

How will Happy Valley Casino impact Centre County? We looked at PA's other 4 mini-casinos

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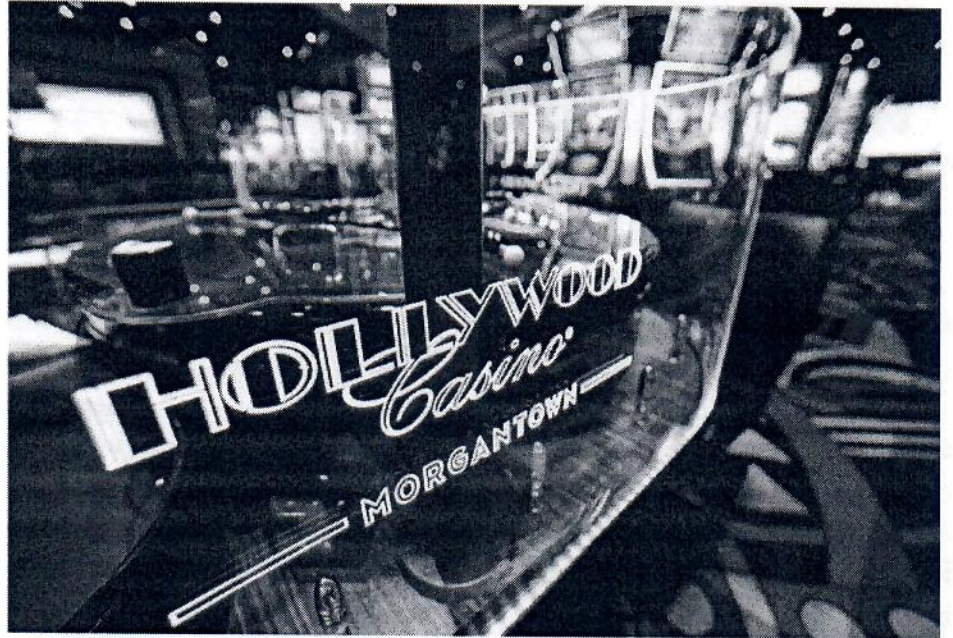
After nearly a six-year wait, Happy Valley Casino is finally preparing to open — but one important question remains.

How will Pennsylvania's fifth mini-casino impact this community?

For six years, a clear line's been drawn. Supporters have typically pointed to the economic impact while downplaying concerns about the potential for increased crime. And critics typically pointed to the potential for increased crime while downplaying the economic impact.

No two casinos are identical, and enough variables exist that a casino at one property has the potential to have a positive impact while a similar one in an entirely different spot could prove negative. That's why even PolitiFact, which is charged with sorting fact from fiction, concluded evidence of whether casinos increase crime as "mixed."

How Happy Valley Casino impacts College Township and



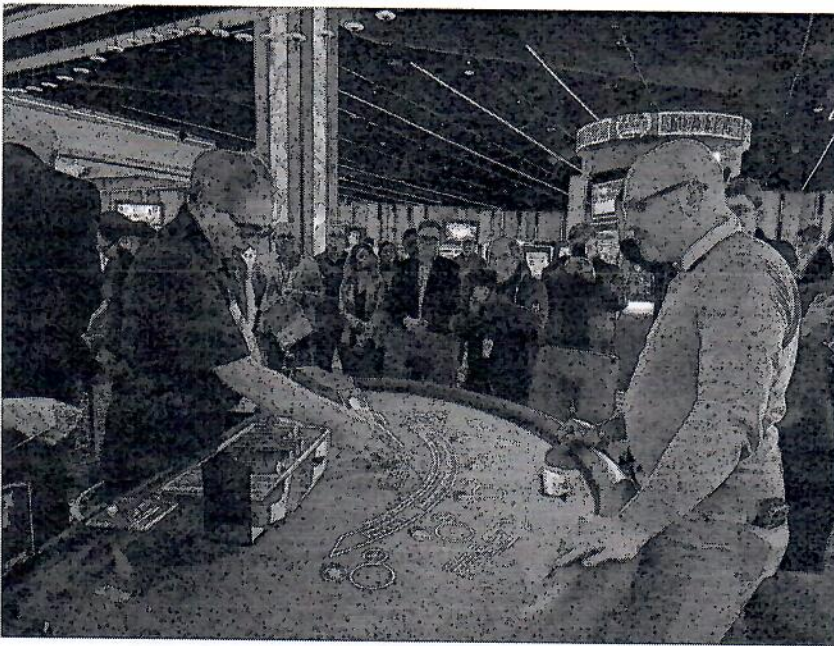
An etched glass sign that reads "Hollywood Casino Morgantown" is pictured on the floor of the casino in 2021. The Hollywood Casino Morgantown is one of four mini-casinos in Pennsylvania.

Centre County remains to be seen. Casinos can undoubtedly be lucrative, as the township and county each stand to gain an estimated \$1.6 million annually — at least the first year — just from their annual 2% cut from slot machines and 1% cut from table games. But studies also suggest at least 40% of casino revenues are earned from problem gamblers and those who live within 10 miles of a casino are twice as likely to

become problem gamblers.

Will the good outweigh the bad? Will the casino revitalize Nittany Mall and provide quality jobs? Or will critics' worst fears come to fruition?

Ahead of the casino's grand opening, we decided to reach out to the four Pennsylvania communities with mini-casinos that have already been through this process themselves — near Greensburg, Morgantown, Shippensburg and York.



Parx Casino Shippensburg opened in Cumberland County in January 2023.

We asked officials and community leaders there how casinos impacted their communities and whether they regretted the new businesses — or whether they'd embrace them all over again. All of these communities had at least two full years to marinate in the impact, so nobody better knows the effects than them.

Here's what they said:

Parx Casino Shippensburg

Location: A 73,000-square-foot mini-casino in a former Lowe's store, about 2 1/2 miles from Shippensburg University

Date opened: January 2023

Cumberland County population: An estimated 275,500 people

Cumberland County Commissioner Gary Eichelberger acknowledged Shippensburg Township, a largely rural municipality with a mix of farmland and residential development, faced con-

siderable public resistance as Parx Casino prepared to open.

The top concerns expressed there — a potential increase in crime and gambling addiction — were the same as those voiced by opponents of the Happy Valley Casino. But after three years of operation, Eichelberger said "we have heard virtually nothing in regard to any of the fears becoming reality."

According to Pennsylvania State Police statistics that date back to the month the casino opened, there have been only two gambling offenses in the township. Drug, firearm and DUI offenses appear to have remained flat.

Anecdotally, Eichelberger said he is not aware of any major policing issues. He said he believes Shippensburg University, home to about 5,100 students, generates more calls and concerns than the casino.

The facility, Eichelberger said, has been praised for its affiliated restaurant — a welcome addition to the western edge of the county — and for maintaining a "very nice facility that presents no visible problems." He said traffic in the area has been likened to a shopping center: cars come and cars go at a steady but largely unassuming pace.

On the whole, the county's longtime commissioner said the casino appears committed to the "good neighbor" pledges they made during the application and approval processes.

"There appears to have been a lot of unwarranted fears over the casino's presence, and their business and community practices have been a net improvement for the area," Eichelberger wrote in an email to the Centre Daily Times. "... I cannot speak to the occurrence of addiction to gambling, but the Commonwealth keeps tabs on impacts around these locations. We have noted no specific uptick in any demands to our county social service agencies other than what we attribute to the rapid population growth we have been undergoing as a county.

"As long as PARX remains diligent in those practices, I anticipate no real change in the current level of satisfaction with their being here."

Shippensburg Township Supervisor Stephen Oldt was effusive in his praise of the casino, telling the CDT "every-

one is fat and happy here." The casino, he said, has been a "moneymaker."

Since the casino opened, the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board said the county and the township have received a combined \$4.19 million. An agency spokesperson also told the CDT there will likely be a significant uptick in tax revenue this year after the casino replaced its hybrid table games with traditional table games.

"We haven't had a lick of problems," Oldt said. "... I've never seen so much growth."

Hollywood Casino Morgantown

Location: An 81,425-square-foot mini-casino on a 36-acre plot near the intersection of the Pennsylvania Turnpike and Interstate 176

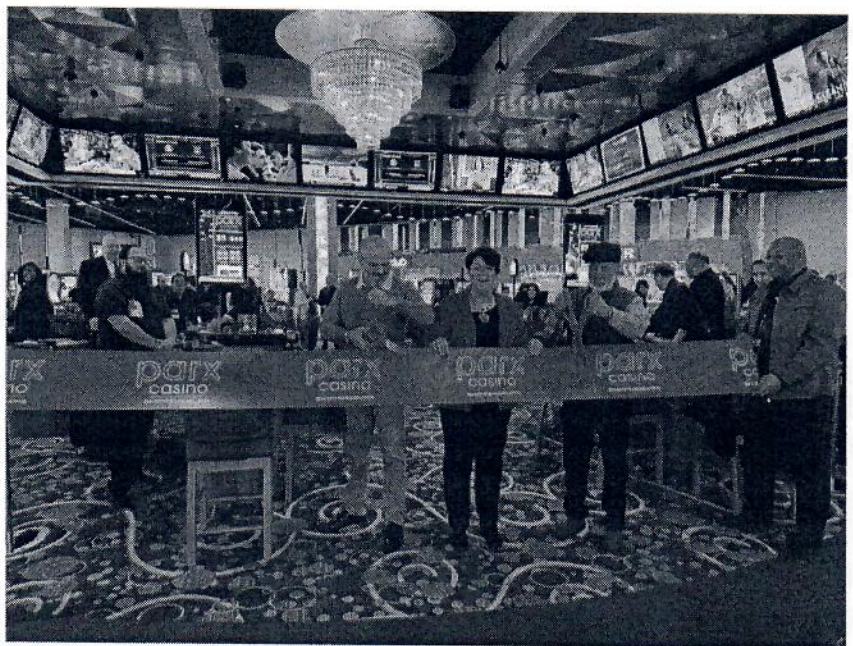
Date opened: December 2021

Berks County population: An estimated 439,000 people

Pennsylvania gaming officials voted unanimously last summer to renew Hollywood Casino Morgantown's license following a successful first few years in business.

The Berks County casino has helped revitalize a quiet stretch along the turnpike since opening in late 2021. Significant revenue from the casino and minimal effects on local crime have helped it become a beneficial partner in the community, officials said.

"This site lent itself to an area that had not seen a lot of proactive commercial de-



velopment," said Pamela Menet, Berks County's director of community and economic development. "In that area of the county, there are some smaller, independently owned businesses. It's not an area of huge franchises. But [the casino] has been very favorable for surrounding businesses, and it has absolutely increased traffic to that area as a point of destination."

Some small businesses in the area have expanded or renovated their facilities thanks to the increased traffic from the casino, Menet said. The casino, equipped with 675 slot machines and 29 table games, has helped provide entertainment and recreational opportunities that were not readily accessible in the area.

Menet said the casino has also supplied strong jobs for more than 300 people.

"It provides opportunities and flexible work environments for those who might have re-

tired from their main careers but want to keep working," Menet said. "Part-time jobs add flexibility for folks who might have children or other obligations that keep them from working a typical 9-to-5 job, and the pay has been significant enough to provide economic mobility. These are often not the minimum wage-paying jobs people might assume."

Last summer, state gaming officials reported that the casino generated \$315.7 million in gross revenue from its slot machines, table games and sports wagering since opening and returned \$143.9 million in tax revenue to the commonwealth. So far, Hollywood Casino Morgantown has generated \$87.6 million in gross revenue from those categories since the 2025-26 fiscal year began last July.

Shared revenue generated by the casino and returned to Caernarvon Township alone reached \$1.34 million last year,

representing nearly a quarter of the municipality's \$5.38 million 2026 budget. Menet said those dollars have helped communities fund infrastructure projects and public services.

"This has been an opportunity for communities to do things like purchase a new plow truck or upgrade local parks," Menet said. "It really has made meaningful differences in our area and provided a source of funds for projects that municipalities otherwise wouldn't have been able to undertake."

John Adams, Berks County's district attorney, said the casino's impact on crime has been "minimal at best." An online crime database maintained by Pennsylvania State Police reports just two gambling-related offenses in Caernarvon Township since January 2023, when the database began.

The casino's location in a more rural area on the edge of southern Berks and Lancaster counties has helped limit potential increases in crime, according to the district attorney. The project was originally pitched for downtown Reading, which "would've created a lot of problems."

"I think the casino has been a very positive partner in our community," Adams said. "Having this mini-casino here in Berks County has been a benefit for local economics, but also for development. Frankly, I think it's been all positive."

Paul Stolz, Caernarvon Township's police chief, said his

10-officer department has had few issues policing the casino's surroundings, where most calls concern public drunkenness or suspicious persons. He said he's pleased he can count on one hand the number of times officers responded to a child left in a car by a casino guest.

"We have an occasional day with multiple calls to the casino, but we have far more days, weeks and months with no issues over there at all," Stolz said.

Hollywood Casino York

Location: A roughly 80,000-square-foot mini-casino that replaced a Sears anchor store at the York Galleria Mall, near the intersection of Interstate 83 and U.S. Route 30

Date opened: August 2021

York County population: An estimated 471,000 people

The manager of Springettsbury Township, home to Hollywood Casino York, still remembers the wave of public concerns and complaints that swelled before the casino opened in 2021.

A small-but-vocal minority warned about the odds of increasing crime, and public meetings were often filled with more casino opponents than supporters. But township manager Mark Hodgkinson, who's worked for the municipality for nearly 30 years, said something curious happened once the casino opened.

"I haven't received any complaints of the casino since it's

been in operation, like I did prior," said Hodgkinson, who took over as manager in September 2020. "... They've been a very good partner with the township. They really have."

That's not to say everything has gone perfectly. Hollywood Casino York was fined \$80,000 in 2023 for failing to meet minimum security staffing requirements for the equivalent of 55 days, and a purported former employee posted anonymous complaints online late last year — referring to security as a "joke" and painting the work environment as far from ideal.

But, overall, Hodgkinson said the primary fears of constructing a new casino have not come to pass.

Officials with Hollywood Casino York described the fine as a temporary hiccup that did not impact public safety, pointing out the casino averaged less than one security incident per hour during its busiest times. Officials also noted the township's police department is literally at the other end of the casino's parking lot.

The numbers back up officials' assertions. Based on data from Pennsylvania's Uniform Crime Reporting System, crime in Springettsbury Township — where the casino is located — actually dropped 22% in the full four years the casino has been open (2022-2025) compared to the four years prior (2016-2019), with the COVID year not included for obvious

reasons. Violent crime has similarly gone down double digits, and both trends are mirrored at the county level.

“I don’t have any information to back up that the casino’s responsible for the (decrease in crime), but the casino has certainly not been a hindrance in that regard,” Hodgkinson said. “I think we get 2-3 calls there a month from a police perspective and like 2-3 calls a month from a fire/EMS perspective, and those are mostly for medical reasons like falls.”

Ironically enough, Hodgkinson said, the Sears the casino replaced typically saw more monthly arrests than the casino.

Elsewhere around the community, support now seems easier to find than opposition.

During a public hearing this past fall on the casino’s license renewal, several community leaders spoke in favor of the casino. An official with the York County Economic Alliance said gaming funds — which amounted to more than \$5.75 million since 2021 — helped pay for projects to improve public safety and support municipal water systems. The home municipality’s director of parks and recreation also said the casino’s sponsorship helped bring to life Fourth of July fireworks and the annual holiday tree lighting event.

And Christina Wingert, of the LGBTQ+ organization Rainbow Rose Center, lauded the casino for its more than

\$30,000 in donations and its “true commitment to diversity, inclusion and the betterment of our shared community.”

“Their investment has played a vital role in helping us expand and sustain our peer-to-peer support groups, our social groups and our community events — programs that foster connection, belonging and well-being for countless individuals,” Wingert said, according to reporting from the York Daily Record.

Not everyone loves the York casino. And plenty would prefer it revert back to a department store. But for Hodgkinson, who’s long been a casino supporter, he has no regrets.

“I had a good feeling that it was going to be a good thing for Springettsbury Township,” he said. “And it turns out that it is.”

Live! Casino Pittsburgh

Location: A 100,000-square-foot mini-casino built in a former Bon Ton box store in the Westmoreland Mall, Hempfield Township, within 20 minutes of five colleges

Date opened: November 2020

Westmoreland County population: An estimated 351,000 people

Since Live! Casino Pittsburgh opened five years ago, local officials say that it’s served as more than just a casino — it’s become one of the county’s premier entertainment destinations and economic drivers.

Douglas Weimer, a 26-year Hempfield Township supervisor, told the CDT that while he doesn’t gamble there, he’s attended several events at the space’s three eateries and large meeting space. Weimer also shared that the casino has revitalized the mall and the surrounding area, making it a place for people of all ages to shop and visit.

“It has been a major benefit to securing pre-existing commercial spaces and box stores in the mall, and it’s also helped rejuvenate our regional commercial corridor,” Weimer said. “It’s benefitted local businesses around the mall too, in that when commercial properties become vacant, they don’t remain vacant for very long.”

The supervisor added that his township receives roughly \$2 million per year thanks to the casino, which he noted is currently helping fund a multi-million dollar park project.

Westmoreland County also receives additional annual funding as a result of the casino, and those funds are used toward local projects, although the funding has to be applied for through grants. County Commissioner Douglas Chew said many of the grant applications have received either partial or full funding based on their requests.

“This particular casino makes giving back to the community a priority,” Chew said. “We’re getting a few million dollars across the different

agencies that apply, and it's all going right back into the county."

According to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board, in 2025 alone, the casino generated more than \$116 million in revenue — \$98.5 million from slot machines, \$15.8 million in table games and \$2 million from sports betting.

Aside from the monetary side of things, the two officials also noted that the casino has not appeared to have a major impact on the students of the five colleges and universities that surround it, including Seton Hill University and University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg.

"This thing is not affecting the youth in regard to sports betting, slots or anything of the sort — the casino floor is by far and away occupied by mainly the retired generation," Weimer said. "The college kids are usually only there for the entertainment aspect. Maybe they'll watch a Steelers or Penn State game, but that's about it."

As for a crime increase, Weimer shared that he's seen "no significant reports of increased crime whatsoever," aside from some "nonsensical" police calls.

Westmoreland County District Attorney Nicole Ziccarelli did not respond to a request for comment. But, in a November article from the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, casino general manager Sean Sullivan highlighted 2024 testi-

mony from state police and mall officials who stated crime had not increased since the casino's opening.