

Debating a casino in Carlisle: Council will listen to residents' comments Thursday | Carlisle

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 09 May 2018 10:01 -

Parx Casino officials addressed Carlisle Borough Council last week about their proposal to bring a minicasino to the borough.

Thursday night, borough residents get their turn to tell the council in person what many have been saying through social media posts, emails and phone calls all week.

The borough council will meet at 7 p.m. Thursday at borough hall, 53 W. South St. Those who wish to be recognized early in the comment period are asked to contact the borough at 717-240-6920 to be placed on the agenda.

A vote is not expected to be taken on the issue Thursday evening. Borough officials have said the earliest a vote could be taken would be in June.

Comments will be limited to three minutes each, according to a post on the borough website. Borough officials are also asking residents not to repeat what others have already said in order to give more people the opportunity to speak. A Facebook post concerning the meeting also noted that "this a 'comment period' and not designed as a way to debate council members or staff."

At last week's borough council workshop session, Anthony Ricci, CEO of Greenwood Gaming & Entertainment, which owns and operates Parx, sketched out what the borough might expect to see should the borough council vote to overturn its previous resolution to opt out of hosting a casino in town. The Category 4, or mini, casino would have between 300 and 750 slot machines and could also add up to 30 table games initially.

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Officials from Greenwood Gaming & Entertainment said Wednesday that a casino located in Carlisle could bring \$1 million each to the boroug...

In February, the owners of Parx Casino picked a general location along Interstate 81 in Cumberland County for its Category 4, or mini, casino. The minicasino could be built anywhere within 15 miles of a centerpoint in South Newton Township.

The casino owners have roughly four months remaining on their six-month window in which to apply to the state for a Category 4 slot machine license. That application will contain the precise site of the proposed casino, as well as details about the casino.

The Borough of Carlisle falls within the required 15-mile radius, but its council voted 4-2 in December in favor of opting-out of allowing a casino. The legislation governing the casino licensing process allows a borough to opt back in later.

Talk of the town

"This issue does seem to have lit a fire under many of our residents, both new and long-term. I have received comments and questions from residents both on the borough email and on my personal email," said councilwoman Deb Fulham-Winston.

Councilwoman Dawn Flower-Webb said residents have been sending links to articles and providing data for borough officials to use in making a decision that would carry long-term implications.

Many who favor the casino have cited economic and entertainment benefits, but Flower-Webb said most who have expressed their opinion are against it. They have questioned the real value of the jobs the casino will bring and the true cost of the casino to the borough. Residents have also voiced concerns about traffic issues and the casino's potential effect on vulnerable citizens.

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“Having a casino in an easily accessible location for individuals who have a gambling addiction or are challenged in some way by gambling would be a concern,” said Scott Shewell, executive director of Safe Harbour, a nonprofit agency in Carlisle that helps the homeless and potentially homeless.

People can become homeless for a host of reasons, but among them is an addiction to gambling. As with other addictions, those addicted to gambling spend their resources on the addiction rather than what it takes to maintain a household, Shewell said.

Ricci last week championed the company’s responsible gaming program that he said limits compulsive gambling issues, which includes the option for those with gambling problems to “self-exclude,” or effectively ban themselves, from casinos.

According to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board’s annual report from 2016-17, 11,567 people requested such self-exclusion as of June 30, 2017. Of those, 58 percent opted for a one-year ban, 20 percent for a two-year ban, and 22 percent placed themselves on a lifetime ban from the state’s casinos.

Charm factor

Echoing sentiments expressed by residents at last week’s workshop meeting, councilman Sean Shultz said a casino would “upset the basic character and historic charm of our town.”

  



The fourth minicasino license auctioned off by Pennsylvania gambling regulators is for a location in the South Newton Township area, officials...

Though Parx officials did not name a potential location, the most viable locations are at the gateways to the town which, Shultz said, sends the wrong message.

“While I understand the allure of the revenue that may be derived from a casino, I do not believe we should sell away the essence of our town,” Shultz said.

Jonathan Bowser, CEO of the Cumberland Area Economic Development Corp. said that though the goal would be for casino visitors to also stay overnight, he’s confident Carlisle would not become fully identified with the casino.

“It complements what Carlisle already has to offer. It’s not going to make Carlisle’s identity,” he said.

Greenwood Gaming & Entertainment said the casino is projected to bring in \$50-55 million, of which the borough and the county each would receive 2 percent, or about \$1 million each. The casino is also expected to generate about \$50 million in annual economic benefit to the community.

The borough also can’t overlook the tax benefits of hosting a gaming facility, Mayor Tim Scott said.

“The good we can do with increased and improved services while holding the line on taxes is one of the driving factors your elected officials are obligated to consider,” he said.

Scott also said a minicasino would add value to the Carlisle experience, attract other investment and economic development, provide jobs and allow the borough to increase and improve public services without raising taxes or fees.

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“After balancing all the factors I mentioned above plus others, I am in favor of the vote to repeal the opt-out provision council adopted in December,” Scott wrote in an email.

Should Scott be joined by three other members of the council to overturn the opt-out resolution, he said he will hold Greenwood Gaming accountable to the community and make sure they deliver on their promises.

Job growth

In his presentation last week, Ricci said the casino is expected to generate 250 jobs, of which two-thirds would be full time. All save servers who receive tips would be paid more than minimum wage with the average employee earning \$42,000 per year.

“In any kind of economy, any time you can get those kinds of jobs and that kind of investment it’s going to be a win from an economic perspective,” Bowser said.

Fulham-Winston, however, pointed out that there was a “wide divergence” between the wage figures cited by Parx officials and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show a range of salaries for casino workers in Pennsylvania in its 2017 report. Gaming dealers receive an average hourly wage of \$9.44 per hour with an annual average salary of \$19,640.

First-line supervisors earn an average of \$25.03 per hour for an average of \$52,050 per year. All other gaming workers earn an average of \$14.92 per hour or \$30,190 per year.

On the whole, Scott said the “doom-and-gloom scenarios” have not materialized since gambling was legalized in Pennsylvania in 2003.

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“I have carefully weighed the possible negative impacts in our community, and I do not think many of the arguments hold weight,” he said.

Kirk Wilson said a minicasino can be an asset to the community, suggesting opponents are basing opinions on emotion rather than fact.

“The movie industry in years past made casinos look like dens of inequities. I can’t say whether they were or not, but people are basing their opinions on fiction, not fact,” he wrote in an email to The Sentinel.

Wilson said the casino would not be on the scale of those in Las Vegas or Atlantic City, and would not put additional strain on the borough police department. He pointed to Hollywood Casino in East Hanover Township in Dauphin County which does not have its own police force. State police provide law enforcement.

Wilson also said statistics being used by those opposed to the casino are from studies that are 5-10 years old and fail to take into consideration how a smaller casino would affect a community.

There’s also a big “what if” question that hangs over the whole discussion.

“What if we say no and a neighboring township says yes? What if we have a casino on our border with a Carlisle address and we receive nothing to manage the challenges?” Flower-Webb asked.

Any casino wanting to move into a neighboring township would face the same uphill battle it faces in Carlisle as Parx officials would have to ask those municipalities to overturn the “opt-out” resolutions that they, too, passed last year.

Read more <http://news.google.com/news/url?sa=t&fd=R&ct2=us&usg=AFQjCN>

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