

## County restricts alcohol sales while City disapproves liquor license transfer

Written by By Deswood Tome Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 12 January 2018 07:41

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The McKinley County Board of Commissioners voted Jan. 9 to restrict operating hours of liquor retail sales in the county.

The ordinance will restrict hours of sale to 10 am from Monday through Saturday going forward. Currently, liquor is sold in some stores in the county as early as 7 am.

The action taken is the first reading of the proposed ordinance. It now passes to the Jan. 23 commission meeting for adoption.

The ordinance cites the New Mexico Liquor Control Act, which gives counties a local option to restrict hours of sale of alcoholic beverages.

Commission Chair Genevieve Jackson, after being elected as the new chairperson, asked for public comment on the action. No one offered.

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The Gallup City Council also met Jan. 9, starting their meeting at 6 pm, and also discussed alcohol sales in the area. A proposed liquor license transfer from the shuttered El Dorado Restaurant and Lounge to the Allsup's convenience store, 112 Arnold St., was on the agenda for the council's vote.

The potential for this transfer to increase alcohol sales in the city proved a controversial topic.

Gallup Deputy Police Chief Franklin Boyd gave statistics to the City Council. The Gallup Police Department received 58,615 calls for service in 2017. City Councilor Yogash Kumar pointed to the significance of this number, considering that the city's population is only 24,000 residents.

On the other side of the debate, George Banister, Allsup's business director, pushed in favor of the transfer. Allsup's, the New Mexico based convenient store, started in Roswell in 1956. Of the 318 stores statewide, 280 sell liquor.

Banister assured the council that Allsup's employees are trained to follow rules and laws as it comes to liquor sales.

"I'll give you an example," Banister said. "Anyone who sells liquor to a customer not 21 years of age they are fired immediately. Same for selling to someone under the influence. If we don't follow the rules we stand to lose the license."

Liquor products are kept in glass sales cabinets and are only accessible by Allsup's employees.

Louis Maldonado was not convinced by Banister's promises.

Maldonado is against adding another store that sells liquor products, and testified as such before the council. "Adding one more [vendor] cannot be considered an improvement," he said.

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“Gallup has been ‘drunk city’ long before Mayor Munoz named Gallup ‘drunk city’,” Maldonado said.

Stagecoach Elementary Principal Shannon McFarland also gave her concerns, citing the issue of alcohol sales near schools.

“I had too many times parents picking up children who [arrived] under the influence,” McFarland said. “Keep our little guys safe—especially when there’s such a high substance abuse. It will [make] alcohol more readily accessible.”

City Council members cited a range of concerns about the topic: from the number of liquor licenses already in Gallup, to locations of sales, high statistics of alcohol related incidents and crimes, and health concerns.

In the end, the City Council voted unanimously against approving the transfer.

***By Deswood Tome***

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