



**TESTIMONY OF ERIC E. McLAUCHLIN, ESQUIRE  
(FAVORABLE)**

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments and information in favor of House Bill 465 (cross filed as Senate Bill 482) and the opportunity for Harford County to establish a Resort Complex License in the northeast region of the state. This Bill was introduced in the same form in 2020, at which time it had the support of Harford County's Liquor Control Board, the Harford County Council, the Harford County Chamber of Commerce, nonprofits, education and industry alike. It ultimately became a Delegation Bill. It is again being presented as a Delegation Bill.

The bill creates a new class of alcoholic beverage license in Harford County for destination or "resort" type projects meeting very specific criteria. It was and is being proposed using the example of the large-scale economic development project in progress for some time at the Water's Edge destination in Belcamp, Maryland. The concept of the Water's Edge destination includes its existing facilities like its state-of-the-art conference center and members-only dining club, along with the addition of potential lodging space, culinary education space, hospitality training facilities, a restaurant, the Discovery Center at Water's Edge, and open space amenities such as pickle ball courts, trails and kayaking. The bill promotes workforce training, employment, positive use of our natural resources and economic development in general.

As with other counties in Maryland, this legislation is aimed at reconciling the need for additional licensing of the service of alcohol with current limitations on the number of licenses that may be owned and operated in common. The real estate of which the Water's Edge destination is comprised consists of multiple parcels, multiple buildings and diverse operations, all in common operation. The goal of this legislation is the creation of a single license that allows for the service of alcohol from a variety of points within a single County "destination." It allows a large-scale county destination to operate different service types in common. In this specific example, it allows a large enterprise making a substantial investment to serve alcohol in a conference center, separate from its training and education spaces, separate from its dining club, separate from its stand-alone restaurant, and so on.

The business community came to this property owner and expressed a strong desire to see the continued development of Water's Edge as a destination in Harford County, not just for the existing conference and events venue, but for training and education, restaurant and hospitality, culinary education, active open space, shoreline activities and now a Discovery Center. As promised to the community, Water's Edge has actively promoted and advanced those plans.

The Water's Edge destination essentially began with a conference and events center and the Bata Club, a private dining facility. The owners then purchased 4690 Millennium Drive, a four-story building adjacent to the existing facilities.

Now underway in and around that space are the additions of:

- Restaurant and hospitality. By establishing a restaurant open to the public, but equipped with a "teaching kitchen," Water's Edge will provide an additional dining amenity for the County, but also an opportunity for individuals to acquire skills required in the restaurant and hospitality field. The success of the restaurant, however, requires the ability to lawfully serve alcohol.
- Culinary education and entertainment. The chefs at the existing dining club and the proposed private restaurant have collaborated on a concept to create an opportunity for members of the public to learn about the preparation and tasting of food, along with the tasting and pairing of foods with wines and spirits. The success of this concept requires the ability to lawfully serve alcohol.
- An off-sale privilege. This amenity would be available to patrons of the dining club, restaurant and culinary entertainment experiences to, for example, purchase a wine that they have enjoyed elsewhere within the Water's Edge destination.
- Open space and shoreline access. Working with an environmental engineer, Water's Edge has taken an environmental inventory of its natural resources and has designed active open space areas complete with walking trails, pickle ball courts, and shoreline access for kayaks and canoes. Some service of alcohol is planned in designated locations within these activity-related areas, all of which are connected to or adjacent to other facilities in a controlled way.

Also in the planning process as part of the continued enhancement of the Water's Edge destination are:

- Lodging. The construction of an all-suites style lodging facility is planned adjacent to the 4690 building. Service of alcohol may be planned from this location or guests will be able to avail themselves of the restaurant, culinary entertainment, off-sale and active open space opportunities at the Water's Edge destination.
- Discovery Center. The Water's Edge owners have collaborated with the Discovery Center at Water's Edge to incorporate this place where students of all ages can explore, experience, invent, create, and play with technology, leading them to a greater understanding of the scientific principles at play and the history of that technology's development in Harford County. The Discovery Center will be directly adjacent to the other amenities.

Again, the challenge for the owners of Water's Edge is how to capitalize on these amenities and opportunities in the current legal landscape where alcohol laws are concerned. My advocacy is for advancing and expediting Harford County's competitiveness in a destination economy. Establishing this Resort Complex License and allowing it to foster these collaborations in various types of operations is a simple and cost-effective step. The bill promotes workforce training, employment, positive use of our natural resources and economic development in general.