

# 2010

Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Commission

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## [ CLUB CENTRAL ]

A look at policy changes which other cities have enacted around the world to combat alcohol-related violence stemming from nightclubs, bars, restaurants and other business in the nighttime economy and how these changes may be applicable to the problem that is occurring in Washington DC.

Recently a documentary was made titled “Clubland” which focused on the debate between relationship alcohol and violence, specifically on what role clubs and societal norms have in this conversation. The documentary focuses on Toronto, showing several different angles and viewpoints on the issue. Director Eric Geringas notes that nightclub owners, politicians, police officers, the club-goers and others all have different ideas and views on the issue; but this 45 minute documentary unfortunately does not delve much deeper than the surface of the issues. There is no new information that common sense has not already told us: “residents complain, the business owners scoff back ... young people dressed to the nines and acting like drunken ragdolls” policemen who patrol the streets nightly, and in the end: “nothing solved.”<sup>6</sup> Despite the lack of solutions offered by the documentary, the problem it highlights is real, and it is a problem that is not unique to Toronto, any other major city could be substituted into the documentary and the film would vary slightly. However, it is in those small variations that we can see how best to solve DC’s own alcohol-violence related problem. In the next few pages I’ll attempt to outline and show those differences so that we might cull from them the best and most adaptable methods for use in the Dupont Circle area.

## **TORONTO**

The first city examined is Toronto, only 351 miles north of Washington DC. The focus of Geringas’s “Clubland” has an estimated 50,000 young people visiting 60 nightclubs on the average weekend.<sup>6</sup> In an effort to stem the increasing tide of alcohol related issues, Toronto Councillor Adam Vaughan has said "the new style, is to go to a smaller, more intimate club with a more specified musical format and to club-hop between five or six little small clubs."<sup>8</sup> The hope is to move people away from giant mega-clubs and reduce the number of people at any one place. One does not need a degree in psychology to know that people in large crowds tend to behave differently from individuals on their own, or in smaller clusters.<sup>11</sup> Common sense (and a study by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre in Australia) would remind us that there is less of a chance of issues arising amongst smaller groups of individuals than of large – drunk – mobs.

Additionally, Councillor Vaughan has also stated that "there's a comprehensive set of bylaws about to come forward," and these are intended to make the district safer. He has described "an enforcement policy that's being co-ordinated with the [Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario] and the police and fire and ambulance and health and licensing as well as zoning," which was put in place at the end of 2009.<sup>6</sup> However, some business owners have begun to cry foul amidst the new regulations, which they claim “restrict growth.” The new amendments in fact do restrict the size of restaurants (there is no distinction between restaurants and bars in the city’s by-laws), but only two of the 24 restaurants currently in the area fall outside of the new size limit.<sup>15</sup>

## **BIRMINGHAM**

3583 miles to our east and across the pond we find Birmingham, a city with the metro population about one-half that of Washington’s. However, Birmingham is no different than these other cities in facing

alcohol related problems. What is different has been their solution. After a series of complaints, a licensing committee “decided the club should close at 2am and told [a local club’s] owners to introduce a taxi marshalling scheme for customers leaving the premises in order to keep the noise down.”<sup>4</sup> Licensing chairman Nigel Dawkins is further “urging the planning department to draw up a rigid policy to separate flats and apartments from nightclubs” hoping to prevent further conflicts. “The idea of city centre living is a wonderful thing but we simply cannot have residential blocks being built adjacent to night clubs or located right in the heart of our night time entertainment areas.”<sup>4</sup>

## DUBLIN

Across the pond, in Dublin, a different strategy has been put into play. Last July there was an act which pulled back the closing time of nightclubs from 3:30am to 2:30am. Prior to the change, public order “offences” in the south Dublin city area (which has the highest concentration of nightclubs) were falling. They fell in that location by 4.8% over the three year period before the change. Industry officials compare that number with a 25% *increase* of “offences” in the rest of the State.<sup>7</sup> The Irish Nightclub Industry Association is calling for another change, that clubs should have the option to stay open until 4am, to give a bump to the economy by creating 1,600 jobs. Additionally, Barry O’Sullivan, chief executive of the association, points out that extending the hours of trading will mean that people do not all leave licensed premises at the same time – presumably lowering the incidence of occurrences of violence at nearby transportation hubs and 24-hour fast food outlets.<sup>7</sup>

## SYDNEY

Still further away from Washington DC (9,772 miles) is Sydney, which has engaged this issue from a number of different directions. The city council has already taken steps to “reject development applications from hotels if an area has too many already,” and it intends to extend this practice to other types of applications which “would have negative social and environmental impacts,” namely, nightclubs.<sup>2</sup> While the council has refused development applications from a group of club developers on these grounds before, the council has been defeated in court because it could not prove saturation point had been reached. But this time it is armed with research. “There is a correlation between the increased density of licensed premises in Kings Cross and the level of alcohol-related violence,” the Deputy Mayor, John McLnerney, said.<sup>2</sup>

Adding to the violence, cab drivers have become sick and tired of their cabs being defaced by drunk revelers and are starting to take a stand by not picking up individuals, instead leaving them stranded in the city; “one of the many factors contributing to the scourge of alcohol-fuelled violence that has infected the state, and Sydney’s nightclub districts are at the heart of it,” reports Anita Maglicic of the Sydney Morning Herald.<sup>10</sup>

To solve this issue, the “city has considered restricting the number of late-night pubs and clubs in the most popular entertainment strips,” after a new study revealed a correlation between “hotel density

and alcohol-related violence in the inner city.”<sup>1</sup> The study, by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, is the new research the council was armed with when it moved to reject the development of earlier described problematic developments. The study found that “alcohol-related crime had soared in Kings Cross and Darlinghurst in recent years as the density and number of late-night premises increased.” Additionally, “We found that there was a consistent relationship between the number of licensed premises and the amount of harm in that particular precinct,” the principal author of the study, Anthony Shakeshaft said.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is important to remember that this study does not prove that the licensed premises are the *cause* the violence, but what it does show is that there is a direct correlation between the number of these premises and the alcohol-related violence in the area. The council will consider developing a database of information about pubs and clubs in the local government area which could be used by planners as evidence when considering a proposal for a night-trading hotel and its potential impact on the community.<sup>1</sup>

Another attempt at curbing alcohol-related violence (which is accountable for over 3,000 deaths per year in Australia according to police figures) has been a recent – unprecedented – police blitz called Operation Unite which took place across both Australia and New Zealand. It has been seen as “a sign of frustration by police” due to the multiplication of licensed venues without restricted trading hours.<sup>5</sup> However, this blitz, and more in the future, are not the solution claims Alison Ritter, Associate Professor at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, a sentiment with which the police forces of both Australia and New Zealand agree. Simon Overland, Victoria’s Chief Police Commissioner, recognizes that “Police enforcement is the last line of defence when all else has failed. Only by challenging the community, steered by strong leadership to change its culture, can we hope to achieve lasting change.”<sup>5</sup> Research by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre shows that this can be done by consistent regulation of licensed venues, their density within cities and their trading hours. This is further supported with research done by the Responsible Hospitality Institute in their report “Managing the Nighttime Economy” which focused on Mount Pleasant.<sup>13</sup>

## MELBOURNE

In nearby Melbourne, regulation has come in the form of rejecting any “new venue for more than 300 people... if there were three or more taverns, nightclubs or hotels within a 150-metre radius of the proposed premises.” There are already about 1600 licensed venues in the municipality.<sup>9</sup> However, these new regulations, which are still in committee stages, have hit a snag. One of the members, Minister Justin Madden, believes the wording of the clause could “create a loophole in which licensees would apply to run venues for 299 patrons within the radius,” he said.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, he has argued the un-scientific number of 150 meters poses a problem, despite the city having a similar regulation (100 meters) regarding adult bookshops and other sexually explicit adult entertainment venues.<sup>12</sup> At this time all discussion on the new regulations has been limited to closed-door sessions, and as reported by local news agencies, has likely been all but ended.

Changing and improving drinking habits has also been acknowledged as a possible change in public policy to remedy the violence created by alcohol. It is a “drawn-out process that depends on attitudinal, cultural and behavioural shifts. These may be partly influenced by education, advertising campaigns, school and parental initiatives, along with other means,” notes another study by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.<sup>11</sup>

Melbourne has also started to adopt an aggressive policy that it cites has worked in New York City. First, its core policing strategy, maintaining a highly visible police presence, works. New York police have reduced violent crime in their nightclub precincts by 22% in the past 12 months through specialized units called Cabaret Taskforce Squads.<sup>3</sup> This has been accomplished by literally saturating each targeted area with dozens of police, even including mounted police. Additionally, police have “powers to instantly shut clubs that do not co-operate, thus putting pressure on other clubs.”<sup>3</sup>

Deputy Commissioner Sir Ken Jones says that “police need to deal directly with the companies who make the profits from the binge-bust Melbourne nightlife and ‘if need be’ shame them into action.”<sup>14</sup> In a candid interview with Melbourne’s “The Age,” the career policeman mapped out a five-year plan to win back the city. And in doing so he showed that he is not frightened to offend and challenge who he calls “the powerful,” including state politicians, town planners, big business and nightclub security firms. “Those who clamour for more and more police allow others to shirk their responsibilities,” he says. He adds that club owners and the alcohol industry make huge profits, but leave police, ambulance officers and hospitals to deal with the mess. “They are able to export the negative costs of their businesses into all those public sectors paid by taxpayers, that can't be right.”<sup>14</sup> Instead he has offered up a different solution, in which club owners would be forced to internalize the costs of these problems through fines and taxation.

He suspects that businesses will be reluctant to change and will need to be confronted. He points out, “We don't have a happy smoking hour. Woolworths and Coles don't have an all-you-can-smoke hour between five and six . . . And for good reason. We are blindsided on alcohol. It is just as toxic if not used responsibly.”<sup>14</sup> He wants new licensing laws, where managers would be issued with “demerit points” for failures to enforce responsible levels. Additionally, rogue clubs would be banned from the industry, which the Deputy Commissioner hopes would force people to act quickly, once “they realize their livelihoods are threatened.”<sup>14</sup>

## **WASHINGTON DC**

So what can we do about our own problem? By adopting and adapting the successful strategies employed in other cities around the globe. Not all of these solutions will work in our area, but some, once tweaked to allow for Dupont’s own historic nature, its culture, and its problems, may prove to be at least one step in the right direction. A (very simplified) breakdown of the measures taken by other cities is below.

- Toronto: Lower the size of clubs to reduce the number of people and problems associated
- Birmingham: Create taxi marshalling zones  
Create separate zoning laws for residences and clubs
- Dublin: Extend trading hours to reduce the impact of all club-goers leaving at once
- Sydney: Regulate the density of nightclubs in the city  
City (and nation)wide police blitzes
- Melbourne: Limit club capacity  
Have more police on the streets with more authority  
Pay for more police with increased fines and taxes

And while it is important to learn what other cities are doing to curb this violence, each city is different and faces different challenges for a variety of reasons ranging from demographics to local culture onto the involvement of local government. A study by the Responsible Hospitality Institute was done on Mount Pleasant showcasing many of the problems and solutions that have been discussed in this paper thus far. However, even Mount Pleasant, despite its proximity and similarities, still has vast differences from Dupont Circle regarding the number and occupancy of licensed establishments, population density, demographics, and more.

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