

# *HOST COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE*

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## *Meeting Minutes for August 22, 2012*

Meeting Open to the Public to Observe & Make Comment

*Wednesday, August 22, 2012*

*6:30PM*

*Paris Street Community Center Gym*

*112 Paris Street, East Boston MA*

### **1. Welcome**

*Mr. Brian G. Leary, Chairman*

Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> public meeting and thank you for coming. It was about 6 weeks ago that we were in the Orient Heights Yacht Club. We wanted to come back to East Boston because we wanted to hear what you have to say.

This morning we sent a letter to Suffolk Downs demanding additional information related to transportation, environmental impact, an economic study, look at workforce, local businesses, schools, and a comprehensive analysis of the impacts.

We want to make sure that these problems are addressed in the mitigation agreement.

We are concerned about the proposal to phase the construction. Currently they are planning to add gaming to the grandstand, then elsewhere and then adding a hotel.

The developer has a grand vision of a world class casino but if East Boston approves of this, they should get the benefits of the development from Day one – the jobs, the innovation of the local economy.

The fundamental expectation is that the Agreement is going to be significant. It will be reasonable for the developer but there is also room for us to ask for more.

**DAVID:** We have had several meetings with Suffolk Downs and Caesars and the items in the letter reflects the information or lack thereof that we have at this point. We need transparency in terms of the realistic amount of jobs and business information.

**BRIAN:** We have some specific updates relating to transportation issues, workforce development issues, small and local business issues.

Liz will give an update as to where the whole state gaming process is.

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Thank you to the interpreters.

## **2. Report from the Executive Director**

*Mrs. Elizabeth Dello Russo*

City has begun the community process. Suffolk Downs has given a letter of intent to the City. They have approached the gaming commission and paid the \$400k fee. This shows how seriously they are taking this and it shows their commitment. The City's community process is happening in East Boston because the applicant has come forward. We had helpful public comment at the prior East Boston meetings. Feedback is always helpful from residents, local businesses, etc.

On the screen are different ways to approach the City with feedback.

We have been holding office hours to give an opportunity to provide one-on-one feedback. Tuesday August 28<sup>th</sup>, next office hours at 26 Bennington Street from 8am to 8pm.

Have a letter from Suffolk Downs asking for information to help them develop a plan on public safety. We want to work with them to come up with a comprehensive plan.

The Massachusetts Gaming Commission held a public forum that had interesting thoughts about community mitigation and compulsive gaming. We will have some information on our website with some of the information from that forum.

Detroit example:

Within City limits and one of the things that the Detroit agreement does is that they set up different funds that the casino applicant pays into. These funds were for local businesses. This is somewhat similar to what the state has done with their 25% tax rate. Though no other state is similar to MA in this law it is helpful to look at other states. We will put the Detroit agreement online.

**BRIAN:** How has the second phase of the Mass Gaming Commission been pushed back?

**LIZ:** The Gaming Commission has rough estimate of deadlines. Part 1 of the bid will come out (not be due) somewhere between mid-October and mid-November and then it would be due between January and May of 2013. That part really has to do with the financial part of the bid.

Part 2 would be available between July 2013 and May 2014 so they are giving estimates that are very far out.

This information is currently available on the State's website.

**BRIAN:** Have any of you accessed the City's gaming website yet?

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The last meeting brought up lots of concerns about workforce development and Ron has been talking to the developers about these issues

### **3. Small and Local Business Plan and Jobs**

*Mr. Ronald L. Walker, II*

At the last meeting we talked about small business opportunities in a casino, the possibility of putting local businesses into a casino, and jobs.

Since the last meeting, I have meet with Suffolk Downs about how to put together a model so that businesses have an opportunity to be successful. We are focusing on jobs inside the casino itself. We have some detail about the job opportunities.

Want to make sure that we are targeting East Boston businesses and making sure that businesses can leverage the buying power of the casino itself.

Also want to encourage job training. We need a comprehensive plan that works with City to identify businesses in East Boston but we also want to ensure that there are job training programs, resources and expertise for this to be sustainable and successful.

Procurement – There are around \$150M in procurements. What is the impact on these host cities? We want to make sure that the local businesses that can provide to the casino are included (flowers, cleaning, linens, etc). We have asked Suffolk Downs to identify those businesses that line up with those that they outsource and think about what are part of the larger organizations for efficiencies. We want to make sure there is a sustainable comprehensive business plan.

Jobs:

How will they create new jobs in addition to the construction jobs? Lots of East Boston residents should look for opportunities at the track and at the casino. They should employ East Boston and Boston residents.

We are also thinking about job training. There is a school to train people who will be working on the casino floor and dealing. We should understand what that opportunity is for local residents.

How do you encourage patrons and employees at the casino to shop and eat inside East Boston? They have a pretty good track record of encouraging them to do that but we need to see what that really entails.

With East Boston Main Streets and the East Boston Chamber there is a branding opportunity here.

The recommendation is to make sure that this is part of the Host Community Agreement

**SARAH:** Thanks for your hard work on this. Appreciate that you're looking at supporting small local businesses. When you think about a program to support the job training and other programs, do you see this being a Suffolk Downs project, an existing program or something else?

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**RON:** I see it as something from Suffolk Downs. I do envision the existing structures, such as Main Streets, and those programs to work with the casino closely to create a partnership. We have to have measurements in there as well. We don't want them to reinvent the wheel. We want to be able to hold Suffolk Downs accountable for the program as well. If there's a training program that they have, we can leverage that on behalf of businesses and I feel good about the potential sustainability.

**DAVID:** We want to get the casino to promote the local restaurants and community through the concierge. Is there a way to get them to encourage the marketing efforts so that it's not just beneficial to the restaurants in the casino?

**RON:** They will try to identify the businesses and restaurants. They have to have a formalized approach.

**DAVID:** We want to work with him on the business side of this. People will want to experience East Boston.

**RON:** We talked about a branding strategy as well.

**SARAH:** We want to talk about getting people prepared for the jobs that will be there. There are certain requirements that people will need to have. There is a combination of having the jobs available and the training but in this time we should try to work with English as a Second Language and other programs to put together a training program now so that people are trained when the jobs are available.

**LIZ:** There are a number of documents and PowerPoint's about how community colleges can help with training for the jobs that will come. This would apply across the state. There are a lot of jobs that come with that. The Mass Gaming Commission suggests that communities come up with a "brag" list in terms of marketing. Getting real thoughts about how the community moves forward. It's good that the Mass Gaming Commission is also interested in this.

## **4. Discussion of the Transportation Plans**

*Mr. Brian G. Leary*

We have something from Suffolk Downs but it is missing key elements relating to parking. Major refurbishing of the Suffolk Downs T stop or something more creative like water transportation. It was in the news this week that there is a grant for additional ferries from the Boston harbor to right around the corner from here. Is that something that we should likewise focus so that the City also gets to discover East Boston not just Orient Heights or the Suffolk Downs area but all of East Boston? That gets people into the community and not necessarily into the casino.

**SARAH:** Big proponent of water transportation. Curious about the current ferry proposal that goes to Maverick. There is somewhat of limited passenger availability. I'd be interested in seeing how the operation plan goes for that and think about it being a long term plan. There are other more critical issues here like the fact that our public transportation goes until 1am. We need to make sure that people can still move in those off

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hours. 1. Being critical about how the taxi service works. 2. Silverline service. There are renovations on the blue line service overnight but we do have the silver line and I'd like to think about those opportunities. I think that there are other transportation efforts other than just water.

## **5. Public Comment**

**Jeanne:** Would like to see that there is a tiny piece and that is for the children of East Boston. I teach an after school program where they get homework help. We depend strictly on funding from the City and the state in grants to have this program. Hopefully you can provide us with some funding to continue programs like this.

**Robert and Mary:** President of the East Boston project advisory committee. They advise on the East Boston waterfront parks. There is a second phase to the Piers Park project. When this was initially planned, the state was going to fund this second phase. This could set the trend for getting waterfront development back on trend.

**Leroy:** He is concerned about the development and how it affects him living at his house. He lives 60 feet from the Suffolk Downs parking lot. He's concerned that he will be facing a building that is 6 or 7 stories high right across from the street. Concerned about lights, traffic, what about the winter and when we have a blizzard? Mitigation should address effects on community as a whole but also on those who have the most to lose with property values and we should be given consideration. Even may offer to pay to purchase homes and help with relocation.

College scholarships restricted to East Boston residents. Financial sponsorship for local sports teams. More supervised programs from teens during after school hours.

**Vlad:** Thinks it would be good but at local meeting with Suffolk Downs, there are lots of questions but they aren't getting any answers. How much \$\$ is the casino going to give to community for next 15 years? What's the guarantee that we get it and how do we guarantee that it stays in East Boston? HCAC should share the answers of this with the community.

**Mary:** After reading about the letter and the EPA fines assessment, I spoke with Chip Tuttle. When are you going to implement the benefits to the community - when you get the green light for this project? (question to Chip). Recommends that any mitigation comes up front when the first shovel goes into the ground. Fearful that when it's done, that it will be the Mass Gaming Commission's job to fully implement the mitigation agreement.

Do East Boston projects first, concurrently.

Is the \$40M a static amount because it's under funded.

Bring Massport to the table on this.

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Want to see a model of K-8 classrooms in one building. If we can keep the kids here and in the same building. (See HCAC email for information).

**Sean:** Public transportation is a big issue. Especially with a casino, people will be drinking and gambling. In favor of water transportation but don't see it as a big game changer here. Getting information to the public is important. Want to get the stats from Suffolk Downs and see all of the reports and everything that we are getting from Suffolk Downs to see how they are arriving at their solution.

**Pauline:** Wants to hear from HCAC. People didn't really know about the meeting. Why wasn't it in the East Boston Times?

**Eliana:** Concerned about the process to incorporate Latino residents to this discussion and the mitigation agreement. Latinos are the majority of renters in East Boston and have a lot of businesses.

Concerned about the lack of opportunity for them to actually vote because they cannot vote yet. Look into other alternatives for those residents to express their opinions.

**Amanda:** Would like to see that a percentage of the jobs go to East Boston residents and that a percentage goes to minorities and that it goes to people of color.

Local businesses – curious to see what that would look like. Trying to think of her favorite restaurants in the casino. Would there be a stand where they serve the food or would there be an additional actual restaurant in there?

**Ed:** Transportation – Suffolk Downs has a plan but there will be an influx of transportation initially but once it calms down, there will not be as many people.

Crime – wants to make sure there's good security. Doesn't think that there will be much of an impact in the way of crimes, prostitution, pick-pockets.

**Paul:** Thinks it's what East Boston needs. There needs to be a transformation with the jobs. Need to have community colleges involved to have them trained for the jobs that are coming for the casinos. There should be something worked out between the colleges and casinos. Maybe the colleges give East Boston residents a discount on the courses that would help with the job training.

Should stipulate that a certain percentage of workers at the casino be East Boston local residents and it needs to stay steady.

Even in the construction phase there will be union involvement and within that there should be a local provision.

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Need funding for the parks, new parks, money for revamping others.

Development of the neglected waterfront. That's an opportunity for new buildings, new restaurants, and that leads to more construction, more local jobs. This will bring an influx of new people moving to East Boston. There will be housing developments – then property values go up, rent goes up. Maybe have some sort of rent control.

Need money for the youth programs, local schools for computers, books.

**Celeste:** Need transparency. How much is Suffolk Downs spending to woo the locals?

Jobs. There is a lot of talk about job projections but there's been no delineation about the different types of jobs versus managers and union jobs. In Cleveland, those positions make about \$6/hour plus tips. Want to see a job detail breakdown.

Business opportunities: had a recent Chamber meeting where Suffolk Downs mentioned having 10 business and restaurant positions. Need to know the vetting process and the likelihood of gaining those spots and what is the added value for those businesses.

Local business partnerships: Bring about provide local business services. New Orleans data where there were 350 businesses for \$1,000 per year.

Transportation: Who will be shouldering the cost of water transportation? Need better public transportation.

**Jesse:** Concerned about the effects this will have on the arts, the local businesses, restaurants.

Haven't heard any reasons why it would be good for East Boston or families in East Boston.

Have poor air quality, high asthma rates.

Concerned about crime, traffic, addiction.

Casino should establish trust to create open green space with \$10M endowment with \$1M annual mandatory financial commitments. Protected salt marshes, dog parks, community gardens, public plazas.

**Jaya:** think long-term. Not just community center, youth program. There should be some guarantee of a trust with funds that are funneled back to residents, homeowners, business owners that are in East Boston.

Jobs - Want a percentage of employees across the board to be from the community.

**Diane:** Hoping to present the Chamber report after Labor Day.

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Re-branding and repositioning of East Boston are important.

Ferry service – East Boston ferry was in place many years ago. There were built-in problems that weren't good for the sustainability of the ferry. One was that the T would not the use of a T pass on the ferry. Second, there was limited parking in the area. Look at water transportation as part of a larger plan. It shouldn't be looked at as just an opportunity for the casino visitors, but rather to bring more people in general to the harbor and to East Boston. Look at the connectivity with water transport and East Boston businesses (linkages to Maverick and Central Square) and restaurants.

Subsidies – there should be one and maybe apply casino revenues towards those.

**Eliana:** Encourage committee to call the Boston Police Department officers to the public to meeting to hear their concerns, especially considering the current state of crime in the City. That way the community knows what to ask.

**SARAH:** Appreciate the residents that came with constructive ideas. Has been working on revitalization, and stabilizing and increasing property values.

Open space is important.

The education piece is an important piece and they currently have an East Boston education working group.

Would like to have community revitalization and education on the agenda for next time.

**DAVID:** Transparency and answers. This is basically what was asked of from Suffolk Downs in that recent letter that was sent.

**RON:** We take this seriously and appreciate your comments regarding the mitigation agreement.

**BRIAN:** Concerned about Pauline's comment regarding getting people to the meetings. We want to get some more information from Suffolk Downs and give them a chance to respond, give us the docs, and then figure out how to get the information to the community.

## **6. New Business**

- Reserved for topics the Chair did not anticipate at the time of posting. There is no new business.

## **7. Conclusion: Thank You and Adjourn**