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**To:** [licensing](#); [Vidaver, Regina](#); [Field, Derek](#); [Madison, Sabrina](#)  
**Subject:** 83669 - Emphasize groceries alongside liquor sales  
**Date:** Sunday, March 16, 2025 4:51:25 PM  
**Attachments:** [image.png](#)

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Dear ALRC and item sponsors,

A few things I want to highlight about this item:

1. It's not about liquor store density

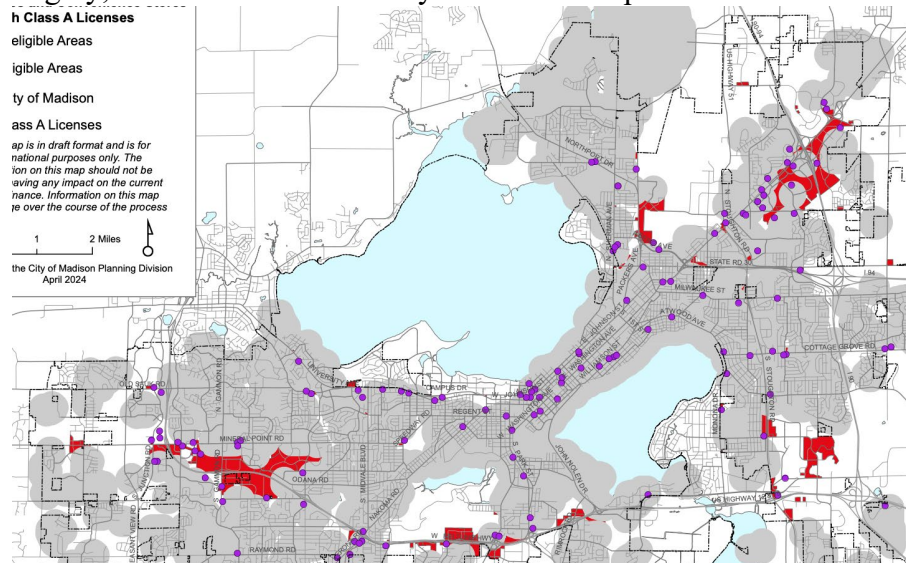
First off, the proposed ordinance doesn't directly address the density of liquor stores in relation to each other, which is a shame, because that was (allegedly) the initial impetus for it, after the city received an umpteenth application for the same short stretch of E. Wash.

2. The intent is total prohibition

At the January meeting where this was discussed, Alder Vidaver shared that the agenda here is to eliminate liquor stores (and alcohol sales more broadly) from Madison entirely, and that the criteria about proximity to parks was chosen simply because the parks network covers so much of the city.

3. This produces an inequitable area of effect.

This map (also attached in Legistar) shows the areas where liquor stores would be prohibited in gray, and the areas where they would still be permitted in red:



The areas in red coincide, to a sad/hilarious extent, with currently-underserved areas of the city, and equity priority areas. A lot of these areas are also along high speed roads, incentivizing people to drive to get their drinks.

4. The grocery loophole is non-specific

Another way to look at this item would be the effect it will more likely have: in order to get approved under this new ordinance, liquor stores will be required to include non-liquor products as their token "groceries".

If that were the framing/intent of the ordinance--to require that liquor stores provide community value and convenience for non-drinkers as well--I would be entirely in support of it. But then why include the "distance from parks" measurement at all? Why not apply that requirement city-wide?

Many liquor stores already stock things other than liquor. For example, Steve's has a lot of meat, cheese, chocolates, jams, and more, beyond the typical non-alcoholic mixers. Not fresh produce though. It's not a one-stop grocery where you can find what you need for a balanced diet.

Based on these factors, I see a couple viable paths forward for this item:

A. Carry on as is

When this gets to the full council, there may not be a majority that shares the hard-line prohibitionist agenda. But if the true goal is to performatively raise awareness of alcohol's effect on public health--more so than actually adopting an ordinance--maybe that's fine (no judgement here!).

B. Pivot to limiting the density of the licenses themselves

This might more directly address the root cause of the issue in particular locations like the E. Wash corridor. Being a more limited change, it could be easier to get buy-in.

C. Pivot to a city-wide "grocery-liquor-combo-store" ordinance

The difficulty with this approach will be figuring out to what extent the city can get away with requiring groceries in these stores. The ordinance could specify certain categories of goods, like fresh vegetables. Alternatively, class A licenses could be granted on a percent-food-percent-drink sales basis, like class B licenses already are. Or percentage of floor space perhaps. This could face push-back from retailers who really only want to stick to the business model they're used to.

I'll be interested to see how this continues to evolve, and I hope it can become something that serves Madison well.

Thank you,

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