

## Sunny Isles strips nude dancing from Boardwalk

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The Boardwalk will stay open -- but there won't be any more nude dancing and adult videos inside.

Sunny Isles Beach commissioners Thursday voted 3-2 to deny Victor Zepka -- owner of the Boardwalk bar beneath City Hall -- five zoning variances that would have allowed him to keep operating an "adult entertainment venue."

Voting against the variances were Mayor Dave Samson and commissioners Lila Kauffman and Daniel Iglesias. Voting for them were commissioners Irving Turetsky and Connie Morrow.

The debate took two hours and featured plenty of heated exchanges. More than 200 mostly gay club supporters packed the tiny commission chambers and spilled outside.

City Building Official Michael Berkman, who came close to shutting down the Boardwalk in November after warning Zepka several times to cease the adult entertainment, said the club, at 17008 Collins Ave., is licensed only to operate only as a bar -- not a club featuring male dancers in G-strings.

Before the vote, Zepka's lawyer Stanley Price told commissioners his client was a victim of "zoning discrimination."

Price used The Porterhouse, a restaurant and bar on Collins that stays open late and features live music, as an example.

Iglesias asked Price: "Isn't there a difference between adult entertainment and a five-piece band?"

"I'm not claiming a vested right," Price shot back. "I'm arguing a point of zoning discrimination."

When Price left the podium, it was Berkman's turn.

He told commissioners Zepka had "illegally" operated the Boardwalk as an adult venue for 16 years.

Berkman said the Boardwalk was not in the proper zoning district for that kind of entertainment.

"It's a self-created problem," Berkman said. "The Boardwalk would not have been an issue if he had all the licenses."

Berkman later said Zepka's bar wasn't the only establishment facing such a dilemma.

"There's about 90 other businesses [in the city] that are in the same boat," he said.

Commissioners also were concerned about previous problems at the Boardwalk.

According to reports from Florida's Division of Alcoholic Beverage and Tobacco Enforcement, there was more going on inside the club than strip shows.

Reports show that between 1985 and 1997, club owners had been fined several times because drugs were sold inside the club and because men were exposing their sexual organs.

Price and Zepka told the commission the same things happened in straight clubs.

"Officers do not understand the gay lifestyle," Zepka told commissioners. "We all have our own definition of indecency. Our dancers don't take it all off. This is a very respectable place."

With the roaring and cheering crowd outside, Zepka went on to say the Boardwalk also brings a lot of business to the city.

Zepka supporter and lawyer Elizabeth Schwartz made a speech about Sunny Isles Beach being a city that is diverse and open to all.

Taking away the club's personality -- which she said lures people from all over -- would not be smart.

South Beach Realtor Bret Taylor, 29, also a Sunny Isles Beach resident, said it was "tragic what the commission decided.

"It sent the wrong message to people," Taylor said. "It seems if the business does not fit the criteria of what the city wants, their days are numbered."