

Man linked to proposed 118th Avenue massage parlour arrested outside hearing on prostitution charges

By Gordon Kent, Edmonton Journal April 4, 2013



Vice Det. Ken Brander inspects a fridge in an Edmonton massage parlour to see if it is stocked with food on Oct. 25, 2012.

Photograph by: Greg Southam, file , Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Edmonton's development appeal board postponed a hearing on a proposed 118th Avenue massage parlour Thursday after the applicant's translator was arrested on prostitution-related charges.

Simon Shum, 55, has said he's helping Ha Yung Tso with the controversial project, which residents fear will boost the sex trade in the area, two doors away from the Crystal Kids youth centre.

Shum was charged with living on the avails of prostitution and taken away in handcuffs as he waited for a Subdivision and Development Appeal Board hearing into the application to start.

"This arrest that I made here today has nothing to do with what anybody is here for. It's total happenstance," Det. Dave Schening told reporters.

"He was arrested because of an ongoing investigation into trafficking in persons."

Shum is already facing similar charges, said Schening, adding he attended the hearing to find out whether the application involved a body rub parlour.

“I just walked in. There he was sitting there ... I have been trying to track him down for a few weeks.”

More than two dozen people showed up to speak against the planned conversion of a building at 8706 118th Ave. into a massage parlour, which a development officer has turned down based on inadequate parking.

Opponents argue the facility would put vulnerable children in danger and hurt efforts being made to improve the area.

“We think the community is cohesive around this issue. They’re not going to let it go away. It’s not the type of business they want on the Ave.,” Crystal Kids president Bryan LaFleche said, adding he has seen the site’s proposed floor plan.

“To us, it looks like a sex shop and nothing else.”

He’s concerned that even if a therapeutic massage operation is allowed, it could legally become a body rub parlour.

The non-profit group has collected more than 12,000 signatures in an online petition against the project.

They’re prepared to argue that without two required off-street parking spots and no loading spaces or bicycle parking spots, the development shouldn’t go ahead, LaFleche said.

“Bicycle use on the avenue is up ... Regardless of what you turn up for, it would be better if you rode a bike.”

Crystal Kids executive director Miri Peterson said the city has spent millions of dollars upgrading 118th Avenue and run a campaign to deter customers from looking for prostitutes in the area.

“It would be counter-productive for a city board to say ‘come on back.’ That wouldn’t make sense.”

The Subdivision Development Appeal Board is an independent body made up of community members, not city staff.

A Calgary planner retained to handle the case for the applicant, Hayung Holdings Ltd., sent an email asking for an adjournment because he couldn’t attend the hearing and wants more time for community consultation.

Tso, who appeared by herself, spoke little English and appeared to have trouble understanding the proceedings.

The board put off the hearing until May 2.

Outside the board room, she denied “100 per cent” that her business would involve sex, saying “it’s just ladies and men.”

Her development permit application described the proposed business activity as a “massage parlour.”

Shum has said Tso, who recently bought the two-storey building and lives upstairs, wants to offer massage therapy and belongs to a massage association.

Her idea is to work alone initially using the main floor and possibly the basement, he said.

Body rub or exotic massage parlours are allowed in Edmonton. The businesses and workers must be licensed annually, which includes a training session on labour law for body rub staff.

Under bylaw amendments approved by city council last month, body rub centres can't be located within 100 metres of schools, parks, child care centres, temporary shelters and extended medical treatment centres; however, Crystal Kids does not qualify as one of these facilities.

But Chris Morris, principal until last December at nearby Spruce Avenue Junior High School, said one-third of his 300 students spent time at Crystal Kids.

“Those kids don't always have a safe place to be. That's a safe place. To have something like that (so close) ... it's ludicrous,” he said.

“At what point are you going to put another hurdle in front of these kids so they won't be successful? ... I have an issue with those sort of people being around children. I think it's bad for our community, I think it's bad for our city.”

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