

Chase's restaurant dispute heats up between owner, SLT

By Kathryn Reed

Things are beginning to sizzle at Chase's Bar and Grill inside Lake Tahoe Airport and it has nothing to do with what's being prepared in the kitchen.

Owner Sam Sonki Ahn believes the city of South Lake Tahoe, as his landlord, is not acting in good faith in negotiating a new lease. He is accusing the city of negotiating a lease with a potential buyer of the restaurant.

City Attorney Patrick Enright acknowledges the city is in talks with Tom and Diane Miller.



Sam Sonki Ahn discusses his lease with South Lake Tahoe to operate Chase's restaurant.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

"They won't buy it without a lease. We are talking to the potential buyers about what the lease would be," Enright said.

The Millers, who used to own Steamers Bar and Grill in South Lake Tahoe, could not be reached for comment. They were at the Jan. 26 City Council meeting and spoke briefly before the council went into closed session to discuss the lease.

The direction from the council was for the city attorney's office to negotiate a more coherent lease with someone.

"What we want is a viable restaurant there. Now no one frequents it. The new owners have new marketing ideas and would market it more aggressively. They want to change the menu and be open more hours," □ Enright told *Lake Tahoe News*.

What has Ahn frustrated is that he says the Millers are not talking to him directly about the sale of the restaurant and are instead making a deal with the city that will run him out of business. He believes the city, as the landlord, should have no say in the sale of a private business.

Enright agrees the actual sale should be between the Millers and Ahn. However, even Enright is calling the Millers the new owners, but the current owner says he has not negotiated any deal with anyone for the sale of Chase's.

Ahn said he has been trying to negotiate a long-term lease with the city, like he has had in the past, but the city since November will only keep it month-to-month.

Ahn took over the restaurant about five years ago from Mike Weber. Ahn said he paid \$78,728.17, plus \$8,000 for inventory to Weber.

He said he is willing to sell the restaurant for \$49,000.

"I also bought the equipments and more fixtures. I invested about \$150,000 total," □ Ahn said.

But what he owns and what the city thinks it owns are in dispute.

“The current lease is confusing and vague as to who owns what. What we are willing to do is pay a nominal amount and city would own it and there would be no issue in the future,” Enright said. “The city is only negotiating to resolve the dispute as to who owns what.”

The city has offered Ahn \$5,000 for the fixtures, bar, lights and everything in the commercial kitchen.

Ahn contends about two-thirds of the items in the nearly 3,000-square-foot restaurant belong to him – including the counter, water faucets, bar area and other objects.

Enright and Ahn agree the liquor license belongs to Ahn. It is in the name of the restaurant and cannot be transferred off the site.

Ahn pays the city \$552 in rent each month, plus 5 percent of gross revenue.

The city wants the restaurant to be a bigger moneymaker – to be a place locals visit as well as those on business at the airport, and to possibly be a place where service clubs would meet.