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Jim Higgins, a Duffy's bartender, watches a live band in the Zoo Bar Tuesday night. A task force formed by the mayor released a report that called for more venues to serve alcohol to bring better concerts to Lincoln.

Josh Wolfe/DN

Task force finds beer might be part of solution

By Shelley Mika

Staff writer

It's probably not surprising that 80 percent of respondents to the Mayor's Concert Task Force

Survey agreed that they would attend "age appropriate" events where liquor was served. Nor is it a shocker then that the majority would approve of liquor being served at Pinewood Bowl.

"We didn't learn anything we didn't have suspicions of earlier," said Jim Ritzman, chairman of the Task force.

But what is surprising: Although these statistics appeared on the Mayor's Concert Task Force Survey, economic concerns may replace the wishes of Lincolinites as the impetus for the next steps taken by the task force.

Ritzman said doesn't think serving alcohol at Pinewood Bowl, or anywhere else, will bring more people. He believes Lincolinites prefer "entertainment value."

Apparently, concert promoters disagree, as Ritzman conceded promoters would be more likely to bring shows to Lincoln if liquor were sold at events.

"The promoters have requested to serve beer; that's one of the revenue streams," he said. "That's the bottom line."

So alcohol, or more of it, is the decree of the Concert and Entertainment Task Force, whose original goal was to determine what kinds of problems existed with entertainment options in Lincoln.

As a starting point, the team's

two objectives were to research Lincoln's ability to attract concerts and also to decide whether existing policies or facilities hindered the presence of a thriving entertainment scene.

Since its first meeting in January, the committee formed five subcommittees: venues, survey, Pinewood Bowl, UNL involvement and corporate support. A glance at the list of Task force members makes it clear that a wide range of people with expertise in each area have contributed to the cause, as they come from local venue coordinators, city employees, UNL and high school students to local business persons.

According to the results of the survey, the team's main concern has become economically oriented, and in particular whether or not concert organizers can make enough money to bring acts to Lincoln. If organizers can make enough profit, the likelihood that tours will come to Lincoln increases, and a good deal of the profit comes from beer sales.

"The revenue isn't on ticket sales," Ritzman said. "If you are the promoter and you bring your acts into town, serving beer becomes a financial factor in that it's one more avenue that they can make more money on. The promoters are the ones asking for it."

Although Ritzman said that alcohol was an important economic factor, he emphasized that beer sales at concerts aren't the primary focus, much like sports fans don't attend games to gorge on concessions, but usually end up doing so anyway.

"Alcohol isn't the horse that drives the cart. It's the other way around. It's a revenue stream and not the main factor," Ritzman said.

Andy Fairbairn, entertainment and promotions coordinator for Duffy's Tavern said alcohol sales could affect concert attendance. Although not a member of the Task force, Fairbairn commented on the personal side of the issue.

"I think serving liquor would help, but I don't think liquor alone will make people go," Fairbairn said. "People who already go to bars to see shows do like to have a cocktail when they see bands."

Alcohol wasn't the main concern of Fairbairn either: "Lincoln's music scene needs a kick in the pants. The main thing is an attitude shift. People need to be supportive of the shows in Lincoln and go see them."

"One reason bands don't come to Lincoln is because it has a record of the audience not showing. That scares off other

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