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**EQUITABLE
PARK
DESIGN
TOOLKIT
(Vendors)**

University of California
Los Angeles

EQUITABLE PARK DESIGN TOOLKIT (VENDORS)

A comprehensive project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Urban and Regional Planning.

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(2023)

DISCLAIMER

This report was prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master in Urban and Regional Planning degree in the Department of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles. It was prepared at the direction of the Department and of [insert client name] as a planning client. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department, the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, UCLA as a whole, or the client.

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INTRODUCTION

IMPORTANCE OF EQUITABLE & ACCESSIBLE PARKS

Parks are fundamental parts of the urban landscape that provide space for recreation, connection with nature, leisure, and community cohesion. They are one of the few spaces in the city where all are welcome, and entrance is free. There are also significant and research-supported health benefits associated with living close to parks, however, not all communities share equal access to the benefits of parks. There is a long list of communities that are less safe in the public realm than others, park users who face danger, harassment, and assault when spending time in parks and public spaces. There are also some groups whose presence in parks is criminalized.

Street vendors are one of the groups who are often routinely excluded and criminalized for existing in the public realm. A group of individuals who are primarily elderly, undocumented, female, disabled, and immigrants, vendors withstand hardship and discrimination on compounding scales. Many States have anti-vending laws and regulations that limit vendor behavior. But this tide is changing across the US; thanks to decades of advocacy, street vending laws are being updated across the nation to decriminalize vending. More can be done to support street vendors in the public realm. This toolkit is meant to outline design and policy recommendations for urban designers, planners, and park advocates to better support the vendor community in public spaces.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

1. GOALS OF THIS TOOLKIT

- Provide an intuitive and actionable outline of policy and design recommendations that can increase access to public space for discrete marginalized groups. Chapters on vendors and unhoused residents are already written and others can be added over time.

2. WHO IS IT FOR

- Urban designers, policymakers, advocates, students, planners, and other community members.

3. HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS TOOLKIT

- This report focuses specifically on street vendors as a community that is excluded from the public realm. The format of the toolkit is designed to be replicated and built upon. As mentioned in the introduction, there is a long list of community groups that are excluded from the public realm, and each community requires specific research and consideration. Subsequent chapters will have different focuses, such as on gender minorities, unhoused communities, children and seniors, etc.,
- Given that all public space projects present unique and site-specific considerations, this toolkit is meant to provide a framework and approach that can be expanded upon and adapted to diverse sites and communities. It is not meant to and should not take the place of sustained community engagement and intentional co-creation of public space with park users and residents.
- Planners, designers, and advocates can use this toolkit as a starting point for design and policy considerations to take into account when:
 - Planning and designing a new park.
 - Evaluating, adapting, and/or renovating an existing park to better accommodate the vendor community.

METHODOLOGY

To write the following toolkit, I started with a literature review of relevant research, news, and advocacy relating to street vendor rights and public space access. This research looked into the challenges vendors face, the public benefit they provide, and the laws they navigate to continue their work. It provided a jumping-off point for initial policy and design recommendations which I ground-truthed in a series of interviews with urban designers and vendor advocates.

Those interviews were conducted with;

VENDOR ADVOCATES

- Inclusive Action For the City
 - Chih-Wei Hsu, Research Associate
- Community Power Collective
 - Sergio Jimenez, Senior Organizer, Street Vendor Justice
- East Los Angeles Community Corporation (ELACC)
 - Elba Serrano, Director of Community Wealth & Services

URBAN DESIGNERS

- Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI)
 - Adriana Carias, Design Associate
 - Naira Kiani, Senior Planning Principal

To support my work, I also conducted a series of quantitative and qualitative analyses to understand the barriers street vendors face and the public benefits they provide. This includes spatial data analysis using LAPD arrest data and American Community Survey 5-year estimates to understand the relationship between anti-vending enforcement and neighborhood change in Los Angeles, a review of news reports on anti-vending enforcement following the passing of SB946, and an analysis of the presence of street vendors and their role in addressing food access issues in public space. Findings from these analyses are embedded throughout the toolkit.

1: VENDORS IN PUBLIC SPACE

Street Vendors make up a significant part of the informal economy across the globe. I use the term “informal economy” to refer to any economic activity that is unregulated by government institutions. This understanding of informality is generated from the scholarship of Keith Hart (1973) and Lisa Peattie (1987). (Mukhija, Loukaitou-Sideris, 2015) There are significant interconnections between the informal and formal economies which can make the informal economy blurry to study; relying on the regulations such as permitting systems and taxes allows one to delineate formal from informal.

Early scholarship on the informal economy focuses on economic activity in developing countries. This toolkit draws from the wealth of research on informal economic activity in the US to understand its presence, and value in the Western economic context. (Mukhija, Loukaitou-Sideris, 2015). The informal economy is widespread; 61% of the global workforce is informal and 25% of the US workforce is informal. (Hidalgo, 2020) (Redento, et al. 2021)

This toolkit has been created to be applied to a broad geographic boundary, but to root the recommendations in real-world examples, I will use Los Angeles street vendors as a case study.

WHO VENDS IN LOS ANGELES: HISTORIC CONTEXT AND RISKS

Throughout the vast pedestrian-unfriendly metropolis, there are spots of street life in Los Angeles (LA) provided by taco trucks, fruit carts, food stands, and other informal food and goods sales. In 2021, there were an estimated 10,000 street vendors operating in the City of Los Angeles. (Bennett, et. al, 2021) This number is likely an undercount given that the act of street vending was only legalized in 2018, and street vendors are still fighting to fully legalize their work in 2023. East LA Community

Corporation (ELACC) held a summit in 2019 for street vendors to educate them on new permitting processes and rules. During this process, they estimated the street vendor count in LA to be closer to 50,000, underscoring the severe lack of data in this field. (Bennett, et. al, 2021)

Between 2014 and 2020, UCLA researcher Leigh-Anna Hidalgo interviewed, studied, and photographed street vendors across the city. She found that the roughly 50,000 street vendors in LA are majority Latinx, Black, “women, undocumented, elderly, and disabled”. (Hidalgo, 2020) Hidalgo recounted that during her six-year study “almost every street vendor [she] spoke with had a story of chronic illness, disability, addiction, depression, and anxiety that they associated with traumatic events they had accumulated through lived experience with war, migration, racism, xenophobia, sexual assault, and domestic abuse” (Hidalgo, 2020) Her research also found that street vendors in LA increased by 400% from 2001 - 2014. During that time street vending was criminalized in the city, and violence against street vendors from police and the public increased.

CHALLENGES VENDORS FACE

From 1994 - 2018 the sale of goods, wares, or merchandise on sidewalks and parkways was classified as a misdemeanor. Vendors who engaged in this behavior were at risk of penalties as high as \$1,000 and/or jail depending on the judge's discretion. (Hidalgo, 2020) In addition to the legal charges, vendors also endure harassment from law enforcement and community members who regularly assault them and confiscate their carts, profits, and materials. The Los Angeles Police Department reported that crimes against street vendors increased by 37% between 2010 and 2019 (38 to 166 incidents a year). Of these reported crimes, nearly 45% were robberies, and 28% involved some type of assault. (Hidalgo, 2020) There have even been a few cases of vendors being killed, notably a series of high-profile murders of black street vendors in 2016. (Hidalgo, 2020)

The legalization of street vending in 2018 has changed the enforcement landscape for vendors, but they still face significant safety, legal, and financial risks doing business in the public realm. While vendors no longer face the risk of jail time, the recent legislation keeps anti-vending laws active in a series of locations across the city and enforces strict buffer rules in the parks and on sidewalks. The municipal code amendment that authorizes street vending with a permit also established eight “no vending zones,” which are 500-foot barriers around high-traffic attractions throughout the city. The eight “no-vending zones” block vendors from doing business 500 feet from Universal Studios/Citywalk, the Hollywood Bowl, Hollywood Walk of Fame, Dodger Stadium, El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument/ Plaza Olvera, Convention Center/ LA Live, Staples Center, Venice Beach, and Exposition Park/ Los Angeles Coliseum.

In addition to these zones, vendors are not allowed to do business at any venue determined by the Board of Public Works to be off limits, educational facilities, parking spaces, and certain parks. (StreetLA, 2019) In the areas where vending is permitted, there are extensive buffer rules that need to be adhered to. I use the term "buffer rules" to describe the setbacks vendors need to adhere to on the sidewalk and in parks:

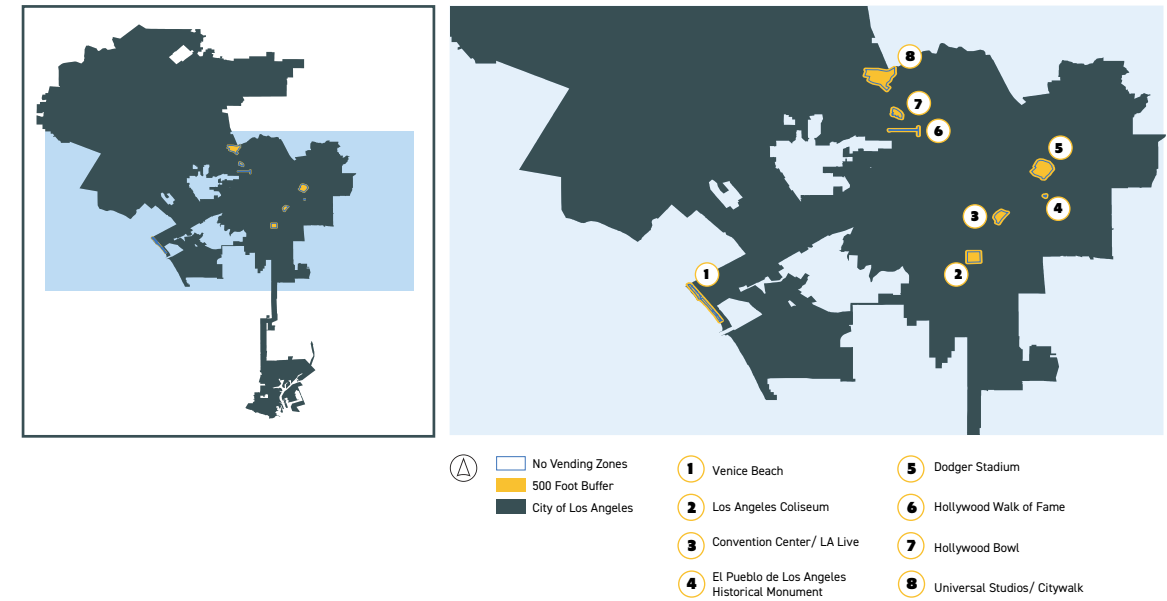
ON THE SIDEWALK
(ENFORCED BY STREETSLA)

- 3 feet from street lights, edge of tree wells, parking meters, and above-ground utility structures
- 5 feet from fire hydrants
- 2 feet from above-ground utility boxes
- 18 inches from the face of the curb and edge of a driveway
- 3 feet from other vendors
- 20 feet from the entrance to any buildings
- No vending in roadways, medians, pedestrian islands, and bike-ways (StreetsLA, 2020)

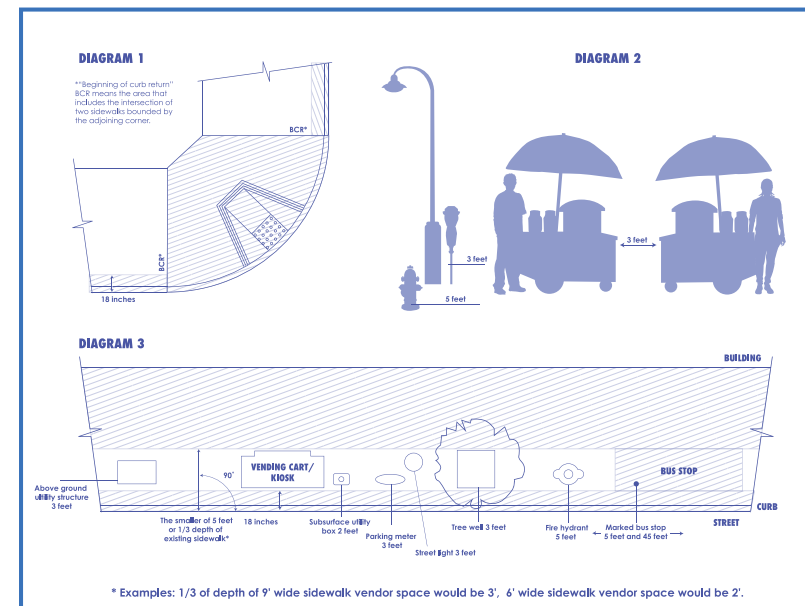
IN A PARK
(ENFORCED BY THE LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS)

- 100 feet of any building or playground
- 500 feet from any school site, camp, youth activity, or senior center
- 5 feet from park benches or park furniture
- 10 feet from any crosswalk
- 25 feet from fountains, statues, monuments, or art installations (Recreation and Parks, 2020)

NO VENDING ZONES IN THE CITY OF LA IN 2023



VENDOR LOCATION RULES ON AN LA SIDEWALK



Source: Streets LA (2019)

WHAT ROLE DOES ANTI-VENDING ENFORCEMENT HAVE IN GENTRIFICATION?

With a team of student researchers, I conducted an analysis of available LAPD anti-vending citation/arrest data (Street Vending Citations, 2022) and gentrification and displacement metrics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018) to look at where tickets and arrests are given to vendors across the city on a granular level. From this analysis, we found:

- The highest instances of arrests and tickets occurred in neighborhoods with a high risk of displacement (i.e. currently undergoing gentrification), compared to neighborhoods that are low-income/susceptible to displacement (i.e. haven't gentrified yet) or neighborhoods that are stable and already have moderate or mixed-income demographics.
- The highest instances of reported arrests and tickets occurred in and around public parks, illuminating the risk vendors face doing business in city parks.



Vendors are still routinely ticketed and harassed by police for doing business in no-vending zones, parks, and sidewalks and regularly receive administrative fines and/or get their equipment confiscated by the health department for operating in prohibited areas. A collection of community groups (Community Power Collective, Inclusive Action, and East Los Angeles Community Corporation (ELACC)) are suing the city of Los Angeles over no-vending zones, citing that they violate the statewide legalization of street vending. (Busch, 2022) Interviews with advocates revealed that the enforcement of anti-vending laws can vary based on the council district.

To exemplify the variety of responses to vendors among council districts, here is a statement from the current council member for District 13, Hugo Soto-Martinez, who is actively working with vendors to come up with a comprehensive permitting process that will allow vendors to do business in Echo Park Lake.

"As the son of street vendors, the cultural vibrancy that street vendors bring to the community and the economic opportunities they provide for immigrant families is very personal for me.

We introduced a motion in City Council that will streamline the street vending permitting process to be in compliance with state law, and we're working to bring vendors back to Echo Park Lake along with other parts of our district so they can benefit our communities and provide for their families.

One of the most important parts of these processes has been working with the street vendors themselves. Vendors know what issues they run into, what they need to succeed, and how to organize, so we listen to street vendors, and follow their lead as much as possible so that we can improve things in our district." -- Councilmember Hugo Soto-Martinez (Soto Martinez, 2023)

This response to vending in active public space conflicts drastically with other districts across the city, many of which host and enforce no-vending zones.

In Los Angeles, the enforcement of anti-street vending law laws has been linked to gentrification and neighborhood change. A review of police division arrest data found that the highest level of vendor arrests was concentrated in neighborhoods surrounding Downtown LA that have been experiencing dramatic gentrification processes. (Hidalgo, 2020) The racism and xenophobic beliefs that led to the criminalization of street vending, allow the state to control where vendors are and move them around. The state's control over vendor behavior, movement, and ability to create livelihood, cheats them of their right to exist. (Hidalgo, 2020)

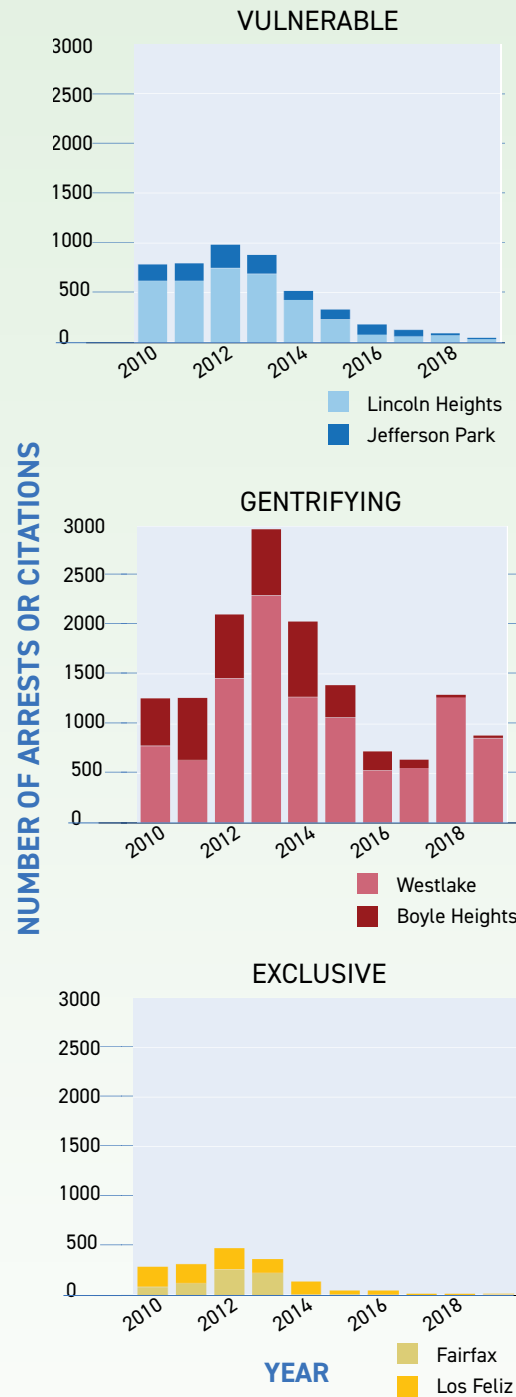
MORE ABOUT RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

To conduct this research we selected sample neighborhoods that fell into different stages of gentrification in 2018 according to the Urban Displacement Project's Mapping Neighborhood Change in Southern California: Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties interactive map. We zoomed into two neighborhoods that are classified as "Gentrifying" - low-income/susceptible to displacement, two that are classified as "At-Risk"- Early/Ongoing Gentrification and/or Advanced Gentrification, and two that are "Exclusionary" - Stable/Advanced Exclusive.

Next, we mapped all the vending citations and arrest data that we could find between 2010 and 2019, using a public records request filed in 2019 that included an expansive list of relevant citation codes. This data is not a full picture of arrests, citations, and fines that vendors have received in Los Angeles. Because vendors are in the public right of way, they are vulnerable to harassment, fines, tickets, and arrests by numerous regulatory agencies including LAPD, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Recreation and Parks, StreetsLA, LADOT, and private security. Finally, we geocoded the citations we were able to collect and conducted a spatial analysis

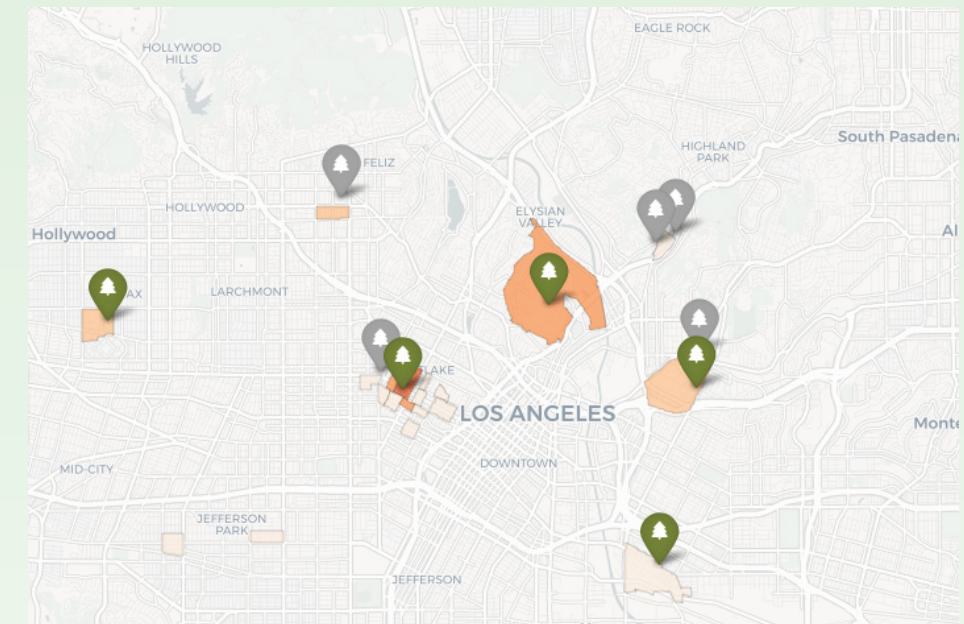
ARRESTS/CITATIONS FOR UNSANCTIONED USE OF PUBLIC SPACE

IN SELECT NEIGHBORHOODS IN LOS ANGELES (2010 - 2019)

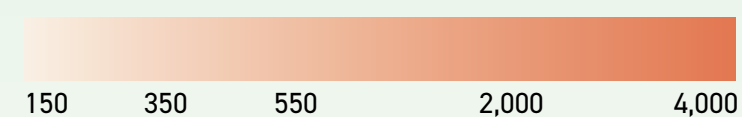


Data: LAPD Citation Data (2022)

AREAS WITH THE MOST VENDOR CITATION AND ARRESTS IN SELECT NEIGHBORHOODS IN LOS ANGELES (2010 - 2019)



NUMBER OF STREET VENDING ARRESTS AND CITATIONS



PARKS

(within and next to the census tract of interest)



Data: LAPD Citation Data (2022) & LA County Open Data HUB

of arrests, citations, and fine locations compared to the gentrification stage. The trends we uncovered above are only preliminary. In order to draw more significant conclusions, one would have to map all the citations over the years and do a more holistic review that is not limited to 6 relatively random locations. Our entire process can be reviewed [here](#).

In addition to robbing street vendors of their right to exist in public space, a right meant to be granted to all individuals, their banishment from the public realm also undermines vendor's ability to participate in the everyday urbanism that shapes the urban environment. Everyday urbanism is a lens to see the multiplicities of daily life - commutes, strip malls, supermarkets, parks, and schools, and the drivers of what shapes and forms a city. (Crawford et al., 1999) The concept of everyday urbanism contrasts with other types of urbanism and planning theory that rely on formal planning (general plans, zoning code, and tax incentives) to design and construct the built environment. Instead, everyday urbanists believe that the "powers of creativity and imagination already present within daily life [] transform the urban experience and the city" creating new spaces, identities, and cultural identities. (Crawford et al., 1999) This participation in city building is an inherently political act. Street vendors, a group who are not a part of formal planning, shape the built environment and cultural landscape of a city, by turning underutilized or misused space into a place of cultural significance or activity. Consider a vacant parking lot after a business closes or an alleyway that gets little traffic outside of trash pick-up hours. Vendors bring life to these spaces by drawing customers and adding dimension through light, sound, and economic activity. (Cupers, 2022) The removal of vendors from the public realm not only sanitizes the city of the character vendors bring to the built environment, but it also robs them of the democratic right to participate in city building.

In 2018, SB 946 legalized street vending in California, this was a monumental win for the vending community, but there is a long way to go before their trade is truly legal, navigable, and safe for all participants. To gain a better understanding of the landscape in the region, here is a brief overview of the recent history of vending in Los Angeles.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTI-VENDING LAWS IN LOS ANGELES:

The 1870s:

FIRST REPORTED VENDORS
Chinese and Mexican immigrants reported selling produce, tamales, and masa from pushcarts (Bruene et al., 2022)

The 1890s:

FIRST ANTI-VENDING RULES
Government-sanctioned attempts to severely limit or curb vending by limiting tamaleros' movements and behavior. (Contreras, 2022)

1904:

NEXT WAVE OF ANTI-VENDING RULES

Rules published to limit vending.

- Only allowed on "public highways" in business centers from 6 pm to 2 am
- Required operating licenses (Los Angeles Times, 1904)

1910:

INCREASED REGULATIONS

The City of LA enacts strict outdoor vending regulations that favor white vendors over Chinese and Mexican Vendors (Elliott, 2015)

1930: All street vending in Los Angeles was criminalized by 1930 (Bruene et al., 2022)

1932:

OLYMPICS

Vendors "run-off" in preparation for the Los Angeles Olympics (Elliott, 2015)

1986:

IMMIGRATION REFORM AND CONTROL ACT

The Immigration Reform and Control Act was a response to increased migration from Mexico and Central America that enacted sanctions against employers of undocumented immigrants. Both factors led to an increase in the number of vendors selling goods in Latinx neighborhoods. (Wolff, 1992)

1988:

VENDORS START ORGANIZING

Foundation of the Asociacion de Vendedores Ambulantes to help vendors' daily interactions with the police throughout the city. (Weber, 2002)

1989:

VENDORING TASK FORCE

LA City Council Member Michael Woo formed a Task Force on Street Vending (Contreras, 2022)

1990:

ENFORCEMENT SPIKE

a spike in anti-vending arrests. The year saw 2,700 vendor arrests x2 the number of arrests from previous years. (Kettles, 2004)

1994:

ORDINANCE 169319

LA City Council Passes Ordinance 169319

- Prohibits street sale of goods and deems street vending a misdemeanor
- Creates opportunity for 8 “special vending zones” where vending with a permit is allowed
 - McArthur Park was the only one ever created and is largely seen as a failure due to its low participation by vendors
 - The permitting process was complicated and expensive.
 - Regulations significantly limited mobility in a means that was harmful to business. (Bruene et al., 2022)

2008:

LA STREET VENDOR CAMPAIGN STARTED

A group of resident leaders with East LA Community Corporation began supporting vendor neighbors who were being ticketed and harassed by police.

- Grew into a huge vendor advocacy movement that led to significant legal wins. (Hidalgo, 2020)

2017:

LA CITY COUNCIL

DECRIMINALIZED VENDING

- Reduced the penalty of street vending from a misdemeanor criminal offense to an administrative fine
- Protects vendors from exposure to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Heil, 2019)

2018:

SAFE SIDEWALK VENDING ACT PASSED

State of California passes Safe Sidewalk Vending Act (SB 946)

- Legalized street vending statewide
- Prohibits criminal penalties for sidewalk vending
- Sets a framework for local governments to set up permitting processes to protect health, safety, and welfare concerns (Bill Text, 2018)

ORDINANCE 185900

LA City Council passes a Vending Ordinance (Ordinance 185900), to provide local rules and regulations for vendors in LA.

- Doesn't allow vending in “no vending zones” These zones are 500 feet boundaries around tourist attractions, concert, and event venues due to concerns about overcrowding. (Hollywood Bowl, Universal Studios, El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, Dodger Stadium, Hollywood Walk of Fame, Los Angeles Coliseum).
- Requires licenses and permits to

vend on sidewalks and parks that are expensive and unattainable. (Los Angeles City Council, 2018)

2020:

THE CITY OF LA BEGINS ISSUING VENDING PERMITS (Contreras, 2022)

COVID 19 MOTIONS

3 months into the vending program, the COVID-19 pandemic began in California. The state ordered a state-wide shelter-in-place requirement and only allowed “essential” businesses to operate. The Los Angeles City Council introduced a series of motions prohibiting vending during the pandemic, including a temporary moratorium on street vending which undermined any progress in legalization. (Contreras, 2022)

2021:

PITFALLS REVEALED

UCLA and Public Counsel uncover the pitfalls in the vending legislation in a widely cited report. The report focuses on the obstacles vendors face in acquiring the health permits necessary for legalization.

- Only 165 permits have been issued due to the unattainable requirements and expensive permitting process.
- New rules allow local officials to punish violations, confiscate carts, and continue to fine vendors who do not meet the impossible standards in SB 946.(Bennett et al., 2021)

2022:

CALIFORNIA RETAIL FOOD CODE UPDATED

The state of California passes SB 972 which updates the California Retail Food Code.

- This bill aims to increase access to food vending permits
- Certain kinds of food vending are deemed “potentially hazardous” and subject to administrative citations, but no longer qualify as a misdemeanor or infraction offense.
- Maintains no vending zones (Bill Text, 2022)

LAWSUIT OVER NO-VENDING ZONES

Vendors sue the city of LA over “no-vending zones:

- Despite the wins in vending laws, there are still rules about where vendors can do business, a coalition of vendors sue the city over the exclusion from 9 high-traffic areas such as the Hollywood Walk of Fame. (Busch, 2022)

Why would this vulnerable group of people (BIPOC, elderly, disabled, and undocumented women) increase their numbers in such a dangerous line of work? Hidalgo surmises that these groups are pushed to vending because of globalization, deindustrialization, migration, and exclusionary hiring practices that make informal labor preferable to wage labor. (Hidalgo, 2020) Hidalgo's interviews with vendors found that vending is more profitable than factory work, yielding around \$15,000 a year. In my interviews with organizations that provide technical assistance for vendors in Los Angeles, I found that in 2023, street vendors in Los Angeles make anywhere between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year, and most vendors fall between \$25,000 to \$35,000 a year. For reference, the US Department of Health and Human Services classifies a family of 4 living in Los Angeles County as "Extremely Low Income" if they make \$35,750 or less in a year. (Los Angeles Almanac, 2023) Vending also provides more flexibility for people with care responsibilities (often women) than formal work. People with children or elderly family members who require care need the flexibility to pick up and drop off at school or doctors' appointments and may have to call in sick or bring dependents with them to work.

Beyond the unreliable economic benefits and the increased flexibility that comes along with street vending, people may be pushed to vending because they lack the language skills, formal documentation, and education to get hired elsewhere. (Hidalgo, 2020) Unfair hiring practices that discriminate against older and disabled people often leave them with no other choice but to create their own jobs. Studies in other cities have pointed to trends of urban and population growth outpacing job growth and leading to shortages of work options and increasing numbers of street vendors. (Damanik, 2022)

2 :

PUBLIC BENEFIT VENDORS PROVIDE

Despite the hardship that the state puts street vendors through, vendors provide proven and significant public benefits to the community. These include;

VIBRANCY IN THE PUBLIC REALM & CREATION/OPTIMIZATION OF SPACE:

The activity that vendors bring to the public realm is an asset. There is a sense of liveliness, friendliness, and vitality provided by street vendors which help to make our cities livable. (Damanik, 2022) (Darshini, et al, 2014) Vendors often take over misallocated space and turn it into active and meaningful cultural landscapes. (Cupers, 2022) (Giraldo, et al, 2020) Examples of the types of misallocated space vendors transformed include;

- parking lots after a business is closed
- excess space on the sidewalk where walking paths are interrupted by street trees or other infrastructure
- Areas along busy walking paths of public parks that are too chaotic to sit or play in

Since vendors are smaller, more responsive, and more mobile than brick-and-mortar businesses, they make more efficient and effective use of space. For example, they can respond to temporal food and service needs outside of event spaces like concerts and sporting events.

INCREASED SAFETY:

By creating space, vendors bring pedestrian activity and sometimes light to otherwise dark and vacant areas increasing the perception of safety.(Damanik, 2022) (Darshini et al., 2014)

Studies of vendors in New York show that vendors make long-term connections with clients in the spaces where they operate, keeping eyes on the street and taking responsibility for ensuring the cleanliness and safety of their place of work for themselves and their customers. (Damanik, 2022)

ACCESS TO HEALTHY, CHEAP, & CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT FOOD:

Food vendors operate on a low budget and can provide healthy food options at affordable prices. This is a considerable asset in areas that suffer from food deserts; geographic locations where residents have limited convenient options for affordable and healthy foods. (Annie E. Casey, 2021) In Los Angeles and across the global north, food vendors play a critical role in providing healthy food access in areas with few other options.(Bennett et al. 2021) (Rodento et al. 2021) A great example of this is the cut fruit vendors who meet an important need for fresh fruit and vegetables that is missing from convenience stores. (Bennett et al., 2021)

Vendors also increase access to culturally significant foods.(Rodento et al. 2021) Often immigrants, the act of selling goods from their home countries provides a way to celebrate and express culture in their historically dissented communities. (Bennett et al., 2021) This is meaningful for vulnerable communities and also meets the need for more vibrant lifestyles and diverse forms of public space. (Rodento et al. 2021)

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY:

The option to create an income with a low-overhead cost and minimal training provides economic stability and well-being for individuals and their larger communities. (Giraldo et al, 2020) Studies of street vendors in a series of cities in South America and Africa found that the creative, transformative act of street vending improves individual and collective well-being through economic opportunity and increased individual agency of vendors. (Giraldo et al, 2020)

In Los Angeles, where informal vending provides work for so many who cannot find formal work elsewhere, sidewalk vendors are the “engines of economic productivity and pillars of their communities”. (Bennett et al, 2021) This is the case because street vending provides economic opportunities for low-

income and immigrant workers who can use the flexibility and agency of street vending to start a business, augment low wages, respond to wage theft, and combine childcare responsibilities with a viable income. (Bennett et al, 2021) (Cupers, 2022) (Giraldo et al, 2020) Research on these vendors found that for most vendors, their businesses provide income to pay rent and medical bills, avoid houselessness and put food on the table. (Bennett et al, 2021) (Hidalgo, 2020)

In addition to creating a lifeline for the economic stability of individual vendors, vending is an asset to the economic stability of wider communities. For example, studies of street vendors in Indonesia found that when there is a shortage of formal work, vendors can quickly and responsively rebuild local economies. (Damanik, 2022) They also provide responsive and agile access to goods and services in a way that other less mobile services cannot. (Giraldo et al, 2022)



DO VENDORS FILL FOOD GAPS?

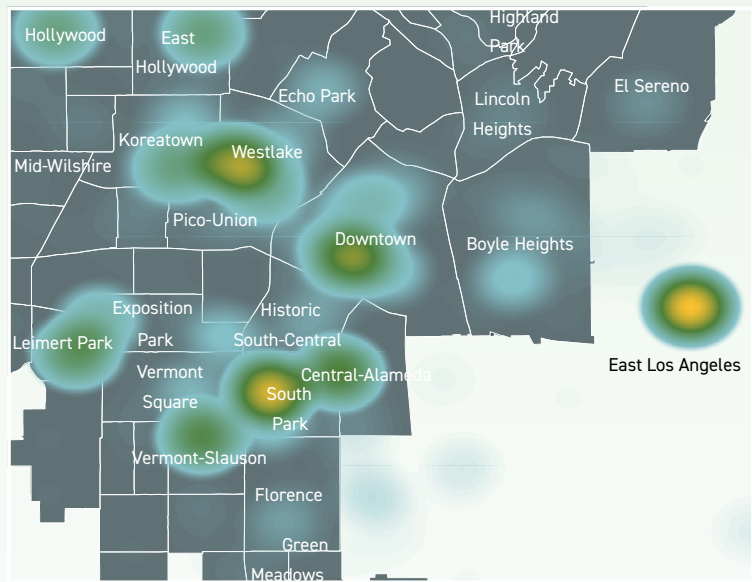
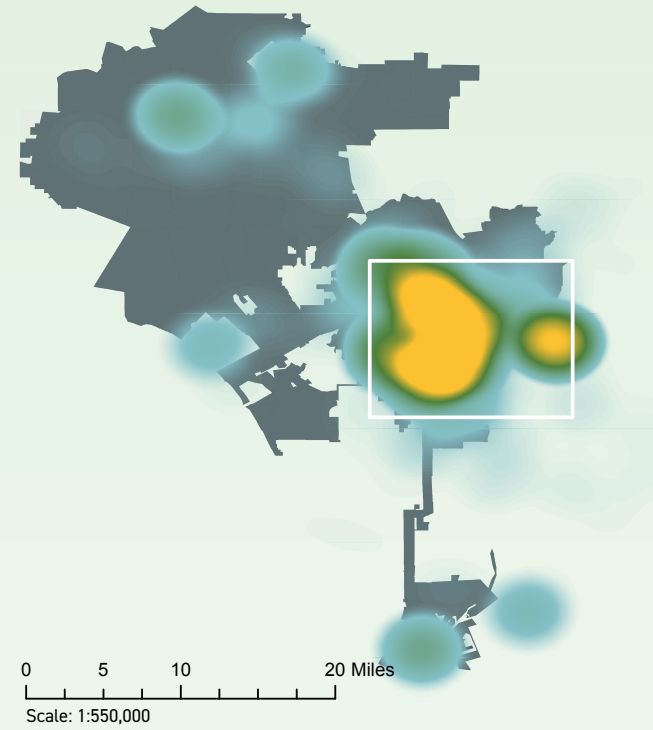
I took a closer look at the location of fruit vendors conducting business in Los Angeles to see the extent to which they fill food gaps in the city. For this analysis, I used a sample of roughly 2,000 reported vendor locations and inventory collected by the advocacy group Inclusive Action. Inclusive Action conducted a survey of active vendors in Los Angeles and provided me with latitude/longitude data points of where anonymous vendors report doing business and what they sell. I compared these points with available data on the locations of healthy food retailers from the California Department of Public Health, and food deserts identified using the United States Department of Agriculture criteria for low-income and low food access areas. Some things that are worth noting are:

- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) completed a report in 2015 of the low-income, low-access food landscape across this country. This project looked at census data for income, food access benefits, and food distribution locations to assess which census tracts had limited access to food and low incomes. (Rhone et al., 2019) The map below uses dark blue to mark tracts that are considered LILA, low income, low access considering a 1-mile radius. The highest concentrations of vendors in Westlake and downtown are not located in LILA tracts, but there are a considerable number of vendors doing business in LILA tracts, particularly in the northern regions of the city.
- The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) created an index for healthy food retailers called the Healthy Communities Data and Indicators project. For this analysis, CDPH looked at the ratio of healthy food retailers by census tract. (CDPH, 2017). Counting the number of food healthy food retailers and dividing that by the number of total food retailers to get an estimate of what proportion of the food available in the tract is considered "healthy". I mapped food vendor counts over these indicators to see how vendors might fill in food gaps in Los Angeles. Generally, vendors are concentrated in dense areas where there are higher percentages of healthy retailers (30-60%) in the food access landscape. That said, there are vendors providing food access in areas with lower access to healthy food retailers (0-20% of food retailers are healthy food retailers) in the less dense, northern regions of the city.

THOUGHT
BUBBLE

- Overall, there are vendors doing business in areas with low access to other healthy food retailers, pointing to a finding that vendors do help fill food gaps in Los Angeles. More holistic data collection of vendor locations and products would be necessary to draw more conclusions from this data.

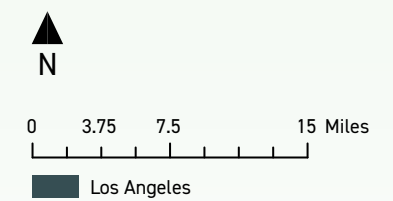
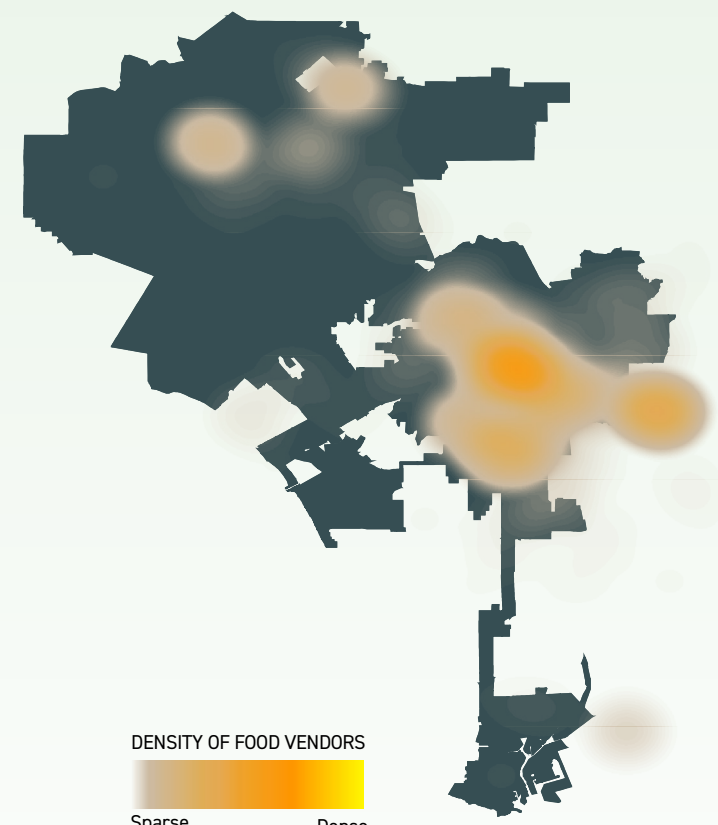
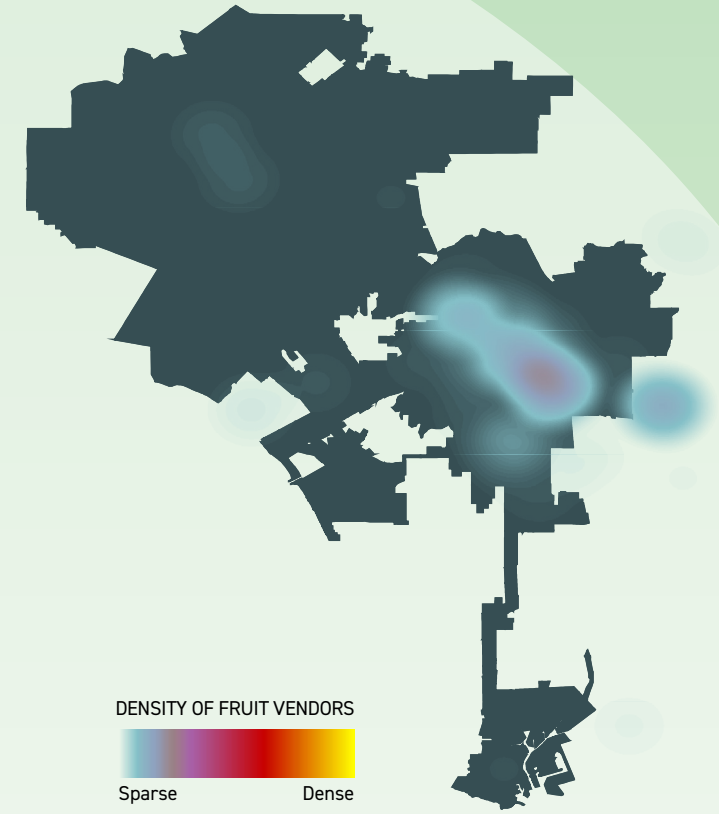
DENSITY OF SAMPLE VENDORS IN LOS ANGELES (2019)



Data: Inclusive Action self reported vendor locations.

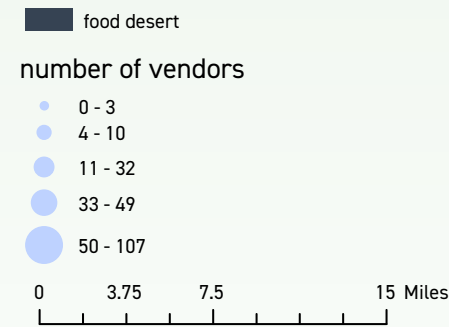
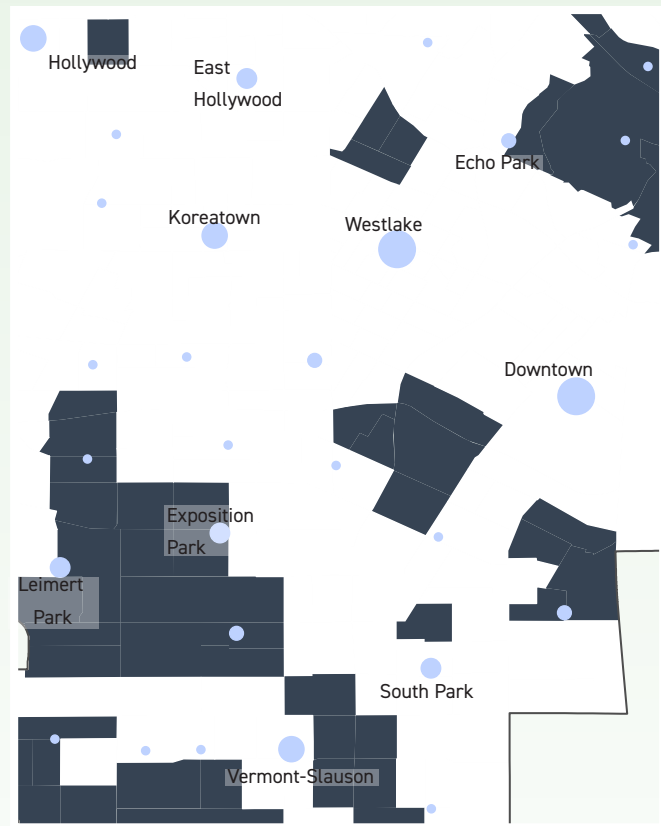
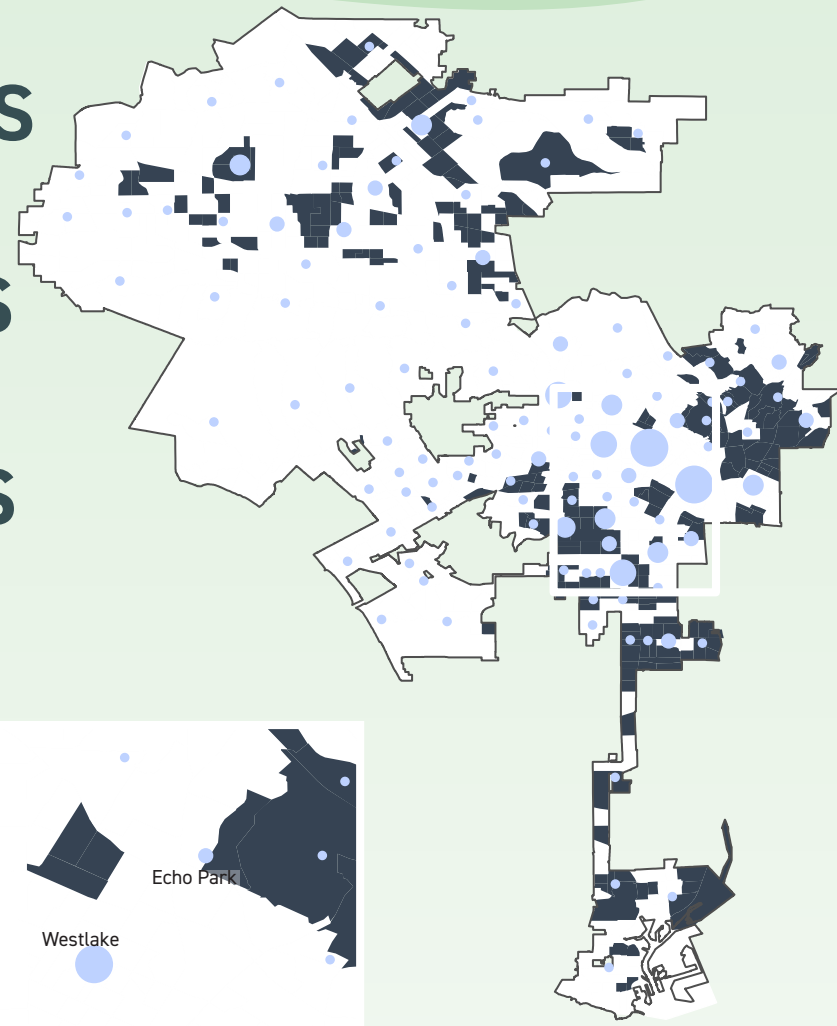


DENSITY OF SAMPLE FRUIT AND FOOD VENDORS IN LOS ANGELES (2019)

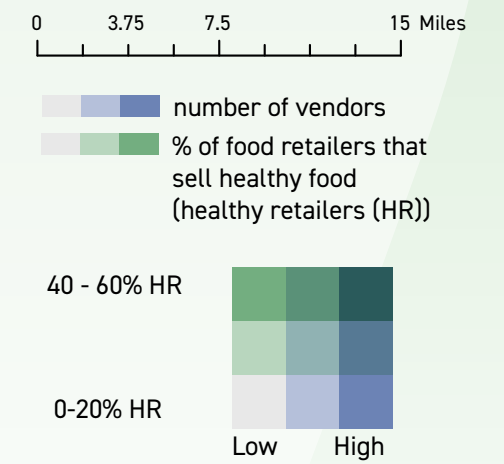
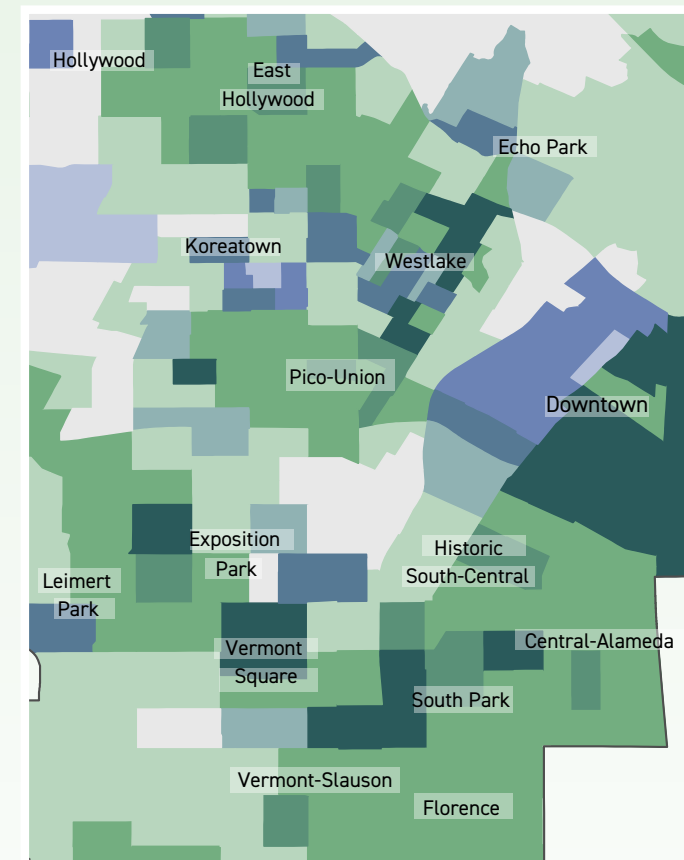
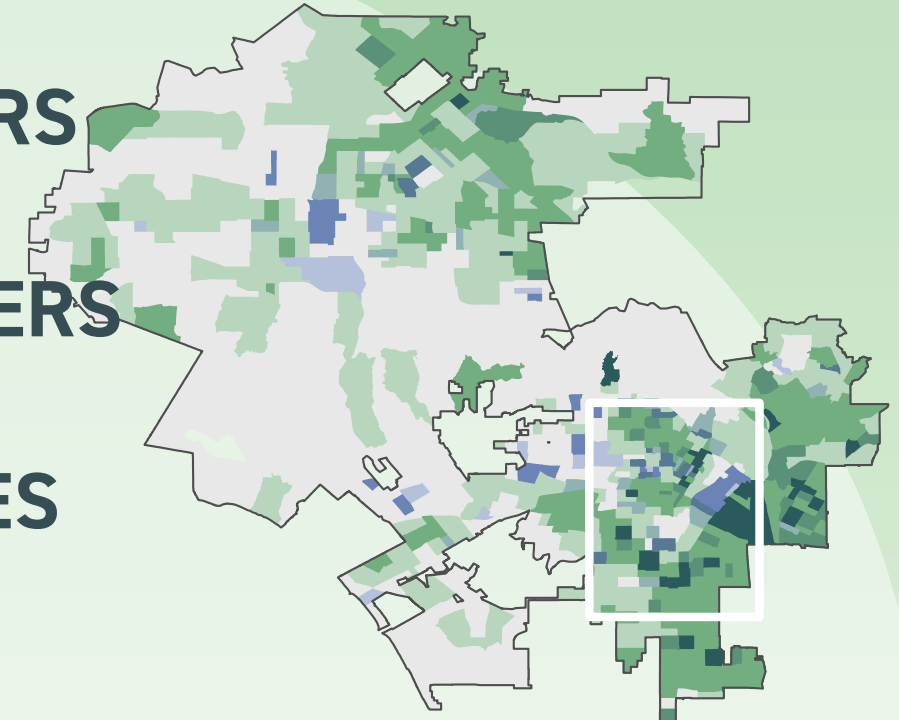


Data: Inclusive Action self reported vendor locations.

FOOD VENDORS & FOOD DESERTS IN LOS ANGELES



FOOD VENDORS & FOOD RETAILERS IN LOS ANGELES



Data: Inclusive Action self reported vendor locations & CPH Food retailer index

3: POLICY IDEAS

Policy changes that would make safe and accessible vending possible:

CREATE A LOAN PROGRAM FOR SAFE & APPROVED EQUIPMENT

The cost of code-compliant food carts is the first and most pressing hurdle vendors face when trying to obtain a permit for vending in California. The health department puts equipment regulations and design standards into place to ensure that food sold in the public right of way is safe for consumption. Vendors, regulators, and consumers can all agree this is a priority, so in addition to setting food safety standards, municipalities should make meeting these standards attainable. Interviews with vendor advocates who are trying to help get vendors permitted in Los Angeles suggested that municipalities can make meeting health code standards achievable by:

1. Setting food cart-specific health code regulations rather than adapting food truck or brick-and-mortar codes for mobile vendors.
2. Working with design and manufacturing organizations to develop a mobile food cart design that meets health and safety regulations.
3. Setting up or supporting banks, credit unions, or other financial institutions in creating a loan program to make the acquisition of these carts accessible to vendors.

None of these actions can stand alone, instead, they should be launched simultaneously in order to make as many cart options as possible available to vendors while encouraging maximum financial accessibility to safe and approved equipment.

In Los Angeles, the health code regulations vendors need to comply with in order to get a legal vending permit are not created for food vendors on foot, but for food trucks. The equipment requirements are much heavier, bulkier, and more expensive than possible for vendors who operate out of a cart or on

foot. This is a huge obstacle to legalization, because the steps needed for a permit, equipment code compliance, are nearly impossible to meet. Interviews with urban designers working on code-compliant food carts illuminated the need to write a set of restrictions that meet the specific behaviors of mobile, on-foot food vendors. (Kiani, 2023) In theory, if the regulations are designed for food vendors, they will be easier to meet, and more vendors will be able to get permits.

In Los Angeles, a collection of advocates and design organizations are in the process of designing mobile food carts that meet health and safety regulations and plan to provide open-source access to these designs. East Los Angeles Community Corporation, a non-profit organization that provides technical assistance to vendors in Los Angeles, will give many of the carts away for free. A loan program run or endorsed by a regulatory body that has pre-approved the food sales equipment could expedite the widespread use of safe mobile food carts. It might not, Los Angeles tried this same process in the 1990s with the launch of the MacArthur Park street vending district and most vendors did not want to purchase the carts in part due to cost. There is always the possibility that the cart provided by the city or endorsed organization won't meet the specific needs of a vendor (whether that means it is too expensive, or not functional for their operations). For that reason, a cart could and should be provided as an option, but should be paired with achievable DIY standards and loan programs to make buying an approved cart possible.

A loan program is something that came up over and over in interviews with vendor advocates who spoke to the difficulty vendors face in access to small business loans. This lack of access was especially overt during the COVID-19 pandemic when other businesses were receiving financial support from the local and federal government and vendors were not given the same relief. (Hsu, 2023) (Serrano, 2023) There is a need to create a trusted pathway for established financial institutions to support vendors as they meet the new health and safety standards and grow their businesses.

CONTINUE TO EASE PERMITTING PROCESSES

Complicated and expensive permitting processes present significant barriers for vendors aiming to operate compliant businesses. (Bennett et al, 2021) As of 2021, only 204 of the estimated 50,000 vendors were permitted in Los Angeles. (Bennett et al, 2021) By easing restrictions and providing straightforward permitting processes, agencies can help foster an inclusive and positive vending community.

Despite the recent legislation to streamline the permitting process and ease restrictions for street vending in Los Angeles, many inhibitors remain. Conversations with advocates and organizers supporting vendors as they navigate the permitting process in Los Angeles illuminate a few important considerations for regulators:

- **Consider permitting office location:**
There should be permitting offices located in areas that are accessible to high numbers of vendors, especially when vendors are required to get carts inspected.
- **Provide translation services:**
Many vendors are very recent immigrants to the US. In Los Angeles, a large community of vendors are from indigenous communities in South and Central America and don't speak English or Spanish. This leaves huge groups of vendors isolated from important regulatory information and resources.

CREATE PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMERCIAL KITCHENS NEAR POPULAR VENDING ZONES

Vendors need a clean space to prepare and store their goods and carts during off hours. In California, the rules around what kinds of spaces are approved for this behavior are shifting, and advocates are working to widen the types of commercial kitchens that can be used for prep and storage. (Serrano, 2023) More can be done to make underutilized industrial kitchen spaces available to vendors, particularly in places of worship, community centers, schools, and restaurants that only use their kitchen space and storage during discrete times. (Jimenez, 2023)

Building relationships between vendors and organizations with open commercial kitchen space would ease the process for vendors and foster community connections between vendors and local institutions. When possible, there is also an opportunity for community groups that own a commercial kitchen to make a small profit by offering commissary space for vendors. For reference, in Los Angeles, commissary kitchens cost at least \$150 a week or \$500 a month to store a food cart. (Jimenez, 2023) (Serrano, 2023)

DELEGATE A TRUSTED ORGANIZATION TO RUN OUTREACH AND EDUCATION AROUND REGULATIONS

A constant challenge is the lack of trust between vendors and the regulatory bodies who enforce anti-vending laws and institute permits. To ensure that rules, regulations, and rights are well understood amongst the vendor community, they should 1) be involved in making the rules and 2) have a reliable and trusted organization be responsible for communicating those rules to them in a variety of accessible outreach methods. This could happen if a regulatory agency created an arm or department responsible for vendor relations, or if a city delegated a trusted organization to run all outreach. The method for this would depend on the resources and structure of the municipality. (Jimenez, 2023)

4: DESIGN IDEAS

Appropriate design and planning of the spatial environment would make safe and accessible vending in public spaces possible

DO AWAY WITH “NO VENDING ZONES” AND OTHER POLICIES THAT RESTRICT VENDOR MOBILITY

Central to the street vendors' economic success is their ability to move about the city at different times and follow foot traffic. Historically, state authorities have tried policies such as “no vending zones” to maintain control over where vendors operate and when. This tactic of confining vendors to certain spaces to control their movements undermines their right to mobility and the essential logic of vending. (Cupers, 2022) Often implemented by brick-and-mortar business owner's influence, these “no vending zones”, allow for the enforcement that has been so destructive to the vending community. (Cupers, 2022)

Another tactic used to restrict vendor mobility is the use of physical barriers like fences and boulders to displace vendors. These tactics are included in the hostile architecture that limits the mobility of vendors and should be done away with to support existing vending hubs. (Bennett et al, 2021)

SUPPORT THE CREATION OF SPECIAL VENDING ZONES

An alternative to “no vending zones” are “special vending districts”. Rather than roping off areas of the city and continuing to limit vendor behavior with punitive enforcement, special vending districts are areas that are built to accommodate vendors with safety and accessibility considerations. These zones would have dedicated spaces for vendors and vending amenities that

EXAMPLE OF A PHYSICAL BARRIER TO LIMIT VENDOR MOBILITY



Photo by: Lexis-Oliver Ray

An example of this hostile architecture can be seen in front of the Los Angeles City College swap meet, a popular market that fills the sidewalk and parking lot on weekend days. In December of 2022, individuals associated with the LACC swap meet put boulders up along the sidewalk to block vending during the run-up to the holidays. Attached is a photo captured by the journalists at LA Taco. (Villafana, 2023)

foster connections among vendors and residents.(Bennett et al, 2021)

To be successful, special vending zones should be created in existing vending hubs, or areas with high potential to be vending hubs. Locating special ending zones in existing vending hubs is crucial to their success because vendors are unlikely to use new amenities if they are hard to access or are not located in areas where they can get good business. This was made clear by the failure of the MacArthur Park Vending Zone pilot in Los Angeles in the 1990s where the locations of permitted vending sites were hard to access and bad for business and subsequently went unused.

After prioritizing the existing vending hubs for new special vending zone amenities, it could be useful to add amenities to areas that have the potential to become vending hubs. One would need good reason to believe that an area where vendors are not currently doing business has the potential to become a vending hub, such as a specific request from the vending community, high pedestrian traffic, or significant new development (whether it be of parks, event spaces, or other attractions). Even with good reason, all special vending zones should be identified in collaboration with the existing vending community and tailored to meet their specific needs.

In addition to updating the built environment with vending amenities (detailed in the next section), there are power and capacity-building programs that can be implemented around special vending zones to increase their impact. For example, the Guatemalan Night Market in Westlake Los Angeles is a regular night market that takes over the sidewalks of 2-4 city blocks 7 days a week from 5 pm-12 am. The night market is bustling and crowded and coordinated. The vendors have organized themselves with matching t-shirts and all chip in for regular maintenance to care for their place of business. They hire regular power washers and trash pick-ups as a collective. (Hsu, 2023) (Jimenez, 2023)

This model of collaboration could be replicated in other vending zones, and supported by the introduction of vending amenities like public sinks, access to power, or trash cans. Another benefit of building place-based relationships amongst vendors is that it makes it easier for vendors to build power and relationships with local businesses, schools, spiritual institutions, and other community spaces. These community-based connections create opportunities for symbiosis like vendor's use of unused storage space and the growth of coalitions and power building in a community. These coalitions can be powerful when they work together to advocate for investments and policy changes in their community. Think for example if vendors, parents, and educators worked together to secure funding for better sidewalks outside schools. (Jimenez, 2023)

ALLOCATE SPACE (WITH HEAVY FOOT TRAFFIC)

Studies show that vendors locate themselves where people regularly walk. (Sun et al, 2022) This makes sense as street vendors bank on existing foot traffic for business while creating foot traffic from customers. Allocating space for vending, while maintaining ADA access to the public right of way is necessary to keep the public realm open and safe for all users.

PROVIDING VENDING AMENITIES:

Equipment and logistical barriers present significant challenges for vendors that can be alleviated with thoughtful design. Logistically, vendors face a shortage of commissary space to prepare food safely and legally for sale. (Bennett et al, 2021) Increasing access to food preparation space where vendors can cook, clean, and store goods would make it easier for them to meet health codes and provide safe and accessible food.(Bennett et al, 2021)

In public spaces, the co-location of the following amenities could make vending more accessible and safer. (Bennett et al, 2021) (Darshini et al, 2014) Considering where these amenities are located and how they interact with one another will be crucial to optimizing usability.

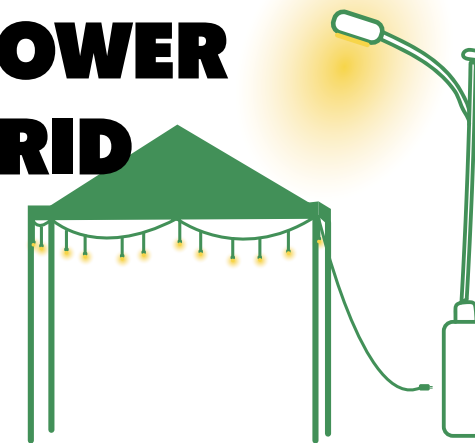
TRASH CANS & CLEAN-UP SERVICES



Vendors create waste. Adequate receptacles and regular waste removal services are necessary to keep shared spaces clean. Trash cans, removal services as well as regular cleaning services like power washing and trash pick-up are key to providing sanitary vending sites.

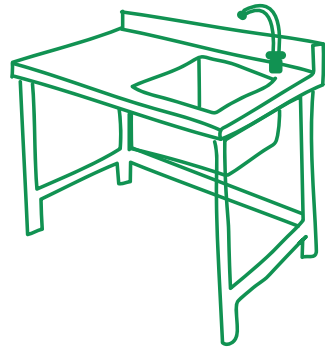
Some vendors in Los Angeles have indicated in other outreach that they would be willing to pay a small fee for trash removal, and some coalitions of vendors already have a model like this. The Guatemalan Night Market on Bonnie Brea is an example where vendors pay for a cleaning service to clean up once every few weeks.

CONNECTION TO THE POWER GRID



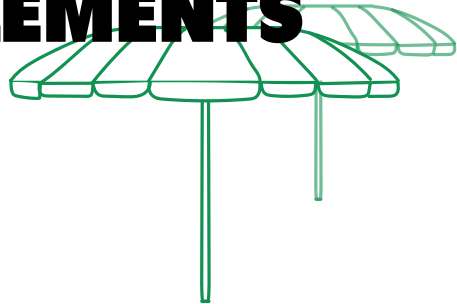
In many cases, vendors are using portable generators and propane tanks to power the fuel and lights at their vending stations. There are existing models in LA and across the globe for Electric Vehicles to charge using hook-ups through street lights. Using this model to present charging opportunities for vendors would encourage safer, cleaner, and more efficient power sources like rechargeable batteries which cut down on costs for them, and help improve local air quality.

WATER FOR DRINKING & CLEANING



Similar to access power, vendors would benefit from access to running water to meet health and safety standards. Finding a way to connect vendors to the LADWP water system to provide communal ware washing and hand-washing sinks would make meeting health code standards much easier and create a cleaner, easier process for the public.

SHELTER FROM THE ELEMENTS



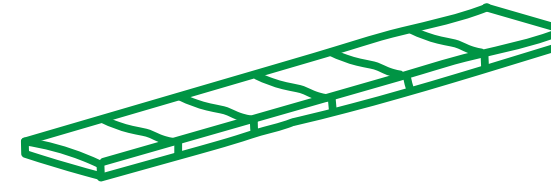
Vendors are recognizable by their umbrellas and tents. This is partly because they protect from the rain and sun but also because overhead protection is necessary to meet health and safety regulations. Creating shelter from the elements for consumers and vendors would lighten their load and create a more hospitable consumption experience for customers.

TOILETS & FURNITURE



Public Bathrooms not just for vendors, but for the general public are a public health and safety requirement. Similar to the shade and storage amenities, providing tables and chairs for vendors would be one less thing for them to haul around from site to site and enhance the customer experience.

ACCESSIBLE PATHWAYS



Vendors only do business as far as they can travel from their homes. Sometimes they have trucks or access to rides which allow them to travel distances to meet crowds but in most cases, they set up shop as far as they can travel on foot with their equipment. Parks can accommodate vendors by creating areas with flat surfaces and accessible pathways to those areas. These spaces should be designed considering access to pathways for other park users. Bump-out spaces next to the walkway in high-traffic areas for vendors to set up could be one workaround that would accommodate vendors.

It is worth noting that the main anti-vending argument is that vendors take up space in the public right of way and limit ADA access in the public spaces of Los Angeles. Rather than viewing the public right of way as a limited resource, designers can take on the perspective that designing for the most marginalized groups makes the public realm more accessible for everyone.

CONCLUSION

In the above report, I used the Los Angeles Street Vending community as a case study to explain the current conditions of street vendors, the public benefit they bring to a community, and the challenges they face. Embracing a rights-based approach that argues for the right of all urban inhabitants to access the benefits of urban life (Darshini, 2014), I argue that street vendors should be included in the design of public space.

Using the literature around vending as a foundation, I conducted a series of interviews with individuals working on vendor rights and operations in Los Angeles to develop design and policy recommendations to be considered when designing, evaluating, or adapting a park to better accommodate street vendors. The recommendations I provide are meant to be a starting point. Every project will require site-specific outreach and collaboration with residents, current users, and vendors in order to successfully meet park user needs.

Due to time and resource limitations, I did not work directly with vendors to develop these recommendations. This limits my findings to initial ideas that need to be reviewed, edited, and approved, by vendors and park users in the design and co-creation process of a place-based public space. The ultimate goal is to create a framework to build from when designing parks and public spaces that make the public realm less hostile toward the vendor community and encourage safer, more livable, and inclusive public parks.

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