



April 7, 2024

To the Highland Park City Council:

The Illinois Restaurant Association, a nonprofit organization founded in 1914, is the voice of the restaurant and hospitality industry in the State of Illinois.

Our organization is writing to urge the members of the Highland Park City Council to reverse the City's archaic and undemocratic ordinance Section 119.320 (the "Ordinance"). The Ordinance does not serve any viable contemporary public interest. It was enacted by the City of Highland Park at a time when Illinois statutes, dating back to the end of Prohibition, prevented local City Council members from receiving liquor licenses. The Illinois legislature has since modernized its laws as applied to municipalities like Highland Park, but Highland Park has not yet updated the Ordinance.

Small business owners who operate restaurants with liquor licenses represent an important segment of the community. There are 26,193 eating and drinking place locations in Illinois. We are the largest private sector employer in the State, accounting for 561,400 jobs, which is 9% of the State's total employment. These business owners should not be singled out for exclusion from service on local city councils.

In Highland Park's most recent City Council election, more votes were cast for Jeff Hoobler than any other candidate. Mr. Hoobler owns a restaurant with a liquor license and his business interests were a key feature of his campaign. The election results represent the strongest possible statement of what the community considers good public policy to be. The Ordinance, if it continues to exist, would take that decision out of the hands of the voters. It also would continue to deprive individuals like Mr. Hoobler from the opportunity to serve in local government. Our Association believes that a restaurant owner with a liquor license must be given the same rights to serve the community as other business owners, and the Ordinance should be amended accordingly.

Some have argued that the sole purpose of such an amendment would be "to benefit a council member." Nothing could be farther from the truth. Amending the Ordinance would benefit the public at large by allowing broader participation in local government. Communities benefit when they are open to a wider and more diverse range of candidates. Voters – including all future voters – should be allowed to make decisions regarding the benefits and detriments of holding a liquor license or any other type of business interest while serving.

On behalf of the Illinois Restaurant Association, I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reconsider your earlier vote and amend the Ordinance give local business owners, including restaurateurs and liquor license holders, a seat at the table.

Sincerely,

Sam Toia
President & CEO
Illinois Restaurant Association