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Vending Oversight Committee

Grasshopper Goods

Dr. Karen Tardrew, CEO /founder.

The landscape of retail has changed considerably over the last decade. Online and big box competition have made the retail climate much more difficult for small business retail.

Most small retailers can't afford the comparatively high rents in downtown Madison and other high-density areas. Mobile retail is solution to that problem. According to the [American Mobile Retail Association](#) (AMRA), the mobile business industry has recently grown to nearly 1,000 trucks across the U.S.

In a recent [survey](#) from PwC, 58% of respondents rank convenience as the number one reason for shopping online. The growing ecommerce market has forced retailers to rethink the ways they capture the attention of shoppers. As competition between online and brick-and-mortar continues, retailers have shifted their focus to something online merchants might have trouble replicating — a fully [immersive retail experience](#) that appeals to [all of their customers' senses](#).

Despite what some claim, the retail experience isn't dead. [Seventy-two percent of shoppers](#) still consider the in-store experience as the most important channel when making a purchase. Mobile retailers are in a position to offer a unique and fun retail experience that stands apart from fixed storefronts.

Recently, a customer came to our Stoughton shop over the holidays. They were previous customers in our truck. She just came from downtown Madison. She shared that she and her daughter tried to

shop small and usually shop downtown for the holidays. She said, "We left. There was no retail to speak of and to many aggressive panhandlers and only restaurants. I won't take my daughter there anymore to shop anymore."

I've been working to get the permitting issue addressed in Madison for 4 years without substantial progress (other than the ability to vend on private property.) In order for my business to survive this hurdle to my planned business model, we've had to adapt substantially and hardly consider ourselves a "Madison" business at this point. Other municipalities on the other hand have been extremely welcoming to my business. I have a year round vending permit in Middleton. There I've been invited to development committees and I'm part of the Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, I've had the means – outside full time income, home equity, a spouse's income and retirement savings - which has been required to this point to have kept the business open through this process. And I know I'm extremely privileged in this regard.

Other business owners - particularly those with lack of access to capital - would have not been able to sustain these challenges - or even get going at all given Madison's current policies on mobile retail.

Finally - I have to acknowledge that I could no longer wait for the City of Madison to act on permitting for my type of business so I made the difficult financial decision to open a storefront in Stoughton this past November.

I also want to address what's possible.

Frankly, low-density permitting isn't very appealing due to

a) lack of customers and b) safety issues. Unless in conjunction with a planned event, sales likely wouldn't support the cost of gas, employees, etc. Also it's not safe for me or staff to be in a remote location - away from lots of people. We're more likely to be robbed or harassed in the truck.

Madison needs more retail options for it's downtown residents and Madison's small business retail entrepreneurs need more options to allow them to compete in the modern world - especially those entrepreneurs without deep pockets and safety nets.

Grasshopper Goods has been voted #1 Woman's Boutique for the last two years in a row via Isthmus. I have a proven business concept that is well regarded and sought after by my shoppers in this City.

I ask the committee to work with me to pilot a mobile retail program perhaps similar to the program in Austin (the Picnic). We mirror their metropolitan vibe and population needs. We could start with limited hours to provide more retail experiences downtown on a regular basis.

It could only help to promote a positive atmosphere downtown and draw more people there.

By allowing innovative, new, interesting, exciting, mobile entrepreneurs to operate downtown more people would be drawn there. Making it a more inviting place for everybody.

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