

Council Shoots Down Walgreens' Bid To Sell Alcohol

Vote of planning commission upheld due to concerns about student access to wine and beer.

Source: Menlo Park Patch

By Austin Walsh

August 24, 2011

The Menlo Park City Council gave the final denial to a request by Walgreens to be allowed to sell beer and wine at its store at 643 Santa Cruz Avenue, ending weeks of contentious debate.

The pharmacy had appealed a previous 4-3 vote by the planning commission to deny a permit, but the council unanimously supported the decision.

"I think it's important for a drug store to be a drug store, and just provide that particular service," said Councilwoman Kelly Fergusson.

The request has stirred heated argument among speakers at previous meetings, but no one addressed the council last night.

Walgreens legal counsel Dan Kramer argued that the retailer should be allowed to market beer and alcohol, partly because that would level the playing field between the pharmacy and its competitors in vying for a portion of the revenue that comes from alcohol sales.

"Walgreens just wants the same opportunity to carry the same products," he said, adding that chains in town including Safeway sell many of the same products, and enjoy permission to sell alcohol.

Last year, the council allowed BevMo, a warehouse-style alcohol retail chain, to move into Menlo Park on El Camino Real, near the Walgreens store, Kramer said.

Local independent retailers fought Walgreens' bid, fearful that it would hamper their own profit margins.

Country Corner market, Tri-E-Z Foods & Liquor, and Sharon Heights Wines and Liquor have filed statements with the city to voice their

opposition.

The California Department of Alcohol Beverage Control has imposed a moratorium on more alcohol permits in Menlo Park, Councilwoman Kirsten Keith said.

Other council members cited the risk to students.

The pharmacy is located near Hillview Middle School and Menlo-Atherton High School, and is frequently patronized by students, Councilman Peter Ohtaki said.

The Santa Cruz Avenue Walgreens had purchased the liquor permit from a company in Pacifica.

Stores wishing to sell alcohol must first obtain a permit, then have that permit approved by the appropriate city government. But the permit does not need to be purchased in the same city where the store wishes to sell alcohol.