

Pickering residents will find casino question on fall election ballot

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PICKERING -- Voters in Pickering will find a referendum question about a casino on their municipal election ballot this fall.

On April 22 council voted unanimously to put a question on the ballot that reads, "Are you in favour of a gaming facility (casino) in the City of Pickering as part of a hotel, convention centre, entertainment complex in a non-residential area?"

Despite the unanimous support, some councillors expressed concerns.

"Council has already made a determination in regards to being a willing (casino) host," said Councillor Kevin Ashe, referring to a December 2012 vote.

He also questioned the timing, noting council will have to address an application for a casino at Bayly and Church streets long before the referendum.

The application has been submitted by Durham Live to re-zone three pieces of land to create a massive tourist destination, which could potentially include a casino.

City staff confirmed the Planning Act requires re-zoning applications to be dealt with within 120 days, or else the applicant has the right to take the matter to the Ontario Municipal Board.

"Some have suggested that we don't deal with the planning application until we have the referendum...but if we don't deal with this the decision could potentially be taken out of council's hands," Coun. Ashe noted.

The Municipal Act says referendum results are binding, subject to a few exceptions, if at least 50 per cent of eligible voters respond to a question.

City Clerk Debbie Shields acknowledged this particular situation is "confusing," because voters will have their say on something that may have already been decided by council.

She couldn't say what would happen if 50 per cent of eligible electors turned out and voted in opposition to a casino, but council had already approved one.

"I don't know if it would be binding in a legal sense," Ms. Shields says, noting the clerk's department will investigate the issue further.

This will be the second question to appear on the Pickering ballot in October. On March 24 council approved a referendum question relating to the size of regional council.