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HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL

**SEXUALLY ORIENTED BUSINESS
ORDINANCE REVISION COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE REPORT**

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by the Sexually Oriented Business Revision Committee for the purpose of summarizing the Committee's work in drafting a proposed amendment to Articles II and III of Chapter 28 of the Code of Ordinances, Houston, Texas. In addition, a new Article VIII has been proposed to be added to Chapter 28. These summaries include prior efforts of regulating sexually oriented businesses (hereinafter "SOBs"), testimony by the Vice Division of the Houston Police Department, reports and requests, citizen correspondence, industry memos, legal department research, and summaries of the principal themes heard in the public testimony taken by the Committee.

The Committee's intention is to supplement prior reports issued in 1983, 1986, and 1991. The original Ordinance was adopted in 1983. The 1986 Supplemental Report included premises that serve alcoholic beverages. The 1991 Supplemental Report addressed the addition of adult bookstores and movie theaters as regulated enterprises within the Ordinance's land use controls. The primary purpose of the current committee was twofold. First, the Committee desired to review the existing Ordinance and the City's ability to enforce the existing Ordinance. Secondly, there existed a need to assess and analyze the Ordinance with regard to its strengths and weaknesses and review them with regard to how effectively this Ordinance protects the interests of the public as well as the rights of the businesses subject to regulation. These amendments and additions relate principally to the licensing of SOB employees, lighting configurations, distancing requirements between land uses, prohibition of "glory holes," elimination of closed-off areas, public notification of sexually oriented business applications, clear lines of vision, and dancer "no-touch" policies.

SOBs enjoy Constitutional protection and must be allowed to exist and operate regardless of feelings about them. If the regulations were to be so onerous or so burdensome that they preclude or inhibit them being able to even exist, they would likely be declared unconstitutional. The Committee made it clear, both during the hearings and afterwards, that it was not the intention of the Committee to propose any ordinance that would be subject to a successful court challenge because it either directly or indirectly (or for that matter inadvertently) eliminated the opportunities for such businesses to exist in the City of Houston. Therefore, the challenge is to keep SOBs from infringing on the rights of citizens without denying SOBs a reasonable opportunity to operate in the City.

This report is not intended as a legal treatise on the regulation of SOBs, although the Committee was guided in its deliberations at various points from advice by the Legal Department and received numerous legal comments from counsel for the regulated businesses. This report is intended to be reviewed from a lay perspective for the use of the members of the City Council and members of the public in understanding the reasons that the amendments and additions to the Ordinance have been proposed. This report is intended only as a summary. The Committee has developed extensive files in connection with its work that are available for review.

On May 24, 1996, the Mayor's Office announced the members of the newly re-created committee, now titled the "Sexually Oriented Business Ordinance Revision Committee." Council Members Jew Don Boney, Jr. and Helen Huey served as co-chairs. In addition, Council Members Castillo, Driscoll, Roach, Robinson, Sanchez and Sacaz served as members.

HISTORY OF THE ORDINANCE

The existing Ordinance had its basis in the work of the 1983 City Council Committee on Sexually Oriented Businesses that resulted in the adoption of Ordinance 83-1812. The history of the Committee's work is documented in the report filed with the City Secretary in connection with Ordinance 83-1812. This ordinance adopted a land use program that was controlled through permits and various incidental regulations for SOBs. Its focus was on regulating adult modeling studios, adult entertainment parlors, adult massage parlors and other similar businesses. Ordinance 83-1812 did not extend land use controls to premises that had alcoholic beverage permits and licenses, to adult bookstores or to adult movie theaters because the state enabling law upon which the Ordinance was predicated did not then authorize land use controls on those forms of adult businesses. See former Art. 2372w Tex. Rev. Civ. Stat. Ann..

In 1985 the Texas Legislature revised the state enabling law to delete the exemption for premises that held alcoholic beverage permits and licenses. Following the revision of the state enabling law, the Committee reconvened to consider adding the so-called "topless bars" to the land use control structure of the Ordinance. The Committee reconsidered its prior work and took additional evidence relating in the adoption of Ordinance 86-323 which extended land use controls to the topless bars and placed the Ordinance into substantially its present form. The work of the Committee in the submission of Ordinance 86-323 is extensively documented in the Legislative Report filed with the City Council at the time of its adoption.

The genesis for the 1991 proposal amending the Ordinance related to circumstances virtually identical to those that arose in 1985. The Legislature in its 1989 session again amended the state enabling law. The 1989 amendments deleted the exemption from land use controls that had formerly existed in the state law for adult bookstores and adult movie theaters. However, some of the evidence received from the public in 1983 and 1986 related to adult bookstores and adult movie theaters. For this reason the Committee drew upon its 1983 and 1986 works in the preparation of the amended Ordinance draft and regarded the 1983 and 1986 evidence and experiences as pertinent to its 1991 work.

The scope of the Committee's recent work evolved as a result of increasing community concern regarding the proliferation of Sexually Oriented Business under the existing regulations.

In addition, the Houston Police Department urged the City Council to consider means to control serious violations that were increasingly repetitive at numerous SOB establishments. Because of these requests and concerns the current Committee was established to review and strengthen the existing ordinance.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

General. The Committee was re-established in the summer of 1996 to review ideas on strengthening the current Ordinance. The Committee has conducted its business in public meetings. These meetings were posted on the City Hall bulletin board and were typically attended by the Committee Members, City support staff and interested members of the public and/or the regulated businesses. The Committee also conducted three of its meetings as public hearings at which members of the industry and the general public testified. Along with the City Hall posting, notification of these public meetings was published in the newspaper and letters were sent to civic associations, individuals who had requested participation, and current SOB permit holders. The mailing list consisted of more than 1,000 names and was maintained in the office of Council member Huey and the Mayor's Citizens Assistance Office. Proponents and opponents of the regulation of SOBs were encouraged to speak openly of their ideas and viewpoints.

In addition to these public hearings, a significant number of people chose to voice their opinions through written correspondence to the mayor, city council, and/or legal department. The authors of these letters consisted of civic association presidents, topless club owners, City of Houston citizens, SOB dancers, state elected officials, advocates of various organizations and other concerned citizens. There are approximately two hundred and seventy-five letters on file. Most urged for the strengthening and enforcement of the current ordinance. While others stressed First Amendment rights, some urged industry cooperation, and others voiced concerns about the growing number of unlicensed SOBs.

Findings and Conclusions Based upon these proceedings, the committee has made additional findings and conclusions to supplement previous legislative reports.

First, because of the criminal activities that are associated with SOBs, the Committee determined the necessity of licensing all SOB entertainers and managers. Requiring an entertainer or manager to be licensed would establish a foundation for documenting those who have previous convictions for prostitution, public lewdness and other similar offenses. In addition, licensing could help eliminate underage entertainers because they would be required to prove that they are eighteen or older in order to obtain the license.

Second, the Committee found that there exists a serious predicament in the enforcement of public lewdness, prostitution, indecent exposure, and other criminal activities. Vice officers testified that because they do not engage in inappropriate behavior (such as removing their

clothing), convictions are difficult to achieve. The officer's non-participation is perceived by the entertainer that he is working under cover. The entertainer proceeds with caution, avoiding lewd behavior that might normally occur. In addition, when a patron is charged along with the entertainer, it is difficult to obtain a conviction because of the sensitivity of the relationship between the two accused.

Third, the Committee was shown a video by the HPD Vice of a bookstore "glory hole." These exist in small rooms or booths in which individuals are admitted and permitted to use one or more arcade devices. The enclosed booths are joined to the neighboring booth by a hole in the wall. These "glory holes" are used to promote anonymous sex and thus facilitate the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Fourth, the Committee found that sexually oriented businesses that did not have clear lines of vision encouraged lewd behavior or sexual contact. Many businesses are designed with areas that are out of the view of managers and are conducive to illegal behavior. Entertainers are cognizant of these areas where violations can occur unobserved by management or law enforcement personnel who are conducting open inspections. For example, high back chairs are used as barricades to shield illicit behavior. In addition, testimony revealed that private, secluded, dimly lit areas have the same effect. Testimony revealed that once the entertainer felt comfortable with the patron, ruling out that he was an undercover officer, he would be asked to move to a more private area. In some cases he would be asked to pay a fee to enter the "VIP" room by either purchasing a membership or purchasing an expensive bottle of champagne. HPD cannot always afford these admittance fees in the course of investigations and often cannot access and monitor these specific areas.

Fifth, the Committee considered the issue that multifamily tracts were being counted as one tract in the residential quota, where in actuality, many families were living independently upon one tract. Through the Planning and Development Department a new formula was established based on average homeowners' property size that would account for the piece of land. These new figures were used to achieve a residential formula of eight single family tracts for each acre of multi-family track. In addition, those lots platted for residential development, but currently unimproved, were added to the residential tract formula.

Sixth, inadequate lighting prevents managers and police officers from monitoring illegal activities. Often the lighting is so dim that an investigator cannot observe the activities from one table to the next. Vice officers testified that smaller businesses use lighting as a way to camouflage illegal activities. As a measurement for responsible lighting it was suggested that the requirement be similar to those minimum requirements established by the Uniform Building Code for 'exit' signs.

Seventh, the committee determined that enterprises that had locked rooms, were often used as fronts for prostitution. An entertainer would simply request the patron to remove his clothing. Those who objected were deemed to be Vice officers therefore restricting the usual services of the entertainer. The more money that a customer showed, the greater the 'services'.

Eighth, in keeping with the theme of family preservation, the committee was urged through public and expert testimony to include public parks in distancing restrictions. A "public park" is defined as a publicly owned or publicly leased tract of land, whether situated in the city or not, designated, maintained and operated for public use for recreational purposes by the city or any political subdivision of the state and containing improvements, pathways, access or facilities intended for public recreational use. The term "public park" shall not include public roads, rights-of-way, esplanades, traffic circles, easements or traffic triangles unless such tracts or areas contain and provide improvements or access to a recreational use by the public. Additionally, members of the Committee felt that the testimony supported inclusion of "private parks" as a protected land use. The Legal Department was asked to consider possible inclusion of this category in the final draft Ordinance.

Ninth, repeated testimony requested that notification of a pending Sexually Oriented Business Permit be given to surrounding neighbors of proposed sights. It is within the framework of the current case law to require a SOB applicant to post signs on the proposed site in addition to publishing an intent to apply for a permit in the local newspaper. Testimony revealed a great deal of concern over the general public's lack of warning of the SOB application until it has been approved and opened.

Tenth, the committee found that continuing the amortization provisions of the previous Ordinances would be preferable to grandfathering the sexually oriented businesses that do not comply with the amended Ordinance. Grandfathering would allow nonconforming uses to continue under the new ordinance in perpetuity, or until market forces wiped out the business. Grandfathering creates a monopolistic position for non-conforming property uses and prevents the municipality from exercising its power to protect its residents. Under the amortization provisions of the previous Ordinance, a business regulated as to location had six months to come into compliance. However, if such a business believed that six months was an inadequate period in which to recoup a reasonable return on invested capital, that business would have the opportunity to request an extension of the compliance period. In light of this recourse, and taking into account the present, ongoing and serious detriment that such businesses pose for the community at large, the Committee determined that an appropriate balancing of interests justified continuation of the amortization provisions.

HPD Vice Review:

The Houston Police Department's Vice Division played a major role in providing the City with statistics, details and testimony regarding their experiences with SOBs. In addition to written reports, three undercover vice officers testified at the August 29th hearing. Currently, the licensed SOBs are broken down as follows:

36 Topless Clubs
9 Adult Theaters
9 Nude Clubs
4 Video Stores
28 Modeling Studios
18 Adult Bookstores

In addition to the above list, there are approximately 18 adult theaters, bookstores and video stores with injunctive relief under federal court order in pending litigation styled, 4330 Richmond Avenue Incorporated, et al. v. The City of Houston. The City cannot enforce the SOB ordinance against the enterprises while the litigation is pending.

Between July 1, 1995 and August 31, 1996, the Houston Police Vice Division recorded 517 arrests in SOBs resulting in 355 convictions, or a conviction rate of 69%. Topless clubs experienced 289 dancer arrests with a conviction rate of 59%. In addition two managers were arrested but not convicted. There were six patrons of adult theaters taken into custody, resulting in a conviction rate of 83%. Dancers in all nude clubs accounted for 31 arrests, of which 71% were convicted. Thirty-six patrons of adult video stores were arrested resulting in an 86% conviction. The modeling studios' record consisted of four arrests and one conviction. One hundred and forty-nine patrons of adult bookstores were arrested with 125 convictions (84%).

Of the 36 topless clubs, the number of arrests per club ranged from 0 to 50. While seventeen clubs had less than 10 arrests in the last two years, one club had 50. Prostitution, public lewdness, narcotics, and indecent exposure made up these violations. Auto thefts are also on the rise in topless bar vicinities. This is due largely to the fact that a thief knows that he has about an hour and a half to steal the car before the owner comes back.

Topless clubs make up the majority of arrests in the Vice Division's enforcement experience. When the officer goes under cover in a club, he must assume the identity of a patron. Employees explicitly ask for badges, weapons, handcuffs, and go as far as feeling around the patron looking for these items. Once they feel comfortable that the patron is not a police officer, they will often ask him to move to a more secluded area, or possibly the VIP room of the club. The entertainer explains that she can do better dances in these areas and a 'lot more things' because they aren't watched as closely. This is when the opportunity for sexual or lewd activities occurs.

The Vice Division representatives testified that licensing and criminal background checks will assist in the regulation of the entertainers behavior. Often, the same dancer is arrested under a different or "stage" name. A license will ensure an individuals true name, thus avoiding the use of stage names. This will ensure that individuals who are arrested and convicted are properly identified in the event of future criminal arrests.

Modeling studios, tanning salons, encounter parlors and similar SOBs require the patron to disrobe on entry. Performance is based specifically on the amount of money a patron is willing to

spend. This takes place behind locked doors. Vice officers' testimony revealed that in their opinion, these businesses were merely fronts for prostitution. Vice officers elaborated on schemes of credit card fraud contributed to these enterprises. Often the charged amounts are altered or bogus charges are sent through for payment. When the client complains, he is threatened with the disclosure of the type of enterprise that he was in.

Vice officers testified that "bookstores are nothing more than just blatant open sexual contact between people with complete anonymity." With professionally cut 'glory holes', random sexual activity between males is rampant. One officer went as far as testifying that in his eleven years with Vice he does not recall ever seeing anyone go into a booth, watch the movie for thirty minutes and walk out.

The HPD Vice officers felt that the following ordinance change suggestions would be helpful in the enforcement and regulation of sexually oriented businesses:

- 1.) licensing of persons involved in a SOB - manager, owners, dancers, waiters, bartenders
- 2.) minimum age 21 (this requires a state law change)
- 3.) premises need to be well lit inside
- 4.) no touching
- 5.) models in modeling studios should not be allowed to remove all their clothes
- 6.) make it a violation for models to ask patrons to remove all clothes
- 7.) require bookstores and arcades to be well lit, no dark corners, no booths, no access between video booths, and no "glory holes"
- 8.) entertainers to be considered employees rather than contractors
- 9.) all investors and shareholders to be disclosed and licensed
- 10.) public display of licenses
- 11.) 6 foot distances between performer and patron
- 12.) no private viewing areas
- 13.) devices used as barriers limited to four foot heights
- 14.) illumination of one candle foot at floor level minimum
- 15.) no locked interior doors in modeling or tanning studios
- 16.) regulate escort services
- 17.) prohibition against use of inanimate objects by SOB employees to depict sexual conduct
- 18.) prohibition against warning systems
- 19.) redefine "multi-unit center"
- 20.) restrict transfer of permit/license
- 21.) develop time line for revocation/suspension hearing
- 22.) amend terms "knowingly" and "negligence"
- 23.) owners, managers and employees of a SOB shall have their license immediately available

Although not all of these items were determined by the Legal Department as legally defensible under the extant enabling statute and case law, they were taken into consideration.

PUBLIC HEARING SUMMARY

The initial Public Hearing was held on July 15, 1996 in the City Council Chamber. Council Member Boney outlined the intentions of the current committee as:

- a. review the ordinance
 1. enforcement issues
 2. effectiveness of the ordinance
 3. operating procedures
- b. review all SOBs, regulated and licensed, unlicensed and illegal
- c. licensing of employees
- d. visibility issues
- e. revision of land policies
- f. balance SOBs' constitutional right and the right of the communities

The public testimony proceeded as follows:

According to members of the industry, policies for public lewdness cases are made in a personal and participative way. In other words, Vice officers encourage lewd behavior, even to the extent of participating, in order to "get a case." Industry representatives generally agreed that employee licensing is necessary, though some prefer the Police Department, others prefer the Health Department. Depending on the quality of an arrest, three or five within twelve months should be sufficient for revocation/suspension of SOB license. In addition, it is felt that there lacks effective police enforcement of unlicensed tanning salons and massage parlors.

Dr. Devinney, professor of Abnormal psychology, testified that sexual deviants are attracted to communities because of Sexually Oriented Businesses. There are some deviants who cannot get sexual satisfaction unless they pay for it. While others are not satisfied unless they take or steal it. In addition, there are some sexual deviants who cannot have sexual satisfaction without forbidden partners such as children, invalids or elderly. SOBs located in residential or even retail areas attract sexual deviants because they have their entertainment, then they come out and have a fertile field for solicitation. Therefore, they do not belong in or near residential communities.

Because of the adverse secondary effects caused by Sexually Oriented Businesses, citizen responses urged the increase of distancing of SOBs from schools, churches and licensed day cares. In addition, they perceived a need to decrease the current residential formula of 75% to 25%. They also requested notification to area residents of proposed SOBs, either by posting a large sign on the property or individual mail outs. In addition, they urged that billboard advertising be illegal.

The second public hearing occurred on July 29, 1996. Attorneys representing the SOB industry requested that a hearing panel be developed to deal with permitting issues. In addition, the panel should consist of non-law enforcement individuals, and contain several different hearing officers.

Testimony indicated that although many SOBs follow the rules, most industry representatives are not against stronger regulations in regards to licensing the entertainers. Often the dancers are transient. The establishment of a license issued through HPD would create a data base of information.

Furthermore, a great deal of discussion was given to a "no touch" policy. Owners and dancers alike stated that touching was part of the entertainment. Plexiglass barriers, mini-stages, and six foot distancing were all criticized.

A third public hearing was scheduled for the public to comment on the draft ordinance prior to final council approval, and was held January 6, 1997.

REVIEW OF WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

More than two hundred seventy-five letters were received regarding the sexually oriented business ordinance. These letters came from property owners, SOB employees, concerned citizens, parents, educators, civic association, and business owners. While not all suggestions could be incorporated into this summary, each letter was carefully reviewed and passed to other members of the committee. These documents are on file in the Legal Department.

Approximately one hundred seventy five letters were the result of a letter writing campaign promoted by 'Adults for Legal Freedom'. The principal theme of these letters was the over-regulation of the adult business industry. They feel that this industry attracts tourism, pays considerable tax revenues, and creates jobs, and therefore is a valuable asset to the city. In addition, they believe the reworking of this ordinance is for political reasons only.

Letters came in urging the extension of distancing between a SOB and neighborhoods, schools, licensed daycares, churches, medical clinics, government offices, historic districts, public parks, hospitals, and distancing between sexually oriented businesses. It was asked that new residential projects with preliminary approval from the planning commission be included in the residential formula. Also, concerns arose over the representation of multifamily dwellings in the residential radius computations.

Notification of the public that a Sexually Oriented Business has applied for an application was a relatively new issue brought before the committee members. Suggestions ranged from 90

day notices by property signs to postcards being mailed to all residents in the area. Notification by newspaper, certified mail, and public hearings were also brought forth.

With regard to entertainers, recommendations were to prohibit touching, prohibit asking customers to undress, install an 8' high stage, require 6 feet distances from patron, and plexiglass barriers, license all dancers, increase minimum dancing age, require criminal background checks, no licenses issued to convicted felons, and require license to be worn at all times when inside an enterprise.

Other correspondence recommended that SOB permits should be renewed annually, repeated violations should be ground for denial, prohibit locked interior doors, require sufficient illumination of the facility, and to hold owner/manager accountable for activity occurring on the premises.

While opinions and suggestions varied. Most people agreed with the proposition that sexually oriented businesses would continue to exist, and expressed concern to create a solution in which they could coexist without infringing on the rights of the citizens of the city.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Adult Arcade Ordinance Changes.

1. It is recommended that the Police Department's concerns regarding "adult arcades" or "peep shows" be addressed by amending art. II of Ch. 28 of the Code of Ordinances to eliminate problems of sexually transmitted disease and criminal sexual conduct in such operations. At present, art II prohibits enclosed booths for viewing sexually oriented entertainment but regulates only establishments whose "arcade devices" are intended for the viewing of five or fewer persons. The recommended amendment would make devices intended for viewing by less than one hundred persons come under the purview of art. II. In addition, no adult arcade or adult mini-theatre shall be configured in such a manner as to have any opening in any partition, screen, wall or other barrier that separates viewing areas for arcade devices or adult mini-theatre devices from other viewing areas for arcade devices or adult mini-theatre devices. This provision shall not apply to conduits for plumbing, heating, air conditioning, ventilation or electrical service, provided that such conduits shall be so screened or otherwise configured as to prevent their use as openings that would permit any portion of a human body to penetrate the wall or barrier separating viewing areas. This should eliminate the