2 councilmen say Opelousas' new liquor law meaningless

Acadiana bureau

OPELOUSAS — You can still drink all night long in Opelousas now that the City Council has passed what two councilmen called a meaningless ordinance banning liquor sales, but not consumption, in the city after 2:30 a.m.

The council met at noon Friday to vote on a proposed city ordinance to close bars at 2 a.m. The St. Landry Parish Police Jury passed a 2 a.m. closing law recently.

The council defeated a 2 a.m. closing law by a 3-2 vote with Councilmen Mike Thibodeaux, Charles Hudson and Lewis Butler voting against it and Ryan Duplechain and Sherman Stanford voting for it. A substitute motion by Stanford to close bars at 2:30 also was defeated, as was another motion by him banning the use of alcohol on bar premises after 2:30.

Duplechain and Stanford said after the meeting that the new ordinance will mean little or nothing.

“Customers can buy 10 drinks at 2:29 and then buy ice for the rest of the night. The bars can still sell ice,” Stanford said. “The law means nothing and establishes nothing."

“Bars will be open all night,” Duplechain said. “They will no longer be able to sell alcohol after 2:30, but they will be open and the ban on liquor sales will be hard to enforce.”

Mayor Tom Edwards said he was surprised at the way voting went. The mayor had said earlier in the week that he thought the 2 a.m. closing law would pass.

If it didn’t, Edwards predicted, Opelousas would become “a little Las Vegas attracting late-night drinkers from surrounding parishes,” including the rest of St. Landry, where the 2 a.m. closing law has passed.

The Opelousas Ministerial Alliance asked the Police Jury and City Council to pass the 2 a.m. closing law, saying it will help reduce highway deaths caused by drunk drivers.

But statistics released by Troop K of the state police indicate that most deaths and injuries caused by drunk drivers occur between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. Msgr. Guy Lemoine, a member of the ministerial alliance, expressed disappointment Friday at the outcome of the voting.

“I think it’s a sad day. The City Council did not act in harmony with the population and politicians of south-central Louisiana in their efforts to work for the improved safety of our citizens. Instead it gave in to local protest of a small few, including one of its own members, just for the sake of a few extra bucks,” Lemoine said.