

City Council Requires The Reef Remove Outdoor Seating On Howard Wharf's Path To The Harbor

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NEWPORT — The Reef has been required by the City Council to remove service from the northern portion of its outdoor patio on Howard Wharf after approval for its liquor license passed with the condition the restaurant does not encroach on the established 18-foot wide right-of-way to the harbor.

“That’s important to the citizens of Newport, to have a way to walk down (to the waterfront), and they’ve always had that,” Mayor Jeanne-Marie Napolitano said. “Until that issue is resolved, (The Reef) is not to have anything on the right-of-way, obstructing it.”



The Reef has been engaged in a two-year-long dispute with Friends of the Waterfront, a nonprofit advocacy group dedicated to public harbor access, over whether its patio obstructs public access to Newport Harbor. Howard Wharf has been designated by the Coastal Resources Management Council as a public access road to the water since 1987, but the CRMC’s designation documents and changes to the wharf itself have made it unclear where the exact protected boundaries for the public property lies.

When The Reef purchased 10 Howard Wharf from the owners of the former restaurant The Pier in 2019 and began adding the outdoor patio onto the space, Friends of The Waterfront objected to their entertainment license in the hope it would bring attention to the restaurant encroaching on a public right-of-way. Friends of the Waterfront argued the public street continues in an 18.24 ft-wide path extending from the end of the original street pavement to the harbor.

The following two years, City Solicitor Christopher Behan worked to resolve the issue between The Reef and Friends of the Waterfront, but the issue quieted as the city began to cope with the pandemic. Now that the city has started opening up, Friends of the Waterfront representative Attorney Michael Rubin submitted a new objection to The Reef’s liquor license renewal as a way to reach a conclusion with help from Newport City Council.