



**Testimony of Matt Ruben
President, Board of Directors, Northern Liberties Neighbors Association
Before the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board
HSP Gaming License Extension Hearing, Philadelphia, PA, May 6, 2009**

Members of the Board,

My name is Matt Ruben. I am the elected President of the Northern Liberties Neighbors Association, which serves one of the two communities in which the SugarHouse site is located. I am a Philadelphia homeowner, taxpayer, and voter; I am here today as an unpaid volunteer.

It has been three years, three weeks, and three days since the last public testimony at a Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board hearing in Philadelphia, and very little has changed.

Back then, we wanted jobs and revenue from casinos, but we also wanted to develop casinos in a way that minimized the negatives. The same is true today, and HSP is no closer to any real solutions.

Back then, casino traffic was an unsolved problem, and I-95 improvements were six years away. Now, traffic remains unsolved, and we have an independent,

professional review commissioned by the City that states, “[HSP’s] traffic impact analysis leads to a poorly designed project inappropriate for an urban waterfront undergoing rapid revitalization.” And I-95 improvements are still six years away.

Back then, proposed casinos would sit as little as 190 feet from taxpayers’ homes, posing an unnecessarily high, nationally unprecedented risk to neighborhoods. Now, studies confirm negative impacts increase the more people live close to a casino – and this project sits only 190 feet from taxpayers’ homes. And in the interim, no one, in any state, has been so foolish as to put a casino this large next to neighborhoods this dense.

Back then, we thought it shocking to put a casino – a giant, windowless box with a large parking garage – on a waterfront. Now, we have the *Civic Vision for the Central Delaware Waterfront*, a landmark, award-winning planning process, engaging more than 4,000 people, endorsed by the Mayor, and accepted by the City Planning Commission as *the* development framework. And HSP proposes a first phase violating essential tenets of that vision, including 1,465 surface parking spaces covering more than 85 percent of the land and extending onto an associated area to the north.

So we still have unmanageable traffic, dangerous proximity to neighborhoods, and an inappropriate waterfront site. But there is a difference: we now have the benefit of experience.

What does that experience show? HSP, by its own admission last month, has no financing. Its ability to build an interim facility is questionable, and there is no evidence it could build anything beyond that – meaning HSP would fail to deliver the full jobs or revenue anticipated by the law and desired by this Board. HSP has failed to come to any agreement with any established civic association. It has fought wars of words with the City, but has proven incapable of picking up City permits in a timely fashion. It has failed to obtain federal approvals and makes questionable claims about its ability to obtain them in the near future. It has failed to set up an interim facility at another, temporary site; or to seek a change of location for its permanent license. And it has doubled its extension request, asking for *triple* the legally allotted time and making a mockery of the legislature’s intent and your oversight role.

Back then, you had to decide among five applicants, four of whom were on the waterfront. You acknowledged but discounted the negatives because all the waterfront applicants had them. Now your choice isn’t HSP versus another applicant. Your decision is whether to reward HSP’s failure, giving them two more years of the same and expecting a different result; or to say *enough*, deny this extension request, and move on to a better solution that gets a viable project up and running, bringing in revenue, creating jobs, and minimizing the negative impacts. I urge you to make the latter, wiser, choice.