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Miamisburg to regulate Internet cafes

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MIAMISBURG — City Council voted Tuesday night to join communities throughout Ohio in regulating the spread of Internet sweepstakes cafes.

The Miamisburg City Council unanimously approved new zoning regulations that set standards for design, parking and limits on where the new businesses can locate in the city, keeping them mostly near Interstate 75.

Within a month, Miamisburg is expected to add business licensing requirements for the cafes, said Chris Fine, the city's acting development director.

Customers play electronic games, some resembling slot machines, typically with prepaid phone cards.

"In northeastern Ohio, it's kind of a booming business," said Christy Prince, a lawyer with Kegler, Brown, Hill & Ritter, a Columbus law firm that is tracking trends in Ohio gambling laws.

According to Fine, Internet cafes are operating in Jeffersonville and Harrison Twp.

Springboro, Trotwood and West Carrollton are among other communities that are mulling or approving similar regulations in anticipation of operators coming to their communities.

Miamisburg began studying the issue in November.

While doing research and developing regulations, Miamisburg and area governments throughout Ohio set moratoriums to temporarily bar the cafes from their jurisdictions.

In March, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine called for new state law regulating Internet sweepstakes cafes and skill gaming centers through the new Ohio Casino Control Commission.

House Bill 195 was introduced on April 12 and assigned to the state government and elections committee. No hearings have been held, according to legislative records.

Later this month, the Springboro City Council is expected to approve similar regulations for Internet cafes.

That body also is expected to permit sexually oriented businesses — previously excluded from the city under existing code — in designated zones.

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