

Planning
Department



CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

September 8, 2017

Michigan Liquor Control Commission
Attn: Anita Fawcett
525 W Allegan PO Box 30005
Lansing, MI 48909

RE: OPPOSITION TO AMEND/ELIMINATE RULE 436.1133 – THE “HALF-MILE RULE”

The City of Grand Rapids opposes any proposed changes to Rule 436.1133 (The “Half-Mile Rule”) that would reduce or eliminate the separation distance between Specially Designated Distributor (SDD) licenses.

Despite Grand Rapids “Beer City USA” designation, we recognize that not all alcohol outlets are the same. The recent legislative change to allow beer and wine sales at gas stations has not been controversial for us; in fact, the Planning Department is in the process of modifying the Zoning Ordinance to allow such sales with administrative review. Liquor stores, however, are a different matter as our crime data shows that incidents of robbery and assault occur at a greater frequency within the proximity of liquor store locations.

The “Half-Mile Rule” has provided protection for our urban neighborhoods. The Rule has prevented multiple outlets from co-locating in close proximity to one another, thereby limiting the amount of businesses saturating a neighborhood. Quality of life impacts such as loitering, litter, noise, and personal safety (real and perceived) can be difficult to manage even at a single SDD outlet. A concentration of outlets would be severely detrimental, particularly in communities that are already vulnerable.

Given that the MLCC controls the sale of alcohol products within outlets, local units of government do not have the ability to prohibit the sale of products that allow for fast consumption - such as miniatures and half-pints. These items are particularly problematic as it is common in vulnerable neighborhoods for these to be the product of choice for reasons of price and purpose. There are areas of our city where alcohol addiction is evident. Allowing for the opportunity to increase the number of SDD outlets in these communities, and the supply of such product types, will make neighborhood revitalization efforts even more difficult than today.

The MLCC’s role is important in maintaining the stability of our local business districts and neighborhoods. Local issues surrounding race, poverty, and geography oftentimes come into play in discussions about SDD outlets. In this particular circumstance, local control is not the best or wisest approach. The MLCC’s guiding philosophy “to make alcoholic beverages available while regulating their sale and distribution in order to protect the rights and interests of Michigan citizens” clearly applies. Numerous neighborhood associations and citizens have spoken that the current rule is clear and consistent, and should remain.

Regards,
Suzanne M. Schulz, AICP
Managing Director of Design, Development and Community Engagement

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