

ATTACHMENT 10
PUBLIC COMMENTS

Agenda Item Number 2

RECEIVED THROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION REVIEW
(JULY 12, 2022)

From: Freddie Francis [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 6:50 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom; John Jay
Subject: Fwd: Lowell Sheldon liquor license

Public comment from Elizabeth Kurtz, Camp Meeker.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Keep Freestone Safe [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, May 31, 2022 at 6:49 AM
Subject: Fwd: Lowell Sheldon liquor license
To: [REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Lisa Kurtz [REDACTED]
Date: Mon, May 30, 2022 at 4:02 PM
Subject: Lowell Sheldon liquor licen[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in regards to the liquor license appeal submitted by Lowell Sheldon, regarding Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave.)

I have personal experience with Lowell Sheldon which I believe to be relevant. He took large sums of money from my mother, calling the more than \$100,000 over about 2 years a "line of credit" for the restaurant which she paid in advance with no written agreement. I don't know how long this had been going on before I was alerted by her financial advisor in 2015.

My mother moved to Sebastopol in 2008, after the recent loss of both her son and husband to cancer. She was at the time 74-81 years old. She developed a serious drinking problem for the first time in her life.

When I became aware of this situation, I met with Sheldon to ask him to provide me with paperwork for their arrangement. I was met by a cold and dismissive response and was told that he would not be providing any receipts or paperwork as I requested. I also told him how concerned I was about my mother's drinking and asked if he would please ask his staff to not offer or encourage the alcohol. I told him I did not expect anyone to police her drinking but any help with this matter would be appreciated. Again, he was very dismissive and uncaring. I left that meeting feeling sad and frustrated. It was very clear to me that there was no emotional connection to her in any way, yet he seemed to have a clear conscience about taking money from her and seemed inconvenienced to talk to me.

I was unable to put a stop to this situation until I threatened him with an elder abuse charge and took my mother from the condo where she was living and moved her to a retirement community

in 2017. At the end of her time at the complex located behind Sheldon's restaurant, he was having open wine delivered to her door at 8:00 in the morning. Although I never pressed charges and he remained in business, the thoughtless and reckless nature of his behavior was the source of much pain for myself and my family. I have heard of his sexual harrassment and drug abuse and because of my experience with him, believe the accusations stated by his victims. His toxic behavior makes me believe that the city of Sebastopol would be avoiding future ethical and legal problems by standing behind those who have been traumatized by Lowell Sheldon.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth (Lisa) Kurtz

--

freddie francis

████████████████████

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 7:43 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Lowell Sheldon/Alcohol License for Piala LLC(7233 Healdsburg Avenue)

From: Frank Dice II [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 5:56 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Lowell Sheldon/Alcohol License for Piala LLC(7233 Healdsburg Avenue)

Good evening. My name is Frank Dice III and I was the lead bartender at Underwood Bar And Bistro from 2003-2017. During that time, I witnessed Lowell Sheldon first hand all too often.

He was consistently disrespectful, and exhibited behavior that could be described as boorish at best. He was also more often than not intoxicated, conniving and even insidious. I eventually stopped serving him around 2013 at The Underwood(though he wasn't formally 86'd I made it clear to him he wasn't welcome anymore)mostly because he was so incredibly disagreeable and made the rest of my clientele uncomfortable.

I've been in the restaurant/bar/winery business since 1991 and Lowell Sheldon remains one of the most disreputable individuals I have ever come across.

In closing, I would strongly recommend against granting the man a liquor license.

Regards,
Frank Dice III

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 7:57 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Lowell Sheldon

From: LeAnn Kurtz [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 7:34 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Lowell Sheldon

To Whom it May Concern-

I believe that Lowell Sheldon should not be granted an alcohol license and here's why. I understand he has a long history of sexual abuse, but this is something entirely different that I believe is illegal as well.

My mother owned one of the condos on the Florence St. property where Lowell's Restaurant was located. She ate nearly 100% of her meals there. At the time, my father had recently passed away and she was having a struggle with her alcohol consumption. She would regularly drink a bit too much and also, due to her advanced age, (in her 80s), her judgment was often impaired. She has a lot of money, and Lowell was aware of this. He told her she could run a "tab" and charged her \$50,000.00 upfront, TWICE!!! After that, he would let her eat there and never once offered receipts or any evidence of how much she'd spent. When he said her first \$50,000 had run out, he did the same thing again. Is this even legal?

I believe my sister asked for receipts and he was unable to produce them. I also have a hard time believing that this could be a legal way of doing business.

Due to the sensitive nature of the circumstances and my mother being a very private person, I am leaving her name out of it. I just wanted to make you aware of possible illegal money transactions as well as sexual offenses.

My name is LeAnn Kurtz, phone number [REDACTED] and I live in Sebastopol.

Thank you for your time.

Cheers,

LeAnn Kurtz
[REDACTED]

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 7:18 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Upcoming Public Hearing re: Piala

From: Danielle Connor [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, May 27, 2022 10:24 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Upcoming Public Hearing re: Piala

Hi Kari, please share my letter with the Planning Commission staff and any relevant parties.

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I wanted to reach out to you and the Planning Commission staff regarding the denial of Piala's PNC letter for their ABC license. It's my understanding that this is going to be in front of the Planning Commission soon at a public hearing, since Lowell Sheldon has appealed this decision. I plan to speak publicly as well but was hoping you'd hear me out on a personal level too.

I employ several of Lowell's former employees and sadly have also experienced his harassment first hand at Retrograde as a customer, and on a personal level. I am very concerned about him opening up another business in town (near a school, no less) with access to alcohol and being in a continued position of power that he has time after time abused. He repeatedly failed to uphold his duties as a business owner to protect his employees, as have his management and business partners. I know that work culture is led from the top down and Lowell has no interest in protecting his employees. He has a heavily-documented decade+ long history of sexual abuse, assault, harassment and clear workplace violations that have all involved alcohol, including giving alcohol to minors. He has profited financially from the abuse of others as this forced his previous business partners (Fern Bar, Handline, Khom Loi) to buy him out of his shares, earning him profits well over 6-figures. He has also been banned as a customer from these businesses for the abuse he has forced their employees to endure and used his position as a partner to manipulate them.

Before everything went public in [the Bohemian](#) and [SF Chronicle](#) last year, he had made inappropriate comments toward my employees and been a horrible customer for years. He would repeatedly "forget his wallet" and never return to pay for goods he pressured my employees into giving him, even though we have a strict policy against that. Multiple team members privately expressed concerns to me about him making them feel uncomfortable and making inappropriate comments to them, which was the final straw. We asked him not to come in anymore, which prompted him to call me late at night (I've never given him my cell number), email me repeatedly and have his family members and friends threaten me and my business. They sent me emails, messages on social media and plastered my business with negative reviews on Yelp (which I have since had removed thanks to their help). I know there is nothing that can be done about this by the PC, but it speaks to his character and the character of the people who choose to work with him. These are all huge red flags and further show he does not understand or respect boundaries. I fear retaliation again for speaking out against him but cannot allow him and his behavior to attempt to silence me.

As an employer, it is our legal responsibility to protect our employees from the very abuse he forced them to endure. I know first hand from employing his former employees that he has psychologically

traumatized them and fostered horrible work environments. Many of his former employees are afraid to speak out against him. As someone who is trying to foster a positive, trusting work culture, it is very hard to do so with what his employees have endured. There is no way for anyone to guarantee that he is not part of daily operations and I fear that with access to alcohol, this will again become the norm at his new business and continue to have a negative impact on youth, women and workers in our community. I fear for innocent employees who may not know his history or read the first-hand events of what he has done, as many Sebastopol workers come from all over Sonoma County to work in the service industry here. Most of my employees, for example, do not live in Sebastopol.

As a contributing community member, it is our responsibility to keep fellow members safe as much as we can control. You can help prevent future victims of workplace harassment by upholding the Planning Director's decision to deny Pinal and Lowell Sheldon the PNC letter they need to obtain an ABC permit. This might be one of the biggest decisions in front of you this year and I empower you to do the right thing. I appreciate your time.

Thank you,
Danielle

--

Danielle Connor she/her
Co-Founder, Head of
Operations, Retrograde
Coffee Roasters

www.retrograderoaasters.com

From: Madeline Miller [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 10:40 AM
To: Freddie Francis
Cc: John Jay; Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Re: Public comment from Madeline Miller

actually residing in Belfast, ME for the time being. thanks!

On Tue, Jun 14, 2022 at 10:13 AM Freddie Francis [REDACTED]m> wrote:

Hi John and Kari, I'm sharing the following public comment on behalf of Madeline Miller, who is CC'd (so you know she is real) but who does not wish to be contacted/receive any related followup. Let me know if you have any Q's. Thank you!

- freddie

I am a former employee of Lowell Sheldon who spoke to the SF Chronicle in September 2021 about witnessing and experiencing several instances of Lowell's inappropriate behavior including sexual comments and unwanted kissing. I maintain that these events are true and I support the efforts to deny his new alcohol permit.

-- Madeline Miller,
Formerly of Sebastopol; now residing in Tucson, AZ

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 11:58 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Lowell Sheldon

From: Natalia Chamaki [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 10:31 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Lowell Sheldon

Good morning,

My name is Natalia and I am from Graton. I am writing you in regards to whether an alcohol license ought to be granted to Lowell Sheldon. It is of my strong opinion that he should not be granted one. Lowell is a predator. In either 2016 or 2017, I had secured a job at Peter Lowells, however after two weeks on the job I was offered a position at Ramen Gaijin which I jumped. I found Lowell to be so creepy and off-putting. During my short stint at Peter Lowells, Lowell had a prolonged gaze, would walk and stand too close, and brush up against me, not necessarily in a sexual way, but he had plenty of room to avoid me. I made no complaint (except to perhaps my mother) and began looking for a new job. When working at Ramen Gaijin, Lowell frequented the restaurant. I would watch him make women extremely uncomfortable at the bar, he was always lurking over them or putting his face too close to theirs. If I were walking past him he would put himself directly in my path, and once while I was at the bar waiting for someone's drink order he leaned in behind me, pinning me against the bar and himself. Overall, that man is a creep. I always wondered why nobody said anything about his disgusting and downright rapey vibes. Then I saw Leah's statement about Lowell, and all the other women coming forward with their sexually abusive experiences they had with Lowell. It all became clear. Lowell was using his position of authority to sexually abuse women, and a tool he frequently used was alcohol. People like Lowell are not going to change, they do not see what they are doing as wrong, or they simply do not care. Granting Lowell the ability to utilize one of his preferred tools he uses to get women at their weakest moments is empowering an abuser, and it would be a damn shame. I know these are just accusations, and he has never been convicted of sexual assault, but waiting for a conviction before the community finally puts up safeguards for women against this predator would be such a disservice to every person who has ever been a victim of sexual assault.

Thank you for your time,
Natalia Chamaki

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 1:17 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Denial of alcohol permit to Lowell Sheldon

From: rachel kulinski [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 12:19 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Denial of alcohol permit to Lowell Sheldon

To whom it may concern,

Lowell Sheldon should not be granted an alcohol license for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave.

I have firsthand knowledge of Lowell's abuse towards close members in the community and have also witnessed his inappropriate behavior towards women first hand at social gatherings.

I, Rachel Kulinski (a local business owner) 100% support denying an alcohol license for someone who has a 10+ year heavily-documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol.

Rachel Alyn Kulinski

[REDACTED]

Jenner, CA

95450

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Thursday, June 02, 2022 3:06 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Alcohol License for Piala LLC (7233)

From: Aaron Purtill [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, June 02, 2022 2:14 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Alcohol License for Piala LLC (7233)

Hello, my name is Aaron Purtill. I am a former employee of the now closed Peter Lowell's and a long time resident of Sebastopol.

I believe that Lowell Sheldon should not be responsible or have power at a business that serves alcohol. There is an undeniable pattern of abuse and inappropriate behavior by Lowell at his previous businesses, which was often fueled by alcohol. He has proven time and again that he will offend, apologize, and repeat. I believe it is a huge sign that all previous restaurants he was a partner in have bought him out and cut tie — this shows that they feel it is unsafe to their employees to keep him as a partner due to his patterned behavior. I also see a huge red flag that Piala has already publicly separated him from day to day operations; I believe they know who they are in business with and realize they are at risk from his behavior.

Thank you for your time,
Aaron Purtill

Sebastopol City Commissioners,
If I can be of help in any way, please get in touch. My contact info is at the bottom of this letter.

My name is Dustin Andres. I am a former resident of Sebastopol and Graton. Though I moved to Washington D.C. a few years back, I visit West County a couple of times every year because I love the community and feel a deep sense of home there.

I write today in support of the change of ownership application for Piala Georgian Cuisine, on behalf of Lowell Sheldon.

Lowell has been my friend for almost two decades. We met as university students in Seattle and I've watched him grow up. With a dedication, grit, and community ethic that I admire, he built three restaurants from the ground up in Sebastopol - businesses that employed hundreds of people; paid taxes; and pleased countless diners.

Those efforts required years of behind-the-scenes work: False starts. Stalled projects. Construction disasters. Razor-thin profit margins. The personal toll of running multiple businesses: On one's relationships, on families, and on one's own well-being.


Though Lowell won't have any supervisory role in Piala, I know he put his heart into planning the new project. I am very much looking forward to sampling the Georgian cuisine that will add a whole new flavor to the food palette of West County.

I'm not here to tell you that Lowell is a perfect person. He has certainly made mistakes. But he isn't the cartoonish villain that recent media coverage makes him out to be. I've personally seen Lowell be a good manager, a civic-minded employer, and a very generous member of the community, supporting numerous non-profits.

These past two years, he has faced a storm of public scrutiny, difficult private conversations, and severance from his existing businesses. By any measure, it's been an intense period.

In Lowell, I see someone who is working to learn from his flaws - in therapy, in restorative justice efforts - and in a number of other community projects.

Lowell is a native son who wants to apply his skills to support his young family, and a successful change in ownership will allow him to do that. While some would pick up and choose a new city - he truly loves Sebastopol and would like to do the work to repair his relationship with his hometown.

Thank you for reading.
Best regards,
Dustin Andres


From: Amy M. Fox [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 26, 2022 1:32 PM
To: John Jay; Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Lowell Sheldon and Piala Georgian Cuisine

Dear Mr. Jay and Ms. Svanstrom,

I recently read the linked item from KSRO (<https://www.ksro.com/2022/05/26/lowell-sheldon-seeking-to-open-new-restaurant-in-sebastopol/>) informing the public of Lowell Sheldon's intention to petition the city to reverse its decision regarding ownership of Piala Georgian Cuisine. I would strongly urge the city to hold to its decision.

Mr. Sheldon has shown himself to be a predator and a threat to the women of this community. While I do not know Mr. Sheldon personally, in fact my one encounter with him was a positive customer service resolution to an issue at one of his restaurants, I firmly believe as a community we have to believe and take seriously the claims made by his former employees. His inability to act appropriately when alcohol is involved should bar him from being the proprietor of an establishment with a liquor license. Believe and protect the young women of this community.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Amy M. Fox
Sent from my iPhone

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 7:18 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Alcohol License of Lowell Sheldon

-----Original Message-----

From: Anna Frattolillo [REDACTED]m>
Sent: Friday, May 27, 2022 9:01 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Alcohol License of Lowell Sheldon

Good Morning Kari and Planning Commissioners of Sebastopol,

Thank you to you and the Planning Commissioners for receiving comments previously and not approving Lowell Sheldon's alcohol license.

As someone harmed by sexual abuse and assault as a child and adolescent, I write to ask you to ask consider to not approve this license again. As a customer of Lowell's for years, I got the sense that Sheldon was the owner by his posture, sense of entitlement, and predatory energy. While the food was delicious, I always hoped he would not be there. I took this as a sign of my own wounding and trauma at the time, rather than reaching for others who may have been impacted. For this I am deeply sorry. As someone who has dappled in worker and community organizing, I stand alongside workers who have been exposed to his power over them; having to choose the need to make a living over safety and dignity. As a mental health provider with youth in Sonoma County communities for the last eight years, I know that people have been through so much over the last 5 years in this county, in particular.

I ask you to reduce the harms that may fall upon this community if Sheldon were to be granted an alcohol license.

I wonder if there are any alternative ways Sheldon may be able to contribute meaningfully to this community. I wonder what transformative processes he may engage with, so that his own healing and that of the collective can begin. I wonder what resources have been offered to those who have been harmed by his sexual assault, and I wonder what they may be needing.

I wonder about the role of the Planning Commission. How do licenses, zoning and land use of the city contribute to more safety and dignity for workers and community members of all classes, races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and documentation statuses?

I don't know but I thank you for your expertise, and for your time in reading this.

Anna Frattolillo
Occidental CA
[REDACTED]

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 7:20 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Public Comment Re: Lowell Sheldon Alcohol License

From: Becky Maguire [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, May 27, 2022 1:56 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Public Comment Re: Lowell Sheldon Alcohol License

Hi there,

My name is Becky Maguire. I live in Santa Rosa, close to Sebastopol. I have close ties with several survivors of Lowell Sheldon's numerous abuses/instances of harrasment. I am saddened that he continues to seek power in restaurant spaces when his behavior is likely to be repeated. I believe he should be denied an alcohol license for many reasons, the most important of which many of his abuses have involved alcohol.

Thank you,
Becky Maguire

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Wednesday, June 15, 2022 2:38 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Support letter for Lowell Sheldon

From: Beth Brown [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 15, 2022 2:06 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Support letter for Lowell Sheldon

Dear Ms. Svanstrom:

I am writing in support of letting Mr. Sheldon continue his plans to open his establishment, including obtaining a valuable liquor license. I want to be clear that I do not know this man nor have I ever eaten at any of his establishments. I have no economic or personal interest in him obtaining his liquor license.

Like most women, I have experienced sexual harassment personally throughout my life and I know how frustrating it is to move in environments dodging bad behavior/boundaries. That being said, I do not understand withholding a liquor license, as this sounds like arbitrary punishment for his past behavior. Did he commit a crime related to holding a liquor license?

While the complaints about him and his work environments are problematic it seems that he has acknowledged his mistakes and has owned his past immature behavior. I do not see the point of men recognizing and apologizing for their mistakes if it means nothing. Otherwise, there is no point to them showing contrition. I also do not believe people should be prevented from working/making a living. While clearly the women who he hurt are angry and believe he has not shown enough guilt (what is enough guilt and who decides the measurements?) - there comes a point where we need to move forward. If we do not believe in people changing, or moving on from their mistakes, then we should just exile them to some vacant island.

To me it would be best letting him move forward with his business plans. The best measure of his behavioral changes are: 1. If he is able to hire and retain high quality, happy staff, 2. If the public opts to give him a second opportunity, patronizing his establishment.

If we were to cancel every man who failed to act properly toward women and girls, every institution from govt to hospitality to religious establishments etc would be closed. I do not know anything about the situation other than from what I have read. But it comes down to if these women want to pursue criminal or civil cases against him that is one thing but short of legal cases directly related to his behavior we need to allow people, such as Mr. Sheldon, opportunities to move on, practice their art, and support his reintroduction to the community.

Sincerely,

Beth Brown
Santa Rosa

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 7:18 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: comment re: do not approve Piala alcohol license

From: Casey Lanski [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, May 27, 2022 9:55 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: comment re: do not approve Piala alcohol license

Hello,

My name is Casey Lanski and I am a resident of Santa Rosa. I first met Lowell Sheldon at my business in Sebastopol, Retrograde Coffee Roasters.

My personal recommendation is to deny Lowell's alcohol license. As an owner-operator in Sebastopol for over 5 years, I have come into contact with Lowell as well as those he has harassed and mistreated. We have/had professional relationships with these individuals, as well as the businesses working with Lowell.

When the accusations went public, I was shocked at the quick and presumptuous progress/healing that Lowell claims to have made on his own. Equally appalling was the lack of compassion and inaction by the companies where these allegations are based. Lowell has been removed from these companies, and my rhetorical question is: how could a conscious mind give him the license to an extensive haul of alcohol and grant him the opportunity to create a toxic culture where he can abuse more employees?

I do not think Lowell has realized his specific problems with alcohol/drug abuse, which are clearly documented in the recent press in 2021. Similarly, Lowell has not acknowledged his problematic workplace behavior, and the subsequent exodus from his business partnerships were done without recognition that harassment had occurred. It simply is not up to Lowell and his colleagues to decide the definition of harassment.

At Retrograde Coffee Roasters in 2019, Lowell was upset that he would not be allowed to have a cappuccino without providing payment. Being told there is no special treatment, he began to use body language and eye rolling as bad behavior, and retorted that he "knew the owners" as if to convey his power over my employees. This type of behavior is not uncommon in the service industry, but it is completely unacceptable that a "renowned" entrepreneur would treat another business, and its entire organization with disrespect.

It goes without saying that alcohol will exacerbate personal problems, and Lowell is no exception. I don't believe Lowell is planning a wholesome and community-minded business; that will serve as a space that supports women, workers, and survivors of assault. This community would be better served knowing that the accusations have been heard and we are listening to the collective message: we cannot allow Lowell to repeat history.

Thank you,



Marylee Guinon, LLC

[Redacted]
Freestone, CA 95472
primary/cell: [Redacted]
landline: [Redacted]
[Redacted]

June 1, 2022

City of Sebastopol
Planning Commissioners
Paul Fritz, Kathy Oetinger, Zachery Douch,
Linda Kelley, Evert Fernandez and Deborah Burnes
Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

RE: Reject Applicant’s Appeal of Denial of Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit, File 2022-020

Dear City of Sebastopol Planning Commissioners and Planning Director,

The purpose of this letter is to respectfully ask that the Planning Commission reject the appeal of Denial of Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit, for PIALA LLC. The Planning staff have provided defensible grounds for this denial based on corroborated reports. The community now looks to the Planning Commission to exercise your judgment and discretion, and refuse the applicant’s appeal.

As way of background, I retired to West County from a career in land use planning and entitlements where I worked for the public and private sectors across California. My profession exposed me to a plethora of multi-disciplinary professional challenges and during my career, I garnered best planning principles and practices based on tough lessons learned. I suspect that the City’s planning decision makers share some of those principles that are relevant to the matter before you.

A proposed project description is defined by verifiable facts, not last-minute assurances and empty promises that may not or cannot be fulfilled. Owner Lowell Sheldon claims he will not be involved in the operations of his business, suggesting that his established pattern of at-risk behavior will be mitigated. How can an owner be barred from his place of business, especially when allegations include after-hours

events with repeated instances of sexual harassment, assault and other inappropriate behavior, particularly in the context of alcohol use?

Conditions and mitigations placed on a project must be enforceable, and if the agency is unable to enforce such conditions of approval, the project must be judged by the facts sans mitigations. In this case, no one can ensure the community that Lowell Sheldon will not enter the premises of his business as Sheldon suggested, including after-work hours when much of his persistent unprofessional (e.g. the service of alcohol to minors), illegal (e.g. drug use) and abusive (e.g. sexual harassment) behaviors allegedly occurred.

In evaluating a project, look for trends. In reading Lowell Sheldon's letters to the community, it is apparent that he can own "making some of his employees feel uncomfortable". And the purported self-work that he pursued over the past few years presumably was about this seemingly minor transgression. However, Lowell Sheldon resolutely does not own the repeated instances of sexual harassment, assault, serving alcohol to minors, and other inappropriate behavior, and therefore it is unlikely that he has accomplished any authentic reform. Many of us have witnessed first-hand a reformed individual; that individual does not place themselves back into that same risk environment. Moreover, Sheldon dismisses the allegations in stating his decade-long behavior "did not meet the standards of today". This quote alone speaks for itself.

Address the actual problem. Previous business partners of Sheldon and survivors of his harassment have corroborated the risks to the community of Sebastopol. Sheldon himself asserts he will be removed from operations. An alcohol-serving environment owned by Sheldon with vulnerable workers from our community is the problem. The risk to workers, minors and other community members in an alcohol-serving business cannot be mitigated.

I trust the Planning Commission will use its discretion to deny approval of a license allowing Mr. Sheldon to engage in the sale and service of alcohol in the City of Sebastopol.

Respectfully,

Marylee Guinon
Freestone, CA 95472

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 7:13 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Deny alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon

From: Claire McCaffrey [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, May 28, 2022 4:10 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Deny alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon

Hello,

My name is Claire McCaffrey. I live in Santa Rosa and I stand with the survivors who have been sexually assaulted and harassed by Lowell Sheldon. I do not believe that someone who has a 10+ year heavily-documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol should be granted an alcohol license for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave).

Thank you,
Claire McCaffrey

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 4:30 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Piala LLC, 7233 Healdsburg Ave.

-----Original Message-----

From: CYNTHIA STRECKER [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 4:23 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Piala LLC, 7233 Healdsburg Ave.

Dear Commissioner Svanstrom,

I am writing to ask you to DENY a liquor license to Lowell Sheldon for his planned wine bar at 7233 Healdsburg Ave. I live in the greater West County and am therefore not always aware of what's happening in Sebastopol, but I began hearing about Sheldon's sexual advances and thoroughly inappropriate behavior last spring.

After looking into the matter a bit more thoroughly and reading several newspaper articles about him I realize his behavior has gone beyond what I had heard about. At least 11 young women have come forward to tell their stories of a toxic working environment complete with lewd sexual innuendos and illegal drug use by their boss, Lowell Sheldon, both after and in some cases during the working day.

This is a man who regularly drank alcohol with his employees after hours. Even with an underage employee. He also appears to have used cocaine and in one instance tried to get one of his employees to consume mushrooms. This man clearly has no sense of boundaries, is thoroughly unprofessional and exhibits very poor judgment. Alcohol and poor judgment are well known to be a dangerous combination.

Surely the most despicable incident I read about involved his forcing himself onto a young woman and ultimately, without her consent, ejaculating in her mouth. This is abusive, predatory behavior pure and simple.

Three other restaurants in town in which he was a partner learned of his behavior, took steps to distance him from their staffs and limit his contact with them then ultimately eliminated him as a partner by buying him out. They appear to have realized that while Sheldon may be a talented restaurateur he is nevertheless bad for business. Allowing him to open an even more alcohol related business will be bad for Sebastopol and, indeed, the reputation of the entire West County.

His behavior has been going on for a number of years. At a number of points he has made apologies and has sworn to change his ways. Apologies and promises of this sort are an integral part of the cycle of this type of violence. They often buy the perpetrator time to re-group and do it all again.

The situation now is that Lowell Sheldon has acted in such a vile manner over a period of years that his former business partners no longer want to be associated with him. They have therefore bought him out. This leaves him with a large pot of money which he wants to invest. Please...do not let him do it in Sebastopol. DENY his liquor license.

Thank you,
Cynthia Strecker

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Monte Rio. CA. 95462

Sent from my iPad

From: Freddie Francis [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 4:35 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom; John Jay
Subject: Supporter letter from Dani Martinez

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Dani Martinez [REDACTED]
Date: Thu, Jun 9, 2022 at 4:00 PM
Subject: public comment to support survivors
To: [REDACTED]

Planning Commissioner Kari Svanstrom:

I write to you to ask that Lowell Sheldon be denied an alcohol license for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave). Sheldon has a decade long, documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse. These instances have particularly happened when involving alcohol. I was horrified to read in the North Bay Bohemian's coverage "[Rotten Core: Former Employees Say Farm-to-Table Restauranteur is Toxic and Abusive](#)" that Sheldon regularly pressured staff, including an underage worker, to drink, and that this behavior was often a precursor to assault.

Given this history, it is clearly evident that Lowell Sheldon has shown repeatedly lacks the professional and moral character to be allowed to operate an alcohol-related business.

Your office has a duty to help ensure the safety of Sebastopol residents, workers, and visitors from abuse of alcohol. I urge you to make Sonoma County a safer place and deny this alcohol license.

Sincerely,
Dani Martinez [REDACTED], Monte Rio, CA 95462

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 06, 2022 7:16 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Hearing of Appeal for alcohol license

From: Denise Zukowski [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Saturday, June 04, 2022 10:51 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <kvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Hearing of Appeal for alcohol license

Dear Planning Commissioner;

I have lived in Sebastopol since 1996, I have raised my children here, active in parent school organizations, and worked in Sonoma county as a nurse since 2001.

I have seen Peter Lowell's restaurants thrive and be successful. I used to think he was an adept business man and an admirable member of our local community. Now, since reading and hearing more than a dozen women come forward with his sexual predatory behavior, I have changed my mind, he is a CREEP!

Why does Sebastopol continue to allow him to do business here?

Recently he was denied an alcohol license for another new restaurant, and now he is appealing.

Denying him an alcohol license is an appropriate consequence for Lowell who has a 10 year plus heavily documented history of sexual assault, harassment and workplace abuse involving alcohol.

If you are going to allow him to open a new restaurant, the least you can do is continue to deny the alcohol license on his appeal. I know what the rest of the community is going to do : boycott !

Denise Zukowski

[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, CA

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 9:54 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Denial of liquor license

-----Original Message-----

From: Betha MacClain [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, June 11, 2022 9:34 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Denial of liquor license

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to convey my position on granting a liquor license to Lowell Sheldon, a well documented sexual predator who uses alcohol to create the context for his pattern of rape and abuse. He should not be granted a liquor license for any business in which he is a partner.

I am not one of his victims but I know several of them, including former students and colleagues whose characters I know well. The restaurant and hospitality business, which I worked in for many years, creates an environment that is similar to theater. You have to trust each other while working in stressful, sometimes chaotic circumstances, all the while conveying calm and ease to the customer. In addition, many people in restaurant and hospitality work are young and still developing their understanding of what is right and wrong in the workplace, how to collaborate and work as a team even with people you may not know well or trust, and how to set boundaries. These factors are relevant because it is part of why Sheldon's pattern of predatory behavior has been so successful. Will you keep giving him more opportunities to cause trauma and harm?

The allegations against Sheldon are criminal, and to allow him to continue to run businesses that give him access to young women and alcohol is to give him your permission to continue the abuse.

My position as a resident in your community is clear: NO. Please vote in a manner that supports the safety and health of those in your community who have been, or may become, Sheldon's targets if you continue to allow his pattern of abuse via business model.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth MacClain

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 7:13 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Lowell Sheldon Alcohol License

-----Original Message-----

From: Em Armstrong [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, May 28, 2022 8:30 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Lowell Sheldon Alcohol License

Hello,

I'm a resident of Sebastopol and I was upset to find out Mr Sheldon is appealing his denied permit to open yet another business that serves alcohol. His abuse of power and documented workplace sexual harassment is inextricably linked to alcohol being served at his businesses.

Our community does not need yet another wine bar—much less one that stands to make Mr Sheldon richer after harming so many people and suffering zero consequences. I've heard of his substance abuse with and around employees (first hand accounts from friends, illustrating an erratic and volatile workplace) since he first open Peter Lowell's over 10 years ago.

We cannot allow this person to continue to cause harm our community. I've personally been in alcohol recovery for over two years and I understand the risk of allowing an abuser to be surrounded by the very thing that makes them makes them lose control. It just doesn't make sense to grant him another alcohol license. I hope he can get help and be an example of healing for others.

Please stand with the survivors of his abuse and don't allow this appeal to happen.

Thank you for your time,
Emily Armstrong

From: Frances Bailin-Petze [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 24, 2022 3:42 PM
To: John Jay
Cc: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Lowell Sheldon

Dear Mr Jay and Ms. Svanstrom,

This is written in support of Lowell Sheldon receiving any city permits he is requesting.

I and my husband have known Lowell Sheldon for over 15 years. I have been a regular customer at his excellent restaurants as well as a friend of his. I have consistently found Lowell to be friendly, generous, on top of his business activities and participatory in any community needs his restaurants could get involved with. His product has always been excellent. The environment in his places of business has always been relaxed including his well chosen employees.

Lowell is the father of two beautiful boys that he is involved with and supports wholeheartedly.

I am aware of and were surprised by the accusations. We both know of Lowell's efforts to examine himself through this process and are comfortable that he has done all he can. Lowell has used these events as a learning experience whereby he has seen his mistakes and has made appropriate corrections. We are confident that these issues will not reoccur.

Although inappropriate behavior was publicized, we are also questioning one of the accusations where the accuser did not acknowledge her own role. Everyone makes mistakes. Do we learn from them or just repeat them? Again, I am confident the behavior will not reoccur.

I feel very strongly that since charges were not filed or legal action pursued, Lowell should not be denied his right to permit. Lowell is not a convicted criminal. Putting up impediments or punishment to his earning an income should not be the role of the City of Sebastopol.

Please grant him permits.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel to contact me with any further questions.

Frances Sima Bailin Petzel
[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, California 95472
[REDACTED]

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 9:52 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Lowell Sheldon should not be granted an alcohol license for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave)

From: glynda [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 10, 2022 2:02 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Lowell Sheldon should not be granted an alcohol license for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave)

Planning Commissioner;

My name is Glynda Cotton. I live in Sebastopol and, due to that, I'm aware of the sexual assault harassment & abuse and workplace abuse that Lowell Sheldon has perpetrated on his employees—both adults & minors—the majority of which occurred while Mr Sheldon was abusing alcohol and/or illegal drugs.

I know that he's left the workplaces/restaurants that he *was* involved with, due to the same, and I cannot, for the life of me, understand why you would allow him to do the same thing to a new collection of employees. His application for an alcohol license should be denied.

I have been a victim of exactly this kind of workplace and it was awful, demeaning, and unacceptable in every sense of the word. I do not know the victims, personally, but I have had conversations with those that do and, of course, I know what working in that kind of environment is like.

Additionally, I was domestically partnered to a restaurateur in another city, who I knew since I was a teen, who lived a secret (from me) life full of alcohol & drug abuse, who ended up fired for exactly the same reasons: sexual assault, abuse, & harassment—from more than one restaurant. He ruined my life (pre-firing) and is the reason that I now live here in Sebastopol, having rebuilt my life, far from that unethical, abusive man and far from the people who supported him, within a new community, full of kind & good people who have supported me in my rebuilding a new & gorgeous life.

I want to live in—and I believe in—a community that supports women, workers, & survivors of sexual violence. We will not be that community if you permit an alcohol license to Lowell Sheldon.

I want you to deny his application for an alcohol license—it is an appropriate consequence for someone who has a heavily document history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol; it's appropriate for our town; it's appropriate for the workers, which you'll be protecting by removing alcohol from the premises; and it's appropriate for the survivors of, not only his actions, but all the survivors of actions like his.

Please deny the application for alcohol by Sheldon Lowell for Piala, LLC (7233 Healdsburg).

Sincerely,

Glynda Cotton
Resident of Sebastopol

--

* only bad witches are ugly

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 06, 2022 7:16 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Sheldon Lowell

From: Jane Shelly [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, June 04, 2022 8:38 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Sheldon Lowell

Please deny this abusive, toxic person a license to sell alcohol at his restaurant in Sebastopol.
Respectfully,
Jane Shelly
Bodega Bay

From: Freddie Francis [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 4:36 PM
To: John Jay; Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Support letter from Jesse Strecker

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Jesse Strecker [REDACTED] >
Date: Mon, Jun 13, 2022 at 1:43 PM
Subject: Reject Piala LLC's Alcohol License
[REDACTED]

Planning Commissioner Kari Svanstrom,

I'm writing to ask that you deny an alcohol license for Piala LLC at 7233 Healdsburg Ave. Lowell Sheldon, a major player in the plans to create Piala, has a history of sexual harassment, abuse, and otherwise inappropriate and unsafe behavior that stretches at least a decade. Growing up in west county, it was an "open secret" that Lowell behaved this way, yet he was powerful enough that too many in the community let his bad behavior slide. But the time has come when we must no longer tolerate sexual harassment and abuse, particularly by those in positions of power and authority in our community. Lowell Sheldon has shown that he lacks the responsibility to open an establishment serving alcohol. I hope your office will treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves, and deny Piala the alcohol license.

Sincerely,

Jesse Strecker
Born and raised in Monte Rio, currently residing in Richmond, CA.

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 9:48 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Piala LLC alcohol license

From: Joey Smith [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 10, 2022 10:10 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Re: Piala LLC alcohol license

Hi,

Thank you for reading this and taking it into consideration. I know that I'm not alone in these thoughts, and I felt compelled to write to you.

This is in regard to Piala LLC, specifically Lowell Sheldon. I appreciate that the request for an alcohol licence was denied, but **am concerned about Sheldon's appeal and rallying of certain friends to help overturn the decision.**

I am among many who think it would be a mistake to grant an alcohol license to Piala LLC for the following reasons:

I'm sure you've read the articles in the SF Chronicle. But just in case you haven't in a while:
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/food/restaurants/article/Sebastopol-restaurants-Lowell-Sheldon-fern-bar-16486266.php>.

I read about this behavior in the North Bay Business Journal and the Press Democrat, as well.

I think it's important to Believe Women when they come out, and there is a solid trail of harassment claims against Lowell Sheldon. **Abuse of alcohol was involved in the majority of these allegations, and I think this is the key reason to pause and reflect, and ultimately, deny the alcohol license.**

I'm also concerned at Sheldon's lack of accountability - he has deflected and denied which makes me think the odds are higher that this may happen again. While he mentions he made people uncomfortable, he still won't own up to harrassment.

Personally, I want the community I live and recreate in (I'm a lifelong Sonoma Countian) to be one that *supports* women and survivors of sexual violence.

Please deny the alcohol license for Piala LLC. Let's stop any abuse before it occurs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joey Smith

From: Julia Hsieh [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 24, 2022 1:08 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: Re: Lowell Sheldon and new Georgian restaurant

Dear Mr. Jay,

I am writing to you today to voice support for the new Georgian restaurant Lowell Sheldon is planning to open in the former Peking Chef location.

As someone who has been an avid tourist of Sebastopol over the years, one of the major draws for our trips up north has been the restaurants Lowell have created, as they add so much to the food landscape in Sebastopol and are a shining highlight my family and I look forward to. Over the years of visiting Lowell's restaurants, we've gotten to know him, and have always found him to be kind and generous and his largesse of spirit really contributed to the overall experience of being in one of his restaurants. They're upbeat, friendly places with excellent food.

As the negative press about him swirled in recent years, I didn't know what to make of it since it really countered our positive perceptions of him - he seems to be dedicated to his community, dedicated to his craft, and a genuinely good person.

But I'm not here to take sides on the issue and judge what's true or not true, but I will say that even in the worst case scenario that he did all the things he's accused of, that doesn't change the fact that people make mistakes and can learn from them and change for the better. Lowell seems to be more than capable of that, and shouldn't be prevented from moving on with his life and making a living doing what he does best.

Allowing him to carry forth with the project only adds to the overall culture of Sebastopol, making it a more attractive place to visit. We can all benefit from more dining options, that's for sure. I know nothing about Georgian food or wine, but I am eager to find out more!

I genuinely hope you will change your mind about allowing this project to move forward. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

Julia Hsieh
Oakland, CA

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 9:49 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Public Comment

From: Manjula Martin [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 10, 2022 1:25 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Public Comment

Hello,

I'm writing with a public comment for the upcoming meeting about whether to uphold the denial of a liquor licence for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave).

My name is Manjula Martin and I live in unincorporated West Sonoma County. Sebastopol is where I go for most of my dining needs and services. I encourage you to uphold the denial of a liquor license for this establishment. One of the partners in Piala, LLC, Lowell Sheldon, has a well documented history of sexual harassment and worker abuse as an employer in the local restaurant industry. These abuses have been documented by many former employees, as well as recent investigations by the San Francisco Chronicle, Press Democrat, and North Bay Bohemian. Use of alcohol and illegal drugs were involved in the majority of these incidents. Many women have come forward sharing their stories of these abuses, and Sheldon has shown neither remorse nor any attempt to reform his behavior. Denying an alcohol license is a completely appropriate response to an application by a person who has a 10+ year heavily documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse **involving alcohol**.

I want to live and dine out in a community where the workers of that community are safe and respected. Allowing this new venture of Sheldon's an alcohol license would not be in line with those values, or the values of Sebastopol and West County. Please uphold the denial of this license.

Thank you,
Manjula Martin

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 3:01 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Piala LLC ABC license

From: Mark Mellander [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 2:36 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Piala LLC ABC license

Dear Sebastopol Planning Commissioner:

A brief note about why Lowell Sheldon should not be granted an alcohol license for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave). It would be impactful if you deny an alcohol license. It is an appropriate consequence for someone who has a 10+ year heavily-documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol. Please support all the women who have suffered over aggressive & persistent unwanted sexual behavior. Denying Lowell Sheldon an ABC license will diminish the chance of this occurring again for them or any other employees he has in the future.

Joyce Mellander , Freestone CA

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 06, 2022 7:16 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: No, no, no!

From: michael Yezbick [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, June 04, 2022 2:56 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: No, no, no!

Lowell Sheldon is not a person who should have power over other people. He has demonstrated, many times over many years, that he will use his power to sexually harass female workers in his employ. Do not let him have a way to get back into the restaurant business, in any capacity whatsoever. If you do, and he continues to sexually harass female workers, you will be responsible for allowing this to happen. Don't give him an inch, because he will take a mile, and his white male privileged background will allow him to get away with more of the same.

Remember, he is a serial harasser and only you can stop him. Don't give an inch!

Thanks, Michael Yezbick

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 9:45 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: No alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon

-----Original Message-----

From: Morgan True [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, June 09, 2022 7:46 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: No alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon

To whom this concerns,

My name is Morgan True, I lived on Barnett Valley Rd in Sebastopol throughout the pandemic and my mother has lived there since 2016. I am perturbed by the thought of Lowell Sheldon owning a liquor license after hearing the stories of the survivors of his abuse first hand. Denying an alcohol license is an appropriate consequence for someone who has over ten years of heavily documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol. I am adamantly against Lowell Sheldon being granted a liquor license For Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave) as it is just down the hill from my family home. I refuse to watch members of my community fall victim to his abuse after a clear pattern was identified and no one did anything to stop it.

Please hear the voices of the victims and put an end to the cycle.

Sincerely,
Morgan True

From: Otis Hsieh-Lappetit [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 24, 2022 2:16 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: Lowell Sheldon / Piala Restaurant

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this email to show my support for Lowell Sheldon and the new restaurant he is building out in Sebastopol. I believe it's called Piala.

I've been a longtime fan of Lowell's establishments. I enjoy visiting wine country and Sebastopol and his hip farm-to-table spots really fit the whole ethos of the region, and I am excited to see how this project will shape up. I will be the first in line when it opens.

I was saddened to hear what happened with him in recent years, but despite that I hoped he would come out of it intact. It's a shame how we can so easily destroy someone's reputation these days in the age of cancel culture, even though from what it seems, these were allegations and stayed allegations.

I sincerely hope that hearsay will not be the determining factor that spells the end of a man's career. That would be a huge disappointment to me and many people like me who have enjoyed Lowell's restaurants and hope to see more from him.

Sincerely,

A longtime fan
Oakland, CA



Delivered Electronically

Chair, Paul Fritz
Planning Commission
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

May 31, 2022

RE: New Restaurant at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue (File 2022-020)

Dear Chair Fritz and Commissioners:

Our subsidiary Sebastopol Center, LLC is the property owner of the retail center which includes the proposed restaurant (Piala Georgian Cuisine). This location has continually operated as a restaurant serving beer and wine for the entirety of our ownership beginning in 1998. During the pandemic the previous restaurant was forced to close and after significant effort in trying to sub-lease the restaurant space, Lowell Sheldon and his partners proposed to open a new Georgian style restaurant serving beer and wine.

While we understand that there has been confusion surrounding the use of the premises, I wanted to provide further clarity to ease any of your concerns with regards to the use. Due to this location's long history as a restaurant, we wanted to make sure that the use would remain as a restaurant. **Our sub-lease and lease agreements with Piala, LLC restrict the agreed use of the premises to a "sit-down restaurant serving beer and wine"**. We believe that this new restaurant will add to the vibrancy of Healdsburg Avenue and serve the community with a cuisine that is unique in Sebastopol.

We also understand that the planning department has concerns with the workplace safety of Piala. In speaking to Lowell and his partners at Piala we are confident that they have implemented best practices with regards to workplace safety and security and have demonstrated their sincerity in making sure Piala is welcoming to all. While we don't have a personal relationship with Lowell, he has acted with the utmost professionalism and integrity throughout the leasing process.

We respectfully ask that you approve the proposed restaurant use with beat 7233 Healdsburg Avenue.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter Squires
Realty Equities

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 7:13 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Lowell Sheldon should be able to get a permit to serve alcohol

Kari Svanstrom
Planning Director

From: RJ Stovebags [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, May 29, 2022 11:47 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Lowell Sheldon should be able to get a permit to serve alcohol

Hi Kari,
I have known Sheldon as an acquaintance and customer at his restaurants over the years. I have read the news reports and the various charges leveled against him and I find his response satisfactory. Remember, these are unsubstantiated allegations which have never been investigated in any real way. There were real life negative consequences as a result of the publicity and it seems Lowell does have contrition.
Please grant him the right to continue to improve himself and do what he does best, own and run great world class restaurants in our town.
Thank you
Russell Sutter
Sebastopol

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 9:49 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Lowell Sheldon

From: Sandy Campbell [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 10, 2022 12:22 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Lowell Sheldon

Hello,

My name is Sandy Campbell and I live at Burbank Senior Housing in Sebastopol. Please do not give Lowell Sheldon a liquor license because I believe the reports of his sexual harrasement are well documented. Please protect working, young women in our community.

Thank you,
Sandy Campbell

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 7:40 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: ETOH lic. For Lowell Sheldon

-----Original Message-----

From: Yvonne [REDACTED] >
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 5:23 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: ETOH lic. For Lowell Sheldon

I do not think that adding alcohol in the mix for a person who has a history of abuse of both substances and people should even be a discussion.

People quickly lose their inhibitions with the consumption of alcohol. It was wise to not grant the license in the first hearing. Please to not let him manipulate the planning commissioner.

Thank you for your time.

Yvonne Bethune
Sebastopol.

Sent from my iPad

May 23, 2022

Dear Sebastopol Commissioner -

I am a 14 year old student from Summerfield Waldorf School living in Sebastopol. I am writing you as a local caring person who would like Lowell to be able to open restaurants here in town.

I loved going to his restaurants since I was small, eating breakfast and lunch at Lowells. I believe he stands for good quality food, a good place to work, and a business that benefits our community. Everybody would win with his local business and I support his projects and new restaurant.

As long as I've known him, he has been professional and caring. I believe the changes he has made are sufficient in demonstrating his understanding of the concerns about his character.

Please support this project and help him to open his restaurant.

Sincerely,

Anonymous Citizen of Sebastopol -
Anonymous due to fear of retaliation
Child male, 14 years old, student of Summerfield Waldorf
[REDACTED], Sebastopol, CA
May 23, 2022

Dear Sebastopol Commissioner -

I am a local therapist and longtime resident of Sebastopol.

I have known Lowell through his various businesses over the years and have loved every one of them. Also, I fully endorse his current project and believe it will benefit the community.

His character as I know it is and has always been professional and caring. Additionally, although I am aware of the issues at hand, I believe the remedies he has undergone are sufficient in demonstrating his understanding of the issues and his integrity.

I firmly believe he should be supported and allowed to opening a restaurant that will help the community. All of Lowell's restaurants I have ever visited have been good for employees as well as local farmers, businesses, and residents. Please support this project and recognize the positive impact of his work.

Sincerely,

Anonymous Citizen of Sebastopol -
Anonymous due to fear of retaliation
Adult female, 49 years old, married mother of 1
[REDACTED] Sebastopol, CA
May 23, 2022

Dear Sebastopol Commissioner -

I am writing you as a concerned and longtime Sebastopol citizen and restaurant owner of multiple restaurants in San Francisco.

I have known Lowell through his local business operations over the years and have always loved and appreciated his creativity and offerings: Quality, sustainable, and locally produced. I firmly endorse his current project and believe it will benefit the community significantly.

His character as I know it is and has always been professional and caring. Additionally, although I am aware of the issues at hand, I believe the remedies he has undergone are sufficient in demonstrating his understanding of the issues and his integrity.

As a free citizen, and local entrepreneur, I firmly believe he should be supported and allowed to opening a restaurant that will help the community. All of Lowell's restaurants I have ever visited have been good for employees as well as local farmers, businesses, and residents. Without his projects this town would be a lesser place to live. Please support this project and recognize the positive impact of his work.

Sincerely,

Anonymous Citizen of Sebastopol -
Anonymous due to fear of retaliation
Adult male, 51 years old, married father of 1
[REDACTED], Sebastopol, CA



Delivered Electronically

Chair, Paul Fritz
Planning Commission
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

May 31, 2022

RE: New Restaurant at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue (File 2022-020)

Dear Chair Fritz and Commissioners:

Our subsidiary Sebastopol Center, LLC is the property owner of the retail center which includes the proposed restaurant (Piala Georgian Cuisine). This location has continually operated as a restaurant serving beer and wine for the entirety of our ownership beginning in 1998. During the pandemic the previous restaurant was forced to close and after significant effort in trying to sub-lease the restaurant space, Lowell Sheldon and his partners proposed to open a new Georgian style restaurant serving beer and wine.

While we understand that there has been confusion surrounding the use of the premises, I wanted to provide further clarity to ease any of your concerns with regards to the use. Due to this location's long history as a restaurant, we wanted to make sure that the use would remain as a restaurant. **Our sub-lease and lease agreements with Piala, LLC restrict the agreed use of the premises to a "sit-down restaurant serving beer and wine"**. We believe that this new restaurant will add to the vibrancy of Healdsburg Avenue and serve the community with a cuisine that is unique in Sebastopol.

We also understand that the planning department has concerns with the workplace safety of Piala. In speaking to Lowell and his partners at Piala we are confident that they have implemented best practices with regards to workplace safety and security and have demonstrated their sincerity in making sure Piala is welcoming to all. While we don't have a personal relationship with Lowell, he has acted with the utmost professionalism and integrity throughout the leasing process.

We respectfully ask that you approve the proposed restaurant use with beat 7233 Healdsburg Avenue.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter Squires
Realty Equities

Stuart G. Gross
[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, CA
95472

May 31, 2022

Sebastopol City Planning Commission

Re: City's Denial of Change of Ownership Application – Piala Georgian Cuisine

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I write to support the change of ownership application of Piala Georgian Cuisine and to, more specifically, address the City of Sebastopol's ground for denial of the application based on the involvement of Lowell Sheldon in Piala. I have known Lowell personally and professionally for seven years and, while Lowell is not without his flaws (and who is without them?), I strongly disagree with the premise that Lowell's involvement in Piala would make Piala's operation "detrimental to the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort, or general welfare of persons residing or working in the area." Independent of my opinions of Lowell and Piala, I also have significant concerns regarding the apparent process and bases on which a contrary determination was reached by the City and what that means for the basic due process rights of persons wishing to pursue business in Sebastopol, as well as the broader character of Sebastopol going forward.

In 2015, my wife Alina and I moved from San Francisco to Sebastopol. Lowell was one of the first people we met in town and is one of our best friends. Like many people probably, we met Lowell at his restaurant, Peter Lowell's. Lowell's was the place we would go, many Friday nights, and we felt welcomed into the warm familial atmosphere of the place, sitting at the bar, eating an amazing meal, while talking with Lowell and others working behind the bar and those sitting to our left or right. It was a very special place that I still miss and that I have never experienced before in any place I have lived.

Our friendship with Lowell expanded beyond the restaurant, with him inviting us to dinners and gatherings at his house, Handline when it opened, and other places. He brought us into the community and is responsible for making the connections we now have with many of our local friends. And when we had our first child exactly two weeks ago, it was Lowell who first brought us over dinner, which he then repeated a few days later.

Is Lowell a little weird? Yes. Does he rub some people the wrong way? Yes. Is he a bad person? No. He is a good person, and a close and good friend, whom I am glad will be in my son's life as he grows up in this community.

I have also known Lowell professionally, and my experience in that capacity has indicated that Lowell's empathy and concern which are demonstrated in his personal relationships are also

expressed in how he does business. I'm an attorney with experience handling commercial torts, and in the immediate aftermath of the flooding of The Barlow in 2019, Lowell reached out to me to inquire, not whether I could help just his business, The Fern Bar, but whether I could help all of the affected businesses in The Barlow. Lowell took it upon himself to organize meetings with all of the affected businesses, with the goal of sharing information and forming a unified strategy to gain compensation for the losses that all suffered. That effort resulted in my firm attaining millions of dollars in compensation for those businesses, including some of the most beloved in Sebastopol, which has allowed them to continue and prosper, and the effort catalyzed a reassessment by The Barlow of how it addresses flooding that will have a very real and substantial benefit to public safety and welfare in the future. That would very likely not have happened without Lowell.

The effort that Lowell took to make this happen is part of a consistent pattern that I have witnessed of him taking actions to assist other members of the local business community. When I reviewed the photos of the aftermath of The Barlow flooding, Lowell repeatedly appeared in cleanup photos of other people's businesses. And when The Nectary recently had its lease renewal denied by The Barlow, it was Lowell who reached out to Barney Aldridge on its behalf.

Lowell is a dedicated and significant asset to Sebastopol's business community. That is clear from the fact that he was involved in the three most important restaurants/bars to open in the last ~5 years, Handline, Fern Bar, Khom Loi, as well as Peter Lowell's, which played such an important part in so many people's quality of life in Sebastopol for so many years. And it is clear in how he conducts himself with regard to other businesses and their owners: he recognizes that in a community like Sebastopol success is not a zero-sum game; everyone's success benefits everyone.

This leads me to the process by which the City apparently made the decision to disregard all of the above and deny Piala's application based on the unadjudicated accusations of approximately four people. The accusations of these four people should be treated with respect—and I know Lowell has done so—but they are accusations. No case has ever been brought based on those accusations and thus there has been no determination of their truth. This is important. We live, hopefully still, in a country of law and due process. And, more specifically, we live in a community that places high value on democratic principles and open-mindedness. Nobody anywhere should be denied the ability to pursue a livelihood simply on the basis that some people accuse her or him, and that the City of Sebastopol, with its proud liberal tradition, would potentially do so is very disappointing.

Finally, I want to make mention the fact that while the City's decision to deny the application is based on certain people's opinions about Lowell, Piala is not going to run to Lowell, but by Jeff Berlin and Irma Hernandez. I've been lucky to become friends with Jeff over the last couple of years, and he is a very good and kind person, who has more love for his three sons than anyone I've ever met and is a wicked good chef and connoisseur of Georgian wine and food. Jeff successfully ran a restaurant in the East Bay for many years and is exactly the type of person that we who live in this area should want to bring his skills here and enrich our lives.

For all of the reasons above and many more that are unstated, I respectfully request that the commission reverse the denial of Piala’s application and let the community enjoy what Piala will bring to it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart G. Gross', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Stuart G. Gross

IN SUPPORT OF

Pialla and Lowell Sheldon

May 25, 2022

City officials
Planning Departments
City of Sebastopol
County of Sonoma

Dear Commissioners,

We are writing in the hopes of you approving the transfer of ownership application for Lowell Sheldon and the Pialla project.

My wife and I met Lowell and his former partner at a child birth class. Our boys ended up at school together and we became friends. We have enjoyed getting to know each other, spending time our families, and a mutual appreciation of good food.

Lowell has been involved with at least four establishments in Sebastopol that we are aware of. These establishments have all added tangible value to our community. They have brought countless people together, created many jobs, paid living wages, all while maintaining a focus on sustainability and quality.

We don't believe in cancel culture. People need to be able to learn from their mistakes and be allowed to earn the trust and confidence of their chosen community. Lowell needs to move forward, support his family and stay in a town where his culinary influence is valued.

Sincerely yours,

-Adam & Jennifer Almquist

[REDACTED] SANTA ROSA, CA 95404 [REDACTED]

Dear Commission,

I grew up in Sebastopol and have fond memories of dining at Peter Lowell's. In fact, when I think of home cooking, Lowell's menu is as much a part of those memories as the food prepared by my dad and mom, who were juggling careers and single-parent households. My mom and I dined at Lowell's on a regular basis (multiple times a week) and my dad and I dined there on special occasions, including many birthdays, post-ballet recitals, school events and graduations... Lowell's Café served wonderful food in a sunny family environment.

During my countless visits to the restaurant, I witnessed Lowell's professionalism, kindness and strong work ethic. My mom and I were regulars there for nearly the entire duration the restaurant was open. Lowell always gave us a wave and a smile and would make a point to come chat with us or just say hi if the kitchen was busy. When I was younger my first business venture was with Lowell! I sold chicken eggs to the restaurant, and can still remember Lowell's warm smile when I would bring in the eggs every week as a terrified eight year old.

Throughout the years I also got to know a lot of the staff, who were always personable, kind and seemed to enjoy their working environment. From what I know of Lowell and his previous restaurants, Piala will be a wonderful addition to Sebastopol and Sonoma County cuisine. I do not believe that this exciting new venture should be blocked and urge the commissioners to support this new project.

Amelia Levin-Sheffield
London, England

I have known Lowell Sheldon for over 10 years . He is talented, respected, committed to his community and collaborates with others who share similar interests in business throughout west county . Lowell is an asset. I worked for him for 5 years. He was fair and implemented good employee policies.

Sexual Harassment is a complicated issue, it's engrained in our culture and like many other societal challenges will take hard work to change the course. If we care about the people in our communities, we work together. We show up, we're accountable and we take responsibility for our actions as individuals. Women are simply not always the victims. Women participate in the culture of harassment but this isn't talked about. My point is we can not throw out people who demonstrate poor judgement and bad behavior , we work to correct it. City and county governments need to work with local business owners and come up with guidelines to address an issue like harassment in the workplace. It's time communities think outside of a box we've been in for far too long . Defamation and ostracizing someone is not a healthy solution to an issue we all agree needs to be addressed.

Anonymous Female
(Fear of retaliation)

To Whom it May Concern,

I have worked for Lowell Sheldon for a collective five years, and nowhere in that time did I feel harassed by him. My time as a sous chef at Lowell's Restaurant was the best time of my culinary career. I often think to myself about how much I miss working at that particular establishment. Lowell gave me a chance when I had no experience and taught me so much in the half decade I worked for him. I would also like to point out that I have been open about not having any issues in relation to Lowell in my workplace at both Handline and Lowell's Restaurant, I've even talked to journalists that chose to leave my statements out because it "didn't really fit the story". I have given writing this letter a lot of thought as it does feel strange to go against the opinion of so many fellow women, but at the end of the day I am choosing to support this new restaurant because I feel in my heart no women (or men) are at risk in this establishment. Aside from Lowell, I personally know Chef Irma Hernandez, I know she is excited for this opportunity, and certainly deserves it. Having a Georgian restaurant in the community would be amazing and unique. Punishing the many other people involved in this business would be utterly unfair, and truly an ironic consequence as it would be taking away an opportunity for a female chef, because of a movement started for women empowerment.

(I would like to remain anonymous thank you)

Dear City of Sebastopol Commissioners,

I am a longtime resident of Sebastopol, writing to ask you to allow the owners of Piala Georgian Cuisine at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue to operate their new restaurant. I understand that the City of Sebastopol has given in to peer pressure from several former employees of Lowell Sheldon and denied Piala's change of ownership application, and I believe this decision is unjust and unwarranted.

I am a woman in my thirties and have known Lowell Sheldon, one of the three owners of Piala, for over 15 years. I worked in his restaurant, Peter Lowells, and have spent time with him, his family and children, outside of work. I know Lowell to be honest, caring and generous. He is receptive to criticism, and someone who strives to learn and improve himself. I have been a working professional for 10+ years, and some of my happiest work memories are from the time I spent as Lowell's employee on the team at Peter Lowell's. Lowell was a straightforward and fair boss and created a positive work environment. I never experienced anything remotely close to the salacious tales spun by the media in 2021.

Lowell has made mistakes in his past, and paid dearly for them. Unlike many people in our society, he has done everything in his power to learn from his mistakes and to become a better man and community member. By giving in to peer pressure and hearsay from a small group of people and denying him the possibility of opening a new restaurant (of which he will NOT be an operating partner), you are denying him the chance to show that he has changed his ways. You are also denying two hard working, thoroughly kind and creative community members, Jeff Berlin and Irma Hernandez, the opportunity to earn a livelihood doing what they love; offering our community a delicious and unique food and wine space.

There are people in our town who have decided to dedicate time and energy to destroying not only Lowell's livelihood and future, but that of his associates. As a resident of Sebastopol and former employee of Lowell Sheldon, I would ask you to grant Piala the opportunity to move forward and open its doors. It will add a dynamic and valuable dining option to our town, and provide a livelihood to deserving community members.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will remain anonymous due to fear of retaliation, ostracisation and abuse on social media from the people opposing this project.

Sincerely,
Anonymous Sebastopol Resident

Dear City of Sebastopol Planning Commissioners,

I am writing regarding your denial of Lowell Sheldon's change of ownership application for Pinala Georgian Cuisine at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue. As I am sure you know, Lowell has founded or been involved with several restaurants in Sebastopol already, each of which has been a great addition to the town in its own way. Although he has lately been on the receiving end of much bad publicity, it hardly seems a valid excuse to deny him and his new partners Jeff Berlin and Irma Hernandez the chance to create something new and special for Sebastopol and its residents. Is it right to deny someone their livelihood based on a few angry voices? It seems particularly two-faced when we know the city coffers have already benefited greatly from Lowell's previous successes. I have known Lowell for several years now and I know him to be a hardworking, committed and generous person, and someone who has made tremendous effort to learn from his mistakes and do what is right moving forward.

I will remain anonymous at this time, due to the vicious and retaliatory nature of those trying to cancel Lowell and those associated with him. I urge you to reconsider your decision, for the benefit of all of us and our town.

Sincerely,
Anonymous, Sebastopol, CA

May 30, 2022

City of Sebastopol Planning Commission
710 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol CA 95472

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon and his business partners to open Pila restaurant.

I have known Lowell for over ten years, meeting when I was an almost-daily breakfast regular at Peter Lowell's. I do not know what happened between Lowell and some of his employees, but I do feel that I have enough insight into Lowell to see that he has sincerely and humbly undertaken deep self-reflection since he was made aware of the harm that a few of his employees experienced from their interactions with him.

Lowell is an imperfect being, as are we all. Unlike many of us, however, and despite the vicious, humiliating, and sometimes gratuitous public exposure of his flaws, Lowell has openly, ongoingly, and actively sought to understand himself, to rectify the damage done, and to ensure that he never again makes the same mistakes.

The restaurants that Lowell has co-created – Peter Lowell's, Handline, and Fern Bar – and his pioneering contributions to the local artisanal food scene are significant elements in what makes Sebastopol a vibrant place to live.

I encourage you to be rational and fair-minded in your decision, and to let Lowell and his partners bring what will undoubtedly be yet another fabulous restaurant to Sebastopol.

Regards,

Alysson Baker

May 28, 2022

Sebastopol Planning Commission

RE: Piala Georgian Cuisine

Dear Commissioners,

I'm writing in support of the change of ownership application for the partners of Piala Georgian Cuisine, which includes Lowell Sheldon. My understanding is that various members of the community are seeking to block the application due to Lowell's involvement. I'm writing as a fellow community member in support of this application.

I have known Lowell Sheldon since 2013. I first met him at his restaurant, Lowell's, shortly after taking up residence in Sebastopol. Lowell's quickly became a favorite place to dine and get to know the local community. I dined there with my husband nearly every week were we often spoke with Lowell and members of the staff. Lowell's was the kind of place that invited its patrons to relax and mingle and become a part of the community. During all the times I visited the restaurant I only witnessed the most positive of work environments. The interactions I observed between Lowell and staff were always kind and professional.

I understand that allegations have been made against Lowell regarding his management of this and other restaurants. Based on my personal observations of Lowell as he conducted his business and my strong belief that a community member should not be blocked from participating in a business based on allegations alone, I fully support the application for ownership change. It would be a shame if the efforts of Jeff Berlin and Irma Hernandez two individuals seeking to bring a new small business to our community were derailed for this.

Sincerely yours,

Robert (Bart) Magee

Sebastopol CA

Whom it May Concern,

I am writing this note on behalf of Lowell Sheldon, to speak of his character and my experiences with him and his establishments.

I first met Lowell almost 9 years ago shortly after moving to Sebastopol. I was a frequent diner at Lowell's Restaurant and over time got to know Lowell and many of his staff, both professionally and socially. I am an interior designer and when Lowell was opening Handline Restaurant, he asked my advice on table and bench design. Apparently that went well because Lowell then asked me to design the Fern Bar Restaurant. It was a great experience all around and again, I got to know more of the staff.

Never in any of my interactions as a patron/vendor/friend did I ever witness, experience or hear of any improperly treated or angry employees. In fact it was quite the opposite. What I know of Lowell personally is that he is very invested in his community. His farm to table ethos and restaurants provide jobs for the community and wonderful dining options for local diners (and tourists). It is not, in my opinion, necessary to block the opening of Piala or any Lowell venture based on the alleged experiences of three former employees. From what I know, Lowell has gone above and beyond to "right" any perceived "wrongs" that he may have done.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely, Brian Anderson

To Whom It May Concern,

Lowell Sheldon is creative and has vision. He is a hard worker and makes things happen. He is a real leader and cares about doing the right thing for his community, for his employees, and for the environment. Sebastopol has benefited tremendously from his entrepreneurial spirit and his indefatigable work ethic, just like it did from the contributions of his late father, Steve Sheldon. If the proposed new venture, Piala Georgian Cuisine, is anything like Peter Lowell's, Handline and Fern Bar before it, it will undoubtedly be a real asset to the Sebastopol dining scene. I sincerely hope it comes to fruition.

I have been going to Lowell's since it first opened in 2007. In the early years, it was apparent that Lowell was working around the clock to make the restaurant not only a successful business venture, but also a real community hub for the town of Sebastopol. Lowell and (later with Natalie) worked tirelessly to make sure they thought through every detail...from the sustainability of the materials used in the restaurant buildout and expansion, to the hyper-local sourcing of their ingredients, to the fair wages of their staff. They were conscientious and thoughtful in how they approached decisions, at every turn trying to be equitable, socially and environmentally conscious, fair and excellent.

Not only was the food at Lowell's restaurants delicious, but the atmosphere at the restaurants was a ton of fun. It was clear that there was a lot of camaraderie among the staff. On several occasions, I was invited to socialize with Lowell, Natalie and their staff, after hours. It appeared to me that the group had a lot in common, really enjoyed each other's company and had a shared sense of purpose in providing Sebastopol with deliciously prepared local food in a relaxed, convivial atmosphere. Lowell's restaurants, in my opinion, seemed like an awesome place to work.

As you know, Lowell is no longer associated with any of his former restaurants as a result of his former employee's allegations over his inappropriate behavior. He has now paid for this behavior. This has been a huge learning experience for him and quite humbling. He is not the young, egotistical restaurateur of the past. Lowell has learned from his mistakes, faced consequences for his actions, and is well-aware that his behavior hurt others, even if inadvertently. He has apologized and repented.

There is no good or fair reason why Lowell should not be able to do business in the restaurant industry in the city of Sebastopol moving forward. He poses no threat to anyone and there is no doubt that any future venture of his will be operated in the most professional manner possible. Yes, Lowell made mistakes. But again, he has paid for them. Justice requires we all acknowledge this, let Lowell, his former employees and the town of Sebastopol collectively move on, and allow him to make a living, bettering community in which he lives in the process.

Respectfully,
Brody

Dear commissioners:

As a person raised in Sebastopol for my childhood and young adult life I wish to express my strong support for Lowell's new restaurant. I have had both personal and professional relations with Lowell for forty years and have strong faith in his character that has not wavered during that time. I have followed the media and social media over the last year and do not believe his actions or alleged actions warrant the city not allowing his permit. I also do not believe he has been treated fairly. I understand the situation is challenging given the political and social scene, but I strongly believe in his integrity.

Lowell has added substantially to the food scene in Sebastopol through his sincerity to the mission, his dedication and hard work, and I wish that this can continue and we will all continue to benefit from it. While we all undoubtedly have our weaknesses and areas to improve upon, I give Lowell a strong thumbs up and would fully trust him with my own family and thus I would also trust him to be a representative of the Sebastopol community.

Please approve this application.

Chris Hall
Oakland, CA

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter in support of the new restaurant Paia receiving approval for their permitting. I have known Lowell Sheldon, professionally and personally, for the last 12 years. In that time, I have known of his evolution of a single restaurant owner to a partner in a multifaceted hospitality operation. He has had numerous employees and relationships within the community. Many of which are showing support.

The recent allegations and information that has been brought against him has shown the effect that his behavior had on employees and the community. His actions that have been revealed, were inappropriate, hurtful and will have lasting impacts. Lowell has been vocal about hearing these effects and doing the work to make the necessary changes. Learning the true effect his words and actions have on others. These are also allegations that have not been proven in a court of law. He was found guilty of public opinion, not the judicial system.

I am a believer in second chances, and people learning from their mistakes. I am also a supporter of those who learn from their mistakes being advocates and voices, so these behaviors are removed from our culture. Giving Lowell this opportunity could allow him to use his influence in the community for the benefit of others.

Thank you

Anonymous Sonoma County Resident and Business Owner

May 24, 2022

I first met Lowell Sheldon in 2007 and worked with him at both “Peter Lowell’s” and ‘Handline”. I have always found him to be respectful, supportive and genuinely interested in my personal success by making sure I had what I needed to be a team player and contribute to the overall success of the restaurants.

Lowell has always been friendly and very approachable when I had questions and or concerns about policy or procedures. I found him to be open to any ideas I brought before him and I feel I learned a lot from him over the years we worked together.

I am aware of his alleged misconduct. While there are always two sides to such a story, I believe there is a third side as well. That side is where we identify the problem and correct it, forgive and move forward. Not judge, shame and punish while denying room for growth. Isn't showing understanding and compassion always the right thing to do? Mistakes come with being human and it is our responsibility as conscious people to lift one another up. While a small portion of our community has taken it upon themselves to punish him by petitioning against his every move to start anew, it's simply unfair and counter productive.

I do not agree that any individual should be held back from contributing to the betterment of the community he has given so much to. Lowell has done the work required to reach a deeper understanding of his role and position both in his businesses and the community. We all are deserving of a second chance to improve ourselves and step up. That is all he is asking and I believe he is deserving of the opportunity to prove himself worthy.

We are so lucky to have his talent and passion in Sebastopol.

I believe without a doubt that this new intended restaurant Piala, if granted a beer and wine license will be a smashing hit and offer us and our many visitors a unique and outstanding experience that people will want to return to.

Please give this man the opportunity to set an example of self improvement and awareness, one we can all be proud of.

With respect,

Deborah Snow

Sebastopol, Ca

I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon and his plan to participate in the opening of the Piala Georgian Cuisine restaurant. Although I do not know Mr. Sheldon personally, I was a big fan of the former Peter Lowell's restaurant, with its delicious locally-sourced food and the lovely ambience. Of course recent allegations against Lowell re: his treatment of some restaurant employees are now blocking the permit application for Piala which seems over the top to me. While his actions were not always professional, they were not criminal. Also Lowell has acknowledged that he made mistakes in his management of his first restaurant and has since done therapy and training to gain awareness and insight into how to move forward. Please let him do that with this new endeavor that can enhance our community and bring joy to our stomachs!

Sincerely,

Delora Porter, Sebastopol CA

Dear Sebastopol Planning Commission,

This letter is is strong support of Piala, a newly proposed restaurant in Sebastopol. We have known and worked with Lowell Shelton for almost twenty years. During our long association, Lowell has been professional and a pleasure to work with. I have never seen any bad behavior from him.

According to some Lowell has made mistakes in the past; but he has received counseling and training. Additionally, Lowell does not have an operational role in Piala, its being managed and run by his partner, Jeff Berlin.

Everybody deserves a second chance, especially when the accusations against Lowell were never proven, and he was never convicted. Let's stop the witch hunt and move on.

Piala will be a great addition to our local community. I am happy to share further thoughts and help with Piala's approval process in anyway.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Ken Freeman

To Whom It May Concern,

I have personally known Lowell Sheldon for almost his entire life. My family, friends, and I frequented his former restaurant, "Peter Lowell's" and found the environment welcoming. We were always received warmly by the staff and thought that the employees were happy there.

I strongly believe that Lowell Sheldon should not be denied a beer and wine license because he is not in any way involved in the day-to-day operations of the restaurant. If Lowell's main contribution to the restaurant is design and tenant improvements, then I can't see any logical reason to deny a beer and wine license.

Since I have never eaten at a restaurant that offered food from the Republic of Georgia, I believe that this type of restaurant would be a very positive addition to Sebastopol; especially culturally.

I hope that you will consider issuing a beer and wine license so that Lowell and his partners can move forward with their business model and concept.

Respectfully,

Rick Genstil
Santa Rosa



Nathan Gheen
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
San Francisco, CA [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

28 May 2022

Planning Commission
City of Sebastopol
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in strong support of Pila Georgian Cuisine and Mr. Lowell Sheldon. I have known Mr. Sheldon for 20 years. When we first met he was working in a small Italian restaurant in Seattle with a dream and vision of one day creating his own restaurant in his home town of Sebastopol. It was a privilege and a wonder to witness Lowell transform this dream, over years of extraordinary dedication and hard work, into reality.

Over the years I have spent countless hours alongside Lowell through every stage of opening and running his businesses and witnessed his conduct and relationships with business partners and associates, farmers, winemakers, restaurant staff and customers, as well as being a regular customer myself. What I witnessed is a visionary, forward thinking business owner who cultivates real relationships, cares deeply about Sebastopol and the impact of his businesses, and creates overwhelmingly positive experiences for customers and staff alike.

In addition to my personal experience of Lowell and his businesses, my brother Jordan Gheen was employed and mentored by Lowell when he was a young cook just beginning in the restaurant industry. Lowell cultivated my brother's love of food and restaurants and greatly expanded his skill and knowledge. My brother went on to a successful career as a chef in the Seattle area and credits his accomplishments in large part to his experience working with Lowell.

Over 20 years of friendship I have witnessed Lowell face many challenges, professional and personal. A powerful desire for personal growth and self-improvement are elements at the core of Lowell's character. Lowell's striving and real work to be a better citizen, community member, business owner, father, and friend has been a constant. Please allow this exceptional man to continue his life's work creating and contributing to the food and wine experience in Sebastopol.

Sincerely,

Nathan Gheen, RN

To: Planning Commission, City of Sebastopol

From: Gregory Haynes [REDACTED] Sebastopol, CA 95472

Re: Letter of Support for Piala Georgian Restaurant/Lowell Sheldon

Date: May 25, 2022

Dear Commissioners,

As a long-time Sebastopol resident, I urge you to reverse the decision of the Planning Director and to approve the transfer of the beer and wine license for Piala Georgian Restaurant.

I believe that Lowell Sheldon will be a responsible Sebastopol citizen and that the proposed restaurant will be run professionally. I have personally known Lowell for many years and have been a regular customer at his previous businesses. His positive character attributes vastly out-weigh any weaknesses that may have shown up in the past.

Thank you for your consideration,



Gregory Haynes

Cc: Lowell Sheldon [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 08, 2022 8:43 AM
To: [REDACTED]; John Jay
Subject: In support of Piala

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my support for the approval of the business license transfer for Piala Georgian Cuisine. While I take the accusations against Mr. Sheldon seriously and do not discount others experiences and feelings, I cannot in good faith support the denial of his & his partners ability to contribute, participate and earn a living based on accusations that have not been proven in a court of law and seem as if they are being litigated through social media and a war of personal attacks and hearsay. I also am strongly opposed and deeply troubled that a taxpayer funded office, whose job should be perfunctory is interjecting personal bias and public rumors into the process and fear it will set a poor precedent moving forward that could lead to other discriminations.

It is my personal experience in 10+ years of knowing Lowell Sheldon in both a personal and professional capacity that he is a person who is kind, generous & thoughtful. Lowell has flaws, as we all do, but I believe he is capable of genuine self reflection and self work and I believe that he has done the necessary reflection and work that will allow him to be a good faith contributor to our community.

I am signing this letter anonymously out of fear of retaliation from those who oppose Mr. Sheldon doing business in Sebastopol.

Thank you for your consideration,
A Concerned Citizen

To whom it my concern ,

My name is Irma Hernández through this letter I would like to express my experience working at Peter Lowell restaurant at the beginning I was worried of not knowing Mr. Lowell but once we started working together I got to know him better. As a person and as a boss since he was the one teaching me the job, he was very patient never crossed the line from being a boss I've never felt disrespected or harassed. I knew it was a good place to work. I worked at Peter Lowell for 7 years from 2012 to 2019 and I never felt disrespected or uncomfortable. If I had the opportunity to work with Mr. Lowell again I would without any hesitation

Dear City of Sebastopol,

It has come to my attention that Lowell Sheldon seeks to open a new restaurant. Awesome! I respect Lowell & have loved taking my family to his restaurants since they were little kids. The loss of Peter Lowell's was sad for our family; we have many happy memories of eating there! I'm confident that Lowell will continue to make outstanding contributions to this community.

I understand that there has been some controversy around Lowell. As there was no crime committed, however, I am guessing that this is really a "relationship" problem, an issue of broken trust. By saying this, I'm not diminishing the situation; in my view, these are essential and important matters. And accordingly, I hope those involved in the controversy work things through as rational, caring adults who can admit wrongdoing, make amends, heal, and move on.

Moreover, if this is an issue of broken trust & inappropriate behavior (and not of a crime committed), then it is for the people involved to repair — without the interference or oversight of a city council or any other legal body.

In my view, people will always break and repair trust; it's a big part of how we grow and learn as humans. When a person makes a mistake and then takes clear responsibility & obvious steps to learn and rebuild — that effort counts for something. People often do dumb things, learn hard lessons, and go on to make great contributions to society. An incident of broken trust or inappropriate behavior should never be the basis for denying someone a right to open or be involved as a partner in a new business.

I urge you to green light Lowell's new business idea!

Yours in solidarity,

JB
Sebastopol resident since 2008

Members of Planning Commission

I have personally known Lowell Sheldon for approximately 20 years.. My family, friends, and I frequented his former restaurant, "Peter Lowell's" and found the environment welcoming. We were always received warmly by the staff and thought that the employees were happy there.

I strongly believe that Lowell Sheldon should not be denied a beer and wine license because he is not in any way involved in the day-to-day operations of the restaurant. If Lowell's main contribution to the restaurant is design and tenant improvements, then I can't see any logical reason to deny a beer and wine license.

I am aware of the media coverage and accusations. Lowell has acknowledged and taken very seriously his past mistakes. Lowell has made full efforts to learn and correct those mistakes, through personal therapy, weekly meetings concerning Restorative Justice, and training to understand and address sexual harassment in the workplace. He is a great example of what a person should do under his circumstances and should be held up to the community as such. I believe there are no other restaurants offering Republic of Georgia cuisine in Sonoma County, and this type of restaurant would be a very positive addition to Sebastopol and Sonoma County; especially culturally(at a time culture sharing is crucial).

Lowell's involvement in several restaurant ventures in Sebastopol has created significant revenue for Sebastopol and made the town more attractive to residents and tourists.

I hope that you will consider issuing a beer and wine license so that Lowell and his partners can move forward with their business model and concept.

With respect, Sebastopol resident for over 25 years and frequent diner out,

Jerry Terhune
Sebastopol, CA

Joseph Petzel May 24, 2022

[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, Ca.
95472
[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern:

I have known Lowell Sheldon for many years. I have been a regular consumer in his many restaurant ventures. I never saw any unacceptable behavior on his part in any of my visits. I know people who worked for him and heard no instances of illegal, unethical or personal abuse by Lowell. I am a retired Psychotherapist, working in Sebastopol for many years. After the “news” of the complaints broke in the Post Democrat, he called me and we met. Our conversation was deep. He was truly sorry for any harm he might have caused by his behavior. He was confused as none of the complaints seemed to me to be actual sexual abuse. He admitted to an insensitivity and some verbal mistakes. He seems to understand how his words were insensitive and has taken it upon himself to correct the situation. I could feel his remorse and confusion. I was also taken by the actions he was taking to understand what he did to upset some employees.

It seems very arbitrary, cruel and probably illegal for him to be denied the right to restaurant in Sebastopol. I could understand if he was convicted of a crime, but he’s not. Are a few letters enough to rob him of his right to make a living in our town? Sure if he was convicted of a crime that relates to his running a restaurant, the town should be protected from such a person. HE HAS NOT. If this decision is not overturned, I will be voting to remove any elected officials behind this violation of his rights. Feel free to call me if you need any further info.

Joe Petzel

City of Sebastopol Planning Commission:

It has come to my attention that this body is going to deny the application for change of ownership to Piala Georgian Cuisine, presumably because the transaction involves Lowell Sheldon. I would like to voice my disapproval of the drastic step the City has decided to take in denying what should be a routine application. Is this done at the urging of a few of his former disgruntled employees? How would that be appropriate?

I suppose due process is not one a concern of this body, but this appears patently unfair. I am not justifying how Lowell previously managed his restaurants; indeed, he made many mistakes, but I also find the character assassination of him to be very distasteful, even dangerous. Lowell deserves to have the complaints against him resolved in the proper forum, where he would have an opportunity to defend himself and this body is NOT the proper forum to resolve such complaints. Blurring those lines is dangerous.

I have known Lowell since I was a baby, and I went to school with him through High School. We were friends growing up and continue to be friends to this day. I know he and his family well and I have frequented the many wonderful restaurants he has been involved in, including most notably Lowell's, FNA Peter Lowell's. Me, my wife and our two children used to eat there almost on a weekly basis. It was a great place to bring the family and we always found the atmosphere to be congenial, friendly, and professional – in all, it appeared to be a positive work environment.

Since Lowell and I have been friends all our lives, I can attest that Lowell is a person of good character. He has certainly made mistakes as we all have, however, he, unlike most of us, has recognized his mistakes and taken appropriate action to ensure he does not repeat them. This should be rewarded not punished! Lowell has done a lot to bring world class dining to Sebastopol and support the community. Gratitude would be more appropriate than disdain here.

Please approve the application of Piala Georgian Cuisine and allow Sebastopol to have another fantastic dining option. It is good for the City and good for the community.

Johann Hall, Sebastopol, CA

Planning Commission
Sebastopol, CA. 95472

RE: Character reference for Lowell Sheldon and endorsement of Pila Restaurant

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Jonathan Racherbaumer and Lowell Sheldon and his partners at Pila Restaurant have asked me to write a letter to the commission as testament to Lowell Sheldon's character to which I am happy to oblige.

I have known Lowell Sheldon for approximately 13 years and consider him to be a dear friend. I first met him at Peter Lowell's restaurant in 2009 as my family and I began frequenting the establishment and were amazed by its menu and consistency of service. I personally became a regular breakfast customer and got to know many of the employees and customers. One could say I had a front row seat to the evolution of PL's. Never once in the several hundred visits to the establishment had I witnessed any improper conduct of Lowell, or the management and employees. My family and I considered it our favorite restaurant in Sebastopol. In my perception, the team with its family atmosphere at Peter Lowell's restaurant not only executed a fine dining experience but transformed how restaurants serve their community. I was saddened when Lowell's restaurant had to close its doors.

With regards to Lowell's character, I have witnessed first hand Lowell to consistently be the first to make amends following any transgressive behavior... apologize... show humility and ultimately hold himself accountable especially when it counts to another person's feelings. I make this point with emphasis because Lowell and I have had a few pointed differences throughout our friendship. In my experience when conflicts arise with friends and other relations, I find conscientious, non-defensive, pro active behaviors to be out of the norm. I have seen Lowell exhibit these traits regularly.

My wife, Vayya, made the point (and I agree) that he is an *unusually* loving person... always sweet and kind...always saying "I love you". I have observed a caring and tolerant father towards my own children as well as other kids.

No one is perfect by any stretch and we are all learning and growing....I believe Lowell has faced the scrutiny of public opinion with a humble will to change for the better. It will be a sad day for the Sebastopol community and the greater North Bay to be denied Lowell Sheldon's talents as a restaurateur.

In closing, I am aware this reference letter may be seen as biased in that I am a family friend and care deeply for Lowell and his family. However, I believe my perceptions to be fair and in good faith. Hopefully this letter will provide some valued input that aids in the commission's decision.

Respectfully,

JONATHAN RACHERBAUMER, D.C. [REDACTED] 1. SEBASTOPOL, CA 95472 • Phone [REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern,

I have known Lowell Sheldon for over two years. He was the employer of my partner at Peter Lowell's restaurant. In these past few years I have developed a close friendship with Lowell, his two young sons, the mother of his boys, his family and many of his friends. I have witnessed a kind, thoughtful and giving community man and father. Lowell is trustworthy, considerate and attentive to his friends and family. Especially to his sons. I have only the highest praises for Lowell and believe strongly in him as a friend, father and business owner.

Best wishes,
Juliana Thomollari
Occidental



Matthew Justus and Family

[REDACTED]
Davis, [REDACTED]

June 7, 2022

Kari Svanstrom & Planning Department
City of Sebastopol
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

Dear Ms. Svanstrom,

I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon and his partners in regards to their new restaurant in Sebastopol.

I have known Lowell for more than twenty years, and across those decades I have found him to be one of the most community minded people I have ever known. Since the inception of his first business in town he has always been committed to creating an environment that serves the community as well as his employees. Before it was law, or even in style to do so, he was determined to pay living wages, offer health insurance, and to pay his suppliers top-dollar for high quality local products from farms and artisans. He always took less money for himself, lower profits for the business, so that his employees and his suppliers could do better. This is what it means to be a responsible community member.

While it is clear that he has made some mistakes in his personal life, and that some of his employees were made uncomfortable with his managerial style, it is also quite clear to me that what has been created by the SF Chronicle, and others is a media storm where one is "guilty until proven innocent."

Lowell has committed no crimes, he has not been sued for any of his behavior. While some of his former employees are organizing a campaign to destroy his

livelihood, the vast majority of his former employees (of which there are hundreds) are NOT a part of this campaign to prevent him from providing for his children.

What precedent is the city setting if it decides to bar someone from doing business simply because a group of aggrieved people are loudly proclaiming their dissatisfaction? How could the city decide to block someone's business, based totally on subjective interpretations of past events which have not been litigated in court?

He has spent the better part of the last two years attempting to atone for the disappointments and hurt that *some people* have felt about him. And in doing so he has given up almost all that he has created over the last two decades, his sources of income, his small business community, is gone. That is an incredible punishment that he has already served!

One of the foundational values of this country is the offer of second chances. It is time to give him that second chance. I encourage you to offer Lowell and his partners the opportunity to operate their business. If the people who don't like Lowell don't wish to patronize or work at this business, that is their right. But why deprive the rest of the community the right to decide for themselves if they want to support the business?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Justus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Matthew" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Justus".

Matthew Justus

Dear City of Sebastopol Planning Commissioners,

I am a Sebastopol homeowner residing at 370 Neva Street. I am writing regarding your denial of Lowell Sheldon's change of ownership application for Piala Georgian Cuisine at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue. I am not a personal friend of Mr. Sheldon rather a longtime customer of Lowell's, his previous restaurant. I have observed Lowell as a customer for over five years and have found him to be professional and courteous at all times. My observations do not excuse the inappropriateness of behavior he has allegedly displayed with staff and something I cannot comment upon. Lowell has been a successful business owner managing restaurants in our community for years and his establishments have brought distinction and notoriety to Sebastopol including reviews in the NYT. The planning commission represents the city not the victims of his alleged inappropriate behavior and I feel it is not the commission's role as our elected officials to set precedent as the morality police. Lowell has apparently taken restorative action to grow and learn from his self-inflicted experience and clearly understands the pain he may have caused others. Punishing Lowell doesn't serve a purpose in this setting in my opinion should be a decision for a civil court if those on the receiving end choose to pursue. I enthusiastically support his application and hope you will seriously reflect and reconsider your decision. Punishing Lowell will deny the community employment, impact others' livelihoods and withhold the community his creativity in the culinary arts

Sincerely,

Lance Stone

To whom it may concern:

This letter is in support of Lowell Sheldon and his proposed restaurant, Piala. I met Lowell when I began working with him as an engineer on the design of Peter Lowell's restaurant. My relationship with him has been mainly business. I always found him to be honest and straightforward and he could also be warm and friendly. I enjoyed dining at Peter Lowell's and never observed any negative interactions or attitudes among him and the staff.

Through his restaurants, Lowell has brought business and life to Sebastopol and raised its profile as a dining destination. By replacing tipping with a set 20% surcharge, the restaurant contributed to the staff's financial security. I believe any future venture will be a positive contribution to the city.

I have read of the accusations against him, and also of his efforts to accept responsibility, learn, and grow. He has stated that he will not be involved in the daily operations of the business or its employees. He is establishing policies to ensure the safety and security of the staff. I see no reason to deny him any business opportunities in Sebastopol.

Sincerely,
Paul Larkin
Sebastopol

Dear Planning Commissioners

I write in support of the new restaurant.

As a former patron on Pete Lowels restaurant I have confidence in the creative and community focus of the creators.

Please allow the them the opportunity to contribute their creativity and efforts to our city as they bring forward a new restaurant concept.

Respectfully,

Lawrence Jaffe
Sebastopol CA

Letter in support of Lowell Sheldon

I have known Lowell for the better part of a decade. I worked with him as a supplier of wine, meat and produce. We met professionally many times and communicated often while he ran Peter Lowell's and later Handline Restaurant. I always found Lowell to be polite, professional and friendly. I could see that he ran his restaurant as a group of friends and equals which appealed to my sensibilities. Lowell's business was driven by a singular passion for preparing and promoting local food and wine. I always had the sense that he employed people who also believed in this vision which is one that remains fairly unique.

My observations of Lowell's business operations were sometimes as a customer but most often I would see the "back of the house." I would either come in and conduct a wine tasting for Lowell or deliver wine, lamb or vegetables into the kitchen. I never observed anything unprofessional take place. By all accounts it seemed like a positive work environment, especially considering that many restaurants are operated in an unprofessional manner. This never seemed to be the case at Peter Lowell's or Handline.

In my estimation, Lowell's restaurants have always had a positive impact on the town of Sebastopol and the broader community of food and wine. A strong argument exists that Lowell's endeavors have made the Sebastopol food scene what it is today and helped other businesses as the waters rise. I do not believe that Lowell should be blocked from opening a restaurant that serves beer and wine. I do not believe that this is appropriate. Furthermore I believe that Pila would be a wonderful addition to the Sebastopol restaurant scene.

Lowell has elevated the restaurant scene in Sebastopol and he ought to be allowed to continue doing this. Lowell is very talented and it would be a mistake to drive his talent out of Sebastopol. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about any of my statements.

Sincerely,

Ken Blair

Preston Farm and Winery



Dear Planning Commissioners,

I am writing regarding the denial of Lowell Sheldon's change of ownership application for Piala Georgian Cuisine at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue. I was surprised to learn that it had been denied.

I have known Lowell since my family moved to Sebastopol over a decade ago. He is a hardworking and generous guy who has dedicated his life to bettering this town. He is a talented chef who has opened the most beloved restaurants in Sebastopol, benefiting its local farmers, wine producers, residents, tourism, and our region's economy.

Lowell was born and raised here, attended local schools, and he and his family are part of our community. He is a hardworking and generous guy who has dedicated his life to bettering his hometown. In addition to all of this, he has volunteered his time to helping local nonprofits.

My family first met him when he was on a gleaning outing in our neighborhood and asked if he could harvest fruit from our yard, which we loved. I imagine many other homeowners had similar visits. We have enjoyed many hours with Lowell at his restaurants.

Although I can't speak to the concerns voiced by former employees, Lowell has said he did make mistakes and has taken it upon himself to address and learn from them. Like all of us, he has the capacity to learn and grow. I respectfully urge you to reconsider your decision.

Sincerely,

Deirdre Holbrook
Sebastopol

Jeff Berlin

[REDACTED]
Freestone, CA 95472

Friday, May 27, 2022

Letter in Support of Lowell Sheldon

To Whom it May Concern - Sonoma County Planning Commission,

I am writing as a friend of Lowell Sheldon, as his business partner in the proposed Piala Restaurant project, and as a concerned citizen of Sonoma County. Having known Lowell personally now for several years, I can confidently attest to how genuine and heartfelt his efforts have been towards repairing the damage his past behavior has caused. It should be emphasized as a testament to Lowell's character that his response to the accusations made against him and the tremendous public scrutiny that he has faced, has been that of humility and willingness to openly admit his errors, as well as a continued determination to learn and evolve, both personally and professionally. Lowell has worked exhaustively through personal therapy and specialized programs emphasizing restorative justice training and has made many attempts to engage in conflict resolution with his aggrieved detractors. I feel strongly that Lowell has taken every possible step towards improving and educating himself and trust him completely in our new business venture.

Lowell has contributed significantly to the prosperity of his community by creating a restaurant culture that supported local family farms, breweries, wineries, creameries and other artisans and trades, as well as promoting environmental sustainability in as many aspects of the construction and operation of his businesses as possible. In addition to being able to continue along this trajectory with the development of a new project, there exists also the opportunity for Lowell to demonstrate how an individual can learn from his failures and become a conscious and progressive member of society once again, and an example of how dealing with our societal problems through constructive communication and professional mediation can produce real change that benefits us all.

Lowell is a kind, compassionate and generous man, father and friend, and more than deserving of the opportunity to prove his worth in our collective struggle for equality. I stand by him as a friend and as someone who believes that we are all capable of redemption.

Sincerely,

Jeff Berlin

05/28/22

To Whom It M~~A~~y Concern,

I have known Lowell on both a personal and professional level for a number of years, and have found him to be a loving, caring father, and one who has always taken great pride in the businesses he runs, and I fully support his attempt to open the restaurant P~~i~~ala with his partners. Lowell has provided the town with a number of successful restaurants and was a pioneer in the farm to table concept which has been pivotal in helping Sebastopol develop into the culinary destination it is today.

I understand the concerns given the recent allegations, but that is exactly what they are, allegations. I don't believe an individual's livelihood should be taken away based on a "he said/she said" philosophy. Lowell has been extremely proactive and has taken this opportunity for self reflection given these perceived transgressions. He has sought advice from professionals and has an HR company overseeing the operation.

It is also my understanding that he will not be the face of the business, and will be taking more of a background role, leaving the daily duties to Jeff Berlin and Chef Irma, who's careers a livelihood we also need to consider.

My belief is that P~~i~~ala will provide a great addition to Sebastopol's thriving restaurant scene and that Lowell Sheldon has taken the appropriate steps to improvement both as an individual and as a business owner.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Mathew', written in a cursive style.

Mathew

Regarding: Piala Georgian Cuisine

As a 42-year resident of the Sebastopol area, I have appreciated the amazing improvements in restaurants and eating establishments that have evolved in our community. From the initial run of hamburgers and pizza, our city now has a reputation for numerous distinctive palettes and prize winning plates. This latest offering of a Georgian menu will add another to our diverse cuisines and tempting choices. Sounds like a good choice I will support!

During all this time, I have observed Lowell Sheldon as he became a dedicated chef and restaurant entrepreneur - also as he matured as a loving father, became an organic farmer, and an active member in his community. However, I have no direct information regarding the situation that arose several years ago with his employees.

What I have heard him say is that he “made mistakes” and has been actively seeking professional help to be able to correct his behavior so as to avoid any similar misunderstandings in the future. I can praise Lowell Sheldon for his honesty and depth of self-understanding ,regarding the needs of himself as an employer, to admit his errors and be willing to take all the necessary steps to ensure that this will never happen again.

Sebastopol could also add this feather to its cap - as a part of a restaurant culture that has evolved to meet the needs of our modern times. I encourage you to give Lowell the chance to accomplish this.

Sincerely, Linda Banks, Sebastopol CA

Darmiche Inc.

[REDACTED]
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

30 May, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to add my voice to the many others advocating for Lowell Sheldon and his business partners to be granted an operating permit for their new restaurant venture – Piala Georgian Cuisine.

As a bookkeeper, I have worked with Lowell since the opening of Peter Lowell's Restaurant back in 2007. For fourteen years our firm handled all of the bookkeeping and payroll duties for Peter Lowell's and continues as the bookkeeper for Handline Restaurant.

Our firm has always specialized in bookkeeping for the Restaurant Industry here in Sonoma County, so our perspectives are based on a large sampling of local restaurants. Without doubt, Lowell's businesses were always amongst the leaders in offering very generous Health and other benefits to their Staff. Their spending choices often put the compensation paid to the Employees ahead of the profitability of the business. Additionally, the company made significant Charitable contributions each year to Fire Victims, Food for Thought, and other organizations in Sebastopol.

Personally speaking, I watched Lowell evolve from a brash 26-year-old determined to conquer the culinary world, to the mature businessman that he is today. Anyone who knows Lowell will tell you that he can appear arrogant and/or aloof at times, sometimes poorly wording what he means to say. They will also tell you that last year's experiences have certainly chastened him, and that his recent "sensitivity training" has taught him more professional ways to communicate.

Lowell has always been proud to be part of the community in Sebastopol. He and his late father, Steven, have already made notable contributions to the well-being of the town. Accordingly, I would urge the Planning Commission to approve the permit for this new business venture.

Best regards,

Michael Hirschberg

May 30, 2022

To the City of Sebastopol, regarding the permit application for Piala Restaurant.

We have known Lowell Sheldon and his family, personally and professionally, for 20+ years. He has contributed to our local restaurant and food scene in a uniquely positive way. We actually moved into town with the benefit of being closer to his (now closed) restaurant, Lowell's. Wolfgang worked on the construction of the Fern Bar and Lori has worked with Lowell and his father on real estate transactions.

We respectfully object to the denial of the permit to operate and serve wine/beer at the new restaurant, Piala based on the widely published allegations against Lowell. He spent the last few years to improve and prep himself to do better in his undertakings. We don't understand how allegations against a person that have not been litigated can be grounds to deny a person their way to make a living. Given the allegations and Lowell's efforts to improve upon himself, he has definitely earned the right to have a second chance.

We look forward to Lowell's new endeavor in our town and sincerely hope the planning commission will approve the application.

Sincerely

Lori Sacco

Broker/Manager, Vanguard Properties

Wolfgang Dilger

Owner, Bauhaus Construction

June 4, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon and his new attempted venture, Piala Restaurant.

I have known Lowell for over 20 years and he employed my son at Peter Lowell's for 3 years when my son was a teenager. From my son's reporting, Lowell was a fair and kind employer. He clearly has a talent for creating aesthetically beautiful spaces, wonderful employees, and delicious and innovative food and wine combinations. He's been a star in this community for these and more reasons.

In my view, when a person makes mistakes, they deserve an opportunity to make things right. Lowell takes these issues seriously and has taken responsibility for his mistakes making every effort to correct those mistakes. Under the circumstances, I believe it would be wrong to deny the man the right to make a living in his profession. I believe the commission should reconsider denying him that, especially since his role would be operational only in this venture and that he has contracted with an outside HR company.

I implore the commission members to reconsider their denial and adopt a fair and rational decision in this matter.

Sincerely,

Anonymous
(to protect myself and my business from retaliation)

26 May 2022

Dear City of Sebatopol Commissioners,

Lowell has taken big steps forward this year by hearing the concerns of others and initiating a positive change. It is now our responsibility to see that change through. Lowell works everyday to become the best citizen, father, listener, and leader he can be. He has taken immense strides in his personal growth, and he (not only he, but everyone) deserves *fair* consequences for their actions. This denial of transfer of ownership is unfair.

To those who voiced their opposition, I understand their frustration, hold their concern, and know that the past must inform but not dictate the future, which is why Lowell will not join Piala's as an operating partner. Our community will heal only when thoughtful, deliberate care is given to such matters, which is why I thank you for considering my support for Lowell, Irma, Jeff, and the opening of Piala Georgian Cuisine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Fairchild". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Fairchild
Los Angeles, CA

May 30, 2022

To: Sebastopol Planning Commission

Re: Piala Georgian Cuisine Change of Ownership Application

I am writing this letter in reference to the Planning Commission's decision to deny a routine change of ownership application for Piala Georgian Cuisine. I have known Lowell Sheldon for over two decades as a close family friend. While none of us are perfect, Mr. Sheldon is a compassionate, thoughtful, and socially conscious person. He cares deeply about the Sebastopol community and has invested in the region's vitality with multiple successful restaurants. Those business ventures have been more than popular places for social gathering: They have put social, environmental, and economic justice principles into action by sourcing local, organic, and nourishing foods.

My family has been to each of Mr. Sheldon's dining establishments. Food service is demanding work, but I have always found the staff to work in a positive and professional environment. I understand that not all previous employees had that same opinion and that Mr. Sheldon has engaged in professional assistance to ensure an accountable, safe, and supportive work environment for any of his future projects.

Finally, as someone who follows local government closely in my own community, I find it to be a dramatic overreach by the Planning Commission to interject their own subjective standards into a routine license transfer process. When local governments react to allegations in the media, they become courts. That is not the role of the Planning Commission and it sets a troubling precedent for future decisions.

Sincerely,
Michael of Bellingham, WA

May 31, 2022

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Lowell Sheldon and Piala Restaurant and all future projects that Lowell may be involved in.

Lowell has been a business partner, friend, and boss to me over the course of the last decade. He gave me a chance early on in my career when I was only just getting started. In those early days of opening my own business, he helped me connect with the community and made several key introductions that extraordinarily helped me get my feet off of the ground as a young business owner. Over the years he has continued to open doors for me, and I have seen him do this sort of thing for many other small businesses in our community.

I am aware of the allegations made against Lowell. I feel that Lowell has taken responsibility and knows he has made mistakes in the past. He has apologized thoroughly. The accusers, in my opinion, feel power hungry and blindly driven to destroy Lowell at any cost and without any recognition of the amazing things he has done for this community or recognition for their own part in this story.

I feel very strongly that Lowell has brought an incredible amount of opportunity to this community and has much more to give. I feel that He should absolutely be allowed to continue to give to this community in the form of restaurants and other projects. He's a kind person with good intentions and does an incredible amount of good for our community.

Sincerely,

Anonymous due to fear of retaliation as fellow business owner
Adult female, 37 years old, mother of 1
Born and raised and still live in Sebastopol, CA

May 30, 2022

Planning Commission
City of Sebastopol
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

RE: Píala Georgian Restaurant

Dear Members of the Planning Commission and Concerned Community Members:

I have known Lowell Sheldon through both a personal and a business lens for nearly a decade and a half. Lowell has dedicated himself to Sebastopol's food industry and has contributed in significant and positive ways. I write this letter in support of his latest enterprise because I believe he will demonstrate that he has learned from his past errors in judgment and will operate Píala pursuant to the highest standards of professional conduct.

As a young man steering a restaurant enterprise, Lowell did not always demonstrate the best judgment when relating to his employees and others in his social circle. The public exposure of his shortcomings as a business leader is feedback that I have witnessed Lowell take seriously. He is earnest about reflecting on how his conduct made others feel and about putting in the work necessary to create a work environment free of sexual harassment. As he moves forward with his life, I believe that his apology is heartfelt and that he is ready to contribute to the community with the same fervor for fine cuisine, *as well as* with an improved self-awareness and care for his greatest asset, the people who make his restaurants possible.

Sebastopol, like society in general, should be supporting young people who strive to learn and grow from their mistakes. If we are honest, none of us would be where we are today if we were not given the chance to learn and grow from our mistakes. We should not, as a community, banish Lowell because a group of individuals do not want to give him a second chance.

Lowell's latest endeavor, the Píala Georgian Restaurant, offers Sebastopol a new, unique type of cuisine. I support Lowell in this project and request that the Planning Commission do the same.

Sincerely,

Anonymous Sebastopol Resident

To Whom It May Concern:

I have known Lowell for many years, being a good friend of his Mom's. I am very impressed with the work he has done and is doing to bring more healing and harmony into his life. Our family really loved his restaurant - Peter Lowells and was sorry to see it close. I knew a few of the employees who seemed happy there and it felt like it was a good environment.

I don't know much about this new restaurant, but Lowell's success has been very apparent with his other places of business and don't see why this new endeavor should be denied. Sincerely, Marcia Larkin-a Sebastopol resident

5/30/22

**To the City of Sebastopol
Commissioners,**

We are writing to support Lowell Sheldon and his petition to open a new restaurant in our community. We have known Lowell for 14 years, having patronized his restaurants since 2008. In addition to dining frequently at Peter Lowell's, Lowell's, Handline and Fern Bar, we have hired Lowell and his team to cater numerous events in our home over the years. We have always found him to be professional, respectful and appropriate.

We were loyal customers not only because the food was quite delicious, but also because the environment was warm, welcoming and cheerful. We appreciated the progressive values that Lowell's restaurants embraced. In particular, he boldly eliminated tipping and incorporated the extra percentage into the cost of an entree. This way the entire staff could benefit from each customer's bill, rather than just the servers. This is just one example of many ways in which Lowell made it his brand to support the personal success of his employees.

We were very disappointed, even sickened by the news of the accusations against him. We take it very seriously and we believe the women. It's important that harassment is identified and addressed. And appropriately, he has lost a great deal as a result of his disturbing behavior. However, we also strongly believe in redemption. People deserve the opportunity to learn and grow. We feel that Lowell has taken extensive steps to do just that and feel his contrition is quite sincere. To our knowledge, there were accusations, but no actual police reports or legal charges filed. It is not appropriate to deny Lowell a permit, based on extensive bad press. We must offer the opportunity for change and forgiveness. That is the Sebastopol we want to live in.

Sincerely,

Melanie Born and Madeline Duva

May 24, 2022

City of Sebastopol and Planning Commission,

I am writing because I understand Lowell Sheldon is running into difficulties with the City in having a new venture approved.

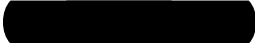
Lowell's restaurants have been great additions to our town. He has been generous with local schools and organizations, participated in community events, and provided Sebastopol with significant business revenue. I am aware of the bad publicity and troubles he has brought down upon himself, but I do not think he should be prevented from working in Sebastopol.

He has paid dearly for his mistakes and I am pleased to see he is creating a new business. It strikes me as cowardly and wrong for the city to deny approval for this new restaurant. Raise your hand if you have never made mistakes. Count yourself lucky if you have not been publicly shamed and humiliated, deprived of your livelihood.

I urge you to approved this new venture.

Sincerely,

Michaela Miller


Sebastopol

Molly Joy Martin

Sebastopol, CA [REDACTED]

May 27, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon, whom I have known as a friend for the past 3 years, and in support of Piala, an exciting new restaurant project. I have never worked with or for Lowell, but I have spent a lot of time around him and his family, enough to confidently vouch for his character in the areas I will explain in this letter. I know Lowell to be honest in all matters, even and maybe particularly when it does not serve him. In my observation, Lowell cares about doing the right thing- in his business dealings, for his community, and for the environment. This ethos, reflected in the community of Sebastopol as a whole, is part of why I love living here.

I also know Lowell to be flawed. I was upset by the allegations, and in no way do I wish to minimize the experience of those accusing him. I believe that there should be consequences for treating other people poorly, which Lowell experienced when he was divested from the businesses he built. Lowell continues to experience loss, both personal and professional, as he faces this reckoning. As I watched Lowell being very publicly confronted and condemned, I saw someone who is able to hear criticisms of himself, is willing to accept responsibility for the impacts of his behavior, and who truly wants to do better. I know he has put in work to be a more sensitive, respectful, and self reflective person going forward, both with professional trainings and by engaging in conversations and requesting feedback from those around him.

I believe in second chances and redemption, and I think those values are shared in the Sebastopol community. Lowell should be allowed to use his talents in a way that is positive and healthy, and also reflective of the community standards. It is my understanding that Lowell will not have any operational involvement in Piala. That role will be filled by Jeff Berlin, who has previously had very successful restaurants in the Bay Area (A Cote, among others), and whom I also know personally. Jeff is eminently qualified to run a restaurant and manage people. To deny permits to Piala because Lowell is involved in the creation is unfair and unwarranted. Lowell should be allowed to redeem himself in the community and I know that he has something valuable to share with the creation of Piala. I urge you to reconsider the denial of permits to Lowell and his partners.

Sincerely,

Molly J. Martin

5/24/2022


Dear Sebastopol Planning Commission,

I am writing this letter in support of my brother, Lowell Sheldon, and his change of ownership application for Pila Georgian Cuisine in the former location of Peking Chef. As his brother, I know Lowell's character and temperament better than most, even if I am admittedly biased. Lowell is a kind, passionate, fun-loving, and generous individual who cares deeply about social justice and making the world, including the food service industry, culinary world and city of Sebastopol, a better place for all. Yes, he can also be quite exacting, occasionally pushing both himself and those around him ways that might cause some to chafe at his high expectations. And like all of us, he can occasionally become stressed out, overwhelmed, or irritable and inadvertently make others feel uncomfortable, offended, or bad – events which I know he always deeply regrets, introspects on, and attempts to learn from.

That said, I have spent countless time in his various restaurants over the years, interacting with his many employees (most of whom I got to know personally), and I can honestly say that at no point in time did I hear or perceive anything but positivity, laughter, and good will among his staff and customers. Yes, I am aware of allegations made by a small group of his former employees regarding the work environment at one of his former restaurants. And I have no reason to doubt, for the reasons mentioned above, that Lowell might have said or done things (albeit perhaps inadvertently) that made these specific employees upset with and resentful toward him. It was his first restaurant, and he was quite young, with room to grow as a restaurateur, when he started it. But even if some of the allegations are accurate, my understanding is that Lowell has since made a sincere and concerted effort to reach out to these individuals to apologize, make amends, and seek their forgiveness for any harm he might have caused. Lowell has also done considerable work to improve himself in the intervening years. For all this, he should be commended.

Lowell has been an outstanding and generous member of the Sebastopol Community for his entire life and this new restaurant will add a unique and culturally valuable new dining option to the Sebastopol dining scene. It is an establishment which will benefit all. Proportionality and fairness require that we all receive a chance at redemption and second chance to be our best selves, and Lowell is no exception. I trust the Sebastopol Planning Commission will decide wisely and fairly in this case and allow this generous, moral, and deeply committed member of the Sebastopol community to continue to enrich the culture of my beloved hometown and county for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oliver Sheldon', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Oliver Sheldon, Sebastopol, CA / Maplewood, NJ

May 31, 2022

Planning Commission – City of Sebastopol
7120 Bodega Ave.
Sebastopol, CA 95472

RE: Piala Georgian Cuisine change of ownership to Lowell Sheldon

Dear Planning Commissioners,

On behalf of Lowell Sheldon, it is my pleasure to provide this letter of support to request that the Planning Commission grant the change of ownership of former restaurant Peking Chef to Lowell Sheldon, so that he may open up Piala Georgian Cuisine at 7233 Healdsburg Ave. The improvements that Lowell Sheldon is envisioning for the location is a smart opportunity for the City of Sebastopol to achieve [goal #3 of the cities strategic plan](#) and further enhance the culture of the community at large.

I have had the privilege of knowing Lowell Sheldon for over two decades. He is one of the few individuals I know who is guided by values and vision. I have spent the past 20+ years watching Lowell learn how to create sustainable change and how to do it effectively. Lowell has always believed that there is a better way that we could be living and a better way that we could construct our society, that would produce more positive outcomes for people. Lowell has an incredibly strong internal drive to make the changes that would lead to this “better version” of how we live. And lastly, Lowell knows how to connect with peoples hearts and has a foundation of love.

This combination of factors – along with a belief that life has meaning and that each of us has a purpose – leads Lowell on a continuous exploration both personally and professionally of how he could best use his talents to help create this “better version” of society and himself. He has owned and managed restaurants in Sebastopol and established his vision and defined his path (desire lines per se) to produce better outcomes both for the people working there, those providing for it, and for the people using the services. He is driven to go as far and as wide and as deep as he can with the resources that he has. He has a unique talent and ability to align systems, resources, and people to create change.

Over the last few years, I have witnessed Lowell lift his perspective up a level so that he can see the full context. He invites people in to problem-solve and listens more carefully than ever. I have a deep admiration for his ability to approach the challenges he has faced over the last few years with an open heart, all while keeping a commitment to his goals. I have not seen anyone acknowledge the truth of others’ experiences quite as he has.

I would be excited to see and support Lowell in leading Piala in partnership with Irma and Jeff to create a unique experience for the community of Sebastopol, and to give Irma and Jeff the opportunity to make their vision become reality and expand what either of them may have ever thought was possible.

As Lowell begins to reconnect with his community, I urge the Planning Commissioners to give him the opportunity to engage with staff, patrons and partners differently. And to give him the opportunity to build upon all that he has learned and to come together in partnership with his community.

It would be a tremendous loss to the community and City of Sebastopol to not allow this vision to become reality for those who really believe in it, can see themselves in it and who will have a hand in creating it.

Sincerely,

Pia Gheen

[REDACTED]

San Francisco, CA 94134

[REDACTED]

Dear Commissioners:

This is a letter in support of Píala Georgian Cuisine and its design-and-buildout partner, Lowell Sheldon, who I have known for many years and now call a close friend. First and foremost, I believe Píala will be an excellent addition to the culinary landscape in Sebastopol. As with all of Lowell's previous restaurants, Píala is conceptually unique and stands to offer delicious, locally sourced food in a warm environment that welcomes everyone. I have no doubt that he and his operating partners will run the restaurant professionally, with the utmost care for food, and for their employees and diners.

As long as I've known Lowell I've been impressed by (and envious of) his relationship to food, which is really a form of caring about people. He shows his love through food, and I have happily been the recipient of that love countless times. What I witnessed as a long-time customer of Peter Lowell's—from the restaurant's inception to eventual closure—was a culture of fairness and inclusion, where the owner/operator offered both living wages and health care to his employees, a first in the Sebastopol restaurant scene as far as I know. Which is to say, I know Lowell as a creative, empathetic, and deeply intentional person. A person who makes things and the people around him better.

Lowell is also a fallible person—as well all are. Full of the idiosyncrasies that make up any personality—and thank god for that. I shudder to think of living in a world where none of us makes mistakes, none of us has a chance to right our wrongs, where only some people live in glass houses. I'm aware of the allegations regarding his misconduct. I have read the newspaper articles and take what's been reported seriously. There's no excuse for the pain he has caused others to feel. But I believe his strengths as a person outweigh his weaknesses by a landslide, and that the personal work he's done in the last several years to correct his behavior bears this out. He's listened and acted, and made lasting changes. For the City of Sebastopol to block the change of ownership request for Píala Georgina Cuisine leaves no room for that growth and change to be seen and felt in the community.

I urge you to take a step forward with him by approving the change of ownership application for Píala Georgian Cuisine.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Andrew Touhy
Graton, CA

June 2nd, 2022

From:
Josh Woodlander
Sebastopol, CA
[REDACTED]

Regarding Planning Approval for Piala Restaurant and Witness Testimony of Lowell Sheldon's Conduct at Peter Lowell's Restaurant

I was the owner and proprietor of 1stWave Interactive, a web design and UX consultancy, located in the same building and directly adjacent to the Peter Lowell's Restaurant for the period of September 2008 to April 2022. I was a witness to the comings and goings of restaurant patrons, employees and management for the entirety of the restaurants 10+ years of existence. At no time did I witness unwanted sexual jokes or inappropriate behavior on the part of management or employees. Specifically, I did not witness any behavior on the part of Lowell Sheldon that was sexually inappropriate with employees.

What I witnessed was a restaurant culture of employees and management fraternizing in the mode of a "collective" friendship driven business. Chefs, wait staff, and managers would hang-out together for long hours after closing time, eating food and drinking wine together. From the outside, the appearance was that of a group of young people having fun and enjoying themselves.

I read the news articles of the accusations of inappropriate behavior on the part of Lowell Sheldon and his management style. Though I did not witness this behavior during the hundreds of hours directly observing and engaging with the restaurant, I do not dispute any of the women who stepped forward with their own personal accounts. My own personal observation and what I overheard from time to time from others, was that Lowell Sheldon could be "moody" and "aloof" on occasion — very friendly one day and curt and distracted the next day. Peter Lowell's was a beloved restaurant and local favorite widely known for spearheading the use of local organic food and establishing strong relationships with local farmers.

Piala Restaurant should be allowed to do business in Sebastopol. Lowell Sheldon, despite personal faults, has been a visionary creator of unique restaurant experiences in Sebastopol and has brought much value to the town and it's culture with his focus on Organic farm to table cuisine. Patrons and residents of Sonoma County should have the freedom to support or not support Piala restaurant based on the way the business conducts itself and treats employees.

Sincerely,
Josh Woodlander
Owner
1stWave Interactive
[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, CA 95472

Dear Sebastopol Planning Commissioners,

I am writing to support the Lowell Sheldon in opening a restaurant. I have been a resident of Sebastopol for 18 years and have known Lowell since 2007. Most recently my address was 620 Live Oak Ave.

I have been a regular, 2 to 3 times per week customer at Peter Lowells and Handline since it opened. During this time I have known Lowell as a conscientious person with high standards. He was a pioneer in providing health insurance to his workers, and took a big risk in eliminating tipping at his restaurant, which is in my opinion demeaning, especially towards women.

I believe in the power of redemption and in everyone's right to earn a livelihood. Through his sincere apologies and willingness to undergo serious therapy and retraining, Lowell has demonstrated contrition. I believe he will not repeat past mistakes and he deserves a second chance. He has repented and fully deserves to get on with his life and earn a living. We do not need to go medieval on Lowell.

I hope you allow the restaurant to open. Please call me at [REDACTED] if you have any questions.

Sincerely, Rajesh

May 30, 2022

Planning Commission
Sebastopol

Re: Piala Georgian Restaurant

I have known Lowell Sheldon from both a business and personal perspective for well over a decade. Lowell has made significant, positive contributions to the Sebastopol food community.

As a young man growing up while learning the restaurant business and navigating today's complex social and social media world, Lowell made some errors in judgement and perception. In hindsight he has come to painfully understand and learn from those errors. He has apologized and is attempting to move his life forward to once again contribute to the local community.

The city should be encouraging young people to learn and grow from their mistakes, and move on to lead successful lives in the community. Lowell should not be blocked and prevented from doing so because of past errors and demands from individuals seeking permanent retribution.

The Piala Georgian Restaurant would bring an additional contribution as a diverse local dining option. I encourage the Planning Commission to make the right choice here and allow the Piala Georgian Restaurant to move forward with its plans.

Sincerely,



Robert Nissenbaum
Sebastopol, CA

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon, Jeff Berlin, and Irma Hernandez, and of their current project, Píala Georgian Cuisine.

I know Lowell well and have had the opportunity to meet Jeff and Irma, and I have absolute confidence that Píala will operate at the highest levels of professionalism and care. It will be a valuable and unique addition to the dining options in Sebastopol, and bring a venue for natural wines to Sonoma County.

I have known Lowell and his family since childhood, but in the past several years I have come to count Lowell as a friend. He is a deeply caring community member, a kind and generous friend, and a loving father. I have had the great pleasure of dining at his restaurants with my family, and still miss the food and camaraderie of Lowell's. As a regular and a friend, I witnessed his commitment to providing health care to his employees and living wages to his kitchen staff. He has contributed immeasurably to the City of Sebastopol, helping to build its reputation as a destination for food and wine, and participating in countless non-profit events and fundraisers.

Like many others who know Lowell personally, I was disappointed and saddened by the allegations and media reports. I take them seriously and my support is not intended to refute or minimize the real pain and damage he has caused. At the same time, I have witnessed the level of reflection and personal growth Lowell has undertaken since then. He has listened and acted with humility, acknowledged his mistakes, and taken concrete steps to learn and change. I would not hesitate to work with him as an employee or business partner and I believe Píala deserves the chance to succeed or fail on its own merits. I urge you to approve the beer and wine license for Píala Georgian Cuisine.

Sincerely,
Rose Haynes Touhy
Graton, CA

I've known Lowell for several years now and I'm friends with his kids. I really miss the food from Peter Lowell's and I think Lowell deserves another chance to make a wonderful and delicious environment for Sebastopol. I still go to Handline almost every week. I believe that his new restaurant could be just as great.

Anonymous, Age 10
Graton, CA

Greetings to Whom It May Concern:

My name is Nancy Samuels and i have known Lowell Sheldon, and his family, for many many years. In fact, my son and Lowell went to school together.

I am writing because i believe Lowell has paid for his mistakes and has taken a good, long look at himself this past year and has changed in a very positive way.

I do not think he should be punished further by the community and not be allowed to open this new establishment. He won't even be working with the public, but will be behind the scenes. I think PIALA will be of great value to sebastopol and to the people who live there.

My family and i ate at his previous restaurant, Peter Lowell's, countless times and i never saw or felt anything other than friendliness and good vibes. I loved eating there and the staff always seemed happy to be working there. In fact, i still miss that place.

In summary, i hope you will issue a license to Lowell and his partners so they can sell beer and wine and some nice food at PIALA.

If you have any further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to call me. Sincerely, Nancy Samuels

[REDACTED]

Wednesday May 25, 2022

Dear Sebastopol City Council Members, I am writing to strongly support the change of ownership application from Peking Chef at 7233 Healdsburg Ave to Pinala Georgian Cuisine, which was submitted by Jeff Berlin, Irma Hernandez and Lowell Sheldon.

As a friend of Lowell Sheldon's parents, I was among the first to dine at Peter Lowell's Café in 2007. And it is not an exaggeration to say that I (and my little family) dined at Lowell's numerous times a month from 2007 to 2013, until we moved from Sebastopol to San Francisco. The reason we dined regularly at Lowell's for six years is because the food was terrific, the environment was friendly and community-minded (attributes that cannot be faked in small open floor-plans), and the ethos was creative, sustainable (supported humane meat and farm to table experience), and progressive (staff received benefits and a living wage).

Furthermore, my daughter, Amelia began raising chickens when she was five years old. Three years later, Amelia had grown her flock to 30 chickens and wanted to sell the eggs. Acquainted with Lowell from eating regularly at his restaurant, eight-year-old Amelia (with knees knocking) asked Lowell if he would buy eggs from her. Lowell respectfully asked Amelia the same questions he'd ask any food vendor and then agreed to purchase her eggs. Amelia sold a small quantity of quality eggs to Peter Lowell's restaurant for four years and from that experience she learned about business, developed math and marketing skills ... and most of all—Amelia gained confidence in herself and abilities.

Lastly, after moving back to Sebastopol from San Francisco in 2017, I lived for over a year in a Florence Loft condo, which shares property boundaries with (now formerly) Lowell's Café. And, with my daughter off to college, I consoled and gave myself a break from being a mom-home-chef by eating at Lowell's Café almost on a daily basis; it was wonderful!

Like all my previous experiences dining at Lowell's Café, during the year I spent eating there on a daily basis I never, NOT ONCE, witnessed any type of unprofessional conduct from Lowell Sheldon. No doubt Lowell has made mistakes and has regrets like all of us. Nevertheless, in truth, he is a pillar of this community. In addition to Lowell's Café, he has been a part of many other restaurant endeavors—directly and as a mentor—and each of those restaurants (or business) has contributed to the vitality of this community through taxes, as places for people to meet and form bonds, and by establishing a uniquely Sebastopol food scene that has attracted other businesses and tourism.

Lowell Sheldon is above all else an ethical and thoughtful person, generous and wildly talented—a creative force in the restaurant scene—both locally and nationally. I am grateful for his contributions and look forward to dining at Pinala Georgian Cuisine. Please, I urge City Council members, on behalf of the greater Sebastopol community, to give the Pinala project your full support and assistance.

Sincerely, Sandi Sheffield
 [REDACTED] Sebastopol, CA 95473
 Tele [REDACTED]

Ps. I am a feminist and victim's rights advocate, and greatly distressed that a handful of former employees (out of the hundreds that worked at Lowell's Café) have been allowed to receive their 15-minutes of fame by slandering Lowell Sheldon. If it weren't for their attacks on Lowell, none of the supposed victims would have any agency or celebrity. Please do not allow a few disgruntled employees using McCarthyism style bullying to continue to make news by ruining the career of a much beloved local business leader. Worst of all, when people make false accusations (and in this case, mountains out of mole hills) this leads to the disbelief of people who have faced real workplace harassment or abuse.

Dear City of Sebastopol Commissioners,

I write to urge you to reconsider your decision to deny the transfer application of Píala Georgian Cuisine and to express my unequivocal support for the addition of this restaurant to the Sebastopol community. The denial of a beer and wine license transfer to a prospective establishment like Píala is effectively a ban of the business entirely, a measure that you as elected officials should exercise in only the most clear cut situations. I hope that you will give this and other letters in support of Píala equal weight to those previously offered in protest to this application and grant Píala's transfer application.

As a feminist and someone who has known Lowell for over a decade, I am dismayed by the rush to characterize him in such damning and sexist absolutes without any attempt to hear from him, paint a complete picture, or accord even a modicum of due process. The Lowell I know -- both as a frequent diner in his restaurants and through our shared community -- does not at all square with the image presented by a handful of vocal former employees in recent months. Lowell is a creative, hard working, principled, and thoroughly kind and generous person. As is often the case with young entrepreneurs, Lowell's talent and vision outpaced his professionalism, and at times he blurred personal and professional boundaries. But he isn't a menace. His restaurants were built around a core commitment to community -- with an emphasis on sourcing from local farms, paying a living wage and providing healthcare, and contributing to the professional growth of others in the community -- and I personally felt this shared sense of community among his teams. I have known several people who've worked in Lowell's restaurants over the years -- and spent countless nights with them during and after hours -- and what they expressed and what I experienced first hand was unequivocally positive, supportive, and safe.

If you are going to consider anything about Lowell's character in determining the outcome of Píala's application, you need to consider all of who he is, including what I think stands out most about him: his willingness to hear and engage with clear and direct criticism (even when it's *hard*), to introspect on it, and to become better. I am not sure I know anyone who would have taken the sort of character assaults Lowell experienced this past year and responded in the manner that Lowell did, with a sincere openness and a deep desire to improve himself and repair any wrongs felt by the community. Lowell and I have talked extensively over the past several months about the allegations that have surfaced -- and rather than dwelling on the falsity and exaggerated nature of many of them, his primary focus has been on how he can learn, grow, and mend. This is a quality we should look for in all business owners and employers.

It is in this spirit that Lowell has approached the Píala project he's partnered with Jeff and Irma on, putting in place all the necessary guardrails to ensure others in the community will feel comfortable with his involvement in a new restaurant, regardless of whether he actually poses any risk. The Píala partnership expressly provides that Lowell *will have no involvement in the* operational management or staffing of the

restaurant in any capacity, and that partners, restaurant veterans Jeff and Irma, will oversee all operations, staffing, and management. I know Jeff and Irma personally to be respectful, professional, and kind. I understand they have also undergone harassment training and that Piala has taken the additional measure of having a specialized HR firm handle those matters for the business.

Given all of the above, there is no legitimate basis for you to deny Piala's transfer application and effectively bar Piala from opening its doors to the Sebastopol community. Please reconsider your decision and grant Piala the transfer application it is seeking.

Sincerely,
Sarah Jackel
Oakland, CA

Dear Commission,

Over the last 14 years I have enjoyed Lowell's restaurants with incredibly regularity. What he creates in this town is valuable and makes this town better. As local business owner I can attest to the learning curve we must all walk on as we grow and engage with employees and the public. It is not an easy task. As you have read in the media, he has not always succeeded in making every employee appreciate who he is. He has not always succeeded. His failures are human failures. We can all relate to such shortcomings.

This, however, cannot be the basis for how our city governs use permit applications. We must not govern based on personal attacks online or in the media. We must govern based on facts and fairness for all. After talking with him I have learned that he has never been sued for his mistakes or investigated by the police. This leads me to believe there are two sides to the story and what you are hearing from his detractors does not add up.

In my personal interactions with Lowell he has always been fair, honest and respectful. I know him to be a good person who always wants to do better. Please approve his transfer of alcohol permit and help make Sebastopol a more fair place for all.

Sincerely,
Scott Gibbs
Sebastopol Plumbing

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to my express my support for Lowell Sheldon's participation in the new Giala Restaurant in Sebastopol.

I have been a very regular customer in Lowell's restaurant ventures over the years. I have very much appreciated these restaurants and the contributions that they made to the community. I have interacted Lowell many times over those years. In those many visits I always found him to behave with a professional demeanor. I never personally witnessed any behavior by him that would make me support the denial of a permit for a new venture. In fact I was always impressed by the staff in general and found them to be efficient, pleasant, and seemingly happy in their job.

I think a new restaurant opened by experienced restauranteurs will be an asset to the community on a number of positive levels. It's always great to have a new restaurant to dine at, especially one with interesting cuisine. Also, this community really needs business that will draw more people out into the downtown. This will have a domino effect on the local economy.

Lastly, I've seen the press and the accusations and have always taken them seriously. While I'm not qualified to comment on them, it does appear that Lowell has gone to substantial lengths to better himself and to make amends. I think that after a point, justice is served and that a life sentence in this instance is unfair and unreasonable.

Respectfully,
Glenn Siegel
Sebastopol, Ca.

- > Dear Members of the Planning Commission,
- >
- > I'm writing in support of Lowell Sheldon, as a non-operational partner in a three-person partnership, to open Piala in Sebastopol. I have known Lowell since he was in Kindergarten and throughout his education, including college, as well as his endeavors initiating food culture into Sebastopol that can continue to support our town.
- >
- > I am aware of the media coverage and accusations. Lowell has acknowledged and taken very seriously his past mistakes. If every person in his situation would make the effort to learn and rectify those mistakes the way Lowell has -through personal therapy, weekly meetings concerning Restorative Justice, trainings to understand and address sexual harassment in the workplace -then there might be much more awareness from all employers in the workplace.
- >
- > But for me, more importantly, is his character. As I said, I've known Lowell since he was a child. Basically, within, he is a sound and well-meaning human being. That is evidenced already by what he is doing to amend the damage that he caused.
- >
- > I do not believe that any citizen should be blocked from opening a business because former employees demand it.
- >
- > Piala will be a wonderful addition to dining in Sebastopol. Lowell brings the worldliness and expertise to these ventures.
- >
- > I ask you to be open and allow his venture to go forward.
- >
- > With best wishes,
- >
- > Sandy Smith
- >

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to voice my support for Lowell Sheldon as a business owner and restaurant entrepreneur.

I was a devoted customer of Peter Lowell's restaurant and was truly sad to see it close. There is no substitute in Sebastopol or the county. Lowell's vision and his high standards for cuisine are unmatched.

I enjoyed the ambience at the restaurant--Lowell was always welcoming-- and I recall that there were several long-term employees. Whatever complaints former staff had, I was not aware of anything untoward.

Sebastopol needs great food and great restaurants. Lowell is a proven leader in the industry and I support his right to work here at his chosen profession.

I trust that Sebastopol will be the richer for Lowell's continuing efforts to expand and grow his restaurant offerings.

Sincerely,

Janine Sternlieb
Sebastopol, CA

Dear City Council:

In the spirit of fairness and due process, I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon and his effort to open Piala restaurant.

While the allegations against Lowell are very troubling, they have not been proven in a court of law and yet Lowell has undertaken significant work to address what he admits was inappropriate behavior. He has undergone three years of therapy, six months of weekly work with an organization specializing in restorative justice to better understand his impact on others, three two-hour trainings on consent and power dynamics, and two other trainings specifically to better understand and address sexual harassment in the workplace. He did this voluntarily.

This is a good outcome of a bad situation. What would denying the business transfer accomplish? Lowell should not be barred from earning a living in Sebastopol. He deserves the chance to prove himself. Those that find him objectionable need not work at Piala or dine there.

The planning commission's denial raises a number of questions:

- Has the planning commission denied business transfers to others based on individual requests?
- Will the commission review all transfers granted to ensure the parties are held to the same standard it is seeking to hold Lowell? What is that standard?
- If similar allegations are made about other business owners, will their business standing be revoked? If not, why not?
- Is the commission establishing a new policy that those who have been accused of appropriate behavior may not own businesses in Sebastopol? What is the legal basis of this?
- Given the planning commission's effort to deny a business transfer to someone about whom unproven claims have been made, will it also prohibit business transfers to those who have been convicted or cited for crimes? If not why, not?

It's worth noting that Lowell has been a pioneer in local and ethical purchasing in Sebastopol and was the first restaurateur in the city to enact a diner surcharge to give employees health insurance. Further, his role at a Piala is to design and execute the concept. He is not an operational partner. Given Lowell's proactive, voluntary efforts to better himself, just what is the planning commission seeking to accomplish with its denial? I urge the city council to grant approval.

Sincerely,

Stett Holbrook

Sebastopol

To the Sebastopol Planning Commission,

I am writing in support of the opening of Piala restaurant.

I have known Lowell Sheldon since 2006, and witnessed his hard work, creativity, and focus on healthy, local, organic food. Lowell initiated a trend in the restaurant industry in Sebastopol which has benefited many businesses and the city in general. Peter Lowell's, then Lowell's, was a wonderful restaurant which thrived for many years. Lowell volunteered his time and supported many non-profit initiatives.

I do not think that a business owner should be blocked from opening a restaurant, or serving beer and wine, because of former employees accusations. First of all there were no convictions or any legal actions. Second of all, there are business owners locally who were convicted felons and run restaurants and bars! Every human being deserves the opportunity to redeem themselves!

My understanding is that Lowell will not be an operational partner, and that he has gone through many trainings and counseling since the incidents first came to light three years ago.

I would urge you to allow Piala to open and support Lowell's commitment to the highest standards by using Personal Perspectives to handle all HR related issues.

I absolutely think that as a society we should not destroy people's lives through a 'cancel culture', but rather support them in their continual growth and striving.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tracy Saucier

Petaluma, CA

To Whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of the change of ownership application for Piala Georgian cuisine and owner Lowell Sheldon. There are two points of emphasis that I would like to convey in this letter. First, I feel very strongly that the city Planning Director Kari Svanstrom's decision to deny the application based on a letter from former employees of Lowell is short sighted and unprofessional. While she cited a weak secondary claim of the establishment not being a restaurant (a claim easily shown to be untrue), Ms. Svanstrom was quoted in a recent Press Democrat article as saying she "basically denied it on the content of the letter." To think that a city official would use her position to punish a business owner and its potential employees based on a letter signed by 18 people is maddening. To simply accept that account as fact absent any criminal charges, or even a civil proceeding, and without asking for input from any other former employees, shows a striking willingness to bow to a small special interest group in setting city policy. That is a dangerous slope to go down in terms of how the city interacts with potential new businesses and proprietors. Is the city going to investigate and judge every new business owner's past before they are allowed to set up shop? That strikes me as decidedly outside of the duty of our city employees, and presents an inhospitable regulatory environment for prospective businesses.

My second point of emphasis in writing this letter is to provide a contrasting view of the character of Lowell Sheldon. I have known Lowell for about 20 years. I saw him grow from a young, inexperienced restaurateur, into a leader of the local food movement that honors the valuable work of our local farmers and ranchers. His restaurants also led the push to give workers a living wage, and operated with a heightened commitment to community building and support. Not just as a patron, but as a friend, I have interacted with him in many ways over the years. Our children went to pre-school together and continue to be close friends, and I have come to know a man who is a wonderful father and generous, caring friend.

I don't claim that Lowell is a man without flaws. The birth of his first restaurant came during his 20's, and he has admitted to being unprepared for the role of owner/manager at such an age. He has taken responsibility for the hurt he caused and mistakes he made. I fully support the right of any person who feels like they have been treated inappropriately to be heard and their experiences acknowledged. It is especially important that women feel safe and empowered to speak openly, without fear of retribution, if they feel uncomfortable with interactions with a boss or coworker. I do believe that the individuals who did speak out were standing in their truth and should be acknowledged. Having worked in the restaurant industry for many years, I know all too well an industry that is male dominated, with top-down management structures, staffed primarily by young men and women who often turn to alcohol and drugs after long and stressful shifts. It doesn't excuse bad behavior in any way, but these are industry norms that we should be striving to address. Having known many of the former employees of his restaurants who enjoyed working for him, I believe that the accounts presented don't represent the complete story of Lowell as a boss. I think he has learned from his mistakes, and building on his successes, is committed to creating a restaurant that will live up to the ideals of equity, respect, and transparency. I implore this commission to do the right thing and allow him the chance to prove that we are a community of growth and change.

Respectfully,
Tucker Hemquist
Occidental Rd., Sebastopol

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing this letter to express the good character that Lowell Sheldon has exhibited to me, my family, and my co-workers over the last five years. It seems unnecessary to be doing so, but apparently there has been an attempt to prove otherwise. I've known Lowell since 2018 when I moved here to be the chef at his restaurant Lowell's.

What attracted me to working for him was the community he seemed to have coaxed into existence from a small little restaurant in a small town that I wasn't used to or familiar with. I didn't know anyone aside from my best friend that I moved to the area with, who worked as a server the entire time I was employed with the restaurant. Lowell and his family counted us as a family member and I counted them the same.

Working with Lowell was always great, always fun, and sometimes challenging. He had a standard of operation and I fell in line nicely to uphold the standards I was responsible for. When an issue arose we always talked about it in a respectful and constructive way. I saw him demonstrate the same method with the others I worked with. There is a necessary rigidity to upholding these standards that is crucial for a restaurant to function as seamlessly as Lowell's did and I always respected his ability to do so. Respect was granted from my first conversation with him and it hasn't ever changed since.

I noticed that Lowell loves his sons and is a good dad from my first few interactions with him and his family. I could also tell that he loved his work, bringing what I believe to be the best food that I had the privilege to serve in Sonoma county.

I fully support him in his new venture, with all that that entails and hope with my whole self that he is permitted to do so. If it is one thing that Sebastopol is lacking, it is restaurants that offer something special that only he has been able to deliver. Please reach out with any further questions as I would love to answer or clear any doubts.

With sincerity,

Griffin Wilson

To whom it may concern;

I am writing this letter in support of Lowell Sheldon, to assure any present or future projects be considered with a more complete representation of the person that I have known and respected my whole life. I grew up with Lowell and his family, and have worked professionally with Lowell's father Steve, as well as Lowell for over 10 years. The projects that first Steve, then later Lowell have brought to this community by any measure have made a lasting positive impact on the community as a whole. I have maintained contact and communication with Lowell throughout these past few years. I have seen him address these issues and grow from them. He has taken to heart all of the concerns that have been raised, and done more than most to try to remedy each and every one of them. I have 100 percent confidence in Lowell's ability to grow and become an even better member of the business community. Because of a fear of retaliation, I believe his support is much more broad than his critics would like you to think. After all it is a hallmark of this great nation of ours, that people are capable of change, growth and deserve the opportunity to show as much.

Vladimir Gortinsky,
Petaluma

To: Planning Commission, City of Sebastopol
From: Will Haynes [REDACTED] Sebastopol, CA 95473
Re: Letter of Support for Piala Georgian Restaurant/Lowell Sheldon
Date: May 27, 2022

Dear Commissioners,

As a born and raised Sebastopol resident and land holder, I suggest that you reconsider the decision of the Planning Director and approve the transfer of the beer and wine license for Piala Georgian Restaurant.

I worked as a server at Peter Lowell's restaurant between the years of 2011 and 2014, and contrary to how some individuals would like to paint a picture of the work environment as toxic, my experience was very different. The establishment was a pillar of the community providing healthy food, supporting local and organic farmers and winemakers, creating jobs, and bringing people together. Me and my team of other employees both male and female looked forward to going to work and had a great camaraderie. Things were run smoothly and professionally, and any reports of partying in the workplace or underage drinking etc. were not something I witnessed, and would have been isolated incidents not the norm. The newspapers never came to interview me or many of my coworkers for an alternate perspective, and I think the narrative is warped and inaccurate.

Lowell Sheldon was a good boss in general. Though sometimes lacking in social graces causing people to feel a little awkward

at times, I always felt his intentions were good and that he cared deeply about the well-being of his employees and the community. He strove to take care of his staff in a way that was unheard of in the industry, offering things like health insurance to full time employees and a living wage to those that worked in the kitchen. I believe his ideals came before profits, and ultimately caused the untimely end of an establishment I often still miss in Sebastopol.

Since that time I think Lowell has continued to grow both personally and professionally, and that the proposed restaurant will be run according to the high standards of the time we live in. If approved it will be a real benefit to the Sebastopol community and economy.

Thank you for your consideration,

Will Haynes

Cc: Lowell Sheldon 

Letter in support of Alcohol Use Permit application appeal for Piala Georgian Cuisine
Date: 6/2/22

To whom this may concern at the licensing board:

I write to urge you reconsider and approve the previously denied application to serve alcohol at Piala Georgian Cuisine in Sebastopol.

It is my strong belief that this restaurant will be as upstanding and valuable addition to the Sebastopol dining and libation scene.

I understand that you have concluded that one of the owners involved in this venture, Lowell Sheldon, has a reputation based on allegations and press articles that disqualifies him from being able to be trusted with such a license. I believe you have come to this conclusion without the full story, and hope that my sincere letter can also be taken into account. I was born and raised in Sebastopol, and will always consider it a home. I have frequented Lowell's restaurants from the very beginning, and had good friends who worked at them for many years.

Over the many years in the challenging business of starting and running or helping to run 3 vital restaurants in Sebastopol, Lowell undoubtedly made mistakes and errors in judgement, and he has already paid a stiff price and had to grapple with the severe damage to his reputation in deep and painful ways. I have seen him do this work, continue to do this work, and believe he is ready to be trusted as one involved in such a new venture as this. He deserved to have a reckoning, but not to have his reputation and livelihood destroyed forever.

With these many letters of support, I believe you will see that the community of people around Lowell, who know him well, continue to support him wholeheartedly. We have not abandoned him, and never did, and we are composed of scores of strong, progressive women and men who believe in fair treatment of employees and respect for women. We know Lowell, know he has made mistakes like all of us, have listened to the accusations and general negative picture painted of him, but said we know a different Lowell than that. Some of what we have read and heard we believe, but much of it we simply believe has been exaggerated and distorted to paint Lowell in the most negative light possible. He simply is not a predator or danger to society, and I believe the truest evidence of this is the fact that so many community members/supporters completely rejected that picture of him.

The Lowell we know, with new tools and support, good partners, and a better understanding of how not to blur the personal and professional, is ready to once again be involved in a restaurant venture in Sebastopol.


Sincerely,
Will Sheldon

Dear Commissioners,

I am disappointed that the Sebastopol City Council is taking such a narrow-minded and mean-spirited position with respect to Lowell Sheldon and his business endeavors. Lowell has made substantial contributions to the economic, social, and cultural life of Sebastopol. He transformed the Foster Freeze eyesore (with the help of his dad Steve) into a beautiful site that draws more customers than any other restaurant in Sebastopol. All of his enterprises have incorporated fundamental Sebastopolian values- sustainability, using locally sourced ingredients and beverages, concern for the environment, and providing living wages for his employees.

I have known Lowell since he was seven years old. I can tell you that he has taken seriously the allegations that were brought against him and he has done a lot of soul searching. He is a changed man. And he deserves a second chance. Open your hearts and your minds and allow him to continue doing what he has already proven he does so well. He is an asset for our community.

Randall Willens

 restaurant, but Lowell's success has been very apparent with his other places of business and don't see why this new endeavor should be denied. Sincerely, Marcia Larkin-a Sebastopol resident

To Whom It May Concern:

I was a dedicated patron of Lowell's Restaurant (formerly Peter Lowell's) for all the 12 years it was in business. I found it to be a one-of-a-kind establishment that served healthy food which appealed to many varied diets and had an ethic that supported local farm-to-table, ecological concerns – which I and my friends found at NO other restaurants around here. The community rallied around it and made it one of the most successful eateries in West County. I, personally, found it to be graciously and professionally run. A large number of people I know felt similarly and were sad when it closed. Many still say they miss it and that there is nothing to replace it.

Lowell went on to found two other successful restaurants in Sebastopol. He has done more for the food scene in this town than practically any other person. People came from far and wide to eat in Sebastopol because of him. He started running his first restaurant at a very young age, was inexperienced, and I hear there were mistakes made and SOME employees upset. But remember, there were hundreds of workers and patrons who, alternately, enjoyed working and eating there and have positive things to say about him as a business owner. And he has admitted his faults and has strenuously and continuously striven to correct them and make amends, which is admirable.

I truly feel that Sebastopol would be remiss in not giving him a chance to launch this new endeavor. With his intention to do it RIGHT, with a new-found knowledge demonstrated by a rigorous personal and professional focus on the issues facing him, he will surely be an asset to the community once again! And since he is not the one who will actually be operating the restaurant anyhow, why is this avenue to his uniquely gifting the community and making a living here being blocked? He has apologized to the women who are now trying to “punish” him (for actions which didn't ever even come to the level of proven culpability), he has accepted responsibility for making anyone uncomfortable, and he has taken steps to correct any future errant workplace behavior. What else can he do? I hope he is given the opportunity to move forward and prove his worth once again.

I have also known Lowell for his entire life growing up in Sebastopol, and have seen him to be a hard worker and a fair and kind person, one with high principles who comes up with creative solutions to problems. He is essentially a good man and should certainly not be penalized indefinitely. Please allow him to open up this business he has been working quite hard on and which will surely draw more people to our town.

Sincerely, Leslie Young (REDACTED), Sebastopol

May 24, 2022

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter of support for Lowell Sheldon regarding his role in the build out and design of the proposed Piala Georgian Cuisine in the former location of Peking Chef.

I have known Lowell for over 15 years and worked with him on the launch of his first restaurant Peter Lowell's. We have remained friends ever since and have admired his strong sense of community and his business acumen. I know the true character of Lowell and I know he has always tried to foster a positive work environment and has been supportive of his employees.

We all make personal mistakes, and when one takes responsibility for these mistakes as Lowell has, they deserve to move forward in their lives and livelihood. No one should be prevented from opening a business, even one serving beer and wine, because of the demands of a few former employees. We all need more dining options and I feel Piala will add value to the Sebastopol community.

Sincerely,

Rob Akins

Rob Akins
Forestville, CA

Kari Svanstrom

From: Alexandra Lopez [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, June 23, 2022 11:33 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Sheldon/Piala Public Comment
Attachments: Public Comment.pdf

Dear Director Svanstrom,

Please see my attached public comment regarding Lowell Sheldon's appeal.


Kind Regards,
Alexandra Lopez
Hopland, Ca

Kari Svanstrom

From: Angela Jackson [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, June 23, 2022 10:59 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Cc: keepfreestonesafe@gmail.com; Leah Engel
Subject: RE: Piala Alcohol License Appeal Hearing,
Attachments: Piala Hearing Letter.docx

Hello! My name is Angela Jackson and I'd like to submit this letter for consideration in preparation for the hearing for Piala's appeal after they were denied an alcohol license the first time and why no business of Lowell Sheldon's should be allowed to serve alcohol in any sort of near future. Thanks so much for the time taken to read my letter and please feel free to reach out if y'all have any other questions.

Best,
Angela



Angela Jackson-Melendez, she/her
Cafe Manager, Events Coordinator,
Retrograde Coffee Roasters

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

www.retrograderoasters.com

130 South Main Street #103 Sebastopol, CA

Kari Svanstrom

From: Timothy Ryan [REDACTED] >
Sent: Thursday, June 23, 2022 9:21 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: PIALA WINE BAR PROTEST LETTER /// SEBASTOPOL, CA /// PLEASE READ

Dear Planning Commission of Sebastopol California,

My name is Timothy Ryan and I'm writing to voice my gravest concerns as a West Sonoma County community member and ex-employee of one of Lowell Sheldon's businesses.

First and foremost I'd like to state that when I met Lowell Sheldon at Handline back in 2016 my first impression was that he was intelligent, charming and talented with his restaurant concepts. I liked him. We got along in many ways. I was grateful to gain employment at the new much-talked-about restaurant in Sebastopol, Handline. Handline had an ethos with regard to the local food products they sourced and their beverage program which was inline with mine. I did not work with Lowell directly very often because his role was not related to daily operations. He was often in the establishment making additions to infrastructure, repairs, landscaping, or hanging out with friends. He would always make it clear that he owned the place by acting as the general manager or proprietor. He would often be engaged in hyper-vigilant behavior which made many employees irritated. After he hired me we got along rather well in the beginning.

The talk among the town was that he was talented at what he did. Yet there was always a qualifier after this statement. People would tell me that he is socially awkward and has a serious issue with boundaries. After which they would dismiss it as "it's just Lowell's spectrum-like awkward behavior." On many occasions some people warned me that he was "a creep" and to stay away. Other people seemed to overlook these notions which they had about Lowell because he's a local figure in a position of power who had multiple popular restaurants/bars (his dad built much of this community—as most of the locals know)

I often frequented the establishment which he managed down the road named after himself—Lowell's. For years I'd eat and work on my laptop there for lunch, multiple times a week. I enjoyed the good food and company of the employees, many of whom I had a casual friendship with. During the years of working with Lowell and patronizing his eponymous restaurant, I got to know and observe him in the work environment. He liked to push boundaries and test his dominance over employees in multiple ways. Whether verbally or physically, it always made me feel uncomfortable to witness. I could see the discomfort within the employees and they'd often tell me how difficult it was to work with him. While this did not include all of the employees, it included many. He had a way with building people up, charming them and then tearing them down.

I'd see him out at the local bars after work with employees and other industry folks. The lack of respect for boundaries was apparent in this setting as well. He often asked folks to sit on his lap.

I had some very uncomfortable encounters with him myself between working at Handline and frequenting Lowell's. On several occasions he grabbed my hips and pressed his pelvis into me from behind while at work. He stuck his tongue in my ear while working. He grabbed my ass. It was a game of power and "fun" for him I suppose. My way to combat it was to fight fire with fire and act like I was beyond it all. I'd had more experience in the industry than he did and came from SF, which afforded me some respect and more leeway with him. I noticed a darkness in him beyond the charm. I'd nervously laugh off many of his indiscretions as did many others. He would regularly massage employees and patrons at his establishments without solicitation. A few of his friends were fine with it but most were not. I know someone who actually included these unsolicited massage encounters into his stand-up routine at Hopmonk's open mic. He said it was

an awkward and provocative bit but that it got nervous laughs because people all knew Lowell's regular disregard for boundaries. Many folks won't say this on the record about him because they don't want to disrupt the status quo or get mixed up in "these kinds of affairs." The fact that people (myself included) could dismiss this behavior and then offer him more power in the form of a new bar frightens me. We've all read the SF Chronicle, Press Democrat and Bohemien articles investigating the horrific accusations of sexual assault and misconduct within our community against Mr. Sheldon. When I distill my direct experiences of Lowell with the experiences others have relayed to me in confidence, I am left with one unequivocal calling: SPEAK UP!

Previously I've dismissed this behavior out of fear of standing up to a local figure in power. Someone who had access to all the top wine producers, venues, restaurants, other powerful and charming figures. I didn't want to disturb my reputation in the community. I shouldn't have dismissed this. I regret this with heartbreaking remorse. I knew that he was playing these power dynamics with his employees and others. I may have been able to prevent the abuse of strangers and people I care about had I spoken truth to power. Demanded accountability. That is why I'm writing this letter to you now. If Lowell Sheldon gets to own another bar in this county it would be shameful, disgraceful and dangerous.

I grew up working in restaurants nearly my whole life in San Francisco. This type of predatory behavior is par for the course. Sadly, it's expected. To avoid embarrassment and/or losing your job, you laugh it off or just grit your teeth and let it happen, repeatedly. This behavior is so rampant and normalized in the service industry (and many others) that people in a position of power have carte blanche to do what they please without accountability. I used to see Lowell nearly bring employees to tears just for the sake of toying with them, over a napkin on the ground. Because he could. I sincerely pray that you take all of this into consideration.

We have an opportunity to do the right thing here for our community by pleading to the Planning Commission of Sebastopol to **NOT GRANT** Lowell Sheldon access to a permit for PIALA wine bar, or any other future establishments. This is my plea. For the safety of our community please do the right thing.

Best regards,

Timothy Ryan

Kari Svanstrom

From: Shivani Hawkins [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 9:05 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Re: Freestone Hotel

Sorry, I forgot to mention - my husband Nicholas Hawkins also co-signs this. Thank you!

Best,

Shivani

Shivani Hawkins
 [REDACTED]

www.studiofreestone.com

On Jun 22, 2022, 9:00 PM -0700, Shivani Hawkins [REDACTED] wrote:

Hello,

We live at and own a commercial property just around the corner from the Freestone Hotel that Lowell Sheldon owns and wants to turn into a tavern and hotel. We are naturally in support of appropriate and respectful commercial development/uses of properties in Freestone, but it is impossible to support this proposed use, for so many reasons.

We moved here because of the quiet serenity and warmth of this community, and intend for this to be our permanent home. We have a young daughter whose only place to ride her tricycle or explore in her stroller is down Freestone St... the hotel occupying that entire street destroys what little shared community/pedestrian-friendly space that we have. The proposed plan would also create noise, disturbances, and other hazards that are likely to occur in places where heavy drinking late into the night is promoted.

The proposed water usage, noise, parking issues, and traffic would dramatically impact us and turn our beautiful historic town into something it was not intended to be and dramatically change its character. I would love to see something happen there at that hotel, but this is not it, nor is Lowell Sheldon the right person to lead that project.

Like most in our community, we were horrified to learn about all the more than ten years of sexual harassment, assault, and worker abuse issues, as well as the credible allegations of rape. I don't see how giving him an alcohol license in a place with lodgings is not just turning a blind eye to the very real harms that these women and other employees have suffered at his hands, and effectively ensuring that the same situation will happen again. As residents, commercial owners, and parents in Freestone, we can not sit idly by and let this happen around the corner from where we are raising our children.

We would love to see the Freestone Hotel be restored and put to use in a way that is respectful of this community, our resources, our guests, and our employees working here. The current project is not that. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Shivani

Kari Svanstrom

From: Mirc [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 6:56 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: No Alcohol License for Lowell Sheldon for Piala LLC

I am writing on behalf of survivors of sexual assault, not only in this instance, but locally, nationally, globally. i am writing on behalf of all those who are harmed and affected by rape culture and patriarchal systems of domination, which is everyone. Everyone is harmed and affected, and everyone has a part in prevention and accountability, especially men who time and time again are by far the largest demographic of perpetrators AND those who perpetuate rape culture by remaining apathetic and silent when it comes to demanding change and accountability. The accusations and accounts against Lowell Sheldon are numerous and clear. Lowell's behavior is unequivocally unacceptable and has demonstrated many clear violations and a lack of accountability. I believe in Lowell's ability to reckon with his actions, BUT only if there is real accountability. Granting an alcohol license to a person who has been accused many times of severe harm and acts of violence against many of his employees is NOT accountability. That is skirting it. That is perpetuating rape culture and rewarding this inexcusable behavior. Lowell Sheldon should not be granted an alcohol permit for this proposed Freestone Hotel. That is a concrete action and one step you can take to demand accountability and prevent the potential for further harm. Rape culture affects all of us and it demands action from all of us, that is how we begin to change and attempt to heal.

sincerely,
concerned citizen living near occidental

Kari Svanstrom

From: Mario Lopez [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 5:27 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Opposing Lowell Sheldons instrument of abuse

Hi,

My name is Mario Lopez. I live in Hopland Ca. I am a food service veteran and husband of Alexandra who is a witness and victim of Lowell Sheldons sexual abuse.

I can speak to the direct harassment by Lowell Sheldon of my family. Sheldon let my wife know he “thinks” about her every time he drives past our house. This threat isn’t even veiled, its as clear as consommé.

I believe that giving this permit to Lowell Sheldon is tantamount to giving a serial rapist a mask, tranquilizers, rope and a key to the front door. His business's that serve alcohol have been his roofie and if there isn’t someone stepping in to protect these employees and guests, it will continue to happen.

I ask that everyone stop and think about Lowell Sheldon’s letters of support he has received. He has asked family, friends and colleagues to ignore his dirty secrets that came to light. He has asked them to ignore the truth and support the bright and shiny side. Basically, he has asked a vegan to write a review of the fennel and arugula salad at the steak house. A review where they share their experience on a tiny portion of the menu and ignore the rest of menu that they don’t agree with. Selective narrative is not safe in this case. We have to see the entire picture, unadulterated.

Please deny this alcohol license for it will be used as a weapon of sexual assault.

Mario Lopez

Kari Svanstrom

From: Freddie Francis [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 1:29 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom; John Jay
Subject: Public comment for 6/28 hearing re: Lowell Sheldon alcohol license
Attachments: FF public written comment against LS.pdf

Hello there,

Attached please find my written public comment asking the Sebastopol Planning Commission to uphold the denial of an alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon/Piala LLC.

Thank you,
Freddie

Kari Svanstrom

From: Raisa Yavneh [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 12:48 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Lowell Sheldon - Alcohol License

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing to urge the Planning Commission to reject Lowell Sheldon's appeal to be granted an alcohol license for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave). The denial of an alcohol license is an appropriate consequence for a man who has a well-documented 10+ year history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol. To grant Lowell Sheldon an alcohol license in light of the numerous substantiated accusations against him would be incredibly negligent.

If this license is granted, the Planning Commission would be complicit in any and all ensuing assault and workplace abuse – which, given Sheldon's track record, is a certainty.

There is no better metric by which to anticipate this man's behavior than to look at the decade-plus of harm he has caused to women and workers in our community. I ask you: is this the culture we wish to foster in our small town? One where workers have to endure unwanted touching and other forms of sexual assault and harassment in order to earn a living? One where survivors' stories are silenced and ignored, and the man who perpetrated harm against them is granted the ability to continue doing so?

You, the Planning Commission, have the power to take a stand against sexual violence in this community. You are in a position to listen to the 750+ citizens who [signed a petition](#) demanding that Lowell Sheldon never be granted an alcohol license in our community. You made the right decision in denying this license the first time around. I implore you to hold fast in this decision.

Raisa Yavneh
Sebastopol resident

Kari Svanstrom

From: Ash Hay [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 11:52 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Block Lowell Sheldon's liquor license

I am writing to you today to ask that you deny Lowell Sheldon an alcohol license on future endeavors. Many of my friends and community members have been victims of Sheldon. He has a well documented, heavily reported history of sexual harassment, assault, worker abuse, and endangering minors as an employer. Abuse of alcohol and illegal drugs were involved in the majority of these allegations.

He has had numerous businesses throughout Sonoma County and has similar reports of abuse from employees across all establishments. This shows Lowell Sheldon lacks the professional and moral character to be allowed to operate an alcohol-related business. He has denied many of the allegations.

Over 750 concerned citizens signed the petition demanding not only that Sheldon be removed from the Freestone Hotel project, but also that he not be granted an alcohol license for future endeavors. Our community has spoken.

I want to live in a community that supports women, workers, and survivors of sexual violence.

Denying an alcohol license is an appropriate consequence for someone who has a 10+ year heavily documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol.

Please harness your power and responsibility to this community and keep our restaurant and service workers safe.

Cheers

Ash Hay

Kari Svanstrom

From: Kellen Kaiser [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 11:27 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Public comment regarding Lowell Sheldon

Hello,

I hope you are having a good day. I am reaching out to ask that Lowell Sheldon not be granted an alcohol license for Piala LLC(7233 Healdsburg Ave). Given his history of sexual assault and harassment, it is not in the best interest of the community to enable any future misbehavior. Abuse of alcohol and other drugs were involved in the majority of allegations against him.

He has proven through his actions that he cannot be trusted to handle alcohol in his businesses in an appropriate manner and nothing he has done since then has proven his behavior has changed. He has not taken responsibility for his actions or shown remorse. He has shown in a variety of ways that he lacks the professional and moral character necessary to operate an alcohol related business.

While I am not a resident, I am a frequent visitor and consumer of Sebastopol services/hospitality. I want to feel safe as a woman in your community and know that the folks who live there want the same.

Thank you,

Kellen Kaiser

Hopland, California

Kari Svanstrom

From: Lowell Sheldon [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 11:21 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Fwd: letter of support

See attached letter.

Best,
 Lowell

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].m>
 Date: Wed, Jun 22, 2022 at 11:08 AM
 Subject: letter of support
 To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].m>

to whom it may concern:

i am writing in support of lowell sheldon's ability to open and run businesses in sonoma county.

i do not know lowell well nor have i worked with him, however i have had casual social contact with him over the years as he is part of my greater community in sonoma county. he strikes me as intelligent, fun, ambitious, adventurous, creative, pioneering, self-involved and possibly socially awkward. not all of us are born with an innate understanding of how to operate smoothly in the human world, it takes years of work to learn it.

i was disappointed to read about his indiscretions in the running of his businesses, and saddened that there was emotional harm done to his employees and shocked and horrified at the allegation of sexual assault.

the media and social media that has surrounded the allegations have been fierce and seemingly thorough, however the ensuing campaign to ban him from running businesses i feel goes too far. certainly his reputation has been forever marred and all who choose to work with him will be cognizant of his scarlet letter. plus, i believe he is, as they say, "doing the work" to unlearn his incorrect social assumptions, and learn correct ones.

i understand that he has been in therapy and professional workplace training in an effort to more deeply understand his role as a leader in the community. this is the restorative work that one would hope someone in his position would do to learn and grow. personally i hope he has reached out to those who felt victimized by his actions, however that is not my business as it is between them.

if we as a community hold restorative justice as a value, certainly it should be extended to all members of our society. destroying a person's name, livelihood and passion because they make mistakes is not social progress, it is punitive and small. as for the sexual assault allegations, that needs to be settled in a court of law, not the town square stoning.

i believe lowell if given the chance will contribute greatly to our community of businesses and to the larger community. i believe he deserves a chance to get it right. after what he's gone through publically, there's no other way forward for him but to take the high road. our greatest teachers are those who have seen the darkest days.

thank you for your time,

keeping this anonymous for fear of retaliation

--

Lowell Sheldon



Kari Svanstrom

From: Rosa Jerez [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 9:42 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Lowell Sheldon liquor license

Hello. I'm writing to support the victims of Lowell Sheldon. Well-documented creeps shouldn't be allowed to continue about their super-privileged business as usual. Please consider denying his liquor license. Thanks for your time.

Rosa Jerez
Sebastopol

Kari Svanstrom

From: Hilary Go [REDACTED]@pm>
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 9:04 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Public Comment in Support of Survivors

Hi my name is Hilary Go, I live in Sebastopol and I'd like to submit a public comment about why Lowell Sheldon should not be granted an alcohol license for Piala, thank you:

It is toxic and dangerous for Lowell Sheldon to be granted permission to conduct business, especially with an alcohol license. Sexual harassment, assault and worker abuse cannot be tolerated under any circumstances, and Sheldon is guilty of all of the above involving the use of alcohol. Please keep our community safe by denying Sheldon his license- which is a just consequence for his heavily documented history of workplace abuse!

Kari Svanstrom

From: Lowell Sheldon [REDACTED] >
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 8:38 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Fwd: Piala Letter
Attachments: Brenna Churma - Piala.pdf

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [brenna churma](#) [REDACTED] <[m](#)>
Date: Sat, Jun 18, 2022 at 8:12 PM
Subject: Piala Letter
To: [REDACTED] >

Hi Lowell,

How are you?

Here's my letter for the Planning Commision. If you notice any errors please let me know :)



Best,
Brenna

Kari Svanstrom

From: Lowell Sheldon [REDACTED]m>
Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 8:23 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Fwd: letter of support
Attachments: Prena - Letter.pdf

Hey Keri,

I see John is out of town. I have a few more letters that are coming in and wanted to forward them along.

Best,
 Lowell

Begin forwarded message:

From: [REDACTED]m>
Subject: letter of support
Date: June 21, 2022 at 9:52:11 PM PDT
To: [lc \[REDACTED\]m](#)

Dear Planning Commission,

I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon. I have known Lowell and his family for over 20 years. I have worked with Lowell for periods of time on and off throughout those years. I believe Lowell to be an intelligent individual who learns from his mistakes. He is passionate about the environment, hospitality, and serving food that is responsibly-sourced. He can be a little awkward in social situations. He does not always say the right thing which can come off as pretentious at times. However I believe he is dedicated to making Sebastopol a better place through supporting his community, both personally and through the lens of his businesses. He is a good person overall. We all have our struggles.

I think the feedback he has received has been harsh but necessary and I believe he has listened to the community. I think it is time we move forward in a constructive way with this issue. There are many challenges facing our community, yet this salacious story keeps popping up in the media. By now it should be obvious it is a one sided hit piece concocted by a very small group who are determined to get him to stop operating in Sebastopol because they don't like his character. He has obviously made some mistakes in regards to how he made certain people feel within the workplace, he has apologized, and has taken steps such as therapy, management courses, power dynamics, etc. to learn and grow. The restaurant industry has been a hotbed for inappropriate behavior fueled by alcohol and drugs for decades, this is not an isolated case, merely part of a much broader problem, and I am glad to see things are changing for the better in the industry. People need to be given the opportunity to learn, change and grow with the times.

I support Piala Wine Bar opening in Sebastopol and I believe the partners involved made the right decision in hiring an HR consulting firm to handle issues if they arise. I believe it is unjust to prevent someone from operating a wine permit when they have been convicted of nothing. The city is making decisions based on opinions and hearsay, which I find disturbing. What precedent is being set by the city in regards to allowing public opinion to determine the permitting process in Sebastopol?

I believe that we owe the women who came forward in this story a show of gratitude, as they risked so much in bringing this inappropriate behaviour to light. I believe that change is already taking place, perhaps not in the ways exactly as they had hoped, but we will overcome together in an inclusive, constructive, and peaceful way to make Sebastopol a better place.

Sincerely,
Anonymous (for fear of retaliation) Sebastopol, CA

Kari Svanstrom

From: Xochi La <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday, June 21, 2022 9:41 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Public comment in support of survivors

Planning Commissioner

I am writing to advocate to NOT approve an alcohol license to Lowell Sheldon for his new restaurant Piala LLC. As a local born and raised in Sonoma County I have observed and heard from close friends of his mistreatment of his staff and of his sexual assaults and harassments of multiple women in the community for many years. Given the information known about Lowell it is clear that this person is not responsible or safe under the influence of alcohol and drugs. It seems irresponsible and counterproductive to grant this person yet another alcohol licence to continue to assault and harass women and other members of our community. I want to live in a community that supports women, workers, and survivors of sexual violence. Please consider not allowing this continued community harm to happen.

With appreciation,
Xochi Lubin-Amaya

--

Xochi Lubin-Amaya MA, AMFT, RYT
She/Her/Ella

Kari Svanstrom

From: Rio Scharf [REDACTED] du>
Sent: Tuesday, June 21, 2022 8:20 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Public Comment re Lowell Sheldon

Hello,

My name is Rio Scharf and I live in Santa Rosa, CA. I write to recommend that Lowell Sheldon be denied an alcohol license for Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave). As someone with loved ones in the Sonoma County hospitality industry, I believe that there are credible accusations of sexual misconduct against Lowell Sheldon. Creating a safe community requires treating these accusations seriously and working to prevent similar incidents from happening again.

Based on his public comments, Mr. Sheldon is allegedly working to address mistakes made in his past. If true, that is commendable. Yet, it does not mean it is appropriate for him to be granted an alcohol license at this time and put in a situation similar to that from which he caused such harm in the recent past. No one is entitled to an alcohol license; it is a privilege. I cannot imagine a more compelling reason to lose access to that privilege than to have used alcohol and a position of power to cross boundaries, sow discomfort, and violate others' autonomy.

Respectfully, I urge you to deny Mr. Sheldon's request for an alcohol license.

Best,
Rio Scharf

Kari Svanstrom

From: Bob Engel [REDACTED] <>
Sent: Tuesday, June 21, 2022 8:57 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Lowell Sheldon Liquor Establishment License

City of Sebastopol
Public Comment

I am writing to express my opposition to the granting of a liquor license to Lowell Sheldon because of his documented history as an irresponsible business owner.

I was for almost twenty years the executive chef at Russian River Vineyards in Forestville. During that time I saw dozens of young people pass through as employees. They were in high school when they started, maybe it was their first job, they might come back to work summers after they went to college. I felt that we had a responsibility to these young people to provide a safe place for them to learn how to be in the work world.

Restaurants can be fun places to work, but fun does not include offering alcohol to underage employees, or creating a toxic environment in which women are valued as commodities by those with the power that comes with ownership or management.

I have found the reports of abuse by Sheldon's employees to be credible, and I find his apologies to be inadequate. His admissions of errors fall far short of the standard for genuine contrition, which is one that recognizes and fully accepts responsibility for the harm done to others.

Sheldon hasn't shown the maturity and sense of community responsibility that are required to own and run an establishment that serves alcohol.

Bob Engel

Residence [REDACTED], Graton
Business Office [REDACTED] Sebastopol

Kari Svanstrom

From: marylee guinon [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 21, 2022 7:50 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom; John Jay
Cc: marylee guinon
Subject: Re: Lowell Sheldon liquor license
Attachments: PLP21-0021 Status Letter 6.7.22-1.pdf

Greetings Kari and John,
For your information, I have attached a letter from Sonoma County Permit Sonoma to Applicant Lowell Sheldon regarding his Proposed Freestone Hotel, Bar and Tavern. Your office can decide if this is relevant to the proposed Sebastopol Pila project, but I thought it important that the City be informed of the County's intention to use its discretion and follow the General Plan policy, zoning and code.

Thank you for your professionalism and effort on the Pila matter.

Kind regards,

Marylee Guinon
Marylee Guinon LLC
[REDACTED]
Freestone, CA 95472

[REDACTED]

I have personal experience with Lowell Sheldon which I believe to be relevant. He took large sums of money from my mother, calling the more than \$100,000 over about 2 years a "line of credit" for the restaurant which she paid in advance with no written agreement. I don't know how long this had been going on before I was alerted by her financial advisor in 2015.

My mother moved to Sebastopol in 2008, after the recent loss of both her son and husband to cancer. She was at the time 74-81 years old. She developed a serious drinking problem for the first time in her life.

When I became aware of this situation, I met with Sheldon to ask him to provide me with paperwork for their arrangement. I was met by a cold and dismissive response and was told that he would not be providing any receipts or paperwork as I requested. I also told him how concerned I was about my mother's drinking and asked if he would please ask his staff to not offer or encourage the alcohol. I told him I did not expect anyone to police her drinking but any help with this matter would be appreciated. Again, he was very dismissive and uncaring. I left that meeting feeling sad and frustrated. It was very clear to me that there was no emotional connection to her in any way, yet he seemed to have a clear conscience about taking money from her and seemed inconvenienced to talk to me.


I was unable to put a stop to this situation until I threatened him with an elder abuse charge and took my mother from the condo where she was living and moved her to a retirement community in 2017. At the end of her time at the complex located behind Sheldon's restaurant, he was having open wine delivered to her door at 8:00 in the morning. Although I never pressed charges and he remained in business, the thoughtless and reckless nature of his behavior was the source of much pain for myself and my family. I have heard of his sexual harrassment and drug abuse and because of my experience with him, believe the accusations stated by his victims. His toxic behavior makes me believe that the city of Sebastopol would be avoiding future ethical and legal problems by standing behind those who have been traumatized by Lowell Sheldon.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth (Lisa) Kurtz

--

freddie francis



Kari Svanstrom

From: Pat Engle [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 7:49 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Deny Lowell Sheldon an Alcohol License

I have lived in Sonoma County for almost 40 years. My husband and I raised our two children here. Like many young people, both of my children worked in the food service industry as one of their first places of employment.

I am writing to urge the planning commission to uphold its decision to deny Lowell Sheldon the privilege of operating a business that serves alcohol (Piala LLC, t7233 Healdsburg Ave). In former restaurants that he owned and worked at, Mr. Sheldon served alcohol to underage employees, just one extremely troubling behavior in a list of troubling behaviors that include his unwanted touching of employees, touching of a sexual nature.

Now that Mr. Sheldon's illegal and highly inappropriate actions have finally been brought to light, the commission must insure that Mr. Sheldon is never allowed to operate another business in Sonoma County from which he can continue his destructive and amoral behavior. Please protect our young workers.

Pat Engel
Graton, CA

Kari Svanstrom

From: Barbara Krukar [REDACTED] >
Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 4:35 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Lowell Sheldon

I support **denying** alcohol license to Lowell Sheldon, it is an appropriate consequence for someone who has a 10+ year heavily-documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol. I am neighbors with the mother whose daughter was sexually assaulted by Lowell Sheldon, it has left lasting negative impact on the daughter and daughter's friends who were similarly treated.

Sincerely

Barbara Krukar
[REDACTED]
Sebastopol

Kari Svanstrom

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 12:50 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Sebastopol Planning Commision

Dear Ms. Svanstrom:

I am a resident of Sebastopol. My name is Barbara Arbunich.

I am writing to support the denial of giving Lowell Sheldon a permit to open a bar/ restaurant in Sebastopol.

I know one of the woman who was harassed and she is still traumatized by his inappropriate, unsolicited advances. From what I have read and heard, he demonstrated this behavior in all the establishments he has been involved.

I question his ability to appropriately supervise young work staff and to remain professional due to his business being one which serves alcohol and his history.

Thank you for reading this.

Barbara Arbunich

Kari Svanstrom

From: Barbara Hom [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 9:17 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Lowell Sheldon
Attachments: Letters to Sebastopol Planning Commission.pdf

I am a 44 year resident of Sebastopol with a daughter who was one of his victims. I strongly support the denial of the use permit for Lowell Shelton's new restaurant on 3 levels.

Firstly, as former General Manager of the Culinary Institute of America in Saint Helena and also for former Food and Beverage Director and Executive Chef of the Sheraton Hotel in Petaluma, I can unequivocally state that Lowell Sheldon's behavior would not be tolerated in the corporate restaurant world. After the 1st allegation he would have been suspended and after the 2nd, he would have been dismissed. If he had been allowed to remain at his job, we would have been open to many lawsuits. Because Lowell's businesses were privately owned, the young ladies had no place to voice their complaints or get recourse. This would be the case if Lowell opened another restaurant.

Secondly, Mr. Sheldon has not really publicly acknowledged his sexual harassment of these women. He has used the terms "I ran the restaurant in a sloppy manner", "behaving inappropriately", "mistake", etc. I believe he does not really think he has done anything wrong. As a community elder, we are expected to keep our town safe. Three major restaurant owners have extricated him. We cannot let this predator back in our midst.

Thirdly and most importantly. my daughter was one of his victims. My daughter was born and raised here. She went off to college in New York got a communications degree from NYU, worked in Manhattan and then in Los Angeles as the managing editor of a national wine and spirits magazine. She was recruited by Lowell Sheldon to be director of communications and marketing for his restaurant group Lowell's, Handline and Fern Bar. She was sexually harassed by Lowell when she was out with her friends one evening. When the incident happened she spoke up loudly and sharply and said STOP. Because she was upper management, she gave courage to the other women who had been harassed by him. And the women came out in droves and spoke up of their incidents. That was when they decided to stand together and make it known. The claims against Lowell Sheldon are not just allegations.. They are real as I have met some of the other young women and have heard their stories. My daughter has been irrevocably harmed by the incident and has had difficulties holding down a job since. Please please do not allow this man a restaurant in our community. Let's keep it safe for the future young women.

I am also attaching several letters from people in this community who are greatly concerned. Please read them, especially the first one from Kathryn Fong, a former Human Rights Commissioner in San Francisco.

I appreciate your time.

Kindly,
 Barbara Hom
 [REDACTED]

Kari Svanstrom

From: D Sotelo Escobedo <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 8:22 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Public Comment for 6/28 Commission Hearing

Good afternoon Director Svanstrom,

My name is Davida Sotelo Escobedo and I am a resident of Sebastopol. I am writing to express my deep concern over the proposed alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon at Piala LLC. Lowell Sheldon has shown repeatedly that he lacks the professional and moral character to be allowed to operate an alcohol-related business. The community has spoken, with over 750 community members signing onto a petition demanding not only that Sheldon be removed from the Freestone Hotel project, but also that he not be granted an alcohol license for future endeavors.

I stand with the survivors of Lowell Sheldon's many abuses who deserve to live in a community where abusers are held accountable. The Planning Commission has the power and the responsibility to deny an alcohol license as an appropriate consequence for someone who has a 10+ year heavily documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol. Stand with the community — should not be granted an alcohol license for Piala LLC.

Best,
Davida Sotelo Escobedo

Kari Svanstrom

From: Lina Blanco [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 7:49 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Public comment: Keep our community safe. No alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon (Piala LLC)

Dear members of the Sebastopol Planning Commission:

My name is Lina Blanco, and I am a resident of Sebastopol with community roots across West County. Several of my close friends live in Freestone.

I spent years working as a low-wage restaurant worker who regularly dealt with sexual harassment from guests and powerful clients at work. I've experienced first-hand when owners and chefs participate in, condone, and reproduce these dangerous cycles of assault. As a minor and student funding my own college education, I was too scared to say no to inappropriate advances from my bosses and their friends for fear of immediate repercussions or punishment like reduced hours, poor scheduling, or loss of work. I only gained the strength to quit my job in the restaurant after nightly harassment escalated to assault at the hands of the restaurant's owner's intoxicated close friend.

In Sebastopol, Lowell Sheldon has a [well-documented, heavily reported history of sexual harassment, assault, worker abuse, and endangering minors](#) as an employer. Abuse of alcohol and illegal drugs were involved in the majority of these allegations made by the brave young women workers.

It's obvious that Lowell Sheldon lacks the professional and moral character to be allowed to operate an alcohol-related business, as his behavior repeatedly shows, despite denying many of the allegations

I, along with over 750 of my neighbors, have [signed the petition](#) demanding not only that Sheldon be removed from the Freestone Hotel project, but also that he not be granted an alcohol license for future endeavors.

Our community has spoken.

I am proud to stand behind my neighbors and the women who courageously stepped forward to share their stories of abuse. We should not have to parade our stories of pain for the right thing to be done. Yet we know that if that's the only way we can make a change, we will. I want to live in a community that supports women, workers, and survivors of sexual violence.

The solution is right in front of us. Denying an alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon's Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave.) is an appropriate consequence for someone who has a 10+ year heavily documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol. Please do not add your stamp of approval to a man who has threatened the safety and well-being of young women in our community.

Sincerely,

Lina Blanco
[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, CA 95472

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Kari Svanstrom

From: Rosalyn Fay [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, June 18, 2022 11:44 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Public Comment Regarding Lowell Sheldon's application for a liquor license

To Whom it May Concern,

I am a resident of Occidental. I have recently learned that Lowell Sheldon is applying for an alcohol license to open another establishment, but this time, here in our backyard of Freestone. I am against him being approved for a license for the simple reason that it is inappropriate for someone to be given a liquor license who has a 10+ year heavily-documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol. I personally witnessed Lowell's lecherous energy toward female customers and staff several times as a regular customer of Peter Lowell's. Upon hearing the stories of sexual harassment that have emerged from his staff, I had no doubt they were true based in my own observations. I no longer support his restaurants and do not support him bringing that kind of energy to our community. Please deny Lowell an alcohol license.

~Rosalyn Fay

[REDACTED]
Occidental, CA 95465

Kari Svanstrom

From: Allegra Wilson [REDACTED] m>
Sent: Friday, June 17, 2022 4:12 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: Believe survivors & keep people safe

To Whom it May Concern:

I live in Santa Rosa and have friends and family throughout Sonoma County. I am very concerned about the potential liquor license for a project being proposed by Lowell Sheldon. Countless survivors who have faced abuse and harassment have spoken. This man is a predator. He has faced little to no consequence for his actions, and takes no responsibility for them. Denying an alcohol license is an appropriate consequence for someone who has a 10+ year heavily-documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol. Please act to preserve the safety and integrity of our community, and deny Sheldon's request.

Sincerely,
Allegra Wilson

Kari Svanstrom

From: Diana Badger [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 17, 2022 2:37 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: NO More Alcohol Licenses for Lowell Sheldon

To the Sebastopol Planning Commissioner:

While I have enjoyed dining at Lowell Sheldon's restaurants in the past, after learning of his predatory and abusive behavior I absolutely support the effort to ban him from being granted any more alcohol licenses for doing business in the West County area. This includes at Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave) and in Freestone.

Denying an alcohol license is an entirely appropriate consequence for someone who has a heavily documented, 10+ year-history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol.

I urge you to do the right thing for our county.

Sincerely,

Diana Badger
Sebastopol resident since 2000

Kari Svanstrom

From: maureen donaghue [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, May 28, 2022 10:46 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom
Subject: thank you

hello

Please accept my thanks for the recent denial of an alcohol permit to an alleged abuser of women.

All cities need courageous leaders, and
in my experience, civil servant leaders are often overlooked.

So, thanks for your service and for standing up for women.

~Maureen Donaghue

Dear Planning Director and Commission of Sebastopol,

My name is Alexandra Lopez, and I am a former employee of Lowell Sheldon's. I am writing to urge the Commission to reject Sheldon's appeal to pursue an alcohol license. The original decision to deny Sheldon's Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit application was based on well documented and credible evidence, and the commission recognized that Sheldon's involvement creates the potential to be detrimental to the health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community, including potential employees, customers, and other members of the general public, and not be in the best interest of the City.

As someone who has both witnessed and personally experienced Sheldon's abuse and toxic behavior, I can unequivocally say that he has not learned from nor properly addressed his actions and therefore remains a threat to community well-being. There have been several occasions over the past few years where I have had to ask that Sheldon not contact me directly in any form, and yet he continues to demonstrate that my boundary is not important by sending me emails or allowing his family members to contact me. The most recent incident occurred on June 9th, 2022. In his correspondence he reminds me that we share a community and he thinks of me and my family when he passes my house. This is very threatening and manipulative language from someone who claims to have an understanding of the harms he has caused. He goes on in the email to bully us into ceasing our activism and attempting to gaslight us by saying that our work is "counterproductive" and how many are against our cause. He further attempts to intimidate us by including his letters of support. This is not the behavior of someone who wishes to reduce harm or take accountability, but to intimidate his victims further for his own personal gain.

I would like to clearly state that if I believed Lowell to be a contrite and reformed individual I would not be writing to the Commission stating otherwise. I do believe in redemption and second chances. However this is not even close to being Sheldon's second, or even third, chance. I do believe that people should be able to earn a living and I believe that right also extends to Lowell. But that right does not include being allowed to operate and profit from an alcohol based business where he has repeatedly shown that he does not hold the professional and moral character to operate such an enterprise.

I implore the Commission to stand by their original decision to deny Lowell Sheldon's application for an Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit.

Regards,
Alexandra Lopez
Hopland

To whom it may concern~

Let me start by defining what this entire situation is about, because supporters of Lowell Sheldon seem to be confused -- no one is attempting to bar Lowell from the community. No one is saying that he cannot own a restaurant, no one is saying that he cannot make money or collect an income. Why these other things keep being brought up by supporters of Lowell is beyond confusing to me and seems to be an attempt at mudding the waters and taking attention away from the intent of what's actually happening. We do not think that any business that has anything to do with Lowell should be allowed a liquor license or a legal basis on which they may serve alcohol given the ample examples of Lowell abusing his power and engaging in inappropriate behavior with his own employees and other community members when intoxicated and after offering and serving others alcohol in his establishments, **often after hours** (not during active operation).

My personal experiences with Lowell are few enough to be listed here, I will admit. In the last five years he very seldomly came into the coffee shop that I manage, though it seems that each visit carried something else vaguely problematic. He's never treated any of our team members like they were anything other than a means to get him his order, and never like they were actual living and breathing human beings attempting to form a customer service connection with him, as that's important to us here. He'd usually give a fake name for whatever reason, and the most common fake name he'd use is a Latino name that is not anything close to his actual name. Because he gave the name of a Latino man that is not him, he would typically not pick up his order when the name was called out. Once he came in while I was covering a break on the register -- he spoke on the phone throughout the entire transaction and once we reached the end of the transaction and had already begun preparing his order, he told me that he did not have his wallet on him but asked if it was, "cool," because he, "knows the owners." Not only is it not uncommon for folks in our community to know our owners because they are big on community outreach and make an effort to support other local businesses, but they are by no means friends or even really acquaintances as we've known about the problematic culture surrounding Lowell since long before any of the articles about him came out and they didn't have much engagement with him even before that. There was no offer to come back and pay at a later date, no apology, and to think that he didn't have Apple Pay on his phone in 2021 is absurd. Another time I was eating dinner with my partner at Handline and Lowell and his ex-wife spent 20 minutes out on the dining patio yelling at each other in front of us and other diners before leaving one of their large tables completely filled with half-eaten dishes. Five minutes later, a Handline employee came out asking what had happened and said that no one had paid an over \$300 bill for their meal. My last one-on-one interaction with Lowell was when I told him that he was no longer welcome to come into the establishment that I manage to ensure the safety and comfort of our team members and guests, as we have both team members and regular customers who have been abused by Lowell in the past. He didn't look at me the entire time we spoke, then asked if I was, "for real," before leaving.

To the folks who say he's a great guy because he came by your table when you were a regular at Lowell's: that is how owners of businesses typically operate. He wanted your money, and he showed you the face he wanted you to see when you were paying the elevated prices at his restaurant. To discredit folks who worked with him and knew him on a personal level because you had a shallow experience with him as his customer is hardly a credit to his character.

To the folks who say he's done great things for the county and the country when it comes to food and sustainability: sure. Other people are capable of picking up that torch but also Lowell positively contributing to the food industry does not require him to own a business that has a liquor license.

To the folks that say that Lowell will not have any managerial power or will not be operating any of these businesses: we have documented accounts from the people that he abused that many of the instances of abuse happened **after hours**. This means that Lowell didn't need to be on shift all day, he does not need to be involved with business operations to show up after close and offer people alcohol. Furthermore, the obsession with obtaining a liquor license and the implication that serving alcohol is a necessity to his businesses after so many of the recorded instances of abuse happened after Lowell offered people alcohol, as their supervisor and owner of the business they were employed at, should raise more suspicion than it is.

To the folks who say that they will not speak out against Lowell in fear of online retaliation from the folks that Lowell has abused or their supporters: the only instances of online retaliation have come from Lowell's own family members, like his mother and his brother who have both harassed people that I know personally, be it publicly over social media or privately via email. Lowell's family members have slandered the community members that Lowell has abused, saying they just want fifteen minutes of fame or that they're just looking for money despite not seeking any monetary compensation for what has happened to them.

I have not been personally abused by Lowell Sheldon other than being mistreated as a customer service worker by him, though in my opinion the way that folks treat customer service workers says a lot about them. Regardless, I am a woman in our community that has been sexually abused, and a woman in the world that has been sexually abused by an employer in the restaurant industry. We know that this is not uncommon, or rather that it is extremely common and is something that is almost expected if you're entering the restaurant industry. I do not accept this, and I think that we need to do everything in our power to change this. In many instances this abuse does not involve alcohol or drug abuse, but we have multiple personal accounts that claim that this is a huge factor in nearly every instance of abuse involving Lowell. This is why this discussion is being had, this is why his businesses should not be allowed to serve alcohol. I care about other people in this community, I have managed so many who have gone on to enter the restaurant industry and things like this make me feel concerned for their safety. This community loves to virtue signal at any opportunity, except for when it comes to holding their own community members accountable. We'll show out for protests, hang flags and post signs in our yards for causes that do not actually directly affect our community, but when someone who was known as a pillar of food and farm culture in our county shows that he doesn't deserve the trust y'all put in him you don't want to take a hard look at that. If we're going to pretend that we care about abuse happening to people we don't know in other places, it's time to start actually showing that we care about the abuse that is happening to our own community members, right here at home.

Angela Jackson
6/22/2022

June 22, 2022

My name is Freddie Francis. I've lived in West County for seven years. Several survivors of Lowell Sheldon's sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse are close friends of mine. I have been supporting them as they bravely have spoken out in support of creating a safer and healthier Sebastopol for all.

Anyone reading this knows about the multiple women and workers in our community who spoke out about their experiences of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse at the hands of Lowell Sheldon. If you are reviewing these public comments, you have likely read additional accounts of harassment and manipulation, including from my friend Lisa Kurtz, who shared her story of how Lowell Sheldon extracted \$100,000 from her elderly mother without a written agreement, and with the use of alcohol as a tool of manipulation.

If you are reviewing these public comments, you are also hearing from Sheldon's supporters, who in addition to victimblaming accusations of "seeking celebrity" and glossing over his 10+ year history of this behavior, make calls for forgiveness and redemption. I am all for forgiveness and redemption, and I strongly believe in the power of people who have committed violence to transform and heal. However, from what I have witnessed firsthand since September 2021 when articles in the SF Chronicle, Press Democrat, and Bohemian came out, it is clear to me that Sheldon is far from reformed.

- Lowell Sheldon has repeatedly breached consent by ignoring survivors' requests for no-contact, including reaching out to victims' family members, spouses, and friends in person, over email, and on social media.
- Summerfield Waldorf School requested that Sheldon wait in his car and have staff walk his children to his car for pickup. He at first agreed to these terms then stopped doing this after about 2 weeks, in spite of the fact that someone he sexually assaulted is also a parent at Summerfield.
- Sheldon abandoned a transformative justice process with Ahimsa Collective, and violated their written agreement to keep the process private by touting it as an indication of his reform while soliciting public comments.
- Multiple of Sheldon's friends and family members have harassed the survivors, their family members, and supporters in person and online. Though Ahimsa Collective requested that Sheldon ask his family members to stop, the harassment has continued in the leadup to this hearing.
- On May 23rd, Sheldon sent out a letter intended to be seen only by his supporters that denied the breadth of his actions and urged them to submit public comments anonymously and directly to him "out of fear of retaliation [from survivors]," in spite of his ongoing harassment and retaliation of survivors and their supporters.

- On June 9th, Sheldon sent a PDF of his supporters' letters to the survivors as a means of intimidation and urged them to quit their advocacy, writing "your work to keep me from moving forward with my professional life is counterproductive. It turns many people in this community against your cause."
- Sheldon has issued a number of contradictory statements, denying sexual harassment (with the exception of the single comment telling his employee to "come sit on daddy's lap") yet not denying the graphic and violent sexual assault reported in the Bohemian. In these letters he also made ridiculous claims about "no complaints ever being brought forth" during his management of Lowell's in spite of heavily documented evidence to the contrary. He continues to emphasize how he will not be a part of Piala operations, in spite of the fact that many of his abuses and transgressions occurred out of the workplace, and when he was already banned from entering his former businesses.

Expressing the sentiment of remorse and taking accountability are different things. It's great that Sheldon feels remorseful; that's completely appropriate. But the work of taking responsibility, personal transformation, and integrating these lessons into his personal and professional life takes time, and Sheldon hasn't for a second taken a pause in his entrepreneurial pursuits.

I am asking the Sebastopol Planning Commission to use their discretion in upholding the denial of an alcohol license for Lowell Sheldon and Piala LLC, out of concern for the safety of women, workers, and community members in Sebastopol and beyond.

Most sincerely,

Freddie Francis
Sebastopol

Dear Planning Commissioners Paul Fritz, Kathy Oetinger, Zachary Douch, Linda Kelley, Evert Fernandez, Deborah Burnes

Subject: Piala

I have known Lowell as a family friend for over 10 years. In that time, I have known him to be an intent listener, deep thinker, and sensitive person. I have never thought his conduct to be inappropriate. In fact, I am consistently inspired by his determination towards ethical decision making with his businesses. Having worked in the restaurant industry for more than 16 years, Lowell's position in the industry stands out as being among the most community minded that I have witnessed. He has been a champion for the local food systems and thoughtful aesthetic that is now an integral part of Sebastopol's identity. Furthermore, when Lowell previously ran his restaurants, they were among the first to pay *all* restaurant employees fairly, and invest money from each sale to offset carbon.

With that said, Lowell's growth and learning from his recent experiences means that his future endeavors (Piala), will go even further to move Sebastopol into a more equitable community. The incidents reported by Lowell's former employees are indicative of a more serious societal problem regarding power imbalances and the unwanted sexualization of women. His business plan for Piala corrects his previous mistakes and ensures no employee will be left to feel powerless and without a voice. In this manner Piala will be ahead of many local businesses.

Lowell has taken responsibility for how he has impacted those around him and he has created a plan to redress the grievances. I am asking for the planning commission to appreciate the value of this restorative justice approach, and allow Lowell to once again share his talents with his community in a meaningful way. I am asking for the planning commission to not overstep their power, and to instead allow for the community to decide what businesses they want to support.

Kind regards,
Brenna Churma
San Diego, CA

Dear Planning Commission,

I am writing in support of Lowell Sheldon. I have known Lowell and his family for over 20 years. I have worked with Lowell for periods of time on and off throughout those years. I believe Lowell to be an intelligent individual who learns from his mistakes. He is passionate about the environment, hospitality, and serving food that is responsibly-sourced. He can be a little awkward in social situations. He does not always say the right thing which can come off as pretentious at times. However I believe he is dedicated to making Sebastopol a better place through supporting his community, both personally and through the lens of his businesses. He is a good person overall. We all have our struggles.

I think the feedback he has received has been harsh but necessary and I believe he has listened to the community. I think it is time we move forward in a constructive way with this issue. There are many challenges facing our community, yet this salacious story keeps popping up in the media. By now it should be obvious it is a one sided hit piece concocted by a very small group who are determined to get him to stop operating in Sebastopol because they don't like his character. He has obviously made some mistakes in regards to how he made certain people feel within the workplace, he has apologized, and has taken steps such as therapy, management courses, power dynamics, etc. to learn and grow. The restaurant industry has been a hotbed for inappropriate behavior fueled by alcohol and drugs for decades, this is not an isolated case, merely part of a much broader problem, and I am glad to see things are changing for the better in the industry. People need to be given the opportunity to learn, change and grow with the times.

I support Piala Wine Bar opening in Sebastopol and I believe the partners involved made the right decision in hiring an HR consulting firm to handle issues if they arise. I believe it is unjust to prevent someone from operating a wine permit when they have been convicted of nothing. The city is making decisions based on opinions and hearsay, which I find disturbing. What precedent is being set by the city in regards to allowing public opinion to determine the permitting process in Sebastopol?

I believe that we owe the women who came forward in this story a show of gratitude, as they risked so much in bringing this inappropriate behaviour to light. I believe that change is already taking place, perhaps not in the ways exactly as they had hoped, but we will overcome together in an inclusive, constructive, and peaceful way to make Sebastopol a better place.

Sincerely,
Anonymous (for fear of retaliation) Sebastopol, CA

Katheryn M. Fong
[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, CA 95472

June 10, 2022

Planning Commission
City of Sebastopol
City Hall
Sebastopol, CA 95472

Re: Lowell Sheldon Request for Alcohol Transfer and Use Permit

Dear Commissioners,

As a former member of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, I know the challenges you face in your re-consideration of the Alcohol Transfer and Use Permit requested by Lowell Sheldon. Having listened to and read testimonies of sexual harassment as a Human Rights Commissioner, I can say that incidents such as those reported by staff who worked for Lowell Sheldon do have lasting negative impacts on the victims. Post trauma recall and anxiety are real for subjects of sexual harassment. The allegations that have been brought forth by numerous former employees and Lowell's own admission of "bad behavior" reflect the inappropriateness of this individual's involvement with establishments serving alcohol.

As a current resident of Sebastopol, my family and I enjoy dining out in our community. We wish to do so in establishments that offer safety not only to customers, but to staff as well. I encourage you to uphold your original decision to deny the permit to Lowell Sheldon.

Sincerely,



To the city of Sebastopol planning commission and California alcoholic beverage control:

I am writing this letter to oppose the permit application of lol Sheldon to open up a bar and restaurant in Sebastopol. In the past Mr. Sheldon has been accused of sexual harassment and serving of alcohol and drugs to underage employee minors after hours in his establishment. Mr. Sheldon has demonstrated his lack of ethics and his lack of a real remorse in regards to the sexual allegations.

Mr. Sheldon claims to have apologized and done work to better himself. But he however continues to deny that the behavior constituted sexual harassment or assault. He also claims they were just allegations. As a family friend of one of the victims , I can tell you for a fact, the claims are real. My friend's daughter has been irrevocably harmed by the incident.

It seems that Mr. Sheldon's lack of real remorse is a signal that his judgement to operate a facility in Sebastopol with an ABC permit should prevent him from operating a facility in Sebastopol that may have minor employees, and his application should be denied. Just the fact that employees have claimed that he served alcohol to minor employees after hours in his past establishments should be enough to disqualify him from ABC permits in the future and from opening an establishment in Sebastopol in the future.

For the above reasons I would request that he be denied a use permit and ABC license as requested in his current application..

Respectfully submitted,
Reuben Weinzveg
Sebastopol neighbor
[REDACTED]

Dear Sebastopol Planning Commission,

I am writing to ask that Lowell Sheldon's appeal for the use and alcohol permit be denied.

I have been a homeowner in Sebastopol for over 35 years. One of the women who was sexually harassed by Lowell Sheldon is the daughter of a friend of mine. I have known her since childhood and know her to be an honest person. The young women, who were sexually harassed and assaulted by Mr. Sheldon, are very courageous to stand up to this predator who abused his power as their boss. His behavior was unacceptable. In fact, even his former partners in three of his former restaurants have all severed ties with him because of his inappropriate behavior.

I have concern for any young women who work for him; especially because he is still not willing to understand or acknowledge the trauma he caused. He states that he has changed, but he still thinks the "inappropriate behavior" of which he has been accused is just the "mixing of my personal life with my business" as he stated to the Press Democrat in its May 27th issue. From his statements, I do not think he understands the severity of his behavior and that he sexually harassed and assaulted his female staff members over years while in his position of power. This wasn't just one or two employees complaining. Twelve women came forward with great emotional distress and fear of losing their jobs and income to bring this out in the open and keep him from continuing this predatory behavior and harm. They are concerned that he is a threat to other female employees and the community, especially in an environment which sells alcohol.

I agree with the decision to deny Sheldon Lowell the use and alcohol license and I am asking for that decision to stand.

Thank you,
Jill Stocks
Sebastopol

████████████████████

Att: Sebastopol Planning Commission

I am a West Sonoma County property owner and am familiar with the allegations against Lowell Sheldon. This is not an issue of " he said, she said". This is "THEY said, he said". There are over a dozen women testifying that Mr. Sheldon sexually harrassed or assaulted them in the workplace. Does it have to take a lawsuit or a criminal conviction to protect the young women in our community?

The Sebastopol Planning Commission should deny the use permit and alcohol license to Mr. Sheldon on the basis of his past behavior. If his pattern of sexual harrassment and assault is ignored, it is signaling that the community will allow this to behavior to continue.

Protect our young women and deny this predator another opportunity to harm them.

Signed,

Zepporah Glass

Sebastopol

████████████████████

To the planning board:

I am very concerned about Mr Sheldon receiving a use permit for a restaurant or bar serving alcohol. He has demonstrated many times in the past that he has sexually harassed his employees. In essence you're putting the fox back in the hen house. Please listen to the women with direct experience of his harassment as well as the community at large who do not want to see this man empowered to commit further exploitation of his staff.

Sincerely,
Jan Marks
Sebastopol



John Jay

From: Caitlin Palmer [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, July 09, 2022 11:43 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom; John Jay
Subject: Letter re: Item on July 12 Planning Commission Agenda

Please include this letter in the agenda packet for the July 12 Planning Commission meeting.

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I'm writing in regards to item 5B on the July 12 planning commission meeting agenda (Piala's alcohol use permit).

First, I'd like to thank the commissioners who attended the June 28 meeting for your thoughtful consideration and questions. You showed integrity and it reaffirms my commitment to doing business in the Sebastopol community (I regularly spend time and money here visiting friends and buying produce and herbs from local growers for my herbalism practice).

I support the commission's initial decision to deny an alcohol use permit to the applicants. I urge you to uphold that decision.

I encourage you to continue to stand firm in your authority and responsibility to the community. At the June 28 commission meeting, I heard a public commenter mischaracterize your consideration of community input as bias. They wrongly ignored the Commission's duties as described in the municipal code "To act in an advisory capacity to the City Council [...] and to serve as a forum for members of the public to voice their comments regarding such matters" (2.24.070(D)). Considering community input is necessary in an accountable public process, not bias.

Approving the permit on the condition that Lowell Sheldon not be allowed on the premises cannot be enforced and will not provide the safeguard that community members are requesting. According to city code, "[T]he applicant for the conditional use permit shall have the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that the proposed use will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare, result in undue concentration of alcoholic beverage outlets, or detrimentally affect nearby communities" (17.350.020 (D)). The applicants have not provided clear and convincing evidence to meet this condition. Lowell Sheldon, on public record, refused to agree to not be a patron or on the premises. He also violated similar conditions in his role at Khom Loi, causing that business to end their relationship with him.

Sebastopol is an incredible community that deserves businesses and workplaces that are safe and welcoming. The people who live, work, and visit here deserve for local leaders such as this commission to make decisions that honor their requests for safety.

Sincerely,
Caitlin Palmer



City of Sebastopol APPEAL FORM

Date: 7/19/22
* Filing Fee Paid: \$1070.00
File #: 2022-60

To: (check one):
 PLANNING COMMISSION (limited to the appeal of staff determination not involving design matters or Planning Director Use Permit decision)
 DESIGN REVIEW BOARD (limited to the appeal of staff determination on design matters)
 TREE BOARD (limited to the appeal of staff determination on tree removals)
 CITY COUNCIL (all other appeals)

FROM: JESSE HOM-DAWSON
(Please print your name)

SUBJECT:
I wish to appeal the action of: (check one):
 CITY STAFF (please give name or title) _____
 PLANNING DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEARING
 TREE BOARD
 DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
 PLANNING COMMISSION

Taken or made on 7/12/22 with regards to APPROVAL USE OF ALCOHOL PERMIT FOR
(Date of action or decision) (Name of use, applicant, project or other description of item you are appealing)
7233 HEALDSBURG AVE. (PIALA)

I ask that the decision or determination made above be reversed and/or modified, and that the original application be:
(Check one): granted denied modified

The reason(s) that my appeal should be granted by the Board, Commission, or Council named above are set forth below: or, are attached. STATEMENT TO COME BY 7/22

*APPLICANT HAD BURDEN OF PROOF TO SHOW THE USE WOULD NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE HEALTH, SAFETY, OR WELFARE OF COMMUNITY AND THIS WAS NOT PROVEN. (SECTION 17.350.020). ADDITIONALLY, THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT ARE UNENFORCEABLE (17.415.020.A).

I understand that there is a filing fee for appeal, whether the appeal is from a Staff Determination, Design Review Board Decision, or Planning Commission Decision, and that the fee must be paid on the date that the appeal is submitted. Appeals must be submitted within 7 calendar days from the day of the original staff determination, or of the Board/Commission action. (The date of the decision is not included in the calculation of 7 days.)*

You will be notified by mail of the date of the Board, Commission or City Council hearing on review of your appeal. All interested persons will be entitled to attend the meeting and be heard.

Jesse HD JESSE HOM-DAWSON
Your Signature Print Name

[Redacted]
Your Mailing Address

[Redacted]
Your Phone Number Your Email Address

* If a staff determination was mailed to you, and a public meeting has not been held, the appeal must be submitted within seven (7) days of the mailing of the letter.

Please accept this appeal to the decision made by the Sebastopol Planning Commission regarding the approval of an alcohol use permit in Lowell Sheldon's name for 7233 Healdsburg Ave, a restaurant named Piala. I believe the Planning Commission's decision to provide him with a conditional license was made in error due to the following reasons.

Background

In Planning Director Kari Svanstrom's initial response to Sheldon's application, she cites Municipal Code 17.415.030 B, which states: "The establishment, maintenance, and operation of the use applied for will not, under the circumstances of the particular case (location, size, design, and operating characteristics), be "detrimental to the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort, or general welfare of persons residing or working in the area of such use or be detrimental or injurious to property and improvements in the neighborhood or to the general welfare of the City." In her opinion, this criterion was not met due to over ten former employees of Lowell Sheldon speaking out publicly of sexual harassment, toxic workplace, as well as illegal practices such as the serving of alcohol to underage workers (City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Staff Report, June 28, 2022).

City staff and Planning Commission agreed that Sheldon poses a risk to the health and safety

The damning allegations against Lowell Sheldon have been printed in multiple news sources (*The Bohemian*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The Press Democrat* to name a few), and been verified by multiple fact checkers. There is also a police report detailing Sheldon's assault of a woman while he was under the influence. I am not here to convince you that Sheldon is "detrimental to the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort, and general welfare of our community". This determination is clear, and has been voiced by almost all the members of the Planning Commission during their public meeting on June 28th, 2022. Commission Member Paul Fritz said, "What the planning commission has to find is that the operation of this restaurant with its alcohol license will not harm people in the community. At this point I don't know if I can say that." Commission Member Evert Fernandez echoed his sentiments, saying, "'Would I feel comfortable to have my daughter work there? The answer is that I couldn't say honestly I would."

The burden of proof was placed on Sheldon

By filing an appeal, the burden of proof was placed on Sheldon to prove that he is NOT detrimental to the health, safety, etc, of employees and customers alike. The members of the Planning Commission agreed that he failed to prove this. The administrative record includes documentation that Sheldon continued to harass and intimidate the former employees who shared their experiences in advance of the June 28th hearing. The commissioners also expressed concern that Sheldon failed to accept responsibility for his actions, without which, it is unreasonable to expect his future behavior will be different. If the Planning Commission believed he was not a danger, they would have completely overturned the initial staff decision. However, they did not. **As such, Sheldon did not meet the criteria for Svanstrom's original decision to be overturned.**

Conditions must adequately address the threat and be enforceable

The Planning Commission reluctantly agreed to attempt to mitigate the possibility of Sheldon causing future harm by placing several provisions on the conditional license they agreed to approve on July 12th. Their original proposal was that Sheldon (City staff in the June 28th hearing) not be allowed to set foot in Piala, which he refused. The final provisions include Sheldon not being allowed to serve or consume alcohol on the property and he may not participate in any direct management of the employees. Comments by Commissioners included, ““There are many eyes on this project,” said Paul Fritz. “I think the community is monitoring this.” Kathy Oetinger stated, “I feel like we would be leaving the enforcement up to Mr. Berlin and Mr. Sheldon.”

Please consider for a moment what this would look like. Anyone who would choose to dine at Sheldon’s establishment would not be the community that would be willing to monitor this condition, and the community members who would be willing will certainly not feel safe as patrons of Sheldon’s restaurant. Secondly, if they leave the enforcement to Berlin and Sheldon themselves, are they really expecting either of them to report themselves if Sheldon breaks the provision? I don’t believe it is likely that Berlin would go to the City to tell them that Sheldon drank on premise and the City should remove his alcohol license. Furthermore, considering Sheldon’s habit of intimidating and harassing employees who choose to speak up, it seems improbable that if Sheldon asked Piala’s employees to serve him alcohol that they would feel comfortable saying no, or even if they witnessed Sheldon himself serving the alcohol they would be reluctant to report.

When the provisions are considered in a realistic manner, it is clear that they place an unfair burden on the community. It is not the responsibility of the community or the offender or offender’s business partner to enforce these provisions, it is the city’s responsibility. And if they cannot enforce those provisions, then the first approval should be overturned.

Recommendations to use discretion and authority

In lieu of a conditional permit, I and the other victims suggest the following alternatives:

- Deny the license for one year. In one year, allow Sheldon to return to the Planning Commission with evidence that he has taken meaningful steps to understand the risks of drug and alcohol use in the workplace and is no longer a threat to community health and safety by holding a license to sell alcohol.
- The second alternative is that Sheldon remove himself from any ownership of Piala. The former businesses he was associated with have all removed him as owner because of past behavior and the risk he posed. Jeff Berlin has stated many times in the June 28th meeting that he plans on doing most of the work alone, and Sheldon would only come in if they were short an employee. As multiple commissioners noted, staffing shortages

are extremely common in our current economy and the likelihood that Sheldon will frequently be needed is high.

- Sheldon could maintain his role as owner but be banned from being on premises based on Planning Director's initial recommendation in the June 28th hearing for a minimum of one year. Berlin stated multiple times in the June 28th hearing that he was fully capable of running the restaurant without Sheldon's help.

All alternatives mitigate the damage that Lowell could cause to the Sebastopol community, which could be the harm of another employee that could be traumatic and cause lasting mental, emotional, or physical damage. Twelve years of this sort of behavior shows a pattern of using his position of owner to manipulate and abuse other employees. The liability not only to Berlin but to the the City of Sebastopol for approving this unenforceable conditional license is too high to risk another person being harmed. Please reconsider the Planning Commission's decision.

We ask that the city be provided with the full administrative record of the previous application, denial and appeal with all supporting documents in advance of reviewing this matter. We only seek to keep our community safe and prevent any future harm.

From: Kathy [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 1:57 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: Alcohol permit

I oppose the transfer of the alcohol permit to Lowell Sheldon owner of Piala restaurant on Healdsburg Ave in Sebastopol Ca.

Sent from my iPhone

June 1, 2022

City of Sebastopol
Planning Director
Planning Commission
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

**RE: Reject Applicant's Appeal of Denial of Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit
Application, File 2022-020, Piala LLC**

Dear Commissioners and Planning Director:

Please consider my following comments, and uphold the position of the City of Sebastopol Planning Department staff to **deny an Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit** at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue.

While the Applicant, Mr. Lowell Sheldon, is entitled to his own opinions regarding this denial, he is not entitled to his own set of *facts*.

Mr. Sheldon suggests that he "ran (his) first restaurant in a way that was sloppy and made some of (his) employees uncomfortable...". *In fact*, most of these employees allege, particularly in the context of alcohol use, "repeated instances of sexual harassment, assault and other inappropriate behavior", and as partners in one business venture after another demanded Mr. Sheldon's separation from their partnerships due to "his pattern of sexual harassment" (*Press Democrat 9/25/21*), Mr. Sheldon has, *in fact*, repeatedly described this behavior as simply "making people feel uncomfortable".

Mr. Sheldon states that his well-documented behavior "did not meet the standards of today". *In fact*, "repeated instances of sexual harassment, assault and other inappropriate behavior" were never acceptable standards, now or in the past.

Mr. Sheldon states that he will not be "an operational partner", with the implication that his alleged and documented persistent unprofessional, illegal and abusive behaviors thus cannot impact the community. *In fact*, Mr. Sheldon is identified as the owner who has applied for the Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit, and will most certainly be present at times at the proposed business. Further, even if it were possible, the City should not consider conditioning approval of this proposed project with unenforceable criteria such as not allowing the owner to enter his own property, in an attempt to mitigate Mr. Sheldon's long-standing history and behavior surrounding alcohol.

In a recent letter to select individuals, Mr. Sheldon stated that "3 former employees (and some of their friends who do not know me)" requested denial of "a change of ownership application". *In fact*, the many letters known to me from concerned stakeholders and members of the community to the City of Sebastopol and the California Department of Alcohol Beverage Control were largely in protest of approval for a license to permit Mr. Sheldon to engage in the sale and service of alcohol.

Mr. Sheldon opines that "a citizen should not be blocked from opening a restaurant serving beer and wine because former employees demand as much". *In fact*, Mr. Sheldon was denied approval by the City of Sebastopol because of "a history of inappropriate behavior in the workplace" and "the proposed use is not a restaurant, but rather a bar, which requires a Conditional Use Permit review by the Planning

Commission, and also has different parking requirements attendant thereto” (*City of Sebastopol Planning Department, May 4, 2022*).

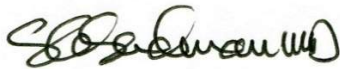
There is abundant evidence, carefully considered by the City of Sebastopol in the Findings for Denial, File 2022-020, “that, given the specifics of this case, the issuance of a Use Permit would be detrimental to the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort, or general welfare of persons residing or working in the area.” As asserted by the City of Sebastopol Planning Director, there is, in fact, “a history of inappropriate behavior by the proposed owner within and outside of the workplace in several establishments within Sebastopol and the immediate area.”

It appears that for at least a decade, Mr. Sheldon engaged in extensively documented behavior involving alcohol for which, in fact, a dozen women have come forward to provide detailed history alleging “repeated instances of sexual harassment, assault and other inappropriate behavior” as well as “unprofessional behavior” such as the service of alcohol to minors. While there exists, in fact, an abundance of evidence to suggest the veracity of these allegations, there is no compelling evidence to suggest that this pattern of behavior did not exist, has changed, or ever will change.

There is no justifiable reason or verifiable evidence to suggest that the Denial of the Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit application at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue should be reversed.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Seidman' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Scott Seidman, M.D., F.A.C.E.P.
Freestone, 95472 CA

cc: Kari Svanstrom
ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 1:32 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Peter Lowell

-----Original Message-----

From: Simon Lowings [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 24, 2022 11:41 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Peter Lowell

Hi As residents at [REDACTED] we support Peter Lowells application for a liquor license for a new restaurant on Healdsburg Avenue. We see no reason why it should be denied. Best wishes Simon and Anne Lowings.

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 1:31 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: PUBLIC COMMENT: Alcohol license, Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave)

Kari Svanstrom
Planning Director

From: Ray Gonzales [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, June 23, 2022 12:26 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT: Alcohol license, Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Ave)

Hello,

My name is Ray Gonzales & I'm a resident in Sebastopol, Ca. I'm in support of your denial of the alcohol license for Piala llc. Lowell Sheldon has a well documented, heavily reported history of sexual harassment, assault, worker abuse, and endangering minors as an employer. Abuse of alcohol and illegal drugs were involved in the majority of these allegations. Lowell Sheldon has shown repeatedly that he lacks the professional and moral character to be allowed to operate an alcohol-related business. He has denied many of the allegations Over 750 concerned citizens [signed the petition](#) demanding not only that Sheldon be removed from the Freestone Hotel project, but also that he not be granted an alcohol license for future endeavors. Our community has spoken.

I want to live in a community that supports women, workers, and survivors of sexual violence. I want my two daughters to grow up in this type of community. No action taken here will impact what I do with my businesses in this area & where I spend my dollar. I want Sebasotpol to thrive. Let's not be known for supporting this type of behavior; it will only further stain our community.

Denying an alcohol license is an appropriate consequence for someone who has a 10+ year heavily documented history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol.

Thank you for listening & look forward to the right action being taken to address this.

Ray Gonzales
[REDACTED] Sebastopol, CA 95472
[REDACTED]

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 1:33 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: public comment on Lowell Sheldon case

From: Zoe Kessler [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 24, 2022 3:41 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: public comment on Lowell Sheldon case

Hello my name is Zoe Kessler. I am a long time sonoma county resident. I would like to add my public comment on the topic of not allowing Lowell Sheldon to own a business or participate in any commerce in Sonoma County. For years Lowell has been a known predator in this area. Many many of my friends and family have reported him as an unsafe and dangerous person. I personally have been a patron at his restaurants and have been made very uncomfortable by him. One night in particular I was sitting at the bar at Lowell's establishment, eating dinner and he was very drunk and kept coming over to me and putting his arm around me and breathing very heavily on me. he has repeatedly tried to insight flirtation with me and each time I have turned him down or completely ignored him, yet he persisted. I never felt comfortable in his presence and especially now hearing other women's stories, I 100 percent support them and we must not let this predator run anymore businesses or give him any sort of power of differential over employees. He is dangerous and should be prosecuted for his crimes. Thank you.

--

Zoë Lynne Kessler
Holistic Practitioner | Self Care Coach | Massage Therapist

"Keeping your body healthy is an expression of gratitude to the whole cosmos, the trees, the clouds, everything." -Thick Nhat Hanh

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 1:33 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Reject Appeal of Denial of Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit Application, File 2022-020
Attachments: [Deny Appeal by Sheldon From Seidman June 1 2022 Freestone.pdf](#)

From: Scott Seidman [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, June 25, 2022 8:50 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom <kvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Fw: Reject Appeal of Denial of Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit Application, File 2022-020

Dear Kari Svanstrom –

After release of the meeting agenda and Staff report for the upcoming June 28th Planning Commission meeting, I noted that my Comment Letter, sent to you via email on June 1st, was missing from the packet. I have attached this email and letter, and request that it be included in the packet.

Cordially,
Scott Seidman

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Scott Seidman [REDACTED]
To: kvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.com <kvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, June 1, 2022 at 12:39:33 PM PDT
Subject: Reject Appeal of Denial of Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit Application, File 2022-020

Dear Kari Svanstrom -

Attached please find my comment letter to reject the appeal by the Applicant of the Denial of Alcohol Transfer and Alcohol Use Permit Application, File 2022-020, Piala LLC.

Cordially,
Scott Seidman

From: Kari Svanstrom
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 1:34 PM
To: John Jay
Subject: FW: Upcoming appeal regarding Piala restaurant

From: Zac Douch [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 11:38 AM
To: Debbi Burnes [REDACTED] Fernandez, Evert [REDACTED] Kathy Oetinger [REDACTED]; Kelley, Linda [REDACTED]; Paul Fritz [REDACTED]
Cc: Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Upcoming appeal regarding Piala restaurant

Dear Chair Oetinger and Commissioner's,

Only a week away from my position on the commission it is ironic that I am moved to write to you regarding the appeal of the staff decision regarding the Piala application for the transfer of an alcohol use permit.

In reviewing the staff report it is perhaps understandable that Kari had pause for concern in approving this application at a staff level on both counts she cited. Clearly the accusation and indeed the acknowledged behavior of Lowell were deeply troubling. Having re read the press coverage it is clear Mr. Sheldon made significant errors of judgement fueled perhaps by character flaws, an unhealthy power dynamic as well as alcohol and a carefree after hours work culture. It is also clear that his behavior had real impact on some staff members. However it does seem that Mr. Sheldon has made efforts to try to make amends; to acknowledge his poor judgment, to apologize, to do the personal work that is required to make a difference to his own behavior and to how he impacts others. He has remained active in the community when others might have withdrawn under this level of scrutiny and bad press.

On balance I believe the proposed use will *not* adversely affect the health, safety, or welfare of area residents (17.350.020 Paragraph C) and that the applicant has shown that to be the case (17.350.020 Paragraph D) through hiring a HR company and the other steps the applicant has taken. I believe the commission must focus on the *use* not on one individual associated with the use. If you do allow yourselves to focus on one of the partners and deny this use permit based only on reports of misdeeds as opposed to formal investigations/accusations of criminal behavior, we would be in dangerous territory. Perhaps my opinion would be different if there were police reports or a formal investigation was underway, in such circumstance I probably *would* want to await an outcome. But there are none.

Whatever your/our personal views are of Mr. Sheldon, as a commission you should not cast judgment on this individual at the cost of a legitimate business use application but rather focus on the use and the finding as they relate to 17.350.020 and crafting additional condition if deemed necessary to allow this application to move forward.

Respectfully

Zachary Douch

Thank you,
Zac Douch



ZAC DOUCH : VP

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

EARTHSTONE CONSTRUCTION

[REDACTED]

SEBASTOPOL, CALIFORNIA 95472
EARTHSTONECONSTRUCTION.COM

June 23, 2022

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you in support of your denial of the alcohol license for Piala LLC and to urge you to stand firm in your decision, even as Lowell Sheldon appeals it. Lowell Sheldon has a well documented, heavily reported history of sexual harassment, assault, worker abuse, and endangering minors as an employer. Abuse of alcohol and illegal drugs were involved in the majority of these allegations. The denial of an alcohol license is an appropriate consequence for a man who has a well-documented 10+ year history of sexual assault, harassment, and workplace abuse involving alcohol.

My family and I moved to Freestone almost three years ago and feel so lucky to live in such a beautiful place, and also one that prides itself on progressive values and doing things differently than the status quo. We are proud to raise our two young children here. When we first heard of Lowell Sheldon's hotel project just steps from our front door, we were interested, especially since we'd heard of Sheldon and had been to some of his restaurants. But then we started hearing the stories. From neighbors, our hair stylist, people coming by our farm stand. We were told that it was a well known West County secret that Sheldon "made women uncomfortable". We did some research and discovered that some of his employees had quit in protest of his toxic and abusive behavior. After listening to their stories, we knew we could not support any project he was involved in.

When the [SF Chronicle](#) and the [North Bay Bohemian](#) researched and reported on Sheldon's long running and extensive abuse, harassment, and assault of not only his employees but also women in the community, it was heartbreaking to read through the details of what many people we now consider friends have gone through. The bravery they showed in coming forward to publicly state what so many had turned a blind eye to, swept aside, refused to act on, can not be overstated.

Sheldon's other restaurants in Sebastopol all chose to sever ties with him when his vile actions became public. The fact that his three previous businesses saw him as a liability once the public at large was made aware of exactly how Sheldon acted when in a position of power should speak volumes. It would be completely negligent to allow someone with his history to open yet another establishment with alcohol sales given his well documented history of abuse.

He has shown no remorse, both he and his family and friends continue to harass the survivors and their allies. His story has changed many times, but one of the more telling things he's said of late is that he won't be a part of the day to day operations of the business. Why would he need to make that clear? Is it perhaps because he presents a danger to his employees and is not to be trusted around them?

Ultimately, you found his application for a liquor license to be lacking, and I think it's clear you made the right decision. Over 750 concerned members of our community have signed a

petition demanding that Sheldon be removed from his Freestone Hotel project and that he never be allowed to serve alcohol in our community again, due to all of the harm he has caused women and workers in West County. We want to live in a place that protects women and workers from sexual abuse, assault, and harassment, that believes and stands with survivors, and you can do that by upholding your decision to deny Lowell Sheldon a liquor license.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Gleason



Sebastopol

From: Jim Haidler <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 11:10 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: Oppose Peter Lowell liquor license

I oppose granting a liquor license to any operation run by Peter Lowell. He has been shown to be someone of ill repute by many credible sources. His continued participation in businesses of Sebastopol will only enable him to continue his abusive behavior and damage the reputation of this city. Paila is less than a block from my home.

Jim Haidler [REDACTED] Sebastopol CA 95472

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Michelle Kelly [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 11:35 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: Opposition of Alcohol Use Permit for Piala

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the application for a liquor license for Piala, a restaurant associated with Lowell enterprises. I live near the restaurant and am compelled to oppose a liquor license for Piala.

Numerous credible witnesses have outlined a history of sexual harassment and abuse by Lowell in his other restaurants. It's critical to note Lowell's record of sexual harassment targeted his employees who were dependent on income from their jobs. This record of employer abuse does not reflect the values of our community and needs to influence the city's decision as to whether or not to grant a liquor license. I urge you to decline the alcohol use permit based on past employer practice.

Respectfully,
Dr. Michelle Kelly

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

To:
City of Sebastopol Commissioners

June 26, 2022

I am writing this letter of support for Lowell Sheldon and Jeff Berlin and their pending restaurant project in Sebastopol called Piala. I am writing because I have known both Jeff Berlin and Lowell Sheldon for many years. I was a wine sales person who saw these men regularly in a professional capacity. Since that time, I have remained friends with both Jeff and Lowell.

I support the project because I think they will bring something of value to Sebastopol with a new venture that showcases food and wine from Georgia. My friends in the area are also very curious and interested in trying this restaurant. And knowing both gentlemen from past restaurant incarnations, their new spot will be a wonderful addition to the Sebastopol community.

I know that Lowell has made some immature and bad decisions in the past regarding his behavior around employees. Yet, I am convinced that he has made efforts to understand the errors of his ways and learned from this experience. He has taken concrete action to change his behaviors.

In addition, it is my understanding that Lowell will not run the establishment but merely design and implement the concept. Jeff Berlin has ample experience in running a restaurant in a professional manner and will bring his expertise to Piala as he has done in past ventures in the Bay Area where I knew him for many years.

You should allow this project to go forward and bring a breath of fresh air to the community by providing another excellent dining choice to our little corner of Sebastopol.

Sincerely,
Andrea Lederle
Graton, Ca

From: Cari Wynkoop [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 28, 2022 12:04 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: Oppose Piala liquor license

Dear Mr. Jay,

I live in the neighborhood directly across from the proposed wine bar, Piala. Cleveland Avenue is a cul-de-sac with a semi-blind hill, connected to the Joe Rodota trail. It is a favorite entryway for walkers, cyclists, and kids.

We have noticed an increase in traffic, high-speed turnarounds, and more parked cars attending the numerous restaurants in the area. There is very limited parking in the lot adjoining Piala. Additionally, the crosswalk connecting our street to the other side of Healdsburg Ave is poorly marked, and without crossing lights.

Despite the applicant's attempt to rebrand Piala as a restaurant, the language on the website (as of 6/27/22) reflects a very wine-forward and bar-focused environment. The hours are also listed as 4:30pm-11pm.

I have children and do not want to see increased traffic, more parking on our street and--most importantly--higher risks of people driving under the influence.

We are also located near the high school, with teenagers regularly walking by and near the proposed site of Piala.

Heightening the concern is the applicant, Lowell Sheldon's, demonstrated lack of responsibility and abuse of managerial power, specifically against young women. Substantiating the claims and causes for concern, Khom Loi (one block away, and the former site of Lowell's) severed ties with Lowell. They were the fourth restaurant to do so.

This is not an appropriate or safe location for a liquor-licensed wine bar.

Cari Wynkoop
[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, CA 95472

From: Stephen Zollman [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 11:46 AM
To: John Jay
Subject: Oppose Peter Lowell liquor license

I oppose granting a liquor license to any operation run by Peter Lowell. He has sexually harrassed many of his female employees, this backed by many credible sources. This type of behavior towards women is never acceptable, especially now in light of our Supreme Court's ruling. His continued participation in businesses of Sebastopol will only enable him to continue his abusive behavior and damage the reputation of this city.

Paila is less than a block from my home.

Stephen Zollman, [REDACTED], Sebastopol CA 95472

ATTACHMENT 11
PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED AFTER
JULY 12, 2022

Agenda Item Number 2

From: marylee guinon [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 23, 2022 10:39 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom; John Jay; Patrick Slayter; Neysa Hinton; Una Glass; Sarah Glade Gurney; Diana Rich
Cc: marylee guinon
Subject: Appeal PC's Decision to Approve Piala Alcohol Use Permit, File 2022-020

August 22, 2022

City of Sebastopol

Patrick Slayter, Mayor

Neysa Hinton, Vice Mayor

City Council Members

Una Glass, Sarah Glade Gurney and Diana Rich

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

7120 Bodega Avenue

Sebastopol, CA 95472

RE: Appeal PC's Decision to Approve Piala Alcohol Use Permit, File 2022-020

Dear Patrick Slayter, Neysa Hinton, Una Glass, Sarah Glade Gurney and Diana Rich:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to City Council on the appeal of the Conditional Approval of the Alcohol Use Permit for APN 004-251-023 (File 2022-020), Piala LLC. The purpose of this letter is to respectfully ask that City Council earnestly ascertain your authority in this matter, and then employ your discretion in exercising your full authority to protect the health, safety and welfare of community residents.

Acknowledged Risk to Health and Safety

As stated in the Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020, the City is charged with the responsibility to consider, and the authority to act on "*whether the proposed use will adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents*".

The Planning Commission and City staff invested considerable time in research and public hearings regarding Píala's application for an alcohol use permit. As recognized in the May 4, 2022 Findings of Denial from the City of Sebastopol Planning Department and the June 28, 2022 staff report, and voiced by several of the Planning Commissioners and members of the public in two public hearings, **it has been established in the administrative record that Sheldon poses a risk to the health and safety of area residents.** At the July 12 public hearing (ca. 29 minutes) Sheldon's attorney Mr. Haroche acknowledged the "perceived risk" and why the proposed conditions "divorced Lowell from alcohol".

Applicant's Burden of Proof

Furthermore, staff and Commissioners, throughout the appeal meeting on June 28, 2022 clearly established that, as stated by Kari Svanstrom: *"The applicant had not met the burden of proof regarding safety and welfare of the community"* (May 4, 2022 Findings of Denial from the City of Sebastopol Planning Department).

Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020 D states: *"In all determinations pursuant to this section, the applicant for the conditional use permit shall have the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that the proposed use will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare, result in undue concentration of alcoholic beverage outlets, or detrimentally affect nearby communities."*

Before City Council proceeds, this burden of proof requirement should be met pursuant to Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020.

Consider Use and Applicant/Owner

The City has the authority and responsibility to consider both the Use and Applicant/Owner. The nexus of Applicant and Use cannot be separated. It is imperative that the City Council ascertains your authority in this appeal process. The nexus of Owner and Use is specified in the Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020 E: *"The Planning Commission, or City Council on appeal, **may impose any conditions on the applicant or proposed location** reasonably related to the health, safety or welfare of the community."*

Combined with your responsibility to consider, and the authority to act on *"whether the proposed use will adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents"* (Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020), I urge City Council to take actions to ensure that the location and the applicant do not present a risk to the community. I ask that you consider whether the approved Conditions actually mitigate the acknowledged risks to public welfare and safety in our community. I believe you will find that **the Conditions do not mitigate the risk and the Conditions are unenforceable.**

Unenforceable Conditions

June 28, 2022 Planning Commission meeting, Kari Svanstrom explained to the Commissioners that: *"They (the conditions) do need to be done in a way that's enforceable and objective in their metrics."*

The Conditions proposed to mitigate the acknowledged risks are unequivocally unenforceable. Requiring a business partner (Jeff Berlin) to enforce conditions that would without question negatively impact the business is incongruous. And, it is unfathomable to rely upon the public and Pinal workers to enforce the conditions, especially given the corroborated reports of sexual harassment, toxic workplace, and illegal practices such as the serving of alcohol to underage workers. These workers did not feel safe or empowered to speak out.

The Planning Commissioners expressed concern that Sheldon failed for years to accept responsibility for his actions. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect any behavioral change. Sheldon recently dismissed the allegations stating his decade-long behavior *"did not meet the standards of today"*. This quote alone speaks for itself.

Conditions and mitigation measures placed on a project must be enforceable, and **if the City is unable to enforce such conditions of approval**, the project must be judged by the facts sans mitigations.

I understand the Planning Commissioners were told that their authority was limited and this resulted in compromises in the process. I urge City Council to confirm its authority to ***"impose any conditions on the applicant or proposed location reasonably related to the health, safety or welfare of the community,"*** and exercise your sound judgment in considering enforceable conditions.

Operating within its authority, City Council could deny the Conditioned Approval of the Alcohol Use Permit, or prohibit Lowell Sheldon from entering the restaurant premises.

Respectfully,

Marylee Guinon

Freestone, CA 95472

From: Jacqueline Gleason [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, August 24, 2022 2:39 PM
To: Kari Svanstrom; John Jay; Patrick Slayter; Neysa Hinton; Una Glass; Sarah Glade Gurney; Diana Rich
Subject: Appeal the approval of Paula's alcohol use permit

Dear Sebastopol City Council:

I'm writing to ask that you approve the appeal against granting an alcohol permit to Piala LLC ([7233 Healdsburg Avenue](#)) and uphold the original denial of the Planning Commission.

As a friend and supporter of many of the women harmed by Lowell Sheldon, I was heartened to hear the initial reaction from the Planning Commission. Their denial and response to Sheldon's appeal demonstrated an understanding of what was at stake for our community with their decision. Their subsequent decision to approve the conditional use permit came as a surprise, and a disappointment to me and those of us who only want to prevent future harm to women and workers in Sebastopol.

The facts seem plain. Sheldon was credibly accused of sexual harassment and sexual assault by over 11 women, as has been extensively reported by the SF Chronicle, North Bay Bohemian, and the Press Democrat. Sheldon was also found guilty of violating the terms of his employment at Fern Bar by an outside investigation initiated by the other owners of the restaurant after an employee complaint. As a result of this, his three restaurants chose to part ways with him, choosing to buy him out of his ownership stake rather than continue to risk their employees' well-being by having him involved. Since then, Sheldon has pursued opening new projects in Freestone and this one in Sebastopol, despite repeated calls from the community for him to take some time away from the spotlight to reflect and reform.

Working with the survivors this past year has demonstrated one thing very plainly, Sheldon takes no responsibility for the harm he has caused. Despite his claims before the planning commission just a few short months ago, where he talked of the therapy and deep work he's been doing, he just this week sent out a letter to his mailing list with his letter to this council attached, categorically renouncing about responsibility for the deep harm and trauma he has caused so many people around him. This directly contradicts his claims to be a reformed man who understands the harm he caused and is striving to move forward. This robs his survivors of any form of hope for accountability. He claims himself a victim of the Me Too Movement, despite the only real accountability he's faced has been being removed from his restaurants, where he received a fair buy out deal (which he fails to mention in all of his narrative spinning about how he's the only one who has suffered).

His survivors and supporters have only asked that he not be in a position of power to serve alcohol and continue to perpetuate harm to women and workers around him, which he will undoubtedly do since he sees nothing wrong with the way he's acted while running his restaurants, as he's said himself just a few days ago.

The City Council has every right and in fact every obligation to take into consideration the potential for public harm when issuing a conditional use permit. According to city code, "[T]he applicant for the conditional use permit shall have the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that the proposed use will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare, result in undue concentration of alcoholic beverage outlets, or detrimentally affect nearby communities" (17.350.020 (D)). The burden of

proof is on the applicant, and he himself has stated that he has done nothing wrong, despite extensive, documented evidence to the contrary.

Additionally, the condition imposed by the Planning Commission (that Sheldon not be allowed to serve or consume alcohol on the premises, or be in a managerial role) does not actually mitigate any potential harm because it is completely unenforceable. Anybody who is willing to be a patron at Piala is either a supporter of Sheldon's or unaware of the situation and thus unable to report any wrongdoing. This places the burden of keeping women and workers safe at this restaurant on the community, and especially those already harmed. It is unimaginable that this condition will have any real effect at keeping people safe, and indeed if something was reported somehow, the result of that is yet another person being traumatized by a known predator.

All this is not to say that I don't believe in reform. And second chances. And people learning from their mistakes. Because I do, wholeheartedly. It is part of my deeply held personal and political beliefs. But this type of reform requires somebody to reflect and acknowledge the harm caused, to listen and honor the wishes of those harmed, and to put in the work of making it right. And that is not what is happening here. Instead we have a person who has continued to harass survivors and allies for the better part of a year, enlisting his own friends and family to do so, as was documented to the Planning Commission. We have a person who now renounces any responsibility for this harm, ignores any requests by his survivors, and pushes forward down the same path.

I urge you to consider the significant risk to the community posed by Sheldon's involvement in an establishment serving alcohol and to either deny the conditional approval of the alcohol permit or prohibit Sheldon from entering the premises under any circumstances.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Gleason
Freestone, CA

Sent from my iPhone

From: City Council
Sent: Tuesday, August 23, 2022 8:30 AM
To: Una Glass; Sarah Glade Gurney; Neysa Hinton; Diana Rich; Patrick Slayter
Cc: Lawrence McLaughlin; Kari Svanstrom; John Jay
Subject: FW: Appeal of Planning Commission Request

Good morning
Please see email related to City Council agenda item.

Due to the COVID-19 Shelter in Place Orders by the County of Sonoma and State of California, City Administration Offices are closed to the public; but City staff is answering phones and emails and making in person appointments when needed. Mary Gourley

-----Original Message-----

From: M.MILLS-THYSEN [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, August 22, 2022 8:47 PM
To: John Jay <jjay@cityofsebastopol.org>
Cc: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.org>; Kari Svanstrom <ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Re: Appeal of Planning Commission Request

To our City Council,

We strongly support the original decision by our Sebastopol Planning Director to deny an alcohol use permit to Lowell Sheldon for 7233 Healdsburg Avenue. We believe the Planning Commission wrongly decided to approve the appeal to reverse that decision.

We support the application from Jesse Hom Dawson to appeal the Planning Commission decision to allow the alcohol transfer permit to go forward.

We urge the City Council to deny the alcohol use permit at 7233 Healdsburg Avenue, and at any other location in our city where Mr. Sheldon attempts to manage a public business, as he has shown himself to be an inappropriate actor in the public arena.

The right of workers to work environments free from harassment and other unsafe practices should take precedence over pressures by individuals who have demonstrated themselves untrustworthy. We hope you will vote to put your consideration of workers first.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mark and Marghe Mills-Thysen
Sebastopol Residents

From: City Council
Sent: Tuesday, August 23, 2022 8:31 AM
To: Una Glass; Sarah Glade Gurney; Neysa Hinton; Diana Rich; Patrick Slayter
Cc: Lawrence McLaughlin; Kari Svanstrom; John Jay
Subject: FW: Piala Alcohol use permit

Good morning

Please see email related to City Council agenda item.

Due to the COVID-19 Shelter in Place Orders by the County of Sonoma and State of California, City Administration Offices are closed to the public; but City staff is answering phones and emails and making in person appointments when needed. Mary Gourley

From: Sam Levy [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 23, 2022 8:06 AM
To: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.org>
Subject: Piala Alcohol use permit

To the members of the Sebastopol City Council,

I just recieved another of Lowell's letters, and this time I feel obligated to provide my thoughts having experienced the damage in his wake first hand.

My partners and I took steps to remove him from Fern Bar as quickly as possible once we learned of his behavior. I did not feel comfortable with him having any contact with our staff nor access to our restaurant from the very beginning once I saw how he behaved with regularity.

He denied responsibility and ignored all of our business partners requests to address his behavior over the years. Every time an appology and empty words followed direct confrontation. He repeated behavior publicly and privately that endangered our employees, our business, and our reputations. It became clear he did not intend to nor could change.

I would strongly recommend and request that however possible, you not allow Lowell to gain access, controll, or influence in any way over young women and men where alcohol is available. I spent 2 years insulating Fern Bar from him, and after years he had not made any behavioral changes nor made any acknowledgement that he needed to. He always denied fault, brushed off the damage he caused others as insignificant or imagined, and only made appologies as a calculated manuever. Never did they seem genuinely felt, because he never changed his behavior. The only thing that worked for us to protect our team and community was a complete removal from access to the restaurant then when possible a redemption of his shares in the business.

I have seen first hand how he weilds power, and his letters over the years have shown a complete lack of understanding how damaging and dangerous his influence can be. It isn't the media, it isn't 'me too', it isn't a false narrative, Lowell is a danger to our community and I would never ever allow my daughter or anyone's daughter I know to work for any restaurant he owns because I know it is only a matter of time before something else happens. He believes his own lies. I hope you don't.

Sam Levy

[REDACTED]

w.707.861.9603

www.fernbar.com

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Barbara Harris [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 23, 2022 11:47 AM
To: Lawrence McLaughlin; Mary Gourley; Kari Svanstrom; John Jay
Cc: Sarah Glade Gurney; Una Glass; Diana Rich; Patrick Slayter; Neysa Hinton
Subject: Lowell Sheldon Request for License

Dear city of Sebastopol decision makers:

I usually don't respond to the personal business of those requesting assistance from the city of Sebastopol.

However, since I am in the neighborhood of this potential new restaurant, I had received a notice of the request (again) for liquor license.

And, however, since I received (for some reason) once again, a message from Lowell Sheldon, it seems fitting that I take this opportunity to speak my mind (and heart).

In taking the time to read the lengthy letter from Sheldon, about mid-way I realized that it could have been stated within 3 paragraphs, rather than wading through that which revealed a troubled and self absorbed person whose therapist should be accountable for such advice as noted.

In other words, please accept my communication as request to withhold any permit/license of alcohol served and/or any other requests from Lowell Sheldon which involves the city of Sebastopol. I trust that when the county is involved with the planned Freestone property, there will be the opportunity to respond.

Thank you,
Barbara Harris

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: Freddie Francis [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 23, 2022 10:56 AM
To: Kari Svanstrom; John Jay; Patrick Slayter; Neysa Hinton; Una Glass; Sarah Glade Gurney; Diana Rich
Subject: Please appeal the decision to approve Piala's alcohol use permit

August 23, 2022

Dear Sebastopol City Council:

I'm writing to ask that you accept the appeal against granting an alcohol permit to Piala LLC (7233 Healdsburg Avenue).

I've worked closely with a number of incarcerated people for nearly a decade. Through this work I have built genuine friendships – some of the people I consider friends have histories of committing violent acts including rape and sexual assault. I believe wholeheartedly in peoples' ability to address harm they've caused, to transform and make amends to whatever degree that may be possible. My life's work is based upon the belief that no one is disposable.

For the past year I have organized alongside survivors of Lowell Sheldon's sexual violence, harassment, and workplace abuse. I see clearly that his behavior demonstrates no degree of reformation – only a broader vocabulary with which to defend and obstruct his actions and character. Transformation begins only when someone fully grasps and accepts responsibility for the harm they have caused.

In the past year I have personal knowledge of Sheldon:

- Repeatedly defying survivors' clear requests for no contact.
- Touting a "restorative justice" process as proof of his transformation, when in reality he left the process unfinished.
- Claiming: "I have never sexually harassed or assaulted anyone," in the same letter he acknowledged telling his employee to "sit on daddy's lap," sent August 23, 2022.

The vitriol which I've seen him regard survivors of his violence is disturbing.

Piala co-owner Jeffrey Berlin is responsible for enforcing the conditions set forth by the Sebastopol Planning Commission. Of the suggested condition that Sheldon attend Piala only as a patron, Berlin said at the 6/28 Hearing: **"I wouldn't even see it as something that needs to be enforced."**

Anyone who attends Piala as a patron will have either personally justified their support of Sheldon, or be uninformed about his chronic transgressions. Given that the burden of proof is on the city to enforce the conditions set forth by the Planning Commission, and anyone visiting Piala as a patron is likely already a supporter of Sheldon, the conditions are unenforceable.

Extending the benefit of the doubt to Sheldon and his partners puts women's safety at risk. If Sheldon messes up, the City can change the conditions or withdraw the alcohol permit. But if that happens, it means we have collectively allowed another woman to become a survivor of trauma, starting at ground zero to make her way back to wholeness.

Sincerely,

Freddie Francis

[View this email in your browser](#)

Dear Friends, Family and Community,

It's been nearly a year since my last communication. At that time I was in deep reflection on the state of my work life and my past. It was a deeply confusing time. I knew that I had made mistakes and was working to learn from these mistakes, as I had always done throughout my life, but I also knew I was accused of numerous deeds I simply could not apologize for, because they were not true. I didn't want to fight, mostly because the media narrative was so powerfully distorted that I felt powerless. So I apologized for what I could, and kept my head high knowing who I really was.

In retrospect this approach left me exposed to ongoing harassment. Three former employees viewed themselves as activists, and having sensed my vulnerability, felt empowered to keep fighting to tear me down. They started a campaign to "Keep Lowell Out of Freestone" and sent deceitful and hate filled letters to the City of Sebastopol asking for me to be banned from opening a restaurant. Their ongoing harassment has cost me 10's of thousands of dollars in legal fees and rent, and made it incredibly difficult for me and my partners to make an honest living doing what we love - which is to create community around the dinner table.

In July we went in front of the Sebastopol Planning Commission looking for a fair hearing from our government body. What we got instead was a hearing in which each member of the Commission judged me as guilty without even pondering whether they had any facts in front of them. Upon negotiating a path to the approval of our use permit, agreeing to a set of conditions that appeased the City's biased concerns, our detractors nevertheless appealed to the City Council. On August 31st we meet with the City Council for what we expect will be our final approval. We plan to open Piala Georgian Cuisine in late September.

It's important that my community has access to the truth and my side of the story. I have submitted my story to the City Council as a public record, and I share it with you below. I hope you will take the time to read it, and that it gives you some insight into the moment we are all living in: one in which the court of public opinion (fueled by internet chat groups and biased news media) has

usurped a fair hearing in our legal system where sworn testimony is the gold standard.

Following today's email we will not use this platform to speak about the past. We are looking forward to a beautiful and healthy future. We are opening an amazing Georgian Restaurant called Piala in our little town of Sebastopol. The food, wine and culture of Republic of Georgia are truly a gift and we are thrilled to share this passion of ours with each of you. Jeff Berlin, who is my partner and the daily operator of Piala, will be reaching out in September with an opening date, welcoming you to join us for some food and wine. As they say in Georgia - Gaumarjos!

Application: Alcohol Use Permit/ABC Transfer (2020-22) Applicant: Piala, LLC
Date: August 31, 2022

I address this to the Sebastopol City Council, News Media, and to the public at large.

I am innocent of all accusations of sexual harassment and assault.

Since these allegations came out in September 2021, I have remained largely silent, and was ready to move on. I thought, erroneously, remaining quiet and compliant was the right and honorable thing to do, a way for me to keep the peace and preserve whatever semblance of a dignified person I still could.

But, as someone who has spent every day of the past year, introspective, contemplating all sides and nuances of these allegations, I have come to conclude that staying quiet and maintaining a stiff upper lip is not the solution and never will be. The only way for me to move forward with my life with a true sense of dignity and self-respect is to speak the truth and share my side of the story.

Before I begin, I will be the first to admit, I'm no angel. I am complex and flawed. I have a stack of mistakes and miscues along with the lessons learned from them, stored deep in my memory bank. I've always sought to be a man

who apologized directly to those I have slighted. My entire life has been one long process of reconciling my present with my past, and growing into the future person I hope to be. With God as my witness.

Though I'm no angel, I'm also not the cartoonish predator I've been made out to be. While I am more than willing to take complete ownership of the mistakes I did make, I resolutely refuse to take ownership of the ones I didn't. One of the most significant lessons I've taken away from my extensive work in therapy is that I now know how to genuinely apologize and atone for the mistakes I have made - as well as know that I cannot apologize for those I haven't. For that lesson alone, there are days when I can truthfully say this experience, as painful and humiliating as it's been, might be one of the best things to ever have happened to me. The strange truth of it is it's made me a better, more authentic person.

Before I got there, though, I was willing, too willing, to throw out an apology whenever one was expected of me. Too willing to unthinkingly accept the blame cast upon me while too unwilling to speak up when the alleged victims and the newspapers that aided and abetted them distorted events and twisted the facts to suit their needs. Looking back, I have to ask myself why I was so ready to self-gaslight and absorb blame for crimes I knew I hadn't committed.

For one thing, I didn't believe I had any other real options. In our current culture, where the court of public opinion is the only one that matters, what kind of person would I be if I didn't "believe women"? If I, or anyone for that matter, were to argue with an alleged "victim", I'd be doubtlessly seen as an unreasonable monster. It was an additional misstep to add to the list of all the other "sins" I had already been accused of. If I didn't deny the allegations, I was damned because I would be agreeing I was guilty, and if I did deny them, equally damned, because it would imply I thought that these women were lying - the most unacceptable and morally reprehensible thing to think at the time. It's a trap. And I was trapped.

Finding the language today to speak about this with humility and resolve, has been liberating. Understanding the specifics of how my accusers' way of thinking is broken and how the point was to keep me (and everyone else) from asking too many questions - or otherwise face the very real consequences of being canceled - makes me want to speak up more. Lifting the veil on this has revealed to me many truths both broad and particular. On a broader level, I hate how this broken thinking has eroded due process and stripped us of one

of our foundational truth-seeking tools. I hate how it favors a cruel and sensational mob justice. I hate how it has made us blindly compliant, unthinking and, worst of all, glorify shame and shaming. And I, for one, am done being shamed. Particularly for things I have not done. In no way and in no world am I ready to fall on my sword, have my reputation raked over coals, name smeared beyond recognition, lose my ability to start a business and provide for my family over crimes I didn't commit or over infractions so minor, no one would ever look at them.

My detractors would have you believe that if I don't buy into their zealous worldview, I should be heretically punished and cast out. They get to play both victim and judge, controlling the cause and effect, handing down judgment that I am guilty, even though I have never been investigated or convicted of anything. That isn't justice. It's a personal vendetta masking as justice.

I was targeted and unfairly rammed into this narrative for several reasons. One, I was the boss. And in this cultural paradigm, having "power" alone is as good as an indictment. The justice merchants of today sell the idea that "power" is mysterious, pervasive and drives every angle of our lives. And that it underpins each and every interaction between men and women, boss and employee. They would have us believe it is top down and impenetrable. This incomplete notion of power feeds into a pernicious victimhood mentality. In reality power is fluid, and runs in all directions. In reality, we all have agency. We have the agency to choose what to engage with or disengage from. We can see power as either a tool of oppression or a path to liberation. It can be everything or nothing. It is whatever we project onto it, and in this instance, this particular definition of power was abused by some to portray themselves as helpless victims, when in reality, they had agency. They could have chosen to have straightforward conversations in an effort to pursue genuine understanding. They could have chosen to litigate those accusations in our robust legal system. Instead they chose to wield their power on social media and via journalists, who have significantly more power than I ever had, to tear me down.

Was I always a great boss, each and every day, for twelve years? No. There are many things I wish I could go back and change about how I ran Lowell's. But my deficiencies as a boss never overlapped with abusing my power. The overtone of this entire ordeal is a presumption that I wielded power in order to coerce people into doing things. It's a false premise and one that needs to be discarded. Those that stayed into the evening to have a few drinks after work

did so happily. Those that worked at Lowell's did so willingly, and could have left at any time to find another job. Indeed, many did, over the years, for a variety of personal reasons. The only reason people ever stayed working at Lowell's was because they chose to. Because it was a truly decent place to work.

And the other reasons? Here, it gets hazier. To get to the bottom of everything that has happened, I have to recognize that there's another, truer story beneath this one. The understory might be an overshare, but I think it's one that's essential to tell: while I was with my partner, who was my partner both in life and in business, I had an affair. And to make matters worse, this affair was with an employee. We all know the damage that affairs lay to bear and this one was no exception. However, the awfulness of my betrayal must not be confused with sexual harassment or predatory behavior. It was consensual, and because of our callowness, we chose a path of dishonesty.

The affair not only tore apart my family in the most impossibly painful way, but the aftershock of this seismic event also rippled out underground to shake the foundations of our businesses, and the employees felt this. It redefined how employees viewed me.

I bring this painful and intimate part of my past up because I believe these two things - the affair and the sexual harassment allegations - got coiled together and became impossible to decouple. As MeToo grew larger and more diffuse, to encompass everything from rape to a disappointing date, thus equating their seriousness, MeToo became a catchall term for "men doing bad things to women", whether that bad thing is sexual assault or making someone mildly uncomfortable or having an affair. Although my affair was a separate thing entirely, it dumped me squarely in the "men behaving badly towards women" category. The affair shocked many of my employees and tested how they saw me. If I was capable of cheating on my partner, then what other ugly man things was I capable of?

Of course, no one spoke openly of the affair at work; it existed in the basement world of rumors, as these things do, the rumor growing insidiously in chaotic and malignant ways. Rightly so, many of the staff had a strong urge to protect my former partner. I suspect that this protective impulse, coupled with the burgeoning MeToo movement, created the perfect conditions to day-by-day mold me into a sexual predator. It was the perfect set-up for employees, especially those carrying their own pain and trauma, to now view me with new

eyes and an out-and-out contempt. Of course, my shortcomings and flaws as a manager early on didn't help. What started out as a very private personal betrayal slowly became a collective one.

The affair had ended one year before I made my now infamous "sit on Daddy's lap" comment. A crude and very regretful comment to be sure, but on the whole, a comment too feeble to hang an entire sexual harassment interrogation on. But it's like that saying about going bankrupt, how it happens gradually and then suddenly. That comment was the suddenly. If employees had been quietly simmering with suspicion and contempt, that comment led to the boil over. Anyone had the green light now to openly skewer me. Not only skewer me but revise history with abandon. Any and all stories welcome, however distorted, untruthful or self-serving. Run-of-the-mill work activities, like bumping up against someone in a tight kitchen space or a friendly hug or a picture taken while picking plums, were now loaded with dark meaning, anything even slightly questionable now reframed as something mimicking sexual harassment. And the rest, as we all know, is history.

I will say this again: I have never sexually harassed or assaulted anyone.

I am aware that my version of events and the conclusions that I've drawn from them might be controversial or seen as denial. A way to absolve myself of the wrongdoing assigned to me. But nothing could be further from the truth. I come to these complicated conclusions from a daily reckoning of the hard truths, a mirror held up firmly to my face, even on days when my heart would rather fail me. In fact, I welcome a good-faith discourse or, better yet, going through a formal process where both sides can ask the hard questions and are accountable to the answers.

I have been made out to be a sexual predator because some of my former employees harbor negative feelings about me. I believe they dislike me not because I harassed them but because I betrayed my partner (and for various other mundane reasons why people dislike each other). There was nowhere to put these bitter feelings, and MeToo gave them the perfect place to express it. And an overzealous media hungry for a piece of the MeToo pie swallowed this story hook, line and sinker.

Ultimately, I write this not to exonerate myself but to give you, members of City Council, a fuller picture, one that now includes my side of the story, in hopes that it will bring us to a fuller and more balanced understanding. I know that a

true exoneration is impossible. My name will still be left to rot on the forever internet and the stain of being an alleged “sexual predator” will never really wash clean. Instead, I write this, humbly, to ask you to keep an open mind to the intricate truths that underlie these matters, and to grant some mercy as I attempt to start again.

Throughout this past long, difficult, painful year, I have been girded by these words by Salman Rushdie: “Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, power to retell it, to rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless.” I will keep striving for that personal power by telling my story, by integrating my past with the present, all the while seeking truth and staying close to my own fallibility.

Thank you,

Lowell Sheldon

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City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Hearing June 28, 2022
Public Comment by Naomi Minturn

My name is Naomi Minturn and I am a resident of Sebastopol. I'd like to thank Commissioner Kelly for bringing our attention to the police report filed on September 27th, 2021.

At the time of the account detailed in this report it is noted that Mr. Sheldon already had a documented investigation of sexual harrassment underway from his role at Fern Bar. He had already been removed from direct supervisory contact with employees and asked not to be onsite. In fact, he disclosed all of this to Ms. Doe. He spoke about the work he was doing on himself, including therapy, and his new-found desire to understand consent. He spoke with convincing sincerity, expressed remorse and tearfully expressed a genuine desire to learn from the experience. And yet, within a matter of hours, he would go on to violate Ms. Doe while she was incapacitated after spending the evening drinking with him.

In addition to the accounts of his employees that include experiences of unwanted touching and inappropriate comments you have also received written comments from multiple community members who detail their own experiences with the way Mr. Sheldon attempted to wield his power. Despite his claims that he will have no role in daily operations, to grant him a license to sell alcohol not only places any future employees of Piala in harm's way, it also increases the risk to the greater community of Sebastopol

Mr. Sheldon and his supporters referenced the fact that criminal charges have not been pursued. The police report in your possession includes a statement from Jane Doe that she did not wish to endure a criminal trial and discouraged the Sheriff's office from pursuing further investigation. Without her participation the investigation could not proceed. Perhaps she and the other survivors of Mr. Sheldon's abuse held out hope that some measure of accountability and reformation could be achieved through a restorative justice process. It is my understanding that this process was terminated early, in part, due to Mr. Sheldon's non-compliance. While it has only been 9 months since the public revelation of Mr. Sheldon's well-documented behavior, which is too short to enact meaningful change, I believe that the statute of limitations on felony forced oral copulation is 10 years in the State of California.

I thank Kari and John for their initial denial of an alcohol license to Mr. Sheldon's new venture. As leaders in our community, I urge you to uphold this decision for the safety of the citizens of Sebastopol.

City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Hearing June 28, 2022
Public Comment by Leah Engel

Good evening, my name is Leah Engel and I am a lifelong Sonoma County resident. I have worked in the restaurant industry in our community for almost 20 years and 6 of those years were spent working for businesses owned by Lowell Sheldon. During that time I experienced and witnessed an extremely toxic, manipulative, and inappropriate work environment while under his leadership.

Lowell would like you to believe that he has learned from his mistakes, that he has done the work and changed his behavior, when the truth is to this day Lowell has denied all but one allegation brought against him, showing that he is unwilling and incapable of taking accountability for his actions. He has publicly disregarded our experiences as untruthful, treating us like second-class citizens in our own community — our experiences do not align with the persona that he and his supporters would like you to believe so they are deemed a lie. It's clear he does not care or understand the extent of harm he's caused us. Many of us have also been subject to harassment and intimidation from Lowell and his family members, as have our allies, deepening our trauma.

I ask you tonight, how can we believe he's reformed if he refuses to take accountability for the harm he has caused his employees and his community members? Should a known predator with at least a decade long pattern of abuse, often fueled by alcohol and drugs, be allowed to open a restaurant that serves alcohol in our community? And would a person who was truly rehabilitated from their abusive behavior willingly choose to put themselves back in an environment that fuels said behavior?

I've seen nothing that makes me believe Lowell is truly reformed and have no doubt that if given the opportunity he will continue to use his position of power to cause harm and trauma to our community members. I commend Kari and John for their initial denial and I hope the Planning Commission upholds this decision. Thank you for your time.

City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Hearing June 28, 2022
Public Comment by Jesse Hom-Dawson

My name is Jesse Hom-Dawson and I was born and raised in Sebastopol, and was Director of Marketing at three of Lowell's restaurants, as well as a victim of his sexual harassment.

Many of Sheldon's letters of support mention making mistakes, and how people deserve second chances. Harassing and assaulting women is more than a "mistake". It's a purposeful action to assert your position of power over others and use it to get what you want. This is behavior that goes back over thirteen years. This is not his second chance, or his tenth, or his twentieth. When Sheldon tells you the problem is three disgruntled former employees, not the consequences of his own actions, he does not understand the harm he has caused, and as such will never change.

I have seen Sheldon reach out to us repeatedly after we told him we wanted no contact with him. I have seen him reach out to my mother when I ignored his missives. He has sent emails to us meant to be intimidating, telling us that by speaking out we are turning the community against us. I have seen him invalidate our experiences and excuse his behavior.

We are not asking to shut down his restaurant, we are simply asking to deny him an alcohol approval use permit. He may tell you he won't be running the restaurant, but the fact is the alcohol application was in his name, not any of his partners.

I find it significant that when he was a partner in Khom Loi, his other two partners forbade him to talk to any other employees, and had a clause in their contract to easily remove him. One does not set such guidelines unless they believe that if allowed to, Sheldon will continue his inappropriate behavior. If Sheldon must clarify that he won't be involved in day to day operations at Piala, that shows a lack of faith from his current partners that he can't be trusted in the restaurant environment.

I have seen him use illegal drugs during workplace hours and in workplace settings, including with one of his current business partners. He has also offered illegal drugs to me or other employees while we are working.

I have seen him removed from the partnerships of three local restaurants for his actions, and banned from multiple local businesses for inappropriate behavior unrelated to the sexual harassment.

I have seen his ex-business partner and the mother of his children express concern for their children because she is not sure he will truly ever change.

To those who called us power- or money- hungry: We have gained no power or money. I am here because I truly believe he has not changed, and will continue to harm women as long as he gets away with his behavior. And when I look at the dozens of women affected by his actions in the past, the ones who reached out to us on social media, who walked up to us in coffee shops, who passed messages through friends, thanking us for speaking up and finally saying something, I realize this traumatic experience was worth it. Sheldon thinks he is above the law and untouchable, and I hope you will show him that his actions must have consequences.

City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Hearing June 28, 2022
Public Comment by Alexandra Lopez

My name is Alexandra Lopez and I have worked in West County for the past 4 years and am a former employee of Lowell Sheldon's and survivor of his abusive behavior.

Lowell Sheldon continues to say that the claims of abuse against him are empty allegations.

I would like to go over the facts.

It is a fact that in 2019 an outside HR professional hired by Fern Bar who interviewed witnesses, reviewed documents, texts and video footage, concluded that Sheldon's conduct violated Fern Bar policies.

It is a fact that this same evidence was reviewed by the legal teams of the San Francisco Chronicle and North Bay Bohemian and found to be accurate and credible.

It is a fact that despite clearly stating my boundary that I wish to have no direct contact with him, Sheldon has ignored that boundary 3 times by sending me emails with manipulative and threatening language. The most recent occurrence was on June 9th.

It is a fact that before he was removed from his businesses, he was not involved in day to day operations, and during this time sexually assaulted one woman in this community.

In a recent letter written by Sheldon he lists the quantity of time he has spent on various therapies as a way to show he is reformed, specifically listing his engagement with a restorative justice organization.

It is a fact that he withdrew from that restorative justice program.

His facilitators mutually agreed to end their work because he was not meaningfully participating in the program and on several occasions actively went against their guidance. Furthermore, at the request of the organization, he was asked not to mention their work with him in any public-facing way, which he ignored. This shows me that he was not truly interested in accountability and is only willing to put in effort insofar as it serves his public persona.

Sheldon also states that after doing business for 12 years that no complaints were ever brought forth and it was only as of 3 years ago was he made aware that he did not meet the standards

of today. In fact, it was always the "standard" to not harass and assault people. Stating that he was open for 12 years with no complaints is not a measure of how well he ran his business or that he didn't harm workers. Given that the most he can own up to is that he was "sloppy and made some of his employees uncomfortable" does not even begin to show that he has a real understanding of how he caused harm or that he was likely causing harm long before it was "made aware" to him.

Sheldon and partners have stated that he will not be part of day to day operations, presumably as a safeguard to temper fears that he will be a threat to workers. It is foolish to think that he will never be present while workers are on duty. Any time he is on premises, most likely as a diner consuming alcohol, he has the potential to be a threat to workers' safety.

It is important to recognize the language in the denial letter from the planning commission sent to Sheldon. It states that "granting an alcohol beverage license in this case would therefore have the potential to be detrimental to the health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community including potential employees, customers, and other members of the general public..." The Commission has the opportunity, as leaders, to uphold the Planning Director's original decision and show definitively that they see the potential risk of granting Sheldon an alcohol use permit and supporting and protecting their community.

August 23, 2022

Sebastopol City Council
citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.org

RE: Alcohol Use Permit, File 2022-020, APN 004-251-023, Piala LLC

Dear Patrick Slayter, Neysa Hinton, Una Glass, Sarah Glade Gurney and Diana Gardner Rich:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment for the Administrative Record on the appeal of the Conditional Approval of the Alcohol Use Permit for APN 004-251-023 (File 2022-020), Piala LLC.

The following letter reviews a number of issues and concerns regarding the proposed Piala LLC project. Many of these issues were raised by the Planning Commissioners during the June 28, 2022 appeal hearing.

The proposed Conditions of Approval have several elements that require the City’s consideration, and upon thorough analysis of these elements, could, through the City’s discretion and authority, result in the following actions:

1. Find that the burden of proof has not been met through clear and convincing evidence by the Applicant(s) that the proposed use will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents.
2. Find the Conditions of Approval to be unenforceable.
3. Find the conditions for compliance with a bona-fide eating establishment inadequate.
4. Deny the Conditional Approval of the proposed Alcohol Use Permit, or adopt enforceable Conditions.

1. Authority and Responsibility of the City of Sebastopol

As established in the Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020, the City is charged with the responsibility to consider, and the authority to act on *“whether the proposed use will adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents”*.

The nexus of Owner and Use in the Municipal Code cannot be separated. A simple example is a proposed child care center use where the owner/applicant is a registered child sex offender. Likewise, as an example in this case, the use does not permit service of alcoholic beverages to minors. If the owner is shown to have engaged in this illegal behavior (as has been alleged), then the owner of that use creates a risk that *“will adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents”*.

This nexus of Owner and Use is further clarified in the Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020 E: *“The Planning Commission, or City Council on appeal, **may impose any conditions on the applicant or proposed location** reasonably related to the health, safety or welfare of the community.”*

The City of Sebastopol has both the authority to act, and the responsibility to ensure that neither the location **nor the applicant** present a risk to the community.

2. Burden of Proof

In the May 4, 2022 Findings of Denial from the City of Sebastopol Planning Department, it was noted that *“the alcohol license is being denied based on a letter of protest that was submitted by several individuals which indicates a history of inappropriate behavior in the workplace”*.

Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020 D states:

In all determinations pursuant to this section, the applicant for the conditional use permit shall have the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that the proposed use will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare, result in undue concentration of alcoholic beverage outlets, or detrimentally affect nearby communities.

Staff and Commissioners, throughout the appeal meeting on June 28, 2022 clearly established that, as stated by Kari Svanstrom: “The applicant had not met the burden of proof regarding safety and welfare of the community”. During the appeal process, the applicants and their attorney failed to present clear and convincing evidence to counter the statements and position of the Planning Department, despite ample uncensored and unconstrained opportunity to do so. The failure to meet this requirement was repeatedly confirmed by members of the Planning Commission:

As Commissioner Fritz stated following the presentation by the applicants and their attorney:

“We need to not deny that these are real allegations.”

“He has not learned and he is not respecting people’s boundaries.”

“From what I’ve seen and heard tonight, I don’t know that I believe that Lowell is a changed person.”

“I can’t say Lowell is a changed man, and that I have no problem or no concern that he will not be a threat in the future. I just don’t have that...understanding.”

“I do really have concerns about Mr. Sheldon’s involvement at this point and what it could mean to the health, safety and welfare of the workers at the restaurant.”

Comments by Commissioner Burnes included:

“I feel very uncomfortable with a lot of the comments tonight, leading me to believe, not only does Lowell not take what happened, and has done his piece in, um, his own self, you know, but also that his supporters haven’t.”

“We heard that, you know, that he has worked very hard to change, but we saw little evidence of that. As I stated, we saw evidence to the opposite.”

“We’re talking about women who have been violated and someone mis-using their power.”

“I wish we were in a situation where, as our lawyer said, where he had proven to us as a Commission that he has changed.”

Commissioner Fernandez noted:

“Would I feel comfortable having my daughter working there, and the answer to that is that I couldn’t honestly say that I would.”

“I’m in line with the other Commissioners in my concerns with this, to deny this.”

It is thus clear that the Planning Commissioners agree with the May 4, 2022 Staff assessment that the requirements of Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020 have not been met, and continue to maintain that **Mr. Sheldon, as an owner of the proposed use, presents a risk to the safety and welfare of the community.**

3. Unenforceable Conditions

Per Sebastopol Municipal Code §17.350.020:

E. The Planning Commission, or City Council on appeal, may impose any conditions on the applicant or proposed location reasonably related to the health, safety or welfare of the community.

As established in the following section (4), the Conditions proposed to mitigate the risks the applicant and proposed use create to the health, safety or welfare of the community **are unenforceable.**

As there is currently an acknowledged absence of “clear and convincing evidence” establishing that there is not now, nor ever will be any potential episode where Mr. Sheldon’s alleged and documented dangerous behaviors might occur, there exists the real risk that any a violation of these unenforceable conditions may result in permanent, life-altering trauma for any additional victim(s). Thus, the use of unenforceable conditions is not the mechanism by which to either assure compliance or mitigate risks that would prove to “*be detrimental to the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort, or general welfare of persons*”.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, any condition that allows the presence on site by Mr. Sheldon during or out of regular business hours would potentially create the situation where Mr. Sheldon could exercise hierarchical power over staff and employees. Further, as the unenforceable conditions **do not prevent Mr. Sheldon from arriving inebriated**, his intoxicated presence, with any attendant behavioral indiscretions involving staff, employees or patrons, would not be prevented.

As noted by Commissioner Burnes:

“I haven’t seen him demonstrate the ability...If it (conditions) doesn’t (work), another woman has been at the end of that, and I am just not willing to be the person to say OK, let’s see if this time he can adhere to it.”

“This is a history of violation after violation and so I am not comfortable with making the condition that he won’t be there, because I haven’t seen him show us that he has respect for the these, um, rules when they’re set in place.”

Commissioner Fernandez states, regarding unenforceable conditions:

“I don’t know that any conditions can be placed to ensure that, other than (Sheldon) not being part of it.”

“It’s not a decision where, OK, if it don’t work out, you know, it’s unfortunate. It’s, we’re talking about people’s lives.”

The attempt to create Conditions of Approval that are, by their nature, unenforceable vacates any potential effect these conditions could provide. When describing the role of conditions for approval in the June 28, 2022 Planning Commission meeting, Kari Svanstrom explained to the Commissioners that:

“They (the conditions) do need to be done in a way that’s enforceable and objective in their metrics.”

Any proposed project that requires conditions of approval that cannot be enforced should not be approved.

4. Responsibility for Enforcement

As currently proposed in Exhibit B, Draft Conditions of Approval, (Staff Report PC_7-12-22), all enforcement of Conditions 2 and 3 shall be the sole responsibility of proposed Applicant Jeffrey Berlin:

2. Applicant shall not permit Lowell Sheldon to exercise, directly or indirectly, any personnel - related responsibilities in connection with the ownership, management, or operation of the subject business, including without limitation:

- a. the hiring, training, management, supervision, review, discipline, or termination of any employee; or*
- b. the fielding, review, investigation of, or response to any employee complaints or concerns.*

3. Applicant shall prohibit Lowell Sheldon from serving or consuming alcohol in any capacity while on the premises.

Mr. Berlin is described as a co-owner and business partner in this proposed project. As such, he has significant conflict of interest as the sole individual responsible for enforcement of the proposed Conditions, any violation of which could result in substantial personal financial loss as well as potential permanent and life-altering trauma to any future victims, with attendant liability. Thus, Mr. Berlin is incentivized not to report such violations.

Moreover, to ensure compliance with all conditions for which Mr. Berlin would be held responsible, his presence would be necessary whenever Mr. Sheldon is on site, both during and out of regular business hours. This is an unenforceable condition.

Mr. Berlin would be required to personally observe and/or potentially serve all beverages provided to Mr. Sheldon when on site. This is an unenforceable condition.

Mr. Berlin would have to personally observe and prevent other individuals, both staff and patrons, from providing alcoholic beverages to Mr. Sheldon when on site. This is an unenforceable condition.

Mr. Berlin would have to personally review and assess all communications, both verbal and non-verbal and direct or indirect with personnel via telephone, email, text and in person by Mr. Sheldon or through an intermediary, agent or representative of Mr. Sheldon to assure that Mr. Sheldon has had no contact or influence in any way with any individual for any matter that might be construed as personnel-related. This is an unenforceable condition.

Any proposed project that requires conditions of approval that cannot be enforced should not be approved.

5. Bona-fide Eating Establishment

Exhibit B, Draft Conditions of Approval, section 7 requires:

“The establishment shall be maintained as a bone-fide (sic) restaurant...a) The menu shall at all times serve full meals, in addition to any such smaller plates proposed.”

The California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (“ABC”) has required that restaurants that serve alcohol *“Must operate and maintain the licensed premises as a bona fide eating place. Must maintain suitable kitchen facilities, and must make actual and substantial sales of meals for consumption on the premises” (BPC §23038).*

The interpretation of “actual and substantial sales” has previously been defined by the ABC for regulatory purposes to be that in each case where food is served, the applicant must keep records and show that **a minimum of 51% of gross receipts are from food sales**. Although this specific ABC wording has recently changed, this is the standard used by many municipalities. For example, the Planning Department for the City of San Francisco, based on a standard developed after both examination of Washington DC’s Planning Code and averages reported by the National Restaurant Association, has defined a Bona-fide Eating Establishment that serves alcohol as follows (San Francisco Municipal Code Article 1, General Zoning Provisions, §102 B):

(e) The restaurant must secure significant revenue from food and non-alcoholic beverage sales. Significant revenue from food and non-alcoholic beverage sales shall mean either:

(1) A minimum of 51 percent of the restaurant's gross receipts shall be from food and non-alcoholic beverage sales prepared and sold to guests on the premises. Records of the restaurant's gross receipts shall be provided to the Department upon request

(2) Annual gross food and non-alcoholic beverage sales prepared and sold to guests on the premises of at least \$4,200 per occupant based on the premises’ maximum occupant load as determined and approved by the San Francisco Fire Department and Department of Building Inspection

Due to the initial and well-documented intent of the Applicant to open a bar, and with consideration, when compared to restaurants of a similar nature, for the limited and minimally-amended bar menu update provided as evidence of performing as a bona-fide eating establishment, as a condition of use for a permit for the service of alcohol at a bona-fide eating place, the City could use its discretion and authority to ensure compliance with intent, and require, as utilized by other municipalities, either of the following conditions:

- 1. An independent quarterly or biannual accounting that establishes that 51% or more of gross receipts are derived from the sale of food and non-alcoholic beverages**
- 2. Annual gross food and non-alcoholic beverage sales prepared and sold to guests on the premises be at least \$4,200 per occupant based on the premises' maximum occupant load as determined and approved by the Sebastopol Fire Department and Sebastopol Department of Building and Safety**

These conditions have been well-vetted for regulatory purpose, and are currently utilized as defining a Bona-fide Eating Establishment by other municipalities including the City of San Francisco. As such, the Applicants should be readily compliant with these conditions.

As noted by Ms. Svanstrom, **these additional proposed conditions would be both “enforceable and objective in their metrics.”** Based on history and prior statements and actions by the Applicant, addition of these conditions is important to assure compliance. As noted by Commissioner Burnes in describing the history and behavior of the Applicant: *“I haven’t seen him show us that he has respect for the...rules when they’re set in place”, and “This is a history of violation after violation”.*

IN SUMMARY:

1. The Administrative Record documents that the Applicants have not shown that the proposed use will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents.
2. The proposed Conditions of Approval are unequivocally unenforceable.
3. The Proposed Conditions of Approval cannot ensure that Mr. Sheldon will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents.
4. There is reasonable doubt that the proposed use will meet the requirements of a bona-fide eating establishment without additional enforceable and objective conditions.

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

- 1. Deny the Conditioned Approval of the Alcohol Use Permit, or**
- 2. Prohibit Lowell Sheldon from entering the restaurant premises, and**
- 3. Require enforceable and objective Conditions of Approval for a Bona-fide Eating Establishment**

Thank you for your consideration of the issues presented above.

Cordially,



Scott Seidman, M.D., F.A.C.E.P.
Freestone, CA 95472

cc: Kari Svanstrom: ksvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org

To: Sebastopol City Council Members
From: Leah Engel, Freddie Francis, Jacqueline Gleason, Ray Gonzalez, Jesse Hom-Dawson, Alexandra Lopez and Naomi Minturn
Re: Alcohol Use Permit for Pialla LLC

August 24, 2022

Dear Patrick Slayter, Neysa Hinton, Una Glass, Sarah Glade Gurney and Diana Gardner Rich:

We are writing to you as a group of survivors and supporters to express our concerns regarding the alcohol use permit for Piala LLC. Some of us have personally experienced Lowell Sheldon's abuse as former employees. The administrative record leading up to the Planning Commissioners June 28, 2022 appeal hearing contains a detailed account of our concerns that the proposed use "*will adversely affect the health safety and welfare of area residents*" and we do not believe the applicant met the burden of proof to demonstrate otherwise. In addition, the conditions of approval are unenforceable and do not provide sufficient protection to potential employees or patrons of Piala or to area residents. We are seeking only to prevent another woman in our community from having to experience a life-altering trauma. We ask you to use your authority to:

1. Deny the conditional approval of the proposed Alcohol Use Permit or
2. Prohibit Lowell Sheldon from entering the restaurant premises

With Sheldon as Owner, an Alcohol Use Permit for Piala will Affect the Safety of Residents

Planning Director Kari Svanstrom's initial response to Sheldon's application cites Municipal Code 17.415.030 B, which states: "The establishment, maintenance, and operation of the use applied for will not, under the circumstances of the particular case (location, size, design, and operating characteristics), be "detrimental to the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort, or general welfare of persons residing or working in the area of such use or be detrimental or injurious to property and improvements in the neighborhood or to the general welfare of the City." In Svanstrom's opinion, this criterion was not met due to eleven former employees of Lowell Sheldon speaking out publicly of sexual harassment and a toxic workplace, as well as illegal practices such as the serving of alcohol to underage workers (City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Staff Report, June 28, 2022).

As former employees, we experienced and witnessed these violations first-hand. By filing an appeal to the Planning Commission's initial denial of the application, the burden of proof was placed on Sheldon to prove that he is NOT detrimental to the health, safety, etc, of employees

and customers alike. The members of the Planning Commission agreed that he failed to prove this. As Commissioner Fritz stated:

“I do really have concerns about Mr. Sheldon’s involvement at this point and what it could mean to the health, safety and welfare of the workers at the restaurant.”

Our first-hand experiences with Lowell Sheldon as an Owner at multiple establishments negatively affected our health and well-being and we witnessed co-workers and community members suffer from his actions over the course of years. We have seen no evidence of his purported change or growth as we stated in our statements to the Planning Commission at the June 28th, 2022 hearing (see attachment). Many of the Commissioner’s shared our concerns:

Commissioner Fritz stated:

“He has not learned and he is not respecting people’s boundaries.”

“From what I’ve seen and heard tonight, I don’t know that I believe that Lowell is a changed person.”

“I can’t say Lowell is a changed man, and that I have no problem or no concern that he will not be a threat in the future. I just don’t have that... understanding.”

Commissioner Burns expressed similar doubts:

“I feel very uncomfortable with a lot of the comments tonight, leading me to believe, not only does Lowell not take what happened, and has done his piece in, um, his own self, you know, but also that his supporters haven’t.”

“We heard that, you know, that he has worked very hard to change, but we saw little evidence of that. As I stated, we saw evidence to the opposite.”

“We’re talking about women who have been violated and someone mis-using their power.”

“I wish we were in a situation where, as our lawyer said, where he had proven to us as a Commission that he has changed.”

On August 23, 2022, Mr. Sheldon used the email list for one of his former restaurants to share the letter he sent to the Sebastopol City Council. He opens this letter by stating,

“I am innocent of all accusations of sexual harassment and assault.”

In fact, an independent investigation was completed by Susan Daniel of Employee Relations Consultants to investigate claims of sexual harassment while Mr. Sheldon was a co-owner at Fern Bar and found that policies had been violated. An email dated November 26, 2019 from co-owner Sam Levy to a victim states:

*“Ms. Daniel interviewed numerous witnesses, and reviewed documents, emails, texts and video footage and **ultimately concluded that Mr. Lowell’s [sic] conduct violated Fern Bar policies.** Rest assured, Fern Bar will be taking proportionate, remedial actions to prevent such violations in the future.”*

In Mr. Sheldon’s letter to the Council he cites that one of his main lessons from “extensive therapy” has been to learn how to make a genuine apology and refuse to apologize for mistakes he has not made. **To date, none of us have received an apology for the tremendous harm he has caused us that was not couched within a threat.** He has yet to take responsibility for anything other than running his business in a “sloppy manner” or having “flaws.” Rather than acknowledge the effects his actions had on his employees and the damage that caused, he constructs a narrative wherein he himself is a victim of the MeToo movement.

We ask that the City of Sebastopol please consider the long-lasting effects that workplace harassment, abuse and sexual assault have on survivors in your review of this matter.

Conditions Must Be Enforceable

The Planning Commission reluctantly agreed to attempt to mitigate the possibility of Sheldon causing future harm by placing several provisions on the conditional license they agreed to approve on July 12th. The Draft Conditions of Approval stated:

2. *Applicant shall not permit Lowell Sheldon to exercise, directly or indirectly, any personnel - related responsibilities in connection with the ownership, management, or operation of the subject business, including without limitation:

 - a. *the hiring, training, management, supervision, review, discipline, or termination of any employee; or*
 - b. *the fielding, review, investigation of, or response to any employee complaints or concerns.**
3. *Applicant shall prohibit Lowell Sheldon from serving or consuming alcohol in any capacity while on the premises.*

These conditions fail to mitigate the risk that this project *will adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents* and are unenforceable. Many of the Commissioners noted the limitations of these conditions.

Commissioner Burns stated:

"I haven't seen him demonstrate the ability... If it (conditions) doesn't (work), another woman has been at the end of that, and I am just not willing to be the person to say OK, let's see if this time he can adhere to it."

"This is a history of violation after violation and so I am not comfortable with making the condition that he won't be there, because I haven't seen him show us that he has respect for the these, um, rules when they're set in place."

Commissioner Fernandez stated:

"I don't know that any conditions can be placed to ensure that, other than (Sheldon) not being part of it."

"It's not a decision where, OK, if it don't work out, you know, it's unfortunate. It's, we're talking about people's lives."

Enforcement would be left to Co-Owner Jeffrey Berlin who stated to the Planning Commission in the July 28th meeting, "I wouldn't even see it as something that would even need to be enforced."

Mr. Berlin would have a significant conflict of interest in reporting any violation of the condition. Reporting a violation would result in a personal and professional financial loss to Mr. Berlin.

Any employee who witnesses a violation would face significant risk in reporting, even with an outside HR firm in place. As we know from experience, speaking out against Mr. Sheldon carries significant consequences to livelihood, safety, relationships and personal well-being. It is not the responsibility of employees to monitor the adherence to such a condition.

During the June 28, 2022 Planning Commission hearing it was proposed that Lowell Sheldon be prohibited from entering restaurant premises. We believe this condition to be enforceable and that it would mitigate the risk that this project *will adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents*.

We ask you to deny the Permit or place the condition that Mr. Sheldon is prohibited from entering the establishment.

Summary and Personal Statements

We have lived and worked in Sebastopol for years – some of us grew up here, and all of us consider it our community and our home. We have witnessed and experienced harassment and assault by Lowell Sheldon. We are seeking only to prevent another woman in our community from having to experience a life-altering trauma. We believe that his involvement in Píala as an establishment that serves alcohol poses a significant risk to our community and ask you to uphold your responsibility to protect the area residents. We ask that you:

1. Deny the conditional approval of the proposed Alcohol Use Permit OR
2. Prohibit Lowell Sheldon from entering the restaurant premises

Sincerely,

Leah Engel
Freddie Francis
Jacqueline Gleason
Ray Gonzalez
Jesse Hom-Dawson
Alexandra Lopez
Naomi Minturn

Attachment: Selected Public Comments from June 28th, 2022 City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Hearing

HAROCHE LAW

p: (707) 814-0028 f: (707) 289-7996 bob@haroche.law 121 North Main Street, Ste 210 Sebastopol, CA 95472

August 24, 2022

Sebastopol City Council
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

Re: *Piala Use Permit (2022-020): Response to Appeal*
HL no. 213-01

Dear City Council Members:

I am writing on behalf of Piala, LLC and its principals Lowell Sheldon and Jeffrey Berlin in response to the appeal filed by Ms. Jesse Hom-Dawson.¹

Introduction

The appeal, as Appellant states in her letter, is premised on "*allegations* against Lowell Sheldon...printed in multiple news sources" (emphasis added). The operative word here is "*allegations.*" No criminal charges were ever sought nor any sheriff's investigation ever commenced.² No complaint was ever filed with the Department of Fair Employment and Housing and no civil lawsuit was ever brought. The allegations against Lowell, which he has vehemently denied, were never subject to cross-examination, never weighed in any forum against Lowell's testimony, and never adjudicated. These are not facts but unchallenged accusations by individuals seeking

¹ The subject use permit was originally applied for in the name of Lowell Sheldon, acting on behalf of Piala, LLC. In accordance with the Planning Commission's approved condition, the applicant is to be modified to be Jeffrey Berlin.

² Appellant misleadingly refers to a "police report detailing Sheldon's assault of a woman while he was under the influence," but that document, a half page in length and heavily redacted, is no more than a business record of a complaint having been received by the Sheriff's office. The individual made the report *two years* after the alleged incident occurred and timed to the day to coincide with publication of an article about Lowell in *The Bohemian*. The reporting individual never followed up on her complaint.

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to elevate what they perceive as boorish behavior to the level of a criminal threat to Sebastopol residents and visitors.³

We do not intend, however, to litigate these accusations before the Council because the sole issue before you is whether granting Jeffrey Berlin an alcohol permit for Píala restaurant would adversely affect the health, safety, or welfare of the community. The answer is that it would not and the conditions we have proposed, and which staff supported and the Planning Commission approved, will ensure as much.

Any Perceived Risk from Permit Issuance Has Been Eliminated

Appellant misrepresents that the Planning Commission "agreed that Sheldon poses a risk to the health and safety." It certainly did not and its findings nowhere suggest as much. Indeed, the Commission could not have legally approved the permit had it found, as Appellant contends, that the proposed use would pose such a risk.

What the commissioners *did* agree on was that they did not want to adjudicate the veracity of the accusations leveled by Appellant and others, so they instead accepted staff's and Applicant's proposed conditions designed to eliminate any perceived risk posed by Lowell's part-ownership of Píala, LLC.

Specifically, the use permit was approved subject to a number of unusual and stringent conditions including:

³ This is not to say that Lowell has always acted impeccably (he has not) but he *has* acknowledged, examined in therapy and in restorative justice work, and apologized repeatedly for his lack of boundaries with former employees. Earlier this year, for instance, he wrote to Appellant:

I continue to be deeply ashamed of the comment I made to you. It is a north star for me and will always be at my side to remind me never to be inappropriate with employees in the future. I wish you peace as you move forward in your life.

Appellant responded to this apology by taunting Lowell that "[n]ow hundreds of our supporters know what a cowardly sack of shit you are."

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- All personnel matters, including employee complaints, will not be handled by Lowell or his partners but instead by an outside human resources firm.
- Lowell shall not "exercise, directly or indirectly, any personnel related responsibilities in connection with the ownership, management, or operation of the subject business."
- Lowell shall be prohibited from "serving or consuming alcohol in any capacity while on the premises."
- Violation of either of the latter two conditions "may, by itself, constitute a ground for revocation of the subject use permit."

Reasonableness of Proposed Conditions

Permit conditions must bear a sufficient nexus to the projected burden (or risk) of the proposed development (or use).⁴ In this case, it bears noting that Lowell could, *without any use permit*, still work as the on-site manager and staff supervisor of any "dry" food establishment in the City – in which case the City would have *no authority* to consider, much less address, the behavior he is accused of having committed between 3 and 9 years ago.

It is only the pending alcohol use permit application which affords the City this opportunity to review that past (alleged) conduct. Yet even then, it must still make findings that the "proposed use" – *i.e., the sale of alcohol* – would "adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of area residents."^{5 6}

⁴ *Associated Home Builders, Inc. v. City of Walnut Creek*, 4 Cal. 3d 633, 644 (1971); *Ayres v. City Council*, 34 Cal. 2d 31, 42 (1949).

⁵ City Code § 17.350.020.

⁶ The City is legally required to base its decision on findings and those findings in turn must be supported by "substantial evidence." Code of Civil Procedure § 1094.5. Analogizing to the CEQA context, "substantial evidence" means "facts, reasonable assumptions predicated upon facts, and expert opinion supported by facts." 14 CCR § 15384 (b).

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Given that fact, our approach, which both staff and the Commission found to be reasonable and realistic, is to separate alcohol from Lowell's involvement altogether and thereby provide a complete mitigation of the perceived risk posed by the presence of alcohol.⁷ In other words, once we completely divorce Lowell from any interaction with alcohol, there no longer remains any nexus between the proposed use and the feared harm to be mitigated.

We appreciate that this application has presented a controversy different than what the Council is typically tasked with addressing, but it is critical to both this applicant and the business community at large that the City not embark on using the development process as a means to render social judgment rather than implement rational, and legally defensible, land use planning.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Bob Haroche

⁷ Appellant argues that the condition prohibiting Lowell from touching alcohol on-site places "an unfair burden on the community" to ensure compliance. But in terms of monitoring, this condition is not unlike any other imposed on a discretionary approval. City staff does not regularly patrol businesses to ensure compliance with permitted uses, hours of operation, noise levels, or any other limiting condition attached to their permit. Staff instead relies on community reporting of problematic behavior.

In this instance, with Lowell's detractors having already undertaken a year-long news and social media campaign against him, one can safely assume that they will be highly attuned to any whiff of impropriety at Piala. As one commissioner commented, "There are many eyes on this project...I think the community is monitoring this."