

Written by Administrator
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VANCOUVER -- The province won't use its senior government powers to overrule Vancouver if the city rejects B.C. Pavilion Corp.'s application for an expanded casino, PavCo chairman David Podmore said Friday.

Podmore said the BC Place Stadium renovation is being done under provincial authority, meaning it doesn't require municipal approval and could ignore any land-use restriction put in place by the

city.

But he said the Crown corporation also has an agreement to cooperate with the city on the development of lands around the stadium, including a two-acre parcel at the west end that PavCo leased to Paragon Gaming of Las Vegas for a \$450-million casino and hotel complex.

"The stadium upgrade commitment agreement that we signed with the city committed us to working through the city approval process on the development of the lands," he said. "We certainly aren't contemplating [a unilateral decision] at this time. It has never been the intent."

On March 7 city council will consider an application by PavCo and Paragon to rezone the parcel for a massive entertainment zone. The project is under intense public scrutiny because it involves doubling the size of the existing Edgewater Casino, making it the largest in Western Canada.

While Podmore says the provincial government has no intention of forcing its will on the city, it has in the past acted unilaterally. Norman Ruff, a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Victoria, said BC Place itself is an example of that.

More than 30 years ago, the province decided to build the stadium as part of a plan to bring a world exposition to the city. In the process, the province bought the north side of the creek from Marathon Realty for the site of Expo 86 and afterwards sold it to Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing for long-term residential development.

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"There is a tendency by Victoria to take a paternalistic view of Vancouver," he said. "Dispute the institutional arguments, if you can make the argument that economic interests are paramount, that argument usually wins."

But Podmore said he doesn't believe the province needs to go that route again. "I was there when that happened," he said. "My experience and my preference is to work cooperatively. It gets us further."

Podmore also clarified information he provided Thursday about the provincial contribution to the stadium renovation program. He said the entire project is still projected to cost \$563 million. But he said the province's share is actually \$467 million, of which \$277 million was a grant and \$40 million is in "deferred maintenance funds." The province loaned PavCo only \$150 million, he said.

PavCo will make up the remaining \$96 million from the land-lease revenues, naming rights, sponsorships and other sources.

Podmore said land lease payments from the Paragon development and a future development on the other side of the stadium would be used to pay down the province's debt.

"It doesn't change the effect. The business plan is we are to raise monies through all of these various activities to offset the cost of the development," he said.

jefflee@vancouver.sun.com

[Twitter.com/sunciviclee](https://twitter.com/sunciviclee)

Blog: www.vancouver.sun.com/jefflee

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