

Omaha City Council recommends approval of liquor license for Benson Grocery

Written by John Chapman

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - The Omaha City Council voted 6 to 0, recommending approval of a Class D liquor license for Benson Grocery.

If approved by the state, that would give the future grocery store on 54th and Northwest Radial the OK to sell beer, wine and liquor.

Representatives of the owners told the City Council that Benson Grocery will operate as a grocery store.

"They'll have a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, canned foods and vegetables, dairy, all of your grocery and convenience items," said David Houghton, attorney for the applicant.

Community concerns

People who live in the area are OK with the grocery store, but there are people who are not OK with another alcohol outlet in the area.

"I oppose the liquor license because we have plenty of liquor opportunities in the Benson area also because it is close to both Benson High School and the junior high next door, and I think it creates another opportunity for school children to find a little trouble," one resident said.

Jack Griswold, a business owner in the area for more than five decades, voiced his opinion through a letter to the council. Griswold says if approved, there would be liquor sales across the street from a church and close to schools and a city park and he writes there are already two smoke shops in the area and other places to buy alcohol.

There are others who point to other neighborhood grocery stores that sell fresh fruits, vegetables and grocery items. But some store feature and promote alcohol sales as the primary attraction.

Council questions

Councilmember Ron Hug wanted to know how much of the store's space would be dedicated to the sale of alcohol.

"They do not have any blueprints I think the building length is approximately 60 feet by 50 feet," the attorney said.

Hug asked, "OK, so the area to sell alcohol will be how big?"

"I don't have a floor space percentage on what will be dedicated to alcohol sales," the attorney replied.

"So we don't know the percentage of the floor space that will be used for selling alcohol, yeah, I don't have that in the application," he said.

Expert perspective

Chris Wagner is the executive director of Project Extra Mile, an organization dedicated to preventing alcohol related harm. He tells us too many outlets that sell alcohol in one area is one of the main reasons that leads to excessive alcohol use.

"The more available it is more likely its going to be cheaper because the businesses are competing against one another and its easy to get," said Chris Wagner, executive director of Project Extra Mile.

What happens here is not a done deal. If neighbors are passionate enough they can take their concerns to state officials in Lincoln.

"Ask for the liquor control commissions help as they have in certain situations in Omaha, they have denied applications," Wagner said.

The Omaha City Council's approval for a liquor license for Benson Grocery is only a recommendation. Final approval or rejection will come from the Nebraska State Liquor Commission.