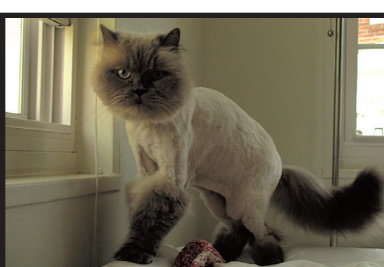


news to us



CORKED

How a suburban politician is getting between you and your booze

BY PAUL MCMORROW | PAUL@WEEKLYDIG.COM

Thirsty locals, entrepreneurs and city politicians, take note: If you fuck with a man's boat, you pay the price. Also, government is stupidly inefficient; suburban politicians know what you need better than your mayor does; and ten grand is small change.

These are the lessons we're learning as the city of Boston's quest to create new beer and wine licenses enters its ninth month.

Back in October, Mayor Thomas Menino filed legislation that would create 30 new beer and wine licenses—the kind most used by the small, independent restaurants that are frequently credited with revitalizing Boston neighborhoods. After hearing tales of woe from restaurateurs who couldn't get licenses because the city didn't have any to give out (or who paid blood money to buy somebody else's permit), the city council decided to double Menino's original request and create 60 licenses. The proposal was unanimously adopted in December, signed by the mayor, and sent to the State House for routine approval.

State law caps the number of beer and wine and full-liquor licenses Massachusetts cities and towns can give

told the *Boston Courier* last week, "but 60 is excessive. We think 30 or 40 is more defensible."

So, responding to Morrissey's objections, Menino, Morrissey and Senate President Robert Travaglini have been trying to rework Boston's license request. Last Wednesday, believing such a compromise had been reached, Menino filed last-minute legislation with the council, asking for 40 new beer and wine licenses and 15 full-liquor licenses; five of those liquor licenses would be reserved for hotels. A number of councilors praised the compromise, and the council approved it and sent it back to Morrissey's committee.

Where, apparently, it'll be greeted coolly. After telling the *Courant* that he objected to the size of the city's request, Morrissey told the *Dig* that he objected to language preventing the legislature from altering its contents.

In the course of a rambling defense, Morrissey also cited the city's size ("Boston is so big. They already have so many licenses"), concern for existing restaurants ("Does Allston want more licenses? Does Newbury Street really want more? Local restaurants probably don't want more competition") and the need to pro-

ferred to licenses being sold on the secondary market for upwards of \$10,000 as "short money."

Why the obfuscation? Did Menino think he had secured a compromise when he really hadn't? Or is something else at play?

One hot rumor has it that, by playing games with the council and the mayor, Morrissey is exacting a measure of political revenge on the city. State House watchers say that Morrissey, an avid boater, is still pissed about a 2005 council-led crackdown on out-of-town-ers who moored their boats in Boston Harbor without paying the city mooring fees (somewhere between \$9,300 and \$18,500 for Morrissey's 30-foot powerboat, on top of his yacht club fees in Quincy). Delaying passage of the city's alcohol licensure bill would be a blow for Morrissey and his boating constituents against Boston's nautical tyranny, insiders say.

But regardless of whether the current fracas is about protecting suburban restaurants, avenging South Shore boat-ers or just about haggling over numbers, local pols say the fight shows just how broken the state's municipal home rule system (which may require city councilors to ask the state for permission to piss) really is.

"So often, somebody who's not directly elected by the people of Boston thwart the collective will of the people, the city council and the mayor," says City Councilor Steve Murphy.

"They have no business needing to approve a law like this," Councilor Mike Ross adds. "It's preposterous. Of course we should defer to them on larger issues ... but to have them decide whether or not a restaurant can open—to kiss somebody's butt up there to get it done—is a real problem. If the public knew everything that went into getting a license, they'd be disgusted." ☒

Morrissey doesn't like the city's request for more beer and wine licenses, so he has spent the past nine months making sure it gathers dust on a desk somewhere.

out, so the first stop for municipalities looking to expand their allotment is the legislature's Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure, co-chaired by Quincy Senator Michael Morrissey. Morrissey doesn't like the city's request, so he has spent the past nine months making sure it gathers dust on a desk somewhere.

"No one is blocking anything," he

tect suburban restaurants from Boston's competition ("The opinions of people outside Boston are important, too") as reasons why the city's request might still be defeated. He then added that he wanted the legislature to be able to dole out licenses to specific neighborhoods or even developments—a usurpation of the Boston Licensing Board's authority (and probably illegal, anyway), and also

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