

CASINOS AND CRIME IN THE COMMUNITY: COMBATING THE MISPERCEPTION

When it comes to a casino's presence in a community, a topic that sometimes can arise is whether or not casinos create and bring with it crime in the community. While it is easy to point the blame at the presence of a local casino, it is important to consider what research, statistics and experiences have revealed, or in some cases, what they haven't revealed in regards to linking casinos with additional crime.

Listed below are a collection of third party observations and experiences that help provide a more informed view of the perception of casinos and crime in the community.

Various police representatives say there is no data suggesting casinos create additional crime

Based on the experience and expert opinion provided by various Canadian police authorities, there is no evidence that a gaming facility in a community increases crime.

- ▶ During a city hall public meeting in January 2013 regarding the possibility of a casino in downtown Hamilton, Ontario, deputy police Chief Ken Leendertse said that although Hamilton police have no opinion on a casino in the downtown, there is no data suggesting it would create additional crime.
- ▶ In April 2015 during a North Vancouver policy committee meeting regarding the topic of lifting a 20-year-old bylaw that bans commercial gambling, North Vancouver RCMP Superintendent and officer in charge Chris Kennedy shared his view on the matter. He told council he'd interviewed the commanding officers of other detachments with community gaming facilities and found no public safety reason to oppose one opening on the North Shore in British Columbia.
- ▶ Offering their referral for a gaming license in Surrey, BC during a staff report to city council, local RCMP advised that based on their experience with and calls for service to the Elements Casino (formerly Fraser Downs Racetrack & Casino), they did not have concerns with a proposed casino as it relates to crime and public safety in South Surrey or on the demand for police resources in the area surrounding the proposed casino.
- ▶ In November 2012, video testimonials from a number of Ontario Police Chiefs (OPC) indicate there has been no evidence that a casino's presence increases crime over the two decades that casino gaming has been available in Ontario
 - ▶ Based on his experience in providing services inside many gaming facilities across the province, Ontario Provincial Police (OPC) Chief Superintendent Fred Burtucca explained "We have not seen an increase in crime. In fact, facilities are very well run. We have a very close relationship with the security and surveillance people located at the site and we're able to respond immediately to any situation that happens."
- ▶ The first-ever casino built in Moncton, New Brunswick in 2008 had its fair share of doubters. But according to Codiac RCMP, since Casino New Brunswick opened its doors, there haven't been any major incidents reported, and any rare onsite problems could be dealt with by the facility's security staff members.
- ▶ In a BC government report (Socioeconomic impacts of new gaming venues in four BC communities), The Vancouver Police Department, and Langley and Surrey RCMP each identified a key spokesperson to speak to the impacts of each respective new gaming venue. From a police perspective, the findings were:
 - ▶ In general, there has been very little crime or police work associated with the new venues (Edgewater Casino, Hastings Racecourse, Elements Casino and Cascades Casino)
 - ▶ "As of 2005, the venues have not appeared substantially on the police "radar," suggesting that they are creating little direct and visible disturbance or crime at a level noticeable to police." (p. 119)
 - ▶ Police did not note any overall increase in [parking lot related] theft, nor property crime in general that could be attributed to the venues.
 - ▶ Police had these comments: "No, the casino hasn't caused any problems;" "We get calls very rarely from them;" "The casino security is very good and they can handle most problems themselves;" "The casino has been very low level for us;" and "We did anticipate some problems and they simply have not materialized." (p. 119)
- ▶ During a public meeting when the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) was presented with its first Public Safety Impact Report, Police Chief James Alfred of Plainville, Massachusetts said that he saw no major impact between Plainridge Park Casino and crime in the nearby neighbourhoods. He described it as "so far, so good".

Casinos not a problem for Community Leaders

A Canadian Gaming Association (CGA) report published in 2015 presented the opinions of Community Leaders who agreed to have casinos developed in their municipalities. One of the questions they were asked was whether they thought casinos in the community have contributed to crime. The findings demonstrate that the anticipated negative impacts of a casino in the community did not actually transpire:

- ▶ Community Leaders indicated that the majority of public perception of various societal and personal difficulties associated with casino gambling did not materialize (specifically crime and related strains on municipal services).
- ▶ Community Leaders suggested no incremental demand on public services such as police, fire and emergency medical services (EMS) as a result of introducing casino gaming to the community.

In December 2012, when reflecting on how the opening of Brantford casino has helped revitalize the city and its downtown area, Chris Friel, Mayor of Brantford, Ontario at that time, echoed a similar opinion as Community Leaders surveyed by the CGA. Though he was initially opposed to the casino when it opened, out of fear that it could lead to increased crime, Mayor Friel is clear on the positive impact that the facility's revenue has had on his community. "It's exceeded our expectations. The dollars that we have been investing to see those building and the campuses grow, in our urban core, have come directly from the casino."

Casino jurisdictions experience no more crime than the average municipality

In a series of police video testimonials from November 2012 that indicate there is no link between gaming facilities and increases in crime, Ontario Police Chiefs state that based on their experience, a casino's presence in the municipality has not been an issue, and there is no difference in crime rates between a community with a casino and a community without one.

- ▶ In his video testimonial, Dennis Poole, Chief of Police for the Municipality of Chatham-Kent in Ontario said that the OLG Slots at Dresden Raceway has not been an issue for police from a community safety perspective, noting that the average police calls per year to the facility are 20, no more than the average mall or large department store in the community. Poole adds that their working relationship with the facility's security staff has been exceptional and that they have been very helpful in resolving any issues, all of which have been relatively small.
- ▶ Brantford, Ontario Police Chief Jeff Kellner stated that prior to the Brantford Casino opening its doors in the city, there were initial concerns that a gaming facility would increase the local crime rate, however those concerns never materialized: "We were concerned as a police service, but the overall impact, as it related to crime, has been very insignificant in our community."
- ▶ As part of their referral for a gaming license during a staff report to council, Surrey RCMP shared that based on their experience, the number of calls for service to Fraser Downs Racetrack & Casino (now Elements Casino) in Surrey, BC falls within the same range as other licensed establishments across the City.
- ▶ A 2007 report published by the BC government around socioeconomic impacts of new gaming venues in four BC communities (Langley, Township of Langley, Surrey, Vancouver) found that:
 - ▶ "Both Langley Township and Surrey experienced a statistically significant drop in the number of criminal code offenses after the introduction of gaming facilities near or in their communities. No change was observed for the City of Langley or Vancouver" (p.9)
 - ▶ "Concerning social impacts, there is very little evidence that these new venues have exacerbated existing social problems, as there was no significant increase in the overall rates of crime or problem gambling." (p.12)
 - ▶ Based on the number of criminal code offenses each month from January 1995 to October 2005 (Surrey's Fraser Downs, Vancouver's Edgewater and Langley's Cascades opened between April 2004 and May 2005), there was no obvious change in criminal charges subsequent to venue introduction.
- ▶ Results of the first public safety impact report commissioned in 2015 by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission showed no significant increase in crime after the opening of Plainridge Park Casino in Plainville, Massachusetts, and even a decrease in some areas. Specifically, findings demonstrated no increases in robbery, burglary or theft and a significant decrease in auto thefts.

Sources

The Spec – Daniel Nolan, Thursday, January 17, 2013

Casinos alone don't cause crime, Hamilton officer says Samantha Craggs, CBC News January 11, 2013 | bit.ly/1YpsQ9Q

Brent Richter / North Shore News April 22, 2015 | bit.ly/1p3JmQA

Planning and Development Report: Staff Report to Council

Canadian Gaming Association Casino gaming in Canada: The Opinions of Community Leaders | <http://bit.ly/2hTeDnN>

Ontario Police Chiefs Say No Link Between Gaming Facilities And Increases In Crime November 6, 2012 |

National Post

Betting on the future: Communities across Ontario have benefitted from gaining facility revenue, December 5, 2012 | bit.ly/1SvTCNr

Police Chief video testimonials from Ontario Lottery Gaming Corporation

Socioeconomic impacts of new gaming venues in four British Columbia Lower Mainland communities

Prepared for: Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch / Prepared by: Blue Thorn Research and Analysis Group, Victoria, BC
July 31, 2007 |

Browne, M.N. & Kubasek, N.K. (1997). Should we encourage expansion of the casino gambling industry? Review of Business, 18 (3), 9-13.

Smith, G.J. & Wynne, H.J. (1999). Gambling and crime in Western Canada: Exploring myth and reality. Calgary, AB: Canada West Foundation.

Mass Live

Facts indicate the downtown MGM Springfield casino is a safe bet (Editorial) November 20, 2016 | bit.ly/2huCo4U