

Members of the Alcohol License Review Committee:

I am writing in support of the application by Bryan Richgels to create an outdoor patio at the Mason Lounge at 416 S. Park St.

I have been a resident of the Greenbush neighborhood for 14 years, and I quickly came to associate the various bars in that stretch of Park Street with late-night fights, shootings and, oh yes, round-the-clock televised porn.

What a relief it was to see Bryan open the Mason Lounge last year. I had high hopes for it as a neighborhood tavern that would serve quality beer without inflicting more drunken patrons on my neighbors. I haven't been disappointed so far. As a customer, the Mason is thoroughly enjoyable, not least for the fact that the absence of televisions and jukeboxes means you don't have to shout to talk to people. And while maybe there is a police report connected to the bar I haven't seen, I saw nothing about it in the Madison Police Department's online incident reports nor in police stories written for the Wisconsin State Journal, Capital Times or madison.com.

I believe the turnaround in clientele has everything to do with how Bryan runs the business. If he were looking for maximum profit, he would be open as often as possible, as late as possible and encourage maximum consumption with numerous drink specials and cheap products. He does none of those things. I have the sense that customers go to the Mason for conversation and craft beer in modest quantities, and so are far less likely to trouble the neighborhood when they leave than were patrons of previous bars in that location.

Given that things are going well there from a neighborhood perspective, I am very much inclined to support a move that will help Bryan's business thrive. He has told me that in warmer months, patrons would like to be able to sit outside, and I think the proposal that's been put forward will help his business grow while still respecting his residential neighbors. It's my understanding that Bryan has agreed to a number of conditions about hours, access, staffing and lighting for the patio developed in conjunction with the Greenbush Neighborhood Association. You should know that the fact the association is endorsing this proposal is highly unusual. The troubled history of bars on that stretch of Park Street has made all of us leery about proposals to increase capacity, so the support Bryan has built through his track record and his diplomacy is very much to his credit. I hope you will take all of this into account in making your decision.

While I am unlikely to be able to attend Wednesday night's hearing, I would be happy to respond to any questions if you feel that it would be useful to you. Thank you for hearing me out.

Sincerely,

Chris Murphy
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