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TOPICAL TOP STORY

Madison malls may impose teen curfews on weekend evenings

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Madison officials said they expect the owners of West Towne Mall, above, and East Towne Mall to soon impose policies that would limit the presence of unaccompanied youth in the facilities on weekend evenings.

JOHN HART, STATE JOURNAL

As malls nationally address bad behavior and incidents, Madison's two biggest shopping malls soon may impose new policies that would prohibit anyone under 18 from being in the malls without a parent or guardian on Friday and Saturday evenings.

City officials on Tuesday evening confirmed the malls' owner, CBL Properties of Chattanooga, Tennessee, which owns many shopping centers across the nation, would soon be coming out with a new policy. CBL officials could not be reached Tuesday night.

The city officials were responding to a post on Facebook by Michael Johnson, president and CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, asking whether youth under 18 should be allowed in shopping malls on weekends after 4 p.m. without parents who are 21 or older.

"This policy might be coming to Madison very soon. Is it the right or wrong call?" Johnson wrote in the post late Tuesday afternoon, which elicited scores of responses.

"There is something that is coming along these lines," Mayor Paul Soglin later confirmed, stressing that the policy would be from the mall's owners, not the city.

"We have raised some very serious concerns about its legality and our reservations about how its going to be equitably managed," Soglin said. "We're raising questions about whether or not it would be in conformance with current ordinances regarding (racial) equity."

City officials also have concerns about being asked to enforce such a policy, the mayor said.

Police Chief Mike Koval, informed of the Facebook post, said he believes CBL will make an announcement to the community by the end of the week.

Koval could not provide data on incidents involving police at the mall, but he said police contacts with youth are primarily at schools, bus transfer stations and in and around retail areas, including the malls.

Ald. Paul Skidmore, 9th District, who represents the West Towne area, said discussions with mall officials had been ongoing. "This is not a surprise," he said. "This is really thought out and well vetted."

Ald. Samba Baldeh, 17th District, who represents the area that includes East Towne, also confirmed that the malls were looking at a policy to limit when unaccompanied minors can enter the properties. He said he opposed any such move, but conceded it's a private decision the mall owners can make.

Other malls, including some in Wisconsin, have instituted similar bans.

The Mayfair Mall and Bayshore Town Center in Milwaukee County both have policies that require minors to be accompanied by adults starting in the afternoon on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Mayfair, in Wauwatosa, first instituted a parental policy for Friday and Saturday evenings in 2007 after several incidents involving teens. Bayshore, in Glendale, began a similar policy in 2010 after a disturbance. Both malls expanded policies to Sundays in 2011.

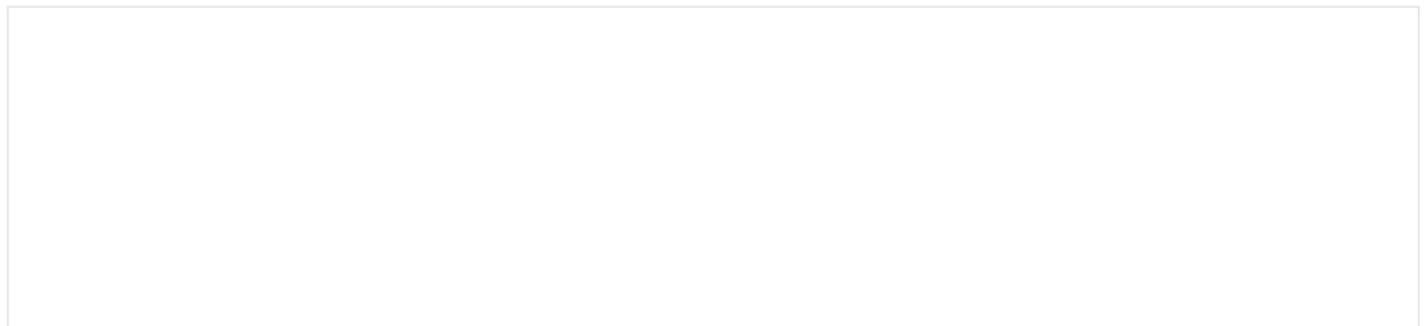
Restrictions on teens in malls aren't new. The Mall of America in Minnesota instituted such an approach in the 1990s, and minors cannot wander America's largest mall unaccompanied on Friday and Saturday nights.

A spokesperson for the International Council of Shopping Centers has said versions of such an approach have sprung up across the country and that the trade organization is aware of at least 105 of the 1,222 shopping malls in the U.S. having some policy limiting access by minors.

State Journal reporter Logan Wroge contributed to this report.

'This policy might be coming to Madison very soon. Is it the right call or the wrong call?' Michael Johnson CEO, Boys and Girls Club of Dane County

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