

Open Work Session

Letter to Liquor Control Board on Selling Beer and Wine at Liquor Dispensaries

October 20, 2020

Mr. Cannon said initially he was thinking maybe they would look at State law, which allows the sale, but it would probably be a little bit easier without a lot of hoopla to just do it locally and try to come to an understanding that they will not sell wine and beer. He explained, the idea here is to try to eliminate as much government competition with the private sector, and this is just one small step towards that. He said there are many businesses that he talked with who are very concerned about the fact that here they are trying to survive through the COVID crisis, and maybe it is time for the County not to compete in beer and wine sales. He said the point of the letter is, as opposed to going to the State of Maryland and changing State law with the Eastern Shore Delegation, to maybe just do it amongst themselves and hopefully they will get a compromise where the dispensary will agree to go along.

Mrs. Acle said she has a question because she thinks this was brought up before she was on the Council, to which Mr. Cannon clarified, that was the elimination of the Liquor Dispensary entirely, which could be a matter for another year. Mr. McCain added, that has been a 15-year discussion, to which Mr. Cannon responded, that is an issue that he thinks every Council has been concerned about competing with the local sector, and this is just a small change. Mrs. Acle asked if this is a group that has this concern, to which Mr. Cannon responded, he thinks it is just businesses in general who are trying to sell beer and wine, whether it is a mom and pop shop, or store, or whatever it might be, they are just trying to earn a living. Mrs. Acle said she stopped by a gas station by her house that sells beer and wine on her way here, and she asked them if they felt this was a competitor, and maybe because of the distance, they did not think it was, so she was just wondering if it was certain areas of the County, to which Mr. Cannon responded, he thinks it is what the actual fiscal impact may or may not be on the local businesses. He said the other one is just the idea of whether or not the government should be competing at all, period, and this is sort of one way to bring that down a notch.

Mr. Hastings said, generally, he thinks this is a good idea on the point that he thinks most folks know if they want to find a good beer they do not go to the Liquor Control Board, they go to Cheers, or somebody who actually knows what they are talking about. He continued, that being said, he does not think they need further competition, and this is generally an area where he feels like the County should get out of the way and let business do this. He said he thinks the larger issue of controlling alcohol is not as much of an issue nowadays. He clarified, he is not saying it is not an issue, but he thinks the private industry has done a good job in finding ways to make sure they are complying in all the ways they should, and the further the County can pull back from these types of systems, he is generally more in favor of that.

Mr. Taylor asked, what about their current inventory of wine? He said he has no idea in the industry whether they can send it back and get full reimbursement, but that might be a possible thing to consider as to what they do with what they have in stock. Mr. Dodd said they could find out how long it would take to sell it, to which Mr. Taylor responded, they could just sell it until they get rid of it if they cannot return it.

Mr. Dodd asked if the gist of the letter would be asking the Liquor Control Board not to sell beer and wine, to which Mr. Cannon responded, correct, and hopefully they could refrain from that by the end of the year, so Council could at least consider that as a two-month window. Mr. Dodd asked if everybody is okay with that, to which there was a general consensus.

Mrs. Acle asked if Council is looking for the Liquor Control Board's input on this, to which Mr. Cannon responded, the letter should probably prompt them enough to give their input, and Council asked them to attend a meeting several different times. He said they tried to arrange that, but it has been very difficult to do, so he thought maybe they could expedite it by getting a letter out. He said then they can certainly come back to Council in person, or with a letter, and put a compromise they would maybe like to reach as far as a timeframe, but Council can establish a timeframe and see if that works.

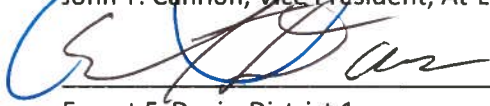
Mr. Dodd asked Mrs. Hurley to draft the letter, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, there is actually a proposed letter in the Brief Book. She clarified, the only thing that letter does not have is December 31 as the time period, to which Mr. Cannon responded, Mr. Taylor made a good point, and they should probably give them that timeframe. Mr. Dodd said they can send the letter with that two-month date. Mr. Cannon said they can ask for a response as soon as possible. There was no further discussion.



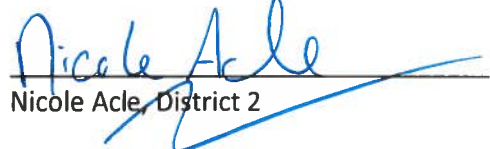
Larry W. Dodd, President, District 3



John T. Cannon, Vice President, At-Large



Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Nicole Acle, District 2

Josh Hastings, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



William R. McCain, At-Large



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator