

Casino Revolution stresses commitment to South Philadelphia

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Casino Revolution's commitment to South Philadelphia and plans to get its gambling hall up and running early make it the best choice for Philadelphia's second casino license, PHL Local Gaming officials told the state gaming board this afternoon.

PHL Local Gaming, led by produce magnate Joseph Procacci, is one of five applicants for the license, proposing a facility called [Casino Revolution](#) that would be located in South Philadelphia's stadium district. The bidders are making presentations and answering questions at suitability hearings before the Gaming Control Board this week.

Officials stressed Procacci's long work in South Philadelphia, and said those ties would enable Casino Revolution to begin operations sooner than the other applicants. PHL Local Gaming officials also asserted that their site, at Front Street and Pattison Avenue, is the best location of the three groups proposing casinos in South Philadelphia.

"I love South Philadelphia," Procacci said. "I will build a casino that I will be proud of and that you, my fellow Pennsylvanians, will be proud of."

Casino Revolution would open at least six months before any other bidder, its backers say.

That's due in part to Procacci's long business in the district. He owns a warehouse that will be integrated into the casino complex, giving PHL Local Gaming a big head start on construction.

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An expedited casino with 1,500 slot machines would open early -- about nine months after construction starts -- while the rest of the casino and hotel are under construction, officials said.

"We will generate more tax revenue more quickly," PHL Local Gaming executive John O'Riordan said. The planned 2,400 slot machines would be operating a year after construction begins, he said, with the hotel opening about eight months later.

Gaming board members, however, appeared skeptical of the phased construction plan.

Casino Revolution said it was committed to a full opening, and Merit PHL President Pete Ferro described another Merit project, Silver Reef Casino in Washington state, as an example of successful phased development.

That casino is now its seventh phase of development, adding luxury suites to its hotel, Ferro said.

More development phases could follow for Casino Revolution.

The project is the only proposal with the space to eventually expand to the full 5,000 slots permitted by law, said Cory Morowitz, an analyst who did a market assessment for the project. And Casino Revolution could do that on one level -- an important feature, he said, since multi-level casinos generally do poorly due to patron-flow patterns.

In addition, PHL Local Gaming is planning an entertainment complex that includes a water park, zip line, golf driving range, pool and soccer fields. That complex, officials said, would get visitors to South Philadelphia more frequently.

Procacci's long work in South Philadelphia means area businesses and residents support the casino project, Casino Revolution officials say.

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"We have tremendous community impact and community support," O'Riordan said.

PHL Local Gaming officials also said their planned site is the furthest of the three South Philadelphia proposals from residential neighborhoods. The site is also closest to Interstates 95 and 76.

Like the other casino applicants, Casino Revolution's backers faced questions about market saturation in the Philadelphia region. The group said the recent dip in Pennsylvania gaming revenues means the casino industry needs a jolt, not less investment, and there's room in the market for expansion.

"At present, the southeastern Pennsylvania market is not fully supplied," economic consultant Eugene Christiansen said. "It is not saturated."

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