



Massachusetts Gaming Commission

Meeting Minutes

Date/Time: May 1, 2025, 11:00 a.m.

Place: Plainville Town Hall
190 South Street
Plainville MA, 02762

The Commission conducted this public meeting and public hearing in Plainville and did not utilize remote collaboration technology. To ensure an adequate, alternative means of access for any interested member of the public, the meeting was live streamed via [Plainville North TV](#) and [recorded](#).

Commissioners Present:

Chair Jordan Maynard
Commissioner Eileen O'Brien
Commissioner Bradford Hill
Commissioner Paul Brodeur

1. [Call to Order](#) (01:25)

Chair Maynard called to order the 550th Public Meeting and the Public Hearing of the Massachusetts Gaming Commission ("Commission") at 11:05am. Roll call attendance was conducted, and Commissioners O'Brien, Hill, and Brodeur were present for the meeting. Chair Maynard stated that Commissioner Skinner was not present but noted that she would review the comments and record in this proceeding prior to the adjudicatory hearing scheduled for May 14, 2025.

The Chair stated that today's meeting had only one agenda item, and it was to offer the public an opportunity to share comments regarding the renewal of the Category 2 gaming license held by Plainville Gaming and Redevelopment, LLC, doing business as Plainridge Park Casino ("PPC"). Chair Maynard emphasized that it would primarily be a listening session for the Commissioners, and no votes or decisions would be made at this time; the goal was to gather information and gauge public sentiment.

2. [Opportunity for Comments](#) (05:35)

- a. Applicant, Plainville Gaming and Redevelopment LLC d/b/a PPC

The Chair recognized Mr. North Grounsell, General Manager of PPC, who prepared a presentation and statement for the Commission. Mr. Grounsell thanked Chair Maynard and the Commissioners. He stated that PPC recognized that licensing within the Commonwealth was a privilege, not a right, and that a lot of trust has been placed in them, which they strive to be worthy of. Mr. Grounsell then introduced Ms. Heidi Yates Akbaba, VP of Finance, to provide a look back over the past five years of operations.

Ms. Yates Akbaba reported recent updates to the property, including new digital signage, rebranding their rewards program to PennPlay in 2023, bringing on the sportsbook, replacing casino carpets, and remodeling the food court to include Wahlburgers restaurant. Ms. Yates Akbaba added that major capital improvements totaled \$25 million dollars, including remodeling the former Flutie's restaurant space into the ESPN Bet sportsbook, the food court renovation, casino carpet, and paddock improvements for harness horseracing participants.

Ms. Yates Akbaba detailed that PPC had generated \$338 million in tax revenue for the Commonwealth, comprising \$276 million in slot tax, \$62 million in racing tax, and \$800,000 in retail sports wagering tax. She stated that PPC contributed \$56 million to charities and honored their Host Community Agreement with the Town of Plainville ("Town") with \$11 million. Ms. Yates Akbaba added that PPC met or exceeded their diversity spend goals over the five year period, surpassing its annual goal of 21% with a total diversity spend of 25%. This included meeting the 12% goal for women spend, surpassing the 6% goal for minority spend at 7%, and surpassing the 3% goal for veteran spend at 5%.

In concluding her presentation, Ms. Yates Akbaba provided data for PPC since becoming the first licensee in Massachusetts in 2015. The property has generated over \$696 million in total tax revenue for the state, \$32 million in capital improvements, over \$1.35 million contributed to charities, a lifetime host community fee of \$23.1 million, and \$3.1 million in host and surrounding community agreements. The racing operation conducted 5,119 races over 52 days annually, resulting in a total payout of \$77 million in purses and nearly \$7.7 billion in handle. She then introduced Mr. Joseph Wenzel, VP of Operations for PPC.

Mr. Wenzel discussed enhancements to the gaming floor. He stated that PPC had reimaged the floor with new product and reinvestment, brought in the sportsbook, and enhanced the gaming experience by removing pandemic-related plastic dividers on the floor. He highlighted collaborative efforts with GameSense to enhance their commitment to responsible gaming.

Ms. Kathy Lucas, VP of Human Resources, reported on the employment and diversity metrics for PPC for the last five years. Ms. Lucas reported that PPC had exceeded diversity and veteran hiring goals and worked to meet goals for women and local hires, returning to pre-Covid numbers. She stated that 62% of employees are Massachusetts residents. She detailed training initiatives provided by PPC, including DEI and Belonging training programs for managers, an emerging leaders program, and culinary apprenticeship programs. She added that a new management leadership program allows managers to cross-train in different departments.

Ms. Lucas stated that PPC was proud to report that employees were eligible for benefits on day one. Employee benefits include a scholarship fund for employees' children (\$165,000 paid out), the PPC Cares program for employees in crisis (\$35,000 spent), tuition reimbursement (\$50,000 for 11 employees), and an English for Speakers of Other Language ("ESOL") program for language skills. Ms. Lucas concluded by stating that PPC had provided over \$125,000 in bonuses to recognize and reward their team members.

Steven Bradford, VP of Marketing, detailed PPC's contributions to local charities and communities. He reported that PPC has supported over 50 charities and communities, including Habitat for Humanity, Lenore's Pantry, Plainville Rotary, and Plainville Lions Club. He added that PPC also hosts seasonal events involving donations for pet supplies, toys, and school supplies. Mr. Bradford also noted the company's 2023 rebrand to Penn Entertainment, the introduction of the Penn Play app, and the 2024 launch of the new ESPN Bet sportsbook venue, which hosts events like broadcasts, watch parties, and appearances by local sports figures.

Mr. Grounsell concluded the presentation by stating they are proud of their record and believe they have lived up to their commitments. He expressed being most proud of the partnerships formed in the community and acknowledged that their achievements would not be possible without their team and the support of the community.

b. [Representatives of Host Community](#) (19:35)

Next, Chair Maynard recognized representatives from the Town of Plainville, starting first with Town Administrator, Brian Noble.

Mr. Noble stated that he was strongly in favor of renewing PPC's license and highlighted the positive relationship between the Town and the casino. He acknowledged that PPC has preserved and revitalized the legacy industry of harness racing, supporting the broader equine and agricultural economy, creating economic opportunity, and preserving critical open space. Mr. Noble expressed his concern about the competitive pressures faced by PPC, particularly from Twin Rivers casino in Rhode Island. Mr. Noble stated that PPC had been operating under significant statutory constraints. He suggested that the state law, G.L. c. 23K, needs to be revisited to ensure fairness, competitiveness, and our continued economic growth as a state. He noted that while statutory reform was a legislative matter, it was important to raise these matters in a public forum to prevent PPC and the region from being at a competitive disadvantage. He concluded by expressing pride in the relationship with Penn National and PPC, describing them as exceptional partners for the Town and for the region.

Brian Kelly, Plainville Select Board Chair, echoed the sentiments expressed by Mr. Noble. He emphasized that PPC was a critical business for the Town and that they couldn't have a better relationship with the casino. Mr. Kelly highlighted that the revenue from the host community agreement was directly responsible for the construction of the new town hall where the public hearing was being held and noted that the revenue pays the bond for the building. He thanked the Commission.

Maggie Clarke, Plainville Select Board Member, offered comments in support of the renewal of PPC's license. She thanked the Commission for holding the meeting in the Plainville Town Hall, noting that this building and the public safety complex stand as visible symbols of the partnership with PPC. She stated that these buildings represented real, tangible progress for Plainville. Ms. Clark stated that she had tried to recall any negative impacts PPC's presence had on the community and noted there had been none from her perspective. She concluded by thanking PPC for being outstanding neighbors to the Town. She stated there were several positive impacts by PPC and thanked the Commission for being present today.

Jeff Johnson, Plainville Select Board Member, spoke in strong support of PPC's license renewal. He stated it had been a great pleasure working with PPC as a tremendous partner to the Town. He emphasized that it was so important for partners like PPC to be encouraged and motivated because of the positive things they do, such as creating jobs, fostering economic vitality, and revitalizing the harness racing industry. Mr. Johnson shared that he initially had concerns about both horse racing and the casino in the area, but noted that his concerns turned out to be poorly founded. He stated that PPC had exceeded every commitment they had made to the Town and did not cause any of the negative impacts that many people feared. He concluded by stating that the Town and the Commonwealth could not have a better partner in PPC.

c. [Representatives of Surrounding Communities](#) (30:11)

Leigh Fontes, CEO of the Attleboro Norton YMCA, stated she was from a surrounding community. She highlighted PPC as a valued community partner who has been supportive of their annual campaign. She mentioned that the casino's general manager, Mr. Grounsell, was on their board. Ms. Fontes emphasized that their partnership and support benefited families, seniors, and the broader community beyond Plainville and thanked the Commission for their time.

Tim Munn, a Wrentham resident, stated he wanted to speak on behalf of the local communities. He noted his involvement with Lions Clubs in Plainville, Rehoboth, and Norfolk. Mr. Munn discussed PPC's support, along with the Standardbred Owners Association, for a Polar Plunge event that raised money for eye research. He noted the casino was an important and consistent supporter and a headline sponsor for this \$50,000 event. He also mentioned living two miles from the casino and hearing from police officers in Rehoboth and Norton who had not heard of negative issues at the casino.

d. [Representatives of Impacted Live Entertainment Venues](#) (35:34)

Chair Maynard noted that the Commission had received a letter from a representative on behalf of the Impacted Live Entertainment Venues ("ILEVs") and that the Commission would take it into consideration. He then inquired if there were any other representatives on behalf of ILEVs present who wished to offer testimony. Seeing and hearing no participants, the Chair moved onto the next agenda item.

3. [Comments by Members of the Public](#) (35:50)

Chair Maynard stated that the Commission would now hear remarks from members of the public who had signed up to provide testimony.

The Chair called Jack Lank, President of the United Way Regional Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Lank stated that his organization served the 16 communities that surround Plainville. Mr. Lank spoke in favor of renewing PPC's license, emphasizing that PPC has been a tremendous community partner for their region since before its opening. He highlighted that PPC had provided jobs for local residents, strengthened the local tax base for neighboring communities, and generated economic activity in the region. He specifically mentioned that local merchants, convenience stores, coffee shops, and restaurants in the area have seen a huge increase in revenue due to casino visitors. He also gave an example of PPC supporting a local vendor right in North Attleboro to refinish their bar stools. Mr. Lank concluded that PPC exemplified a responsible and engaged community partner contributing positively to the economic and social well-being of the region.

Nancy Longobardi, the Secretary & Treasurer for the Standardbred Owners of Massachusetts ("SOM"), spoke in support of PPC's license renewal. Ms. Longobardi stated that the relicensing of PPC had been the force behind the success of their breeding program. She stated that over the last 5 years, they have had 650 resident brood mares and given away over \$12 million in stake race purses. She explained that the SOM's success has also allowed them to make donations to local organizations. She stated that SOM, along with PPC and the Harness Horseman's Association, has made donations to the Standardbred Transition Alliance, which is important for the retraining of standardbreds after their racing career. Ms. Longobardi concluded by emphasizing that relicensing PPC was very important for the continuing success and growth of the program.

Michael Vartabedian, representing the International Association of Machinists ("IAM") Union, spoke strongly in favor of renewing PPC's license. Mr. Vartabedian highlighted that Penn National was more than open and provided neutrality for the union to speak to workers, agreeing to voluntary recognition if they chose to unionize, which he noted does not happen too often. He added that their relationship has evolved over the years into a partnership, which he described as unusual for a company and a union. Mr. Vartabedian emphasized that PPC leadership was extremely respectful to the workers, and that PPC provided good paying union jobs. He mentioned PPC was a partner in the union's charity, Guide Dogs of America. Mr. Vartabedian concluded by encouraging the Commission to renew PPC's license, stressing the hundreds of good paying union jobs at stake and calling PPC a good employer.

Marlene Warner, CEO of the Mass Council on Gaming and Health ("the Council"), provided comments focusing on the strong, long-standing partnership between PPC and the Council, which is involved in responsible gambling initiatives. She praised PPC for being willing to be a "guinea pig" by implementing responsible gambling programs like Play My Way and GameSense, noting they were unusual in the U.S. and that PPC was willing to test them. Ms. Warner highlighted PPC's collaborative approach to the voluntary self-exclusion program, seeking to balance care for patrons with their operational responsibilities. She stated that PPC consistently went way beyond the bare minimum in their commitment to responsible gambling and community support initiatives. She highlighted PPC's pioneering efforts as the first casino in

Massachusetts to train staff in mental health first aid and in “question, persuade, and refer” protocols related to suicidal ideation.

Kim Thomas, from Old Colony Habitat for Humanity, spoke in support of the renewal of PPC’s license. She stated that her organization served 24 communities in Bristol and Norfolk county, which included many surrounding communities. She highlighted PPC's 10-year partnership with Habitat for Humanity, mentioning that they have built homes alongside the casino in Attleboro, Mansfield, Norton, and Taunton, all neighboring communities to Plainville. She noted that PPC's engagement went beyond transactional, describing them as a true community partner invested in the well-being of their neighbors.

Dale Borgevine, a long-time Plainville resident of 67 years and original committee member that supported PPC coming to Plainville, also gave remarks regarding PPC’s renewal. Mr. Borgevine noted that while he initially had mixed feelings about the casino, it turned out well. He emphasized the genuine nature and care shown by the PPC management team, specifically recounting positive personal interactions with Mr. Grounsell and other staff members. Mr. Borgevine concluded by requesting that the Commission renew PPC’s license.

Plainville Police Chief, Robert Miller, spoke in support of the renewal of PPC’s license. He noted that he felt the relationship had grown beyond just business to blur the lines between community and family, noting that the casino treats its team members like family, and stated that it felt that PPC had woven themselves into the fabric of the community.

4. [Other Business](#) (58:38)

Hearing no business, Chair Maynard requested a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Brodeur moved to adjourn. Commissioner O’Brien seconded the motion.

Voice Vote:

Ayes: 4.

Nays : 0.

The motion passed unanimously, 4-0. Meeting adjourned.

List of Documents and Other Items Used

1. [Notice of Public Hearing / Public Meeting and Agenda](#), dated April 14, 2025