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Cameras for 4 a.m. bars?

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BY FRAN SPIELMAN/City Hall Reporter

Chicago bars licensed to sell booze until 4 a.m. would pay a price for the noise and crime problems they create: surveillance cameras, exterior lighting and "adequately trained" security guards who attend CAPS meetings, under a crackdown advanced today by a City Council committee.

Nearly two years after Mayor Daley introduced the ordinance, the License Committee finally got around to passing it - with a few major changes.

Instead of leaving it open-ended, surveillance cameras required at each building entrance and exit - sophisticated enough to clearly identify patrons - would have to be operable from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m.

Since bar owners are already being saddled with a major security expense, the city has agreed to waive the fee for installing cameras along the public way.

And in addition to requiring enough "adequately trained" security personnel to address "excessive noise, loitering, littering, fighting, traffic control and criminal activity," employees and managers would be required to attend neighborhood CAPS (community policing) meetings to keep their fingers on the pulse.

Exterior safety plans must be submitted to the city by Jan. 1 and there will be considerable flexibility.

"We recognize that one size does not fit all. We've got late-hour licenses that vary from very, very small mom and pop corner taverns all the way up to your large nightclub venues in the downtown area," said Scott Bruner, the city's director of business affairs and licensing.

"We leave it up to the business to determine what is the appropriate need for their particular size. We just need to know that there's something in place. Saying, 'We figure it out as we go' is not an appropriate response."

Chicago has 209 bars licensed to serve liquor until 4 a.m. Monday through Saturday and until 5 a.m. on Sunday. Nearly 30 percent of them are in the 42nd Ward. That creates tension in a downtown area that's one of the city's fastest-growing residential areas.

"It's a major concern with my constituents. We've had a number of problems within the River North neighborhood - altercations, fights and vandalism outside these venues. There was an SUV blown up 2.5 months ago within 100 feet of the Buzz Bar in River North," said downtown Ald. Brendan Reilly (42nd).

"There are some responsible club owners who do a very good job. This ordinance will target those who don't have great track records. It'll send a message to proprietors of these establishments that they will be held accountable for what goes on in the immediate area surrounding their venues and ultimately improve conditions for neighborhood residents."

Ald. Bob Fioretti (2nd), whose Near South Side ward has a handful of late-hour licenses, said the presence of cameras "may sensitize some of these bar owners to be aware that they have to reach out and stop nonsense that's happening in their bar and outside of their bar. And it may cut down on the amount of drinks that are being served at some of these places."

The security crackdown comes at a time when a growing number of aldermen have called a halt to late-hour licenses.

Before leaving office, Reilly's predecessor Burton F. Natarus (42nd) put a lid on

late-hour licenses in the downtown area, even though he once pushed through a 4 a.m. license as a favor to 1st Ward power brokers.

Fed up with the "Bourbon Street atmosphere" around Wrigley Field, Aldermen Tom Tunney (44th) and Vi Daley (43rd) did the same. They were joined today by Ald. Helen Shiller (46th).

Failure to submit a security plan to the city's Department of Business Affairs and Licensing would be grounds to deny a late-hour license. Failure to implement the plan to address chronic complaints would be grounds to suspend or revoke the license.