

County starts work on voters' mandate supporting liquor tax

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 06 December 2019 09:45



Vote to come in December

The McKinley County Board of Commissioners heard a presentation regarding a new ordinance involving the Liquor Excise Tax at their Nov. 19 meeting.

“The ordinance was voted for during the Nov. 5 election,” Lori Parra, director of the McKinley County Community Services Department, said. “This ordinance is in effect for three years from the approval date.”

County Attorney Doug Decker specified the effective date of the ordinance will be March 1, 2020 if adopted as written.

The ballot asked voters if they think McKinley County should continue to impose the Liquor Excise Tax at the maximum amount of six percent, as allowed by state law.

The tax revenue would then be used for the purpose of funding education programs and the prevention and treatment of alcoholism and drug abuse in McKinley County, according to the ballot.

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In a 2018 study, the New Mexico Department of Health found that increasing the Liquor Excise Tax has been shown to decrease drinking, particularly with underage drinkers.

Seventy-nine percent of votes were for the ordinance and 21 percent were against it, Decker said.

Then he turned his attention to how to make the ordinance a reality.

"We have to show continuous existence of this ordinance," Decker said. "We have to go to the elector at least every three years. We have to continue it since its inception when we did qualify for it after the Finance and Administration Department and Tax and Revenue Board presented the tax to us."

The board used to vote on the ordinance every two years, Decker said. However, the adoption of the Local Election Act put the ordinance on the ballot every three years, since local elections were moved to Nov. of odd-numbered years.

Decker said the county has to publish an 'intent-to-adopt' of the ordinance before adopting it, meaning the county has to have enough time to inform voters the commission is going to vote on whether to keep the Liquor Excise Tax in place.

There was no public comment given in support of, or against the ordinance during the meeting.

Decker said the county commission would be able to set the rate of the Liquor Excise Tax when it proposes the question on the ballot.

"This gives us enough time to get the election results copy, the ordinance copy, and send it to Tax and Revenue, because we have to send it in 90 days before the effective date," Decker said.

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The earliest date the county can send the ordinance to Tax and Revenue for approval is in December. The county is planning to vote on adopting the ordinance at their Dec. 3 meeting.

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