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Lenoir will hold election on liquor

By SHIRLEY HUNTER MOORE
Staff Writer

LENOIR — Lenoir residents will decide whether they want alcoholic drinks served in hotels, restaurants, community theaters and the convention center.

The Lenoir City Council Tuesday agreed to a liquor-by-the-drink vote after hearing from representatives of a citizens group. City Manager Jim Hipp said they will work with the board of elections to set a date for the vote.

At the meeting, the group Citizens for Progress presented the council with a petition group members said contained the signatures of 1,430 Lenoir residents who supported liquor-by-the-drink.

Afterward, Jerry Hodge, a group spokesman, said the issue is an economic one.

"We view it not as pro-liquor vs. anti-liquor," Hodge said. "This is an opportunity to prevent the erosion of dollars."

In April, the Caldwell County Chamber of Commerce announced it would try to get liquor-by-the-drink on the ballot this year. Citizens for Progress formed to help with the effort.

Also, an anti-liquor group

launched a bid to rid the county of all alcohol, including the county's ABC liquor stores in Granite Falls and Lenoir.

Alcohol opponents say liquor-by-the-drink would add to social problems, such as alcoholism and drunken driving.

In a surprise move last month, the group asked the council not to act on its petition calling for removal of the Lenoir liquor store.

"We just wanted them to know that a lot of people didn't want it here," said the Rev. Waitzel Beard, a spokesman for liquor opponents and pastor of Community Baptist Church in Lenoir.

In the meantime, liquor opponents have been collecting names on a different petition, Beard said, and they still plan to call for a vote on the ABC store.

In 1982, Lenoir voters rejected mixed-drink sales 61% to 39%. The margin failed by more than 800 votes. It would have allowed the sale of mixed beverages in hotels, restaurants, private clubs and convention centers.

The issue was defeated again in 1988 by more than 400 votes, 56% to 44%.

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