

Streamlined Permit Renewal Application Process for Farmers' Markets

Date: April 8, 2022

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

At its December 15, 16 and 17 meeting, City Council directed Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) to report to the April 26, 2022 meeting of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on a new streamlined application process for renewing permits for long-standing farmers' markets in City parklands.

Toronto's farmers' markets are valued members of the food supply chain, provide residents and visitors with local access to fresh fruits and vegetables, support the agriculture sector and contribute to vibrancy of parks and neighbourhoods throughout the city. These markets are run by or are dependent on the participation of volunteers whose significant contributions are integral to the successful operation of farmers markets in Toronto's parks. By creating a more streamlined permit renewal application process, PFR can help these markets make more efficient use of volunteers' time and contributions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. The Infrastructure and Environment Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications as a result of the recommendation in this report. The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

DECISION HISTORY

On December 15, 16 and 17, 2021, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report to the April 26, 2022 meeting of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on a new streamlined application process for renewing permits for long-standing farmers' markets in City parklands.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.MM38.48>

COMMENTS

Over the last decade the number of farmers' markets operating in Toronto parks have increased and become a beloved fixture in neighbourhoods across Toronto. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of fresh food markets in the city was reinforced when farmers' markets became recognized by both the City and Province of Ontario as essential businesses and part of the Provincial Reopening Framework.

Toronto's park-based markets are an important part of the local food web with residents gaining access to local food and an opportunity to contribute to the local economy. Many were founded and are maintained by community members for the benefit of their neighbourhoods. They typically operate on small budgets relying on volunteers for their organization and administration.

In 2020 the City of Toronto hosted 22 farmers' markets on City property, including 16 in parks permitted by PFR and six on civic squares permitted by Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM), Economic Development and Culture (EDC).

PFR Application Process

Farmers' markets are included in the special events category for issuance of parks permits. By definition, a special event is any organized event in a park that involves: selling or serving food to the public; the use of sound amplification (speakers, megaphone); serving or selling alcohol; and other conditions that many farmers' markets have grown to include. For example, markets may incorporate live music and entertainment or some may include the sale of prepared food. This categorization ensures appropriate due diligence, coordination and resourcing are undertaken and assigned to the farmers' markets prior to their operation.

Prior to applying for a farmers' market permit from PFR, all fresh food markets must undertake a series of actions to confirm alignment with the program and all applicable rules and regulations. This information forms the basis of the application package.

Steps include:

- consultation with Toronto Public Health to ensure compliance with the Food Premises Regulation
- ensuring that market operations are in compliance with all City bylaws and any other applicable legislation (e.g. Ontario Health and Safety Act)
- featuring local, Ontario-grown or manufactured products; ensure that no wholesaling or reselling of any products occurs at the market, with the exception of local not-for-profit organizations.

- securing general liability insurance for a minimum \$2,000,000.00 (two million dollars), naming the City of Toronto as additional named insured.

Additional requirements for organizing a market may include developing a layout of vendors, preparing an emergency action plan, waste management planning, a parking plan and/or a traffic control plan. These requirements are important for ensuring that markets are safe, fair and of consistent high quality.

Inherent in the nature of farmers' markets is the likelihood of change in programming/entertainment, vendors and/or layout year over year. As a result, some of the permit requirements must be submitted annually prior to issuance of the permit.

These include:

- List of vendors
- Layout plan
- Emergency Action Plan
- Toronto Public Health consultation
- Proof of insurance

Renewal of farmers' market permits for the next year of operation begins in the fall of the year prior. PFR staff send a letter notifying the permit holder in November inviting the submission of an application no later than January. All markets must provide a complete application package annually. Park-based farmers' markets operate annually from May 1 to the end of October. This timeline allows for review of the application and collaboration with the market organizer/permit holder and other city divisions to ensure all due diligence is complete and requirements are met in advance of the opening date.

Consultation

In an effort to identify opportunities to streamline the annual application process, PFR undertook consultation with other divisions issuing farmers' markets and event permits as well as with market organizers/permit holders.

EDC and CREM are two divisions that have hosted fresh food markets on Nathan Philips Square and David Pecault Square. Though their events vary slightly in their organization structure, they follow a similar process of inviting applications annually. These divisions also follow a similar timeline, inviting applications from organizers in the fall in advance of the new season.

Consultations with volunteers tasked with the organization of markets on PFR properties revealed that the annual submission of the application package is time-consuming and can be a challenge for those new to the task. They further pointed out that many park-based markets have become regular fixtures at the same location year-over-year. Further, they indicated that the ability to review information on file with the ability to update information that might change one year to the next, would be less of a burden on market organizers and volunteers responsible for these administrative tasks.

Market organizers/permit holders have provided feedback that a system of checks, amendments and validation rather than resubmission of a full application with accompanying documentation would reduce the administrative burden currently experienced.

Process change

To address this feedback, PFR will implement a change to the process in the fall of 2022 to align with the renewal initiation process for the 2023 season. During this period, staff will initiate the renewal process for the existing markets operating on City parklands. Staff will lead market organizers/permit holders through a review of the application information on file and invite input to identify changes that need to be reflected in permits issued for the 2023 market season. This is a departure from the current process where the organizer/permit holder is expected to initiate the process and submit a new application form for every year.

Following the 2023 season, PFR will follow up with stakeholders to solicit feedback on effectiveness of the process change and invite input to adjust the process for subsequent years based on outcomes.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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