To the Wichita City Council:

I am communicating with The Council as the owner of Quiznos, located in downtown Wichita on the corner of Main and Douglas streets. Our restaurant was established at this location almost 20 years ago.

During those 20 years, we have managed to:

- Provide high quality fast food to our central business district (CBD).
- Provide a highly recognizable franchise in our CBD.
- Provide jobs for residents of downtown Wichita.
- Provide training and on-the-job learning of new skills to employees.
- Provide a business environment that allowed a number of family and others to learn business.

After 20 years:

- We managed to survive in the face of competition as other restaurants moved in to carve out business.
- We survived (but victims) of the City of Wichita -Minnesota Boys debacle that put downtown behind at least 10 years.
- We survived while operating in a virtually empty building as our landlord has not leased office space because of no demand. Parking continues to be an issue as well.
- We struggled to keep the doors open as we waited for downtown Wichita to build apartments and condos hoping to increase the number of individuals to draw from for food business.
- We struggled further when Downtown Wichita chose to create a pop-up park for food trucks on Douglas, less than 100 yards from our front door.
- We now operate at an annual loss which is not sustainable going forward.
- On September 27, 2016, I read in the Wichita Eagle that the Wichita City Council is considering easing restrictions on food trucks, making it cheap and easy for them to compete for business.

Facts to consider:

- Permanent Restaurants (PR) depend on walk-in traffic during a two hour lunch time to make money.
- Food Trucks (FT) drive into downtown to compete for the foot traffic. Return home when lunch is over.
- PR depend on the good weather months to make a profit to survive the slower winter months.
- FT depend on good weather as well and get promoted by Downtown Wichita featuring special events.
- PR pay rent 365 days per year. FT will pay $50 for a 30 day permit.
• PR provide jobs to downtown residents. FT provide few or no jobs to downtown residents.
• PR pay utilities 365 days a year. FT do not.
• FT will take away parking spaces away from potential PR customers.
• Since the food trucks opened in the pop-up park our (Quiznos) revenue is down 30%. There will be no excess revenue from this summer to carry us through the winter.
• When Quiznos offered outdoor seating 5 years ago, the city forced us to cease and desist. Instead, they provide a complimentary outdoor dining area for FT and attract business away from PR.
• We also compete with low-profile, non-franchise businesses that operate in other CBD buildings with subsidized leases and/or food in an effort to maintain building day-tenants.

Going forward I ask the Council to consider the future of downtown Wichita:

• The September 27, Wichita Eagle article by Dion Leifer indicates Wichita has a "plethora of food trucks". Do you really want or need to encourage the food truck industry? I do understand the need to regulate issues such as safety but to give them additional cheap licenses to compete with permanent downtown businesses??

• If the residential units do indeed fill up there will be an expanded opportunity for adding evening dining opportunities to increase revenue. In the meantime I would suggest the Council encourage Downtown Wichita Development to look into what they can do to secure the future of permanent restaurants, not just come up with more ways to bring more food trucks into downtown. If the situation is not changed I suspect there will be less permanent eating places available when the residential space is occupied.

• Interestingly, the Washington Post published an article by Phillip Bump on September 2, 2016 which has application to Wichita, "The national economic implications of a taco truck on every corner". Ironically, Mr. Bump sites Kansas as an example. Is he fore-telling the future of downtown Wichita?

• How about Wichita helping us with tax credits and/or subsidies until the population density grows to provide the revenue to at least allow us to remain in operation?

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the situation further.

Respectfully,

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Faced with an plethora of food trucks, Wichita is considering opening downtown to street-side food-truck operations and passing regulations in an effort to ensure they run in a safe and orderly fashion.
A proposed ordinance discussed by the City Council at a workshop Tuesday would get rid of a current ban on food truck operations on downtown city streets and regulate such matters as fire suppression systems and how close food trucks can operate to buildings, fixed restaurants and each other.

"The popularity of food trucks has exploded," in the past couple of years, said planner Scott Knebel. "In 2012, we invited the people who were licensed as food truck operators to a meeting and one of them showed up. This year, we ... had two meetings with operators and the room was packed beyond capacity. There were 20-plus food truck operations."

An estimated 40 to 50 food trucks work Wichita’s streets at any given time, but it’s difficult to know for sure because they operate on the same temporary sales permits as any street or sidewalk vendor, officials said.

Truck operators at Tuesday’s meeting were generally supportive of the proposed ordinance. They said it would open up downtown areas that are now off limits and that, for the most part, the restrictions appear to be reasonable.

Natalie Burris, operator of the Noble House Hawaiian food truck, and Kate Clause with the Sunflower Espresso truck said they’re especially excited that more of downtown would be open to food trucks.

Another big change: Instead of having to get a permit for each location, truck operators could get one permit that allowed them to operate anywhere where food trucks are allowed.

The operators said the current location-by-location permitting is cumbersome and expensive and it would be easier to operate if the city allowed more roaming under a single permit.

At present, the trucks are pretty much restricted to a private “pocket park” on Douglas between Market and Main. Although that’s not a bad location, the ability to make short stops on city streets would open new territories near businesses that don’t have many lunch or coffee options nearby, the operators said.

Clause said another place she’d like to be able to serve is around the downtown library.

**Automatic control**
Probably the most controversial aspect of the regulations would be a requirement that food trucks have an automatic fire-control system if they cook food that generates grease-laden vapors.

Some food truck operators have objected to the cost – about $4,000 a truck, said Scott Knebel, a planner who has been working on the ordinance.

Council member James Clendenin, whose father had been in the food business, questioned whether the same level of safety could be achieved with ordinary fire extinguishers.

Fire Marshal Brad Crisp said a grease fire in a small space “probably isn’t going to be controllable by a 10-pound fire extinguisher.” Fires are especially dangerous in the context of food trucks, almost all of which carry an on-board propane supply for grilling and other appliances.

Crisp said there have been three food-truck fires in Wichita in the past few years, though none recently. He said he could point to examples nationally of catastrophic fires where “people were severely injured and even died.”

Burris and Clause said they’re not really troubled by the fire regulations. The Noble House truck already has a fire suppression system and Sunflower Espresso’s coffee machines don’t generate greasy vapor, so it won’t be required to have a system.

However, “I know some of the other trucks are going to struggle to update what they have,” Burris said.

The permit price would be $50 for 30 days, $250 for six months or $400 for a year.
A supporter of Donald Trump appeared on MSNBC's "All In" on Thursday night to offer a vision of a bleak, delicious future.

"My culture is a very dominant culture, and it's imposing — and it's causing problems," Marco Gutierrez of Latinos for Trump told Joy Ann Reid. "If you don't do something about it, you're going to have taco trucks on every corner."

That's a serious charge, worthy of being considered seriously. Although easy access to inexpensive Mexican food would be a boon for hungry Americans, what would the inevitable presence of those trucks do to the American economy? How could our country accommodate an explosion of trucks at that scale?

The first question we must answer is how many trucks we're talking about. A corner is dependent on an intersection of street, a place where two roads meet or where one road turns. For the purposes of our thought experiment, we will assume that Gutierrez didn't mean a truck literally on every corner — that would be ridiculous. Instead, let's assume that he meant a truck at every intersection.

There doesn't appear to be an official tally of the number of intersections in the United States, in part thanks to our using this term to describe a lot of possible combinations of streets.

We do have estimates of the number of intersections with stoplights in the country, though. In 2004, the Institute of Transportation Engineers estimated that there are 265,000 "signalized intersections" in the country. But that report also included a rule of thumb suggesting a ratio between the number of

intersections with stoplights and the population: For every 1,000 people, one intersection with a stoplight. That doesn’t quite hold in New York City, where there are 12,460 intersections with stoplights and a population of only 8.4 million. But it’s fairly close, so let’s use it. That would peg the current number of intersections with stoplights in America at 322,000.

That’s just intersections with stoplights, of course. Estimating how many other intersections there are is even harder. So for the sake of argument, let’s assume that there are nine un-signalized intersections for every intersection with a stoplight. The density of stoplights is higher in a city — Manhattan has 2,820 signals but probably about 3,500 intersections — but out in more rural areas, they’re rarer. Here’s a random swath of rural Kansas: Lots of intersections, few signals.

That would give us about 3.2 million intersections in the United States. And it would mean that, per Gutierrez’s vision of the future, we’d suddenly see 3.2 million conveniently located taco trucks. How ubiquitous is that? Well, it’s one on every corner. But we can also compare it to Starbucks, which seems pretty ubiquitous in a lot of places. In 2012, there were about 11,000 Starbucks locations in the United States.

It’s only now that I realize that the idea of the “taco truck” may be foreign to some people. A taco truck is a large box truck — a food truck — that has a small Mexican restaurant in the back. They are relatively common in California, I can say from experience; I suspect that that holds true for other places in the Southwest, as well. It requires a handful of staff members — or less than that, really.

So what would it mean to have 3.2 million such establishments on our streets? Well, according to this article at something called "FoodBeast," there are already 3 million food trucks in America, so apparently we wouldn’t really notice them. Unless that figure is wrong, as this article effectively argues. For example: "According to TruckInfo there are about 15 million trucks on the road in the U.S. This means 1 in 5 trucks on the road are food trucks." Which seems high.

But it’s where we’re headed, apparently, if Trump loses. That’s good news for the economy in one way. If you assume that three people work in each truck, that’s 9.6 million new jobs created. The labor force in August was 159.4 million, with 144.6 million employed. Adding 9.6 million taco truck workers would help America reach nearly full employment — and that’s just the staffing in the trucks. Think about all of the ancillary job creation: mechanics, gas station workers, Mexican food truck management executive. We’d likely need to increase immigration levels just to meet the demand.

Of course, there would be other repercussions. Many of the taco trucks would struggle to find business, like those posted at remote crossroads in Kansas. Other restaurants would likely suffer as a glut of other options and price wars undercut their offerings. There would be plenty of jobs for those fired from higher-end restaurants, but the resulting drop in wages would be staggering.

That, more than the cultural fearmongering some might see in Gutierrez’s dire warning, is the real threat to America. A taco truck on every corner means a dramatic shift in how America views itself, sure, but it also means a new economy built on serving up burritos or developing new, more fuel-efficient box trucks. It means a change to the American way of life that Gutierrez, for one, finds unacceptable.

Update: Using Census Bureau shapefiles (called TIGER) on America’s system of roads, a reader (and New York Times programmer) pulled a more specific number: over 21.5 million.

That means 6.3 million new jobs -- save for those people already employed at taco trucks, as another reader notes. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not track "taco truck employees" as a separate data point.) It also means that the scale of everything else increase by a factor of seven: seven times as many mechanics and seven times as much vegetable oil sold for the deep fryers.

As you consider this important political issue, bear that in mind.

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