



News Release

Oregon Liquor Control Commission
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State Epidemiologist updates Commission on Oregon's progress against COVID-19

Commissioners share frustrations of hospitality industry struggling to re-open

PORTLAND, OR. – The State of Oregon's epidemiologist updated the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, at its **regular monthly meeting on March 18, 2021**, about the progress in Oregon's fight against the COVID-19 virus, and what that means for the re-opening of OLCC licensed bars and restaurants. Dr. Dean Sidelinger, with the Oregon Health Authority, provided an update on COVID-19 infection trends, vaccination rates, and the outlook for re-opening Oregon this summer. The revelations led to a discussion with Commissioners about how to balance the risk of the virus spread and the sustained economic hardship faced by the hospitality industry. The Commissioners also appointed a new liquor agent in Ontario and voted to adopt two stipulated settlement agreements.

According to Sidelinger, there has been a steady decline in the number of COVID-19 cases in the state countered by an increase in vaccination rates that are helping control the virus spread; that's reflected in the county risk level maps now showing more counties in the lower and moderate risk categories compared to the high and extreme risk categories. Statistical modeling suggests this trend will continue and could lead to more re-opening activities taking place.

Sidelinger emphasized that capacity restrictions in bars and restaurant have contained community spread in locations where virus case counts have spiked. "When there's a larger amount of Covid in the community, so the counties in extreme and high risk, the risk of spread in these communities tends to go higher, and that's why the restrictions look a little different in eating and drinking establishments," said Sidelinger.

Several Commissioners questioned Sidelinger about the difference in restrictions faced by the hospitality industry compared to other businesses. "Many of our [alcohol] licensees and the more than 70,000 Oregonians they employ, feel lost and that they received the 'brunt end of the stick'," said Commissioner Kiauna Floyd. "They want to know how they can safely and successfully plan for the future."

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Sidelinger indicated data from several national studies conclusively correlates that wearing face coverings, practicing social distancing, and modifying gathering spaces to improve airflow have reduced the spread of COVID-19; he attributed the behavior of Oregonians following these measures to the success Oregon has had, compared to other states, in battling the virus.

OLCC Commission Chair Paul Rosenbaum expressed thanks to Sidelinger and OHA for the ongoing conversations the two agencies have had during the pandemic and expressed optimism that the state's COVID guidance would help OLCC licensees reduce the risk of virus spread as they re-opened.

"Our agency is a regulatory agency, which first and foremost has the interest of the general public at heart," said Rosenbaum. "There is a tremendous concern for the protection of the public and the protection of the business."

OLCC Executive Director Steve Marks expressed appreciation to OHA for creating a public health framework during the multiple phases of the pandemic that allowed OLCC to waive rules and enable licensees to conduct some business activity and scale up that activity as the spread of the virus subsides.

"OLCC alcohol licensees have suffered significant economic harm because of the pandemic and have struggled to stay open and make money, even when following public health guidelines to stop the spread of COVID-19 and keep Oregonians safe," said Marks.

Commissioners reinforced they would take a similar approach to the one they took as the pandemic forced alcohol licensees to reduce and restructure their business models. As OLCC licensed bars and restaurants re-open, the OLCC will continue to look for ways to help provide economic relief to licensees.

Commissioner Matt Maletis called out one action that could help OLCC licensees that the Commission can't take unilaterally -- waiving license fees. "Throughout the pandemic we've been able to provide financial regulatory relief to the hospitality industry, but Washington State has gone even further by temporarily waiving liquor license fees," said Maletis. "That's an idea worth exploring by the legislature in order to provide additional help to this important, but struggling part of Oregon's economy."

In other business before the Commission, three applicants presented plans to be considered for appointment as the Liquor Agent for Ontario, Oregon. After considering the qualifications of each applicant, the Commissioners selected Jennifer Weichers, as the new operator.

The Commission also ratified violation fines and suspensions based on stipulated settlements (*detailed information on specific cases can be found [here on the OLCC website](#)*).

River Pig Saloon (FCOM) in Bend held an event in an unlicensed common area of the building where the business is located. The area serves as an entry way for other businesses housed within the building. Licensee will pay a civil penalty of \$5,660.00 **OR** serve a 36-day suspension.

Licensee is: Zeco Development Group, LLC; Ramzy Hattar, Managing Member; Shadi Hattar, Member.

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White Water Taphouse (L) in Bend allowed consumption of alcoholic beverages on the licensed premises after 10:00 pm in violation of Oregon Health Authority guidelines relating to the hours that a business may serve alcoholic beverages for on-premises consumption on the licensed premises. Licensee will either pay a \$3,795.00 civil penalty **OR** serve a 23-day suspension.

Licensees are: Griffin Restaurants, LLC; Nicholas Griffin, Managing Member.

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A copy of the Stipulated Settlement Agreements for Alcohol Violation Cases can be found on the [OLCC website](#), on the Laws & Rules page under the [Final Orders](#) section.