



April 25, 2018

Dear Mayor and City Council Colleagues,

Re: Communication on EX33.2 Expanded Gaming and Woodbine – Further Information

As we continue our discussion into the future community benefits to be drawn from gaming expansion at Woodbine, I would like to bring to your attention an Op-Ed featured in the Toronto Star discussing the opportunity in front of us to build a respectful relationship between the project and community members.

I have attached this article to my letter for your review and consideration.

Thank you,

Councillor Mike Layton
Ward 19, Trinity-Spadina

TORONTO STAR

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The fight for community benefits at Rexdale casino

It is not too late to build a respectful relationship for this massive project, which will have a huge impact on the community.



The proposed Woodbine race track and casino in Rexdale “can either provide shared prosperity for an entire generation, or it can simply focus on providing profit for corporate investors,” write Rosemarie Powell and John Cartwright. (WOODBINE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP)

By **ROSEMARIE POWELL** Opinion
JOHN CARTWRIGHT
Wed., April 25, 2018

The big casino is finally coming to town, and someone is about to score the jackpot.

That someone is of course the developer, Ontario Gaming GTA LP, a Great Canadian Gaming/Brookfield BP/Clairvest partnership, who won the contract from Ontario Lottery + Gaming to build and operate a Vegas-style gaming facility with two hotels, a 4,200 seat performance venue, restaurants and retail.

It is reported that the proponents expect a 10 to 15 per cent annual return on investment — not bad for a 22-year contract.

Everyone knows that gambling has serious impacts — problem gamblers can harm not only their own lives but also their loved ones. People have reservations about gaming for a variety of reasons, and religions have strong opposition to gambling as a matter of faith. Toronto City Council will have to decide if the efforts of Great Canadian Gaming to purchase the “social licence” for the casino are worthy of support.

So far, it seems the company is offering not much more than they would be doing anyway — some local hiring, some limit on how many jobs will be part-time, and some apprenticeships. But outside of once-a-month access to venue space, there is little significant money for community needs.

This project can either provide shared prosperity for an entire generation, or it can simply focus on providing profit for corporate investors.

Back in 2006, another proposal for an entertainment complex at Woodbine was made by Baltimore-based Cordish Corp. People in the nearby neighbourhoods started organizing to make sure residents would get a fair share of the jobs. Along with a number of local unions, they founded a movement named Community Organizing for Responsible Development (CORD).

This coalition mobilized to pressure City Hall to provide community benefits, focused on training and hiring opportunities. And while the Cordish plan fell victim to the financial crash, the idea of a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) was not lost. After proposals to build a casino on Toronto’s waterfront went down in flames, the Woodbine location was approved in 2015 depending on the operator meeting 21 conditions set by Toronto City Council.

In 2013, the Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN) was formed as a community-labour coalition to secure job opportunities for diverse communities in the construction of the new transit lines. It subsequently negotiated a framework with Metrolinx and the builder, Crosslinx Transit Solutions that included apprenticeships, professional occupations and procurement from local business and social enterprises. Its success has been underpinned by a spirit of co-operation and solution-building, supported by city agencies, provincial ministries, United Way and community funders.

In 2015, CORD merged with TCBN to continue working with local residents and organizations in Rexdale. Research on CBAs signed with casino developers across North America informed a comprehensive proposal that was put to Ontario Gaming GTA LP in November of 2017. Unfortunately, after an initial meeting with TCBN and local residents, Great Canadian Gaming broke off all talks. Instead, the company continued to lobby city councillors.

After extensive negotiations around the 21 conditions, city staff finalized two reports; one on planning issues and another on community benefits. The planning report passed at the Etobicoke York Community Council, while the second went to city executive, which heard a number of deputations pointed to the need for improved benefits to be included in any approval.

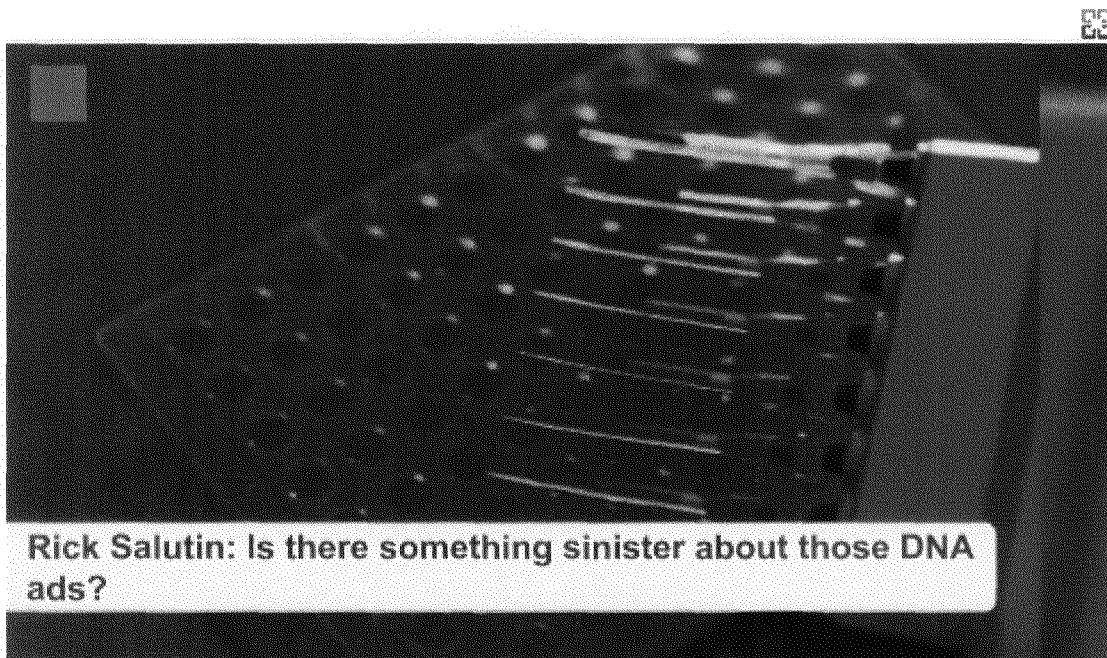
To the credit of city staff, there are specific targets for local and social hiring, and a goal of at least half being full-time jobs (ironically, this is lower than the existing workforce ratio). That is a partial but significant victory for the community, but it falls short of what should be expected. Oversight and holding the developer to account on these promises will be key.

“We are here to protect the public interest ... I’ll be watching very closely to see how proponents respond to need for child care, more ambitious targets, and the important question of representation.” Mayor John Tory said at the end of executive meeting.

The expanded Woodbine Casino will generate millions in private profit every month — for 22 years. A small portion will go back to the city as part of OLG’s Municipal Contribution Agreement. Taxpayers will be supporting the workforce development through Employment Ontario agencies and a community college.

Missing is an authentic role for the community partnership that understands the full potential for this development to be the best neighbour that it can be. It is not too late to build a respectful relationship for this massive project, which will have a huge impact on the community. Maybe all that is needed is a matter of good will.

Rosemarie Powell is executive director of the Toronto Community Benefits Network. **John Cartwright** is president of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council and co-chair of the TCBN.



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