

## Betting on when a casino license will be issued? Wait until next year - Patriot-News

Written by Administrator  
Friday, 17 December 2010 23:06 -

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**Published: Saturday, December 18, 2010, 12:00 AM** **Updated: Saturday, December 18, 2010, 12:05 AM**

Midstate residents might have to wait longer than expected to know if Pennsylvania's last resort casino will wind up here.

Some lawmakers want the state Gaming Control Board to hold off on awarding the license.

And two of the four applicants for

the last casino license want to reopen the process so additional information can be considered, which could further delay the board's decision.

State Rep. Curt Schroder, R-Chester County, sent a letter Wednesday to board members asking the board to hold off on making a decision. Four board members' terms expire next month.

Schroder is asking the Gaming Control Board to wait until the newly appointed members, chosen by lawmakers and the governor, are seated next month.

Four sites are vying for the license, including Holiday Inn Harrisburg West in Hampden Twp. and Mason-Dixon Resort and Casino near Gettysburg. The license allows up to 50 table games and 600 slots for an established resort.

Board spokesman Richard McGarvey said the vote to award the license is slated for its 10 a.m. Jan. 6 meeting at The State Museum in downtown Harrisburg.

The Gaming Control Board had been expected to make a decision on the resort license before the end of the year. But this month, the board said it wouldn't make an announcement until the Jan. 6 meeting at the earliest.

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It's possible new board members could be appointed by the following meeting, which is scheduled for Jan. 26.

Schroder argues it would be more prudent to wait to make the decision.

“Waiting an additional month or two until new members are appointed and educated on each applicant will ensure confidence that the board is making the best decision,” Schroder wrote. “Further, it will ensure that the board members who have to implement the decision are the ones who made it.”

Two of the four legislative appointees on the seven-member panel must be replaced next month.

Kenneth McCabe, chosen by Senate Republicans, and Jeff Coy, appointed by House Democrats, will reach their term limit of three consecutive two-year terms in mid-January. The men can serve until a replacement is named but cannot be reappointed to the board.

The other two legislative appointees could be reappointed to another two-year term or could be replaced. Either way, the change in January won't tip the partisan makeup of the board.

Gov.-elect Tom Corbett won't have a chance to replace any of Gov. Ed Rendell's appointments until board chairman Gregory Fajt's term expires in July. Terms for Rendell's other two appointments don't expire until 2012 and 2013.

Schroder pointed to past problems the board has faced.

On Thursday the board revoked the license of the long-stalled Foxwoods Philadelphia casino — the first revocation in the board's six-year history.

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“We don’t want to see that happen again,” he said.

While many House Republicans agree with Schroder, House Speaker-designate Sam Smith, R-Jefferson County, isn’t advocating one way or the other because he appoints the caucus’ board member, spokesman Steve Miskin said.

Incoming House Majority Leader Mike Turzai, R-Allegheny County, said he supports Schroder’s efforts.

Senate President Pro Tempore Joseph Scarnati, R-Jefferson County, has no intention on telling the board whether they should or shouldn’t wait to award the license, a spokesman said.

“Our philosophy has always been immensely hands-off,” said Drew Crompton, Scarnati’s chief of staff. “We don’t tell the board members what to do. We don’t tell our appointee what to do — he has to make those decisions.”

Representatives from the four groups seeking the license were reluctant to comment on how a change in the board might affect their applications.

“We do not get involved in matters between the Legislature and the Gaming Control Board,” said David La Torre, spokesman for Mason-Dixon Resort and Casino, the group behind the Gettysburg-area casino.

Only one applicant expressed a preference of when the board would award the license.

“We’re still hopeful that the gaming board will make the decision to award the license at the January hearing,” said Gina Bertucci, spokeswoman for Fernwood Hotel and Resort in the Poconos.

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Regardless of any personnel changes the board may face, their decision could be delayed for another reason.

Any board member — new or old — can ask to reopen the record to have questions answered or take in additional information, McGarvey said.

So can the license applicants.

Mason-Dixon Resort, the company proposing the casino near Gettysburg, filed a petition this month asking the Gaming Control Board to reopen the official record so that new information on the Nemaquin and Isle of Capri financial situation can be included.

That petition has gained the support of the group behind the proposed Hampden Twp. casino project as well as the Meadows Racetrack and Casino in Pittsburgh. A Gaming Control Board spokesman said the board would likely consider the petition at its Jan. 6 meeting.

The operator for the Nemaquin project, Isle of Capri, said it plans to use proceeds from the Nemaquin casino to help fund another casino project it has in Missouri.

Isle of Capri is the most highly leveraged gambling company in the nation and might not have enough cash on hand or enough borrowing capacity to complete the Missouri project without aid from Nemaquin, according to news reports.

Isle of Capri denied there is a problem. But a spokesman for the Gettysburg project said the Isle of Capri financing plan relies on “cushions and precise timing from cash flow they don’t own and from a casino they haven’t built.”

*Kari Andren contributed to this report.*

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