

“Being Dry Comes At a High Price” Proposal to Make Denton County a Wet County

By: Hannah Lasco

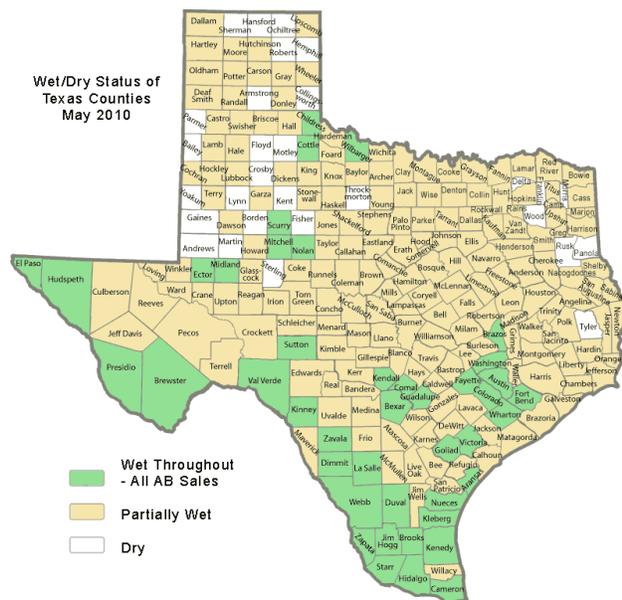
Executive Summary & Introduction

Denton is a “dry county,” meaning alcohol is legally prohibited or limited in some form. This creates a problem because it affects our safety on the roads, it encourages binge drinking – a health concern- in a city full of college students. In addition to that, Denton’s specific limitations on alcohol are not consistent throughout the entire city. This does not only cause confusion and disunity, but sabotages economic and community growth.

By becoming a “wet county,” these problems would be greatly reduced, discouraged, or solved. (Depending on the specific issue) The concept of removing all prohibitions or limitations from alcohol is not a new one. While many “dry” laws have good intentions, they also have many contradictory outcomes, and there is no evidence that the cost of being a “dry county” is worth the cost.

Background on “Dry Counties”: The Last Remnants of Prohibition

“A dry county is one whose government forbids the sale of alcoholic beverages in some form.” (Hanson) Texas has 75 counties that purely “dry.” Out of Texas’ 254 total counties, almost all the remaining counties are partially “dry,” having laws concerning the limitation of alcohol to varying extents. These laws stem from archaic “morality” ideals from when prohibition was lifted, and represent 1930’s temperance minded minority.



A purely “dry” location would prohibit alcohol in all forms, consumption, and sale. A purely “wet” location would allow all of these activities. A large portion of Texas falls somewhere in between. There are so many varying degrees of “wet” and “dry” and many different considerations in drawing the line. Some limit what kind of alcohol is permitted. Other places limit the day of the week and the time of day any form of alcohol must be purchased. Alcohol content in beverages is another popular limitation. (one can drink a beer

as long as it is only 4%, but crack open an 8% and you've committed a crime!) Certain counties have limitations on where alcohol can be consumed, purchased, or delivered.

Examining the Problems

On freerepublic.com, a blogger posted his thoughts on Denton's alcohol limitations:

I live 30 miles north of Dallas, that would be Denton County. When we go into town to eat, the waiter looks at my driver's license, notes the number, then I'm a "club member" – no charge, no paperwork, and equally, no point to it!

Cant buy liquor in the City of Denton – it's a college town, and we can't have them college students getting drunk, doncha know – but out here in the county there are two huge liquor stores just 3 or 4 miles from my place. You just don't want to be driving in between them and Denton on a Saturday night, though, for the drunk students on the road..."

Road Dangers

Many studies have compared "wet" versus "dry" counties on the subject of alcohol-related car accidents. One of the most popular reasons cited by supporters of "dry" laws is that they want to minimize drunk driving. Yet, when comparing the amount of alcohol-related car accidents and fatalities across counties both "wet" and "dry," scientists consistently found that more of these drunk-driving incidents involved people who lived in "dry" counties. They concluded that residents that were forced to drive farther from their homes to purchase and/or consume alcohol were more likely to not only drive while intoxicated, but drive for a longer duration of time than usual. (David J. Hanson, Ph. D) Scientists are not the only ones coming to these conclusions; recently there have been politicians voicing their opinions, saying that just allowing alcohol sales would just be safer than making people drive to other counties. In addition to the car accidents, there have been reports that "dry" counties have more DUI/DWI arrests than other counties, which is logical considering the previous point.

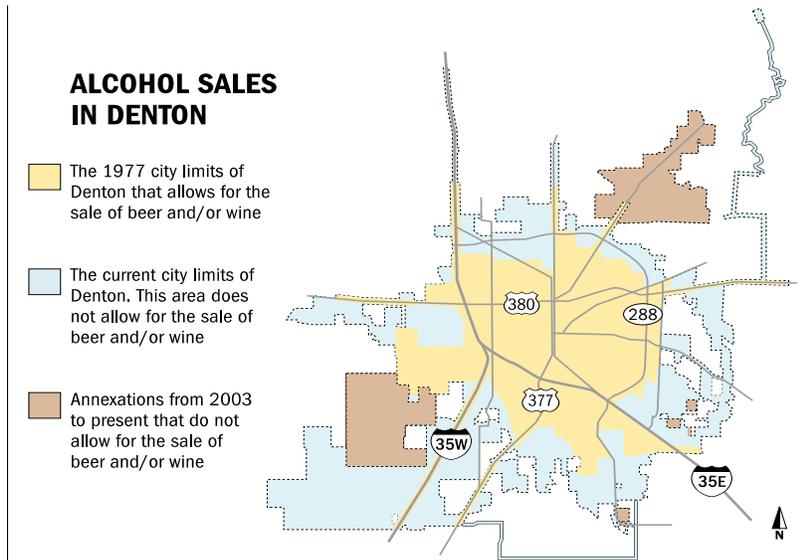
Needing to "Stock Up": Raising Percentage of College Students That Binge Drink

Aside from Christian and Women's colleges, student binge drinking occurs in large percentages throughout the nation. Supporters of "dry" laws have historically assured the public that if you make alcohol less available, it will be harder to abuse. However, when purchasing alcohol requires a trip to the next county, the average person "stocks up" so that he or she will not have to make the trip as often. The usual result is that the person makes the trip just as often, but drinks twice as often.

Personally, I can affirm this study. Though driving "all the way" to another county to buy liquor in Denton is not that much of a hassle, college students are lazy. I have friends that "stock up" every time they go to the liquor store, and are nearly always intoxicated. It is possible that that would happen either way, but it is true that I had never heard of the concept of "stocking up" until I moved to Denton. When I lived in Houston, you went to the liquor store when you needed something, bought just that without a second thought, and went home.

A Problem Within a Problem: No Unity Threatens Community

Within the City of Denton there is a complex and confusing problem. Not only is Denton one of those controversial “dry” counties, but there are different levels of “dryness” within the city limits.



This image (Denton Record Chronicle) illustrates that parts of Denton are completely dry while others are not.

The impact of this disunity alone is disastrous for the city’s growth and economy. For example, in 2001 a Tomb Thumb grocery store was going to be built at the intersection of Teasley and Ryan. It would have been an ideal location due to the developing housing

communities nearby. At the last minute, they backed out of building there because they realized that their store would be on the “dry” part of Denton, where they would not be able to sell beer or wine at any time. They did not believe that it would be possible for them to compete with places on the less “dry” side of Denton. One such place that they didn’t think that they could compete with was a gas station on the other side of the road, that was legally able to sell beer and wine.

Proposed Solution

Denton County should successfully pass a law declaring itself as a wet county.

Conclusion: The Benefits of Being “Wet”

As the mayor of Winona, Texas said, “ In 20 years, there won’t be a dry county in Texas. There’s not the stigma to alcohol anymore.” It is time for Denton to “get with the times.” Denton’s transition would have a number of benefits.

Tax Revenue

Jackson County, in Alabama, is a dry county, though some cities in Jackson County decided that they would welcome additional revenue that alcohol sales would bring in. The Alabama Attorney General informed them, however that only “wet” counties were able to tax the sale of alcohol.

The potential tax revenue that alcohol sales are capable of generating gives enough economic incentive to go “wet” even if there were no other benefits. As the mayor from

the soon-to-be wet town on Monroeville, Alabama, put it, “ We are ‘wet’ already, we just don’t get any tax benefits from it.”

An unfortunate truth for those opposed to legalizing alcohol sales: being a dry county does not make it illegal to drink alcohol. Alcohol consumers will take their money, and go somewhere else to purchase alcohol.

This is an example of how powerful this could be: the tiny town of Winona, Texas recently went “wet.” Their city used to get \$2,200 per month in tax revenue. Six months later, their city is getting \$11,000 per month in tax revenues.

Growth

If all of Denton had the same laws within one boundary line, businesses would no longer have to consider which “side of the road” when building. Remember the Tom Thumb that would have been built near the new housing developments in 2001? Since then, many other businesses have followed Tom Thumb’s lead, and chosen to build in other areas around Denton. If businesses felt they would be able to compete fairly, growth would occur in all parts of Denton, not just the “moist” ones.