

Streamlining Food Business Permitting

King County Board of Health

April 17, 2025

Dr. Eyob Mazengia

Food & Facilities - Assistant Division Director

Dr. Atar Baer

Food & Facilities - Section Deputy

Ian Miller, MPH

Food & Facilities - Technical Senior

Environmental Health Services Division

Public Health
Seattle & King County



FOOD
SAFETY





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Food Safety Program Goal

Ensure food safety measures are in place to protect the public from foodborne illnesses

We accomplish this objective by:



Completing
plan reviews



Conducting
regular inspections



Providing
food safety trainings



Responding to
complaints



Taking
enforcement actions

Current Landscape

Permitted Vending

- 12,500 permanent food businesses
- ~800 mobile food units
- ~3,500 temporary food permits
- 50 Farmers Markets



Unpermitted Vending

- Mainly street food vendors selling cut fruit and food cooked on site
- Increased trend locally (109 vendors closed in 2024 vs. 27 vendors in 2023)
- Increased trend nationally
- Increased frustration among permitted street vendors
- Difficult to trace foodborne illnesses
- Increased media/public attention





Permitting Challenges

- Financial barriers
- Difficulty navigating the permitting process across multiple agencies (City/State business licenses, PHSKC, L&I approval, street use permits, fire)
- Commissary kitchen access/cost
- Access to sanitation facilities
- Street use access/restrictions
- Language barriers
- Turnaround time to get permitted



Initiatives to remove barriers:

Improve access to commissary kitchens

Completed

Upcoming



Project: Offer commissary kitchen vouchers for up to 6 months to new and unpermitted street food vendors

Benefits: Reduces upfront cost; reduces likelihood of unsafe home preparation

Timeline for Initiating: Q3-Q4 of 2025

Impacts on program: Will require resources to manage the voucher program. We have success offering a similar kitchen access voucher during the COVID pandemic response.

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Initiatives to remove barriers:

Increase permitting options

Completed

Expanded catering: Created a pathway for caterers to sell food to consumers from a "pop-up" retail outlet.



Upcoming

- **Project:** Pilot options for seasonal pop-up permits for street vendors to sell low-risk foods without having to be at a temporary event/farmers market.
- **Benefit to customers:** Provides a pathway for start-up food businesses.
- **Timeline for Initiating:** Q3-Q4 of 2025
- **Impacts on program:** We expect a significant number of requests for "pop-up" permits, requiring additional staffing to issue permits and conduct inspections. If the pilot is successful, the EH Program may propose to the Board a code change.

Initiatives to remove barriers:

Close knowledge/information gaps



Completed

- **Multilingual staff**
- **Increased access to staff:** Increased direct customer support via Environmental Health Sanitarian on Duty
- **Publications/media**
- **Increased community engagement:**
 - 11/19/2024 at Rainier Beach Library
 - 2/3/2025 at El Centro de la Raza
 - 3/25/2025 at El Centro de la Raza
 - Upcoming session planned for April 2025 at El Centro de la Raza
 - About 150 individual businesses supported so far

Upcoming

- **Project:** Contract with Community Based Organizations to conduct outreach and support street food vendors with the permitting process.
- **Benefits:** Reduce time and effort needed to obtain street food permits.
- **Timeline for Initiating:** Will establish contracts in Q2 of 2025, program will run through summer 2026
- **Impacts on program:** Will require establishing contracts and use of program resources.

Initiatives to remove barriers:

Reduce financial barriers

Completed

Proration of Permit Fees: BOH Rule Change 2/15/24

Opening Date/Risk III	In 2023	In 2024
April 1 – June 30	\$927	\$927
July 1 – Sep 30	\$927	\$695
October 1 – Dec 31	\$463	\$463
Jan 1 - March 31	\$463	\$231

Upcoming

- **Project:** Pilot a one-time 50% reduced fee for new street food vendors with carts selling low-risk foods (e.g., cut fruit, shaved ice). The reduced fee includes 50% off plan review and annual permit fees.
- **Benefits:** Reduces upfront cost (\$790 - \$1093); reduces likelihood of unsafe home preparation.
- **Timeline for Initiating:** Q2-Q3 of 2025
- **Impacts on program:** Reduced revenue (\$40,000 - \$55,000); however, the pilot will test whether the cost will be offset by reduced time/effort spent on enforcement related to unpermitted vending, which is not covered by permit fees.

Initiatives to remove barriers:

Reduce permitting wait time

2024/2025	Number of plans in queue	Turn around time in days
1st Quarter/2024	160	74
2nd Quarter	112	55
3rd Quarter	39	24
4th Quarter	48	26
1st Quarter/2025	68	26

Ongoing Challenges

A multi-agency, sustained approach is needed to address:

- Lack of affordable commissary kitchens that are geographically accessible county-wide (\$800-\$1500/month)
- Costly and limited access to locations where permitted vendors are allowed to operate
- Permitting requirements from other agencies
- Staffing capacity constrained by the fee for service model
- Viable/effective options to bring unpermitted vendors into compliance

Expansion of The Food Safety Rating System

(1) BOH rule change to expand the food safety rating system to include ~2,000 additional food establishments

Increases access to food safety information to customers and incentivizes operators to improve food handling practices



Caterers



Food trucks and carts



Bakeries



Meat/seafood shops

(2) Updated description of emojis on our placards





Questions?

Contact

KCBOHAdmin@kingcounty.gov