

Neighbors fear possible expansion of hours at N.O. Fairgrounds

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NEW ORLEANS – Folks living around the New Orleans Fairgrounds say the venue is a storied part of the neighborhood, but some worry people could soon be gambling there until the wee hours of the morning.

Members of three neighborhood associations near the Fairgrounds met Thursday to sound off on what they say are plans for the venue to expand its hours of operation for slot machines.

Under current strict proviso guidelines, slot areas close at midnight.

Neighbors believe Fairgrounds officials want to change that.

"I have real concerns about just the need for people to stay drinking or playing whatever until 1, 2, 3, or 4 a.m. That just doesn't seem healthy to me," said one neighbor.

Neighbors fear the possible change would increase traffic late into the night.

They also say they're worried about people roaming through the area and committing crimes.

A Fairgrounds spokesperson told Eyewitness News he doesn't have any specific information on possible expansion plans. But neighbors say Fairgrounds officials asked them to bring the issue up at Thursday's meeting, to get feedback on the idea.

The feedback was mostly negative. One neighbor talked about starting a petition if necessary.

Residents say they worked with the Fairgrounds closely to develop the guidelines for its current casino operation, but say they are in no mood to give in to expansion requests.

"The neighborhoods, all of us, have given in time and time again, over and over and over again," said Patricia McDonald Fowler with the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association. "We've given as much as we can. We need to remain firm. And my response to this was same thing I said to Linda first time I heard it, 'Not only no, but hell no.'"