

LICENSE HEARING MINUTES
Golden Thyme Holdings LLC, dba Golden Thyme Restaurant & Bar, 934 Selby Avenue
Thursday, March 20, 2:00 PM
Room 330 City Hall, 15 Kellogg Boulevard West
Nhia Vang, Legislative Hearing Officer

The hearing was called to order at 2:00 PM

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

Licensee: Damon Mason, Applicant/Director of Operations/Managing Member; Tony Tims, General Manager; Randy Norman, Consultant

License Application: Liquor On Sale - 100 seats or less, Liquor On Sale - Sunday, Liquor-Outdoor Service Area (Patio), and Entertainment (A) licenses

Other attendees: Bernard Foster, 888 Selby Ave; Elizabeth & Anthony Bohaty, 925 Dayton Ave; Thomas Wells, 929 Selby Ave; Delores Kargleder, 926 Dayton Ave; Jerry Blakey, 147 Milton St; Justin & Megan O'Connor, 941 Selby Ave; Leora McFarthing, 829 Fuller Ave

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:

Eric Hudak and Ashley Skarda, Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) - Licensing, gave a staff report for licensee Golden Thyme Holdings LLC, (License ID# 20250000218), d/b/a Golden Thyme Restaurant & Bar, located at 934 Selby Avenue. The application is for Liquor On Sale - 100 seats or less, Liquor On Sale - Sunday, Liquor-Outdoor Service Area (Patio), 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.

The District 8 Summit-University Planning Council submitted an email in support of the application. Building conditions, N/A; License approved with conditions; and Zoning approved.

Hearing Officer Vang: Why do we specify a midnight closing for this business?

Hudak: The only type of Liquor On Sale license available in the City outside of the downtown area is for those doing business as a restaurant. It requires them to close at midnight and operate as a restaurant. Section 409.02 of the Legislative Code describes a restaurant as:

- a. Derives a substantial amount of its income from the sale of foods and nonalcoholic beverages.
- b. Has a full-service kitchen, including:
 1. At least one (1) cooking line with required ventilation;
 2. One (1) or more ovens and ranges, or other cooking equipment as approved by the director;
 3. Food preparation areas having sinks;
 4. Refrigerators and/or coolers for the safe storage of food;
 5. All of the above elements meeting relevant NSF International standards.
- c. Maintains all food and health-related licenses and permits necessary to operate as a high or medium risk establishment as defined in Minn. Stats. § 157.20, Subd. 2a.
- d. Offers adequate interior seating for not less than thirty (30) guests at a time.
- e. Prepares meals on-premises, which are served to guests seated at tables or other eating surfaces.
- f. Only sells intoxicating liquors to patrons who are seated at an eating surface unless the patron being served is on a bona fide waiting list for available seating.
- g. Ends all food and beverage service no later than 12:00 a.m., and closes no later than 12:30 a.m., except on January 1 during which all food and beverage service must end no later than 1:00 a.m., and close no later than 1:30 a.m.
- h. Offers a menu including at least four (4) entrees, or as otherwise approved by the department.
- i. Offers full menu service during all hours of operations, with the exception of the hour prior to closing.
- j. Actively promotes food sales to all guests within the licensed premises of the restaurant during all hours of full menu service.
- k. Maintains a kitchen open for meal service, which is appropriately staffed and supplied to fulfill orders from the menu in effect during all hours of full menu service.
- l. Allows no greater than ten (10) percent of the area of the licensed premises to be used for entertainment purposes, including, but not limited to, dancing or musical performance.
- m. Makes business records, including, but not limited to, federal and state tax returns, available for inspection by the director or the director's designee at all reasonable times.

Hearing Officer Vang: Is this a new liquor license for this location?

Damon Mason: Yes. It has always just been a coffee shop.

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

Mason: I joined Rondo Community Land Trust 22 months ago and have experience in elevated food restaurants. Our goal is to reactivate the corridor along Selby Avenue between Lexington Parkway and Dale Street. We're keeping legacy businesses that have closed or moved on. When you're doing work like this you have to be intentional, and that is our intent. We have split Golden Thyme into two businesses. We restored the vision of Michael and Stephanie Wright with Golden Thyme Café, and then also taken their vision and created a restaurant and bar. Our aim is to bring back Rondo history in an elevated way. The planned hours are 11am – 9pm every day. We want to close that early to give staff time to get the restaurant back in order for the next day. This business is an homage to the past. It also serves as a way for residents to not need to leave to another neighborhood for an elevated experience. It's for families. This is not a bar or hangout place.

Hearing Officer Vang asked about staffing.

Mason: We want to bring jobs back. 40+ jobs. Some employees live in the building above the restaurant. We have other business to bring 60+ additional jobs to the corridor.

Hearing Officer Vang asked about alcohol training and monitoring the patio.

Randy Norman: I'm a longtime restaurateur helping the Rondo Community Land Trust with their development. I've been in Minnesota since 1997, but this is my first time doing business in St. Paul. We have proactively reached out to ServingAlcohol.com, run by Bob Pomplun. Their training makes sure everyone understands the risks of serving alcohol. They are scheduled to train everyone on Wednesday, March 26. The first training is 3 hours and then there will be ongoing training for new employees.

Hearing Officer Vang: How are parking and deliveries handled?

Tony Tims: We acquired a parking lot next to the building with 10 spots. We will be maintaining it.

Mason: The owner of that lot is a historic Rondo resident. We are happy to be working with them and they are happy to be working with us. The parking lot already has signage. It's right next to the building.

Hearing Officer Vang: What direction does the patio face?

Mason: The patio is small, about 3 tables. It's just intended to complement the summer weather. It faces Selby and the homes across the street. People used to sit outside at the café and have their coffee a lot. This will allow patrons to have our elevated experience outside.

Hearing Officer Vang: Is the patio enclosed?

Mason: It's open. It has a metal railing and is clearly separated from the sidewalk. It is ADA accessible.

Hearing Officer Vang: How will patio seating be handled?

Mason: All patrons will be seated by a host. Patrons can come without reservations, but the goal is to have reservations.

Norman: The interior is a small space with 13 tables that seats 40-50 people. Having a small space means better service. This is intended to be a destination spot for the corridor.

Mason: Rondo is a brand in itself. We take Rondo all over the country. I was recently in Washington D.C. advocating for our community. I'm not from Rondo. I'm from Gary, Indiana. I've come to appreciate the history though, and we want to keep this legacy alive. This is one of the stops on the tours run by the Rondo Community Land Trust.

Hearing Officer Vang: Do you keep doors open during summer to allow a breeze in to the restaurant?

Mason: No. It's not big enough for that.

Hearing Officer Vang: What kind of entertainment will be offered, where is the location and how often will it happen?

Tims: There's a 3-by-4-foot area by one of the doors. It will be 1-2 singers for things like jazz brunch, but nothing loud to disturb the community or upstairs neighbors.

Mason: Rondo has elevated jazz singers that we want to host. Outside people will not hear the music when the doors are closed. Music frequency will be maybe once a week.

Tims: The music will not be amplified.

Hearing Officer Vang asked about exterior lighting.

Tims: The building already has lighting.

Hearing Officer Vang: And is it already placed on the patio?

Mason: Yes. It's always had it since the structure was created.

Hearing Officer Vang asked about trash pickup.

Tims: We already have it on our scheduling. We share the pickup area with the building and have our own receptacle.

Norman: Our receptacle has more frequent pickup than the residents.

Hearing Officer Vang: What is the alley like?

Mason: It's just an alley, not a flow-through one.

Hearing Officer Vang next invited others in attendance to share public testimony.

Elizabeth Bohaty, 925 Dayton Avenue: Is there a separate bar area from the eating area?

Mason: Yes.

E. Bohaty: Who will manage the site?

Tims: Me.

E. Bohaty: Could we get a written commitment regarding the 9pm close time?

Norman: The license allows us to be open until midnight. We may need to stay open until 10pm or so for special events like the Selby Jazz fest, though our business model is only until 9pm. We have a bar, but the business isn't bar driven. The intent is to derive 60% or 70% of revenue from food. We are committed to that.

E. Bohaty: It sounds lovely. I'm uncomfortable with the ability to change the business plan to have later hours in the future. We live close by, and I don't want people screaming outside our windows.

Mason: I understand that. We know we are paying for the sins of the past. I understand where you're coming from. We are not the people of the past. Our Exec Director is a 4th generation Rondo resident and knows the past. Your concern is valid, and we are correcting those things. We do not want to disturb anyone's peace or sleep. I unfortunately can't commit to a 9pm closure for Selby Jazz Fest, but I won't allow negative behavior. If there are ever concerns, I am always around to receive concerns at 1041 Selby Avenue I'm there every day, even on the weekend.

E. Bohaty: I hope I didn't cause offense.

Mason: None taken.

Tims: We plan on being good neighbors.

Tom Wells, 929 Selby Avenue: I was talking about this two hours ago with the mayor and others. I've been here for 21 years and came in after People's Choice left. I support this business being successful. I'm concern about the liquor license going until 12pm. I would hate for a change in ownership or something else resulting in extending the hours.

Mason: We will never be giving up this asset. We will not be transferring it outside of the community. The Rondo Community Land Trust will never transfer this to anyone.

Wells: I was also curious about parking, but I had some of those questions answered and can live with their plan. For security, will there be security provided if someone needs a walk to their car or anything?

Mason: We are not an indifferent establishment. Bars have security because they don't practice prevention. We are not a bar or club. If anyone needs a walk to their car, the community, including me, will walk them to their car.

Wells: I like that answer. My band has led the Selby Jazz Fest for the last year. We're a part of the community too. I am asking questions because people will be asking me. I want to convey accurate information. Walker West, where I also teach, has taken over the Selby Jazz Fest this year. I also feel some obligation to be reporting to them about this.

Mason: We are in partnership with Walker West as well. The relationships are crucial. We're all collaborating to revitalize Rondo in different ways. Everyone is doing their part, and our part is in these activations. I hope that helps.

Wells: Thank you.

Hearing Officer Vang: We received Wells' letter as well and I will refrain from reading it into the record since he is here. Could DSI staff explain what the change in ownership and conditions process entails?

Skarda: A license changing hands means a reapplication for the license and a repeat of this process.

Norman: We also have to comply with the laws every day, or else we risk losing the license when it comes time for renewal. It is in our interest to behave well.

Wells: There are facts that are important here, but for me, I have to have a connection with the people and look them in the eye and say, “I hear you.” That's important. I appreciate this opportunity to do that.

Jerry Blakey, 888 Selby Avenue: My wife and I bought our property around 40 yrs ago. My biggest concern is the alcohol. People’s Choice was in its heyday when we moved in and there were a lot of incidents and needles on the ground. I think about that when I think about this business’s ability to go until midnight. That is a problem for the neighborhood. Regarding parking, we still have issues with parking in the neighborhood. I have a problem with inebriated people after 9pm in the past. We have since put a major investment in our home. I’m a small business owner. I get it, but late night alcohol is going to be a problem.

Norman: Our initial business plan was to operate until 10pm. We then reevaluated that and saw that the neighborhood and its other businesses don’t complement us being open until 10pm. We are looking at how things affect the neighborhood, tenants, and the corridor as a whole. As such, 9pm makes sense for us. This is about investing in the community. Most businesses close by 8pm. We don’t want to be open late all by ourselves.

Blakey: I want to be able to be outside with my family. I’m concerned that the license allows liquor service until midnight.

Norman: That’s how the license is written.

Blakey: We don’t want to go back to what we’ve dealt with.

Mason: I hear you. You have our commitment as to how we will govern ourselves. It’s heavy work when you’re working with repairing trust. I’ve been there. I’ve been in Minnesota for 30 years, but the community is so much older. I work in this community, and I’m always a phone call away, or you can stop in my office. I’m here all the time. I don’t run from the community. When Selby Jazz Fest comes, if we’re open an extra thirty minutes, just kind of wink at me to remember this conversation. You can nudge me. That’s acceptable.

Tims: We would give ample notice for anything keeping us open after 9pm. The pandemic changed things. Most businesses don’t make money after 10pm anymore. 9pm closing is our sweet spot. This is intentional for our business, and we also want to be a good neighbor.

Hearing Officer Vang: We received Wells’ letter as well and I will refrain from reading it into the record since he is here.

Delores Kargleder, 926 Dayton Avenue: What are your roles, here?

Mason: I am the Director of Operations for the Rondo Community Land Trust and the managing partner at the restaurant.

Tims: I’m the general manager at the restaurant.

Norman: I’m a consultant.

Kargleder: I've been in the neighborhood for about 30 years. My kids grew up there and I was there during the time of People's Choice. I support the Rondo community and small business in this neighborhood. My concern is about the alcohol. We have had a lot of problems with alcohol at night where people go into the street after drinking. Mason mentioned this as a family space, including children. Alcohol and children are a big problem. The license allows you to stay open until midnight, but you're saying you will only stay open until 9pm. Is that correct?

Tims: That is correct

Kargleder: If we see if the place stays open until midnight, we will have the right to say we don't want it there?

Tims: Yes.

Mason: Yes, and you will always have access to us if you have concerns. We are a community building. Regarding children, every restaurant allows kids to join for dinner where alcohol is served, to show them dining experiences. I am a foodie. I bring my kids to dinner, but the kids are not drinking. I am showing them the dining experience. It's not about drinking around kids.

Kargleder: Is the inside and patio smoke free?

Mason: We do; it's entirely non-smoking.

Tims: We have a smoking area.

Skarda: It's illegal to allow smoking within a certain distance from the entrance.

Tims: Our designated smoking area is away from the door.

Skarda: It's also not legal in Minnesota to smoke indoors at restaurants.

Tims: No vaping will be allowed either.

Kargleder: You will have 10 parking spaces next to the building?

Mason: Yes.

Kargleder: How will music affect the upstairs residents?

Mason: The singing is meant to complement the experience. This is not a concert. Respect to our tenants upstairs, who are also our employees, is a priority. People on the street won't even hear the music.

Kargleder: I am in favor of the restaurant. I'm concern about the alcohol and parking. If you only have 10 parking spaces, where will everyone else park?

Mason: We didn't have anything before when we were the coffee shop.

Kargleder: I know.

Mason: I heard about the lot next door and the owner was excited to work with us.

Kargleder: Can you try to achieve more spots? There's a lot across the street.

Mason: I can try if you have contact info. I can't guarantee anything.

Frances Birch, DSI Zoning: The City no longer has parking minimums for off-street parking. Parking was reviewed as part of the zoning review, but it is not required.

Hudak: What is your impression of 10 off-street spaces? Would that have satisfied the old parking requirements?

Birch: Yes, that would have been sufficient for the past requirements.

Kargleder: The license says 100 seats or less. Can the place hold 100 people?

Tims: No.

Kargleder: I'm confused.

Hearing Officer Vang: That type of license is the smallest liquor license allowed in this city. We used to have the 50 seats or less license but as the licenses were being streamlined, that license was eliminated.

Kargleder: I love the Selby Jazz Fest. Will alcohol be served during that?

Mason: Yes. Golden Thyme is a hub during that event. I encourage you to get a table that day. A reservation will likely be needed.

Hearing Officer Vang: We received Kargleder's letter as well and I will refrain from reading it into the record since he is here.

Bernard Foster, 888 Selby Avenue: I want to see this go through. I don't see big issue with parking, unless this place becomes so popular that everyone wants to eat there. I never use the spot in front of my house. I have a garage. Many houses do. As far as security, I lived through People's Choice. We have to give this business a chance. If people leave my house acting stupid when they leave, that's not on me. That shouldn't be their burden. 45 years ago, all the money on Selby stopped at Dale when it went west. Nothing could get done. Now that somebody that looks like me wants to do something, there's always this obstacle. If they didn't look like me and if they want to open a business on Grand Avenue, they would be welcomed. I'm tired of seeing that. People that look like me don't own anything on Selby anymore. New neighbors don't speak to me, and I've been there the longest. I support this business 100%. We take a chance every day when we leave our homes. If something's going to happen, it's going to happen.

Hearing Officer Vang stated that she encouraged the applicants to not put their staff and patrons at risk if security is a concern and that they train all staff to call police and not put themselves in jeopardy.

Mason: That is part of our training.

Foster: In the 23 years of Selby Jazz Fest, we've never had an incident when something bad happened.

Wells: The Selby Jazz Fest had the opportunity to get a liquor license but decided against it. I think that was a wise decision. Is it correct that you will serve liquor during the event?

Tims: In the restaurant, yes.

Norman: I'm not aware of anything that would allow people to walk around outside with alcohol unless there was a special event license. We will have control within our space, and no one will be walking out with alcohol.

Hudak: There is the opportunity to extend liquor service into areas like your parking lot for special events. That must be done through a process of a temporary extension of service area, and that would have a public notice requirement and go through a process similar to this.

Norman: I alluded to that earlier when there were some concerns about us being open until midnight. That's what the license says. I don't think people want that. From a food perspective, we can still provide that service who might be up late making but we will mainly be clearing things away and preparing for the next day. That's part of our business model.

Wells: Selby Jazz Fest usually ends around when the sun goes down. Will there be mixed drinks and hard liquor?

Tims: Yes. We have a full-service bar.

Justin O'Connor, 941 Selby Avenue: My wife and I live across the street. We've been there since 2017. We were on Grand Avenue for 5 years before that. We loved the area. There is an older guard in the room that I really have history with bad establishments like People's Choice. When we were on Grand Avenue, Billy's had issues. I don't think this is that type of negative establishment. Plenty of places like Sweeney's serve alcohol and are great neighborhood establishments. We want to see this business grow. I was surprised to see the midnight closure on the notice, but then I learned that's just the license. I know you haven't said in writing that you would close at 9pm, but I don't think that's necessary. If you want to carry the torch for this legacy...how long was Golden Thyme on that corner?

Tims: 24 years.

J. O'Connor: I have young kids and want a nice neighborhood. I support this business.

Anthony Bohaty, 925 Selby Avenue: I've been here for 35 years, first as a renter and then as an owner. My wife and I have lived at 925 Selby Avenue for 30 years. I appreciate the verbal assurances today. I appreciate this being part of the original vision of the owners. I fully supported that, though at the time I thought it was going to be more of a wine bar. I still appreciate the commitment to be a good neighbor. Having something in writing would be nice, though.

Mason: We will always comply with everything that's in law. We will also stick to our verbal agreement. Community is verbal. These verbal conversations and relationships matter.

Hearing Officer Vang: We will attach your business plan to the record as well so that those interested may view them. For your awareness, the City operates on a complaint-based system. A business has to earn conditions that would restrict their ability to operate a business, and that has not happened here.

Tims: You need to trust us and understand that we need to be accountable.

E. Bohaty: Can we get your contact info?

Mason: Of course.

Hearing Officer Vang: The sign-in sheet that everyone signed in today will also be attached to the resolution that goes before Council. This sheet will have everyone's contact information.

A. Bohaty: Thank you. This has been great.

Hearing Officer Vang next read into the record the letter of objection from Adam Irvin, which expressed concerns about safety and noise.

Hearing Officer Vang next read into the record the letter of objection from Joel Bluhm, which expressed concerns about noise and hours of operation.

Hearing Officer Vang next read into the record the letter of objection from Gabrielle Pillmann, which expressed concerns about noise and parking. She then gave the applicants the opportunity to respond.

Mason: We appreciate those concerns, as well as those raised here today. This will be a more elevated experience and we want to have a beautiful offering to the community.

Norman: The experience will be low key and intimate. That is distinct from an experience of late-night music. That is not what this is. We hope that description helps convey the intent of this business.

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 agreed-upon 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 3:35 PM.

The Conditions Affidavit was signed on March 7, 2025, and submitted on March 14, 2025.