

Our Provincial Government's Gamble

By Victor Lachance

Full disclosure: I'm a member of the Coalition Against the Proposed Prison (CAPP) which is holding a Community Action Webinar on May 13th starting at 8:00pm, so that local residents can work together to push back against the suddenly announced and ill-conceived plan for a 235-bed prison in Kemptville. Please join us by registering at coalitionagainstoproposedprison@gmail.com

Our provincial government has a gambling problem. Why do we know this? Because the Premier, the Solicitor General and our MPP and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing are gambling that if they don't answer emails, letters, questions and the media, the Kemptville prison issue will simply go away. They are gambling that the residents of Kemptville won't notice when the provincial government tramples on the Campus Master Plan, when they shred our Tourism Strategy, when they damage the downtown renovation plan and when they disregard the Green and Growing vision of Kemptville. The government is also gambling that people won't notice when they don't protect the Barr Arena and the farm buildings after the International Plowing Match, and when these historical buildings are razed after the event. More importantly they are gambling that the residents of North Grenville will still vote for Minister Clark no matter what he and the provincial government do to Kemptville.

And that's a problem because it shows a wanton disrespect for the residents of North Grenville and Kemptville. It shows a remarkable amount of disrespect for our Municipal Council.

And yet there's more.

The provincial government is gambling that we'll just shrug at the fact that there was no consultation with Municipal Council and the residents of North Grenville. They're gambling that they can get away with taking the land away from the Algonquin people without anyone caring about it. Worse than that, they're gambling that people won't notice the horrible irony of ignoring the land claims and rights of Indigenous people in order to build a prison that will disproportionately incarcerate Indigenous people. And they're also gambling that people won't care about the way prisoners are treated, even when the majority of them are simply awaiting their day in court.

The Premier and our Member at Queen's Park are gambling that we'll believe them when they say that the government won't use a Ministerial Zoning Order to override anything Municipal Council or conservation authorities have to say, even though the Ford government has issued a whopping number of MZOs since 2018, and that Ford himself is quoted as saying that he will never stop using MZOs. I suppose our MPP is also gambling that we won't notice that he's just approved another six new MZOs.

The provincial government is also gambling heavily that our Mayor and Council will be swayed by the little sweeteners that the Solicitor General is offering to appease the voters, so that Council can do their dirty work of promoting the prison and making it more acceptable to the residents of Kemptville.

But they're not done yet.

They're gambling that the people of North Grenville will not notice that the bail and remand system is broken and that if the government would just begin to fix it we wouldn't need another jail, especially one that will change the future of Kemptville in a bad way.

The Premier and our MPP are also gambling that taxpayers won't care that the \$250M cost over the next several years will do little for a post-pandemic recovery when compared to investments in such things as health care, affordable housing, education, food security and the environment. They're gambling that we'll think that the prison is a good idea even though the Solicitor General's office has already backed away from their exaggerated, unsupported and misleading claims of economic benefits.

They're also gambling that taxpayers will believe them when they say that we won't have to bear any costs during the construction, and then future costs once the proposed prison is built and placing a burden on our hospital and municipal services.

Perhaps more importantly they're gambling that people will think there's nothing they can do about this proposed prison even though the Ford government has already backed down from over a dozen bad ideas. And this is certainly another one.

And to top it all off, they're gambling that they'll get away with all of this under the cover of a pandemic.

So I would say that this is some very problematic gambling. And I would add the obvious fact that they're gambling with your vote.

The Premier, the Solicitor General and our MPP Steve Clark have already rolled the dice with me and lost. I wonder how you'll feel when they roll the dice with you?