



YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

City of Cambridge

Executive Department

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IN CITY COUNCIL
October 5, 2026

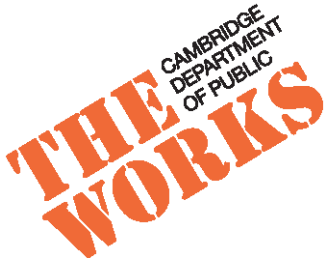
To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please see attached a memo from John Nardone, Department of Public Works Commissioner, conveying a response to Awaiting Report 26-32 regarding regulation of food vending in parks.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager





City of Cambridge Department of Public Works

John F. Nardone, Commissioner

147 Hampshire Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
theworks@cambridgema.gov

Voice: 617 349 4800

TDD: 617 499 9924

September 30, 2026

To the City Manager:

The Department of Public Works, in collaboration with the Law Department, Community Development Department (CDD), Inspectional Service Department (ISD), Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP), and the License Commission have prepared this response to AR 26-32, which requests that the City Manager confer with relevant City staff to review City ordinances regulating the operation of food vendors in City parks and report back to the City Council with policy options.

Overview

Cambridge's parks offer welcoming spaces where residents and visitors can relax, play sports, and enjoy a variety of activities. As these spaces continue to serve as vibrant community gathering areas, park users are interested in convenient food and beverage options during their visit. The addition of vending not only enhances the overall park experience but also creates opportunities for local entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Currently, Cambridge's municipal code prohibits vending in city parks, limiting the City's ability to offer these amenities. Allowing regulated vending in parks would create low-barrier opportunities for entrepreneurs while providing accessible food options in areas not served by nearby commercial districts.

Expanding allowable uses in Cambridge's parks aligns with the City's broader goals of supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses, enhancing public space, and fostering community vibrancy. This response outlines current regulatory and permitting requirements for mobile food vendors, the proposed ordinance and regulation changes that would be needed to enable vending in parks, and an implementation strategy for a pilot program to allow food vendors in Cambridge public spaces. We believe the proposed structure will support small businesses and community organizations, activate public spaces, and establish a fair pilot program for City staff to administer.

Existing Regulatory Framework and Permitting

Under the current Cambridge Municipal Code and park regulations, commercial activity and food vendor operations are not allowed within the boundaries of city parks overseen by the Department of Public Works (Danehy Park is managed by the DHSP). Food vendors, such as food trucks and carts, can operate on private property with permission from the property owner, on a public sidewalk with permission from the Department of Public Works, and in a parking space with permission from the Cambridge Department of Transportation.

Currently, to vend in one of these locations, a mobile food vendor first applies for a Hawkers and Peddlers License with the License Commission and applies for a Mobile Food Truck Permit or a Temporary Food Service Permit with the Inspectional Services Department. Location approvals are part of this process and to make the application process easier, all of these licenses and permits can be applied for online. These existing licenses and permits would also be required for a vending in parks program.

Applicable Ordinances and Regulations

To permit food vending in public parks, the City would need to comply with the following municipal code sections and regulations:

- **Municipal Code Title 12.20 (*Commons and Public Grounds*) and Current Park Regulations:**
 - o *Chapter 12.20.050 (Selling items or holding shows prohibited):* This section prohibits selling goods in parks, however it also states that selling is allowed if approved by the Commissioner of Public Works. So this section of the Code does not need to be amended. Current park regulations state that no soliciting is allowed in parks, so this regulation would need to be amended to allow commercial activity.
- **Municipal Code Title 5 (Business Taxes, Licenses, and Regulations):**
 - o *Chapter 5.36 (Peddlers and Hawkers):* Designated stationary locations within municipal parks constitute authorized vending sites for License Commission-approved peddlers who have been selected through the City's park vending process with permission from the Superintendent of Streets.
 - o *Chapter 5.36.060 (Restricted Areas): Peddlers and Hawkers in the Cambridge Common and Joan Lorentz Park* would need authorization from the Police Commissioner, unless exempt under G.L c.101: "No person shall, within the limits of Memorial Drive on the south from the Western Avenue Bridge to Hawthorn Street, to Mount Auburn Street, to Ash Street, to Mason Street, to Garden Street, to Chauncy Street, to Everett Street, to Oxford Street, to Kirkland Street, to Trowbridge Street, to Putnam Square to Putnam Avenue, to Western Avenue and return to Memorial Drive at the Western Avenue Bridge hawk or peddle, sell or expose for sale, distribute or give away goods, wares or merchandise within the confines of the area set out in this section except when authorized to do so by Chapter 101 of the General Laws and acts in amendments thereof or in addition thereto, except under a permit issued by the Chief of Police. The provisions of this section shall not apply to the sale of newspapers."

Proposed Regulatory Implementation Framework

To establish a low-barrier, equitable, and park-safe vending program, two new administrative processes are required:

A. Pilot Vending Program

The vending program would be specifically designed to provide lower economic barriers for Cambridge-based entrepreneurs, immigrant-owned businesses, and family-run operations.

Based on discussions with CDD, current demand from Cambridge-based food entrepreneurs for food cart vending is limited. Recognizing that market conditions may shift, the program will be established with a prioritization framework that gives preference to Cambridge residents, first-time business owners, and minority- and women-owned enterprises. The program will factor in product types to ensure a diverse range of offerings (e.g., pastries, coffee, diverse street food) and prevent direct overlap of identical cuisines in a single park on the same day or to avoid direct competition with brick-and-mortar business in a specific area.

CDD's Economic Opportunity and Development Division will continue to work with departments to provide clear, plain-language guidance to businesses interested in vending or starting a business in Cambridge. CDD's focus will be particularly through permitting guidance and its technical and financial assistance programs.

B. DPW Park Vending Permit

The Department of Public Works would need to establish a new, park-specific operational permit focused on mitigating physical impacts on the public space. In addition to establishing a new permit, city staff will have to oversee and check to ensure vendors are adhering to city policies.

- **Footprint and Placement:** DPW will determine site locations and create site plans to ensure operations remain in designated vending areas. Operations would be limited to paved plazas, wide walkways, or designated hardscapes to protect turf, root systems, and landscaping.
- **Waste Management:** The permit would mandate a strict "pack-in, pack-out" policy. Vendors must provide their own trash, composting, and recycling receptacles, remove all generated waste from the park at the end of their shift, and adhere to the City's Bring Your Own Bag and zero-waste ordinances.
- **Operational Oversight:** The permit would need to regulate noise and emissions and establish stringent rules against the disposal of gray water or grease on park grounds. DPW and ISD would also have to conduct site inspections to make sure vendors are within their permitted areas and following vending in parks regulations.

Phased Expansion and Future Opportunities

Implementing this initiative through a pilot program would allow the City to activate public spaces while monitoring operational impacts of having food vendors in parks. By launching an initial phase in 3 or 4 parks that are over 25,000 square feet, City staff could collect data on usage, economic benefits, public satisfaction, and environmental impacts. This phased approach could establish the operational groundwork for a future expansion and a wider variety of park locations in subsequent seasons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Nardone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John Nardone
Commissioner