

Businesses oppose alcohol courses for part-time help

By Pierre Comtois, Correspondent

Nashoba Publishing Article Tavern League Pushes Responsible Serving

Groton, MA -- Selectmen decided to return a draft liquor policy for more work after objections from some local businesses that one of its provisions was too broad.

The board met at a public hearing to review a draft of the proposed policy. Some business owners attending the meeting questioned a provision that would require all of their employees who might have anything to do with handling alcoholic beverages, to be formally trained in alcohol management or take a server training course called TIPS (Training for Intervention Procedures).

Chief of Police Donald Palma, who attended the Aug. 18 hearing, said to be TIPS trained an employee must take a course lasting about four hours, for which their employers must pay expenses.

However, many of the lower-level employees of local restaurants were seasonal or come and go too frequently to make training them worthwhile, selectmen were told.

Instead, business owners suggested that only bartenders, managers and other more enduringly employed workers be trained and they could then supervise the more transient and temporary employees.

To do otherwise, they suggested, would present a hardship on business owners.

The formal liquor policy was suggested, and the draft drawn up, after administrative secretary Patrice Garvin discovered that the town had no real liquor policy.

The proposed draft discussed Monday night was based on information Garvin had gathered from other towns. The policy is intended to make the liquor license application easier for local businesses and not more difficult, Garvin said.

Drawing up the new measures, Palma said, "was in keeping with the proactive policy the board is taking it's a wise decision."

Besides the training aspect of the proposed policy, the document also seeks to regulate "carry in" practices, in which "patrons are allowed to carry in only wine and beer for personal consumption."

In doing so, patrons bringing their own liquor are only allowed to do so at a full-service restaurant and must be ordering food when they go. Only employees 18 years of age or older will be allowed to wait on customers with carry-in liquor.

The business people received some support from Palma on low-level employees when the chief admitted that they had given the board "something to ponder."

In addition to concerns about the training of paid staff, others wondered how the new policy would be applied to one-day liquor licenses and whether local clergy would have to undergo TIPS training if a local church wanted to hold a picnic.

Both questions persuaded selectmen that more work had to be done on the policy and continued the public hearing until their meeting of Sept. 8 for further deliberation.

Also at their Aug. 18 meeting, the Board of Selectmen voted to appoint Steve Webber to the Bylaw Review Committee; David Melpignano to the Cable Advisory Committee; and FinCom member Jay Prager to the schools' Think Tank Committee.