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'We don't have any money' for Pan Ams

City shouldn't pursue hosting 2015 games, councillor says

By SARAH GREEN

Toronto doesn't have the money to make a play for the 2015 Pan Am Games, a vocal critic of the city's past Olympic bids said yesterday.

"There couldn't be a worse time," said Councillor Michael Walker, who opposed the city's chase of the 2008 Summer Games, awarded to Beijing. "There's got to be a better use of taxpayers' money than this one-time shot and it's gone.

"I just don't think we should pursue it," he said.

The federal and provincial governments have had preliminary meetings to look at the idea of hosting the Pan Am Games in the Golden Horseshoe area. Some reports have pegged the cost of the games at \$1 billion.

The games, which bring together athletes from the U.S., Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean, are held every four years. Canada last played host in 1999 when it was in Winnipeg.

Venezuela and Columbia are also in the running for 2015.

Walker said the potential benefits of a Toronto bid don't outweigh the drawbacks -- particularly as the city struggles to pay for basic services and the province's economy sputters.

"It's a big party -- 'Look at me, we're going to be on national television' -- that's not good enough," Walker said. "We don't have any money. I don't think Queen's Park is going to have any money."

Toronto Mayor David Miller was also cool to the idea.

"We haven't made any determination on that," Miller said. "I've learned from these bids. You need the provincial and federal government on board first."

He referred all questions to the province, saying Ontario would provide the majority of funding for any bid.

Councillor Doug Holyday said he's long suggested Toronto bid for a smaller multi-sport event like the Pan Am Games before going for the big prize -- the Olympics.

He would support a Toronto bid for the 2015 games as long as the province, Ottawa and the private sector come through with cash to support it, Holyday said.

"It would be a great thing for Toronto. It has to be properly financed," he said. "I think it's worth exploring."

The games would give the city new venues and housing as well as tourists and international notoriety, Holyday said.