

Below is a draft of the *Times Union* Commentary, "[exempting rules a bad sign indeed](#)" (August 3, 2015), by Stockade resident and retired lawyer David Giacalone, as submitted to the TU Editorial page Editor:

A huge, homely and hazardous casino sign

On July 22, 2015, the Schenectady Planning Commission approved the size, design and location of a colossal pylon sign that Rush Street Gaming plans to erect for its Schenectady Rivers Casino at Mohawk Harbor. It will stand only yards from Erie Boulevard, at Front and Nott Streets. The Commission made its decision without applying the required Site Plan standards, which include assuring vehicle and pedestrian traffic flow and safety, proper location and design of signs, and protection of neighboring properties. Not only did the Commission fail to make improvements requested by the public, it approved a bait-n-switch pylon version even worse than prior proposals.

Now 80' by 39', the sign is a rectangular "cabinet" built around steel girders, which will mar

the skyline and streetscape far into Schenectady's future. The glare and changing messages of its 32' by 19' LCD screen also threaten traffic safety, by distracting drivers at a busy and complex intersection, which will soon include the County's first traffic rotary.

Moreover, at the top of the pylon, the 14.5-foot high Rivers Casino "branding" sign is likely to create disturbing glare and light pollution for nearby neighborhoods. It is not only far brighter in the latest version, with a white background rather than black, it is also about seven feet higher in the sky. The change clearly suggests the real goal of Rush Street: To dominate the Schenectady skyline and be seen for miles, not to make sure vehicles on Erie Boulevard find the casino and enter the traffic rotary safely.

Pressured to fulfill the casino's wish list, the Planning Commission recommended a set of amendments last February that exempt the casino from signage restrictions that apply to all other Schenectady businesses. While other

businesses are limited to 150 square feet of total signage, the casino can have 19,000 square feet; rather than the usual 7-foot height limit for a freestanding sign, the casino can go up to 80 feet with its pylon. And while pylon signs are normally restricted to eight feet wide, the casino pylon has no width maximum. Further, it was exempted from showing its LCD screen would have no impact on traffic or pedestrian safety.

The monolithic pylon will be taller and wider than Schenectady's old Masonic Temple (State at Erie Blvd.). In contrast, the classic pylon sign at Westgate Plaza is but 65' tall, and flares from a narrow base of 14' to about 30' at the top, with much open space between its girders, and without the distracting light and motion of a giant LCD screen.

From the perspective of safety and aesthetics, Rush Street has chosen to place its pylon at the worst spot on its 25 acres, and has submitted neither a Visual Impact Analysis of the pylon nor any depiction of it as viewed from Erie

Boulevard. Rush Street also announced on July 22 that the pylon would be “v-shaped,” but has provided no drawing explaining that configuration. Because the submissive Commission failed to demand those crucial documents, or to find the courage to do its duty, the City of Schenectady will soon have a very homely and hazardous new symbol.

[For more details with many images, see <http://tinyurl.com/PylonPrecis>]

David Giacalone also added this Comment to the published version of his Commentary:

Three quick additional points: (1) The v-shaped pylon will have a monster 32' by 19' LCD screen on each of its wings, one pointed toward the corner of Nott St. and Erie Blvd. and the other toward traffic coming westward on Erie Blvd. Due to the orientation of the street and other obstructions, that westbound traffic cannot see the LCD screen until it gets to the very block where the pylon and casino are located. The Planning Commission has never mentioned a 2nd LCD screen. (2) City Hall likes to say the pylon has been exempted from all signage regulations in the rest of the zoning code, but the same amendment that exempted casino signage from Art. IX rules, specified “Signage for a casino gaming facility and related uses within the C-3 District shall be viewed and approved by the Planning Commission as part of the Site Approval process.” And, (3) The definition of a pylon sign that applies to everyone else permits no base wider than 5' and no sign portion wider than 8 feet.

There is much more on this topic at <http://tinyurl.com/CasinoBS> .