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BY SUSAN STAR PADDOCK

Gettysburg casino promoters are doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Their attempts were rejected by the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board in 2006, by the Harness Racing Commission in 2007 and 2008, and should be denied this time.

Mason-Dixon's

shocking location sparks the most controversy, but it also has a weak business plan, will damage Gettysburg's economy and is legally ineligible for a resort casino license.

Mason-Dixon has targeted Cumberland Twp., which surrounds the borough of Gettysburg and is home to most of Gettysburg National Military Park. In 2005, the investors tried to locate one mile from GNMP's boundary, creating overwhelming opposition. Now they are closer in the Eisenhower Inn, a half-mile from the political boundary of the GNMP.

The Eisenhower does not meet the state's legal requirement that the Category III license be awarded to a "well-established resort ... having substantial year-round recreational guest amenities." This license requires gamblers to be hotel guests or buy at least \$10 of a resort's amenities. Seeing little to offer at the Eisenhower, and a plan showing no revenue for resort amenities, the board questioned whether Mason-Dixon wants to circumvent the legislation to create a "mini Class II casino."

Even Penn National, Mason-Dixon's own operating partner, feels no loyalty to the plan. Its vice president testified that another applicant would bring more revenue to the state and added that Mason-Dixon's proposal for 50 table games was "unrealistic." Mason-Dixon projects that its table games will earn 80 percent more than the state average.

In 2006, the board said there was no "credible evidence" a Gettysburg casino could compete for gamblers and that's still true. Surrounded by large casinos an hour away, Mason-Dixon is forecasting a locals' casino with 87 percent of the revenues from rural day-trippers. Investors predict that 30 percent of Adams County adults will lose \$1,200 a year. As one board member said, these inflated numbers "don't add up."

Mason-Dixon says it'll produce more battlefield tourists, a claim greeted with skepticism by the board and contradicted by its own data showing little traffic going from the casino to other attractions. A casino is unlike any other business in that it redefines the area it occupies as a casino town. Solid data show that when casinos come to heritage tourism towns, visitation to the historic resource plummets as it did in Vicksburg, Miss., where 40 percent of the historic downtown is now shuttered.

Heritage tourists have been the backbone of Gettysburg's economy for 147 years. Studies show these customers differ from recreational tourists because they travel for meaning, learning and authenticity and avoid places marred by incompatible development. Casino proponents argue that these customers are being unreasonable to object to a casino near the GNMP, but vacation choices are based on feelings. Heritage tourist avoidance would cost Adams County hundreds of jobs, so while the casino would hire, dozens of mom-and-pop restaurants and tourist shops would be hurt. Because Gettysburg is an anchor for PA tourism, the negative economic impact would extend statewide.

Even unlicensed, this proposal and its predecessors have made locals less trusting and more contentious. The wounds of casino-related skirmishes in community groups were barely healing when this new proposal was uncovered. The Legislature could prevent this with a buffer zone incorporating more of the actual battlefield.

Gettysburg has a long history of exploitive development approved and later removed because of local and national opposition. Since investors' plans were discovered by a Patriot-News reporter, the board has received more than 41,000 opposition petitions and a deluge of correspondence.

Locally, it's opposed by the faculty of Gettysburg College and 16 community groups ranging from the Adams County Medical Association to the Adams County Farm Bureau. Statewide, Gov. Rendell, Gov.-elect Corbett, Sen. Casey and Congressman Platts have joined four Pennsylvania newspapers in opposing it.

Nationally, dissent is voiced by the US News and World Report, seven of the most-respected preservation and veterans groups, 275 top historians and 8,870-plus Facebook members. No Casino Gettysburg's volunteers, inspired by Gettysburg itself, include Ken Burns, David McCullough, Susan Eisenhower and others appearing in our filmed PGCB testimony.

Gettysburg casino plan fails on many levels - PennLive.com

Written by Administrator

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Though their reasons for opposing the project are many, most agree that a casino a half-mile from the boundary of Gettysburg National Military Park would forever change the meaning of this place by exploiting these now silent killing fields.

The Battle of Gettysburg left 51,000 American casualties in three days, and in the most memorized speech in the world, President Lincoln asked us to “never forget what they did here.” It was a fight over principles, and the Gettysburg Address forever defined our nation as a union free of slavery. The state should never diminish the context of this monument to national sacrifice or change the identity of Gettysburg. The board should just say no casino Gettysburg.

SUSAN STAR PADDOCK is chair of No Casino Gettysburg.

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