

Stadium district casinos make neighbors nervous



The Hollywood Casino Philadelphia as proposed by Penn National, in which some revenue would flow to the city. (Source: Penn National Gaming Inc.)

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LINCOLN FINANCIAL FIELD will soon play host to an anxious, angst-ridden crowd of people - but they won't be Super Bowl-starved Eagles fans.

The Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board is set to hold public-input hearings May 8 and 9 at the stadium as the battle for the city's second casino license lumbers forward.

So, why the angst?

Three separate proposals call for casino complexes to be built in South Philly, not far from the area that's already home to the Linc, Citizens Bank Park, the Wells Fargo Center and Xfinity! Live.

The influx of traffic for games and concerts at the venues has long been a bone of contention for neighbors. The potential for even more congestion already has local groups on alert.

The Gaming Control Board said it had to add the hearing on the 9th because all of the speaking slots had been filled for the eight-hour hearing on May 8.

Shawn Jalosinski, executive director of the Sports Complex Special Services District, the nonprofit that serves residents in the stadium area, said in an email earlier this week that the organization's leaders "unanimously oppose any casino to be located south of Oregon Avenue, based on concerns of increased traffic congestion, security, and neighborhood quality-of-life impacts."

The SCSSD stretches from 20th to 7th Street, and from Oregon Avenue to the I-95 South entrance near the Navy Yard.

Representatives for the proposed South Philly casinos downplayed the possibility of adding to congestion woes in the area, which hosts 380 events and about 8 million visitors every year, according to the SCSSD.

PHL Gaming, which wants to build the Casino Revolution at Front Street and Pattison Avenue, touts the fact that it would be almost a mile away from a residential neighborhood.

"We've been lumped into the broad category of the stadium-district casinos, but we are not, geographically, a part of that community," said Bruce Crawley, spokesman for Casino Revolution. "We're the furthest removed from any residential properties."

Karen Bailey, spokeswoman for Penn National Gaming - which wants to build the Hollywood Casino at 7th Street and Packer Avenue - said casino customers, unlike fans heading to sports games, won't flood the area en masse at the same time.

"Our customers flow at all different times," she said.

They would also probably want to avoid congestion, too. "Convenience is important to a casino customer," Bailey said. "They want to get in and out."

A spokesman for the Stadium District Live Hotel & Casino, proposed for 9th and Packer by the Cordish Cos. and the owners of Parx Casino in Bensalem, could not be reached for comment.

For more on the hearings, visit gamingcontrolboard.pa.gov.