

MEETING MINUTES OF THE  
**PALMER CITIZEN CASINO IMPACT STUDY COMMITTEE**  
GENERAL GROUP MEETING 25  
PALMER TOWN BUILDING, MEETING ROOM I  
FEBRUARY 4, 2009 – 6:30 PM

Meeting opened at 6:40 pm by Gerald Chudy, Chair.

**ATTENDANCE**

**PRESENT** Rocqueline Blazejowski, Charlotte Burns, Gerald Chudy, Mickey Ghosh, Joseph Mastalerz, George Roy, Michael Swiatlowski

**ABSENT** Anthony Dimitropolis, CathyAnn Gehlhausen, Stephen Sears, Carol Sugrue, Paul Wisnewski

**OTHERS PRESENT** Mike (Gamblers Anonymous), Paul (Gam-Anon), Alice Davey (Community Development Director), Ken Somerville

**MINUTES APPROVAL**

*Minutes approval will be postponed due to Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon guests.*

**DISCUSSION WITH MIKE (GAMBLING ANONYMOUS) AND PAUL (GAM-ANON)**

Mike and Paul decline to provide last names in order to remain private. The committee respects their wishes and thanks them for joining us.

Paul begins by explaining that Game-Anon is a self-help organization for people with close friends or family of compulsive gamblers. He has been a member for 10 years and has no opinion for or against a casino in Palmer. His wife is addicted to gambling. Paul states that if gambling becomes more of a way of life in this area, the education levels of its effects would need to increase. He also states that 10% of people have the potential to become addicted and it is the thrill of escape that drives the gambler more than the desire for more money.

Paul has learned a lot about himself through his wife's addiction. He feels responsible for enabling the addiction to grow by working hard to pay off the debts, but could not stop her from continuing. She lost all of their savings once and he worked through it. When she lost the savings the second time he learned to deal with the addiction in a different way – through group therapy with organizations like Gamblers Anonymous.

Mike adds that people in Gamblers Anonymous come from a variety of financial backgrounds and are all ages. The charter of GA is self-supported, it's goal is to help individual members.

G. Chudy asks if casinos typically sponsor meetings and/or the organization? Mike answers yes, absolutely. New members generally have to get over their own denial before joining which can be very difficult. The average age of a compulsive gambler is getting younger and younger but the biggest problem area is still senior citizens.

Mike explains that he has been a compulsive gambler since he was 16 and is now nearly 70 years old. He started to get help 20 years ago. He was a successful stock broker for 20 years. He also states that internet gambling is targeting a younger audience which is why the average age of compulsive gamblers is going down.

C. Burns asks what can casinos do the help reduce the number of addicted gamblers? Mike and Paul respond that ATMs within casinos are a huge problem as people can go as far as getting cash advances from credit cards. Signs regarding addiction at casinos may not be doing enough. This is an emotional disease.

R. Blazejowski asks if this is not just a casino issue, but perhaps something larger? Mike and Paul agree, but state that gambling is not necessarily about winning. It is about the action and casinos certainly provide an exciting atmosphere for that action. Casinos are very hypnotic and are designed that way for a reason.

The committee again thanks Mike and Paul for their time and insight.

#### DISCUSSION WITH ALICE DAVEY (COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR)

G. Chudy asks Alice Davey what type of grants are available for studies regarding the preparation/development of a casino in town? An example could be a proposal for the Water Districts to do their modeling. Alice Davey responds that she is unsure of what grants could be used for a study at this stage. Her experience is that the state government typically won't fund projects until there are definite plans. The casino issue can take so many directions right now that it's hard to focus on any specifics.

M. Swiatlowski explains the discussions that the committee has recently had with the 4 Water Districts and their need to refine a proposal to link up with the Quabbin.

Alice Davey says that she is currently involved with many programs that are tied into the community development block grants (CDBG). C. Burns asks if this is a state or federal program? Alice Davey replies that the town applies through the state and the state awards the money which comes from federal funds.

Alice Davey states a concern regarding a casino in Palmer: if the town grows in population and/or average income, the amount of money the town receives in aid could be very different. Currently her department handles \$1 million a year and that is based mostly on the town's status. A casino would have an affect on that status and the loss of aid from the state as a result of this should be taken into consideration as the town would need to fund these programs or they could be dropped.

She goes on to say that the state wants to be the last funding source – the developer and the town would come before the state as a revenue source. The committee thanks Ms. Davey for her time.

#### GENERAL DISCUSSION

G. Chudy reads a statement prepared by P. Wisnewski. He has met with the Assessor's Office regarding the Sherman Property. The property has not legally been sold. There are five lots on the land and over 90 acres in under Chapter 61 for Open Space Preservation. In order to sell the property, the town has right of first refusal and can be given the first chance to buy. If a private entity buys the property, they must pay five years of back taxes as if the property was zoned at a commercial rate.

G. Chudy reads another statement prepared by P. Wisnewski. He submits his write-up on the impacts of casino on the Library and Top Floor Learning. This will be reviewed along with the Social and Cultural Impacts.

G. Chudy reads a letter from a Worcester PolyTech student who wishes to gain information from the committee for a report. The committee suggests that the information about town zoning may be found on the town's website – townofpalmer.com.

G. Chudy also shares information that Mohegan Sun has announced plans to open an office in Palmer for the general public and media to ask questions regarding their plans to open a casino in Palmer. The exact location of the office is unknown.

#### UPCOMING MEETING SCHEDULE

February 18 – review and discuss sub-committee reports

March 4 – final report preparation

#### ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by R. Blazejowski to adjourn meeting at 8:04 pm.

G. Roy seconded. The vote passed (7:0).

MINUTES SUBMITTED BY MICHAEL SWIATLOWSKI.

APPROVED – DRAFT