

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL BOARD
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MEETING

IN THE MATTER OF: :
:
Balducci's Holding, LLC :
t/a To Be Determined : Fact-
3201 New Mexico Ave., NW : Finding
Retailer B - ANC-2E : Hearing
License No. 88667 :
:
(License in Safekeeping) :

January 28, 2015

The Alcoholic Beverage Control Board met in the Alcoholic Beverage Control Hearing Room, Reeves Building, 2000 14th Street, N.W., Suite 400S, Washington, D.C. 20009, Chairperson Ruthanne Miller, presiding.

PRESENT:

- RUTHANNE MILLER, Chairperson
- NICK ALBERTI, Member
- DONALD BROOKS, Member
- MIKE SILVERSTEIN, Member
- HECTOR RODRIGUEZ, Member
- JAMES SHORT, Member

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

10:38 a.m.

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3 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: The next case on
4 our calendar is a Fact-Finding Hearing for
5 Balducci's located at 3201 New Mexico Avenue,
6 N.W., License No. 88667, in ANC-2E. Good
7 morning.

8 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Good morning.

9 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: So when you are
10 ready, if you could identify yourself for the
11 record?

12 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Certainly.
13 Good morning, Members of the Board. My name is
14 Anne Marie Vassallo McKinnon and I am here for
15 Balducci's Holdings. As you know, we have a
16 license. It's currently in safekeeping. And the
17 Board -- shall I stand?

18 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Wait. Can I just
19 ask you to pause for one second?

20 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Sure.

21 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: And say what your
22 relation is to Balducci's?

1 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: I do work for
2 Balducci's in Maryland and Virginia.

3 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Are you an
4 attorney?

5 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: I am an
6 attorney --

7 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay.

8 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: -- for their
9 Maryland and Virginia stores. And they asked me
10 to come here today.

11 Balducci's is located up in North
12 Jersey. There is a bit of digging out today.

13 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Right.

14 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: From
15 yesterday's storm.

16 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay. Okay. So
17 the reason that we scheduled this Fact-Finding
18 Hearing is that we do so for licenses that have
19 been in safekeeping that have come to our
20 attention that have been in safekeeping for a
21 long time.

22 So according to my notes, this one has

1 been in safekeeping since 2008. Is that correct?

2 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Well, I don't
3 believe that is actually the case. The license
4 was transferred to us. I believe the transfer
5 actually was finalized, I don't have a copy of
6 the resolution, around 2011.

7 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay.

8 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: As you may
9 recall, Sutton Place Gourmet was the predecessor
10 to Balducci's and they have had locations in
11 Maryland and Virginia and in D.C., the one on New
12 Mexico Avenue. They -- we acquired Sutton Place
13 Gourmet and during the time of that acquisition,
14 they actually filed for bankruptcy. A lot of
15 financial challenges. So --

16 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Who did?

17 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Sutton Place
18 Gourmet.

19 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Sutton Place.

20 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay.

22 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: And that

1 actually made the transfer of the license a
2 little bit complicated, but we got through it.
3 The Board and the staff actually gave us the path
4 to enable that to happen.

5 So the license, I believe, was
6 transferred to us finally in 2011. We have
7 sought renewal since that time. We did have to
8 close the New Mexico Avenue location. Basically,
9 it's all part of kind of a company-wide plan to
10 get the financial house in order. And actually
11 things are doing well.

12 So Balducci's is on an expansion mode
13 and looking to renew, reengage, get back into the
14 market. I mean, we are in Maryland. We are in
15 Virginia. We very much want to be in D.C., but
16 it had to be financially prudent and I would say
17 about six months ago the expansion mode really
18 kicked in. We are looking in areas of
19 Connecticut. Really, things have turned the
20 corner, I would say.

21 So we would like to maintain this
22 license. We are looking at locations. You know,

1 I don't have a specific location to give you and
2 I really don't know the status of negotiations
3 with the various, you know, places. And we want
4 to make sure it is the right fit.

5 I mean, if you are familiar with the
6 Balducci's, it's kind of a -- it's not quite a
7 supermarket. It's not quite a green grocer.
8 Somewhere in between, a lot of custom offerings,
9 a lot of pre-prepared foods, a lot of highly
10 refined preparations of foods. So we want to
11 make sure it's the right fit, finding the right
12 location.

13 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Can I ask you, I
14 just want to get the history right. So the
15 license was transferred in 2011?

16 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: That's my
17 understanding.

18 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Was Balducci's
19 open in 2011?

20 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: It was still
21 open for a little while, the one on New Mexico
22 Avenue.

1 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Right.

2 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Operating
3 under the name of Balducci's.

4 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Right.

5 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: But I believe
6 the location closed in 2011 or '12.

7 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay.

8 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: I would have
9 to go back and check.

10 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: So it has been
11 closed for over two years?

12 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: About two
13 years, yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: And so during
15 those two years it wasn't actively seeking a
16 different location?

17 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: That is my --
18 pardon?

19 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: During those two
20 years it wasn't actively seeking a location, but
21 at this point --

22 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: No.

1 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: -- it is?

2 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: In those two
3 years, we were just trying to make sure
4 Balducci's, the whole concept, didn't disappear
5 entirely. It had gone bankrupt for, you know, a
6 lot of financial reasons and had to get things
7 back in order. So no.

8 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay.

9 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: We weren't
10 during those -- probably mid-2014, because that's
11 when the financial picture started to brighten a
12 good deal and we just -- and the expansion plans
13 kicked in. So say six months ago, give or take.

14 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Is there a
15 definite expansion planned for D.C.?

16 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: There is if we
17 can find the right location on the right terms.
18 Yes, absolutely. We are in Maryland. We are in
19 Virginia. Montgomery County, Fairfax, we would
20 like to be right in between those two.

21 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay. Mr.
22 Brooks?

1 MEMBER BROOKS: Yes. Thank you, Madam
2 Chair. Have you retained a real estate agent to
3 help you find a location?

4 MS. VASSALLO MCKINNON: I am not in
5 the -- I don't know. I mean, I can check for you
6 and get back to you. I am not in -- I handle the
7 alcoholic beverage matters. I'm really not in
8 the real estate parts. I know that they have
9 been talking with developers. I'm not sure if
10 they have been doing it directly or if they are
11 using a tenant rep to do that. I'm just not
12 sure.

13 Patrick Dentato is our CFO. He is --
14 he -- I'm not sure if he is doing it directly in
15 his office or if they have retained, you know,
16 one of the brokers in the area.

17 MEMBER BROOKS: Yes, I would be very
18 interested in learning and knowing that, because
19 to me that signals your not only interest, but
20 your sincerity in looking for a location --

21 MS. VASSALLO MCKINNON: Yes. Okay.

22 MEMBER BROOKS: -- for the business.

1 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: I would have
2 to get back to you. I mean, I would expect that
3 they are -- I don't know. I couldn't tell you if
4 they are using JLL or who they might be using,
5 but I would expect they were.

6 I mean, the redevelopments in the
7 area, I mean, they are not single -- they are
8 very complex, so you need to get in -- we know we
9 have to get in early and begin the discussions
10 early, because there is competition for the
11 spaces, I mean.

12 MEMBER BROOKS: Yes. And how long has
13 this process been going on?

14 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Pardon?

15 MEMBER BROOKS: How long has the
16 process been going on as far as looking and
17 interested?

18 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: About May/
19 June of this past year is when we kind of got the
20 balance sheet and made expansion a potentiality.
21 Not expansion, but just getting back into the
22 market that we had been in or we need to get

1 into, you know.

2 MEMBER BROOKS: All right.

3 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: The financial
4 picture had to look better than it did when --

5 MEMBER BROOKS: Thank you.

6 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: -- we acquired
7 the license.

8 MEMBER BROOKS: Thank you, Madam
9 Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay.

11 MEMBER SHORT: Madam Chair?

12 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Yes, Mr. Short?

13 MEMBER SHORT: You represent the
14 company, so you would know about Class B. Their
15 license is a Class B?

16 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: It's Class B
17 Retailer, yes.

18 MEMBER SHORT: And do you realize
19 there is a moratorium on those in the city, at
20 the time?

21 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: We do. And
22 that's why this one is so crucial to us. Yes,

1 absolutely.

2 MEMBER SHORT: Okay. And it's crucial
3 to the Government also. So what time period do
4 you think your company will be ready to say we're
5 going to be putting this license to --

6 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: In terms of
7 opening a store and activating the license or of
8 being able to give you a definite location and--

9 MEMBER SHORT: What is your plan to
10 give us a plan?

11 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Well, I think
12 within the next year we are going to be able to
13 identify a location.

14 MEMBER SHORT: Next year? This is
15 2015 the beginning.

16 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Within a 12
17 month period. If I -- are we going to be able to
18 open the doors and start serving customers and,
19 you know, selling bakery and fine wines?

20 MEMBER SHORT: So you want to keep it
21 in safekeeping for the next year without giving
22 us any --

1 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: I can't give
2 you a location until we have a lease signed.

3 MEMBER SHORT: Not only a location.
4 Do you have a plan in place to satisfy this
5 Government that for a whole year that Class B
6 someone else could be using it, giving us tax
7 dollars.

8 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Yes.

9 MEMBER SHORT: So what is in it for
10 the Government that you continue for one year
11 with a license that a lot of other people could
12 be using and paying taxes on it?

13 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: I cannot tell
14 you specifically the date that we can tell you we
15 will be putting a location, siting it at a
16 specific location. But I believe within the next
17 12 months, we will have a lease signed to be able
18 to say the license will be here.

19 MEMBER SHORT: Thank you. That's all
20 I have, Madam Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay. Others?

22 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: Madam Chair?

1 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Mr. Silverstein?

2 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: Yes, I'm not
3 satisfied with 12 months.

4 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Okay.

5 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: I think that we
6 should hear from not you --

7 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON:

8 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: -- in six months,
9 but someone with the knowledge of where you are
10 moving forward with this.

11 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Okay.

12 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: We want to know.
13 I mean, I remember Balducci's. I definitely
14 remember Sutton Place Gourmet. I can tell you
15 that the place where you were is occupied --

16 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Yes.

17 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: -- up on New
18 Mexico. I go there regularly. But you can't --

19 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Yes, based
20 upon --

21 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: -- sit on this
22 license forever. And I think we want to know in

1 six months, we want the progress of your siting.

2 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Okay.

3 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: Where you are
4 looking. There is so much going on in the city.

5 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Exactly.

6 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: You have a
7 valuable -- there is a moratorium on these.

8 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Yes.

9 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: You have a
10 valuable instrument here and use it or lose it.

11 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Mr. Rodriguez?

12 MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Madam Chair, I
13 agree with Mr. Silverstein on this matter. I
14 believe that, you know, a year is a long time and
15 I don't see any real plan, just some belief that
16 you have.

17 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Okay.

18 MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: But we can't
19 operate on beliefs. I believe in a lot of
20 things, but when it comes to liquor licenses and
21 the property utilization of liquor licenses, we
22 have to go beyond belief. We have to have some

1 facts. We have to have some plans. And I don't
2 feel that you have your arms entirely around
3 this. There is some information that you are
4 lacking. You are coming before us with some
5 beliefs, but I don't feel that you really have a
6 grip on this. And I would like to see this Board
7 receive a better plan.

8 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Okay.

9 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: Madam Chair?

10 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay. I have one
11 other question for you. What is in that location
12 right now where Balducci's was?

13 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: I am not sure.

14 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay.

15 MEMBER SILVERSTEIN: Wagshal's.

16 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Wagshal's? Oh,
17 Wagshal's, okay. So what I'm hearing from the
18 Board and I know you probably haven't heard this
19 before today, is that, you know, that licenses
20 can't sit forever. And though, you know, this
21 may be a surprise to you.

22 So it sounds like you have found plans

1 that are developing and what the Board would like
2 to see in six months is a more definitive plan
3 like on paper.

4 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: What you are
6 doing. Who you are contacting. What the time
7 line might be, so that the Board can have
8 confidence that you actually really are moving
9 now towards utilization of that license. I mean,
10 obviously, the Board would love it if you came in
11 with a signed lease, but that may not be
12 realistic. I understand that.

13 But if you have -- come in with, you
14 know, who your real estate agent is.

15 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: And what their
17 plan is, what markets they are hitting, any kind
18 of information that can convince the Board that
19 you are moving in that direction, you know,
20 methodically, seriously. Anything else the Board
21 wants to say on that?

22 Do you understand that?

1 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Oh, I do. I
2 understand. I mean, I would love to give you the
3 specifics.

4 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Right.

5 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: But I have --

6 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: You don't have it
7 today.

8 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: No. And I may
9 have them, you know, it's just going to take a
10 few more conversations to drill them down.

11 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay. And then
12 you may be further along in a few months, so
13 hopefully, and so I just wanted to let you know
14 what might be expected in six months. And I
15 think it's a good idea certainly to have
16 something on paper at the Fact-Finding Hearing to
17 give to the Board that is concrete.

18 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: And if you have
20 any questions, you can ask our General Counsel,
21 Martha Jenkins, as you get closer.

22 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Okay.

1 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: So we will set
2 this for a hearing within six months with
3 expecting a submission from you on that.

4 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: And I really
5 do think in six months we will be able to give
6 you, you know, many, many, many more bullet
7 points.

8 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay.

9 MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: That's good.

10 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: I mean, we--

11 MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: That's what we need
12 to hear.

13 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: So I think --

14 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: It's a great
15 market. We know that.

16 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Right.

17 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Yes.

18 MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Okay.

19 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Got to, you
20 know, find one where --

21 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: So I'm going to
22 move to approve this application for safekeeping

1 for a period of six months and that a Fact-
2 Finding Hearing be scheduled within those six
3 months, at the end of the six months with a
4 submission to be provided to the Board a week
5 ahead of time.

6 MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Second it.

7 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: All right. Do I
8 have a second?

9 MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: I seconded.

10 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Mr. Rodriguez
11 seconded the motion.

12 All those in favor say aye.

13 ALL: Aye.

14 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: All those
15 opposed? All those abstaining? Okay. The
16 motion passes 6-0-0. Okay.

17 MS. VASSALLO McKINNON: Well, thank
18 you. I do hope to come back to you.

19 CHAIRPERSON MILLER: Okay. Thank you
20 very much.

21 MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Stay warm.

22 (Whereupon, the Fact-Finding Hearing

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