

Cork's gets all-alcohol license

By Meredith Holford

Thu Jan 24, 2008, 04:52 PM EST

From the Mansfield, MA, News and Enterprise.

Three different businesses tried to make a case for snapping up the town's one remaining all-alcohol liquor license before selectmen Wednesday, and Cork's Fine Wine and Liquors made off with the prize.

The two-year-old liquor store, located within the Erin's Centre plaza on Rte. 140, is called "fine wine and liquors," but has until now held only a wine and beer license. It is owned by former selectman candidate Bill Clemmey and his sister-in-law, Megan Foley.

Selectmen voted three times in an unusual effort to get the license to one of the three contenders—Cork's, Tedeschi's on Chauncy Street, franchised by Bob Langton of Jewell Street, and the Store on South Main Street, owned by Madhuben Patel of Westborough.

Patel's family members operate the South Main Street convenience store, a small establishment that started out as a milk and penny-candy store in the mid-1900s. The Patel family purchased the Store in 2001, and Langton has held the franchise on Tedeschi's since 2002, when the existing beer and wine license was transferred to him.

The board discussed a number of different issues in awarding the license, the only license of its category left in Mansfield. It remained unclaimed only because Wine World on North Main Street abruptly closed late in 2007; the license lapsed because it was not renewed.

Concerns of the board focused on who had been waiting the longest, as well as the location and capacity of the stores that had applied.

Selectmen Chairman Lou Amoruso said he never realized either Tedeschi's or the Store was waiting for an all alcohol license until recently, but said Cork's owners had made it abundantly clear they wanted a full palette of choices within their 6,000 square foot liquor store from the beginning. Clemmey and Foley had drafted an article for last year's town meeting that called for the state to grant the town two more liquor licenses, but withdrew the article before the meeting could consider it.

Jon Aieta, attorney for Cork's, came prepared with a list of 200 signatures of customers of the liquor store who supported the application. He noted Cork's has had no violations or incidents, and said unlike the other two establishments, Cork's is not a convenience store. He emphasized all staff is over 21, and certified as TIPS trained.

TIPS — Training for Intervention Procedures — teaches employees methods to identify and prevent underage drinking, intoxication, and drunk driving. Selectmen ask everyone who comes in for a liquor license for a store or restaurant if employees are certified in the program.

Selectman David McCarter said his deliberations were governed by one question.

"I know you all want one," he said. "But what does the public need?"

He said of the five establishments that received a license the previous year, one closed, and one does little business in liquor.

"Is there a public need to issue another one?" he asked. "If that guy in the center of town couldn't survive with a full liquor license, why should we give out another one?"

Town resident Tom Prestwich told the board he didn't think it could grant a liquor license to any establishment that is not handicapped accessible, a fact that was disputed by Rum Runner's owner Peter DeTrollo.

"Go into any big city," he said, adding many small liquor stores are not ADA qualified.

The board was concerned that the Store is in a thickly residential area, and that the actual owner is only present one day a week.

"I have certain reservations for a corporation that is in the middle of a densely settled residential neighborhood," Selectman Sandy Levine said. "Cork's is in a good location, but they are asking to jump the queue. There are people in line longer, five or six years.

The first motion, to grant the license to Cork's, failed 2-2, with George Dentino and Ann Baldwin in favor, McCarter and Levine against, and Amoruso abstaining.

The second proposal, to grant the license to Tedeschi's, failed as well, with Dentino, McCarter, and Baldwin opposed. Amoruso and Levine support it.

The final motion was made by Baldwin, again to give the license to Cork's. McCarter and Levine were opposed, but the vote squeaked by with Baldwin, Dentino and Amoruso in favor.

Dentino noted partway through the voting process he thought "personal issues" were in play, particularly where Cork's was concerned, but Levine said again she was concerned only with the applicants' rightful place in line.

Megan Foley said from her office Thursday the owners of Cork's cannot add to their inventory until the state Alcohol and Beverages Control Commission reviews the license application and approves it — a process that could take a number of weeks. She estimated the final decision could be in hand by March or April.

"It's been a hard won battle," she said.