

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
GAMBLING IMPACT COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
Monday, April 14, 2008

The scheduled meeting of the Northampton County Gambling Impact Committee was held at 6:35 PM, April 14, 2008 in the third floor County Council Meeting Room.

ROLL CALL

The following committee members were present:

Robert Balum	John McGeehan
John Conklin	Robert Pfenning, Chair
Jill Mancini	John Stoffa
Ross Marcus, Vice-chair	Ann Terres
Victor Mazziotti	

The Chair noted that Phoebe Teichert has resigned from the committee. He thanked her for her service and wished her well.

The Chair noted that Jill Mancini has been designated as the person responsible for gaming law matters within the County Solicitor's Office.

There was no media representative present.

The following municipalities were represented:

Freemansburg Borough	Hellertown Borough
Hanover Township	Lower Saucon Township

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

After soliciting input from the municipality representatives, the Committee approved the December 10, 2007 and February 11, 2008 minutes as distributed.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR RE: AGENDA ITEMS

No comments were made by those present.

OLD BUSINESS

Gambling Addiction

1. The chair distributed handouts regarding gambling addiction, definitions, diagnostic criteria and a portion of a May 2007 study done which sort of provides a benchmark showing how the gambling addiction criteria are met in the Lehigh Valley.

2. Ann Terres distributed information about an April 26, 2008 seminar to be held in Bethlehem dealing with the "Dynamics of Compulsive Gambling in our Community".

3. The Chair announced the following planned speakers on the topic of gambling addiction:

6/08 Representative from the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board's Office of Problem Gambling

9/08 Representative from the Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem discussing their program for dealing with problem gambling

10/08 Ross Marcus reporting on the County's Social Services Task Force on Gambling Addiction

Pennsylvania Ethics Commission and Section 1512 of Act 71

The Chair distributed handouts from the Pennsylvania Ethics Commission's website including a decision flowchart to be followed to determine who is a "public official" under Act 71, an Introduction to the Commission's Gaming Act List, Northampton County's response to the Commission regarding authorities and boards to be on the List, and Northampton County's description of the duties of this Committee. A discussion ensued regarding situations under which members of this Committee would be classified as "public officials" if they did not meet other criteria, specifically the expression of an opinion or a recommendation regarding any matter under Act 71. Jill Mancini was tasked with reviewing the law to clarify this topic.

Municipal Grants

1. John Stoffa reported that the County's General Purpose Authority was still considering whether or not it wished to be the authority which will make the municipal grants, but will probably reach a decision within a month. He also noted that Act 71 contains no provision for administrative fees to pay for the costs of the authority making the grants.

2. The Chair pointed out that this committee has no authority or requirement to determine how municipal grants should be awarded. That decision rests solely with the authority designated by County Council to be the grant making authority.

3. The Chair distributed a Pittsburgh Post Gazette article showing how contentious grant awards can be. He noted the comment that those unhappy with the approach taken should seek a revision of the law.

4. The Chair distributed a press release regarding the award of municipal grants in Luzerne County. He noted the similarity of the Act 71 grant awarding rules for Luzerne County and Northampton County. He also noted that all the grants seemed to be for capital projects and not personnel costs. There was a limited discussion of whether the City of Bethlehem could (the Chair felt it can) or should apply for a municipal grant given the host fee they already will receive under the law. The feeling was that they should not apply.

5. After the municipal representatives indicated that discussion should continue, Jill Mancini gave her opinion on some of the legal issues involved with the municipal grant proposal submitted by four of the five "contiguous" municipalities (review promised at the December 10, 2007 meeting).

Her comments covered whether or not the proposal met the definition of a grant (it does), whether all grants need to be awarded through a competitive process (does not seem to be required), whether or not specific purposes of the grant need to be specified (probably not if grant falls within the uses specified in the law), and whether or not grants need to be specifically tied to the impact of the casino's operations (other than health and public safety grants could go either way -- there is a current lawsuit before Erie County Court which may decide this issue).

6. The municipal representatives present clearly made their point that they do not wish to be burdened with excessive administrative costs incurred to prove a casino impact that needs to be funded.

7. The Chair noted the need for whatever grant making process is used to be as fair as possible to all eligible grant recipients, including the requirement that the "contiguous" municipalities receive "priority" due to the greater impact they would clearly face. If the process isn't carefully developed, the flow of grant funds may be delayed by lawsuits.

Other Old Business

There was no other old business discussed.

NEW BUSINESS

Request to City of Bethlehem

The Committee discussed how it should request a copy of the gambling impact on crime study done by the Police Commissioner of the City of Bethlehem. By a majority vote, the Committee asked Robert Balum to request a copy through the Northampton County Police Chiefs Association.

Chair Reports

The Chair briefly commented about the Fourth Annual Pennsylvania Gaming Congress, gambling trends and plans in Pennsylvania, and progress being made on the Bethlehem facility.

Other New Business

There was no other new business discussed.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR ON ANY GAMBLING IMPACT MATTER

No comments were made by anyone present.

ADJOURNMENT

Note that the next Committee meeting will be held Monday, June 9, 2008