

WILL COUNTY BOARD
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

Immediately following the Forest Preserve Meeting, but not prior to 9:45 a.m.

Will County Office Building – County Board Room
302 North Chicago Street
Joliet, IL 60432

August 13, 2009

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Moustis called the meeting to order at 10:28 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Present were Members: Bilotta, Adamic, Anderson, Deutsche, Singer, L. Smith, Weigel, Dralle, Wisniewski, Kusta, Goodson, B. Smith, Gould, May, Rozak, Konicki, Seiler, Brooks, Stewart, Winfrey, Babich, Wilhelmi and Moustis.

Absent were Members: Maher, Traynere and Blackburn.

Also Present: B. Friefeld.

Present from State's Attorney's Office: M. Tatroe; M. Manning.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

Mr. Bilotta led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

No minutes were presented for approval.

OLD BUSINESS

NEW BUSINESS

Video Gaming

Mr. Moustis stated this is how we will move forward to structure our decision making – there should be some public hearings. We will assign this to the executive committee but come back to the committee of the whole. He would like to hear from the Sheriff, the State's Attorney; also the County Executive's Office since they oversee the liquor licenses for the county. How many liquor licenses are involved?

Mr. Ryan answered about 44 or 45; it is only those that consume alcohol on the premises.

Mr. Moustis indicated he has already expressed his views - it is a bad idea. He is not against gaming personally; those that go to the casino, they choose to go; it is a controlled environment. This is about introducing gaming in bars on a local level, where it is not a gaming designation. He has read about video poker being referred to as the crack cocaine of gaming. We would be introducing what may be one of the most addictive types of gaming on a local level. We would have difficulty on how to regulate this; we are still waiting for regulations.

Ms. Kathy Gilroy read an excerpt from a letter from Phyllis Vineberg whose son's suicide was due to a gambling addiction.

Mr. Sam Panayotovich, a consultant with BP Consultants and also a former state representative stated he had introduced this bill in 1982. In the 80's we thought this could have been a good thing. We do not want Will County to rush to judgment. The discussion was for 3 machines in each establishment but the state thought 5 would be good; they will generate \$11,000 per machine per establishment. That is \$55,000 for the local municipality. We are asking that you would not rush to any judgment until you hear what is out there.

Ms. Mary Goines stated in the Will County area we have 2 casinos, off-track betting, race tracks, Vegas Nights at churches; we have a lot of gambling. This is something that has been around a while. Many municipalities are not opposed to gambling; Joliet so far has not opposed it. It would be discriminatory to take it away from the 44 places that would be involved. There are many gaming machines in many locations. None of that revenue currently goes to the state; now the state will get 30% of that money and local municipalities will get 6%. We are asking you to have open mind; not everything is as bad as it looks – this would help some survive.

Mr. Moustis commented this county has not taken a position. We will have a process and eventually get to vote whether we will allow video poker in bars.

Mr. Babich questioned if this could go for a referendum in February.

Mr. Moustis replied we are elected to make these decisions; the legislature gave us the authority to have that option. They wanted the communities to decide for themselves on a local basis; we now decide for the unincorporated areas only. He does not know how it would work unless every municipality would agree to allow or ban it county-wide. Every municipality and jurisdiction that allows liquor licenses has the option.

Mr. Brooks clarified if county board took a stand then will it be up to the 35 municipalities.

Mr. Moustis stated every municipality – every unit of government that issues liquor licenses would decide for themselves. We would only be making the decision for the unincorporated areas.

Mr. Adamic commented he is willing to keep an open mind. Personally, he feels gambling is a bad idea. We have 2 establishments, Harrah's and Empress; this would probably override their business.

Mr. Kusta indicated he takes a different approach. People have the right to decide what they do with their money. Ultimately he will vote no because this will place a huge burden on the people of Will County to regulate it. He does not think it is a good idea to spend tax payer money towards this.

Ms. Smith stated we do not have all the information to make any determination pro or con. She likes the idea of public hearings. We do not know what all the municipalities are doing or what the impact would be to the county.

Mrs. Dralle commented the original intent of this legislation was to allow counties to have money for needed projects. What revenue do we anticipate being generated and which projects would this money be used for?

Ms. Goodson stated we only have half of the information. It would almost be irresponsible to move forward too quickly until we have the rules that the gaming board is putting together. Mr. Kusta commented on the oversight. This would be completely paid for by the revenue of the machines; it is the responsibility of the gaming board.

Mr. Moustis commented the gaming board initially said they are not prepared to regulate machines of this nature.

Mr. Bilotta reminded everyone these things exist already – they are out there. On one hand this is an opportunity to regulate that. He would like to see what the state gaming board comes up with. He does not think everyone is in favor of expanding gambling. He would like to see all the information before we take a stand. He agrees with having some hearings.

Mr. Wilhelmi stated he agrees with Mr. Bilotta. There were 47 Senators that voted for this bill with a great amount of bi-partisan support. Many of the things we wanted in the capital bill would not get done. We need to have an open mind and wait until we get all information.

Mr. Wisniewski commented he would be voting against this. The state did a very poor job of looking at the down side of the economic cost to the public versus short term increase in revenue.

Mr. Singer stated it is important that we look at the transition of our government and how our government funds itself. We have transitioned from the hope that businesses locate here to grow our tax base to where the state is building its funding infrastructure on the backs of smoking, drinking and gambling. This is our opportunity to take a leadership position and say no to Springfield - do it right; work on building an economy that supports jobs. Video gaming is not going to be the solution to funding the state; it is not the solution to building our infrastructure. He hopes this board does not support this because it is not a healthy plan to fund a local, county or state government. We need to send a message to Springfield.

Mrs. May commented she does not know how much money would be generated from this or how it will affect the people in unincorporated Will County. She would like to hear from agencies and from people that will address the costs. There are many questions to address; we need more information before we make this decision.

Mr. Moustis indicated there are different venues of gambling; this is a venue that brings little or no value to the community. We are not debating whether gambling should be allowed – just this venue. There could possibly be more ill affects than positive. It was a bid idea when it was introduced in 1985 and it is a bad idea in 2009. It has been stated that 30% of the capital bill would be funded by this. He would rather have a smaller capital bill than allow this.

Ms. Konicki commented it would be very hard to see this coming to unincorporated Will County. It is the venue that is the problem; people who want to gamble go to the casinos. This bill takes this venue where people going about their daily lives will trip across them. You cannot just look at what money will be generated. Illinois needs to get more real with how it funds itself. This is a temporary answer; this is not the way to run state government. She supports the idea of going through the process.

Mr. Smith indicated he received 32 responses and 24 are against this. Video gaming outside of casinos will be a tough sell for municipalities. The capital bill is a good idea but this is not the right funding for it.

Mr. Moustis commented there is no rush to do this. The earliest would be October to take a vote. We are not rushing; everyone will have their say. There is plenty

of time to get out in your districts and ask the people if they support this. Everyone will have a good feel of how their district would like them to vote on this.

Mr. Ryan stated we appreciate the fact that you will take time and hear from all sectors of the community. One of the main issues we hear is that it is going to put those business owners in unincorporated Will County at a complete disadvantage with adjacent municipalities. We do not have to approve this; we just have the option to opt out. If a county or municipality does not take action, gaming is allowed within their jurisdiction. The county board and the County Executive for a number of issues, has been sensitive to not imposing restrictions that impair competitiveness of businesses in unincorporated Will County. The most recent example is the tobacco licensing – the principle is the same. In conversations with a representative from gaming board, they exercise extreme diligence in regulating gaming in Illinois. That is why it takes 9 to 12 months to implement rules. It would be useful to have a member from the gaming board at the public hearings. We do not want any further administrative or enforcement burden; in talking with the gaming board they are not going to delegate enforcement to the municipalities; that would undermine their integrity. We all have the right to be skeptical. The Illinois Municipal League has been very vigilant that this does not impose unfunded mandates on local municipalities. It is correct that 30% of the net income will go to state – the bulk of that will go to the capital fund that was established to provide debt service for the capital program. We have all expressed frustration over the last 6 years with how the capital bill proceeded. Video gaming always was a key component in the financing of the capital bill. It is prudent to find out how many local jurisdictions will opt out. For the county itself; it would generate revenue based on gaming terminals at the 44 establishments. The maximum number of machines permitted would be 5, which would essentially generate about \$11,250 in income annually. The gaming board has to submit in the next 10 days their process on the rules. In the meantime we will all reach out to constituents and come to some sort of consensus what will be in the best interest of all Will County residents.

Mr. Moustis commented he would like the county to have the ability to create a different liquor license for clarification for those who have video gaming.

Mr. Ryan indicated the legislation authorizes the county to impose up to a \$25 per terminal fee; it does not speak to a different class of license but it does not say you cannot.

Mr. Moustis asked Mr. Harvey if there could be another classification for liquor licenses for those who have video gaming.

Mr. Harvey answered the bill does not address that at all because they only control the gaming aspect.

Mr. Moustis commented we should take look at that. He asked everyone to participate – to get out in your community. We have plenty of time; we will discuss where the public hearings will be held, probably throughout the county, for the community will have the ability to participate.

A motion was made by Mr. Adamic, second by Mr. Bilotta, to move assign the issue of video gaming to the executive committee. All in favor. MOTION CARRIES.

Other Business

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Gould, second by Mr. Adamic, to adjourn the meeting at 11:21 a.m. All in favor. MOTION CARRIES.