

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE AND CANNABIS BOARD
+ + + + +
MEETING

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IN THE MATTER OF: :
 :
DC's Finest :
6500 Chillum Place NW : Fact Finding
ANC 4B : Hearing
License No. 120530 :
 :
(Safekeeping Status and :
Transfer Application) :
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Thursday
July 20, 2023

The Alcoholic Beverage and Cannabis Board met via WebEx videoconference, Chairperson Donovan W. Anderson presiding.

PRESENT:

DONOVAN W. ANDERSON, Chairperson
BOBBY CATO, JR., Member
EDWARD S. GRANDIS, Member
JENI HANSEN, Member
JAMES SHORT, JR., Member

ALSO PRESENT:

JOSE ORELLANA, DC ABCA Staff
BOB SIMMONS, Licensee
MATT LAWSON-BAKER, Licensee
INVESTIGATOR JASON PERU, DC ABCA

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 11:33 a.m.

3 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right, the
4 next case on our calendar, we have another fact-
5 finding hearing. And this case is DC's Finest,
6 License No. 120530. Mr. Orellana, can you please
7 elevate the rights of the Licensee, excuse me, in
8 this case?

9 MR. ORELLANA: Bob Simmons, your
10 access has been elevated. Matt Lawson-Baker,
11 your access has been elevated. And that appears
12 to be all, Chairman.

13 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Thank you. Hi,
14 good morning, everyone. Good morning.

15 MR. SIMMONS: Good morning, gentlemen.

16 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: I would like
17 the parties to introduce themselves for the
18 record. Please spell and state your name for the
19 record. I'll start with you, Mr. Simmons, and
20 your relationship.

21 MR. ORELLANA: Yes, sir. Here.

22 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Yeah. I need
23 you to introduce yourself for the record, sir.
24 Do you mind spelling and state your name, sir?

25 MR. SIMMONS: I'm sorry, yeah. Robert

1 Simmons, DC's Finest.

2 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: And what's your
3 relationship? Are you the owner, sir?

4 MR. SIMMONS: Yeah, owner.

5 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Mr. Lawson-
6 Baker, please spell and state your name for the
7 record, please, sir.

8 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Good morning, Board
9 members, it's Matt Lawson-Baker, and I'm also an
10 owner of DC's Finest with Bob.

11 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right.
12 Good morning, sir. All right.

13 MR. SIMMONS: For full disclosure,
14 he's my son-in-law, too, if you're looking at the
15 --

16 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right. So
17 hold on a second.

18 Now this is another license that has
19 been in safekeeping. And so what we're trying to
20 find out is where are we in bringing this license
21 back into production? Because I'm not sure if
22 you'd overheard the hearing before. One of the
23 concerns that the Board has, as you're aware, we
24 are expanding the program in November, the
25 unlicensed. And we are all aware that there are

1 a significant amount of unlicensed facilities
2 operating in D.C. In November, ABRA will allow
3 these unlicensed facilities - they will be able
4 to apply for licenses to, yeah, to operate.

5 One of the concerns that we have been
6 told by a lot of these facilities is that D.C.,
7 we don't have enough product. So therefore, they
8 don't want to apply for a license, because they
9 are afraid that they would not be able to
10 operate, because there is not sufficient product
11 on the market.

12 And so you have a cultivation license.
13 And I know that once the law was changed, you
14 were also given the opportunity that you
15 automatically were also given that manufacturer
16 license. So please let us know where you are
17 with this facility and able to operate.

18 MR. SIMMONS: Go ahead, Matt.

19 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: And when you
20 speak, just identify -- I guess if you're
21 speaking, Mr. Lawson-Baker, so when you speak
22 just identify yourself. We have a court
23 reporter, so just to make sure that when you
24 speak identify yourself when you're speaking.

25 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Yes, so Matt

1 Lawson-Baker. I'd like to give you the update on
2 where we are at DC's Finest. Just for the
3 record, we're also the owners and operators of
4 Alternative Solutions. We've been operational
5 since 2015, and we currently command over 40
6 percent of the market share. So we are very
7 integrated in this program and heavily invested.
8 And we're not looking at changing that approach.

9 Investigator Peru, good to see you,
10 thanks for joining. We have a big property
11 that's in process right now in Chillum Place.
12 It's 65,000 square feet total.

13 We've been through a few delays in
14 getting our project up and running due to the
15 existing building going through a reconstruction
16 which is at its final stages and final punch list
17 right now. They just finished the exterior
18 paving on the weekend. So we're finally getting
19 that building ready to be built out.

20 Our design process, we have finalized
21 the permit plans and the permit package as of
22 Monday. And we're due to submit the permit set
23 hopefully tomorrow. We're just finalizing the
24 application with our expediter.

25 We are also going down the fast track

1 process that's now available through permitting,
2 so we're doing everything we can to expedite that
3 process.

4 We've spent over a quarter of a
5 million on the design. We've gone through many
6 iterations trying to forecast what this market is
7 actually going to look like, and it's a lot of
8 crystal ball stuff.

9 You know, we've been riding the roller
10 coaster of D.C. for many years, as I mentioned
11 before, so there's a bit of a gamble and a bit of
12 a hood that the market is going to be there to
13 fulfil the requirements that we're going to go
14 produce all of this cannabis.

15 But we feel confident that our plan of
16 attack should be very effective for the program
17 and be able to support a lot of additional
18 businesses coming into the program.

19 So I'm saying all that, I know you
20 want exact timelines. For what we're being told,
21 the permitting process can take three months, can
22 take six months, because of the new systems that
23 have been set up within -- since they changed
24 from DCRA.

25 Any help we can get on that to

1 expedite it would be fantastic. I know you guys
2 are not directly associated with them, but as
3 soon as we get the permit in hand, that the
4 contractors are already lined up, we've already
5 ordered out all the materials, we're going to
6 start bringing in the materials while we're
7 waiting for the permit so that everything is
8 onsite.

9 And our construction timeline is four
10 months from when we get the permit until when we
11 get plants in the ground. Then from plants in
12 the ground it's a nine, ten week growing cycle
13 plus four weeks dry cure package.

14 So in a perfect world, if we got the
15 permit in October, you know, we'd be built out by
16 January and starting to grow so that by April
17 next year we're getting product to market.

18 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr.
19 Peru, can you identify yourself on the record,
20 please?

21 MR. PERU: Investigator Jason Peru
22 with ABCA Enforcement.

23 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Mr. Peru, do
24 you any questions, or any comments, or anything,
25 regarding DC's Finest?

1 MR. PERU: Yeah. No, I'll just say
2 that Matt has always been very responsive with
3 any calls and questions regarding Alternative
4 Solutions. And we had a recent conversation in
5 reference to the new location.

6 I have been up there and seen, and
7 have watched the build-out take place from the
8 roofing of the building to the actual physical
9 building being complete on the structure itself.

10 So yeah, you know, I will just say
11 that I think that we are moving in the direction
12 they're claiming that they're moving in, from
13 what I can tell. And as time gets closer for
14 them to complete the build out, and we're looking
15 at all the requirements from security, to access,
16 and all that stuff, we'll have a conversation.

17 But I believe that what Matt is saying
18 in this timeframe is very possible based on what
19 I have physically seen out there and what he's
20 before done so far.

21 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr.
22 Peru. Any questions by any Board members?

23 So either Mr. Simmons, or Mr. Lawson-
24 Baker, any final comments you want to make?

25 MR. SIMMONS: Just that I was born in

1 D.C., and we're excited to be here, and we're not
2 a national, we're a local bunch of guys. Matt's
3 background in building development, as well as
4 mine, has helped us keep things moving and giving
5 you the answer, Mr. Peru, that you need to see
6 that we're serious about this. So we're looking
7 forward to continue what we're doing, and I thank
8 the Board on our behalf for monitoring and
9 helping us along.

10 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right, just
11 a quick question. I know you're saying it's a
12 large facility. So how much product do you
13 believe that, once the facility is up and
14 running, how much product can you guys produce?

15 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: So, right now,
16 we're taking it with -- we are phasing the
17 building because, as I said before, nobody knows
18 how this market's going to play out. So our
19 phase one is 30,000 square feet. It'll double
20 our existing capacity, so what we're doing in
21 Alternative Solutions will double.

22 What we're planning to do there is
23 fill in all the products that were not currently
24 making, because if the market doesn't grow, which
25 is a possibility, you know, you're adding your

1 licenses, but there's no guarantee the patients
2 are coming with those licenses.

3 So if the market doesn't grow, our
4 goal is to produce all of the products that we're
5 not currently producing and putting on the
6 market. So that way we'll still be able to keep
7 the business afloat and wait for the market to
8 grow.

9 So doubling what we're doing now, you
10 know, would double our flower output from 200 to
11 400 pounds a month. And then all of our material
12 for extracts and other products, pre-rolls,
13 tinctures, vape cartridges, the whole lot would
14 double from, again, 200 pounds of trimmed process
15 to 400 pounds.

16 At a minimum, you know, we've got a
17 state of the art facility design in this new
18 building. The building that we're currently
19 operating, and Investigator Peru will be able to
20 confirm this, but we've been renovating and
21 upgrading every year to keep it at a very high
22 standard. And with the new building, you know,
23 everything we've learned over the years is going
24 into that to make it more efficient and produce
25 greater yields.

1 So I'm interested to see how the
2 market will play out. And I don't think anyone
3 can tell us how many patients we're going to have
4 to work the numbers back from a demand point of
5 view. It's really going to be just wait and see.

6 So as the market grows, and if we're
7 selling everything we're growing, and we can
8 foresee that, we can expand into the rest of the
9 building very quickly from there.

10 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Now what, I
11 know that you feel that you have current
12 facility, so what is it that you currently
13 produce, and what are some products that you
14 anticipate you want to produce --

15 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: So right now our
16 major product is flower, obviously. And then our
17 number two is vape cartridges, pre-rolls, after
18 that then tinctures. We do topicals and we do
19 concentrates.

20 The concentrates we do are limited,
21 because the demand is really not there. But what
22 we plan to do in the new building is increase our
23 extraction capabilities. Right now we currently
24 just to ethanol extraction.

25 In the new facility, I would like to

1 do hydrocarbonate extraction, along with more
2 solventless extraction, so we can provide the
3 full array of products including all edible
4 products that are currently allowed in the
5 program along with a bigger line of concentrates
6 that we don't currently provide.

7 And since you brought that up, I do
8 have a question relating to that, and I'm hoping
9 that the process for getting these products into
10 the market will be streamlined or improved.
11 Because going through the route at DOH adds
12 another layer of complexity and delays
13 everything.

14 So I think it could be split up even
15 further into the product lines where, you know,
16 you don't need to get a full kitchen approval to
17 make all edible products. Because there's a lot
18 of products you can make in the edibles line that
19 you don't need a fully-fledged kitchen.

20 So, yeah, I think that's something
21 that I'd like to discuss with Sean and
22 Investigator Peru in going into figuring out ways
23 that we can make that process more efficient on
24 our side.

25 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Thank you. I

1 have it. Are you aware there are certain -- in
2 food production it still adds a little time to
3 the Department of Health. So I'm not quite sure,
4 but I know that our agency will provide you
5 whatever assistance that we can as far as the
6 Government that's can certainly try to make --
7 ensure that the business succeeds, if it gets the
8 products that are needed.

9 And especially I know that the
10 unlicensed market, there are certain products
11 that they offer that I'm not sure if you
12 currently offer. And so if we are going to bring
13 those unlicensed businesses into the licensed
14 market, then we need to provide them the options
15 that they currently produce, so wherever it is
16 that they get their current products from.

17 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Yeah. And the new
18 facility will have all of that in DC's Finest.
19 But what I'd like to do is get some products
20 early into market so that when they do change
21 over we already have them in the market.

22 And we can do that in our current
23 facility, but it's how you define edibles. Is it
24 a pharmaceutical product or is it a baked goods
25 or, you know, a kitchen product? So, I mean,

1 there are some definitions there that can be
2 played around with.

3 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Well, I think
4 that that's discussions you need to have with our
5 Director, also with Mr. Gordy and Mr. Peru. And
6 whatever it is that the Board can do to assist
7 that process, we will be open once that
8 conversation has been brought to our Director and
9 to see what it is that the Board can do to -- or
10 to the Mayor, or the Council, to assist you in
11 making sure that that occurs.

12 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Okay, I have one
13 final question. And you don't have to answer it
14 if you don't want to. But is there any way that
15 the Board can provide any assistance with the
16 permit process, expediting it?

17 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Well, I think
18 that -- Mr. Peru, can you answer that question?
19 What is it that, from your end, Department of
20 Buildings, can do as far as the Department of
21 Buildings is concerned?

22 MR. PERU: I mean, we definitely have
23 contacts there that we can reach out to. I mean,
24 have you submitted things yet? Is that what
25 you're asking -

1 (Simultaneous speaking.)

2 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Once it's submitted
3 then I can, I'll send you over the full
4 application so you can see it. And then any
5 assistance in the process will be helpful. I
6 don't want it to end up being six months, because
7 it got stuck on someone's desk with some random
8 comment.

9 MR. PERU: Okay, and I'll deal with
10 Mr. Gordy. We can definitely, if you've got the
11 resources we can maybe, you know, ask for
12 assistance, look at it, from DLCP.

13 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Much appreciated.

14 MR. PERU: Yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Our agency has
16 - I'll say that agency will do whatever it is
17 within our power to assist you. But you have to
18 let us know. I mean, I can't promise that were
19 going to solve the problem. But at least if you
20 let us know, then we will work to see what can be
21 done to ensure.

22 I know that this government wants to
23 make sure that we offer one of the best
24 industries in the country. So I'm saying that
25 the entire government is behind what you are

1 doing. And so whatever it is that we can do to
2 ensure that you succeed then we will do that to
3 ensure that you are able to bring your product
4 onto market as quickly as possible.

5 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Fantastic.

6 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Okay. All
7 right --

8 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: That's aligned with
9 our goals --

10 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: I'm sorry.

11 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: I'd say said that's
12 aligned with our goals as well. We want to be
13 the best in country, and we've got a very high
14 standard of high quality product that we produce.
15 And we want to continue that.

16 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Thank you, sir,
17 for your representation today. Before we close,
18 and questions by any Board members?

19 Do you want to say something, Mr.
20 Grandis?

21 MEMBER GRANDIS: Thank you. Mr.
22 Lawson-Baker, after this hearing, if you could
23 provide the agency with some of your insight on
24 this, sort of what I think you're talking about
25 as a kitchen light type of thing, as our Chairman

1 says, we have to stay in our lane, and DOE stays
2 in their lane, and the Department of Building
3 stays in its lane, but we all try to work
4 together.

5 It could be helpful if you had some
6 ideas that can be documented on maybe a less
7 formal process for the kitchen issue when it
8 relates to the kind of products that you're
9 talking about. If you have some insight, that
10 could be helpful to the agency. I'm just
11 offering that.

12 But I think we all concur with the
13 Chairman that the District wants to become not
14 only competitive or stay competitive, but be an
15 example for the rest of the nation. So on these
16 kind of topics, it's a learning curve for all of
17 us. But your insight we would benefit from.
18 Thank you.

19 Mr. Chairman, thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr.
21 Grandis. Mr. Short?

22 MEMBER SHORT: I'd just like to say to
23 Mr. Bob Simmons and to Matt Baker.

24 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Sure.

25 MEMBER SHORT: Your presentation was

1 pretty well together, and thank you for that.
2 And to Mr. Simmons, you're not alone. There are
3 a few of us Washingtonians left in this city.
4 And as you know, this --

5 MR. SIMMONS: I may predate you
6 though. I go to 1947, Old Providence Hospital.
7 They tore it down after they recycled me.

8 MEMBER SHORT: No, you do not predate
9 me. I was born in the front bedroom of 719
10 Langston Terrace, NE.

11 MR. SIMMONS: Oh, really?

12 MEMBER SHORT: 1946.

13 MR. SIMMONS: Oh, no. Well, good.

14 MEMBER SHORT: Welcome to the club.
15 Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, that's all I
16 have.

17 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right,
18 thank you. Thank you, Mr. Lawson-Baker, Mr.
19 Simmons. It's actually my first opportunity to
20 meeting you formally in this process. So thank
21 you for the work that you've done. We look
22 forward to continuing working with you to make
23 sure that this process works.

24 You want to say something, Mr.
25 Simmons?

1 MR. SIMMONS: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I
2 just want to emphasize the fact that we are very,
3 very excited about working through this process
4 and everything, and we'll give you any
5 information to put with your efforts on any of
6 these issues.

7 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: Thank you, sir.
8 Thank you very much. We'll take that under
9 advisement. Have a great day, and thank you for
10 your presentation today.

11 MR. SIMMONS: Thank you.

12 MR. LAWSON-BAKER: Thanks. Thanks,
13 Board.

14 CHAIRPERSON ANDERSON: All right,
15 thanks.

16 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter
17 went off the record at 11:53 a.m.)
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In the matter of: DC's Finest

Before: DC ABCA

Date: 07-20-23

Place: teleconference

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