



THINGS THAT WORK

Could a 'night mayor' awaken Boston's sleepy night life?



CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

A doorman checked a woman's identification outside the Royale and Candibar nightclubs on Tremont Street.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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Boston's reputation for a sleepy, sometimes underwhelming night life has long been a buzzkill for party-starved college students and working professionals. But what if the city had a night life boss?

Major cities across Europe, South America, and the United States have in recent years created night life manager positions — jobs intended to foster night life growth while addressing related issues, such as evening transportation, noise, and public safety.

Boston appeared to take steps in that direction in 2014 when it assembled a temporary task force to tackle night life issues. But the group eventually disbanded after less than two years, and its chief recommendation, later closing times for bars, never materialized.

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The most convincing, common-sense argument for a so-called night life mayor, industry experts and municipal leaders say, boils down to dollars and cents: Night life is a remarkably valuable sector, estimated to generate billions of dollars in economic impact for some cities. So why wouldn't they put at

least one person in charge of monitoring it?

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Proponents say the supervision that night life managers can provide is sorely needed and can make a difference for the many cities that have long overlooked the good and bad of what happens after dark. “We’ve failed in that we’ve never planned around the night,” said Andreina Seijas, a researcher at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design, who has closely studied [urban nighttime policies and economies](#). “If you consider your city just from 9 to 5, you’re limiting yourself and you’re missing out on the other 9 to 5. It’s a huge missed opportunity.”

But there’s more to night life than just partying at bars and nightclubs, eating at restaurants, and attending other cultural and social events, experts say.

“There are thousands, in some cities millions, of people who work at night — doctors, nurses, taxi drivers,” Seijas said. “A robust night life can create more jobs and have positive spillover for cities’ economies.”

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That’s where the night life administrator role comes in. Major cities from [Amsterdam](#), [Paris](#), and [London](#) to [Cali](#), [Colombia](#), to [San Francisco](#), [Pittsburgh](#), and [Orlando](#) have hired an expert to find ways to improve nighttime experiences for businesses, their patrons, and residents alike. [New York](#) recently created the position and plans to fill it soon, while Washington, D.C., is [considering](#) the idea.

The basic idea is for the administrator — sometimes with the support of staff or an advisory commission or board — to unite key stakeholders involved with the industry, gather their input, and use the information to recommend and lobby for changes that could improve night life.

The night life manager could help tackle a host of issues, such as reviewing whether nightclub and bar

closing times should be adjusted or combing through licensing, permitting, and other rules to see if any are outdated. That person may also explore ways to improve response to noise complaints, street lighting, trash pickup, public restroom availability, and transportation access both for partiers and overnight workers.

One of the job's key challenges: finding common ground.

"There are people who want to sleep, people who work at night, and people who want to have fun. We try to find the middle path in all the projects we do," said Mirik Milan, who serves as night mayor in Amsterdam, a job that city created in 2003. "We are really the liaison that connects all sides."

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But can one person, or at best a relatively small group of people, bridge those divides and really make a difference?

Current and former night managers say yes, pointing to their accomplishments as proof.

Pittsburgh, for example, created a nighttime economy coordinator position in 2014, and the current coordinator, Allison Harnden, said she helped oversee the [rollout](#) of nighttime parking meter collection in one popular neighborhood, helping to boost city revenues that are then reinvested in night-life-related public safety and infrastructure needs.

In San Francisco, a night coordinator-led commission has worked to ease permitting for live music, while protecting both residents and venues from conflicts over noise, said Jocelyn Kane, a consultant who was the commission's executive director from 2011 to September.

Outside experts say they believe night managers are more than just a fashionable trend.

The Responsible Hospitality Institute, an organization that aims to help cities with night life issues, has endorsed the night manager concept. As part of its annual summit in February, it plans for the first time to host a one-day [academy](#) offering training for night managers.

The organization's founder and president, Jim Peters, said cities shouldn't expect night managers to solve every night life issue or make major improvements entirely on their own.

"The night mayor is like an orchestra conductor. The conductor has to coordinate with and rely on many people playing many different instruments to make music," Peters said. But that conductor role is the glue that holds it all together, he noted. "An orchestra can't really do much without a conductor."

Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh, in his second major [speech](#) as mayor in 2014, [called night life](#) an important economic issue and [established](#) a late night task force to try to "create the kind of night life that visitors expect in a world-class city."

But the task force was short-lived.

The group [disbanded](#) in late 2015 after making several [recommendations](#).

The biggest idea it offered — extending bar hours — fell flat in the Legislature and was never enacted.

Officials in Walsh's office said they aren't actively considering creating a night life manager position, but are open to the idea.

City Councilor Michelle Wu said she'd like to see Boston consider the concept.

"The real opportunity is unlocking this part of our economy that can create jobs for the people already living in our neighborhoods," she said.

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