



MINUTES
LIQUOR COMMISSION - REGULAR SESSION
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2023, 4:00 P.M.

The Liquor Commission convened in regular session at 4:00 P.M. Commissioner Mwilambwe called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Mboka Mwilambwe	Commissioner	Present
Lindsey Meister	Commissioner	Present

Staff Advisors

Attendee Name	Title	Status
George Boyle	Asst. Corporation Counsel	Present
Leslie Yocum	City Clerk	Present
Paul Williams	Asst. Police Chief	Present
Chris McAllister	Building Official	Present

Public Comment

No public comment was received.

Consent Agenda

Items listed on the Consent Agenda are approved with one motion; Items pulled from the Consent Agenda for discussion are listed and voted on separately.

No Consent Items were presented.

Regular Agenda

All license creations, amendments, or transfers are contingent upon compliance with all building, health, and safety codes.

The following item was presented:

Item 5. A. Public Hearing and Action on an Application from Pilot Travel Centers, d/b/a Pilot Travel Center #299, located at 1522 W. Market St. Requesting Approval of a Change of Ownership for their Class GBPS (Convenience, Beer & Wine Only, Package, and Sunday Sales) Liquor License.

Commissioner Mwilambwe opened the public hearing at 4:03 P.M.

Randy Little, General Manager of Pilot Travel Centers, after being sworn in, addressed the Commission. Mr. Little explained the request was related to the majority sale of Pilot to Berkshire Hathaway. He stated that Pilot intended to continue normal operations and that the majority ownership shift would not affect operations.

Commissioner Meister confirmed additional details with Mr. Little that no changes in operation would occur. Mr. Little stated that the new CEO was more loss prevention and asset protection oriented, and that no other major changes to normal operations would occur.

Commissioner Mwilambwe pointed out that the Commission was most concerned with the liquor license and how it would be managed, making sure employees were BASSET certified, etc. Mr. Little stated that all employees were required to be BASSET trained.

Staff expressed no concerns with the change.

Commissioner Mwilambwe asked if there was anyone in the audience who wished to speak for or against the application. No one spoke up.

Commissioner Mwilambwe closed the hearing at 4:06 P.M.

Commissioner Meister made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Mwilambwe, to positively recommend the Item to Council.

Commissioner Mwilambwe directed the Clerk to call the roll:

AYES: Mwilambwe; Meister

Motion carried.

The following item was presented:

Item 5. B. Public Hearing and Action on an Application from JL Palma, LLC d/b/a Venue 309, located at 1611 Morrissey Dr., Units 2 & 3, Requesting Approval of the Creation of a Class EAS (Entertainment, All Types of Alcohol, and Sunday Sales) Liquor License.

Commissioner Mwilambwe opened the hearing at 4:07 P.M.

Nathan Hinch, Attorney of the Applicant, and Joe Palma, Applicant and Co-Owner of JL Palma, after being sworn in, addressed the Commission.

Mr. Hinch stated the application filed referenced that the building was split into 3 units with Venue 309 occupying 2 of the 3. He noted that 3rd unit was held by the Station Saloon and that their application did not pertain to that unit. He stated the intention and purpose of Venue 309 would be to host events and use a shared kitchen with the Station Saloon.

Mr. Palma stated that Venue 309 would be a wedding and event venue that specialized in weddings, live music, and corporate events.

Mr. Hinch stated the entertainment portion of the application would apply to events with bands playing and/or ticketed events. He noted that they were aware from the City Clerk Department that additional permits would be needed for outdoor events.

Mr. Palma shared that he had originally intended to purchase the Stable, a previous entertainment venue downtown Bloomington, to operate the same style of business, but that the purchase never came to fruition, so he began looking elsewhere.

Mr. Hinch clarified in reference to the application, that Mr. Palma had not been convicted of a felony; however, that he had a felony plea and received second chance probation and that upon completing the probation had not been convicted of a felony. Mr. Hinch expressed a desire to be forthcoming about the issue and understood that the Commission is tasked with investigating the suitability of applicants. He noted that Mr. Palma had turned his life around since that time.

Commissioner Mwilambwe inquired about Mr. Palma's experience in managing a venue of this type. Mr. Palma responded that in 2015, he had started a DJ company and that he had worked in most venues in Bloomington-Normal and the surrounding area. He shared that his business had grown to include all facets of wedding and entertainment events.

Commissioner Mwilambwe asked about capacity at the venue. Mr. Palma stated that they were unsure at the time because they had not received communication from the City's Fire Inspector, but he estimated around 300.

Commissioner Mwilambwe asked about the number of employees planned for the venue. Mr. Palma responded up to 25.

Commissioner Mwilambwe asked about hours of operation. Mr. Palma stated they would be open from 8:00 A.M. until around 1:00 A.M.

Commissioner Meister asked when they intended to open. Mr. Palma stated February.

Commissioner Meister asked about intentions for outdoor space and if the venue contained said space currently. Mr. Palma stated that it didn't currently have an outdoor space, but that they would like to build one in the future.

Commissioner Meister confirmed weddings would include guests of all ages, not just 21 and over. Mr. Palma confirmed.

Commissioner Mwilambwe asked about policing and identifying of underage patrons. Mr. Palma stated that they would use security and BASSET certifications would be a priority.

George Boyle, Asst. Corporation Counsel, asked when Mr. Palma had completed his probation. Mr. Palma answered 2016. Mr. Boyle asked if he had any issues since. Mr. Palma stated he had only had traffic tickets for speeding.

Mr. Boyle asked about the capacity of the venue and verified that the license applied to the indoor space only. Mr. Palma agreed and stated he was unsure about capacity until after inspections were completed.

Paul Williams, Asst. Police Chief, inquired about cameras and security at the venue and in the parking lot. Mr. Palma stated they would have a hybrid camera system installed and would have hired security for all large gatherings. He stated that there were no cameras in the parking lot currently, but that they were planning to add them.

Chief Williams asked about the possibility of being underprepared for the number of guests and what would be done if that occurred. He also asked about a vetting process for prospective clients and events. Mr. Palma stated that he intended to vet guests himself and had really planned to primarily cater to higher-end clientele.

Chris McAllister, Building Official, stated that an occupancy of 300 sounded accurate and referenced upcoming inspections to finalize occupancy, as well as work with Mr. Palma.

Commissioner Mwilambwe and Mr. Palma discussed BASSET certification again and Mr. Palma needed some assistance on specific plans for the venue and staffing.

Elizabeth Palma, JL Palma Co-Owner, after being sworn in, addressed the Commission.

Commissioner Mwilambwe and Mrs. Palma discussed BASSET training and staffing plans.

Mrs. Palma stated that bartenders would card anyone who came to the bar for alcohol, and shared that all non-alcoholic beverages would be table served. She confirmed all staff serving alcohol would be BASSET Certified.

Commissioner Meister noted the hours in the application were listed as 9:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M. Mrs. Palma stated that those hours would be their usual hours of operation, but that they might extend the hours to 1:00 A.M. in special situations. She stated they did not intend to be open past 1:00 A.M.

Chief Williams asked what time the loud music would cease and expressed concerns again over large groups. Mrs. Palma stated that they believed their high per-person charge requirements for all events would likely keep events smaller and limit unscheduled guests. She also stated they will be very focused on complying with all rules and regulations, as well as contacting authorities when needed.

Commissioner Mwilambwe and Chief Williams expressed concerns with screening potential clients. Mr. Palma stated that they will have a solid vetting process in place and that they would be active and very involved in all events to monitor for potential issues.

Commissioner Meister clarified that hours would be modified to 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 A.M. She also asked if one or both of the owners would be present during all events. Mr. Palma confirmed the hours and stated that one of them would be present at every event.

Mr. Boyle asked if the Station Saloon would remain in business. Mr. Palma replied yes.

Commissioner Mwilambwe closed the public hearing at 4:36 P.M.

Commissioner Meister made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Mwilambwe, to positively recommend the Item to Council with the condition that the hours be 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 A.M.

Commissioner Mwilambwe directed the Clerk to call the roll:

AYES: Mwilambwe; Meister

Motion carried.

Old Business

No Old Business was discussed.

New Business

Mr. Boyle provided an update on compliance checks that had been completed by the Bloomington Police Department on October 19, 2023.

Executive Session

No Executive Session was held.

Adjournment

Commissioner Mwilambwe made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Meister, to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Mwilambwe directed the clerk to call roll:

AYES: Mwilambwe, Meister

Motion carried (viva voce).

The meeting adjourned at 4:39 P.M.

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON



Mboka Mwilambwe, Commissioner

ATTEST



Leslie Smith-Yocum, City Clerk

