

Philly Delegation Unites to Resite

Contributed by KM DeAngelis
Friday, 04 July 2008

On July 3, 2008 a historic agreement between the Pennsylvania House and Senate was reached. All Philadelphia legislators committed to moving both SugarHouse and Foxwoods Casinos away from neighborhoods and the waterfront. At a press conference in Harrisburg (you can view video of the conference [here](#) and read [planphilly's coverage](#)), Senator Vince Fumo, Representatives Dwight Evans, Bill Keller and Mike O'Brien were joined by other Philadelphia lawmakers to announce the relocation of the two Philadelphia casinos.

Mayor Nutter and Governor Rendell spoke today with Fumo and Evans, and all pledged to find a new location for the casino operators, so residents may live in their communities without the negative disruption casinos would bring.

The local newspapers will have the stories on the stories over the weekend. This article was crafted to thank the hundreds of citizen volunteers who were the engine behind this move.

On July 4th, 2004 casinos in Philadelphia were a done deal, or so most Philadelphians thought. A determined band of citizens drew a line in the sand, and said "CasiNO!". They vowed to protect their homes, their neighborhoods and their precious waterfront from these unwanted businesses.

Neighborhood leaders up and down the river joined together in a coalition of 27 civic groups and PNA, Philadelphia Neighborhood Alliance, was born. Likewise, Casino Free Philadelphia rallied neighbors to march and stomp and stop the casinos. NABR, Neighbors Allied for a Better Riverfront, rolled out their group effort extolling the untapped potential of our river's edge. FAST, Fishtown Against SugarHouse Takeover, flexed their muscle, while mom's pushing baby-carriages also helped hold down the Northern borders as MASH, Mothers Against SugarHouse. Added to this unlikely mix was the ILA, the International Longshoreman's Association, who joined with community activists to save their beloved Port. All groups formed ONE unbroken picket line along the 7 mile stretch of water... hey, we're a union town!

For the first time, activists met and listened to each other, crafted ideas and strategies. All groups rolled along on monetary donations from the residents. So 1 collective David took on 2 billionaire Goliaths.

Our strength was our ability to quickly recognize and unify riverfront leaders/activists. We soon realized there was no difference between SugarHouse and Foxwoods. Either one would destroy many neighborhoods, and this became unacceptable to all.

We learned to trust our new found neighbor partners along the river, and soon realized we shared the same concern and great visions for our City. Councilman Frank DiCicco listened because both casinos were in his District. He was the first legislator we convinced to get on the bus.

Representative Babette Josephs gave us a push by writing the 1500 foot buffer legislation that made it to position 1 on the ballot, only to be snatched away right before the election by the PA Supreme Court.

We pummeled PennPraxis to design a casino-free waterfront alternative. We knew what we wanted and they heard us.

There may have been 2 casinos, but we attacked them as one common enemy...with a zeal that was our greatest strength. We lobbied, emailed, picketed, and buttonholed every legislator we could find. The message never wavered, move both of them!

The casinos had the money, but they were no contest for passionate, strong willed community leaders. We knew we owned this City, the birthplace of our Nation, and we refused to give it up.

Welcome to the Philadelphia big leagues!

One by one, day in and day out, we won over Councilmembers, State Representatives, Senators and one Mayor. They saw our unbridled determination. The Governor felt our presence a long time ago, and we refused to let him bully us.

So tonight is a thank you, said before all the newspapers come out. A thank you to the real heroes, the everyday citizens who live here. Who see the tremendous history and value our neighborhoods and Port offer. We are determined to have our long promised world class waterfront.

As volunteer Mary Reinhart wrote, thank you to "everyone of you who begged for petition signatures in the freezing cold, staffed ballot boxes, sacrificed your own businesses, attended meetings, showed up at demonstrations, trekked to

Harrisburg, "lived" in City Council meetings, wrote a letter, sent an email, signed a check, wept and kept on hoping for the best. Pat yourself on the back, because you stopped the casinos long enough for our government and the professional planners to step up to the plate!"

Happy 4th of July Philadelphia! We dearly love you.

Resources:

Fumo Press Release (7/3)

Inquirer story (7/4)

planphilly story (7/3)

Daily News (7/5)