

MAYOR PERSONS' VETO OF CITY COUNCIL ACTION ON TWO
ALCOHOL BEVERAGE ORDINANCES

Monday, May 14, 2012

On Monday May 14, 2012, I vetoed two ordinances adopted by the City Council on May 7 which pertain to alcohol beverages. I have done this in the interest of public safety, and because I think a majority of our citizens oppose these two measures.

One ordinance would revise the permitted hours for pouring alcoholic beverages at licensed establishments. The change would extend the serving hours for alcohol from late Saturday night into Sunday morning, and I oppose this change in the City's current ordinance because I believe it negatively would impact the public safety of the City and would result in our streets and roads becoming more dangerous. Statistics show a majority of the arrests and crashes for Driving Under the Influence (DUI) are made between the hours of midnight and 4:00 a.m. on weekends, indicating this is the time of the week when our public streets already are the most endangered by drunk drivers. Therefore, I have vetoed Ordinance-2012-19 (Agenda Item 20-12-28).

The second ordinance would provide for Sunday package sales of alcoholic beverages, contingent on approval of a referendum on November 6, 2012. I am opposed to this, and I feel there already is sufficient time during the week when people can make purchases of packaged beer, wine, and spirituous liquor. Package sales of alcoholic beverages on Sundays will result in increased abuse of alcohol and increased danger on the public streets and highways due to intoxicated drivers. This measure is in conflict with the public safety goals of the City of Douglasville, and is not in the best interest of the

City. Therefore, I have vetoed Ordinance-2012-21 (Agenda Item 20-112-30).

I have been consistent in my opposition to these alcoholic beverage measures from the time they were first proposed by some members of the City Council. Likewise, I have been consistent in my opposition to any proposal to change the food-to-beverage ratio, which would facilitate more alcohol and less food consumption in our restaurants. The proposed ordinance to change the current food-to-beverage ratio was tabled by the City Council on May 7; however, it will be up for discussion again on Tuesday, May 15, and up for a vote at the Monday, May 21, City Council meeting.

Our form of government provides that the mayor has the authority and the responsibility to veto any action of the City Council that he believes is not in the best interest of this community and its citizens. Certainly, I do not take this responsibility lightly, but I would be remiss if I did not act in what I consider to be the best interest of the City of Douglasville and its citizens.

Up to this point I basically have been silent during the public debate. As I have presided at the City Council meetings, I have made sure our governmental process was working effectively, with both sides on these issues being able to speak and to have equal opportunity to participate.

Now, I firmly believe it is time for me, as Mayor and CEO of this great City, to state my position. This is my time and opportunity to vote on these measures.

Leadership is not following the herd. I believe true leadership is setting the example. And I

strongly feel that's what I have done in vetoing these two City Council actions.

There has been talk about what other communities have done. We are not "other communities." Do we set our standards by what others have done? I say: "No." We set our standards by doing what is right and what is in the best interest of this community. We must be bold and set higher standards than just following what others have done.

There has been talk about making these changes to help our downtown. Frankly, I think changing the food-to-alcohol beverage ratio and extending service hours for alcohol in the long run will hurt our downtown area. Higher standards will help make our downtown an even better place, and I believe it has been getting stronger and stronger. Our occupancy rate is very good. And I believe the new Downtown Conference Center will be an attraction which will make downtown more vibrant, and will be a catalyst to attract more businesses to this part of Douglasville.

I campaigned for Mayor on a pledge to help make this a safe community to live in, to help make it one of the premier places in America to live, work, play, and raise a family. That is what I intend to do, as I consider the decisions I must make as Mayor.

I have based my decisions -- my vetoes -- on what I consider to be very valid reasons. And I believe I can support my vetoes with facts.

I believe relaxing the current regulations on alcohol consumption would be a detriment to the safety and well-being of the entire Douglas County community, and not just within the City of Douglasville.

The data that I have provided to the City Council members -- as time after time we have discussed these

measures at the committee level -- have addressed how the proposed changes would be a real detriment to public safety.

Data presented from city, county, and state sources show a direct correlation between DUI crashes, arrests, and fatalities and the consumption of alcohol by people who drive. Conversations with local and state law enforcement officials have verified this correlation. We heard about this correlation from the Douglas County Sheriff's Office during the public hearing on May 3.

The evidence and facts underscoring this danger to public safety are illustrated by the wrecks and fatalities we have seen in our community as a result of the excessive use of alcohol, especially late at night. Two recent examples of the increased danger to public safety resulting from individuals having consumed too much alcohol in establishments late at night and then driving are: the May 2 crash on Post Road where two young men in a vehicle were killed by another vehicle driver who had been drinking, and the March 27 incident on Interstate 20 where an EMT on his way home from work around 5:00 a.m. was killed when his motorcycle was struck in a multi-vehicle wreck caused by a driver who had been drinking.

Also, I have listened to the expressions from our community. While there have been expressions from both sides, the great majority of the input I have heard and received -- at City Council meetings, emails, phone calls, and face-to-face contacts -- has been that our community does not want to see our alcohol beverage ordinances changed and relaxed. And certainly a great majority of those I have heard from do not want the City of Douglasville's decision to be based on what other communities have done.

Let me make it perfectly clear that I do not believe a possible increase in City revenues resulting from a relaxation in our laws pertaining to alcohol

consumption is worth the increased danger to public safety to our children, young people, and other family members.

I believe a majority of our community has spoken strongly against these proposed changes in our alcohol beverage ordinances.

Therefore, by the authority granted to me as Mayor and CEO of this City, by State law, and by the City Charter, I have vetoed the two alcohol beverage ordinances approved by the City Council on May 7, 2012. These decisions were made based on the facts presented, the conversations I had with law enforcement and their opposition to these measures, the detriment I felt the changes presented to public safety and the overwhelming opposition from the public.

I believe we have many assets which can be used to help our City and our community continue growing so it can become one of the premier places in America to live, work, play, and raise a family while maintaining a safe environment.

In conclusion, let me say that I believe everyone on this City Council is sincere in his or her intent. At this time, I would like for each member of the City Council to reevaluate his or her decisions and determine not to vote to change our current regulations regarding alcohol beverages.

Regardless of the final outcome concerning the alcohol beverage measures before this City Council, I can respect each member's individual decision and can continue to work with all members of the City Council. Some people might choose to take one issue and make it a divisive issue. I would ask -- not only those of us who are elected officials but everyone who has been involved in the debate concerning alcohol beverage issues -- that as we go forward, we all focus on the

overall needs and the overall direction of this great community.

Thank you.

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