



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Council Member Robert Thoms
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: **Resolution - Directing the City Manager to Develop A Permanent Outdoor Dining Program - requested by May 11, 2021**
DATE: 5/6/2021

SUMMARY & PURPOSE:

A resolution directing the City Manager to bring forward a recommendation to the Economic Development Committee to allow reasonable permanent outdoor dining options in addition to sidewalk cafes, including parklets, and streateries, in time for the proposal to go into effect before the Curbside Café and Market Pilot program expires.

The resolution directs the City Manager to review all outdoor dining options across the City, including sidewalk cafes, parklets, streateries, and other options allowed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and consider how to reduce barriers to outdoor dining, including:

- Creating one point of entry for City permitting for all outdoor dining options,
- Reviewing restrictions based on size of sidewalk available outside of restaurants and proposing potential alternatives to remove barriers for these restaurants, and
- Considering how to reduce any other startup costs for restaurants.

When forming the recommendation, City staff should include outreach to a broad group of stakeholders, including the Downtown Tacoma Partnership, the Cross District Association of Tacoma, the Commission on Disabilities, and the Transportation Commission. These stakeholders should participate in the review of the future program considerations staff identified and shared at the April 27, 2021 Economic Development Committee meeting: parklet locations, program and design approach, race and social justice, community support, parklet operation and maintenance, accessibility, parking demands, cost to construct, competing City priorities, and staffing.

[Council Member Robert Thoms]

COUNCIL SPONSORS:

Council Members McCarthy, Thoms, and Walker

BACKGROUND:

This Council Member’s Recommendation is Based On:

During the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, PDS and PW undertook several initiatives to assist the business community in addressing the impacts caused by the pandemic. In Phase 1 Stay Home, Stay Safe, the City introduced temporary Food Loading Zones and ADA parking stalls. In Phase 2 Safe Start, the City promoted the temporary Curbside Café and Market Program and existing temporary Sidewalk Café Program. The Community and Economic Development Department and Downtown Tacoma Partnership also partnered on the 8th Street Eatery that opened a street to pedestrians and customers.

Curbside café/markets, also known as streateries or parklets, are similar to sidewalk cafés but located in a parking space in the right-of-way. They function as an extension to an existing restaurant’s seating area or retail store.



Curbside cafes/markets are permitted to be used only during the regular operating business hours of the host establishment. Private use of the public right-of-way typically requires entering into a formal agreement with the City; however, as a pilot program, this requirement was waived in an effort to support local businesses affected by closures related to COVID-19.

The intent of these pilot programs are to increase the capacity for businesses to comply with the requirements of Governor Inslee's Safe Start phased reopening plan. A permit for the Curbside Café and Market Pilot and Sidewalk Café programs can accommodate temporary structures such as tables, chairs, planters, merchant displays, and shade coverings.

The City of Tacoma has historically invested in the public right of way in ways that support additional outdoor commerce. Outdoor dining options have proven to be successful economic drivers that activate outdoor spaces across the City. However, a number of problems have been identified:

- Current permanent outdoor dining options have more barriers and higher costs than the temporary pilot options rolled out during the COVID-19 emergency.
- The temporary nature of the current pilot disincentives businesses from investing funds in outdoor dining infrastructure.
- While businesses speak highly of the City's permit staff, they have described barriers to finding the right permit information and have requested a smoother entry point.
- Spaces right outdoors of restaurants are sometimes ineligible for outdoor dining options due to minimal sidewalk space, slope of sidewalk, or other characteristics.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Sponsors engaged with small business restaurant and owners, the Hospitality association, and business organizations like the Downtown Tacoma Partnership, to find opportunities to maintain operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Outdoor dining options have been successful in increasing business and adding greater vibrancy to businesses, the industry has requested the City make outdoor dining options permanent.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Equity and Accessibility:

All residents and visitors to the City of Tacoma rely on the public right-of-way to travel the City. Individuals with a mobility disability rely on unobstructed sidewalks for access. The Americans with Disabilities Act set standards for accessible design. While considering how to lower barriers on business to create outdoor dining spaces, this resolution directs the City Manager to include the City of Tacoma's Commission on Disabilities in outreach efforts and take care to ensure the City is accessible to all Tacomans.

Economy/Workforce: Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity

Increase the number of diverse livable wage jobs.

Increase the number of infrastructure projects and improvements that support existing and new business developments.

Outdoor dining options will increase opportunities for local businesses to thrive in Tacoma, increasing employment opportunities for our residents. Making outdoor dining options permanent provides businesses the stability needed to make more costly infrastructure investments in outdoor dining.



ALTERNATIVES:

Presumably your recommendation is not the only potential course of action; please discuss other alternatives actions for council or staff to take. Please use table below.

Alternative	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
1. Only extend outdoor dining options for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency.	Provides flexibility to businesses impacted by the COVID-19 emergency.	Does not offer long-term certainty and limits future economic development expansion.
2. Prioritize other uses of the public right of way instead of outdoor dining options.	Potentially allow for other uses, such as community gardens and increased parking.	Prevent expansion of outdoor dining, a proven economic driver across the City.

EVALUATIONS AND FOLLOW UP:

Staff will present an update on their work to the Economic Development Committee in July of 2021. Staff will bring a final policy proposal to this Committee prior to the expiration of the temporary outdoor dining options. The committee will review the proposal and recommend final changes to the full Council for a vote.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECOMMENDATION:

The sponsors recommend passage of this resolution, and the careful consideration of outdoor dining options in order to enhance outdoor spaces in our City while creating a more vibrant economic environment.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No fiscal impact.