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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE FINAL REPORT ON LIQUOR LAW REFORM

As you're probably already well aware, the government of BC has been undergoing its first major review of our antiquated liquor laws in over two decades, and after holding 65 stakeholder meetings, and receiving 76,255 site visits and 3,587 e-mails over a six-week public consultation period, Parliamentary Secretary John Yap released his highly anticipated final report this past Friday. Find it here. The report contains a total of 73 recommendations that touch on everything from how alcohol is sold and purchased to how it's licensed and distributed, and the Province has announced that it fully supports every one of them.

So just what kind of changes are coming to BC? Well, many of the report's 'big ticket' items were previously released back in November and December, but are worth mentioning again. These include things like liquor sales in grocery stores, the return of happy hour, accompanied minors in pubs, and my personal favourite: liquor sales at farmers' markets. The report also contains a number of new recommendations that are sure to resonate with the drinking public. First of all, the liquor consumption 'holding pens' at the festivals you frequent (otherwise known as 'beer gardens') will soon be a thing of the past. Starting this summer, you should be able to walk around with a pint at events instead of being segregated behind a fence. For those of us who would prefer to drink a \$12 rum and coke instead of a \$9 glass of Canadian when they watch the Canucks at Rogers Arena, you're in luck, because alcohol sales at sporting events will no longer be limited to just beer and wine. And finally, if you're like me, and filling up a growler at a local brewery is how you get your beer, you'll soon have even more choices, as government and private liquor stores will now be permitted to sell and fill growlers.

Speaking of growlers, the report also contains a number of good things for the fine people who labour every day to make the beer we drink. The first of these is the creation of a new craft beer marketing and product-placement strategy for government liquor stores, similar to the one currently used for BC wine. The government also plans to start working with BC's craft brewers to create maps, apps and brochures to develop craft beer tourism, plus it wants to simplify the archaic rules that regulate liquor production and distribution in the province. There's even talk of setting up a quality assurance program for BC Craft beer like the VQA program used by our province's wineries.

At this point, a fair amount remains to be seen about what a number of these recommendations will actually look like when put into place, as several will take a fair amount of time to study before they can be





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implemented. The real test will be in the look of new legislation, policy manuals, license applications and, of course, in how quickly we can start to enjoy the changes announced on Friday. While the province didn't go as far as some of us would have liked and permitted things like public consumption at parks and beaches or liquor sales in corner stores, it's nonetheless pretty amazing to think about how far we've come in such a relatively short amount of time. Consider the following quote from a provincial review of our liquor laws back in 1952, "we do not look with favour on, and very definitely recommend against, the exotic, dimly lighted, voluptuous type of cocktail bar which creates the delusive impression of opulence and social distinction." Think about that the next time you find yourself enjoying happy hour at The Keefer or wandering about in the sun at Folk Fest with a pint of Old Jalopy, or simply having a meal with your kids at your local pub.

After years of window-dressing and baby steps, it looks like we just might finally be getting 21st century liquor laws in BC. Let's drink to that.



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