

Commission won't let grocery store sell liquor

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Zoning Commission Larry Badiner said he thought the addresses 60-80 Turk were in the SUD, which would place Tip Top also inside the SUD, but he referred the boundary question to planning's Rick Crawford, who The Extra was unable to reach.

Three weeks after the commission decision, Rantisi was uncertain about appealing before the Board of Supervisors. It would require a petition signed by owners of 20% of the property within 300 feet of Tip Top — or five supervisors subscribing to the appeal — paying a \$500 fee, and filing before Oct. 13.

"I'm undecided," Rantisi said, still shaken and upset by the rejection.

The challenge he faces is whether a retail operation that once may have derived 17% of its sales from liquor can live without booze and morph into a grocery popular enough to continue supporting Rantisi's and his employees' families, 25 people in all.

In an unusually large public turnout that jammed

the City Hall chambers to overflowing, nearly 60 people testified before the commission, the vast majority against the transfer, though many conceded admiration for the plucky Palestinian immigrant. He has maintained his small liquor store and grocery since 1992 on a gritty Tenderloin street plagued by loiterers, drunks and drug pushers, an area TL Capt. Gary Jimenez calls "ground zero for violence."

The wall of detractors posited that liquor sales contribute to an intimidating, dangerous scene outside the store and add to the neighborhood's ills. And City Planning, which led off the opposition, set the tone. Liquor stores in such high-crime areas are "magnets" for crime, said the department's Rick Crawford.

The sentiment was echoed by organizations such as The New Tenderloin coalition, TL Community Benefit District, Central City SRO Collaborative, and TNDC, plus the Department of Public Health, the Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development, and the police.

Eliminating just one license in an area heavily oversaturated with liquor outlets is a step in the right direction, they said.

All of San Francisco has been over the top with its licenses since the state Alcoholic Beverage Control department 46 years ago established ratios limiting the number of licenses by a county's population. San Francisco, smarting under the crime-pocked neighborhood's reputation, tightened the squeeze in the Tenderloin in 1999 by creating a North of Market Residential Special Use District. As an added bureaucratic level, the SUD requires the Planning Commission to okay a premise-to-premise transfer within the district — even a mere 60 feet away — before the issue goes to the Board of Supervisors and, finally, the ABC.

"Without land use, the city trumps the state," inspector Dave Falzon, liaison to the ABC from SFPD's vice crimes division, said in an interview later. "If it's dead at Planning, it won't go to the supes. People underestimate the importance of land use. And the liquor issue is a real one. I'm not against liquor, I'm just for responsible dispensing of it."

Falzon said people assume that all mom-and-pop stores in the Tenderloin sell alcohol, and that they can't be profitable without it.

"But that's wrong," he said. "There have been six or seven over the last five years in the neighborhood that are making it as groceries."

Ten years ago the SUD banned new liquor stores in the area and imposed restrictions and "Good Neighbor" standards on existing ones. The legislation's author, then-Supervisor Leland Yee, said the "inordinate number" of liquor stores contributed adversely to the community's health and welfare. The area had 74 off-sale retail licenses, one for every 327 residents, a distant cry from the ABC's stated 1-to-2,000 ratio. But existing licenses cannot be taken away simply because of license oversaturation.

Hallinan represented Rantisi, 43, at the hearing. He said Rantisi is a Christian who had fled a Muslim world. He came to the United States at 21, worked in a Mission District grocery, then bought Grand Liquors five years later and sent for his family. Rantisi has been a good neighbor, doing his part to cooperate with police to curtail violence outside, Hallinan said.

"After he lost his lease, he's trying to make a nice grocery store across the street," Hallinan said. "He's been under pressure from the neighborhood to get rid of the bad liquor and he has greatly reduced the amount, such as the airline bottles."

The two-finger size bottles of hard liquor, fortified wine and jumbo cans of malt liquor are favorites of street alcoholics with the right change. The mini-bottles are also attack targets of neighborhood activists when a liquor license is vetted in public.

"He sells what the neighborhood wants," Hallinan continued. "Liquor is a necessary part. But profits are marginal. And to give up 10%-17% could be the difference."

The commission's denial shapes Rantisi's future business model.

Since signing a 15-year lease at 90 Turk St. in March, Rantisi carefully planned his fresh approach. He appeared at community meetings to describe what would occupy the new Tip Top build-out on 2,147 square feet, a big jump from his crowded 1,200-square-foot Grand Liquors.

It would have fresh meat, poultry and seafood,

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PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

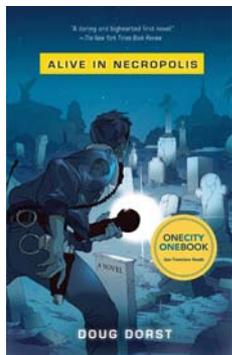
Owner Karim Rantisi, here in his new grocery, pledged to sell "fine" wines and liquor, but to survive he now has to be profitable without them.

Upcoming Events at the Main Library

Tricycle Music Fest West

Kids Rock Out at the Library
Main Library Event
Saturday, October 10
10 a.m.- 2:30 p.m.
On the Fulton Street steps

Performances by:
Charity and the JAMband
Frances England
The Devil-Ettes
The Hipwaders
The Time Outs
See all Tricycle Music Fest events
at www.tricyclefest.org



One City One Book

Tuesday, October 13, 6 p.m.
Lower Level, Koret Auditorium
One City One Book and Litquake present: **Doug Dorst**
in conversation with **Adam Johnson**, with special
guests foolsFURY Theater
See all One City One Book events at
www.sfpl.org/news/ocob/events09.htm



San Francisco Public Library

Main Library 100 Larkin St. (at Grove) (415) 557-4277 sfpl.org

Litquake

San Francisco's Literary Festival

Litquake at the Library

Off the Richter Scale
Saturday, October 10, 11 a.m.- 5 p.m.
Lower Level, Koret Auditorium
Writers who will shake up your literary world!

Shaken and Stirred:
Litquake in Conversation
Sunday, October 11, 12:30-4:30 p.m.
Lower Level, Koret Auditorium
Panel discussions that highlight the cutting-edge
subjects of literary life.

KidQuake
Elementary School program:
Wednesday, October 14, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
Middle School program:
Thursday, October 15, 10 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
Lower Level, Koret Auditorium
and Latino/Hispanic Community Meeting Room

TeenQuake
Friday, October 16, 6:30-9:30 p.m.
Main Library
Teens take over the Library