

'Gentleman's club' rumors abound in Moscow

Officials say no plans for such a business have come before the city for approval

By Mark Williams, Daily News staff writer

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Rumors of a potential gentleman's club in Moscow are swirling, but evidence if such an establishment is coming and where it would go is still emerging.

In early January an ad for Flames, "a new bar and gentleman's type club," appeared in the jobs section of the Pullman/Moscow Craigslist Web site seeking bouncers, servers, entertainers and other staff, stating that the bar would be "opening soon in Moscow, Idaho."

The ad has since expired and is no longer viewable.

E-mail inquiries to the ad seeking comment were not returned.

Community Development Director Bill Belknap said currently no permit applications or other paperwork concerning such a business is before the city, but acknowledged that the rumors have reached his office as well.

Belknap said the Flames ad is the first time he has heard of such a posting on Craigslist, but not the first time someone has contacted the city about potentially opening a similar business in the area.

"We have fielded calls once a year or every two years from people inquiring about similar businesses, but nothing has ever come of it and nothing has ever come before the planning and zoning commission," he said.

Cadillac Jack's (CJ's) owner Phil Roderick further stirred the rumors at this week's City Council meeting calling on the city to make changes to its code to prevent a club from opening saying it would be a "stigma" on the community.

"If we don't get a law put together that doesn't allow that ... I might as well do it," he said. "Because if somebody else does, you guys may throw a law in, and he's going to have a monopoly, and I'm not going to let that happen."

Belknap added that the city has nothing in its current zoning code that would prohibit such a club from opening, particularly if it were to open downtown, which he said has been asked by curious citizens.

He said inquiries have been made regarding the former site of The Beach on Third and Main streets, but building owner Barry Tassler has indicated he has no plans for a gentleman's club. The Latah County Commissioners approved in early January a liquor license for the site for an entity doing business as Champion's Grill & Bar.

"We asked (Tassler) early on and he denied that it was him, and he has not turned in any plans for that type of use or layout," Belknap.

City Attorney Randy Fife said enacting new code aimed at regulating a club is not as simple as prohibiting such a business because it would be unconstitutional under the first amendment. Still, cities are allowed to regulate the "time, place and manner" of where such businesses can operate. Examples include prohibiting a gentleman's club from opening near a church or a school and also restricting how close similarly oriented businesses can open from each other.

Fife said he would construct a similar ordinance if called upon, but even that scenario would present challenges.

"One of the challenges in a town geographically this small is to find a place that they could be allowed," he said.

Though Fife is not working on specifics currently, Belknap said the city likely will visit the idea of enacting something that would regulate where a "sexually oriented business" could operate. He said a draft could be brought before either the Administrative or Public Works/Finance committees in the next month or two.

"Informally we are exploring the concept ... and I expect the council might consider moving in that direction," he said.

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