

# Neighbors and City Join Forces to Close High-Crime Area Liquor Store

By Sean Yoes, *Baltimore Afro-American*, October, 2008

On the night of July 19, a man was shot in the head during an argument inside the liquor store and was pronounced dead. Maurice Fullwood was charged with the bloody homicide, which was captured on the store's video camera.

Fullwood was arrested about 10 days after the shooting when he was spotted near the scene of the murder. It wasn't his first encounter with the police. Fullwood had been charged with several felonies, including attempted first-degree murder, attempted second-degree murder, first-degree assault and second-degree assault.

"If you talk to the commander in that area, they were able to track the majority of those crimes that took place around that liquor store," Shields said.

In June 2007, the city council passed legislation to strengthen the city's public nuisance law that now gives authorities the ability to lock up any house or apartment for up to a year that causes a "nuisance" in a neighborhood.

Baltimore City Police Commissioner Frederick Bealefeld used the newly-augmented ordinance to initiate a "padlock" hearing in August against Linden Liquors that resulted in the bar being shut down for a year.

"Owners must be responsible and cannot send a message—implied through inaction—that drug dealing inside their business is okay," Baltimore City Council President Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said in a statement. "Lives are at stake, and our neighborhoods deserve better."

However, the owner of the Linden Bar, Chang K. Yim, who has owned Linden Liquors with his wife since August 2003, believes he and his family are being blamed for conduct that's not their fault.

"I think this padlock law is unconstitutional and my case has been singled out," Yim said. "They just went through and padlocked my store," said Yim, who made the comment while picketing in front of City Hall with several of his family members in protest of the closing of his bar.

"I had a meeting with the community and police department and a Baltimore City Council member (William Cole) and those meetings—I followed up with a new camera in the store and a light outside," Yim said. "Those things I accepted but some of those things—like not selling candy bars or snacks—you know, are purchased by adults, too, not just young kids. So I didn't follow those kinds of things."

Yim said that he and his family members picketed outside of City Hall for several days.

“Since we have been closed, nothing has changed,” reads a statement he hands out to anyone who will take it. “The drug dealers and buyers still infest the school playground, both sides of Linden Avenue, and the corner of North and Linden Avenues. We are absolutely baffled why anyone would think that closing our store down would solve anything.”

But many members of the community surrounding Yim’s establishment say they have already noticed a difference.

“It’s been an amazing transition—there’s such a vast difference in the way the neighborhood is,” said Jonathan Mogul, a Spicer’s Run resident. “It’s almost like a completely different neighborhood with that store gone. There’s a lot less noise. We can sleep with our windows open without fear of being awakened by shouting matches or gunshots going off.”

Linden Liquors sits within Baltimore’s 11<sup>th</sup> District represented by Councilman William Cole IV who says he received complaints about Kim and his bar when he was campaigning for his council seat in early 2007.

“We had several hundred people sign a petition asking for that liquor store to be closed,” said Cole who was instrumental in the closing of Linden Liquors.

“You’re not talking about a handful of disgruntled residents that live around there. We’re talking about people who live on both sides of North Avenue that said that that establishment had become a cancer.” He added, “Kim had a number of opportunities to do the right thing and he chose not to and I don’t know why. I don’t know if he didn’t understand that this was a serious situation or if he just didn’t want to spend the money. But either way, he was warned way in advance.”

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While Kim and others argue the constitutionality of the padlock law and the city’s strengthened nuisance ordinance, Park Heights community activist Derrick Compton Sr. hopes that he can utilize them to shut down other liquor stores in Northwest Baltimore.

“In the 5100 block of Park Heights they have four establishments in one block that sell beer, wine and alcohol—in a one block radius—three of them basically opened 24-7,” Compton said.

Compton said Lowell’s Liquors on Woodland Avenue in particular has been a magnet for crime in Park Heights.

“In October of 07’ three young men were shot in a bar on Woodland and Park Heights (Lowell’s) and one of the young men died,” Compton said.

“They were selling young people alcohol without asking them for I.D.—they were selling them tobacco products without asking them for ID,” he added. “When we found out

about it somebody challenged me and said, 'So, what you gonna' do about it?' And I said, 'Well, I am going to do something about it' and that's how this work started."

Several phone calls to Lowell Liquors were not returned.

While Compton and others across the city fight to shut down "nuisance" establishments, those who live near the closed Linden Liquors are not certain their troubles have ended.

"The owner of the store is still protesting the closure and still has the opportunity to appeal the decision," Jonathan Mogul said. "The fight is far from over."

Darnell and MeShelle Shields were newlyweds when they moved to the newly-built Spicer's Run community of townhomes eight years ago near the corner of North Ave. and Eutaw St. in West Baltimore.

At the time, gentrification around North Avenue had begun to smooth out the rough outer edges of the more upscale Reservoir Hill and Bolton Hill neighborhoods that the new community straddled.

So the Shields'—who had yet to have the first of their three children—took a chance on Spicer's Run like many of the other young couples who bought homes there.

"When we first got there it wasn't as bad," recalled Shields, an educator who mentors Black boys. "But things started changing when we saw the blue lights come up," he added, referring to the now ubiquitous blue light police cameras posted along North Avenue and throughout much of the city.

"We've all witnessed crimes. MeShelle and I both witnessed crimes—our neighbor's window was shot out—a stray bullet, basically. So we've all witnessed crimes."

The Shields' and their neighbors came to a consensus early on about the main source of the trouble—the Linden Bar and Liquors, a bar and package goods store in the 900 block of North Avenue, directly across the street from Spicer's Run.

The bar—shut-down in August by order of the Baltimore City Police Department—used to be open until 2 a.m., seven days a week. It had been operating at the North Avenue location for about 40 years and has been troublesome for many of those years, to let some longtime West Baltimore residents tell it.

In recent years, the trouble grew worse -- chronic loitering, drug transactions, violence and even murder. Again, fingers pointed to one place -- Linden Liquors.