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The first rules of the new package liquor stores were passed in first reading at the Monday commissioners meeting.

“The spirit of the referendum is people want access to liquor,” Commissioner Ray Justice, in his first meeting, joked at one point in the long debate.

While some issues were sent to the City Attorney to further investigate what the City of Mt. Juliet could do in placing restrictions on liquor stores, several were approved.

The first was that it could be a free standing building or strip center, as long as it was owned by the person holding the liquor license. Originally, it was supposed to be a free standing building only that must be owned by the liquor license holder. Justice thought that people should be able to lease an existing building, but Hagerty thought it would help to ensure the City that someone was in good financial standing to run an operation like a liquor store. Justice feared that not being able to lease the property would eliminate Providence and Paddocks, but Hagerty named off several parcels where a new store could go.

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Tuesday, November 27, 2012

The next was the residency requirements. The ordinance as written left the commissioners open to what kind of residency requirements they could enact. It was originally written that they could say that they could live in the city or county for five years.

“It’s always going to be an issue,” said Commissioner James Maness about the requirements, however they set them because someone is going to get left out.

Commissioner Jim Bradshaw worried that if they made it five years, it would eliminate some people in Providence who may have only been here a few years, but are still very much a part of our community. There was also a worry that people just outside the city limits who may have been annexed into the city recently, or live just outside the city limits and still are a big part of the community.

In the end, the commissioners agreed unanimously to make the rules two years in the city or five years in the county.

How many liquor stores to allow in the city was the next issue. As it was written, it would allow one liquor store per 10,000 people in the City of Mt. Juliet. Mt. Juliet’s population stands just under 30,000 at this time, so that would have allowed two. Justice believed that there should be no limit on how many can come into the city.

“This whole ordinance flies in the face of what I believe,” said Justice.

Justice believed it should be open to the free market, and to let those who succeed, succeed and those who fail, fail. Hagerty said he feared that if we didn’t have some sort of regulation, we could end up with a liquor store on four corners on the same intersection, so there needed to be some rules in place.

Eventually, the requirement was lowered to one per 8,000 people, which would allow three. The hope is to get one on the south side of Mt. Juliet Road, close to the intersection of North Mt. Juliet Road and Lebanon Road, and one in the Shiloh area.

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State law requires liquor stores to be closed by 11 p.m. Maness suggested they move it up to 10 p.m. because of shift changes, but Mt. Juliet Police Chief Andy Garrett said that would not work because Officers are not out in their zones right at the shift change. The commission elected to move it up to a closing time of 9 p.m.

Several issues will come back on second reading based on what the City Attorney Gino Marchetti can determine as far as the legality of the commission's restrictions. Some of those are how far apart the city can require the stores to be from each other. Three miles was suggested. Also, if they could put a requirement on what the minimum and maximum square footage could be on the stores. It was suggested as no less than 3,000 square feet and no more than 10,000.

Second reading on the issue will be at the Dec. 10 meeting.