

Ford's exec committee pushes casino debate to council

Written by Administrator
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Mayor Rob Ford's executive committee has approved a motion that will move the debate over whether Toronto should host a casino in the downtown core, or Exhibition Place, to city council.

The vote passed nine to four in favour of the motion which supported city manager Joe Pennachetti's report last week that made 43 recommendations council should consider if it were to go ahead with a gaming facility.

Pennachetti and city staff appeared before the 13-member committee earlier today to answer questions about his report.

The city manager, while replying to a question from Coun. Cesar Palacio about the the casino's undetermined hosting fees, promised they would be delivered by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., before the end of April.

"OLG is reviewing the formula but they will have their formula made public, to our knowledge, by the end of this month," Pennachetti said.

Police Chief Bill Blair also appeared to answer questions, asked whether casinos increased the crime rates in neighbourhoods where they're located, specifically Woodbine Racetrack.

Blair said police have not found statistical evidence to link criminal activity directly to the Etobicoke-based facility that boasts more than 2,500 slot machines.

"Violence does occur in some proximity to that, but it is more related to the neighbourhood in which it's taking place," he said.

Blair told the councillors he had been consulted about the impact of a casino on a municipality for the city manager's report, and he'd spoken with police chiefs in Montreal, Niagara Falls, Las

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Vegas and Singapore about the issue.

"They indicated that they had not seen any increase in organized criminal activity or public safety concerns at those locations," he said.

But when pressed by Coun. Adam Vaughan about whether he had spoken to police chiefs in Vancouver and its surrounding municipalities "an area with seven casinos" Blair said he had not.

Earlier in the morning, councillors questioned city staff

Committee members listened to arguments on Monday from city residents, business owners, community groups and even Las Vegas casino representatives.

But even after 11 hours of input, some people touting strong opposition to any type of casino expansion in Toronto, the mayor wasn't swayed from his own opinion.

"I want to see a casino approved. Carry it on to council and take it from there," said Ford.

Unionized downtown hotel worker Chris Koehler agrees, and said a casino that brings 10,000 unionized jobs to the city could boost the standard of living for low-income residents.

"Being in the union for almost 15 years now, the benefits I've received from that, I think other people could benefit from that also," said Koehler.

Many among the 200 who waited to speak for three minutes yesterday remain opposed to a casino.

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Toronto resident Angela Emerson said a casino will only bring social problems to the city.

"I feel so strongly that a casino will be bad for the city," she said.

Released last week, the city manager's report calls for a 50-50 split of casino profits with the province, with the city taking in no less than \$100 million annually.

The province has yet to agree to that formula, which would give Toronto a far richer share of the profits than host municipalities in other Ontario communities.

Read more <http://ca.news.yahoo.com/ford-exec-committee-pushes-casino-debate-council-000419984.html>