

Mayor says she's working on new casino resolution

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 19 February 2014 07:59 -

SARATOGA SPRINGS >> Mayor Joanne Yepsen said she is working on a resolution regarding full-scale casino gambling to bring to the City Council that would “update” the council’s previous resolution on the subject, passed in December 2012.

That resolution stated, among other things, that the “Council expresses its strong support for Saratoga Casino and Raceway as a location for one of the seven potential casinos to be authorized.”

Yepsen would not say when the resolution would come out, whether it would take a side in the debate over whether Saratoga Springs should be the location for a casino. She was also vague about exactly what it would address, saying “it is still a work in progress.”

Yepsen said it is important for the resolution to “reflect the current thinking” of the city and the council.

She pointed out that at the time of the previous resolution, which passed the City Council unanimously, “we didn’t have nearly the public comment” that have been generated at recent council meetings.

Tuesday night was no exception. The crowded Council Chambers was packed with people wearing red shirts emblazoned with Saratogians Against Vegas-style Expansion (SAVE), as well as SAVE buttons and stickers. A handful of residents were also wearing white Destination Saratoga shirts — an organization that supports locating casino-style gambling at the Saratoga Casino and Raceway.

The public comment period of the meeting drew people on both sides of the issue, though more from the SAVE side of the argument.

“I beg this council to think long and hard about what we are inviting into our community,” said Ammy Holgate, wearing a red shirt.

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A man who said he was part of the Saratoga Quakers called the plan for casino-gambling "parasitic" and asked "what do you profit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul?"

Still others argued table gambling would bring the region jobs.

Local hotel developer Mike Hoffman, president of Turf Hotels, said the idea of a casino being located in a nearby community that Saratoga Springs would have to compete with "keeps me up at night."

That sentiment echoes the December 2012 resolution of the City Council, too, which urged the governor to be more open about site selection prior to the referendum.

Yepsen said the new resolution would reflect that "the city is still divided" and some of the concerns of local groups, such as the City Center Authority which last week voted its opposition to a proposed 24,000 square-foot multi-purpose event center located at the Saratoga Casino and Raceway.

City Center Authority President Mark Baker read the resolution, which argues the event center would undercut "pedestrian/consumer traffic in the central core business district" by drawing business away from the City Center.

The resolution specifically did not address casino gambling, though.

Yepsen said she will bring the concerns to the New York State Gaming Commission at an upcoming meeting. Those concerns, too, will be rolled into the new City Council resolution.

Meanwhile Saratoga Casino and Raceway is expected to submit its site plans for a \$30 million expansion that includes a five-story, 120-room hotel as well as the event space to the city's

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land-use boards within the month, Yepsen said.

That project is expected to move forward with or without full-scale casino gambling.

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