

Exhibition Place Position on New Requests for Casino License

Date: June 4, 2026
To: The Board of Governors of Exhibition Place
From: Don Boyle, Chief Executive Officer
Wards: Ward 10 – Spadina – Fort York

SUMMARY

This report outlines Exhibition Place’s present casino activities. The report also provides public health evidence regarding the social and health impacts associated with gambling expansion in Toronto.

Exhibition Place recognizes the historical temporary casino operated by the Canadian National Exhibition Association (CNEA) during the annual fair and proposes that this be grandfathered in.

While the City of Toronto does not have a formal policy position on temporary charitable casino operations, City Council and Toronto Public Health have a documented history of opposing the establishment or expansion of permanent casinos in Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Executive Officer recommends that the Board of Governors of Exhibition Place:

1. Grandfather the historical temporary casino operated by the Canadian National Exhibition Association (CNEA) during the annual fair.
2. Direct the Chief Executive Officer to bring any new requests for casino licenses at Exhibition Place to the Board for approval.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts to this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on January 27, 1997, the Board convened a Permanent Charity Casino Task Force comprising Board Members Joe Pantalone, Carole Kerbel, and David Miller, as well as two members of the CNEA Board.

At its meeting on August 27, 1997, the Permanent Charity Casino Task Force reviewed potential proponents for a permanent charity casino. This was the final meeting of the Task Force prior to amalgamation, with no subsequent follow-up.

COMMENTS

Gambling Activities at Exhibition Place

The CNEA Charity Casino began in 1991, originally located in the Ontario Government Building, and is currently hosted at the Better Living Centre before and during the annual fair. The legal framework for this activity is set out in sections 206(3) and 206(3.1) of the Criminal Code of Canada, which provide a specific exemption permitting certain gaming activities when conducted by a fair or exhibition board on exhibition grounds during an approved fair period.

Discussions regarding a permanent charity casino date back to the mid-1990s. These discussions followed the Government of Ontario's decision to permit the establishment of permanent charity gaming facilities across the province, which now include approximately 36 full-time operations.

In 1996, Exhibition Place and the CNEA publicly announced their intention to pursue a permanent charity casino on the grounds. A Permanent Charity Casino Task Force was established at a meeting on January 27, 1997. Throughout 1997, the Task Force met regularly to review a shortlist of proponents provided by the Province and indicated that Exhibition Place would be open to partnering with any qualified operator interested in developing a permanent facility. The last documented meeting of the Task Force took place on August 27, 1997, and there has been no follow-up since amalgamation.

City of Toronto

In 2013, two potential locations in Toronto were contemplated as part of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation's (OLG) broader exploration of expanded casino operations within the city. As part of this deliberation, two zones were considered. The area encompassing Exhibition Place, the downtown core, and the Port Lands was identified as the C1 zone, while the C2 zone encompassed the Woodbine Racetrack area.

Many comments raised during the consultation process focused on the potential adverse impacts on the city's reputation and image. Polling conducted as part of the process indicated that 61 percent of respondents opposed to a casino cited concerns related to social problems, while an additional 17 percent identified crime as a primary

concern. Respondents also raised concerns regarding broader social and health impacts, including problem gambling, impacts on family cohesion, and crime.

City Planning staff further reported that a casino of the scale contemplated by OLG within Toronto's downtown area could have significant negative impacts and detract from the diversity, character, and urban lifestyle that contribute to the area's continued success and appeal. Within this broader assessment, staff noted that a casino at Exhibition Place would fundamentally alter the site's character by introducing unplanned land-use impacts and creating challenges in maintaining the campus's existing character.

Additionally, City Planning recommended that the City not consider establishing a temporary casino within the C1 zone, as it is anticipated to result in the same planning and land-use impacts and processes as a permanent facility and may ultimately become a permanent fixture over time.

At its meeting on May 21, 2013, the Toronto City Council considered the proposed expansion of gaming activities and voted to oppose the establishment of any new gaming sites within Toronto.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2013.EX30.1>

Gambling and Gaming Licenses

Section 207 of the Criminal Code of Canada delegates authority to provincial governments to conduct and manage certain forms of gambling within their jurisdictions. Under this framework, Ontario fulfils that responsibility through the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) and the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG).

The AGCO is responsible for regulation and licensing, while the OLG operates and manages gaming activities. The AGCO authorizes municipalities to issue licences for most lottery events, including bingo, non-electronic raffles, and bazaar gaming events. Municipalities may also establish additional criteria, through by-laws and policies, to guide licensing decisions and administration. Chapter 553 of the Toronto Municipal Code provides limited options for charitable gaming. The City issues lottery licences and permits to eligible charitable, non-profit, and religious organizations.

Health Impacts of Gambling

Recent reports from the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#) and [Toronto Public Health \(TPH\)](#) have identified gambling as a public health issue. Nearly 70% of adults in Ontario report participating in gambling activities, as gambling and gaming-related activities continue to expand across digital and in-person environments. Although many of these reports were prepared in the context of proposals for permanent, full-time casino developments, the underlying public health principles remain applicable to temporary establishments.

Current evidence indicates that gambling-related harms are shaped not only by individual behaviour but also by broader environmental and systemic factors, including

the availability, accessibility, and proximity of gambling opportunities. Increased exposure to gambling environments is associated with a higher risk of habitual gambling and related social and health impacts. TPH has found an association between gambling and lower levels of well-being, including an increased risk of mental health disorders, financial hardship, and other adverse social outcomes. They identified expanded gambling opportunities as correlated with higher rates of problem gambling and related harms that affect not only individuals but also communities.

Evidence also shows that gambling-related harms are not evenly distributed across society. These harms disproportionately affect marginalized and disadvantaged socio-demographic groups, including youth, Indigenous peoples, and persons with low incomes. These groups are overrepresented among problem gamblers and are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of gambling. For example, in a 2023, [CAMH surveyed Ontario students](#) and found that approximately 7.9% reported betting money on online games, such as online casino games and online sports betting, at least once in the past year.

Population-level data further indicate disparities in gambling participation and harm. Statistics Canada reported that a greater proportion of Indigenous respondents (72.4%) had gambled in the past year compared with non-Indigenous respondents (64.2%). The same report also found that lower-income households (the bottom 40% of income earners) experienced higher rates of gambling problems than households in the top 20% of the income distribution (2.7% and 2.1%, compared with 1.1%). As a result, gambling expansion may exacerbate existing health and social inequities.

CAMH has emphasized that environmental conditions, such as increased exposure to gambling opportunities and access to higher-risk forms of gambling, are significant risk factors for gambling-related harms. Similarly, TPH has stated that increased availability and accessibility of gambling, including new casinos or slot machines, are likely to increase the prevalence of problem gambling, and that proximity to a gambling venue is itself a determinant of problem gambling.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that introducing new casino opportunities may lead to adverse public health and community impacts, particularly for vulnerable populations.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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