



**POLICY REPORT
LICENSING**

Report Date: December 3, 2015
Contact: Andreea Toma
Contact No.: 604.873.7545
RTS No.: 11220
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: December 16, 2015

TO: Standing Committee on City Finance and Services
FROM: Chief Licensing Inspector in consultation with the Acting Director of
Planning & Development Services
SUBJECT: Liquor Policy Review - Quick Start Initiatives

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Acting Director of Planning & Development Services be instructed to amend the Liquor Store Guidelines effective February 1, 2016 to allow and regulate a new liquor store type that sells groceries as well as wine, and to allow up to five such stores as a pilot program, generally in accordance with Appendix A;
- FURTHER THAT staff be directed to report back in early 2017 with an evaluation of the pilot program, including recommendations for its continuance, expansion or termination.
- B. THAT Licensing staff be directed to advise local liquor manufacturers that City by-laws and regulations permit service of liquor produced off-site, provided that it is in compliance with Provincial regulations;
- FURTHER THAT, as part of the comprehensive liquor policy review work underway, staff be directed to consider a licence and fee structure for manufacturers' lounges that is comparable to other Liquor Primary licences and bring forward recommendations in 2016.
- C. THAT staff be directed to use current special event permitting processes to process applications for artisans' markets with valid Provincial market authorisations to include up to three local liquor retailers at an artisans' market.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report responds to Council direction to bring forward “quick start” liquor policy changes that can be implemented prior to the comprehensive liquor policy review that will be completed in 2016. Three liquor policy measures are proposed:

1. A pilot program to allow the sale of wine in grocery stores on a limited basis;
2. Allowing manufacturers’ lounges to serve liquor produced off-site; and,
3. Allowing the sale of locally-produced wine, beer or spirits at artisan/craft markets.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

The BC Liquor Control and Licensing Branch (LCLB) has primary authority over the sale and service of alcohol. The City further regulates the type, location, and operations (e.g. size, hours) of businesses selling or serving liquor.

In 2013 the LCLB conducted a comprehensive review of Provincial liquor regulations. The City of Vancouver provided feedback into this review process. The Liquor Policy Review recommended 73 provincial liquor policy changes, including the introduction of new models for liquor sale or service.

A comprehensive review of the City’s liquor policies is underway. The review is considering opportunities to update the City’s sizable body of existing liquor policy, including modernization to reflect the recent Provincial regulatory changes. In September and October, 2015 Council considered motions to direct staff to consider early implementation of two recent Provincial policy changes, specifically:

- to “fast-track a policy to allow Vancouver distilleries, wineries, cideries and breweries to sell liquor they do not produce - up to 20 percent of their sales each quarter - in accordance with new Provincial regulations” (September 29, 2015); and,
- to “establish a new policy related to the location of wine stores in grocery stores... and immediately process all outstanding applications for wine stores in grocery stores.” (October 20, 2015).

Council requested that a report on these changes, and any other feasible policy “quick starts”, be brought back before the holiday season.

CITY MANAGER’S/GENERAL MANAGER’S COMMENTS

The Acting City Manager and the Acting General Manager of Community Services recommend APPROVAL of the recommendations in this report.

REPORT

Background/Context

As previously noted, the Provincial Liquor Policy Review recommended 73 provincial liquor policy changes. To date the Province has implemented many of these changes, including:

- happy hour allowed;
- new minimum drink prices;
- retail craft liquor at farmers' markets;
- minors allowed in Liquor Primaries (subject to limits);
- online Special Occasion Licensing applications; and
- enhanced Serving It Right requirements.

In the last ten years the City has also made changes to local liquor regulations, some of them in response to Provincial policy changes. Specifically:

- in 2006 the City allowed later extended hours at Liquor Primary establishments;
- in 2013 the City allowed liquor manufacturers (e.g. breweries, wineries, distilleries) to have an on-site lounge in which liquor could be served, not just sampled¹; and
- in 2014 the City allowed retail liquor sales and sampling at Farmers' Markets as a pilot, and in 2015 approved the changes on an on-going basis.

Strategic Analysis

As the Province continues to implement the recommended changes to their liquor policies, there will be additional opportunities for corresponding local policy changes to increase both the variety and availability of liquor sale and service establishments in Vancouver. In collaboration with Vancouver Coastal Health, staff recommend that any further local policy changes be considered as part of the comprehensive policy review, where the potential impacts on public health and neighbourhood liveability can be thoroughly considered. (Vancouver Coastal Health has provided a Briefing Note recommending that the City prepare a comprehensive liquor strategy with an eye to protecting Vancouverites' health. See Appendix B). The comprehensive liquor policy review is already underway. Commenced formally in 2013, staff have conducted significant background research, best practices evaluation, data analysis and mapping, as well as initial outreach to key stakeholders in the industry, arts and culture community and health sectors. This work led staff to arrive at three general conclusions about the status of liquor in Vancouver:

- a) The city currently has ample opportunities to purchase liquor, whether for take-away (e.g. retail format) or for consumption on-premises (e.g. restaurants, bars, performance venues);
- b) The excessive availability of liquor leads to higher levels of drinking (and binge drinking) which in turn results in social harms and community impacts affecting health and safety, social well-being and public order; and,

¹ Liquor "samples" are limited in size and quantity, while liquor "service" is not.

- c) Managed strategically via a robust public policy framework, liquor has great potential to play a positive role in the city.

To guide upcoming work on liquor policy, the following objectives have been drafted:

- a) Moderate the amount of access to liquor;
- b) Minimize the harms of liquor consumption;
- c) Promote the benefits that liquor can bring (e.g. social, cultural, tourism, economic and even sustainability); and
- d) Modernize City regulations and administrative processes to reflect principles of clarity, consistency and fairness.

Relying on these objectives for general guidance, in 2016 staff will conduct consultation on more specific liquor policy directions before bringing them forward as a comprehensive liquor strategy for Council's consideration.

In advance of this much broader and far-reaching work, staff have identified three recent Provincial policy changes that are suitable for immediate implementation as part of the quick starts package requested by Council. Vancouver Coastal Health recommends that the City wait to implement changes to liquor regulations until the liquor strategy is in place; however, the three initiatives are of a small scale and limited complexity, and may indeed serve as a test-case to better understand the issues associated with liquor policy liberalisation. For this reason the recommendations that staff propose to bring forward for Council consideration on the overarching Vancouver Liquor Policy will be better informed through this tangible pilot.

1. Wine Sales In Grocery Stores Pilot Program

Background

In April 2015 the LCLB approved regulations to allow wine to be sold in grocery stores. The Province regulates wine sales in grocery stores as follows:

- eligible grocery stores must be at least 10,000 sq. ft. and must be “primarily engaged in retailing a general line of foods”²;
- no more than half of the grocery store's total sales may be from liquor;
- wine displayed for sale must be confined to a single location within the grocery store, although a separate cashier is not required (i.e. patrons may pay for the wine at the same checkout point for groceries);
- the display area must be able to be rendered inaccessible to the public during hours when the grocery store is open but when liquor is not allowed to be sold;
- there is no limit on the size of the wine display area;
- one tasting area is permitted, immediately adjacent to the display area, and must be defined by a physical barrier (e.g. ropes and stanchions); and
- the grocery store must provide an acceptable security plan that details how the store will guard against shoplifting and sale to minors.

² See the [Liquor Control and Licensing Branch Policy Directive No: 15-01](#).

Grocery stores that sell wine are not subject to the LCLB's one kilometre distancing requirements from other liquor stores.

Proposed Quick Start: Pilot Program

Staff are recommending that Council approve a pilot program to allow a limited number of grocery stores in Vancouver to retail wine. To be eligible to participate, the grocery store would be required to:

- meet all Provincial regulations (some noted above);
- meet the requirements of the Zoning and Development Bylaw (i.e. locate in a zoning district in which both Grocery Store and Liquor Store are permitted uses);
- locate outside of the Downtown Eastside/Gastown Liquor Retail Restricted Area as per the existing City's Liquor Store Guidelines (see Attachment 1);
- not create more than five such stores (to enable testing of the concept during the pilot); and
- obtain a time-limited, conditional Development Permit and a Business Licence.

The proposed pilot program can be implemented without amendments to the Zoning and Development By-law; however, amendments to the Liquor Store Guidelines are recommended to:

- a) define and allow a new type of liquor retail store, to be known as a Grocery And Wine Store (Type 4);
- b) exempt Type 4 Stores from locational restrictions that apply to other three types of liquor stores (which are confined to local shopping areas only, distanced from each other, and distanced from family-oriented uses: churches, parks, schools, community centres and neighbourhood houses). This exemption acknowledges the more benign nature of wine in grocery stores as compared to liquor-only stores; and
- c) limit the total number of Type 4 Stores in Vancouver to five. The cap will help address concerns about net increase in liquor retail availability, and also contain the scale of the pilot program to more easily manageable levels should issues arise.

An amended version of the Liquor Store Guidelines is included as Appendix A.

The participants in the pilot program would be evaluated after 12 months from commencement of the pilot, and the results reported to Council with recommendations regarding program continuation. Evaluation measures will include incidences of sales to minors, and community feedback on the new sales model.

Recently, four VQA wine store licences have relocated to grocery stores in Surrey, White Rock, Tsawwassen and City of Langley. Staff visited two of these stores and observed a high attention to security and confirming eligible age, and that all patrons purchasing wine also bought several food products. As part of the pilot, staff will liaise with our counterparts in these jurisdictions, and the grocery store operators, to understand their experience with this new liquor retail model.

2. Manufacturers' Lounges - Serving Liquor Produced Off-Site

Background

Until July 2015 the LCLB did not allow manufacturers to serve liquor that was produced off-site (i.e. manufacturers were allowed to serve liquor only if it was made at that location)³. However, under recently-approved LCLB regulations, manufacturers may now serve off-site-produced liquor provided that it does not exceed 20 percent of the total value of liquor served in their lounge, calculated on quarterly basis. All retailed liquor products (i.e. to take away in a sealed container) must continue to be produced on-site.

Proposed Quick Start: Action

At the time of the provincial announcement, City staff initially advised that current Zoning and Development By-law provisions would require amendment before local manufacturers could avail themselves of this new LCLB provision. However, upon subsequent in-depth review, staff have determined that bylaw amendments are not needed. Accordingly, interested liquor manufacturers should be informed that they may serve off-site liquor, subject to LCLB regulations. Changes to the City's existing regulations on lounge operations (e.g. hours, size, patios) are not recommended due to concerns about the preservation of jobs-producing industrial land.

To date the lounges have been considered sufficiently small-scale to be allowed to operate with only a Business Licence for their manufacturing function (e.g. similar to cafes that retail small quantities of merchandise without a retail licence). Given their popularity and this expansion of serving capability, it may be appropriate to licence these lounges as liquor establishments, and charge fees similar to liquor primary establishments. Staff propose to consider this matter further, and consult with the industry, as part of the 2016 liquor policy review consultation.

3. Retail Sale of Liquor At Artisans' Markets

Background

In June 2014 the Province made regulatory changes to allow liquor manufacturers to retail liquor at farmer's markets. The City first piloted this new liquor sales approach in 2014, and then approved it in perpetuity earlier this year. Community feedback on the pilot has been very positive, as was the City's assessment of community fit.

In October 2015 the Province further amended the regulations to also allow retail liquor sales at artisans' markets (defined by the LCLB as "vendors who sell at the market artisanal goods of their own making")⁴. These broader regulations will enable liquor sales at holiday markets, craft markets, and certain food markets (e.g. vendor-produced ready-to-eat foods). The LCLB regulations require that:

- the artisans' market must have at least six vendors that do not sell liquor;

³ See [LCLB Policy Directive No: 15-07 Limited sale of all types of sale in manufacturer lounges](#)

⁴ For more information see [LCLB Policy Directive No: 15-11 Expansion of \(Farmer's\) Market eligibility criteria](#)

- artisans' markets may not sell used goods, or goods not produced by the vendors selling them (e.g. flea markets, vintage markets and general commercial markets are not eligible); and
- liquor vendors may offer samples, but full liquor service (for immediate consumption) would not be permitted.

Provincial regulations would allow a single-event market to operate for up to 35 consecutive days, and a recurring market may be held up to three times a week.

Proposed Quick Start: Action

The City currently licences artisans' markets on a discretionary basis, as follows:

- On private land: craft/artisan markets may obtain a time-limited business licence for a Special Event on private property at the discretion of the Chief Licence Inspector;
- On public land: craft/artisan markets may obtain a permit at the discretion of the Festival Expediting Staff Team (FEST).

Staff recommend that Council direct staff to apply these existing processes to artisans' market applications to retail liquor, subject to LCLB requirements. As with farmers' markets, artisans' markets would be allowed to host no more than three BC-based liquor manufacturers at a time. The cap of three would allow one of each general liquor type -beer, wine and spirits- and will ensure that the primary focus of the market remains on non-alcoholic goods.

As per current practice, staff will evaluate the scale and frequency of markets on a risk management basis to determine suitability of on-site liquor sales. Large events will not be considered for on-site liquor sales, however, festivals (e.g. Italian Days, Car Free Days) may seek to feature an artisanal (or farmers') market, including retail liquor, as a component of their event. Staff would evaluate these market-within-a-festival applications using a risk-management approach taking into account past performance, applicant capacity and community suitability. The limit of three liquor vendors per event would be applied, regardless of how many markets are contained within the whole event.

Implications/Related Issues/Risk (if applicable)

Financial

There are no financial implications to the City at this time.

CONCLUSION

In January 2014 the Province issued its Liquor Report, and has been steadily implementing its 73 recommendations. Although staff have commenced a parallel review of liquor policies, this work is not yet ready to be brought forward for Council consideration. In light of this, and several Provincial changes that have been well received by the industry and public, Council requested that several matters be brought forward immediately. These "quick start" actions are of a scale and complexity that enable their implementation in advance of the comprehensive liquor review that is anticipated to be completed in 2016.

* * * * *

Proposed Amendments to Liquor Store Guidelines

~~Strikethrough~~ indicates deletions

Underlined italics indicate additions

1 Application and Intent

These Guidelines are to be used in conjunction with those District Schedules of the Zoning and Development By-law and Official Development Plans which conditionally permit the liquor store use. The guidelines provide direction regarding a range of factors, including location and spacing as well as operational and administrative considerations. The applicant should consider all of these factors in the preparation of their development permit application. City staff will use the guidelines in the assessment of development permit applications for a liquor store, including redevelopment of existing liquor store premises. This assessment will be based on the characteristics of the site and surrounding area and the details of the development proposal. The permitted product range of a liquor store is defined in the Development Permit.

The intent of these Guidelines is to provide reasonable access to liquor stores while minimizing impacts on neighbourhoods.

2 Types of Liquor Stores

2.1 **Categorization**

There are ~~3~~ 4 types of liquor stores, categorized as follows:

- (a) Type 1
 - (i) A store 280m² (3000 sq.ft.) gross or less that sells any combination of beer and/or wine, including cider and coolers.
- (b) Type 2
 - (i) A store 280m² (3000 sq.ft.) gross or less that sells any combination of beer, wine and spirits.
- (c) Type 3
 - (i) A store over 280m² (3000 sq.ft.) that sells any combination of beer, wine and spirits.
 - (ii) Type 3 stores may be a maximum of 2300m² (25,000sq.ft.) gross in size.

(d) Type 4

- (i) A store that sells only wine (including sake), and is located within a Grocery Store use.

2.2 **Conversion Process**

- (a) A Type 1 store may apply to become a Type 2.

3 Location and Number of Stores

New locations for liquor stores, except Type 4, are focussed in certain identified Local Shopping Areas. These Local Shopping Areas come from adopted Community Visions, Local Area Plans, or Council Policy, and are intended to serve the daily needs of residents.

General commercial areas are commercially zoned areas that contain significant retail, but are not Local Shopping Areas because their focus is more on serving employees, tourists, or citywide/regional customers rather than nearby residents.

Local Shopping Areas are shown on the attached map #1, and their boundaries are described in the attached table. Also shown on map #1 are the general boundaries for the Central Broadway and Downtown areas.

3.1 Type 1 Stores

- (a) A maximum of one Type 1 store may locate in any identified Local Shopping Area that:
 - (i) does not have a liquor store of any type; or
 - (ii) has an existing liquor store that is restricted by provincial legislation to the sale of wine only products .
- (b) In the Downtown and Central Broadway areas, where there are no identified Local Shopping Areas, additional Type 1 stores may be located, provided each is 500m or more from any liquor store.
- (c) An existing Type 1 store in a Local Shopping Area may relocate within its Local Shopping Area. An existing Type 1 store that is in a general commercial area may relocate within its general commercial area.
- (d) Existing Type 1 stores may expand up to the 280m² (3000 sq.ft.) gross size limit.

3.2 Type 2 Stores

- (a) Existing Type 2 liquor stores may remain in their current locations, or relocate close by (i.e. within the same Local Shopping Area or general commercial area), provided that the new location meets the guidelines as well or better than the previous location.
- (b) Existing Type 2 stores may expand up to the 280m² (3000 sq.ft.) gross size limit.

3.3 Type 3 Stores

- (a) Existing Type 3 liquor stores may remain in their current locations, or may relocate close by (i.e. within the same Local Shopping Area or general commercial area), provided that the new location meets the guidelines as well or better than the previous location.

3.4 Type 4 Stores

- (a) Type 4 liquor stores may locate in any Grocery Store located inside or outside of a Local Shopping Area, provided that: i) Liquor Store is an approved use in the zone and, ii) there are not more than five Type 4 liquor stores in the City of Vancouver at any one time.

3.4 General

- (a) One store only (of ~~any~~ Type 1, 2 or 3) may locate in each of the two emerging neighbourhoods of Southeast False Creek and the East Fraserlands. The locations in these emerging neighbourhoods will not be considered until planning has proceeded to the point where commercial areas are identified and approved.
- (b) One store only (of ~~any~~ Type 1, 2 or 3) may be located in new Local Shopping Areas, identified through neighbourhood planning programs. Proposed locations in these emerging Local Shopping Areas will not be considered until these new Local Shopping Areas are defined and approved.
- (c) No liquor store of any Type should be located in the Downtown Eastside or Gastown areas where existing Council policy does not permit new liquor retail outlets (see attached Map #2).

4 Separation from Family oriented uses

- (a) No liquor store, except Type 4, should be located within 150m of a church, park, elementary or secondary school, community centre or neighbourhood house.

5 Liquor Store Operations

With regard for the primary focus of the business (range of liquor products sold), the following factors will be taken into consideration:

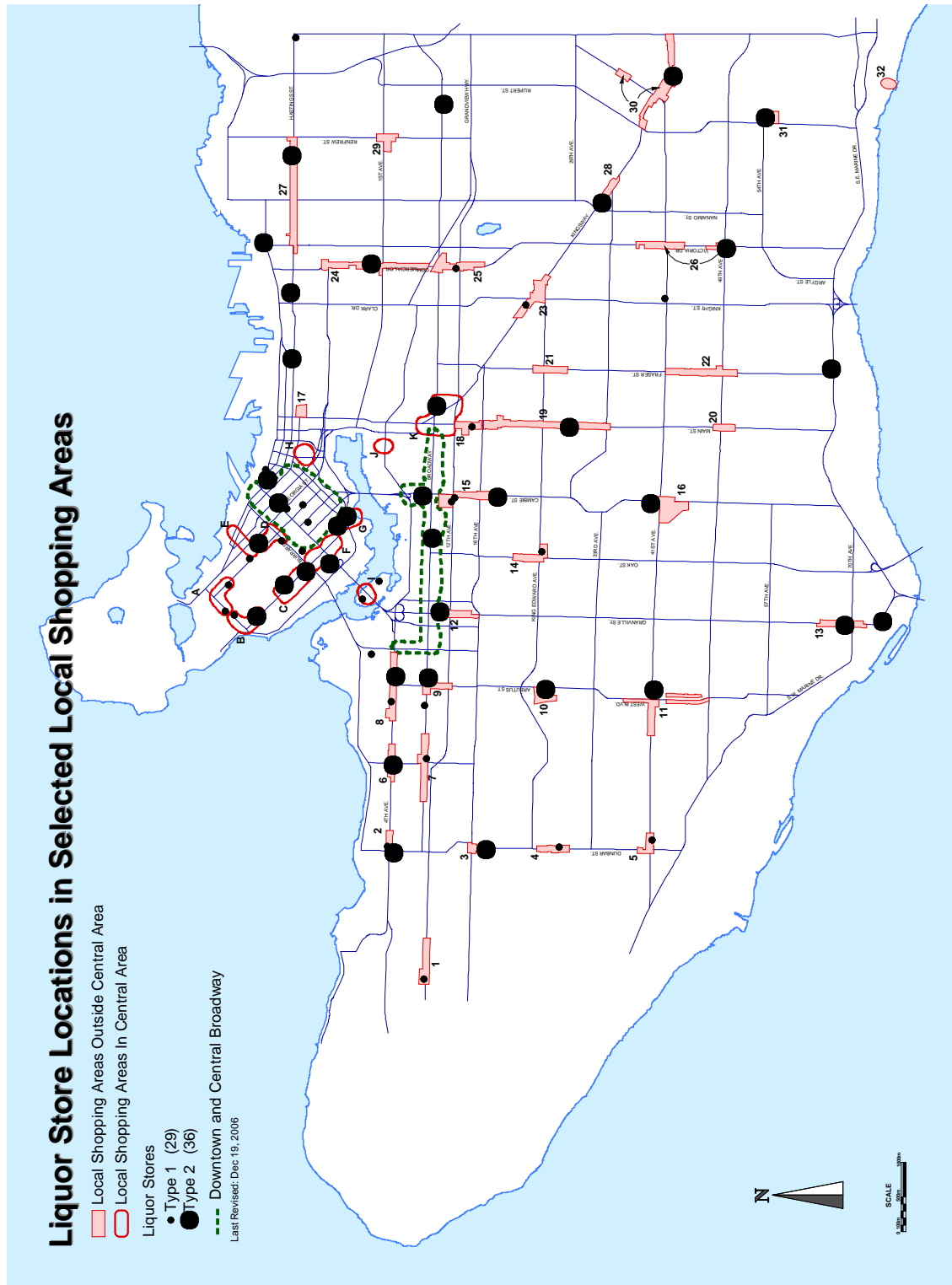
- (a) Hours of operation
- (b) The manageability of the impacts related to:
 - (i) traffic
 - (ii) parking, with particular concern for short term parking
 - (iii) loading, with an applicant provided loading operations plan detailing how and when loading will take place and how large delivery vehicles will be accommodated
- (c) Handling of bottle returns (design and operation)

6 Process and Administrative Considerations

The main process steps will be as follows:

- (a) The Applicant submits a copy of the Liquor Control and Licensing Branch (LCLB) preliminary approval letter.
- (b) Staff conduct a neighbourhood notification of affected neighbours (size of notification area will be determined for each application).
- (c) The applicant posts signage on-site, advising of the liquor retail proposal; this signage should be in keeping with the City's normal sign preparation and installation procedures.
- (d) The Development Permit may be approved for a limited period of time subject to the discretion of the Director of Planning.
- (e) Applications deemed controversial by the Director of Planning may be referred to Council for advice.

Map #1. Liquor Store Locations in Selected Local Shopping Areas

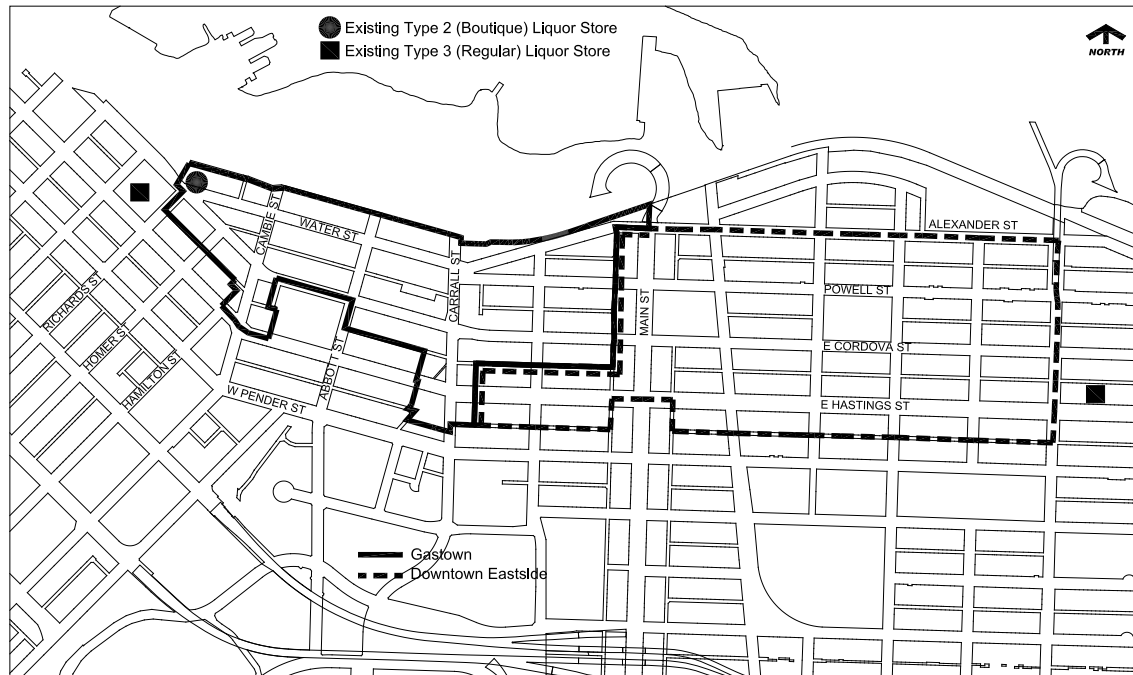


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Description of Selected Local Shopping Area (LSA) Boundaries December 2006

LSA #	Description
1	W. 10th : Tolmie to Discovery
2	W. 4th : Highbury to Collingwood
3	W. 16th N side, Alma to Dunbar and south side opposite, Dunbar 17th - 19th
4	Dunbar: lane S of King Edward to W 30th
5	Dunbar: W 39th to lane S of W 41st ; W 41st : Dunbar to Collingwood
6	W 4th : W of Bayswater to Trafalgar
7	Broadway: Collingwood to Larch
8	4th Avenue: Burrard to Balsam
9	Broadway: Vine to Arbutus; Arbutus: Broadway to 12th
10	Arbutus Village Shopping Mall
11	W. Blvd: 37th to 49th ; E. Blvd: lane N of 41st to 49th ; W. 41st : Larch to Maple
12	Granville: 10th to 16th
13	Granville: W 64th to S of 71st
14	Oak: W 21st to S of King Edward, King Edward Mall
15	Cambie: 12th to 16th , east side; w 16th to W 19th
16	Cambie: W 39th to W 43rd , Oakridge Centre
17	Main to Gore; Pender, Keefer
18	Main Street: 12th to 16th
19	Main Street: 16th to 33rd
20	Main Street: 48th to 51st
21	Fraser: 23rd to 28th
22	Fraser: 41st to 51st
23	Kingsway: Inverness to Perry, Knight: lane N of Kingsway to King Edward
24	Commercial: Lane N of Venables to Grandview Highway North
25	Commercial: Grandview Hwy. S to 16th, Broadway: E and W of Commercial
26	Victoria: 37th to 44th , 47th to 50th
27	Hastings: Semlin to Renfrew
28	Kingsway: Earles to Nanaimo
29	Renfrew: Graveley to 3rd, 1st Avenue: S side, Kaslo to Renfrew
30	Kingsway: Rupert to Boundary
31	Champlain Mall, 54th and Kerr
32	East Fraserlands
A	Denman: Nelson to Robson, Robson: Denman to Cardero
B	Denman: Nelson to Davie, Davie: Denman to Cardero
C	Davie: Jervis to Burrard
D	Robson: Bute - Burrard, Alberni: Bute - Burrard, Burrard: Smithe - Georgia
E	Bute: Robson to Coal Harbour
F	Davie: Burrard to Homer
G	Davie: Homer to False Creek & Marinaside Cres.
H	Abbott - Keefer - Pender
I	Granville Island
J	1st /2nd Avenues, Main/Quebec south of Terminal
K	Broadway/Main/Kingsway

Map #2. Downtown Eastside/Gastown Liquor Retail Restricted Area



Existing Type 2 (Boutique) Liquor Stores are located at:
375 Water Street

Existing Type 3 (Regular) Liquor Stores are located at:
555 West Hastings
769 East Hastings

Appendix B: Briefing Note from Vancouver Coastal Health

BRIEFING NOTE

Date: December 3, 2015
Prepared for: City of Vancouver
Issue: Increases in alcohol accessibility in the City of Vancouver

Background

While alcohol enjoys widespread social and cultural appreciation, its recreational use comes at a price. Alcohol causes an estimated 7.1% of all premature deaths in Canada and 9.3% of premature death and disability combined, well above the worldwide average of 4.6%.^{1,2} Given the higher sales of alcohol within British Columbia than the Canadian average, the effects on our local population is likely even larger.³

Alcohol's contribution to death and disability comes from a surprisingly broad number of diseases and injuries. Most evident are harms related to impaired driving, alcohol-related violence, alcohol addiction, and alcohol poisoning. Many consequences are far more insidious. Alcohol increases self-inflicted injuries and falls, worsens a number of psychiatric and neurological conditions, and contributes to poor health outcomes for mothers and babies.^{1,4} Alcohol quietly increases the burden of a wide range of chronic diseases, ranging from many different cancers to cardiovascular disease to gastrointestinal disease, among others.^{1,4}

Additionally, alcohol's effects are not just the problem of heavy drinkers - its effects on chronic disease, cancer and injuries are significant for moderate drinkers as well.⁵⁻⁷ Beyond the health outcomes, associated productivity losses and social disruption make this substance highly costly to Canadians - a bill up to \$600 for every single Canadian each year.^{5,8} Yet demand for alcohol can be modified - it is driven by availability, price, marketing and varying social norms. Conversely, the best alcohol policies are strongly associated with reductions in alcohol consumption.⁹

The current situation

The City of Vancouver is considering expanding accessibility to VQA wine in grocery stores. Given the evidence, we see a number of risks associated with sales of VQA wine in grocery stores. While the literature on incremental introduction into grocery stores is limited, it suggests increases in consumption.¹⁰⁻¹⁴ In particular, this retail environment may facilitate longer hours of sale, larger display size and store space devoted to liquor, and easier underage purchases. Other jurisdictions have found that grocery stores are more likely to sell to underage youth than full-service establishments.^{15,16} These concerns may be addressed by strict policies and vigorous enforcement. However, more difficult to address are other consequences: liquor advertising and promotion that are more visible to youth, increased retail competition resulting in reduced prices, and the potential to increase impulse purchases or trade-offs of alcohol for nutritious food.

⁵ Figure in 2015 dollars

Although the VQA wine proposal does limit alcohol available to wine, other jurisdictions have experienced this type of limited introduction as the “thin edge of the wedge.” Retail outlets and trade groups have successfully challenged such limited implementations in other jurisdictions, resulting in further liberalization than was originally intended.¹² Nonetheless, if there are corresponding trade-offs in accessibility the impact may be mitigated. For example, if there were to be no additional liquor licenses available for the City of Vancouver, transfer of a liquor license from a full-service liquor establishment to a grocery store with VQA wine would reduce the availability of cheaper, more potent liquor.

Research evidence

Therefore, while increasing access to alcohol can seem appealing because of increased convenience, we urge caution. There is strong scientific evidence that higher liquor outlet density is associated with increasing harm from alcohol.¹⁷⁻²¹ Consumption increases, along with injury, crime, violence, alcohol-related deaths, and other medical harms like sexually transmitted infections.

Independently of density, privatization of liquor outlets is also associated with increased harm.²² The reasons for this may include changes in hours and availability as well as changes in advertising, promotion, and degree of compliance with regulation, all of which are also associated with increased alcohol-related harm.²²⁻²⁴ Higher density of outlets also leads to greater competition, which can lead to lowering of prices - a potent driver of consumption.

British Columbia has already experienced substantial increases in alcohol consumption over the past 15 years, concurrent with increasing density of liquor outlets and privatization of liquor sales.^{25,26} Studies of the increase in private and total liquor stores in BC in the 2003-2008 period demonstrated substantial increase in hospitalizations and alcohol-related death, consistent with the evidence from other jurisdictions.^{25,27,28} One study estimated conservatively that a 20% increase in private store density increased local alcohol related mortality by 3.25%, and this likely underestimated long-term effects.²⁸

Considerations

The City of Vancouver’s submission to the Provincial Liquor Review in 2013 emphasized the City’s understanding of these important issues and its desire to retain local government input into liquor licensing and land use decisions.²⁹ It specified the importance of municipal regulation of liquor establishment location and hours as well as retention of control over the number and location of liquor retail outlets in its municipality. It pointed out that there is already very easy access to retail liquor and expressed concerns about liquor sales in grocery stores. We agree with these thoughtful recommendations and their focus on health and safety.

Unfortunately, together with the large number of other alcohol liberalization policies being implemented by the provincial government, we feel there will be a substantial aggregate increase in availability of alcohol in Vancouver. Given the piecemeal approach to releasing policy changes, it is very difficult for the City to assess the overall impact and develop an effective global policy. For example, Vancouver’s maximum density standards in zoning for liquor establishments are supported by solid evidence. However, the sum of the many recent

changes in liquor availability in a variety of licensed establishments may subvert the effectiveness of current zoning.

Recommendations

We strongly recommend the City develop a comprehensive Municipal Alcohol Policy³⁰⁻³² that reviews local alcohol-related health and safety issues and develops a global strategy within the City's jurisdiction to protect its residents. This strategy ideally would include a synthesis of all new availability measures resulting from the province's liquor review, a review of best practices for decreasing harms from alcohol, and examination of zoning by-laws and other municipal powers.

Local alcohol policies can be an important and effective way to promote moderate alcohol consumption, support community values, raise awareness of harms, influence community social norms and promote healthier communities.^{30 (pg 2)}

As highlighted above, policy areas with good evidence of reducing alcohol-related harm include:^{4,33}

- Minimum pricing indexed to inflation, differential pricing by alcohol content, both on and off-premise, including prohibition of discounting or loss-leading
- Robust licensing requirements, including hours and days of sale, density limitations, specification/standardization of drink sizes, disallowing drink promotions
- Enhanced enforcement and proactive policing directed at on and off-premise establishments
- Limitations on drinking in public spaces and at public events
- Local restrictions on marketing and promotional activities

For example, the City could consider tightening hours of sale and earlier venue closures, implement continuous re-evaluation of existing and new liquor licenses for community impact and health/safety, and restriction of alcohol sponsorship for civic events. Other examples can be found in the Centre for Addictions Research of BC's publication "Helping Municipal Governments Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms."³⁴

We strongly recommend that the City wait to implement changes to accessibility, even in pilot project form, until such a plan is in place. Once all the provincial changes are public, the City can respond with a comprehensive approach to implementation of changes and mitigation of harm. We would be happy to help the City to develop such a strategy and are confident the City will continue to treat the health and well-being of its residents as paramount.

References

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