CITY COUNCIL POSTPONES ACTION AGAIN

2 A.M. Closing Law Still Undecided

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The Lafayette City Council again tabled a controversial proposal which would prohibit the sale of alcohol from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. and would force lounges to shut down during those hours. It postponed a decision last week in order to receive the recommendations of an Intergovernmental Task Force on Drunk Driving. That task force recommended a parishwide 2 a.m. closing law.

But Council members said they still don’t have enough information to make a decision. The matter may come up again in two weeks.

Councilman W.M. “Dub” Hudson noted that it seems like the Council just continues to postpone a decision on a hot issue.

But he said he is not in a position to “logically and intelligently” vote on it.

Get Drunks Off The Road

“I personally have some problems with what we’re trying to do here,” Hudson commented. He noted that the aim is to get the drinking driver off the road, but there are many facets to achieving that goal.

A 2 a.m. closing law, he said, may need some back-up laws, such as one which would prohibit “go-cups,” plastic containers which allow patrons to leave lounges with alcoholic beverages.

Hudson said he also has some questions about whether liquor sales should be stopped at 2 a.m. or whether patrons should be forced to leave a lounge or business at that time.

In a letter to the Council, Mayor Duval Lastrapes urged the adoption of the 2 a.m. closing law.

“I would suggest one amendment to the ordinance and that would state, in clarifying a point, that the sale of alcoholic beverages must stop at 2 a.m., but in the case of bars and lounges, patrons must be clear of the premises by 2:30 a.m.,” he said.

Some bar owners, however, have expressed concern about forcing patrons onto the highways at a specified time.

Mike Schwartz, an owner of Rimrock, told The Advertiser yesterday such a move could be dangerous. “Stopping the sale of alcohol at 2 o’clock is fine...Bars could all, in good spirit, offer coffee and any assistance to people who have a problem,” he said.

But making a lounge empty by 2:30 a.m., he said, “would be like ending a football game and everybody leaving the stadium drunk.”

In his letter, Lastrapes stressed the importance of the administration’s recommendation that “all establishments which sell alcoholic beverages, and not just bars and lounges, must cease the sale of alcoholic beverages at 2 a.m. under this ordinance. This ordinance will require the closure of those places whose primary business is the sale of alcoholic beverages and for other establishments, that section of their establishment must be closed off.”

A Chance To Speak

Some citizens and business owners who attended yesterday’s meeting seemed upset because they did not have a chance to voice their opinions at that time.

After some discussion, it was decided that members of a local bar owner’s association would meet within a week and formulate a written recommendation for the Council to consider before the issue is placed back on the table.

Citizens were urged to submit their

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2 a.m. Closing Law
Delayed Again

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opinions in writing to City Clerk Glenn Duhon, who will then distribute them among the Council members.

A public hearing is always held before a final vote on any ordinance.

On a related matter, the Council approved the city’s application to the State Highway Safety Commission for a grant for a proposed program to deter drunk drivers, although Councilmen expressed some concern about it.

One of the major problems was the issue of long-term funding. But Al Thierry, director of Community Affairs, said the details of the program are now being worked out and it is hoped that the program can be made self-sustaining.

The Council also approved a new law which strengthens the penalties for persons convicted of selling liquor to minors. In the past, violators paid fines, but the new ordinance calls for the suspension of the violator’s liquor license.

Councilman Benny Ritchey believed that that ordinance as written affects any minor allowed on the premises of a store which sells liquor, such as a convenience store. City Attorney Ed McGlasson will review the ordinance and if the Council determines it needs to be clarified at a later date, it can be amended by a majority vote.