

EDITORIAL: Checkmate

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In chess, good players must think several moves in advance.

But none of the group of chess players who've been meeting at Park Royal for 50 years anticipated the shopping centre's decision to unceremoniously oust them. A group of about 30 chess players at the mall were recently told it was game over at their regular spot in the mall's food court.

The reason? They were taking up space meant for "paying customers."

Mall management threatened to call the police on the players – many in their 70s and 80s – if they continued to "loiter" against mall policy.

The mall's move has since ignited a storm of public indignation, and rightly so. Even Mayor Michael Smith weighed in suggesting the mall may want to rethink its play.

Just who are these hooligans the mall wants gone?

Assorted philanthropists and retirees who have contributed to building their community and who have given back to the mall by hosting tournaments and offering lessons. Apparently not the sort the mall wants taking up valuable real estate.

It does seem deeply ironic that in an age when shopping malls strive to promote themselves as community "villages," that when people actually create a community, they become personae non gratae.

The chess players are part of the mall's culture, one its corporate owners should be embracing, not tossing in a short-sighted and mean-spirited move.

It may be the end game for chess players but we'd like to think it's not yet the end.

Park Royal, it's your move.

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