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Tightening up on adult businesses

County working to close any loopholes that may be exploited

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Shelby County Commissioners cracked down on the county's sexually oriented businesses a month ago, approving new laws that spell out how adult businesses should operate.

On Monday, commissioners pushed the regulations further and took initial steps to close any loopholes that could allow businesses to be "grandfathered" in areas where they're no longer allowed.

Commissioners unanimously approved the first of three readings of an ordinance that clarifies city and county zoning laws.

Current zoning laws say that adult businesses must operate in industrial zones, away from churches, schools and homes.

However, adult businesses that opened in nonindustrial areas before the zoning laws are allowed to stay unless they stop operating for 365 days or more.

The new ordinance, sponsored by Commissioner Steve Mulroy, specifies that businesses benefiting from the grandfather clause that cease operation for a year or more because of the loss of a permit or license are also forced to move.

"That still counts for that 12-month period that un-grandfathers them," Mulroy said. "I don't think that was clear before."

And he said it will apply to adult businesses that are in violation of the new sexually oriented business ordinance, approved by the county in September.

The law, which goes into effect Jan. 1, restricts the sale and consumption of alcohol, establishes a five-member board to regulate the industry and requires that all employees obtain a work permit. Businesses that fail to comply can lose their licenses.

Community activist George Kuykendall said laws that tighten the zoning codes are badly needed because numerous adult businesses in Shelby County currently benefit from being grandfathered in to areas near churches, schools and other family oriented businesses.

"This will bring it to the surface that people have the right to set the standard of decency in their neighborhood," Kuykendall said. "People don't want crime associated with adult businesses, and they don't want loopholes."

Also on Monday, commissioners approved in an 8-4 vote an adult business resolution that deals with enforcement of the new sexually oriented business ordinance on adult bookstores.

Also sponsored by Mulroy, this resolution simply urges the Sheriff and Memphis Police Department to focus enforcement efforts on bookstores with on-site viewing of pornography.

Mulroy said the bookstores with on-sight viewing statistically contribute to crime more than those without.

Voting against the resolution were Commissioners David Lillard, Wyatt Bunker, Joyce Avery and Mike Carpenter.

Bunker said it was not the commission's role to tell law enforcement officers how to do their jobs.

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