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Casino opponents, supporters sound off at Tyre meeting

By DAVID L. SHAW dshaw@fltimes.com | Posted: Friday, May 2, 2014 11:10 am

TYRE — The split among local residents over the proposed casino and resort was evident at Thursday night's Town Board meeting.

Casino supporters and opponents attended a public hearing on Local Law No. 3 and a special board meeting that followed. Few directly addressed the local law, as urged by Supervisor Ron McGreevy. Instead, they made it a forum for the two sides.

The local law would amend the town zoning law by adding the definition of a Planned Unit Development and allowing the amendment of the town zoning map to include a PUD district for the proposed casino resort on an 86-acre parcel on Route 414 just north of the Thruway.

Casino supporter Karen Thomson asked what would happen if the PUD amendment were approved and the casino plan accepted but the Wilmorite Corp. did not get a state license. She wondered if a new party would have to go through the entire PUD process again.

She didn't get an answer as her question was followed by comments opposing the casino from Lynn Barbuto, who read a letter she said was from Daniel Schultz, the leader of the local Amish community. Schultz claimed the casino would have several negative impacts on the Amish farming community.

Cathy Davis said the casino does not conform to the opinions of a majority of residents in a survey on their priorities for a new comprehensive plan. She said most favored maintaining the town's rural character and agricultural base, with gambling not a priority.

Desiree and James Dawley also opposed the casino project, citing many negative impacts they felt would result from the \$350 million resort.

Sandra Picchi questioned why the board was considering the local law when the PUD law was being challenged in court. Arguments are scheduled for May 7.

James Nearpass also said a casino does not fit with the comprehensive plan.

Christina Fitch of Liverpool urged the town not to allow the casino. She listed the "realities" of gambling and the gaming industry, saying they far outweigh any positives.

“I’ve been to all meetings since December,” chimed in Richard Worden. “Questions have been asked of the board, but there has been no response. As elected officials, you answer to the people and you haven’t done that.”

Asking to speak at the special board meeting were casino opponents Nelson Acquilano of the Finger Lakes Council on Addictions and Les Bernal of Stop Predatory Gambling and casino supporters Carmina Russo, Nancy Bush and Tina MacDonald.

Acquilano, citing national studies, recited a long list of the negative impacts on families, individuals and communities from gambling.

“I urge you to reject this. Stop the epidemic that destroys families,” he said.

Bernal is head of the Stop Predatory Gambling Foundation in Washington, D.C. He spoke at a Thursday press conference at the casino site and stayed to address the board.

Also citing studies, he was harshly critical of gambling and casinos for numerous negative impacts on a community. He was especially critical of government-sponsored gaming, noting that few politicians and casino owners who promote gambling don’t gamble themselves.

He disputed claims of casino developers about jobs and promoting tourism in the community by casino visitors.

“Your vote in this project will determine who you are as a community,” Bernal said. “If you vote yes, you are promoting unfairness and inequality. If you vote no, you favor fairness and equity for all.”

Russo said her work in customer service at the Waterloo Premium Outlets in nearby Junius convinced her that visitors to a casino resort would be looking for things to do and places to go while here.

Bush pointed to the potential for 1,800 casino/resort employees and 1,200 construction jobs, noting the project would also include a hotel, restaurants and entertainment venues.

MacDonald explained how she believes the casino project conforms with survey findings.

Later, the board reviewed comments received from seven parties in response to a letter sent by the town asking if they objected to the town being lead agency for the State Environmental Quality Review Act process for the casino.

Consulting attorney Virginia Robbins and consulting engineer Brian Cummings noted that no one objected to the town being lead agency.

But several listed concerns that they wanted addressed in the SEQRA review.

The board agreed those concerns will be addressed in the process of developing a mitigation plan. Those concerns include wetlands protection, stormwater control, drainage and traffic issues.

The town Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board also made comments that will be addressed. They include improved traffic controls at two nearby intersections, economic factors, impact on local businesses and property values.