

View Royal casino wants to double its size

Gamblers often fill casino to capacity; people turned away because of parking shortage

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The Great Canadian Casino in View Royal is planning a significant expansion that would see it almost double its floor space, build a lounge for live entertainment and add a tele-theatre where patrons could watch sporting events and bet on live horse races.

But whether it will get municipal council's approval to serve alcohol throughout the building - even on the gaming floor - is anyone's bet.

"We are proposing a full-service lounge in which I believe we will get liquor approval. Obviously we would like to be able to get liquor approval throughout the entire facility as we have with our other properties in Richmond and Coquitlam," said Howard Blank, Great Canadian's vice-president of media and entertainment.



CREDIT: Times Colonist file

The View Royal Casino opened in December 2001 at 1708 Island Highway.

Blank said the expanded casino would be patterned after the successful River Rock Casino in Richmond.

But any proposal to serve liquor on the gaming floor would be "hotly debated" by municipal council, View Royal Mayor Graham Hill said Thursday. Council needs to sign off on the expansion before it can go ahead.

"Council has a good regard for the GCC and the way they run their business. ... The lottery corporation has a messaging campaign that says 'play within your limits.' I know that members of council have a sense that liquor on the gaming floor could interfere with judgment."

While the casino would like to get council's approval to serve liquor on the gaming floor, the expansion is not necessarily contingent on that, Blank said.

He said the existing facility, which opened in December 2001, is "antiquated," and there's a demand for a bigger space.

"We've been at and exceeding capacity on numerous occasions," he said.

Currently, the casino has a floor area of about 32,000 square feet and features 437 slot machines, 24 table games and food and beverage areas.

The redevelopment proposal includes increasing the existing floor area by about 24,000 square feet to accommodate new gaming facilities including more slots, a poker room and a tele-theatre. The company is planning expanding food and beverage facilities to include a new lounge which would feature live entertainment.

The company has an agreement to purchase an additional 1.5 acres adjacent to its existing facilities (a vacant oil-change property) and wants to expand the parking lot by 380 spaces.

Blank said parking has been "a huge problem" at the View Royal site.

"There's been many people who have just turned around who can't come in because our lots are full," he said.

People at the casino Thursday welcomed the expansion plans.

"It's hard to get to the slot machines especially at nighttime," said Bill Whittet. "Usually, we come on a Friday night and never get near a machine."

"That's why we're here tonight," added his wife, Diana. "We're not coming on the weekends."

New Brunswick visitors Belva Carlen and Bessie O'Brien agreed more space is needed - particularly for parking.

Two days ago, they parked their car across the street because the casino parking lot was full. Lucky for them, when they went back across the street they were \$160 and \$245 richer.

And if they come for another visit, Carlen and O'Brien would be happy to try their luck on the horse races.

"I think the horse racing would be wonderful," said Carlen. "That is fun."

Marianne Thomas hadn't heard of the casino's proposals but quickly warmed to them - although she predicted that if the casino expands, more people will gamble.

"There are pros and cons to it," said Thomas, who described herself as an avid gambler trying to control herself. "I feel bad for people who are coming here and going absolutely broke, losing everything."

Puffing on a cigarette, Doug Hubbs, had his own request to add to the casino's wish list - a warm indoor smoking room.

Hubbs said he would love to see live shows, and he'd enjoy having a beer while he gambles, although he added: "I'm not there to drink. I'm there for entertainment."

Under an agreement between the West Shore municipalities, they share some casino revenues for being hosts to the facility. View Royal receives between \$1.8 million and \$2 million annually.