



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ALBERTA

August 23, 2024

Mayor Amarjeet Sohi
City of Edmonton
1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, AB
T5J 2R7

Dear Mayor Sohi and Members of Edmonton City Council,

I am writing with deep concern and disappointment regarding your recent letter to Alberta Gaming, Liquor & Cannabis (AGLC) opposing the relocation of the Camrose Resort Casino to South Edmonton. While I appreciate your duty to advocate for the best interests of Edmonton, many Northern/North-Central Albertans see the manner in which this situation has been handled as callous to the needs the communities across Northern and North-Central Alberta.

First, let me address the inconsistency in the city's stance. Initially, Edmonton City Council pressed the AGLC to reject the casino's relocation. After the AGLC denied the proposal, resulting in public outcry from the other regions, the council's stance appeared to soften. Now, with the revised application on the table, the council has reverted to opposition. This flip-flopping is a disheartening gesture to all the communities across Northern and North-Central Alberta that have been counting on this relocation to rectify long-standing financial inequities.

Edmonton is undeniably the hub of the North, aptly nicknamed "The Gateway to the North." The city's strategic location means that every day, tens of thousands of Northern Albertans travel to Edmonton for a wide array of reasons—medical appointments, shopping trips, flights, sports events, business meetings, and more. Even Northern Albertans heading by road to Calgary, or the United States must filter through the Edmonton area due to the natural highway routes leading through the city. Highways connecting Northern Alberta all converge in Edmonton, not Camrose, making Edmonton the primary destination for Northern Albertans. By some estimates, the North alone accounts for as much as 30 to 35% of the province's GDP, with the lion's share of this economic activity flowing through Edmonton. This central role of Edmonton as the hub is a significant reason why the Camrose casino struggled to remain viable. Northern Albertans naturally gravitate towards Edmonton's casinos due to location and convenience.

This geographical reality is why, for decades, the money of Northern Albertans has poured into Edmonton's casinos, significantly contributing to the city's economy and funding Edmonton non-profits

to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Yet, in this moment, the city and these non-profits are pretending as if this revenue was solely generated by resident Edmontonians, which is blatantly untrue. The current stance is not just misleading—it is a clear manifestation of greed and selfishness. You know that Northern Alberta money has supported Edmonton's charities for years, but now, when it is time to give Northern charities their fair share, Edmonton refuses to share the largess it has received.

Relocating the Camrose Casino was an eminently reasonable request, given that Edmonton is where the North's gaming dollars naturally flow. There is even a precedent for this type of arrangement. The ACE Casino in Calgary operates with a dedicated rural casino license, significantly boosting revenues for rural charities in the surrounding area. As the AGLC already permits this model in Southern Alberta where a similar situation occurs with Calgary, it is disappointing that Edmonton City Council does not believe that the same fairness should be extended to the northern half of the province.

Adding to this disappointment is the fact that Northern and North-Central Alberta's MLAs and many of its mayors and reeves have long supported Edmonton's key projects, such as the Stollery Children's Hospital. Our communities have consistently rallied behind Edmonton, recognizing it as the central hub that it is. Yet now, when Northern Alberta seeks a modest adjustment to ensure equitable distribution of charitable gaming revenue, Edmonton responds with resistance and self-interest.

By opposing the relocation, the Edmonton City Council is essentially saying that it would rather see Northern and North-Central Alberta's women's shelters, seniors' programs, schools, youth initiatives, animal welfare organizations, and community programs go severely underfunded than share a portion of the wealth that Edmonton has reaped from Northern and North-Central Albertans for decades. This stance is not only embarrassing for Edmonton, but it also paints the city as greedy and unwilling to support the broader needs of the province.

Edmonton can be better than this. I strongly urge you to rescind your opposition letter and, instead, write a letter of support to the AGLC advocating for a fairer distribution of charitable gaming revenues. I also encourage you to urge Edmonton non-profits and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, who have written similar letters of opposition, to do the same.

Now is the time for leadership that reflects fairness, equity, and a recognition of the contributions made by all Albertans, including those from the North. The future of many vital programs in Northern and North-Central Alberta depends on it.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Cyr". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott Cyr, MLA
Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul