

TO: ALL City of Madison Alders

FROM: Joel Gratz
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RE: Opposition to New (Class A) Licenses for Kwik Trip dba Stop N Go at 2002 Winnebago Street
City Council Agenda Item #7 (1/5/2021) Legistar File # 62957

I am asking Council members to oppose issuing a new Class A License to Kwik Trip for the Stop N Go location they have purchased at 2002 Winnebago Street. I will also appear at tonight's meeting to speak on this issue and be available for questions.

While I know those Council members who serve on the ALRC are already familiar with the objections raised to this license I will provide background for the full council. The specific circumstance and issue of why you should deny this license may appear at first to be unique and different than normally considered but is actually not different in that the privilege of being issued a license by the City to sell alcohol should be reserved for those who are good community members and good citizens. Particularly when the proposed licensee is not a local owner it is all the more important that they demonstrate that commitment to and understanding of the neighborhood and local community. Kwik Trips actions as they take over this Winnebago Street location have not demonstrated that understanding and commitment to the community.

For over twenty years the Stop N Go Convenience store at Winnebago Street has housed a contract post office. (The history of a post office in this vicinity dates decades longer, with previously a post office in a building immediately behind the store, on Second Street.) The post office operated by Stop N Go until early December had official USPS post office boxes for approximately 300 customers, sold stamps and other postage and offered USPS shipping and mailing services. Having had a post office box there for seven years I know from daily visits that the post office is used extensively by neighborhood residents. The excellent Stop N Go staff did a great job serving the community and knew many of the customers and box holders by name. Rarely was I in the store when there weren't others using the post office services there. The post office contributed to the location being more than just a convenience store but being a community destination.

Kwik Trip announced the agreement to purchase the Stop N Go stores on July 29, 2020, over five months ago. This follows on the heels of their purchase in recent years of the locally owned PDQ convenience store chain. Kwik Trip is now the dominant convenience store chain in the Madison area, having eliminated other local competition through merger and acquisition.

While there is no dispute that it can be Kwik Trip's business prerogative to discontinue the post office they could have in the intervening five months engaged in discussions with the Alder, the community and stakeholders of the possibility the post office may close thus allowing the community to perhaps find an alternative location before the disruption they have caused. That was not done. Instead the community and customers were given little notice, telling box holders in early November with less than a month's notice that the post office would close. Further, Kwik Trip has tried at times, to pass off responsibility for this decision to the previous Stop N Go owners, even though the decision was made after the agreement to purchase and closely tied to the closing of the purchase. There can be no doubt this was a Kwik Trip decision. From Kwik

Trip's due diligence, they certainly knew in the summer that the Stop N Go location housed a post office, and had they been committed to being a good community members they would have initiated the public discussion to either learn of the value of the post office to the community or allow the community to seek an alternative arrangement. Kwik Trip has no response as to why they failed to take such reasonable action.

The decision to close this post office is clearly final with Kwik Trip. The boxes and post office counter have been removed and the store reorganized. Closing the post office is a significant negative impact to the local community on the east side of Madison. Since its closure there is no near east side post office. Customers have had to move their post office boxes at other less convenient locations, on Milwaukee Street, downtown on the Square, Monona, or elsewhere. After the closure, neighborhood members no longer are able to walk to drop off packages to be mailed or buy stamps.

The neighborhood meeting with Kwik Trip in December re-affirmed my belief that they should not be granted the privilege of a city license to sell alcohol at this location. Kwik Trip as part of each presentation maintains that they are a good community member and, in fairness, they do cite a number of positive aspects of their business such as their higher wages and profit sharing, as well as contributions to a number of worthy causes. But Kwik Trip is largely mute, at best, as to any request to explain how terminating, on fairly short notice and without public discussion, the postal services provided at the Stop N Go location on Winnebago Street demonstrate a commitment to our local community and neighborhood.

The closure by Kwik Trip shows contempt for the community they wish to be part of. While if issued a license, they may well prove to be an otherwise responsible alcohol seller, that alone should not be the only consideration. Corporations like Kwik Trip preach that they are good community members and citizens, but they must also show that through actions and in this case Kwik Trip has shown the opposite and as such they should get extra scrutiny of their license request.

If Kwik Trip, or any applicant, is going to tout their good deeds and community commitment as reasons to approve their applications then it leaves it very fair and relevant to determine if those are true statements supported by their actions. Kwik Trip's do not.

The applicant's actions are relevant directly to the issue of determining if an applicant will be responsible and responsive with any future issues relating to this license. Other community members have raised legitimate concerns about licensing an additional store in such close proximity to a neighborhood high school. Kwik Trip's failure to adequately connect with the community in this situation should raise doubts as to their responsiveness and communication with the community if they are licensed and issues of underage access to alcohol sales or other problems should arise. They have not proven through their actions that they are worthy of being licensed here.

The file on this item contains an email from Alder Rummel which while not offering support for this license notes: "I believe the applicant has heard the concerns of the neighborhood regarding the loss of post office boxes and mail service and will be reviewing their future expansion plans with these concerns in mind." At minimum I hope the Council does not issue a license at this time and allows the applicant time to demonstrate if Kwik Trip is sincere in considering both the impact of the loss of the post office in their future plans as well as how well they can communicate with the neighborhood going forward.

I ask you to please oppose and deny Kwik Trip a new license for 2002 Winnebago Street.