

A Public Meeting of the Oconee County Board of Commissioners was held on Thursday, June 14, 2007, at 6:30 p.m., in Courtroom No. 1 at the Oconee County Courthouse.

Members Present:

Chairman Melvin Davis
Commissioner Jim Luke
Commissioner Don Norris
Commissioner Margaret S. Hale
Commissioner Chuck Horton

Staff Present:

Administrative Officer Alan Theriault
County Attorney Daniel Haygood
County Clerk Gina M. Lindsey

Jeff Benko, Finance Director
Wayne Provost, Strategic Planning
William White, Project Coordinator

Media Present:

Merritt Melancon, The Oconee Enterprise
Chris Butler, Athens Banner Herald
Ingunn Mercer, The Oconee Leader

Chairman Davis began the meeting with a Moment of Silence. Commissioner Hale led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Davis stated this was the second of two public meetings to allow citizens the opportunity to comment on the permitting of on-site consumption sales of beer and wine in food service establishments and a potential ordinance to regulate such sales.

Strategic and Long-Range Planning Director Wayne Provost moderated the meeting. He explained the procedures and noted speakers are limited to three minutes each. Mr. Provost opened the floor for comments on the permitting of on-site consumption sales of beer and wine in food service establishments.

Speaking in opposition: Marilyn Hardigree said beer and wine should not be allowed due to the number of schools in the county and noted her concerns for drunken driving accidents. Andrew Malcom expressed concern for the negative impact on families and presented a scrapbook of news articles on alcohol related events. John Daniel said good economic growth would come to Oconee County without beer and wine. Greg Healan, Carlton Shelton and Tom Leach noted the voters have defeated the sale of liquor in three referendums since 1990. Jay Sultan expressed concern for a decline in quality of life, increased DUIs, adult entertainment and bars. Jerry Studdard stated the sale of beer and wine would only benefit a few. Charles Jones spoke on the value of a life and moral consequences. Johnny Pritchett said people are moving into Oconee County for the quality of life and to get away from what they had. Nedra Johnson stated she resented the restaurants for pressuring the citizens. Frank Watson and John Cleaveland said development of this kind was not good for the county and would cost the citizens.

Speaking in favor: David Wood said beer and wine has been available in the county for many years and allowing the sale in restaurants would provide better regulations on the amount of alcohol served to a patron. Dan Matthews remarked the restaurants in Watkinsville have set a fine example and said it would be good for the county's economy. Trey Thompson referred to a recent poll and said it was indicative of a majority of the population being in favor. Frank Bishop said development would be enhanced by bringing in quality dining. Larry Benson read from a newspaper article on the increased popularity of wine and referred to a Harvard Study on the health benefits. Becky Vaughn noted the supply of alcohol and addictive substances cannot be eliminated, but a strong ordinance would provide better regulations than "brown bagging". Sarah Freeman said this was a decision of opportunity and financial viability. Alex Pannell and Monica Ali spoke on the economic impact and diversified tax base. Leslie Lock stated citizens should have the same choice in restaurants as they do in grocery stores. Bill Valco spoke on the freedom to choose.

Dr. Ruthann Lariscy reported on a public opinion research project conducted by Opinion Research Solutions (ORS). In late May, 2007, a telephone survey was conducted with 800 residents of Oconee County. Participants were asked to respond to five questions pertaining to their desire to have high quality restaurants in the county, whether restaurants should be allowed to serve beer and wine, their satisfaction with the current property tax base, their interest in a more diversified tax base and the extent to which having high quality retail

shopping in Oconee County is important to them. In summary, Dr. Lariscy stated a large majority of respondents want more high quality restaurants in the county (77%). Residents expressed support for allowing restaurants to pour wine and beer (59%). The largest number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current property tax system (85%) and a majority want a more diversified tax base (65%).

Mr. Provost opened the floor for recommendations on the content of a draft ordinance to regulate sales of beer and wine in food service establishments.

Larry Ward said no ordinance can control beer and wine once the door is opened. Tom Collins stated the draft ordinance is too difficult to comply with and its purpose to attract restaurants is lost. Chris Blackmon suggested lowering the requirements as to the number of full-time employees, the number of parking spaces and the food/alcohol ratio. Lee Becker noted the draft ordinance does not address training for servers, age of servers and enforcement of the regulations. He also remarked the cost of enforcement may outweigh the amount of revenue generated for the county.

Charles Baugh said the draft ordinance allowed for too much interpretation and suggested approving special districts. He said licensed restaurants should have to show proof they are adhering to the food/alcohol ratio requirement and asked if each license would be approved by the Board of Commissioners. Jay Sultan stated penalties should be on the owners of the restaurant and not the servers.

Trey Thompson suggested requiring the licensee to have alcohol liability insurance. Becky Vaughn commended the first draft of the ordinance and recommended changing the age requirement for servers to be over 21 and managers over 25. She also suggested training for servers and alcohol liability insurance be added as requirements. Ms. Vaughn asked the Board to outlaw “brown bagging” in restaurants that do not have a pouring license.

There being no further business, by consensus the meeting was adjourned.

County Clerk

Chairman

Date