

LICENSE HEARING MINUTES
Leela Nightclub LLC, dba Leela Thai Restaurant, 945 Rice Street, Suite A
Thursday, July 10, 2:00 PM
Room 330 City Hall, 15 Kellogg Boulevard West
Nhia Vang, Legislative Hearing Officer

The hearing was called to order at 2:01 PM

Staff Present: Jeff Fischbach, Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) Licensing Inspector; Ashley Skarda, DSI Licensing Inspector; Frances Birch, DSI Zoning Inspector (remote participation)

Licensee: Srisawang Lee, Applicant/Owner

License Application: Liquor On Sale - 101-180 Seats, Liquor On Sale - Sunday, and Entertainment (A) licenses

Legislative Hearing Officer Nhia Vang made introductory comments about the hearing process: This is an informal legislative hearing for a license application. This license application required a Class N notification to inform neighbors and the District Council about the application and provide them with an opportunity to submit comments. The city received correspondence of concern/objection, which triggered this hearing.

The hearing will proceed as follows: DSI staff will explain their review of the application and state their recommendation. The applicant will be asked to discuss their business plan. Members of the community will be invited to testify as to whether they object to or support the license application. At the end of the hearing, the Legislative Hearing Officer will develop a recommendation for the City Council to consider. The recommendation will come before the City Council as a resolution on the Consent Agenda; the City Council is the final authority on whether the license is approved or denied.

There are three possible results from this hearing: 1) a recommendation that the City Council issue this license without any conditions; 2) a recommendation that the City Council issue this license with agreed upon conditions; or 3) a recommendation that the City Council not issue this license but refer it to the city attorney's office to take an adverse action on the application, which could involve review by an administrative law judge.

Minutes:

Jeff Fischbach, Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) - Licensing, gave a staff report for licensee Leela Nightclub LLC, (License ID# 20250000797), d/b/a Leela Thai Restaurant, located at 945 Rice Street, Suite A. The application is for Liquor On Sale - 101-180 Seats, Liquor On Sale - Sunday, and Entertainment (A) licenses. DSI is recommending approval with the following license conditions:

1. Licensee agrees to operate the establishment in compliance with Section 409.02 of the City of Saint Paul Legislative Code as a "Restaurant".
2. Licensee agrees to close the establishment at 12:00 a.m. midnight. All patron/customers shall vacate the premises by 12:30 a.m. each day of the week as per Section 409.02 of the City of Saint Paul Legislative Code.
3. Per City of Saint Paul Legislative Code 411.02, the definition of Entertainment A is, "Amplified or nonamplified music and/or singing by performers without limitation as to number, and group singing participated in by patrons of the establishment." (includes karaoke). Entertainment A license does not allow for patron and/or performance dances.

Fischbach: The applicant has been working with DSI Inspector Tom Ferrara and still needs to get a few items to him before we can set up an on-site inspection.

Frances Birch, Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) - Zoning, gave a staff report. The area is zoned T2 – Traditional Neighborhood. This is a permitted use. A Conditional Use Permit is not required, given the size of the space. There are no parking minimum requirements for this application. Any changes to their parking plan will require zoning approval.

Hearing Officer Vang: Any questions about either staff report or the proposed conditions?

Lee: No.

Hearing Officer Vang asked the applicant to talk about the business: history, hours of operation, number of employees, etc.

Lee: We plan to serve Thai food, offer live music and karaoke, and serve liquor. I have experience working as both a server and cook, so I'm familiar with food and liquor service. Our current hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 11 AM to 8 PM. Once we obtain a liquor license, we may extend our hours to 10 PM on weekdays and midnight on weekends. Karaoke will likely take place Thursday through Sunday in a back corner of the venue. We are also considering adding some sound mitigation measures, though the building's brick construction already provides some natural soundproofing.

Hearing Officer Vang: Do you use the emergency exit for deliveries or trash disposal?

Lee: There are two emergency exits. The one near the storage is near the trash so that's the one we use. The other one is just used as an emergency exit.

Hearing Officer Vang: Where do they exit to?

Lee: The storage one just goes outside and the other by the boiler goes to a tiny, gated area.

Hearing Officer Vang: Are the dumpsters fenced in?

Lee: They are just big dumpsters outside.

Hearing Officer Vang: Do you have cameras monitoring the dumpster area for illegal dumping?

Lee: Yes, we have installed cameras covering the entire interior and exterior of the premises.

Hearing Officer Vang: Do you have a security plan for when you're open past 10pm?

Lee: We may hire a security guard on weekends to help maintain safety and ensure guests get home safely.

Hearing Officer Vang: Will you be hiring additional staff if you get these licenses?

Lee: Yes, we plan to hire a bartender and possibly some additional servers. Currently, we have four employees: two front-of-house staff who alternate shifts, and two back-of-house employees.

Hearing Officer Vang: Will security be employed or contracted?

Lee: Contracted.

Hearing Officer Vang: Will a server be covering the bar area?

Lee: It will mainly be the bartender, but our server also has access to it. That's where we keep our soft drinks and homemade drinks.

Hearing Officer Vang: How will IDs be checked?

Lee: We currently check IDs by looking at them but may switch to using a scanner depending on how business develops.

Hearing Officer Vang: Is trash disposed of in the morning or evening?

Lee: In the evening.

Hearing Officer Vang: You might want to consider waiting until the next morning to dispose of bottles to minimize noise. How frequently are trash and recycling collected?

Lee: Once a week, each. We share trash and recycling dumpsters with the liquor store next door, though I'm not sure about other businesses in the building. They may also use them. Our building manager handles it, along with the rest of the property, including snow.

Hearing Officer Vang: The STAMP Activity report in your packet mentions a gate falling down that has since been resolved. Are you aware of this situation?

Lee: No, but I don't want customers to be put at risk and will look into it.

Hearing Officer Vang: I want to make you aware that complaints like this, or similar issues, may arise. It's also important to inform your landlord about these matters. Could you please let me know who the property owner is?

Lee: TK2 LLC.

Hearing Officer Vang: Do you sweep around the exterior of the business for trash?

Lee: Yes.

Hearing Officer Vang: Do you have a waste bin in front of your business for trash?

Lee: No, but we may consider adding one to limit trash.

Hearing Officer Vang: Are you planning to change the exterior lighting?

Lee: No.

Hearing Officer Vang: Are the cameras yours or were they already there?

Lee: They are ours.

Hearing Officer Vang: I encourage you to consult with the Police Department about camera placement, if you have not done so already.

Lee: We try to cover all angles.

Hearing Officer Vang: How is training handled for employees who may deal with unruly customers or potential overserving of customers.

Lee: We are working on a plan for that. We don't want to have people overserved or drunk.

Hearing Officer Vang: Are you hiring all new staff or hiring people who worked for the previous business at this location.

Lee: It's all new staff. We opened back in June with just food.

Hearing Officer Vang next read into the record the letter of objection from Jane Freedy, which raised concerns about parking, noise, trash, and nuisance activity. She then gave the applicant the opportunity to respond.

Lee: We have a lot of parking options. I have a handout showing where our customers can park. There's also two areas across that customers can park.

Hearing Officer Vang: We will add that to the record.

Lee: I understand the neighbor's concerns, and we will not permit alcohol carryout. Additionally, anyone who steps outside to smoke will not be allowed to take alcohol with them. We also plan to add an ashtray and a waste bin for smokers.

Hearing Officer Vang next read into the record the letter of support from Ray Moore. She then gave the applicant the opportunity to respond.

Hearing Officer Vang stated that after reviewing the records and considering the testimonies from all parties, she will recommend to the City Council that they approve the license with the following conditions:

1. Licensee agrees to operate the establishment in compliance with Section 409.02 of the City of Saint Paul Legislative Code as a "Restaurant".
2. Licensee agrees to close the establishment at 12:00 a.m. midnight. All patron/customers shall vacate the premises by 12:30 a.m. each day of the week as per Section 409.02 of the City of Saint Paul Legislative Code.
3. Per City of Saint Paul Legislative Code 411.02, the definition of Entertainment A is, "Amplified or nonamplified music and/or singing by performers without limitation as to number, and group singing participated in by patrons of the establishment." (includes karaoke). Entertainment A license does not allow for patron and/or performance dances.

The hearing adjourned at 2:27 PM.

The conditions affidavit was signed on July 2, 2025, and submitted on July 7, 2025.