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Farmers' markets seek parking fee exemption

Natalie Alcoba Mar 23, 2011 – 7:21 PM ET

Toronto city councillor Mike Layton is hoping to save farmers' markets from paying thousands of dollars in parking fees with an annual permit exclusively for hawking local produce.

Markets have been accustomed to paying a yearly "street event fee" of \$81.33 in cases where farmers need street-side parking to set up. Mr. Layton believes the groups had previously been getting a "not for profit" rate that didn't technically apply, so transportation officials had planned to start enforcing the bylaw by levying a daily charge.

Organizers say the change could put the markets out of business.

"In the case of Trinity-Bellwoods, which runs for 25 market days, this would mean a cost of \$2,033.25 for parking alone," Anne Freeman, co-ordinator of Toronto Farmers' Market Network, wrote in a letter to Mr. Layton. Their budgets are usually less than \$10,000. "In short, it would threaten the viability of Toronto's small markets," wrote Ms. Freeman.

Thirty farmers' markets operate from May to October in Toronto, and at least five park-based markets would be affected by the changes: Trinity-Bellwoods, Riverdale Farm, East Lynn, Withrow Park and Sorauren Park.

Councillor Layton, a member of the public works committee who represents Trinity Spadina, thinks the markets should be exempt. He has proposed a one-time annual fee, in consultation with transportation officials, set at the day rate of \$71.97. "It wasn't the intention of the bylaw to hose farmers, and transportation services has acknowledged it," Mr. Layton said. The committee will consider the proposal at its April committee meeting.

Mr. Layton expects it to sail through. "How can you not support farmers and food in our communities? It's not that much money out of our pockets, we've never charged them this much before."

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