

## Fate of casino in Petersburg takes setback in Senate committee

Written by Administrator

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RICHMOND, Va. (WWBT) - A Virginia Senate committee voted against moving forward State Senator Joe Morrissey's, D-Richmond, bill to allow a casino in Petersburg, late Thursday. The 9-7 vote was a significant blow to Petersburg, which hopes to welcome the ONE Casino + Resort project, that was rejected by Richmond voters, last year.

Morrissey's legislation would add Petersburg to the current list of cities eligible for a casino. But it also barred any locality which already voted 'no' - Richmond - from holding another referendum ballot question on a casino, for five years.

Meantime, the City of Richmond's second attempt to get residents a "re-do" casino referendum on the November ballot, could come down to a court battle.

"I disagree with the mayor (of Richmond) because he didn't respect the democratic approach there, and Petersburg is just that city that the General Assembly wants to have a casino," said Sen. Morrissey.

Morrissey said he immediately pushed to bring the casino to Petersburg, after Richmond voters rejected the project, by meeting with CEO Alfred Liggins of Urban One, the company behind the casino, the next day.

"I said Alfred don't be despondent, don't be disappointed. You lost, but let's go down to Petersburg. Let's talk to the mayor," said Morrissey of his conversation with Liggins. "The next day we were eating lunch with the mayor and one of the council people."

A House version of the same bill to bring a casino to Petersburg is still alive in the statehouse. Next week, could be a pivotal week with more votes. If the bill passes the House, it can be taken up by the Senate. But again, state senators already shot down the idea once, at this point.

Meantime, Mayor Stoney used part of his State of the City Address this week to tout the missed

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economic opportunities as a reason to continue the push for a Richmond casino.

“I urge members of the General Assembly to remove any legislation that would prohibit Richmond from acting on this great opportunity,” said Stoney. “If the referendum is successful, we will utilize revenues from that project to modernize city and school infrastructure and provide a \$0.02 reduction on the real estate tax.”

Morrissey says Petersburg tax revenue could jump by 30 or 40 percent if a casino is built there. He also said it's not guaranteed that it would necessarily be the ONE Casino, that would go up in Petersburg.

“Alfred said, at the end of the lunch... I'll be the preferred vendor, right? And we, the mayor and I looked at each other and, no, they'll be all the proposals will be equally vetted and the best man wins,” Morrissey said.

Richmond City leaders have not ruled out litigation if it comes to it.

NBC12 did reach out to those involved in the ONE Casino + Resort project to see where the group stands on all this back and forth. We've not heard back.

NBC12 also reached out to the City of Petersburg for comment and a spokesperson for the city declined.

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