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# Crime up in Hellertown

## Borough wants share of gaming money to pay for two more officers.

October 22, 2010 | By Margie Peterson, SPECIAL TO THE MORNING CALL

Hellertown is hoping to get gaming revenue to pay for two more police officers to battle an increase in crime the borough has seen since the Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem moved next door.

Police Chief Robert Shupp told Borough Council this week that crime and arrests are up since last year and that means more overtime for officers testifying in court. The increase includes mostly drug crimes and drunken driving but also some counterfeiting, prostitution and other infractions.

"We're encountering drugs we didn't encounter in Hellertown [before]," including methamphetamine and heroin, Shupp said in an interview.

In the year before the casino opened in May 2009, borough police had 35 drug arrests; in the year following they had 102. Drunken driving arrests rose from 51 to 76 in the same period. Hellertown police responded to 5,752 calls in the 14 months before Sands opened and 7,222 in the 14 months after, Shupp said.

Shupp said the increase doesn't mean that all the offenders are coming from the casino but it was the only major change in the area during that time.

Bethlehem has hired more officers and as they step up patrols, criminal activity might be migrating to the borough, he speculated.

Before the casino came to Bethlehem, surrounding communities were assured that there would be money to deal with any negative impacts, he said.

"That casino has been open a year and a half and we haven't seen one dime," Shupp said. "I can't blame the Sands because the Sands are fulfilling ... their obligations. They're giving the money, we just haven't seen it."

Hellertown Councilwoman Stephanie Kovacs is hoping to change that when she makes a pitch for several borough grant applications at the Northampton County Gaming and Economic Redevelopment Authority meeting Monday evening at County Council chambers.

Hellertown and other communities surrounding the casino — Freemansburg and Bethlehem and Hanover, Lower Saucon and Bethlehem townships, as well as Northampton County — are eligible to apply for a pot of gaming revenue to help mitigate its negative effects. By January, that pot — called the restricted fund — is expected to be about \$1.2 million, Kovacs said.

She and other representatives on the gaming authority will rate the projects on a point system. (A separate pool of gaming funds is available for economic development projects.)

Kovacs said Hellertown has a grant application for restricted fund money for two police officers. The borough currently has an open shift it fills with part-time officers or full-timers working overtime.

"We're stuck fighting more crime with the same amount of officers," Shupp said. "It isn't fair for us to put the increases in crime and crime fighting on the taxpayer."

The borough is also seeking gaming revenue for other police and rescue equipment, including a police cruiser.

Freemansburg is also seeing more crime and arrests and is applying for gaming money to help pay to expand its police headquarters. Neely Rose, office manager for Freemansburg police, said officers were called out on 1,160 incidents in 2009. In the first nine months of this year, they've been called out on 1,583 incidents. The small department had 38 drug or drunken driving arrests in 2009. In the first nine months of this year, it's had 43, Rose said.

The police department has three full-time officers, including the chief, and nine part-timers.

"Our [headquarters] consists of three rooms," Rose said. "If we have more than one criminal here at a time we have to handcuff them to a pole in the hallway."

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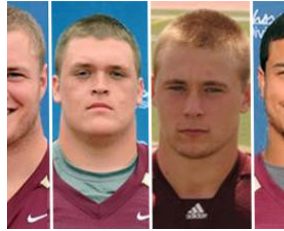
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