



The Patriot-News

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Friday, July 27, 2007

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Given that East Hanover Twp. is home to a new slots casino that is expected to attract 5,000 visitors a day, and neighboring South Hanover and West Hanover townships are among the region's fastest-growing municipalities, it begs the question as to how much longer the current state police patrols of these communities will suffice?

If local police services are needed, a regional department is certainly the way the go.

Marsico, R-Lower Paxton Twp., has raised the idea of Dauphin County funding a regional force from its share of state gaming revenues, which are estimated to total between \$10 million and \$19 million annually.

These local shares of statewide revenues come without strings attached, but Marsico believes -- and we agree -- their best use is for public safety, traffic and infrastructure issues related to gaming facilities. In the case of Dauphin County, that would be the casino being built at Penn National Race Course in East Hanover Twp.

Of course, such issues won't be confined to East Hanover, but will spill over into neighboring municipalities.

West Hanover's population has increased 29 percent since the 2000 U.S. Census and South Hanover's by 27 percent -- compared to just under one percent for the county overall. Residential development in those areas is only expected to increase.

Combine that growth rate with the new casino in East Hanover and it's entirely possible that all three could be pressured into considering local police services in the not-too-distant future.

Dauphin County commissioners are noncommittal at this point, and early reaction among officials in all three municipalities is somewhat mixed. East Hanover is open to the idea, and West Hanover supervisors are withholding comment until after their Aug. 6 meeting.

South Hanover supervisors Michael Spivey and Robert Cassel appeared skeptical, particularly in regard to financing, with Cassel questioning Marsico's involvement in "giving out county money."

Although both startup and long-range funding are legitimate questions -- and there are other issues to air as well -- this seems eminently doable. The state formula provides a 4 percent annual share to host counties and municipalities -- split 2 percent each. If the 2 percent to the municipality exceeds half of its annual budget -- and Marsico says it likely will in East Hanover's case -- the difference goes to the county, meaning that all the money stays local.

We beg to differ with Cassel on Marsico's involvement. In our view, this money is a windfall to local jurisdictions across Pennsylvania from state-acquired revenues. It's completely understandable that Marsico would have an interest in how the money is disbursed among his constituents.

But more important, he is breaking with provincial approaches that are all too common in this state and area by providing regional and futuristic thinking.

Marsico deserves credit for a great idea. We urge Dauphin County commissioners and supervisors in these three townships to give it strong consideration.

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