

More hours to sell alcohol? A closer look at SB 384



Interim City Manager Ron Strand (pictured at the last council meeting July 19) plans to recommend council write a letter to state Assemblyman Vince Fong opposing SB 384. Acting Ridgecrest Police Chief Jed McLaughlin will also be speaking on the subject at the city council meeting tonight. - Jessica Weston/Daily Independent

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When the Ridgecrest City Council meets today, it will decide whether or not to prepare a letter to California Assemblyman Vince Fong opposing SB 384. But, what, exactly, is SB 384?

In a nutshell, the California senate bill would extend the hours that alcohol can be served legally in licensed drinking establishments that obtain a permit. Establishments would not be required to increase hours, but would have the option to apply for an additional hours permit.

Under existing law, anyone who sells, gives or delivers an alcoholic beverage between the hours of 2 and 6 a.m., is guilty of a misdemeanor. Anyone who knowingly purchases an alcoholic beverage between those hours is also guilty of a misdemeanor. SB 384 would allow venues to apply for a permit to extend legal hours for alcohol service

to 4 a.m. The bill was authored by Senator Scott Wiener with Senator Joel Anderson. It was passed by the state senate 27 to 9 on May 31 and is currently with the state assembly.

Under the current law, the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) licenses individuals and businesses for the manufacture, importation, and sale of alcoholic beverages in California and collects license fees. An “on-sale” license authorizes the sale of alcoholic beverages for consumption on the premises; an “off-sale” license authorizes the sale of alcoholic beverages in original, sealed containers for consumption off the premises.

If passed, SB 384 would establish a process by which an on-sale licensed entity could apply to the Department of ABC to for an additional hours permit to extend hours for alcohol sales to 4 a.m. Applicants would have to comply with a list of requirements, including notifying law enforcement and residents within 500 feet of the establishment of their application. No one under 21 would be allowed in the area serving alcohol during the extended hours.

Proponents of the bill argue that it would allow California tourist destinations in areas such as Los Angeles and San Francisco to compete for tourism, conferences and conventions. Another argument in favor of the bill is that it would allow local establishments to take advantage of the extended hours at their discretion. Some have also argued that the bill could lead to increased late-night employment in certain sectors.

Not surprisingly many of those supporting the bill are hotel, restaurant, and travel associations. Uber also reportedly supports the bill.

Opponents, meanwhile, cite health and safety concerns as reasons to oppose the bill. According to an Alcohol Justice report, findings from numerous studies indicates extending hours of alcoholic beverage sales increases alcohol-related problems and harm.

“Expanding to later closing times and removing restrictions on hours of sale is associated with increases in alcohol consumption and related problems, including violence, emergency room admissions, injuries, fighting, alcohol-impaired driving and motor vehicle collisions . . . Alcohol-related violence that may be experienced includes physical assault, robbery, sexual assault, and child abuse,” according to the report.

More Video:

Scenes from Rock the Relay, a benefit concert held at Furys Sports Bar on July 22, 2017.

Opponents also argue that the extended hours of alcohol sales will place additional burdens on law enforcement, fire and emergency services without providing additional funding.

A similar bill California SB 635 failed in 2013.

The Ridgecrest city staff is recommending council submit a letter to Fong opposing the bill. Interim City Manager and former Ridgecrest Police Chief Ron Strand said Fong first approached him for an opinion from a public safety standpoint.

Strand told the Daily Independent Monday he thinks the change would likely lead to more drunk driving and poor decision-making.

“We’re opposed to it. In our opinion it would lead to more crime, more alcohol-related incidents and overconsumption. This is more of an urban thing. It’s not really good for small-town rural America,” he said.

The item is scheduled for presentation by acting Ridgecrest Chief of Police Jed McLaughlin.

The regular council meeting is scheduled for Wednesday August 2 at 6 p.m., at City Council Chambers at City Hall, 100 W. California Ave in Ridgecrest. It will also be broadcast on Mediacom Channel 6 and streamed online at www.ridgecrest-ca.gov/city-media/rc6-live.