

A review of the New Bedford casino public forum at the Z

On June 23, 2015, New Bedford voters will decide if the City of New Bedford will permit the operation of a \$650 million gaming establishment on the New Bedford waterfront. The third and final public forum is scheduled for June 17 from 6:00pm to 8:00pm at Normandin Middle School.



On Wednesday, June 10th, approximately 250 people attended a public forum on the potential casino coming to New Bedford. It was hosted by Leadership SouthCoast and SouthCoast Media and featured nine panelists. Each panelist had roughly 5 minutes to present their thoughts on a casino and a Q & A followed. Here's a summary of the panelists:

STRONGLY ANTI-CASINO VOICES

Rev. David Lima from the Inter-Church Council of Greater New Bedford and Stephanie Rafael-DeMello representing the fishing

industry (Bela Flor Seafood Brokerage and Northeast Fishery) were the most vocal anti-casino voices. Rev. Lima pointed out the negative impacts of a casino (addiction and crime) and Stephanie Rafael-DeMello was concerned about the traffic congestion along the New Bedford waterfront. She stated the fishing industry is already going through a trying time and a casino would negatively impact the industry.

STRONGLY PRO-CASINO VOICES

KG Urban's Andrew Stern and New Bedford Economic Development Council's executive director Derek Santos were major proponents of the casino. They reviewed the highlights of the **Host City Agreement between KG Urban Enterprises and the City of New Bedford**. Andrew Stern pointed out some key points during his time and the Q&A:

- Several non-profits and other businesses have tried to move to the NStar location to include the Ocean Explorium. They estimated the clean-up would cost about \$9 million, but funded studies revealed the cost would be \$50 million or more. The total cost to get the area ready to build the casino is estimated at \$100 – \$120 million (\$30 million to buy the land, \$50 million for the clean-up, \$20-\$40 million to move out the heavy equipment and relocate Nstar – now Eversource.) There is no one else coming to clean that area up or bring \$1 billion to New Bedford.
- All entertainment would be hosted at the Zeiterion Theatre.
- Roughly 6,000+ construction and permanent jobs would be created.
- 10s of millions of casino dollars are flowing from MA to RI and CT right now. The biggest clients for a New Bedford casino would be MA residents spending money at casinos outside the state, people south of Boston and people spending money on scratch tickets already.

PRO-CASINO VOICE

Lynn Cunningham, from the Chamber of Commerce in Bethlehem, presented 6 years of data and information related to a KG Urban developed Sands Casino Resort in Bethlehem, PA. She stated the casino filled an important void after Bethlehem Steel left the city in 1988. There was a lot of unused, abandoned space much like the 43-acre NStar facility, where the proposed New Bedford casino would be developed. Lynn Cunningham stated that the casino didn't overtake the town, crime was negligible and Bethlehem is still one of the safest cities in PA. She said there was a small increase in addiction, but it wasn't just the casino. \$3 billion in development money has flowed into the former Bethlehem Steel location since the casino was approved to include building an Arts and Entertainment Center. In her opinion, Bethlehem is a better place since the casino moved in.

NEUTRAL VOICES

New Bedford Police Chief David A. Provencher stated several times that he "...lets the data drive decision making." Originally, he was a believer that casinos bring crime and addiction to cities, but after doing research and reading studies feels there is no increase in serious crime and with planning the New Bedford Police Department "would be in a strong position to handle any extra crime" and that "police departments respond to trends in their community."

R. Carleen Cordwell, a south end New Bedford property owner, felt that if done right, casinos could be a good thing for a community. She stated that "Casinos don't cause crime, poverty does." She is a strong advocate of using the extra money the City would get from the casino to help the city's youth and disadvantaged population.

Jessica Coelho, owner, Tia Maria's European Café, stated that she was neutral on bringing a casino to New Bedford. She pointed out the good and bad.

Charles Carroll, the director of clinical services at High

Point Treatment Center, talked about addiction. His opinion was that casino addiction mostly affect those already gambling (people heading to Rhode Island/Connecticut or doing scratch tickets.)

ELECTION DAY – 23 JUNE

On June 23, 2015 New Bedford voters will be casting their votes to determine if the City of New Bedford will permit the operation of a gaming establishment licensed by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission on approximately 43 acres located off of MacArthur Drive at the site of the former Cannon Street power station.

Voters may cast absentee ballots at the Elections Office in City Hall (133 William Street, Room 144) during regular office hours (8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. Monday through Friday) and on Saturday, June 20, 2015 from 8:00 A.M. to noon. Absentee ballots may be cast until noon on June 22, 2015 (the day prior to the Referendum Election).

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