

Council approves OTW liquor license amid concerns

License comes with one stipulation: alcohol stays inside restaurant

BY KATHY CHANG, Staff Writer

From the Woodbridge, NJ, Sentinel.

WOODBIDGE - Patrons will be able to enjoy an alcoholic beverage of their liking when Timothy McLoone's restaurant McLoone's at Favorites opens in mid-September in Fords.

The Township Council voted 8-0 in favor of the liquor license transfer at the Aug. 7 council meeting from the family ownership, JRC Associates, of The Club at Woodbridge, which no longer uses its license, to McLoone's new restaurant.

Ward 2 Councilman Richard Dalina abstained from the vote because of his family business, Dalina's Tavern and Restaurant, in Fords, which had been in business for 65 years. Dalina said even though the restaurant has closed, the business is still a corporation.

"Until everything is dissolved, I will not be voting on any liquor license decisions," he said.

The New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority (NJSEA) entered into an agreement with McLoone in April to operate a food and beverage service called McLoone's at Favorites at its off-track wagering (OTW) facility.

McLoone is the owner of McLoone's Riverside in Sea Bright and McLoone's Pier House in Long Branch, both in Monmouth County.

Since April 2006, the NJSEA has canvassed vendors from various major chains including T.G.I. Friday, Chili's Grill & Bar, and Houlihan restaurants.

Council President Brenda Velasco said the council voted on the merits of McLoone Holdings Co. LLC's application.

"All the criteria that needed to be established has been met," said Velasco, who said the criteria included police department reports, the FBI report, state tax clearance, and financial records.

Helen Doyle, project manager for the restaurant, and Tim McMahon, the restaurant's director of operations, who came to the meeting on behalf of McLoone, said they were very pleased and happy to become part of the Woodbridge community.

"We do understand the [public's] apprehension of an off-track wagering facility and change," said McMahon. "We are confident and are ready to be a positive addition to the community."

The council voted in favor of the Type 33 consumption liquor license, but placed a special condition on the license.

"With a Type 33 liquor license, the restaurant is entitled by law to sell alcoholic beverages in its original container for off-site consumption," said township Municipal Clerk John Mitch. "We have set a provision that the restaurant cannot sell alcoholic beverages for off-site consumption, only for inside the restaurant."

McLoone's at Favorites consists of 23,000 square feet. The food and beverage portion of the facility is approximately 14,000 square feet and will consist of a kitchen and kitchen storage area, main dining area, bar area, dining areas adjacent to the bar area and an NJSEA VIP room.

There will be 387 seats available for the food and beverage area. There are 366 planned parking spaces.

Approximately 30 residents came to a public forum on the transfer of the liquor license at the off-track wagering facility, held July 31 in council chambers, and said they were worried about the mix between gambling and alcohol.

Doyle and McMahon said that after they discussed the public's concern with the NJSEA, they agreed and decided to take out the four self-betting machines that were initially planned for inside the restaurant.

At the public forum, Carole Mayti, who has voiced her opposition to the OTW over the past year, asked McLoone to keep "the drunks from leaving his facility."

McLoone reassured residents that his establishment would not serve alcohol to intoxicated patrons.

"These patrons would be carefully taken care of," he said.

McLoone said his entire staff is TIPS (Training for Intervention Procedures) certified. The TIPS program is a skills-based training program that is designed to prevent intoxication, underage drinking and drunken driving.

"In our 23 years in business, we have not gotten one liquor license complaint," said McLoone. "We don't serve shots or hold bachelor parties, because it makes business revenue disappear. We have old-fashioned bands play at the other two restaurants."