

# Board hedges its bet on card rooms

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SANTA CRUZ — They all got a shot at playing their best hand Tuesday as supervisors wrestled with a proposal to open card rooms 24 hours a day.

Poker-faced card players squared off against Sheriff Al Noren in a lengthy public hearing that, in the end, saw supervisors postponing a decision for two weeks.

The postponement would allow Noren time to review the proposed change with the county counsel.

Three of the four supervisors present said they favored extending the hours from the present 2 a.m. closing time to 6 a.m. The effect of that would be to open card rooms 24 hours a day. (Supervisor Joe Cucchiara was out of town at a meeting.)

Supervisors Dan Forbus, Gary Patton and Wayne Moore played their hand in favor of extending the hours. They espoused the libertarian principal that less is better — in this case, less government interference in private lives.

The only supervisor against the draft card-room ordinance was Robley Levy, who echoed the sentiments of Noren in

wanting to leave the present ordinance intact.

There are three licensed card rooms in the unincorporated part of the county that would be affected by the proposed change, according to testimony at the meeting. But there are private card games that go on after the licensed clubs close their doors, said one self-avowed card player, Pat Pfremmer of Bonny Doon.

"Frequently, the games move to private homes where the chances of losing more money are greater," she said.

Noren appeared before supervisors to clarify his position, which was somewhat muddled last week when his chief deputy, Marv Gangloff, said Noren favored 24-hour card rooms on a one-year trial basis.

"I'm not going to get on a soap box," said Noren, in saying he favored the status quo.

"I see no good that would come of it," said Noren of the extended hours. "Certainly, I would never recommend to the board they do it."

When the proposal first came to light in August, Noren had been asked by supervisors to work with the county counsel on a card-room ordinance. He said there was some "miscommunication along the line"

between one of his lieutenants and himself over the draft ordinance that was before supervisors for consideration.

This point became a bone of contention, leading Forbus to call Noren's bluff at one point during the hearing.

"If it isn't what you said you wanted, why is it here as a compromise (ordinance)?" Forbus asked Noren.

"I was somewhat flabbergasted myself when this came back and said I was in favor of it on a limited trial basis," replied Noren.

The sheriff said he saw the "potential for increasing problems" with extended hours and added the arguments in favor of the ordinance were "shallow."

Forbus said that by 2 o'clock, most of the sheriff's law enforcement problems cease to exist. "Card playing is a form of recreation. I used to do it (in the Navy) but I don't anymore. These are all liquor problems."

Moore said, "I have no philosophical problem with extending gambling hours."

He liked the suggestion of Sahara Gardens Casino owner Ron Fox, who said he plans to hire security officers to patrol the parking lots, thus shifting the law-enforcement burden off sheriff's deputies.

In testimony Tuesday, supervisors heard from others supporting the 24-hour concept.

Attorney Gordon Salisbury, representing Fox, said, "The new ordinance makes it easier for the sheriff to close down a card room."

Also, he said, "There haven't been that many problems in the past" with card rooms.

Salisbury asked that the draft be changed. As proposed, it prohibits any sale of liquor in card rooms. Under current law, liquor can be sold until 2 a.m.

Salisbury urged supervisors to adopt the ordinance, saying, "Players that are losing as 2 o'clock approaches are likely to go to San Jose," where card rooms stay open around the clock.

Russell Leslie said a lot of people, including his wife, drive to Marina or San Jose after the card rooms locally close. "Why can't we try it for a year?"

Fox said in the 10 months he's owned the Sahara Gardens Casino, the card room has never had any problems. He blamed them on the bar next door.

Noren replied, "I know full well, from my limited gambling experience, that drinking and card rooms go hand in hand."