

Counsel members,

My name is Christopher Nelis, and I am the owner of Old Bavarian Brau Haus or OB's Brau Haus. For a little bit of history we have been downtown Appleton for a total of ~~25~~ 25 years serving German cuisines to our guests. I am very happy and lucky to be a part of the downtown district. The beauty and diversity of downtown is heavily reliant and influenced by the small business owners and their employees. People depend on these businesses downtown for jobs providing financial security for their families and children, to go shopping, or to go for a walk and congregate, and the list could go on.

I am before you today to express my concerns and the concerns of a few other fellow business owners about the 'road diet' or 'Smart Streets', but I can only speak for myself. Before I begin I just would like to say that Downtown Appleton is primarily a commercial district but does happen to have some residential condos or apartments.

Smart Streets was primary introduced to us to add bike lanes to College Ave and to have a better lane configuration to improve flow of traffic and safety. The program's website points out the importance of these streets to enable transportation, commerce, and social interactions. It also touts within the first pages of the website to enhance the outdoor experience, support local businesses, and bolster a welcoming downtown. It further explains that for safety there will be an expected reduction in vehicle accidents, improved pedestrian crossing, smoother traffic flow, and improved visibility turning. Along with the aforementioned it also explains about the bike lanes dedicated to cyclists, scooters, and other wheeled vehicles along with mentioning growth by creating a livable pleasant neighborhood environment with slower speeds allowing people to see what downtown has to offer, and the attraction of bicycle and pedestrian groups to spend money in shops and restaurants.

There were multiple studies or metrics published on the SmartStreets website during the periods of July 2023 through January 2024; August 2023 through July 2024; and finally

August 2023 – December 2024. These were pretty vague and also extremely brief on the reporting on bicycle count and pedestrian count. For both of these counts according to the website on the first two reporting periods pedestrians and bicycles they were only counted for a 24 hour period out of a one year window for a total of 48 hours from July 2023 to July 2024 for a total of 33 bicycles or 1.37 bikes an hour, adjusted for peak hour usage assuming all bikes used the lanes from 8am-8pm that is 2.75 bikes an hour. This timeframe is only a 1/2 of a percentage of the total hours in a year or two days out of 365. The study itself even suggests with an asterisks on certain metrics that there is 'low confidence' due to small data sets. This is not or does not seem like an adequate amount of time to accurately propose the median usage of the bicycle lane per cyclist throughout a calendar year. Mentioning a calendar year it goes to say that these bicycle lanes can really only be used for 7-8 months of the year and typically only during fair weather.

This year and a half trial program was made to make bicycling downtown safer and more accessible and to bolster more bicycle business downtown. While this seems to be the case safety wise for bicyclists it also appears that these bike lanes are seldom used. I would have thought to have seen a noticeable increase in bicycle traffic over this time span, but there just has not been. Cyclists are still using the sidewalks, motorized bikes that go 20-30 miles an hour are in the bike lanes, which is a massive safety issue for anyone leaving their vehicle, and there has been zero increase in bicycle business for my business with these changes. Unfortunately it has had the opposite effect for my restaurant by decreasing business by an estimated 20-30% which in turn also means 20-30% less business for my staff as well. I have read the ADI business owners survey and this also seems to be the case for other businesses with one stating quite literally that they will probably have to close if the configuration is not restored to the original.

It has been over a year and a half and at the rate of 2.75 bikes an hour between 8am-8pm it would seem that having an extra mini van or 4 door coupe park out front of a store front with 4 people would be more beneficial for downtown businesses.

Another part of the study said that slower speeds would improve safety. Looking at the memorandum from the department of Public Works it states that speeds were reduced by 3%. This is a change from 20 miles per hour to 19.4 miles per hour. This change in speed is unfortunately negligible and does not make the impact from a motor vehicle into a pedestrian any more or any less safe.

The memorandum also states that reportable crashes is down from 1,058 to 923 total which is a 12.7% difference. This shouldn't have to be stated, but respectfully if you remove lanes and or roads you will simply just have less accidents.

Looking again at the ADI Business Owners Study it seems pretty split up and down the board between the 5 options from Very Satisfied through Very Dissatisfied. Some of the write-in comments from business owners are very concerning.

Here are some of the write in comments from the ADI business owners survey from business owners that were not stated during the February 24<sup>th</sup> meeting with the Municipal Services Committee.

'We have had so many people message us that they will no longer come to our location downtown due to the bike lanes, new lanes, and less parking. Many people have spoken about how the downtown is no longer what it use to be.' 1/11/2025

'30% less revenue, People complaining about trying to get to the studio. And no one uses the bike lanes.' 1/9/2025

'Traffic gets backed up. Hard to turn onto College Ave. You have to really watch when you open the car door.' 12/31/2024

'If things don't change back, I may have to close.' 1/9/2025

On this ADI study 19 businesses replied. The low number does not infer that there is comfort or acceptance to these changes. It is quite possible people may not have received the survey, and or thought or felt that their voices would not be heard or taken seriously.

One of the biggest concerns with traffic that I would like to bring to the forefront of this lane configuration is when the PAC has a large show or event. Traffic is an absolute nightmare and this has also been stated by my customers, social media posts, other business owners et cetera. I think there definitely needs to be some more thought and foresight to the congestion that is going to be added to the traffic downtown with the addition of US Venture. This business will be bringing an extra 650 jobs to the 222 building downtown according to Fox 11 News. With these 650 jobs will certainly bring a lot of extra vehicles. There will be a large influx of traffic because of this during the morning, lunchtime, and evening hours.

Changing the roads in this manner is a severe and drastic change for what seems to be a negligible usage of the new bike lanes. College avenue has always been safely and easily walkable. There are plenty of crosswalks that are very easily accessible and very well labeled.

Significant changes like this to the commercial district of downtown should strike an appropriate balance and not be so extreme. For this little usage of the bike lanes this does not seem to balance with the needs of the businesses downtown.

I believe there would be better ways to change the speed and traffic volumes downtown. Perhaps having a dedicated cruiser downtown patrolling would help tremendously in stopping speeding, racing, and loud exhausts. There will always be loud noise downtown as it is a commercial district, but I do believe that having a higher cruiser presence downtown would alleviate these problems and also add additional revenue to the city to pay for itself over time.

I want the best for the downtown businesses and its residents. With the way downtown is there has to be a balance struck between the needs of the few to what College Ave actually is. A primarily downtown commercial district with a lot of diverse family owned businesses, boutiques, coffee shops, restaurants, that all add the vibrancy, beauty and appeal of a downtown district to attract people. The people of downtown rely on these businesses for commerce and to support their families with the jobs that they provide.

In summation I do not believe these changes should be made permanent and I think that alternatives should be explored to reduce noise and increase safety before making such a huge and drastic change to the downtown district. Businesses and their employees absolutely need the traffic that the four lanes had to offer. The negligible changes in the safety metrics are not enough to justify business closures, reduction in business, or the ease of accessibility to downtown.

Change can be a great thing, and sometimes change can be just that and only that. I appreciate the people who participated in the studies for the SmartStreets data, and also the time put into this project by the city and the department of public works and ADI.

Thanks for your time,

Christopher Nelis