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## Cashing in on casinos

### City looking for bigger cut of gambling profits

By TERRI SAUNDERS, SUN MEDIA

Cities like Ottawa should be getting a bigger piece of the casino cash pie, some city councillors say.

Toronto city officials are planning on meeting soon with representatives from the provincial government in a bid to increase their municipality's share of casino profits to 10% from the approximately 3% they receive now.

Coun. Peter Hume and Coun. Jan Harder have signed their names to a motion going before Ottawa city council tomorrow suggesting Ottawa not only support Toronto's bid for more cash, but hop on the casino revenue bandwagon itself.

Across Ontario, most municipalities with a casino in their jurisdiction get a skim of the daily take. In almost all cases, local governments take 5% of the revenue from 450 slot machines inside the casino, plus an additional 2% from all other slot machines.

In 2006, city coffers were plumped up by \$3.38 million in revenue generated by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Commission through its operation of the Rideau Carleton Raceway.

#### 75% GOES TO PROVINCE

The rest of the revenue, estimated to be about \$107 million in 2006, was divvied up between four other parties: The racetrack owner and a group of horse breeders each took 10%; the Ministry of Health's Problem Gambling Strategy got 2%; and the rest, about 75%, went to the Ontario government's consolidated revenue fund, which includes the Ontario Trillium Foundation, an organization that doles out grants for community projects annually.

Coun. Georges Bedard said he will be supporting the motion, and he believes all of his colleagues will do the same.

"We need this money more than the province does," said Bedard. "We have issues in this city with water, sewer, transit and homelessness but we don't have the money to fix them all the way we need to."

Coun. Peggy Feltmate said hopping onto the Toronto bandwagon will allow Ottawa officials a better shot at being heard on the issue and she's hopeful the province and municipalities can ink a new deal.

"This would be a consistent, steady stream of revenue which we could budget for every year," said Feltmate. "The fact is casinos are going to exist no matter what you do, so why shouldn't we try to get more money from their operations?"

A year ago, elected officials in Toronto began to bandy around the idea of building a new casino which would be run by the city and which could serve as a revenue source. Some councillors even went so far as to suggest the city retain 100% of the profits and hand nothing over to the provincial government.

Casino revenue, officials argued, could help Toronto fill in a portion of a \$575-million budget shortfall expected this year.



Councillors are signing on to a motion that seeks to increase the city's share of casino profits. However, one addiction expert says relying on revenue from casinos is problematic because it compromises the government's willingness to limit gambling. (Tony Caldwell/Sun Media file photo)

In other provinces, municipalities have hammered out deals to get their fair share of casino revenues. In British Columbia, legislation requires casinos to turn over 10% of revenues to municipalities and that money is used to fund city-run programs and services. In Nanaimo, B.C., officials are eyeing the approximately \$3 million in annual revenue they receive from a local casino as a potential funding source for new social housing initiatives.

Officials with the city of Gatineau said yesterday they receive no portion of the revenue generated by Casino du Lac Leamy.

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#### MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

- Casinos in Ontario: 3 resort casinos, 5 casinos, 17 slot facilities
- Rideau Carleton Raceway: Opened in February 2000
- Slot machines: 1,250
- Customer visits since opening: 13.1 million
- City of Ottawa's share: 5% of first 450 slots, 2% of remaining slots
- Total revenue to city since opening: \$27.4 million