

November 12, 2012

Mr. Helder Gil
Legislative Affairs Specialist
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
1100 Fourth Street, SW
Room 5164
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Mr. Gil -

I am writing to you as a DC citizen concerned about this article in the Washington Post that reports the implications the new rule would mean that 8 of 10 common food truck locations would be off limited to food trucks. The locations apparently do not meet the proposed regulation that "Food trucks may not vend from a parking spot adjacent to an 'unobstructed sidewalk' that's 'less than ten feet (10 ft.) wide in the Central Business District.' " (quote from the Washington Post).

As a student of international trade, I know that you can come up with the least trade restrictive regulations that get done what you need to do to regulate traffic flow, pedestrian safety, and parking. This provision sounds unnecessarily trade restrictive. Especially given the amount of park space open on the 21st & Virginia Ave, NW location.

I work at the U.S. Department of State, running an employee idea generation program in support of innovation, on behalf of the Office of the Secretary. I want to tell you my personal story about what having food trucks on 21st & Virginia Ave, NW has done for me and for my colleagues at the Department of State. I hope then you will understand why it is so important that we create an environment conducive to allowing the food truck culture to exist and flourish.

I work on innovation. Innovation - to essentially take on a project that is new to you with an uncertain, unknowable outcome - requires trust. Trust requires human contact in a safe environment. If you can laugh, have good food, experience the sunshine, get out of the office for a bit and mingle with others, then that goes a long way to creating trust.

The Department of State's office environment is very formal, and our cafeteria is filled with the buzz of business getting done. But when the food trucks come to 21st & Virginia Ave, we all have an opportunity to step outside - of the office, of our bureaucracy, of our staid work-a-day selves. We experience the zaniness of Fojol Brothers, with their funk music, hoola hoops and free picnic blankets. We enjoy the incredible cookies and warm smiles of Captain Cookie. We get the incredible fish tacos of Surfside - a restaurant that used to be in my neighborhood until I moved, and now I can catch them near work every now and again. (Those are a few of my favorites, and there are so many others.)

I once met with my boss and had a counseling and strategy session over a food truck picnic. I see entire offices get outside for the day. I find myself informally networking with colleagues who work in offices beyond the Harry S Truman building, as the Department of State has annexes all over the Foggy Bottom area. We all mingle around the 21st & Virginia Ave parks, when we rarely see each other informally, as we work in different buildings.

Steve Jobs famously designed Pixar studios so that the engineers and designers had to come out of their offices and congregate in the same open central area for bathrooms, coffee, and food. He did this on purpose because he knew the human relationships would be what makes Pixar amazing.

Since the food truck culture has taken over my corner of working DC (Foggy Bottom), I have seen people take advantage of a place to congregate and relax in the sunshine, become more human to one another, enjoy their work places more. On the employee idea generation forum that I run, our employees based in annexes in Virginia have asked how they can convince food trucks to come their way. Major creative cities - San Francisco and Portland - have incredible food truck cultures.

DC needs to be along side them with that reputation. DC needs the food trucks to keep our souls light, our bellies full, our humor amused, our communities congregating, so that at our workplaces, we can get down to the hard business of innovating and keeping our country running.

Please look for the least trade restrictive measures so that we can continue to have a flourishing food truck culture on 21st & Virginia Ave, NW, and indeed all around the city. Design the new rules to reinforce our nascent food truck culture.

Sincere regards,

Kerry O'Connor
Resident of Ward 4