

FACT SHEET: ALCOHOL OUTLET DENSITY

What do we mean by “outlet density”?

Outlet density is defined as the amount of liquor licenses existing within an established geographic area. For purposes of Madison’s proposed ordinance, the area includes four downtown police sectors (403, 404, 405 & 406) and encompasses .9 square mile. Approximately 31% of the city’s Class B Combination licenses are within this small geographic area.

What has been the trend in outlet density in downtown Madison?

From 1997 to 2006, the total number of alcohol licenses has increased from 57 to 128, a 125% increase (City of Madison, 2007).

Will the proposed density reduction ordinance solve Madison’s alcohol problems?

Madison’s “culture of alcohol” is complex, and no one strategy will cure the problem. A multi-faceted approach is needed. Limiting the density of alcohol outlets is one proven intervention strategy recommended by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) to address problem drinking behaviors. Communities can and should regulate the availability of alcohol as part of a comprehensive public health and safety policy.

Why is reducing alcohol retail outlet density a good environmental strategy?

From a harm reduction standpoint, it makes sense. Research conducted on the impact of outlet density on alcohol problems has found that:

- Outlet density impacts drinking by making low cost, or volume discounted alcohol available to persons predisposed to drink heavily (Gruenewald et al., 1996)
- Outlet density has been correlated with heavy drinking, frequent drinking, and drinking related problems, particularly among women, underage students, and students who picked up drinking in college (Weitzman et al., 2003)

Reducing density also makes sense from a crime and policing perspective. Many research articles demonstrate the relationship between alcohol outlet density and alcohol-related crime, violence, and other disturbances. (See the attached Research Summary: “Evaluating the Impact of Outlet Density on Crime,” Institute for Public Strategies).

The Madison Police Department reports that incidents of violence and disorder are clustered in the same area where liquor licenses are located, and that incidents peak before and after bar time.

If the goal is to reduce outlet density, why does the proposed density ordinance still allow new licenses for restaurants?

Studies have shown that licensed establishments where alcohol comprises the majority of sales generate the highest numbers of police calls. (See attached Information Briefing: “Alcohol Outlet Density,” University of Nebraska/Lincoln). Bona fide restaurants (those whose food sales exceed

alcohol sales) are rarely responsible for alcohol-related problems and generate few police calls. The Alcohol License Review Committee (ALRC) needs to ensure that restaurants with liquor licenses remain restaurants, and do not “morph” into bars in violation of their licenses.

If the density ordinance is enacted, won't there be an increase of bars and alcohol-related problems in other nearby neighborhoods?

Density restrictions can be expanded to cover other sectors as needed, but tougher enforcement of current regulations and an actively engaged ALRC can prevent this scenario from happening. It should be pointed out that other neighborhoods are already negatively impacted because officers must frequently respond to downtown calls at bar time, leaving outlying areas less protected.

Will the density ordinance result in more house parties where drinking is unregulated?

Madison police have become very effective in closing down large house parties. Central District Captain Mary Schauf recently stated that the pool of individuals at house parties is largely distinct from the pool of individuals who drink at bars. The density plan is intended to improve the overall community environment and prevent crime and violence. Prevention strategies are needed to decrease risky drinking across *all* settings.

Will a density ordinance hurt downtown economic interests?

The proposed density plan will protect the safety, security, and economic interests of the many people who live, work, and run businesses downtown, rather than the economic interests of a few landlords and tavern owners. The density plan will help attract more residents and businesses, including new restaurants. The future economic health of the entire city depends to a great extent on the economic health of downtown. A balance of various kinds of establishments can create a vibrant economy without the negatives associated with an over-saturation of bars.

Madison's drinking scene was here long before new downtown development. Shouldn't downtown residents just learn to live with some problems as part of the urban environment?

- The primary purpose of government is the safety and security of all its citizens. *All* residents, regardless of where they live, should be able to expect a high quality of life.
- Intoxication is not an excuse for criminal, violent or destructive behavior.
- If crime, violence and disturbances continue, we will see a cycle of fright, flight (to outlying neighborhoods and the suburbs), and blight. This would be devastating to the economic viability and reputation of the entire city.

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