

## Fireworks expected at casino hearing

Written by Administrator  
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**DAILY NEWS**

VEGAS-STYLE fireworks could go off during a City Council committee meeting today when officials from the gaming company seeking to build the city's second casino square off with critics who've accused the developer of discriminating against African-American customers.

Among the dozens of people who've signed up to speak against the Cordish Cos. are six former employees and customers who allege to have witnessed or been victims of racial discrimination at the company's Fourth Street Live! entertainment complex in Louisville, Ky.

Paula Peebles, chairwoman of the Philadelphia chapter of the National Action Network, traveled to Louisville in August to investigate the allegations against the company. In September, NAN issued a report titled "Indicted," which claims to corroborate allegations that the company uses its dress-code policy to keep black people out and hires whites to start fights, resulting in only blacks being kicked out.

Peebles has said her organization is not opposed to the \$450 million casino and hotel being built in the stadium district, as long as there is no participation by Cordish. The Baltimore company owns numerous entertainment venues around the country, including Xfinity Live! in South Philadelphia.

"We've come together to appeal to Council to do their due diligence. Read the report from the National Action Network. Speak to the individuals who have been affected by racism from Cordish Companies," Peebles said last week during a news conference outside City Hall.

Peebles and others at the news conference had previously asked Council to hold a special hearing, believing that today's Rules Committee meeting would not provide sufficient time to all who want to testify. Councilman Kenyatta Johnson, in whose district the casino would be built, and Rules Committee Chairman Bill Greenlee rebuffed that request. Greenlee last week said

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everyone wanting to speak will be heard.

While the committee's business with the casino project is limited to voting on two zoning bills, the racism allegations are likely to get most of the attention.

"We need Council to stand up for the majority of Philadelphians who are black and brown and yellow," Bishop Dwayne Royster, executive director of POWER, a grass-roots religious organization of 45 churches, said at last week's news conference.

"If you're only going to stand up for a handful of people that are going to make the money and then abuse the people of Philadelphia, you should not be in office. This is a travesty, this is a tragedy," Royster said.

In haste to fight back against the allegations, Cordish stumbled twice last week. A news conference that was to take place at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown on Friday morning was canceled abruptly. Later that day, the company issued a news release in which it inaccurately stated that it and partner Greenwood Gaming and Entertainment Inc. had reached agreements with the city on four "groundbreaking initiatives."

Cordish chief operating officer Zed Smith, in an interview, said the news release headline was misleading. "The overall agreement was with the state, the state Gaming Control Board, but there are benefits to the city," Smith said.

Stadium Casino LLC, the name under which Cordish and Greenwood are operating, has committed to paying all employees no less than \$12 an hour, employing a permanent workforce that is 50 percent minority and 40 percent women and hiring 47 to 58 percent of construction contractors that are minorities and women, according to the news release.

The casino partners have also committed to reporting to a Diversity Oversight Board, which will monitor their implementation of diversity goals, and have signed a community-benefits agreement with five community groups who will be the casino's neighbors.

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Under the agreement, Stadium Casino will establish a \$15 million fund from which a Community Advisory Board will administer grants to local communities during construction and 20 years thereafter, according to the news release.

Smith, who is scheduled to testify today, said Cordish is not a racist company, but is one that will provide good jobs for city residents.

"I would encourage the citizens of Philadelphia to focus on the facts, and the facts are, we're generating tremendous revenue for the state and the city. We're generating 3,000 construction jobs and 2,000 permanent jobs," he said.

"Over the years, we've invited 50 million visitors to our venues, we've hired over 25,000 employees. We're proud of our track record, and we'll stand on our track record," Smith said.

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