

Tuesday, November 11, 2008
News | Toronto & GTA

So much for spicing it up

City set to OK 'Toronto a la Carte' carts for spring

By [DON PEAT](#), SUN MEDIA

Last Updated: 10th November 2008, 3:26am

Forget about Thai noodles, perogies or frog-leg porridge.

A new street-food pilot project won't be tempting passers-by with a range of exotic or gourmet fare.

The city's executive committee is expected to chew on a proposal today and spit out a seal of approval for a one-year trial project designed to ensure food vendors offer up more than hot dogs and sausage.

Under the supervision of Toronto Public Health, plans call for the city next spring to deploy up to 15 "Toronto a la Carte" carts that will serve new menu items and allow some existing vendors the option of offering customers different choices. The new vendors will have to pay between \$5,000 to \$15,000 for locations such as 1 St. Clair Ave. E. and Nathan Phillips Square. Approved existing vendors would have to shell out an extra \$1,000.

Originally councillors had talked about introducing spicy Thai noodles, souvlaki, satays, fish and chips, perogies and even frog-leg porridge.

But all that talk turned out to be cheaper than a roadside hot dog.

In fact, the much talked about plan to spice up the city's mobile food options is pretty bland.

'GO BANKRUPT'

Now the most exotic items on the proposed list, approved by the health board last month, are corn on the cob and Tabbouleh salad -- garlic and olive oil mixed with chickpeas, green onions and cucumber -- on pita bread.

Councillor Rob Ford said the city should stay out of the way of vendors and let the market decide what they serve.

"They're going to go bankrupt, these poor vendors," the outspoken Etobicoke councillor warned. "They're sort of handcuffing them."

"I don't think they are going to be able to do well or make any money."

Councillors are being asked to approve \$86,000 for the program and the hiring of one temporary employee for the project.

Although councillors had once pondered buying the carts and leasing them to new vendors, the new plan calls for vendors to buy the carts directly from a lone city-approved manufacturer. The price of carts range from \$15,400 to \$27,800.

Ford called the proposed plan ridiculous and just the start of an attempt to unionize the entire independent street vendor fleet.

"I would just open it up and let them sell anything ... whatever they want to make money on,"

Ford said. "It's just wasting taxpayers' money and staff's time to do all these reports."

Serving up hot dogs and sausages along Queen St. yesterday, Brian agreed the process was ridiculous.

The vendor, who wouldn't give his last name, said it's been a rough year for outdoor vendors due to a rainy summer and being able to provide healthy options could be a "great thing" to help business.

"People are a lot more health conscious, so give them the option," he said, adding sales of bananas and apples from a food truck went over well.

But he called the proposed new food list inadequate.

"I think they should be getting into a lot more foods, Mexican food would be a hit," Brian said. "If they are willing to do a veggie burger, why not do a regular hamburger, too? People would like it."

HEALTH BOARD APPROVED MENU

A small group of existing street food vendors and new vendors could be serving up the following food by spring:

- Pre-packaged fruits and vegetables using only vinaigrette dips
- Whole fruits and vegetables, including corn on the cob
- Pre-packaged fruit salad
- Bagels with individual serving containers of butter, margarine, peanut butter or jam
- Pre-packaged nuts and seeds
- Pre-packaged salads containing only vegetables and fruits with all dressings to be pre-packaged and not requiring refrigeration.
- Pre-packaged Tabbouleh salad and pita bread
- Soups
- Pre-cooked veggie burgers
- Coffee and tea