

Hours of alcohol sales extended in Gothenburg

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 28 April 2011 19:45 -

Council wants uniformity of hours, sale times similar to those in surrounding towns.

Whether or not to increase hours of alcohol sales in Gothenburg prompted much discussion and testimony over the past three months.

During a final vote of the Gothenburg City Council on April 19, the proposal passed with Jeff Kennedy, Jeff Whiting and Gary Fritch for the proposal and Tim Strauser against.

Because of publication requirements, the law will take effect May 11.

New hours are 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 10 p.m. Sunday.

Fritch said he wrestled with the decision, noting he agrees with residents who testified that excessive alcohol use tears families apart.

However he said the council needed to decide whether extension of hours was a separate issue from alcohol abuse.

“You can’t always legislate people’s morals,” he said.

Fritch said the city needs consistency with hours among businesses that sell alcohol. Consideration of sale hours of surrounding towns is also important, he said.

Before the vote, liquor and convenience stores could begin selling alcohol at noon on Sunday while restaurants and bars could not until 4 p.m.

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City administrator Bruce Clymer shared a survey of hours of surrounding towns which showed Gothenburg is the only community with different hours for different licenses such as beer off-sale and on sale.

Six towns sell alcohol until 1 a.m. Monday through Friday except Farnam that quits at 11 p.m.

All seven have a 1 a.m. closing time on Friday and Saturday nights which Gothenburg currently has.

On Sunday, Lexington, Maxwell and North Platte are open until 1 a.m., Farnam until 11 p.m. and Brady until midnight. Cozad and Maxwell businesses are closed.

Sunday opening times are Lexington, 6 a.m.; Maxwell, Farnam, Brady, 7 a.m. and Gothenburg, 4 p.m.

Fritch also said 70 Nebraska towns allow businesses to sell alcohol until 2 a.m.

He cited statistics from the Internet which show that increased sale hours don't translate into higher drunken driving arrests or accidents.

Strauser said numerous people have requested a public vote on the issue. He asked that the council table the proposal and put it on a ballot.

The council discussed the petition process of collecting signatures to vote on the issue but the majority decided against it.

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Mayor Joyce Hudson reminded members that they are elected to make decisions, noting that it's also the public's right to challenge decisions.

Because increasing sale hours is a sensitive issue, Kennedy said he was comfortable if residents filed a petition to put the issue on the ballot.

"I think it's the public's place to bring it forward and for us to vote how we feel."

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