

St. Mary's Liquor Board takes a look at growlers

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The St. Mary's County Alcoholic Beverage Board voted Thursday, July 10 to approve new permit policies regarding "growlers."

Growlers are a growing trend among craft beer drinkers, where the buyer purchases a reusable carafe with a stoppered lid, allowing them to take the bottle home for personal consumption. The Ruddy Duck in Solomons has offered craft beers using growlers for a number of years and the Liquor Board has been working on establishing policy for their use in St. Mary's.

The definition for refillable container license proposed change included making sure the new document was identified as "permit" and not "license."

Chairman Moses P. Saldaña Jr. described the proposed policy, where a "refillable container permit, for refillable containers also known as a growler, may be issued to the holder of a Class B or D license after filing an application with the Alcoholic Beverage Board," Saldaña said. "The container must be sealed after being filled on the licensed premises."

David Dent, president of the St. Mary's County Licensed Beverage Association demonstrated some options on how the containers could be packaged so that merchant and customer are within policy. He demonstrated by pulling out the critter in question, a bottle with a sealed stopper known as the growler. Once the stopper is in place, Dent said the purchase could be sealed with a piece of tamper-proof tape.

"Using the tamper-proof tape, that option would add about 30 cents retail to the price of the purchase," Dent said. He added he bought the tamper-proof tape online for \$36.

"The low-tech option is, put the growler in a bag and staple it. The first option would add no cost to it," Dent said. "If you add a seal, it would add to the cost. It would add another inventory item to the store, something you have to keep on hand and something you would have to store. A bag would cost no money. My point being, we will abide by whatever the board decides. I just wanted the board to understand what options are available."

"Drinking craft beer is not a cheap purchase," Saldaña said. "A 30 cent piece of tape would help your patron eliminate any questions from law enforcement. If you agree, I would leave it as is with one change, if not, we'll modify. The tamper proofing is a variety of solutions for the seals."

He also wondered if the Health Department would have concerns over cleaning the bottles that are being refilled.

"Maybe they could just have a bottle exchange," he suggested.

Dent said the customer is required to bring their clean bottle in order to get the refill.

"The Health Department didn't like that, but the law is the law," he said. "You put the onus on the customer to make sure the bottle is clean. My only concern is that the Health Department is going to put additional requirements in place."

When asked what kind of feedback he has been getting from his customers, Dent, who owns Chiefs in Tall Timbers, said, "My customers are excited about the idea."

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