

December 12, 2011

One of the concerns involving the ongoing debate relating to potentially allowing a casino anywhere in Nassau County is whether the surrounding local community will be protected from any negative impacts. As our discussions of Floral Park's Statement of Principles have demonstrated, there are a host of issues that must be resolved before any ceremonial ground breaking takes place. While the chant of "jobs, jobs, jobs" to the persistent drum beat of casino lobbyists tries to drown out the voices of concerned citizens with legitimate issues, fortunately our democracy still allows for such debate.

Among claims regularly made by casino lobbyists are promises of a steady revenue stream for local communities. A recent ruling by a federal court in Minnesota, however, raises serious concerns even about that issue; whether the State of New York, Nassau County or even the Incorporated Village of Floral Park can be assured that promises made by a federally recognized sovereign Indian nation can be relied upon in the future when making decisions about hosting a casino.

In 1986, the former Sears Department Store building in downtown Duluth Minnesota became the first Indian gaming site off a reservation in the United States. Allowing the Fond du Luth Casino to open in 1986 came from a series of agreements between the City of Duluth and the Fond Du Lac Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa. With the City of Duluth's support, the federal government placed the Sears Building land in trust and declared it part of the Fond Du Lac Indian Reservation. For the last 25 years, various agreements put into place have generated an estimated \$80 million for the City of Duluth, Minnesota.

Now that the original 25 year agreement that the City of Duluth made in 1986 has expired, the United States District Court judge, who was recently appointed by President Obama, was asked to weigh in. The federal judge recently ruled that the sovereign Indians operating the casino in downtown Duluth Minnesota are under no further obligation to renegotiate a new revenue sharing contract with the City of Duluth, the casino's hosting community! The City of Duluth is now facing the reality of having all the burdens of hosting a casino without getting any share of its revenues. Does that sound fair?

This is not an isolated incident. In our own State of New York, the Seneca Indian Nation operates three casinos near Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Salamanca. The Seneca Indian Nation currently owes New Yorkers an estimated \$343 million, which they have withheld due to an ongoing dispute with the State of New York. Governor Cuomo has even requested assistance from President Obama's administration in this protracted dispute. Among the local communities caught in the cross fire has been the City of Salamanca, New York.

Last year the City of Salamanca had to lay off 40 percent of its own workforce because it has not received its promised share of revenues from the casino in Salamanca, New

York. According to its mayor, as a “host community of the Seneca Casino the city provides essential services using the revenues generated from the gaming compact agreement. The revenues we planned for in our budget will not materialize in the foreseeable future and the city cannot afford to provide services to the extent we have been.” (Cattaraugus County Report; September 17, 2010). Is it fair that the City of Salamanca had to fire its workers because its promised shares of revenues for being a hosting community have been cut off by the local casino?

Please be assured that Floral Park would rather not have to negotiate concerning being a hosting community for a casino, or anything else at Belmont Park that could potentially dramatically impact the quality of life of our community. The Belmont Task Force was established in 2007 in response to the possibility of a State controlled VLT racino at Belmont Park. At that time we presented our Statement of Principles to our State representatives and since, have continued monitoring the expansion of any legalized gambling at Belmont Park. Recently, I have dedicated a significant amount of attention, 15 of my 20 Mayor’s Messages to date, discussing the many issues regarding the possibility a sovereign Indian nation casino at Belmont Park and the potential impacts a sovereign Indian nation casino operation could have on Floral Park and our neighboring communities. My hope has been to heighten public awareness so that if any casino proposal were presented, our response will be measured, reasonable, and informed. Passions have been ignited and many have shared their deep emotional concerns that a casino could irreversibly impact our quality of life. These emotions are real and I share them, we love Floral Park, but emotions fade and our response must be based on sustained principled argument.

Unfortunately some of these issues that are being foisted upon us by powerful political forces are not of our own choosing. But, we have successfully dealt with such challenges to our village’s quality of life before. Floral Park will take the lessons learned from other hosting communities like Duluth Minnesota or Salamanca New York to make sure that they are not repeated here. Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. Floral Park surely knows its history and will continue to prosper and thrive as a result.