

Vote “NO” to Sunday alcohol sales

Written by Liene Topko

As a non-profit organization that advocates for evidence-based policies and practices to prevent alcohol-related harms across Nebraska, Project Extra Mile has watched the City of Gordon’s consideration of Sunday alcohol sales with interest. The citizens of Gordon will make a decision this month on whether to allow Sunday sales; however, this is unlikely to be the last time this topic is discussed. This is due to the influence of the alcohol industry and their desire to frame this issue as an economic benefit and convenience. In reality, the issue is much more complex, which is why I’m writing to share the following research so that citizens can make an informed decision about what their community will look like.

Is this about being able to drink on Sunday or have a beer on gameday? No, of course not. Alcohol is sold throughout the morning afternoon and evening 6 days of the week. A little planning can ensure that you have all the alcohol you will need on Sunday. Will adding alcohol sales on Sunday prevent businesses from locating to another community in Sheridan County or closing? Probably not. Only the sale of alcohol is prohibited on Sunday, meaning that businesses can still be open and selling food and other non-alcoholic beverages.

In May 2019, the city council voted against expanding alcohol sales to Sundays from noon until 1 a.m. In doing so, the city council followed scientific research showing that increasing the availability of alcohol increases alcohol-related harms in the community such as alcohol-involved traffic fatalities, violence, sexual assault, increases in at least seven types of cancer, and many other harms.

Multiple nonpartisan, scientific research bodies recommend maintaining limits on hours and days of sale based on the strong evidence that increasing the availability of alcohol leads to increased excessive drinking and the associated harms.

While city data is not available, a County Health Rankings Report states that 19% of Sheridan County residents report drinking excessively and 71% of driving deaths in the county were alcohol involved. Furthermore, a study in New Mexico reported a 29% increase in alcohol-related crashes and 42% increase in alcohol related fatalities on Sundays after the ban on alcohol sales was repealed. Unfortunately, innocent bystanders lose their lives to drinking drivers every year. The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine estimates that almost 40 percent of all alcohol-related traffic fatalities involve someone other than the drinking driver.

It’s also worth noting that while alcohol sales are very profitable for the industry, excessive drinking costs our state \$1.2 billion annually in terms of lost work productivity and both increased health care and law enforcement costs. These costs were shouldered by businesses and taxpayers and amounted to approximately \$639 per citizen.

The citizens of Gordon have the right to make informed decisions and should consider not only the convenience of alcohol sales on Sunday, but also the negative impacts that allowing alcohol sales on Sunday will have on public health and safety. We would urge Gordon residents to follow the science and vote against Sunday alcohol sales.