

State casino board gets an earful in Poughkeepsie

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 23 September 2014 20:25 -



A crowd turned out for the New York Gaming Facility Location Board's public comment session on Tuesday in the City of Poughkeepsie. (Photo: Darryl Bautista/Poughkeepsie Journal)

The state's three-city tour to gather public opinion about where new casinos should be built heads to Ithaca today, Wednesday, one day after capacity crowds packed the Grandview in Poughkeepsie.

Many came in colored T-shirts supporting — or opposing — proposals.

There was green for the Sterling Forest Resort in Tuxedo, orange for the Grand Hudson Resort and Casino in New Windsor, and blue for the Nevele in Ellenville.

A small group in yellow shirts opposed the Tuxedo project.

There were others, too, their wide range of interest reflected in their choice of clothing — everything from business professional, to Hasidic black or jeans.

"The turnout is phenomenal. We had a line developing from the time we showed up here (Tuesday) morning," said Robert Williams, executive director of the New York State Gaming Commission.

At stake is the chance for the Hudson Valley and Catskill region to get at least one, and possibly two, casinos.

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A state board is reviewing 16 casino proposals statewide.

Nine are targeted for sites in Ulster, Orange and Sullivan counties.

None are proposed for Dutchess County.

Later this year, the board will recommend at least one project for each of the state's three regions.

One of the regions, which includes the Albany area and the Southern Tier/Finger Lakes area, may get the green light for a second casino.

Since it has twice as many proposals as any other region, the Hudson Valley is the likely choice for two casinos.

Charles North, president and CEO of the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce, came to express support for a plan by Caesars to build a casino in Woodbury, Orange County.

"After looking at all the facts, we found that Caesars is the most economically feasible and community-minded organization reaching across the river," North said. "They are interested in helping veterans. They are interested in helping the disabled community. They are interested in hiring people through our workforce development program."

North's counterpart, Ulster County Regional Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Ward Todd, spoke in favor of a plan at the Nevele Resort in Ellenville.

"It really does speak to the character of a community," Todd said. "This is a perfect fit because that's what was there before."

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Not all wanted a casino to come to the region.

The Rev. Bill Banuchi, executive director of the Marriage and Family Savers ministries and institute in Newburgh, objected to any expansion of legalized gambling because of the adverse effect on families.

Others framed their hopes in stark economic terms.

Ellenville Mayor Jeff Kaplan said his village "is dying." He cited a steady stream of residents on one street who have left the village for other places to live.

"There is no next project for Ellenville," he said about the Nevele. "This is *the* project."

Ellenville resident Humberto Valencia, 42, said a casino would have a spillover effect on other businesses.

"There are bungalow colonies and other hotels in the surrounding areas," he said. "That will provide even more opportunities for employment."

No less desperate was a group of residents from Newburgh supporting a proposal in nearby New Windsor, even though the city council is backing a different project.

"We need the jobs," Newburgh city resident Deborah Danzy, 57, said. "We need the education. We need the streets fixed. We need it for job training."

Though some have criticized casinos as generators of mostly low-paying jobs, Danzy saw those same jobs as an opportunity for a "poverty-stricken" city.

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"City of Newburgh people are not looking for \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$80,000 jobs," she said.

"We know we can do the maintenance, the housekeeping, the cooking. I feel if Newburgh were to get this casino, it would generate a lot of jobs for the community."

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Public meetings

The final of three hearings will be held Sept. 24 to allow the public to weigh in on the casino proposals. The hearing will be held from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at Hotel Ithaca, 222 S. Cayuga St., Ithaca, NY 14850

VIDEO

To see a video report from the hearing in Poughkeepsie, go to Poughkeepsiejournal.com

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