

Written by Administrator
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With state lawmakers considering a gambling expansion that could threaten the soon-to-open casino in Des Plaines, Mayor Martin Moylan believed he needed to be where the action was.

He spent hours on Sunday shaking hands with lobbyists and grabbing phone or face time with legislators. It was his third trip to the capitol in two months to “educate” those who might be voting on whether to

add new casinos and allow slots at race tracks.

“When you’re face to face, they get the feeling of how passionate you are on the issue rather than phoning,” Moylan said. “You wait all day.... but it’s a process. It’s just how the process works.”

At a time when casino revenues are already down, gaming officials believe profits could plummet further, hurting the Des Plaines facility which is scheduled to open in July.

“You’ve got to be here to protect your interests,” Moylan said, dressed in a black suit and leaning on the third-floor railing in the capitol.

The fate of the proposed expansion is unclear as attention is focused on reaching agreement on a tax increase before new legislators are sworn in on Wednesday. Recent amendments to the bill would give existing casinos more gaming positions, various state tax breaks, a \$2 million renovation tax credit, and force Arlington Park to hand over one-third of its gambling revenue annually to Des Plaines.

If the bill passes, Moylan said the latest changes are a “good first step to alleviate the amount of pressure” off the city which, to land what it thought was the 10th and final casino license, agreed to pay the state \$300 million over the next 30 years and promised to share 40 percent of its revenue with 10 needy communities, including Chicago Heights, Summit and Dixmoor.

Gaming officials said they believed the Des Plaines casino would make as much or more than the Grand Victoria Casino in Elgin – the state’s most profitable casino – because of its proximity

to O'Hare International Airport and Chicago. But that prediction could change.

"Des Plaines will basically have a semi-circle of casinos 30 miles around it," said Tom Swoik, executive director of the Illinois casino gaming association, if the bill passed as written. "This expansion is too large."

Swoik also said the recent concessions of tax credits or more gaming positions wouldn't offset the losses for Des Plaines from additional casinos. He said casino revenue is down 32 percent in the state since the smoking ban took effect in 2008 and the economy soured, and it could drop another 12 percent if the expansion passes.

Moylan made the rounds Sunday for four hours, traveling from floor to floor and grabbing the latest version of the bill, quickly scouring the text for last-minute changes. As she talked with Moylan, Rep. Elaine Nekritz, D-Northbrook, said she's unsure which way she'll vote, but is worried the expansion is too expansive. She said she's heard from many of her Des Plaines constituents for and against the legislation.

Although the Des Plaines City Council hasn't decided how to spend the casino's profits, Moylan said the money would most likely be earmarked for upgrading neighborhoods by repaving streets, creating permeable alleys, and increasing sewer sizes.

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