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Comments [sent via electronic mail, 2 PM]

To: The City of Schenectady City Council

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Re: Public Hearing on **The Naming of streets in Mohawk Harbor**

Below, I offer several reasons why "Rush Street" would be an inappropriate name at Schenectady's Casino Compound. [You may be least familiar with the discussion, on page 4, of Benjamin Rush, the namesake of Chicago's Rush Street.]

First, though, I want to state that my personal preference is that this important piece of our City and its history be commemorated for its role in making Schenectady the City that Hauls the World *and* that contributed so strenuously to our nation's war efforts. That can and should be done by paying tribute to *ALCO and its workforce in the street name of the roadway used to enter the casino compound at Mohawk Harbor*, and perhaps the two other streets, as well.



AMERICAN LOCOMOTIVE Drive

I believe the words "American Locomotive" should be used in the street name, whether it is dubbed a street, drive avenue, boulevard, or lane. In addition to paying tribute to the site's past, the name American Locomotive, or similar words, will symbolize that Mohawk Harbor and its Casino can be an *Engine for Economic Growth* in

Schenectady, *without* suggesting that Schenectady should be or somehow already is proud of the City's role in the Gaming Industry and related businesses.

For myself, and many other people in our City and County, the existence of a casino in Schenectady may be seen as potentially good for employment and our tax revenue. It is not, however, a matter of civic "pride". A casino does not and will not invoke for the City a feeling of satisfaction or pleasure taken from its achievements, or a feeling of dignity, value or self-respect. Even if well run by a committed workforce (with their own personal pride in a job well done), and if enjoyed by customers for its entertainment value, it is merely a part of the broader, important but not crucial, leisure industry.

A casino will "produce" entertainment for some, and riches for a very few (mostly living elsewhere), but nothing that speaks of greatness and of a community's special skills and dedication. And, although denied by our leaders and its cheerleaders, a casino has the potential to have a significant negative impact on many aspects of the life of our community and its families.

I am proud of Schenectady's connection to ALCO (and to GE), but I will never be *proud* of our City's connection to the Gaming Industry, or to Rush Street Gaming. Honoring our past with a name like American Locomotive Street (or Drive) would be an important reminder to our residents and visitors of our proud and productive past, *and* of our faith in a future filled with achievements beyond the narrow scope of the gaming industry.



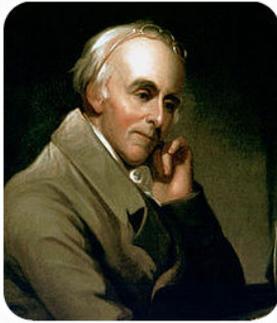
What's wrong with the name Rush Street?

1. **Name it after Rush Street in Chicago? No, thanks.** Rush Street Gaming CEO Greg Carlin says they are not naming the street after themselves, but are instead hoping to invoke the energy and aura of

Rush Street Chicago. His letter to the Council says, "Rush Street in Chicago is a renowned entertainment destination. It sits just one block west of the 'Magnificent Mile,' an internationally known shopping district. Some of the finest dining and nightlife options in the city of Chicago are on Rush Street. I can tell you the atmosphere on this mile-long thoroughfare is electric. We want to bring that same excitement and success to the Electric City."

Indeed, according to [Wikipedia](#), Rush Street Chicago "continues to be part of one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the country and has businesses that correspond to the demands of its residents. The neighborhood hosts highly rated restaurants, five-star hotels, four-star spas, an elite senior citizen residence and prominent bars." From my perspective, there are at least two big problems with invoking Rush Street Chicago:

- A. The vast majority of people considering or actually coming to Mohawk Harbor do not have the slightest idea what Rush Street Chicago is. Rush Street's management in Philadelphia claims its SugarHouse casino constitutes a "local market", although in a large, cosmopolitan city. You can bet Schenectady will also be a very local, provincial market. If Rush Street Gaming truly wanted to make Rivers Casino in Schenectady a world-class entertainment destination, it would not have given us a casino designed to look like an outdated shopping mall, and it would not be requesting a pylon sign so huge and homely that it would never be permitted within several miles of Chicago's Rush Street and the fancy homes of its Gold Coast.
- B. Those who *do know* what Rush Street in Chicago is like, can only be disappointed, and maybe even insulted, by the comparison once they arrive at Schenectady's version. Councilman Vince Riggi is correct to say that it is pretentious of Rush Street to name the street after itself, but it is probably even more pretentious to suggest their investment here will produce results comparable to even a tiny part of Chicago's Rush Street. It is not too farfetched or cynical to predict, especially given the physical limitations of the site, that *Schenectady's Rush Street will be to Chicago's Rush Street as our Wall Street is to Manhattan's Wall Street. (go here for a collage comparing the two Wall Streets: <http://tinyurl.com/WallStSchdy>)**



2. **Name it after Benjamin Rush? Please, no, for his sake and ours.** Rush Street in Chicago is named after [Dr. Benjamin Rush](#) [1746-1813], a physician who signed the Declaration of Independence, is called a Founding Father, was a leader of the American Enlightenment, perhaps the most prominent physician in the nation at the time, and wrote the first book in America on psychiatry. He was also a well-known abolitionist. Of course, it makes little sense to name an important thoroughfare in Schenectady after a man who has no local ties. More important, however, before doing so, we should consider, among other peculiarities, that:

- A. Ironically, Dr. Rush was a prominent advocate for temperance. He fought to include bans on "gaming, drunkenness, and uncleanness" along with "habits of idleness and love of pleasure", in the U.S. Constitution. He also campaigned against taverns and "clubs of all kinds where the only business of the company is feeding (for that is the true name of a gratification that is simply animal) are hurtful to morals". [See "[The Benjamin Rush Prescription](#)", by psychologist Romeo Vitelli.] This leads me to believe Dr. Rush would strongly oppose naming the casino roadway Rush Street.
- B. Although Dr. Rush was a leading abolitionist, it should be noted that "In 1792, Rush read a paper before the American Philosophical Society which argued that the 'color' and 'figure' of blacks were derived from a form of leprosy. He argued that with proper treatment, blacks could be cured and become white [[Wikipedia](#)] Also, despite his public condemnations of slavery, "Rush purchased a slave named William Grubber in 1776. To the consternation of many, Rush still owned Grubber when he joined the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1784." [*Id.*]
- C. While other physicians gave up the practice of bloodletting and purges, Dr. Rush did not, and his practice waned. Indeed, "Some

even blamed Rush's bleeding for hastening the death of Benjamin Franklin, as well as George Washington. . " [for more, see [Wikipedia](#)]



3. **The Many Meanings and Connotations of the Word**

"rush": The word "rush" has [many meanings](#) as a verb, adjective, and noun, and quite a few of the meanings conjure up notions that seem unseemly, misleading, or unworthy for a great City and sober community to be pushing. One example, of course, is the rush one gets from taking certain drugs. As described at [Dictionary.com](#): "rush" is "the initial, intensely pleasurable or exhilarated feeling experienced upon taking a narcotic or stimulant drug." The little yellow bottle seen on the head of this section contains a product deemed a liquid incense or aroma popper, thought of as a cheap form of "club drug". No matter what [fans of the product](#) my say or feel, neither the item nor the word comes to mind when I think about responsible gambling. And, even if lots of the old rockers on the Senior Casino Tour buses arriving at Mohawk Harbor are fans of the [band Rush](#), I'm finding it hard to fit the lyrics to their biggest hit, [Tom Sawyer](#), into a useful mindset relative to the future of the City of Schenectady.

4. **Naming the Street after Rush Street Gaming.** *Pretentious. At-Best, Premature. Surely proof that Fools Rush In.* [Rush Street Gaming](#) has yet to prove that it will be a good corporate neighbor or citizen in Schenectady, and thus perhaps the recipient of an Honorary Street Name some day. At "[Snowmen at the Gates](#)" (f/k/a *Stop the Schenectady Casino*)), there is plenty of proof that RSG asks for much and gives virtually nothing it is not forced by law to give. It certainly has been [far more generous at its other casino locations](#) with extra funding for local development and community services, and general mitigation of impact expenses, than in Schenectady, where the Mayor and City Council have given it all it wants, and more. Moreover, Neil Bluhm is far

too good of a businessman to refuse to listen to offers to buy him out at Mohawk Harbor. *E.g.*, in 2012, he and Greg Carlin [sold their Riverwalk Casino](#) in Vicksburg, Miss., four years after it opened. That makes the Rush Street connection less than solid. Our elected leaders should have some self-respect and say no to this name grab. That could start a great new precedent, asserting that Schenectady has a casino, but is Not a Casino Town.

Conclusion: Even if "Rush Street" were tolerably acceptable as a street name in Mohawk Harbor (which it is not), honoring our ALCO history and signaling our belief in a future that will once again be productive and worthy of civic pride are goals that point strongly to rejection of the street name Rush Street.

An expanded version of these Comments, with additional images and links to related materials can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/RushStWrong>

Thank you for holding this public hearing, and for your time and consideration.

s/ David A. Giacalone