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Aldermen who continue to debate ban on weapons in municipal buildings will vote on ordinance Dec. 6

Port Washington officials remained split over a proposed ban on weapons in city buildings Tuesday.

“We haven’t had weapons in this building for 100 years,” Ald. Paul Neumyer said as the Common Council reviewed a proposed ordinance prohibiting weapons in city buildings. “Why would we allow it now?”

But Ald. Burt Babcock said weapons should be allowed everywhere or nowhere.

“I don’t like it when politicians pass laws, then exclude themselves from having to abide by them,” he said. “Why is it safe for everyone else to be walking around with weapons, but not here?

“If you’re going to pass a law allowing concealed carry, you should have it everywhere.”

Ald. Mike Ehrlich told the council he is struggling with the issue, particularly as it pits safety concerns with constitutional issues.

“I do understand how having guns in a public forum like this could hinder debate,” he said. “But I haven’t been convinced a ban is the right thing.”

By the time the Common Council votes on the proposed ordinance banning weapons at its Dec. 6 meeting, Ehrlich said he hopes to have reached a conclusion.

The state’s concealed carry law, which took effect Nov. 1, presumes people can bring weapons into all buildings, but gives municipalities and businesses the opportunity to ban them.

To do so, the city must pass an ordinance and post signs at the entrances to its buildings.

Aldermen seemed equally as concerned about the potential liability that comes with a ban on weapons as they were about safety, which was the primary concern expressed when they authorized the drafting of the ordinance two weeks ago.

The state limits municipal liability to $50,000, City Attorney Eric Eberhardt said. But he warned aldermen that the concealed carry law is evolving rapidly, saying, “This is a very grey area. One question gives rise to three or four others. You can expect some trailer bills to address some of the issues.

“Stay tuned.”

For example, he said, the law allows organizers of special events to ban weapons. But, he added, the many festivals held in Port Washington don't appear to satisfy the requirements for a special event, and thus it appears weapons would be allowed at them.

Ald. Dave Larson reiterated his concern that posting signs notifying people that weapons are banned doesn't ensure compliance with the law.

"That's my concern, that with the posting of a sign (banning weapons) there's an expectation of safety," he said. "We have to enforce it. Have we talked at all about how we're going to enforce it?"

The city should consider installing metal detectors at buildings, or searching people entering the buildings, he said.

"You're chairman of the finance and Licence Committee. Is there money in the budget?" Mayor Scott Huebner replied, noting there is none. "There's your answer."

Huebner noted that the ban on weapons has been requested by everyone from city employees and department heads to the police chief.

It's a particular concern in places where children congregate, he said.

"Do you want guns at the pool?" Huebner asked, adding the library board also wants a ban on weapons at the Niederkorn Library.

Neumyer, a retired police officer and current sheriff's deputy, said he is particularly concerned that the legislature removed the requirement that people who obtain concealed-carry permits be trained.

"We don't need citizenry carrying firearms who haven't been trained," he said, adding law enforcement officers undergo many hours of training before they can carry a gun. "It's foolhardy."