



## Holyoke City Council keeps hand in casino game as supporters barely keep alive bid for gaming issues committee



By [Mike Plaisance, The Republican](#)

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[HOLYOKE](#) - The rest of the world can claim cockroaches and [Keith Richards](#) as death-defying symbols, but as the [City Council](#) determined again Tuesday, here it is casino gambling.

Councilors who opposed formation of a special committee to review [casino](#) issues failed to kill the proposal, even though it technically was defeated by virtue of a 7-7 vote.

Following the tie vote, there were bids to table and reconsider the item. Councilors supporting the proposal for a casino-issues review board succeeded in getting it referred back to committee. That means it can be brought up again.

Supporters said the city still needs such a committee to discuss effects on Holyoke of a gaming resort that could come to Springfield, Palmer or West Springfield, despite Holyoke Mayor [Alex B. Morse](#) saying Thursday he will no longer consider casino projects here.

That was Morse's third change of heart on the issue in the past year. He ran for election in November 2011 on an anti-casino platform.

Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards isn't the only symbol of death-defying stamina.

Associated Press file / Stuart Ramson

He [announced Nov. 26](#) he would consider gaming proposals because the size of such projects would be affecting Holyoke, anyway, and the city should influence its own impact by considering casino projects.

But [on Thursday, Morse reverted](#) to his original position, saying the controversy had grown too divisive since his Nov. 26 announcement and the city's redevelopment was better without a casino.

The proposal the council was considering at City Hall was a 4-0 recommendation from the Charter and Rules Committee to establish a board of five councilors to consider casino issues and give the public a forum on gaming matters.

"It's established. Enough of this nonsense. Let's get the information," Ward 6 Councilor Todd A. McGee said.

"The truth is it's not a dead issue until somewhere a license for a gaming resort is issued," Councilor at Large Joseph M. McGiverin said.

But foes of forming such a committee argued the reality was that Morse's opposition essentially kills a casino here. The state gaming law established last year gives the mayor sole authority to negotiate a host-city agreement with a casino operator, and with Morse saying no, Holyoke is out of the casino derby they said.

"I don't see the point of a committee to discuss something that's not going to happen," Ward 7 Councilor Gordon P. Alexander said.

Councilor Rebecca Lisi said formation of a City Council casino committee sends the message the city still considers itself in the casino hunt, which is untrue.

"I think it's a slightly back-door way of bringing the issue to the fore," Lisi said.

Councilor at Large James M. Leahy said a casino committee remained necessary here because he doubted the two developers proposing gaming resorts would go away.

Two proposals had targeted Holyoke with separate proposals for gaming resorts on the Mount Tom Range. Paper City Development, a limited liability company, wanted to build a casino at Wyckoff Country Club along Interstate 91. Entertainment venue owner Eric Suher wanted to open a casino at Mountain Park, the outdoor concert he owns.

The council and public need a review committee if only because Morse might change his mind again, Councilor at Large Daniel B. Bresnahan said.

"Maybe in three months, he's going to want to get back into the game," Bresnahan said.

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