

February 16, 2011

To: Mayor and Council

Subject: Proposed Casino Development at 777 Pacific Boulevard

The subject of today's public hearing is a complicated web of interrelated items entailing land use and casino expansion at an important downtown site. Provincial, municipal and private sector partners have collaborated for several years to create the package of recommendations on today's agenda. The Commission acknowledges this complexity, and we are confining our comments today to the public process associated with the expansion of gambling.

The complexity of the package and involvement of multiple stakeholders, combined with its frequent characterization as a 'done deal,' have contributed to a perceived absence of public concerns. However, we believe that the absence of extensive public comment and discussion reflects a lack of awareness of a lengthy and intricate process, rather than apathy or consent.

Noting that the public consultation for this package has consisted of two open houses targeted to adjacent neighbourhoods and two meetings with the NEFC Joint Working Group, we were heartened by Council's January 18 decision to direct staff to "*undertake further public consultation on the issue of gaming expansion.*" However, while we applaud Council's decision to seek more public input, we do not believe that adequate time has been allowed for staff to undertake the necessary level of consultation. Major gaming expansion is a significant departure from previous City policy and direction. It should not occur without an amount of public input comparable to the consultation underlying the original policy and direction.

As gaming revenue is now projected to surpass corporate tax revenue for the BC government, and as it increases in importance to the City's revenue, we recognize gambling as an issue that will return repeatedly before Council. It is, therefore, critical to remember the outcome of previous public discussions in which citizens expressed and affirmed their core values. Vancouverites have repeatedly expressed opposition to and concerns about large-scale gambling in Vancouver. Indeed, CityPlan, the 1995 result of 3 years of public consultation with 20,000 citizens and still one of the City's principal policy documents, explicitly states: "*Vancouver will . . . not support large scale casinos in the city.*"

Looking back, we recall that in early 1994 Vancouver turned down the opportunity to pay for a convention centre through the establishment of a Las Vegas-style hotel and casino. Later that year, on November 1st, Council passed a resolution opposing gaming expansion and stated that further consideration of gaming expansion should be determined by the people of

British Columbia “*through appropriate broad and local involvement in a meaningful consultation program.*”

In 2004, an Ipsos-Reid survey, commissioned by the City of Vancouver prior to Council’s decision to support the establishment of Edgewater Casino at Plaza of Nations, reported that 60% of residents opposed the proposal, with only 35% in support. In a separate question, 56% considered gaming facilities a liability, as opposed to 40% who said they were an asset.

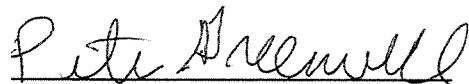
A 2007 study, commissioned by the BC Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General on the socio-economic impacts of new gaming facilities, reported consistent data. Comparing Langley City, Langley Township, Surrey and Vancouver, it found that Vancouver held the most negative attitudes toward gambling, and cited an increase in the perception that the harm of gambling outweighs its benefits, from 56.6% in 2004 to 63.9% in 2006. The study found that the negative attitude toward the Edgewater Casino also significantly increased. In 2004, only 26% believed it was likely to be somewhat or very beneficial to the community but, by 2006, the percentage had dropped to 15.1%.

We believe that Vancouver’s consistent historic opposition to large casinos and expanded gambling is ground for taking the time for a city-wide consultation on this proposed massive casino expansion, in order to address issues that were not covered at the City’s February 8 information session. These include:

- the impact on the City’s policing budget,
- the impact on local business and residential areas,
- the opportunity that the casino provides for expanding and adding legitimacy to the operations of organized crime in Vancouver, and
- the social impacts on vulnerable populations, including problem gamblers and low-income households.

In conclusion, the Vancouver City Planning Commission urges council to postpone its decision on gambling expansion in order to allow for a thorough public consultation, including the provision of information needed to address public concerns. Ideally, this information would include the timely response of provincial agencies to the Council motion seeking action to restore public confidence in the oversight and management of the province’s gaming industry.

Yours truly,



Peter Greenwell, Chair
On behalf of the Vancouver City Planning Commission