

Top Cop Opposes New Bar for Gramercy Park North

By Andrew Park

A Community Board 6 committee that supported a full liquor license for a proposed high-end wine bar in Gramercy last summer backtracked on its former vote.

CB6's Business Affairs & Street Activities Committee passed a negative recommendation last Thursday after weighing public testimonies, including one from the local precinct commander, on a proposed establishment at 38 Gramercy Park North. This was after a discrepancy in the developer's application came to light.

In July 2009, CB6 originally backed applicants J.P. Miller and Cole Miller — operators of posh restaurant The House on East 17th Street — for their State Liquor Authority application though an admitted error on calculating the 500-foot rule called for a review.

"It was basically done incorrectly," J.P. Miller told committee members.

A mistake in determining whether there were more than three bars within 500 feet of the proposed premises, or the 500-foot rule, on the Millers' application triggered the committee to review whether to stake the Millers' pending license in a mandatory SLA hearing scheduled for next week.

According to community rights lawyer Barry Mallin, nine liquor-licensed establishments were obviously within 500 feet of 38 Gramercy Park North.

"They can't plead ignorance here," said Mallin. "I don't buy this."

And nearly 300 Gramercy residents represented by Mallin also aren't buying it.

Slighted residents began rallying in January contending they had not had a chance to speak their concerns although CB6 fully met its notice requirements.

Given the chance at the meeting, Gramercy residents said they saw no reason to add a bar to Third Avenue nightlife, which, they said, has already congested the neighborhood with drunken patrons, noise and traffic.

Fear of even more traffic on East 21st Street also spread to police.

In a rare move at the committee meeting, the 13th Precinct's top cop went on record saying a bar at 38 Gramercy Park North would add to East 21st Street's one-way

gridlock.

"I've never been down here before to oppose any restaurant or bar, but I'm very much against this," Deputy Inspector Timothy Beaudette told committee members. "The traffic on 21st Street is very, very heavy. I can't be more against the location."

The 13th's stationhouse, which sits across Third Avenue from the Millers' planned wine bar, parks nearly 80 percent of its fleet, or 16 to 17 police vehicles, along East 21st Street. Beaudette's concern was keeping this stretch clear for police responders.

"We also have the Emergency Services Unit there. The Emergency Services Unit are the guys we call when we need help police officers," Beaudette said. "Their trucks are housed right next door to me so we need this area to be open."

And East 21st Street is already the precinct's most heavily trafficked corridor, Beaudette said. A cluster of Gramercy bars and restaurants as well as nearby clubs stretching all the way to Seventh Avenue brought "tons" of taxis and limos on the weekends.

Having the southbound Lexington Avenue merge into East 21st Street near a hotel also helped fuel heavy traffic.

"Right now it doesn't back up to the precinct," said Beaudette. "But if we put an establishment here, if it's a restaurant a bar or something else that generates a lot of people, there's going to be cabs."

However, the wine bar, which would fit into the basement of the 38 Gramercy Park North co-op, received the favor of residents there.

38 Gramercy North landlord and co-op president Lance Levins said the building's board had voted unanimously approving the Millers' 15-year lease and proposed use of the space.

The community opposition, Levins said, was "based on erroneous assumptions."

The Millers have sunk over \$600,000 into the project based on the former CB6 resolution and expect to invest another \$162,000.

So far, they have promised no live music, no dancing and to dedicate a staff to direct leaving patrons toward Third Avenue.

An offer from the Millers also still stands to meet with the community to hash out the differences before the scheduled SLA hearing at the agency's East Harlem headquarters Tuesday, March 16 at 11 a.m.