



## ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES ADVISORY BOARD

Marc Elrich  
County Executive

Meeting  
Tuesday, September 12, 2023  
Alcohol Beverage Services

### Minutes

*Members and Staff Present:* Brett Robison, ABAB; William Shanklin, ABAB; Man Cho, BLC; Lt. Adam Currie, Montgomery County Police Department; Jocelyn Rawat, ABS Communications Manager; Melissa Romeo, ABS Communications Manager; Uday Berry, ABS; and Amy Samman, ABS Chief of Licensing, Regulation and Education.

*Absent:*

Dr. Nkemjika Ofodile-Carruthers, ABAB  
Spiro Gioldasis, ABAB  
Kathie Durbin, ABS Director

Brett Robison called the meeting to order at 9:08 am. A motion was made to approve the July 2023 meeting minutes by Mr. Robison, seconded by Lt. Currie, and unanimously approved by the members present.

*General Discussion:*

Ms. Samman informed board members that three new individuals had been appointed to the Board of License Commissioners (BLC), totaling a number of five commissioners comprising the BLC.

*Jocelyn Rawat and Melissa Romeo, ABS Communications Presentation:*

Ms. Rawat and Ms. Romeo introduced themselves to the board members as the communications managers at ABS. Ms. Rawat began the presentation providing a brief overview of the impact ABS had on the local community through its scope of operations comprised of county stores, licensees, retail customers, and residents. Ms. Rawat informed board members that ABS was not supported by Montgomery County tax dollars but instead by the revenue generated from alcohol product sales and annual licensing dues. MS. Rawat also stated that ABS provided approximately \$30 million to the Montgomery County General Fund every year.

Ms. Romeo provided an overview of the ABS Communication Center, which involved five employees fielding email and telephone inquiries, then directing them to the appropriate departments. Ms. Romeo informed board members the Communication Center managed alcohol

orders and assisted with the iStore and alcohol deliveries. Ms. Romeo said that two of the five communication specialists were iStore experts, enabling the Communication Center to provide licensees with training on placing product orders via the iStore. In addition to customer service, the Communication Center also informed customers about product availability and new products, sending out weekly newsletters every Tuesday. Ms. Romeo stated that all inquiries received by the Communication Center were recorded and addressed, with employees being required to answer all phone calls and emails.

Ms. Rawat stressed the importance of social media in terms of communication, with ABS utilizing Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Pinterest accounts to provide Montgomery County licensees and residents with regular notices. Ms. Rawat informed board members that ABS posted monthly social media notices highlighting new license holders and the highly allocated second Saturday program. ABS social media accounts also detailed upcoming tasting events held at county stores and the highly allocated lottery held annually in March. Ms. Rawat stated that ABS social media accounts also promoted programs such as April Earth Month, which highlighted sustainable products in ABS stores. ABS also advertised its Community Matters program on social media and in Bethesda magazine, which emphasized the purpose of the Oak Barrel and Vine stores as a way to promote local products.

Mr. Cho asked about the process local manufacturers used to get their products in county stores. Mr. Robison replied that the county had a limited liability program that allowed local manufacturers to sell directly to retail stores. Local producers were also able to sell directly to the ABS warehouse, which would distribute products to county retail stores. Ms. Romeo added that the ABS website had a page to link manufacturers with the ABS retail team. Ms. Rawat said that there was a significant increase in revenue generated from local products, increasing from a few hundred thousand dollars to \$1.7 million over the past four years.

Mr. Robison asked why Facebook was the most important social media platform for ABS. Ms. Rawat replied that the ABS Facebook account had the most followers and the most amount of engagement. Though the ABS Pinterest account was growing, many older residents and customers were more active on Facebook.

Amy Samman, ABS Update:

Ms. Samman informed board members that the point-of-sale system in ABS retail stores had been updated, with all retail stores utilizing updated software and hardware by October 10, 2023. Ms. Samman also informed board members that Kevin Hutchinson was the new Division Chief for ABS Retail Operations, with the former division chief, John Zeltner, remaining part-time to assist with the transition.

Ms. Samman informed board members that the ABS loss prevention program won the “Best Enforcement Program” award from *StateWays* trade magazine. Ms. Samman also stated that Gabriela Monzon-Reynolds, Community Outreach Manager, was launching a campaign addressing alcohol consumption among underage Montgomery County residents. The campaign focused on individuals over 21 illegally providing alcohol to the underage population. ABS was also creating holiday coasters to distribute to licensees and stores, with QR codes that provided users with methods of transportation when under the influence of alcohol.

Man Cho, BLC Update:

Mr. Cho, Chair of the BLC, informed board members that the BLC recently had a greater variety of license applications from beer and wine stores, art galleries, orchards, and nail salons. Mr. Cho said that there were continued violations of Section 5.4 Alcohol Awareness, where certified individuals left the premises while establishments were still open and selling alcohol. Retail delivery, an addition that had been overlooked during the Covid-19 pandemic, had been reintroduced to the application process. Licensees were required to provide a written retail delivery policy prior to the addition being granted to their licenses.

Mr. Cho said that the BLC held the first hearing for a commercial license spanning ten acres of outdoor space. Mr. Cho stated that the entity was asked to provide additional information prior to the license being granted, including a written security plan detailing how the company planned to secure and monitor the outdoor area. Mr. Cho added that Copper Canyon in Gaithersburg was granted permission to use a newly built barge adjacent to the establishment to serve diners alcohol after having provided the BLC with a satisfactory security plan for the space.

Ms. Samman said that the new commercial license was causing confusion among licensees and developers, particularly during Covid-19 when off-premises alcohol sales were permitted. Mr. Robison expressed concern for developers purchasing and creating retail spaces with the hopes of gaining commercial licenses. Mr. Cho was encouraged that Montgomery County police had the duty of approving security plans for new commercial licenses.

Lt. Adam Currie, Montgomery County Police Department Update:

Lt. Currie informed board members that MCPD's alcohol enforcement unit was fully staffed after Covid-19. The police department was planning to re-initiate its annual holiday task force, using units from the Maryland Transportation Authority Police, Maryland State Police, and Rockville City Police to increase the number of sober checkpoints around Montgomery County, particularly in Silver Spring and Wheaton.

Lt. Currie provided board members with an update from Sgt. Kepp, who reported underage alcohol sales from Caddies on Cordell. Sgt. Kepp also reported that Eva Lounge and XOXO Hookah Lounge were selling alcohol to customers without having active licenses.

Next Meeting:

The next ABAB meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 14, 2023 at 9:00 a.m.

Adjournment:

There being no other business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 10:05 a.m.