

TORONTO FARMERS' MARKET NETWORK TFMN.CA

March 22, 2011

Dear Councillor Layton,

I am writing to you in your role as a member of the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee, on behalf of the 30 farmers' markets in the City of Toronto. We are seriously concerned with Transportation Services' plan to dramatically increase the parking fees levied on a number of our park-based farmers' markets. We are asking that you and your fellow committee members reverse this harmful decision before our markets open in May.

Many Torontonians are looking for ways to eat more local food, as they become increasingly aware of the environmental costs of shipping food long distances. A growing number of Torontonians want to spend their food dollars in support of the local economy, and to help local farmers make ends meet. As a result, we have seen a rapid growth in the number of markets in the City over the past 5 years.

Toronto's park-based markets are an important part of our local food web. They were founded, and are maintained by community members for the benefit of their neighbourhoods. These markets operate on very small budgets, generally less than ten thousand dollars a year for seasonal markets, generated from fees charged to the vendors, to cover all costs of running the market, including Parks permits and insurance. As an example, Trinity-Bellwoods Farmers' Market expects to have a total operating budget of between eight and nine thousand dollars for 2011.

In situations where designated streetside parking is needed to make the market setup possible, markets have paid a once annual Street Event fee to Transportation Services, currently \$81.33. Recently we learned that Transportation is planning to change these fees from an annual to a weekly charge. In the case of Trinity-Bellwoods, which runs for 25 market days, this would mean a cost of \$2,033.25 for parking alone, a very substantial fraction of the total funds the market organizers have to work with. There is a limit to what farmers can pay to attend. Participation in our City's markets already costs vendors in the form of travel and fuel costs, as well as time away from production. Those costs are offset by their modest income from market sales. Increasing their charges this much would in many cases make the difference between participating and not participating in the market. In short, it would threaten the viability of Toronto's small markets

At present, we are aware of at least five community markets that would be affected:

Trinity-Bellwoods Farmers' Market
Riverdale Farm Farmers' Market
East Lynn Farmers' Market
Withrow Park Farmers' Market
Sorauren Park Farmers' Market

There are so many reasons for the City of Toronto to help facilitate farmers' markets; they offer tremendous health, community and environmental benefits. On behalf of all the markets, we are asking for your assistance to return the Street Event fee for farmers' markets to a once annual charge in keeping with previously established practices.

Sincerely,

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