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11-24-15

Jackie Henderson

From: Kevin Beekman <kbeekman@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2015 2:06 PM
To: City Council
Subject: Food Truck program suffers from a lot of regulatory confusion

Dear Mayor and City Council,

Over the last few years, I've been engaged along with several other community members in trying to clarify rules about on-street and off-street vending, particularly as they apply to farmers markets, but also in general.

At the Four Mile Run Farmers & Artisans Market, we pursued permission to host food trucks as part of our two-fold mission: to help revitalize and promote a sense of place in Four Mile Run Park and to empower small and start-up businesses and their customers. As an all-volunteer run market, any funds we derive from market operations are fed into the park. In addition we do our part to help maintain the park and actively solicit contributions for the benefit of the park.

Food truck, and more generally, prepared food vending, is something that we found to be desired by the citizens who visit the park and we proudly have undertaken efforts to fulfill those wishes, which are clearly borne out by the City's own citizen surveys.

But we've found that the very small businesses that we are trying to help are being hampered by confusing and onerous regulations. Consequentially, we have had very little success in getting many vendors to come to market. The cost and burden are just too hard to overcome.

Meanwhile, knowing the rules ourselves, we constantly see unregulated vendors going about their business on City's streets and on private and public property in clear violation of City regulations. We've seen everything from food trucks blaring amplified music for hours on end to guys opening coconuts at the curb with machetes. We've seen sports boosters firing up grills in city parks as a fundraiser and we've seen bake sales by little kids on street corners. Any and all of these are precisely what we've either been told we can't host at our farmers market or are things that we've been cited for, either in error or for purely bureaucratic reasons.

I know Nick Partee has outlined some specifics such as the unnecessary differences between special event permits and food truck vending licenses, but the broader problem is simply a good deal of confusion on the part of the regulators themselves.

In the instance, where a food truck approached us to operate at the market under a special event permit, we were led to believe that was permissible and so had the truck operator. Yet, we were later served with a "Cease and Desist" letter before any further communication had been made to us. What's more, when city regulators later relented and agreed with our (and their) earlier interpretation, the "Cease and Desist" was never removed (we have received no formal communication regarding the matter).

We know that trucks and vendors approved in neighboring jurisdictions continue to operate in the city. Many probably don't know the exact boundaries. But those outside-of-the-city approvals don't suffice when we are approached by vendors and refer them to the City for approval. A small business that has already jumped through hoops to operate in Fairfax, Arlington and DC is not going to add Alexandria to the mix, regardless of what good it will do for our community and regardless of how its presence will help us boost our neighborhood and help us revitalize the park.

As citizens, we want to help promote an entrepreneurial experience that is positive and healthy for our community. Unfortunately, our experience has been that the only way for some entrepreneurs to operate in Alexandria is outside of the regulatory process and it's clear that the current regulatory system is prone to the kind of failures where bad things happen. We need your help to revise the food truck registration process. We're committed to working with the City to do our part as well.

-Kevin Beekman
703-822-5741 (Voice & SMS)

Jackie Henderson

From: Nicholas Partee <nickdeuva@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2015 12:38 PM
To: City Council
Cc: Four Mile Run Market Inc
Subject: Food Truck Pilot Program Improvement Needed

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

I am one of the managers of 4MRMarket. After talking to a few food truck vendors, getting a cease and desist order from the City, and talking to the health dept. a couple of times this spring/summer, it seems like serious streamlining and consolidation is necessary for food trucks to be a success story in Alexandria.

Every food truck vendor I've talked to has said the system is set up to fail. A food truck vendor has three different options for selling at our market, but that seems unnecessary. There are Mobile Food Establishments (sometimes called Mobile Food Vendors) that are not eligible to be reviewed at the permitting center unlike normal food establishments, the Off Street pilot program, and temporary event permits.

A few ideas, and I'm sure my fellow 4MRMarket managers and food truck owners will have others:

- The first two types should be merged and streamlined, made less expensive
- The Fire Inspection should be made an annual requirement, even for temporary event permits if certain conditions are met (perhaps the food truck's setup is submitted and re-inspection is only required if the setup is changing--random inspections can still be conducted, but at no cost to the food truck).
- I couldn't find one, so there should be an easily accessible guide for food trucks: what to do for each type of permit with each City agency, what each type of permit allows, etc. If some of the streamlining happens, this would be a simpler document.
- Temporary event permits should not need to be filed if the vendor is already approved through the mobile vendor program. Rocklands said they were being asked to file one for the Jazz Festival, despite being on the Off Street Food Truck Pilot Program list. This might have been a one-off error by a member of staff. I don't know if it was resolved without further action needed.
- Could fire inspections be made less expensive if the vendor went to the inspector? Since they're mobile, that seems like a money saver for the trucks and a time saver for the inspector. (Maybe this already happens?)
- The list of Mobile Food Vendors/Establishments should be more easily accessible and contain more contact info for the food vendors. Here is the site: www.alexva.us/as3. It's tough to find some of these people, maybe because the name on the website is an incorporated name vs. the name under which they're doing business? Why not consolidate the list for different types of mobile food trucks/vendors?
- Allow the trucks to go more places. A common complaint of vendors (and some friends that wish we had more food truck options) is the lack of trucks where they would want to go, which equates to where you would want them. Why not allow them in more commercial areas in limited numbers? This would make more trucks sign up and off-street events would benefit from the increase in selection.

These are just ideas from dealing with the process and frustrated vendors this spring/summer. We stopped aggressively trying to get food trucks at the market this year due to all the hurdles--and the fact that there are few trucks available that would be a good fit for the market.

Food trucks don't make enough at our small market to justify all the fees. They need to have more of a reason to register in the City, which would in turn eliminate the barriers to setting up at our market from time to time.

Thank you,
Nick Partee