



**CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
WASHINGTON HEIGHTS AND INWOOD, INC.**

November 2009

A message from the Washington Heights-Inwood Chamber of Commerce:

To our Elected Officials, Community Representatives and Chambers of Commerce:

As President of the Washington Heights and Inwood Chamber of Commerce, it is rare that the topic of legal and illegal street vending is not brought to my attention from our membership and members of our community.

Is there a product unavailable in legitimate stores that make street vending necessary?

With the exception of city parks and unusual circumstances the answer is absolutely not.

Street vending is out of control throughout our northern Manhattan community. Vendors are unregulated, despite laws and protocols that are currently on the books. The current regulations are nebulous, confusing and ineffective. Small businesses are closing, due directly to unfair competition. The mom and pop shops that are so integral to our economy and community are closing their doors. Over two hundred small businesses have closed in our neighborhood. Street vendors operate at minimal costs due to their lack of overhead and a freewheeling attitude toward the law and the community. They attract consumers with the benefit of overt advertising, which “dangerously interferes with daily foot traffic”. Let’s bring street vendors in from the cold and make them small business owners, but first let’s keep the small business people viable as they struggle to maintain an income.

Small businesses who are inspected regularly, pay taxes, fees and must answer to the NYC bureaucracy are unfairly treated by the regulators who should be working for their enhancement.

Health Department DOT and Consumer Affairs regulations are ignored by coffee carts, produce vendors and other food and beverage street purveyors. Where do these people go to the bathroom and wash their hands? The answer to this question should be enough to stop street vendors and garner support for legitimized businesses.

The street vendors cause an excess of garbage and litter. Often times they will drop their refuse into municipal waste bins or mask it among the legitimate collecting areas of responsible businesses that pay for their garbage to be collected on a regular basis.

Vendor's resupply trucks take up premium parking spaces, often for an entire day and into the night breaking multiple parking codes as well as inconveniencing the patrons of businesses in New York City neighborhoods. The **street vendors are not representative of the Washington Heights-Inwood community.** Rather they are “outsiders”. It is believed by many that they buy and sell premium vending locations among themselves. They are indeed more organized than our own Chamber of Commerce and operate within a close knit network as a “subterranean black market” Products sold from apparel to media recordings infringe on copyright laws having a huge impact on law abiding business and tax collecting agencies. Street vendors with the support of the city bureaucracy attack the concept of fairness. Not only blocking street

traffic they violate the freedom of all our citizens to move freely, which is akin to violating the first amendment of the constitution.

New York City administrations have been confronted with the problem of street vending since the time of Fiorello LaGuardia. Returning veterans from World War I took to the streets, hoping to make up for the lack of employment opportunities available to them.

Fortunately, today our veterans have more employment and educational benefits than in generations past. There should be more we offer our veterans than the opportunity to street vend. According to Consumer Affairs there are 2731 licensed vendors of this 1380 are Veterans. The Health Department has 2800 food vendor permits provided for in New York City most of which most are in Manhattan, and now there are 1000 green cart permits provided all to the detriment of keeping small business as the building block of our neighborhoods and economy.

If anyone should have the right to determine the need for street vending it should be the community under the auspices of our NYC Community Boards. Furthermore if there is a need or desire for street vending-- that right should be allocated to the small businesses that are already in place and adhere to the policies of New York City. By doing this inspectors and regulators would have accessibility to protecting the public. There is nothing more obnoxious than a fruit vendor setting up shop outside the local supermarket or a bagel/coffee cart feet away from a Bagel Shop. If street vending ceased to exist the influx of new businesses and taxes would raise helping new employees work in a more amenable environment. The city would be cleaner, streets more open,

architecture and beauty no longer marred. The time is now for communities and small business people to be heard.

Let us put more small business taxes into the New York City coffers. Let us protect our citizens from the abuse of unhealthy and unregulated street vending. **Let us solve this problem with our elected officials, community representatives and the New York City Chamber of Commerce. Please send your comments to**

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