

From: [Kapusta-Pofahl, Karen](#)
To: [Plan Commission Comments](#); [Stouder, Heather](#)
Subject: Alder Myadze message on item #78322 amending section 28.104(7)(c) of the Madison General Ordinances to add an exception to height and story requirements for buildings in the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay District
Date: Friday, July 7, 2023 12:02:30 PM

[BCC'd to All Alders]

Staff: Please enter into Legistar attached to item #78322

ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION PLEASE DO NOT REPLY ALL

Dear Commissioners and Colleagues,

I would like to address legislative file number 78322 amending section 28.104(7)(c) of the Madison General Ordinances to add an exception to height and story requirements for buildings in the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay District. As a sponsor of this amendment, I would like to share my reasons for proposing a change to the ordinance. This amendment will create a sixth exempted category for the TOD District that will enable counseling and community service organizations such as The River Food Pantry to proceed with the construction of new, much-needed facilities.

Over the past 17 years, The River has become South Central Wisconsin's busiest food pantry, serving well over 2,500 people each week. The River works to build a stronger, fully-nourished community for all Madison residents by addressing food insecurity among low-income and underserved communities. It is a growing organization that currently manages 8 food distribution programs and several supporting operations that reduce food waste. In 2022, nearly 13,000 Dane County residents accessed The River's services 207,315 times. Moreover, with recent inflation rates and the end of pandemic relief programs this spring, community need for the pantry's services has already increased by a staggering 50% compared to service data from the same period of 2022. The River served 5,465 unduplicated individuals in May alone—and has lately been assisting 2,500-3,000 people per week!

The growth in community need has stretched The River's operational capacity to the limits of its current space. With that in mind, The River has been preparing to move to a new facility for several years, and as of this past March, has launched a capital campaign to secure funding for the land purchase and construction. The River examined many potential sites around the Madison area before deciding that constructing a purpose-built facility on Packers Avenue just north of their current location was the best option. Location is critical for community organizations assisting underserved communities. The River needs to stay on the northside, where there are often few resources available to low-income households. The River's current location, and the site of the proposed facility, are both located between 2 areas recognized as Food Access Focus Areas by the City of Madison. This means that Madison residents living in food deserts will retain access to an important pillar of support—one that may be their sole source of healthy, affordable groceries and meals. Their planned facility will not only enable them to maintain current services, but provide a foundation that will ensure The River can continue to grow and adapt to meet community needs in

the coming years. Given their current service numbers, it seems clear that a larger, more effectively designed facility will be of even greater use to the area.

The River has worked to carefully design a purpose-built, 25,000 sq. ft. facility that maximizes the efficiency and capacity of each of their food distribution operations. The new facility will include a commercial-grade kitchen, indoor dining area, significantly increased storage capacities, multi-use spaces for collaboration with community partners, and a distribution area tailored to meet the needs of The River's innovative curbside distribution model. Planning a shared operational space for 8 distribution programs and an extensive food recovery program is no easy task, but it is doable. Unfortunately, some of the current requirements for the TOD District would require significant changes to the building design that would ultimately increase costs while reducing operational efficiencies. The need to include a full second floor with an elevator for accessibility, for instance, would likely increase the cost of the project by \$1 million while eliminating planned storage spaces that would support the larger kitchen. Ultimately, this would likely result in a scaling down of other program capacities and sustainability initiatives within the new space, or even necessitate the relocation of the entire pantry. Since many of The River's clients contend with limited time and transportation access, this could result in the elimination of key services for northside residents.

The proposed exemption category would eliminate major barriers in creating a valuable new resource for the community. The city already provides an exemption for community and neighborhood centers, and this amendment would create a similar category for counseling and community service organizations. Recognizing that organizations such as The River play similar roles in the lives of community members is necessary to addressing the actual, persistent needs of underserved and historically marginalized populations. Indeed, The River already collaborates with a variety of community partners, including health organizations and neighborhood centers, and has designed a facility that is meant to deepen those partnerships by providing wrap-around services to its clients. While The River Food Pantry is one clear example of how this new category would make a difference for many residents, it is far from the only nonprofit service provider working with vulnerable populations that would benefit from a more accurate zoning category.

In conclusion, I urge you to support legislative file number 78322, which creates a new category exempting counseling and community service organizations from TOD District requirements in order to better enable critical community resources such as The River Food Pantry to be sited where they will have the greatest impact on our community.

Thank you.

Charles Myadze
District 18 Alder
Madison Common Council
608 669-6751