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Chiefland leaders vote 3-2 to keep Sunday alcohol sales ban



Mayor Betty Walker, seen here at the meeting on Monday night (July 9) seconded the motion to revise the current law, which would have allowed alcoholic beverages to be sold in Chiefland on Sundays.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © July 11, 2018 at 12:08 p.m.

CHIEFLAND -- Having waited too long to poll the voters of Chiefland via a straw ballot on the question of whether the city government should allow the sale of alcoholic beverages on Sundays, the Chiefland City Commission voted 3-2 Monday night (July 9) to retain its "blue law" stance in that regard.

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Vice Mayor Chris Jones



City Commissioner Donald Lawrence

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City Commissioner Rollin Hudson



City Commissioner Teresa Barron

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Anna and Tim West are seen in the audience Monday night. Tim West is running against Teresa Barron in the upcoming city election. West said he would have voted in favor of allowing alcoholic beverages to be sold on Sunday in Chiefland. If Mayor Walker and Vice Mayor Jones maintain their current choices in that regard, and if West is elected and the question is posed to the City Commission again, then the local law could be amended to allow sale of that type of beverage in the city limits on Sundays.

Mayor Betty Walker introduced the potential to revise the city's law that prohibits the sale of alcohol.

After she delivered a relatively strong set of reasons to approve it, as well as adding commentary on the eight Internet Cafés in the city limits that allow gambling 24-hours-a-day, Vice Mayor Chris Jones made a cogent argument in favor of changing the ordinance too.

Meanwhile, City Commissioner Donald Lawrence, the newest City Commission member who was appointed to his position after the tragic death of Mayor M. Teal Pomeroy, gave his reasons for voting against the possible change. Lawrence is up for reelection, but no person qualified in time to challenge him on the ballot.

City commissioners Teresa Barron and Rollin Hudson stayed silent on the issue on Monday night, however after a Jones-Walker motion to adopt the change, it was a Lawrence-Barron-Hudson vote that shot down the proposal.

There was some public input on the matter as well Monday night, although as has become the custom in Chiefland, the speakers addressed the City Commission from

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their seats in the audience.

The next night, during the regular meeting of the Williston City Council, that city's leaders required public input to be from the podium and a well-lit clock started when the speaker began. The limit for public input during that section of that city's agenda is five minutes.

Meanwhile on Monday in Chiefland, Mayor Walker said that the people who gamble on Easter, Christmas and on any Sunday at the eight Internet cafés in Chiefland are no better than a person who may want to purchase or consume alcohol at an establishment in the city. Besides, she added, currently there is only the Chiefland Billiards where a person can sit and drink alcohol, she said.

If people want to buy alcoholic beverages on Sunday, they can just drive out of Chiefland and buy it and then return to the city, Walker said. The only thing this continuation of that law in Chiefland is doing, other than causing a minor inconvenience for some people, is causing any chain restaurant like Applebee's or Beef 'O' Brady's or Red Lobster, etc., to skip over even considering Chiefland as a place to build their next restaurant.

Walker said she prefers to not have to keep raising the millage on ad valorem property taxes in the city, and one way to help growth in the city would be to allow Sunday sales of alcoholic beverages.

If the residents and visitors of Chiefland want the city to continue sustaining the level of service that exists today as the city goes into the future, then the city needs to add more business interests, Walker said. However, she added, if people want the status quo to go unchanged, then there is that option.

"If we want to stay in this cowboy town like this forever," Walker said, "then we will be here – riding in the same rut, telling him (the metaphorical horse of the economy) to get up. He ain't getting nowhere."

Betty Anderson of Chiefland spoke in favor of the city revising its ban against alcoholic beverage sales on Sundays.

She said she has worked in restaurants in Pasco County, where after 1 p.m. on Sunday the restaurant could serve beer or wine.

"I see nothing wrong with that," Anderson said. "All we are doing is lining the pockets of who owns the convenience stores, or whatever, outside of the city limits."

Mayor Walker added that the city needs to take progressive steps toward more growth. As it is, the city fails to pay its police officers enough for them to stay. Walker said they obtain their training in Chiefland and then they leave for a higher paying municipality or county.

Walker said the same is true for the employees in the city's water department and its wastewater department too.

The mayor added that it was her opinion that most of the anti-Sunday alcohol sales faction is from people who do not live in the city limits, and she took it a step further to surmise that those folks may be "closet drinkers."

City Attorney Norm D. Fugate explained to the City Commission that it could have placed a poll question on the city election ballot, however it is too late now to change the

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ballots for the city election. The question would be for voters to say if they favor alcoholic beverage sales on Sundays.

Hal Lyons, a principal in the development of Strawberry Fields For RVers – one of two RV parks currently under construction in the city limits, mentioned to the City Commission that the prohibition against alcohol in the United States was overturned in 1933.

“And most blue laws throughout the United States were repealed in the ‘60s,” Lyons added, “and we’re (in Chiefland) still operating under partial-Prohibition here. We’ve got to get up to speed.”

Vice Mayor Jones said Chiefland’s growth is abysmal. He said Gilchrist County, Williston and other areas are growing.

“I think we’re staying in the Stone Ages,” Jones said.

He thinks the city should allow the sales of alcoholic beverages on Sundays, at least after 1 p.m. or 2 p.m.

Jones said he could care less if a bar were to open or reopen in Chiefland. His vision is more toward chain restaurants that sell alcoholic beverages as an item on their menu.

Jones said he believes the law enforcement leadership at the Chiefland Police Department is able to cope with the addition of one more day of alcoholic beverage sales during the week.

“I think we are losing out by keeping the stance that we have right now,” Vice Mayor Jones said.

City Commissioner Donald Lawrence led the opposition to the change in the ordinance.

Lawrence said he knows the change will come at some point, however he is “from the old school.”

“I’ve seen it (alcohol) destroy people,” Lawrence said. “I’ve been in education all my life. It has destroyed people.”

Lawrence said he recognizes that the city budget needs a stronger revenue stream that would occur from more business interests making this city their home.

He noted his appreciation for the work by the CPD and Chief Scott Anderson.

Most people in America understand that government entities can’t legislate morality.

Vice Mayor Jones took issue with Lawrence’s presumption that adding a day of sales would change any person in regard to them being destroyed by alcohol or other drugs.

Government prohibiting sales of alcohol on a day is not a guarantee that such a person will not destroy himself or herself with alcohol, other drugs or other vices, Jones said.

While Barron and Hudson were silent except for their votes against the change that night, they did respond to questions on the telephone on Tuesday afternoon.

Barron said she is grateful for Commissioner Lawrence making his statement that he felt that in good conscience he could not vote in favor of it. Barron voted “No,” she said, along similar lines as what Lawrence expressed.

She felt her Christian values led her to vote “No.”

“I just could not vote ‘Yes,’” she said.

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Commissioner Hudson said his friend the late Mayor Pomeroy would always vote “No” on this question. Pomeroy owned a bar for a time, Hudson said, but even if he owned a bar and would lose revenue, Pomeroy would vote “No.”

When Mayor Pomeroy was on the City Council he was adamant about keeping this ordinance intact.

Hudson said he voted “No” because while he believes that he is progressive and is in favor of some change, this is not a matter he believes should be changed in Chiefland at this time.

His recent trip to Washington, D.C., Hudson said, reminded him that there are some things that should remain constant – like the ideals of the Founding Fathers.

As for alcoholic beverage sales on Sunday in Chiefland, Commissioner Hudson said he just does not feel like he needed to vote in favor of it. Hudson said he thinks he voted as the majority of his constituents in the city would want him to vote in this regard.

Tim West, a candidate who is running against Barron in the upcoming city election, said on the telephone on Tuesday afternoon that he would have voted “Yes” for alcoholic beverage sales in Chiefland on Sundays.

“I’m for Chiefland,” West said. “I think the added revenue would benefit the city and it would benefit local business. We don’t have a problem during the other six days of the week with the sale of alcoholic beverages.

“The ‘blue laws’ are outdated,” West said. “There was a time when you couldn’t buy clothes on Sunday. Now you can.”