

Food Trucks and Mobile Vendors

RULES AND REGULATIONS



Updated: MARCH 2026

A Guide for Operators of Mobile Food Establishments

Quick Tips:

- All units must return to their base, at a minimum, every 24 hours (when in operation)
- No food can be stored, cooked, or prepared at a home/private residence/personal garage
- Do not dump wastewater from dirty water tanks (or grease) directly into street sewer (use a sink in your service base)
- Pick up trash during/after operation around your mobile unit to maintain the premise properly
- No extra food or single service items are allowed to be stored inside a vehicle near your unit while operating
- Mobile means mobile – generator must be attached to the unit; no separate signage, tables, chairs
- A separate trash can must be provided
- A temporary event/transient food license is more appropriate if you ONLY operate at special events
- Camping style coolers cannot be used for storing food
- Beverage dispensers must be food grade (no 'Gatorade/Home Depot' jugs)
- Do not use a garden hose for filling your clean water tank; it must be NSF 51 or 61, or Food Grade
- You must keep track of your base use with sign in/out logs
- If your unit is licensed by a different municipality and you wish to operate in the public right of way, you need to obtain a Mobile Seller's License through the License Division
- For complaints, please visit [milwaukee.gov/foodtrucks](https://www.milwaukee.gov/foodtrucks)

Trucks, Trailers, Pushcarts, & Restaurants on Wheels

The City of Milwaukee Health Department inspects and regulates all mobile food operations. There are two different licenses that can be available for trucks, trailers, pushcarts, & restaurants on wheels:

- **Mobile licensing** *is required if you plan to operate on a public street, private property, or on your own without association of an organized, special event.*
- **Temporary event/transient food licenses** *can be used for operations only at an organized, special event.*

The Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) defines a transient food establishment and special events as the following:

(a) “Special event” means a department-recognized event that is sponsored, planned, organized, and publicly advertised by organizations that include the following:

1. Neighborhood associations
2. Religious groups
3. Cultural groups
4. Political parties
5. Churches
6. Schools
7. Sports teams
8. Fraternal organizations
9. Non-profit organizations
10. City, county, state or federal governments

(b) Special events are limited to gatherings of people for concerts; sporting events; trade shows; flea markets or farmers markets; public exhibitions by artists, craftsman, or vehicle enthusiasts; a fair, carnival, circus, or governmentally recognized celebration based on a specific calendar date such as a holiday or anniversary; or any other event approved by the regulatory agency. A “potluck” is not a “special event”.

“Transient retail food establishment” means a temporary retail food establishment that operates at a fixed location in conjunction with a special event and sells or serves food for a period of no more than 14 consecutive days or in conjunction with an occasional sales promotion.

Note: a reoccurring gathering of food trucks on a public street or area is not a special event; mobile licensing is required.

This guide is intended to apply to mobile units operating under a mobile license (mostly typically in the public right of way), not associated with a temporary event. Vendors using their mobile unit at temporary events may operate in the same fashion as a temporary event vendor.

Licensing

All applications are processed and all licenses are issued through the City Clerk's License Division. It is a more in-depth process than just passing a health inspection. You may need to submit fingerprints for MPD, a WI State Seller's Permit, and any other paperwork required by licensing. Anyone operating an ice cream business may need to obtain an Ice Cream Peddler Permit. You will need to obtain an occupancy permit for your mobile service base. You should obtain your licenses from the jurisdiction that your mobile service base is located. Mobile unit licenses are valid in any jurisdiction. If you have questions about licensing, contact the license division:

License@milwaukee.gov | (414) 286-2238

Licenses are required to operate – your unit will need a mobile license and your mobile service base needs a separate license. You'll need to complete the licensing process and obtain a physical copy of your licenses prior to selling food. Licenses are not transferrable and are only valid for the business and the unit they were issued to. Licenses will be checked by your health inspector during inspections.

If you wish to sell in a Milwaukee County Park, visit:

<https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Plan/Get-a-Permit>

Your Mobile Unit

Unless the unit previously had a license in Wisconsin, operators must submit their purchase/buildout plans to a CEH Coordinator for evaluation. Operational Plan, Itinerary, Shared Kitchen Agreement, and Menu should also be included.

MKEHealthMobileFood@milwaukee.gov | (414) 286-8327

All units must follow the Wisconsin Food Code. Purchase equipment that is listed for commercial food service use by an ANSI accredited listing service (such as UL Sanitation, ETL Sanitation, NSF or CSA). A piece of equipment that would not be accepted in a permanent food establishment will not be accepted on a mobile unit.

Vehicle Surfaces

Mobile units must meet Wisconsin Food Code standards for floor and wall finishes and lighting. All surfaces must be smooth, durable, easily cleanable, nonabsorbent, and water resistant. Exposed wood is not allowed. Lights must be shielded or shatterproof.

Trucks and trailers shall be enclosed; carts shall have overhead protection. Units must be moveable.

All units must have business identification on at least 2 sides of the unit, using lettering /numbering that is at least 3 inches tall. The business name and valid telephone number must be on it. License plates may be required per Department of Motor Vehicles. MHD will issue a unique mobile ID # tag to each licensed unit that shall remain adhered to the unit at all times. If the ID number is ever covered or removed you must notify MHD immediately to have a new one issued.

Handwashing Sink

Any operation that handles unpackaged food or drink must have an approved handwash sink. It must be plumbed with steadily running hot and cold water; be non-hand operated (automatic, wrist blades, knee/foot paddles); stocked with soap, paper towel, & signage.

Running water for proper handwashing is required to operate, even in the middle of winter. Business owners must figure out methods to keep lines and pumps from freezing. Handwashing prevents illness possibly death of customers. Citations and license referrals will be assessed for lack of running handwash water

Warewashing Sink(s)

If you wish to clean utensils or dishes on the mobile unit, a 3-compartment warewash sink with drainboards & hot water is required.

Sink requirements vary depending on the type and complexity of your operation. Consult with MHD for recommendations. Warewash sinks are not required on your unit if:

- You use your mobile service base's approved warewash facilities to clean all utensils/dishes **AND** you carry enough clean/sanitized utensils to comply with WFC 4-602.11
- You serve only prepackaged food or dispense beverages into single service cups from covered containers
- All utensils and serving equipment are single-service only

WHEN WAREWASHING SINKS ARE RECOMMENDED ON THE UNIT:

- Units with raw animal products and/or extensive food preparation onboard the unit
- Units that operate for long shifts or a significant distance from their service base
- Units that are not the primary license holder at the mobile service base/ shared kitchen

Water Tanks

You must have clean running water to operate, even in frigid Wisconsin winters. Your tanks must have a sight gauge or be transparent enough to monitor water level in the tanks. When you have 1 gallon or less clean water available, it is required that you stop operating and return to your service base. Tanks must be designed to food code standards and you must clean/sanitize them regularly. The inlet must have a cover to protect supply.

Clean Water Required...	Unit Type	Tasks Done on Unit	Waste tank to collect dirty water shall be 15% bigger than your clean tank
5 gallons	Pushcarts; human powered	Handwashing	
10 gallons	Trailers, trucks, large units	Handwashing	
40 gallons	Any unit	Utensil/dirty dish washing; extensive food preparation; handwashing	

Ingredient water (hot cocoa, lemonade, horchata, tea, coffee) will require separate supply tanks depending on operation.

- * If you use a hose to fill your unit with clean water—it must be an approved NSF 51 or 61 or Food Grade hose. Store it in a clean, covered container labeled “Clean Water Only.” Use it for filling clean water only, not for any other purpose.

Sinks and tanks must be plumbed according to the Uniform Plumbing Code using approved materials.

Wastewater

Do not dump your dirty water or grease directly into the sewer. You must dump wastewater in an approved sink in your mobile service base or at a proper dump station. You can use a wheeled caddy or a hose to dispose of wastewater. It cannot be the same hose you use to fill your clean water tank. You must be able to demonstrate during the licensing inspection that the unit drains by gravity or a pump.

Maintaining Premise

Please provide customers a trash can outside of your unit. After operation pick up trash in the surrounding area of your unit so the premise remains well maintained and pest free. Dispose of all trash properly at approved facility.

Ventilation

This is regulated by Department of Safety & Professional Services (DSPS). Learn more by contacting DSPS by email dsps@wisconsin.gov.

Ventilation hood systems shall be sufficient so that grease and condensation does not collect on walls and ceilings. The use of hood systems and exhaust fans prevent the buildup of smoke, heat, & steam inside the unit. Open windows should have screens. An unscreened service window may require a standard operating procedure (SOP) to address pests.

All cooking equipment shall be placed under the hood/ventilation system. Open flame cooking equipment shall not be placed directly next to appliances with grease depth – rearrange or provide splash guard.

Other Equipment

- Coolers should be mechanical with a thermometer inside; ice can only be used on pushcarts as a means of refrigeration
- Hot holding equipment is to be mechanical. The use of heat cans is not permitted
- Fire extinguisher required. ABC is appropriate for most operations; K Rated required for grease depth (ie. Fryers)
- Power source (generator must be attached to unit) should be able to run all equipment at the same time

Your Mobile Service Base

Your unit is required to return to the service base at a minimum of every 24 hours for maintenance and servicing. **YOU MUST LOG OR KEEP TRACK OF YOUR BASE USAGE with a notebook or blank log; never pre-fill the log.** Maintenance and servicing will include duties such as filling up your unit with clean water and appropriately dumping your waste water. You might cook, prep food, wash dishes, or store food/supplies at your service base. Your service base will be inspected and it must remain licensed. If you lose access to your service base for any reason you are not allowed to operate. You must find a new base and get it properly licensed prior to operating again. You must always use your mobile service base as required.

If your mobile service base is a shared kitchen (i.e., you do not own the space or associated restaurant), there must be a shared kitchen agreement in place between you and the base. MHD may deny your service base location if there are too many operators currently using the service base. MHD may also deny your service base location if the shared kitchen primary license holder has poor compliance history as a shared kitchen owner. There must always be a Certified Food Protection Manager onsite at the shared kitchen while food processing is occurring.

We recommend to confirm the likelihood of approval for your desired service base location with MHD prior to signing agreements or leases of shared kitchens.

THE MOBILE SERVICE BASE TYPICALLY MUST HAVE:

- Food prep facilities, as needed by your operation
- Warewashing sinks with drainboards
- Handwashing sink
- Food storage as needed – cold, dry, & chemical with labeling to clearly distinguish separation between operators
- Mop sink
- Sink with a threaded tap to properly use your clean water hose
- Food prep sink, as needed by your operation
- Approved finishes for floors, walls, ceilings; commercial NSF equipment
- Proper lighting & ventilation; approved plumbing and backflow prevention

Businesses that sell only prepackaged ice cream products may be approved for a variance to not have a licensed service base. This is typically the only exception. Even if you only use your service base for clean water or dirty water disposal, it will still need a license.

Food Safety & Protection

Just like a restaurant, it is expected that your food safety practices are safe to prevent foodborne illness. Inspections are unannounced and food handling behaviors will be observed. The Food Sanitation Grading system applies to mobile units.

- ✳ A Certified Food Protection Manager (CFPM) is required. This person is responsible for cooking and food preparation; has responsibilities to manage employees, including food safety training. Several agencies offer approved certificates all with varying formats for learning, see milwaukee.gov/cfm for more information.

Your business should also establish an **Employee Illness Reporting** policy where employees are properly trained to report certain symptoms to their manager. The manager is required to know what diagnoses are to be reported to MHD.

Food Temperatures

The food danger zone is between 41°F – 135°F.

- Keep hot food at or above 135°F
- Keep cold food at or below 41°F

Check temperatures regularly using your food stem thermometer. Have a food thermometer on your unit and available at your service base. Make sure it is **properly calibrated**.

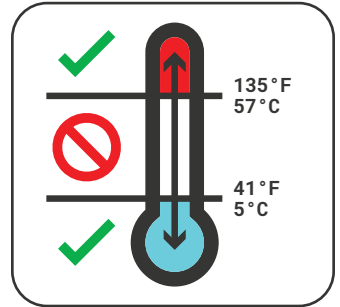
- Proper cooling methods and parameters must be practiced, see **Cooling Fact Sheet**
- Cooking temperatures, see **Cooking TCS Foods**
- Proper thawing, see **Thawing**
- Raw meats are not allowed on pushcarts

For DATCP Food Code Fact Sheets bolded above please visit:

datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/FoodCodeFactSheets.aspx

USING DRY ICE – PUSHCARTS ONLY

Do not handle with bare hands and do not put food or drinks in direct contact with it—there must be a barrier between. Dry ice gives off harmful gases, so keep it well ventilated. Dispose of it properly—never in the sewer, toilet, street, garbage can, or sink. It should be allowed to evaporate in a well-ventilated area safely away from the public.



Sanitation & Hygiene






DO HAVE:

- An approved sanitizer for food contact surfaces and matching test strips
- A clean, organized mobile unit & storage spaces at the service base
- Extra sanitized utensils to rotate every 4 hours of operation
- Extra hand soap, paper towel for handwashing
- Disposable gloves
- Hairnets, hats, aprons for employees
- Good handwashing practices – this is how we avoid spreading illness!

DO NOT:

- Touch ready to eat food with bare hands (including breads, buns, tortillas, etc.)
- Store any food on the floor
- Work with food when you are sick
- Block or put anything in your handwash sink basin
- Use equipment that is not ANSI sanitation certified & stamped

Acceptable Sanitation Listings for Equipment

Certifying Group	Mark
NSF International (NSF)	
Intertek Marked "ETL Sanitation."	
Underwriters Laboratory (UL) Marked "Classified UL EPH."	
Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Marked "CSA Sanitation to NSF/ANSI."	
Baking Industry Sanitation Standards Committee (BISSC) Marked "Certified BISSC."	

Abbreviations

CFPM	Certified Food Manager
NSF	NSF International (sanitation listing)
ANSI	American National Standards
MPD	Milwaukee Police Department
MHD	Milwaukee Health Department
CEH	Consumer Environmental Health
DSPS	Department of Safety and Professional Services
DNS	Department of Neighborhood Services
TCS	Time/Temperature Control for Safety
WFC	Wisconsin Food Code
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure

Moving and Parking

This document is provided as a guide and summary of related Milwaukee Code Ordinances (MCO) from other departments. DPW & MPD enforce mobile parking. Mobile units parking on private property could be subject to additional permits from DNS. Contact **(414) 286-8210** or email developmentcenterinfo@milwaukee.gov for information.

1. Vehicles licensed for food peddling must obey all traffic laws and regulations. (MCO Ch. 101 Traffic Code)
2. You may not park or sell within 300 feet of a school entrance while the school is open to students. (MCO Section 115-45)
3. You may not stop for more than two hours in any residential block and such stops must be separated by a six-hour period. You must be in compliance with all posted parking signs and limits. (MCO Section 115-45)
4. Food, merchandise, or any other article may not be sold or offered for sale for two hours immediately before the start of any scheduled event, and ending one hour immediately after the event on any public street or sidewalk within **500 feet** of the following: Wisconsin Center, the Auditorium, the Arena, the Milwaukee Public Museum, the Fiserv Forum, the Performing Arts Center, the Rave/Eagles Club, the Riverside Theater, Summerfest and American Family Field parking facilities, the right of way for Jazz in the Park, River Rhythms, the Westown Farmer's Market, and any other special event as communicated by police officers under the direction of the Commissioner of Public Works. (MCO Section 105-56 and 105-57)
5. **PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY:** All sales shall be made on the public right-of-way directly from a food peddler vehicle or a carried container unless one of the following exemptions is met:
 - A food peddler is selling food at the invitation of a business owner on private property provided all sales are made only to employees of the business, not to the general public.
 - A food peddler is issued an occupancy permit by the Department of Neighborhood Services allowing food sales by the food peddler on a private property.
6. Food peddlers cannot park within 50 feet of a restaurant without a drive-through facility.
7. **PRIVATE PROPERTY:** Parking of peddlers on private property requires an occupancy permit issued by the Department of Neighborhood Services.
 - To apply for special occupancy in person, visit milwaukee.gov/DNS/permits or call **(414) 286-8210**. To apply online visit milwaukee.gov/lms.
8. There are other specific streets and highways where the selling of articles from a parked vehicle is prohibited, see enclosed maps. (MCO Section 115-45-1-B)
9. **SEMI PERMANENT PARKING:** The unit must return to its service base every 24 hours. If it is parked semi-permanently (i.e., food truck park, private property) a second mobile service base license will be required for that location. The unit must remain moveable with its wheels on.

Other Rules

- Each mobile food establishment shall return to its service base at least every **24 hours** for service and maintenance. (MCO Section 68-37-8)
- Food cannot be sold door-to-door. (MCO Section 68-39-11)
- It is prohibited to make any sales from a roadway median strip, safety island, or on foot into any street or roadway (including an alley) where there is vehicular traffic.
- You cannot block or restrict an individual's access to a business or residence, and you must allow a **minimum 5 ft.** clearance on sidewalks for pedestrians. You cannot make any comment, request, or proposal which is obscene, lewd, lascivious, profane, filthy, or indecent.
- No sales are allowed Monday–Friday 3am-6am & 3:30am-6am Saturday–Sunday. Exceptions granted for January 1st, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, the 3rd and 4th of July, Labor Day, and on city streets adjacent to State Fair Park during the run of the Wisconsin State Fair. (MCO Section 115-45-3)
- A mobile vending operation must be completely mobile. You cannot have separate coolers, grills, or signs; no customer chairs /tables permitted. Everything must be attached to unit. Generators are acceptable provided they are **attached** to the mobile unit. A garbage can is allowed to remain separate from the unit. (MCO Section 68-39-13)
- Any electrical or gas connections must remain as “quick connect” and not hardwired; must be code compliant.
- If you are interested in selling food in any Milwaukee County Park, you must contact the Milwaukee County Parks System for proper permits. For more information visit: <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Plan/Get-a-Permit>
- Vendors who use a mobile establishment at a festival and want to offer items or services for which they are not normally licensed (such as grilling next to the unit) may be required to obtain additional licensing. Contact the License Division of the City Clerk's Office at **(414) 286-2238**.
- **EMPLOYEE TOILET:** Must have arrangements for appropriate toilet use for employees while operating.
- If your unit is licensed by a different municipality and you wish to operate in the public right of way, you need to obtain a Mobile Seller's License through the License Division.

Noise

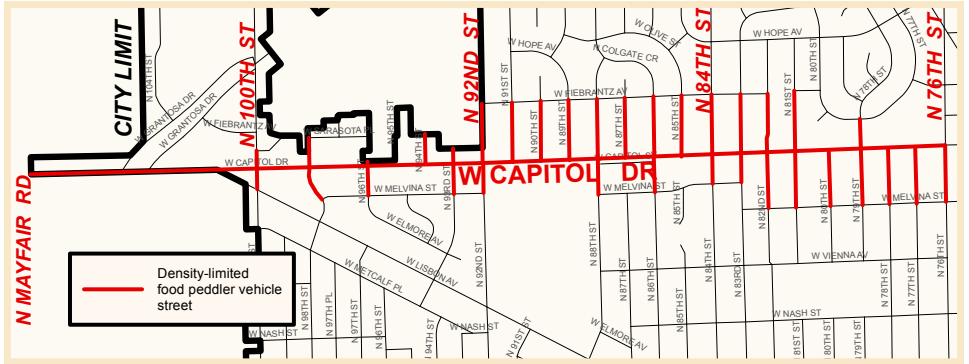
- No horns of any kind are allowed. (MCO Section 68-39-12)
- Generators must produce not more than an average of 80 decibels of sound, measured 4 feet from the generator. (MCO Section 68-13-C)

References

*Milwaukee Code Ordinance:
Chapter 68 Food License
Regulations, Chapter 101 Traffic
Code, Section 105-56 Sales on
Public Premise including venue
list, & Section 115-45 Selling
Articles from Parked Vehicles*

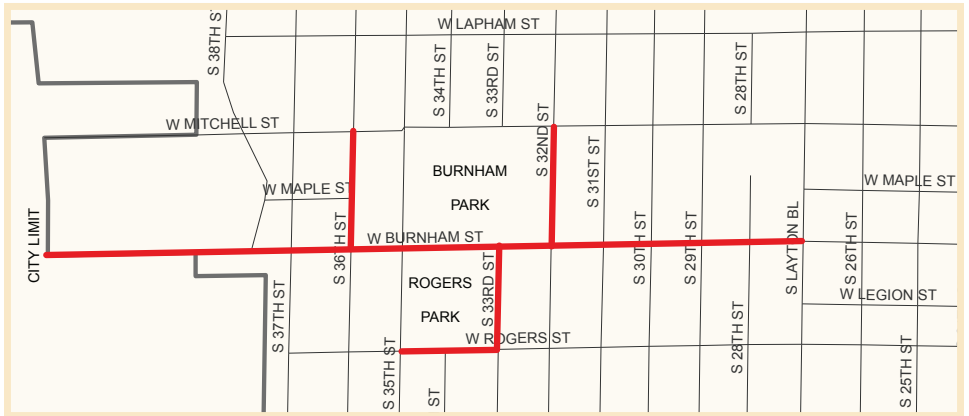
*City of Milwaukee Council
Legislative Research Center,
Legistar*

The West Capitol Drive Type 2 Zone



City of Milwaukee West Capitol Drive Type 2
Density-Limited Food Peddler Vehicle Zone
(Common Council File No. 231874)

The Burnham Park Type 1 and Type 2 Zone



City of Milwaukee Burnham Type 1 Time-Limited and
Type 2 Density-Limited Food Peddler Vehicle Zone
(Common Council File No. 241240 and No. 220413)

BE ADVISED: The Burnham Park Food Peddler Vehicle Zone is both a Type 1 and Type 2 zone. Food peddlers must have an assigned parking space to operate in the zone, may not operate between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m., and cannot park in the zone for more than 6 hours within a 12-hour period.

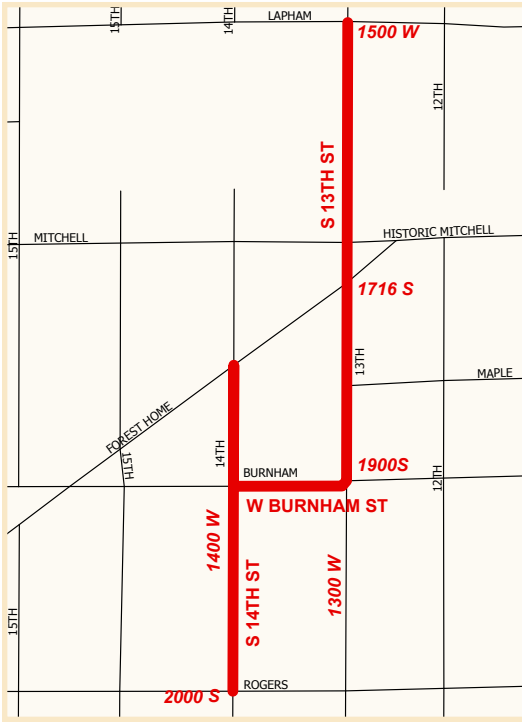
Specific Streets Where Selling Is Prohibited



- 1 The east and west sides of North Downer Avenue from East Webster Place to East Park Place, all days of the week, including Sundays and holidays. (2020; Legistar file 200432)



- 2 All streets within the boundaries of the Brady Street Business Improvement District (BID No. 11), all days of the week, including Sundays and holidays. (2017; Legistar file 161543)

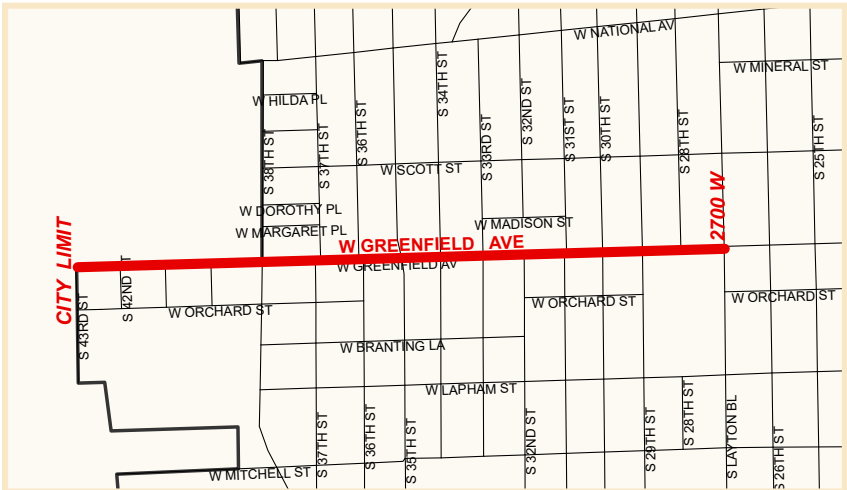


10 The east and west sides of South 13th Street from West Lapham Boulevard to West Forest Home Avenue. (2026, Legistar file 251532)

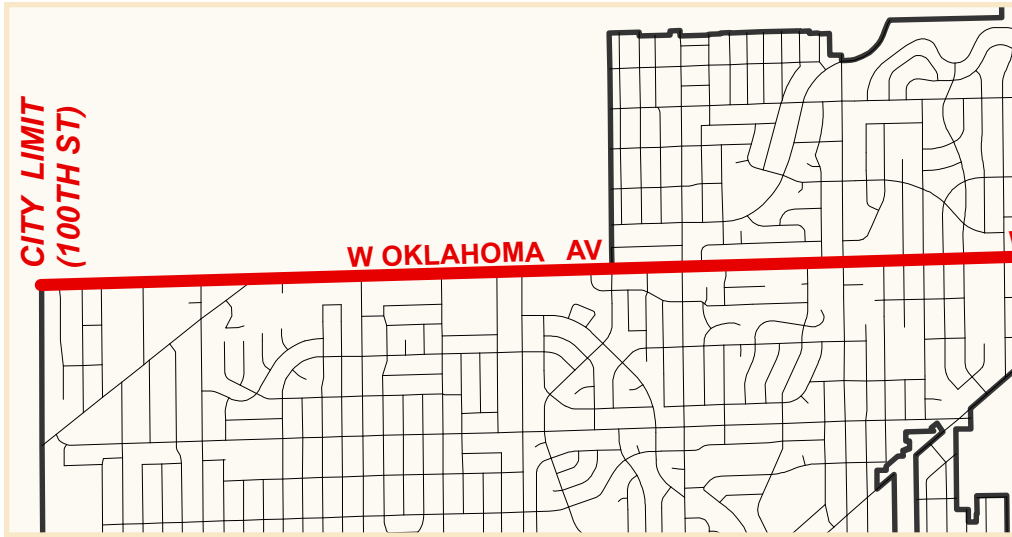
The east and west sides of South 14th Street from West Forest Home Avenue to West Rogers Street. (2026, Legistar file 251532)

The east and west sides of South 13th Street from West Forest Home Avenue to West Burnham Street. (2022, Legistar file 220514)

The north and south sides of West Burnham Street from South 14th Street to South 13th Street. (2022, Legistar file 220514)

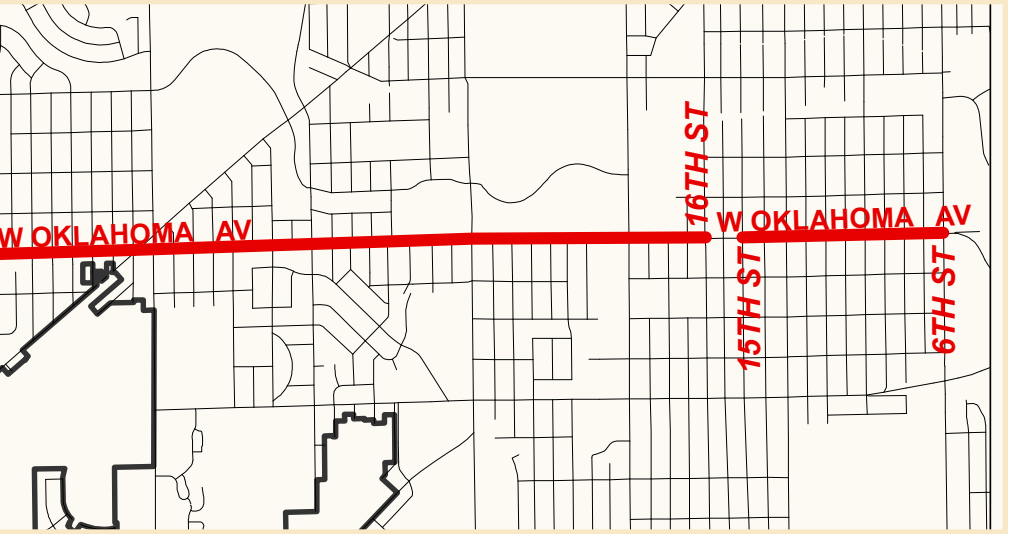


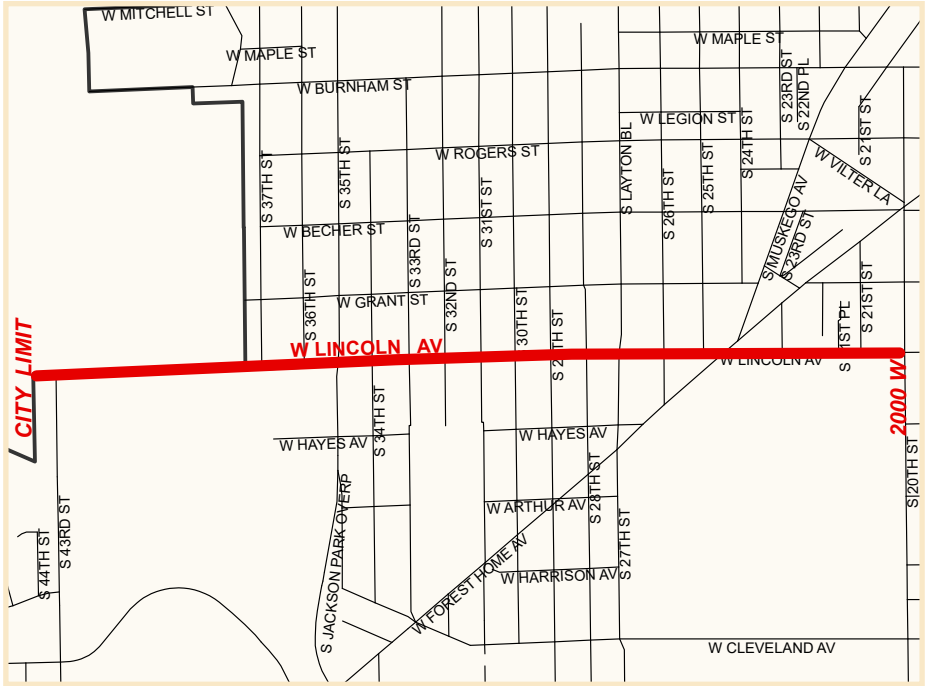
11 The north and south sides of W. Greenfield Avenue from S. Layton Blvd., westward to S. 38th St. all the days of the week, including Sundays and holidays. (2025; Legistar file 250024)



12 From the center line of S. 6th Street to the center line of S. 15th Street from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. central standard time on all days of the week, except Sundays and holidays.
(1955; Common Council File No. 55-340-b)

From S. 16th Street west to the city limits on all days of the week, including Sundays and holidays, from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
(1958; Common Council File No. 58-1171-a)





- 13 The north and south sides of W. Lincoln Ave. from S. 20th Street westward to the city limits all the days of the week, including Sundays and Holidays. (2017 & 2016; Legistar files 170737 & 160363)

Notes

Contact Us

LICENSES

City Clerk License Division
City Hall, Room 105
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

—
(414) 286-2238
License@milwaukee.gov
milwaukee.gov/license

INSPECTIONS

City of Milwaukee Health Department
Consumer Environmental Health (CEH)
Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building
841 North Broadway, Room 304
Milwaukee, WI 53202

—
(414) 286-3674
MKEHealthMobileFood@milwaukee.gov
milwaukee.gov/mobilefood

OCCUPANCY INSPECTIONS

Department of Neighborhood
Services (DNS)
—
(414) 286-8210

VENTILATION
Department of Safety
& Professional Services
—
dsp@wisconsin.gov



City Clerk's Office
Public Information Division
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