

Official Statement
January 28, 2023
“Let The People Vote”

On January 8, 2023 Tiffani Arndt, Shannon Hoff, and Tim O’Keeffe filed a referendum petition with the Hastings City Clerk seeking a citizen vote to rescind a City Council Resolution passed in November, 2022 approving a Conditional Use Permit for operation of a horse track at the northwest corner of 42nd Street and US Highway 281 in Hastings. The horse track is required to operate a casino at that site. The petitioners take significant exception to the practices of the Hastings City Council and the processes leading up to this vote. Specifically:

- The City Council ignored the public’s overwhelming opposition to a casino at this location. The Council had received over 849 letters, e-mails and calls opposed to a casino, compared to just ten letters in favor. At the meeting, thirty people testified against the proposal compared to just five for those in favor, and of those five, two were not citizens of Hastings.
- The application was flawed in review. There was neither a permanent City Planner nor a City Administrator to review the plan and alignment with the Comprehensive Development Plan and Future Land Use Map. Additionally, the developer’s presentation included a land use violation within the commercial zoning for the casino.
- The developer misleadingly implied that Hastings must have a casino to earn property tax relief from casino gaming in Nebraska, which is not true. Hastings will benefit from casino gaming in the form of property tax relief whether there is a casino in Hastings or not.
- At least three Council members issued social media comments in favor of the proposal prior to the meeting and after not hearing arguments in the matter; in some cases after meeting behind closed doors with the developer’s attorney.
- One Council member was a recent shareholder in the real estate firm that is set to collect a large commission on the sale of the land.
- At the time of the vote, the City Council was lame duck, with a new Council to be seated following the November 2022 election, which occurred prior to this vote.
- There was no requirement to plat the land according to the developer’s illustrations presented to the City Council. That allows wide leeway in the future to expand the project incrementally without proper review.

A referendum petition allows the people to directly determine the fate of this important development. By signing the petition, voters in Hastings are not taking a stand against the casino. They are taking a stand in favor of due process and thorough public examination of a very important strategic matter—namely, “Do we want a casino at the entrance to our community when we can benefit from property tax relief whether we have a casino or not”?

The petitioners have six months to collect signatures representing more than twenty percent of voters in the last election. The referendum would be on the May, 2024 Primary Election Ballot. This timing allows plenty of opportunity for the community to study the matter and make an informed decision.

Early indications are that there is strong support for the petition. Given the outpouring of citizen action in just a short window last November in the lead up to the rushed and hushed City Council decision, the petitioners are confident that

| a sufficient number of qualified signatures can be collected. The petitioners plan to canvass the community for the full six months allowed so as to curate the quality of signatories and ensure approval.

Tiffani Arndt
Shannon Hoff
Tim O’Keeffe