



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

FRIDAY, MARCH 4, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments and information in favor of 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 is proposed using the example of the large-scale economic development project at the Water's Edge destination in Belcamp, Maryland. The concept of the Water's Edge destination includes existing facilities like a state-of-the-art conference center and members-only dining club. It also includes 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 in other counties in Maryland, this legislation is aimed at reconciling additional licensing with current limitations on the number of licenses that may be owned and operated in common. The Water's Edge destination consists of multiple parcels of real estate, 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 outlets within a single County "destination." It allows a large-scale County destination to operate different service outlets 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 dining club, separate from its training and education spaces, separate from its stand-alone restaurant, and so on.

The business community has expressed a strong, cohesive 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 owners have purchased adjacent properties and buildings to make these things a reality.

Now underway 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.

The original planning process of the continued enhancement of the Water’s Edge destination also includes an all-suites style lodging facility adjacent to dining and education building. Service of alcohol may be planned from this location. At the same time, guests may avail themselves of the restaurant, culinary entertainment, off-sale and active open space opportunities at this Water’s Edge destination.

Again, the challenge for the owners of Water’s Edge is how to utilize these amenities and opportunities in the current legal landscape of local alcohol laws. The traditional limitations on common ownership and operation were never intended for an enterprise of this size and scale.

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.

We are asking for this Committee to act favorably on the Bill, with its proposed amendments.