

County Democrats push for lower food vendor fees

Jill Terreri • Staff writer • October 26, 2010

Monroe County Democrats, armed with a letter from the state Department of **Health**, said they would push to change expensive fees for certain food vendors at farmers markets, but the administration of County Executive Maggie Brooks is not inclined to agree.

For over a year, advocates of farmers markets have objected to fees charged by the county for vendors of prepared foods. The fees can amount to over \$1,200 if vendors want to sell at a single market for the entire market season.

Today, 10/26 **Democrats** said they planned to change the fee structure in the 2011 county budget, which has not yet been introduced.

"We believe these fees are way too high," said Legislator Willie Lightfoot, D-Rochester, who was joined by farmers market organizers this morning in County Legislature Chambers.

The Brooks administration has no plans to change the fees in the upcoming budget, said county **Director** of Communications Noah Lebowitz.

The fees for prepared food vendors, which cost \$115 in **Monroe** County, must be renewed every two weeks, according to the county.

A letter from the state Department of Health indicates that the date of the permits may exceed 14 days when food **service** operators prepare the same menu at the same location, but that the permits may not exceed one year. The letter also acknowledges that this rule about the permits will be incorporated into state code, but that hasn't happened yet.

The state letter, sent to a lawyer for the county, is dated Sept. 15. Democrats said they only recently obtained the letter, which is why they brought up the issue today.

The letter carries no weight with the county, because it doesn't override the law and because it is

promising something will happen, likely in a new governor's administration, which is "presumptuous," Lebowitz said.

Fees for yearly restaurant inspections in Monroe County are about \$370, and hot-dog stand operators pay \$225 per year to be inspected.

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