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Comment by Council Member Daniel R. Garodnick
On
The Amendment of Street Fair Permit Rules

October 24, 2016

Thank you to the Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO) for holding this hearing, and for your work on this important issue.

I appreciate that you are taking a serious look at how New York City manages and permits street fairs, and I support efforts to reform our process. Street fairs are familiar to most New Yorkers, and what they are likely to find are socks and sausages, cell phone cases and scarves -- a generic, corporate operation, with very few local roots or offerings. And while they are frequently disruptive to traffic, they would still be worth doing if they added real value to our streetscape or local businesses. Unfortunately, today, they do not. When we have street fairs in the city, they should be both beneficial and minimally disruptive for the community in which they are taking place.

While I broadly agree with SAPO's desire to reform street fairs, I wanted to raise the following observations:

1. The local participation threshold should not be so high as to eliminate a real chance for a street fair to take place.
2. Limitations on multi-day and multi-block festivals by Community Board is an important reform. However, SAPO should consider whether these limits will shoehorn the bulk of the festivals into the most highly trafficked area of the Community Boards, further exacerbating traffic issues, and whether specific place-based limitations may be more appropriate; and
3. We need to think about how to mitigate impacts of any reform on local groups which get a significant amount of their funding from sponsoring street fairs.

These proposed rules demonstrate thoughtful attention to the challenges that are posed trying to regulate street fairs while considering both their benefits and drawbacks, and are a good starting point for comprehensive improvements. I thank you for your consideration of these views.