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Item #	1
Report No.	4
Council - January 29/13	

TO: Mayor Bevilacqua & Members of Vaughan Council

Mon., Jan 28, 2013

RE: Council Item - Tues., January 29, 2013

VAUGHAN ENTERTAINMENT AND CASINO COMPLEX ECONOMIC IMPACT REVIEW

I have lived in Vaughan since 1978. I have seen Vaughan grow from a Township of five villages and a population of about 20,000 to city status in 1991. I have seen the population grow to 300,000 spread throughout the city. Despite this tremendous growth however, the City of Vaughan lacked a city centre or downtown that would give it one identity- an identity that would be easily recognized around the world as the image of our city. Our city has a plan, the VMC, a vision for our new "downtown" where residents from all its villages and visitors from around the GTA will come to shop, live and work in one vibrant place. Creating the vision of a "downtown" in an area bounded by highways and predominantly industrial uses has not been an easy process. To date, the planning and functional rationale of our downtown has been revised at least once from a "corporate centre" to a "residential-commercial-office" centre. The success of the current plan for the VMC will depend on being able to attract existing Class "A" businesses and retailers from the GTA to move there. These businesses along with the soon-to-be-opened subway will attract people to live in the VMC. The reality however, is that those same businesses and retailers could move anywhere along Toronto's subway system with access to a much higher existing population and services. The North York City Centre is one example. Under the current plan, Vaughan's new "downtown" or VMC is a vision that will have regional importance at best. The new subway will make the VMC attractive to residents working in Toronto initially, but it alone is not the economic driver needed to create something great. **The current VMC plan is a vision that may take 25-50 years to fully realize because it currently lacks the "spark" the will ignite the vision for a world-class city.**

If the new slogan for Vaughan is "The Place to Be", it will require strong leadership and vision. In fairness to Mayor Bevilacqua, much of the vision and approvals for the VMC occurred before he was elected in 2010. However, the Mayor and current members of Vaughan Council now have the opportunity to put the City of Vaughan on a fast track to a world-class city. If Vaughan is to become a city of national and world-class significance, it will be critical to encourage and approve different ways to attract business, retailers and visitors, not just from the GTA, but from around the world. A new entertainment district comprised of a casino & conference centre has the potential to be the "spark" to becoming a creative, world-class city. A creative city having world-class entertainment district, a major conference centre, corporate headquarters, high-end retailers, residents from every part of the world AND strong arts and cultural venues located in one district, the VMC. Approval of a casino-conference district will instantly place the City of Vaughan on the national and international stage. A casino-conference district will surely create an instant "spark" for economic development and activity that would otherwise take years to develop. It would be the catalyst and marketing dream to attract new retail, entertainment and residential development in a significantly shorter time frame generating many times the revenue for our city contemplated by the casino-conference centre alone. The economic, employment and financial benefits for our city are far too great to deny this real opportunity. An opportunity using provincial investment dollars, not our city's!

Many opponents of a casino in the City of Vaughan list infrastructure concerns and the social impacts of gambling. Our society faces many social impacts from drinking, smoking and even fast food restaurants. Our city has dozens of LCBO and Beer Store outlets, hundreds of fast food restaurants and tobacco is sold in almost all neighbourhoods. Why? Because people want them and most believe they can make responsible choices. Casinos are a form of entertainment attended by a significant percentage of the regional population and will attract visitors from around the world. For those people who cannot make responsible gambling choices and who are addicted to gambling, the OLG has a strong program to help people with gambling problems. Gambling in other forms is found in most corner stores and on the internet at home. Governments or neighbourhoods don't ban lottery sales or outlaw internet gambling. Other concerns such as infrastructure concerns would be addressed through the VMC transportation and parking plan.

Our city and more specifically Vaughan Council have an opportunity to decide on allowing a casino-conference centre within our city and best suited for the VMC district. The real opportunity of this scale and importance does not happen often. The timing is right, the economic stimulus and benefits for our city are enormous. Say "yes" to a casino-conference district and great things will follow. **The path to a world-class city starts with a strong vision for the future and leadership that moves us forward now and at every opportunity.**

Sincerely,

Frank Greco

Cc Vaughan Senior Staff, City Clerk, Local media, VCC, OLG, Vaughan MPP