

# Locals 'Traumatized' by Chelsea Party Spot Reject Celeb Chef's New Eatery



By [Maya Rajamani](#) | July 13, 2017 3:04pm

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The former Il Bastardo space, at 191 Seventh Ave., between West 21st and 22nd streets. [View Full Caption](#)

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CHELSEA — A celebrity chef hoping to open a pair of eateries in a space formerly occupied by a complaint-plagued restaurant known for its late-night parties got a hostile reception from neighbors who would rather see the space remain vacant than taken over by another boozy venue.

The [now-shuttered](#) Italian restaurant [Il Bastardo](#) at 191 Seventh Ave., between West 21st and 22nd streets, had for years [drawn the ire of neighbors who claimed it was a haven for rowdy, drunken patrons and promoted binge drinking](#) with its “midnight brunch parties” and cocktail specials.

Last month, the [State Liquor Authority](#) revoked the restaurant's liquor license and imposed a \$10,000 fine on its owners, a spokesman for the agency said.

On Tuesday, [Kristin Solenne](#) — who’s been a judge on the Food Network show “Beat Bobby Flay” and has [an upcoming Health & Wellness Channel show](#) — appeared before [Community Board 4](#)’s Business Licenses and Permits committee hoping to secure support for a new liquor license at the space.

“What I’m looking to do is divide it into two different restaurants — California, coastal-inspired cuisine on one side, white-cloth Italian cuisine on the other side,” Solenne told the committee.

Both eateries would be “really nice community restaurants” to which patrons could feel comfortable bringing babies in strollers, she added.

However, residents opposed to seeing another liquor-serving establishment in the space were less than enthused by the chef’s plans.

[“Il Bastardo has been a problem in the neighborhood for five years, with little to no cooperation from management or the owners,”](#) said 100 West 16th Street Block Association president [Paul Groncki](#), saying the neighborhood didn’t need to be “traumatized” by another large restaurant.

“It has been a nightmare for five years,” Chelsea resident Diane Nichols added. “I’m strongly against this application.”

Compounding residents' and committee members' concerns was a past business connection between the Il Bastardo owner and Solenne's husband, Robert Malta.

Malta — a restaurateur involved with eateries including [Bocca di Bacco](#) and [Arte Cafe](#)— once owned another restaurant with Il Bastardo's owner that “no longer exists,” Solenne's attorney Martin Mehler said.

“My husband was not involved in Il Bastardo,” Solenne added. “This would be my operation, and this is what I'm looking to bring to the community.”

While Mehler said the new restaurants would feature “no repetition” of the unruly behavior that plagued Il Bastardo, committee members refused to throw their support behind the chef's application.

“I don't think it's in the public's best interest to have another restaurant in this space,” committee member Inge Ivchenko said.

“This place has been really, really a major problem,” committee member [Christine Berthet](#) added.

The space would be better off vacant than home to another venue with a liquor license, Berthet and several attendees and committee members added.

“The landlord has to learn that this place is not going to be a large liquor operation, [and] they have to learn the hard way,” Berthet said. “Leave it empty for one year, and then they'll get the message.”