

OTBA Food Truck Report

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prepared by Laura Barclay, Old Takoma Business Association

Food truck events have continued successfully into the winter in Old Takoma. Trucks are scheduled at both the Takoma Junction and at Trohvi in Takoma, DC. Trohvi has now taken ownership of booking trucks at their location and a master food truck calendar is shared online so as to minimize any overlap in product offering. Adding Trohvi to the mix opens up the pool of DC permitted food trucks (118) compared to the 16 trucks permitted in Montgomery County. We find that the community often walks or drives between both locations for their family dinner. Fridays remain the most popular night of the week, but trucks have also been scheduled on Saturday afternoons, Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings.

Over the last 6 months, the food truck landscape has changed with trucks, which were regular Takoma Park visitors, going out of business and new trucks hitting the streets. We have been able to offer a nice mix of options to the community: fish, burgers, hot dogs, BBQ, Latin food, comfort food, nouveau American, Indian, Italian, Vietnamese and sweets.

Fridays (both locations): On Fridays, 4-6 trucks total are booked at the two locations. The sales numbers have decreased throughout the winter (about 50-100 meals sold per truck in December versus 200+ meals per truck in the summer). While reduced, the trucks remain interested in attending on Friday evenings they represent revenue opportunities unavailable anywhere else.

Thursdays (Takoma Junction): Curely's Q BBQ started coming regularly on Thursdays in December and has stated that the demand is very low (approximately 30 meals per Thursday), but as of this report, is still planning on proceeding to establish name recognition in the area.

Saturdays (Takoma Junction): After one very successful Saturday afternoon visit in the fall by Go Fish food truck, a series of Saturday afternoon visits in December proved to be a financial loss. Seasonality of the product offering and the holiday season are considered to be reasons for the weak sales. It is the goal to try again in the Spring.

Sundays (Trohvi and Eastern Ave, NW): Rolls on Rolls tested Sunday mornings at both locations during the Takoma Park Farmers Market. Business was slow, but visits were not regular enough and with the colder weather, market foot traffic is down.

It is the belief of the Food Trucks and the OTBA that with warmer weather and continued marketing, that Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays could be well-received by the community and more profitable for the trucks. Also, the TP Public Works Department will be installing the picnic tables purchased with Takoma Junction programming funds at the end of January which should also have a positive impact on food truck sales come Spring.

Business Response:

There have been a couple of complaints from Old Takoma eating establishments (both in MD and DC) that the food trucks have negatively impacted their Friday evening business. The OTBA believes that increased marketing by these restaurants would resolve the situation because ultimately their offering is far more complete with a wider menu, drinks, tables and chairs. It is our opinion that the excitement generated and positive impact to Old Takoma's image as a fun and hip area to visit ultimately benefits all businesses in the end.

Community Feedback:

"Just want to say - I am so impressed with this Food Truck way of (1) doing something fun and welcoming for Takoma people, (2) creating data to tell restaurants they have a market here, and (3) doing their market research for them, so they even know what kinds of food people buy most. And adding the Junction and Trohvi as destinations broadens everyone's idea of "Takoma Park commercial areas" beyond Old Town. This whole thing is just simply brilliant. Bravo to all of you!" - *Takoma Park Resident*

Going forward:

OTBA to continue to schedule food trucks while working with the City of Takoma Park to make recommendations on food truck policy and permitting. Issues under consideration are:

1. Food truck zones with limitations of number of trucks and possible scheduling:
 - a. to ensure that residents and Old Takoma businesses are not going to be negatively impacted by the presence of food trucks.
 - b. to provide assurance to food trucks that they will have reasonable sales during a visit and want to return.
2. Policy on private property to address local businesses desire to schedule food trucks for events on their properties.
3. Licensing pricing that supports the Food Truck model in Old Takoma where trucks may only visit 1-2 times per month.