

A Proposal to Capitalize on Public Space in Downtown McKinney

Submitted by the McKinney Restaurant Council, an affiliate of the McKinney Chamber of Commerce, November 6, 2020

Goals:

- (1) to develop innovative, yet temporary solutions to keep downtown McKinney merchants and restaurants viable in a time of enduring COVID-19 related restrictions;
- (2) to enhance the retail and dining experience for local businesses and consumers; and
- (3) to demonstrate unity between the business and government sectors as we all seek to maintain safety and grow the economy in a time of great uncertainty and fear.

Relevance:

Many restaurants received federal relief early in the pandemic, but that relief has long since evaporated as the crisis has lasted far longer than anticipated. According to survey data that the Texas Restaurant Association collected from Texas restaurants, including many of those in McKinney, this summer, without additional financial and other types of relief from all levels of government, restaurants expect they'll have to take the following actions by January 2021:

- 29% - permanently close one or more locations
- 43% - furlough or lay off additional employees
- 48% - not rehire or replace employees
- 42% - reduce operations
- 47% - take out additional loans/credit
- 44% - delay payments to landlords or suppliers
- 52% - use personal savings to cover business expenses

Although indoor capacity is currently capped at 75%, more than 80% of restaurants are unable to reach that capacity due to the social distancing requirements and many guests still prefer take-out or patio dining only. Further:

- 43% of restaurants report having significantly fewer employees compared to this time last year, and an additional 32% report having slightly fewer (i.e., 75% have fewer employees).
- About 97% of restaurants report that revenue is down compared to this time last year. For over 38%, their revenue is down by at least 50%.
- About 55% of restaurants report that expenses are up compared to this time last year. This is remarkable considering restaurants' decreased traffic and capacity.

With colder weather upon us, and what is normally a bustling holiday season threatened by another month of reduced sales, it is imperative that the City and the business community unite to develop solutions to the challenges we are facing. Moreover, a lively and thriving restaurant scene benefits downtown McKinney merchants in a number of ways, including increased foot traffic and potentially more spending.

Proposal:

- Make available all possible sidewalk and street parking spaces for communal use to enhance the consumers' experience and expand capacity amidst social distancing requirements and other caps on capacity.
 - We recognize that any ideas will need to preserve walkability and comply with all ADA requirements.
 - We recommend starting with merchants and restaurants on one street as a pilot to test viability and benefit from lessons learned.

Approaches:

- Leverage existing permitting processes (e.g., temporary event permits, special event permits) where possible, by having City staff explore existing and potential flexibilities and uses.
- Accelerate the permitting approval and inspection process, where possible, to expedite business plans.
- Consider innovative heating and ventilation methods to accommodate consumers outdoors safely and comfortably.
- Expand "brand awareness" for the downtown parking shuttle and enclosed parking options through use of social, print, radio media and other means to promote the use of available parking options that the City has already paid for and provides for free to downtown visitors.

Guiding Principles

- Act quickly---ideally before Thanksgiving
- Coordinate effectively with all vested City departments and units