

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2006

ESP Points Toward the North Shore Casino

By Daniel Rothschild and Kenneth Doyno

Choosing among the three casino proposals for Pittsburgh initially focused on which one would produce the greatest revenue. After Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board officials settled on final revenue estimates, however, little difference remains between the three proposals. If tax revenue is no longer among the main issues in deciding on a site, then what are?

In their recent article (“And the Award Goes To...”, Dec. 10 Forum) the co-chairs of the Pittsburgh Gaming Task Force identified the key issues, from traffic and design, to employment and social services support. They stated that the decision should be based on which proposal combines these factors to provide “the most comprehensive benefit to the entire region.” What needs to be added to their analysis is a framework for organizing the issues and understanding their inter-relationship.

We have developed a framework called “ESP” to evaluate the effects of development on existing communities. ESP stands for the Economic, Social and Physical traits of a project that must complement one another if it is to provide added value to the community.

“Economic” addresses the financial impact of a project and spin-off revenues generated by surrounding developments. “Social” refers to the effect of a project on the users and on people in surrounding



neighborhoods and the region. “Physical” encompasses a project’s connections to transportation networks, its environmental impact and its relationship to the surrounding area.

An ESP analysis for a casino must first focus on its social aspect, since a casino has proven negative social effects, including gambling addiction and crime. The great risk of a negative social impact is why the level of emotion is running so high in relation to the Hill District site.

The Isle of Capri proposal for the Hill is the only one that would put a casino in a residential neighborhood’s street grid, which means that its negative social effects would reverberate more

strongly and more viscerally there than at the two other sites. This is why numerous Hill District groups oppose locating the casino in their neighborhood.

The only reason to choose the Hill District proposal would be if its promised economic and physical traits outweighed its negative social impact by producing greater spin-off development than the other sites. Continuing the ESP analysis shows that this is not the case, and that the Majestic Star/North Shore site has remarkable advantages when it comes to influencing additional development.

A well-designed casino on the North Shore would probably have a positive impact on our regional image and tie in with the visionary

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2006

plan of the Riverlife Task Force to create a riverfront park spanning both sides of the three rivers that meet Downtown, from the Hot Metal Bridge to the West End Bridge to the 31st Street Bridge. Once completed, people will be able to walk, jog or ride their bikes in a park that connects 11 city neighborhoods.

A large-scale development like the North Shore casino, anchoring the Ohio River basin adjacent to the West End Bridge, would energize this end of the park with activity, while being separated from the adjacent residential neighborhood of Manchester by the raised roadway of Route 65 and the adjacent industrial zone. Pedestrian connections across the West End Bridge would be strengthened as a result of Riverlife's recent international design competition for a walkway that touches down at the North Shore casino site. As for traffic, the North Shore site has regional roadway connections in every

direction, and the surrounding area was designed to handle large volumes of traffic.

The North Shore developers have stated that various activities, including dining, will be able to be accessed directly from the riverfront park, increasing the number of pedestrians. With the casino expected to attract 6 million annual visitors, there would be a steady flow of visitors up and down the riverbank, increasing the likelihood for additional development on the North Shore, including restaurants, hotels, retail and water shuttle service. Although the Forest City/Harrah's casino at Station Square also would be on Three Rivers Park, the access to the riverbank is cut off by railroad tracks and the site is isolated by the river and Mount Washington, preventing it from stimulating more nearby development.

Selecting the North Shore site has the added benefit of encouraging spin-off development in two neighborhoods. Thanks to

the initiative of city and county officials, funding for a new arena in the Hill District is also included in the North Shore economic proposal (as it is in all three proposals). The developer also has released plans for additional development around the new arena on the Hill.

Filling in the lower Hill with a new arena and related development, without a casino, would be an excellent starting point to revitalize the Hill District.

The North Shore site offers all of the positive advantages of the Hill District site, without the negative social impact being located in a residential neighborhood. Choosing the North Shore site would provide economic spin-offs at two locations. With Station Square remaining as a great entertainment activity center, with the Point State Park renovation underway and with the continued development of Three Rivers Park, the North Shore site advances the grandest vision for our region's future.