

**TESTIMONY on HB 1620 PRESENTED TO THE PENNSYLVANIA
STATE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON URBAN AFFAIRS
SUBMITTED BY RENE GOODWIN
2 MAY 2008**

Good morning and thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today on HB 1620. Just two days ago I testified before Philadelphia City Council's Rules Committee on 2 bills that would establish a CED (Commercial Entertainment District) for the area around the proposed Foxwoods casino. It was the last of four hearings. The topics covered during those hearings were the conditions to be met by the casino if the legislation is approved. That experience and process has served as a training ground for today for much has been learned.

There are five questions one must ask in writing a story: who, what, when, why and where. I shall use those words as a guide to present this testimony to you.

WHO

Who is to be served and who is to provide the service. I am not familiar with all existing casino sites or future ones to come but I do know the Foxwoods site, for I live 4 blocks away from it, and will refer to that often as my point of reference. Consideration must be given to the fact that a casino anything less than 10 miles away from a residential community is going to have negative impact on the community.

The Aborn Study, commissioned by Sullivan County, NY states in its introduction "the connection between casino gambling and crime is an important public policy issue not just for a community considering allowing casinos to operate locally, but for adjoining communities as well." The study goes on and cites statistics from most of the locations in the US where casinos exist. I implore you to read them for the statistics are stunning.

**TESTIMONY on HB 1620 PRESENTED TO THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON URBAN AFFAIRS
SUBMITTED BY RENE GOODWIN
2 MAY 2008**

In considering who gets served by the CNID it would be wise to include as broad a number of communities as possible, not just the inner circle.

Who will serve is also an important consideration. There must be true community representation and input from early on not just after the fact. The process leading up to this point has not allowed full community participation in the planning and deciding - and I refer primarily but not exclusively to the passing of Act 71, the enabling legislation. How appropriate that it should be call "enabling"

WHAT

I have been working with the Central Delaware River Advisory Group which is part of the Penn Praxis Plan. The plan is referred to as a civic vision for the Philadelphia waterfront. They two are grappling with how to create an entity that would properly oversee the manifestation of the civic vision. Lengthly discussions over an extended period of time have resulted in some conclusions and recommendations regarding an entity. Those conclusions, soon to be published and made available, include the realization that an in order to successfully achieve the stated goal, the entity must have teeth. These teeth must be not only in the form of who sits on the board but the actual legal organizational construct.

If there are no "teeth", no strong legal teeth, no way of guaranteeing that the parties live up to agreements made, then this will be an exercise in futility.

WHEN

Two casino licenses have been approved in the City of Philadelphia, the only class "A" city in the Commonwealth and yet in this class "A" city the class "A" citizens were not given the right to decide their own fate. And now, if these two casinos are able

**TESTIMONY on HB 1620 PRESENTED TO THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON URBAN AFFAIRS
SUBMITTED BY RENE GOODWIN
2 MAY 2008**

to move forward, then will there be some minimal, very minimal protection provided for the nearby communities that are not 10 miles away but rather 200 to 400 feet.

The point here is that after licenses are granted is almost too late to start developing CNID's and their management entity. I believe it must be considered more like a pre-nuptial agreement and included as part of the licensing process. Once the licenses are granted you have already lost a great deal of bargaining power. It's too late to use birth control after the lady is pregnant.

Provisions must be made early on to protect not only the citizens, but the municipalities and that state. The expenses to be incurred by host communities are huge. There is no way, even with projected casino revenue, to completely cover the added costs. The operative word here is "projected" for that's all they are. If factors come into existence which negatively impact any casino's ability to generate the full "projected" revenue, the municipality and that state will be left holding the bag and it won't be pretty.

Recently, in NY City, the Mayor had to close down some off-track betting facilities. It was either that or subsidizes them. In Atlantic City, plans for mega complexes are being put on hold due to economic downturns, and in Philadelphia, Foxwoods has stated publicly when in prior testimony that it was not certain that Phases II and III of it's project would go forward – which is contrary to what they stated this week. It seems to change depending on to whom they are speaking. But you see, that's my point. What assurances does the state really have? Does it have full control over the economy?

WHERE

This relates back to my question of "who". As the PNA (Philadelphia Neighborhood Alliance), a coalition of 27 civic associations joined in support of responsible waterfront development and to encourage transparency in the democratic process, I didn't understand at first why groups 10 or 20 or 30 blocks away were as concerned as those of us in the target area. That was before I began to learn – learn that

**TESTIMONY on HB 1620 PRESENTED TO THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON URBAN AFFAIRS
SUBMITTED BY RENE GOODWIN
2 MAY 2008**

according to Robert Goodman, who's testimony is in you package, stated that nowhere in the United States was there a casino as close to residential neighborhoods as proposed here. But he further stated that the closer than 50 miles a casino is to a community, the greater the negative impact and the Aborn study verifies the higher the crime rate.

Then I looked at my sister communities 10, 20 and 30 blocks away and I understood. There is a degree of built in protection in and around the casino property and perimeter. But what happens when the problem casino patron walks or drives a few blocks or a mile away? What extra protection will these folks have?

Recently there has been an increase in crime in my very own wonderful residential community. The weakened economy will continue to fuel this increase in crime. Yes, the casino will bring a limited number of jobs but it won't be enough to employ all the unemployed or the nearly unemployable. What it will do is draw them like a magnet to the casino area and the surrounding communities.

At the third of the four hearings to which I referred earlier, Philadelphia's Deputy Mayor Everett Gillison stated that it would cost the City approximately \$17m dollars to hire, train, equip, and house the number of police officers needed to create a special unit to police casino areas. Two weeks later, the City has been forced to reassign other special units to the streets to attack an already high murder rate.

Council members were stunned when the \$17m dollar figure was made public and stated there is not such amount in the budge for the next five years.

So the where not only refers to how wide an area will be serviced, or I should say protected, for public safety is the responsibility of all elected officials, but from where will the money come to protect them, us, me?

**TESTIMONY on HB 1620 PRESENTED TO THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON URBAN AFFAIRS
SUBMITTED BY RENE GOODWIN
2 MAY 2008**

WHY

This is the easiest question to answer – because if casinos are not held responsible, if the owner/developers are allowed to prosper at the expense of the citizens, the municipalities, and the State, then we have completely lost who we are and have become not much different than a drug lord who is calling the shots. Gambling is after all an addiction. I have addiction in my family so I know it's more than a word. I know how it rips a family apart.

In this instance, I'm not just talking about those who become addicted to playing the slots. I'm also talking about those who become addicted to the revenue. Please don't let that happen. Structure this entity, its powers, and its composition as a strong entity that can do more than just perform triage. It has been said that our greatest job is to be good ancestors. Let's not just think for today but for the future.

Thank you.

Rene Goodwin
118 Federal Street
Philadelphia, PA 19147
215.271.5872
renegood@comcast.net