

Proposed Sugar Creek casino hearing brings out friends, foes - Kansas City Star

Written by Administrator
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Those for and against a proposed Sugar Creek casino had their say in a public hearing Wednesday.

Supporters included the Jackson County executive, a former Sugar Creek mayor and several area residents.

Opponents included representatives of Ameristar Casinos Inc., the Kansas City Port Authority and several area residents.

Much of the conversation at the Mike Onka

Memorial Building was driven by the possibility of adding perhaps 1,000 jobs, the estimate given by casino applicant Paragon Gaming Missouri LLC.

Jack O'Renack, Sugar Creek's mayor from 1981 to 1993, recalled jobs lost when Amoco closed its refinery in 1982.

"Our quality of life has not been the same since," he said.

Jackson County Executive Mike Sanders told Missouri Gaming Commission members that the Sugar Creek proposal enjoyed significant local support. That is in apparent contrast, he added, to a proposed casino in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

A measure on the Nov. 2 ballot will allow Cape Girardeau voters to approve or disapprove of gambling.

State Sen. Victor Callahan urged commission members "not to fear competition" in regard to "what the state of Kansas may or may not do."

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That was apparently a reference to the Hollywood Casino, now under construction near the Kansas Speedway.

Bill Dunn Jr., executive vice president of J.E. Dunn Construction, suggested that his company could get the Sugar Creek casino open before the Kansas Speedway facility, expected to be completed in 2012.

Finally, Rick Hemmingsen, Independence Chamber of Commerce president, reminded commissioners of the area's most famous citizen and his regard for games of chance.

"Harry Truman did play poker," he said.

In opposition was Troy Stremming, public affairs representative of Ameristar, who maintained that another local casino would dilute gambling revenues "in a market that is already saturated."

Vincent Gauthier, executive director of the Kansas City Port Authority, argued that a Sugar Creek casino would imperil the financial health of the four existing area casinos while not adding significantly to the state's revenues.

Susan Julian Davis, a resident of the Courtney Bottoms district of Sugar Creek, adjacent to the proposed casino site, said that she and other area property owners should have been given more information.

"None of us have seen any ideas about what the plan involved," said Davis, who said she was not necessarily opposed to it. "As a matter of courtesy, I think it would be nice to know what is planned."

James Mathewson, Missouri Gaming Commission chairman, found Davis' remark interesting.

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“Why didn’t somebody go out to see her?” he asked.

The hearing Wednesday, he said, was held to generate as much dialogue as possible.

It followed forums Monday and Tuesday in Cape Girardeau and St. Louis.

Mathewson said he was awaiting an analysis from state economic development officials, expected next month.

A decision on which applicant receives the license — if any — should be made by the end of November.

“We still have a long way to go,” Mathewson said.

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