

# Split vote in MW opposes potential cigar lounge

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THE PIONEER NEWS

MOUNT WASHINGTON — The smoldering coming from Fick Hall was a result of discussions involving a proposed update to the city’s Alcohol Beverage Control ordinance.

In the end, a spark of shock jolted business owners when the city decided not to update the ordinance regarding cigar lounges.

The Mount Washington City Council heard a first reading during its Dec. 8 business meeting that would amend a section of the ABC ordinance to define a cigar lounge/cigar bar and provide for compliance.

The request was made by Eric and Lisa Armstrong, co-owners of All-In-One Security for 25 years, along with their son, Justin. The family was hoping to establish a cigar lounge featuring cocktails and golf simulators at a property located on Highway 44 East.

Lisa said the family lived in and moved their business to Mount Washington. The family needed the ordinance amendment to provide specific regulations and allow them to move forward with their business plans.

“So you wanna put a bar 600, 700 feet from a high school,” was the initial response from council member Layne Abell.

“It’s a lounge,” Eric responded. “The focus is on the cigar lounge,” said Lisa. “We’ve learned a lot about the types of lounges. It will be upscale, quaint... it’s not a bar atmosphere at all.”

Council member Dustin Armstrong inquired about food service. Lisa said the owners were looking at providing pre-packaged items such as chips and peanuts, while allowing food to be brought in from nearby restaurants.

“We’re not wanting to prepare food,” she said.

Abell mentioned Kentucky House Bill 211, which included smoking

restrictions pertaining to cigar bars. City attorney Scott Wantland said the House bill did not pass but said the city’s ordinance was based on the bill. He said the city did not have a smoking ordinance.

According to Abell, the bourbon and tobacco industries were “pushing for more access” to sell their products through cigar bars.

“It’s not a bar,” Lisa reiterated. “It will have comfortable seating, it will be a meeting place.”

“What is the biggest portion of your business,” asked council member Greg Gentry.

“It’s gonna be drinks,” Abell quipped.

Eric said that, by law, the business would need a minimum sale of 15 percent based on cigars. He said that number, on average for other similar businesses throughout the country, was usually closer to 45 percent.

“The customers will come in for the cigars,” he said. “The bourbon is extra.”

Dustin Armstrong inquired about open hours. Eric said the owners were looking at possibly noon to 10 pm.

He added that there were plans for two golf simulators, one in a separate non-smoking area.

Abell mentioned that there was “not a ventilation system in the world” that completely worked to keep all second-hand smoke out of a building. He added that any employees would be subject to the smoke.

“The employees will be aware of it,” Lisa said.

“We’re selling to cigar smokers,” Eric added. “These are experts. They know what types (of tobacco), how the cigars are rolled.”

With the next regularly-scheduled council meeting canceled due to the Christmas holiday, Gentry asked if the city should host a special meeting for a second reading of the ordinance amendment.

“What’s your rush,” Abell inquired.

Gentry said the owners were likely ready to move forward with their

plans if the amendment was approved. Meanwhile, council member Sandra Hockenbury addressed her concerns that many in the public were unaware of the issue.

“We need to get the word out,” Hockenbury said. “We need to let people ask questions.”

Wantland said that if the council wanted a special meeting, they either needed to have the mayor call for it, or collect four council members’ signatures, in writing, on a piece of paper officially requesting a meeting.

Abell agreed with Hockenbury that there needed to be more community input. Hockenbury said public speaking needed to be allowed at a meeting with a second reading (public speaking is allowed during first readings of proposed ordinances but not during second readings).

Lisa mentioned that the plans began about 18 months ago, noting that the owners were not trying to rush anything.

Meanwhile, a passed sheet of paper resulted in signatures from Hockenbury, Gentry, and council members Troy Barr and Bruce Gooden, requesting a special meeting. Abell suggested a time of Dec. 10, just 48 hours following the regularly-scheduled meeting.

Along with the date request, the council added that the public would be allowed to speak during the special meeting.

On Dec. 10, two of the three sign-in speakers included Lisa and Justin Armstrong. Lisa said she appreciated the special meeting, reminding the council that the business owners had completed “plenty of research” regarding cigar lounges.

According to Lisa, the lounge would be “something good for the locals” while also complimenting tourism via proximity to the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. She said the lounge would be located in “a nice, upscale, new building.”

Justin added the lounge would be “a nice little social environment

to hang out at” and that the owners were trying to come up with an idea that was “a little out of the box for us.”

The other sign-in speaker, Steve Holzknecht, said he was a member of the Heritage Hill Golf Club and a cigar smoker.

“I think this county could use something like this,” Holzknecht said.

Turning to further council discussion, Gooden said if the city voted to approve the ordinance change, then the county later passed something that conflicted, then it would not affect the city ordinance.

“It’s a reason I’m for it,” he added, also mentioning more revenue for the city. “If people don’t like it, they don’t have to go.”

Dustin Armstrong argued that there was not a countywide smoking ban in place. He mentioned that the location would be ages 21 and over and that customers would be carded. He said the location was already in a B-2 Business zone.

A high school teacher and sports coach, Dustin Armstrong admitted he wasn’t thrilled with the proposed business’ proximity to Bullitt East High School. But he mentioned Gallant Fox Brewing Co., near Mount Washington Middle School, as well as liquor stores nearby other school campuses.

“If they can already build, then do we need an ordinance,” he inquired.

“I think we do, based on what (Gooden) said,” Gentry responded. “We’re supposed to vote on what’s in front of us,” said Barr. “No one is a fortune teller in this group.”

According to Abell, the city voted over 30 years ago to “go wet” and allow liquor sales. He felt the council could not override that vote. He also mentioned specific food sales ratio requirements.

“What does this have to do with tourism,” he added.

Gentry made a motion to approve the updated ordinance, seconded by Barr. They were joined in the

approval vote by Gooden. Abell, Armstrong and Hockenbury voted in opposition.

“Tie goes to the mayor,” said Wantland.”

“No,” said mayor Stuart Owen.

“We’ve turned away a business coming to Mount Washington,” Gentry said following the vote. “We’ve also turned away their main business.”

When discussions turned to future business pursuits, Eric announced, “I’m not taking a risk,” stating that he would no longer seek to create the business within the city limits.

“I’m from here,” he said. “I went to school here. If you don’t like this, don’t go to it. Mount Washington wants to grow but they keep stepping on their own two feet.”

Following the meeting, Owen said he voted no based on legality issues and concerns after speaking to Wantland about the situation.

Meanwhile, the business owners remained in shock following the split vote that opposed the ordinance update.

“I’m disappointed in the council for not being more informed,” Justin said. “We’ve sunk money into this already based on city regulations.”

Justin added that all the business produced by the creation of the lounge would’ve involved city companies. He said the owners would likely further pursue the lounge in another location.

“All 100-percent local businesses, from builders to electricians, the HVAC work... but we will look elsewhere. This will happen.”

Lisa again reiterated that the location would’ve been a cigar lounge and not a bar. She was disappointed in her family’s home city, where the couple lives and their family members attend school.

“We believe in this business and that it will be good for those who want it,” Lisa said. “We would’ve worked with (Bullitt County) Tourism and the (Kentucky) Bourbon Trail. I’m just shocked!”

## BULLITT

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That pushed the lead to 26-8 and Popplewell called another timeout.

Bullitt Central did score the next three points, but then Bullitt East scored six straight points to push the margin to 32-11. At halftime the Chargers had that 34-15 advantage.

Stinnett nailed two more three-pointers in the third quarter as the margin ballooned to as many as 25 points. Bullitt Central had connected on 20 three-pointers in the first three games of the season,

but in this game did not hit from beyond the arc until Jayden Kearney hit one at the end of the third quarter.

All three of Bullitt Central’s three-pointers came in the final nine minutes of the game. It took the Cougars scoring the last four points of the game to get the margin as close as it ended up being.

Stinnett led all scorers in this game with 22 points. The Chargers also got 11 points each from Bates and Mefford.

All of Bullitt Central’s scoring came from the five starters. Lee finished with 15 points while Kearney had 13 and Carnes 11.

This is the only regular

season meeting between the two programs on the schedule.

Neither team is playing in a true ‘bracket’ style tournament before the holidays. Bullitt Central has a key game on Friday at home against North Bullitt in a boys’ only contest. There will be a JV game at 6 p.m. and then the varsity contest is set for 7:30 p.m. This may well be the first regular season boys’ only game between the two programs in 50 years. That came about when the North Bullitt girls had to drop an early meeting with Bullitt Central so that they could play in the Queen of the Commonwealth event at Bullitt East, which

starts play on Friday.

The second regular season showdown between the two schools will be on Friday, Feb. 6, and will be a traditional girl/boy doubleheader.

Bullitt Central will then play two ‘showcase’ type games at Carroll County on Monday and Tuesday before taking time off for Christmas. Bullitt East has one game

in the Carroll County event, but that is on Saturday. The team then heads to Somerset for games on Monday and

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