Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Tuesday, 20 November 2012 18:48

http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/112212/foxysSM.png

Port officials balk at giving new liquor license to former bar with history of problems

Port Washington officials were expected to decide Tuesday whether to grant a new liquor license for the former Foxy's Bar in Port Washington.

City Administrator Mark Grams has recommended the Finance and License Committee and the Common Council not grant the license, saying he does not believe the new management will make enough changes to avoid the problems the city experienced with Foxy's — problems that could offset the improvements being made to the downtown.

"I don't think the Common Council wants another Foxy's type of bar in the downtown, especially next to a building that will be the cornerstone for future downtown development," Grams said, referring to the former Lueptow's Furniture building. "They're spending a couple million dollars in improvements there, and the city is going to be improving the (adjoining) alleyway.

"The last thing I want are people walking through a new pedestrian way dodging around broken bottles and urine."

At the very least, Grams said, the city should impose strict conditions on the business to keep the license.

Grams said his recommendation was supported by Police Chief Kevin Hingiss.

The license application for the new business, which is to be called Deville's Lounge, states it would be owned by Troy Koput of West Bend and managed by Christian Zaja, a former bartender at Foxy's.

Zaja said Monday that he was surprised by Grams' recommendation, saying he and Koput want to change the reputation of the tavern.

"I know what was being done wrong, but I didn't have a say in it," Zaja said. "I'm trying to do things as right as possible. We don't want the trouble they had. We're literally trying to start that building fresh, to get rid of the reputation it has."

Zaja, who said he's tended bar in Port Washington establishments for the past eight years — including five years at Foxy's — said he's been working on building improvements for the past

four or five weeks.

The goal, Zaja said, is to create a lounge where anyone of any age came come, relax and feel safe.

"We're putting a zero tolerance policy in place," he said, as well as a security system that will monitor activities in and out of the bar.

He's already talked to Hingiss about the changes and told him he's ready to work with police, Zaja said.

"I'm trying to go about this the right way," he said. "I know the community's worried about it being another Foxy's. That's what I don't want."

A background check done by the police department showed that during the eight years Foxy's was in business, the police department had 134 contacts with the tavern. Of those, 36 were for disorderly conduct complaints, 17 for theft, 11 for fights, 11 for battery and 10 for loud and unnecessary noise. A three-page outline listed many of the incidents, which included several times when underage people were served or found on the premises.

Grams said that when the new owners came to apply for the license, they told city workers they wanted to have the tavern open for Thanksgiving, when college students would be back in town.

"I don't see a change happening there," Grams said, noting that's the clientele that caused many of the problems.

If the Common Council doesn't deny the license, Grams said, he would support imposing a number of conditions on the bar — something he said he would like to see the city do as a matter of course in the future.

"You really can't do it to existing (bar) owners," Grams said, unless there are serious issues. "But for anybody new, yeah, you can do it...and should do it."

The City of Green Bay, for example, requires taverns to have a functioning ID scanner that checks identifications and records the time and date each ID is scanned and to have a security system that records on video activities on the premises. Those recordings must be kept for at least two weeks and provided to police if requested.

The city also prohibits taverns from selling an unlimited number of alcoholic beverages at a fixed price or giving them away for a set period of time, and prohibits the sale of alcohol to "any known habitual drunkard noted on the No Serve List."

Image Information: PORT WASHINGTON aldermen were expected to decide on Tuesday whether to grant a liquor license to Deville’s Lounge, which would be located in the former Foxy’s Bar (right) at 219 N. Franklin St. But the bar’s proximity to the former Lueptow’s Furniture building (left), which is undergoing significant renovations, has some officials questioning whether the tavern will be too disruptive and cause problems in the redeveloping downtown.
Photo by Bill Schanen IV