



Vending and *PITTSBURGH'S* Just Transition

CITY OF PITTSBURGH





Vending and Pittsburgh's Just Transition

2025

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Executive Summary

Pittsburgh needs to modernize its approach to food trucks and carts, mobile retail, sidewalk sales, and other vending businesses.

This report discusses the challenges experienced by food, merchandise, and other vendors working in the City of Pittsburgh. It documents the impacts of vending policy on mobile and brick-and-mortar business owners, regulators, and the broader community and envisions the potential future of vending. The recommendations presented here aim to develop a transparent, efficient, and equitable program and expand entrepreneurship opportunities, while maintaining the program financially and effectively upholding regulations.

This program has the opportunity to build on recent successes, such as DOMI's Outdoor Dining & Retail License and the debut of OneStopPGH. From numerous discussions, learnings from other cities, and survey feedback, the project team has developed a set of recommended policy changes and strategies to support the vending program.

The current vending program's structure presents substantial challenges for business owners (mobile and brick-and-mortar) and regulators.

1. **Location restrictions and permitting challenges:** Under current policy, applicants navigate a small volume of permitted locations, both on the street and sidewalk and on private property, a lengthy and largely ineffective process for adding new options for stationary vending locations, and confusing regulations.
2. **Unsustainable fee structure and compliance support:** The City struggles to support vendors acting in good faith due to a lack of investment in the program, inadequate fees to sustain it, and limited resources to ensure compliance with regulations. Confusing regulations additionally present a challenge for enforcement and community members looking to report violations.

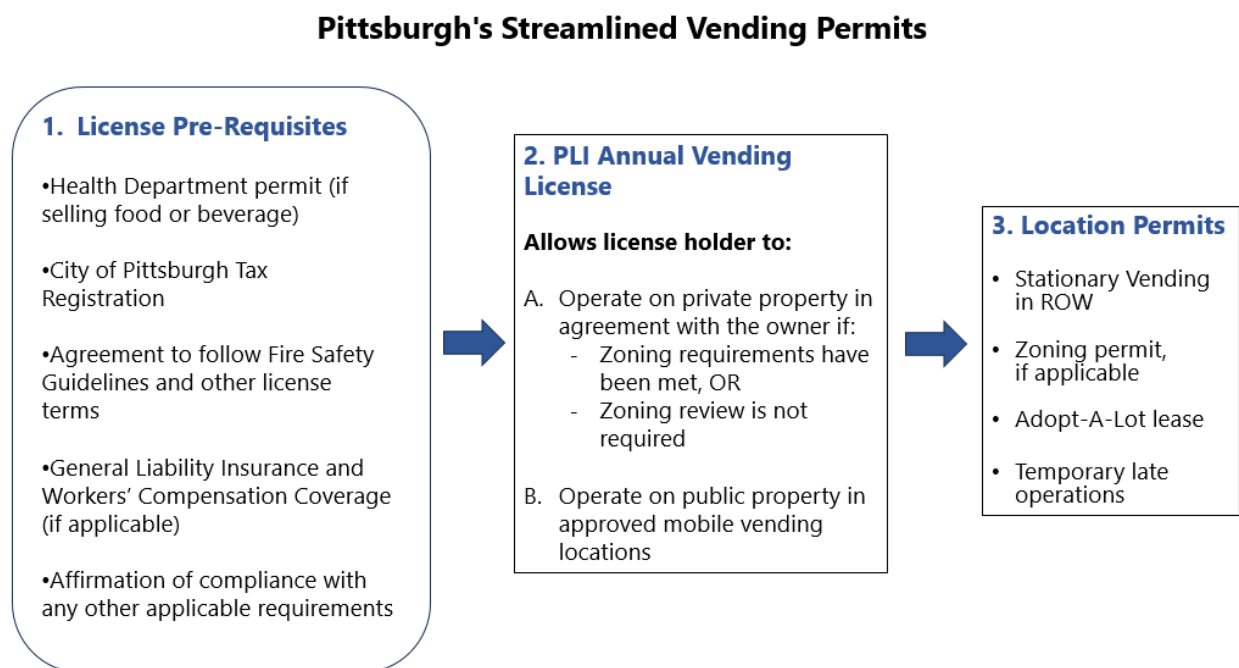
To promote economic opportunity and vibrancy in Pittsburgh's business districts, we recommend the following policy changes:

1. Create an **integrated permitting process** with a single entry point and customer support. PLI's updated Annual Vending License would apply to vending on public or private property, and additional permits would be administered depending on location (See Figure 1).
2. Transition **from site-by-site evaluation to criteria-based evaluation** for vending locations. Designate specific vending locations Downtown, in parks, and other districts determined to require additional scrutiny. **Eliminate the formal Street and Sidewalk Vending Site Designation Committee.**
3. Outline a process for establishing a **group vending zone on public property**. Generally, a separation of 50 feet would be required for vending in the street or sidewalk, but this process would waive that requirement.

4. Update license rules and regulations:
 - a. Eliminate the 4-hour limit for mobile vending
 - b. Publish Fire Safety guidelines
 - c. Explore opportunities for temporary later operating hours
5. **Amend the Pittsburgh Zoning Code** to expand vending opportunities and clarify permitting:
 - a. Expand zoning permissions for Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, Non-Accessory Use
 - b. Outline exemptions for zoning permits and process for compliance
 - c. Update definitions and use standards for Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, Accessory and Non-Accessory.
6. Add vending as an option in the Vacant Lot Toolkit

Additional strategies identified include developing resources to support vendors in starting a business and complying with regulations, developing new informational materials, supporting a pipeline from vending to starting a brick-and-mortar storefront or vending in addition to operating a brick-and-mortar location, and facilitating relationships among business owners and agencies. The report includes strategies for continued partnership across agencies to support innovative business models and further streamline the licensing process.

Figure 1: Proposed integrated vending permits



Introduction

Vending, or the outdoor sale of food, merchandise, or other goods and services, encourages foot traffic, vibrant placemaking, convenient products, and accessible entry points to entrepreneurship. Vending businesses are subject to many of the same regulations as brick-and-mortar establishments, such as Allegheny County's food safety standards, business registrations, and taxes. Additionally, the City of Pittsburgh governs the location and operating requirements for vendors.

Requirements vary based on the type of vending unit and whether activity takes place on private or public property. To operate on the street or sidewalk, vendors must obtain a Stationary Vendor or Mobile Vehicular Vendor License from the Department of Permits, Licenses, & Inspections. To operate on private property, vendors must follow rules for zoning and permitting. However, vendors have had difficulty navigating regulations and finding allowable locations in a timely manner. Over the years, the program's framework has become increasingly outdated, creating frustration for vendors, brick-and-mortar establishments, and regulators.

These factors have created a need to evaluate and update Pittsburgh's vending program to become more transparent, efficient, and equitable. Especially as finding brick-and-mortar spaces for business becomes increasingly inaccessible, vending is a component of building economic opportunity in Pittsburgh. Properly leveraged, vending can support existing and new brick-and-mortars through collaborative partnerships.

Across the US, cities have taken a variety of approaches to vending regulations. The most recent wave has been in the years since the Great Recession, but the debate over who should use the street and in what manner goes back as far as debates over shared space. As entrepreneurs have innovated sales and service models through the flexibility of vending, cities have grappled with fitting changing trends into longstanding legal frameworks. In the early 21st Century, food trucks became an incubator for new food conceptions, but cities were working from decades-old rules that accounted only for ice cream trucks and hot dog carts. Street vending was and still is stigmatized as illegitimate and unsanitary, but cities have increasingly attempted to push back against this stigma and create regulations that allow innovation while maintaining health and safety standards.

In all of this, no single standard approach to regulation has emerged. Cities have varying physical and social environments and have adapted regulations to local context. At the same time, there are clear patterns across cities that have successfully developed their vending programs to meet the needs of their business and residential communities. In this work, City of Pittsburgh staff evaluated current regulations and opportunities to build a more efficient and equitable program. The team researched writings on vending policy, met with regulators in other cities, held focus groups and small discussions, and collected input online. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City, led by the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure, developed standards for commercial use of Pittsburgh's streets and sidewalks for the Outdoor Dining & Retail License (*Outdoor Dining & Operations Program*, n.d.). Together, this work identified a set of Best Practices applicable to Pittsburgh and Recommendations for policy changes, program

administration, and investment. This work is documented in this report, which aims to outline a framework for a transparent, efficient, and equitable vending program that will better serve Pittsburgh's residents and business community. The project team will continue to work with project partners to refine policies and next steps.

This research coincides with the development of Pittsburgh 2050, the effort on track to become the first adopted comprehensive plan in Pittsburgh's history. The ethical framing of this work is that of a Just Transition, a concept developed in labor movements and formalized by the Climate Justice Alliance. The plan focuses on four principles of this concept under the umbrella of Democratic Governance: Equitable Redistribution of Resources, Social and Ecological Wellbeing for All, Retaining Cultural Heritage, and Regenerative Economies & Life-Affirming Work. These principles frame life-affirming work and equitable entry points to the economy as rights to which every Pittsburgh resident is entitled. Life-affirming work, equitable entry points to the economy, and low-overhead entrepreneurship opportunities are far from guaranteed for Pittsburghers today, and vending policy is one avenue the City can use to diversify economic options for Pittsburghers.

Project Scope and Process

Numerous City Departments, led by The Departments of Permits, Licenses, & Inspections, Mobility and Infrastructure, and City Planning, as well as the Office of Nighttime Economy collaborated to develop this policy framework. The Departments also worked with the Urban Redevelopment Authority to identify opportunities for Pittsburgh's regulators and investors to support entrepreneurship beyond changes to City's licensing process for vendors. Additional government departments, business district professionals, and vending business owners participated in discussions on the current policy and visions for changes.

The remainder of this report summarizes this collective work to date and sets out policy recommendations for stakeholders to continue refining and develop into finalized legislation. The following sections describe the Current Program, Challenges, Best Practices, and Recommendations.

The overall goals of this research, engagement, and program updates are as follows:

1. Develop a clear, transparent, and efficient process for matching vendors with appropriate locations in the right-of-way
2. Expand opportunities for vending in the right-of-way and on public and private property
3. Prevent forced movement of vendors, and have a clear process in place for when this is unavoidable
4. Promote equity between stationary and mobile vendors
5. Become a national leader in supporting vending as a means of economic mobility and incubation opportunity
6. Develop a strategic and equitable fee structure that addresses licensing, inspection, maintenance, vacant lot use, trash collection, use of parking, and/or other considerations

To identify challenges and paths forward, we researched best practices, hosted an Engage Pittsburgh survey, held two focus groups, and had numerous conversations with City staff that inform this report. Information on this work has been distributed to businesses, including current vending licenses holders and an email list of hospitality businesses maintained by the Office of Nighttime Economy. The project team has also presented to the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs Welcoming Communities network and reached out to vendors at the Greater Pittsburgh Food Truck Festival. Feedback on this report and additional engagement in Summer 2025 will refine policy proposals and shape implementation. In this window, we will continue to receive feedback from stakeholders already engaged and seek to reach additional community members who did not have a chance to connect in the first round of discussion. More details on engagement thus far are available in Appendix A.

Current Program

In Pittsburgh's Code of Ordinances, the Stationary Vendor and Mobile Vehicular Vendor Licenses are governed by Chapter 719, Vendors and Peddlers. This Chapter defines a vendor as "any person, whether a resident of the City of Pittsburgh or not, who sells or offers for sale goods, wares, merchandise, meats, fish, vegetables, fruits, garden truck, farm products, or provisions from an approved vending station," in the case of a Stationary Vendor, or "from an approved vending vehicle that shall not remain at any one (1) location for a period of greater than four (4) hours," in the case of a Mobile Vehicular Vendor (City of Pittsburgh, PA, n.d.). In its current form, this chapter refers only to vending activity in the street or sidewalk (the Right-of-Way). Details of the program are established in the PLI Rules & Regulations pursuant to the framework established in Chapter 719 (Licensing Rules and Regulations, 2022).

Mobile Vehicular Vendors are not licensed for specific locations but are generally licensed for operations in Pittsburgh, contingent on following all regulations and paying for the use of metered spaces. Stationary Vendors choose locations from a pre-existing list. If an applicant wishes to use a spot not already approved, they must nominate the site for review by the Street and Sidewalk Vending Site Designation Committee (SVC), which is made up of representatives from the Mayor's Office, Department of Public Works, Department of City Planning, Public Parking Authority, Parks, Recreation & Youth Policy, Department of Mobility & Infrastructure, Department of Permits, Licenses, & Inspections, and two licensed vendors.

If the site is approved by the SVC, it is sent to City Council for final action. If the location is approved, it is publicly offered to any interested vendor through a lottery, and the initial nominator might not be able to claim the spot. Approved stationary vending locations are listed in §719.10 of the City Code. Even if a location is approved, vendors must pass an inspection by the Department of Mobility & Infrastructure (DOMI) before their license is finalized. If a vending unit is too large for the specific site or DOMI finds that conditions are such that vending is no longer suitable, the City must work with the Stationary Vendor to find another suitable location. Once approved for a site, a Stationary Vendor is allowed to use the location for the duration of their license and is only obligated to move their vending unit at the request of the City.

Mobile Vehicular Vendors, who must operate from trucks or trailers that can safely operate in the parking lane, are permitted to use metered parking spots in non-residential areas and in selected locations in Schenley Park (Bob O'Connor Golf Course, Flagstaff Hill, and Schenley Oval) and Frick Park (Tennis court parking lot and Frick Environmental Center) outlined in §719.05C of the Code. Vendors must pay for parking and move at least once every four hours. Current allowed locations for both types of vendors are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Per Ordinance 2023-1818, Mobile Vehicular Vendors are prohibited in the Mount Washington metered area. In specified areas, including the City's major sports and events facilities, Market Square, directly adjacent to Schenley Plaza, and in the Strip District, the City does not have jurisdiction to regulate vending (*Maps of Prohibited Vending Locations*, 2014).

Figure 2: Current allowed areas for mobile vehicular vendors

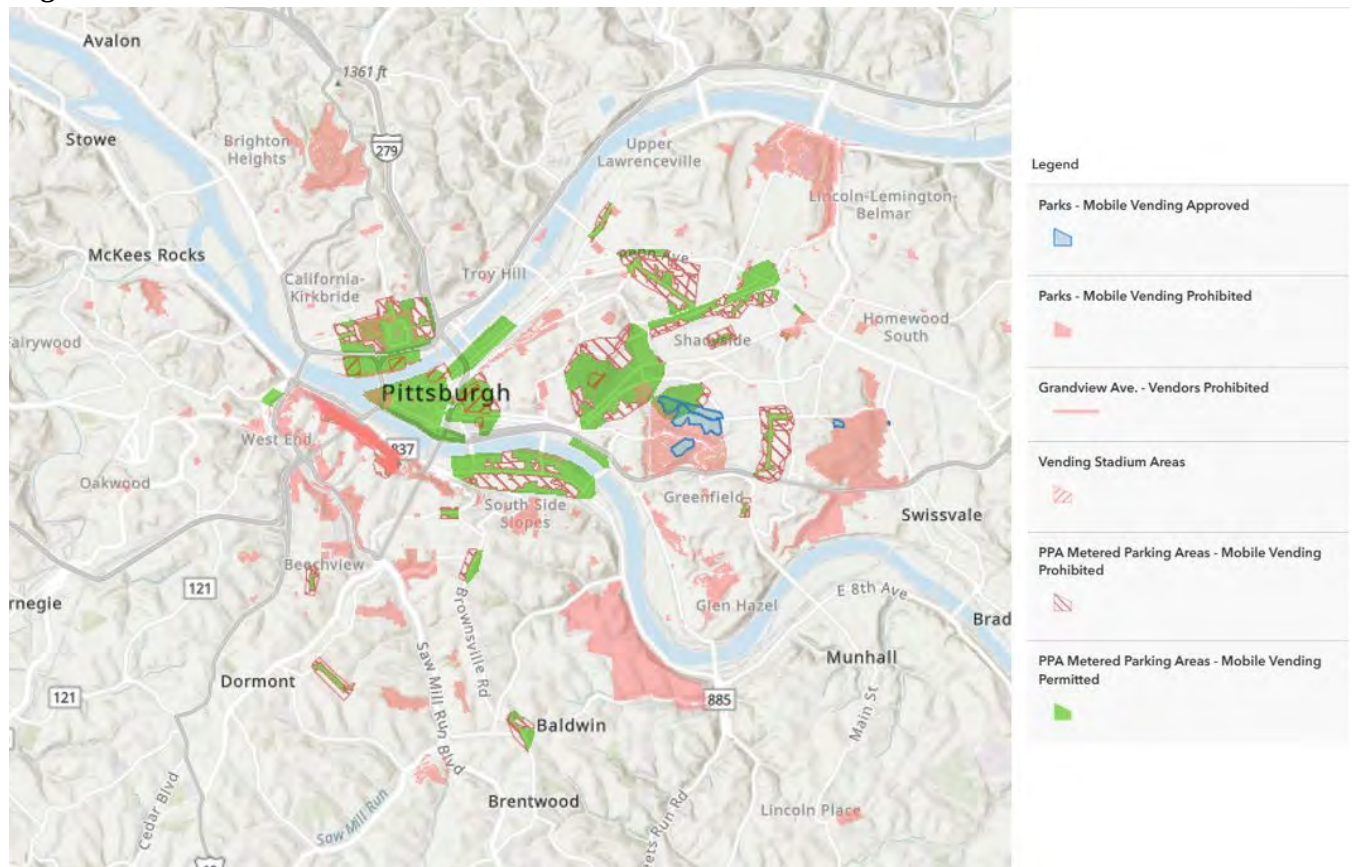


Figure 3: Current allowed areas for Stationary Vendors

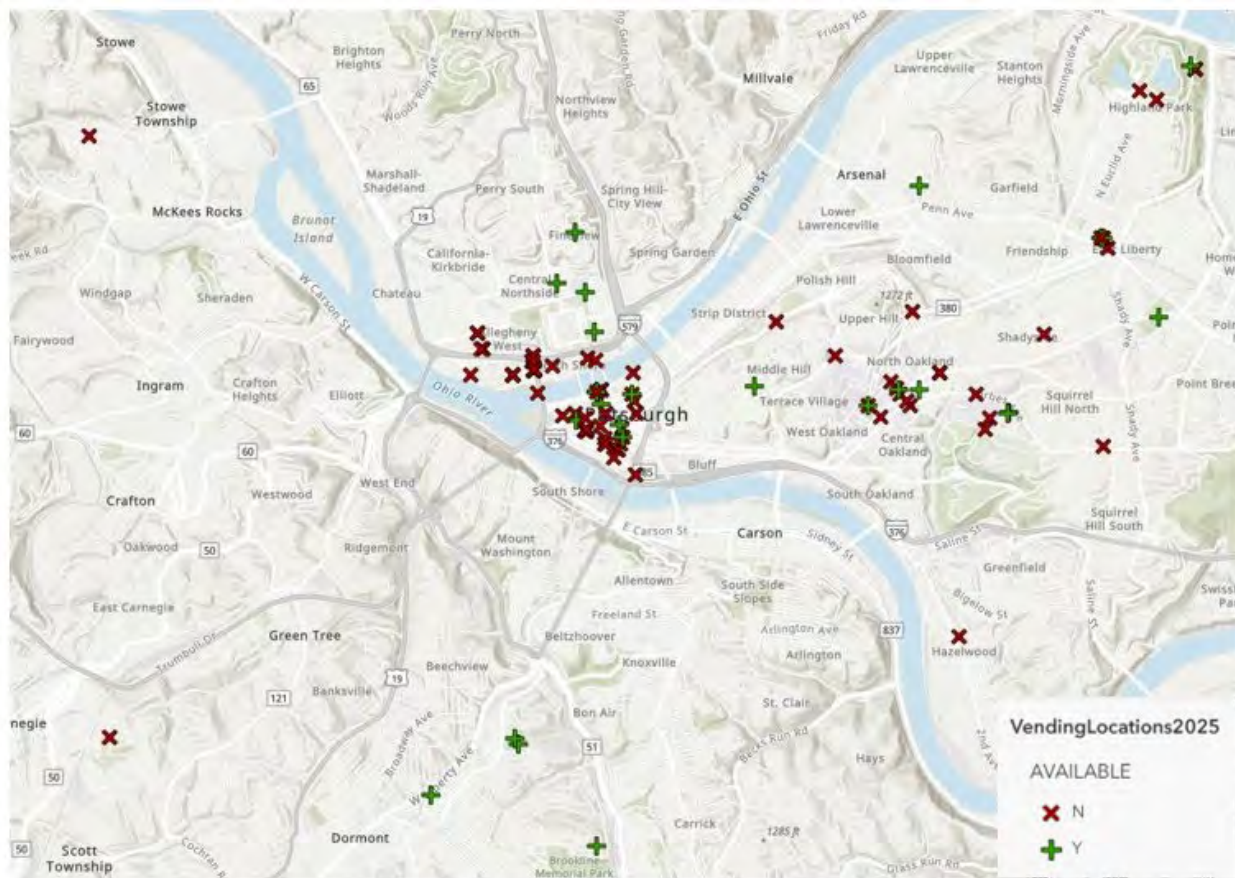
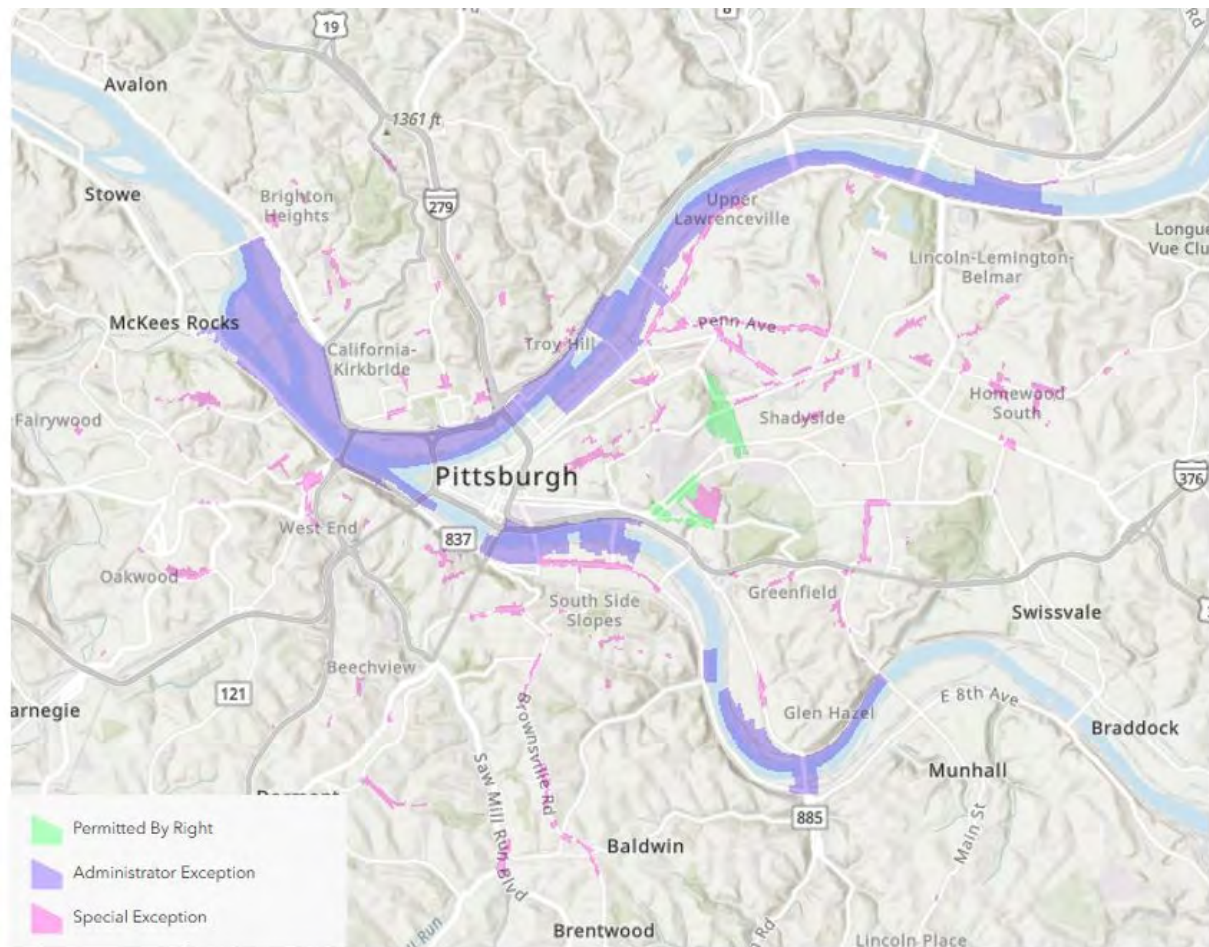


Figure 4: Current zoning districts authorizing vending as a primary use on private property



In 2000, City Council passed Ordinance 2000-0203, which outlined the current framework of Chapter 719 and the Street and Sidewalk Vending Site Designation Committee. This was intended to increase regulation of vendors and provide protections from competition among vendors and between vendors and brick-and-mortar establishments. As the emerging food truck trend came to Pittsburgh, City Council updated the policy in 2015 to allow new flexibility for Mobile Vehicular Vendors through Ordinance 2015-2185.

Under current policy, vending on private property does not require a license but is subject to zoning, building, and other regulations for the use of private property. The Zoning Code determines where vending is permitted and what use standards vendors must meet. Vendors operating on private lots as a secondary activity to something else (such as a bar, retail store, urban farm, or religious institution) are regulated under the Outdoor Retail Sales & Services (Accessory) Use. If operating on a private lot as the primary use, this would be considered Outdoor Retail Sales & Services (Non-Accessory). There is currently no pathway to vending on City-owned vacant lots, but vending could activate some of these lots, especially in areas without space for vending in the public right-of-way.

The City does not collect information on vendors operating solely on private property, and both internal and external stakeholders have expressed confusion about requirements for complying with zoning standards when vending is an accessory use on a lot. Thus, while compliance with zoning requirements is relatively low, vendors have not been presented with a clear pathway to compliance. When vending is the primary use on a lot, compliance is more straightforward. However, Outdoor Retail Sales & Services as a primary use is currently restricted to only a few zoning districts in the City, as shown in Figure 4.

Estimating the number of vendors operating in Pittsburgh is challenging. The City of Pittsburgh tracks active vending licenses, but this does not include vendors operating solely on private property or vendors out of compliance. A November 2024 snapshot of licenses reflected 45 active stationary vendor and 31 active mobile vendor licenses (one vendor or business can hold multiple licenses, for example if alternating between stationary locations). The Allegheny County Health Department tracks the number of Mobile Food Facility licenses issued, but this does not include non-food vending. County Mobile Food Facilities also include many businesses not considered vending, such as concessions providers within stadiums. Finally, County data tracks geography based on commissary location, not operations location. As of March 2025, ACHD had active permits for about 140 Mobile Food Facilities with commissary facilities in the City of Pittsburgh.

Because each city has its own processes for licensing, permits, and data collection, it is difficult to directly compare number of licenses. However, we can still make rough comparisons between Pittsburgh's numbers and those of peer cities, with the caveat that these each reflect different locations and types of vending (ROW, on lots, varying structures). Some of these estimates include non-food vendors (Philadelphia, Oakland, City of Pittsburgh), but others do not (Allegheny County, Denver, Portland, Austin). Table 1 compares vending numbers across peer cities. Tables 2 and 3 compare permit fees and allowed locations.

Table 1: Vending Licenses for Peer Cities

City	Population (2020 Census)	Vending Permits/Type	Source
Pittsburgh	303K	76 ROW Licenses; 137 Mobile Food Facility Permits	<i>City of Pittsburgh Vending Licenses, 2024; Allegheny County Mobile Food Census List, Pittsburgh, 2025.</i>
Allegheny County	1.2 mil	451 Mobile Food Facility Permits	<i>Allegheny County Food Facilities, 2025</i>
Philadelphia	1.6 mil	650 ROW Vendors	City of Philadelphia Staff, personal communication, 2025
Denver	716 K	680 ROW and Private Property Vendors	City and County of Denver Staff, personal communication, 2024-2025
Portland	653 K	500 Food Carts	<i>Portland Food Cart Finder, n.d.</i>
Austin	962K	2000 Food Trucks	<i>Austin Food Trucks & Trailers, n.d.</i>
Oakland	441K	120 Vendors	City of Oakland Staff, personal communication, 2025

Table 2: Permit Fees for Peer Cities

City	Fees charged for base permits (not including parking fees, fire permits, health certificates, or business licenses)	Source
Pittsburgh	\$135 for License	<i>2025 Fee Schedule, Departments of Permits, Licenses, & Inspections, 2025</i>
Philadelphia	\$330 per location for General Vending; additional fees for Special Vending Districts	<i>Vending and Street Sales, n.d.</i>
Denver	\$150 base application	<i>New Retail Food Mobile Application - Food Truck or Food Cart, n.d.</i>
Portland	\$60 application fee and \$75 permit fee for vending (plus an insurance processing fee). Most vendors must have a business license but not a separate permit; when zoning review is required, the base fee is \$150	<i>Apply for a Vending Cart Permit in the Right-of-Way, n.d.; Building and Other Permits Fee Schedule, n.d., p.11</i>
Austin	Sidewalk Vending: \$440 Permit Application and \$715 Space Rental (plus 4% technology fees) Mobile Retail: \$82 Development Review (plus 6% technology fees) Mobile Food Vending is managed by the Health Department.	<i>Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Approved Fees, n.d.; Other Permits and Fees, 2025; Health Department Permit Fee Schedule, 2024</i>
Oakland	\$400 for non-motorized pushcart; \$483 for food trucks, trailers, and large pushcarts	<i>Mobile Vending Application, 2023, p.5</i>

Table 3: Allowed Vending Locations for Peer Cities

City	Allowed Locations	Source
Pittsburgh	Metered parking spots, approved stationary vending locations; select private property	<i>City of Pittsburgh, PA: Vendors and Peddlers</i> , n.d.; <i>City of Pittsburgh, PA: Zoning Code</i> , n.d.; <i>Licensing Rules and Regulations</i> , 2022
Philadelphia	Any street that meets criteria and is not prohibited; additional process for Special Vending Districts; regulated as a takeout restaurant on private property	<i>Vending and Street Sales</i> , n.d.; City of Philadelphia Staff, personal communication, 2025
Denver	Most streets as long as meet criteria, prohibited in Central Business District; on private property in most commercial and mixed-use areas, industrial areas, some open space, and downtown outside of the CBD	<i>Mobile Retail Food Truck, Trailer and Cart Guide</i> , n.d.
Portland	Most streets but limited to stopping for 10 minutes if adjacent to residences; some sidewalks that meet criteria; on private property in commercial, mixed use, employment, industrial, and campus areas, with more restrictions for large trailers.	<i>Mobile Vending Carts and Food Carts on Private Property Portland.gov</i> , n.d.; <i>Sidewalk Vending Cart Application Packet</i> , 2016
Austin	Limited operations in the public right-of-way; on private property in commercial and most industrial zones as long as buffers are met, but buffers and zoning restrictions do not apply if vending for less than three hours	<i>Austin Code § 25-2-812 – Mobile Food Establishments</i> , n.d.; <i>Austin Code § 25-2-818 – Mobile Retail Establishments</i> , n.d.; <i>Frequently Asked Questions about the City of Austin's Mobile Food Establishment Ordinance</i> , 2018; <i>Mobile Retail Establishments</i> , n.d.
Oakland	Sidewalk, streets, and private property that meets criteria in commercial and industrial zones; use of publicly-owned lots through special application	<i>Mobile Vending</i> , n.d.

Challenges

The experiences shared by stakeholders within and outside government revealed a set of challenges in Pittsburgh's current vending environment. Compared to peer cities, Pittsburgh has a relatively small number of active, licensed vendors. Factors influencing this include: 1) a small volume of allowed vending locations, 2) a difficult process for adding new sites for Stationary Vendors, 3) complex and confusing regulations, 4) an unsustainable fee schedule 5) a need for more compliance assistance.

1) Small volume of allowed vending locations

As discussed above, vendors face a limited set of options for setting up in the right-of-way, especially for stationary vendors. While part of the challenge in expanding available locations is that Pittsburgh's landscape includes many narrow sidewalks and steep roads, a restrictive approach to approving locations plays a large role. Not only do locations have to be pre-approved in legislation, but the criteria for an approvable location have not been standardized or published. The Mobile Vehicular Vendor license requires moving every four hours and restricts residential zones altogether, even for a brief stop. Parks are essentially off limits to vendors with a handful of exceptions, yet both vendors and potential customers have expressed interest in the use of park space.

Vendors turning to private property are not guaranteed to find a suitable location there, and nonetheless, a vendor's business model might require setting up directly in the sidewalk or street to catch foot traffic. On private property, vending as a primary use is prohibited in most types of commercial and mixed use districts. As an accessory use, it is permitted more broadly, but as discussed above, ambiguity in regulations has left constituents unsure of what the requirements are for complying with and enforcing policy on private property.

Finally, a lack of pathways for use of City-owned vacant property also leaves a potentially valuable resource for vendors untapped. Recent work planning the future of Pittsburgh's vacant land has identified city-owned parcels that might be suitable for commercial use and can inform which lots are made available for vending.

2) Difficult process for adding new Stationary Vending locations

The Street and Sidewalk Vending Site Designation Committee (SVC) governs permitted locations for street and sidewalk vendors in the public right-of-way, and its decisions are finalized through City Council. The Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections can issue licenses to stationary vendors only in these approved locations. These licenses are renewed annually through a vendor-initiated process.

If a vendor wishes to locate at a site not previously approved, they must nominate the site for review by SVC. The majority of these nominations are denied, and none have been approved in recent years. Common reasons include too narrow of a right-of-way, barriers or planned construction projects, or the prohibition on vending in City parks, but consistent criteria have not been clearly articulated and made available to the public. The current model has the

SVC meet twice a year to review nominations. If a vendor submits an application and must wait up to six months for a response, they could have missed their desired window of operation or peak season.

Anyone can nominate a site for vending, but in practice vendors themselves have been the primary users of process. However, new sites are given out in a lottery, and the nominator does not get priority in site distribution. The current site nomination process puts the burden of nominating eligible sites on vendors, but these vendors do not receive preference if multiple parties are interested in using a site after approval. Available sites are limited and slow to respond to market demand, and criteria for approvable sites are not clearly outlined. This creates a disincentive to obtain a license before operating or to operate within the City altogether.

3) Complex and confusing regulations

Vendors, brick-and-mortar business owners, and even City regulators have expressed confusion around vending in parks, the distinction between vending and special events, requirements for vending on private property, and other operating standards for vending. Vendors operating outside the ROW are referred to zoning processes, but public information on what this entails is not easily accessible. There is also confusion about where Mobile and Stationary vendors are permitted and prohibited and what types of structures are allowed. For example, trailers might be too large for the sidewalk but not easily moveable enough for the street.

In addition to clarifying and simplifying regulations, there are some important gaps to address through collaboration across departments. For example, there is opportunity for collaboration with the Bureau of Fire to administer fire safety standards and with the Department of Public Safety to collaborate on policy development and compliance support. Vendors have asked to see more coordination between the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Health department to improve the permitting process for vendors and reduce points of confusion.

The Stationary Vendor licensing process has created confusion for both applicants and regulators. The policy for both Stationary and Mobile vending can be so challenging for vendors to follow that it has led some to preference locations outside the city or to avoid compliance altogether. Lack of compliance and low volume of licenses leaves the City with missed revenue while bearing costs associated with use of facilities. These challenges also frustrate vendors who do comply with regulations because it can make their efforts feel fruitless.

4) Unsustainable fee structure

The City charges mobile and stationary vendors each \$135 for an annual license (2025 *Fee Schedule, Departments of Permits, Licenses, & Inspections*, 2025). If changes to the current program increase cost of administration, these fees may need to increase as well. This fee already is below the actual cost of administration. For example, vending in parks could cost a

premium due to increased maintenance, or fees for using parking spaces could be increased to mitigate concerns that vendors are not investing as much in their locations as brick-and-mortar establishments. Creating an integrated license with additional permits and building a program that overall can support vendors will come with higher fees. At the same time, it is crucial that the fee structure not present a financial burden to businesses and that resources offered are worth the cost associated with becoming a licensed vendor.

5) Need for more compliance assistance

The Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections is responsible for ensuring compliance with vending regulations. While PLI is able to offer administrative citations, the agency does not have direct policing power. As of now, the agency does not have staff regularly working in the evening and on weekends, and police officers are asked to intervene when potential violations have occurred. Vendors and brick-and-mortar businesses have both experienced frustration with compliance. Because much of this enforcement is complaint-based, entrepreneurs of color can be particularly vulnerable to receiving a disproportionate number of complaints. At the same time, unlicensed vending has also occurred, and updating regulations and compliance strategy can help mitigate this in the future. To uphold the City's regulations, officers need clear information about policies and how to manage violations. The Bureau of Police and PLI also have opportunity to create new ways to support unlicensed vendors to come into compliance.

Precedent: Outdoor Dining and Retail

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Pittsburgh's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure launched new temporary Outdoor Dining Guidelines to allow businesses to operate safely. This was formalized into the new Outdoor Dining & Retail License in 2022. The program's development addressed important considerations about the use of the street and sidewalk that apply to vending policy. City Council passed Ordinance 2022-0073 to establish the program, and DOMI established and iterated upon specifics of the program's administration in the Application Guidelines (Outdoor Dining & Retail License - Application Guidelines, 2022). This process specified requirements for details such as placement and design, accessibility, clear sidewalk space, barriers for cartway uses, structure, platforms, furnishings, operations, heating and lighting devices, and maintenance of the right-of-way. When the program first launched, a trial window for these rules provided flexibility for DOMI to update the rules when unanticipated challenges arose.

The life safety and traffic considerations developed for the Outdoor Dining & Retail License can provide the framework for vending policy. ADA requirements call for a minimum four-foot sidewalk clearance. To ensure this, the Outdoor Dining & Retail program requires businesses to keep at least four feet of clearance for sidewalks up to ten feet wide and to keep at least one-half of the sidewalk clear. Based on feedback from disability advocates, the DOMI Policy establishes a preference that units keep the building side of a sidewalk clear to provide a

buffer between pedestrians and the parking lane, but when there are many obstructions on the building side, clearance along the curb might be approved.

For use of the parking lane for Outdoor Dining, DOMI requires crash-protective barriers at the traffic edge of the outdoor dining area. The City currently manages safety in vending by requiring vendors using the parking lane to use a mobile vehicle such as a truck or trailer. Less protected structures such as carts, kiosks, tables, and tents have to be on the sidewalk. DOMI only permits Outdoor Dining on roads with speed limits of 25 mph or less.

The success of the Outdoor Dining & Retail License is testament to the value of activating the ROW with commercial activity, and much of the research done to develop the program also applies to vending policy. There are some additional considerations for vending units, however. It is important to plan for managing lines that might form for vending and to ensure that vending stays in its permitted footprint. In the parking lane, vending should not be within 20 feet of crosswalks or intersections or in areas otherwise unsafe for parking, and vending should obstruct any other objects or uses on the curb, such as fire hydrants and bus stops.

Permitting the right-of-way for vending introduces a new interested party to curb management on a given street. For Outdoor Dining & Retail, the property owner/tenant requests the use of the right-of-way for their business. This is a clear indication that the operator prefers to use the curb space for dining or retail instead of parking, loading, or anything else. Vending that is separate from the adjacent business does not necessarily incorporate adjacent property owners and tenants' preferences for using the curb space. Unlike Outdoor Dining & Retail, the number of vendors on a given block face will not be naturally regulated by the number of brick-and-mortar businesses, so additional planning is required. This could be managed by requiring a certain distance between vendors or limiting the number of vendors in a given block-face. For example, requiring 50 feet between vendors leaves space for parking or other uses of the curb.

Effective curb management also requires coordination among permitted ROW activities in addition to vending, dining, and retail, such as valet services, loading zones, and accessible parking spaces. An additional challenge is that many vending locations that might be attractive to vendors overlap with areas where parking supply is limited. Because ROW conditions are constantly in flux, vendors in the ROW must also be willing and able to move materials as needed. It is also important to ensure cables or other items associated with vending do not create accessibility or tripping hazards on the sidewalk.

Best Practices

To understand how other communities have developed their vending programs, we reviewed policies from across the United States and met with regulators in several cities to discuss programs, volume of permits and licenses, and lessons learned. We pulled out unique aspects of each program to consider in Pittsburgh's context and looked for patterns across cities. This section describes the overall approach to vending in several cities and identifies best practices that, along with the Pittsburgh-specific discussion and engagement, guided the recommendations presented here.

Portland, OR

Portland, Oregon has permissive policies for vending from truck and trailers (typically referred to as "carts" in Portland) on private property, especially for vending units up to 16 feet long. When permanent structures are introduced, vending pods must work with Development Services for a commercial building permit. The vast majority of Portland's 500+ carts are stationary units on private property. Travel Portland maintains the Food Cart Finder, which promotes entrepreneurs and guides residents and visitors to food cart options.

The City of Portland differentiates four types of carts: Utility Trailer, Light Truck, Medium Trailer, and Heavy Trailer. Utility Trailers and Light Trucks are allowed in all Commercial/Mixed Use, Employment, Industrial, and Campus Institutional zones. Medium Trailers and Heavy Trailers are allowed in subsets of these zones. Portland's industrial sanctuary zoning introduces restrictions on retail in industrial zones. Carts that use propane must acquire a fire permit. Vending from the street in a mobile vehicle does not require a permit, but vending from the sidewalk does. These units cannot be left unattended for 30 minutes or longer, carts in residential zones can only spend 10 minutes in a given block before being required to leave for at least two hours (*Mobile Vending Carts and Food Carts on Private Property*, n.d.). On the sidewalk, guidelines in Portland are clearly outlined but are restrictive to the point that very few operators take advantage of the program, according to City staff (personal communication, 2024-2025). Carts on the sidewalk have to be moved overnight, must obtain permission from abutting property owners, and operate only in commercial areas (*Sidewalk Vending Cart Application Packet*, 2016).

Austin, TX

Austin, Texas operates its vending program with a similar approach. Small vending carts are permitted on the sidewalk, but tight location and cart restrictions mean there were only about 20 active users of this program as of late 2024 (City of Austin Staff, personal communication, 2024-2025). For mobile vendors that use private property, Austin uses two distinct licenses: Mobile Retail and Mobile Food. Mobile vendors generally do not operate in the right-of-way, but they can obtain permits to do so during special events. Location requirements for both licenses on private property are permissive, and there are about 2,000 mobile food vendors in the city (*Austin Food Trucks & Trailers*, n.d.). Vendors can set up in commercial zones and most industrial

zones as long as they meet a handful of small buffer restrictions. For eligible neighborhoods seeking additional buffer requirements for vendors, there is a pathway to formally request and institute this through the City (*Austin Code § 25-2-812 – Mobile Food Establishments*, n.d.; *Austin Code § 25-2-818 – Mobile Retail Establishments*, n.d.; *Frequently Asked Questions about the City of Austin’s Mobile Food Establishment Ordinance*, 2018; *Mobile Retail Establishments*, n.d.).

Denver, CO

With about 600 food vendors in the right of way and close to 80 on private property, Denver also built a thriving vending program. Vendors are permitted to use most streets, as long as they are not within 20 feet of an intersection or 300 feet from a public park or parkway. The Central Business District is also closed to vendors. This restriction is in place to due to safety concerns associated with the density of parking garages and intensity of traffic flow that could subject vendors and patrons to potential collision dangers. Sidewalk vendors apply for specific locations on the sidewalks, and food trucks can change location as frequently as desired by booking parking spots up to fourteen days in advance. Denver requires trucks to be at least 10 feet apart as a fire safety measure.

Denver strategically uses food trucks to support safety in the busy weekend nightlife hours. Its famous nightlife district, Lower Downtown (LoDo) is bustling on weekend nights, but when bars, clubs, and events close, crowding can present a safety issue. Food trucks could contribute to this issue by encouraging crowds to form, but Denver strategically moved food trucks and rideshare to dedicated zones in LoDo. This brings hungry patrons to the food trucks while dispersing crowds as venues close for the night, creating a win-win for the brick-and-mortar and mobile businesses. Denver does not have competition-related distance requirements in the public right-of-way but does require trucks on private property to locate 200 feet from brick-and-mortar restaurants or other food trucks and 50 feet from residential zones (City and County of Denver Staff, personal communication, 2025 2024; *Mobile Retail Food Truck, Trailer and Cart Guide*, n.d.).

Philadelphia, PA

Philadelphia divides vending licenses in the right-of-way both by location and vehicle type. General Vending applies to most of the city, while Special Vending is in select districts that require oversight due to high demand. For some Special Vending Districts, vendors also need to acquire a General Vending license. Depending on the type of vehicle, vendors will need a Sidewalk Sales or Motor Vehicle License. In Special Vending Districts, the number of licenses is restricted by lottery (in the Center City) or by waitlist (in Special Vending or Neighborhood Vending) (*Vending and Street Sales*, n.d.).

There are about 480 vendors selling from carts on the sidewalk or motor vehicles on the street and about 165 in Special Districts (with some overlap between these numbers). These licenses are not subject to any time limits that would distinguish between mobile and stationary vending, and they do not have any distance requirements from other businesses. The City has a

set of prohibited areas and streets, but otherwise sites in the street or sidewalk are eligible if they meet certain criteria. Philadelphia regulates vending on private property as a takeout restaurant, so combined data is unavailable (City of Philadelphia Staff, personal communication, 2025).

Oakland, CA

A final example included in our best practice research, Oakland, California is unique in opening up city-owned vacant lots for vending opportunities. Vendors are able to apply for use of lots in commercial and industrial zones. These agreements are facilitated by the City's real estate department, and locations are screened based on zoning, code requirements, state requirements, administrative guidelines, and safety concerns in the area surrounding the lot. Lease agreements vary in the length of access guaranteed to the vendor for using the lot. While over 70 vendors have applied for this program, only a dozen or so currently use it. The primary challenge cited is high rent charged by the City. Across the ROW, private property, and City-owned lots, there are about 120 licensed vendors in Oakland (City of Oakland Staff, personal communication, 2025; *Mobile Vending*, n.d.).

Previous Reviews and Additional Best Practices

Several previous reviews have explored approaches of planning for vending from various lenses, including Agyeman et al. (2017) and Ball (2002). Terranova and Morley (2014) summarize key policy considerations for cities, and McFarland et al.'s 2013 *Food on Wheels: Mobile Vending Goes Mainstream* compares policies in 13 cities to guide decision-makers and offers its own set of high-level Best Practices. Cannon (2023) focused on vending policy in Oakland, California through a case study at Lake Merritt, and Kappel et al. (2008) studied food cart policy in Portland, Oregon. These studies helped determine appropriate questions to pose during discussions and policy considerations to include in program updates. Peer city research and these studies revealed several Best Practices for vending policy. There is overlap between these Best Practices and those from these previous reports, but these synthesize, build upon, and contextualize them for current policy discussions in Pittsburgh.

Best Practice 1: Be intentional about vending and small business's role in economic development.

While each city approaches vending differently, there are meaningful patterns across those who both manage concerns such as permitting and trash collection without overburdening entrepreneurs with unneeded regulations. Primarily, this requires planning and resources to ensure an efficient program. Research, in-depth discussion, and community engagement are lengthy processes but crucial for later success. Cities with particularly successful vending programs have gone beyond simplifying regulations to take a coordinated approach to resource allocation and program administration. This requires a flexible program that stays current and regularly receives input from stakeholders most affected by policy details. Vending businesses innovate quickly, and government must be prepared to keep up.

Best Practice 2: Provide clear information about regulations, permitted locations and structures, processes, and operating rules.

In *Food On Wheels*, the authors emphasize that “[areas] where vending is allowed must be clearly delineated and easy to decipher... A map that explicitly labels the areas where vendors are allowed to operate would be a helpful tool for all stakeholders” (p.15). Providing clear information creates a smoother process for regulators, vendors, and residents or business owners looking to address a rule violation. It also demonstrates that a city values a program and aims to provide excellent customer service to applicants and residents. Developing informational materials uncovers missed ambiguity before it leads to confusion. A lack of clear information has led to confusion about permitted locations, lengthy application timelines, and disputes over compliance. Clear maps, guides for obtaining proper permits, and rules for operation support vendors, regulators, brick-and-mortar businesses, and the general public understand and uphold the program’s rules.

Best Practice 3: Work across departments to create a seamless process for vendors, fill gaps in the regulatory framework, and ensure safety standards are upheld.

One inescapable challenge of operating a vending program is that it must involve many departments to meet standards of safety, land use, and business practices, but each department’s resources must be used efficiently. The licensing process should ensure that all of these important pieces are accounted for and can work as a catch all to make sure all operators have met requirements for doing business in Pittsburgh. Cities generally struggle between the ideal of reducing the number of steps to a permitting process and the impracticality of doing so given the need to ensure approval from multiple City departments. Regulating vending activity is often a small piece of many departments’ responsibilities but requires intentional oversight to ensure seamless operations and that any gaps are quickly identified and addressed. An integrated permitting process has been achieved only by a few cities, but coordinating across departments ensures an efficient program. In addition to being a pattern across our own research, this challenge is discussed in multiple previous reports, including *Food on Wheels* (pp. 7-8) and Terranova and Morley’s “Planning for Food Trucks” *PAS QuickNotes* entry.

Best Practice 4: Be proactive to manage high-demand areas and strategic about concentrated pockets of vending.

Busy and high-density areas can require more intricate planning to manage demand for vending and ensure traffic safety and flow. *Food on Wheels* suggests that “The greater the density of the area, the greater the case for more restrictions, but an outright ban on all mobile vending is not suggested unless the circumstances are exceptional.” Philadelphia manages high-demand areas through its Special Vending District program. In Special Vending Districts, the number of permitted vendors is regulated to prevent overcrowding. In Portland and Austin, vending has been concentrated on private property, while in Denver it primarily takes place in the right-of-way. Denver’s policy of specifying permitted locations for food trucks during busy weekend nights in LoDo is another example of strategic management of traffic flow.

Best Practice 5: Address historic anti-vendor stigma built into legal structures

In *Food Trucks, Cultural Identity, and Social Justice* a series of essayists and editors Julian Agyeman, Caitlin Matthews, and Hannah Sobel, discuss the regulatory, democratic, and spatial-cultural practices around street vending. Through stories of individual cities and food truck operators, the essays reveal a landscape that has systematically burdened entrepreneurs from BIPOC and immigrant communities. Historically, street vending has been stigmatized as illegal, failing to meet health standards, and considered a nuisance. BIPOC and immigrant entrepreneurs in particular have faced these harmful stereotypes. Vending at its best can be an economic opportunity for entrepreneurs who have been excluded from other areas of the economy, and updating laws can help make this possible. Aspects of legal structures that built this stigma into law must be rewritten, and government must work to build trust with entrepreneurs who have experienced harm from past policies.

Best Practice 6: Support positive relationships among different types of businesses.

Vending and brick-and-mortar operations can be complementary, but they can also be competitive. These dynamics present a difficult challenge for regulators. The primary roles for city officials include setting distance limits for vendors locating near competing businesses, managing complaints about rule violations, setting fair fee structures for vending licenses, and managing the use of the curb. Managing rule violations is made easier by clarifying regulations and ensuring enforcement has needed capacity. Fee structures can recoup costs for providing licensing services but must not overburden vendors, and curb management requires coordinating vending uses with uses on the curb (parking, loading, etc.) and managing overall amount of curb activity. Requiring a certain amount of distance between vendors in the right-of-way or limiting the total number of vendors allowed on a given block-face can help address these challenges. Creating sites where vendors can set up in groups can also help manage curb space.

While tension may exist between brick-and-mortar and vending businesses, proper safeguards can alleviate these concerns and support collaboration among the business community. Many businesses operate both a permanent location and mobile unit to diversify revenue. Bars and breweries are required by state liquor code to have food available for customers. As such, they often invite food trucks to vend outside their establishments, allowing both to benefit from each other's business. More vendors in a particular area could also increase foot traffic overall, leading to more business for both vendors and brick-and-mortars.

Recommendations

This section presents a set of key policy changes for the vending program. This includes amending Chapter 719, Vendors and Peddlers and Zoning Code's approach to Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, as well as introducing vending as an authorized use of City-owned vacant lots.

Policy Recommendations 1 through 4: Amendments to Chapter 719, Vendors and Peddlers, also requiring updates to the Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections Licensing Rules & Regulations

1) Create an integrated permitting process with a single entry point and customer support.

This recommendation calls for establishing a general Annual Vending License, managed by PLI, and requiring additional permits when necessary. This process will need to verify businesses have all necessary certifications for general vending as well as for vending in specific locations. PLI would maintain the overall licensing processes, and DOMI, Parks, DCP, and other agencies as needed would permit specific locations if vendors are applying for use of a specific site.

To obtain an Annual Vending License, applicants would need to meet the following prerequisites, with changes at the discretion of PLI:

- Health Department permit (if selling food or beverage)
- City of Pittsburgh Tax Registration
- Agreement to follow Fire Safety Guidelines
- General Liability Insurance
- Workers' Compensation Coverage (if applicable)
- Affirmation of compliance with applicable county, state, and federal business permits, registration, certificates, accessibility standards, and any other requirements
- Agreement to comply with the terms of the license

With no additional permits, Annual Vending License holders would be permitted to:

- Operate as a "mobile" vendor in locations on the street, sidewalk, and in parks locations that have been pre-approved for mobile vending
- Operate as a "mobile" vendor on private property if exempt from zoning review as described below or is setting up on an approved host site

Annual Vending License holders could do the following with an additional permit or lease:

- Operate as a “stationary” vendor on the street or sidewalk through obtaining a permit from DOMI
- Operate in City parks with a permit from the Department of Public Works
- Operate on City-owned lots through the Adopt-A-Lot program, either as the lessee or working with a lessee.
- Operate regularly or, for a property owner, host vendors regularly on private property

2) Transition from site-by-site evaluation to criteria-based evaluation for vending locations. Designate specific vending locations Downtown, in parks, and other districts determined to require additional scrutiny. Eliminate the formal Street and Sidewalk Vending Site Designation Committee.

This would eliminate the Street and Sidewalk Vending Site Designation Committee as a formal entity and replace its role with a set of criteria for new sites and pre-approved sites designated by departments. Departments with a role in vending policy should continue to convene informally to discuss the program, specific applications, or other topics as needed.

Eligible sites would be determined using criteria that is established at the time of updating the program. Locations that meet these criteria would also be eligible for stationary vending if approved by the appropriate permitting department. DOMI, PLI, and/or other agencies would likely need to adjust criteria over time, but draft standards for the PLI Rules & Regulations are as follows:

Draft Standards for Vending Locations in the Right-of-Way

Mobile vending on the sidewalk or in legal parking spaces is permitted, except Downtown and in parks, where there will be specific vending zones, and Mt. Washington, where vending is prohibited in the ROW.

Legal on-street parking spots in non-residential areas are eligible if they meet the following criteria:

- o At all times, including with customers queuing or waiting: at least 4 feet of sidewalk space is kept clear
- o At least 20 feet from an intersection or crosswalk
- o At least 50 feet from another vendor
- o Not obstructing a building entrance, bike lane, fire hydrant, bus stop, accessible parking spaces, loading zone, outdoor dining, or any other structure
- o Not posing a safety risk due to any nearby activity, such as construction
- o The adjacent street has a speed limit of 25mph or less

- Not within 100 feet of a brick-and-mortar business whose primary product is the same or similar to the vendor's primary product, unless the vendor has permission from the business owner.
- Not on or within 1 foot of catch basins
- Any additional criteria adopted and published by DOMI
- If the parking space is in a paid parking area and the applicant wishes to reserve the spot in advance, the applicant must receive approval from the Pittsburgh Parking Authority to temporarily close the paid parking. If the applicant seeks to utilize a paid parking zone and does not have prior approval from the parking authority, the applicant must pay the meter for the time used in the space.

In residential areas, mobile vending units on the street may stop in a legal parking area to make a sale to a patron on the sidewalk. Mobile vending units in the street cannot spend more than 15 minutes stopped on a block unless there is a line of patrons and cannot return within two hours to the same block.

Sidewalk spaces in non-residential areas are eligible if they meet the following criteria:

- At all times, including with customers queuing or waiting: at least 4 feet of sidewalk space is kept clear
- At least 20 feet from an intersection
- At least 50 feet from another vendor
- Keeping the building side of the sidewalk clear if feasible
- Not obstructing a building entrance, bike lane, fire hydrant, bus stop, loading zone, outdoor dining, or any other structure or activities on the curb
- Not posing a safety risk due to any nearby activity, such as construction
- The adjacent street has a speed limit of 25mph or less
- Not within 100 feet of a brick-and-mortar business whose primary product is the same or similar to the vendor's primary product, unless the vendor has permission from the business owner
- Not within 50 feet of another vendor
- Any additional criteria adopted and published by DOMI

Vendors setting up in the street or sidewalk for a longer period of time in residential areas should only do so adjacent to non-residential uses, such as agriculture, community institutions, and green space.

Stationary locations already approved should remain available to currently licensed vendors, and currently vacant spaces should be kept online as options for vendors to use. This would not be a guarantee of being approved for the permit, as eligibility also depends on whether the specific vending unit can be accommodated in that location and meet the criteria above. Vendors must ensure that they are not creating any tripping hazards with running cables, and the City should work with vendors and neighbors to mitigate any sound concerns.

The proposed Downtown zones for mobile and stationary vending should be discussed with the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership and other stakeholders to ensure they will meet the neighborhood's needs. Within City of Pittsburgh Parks, mobile vendors could set up in a pre-approved list of areas still to be developed or in areas in the ROW within parks determined to meet eligibility criteria outlined by DPW, CitiParks, and DOMI. Some approved locations have already been established under the Mobile Vehicular and Stationary Vending Licenses.

3) Outline a process for establishing a group vending zone on public property

In general, a required separation of 50 feet between vendors is proposed to preserve curb space for other uses (this 50-foot restriction would not apply on private lots). In a Group Site or Vending Zone, this 50-foot requirement would be reduced to 10 feet, or the minimum standard determined by the Bureau of Fire. Group sites in the right-of-way would be subject to change at the discretion of the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure. Sites would be approved through a nomination process. Existing clusters of stationary vending locations are recommended to be transferred to group sites under this policy. Proposed group sites on private property would follow the regular zoning process for Outdoor Retail Sales & Services.

The proposed nomination process for a group vending site on public property is as follows:

Proposed Group Location Nomination Process on Public Property

- Applicant proposes a location
- DOMI evaluates the site's eligibility, including factors such as:
 - o Traffic safety
 - o Parking demand and supply
 - o Demand for other uses of the curb
- City oversees any applicable community engagement process
- Licensing Officer makes a recommendation to the decision-making body, likely an existing Commission, for a final determination

4) Update license rules and regulations

We further recommend the following updates to the vending rules and regulations:

- a. **Change the definitions of “mobile” and “stationary”:** This recommendation would eliminate the 4-hour limit for mobile vending and shift to a definition of “mobile” vending as vacating a space at the end of the day. “Stationary” vending would be defined as vending from a spot with an annual permit and being permitted to keep the vending unit in the permitted spot overnight.
- b. **Publish Fire Safety Guidelines to advise vendors on the fire safety laws** the City is responsible for enforcing and recommended best practices. PLI and the Bureau of Fire would respond to violations of these standards.
- c. **Explore opportunities for temporary allowance to operate between 12am and 3am, if certain impact prevention and safety standards are met.** While a blanket expansion of permitted operating hours would not be advisable given current public safety capacity, the City could offer special permits for vending later at night. Particularly during mega-events such as the NFL Draft, this could be mutually beneficial for visitors, residents, and vendors.

Policy Recommendation 5: Amend the Pittsburgh Zoning Code to expand vending opportunities and clarify permitting

- a. Expand zoning permissions for Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, Non-Accessory Use

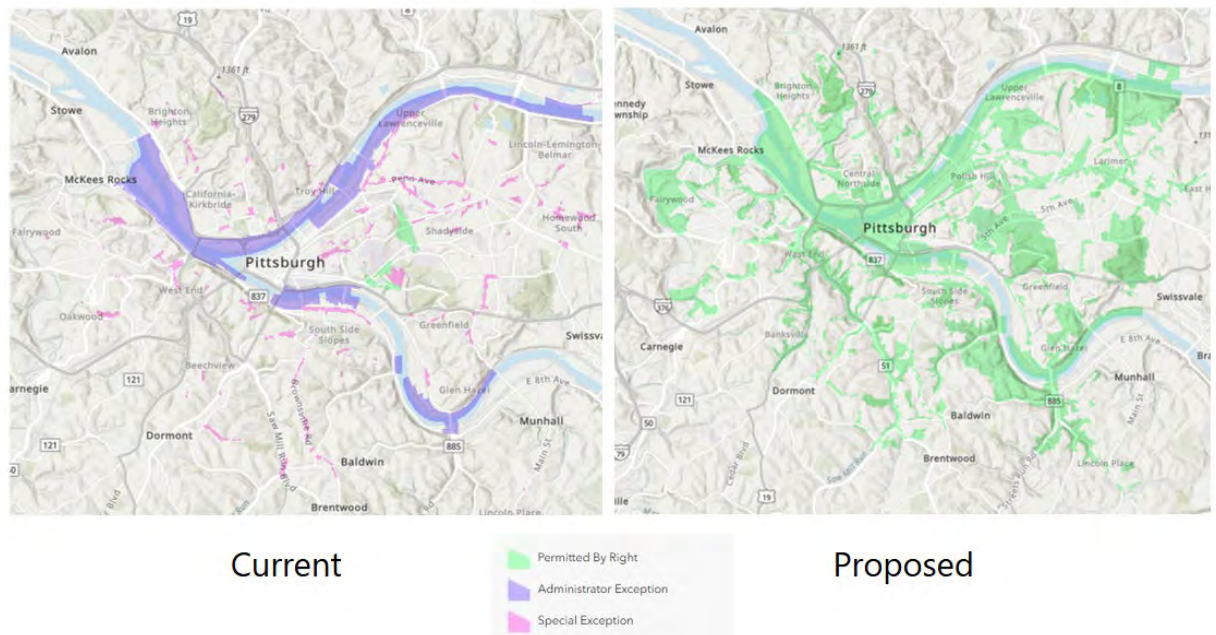
Vending activity falls under the Outdoor Retail Sales & Services use. As a primary (Non-Accessory) Use, it is currently permitted in the following districts: By Right in UC-MU and UC-E, by Administrator Exception in Riv-MU, Riv-NS, Riv-GI, and Riv-IMU, and by Special Exception in LNC and R-MU. As an accessory use, it is permitted under any Primary use for which it can be defined as Accessory.

To better align the Non-Accessory use with permissions for other commercial activity, the proposed changes to the Use Table are shown in Table 2.

Table 5: Proposed Use Table Updates for Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, Non-Accessory

Base Zoning Districts																								
Residential					Mixed Use										Special			DT		RIV				
R 1 D	R 1 A	R 2	R 3	R M	N D O	L N C	N D I	U N C	H C	G I	U I	U C - M U	U C - E	R - M U	P	H	E M I	G T		R M	M U	N S	G I	I M U
					<u>P</u>	<u>S P</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>P</u>	P	P	<u>S P</u>	<u>P</u>		<u>P</u>	<u>P</u>			<u>A P</u>	<u>A P</u>	<u>A P</u>	<u>A P</u>

Figure 5: Current and Proposed Zoning permissions for Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, Non-Accessory



b. Outline exemptions for zoning permits and process for compliance

The standard Accessory use process does not accommodate vending uses in a straightforward manner. We recommend allowing licensed vendors to operate on private property if certain conditions are met. These conditions may need to be modified over time by the Zoning & Development Review office, but they should include:

- 1) Exemptions for vending for events during which sales are not made to the general public, and events are not hosted frequently enough to require zoning approval.
- 2) Exemptions for vending for less than a certain amount of time and/or frequency such that a zoning review is not required.

If the lot will be used for vending that does not meet the above criteria, the property owner would need to add a vending location to the site's Record of Zoning Approval but would not be obligated to always host the same vendor(s). If a stamped site plan was not already included for the structure, vending should not require a stamped site plan to be created. Vending alone should also not require any curb cut permitting or reporting. Examples of cities that have taken a similar approach include Denver, CO (*Mobile Retail Food Truck, Trailer and Cart Guide*, n.d.) and Durham, NC (*Outdoor Sales Information*, 2020).

- c. Update definitions and use standards for Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, Accessory and Non-Accessory.

Additionally, this recommendation proposes that the definitions and use standards for Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, Accessory, and Outdoor Retail Sales & Services, Non-Accessory, be amended as follows:

Non-Accessory

- Remove 100-foot competition restriction
- Require vendors to follow regulations associated with the general vending license
- Allow vendors to locate on the same lot if at least 10 feet apart or meeting the minimum distance standard determined by the Bureau of Fire

Accessory

- Remove requirement that activity be pursuant to the same business identification number as the primary use
- Waive requirement for accessory use application in specified cases
- Consider whether additional standards are needed for uses in residential districts that could have Outdoor Retail Sales & Services as an Accessory Use

Policy Recommendation 6: Add vending as an option in the Vacant Lot Toolkit

Recent analysis by the Department of City Planning and the Ethos Collaborative has identified parcels viable for commercial activity that can inform allowable sites. This Adopt-A-Lot option could be piloted in specific commercial zones, such as Local Neighborhood Commercial Districts, with the possibility to expand to more commercial and industrial zones. Lots with steep slopes, that are landslide prone, or have any other environmental hazards would not be eligible. Lessees would be responsible for meeting all fire code, ADA, building code, and other requirements and would need to submit plans for the use of the lot to go through a City approval process.

As with existing Adopt-A-Lot programs, vendors using City-owned land would not have guaranteed opportunity to renew a lease. They would be responsible for keeping the lot free of garbage and would have the same use standards as vendors operating on private property. Vendors would need to sign a lease agreement with the City and produce a certificate of liability insurance, along with any other required paperwork.

Additional Recommendations

In addition to the legislative changes above, we recommend the City and/or its partnerships take the following steps.

1. Develop resources such as grants and staff support for vendors
 - a. Update program regularly and allow a trial period for new regulations
 - b. Assess and allocate staffing needs for customer support, program development, administration, and enforcement.
 - c. Host Vendor Permit Days at the OneStopPGH counter with representatives from all relevant departments and language interpreters available to assist with applications.
 - d. Update permitting and license fees based on program cost, and identify resources available for entrepreneurs for whom fees might be a financial burden.
2. Create informational materials with clear guidelines for vendors
 - a. Create guides for vendors available in multiple languages, including the process for relocating vendors when needed.
 - b. Maintain informational maps for prohibited areas, special zones, and other key information on the policy.
 - c. Clarify expectations for vendors during the 2026 NFL Draft and special events permits vs. vending licenses.
3. Build partnerships for an accessible pipeline from mobile to brick-and-mortar.
 - a. Develop a pipeline for expansion from vending to pop up shop to brick-and-mortar and coordinate resources available.
4. Facilitate relationships among vendors and between vendors and brick-and-mortar business owners.
 - a. Encourage vending in groups to promote efficient use of resources and shared benefits of co-location. Provide shared benefits such as shared power sources and coordinated permitting processes.
 - b. Introduce a general registry/certification sticker to verify that a vendor is licensed in the city of Pittsburgh, potentially working with Visit Pittsburgh to keep an updated website.
 - c. Encourage collaboration between vendors and licensed commissaries and commercial kitchens, as well as among vendors.
5. Work with partner agencies to expand opportunities and keep regulations up to date.
 - a. Work with the Commonwealth of PA to explore opportunities for liquor vending and other emerging opportunities.
 - b. Coordinate with the Allegheny County Health Department on regulatory updates and informational materials.

Conclusion

Over the past six months, the project team has worked closely across agencies to imagine a vending program that better serves Pittsburgh's businesses and residents. In all of this work, critical life safety, health, quality of life, and competition concerns are balanced with the goal of increased flexibility and opportunity for vendors in Pittsburgh. Increased efficiency and transparency set clear expectations for all parties. In addition to making the process less burdensome for vendors, these updates will help regulators uphold the rules and regulations. The recommendations presented here can support a more vibrant public realm with increased foot traffic for Pittsburgh's business corridors.

Interviews and discussion thus far have raised vending as an opportunity for more flexibility in starting or growing a business. Whether it is starting in a mobile unit and scaling to a brick-and-mortar, operating mobile and brick-and-mortar enterprises simultaneously, or growing an entirely mobile enterprise, clear and equitable vending policy will demonstrate the City's commitment to building a diverse local economy.

Implementing these recommendations requires updating Chapter 719, Vendors and Peddlers, and Outdoor Retail Sales & Services use in the Zoning Code. It also requires continued collaboration across agencies and with Pittsburgh's business community, as well as a renewed investment in the human and financial resources needed to execute a successful vending program. In the next stage of work, the project team will continue to refine these policy recommendations to prepare for legislative change to continue to prepare Pittsburgh for the 2026 NFL Draft and beyond.

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This work is the result of numerous contributions from City of Pittsburgh staff, vendors, business district managers, economic development professionals, and residents who have shared insights in discussion and survey responses. Thank you to all who have contributed their time and insight to this project and who work with the City moving forward to refine and implement these findings.

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Thank you to all who have set aside time on top of everyday responsibilities to envision the future of vending policy in Pittsburgh.

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