

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Asking for trouble?

Pottstown Council will conduct a public hearing 7:30 tomorrow night at its Committee of the Whole meeting on a request by the Montgomery Elks Lodge, 605 Walnut Street, to obtain a liquor license.

Under Pennsylvania law, once a municipality reaches a threshold of one liquor license for every 3,000 residents, the municipality must approve all subsequent requests for additional licenses.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

Pottstown already has oodles of restaurants, bars, and social clubs with liquor licenses, so Council is required to decide whether the Montgomery Elks' application to obtain a liquor license now held by the Gilbertsville Fire Co. moves forward.

The Montgomery Elks previously held a liquor license, but the license expired and was not renewed by the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board in September 2014.

Earlier that year, the LCB conducted hearings after the state police Bureau of Liquor Control found 15 violations at the Montgomery Elks between April 30, 2013 and April 30, 2014.

The Elks Club made headlines after a man was shot (he lived) and two Pottstown police officers were assaulted by a crowd outside the Elks Lodge in the early morning hours of Feb. 2, 2014. Police from three counties responded to the melee. Both Pottstown officers were injured and one was on

disability for four months after the incident.

During the previous 27 months, Pottstown Police had filed more than 230 incident reports for the Elks Lodge, according to documents obtained by The Mercury under a Right to Know request.

"You won't find that number of calls anywhere else or to any one address (in the borough)," a Pottstown police captain said at the time.

The administrative law judge for the liquor control board said the testimony at the hearings "clearly establishes a pattern of conduct" that shows the lodge was "disregarding its responsibility to monitor outside and adjacent to the licensed premises."

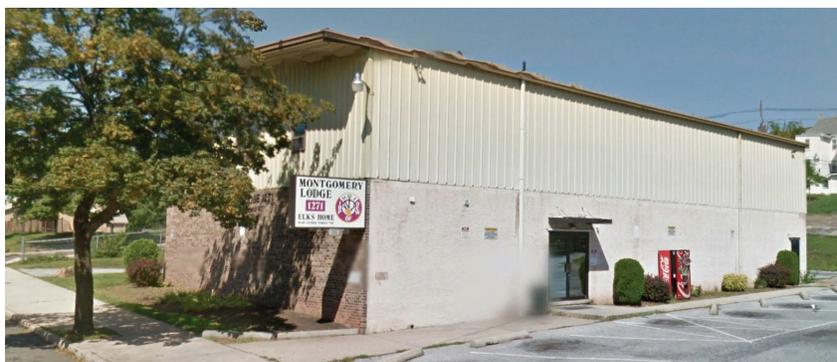
Pottstown is already awash with liquor. It has eight bars/restaurants and seven social clubs with liquor licenses, plus beer distributors and breweries.

Wherever liquor is served, there is potential for problems to spill out into the street.

In fact, the Pottstown Area Industrial Development Authority bought two problem bars on the 100 block of High Street years ago simply to shut them down. It was necessary before the block could be revitalized.

With a police force already stretched thin, should Pottstown Council take a chance on more problems?

For the last five years, the Montgomery Elks Lodge has provided a place for people to socialize without liquor. It can continue to do so.



MONTGOMERY ELKS LODGE at Walnut and Warren streets, which lost its liquor license in 2014 after numerous liquor violations and a slew of incidents involving Pottstown Police, including a melee in which two officers were injured, now wants its license back. Pottstown Council will decide whether to let the application go forward.