

Summary re Regulation of Sidewalk Vending and Catering (Food) Trucks

Background: In recent months, sidewalk vending and food truck operations have increased in the Palisades' commercial village area, near the Ralphs market parking lot (north and south sides, along Sunset Blvd. and Alma Real). Palisades stakeholders have commented both positively and negatively on the food trucks and sidewalk vendors; some have indicated that they support the trucks/vendors and appreciate the food and value, while others have expressed concerns about pedestrian/sidewalk access, congestion, proximity to schools, permit status, public health/safety and impact on nearby brick & mortar establishments. In December 2024, Ralphs brought a lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court against several Palisades food trucks and sidewalk vendors, alleging that they are unlicensed, that they are violating the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) and that their actions constitute a public nuisance (*Ralphs Grocery Co. vs. Gracias Señor Los Angeles, et al.*).¹

Regulations: Separate sets of regulations govern sidewalk vending and food truck operations in Los Angeles.

1) Sidewalk Vending: Food carts or kiosks/stands (aka "taco stands") that operate on city sidewalks (as opposed to food trucks parked on the streets; *see below*) are governed by state law (SB 946 & SB 972), by the LAMC (Sec. 42.13), and by rules promulgated by the city's Bureau of Street Services (StreetsLA).² Some salient considerations and provisions include:

- At earlier PPCC meetings in 2024, state and city officials explained to the board the rules then-governing sidewalk vending, including applicable state law.³ A former LAMC restriction on sidewalk vending within 500 ft. of schools (referenced at PPCC) was eventually *removed* as part of the city's settlement of a lawsuit by sidewalk vendors (based on overriding state law which decriminalized sidewalk vending and effectively prohibited most local restrictions, unless directly related to public health or safety).⁴
- Sidewalk food vendors in Los Angeles are required to obtain, and keep up-to-date, several licenses and permits, and to abide by certain restrictions imposed by the city as well as health/food preparation requirements imposed by the county. (It's unclear whether the Palisades sidewalk taco stands hold all required licenses and permits.) Complaints about violations can be made via contacting 3-1-1 (city), and/or by calling (626) 430-5500 or online at publichealth.lacounty.gov (county).
- We understand that complaints about the taco stands' operation have been made to authorities by Ralphs and other stakeholders. It's unclear if the city (or county) ever undertook investigations or imposed fines, or if other enforcement measures were applied. The stands are still operating.
- LAMC Sec. 42.13 provides that administrative fines may be issued for violations of the city's regulations, with permits/licenses potentially suspended after *four or more violations*. Officials have told us that health violations may result in food being forcibly discarded (the stands/equipment are not removed).

¹ Gracias Señor is represented by a Palisadian attorney, who supports the food trucks/sidewalk vendors and advised this author that the case will be vigorously defended. Meanwhile, representatives of StreetsLA, LADOT and the City Attorney's office have been invited to attend an upcoming PPCC board meeting, to clarify the relevant rules, regulations and enforcement measures that apply to these operations. **PPCC has taken no position on these matters to date** (*given the divided public opinion, community consensus reflected by a required 2/3 majority board vote seems unlikely*).

² LAMC Sec. 42.13 (sidewalk vending): https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/los_angeles/latest/lamc/0-0-0-130544. StreetsLA rules (sidewalk vending): https://streetsla.lacity.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/Updated%20Sidewalk%20Vending%20Rules_12.3.24.pdf.

³ See, e.g., 1/25/24 PPCC minutes: <https://pacpalicc.org/index.php/ppcc-minutes-2024-01-25/> (item 8.5.3).

⁴ Prior summaries by this author to the PPCC board (written reports, PPCC positions and meeting updates): <https://pacpalicc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/At-Large-Report-5-23-24-1.pdf>; <https://pacpalicc.org/index.php/ppcc-minutes-2024-07-25/> (item 8.3.2).

- StreetsLA regulations provide that sidewalk vending stands cannot “unreasonably (interfere) with or (impede) the flow of pedestrian . . . traffic,” and cannot “obstruct the passage of any sidewalk” by causing customers to congregate. The rules require stands to allow for at least *3 ft. of space along sidewalks for pedestrian passage* (reduced by the City Council from a former 5 ft. restriction), and they impose additional space restrictions, *e.g.*, stands/equipment must be set at least 18” from the curb face.
- Some stakeholders have observed that the taco stands do not always provide for the required 3 ft. of clear passage; that the tents with support poles planted across the sidewalk interfere with pedestrian passage; that the operations (which at times include patrons sitting at tables & chairs or waiting in line) often block the entire sidewalk; that pedestrians and persons in wheelchairs are forced to proceed through the Ralphs lot because the congested conditions impede access to the public right of way; that the stand equipment at times is set very close to (less than 18” from) the curb, with vendors unsafely standing in the street (Sunset Blvd.) to prepare food; and that the conditions are generally hazardous.⁵

2) Catering (Food) Trucks: Food trucks that operate on city streets (as opposed to sidewalk taco stands) are governed by LAMC Sec. 80.73.⁶ Some salient considerations and provisions include:

- Officials have not yet presented information to PPCC on the rules governing catering (food) trucks.
- Food trucks are required to obtain, and keep up-to-date, various state, county and city licenses and permits (it’s unknown if those in the Palisades currently hold all required licenses/permits).
- Violations of Sec. 80.73 are treated as infractions and punishable by fines. It’s unclear if further enforcement measures can be applied if fines are unpaid (or whether in this case any investigations occurred, violations were determined, or fines were imposed in the first place in response to complaints). The trucks have remained parked and operating along Sunset and/or Alma Real.
- LAMC Sec. 80.73 expressly prohibits catering trucks from parking within 500 ft. of the property line of schools. Ralphs claims in its lawsuit that trucks parked along both Sunset Blvd. and Alma Real violate this provision (some of the trucks do appear to park within a few hundred feet of Corpus Christi, Village and/or Seven Arrows schools). To the author’s knowledge, the 500 ft. restriction in Sec. 80.73 still applies and hasn’t been removed (as it was with sidewalk vending); however, it’s unclear whether the prohibition is widely known, or is routinely (if ever) enforced with respect to food trucks.
- Another distance restriction: Food trucks must not be parked within 100 ft. of an intersection in Los Angeles. The Alma Real/La Cruz intersection, and possibly the La Cruz/Sunset intersection, may be within 100 ft. of sites where food trucks park (but again, it’s unclear if this restriction is enforced).
- LAMC 80.73 also imposes time limits on catering truck parking: In residential areas, the trucks cannot park longer than 30 minutes in one location. In commercial areas, they cannot park longer than one hour in a location, and after that, must move at least ½ mile away (measured in a straight line). It appears that the trucks along Sunset Blvd. and Alma Real are often parked for longer than one hour without moving (according to allegations in the Ralphs lawsuit, food trucks are regularly parked from 6am-2pm along Sunset and/or Alma Real, or in some cases from 11am-6pm along Alma Real).
- *To repeat:* Although serious concerns have been raised and complaints made about negative impacts and possible violations of the rules and regulations, the food trucks (as well as the taco stands) at this point are operating and appear to be enjoyed and generally supported by Palisades stakeholders.

Chris Spitz, PPCC At-large Rep, 1/4/25

⁵ Another sidewalk taco stand has recently appeared on Via de la Paz; the reaction to this stand so far is unknown.

⁶ LAMC 80.73 (catering/food trucks): https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/los_angeles/latest/lamc/0-0-0-166680.