

# Hinkle still wants to take tattoo business downtown despite rejection

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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Chris Hinkle is a man who has deep passion toward the artistry of tattoos. He often takes his sketch-pad home at night and prepares his drawings for clients. On weekends, he is in his business doing payroll and other office tasks. Quite simply, he lives and breathes and loves both the creativity and business facets of the tattoo industry.

Hinkle, 39, owner of [Grand Piasa Body Art and Artist Supply](#), wants to move his business from [3094 Homer Adams Parkway](#) to Downtown Alton. The Alton Plan

Commission rejected the zoning amendment to Alton City Code to allow tattoo parlors in a Downtown Commercial zoned district with a special use permit.

The tattoo issue in Downtown Alton will likely come to a head at the Alton Committee of the Whole meeting set for 7 p.m. May 11 and the City Council Meeting at 7 p.m. on May 13. [Riverbender.com is working to stream both meetings live those nights.](#)

Hinkle does not want to be at the center of any controversy. He said he is willing to work with the city on the project and is sensitive to the outward display of his business.

“I had hoped there would be more understanding and I could answer some of the concerns,” he said. “It seems as if there is an older class that feels this is meaningless to them and don’t want to waste time hearing about it. As soon as you say the word ‘tattoos,’ they automatically put on deaf ears. It is just easier to keep moving and pass it by than give it two seconds of consideration.”

Hinkle has been extremely successful in his eight-year tenure, but he says he has outgrown his 2,000-square foot space on Homer Adams Parkway. The location he is talking for his two business forms - body art and artist supplies - would occupy about 5,000-square feet and be perfect for his business today, he says. He prides himself on operating a professional organization and is constantly working on his education in the industry and of his associates. He has a tattoo removal business that brings people from other states to his shop, which he thinks is a plus for Alton. Hinkle worked in Edwardsville during the first part of his tattoo career.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker has strong opinions on the issue and said, “He should be allowed to open. There is no legal reason to deny it. He seemed to be open about some of the concerns about the visual appearance of his tattoo parlor and open to go above and beyond to make it look good. He appears to want to do the right thing.”

Sara McGibany, president of [Alton Main Street](#), is a proponent of Hinkle being able to take his business to downtown and said she believes it is a natural fit.

She said the decision on Hinkle and his parlor could send a big signal whether Downtown Alton is welcoming the creative class of businesses. She has been working with Jacoby Arts Center after two members spoke against it at the last Alton Plan Commission meeting.

Jacoby Arts Center President Dennis Scarborough said he wasn’t aware Dee Kilgo and Dit Panfile would speak at the meeting this week. Scarborough owns an antique shop in Alton and he signed a petition when Hinkle came around trying to get business owners to support his move to downtown.

“I questioned whether Dee and Dit were speaking for Jacoby and I wrote a letter after the meeting to the board members and said we had not discussed this at a board meeting and taken a consensus of how Jacoby felt on the issue,” he said. “No one, including myself, had a right to speak for Jacoby without Jacoby voting on it.”

Scarborough said Kilgo and Panfile do not live in the city of Alton and are only board members at Jacoby, so he said that was another reason he was surprised they spoke at the meeting.

Scarborough is arranging an educational forum on the art form for 7 p.m. at Jacoby Arts Center next Wednesday.

“We thought of what we could do and we thought it would be good for Jacoby to have a panel on what is art with questions from the audience,” he said. “It is a good opportunity for Jacoby to stand out as a body that would want to educate the public, the aldermen and members of the zoning committee on the issue.”

Jeannine Kelly owns three buildings in the [600 block of East Broadway](#) and has expressed that she opposes Hinkle’s business coming to downtown. Dee Kilgo, who coordinates Jacoby exhibits, also expressed displeasure at the meeting.

Hinkle said he has talked with Alton Mayor Brant Walker who seems pretty optimistic about what he is trying to do.

“I hope I have his support,” Hinkle said. “I wish the council would listen on the issue and make an intelligent and informed decision based on the information at hand and not just because so and so doesn’t care for it.”

Hinkle has been in the tattoo industry for 13 years. He said his plan would be to take the [556, 560 locations on Broadway](#) and Biker Brothers would remain in its building. He would add his tattoo parlor and art supply business and he thinks those fit together perfectly.

Hinkle said it means a lot to him to have a business in Alton and he wants to stay here, but he feels he should be able to locate the business in downtown.

“I support Alton and other Alton businesses,” he said. “I have supported Jacoby when it was in trouble not too long ago and sponsored a couple of events going on down there. I am part of the community and my shop has seminars on what is good and bad with tattooing and body art. We are members of national professional tattoo organizations. I like to keep a constant state of learning.”

He said if anyone wished to speak in his favor at the meetings, they would need to contact Alton City Hall. “I feel like the only card I have left is to pack the place with supporters and people speaking their minds,” he said. “I feel like it has moved beyond me.”

Being a tattoo shop owner and artist is something Hinkle said he doesn’t look at as only a career, but a lifestyle.

“There is never a moment to cut it off,” he said. “It is a part of me every day. Ultimately what are we doing is putting a picture on a person and I don’t see how that has a negative effect on anybody. It is a personal decision.”



**What are your thoughts on a tattoo parlor moving in downtown? Let us know in the comment section below.**