

To Whom it May Concern:

I have been a proud resident, worker, property owner, architect, developer, and community participant in the Marquette Neighborhood in varying degrees for over 40 years. I've watched and been part of Williamson Street's evolution from a charming area with a bad reputation to a charming area with a reputation that now lures visitors, residents, entrepreneurs, developers, and more.

In 1990 when I purchased the deteriorating Richard Ela Industrial Supply buildings on the 700 block of Williamson Street I was advised to develop them into offices, but at that point having been in the neighborhood for nearly 20 years, I insisted on including a restaurant and a coffee shop to try to hopefully activate the underappreciated street with the presence of people from within and without the neighborhood. I found the right tenants in Eldorado Grill and Ground Zero Coffee, and slowly an expanding public began to discover the true charms of Williamson Street.

Now, decades later, the East Side of Madison is undergoing an unprecedented renaissance with exciting developments over the entire East Isthmus from Lake Monona to Lake Mendota, and there is an abundance of both enthusiasm and opportunity in this blossoming part of Madison.

As a contiguous neighbor, I have been highly supportive of the multi-storied development of the Olds Building complex, and I was excited to hear about the proposed I/O Arcade Bar within it. When I noticed the owner's request for support on Twitter, like the many others who have responded positively, I decided to express my own enthusiasm. But then I dug deeper to examine the plan, capacity, parking, and other details of the proposal.

I'm afraid that I now feel strongly that the proposed capacity, even reduced from 250 to 155, in a 2800 ft.² space with 27 parking spaces shared with other tenants is simply asking for too much of a good thing. The nature of Williamson Street as a historic small-scale business and entertainment corridor serving the adjacent residential community and beyond is being threatened by its own desirability. That is also without question the feeling of many other business owners and residents of the neighborhood.

This size of drinking establishment would be eminently suited for East Washington Avenue with its broad boulevard, multi-story parking ramps, and large-scale developments and there is no shortage of available space in that corridor. There are also emerging areas between Williamson and East Washington that do not have the limitations of scale and proximity that have become so problematic on Williamson Street in the last decade.

Additionally, high capacity drinking establishments often present their own unanticipated problems; the other large scale bar that was added to Williamson Street in recent decades has presented numerous problems for the community as I am sure you are well aware.

I strongly support the concept of a video game oriented drinking establishment and feel it would be great in attracting and serving emergent cultural groups and contribute to the vitality of our city. Madison needs to have more of these functions to appeal to those who will be and in fact are our new leaders. However, when they are the sheer size of the proposed I/O Arcade Bar they should be located in areas of a more appropriate scale, ultimately even for their own benefit.

Thank You,

John Martens

Owner, Historic Madison Candy Company, 740-744 Williamson St.