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Liquor sales approved at new Irish pub, despite opposition

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WESTCHASE — Brew options abound at World of Beer.

Patrons sip sake at Zen Bistro.

And now a new Irish restaurant and pub will expand the mix of spirits in Westchase.

Despite opposition by many in the community, Steve Luce, the county's land-use hearing officer, has approved a waiver submitted by Maloney's Local Irish Pub to sell liquor.

The pub is at 9540 W Linebaugh Ave., on the southeast corner of Westchase Town Center. The spot was formerly occupied by Pete's Steakhouse Italian Grill.

Under the new zoning, Maloney's will be allowed to sell liquor. Previously, the site was zoned only for beer and wine.

No specific evidence showed that serving liquor at Maloney's, versus serving beer and wine only, would create "greater significant adverse impacts on adjacent properties," according to Luce's report.

But neighbors say the town center is already the culprit for drunken activity and more hard liquor will make it worse.

"There's loitering, drunken behavior, urination in our yards, litter, loud music, fighting, trespassing and all the other goodies that come with drunkenness," said Michael Niemis, president of the Townhomes of West Park Village Association.

Niemis, whose neighborhood is closest to the town center, said he was disappointed with the county's decision.

"They just ignored the school system, Westchase Community Association and our Townhomes Association," Niemis said.

In July, the Westchase Community Association Board voted 4-3 to oppose hard liquor sales at Maloney's.

The Hillsborough School Board also voted against the measure. County guidelines say a business selling alcohol can't be within 500 feet of a school. Maloney's, however, would be about 268 feet away from Westchase Elementary, which sits on the other side of Linebaugh. As a matter of policy, the School Board always opposes waivers to the 500-foot rule, said David Borisenko, the school district's manager of planning and facilities siting.

Proponents of the new pub say it's a step in the right direction for the community as a whole.

"We need to support businesses in that Westchase Town Center area," said John Schmidt, a Westchase Community Association board director who voted in favor of the pub. "If we don't, that becomes a ghost town with empty buildings and it's a distraction from our community."

Maloney's is slated to open in late October or early November, said Mark Bentley, an attorney for the pub's owners. "The community can be assured that our client will respect all the laws and regulations regarding the operation of the business, including parking and noise mitigation," Bentley said.

The inside of the pub will be about 3,500 square feet — 1,000 of which is dedicated to the kitchen. There will also be a 629-square-foot patio, which wraps the building on the north and east sides.

Maloney's will feature live music on certain nights, mainly with singles and duos performing, Bentley said.

The pub will not feature an outside bar, nor will amplified music play outside, according to county zoning records.

An early draft of Maloney's menu features bar staples with an Irish twist, including Emerald Isle sashimi tuna and a Guinness Burger; along with traditional cuisine like shepherd's pie.

Some question what effect the pub's opening will have on neighboring World of Beer, which had considered applying for a hard liquor license prior to its opening in 2007. But owner Scott Zepp changed his mind once he received opposition from the community. Now that Maloney's will be able to sell liquor, some fear World of Beer could be next.

But Zepp said he has no current plans to apply for a hard liquor permit. "We just really love the Westchase area, and when they told us they didn't want World of Beer to have liquor, we said 'okay,' " Zepp said.

If he ever changed his mind, it would only be fair for the county to approve it, he said.

"But it doesn't mean we're going to," Zepp said.

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