President Rob Annicelli said. "That's my motivation."

How much money would a casino earn for the county? – That's probably an impossible question to answer accurately, because it's impossible to predict how many people would come to a casino near Arundel Mills. But here's one guidepost: the Maryland State lottery reported that the new Hollywood Casino in Perryville pulled in \$2 million during its first four days, for an average of \$346 per machine, per day. That casino has about one-third the number of machines as the planned Arundel Mills facility.

What's known for sure is that Anne Arundel County would get 5.5 percent of all slots proceeds. Another 48 percent of slots revenue would go to the Maryland Education Trust Fund.

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