

## Chicago Opts In to Video Gaming: What It Means for Local Businesses

For the first time since Illinois legalized video gaming in 2009, the City of Chicago is preparing to opt in. This is a meaningful shift for the state's largest market and one that could open new opportunities for licensed bars, restaurants, and taverns across the city.

For years, video gaming expanded throughout Illinois while Chicago stayed on the sidelines. That gap may soon close.

### What “opting in” actually means

Opting in allows eligible businesses within Chicago city limits to apply for video gaming licenses under the Illinois Video Gaming Act. Participation is optional at the business level. Locations must still meet all state and city requirements, including liquor licensing, zoning, and local approvals.

In simple terms: the city allows it, and each business decides whether it makes sense for them.

### Why this matters to Chicago businesses

Video gaming has proven to be a steady, supplemental revenue source for thousands of locations across Illinois. When integrated properly, it supports existing operations rather than distracting from them. Many successful locations view gaming as one more amenity—similar to darts, pool, or jukeboxes—that enhances the overall guest experience.

For Chicago businesses competing with nearby suburbs where gaming is already legal, opting in helps level the playing field and keeps entertainment dollars closer to home.

### A regulated, familiar model

Illinois video gaming is already one of the most regulated forms of entertainment in the state. Limits on the number of terminals, strict age requirements, placement rules, and continuous monitoring are standard. Chicago will add its own local framework, but the core system is well-established and widely understood.

For location owners, this is not an experimental concept—it is a proven model that has operated successfully for more than a decade statewide.

### What happens next

If approved, Chicago's rollout is expected to be measured rather than immediate.

Licensing, inspections, and local rulemaking take time. That creates a window for business owners to learn, ask questions, and evaluate whether video gaming aligns with their space, customers, and long-term goals.

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## Things to Think About as This Moves Forward

- **Budget approval enables the path, not the pace**

Video gaming is included in the city's budget planning, which authorizes the concept. Final approval allows the city to move forward, but it does not require immediate execution.

- **Implementation and authorization are separate steps**

Passing budget language is one milestone. Developing local rules, staffing, enforcement processes, and licensing workflows is another—and those steps take time.

- **Local dynamics may influence timing**

As with any major policy change in Chicago, stakeholder input, amendments, and administrative priorities can affect how quickly programs move from paper to practice.

- **City oversight adds an extra layer**

While Illinois already has a mature regulatory framework for video gaming, Chicago will introduce its own local review and compliance standards that businesses should be prepared for.

- **Early awareness matters**

Businesses that understand the process, requirements, and economics ahead of time will be better positioned if and when the city begins accepting applications.

### **Bottom line**

Chicago opting in to video gaming is a milestone moment. It brings the city in line with much of Illinois, creates new options for licensed establishments, and opens the door to a proven revenue stream. For business owners, the smartest move right now is to stay informed, understand the model, and be ready to act when the city officially gives the green light.

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## What Chicago Businesses Should Do Now

# PSG Blog Post



This moment is best viewed as a preparation window. No immediate action is required, but smart planning now can reduce friction later.

- **Assess fit, not hype**

Consider whether video gaming aligns with your brand, customer base, and physical layout. The most successful locations treat gaming as a complement to food, drinks, and entertainment—not a replacement.

- **Understand space and flow**

Video gaming requires designated, compliant space. Even before rules are finalized, knowing where terminals *could* live in your location helps with faster decisions later.

- **Review licensing basics**

Participation requires proper liquor licensing, good standing with regulators, and adherence to state and city rules. Identifying gaps early avoids delays if applications open.

- **Run the numbers conservatively**

Video gaming is a supplemental revenue stream. Look at it as steady, incremental income rather than a silver bullet. Locations that plan conservatively tend to be happier long-term.

- **Stay informed through trusted sources**

As Chicago finalizes its approach, accurate updates will matter. Rely on experienced industry partners and official guidance rather than speculation.

- **Be ready, not rushed**

There is no advantage to reacting emotionally. Businesses that move forward with clarity and intent will be better positioned than those chasing headlines.

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