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TO: City Planning Commission

FROM: Christopher J. Gulock, AICP, Deputy Director

RE: **Proposed Zoning Ordinance text amendment to Chapter 50 of the 2019 Detroit City Code to add regulations to establish "food truck pod" as a new land use, to add "temporary food truck" to the list of allowed temporary uses, and to add related regulations and definitions**

DATE: October 19, 2026

On October 22, 2026, the City Planning Commission (CPC) will hold a 5:15 PM public hearing to consider revisions to Chapter 50, *Zoning*, of the 2019 Detroit City Code, regulating food trucks on private property. The proposed text amendment would add regulations to establish "food truck pod" as a new food and beverage service land use, to add "temporary food truck" to the list of allowed temporary uses and to add related regulations and definitions. The proposed ordinance is attached for reference.

This effort includes minor amendments to Chapter 34 of the City Code which regulates Peddlers, Solicitors, and Vendors to ensure consistency with the proposed amendment to Chapter 50. The Chapter 34 amendments have been prepared by the Law Department. Both of these ordinances must be taken up by City Council in order to effectuate the proposed new amendments.

BACKGROUND

Current Regulations

Presently, the City has no specific zoning regulations allowing food trucks on private property. However, the City over the years has been allowing food trucks on a limited basis on private property under the Zoning Ordinance's (ZO) regulation of temporary uses and structures. Section 50-12-559 of the ZO allows the Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department (BSEED) to approve other temporary uses (not listed in the ZO) where it is determined that such uses would not jeopardize the health, safety or general welfare, or be injurious or detrimental to properties adjacent to, or in the vicinity of, the proposed location of the activity. BSEED estimates at any given time, there are 10 to 15 temporary permits for food trucks. However, it is assumed many of the food trucks on any given day have no land use permits.

Past Efforts & Food Truck Benefits

In 2012 and 2013, the CPC and City Council held public hearings on a ZO text amendment allowing and regulating food trucks; however, in part due to the City's dealing with bankruptcy, a text amendment was never approved.

Since that time, food trucks have remained and grown as a viable land use option. Below is a summary of some of the benefits of encouraging food trucks as reported by the American Planning Association (PAS Essential Info Packet Regulating Food Trucks November 2015):

- Food trucks provide opportunities for entrepreneurs and small businesses
- Food trucks can add interest, vibrancy, and activity to streetscapes and sites
- Food trucks can expand food access in areas underserved by traditional restaurants and offer fresh food options
- Food trucks can provide a stepping stone to opening a storefront business

In the past, there was some pushback to allowing food trucks, because it was said to be unfair competition with low overhead compared to brick-and-mortar restaurants, etc. Also, since it is primarily an outdoor use, there have been concerns voiced about litter, noise, fumes, etc. However, since last reviewed, food trucks have grown as a viable option that is a desired choice amongst customers, and it should be noted that many brick and mortar restaurants also have added food trucks as part of their operation.

Food Trucks on City Streets

In 2021, the City approved Ordinance No. 2021-44 which allowed food trucks for the first time along commercial corridors. Restrictions for vending on the street in the Central Business District (CBD) and Cultural Center (CC) remain. In this new ordinance, food trucks cannot operate on any residential street in the City and may only operate where on-street parking is allowed. In the event that the parking space is metered, the food truck is required to pay parking fees for the time they are parked. This ordinance opened up new opportunities for food trucks, but only on commercial corridors. Some of the regulations from this ordinance include:

- For the CBD and CC, food trucks are only allowed on the street in 2 zones in the CBD and 2 zones in the CC
- Food trucks cannot park on the street within 200 feet of a restaurant, K-12 school, or sports arena
- Food trucks cannot vend on a list of 14 restricted commercial corridors

Recent City Research

In early 2024, the Planning and Development Department (P&DD) expressed interest in allowing food trucks near the newly proposed Joe Louis Greenway, because there was often a lack of restaurants near the JLG which is a former rail line often running through industrial areas. Later that year, the Mayor's Office reached out to CPC staff and other interested departments to begin drafting new food truck regulations for private property in general.

A working group has met off and on for the past two years drafting the subject regulations. The City departments involved include the Mayor's Office, Housing and Revitalization Department (HRD), Detroit Health Department, Law Department, BSEED, and P&DD. Council Member Gabriella Santiago-Romero and her office also support regulations being added to the Code and have participated in drafting the proposed amendments.

SCOPE OF THE ORDINANCE

The proposed text amendment would add regulations to establish "food truck pod" as a new food and beverage service land use, to add "temporary food truck" to the list of allowed temporary uses and to add related regulations and definitions. The proposed ordinance is summarized below.

Food Truck Pods

The proposed amendment would add food truck pod as a specific land use within the food and beverage service use category as well as specific land use standards. Below are highlights of the proposed regulations:

- Food truck pods would be a by-right use in the following zoning districts: B2 (Local Business and Residential District), B3 (Shopping District), B4 (General Business District), B6 General Services District, M1 (Limited Industrial District), M2 (Restricted Industrial District), M3 (General Industrial District), TM (Transitional-Industrial District), MKT (Market and Distribution District), SD1 (Special Development District, Small-Scale-Mixed-Use District), SD2 (Special Development District, Mixed-Use), SD4 (Special Development District, Riverfront Mixed Use). *Being by-right would make it easier for small businesses and start-ups to operate. Pods would not be allowed in residential districts, B5 Major Business (which is mostly downtown), or M4 (Intensive Industrial) or M5 (Special Industrial) zoning districts. Most of the CBD consists of the B5 (Major Business), PC (Public Center), or PCA (Public Center Adjacent) zoning districts.*

- Food truck pods would be required to be reviewed through BSEED's site plan review process. *Since the uses are by-right and primarily an outdoor use, requiring site plan review would help ensure the sites are laid out safely for vehicles and pedestrians.*

- One or more food trucks are allowed at a pod. *As part of the permit review, BSEED would set the maximum based on the size of the site and the site plan.*

- There are no spacing restrictions from existing or future brick and mortar restaurants.

- Permanent accessory structures may be built to complement the food trucks, including bathrooms, storage, gazebos, etc. *These are limited to no more than 15% or the site or 500 square feet (whichever is less).*

Advantages of Food Truck Pods

While there may be more start-up costs at the front end, the following are some benefits to developing a food truck pod:

- It gives food trucks and customers greater business stability and predictability
- With long-term security, food trucks may be more inclined to invest in their business
- Pod owners can sell the business similar to the way other site-specific businesses are sold

Temporary Food Trucks

The proposed amendment would add temporary food trucks to the list of temporary uses and structures, including specific use standards. Highlights of these amendments are as follows:

- Temporary food trucks are ONLY allowed on land zoned B2, B3, B4, B6, M1, M2, M3, M4, PD (Planned Development), TM, MKT, SD1, SD2, and SD4. *Other zoning districts are only allowed for special events.*

- Temporary food trucks are not allowed in the Central Business District or Cultural Center unless in conjunction with a special event. *The proposed ordinance didn't want to disrupt the successful food truck offerings at Cadillac Square and Spirit Plaza.*

- Temporary uses need to be applied for on an annual basis and are good for up to 180 days per year.

- Food trucks must vacate the site after each day of operation.

- Temporary food trucks are not permitted within 100 feet of the doorway of any established standard restaurant, within 200 radial feet of a school site, or 200 feet from any sports arena or stadium.

Advantages of Temporary Food Trucks

The following are some benefits for temporary food trucks:

- A food truck can obtain a temporary food truck permit for multiple sites giving it flexibility
- A food truck with a temporary permit may prefer to vend only part of the year due to weather restrictions
- There are potentially less start-up costs if not making permanent site improvements

Standards Required for Both Food Truck Pods and Temporary Food Trucks

Below is a summary of standards proposed for both food truck pods and temporary food trucks:

- Food trucks may be developed on vacant land or alongside other principal uses (whether operating or not). *Therefore, food truck pods could redevelop vacant land for a new use or be established where there is an already existing commercial use, such as a retail store.*

- Food trucks must be parked, and customer service areas must be on a hard surface area.

- Food trucks must be located not less than 20 feet from land zoned or developed residential.

- Food trucks must be set back not less than 10 feet from any other food truck or structure.

- Food trucks on zoning lots adjacent to or across an alley from a lot containing a single- or two-family dwelling shall not operate between the hours of 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.

- The use of generators is not allowed on zoning lots abutting or across a street or alley from land zoned residential or developed with residential uses.

- Outdoor dining is allowed subject to site plan review.

- Toilet facilities for food truck employees must be located a reasonable distance from the food truck location, available during food truck hours of operation, and shall be identified as part of any site plan review.

Standards for Gas Stations

The City of Detroit has over 400 permitted gas stations. These sites, which have a range of sizes, provide needed services and are scattered throughout the entire City. The working group consulted with the Detroit Fire Marshal Division regarding the proposed amendment. The proposed amendment recommends that both food truck pods and temporary uses could be allowed at gas stations, subject to the spacing standards summarized below:

- Food trucks must maintain a minimum distance of 100 feet from any underground storage tank refueling area and vent pipes, and
- Food trucks must be positioned at least 50 feet away from any active fuel pump.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Types of Food Trucks & Regulations

Currently food trucks in Michigan fall under one of two categories: a mobile food establishment (MFE) or a special transitory food unit (STFU). In general, a MFE is a food service establishment that operates from a vehicle, which returns to a mobile food service establishment commissary for servicing and maintenance at least once every 24 hours, and a STFU is a temporary food establishment that is licensed to operate throughout the state without the 14-day limits. Both of these definitions have been copied from the existing Chapter 34 and added into Chapter 50.

Business Licenses

In order to guarantee quality food service, food trucks are required to obtain licenses from two different agencies. First, food trucks must apply to a health department (which includes the Detroit Health Department) for a food service establishment license, a state requirement that includes all of the health and sanitation inspections. Second, the food truck must apply to BSEED for a City business license. These two licenses will remain in addition to the newly proposed building permit for a food truck pod and temporary use permit for a temporary food truck.

Community Outreach

HRD's Jobs and Economy Division lead the City's efforts, in cooperation with other working group members, to present the draft ordinance to various groups. In addition to residents, outreach meetings were held with food truck owners and operators, food truck consultants, the Michigan Restaurant and Lodging Association (MRLA), and the Department of Neighborhoods community presentations (referred to as the DONcast). Two in-person meetings were held at Eastern Market. The majority of the feedback from the outreach was positive, with edits made along the way based on feedback Both residents and food truck owners stressed the need for fair and strong enforcement to bring into compliance any food trucks not following the new rules. Below is a summary table of outreach sessions, dates, and attendees.

Session	Dates	Attendees
Focus Group # 1 - Virtual	September 19th, 2025	3

Focus Group # 2 - Virtual	October 6th, 2025	1
Focus Group # 3 - Virtual	October 13th, 2025	5
Focus Group # 4 - Virtual	October 27th, 2025	7
Focus Group # 5 - Virtual	November 10th, 2025	2
Doncast # 1- Virtual	November 17th, 2025	40
Focus Group # 6 - Virtual	December 1st, 2025	4
Focus Group # 7 - In Person	February 11th, 2026	41
Doncast # 2- Virtual	June 1st, 2026	50
Focus Group # 8 - In Person	June 3rd, 2026	30
Focus Group # 9 - Virtual	June 23rd, 2026	10
Focus Group # 10 - MRLA	July 15th, 2026	7
Focus Group # 10 - Virtual	July 27th, 2026	11
Total # of people spoken to:		**211**

Table summarizing outreach dates and attendees

Zoning Text Amendments

Section 50-3-49 of the ZO lists approval criteria for zoning text amendments. The criteria are summarized below:

1. Whether the proposed amendment is consistent with the stated purposes of this chapter;
2. Whether the proposed amendment will protect the health, safety, or general welfare of the public; and
3. Whether the proposed amendment corrects an error or meets the challenge of some changing condition, trend or fact.

Attachment

cc: Dara O'Byre, Deputy Director P&DD
Greg Moots, P&DD
Mona Ali, HRD
Scott Withingham, Detroit Health Dept.
James Foster, BSEED
Charles Reed, BSEED
Danial Arking, Law Dept.