

WINDHAM TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

WINDHAM TOWN HALL AUDITORIUM

Tuesday, March 2, 2010 - 5:30 P.M.



Mayor Ernie Eldridge opened the Public Hearing at 5:30 pm.

The mayor turned the floor over to the Autotote representative. Attorney Bill Sweeney from the New London firm of Tobin and Carberry. He explained that the hearing is being held pursuant to Sec. 12-572(a). CGS.

Atty. Sweeney said that his client must first determine if a location is suitable and appropriate. He gave background on Autotote. It is a division of Scientific Games. They operate under the "Winners" name at twelve locations around the State of Connecticut. Prior to 1993, Off Track Betting was operated by the state. It is a heavily regulated business that allows people aged 21 and over to bet on harness racing, horse racing, thoroughbred racing, greyhound racing and Jai Alai. They originally operated primarily in the western part of the State but have recently opened locations in Eastern Connecticut with a branch in Putnam and a planned location in New London. Autotote plans to lease 3000 square feet of leased space, 1800 of which is patron space (600 on the first floor and 1200 on the second floor. Autotote plans on hiring one to two full time employees and three to four part-time employees. It is also anticipated that the enterprise will produce other wait staff positions for the bar/ restaurant at the location. The total wager amounts are called the "handle." 1.6% of the handle goes to the host community. That is conservatively estimated at \$64,000.

Atty. Sweeney also pointed out that the proposal meets the economic development goals of the Windham Plan of Conservation and Development with regard to the re-use of empty space.

Chief Lisa Maruzo-Bolduc pointed out that the proposed facility would be located in the Willimantic Service District and would have to rely heavily on Police and Fire services that are paid by the Willimantic Service District residents. She asked that a significant amount of money from the profits be allocated to the Willimantic Service District.

Lynn White, 59 Card St., Willimantic spoke in opposition to the idea that we view OTB as part of a business plan for our community. Our friends and neighbors might be caught up in the drinking and gambling.

Bill Serrano, Prospect St., spoke in favor of OTB stating that there are already gambling opportunities in the area. This is a recovery community and Damian Fox provided him a job when others wouldn't.

Cesar Castro, local business owner, spoke in favor to OTB. He went to Stamford to visit an OTB and found the business to be well run and well organized. He stated that the income would help the town.

Dan Pelletier, 444 N. Windham Rd. stated that he moved here 6 years ago. He used to live in a town with OTB. He felt it would bring more people to town and possibly help to attract other businesses. The revenue is needed.

Tom DeVivo from S. Park St. stated that OTB would help promote the Arts and Entertainment District that was created a few years ago. He asked the Council to support the project.

Colin Rice, 720 Main St., spoke in favor to the proposal. He stated that he was impressed with the quality of the restaurant at Thirsty Frog and said that this would be a good partnership.

Lynn Duvall, 700 Main St., said that the owners of the Thirsty Frog have invested in making their building a destination. They have built a diversified business model and have committed to us. We should do the same for them.

Tim Tracy, 49 Haven Ave stated that he is thrilled that there is a new restaurant in town but expressed his opinion that it doesn't need to depend on OTB. This is a wrong direction for the business.

Dr. Richard Bloomer spoke and offered his opinion that the revenue from this should go to the Willimantic Service District.

Leo Santucci, 74 Windham St. said that he had gone to Putnam to see the OTB at JD Coopers. There were about 60 people there. It was a mostly middle-aged, quiet, respectful crowd. The Thirsty Frog is a successful restaurant. We should support the proposal.

Mark Peloquin, Scarborough Rd., stated that gambling has nothing to do with Willimantic's bad reputation. He fully supports the proposal.

Anita Murphy said that she has no objections to the restaurant but that she is concerned about the college students in Town and is concerned about the effect this has on them.

Jan-Maya Schold said that this is a benefit to the whole town but the Willimantic Service District takes the brunt of the cost.

Kevin White, 59 Card St. said that this enterprise will result in additional costs. I ask you to say, "No, thank you."

Mike Dancue said that Damian is a responsible business owner. I support OTB to bring people to our town and business.

Jack Arsenault said that there are 18 empty storefronts between CL&P and the Frog Bridge. He voiced his support for the proposal.

John Walker of the Shoe Smith said that running a business at this time can suck the life out of you. He said that this will bring people into town.

Stephanie Iazzetta said that we shouldn't approve just any business. We have battled prostitution, drugs and alcohol. Please say, "No."

Alan Giordano said the venture is legal and highly regulated. It will bring people to town. The council should support this.

Dawn Niles, N. Windham, said that she had done research on OTB. Connecticut has chosen to be a gambling state and that shouldn't be this issue. She also expressed agreement with the Police Chief that the major part of the revenue should go to the Willimantic Service District.

Gene Chaine, Windham Center, said that the success or failure of the Thirsty Frog is not dependent on OTB. OTB will serve as a destination but that won't necessarily add foot traffic to other business. The small amount of additional revenue will not offset additional costs to the Town.

Charles Kratt, Monticello St. said that it appears that the majority present support this project. He stated his support for the project. The Thirsty Frog has invested a lot in their business and they wouldn't risk something that would cause harm to the business.

Matt Piolonuk, High St. stated that the Thirsty Frog is a nice establishment. We need revenues. Main Street used to be busy. Give Damian Fox and OTB a chance to turn Main St. around.

David Fenn, Windham Center stated the he personally is not a gambler but that this kind of entertainment is not a bad thing. He believes that all of the revenues should go to the Willimantic Service District.

Jerry Iazzetta, Council Member, pointed out that based on the information presented that \$64,000 in payments to the Town is based on total wagers of \$4 million and that \$800,000 of the total does not go back to customers. He asked. "Wouldn't tax payers rather have small increases than pay out that that kind of money?"

Ernie closed the hearing at 6:31 pm.

Submitted By:

Don Muirhead
Personnel Director

