The Beer Will Flow at Utah's Oktoberfest

ANNIE KNOX, Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The beer will flow at a Utah Oktoberfest, after the state liquor board backed off its warning [1] that the long-running German celebration of all things ale could go dry this year.

Utah's state liquor board on Tuesday voted unanimously to grant a license for Snowbird Ski Resort's 12-week event, now in its fourth decade.

"It's clear that this is a valuable community event," said board Chairman David Gladwell, "and that there's tremendous community support." Resort managers say next to a fresh batch of snow, Oktoberfest is the resort's second biggest draw.

Oktoberfest proponents say the celebration isn't just about beer, but showcases food, folk dancing and other activities, fueling an otherwise slow season for northern Utah tourism.

Earlier this year, the state liquor board warned Snowbird that it might withhold the liquor permit, reserving it instead for a charitable event.

The commission cited a stricter interpretation of the law in issuing the warning when questioned by Utah lawmakers. But it agreed to rethink the new approach.

Commissioners said earlier this month they were simply trying to "tighten up" oversight of such permits.

It was a fair move, board member Jeff Wright told reporters after the meeting.

"We're allowed discretion," he said.

Under state law, the board must adhere to Utah code set by the Legislature.

A Utah lawmaker is drafting legislation that would ensure one business' license request doesn't take priority over another.

"I was torqued. I wasn't happy" about the board suggesting that charities be favored over businesses, Curt Oda, R-Clearfield said Monday evening.

If the commission chooses one qualified business over another, "would that not be discrimination?" he asked.

It's the latest flashpoint in the policing of Utah's unique liquor laws. Last year, the beverage control department came under fire for citing restaurants serving patrons alcohol without first making sure they intended to stay and eat.

The state relaxed its heavy-handed liquor laws in 2009, when it stopped requiring bars to operate as members-only social clubs. But officials rejected further revisions this year after Mormon church leaders defended Utah's liquor laws, saying they keep people safe.

Snowbird's Oktoberfest attracts about 60,000 people. It kicks off Aug. 16.

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