



Overview of Mayor Greg Nickels' Proposed Nightlife Premises Legislation

Background

Many Seattle neighborhoods, including downtown, have experienced significant growth in the number of residents, businesses and late-night entertainment clubs. This growth of nightclubs has contributed greatly to the economic vitality and cultural vibrancy of the city.

Mayor Greg Nickels' actions throughout his tenure have demonstrated his desire for a vibrant and safe nightlife scene and music industry in Seattle. He worked to get rid of the Teen Dance Ordinance, open the city's Music Office, fund an economic impact study, support The Vera Project, include music and clubs as a business category in citywide economic development decisions, and has time and time again stood by venues when they have been attacked by people trying to blame violence on music.

Sometimes, due to close proximity, conflicts arise between club owners and patrons, and nearby residents and other businesses. Common complaints center on public disturbances, large crowds and liquor control law violations. As Seattle continues to grow and thrive, it's important for the city of Seattle to adapt its practices and regulations to promote that growth, protect public safety, and make sure all voices are heard and respected.

Acknowledging that a vibrant, not a violent, nightlife can contribute to the city's cultural and economic vitality and diversity, and that early intervention can prevent many issues from becoming chronic problems, Mayor Nickels formed the Nightlife Task Force in October 2005. The task force advises the mayor on coordinating, planning and regulating nightclubs throughout the city, while balancing the needs of a vibrant and healthy nighttime entertainment industry with the needs of residents and other businesses who share the same neighborhoods. The task force is composed of club owners, neighborhood businesses and residents.

New Regulations

The mayor's proposed legislation provides certainty and clarity to neighbors and nightclub and bar owners. It focuses the nightlife premise definition to get at the problems most people have been concerned about. Under the mayor's proposal, the city will now codify a regulatory system developed with the advice of residents and nightclub and bar owners:

- The definition of a "nightlife premise" is tied to occupant density, alcohol service, and hours of operation.
- Nightlife premises must adhere to their occupancy load limits, which eliminates overcrowding – often a cause of problems and a significant public safety hazard.
- Nightlife premises must limit amplified noise to reasonable, clearly defined levels.
- Nightlife premises must patrol for litter within 50 feet surrounding the club at closing and continuing for at least 30 minutes after closing.
- Nightlife premises must return all calls within 24 hours of receipt.

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- Penalties for violations range from fines to suspensions, depending on the gravity of the offense.
- A seven-member mayoral-appointed Nightlife Premises Advisory Board will mediate disputes between nightlife premises and neighbors. Board members will consist of nightlife premises licensees, neighborhood residents and other interested individuals. The board will prepare an annual report on the effectiveness of the ordinance and offer any recommendations it may have. Board members will also work with regulated clubs to help them come into compliance with the new requirements.

In addition, the mayor is committed to making it easier for nightclubs to work with the city by:

- Creating and maintaining a “Nightlife Premises Guideline Handbook” with all current requirements for operating a late-night establishment.
- Designating a city office to serve as a liaison between nightlife premise owners and city departments.
- Providing training opportunities for nightlife premise security personnel by the Seattle Police Department.
- Eliminating the need for individually negotiated good neighbor agreements.

The new nightlife premises regulations, coupled with the work of Seattle’s Joint Assessment Team, which makes sure premises are up to code, and stepped up tracking of city code and liquor license violations, should help ensure that Seattle’s growing number of clubs and bars are safe, vibrant places to have fun without undue impacts on Seattle’s neighborhoods.