

## **PARTIED OUT - Council, liquor board spar over one-day liquor licenses**

By Stephen Janis, *Investigative Voice*, April 14, 2009

The invitation for a party at the Hiram Grand Lodge on March 23 in Bolton Hill promised a night of dancing, top-shelf liquor, and a special VIP section for attendees willing to pay \$50.

But according to documents the promoters filed with Baltimore's liquor license board, the party was a fundraiser for an organization called the Will Lively Foundation, and therein lies the rub.

City law grants one-day liquor licenses to charitable organization only, allowing dozens of non-profits to hold fundraisers at licensed banquet halls. The only exception that allows liquor sales by organizations that don't directly hold a liquor license also has allowed what one city councilman calls "mobile nightclubs" to flourish, raising concerns that the law is being abused.

The invitation for the party at the Hiram Grand, a Masonic lodge, does not mention the Will Lively Foundation. According to filings at the Board of Liquor License Commissioners for Baltimore, a state agency, the foundation is not incorporated. (No such organization shows up in a Google search.)

That's why City Councilman Bill Cole and area residents are fighting to stop the regular weekend parties at the lodge, which have prompted scores of police calls, boisterous crowds, and in some cases vandalism.

"The temporary liquor license is supposed to be for fundraising banquets, but what I think you have here is a mobile nightclub located in a residential neighborhood," says Cole, who represents the 11th district where the lodge is located.

"You really have to question if these are really charitable events."

Cole said the exemption in city liquor laws that grants charities a one-day liquor license to sell alcohol at fundraising events has become a convenient loophole for promoters.

"These are banquet halls and they've become nightclubs, and it's causing problems in the neighborhood."

John Kyle, president of the Mt. Royal Improvement Association, agrees with Cole.

"We've had at least 100 calls to police, loud crowds and there simply is not enough parking," Kyle said of the blocks surrounding the lodge at 1207 Eutaw St.

"I think these are nightclubs operating without the proper scrutiny."

A man who answered the phone number listed on the invitation for the March 23 event said he did not want to comment. A number listed for the Hiram Grand Lodge as not answered on Monday..

But liquor board Executive Secretary Sam Daniels said the party promoters have not violated any liquor laws

“The parties at the Hiram Grand are no more or less a charity than the Virgin Mobile Festival was,” Daniels said of the outdoor concert festival held at Pimlico Race track last August that featured big name acts like Nine Inch Nails and Stone Temple Pilots. According to liquor board records, the for-profit concert held was granted a temporary liquor license courtesy of Living Classrooms Foundations, a Baltimore-based charity that coordinates environmental education programs for Maryland teens.

“The point is, one of the main profit centers for halls are rentals, and we’re cutting that off,” he added.

“But the truth is there is nothing I can do until they bring me something substantive.”

Daniels said he was more than willing to crack down on temporary liquor license holders, pointing to his enforcement efforts to curtail parties at the Lithuanian Social Club last year. The East Baltimore banquet hall was home to a popular Friday night dance party that flourished in 2008. But when police and area residents came to Daniels with a list of problems like fights and neighborhood vandalism outside the club, he acted.

“Once I have something to work with, I get involved,” he said.

Still, the use of one-day liquor licenses has not escaped the scrutiny of other City Council members. At a council hearing Monday on a proposed law that would loosen restrictions on live entertainment for commercial establishments, Councilman James Kraft urged caution, citing past problems with one-day licensees.

“What we have is non-profits who own and operate the banquet hall which have lead to problems with the type of entertainment they bring in all these venues,” Kraft sai.

That’s why Cole said he hopes the law can be changed.

“I’m not sure if it has to be changed on the state level, but I think something needs to be done.”