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2-2 vote stops extended hours for Bronson bar



Dorothy McKenzie speaks to the Bronson Town Council on Monday night (Dec. 19).

**Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison
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BRONSON --
McKenzie's Four Corners Bar on the southwest corner of

Thrasher Drive (State Road 24) and Hathaway Avenue (U.S. Alt. 27) in Bronson will close at midnight like it always does – even on New Year's Eve (leading into New Years Day) 2016-17.

A 2-2 vote on Monday night (Dec. 19) reflects that four members of the Bronson Town Council were unable to reach agreement on a motion by Town Councilwoman Katie Parks, seconded by Councilman Jason Hunt, to extend the hours to 2 a.m.

Dorothy "Dottie" McKenzie and James Cothron of the bar spoke with Mayor Bruce Greenlee, Vice Mayor Beatrice Roberts and Town Council members Parks and Hunt about why McKenzie and Cothron believed the hours should be extended. Greenlee and Roberts voted against extending the hours.

Bronson Town Councilman Aaron Edmondson was absent from the regular meeting.



(from left) Town Councilwoman Katie Parks, Mayor Bruce Greenlee, Vice Mayor Beatrice Roberts and Town Councilman Jason Hunt tend to business on Monday night.

When a motion is made and the vote is a tie, the motion dies as a result of the lack of a majority vote.

McKenzie said she believes that as a result of neighboring area bars, like in Fanning Springs,

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Cedar Key, Gainesville and Ocala being able to stay open until 2 a.m., some patrons leave the Bronson bar and go there. Rather than focusing on the idea of keeping these patrons' business in Bronson from an economic perspective, McKenzie said she again stressed on the idea of people drinking at her bar being more safe than at some out-of-town bar.

As she has said to this Town Council as she has said in years past to previous Bronson leaders when she attempted to extend bar hours, people driving as many as 80 miles roundtrip rather than five to 10 miles increases their odds for a traffic accident.

She also asserted that by the drinkers leaving her bar, going to some other city's bar and then returning to Bronson, increases the danger to those drivers and other drivers on the roads more than if the people who imbibe had just continued their drinking at Bronson.

McKenzie also said she has taken intoxicated bar patrons home from her bar, when this is unlikely to happen when a person is from Bronson and they are drinking in some other municipality. Cothron said he has even gone back to those patrons' homes to bring them back to the bar to pick up the vehicles they had parked the nights before.

After McKenzie indicated that she is hearing the same refusal as before, Mayor Greenlee said this was his first experience with McKenzie asking for extended hours.

Mayor Greenlee said that perhaps when there is a full Town Council present, and if McKenzie asks for a specific date for an event -- like New Year's Eve -- for an extension of hours, then she may have better odds of success. The mayor was quick to mention that he is not saying he would change his vote, but that potential exists.

Cothron, who was accompanied by his dog Missy, said the Bronson Town Council has never helped McKenzie's Four Corners Bar.

McKenzie told the Town Council, as she has in previous visits to the Dogan Cobb Municipal Building for Town Council meetings in years gone by, there was a time when her bar was open 24-hours, with a one-hour cleanup time. She went on to say the mayor and Town Council back then asked her to cut the hours back to midnight, and she agreed, allegedly conditioned on the idea of extending hours again in the future. She said the shooting and stabbing incidents had become too plentiful, and that is why she agreed.

She said that deal to cut back on hours of operation was on "a handshake agreement." Mayor Greenlee said he must depend on written records rather than a verbal report of such an agreement made years ago.

The mayor reminded McKenzie and Cothron that they can return with another request when there is a full council present, and he suggested that perhaps if an event was given extended hours and that did not cause any issues, then it could be the start of moving toward 2 a.m. as a closing time in the future for McKenzie's Four Corners Bar.

In the meantime, though, the Town of Bronson ordinances call for a midnight shutdown.