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POSITION STATEMENT

City of New Bedford “Community Host Agreement” Referendum Vote

The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit business advocacy and economic development organization. It has a diverse membership base of 1,000 businesses – primarily small and medium size - in the SouthCoast region of Massachusetts. This policy position is intended to serve as guidelines for the Chamber’s Government Affairs efforts and has been reviewed and approved by the Chamber’s Government Affairs Committee and Board of Directors.

Adopted: June 15, 2015

The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce and its Board of Directors would like to encourage all citizens of New Bedford to take part in the “Community Host Agreement” Region-C Gaming Referendum voting process, which is scheduled for Tuesday, June 23, at all citywide precincts.

New Bedford residents in general need to be engaged, because whether you support gaming in New Bedford or not—you must make your voice heard and take part in this Democratic process.

In the spirit of full transparency, our chamber’s Government Affairs Committee held two consecutive Region-C Gaming meetings in the months of May and June, in which we hosted presentations from New Bedford Economic Council Executive Director Derek Santos and Reverend David Lima, Executive Minister of Inter-Church Council of Greater New Bedford.

Mr. Santos and Reverend Lima have opposing views on the positives and negatives of the casino and the effects it would have on the Greater New Bedford Region.

In order to help you make a more educated decision on your vote, the New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce has provided for you the main highlights and talking points from our last two consecutive Government Affairs meetings, which discussed the both the “pros” and “cons” of a waterfront casino here in this city.

Derek Santos, New Bedford Economic Council Executive Director (5-8-15, New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs meeting)

1. This is a casino proposal on New Bedford's terms, an overall development plan that generates all the greatest possible benefits and makes significant steps towards neutralizing the potential downside.
2. As many as 3,800 jobs will be created by the project as well as over 2,000 construction jobs. Even a conservative estimate of 2,000 jobs would represent nearly two-thirds of the City's current unemployed. There is also a provision in the Host Community Agreement (unique to New Bedford) that clearly states hiring goals for qualified city residents.
3. As per the HCA document, the project will result in \$10 million in local procurement for good and services--a tremendous boon to local companies throughout the city.
4. The agreement represents a significant influx of new revenue, providing a \$4.5 million upfront payment to the City of New Bedford as well as \$12.5 million in annual payments. By way of comparison, this is a 25% increase of what the Brockton -- a city competing to host a casino -- HCA provides. Also, the funding of economic development and community preservation through the HCA will lead to significant re-investment in New Bedford.
5. The casino proposal for Cannon Street is not viewed as a stand-alone project. The concept is to integrate the site plan (both physically and programmatically) into the development of the waterfront--specifically in how the waterfront can appropriately connect with the downtown to achieve the greatest possible results to pull visitors to the downtown and the rest of the city.
6. The inclusion of the convention center, the location of the hotel (with a limit on rooms), and the limitations on restaurants within the casino complex, stands to benefit the downtown directly. This is a plan that will encourage patrons to leave the site and visit other establishments. In fact a program to promote such activity is part of the HCA. There is also no fixed-seat theatre as part of the Cannon Street proposal, and thus such entertainment will happen as the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center as another direct benefit.
7. The project will include the \$50 million in remediation of a brownfield site, a \$10 million harbor walk with public access to the waterfront, preservation of commercial fishing berthing area, as well as the creation of a public recreational boating marina. No other privately financed project on the horizon can provide such public/commercial benefits or environmental remediation.
8. The design restrictions placed in the HCA are meant to protect New Bedford's character. The building height and sign restrictions make this a more subdued project that won't dominate the surrounding area and therefore will mitigate any effect on the city's image as purely a casino city.

Reverend David Lima, Executive Minister of Inter-Church Council of Greater New Bedford (6-12-15, New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs meeting)

1. Gambling revenue is taken from the vulnerable and the desperate: 40-60% of casino revenue comes from problem gamblers and addicted gamblers.
2. Greater access to casinos leads to more gambling addictions. Living within 10 miles of the casino doubles your likelihood of becoming a problem gambler.
3. According to a 2014 study, violent crime increased in the towns surrounding Connecticut's two casinos after the casinos arrived, despite a sharp decline in crime in Connecticut as a whole.
4. There is a promise of "guaranteed jobs for New Bedford residents": But our understanding is that it would be limited to a "good faith effort". Residents who are "properly qualified" get "reasonable preference", but that does not guarantee any percentage of the potential jobs will go to city residents.
5. Voters will not know the full impact the casino would have on our community until after the ballot. The casino company agreed to commission and fund studies to address the impact the casino would have on traffic, public safety, schools, and our community as a whole, none of which will be completed before the ballot.
6. Traffic has been a major issue raised by many, especially the fishing industry. That's not to mention if anything should ever get started on our new \$130 million marine park, which seems to have been forgotten in the rush to get the casino after putting "most of our effort" behind that economic driver over the last few years.
7. If a Tribal casino opens nearby, the promised minimum annual payment to the city will be a challenge to achieve. History shows when revenues are down, casinos force agreements to be changed.
8. Players and visitors are not going to shop at local businesses, but are going to stay inside the casino for the new restaurants and shops. This will cause local restaurants/businesses to have fewer customers, and may even cause them to close.

Those are the opposing views on this critical issue.

The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce and its Board of Directors encourage you, the taxpayer, citizen and voter of this city to decide what is best for you and your family when you head to the polls on the 23rd of this month.

All citywide residents need to be informed, raise good questions and, most importantly, vote.

While this statement is policy as of the effective date of this document, the Chamber reserves the right to adopt changes and make modifications and additions to its policies, and will continue to monitor issues as they develop.

Please contact Kim Perry, Chair of the New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee at (508) 999-5231 with any questions regarding this policy position.