City Councilman Suggests Passing Container Ordinance

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Public sentiment is ready for a city ordinance which would ban open containers from private vehicles, Councilman Dub Hudson told the Advertiser Friday.

Hudson's remarks were in response to statements made Thursday by members of the local Task Force on Drunk Driving.

The City Council is scheduled to vote on an open container ordinance at its regular meeting Tuesday, but the task force will ask for a delay on the vote. The task force wants to research this and other methods of solving the drunk driving problem.

"I understand they want this postponed while they study it. I think this is a mistake and I think the Council should go ahead and pass the ordinance," Hudson said. "We've been working on it since January. It's ready to go and I think we should go ahead with it."

He suggested anyone opposed to the ordinance, which is based on a similar law in Utah, should attend Tuesday's meeting to air their grievances or provide input and ideas.

At The State Level

State legislators are currently tangling with dozens of bills aimed at the drinking driver. Rep. Ron Gomez has authored an open container bill, which is nearly identical to the one before the City Council. Gomez has been rewriting the bill, but it has not yet been brought up for consideration.

"There's no assurance at all that the open container law (by Gomez) will ever get out of committee," Hudson said. "It's the mood of the city that this type of ordinance is wanted and I think the fact that our representative authored such a bill illustrates that.

"I don't believe there's one person or visitor in Lafayette that can't from one location in the city to another without having a drink in his hand. That's what this ordinance is about."

Some critics have claimed there are enough ordinances geared at the drinking driver already and action should be directed towards enforcement.

"I've been told that for every DWI (driving while intoxicated), there are 10 drinking drivers who are not arrested. Officers can't stop them unless they have probable cause — which means they have to be driving the wrong way on a one-way street or showing some other erratic behavior," Hudson said. "They could be heavily inebriated, pass a corner where a police officer is sitting, drive three blocks and kill somebody."

Chief's Reaction

The councilman said he has discussed the open container proposal with Police Chief James Romero.

"He's indicated it might be hard to enforce, but there's a problem enforcing every law. He indicated it would definitely give police another tool," Hudson said. "We can't ignore it because it might be difficult to enforce."

Some critics may believe police will stop anyone holding a soft drink, he said, but most officers will use "good judgment."

Hudson hopes the ordinance may also help to cut down on teenage drinking.

Because they may be too young to legally patronize bars, many youngsters drink in automobiles.

"Maybe this ordinance could save some youngster's life down the line," Hudson said.