



State gambling officials accepting bids for next casino

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A first winner of Philadelphia's two gaming licenses failed to turn this parcel into a casino.

Let the scramble begin for Philadelphia's second gaming hall.

The state gaming board announced yesterday that it would begin accepting applications for the license which it yanked from the stalled Foxwoods project in December 2010. State lawmakers had discussed allowing the license to be rebid statewide, but no action has been taken.

The board's decision does not rule out a possible change by legislators, but will at least start the process. A number of high-profile suitors are expected to apply, including developer Bart Blatstein, Parkway Corp. President Robert Zuritsky and real estate magnate Don Peebles. Business mogul Donald Trump applied for a license during the first bidding in 2006, but it is unclear if he plans to submit another application.

Mayor Michael Nutter, who initially opposed casinos but was one of many elected officials who lobbied to keep the second license in Philadelphia, applauded the decision, arguing that it would provide much-needed revenue for schools and create thousands of jobs.

Some critics claim the market for casinos in southeastern Pennsylvania is oversaturated with SugarHouse, nearby Parx Casino in Bensalem and Harrah's Philadelphia in Chester. SugarHouse, however, led the state's 11 casinos in gross revenue per slot machine in May.

"I think the picture is better than what people were forecasting before," said Stephen Mullin, former city commerce director and current senior vice president for Econsult Corp., which is conducting an economic impact study for Blatstein.

Casino opponents said the move will further perpetuate gambling addiction in the region. "It's a predatory industry and there's more prey to be had," said Paul Boni, a board member of Stop Predatory Gambling, a national advocacy group.

Winner still about year away

The gaming board will accept applications through Nov. 15 and any decision on a winning bid

could take nine to 12 months, according to board chairman William Ryan Jr.

The state law that authorized casinos in 2004 called for Philadelphia to have two licenses. In 2006, the gaming board awarded the licenses to SugarHouse Casino, which opened in September 2010, and the Foxwoods project proposed for Columbus Boulevard near Reed Street in South Philadelphia, which never materialized due to a series of financial problems.

Gaming board spokesman Doug Harbach said there will be public hearings in Philadelphia before the license is awarded.

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