

June 6, 2016

Sirs and Madams Alder:

I am requesting our license be renewed without conditions. THAT BBQ JOINT has no license violations and no complaints with the police department.

The issues with MNA are not related to alcohol or the sale of alcohol and requiring us to meet with them monthly will not resolve those issues.

I am hoping the Common Council will not be a party to the tactics, [from the minutes of the MNA Board on March 16] “..separation of liquor license from ALRC.. Leslie explained that this **tactic** is known and reliable leverage to work with the business.”] continued harassment and slander of our businesses good name by select members of the MNA.

I apologize for not attending the ALRC meeting myself. I contacted the clerk’s office the week before and was assured everything for the license was good, there were no issues and everyone had signed off accept for the ALRC. I was sent a registered letter to attend that I didn’t pick up until the day after the meeting. I had been out of town as the restaurant was closed until June 1st.

I would also like to address the letters submitted to the ALRC.

Our alcohol sales YTD are 1.9% of gross sales. We offer beer as a drink option to people having lunch or dinner. These numbers are hardly make or break for us.

We are not a meat production facility. We cook meat low and slow, as any good barbecue must be cooked. Our smokers are indoors, under commercial hoods with fire suppression systems.

Mr. Lee, president of the MNA, came into our restaurant and advised us he had received a couple complaints from neighbors about the noise and smell. We spent 20-30 minutes explaining our operation and the need to smoke meat overnight and our inability to change our business model. He advised us he had spoken to the neighbors and requested they call him whenever there was an issue so he could witness it himself, as a neutral member. We never heard the results of any calls.

He asked if we would meet with the neighbors and I told him no, assuming he would convey our business practices to the neighbors. I don’t know what information he conveyed but the only take away on the part of the neighbors was I “refused” to meet.

The offended neighbors proceeded to complain to the city about everything and anything they could think of. They made my landlord jump through hoops and wish he had never leased the space to me. None of them ever personally came into our establishment at any point in time to discuss concerns.

The city came out with a meter and tested the noise level from 10 feet from the building and it was below ordinance levels. The hood fans make no more noise than an air conditioner on top of any other commercial building. The noisiest component outside is the compressor to the walk in cooler, which was in the building long before us and does run 24/7.

The only other request to meet that I received came from the alders office. I attended..

The neighbors opened the meeting with “we can do this the easy way or the hard way”. I would hardly consider that the opening salvo to constructive conversation.

We were confronted with accusations of cooking meat at high temps and releasing carcinogens in the air. All totally false.

We were accused of deliberately withholding information from our application and discussion at the P&D meeting. That is a blatant lie. We operated at 1511 Williamson Street for 1 ½ years without a single complaint. We smoked meat overnight there as well. We had no reasonable expectation that we would meet resistance here. The only question we were ever asked about the smokers came from Alder Rummel and she just wanted to know if the smokers were outside.

We were not completely dismissive about the concerns of the neighbors. I expressed many times that I understood their concerns but was at a loss to do anything about them. We can't not run the fans at night or the smoke alarms will go off in the building. Meat takes 12-16 hours to smoke which means it has to be done overnight.

After being berated as a “bad neighbor” for most of the meeting, it became clear no one had any solutions and the neighbors would not be happy unless we ceased operations. The city officials made them aware we were within all legal requirements. Air scrubbers and carbon filters were mentioned at the cost of 30K at which point I advised them we had no money for further renovations. Alder Rummel was going to look into the cost of such things and work with the landlord and MNA about possible solutions. The landlord did make a couple modifications, above and beyond what was required, apparently to no avail. Beyond that, I heard nothing further.

One of the attendees to this meeting apologized to me after, stating ‘I didn't realize this was going to be a witch hunt or I wouldn't have come. I am so sorry.’

To keep things in perspective we are talking about one irate neighbor and another upset neighbor. The irate neighbor has been actively campaigning for months--even stopping pedestrians on the street to get their opinion. She managed to get 6 additional people to voice concern. Out of hundreds. We have a lot of supporters in this neighborhood. We are a successful business that is paying taxes and employing people. I do feel bad that some neighbors are upset and I am at a loss to fix the issues for them. But to say there are children on the street not sleeping because of the fans is absurd.

Once again, I hope the Council approves our renewal without conditions.

Sincerely,

Maureen White

Owner-THAT BBQ JOINT