

The Boston Herald

Suffolk CEO says casino will reduce crime in Eastie but numbers don't add up

By O'Ryan Johnson
Thursday, June 14, 2012

A Suffolk Downs bigwig pitching a casino plan to East Boston residents Tuesday night vowed to fight crime around the gaming resort by adopting good practices used in other cities and towns.

"In Wilkes-Barre, crime went down after a casino moved in," Chip Tuttle, Suffolk Downs' chief operating officer, told the audience, referring to the Pennsylvania host city of a Mohegan Sun casino.

But according to FBI crime numbers and the district attorney of Luzerne County, crime has actually gone up in several categories since the casino opened in 2006. From 2005 to 2010, larcenies shot up 20 percent, property crime jumped 13 percent and aggravated assaults increased 12 percent.

"I believe it's just increasing," said Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis. "Yes, homicides may have gone down, but every year is different with homicides and rape. The burglaries, the property crime — those things I don't think have gone down. ... We get approximately 5,000 cases a year, and it's been increasing."

Suffolk Downs spokesman Christian Teja said Tuttle misspoke, citing Wilkes-Barre instead of another Pennsylvania town where they say crime has gone down.

"Chip sometimes refers to locations where resort casinos have recently been built and early data shows little impact on crime statistics," Teja said. "In discussing Pennsylvania, where resorts have been developed in several different locations, he meant to cite Bethlehem, where the mayor noted a decrease in crime in his 2012 State of the City address."

In Bethlehem, a casino opened in July 2010. While FBI statistics are not available for 2011, the bureau's numbers for Bethlehem from 2009 to 2010 show a 6 percent increase in violent crime and a 7 percent increase in property crime, as well as jumps in robbery and larceny. Burglary in Bethlehem rose 20 percent over those two years.

East Boston resident Brian Gannon, who is part of a group opposed to the casino, said Tuttle's flub has him worried about other data presented Tuesday night.

"If this is the way it's going to be going forward, we're in a lot of trouble," he said. "We need to look at all the other data they're currently using, the traffic studies, everything."