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## Chicago Tribune

# St. Charles leaders reopen talks on video gambling



*A crowd of residents listens to debate about allowing video gaming in St. Charles at a city council committee meeting on Aug. 3. (Alexa Aguilar, For the Chicago Tribune)*

By [Alexa Aguilar](#) Chicago Tribune

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A year after it refused to entertain the idea, the St. Charles City Council is re-opening the debate on whether it should allow video gaming in the city.

The residents who made their case at Monday night's council committee meeting fell into two camps: those who thought video gaming would invite a host of social ills and doesn't fit with St. Charles' image, and business owners and fraternal lodge members who thought that a few machines would provide a helpful financial boost.

"Video gambling is not my business ... but it keeps the doors open," said Bob Karas, of South Elgin, owner of Rookies in St. Charles and other Kane County restaurants with video gaming machines.

Since the law allowing video gaming machines passed in 2009, the state's gaming board has issued 7,000 licenses for machines throughout the state, city officials said.

So far, the Tri-Cities, Campton Hills, and Sleepy Hollow are the lone holdouts in Kane County, said Police Chief James Keegan.

Chris Minick, the city's finance director, said that depending on how many eligible St. Charles establishments received a license, the city's take would range between \$173,900 and \$695,000 a year, depending on how many of the city's eligible establishments receive a license for up to five machines. The state of Illinois, the machine operator, and the establishment also receive a cut of the machine's income.

Ald. Rita Payleitner said she opposed the measure, as those amounts of revenue mean that millions were lost by residents playing on the machines, and that the revenue for the city doesn't outweigh the negatives it would bring.

Ald. Maureen Lewis said that after years serving on the mental health board and allocating money to social service organizations, she had reservations about approving gambling in St. Charles.

Melynda Litchfield, a St. Charles resident and spokesman for non-profit group Stop Predatory Gambling, told the aldermen of her own gambling addiction and the family and financial problems it created. She moved to St. Charles in part because of its absence of video gaming, she said. The consequences of video gaming addiction can include child neglect, bankruptcy, and suicide, she said.

"Please maintain this town as it was meant to be, and like your signs say, a number one place for families," she said.

But Ald. William Turner, and a few members of the audience, took issue with the idea that adults couldn't partake in a legal activity.

"I don't believe in nanny government," Turner said, and it's not the problem of the 98 percent that 2 percent can't "handle themselves."

Mayor Ray Rogina also spoke in favor, saying he was skeptical that St. Charles' image would be affected by allowing video gaming.

"I trust we can manage it properly," he said.

Other aldermen said they wanted more information and discussion and agreed to continue the discussion at the Aug. 17 committee meeting.