

# north shore news

## City of North Vancouver considering slot machines (but not at the Shipyards)

### North Vancouver City council debates 20-year-old commercial gambling ban

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

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Slot machines owned by Playtime Gaming. Photo supplied

One-armed bandits may yet be riding into the City of North Vancouver.

Council listened at length to arguments for and against [rescinding a 20-year-old bylaw that bans commercial gambling \(http://www.nsnews.com/city-of-north-vancouver-to-reconsider-slot-machines-1.1777669\)](http://www.nsnews.com/city-of-north-vancouver-to-reconsider-slot-machines-1.1777669) during a policy committee meeting Monday night but opted only to further study the controversial matter.

The request to allow a “community gaming centre,” which differs from a casino in that it could only have slot machines or bingo and runs on limited operating hours, comes from Playtime Community Gaming.

Municipalities that host community gaming facilities or casinos get 10 per cent of the net proceeds. Playtime’s co-ordinator of business development, Arthur Villa, estimated that would be about \$2 million in unencumbered revenue at the city’s disposal per year.

The B.C. Lottery Corporation, which is B.C.’s gambling regulator and also has a mandate to generate revenue for the province, has given Playtime exclusive access to any new gaming facility on the North Shore.

The company, which owns a number of bingo halls and community gaming centres, is hoping to build a 40,000-square foot facility, half of which would be used for entertainment, dining and administrative space. The rest would hold upwards of 300 slot machines.

Just where such a facility would go, however, remains a big unanswered question. The Harbourside property isn’t up for consideration, [nor is the Shipyards even though that’s where the company was originally asking to set up shop \(http://www.nsnews.com/ka-chinging-in-the-new-year-1.758025\)](http://www.nsnews.com/ka-chinging-in-the-new-year-1.758025), according to Villa.

Squamish Nation land has been up for consideration but the nation’s leadership recently rejected carrying talks any further. There are other properties within the city that may be coming available, Villa said, but it would be premature to disclose which ones until after the bylaw had been amended. Any future site will still have to go through a public process.

The majority of residents who turned out to speak at the committee hearing on Monday urged council to scrap the gambling plan, arguing it would be a fundamental change to the character of North Vancouver and that it would be unethical to raise revenue off the backs of gamblers.

“I think council needs to take a stand and not bow to the almighty dollar,” said Brenda Rovner, adding she wouldn’t want her own kids “hanging out in some dark, air-conditioned godforsaken place pumping money into an electronic machine that’s just going to suck up their money and it gives them no actual societal benefit.”



Marianne Ketchen urges City of North Vancouver council to uphold its ban on gambling. - Cindy Goodman

Still, a handful of others who enjoy testing their luck on slot machines elsewhere in the province spoke in favour of rescinding the ban, because of the money it would generate for the city and it would give them the opportunity to stay on the North Shore.

Rescinding the ban also has the support of the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, as it would add jobs, tax revenue and stimulate more business and tourism in the city.

Speaking from a public health perspective, North Shore medical health officer Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, said the net harm from gambling outweighs the benefits in most cases. A 2007 study found pathological gamblers and problem gamblers make up about one per cent of the population.

"This may appear reassuring to some people. I still think one per cent of the population is a significant amount of people. The real issue here is this doesn't just affect the gambler. It affects the people around them, such as the family and the community," he said.

North Vancouver RCMP Supt. and officer in charge Chris Kennedy told council he'd interviewed the commanding officers of other detachments with community gaming facilities and found no public safety reason to oppose one opening on the North Shore.

Though there were plenty of strong opinions to be had about the potential for gambling in city limits, it was campaign finance donations that drew the most heated comments at the council table.

Under questioning from Coun. Pam Bookham, Playtime owner Tom Nellis said his company provided paid staff members to operate a phone bank the mayor used in his re-election campaign.

[Campaign finance disclosure documents list K&T properties as donating \\$11,053 to Mussatto's campaign \(http://www.nsnews.com/see-who-paid-for-the-north-shore-s-2014-elections-1.1777101\)](http://www.nsnews.com/see-who-paid-for-the-north-shore-s-2014-elections-1.1777101), \$921.16 each for his council allies, and \$500 each for the other candidates Mussatto supported in the campaign, Matt Clark, Iani Makris and Kathy McGreenera.

Nellis said his company has a history of in-kind donations to "like minded" candidates as well as both of B.C.'s major provincial political parties.

Council will now wait on a fresh report back following more research from city staff before restarting the debate.

BCLC provided roughly \$1.17 billion to the province in the last fiscal year. Of that, \$135 million was granted back to community non-profit groups including \$3.5 million for more than 200 groups on the North Shore.