City strengthens nuisance laws

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LAFAYETTE — Bars, lounges and retail stores here are more susceptible to having their permits revoked, because of a recent change in the city’s public nuisance laws and a stronger effort by city police to prevent the sale of alcohol to minors.

The police department is working diligently to arrest people who sell liquor to minors, said Police Chief Gary Copes.

Eight businesses will appear before the City Council at 2 p.m. Thursday for a hearing to determine if their permits should be suspended or revoked because alcohol was sold to minors.

Copes said the police send juveniles to businesses to try to purchase liquor, and if alcohol is sold to them an arrest of the employee is made immediately.

The new laws that were passed Tuesday by the City Council will give the police more time to deal with situations involving minors, said Copes.

Bars and lounges also may be closed if five arrests are made over a year at the establishments for drug-related or prostitution-related activity, and if three violent felony crimes are committed on the premises within a year. Also, establishments may be closed if reports are filed that 12 disturbances occurred within a year.

Whenever a liquor license may be revoked, the business has a chance to have a hearing before the council, Copes said.

When a permitted business is declared a public nuisance, the business will be closed and padlocked by the police chief for one year, according to the law.

Carl Brown, manager of The Keg Inc., a bar located in an area known as the Strip, said he does not think the change in the number of disturbances from 36 to 12 is fair.

“There might be 12 disturbances in one night,” he said. “And those disturbances might not happen on my property. They may happen in the street.”

Most of the noise-related disturbances come from people who play loud music on their car radios in the street, so it is unfair to blame the bar owners, he said.

There is also a problem with minors trying to get into bars at the Strip, said Brown.

Council President F.V. “Pappy” Landry said the bar owners had their chance to give their input, and the council made restrictions where necessary.

“Personally, I think the number of disturbances is still too high,” he said. “These offenses are severe.”

Landry said he receives calls daily from people who live around the Strip, who say they can’t rest until about 2 a.m., after the bars have closed.

“This is a friendly country town,” said Landry. “People ought to have respect for others instead of annoying them.”