

40 Years of Broken Promises

To the Editor:

I believe I have attended every public hearing on gambling at the Newport Grand since the original one at Rogers High School in 1974. At that hearing, Arthur W. Silvester, Jr., father of present owner Diane S. Hurley, promised that if the voters would allow him to turn his Malbone Road property into a jai alai fronton, it would be made available to the community for concerts, plays, and other entertainment.

Fast forward 29 years. Not a single concert, play, or other entertainment was offered to the community, but in 2003 Newport Grand Jai Alai needed voter approval to stop offering jai alai. To entice the voters, Diane Hurley published a full-page "Letter to the Community" on July 17, 2003, in which she stated:

"We believe that with proper investment we can convert the fronton to a live performance theater and introduce musical acts, comedy and other forms of entertainment."

Again, that never happened. It's now 2014. That makes 40 years of broken promises.

The gambling industry cannot be trusted, especially this latest proposal from three out-of-town wheeler-dealers, with no permanent ties to Newport, to add table games and make the Newport Grand a full casino.

Here's a prediction you can bet on, if this proposal is on the ballot and Newport voters are gullible enough to vote for it:

1. A gaudy Las Vegas style casino

will be built at Newport Grand and open to great, but temporary, success.

2. Fierce competition from existing Connecticut casinos and newly-built Massachusetts casinos will send Newport Grand to the Rhode Island General Assembly pleading for help.

3. The compliant General Assembly will authorize almost anything – 24-hour liquor service, satellite gambling at another Newport location (Bellevue Avenue?), whatever it takes – to keep casino gambling in Newport alive.

4. The shadowy figures behind the Newport Grand Casino will cut and run, leaving the State holding the bag.

There is a solid alternative to this scenario: the North End Development Plan, which has the potential of creating research, manufacturing and sustainable business opportunities.

On Wednesday, May 28, the Newport City Council will vote on whether to ask the General Assembly to put this new casino gambling proposal on the ballot in November. There is a very real sense in which they will be voting on Newport's road to the future, whether it will take the high road to solid economic development or the low road to a much riskier and glitzier future based on gambling.

Please contact members of the city council and urge them to vote against recommending casino gambling in Newport.

Roland F. Chase
Newport

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