

Testimony Regarding House Bill No. 2059

Thomas Underwood, Ph.D.
Executive Director
NOTO Arts and Entertainment District

The NOTO Arts and Entertainment District is an area in North Topeka that in the past dozen years has become the place to be for fun, colorful, unique, and engaging visitor experiences. This historic area of the city features art galleries, unique shops, activities, and one of a kind restaurants and bars. NOTO offers over fifty outdoor public art murals and sculptures, and regularly has music and other performance art at Redbud Park.

Geographically, NOTO is a relatively broad and inclusive area, but the popular conception of district boundaries is the 800 and 900 blocks of North Kansas Avenue. The current common consumption statute requires the blocking of motorized vehicles during times when alcohol is consumed. NOTO businesses are generally opposed to closing it except for very rare occasions. It is important to keep the street open for several reasons. First, many of the shops do not have good access to the back so large items, such as furniture, cannot be easily loaded when front access is closed. Second, parking is a premium commodity in NOTO and closing the street removes approximately 180 parking spaces. Finally, North Kansas Avenue is the strip many visitors drive down, either for the eternal search for that perfect parking place, or simply for a quick cruise of the area.

Since NOTO does not generally support the closing of the street, common consumption as it is currently defined is not viable. However, should the statute be changed so that the closing of streets is not required, as the arts and entertainment district in a relatively defined geographic area, NOTO would be a prime area for consideration and would work with the City for ordinance change and possible implementation of the NOTO district as a common consumption area.

While many details will need to be fleshed out, allowing visitors to get a drink from one of the seven establishments to enjoy while taking in all that NOTO has to offer would add to vibrancy of the district. A common consumption area would further lend to NOTO's vision to "become the region's premier arts and entertainment destination."