

Site Search:

Go

[Extended Search](#)

Week of
August 10-16, 2006



home

news

op-ed

lifestyles

food

sports

police report

youth & schools

calendar

socials & obituaries

classifieds

real estate

place an ad

menu guide

medical guide

archives

contact us



Jammed

Riverfront Communities United, formed in opposition to the proposed casino in South Philly, hired a traffic engineer to analyze two studies released by Foxwoods.

By [Lorraine Gennaro](#)

August 10, 2006

During the warm August days, Mary Reinhart would love to throw open her windows and let the fresh air in. But she can't — unless she wants to live with the constant sounds of traffic.

Residing on the 100 block of Manton Street, the retired Philadelphia park ranger is 13 doors west of an interstate.

"All of us on Manton Street are right on the front line. The roaring traffic of I-95 is an issue all the time for us," Reinhart said. Coupled with highway traffic is congestion on Front Street, caused by residents avoiding jammed Columbus Boulevard, she said.

"That's the situation right now. We can just imagine if Foxwoods brings nine million people here. We're going to be trapped in our houses," Reinhart said.

Foxwoods Casino Philadelphia is one of five groups vying for two licenses (which will be given out later this year) from the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board to open slots parlors in the city.

The company wants to build an \$823 million entertainment/residential complex on Columbus at Reed Street.

In March and May, respectively, Foxwoods released two traffic impact studies — a preliminary and a final — conducted by Orth-Rodgers and Associates Inc. To analyze those reports, Riverfront Communities United, an ad-hoc coalition formed to protest Foxwoods, hired Frank Tavani of F. Tavani and Associates Inc. to conduct a detailed technical review of Orth-Rodgers' report. A former Orth-Rodgers employee, Tavani noted in his overview he had "limited time to conduct this review" because the Orth-Rodgers final study was released May 15 and the deadline for presentation of traffic impact materials before the Gaming Control Board was June 2. Two weeks would not have been sufficient time to conduct a full-on traffic study, Tavani said.

Riverfront Communities is comprised of eight civic and business associations, seven of which are South Philly based: Queen Village Neighbors Association; Pennsport Civic Association; Passyunk Square Civic Association; Bella Vista United Civic Association; Whitman Council; Hawthorne Empowerment Coalition; and Head House Square Business District. The eighth is Society Hill Civic Association.

Riverfront Communities funded Tavani's review, co-chairwoman Colleen



Mary Reinhart, right, from the 100 block of Manton Street, fears she will lose her historic home if Foxwoods Casino Philadelphia builds a new I-95 ramp as part of its traffic mitigation plans. Laura Compton, left, from the 100 block of Federal Street, shares her neighbor's concerns about traffic and congestion. STAFF PHOTO BY MEREDITH EDLOW

Ads by Google

Hotel at Foxwoods Resort

Find Travel Info Including Hotel Reviews, Rates, Comparisons & More! www.TripAdvisor.com

Hotels Near Foxwoods

All hotels near Foxwoods Low Rates. www.HotelsAndDeals.com

Puckett, a former Queen Village Neighbors Association president, said.

"We already knew traffic was a major concern because we live with it," Puckett said of why her group commissioned the analysis.

IN TAVANI'S REPORT, he cited eight issues of concern with Orth-Rodgers' study with four major points being:

- Foxwoods provided information to Orth-Rodgers from which its study was conducted. Data included traffic expected in and out of the site, the number of passengers in a car and which direction those vehicles would originate.

"Orth-Rodgers was supplied information from the applicant. It's typically not the way it works," Tavani said.

Orth-Rodgers Principal Jeffrey Greene said Foxwoods used the client-supplied method because "they know their customers, they know their target market. They have a certain level of business they expect to do."

Such information is usually determined from published reports and books, most notably "Trip Generation," Tavani said. "Whenever a traffic engineer is hired by somebody, that is typically the book they reference to get a handle on traffic generated."

"We did not use ['Trip Generation'] because we had better data [developed by Foxwoods and other casino projects in the country]. We checked it against industry data and used the highest trip data," Greene said.

- Orth-Rodgers' report offered trip generation estimates for four peak hours, including 3 to 4 p.m. Friday and 1 to 2 p.m. Saturday, but has level of service analyses for only 3 to 4 p.m. Friday. Late evening peak hours are not analyzed in the Orth-Rodgers' report when casino patronage would at least double, according to Foxwoods own data.

According to Greene, while patronage increases in late evening peak hours, the volume of non-casino traffic decreases dramatically. The traffic generated by the casino during this time would not reach the levels hit at the peak hours identified in the Orth-Rodgers report.

Tavani claimed the 3 to 4 p.m. Friday hour Orth-Rodgers went with is misleading. "It's important for the [Gaming Control Board] to understand there are 15 other hours of the day that generate traffic equal to or greater than the [Friday] 3 o'clock hour. This isn't something I'm arguing — this is something in [Foxwoods'] report," Tavani said.

- Orth-Rodgers' report suggests 15 percent of casino traffic would originate north of Columbus and another 15 percent, south. Engineers did not examine the numerous intersections south of the Foxwoods site, including two strip malls: Columbus Crossing, which has a Home Depot and Wal-Mart, and Columbus Commons, which has an Ikea, Lowe's and Linens-n-Things, Tavani said. Nor did the study take into account any of the other approved square footage yet to be occupied or constructed at the Commons, which opened in fall 2004.

"They looked at five intersections north of Reed but none south of Reed. I would think the impact of those [south] intersections is of some significance," Tavani said.

Greene said when Orth-Rodgers conducted its study, the Snyder Avenue intersection near Lowe's was closed and remains as such, "so we couldn't do the study and if we did it would have been wrong."

As for the Columbus Crossing intersection, Greene said, "We don't believe that intersection would be a problem," based on one of Foxwoods proposed plans to alleviate boulevard congestion by putting a signal at the Morris Street I-95 on ramp to intercept northbound Columbus Boulevard traffic that U-turns at Dickinson Street.

• Orth-Rodgers did not take into account increased traffic from any of the major high-rise condo developments slated for Columbus, which includes Marina View and Dockside II next to Dockside Luxury Apartments, Tavani pointed out.

Local developer Peter DePaul built Dockside and will construct its 200-unit sister tower in the next two to three years. DePaul is one of a dozen local investors in Washington Partners Community Charities L.P., which owns 70 percent of the casino site. Foxwoods owns the remaining 30.

"I pointed out two major condominium developments," Tavani said. "I would think that's certainly going to add traffic and it should have been included."

But, according to Greene, Tavani is jumping the gun.

"None of them have zoning. We don't know if any of them will be built," he said of the condos.

Construction of Marina View begins Monday and units are being pre-sold, according to an associate at the on-site sales office. At this time, Dockside II has no groundbreaking date set or a specific address, according to a Dockside sales associate.

ONE OF FOXWOODS' most hotly contested plans, in the eyes of Riverfront Communities and residents, is construction of a new ramp from southbound I-95 to Columbus, connecting directly to Dickinson. The ramp is part of Foxwoods "traffic mitigation" plan, along with water taxis, off-site parking/shuttles, and modified traffic lane configurations, among others.

The casino wants to build the ramp to alleviate volume generated by its Phase II construction, which includes an additional 2,000 slots (for a total of 5,000), as well as restaurants and retail shops.

Phase III construction would consist of a 500-room hotel and "potential development of about 200 residential condominium units," according to the Foxwoods traffic impact study. "The third development phase is not anticipated to generate substantial new traffic volumes and will be addressed later," the study said.

In testimony before the Gaming Board April 11, Puckett talked of the new ramp: "There are many residents who remember the construction of I-95 through the heart of the waterfront communities ... They will not sit idly by and allow another outrage to be perpetrated on their community without putting up a fight."

Reinhart, of Manton Street, claimed she would go farther than a fight. "You'll see me out there in front of the bulldozer," she said.

"If they decide to widen I-95, I could lose this house to eminent domain. That's my biggest fear. If you've ever taken an off-ramp, you know they have to start at least a quarter of a mile before. That means if I'm three blocks north of where they expect the traffic to go off, I would lose my beautiful house and all my lovely neighbors," Reinhart continued.

In response, Foxwoods spokesperson Maureen Garrity of Tierney Communications said, "There are a number of ways the ramp could be constructed. We would be willing to work with the community to determine what works best for them."

Regarding who will pay for the addition, Puckett posed in her testimony, "Is Foxwoods prepared to pony up \$40 million and more toward the cost of the ramp?"

Greene said the ramp would cost \$20 million, not \$40 million. The source of funding was not mentioned in Orth-Rodgers' study because it has yet to be determined, according to Garrity. "There are monies available out there," she said of state, federal and local funding.

Based on his experience and research, Tavani said the earliest the proposed ramp could be studied, approved, constructed and opened would be 2014.

Greene disagreed with that projected timeframe. "If we're one of the licensees, it behooves government to help speed the process along because it means they get tax dollars sooner."

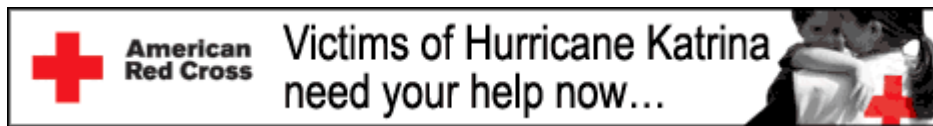
WITH TAVANI'S TRAFFIC review complete, Riverfront Communities plans to continue its fight to ensure South Philly does not hear the sound of slots reverberating off the waterfront.

The second of the group's public rallies is scheduled for Sept. 10 at the Foxwoods site. Nearly 500 residents turned out for the first protest May 20.

"The message we want to send is we are not going away. We will continue this even if they break ground, God forbid" Puckett said. "We will still fight this. This is not the right place for a casino."

 [E-mail this article to a friend](#)

[back to top](#)



© 2006 [Review Publishing Privacy Policy](#)

visit our sister papers: [PW-Philadelphia Weekly](#), [Atlantic City Weekly](#), [Connections Weekly](#).