

Executive Summary

Street food was a common phenomenon on North American streetscapes during the first half of the twentieth century. As a result of sanitary concerns regarding street food, and the automobile oriented design of North American streets, street food vending was slowly phased out of prominence. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of street food, which has been lead by the popularity of food trucks.

From a theoretical standpoint, food trucks contribute many important social, cultural, as well as economic functions to the health of cities. They attract pedestrian activity and the use of public space, leading to more public life and street vibrancy. In addition, food trucks are mobile enterprises that, if given enough freedom to roam cities, can create very efficient use of space. Simply put, food trucks can move to areas where there is demand, thereby, escaping situations in which they are stagnant and with no business. Lastly, as a business entity, food trucks exemplify the essence of free enterprise. In theory, food trucks have relatively low start-up costs compared to bricks-and-mortar restaurants, allowing small-scale entrepreneurs and skillful chefs to thrive.

Despite their growing popularity and positive contributions to cities, food trucks may still be perceived as unsanitary and unfair competition by bricks-and-mortar restaurants. As a result of the dualistic nature of food trucks, Canadian municipalities have developed differing bylaws pertaining to food trucks. Two cities, Vancouver and Toronto, have implemented widely varying bylaws that exemplify their



diverging approaches to achieving a successful balance between regulation and encouragement of food truck vending.

Research Question and Methods

How can bylaws in Vancouver and Toronto enhance the mobility, variety and economic viability of food truck enterprises?

This report analyzes city bylaws related to food truck vending in Vancouver and Toronto. Bylaw analysis had a specific focus on the extent of food truck mobility within their respective cities, their ability to offer variety in their menus, and the economic viability, associated with license fees and permit expenditures, for start-up vendors. The research utilized three methods: literature review, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The literature review organized competing viewpoints regarding food truck vending and compared them with popular precedents from Los Angeles, Portland and Boston. A content analysis of the City of Vancouver's and Toronto's food truck bylaws was utilized with the purpose of gaining an understanding regarding current regulations and the process by which permits are conferred. Interviews were conducted with food truck owners and operators to acquire first hand perspectives from chefs and entrepreneurs that have the experience of starting and operating food truck vending businesses. For the purpose of validating information, interviews were also conducted with City employees.



Recommendations

The report concludes with a series of recommendations, intended for Vancouver and Toronto municipal policy makers, in regards to how bylaws can enhance the mobility, variety and economic viability of food truck enterprises.

1. End moratorium on downtown vending permits by allowing a limited number of stationary vendors in the downtown core.

Toronto's moratorium on granting downtown vending permits has deprived food truck vending on the city's most vibrant locations, creating a detriment to their mobility and viability. For Toronto to create a street food culture, it must begin granting Designated Vending Area permits in downtown locations, according food truck enterprises a fair opportunity to succeed by not limiting them geographically, and allowing them to vend in the most economically viable locations.

2. Allow vendors to possess multiple locational permits.

Granting food trucks multiple public property location permits would enable them to circulate between the permitted site locations. This would enable food trucks to become more mobile, and ensure greater variety for food truck patrons.

3. Integrate food truck enterprises with existing BIAs.

Food trucks should be perceived as legitimate businesses that contribute to the shopping experience in a BIA. In Toronto, food trucks that have a Designated Vending Area permit location within a BIA should be integrated into the BIA by making their membership mandatory. They should be allowed to contribute and participate in BIA decision-making, just like the bricks-and-mortar businesses within the BIA. In



Vancouver, Street Food Vending permit locations should not be restricted to areas outside of established downtown BIAs. Instead, food trucks should be able to reach an agreement with a BIA in regards to vending within its boundaries and the possible BIA membership for the food truck enterprise should be encouraged. Food truck integration into BIAs would alleviate geographical restrictions of desired food truck locations, allowing for greater mobility, as well as viability for food trucks.

4. Commissaries should be mandatory, but their demands should be relaxed.

To maintain the popularity of food trucks, and to attract new patrons, Vancouver should continue to make commissaries mandatory, while Toronto should institute the requirement of commissaries. Despite their importance, certain aspects of commissary requirements can afford to be relaxed in order to decrease their financial impact. Commissary requirements for food trucks should be reviewed and analyzed to ascertain whether current requirements are necessary for the sanitation of food trucks, and how these requirements can be relaxed to reduce renting costs.

5. Vending permit point system should be graded based solely on business plans, not on menus.

To encourage variety in food truck menus, the success of a food truck vending permit application should not be influenced by the content of the proposed menu. The best chance for a street food meal to become culturally significant is for the public to exhibit sufficient demand for it, not by a jury of experts to deem it as culturally significant.

