

north shore news

City of North Vancouver upholds ban on gambling

Council votes against allowing community gaming centre

Chris Slater / North Shore News

June 24, 2015 12:00 AM



File photo North Shore News

The odds are out for a proposed North Shore gaming facility after City of North Vancouver council voted against making changes to the city's current zoning which prohibits gambling.

First proposed by company Playtime Gaming in 2013, a "community gaming centre" which would feature approximately 300 video gaming machines and an estimated daily attendance of 1,000, according to a report created by city staff, was quashed by council Monday.

Community gaming facilities differ from conventional casinos as they only allow electronic gambling machines and cannot be open 24 hours.

The report estimated the proposed 40,000-square-foot facility, which Playtime was looking to see located in the city's Shipyards district, could generate an estimated \$2 million in revenues for the city annually.

Many of the North Shore's local non-profit societies are also funded through provincial grants raised through gaming. However, a majority of council was not supportive of allowing such a project to come to the area.

"I'm not looking to further this idea," said Coun. Pam Bookham, expressing both a lack of real interest from the community and the potential negative social impacts such a facility may have for some in the area as reasons for her decision.

"Whatever financial benefits come with the introduction of a new gaming facility I think will come at a cost to people within the community that we should be especially concerned about," she said.

Enclosed in the report was input from medical health officer for the North Shore, Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, expressing his concerns on bringing a gambling facility to the community.

"Electronic gaming machines and table games are both associated with an increased risk of problem gambling compared to other forms of gambling; however, electronic gambling machines may result in greater impacts among problem gamblers," Lysyshyn's statement read in part.

Citing concerns similar to Bookham's, Coun. Linda Buchanan said the city should take more time to see how similar facilities in other Metro Vancouver municipalities, including Maple Ridge, Surrey and the Township of Langley, are working.

"I too haven't seen a huge amount of people who are really, really wanting this. ... At this point I'm not seeing where we would put this in our community and I think that at this time we should perhaps take a little bit more time to see how this is working in other communities."

Although opposed to such a centre going in on the city's waterfront, Coun. Holly Back disagreed with the majority of council that was against changing the city's gaming bylaws, citing discussions she has had with mayors from other communities that were initially opposed to allowing gaming but have now changed their minds.

"I've spoken to different mayors in Penticton and Burnaby who have gaming and who were opposed to it when they first brought it in. They think it's fantastic and they've had no issues with violence or problems or anything," said Back who also said she'd like to see more research done on the topic.

"I think we're afraid of something we don't really know too much about . . . I do think there might be some other places in North Vancouver that it could go so I'm actually not going to support (upholding the prohibition) because I'd like to see a little bit more research done on it."

Mayor Darrell Mussatto was also in support of seeing a community gaming centre coming to the city but like Back and others on council, was opposed to allowing such a facility to go in at the originally proposed shipyards location.

Mussatto explained that many of the non-profit organizations in North Vancouver receive funding through provincial gaming revenues such as lotteries or similar community gaming facilities.

"Those agencies are funded through, whether it's lotteries or whether it's community gaming facilities. . . . So we're happy to take money on the North Shore but we kind of don't want to have any official gambling here on the North Shore."

Mussatto also underscored the fact that other Metro Vancouver municipalities initially against allowing gaming in their communities are now supportive of it.

"There was a lot of fear before those facilities went in — a lot of 'Oh, what if this...' or, 'This is going to happen.' I can tell you, they were all opposed, now they're supportive, very much so."

In the end, council voted 5 to 2 in favour of leaving the current gambling bylaws unchanged, with Mussatto and Back voting against.