

ROBERTO CURTO FOR MAYOR

STREET VENDING REVIVAL

**A Proposal To Expand Street Vending and Support
Local Entrepreneurs.**



**More Flavours. More Opportunity.
More Life On Our Streets.**

curto.ca

More Than Hot Dogs

A street-vending plan for a more vibrant, entrepreneurial Toronto

The idea. Toronto should treat street vending as a normal part of city life and small-business creation, not as a novelty that City Hall has to curate. I love a hot dog stand. I just don't think hot dogs should be the limit of our imagination.

What Went Wrong Last Time?

Toronto has tried this before. The 2009 Toronto a la Cart pilot was designed to introduce more diverse street food, but City Hall wrapped the idea in a highly controlled experiment. The program was approved for up to 15 vendors and launched with only eight. The City's own review concluded that location, product and marketing were critical to success and that food-safety risks could be managed with proper precautions.

The lesson is not that diverse street food failed. The lesson is that over-designed experiments can kill creative ideas before they have a chance to become normal city life. Eight carefully curated carts were never going to transform Toronto's public realm or create a meaningful street-vending economy.

The principle: regulate the basics, not the creativity

We need rules for food safety, accessibility, pedestrian clearance, sanitation, fire safety and where a cart can physically operate. We do not need City Hall choosing cuisines, designing carts or deciding what Toronto's street-food culture should look like. No cuisine quotas. No curated menu. Make room for entrepreneurs and let Toronto surprise us; dumplings, dosas, bifanas, tacos, coffee, baked goods, flowers, books, something strange, something great, or something nobody at City Hall thought of!!

The plan

Make vending a normal business category. Move away from special, highly controlled pilots. If an applicant meets clear health, safety and public space rules, the default should be to let them operate.

End sidewalk location fees. Keep a reasonable licence/permit system to manage vendors and locations, but eliminate Toronto's separate sidewalk location charges. Current food cart rules can add thousands of dollars in location fees before a vendor sells anything.

Create a simple vending map. Toronto currently tells applicants to find and assess their own sidewalk location and does not maintain a list of available locations. Publish an easy map showing permitted and restricted streets, similar in spirit to New York's location based approach.

Replace protectionism with public-realm rules. Review blanket separation requirements from restaurants and other vendors. The City's job should be keeping sidewalks passable and safe, not insulating existing businesses from every nearby competitor.

One clear application. Bring licensing, location approval and relevant requirements into one plain-language process, with multilingual help for first time entrepreneurs.

Let vendors choose the product and cart. Set practical size, accessibility, food safety and fire standards, then get out of the design business. Do not repeat a la Cart's over curated model.

Build vending into better streets. Make vendors part of pedestrianized streets, plazas, parks and high-footfall areas. Provide garbage, seating and other public realm basics where clusters make sense.

Start where Toronto wants more life. Connect vending to revitalization efforts such as Queen Street West and other pedestrian focused areas. Street food, music, seating, markets and cultural programming can reinforce one another.

What to borrow from New York (and what not to)

New York regulates where vendors can operate with concrete street rules: minimum sidewalk widths, distance from entrances and crosswalks, cart-size limits and restricted-street maps. It is also expanding mobile-food-vending access by thousands of permits. Toronto does not need to copy New York's entire licensing system. New York has had its own permit scarcity problems but we can borrow the basic idea: lots of legal entrepreneurship, clear location rules, and less municipal curation.

Why it matters

Street vending is small-business policy, public-realm policy and culture policy at the same time. It lowers the barrier to trying an idea, creates reasons to linger on a street, gives newcomers and small entrepreneurs a visible foothold, and lets Toronto's diversity show up in everyday city life. A creative city cannot be created by committee. Sometimes City Hall's job is simply to set fair rules, make room and let people make the city more interesting.

Sources / policy context

City of Toronto, Street Vending Bylaw Review (2026): recent changes include lifting the sidewalk-vending moratorium in Wards 10, 11 and 13 and extending food-truck operating periods.

City of Toronto, Vending Carts (Food and Non-Food): current licensing, location, clearance and sidewalk location-fee requirements.

City of Toronto, Toronto a la Cart review (2009): pilot approved for up to 15 vendors, implemented with eight; City identified location, product and marketing as critical success factors.

NYC Business / NYC Health, Street Vending and Mobile Food Vendors (2026): location rules and expansion of mobile-food-vending permits.