



TULANE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL of LIBERAL ARTS

Policy Research Shop

City of Ralston, NE: Policy Proposal for the Implementation of a Food Truck Park

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1. Executive Summary

The city of Ralston, Nebraska hopes to attract visitors and new residents to the City through new attractions. With newly obtained green spaces, the city wants to construct a food truck park to create a gathering space for local entrepreneurship and patronage. The recently obtained public space sits along a high-traffic road running through the center of Ralston and near the Ralston arena. In order to determine what the city must do to make this space usable for food trucks, how to manage and regulate the park, what licensing statutes must be revised, and what attracts private vendors to a food park, the city of Ralston has commissioned this study from the Tulane University Policy Research Shop.

2. Introduction

2.1. Ralston Background

Located in the outskirts of Omaha, Nebraska, the city of Ralston takes up roughly one square mile. With only 7,300 residents, local businesses have a significant impact on the city. In 2012 the city undertook the construction of the Ralston Arena with the goal to generate additional revenue that could supplement the city's existing budget. The city of Ralston is seeking to implement a food truck park in relatively close proximity to the Arena with the aim to create additional social benefits, benefit small, local businesses, and attract citizens from Ralston and the surrounding areas.

2.2. Food Truck Industry Growth Background

The value of the food truck industry has increased significantly in recent years. Between 2015 and 2020, the industry itself has grown 7.9%. While this seems like a small number, an almost eight percent increase in a five-year span is very notable. To further emphasize this, the value of the

food truck industry in 2015 was \$856.7 million¹. Now, in 2021, the industry is worth close to \$1.4 billion.² These numbers alone display how much the food truck industry has grown in recent years and there are no signs of slowing down.

There are currently over 24,000 active food trucks in the United States. Partnered with this, there are over 30,000 people employed by food trucks.³ This is a number that has increased by 6.1% in the last five years. Also, food trucks employ, on average, 1.2 employees per truck.⁴ The industry has increased in value so much because there are less costs than that of a restaurant. Due to the appeal of low start-up costs and upside potential for profit, the food truck industry has continued and will continue to grow in the coming years.

2.3. Ralston Food Truck Policy Background

2.3.1. Omaha and Surrounding Area

In the past ten years, the food truck industry in Nebraska has grown significantly. More food truck businesses, or mobile food units, have been created in both the major and minor cities within the state. Because of this, new laws at various governmental levels have been added and revised to help these vendors run their businesses and to aid governments in their regulation of mobile food units. One of the main focuses of the adapting regulations is the health and safety of the public, accomplished by emphasizing food safety and sanitation.

Cities like Lincoln and Omaha have a very large food truck population. Most cities in Nebraska do not have as many laws and regulations when compared to other states.⁵ For example, North Platte does

¹ “Food Truck Revenue Growth Increasing,” Food Truck Training and Certification, Accessed June 30, 2021, <http://foodtrucktrainingcertification.com/featured/food-truck-growth-keeps-increasing/>

² “20+ Food Truck Industry Statistics: What’s Cooking in 2021?,” smallbizgenius, Accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.smallbizgenius.net/by-the-numbers/food-truck-industry-stats/#gref>

³ “20+ Food Truck Industry Statistics: What’s Cooking in 2021?,” smallbizgenius, Accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.smallbizgenius.net/by-the-numbers/food-truck-industry-stats/#gref>

⁴ “Trends Shaping The Food Truck Industry Outlook in 2021,” Linchpin, Accessed June 30, 2021, <https://linchpinseo.com/trends-food-truck-industry/#the-food-truck-industry-is-outgrowing-the-restaurant-industry-55-to-43>

⁵ Huck, Mackenzie. “Bill Aims to Ease Restrictions on Food Trucks in Nebraska”. *1011 Now*, June 20, 2021. <https://www.1011now.com/content/news/New-bill-aims-to-ease-restrictions-on-food-trucks-in-Nebraska-506742051.html>

not require a license, and food trucks in Scottsbluff are not regulated under ordinances.⁶⁷ Food trucks have to follow the same regulations as brick-and-mortar restaurants. Under the Nebraska Pure Food Act and the Nebraska Food Code, all mobile food units need a permit from the state of Nebraska, with a fee of \$79.23.⁸ The businesses also need an inspection at the time of the application. Large cities, like Lincoln and Omaha, however, have different regulations that are easier to follow and are created specifically for those cities. With the ability to craft their own regulations, local governments throughout Nebraska have taken different approaches to food truck regulation. For example, food trucks in Omaha cannot sell food within 50 feet of a permanent food establishment without written permission.⁹ In Fremont, no vending is allowed within 200 yards of a city ballfield or swimming pool.¹⁰ In Kearney, food trucks are not allowed to park on public property.¹¹

Although the cities in Nebraska are not known throughout popular media and news for their food truck presence, the laws and regulations have been amended and eased back in response to the recent growth in Nebraska's food truck industry. The evolving regulations will help current and future food truck vendors operate their businesses throughout Nebraska, leading to further growth in the industry.

2.3.2. Ralston's Current Policies

The City of Ralston authorized mobile food vendors to operate within the boundaries of the City of Ralston in 2017. The stated purpose of the City Ordinance that authorized mobile food vendors was to regulate and require licenses for mobile food vendors so that their use of various properties and locations can occur in a "fair and safe manner" while allowing for the

⁶ Hubbert, Elice, and Logan Seacrest. "Food Trucks: An LRO Background." Nebraska Legislature. Legislative Research Office, June 10, 2021. https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/research/foodtrucks_2020.pdf

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ltc, "Nebraska Legislature," Nebraska Legislature - Revised Statutes Chapter 81, June 12, 2021. <https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/browse-chapters.php?chapter=81>

⁹ "Code of Ordinances," Municode Library, June 20, 2021, https://library.municode.com/ne/omaha/codes/code_of_ordinances

¹⁰ "City of Fremont Development Policies," Fremont.gov, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.fremont.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6954/Fremont-Development-Policies?bidId=>

¹¹ "Chapter 21 - DISTRICT R-3, URBAN RESIDENTIAL MULTI-FAMILY DISTRICT" Municode Library, June 20, 2021. https://library.municode.com/ne/kearney/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CH21DIURREMUMIDIMENS

beneficial service that mobile food vendors provide. The City Ordinance requires a mobile food vendor license, issued by the City Clerk, to be held by the mobile food truck operator if their application is accepted. The license application process is accompanied by a \$100.00 processing fee and the license must be renewed annually. Mobile food vendors face many regulations on where they can sell their items; mobile food vendors may not sell from a location within 50 feet of the main entrance of a permanent food establishment when it is operating unless they have been granted written approval, in an area where patrons would be in a portion of a street being used by motor vehicles, and must obtain a permit or written consent from the owner of a property if the property is not a parking space or a city right-of-way. Mobile food vendors are not permitted to sell or offer to sell alcoholic drinks or foods containing alcohol. Mobile food vendors are responsible for providing trash and recycling receptacles and must properly dispose of these items. Mobile food vendors may not place any fixtures or equipment, such as a table, chair, umbrella, or electric generator, on any city property. Since this ordinance has been passed in 2017, it has not been revised.¹² The current Ralston policies do not have specific regulations for food truck parks, making a revision necessary with the creation of a food truck park.

3. Case Studies

In this section, we provide five case studies of communities in various parts of the country who are promoting and regulating food trucks and food truck parks. These cases were chosen based on their varying methods for regulation, their location in relation to the researchers, and their size in comparison to Ralston, Nebraska. For each case study, we discuss the licensing process, the regulations in place, and the status of food truck parks in the community.

3.1. Denver, Colorado

Introduction

The United States Chamber of Commerce issued a food truck index called “Food Truck Nation” in 2018, ranking twenty American cities based on their friendliness to food truck owners. Denver, Colorado is ranked by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Food Truck Nation study as the second-best city to operate a food truck in, behind Portland, Oregon. The number

¹² City of Ralston, Ordinance No. 1208, April, 2017, <https://www.cityofralston.com/sites/g/files/vyhlf6046f/uploads/1208.pdf>.

of food trucks in the Denver Metro region has more than tripled since 2014, largely because of the ease and straightforwardness of the process for opening a food truck.¹³

Permits and Licensing

In order to obtain a license, a mobile plan review packet must first be filled out and submitted to the Department of Excise and Licensing. This is a series of forms detailing things about your business such as facilities, menu, anticipated operating locations and events. Along with the packet, an application fee of \$200 and a licensing fee of \$125 are required. The licensing fee is also a yearly payment of \$125 once the food truck is in operation. Once the packet is received, it is given to the Department of Public Health and Environment as well as the Fire Department. Once the packet is approved, both departments will schedule an in-person inspection. Once these inspections are successfully completed, the Department of Excise and Licenses will issue a license to the food truck. After the license is issued, the food truck may begin to operate.¹⁴

Regulations

Operational food trucks in Denver may park on any public street with certain exceptions. They are prohibited from parking within twenty feet of an intersection, on any streets in the central business district, and not within three hundred feet of a public park unless special permission has been granted by the Department of Parks and Recreation. They must still obey all parking laws such as paying meters and not double parking. They also are not allowed to serve customers standing on the street as well as placing chairs, tables or signs on public sidewalks or streets.

A food truck is allowed to operate in any area of the city without a zoning permit if they are at a location for less than thirty minutes. If a food truck is operating on private property for more than thirty minutes, a zoning permit is required. There are specific zones that are available to be operated on by zoning permits. This is a separate application, and a site plan is necessary in order to obtain it. On private property, a food truck cannot operate for more than four consecutive hours at a time between 8am and 9pm. They must be the only food truck on that specific zone lot as well as being 200 feet from any other food truck or eating and drinking

¹³ “Why the food truck business model works,” Denver South, Accessed June 30, 2021, <https://denver-south.com/why-the-food-truck-business-model-works/>

¹⁴ “Retail or Mobile Food License (Food Truck or Food Cart),” Denvergov, Accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Departments/Business-Licensing/Business-Licenses/Retail-Food-Mobile-License?BestBetMatch=mobile%20plan%20review%20packet!95c94ae0-247e-4b0c-b511-f9439cc122bd!c4f1b630-3cf4-4ec1-8110-c4784b6aa32e!en-US>

establishment. They also must be at least 50 feet from any residential zone. In order to receive a permit, it is an annual \$50 fee.¹⁵

Food Truck Parks and Events

If a food truck is operating at an event, the requirements are much different. Groups of food trucks are allowed to be present at special events and they are allowed in most zone districts in Denver. If the event has obtained a zoning use permit, the food truck is not required to obtain one specifically for themselves. They can operate at an event for a maximum of 12 consecutive days and cannot operate at that same location for 90 days after. The residential zones where food trucks are prohibited from operating independently are allowed to host food trucks if it is an event that is sponsored by a nonprofit or government organization. An event permit costs \$10 per event for the food truck to attend.¹⁶

In relation to events, Denver has an event every other Monday in the summer called DTC Eats. This is a food truck rally where fourteen to sixteen food trucks gather in a single parking lot to offer a wide range of food to customers.¹⁷ This event would fall under the permitting of an event and would therefore allow food trucks to be in close proximity to each other as well as not having to obtain a zoning license. As seen, the permitting and licensing process in Denver is relatively simple and inexpensive, leading to the heavy growth in the food truck population and the continuously attracting customers.

3.2. Austin, Texas

Introduction

Austin has been a leader throughout the country's food truck craze since the city's first food truck opened its doors in 2007. Since the food trucks began operating, interest or demand hasn't waned; annually, more than 1,000 permits are issued to local food trucks in Austin.¹⁸ From 2010 to 2016, the number of food carts in Austin grew 600 percent, leading the city

¹⁵ Mobile Retail Food Truck, Trailer and Cart Guide," Denvergov, Accessed June 30, 2021, https://www.denvergov.org/files/assets/public/business-licensing/documents/food_truck_guide.pdf

¹⁶ Mobile Retail Food Truck, Trailer and Cart Guide," Denvergov, Accessed June 30, 2021, https://www.denvergov.org/files/assets/public/business-licensing/documents/food_truck_guide.pdf

¹⁷ "Case of the Mondays? 'DTC Eats Is Back for a 4th Summer of Food Truck Glory," Our Community Now, Accessed June 30, 2021, <https://ourcommunitynow.com/denver-co/case-of-the-mondays-dtc-eats-is-back-for-a-4th-summer-of-food-truck-glory>

¹⁸ "Austin Food Trucks By The Numbers," *Austin Monthly*, November 2018, <https://www.austinmonthly.com/austin-food-trucks-by-the-numbers/>.

to be recognized as the city where new food trucks pop up the fastest.¹⁹ For these reasons, Austin's methods for regulation and licensing are crucial for understanding effective food truck policymaking.

Permits and Licensing

Austin was ranked 7th most friendly city for food truck operations out of the 20 cities studied by the United States Chamber of Commerce's Food Truck Nation report, based on their processes for obtaining permits and licenses, ease for complying with restrictions, and regulations involved with operating a food truck.²⁰

For obtaining permits and licenses, Austin was ranked 6th, largely due to their one-stop-shop model for food truck permitting and fees; Austin currently has twenty steps and fourteen trips to regulatory bodies required of food truck operators. The relatively low fees associated with the permitting process, \$1,139 in total, also contributes to the high ranking of Austin as a food truck friendly city. However, the entrepreneurs that the authors of the Food Truck Nation report spoke to consistently pointed to the hassle of the inspection process associated with the permitting and licensing process. Among the hassles noted were the length of inspections being too long, the available windows for having the inspections conducted were not long enough, the process for approval was very slow, and the low number of commissaries were not enough to handle all of the trucks.²¹

In an interview conducted with an Austin-based food truck owner, the owner expressed that, despite the low number of commissaries in Austin, they are necessary for operation and the low number seldom bothers food trucks parked in a designated food truck park. Commissaries are necessary for replenishing water, throwing away food, preparing food, dumping gray water, and other needs of food truck owners. This food truck owner noted that the commissaries are only needed every so often for food trucks located within a privately-owned food truck park, so they do not necessarily negatively harm many food truck owners.²²

¹⁹ Will Anderson, "Regulatory challenges impede Austin's thriving food-truck scene, report says," *Austin Business Journal*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.bizjournals.com/austin/news/2018/03/28/regulatory-challenges-impede-austin-food-trucks.html>. and U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Food Truck Index, *Food Truck Nation Report*, by Michael Hendrix and Lawrence Bowdish, <https://www.foodtrucknation.us/wp-content/themes/food-truck-nation/Food-Truck-Nation-Full-Report.pdf>

²⁰ U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Food Truck Index, *Food Truck Nation Report*, by Michael Hendrix and Lawrence Bowdish, <https://www.foodtrucknation.us/wp-content/themes/food-truck-nation/Food-Truck-Nation-Full-Report.pdf>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Miguel Kaiser, Phone Call with Author, June 14, 2021.

Regulations

Once the permitting process has been completed, the mobile food unit must pass an inspection. Mobile Vendors must remain 20 feet from any structure and 50 feet from a residential building, remain at least 15 feet from any fire hydrant, must not block access to a Fire Department Connection, and must not block entrances or exits from any structure. Electricity must be supplied through a generator or other source within the food truck itself; electricity may not be pulled from a nearby structure and extension cords cannot be used excessively. A maximum of two 100-lb propane cylinders are permitted. Maintenance of a safe and secure water supply is the responsibility of the Mobile Vendor operator; hot and cold water must be available for use to all sinks at all times. Each food truck must have permanent holding tanks for fresh water and wastewater in each unit: fresh water tanks must hold 30 gallons or more and wastewater tanks must be 15% larger than the freshwater tank. For restrooms, Mobile Vendors must arrange to share a facility with a fixed establishment or provide a portable restroom.²³ All the service items necessary for operation must be kept inside the mobile unit or at a central preparation facility at all times, including coolers, propane tanks, generators, barbecue pits, grease disposal bins, and cash registers.²⁴

The survey administered for the Food Truck Nation report found that food truck owners across the country consistently called for simplifying or eliminating the regulations on mobile food units. An Austin-based respondent to their survey expressed their frustration with the regulations by saying, “we all work so hard as small business owners that we don’t have time to deal with the government. Government’s job should be to ensure we run a safe food service business, pay collected sales tax, obey labor laws, and that’s about it.”²⁵ Overall, Food Truck Nation noted that complexity in the city’s regulation process represented the largest burden to food trucks.

²³ Austin.gov, “Mobile food vendor permit guide,” 2021, <https://alpha.austin.gov/en/permits-tickets/business-permits-and-licenses/food-business-permits/mobile-food-vendor-permit-guide/>.

²⁴ Ibid and Texas Department of State Health Services, Texas Administrative Code: Requirements Applicable to Certain Establishments, October 11, 2015, [https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=25&pt=1&ch=228&rl=221](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=25&pt=1&ch=228&rl=221).

²⁵ U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Food Truck Index, *Food Truck Nation Report*, by Michael Hendrix and Lawrence Bowdish, <https://www.foodtrucknation.us/wp-content/themes/food-truck-nation/Food-Truck-Nation-Full-Report.pdf>

Food Truck Parks

Austin's food truck regulations and operations are unique in that stationary carts are located on private property.²⁶ As the number of food trucks in Austin grew throughout the last decade, so did privately owned and operated food truck parks, which offer patrons an assortment of local vendors with a variety of options, additional amenities, and a space to gather.²⁷ Across Austin, one can seldom find a neighborhood without a food truck park.

Austin's food truck park owners have faced fierce price competitions as the parks grew in popularity. Sarah Hannon, the former owner of the Midway Food Park in Austin, told *The New York Times* that after opening the park in 2013, other property owners began to realize that they could "shave off a corner of their parking lot and give a food truck space," leading to an increase in the number of privately-owned food truck parks. At one point, Ms. Hannon had 40 vendors on the waitlist for her food truck park, but because of competition, she struggled to keep up with the price for a food truck space. While Ms. Hannon was charging \$1,500 a month to reserve a spot, many competitors charged \$500.²⁸

The phenomenon of private property owners using some of their extra space for food truck parking has continued to thrive in Austin over the last decade. The owner of the TLOCS food truck, parked at the popular 5000 Burnet Street Food Park, explained in an interview that the food truck park owner has two office buildings, and because of the high property taxes on the buildings, the owners decided to invite food trucks to the parking lot since there are no property taxes on food trucks. Depending on where the food truck is parked in this lot, the rent varies from \$800 to \$1000 per month, depending on visibility from the street and entrance. Included in this rent is a series of amenities provided by the property owner, such as picnic tables with umbrellas, permanent restrooms, a refrigerated area for the food truck owners, security cameras, stations with dog waste disposal bags, trash receptacles, and power stations for each food truck. These types of amenities are common for private food truck spaces, according to the owner of TLOCS, but there are additional ones that can benefit food truck operations, including a grease trap on the property where mobile food

²⁶ Linda Baker, "Food Trucks 'Are No Longer a Novelty,' but They Are Adapting," *New York Times*, February 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/business/food-truck-expansion-entrepreneurship.html>.

²⁷ Brandon Warson, "Austin may not be as food truck-friendly as you think," Culture Map Austin, May 21, 2018, <https://austin.culturemap.com/news/restaurants-bars/03-21-18-austin-most-food-truck-friendly-cities-america/>.

²⁸ Linda Baker, "Food Trucks 'Are No Longer a Novelty,' but They Are Adapting," *New York Times*, February 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/business/food-truck-expansion-entrepreneurship.html>.

vendors can dispose of grey water.²⁹

Amenity	The Picnic Food Park	5000 Burnet Street Food Truck Lot	South Austin Food Trailer Park and Eatery	Thicket Food Truck Park
Live Music				
BYOB				
Parking Spaces				
Seating				
Dog Friendly				
Playground				
Other (noted)	Boutique trucks			Community garden, outdoor yoga

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As seen in the above table, some of the most popular food truck parks, based on their appearances on popular travel advice websites, share similar amenities at their food truck parks.³¹ Based on the variety of amenities available and how common some amenities are, they are likely to be deemed more attractive to visitors to the parks, making them important considerations for food truck parks to implement.

3.3. New Orleans, Louisiana

Introduction

New Orleans, Louisiana is known for offering diverse cuisines and mouth-watering food. Areas like the French Quarter, Magazine Street, and Freret Street attract both locals and tourists because of the abundance of restaurants and food trucks that are located throughout the area. Although the city is currently filled with food trucks, a decade ago there were almost no legitimate food trucks in New Orleans. Before Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans offered a very narrow legal pathway for owning and operating a food truck within the city.³² The very few food trucks that were in the city often had to work under the radar in order to operate. The very few laws on the record at this time were very restrictive and difficult to understand, which made it very difficult to obtain a permit to operate a food truck.³³ During that time, there were roughly one hundred permits available annually for all types of mobile vendors, not just food truck

²⁹ Miguel Kaiser, Phone Call with Author, June 14, 2021.

³⁰ Table compiled by author with data from <https://www.austintexas.org/things-to-do/food-and-drink/food-trucks/> and <https://www.thrillist.com/eat/austin/best-austin-food-trucks-parks>

³¹ Anastacia Uriegas, “A Truly Exhaustive Guide to Austin’s Food Truck Parks,” *Thrillist*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.thrillist.com/eat/austin/best-austin-food-trucks-parks>. and Visit Austin, “Austin Food Trucks and Trailers,” <https://www.austintexas.org/things-to-do/food-and-drink/food-trucks/>.

³² Interview with Alex de Castillo

³³ Price, Todd A. “Food Trucks Thrive Under New City Laws. *Nola.com*, June 14, 2021. https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/eat-drink/article_69149bec-d5ab-5056-a423-84333d7c3d13.html

vendors, greatly reducing the possibility for food truck owners to obtain a legal permit. Now, there are one hundred permits available every year for food trucks alone. Previously, they allowed only 35 food truck permits every year.³⁴

Permits and Licensing

The laws have been recently updated to make it easier to obtain a permit and own and operate a food truck business. La Cosinita food truck owner Rachel Billow stated in an interview that applying for and obtaining a permit to operate a food truck took her months.³⁵ According to Alex de Castillo, the owner of Taceaux Loceaux food truck and restaurant, obtaining a food truck permit ten years ago was almost impossible and not worth the trouble. Now, Castillo says that the new laws are easy to abide by and, although it is still difficult to get a permit, it is much easier than it was before Hurricane Katrina. Castillo also thinks that the prices for a permit are somewhat reasonable. The total cost for a mobile food truck permit and license is around \$655.25 but may cost more in certain cases. This includes the application fee, the food truck permit fee, mobile vending permit from the fire department, health inspection fees, temporary food service establishment permit, occupational license fee, sales tax deposit, and I.D. card fee per card.³⁶

Regulations

Food trucks are prohibited from operating in the French Quarter and the Central Business District (CBD).³⁷ The restrictions keep food trucks from operating in the most tourist-heavy neighborhoods of the city, thereby reducing food trucks' access to these customer bases. Castillo of the Taceaux Loceaux food truck and restaurant agreed that one of the biggest problems facing New Orleans food trucks is the operation areas. Some laws regarding operation locations and operation restrictions have been amended in the past several years. Vendor trucks cannot operate

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ "50 Food Truck Owners Speak Out: 'What I Wish I'd Known Before Starting My Food Truck.'" *FoodTruckr*, June 20, 2021. <https://foodtruckr.com/2020/05/what-i-wish-id-known-before-starting-my-food-truck>

³⁶ "Mobile Food Truck Permit and License" *City of New Orleans One Stop*, June 14, 2021. <https://www.nola.gov/cultural-economy/documents/food-truck-permit-guide/>

³⁷ Price, Todd A. "Food Trucks Thrive Under New City Laws. *Nola.com*, June 14, 2021. https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/eat-drink/article_69149bec-d5ab-5056-a423-84333d7c3d13.html

within twenty feet of an intersection or a stop sign or any other traffic control sign. They cannot operate within three feet of any driveway, wheelchair or bicycle ramp, and cannot park in front of or block the exit/entrance of a building. They also cannot operate within two blocks of an elementary or secondary school while the schools are in session.³⁸ Food trucks can also be parked for up to four hours in a single location, which previously was only 45 minutes. Previous laws have stated that food trucks cannot park within 600 feet of an operating restaurant unless allowed by the restaurant. Now, there is no limit to how close a truck can park to a restaurant.³⁹ Previous laws stated that food trucks had to be operating within 300 feet of a public bathroom. The new laws state that they do not need to be parked near one if they are not parked at a location for more than two hours.⁴⁰ Food also has to be prepared at the food truck site and needs to meet the same health and safety regulations that restaurants follow. It is also the vendor's job to keep the site clean and provide a trash can. They also cannot provide furniture in the streets or sidewalks.⁴¹

In the City's Food Truck Operating Areas map below, vendors with a food truck permit are permitted to operate in the yellow zone. Vendors who want to operate their food truck in the blue areas must obtain a Franchise permit from the City Council.⁴²

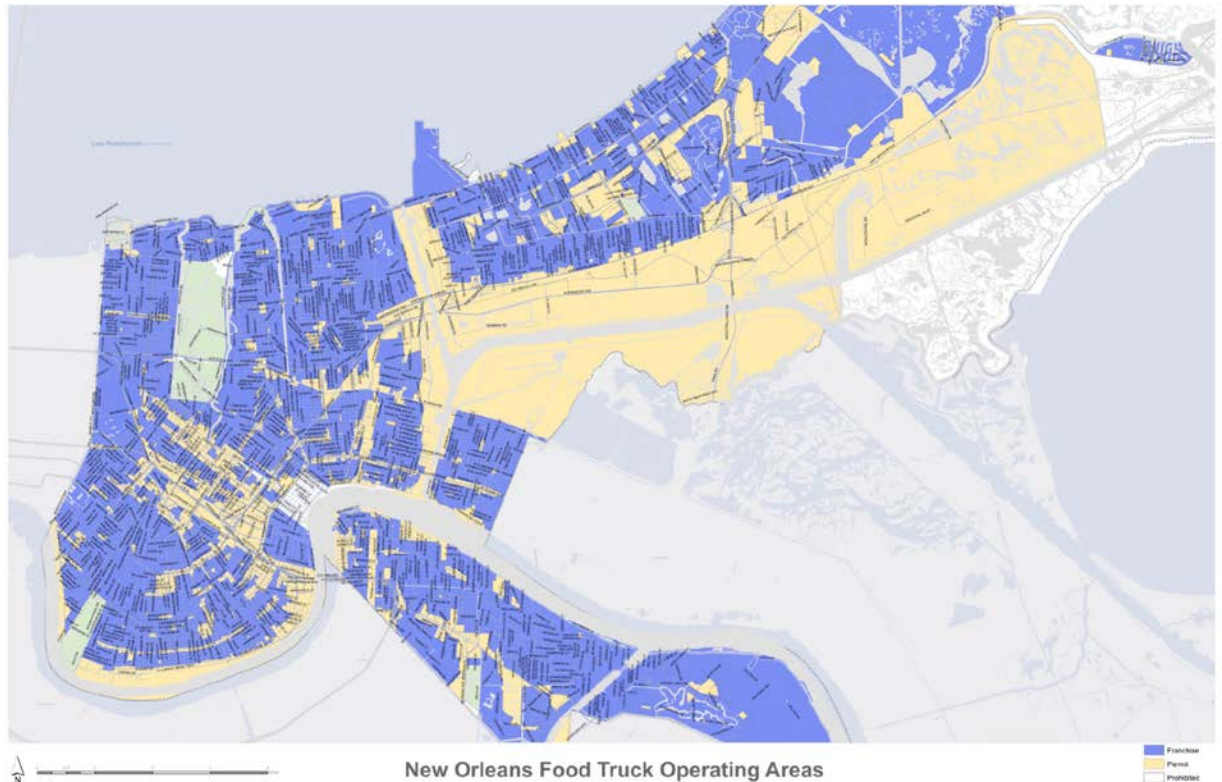
³⁸ "Mobile Food Truck Permit and License" *City of New Orleans One Stop*, June 14, 2021. <https://www.nola.gov/cultural-economy/documents/food-truck-permit-guide/>

³⁹ Danny Monteverde, "N.O. City Council Approves New Food-Truck Laws," NOLA.com, April 22, 2013, https://www.nola.com/news/article_c69ec57f-dd62-5175-bc16-f69ab7d935c3.html.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Mobile Food Truck Permit and License" *City of New Orleans One Stop*, June 14, 2021. <https://www.nola.gov/cultural-economy/documents/food-truck-permit-guide/>

⁴² Ibid



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Food Truck Events

In the interview with Castillo of Taceaux Loceaux, he stated that it was difficult to operate at events, such as music festivals, and it usually did not benefit the food truck businesses and was not worth it. Most of the time, the event managers did not provide amenities for the vendors and the food truck businesses at the events did not make a lot of money. The only main benefit of working at an event was to promote their business, so people could hire them for catering, or for Castillo, to promote his restaurant.⁴⁴ Vendors also have to obtain a permit to operate during the event. The extra permit is \$50.25 for business owners, and free for non-profit organizations.⁴⁵

Although the startup can be difficult, food truck parks can thrive in New Orleans. An old food truck park, *Deja Vieux Food Park*, was located in the Lower Garden District that held up to six food trucks. The food park was open every day of the week. The park also included a permanent bar

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Interview With Alex de Castillo

⁴⁵ “Mobile Food Truck Permit and License” *City of New Orleans One Stop*, June 14, 2021. <https://www.nola.gov/cultural-economy/documents/food-truck-permit-guide/>

and patio, with TVs and games, and a weekly jazz show.⁴⁶ If a food truck park/ food truck festival plans on selling alcohol, the park needs to obtain an alcoholic beverage permit, which requires a processing fee. The park also needs an occupational license special event permit. The vendors at the park need an individual trade show vendor occupational license. A food truck park or festival also needs to apply for street closure if they plan on holding the events in the streets, which might also require meter rentals, requiring an application and additional fee.⁴⁷

Several local New Orleans food truck vendors started the New Orleans Food Truck Coalition in 2012 in order to fix and amend the mobile vendor laws and protect the rights of the vendors.⁴⁸ Several years ago, NOFTC partnered up with councilwoman Stacey Head to reform these laws. One of Head's goals is to increase the amount of permits issued every year. Every year, the pre-existing vendors are able to obtain permits first, and then new businesses are able to apply for a permit. This makes it difficult to create more food truck businesses in New Orleans.⁴⁹ She also wanted to expand the distance limit that restricted food trucks from operating near a restaurant.⁵⁰ After the laws were amended, many restaurant owners and restaurant association members were against food trucks and did not support the new laws⁵¹. The main reason restaurant owners were against food truck vendors is because the trucks are able to park close to the restaurant, which can potentially affect the business for the restaurant owners. They also believed that food trucks do not meet the health code standard and crowd streets and sidewalks.⁵²

3.4. Hartford, Connecticut

⁴⁶ "Have You Visited New Orleans' First Permanent Food Truck Park?," NOLA Weekend, June 14, 2021, <https://www.nolaweekend.com/new-orleans-first-ever-permanent-food-truck-park-opens/>.

⁴⁷ "OneStop - Events - Food Sales & Preparations - City of New Orleans," nola.gov, accessed June 18, 2021, <https://www.nola.gov/onestop/events/food-sales-preparations/>.

⁴⁸ Interview With Alex de Castillo

⁴⁹ Richard Thompson, "New Orleans Food Truck Owners Say to Embrace Burgeoning Industry, Ease Regulations," NOLA.com, June 19, 2021, https://www.nola.com/news/business/article_3c139672-cd7a-50e4-9971-753748ed86ff.html.

⁵⁰ Todd A. Price, "Food Trucks Thrive Under New City Laws. *Nola.com*, June 14, 2021. https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/eat-drink/article_69149bec-d5ab-5056-a423-84333d7c3d13.html

⁵¹ Interview with Alex de Castillo

⁵² Elice Hubbert and Logan Seacrest, "Food Trucks: An LRO Background," Nebraska Legislature (Legislative Research Office, March 2020), https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/research/foodtrucks_2020.pdf

Introduction

What was once a vacant lot in West Hartford, Connecticut, has become a vibrant and lively food truck park that attracts vendors and customers from the greater Connecticut area.⁵³ In the words of GastroPark's founder Tate Norden, the park was "inspired by the desire to unite the community while supporting locally."⁵⁴ With three time slots a day and a rotating fleet of vendors, GastroPark offers a great venue for food trucks to routinely congregate and has quickly become one of West Hartford's most popular attractions.

Permits and Licensing

The city of West Hartford has created an online portal for vendors to register for the appropriate permits needed to become a licensed food truck vendor. The streamlined nature of the portal benefits vendors by providing notifications of upcoming bids, information regarding payments to the city, and the ability to easily update company information.⁵⁵

Food Truck vendors are required to obtain a permit from the West Hartford Police Department and the West Hartford Health District at a cost of \$200 in order to operate. These licenses ensure that food trucks and their operators comply with pre-existing code from both the city and the state of Connecticut. Food trucks seeking to operate long-term on privately owned property must also obtain a zoning permit prior to operating.⁵⁶ Parking and operating on the street requires approval through the Hartford Parking Authority and those requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Food Truck parks must also obtain a Special Use Permit (SUP) which must be approved and obtained through the Planning and Zoning Division. Food Truck parks are defined as a permanently established area with capacity to accommodate up to, but not to exceed, five food trucks offering food and beverages for sale to the public.⁵⁷ Thus, West Hartford's ordinance requires appropriate licensing on behalf of the individual food trucks and their owners, as well as a specific permit in order to establish a park for these vendors to operate.

⁵³ Maddie Phelps, "GastroPark Food Truck Park Opening in West Hartford," CT Bites (CT Bites, September 2, 2020), <https://www.ctbites.com/blog/2020/8/30/gastropark-opening-in>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Vendor Registration - Town of West Hartford," West Hartford, 2021, <https://www.westhartfordct.gov/town-departments/purchasing-procurement/vendor-registration>.

⁵⁶ "The Mobile Food Truck & Food Truck Park Ordinance." West Hartford Town Council, March 28, 2017. <https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1581355431/westhartfordctgov/b80yvj4yqxl6to4pt0bt/FoodTruckWITHmap.pdf>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Regulations

Until 2017, when Tate Norden had the idea to convert a vacant lot into a food truck park, the existing ordinances of West Hartford, Connecticut did not accommodate food trucks. Following the nationwide expansion of the food truck industry, West Hartford similarly sought to incorporate them into the local community. With that being said, Community Development Director Mark McGovern asserted that the local government would have to make sure they would be implemented “where it makes most sense, where it could work without it becoming problematic for the commercial district or traffic or public safety concerns.”⁵⁸

Any proposal for a food truck park must submit a detailed plan to the planning and zoning commission, and West Hartford’s current ordinance includes language limiting the number of food trucks to five at a time.⁵⁹ Other city stipulations include a requirement for at least two permanent bathrooms on the property and the park must be handicap accessible.⁶⁰ West Hartford’s food truck ordinance outlines their hours of operation to take place between 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., a minimum required distance of 500 feet from a permanent restaurant, and the requirement for vendors to provide their own waste receptacles and handle their own trash. In addition, no portable signs or loudspeakers are permitted, and transient vendors cannot establish their own seating areas apart from that established by the park.⁶¹ Above all, food truck parks are required to comply with overarching state and local food establishment health codes along with any other industry operations.

The ordinance in West Hartford is designed to support and regulate the implementation of food trucks and other mobile vendors while protecting the operations of existing brick-and-mortar restaurants. Thus, West Hartford seeks to expand opportunities for the emerging industry of food trucks while also catering to the priorities of local business owners and wanting to protect their marketplace as well.

Food Truck Parks

⁵⁸ Mikaela Porter, “Food Trucks May Soon Take to Streets of West Hartford, Food Truck Park Could Follow.” *Hartford Courant*, 19 Mar. 2017. <https://www.courant.com/community/west-hartford/hc-west-hartford-food-truck-ordinance-proposed-20170319-story.html>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

GastroPark is the most prominent food truck park in West Hartford and was the foundation for the implementation of the city’s ordinance to permit and regulate these operations. GastroPark operates five days a week, dividing each day into a morning, afternoon, and evening shift with a rotating schedule of vendors averaging between two and four trucks at each shift.

3.5. Cody, Wyoming

Introduction

The City of Cody, Wyoming is home to 10,000 residents and its local economy thrives on the tourism industry, serving hundreds of thousands of annual visitors who are attracted to nearby Yellowstone National Park’s East Entrance, the cultural significance associated with Colonel William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody who founded the town, and the mountainous terrain.⁶² Recently, the City of Cody recognized a spike in both the popularity of and the number of food trucks within the city, prompting the City Council to approve a pilot program for food trucks, allowing three food trucks to reserve a weekend spot at Mentock Park throughout the summer.⁶³

Permits and Licensing

The City of Cody currently requires that Mobile Food Vendors operate on privately owned property or obtain City of Cody Council approval for operation rights on public property. Vendors must pay a \$70.00 annual license fee, a \$100.00 special event fee for special events, or a \$200.00 special event fee for special events lasting more than a week.⁶⁴ Beginning June 25, 2021, the City of Cody will open Mentock Park to serve as an area for Mobile Vendors to operate outside of the Special Event restrictions, which included a \$100.00 special event fee and a restriction on operating on any city property, including parks.⁶⁵ The City attorney for Cody, Scott Kolpitke, also advised the City Council that if the experimental pilot program goes well, the council could amend the mobile vendor ordinance to include these abilities to operate outside of the Special Event

⁶² “City’s Highlights,” City of Cody, <https://www.cityofcody-wy.gov/>.

⁶³ Zac Taylor, “Responding to food truck craze, city adds space,” *Cody Enterprise*, June 16, 2021, https://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_ee38fd78-ced8-11eb-bc6e-53de4e2caf00.html.

⁶⁴ City of Cody, *Reference: Changes to Mobile Vendors - Ordinance 2020-14*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.cityofcody-wy.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3992/Ordinance-2020-14-Mobile-Vendors?bidId>.

⁶⁵ City of Cody, *City Council Special Meeting Agenda—Resolution 2021-07*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.cityofcody-wy.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/5212>.

restrictions.⁶⁶ If the council amends the mobile vendor ordinance, the ability to reserve a spot at Cody park for a smaller fee than for typical special events throughout the summer could remain permanent, meaning Mobile Vendors could operate in designated public spaces from June 1st to August 31st annually.⁶⁷

Regulations

The pilot program requires that mobile vendors request, in writing, with a minimum of a 48-hour notice, the authorization to utilize the space in Mentock Park, which can only be authorized by the City Administrator. Also, the Mobile Vendors are only allowed to operate on the following combinations of three days: Thursday, Friday, and/or Saturday or Friday, Saturday, and/or Sunday. No more than three vendors will be authorized to operate on the same days at the park. The Mobile Vendors may not operate before 11:00 am or after 7:00 pm. Replacing the typical \$100.00 fee for special events is a fee of \$25.00 for a spot at the park that must be paid at least one day in advance. Also, the Mobile Vendors must provide trash receptacles and empty the trash receptacles located nearby.⁶⁸ The City is not providing amenities specifically for the Mobile Vendors; instead, the City is requiring the Mobile Vendors to bring all of the supplies they need as well as provide additional trash receptacles for the patrons in the area.

Food Truck Parks

The decision to open Mentock Park followed food truck events hosted by Geysers on the Terrace on Monday evenings, which brought food trucks together on the night that many of the brick-and-mortar restaurants were closed throughout Cody. On June 7, the first night of the food truck event at the Geysers on the Terrace, three food trucks attended and each sold out of food. The following week, six food trucks showed up, showing the growing interest in parking together to mimic a food truck park. Council member Diane Ballard noted in the work session the week before the final City Council vote on the food truck pilot program that the demand “is such that we better be thinking ahead,” arguing for the food truck program that she views as filling a “slightly different niche.” Ahead of the ordinance for the

⁶⁶ Zac Taylor, “Responding to food truck craze, city adds space,” *Cody Enterprise*, June 16, 2021, https://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_ee38fd78-ced8-11eb-bc6e-53de4e2caf00.html.

⁶⁷ City of Cody, *City Council Special Meeting Agenda—Resolution 2021-07*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.cityofcody-wy.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/5212>.

⁶⁸ City of Cody, *City Council Special Meeting Agenda—Resolution 2021-07*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.cityofcody-wy.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/5212>.

Mentock Park pilot program, the city government held discussions with a handful of food truck owners as well as brick and mortar businesses. The city manager Barry Cook recalled that there was strong support for food trucks in Cody, but the local owners had an issue with those out of town. Council member Emily Swett, who helped to lead the pilot program, reported that none of the brick-and-mortar restaurants and food truck owners who participated in the ordinance planning opposed the opening of Mentock Park for food trucks. Additionally, the owner of a local restaurant, Nathan Kardos, suggested eliminating fees to make it more appealing to food trucks, showing support for the program among local restaurant owners. Among those with hesitations to the ordinance were council member Heidi Rasmussen, who at the work session mentioned her strong opposition to another potential location, Bob Moore Memorial Parking Lot, which she saw as potentially harmful to the downtown restaurants. In her words, “I think it's a slippery slope, but I’m entirely against Bob Moore. It’s too near brick-and-mortars, and they support us with utilities; they’re open all year.” Council member Andy Quick, however, showed his interest in opening multiple food truck park locations, noting that “we could have half a dozen locations eventually. Then we could determine how many trucks they could carry.” Overall, there was strong support for opening Mentock Park for food trucks among the major stakeholders, especially since as a pilot program nothing was permanent as of yet, but most of the concerns voiced consisted of the potential for hurting local downtown restaurants and potential parking issues for patrons.⁶⁹

4. Policy Options

4.1. Maintain the Status Quo

Description: Ralston, Nebraska will keep current laws and regulations regarding food trucks, food truck parks, permits and licensing.

Amenities, such as seating and restrooms, would be available for both vendors and visitors. No further restrictions regarding food trucks would be implemented.

Pros:

⁶⁹ Zac Taylor, “Responding to food truck craze, city adds space,” *Cody Enterprise*, June 16, 2021, https://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_ee38fd78-ced8-11eb-bc6e-53de4e2caf00.html.

- The food truck industry creates small businesses and allows people with little skill to create a job.
- It is much cheaper to run a food truck than to run a brick-and-mortar restaurant. A food truck start up can cost around \$40,000, while a restaurant can cost \$250,000.⁷⁰
- Food trucks bring more tourists to the area.
- The working hours at a food truck are more flexible.
- A food truck business makes it easier for the business to expand into a brick-and-mortar restaurant.

Cons:

- Food trucks create foot and vehicle traffic.
- Food trucks can crowd the sidewalks and streets.
- It is more difficult to create a sanitary environment while in a small food truck.
- The food truck industry creates unfair competition with brick-and-mortar restaurants.

4.2. Similarities and Differences Between the Cities

4.2.1. Permits and Licenses

The City of Denver requires a license to operate on all public streets with the other zoning permits required for operating on private property. A license application fee of \$200 is required as well as a \$125 license fee which is due annually. These are subject to inspection by the department of health as well as the fire department but overall, a normal license with certain zoning permits will suffice to adequately run a food truck.

In Austin, in order to obtain a license, twenty steps and fourteen trips to regulatory bodies are needed in order to receive a license. The fees for permitting amount to \$1,139. Food trucks in Austin, similar to Denver, are subject to inspection, which can sometimes take extended periods of time. The process of approval can also take longer than expected, causing significant barriers to food truck operation.

In New Orleans, it is difficult to obtain a food truck permit. There are only roughly 100 permits for all mobile vendors available each year. The

⁷⁰ Richard Thompson, "New Orleans Food Truck Owners Say to Embrace Burgeoning Industry, Ease Regulations," NOLA.com, June 19,, 2021, https://www.nola.com/news/business/article_3c139672-cd7a-50e4-9971-753748ed86ff.html.

cost for a license and permit amount to \$655.25, which includes an application fee, permits, a license, taxes, and an I.D. card fee. Due to the low numbers of permits available, there is a longer process in order to obtain one due to the high demand.

In Hartford, permits are obtained with a cost of \$200. They also must obtain a special use permit which is approved by the planning and zoning division. Part of their license ensures they follow city codes and guidelines. Food trucks may also obtain zoning permits in order to operate on private property for extended periods of time.

In Cody, three food trucks can reserve weekend spots at Mentock Park. Here, they can operate outside of special event restrictions, which they had to pay a \$100 fee for. The city requires vendors to operate on private property or receive city council approval for public land. The annual license fee is \$70.00 to go with the special event fee of \$100 or a week long special event fee of \$200.

4.2.2. Regulation

The city of Denver's regulation for food trucks encourages use of public streets except for those in the Central Business District so long as limitations restricting distance from intersections and public parks are adhered to. Strict regulations are in place pertaining to their location and any food truck operating in a particular spot for more than thirty minutes is required to obtain a zoning permit that allocates specific zones and hours of operation. Regulation through zoning permits proves to be successful in Denver and clearly conveys the standards and limitations that the city enforces.

Austin's regulations require an in-depth inspection following the attainment of the appropriate licenses and permits. This ensures a standard of quality for vendors and protects the health and safety of the public. Other regulations include distance limits from city structures such as buildings and fire hydrants and there is a requirement for food trucks to supply their own utilities. Surveys of Austin food truck owners suggest a collective frustration towards the lengths these city regulations go to, making it difficult for business owners to navigate the complicated landscape.

New Orleans has added regulations over the last ten years that have significantly encouraged food truck participation. The major stipulation under the city's mandate prohibits food trucks from operating in major tourist and densely populated areas such as the French Quarter and Central

Business District. Other laws in place restrict operations near driveways and other such as entrances and exits to buildings, as well as require food to be prepared at the site of the food truck and adhere to the same health and safety regulations established for New Orleans restaurants.

Hartford's 2017 ordinance specifically addressing food trucks and food truck parks seeks to support vendors while also protecting local restaurants and other businesses. Food truck vendors must be a minimum of 500 feet from a permanent restaurant and must handle their own utilities and waste so as not to infringe on the utilities provided to these businesses. Food trucks are also not allowed to establish their own seating areas apart from what is established for them by the food truck park if that is where they are operating. Established food truck parks have specified hours of operation and permit no more than five food trucks from operating at one time.

The city of Cody outlines a program that requires a 48-hour notice and authorization period for trucks to be able to operate at the designated space in Mentock Park. Operations are limited to three days a week and no more than three food trucks are allowed to operate at the same time on those days. Like Hartford, vendors must also supply their own waste receptacles and are required to provide their own utilities. These stipulations were constructed out of community concern to protect local restaurants and businesses but also may be flexible to change given feedback from the pilot program.

4.2.3. Food Truck Parks

Each city in the provided case studies has a unique approach to regulating and permitting food truck parks' operation in their city. Denver does not allow food trucks to park near a public park without explicit permission from the Department of Parks and Recreation whereas the City of Cody has started a program for food truck operation within one of their parks. Denver also does not allow food trucks to operate for more than four consecutive hours on private property between 8am and 9pm, whereas Austin thrives on privately owned and operated food truck parks where mobile vendors can park for months at a time. Denver and Cody share the idea for having a special event for food trucks in which many can park at a single space at a designated time; Denver has a summer event where fourteen to sixteen food trucks gather in a single parking lot and the City of Cody is launching a summer program where mobile vendors can operate in

Mentock Park for three days over a weekend. Austin and Hartford both support stationary food truck parks on privately owned property.

In Denver, rather than a set food truck park, there is instead a weekly rally where a dozen or so food trucks gather in a designated area that in essence mimics a food truck park for the days it operates. Permitted as a special event, the city of Denver therefore allows the food trucks to be in close proximity to each other without having to obtain an individual zoning license. This process makes it easy for food trucks to choose to be involved in these events, however this may take away from the consistency provided by a more frequently available designated location.

In Austin, private property owners provide space for food trucks to park and this has in essence created self-ordained food truck parks. With rent going directly to the property owners, there are often amenities provided to food truck owners that benefit their operations and incentivize businesses to congregate in these areas.

New Orleans food trucks are prohibited from operating in largely tourist areas, such as the French Quarter and Central Business District, which makes organizing and establishing a food truck park difficult. Food trucks are most likely to congregate at sanctioned events such as festivals or concerts to promote their business and pay a fee of \$50.25 to obtain an extra permit, but they are not particularly beneficial for the food truck owners. It is difficult to turn profits at these events and oftentimes vendors are not provided adequate amenities. Past food truck parks have had difficulty creating long term success as New Orleans regulations regarding food and alcohol distribution adds complications for obtaining the required permits and licenses which can also rack up the costs for business owners. In New Orleans, most vendors have proved to have the greatest success with private catering events, though the orchestrated congregation of food trucks at special events can help bolster business and adds an attractive element that draws in the population.

Hartford has had considerable success establishing a food truck park, which can be attributed to the relatively small size of the city and the ability for the local government to effectively consult stakeholders to implement the best policies for operation. Food truck parks must obtain a Special Use Permit through the Planning and Zoning Division, which allows for a designated area to permanently establish up to five food trucks offering food and beverages for sale to the public. The well-known and publicly adored GastroPark in West Hartford has accumulated a slew of local food truck businesses who swiftly and easily obtained the necessary permits and operate on a rotating schedule in the park. The establishment of a

permanent and designated food truck park works to benefit both the businesses and consumers and has been successful in attracting visitors to the city.

Cody, Wyoming has recently and quite successfully implemented food trucks into the city. Part of their success can be attributed to researching nearby, similarly sized cities who have also implemented food truck policy and analyzing what worked and what did not. In size and geographic proximity to a large city, Cody is similar to Ralston. The pilot program at Mentock Park highlights the successes of the city's registration and licensing process and the ease with which food trucks can become involved. Seeking to protect the interests of local brick-and-mortar businesses, Cody established that food trucks cannot operate on public streets but are able to operate on private property with owner's approval. Regulating time for operation and geographic location helps to balance the presence of food trucks with the city's other local businesses and has been quite successful for both and has been a great attraction for local citizens and tourists alike.

4.3. Policy Options Most Useful for Ralston

Ralston currently has relatively lenient policies for mobile food vendor operation and low licensing fees in relation to the other provided case studies. However, with the goal of opening a food truck park on city-owned land, incorporating new regulations, plans, and amenities to the land would enhance the land that will soon become the food truck park and using other cities' existing plans can help to ensure the success of the food truck park.

The license application process that Ralston currently has in place makes food truck operation easier and more attainable for local entrepreneurs than other cities. Denver has a slightly higher licensing fee, twenty-five dollars more than Ralston's, New Orleans's license fee is fifty dollars higher than Ralston's, whereas Austin's permit options are more than double the current fee of \$100.00 that is in place in Ralston.⁷¹

⁷¹ Denver Government, "Retail Food Mobile License (Food Truck or Food Cart)," <https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Departments/Business-Licensing/Business-Licenses/Retail-Food-Mobile-License#:~:text=Include%20the%20name%20of%20your,an%20invoice%20with%20a%20receipt.> ; City of New Orleans, "Mobile Food Truck Permit and License," <https://www.nola.gov/cultural-economy/documents/food-truck-permit-guide/#:~:text=A%20non%20refundable%20application%20fee,deposit%3B%20E2%80%A2%20A%20%245.00%20I.D.> ; Austin.gov, "Mobile food vendor permit guide," 2021, <https://alpha.austin.gov/en/permits-tickets/business-permits-and-licenses/food-business-permits/mobile-food-vendor-permit-guide/>.

Hartford's lowest option for a license fee starts at \$200.00 but can range from that price to \$575.00.⁷² The City of Cody offers a lower licensing fee, \$70.00, than Ralston, but the \$25.00 fee required to operate under their new ordinance at Mentock Park makes the difference between their licensing fee and Ralston's only \$5.00.⁷³ Because of the size of fees between the other studied cities, Ralston's relatively low licensing fee will likely encourage food truck operation, but keeping this price as low as possible, with a low number of additional fees, will increase the participation in the food truck park.

Although regulations for general operation, such as distance from other buildings and businesses, will not apply to the food trucks operating within the food truck park, determining how many food trucks can operate, the days of operation, how food trucks will be approved to park at their designed spot, and other determinants of regulation will be required before the food truck in Ralston can open and operate. Ralston can look to Hartford's definition of food truck parks for aid in determining how many food trucks can operate in their food truck park, which caps the number of food trucks in an established area at five; the cap could increase or decrease based on the available space in the City of Ralston's lot. In privately operated food trucks in New Orleans, Austin, and Denver, food trucks can determine their days of operation. However, in food truck parks operated by the city itself, such as with the food truck park in Cody, regulation is created to keep food truck operation fair. The City of Cody has a similar climate and population size to Ralston, making their method for scheduling and overall operation helpful when planning for Ralston's food truck park. By having food trucks operate for three days at a time, as Cody does, and keeping the park open for as many months as possible, the mobile vendors parking there can be assured fair use of the public park. The method for determining which food trucks can park at Ralston's food truck park could use the City of Cody's government-operated food truck park or Austin's private food truck park methods. Most of Austin's privately operated food truck parks use an application process through their websites, making the approval process fully online, limiting the time it takes to receive and grant approval. The City of Cody requires written approval for mobile vendors to

⁷² Town of East Hartford, "Itinerant Food Vendor Requirements," <https://www.easthartfordct.gov/environmental-health/pages/itinerant-food-vendor-requirements>.

⁷³ City of Cody, *City Council Special Meeting Agenda—Resolution 2021-07*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.cityofcody-wy.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/5212>. and City of Cody, *Reference: Changes to Mobile Vendors - Ordinance 2020-14*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.cityofcody-wy.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3992/Ordinance-2020-14-Mobile-Vendors?bidId>.

park in Mentock Park by the City Administrator. To combine the two, Ralston could create a fully online platform for the application process that can be approved virtually by the local government actors.

After speaking with mobile food vendors in various cities, the need for amenities and additional attractions to bring patrons to the food truck park is evident. Austin's food truck parks have differing methods for attracting visitors, in addition to the food trucks themselves, including seating, fans or heaters, playgrounds, boutique trucks, ample parking, dog-friendly policies and amenities, live music events, and a BYOB policy in many of the food truck parks. New Orleans and Hartford carry similar strategies, with permanent seating and games being popular amenities in these cities. To attract patrons, then, having additional activities and attractions at the food truck park has been deemed useful across other cities. As the primary operator, the city could provide electricity plug-ins, a grease trap, and a water tap to allow for food truck operation across multiple days without the need for an additional commissary space in the city. Also, implementing policies such as being dog friendly and a BYOB alcohol policy could attract patrons to the park by making it a welcoming space for the entire family. Additional amenities cities or operators often provide to make the park more comfortable include permanent seating, trash receptacles, parking, and restrooms. Other options to consider implementing include live music, games, playgrounds, and attractions like outdoor yoga and meditation.

5. Limitations of this Study/Suggestions for Future Research

Although we were fortunate to have access to each of our cities' posted regulations and licensing procedures for mobile vendors, we did not have access to information about how food truck parks were constructed, the planning or decision-making associated with which attractions to have accompanying food trucks at the food truck parks, or much data that showed the overall costs associated with opening a food truck park.

Unfortunately, we also faced obstacles when obtaining qualitative data in the form of interviews because of the limited time we had to meet with stakeholders and the busy schedules of those in the mobile vendor industry because of the busy summer season and the increased patronage associated with the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions across the case cities.

The cities we used to study vary in size, demographics, economy structure, and many other factors. Because of the size of the city of Ralston,

we included the city of Cody, Wyoming in an attempt to ensure there was a city of comparable geographic and population size that had experience and information on food truck parks in their jurisdiction. However, in further research, looking deeper into cities of comparable geographic size, population size, and economic activities would benefit the policy options.

6. Conclusion

Government officials in Ralston, Nebraska are seeking new ways to attract local and out-of-town patronage to locally owned establishments. After obtaining a plot of land on a heavily trafficked street, Ralston government officials plan to open a food truck park, planning to draw customers in through this attraction. This study, in which various cities' models for food truck operation and regulation were researched, will aid in Ralston's planning for turning their available land into a thriving food truck park. The booming growth in Nebraska's food truck industry shows that the creation of a food truck park in Ralston, meant to attract both local and out-of-town patrons, will serve as a means to grow businesses throughout the town.