

## **B.C.'s biggest casino to get even bigger**

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Richmond Review

June 6, 2008.

**RICHMOND, BC --** River Rock Casino Resort, Western Canada's biggest gambling facility, is getting bigger.

Parent company Great Canadian Casino Corp. hopes to add another 37,800 square feet of gaming, restaurant and office space to the north side of its River Road casino compound.

That's on top of a massive expansion approved by Richmond council last year, which allows the company to build a five-storey, 192-room hotel above a seven-storey parkade.

That 1,200-space parkade, the second for the casino, scheduled to be finished by sometime next year, will serve Canada Line users by day, and casino patrons by night.

A city staff report that reveals details of the latest expansion also hints of another future phase of casino resort expansion on the horizon.

Great Canadian spokesperson Howard Blank was short on details and refused to comment on expansion plans.

"I'm not going to be speaking to anything until we formally go before council," he said Thursday.

City spokesperson Kim Decker said Great Canadian is proposing a two-storey expansion that will include a new gaming area and space for offices and food service. The proposed addition would be linked to Canada Line's future Bridgeport station, parkade and hotel by a "sky bridge," according to a staff report.

The proposal doesn't require rezoning. The city's development permit panel will hear Great Canadian's application next Wednesday.

In its 2006 annual report, Great Canadian's chairman Ross McLeod pointed to a bright future for business thanks to the coming rapid transit line.

"River Rock has already established itself as a major player in Vancouver's entertainment landscape, and we expect the completion of the Canada Line will only further its success."

Great Canadian will build the \$33-million parkade, with a \$4.5 million contribution from Translink. In exchange, the casino operator gets title to the parkade and nets an extra two-and-a-half acres of land for "potential future opportunities."

River Rock is Great Canadian's largest property in Canada, earning city council's approval to rename a portion of Garden City Road to Great Canadian Way in 2004.

Last year, the company expected competition for the public's gambling dollars with the opening of a new 100,000-square-foot casino in Queensborough, on the edge of Richmond. But so far, the impact has been minimal at best.

The casino returned \$12.8 million in gaming revenue to the City of Richmond last year—up \$650,000 from the previous year.

Bill Chu, of the Multicultural Coalition Against Gambling Expansion group, compared the casino to "a cancer" when it was relocated—and expanded—from Bridgepoint. Chu said now that cancer is growing.

"The city council in Richmond seems to be so for this sort of thing that I think it's missing the mark of being responsible for the citizens first."

Chu attributed a rise in social problems and even the scheduled closure of Bridgeport's RONA big box store to the casino.

"When would you ever see something like that closing down? The economy is being sucked dry by this monster out there."

Barbara Tinson, chair of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, said River Rock is a legitimate business that has brought millions of dollars of new revenue to the city.

And despite it being largely a destination location, Tinson believes local businesses have benefited, since the facility attracts people to Lulu Island.

“It might make people want to stay in Richmond, so from a tourism perspective, it is a good thing, because it’s definitely an attraction.”