

City Passes Ordinance: No One Under 21 Allowed in Bars

From the University of Central Missouri school paper.

WARRENSBURG, Mo. -- City Council has adopted, by unanimous vote, the Chapter 3 ordinance that will keep people under the age of 21 from entering alcohol-serving establishments.

The ordinance will go into effect March 12, 2008, a date that was changed from Jan.12 to allow businesses 90 days to comply with new regulations and licensing procedures.

The vote came after a lengthy hearing Monday night, in which club owners and citizens had the chance to speak for or against the ordinance.

Despite inclement weather conditions, the City Hall annex on Burkharth Road was full, with several people huddled at the back or waiting outside the conference, awaiting the decision of Council.

Jeff Hancock, city manager, made a presentation outlining the Council's actions and objectives, since its last meeting Nov.22.

Hancock said Council members, city staff and mayor Don Nimmer met with Warrensburg Partners in Prevention (WAPIP) staff, the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street's Board of Directors, and UCM students at the University Student Government Forum Dec.5.

Hancock emphasized that the city's two main objectives are the "implementation of an effective strategy to reduce the number of alcohol-related crimes, particularly in the Pine Street district," and enforcing Chapter 3 to ensure the public's safety and health.

Hancock said that since Dec.6, 18 responses were sent to the city through its Web site, with a majority of 14 in favor of raising the entry age to 21, one against and three that offered suggestions, but did not express a stance either way.

Hancock said the responses centered around people's concern for safety and how the incidents on Pine Street damage the city's "image."

"Reasons cited by those in favor indicated concern about the ease of minors' consumption of alcohol in the Pine Street entertainment district, the increasing danger and violence, the irresponsible nature of bar owners in the district, the fear of going downtown because of crime, and the dislike for the reputation of a 'party town.'"

Among those who sent in electronic responses to the new age restriction, Pastor Jerry Basye, from the First Christian Church, said he had observed violence in Pine Street, even during the short time he has lived in Warrensburg.

"I want to urge [the Council] to back the amending of ch. 3... In the short time I've been here, there have been two very ugly situations that were riots," wrote Basye. "Our law enforcement people believe amending Chapter 3 is of vital importance. I agree and stand behind them."