St. Martinville City Council Votes To Close City Bars

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ST. MARTINVILLE — If the St. Martinville City Council has its way, bars in the city and bars in the parish will all close at the same time.

The Council last night adopted a resolution requesting that the St. Martin Parish Police Jury and the St. Martinville City Council work together on a curfew for businesses that serve alcoholic beverages.

The resolution states that a curfew for lounges and liquor stores in the city should be 2 a.m. on Monday through Friday with a 3 a.m. curfew on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. The resolution further requests that a similar curfew be adopted by the St. Martin Parish Police Jury so businesses within St. Martinville would not be hurt by having the curfew within the city limits as opposed to parish wide.

The Police Jury meets tonight and may take action on the matter.

Proponents of the curfew stated at a public hearing held last week that drug dealing, fights, disturbances of the peace, and drunken driving were the result of not having a curfew for the city's lounges. Opponents of the closure stated that the problems arose from the people on the streets of the city, not the people who frequented their establishments. They also stated that closing the city's lounges would only result in the citizens going to lounges in the other parts of the parish.

Last night, St. Martinville Police Chief Jerry Curry recommended that the city's lounges be closed at 2 a.m. Monday through Friday and at 3 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

Eddie Guidry, who represents at least three bar owners, presented the Council with a petition with about 1,300 signatures of people who are against the bar curfew. Council member Zerben J. Champagne asked how many of the people on the petition are citizens from St. Martinville after he examined the petition. Champagne also noted that at least ten of the signatures were from the same family. Guidry said, "There will be discrepancies."

"If a curfew is established in St. Martinville, the city's citizens will be forced to drive to Lafayette to drink and they will spend their money there. We will be taking money out of the city's and the bar owner's pockets," Guidry said.

Guidry also stated that a vote of the city's citizens would prove that the majority of them are against the measure.

When Guidry said that the measure was unfair because it only affected bar owners, Champagne said that any establishment selling alcoholic beverages would be affected.

Guidry recommended that the Council delay action until a meeting with the Police Jury. "Rushing into this and jamming it down the people's throat is the wrong way," Guidry said.

"We have no assurance that the parish will go along with this," said Council member A. Leo Thomas. "Breaux Bridge enacted their curfew in 1976 and they're still alone in the parish. Let the people contact their police jurors."

"We can wait on the Police Jury, the Police Jury can wait on the state, and the state can wait on the United States. Still nothing will be settled in St. Martinville," said Joseph "Sing" Bonin.

The Council unanimously accepted the resolution stating that matter be presented at tonight's St. Martin Parish Police Jury meeting.

Also at last night's meeting, Mayor Earl "Mac" Willis asked the Council members to tell their constituents that their utility bills will be approximately 56 per cent higher this month as a result of an increase enacted by Gulf State Utilities.