

Alderman Outraged at Tavern Licensing “Double-Standard”

Also Expresses Concern About Drain on City’s Limited Public Safety Resources

Statement of Ald. Bob Donovan November 19, 2009

I can no longer stand by silently and watch what I can only describe as a mockery of our tavern licensing system here in the City of Milwaukee.

I’m specifically referring to the double-standard that I believe exists in the manner the current Licenses Committee handles taverns and clubs that have repeated problems with fights, shootings, excessive noise, traffic disruptions, disturbances, and other serious issues requiring frequent responses from Milwaukee police officers. What I’ve been seeing is that these troubled clubs and establishments – some located downtown, some in Walker’s Point and elsewhere in the city – are not receiving the serious, operation-changing penalties that they deserve. Yesterday, despite a lengthy police report (see attached document) and recommendations from the MPD and neighboring property owners that the tavern license of Ladybug Club **not be renewed** – and despite the fact that the club received a 45-day suspension last year – the Licenses Committee voted 3-1 in favor of renewal with a 20-day suspension!

While I respect my colleagues on the committee and the hard work and hours they put in, something is terribly wrong here. This (Ladybug) decision makes no sense to me, and it is certainly not in line with our policy of progressive discipline for taverns that can’t seem to clean up their act. At the very least, the committee should have sent (another) message to Ladybug in the form of a 60- or 90-day suspension.

But what is also very distressing is that the action came just hours after the committee voted in favor of imposing a 45-day suspension for Jerseys Sports Pub and Grill (and 4014 Lounge) for what can best be described as minor violations (see attached document). Yes, several neighbors testified about problems they’ve experienced with Jerseys, but in my mind they are not ones that jeopardize public safety or siphon off police squad cars every weekend.

We must not continue to allow troubled taverns and clubs to drain our limited police resources, and we must regain control of a licenses process that has, in my opinion, run amok.

When bad behavior from bar and club patrons disrupts neighborhoods and requires repeated calls for police service, then we must impose stiff penalties that bring changes. If those changes don’t occur, then it’s time to shut it down and turn off the lights – no matter where the establishment is located and irregardless of who the patrons are.

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