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## MEMORANDUM

October 21, 2009

**TO:** Mayor and Council

**CC:** Penny Ballem, City Manager  
David McLellan, General Manager, CSG  
Brenda Prosken, Deputy General Manager, CSG  
Mary Clare Zak, Director, Social Policy  
Marg Coulson, Acting City Clerk  
Robin Adair, GM, Intergovernmental Relations and Strategic Partnerships  
Wendy Stewart, Assistant Director, Media Services, Communications

**FROM:** Mario Lee  
Senior Social Planner

**SUBJECT:** Slots at Hastings - Community Impacts and Problem Gambling Issues

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Dear Mayor and Council,

At the July 9, 2009 meeting of the Planning and Environment Committee of Council, Councillor Ellen Woodsworth requested further information on community impacts arising from the introduction of slot machines at the Hastings Racecourse, particularly in regards to a potential City role in dealing with impacts such as problem gambling.

As reported at the July 9, 2009 meeting, staff researched information regarding community impacts related to issues within the City's jurisdiction. The report to Council addressed issues such as traffic, parking, and neighbourhood related crime activities. The conclusion was that those types of impacts were minimal.

Although the surrounding community did have some issues related to traffic and parking, those did not arise from the introduction of slots, but rather relate to PNE and Coliseum activities. Staff also conducted a community survey, held meetings with community groups, and held discussions with regulatory and enforcement agencies (i.e. VPD, Provincial Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch).

## Gaming Research

Other types of socioeconomic impacts arising from the introduction of a gaming facility or its expansion are difficult to assess, mostly due to the cost involved. However, the province of British Columbia, who has jurisdiction over these matters, has done some research and monitors impacts. The Province also has some programs in place to address some of the negative impacts, including a provincial comprehensive Responsible Gambling Strategy. The City of Vancouver (together with other municipalities) is part of this strategy through the BC Partnership for Responsible Gambling. The Responsible Gambling Strategy has three distinct goals, namely:

- Reduce incidence of problem gambling.
- Reduce harmful impacts of excessive gambling.
- Ensure delivery of gambling in a manner that encourages responsible gambling and healthy choices.

Regarding problem gambling, the most recent study on problem gambling prevalence was conducted by the Province in 2007 and found that 4.6% of adult British Columbians are problem gamblers (3.7% moderate problem gamblers, and 0.9% categorized as severe problem gamblers). A further 8.7% of British Columbians are classified as at risk gamblers. A previous prevalence study in 2002 also found that 4.6% of British Columbians were problem gamblers.

In the 2007 study, casino types of games (including slot machines) were found to attract a higher percentage of problem gamblers (12.1%). A new problem gambling study will be conducted in 2012. A copy of the latest provincial problem gambling study can be found at:

<http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/gaming/reports/docs/rpt-rg-prevalence-study-2008.pdf>

In 2007, the province also conducted a study on socioeconomic impacts of new gaming venues in four B.C. communities (Surrey, Langley, Township of Langley, and Vancouver). The study was initially intended to assess impacts from four venues, namely: the Fraser Downs Racetrack and Casino in Surrey, the Cascades Casino in Langley, the Edgewater Casino in Vancouver, and the Hastings Racetrack. The Hastings Racetrack however, was ultimately excluded from the study, as the slot machines were not introduced until late in 2007.

Despite the exclusion of Hastings Racetrack, the socioeconomic study provided some important information such as the profile of players attending the Edgewater Casino (e.g. a significant number of players reside in the Postal Code areas adjacent to the casino), and some general observations in regards to regional economic and social impacts. While the study found that the new gaming venues created over a thousand new jobs, it found no impacts on issues such as: commercial bankruptcy, housing starts, value of residential and non-residential construction, and hotel and motel revenue. The study recognized however, that the new venues provide important revenue to the province, host municipalities, and casino operators, and do have positive spin-off effects. A copy of the socioeconomic study can be found at:

<http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/gaming/reports/docs/rpt-rg-impact-study-final.pdf>

## Provincial Programs

Since 1997, the Province has had a problem gambling program involving two main services:

- A problem gambling toll-free Help Line, which provides confidential services in 13 languages, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Problem gambling counselling, which includes 36 professional clinical counsellors who provide services across B.C.

In 2008/09, the toll-free Help Line fielded over 6,000 calls related to problem gambling, an increase of over one thousand calls over the ones received in the 2007/08 period (4,938 calls). In Vancouver proper, 1,432 calls were received.

In 2008/09, 1,280 clients were admitted for counselling services and increase of over 200 cases compared to 2007/08 when 1,054 clients were admitted. In Vancouver, there were 182 admissions to counselling services in 2008/09. Counselling services are provided free of charge and are capped at 20 sessions per individual (although extensions can be approved).

The province also has a number of educational and prevention programs in place, including activities involving elementary schools, high schools, and Colleges and Universities. Many of these activities do take place in the City of Vancouver. Early intervention is highly important for at least two reasons:

- Studies in Alberta and Quebec have found that adults with a gambling problem first gambled when they were 9 or 10 years old.
- The 18-24 age group have a higher problem gambling estimate (6.3%) and a statistically higher at risk estimate (16%).

The province also has a mandatory training program for all staff in the gaming industry. The Appropriate Response Training (ART) was initiated in 2004 and to date more than 9,300 staff have been trained. The ART training provides industry staff with a good understanding of policies and practices as well as with tools to identify a variety of situations involving customer distress.

## City's Involvement

In conclusion, while recognizing that there are some negative social impacts arising from gambling activities, the City is satisfied that appropriate programs are being put in place by the province of British Columbia. Currently, there is no justification for the City of Vancouver to duplicate the assessment and intervention programs implemented by the province. The City is responding to gaming impacts within the limits of its resources and mandate, through:

- Negotiation of public benefits that benefit the surrounding communities (e.g. local hires in both the Edgewater Casino and Hastings Racetrack).
- Allocation of grants to local community groups to enhance community capacity in neighbourhoods surrounding the local gaming facilities (Edgewater Social Responsibility Fund, Hastings Legacy Fund).
- Partnering with the province to develop information centres (e.g. Edgewater Casino).

- Facilitating the implementation of school-based educational programs in the Vancouver school system (e.g. Know Dice program for Elementary Schools, which addresses common gambling myths and provides information on responsible choices).
- Supporting agencies working with youth at risk, and ensuring that appropriate services are provided (e.g. SUCCESS, Family Services, and Broadway Youth Resource Centre).
- Enhance staff development activities through participation in forums and other educational activities organized through the BC Partnership for Responsible Gambling.

If you require additional information on these matters, please do not hesitate to contact me at 604-871-6034.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mario Lee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

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Senior Social Planner

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