



TESTIMONY

October 27, 2021

FOOD TRUCKS IN LADUE

By Corianna Baier

Testimony before the Ladue Planning and Zoning Commission Regarding the Revision to the Ladue Zoning Ordinance Regarding Mobile Food Vendors.

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMISSION:

My name is Corianna Baier. I am an analyst at the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan Missouri-based think tank that supports free-market solutions for state and local policy. The ideas presented here are my own and summarize research regarding mobile food vendors.

I would like to commend the commissioners for recognizing the increasing supply and demand for mobile food vendors, or food trucks, in our communities. The food-truck industry boomed after the Great Recession, when many people were looking for cheaper, on-the-go options and a lot of culinary experts were unemployed. From 2013 to 2018, the number of food trucks in the U.S. doubled; food trucks employed over 16,000 workers in 2018 and report sales of over a billion dollars annually. This industry was particularly well equipped to navigate the social distancing and shutdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, so it's

not a stretch to think that the demand for food trucks may increase even more.

Ladue doesn't currently allow food trucks to operate as active businesses within the city limits, but again, I commend the commissioners and city council members for considering the inclusion of these businesses. I support actions that give food trucks the freedom to operate within Ladue. However, I hope that the commission recognizes, as I believe the council did, that the original amendment put forth to the City Council last month was too small a step toward accepting and encouraging these innovative businesses. It only allowed food trucks to operate at approved special events with a specific vendor license, on top of the licensing and registration required by St. Louis County. Also, the amendment only allowed for one food truck at events on private residential property, and these events would need special-event approval if they had a food truck.

The amendment was still overly restrictive and burdensome for food

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trucks. In addition, the limitation on private events seems arbitrary; organizers of these events should be able to support as many of these businesses as they want as long as traffic and safety concerns are addressed. I understand that the narrow, winding neighborhood roads of Ladue may present challenges to traffic movement, but I believe the people of Ladue can be trusted to host food trucks in their neighborhoods in ways that don't seriously impede traffic. If they do not, there are police remedies for traffic obstructions. I hope that in rethinking this general issue, the commission takes a larger step forward toward allowing food trucks in the community.

Other Missouri cities have found a variety of ways to accept food trucks into their cities in ways that are less restrictive than what was previously proposed for Ladue. Many cities, like Lake Ozark, allow food trucks to operate outside of special events as long as they remain a specified distance away from a brick-and-mortar food establishment (and not on the Strip in the case of Lake Ozark). Others, like Clayton, only allow food trucks at city-sponsored and public events, but with no limits to the number of food trucks allowed. Ultimately, I believe food trucks should be able to operate anywhere (within reasonable right-of-way and safety rules), and Ladue would be a great place to grant this freedom. These examples still burden food truck operators with a great deal of red tape, but they allow more freedom than Ladue's original proposal, and implementing similar legislation in Ladue would be a step in the right direction.

Some may express concern over competition between food trucks and existing businesses, but that is not something that should be feared. Competition among businesses should be expected and encouraged—and may the best food and dining experience win. Burdensome regulations get in the way of the market process, and lawmakers (instead of consumers) end up picking winners and losers.

Ladue, and our region as a whole, should encourage entrepreneurship as a way of promoting growth and prosperity. As with brick-and-mortar businesses, more food trucks mean more jobs and more options for consumers. Strict regulations make it much harder for these businesses to succeed. I believe we need to give food trucks the freedom to meet the community's ever-increasing demand for dining options. While the first attempt at this amendment was a small step forward, I hope the commission can recognize the value of food trucks and allow them to operate more freely in the city.

Corianna Baier is an analyst for the Show-Me Institute.

ENDNOTES

1. Andrew W. Hait. "Fast-Growing Food Truck Industry Can Operate amid COVID-19 Social Distancing Rules, No Indoor Seating Orders." United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/09/food-trucks-one-way-to-eat-out-during-pandemic.html>
2. City of Lake Ozark. Board of Alderman Meeting Packet for July 27, 2021. Pg. 63. <https://cityoflakeozark.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/BOA-7-27-21-packet.pdf>
3. Mobile Food Vending. City of Clayton, MO. <https://www.claytonmo.gov/government/fire/fire-marshal/mobile-food-vending>
4. Food Trucks in the US – Employment Statistics 2005-2027. <https://www.claytonmo.gov/government/fire/fire-marshal/mobile-food-vending>



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