

# The Gadsden Times

## Etowah group to gaming council: Don't shut us out

By Donna Thornton  
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MONTGOMERY - The message from a group of Etowah County residents to the governor's advisory council on gaming: Don't shut out Etowah County if legislation is recommended to expand gaming in the state.

Christie Knowles, an attorney for CBS Supply LLC, told the council on Thursday the company is poised to move forward with a \$200 million-plus development in Etowah County - and has been for years.

She said her client held off because of the turmoil over the legality of gaming within the state.

Now, as state leaders seem ready to look at clarifying gaming legislation and the possibly of expanding it, Knowles said she doesn't want CBS to be at a disadvantage.

There's been talk of legislatively limiting additional gaming to the sites that already have some sort of gaming.

House Minority Leader Craig Ford, D-Gadsden, is a member of the council, and has prefiled a bill that would protect Etowah County's interests in gaming.

Several interested people from Etowah County attended the meeting: Heather New, president of The Chamber of Gadsden & Etowah County, hotel owner Nanda Patel, Commercial Development Authority Director Lesa Osborn, County Commissioner Carolyn Parker and Gadsden Mall manager Carver Boyton.

New said the chamber was not coming out in support of gaming, but passed a resolution in July asking basically what Knowles was asking - that Etowah County be included if gambling is expanded.

Under the agreement CBS reached in 2008 with the Etowah County Commission, the commission set out regulations for gaming, with the sheriff to be responsible for issuing permits. In 2009, the sheriff awarded CBS a conditional permit.

Advisory Council Chair Clinton Carter asked if the company's interest would change if a state gaming commission, rather than the sheriff, was in charge of permitting. Knowles said she would expect a gaming commission would be involved.

There were questions, too, about the company Knowles represents.

She explained that CBS is a subsidiary of a larger company which deals with gambling equipment, construction, management and other aspects.

Asked if CBS supplies gambling machines to other casinos, she said it did, but none in Alabama.

Knowles said the type of facility CBS plans to build would be a first-class development - an economic driver that would bring 2,000 direct jobs to the area.

The council also heard from representatives of Greene and Houston counties, seeking to keep or revive gaming operations.

**The Alabama Policy Institute brought Rockefeller Institute Senior Policy Analyst Lucy Dadayan to address the council with a**

**report on state gambling revenues titled "Short-Term Relief, Long-Term Disappointment."**

**Dadayan pointed to statistics from various kinds of gaming or lotteries, showing revenues surge when gaming is first allowed, but decline after about five years.**

**There is a limited pool of customers for gaming, she said, and as more states compete for those customers, fees and taxes to states are limited.**

Council Chair Clinton Carter said he understood the statistics showing gaming revenues declining in some states.

However, he said, Alabama now has no gaming revenue.

"You can't decline from zero," he said.

The council had a Jan. 31 deadline for making recommendations on gaming. Members voted at Thursday's meeting to extend that deadline to June 30.

The council meets again Jan. 26, and part of that meeting will be dedicated to a public hearing on gaming issues.