City makes liquor law uniform

By GAYDEN L. COOPER

CROWLEY — Bars, stores, and restaurants all will be selling liquor at the same time on Sundays following action taken at Wednesday night's Crowley City Council meeting.

Although bars must still close at 2 a.m. on Sundays, the council unanimously adopted an ordinance that not only makes the Sunday closing laws applicable to all liquor licensees, but further allows them to reopen later during the day to sell hard liquor.

The new ordinance will become effective July 9.

The council also adopted an amended ordinance for an occupational license tax, which narrowly missed being tabled. The third and final public hearing on the tax was held prior to the council's regular meeting.

Prior to its regularly scheduled meeting, the council also held a public hearing on passing a fee for sewerage treatment. The council is under order from the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6, in Dallas to improve its sewerage system.

The change in the Sunday closing law first came about almost a year ago, said Mayor Robert L. Istre, when bar and lounge owners approached the council protesting the existing law as unfair. They claimed it favored restaurant and store owners, although the bar owners had to purchase a more expensive liquor license, Istre said.

That law forced the bars to close at 2 a.m. and remain closed throughout the day, he explained. Restaurants and stores, while not allowed to sell hard liquor were allowed, however, to sell beer and wines with a limited alcohol content.

Bar owners felt they also should be allowed to sell liquor during the day.

The new law states that after closing at 2 a.m. Sundays, all liquor licensees may reopen at 11 a.m. and close at midnight, and be allowed to sell hard liquor.

When first proposed, the ordinance allowed only bars to sell hard liquor during those hours, but it was amended to include all liquor licenses after local grocery store owners protested during the public hearing held prior to the council meeting.

"I'm a grocery store owner and . . . beings as they (the bar owners) could sell hard liquor, I felt I should be able to sell hard liquor also," Norma Weekley told The Advertiser after the meeting. Weekley is the owner of P&L Foot Mart in Crowley.

In accepting the occupational license tax, the ordinance was first amended to charge a flat fee of $50 to all professionals instead of the floating scale first proposed.

This came after it was almost tabled in a motion made by Councilwoman Isabella DelaHoussaye. She said that since she understood there was some controversy over the legality of the ordinance, perhaps it should be tabled until the question was worked out.

Like other city and parish bodies in the state however, the council is under a July 1 deadline if it wants to pass the law.

"We could stand to lose $250,000 in revenues if we don't pass this in the next three weeks," the mayor said.

City attorney Tom Regan added that the ordinance before the council was the same one proposed by the state Legislature and passed by numerous surrounding municipalities.

DelaHoussaye then withdrew her motion and instead proposed the amendment for a flat $50 fee. The amendment will prevent the city from having to audit professionals as they would have had to do under the sliding scale rate.

It also resolved what Istre said was the only objection made by the professionals present at the public hearings: That they did not want to be audited.

The ordinance passed 8-1, with the only "nay" vote from Councilman Chris John.