

District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA)

Re: BZA Case No. 12799A
Request for Modification of Consequences
6201 Third St., NW (VIP Room)
Washington, DC 20011

Dear Board of Zoning Adjustment,

I am David K. Owens, I reside at 307 Rittenhouse Street, NW, where I have lived for 43 years. My home is located approximately 100 feet from the VIP Room. I am a strong proponent of small businesses which enhance the community, particularly black-owned businesses. I am vehemently opposed to the so-called “minor-modification” of the VIP Room’s license which has been incorrectly characterized in the memorandum in the file for this proceeding by case manager Steven J. Mordfin at the Office of Planning dated November 16, 2018. I join other neighbors who reside in close proximity to the VIP Room, who have also registered strong opposition to granting the VIP Room the right to sell alcohol on the premises (see letters in opposition from Jim Stehle, Suzanne Grinnan, Jay Ferrari and Amber Husbands).

In consideration of the VIP Room’s request for license modification, I urge you to review past decisions issued by BZA, dated January 29, 1979 and by the Alcohol Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA) dated November 1, 2017. These Orders impose conditions that state “the license holder should not sell alcohol on the premises...” because of the impact of the quality of life of the VIP Room’s neighbors. These Orders are consistent with prior decisions by ABRA on March 22, 2016, as affirmed by the DC Court of Appeals on March 29, 2016. This decision denied the VIP Room’s request for Retailer C Class license to sell alcohol on the premises and operate like a tavern or night club.

To set the record straight, the VIP Room’s request is a major modification of current license conditions. If approved, it will fundamentally and significantly impact the neighborhood by inviting crime, litter and loitering. Granting a license to sell alcohol on the VIP premises is putting the camel’s nose under the tent. It will represent a major step, that would eventually lead the VIP Room to turn into a tavern or nightclub. There is a significant difference between the VIP Room being permitted to serve alcohol on the premises versus being able to sell alcohol on the premises!

I am also concerned that neighbors have not been given adequate notice about the requested changes. There has been no outreach by the VIP Room or the Office of Planning. As a result, there is significant outrage from the neighborhood. In my view, the issue is how to maintain a proper balance between the objectives of protecting this quiet, safe neighborhood surrounded by daycare centers, schools, churches and a progressive family environment versus enhancing the financial viability of the VIP Room.

The VIP Room can remain a vital part of this progressive community if it retains its current license status as a gathering place for weddings, retirement parties, repasts and other community celebratory events. I stand ready to assist them in expanding their outreach in this area and I will strongly urge my neighbors to do so as well. I hope you will seriously consider my comments. Thank you for this opportunity to provide you with my views.

Sincerely,
David K. Owens