

April 8, 2026

Councillor Alejandra Bravo
Chair, Economic and Community Development Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West, Toronto, ON M5H 2N2
ecdc@toronto.ca

Re: Item EC27.7 – Refreshing Food and Beverage Offerings in Park and Recreation Spaces

Dear Councillor Bravo and Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

On behalf of the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA), I am writing to express our support for the City's initiative to refresh and expand food and beverage offerings in Toronto's parks and recreation spaces.

TABIA and our member BIAs share the City's objective of enhancing the vibrancy, accessibility, and enjoyment of public spaces. Parks are essential community assets, and expanding thoughtfully curated food, beverage, and programming opportunities can contribute significantly to placemaking, social connection, and neighbourhood vitality.

BIAs play a critical role as stewards of Toronto's main streets and local economies. Many parks are located within or directly adjacent to BIA boundaries, and as such, changes to park-based economic activity have direct implications for surrounding businesses and commercial districts. We are eager to see these changes unlock new opportunities for BIAs to enhance their commercial districts. As such, we offer the following recommendations to ensure that the expansion of park-based food and beverage services is implemented in a way that strengthens, rather than competes with, local main streets.

TABIA recommends BIAs be formally embedded within the governance and implementation framework for park-based vending. BIAs should also be explicitly referenced in the relevant by-law provisions and licensing frameworks as key partners in the process. Specifically, BIAs should be named as a party to execute licence agreements, this change would ensure their formal inclusion in the process.

We further recommend BIAs be recognized as ongoing partners in program oversight, alongside Parks and Recreation, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Toronto Public Health, and Solid Waste Management. BIAs would take on a role in recommending vendor mix, planning and selection of operators within parks located in or adjacent to their boundaries, and inform the final decisions made by the General Manager Parks and Recreation and the local Councillor. For example, BIAs can provide essential local insights to identify gaps in existing food and beverage services and help avoid unintended direct competition with nearby businesses. This will ensure alignment with local economic development strategies, business mix considerations, community needs, and coordination and optimization for existing or planned BIA events held in parks, such as movie nights, markets and other activations.

TABIA is pleased that the city is presenting a clear prioritization framework for operators. We agree that businesses located within the immediate community/BIA should be given first priority to participate in park-based vending, concessions, and programming opportunities. This approach ensures public assets are leveraged to support local economic ecosystems, reinforces the City's commitment to inclusive local economic development, and helps keep economic benefits circulating within Toronto's neighbourhoods. We note that the report includes prioritization for local and Toronto-based businesses within the mobile vending program and evaluation criteria and recommend that this approach be further refined to prioritize BIA businesses first, followed by Ward-level businesses, and then Toronto-based operators.

TABIA also underscores the importance of consistent enforcement as the program is implemented. We are pleased that the report outlines a coordinated enforcement and oversight model across multiple City divisions. BIAs are often the first to experience local impacts. Recognizing this impact, we want to emphasize that clear compliance standards, timely response mechanisms, and transparent enforcement processes will be essential to maintaining fairness, public safety, and confidence in the program.

It will also be important for BIAs to have a formal role in providing feedback on program performance, including both positive outcomes and potential challenges, such as increased cleaning requirements, impacts on local businesses, and operational considerations such as noise and emissions. We would also like to see Parks and Recreation include *impact on the local economy* at the evaluation stage of the program, alongside customer experience and vendor feedback. Understanding the economic impact on surrounding main streets will be critical to evaluating the overall success of the program, including considerations such as changes in foot traffic, business performance, and commercial vacancy trends.

Finally, TABIA recommends exploring mechanisms for equitable financial contribution where BIAs have invested in parkettes and adjacent public realm improvements. Many BIAs fund enhanced cleaning and maintenance services to ensure these spaces remain welcoming. Vendors and concession operators will benefit from these BIA investments. At the same time, vendor activity may increase operational costs for BIAs, e.g. additional waste and maintenance pressures associated with expanded food and beverage activity in parks. While vendors are required to have a garbage for customer waste, the nature of open-air venues means waste will move throughout the surrounding community.

As such, there is an opportunity to consider a fair and proportionate contribution model, such as a location-based fee or revenue-sharing mechanism, that recognizes BIA contributions and supports the sustainability of BIA-led placemaking efforts.

In closing, TABIA welcomes the City's efforts to enhance food and beverage offerings in parks and create more vibrant and accessible public spaces. With thoughtful implementation, strong local partnership with BIAs, and a focus on supporting Toronto-based businesses, we are confident that this initiative can complement and strengthen the City's main streets and neighbourhood economies.

Sincerely,



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