



MILWAUKEE DOWNTOWN

Business Improvement District 21 | 301 W Wisconsin Ave. Suite 106 | Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53203
Phone 414.220.4700 | www.milwaueedowntown.com

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September 1, 2025

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Robert Thiel, Captain of Police – District One
Milwaukee Police Department
749 West State Street
Milwaukee, WI 53222

Dear Captain Thiel:

Re: Serious Concerns Regarding the License
for ELMNT Lounge at 618 North Water
Street

Business Improvement District No. 21 ("BID 21") is writing to express its serious concerns over the acts of violence and shootings and strongly urges the City to review the Class B Tavern and Public Entertainment Premises licenses issued to A1 Waterstreet LLC d/b/a ELMNT Lounge ("ELMNT") at 618 North Water Street.

Being in the heart of BID 21 and proximate to several large office buildings and hotels, ELMNT's operations have significant impacts on BID 21 stakeholders. Unfortunately, predecessor licenses at this location have been sources of unrest for more than a decade and generated objections from residents, owners, employers and employees. But, more importantly, since the Common Council first approved licenses for ELMNT in May of 2025, ELMNT has been a source of crime and unrest. As documented in the attached Journal Sentinel article, police officers have been called to 618 North Water Street 246 times from 2016 to July 15, 2025. Most disturbing, gunfire broke out in front of 618 North Water Street on July 12, 2025 resulting in a quintuple shooting that tragically killed two people.

The mission of BID 21 is to sustain the competitiveness of Downtown and ensure a safe, clean and welcoming environment conducive to positive business activity. BID 21 and its stakeholders have worked tirelessly and invested millions of dollars in resources since BID 21's inception in 1997 to drive positive economic activity Downtown.

BID 21 supports the effort to seriously review ELMNT's licenses because allowing the establishment to continue to operate as it currently does undermines BID 21's mission—making Downtown less safe and discouraging positive economic activity.

Property owners formed BID 21 because they recognized that even the perception of a lack of safety—not to mention an actual safety threat—discourages businesses from locating and operating in the vicinity. Business owners simply do not want to expose their employees and customers to unnecessary risks. And, employees and customers will not choose to work, shop or consume services in an unsafe environment. Extensive market research that we have conducted shows that, even the *perception* of danger, devastates positive economic activity.

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BID 21 appreciates that a well-conceived Plan of Operation, which is followed by a license-holder such as ELMNT, is critical to ensuring safe and productive operation of a licensed establishment. We urge the City to review the Plan of Operation that was the basis for the Common Council approving ELMNT's licenses. It is relevant to consider whether ELMNT complies with its legal capacity limits, security plan, exiting plans, hours of operation and operations which could temper undesired behavior from large, late-night crowds such as entertainment and food sales. See <https://www.elmntlounge.com>.

Please assist us in making Downtown safe, clean and welcoming. The tragic instances related to ELMNT are in direct opposition to BID 21's mission. We urge the Licensing Committee and Members to the Milwaukee Common Council to consider these concerns very seriously as it examines the potential revocation of ELMNT's licenses. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Tammy Babisch, Board Chair

Matt Dorner, CEO

DOWNTOWN

milwaukee journal sentinel

CRIME

This Water Street club has a history of police incidents. Here's why that can't immediately shut down a Milwaukee bar

Sophia Tiedge Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

July 28, 2025 | Updated July 30, 2025, 11:53 a.m. CT

Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

Two people were killed and three injured in a shooting outside ELMNT Lounge on July 12, 2025.

Police have responded to hundreds of calls at the club's address since 2016, including calls for battery, fights, and weapons.

The club's liquor license was recently renewed, making it difficult to close the establishment immediately.

Deadly gunfire broke out at a North Water Street nightclub this month, extending a decades-long span of violence that has left three people dead and prompted nearly 250 calls to law enforcement in close to a decade.

Milwaukee police officers have been called to 618 N. Water St. — recently under new ownership and renamed ELMNT Lounge — 246 times from 2016 to July 15, according to Milwaukee Police Department records.

The total number of calls does not necessarily indicate there were 246 incidents, as some incidents can create more than one entry, if there are multiple calls or dispatches to an incident, for example.

Specifically, records show calls for service included: nine for battery, 17 fights, 10 investigations, one armed robbery, 15 subjects with gun, 14 thefts, three shots fired and one shooting.

This data does not include the July 12 [quintuple shooting](#), which claimed the lives Kevin Lewis, 39, and 52-year-old Antwan "Tweezy" Hogans, a well-known local rapper and club promoter. Three others were injured. A 24-year-old [male has been arrested](#) in relation with the crime, but the shooting is still under investigation.

The July 12 deaths mark three deadly shootings at the club in the past four years. Diamond Arberry, 24, was shot and killed at the nightclub in 2021. No arrests have been made in connection to her death, either.

Alderman Robert Bauman, whose district includes the lounge, said despite the nightclub's history of violence and constituent concerns, the process of closing a club is more complicated than some may think.

The bar's liquor license needs annual renewal, and ELMNT's license was just renewed in April, meaning the city would have to wait nearly nine months before another hearing.

"We can't just come in and nail the door shut," he said.

However, that's not the only option.

So how can the ELMNT's liquor license be revoked?

The second possibility, is a revocation hearing. A citizen or entity can file for this.

Bauman said he plans on urging Milwaukee police to initiate a hearing, but can't do anything beyond that. If it does, the license holder can hire a lawyer and prepare for what Bauman explained as a "mini trial."

At the revocation hearing, licensing committee members decide if they think the liquor license should be revoked. If they vote yes, the Common Council would take up the matter. If this happens, Bauman said the license holder usually files an appeal with the Milwaukee County Circuit Court.

During the proceedings, the establishment could ask for a temporary restraining order that would bar the city from enforcing the revocation. Bauman said this process can take months, and during the proceedings, the bar is able to stay open. If the appeal fails, then the city can revoke the license.

The July 12 shooting

The quintuple shooting took place just weeks after the club changed ownership.

Rajvir Bains, the club's new owner, told the Journal Sentinel he saw shots coming out of two cars while in front of the building next to ELMNT, with the shooting continuing after the car passed the entrance to his bar.

Bains said he normally sees a patrol car stationed outside the establishment on Friday and Saturday nights, but didn't see it on July 12.

Milwaukee police typically has officers patrolling the area since the bar is in the [code RED](#) (responsible entertainment deployment) zone, meaning a higher volume of officers are stationed within the area on the weekends.

"If there was a police presence nobody could have done that," Bains said.

Habib Manjee, who owned the club for 21 years, said he would contact the MPD District 1 liaison officer whenever the club was open or he was hosting events.

A Milwaukee Police Department spokesman told the Journal Sentinel that Bains entered into a voluntary agreement to notify its district liaison about ELMNT's events, but had not received a notification the night of the shooting.

Bains said the area could benefit from a larger police presence, but did not return multiple requests for comment on the bar's communication with MPD the night of the deadly shooting.

Bains said the club was in the process of rebranding after the ownership change. After the shooting, multiple security guards quit. He said they've met with

Milwaukee police and corresponded with the city about the incident, and wants to take necessary steps to prevent violence in the future.

Bains told the Journal Sentinel the club has an ID system which stores inventory of who enters the club, but since the shooting happened outside, they can't confirm if the shooter was a patron.

Vincent Bobot, Bains' attorney, said the bar has been closed since the shooting and will also remain closed this weekend out of respect for the victims.

ELMNT's history of violence

In 2013, while under Manjee's ownership, the club's [liquor license was suspended](#) for violent crimes, but the club remained open after its suspension expired.

In 2021, the bar received a 60-day suspension after Arberry was shot and killed outside the establishment.

During ELMNT's virtual [Nov. 30 2021 license renewal hearing](#), Lakisha Thomas, Arberry's mother, joined the meeting with Manjee and his lawyer. Thomas said she didn't blame the club and wishes the police did more before the violence escalated.

On July 17 — five days after the quintuple shooting — Arberry's family took to the streets to demand answers in the investigation as the case surrounding her death remains unsolved.