

Voters give casino proposal thumbs up

After more than two years of debate and controversy, the question of whether Swift Current wanted a casino boiled down to two simple words.

Fifty-five per cent of ratepayers who cast votes said yes to the project in a plebiscite held Wednesday.

The former Tribal chairman of File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council (FHQTC), which is proposing the development, said winning the support of the majority of residents was a crucial first step.

"We're very excited and pleased that the community has accepted the proposal that we put forward. It's not just the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council's proposal, it's also a community proposal because we worked with people within this community to get to this point with the performing arts centre and the banquet hall," said Ron Crowe, who has been involved in the proposal from the beginning and will now serve the FHQTC in an advisory capacity.

"We've listened to the community and the community certainly has responded in a positive way."

Recently-elected FHQTC Tribal chairman Dean Bellegarde also emphasized the importance of gaining the support of residents.

"We like to always have the community support behind any initiative. So now that File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council has received the support from Swift Current itself, it is very rewarding. I've been speaking with a number of individuals from your community and they are ecstatic, so it's just a matter now of moving the ball forward," said Bellegarde in an interview Wednesday night at the Days Inn where the FHQTC hosted a post-election reception.

While the question put to voters referred only to the casino, the FHQTC also has made provisions for a performing arts centre and convention facilities as part of the project.

On the plebiscite question, 3,670 voters said yes, while 2,990 said no in a municipal election that had one of the highest voter turnouts in recent memory at more than 68 per cent.

The casino issue, which was described by some candidates as being one of the most divisive Swift Current has faced, generated several petitions from opponents and dozens of letters to the editor in support and opposition of the proposal.

Councillor Tim Keene, who was re-elected to another three-year term, was surprised by the plebiscite results.

"I honestly thought the plebiscite vote would be closer. I misjudged that. There is a sense and desire for change in this community," Keene said.

Newly-elected councillor Gord Budd was delighted by the vote outcome.

I saw that as almost the most important single issue of the election. It's not the only issue, but it's certainly the one that's in people's minds," he said.

To me, it says that the city is open for business. The city has spoken. They've said 'yes' we want the casino, the performing arts centre and the convention centre. Let's move ahead and let's get that going.

Crowe cautioned much more work needs to be done to gain the necessary approvals at the municipal and provincial levels before construction begins.

There are still some levels of authority to go through. But certainly the community support makes it very likely that we can see the reality of this kind of project.

*Press Release Date:
The Southwest Booster
October 25, 2003*