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City of North Vancouver ponders liquor retail restrictions

Council considers measures in support of private liquor store owners

Chris Slater / North Shore News

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File photo North Shore News

Following changes to provincial liquor laws earlier this year, City of North Vancouver council voted in favour June 15 of carrying a notice of motion that could bring back previous regulations on the distance liquor retail stores must be from one another in the city.

The motion aims to reinstate previous regulations, which were abolished under the province's recently changed liquor laws, that retailers applying for a liquor licence in the city must be situated a minimum distance of one kilometre apart from other liquor retailers.

With the new laws, which include B.C. Liquor Stores being opened Sundays and holidays as well as supermarkets eligible to apply for liquor licences, the owner of one private liquor store in the city has expressed his concerns on the impacts increased competition is having on business.

However, just how and when to act on the motion brought a difference of opinion among some members of council.

"I do think that these changes at the provincial level are having a significant impact on (private liquor) businesses," said Coun. Linda Buchanan on the motion, which will see the preparation of a staff report to help determine just what council's next course of action will be on the issue.

"I think anything we can do to look at this and support small businesses and support the health and well-being of our community is a good thing," she said, after also citing concerns about the potential negative social effects having a higher concentration of retail liquor could have on the community.

Coun. Don Bell, who initially introduced the notice of motion on the issue, said he believes council needs to pay

attention to these concerns that have been brought forth to the city.

"I think we need to be sensitive to the issues that they have raised that in their point of view might make their operations economically unviable ... so I think getting a staff report further on this would be appropriate" he said.

Bell said issues on regulations of liquor retail should be treated differently from that of conventional retail businesses.

"I don't see this as a precedent. I see a distinction between liquor sales and other kinds of retailers. There has been, historically, restrictions placed on the number of (liquor) units ... I make a distinction with liquor operations over other kinds of operations," he explained.

However, former small business owner Coun. Holly Back, who used to operate a salon in the city said that by allowing protection for these businesses could potentially create other issues down the road.

"As we all know I've been a small business owner in North Vancouver and would have been very happy if the city said to me, 'Nobody can have another salon within one kilometre of your business.'

"So I feel like we're opening up, and certainly in our business community, a bit of a can of worms in saying, 'OK, we're going to support the liquor businesses,'" she said, explaining that competition is a part of the business environment.

"Competition isn't a bad thing and we all have it in business. I think that most of these pubs have been very lucky in the last however many years not to have the competition so close, so I'm sorry, I don't really support it."

Although in favour of reinstating the one-kilometre restriction, Coun. Rod Clark said he believes the city should not be putting more time into waiting for a staff report but should instead be acting on the motion more promptly.

"This is a clear-cut decision: we're going to stay with one kilometre and tell (the) B.C. government to take it somewhere else or we're going to have a staff report which will tell us who knows what," he said.

"I'm of the opinion we should stand up tonight and say we're in support of these local businesses."

In the end, council voted in favour of bringing the motion forward for a staff report, with Couns. Back and Clark voting against.

Coun. Craig Keating, meanwhile, was not present at the meeting.