



Upon learning that a proposal had surfaced regarding the relocation of the Downtown Evanston Farmers Market (DEFM), the Friends of Evanston Farmers Market wondered if any organized research had been done regarding the physical requirements needed to mount this particular market.

In 2013, the basic space assignment for market vendors was altered to accommodate artisanal vendors who required less space, and to allow for the increase of vendor slots available. The market grew in a short time from fewer than 40 vendors to nearly 60. The spatial requirements had not altered since then until last year's market, when the layout was radically altered to allow the very existence of a farmers market during the height of the pandemic. Peripheral areas were co-opted for vendors, and ultimately part of University Place was claimed as well. The open space created permitted traffic to flow and lines to form without compromising social distancing requirements. The result was a season of busy markets with thousands of visitors weekly.

It is certainly arguable, in our opinion, that it would have been impossible to mount the farmers market in any other space during the pandemic without serious downsizing. We hope that it won't be necessary in the long term for the farmers market to require so much dedicated open space, but last year and again this year, it was available when needed.

We can't predict what space for social distancing will be required, but Friends felt we could create an accurate assessment of the space and resources our current vendors require for their stalls. We reached out to all of 2021's vendors, and response was close to 90%. Our intent was not to gauge vendors' opinions about a site change, but rather to determine their requirements for space and facilities, and the importance of various "amenities" like vehicle proximity and refuse disposal. Here is an overview of those results.

## **TENURE AT MARKET**

Of our 50 respondents, 33 vendors have participated in DEFM for over 5 years, 7 for 3 to 5 years, and 10 vendors are in their first or second year of participation.

## **SPACE REQUIREMENT**

The basic unit is 320 square feet. 22 of our vendors require that much space. 9 vendors use 2 units, or 640 square feet. The remaining 19 respondents use between 3 and 5 units (960 to 1600 square feet).

Adding these numbers up, the vendors alone occupy between 31,040 and 43,200 square feet.

## **UTILITIES REQUIRED**

Not many. Only 5 vendors require a source of electricity, while 2 require a convenient source of water. No vendor indicated that ATMs were needed. One of the reasons these numbers are low is probably the proximity of vendor vehicles to their spaces at the market, eliminating the need for powered refrigeration.

## **SET-UP TIME REQUIRED**

Nearly half of the respondents, 24, can set-up their spaces in an hour or less. 15 vendors require twice that, 8 vendors require up to 3 hours, and 2 vendors need more than 3 hours to set up. This sounds like a lot of time, but it is an efficient process because trucks are right next to the vendor spaces during set-up. It would be less so if trucks could not be located so conveniently.

## MARKET OPENING TIME

Vendors are coming from significant distances in many cases, and their day does not end when the market wraps. As a result, an overwhelming majority, 38 vendors, prefer a 7 AM start-time. (This means the start of the market itself—vendors begin set-up at 5am, and even earlier in a couple of cases.) 9 respondents would be happy with an 8 AM start, 1 vendor would prefer a 9 AM start, and a single vendor opts for 10 AM.

## VEHICLE PARKING REQUIRED

We broke this down into vendor and private vehicles. The former category ranges from vans to fairly large trucks. Regardless, respondents indicated that they bring 46 “vendor” vehicles and 50 “private” vehicles. The distinction is relevant in the next 3 responses.

## VEHICLE PROXIMITY

We inquired about the relative importance in being able to have the main vehicle (van or truck containing the vendors’ products) adjacent to the vendors’ spaces BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER market hours. Load-in and load-out are the need fulfilled before and after; access to product is key during the market. Vendors selling extremely perishable items, like meat and poultry, keep their product in controlled environments until required for a purchase. Some produce vendors keep product in storage so that product on display remains attractive for purchase and safe for consumption. Also, remember, in addition to product, tents and tables, along with signage, sanitation stations, et al, must be moved off and on to vehicles.

BEFORE the market, 42 of 50 responders feel it is very important to have their trucks on hand, compared to 7 who considered it somewhat important, and only 1 who considered it not important.

DURING the market, very important responses were still in the majority: 26 for very important, 12 each for somewhat or not important.

AFTER the market responses were similar to before, with 41 considering it very important, versus 7 going with somewhat important, and only 2 responding not important.

## REFUSE DISPOSAL

Our vendors tend to work cleanly, taking refuse away rather than disposing of it on site. Refuse disposal was very important to 20 vendors, somewhat important to 16, and not important to 13 responders.

## FOOD BANK PICK-UP

Hunger Network is able to quickly move among vendors at the end of every DEFM and collect donations of unsold product. 16 vendors consider this very important, 12 only somewhat important, and 22 not important. It’s interesting to note that some of the “very important” responders don’t actually donate their artisanal wares but consider the effort critical regardless.

## RESTAURANT SALES

24 vendors indicate that they sell in quantity to restaurants. 24 do not. 2 vendors did not answer this question.

## RESTROOMS

Unsurprisingly, no responder thought that accessible restrooms were not important. 43 consider them very important, and 7 hardly individuals rated them somewhat important.

## LINK AND LINK SUPPORT

The DEFM and virtually all of its vendors accept Link purchases, excepting vendors whose product cannot be purchased with SNAP funds. [Click this link](#) for information about the Link program at DEFM. Link requires active management on site at the market because the funds are withdrawn, and matching dollars distributed during each market. It requires both personnel and hardware for the transactions.

52 vendors found Link and Link support to be very or somewhat important. Only 7 considered it not important, with one respondent not answering the question.

## PRESENCE OF MANAGEMENT

The market manager arrives in advance of all the vendors and is there after the market ends. That involvement became critical during the pandemic but has always taken the burden of dealing with situations (from removing illegally parked vehicles before dawn to managing unruly shoppers) away from the vendors. 32 respondents called that management involvement very important, 11 only somewhat important, and 6 not important. Again, 1 vendor didn't answer.

## VEHICLE PICK-UP LOCATION

Finally, we asked if it's important to have a location where customers requiring assistance or making bulk purchases can park short-term. 14 thought that amenity very important, 17 found it somewhat important, and it was not important for 19 vendors.

This survey provides concrete information regarding one of Illinois' oldest and largest farmers markets. The attention focused on this market has increased since the period last year when it was Chicagoland's ONLY market for more than a month. This season, nearly 5000 visitors have visited each week, confident in the market's variety, value, and safety.

We can't offer conclusions about the soundness of moving DEFM to another location, because there isn't a similar "map" of space and amenities available. (Amenities is a nice way of saying necessities.)

It is our impression after gathering this data that it would probably require some down-sizing to move the market closer to downtown. By downsizing, we primarily mean reducing the size of the larger vendors' stalls.

Our concern is that many vendors would respond to the change by exiting our market rather than adapting. To a produce vendor, more space means more sales. To many of the vendors, vehicle proximity is critical to the way they do business. Unsolicited comments during the surveys reflected this reality. It required decades to develop the reputation of our market. It would not take that long to reverse that perception, and there are literally dozens of other farmers markets for customers and for vendors.

So, we reiterate our purpose in conducting this survey: Before taking concrete steps towards the relocation of the DEFM, it is our sincere hope that proper research, including analysis of the suitability of any alternative space and an effort to gauge the willingness of vendors to make such a move, occurs.

We would also suggest that Downtown Evanston consider how enhanced marketing alone could position the DEFM as a great driver for downtown Evanston business without “reinventing the wheel,” as one respondent suggested.

Finally, Friends is well-aware that the current market site is privately owned, and could be lost if the space is sold for development. It is certainly prudent to have options in place if a move becomes unavoidable. Fountain Square is one possibility, but in a city the size of Evanston, there are certainly other ideas that should be explored.

# EVANSTON FARMERS MARKET SURVEY RESULTS

VI = VERY IMPORTANT  
SI = SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT  
NI = NOT IMPORTANT

LOGGED  
SURVEYS  
50

TENURE AT MARKET	1-2 YRS	10	< 5 YRS	7	5+ YRS	33		
SPACE REQUIREMENTS	320 SQFT	22	640 SQFT	9	960-1600 SQFT	19		
UTILITIES REQUIRED	ELECTRIC	5	WATER	2	ATM	0		
SET-UP TIME REQUIRED	<= 1 HR	24	1-2 HR	15	2-3 HR	8	3+ HRS	2
MARKET OPENING TIME	7 AM	38	8 AM	9	9 AM	1	10 AM	1
VEHICLE PARKING REQUIRED	VENDOR	46	PRIVATE	50				
VEHICLE PROXIMITY BEFORE MARKET	VI	42	SI	7	NI	1		
VEHICLE PROXIMITY DURING MARKET	VI	26	SI	12	NI	12		
VEHICLE PROXIMITY AFTER MARKET	VI	41	SI	7	NI	2		
REFUSE DISPOSAL	VI	20	SI	16	NI	13		
FOOD BANK PICK-UP	VI	16	SI	12	NI	22		
RESTAURANT SALES	YES	24	NO	24				
RESTROOMS	VI	43	SI	7	NI	0		
LINK AND LINK SUPPORT	VI	23	SI	19	NI	7		
PRESENCE OF MANAGEMENT	VI	32	SI	11	NI	6		
VEHICLE PICK UP LOCATION	VI	14	SI	17	NI	19		