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The Rise of the 'Night Mayor' in America.

The concept caught fire in Europe and is gaining relevance in large and small cities across the Atlantic.

Mirik Milan has become a kind of city management celebrity.

As Amsterdam's first "night mayor," he's been managing the after-hours economy of the Netherlands capital since 2014. His job seems straightforward and imminently practical — Milan manages relationships in an effort to minimize quality-of-life complaints from residents and boost nighttime business — yet no one else on the European continent was doing it.

The idea quickly began spreading to other European cities. Paris and Toulouse, France, as well as Zurich, Switzerland, each created their own night mayor positions. Last year, Cali, Colombia, became the first Latin American city to get one.

And now, large and small cities in the U.S. have begun to embrace the position as their downtowns have become more populated.

"What happens when you bring a bunch of people into the city center? A lot of them want to go out at night, and other people want to sleep," says Jim Peters, president of the Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI), who has consulted with dozens of cities interested in the idea.

Peters stresses that different cities have different problems and needs, but that all cities should have some common considerations: Should bars all have the same closing times, leading to thousands of people pouring out onto the street at once? When people do leave the bars, how are they getting home? Is there enough lighting for people to walk or bike? Are there enough trash cans to accommodate that number of people in the street?

"This is coming into the 21st century of urban planning. It's not all about buildings, roads, bike lanes. It's about the socializing. It's about what people can do in your city," he says. "You have to plan for people as much as you plan for buildings."

Several U.S. cities are doing just that.

Pittsburgh got its first "nighttime economy coordinator" three years ago, around the time Milan started in Amsterdam. Orlando Fla., recently created a "bar czar" position. Fort Lauderdale, Fla., apportioned \$1.4 million this year for a nighttime management team. And Iowa City appointed its first night mayor in April.

Last week, a New York City Council Committee advanced a proposal to create an Office of Nightlife (headed by a nightlife director) and a Nightlife Advisory Board. The proposal will be voted on by the full council on Aug. 24.

If it passes, it could help solve some of the city's problems preserving small, independent art spaces and nightlife venues, according to Rafael Espinal, the councilmember who introduced the bill.

“NYC is one step closer to bringing nightlife out of the bureaucratic shadows,” Espinal said in a press release after the committee vote. “From DIY venues to nightclubs, this bill accurately reflects the diversity of the NYC nightlife scene.”

Like other cities experiencing rapid neighborhood change and rising rents, New York has been struggling to keep space available for smaller, independent venues, “and [Manhattan] has become kind of sterile [with] just a bunch of high rises now,” says Peters, the RHI president. London has a similar problem that’s causing the city to lose population.

“That’s also really driving this increased interest in night managers,” Peters says. “How do you develop and keep the creative and cultural experiences that people want in a city?”

Of course, that involves balancing the needs of businesses with those of residents. Allison Harnden, Pittsburgh’s current nighttime economy coordinator, says she has spent her first year on the job learning how to manage growing pains of the city’s thriving bars, restaurants and art venues.

“We had growing nightlife that, like most cities, really had no plan. It just happened,” Harnden says. “So suddenly you have neighbors feeling the noise or other kinds of disruption because systems haven’t been put in place.”

Harnden’s first order of business was to look at city codes for outdated and counterproductive laws that may be hurting the nighttime economy. She realized, for example, that the city charges an amusement tax for food and drink served in conjunction with any type of entertainment, even without tickets or a cover charge. So if a restaurant has a piano player, it would be subject to the extra tax.

“I don’t think my businesses are usually aware of all this stuff. So then I have to think about, why was that law created? Does it need to be looked at again?” she says.

In Fort Lauderdale, the goal is speedy solutions.

“I don’t want to have an occupancy issue at a bar and not have anyone able to come out until the following night when there’s no issue,” says City Manager Lee R. Feldman. “We need to have someone available at 1 in the morning to address the issue on the spot.”

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