

Baltimore delegate wants to extend last call to 3 a.m.

by Ryan Sharrow, *Baltimore Business Journal*, February 25, 2010

A Baltimore delegate wants to extend last call at some downtown bars and clubs by an extra hour, a proposal met with opposition from some local lawmakers.

The bill, sponsored by Del. Nathaniel T. Oaks, would allow bars in the Inner Harbor area to serve alcohol until 3 a.m. on Friday, Saturdays and Sundays. Last call is currently 2 a.m.

The legislation also would also allow the bars, including establishments on the strip-club row known as “the block,” to stay open until 4 a.m., allowing patrons to finish consuming their beverages.

Some believe the bill would make Baltimore’s nightlife scene more competitive with neighboring cities when luring conventions. Bars in both Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, for example, are now open later than Baltimore bars.

The exact geographic boundaries and how many bars would be impacted are unclear. The bill would affect some bars in city’s 46th district, where there are at least 400 liquor licenses, said Steve Fogleman, chair of the city’s liquor board.

Meanwhile, a number of state legislators within Baltimore City’s delegation have already come out against the bill. Sen. George Della, Del. Pete Hammen, Del. Carolyn Krysiak and Del. Brian McHale have written an e-mail to various neighborhood associations expressing opposition “to such an expansion anywhere in our district.”

“My communities are obviously opposed to something like this,” Hammen, a Democrat, said in an interview. “Bars open longer is not a good thing.”

Fogleman said the liquor board has not taken a stance on the bill. But he noted “in the unlikely event the bill passes we would certainly need more resources, and more funding to send inspectors” out to the bars. The liquor board’s budget has already been cramped by the city’s budget shortfall, he added.

Baltimore City Councilman William H. Cole IV, who represents the 46th district, said there needs to be more communication between the neighborhoods affected before any law is passed.

“I don’t understand why you would introduce legislation like that without at least communicating to the neighborhoods and businesses that would be impacted by the change,” said Cole, adding he has yet to speak with Oaks regarding the bill.

A hearing on House Bill 429 is scheduled for Feb. 26 at 9:30 a.m. in Annapolis.