CURBSIDE EATING:
Mobilizing Food Trucks to Activate Public Space

by

Alison Marguerite Sheppard

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
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ABSTRACT

In the past 5 years, cities across the United States have seen the rise of a new form of street vending: the modern food truck. Nearly overnight, food trucks have become an expected and anticipated occurrence in many metropolitan areas throughout the country. The trucks are a new and unique typology in the street food landscape of the US. Since 2008, they have entered cities peddling gourmet food items, catering to a young, hip clientele, and skillfully using mobile technologies as a business strategy.

Despite predictions that the trend was simply a passing fad, the phenomenon has already established deep roots in many cities. As a result, trucks are having major economic, social, and spatial impacts in the cities that they inhabit. This thesis explores the numerous spatial benefits of these trucks; in particular, it analyzes the ability of the trucks to activate underused public spaces. Food trucks can act as a magnet in otherwise ubiquitous landscapes by bringing people to sidewalks, alleyways, and parking lots that otherwise go unused. This ability to create hubs of activity and interaction can be capitalized on by planners, policy-makers, and designers seeking on-the-ground, low-investment mechanisms to improve the urban environment.

This thesis explores these spatial benefits through the lens of Los Angeles, widely acknowledged as the birthplace and epicenter of the food truck trend. Throughout this paper, successful examples of spaces enhanced by food trucks are used to understand what elements must be present in order for food trucks to capitalize on their unique opportunity to improve public spaces. Based on these patterns, a process is proposed through which food truck location strategies can be generated. The resulting strategies are meant to select locations in which food trucks are not only economically and physically viable, but are also optimal in terms of their potential for activation. The process can be adapted to a range of situations, accounting for the flexibility and context-specificity demanded by the nature of the food truck trend.

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Thesis Reader: Annette Kim, Associate Professor of Urban Planning

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And finally to my family – for giving me the confidence to pursue my dreams, no matter how ambitious they might be. Your blind faith in my ability to succeed has allowed me to do things I never thought possible.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"A new generation of lunch trucks is hitting the streets. They serve high-end fare such as grass-fed beef hamburgers, escargot and crème brulee. As they rove cities like Austin, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles, they alert customers to their locations using Twitter and Facebook. Their owners include highly trained chefs and well-known restaurateurs…The new breed of lunch truck is aggressively gourmet, tech-savvy and politically correct…"

-Katy McLaughlin, "Food Truck Nation"
in *The Wall Street Journal*, June 2009


American & American

In a US News & World Report from August 2012, Rachel Pomerance wrote, "It seems that this country, especially its urban dwellers, has become a nation of foodies, connoisseurs of cuisine among a range of regions and distant lands…So perhaps we should not be surprised by the trend that embodies this hunger for hip cuisine by and for the masses: the food truck. If you live in any number of American cities, you know all about this. You've seen the packs of people lined up at food trucks as if for concert tickets, their cool factor rising in relation to the length of time they'll wait for that perfect pouch of dim sum or extravagantly layered taco" (Pomerance 2012, 2). This description, though seemingly extreme, fairly accurately describes the food truck phenomenon that has swept the country in the past four years.

As recently as 2008, the sight of a brightly colored, highly ornamented truck parked in an otherwise deserted alleyway would likely have raised eyebrows. A queue thirty-deep of young, fashionable clients would certainly have done so. The spectacle would likely have elicited curiosity from some, concern from others. Today, however, this is a common sight in many major cities throughout the US. In the past five years, the food truck trend has skyrocketed from relative non-existence to extreme popularity, attracting the attention of a public hungry for innovation and affordability in their food choices. Throughout its brief history, the trend has risen to unanticipated levels of popularity and despite skepticism, shows no substantial signs of slowing down. It appeals to a wide range of clientele, has been successful in numerous cities, and is incredibly unique. This phenomenon, which has thus far proved itself more than just a passing fad, is playing a major role in redefining how Americans think about street food, vending, and the role that food plays in cultural and societal development.

As a result, of course, the trend has also been surrounded by controversy and debate. For each person that has jumped on the food truck bandwagon and waited in an hour-long line for a Korean taco, another is staunchly opposed to the entire phenomenon. Brick and mortar owners worried about competition protest the location of trucks near their establishments. Cities overregulate where and when food trucks are allowed to sell. Concerned neighbors exhibit NIMBYism, worried about potential negative effects of food trucks in their neighborhoods.

The gourmet food truck phenomenon is incredibly unique to this moment in history. The unique situation that currently exists allows for an exciting exploration of the potential of this trend. It creates unique opportunities for planners, designers, and policymakers to capitalize on a one-time opportunity and to develop innovative and creative strategies. The effect that this phenomenon has on urban life and urban form cannot be denied and provides the backdrop upon which this research and exercise are based.

RESEARCH TOPIC

This thesis will explore some of the larger implications and consequences of this phenomenon. Though a relatively new trend, various academics and practitioners have begun to think about the numerous issues that it brings to light. Literature on this topic is quite limited, but interested parties have begun to examine this trend from a range of perspectives. There have been a number of preliminary inquisitions into the economic, social, and regulatory effects of the booming food truck trend. However, despite a broad acknowledgement that the trucks can have significant spatial and physical effects, few have looked at this area in any great depth. Thus, this thesis will focus on this gap in the existing knowledge base.

To elaborate, a *Los Angeles Times* article from February 2011 explains: "The truck and its staff of merry makers have become a sort of roving party, bringing people to neighborhoods they might not normally go to, and allowing for interactions with strangers they might not otherwise talk to. A constant Twitter feed connects truck-followers and updates them about whether Kogi is going to be late to its next stop" (Gelt 2009, 1). The potential that this journalist points out – the potential to bring people to new areas and incite new interactions – serves as the conceptual backbone of this research. In this way, food trucks can be thought of as acting like magnets in an otherwise monotonous landscape, drawing people to areas that are normally overlooked. This potential can be realized on a smaller scale as well. Beneath the scale of the neighborhood, trucks can have this same impact in the immediate areas they inhabit. Within an area, trucks can draw people to micro-areas that they otherwise might ignore. For instance, alleyways, parking lots, or other liminal spaces can be co-opted by trucks and given a new life.

To expand on this potential further, trucks can not only bring people to new places, but have a clear ability to encourage them to stay there, increasing their value for urbanity. That the trucks have this unique potential is due, in part, to a combination of many of their characteristics. Rooted in the very nature of street food itself, this potential is expanded exponentially by certain unique features of the current trend. As William Whyte wrote in the *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*: "If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food…Vendors have a good nose for spaces that work. They have to. They are constantly testing the market, and if business picks up in one spot, there will soon be a cluster of vendors there. This will draw more people, and yet more vendors, and sometimes so many converge that pedestrian traffic slows to a crawl…" (Whyte 50). As Whyte and others have studied, the pure presence of street food certainly has an effect on how a space is used. The success of the food truck trend starts from this assumption and then layers it with additional factors to really have an unmatched potential to draw and retain people to new spaces.

Many recent media articles point to the poignancy and current relevance of this topic, as well as to the spatial prospects described above. As stated in a March 3, 2010 article in *GOOD.is* (an online community and magazine), "…A growing number of gourmet food trucks in Los Angeles is getting keen on the idea of permanence – or at least temporary permanence. In the process, they're bringing new life – and a more varied cuisine – to the streets of Los Angeles, transforming otherwise empty spaces into lively, popular, and profitable hubs" (Berg 1). Similarly, according the *TheCityFix Magazine*, "Planners are thrilled at the food cart craze too, as carts can enliven the urban environment and revive dead spaces, such as parking lots" (McConville 1). A simple Google search reveals numerous other articles proclaiming the same sentiments. It is clear that bloggers, planners, and others are starting to think about this spatial/physical potential. This thesis will analyze this aspect of the food truck culture in greater depth. It will focus on if and how food trucks can activate and improve public spaces, and practically speaking, will explore the role of planners in the process of doing this.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This topic will be explored by examining a series of research questions, through the lens of a number of case studies in Los Angeles. Given the practical orientation of this thesis, these questions can be thought of as the framework for approaching and conducting this planning study. As such, the research questions

roughly correspond with the chapters of this thesis. The questions are cumulative: they build upon each other to explore the larger theoretical questions posed here and discussed in detail in the concluding chapter.

The first question asked is the most straightforward: how are food trucks currently changing public spaces? Are there examples of spaces in which food trucks fulfill the potential that is the topic of this research? Where and how is this currently occurring? Do trucks, indeed, bring people to spaces that they would otherwise not utilize? These questions largely guide the case studies used in this thesis (chapter 2 and appendix) and were used to inform much of the data collection portion of this thesis.

The second question begins to become more abstract, but its answers are still grounded in physical observation and driven by objective data. The next stage of this study asks: what common elements or characteristics can be extracted from the successful cases recognized and described in answering the first question? Are certain elements (physical, contextual, truck-related, or otherwise) necessary for food trucks to have a significant impact on the use of a space?

The third and fourth questions become more abstract. Still derived from the case studies, these questions involve more subjective analyses and rely on background experience and personal judgment to craft recommendations. Thus, the third question to be addressed asks: What recommendations can be made based on these identified elements? How can planners and designers best use food trucks as a tool for improving underutilized spaces? Is there an ideal "combination" of elements that lead food trucks to be not only financially and socially viable, but also to act as positive contributors to the urban landscape?

Finally, and most theoretically, this research asks broader questions regarding the larger implications and applications of this study. For instance: what does the rise of food trucks say about larger theoretical and political issues, such as the role of street food in cities? Furthermore, how would a food truck strategy by LA planners impact the quality of life of the city? And finally, how can the lessons learned from this study be applied elsewhere?

HYPOTHESES

The questions above and the methodology that follows were based on certain important hypotheses about how and why the food truck phenomenon has arisen and the manifestations it has taken. The description of these hypotheses is intentionally vague, but each will be revisited in turn throughout subsequent chapters. In sum, they essentially provide the theories to be tested by answering the questions presented above.

The main hypothesis on which this thesis is based is the assumption that food trucks are, indeed, changing the public spaces of the city (for the better). Many have discussed various benefits of the presence of food trucks, but few have explicitly documented this change. This study was proposed and conducted on the basis of the hypothesis that the public space benefits are both existing and substantial enough to be worthy of becoming the focus of a master's thesis. Further, it assumes that these benefits can be measured qualitatively by using metrics of how many people use the space, the patterns of this use, and how extended this use might be.

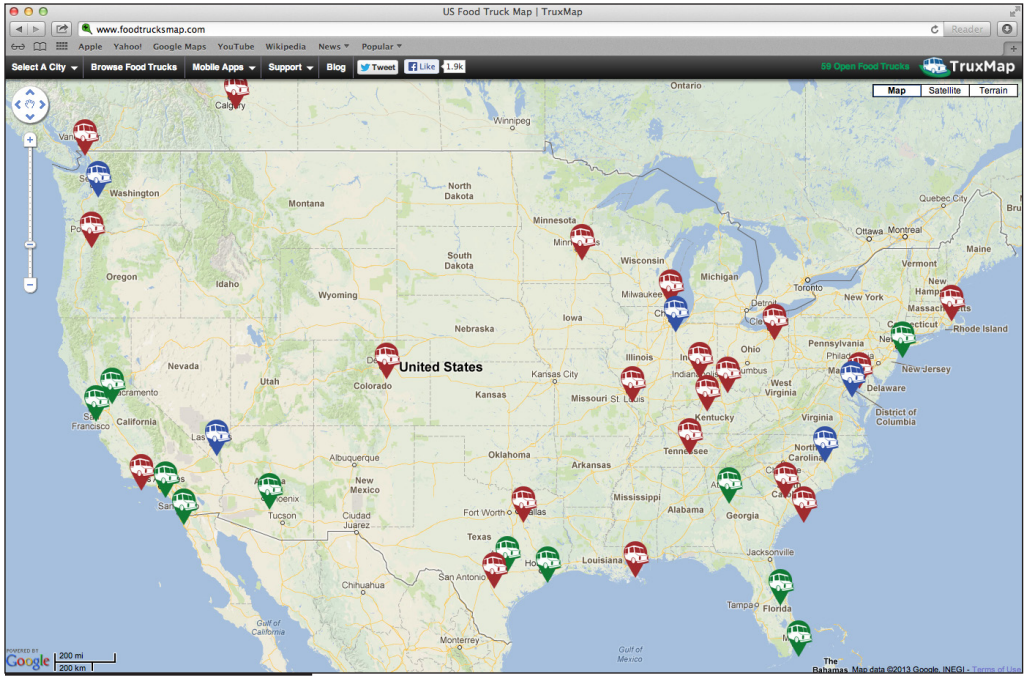
The second major hypothesis is that these changes can be predicted and determined by certain aspects, or elements. The methodology used here is based on the hypothesis that certain contextual elements have a large

effect, that physical and urban design elements play a role, that aspects of the food trucks themselves have a role, and of course, that more ephemeral and temporal elements also contribute. Furthermore, this thesis is based on the hypothesis that elements contribute to different degrees and that some are more important than others in achieving the spatial activation that this study focuses on.

A third significant hypothesis is that planners can influence the role that food trucks can play in the built environment by designing or planning spaces that have "ideal" combinations of these elements. This hypothesis is based on 2 embedded assumptions. The first is that planners/designers have the ability to affect this. It also assumes that there is an ideal situation that can be worked towards. Ideal, here, means spaces where food trucks have the greatest potential to enact change or improve a public space.

A final hypothesis essential to this study is that process proposals cab be widely applied. It would be naïve to assume that the same exact strategy can be applied everywhere, but this thesis is based on the hypothesis that the process used to develop such a strategy can be widely useful, both within LA and in other cities. Of course, many aspects of this study are unique to the case of Los Angeles, but the overall types of elements that should be looked for and larger background questions that should be asked can apply to nearly any city. The conclusion of this paper will provide a guideline for how this methodology and its results can be adapted to other cities.

TruxMap, a mobile and computer application, contains data for the cities noted below. Cities are color coded based on those that had trucks open at time of access. *Source: www.foodtrucksmap.com*



METHODOLOGY

The questions posed and hypotheses tested throughout this process use a mixed-methods approach. At many points, data collection and data analysis blend into one process, to allow further data collection to be as efficient as possible. The processes of case selection, data collection, and data analysis are described below.

CASE SELECTION: LA

The first major decision to be made in determining the methodology of this study was to choose a city to use as a testing ground. For many reasons, Los Angeles is a natural choice for this decision. Not only is Los Angeles a city in which street food is both immensely popular and fairly ubiquitous, it is a city in which quality public space is in short supply. Thus, it has great potential to be home to spaces in which food truck activation is currently occurring and will continue to occur.

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, Los

Angeles is often cited as the birthplace of the modern food truck. But the history of street food, and even of food trucks, in LA is far more extensive than just this. Loncheras and other vendors have been feeding Angelinos for decades; this is one of few cities in the US in which street food is an important part of the culture and food scene. This idea will be discussed in greater depth in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 5, but for the purposes of case selection, it will suffice to say that the uniqueness, founding role, and vast proportions make this a natural case through which to study this phenomenon.

Los Angeles is also generally known for its lack of vibrant and connected public spaces. As Margaret Crawford has explained: "The narrative of lost public space presents Los Angeles as particularly compelling evidence for the disappearance of public life. Most critics agree that the city's low-density development and widespread dependence on the automobile have eliminated street life and public interaction. The city's traditional public spaces support the argument that public space and public life in the city are either commodified, bankrupt, or nonexistent" (Crawford 1995, 2). Public space certainly exists, but this space is often underutilized and undercared for. This public space is often of the less-traditional variety: it is streets, sidewalks, and parking lots. The need for spaces to gather, to interact, and to relax in public is vital in any city, and given the current condition in Los Angeles, this is certainly needed. This factor also was essential in selecting Los Angeles as a case study. It has more spaces that have potential to be improved by food trucks, because the condition is generally lacking in the first place.

CASE SELECTION: TWITTER TRUCKS

Once Los Angeles had been selected as the urban area through which to study this phenomenon, a number of other decisions were needed to narrow the scope of this research further. There are over 6,000 street food vendors in Los Angeles County and a large percentage of these vendors are food trucks of some form. Given this vast extent, a major decision in the case selection process was what type of food truck to focus on. The various typologies that exist certainly all have impacts on the way that spaces are used and utilized. However, these impacts vary among typologies and it is thus important to make distinctions on what is being studied. For instance, the loncheras of Los Angeles have fairly permanent effects the spaces they inhabit. Similarly, construction lunch trucks have a large effect on how spaces are used in the brief moments that they inhabit them. The gourmet/twitter trucks also have clear spatial effects in their moments of inhabitance.

Although a comparison of typologies would be interesting, but there are such vast differences that these really cannot be considered the same phenomenon. Despite the fact that they are both street food, they are truly distinct and a comparison in the form of a master's thesis would not allow the adequate and necessary time to be spent on the intricacies of any one typology. In order to eliminate as many conflating factors as possible and to most methodologically draw conclusions, it is most reasonable and desirable to focus on one typology and to delve into this type in greater depth.

As stated above, the ultimate purpose of this study is to analyze how food trucks can be used as a tool by planners to improve the city by activating its public realm. In accordance with this goal, a focus on the gourmet food truck is a natural choice. These trucks are highly mobile, incredibly flexible, and novel, which increased their applicability as a tool and strategy for innovative planners and designers. Similarly, they have the high likelihood of activating public spaces, based on their clientele and usual location choices. Finally, these trucks are unique to this moment in time. Lunch trucks and taco trucks have been around for decades, but it was the gourmet

truck that has catapulted American street food into the spotlight. This typology is current, fresh, and relatively unstudied, making it worthy of further study and deeper exploration. The trendy food trucks of today have been known by many names: Twitter trucks, gourmet food trucks, microblogging trucks, and more. For the sake of clarity, these trucks will be referred to as Twitter trucks throughout this thesis.

CASE SELECTION: SPECIFIC SITES

A final aspect of the case selection process was the choice of the specific cases that form the basis for the analysis carried out in this study. These cases were selected through a process that first identified a large universe of potential sites and then narrowed down to the cases used and highlighted. First, a large number of potential cases were selected using Twitter, food truck blogs, and other social networking tools. These sites were then characterized into preliminary categories based on broad criteria, such as their spatial typologies, the number of trucks present, and their location in the city. This preliminary list consisted of over forty sites of potential investigation, ranging from street corners that generally host 1-2 trucks, to corporate campuses that attract upwards of a dozen trucks at lunch-time, to neighborhood parks and plazas that are home to regular food truck gatherings.

These categorizations were used to develop a narrower list of potential sites. In this process, sites were selected by a method meant to develop a set of sites with enough similarities to derive well-grounded principles, but with a wide enough range to explore the variations inherent in this trend. These decisions were also influenced by personal limitations and ensuring the capacity to thoroughly observe, document, and analyze the selected sites.

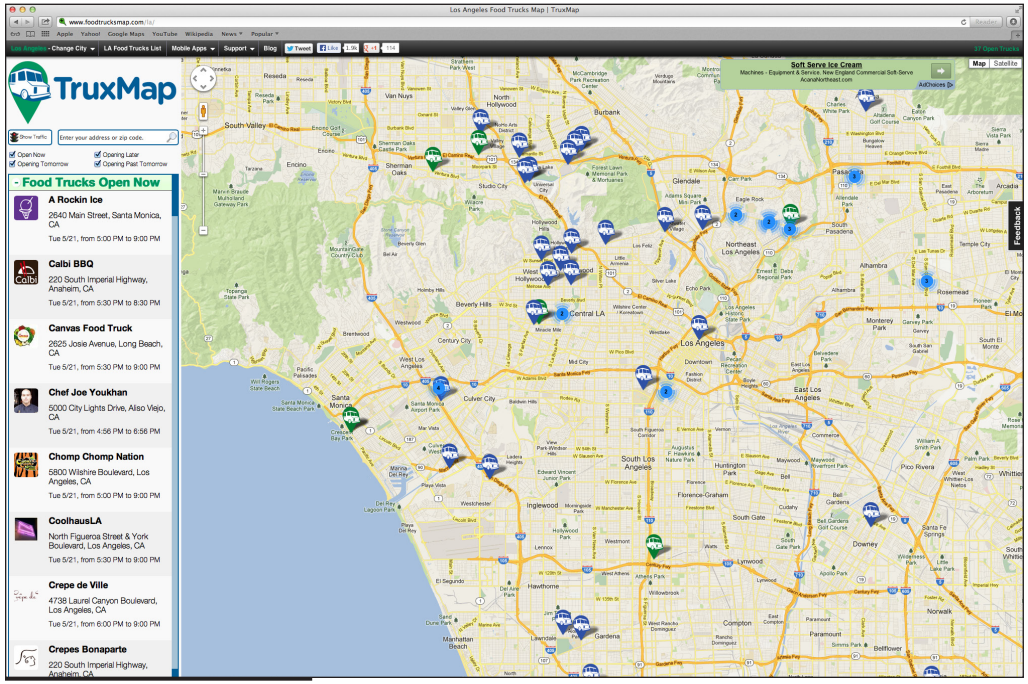
Through this process, 13 sites were chosen as case studies and used to analyze the research questions and craft recommendations. The 13 sites considered as case studies are all discussed either in Chapter 2 in depth, or listed in the Appendix. From the 13 case studies, 5 were selected for inclusion in the body of this thesis. These sites best exemplify the different typologies considered as cases and most closely relate to the resulting analysis. In addition, these cases represent a unique set of spaces, in order to avoid repetition and tedium. However, all examples can be found in the Appendix.

DATA COLLECTION

Data for this exercise was collected using a mixed-methods approach. The same contextual, spatial, and truck information was gathered for each case study site.

A very significant portion of the data used was gathered

The same application (TruxMap) shows trucks located in the Los Angeles area.
Source: www.foodtrucksmap.com



through personal observation and site visits. For each case, the site was extensively documented using mapping, diagramming, photography, and field notes. Extensive observational data was collected at 12 food truck "sites" throughout Los Angeles County in January 2013. [All of this data is included between chapter 2 and the appendix]. This includes information on the physical characteristics of the sites themselves and the surrounding area. In addition to documenting the physical spaces themselves, personal observation was used to gather data on how people use the spaces being studied. These observations include data from different times of day and different days of the week, in order to gain information on the use patterns of the space when food trucks are and are not present.

Additional information was gathered using GIS and Census data, in order to determine the surrounding use and demographic characteristics for each site. This data comprises the large majority of the contextual information presented for the case studies and is essential for understanding the larger context of each case.

A review of news articles, blogs, and other relevant media provided most of the data important for the background, history, and current conditions of the Twitter truck trend. There is little relevant "literature" on this topic, but ample information exists in the form of blogs, articles, tweets, and journals. Given the way in which the trucks operate and communicate, it should be expected that some of these technologically advanced and super-modern forms are important sources of data. Twitter feeds of various food trucks as well as aggregator sites were used to gather data on the location and communication patterns of trucks. In recent years, there have been a number of publications related to the phenomenon, but few have focused extensively on any of the types of information needed to answer the research questions posed above.

Finally, interviews with food truck owners and local experts were conducted to gather additional information. Food truck owners were interviewed to gain information about the choices made in locating their trucks and the priorities valued in this decision process. They also provided insight into the important factors and elements that make up the analysis portion of this study and in some cases, provided information about specific cases studied in this process. In addition, they provided valuable insights on the larger implications of this study and trend.

DATA ANALYSIS

This thesis uses a deductive approach to extracting principles and design guidelines that can steer the future development of public spaces that food trucks can successfully activate.

The observational, media, and interview data was processed to extract trends from the cases in which food trucks are currently activating public spaces. Each site was analyzed using a "before and after" technique in which before and after correspond to the use of the space without and with food trucks present, respectively. A variety of techniques were used in order to extract these trends (elements). One main mode of conducting this analysis was through mapping. By mapping and diagramming the use of the same spaces with and without food trucks, it was possible to perform a direct comparison and determine where and why food trucks are most successful at activation. Mapping the presence of people in the space when food trucks are and are not present facilitated this comparison. Photography was similarly used as an analysis tool in this way. Photographs taken at each of the sites with and without food trucks were used not only to document cases, but also to analyze the changes that occur. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs presented in this document were taken by the author. Interview

data was similarly analyzed to determine trends and derive important elements. Through these different modes, it was possible to analyze and postulate on what characteristics lead to these changes, and by assessing the range of case studies, it was possible to determine the list and rankings of elements that are necessary to ensure food truck success (from an operational and enhancing standpoint). These elements were combined to create the process proposal that is at the heart of the recommendations and conclusion of this thesis.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The body of this document will be organized as follows: In Chapter 1, a brief context/background will be provided. This will set the stage for the following chapters. This chapter will provide both a brief history of the gourmet food truck trend and the role/existence of public space in Los Angeles. Chapter 2 will delve into case studies, analyzing 5 spaces within Los Angeles County, examining not only the characteristics of these sites and the trucks that inhabit them, but also the ways in which space is used with and without food trucks. Chapter 3 analyzes these elements that define these cases in greater depth. The elements are abstracted and prioritized, highlighting variations that exist in how the elements can manifest and the effects that this has on how space is used. Chapter 4 combines these elements and presents a process proposal for how city planners or designers can develop food truck strategies. Chapter 5 discusses the larger implications and wider applicability of this study. It elaborates on how the approach laid out here can be applied by planners, politicians, or designers in other contexts.

CHAPTER 1 | CONTEXT

"Although food trucks existed well before the early 2000s, many sources pinpoint 2008 as the unofficial onset of the food truck phenomenon. Since then, food truck entrepreneurs and chefs alike have used social media to familiarize the world with previously obscure flavors like grits or peppadew."

-Stephanie Buck, "Food Truck History Infographic"
www.mashable.com

In order to develop strategies around the successful use of the Twitter truck, it is important to understand the roots from which this phenomenon developed and the qualities that make today's situation so unique.

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the global street food tradition and the unique trajectory that this tradition has taken in the US. After a broad overview, this chapter will delve deeper into the history of the gourmet food truck itself, looking at its complex, though brief, development and defining characteristics. This history is intrinsically tied to Los Angeles, not only as its site of origination, but also as one of the cities that has embraced the trend most willingly and as a result, claimed a role as a front runner and role model in the phenomenon very early on. The gourmet food truck landscape in Los Angeles is unique and complex, and the latter part of this chapter will provide a concise, yet comprehensive, overview of the food truck phenomenon in Los Angeles.

The second piece of context that must be explored as a backdrop for this exercise is the condition of public space in Los Angeles, which is equally vital to why this city was chosen as a site of investigation for this study. This section will provide a concise overview of the current conditions of public space in Los Angeles. In order to explore and examine how food trucks can alter these spaces, it is essential to have some background on these spaces, and the history through which these conditions developed. This will be essential in understanding not only why the spaces need to be improved in the first place (the theoretical basis for this study) but also the potentials and challenges that will be faced in implementing a process such as that proposed in Chapter 4.

A CONCISE HISTORY OF STREET FOOD

Though the gourmet food truck trend in the US is young, street food and street vending are certainly not new phenomena. Worldwide, street food has been an engrained and essential part of many cultures throughout their development and the trend has taken a range of forms. It would be nearly impossible to provide a comprehensive history of street food in the scope of a master's thesis, and thus this section will attempt only to provide the history that is most relevant to understanding the development and uniqueness of the Twitter truck trend that is sweeping the US. Despite many differences, this trend has certainly been informed by street food and street vendors around the world. This section will situate this trend within this larger context.

GLOBAL HISTORY

At the global scale, street vending has been an essential component of many cultures for centuries. Crossing continents and spanning cultural boundaries, street food has been an engrained component of life for urban dwellers, particularly in large metropolitan areas. The global street vending tradition has taken on a range of typologies and the majority of countries have gone through variations in their street vending as they have developed. Social, cultural, and political differences have led to a varied set of street food typologies, ranging from simple pushcarts to established centers. Despite its different manifestations, street food often has similar roots and roles.

In different countries, varied social, political, and economic environments affect the form in which street food exists. For instance, in Singapore, vendors are rigidly organized in hawker centers, akin to US food courts. In this way, street food has become a more standardized, regulated form. In other contexts, however, similar efforts have been met with strong protest. For instance,

an attempt to organize vendors in indoor marketplaces in Mexico City was met with opposition and the attempt failed. In other situations,an entirely pro-vendor stance is taken. In the majority cases, some middle ground is found. (see Bhomik, 2010 for more information).

Despite these regulatory differences, however, there are many similarities in the role that street food serves in the cities in which it is located. At its most basic, vendors provide an additional food option outside of the home. (Cross and Morales, 2007). They provide an intermediary between preparing food at home and visiting a restaurant or more established venue, adding diversity and additional options. Vendors find gaps in the market and bring food to customers in accessible and affordable ways. As William Whyte writes in the *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, "By default, the vendors have become the caterers of the city's outdoor life. They flourish because they're servicing a demand not being met by the regular commercial establishment" (Whyte 1980, 50). Often, their mobility and flexibility allow them to rapidly adjust for market changes, optimally serving their customers' needs. In general, they sell products that are affordable and easily accessible, establishing themselves as an essential component of the urban dwellers' lives. Bhomik (2010) describes the role of street vendors in a variety of urban contexts, exploring the multitude of ways in which street vendors and the informal economy influence and alter the global economy, public space, and urban life.

Beyond this basic purpose of providing food and filling market weaknesses, vendors fill a number of cultural and social roles in their cities. The tradition of street food is, and traditionally has been, a tradition of community. It is a tradition in which people gather, spend time together, and interact with others whom they may not have otherwise. As an L.A. Times journalist writes, "Hiller, other truck owners and a ravenous public believe

Vendors prepare food on the street in Beijing (top) and customers wait in line at the Chinatown Hawker Center in Singapore (bottom)

in the food truck's promise — the realization of a street-food culture that unites a disparate city and encourages a community that lingers outdoors together over a plate of food. It's a concept long understood by the *loncheras*, or taco trucks, that have operated for decades without stirring the beehive of debate that these flashy new trucks have generated" (Gelt 2011, 1). As this and many other articles and postings explain, street food has a vital community and social role that is an essential part of its nature. In cities around the world, vendors create a place to stop, linger, and interact with neighbors or strangers. Despite its many differences, many scholars of and literature on street food agree on these fundamental characteristics that span the different types of vending that exist around the globe.

UNITED STATES

Like it has with many global trends, the United States has put its own twist on the street vending tradition. Street food in the US has not developed along the same lines as vending in other countries; its history, role, and specifications have been quite different. Though street food has existed through much of the history of the country, its forms have varied and it has not become an engrained part of everyday life for the majority of the population. In fact, the Twitter truck trend is likely the first exposure that many Americans have had to street food, as many aspects of the culture, urban pattern, and traditions of the US have impeded the development of a robust or widespread street vending culture. The history that has existed has been fairly fragmented and not very cohesive, composed of a range of trends and typologies that are not entirely related and do not necessarily serve the same purposes that street vending traditionally has globally. For instance, as Roy Choi (of the Kogi Truck) is quoted as saying in the *Los Angeles Times*, "The thing about taco trucks that people don't really understand is that it's not about cheap eating…Why do you think families bring their kids to eat on folding chairs? Not because it's cheap but because it's part of the culture. It's only in America where it's not considered a beautiful thing to be sitting outside with your family enjoying the weather. It's only here where we have to sanitize everything" (Gelt 2011, 2). Choi's argument really gets at the heart of one of the main issues that underlies the US street food development: certain cultural aspects are just not engrained. This is likely the result of many different factors combined; some simply relate to the cultural values and trends of the US itself, other parts are due to the historical development and trends of street food within the US context.

As Alison Caldwell explains in her article, "Will Tweet for Food: Microblogging Mobile Food Trucks – Online, Offline, and In Line," the first experience that many Americans had with street food was the ice cream truck. Inevitably, this first exposure has a drastically different impact on the way that Americans perceive and understand street food than the exposure that is had by residents of many other countries. The ice cream truck, which can certainly be considered a type of street food, is a very different form than the conventional vision of a street vendor. Largely geared towards children, the ice cream truck visits parks and playgrounds after school lets out, and drives through residential neighborhoods, announcing its arrival with its musical projections. A highly mobile vehicle, one of the main attractors of the ice cream truck is how often it moves around – the thrill of the chase. Though sometimes the ice cream truck might set up at a playground or neighborhood sporting event for a longer period, extreme mobility is truly key in its strategy, business plan, and resulting success. This unique reliance on mobility is clearly reflected in the modern food trucks' liberal use of Twitter, perhaps revealing an influence by the familiar ice cream trucks. The behavior that customers exhibit in following the Twitter trucks is reminiscent of the neighborhood children chasing an ice cream truck, or waiting for it to

signal its arrival with the well-known music.

The first traditional food truck, comparable to the food trucks of today, is believed to have been opened in 1872 in Providence, Rhode Island. According to *The Food Truck Handbook: Start, Grow, and Succeed in the Mobile Food Business,* this wagon, owned by Walter Scott, "sold breakfast sandwiches and pies to workers at nearby establishments" (Weber 2012, 3). The construction lunch truck has been one of the defining typologies of street food in its US history. Like the ice cream truck, mobility is one of its defining features. Typically, construction lunch trucks operate on a fixed route, beginning early in the morning and making a number of planned stops at construction sites and office parks throughout the day. Though the trucks travel and move with great frequency, their movements are planned, anticipated, and coordinated, and in this way, a certain level of consistency/stability is still had. Generally servicing more remote areas with low food access, lunch trucks offer an affordable option for workers in need of a filling and relatively inexpensive meal. The trucks themselves are usually quite successful: each large factory or construction site can provide hundreds of customers looking for a change from their typical brown-bag options. A focus on affordability and convenience, however, have often led to a lower focus on quality and cleanliness, earning these trucks the nickname "roach coaches" and instilling in many Americans a fear of food that comes on four wheels. This fear/hesitation has, in many cases, permeated the initial receptivity of Americans to new street food options.

Another street food option that has been prevalent in some parts of the US are variations on the "hot dog cart." Most widespread in New York City, the "hot dog cart" (a name which, here, is also used to describe pretzel carts, falafel carts, etc) has become a ubiquitous element on many street corners. These stands are

The ice cream truck (top) and construction lunch truck (bottom)
Photos: http://www.beinspired247.org/ (top) & www.flickr.com/photos/2176695129/ (bottom)

conveniently located, relatively inexpensive, and provide quick service. These carts/stands tend to be owned and operated by immigrants and in recent years, there has been significant work focusing on the legality and legitimacy of these vendors. This typology is probably the most similar to the street vendors typically found in a number of other countries. They are convenient, cheap, and a little gritty – three of the main characteristics often exhibited by vendors worldwide. However, in contrast to the street food of a number of other countries, these vendors rarely have the same feeling of communality: they tend to be a very "grab-and-go" type of establishment, from which people are looking for food in an extreme hurry and rarely linger for any prolonged period of time. Throughout the 1900s, the popularity of these and other vending typologies declined, as much of the population came to associate vendors with unsanitary, unfamiliar food options. (Weber 2012, 3).

The loncheros of Los Angeles (and other cities with a strong Hispanic influence) have been another dominant form in the US's street food history. Loncheros, or taco trucks, are stationary food trucks that serve (traditionally) Mexican food in the cities that they inhabit. They generally carry a very specific product and are known and respected for this specialty item. They are usually located in primarily Latino areas and serve a largely Latino clientele, having become a fully engrained part of the neighborhoods and communities that they inhabit. Though their clientele are generally specific to certain geographic and ethnic groups, most Angelenos will agree that loncheros provide an essential and irreplaceable component of the food scene in their cities. This typology likely comes closest to the communal environments created by street vending in other cities: the loncheros create community gathering spaces in the parking lots or alleyways that they inhabit, bringing people together around the food that they serve. The vendors have a degree of permanence and stability that is not really found in the typologies described above, which significantly affects the way that the vendors interact with and impact the urban environment.

The Portland food carts are the most closely related to the Twitter trucks that are the subject of this thesis. The city of Portland is home to hundreds of food vendors that take on a variety of forms and sell an immense range of products. Though they are in many ways similar to the Twitter trucks, the majority of these carts are fairly stationary: they can be moved but generally are not. The trucks tend to be located in clusters, or "pods," which can contain seating, amenities, etc. They have a definite impact on the spaces that they inhabit; pods are often located in vacant or empty lots and thus encourage people to use these otherwise unused spaces. In contrast to the construction lunch trucks, this typology sacrifices mobility for quality and consistency, in many cases really straddling the line between street vending and a brick and mortar restaurant, much like the more traditional loncheras. Like the Twitter trucks, these carts target a fairly specific clientele and are generally acknowledged as a new and trendy phenomenon. (Rodgers and Roy, 2012).

These forms of street food are certainly very different than the street food and vendors found in many other countries, though there are important similarities. The American street food tradition, unlike that in most of the world, has been less a tradition of community and of urban life and more a tradition of convenience. The ice cream truck, for instance, is rarely even found in dense urban fabrics: it is usually associated with suburban communities. The hot dog carts in New York are not places where people gather to socialize with their neighbors, as the taco stands of Mexico City are. In recent years, convenience has been sacrificed for fashion and street food has become a trendy commodity. Like everything else, the US has put its unique stamp on street food,

which has set the stage for the modern trucks that are the subject of this study.

THE TWITTER TRUCK

In recent years, the modern food truck has drastically changed the street food landscape in the US. Though rooted in the street food typologies described in the previous section, these trucks are truly a unique form of vending. There has been little scholarly work on this trend, due to its nature and newness, but much information about its brief but rich history can be gleaned from newspaper articles, blogs, and social media. Food truck owners and entrepreneurs have taken great care to differentiate themselves from their "roach coach" counterparts. Their success in doing this has been so great that they should truly be considered their own trend.

As Caldwell explains, they are "…A new version, or wave, of street food vendors. They arrive on a city block with their artisanal brand, and stand out as separate from the traditional culture of street food vending. Unlike the typical street food cart and truck, they cry out business plan and graphic designer along with hip vendors, chic food, and savvy technology. Each is armed with its own unorthodox variety of menu items that stand out as gourmet and diverse by street food standards…" (Caldwell, 306-307). This section will provide an overview of the brief history of the Twitter truck and the cultural phenomena that have led to the food truck scene that exists today.

ORIGIN

The Twitter truck arrived amid a perfect combination of economic, social, and cultural factors. When the first trucks emerged in 2008, the economy was failing, cities were struggling, and people were eager for vibrance and creative change. The Twitter trucks burst onto the scene with a number of characteristics well-suited for this situation. Economically, in a downturn economy, trucks required a far lower investment than opening a brick and mortar restaurant. Similarly, they can provide products at a lower cost to the customer, if they attempt to. As a result of these factors, the level of risk for would-be owners is far lower than that for opening a brick and mortar restaurant. Compounding these obvious economic assets, the lure of mobility and the ability of trucks to respond to market demand in a way that restaurants simply cannot certainly contributed to the beginnings of this trend.

It is widely accepted amongst food writers, food truck owners, and patrons that the first Twitter trucks appeared in 2008. According to a US News & World Report, "Roy Choi, whose Los Angeles-based Korean barbeque truck, Kogi, arguably spawned the food truck movement and put Choi at its helm" (Pomerance, 2). According to Choi and his team, the idea for the truck was born out of a moment of creative inspiration sparked by the idea of fusing Mexican with Korean cuisines and building on the model of the LA-style taco trucks. Though some variations on the taco truck trend likely occurred before this, Choi and the Kogi truck have been generally acknowledged as the truck that began the trend.

1ST WAVE

Nearly overnight, Los Angeles and other cities saw an immense proliferation of Twitter trucks. Once others saw how successful the Kogi truck had become, they rushed to jump on the bandwagon that seemed sure to lead to success. Given the economic and social conditions, the food truck business was appealing to a wide range of people: inspired restaurateurs, out of work chefs, architects, home cooks, and aspiring entrepreneurs were all enticed by the appeal of the trend. As one journalist wrote at the time, "Following Kogi's cue, a whole new

The Kogi truck (top) and a food truck festival event *Photos: http://saturdaynightfoodies.com/2011/04/27/valencia-to-host-gourmet-food-truck-festival-and-classic-car-show (bottom)*

generation of high-end, social media savvy food trucks hit the streets of Los Angeles and Korean tacos joints began cropping up coast to coast. A person could eat every meal of the day in LA at a truck and eat better, more interesting food than they might find at restaurants. All they need is a phone with a Twitter application. Trucks post their locations and if one is convenient, you go find the truck" (Little, 1).

As more and more people began to recognize the appeal of the trend, cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Austin, New York, and DC were flooded with food trucks selling everything from banh mi sandwiches to escargot lollipops. The trucks followed a clear pattern: their cuisine was unique, exotic, and gourmet, and they intensely relied on Twitter to communicate with followers. (Kam Miceli, January 2013). Trucks were flashy, highly decorated, and sleek. Their focus on gourmet and fusion food brought new flavors and culinary/cultural excitement to their target audience of young, urban Americans.

The rapid success of the trend can be attributed to more than just the economic factors described above. The trend capitalized on a unique social and cultural situation that was present in the cities in which is appeared. According to Asian Palate, a Food and Wine blog, "The unique success factors appear to be the dispersed cultural diversity of the U.S. (which make possible the serving of a diversity of food) and the lack of a street food culture. What grabs the heart of many an American and that of Anthony Bourdain, a best-selling food author and chef, is the emergence of a 'low-end ethnicky' food scene" (Cho, 2). This scene that Cho describes was novel, unique, and exciting. As it continued to grow as unprecedented speeds, these characteristics continued to attract patrons, fans, and entrepreneurs.

The rise to instant fame was aided by the almost religious use of social media to strategically target a highly specific clientele. The use of Twitter and other new technologies will be discussed in greater depth in the Chapter 5, but it is important to note how important these technologies were in contributing to the rise of the trend. The use of and reliance on Twitter has aided in the creation of a sort of cult following surrounding many of the gourmet food trucks. The thrill of the chase of the "best" or "newest" food trucks has created a street food situation unlike that that is present anywhere else in the world, in which food trucks move around at unparalleled levels, and people hungry customers chase them down via social media. Caldwell sums up this situation well: "There is a collective clamor, online and offline, about a new street food trend with an elevated artisanal design – the microblogging food truck. The fact that it's not always there when you want it, unless you *know* exactly how to get it, is what makes this phenomenon stand out. Occupying the intersection of food and technology, this latest public event has adopted online social networking, and in doing so, creates an innovative and shifting trend in street food culture" (Caldwell 2011, 306).

As the trucks became more and more popular, more people increasingly attempted to establish themselves as a part of the trend that seemed bound for success. Josh Hiller of Road Stoves (a food truck outfitting company) says, "Now, it seems like everyone is trying to get in on the winning formula…We've had all the calls: 'We want to do Korean Mexican fusion, just like Kogi… You don't just knock someone off. But the cat's out of the bag, and people with trucks just want to make a buck. People sort of got in like the gold rush and a lot will fall by the wayside" (del Mar, 2). As Hiller aptly points out, the first wave of food trucks was dominated by an almost aggressive race to become a part of the group while it was still in a stage of relative newness. Matt Chernus, owner of the Grill 'em All Truck, echoes Hiller's sentiment, saying, "It seems like every day, you see a new truck on Twitter…It's getting to the point where you've got to wonder if this city [Los Angeles] can really hold this many trucks. Once you start seeing a copycat of every truck, you're going to see a downward spiral" (del Mar, 1). The intense proliferation in this phase and rapidity with which new trucks scrambled to join the crowd provide foreshadowing of the "regression" phase that follows.

REGRESSION

As the trend continued to expand and Twitter trucks continued to rapidly appear, many began to express concerns about the situation reaching a "saturation" point, especially in certain cities. Indeed, in places like Los Angeles the food truck scene was becoming so extensive that it appeared that there would not be room for them all, physically or economically.

An NPR article entitled "Is the L.A. Food Truck Bubble Ready to Burst?" from May 2011 describes this situation, expressing a fear that some cities, like Los Angeles, were becoming so over-saturated with food trucks that supply would overrun demand. According to this article, many food bloggers and trend watchers were anticipating and predicting the trend's demise, citing its over-saturation and quick rise to fame as a sign that the movement would eventually run itself out of steam and disappear as another passing fad. (Del Barco, 2011). The "too good to be true" impression of starting a food truck combined with the harsh realities facing those actually in the business made fears about the sustainability of the trend a real concern.

By May 2011 these feelings reached unprecedented levels; as Hiller states, "We got hundreds of calls, but we rejected 95% of the requests. The problem came when the other commissaries and truck owners saw money and basically just prostituted the whole culture. So what

you ended up with was 15 so-so trucks parked on Mid-Wilshire, the city unhappy, a mediocre food product and all the truck owners cannibalizing each other's business" (Gelt 2011, 2). The flood of mediocre, copycat trucks was simply not sustainable. Natasha Case, co-founder of the Coolhaus trucks, believes that a large number of these "first-wave" trucks died out because they jumped on the food truck bandwagon without much preparation or forethought. Many of the trucks that appeared immediately after Kogi's overnight success have already gone out of business due to lack of strong business plans or original ideas. According to Case, many of the trucks that rapidly entered the scene have already gone out of business due to a lack of ability to compete with more unique, carefully planned trucks. (Natasha Case, January 2013). Eric Tjahyadi, co-owner of the Komodo truck and restaurant, would agree. In an LA Times article on the phenomenon her said: "There's a lot of food trucks out there that were started that have already gone out of business…So now, its kind of like survivalism. If you're going to be a random hot dog vendor or whatever, you will be eaten alive by the competition. But creating a product that's compelling and unique helps" (del Mar, 2).

In the food industry in general, there is relatively high turnover rate of new restaurants going out of business and the food truck scene was no exception. The combination of this already low success probability with the speed with which many of these trucks burst onto the scene resulted in a situation in which market forces really played their course and only the strongest and most adaptable trucks survived.

The situation has been wrought with complexities and characteristics that make it very interesting but also difficult to truly understand. There are numerous fans and avid supporters of the trucks, but equally many opponents. As one NY Times columnist writes, "Urban food trucks, as delicious as they are, can have a dark side…Now comes the modern food truck, where innovative cooks on a budget drive their kitchens around searching for what appears to be an endless supply of diners with Twitter accounts willing to line up for Korean tacos and salted caramel cupcakes…What could be wrong with that? For some, plenty. From Los Angeles to New York, Portland, Ore., to Atlanta, cities are wrestling with a trend now writ large on their streets, trying to balance the cultural good that comes with a restaurant on wheels against all the bad" (Severson 2011, 2).

The feeling that the food truck phenomenon might be changing for the worse was echoed by many others as well. An LA Times journalist summed up the feeling: "Hiller is not alone in feeling that what was once an exciting, underground food scene driven by a punk rock aesthetic and an exploratory mentality is swiftly becoming a mainstream, bottom-line-obsessed maze of infighting and politics. When Kogi started, there were only a few new-wave food trucks on the scene; now that number is hovering near 200, says Hiller. And where experimental entrepreneurs once dominated, corporate players such as Jack in the Box and Sizzler are entering the fray" (Gelt 2011, 2).

NOW

But despite the fact that some players were dying out and quitting the scene, others were still anxious to become a part of it. In some cases, this took the place of corporate chains like those mentioned by Gelt; in others, new entrepreneurs with hopes that their plans could succeed where others had failed were anxious to try their hand at opening a truck.

As a result, the food truck scene is still thriving and in many cases growing despite fears of fading. The level of success obviously varies from city to city, due to a combination of legal, political, and cultural factors. (This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 5).

On a country-wide scale, however new cities are still rapidly developing food truck scenes and new trucks continuing to appear in established food truck markets. The regression described above can be attributed to market forces and the fading of a sense of novelty, but has certainly not killed the trend.

The current Twitter truck landscape is a direct result of the previous two stages – rapid excitement and proliferation followed by changes and skepticism. Many have described this as natural market formation; others have described it in harsher terms. It is trucks like Coolhaus (Case's truck) that are rising to the top of this market/phenomenon. Coolhaus – inspired by architect Rem Koolhaus – sells gourmet ice cream sandwiches modeled and named after famous architects. Both Case and her business partner had previous careers as designers before breaking into the food truck scene. It is trucks like these that are dominating the current Twitter truck landscape. It is not enough simple to be available and mobile: the most successful Twitter trucks are tech-savvy, unique, entrepreneurial, and well-planned. Their owners are not just chefs, but are entrepreneurs and innovators as well. Though new trucks continue to enter the scene, it is now with the knowledge that this is certainly not simply an easy way to make a quick buck.

Los Angeles remains the epicenter of this trend. The city is home to thousands of street food vendors, and the number of trucks per capita surpasses that of other cities by degrees. When people talk about the Twitter truck trend, they nearly always reference Los Angeles, and not only as the site of origination, but because the city is known for its food trucks. The city has less regulations, less push back, and more flexibility than many others. The culture of street food is far more engrained than in other parts of the country. This topic will be returned to in the conclusion of this paper, in which the applicability of this study to other cities will be discussed.

Overall, indications point to the fact that this trend will continue on positively. Severson writes: "Food vendors, surprised to find themselves civic parasites, are fighting back, pointing out that food trucks are a valuable urban amenity. 'Food trucks activate public space,' said David Weber, president of the New York City Food Truck Association. The value of food trucks as modern-day town squares – or at least hipper food courts – is not lost on city officials, many of whom are trying to lure them into other, perhaps less busy, areas" (Severson 2011, 3). In the current food truck landscape, it is imperative for truck owners and operators to understand and plan for the opposition they face. If this can be successfully accomplished, it seems likely that they will survive and that though the situation will continue to evolve, it is here to stay. The trend is so new that it is unclear what direction it will take in the future, but at this point, it seems likely that it will continue along the upwards trajectory on which it is currently moving.

LA + PUBLIC SPACE

In order to address the research questions regarding how food trucks can improve public space in Los Angeles, it is similarly important to understand the current condition of public space in the city. The history of public space in this city is vast and incredibly complex, and the following sections will attempt to provide a brief and concise synopsis of this history and current situation, focusing on the aspects most applicable to this study.

Public spaces have long been recognized for their important role in city life. As Sorkin writes in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space,* "Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of Central Park, conceived public landscapes and parks as social safety-valves, mixing classes and ethnicities in common (bourgeois) recreations and pleasures: 'No one who has closely observed the conduct of the people who visit [Central] Park,' he wrote, 'can doubt that it exercises a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and most lawless classes of the city – an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance'" (Sorkin 1992, 156). Many urbanists, designers, social scientists, and others have written on the need for and benefits of public space in urban environments. (for more information, see Fogelson, 2003; Davis, 2006; Maltzan, 2011). Given the numerous benefits of good public space, it is only natural that a lack of quantity or quality of this amenity is detrimental to urban quality of life. This belief – the inherent benefits to be had from the existence of quality public spaces throughout an urban environment – is central to the argument of this thesis.

LOS ANGELES

Many have written about public space situation in Los Angeles, and few have had particularly positive things to say. Descriptions range from the optimistically hopeful to those that see little chance of the situation ever truly improving. According to Mike Davis in his essay Fortress Los Angeles, "The universal consequence of the crusade to secure the city is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space. The American system is being systematically turned inward. The 'public' spaces of the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity. Inside malls, office centers, and cultural complexes, public activities are sorted into strictly functional compartments under the gaze of private police forces." (Sorkin 1992, 155). Other urbanists, designers, and city planners have echoed this belief and conviction that good public space is severely lacking. Even more basic than the quality argument is the issue of quantity: many argue that there simply is not enough public space in the city.

Margaret Crawford has similarly lamented this topic, writing, "Los Angeles, for example, is often cited as an extreme demonstration of the decline of public space. The few remaining slices of traditional public space (for example, Pershing Square, historically the focus of the downtown business district, which was recently redesigned by Ricardo Legorreta) are usually deserted, while CityWalk, the simulated cityscape, shopping, and entertainment center collaged from different urban elements by MCA and Universal Studio, is always jammed with people" (Crawford 2008, 22). Like many others, her main argument pertains to the issue of the authenticity of the city's spaces; she argues that the city certainly does have public spaces, but the ones that are used and valued are those that are fabricated and totally inauthentic.

Furthermore, as many authors have pointed out, the existing public space is fragmented and disconnected, which can render it far less usable and effective than it might otherwise be. The city has not extensively invested in public space to the degree that it should. This issue is

not one primarily in the history books; it is discussed and lamented to this day. A recent LA Times article describes the sad state of the city's public space through the example of Pershing Square, citing the space as "once the most vibrant public space in Los Angeles" but now "a perfectly depressing symbol of L.A.'s neglected public realm" (Hawthorne 2013, 2). The case described here in Pershing Square is, unfortunately, fairly representative of the case of much of the city's public space.

This situation has larger implications for the form and quality of life of the city. A city with disconnected, fragmented public space is, by many accounts, a city that is less cohesive and less livable. Given the immense benefits of public space on urban life, it is only natural that similarly, negative effects would be the result of the absence of such amenities.

PUBLIC SPACE POTENTIAL

Yet, Los Angeles certainly still has a public realm, if not one of the traditional variety. In addition to the large, well-known and widely acknowledged aspects of the city's public space, there is another aspect of public space, of the more ubiquitous variety. This is the type of public space that can truly be capitalized on by the interventions and activities proposed throughout this thesis. This part of the public sphere is what Margaret Crawford calls everyday space. She says, "Everyday space stands in contrast to the carefully planned, officially designated, and often underused spaces of public use that can be found in most American cities. These monumental public spaces only punctuate the larger and more diffuse landscape of everyday life, which tends to be banal and repetitive, everywhere and nowhere, obvious yet invisible. Ambiguous like all in-between spaces, the everyday represents a zone of social transition and possibility with the potential for new social arrangements and forms of imagination" (Crawford 2008, 9). The type of space certainly exists in LA – the question is if and how it is used. This is the type of space that will be considered throughout this thesis: the spaces that are ubiquitous, alterable, and human-scale. These spaces include parking lots, alleyways, sidewalks, and more. Crawford describes them as "in-between" spaces, others would call them the liminal or ubiquitous parts of the city's public sphere. Regardless of name or intended function, these spaces are the ones that can be most drastically and significantly improved by the types of strategies discussed here and are also the spaces that can have the most direct impact on the everyday lives of the city's inhabitants. (See also Maltzan, 2011; Zukin, 1996; and Whyte, 1980).

When this view of the public realm is taken, there is great potential for people to alter and adapt public spaces for their own needs and specifications. Everyday spaces can be adapted, used, and innovated and thus the potential for entrepreneurs, artists, and creative thinkers is great. Food trucks, thought of as a component of everyday or tactical urbanism, certainly fit this mold. The entrepreneurs who own and operate them can have a significant impact on their city and can shape their surroundings in many ways. It is in this context that the role of food trucks in shaping and activating public space will be studied.

CHAPTER 2 | CASE STUDIES

"In this American moment street food is hip, almost too hip. All of a sudden, cheap deliverables for the consumer are in vogue and ditto cheap startup costs for producers...Across the country from Seattle, Washington to Birmingham, Alabama, taco trucks are no longer exceptional, they're inspirational."

-John T. Edge at the 1st annual street vendor conference

This chapter will present 5 of the sites studied as part of this thesis. The remainder of the cases used are documented in the Appendix of this report. The case studies make up the heart of the data collected and used in this exercise. The cases presented here illustrate examples of where food trucks have succeeded in activating public spaces in Los Angeles. These anecdotal documentations answer the first main question posed in this exercise: where are food trucks successfully activating public spaces? The cases presented here are "successful" to various degrees, but each can be said to provide an example of a situation in which food trucks bring new life and activity to a space that is otherwise underused. The following chapters will draw on these examples to extract trends and develop proposals for how successful cases can be learned from and replicated.

As explained in the methodology section, the data presented here was compiled through a variety of strategies and sources. The majority of data for each case study comes from personal observation and documentation of the sites presented. This is supplemented with demographic and contextual data gathered from background sources, interviews with food truck owners and operators, and information from relevant media sources and literature.

CASE STUDY STRUCTURE

Each case study is presented using the same format in the interest of clarity, comparison, and consistency. The cases are composed of 4 main sections. The first section provides the general context of the site: it gives a brief background on the area the city in which the site is located, describes the surrounding land use, and provides general demographic conditions of the area. The second section provides a more detailed description of the site itself. This section provides a more specific physical context, such as the type of space, the dimensionality of the space, and any physical amenities the site might contain. The third section discusses characteristics and features of the trucks themselves. This includes information on the number of trucks that generally locate at the site, the time of day or week that trucks can be found, and the spatial arrangement of the trucks within the site. A fourth and final section of each case study describes the use of each of the spaces studied. It presents information about how the space is used when food trucks are and are not present, in to measure the changes in the way that people use the space when trucks are present and open for business. This final section provides the heart of the information presented here: the observational data on how people use the spaces with and without food trucks confirm that this phenomenon is, in fact, occurring and that it can been documented and qualitatively measured.

In addition, each case is presented using similar diagrams and photographs to help convey the information described above. Three context diagrams are presented for each case study. These diagrams illustrate the surrounding urban fabric, the land use of the area, and the accessibility and connection of the site to the larger city. A more detailed map is also provided for each case study. This map shows physical details of the site and surroundings, and conveys key information on where and how trucks locate at the site and how people use the site when trucks are present. For each case study, this map conveys the observational data describing how people use the space at peak food truck times.


UNIVERSAL
DISTRICT LA BREA
LACMA
CALIFORNIAS PLAZA
FOOD TRUCK ALLEY

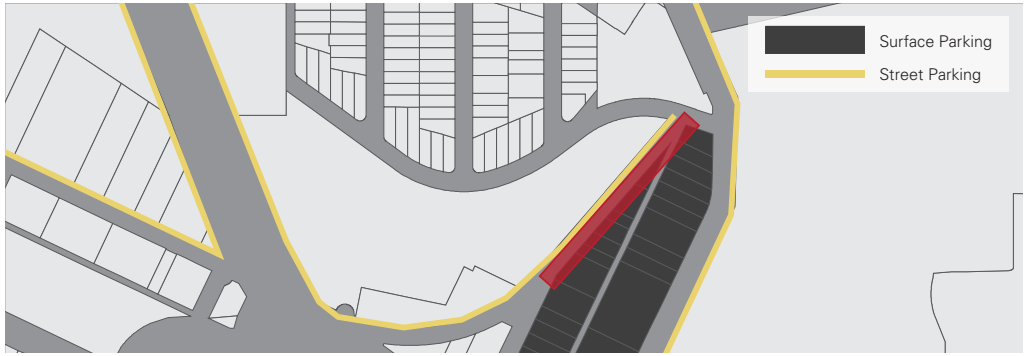
UNIVERSAL
BLUFFSIDE DRIVE, STUDIO CITY

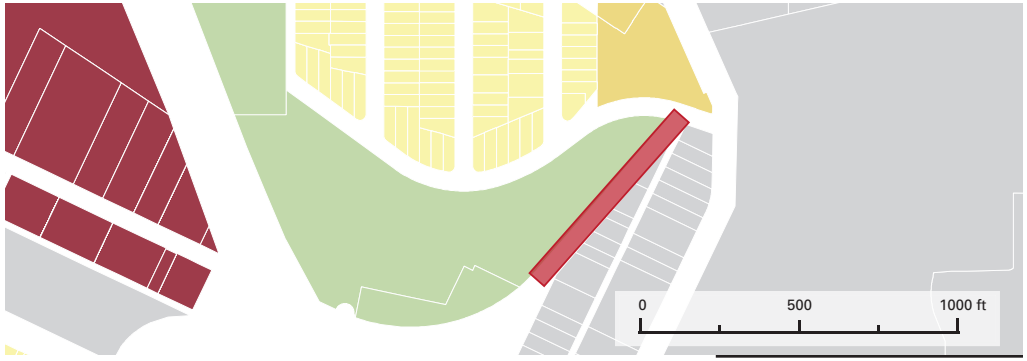
The Universal City site is located in Studio City, an affluent residential neighborhood in the north of the city in the San Fernando Valley region. The neighborhood is home to a number of production studios and accompanying uses, such as a number of hotels, restaurants, and the Universal Studios theme park.

DEMOGRAPHICS
According to the 2008 LA Department of City Planning estimates, Studio City has a population of 37,201 and a density of 5,395 people per square mile, which is one of the lowest densities in the city of Los Angeles. Many residents work in film, television, music and other entertainment related industries, contributing to the affluence of the area.

LAND USE
The site is located across the street from a major entrance to the Universal City production complex. The immediately adjacent area is home to production studios, apartments, and the Campo de Cahuenga. Slightly further from the immediate site are a number of single-family homes. The site is bordered by South Weddington Park on one side and a large surface parking lot on the other.

ACCESSIBILITY
The site is within a 5-minute walk from the Universal City Red Line station on the MetroRail and is also serviced by multiple busses. The Studio City neighborhood is linked to Hollywood, Downtown Los Angeles, and the west San Fernando Valley by Highway 101. A number of other major thoroughfares run through and around the neighborhood. Both on- and off-street parking is widely available.





PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

This space can be classified as a small street or alleyway. Though there is a highly trafficked road adjacent to the site, the site studied here sees very little through-traffic. Bluffside Drive is a fairly narrow street, bounded on one side by South Weddington Park and on the other by a low wall and a large surface parking lot. The site has unique topographic features: South Weddington Park is vertically separated from the street by a fairly steep grade change. This has a distinct effect on the degree of connectivity between the park and the surrounding environment. To the other side of the park is residential development, largely comprised of single-family homes.

AMENITIES

Beyond the park itself, amenities provided in the public realm in this space are fairly sparse. Despite the fact that the park exists as a natural asset, it does not contain enough amenities to become a highly used space. The park is well-maintained but the space is largely un-programmed and the amenities it does contain are not significant enough to allow the space to be treated as anything more than an expanse in the landscape. For instance, there are ample trash barrels provided, but no seating is available throughout the park. The grass of the park is fairly dug up (by the dog walkers who make up a large portion of the park's users), decreasing its value as an amenity. One large circular path winds through the park. At the far end of the park, a baseball field and other open playing field are provided. Trees provide shade within the park, but the sidewalk is generally left exposed to the elements. The public realm in the surrounding area is similarly scarce. Pedestrian amenities in the area are few: sidewalks and crosswalks are available, but in general are not in the best condition.

DIMENSIONALITY

Bluffside Drive is a fairly narrow street, containing one (narrow) traffic lane in each direction with one lane of parallel parking. A sidewalk is provided on one side of the street (approximately 8 feet in width). Immediately adjacent to the sidewalk is an immediate drop-off in elevation as the park is located below street level (at grade with residential street on the other side of the park). The other side of Bluffside Drive is bounded by a low retaining wall around a vast surface parking lot. Trees and plantings line the wall, physically separating the vast parking lot from the street and park. As a result of these features, Bluffside Drive has no building frontage along this stretch.

There are generally 5-8 trucks at this site during lunchtime on weekdays. In general, trucks arrive to set up between 10:30-11:30AM and most serve for about 2-3 hours, leaving by 2:30-3:00PM. Many of these trucks are regular visitors to the space, meaning that they visit this location on a weekly or even biweekly basis. One truck owner explained that his truck generally locates here every Tuesday and Friday, so that customers will know where/when to find them. The trucks that locate here cover a variety of food truck types and options; selling products that range from gourmet grilled cheese to protein packed meals. In general, the trucks that locate here explicitly cater to the lunchtime crowd, and thus fall short of the intensely gourmet trucks that exist across the city. For instance, trucks that specialize in a specific dessert item or beverage are unlikely to locate at this site.

Some exceptions exist to this general pattern. Trucks do locate here on weekends as well as weekdays and some arrive in the morning or stay through the evening. This is a far lower volume than the trucks that serve the weekday lunch rush, however. Many of the trucks that locate here are less reliant on Twitter and other technology than some of their counterparts, as this is a well-known food truck location for workers and residents of the surrounding area.

PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS

Trash receptacles are provided by the trucks themselves, even though there are many present in the park. As there is no seating in the park or along the sidewalks, a few trucks provide camping chairs or stools. The majority do not, however, and most trucks here remain fairly contained to their immediate space. There is little spillover and few instances of the trucks taking over additional space. Given the geometry and topography of the area, the trucks do not have a significant effect on the physical experience of the space.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

Trucks line up in a row along one side of Bluffside, in the parallel parking lane on the side of the street adjacent to the park. As the trucks park in public metered spaces, there are generally cars interspersed in the row of trucks. As a result, the trucks generally span fairly far down the length of the alleyway. Given the narrowness of the street, the trucks occupy a significant portion of the street space.

USE

WITHOUT TRUCKS
When food trucks are not present, this space is very minimally used. It is primarily used by people parking cars along the street or in the adjacent parking lot and cutting through the site to get to their final destination. Similarly, residents from the adjacent neighborhood occasionally cut through or walk around the park. However, even this type of use if sparse. The sidewalks surrounding the area are rarely occupied; other than people waiting for busses or walking from cars into buildings, the public realm is rarely used.

The existence of the South Weddington park does create additional activity, but even this is minimal. During the periods of observation for this thesis, a few people were seen exercising in the park and a few walking dogs. Over a period of a few hours, very few people walked through the park (though some walked around) and no other activities were observed.

WITH TRUCKS
With food trucks present, however, the use of the space significantly changes. Although the space does not necessarily become a prime example of a vibrant and active space, the degree of change from the situation without trucks is certainly visible. The majority of visitors to the space come from nearby office and production spaces. These sources produce a fairly constant flow of people streaming to the trucks on foot during lunchtime on weekdays. The majority of these people arrived in groups of 2-4, although many also arrived alone or in larger groups. However, a significant portion of customers also arrived to the site by car, presumably coming from further destinations.

At any given time, even during the lunchtime rush, there were generally 2-4 groups of people sitting in the park. On a day when there were 7 trucks at this location, there were approximately 30-35 people at the site at any given time, but the vast majority of these were waiting in line at the trucks, either to place an order or pick up their purchases. However this number was very fluid: there was a very steady flow of people coming and going throughout the time.

Most of the customers observed in the space on weekday afternoons take their meals to go and do not remain at the site for significantly longer than the time needed to order and receive their purchases. Some customers do stay at the site to consume their purchases, especially in nicer weather. Customers who take their purchases to go rarely extend their use beyond the space of the sidewalk itself. There is a little spillover into the park, but not much. A large part of this can likely be attributed to the complex topography of the park. The downward slope of the park encourages people to remain on the sidewalk instead of drifting into the park itself. Even if they are just waiting in line to order or receive food, they are occupying and making use of the sidewalk, a space that otherwise is nearly completely unoccupied.

Of customers who stayed at the site for a longer period of time, many were quite creative in their use of the space. Given the lack of seating and amenities in the space, customers must be fairly innovative. Some customers simply sit on the grass in the park, but others found alternative options. On two separate occasions I observed people using a low, horizontal tree branch as a bench to sit on. Though likely not the most comfortable seat, this certainly is an option for people wishing to stay at the park. Another party was observed to take camping chairs out of their car and set them up to eat their lunch in the park. A few of the trucks brought their own stools or seats to the site, but during the period of observation, no one was observed to use them.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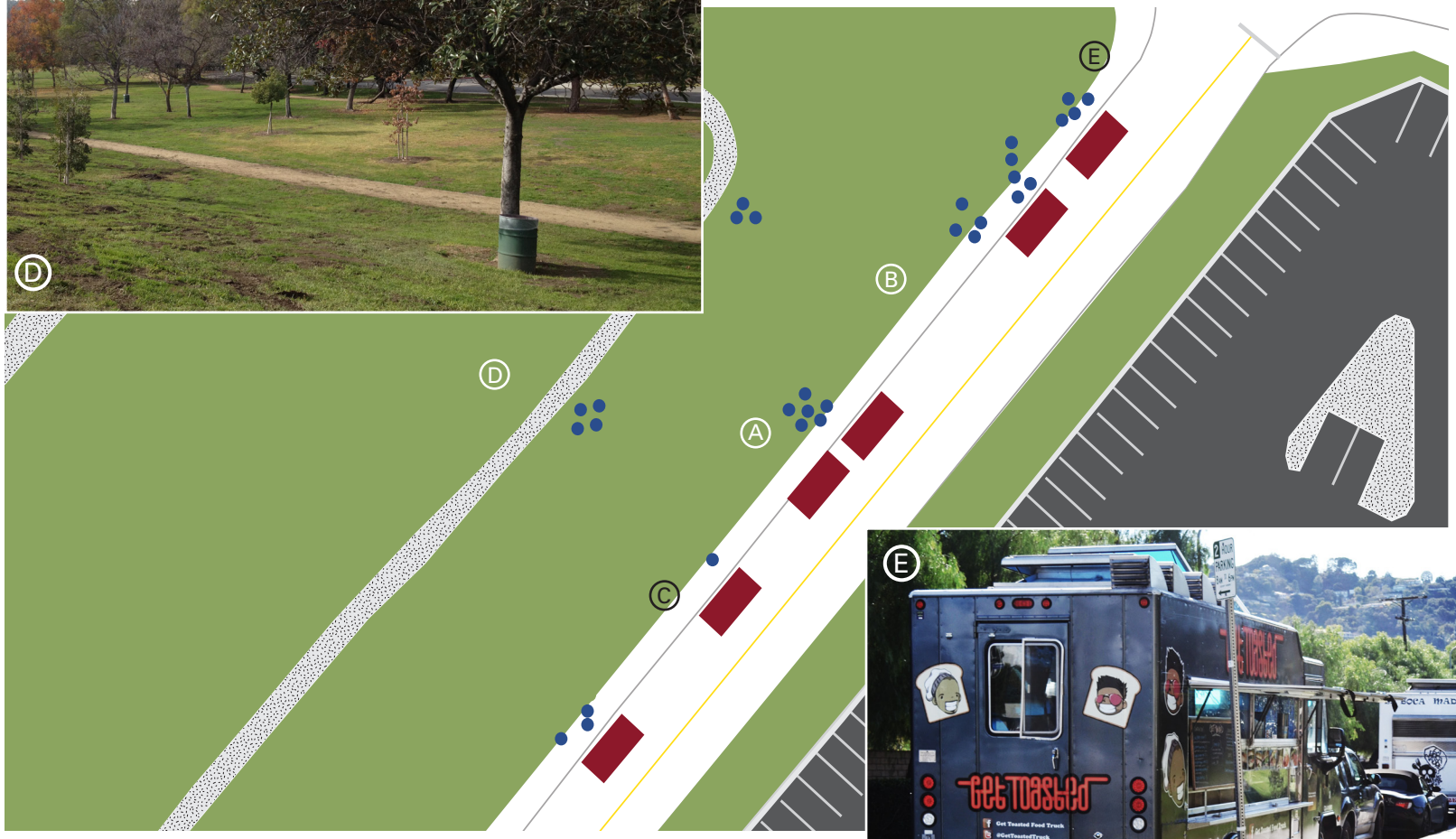
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YOLK
email: flippinyolk@yahoo.com
tel. 424.244.4033
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CLIVE
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architects
PARK
& Tech

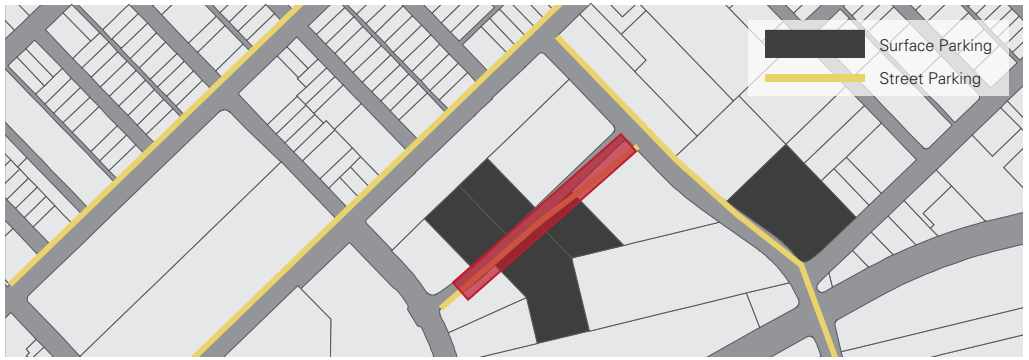
FOOD TRUCK ALLEY
SANTA MONICA

The Food Truck Alley site is located in Santa Monica, approximately 15 miles west of Downtown Los Angeles. Santa Monica is an independent, beachfront city but part of Los Angeles county. The city is surrounded on 3 sides by the city of Los Angeles.

DEMOGRAPHICS
According to the 2010 Census, the population for Santa Monica is 89,736. Once a famous resort town, job growth and tourism increases have changed this reputation and the city now boasts a more stable residential population.

LAND USE
The site itself is adjacent to a large office complex at 2600 Pennsylvania Avenue. The immediately surrounding buildings house internet and TV offices and a branch of Santa Monica College. A large residential area is also within walking distance of the site. Despite the abundance of residential and office buildings, commercial or retail uses are rare. One journalist described this areas as a "white-collar entertainment jungle east of 20th Street and south of Santa Monica Boulevard" (Lim 2011, 1).

ACCESSIBILITY
The site is fairly accessible by Santa Monica's public busses (known as the Big Blue Bus) Two bus routes stop within a 5 minute walking distance of the site. In addition, the site is very easily accessible by automobile: it is located very close to both Olympic Blvd and the Santa Monica Freeway. Parking is ample, both on street and in large surface lots. The site is relatively pedestrian-accessible, especially from immediately surrounding office buildings.



PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

As the name implies, this site can physically be considered an alley or a service road. Pennsylvania Avenue, along which the site is located, fits two lanes of traffic, but is narrow. Large portions of the adjacent parcels are dominated by vast surface parking lots. The buildings interspersed with these lots are generally large, industrial-type boxes that are house various entertainment and media offices.

AMENITIES

The amenities provided in this space are sparse and it is not a very pedestrian-friendly area. Low traffic volumes and the width of the street make the street comfortable enough for pedestrians, but there is no sidewalk along the vast majority of the street. In addition, the landscaped nature and topography of the adjacent land leave no real shoulder for pedestrians to walk on in lieu of a traditional sidewalk. Pedestrian crossings are also lacking: they are present only at the ends of the street where Pennsylvania Avenue meets main roads.

In addition, no real public realm amenities, such as seating, are provided in the space. Some features can be adapted to be used for these purposes, but in general, they are not provided. Some trees provide shade, but these are also scarce and are concentrated along portions of the strip. Similarly, covered entranceways and walkways are found along a few of the buildings, but these are set back from the street. Generally, buildings are set far back from the street itself, contributing to a lack of feeling that a public realm is available and accessible.

DIMENSIONALITY

As mentioned above, there is no sidewalk provided along the strip. The buildings are generally set back fairly far, and at some spots, this allows for a grassy/planted strip to be provided. Generally, however, this landscaped area has a steep topography that renders it less usable by pedestrians. In other points, buildings are simply set far back behind the large surface parking lots, which leaves a vast space that could be occupied by truck patrons, but a space that is very uncomfortable and unwelcoming. The large setbacks and low building height/density create a feeling that the street is wider than it actually is. The amount of space available at this site is currently complicated by the presence of a large construction wall along a portion of the site. This has significant impacts on how the space can be and is used by food trucks, which will be further discussed in the next section.

According to The Examiner: "Located on Pennsylvania Avenue…a colorful train of about 20 food trucks park their aromatic frames, sandwiched by buildings that house local offices of MTV, Yahoo!, and a branch of Santa Monica College. Every weekday starting around 11:00 a.m. to about 2:30 p.m. workers from the surrounding neighborhood trickle onto the unobtrusive street, asking themselves the all-important question: which truck will feed me today?" (Lim 2011, 2).

As this article describes, this is a popular and large food truck location. Widely patronized by the weekday lunchtime population, this site generally hosts 10-15 trucks on any given day. A wide range of types of trucks frequent the site, ranging from a few more traditional taco trucks to incredibly specialized/gourmet. The space is so well-known to local workers and students that few these trucks feel the need to widely publicize a stop here. In general, trucks operate for around three hours at lunch time, and leave the area shortly thereafter.

PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS

Beyond the most basic of adaptations, most trucks here do not blatantly and physically alter their space. For instance, during the observation period, none of the trucks brought tables or chairs for patrons. They did, however, bring trash barrels, as none are publicly provided in the site. Trucks generate shade in the area by their awnings, especially in the places where they park immediately adjacent to the construction walls that are set up in part of the alley. In addition, by parking so close to the vertical construction wall and without the existence of a sidewalk, the row of trucks creates a sort of alley within the alley. By creating a narrower and more protected space, the trucks themselves create a physical environment that is much more human scale and conveys a sense of enclosure or protection. At times, however, this space can feel crowded and somewhat uncomfortable.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

Trucks line up in a row along one side of Pennsylvania Avenue. Given the large number of trucks that locate here and the fairly short length of the street, trucks often are parked very close to one another. Most gaps between trucks that do exist are the result of unchangeable factors, such as where there are no parking spaces due to parking lot entrances or fire hydrants. The tight nature of the line of trucks, combined with the vertical elements described above and the narrow width of the street, contribute to the sense of an alley within an alley described above.

USE

WITHOUT TRUCKS

There is rarely a situation (during weekday, daytime hours) where there are no trucks in this space. However, outside of peak lunch hours there are far fewer trucks present and those that are parked might simply be reserving a space for later. When there are no trucks open for business, very few people use this space. The majority of people observed were simply walking from their car in one of the parking lots to one of the adjacent office buildings. There is little to no need to use the space of the street itself. Given the fact that Pennsylvania Ave is primarily a service road, it is rarely used by people accessing the adjacent buildings, except as a back parking lot entrance. Main entrances are generally around the front of these buildings and thus few people even pass through this area unless there is something (like a food truck) compelling them to come here.

WITH TRUCKS

When food trucks are present, though, the way that space is used changes entirely. The large number of trucks, proximity of many places of employment, and lack of other immediate food/retail options all contribute to the establishment of this space as a hub of food truck activity. Every day at lunch time, numerous customers flock to the area to visit the large number of food trucks present. During the periods of observation, there were at least 50 people present at the trucks at any given time. Most customers arrived directly from some of the adjacent or nearly adjacent office buildings. Most arrive by foot, but some do arrive by car. This is a small minority, as the majority of people appear to be walking over from buildings in the immediate area.

Many of the customers visiting these trucks take their food to go. They temporarily occupy the space of the alleyway as they order and wait for their food, but many leave after receiving their orders. While they wait, they make use of the alleyway in volumes that would never be seen without the presence of the food truck as an attractor. However, much of this space is certainly not designed to encourage or allow people to linger. The topography and landscaping make the trucks at the near end of the street an area that, although well-landscaped, is not optimal for people to comfortably linger. Similarly, the space that is covered by the trucks' awnings immediately adjacent to the construction wall (described as the alley within an alley above) can be a somewhat awkward space for the customers. In some ways, the tight space could encourage interaction among customers, but for many, the space might be just slightly too small to be comfortable for anything beyond the bare minimum length of time. The vast parking lots, though a contrast to the tight alley space, similarly can negatively affect customers' likelihood to stay in the space.

A number of customers choose to stay at the site, though, and consume their purchases before going back to their office buildings. Given the nature of the site, though, there is little space in which they can linger. Some stand along the small hill sloping from the street to the base of the adjacent buildings. Others sit along the low wall that is part of one of the adjacent buildings. This, of course, can only provide a limited amount of seating. There really are no other seating options present for people who wish to stay at the site. The amount of space and lack of a real sidewalk creates a situation in which even sitting on the curb is not really an option.

Landscaped Area
Construction Site
Food Truck
Customers

0 150 300 ft

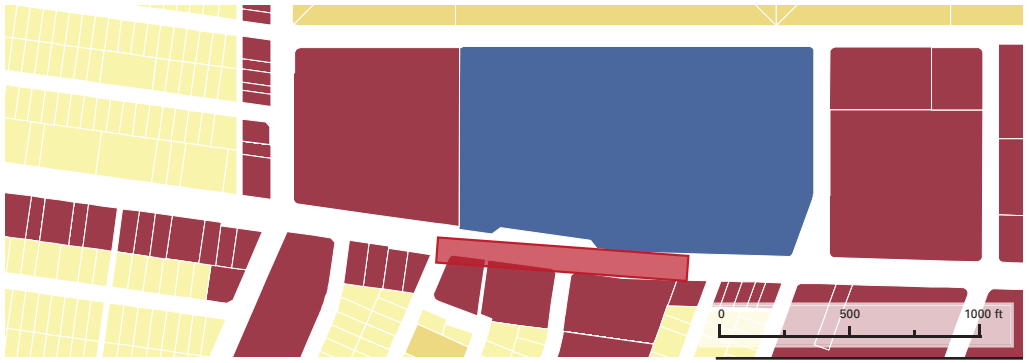
LACMA
MIRACLE MILE

The Miracle Mile is a 1.5-mile stretch of Wilshire Boulevard between Fairfax and Highland Avenues. It sometimes also refers to the surrounding neighborhoods. The Miracle Mile District is bordered by the Fairfax District on the north, Hancock Park on the northeast, Mid-City on the southeast, West Pico on the south, and Carthay on the southwest.

DEMOGRAPHICS
This area is predominantly commercial along Wilshire Blvd, with a mixture of multi-and single-family homes in the residential area immediately surrounding the main commercial and office center.

ACCESSIBILITY
Wilshire Blvd is a major artery traversing the city that also provides access to the LACMA site. The thoroughfare connects this area with many other parts of the city. The area is not well connected by MetroRail, but it decently connected to the rest of the city by public bus. Pedestrian accessibility is moderate: although sidewalks and crosswalks exists, wide sidewalks make for an uncomfortable pedestrian experience, and long wait-times at pedestrian crossings impede accessibility.

LAND USE
Surrounding uses are predominantly office and commercial, and as a result, a number of restaurant/food establishments exist in the area. Wilshire Blvd in Miracle Mile has often been described as a "linear downtown." Just one block off of the corridor, however, is low-density, residential development. On one side of Wilshire is LACMA, (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), a great asset but a large, super-block type development. The La Brea Tar Pits are also nearly adjacent.



PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

This site can be classified as a main road. Wilshire Blvd is a main thoroughfare with multiple lanes of traffic in both directions. The site is immediately adjacent to a large office complex composed of three buildings (5900 Wilshire). It is across the street from LACMA, an entity which has significant effects on the physical environment as well as the use of the area. Immediately behind the large office buildings is mostly residential development – some single family, some apartments or multi-family housing. There are a few large surface parking lots on the site/adjacent to the food truck strip.

AMENITIES

The location of LACMA and the 5900 Wilshire complex significantly increase the pedestrian and public amenities present at this site. There are well-planned street trees that provide shade and some protection from the wind. In addition, there is seating provided in the plazas in front of the office buildings. This plaza space and the seating is technically private but (as will be discussed in the use section) is highly used by food truck customers. The plaza space itself in front of the office towers provide an amenity for users, as they are well landscaped and maintained, creating a welcoming, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing space. Areas of well-maintained grass in front of the plazas (adjacent to the sidewalk) enhance the aesthetic value or usage potential of the space. The Berlin Wall section outside of these spaces further contributes to the success as a public realm. Across the street, LACMA provides a number of similar amenities. Seating and well-designed outdoor spaces are abundant. Restrooms and trash receptacles can be found in these civic spaces or surrounding commercial establishments.

DIMENSIONALITY

Both the street and the sidewalk are quite wide. The street is at least 2 lanes in each direction and in some cases a turning lane is present bringing this to three lanes in each direction. There is also parallel parking on one side of the street and a little drop-off lane in front of LACMA on the other. The sidewalk is also fairly wide (at least 10-12 feet in most places). Furthermore, in the immediate site of study, the buildings are set back considerably from the sidewalk by a large plaza/landscaped space that technically belongs to the adjacent office buildings. In some places, the plaza and public space is differentiated from the sidewalk by steps or a low wall. Buildings are generally large, office tower or box-style development.

At the time of fieldwork for this study, this is probably the most well-known food truck location in Los Angeles. On any given day at lunchtime, between 10-15 trucks arrive in hopes of finding hungry clientele. Although originally trucks only frequented this location on weekdays, they have become a weekend occurrence at the location as well. Until recently, the site generally hosted even more trucks, but new regulations have restricted the number of trucks that are able to park here. Even CBS took notice, writing that, "Anyone who's driven down Wilshire Boulevard near LACMA has noticed that the south side of the street is filled with food trucks dishing out ethnic eats and American fare" (CBSLA 2012). The trucks that locate here represent a large variety of types, styles, and price ranges of food.

PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS

As in many cases, all trucks that locate here provide trash barrels, even though some barrels could be found in the semi-public plaza spaces. In addition, a few trucks brought both chairs and tables with them, creating additional seating spaces just outside of their windows. The majority of trucks observed did not do this, but those that did managed to use these items to expand their reach and area of control.

Similar to the Food Truck Alley site, the trucks here can have a major effect on how the space feels to the user. Here, the presence of the trucks can create a sort of barrier between the wide, main road and the sidewalk used by pedestrians. Although they do not create the same type of enclosed or confined space here that they do at the FT Alley site, here they create a divider, allowing the pedestrian to feel separated and protected from the street. This is also influenced by the large setback between the buildings and the sidewalk: the trucks help to create a vertical element/divider in the vast stretch that might otherwise seem inhospitable.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

Trucks here line up along one side of Wilshire Blvd – the side adjacent to the 5900 complex, opposite LACMA. Here, they span quite a far distance due to their pure numbers. In addition, because there are often gaps or cars parked between the trucks, the strip of trucks stretches out quite far along Wilshire. When enough trucks are present, the string even wraps around a corner and trucks locate partially down a side street. The arrangement is fairly typical, but enhanced and expanded beyond what it would be at a typical site.

USE

WITHOUT TRUCKS

Even without trucks present, this area sees a (relatively) high volume of traffic. Despite the large volume of people passing through and the numerous amenities and attractions on or adjacent to the site, it is certainly not as highly utilized as it could be as a public space. Some of the nearby outdoor/public spaces are highly used: for instance, the plaza at LACMA and the La Brea Tar Pits have many users (although a number may be tourists), revealing that there is certainly a base of people present who might be willing to use this as a public space.

The area directly outside of LACMA is relatively well-used by museum goers, but other areas (such as the space in front of 5900 Wilshire) are less desirable. This was another site that was difficult to study without food trucks, as at nearly every opportunity, food trucks were present. They are generally only closed for business at times of day when people would be very unlikely to be using the space regardless.

WITH

The addition of food trucks to this space seriously increases its use levels and patterns. It is likely that some of these users would have to come to the space with or without food trucks, but a large number are drawn by the appeal of the trucks. When trucks are here and the weather is right, the space truly becomes a hub of activity.

This site is a prime example of the weekday-weekend difference in customers and in use patterns. Trucks still flood the area on weekend afternoons, even when the regular employment masses are nowhere in sight. The customers who arrive, and accompanying use of space, is very different, however. More customers are families, students, or people looking for a leisurely afternoon, than occupants of the office buildings on a lunch break. They are, then, usually more likely to stay and use the space for a prolonged period of time. Given the prominence of this as a food truck site, people are willing to travel to come to the site and visit the food trucks here. A large majority of these patrons arrive by car.

On weekdays, the general clientele is not as leisurely as weekends, but if the weather is right, many people will stay to enjoy their lunch and use the space. On crowded days, anything becomes a seat: people sit on pretty much anything that they can, including steps, walls, grass, etc. This is in addition to those who use the seats provided by truck owners and the seating provided in the semi-private plazas in front of the office development. Even those who do not stay aid in activating the space for some portion of time. The wide sidewalks that rarely see anywhere near the life they are capable of sustaining are flooded with people waiting in line for the perfect sandwich, or socializing with coworkers as they wait to pick up their purchases. In contrast to weekend visitors, many of these customers come from the adjacent office buildings, and simple must walk out the front door for plentiful options for lunch.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Landscaped Area
Public Plaza
Food Truck
Customers
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Kogi

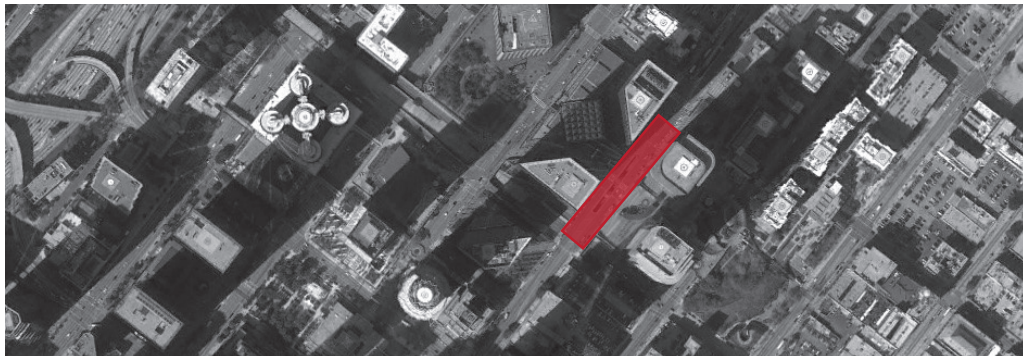
CALIFORNIAS PLAZA
DOWNTOWN

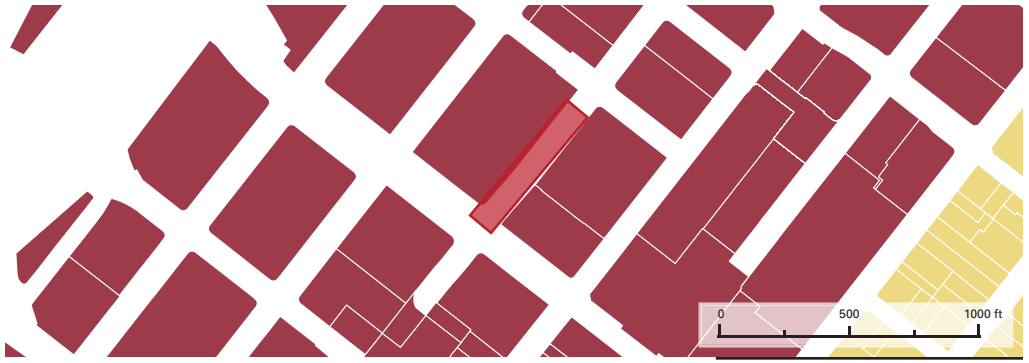
The Californias Plaza site is located in the Bunker Hill District of downtown Los Angeles. Bunker Hill is a historic prominence that traditionally separated Downtown Los Angeles from the rest of the city to the west. There are a number of civic venues on Bunker Hill today, including the Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and others.

DEMOGRAPHICS
Traditionally, very few people have lived in this area. In recent years, however, a wave of residential construction has brought in a number of new residents to the area. Many of these new residents already work downtown and new construction has been catered to a class of residents that will aid in downtown revitalization efforts.

ACCESSIBILITY
This site is only a 10-minute walk from MetroRail Red Line and is also very accessible by bus and by DASH shuttle. There is ample parking available in private lots and on-street. It is somewhat difficult to get to by foot unless you are already at the top of the hill. Similar to other places Downtown, within the development project itself (Californias buildings and surroundings) area is fairly walkable and relatively pedestrian friendly.

LAND USE
There is very little residential development in the immediately surrounding area. This area is predominantly office buildings, with a number of cultural attractions and landmarks sprinkled throughout. There are a large number of dining/shopping options in the immediate vicinity, as well as a number of public/private plazas/open spaces. There is also a large park behind the Californias Plaza development.





PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

The site is located along S. Grand Avenue, a major thoroughfare downtown. The area is unique in the topography of Bunker Hill, which was a major dividing force in the city until it was tunneled through to connect the area in an East to West manner. It is located adjacent to the California Plaza development, which is home to two large office skyscrapers, as well as a number of retail and civic uses and a large plaza.

AMENITIES

The plaza itself provides a comfortable and convenient public space that provides many public space amenities.

It contains ample seating and is well-landscaped and maintained, providing a very comfortable and is a valuable outdoor amenity. Similarly, the space is surrounded by retail and dining options within the lower levels of the Californias Towers. The development also provides amenities such as restrooms and trash barrels. Many of these amenities, though, are only somewhat accessible to the general public. This is a prime example of a public space that, due to its geometry, layout, and design, can feel quite private. Beyond the plaza space itself, fewer public space amenities are available. The sidewalk is wide and contiguous, and pedestrian crossing are frequent. However, there are few other amenities provided on the street. Street trees are not common; only the the towering buildings create shade. In general, no street furniture is provided except for benches at bus stops, but the design of these features make sitting uncomfortable and undesirable.

DIMENSIONALITY

Like much of this part of downtown, the street grid here is regular and wide. Tall skyscrapers and other large buildings complement this street width. Generally very wide sidewalks further increase the expanse of the street, and these spaces extend directly into large setbacks in front of the buildings. This contributes to the large area that feels like somewhat of a no-man's land in between the street and the buildings themselves. The topography of the area is also contributes to the unique interplay of public and private spaces. The entirety of the site is located on top of Bunker Hill, which is elevated above the remainder of downtown. Passageways through the hill create two levels of public realm in this area. On a smaller scale, the plazas, amenities, and public spaces have a unique topography. The large plaza that provides many of the amenities described above is sunken below street level, but entrances to many of the office uses present are raised on large platforms. There is very little space that is actually at grade with the street.

The number of trucks at this site varies, but there are fairly consistently trucks there on weekdays at lunch hour. In general, between 2-5 trucks were observed here on weekdays at or around lunchtime. The types of trucks that locate here vary greatly vary: they range from standard Twitter trucks such as Kogi, to a coffee van, to a more traditional taco truck [located across the street]. Trucks are interspersed with other types of street vending – for instance a cart selling fruit juice – which is unique amongst the cases studied. The nature of the wide range of trucks that locate here allow the space to be used for a longer span of time. For instance, the coffee truck that regularly visits this location arrives earlier in the mornings, and trucks were observed to remain slightly later in the day than they did at many of the other areas studied.

PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS

In general, the trucks here remain fairly confined to their own space and do not have a significant impact on the public space itself. As usual, they bring their own trash barrels, but none of the trucks here set out seating of any sort. A few trucks set carts or stands of condiments out outside of their immediate bounds. The nature of the space that the trucks inhabit – both its dimensionality and its role as a public-private space – likely contribute to this fact. Although the trucks stand between a wide street and a large setback, similar to the LACMA site, they have less of an effect as a dividing factor, perhaps because there are fewer trucks here and they do not create the feeling of a continuous wall like the LACMA trucks do.

SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT

In general, trucks follow a usual pattern and line up on one side of the street (immediately adjacent to the Californias Plaza). They park in metered, parallel parking spaces. A few trucks parked immediately adjacent to each other, but at many points, there were stretches of at least a few parking spaces between trucks. During the period of observation, one truck (a traditional Mexican food truck) parked across the street from where the gourmet food trucks generally line up. This continuity across the street was rarely observed elsewhere, but given the topography and layout of the area, it likely makes more sense for trucks to park across the street if needed, rather than parking down the hill.

USE

WITHOUT TRUCKS

This site is fairly highly used with out without food trucks present, due to its amenities, density of people, and location. The plaza itself is fairly consistently used by employees throughout the day, even in the morning hours before food trucks begin to arrive. Of course, a spike in this usage occurs at lunch time. The numerous of restaurants, coffee shops, and retail uses in this complex produce a number of consumers who often decide to linger in the outdoor space, particularly in nicer weather.

The street and sidewalk itself also has a fairly high usage, with or without food trucks. This can likely be attributed to its location downtown and the high volume of people who must pass through this area going about their daily business. Pedestrian movement through the site is fairly high, especially relative to the other sites studied. Much of this traffic is very fluid, however. People move through the site on their way to final destinations: few people remain in the site for any significant period of time.

WITH

When trucks are present, the use of the space changes drastically. In this location, trucks have the ability to bring an immense number of people to the site, given the high density of potential customers in the surrounding areas. Depending on the time of day, how many trucks are present, and which trucks these are, a line of customers often takes up the entire sidewalk, sometimes even making it difficult to pass through the area on foot. Large clusters of people wait in front of each truck at midday. Even at less peak times (ie, when the trucks are just opening or about to close up) a fairly high volume of customers visit the trucks.

In general, customers appear to be mostly employees from surrounding office buildings, and as a result, many arrive by foot. As this is one of the few locations downtown where food trucks locate, people come to this area from a few blocks away at lunch time. As a result, the majority of these customers are professional or office workers. Many customers remain at or near the site to consume their purchases, particularly in nicer weather. This is likely due to a range of factors. As one truck owner explained in an interview, people downtown generally have an hour lunch break (because of their industry) and thus they have time to come to the food trucks even if they work a little further away, and to stay and relax to eat their food. This is in contrast to a number of the other sites studied, where people do not have the time or ability to remain at the trucks due to the pace and structure of their jobs.

Many of those who remain at the site retreat back to the plaza itself to sit and enjoy their meal, mixing with the other users of the space who are already present. Though this takes people off of the street itself, it adds additional users to the plaza and establishes this as a more lively and social place. A few people were observed sitting on the steps leading to the upper levels of the plaza, but this is generally rarer, given the presence of seating and tables nearby. In addition, private security guards from the Californias Plaza development sometimes discourage people from sitting in this space.

While waiting and in some cases while eating, many people congregate in the area immediately adjacent to the trucks. There is a generally fun and high-energy environment here, perhaps aided by the fact that many customers arrive to the site in small groups, likely with friends or coworkers.

Landscaped Area

Public Plaza

Food Truck

Customers

0 125 250 ft


Grilled C
924 West
LA C
CA 0

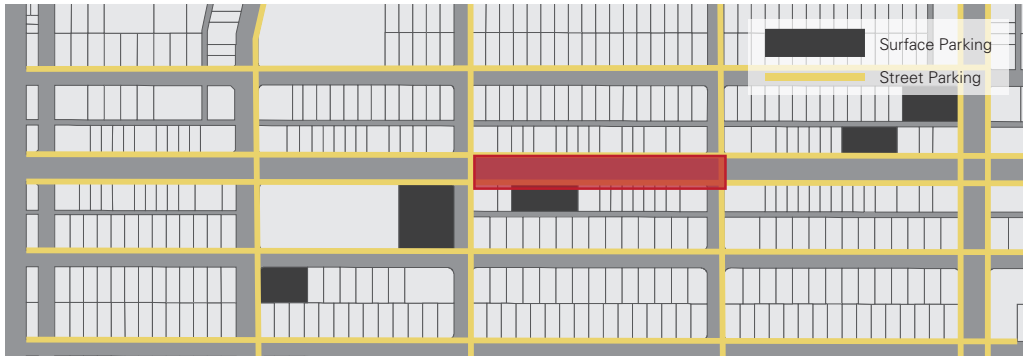
DISTRICT LA BREA
FAIRFAX DISTRICT

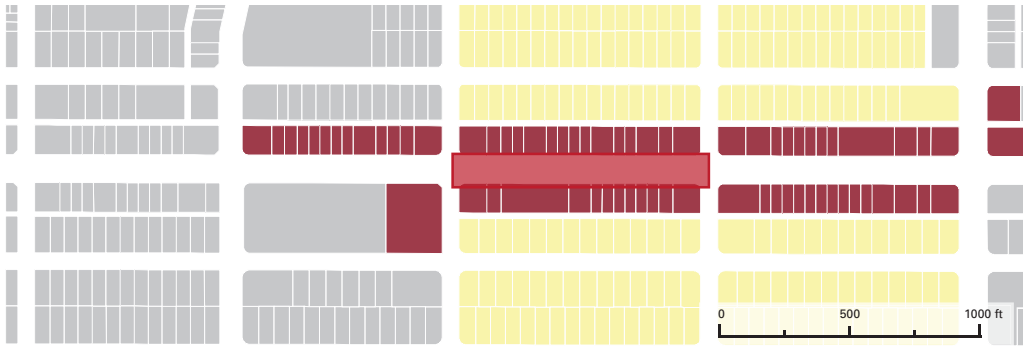
District La Brea is an adaptive re-use development project on La Brea avenue between 1st and 2nd, which features eleven buildings transformed to host a complementary mix of retail, dining and creative offices. District La Brea is in west Los Angeles between downtown and Hollywood in the Fairfax district. Beverly Hills and Hollywood are just a short drive away. Hancock Park is adjacent to the property, as is Park La Brea.

DEMOGRAPHICS
Hancock Park and Park La Brea are both adjacent to this property and house many affluent residents. A mixture of single-family homes and high-rise apartments are located in the nearby areas, fairly close to the commercial strip that comprises this site.

ACCESSIBILITY
This area is fairly accessible, but most easily by car. A couple of busses run down La Brea Avenue with reasonable frequency. The site is not accessible by MetroRail. There is ample on-street parking, parking garages, and surface lots. If you go a street or two over there is 2 hour parking that is not even metered and does not require any sort of permit.

LAND USE
The La Brea Development is home to a number of commercial businesses and offices. The surrounding area on La Brea Ave is also home to a number of small, independent restaurants and eateries, as well as some larger stores/commercial establishments. Just one block off of the avenue is largely single family residential, as is most of the area outside of structured retail/commercial grid.





PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

This site can be classified as a main road and provides a commercial corridor within an otherwise residential area. The immediately surrounding land use is fairly low-density residential development (1-2 stories, generally) and La Brea Avenue contains mostly 1-2 story commercial development.

AMENITIES

Public space amenities in within the site are sparse. Though some of the stores or commercial establishments contribute positively to the experience of the public realm, overall, there are few amenities. The street and sidewalk make up the only real public space to be had in the area, and these are not of the best or most inviting quality. Shade is provided by buildings and a few street trees, but this is very variable along the one block stretch that is included in the site. Seating or street furniture is virtually nonexistent: there is no real space to sit, other than on the curb itself. A few commercial establishments have awnings that improve the public realm or seats the help to activate the sidewalk, but these are not accessible for the general public.

DIMENSIONALITY

This street is another example of a case in which dimensions play a major role in creating an inhospitable and unwelcoming public realm. The width of the street combined with the low density and buildings heights creates an environment that feels sparse and empty, in which the pedestrian feels exposed and uncomfortable. The sidewalks along the block studied are also quite wide, but in multiple instances, construction activity reduces the amount of spaces available for the pedestrian, and imposing construction walls influence the experience of the space. Buildings generally have very small or totally insignificant setbacks: they are generally flush to the space of the sidewalk itself. The combination of all of these factors leads to a space that, despite its numerous stores and attractors for activity, has a generally unwelcoming public realm.

Food trucks locate here as a part of a food truck event, occurring on the 2nd Saturday of every month. The event, referred to at "La Brea 2nd Saturdays" is organized by District La Brea, the multi-use development project underway within the site. Each month, trucks gather from approximately 12-4 PM along the strip of S. La Brea Ave between 1st and 2nd avenue. This event is typical of the food truck events or gatherings that are becoming a norm in many neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles. Not as large scale as some of the more intense food truck festivals springing up in cities across the US, this event is a smaller, more local occurrence. At the event in January, there were 10 trucks at the event, offering a wide range of food and beverage options. The options included everything from trucks serving more conventional Twitter truck fare such as gourmet grilled cheese or Mexican fusion dishes, to trucks specializing in various desserts, to a truck that boasts a wood-fire oven on board. This wide range of options truly epitomizes the mobile food court typology that Twitter trucks often exhibit.

PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS

As in many cases, all trucks provide their own trash barrels and some bring chairs for customers to use as well. Due to the dimensionality of the space and the close proximity of the trucks present, this is a case in which the trucks can alter the feeling of their physical environment substantially. Their presence makes the street feel much more pedestrian, by creating a seemingly smaller and more sheltered sidewalk space. This case is an example in which this smaller space strikes a good balance; the width of the sidewalk and density of the buildings are conducive to creating a comfortable pedestrian environment.

SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT

Trucks follow one of the typical styles of lining up in parallel parking spaces along the edge of the sidewalk. However, at this site, trucks lined up on both sides of the street. Though there were significantly more trucks located on one side, a few trucks also located across the street. Rather than spilling onto the next block, the extra trucks chose to located across the street. Given the width of the street, there is ample space for trucks to park on both sides of the road without creating an obstruction. In general, the trucks were concentrated around one spot on the block where trucks were parked in spaces immediately adjacent to each other. Here, the effect of creating a more pedestrian environment is more extreme than further down the block where trucks are slightly more spaced out.

USE

WITHOUT TRUCKS

The public realm in this area is moderately used without trucks present. Many of the small businesses and restaurants act as attractors and bring customers to the area. As a commercial corridor within a largely residential area, this space has a relatively high level of use. The majority of people using the public space of the site (which is really just the street and sidewalk) are just walking from their cars to stores or sometimes from store to store. Pedestrian flow along the block is moderate, depending on the time of day. The occupation of this space is very fluid, though. Though a few instances were observed in which people would stop or linger outside of stores, this is not the norm.

WITH

When food trucks are present at the site, its level of use increases dramatically. The nature of this site as an event space certainly influences the way in which people use the space when the trucks are present. The vast majority of people who visit the 2nd Saturday event stay and consume their purchases at the site. Many of them arrive by car – in fact, validated parking is advertised as part of the event itself. Most customers come to the event with the intention of lingering at the site for at least a short time.

The general lack of a public realm, however, means that customers need to be innovative and flexible if they want to remain at the site for any extended time. A number of people simply stand with their purchases, leaning against the buildings or construction walls set up at the site. These customers are intermixed with the large number of customers milling around and waiting to order or receive food from various trucks. In this way, the sidewalk actually becomes quite crowded with people at some points. There is, of course, clustering around some trucks more than others, as is the case with nearly all groups of trucks. Some trucks are more popular, or more famous, and thus people tend to cluster around these. This has impacts on the patterns of spatial use that are observed. There are pockets along the sidewalk which are almost too crowded to walk by, and other spaces in which the sidewalk space is generally open.

Customers who choose to stay for a longer period of time are innovative in their use of the space. Many of the trucks located here provide camping chairs or stools for customers to sit on, and during the observation period, a number of customers used these amenities. Similarly, people are willing to sit on the curb and even on the sidewalk itself at some points along this stretch.

Landscaped Area
Parking Lot
Food Truck
Customers

0 175 350 ft

CHAPTER 3 | ELEMENTS

"New technology has been a game changer, allowing trucks to pick and move to where the customers are on short notice. Kogi BBQ, a truck serving Korean-barbecued meat inside Mexican-style tacos in Los Angeles, became a media sensation earlier this year in part for its used of Twitter, on which it currently has 28,000 followers."

-Katy McLaughlin, "Food Truck Nation"
in *The Wall Street Journal*, June 2009

The case studies presented in the previous chapter are used to deductively determine which elements are important in establishing spaces in which food trucks can be successful. This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the elements that have been deemed important. Though the case studies are presented through the lens of many of these elements, the elements are truly derived *from* the case studies. This chapter answers the second major question asked in this study: what characteristics or elements are important in determining how and to what extent trucks can activate the spaces that they inhabit.

In this chapter, the elements will be abstracted in a way that will make them applicable to a broad range of situations. Like the case studies, each element will be presented in the same way. First, a general overview of the element will be given. Then, some possible variations of the element will be presented. Finally, the effects that these different permutations can have on the way that food trucks activate the space will be described. This will be accompanied by a diagram illustrating some of these potential permutations. Photographic examples of the different permutations will also be provided.

The elements encompass a range of that influence how the food truck acts in and influences the space. Some elements pertain to the contextual situations in which the food truck is situated. Others have to do with the physical space itself and the amenities that it provides. Still others pertain to the food trucks themselves.

The elements are presented in two categories. The first category, which will be referred to throughout as the "baseline elements", are a set of elements that describe the base qualities needed for a food truck to locate in a space. If a space has the proper amount and combination of these elements, it can likely be successfully inhabited by food trucks. In some ways, (as described in introduction) this can be considered activation, by pure virtue of bringing people to the particular alleyway or street corner that is occupied. A second set of elements, to be referred to as "enhancing elements" go beyond this base level: they enhance the level of activation of the space. They go above and beyond the baseline elements in ensuring that a space can be more than just occupied by a food truck, but truly activated by it.

The baseline set of elements determines what is needed to bring food trucks to a space and what allows the food truck to operate successfully. These elements are largely contextual. They include factors such as where in the city the truck is, what the surrounding land use is, what the density is like, how accessible the site is, etc. There are also spatial components to this: there needs to be enough space and enough trucks to be attractive and successful. Though at their heart these baseline elements are used to determine the base economic feasibility, they certainly still contribute to the activation of space. In corners, vacant lots, or alleyways where there was previously nothing, the mere existence of a food truck can drastically change the space. A food truck can bring people to an area that they would not otherwise visit and activate the sidewalk by encouraging people to gather where they would not have otherwise. Of course, whether or not the truck will locate varies slightly from truck to truck, but overall, these are the elements that will help make a space a feasible possibility.

The enhancing elements determine and affect how successful food trucks will be at activating a space beyond the level achieved solely by the truck's presence. In order for these elements to have any effect, the baseline elements must also be present. This set of elements determines the magnitude of the effect trucks have on a space after it has already been determined that

a truck can feasibly locate there. These elements answer the question: In order for people to stay, to linger, or to socialize, what aspects must exist? Or what aspects are most likely to lead to this enhanced activation? If the baseline elements provide the framework to bring the truck and the people to the space in the first place, the enhancing elements provide the structure that allows and encourages them to stay and thus have a more drastic, larger, and more sustained impact on the space, and thus on the city.

It is important to bear in mind that none of these elements can be successful on their own. For instance, it may be possible for a food truck to succeed in a site that has only 5 of the possible 6 baseline elements, but for an ideal situation, all 6 should be present. It would be highly unlikely to see a successfully located food truck in a site that has only 2 or 3 of the baseline elements. For example, even if a site has the ideal surrounding land use and demographics, if it is not at all accessible, it cannot successfully support a truck. Similarly, a site that contains all of the baseline elements but only 1-2 enhancing elements will be less successful than one that contains the baseline elements plus has a more optimized set of enhancing elements.

Chapter 5 (Process Proposal) will provide a more detailed and action-oriented guide as to how to use these elements to craft a food truck strategy that will lead to improved spatial activation levels. It will also describe in greater depth the relationships between these elements and the essential role of the connections between elements. This chapter provides the theoretical and abstract descriptions of the elements, treating each as a distinct entity (in the interest of clarity) although they truly are more closely intertwined.

BASELINE ELEMENTS:

A description of baseline elements follows. As noted above, most of the baseline elements are largely contextual. Quite literally, these elements set the baseline of what is necessary for a food truck to occupy and be successful in a space. Given the high mobility levels of these trucks, it is clear that when the right combination of these elements does not exist, trucks simply will not choose to locate at the site.

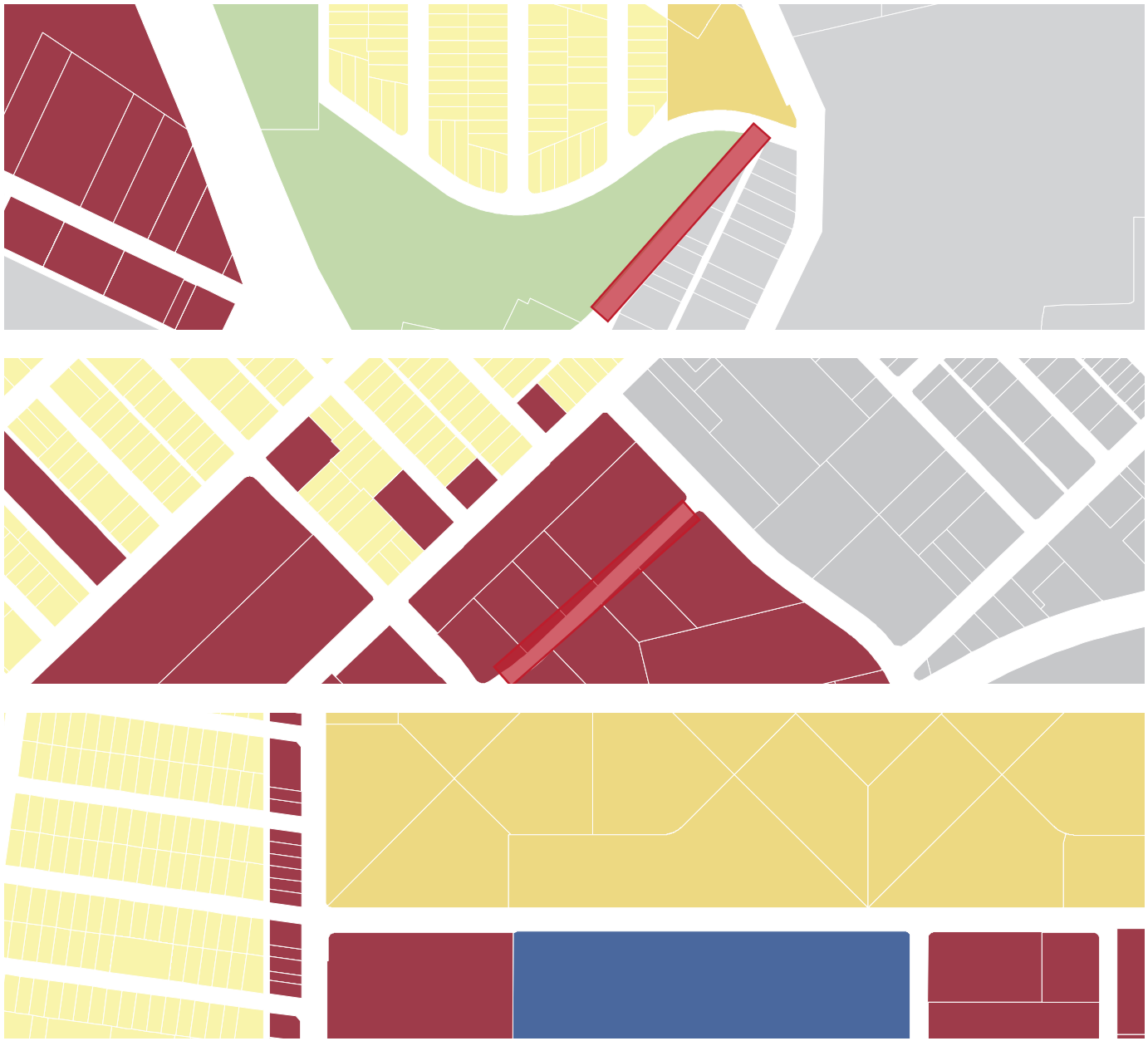

LOBSTA
TRUCK

LAND USE TYPE

The type of land use surrounding the potential food truck site is of the utmost importance in deciding whether a food truck will or will not locate there. There are obviously drastic differences in land use patterns throughout a city, and even within a neighborhood. This study has revealed that these variations can have a very significant impact on the feasibility of food truck success in a space. Certain land use patterns do not generate the demand needed to sustain trucks economically, while others truly optimize this situation.

VARIATIONS

Though fairly straightforward, it is important to note the different effects that various land use patterns have on success levels of food trucks. For instance, a site could be surrounded by predominantly commercial uses or could be in a largely residential neighborhood. Institutional and industrial uses are also clearly an option. Furthermore, there are many sites that exhibit combinations of a number of different use types. These variations have significant impacts on the potential of food trucks to alter and activate spaces. For instance, in a primarily residential area, food trucks are more likely to be activators in the evenings or on weekends, when families and residents are likely be around. Conversely, food trucks are more successful in office areas during lunchtime on business days. From the cases studied, it has become clear that the right mix of uses is necessary to obtain optimum success. Of course this element cannot be thought of as a sole deciding factor, but it is clear that types and patterns of land use are be a significant predictor. Without the appropriate land use to provide a critical mass of potential customers, food trucks will not feasibly be able to locate in an area, and thus have no potential to activate underused space. For this reason, this element certainly should be considered in the baseline set.

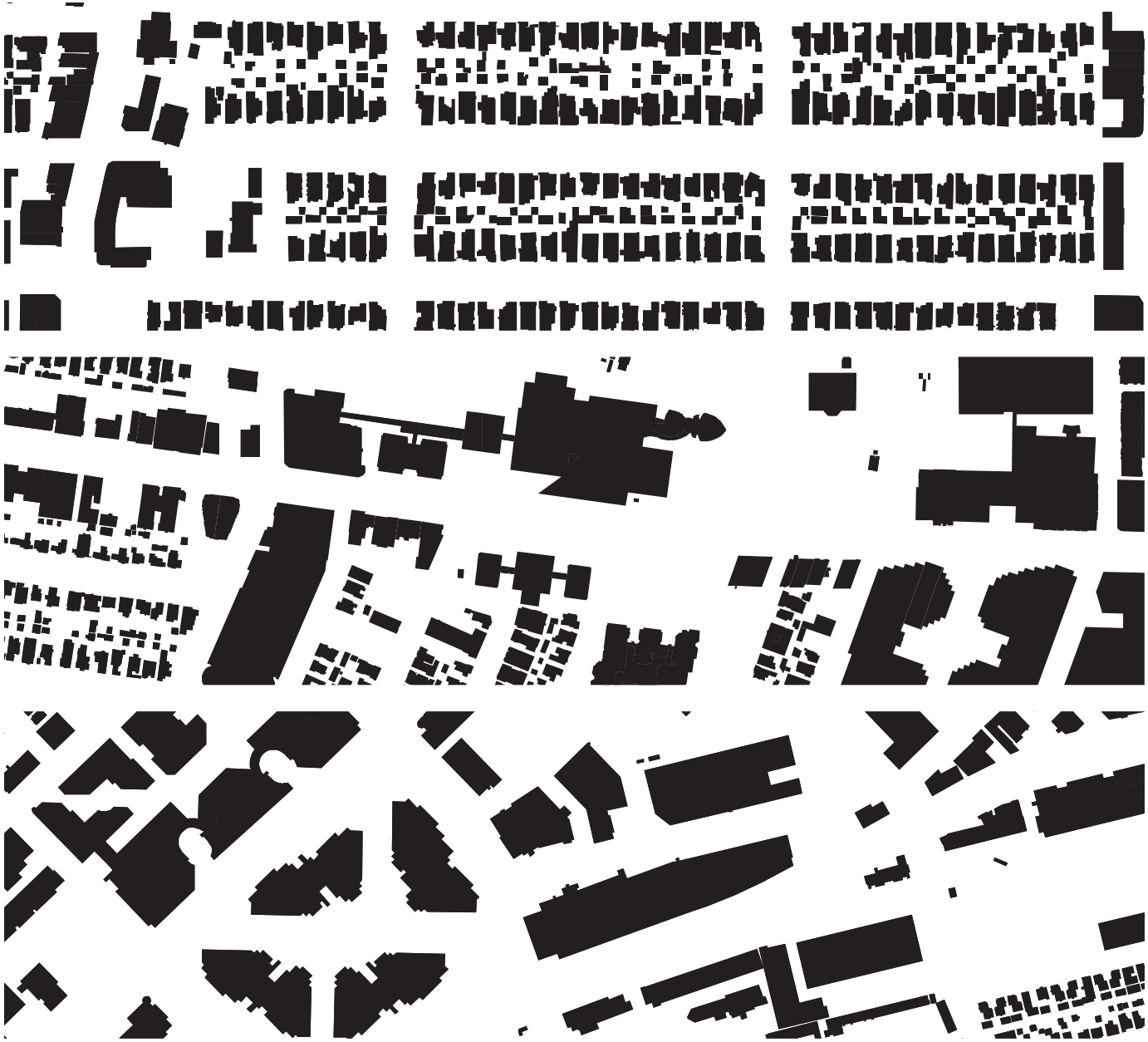


DENSITY

Very closely related to land use is the important factor of density. In many ways, land use can predict the density that will be present and for the purposes of food trucks, different land uses demand different densities to be successful. Like land use, this element is essential as it contributes to generating a critical mass of potential customers for the food truck. The pure density of development is important, as is density as it is more complexly related to potential customer base.

VARIATIONS

The way in which variations of this element affect the role and potential of food trucks is immense. Lower density areas are less likely to have spaces that are prime for food truck activation due to the lower numbers of people to potentially act as activators. Of course, as mentioned above, this also depends on the type of land use that is present. High-density residential development will not provide particularly useful or relevant to ensuring the success of a lunchtime food truck if the vast majority of residents leave the area for work, school, or other activities during the day. Similarly, lower density residential areas might have a high density of jobs and be flooded by workers each day, in need of lunch options. It is clear that although different variations in density are indeed very important and should be considered a baseline element, it is vital to consider this with respect to other characteristics of the area that impact the meaning of the density parameter. In addition, the immediately surrounding density can likely be less if the area is more easily accessible to surrounding areas.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Not only is the pure number of people in the immediate area important in determining whether a truck should even locate at a site, but so too is the demographic makeup of this population. The nature of the Twitter truck phenomenon is such that the trucks generally target a very specific clientele: they are not meant to be appealing or accessible to everyone. This is a fact that, although perhaps not ideal or necessarily equitable, is important to note as a part of the reality of the Twitter truck trend. Like the other baseline elements described in this section, this element is essential in determining that there is a critical mass of customers for the food truck to locate successfully.

VARIATIONS

Variations in this element exist at a number of scales. In some cases, entire neighborhoods of the city are more demographically feasible for food trucks to locate. For instance, neighborhoods consisting of predominantly upper-class, single family homes will respond to and accept food trucks in a different way than predominantly single, young people would. Although food trucks could locate in either of these locations, the demographic characteristics have different implications for the strategies that the food trucks can and should take. Even within areas that seem otherwise similar, however, demographic differences play a major role in a food truck's ability to locate sustainably and to successfully activate public spaces. As one food truck owner explained, different commercial areas within the city do not necessarily create the same opportunities for trucks to attract and retain people. As he explained, people in the entertainment industry, for example, have a significantly more rushed lifestyle, and thus might pick up food from a truck on their way to work, but are far less likely to remain at a truck than a downtown office employee with an hour long lunch break.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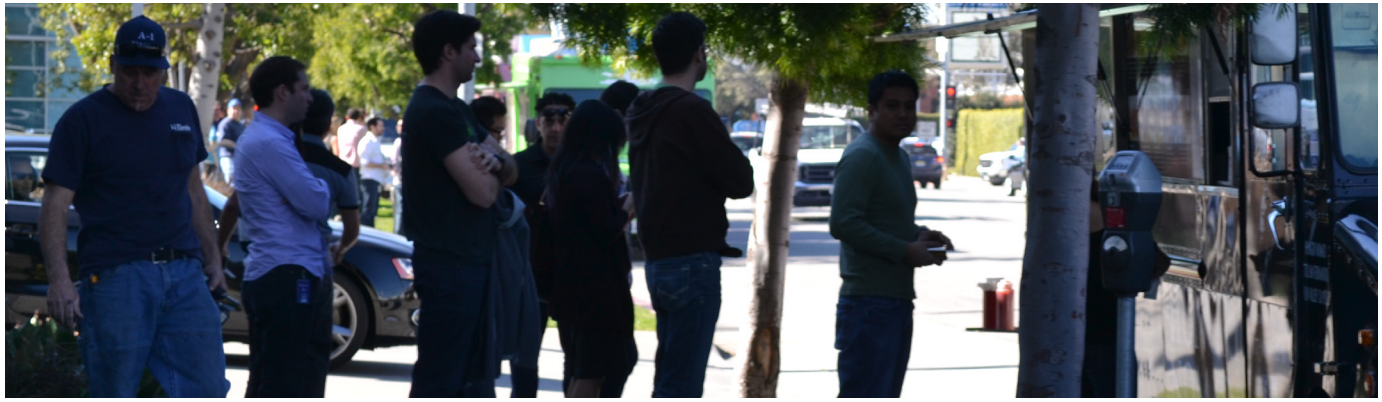
69
Kogi

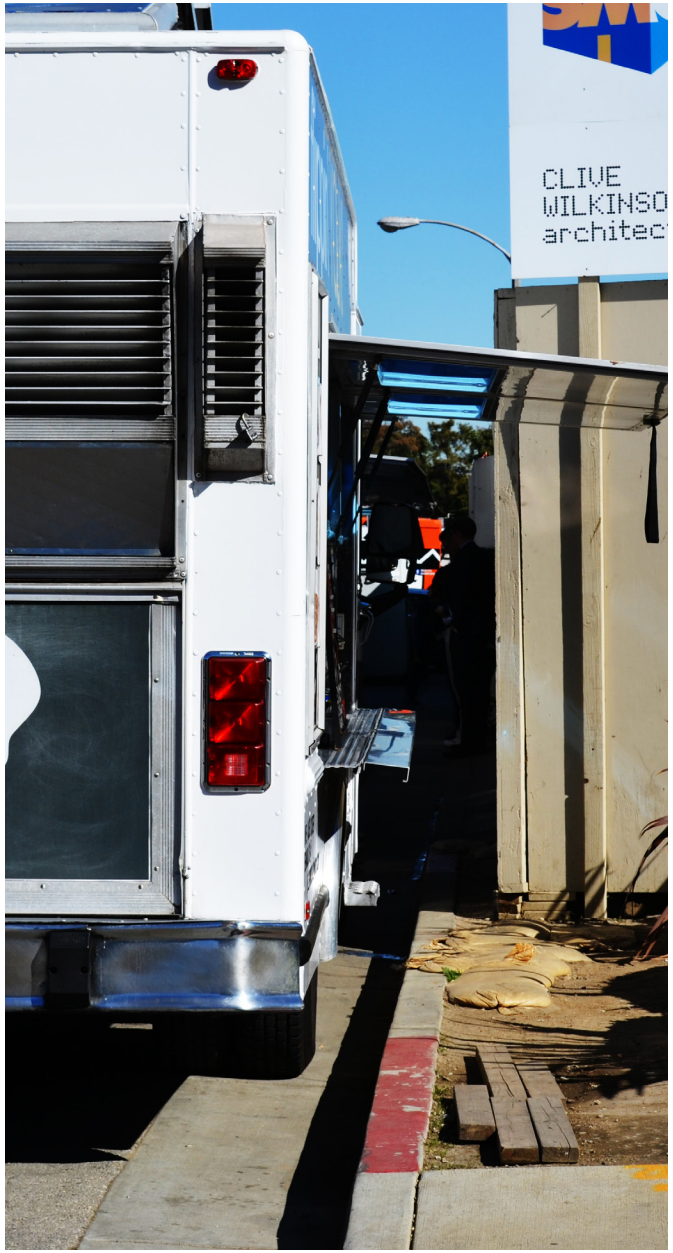


AMOUNT OF SPACE

It is only natural that a defining element is the fact that there must be, literally, enough space for a food truck (or multiple food trucks, see enhancing elements) to locate. There is a bare minimum of space that is needed, regardless of space type, layout, or dimensionality. Many of these characteristics will be covered as enhancing elements, but the baseline element presented here is literally the aspect of having enough space for the food truck and its customers to occupy. In many cases, trucks make do with very little space beyond this base requirement. There are a number of spaces that are seemingly quite small, but have such compelling combinations of the other elements, that it somehow works. The issue of how much space is "enough" certainly varies among trucks based on preferences, needs, and necessity, but the basic need for trucks to have enough space to park and do business is essential.

VARIATIONS

There is not great space for variation within this element. Though there can certainly be wide variability in the amount of space present, there is not great flexibility in the minimum areas. Variations that do exist are informed by other basic characteristics such as size and style of the truck itself, its popularity and how many customers will be waiting at the truck, and how much space the truck needs to fill its basic functions. For its purposes as a baseline element, variations are few. The larger variations that can exist will be returned to in the enhancing element section, under the element entitled "more space."


CLIVE
WILKINSO
architec


DOGTOWN
DOGTOWN

ACCESS

Access is another necessary baseline element. The form of accessibility can vary greatly (depending on city, but also within cities), but it is key in determining whether a space can be successful. Again, this element is essential in ensuring that there is a critical mass of potential customers to support the truck. These potential customers need to be able to readily and easily access the site in order for the truck to be a competitive with other dining options. Regardless of what form accessibility takes, though, it is important to note that is simply must be present. As a baseline element, it is non-negotiable and is necessary to ensure that people can (easily) reach and provide business to the trucks.

VARIATIONS

There are, of course, vast variations in the way that accessibility can be achieved. In some places, accessibility means having a place to park your car; in others, it is being located within a 5 minute walking radius from public transit. These preferences are dependent not only on the city that is being studied, but on personal preferences of customers. In Los Angeles, automobile accessibility is often a very high priority, and thus the availability of parking is an important indicator of accessibility. Most of the cases studied as successful examples of food truck activation have ample parking available. Given the city's obsession with mobility and well-recognized car culture, this is not surprising. However, when thought of in combination with other elements, parking becomes slightly less important and overall accessibility dominates. For example, sites located in the heart of commercial areas need to be easily accessible by pedestrians from surrounding office towers or employment centers. In many of these cases, the convenience of being able to walk out of your building and to a food truck is highly important, perhaps more so than automobile accessibility is.


WIEN

ENHANCING ELEMENTS

The enhancing elements listed below are described, abstracted, and prioritized in a similar manner to the baseline elements. All of these elements, however, have been found to be not 100% necessary for a food truck to be viable in an economic sense, but rather to increase the likelihood of the space to become a social gathering space, spurred by the presence truck. They are similarly presented in the way that their permutations are described and in the way that they are analyzed.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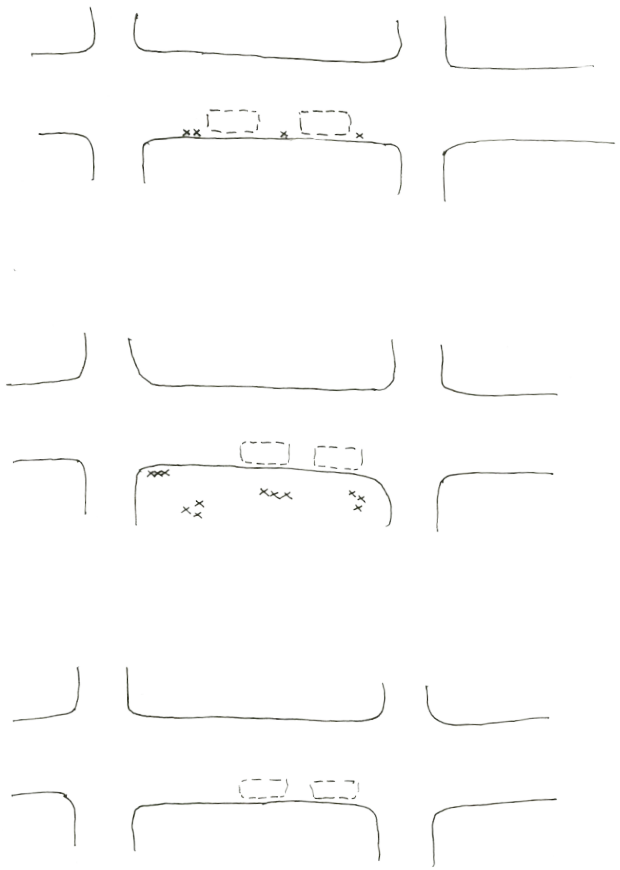


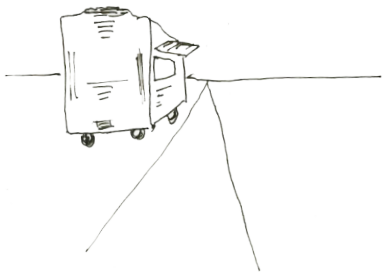
SEATING

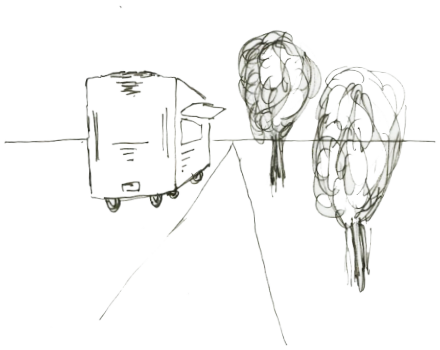
Availability of seating in close proximity to the food truck space is of great importance in determining a space's ability to be activated by the presence of food trucks. Naturally, in order for people to linger, they need a place to sit. There are certainly food trucks that are successful and are successful activators that have little or no seating, but the majority of spaces in which food trucks have the greatest effect have some form of seating.

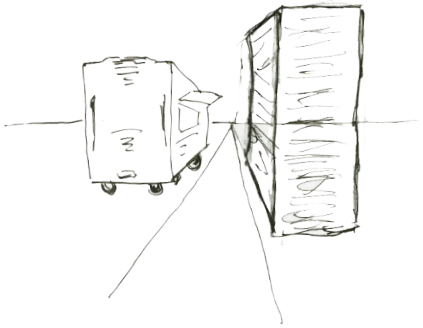
VARIATIONS

The type, location, and provision of seating can take a range of forms. Sometimes, seating is brought by the food trucks themselves. In many of the case studies, food trucks bring camping chairs, stools, or sometimes even tables for people to sit at while consuming their purchases. Alternatively, many of the spaces that food trucks choose to locate have seating already provided. For instance, sites next to parks or plazas may have benches or tables that food truck patrons can use. In many cases, however, people are very innovative and will literally transform anything into a seat. Low walls, thick horizontal branches, and curbs are often adapted as seats by the innovative food truck customer. Though these types of seating are obviously not explicitly provided by the trucks themselves, truck location can be optimized to make the best use of these existing assets. If the right combinations of other elements that encourage people to stay are present, formal seating becomes less important; in the absence of these elements, well-planned seating can encourage people to stay in spaces that they otherwise might now. The differences between spaces with no seating, seating provided by trucks, and co-opting physical options as seating possibilities are great, and this has a significant impact on the potential for a space to be activated by the presence of trucks.


steven alan
RESORT
COLLECTION
2013
&
ADDITIONAL 40%
SALE







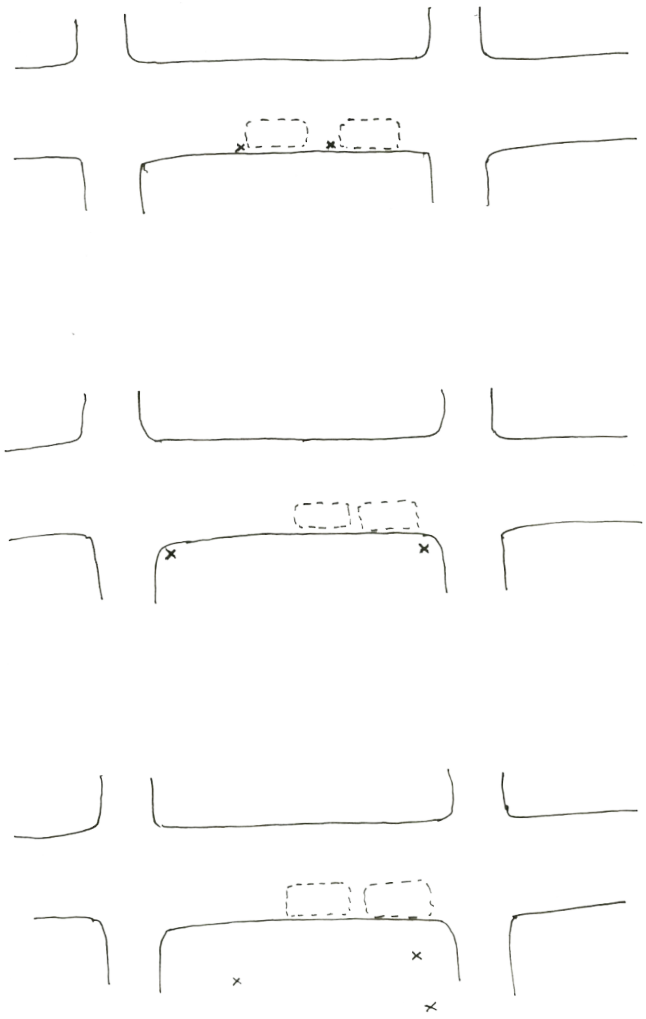
SHADE

The amount of shade (or amount of sun) can certainly impact how much of a gathering space that a place has the potential to become. Whether share or sunlight is needed to encourage people to stay depends on the natural condition of the place that the site is located in. Above a certain temperature, shade is needed in order to make people willing to stay. Similarly, below a certain temperature, sun is needed to make the space desirable for lingering. In reality, this element is a proxy for comfort levels of the site, which is obviously very difficult to define or measure. The proportions of shade/ sun present and its affect on how comfortable people are in a space certainly impacts how likely they are to remain in the space for any significant portion of time.

VARIATIONS

There is obviously a range of ways in which this element can vary. Often, it is a feature of the space itself, regardless of the presence of the truck. For instance, some sites naturally have more street trees or shaded patches than others. This cannot be informed by the truck itself, but trucks can strategically locate in a way that capitalizes on existing elements. In contrast, trucks can alter this element themselves by bringing umbrellas or providing large awnings that can provide shade while people are waiting in line or congregating. The shadows cast by surrounding buildings also plays a role in this element. In cooler weather, large buildings can create unfriendly environments by casting large shadows that make the area too cold for patrons to want to stay. In hot weather, though, this situation might actually be preferred as patrons might be more likely to stay in the space if it offers protection from the harsh sunlight.


the urban oven
NOW SERVING:
MOBILE PIZZA
CATERING

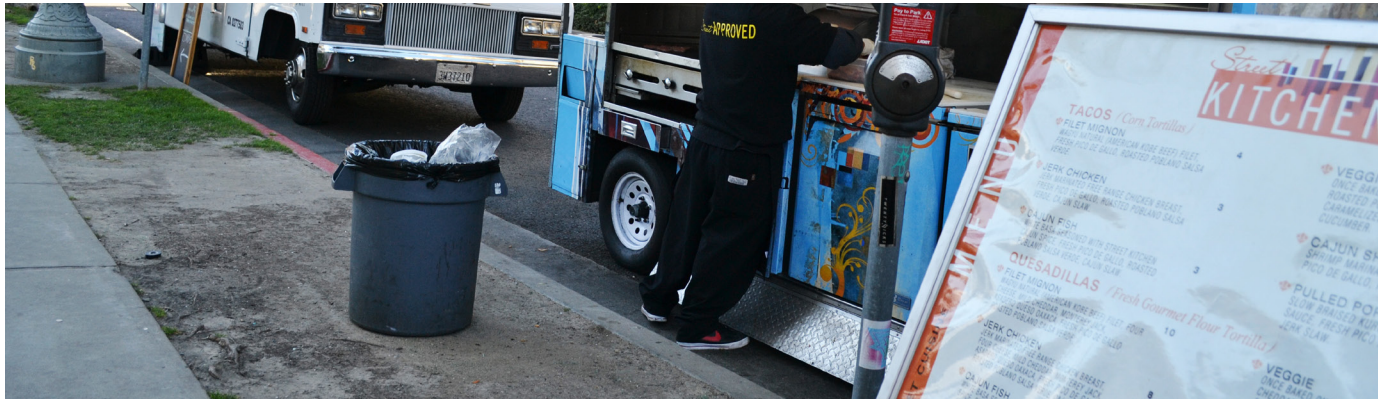


TRASH

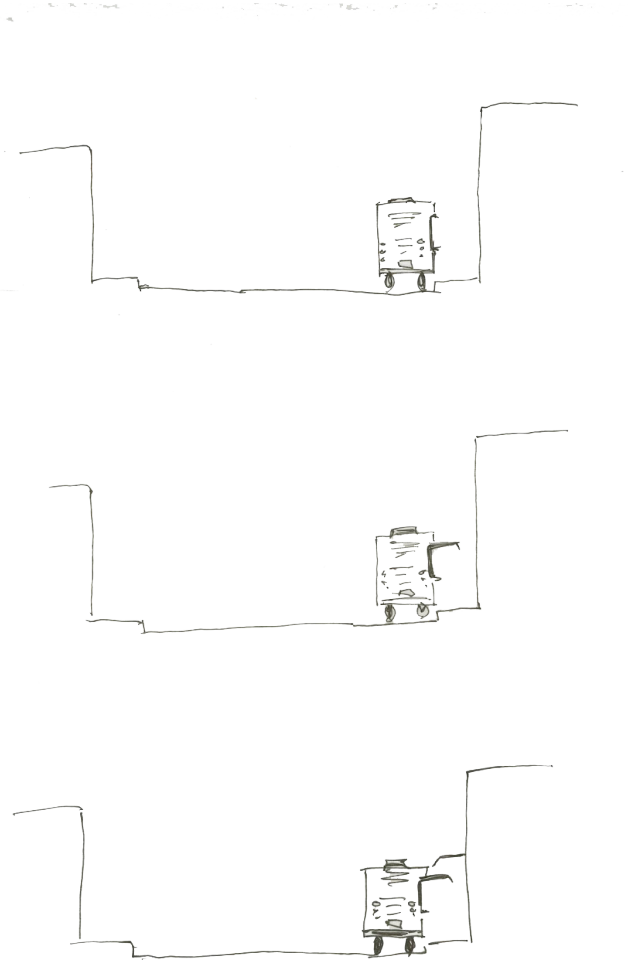
Though it is less directly related to the way in which people use the physical space, the existence and method of provision of trash receptacles is important to consider in developing any strategy related to food trucks. It is, of course, necessary for trash receptacles to be provided in some way, but because this is such an easily alterable element, it is not considered part of the set of baseline elements.

VARIATIONS

There are a number of variations in the way that this can be provided. In many cases, the trucks themselves provide trash receptacles and are responsible for clearing away the trash at the end of the day. In some locations, public receptacles are provided and used by patrons. This depends greatly on the type of space that the truck is located in. For instance, trucks that locate along a public park or plaza are more like to have trash barrels provided by some public entity than those that locate in an alleyway or parking lot. Again, this does not have as direct of an effect on the activation of the space as many of the other elements that are discussed here, but given its importance, certainly should be considered in the set of elements.


APPROVED
TACOS /Corn Tortillas/
FILET MIGNON
JERK CHICKEN
QUESADILLAS
/Fresh Gourmet Flour Tortillas/
VEGGIE


Kogi
20798C1
JE583



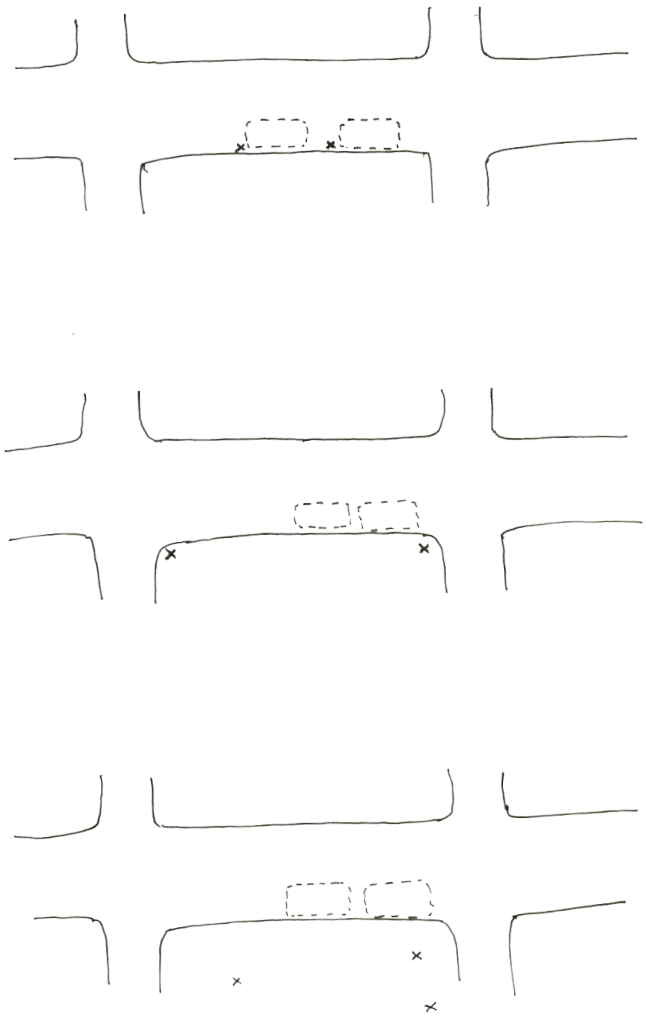
PROTECTION/ENCLOSURE

In order for customers to feel comfortable staying/ lingering in a space there must be a certain degree of protection from the outside/elements. This might be in a patio type of area for customers to sit while consuming their purchases. It also could be created by the arrangement of truck themselves. For instance, when food trucks orient themselves in a circular pattern, the interior space becomes more of a "destination" or enclosed space than when, for instance, they line up along the edge of a parking lot. Similarly, when trucks locate close together along one side of a street with a fairly narrow setback, they essentially create a more pedestrian dimension that makes visitors feel more comfortable. This is especially important in the LA context, where many roads are so wide and non-pedestrian friendly. The alignment and orientation of trucks can create a more pedestrian feel to a space than natural exists.

VARIATIONS
Spaces can gain elements of protection in a number of ways. It can be physical elements of the space itself that create this feeling, or can be altered by things like variations of the arrangement of trucks. This can literally take the form of protection from elements like rain, but can also be more of the "feeling" of a protected space, such as the division of the truck from the street and its corresponding bothers.


SUSHI


2700
YAHOO
ELK MUSIC GROUP
CARAT



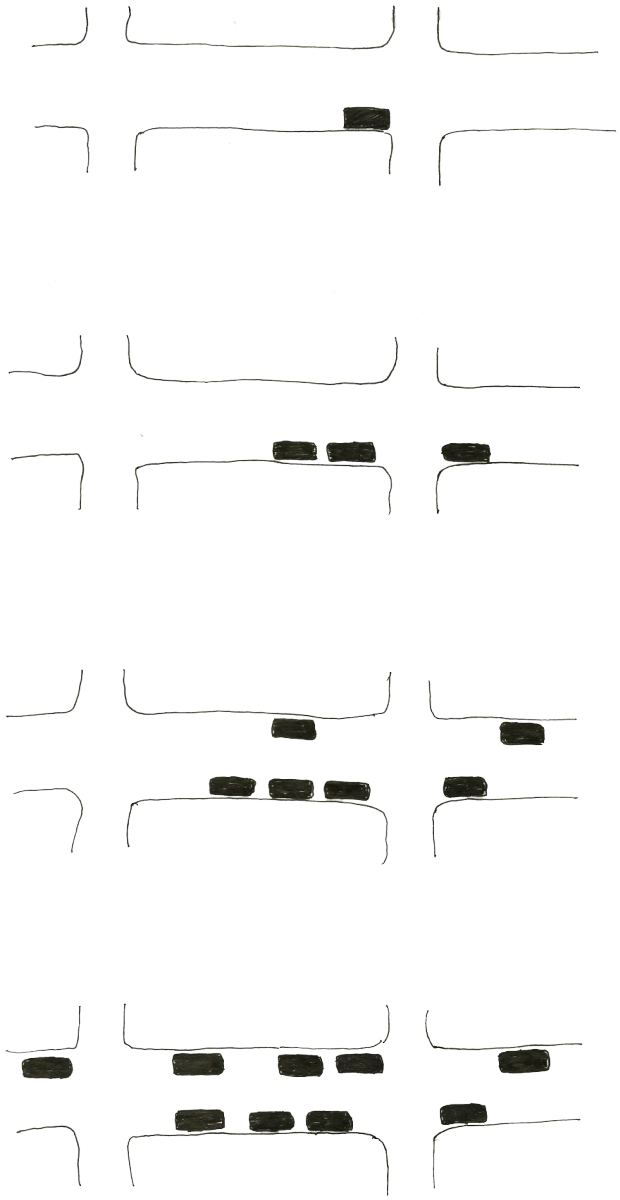
RESTROOMS

In order for people to linger or remain in a space for any significant portion of time, restrooms must be available. In some ways restrooms are legally a baseline element: the food truck must have access to a restroom guaranteed for its employees in order to obtain a license. This situation can be procured through a variety of arrangements. As an enhancing element, though, this refers to access to restrooms for customers. In order for customers to stay in the space for any extended period of time, access to restrooms is necessary. To reach the ultimate goal of prolonged spatial activation, people must have access to restrooms in some form.

VARIATIONS

The ways in which restrooms can be provided can vary greatly. A common option is for restrooms to be provided by nearby businesses, whether through formal agreements, or more informal situations. The feasibility of this, of course, depends fully on the cooperation and agreement of the surrounding commercial establishments. In some situations, truly public restrooms are provided by the city or other entities. This might be an ideal situation for the food truck owners, because they have little to do themselves to secure any special arrangements. This "public" situation could also include scenarios in which an entity, such as an open air mall or a similar form, provides amenities that customers can use. If the majority of customers work in immediately adjacent buildings, this becomes less of a concern, but if customers need to leave the truck area and return to their office to use a restroom, they may be less likely to return to the site and contribute to its activation.

Photos: http://www.theatlanticcities.com/design/2012/01/why-portlands-public-toilets-succeeded-where-others-failed/1020/ (left) and http://streetsblog.net/2010/10/12/the-pay-toilet-coming-soon-to-a-street-corner-near-you/ LONDON (right)



NUMBER OF TRUCKS

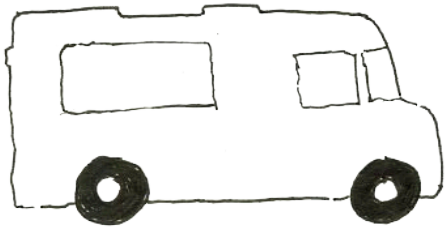
In order for optimal activation, there must be a critical mass of trucks. What this critical mass is can vary and depends significantly on many other elements, but it is unlikely that one truck will create enough of a mass of people and activity to truly enhance use. Once a critical mass gathers, however, there are more people and thus more potential interaction. As William Whyte wrote, "the thing that most attracts people is other people" (Whyte, XX). This is certainly true in the case of food trucks. Although the trucks may be competing for customers, this is not only more economically sustainable, but also increases the sense that the space is a destination or event, encouraging people to stay and use the space for a longer period of time.

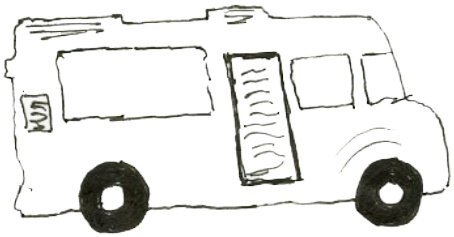
VARIATIONS

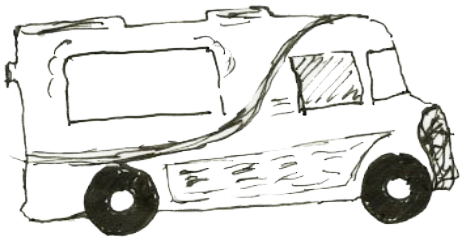
A whole range of variations can exist for this element. Although in many cases more trucks mean more people – and thus more activation – this is certainly not an absolute or definite measure in any sense. There are cases where one truck can be very successful at spatial activation, for instance if it provides extra amenities or optimizes its combinations of other elements in a way that can make it a destination space. In some cases, a smaller number of trucks might be optimal, depending on the population of potential customers that exists. In certain conditions, too many trucks might create a situation that is not encouraging for people to relax and linger. In other cases, a medium number of trucks might be ideal for activating the space, given the other conditions present. For instance, a lot by a small office park might be best served by 2-3 trucks at lunch time. In other cases still, the "more is better" approach certainly proves true. In situations with a large enough base of potential customers and with enough physical space, a large number of trucks certainly has the potential to exponentially increase the activation level of the space.


1545
VERDE


LACMA
STANLEY KUBRICK







TRUCK DECOR

A common characteristic of the new Twitter trucks is their intensely designed exteriors. Though some trucks take a more modest approach, many are adorned with bold colors, professional graphic design, and flashy décor. It is only natural that in the current food truck landscape, visual appeal can have a significant effect on a truck's popularity, which can the translate to its potential to activate spaces. According to Natasha Case of the Coolhaus truck, in order to keep people at your truck, it is important to have things for them to look at and be captivated by. The role of décor in influencing how long people stay in the space is natural.

VARIATIONS

The range of approaches that trucks take to their visual interest levels is wide. Though the majority of gourmet trucks take a more proactive approach to visual appeal than a traditional taco truck, there are many variations within this. Things like color, graphic design, and attractive menu boards are par for the course at this point, but some trucks go above and beyond this, while others hardly reach this level. Some trucks take décor and visual interest to the extreme, with appealing and interactive exteriors that engage and interact with the customer. This can include things to read, items to look at, or in some cases, even the ability to use chalk to draw on the truck itself. At the lower end of the spectrum are trucks that choose to stay with the "industrial" type of look, with minimal adornments. Though this may seem like a failure to capitalize on the benefits of décor that other trucks have realized, it is likely that this omission is actually quite intentional. Lack of décor can send just as a strong of a message as very professional décor: although a lack of décor might not directly influence people to stay at the truck in the way that detailed decorations can, it certainly sends a message about the personality of the truck.


305
PORCHETTA


Savory taste of Vietnam


the urban oven
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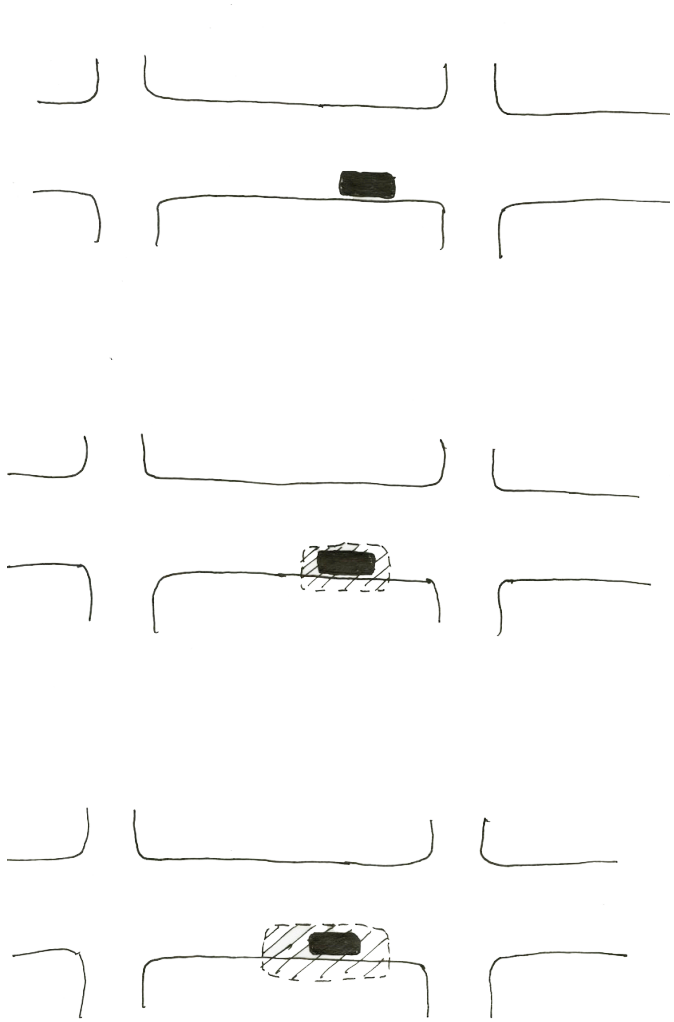
JOGASAKI
SUSHI BURRITO



TRUCK PERIMETER

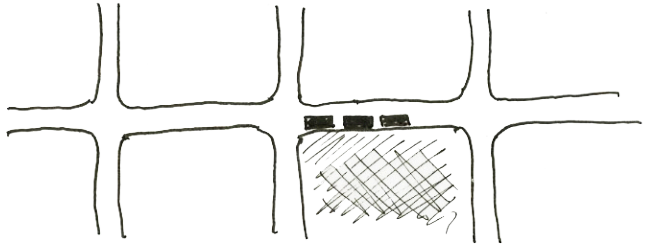
Truck perimeter is a term that is used here to convey a sense of how much the food trucks themselves extend their reach beyond the boundaries of the truck itself. This serves as both an attracting mechanism and a retainer of customers once they are in the area. When trucks extend their perimeter, they generally increase the levels of activation that they are able to produce. Again, this is important for both drawing in new customers and keeping customers in a space.

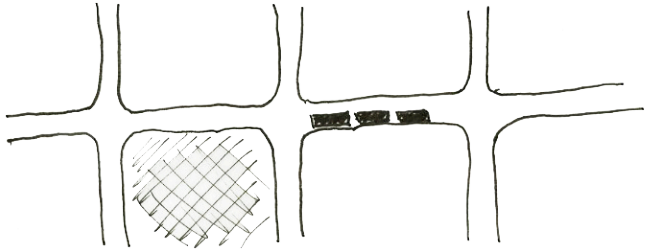
VARIATIONS

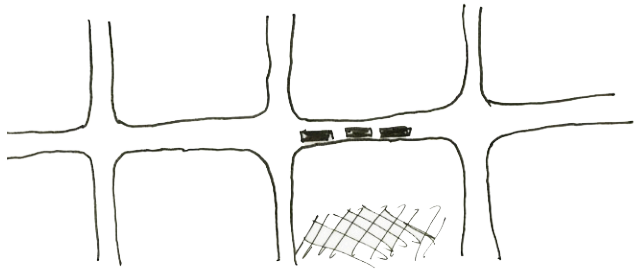
Trucks can alter their perimeter in a number of different ways. This could include the obvious manners such as seating or trash barrels that the trucks provide. Trucks that bring and set out tables and seating are effectively extending their territory beyond the truck itself and the immediately adjacent sidewalk. However, the perimeter can also be extended in more ephemeral ways. When trucks play music, for example, they are extending their "reach" further outside of their truck itself and drawing customers in. Other trucks go beyond even this though, by changing their perimeter by changing the truck design itself. For instance, trucks that have an open front, with the employees standing on the sidewalk with customers, certainly interact with their physical environment in different ways than more conventional truck models.


CHIPOTLE KOBE
KOBE DOG
FILET MIGNON
SHRIMP
PULLED PORK
APPROVED
STOP


COFFEE





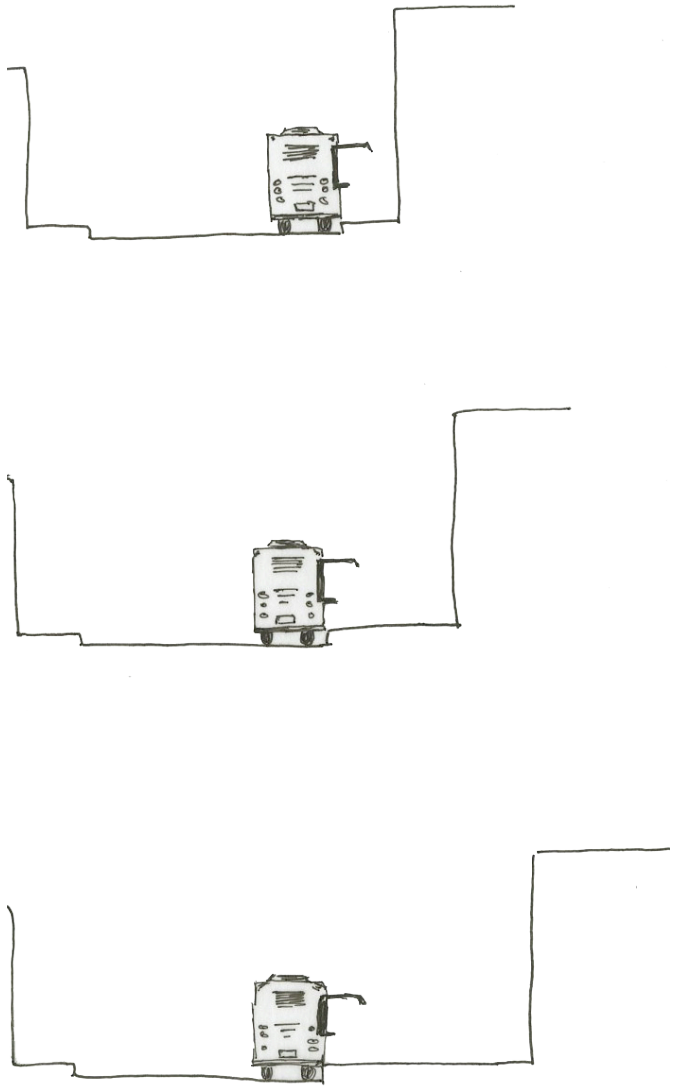


PARK/PLAZA PROXIMITY

The proximity and accessibility of nearby parks and plazas certainly impacts the willingness of people to stay in a food truck location. This is closely related to the issue of seating. It could be argued that this does not lead to an activation of public space in the way that I have been describing because it is not activating the streets/sidewalks of the city. This, this might not have as great of an impact as seating immediately in front of the truck would, but is still an improvement over a space that does not have either of these options. Parks and plazas can take on a variety of forms.

VARIATIONS

They can be totally public, public/private, completely private. They can be immediately adjacent to the food truck site or slightly farther away. The size can also vary significantly, which can impact its potential. Many of the elements described above can also be applied to the park/plaza spaces in addition to street/sidewalk. Issues of provision of seating, shade, and restrooms, for instance, impact how successful a plaza or park space can be in encouraging people to stay and activate a potential food truck site. All of these factors impact how the truck can impact the space.



EXTRA SPACE

Dimensionality (previously referred to as "amount of space") is one of the few elements that is truly treated as both baseline and as enhancing. This is done for a number of reasons. Most baseline elements can also be somewhat considered enhancing: though it is not always the case that "more" is "better" these can usually be thought of using the logic that there is a certain amount necessary, but that there are enhancing benefits beyond this base level. For dimensionality, though, there are so many variations in the effect of the food truck based on dimensional variations that it is worthwhile to also consider it as an enhancing element in its own right.

VARIATIONS

Variations can occur in a wide range of areas. This can have to do with the street width, the sidewalk width, the parking lot area, the division of the truck from the building frontage through various measures. The way in which extra space is found impacts not only how it can physically be used, but also the social effect that it has. Extra space that is vast and uncontained might not have the same tendency to encourage interactions between customers as a waiting space that forces customers to be in close proximity to each other for longer periods of time.


ROUNDS PREM
Premium Burgers - Veggie Burgers -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We Cater!
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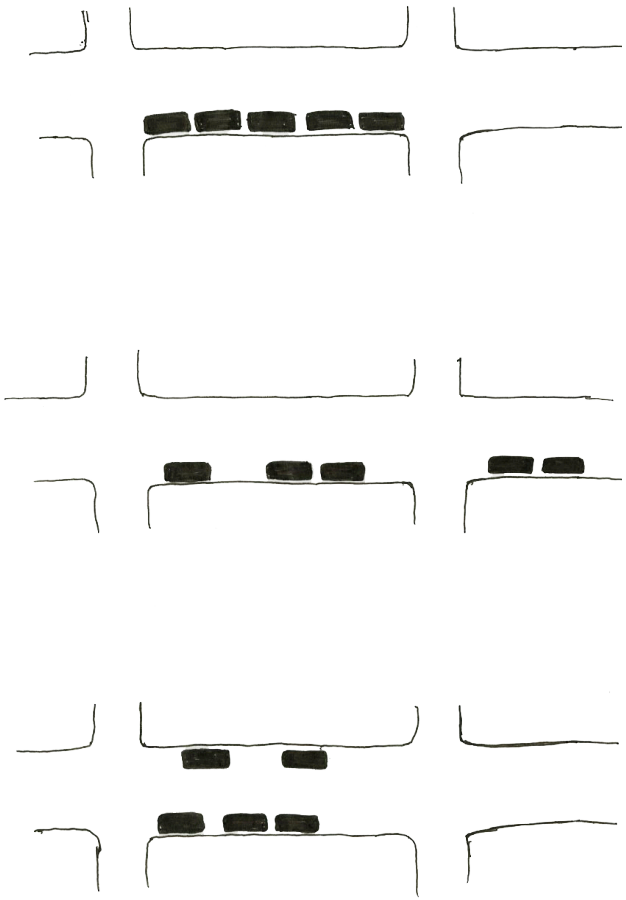


TRUCK ARRANGEMENT

The spatial arrangement of trucks is obviously very dependent on a number of other elements, but is important to consider also as an enhancing element in its own right. The way in which trucks are arranged has a clear impact on how people use the space surrounding them. This is very similar to the elements that pertain to the amount of space available for the trucks.

VARIATIONS

A number of different spatial arrangements have been observed and can be classified. There is a typical typology where trucks line up on one side of a street. Within this typology, there are variations in the spacing of the trucks. A similar typology is the linear typology in which trucks arrange themselves on both sides of a street. Though similar, there are different implications of these types. Another common arrangement (generally in parking lot spaces) is a ring or loop of trucks. In this typology, trucks generally ring the exterior of a lot, creating an interior space where people congregate.


We Cater!
ROUNDS


LOBSTA TRUCK


~ Lower in Fat
~ Sustainable
Patty Wagon
Hamburgers

CHAPTER 4 | APPLICATION

"Hiller, other trucks owners, and a ravenous public believe in the food truck's promise - the realization of a street-food culture that unites a disparate city and encourages a community that lingers outdoors together over a plate of food. It's a concept long understood by the loncheras, or taco trucks, that have operated for decades without stirring the beehive of debate that these flashy new trucks have generated."

-Jessice Gelt, "A Wrong Turn for L.A.'s Food Truck Scene?"
in the *Los Angeles Times*, May 2011

The previous chapters of this document have provided background, examples, and an analysis of the current conditions of the Twitter truck trend in Los Angeles. The third research question – to be addressed in this chapter – asks how the previous analysis can be used create a set of recommendations or guidelines to help cities capitalize on the ability of Twitter trucks to activate and improve public spaces.

The analysis provided in the previous chapters, however, has revealed that the creation of a rigid set of design or policy guidelines to this end is neither feasible nor desirable. Given the context-specificity of how food trucks and patrons use each space, attempting to create one set of recommendations would be truly naïve. It would be nearly impossible for even the most flexible of design guidelines to sufficiently account for the extreme context-dependency of each situation.

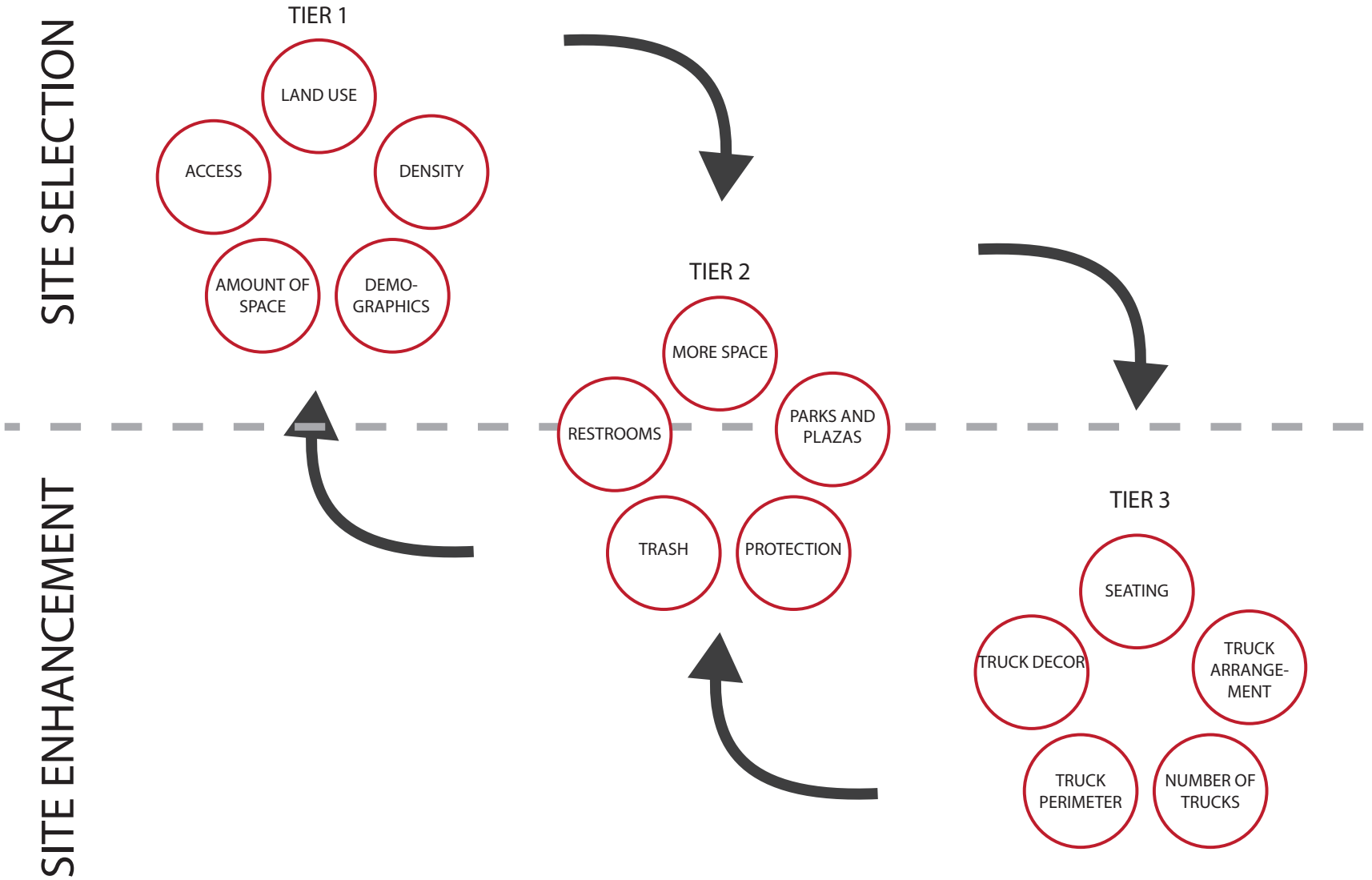
Instead, this chapter will outline the process that a planner or designer might use to craft a strategy that is appropriate for the city, town, neighborhood, or site at hand. This process can be used to develop strategies or plans through which the food trucks' potential as activators of public space can be realized. This proposal is meant to provide a stand-alone, step-by-step guide to aid planners or policy-makers in determining the most optimal food truck strategy in specific situations. Described in detail below, this process aids the user in choosing sites that are optimal for truck location (from both an economic and activation potential perspective) and further, in making decisions about how the selected sites can be altered to improve their activation potential.

The process proposed here draws together the elements discussed in the previous chapter. As mentioned in earlier sections of this document, it is truly the combinations of the elements that determine how possible it is for the presence of food trucks to significantly alter the space. As such, this chapter will present a summary of how each element can and should be assessed – individually and in combination with the others – in developing a successful strategy. Rather than simply acting as a checklist on which the presence of certain elements can be checked off, this process is composed of a more careful analysis of the features pertaining to each element and how these relate to each other. The proposed process can be used to determine where ideal combinations of elements occur and where there is potential for great improvement.

It is important that this proposal, though describing a specific process, is intentionally left quite flexible. The level of flexibility within this framework is just as important as any of the individual elements in ensuring that an optimal food truck strategy can be developed. This degree of flexibility is important for a number of reasons. First, the case specificity inherent in the potential for activation must be accounted for. Similarly, the rate of change of the new food truck phenomenon is incredibly rapid. New technologies, changes in taste, and policies change with immense speed, and thus, flexibility in creating a strategy is susceptible to these changes as well. Thus, the process described below should be viewed flexibly and adapted as needed to fit within the context being considered.

PROCESS DIAGRAM

The flowchart on the facing page summarizes the proposed process in visual form. It provides the overarching framework for the process that can be followed to develop a food truck strategy that uses the elements described in the previous chapter. The following sections of this chapter will break down the components of this diagram in greater detail and provide a more comprehensive description of how each element


SITE SELECTION
SITE ENHANCEMENT
TIER 1
LAND USE
ACCESS
DENSITY
AMOUNT OF SPACE
DEMO-GRAPHICS
TIER 2
MORE SPACE
RESTROOMS
PARKS AND PLAZAS
TRASH
PROTECTION
TIER 3
SEATING
TRUCK DECOR
TRUCK ARRANGE-MENT
TRUCK PERIMETER
NUMBER OF TRUCKS

can be analyzed and utilized. It will also focus on the relationships among these elements and ways in which combinations can be ideally crafted.

The diagram, and the process it represents, is split into two main sections. The first part of the diagram (above the horizontal line) describes the process of site selection. As described in the previous chapter, there are certain elements that must be present in order for a place to be financially and logistically feasible for a food truck to locate. This portion of the process focuses on the elements that are a part of this group and are important for a site to be selected as a location for food trucks.

The second part of the diagram (below the horizontal line) corresponds to the process of site enhancement. After a site has already been deemed feasible for food truck location through the site selection process, making slight alterations to certain elements can optimize its potential for activation. Naturally, some of these alterations require a larger investment than others and the degree to which they can impact the activation levels of the space is also variable.

The elements themselves are broken into three tiers, corresponding to the three phases of action that comprise this process. Tier 1 falls entirely within the site selection portion of the process, tier 2 straddles the line between the two sections, and tier 3 falls is entirely within the site enhancement portion. It is important to note, however, that the entire process is meant to be fluid and reinforcing, not linear. The analyses conducted in each section should reinforce and impact each other. The following sections will provide an overview of each tier, as well as a description of how the elements within each tier should be analyzed and used. Each tier will be further broken down into its component elements to explain, in detail, how one might go about carrying out the analysis process. This section will elaborate on how each tier and each element should be assessed and how strong its role is in constructing a food truck strategy.

TIER 1:

The first grouping of elements falls completely within the site selection portion of this process. The five elements that have been identified as baseline elements are included in this tier. As stated in the previous chapter, these elements are all considered to be essential to the sustainable success of a food truck in a space and should be carefully analyzed in the process of determining if a site is suitable for food truck occupation. They thus are necessary for even the most basic level of activation (bringing people to a space) to occur. Depending on the specific characteristics of each individual site, different combinations of these elements make a space feasible for food trucks. For instance, in some cases, an excess of one might make up for a lesser presence of another. The interrelations between these 5 elements are particularly strong, even stronger than relationships among the other elements.

The results of this preliminary evaluation of the Tier 1 elements will determine whether a food truck can successfully locate in an area. As stated earlier in this document, although this level of use is not ideal from the perspective of spatial activation, even locating in an underused area can help to activate the space. By providing people with a reason to be outdoors, to wait in a line, and to use a sidewalk, the sole location of a food truck can lead to increased activation. Carrying out this preliminary baseline analysis is fairly straightforward. Quite simply, it must be determined if there is enough market demand for a truck (or multiple trucks) to be successful in the space. As the facing diagram shows, there are a number of factors that should be considered.

The majority of these elements, as explained at the beginning of the baseline elements section, are important for two main reasons, which are highly interrelated. The first is to ensure that food trucks can physically and legally inhabit this space. The second is to ensure that a critical mass of customers will be present and willing to visit the trucks. This critical mass component is incredibly important, from both an economic and spatial activation standpoint. The elements to be addressed below should all be considered through these two perspectives. [Note: detailed descriptions of the elements themselves can be found in chapter 4. This chapter is more about the connections among elements and the process of evaluation to choose a site]

LAND USE

Surrounding land use must be carefully assessed. This parameter is one that is important at multiple scales; for instance, at the largest scale, the land use makeup of the entire surrounding neighborhood must be analyzed. This is closely related to the issue of critical mass, and ensuring that the types of uses present will provide a base of enough potential customers to make the site economically feasible. To assess this element, the strategy developer should carefully map out the existing land use in the surrounding area and determine what type of potential customer base this will likely lead to. It should be determined whether this land use is complementary or contradictory to the business plans and strategies of the food trucks that are planned to locate at the site.

On a smaller scale, land use should be analyzed through the perspective of the presence of existing food options. Naturally, in a space with fewer surrounding food options, a food truck will have a greater likelihood of success. In areas with more options, not only will there naturally simply be less sales, but there will likely be more push back and opposition from surrounding restaurant owners, making it inevitably more difficult for a truck to succeed. The number of potential customers should be weighted against the existence of surrounding food options to determine whether the space is feasible for a food truck to locate. In some cities, laws and regulations necessitate an even more careful look at this criteria, because regulations restrict how close food trucks can locate from brick and mortar restaurants. Though this is not the case in Los Angeles, it must be taken into consideration if trying to apply this strategy to other cities.

Tier 1 elements: Land Use, Density, Demographics, Amount of Space, and Accessibility (clockwise from top left)

DENSITY

Similarly, surrounding density must be assessed. This element is also of the utmost importance in ensuring a critical mass and is closely connected to many of the other baseline elements. As described in Chapter 3, there are many variations of density that certainly impact the potential customer mass and thus the potential for food truck success. This parameter should also be evaluated through multiple lenses and in close connection with the other tier one/baseline elements. First, the pure density of the built environment must be considered. As is explained in the description of this element in Chapter 3, food trucks are very rarely successful in low-density environments. Thus, the planner should carefully consider the density of the built environment, both in regard to critical customer mass, and in regard to the types of spaces that people might stay for longer, contributing to enhanced activation. This element is strongly correlated to the land use criteria described above and the other tier 1 elements described below. For instance, a higher density of solely industrial use, will not have the same effect as if this same density existed for commercial development. This must be considered in relation to the strategy of the food trucks being considered: the timing, target audience, and cuisine of the truck will also inform what the ideal combination of these elements looks like. This should also be considered with regard to demographics (to be described next) in order to ensure that the density actually corresponds to a potential customer base.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics are also essential at this stage in the site selection process. A reality of the gourmet food truck phenomenon is the demographic dependencies of the trend. Although these trucks are (and are become ever more) widespread, they cater to a very specific clientele. A $15 hamburger is neither desirable nor accessible to all demographic groups. Though many trucks are attempting to be more affordable and accessible, especially in order to remain competitive with brick and mortar restaurants, they are certainly not viable options for all. Similarly, they are not attractive to all. It has been noted by many media sources, truck owners, and truck goers that the target demographic is a young, upwardly mobile group. The gourmet trucks have been often described as a yuppie trend and thus the existence of this demographic is certainly something to be taken into consideration in determining where the truck should locate. There can be a large volume of potential customers, but if these customers are not of the right demographic type, it is no better than having a smaller population in the first place. Thus, the planner needs to assess not only how many people are in the area, but who these people are.

AMOUNT OF SPACE

The pure amount of space in the area is another consideration that must be made in the site selection portion of this process. As described in Chapter 3, there must physically be enough space for food trucks and customers in order for a space to be successful for trucks. This element is perhaps the most flexible of this first baseline section. Food trucks often currently make do with spaces that are certainly not ideal and have a fairly small amount of space. But there is certainly a minimum that must exist. This depends on a number of the enhancing elements that will be discussed later (number of trucks, etc) but here, the constraint is simply that a minimum of space must exist for a truck to physically locate in the space. The planner should assess how much space is actually available at the potential site. This includes not only the amount of space for the truck to park, but also the amount of space available for customers to wait in line, wait for food, and stay longer if desired. This is a fairly straightforward assessment, but must be carefully carried out in the selection of a site.

ACCESSIBILITY

As described in chapter 3, accessibility is another key element in site selection. Similarly to considerations of density and land use, it is of the utmost importance in determining if there is a critical mass of customers who might visit food trucks in this location. Here, a fairly straightforward analysis of how people can arrive to the space should be conducted. One should analyze different types of accessibility: public transit, road access, parking, pedestrian access, etc. The range of options of how one might access the site should be studied and documented as a comprehensive system. Different combinations of these accessibility options will be most successful in different locations and with different combinations of other elements. For instance, if a space is more easily accessible via car, it might have a lower immediately surrounding density and still have the same potential for spatial activation, because people can be brought in from further locations. In contrast, if a space has a very high density of office buildings in its immediate area, perhaps a lower level of connection to the broader region will suffice to encourage activation of the area.

SUMMARY

It is important to reiterate and reinforce the fact that none of these mini "evaluations" can be carried out in a vacuum, because of the high degree of interrelation that exists. (see diagram and descriptions above) A certain degree of subjectivity must be used in determining what the appropriate combination of these elements is. Following the descriptions above and based on common sense, these criteria should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. There is no one "right" combination of these elements that should lead to the selection of a site. Instead, these should be used to determine whether a space seems to be reasonably feasible. The existence of these elements, in some combination, should predicate the location of food trucks in any potential site.

TIER 2:

The second tier of elements to be considered straddles the line between site selection and site enhancement; they are important in both phases of the process outlined here. These elements should be analyzed for sites that have already been determined as feasible for food truck location via the analysis of the tier 1 elements. These elements should be considered in two ways, corresponding to selection and enhancement. For instance, if a space is determined feasible via the tier one analysis, these elements can be used to select a site that has the most potential to be activated via food trucks. These elements are (generally) the more

Tier 2 elements: More Space, Parks and Plazas, Protection, Restrooms, and Trash Receptacles (clockwise from top left)

physical/permanent of the enhancing elements. They are not absolutely necessary for a food truck to locate (as the tier 1 elements are), but can be used to aid in selecting a site that is more ideal.

In addition, these elements can also be considered in the second part of this process – site enhancement – after a site has been already selected. As they are somewhat more permanent than the elements of tier 3, they should be considered for site improvement after the tier 3 elements are considered. In order to use these elements for improvement purposes, a more substantial investment must be made than is necessary for utilizing the tier 3 elements. The overall process diagram can clarify this cyclical process. Each of the criteria in this tier should be considered in two regards. For each of these criteria, it will first be described as a part of the site selection part of this process, and then will describe how it can (potentially, long-term) be considered as a part of the improvement portion.

MORE SPACE

As described in chapter 3, the amount of space at the site is important in a number of regards. This is a far more detailed element than the baseline element that is simply "amount of space." This tier 2 element refers to the existence of extra space beyond just the bare minimum that is needed for the truck to physically locate. As described in chapter 3, it refers to the dimensions of the street itself, factors like sidewalk width, and dimensions of setback of building from the sidewalk/street. These details can have a large impact on how active the space has the potential to become. A first assessment by the planner should consider if there is extra space that could be used by the truck or its customers and what form this space takes. For instance, having a wide enough sidewalk or setback for people to congregate on will be very helpful in allowing the space to be optimally activated by the trucks. An evaluation of the dimensions of a space is again, not particularly rigid, but can be used to determine whether there is a potential in the site for greater activation (beyond just the baseline of bringing people to the site). This can be used to select sites that ultimately have a greater potential than those that are just the basic level.

As a part of the site enhancement process, increases in the amount of space are (obviously) a fairly long-term alteration of the space. It is unlikely that this would occur solely as part of a food truck strategy. This would likely need to be part of a much larger, concerted effort to change the city's public space/built environment. If a space is highly successful as a food truck location, however, it might be reasonable to propose some of these longer-term changes in order to really up the level of activation possible.

PARKS AND PLAZAS

The existence of nearby (or better yet, adjacent) parks and plazas can make a space more ideal for food truck activation. This is similar to the dimensionality criteria: the existence of these features simply provides more space to be activated. The existence of an adjacent park or plaza provides an additional space for people to sit, linger, and use the public space. The fact that the space is in the form of parks or plazas changes the way in which the space can be activated by the presence of trucks. As described in chapter 3, these spaces can exist at a range of distances from the selected food truck site and can take a variety of forms. The planner should consider where and what form these spaces take, if they exist at all. The proximity, condition, and size of these amenities should be assessed in the site selection part of this process.

Like the other tier 2 elements, park and plaza proximity can also be considered as a part of the improvement portion of this process, as a longer-term change. The

development of parks or plazas in the areas chosen for food truck location is possible, but is, again, a substantial investment than some other interventions could be. If a site proves usable by food trucks and there is a demand for an active, public space in the area, the improvement or addition of parks and plazas could be a possibility. There are options for more temporary/low-investment interventions that could also be considered a part of this element. Minor interventions (a la Park-ing Day or other pop-up parks) could be implemented to test the impact of this element, or even as a longer term strategy for activation.

PROTECTION

Protection from the elements is another characteristic that should be surveyed as part of this tier of criteria. Even in a generally temperate climate like Los Angeles, protection from the elements is generally necessary to create a space in which people are willing to linger. As is described in Chapter 4, this can come in a variety of forms and its effects can range from truly protecting customers and passerby from inclement weather to merely conveying the feeling that a space is protected and not so blatantly exposed. To assess this criteria, a number of questions can be asked. Are there trees that provide shade from the hot sun? Do the trucks have awnings that can shield customers from rain? Do adjacent buildings have awnings? This is a very flexible criteria, but can, similarly to the other elements in this section, can be used by the planner to prioritize sites after they have been identified as viable possibilities.

Similarly to other elements in this section, this element might require a longer term and more dedicated investment to be used in the site improvement process. The institution of new protective elements requires significant investment and the coordination of many different stakeholders. Similar to the park and plaza options, though, temporary alterations can be made to test the impact they might have. For instance, temporary protective elements such as umbrellas or awnings could be brought into a space to test the degree to which they might enhance the space. Longer term alterations could include the construction of a more permanent protective elements, such as pavilions or overhangs in appropriate spaces. Aspects such as the arrangement of the trucks themselves and the dimensionality of the space can affect the sense of protection. In this way, this element is closely linked to other elements considered as a part of enhancement.

RESTROOMS

As explained in chapter 3, the availability of restrooms is certainly important for a space to reach a certain level of enhanced activation. In order for people to willingly stay in the space for an extended period of time, restrooms should exist. This can be a part of the site selection phase as spaces that are likely to have available restrooms can be prioritized. The planner following this process should assess whether restrooms are available in any of a range of forms. Is there potential for partnerships with local businesses or institutions? Is the site in an area where public restrooms are available? These questions can be used to determine if there is potential for people to stay at the location long enough to lead to a significantly enhanced level of use.

This element can be easily analyzed and potentially used as a part of the site improvement strategy as well. Though a longer term strategy might involve the construction of public restrooms/facilities, a shorter term change might be as simple as ensuring that the trucks develop relationships with nearby businesses through which people can use their facilities if needed. This is done by legislation in a number of cities, in which it is mandated that trucks must have access to nearby restrooms as a part of the permitting process.

SUMMARY

The elements described above truly do sit along the line between site selection and site improvement. First of all, these criteria can be used to help inform site selection, despite the fact that they are not essential for a site to be selected. They can be used to prioritize potential sites, or determine which sites have the greatest potential to achieve a level of activation that surpasses the basic level attained simply by the incorporation of a truck. In this way, these elements can be thought of as an addendum to the Tier 1 elements: once sites are evaluated using the five Tier 1 criteria, they can be further assessed using the criteria from Tier 2. The planner or strategist can use these elements to prioritize different sites or affirm a belief that a certain site would be acceptable for locating a truck.

Furthermore, these elements can be considered as part of the improvement portion of this process in combination with the elements that will be discussed in tier 3 below. For this purpose, though, they should be revisited after the tier 3 elements are considered. These make up the longer-term, higher-investment ways in which spaces can be improved from the perspective of potential activation. These elements should be considered based on the success of the elements in tier 3 that will be described below.

TIER 3:

The most malleable of the elements identified in this exploration make up the third tier of elements to be considered in the process of strategy generation. These elements generally pertain to more alterable aspects of the physical environment, as well as to the elements involving trucks themselves. They are elements that can (and should be) used to improve the effect that trucks can have on a space after the site has already been selected. This group of elements falls fully within the site improvement section of the flowchart diagram and this process. This is partially due to the fact that many of these elements are not even present/relevant until food trucks are located in the space. Once the trucks are there, however, alterations to these parameters can be used to increase the potential for activation of the site.

Unlike the previous tiers, they are not as strongly related to each other. However, they should be considered and prioritized against one another. In this portion of this process, is important is to carry out an evaluation of which of these elements might be altered and improved to have the largest effect on the activation level of the space. These are essentially a suite of options that can be selected from on a case-by-case basis. For some sites, one element might have more of an impact on the degree to which the space will be activated, for other sites, different elements will rise to the top priority. And undoubtedly, there are other elements that could have an equally important impact in certain sites that are not included in this list. These should be considered options to select from, but the list is certainly not all-inclusive. It is also important to note that although this tier makes up the last section of the process diagram, it is certainly not the end of the strategy generation process. Since the process is so cyclical, the previous stages must be revisited throughout the process.

SEATING

Seating is one of the first potential enhancing uses that should be considered in the site improvement section. It has the potential to significantly impact the level of activation of a space without requiring substantial investment. The provision of seating, of a range of types, can not only encourage people to stay in a space, but in many ways, makes it possible for them to do so.

It also requires relatively little investment and can be provided in a variety of ways. As explained in Chapter 4, trucks can bring some seating options with them, so long as space for these to be placed is available. Alternatively, seating can be installed in a park, plaza, or other adjacent space that might exist. Similarly, nearby businesses or office spaces could provide seating that customers could use.

This is a quick implementation strategy that can have a large effect if the right combination of other elements exists. It should be highly considered in the improvement phase of this process.

TRUCK ARRANGEMENT

The arrangement of the trucks themselves should also be considered as a potential element that can improve the activation level of the space. This is, of course, as all of the other potential improvements are, highly dependent on the other conditions present. However, once trucks locate in the site, the patterns in which they locate can have a large impact on the degree to which the space can be activated. The different permutations of arrangements discussed in Chapter 4 should be considered as part of this strategy. For instance, is it possible to move trucks closer together, to generate more of a "hub" of activity? And, is this desirable? Alternatively, if the desire is to stretch activation along a larger strip of road, perhaps the trucks themselves should be spread out? These considerations, along with the goals and needs for the space, can be used to determine if a different spatial arrangement would better serve the space in terms of its level of activation.

NUMBER OF TRUCKS

Similarly, the number of trucks has an effect. Closely related to other criteria, such as dimensionality and density (customer base), variations on the number of trucks in a space naturally affect how active the space is. A cluster of trucks might lead to greater activation of the space than a single truck would, purely based on the number of people who would visit it. The agglomeration effect of the trucks is more than purely numbers though. When some people are staying in a space, it encourages others to do the same. This can lead to a space that is proportionally more active than the same number of trucks parked in single spaces would be. By altering a space to include more food trucks, or by combining food trucks into pods, the activation level of the space can be significantly increased.

Tier 3 elements: Seating, Truck Arrangement, Number of Trucks, Truck Perimeter, Truck Decor (clockwise from top left)

TRUCK PERIMETER

The truck perimeter element can also be used by the planner to increase the level of activation of the space. As described in Chapter 3, the characteristic of trucks spilling outside of their rigid boundaries can affect how the space is used and this spillover can take a number of forms. The planner or person using this process can determine if it is appropriate or might be helpful for the trucks to be allowed or encouraged to expand beyond their basic boundary. If it is desirable, trucks can be encouraged to place seating, stands, or other items out on the sidewalk in front of their trucks. In a more ephemeral way, aspects like music that can be considered a kind of spillover can be encouraged as a way to expand the perimeters of trucks.

TRUCK DECOR

Finally, visual appeal/interest can be increased to improve the level of activation of the space. This is a factor related to the trucks themselves, but can be fairly easily modified. As explained in the description of this element, visual appeal of the trucks often keeps people at the site for longer. If the planner determines that this element could be useful in enhancing the activation level of the space, they should work with existing truck owners to improve the visual appeal of the trucks or encourage trucks with a higher level of visual appeal to locate at the site. These improvements can range from complete overhauls of the design of the truck, to minor alterations of decorative features.

SUMMARY

This tier of elements truly reflects a suite of options that can be selected from in determining how to increase the activation level of a site. These elements should be considered in as flexible of a manner as possible and should be selected for use on a very case by case basis.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of this process can be carried out by planners, policy-makers, or food truck owners looking to develop a strategy through which food trucks can be used to improve the public space of the city. The process diagram can really be thought of as a sort of a checklist: there are certain elements that must be present in order to allow food trucks to locate in any given space and other elements that aid in the ability of trucks to improve activity levels in these spaces. The planner using this process to generate strategies should carefully consider the elements outlined in the process, ensuring that the necessary characteristics are met. However, the user must also make somewhat more subjective judgments in determining the balance between elements that exist in combinations and the prioritization of elements that are presented as a suite of options. These decisions should be made on a case by case basis and though they follow the general framework presented here, are inherently subjective.

In developing a food truck strategy, there are a number of factors outside of the elements presented here that must also be taken into consideration. These elements and recommendations are based on the case of Los Angeles, which is unique in many ways (to be discussed in the next chapter). The regulations surrounding food truck operation varies greatly among cities. Even within LA county, which is composed of multiple different municipalities, there are a range of different regulations depending on geographic location. Food truck strategists need to be careful to follow the regulations that are based on the area that they are in at any given time.

CHAPTER 5 | IMPLICATIONS

"This trend has developed in spite of the challenges facing mobile food vendors. Food carts don't seem to fit into cities' normal regulatory structures - they're mobile and can cross jurisdictional lines, but they also need to park, and are often not welcome in public or private spaces...it seems like other cities (excepting Portland) have a long way to go in understanding and capitalizing on the benefits of food trucks."

-Megan McConville, "Food Trucks: Tasty, but Tricky"
in *TheCityFix Magazine*, February 2010

The process proposal presented in the preceding chapter is truly the conclusion of the analysis portion of this study. It combines objective observations with more subjective analysis and recommendations to propose a process through which strategies can be developed. This final chapter, then, will look at the broader implications and applicability of this study. It will discuss the emerging trends and technologies that have shaped and are continuing to shape the trajectory of this new and constantly evolving phenomenon. It will speculate on the final research questions pertaining to the role of food trucks in shaping urban life and urban form. Furthermore, this chapter will provide preliminary speculations as to how the results of this study can be applied on a broader level. Despite the fact that this study is grounded in and highly influenced by the city of Los Angeles, many of its lessons can be applied to other cities. These conclusions will speculate on which aspects of this phenomenon are universal, which are LA-specific, and what this means for the trend.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

Along with its numerous benefits, the rise of the modern or gourmet food truck has brought with it much baggage. The complex nature of the phenomenon has led to numerous implications for urban life and urban form that extend beyond the topics of street food and public space activation discussed in this thesis. The consequences of the spread of this trends range from the straightforward effects on business competition to more conceptual implications related to issues like the right to the city. In proposing strategies that encourage the spread of this phenomenon, these consequences must be considered and anticipated, if not explicitly responded to.

COMMERCIAL BUSINESSES COMPETITION

One of the most significant issues to be considered in regards to this trend is the pushback and opposition felt from traditional brick and mortar businesses. Many of these businesses see the food trucks are a direct threat to their success and financial stability. The push back from many brick and mortar restaurants has been a major force working against food trucks in many cases. Even in cities like LA, where it is not legally possible to prevent food trucks from occupying a space solely because of brick and mortar competition, many restaurant owners are staunch opponents of their 4-wheeled counterparts and have been able to make success much more difficult for trucks. Many restaurateurs see the lower investment costs of food trucks and the ability of trucks to pick up and relocate according to customer demand to be unfair competition.

Food truck owners and supporters, however, view themselves as an innovative player in a competitive market. In their eyes, they have found a hole in the existing market and are providing a service that innovatively fills this and responds to changing market demands. Natasha Case, of the Coolhaus truck, compared the situation to the introduction of online retailers and the way that this altered commercial competition. She explains: "I understand why they could feel threatening to a restaurant, but it's like when online retail was created, are you going to go to a shoe store that says 'this is not fair, Amazon and Zappos have an uncompetitive advantage, and it's unfair.'? No. It's a capitalist world and I think when we introduce a new technique for selling, and it's something – it's a force to be reckoned with – you can't just regulate the hell out of it, you have to find a way to just accept it and make it work. And I think its good to challenge the older models, and they might have to step it up and think more…" (Natasha Case, January 2013). Other proponents of the food truck model have used similar examples, for example, the effect that Netflix had on the video/DVD rental market. The introduction of this new form completely changed the form of the video

rental market, but as Case implied, forced the existing players to innovate and pushed the market forward.

But despite these arguments for innovation and competition, fear and opposition from restaurant owners is certainly still a concern. Many attempts have been made to reconcile this tension, on a variety of scales. Cities have attempted to create food truck zones or have imposed limits to how close to existing restaurants trucks can operate. On case-by-case bases, trucks and restaurants have teamed up to create partnerships that are agreeable to all involved. However, these initiatives have been met with limited success. Overall, there is still a general sense of skepticism and animosity between restaurant owners and food trucks. Unless something is done or this tension somehow exhausts itself, it will be a major factor in the role of food trucks in urban life.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

The role that new technologies, mobile and otherwise, have played in the Twitter trucks' rise to popularity has been essential to the way that this trend has developed and the way that it fits into its urban surroundings. Without certain current technologies, the food truck landscape as we know it today could not exist. Similarly, new technologies that are likely to emerge in the future will undoubtedly further alter this phenomenon. Glimpses of these new trends are already visible and it is highly likely that many of these will take off in the near future, further changing the nature of the food truck landscape. In such a fast-paced and volatile environment, it is important not only to attempt to anticipate new innovations, but also to embrace an attitude of flexibility towards changes that will inevitably occur.

The current and future importance of these technologies has been widely acknowledged. As one NY Times journalist writes: "New technology has been a game changer, allowing trucks to pick up and move to where customers are on short notice" (FTNation 1). Throughout this study, it has become clear that this statement is true in more ways than one. Mobile technology has certainly changed the way in which food trucks communicate with their customers. This has also changed the demographic of the typical food truck owner and the typical client. No longer predominantly the arena of immigrants and blue-collar workers, the new generation of food truck owners needs to be increasingly tech-savvy and social media conscious or they risk not keeping up with changing trends. Just as vendors need to be tech-savvy in order to communicate with potential customers, potential customers must be equally knowledgeable and have

Emerging technologies
Image: http://roaminghunger.com/pages/iphone

access to certain types of technology to know where and when to find trucks.

Rodgers and Roy discuss the beginning of this reliance on mobile technology in their book on Portland's food carts, *Cartopia:* "A roving food truck vendor announcing his locations via Twitter caught on as a clever and fun phenomenon (one that was even mimicked in Portland), but the practice was actually created partly out of necessity. In Los Angeles, food trucks park in metered space and face strict fines for exceeding the time limit of their space. They aren't welcome in front of established four-star restaurants, whose owners frequently harass cart operators. So they are constantly on the move – and keep their fans abreast of their location with twenty-first-century technological savvy" (Roy 52). As the trend has developed, this reliance has become more and more dominant. Twitter and social media have become an essential part of the food truck marketing strategy and without them, it is highly unlikely that food trucks would have the same role that they do today.

Even throughout its brief history, this technological dependence has already begun to evolve and expand. Now, food trucks are using this type of technology for far more than just simply announcing their location. Of course, it still serves this purpose, but it also does much more. A number of trucks have taken to the habit of tweeting out games or riddles; for instance, a special deal can be had at the Coolhaus truck if one says the name of a certain architect on a given day. Other trucks employ similar strategies In this way, truck owners are using tools like twitter to communicate and engage with their clientele in new and innovative ways that are redefining the way that people interact with the trucks. In many cases, trucks' entire business strategies are based around these and other social media tools.

Another example of the new technologies that are already beginning to evolve is the emergence of food truck aggregator sites. A number of these sites/apps have emerged in recent years. Sites such as Roaming Hunger or TruxMaps track various trucks following their Twitter feeds. In this way, potential customers can check one site and determine where a number of trucks can be found. In many cases, this data is further aggregated in the form of maps, allowing customers to spatially see their options for finding their next meal. Other sites or applications have taken this evolution a step further by actually partnering with trucks to install GPS locators on the trucks themselves to live track where the trucks are at any given time. In this way, it is unnecessary to rely on sometimes unreliable Twitter feeds or plans that might change, as the customer can actually see where the truck is at any given time. It is highly likely that innovations like this will continue into the future.

Another trend that has emerged is a blogging community around food trucks (different than the trucks blogs themselves). These blogs are generally started by regular people who closely follow food trucks and then blog about their experiences doing so. These are not only found in LA; there are blogs focusing on trucks in NYC, San Francisco, Austin, and other cities as well. These bloggers take pride in their ability to track down and rate high-profile trucks, and this trend adds an additional layer to the emerging technological innovations surrounding the trucks.

These technological innovations and developments also have broader implications for the role of the trucks in the cities that they inhabit. Another impact of the intense reliance on technology pertains to the role that food trucks are creating for themselves in the city. Twitter allows patrons to know exactly where to find the trucks that they are looking for. In some ways, this decreases the temporality or ephemerality of the phenomenon. Similarly, many truck owners report going to the same

place on the same day of every week, in order to establish a sense of regularity with their customers. Some trucks will post a schedule up to a week in advance on their website, in order to alert their customer base to where they will be. They might still use Twitter to announce unexpected changes or communicate with customers, but already the trend is evolving in the sense that there is generally a less intense "chase" than in the early days of the food truck when trucks would tweet their locations as last-minute as possible, conveying a sense of temporality that is no longer at the epicenter of the trend.

ROLE OF STREET FOOD

The Twitter truck phenomenon has raised many larger questions about what the role of street food in the US context is and what it should actually be. As discussed in Chapter 1, street food has historically been cheap, convenient, and easily accessible. The Twitter trucks are drastically changing this. Street food in Los Angeles now includes everything from $1.50 tacos in Macarthur Park to $15 hamburgers on the streets of West Hollywood. The universal "cheap" factor that once epitomized street food can no longer be taken for granted. Similarly, convenience is no longer a defining aspect. Rather than simply being conveniently located on every street corner, the new food trucks have turned street food into something that is to be sought after, a destination in and of itself. The twitter trucks take the idea of mobility to a new level: a tweet from the Kogi truck, for instance, is enough to send people rushing to their cars and driving across the city in search of the perfect bite of Korean-Mexican fusion.

And beyond this, rather than a quick meal, Angelinos have been known to wait in lines over an hour long at the trendiest food trucks of the moment. This exploration has confirmed the assumptions made in Chapter 1 asserting that the gourmet food truck is clearly its own typology. The larger question raised, though, is whether this new typology contradicts with the fundamental role of what street food should be.

RIGHT TO THE CITY

This change in the role of street food as it expands in the United States brings up even larger theoretical questions. With the recent evolutions of the trend and the fact that it has become less available to all, its role in the city's public spaces has changed. Rather than a situation where street food is, by nature, somewhat democratizing, it has the potential to become almost exclusive and increasingly fragmenting. The new food trucks, with their gourmet fare and high price tags, as well as their targeted marketing towards a smartphone-owning, highly mobile class, raises the question of who, exactly, these trucks are creating spaces for. The fact that they are certainly not creating spaces for everyone is apparent by numerous intentional decisions they must make; their locations, their menus, and their means of communication certainly convey a message of exclusivity, rather than inclusivity. So, it may still be in the best interest of cities to adopt policies and programs to encourage food trucks in order to improve their public spaces, but it will be important to remember and pay attention to who, exactly, these spaces are being created for and who they can be used by. This is probably the broadest implication of this trend and this study, and although it is outside the realm of this thesis, is certainly worthy of future consideration.

APPLICABILITY TO OTHER CITIES

The conclusions and recommendations presented in this thesis are directly informed by the specific cases analyzed throughout this process. As has been mentioned multiple times throughout this document, the food truck phenomenon varies and is incredibly specific to individual cities throughout the US. This variation can be attributed to a range of factors: much can be attributed to engrained cultural differences across the country, but a large amount is likely due to regulatory differences. In applying the conclusions and lessons from this process to other cities, it is important to bear in mind not only the context-specificity of individual sites, but also the differences immense differences that are present among different cities.

LA's street food heritage
Photo: la.streetsblog.org/2008/06/13/latino-urban-forum-leader-calls-for-taco-truck-permits/

UNIQUENESS OF LA

As described in methodology, Los Angeles is a very unique place from both a street food and a public space perspective. This uniqueness was important in the selection of the city as the subject of this study. However, it also limits the applicability of the study to other cities. This section will discuss the unique situation of L.A. in greater detail and explore what implications this has for the application of the results of the study to other cities.

First, the strong Hispanic influence in LA has created a street food backbone that is rare in US cities. Very few other places in the US have such a prominent strain in their immigrant heritage. The history and tradition of Hispanic immigration has certainly shaped the city and the role that street food plays in it. Taco trucks have been the norm in the city for decades, as loncheras have been prominent in not only their own neighborhoods, but are a more frequently seen sight in other parts of the city than in the vast majority of US urban areas, which had really only experienced the lunch truck prior to 2008. In Los Angeles, however, this strong strain has created an overall acceptance and normalcy of street food, even among those who did not typically take part in it.

There are other cities with food truck scenes, but none come close to rivaling Los Angeles in numbers, quality, or variety. Alice Shin of Kogi attributes LA's dominance to several factors. "There aren't a lot of laws pertaining specifically to food trucks, so there's a lot more freedom here than in, say, New York or an impossible city [like] Chicago. The friendly weather also is kind to our business.

No one wants to eat at a food truck when it's raining or snowing!" (Little, 1). In the same article, Frank Ivan Pardo agrees about the weather and adds "The presence of street vendors is embedded in the consciousness of everyone who has grown up in Southern California in the last 30+ years, even if they have never eaten from one of them." Pardo adds: "Why have the food trucks been so incredibly successful in LA, but slow to grow in San Diego, a city with similar demographics, property value, and weather? We can't be certain, but I think we just need to give it a little more time" (Little 1).

Similarly, the automobile culture in Los Angeles is clearly unlike anywhere else. This certainly has an impact on the food truck culture and the way in which this phenomenon has played out. In a city where mobility is everything, and the automobile culture is so engrained, it is only natural that the idea of mobile food would shoot to popularity. As a city already so dominated by cars, it is only natural that in Los Angeles, food trucks take on an interesting characteristic in that they are often just another destination to drive to. Walkability and pedestrian access is likely not as essential as it is in other cities, as people are more likely to drive to trucks than they would in other cities. As an extension of this trend, the "hunt" and "chase" for food trucks has taken on a life in Los Angeles that has been thus unmatched in other cities. The chase to find and track down food trucks has a connotation in Los Angeles that it simply doesn't have elsewhere. Similarly, food trucks have become far more of an attraction than they have elsewhere. Written about in guidebooks and tourism blogs, food trucks have become an attraction, another thing to "check off the list" in Los Angeles, up there with the Hollywood Sign or the Walk of Fame. Little sums up the situation well: "Los Angeles has a long tradition of mobile food service. After all, this is a city often defined by its obsession with restaurants and automobiles" (Little 2). This combination is clearly not present elsewhere in the US, and it seems that this has been important in setting Los Angeles apart.

OTHER CITIES

In other cities throughout the country, cultural norms and regulatory conditions have lead to different conditions. Not only is the scale of the food truck scene very different than it is in Los Angeles, but the form that the phenomenon takes varies widely. As a result, it is of the utmost importance to explicitly recognize how this process can be applied in other cities

Broadly speaking, the component of this study that can be most easily and readily adopted for other cities is its methodology. This can be, in some cases, even more abstract than the process proposal itself. In many ways, the document presented here can serve as a template for how to carry out a similar, comprehensive study in various cities. Many of the elements described and discussed in this document are universal and should be considered in any city. Others, though, take very different roles depending on the city at hand. For instance, the characteristic of accessibility will likely be of the utmost importance in any city. The form that this accessibility will take, may, of course, vary greatly. In Los Angeles, for example, this study shows that automobile accessibility was highly important in determining not only the "baseline level" activation, but also in determining the "enhanced activation." In other cities, perhaps, a different type of accessibility will be more important. In more public transit oriented cities, perhaps proximity to transit would play a stronger role than the existence of parking. Regardless, accessibility will be important to consider.

Uncontrollable elements will determine the specific case in each city. For instance, the climate of cities has immense impacts not only on how successful food trucks can be, but also on how great their base potential for activating public space really is. Similarly,

cultural and more ephemeral elements must be taken into account. As discussed above, not every city has the same underlying and pre-existing street food culture that Los Angeles does. In fact, very few US cities have this. It is important for cities to take this into account when crafting or developing food truck strategies and to recognize the cultural and social values engrained in the city at hand. The role and potential of food trucks varies greatly among and within cities, and the analysis and recommendations of this thesis reinforce this fact. The analysis and results presented here are strongly rooted in the case of Los Angeles, but certain lessons can be taken away and applied to other cities. The process for developing food truck strategies is intentionally left flexible so that it can be adapted to a range of contexts. So long as local conditions are carefully considered throughout the process, the lessons presented here can be applied on a much larger scale, aiding in the generation of food truck strategies to enhance public spaces in numerous cities.

APPENDIX | ADDITIONAL CASE STUDY SITES

In addition to the 5 case studies described in Chapter 2, the following 7 sites were observed in depth as a part of the research process. Although these cases are not explicitly described in the case study chapter, they were equally important in deriving the elements described in Chapter 3 and constructing the process proposed in Chapter 4.

HULU TRUCKS, SANTA MONICA

12312 W OLYMPIC BLVD

LOS FELIZ ON THE LOT

12312 W OLYMPIC BLVD

WARNER BROTHERS STUDIOS 1

2900 W ALAMEDA AVE

WARNER BROTHERS STUDIOS 2

3300 WARNER BLVD

EGGSLUT TRUCK

7950 MELROSE AVE

CALBI BBQ

W HOLLYWOOD

KOGI TRUCK, SANTA MONICA

OLYMPIC BLVD

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