

Campus Citizens Committee: Here's why Grand Forks needs a social host ordinance

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"We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future." -- Franklin D. Roosevelt

GRAND FORKS -- Our youth are the future of Grand Forks. Many in our community do their best to provide young people with a healthy and safe place to live. But in a survey conducted by the North Dakota Department of Human Services, nine out of 10 people in the Grand Forks area said that underage drinking is a problem and that there should be penalties for adults who allow youth to drink.



The proposed social host ordinance that is currently before the City Council would accomplish this.

We know that parties with underage drinking take place in communities throughout North Dakota. Most underage drinkers get their alcohol from social sources (parents, siblings, friends, at parties and so on).

Some parties start out innocently, and then someone brings alcohol. Others may be events planned by people who believe it is safer to "take away the keys" and let young people drink alcohol in their home.

In any case, what are not being considered are the potential consequences that underage drinking may contribute to: physical assaults, sexual assaults, unintended pregnancies, alcohol poisoning, motor vehicle crashes, falls, drownings and suicides.

When an adult condones a party with underage drinking, he or she cannot predict the behavior of the teens who are drinking. In addition, these adults are sending the message to young people that underage drinking and breaking the law are OK.

Currently, such behavior often falls through the cracks of North Dakota law. While state law makes it illegal to provide alcohol to people under 21, the related "social host liability law" is merely civil, not criminal. It states only that those injured as a result of such actions have the right to sue.

This is why it is important for Grand Forks to adopt a social host ordinance. It is meant to specifically make it illegal for adults to allow parties where minors can drink, regardless of who provided the alcohol.

As members of the Grand Forks Community and Campus Committee to Reduce High-Risk Alcohol Use (CCC), we believe that this ordinance is needed to reduce youth access to alcohol. Recent studies have shown that social host ordinances are effective in reducing underage drinking.

If our community can accomplish this, we can also reduce the risks that come with it, making Grand Forks a healthier, safer place for youth and young adults.