

New street vendor rules may ease tensions with restaurants

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Fruitful changes are expected to chill tensions in downtown's sidewalk vendor program – including shifting vendors and broadening wares to add fresh fruits and ices.

Tensions between the sidewalk food carts – and between the food stands and restaurants that are increasingly opening in the city's core – led the Downtown Development Authority to update its year-old downtown vendor franchises.

Street vendors pay a \$20 to \$50 fee to enter an annual lottery and be assigned a location, said Mark Spanioli, authority senior manager of planning, design, transportation and services. For uniformity and aesthetics, they're also issued a navy blue um-

brella, cooler, apron and a special chair.

"We wanted to limit the competition with new restaurants, to create a better pedestrian environment," Mr. Spanioli said, "so we eliminated some locations and added others, for a better distribution of vendors. We also looked at the locations to make sure they had adequate foot traffic."

The city sidewalk vendor ordinance allows flexibility in the nature of wares sold, so the authority is encouraging sellers of "fruits and frozen ices and other things people are craving" to participate, Mr. Spanioli said.

"All of this comes out of our master plan, to encourage street activity with streetscape design, and guidelines for everything from news racks to trash receptacles to where we would



Photo by Maxine Usdan

An update in the street vendor program is intended to ease tensions between food stands and a growing number of permanent eateries.

locate our sidewalk food vendors," he said.

Authority board members acknowledge the concerns.

"I have a problem with these

food vendors – selling arepas, hot dogs or whatever – infringing on the operations of restaurant owners," said Jose Goyanes, downtown restaura-

rant owner and member of the authority's Services Committee. "I have a different clientele, so it doesn't affect me much, but the mom-and-pop cafes have some real competition from the carts."

About 18 restaurants are now open in the central business district, up from "three or four three years ago," he continued, "so this street vendor program has to continue to evolve."

"They've got to get the situation under control," agreed Tony Alonso, downtown merchant and Services Committee member.

With the debut of this program, the situation has improved, he said.

"What I've seen in past years hasn't made me happy. I think this is the better way to go."