Mayor of Maplewood Fails to Protect Small Businesses

Championed by Mayor Nikylan Knapper, the city of Maplewood continues its attempt to push through a food truck ordinance, despite outcry from local small business owners and the Mid County Chamber of Commerce.

Maplewood's Mayor is pushing the city to revise its restrictive food truck ordinance despite grave concerns from the business community. Although Mayor Knapper and the city management have met several times with the businesses and the Mid County Chamber of Commerce (MCOC) they have been unwilling or unable to put forth a draft of the ordinance that does not compromise the security of the brick-and-mortar businesses that anchor Maplewood's thriving community.

Previous administrations recognized the delicate nature of this issue, and worked with the MCOC to draft the ordinance that has been in effect for over 10 years. However, there are inequities in the current ordinance that everyone agrees could be rectified without harm to businesses. For example, food trucks hired as private caterers are currently restricted to private property, making the ordinance discriminatory to renters or those without driveways to pull the truck onto. While Mayor Knapper is looking to correct these inequities, the MCOC and many Maplewood small businesses feel that the proposed bill is an overcorrection. "Maplewood is only 1.5 square miles with a high concentration of small, locally owned businesses. Food trucks, especially at the volume proposed by the City of Maplewood, will be devastating, and the lack of proposed oversight will further compound the problem," says Jeannine Beck the Director of the Mid County Chamber of Commerce.

While the Mayor has repeatedly said that she does not want food trucks inside of Maplewood's Special Business District (SBD), the new bill has loopholes allowing just that. The sole purpose of the "Special Use Permit," is to bring food trucks onto the 7100 block of Manchester Rd. which is part of the SBD. "Food trucks as a means of revitalizing the 7100 block is a misguided notion, and it is irresponsible at best to risk the stability of one area in an attempt to improve another," says Eliza Coriell, co-owner of Maplewood's The Crow's Nest and member of the Maplewood Special Business District Commission.

Another loophole is created with the "Private Use Permit" which is intended to cater to private events such as block parties, whereby the individual customers are part of a private group that is not open to the general public. Unfortunately, it was confirmed by the city's lawyer that the language is so broad that almost any declaration of a group would qualify. For example, a "customer base." The scope of this "private group" would be virtually unenforceable if it grows beyond the intended target. Furthermore, it would allow the trucks inside of unintended areas like the SBD. "The people who have incurred the cost and liabilities of a brick-and-mortar business are the same people being undercut by this proposal. We've helped build the SBD into what it is today and

this has the ability to do long term damage," says Kate Bethel, owner of the boutique soap and candle shop Maven, located in the heart of the SBD.

So why is Mayor Knapper working so diligently and devoting so many resources to this food truck legislation? The answer doesn't seem to be in creating revenue for the city. In fact, there has been no mention of how they intend to track or collect sales tax revenue. "Without a monetary advantage to either the city or the businesses, it's clear that this issue requires a lot more thought," Jeannine Beck of the MCOC.

This issue is slated to be on the agenda of the Maplewood City Council on Tuesday November 8th at 7:30. We ask for your support to let council know that we cannot support destructive legislation. Please consider signing our petition so we can continue to fight for more responsible legislation.

UPDATE: On 11/3/22 the food truck issue was removed from the Maplewood City Council's agenda. We will update our webpage when its back on.