

Upstate, Opposition to a Casino Is a Surprise

Written by Administrator

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Horses at the Saratoga Casino and Raceway racino, which developers want to convert to a larger, full-scale operation. Ángel Franco/The New York Times

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. — With its rich history of horse racing and a 19th-century gambling parlor so opulent that it drew comparisons to Monte Carlo, this upstate enclave would seem to be a natural choice to receive one of the state's [new full-scale casinos](#).

Yet what was once thought to be a fait accompli — that the casino designated for the capital region would wind up in Saratoga — is no longer a sure thing, and much of that is because of a coordinated resistance from many residents and business owners.

They acknowledge that the city's fortunes have long been intertwined with gambling. Even now, with its world-class thoroughbred track closed for the season, a smaller harness track attracts visitors the year round, thanks to its so-called racino, filled with slots-like video lottery terminals.

But they say that the city does not need or want a full-fledged casino.

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“Why mess with a good thing?” said Colin Klepetar, a middle school teacher who has helped organize against it. “This is already a world-class town.”



Slots-like terminals at the racino. Ángel Franco/The New York Times

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The opposition stands in stark contrast to the support in areas like the Catskills and the state's Southern Tier counties along the northern border of Pennsylvania, where business and political leaders have long pushed for casinos to revitalize stagnant economies and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has banked on gambling as a solution to upstate economic woes. And even in Saratoga, city and county officials have endorsed the idea.

Mr. Cuomo pushed for a statewide referendum: The measure, which authorized as many as seven new casinos, [was approved](#) in November, with 57 percent of voters in favor. But it did not pass in Saratoga Springs or in Saratoga County.

"This community voted no by 57 percent and the county voted no by 54 percent," said Sara Boivin, an art historian who is a member of Saratogians Against Vegas-Style Expansion, or SAVE, which has been lobbying local politicians and protesting against potential casino developers. "We just want that message to be taken by officials."

The group, which formed soon after the referendum, has canvassed neighborhoods, packed meetings with opponents and gathered more than 1,000 signatures on petitions urging leaders to reject a new casino. Similar opposition has also been seen in several communities in neighboring Massachusetts. Nonetheless, the uprising in Saratoga has caught some local officials off guard.

New York already has five Indian-run casinos, all of them upstate, and nine racinos at racetracks, including the successful one here — the Saratoga Casino and Raceway — which developers would like to see converted to a larger, full-scale operation.

Developers are finalizing plans in the Catskills, the Hudson Valley and the Southern Tier, where competitions for casinos have pitted neighboring towns or counties against one another. Other cities in the capital region recently approved pro-casino resolutions, including Rensselaer, the downtrodden city across the Hudson River from Albany.

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Southampton



Not to be placed in the same category as the casino in the state of New York, the state of New York is a surprise.