

Shorter Counters and Long-Term Leases

By PAUL D. SHINKMAN

June marked the one-year anniversary of Eastern Market reopening its doors after the devastating fire in 2007. Now, a year later, the indoor merchants have settled into an updated facility, alongside the vendors and farmers who peddle their wares and produce outside on Saturdays and Sundays. But it is not without a few headaches.

Money Counters

The indoor merchants and the DC Department of Real Estate Services, the current governing body of the Market, have temporarily agreed to lower the interior refrigerated counters to three inches off the ground. These counters delineate the Market's central corridor and divide the merchants' areas.

The counters have remained lifted six to nine inches since the Market reopened, in accordance with the DC Department of Health regulations stipulating these counters be either raised at least six inches, or flush with and sealed to the floor. DOH has granted DRES an exemption to this rule in Eastern Market. Many merchants argue that any additional height interferes with business and want the counters to be lowered to the floor.

"It doesn't sound like a lot, but it is a lot," said Bill Glasgow, owner of Union Meat Co. and South Hall food merchant representative to the Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee.

"Being able to look at our customers, see their mouths move and make eye contact is very important," he said. Glasgow has had to build a nine-inch step on his side of the counter to help communicate with his customers in a venue that already has a lot of ambient noise. "It's like our customers are walking in a trench," he added. "It's not healthy."



Tall counters are an inconvenience to customers and market vendors. Photo by Andrew Lightman.

"We're losing elderly trade," said Jose Canales, of Canales Delicatessen. "They don't like to communicate when raising their voice."

Glasgow also pointed out that supermarkets, like Harris Teeter, are allowed to have their counters flush with the floor, allowing much easier communication with the customers.

"Are we second class citizens?" Glasgow asked. "We'll continue to fight this."

EMCAC has long supported lowering the counters to the floor, and passed another motion as such at their last meeting on June 2.

Barry Margeson, the Market manager for DRES, recently said at a public meeting, "There are a number of reasons that Construction opposes this and they include, corrosion of the cases' bottoms, vermin infestation, and the closing of drains," according to an email he wrote to *The Hill Rag*.

DRES is waiting for the Market's "original contractor" to determine if they will be willing to lower the counters to three inches off the ground.

Leases and Permits

DRES has provided EMCAC with a draft of a five-year lease, with an option to renew for five years, that it is willing to issue to the Market's indoor merchants. This is the first lease longer than one year that has been made available to the merchants for more than a decade. EMCAC voted unanimously in support of this draft at their June 23 meeting, and also voted to recommend increasing the term length to ten years, with an option to renew for another ten.

"I'm happy to finally have a lease for longer than one year," Glasgow said, adding he and the other merchants have not had a lease since they signed the short-term agreements after moving into the temporary facility across from the Market following the 2007 fire.

For the past two months the department's lawyers have reviewed the leases, which Glasgow just received last week, he said. Most of the merchants have not yet seen the draft leases, he added.

"At least now we can negotiate," Glasgow said.

DRES is also in the process of negotiating leases, called "permits," for the vendors who work outside the Market on weekends.

"We need to address the whole organization of the outdoor vendors," said Jenae Michelle, who sells custom handbags at the Market. Earlier this month, she took over from Joe Snider as chairperson of the Eastern Market Tenants' Council, the representative body for the outdoor vendors and farmers.

Michelle cited the importance of organizing the available outdoor space and deciding who can work where, and improving the process for filing grievances with management. Currently vendors and farmers must approach the DRES market manager

to complain about the DRES market manager, she said.

The permits are still in draft form, she added, and, unlike the indoor merchants, the outdoor vendors and farmers would accept one-year terms.

Task Force: Eastern Market

DC Council member Tommy Wells (Ward-6) announced earlier this year the creation of a task force to analyze the framework for a potential new governing body for Eastern Market to replace DRES. The task force is headed up by Peter Waldron, a contributing writer to *The Hill Rag* Eastern Market Watch column and former Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, and former Ward 6 DC Council member Sharon Ambrose, who served in office when the Council passed the 1998 legislation establishing the Market's current governance structure.

"We need to find the best model for Eastern Market," said task force member Ken Jarboe, ANC 6B commissioner and EMCAC member. Members of the task force have looked at the historic market in Lancaster, PA, which has hybrid system of a director and a Board of Trustees.

"I'm looking at the next generation, a new governance board with the authority to hire and fire the market manager," Wells told *The Hill Rag*, referencing EMCAC which currently serves only as an advisor to DRES. Wells also pointed out that EMCAC is comprised of members from various local organizations, such as the Capitol Hill Business Improvement District, the Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce (CHAMPS) and representatives from political groups. It will be important to stipulate membership with specific expertise for the make-up of the new group, such as engineering and development, Wells

said.

"I'm hoping the task force will develop guiding principles to test out at public meetings," added Wells.

The task force is planning to meet for the first time in late June.

The Roof Was On Fire

The cause of the 2007 fire garnered much speculation in the months following the incident. Right around the Market's reopening ceremony in June 2009, Council member Wells aired his suspicions that the fire was caused by arson.

In late May of this year, DC Fire Chief Dennis L. Rubin announced that electrical problems with the exterior trash compactor started the blaze that shuttered the building for more than two years.

"In the early accounts, the fire started in the dumpster, and there were a few other area dumpster fires that were arson," Wells told *The Hill Rag* recently, adding that he is now satisfied with the DC Fire/EMS findings.

Capitol Hill Restoration Society Second Vice President Monte Edwards, also a member of the EMCAC board, said the trash compactor system was installed when Eastern Market Ventures oversaw the Market, the precursor to the current DRES management.

Wells said he did not know enough about the issue to determine if EMV should be held responsible for the fire. ★

Artists with a Voice Take to the Street!

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY SHANNON HOLLOWAY



Clockwise from Top Left

1. Albus Cavus' gliding mobile sculptures.
2. The circus of performers gather for the procession.
3. The community supported by generations.
4. Batala Drummers marching to the beat of their own drum.

Artists, performers, activists, and the community came out on June 5 to participate in the Washington Project for the Arts (www.wpadc.org/) "WPA parade"; the District's first ever art parade!

"One of our missions at WPA is to bring art to the masses. Some people are intimidated by contemporary art in a gallery setting, so we do some 'out of the box' events like the parade...to bring art out into the street for everyone to see. It's the lighter side of contemporary art, but really, it's performance art, and more conceptual than it may seem at first glance," said Kristina Bilonick, Program Director for the Washington Project for the Arts.

The Nationals Ballpark was the parade's scenic backdrop (running along Half Street and M Street SE, DC). The festivities began at noon as participants emerged from an enclosed lot across from the Navy Yard Metro Station. The sounds of swiftly beaten drums filled the air as sights of wonder were wheeled into place surprising many who curiously stopped to watch the show. There were floats and mobile sculptures by Artomatic, Albus Cavus' "Give me a Vote," John James Anderson (Job Creation Project), the Glade Dance Collective, Adrienne Mills and music performed by the all woman Batala Washington Percussion Band walking with the Riverside Community Center. The Gallery O/H used a cell phone tower sculpture and provided an (866) number to listen to



their synchronized performance music while they entertained the crowd with a critique of the modern cell phone user; nevertaking their eyes, ear, or attention away from their phones. "Scream at the Economy" used experimental music, sporting masks, laboratory jumpsuits and "screamers" (speakers resembling jet packs/leaf blowers) by The Floating Lab Collective) with Silvana Straw and DJ Fleg. The Washington Puppet Underground, Nadine Bloch sculptures and the Washington Peace Center processions included lots of sculptures, puppets, an activist band, stilt walkers, and an interactive game show called "The Price is Wrong", which compared citizen values with government spending.

For More On Participants

- www.artomatic.org/
- www.givemeavote.org/
- www.jobcreationproject.info/
- www.gladedance.org/index
- www.batalawashington.com/
- www.washingtonparks.net/riverside.html
- www.floatinglabcollective.org/screamattheeconomy.html
- www.puppetunderground.blogspot.com/
- www.nadinebloch.com/puppets/
- www.washingtonpeacecenter.org/

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