

ALCOHOL CONTROL COMMISSION

Monday, February 20, 2023

The Alcohol Control Commission met at 5:00 p.m. this date in the City Commission Chambers of City Hall, 601 Broad Street. Monica Sheppard, Chair was present, along with Steve VanMeter, Harold Morgan, and Commissioner McDaniel (assigned to the ACC for 2023). John Kendrick and Billy Cooper were absent. Also present were Rome Police Major Chris DeHart and Assistant City Attorney Stephen Moseley.

Minutes – December 20, 2022

The minutes of the December 20, 2022, meeting, as submitted in writing by the Secretary, were approved by unanimous consent. There was no meeting held in January 2023.

Combat Market – 214 Broad Street

The application of Brandon Pledger, owner and manager of Combat Market, 214 Broad Street was presented. Mr. Pledger requested that a new beer, wine, and liquor pouring license be issued to him at that location. Along with Mr. Pledger's license request, was also an application for a food/drink ratio variance. Mr. Pledger explained that he does not wish to establish a restaurant at this location but would like to use other products to meet the food/drink ratio, as allowed by the Rome Alcohol Code.

Mr. Pledger explained that he would like to establish a bar at his current retail store which primarily sells coffee, general merchandise, and firearms. Pledger elaborated that his particular line of coffee is now being sold at national retailers and he is not able to compete with their pricing. There have been other coffee shops opened in Rome and the downtown area that have also made profitability more difficult. Mr. Pledger feels like a small bar at this location would be beneficial, and he stated that he plans to specialize in "custom cocktails". He would be open Wednesday – Saturday from approximately 11:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m. Mr. Pledger has experience in the alcohol industry, and he currently serves as the security provider for 3 alcohol establishments. Pledger also stated he has experience as a bartender. Although no longer a police officer, Mr. Pledger maintains his POST certification. The Combat Market is approximately 1500 square feet, and he plans to operate this establishment with himself and two other employees, more if needed.

There was considerable discussion regarding Mr. Pledger's request for a food/drink ratio variance. Rome City Code does allow the Alcohol Control Commission and the Rome City Commission to approve variances in which a business would use products other than meals (prepared, served, and consumed on the premises) to meet the 50/50 ratio.

Currently, there is one other establishment in Rome that has a variance in which premium tobacco products are used to offset distilled spirit sales. Beer and wine sales are not factored into the food/drink ratio computation. Mr. Pledger stated that firearm sales at his

establishment would end by 7:00 p.m. each day. He assured the Alcohol Control Commission that loaded firearms are not allowed in the establishment and that firearm sales would not occur to someone who was intoxicated. He described his gun sales as primarily custom guns. Mr. Pledger indicated that he may call his establishment the Alibi Speakeasy Lounge and Combat Market.

After further discussion by the Alcohol Control Commission members, Mr. VanMeter moved to approve the license request and recommend to the Rome City Commission that Mr. Pledger's food/drink ratio variance application be approved. Mr. Morgan seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

Mr. Pledger was told this matter will appear before the Rome City Commission at their February 27, 2023, meeting. Mr. Pledger should be present at the meeting and prepared to make a presentation and answer questions.

Steel N Spirits – 409 Broad Street

The application of Nathan Roberts, owner and manager of Steel N Spirits, 409 Broad Street was presented. Mr. Roberts is requesting a new liquor pouring license be issued to him at that location and that a food/drink ratio variance be approved. This variance request is to allow the sale of salvaged steel products to meet the 50/50 ratio.

Mr. Roberts has appeared before the Alcohol Control Commission during 2022 to make this request. At one of the ACC meetings, Mr. Roberts brought examples of the salvaged steel products he plans to sell. Mr. Roberts had originally requested the 409 Broad Street location and the 205 North Avenue, however, at this point, Mr. Roberts would like to proceed with only the 409 Broad Street location.

Roberts explained that he plans to have distilled spirits only and specialize in high end cocktails. His establishment is small in size, constituting approximately 800 square feet and there is an outdoor courtyard at the rear of his building. Mr. Roberts does not have room for a restaurant at this location and would not like to operate with that business model.

Based on previous conversations at the Alcohol Control Commission meetings with Mr. Roberts and the comments today, Mr. VanMeter moved to approve the license request and recommend to the City Commission that Mr. Roberts food/drink ratio variance be approved. Mr. Morgan seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

Mr. Roberts was told that this item would appear on the February 27, 2023, Rome City Commission agenda for action and he should plan to be at that meeting to make a presentation and answer questions.

Small Bar Ordinance.

Secretary Smith informed the ACC members that the small bar ordinance that had been previously recommended for adoption by the Alcohol Control Commission had been denied by the Rome City Commission. In January 2023, the Rome City Commission voted 5-4 to deny the ordinance amendment. Monica Sheppard was present at that Rome City Commission meeting and participated in the discussion.

The ACC once again, discussed this ordinance which would allow certain bars to operate without the need for a food/drink ratio. These establishments would be required to operate with the following restrictions:

1. Contain a maximum of 1800 square feet of customer accessible interior space. If outdoor customer accessible space is provided, a maximum of 2200 square of indoor and outdoor space is allowed.
2. These establishments may pour beer, wine, or liquor between the hours of 10:00 a.m. – 10:30 p.m., Monday – Saturday. No beer, wine, or liquor may be consumed on the premises between the hours of 11:00 p.m. – 11:00 a.m., Monday – Saturday. Sunday pouring is not permitted.
3. These establishments may not obtain permits to pour liquor “off premises”.
4. Any type of admission fee is prohibited.
5. The Alcohol Control Commission must approve all entertainment.

It was noted that one of the discussion points at the City Commission meeting concerned the fee that would be charged for a small bar license. Since these establishments would be smaller in size and operate with limited hours, it was suggested that they would be charged a lower liquor pouring rate. The ACC was reminded that Rome’s liquor pouring licenses are volume based and Smith noted that it does seem appropriate that the small bars should pay a lower base fee for their liquor pouring license. Commissioner McDaniel emphasized the importance of support for this concept by Rome’s Downtown Development Authority. While the ordinance is intended to be applicable City wide, the downtown area would most likely be impacted the most.

Mr. VanMeter moved to recommend approval of the small bar ordinance to the Rome City Commission with the condition that the Downtown Development Authority support this concept and that a lower base fee be implemented for the small bars. Mr. Morgan seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

Police Report

Rome Police Major Chris DeHart was present and presented the police report for the previous two months. Mr. DeHart only reported on one incident which involved a fight at 227 Broad Street and resulted in an individual being arrested. Mr. DeHart reported that the establishment handled this disturbance appropriately and called for the Rome Police Department.

Mr. DeHart has been assigned to the Alcohol Control Commission as part of his new position as Rome Police Major. Mr. DeHart will be replacing previous ACC assignee Major Paul Webber who retired.

Adjourn

With there being no further business, Chair Sheppard adjourned the meeting at 5:40 p.m.

Joseph F. Smith
City Clerk