

## Resistance: LA Communities Demanding Control Over Sale of Alcohol in their Neighborhood

Sarah Blanch / 24 April 2017



VOICES--The South Los Angeles Area Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (SLAAANC) voted to join the Westside Regional Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (WRAC) and dozens of other neighborhood councils and public health and safety organizations in supporting a motion to the Los Angeles City Council to reassert local community control over how alcohol is sold and served at new bars, nightclubs, liquor stores and other prospective alcohol retailers.

The motion calls for the reinstatement of “alcohol-specific conditions” on permits issued by the City, which enable community members to negotiate reasonable standards around how alcohol is sold and served, including hours of alcohol sales, types of products sold, drink specials, marketing to youth and other practices. Utilizing local conditions is the means by which local residents and other stakeholders, including LAPD, neighborhood councils and city council members, can mitigate problems that stem from retail alcohol establishments.

For decades, the City allowed community members to negotiate alcohol-specific conditions with new alcohol businesses, but in recent years reversed this practice, not only disallowing such conditions, but also systematically removing them from all existing alcohol licenses.

“The recent position by the City severely disempowers local communities and undermines public health, safety and quality of life for residents across LA,” stated Jean Frost, West Adams Neighborhood Council and SLAANC board member. “On principle alone, the current practice must be reversed, and the groundswell of votes in favor of this conditions motion is a call to the City Council to step up for neighborhood quality of life by doing just that.”

Cities and counties throughout the state allow and routinely utilize alcohol-specific conditions on local permits to help minimize alcohol-related problems associated with the rapidly growing number of restaurants, bars and other alcohol retailers. Without the ability to negotiate how new businesses sell and serve alcohol at a local level, through the planning and zoning process, community members are forced to

do so at the state level through the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, which takes longer and places more burden on community members.

“For decades, the City of Los Angeles allowed conditions to be placed on the sale of alcohol under its land use and planning authority,” said Sarah Blanch, Venice resident with Westside Impact Project. “There is absolute legal precedent for local control. Asking us to negotiate at the state level is an undue burden and really suppresses community voices.”

The motion approved last night by SLAANC also calls on the City Council to cease the City’s new practice of removing existing alcohol-specific conditions from local permits. According to the motion’s organizers, these conditions are arrived at by a substantial consensus process between the new business owners and neighboring residents.

“These hard-fought agreements are being actively disregarded and stripped from the permit without any notification from the City whatsoever,” observed Frost.

Organizers also say that the ability to negotiate conditions at the local level is good for businesses by streamlining the process for developers and allowing community members to say yes to projects they would otherwise oppose.

“Alcohol-specific conditions negotiated through local planning and zoning departments are a ‘path to yes’ for businesses,” said Dana Sherrod of the Institute for Public Strategies, one of the public health agencies championing the initiative. “Through local conditions, LAPD, Council Offices and community members can negotiate with businesses to reach agreements that allow projects to move forward.”

So far, a total of 16 neighborhood and community councils have approved the measure. More than a dozen community organizations have also publically endorsed the conditions motion, including Children’s Hospital, Alcohol Justice and Behavioral Health Services.

Advocates for the motion say its recent successes underscore the high level of concern residents across the City have about maintaining quality of life in Los Angeles neighborhoods in the face of the proliferation of bars, restaurants and liquor stores.

A 2016 Los Angeles County Department of Public Health report, “Alcohol Outlet Density & Alcohol-Related Consequences by City and Community in Los Angeles County,” demonstrated a strong link between many public health and safety problems — including violent crime, emergency room admissions and hospitalizations — and alcohol retailers. According to the study, 12 of 15 Los Angeles City Council districts rank in the highest tier for their incidence of three or more different alcohol-related problems: violent crimes, vehicle crashes, deaths, emergency department visits and hospitalizations.

Organizers are confident the support for the initiative from community groups and neighborhood councils, public health agencies and social service agencies citywide will speed the motion’s path to consideration by the City Council.

*(Sarah Blanch speaks for The Westside Impact Project. The WIP aims to reduce alcohol problems in Santa Monica, Venice and Westwood at the community level. The Project is funded by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and directed by the Institute for Public Strategies, a nonprofit organization utilizing evidence-based strategies to help communities make lasting improvements in health, safety and quality of life. Project implementation assistance is provided by CLARE Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery services. To learn more, please contact the Westside Impact Coalition at **310-215-9924** or by email at [impact@publicstrategies.org](mailto:impact@publicstrategies.org).)*