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Council votes to uphold 1 km rule for booze outlets

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September 29, 2016 03:59 PM



file photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

Anyone shopping for wine in a **City of North Vancouver** grocery store might be in for a long walk.

Council voted 6-1 on Sept. 19 to keep a one-kilometre radius between any outlet hoping to handle liquor, beer or wine – much to the chagrin of a representative from Loblaws.

Sean Makowecky, a senior manager with the grocery chain, urged council to reconsider the one-kilometre rule, which he said would jeopardize their application to sell B.C. wine at their Lonsdale Avenue store Loblaws City Market.

The demand for liquor is strong enough that Loblaws could put bottles on their shelves without “significantly impacting” neighbouring retailers, according to Makowecky.

Save-on-Foods has also applied to sell wine in their Brooksbank Avenue location.

While the policy would be less than iron clad, Coun. Pam Bookham nonetheless wanted to “send a message to the Jimmy Pattinsons and Loblaws that we do not want them coming forward with applications to sell wine in their grocery stores.”

The one-kilometre rule is a way to protect established pubs by not pitting them against “the Goliaths of the food industry,” Bookham said.

Council shouldn’t be in the business of shielding one type of business, according to Coun. Holly Back.

“I really think it’s very unfair that that’s the only business that, as council, we protect,” she said.

While Bookham suggested anyone in “dire need” of booze was already well-served, Back argued that wasn’t the point.

Council should retain the flexibility to allow a pub or bar in any neighbourhood where the residents show a powerful thirst, according to Back.

Because the one-kilometre rule is a policy rather than a bylaw, council can override the guideline if a majority hold that a liquor outlet is a good fit for a certain site.

That latitude displeased Coun. Rod Clark, who dubbed it the “wet noodle approach.”

North Vancouver doesn’t need a further proliferation of liquor outlets, according to Clark.

“I, for one, don’t want to go into Safeway and see three aisles of different types of wine,” he said.

The lone vote against the policy was cast by Mayor Darrell Musssatto, who cited liquor outlets that flourished despite being in close proximity with each other, such as formerly neighbouring The Gull Liquor Store and Liberty Wine shop (since closed) at Park & Tilford.

“It’s something that used to work well in that area and it could work well (again),” he said.

Save-on-Foods “should have the right” to stock B.C. wine, added Mussatto.

Coun. Linda Buchanan was curious how the one-kilometre policy would affect existing businesses, particularly around Lonsdale Quay. The Green Leaf brewery and Cheshire Cheese Restaurant and Bar are each less than 200 metres from the Belgian beers of The District Brasserie, which itself is only about 120 metres from a B.C. Liquor Store.

The numerous establishments in contravention with the one-kilometre rule are the product of a “somewhat convoluted maze of different regulations” alternately enforced by the city and the province’s Liquor Distribution Control and Licensing Branch, according to city planner Michael Epp.

Any bar or shop already open for business would not be affected by the policy, he noted.

The one-kilometre policy comes shortly after council allowed Liberty Wine to open their shop on the south side of Onni’s development at 13th Street and Lonsdale Avenue – only a short walk from Jack Lonsdale’s, noted Coun. Don Bell.

In that decision, there was a compelling case made for how the dealer would serve the market, according to Bell, who called the new policy, “a reasonable step.”

The city’s previous policy enforced a one-kilometre buffer between liquor stores but not wine stores.

The city will still require a rezoning for all new or relocated businesses selling liquor.