

City of North Vancouver to consider casino again

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

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The City of North Vancouver has signaled its interest in allowing a casino in city limits. photo supplied

After folding its hand last year, City of North Vancouver council is anteing up again for the possibility of commercial gambling.

In early June, the B.C. Lottery Corporation [asked the North Shore's three municipalities and two First Nations whether they'd be interested in hosting a gaming facility \(http://www.nsnews.com/news/province-asks-north-shore-to-mull-casino-1.2269850\)](http://www.nsnews.com/news/province-asks-north-shore-to-mull-casino-1.2269850), giving them a deadline of July 15 to respond.

In 2015, the city debated and [rejected a request to overturn its bylaw forbidding commercial gaming \(http://www.nsnews.com/news/city-of-north-vancouver-upholds-ban-on-gambling-1.1977554\)](http://www.nsnews.com/news/city-of-north-vancouver-upholds-ban-on-gambling-1.1977554) when a casino developer wanted to install slot machines at the Shipyards. But some members of council had a change of heart Monday night, voting to take another more general look.

Governments that host gaming facilities get a 10 per cent cut of the revenues, which BCLC estimated would be between \$1.5 million to \$2.2 million for a North Shore casino. That was money the city shouldn't be sacrificing, said Coun. Holly Back.

"I truly believe we will get one in North Vancouver, whether it's in the city or on band lands. I'd rather see the money in our purse than theirs," she said.

Despite worries about negative community impacts, Back said she spoke with Burnaby and Richmond council members who had nothing but praise for the casinos they host.

"They both said they've had absolutely zero problems – in fact they're probably the best tenants they have in their city," she said, noting gaming facilities also bring jobs, amenity space and restaurants. "Everybody has this vision of this big scary thing and it's not. They actually can be quite beautiful."

Coun. Linda Buchanan was one member who changed her vote, largely because this proposal isn't related to the Shipyards or any other public lands.

"The previous application was very specifically wanting to go on public property and we were very adamant, and I'm still very adamant, I would not support anything being on our waterfront," she said.

And, she added, much of the research presented by opponents to the last proposal, including the North Shore's medical health officer, was out of date.

"We have numerous gaming facilities throughout the province, so I'd like to see something in terms of data that's far more relevant than the early 1990s because we don't make any decisions based on science that's particularly that old," she said.

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Coun. Craig Keating and Mayor Darrell Mussatto both voted in favour, stating the city wouldn't be committing to anything other than investigating the proposal further. "I think we should at least look at the pros and cons to see how it would benefit or hurt the city," Mussatto said.

With their four votes, the city will forward a non-binding expression of interest to BCLC.

Still, a contingent of council remained opposed, citing a lack of interest in gambling expressed by city residents.

"Since this issue became public ... I think I've had one letter of support and I've had several indicating concern," said Coun. Don Bell. "I personally think it's an opportunity but there's a cost associated with it as well and so I won't be supporting the motion."

Coun. Pam Bookham voted against the plan, adding a dose of salt for the province, which she said was being "deaf or indifferent" to the voice of the municipality.

"I find myself concerned that the province is pushing this upon our community without regard to the message that I thought we sent quite unambiguously the last time we discussed gaming in the city and indicated we were in fact not in favour," she said. "This is about the province generating revenue through gaming, something that when they were first elected, they were adamant they were not going to do."

Coun. Rod Clark rejected the notion that a North Shore casino was inevitable, saying he'd seen no indication from the other governments they were ready to host one. And B.C.'s chief medical health officer and the North Shore's public health officer have both spoken against increasing gaming, he added.

The districts of North Vancouver and West Vancouver have decided against sending an expression of interest.

Squamish Nation Chief Ian Campbell said his council opted to not respond, saying simply being a host to a private casino wouldn't be a good use of reserve land.

"Our desire or aspiration is to look at partnering or equity or having a licence directly to First Nations. That opportunity has not been afforded to Squamish Nation and we continue to push that issue with B.C. Lotto Corp.," he said.

Tsleil-Waututh Nation did not respond to a request for comment.

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