

Tuesday, August 18, 2015

Mayor Paul Soglin and the Madison Common Council
Rooms 403 & 417
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Mayor Soglin and members of the Madison Common Council:

I am writing in reference to proposed Ordinance Amendment #39140, which would change the license fees for outdoor cafe spaces in downtown Madison.

I have a small business on the Capitol Square for which I employ approximately 14 people, including myself, and have been in business for almost 8 years. We are an independent business that works closely with other small, independent businesses, as well as with local cheese producers throughout Wisconsin. I believe we benefit the City and the community.

Outside our shop, we maintain a patio space each year for approximately five months (May through September) for up to 12 people to sit at tables. While we do not use the space during the winter, or much during weekdays outside our two-hour lunch period, we consider it an opportunity to connect with the many visitors who expect a welcoming space in our downtown.

The Mayor's current proposal would more than triple our current fee from \$550 to \$1729. While this may be a "bluff proposal" in order to put business owners in the mood to put up a smaller amount to pay for downtown maintenance, any increase should raise some questions for the general public, as well as downtown businesses.

Rather than quibble over things like rates per square foot now, here are my general questions:

1. In reading the staff memo, I was immediately thrown into a debate about square footage, and restaurants vs. retail, etc. However, I would like to know what purpose the current funds collected - apparently \$51,168 - serve now. If the City now plans to collect five times that amount, are there clearly stated criteria for use of the new funds? If not, there should be criteria established that specifically benefit the downtown before this proposal moves forward. We should know how this nearly \$250,000 would be used.
2. And after collecting these new funds, does the City intend to put them in a segregated fund that will guarantee their use on the improvements implied by the Mayor's proposal? Or will they continue to be put in the General Fund and governed only by "the Mayor's intent" at budget time? If it will be the latter, I oppose the increase,



which will quintuple the amount now collected, but not guarantee that the funds be spent on the stated policy objective.

3. Finally, if the City plans to evaluate the "value of privatization of public space for private use," will it also take into account the benefit that outdoor cafes and similar spaces bring to Madison? We strive to be a good downtown neighbor, and make visitors want to come back not just to our store, but to a wonderful city, and area of that city, that gives us so much to be proud of. For example, Fromagination has hosted "Make Music Madison" for the past two years, providing a venue for free music to anyone passing by our shop, and giving local musicians a forum for their art. In addition, we benefit from, and contribute to, the atmosphere and community commerce created by the Dane County Farmers Market. I hope that your evaluation takes into account the positive role our businesses play in the fabric of downtown Madison.

If the City of Madison does indeed substantially increase the amount restaurants and cafes pay for summer sidewalk space, there should be a clear statement of purpose, and a guarantee of use, that accompanies this change to the current license fee fund. In addition, the City must acknowledge that its vibrant downtown is in some part created on a daily basis by those of us who sweep the sidewalk, put out the tables, and welcome the visitors.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ken A. Monteleone,
Owner and General Manager

