

Subject:

FW: Integrated Entertainment Gaming Complex

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Communication
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Item: 20

From: S Martin

Sent: Tuesday, October 15, 2013 12:48 AM

To: Bevilacqua, Maurizio; Rosati, Gino; Di Biase, Michael; Racco, Sandra; DeFrancesca, Rosanna; Carella, Tony; Shefman, Alan; Schulte, Deb; Iafrate, Marilyn

Cc: Rossana Burgos; Bella Yuan; fstirpe@rogers.com; electedinc@raccoandassoc.ca; ahatzis@rogers.com; Abrams, Jeffrey; Cribbett, Barbara; NoCasinoVaughan@gmail.com

Subject: Integrated Entertainment Gaming Complex

October 14, 2013

Dear Mayor Bevilacqua and members of Council:

On Tuesday October 15, 2013 you will have an opportunity to put the residents of Vaughan first and vote against the prospect of having a Casino in our city. I urge you to listen to your constituents and read the numerous studies and research that collectively tout a casino as a terrible community "investment" that will put our city at risk of various socio-economic problems. We know that our costs for policing will increase, costs associated with the health care of problem gamblers will rise and families affected by a problem gambler will feel the brunt of financial turmoil.

The residents of Vaughan are being sold a bill of goods. I keep hearing about the number of jobs a casino would bring to Vaughan. Yet, before building a casino was brought to the table, we were told that the VMC would generate jobs and fulfill the vision of Vaughan becoming a world-class city. If this is the case, then I am puzzled as to why there is a need for a casino in our city.

It seems to me that the voices of residents is being muffled by big businesses, billionaire contractors, lobbyists and special interest groups who will not be the ones suffering after the casino is built, they will be reaping the benefits of their investment and leaving our city to clean up the mess, and residents to live in a city froth with issues that we didn't ask for. The long-term and residual effects of a casino in Vaughan will no doubt be a mistake that will change our lives forever.

Have you thought about the socio-cultural implications of casinos in communities?

While listening to, reading about and enduring a state of continuous hypothetical rhetoric about how great a casino will be for Vaughan, I have done some research on how a casino will affect residents from a socio-cultural perspective.

Did you know that slot machine gambling is the fastest form of gambling in the US and Canada? Yet we are clamoring to see one built. Once this floodgate is opened, there will be no turning back.

Gambling is not an innocuous activity. It's not a little hobby, a harmless pass-time or a gentleman's sport. It is a disastrous addiction that will no doubt have harmful and devastating effects on the city of Vaughan.

In 2011, Casinos world-wide took in 144 billion dollars in revenues, which means that gamblers collectively lost 144 billion dollars. That is a staggering number, and one that begs us to caution ourselves.

Did you know that In the United States, African-American women make up the fastest growing population of problem gamblers? The saturation of gambling within households headed by women is profuse and growing. It is deeply concerning to know that women who look like me are mostly affected by gambling. Take that a step further and think about the role women play in society; from working professionals, mothers, mentors, role models, heads of households and community leaders. This is an affront to all women.

As a resident, I have found the lack of community consultations and transparency to offer the public equal time and access as the casino lobbyist is not only troubling but undemocratic. Have you thought about the proximity to our GTA neighbours in high-priority neighbourhoods south of Steeles who will take daily and weekly trips to Vaughan to lose their money in the casino? This worries me. Priority neighbourhoods need support, but not in the form of a casino within minutes of their homes.

Research shows that the social implication of gambling on communities is an exhaustive list of financial woes, addiction, socio-economic issues and family break-ups.

In my opinion, casinos are an insidious form of entertainment. With the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre slated to become the cultural hub of the city, Vaughan will be the benchmark for other cities looking to create a downtown core that supports businesses, while respecting the maintaining the values and social cohesion of families and communities. The VMC is a picture-perfect plan. We do not need to add a casino to that picture.

I ask each one of you that support a casino in Vaughan to reflect on how much money you would be willing to lose at the blackjack table or slot machines in order to generate revenue for this city? My guess is none, because politicians and business women and men in suits are not the ones gambling. The ones gambling are hard-working residents who choose to take their chances with lady luck. We are putting the interests of casino lobbyists and big business before the interests of residents.

To me, gambling is a legal form of robbing people who may already be struggling to pay bills, living with mental illness, new to the country, immersed in debt or experiencing family problems. Casinos are a predatory industry that preys on the most vulnerable in society.

As a teacher who has worked in inner city communities, and affluent communities, worked with First nation's communities and communities where addictions are prevalent, I have seen first-hand, families, living in poverty and the disarray and decay communities face. I have seen the negative impact in homes where financial instability had ravaged families. We can all sit here and paint a fancy picture in our minds of what a casino in Vaughan will bring to the city, but I caution you to seriously think about how a casino will change not just the physical landscape of the city, but the very fabric and fibre that hold us together as Vaughan residents. Do not spend anymore time on this debate, instead funnel your energy into building the VMC and getting on with the business of the city.

Please consider your vote, and think about the city we elected you to serve, not for today or next year, but for the next decade and decades to come. The decision you make as members of council will be felt for years to come, and residents will be forced to live with the dire consequences. For those of you in favour of the casino, please reconsider.

Sincerely,

Shernett Martin
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