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Toronto's "a la cart" street food pilot project is a failure that should be shut down immediately, say senior city staff who also urge council to consider expanding menu options for all food vendors.

The [report](#) to the executive committee, made public Wednesday, recommends that "the A La Cart Street Food Pilot project be discontinued immediately, prior to season three of the planned pilot project."

The handful of vendors still participating in the three-year project, which was to conclude at the end of this year, should be allowed to continue and apply for regular vendor permits "if and when they become available." They should be reimbursed for 2010 location fees and pay no fees through 2013, on condition "they be required to continue to offer healthy, diverse menu options ...," not including hot dogs.

They would be freed of requirements to use hulking, malfunctioning \$30,000 carts originally mandated by the city and told to remove the "a la cart" signage that was intended to signal a healthy, ethnic alternative to the dogs and fries that dominate Toronto's street food.

Council should also form a working group to review the licensing, regulatory and inspection framework for all vendors with the objective of allowing them to offer "a wider range of food items." The results are to go to council's licensing and standards committee in the final quarter of 2011.

The recommendations, from the city's general manager of economic development and culture; executive director of municipal licensing and standards; and medical officer of health, flow from a [consultant's report](#) into a la cart that was also released.

It concludes the project, launched by the health department in 2009 under the leadership of health board chair Councillor John Filion and then transferred to economic development after struggling from the start, "failed to meet its program objectives, and no material improvement can be expected in the final year of the pilot . . ."

"Street food is an entrepreneurial business that cannot be institutionalized. If the city wants to see more diverse food offerings, it must be prepared to accept the eccentric character of street carts," wrote hospitality consultant Cameron Hawkins.

"New York run by the Swiss may be an acceptable management model for public transit, but it is inappropriate for street food."

The *Star* has [chronicled the plight](#) of the eight a la cart vendors as they struggled with red tape, the cost and weight of the carts and other flaws in the program.

About half the vendors have dropped out, with three others planning to return this summer because they have to pay off crushing debts including the carts. Only one vendor, Young Jin Kim, has found any success, and she had to move her Korean food cart to a Korean neighbourhood at Yonge St. and Finch Ave., work through the winter and stay open 12 or more hours per day.



A report released Wednesday recommends the A La Cart Street Food Pilot project be discontinued immediately, prior to season three of the planned pilot project.

Colin McConnell/Toronto Star