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Chiefland heads toward possible alcohol sales on Sundays



Mayor Betty Walker (right) leads the meeting Monday night. She is sitting at the desk normally occupied by Deputy City Clerk Laura Cain (who is seen on the left at the dais). A health issue limited Mayor Walker's mobility that evening.

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Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Oct. 23, 2018 at 9:08 p.m.

CHIEFLAND – For the people who think it is a sin to sell alcohol on Sunday, Chiefland is heading down the road to sin.



City Commissioner Tim West is the most progressive member of the municipal leadership, calling for alcoholic beverage sales on Sundays just like they are on Mondays.

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City Commissioner Rollin Hudson wants to continue with prohibition of alcoholic beverage sales on Sundays in the City of Chiefland.

City Commissioner Donald Lawrence wants to continue with prohibition of alcoholic beverage sales on Sundays in the City of Chiefland.



Vice Mayor Chris Jones (left) sits next to City Manager Mary Ellzey at the dais. Vice Mayor Jones compromised, in a manner, by not making the hours as full for Sunday sales of alcoholic beverages in Chiefland as in the other six days of the week. He pushed for 1 p.m. to be the starting

time, rather than agreeing with City Commissioner Tim West who wanted 7 a.m. as a starting time.

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For the people who think it is not a sin to sell alcohol on Sunday, Chiefland is heading down the road to selling alcohol after 1 p.m. on Sundays, and that may help the local economy.

However, even with the 3-2 vote Monday night (Oct. 23) to instruct Chiefland City Attorney Norm D. Fugate to draft an ordinance very similar to the City of Williston's in regard to days and hours of alcohol sales, there are still two public hearings before the new law would be set for enactment.

The next regular meeting of the Chiefland City Commission is Nov. 12 at 6 p.m. Given that City Attorney Fugate has completed the mission he was given, the City Commission will discuss and eventually approve some ordinance to be heard at two public hearings before adoption.

During the time until the public hearings, the City Commission may choose against going forward, or it may choose to make all of the hours the same on all of the days, or it may stick with what appears to be the plan now -- Sunday sales from 1 p.m. to midnight.

The regular meeting of Nov. 26 could be the first public hearing for the amended ordinance.

The second public hearing for final adoption of the amended ordinance, if all goes as some desire, would be on Dec. 10.

If after the public hearings a majority of the Chiefland City Commission approves the amended ordinance, then people will be able to buy alcohol in the city limits on Sundays at specific times.

In the meantime, for the folks who want to buy alcoholic beverages on Sunday, they will need to buy it at some place other than in Chiefland. One method for the person who is in Chiefland on Saturday and wants to have alcohol the next day, would be to buy it on Saturday -- before it is to be drunk on Sunday.

The Monday night meeting was not as long with proclamations from either the pro-sales or the anti-sales groups, although a couple of staunch anti-sales women again shared their opinions about the inherent evil of alcohol, and how the city's prohibition against Sunday sales of alcoholic beverage is a good tradition to maintain.

Mayor Betty Walker was not at the elevated seat where she normally sits, due to a health issue that limited her from overcoming the obstacle of the first big step to be behind the dais with the other City Commission members.

Nonetheless, speaking from the desk normally used by the deputy city clerk in the meeting room, Mayor Walker led the meeting with grace and style as always.

Vice Mayor Chris Jones bent to pressure from some constituents who pleaded with him to keep the hours of alcohol sales different on Sundays than on weekdays.

Although Jones has said the city is not a theocracy, he still wants the city to be ruled by some degree of "blue laws" as far as the hours on Sundays when alcoholic beverages may be legally sold.

Meanwhile City Commissioner Tim West expressed his opinion that alcoholic beverage sales in Chiefland should start at 7 a.m. and end at midnight on Sunday, just as they currently are sold in Chiefland every Monday through Wednesday.

Depending on how Fugate mirrors Williston's ordinance, business interests like Walmart, Winn-Dixie, all of the convenience stores, Chiefland Billiards and other places that sell alcoholic beverages, may be losing hours of sales time.

Williston lists sales prohibitions on holidays, where Chiefland does not yet.

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The current Chiefland municipal ordinance shows alcoholic beverages may be sold, consumed or served in any place holding a license to sell them during the following hours: Monday through Wednesday from 7 a.m. until midnight; Thursday and Friday from 7 a.m. until 2 a.m. the next day; and on Saturday from 7 a.m. until midnight.

Commissioner West said he thinks 7 a.m. to midnight is a fair time for alcoholic beverage sales on Sundays in Chiefland, because he does not want to overly restrict business interests from sales on Sundays.

He reminded listeners that people passing through Chiefland who are stocking their coolers for boating on Sunday mornings might want to be able to make one stop in the city rather than at a store outside of Chiefland.

Vice Mayor Jones said that from his own personal choice to show respect for people who attend church on Sunday, that he would have hours of Saturday night alcohol sales go into Sunday morning at 2 a.m., however, sales would then start again at 1 p.m. on Sunday until midnight on Sunday.

West told Jones that the latest he would want to see Sunday sales start is at high noon, because football usually starts around 1 p.m. and people might want to buy their beer before the games start. West wants 7 a.m. as the starting time for sales on Sunday to help those business interests that sell that product to not be restricted.

Vice Mayor Jones said he is endorsing Sunday alcohol sales to help attract more business interests to Chiefland, but Jones said he thinks a few hours of lost revenue on Sundays will not stop possible franchise interests or other developers from choosing Chiefland rather than choosing outside the city limits for their business ventures.

And as for the existing grocery stores, convenience stores and liquor stores in Chiefland, at least they will see Sunday afternoon and Sunday evening sales of alcoholic beverages, when that does not exist now.

Nevertheless, store owners and billiard hall owners may not want to budget more revenue coming in until after the law is actually adopted and enacted – which may be as soon as mid-December.

The 3-2 vote that instructs City Attorney Fugate to draft the amended ordinance came from a motion by Jones, seconded by West. Jones, West and Mayor Walker voted in favor of it. City commissioners Rollin Hudson and Donald Lawrence voted “No.”

The City Commission told Fugate to draft the Chiefland hours like Williston, except to give sellers a cutoff time of 2 a.m. Sunday morning, as the carry-forward from Saturday night, and to not allow the start of Sunday sales then until 1 p.m.

Attorney Fugate said he intends to have the ordinance ready for the City Commission to review at the next regular meeting.