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Special Queens County Survey: The Aqueduct Redevelopment

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Creating Jobs, Maintaining Neighborhood Character Keys to Redevelopment
Crime tops list of Local Concerns
Majority Need More Info on Project but Prefer Development Sensitive to
Queens over Vegas Style

Loudonville, NY – Queens residents rank creating local jobs as the most important consideration in deciding upon the redevelopment of Aqueduct according to a new survey conducted by the Siena College Research Institute for Aqueduct Gaming LLC* released today. Ninety-five percent of respondent say it is somewhat or very important to create jobs for people from Queens in the proposed Aqueduct redevelopment. In ranking their top considerations, Queens residents followed jobs for locals (32%) with creating jobs for anyone (27%), and maintaining the current character of the community around Aqueduct (15%). By far the single top concern residents have about redevelopment is crime (58%) followed by traffic (14%), noise and light pollution (9%) and construction disruption (8%).

Currently, a majority of residents say they need more information before they can say they are either in favor or opposed to either the redevelopment of Aqueduct or the proposed addition of video lottery terminals (VLT's) to the Aqueduct site. But when asked to choose between a developer that is familiar with and experienced in New York that will build a facility that fits in with the neighborhood or, a developer with an international reputation that will construct a Las Vegas style facility, 76% of residents prefer the developer with New York experience and sensitivities to the Las Vegas style.

While only one in four Queens residents say they are following the news about the proposed redevelopment of the Aqueduct site either somewhat (17%) or very (7%) closely, of those with an opinion of the redevelopment, supporters outweigh opponents by over three to one. Still, 62% of residents need more information in order to decide if they support or oppose redevelopment and 50% need to know more about VLT's. Currently support for adding VLT's to Aqueduct leads 25% to 21%.

What Queens residents do know is that any redevelopment should create jobs. Nearly all respondents say jobs for people from Queens is either very (84%) or somewhat (11%) important and similarly that creating jobs for anyone is either very (75%) or somewhat (17%) important. Jobs rank far and away as the single most important consideration with 59% of respondents naming either local or any form of job as the single most important redevelopment consideration.

Residents support the redevelopment generating money for the state with 68% saying that is very important and 21% indicating somewhat important. But, maintaining the current character of the community with a similar score of 63% very important and 22% somewhat important (71% very important among those closest to Aqueduct), ranks above state funds when residents select their single most important consideration.

While none of the six current bidders are known by name to a majority of Queens residents, respondents by 76% to 20% prefer hiring a developer familiar with and experienced in New York that will build a responsibly phased facility that fits in with the neighborhood and responds to neighborhood concerns to a developer with an international reputation that will construct a state of the art, Las Vegas style facility that will establish Queens and Aqueduct as a destination vacation. Ninety percent of respondents agree that “we should select a developer that knows and understands the community and respects the community’s wishes” and 79% support seeing a moderately priced attraction that fits in with the neighborhood.

Still, a majority, 56% to 35% agree that the best thing for Queens is to build a spectacular facility that will attract people from all over and put Queens on the map. But by 50% to 41% residents disagree with the statement that “what we need at Aqueduct is a first class development equal or better to anything in Las Vegas.”

Crime rates as the single greatest concern among residents. Overall 84% are concerned about crime and 58% consider crime their single top worry about redevelopment. Large majorities are concerned with traffic (69%), noise or light pollution (73%), and disruption during construction (65%) but those concerns all rank well below crime when residents select their primary worry.

Residents are currently skeptical when asked about the redevelopment successfully meeting a proposed timeline. A majority do not think the developer will in fact be named by September 15. And Queens residents are split as to whether or not ground will be broken by January 1, 2010, all 4500 VLT’s will be operational by December 31, 2010 or whether after the project is complete, the state will receive one million dollars a day from the VLT’s. Residents are more confident that some VLT’s will be up and running by the summer of 2010 (54%) and that the state will receive over 100 million dollars from the selected developer (48% to 40%).

“Queens residents need more information before public opinion embraces the Aqueduct redevelopment. Sure it would be great if the state coffers get a boost, but residents want a development that fits in, and a developer that knows, respects, protects, and helps the people of Queens”, according to Dr. Don Levy, SRI’s Director.

The Special Queens County Survey was conducted August 5-12, 2009 by random telephone calls to 703 Queens County residents over the age of 18. Data was weighted to be enhance representativeness. Results are reported with a margin of error of ± 3.7 points. For more information or comments, please call Dr. Don Levy, Director, Siena College Research Institute, at 518-783-2901 or dlevy@siena.edu. Survey cross-tabulations can be found at www.siena.edu/sri/research

***The Special Queens County Survey: The Aqueduct Redevelopment was sponsored by Delaware North and Aqueduct Gaming L.L.C., one of six current redevelopment bidders**