

**Street-side Vending In Downtown Los Angeles:
Problems, Policies and Assessment**

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Executive Summary

Despite Los Angeles's immense economy and influence on the national and international stage, the city of the west coast is the only major city in the United States of America that has not legalized the practice of streetside vending. In spite of this, previous research estimates that about 50,000 vendors are operating in the shadows and generating up to five hundred million dollars in untaxed revenue, revenue that is not factored in with the rest of the Los Angeles economy. Considered criminal and a necessary casualty for law and order doctrines, the right to the sidewalk has finally found recognition for its economic benefits and positive effects to a society. Despite being considered criminal or a necessary casualty for law and order, the right to the sidewalk has found recognition for its economic benefits and positive social impact in Los Angeles.

The purpose of this research paper is to assess and advise how the City of Los Angeles might be able to create a more equitable and just environment for streetside vendors through a fair regulatory system. To fulfill this purpose, the question asked while performing this research was how legalization and regulation would affect the state of streetside vending in Los Angeles and what policies would best treat vendors. To answer the question, I gathered information acquired from the testimony of a focus group comprised of current street vendors and conducted spatial mapping of a street where vendors work. The map was used to compare and assess different methods of regulatory policy that had been presented to the City Council and the City Attorney. The question asked while performing this research was how would legalization and regulation affect the state of streetside vending in Los Angeles and what policies would best treat vendors.

Based on this research, it is clear that the regulatory policies that have been presented to the City Attorney are too detached from the reality of streetside vending to make a noticeable or positive impact on the streets of the city. A two-vendor block per block policy does not appreciate the scale of streetside vending, wrongfully disrupting and breaking up whole communities of vendors, while requiring written consent from shop-owners continues the dangerous precedent of exploitation that occurs between vendors and brick-and-mortar shop owners. The more complicated proposition was the sidewalk vending provisions that were introduced to the debate by the Street Services Bureau, which included important restrictions like a required distance from bus stops or fire hydrants, but also included more unnecessary and draconian measures like distances from curbs and driveways.

Based on these findings the recommendations are focused on the autonomic and independent nature of the vendors that was apparent in the focus group, as well as the historical errors of alienating vendors from legalization efforts. The recommendations are the creation of an unlimited permit system that clearly conveys a vendor's legality, a simplified regulatory framework that does not alienate and dissuade vendors from incorporating themselves into the permit system, and the creation partnership between vendors and city hall to explore the possibility of public restrooms on city streets and trash-collection deals with municipalities.

Introduction

Los Angeles' size makes it an influential city, nationally and globally and it has pioneered progressive policies like plastic bag bans, air quality standards and water-treatment initiatives. In this enormous city, these unique and progressive policies would not have produced results if not for organizations petitioning and challenging the government to better the living conditions for its inhabitants. The struggle for legalization and fair treatment of street-side vending has appeared in cities throughout America and the globe, yet a breakthrough has been long overdue in Los Angeles. Vendors have been treated unfairly and have suffered in Los Angeles their businesses and property are constantly at risk of confiscation, and although streetside vending legalization is becoming a reality for Los Angeles, the regulatory policies that might come with it may hamper responsible vendors. The following research was carried out to use the story of street-side vending in Los Angeles and other cities, review studies and information gathered about this economic practice, and propose a host of research questions and research methodology to better understand street-side vending in Los Angeles and how the city can improve its relationship with practitioners. The implications of this study are crucial in allowing Los Angeles to better service its people and once again lead by example for cities around the world.

Literature Review

Definition of Streetside Vending

Street-side vending is the practice of setting up a temporary shop next to a street, allowing people to advertise and conduct business with pedestrians, motorists and any other passerby. Vendors carry their products on hand, set them out on the ground, or use a non-motorized cart commonly identified as a pushcart. Vendors use the sidewalk as the platform for their business, and often place their shops near recreational or frequently trafficked areas to maximize their exposure to people. This economic practice has been a cornerstone of all societies and is considered a cheap and effective way to sell goods without the explicit capital investment needed to set up a permanent, immovable business. This gives street-side vendors flexibility in not only location but in products – without need to specialize in one craft business owners can relatively easily change their inventory to best suit the needs of their neighborhood.

Benefits of Streetside Vending:

Street-side vending is crucial to cities, yet the economic and social roles often go underappreciated. There is the strong belief in the literature and research of streetside vending that the businesses do more than support its practitioners, but that it also benefits the surrounding neighborhoods in which these businesses operate. The literature also recognizes streetside vending as a growing industry, illustrated by the surge of permits requested in New York City and its growing popularity as one of the defining factors of

New York culture.¹ This growth is also taking place in Los Angeles, spawning a coalition and a legalization movement that has contested the current law as unlawful, improperly upheld and discriminatory.² In Los Angeles, communities often encouraged peddling through the use of sidewalks as public spaces rather than just avenues for pedestrian traffic but as platforms for pedestrian activities— where places like gasoline stations an ideal place to set up tables and host social activities.³ In this socially invigorated environment, the relationship between communities and street-side vending is often shown to be a positive one, where vendors set up shop in low-crime areas and often contribute to even lower crime rates.⁴ Vendors most typically are low-income immigrants that run their businesses within their communities – offering products that best fulfill the needs of the locale .⁵ The fact that street-side vendors often peddle green foods and produce could be considered a method of diminishing the prevalence of food deserts (areas in cities that do not have stores that offer healthy foods and vegetables required for a healthy lifestyle).⁶ However, despite these attributes, the current municipal law of Los Angeles completely criminalizes most forms of street-side vending, with the exception of certain food trucks – which require a much larger monetary investment up front to start.⁷

In *Changing household dynamics: Children’s American generational resources in street vending markets*, academic Emir Estrada argues that the practice of vending in Los Angeles engages the English-speaking children in families, giving them responsibilities

¹ (Samantha Schmidt 2016)

² (Emily Reyes 2015)

³ (James Rojas 1982)

⁴ (Yen Liu, Yvonne, Patrick Burns, and Daniel Flaming 2015)

⁵ (Yen Liu, Yvonne, Patrick Burns, and Daniel Flaming 2015)

⁶ (Yen Liu, Yvonne, Patrick Burns, and Daniel Flaming 2015)

⁷ (Michael Feuer 2016).

and a stake in their parents business, which allows them to garner agency.⁸ Another benefit of streetside vending is political in nature, the exposure and existence in city centers being a statement of the vendors “right to the city” and their “rights to difference”, preserving their culture and their status as individuals.⁹ Beyond individual and political benefits, the social benefits of streetside vending are also noted, keeping vendors active and acting as a social safety-net for people who would be otherwise unemployed.¹⁰ Streetside vending adds variety to the street and acts as a “laboratory” for vendors, who can experiment with social interactions with clients to improve their own business acumen.¹¹ In Los Angeles, not only is there an estimated population of 50,000 vendors, it is also predicted that these vendors have created around 5,234 sustained jobs that exist due to vendors purchasing and circulating money in the economy.¹²

The Resistance: Excuses of Criminalization

Despite the many positive impacts of streetside vending, numerous problems do dog the industry and keep streetside vending a controversial topic. The foremost complaint about the practice is how vendors clutter streets and lower the value of the surrounding neighborhood, a point made in President Donald Trump’s letter to then Mayor Ed Koch in 1985, where he stated that with “ketchup and mustard splattered” sidewalks, higher class business would leave and “with them both prestige and taxes will

⁸ (Estrada 2012)

⁹ (Crawford, Margaret 1995)

¹⁰(Ray Bromley 2000)

¹¹(Ray Bromley 2000)

¹² (Yen Liu, Yvonne, Patrick Burns, and Daniel Flaming. 2015)

be lost to the city forever.”¹³ Streetside vending is not only considered a blight to developers and businesses, but is often viewed by law enforcement as a sign of a lawlessness and a symptom of illegal activity.¹⁴ Prosecution and anti-vending policies are justified and included in these anti-crime initiatives, following the broken-windows theory, in which writers George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson discuss the first sign of disorder as an excuse for total collapse, where “...if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken.”¹⁵ This no-tolerance policy is then applied to the streets, where:

The unchecked panhandler is, in effect, the first broken window. Muggers and robbers, whether opportunistic or professional, believe they reduce their chances of being caught or even identified if they operate on streets where potential victims are already intimidated by prevailing conditions. If the neighborhood cannot keep a bothersome panhandler from annoying passersby, the thief may reason, it is even less likely to call the police to identify a potential mugger or to interfere if the mugging actually takes place.¹⁶

Beyond law and order, public health is also an issue, as in many cases streetside vendors have shown negligence to food safety standards even in cities that have a legalized and regulated streetside vending network.¹⁷ In one study in New York conducted in 1997, 39 of 51 cases of vendor food were have shown to have been undercooked and still hospitable to harmful bacteria.¹⁸

An American History of Street Vending:

In the history of the United States, literature presents street-side vending as an

¹³(Stefan Sirucek 2017)

¹⁴ (Rodrigo Meneses Reyes. 2013)

¹⁵ (Kelling, George L.; Wilson, James Q. 1982)

¹⁶ (Kelling, George L.; Wilson, James Q. 1982)

¹⁷ (Bryan M. Burt 2003)

¹⁸ (Donna St. George. 1998)

essential practice that was lost to modernization: the city of New York was so dependent on the street-side economy that a study conducted in the 1890s ranked it as the second largest occupation in the Southern East Side, behind tailoring.¹⁹ The importance of the practice only grew in the early 1900s, as pushcarts and sidewalk businesses were declared “The poor man’s market” and a clear avenue for immigrants to produce income.²⁰ In 1930, over 47,000 individuals were reported to have relied on the earnings of pushcarts, and the total amount of business generated was estimated at 40-50 million dollars.²¹ A survey of the Lower East Side in 1925 identified 63 percent of the fruit and vegetable vendors as Jewish and 32 percent as Italian, and the vending of merchandise was dominated by a group of Jewish immigrants at 95.7 percent.²² However, as the century proceeded, refrigerator technology and fast food began to allow lawmakers and city councils to restrict and complicate vendors in the interest of less cluttered streets and a preference to brick and mortar businesses.

The literature best explains the justification of criminalization of vending in its depiction of the La Guardia administration as it dismantled one of the largest business coalitions in the city. The La Guardia administration in New York City existed from 1934 to 1945 – and throughout the period promoted enclosure and open-air markets that rented out stalls to vendors as a method to clean up streets and led to the end of the street market system in New York, cutting a network of sixty marketplaces in 1934 to seventeen in 1939.²³ The Essex Street Market is one of the most historical examples of this transition

¹⁹ (Daniel M.Bluestone 1991)

²⁰ (Lawrence Veiller 2006)

²¹ (Suzanne Wasserman. 1998)

²² (Daniel M.Bluestone 1991)

²³ (Daniel M.Bluestone 1991)

from sidewalk vending to concentrated markets – a bundle of buildings repurposed to an indoor market with leased space for 475 vendors – a massive scaling back from the numbers of legal vendors.²⁴ In 1981, New York Mayor Ed Koch complained about the bazaar-like nature of these marketplaces, trying to reign in what he considered a cluttered streetside environment and establishing a 3,000-cap permit system that allowed vendors back into the streets of New York, but with a limit.²⁵ In 1994, Mayor Rudi Giuliani once again attempted to corral vendors into an open-air market.²⁶ However, the attempt to relocate vendors created a public backlash, and without significant political support the action failed.²⁷

The literature on Los Angeles is not as detailed as the studies conducted in New York, but adds to the history of vending being phased out with the arrival of modernization. Immigrants were once again the work-force of the street economy, making its first appearances as far back as 1876 and reaching a peak in the mid 1920s with Chinese and Mexican immigrants comprising the market.²⁸ Much like modern times, the market was dominated by immigrants, although prosecution and racism was then directed towards Chinese immigrants, as detailed in Natalia Molina’s book, *Fit to be Citizens?*²⁹ Despite one estimate where Chinese vendors made up ninety percent of the vending market that occurred outside of the predominantly white marketplaces, racial beliefs were used to label these vendors as a public health hazard, stigmatizing Chinese

²⁴ (*New York History Walks*. 2012)

²⁵ (Buck Ennis 2016)

²⁶ (Jonathan P. Hicks 1994)

²⁷ (Henry Goldman 2016)

²⁸ (Farley Elliott 2015)

²⁹ (Natalia Molina 2006)

vendors through the beginning of the 20th century.³⁰ Yet, as Los Angeles grew and industrialized, a push to coalesce and organize vending mirroring what happened in New York occurred, pushing most of the vendors off of the street in exchange for sit-down restaurants.³¹ Technological advances in refrigeration allowed for brick and mortar shops to rival the effectiveness of street-side vendors and peddlers leading to a harsh regulatory push in 1930.³² During the fast-food rush of the 1960s and 1970s, with franchise chains like McDonald's forming and dominating the American consumer's market, street-side vending disappeared further into the cultural centers that served as the industry's inspiration and source.³³ In 1964, Mayor Tom Bradley blocked a motion to ban streetside vending outright, stating that it was important to encourage small entrepreneurs and vital for increased opportunity and upward mobility, but after he had left office the ban was enacted in 1980.³⁴ Unfortunately, this ban had just occurred during an influx of Spanish speaking immigrants, leading to a boom in vending and a campaign to legalize vending as early as 1994.

International:

International literature gives context to the importance of vending: street-side vending has been estimated to contribute up to one-fifth of the unofficial economy in many African, Asian and Latin-American and still this practice is more often persecuted

³⁰ (Natalia Molina 2006)

³¹ (Farley Elliott 2015)

³² (Yen Liu, Yvonne, Patrick Burns, and Daniel Flaming 2015)

³³(Farley Elliott 2015)

³⁴ (Sarah Portnoy 2016)

rather than rewarded.³⁵ In one international study carried out in five cities across the developing world, 64% of vendors reported that the business practice accounts for the majority of their income.³⁶ In Chile, 47% of food was purchased in small-stores in lieu of retail stores that had emerged during the turn of the century – and in the city of Santiago, the 401 street-markets that span the city produced an accumulated over 2 billion in annual sales.³⁷ Yet the international literature also shows how the New York blueprint behind drafting restrictive policies exists globally, as cities in rising second and third-world countries attempt to improve their appearance and achieve the status of a stable and wealthy society. An estimated 300,000 stalls existed in Delhi, India, before the government enacted restrictive regulations to corral vendors into legal zones in 2007, reminiscent of La Guardia’s creation of indoor market with stalls for vendors³⁸. In Mexico City, an estimated 10,000 vendors operating in the Historical District were planned to be restricted by the government through the creation of open air markets.³⁹ However, this attempt to restrict vendors failed as an economic downturn halted the construction of the twenty-seven proposed market centers⁴⁰. In 2002, ex-Mayor Rudi Giuliani signed a contract with the government of Mexico City in order to address crime, resulting in removal of about 30,000 vendors that were operating in the downtown due to the proposed policies that operated on the ‘Broken Windows Doctrine’.⁴¹

³⁵ (Sally Roever 2014.)

³⁶ (Sally Roever 2014.)

³⁷ (Joel Stillerman 2015)

³⁸ (Véronique Dupont 2011.)

³⁹ (Diana Londoño 2010)

⁴⁰ (Diana Londoño 2010)

⁴¹ (Rodrigo Meneses Reyes. 2013)

Poor Governance and Individual Action:

Recent attempts in the United States to legalize vending and improve conditions have proven inadequate and serves as an example on how underestimating the importance of street vending can hurt policy. New York's expansion of vending utilizes a license plan however with the low number of available licenses, costing as much as \$20,000 on a black market, it has kept many vendors illegal.⁴² As a result of this burgeoning demand for vendors, New York is considering policy that would double the amount of food-vending licenses over the next seven years, although the number of offered licenses still falls short of historical trends.⁴³ In comparison Los Angeles, a prospective legalization campaign allowed vendors to sell food at MacArthur Park, but the small pool of 14 vendors with a maximum number of 50, offered no significant change and as a result garnered no momentum and led to the quick demise of the exploratory policy.⁴⁴

As a result of ineffective attempts of legalization, case studies exist to show how individuals act by themselves to maximize both commerce and order on the street. The clearest example is the estimated 50,000 street-side businesses that operate illegally in Los Angeles - continuing to sell in defiance of the failed attempt to legalize.⁴⁵ Literature also records how New York vendors that are legal under municipal law are willing to change locations to avoid possible confrontations and interactions with the police – even if it means their new location is illegal.⁴⁶ Many persist even after being arrested, simply

⁴² (Nicole Gelinis 2016)

⁴³ (Samantha Schmidt 2016)

⁴⁴ (Sharon Tso 2015)

⁴⁵ (Yen Liu, Yvonne, Patrick Burns, and Daniel Flaming. 2015)

⁴⁶ (Ryan Devlin 2011)

because the demand for their services and the profits received are too large to ignore.⁴⁷

The purpose of this research is to understand the future of street-side vending in Los Angeles through looking at historical and current day practices, in order to be able to inform the citizens and representatives of Los Angeles how to rightfully accommodate and regulate the economic practice into the future. In order to understand the logistical and environmental issues that complicate street-side vending, qualitative data from focus groups and mapping of street-side vending locations will be collected to assess and vet policies for future.

Research Questions:

The purpose of this research is to acquire a better understanding of the future of street-side vending in Los Angeles and what developments would best help street-side vending on the sidewalk. In order to understand what research questions should be asked, it is important to understand the theme of this research project. The overarching question then, is as follows:

Thematic Question:

In what ways can the environment of Los Angeles be improved to better suit the needs of street-side vendors and increase their positive effects on society?

The question is narrowed down through reading literature: As the work above has shown, the economic practice of vending is heavily influenced by government policies on policing and the built environment. This narrows the focus to the legalization campaign and gives us the following question:

⁴⁷ (Richard Levine 1990)

Refined Question:

What will the campaign to legalize street-side vending have on the vendors of Downtown Los Angeles?

While focusing on the legalization efforts, there are questions that look beyond the simple passage of the law. The goal of this project is to not simply research but also to provide recommendations and insights, a critical and sharp look beyond policy. The following research questions ask more than just the effects of the legalization, but whether or not the policy as it stands is effective and just:

Research Questions:

- What is the state of street-side vending in Downtown Los Angeles? Where do vendors set up shop and what informs them of these decisions?
- How many vendors in Downtown Los Angeles would be legalized by the proposed policy? How does this compare to current street-side vendors?
- What do street-side vendors look for in setting up shop, and how does this relate to the legalization proposal?
- What measures should be taken by the government and local actors to facilitate the practice of street-side vending? Are these measures included in the proposed legislation?

Methods

The purpose of this research is to better understand how individuals deal with injustice and environmental barriers as part of their daily business practice, and the nature of these barriers and how they can be resolved through policy. With such a bold purpose and the broad array of research questions posed above, it is prudent to use both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to diversify the data as much as possible.

The qualitative approach was a focus group designed to get a better understanding of the activities and rationalities that motivate street-side vendors. The group consisted of 4 individuals and was presented with a list of questions focusing on business practices and the decisions made when looking to set up shop. The individuals of the focus group took place in the office space of the East Los Angeles Community Corporation, whose involvement with the campaign to legalize street-side vending allowed it to recruit these vendors for the focus group. The focus group was carried out in Spanish with an ELACC representative present as a facilitator and overseer of the interview. The focus group did not have their names recorded in any way, and had the option to opt out of a written signature in giving consent for the study. The questions presented to the group were the following:

1. What are the key attributes you are looking for when figuring out where to set up shop? What are the most important? Least important?
2. What do you usually bring to work?
3. How often do you change your location? Why?
4. What do you look for when changing your location? Familiarity, proximity, etc.

5. What do you think is the best location for a shop? The worst? Explain.
6. Do you conduct business in your own neighborhood? Why or why not?
7. Who do you have the most positive interactions with? The worst?
8. What measures do you take to ensure your safety while conducting business?
9. If there were one thing you could add to a street to make it more inviting to a street-side vendor, what would you add?
10. What times of day do you think you get the most business?
11. When do you start your work and when do you finish? How strict is this schedule?

I mapped and recorded of street-side vendors throughout Downtown L.A, making a note of what they sold as well as where on the sidewalk they were vending. Informed by the results of my focus group (discussed below) I visited streets and areas where the vendors I interviewed worked. By car and on foot, I tried to cover as much area as possible in the quickest amount of time while also keeping my footprint as small as possible as to not aggravate anyone. The only data collected was the recorded locations and product. The second quantitative research tool was a street-side policy assessment of the proposed regulatory laws that were brought up and under consideration by the lawmakers at the Los Angeles City Hall. Alongside the possible regulations that were brought up in public hearings, I utilized the proposed Sample Placement Provisions that were introduced to the City Council from the Bureau of Street Services, a set of possible regulations that could also be enacted. This review was a mapping project, plotting which

areas of a street would be considered legal under the new policy and the proposed restrictions, and using the data in which I surveyed vendor locations and the products they were selling, so that the two data sets could be compared. Since the research is conducted on the physical environment of Los Angeles streets, this quantitative work was more numerical and required measuring tools such as measuring tape and a street template paper in order to accurately draw the legal and illegal boundaries of the street and translate them onto paper. The resulting information would indicate what sections of the legalization proposal would help vendors and which restrictions would hinder vendors the most, painting an honest picture of a vending-legal Los Angeles, and overlaying the two sets of data would show me how many vendors would be legal under the possible restrictions, helping me understand what portions of the law are most reasonable and which ones are the most damaging.

Background

Context is an incredibly important tool in understanding street-side vending in Los Angeles, and how it relates to the research questions above. While the latest headlines communicate that the practice of streetside vending has been legalized in a vote of City Council, the motion also included the intent to prepare a legal framework for the vending environment in Los Angeles.⁴⁸ To better understand how legalization and subsequent regulation would affect the practice, it is important to realize that the city of Los Angeles had attempted and failed to legalize streetside vending in the past.

⁴⁸ (Howard Fine 2017)

Previous efforts to legalize street-side vending in Los Angeles have been largely shaped by the injustice of the current system. In 1995 an attempt was made to open up select streets to vendors, but this half-hearted legalization failed in both implementation and enforcement, losing funding before the turn of the century.⁴⁹ Out of the eight zones that were supposed to be created, only one zone in MacArthur park was set up four years after the ordinance had been passed.⁵⁰ The district soon lost funding due to the fact that vendors experienced little benefit for purchasing a permit, with permit-less vendors still able to vend in the district, undermining the movement.⁵¹ The small permit pool of only fourteen legal vendors at the start of the program that was hoping to reach fifty permits echoed the lukewarm reception the pilot program received on the street.⁵² As a result, the venture to legalize streetside vending quietly failed and fell out of public circulation.

The failure of city hall to follow through with legalization for vendors allowed for the prosecution and seizure of inventory to continue. Eventually this lack of fair treatment led to vendors organizing once again, this time turning to city hall for damages, arguing that while the seizures are legal, the lack of receipting and returning confiscated items goes against the law and highlights the broken enforcement.⁵³ This legal challenge was based on a renewed community push for legalization – which has presented an amendment to the municipal code that has been undergoing consideration by the city council from 2014 to the present.⁵⁴ The two proposed paths to legalization include a

⁴⁹ (Sharon Tso 2015)

⁵⁰ (Sharon Tso, 2015)

⁵¹ (Elizabeth Chou 2017)

⁵² (Julie Ha 1999)

⁵³ (Emily Reyes 2015)

⁵⁴ (Emily Goldberg 2014)

district-based model echoing the failed 1990 legalization policy, while the more popular policy would be a citywide street vending program that would legalize street-side vending on all sidewalks that meet public safety and federal standards.⁵⁵ This vending program could also incorporate the district model in its policies, including special restrictions or characteristics for certain areas and neighborhoods in the city.⁵⁶

This latest effort to legalize streetside vending began in 2011 with the formation of the Los Angeles Street Vendors Campaign, an organization and coalition supported by the East Los Angeles Community Corporation and over 60 other community group organizations. Catching the support of Los Angeles City Councilmembers José Huizar and Curren Price in 2013, the campaign was able to create a movement in the council to legalize streetside vending.⁵⁷ The initial motion was to direct city officials to propose and comment on a system that would legalize the practice⁵⁸. After four years of continuing the issue the city council voted unanimously to legalize streetside vending, citing the changing political climate as a motive for protecting members of the Los Angeles community.⁵⁹ The ordinance is currently being written by the Los Angeles City Attorney and is considering regulations that range from a 2-vendor limit per block, a sidewalk zoning policy, and a written permission requirement from adjacent store-owners to the legalization law.⁶⁰ Another regulatory framework was offered to the city council in 2014 by the Bureau of Street Services, an outline of a number of restrictive policies meant to

⁵⁵ (Leslie Berestein Rojas 2016)

⁵⁶(Leslie Berestein Rojas 2016)

⁵⁷ (Emily Alpert Reyes 2017)

⁵⁸ (City News Service 2013)

⁵⁹ (Hailey Branson-Potts 2017)

⁶⁰ (Howard Fine 2017)

keep vendors from vending near a number of physical objects found on sidewalks, ranging from fire hydrants to grass.⁶¹

Sidewalk Object	Required Distance (ft.)
Window Display	4 to N/A (Any obstruction of the display is prohibited)
Marked Crosswalk	5
Curb Return (Unmarked Crosswalk)	5
Poles/Posts/Traffic Signs	1 to N/A (Any obstruction is prohibited)
Driveway	5
Lawn, Shrub, Tree or Street Tree Well	5
Entrance to Business	10 to N/A (if only 10 feet separate the entry door from the curb, no stand can be situated in front of a business entrance)

The proposed regulation also outlaws any vending that narrows the pedestrian traffic to a clear space of less than six feet, and impedes the access to the adjacent properties. The provided restrictions also include a provision that maintains that any stand that is identified as unsafe and endangers the safety of person or property is considered unlawful, a general guideline that can be used by law enforcement to deal with any other situations not already listed.

These restrictive policies have been met with resistance of the vendor groups, who consider these guidelines out of touch with the reality of streetside vending and disruptive to the practice.⁶² Their argument is that unnecessary and strict regulation will echo 1994 attempt legalize streetside vending, where strict regulations and lack of incentives keep vendors from applying for permits and legal status. The vote to legalize streetside vending was made during the research, and the regulatory guidelines will be

⁶¹ Appendix A

⁶² (Howard Fine 2017)

going to the city attorney for council review.

Findings

Through research there are many characteristics of streetside vendors that have shown to go against the commonly held belief and public policy which treats vendors as informal entrepreneurs. Observations of vendors in during business hours, their testimony at city hall and their accounts in focus groups reveal much about what vendors desire and expect in the environments they conduct business in. When vendors' habits and their preferred locations are compared to possible regulatory policies, a disconnect appears between popular vending locations and what the city considers to be amendable alternatives to the norm.

Focus Group

*Everyone has a story and if we all told them we would never end this interview.*⁶³

The focus group that was conducted revealed much about what vendors themselves see in their work, and what improvements could be made to the reality of streetside vending. The focus group was composed of four individuals, all with a long history of vending and all Spanish-speaking. It was apparent from the discussion that the environment of street-side vending in Los Angeles is competitive and human: that the majority of the problems and solutions that occur in this vein of work hinges on interactions and agreements between people. These accounts stood as a stark warning to any disruption to the trade, but also offered powerful insights on how vendors could be assisted in their activities.

⁶³ Appendix B

Entering the Trade

*Behind every street vendor there's a story, some are sadder some are happier, but there's always a story behind us.*⁶⁴

All of the vendors had entered into the business on the advice and guidance of another, in one case a daughter introduced her father to her business, in another the participant was introduced to the economy through her brother in law. These human interactions often define the environment the vendors operate in more so than physical features on the street – vendors choose where to set up shop based on the consent and relationship of other vendors in the area as well as brick-and-mortar businesses that operate on the street. A good relationship spells a secure spot to conduct business, where vendors help protect and validate one another by sticking together as a group and finding security in numbers. Bad relationships end in harassment, threats and voluntary expulsion from the community. The third participant spoke of how other vendors in a neighborhood harassed him in a response to his refusing to abide by their rules and pay rent:

*I kept on moving to different spots around that district but the rest of the street vendors kept bothering me and didn't let me sell in peace, they even knocked down my table because they said I was stealing somebody else's place. So after fighting so much I decided to pay because otherwise they weren't going to let me sell there.*⁶⁵

These acts of teamwork and intimidation between vendors are all considered part of the business to the participants of the focus group: owners have to weigh the cost of harassment with the profits that could be made on the street. While the third participant's story ended with him paying a tithe to the vendors in order to keep his spot and end the disruption, the discussion turned to the concept of rent and how that affects the location

⁶⁴ Appendix B

⁶⁵ Appendix B

and business decisions of vendors. Like any other contract or economic agreement, the cost and benefit analysis between individuals is fluid and constantly being revised and reviewed – rents can change, and often vendors seek out places where these charges are low while still being economically viable. However, there was disagreement between the vendors on whether changing location was always the correct course of action. While some members of the focus group stressed the importance of keeping a low profile and maintaining good relations between the police, vendors and business owners, another member of the group disagreed, stating that money and maintaining a viable business remained the priority:

*No, no, no that not true, there's plenty of places where you can't sell because there's no clients. Police in Hollywood always told us to go to the Hollywood bowl, but there's no events there and there's no one! You can't sell if you have no clients! We have to find a place where we can earn money to eat and live and in some places you can't do that.*⁶⁶

The nature of setting up shop is clearly a difficult process for vendors, where various people and relatives are factors in entering and maintaining a spot on the street is not an independent decision that can easily be changed. Forcing vendors to change their location results in the haphazard and difficult migratory lifestyle that the vendors try to avoid, putting them in unfamiliar streets without any friends to help them.

Polished Relationships

*They asked us if we knew that street shops were illegal in California we said we did but that we needed to eat.*⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Appendix B

⁶⁷ Appendix B

Payments are not only exclusive between vendors: often established businesses make these deals out of friendship – not only keeping silent for the vendor’s security but also ensuring that their location in front of the business is exclusive. On the block of one of the participants, the cost of vending in front of a shop can be as high as \$15,000 dollars. This purchased loyalty is viewed as a necessary evil to the participants, who bemoan the dangers of extortion but also affirm the benefits of having a strong relationship with fellow vendors and shop-owners. Interactions between shop-owners and vendors is not grim, and like any community there is a range of interactions – the fourth participant has a positive interaction with the members in her community, as well as with the shop-owner that she operates in front of. The owner seeks no rent but expects her to clean the sidewalk in front of the business, which she does with the help of a homeless individual who she pays for the work. Still, the owner’s beneficence has limits and sometimes there are complaints about the vendor’s use of tents. Cleanliness was another characteristic of a responsible business, shared by the rest of the focus group, the third participant mentioning how he cleans his space to keep a good relationship with the brick-and-mortar business and the rest of the vendors. Yet positive relationships do not guarantee safety – police can still confiscate, ticket and/or expel a vendor from a spot at a moment’s notice without any help from shop-owners and other vendors. The possible regulations that require vendors to acquire written permission by brick-and-mortar businesses would allow established businesses to continue this dangerous relationship. The possibility of requiring money or fulfilling certain standards for consent that could be retracted at any moment is no improvement over the current plight of vendors and would

legitimize this unethical sidewalk environment.

Suggestions

As for attitudes of regarding the composition of sidewalks and possible improvements, there was little care or necessity spelled out by the vendors. While the participants expressed a positive sentiment about features such as trees or shade structures, they mentioned the fact that dead trees were just a wasted space – that they set up parasols and umbrellas and seats in their space to accommodate guests, not relying on the city to help with their business. To the participants of the focus group, more important features much needed on the street would be the costly and difficult amenities that aren't easily set up, like restrooms. The participants typically relied on the brick-and-mortar businesses to relieve themselves, and this provides another method of control that the established business-owners have over their sidewalk-working counterparts. Despite cleaning their working spaces, one participant also was interested in the possibility of making a deal with the city government in order to improve the waste management on the streetside. One of the vendors had a much more visible, thematic change in mind:

*I would like to change the way in which people see us. For example tourists, I want them to see the city clean, organized, and not with people running from the police. I would like for us to have like a uniform or something so we look like real business people.*⁶⁸

This was picked up by the rest of the group, who all echoed the same sentiment that there was a need to stress the business-focused and respectability of their trade, and to shy away from the informal appearance that often plagues public perception of vendors.

All we want is to have a better future, a place where we can work in peace without arguing with anyone and without being scared of the police, we want to use the

⁶⁸ Appendix B

*skills we've learned during these years selling and have a nice environment, see each other as colleagues and friends.*⁶⁹

In relation to the regulatory framework in city hall, with the practice of streetside vending already established, it appears that vendors want to focus more on improvements to their image and business rather than a regulatory framework or adding to the sidewalk.

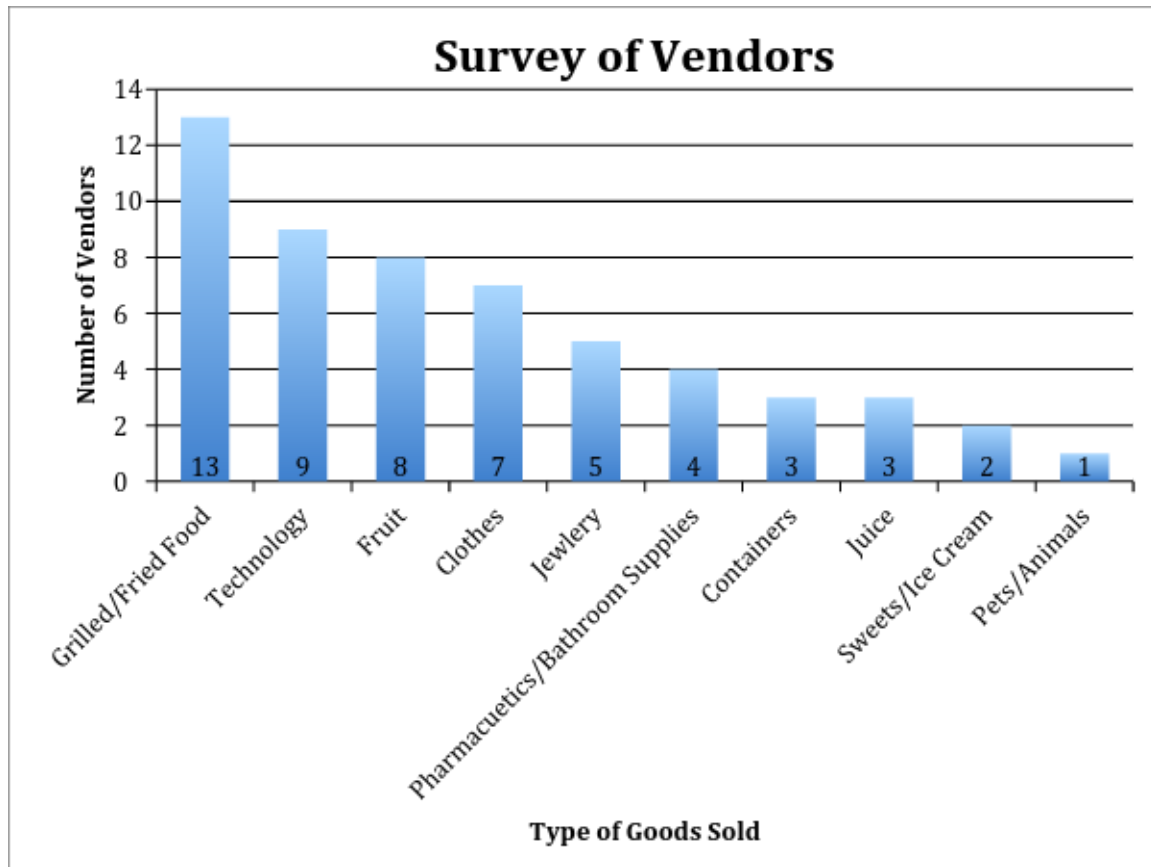
In conclusion, the focus group revealed a great deal of autonomy and responsibility that vendors have in managing their business, collaborating with multiple business partners and making important business decisions in their day-to-day work. Their ability to function within the environment of a sidewalk is limited by other vendors and business owners, they often provide tables and seats for customers and umbrellas and tents for shade as long as it doesn't attract unwanted attention or friction. As a result, when the participants in the study group were asked to change one thing on the streets where they did business, they didn't request many physical additions. This is incredibly relevant to the policy discussions over the legalization and subsequent regulation of streetside vending, with the focus group highlighting how damaging and costly displacement of vendors can be, as well as requiring them to rely on their adjacent business-owners for a legitimate and respected trade .

Observations: Street-side Vendors at their Work

To better understand and articulate this incredibly vibrant and fluid entrepreneurial environment, a walk down Olympic Blvd, where one of the participants

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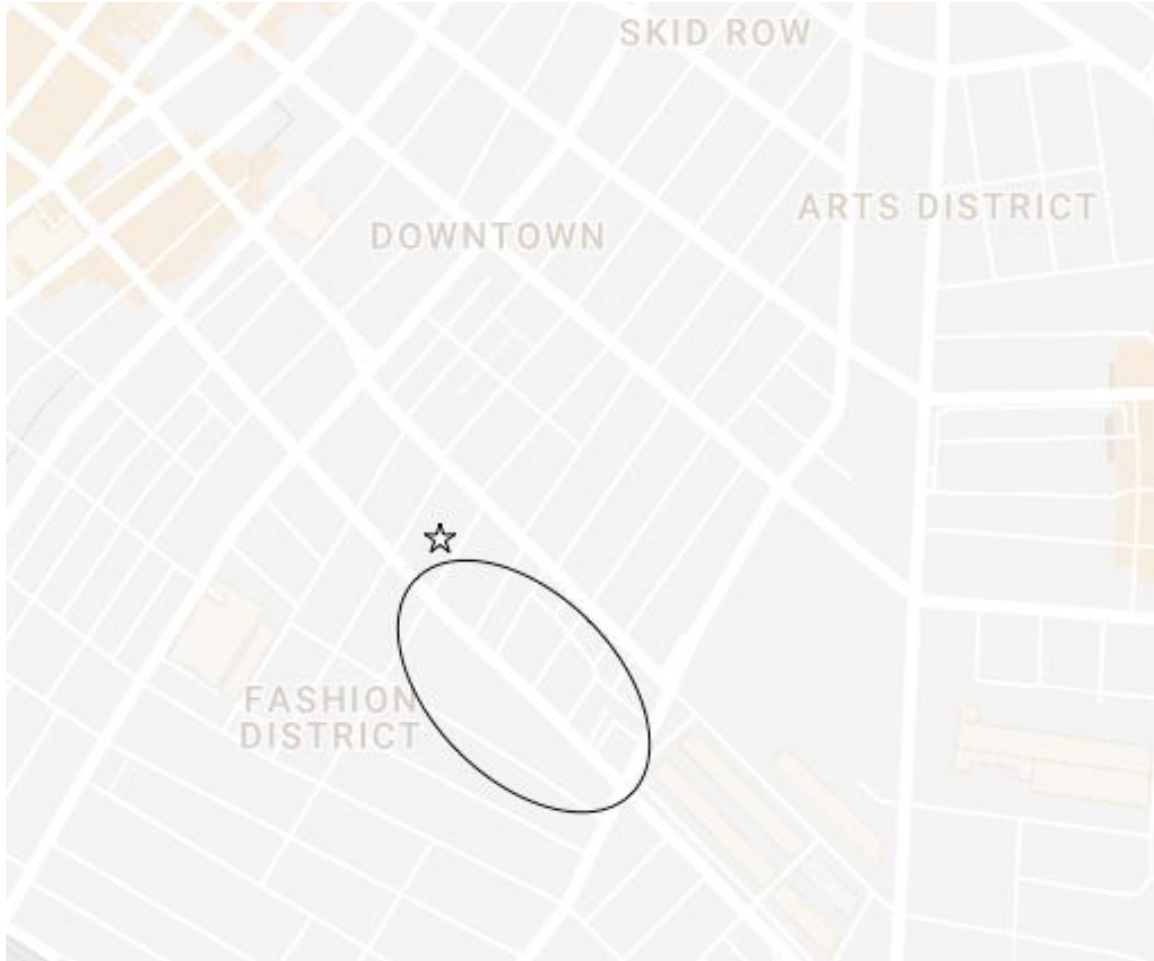
vended provides an excellent observational study. The following graph is a tally of the goods that being sold on Olympic, with each vendor :



The first impressions of the tally clarifies the eclectic and market-place nature of sidewalk vending, where cellphone-chargers, hand-knitted sweaters, aspirin and ice-cream are all sold as merchandise. While most goods are simple food offerings or retail products, other vendors offload containers, grills and even three foot-tall amplifiers. One vendor sold pet birds and iguanas, an example of how diverse the merchandise sold by streetside vendors could be, and not limited to a narrow range of food items. However, the variance of the products sold on this boulevard reveals health and safety issues that legalization would carry: the sale of animals on the street would clearly run afoul with

public health officials and would remain illegal. Pirated movie Dvds and knockoff pharmaceutical products also remain unlawful and grounds for arrest, seizure and other charges. As a result, simple legalization of streetside vending only gives these vendors a partial victory – while their physical presence on the street would be recognized and allowed, their products would have to adhere to the law. However, in comparison to the rest of the street, these unique vendors remain a minority.

The vending community of Olympic Boulevard was less of a cluttered collection of separate vendors and more like a farmers market. The atmosphere was multilingual and full of customers and pedestrians collecting on the one side of the street that held the majority of the vendors. The surrounding neighborhood is diverse and metropolitan (the boulevard exists on the borders of various different neighborhoods) wedged between a fashion district, and surrounded by import stores and warehouse-based businesses, the brick and mortar businesses on Olympic Boulevard ranged from garages to warehouses to parking lots to candy stores. Right across the block and witness to the scene is an elementary school, marked by a star in the map below:



Another place of interest was the two fast-food chains situated right on the same block as where the mapping took place (marked by oval), where a Subway chain and a McDonald's fast-food operated in plain sight of the vendors.



This photograph shows five vendors on both sides of the sidewalk – first on the left by the curb, there exists a vendor working a grill on a table, selling tacos and other food to pedestrians, while on the right, behind the two customers you can see a another business with a tray of cupcakes and other confections. Looking down the sidewalk there is a crowd of people and a network of tents that gives the impression of a farmers market,

where three other vendors operate in the distance. An advertisement for goods hangs in front of the pole, pointed towards the people walking down the sidewalk, not out into the street.



One of the toy shops that existed on the sidewalk, with the cages of the pet-vendor shown past the table of CDs and DVDs. The quality of the tent and the complexity of the

display, with a side wall propped up to display more toys, grants how intuitive and creative vendors are at making as much use out of their spot on the street as possible. These additions will be removed at the end of the day only to be set up next morning, a testament to the efforts of the vendor and their ability to fix their environment to better suit them and the traveling pedestrians.



This picture is on the corner of East Olympic Blvd. and South Central Avenue,

and shows how vendors use the spacious area by the crosswalks to set up tables and chairs for a more comfortable eating experience for its patrons. However, while the food is being prepared on the inner sidewalk to the right of this picture (visible by the seated customers), there is also a vending booth where another vendor is selling cellphone cases. Noticing the blue and storage boxes beneath the table shows the importance of being able to transport your material: one participant in the focus group spoke of the task of transporting her goods to the shop site by using the same familiar taxi driver – it is informative to see that this process holds the same for the rest of the vendors on the interviewee’s street.



This picture of sidewalk vendors includes a clear example of the conflict of regulation: Right behind the jewelry vendor and next to the grill are two power line poles, which according to the proposed restrictions on streetside vending would be unlawful. Both of these vendors would be ticketed and evicted from this area, although there is no available space for them to move to. This is as congested as a sidewalk would become, with shoulder room for the two directions of traffic clearly maintained in the center of the sidewalk, contesting the argument that vendors clog the street and make it

inaccessible for others attempting to pass through.



Snapshots from across the street gives a larger view of the vendors working side

by side and in front of the businesses on alongside Olympic Boulevard. On the right in both pictures you can see vendors operating on the other side of the street as well. The vendor in the latter picture uses the van as a part of the shop and not just a method of transportation, already having part of the goods packed in case there needs to be a quick relocation.





These two pictures from across the street help demonstrate the temporary nature of these shops. With backs turned, the vendors tending to their stations look much less established than a farmers market. The stores that they vend in front of are stores of produce and miscellaneous goods, easily advertising their product to passerbys, in sharp contrast to the inclusive sidewalk nature of the vendors, whose goods are hard to spy.



Situated by a dead tree and a telephone pole, this vendor's set-up would also be considered illegal by the proposed set of regulations provided by the Bureau of Street Services, since the table holding the vendor's goods is set up right against the pole. Some trash can be seen on the sidewalk, where vendors had previously set up shop. This photo helps show how vendors don't show preference to many physical features on the sidewalk, even if they are decayed or unattractive.

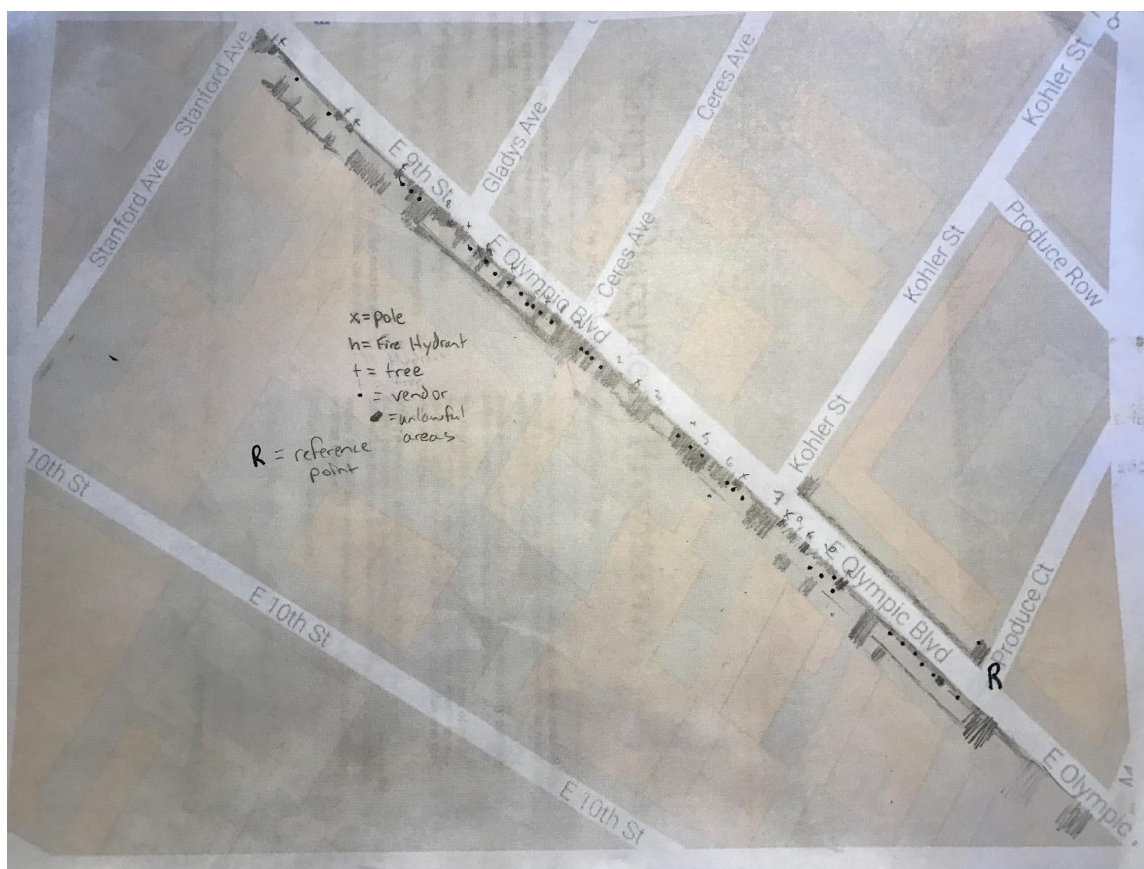


Another vendor set up near a pole alongside this narrow wall, further up the sidewalk from the previous photo. By the edge of the curb and in the distance, a vendor cleans up her area with a portable trash collector .

Fair Game? Possible Restrictions and their Spatial Relation to Vending Locations

In the following maps, marks in the street signify one of the physical features that exist on the sidewalk curb and create the shaded in space of “off-limit” areas for streetside vendors. The dots are the vendors themselves, although a dot does not account for the space used up by tables, tents and other additions to the vendor’s business station. While the map currently shows eighteen out of the fifty-five vendors that are not infringing on the boundaries of proposed legislation, auxiliary objects like chairs can be moved or exist on these illegal spots. The creation of the map took two separate trips – one during the weekday, in order to mark the location the regular street-side objects and plot the restricted boundaries, and another trip during business hours to plot the location of vendors. The measurement of the restrictive zones was done through tape measure to assign my foot as a unit of measurement, using that measurement to ‘walk out’ the illegal zones that are created around each object. The shaded areas signify areas that are restricted by the Bureau of Street Services’ suggested regulations, with symbols along the street identifying what object was the source of the restrictive boundary. The dots represent a single vendor on the street, and not the materials, tables or other additions to the street they have made to help them sell their product. These two maps help convey the gravity of some of the regulations proposed and considered by the city council, especially a two-vendor limit for each block.

Upper East Olympic Blvd



Lower East Olympic Blvd.



Conclusion of Findings

The result of my research has shown how established vendors have become in the streets of Los Angeles, from how they set up shop to what they offer as possible improvements to the city's economy. From the focus group and observations on the street level, it is clear that vendors don't expect or require many physical improvements to accommodate them, as they have shown proficiency in altering and adding temporary objects and features to their surroundings to improve their business, removing some burden from policymakers who look to help streetside vendors. These entrepreneurs that

brave rainstorms do not struggle because of a lack of business or for want of physical improvements to their environment. However, the consequences of over-regulation revealed itself in instances where policies like a 2-vendor cap for every city block makes general legalization pointless by delegitimizing more than ninety percent of the vendors already operating on East Olympic Boulevard. The placement provisions introduced by the Bureau of Street services is the most generous of the regulatory suggestions, but even so only allows about thirteen of the fifty-five recorded vendors legal status, provided that they cut back on the objects they add to the sidewalk (tents, chairs, tables, etc). A regulatory recommendation of requiring written permission of adjacent shop-owners only continues the exploitation and unfair business practices that vendors struggle underneath in the present. More general regulatory policies like requiring cities to Opt-In/Out-out to legalize streetside vending in neighborhoods could create an uncertain future for vendors that dissuades them from enrolling into a permit system. Legalization and encouraging vendors to enter into the official Los Angeles economy will only work so long as vendors are not dissuaded by a continuation of the policies that kept them illegitimate and in the shadows. Currently, the possible regulations that could be enacted threaten to completely nullify the benefits of legalization, and as a result ought to be tempered.

Recommendations

In order for the city of Los Angeles to improve its streets and its treatment of citizens, it must avoid the temptation of creating pilot policies revolving around the ‘practice’ of street-side vending. The MacArthur Park venture failed because of the misunderstanding of how vendors work, burdening vendors with a small unsustainable location under the pretext of a pilot program, as though their livelihood was an experiment. The thematic foundation to these recommendations is the fact that they all recognize street-side vending as a high-tempo business, a job that requires more than just placing a table and exchanging goods, but a lifestyle that requires a variety of skills from negotiation to business management.

Physical Environment

Improvements to the physical environment are helpful but are a problematic investment, since vendors already alter and improve on their settings by bringing in shade with umbrellas and tents, seats and tables for customers, and even cleaning the streets to keep their stations appealing and their neighbors content. Vendors in the focus group mentioned how they appreciated trees, but the reality that trees are perishable and can be restrictive on how vendors set up shop. However, vendors were much more interested in public restrooms and fountains, since currently they are forced to rely on the established businesses to relieve themselves. If the city and its taxpayers want to help improve street-side vending through the physical improvements, amenities such as public restrooms or fountains would be advisable. Encouraging vendors to petition for a public works project which adds public restrooms would allow the city to distinguish

neighborhoods wherein to build public restrooms, giving vendors a bit more independence from brick-and-mortar shop owners in their area. Zoning improvements to free up space on the street may help protect vendors and their customers from automobile traffic, while facilitating a deal between vendors and the trash collecting, street-cleaning organizations can help facilitate the cleanup of sidewalks.

Regulation

Even by setting up tents, tables and stools, the vendors of Olympic Boulevard are resourceful with the space they are given, and always keep room for their customers to safely navigate the street, and for their neighboring vendors. Working side by side, vendors are more inclusive, advertising their product to pedestrians who walk past them, not to others across the street. By simulating the proposed regulatory methods proposed by the Bureau of Street Services, there would be a cut in what areas vendors could set up, and would result in the displacement of a large majority of the vendors, an unnecessary disruption of the business environment. The issue with some regulations is that they are redundant: many driveways alongside Olympic Boulevard are unused, and the reason why vendors took the time to set up shop in those locations with the store-owner's consent, a possibility that would be ruined with the proposed restrictions that would make it unlawful to set up 5 feet near a driveway. Pushing vendors away from the curb with zoning laws on parallel parking spaces and parking meters are unnecessarily severe restrictions that could be scaled back to a single foot. Other regulatory ideas considered would go even further: a limit of two vendors to a block, and a measure which would allow cities to opt out of the vendor legalization altogether –would cause even more

baseless disruption of this economic biome. When considering legalization, the city should keep restrictions focused on protecting crucial sidewalk structures and the safety of people and property, keeping such restrictions for fire hydrants, but keeping space free for the fifty-five vendors that were using the location since they started their work by eliminating needless and unnecessary regulations such as the mandatory distance from driveways, flora and crosswalks.

Ultimately, the most important and effective way the city could treat its vendors fairly is by encouraging and facilitating good business relations. Working in the shadows, vendors are forced into difficult and extortive contracts and partnerships with other entrepreneurs, and legality in any way would help vendors self-determine and separate from toxic relations without any fear of the police. Yet even as undocumented and at-risk businesspeople, vendors have been able to establish a community of fifty-five on a single street, setting up their shops and selling similar products in dignified competition. A cap-less permit system, proposed by various advocacy groups and considered by the City Council, would help give vendors a legal document and pedigree to perform their business and deal with other businesses on a level playing field without upsetting the thriving system that has already been established. Vendors displaying their permit would lessen the toxic competition and intimidation that occurs from other street-side shops and allow first-time vendors to start their business on the streets without intimidation from other vendors. Any initiative that helps vendors distinguish themselves as legal business-owners that have achieved a license would help echo the Broken Windows policy, where a community of clearly legal vendors would allow the city and its civilians

to recognize the orderly nature of the sidewalk community, and feel more comfortable in purchasing and browsing these areas. Vendors would appear as ‘Polished Windows’, and any innovation or method to highlight the legal status of their profession would help facilitate this effect.

Conclusion

Through this study it is clear that legalization cannot be taken seriously if the policy will not take vendors seriously and insists on pouring an irresponsible amount of short-sighted restrictions on issues that are already resolved and addressed by vendors in the current day – entrepreneurs that take responsibility for their business and take actions to preserve it, ensuring it’s longevity and profit. An uncapped permit system would serve as an effective tool for the government to recognize this unofficial industry and benefit from these day to day transactions, while allowing vendors to avoid toxic business environments by being able to present these licenses to both the government and the members of their community. Through legalization in a fair and properly restricted fashion, the City of Los Angeles can allow the stable business practice of street-side vending the chance to improve itself and shake off its shackles of fear.

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Appendix

Appendix Item A: Sample Regulatory Provisions used to calculate 'unlawful areas' in the street survey:

REGULATION

Sample Placement Provisions

(Requested by the Economic Development Committee)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * No vending stand shall be situated near a curb with the back of said stand situated not less than 18 inches nor more than 24 inches from the edge of the curb. Additionally, no stand shall violate the following provisions: * Within 5 feet of any marked crosswalk; * Within 5 feet of the curb return of any unmarked crosswalk; * Within 5 feet of any fire hydrant, fire call box or other emergency facility; * Within 5 feet ahead and 45 feet to the rear of any sign marking a designated bus stop. No stand shall be installed within the marked bus zone; * Within 5 feet of any bus bench. * Within 10 feet of any transit shelter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * In front of an entrance to a business, including the curb area directly across from such entrance where the distance between the entry door and the stand is less than 10 feet; * In any location used, marked or posted for public utility purpose, public transportation purpose or government use; * Where placement unreasonably interferes with the use of poles, posts, traffic signs or signals, mail boxes or other objects legally permitted, but in no event shall the stand be closer than one foot from such objects; * Where placement interferes with the reasonable use or utility for display purposes of any display window of any building abutting the sidewalk or parkway, but in no event within 4 feet of such window; * Within 5 feet of any area improved with lawn, flowers shrubs, trees or street tree well; * Within 5 feet of any driveway;
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Source: Bureau of Street Services

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Sample Placement Provisions (Cont'd)

(Requested by the Economic Development Committee)

- * Within 4 feet of any outdoor dining areas or patio dining areas;
- * Within 20 feet of both sides of buildings officially designated Los Angeles Historical or Cultural Monuments. If there is a block in which all buildings have been so officially designated, then the Board, in consultation with the Cultural Heritage Commission, shall determine siting on such block face for up to four (4) stand. An owner of a building which has been designated as a Historical or Cultural Monument may petition the Board of Public Works to allow stand on the sidewalks in front of their building if the placement of such stand will not interfere with Historic or Cultural nature of the building. The Board shall listen to evidence from all interested parties and make its determination based on the totality of the evidence.
- * Within 20 feet of both sides of visual public art work created, funded or managed through the City's Municipal Art Program including, but not limited to, murals, sculptures and fountains.
- * Where placement impedes the flow of pedestrian traffic by reducing the clear space to less than 6 feet or, impedes access to or the use of abutting property, including, but not limited to, residences and places of business.
- * Notwithstanding any other paragraph of this subdivision, no person shall install, use or maintain any stand where placement endangers the safety of persons or property.
- * No stand shall be installed within 4 feet from any permanently installed structure in the public Right-of-Way, which is not otherwise specifically identified in this subdivision.
- * Within one foot of any utility cover, vent screen or other object that is flush mounted with the sidewalk, except that if the owner or person in control of the below grade sidewalk installation needs additional space for emergency or non-routine maintenance of the installation, any stand which interferes with such maintenance may be requested to be temporarily removed to accommodate the required maintenance and then be reinstalled.
- * Within 4 feet to the front and 10 feet to the rear of any parking meter and where there are no parking meters on the curb, 10 feet from the front of any marked parallel parking place.

Source: Bureau of Street Services

Appendix Item B: English-Translated Transcript of the Focus Group

Interviewer: the first question is how did you get to the location you are now and why did you chose that location instead of another? Were you searching for anything in particular? Did you know anyone already?

Participant 1: I arrived at this country and worked at many different companies but in the last one I worked I was robbed with a gun and my partner was killed. From that moment on I entered into a depression, I was in a very bad moment and I didn't want to work. I entered a lawsuit that lasted for around 3 years. My brother in law is a street vendor from time and time and he kept telling me that I couldn't hide at home anymore, that I should get out and sell things too, he would provide me with the goods to sell. I was using up all my savings and I needed to do something with my life so I decided to do it because he was insisting so much. I started in San Pedro, my brother in law gave me the goods, I was so ashamed and scared but at the same time I felt like I had to pull myself together and be strong. I spent around two years without disturbances, I had a good relationship with the rest of the street vendors, we all got along well and shared. But after two years the police came, they normally only bothered those selling food and that was it. I always told the rest of the vendors that we should clean up if we didn't want to get into trouble because we weren't paying anything and we were making money and we should be respectful in a country that wasn't ours. The day the police came my husband called me and told me to quickly pack everything and go to him because the police were taking everything away not only the food this time. He was in San Pedro and I was in San Pedro with the 12th. I put everything in the car as fast as I could and went to meet him but by the time I got there, there were policemen everywhere. I was so scared... When I got to

him the police had him and they were questioning him, asking him about all the goods, whose they were. I went next to him and told the police I was his wife and that I had been in the bathroom because I didn't want to tell them that I was also selling things somewhere else. They asked us if we knew that street shops were illegal in California we said we did but that we needed to eat, that I had had trouble in my job and couldn't work anymore, we had two kids. They said we were lucky because they didn't take out things away, but they gave us a ticket that was \$700. Somebody talked to channel 52 and from that moment on a girl tried to represent us and defend us but she didn't achieve anything. After that I met the leader of here, Janette and then I joined this group to try to continue with our fight.

Interviewer: When you started in San Pedro, you said that your brother in law gave you the goods to sell, did he also tell you to sell in San Pedro?

P1: No, he didn't tell me to go to San Pedro, he was selling in the alleys but I couldn't do that because they charged you and I couldn't afford it. I saw some people that were selling in San Pedro and I asked them if I could also sell there, I tried to be nice and polite with everyone so they said yes and gave me a spot where I could set up my shop.

Interviewer: are you always in the same location or do you move?

P1: I stayed in the same location from the beginning until the police incident and from then on I moved to where my husband was because he is more frightened and doesn't want to be by himself.

Interviewer: have you had any other incidents with the police since then?

P1: thank God we haven't.

Interviewer: (to p2): what about you? how did you get to the location you are now and why did you chose that location instead of another? Were you searching for anything in particular? Did you know anyone already?

P2: behind every street vendor there's a story, some are sadder some are happier, but there's always a story behind us. I started with my daughter around 2007 or 2008. As p1 said, choosing your location is a matter of asking those who are already selling there if you can join them or not, they are the ones that have the power and are able to let you have a spot. Around the time I started selling I came across this woman here (p4), we were selling almost next to each other but we don't anymore. I talked to the woman that sold in the corner of the street and she liked us so we stayed there. Then I was living in Seattle, Washington and then the tragedy of my daughter and my grandchild happened and when my daughter died I had to come back to take care of the grandchild I had left. From that moment on I started selling in Main street on Saturdays and Sundays and the rest of the week I just take care of my grandchild and spend time with him.

P3: choosing a spot over another is purely based on the circumstances that you are living

in a given moment. My wife and I started selling in Hollywood around the walk of fame but we had a lot of problems with the vendors there. They, together with security staff of the shops, took away our goods many times so we kept moving to different places. After that I went to the Piñata district and started selling in a corner but I was told that I had to pay rent and I didn't. I kept on moving to different spots around that district but the rest of the street vendors kept bothering me and didn't let me sell in peace, they even knocked down my table because they said I was stealing somebody else's place. So after fighting so much I decided to pay because otherwise they weren't going to let me sell there. So to avoid all these difficulties and to avoid problems with the rest of the vendors we decided to find a place where we could pay rent, but when the shop owners see that you are doing well they start rising your rent and you end up paying more than half of what you are making so we moved again somewhere else where we paid less. You can't stand your ground because they threaten you to call the police and immigration police.

ELACC Representative: could you elaborate more on to whom you pay rent?

P3: to the shop owners of the shops as a way to compensate them for what they spend in cleaning what we make dirty but also because it's the only way to gain the respect of the rest of the street vendors because the owner of the shop defends you.

Interviewer: how much do they normally charge?

P3: depends on the place, at first we paid \$800 per month but it was inside the shop, then later we paid \$600 in another spot but that was on the sidewalk, not inside the property of the shop.

Interviewer: if the police come, does this payment give you any security or guarantees?

P3: no, they take away your goods all the same and can give you a ticket, paying to the owner means nothing to the police.

P1+p2: exactly, it doesn't give you any security, protection or guarantees.

P3: to the police it doesn't matter but regarding those persons who are not the police (other street vendors) It does mean security and protection.

P4: I know there's people that pay even more, like 1500\$ per month

P1: I don't want to be rude, but I don't agree, I just use logic, why would I pay for something that doesn't benefit me and that I can do for free because the street is public? From the door inside is their shop but from the door outside is the street, that belongs to the city not to the shop owner.

P3: you should live the experience I've had in order to be able to say that.

P1: I understand what you are saying but if I were you I would just find another place, wherever it is that you go, God will provide for you and He will let you sell.

P3: no, no, no that not true, there's plenty of places where you can't sell because there's no clients. Police in Hollywood always told us to go to the Hollywood bowl, but there's no events there and there's no one! You can't sell if you have no clients! We have to find a place where we can earn money to eat and live and in some places you can't do that.

P2: that's how the shops take advantage of us because they know that there will be clients there and vendors will be able to make money in that spot so they set their price and you can chose if you are willing to pay for it or no.

P4: in the piñata district where the piñata shops are, they charge you, and if you don't pay they call the police on you or they annoy you and bother you until you have to leave, or they put their own goods in the street so you can't set up your table. Where I sell, we don't pay because there was nothing there before, a couple of years ago there was barely any clients because people just went to where the shops are. The owner of where I am is an Armenian and he doesn't charge us, he just asks us to leave the street clean and with no rubbish, that's why we pay the homeless so they help us clean. The Armenian only sometimes comes out really angry and tells us to take away the tents. He also didn't like this one man that sold cheese and made him leave. I arrived to that spot because of a friend and now they all respect me because ive been there for a long time but if I were in need I would pay rent too.

Interviewer: and what do you take to work?

P4: some people have tents, others beach umbrellas or some tarp to make shade, and then the tables to set up the goods.

P1: I am by a wall that keeps me on the shade so I only take my tables.

P2: it depends on where you are because some shop owners don't let you set up any shade because you block the view of their business. If I'm not blocking anyone I set up a tent but it always depends on where you are. When my daughter was selling, the Korean man that owned the shop didn't let her set up anything, even when it was raining. She used to call me when I was in Washington and tell me that It was raining and the Korean didn't allow her to set any coverage but she just stood by the open trunk of her car, she never gave up, that's how she was.

P4: when P2 arrived to the piñata district he wanted to set up his shop by the corner and I told him to get closer to me because the woman in the corner had been there for a really long time and she was going to get angry if he took her place and was going to fight him for it. It was easier that he moved closer to me, he did it, he listened to me and when the woman came she was ok with him being there.

P1: I thank God for everything. Since I started selling because of my brother in law I've

always tried to get along well with everyone. I once met this person this: sell your goods, don't listen to whatever people say, help them if they need you but don't go into any fight for any reason, be kind and nice to everyone, take your rubbish with you, leave everything clean and you will never have any trouble. I listened and learned that lesson well and I've been doing great. I get along well with the rest of the street vendors and with the shop owners, I help them get clients and then they let me have my street shop there. In the area where I am the shops don't open to that street, their doors are by the alleyway so I don't have trouble with that, we avoid those kind of problems so I just try to leave everything clean and get along well with other street vendors, I don't have any complaints about anyone.

Interviewer: how did the rest of you clean up your spot?

P3: my wife and I clean up before we get there and after we leave. We take all our rubbish away after we leave, and we sweep the floor both in the sidewalk and in the road. If for some reason we can't go one day we pay some homeless to do it for us even if we are not going.

P4: I started as a street vendor in an alleyway paying \$800 rent and I stayed there for two years. Then when I was able to put together enough money I rented half of a shop and I could sell all my things there every day but during the weekends I kept going to San Pedro street to sell. There was a person there that had a big curtain that was always closed so I asked them if I could sell there and I could pay them, they said I could and that I didn't need to pay, that was Mr. Benny in a store called Cabalini, and I thank God for that every day. He wrote a permit to me both in Spanish and English saying that he allowed me to sell there and nobody would disturb me. Then my shop burned down and I didn't have any insurance and because it burned in a weekday I had all my things there and they all burned. So I went back to San Pedro but there were not that many clients there and I saw this woman that I knew and she introduced me to some people that gave me goods for free and then I paid them back whenever I could. After that I met this Jew shop owner that allowed me to sell outside his shop during the weekdays for free and gave me some free goods, I helped him with his clients. After he closed the shop he called another friend and that's how I ended up with Mr. Benny for years until the police arrived. When the police arrived I could hide all my things because everyone from the shops knew me and they helped me put them in boxes and hide them in their shops. They were mainly Korean, they are good people when you get to know them, I always loved cooking and I brought them homemade food to share with them and then they helped me with other things. I don't own a car, I've always moved all my things in taxi, this one taxi driver has helped me for years and years. A friend once invited me to the Piñata district, she was one of the first people that started to sell there like ten years ago. She gave me a spot, but I was near a food shop and all my things smelled like smoke all the time, I had to struggle so much cleaning the glasses and all everyday. So this one man that had had a lot of troubles with the police told me that he was going to a different place and that I could keep his Saturday and Sunday spots, and that's where I am today. I've always been really afraid of the police but that's how I've lived for the past years. One day the police came

and we had to pack everything up really fast, my friend and I were terrified and decided to go to a different neighborhood but in that place they mostly sold second hand stuff and all I have is new so I came back to the piñata district. In that other neighborhood is where I first heard about this organization that fights for our rights. I went to a meeting but there were only four or six people on the organization and they never had meetings, I called Janette all the time asking when the next meeting was and she just told me to be patient. I've been in this for 5 years now, at first I was terrified to talk about any of it, but I've learned that I have rights and not only the right to go to jail. One day the police came and there was this black police officer that told me in English to take all my things, I said to her in my little English that I didn't have a car and that I would pack everything but that she was going to see me there again until 6pm that the taxi came to pick me up, I was very respectful to her and tried to talk to her in English and she was very nice to me, but she yelled at other street vendors. I told her that I knew what I was doing was illegal but I had no other way to survive and she told me to be careful and not hurry too much because I could hurt myself. I don't know if she was so nice because I tried to speak in English or because I was just lucky, I had to be nice to them because they are the police but I was not so scared anymore after ELAC taught me that I had rights. In the time I've been here there's been really nice moments, ELAC sent me to different leadership schools, and they have been incredible experiences and I've learned so much from it BUT here I have this, a lawsuit against me from another street vendor that is very aggressive and we didn't let her stay in her spot because of that. I have this terrible habit of being nice to everyone, I've brought this woman into my house, I've been nice to her in so many times, I've got into fights with my husband and my kids because of her, and this is how she pays me back. I'm stupid and that's why I'm crying now because I can't stop being nice to people. She's accusing me of verbal aggression and requesting that I should be banned from selling anymore. I know ELAC is backing me and they support me and I am really thankful for that, everyone knows that I'm never aggressive and that I never get into fights with people. There was only one time that I got into a dispute because the person next to me was selling illegal cds (piracy) and was hiding them under my table and I know that is a big risk that I wasn't willing to take because my family needs me and selling is one thing but piracy is another, I can't do that. But nevertheless here it is (lawsuit papers), they almost broke my window down this morning to drop it because I wouldn't take it last Sunday.

P3: do you know the person that left it in your house?

P4: no, just a normal woman.

P2: but if she wasn't an official person can she drop it? Does it count? Is the lawsuit official?

ELACC Representative: yes, they can be left by anyone. What we are witnessing here in an attack to p4's leadership because she is recognized in the neighborhood as a leader belonging to this organization. This organization supports its leaders and we are going to take action, but it's understandable that p4 is scared because this woman that filed the

lawsuit has a history of aggression and she's known because she got people deported in the past.

P3: she called the police on a boy that was selling in that area too because he was taking a little part of her spot.

P2: but who is she?

P3: another street vendor.

ELACC Representative: yeah that time the police arrived and said that street vending was not a crime anymore because of the movement we started and we have won. But we are currently seeing this attack against leadership and organization and that she is a person that always causes trouble wherever she goes. Now we have to wait to see what our lawyers tell us to do but this will probably be a collective lawsuit.

P1: but I want to ask something, have you talked to her? Like sat down and talk to her in a peaceful manner? Because I can't understand how two civilized people can end up like this, only harm and pain can come out of this, it's not beneficial for anyone. Because when we are angry we do and say many things that we may regret, but before this, something must have happened, couldn't you have reached an agreement with her? Right now with this crazy man in office (Trump) we can't be wasting our strength in things like these...

P3: I think there's also been other people that have put this terrible ideas in her mind, and have made her more angry.

P1: people are so stupid, you can't base your actions in what people tell you to do!

P3: yes but this woman just doesn't understand, she's had fights with my wife and it's impossible to talk to her, she just starts yelling and swearing and screaming. I tell my wife to be quiet because there is no way to make her understand, we are fighting a monster.

ELACC Representative: remember there's more questions.

Interviewers: oh don't worry, say whatever you need to say and share, everything will come in helpful.

P4: well that's my story, it's been eight years in that area and now we'll have to see what happens.

P2: this is just proof of what I said before, everyone has a story and if we all told them we would never end this interview.

Interviewer: well, let's go on then, do you work in your own neighborhood? Why or why not?

P1: I first lived at [inaudible] and I sold Peruvian food in my house on the weekdays and then Saturday and Sunday I went to san pedro street. But after ten years living there all of a sudden I got an eviction order. I don't really know why, but I think it was because this new neighbor called the police because our sons got into a fight. I had 60 days to leave my house and I was really scared and ashamed, I talked to different organizations because my son is special aid and I thought they'd be able to help me, but they didn't because he isn't really disabled, only a slow learner. Then we found another house through a friend and in this place I never thought about selling, now only San Pedro on the weekends.

P2: I started selling in Santa Clarita with my daughter but it was too far away. After my daughter's tragedy I stayed near my house so I can take care of my grandson.

P3: we've never worked nearby where we live because there are no clients and we never thought about it, we just went wherever we were able to sell enough to make a living even if that was very far. My wife has always worked as a street vendor since she was very young and that's how I started, my job didn't pay well enough and she told me to start selling things. We started with umbrellas because it was very rainy then and later we changed into different things depending on the needs of people. All we want is to have a better future, a place where we can work in peace without arguing with anyone and without being scared of the police, we want to use the skills we've learned during these years selling and have a nice environment, see each other as colleagues and friends.

Interviewer: if you could change anything about the street or your situation, anything, what would it be?

P1: the only thing I'd like to change is the relationship with the police, I would love to not be afraid anymore. If this project becomes a reality everything is going to be amazing. I don't complain about the relationship with the other vendors or with the shop owners because I don't have that problem, I'm not selfish and I just get along well with everyone. My only wish would be that we would pay whatever it's needed to the city and then we'd be let alone and work without being harassed by the police.

P2: I would like to change the way in which people see us. For example tourists, I want them to see the city clean, organized, and not with people running from the police. I would like for us to have like a uniform or something so we look like real business people. Because LA wouldn't be LA without us, LA is a latino city, and we like selling things. So I'd change the organization so everything would be clean and tidy.

P3: as p2 said, I'd like to change the image of what we are. Instead of paying the owners of the shops that don't give us any benefits, we should pay the city council so it benefits everyone. We know you don't get anything for free in this country, but we'd be happy to

pay for a permit it that means an improvement. For example if we paid they could build like kiosks or stands for us so it would be safe and more comfortable to work. We are not bad as many people seem to think. We are only normal people trying to get ourselves a better future and trying to set a path for those who come after us. So they don't suffer the injustices, extortion and mistreatment that we are suffering today.

Interviewer: so it would benefit both the city and yourselves.

P3: I'd also change something about the way we handle waste and rubbish and cleaning. If we are paying the city maybe they could take charge of that.

P4: I'd do something with the restroom situation. Because we have a very hard time when we want to go to the bathroom, we have to pay the shop owners if we want to use theirs and sometimes they don't let us.

Interviewer: what about the trees? Do you think they'd benefit you because they'd give you shade?

P4: there used to be threes but they took them away. Also, I have to thank God that I haven't had any trouble with my own safety because the homeless I pay to clean my spot protects me and tells the rest of the homeless not to disturb me, but safety and burglaries are a problem too. If we are given the right to get a permit we would avoid problems such as the one with this lawsuit because this all comes from a dispute over a space to sell. If we had permits everyone would have their own space and their schedules and there would be more tranquility with each other and the police. But this law that we are trying to pass says that there should only be two vendors per block and in my street for example we are like 80 or 100. They also want that we have to ask for the shop owner's permission and that means going back to the extortion and taking the power away from the city council and giving it to the shop owner. We are not stupid, it is obvious that we are not going to sell the same goods that the shop sells, nobody sells piñatas, or candy or disposable plates like the shops, so why should they give them that power to decide over our future? We still have a long way to go and a lot to fight to change the mind of the city council, but we are strong, we have Echo Park, South-Center, McCarthy, El Valle... there are a lot of areas with a lot of vendors and it must be clear when the law is passed that it can't only be two vendors per block and that we can't depend on the shop owners to avoid extortion.

P2: their property starts at their door, the street belongs to the city.

ELACC Representative: if the council gives that kind of power to the owners then they let the owners allow whoever vendor that gives them more money.

P4: that's why we have to keep fighting. ELAC has now a campaign to knock on councilmen doors so we make them understand our situation and they seize the power that belongs to them and not the owners of the shops. Before they didn't know that the

shops were charging rent to the street vendors, and it was ELAC, it was me personally that told them because nobody had the courage to say it out loud, everybody knew it and nobody said anything. Nobody wanted to say anything because that money is not declared or taxed. The other they one of the shop owners laughed at me and asked me if we really thought that they are going to allow losing \$1500 per month.

P2: they think they own that money, that they have the right to it.

P3: but they are charging for something that doesn't belong to them.

P4: for example right next to where I work the shop just changed owners, and the new owner wanted to get money out of that spot but nobody offered because we don't pay in this side of the street. So he waited like a month to see if somebody offered him anything and now that nobody did he just puts his own goods outside in the street. And that's doing the same thing that we do because he doesn't own the street and he can't put his goods there either!

Interviewer: at what time do you start and finish work and when do you get the higher concentration of clients?

P1: We start setting our table at 4am and then we start selling around 6 am. I get most clients between 6 am and 12pm. And then I leave around 2 or 3 pm.

P2: I go at 3 am because I need to set up my table to I make sure nobody steals my spot, then I stay in the car until around 5 am when I start selling. The higher number of clients come from 9 am to like 3 or 4 pm. And I close down at 5 pm.

P3: we go there at 5am to set up the table and to be able to get parking, then we wait in the car until 8 or 9 am when we start selling, and we stay until 6pm.

Interviewer: do you think that if your situation was regulated you wouldn't have to be there so early and waste that much time just sitting in the car?

P1: on the one hand yes, because you wouldn't have to worry about your space but on the other hand what would happen with the parking situation? If you get there in the morning there's already customers and you wouldn't find a spot to park and unload your car and you would have to carry your goods a longer distance and many of us have heavy goods so I think that would not solve the problem for us because of the parking situation.

P4: I don't have a car so I get there at around 9 or 10 am and I stay until 5 or 6pm.

Interviewer: do you think having trees would help you in any way?

P1: I think it doesn't matter now because they already took them down and now it would cost too much to fix the street again and plant trees again and then maintain them and all.

Where I live they are also taking them down and I asked a councilman for the reason and he told me that it's because the roots are breaking the sidewalk and the houses.

P4: yes, where I live they put up notices saying that they are going to cut them down too.

P1: I think that they should stop doing that because we need them to breathe and also, they birds live there! I think it's very unfair and that if we get together and protest we can achieve something.

Interviewer: Do any of you work near a park?

P1+p2+p3+p4: no, we all work in the street.

ELACC Representative: but if you need to know something about the parks you can ask me.

Interviewer: does somebody help you at work?

P1: I work with my husband and my daughter comes from time to time but only when she wants to eat there, she doesn't really help, none of my kids really like what we are doing so they don't help us.

P2: no, I do everything by myself.

P3: my wife and I work alone, and sometimes we get the help of a homeless when she can't come so they help me set up and clean up, but only if she can't come.

P4: I work by myself, Miguelito, the homeless, helps me carry the things from the car and then put them back in and cleans for me. Then the rest of the street vendors help each other when one goes to the bathroom and so on. We are like a family now.

P1: yes that's how it should be because we see each other every week.

ELACC Representative: they suffer a lot when it rains.

P1: yes when it rains we can't go to sell and we really miss everyone, joking with them, teasing them, you miss being out there.

P4: my husband tells me not to go when it rains but I really miss my colleagues so I go anyway when he is sleeping. We are a family and I need to see them every weekend. Up until two days ago I never had trouble with anyone. They all know me when I walk up or down the street everyone makes me presents like food or little things that they are selling and then I share those things with the rest of the vendors around me. There was this time when ELACC Representative went to the district and they told her that nobody would talk to her unless I was there.

ELACC Representative: every area is different, in some areas they recognize me as the leader but for example in the piñata district they have p4 and they know she is fighting for them and recognize her as the leader and not me at the beginning unless I was with her.

P4: even now that you saw me cry here, I never did that in the district because they see me as strong, when I got the lawsuit I just joked about going to jail, who was going to bring me cigarettes, and so on, they just saw me smile and strong, as a leader should be. And everybody heard about the lawsuit and this woman that owns five food street shops came to me and asked, she has never been interested in ELAC and she is very narrow minded but this felt as a victory because now she is willing to listen.

Interviewer: ok so that's all the questions, thank you so much for all your comments.