

Louisiana Gaming Board approves license for proposed St. Tammany casino

Written by Administrator

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A California company is one step closer to opening a casino in Slidell thanks to a decision by the [Louisiana Gaming Control Board](#) on Wednesday to approve the relocation of a Bossier City riverboat casino to the company's proposed site in St. Tammany Parish.

In a unanimous vote, the Gaming Board approved the relocation requested by Pacific Peninsula Entertainment (P2E), which has plans to build a \$329 million casino resort named Camellia Bay at a site on Slidell's lakefront. The company, based out of Los Angeles, owns the DiamondJacks Casino, which [closed its doors permanently](#) in Bossier City after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic more than a year ago.

The company plans to operate its riverboat on the waters of Lake Pontchartrain, offering another option to gamble that doesn't require a drive to Kenner or New Orleans.

Construction could begin as early as 2022 and be completed in about a year, though additional regulatory and political hurdles will need to be cleared before the company can break ground. One of these includes a referendum election for St. Tammany voters to reverse a parishwide no-gambling law passed in 1996. The state bond commission has to approve this election even taking place.

Parish council members voted 8-6 in June to place the question on the Nov. 13 ballot. St. Tammany's Economic Development District inked a deal with the company that could fatten the parish coffers by way of a 5% rake of the casino's net revenue, which is projected to be \$153 million its first year, providing an estimated \$32.9 million for the state and \$7.6 million for St. Tammany. Donna Jackson, an auditor with Louisiana State Police's Gaming Enforcement Division, said the company's financial plan to build the new resort appeared to be in order but emphasized that none of those projected revenue figures are guaranteed.

The Gaming Board came to its decision without debate but not without opposition.

The board heard from only one opponent Wednesday — Scott Jones, a lawyer representing a Slidell couple that has been fighting the casino's relocation, which according to their lawsuit, would place it within about 750 yards from their Lakeshore Estates home.

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The couple, Chandler and Jason Goltz, have a lawsuit pending in the 19th Judicial District but attended Wednesday's meeting to ask the Gaming Board to delay its vote on the company's license transfer.

Jones argued that any vote of approval by the Gaming Board on Wednesday would be approving a gambling license in a parish where gambling is still illegal. He said it is unconstitutional for the Gaming Board to grant a license before a majority of St. Tammany voters decide to legalize gambling.

Jones asked the board to instead pull P2E's current license in Bossier City and place it up for bid to give different companies across the state a chance to run a casino. He said the company has held onto a "rare riverboat gaming license" for more than a year without operating a riverboat casino.

"Let's let the citizens benefit from the money that would generate all across Louisiana," Jones said. "There's no particular reason to leave that with a single company when there are other companies that might be interested in that."

Countering Jones' argument was Assistant Attorney General Jeremy Gathe, who said the Gaming Board has no authority to decide whether such action would be unconstitutional.

"Here the petitioners are asking the board to render a declaratory ruling on the constitutionality of a legislative act," Gathe said, adding that such action is "strictly a function of the judicial branch of government."

After hearing from both attorneys, the board allowed representatives from P2E to show a PowerPoint presentation that touted the various perks the company promises to bring to St. Tammany Parish, including an estimated 1,000 direct ongoing jobs, half of which they intend to fill with St. Tammany residents.

"We've been looking forward to this moment for literally years," P2E founder Brent Stevens said.

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