

Board of Commissioners discusses curfew for county

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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Potential ban of certain alcohol sales also on table

Due to a spike in recent positive cases of COVID-19, the McKinley County Board of Commissioners held an emergency meeting April 13 to discuss establishing a potential curfew to aid in slowing the spread of the illness.

Another factor to slow the spread of cases is potentially banning the sale of alcohol during the curfew, in part due to the concern of inebriated individuals testing positive for COVID-19 and then walking through Gallup with no place to stay and isolate, and thus risking exposing others to the illness.

But, this argument was rebutted during the meeting because county data showed most of the alcohol sales in Gallup occur between 10 am and 4 pm, and the curfew would not go into place until 8 pm through 5 am.

“A complete banning of sales of alcohol is, in my opinion, not the answer,” Commissioner Bill Lee said.

The complete ban of sales would put a strain on local medical facilities and resources needed during the pandemic because hospital bed and ICU space would have to be allocated to individuals going through withdrawals, Lee added.

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Senator George Muñoz, D-Gallup, was present during the meeting and said the county is looking for the best solution to control the spread of the virus in the transient population, and also added completely banning alcohol sales could make transients harder to track.

“The quicker we can control the spread and keep this [transient] population secure in hotel rooms and give them treatment, and make sure they’re not filling out the hospitals, is the number one thing we can do,” Munoz said.

While Muñoz said the data shows social distancing is working in lowering the number of cases, the transient population is one that may not listen to those rules.

Lee said one solution may be to limit the amount of alcohol that is sold at one time as opposed to only allowing sales during a set time frame.

In the end, the proposed ordinance established a ban on the sale of certain alcohol products to aid in slowing the community spread of the virus and urging citizens to self curfew between 8 pm - 5 am.

“[A curfew] will be very hard to enforce in the first place, and we can ask the citizens of McKinley County to self-impose it,” Chairperson Billy Moore said.

The ordinance also forbids licensed liquor stores from selling products that contain an alcohol content of 15 percent or greater. It also limits the sale to one bottle of wine or one 12-pack of beer per customer.

Moore also said the resolution is prepared in a manner that will allow the commission to revisit it in the coming weeks and then reassess if they want to continue with the ban of certain alcohol products, as well as the self-imposed curfew.

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Both Lee and Commissioner Tommy Nelson said they would want to have weekly update meetings on how the restrictions are affecting the case numbers.

“We need to stay on top of this,” Moore said. “[Conditions] may change daily, we may have to get stricter or may have to ease some of the restrictions.”

The motion to implement the ordinance of banning the sale of certain alcohol products and urging self-curfews was passed with a 3-0 vote.

By Cody Begaye
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