

## Town of Fulton

# Permit granted for future distillery

By *Tristan McGough*  
Special to The Reporter

At its meeting, held jointly with the Fulton Town Board on Feb. 14, the Fulton Planning and Zoning Commission approved a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for a new distillery.

Urim Banushi and Lawrence Butcher II applied for the CUP in anticipation of opening a manufacturing-based vodka distillery on a 5.85-acre parcel zoned RRL and located at 809 E. Mallwood Drive. Both were present to answer questions from residents or board members during a public hearing on the application that opened the meeting.

Now owned by John Kinnett, the property had been the site of the old Newville Middle School. The building was later remodeled and used as a church, but it is now only used for storage.

However, before a single drop gets distilled, the partnership will need to secure both federal and state liquor licenses. Before they can get the licenses, they must get the permit from local officials so they can begin the process of updating the facility and complying with all building and fire codes.

The application to the joint board of the Town of Fulton last week described the business plan for their proposed Copper State Distillery.

"Our plan is to bring back the true heritage of premium vodka that was perfected in Poland as far back as the 11th century," the plan says.

And in good news to area farmers who grow potatoes, the plan says, "We have developed a process for fermenting and distilling premium potato vodka and plan to utilize locally grown potatoes."

"The liquor license is not through us," Town Clerk Connie Zimmerman said. "The state department of revenue will renew the license every year once the annual fee is paid, and a federal license will also need to be obtained."

In an email dated Jan. 4 from Special Agent Jason Lee with the Alcohol & Tobacco Enforcement Unit of the Department of Revenue, what would actually be permitted by the appropriate distillery licenses was spelled-out: "...their manufacturer's or rectifiers' permit authorizes the retail sale of intoxicating liquor that is manufactured or rectified on the premises, for consumption on or off the premises. A manufacturer's or rectifier's permit also authorizes the provision of taste samples, free of charge and in an amount not exceeding a total of 1.5 fluid ounces to any one person, of intoxicating liquor that is manufactured or rectified on the premises, for consumption on the premises."

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## DISTILLERY PROPOSED

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At the podium, Banushi and Butcher declared they are not interested in offering any retail sales on the premises, nor are they going to open a "tasting room." Rather, they plan to distill vodka for wholesale distribution.

"We want to distill premium potato vodka, then supply it to distributors," Butcher said. "Initially, we'll target making 20 cases a week at 12-liter bottles per case."

He said the distillery will employ only four people, with plans to be open four days a week, but never on weekends.

The town's commissioners wanted to know about trucking in and out of the facility, as well as about water, waste disposal and air emissions.

"We don't want to lose emissions, as we try to retain these for the distillation process," Butcher said. "There will only be the regular HVAC and generator system emissions."

"The solid waste we plan to sell for livestock feed or fertilizer," he continued. As for the liquid residuals, these are used by pharmaceutical and cosmetic companies, he said.

As for water, which will be coming from the on-site well, "Once used, we'll put the water into a poly-tank and test it before it goes into the sewer system." They had already met with the sanitary district re-

garding sewage.

It takes, according to Butcher, about five to seven days to ferment vodka, then put it through filter tanks, and after that, distill and chill it before distilling again.

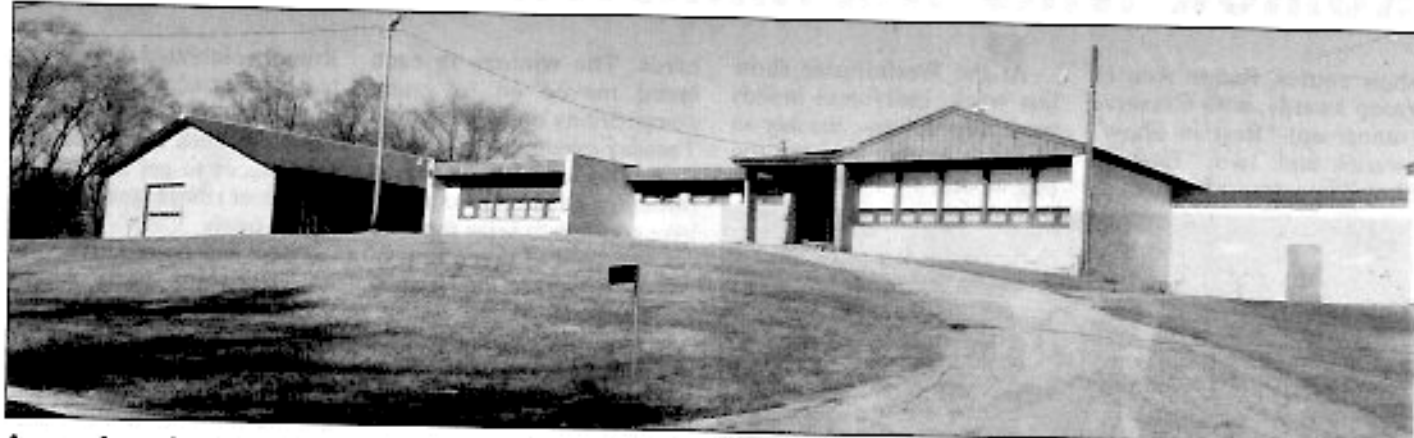
"All in all," Mr. Butcher said, "and depending on conditions, it takes between 10 to 14 days to complete a batch of vodka. Since vodka doesn't age, it will be ready for storage and distribution after that."

The distillery might store up to 300 gallons at a time, but since it takes a while to make a batch, there will be only occasional truck traffic, mainly for distributing the product at intervals or supplying the necessary ingredients, such as potatoes, malt meal and yeast, for upcoming distillates, Butcher said.

Though the distillery's initial target is 20 cases a week, commissioners were curious about what their ultimate target might be.

"30 to 35 cases a week, to be successful," Butcher responded. "Anything beyond that is gravy."

Pressed as to whether they would ever consider expanding their enterprise into a retailing operation, the partners admitted to wanting to open a pub nearby, "But probably at another facility, though there is room for expansion at the distillery itself."



A manufacturing-based vodka distillery has been proposed for a 5.85-acre parcel located at 809 E. Mallwood Drive.

Photo by Stu Bloom

The Planning and Zoning Commission unanimously approved the CUP, with two conditions: the distillery supplying proof of federal and state licensing each year and providing the town an acceptable waste management plan.

The commission's approval means the partners can proceed with their plans.

In a follow-up interview, Butcher said, "We are negotiating an agreement with the owner [of the property] and doing our best to be up and running sometime in July." He declined to disclose any further details regarding contract negotiations.

"We plan to do whatever Fulton and the state requires of us," Butcher said. "We're in process of hiring an architect to do the design. We know we need to provide proper access

and a handicapped accessible bathroom. Plus the whole building must be brought up to code."

Butcher concluded, "We're excited! We'd love to be up and running by end of July, but that's all based on approvals, upgrades and equipment purchases."

Fulton's other business

•In rapid succession, the PZ first recommended and the TB

subsequently approved three Preliminary and Final Certified Survey Maps (CSM) for: Alida Anderson, combining four lots into two; for Eric Zagorski, combining two lots into one; and for Terry Downing and Heidi Pichotta, combining two lots into one.

•Both the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Town Board approved a parking stall maintenance agree-

ment between the town and the Fulton Congregational Church.

•Looking ahead to spring showers, town officials said they want to call residents' attention to an important notice on keeping driveway culverts clear of debris so as to help "prevent flooding over roadways if driveway culverts aren't working properly."