

Jennifer Gomez

From: April Lancaster <apriltreona@gmail.com>
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To: Jennifer Gomez
Subject: Public Comment for Tonights Council Meeting
Attachments: Public Comment COV 11.4.24.pdf

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Good morning Jennifer!

Here is my public comment for tonight!

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I'm here to address the City's latest attempt to restrict the Downtown Farmers Market, a community cornerstone that has overwhelming support. Last year, despite significant community feedback, you imposed a 12-week limit on events, which I warned wouldn't achieve the City's goals. Now, instead of reconsidering that decision, you're doubling down, proposing to redefine "street frontage" to enforce that limit.

But redefining "street frontage" doesn't change the ordinance's language, which centers on "the area proposed for closure." The Downtown Farmers Market has consistently requested to close Church Street at Main—both north and south—because this area has always been the core of our market's operation. This location ensures visibility, safe pedestrian access, and space for vendors—an essential setup for the market's community role. The ordinance already permits closures in this area when a tenant's frontage is within it, which applies directly to my storefront location. Mr. Richardsen, does this definition change the fact that my frontage is "within the area proposed for closure?"

Councilmember Soto acknowledged public support for the market and recommended removing the 12-week restriction, but Councilmember Taylor dismissed this by pulling the item from the consent calendar, claiming staff had spent enough time on the matter. Is this how a well-supported, community-focused event should be treated?

This market has faced serious financial challenges due to prior forced closures that resulted in financial losses totalling more than \$13,000, (which was initiated just 10 days after my work to enhance transparency triggered the first financial reporting from the Downtown Visalians Org. to the City) and we've worked hard to recover, even launching our Market Match program in September to help make fresh produce accessible to more residents. However, these ongoing limitations put that stability at risk, potentially triggering repayment of grant funds that support this program.

At the last meeting's appeal hearing for Rookies, councilmembers voiced support for small businesses, stressing the importance of helping them thrive. But does this only apply to businesses serving alcohol—not those providing fresh produce and a community gathering space? If this is truly your intention, I challenge you to add us to the list of annual community events exempt from good neighbor petition policy. The City's actions suggest a targeted effort to shut down the Farmers Market by pushing it into an isolated, inaccessible location like Garden Street Plaza, while exempting the Downtown Association from the \$250 per day fees that others, including the market must pay.

It seems the City is more interested in giving favors to those with deep pockets & good connections than in genuinely supporting small businesses and community needs.