

Utah May Have Oktoberfest Beer After All

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SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Beer is back on the table for a 40-year tradition at a Utah ski resort — Oktoberfest — after an apparent turnabout by the state liquor board.

The panel last month [warned it might withhold a permit](#) [1] for the annual Snowbird Ski Resort event under a stricter interpretation of state law.

The warning, say critics, painted Utah as staunchly sober and ignored years of protocol that worked just fine. It also has hurt the state's image, making Utah a "laughing stock," said Democratic state Sen. Jim Dabakis, of Salt Lake City.

Some legislators at Monday's Administrative Rules Committee meeting wondered whether they should rewrite the part of Utah code that led to the apparent policy reversal.

They called on representatives from the state liquor commission and its policing arm, the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, to explain what happened.

The state code hasn't changed recently, but the new policy came amid turnover in department leadership in the past few years.

The warning to Snowbird was part of an effort to "tighten up" oversight of such permits, commission chairman David Gladwell said earlier this month. The license is meant for one-time community events — not for running attractions aimed at turning a profit, he said.

On Thursday, Snowbird handed in its bid to continue the weekend festival that runs from August to mid-October, when fresh powder blankets the slopes. It will likely get the go-ahead when the board votes next week, said John Nielsen, one of seven commissioners.

Sal Petilos, director of the alcohol control agency, said he also thinks the resort will get approval.

Snowbird's Oktoberfest attracts about 60,000 people. Its 41st season kicks off Aug. 16.

In the meeting, Democratic Rep. Carol Spackman Moss, of Salt Lake City, questioned "why the scrutiny to this rule" now, when the event has been running for years.

State law tasks the commission with considering benefits to the community before granting such a permit, and that's the part that led officials to favor nonprofits and charitable organizations, Petilos said.

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The commission plans to revise the new approach starting Tuesday, Nielsen said.

Assistant Attorney General Sheila Page noted officials are seeking to crack down on sports arenas and other entities seeking the permits as a quick fix to expand their alcoholic offerings.

In a written statement, Snowbird general manager Bob Bonar called Oktoberfest an "important celebration for Snowbird and the community" and said the resort will continue to work with officials.

It's the latest flashpoint surrounding the policing of Utah's singular 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 residents safe.

The majority of Utah residents belong to the Mormon church, which teaches members to avoid drinking alcohol.

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