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City of Olympia
Executive Department

CC: COUNCIL
STEVE
JAY
KEITH
BRIAN W.

November 28, 2012

Dear City Council Members:

Thank you for acting last spring to designate an Alcohol Impact Area and discourage the sale of high-alcohol-content beverages for off-premises consumption in downtown Olympia. I can't attend your December 11 meeting, so I'm writing to urge you to take the next step toward this goal, a petition to the state Liquor Control Board for a ban on such sales in the area.

I live near downtown and I go there most days for one reason or another. As a citizen member of the Olympia Downtown Association and its safety committee, I served on a task force helping the city staff to monitor compliance with your request that these products not be sold. When we began our work in the spring, five downtown stores were selling them. When the six-month voluntary period ended, the same stores were still selling them. Other downtown stores with retail beer and wine licenses did not sell those products, and still don't.

My assignment was to visit the Capitol Lake Grocery on Capitol Way each month to see which listed products, if any, were being offered for sale. From April to August, I saw no significant change in what was offered. I also observed several sales while in the store. In mid-August, the store owner, Perry Park, told me he did not want me any longer to monitor the products on his shelves, and I have not been there since. I have no reason to think he has stopped selling these products, or will ever do so voluntarily.

High-alcohol beverages seem to be a substantial part of the inventory and sales of all five downtown stores that sell them. Since they compete in the same market, I don't think it's realistic to expect any store to stop selling them unless all do, and I don't see any reason to expect them to act together to end such sales. That means a mandatory ban, enacted by the Liquor Control Board at your request, is the only way to accomplish your goal.

After I was prevented from monitoring Capitol Lake Grocery, Brian Wilson asked me to walk through downtown alleys each week to look for cans and bottles of high-alcohol beverages. I did this for about two months and found numerous cans of Dog Bite, Four Loko, Steel Reserve, Hurricane High Gravity, and other listed products. Because the city's Downtown Project includes more frequent alley cleanups, I didn't find the large quantities your staff has described to you in the past. But it's clear to me that public consumption of high-alcohol drinks continues to be a serious problem downtown.

I drink, and I understand that alcohol is part of our culture. But I'm astonished that anyone can buy, anywhere, the equivalent of four shots of 80-proof in a single can for under two dollars. Such products seem to have no purpose beyond feeding addiction, on the streets or elsewhere. The people who drink them in our streets and alleys need help, and public resources for detoxification, treatment, and other needed services have declined as the need has grown. I hope you will address this problem with other local governments and the state. But motivation is the beginning of change in anyone's life, and there's less motivation to change when it's so easy to feed an addiction. You can take an important step toward a cleaner, safer downtown by asking the Liquor Control Board to prohibit sales of these products.

Thank you very much for your consideration and all the work you are doing to improve our downtown.

Sincerely,



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