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Daily Southtown

Will County eyeing ban on more video gambling

April 2, 2015

By [Susan DeMar Lafferty](#) Daily Southtown

With 27 businesses in unincorporated Will County now offering video gambling, county board members believe enough is enough, and they plan to vote to prohibit any more machines.

The county board's executive committee voted unanimously Thursday to forward the issue to a vote by the full board at its April 16 meeting. If approved, a ban would not apply to those with existing licenses or those in the process of applying for one.

Board members said video gambling had grown faster than they anticipated, and the county board had expected the state to establish tighter regulations. Only the state can regulate video gambling, and the county's only authority is to prohibit it.

"It's gotten out of control," board member Suzanne Hart, R-Naperville said.

"We have enough (gambling licenses), and we should prohibit any proliferation as soon as possible," board member Tom Weigel, R-New Lenox, said.

All but one person who addressed the committee spoke out against video gambling, and most were from the area near 194th Street and Harlem Avenue in Frankfort Township, where Len McEnery has proposed a gas station that could include a convenience store and video gambling.

"We should not have to worry about a mini-casino right outside our bedroom windows," resident Linda Arnold said, urging board members to "protect the children and teenagers."

Placing video gambling machines in a 24-hour business that's "15 feet from swing sets" in homes' back yards is "inexcusable," said Wayne Kendall, a 194th Street homeowner.

"Video gaming will change entirely how this gas station will be used. It will become a destination," said Charlotte Harrington, whose house is two doors from the proposed station.

The most compelling testimony came from a St. Charles woman, Melinda Litchfield, a national victims advocate with the Stop Predatory Gambling movement, who said gambling "nearly destroyed her life" because she became addicted to it.

Video gambling machines "are designed to create addicts. The least of what I lost was money," Litchfield said, citing a loss of dignity, respect, relationships and her job. "There are millions of people like me."

She said video gambling is presented as a "cash cow" with minimal unintended consequences, "but this could not be further from the truth," she told the committee, adding that the "mayhem" that results is real "and you will be left to fix it."

The Frankfort Township residents near McEnery's planned gas station are petitioning to have the state require that establishments offering video gambling be at least 500 feet from residences and schools.

Board member Mike Fricilone, R-Homer Glen, said Will County has 27 establishments with video gambling licenses and 57 with liquor licenses in the unincorporated areas. He was initially unsure about imposing a ban, saying "we cannot stop in the middle after allowing 27. Those 27 will have an advantage over others." But he later voted to support the ban.

Moustis said he's not opposed to video gambling, but the state's regulations "could not be more liberal." He thought the state would limit video gambling to age-restricted establishments, such as bars and restaurants where alcohol is served, but "they have allowed just about everyone to have a license," he said.

The growth of video gambling in places such as cafes, salons and boutiques was never anticipated, Moustis said, adding that a business should not need gambling to be competitive. Until the state restricts it, the county should prohibit it, he said.

The only person to speak in favor of video gambling Thursday was John Saccomanno, a sales representative for Universal Gaming Group, who said he has heard only "favorable feedback" from places that have the machines. The businesses "make a nice profit, and it does not attract trouble," he said.

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