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## **A design for living... with casinos**

By **WILLIAM P. BECKER**

THE RECENT court decision upholding most of the law enabling the development of gaming facilities in Pennsylvania, but overturning the section that would have allowed the state to bypass local zoning controls, appears to have provoked a power struggle between state and local governments.

One side argues that state control is essential in order to avoid projects' getting bogged down in the politics of local zoning approvals, while the other side says that local control is necessary to protect against a state-imposed development that is contrary to the will of the people.

While this contest may provide political entertainment, with the usual focus on winners and losers, it is a distraction from what's really at stake, since neither the State Gaming Commission nor the city has adopted any regulations that govern the location or construction of gaming facilities.

Regardless of whether zoning control rests with the state or local municipalities, it is essential that these facilities meet the highest standards of planning and design so they will enhance, not destroy, the neighborhoods in which they will be located.

But what are these standards, and who will set them? The Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia offers these criteria against which the quality of developer proposals for gaming facilities may be evaluated.

Our goal is that these projects create new urban entertainment centers that include a vibrant mix of gambling with related activities like restaurants, retail, live performances, movies, dance clubs and other compatible uses.

They should be buildings of incomparable quality that radiate a magnetic sense of excitement, entertainment, fun and a little risk. We believe that the best proposals for gaming facilities will have these characteristics.

### **Location and program planning**

Compatible with site in land use, scale, appearance and materials.

Makes maximum use of the site's development potential.

Enhances prospects for development of nearby sites.

Accessible by public transit.

Easily connected to other cultural and entertainment venues.

Consistent with public policy objectives for the area and community concerns.

Includes effective plan for foot, auto, bus and service traffic.

Contains exciting mix of recreational and entertainment activities.

Includes retail, restaurant space.

Allows for expansion of gaming space and other uses.

### **Building and site design**

Overall approach is bold, contemporary and innovative.

Street facades are active, inviting and visually connected to the interior.

Uses high quality building materials.

Exterior signs and lighting are informative and entertaining, but not overwhelming.

Contains monumental and memorable public spaces that connect to the exterior.

Interior spatial organization is clear and legible.

Employs sustainable design principles and materials.

Contains exterior public amenities like landscaping, plazas, arcades and river walks.

Provides links and buffers that are appropriate to adjacent uses.

Places on-site parking so that it is not visible from the street.

WE BELIEVE that there should be a commitment at state and local levels to a formal, open process to review proposals from casino developers that results in a selection based on merit, not political connections. Developers should be required to submit proposals that have sufficient detail so the quality of their planning and design may be evaluated against the above criteria and compared to proposals from other applicants.

And in order for the public interest to be properly protected, proposed development plans should be evaluated by a team of experts, in full public view.

The competition for the limited number of gaming licenses is already under way, and will surely be hotly contested. By establishing and enforcing

standards of design quality, we can guarantee that the casinos that get built will make us all winners.

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