

King County Adult Beverage Ordinance Unanimously Rejected in Strongly Worded Decision by Growth Management Hearings Board

June 1, 2020

Failure by King County to consider environmental harms cited as the key basis for the decision.

Seattle, WA – The Washington State Growth Management Hearings Board has invalidated King County’s controversial Adult Beverage zoning ordinance in a strongly worded, unanimous [May 26th Order](#), in response to a motion filed by Friends of Sammamish Valley and other petitioners. The Board’s Order cites a dozen grounds for invalidation under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and the Growth Management Act (GMA) and faults the County repeatedly for ignoring the ordinance’s potential environmental harm and impacts on infrastructure. Despite strong opposition from farmers, rural and urban residents, environmental and community groups, and local businesses, the King County Council nonetheless adopted the ordinance by a 5-4 vote, after intensive lobbying by a handful of illegally operating adult beverage businesses, supported by ordinance sponsor Councilmember Kathy Lambert.

Opposition to the ordinance centered on its opening up of protected farmland and rural residential areas to adult beverage businesses such as remote tasting rooms, bars, and event centers, where the primary activity is retail sales. The Growth Board’s Order upheld these concerns. The Board recognized that while sponsors claimed the ordinance would “tighten up” regulations around winery, brewery and distillery businesses, it would actually have the opposite effect—legitimizing a group of existing adult beverage zoning violators and opening up areas set aside for farming and rural residential uses across unincorporated King County to more of the same activities.

The wording of the Board’s decision is notably direct. For example, the Board observes with clear disapproval that the County, in its environmental review document, “declines to even acknowledge areas of potential impact and utterly fails to identify necessary areas of environmental review.” The decision is also noteworthy because invalidation of city or county legislation is not common, but instead reserved for the most egregious cases, and because the decision was rendered early in the appeal process.

“We are extremely pleased that the GMHB validated what thousands of citizens, organizations, and businesses have been telling King County for more than two years: the Adult Beverage zoning ordinance would have had far-reaching, negative impacts on the environment, farming, rural character, open spaces, safety, and more in the Sammamish Valley and broadly across rural King County,” said Serena Glover, Executive Director of Friends of Sammamish Valley, one of the lead Petitioners, along with Futurewise, in the appeal to the Board.

About Friends of Sammamish Valley

Friends of Sammamish Valley (FoSV) is a group of citizens, businesses, and organizations with the goals of protecting the Sammamish Valley Agricultural Production District (APD) and the Sammamish Valley watershed, maintaining the character of the surrounding Rural Area, and preserving the rural lifestyle for local residents. For more information visit GoFoSV.org.

Contact: Serena Glover, serena@friendsofsammamishvalley.org, 425-985-2992