

PARTY ON THE PAVEMENT

Your Questions Answered

Party on the Pavement has been a Racine tradition for more than two decades — bringing thousands of people downtown for a free day of music, food, shopping, entertainment and community.

We've heard the questions and concerns about changes to vendor fees for the 2026 event. We understand that these changes are significant for some participating businesses and organizations, and we want to be transparent about what changed, why changes were made, what we learned from last year's event, and what we're doing differently this year.

We also know that people can disagree with a decision even after understanding the reasoning behind it. Our goal here isn't to dismiss those concerns. It's to provide clear information about how and why these decisions were made — and what we're trying to accomplish for Party on the Pavement, participating vendors and downtown Racine.

WHAT CHANGED WITH VENDOR FEES FOR 2026?

Fees increased for several categories of outside vendors. Fees for downtown merchants remain unchanged, with additional discounts available to Downtown Racine Corporation members.

The changes are:

- Food vendors: \$300 in 2025 to \$600 in 2026
- Arts & crafts vendors: \$125 to \$250
- Commercial vendors: \$300 to \$450
- Nonprofit organizations: \$150 to \$250

Nonprofit organizations may also have their booth fee waived by providing 16 total volunteer hours to support the event. Those hours may be divided among multiple volunteers in four-hour shifts.

WHY DID DRC INCREASE VENDOR FEES FOR 2026?

There wasn't just one reason.

The decision reflects three things: what we learned from last year's event, our responsibility to downtown businesses, and the increasing cost of producing Party on the Pavement.

We learned something from 2025.

Last year, DRC made a concerted effort to accommodate as many vendor applicants as possible. While that came from a desire to be inclusive and give businesses an opportunity to participate, in hindsight, accepting nearly everyone who applied wasn't necessarily the best approach.

In some categories, we ended up with too many vendors offering similar products or food. For example (illustrative purposes only), having numerous pizza vendors doesn't necessarily create a better festival than having one or two pizza vendors along with a broader variety of food choices.

More importantly, we heard this from participating vendors themselves. Some told us there were simply too many businesses competing within the same categories, making it more difficult for individual vendors to have a successful day.

We heard similar concerns from downtown merchants about the overall number of outside vendors.

We listened. And we're changing our approach.

For 2026, success isn't about fitting the largest possible number of vendors onto the street. We want to create the right mix of vendors — enough variety to create an exciting experience for attendees without unnecessarily oversaturating individual categories or overwhelming the downtown businesses the event was created to showcase.

We're also returning to the original purpose of Party on the Pavement. Party on the Pavement began in 2004 following a lengthy Main Street construction project as a way to bring people back downtown and support downtown businesses.

That purpose still matters.

Downtown merchants told us after the 2025 event that they wanted Party on the Pavement to put greater emphasis on the brick-and-mortar businesses that operate here year-round.

And the event has become more expensive to produce.

DRC has absorbed increasing costs for insurance, permits, operations, entertainment and other expenses for several years while continuing to expand the event and keep admission free.

The 2026 changes reflect all three considerations: creating a stronger vendor mix, supporting our downtown businesses and keeping Party on the Pavement sustainable and free to attend.

ARE THE HIGHER FEES BEING USED TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF VENDORS?

The vendor mix and the fee structure are related to the overall strategy for the event, but they should not be confused as the same decision.

DRC learned from 2025 that simply accepting as many vendors as possible doesn't necessarily produce the strongest event. This year, we're being more intentional about creating balance among food, retail, arts, commercial and nonprofit participants.

At the same time, vendor fees had not kept pace with the increasing costs and scope of producing Party on the Pavement.

Both issues needed to be addressed.

WILL THERE BE FEWER VENDORS AT PARTY ON THE PAVEMENT THIS YEAR?

Potentially — and that's okay.

Our goal isn't to measure the success of Party on the Pavement by how many vendor spaces we can fill. We want the curated mix of vendors.

Last year, in an effort to accommodate as many applicants as possible, we accepted multiple vendors offering very similar products and food. Participating vendors told us afterward that some categories had become oversaturated.

We agree that we can do better.

For 2026, DRC is being more thoughtful about the overall vendor mix and the balance between outside vendors and downtown businesses.

We believe a better mix can create a stronger experience for attendees, give participating vendors a better opportunity to succeed and complement the downtown restaurants, retailers and businesses Party on the Pavement was created to showcase.

IS DRC TRYING TO KEEP OUTSIDE VENDORS OUT OF PARTY ON THE PAVEMENT?

No, not at all.

Outside food, arts and crafts, commercial and nonprofit vendors have long been an important part of Party on the Pavement and remain an important part of the event.

At the same time, Party on the Pavement is first and foremost a downtown economic-development event. It was created to bring thousands of people into downtown Racine and introduce them to the restaurants, retailers, organizations and other businesses located here year-round.

Our goal isn't to eliminate outside vendors. It's to create a healthier balance between outside vendors and downtown businesses while offering attendees a diverse and exciting experience.

ARE DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES RECEIVING PREFERENTIAL PRICING?

Yes — because supporting downtown Racine businesses is central to DRC's mission and to the original purpose of Party on the Pavement.

Downtown businesses invest in the district 365 days a year through rent or property ownership, employees, utilities, taxes and their ongoing presence downtown. Many also financially support DRC through membership.

Party on the Pavement is one of the ways DRC fulfills its mission of bringing people downtown and supporting those businesses.

Outside vendors add tremendous energy, variety and value to the festival, and we want them to participate. But the businesses that call downtown home year-round remain at the heart of the event.

WHY DID SOME VENDOR FEES DOUBLE IN ONE YEAR RATHER THAN INCREASING GRADUALLY?

We understand why vendors are asking this question.

DRC has absorbed increasing event costs for several years rather than making corresponding annual adjustments to vendor fees. As Party on the Pavement has grown, so have expenses related to insurance, permits, entertainment, operations and event infrastructure.

That ultimately resulted in a larger adjustment being necessary rather than the smaller incremental increases that might otherwise have occurred over time.

We recognize that the increase is significant, particularly for small businesses, and we understand that some vendors may determine that participation no longer makes financial sense for them.

Yes — because supporting downtown Racine businesses is central to DRC's mission and to the original purpose of Party

WHERE DOES THE VENDOR FEE MONEY GO?

Party on the Pavement is a major event spanning approximately 12 downtown blocks. Producing an event of that size requires substantial infrastructure and resources.

Vendor fees help offset expenses including:

- Insurance
- Permits and required municipal services
- Public safety and event operations
- Street closures, barricades and infrastructure
- Sanitation and cleanup
- Entertainment and programming
- Marketing and promotion
- Equipment and logistical support
- Other costs associated with producing a large public event

Vendor fees are only one source of revenue used to produce Party on the Pavement. Sponsorships and other event revenue help cover the remainder.

DOES DRC MAKE A PROFIT FROM PARTY ON THE PAVEMENT?

Downtown Racine Corporation is a private, nonprofit organization. Revenue generated through Party on the Pavement helps offset the substantial cost of producing the event. Any net event revenue supports DRC's broader nonprofit mission and its work to market, program, and strengthen downtown Racine throughout the year.

WHAT DOES AN OUTSIDE VENDOR RECEIVE FOR THE PARTICIPATION FEE?

Party on the Pavement provides vendors access to one of Racine's largest community events. Approximately 23,000 people attended last year's event, according to geofencing data.

A post-event participant survey found that 83% of vendors reported that their sales and/or engagement met or exceeded their expectations.

Attendees spent an estimated average of \$85 each during the event, contributing to more than \$1.1 million in direct downtown spending.

Vendor participation also occurs within a professionally produced event supported by extensive entertainment, programming, marketing, street closures, infrastructure and other activities designed to bring thousands of people downtown.

HOW DOES DRC KNOW VENDORS FELT THERE WERE TOO MANY VENDORS LAST YEAR?

Following Party on the Pavement 2025, DRC asked all vendor participants about their experience. 73 of those vendors responded and their overwhelming feedback included concerns about the overall number of vendors and the number of similar vendors competing within some categories.

That feedback helped inform the changes we're making for 2026.

Did downtown businesses ask DRC to make changes?

Yes. Feedback from downtown merchants following the 2025 event was an important factor in the decision. Merchants expressed concern about the overall number of outside vendors and told DRC they wanted Party on the Pavement to put greater emphasis on the businesses that operate downtown throughout the year.

That feedback was consistent with the event's original purpose and helped inform the 2026 approach.

WHO MADE THE DECISION TO CHANGE THE 2026 VENDOR FEES?

The 2026 fee structure was developed by our events manager and approved by the executive director after considering event expenses, vendor participation, feedback from downtown businesses and vendors, and the experience of producing the 2025 event.

WHY NOT SIMPLY LIMIT THE NUMBER OF FOOD TRUCKS OR SIMILAR VENDORS INSTEAD OF RAISING FEES?

That's part of what we're changing.

DRC is being more thoughtful about category balance for 2026 because last year's experience showed us that accommodating nearly everyone who applied could result in too many similar vendors.

The fee structure addresses a separate issue: the cost, scope and value of participating in a major event that attracts thousands of people downtown.

Our goal going forward is to address both — a more intentional vendor mix and a financially sustainable event.

WHAT IF A SMALL BUSINESS CAN'T AFFORD THE NEW VENDOR FEE?

We understand that the new fee may not work for every business.

Every vendor has different costs, staffing requirements, products and sales expectations, and each business ultimately has to determine whether participating makes financial sense.

For vendors looking for a lower-cost opportunity that day, the nearby Racine Farmers Market will operate from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on September 19 and offers vendor participation for \$50.

WHAT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS?

Nonprofit organizations have an opportunity to participate without paying a booth fee by providing 16 total volunteer hours in support of Party on the Pavement.

Those hours may be divided among several volunteers in four-hour shifts.

IS DRC LISTENING TO THE CRITICISM ABOUT THE NEW FEES?

Yes, absolutely. We know some vendors and community members strongly disagree with the decision, and we appreciate those who have taken the time to share their perspectives.

Listening doesn't mean every decision will be reversed. It does mean feedback should be considered. DRC will evaluate vendor participation, vendor experience, downtown merchant experience, attendance, attendee feedback and the overall financial performance of Party on the Pavement 2026 as we make decisions about future events.

We learned from the 2025 event, and we'll learn from the 2026 event, too.

WILL DRC RECONSIDER THE FEE STRUCTURE FOR FUTURE PARTY ON THE PAVEMENT EVENTS?

Yes. Like every aspect of Party on the Pavement, vendor fees and the vendor structure can be evaluated following the event.

After Party on the Pavement 2026, DRC will review participation levels, vendor and merchant feedback, attendee experience, event expenses and other results before determining the structure for future events.

WHY NOT CHARGE ADMISSION INSTEAD OF INCREASING VENDOR FEES?

Keeping Party on the Pavement free and accessible to the community is important to us.

There is no admission charge for Party on the Pavement.

Free admission also helps us bring the largest possible audience downtown, which benefits downtown businesses and participating vendors alike.

FOR DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES

CAN DOWNTOWN MERCHANTS PARTICIPATE WITHOUT PAYING A STREET VENDOR FEE?

Yes.

Downtown merchants are encouraged to participate outside their businesses.

There is a fee for a designated vendor space in the street. However, merchants may activate their own alcove at no charge.

Businesses wishing to place a table or display on the public sidewalk may do so but must obtain the appropriate City of Racine Right-of-Way encroachment permit.

WHY SHOULD DOWNTOWN MERCHANTS PARTICIPATE IF THEIR BUSINESSES ARE ALREADY OPEN?

Party on the Pavement brings thousands of potential customers into the downtown district in a single day.

We encourage our downtown merchants to use the event to introduce new visitors to their businesses, offer quick-serve food or merchandise, create demonstrations or activities, feature special products, collect customer information, or simply encourage attendees to step inside.

The festival should function as a front door to downtown businesses, not as something happening separately from them.

EVENT LOGISTICS

WHY ARE VENDORS LOCATED ALONG THE SIDES OF THE STREET INSTEAD OF IN THE CENTER?

Public safety.

Party on the Pavement spans approximately 12 city blocks, and emergency vehicles must be able to move through the event area at all times. Crowds can easily move aside if an emergency warrants, but a vendor or business station cannot quickly move. Thus, this requires keeping the center travel lane clear, with vendor or positioned adjacent to the sidewalks.

HOW BIG IS PARTY ON THE PAVEMENT?

Party on the Pavement is one of Racine's largest annual community events.

Approximately 23,000 people attended the 2025 event according to geofencing data, filling approximately 12 downtown blocks.

The 2026 event includes five stages of live music, food and shopping, an expanded German Fest, wrestling performances, axe throwing, dance performances and battles, a classic car show, and appearances by Bernie Brewer and the Brewer Racing Sausages.

Most importantly, the event brings thousands of people into downtown Racine to experience the businesses, restaurants and community that are here throughout the year.

IS THERE AN ADMISSION CHARGE FOR PARTY ON THE PAVEMENT?

No, Party on the Pavement remains free and open to the public.

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2026?

Party on the Pavement continues to evolve, and we're excited to have new and expanded entertainment joining longtime festival favorites.

New or expanded features for 2026 include:

- Wrestling performances
- Bernie Brewer
- The Milwaukee Brewers Racing Sausages
- Axe throwing
- Expanded German Fest
- Five stages of live music
- Food, shopping, performances and activities throughout downtown

Party on the Pavement takes place Saturday, September 19, 2026, from noon to 7 p.m. in downtown Racine.

Admission is free.