The Opelousas City Council is expected to decide at noon Friday whether sales of liquor and beer should be prohibited during early-morning hours.

The St. Landry Parish Police Jury, along with several surrounding towns and parishes, passed similar ordinances recently, but Opelousas has no such restrictions.

The jury’s action leaves the city with no choice but to pass the law, because otherwise Opelousas could become a “little Las Vegas,” Mayor Tom Edwards said.

He said that late-night drinkers from the parish and surrounding areas which have laws against early-morning sales will be drawn to Opelousas unless the city enacts its own ordinance.

“This past Saturday we had people from all over,” he said. “Lafayette, Ville Platte, Eunice, everywhere.”

A 2 a.m. restriction would be the proper time to end sales, he said. But some consideration also is being given to ending sales later on weekend nights, he said.

“It needs to be done,” he said. “It’s a step in the right direction.”

Edwards said, however, that a ban on early-morning liquor and beer sales won’t eliminate the problem of drunken driving.

He said only one alcohol-related death occurred after 2 a.m. between January and October 1982. The peak time for alcohol-related deaths is between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m., he said.

Edwards said more-stringent laws are needed to punish intoxicated drivers. In addition, he said, the state should consider raising the legal drinking age.

“Traffic deaths are being caused by young people,” he said. “Many of them can’t afford to go to bars, and a lot of their drinking takes place in homes.”

He said he plans to meet with the area legislative delegation to discuss laws to penalize drunken drivers.

Edwards said the proposed law for restricting alcoholic beverage sales has kicked up a furor among bar owners.

“It’s been very controversial since I suggested it seven weeks ago,” he said.

But he said a local radio station poll of 250 people revealed that about 61 percent of the respondents favored a 2 a.m. restriction.

Edwards said he isn’t sure what the council will decide, although he believes one councilman, at-large member Vernon Schwartzenburg, will recuse himself from voting because his son-in-law owns a liquor establishment.