

Wednesday, April 24, 2013

Dear Mayor Soglin:

We are writing to you as downtown merchants who are concerned about the effect that ending the Alcohol License Density Ordinance will have on retailing.

Right now, State Street is a thriving business district with a variety of shops and services, restaurants, bars and entertainment venues that benefit everyone from babies to Boomers, from morning past midnight. Visitors from big cities and small towns enjoy our downtown without concern for their safety. If State Street were to become the Bourbon Street of the Midwest, it would be a draw for one segment of the population, but at a loss of many others. Surely we want to appeal to the greatest number of potential users to keep our downtown thriving, from 6:00AM to 3:00AM.

Once ALDO sunsets, many of the "restaurants" will drop the act and apply for bar licenses. Property owners will want a bar or bar/restaurant rather than a retail shop because they generate more revenue and can pay higher rents. You have stated that you fear State Street is becoming a food court and we share your fear of this future. The area will be headed in the direction of a nighttime entertainment district, with very few active daytime businesses. The surge in new bars and restaurants will be followed by the inevitable closing of the less successful ones. It is extremely difficult to convert a bar/restaurant space back to retail once the investments in commercial-grade kitchens and other built-ins have been made, so those properties will sit vacant for several months and even years after the business folds.

Together we represent over 100 years of working and running businesses on State Street, and have seen too many retail shops replaced by restaurants, bars and cafes. Like residents who oppose too many bars in their neighborhood, we as business residents see the problem they bring to an area both in terms of increased crime and police calls but also pushing out daytime businesses. From a shop owner's perspective, the increase in bars brings more broken glass, vomit, cigarette butts and disorderly behavior. Once our downtown loses its retail portion it will be hard to bring back—there has to be a certain density of high-quality shops to make the district successful. With fewer reasons for customers to be there during the day, we will not be able to support clothing stores, bookstores, galleries and gift shops like ours. Our desire is for a business area that is active all day, not just at night.

We hope that we can meet with you and your staff to discuss the ways in which State Street can remain a lively retail mix for all ages and interests. Short-term parking for shoppers and a new, expanded Buckeye lot with an anchor tenant above are just a few ways to encourage downtown retailers and visitors, especially with the city rebounding from the recession. Above all, limiting alcohol density would promote not only the health and safety of our citizens, but the success and diversity of our local businesses.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sandi Torkildson, A Room Of One's Own, 315 W. Gorham Street

Sachi Komai, Anthology, 218 State Street

Anne O'Connor, Driftless Studio, 214 State Street

Sara Hunter Sell, Shakti, 320 State Street

Amy Moore, Little Luxuries, 230 State Street

Hiroko Yamada, HYART Gallery, 133 W. Johnson Street

Peg Scholtes, Capitol Kids, 8 S. Carroll Street

Sandeepa Lama Palmer, Endless Knot, 330 State Street

Anna-Marie Lester, Tellus Mater, 409 State Street

Ashley Leary, Mimosa Books, 260 W. Gilman Street

John E. Hayes, Goodman's Jewelers, 220 State Street

Cas Salas, Triangle Market, 302 State Street

Steve Manley, B-Side Records, 436 State Street

Jacky Trudeau, Sunshine Daydream, 619 State Street

Richard Kilmer & Emily Halapatz, Community Pharmacy, 341 State Street

Lisa Brennan, Four Star Video Heaven, Sprout