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Hoosick group seeks tough drinking law for minors

MIKE GLEASON, Staff Writer
Bennington Banner

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HOOSICK FALLS, N.Y. — The Hoosick Falls Village Board is looking to prevent those who host parties from allowing alcohol to be served to minors.

Joyce Davis, the executive director of the Hoosick Area Partnership for Parents and Youth, is a supporter of this proposed local ordinance, termed a "social host law."

"What this ordinance does is it makes anyone over 16 liable for allowing alcohol to be served on their premises — that includes homes, yards and open areas," Davis said. "We're trying to use this as an education piece. We're not trying to be punitive."

Those who violate this ordinance would be subject to a \$250 fine and/or 15 days in jail. A similar measure, said Davis, passed in Gloversville. According to Davis, the New York State Police Chief's Association has endorsed the legislation as well.

The proposed ordinance is currently in the hands of the village lawyer, who is fine-tuning the wording.

"This will give the police another tool to fight against underage drinking," village Mayor Laura Reynolds said. "Several states have enacted similar laws."

Hoosick Town Supervisor Marilyn Douglas said the town council was concerned the law might be too similar to a current New York state law. "There is already a law that is very specific about this — it would be almost like having another law in town requiring people to wear seatbelts," said Douglas. "We're also concerned about mandating things we might not be able to enforce."

Hoosick Falls Deputy Mayor Margaret Casey also expressed concerns about the provision. "I certainly agree with the concept, but it needs to be carefully worded," said Casey. "I felt that (the ordinance) was not clearly written."

She said that she wanted to ensure the measure did not prohibit parents from serving alcohol to their own children. "Underage drinking is a problem and we need to put a stop to it," Casey added.

Davis concedes that there is a statewide law in effect, but said this law differs from the statewide law in several key ways, most notably that it does not punish people solely for serving alcohol, but for allowing alcohol to be served.

"We want the people responsible to be held accountable," Davis said. "If a mother and father leave town, and their child holds a party where alcohol is served, should the mother and father be held accountable? I don't think so."

Davis said that, although a number of teens would be punished under the proposed ordinance, nothing of the incident would go on their permanent records.

"It's going to be a big learning curve for the kids," Davis said.

Davis professed excitement about the possibility of the proposal's passage. "We're very excited," Davis said. "Our strategy is working, and it's wonderful to see."

According to Reynolds, the law will not be voted on at the board's meeting this month. Reynolds said a public hearing would be necessary, and the most that would be done at the upcoming meeting would be to warn that hearing.