

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

SPECIAL MEETING

May 3, 2008

MINUTES

1. Meeting called to order: 10:13 am
2. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
3. Roll Call: All present

4. Application of Valley Forge Convention Center Partners:

The Valley Forge Convention Center Partners have made application to the PA Gaming Commission to operate a Category 3 gaming establishment which would allow them to install 500 slot machines in the Convention Center. The official state hearing on this application has been set for May 20 at 9 am at the Dolce Hotel (formerly the Valley Forge Hilton) on DeKalb Pike. The meeting today was to provide information to the Board of Supervisors about issues surrounding the operation and to allow citizens the opportunity to provide feedback on their concerns to the Board of Supervisors. The Board will then formulate its own testimony to be presented to the Gaming Commission on May 20.

The applicant told the Board that the operation would provide direct revenues to the township in the area of \$1.2 million. The same amount would be provided to the county which would comprise a sum of funds from which grants can be requested. The funds would be held by the state.

The applicant noted that the conversion of an interior space for the slots parlor would meet all township requirements for construction permits. The applicant also said there would be no need for storm water management as there would be no increase in impervious space. The applicant also said there were approximately 2,257 parking spaces which would be adequate for any additional traffic which the slots might bring in.

The applicant further said the slots operation would enhance the already destination quality of Upper Merion Township which attracts many people from around the region and the country who come to the township to shop and to visit Valley Forge National Historical Park. In addition to the direct revenues the applicant said those attracted by the slot machines would also spent funds in other commercial establishments in the township.

The state regulations require that anyone who wants to play the slot machines must be a patron of the facility which also includes a hotel, restaurants, convention space, and bars. The regulations call for a person to have spent at least \$10 with the facility.

The applicant noted that they were prepared to invest millions in the establishment of the gaming center and that it would bring new jobs into the township. The applicant claimed there would be insignificant impacts on traffic generation and surround residential areas. Also that adequate police and fire services, water and sewer systems were already in place.

There are currently no detailed plans for the physical plant and the applicant said they would not incur that expense until the Gaming Commission provides approval of the application. They noted, however, they were prepared to meet all of the township's requirements.

The question of operating hours was discussed and the applicant said that if the business is there the facility could operate seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The facility will, however, not open if there is insufficient business.

5. Christopher Craig, Counsel, Senate Democratic Appropriations Committee:

Mr. Craig has been involved in the formulation of the state laws concerning gaming and volunteered to address the Board about the application and the overall philosophy of the state in allowing legalized gambling.

He said that prior to the legislation the state had done market research on locating gaming sites and that the premier site in the entire state for gambling was King of Prussia. However, he said the state was primarily interested in allowing the race tracks in the state to have the advantage of slot machines. Therefore the legislation was written in such a way that Philadelphia Park and Chester Downs, both in the metropolitan Philadelphia area would have licenses that allowed for up to 5,000 slot machines. He said the King of Prussia site would not be allowed to compete with the racetracks as that would be in opposition to the intent of the legislation. He also said the same regarding two licenses meant for the City of Philadelphia.

Overall the legislation for a Category 3 license was directed at a King of Prussia site and that the Valley Forge Convention Center was an appropriate venue. He urged the Township to fully participate in the licensing process and to negotiate with the applicant and to seek from the Gaming Commission conditions which would make the application more of a benefit to the township.

6. Robert Loeper , Township Planer

Robert Loeper, the township planner, addressed the Board concerning some planning issues. He addressed primarily the question of the number of parking spaces at the facility. He noted that in the past the Center has made private arrangements with adjoining property to increase parking capacity. The Center then operated a shuttle service. Since there are no detailed plans available he could only estimate the parking situation. One item he pointed out was that currently large trucks and RVs park in the lot and that these large rigs take up quite a bit of space. He also noted that it appears that some of the available parking spaces on in the PennDot right-of-way and that the “herring” pattern of lot striping was not conducive to maximize use. Since the facility is a mixed use, care has to be taken with no only the number of spaces but also the management of the parking lot. He recommended a plan be developed to handle these issues.

7. Brian Keaveney, P.E. Pennoni Associates, Inc., Township Traffic Engineering Consultant

Depending on the time of day and day of the week, he estimated additional traffic of anywhere from 250 to 325 vehicles trips per day would be generated by the slots operation. He also brought to the Board’s attention the current traffic congestion that in general area. The main problems he cited were Route 422 and the uncompleted River Crossings Project. He also called for parking lot management.

8. John Waters, Director of Safety and Codes Enforcement

A number of issues that should be addressed include a proper calculation of the combined weight of 500 slot machines, the amount of space that should be allocated for each machine, and the ability of in-house security to handle minor EMS services. He said he had researched with other municipalities that have gaming and determined that the increase of EMS runs was not significant but that they should be called only when needed and not for issues that can be handled in house.

Waters noted that with the parking lot situation, large rigs then to pull head on into a space but then have to exit straight ahead which puts them going head on against the parking lot's internal traffic. There was also considerable discussion about how to calculate the number of persons allowed on the gaming floor at any one time. Waters explained a variety of variables that go into the calculation but that his department could and would establish those standards and enforce them.

Bill Jenaway, president of the township's Fire and Rescue Services Board, spoke regarding the problems getting apparatus into position on the site due to the manner in which the parking lot is laid out. He also urged that after final plans are available the applicant could be requested to provide fire and rescue funds to make those services more efficient at the site.

9. Ronald Fonock, Chief of Police

The police department researched a number of municipalities along the East Coast to determine their experiences with gaming and the impact on law enforcement. Police staff also visited Philadelphia Park for an on-site tour and interviews with State Police and managers of the facility. Chief Fonock noted that the PA State Police have the responsibility for handling enforcement inside the gaming locations. Previously participants reported that 11 Troopers are assigned to each facility.

Chief Fonock reported that he found no serious impact on law enforcement and that crime generated was not serious. He did say that fender benders, thefts from cars and the like were reported. Philadelphia Park, he noted, which has 3,500 slot machines had 88 arrests last year. The crimes were theft, assault, disorderly conduct and what he called, "liquor crimes." Fonock recommended that radio communications be enhanced at the facility so that communications would not be a problem should police need to respond.

10. Public Comment

One resident said he and his family had over the years, frequented the Convention Center but that the addition of a gaming center did not fit his vision of what the Center or the Township was. He also said he was concerned about parking, future growth of the facility, and that the slots operation would change the character of the Township.

A second resident also opposed the gaming operation saying that the ripple effect of traffic would cause problems in other areas of the Township even if the traffic increase is small.

A third resident said he and 70 members of his senior citizen group were unanimously in favor of the gaming center, said he would generate revenue and provide another source of entertainment.

A fourth resident urged the Township not oppose the facility and to seek to gain as much revenue as possible from the operation.

Two other members of the public spoke but were neutral on the question of the slots operation. One said any future revenue should go towards a community center, and the other, an off-duty State Trooper said he and his colleagues were committed to serving and protecting the community.

11. Adjournment: 1:12 pm