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Bellevue Restaurant Applies For Borough's First Liquor License In 80 Years

By [SARAH SCHNEIDER \(/PEOPLE/SARAH-SCHNEIDER\)](/PEOPLE/SARAH-SCHNEIDER) • MAY 21, 2015

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Fourteen hours after the polls closed and voters decided Bellevue would no longer be 'dry,' the first liquor license application was submitted in more than 80 years.

Specialty Group, a liquor license broker and lender for restaurants and bars, submitted the application on behalf of Grille 565 on Lincoln Avenue. Ned Sokoloff, the company's president and CEO, said the Liquor Control Board received the application by 10 a.m. Wednesday.

"We were poised to the extent of having the application pre done and enveloped and ready for overnight processing. We had people standing by to post the poster in the window the moment that it was official that the referendum had prevailed," he said.

The poster notifying customers the restaurant had applied for a liquor license came after residents of the borough approved a referendum to allow beer and liquor sales in restaurants in Tuesday's primary election by more than 350 votes. Bellevue has tried before to revoke the ban on liquor and sales the town kept when prohibition ended.

"The fabric of the council and position of the mayor has changed and with it comes this approval," Sokoloff said.

A similar referendum failed in 2011 by 87 votes. State law requires four years before a referendum can be placed on the ballot again.

Bellevue Councilwoman Kathy Coder said she was ecstatic Tuesday after the referendum passed. She said people realized that something different had to happen for local economic growth.

"We really feel like this is going to help our downtown and be able to draw in a lot of really neat, cool restaurants, which will also draw in people to Bellevue," she said.

Supporters of the referendum emphasized that sentiment with "Bring Business to Bellevue, Allow Alcohol Sales" signs, while opponents declared "No Bars in Bellevue."

The referendum allows restaurants to own a license which Sokoloff says means the establishment must be able to seat and serve food for at least 30 people, and have a valid health permit.

While the borough qualifies for two liquor licenses based on the 8,000 resident populations, Allegheny County does not have any more licenses to issue as it reached the maximum number allowed by the Liquor Control Board. Owners can, however, buy a license from another business no longer interested in owning one.

While those two licenses do not have to be approved by the municipal council, future licenses will.

"Any applicants after that will have to go through the inter-municipality process and go in front of the council in order to have approval to transfer a license into that municipality," Sokoloff said.

Councilwoman Coder says she doesn't think the referendum is the "silver-bullet" for economic growth, but she and Sokoloff agree it will help.

"The reality is the economic growth that will result, even if it is minute, will be better than it was before. Instead of people having to drive outside of Bellevue to get themselves a drink with a nice dinner or whatever, they'll be able to keep those dollars in the municipality," Sokoloff said.

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