



22 Wilson Street, 2nd Floor,
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To our valued community members, partners and friends,

As the voice of Hamilton's growing arts community, the Hamilton Arts Council is deeply concerned that the positive trajectory of our city's culture may be irreparably altered by the addition of a casino to downtown Hamilton.

The recent and widely acknowledged growth of our arts sector has encouraged urban renewal in downtown Hamilton on the steady foundations of community involvement, adaptive reuse of our heritage infrastructure and efforts to engage rather than exploit the core's socioeconomic challenges. A project as disruptive as a casino not only places the future of our arts infrastructure and the health of our most vulnerable downtown residents at unconscionable risk, but also contradicts the Secondary Plan for downtown Hamilton, a plan which cautions against the impulse towards large, simplistic intervention:

In fact, experience across North America suggests that Downtown revitalization most often results from a collection of seemingly modest actions by individuals, small businesses and community organizations.ⁱ

There is nothing modest about the accomplishments of the arts in our downtown core. The arts in Hamilton have been identified as a vital attractor of talent and investment since the *National Post* first drew widespread attention to Hamilton's cultural scene in 2006. This call was amplified with articles in both *GridTO* and *The Toronto Star* in the last month alone commending Hamilton's grassroots arts community and the growth made possible by its contributions to Hamilton over the past ten years. The positive impact of the arts has been embraced most recently by the City of Hamilton's Planning and Economic Development Department, which welcomed the Culture Division into its fold in 2012 and has continued to feature attractions such as Supercrawl as success stories that define the emerging shape of our downtown core.

What has been achieved to date through private investment, public dollars and immeasurable amounts of sweat equity is a cultural renaissance that invites meaningful participation in downtown



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Hamilton. This was achieved by no single monolithic act or institution; rather, the arts grew in partnerships like the monthly Art Crawl which invites visitors to explore the arts from one storefront to the next and engage freely in shared public spaces. Furthermore, Hamilton artists and their organizations have worked closely with downtown Hamilton's social services to develop community arts programs to address poverty and alienation, particularly among Hamilton's youth. The Urban Arts Initiative's drop-in centre and Centre3 for Print and Media Arts' NuDeal program for teaching creative enterprise to youth are but two examples among many of the arts' positive involvement in our downtown neighbourhoods.

By contrast, a casino is engineered as a self-contained experience that shuts down congress with the community outside its doors and draws a disproportionate share of its revenues from the most vulnerable among us, placing the residents of our Code Red neighbourhoods at heightened risk. In terms of business model and scale, a casino is incompatible with the culture of free enterprise, creative engagement and hope that has allowed the arts to thrive and breathe new life into downtown Hamilton. This creative transformation of Hamilton's national image cannot be preserved in a casino's physical proximity and social shadow.

If downtown Hamilton seems like an attractive location for a new casino development, it is due to the work done by our grassroots arts community to make these neighbourhoods increasingly attractive places to live, work, and invest. A drastic deviation away from the community-driven efforts of the arts and creative industries without our consultation or consent is an insult to all who have thrown their finances, families and futures into their collective hope for a better city through the practical investments and hard work upon which all of Hamilton's proudest achievements have been built.

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ⁱ "Putting People First: The New Land Use Plan for Downtown Hamilton." City of Hamilton Planning and Economic Development Department, Amended May 2005. Section 6.2.3.1: Secondary Plan Principles, page 6.