

7 December 2020

To: Councilmembers Dai Thao and Jane Prince

CC: Councilmembers in Wards 2,3,4,5 and 6, City Clerk and Mayor's Policy Staff

From: East side resident (Ward 7, Precinct 10) Chai Lee

Re: Ord 20-29 Amending Chapter 409 of the Legislative Code pertaining to the distance restriction between liquor license locations, to reduce the location radius for off-sale wine only license locations.

Dear Councilmembers Thao and Prince,

I am writing to register my strong objections to a plan to make an exception, to allow one particular east side brewery to add a "fine wine" shop, and skirt the old rules we have on the books about radius distance. If I want "fine wine," I can still get it at most liquor stores in the city or my east side. In fact, as an east side resident, I feel like my neighborhood is already flooded with liquor stores (and many of them have great wine selections).

I urge you to look at this issue not just through a business perspective but through social impact and equity lenses. The policies you change or make set a tone for who we are and what we value. I used to live 3 blocks east of Yoerg as a boy. When my family came to St. Paul from Fresno 22 years ago in 1998, we lived in a duplex on Freemont and Mendota. Yoerg is already in busy company. It's a straight shot down 7th and Kellogg to the downtown bars. There are liquor stores in the area by Lafayette bridge, up by Arcade and at Mounds blvd. that area is not poor of liquor and wine.

One in four Minnesotans has a DUI/DWI. Read that again please. It is not a typo. One in four Minnesotans have a DUI. What tone and tenor does our city council set if we change the law to further flood our communities with liquor and wine?

I currently live at Margaret and White Bear. I am literally surrounded by liquor stores as it is as an east side resident. It's embarrassing. Four blocks north on White Bear is 7 Bears Liquor. A few blocks east of me at McKnight and Minnehaha is Sarracks Liquor. Just south of me past 94 and before Suburban, by the Target, is an MGM Liquor. I haven't even mentioned the Cub Foods Liquor at Sun Ray. I can get "fine wine" at almost all of these places as it is. If I was a Woodbury resident or an Apple Valley resident, would my government tolerate that much flooding of vice into our neighborhoods?

In a global 100 year pandemic, when many people turn inwards and to their vices, with social anxiety and depression climbing, some people have sadly turned to drinking. What short and long term impact will this social pandemic do to our social compact as a city? It sends the wrong message for our resilience as a community, as a city.

Your august body once led communities on things such as banning indoor smoking and limiting access to menthol cigarettes. If you make exceptions for liquor stores to proliferate in poor and low wealth communities of color, it is a step back.

I urge you to recall what happens when you sometimes give special treatment to certain industries and businesses. Once upon a time we changed the law for Surly. How did such an ungrateful business pay back us taxpayers? In the guise of pandemic losses, they fired staff who attempted to unionize. I am going to sound harsh, but I mean it, and it must be said. Sometimes, when make exceptions to some people/industries, we get taken advantage, and I mean we as a taxpaying base/city, and you as policymakers. It is like being in an unhealthy/abusive relationship. We are the abused. We give the abuser an inch, and he takes a yard. We give him a foot and he takes a mile.

Please hold the line.

Please do not flood our communities with more wine and liquor.

Remember,

One in four Minnesotans has a DUI. And we know the scourge of addiction and dependency amplifies so many more other vices, such as domestic violence and other hard crimes.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chai Lee

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