

LOCAL NEWS

Whittier ponders: How late should Uptown restaurants be allowed to remain open?



Chef Ricardo Diaz talks about their plans to transform the first floor of the historic Nixon Plaza building in Uptown Whittier into the Whittier Brewing Company on Wednesday April 5, 2017. (Photo by Keith Durlinger/Whittier Daily News/SCNG)

By [Mike Sprague](#) | msprague@scng.com | Whittier Daily News

PUBLISHED: November 26, 2018 at 3:40 pm | UPDATED: November 26, 2018 at 6:22 pm

Havana House, the Whittier cigar shop, can stay open until 2 a.m. seven days a week, but [the adjacent Poet Gardens, the soon-to-open microbrewery and restaurant](#), must close at midnight Sunday through Thursday and can only stay open until 1 a.m. Fridays and Saturday.

At its 6:30 p.m. Tuesday meeting, the City Council will look at these disparities and consider establishing a policy on how late restaurants, in particular those that sell alcoholic beverages, can remain open.

It's about time, said Councilman Henry Bouchot, who asked for the review.

“We don’t have a consistent policy on closing hours,” Bouchot said. “When you’re talking about attracting businesses to Uptown, you need to give them a reasonable expectation of what we allow and what we don’t allow.”

Of the 47 restaurants in the Uptown area that sell alcoholic beverages, only a dozen can remain open past midnight. Of those, only five can stay open to 2 a.m. seven days a week, according to city documents. The other seven can stay open past midnight — but typically only on Fridays and Saturdays.

One of lucky ones, [Imli, 7006 Greenleaf Ave., a proposed new Indian-cuisine restaurant, was approved for late hours by the Planning Commission](#) in October. Councilwoman Cathy Warner said that decision is now “up for review,” meaning she has appealed it, and the council will hold a public hearing at its Dec. 11 meeting.

“I think it’s prudent to look at each application on its own merits rather than give a blank check,” Warner said.

Among the issues Warner said she considers are, where is the business and what’s close to it? Are there noise issues and do residents live nearby are other important questions, Warner said.

Frank Medina, president of the Whittier Uptown Association which represents local merchants, favors later hours.

“To draw traffic into Uptown, having a later opening would be better,” Medina said. “People would spend more time in Whittier than driving out to Brea, Pasadena or Alhambra.”

Medina added he’s not concerned about noise: “The music is inside the venue,” he said.

However, Michael Scippa, spokesman for Alcohol Justice, a nonprofit that fought a statewide proposal to allow the sale of alcoholic beverages until 4 a.m., criticizes the sale of alcoholic beverages in the wee hours.

“The data we’ve seen going back 40 years would suggest if you truly want to reduce alcoholic-related harm, you would reduce hours of service, not increase them,” Scippa said, referring to a report from California Alcohol Policy Alliance and Alcohol Justice, which found:

- Changes in last call times of two hours or more are associated with an increase in alcohol-related automobile crashes and tickets for driving under the influence.
- Early morning last calls can overlap with early morning commuters and school activities, removing insulation between late-night drinkers and daytime activity.
- Research in Australia and Norway suggests later last call times increase violence by 17 to 50 percent, while early ones reduce it by 19 to 37 percent per hour of change.
- Greater late-night drinking makes it harder for police to operate effectively and can severely impact emergency room capacity.
- Ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft are insufficient to counter intoxicated driving trends, while night owl mass transportation is largely unavailable.