



DowntownRaleigh  
Alliance

# PUBLIC REALM STUDY

— JUNE 2021 —





# PUBLIC REALM STUDY

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic hit downtowns hard with office employees working from home, business travel halted, conventions and events cancelled, and businesses facing reduced capacities and hours. Downtown Raleigh saw a more than 60% decline in sales from 1st quarter to 2nd Quarter 2020 and lost several storefront businesses over the course of 2020 due to challenges from operating during the pandemic. Many downtowns across the country saw similar impacts and found themselves trying to adapt to a world with fewer people in their central business districts. Fortunately, vaccinations are rising and restrictions are lifting as the harshest effects of the pandemic slowly ease and people are able to return to downtowns over the coming months.

While this pandemic brought extraordinary challenges for downtown, several unique interventions were made in our public realm to help our businesses and commercial districts survive. Working with Downtown Raleigh Alliance (DRA), the City of Raleigh Parking Department quickly deployed more than 80 Curbside Pickup Zones to facilitate takeout/pickup options as businesses were unable to have many customers inside. Later in 2020, using expanded authority from the North Carolina Alcohol and Beverage Commission, City of Raleigh also extended outdoor dining premises to allow businesses to expand their area of service and use the outdoors to do so. Other interventions in downtown Raleigh included DRA's Dine Out Downtown, which closed streets to allow for more expanded outdoor dining and activation. Various community organizations also staged small markets with public health protocols to help entrepreneurs be able to sell their goods and customers to have access to local businesses even through the pandemic.

Coming out of the worst of the pandemic, there is a growing need to look at the temporary/emergency measures developed to help downtown businesses. Cities around the country are evaluating the policies put in place to bridge the pandemic's major impacts surrounding the use of the public realm – expanded outdoor dining, curbside pick-up and how to safely

manage outdoor events. Communities are assessing what has worked, and what actions, policies and processes can be crafted into more durable, beneficial long term policies for our new normal.

In this new normal, people have choices. How do we make it attractive for workers to choose to come into their downtown office more regularly? How can we program our public spaces to make them more welcoming and comfortable? And lastly how do we promote a diversity of choice that offers every member of our community a hearty welcome back to downtown? How can policies be adjusted to best support businesses and patrons in the post-pandemic downtown.

As Raleigh continues to face new challenges and recovers from the effects of the pandemic, this next year provides an opening to proactively rethink our public realm, use lessons learned from the past year, and improve our policies to position Downtown Raleigh as a more flexible, creative and inclusive city of the future.

To help City of Raleigh staff and Council evaluate if and how to integrate these temporary measures into a more permanent state, as well as provide ideas to re-invigorate our downtown through activations, DRA initiated this Public Realm Study to gather and synthesize downtown stakeholder feedback on the following areas.

This study evaluated three key areas:

1. The **permanent expansion of outdoor dining** through parklets, pedlets and expanded use of sidewalk space.
2. Need for more permanent **curbside pick-up zones** for take-out food, to-go drinks and soft goods, grocery pick-up.
3. Strategy to **re-energize downtown** and attract people through use of our public realm and outdoor spaces with **small-scale diverse activations**.

DRA engaged in a robust public outreach process, detailed in the section on Process Overview, with over 20 listening sessions with businesses, residents, City staff, and downtown employees, as well as an Annual Survey that received over 1,000 responses. DRA also supplemented this outreach with research on outdoor dining policies and special events strategies in peer cities across the country, as detailed later in the study. Using this stakeholder outreach and peer city research, this study provides feedback on the longer term viability and interest in recent interventions in our public realm, as well as ideas for facilitating more small-scale activations to re-invigorate our downtown. Our hope is this information helps lead downtown Raleigh to a more vibrant future with the wisdom of recent innovations and a more engaging and diverse public realm.

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# OUTREACH PROCESS OVERVIEW

DRA conducted a robust public engagement process to collect stakeholder feedback on recent outdoor dining expansions and ideas for re-activating our public realm. This process was designed to provide multiple opportunities for the public to participate, as well as have more technical conversations with users to develop an in-depth sense of the issues surrounding outdoor dining expansion and re-activating downtown.

- **20 Listening Sessions:** with key stakeholders in downtown. Including residents, bar/restaurant owners, retailers, service providers, hotel managers, property managers, employers/employees and cultural/live event producers/venues.
- **Annual Survey:** open to the general public and received over 1,000 responses. Provided an option for those unable or not interested in attending listening sessions and town hall. Summary of relevant results can be found later in study.
- **Meetings with key city departments:** Transportation, Parks, Parking, Planning, Special Events, Arts Commission, Convention Center/Red Hat/Performing Arts Center, Union Plaza Management.
- **Innovate Raleigh Community Sessions:** three days of facilitated discussions open to the public and focused primarily on activating our public realm in creative and innovative ways. Each discussion was over an hour and a half long with in-depth ideation.
- **Outreach to senior communities in downtown:** DRA worked with property managers at affordable senior communities in downtown to solicit ideas and feedback from their residents, who may be less digitally connected.

## Additional Research:

In addition to conducting public outreach, DRA also worked with Toole Design and internal staff to research policies in peer cities regarding outdoor dining expansion and small-scale activations.

- **Peer city review of outdoor dining policies:** Toole Design provided review of policies and practices in other cities around the country regarding the permanent expansion of recent outdoor dining areas. Summary of that research can be found later in the report.
- **Small-Scale activations policies:** a review of policies in select peer cities regarding permitting small-scale activations also is included.

Process	April	April	May	May	May	May	June	June
Policy Research								
Annual Survey								
Listening Sessions								
Innovate Raleigh								
Downtown Rundown								
Refine Recommendations								
City Council Presentation								

## SECTION 1: PERMANENT EXPANSION OF OUTDOOR DINING PREMISES

### History and Background of Recent Outdoor Dining Expansion

A brief review of recent context and terminology in outdoor dining expansion in downtown Raleigh is helpful for framing the future possibilities in downtown's public realm.

#### Response to Crisis:

In spring of 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic deepened, state and local governments began looking for ways to support dining establishments while limiting indoor dining capacities. Expansion of outdoor dining premises became a viable option, especially with reduced demand for other uses in public spaces due to work from home, cancellation of special events, and fewer visitors. In North Carolina, the state's Alcohol Beverage Control commission allowed for expansion of outdoor premises in ways previously not allowed. Specifically, they allowed for businesses to use space in front of adjacent properties for expansion of premises, as well as being able to serve alcohol in on-street parking spaces. This regulatory change paved the way for cities across North Carolina, including Raleigh, to adjust their regulations and allow for restaurants and breweries to expand their premises into the public realm.

Several important changes occurred to the processes in downtown Raleigh, which inform the potential for future, permanent adjustments:

- **Expansion of premises to be in front of neighboring properties with permission:** businesses were now able to place tables and chairs in front of adjacent properties if they had permission from those property owners to do so. This expanded the amount of sidewalk space available for businesses beyond what was possible pre-pandemic.
- **Private-use parklets allowed with relaxed standards & fees:**

Previously, parklets were allowed in Raleigh, but required following specific design standards, had to be open to the public at all times, could not host food and beverage service, and required sponsors to pay parking encumbrance fees on a monthly basis that could exceed \$500 per month. Prior to COVID-19, only two parklets existed in Downtown Raleigh, one of which had recently lost support of its sponsor due to cost burden. Under the emergency provisions, though, parklets were allowed through a much faster approval process, with fewer design standards, no application nor parking encumbrance fees, and with support from the City for safety barricades if needed.



Figure 1: Parklet at Raleigh Times



Figure 2: Pedlet at Capital Club 16

- **“Pedlets” permitted and approved:** One of the innovations of the pandemic were the introduction of “pedlets” to Downtown Raleigh, which is where establishments are able to serve on the entire sidewalk in front of their business, while the pedestrian path is moved to the parking space portion of the street itself. (See Figure 2 & 3). Pedlets were not previously seen in Downtown Raleigh, but allowed for businesses to keep service closer to their doors, which made service easier and control of their outdoor space tighter.
- **Expansion of outdoor dining approved in expeditious manner:** City of Raleigh staff were able to design a process that provided faster approval with coordination led by the City’s Office of Special Events & Emergency Management.



Figure 3: Pedlet at Garland



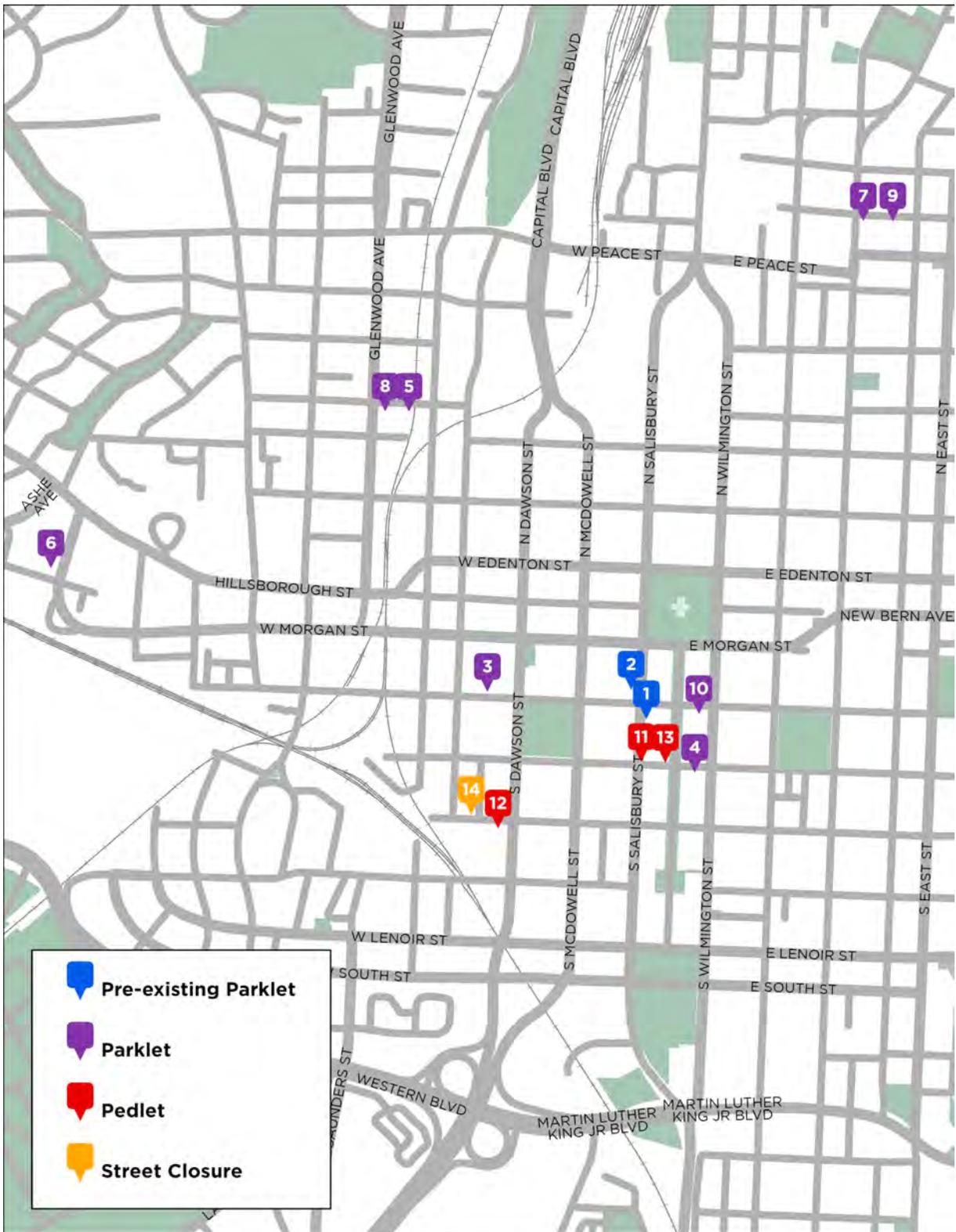
Figure 4: Parklet at Bittersweet



Figure 5: Parklet at Pelagic



Figure 6: Outdoor Dining Street Closure at The Pit



Map of downtown sidewalk extensions and extended seating street closures.

**Lessons Learned & Feedback:**

The experiments in expanded outdoor dining premises during this past year provided a number of lessons learned that can help inform policy decisions on their future.

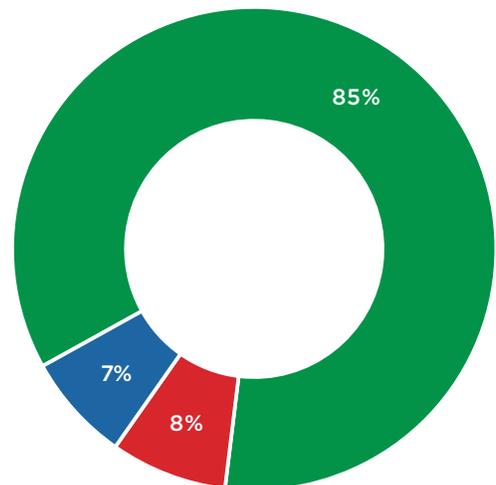
- **Customers loved outdoor dining expansions and want them to stay:** businesses, employees and residents all told us they really appreciated how this allowed them to patronize restaurants in a safe way and also added new life to downtown streets and sidewalks.
- **Flexibility and responsiveness were appreciated and effective:** many businesses were grateful for the flexibility offered and cited the speed with which the process took place was critical to their participation and success. They also cited the low barrier to entry as critical to success and expressed concern about a more complex and expensive process for permanent expansion.
- **Streamlined and simple instructions are important:** Business owners did express some confusion and intimidation with the initial materials regarding how to apply for different options and understanding what was necessary for their applications. Guidance that shows examples and lays out steps in clear fashion is critical to successful understanding of how to apply and implement these expansions.
- **Safety measures necessary but do not look great:** Broad agreement that safety measures were necessary for parklets and pedlets, but the large orange-white barricades would not be great for more permanent outdoor dining expansions.

## 85% of respondents

want to see more on-street sidewalk extensions (private-use “parklets” and “pedlets”) implemented in downtown to expand outdoor dining space

1,026 responses

■ Yes ■ No ■ No preference



Source: DRA 2021 Annual Survey

**Peer Cities Comparison – Outdoor Dining Extensions**

*Prepared by Toole Design*

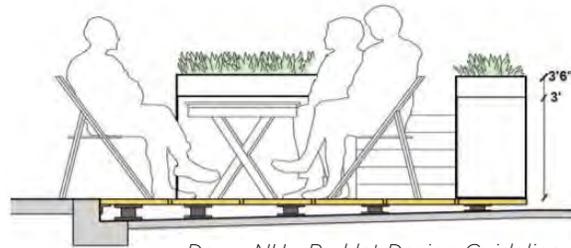
Many cities, including Raleigh, regulated private use of public space prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Most of these pre-pandemic policies pertained to outdoor dining. Additional types of private use of streets, sidewalks, and parking lots became popular during the Pandemic. Emerging and established best practices from across the country influenced the finding of this section with particular importance on peer cities of Charlotte, North Carolina; Austin, Texas; Nashville, Tennessee; Atlanta, Georgia; and Richmond, Virginia.

Upon review of policies, best practices include:

- **Providing clear and explicit graphics to illustrate permitting processes**, mandatory design requirements, and potential configurations of site elements
- **Adjusting fees, bonding requirements, and insurance** requirements by use and impact to the right-of-way
- Conducting **inspections** 1-month after occupancy or on a regular basis after occupancy
- Formalizing **maintenance requirements** through a maintenance agreement (as is the case in Austin and Richmond)
- Recording approved permits in GIS and making the **data publicly accessible** online
- General liability **insurance requirements** are typically \$500,000 or \$1,000,000. This indicates the City of Raleigh's requirements are at the high-end of the spectrum and there is precedent for requiring lower levels of liability coverage. Additionally, there are cities, such as Atlanta, that do not specify minimums for insurance coverage.
- Consider whether there is a **variance option** for businesses with constraints in the public realm immediately adjacent to their property.

While these peer cities are also pursuing ways to make outdoor dining expansions permanent, there are issues related to programs that encourage use of sidewalks and streets for private business operations. These concerns and corresponding questions to consider generally fall into the following categories:

- Maintenance
- Safety
- Aesthetic Quality
- Costs
- Equity



*Derry, NH - Parklet Design Guidelines*

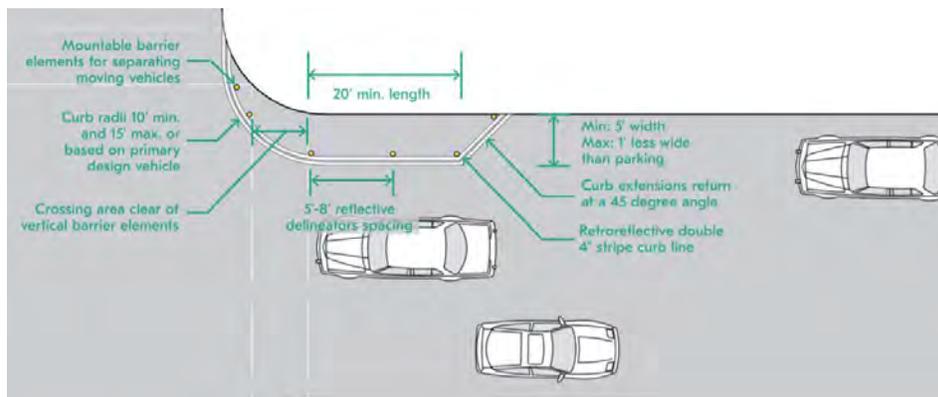
In general, design and construction of outdoor seating areas cannot impact or involve attachments to any street elements. However, Austin does allow a maximum of four bolts to attach platforms to the sidewalk for in-street seating areas and Atlanta may allow cutting or digging into the sidewalk or street surface if performed by a qualified contractor. For all design-specific best practices, see the following section.

### **Sidewalk and On-Street Extensions:**

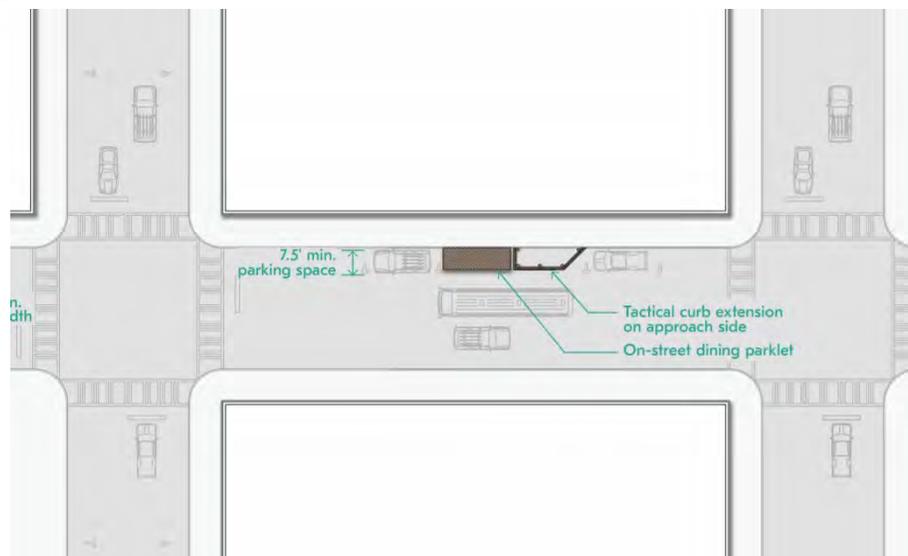
- Maintain a 5-foot wide pedestrian corridor (wider where pedestrian volumes are higher) within the existing sidewalk
- Sound amplification and advertisements not permitted
- Visually permeable fencing and walls
- Vertical clearance zone of 7 to 9 feet
- Detectable guides for people with vision impairments
- 3-foot wide emergency access gaps in the structure, wall, or railing every 20 feet

### On-Street Sidewalk Extensions: Examples of Regulations

- Minimum 6-foot wide with 1-foot clearance from the travel lane (for vehicles or bicycles)
- Not permitted in accessible parking spaces
- Only permitted on city-owned streets with a low speed limit (common range is 25-35 MPH maximum)
- Allowed within valet areas and metered parking on a case-by-case basis
- ADA accessible platform that is flush with sidewalk
- Freestanding platform with a load bearing capacity of 100 pounds per square foot
- Unimpeded stormwater flowlines (6" x 6" gap at face of curb is best)
- Sufficient distance from utilities, transit stops/shelters, intersections, driveways, street trees, crosswalks, curb ramps, and fire hydrants (specific distances vary)
- A 4-foot buffer zone (minimum) on either side of the platform including wheel stops and other vertical delineators
- Encouraging quick-build curb extensions, rather than 4-foot buffer zones, on the approach side of the seating area to provide a more gradual transition for vehicles (see figures below)
- Reflective materials to delineate boundary corners
- Boundaries that may extend beyond the applicant's property lines if they document support from adjacent neighbors



*Quick-build curb extension illustrations - Atlanta On-Street Dining Design Standards*





Template on-street sidewalk extension designs with overhead shade elements - Dallas Street Seats Guidebook



Template cafe parklet design - LA DOT Parklet Design Overview

## Recommendations for Expansion of Outdoor Dining:

### General

#### 1. Build a straightforward process for permanent extension of outdoor dining premises:

Our public process found widespread support for these extensions as ways to energize the public realm and create special experiences. Additionally, behavioral adjustments towards more comfort in outdoor dining areas as a result of the pandemic is likely to continue.

- a. **Allow for continued private-use, on-street sidewalk extensions** (private-use “parklets”) as a means of outdoor dining expansion for downtown businesses and clearly differentiate the terminology and process from public-use “parklets”.

#### 2. Continue to allow for outdoor dining premises to expand to neighboring frontages with permission of property owners:

If a neighboring property owner is willing to provide written permission, allowing outdoor dining to extend to neighboring frontages can create more vibrancy and energy in previously unused spaces in the public realm.

#### 3. Create clear and attainable safety and aesthetic standards for in-street dining areas:

Protecting customers from cars is a widely shared and obvious goal among all stakeholders. The aesthetics of the current jersey barricades are also widely disliked, though, considered necessary and helpful temporary interventions for the past year. Moving forward, business owners and City staff agreed for the need to have higher aesthetic standards and continue to have safety standards. *\*See Peer Cities Comparison section for more specific recommendations and best practices around safety and aesthetic standards.*

- a. Standards need to be **clearly stated with illustrations and acceptable materials explicitly identified** to make it easy for businesses to understand: business owners expressed desire to have guidance on necessary standards as clear as possible and they would be willing to invest in safety materials if they have some certainty of being able to keep these spaces for longer periods of time.
- b. **Ensure distance** from utilities, street trees, transit stops, ramps, crosswalks, etc. as well as stormwater flow.
- c. Before determining final standards, consider **meeting with outdoor dining permit holders to discuss standards and draft guidance to receive feedback** on them and ensure successful implementation.
- d. **Aesthetic Standards need to be clear** with materials identified, as well as language on types of furniture and materials not allowed.
- e. **A few examples of clear and concise guide books that also provide template configurations:** Atlanta On-Street Dining Design Standards, Dallas Street Seats Guidebook, and LADOT People St - Kit of Parts for Parklets.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. Consider a process that allows for 2-3 year pilot permit period to balance higher

**investment required by businesses:** Preferably a 2-3 year pilot program can be established to justify the expense of additional investments in spaces for these businesses to meet standards.

<sup>1</sup> Atlanta- <https://www.atlantaga.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=49283>

Dallas- <https://dallascityhall.com/departments/office-special-events/Documents/GUIDEBOOK%20-%20Dallas%20Street%20Seats%20%202.4.21.pdf>

LADOT- <https://ladotlivablestreets-cms.org/uploads/56fccd902d3d4bd7ba325847c80b87c6.pdf>

- 5. Lower fee structure than pre-COVID process important for continued participation in a successful program:** Businesses have suffered deep losses as a result of the past year and are still struggling to get back on their feet. The previous parklet process, which required full parking encumbrance fees, was prohibitively expensive for businesses and resulted in few parklets. Low fees are very important for businesses to be able to continue to participate, as they made clear throughout this feedback process.
- 6. Centralize authority and decision making for outdoor dining permit review in one City department:** Businesses expressed some confusion of where to ask questions but that when they deal with one point of contact and department, the process is considerably easier. When multiple departments were involved in review, the process tended to bog down with different standards and pacing being applied by these different departments. **One department should have ownership of review and permitting with other departments providing standards and only being involved when an application deviates from or does not meet those standards.**
- 7. Build a broader notification system for property owners within certain radius when outdoor dining expansion permit under consideration:** While outdoor dining expansions had very broad support across stakeholder groups, some expressed desire to receive some opportunity to provide feedback during the process for outdoor dining expansions in front of or adjacent to their property on the location of outdoor dining and its impact on on-street parking, which can serve multiple properties.
- 8. Allow for outdoor dining expansion hours of operation to be consistent with business hours for indoor premises:** Businesses expressed challenges when hours of operation are different for outdoor areas versus the rest of their business, as patrons find this disruptive and tend to leave and create more issues in the public realm. Instead, allowing for consistent hours but not permitting amplified noise and maintaining and enforcing noise ordinances will allow for businesses to use these spaces effectively, while minimizing disruption for neighbors. Those businesses that do not follow rules could have their permits cancelled.
- 9. Do not allow amplified noise on outdoor dining expansions:** Given their proximity to other uses in a dense downtown and the desire for businesses to be able to operate these spaces until closing time, amplified noise could create disruption and challenges.
- 10. Create consistent standards on heating elements and storage for these spaces:** Last winter, there were many different types of heating devices used in these spaces. City could consider a consistent standard for what is allowed and also for storage of any fuel to ensure safety of patrons and structures.
- 11. Establish standards on maintenance, cleanliness and securing tables/chairs:** As these spaces are in the public realm, City should require spaces to be cleaned up at night to avoid trash being left out, aesthetic elements to be maintained, and tables and chairs to be brought inside and/or clearly secured each night after closing. Other cities require a maintenance agreement to ensure this.
- 12. Examine insurance requirements to consider if the current requirements are necessary:** Other cities have lower requirements that may be more attainable for businesses.
- 13. Ensure ADA accessibility with all outdoor dining spaces and/or adjustments to pedestrian paths:** All spaces need to have ramps or level access flush with the curb to ensure ADA compatibility and to ensure downtown's public realm is fully accessible.

**14. Consider an easily accessible grant program to fund outdoor dining expansion**

**materials and elements:** Especially if safety and aesthetic standards increase, businesses may struggle to invest in more expensive spaces. Additionally, a grant program adds an element of equity in allowing businesses to be able to participate even with less resources. DRA administered the Duke Energy Storefront Revitalization Grant in 2020 to fund many similar elements with success. Any grant program needs to be easy to apply for and clear in requirements. Grant program can require or weigh matching funds from businesses to encourage businesses to make investments in these spaces themselves.

**15. Study the potential for expanding the sidewalk width permanently** In locations with sidewalk widths too narrow for seating currently as well as the potential for a business-or-citizen-initiated process to permanently expand sidewalk width on a block-by-block basis in downtown. Process should engage nearby property owners and businesses to allow for feedback on altering the balance of public realm and parking uses. Permits could then be issued in these areas through the normal outdoor dining permit process.

**16. Continue to extend emergency and temporary policies until durable measures are ready to be implemented** and allow for a reasonable transition period before full implementation and enforcement of the new standards and process.

**Expansion of outdoor dining has been a critical tool for helping businesses survive in downtown. Continuing to allow this will help downtown businesses recover fast and add vibrancy to our street-level experience.**



*Parklets along Rue St. Denis in Montreal*



*L.A. parklet with concrete planters*



*Chicago parklet with planter boxes*

## SECTION 2: CURBSIDE PICKUP ZONES

### History and Background of Curbside Pickup Zones

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the City of Raleigh, in partnership with Downtown Raleigh Alliance, moved quickly to deploy curbside parking zones across downtown Raleigh and several other parts of the city. **Over 85 zones** were deployed in downtown within a week of the pandemic beginning and provided a crucial lifeline to storefront businesses for survival during the pandemic.

The advantage of these zones has been their **flexibility** and **low cost**. Their limitations were in their **materials** and **enforcement**. As downtown emerges from the pandemic, though, the efficacy of having so many of these zones may be changing. DRA solicited feedback and examined peer research to provide recommendations on the long-term future of curbside zones.

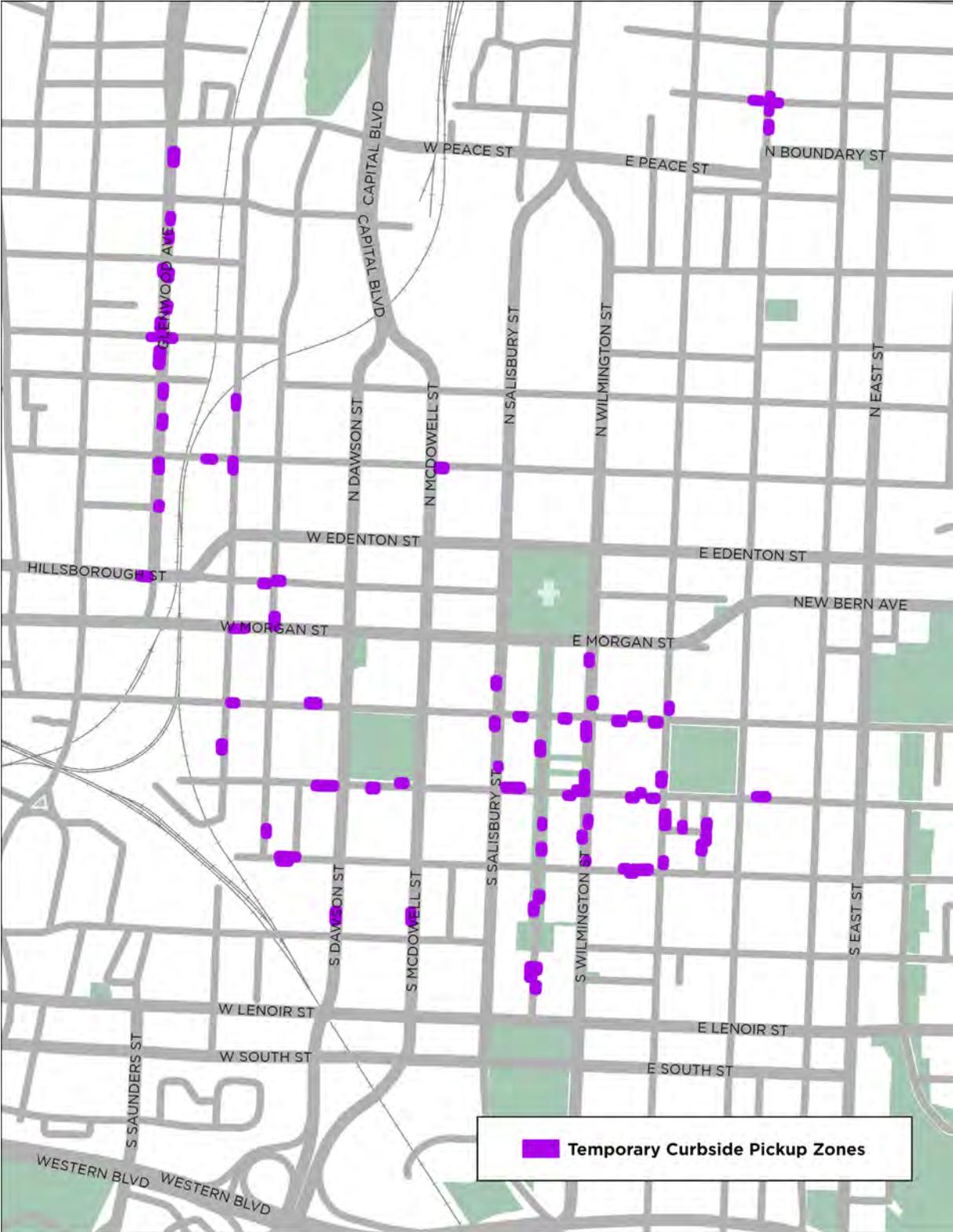
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**85+**  
temporary curbside pickup  
zones deployed in downtown  
at the start of the pandemic

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*Temporary curbside pickup zone signage and deployment*



Map of existing temporary curbside pickup zone locations in Downtown Raleigh.

**Lessons Learned & Feedback:**

- **Curbside Pickup Zones succeeded because of quick deployment, low cost and maximum flexibility:** Businesses appreciated how fast these were deployed, the control they have been able to exercise over them and the ease of moving cones.
- **Customers appreciated the ease and lack of cost for using them:** Residents and employees expressed that they liked using these zones for quick pickups without paying fees.
- **Enforcement of zones was challenging and will continue to be:** Businesses and city staff agreed that some zones have been vulnerable to abuse by non-customers using them as free, long-term parking spaces. With parking staff stretched already by reduced revenue and rising demand, enforcement is a major concern for long-term viability of these zones.
- **Need for these zones varies significantly already:** Many fine dining establishments and restaurants that depend more on sit-down diners have already stopped using their curbside zones, as they focus on staffing in-person service more. Other businesses have continued to rely on them heavily and would like to keep them for the foreseeable future. *See page 18 for comparison charts >*

**68% of survey respondents say “temporary curbside pickup zones” make it easier or make them more likely to frequent downtown businesses**

1,026 responses

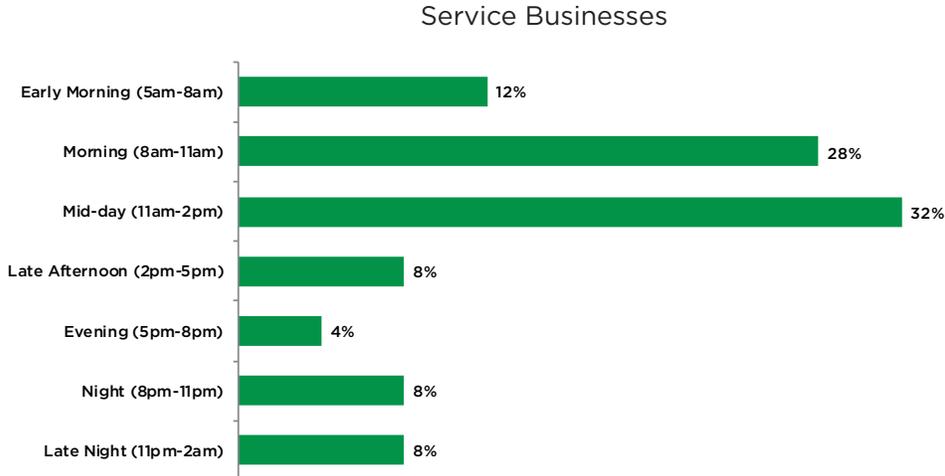
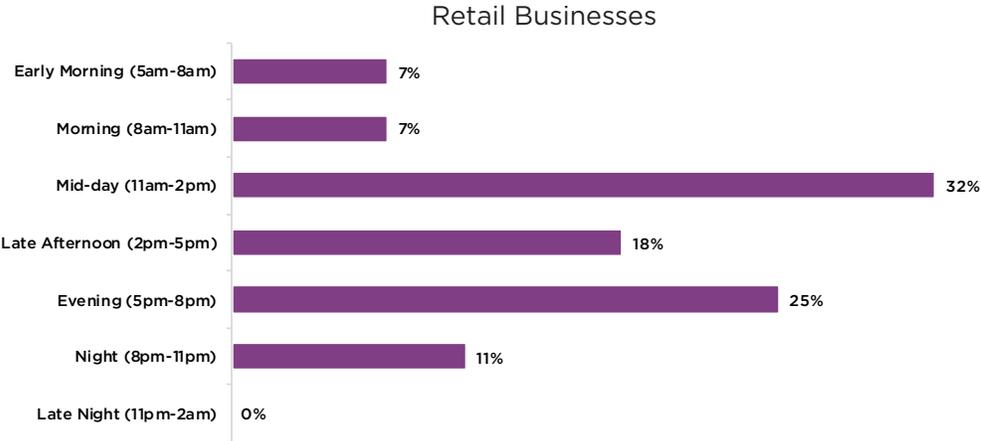
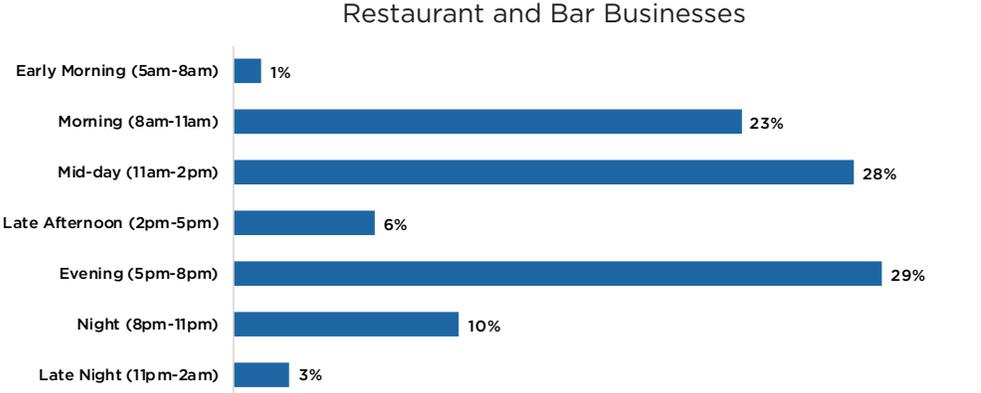
**Only 9.6% of survey participants felt that curbside pickup zones should be phased out now**

Source: DRA 2021 Annual Survey

- o **Sit-down dining and bars have less interest in curbside zones:** These types of businesses are seeing their models shift quickly back to in-person service. Many would be fine with their zones flipping back to on-street parking.
- o **Lunch-oriented and grab-and-go restaurants, such as pizza and sandwiches, have a strong interest in keeping these zones:** These businesses have models that are built for quick pickups and they found these zones very helpful. Some of these businesses have also dealt with diminished foot traffic with lack of lunch customers due to work from home employees, so these zones have been very helpful. Other businesses expressed that these zones have significantly helped their businesses and permanently adjusted their models in more sustainable ways.
- o **Retailers have interest in continuation but it varies by store type:** Grocery, furniture, and convenience-type stores find these zones vital with their high turnover and quick turnover. Other retailers, such as boutiques and soft goods retail, tended to say they would utilize their zones more during the holidays and seasonal sales peaks.
- o **Sense that eliminating them altogether in near term would be bad:** Many businesses expressed that full elimination would hurt a number of downtown businesses and ease of access.
- **Continuing support of curbside pickup zones is popular amongst downtown stakeholders:** Only 9.6% of the participants in the DRA Annual Survey felt that curbside pickup zones should be phased out now, with the remaining 90.4% having no preference (9.7%), the preference that the zones should continue temporarily but phase out when no longer needed (27.8%), or the preference that the zones continue as a permanent option (53.0%).

### Most Active Times for Curbside Pickup Zones

The most active time of usage for curbside pickup varies widely by the type of business. Active usage time of curbside pickup predominantly ranges from 8am to 8pm with no single three-hour period of the day as a consistent peak usage across business uses.

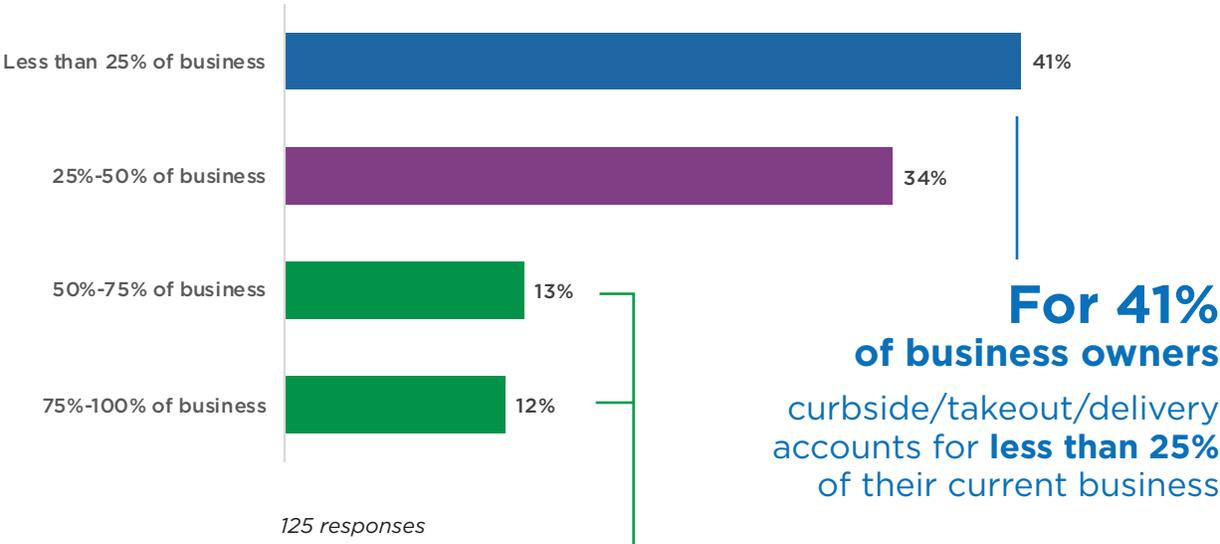


125 responses

Source: DRA 2021 Annual Survey

- **Shared zones are possible, but proximity and uses are important for success:** Businesses expressed openness to sharing pickup zones with neighboring businesses but noted that those zones would still need to be within sight of their business and within roughly a half block to be useful. And they noted that there may be some incompatibility between restaurants that have heavy takeout operations and retailers.
- **Durability of signage and clear, visible markings are important:** The cones and signage worked very well because they were rapidly deployed. But for more permanent zones, the cones will not stand up to long-term use. And some zones saw abuse due to the modest nature of the cones and signage with one business seeing a reduction in abuse once signage was improved.
- **Time limit could be lowered to 15 minutes:** Several businesses and customers expressed that a lower limit could increase turnover more.

What percentage of your business is order-ahead takeout, curbside, or delivery?  
(Including both food and retail pick up services)



**For 25% of business owners**  
curbside/takeout/delivery accounts for **more than 50%** of their current business

Source: DRA 2021 Annual Survey

Curbside Pickup Zone Infrastructure Pilot - W. Martin Street, Raleigh, NC

## Recommendations for Expansion of Curbside Pickup Zones:

- 1. Institute a new application process for businesses still interested in having curbside pickup zones:** Given that some businesses are no longer interested in having these zones, this process helps determine remaining need, evaluate demand, and assess if opportunity to create shared zones. Doing so will provide businesses a chance to express interest and also easily eliminate those zones no longer needed.

  - a. Ask for information on peak times of use to have data to inform possible shared zones
  - b. Fee structure will need to be low/reasonable for participation
- 2. Use application process to identify any possible areas for shared zones that are within half block of interested businesses:** Some businesses may be willing to share if the proximity is close and the other businesses are complementary or have different peak times of business.
- 3. Create a more durable design for these zones that utilizes permanent signage and consider painting zones bright colors to stand out in time for holidays:** Zones that saw more permanent signage saw immediate changes in their abuse by non-customers. Additionally, zones could use paint on the pavement itself, such as bright colors, to clearly show these as special curbside pickup zones. Customers expressed some confusion that could be cleared up by these.
- 4. Provide a temporary deployment of cones/signs for holidays to facilitate shopping:** Some retailers did not express interest in these zones permanently but did see value in them around the holidays. Allowing a deployment of the temporary version with cones/signs for interested retailers during the holiday season would provide added benefit and counter concerns among customers about ease of parking.
- 5. Allow for continued flexibility in curbside pickup zone implementation,** recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work universally and that site-specific exceptions and variances may be practical, particularly while businesses recover.
- 6. Adequately fund enforcement for the curbside pickup zones** to maintain the enhanced zones and ensure appropriate staffing to provide consistent enforcement of the zones and a positive experience for business and consumer users of the zones. It is strongly encouraged to temporarily fund this enhanced enforcement by means other than a fee increase or a high encumbrance cost for downtown businesses.
- 7. Continue to extend emergency and temporary policies until durable measures are ready to be implemented** and allow for a reasonable transition period before full implementation and enforcement of the new standards and process.



Santana Row - San Jose, CA



Chapel Hill, NC

## SECTION 3: SMALL-SCALE ACTIVATIONS

Downtown Raleigh has a long history of successful special events and gatherings. As the state capital and the center of a rapidly growing region, downtown was hosting more than 1 million visitors annually at special events prior to COVID-19.

Much of downtown's pre-COVID success with events came in the form of large-scale events focused on the Fayetteville Street corridor such as World of Bluegrass, Hopscotch, African-American Cultural Festival, Brewgaloo and Artsposure. These events have added plenty of energy to downtown and should return to downtown in the future. But, as downtown developed a consistent competency in large scale events on Fayetteville Street, other potential public spaces opened or were renovated over the past few years that could be used to bring people back downtown. For example, Moore Square, Market + Exchange Plazas, and Union Station Plaza all became operational in the past few years. Additionally, through the expansion of outdoor dining and the use of vacant storefronts, the pandemic showed how downtown's public realm and other space could be used for other activations.

As office workers return and business travel slowly recovers, using downtown's public spaces in the near term is a prime opportunity to bring people back downtown to support businesses and add vitality to our streets. Given the scale, costs, and planning necessary for larger events, as well as changes in behavior from the pandemic, small-scale activations make sense for attracting people downtown in the near term.

As such, DRA reached out to community organizations, residents, employees, event producers, music venues, artists, city staff, as well using results from our Annual Survey, to solicit ideas on:

- **Small-scale activations and events** that would bring people downtown and make living & working downtown fun.
- Ways to make **producing small-scale activation in downtown easy** to facilitate lots of creativity and energy in downtown's public spaces, as well as welcome a diverse array of people.
- **Infrastructure and investments in public spaces** that would make downtown more viable for small-scale activations such as small concerts, movies, performances.
- **Vision and strategies for specific public spaces in downtown** to better help use those spaces natural strengths in more effective ways.

From our public outreach process, the message was clear that more activations downtown would bring people out and help downtown be a more fun place to visit, work, and live. Office workers would be more attracted to working downtown, residents would enjoy living downtown even more and new visitors would come.

**Permitting Process:**

Currently, events are permitted and processed through the Office of Special Events & Emergency Management. Stakeholders suggested several possible tweaks that may facilitate more small-scale activations, while maintaining the City's standards for safety, cleanliness, insurance, notification and consistency.

**Feedback from Stakeholder Engagement:**

DRA met with numerous community organizations, residents, office employees, event producers and artists on how to better encourage and facilitate small-scale activations. Below are some major takeaways.

- **Permitting process is well-suited to large-scale events but could be tweaked for small-scale events:** Community organizations and potential small-scale activators said the special event process can be intimidating for them and seems best suited for large-scale events.
- **Clear guidance, charts and training could help new/smaller activators to understand the process:** Several stakeholders said that processes would be easier to understand with approval process flow charts and guidance. Additionally, some suggested holding a workshop for potential activators to walk through the process and listen to questions.
- **Security costs can be challenging:** Several stakeholders indicated that security costs can be prohibitive for smaller events. All agreed that security is important and necessary for any event, but some asked if there is a way to consider a scaled approach to security whereby private security could be secured for events that are not serving alcohol, keeping under a certain attendance threshold and maintaining a small footprint.
- **The 90-day notification period is long for small-scale activations:** Stakeholders agreed this period was very appropriate and reasonable for large scale events that have multiple blocks closed and large crowds expected, but 90 days was less necessary for small-scale events and can create enough delay to deter activations from occurring.
- **Special Events & Emergency Management Staff regarded as helpful and professional:** The staff that permit and process events are highly regarded and considered thoughtful and interested in successful events by many stakeholders.



*El Rastro Flea Market - Madrid, Spain*



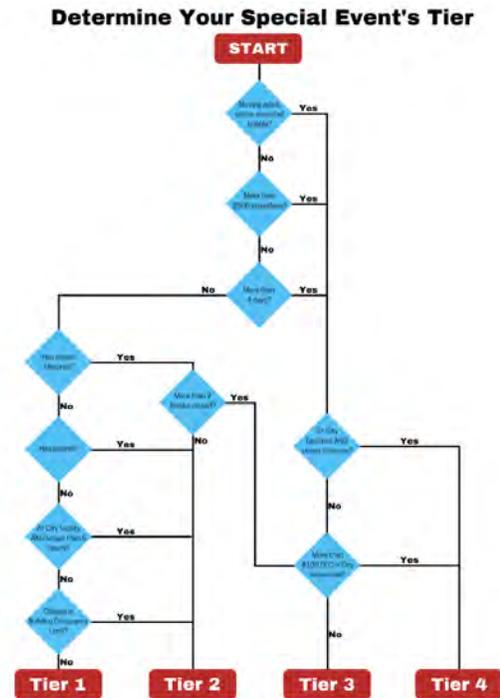
*Outdoor Yoga - San Diego, CA*

### Peer Cities Comparison For Events Policies For Small Scale Activations

In researching Raleigh's peer cities, DRA analyzed special events policies for factors that could help better accommodate smaller events. This included looking at permit timing and event types as well as requirements for insurance and police or security presence.

#### Permitting Timeline & Event Types:

- Several policies have some type of scale based on size of the event, impact on public spaces, impact on City resources, and if there is commercial activity or alcohol. Having different event options helps simplify and streamline the ability to use public space for small scale activations.
- In the City of Durham, they have two processes of special event permitting called **Standard Special Event Permit** and a **Simplified Special Event Permit**. The standard permit is similar to Raleigh's current policy and more traditional event permits and has a deadline of 60 days prior to the event. The Simplified Special Event Permit has a shortened deadline of only 15 days, allowing for small-scale events to go through a shorter, simplified process.
- The City of Austin has a **tier system with four tiers of events**. What they call their "Tier 1" event has a deadline of only 3 days for basic events that use public space for less than 5 hours. The tier system is based on factors such as the size of the event, the impact on City resources, and if there will be alcohol sales or not. See above example of their tier flow chart.
- The City of Minneapolis has an event option called a "**commercial block event**," which is similar to the traditional neighborhood block party that Raleigh has, however, it allows for commercial activity. They define it as a "temporary gathering of people in the street or an alley" with fewer than 2,500 people in attendance. The deadline for this option is as few as 11 days before the event. However, they have a **scale for fees and the fee goes up the closer it is to the deadline**. For example, a permit application submitted **45 days** before the event is only \$200, while an application submitted 11 days before the event is \$400. The commercial block party is smaller than larger commercial events and does not create as many street closures or create other public impacts.
- The City of Columbus has a shorter, flexible option as well called Special Activity Permit (SAP) which is only a **7 day deadline**. They define this as "any private, non-commercial, or organized activity in a City Park, which has minimal impact on the park or amenities. Typically special activities include filming, photo shoots, demonstrations or larger community gatherings with minimal elements."



Process diagram to determine event tier - City of Austin

### Police and security requirements

- Most policies require police or security of some kind but range from being at police discretion to having a very defined scale.
- The City of Dallas is an example of a policy that has very specific requirements based on the size of attendance of the event, shown below:
  - 0 to 250 people = 0 or 2 officers based on discretion of Police using details such as alcohol sales.
  - 251 to 1,500 people = 2 - 4 officers
  - 1,501 to 3,000 people = 4 - 6 officers
  - 3,001 to 5,000 people = 6 - 15 officers
  - Over 5,000 = 15 plus 1 police officer for every 1,000 participants and spectators over 5,000 at the special event
- The City of Minneapolis requires security personnel, which can be off-duty officers or private security personnel and have the following calculation:
  - 1:500 ratio when intoxicating beverages are served
  - 1:1,000 ratio when intoxicating beverages are not served

### Insurance requirements

- Little variation with insurance with most requiring a minimum of \$1 million insurance policy for all events. Austin and Dallas do have some lower insurance requirements which can help better accommodate smaller events.
- The City of Dallas only requires \$500,000 for events with less than 5,000 people.
- The City of Austin has a minimum requirement of \$500,000 for most events.

These cities all have varying systems and processes, but have created flexible, simpler options for those events that will have minimal impact on public spaces. These types of options make public spaces more accessible for small scale activations like renting out plazas for a company event, holding an outdoor fitness class, or hosting an outdoor performing arts event.

## Recommendations for Changing Processes to Facilitate Small-Scale Activations:

### 1. Institute a new application process, fee structure, insurance policy requirement, a common set of standards and flexible thresholds that keep small scale activations within a quick and easy approval process:

Event producers consistently said an easier process for smaller events would make it easier to produce and more quickly activate downtown spaces.

- **New thresholds for triggering small-scale activation process could include:** If the event is limited to a certain existing public space, if event closes only one, non-state owned through street, block for limited time of less than a day, has limited sound amplification, no alcohol sales, no amusement rides or activities with a high liability, and expected attendance is under 1,000 people.
- **Provide clear guidance on a predictable methodology to determine police and security staffing needs** for events. See peer review for examples of cities that use a formula or a defined scale of event size to staffing ranges to determine requirement.
- **Lower the notification time from 90 days to 30 days for small scale activations:** This will allow downtown to be activated faster this year and be more responsive to new small-scale event ideas.
- **Provide an easy-to-read flowchart, simplified guidebook, and checklist for new event producers to understand the approval process:** New or smaller event producers and community groups are intimidated by process, deterred by lengthy and complicated guidebooks, and could use simplified materials to demystify the process most applicable to their prospective events.

### 2. Provide quarterly comprehensive training and/or guide to event hosts to educate them on the process, and requirements:

The goal would be to create a group of well trained producers that can expand the offerings in downtown. Look to target a diverse group of producers that represent interests that have not been engaged in planning downtown events in the past.

### 3. Preplanned layouts for certain spaces:

Collect past event layouts that have worked well and met all the requirements for new producers to use as a guide to their own layout. Explore if we can create preapproved event layouts for commonly used public spaces – Union Station Plaza, Moore Square, City Plaza, Market and Exchange Plazas.

### 4. Examine scaling security and barricade expenses for smaller scale activations:

For many events, the required police officers can be a major expense. For smaller scale activations, explore threshold triggers including size of footprint, alcohol, and expected attendance that allow for fewer police or allow use of private security in lieu of officers.

## SECTION 4: INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT & RE-POSITIONING PUBLIC SPACES

In order to make downtown an easier place to stage small-scale events, several infrastructure investments were suggested by stakeholders to improve downtown’s public realm. Additionally, stakeholders provided ideas to better position specific public spaces to better play to the strengths of those spaces and reduce redundancy and competition among spaces. And finally, several ideas were provided to facilitate more small-scale activation quickly.

### Feedback from Stakeholder Engagement:

What Additional Amenities are needed in downtown public spaces?



1,019 responses

Source: DRA 2021 Annual Survey

- Infrastructure could make staging small-scale events easier:** Event producers and community organizations said there are investments in public spaces that could help make it easier to quickly program these spaces. They cited lack of shade and furniture in some spaces that would make them more welcoming, as well as an opportunity to rent a PA and sound system at a lower cost to make it easier to quickly stage events. Additionally, some stakeholders noted the desire to be able to show large televised sporting events in downtown and suggested investing in infrastructure to do so for future major sporting events.
- Public spaces could be positioned for certain types of events or activations to help with branding them and reducing redundancy:** Stakeholders noted that spaces like Market and Exchange Plaza are not easy to program with traditional events, but could be positioned for specific types of art or activations, while other spaces could focus on being positioned for nearby users such as City Plaza and office employees or Union Station Plaza’s ability to host longer-term activations due to relatively quiet nature of plaza.

- **Coordination, communication and promotion of calendar for events/activations in downtown could be improved:** Several groups are already activating or trying to activate downtown, but are not in touch about their efforts. This leads to some duplication, conflicts, and inefficiencies. Even within City departments, there are programming efforts that could be coordinated more to avoid duplication or competition among similar events in public spaces. The City's Office of Special Events already produces an excellent calendar of upcoming events. Making this more visible and promoted would help event producers understand upcoming programming already in place.
- **Beautification efforts across the public realm would improve experience:** Stakeholders indicated inconsistency across downtown in the aesthetics of public spaces with some such as Moore Square and Fayetteville Street having great landscaping, while many sidewalks and corridors lack much landscaping. While not directly tied to small-scale activations, aesthetics of downtown were cited as part of creating the experience for visitors. Stakeholders cited the need for a clearly identifiable beautification project similar to the sunflowers at Dix Park or daffodils in Downtown Atlanta, whereby visitors know about a specific type of beautification to come and see.
- **Wayfinding at events & near office buildings helps drive traffic to businesses:** Stakeholders noted that temporary event signage deployed by DRA in 2019 helped increase foot traffic for nearby businesses. More signage would help let people know about open businesses and distribute traffic to storefronts.
- **Hiring a group to program spaces would help generate faster and more impactful results:** While stakeholders made many suggestions to improve the ability for many groups to program downtown, some noted that specific downtown public spaces could be programmed with more consistency and branding under one group. For example, hiring an event producer to put on a regular series of concerts would provide consistency in an activation, which has proven successful recently with Dine Out Downtown and in the past with series such as Pickin' in the Plaza.

## Recommendations on Infrastructure, Investment & Re-Positioning Public Spaces

**1. Invest in basic infrastructure to better facilitate small-scale activations and activity in public spaces:** Ideas for infrastructure that could more easily facilitate small-scale events in public spaces:

- **Temporary or permanent shade sails for portions of Moore Square and City Plaza:** this would help stage activations during periods of more intense heat during the summer.
- **More colorful furniture in City Plaza:** this would add more vibrancy to the plaza and make it a more inviting place to come and sit outside during lunchtime for employees.
- **High speed wi-fi in City Plaza to encourage return of office workers:** Office workers indicated a desire to meet and work outside in public spaces such as City Plaza as part of easing into working downtown again. High speed wi-fi may also facilitate small-scale activations easier, too. DRA has priced this investment and identified capable vendors.
- **PA and sound system available for small-scale activations:** Events with full-scale bands and stages would still need different infrastructure, but a PA and sound system available for activations such as small, lunchtime concerts, after work music or fitness classes, and lectures in public spaces would more quickly facilitate these activations in these public spaces. One consideration for a more durable sound system would be the **installation of a PA system into the light towers on City Plaza** to make amplification of frequent activations easier and more affordable.
- **Screen capable of showing live sporting events:** As detailed in the next section on activations, large scale sporting events are a popular idea for downtown. Projection screens are unable to easily show events during daylight, but a more permanent screen with LED capability could do so and be used for Carolina Hurricane playoff games, ACC basketball games, World Cup soccer, Olympics and other major sporting events that often attract crowds to watch and celebrate in public spaces in other cities.



*Plaza Shade Sails - San Antonio, TX*



*Lounge Swings - Philadelphia, PA*



*Musical Rocking Chairs - Denver, CO*



*Street Scrabble - Seattle, WA*

**2. Create a fund for covering the basic costs of small-scale activations:** To facilitate more activations among more diverse groups, City could create a small grant fund for activations that covers costs such as permits, sound systems, security. As many stakeholders expressed concerns about costs, especially after a year of the pandemic, City could create an Activations Grant that covers many of the costs of staging small-scale activations. Build criteria on size of events and qualifying costs to keep it targeted at certain scale and types of events.

**3. Reposition downtown public spaces for specific activations that play to their strengths and reduce potential redundancy and competition among spaces:** Downtown public spaces would be easier to quickly program if certain spaces are dedicated to activities that **use the strengths of the space.**

- **Market & Exchange Plazas as major public art installations:** Event producers expressed the difficulties of programming these narrow plazas beyond YMCA fitness classes. These plazas could host larger installations that are challenging in other areas and in the Right-of-Way.
- **Union Station Plaza hosting longer activations with larger infrastructure and specific types such as sports/active activations:** Union Station Plaza was lauded as a great event space with nice layout and infrastructure. But its location and relative lack of foot traffic makes it ideal for longer-term set-ups such as temporary pickleball courts, futsal court, etc. because it does not serve as the main entrance of the train station nor does it impede traffic. One idea here is to brand the plaza as a pilot program for staging sports-related activations such as pickleball, basketball, and other types of activations where infrastructure can stay in place for weeks.



*Umbrellas in Alleyway*

- **City Plaza as site of activations for consistent, regular activations aimed at office workers:** With workers having more choice about when to work in the office, downtown needs activations to attract them back downtown. With its density of office towers surrounding it and history of successful daytime activations, City Plaza should be the main site of morning, lunchtime and after work activations that are meant to attract and engage office workers. These are detailed more in next section but would include yoga/fitness classes, games and small tournaments such as ping pong and cornhole, and regular, small concert series after work.

**4. Create activations working group for coordination, communication and amplification of existing and upcoming events to reduce duplication and use assets more effectively:** A common resource for understanding all upcoming efforts would help create more coherent programming across public spaces. Even within City departments, there are programming efforts that could be coordinated more to avoid duplication or competition among similar events in public spaces. An events calendar exists within the City and DRA provides an events calendar on its website, but a regular coordination meeting would make sure activations from City departments are more aligned and in partnership with each other.

- **Monthly meeting of DRA and City departments** involved in downtown event programming and communications.

**5. Beautification efforts across public realm that are clearly identifiable and unique would improve experience:** Coherent and easily brandable beautification efforts would also help attract people downtown. For example, in Atlanta, the downtown district invested in large-scale planting of daffodils to create an easily identifiable beautification effort. The tremendous success of the sunflowers at Dix Park shows this as potentially engaging strategy for downtown.

**6. Invest in and allow wayfinding directing patrons to businesses at events:** This allows patrons to more easily find businesses and lets businesses benefit more directly from activations, which has not always been the case in the past with events.



*Madison Square Park Music Series  
in New York City*



*Downtown Daffodil Project in Atlanta*

### 7. Hire a special events producer for a dedicated and coordinated series of programs in public spaces:

While stakeholders made many suggestions to improve the ability for many groups to program downtown, some noted that specific downtown public spaces could be programmed with more consistency and branding under one group. For example, hiring an event producer to put on a regular series of concerts would provide consistency in an activation, which has proven successful recently with Dine Out Downtown and in the past with series such as Pickin' in the Plaza. Hiring a group to coordinate efforts for late summer and fall could help create a more coherent strategy. Two models are listed below:

- ***DRA Model*** - DRA is charged with creating or identifying producers to create a season of small scale downtown activations. To accomplish this task the DRA would have to bring on additional staff help for the duration of the effort, funded with CARES/ARP money to co-produce, co-sponsor, co-insure, co-promote small activations.
  - Could be expedited with a trusted producer using a fast track, maybe semi-independent approval process for pop-up small activations.
  - Centralizes the effort, the calendar, insurance, fee waivers etc. in one place
  - Could manage and track the budget to pay small operators for their expenses
- ***Third-Party Production Model*** - Contract with an event team(s) to produce a series or multiple series of events for downtown.
  - Use private promoters to develop a series of activations targeted as an enticement to get remote workers to come back downtown for the days the series is held. A few specific ideas:
    - > After work music series - like the previous Oak City Live concerts.
    - > A regularly scheduled group fitness series - yoga, cross fit, Zumba, running clubs, etc. Utilize existing downtown business and stakeholders where possible; e.g. YMCA, local gyms etc.
    - > An evening movie series - potential to partner with existing Raleigh businesses like the Alamo, Rialto, etc.
    - > A "garage sale" flea market held on the ground floor of city-owned parking decks on Sundays in concert with the Farmers' Market.
    - > Theater in the Plaza series - potential to partner with Raleigh theatre groups; e.g. Burning Coal, Raleigh Little Theater, etc.
    - > Comedy Nights - potential to partner with existing Raleigh business and organizations; e.g. Charlie Goodnights, Raleigh Improv Group, etc.
  - Engage producers to bring/create one-off events and pop up activations. Use the opportunity to train and develop new producers, expanding the core group of producers, with the goal of attracting more diverse and creative activations.

## SECTION 5: IDEAS FOR ACTIVATIONS & PROGRAMMING IN DOWNTOWN

Throughout our public engagement process, DRA solicited many ideas for ways to program and activate our public realm. Many ideas were provided and many more are likely to be generated as investments and infrastructure for small-scale activations are improved.

### Feedback from Stakeholders:

- **Weekends are seeing increases in traffic, but weekdays could use more activation:** More activations during weekdays would help with residents and attracting office workers back downtown.
- **Evening activities could take place on Thursdays but remaining weekdays should be morning/lunchtime:** Stakeholders expressed that evening activities outside Thursday-Saturday are difficult to attend. But lunchtime and morning activations could work those days.
- **Consistency and regular scheduling in programming is very important:** Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that having consistently scheduled programming is critical for success. They cited the Thursday night music series on City Plaza several years ago and the weekly nature of Dine Out Downtown and Moore Square Market as making it easy for attendees to know when an activation is and be able to plan/rely on it occurring. This also helps with **branding and messaging**.
- **Tie retailers to successful activations through contests, scavenger hunts, maps, and opportunities to participate:** Retailers were not overly interested in regularly vending in parking spaces and on-street, but were very interested in being more explicitly tied into special events and activations by having deliberate strategies to get patrons into their stores through scavenger hunts, wayfinding signs, and maps at activations, as well as opportunities to sell at events.
- **Major interactive and playful elements would help draw people downtown:** Large-scale light, play and interactive installations could be compelling experiences to get people back downtown.
  - **Light swings, tunnels, and other interactive experiences** are popular and desired.
  - **Playful elements** that attract families would be compelling and help dispel concerns about safety and security downtown.
- **Actively encourage and reach out to diverse groups:** Downtown should welcome groups from different races, ethnicities and backgrounds to program downtown and have a clear and active strategy for doing so.

## Recommendations for Programming Downtown:

Below are ideas for re-programming downtown spaces to attract people and create more fun experiences for employees, residents and visitors.

### Music & Performances:

- 1. Thursday evening concert series on City Plaza:** This would help extend the weekend into the week and add an activation that residents and office workers enjoy in a space that is not very heavily trafficked in evenings. Also, based on previous successful precedent.
- 2. Jazz in the Park or Plaza:** Cities across the country have successfully used weekly music performances where patrons are able to bring blankets and purchase food and alcohol on site. Ability to purchase food & alcohol and consistent schedule are critical.
- 3. Lunchtime concert and performances at regular time/day on City Plaza:** Based on success of previous version of this, office workers and residents would appreciate this and would help add activity and fun to downtown during the daytime
- 4. Dance Performances at regular time in City Plaza or Moore Square:** Provide space for dance groups from across the region to come and perform. If at City Plaza, make this a lunchtime activation. If at Moore Square, make this evening or weekend.
- 5. Theater in Park or Union Station Plaza:** Partner with local theater companies to try to stage performances in Moore Square or Union Station Plaza. Consider a specific series such as Shakespeare or plays by playwrights of Color to create new opportunities for diverse artists.
- 6. Movies in Moore Square:** Stakeholders identified this as a better place for movies than City Plaza, which used to host these, due to the lawn and aesthetics.

*Ballet in City Plaza - Raleigh, NC*



*Jazz in the Park*



*Concert in City Plaza - Raleigh, NC*

**Art, Play & Games Installations:**

**7. Major interactive art installation in fall/during holiday season:** Would provide a big draw to downtown and consistent with downtown's reputation as a place of creativity and arts. DRA's Illuminate activation last winter showed that patrons enjoy interactive art displays and will visit downtown to engage with them. Funding for these would be needed, as they require significant resources to bring and operate. See images below of interactive light tunnels and see-saws as examples of major installations available to come to Raleigh during the fall and holiday seasons.

**8. More permanent visual installations at Market and Exchange Plaza:** Use these plazas for installations such as the umbrellas or lighting that people can stand under but not necessarily touch. These installations should be compelling enough for people to want to come visit and see them.

**9. Light Art Projection Festival:** Based on the success of last year's Illuminate art walk, stakeholders expressed a desire to expand the activation and do more large-scale projections on buildings to draw even more attention and elevate the activation to a more dynamic level.

**10. Target certain plazas and streets for Play installations & possible summer camps:** Program a portion of Moore Square near Marbles or in nearby public plazas specifically for kids. Use model in Philadelphia around Playstreets, where by large games, toys are placed in areas during summer for kids to visit and interact with. Summer camps are also welcomed into these spaces to bring more activity and kids into downtown. With camps at Marbles and other nearby institutions, interest should be high. Some simple, low-infrastructure ideas: obstacle courses, large games and chalk.

**11. Museums in Plazas:** Downtown and Raleigh is home to several of the largest museums in the state. Partnering with them for programming and exhibits in downtown's public plazas would be an effective way to turn more of downtown into an educational experience and use a major strength of the city.

**12. Games in City Plaza:** With its central location among office buildings, City Plaza can be used to knit together downtown's office tenants as a central place to play games. Ping pong tables, cornhole boards, large scale chess, and even more active games can be set up on a regular and consistent basis to give employees a break and chance to engage with others. Competitions could be set up with teams from different employers competing, which could make downtown a unique office market.



*Interactive Light Seesaws*



*Light Ring Tunnels*



*Fayetteville Street Projection Art*



*Urban Playground and Shade Sails*

**Sports and Sports-Related Gatherings:**

**13. Temporary active sports facilities in plazas:** Union Station Plaza and possibly other public spaces could be used for temporary sports facilities such as pickleball courts, volleyball, basketball, and other activities to engage downtown workers and residents and attract new users to the spaces. Downtown previously hosted a temporary soccer AstroTurf space near City Plaza that was popular and added people to the space during otherwise quiet times. This would be a way to balance and attract people during off-peak periods. These spaces could host small tournaments among office employees, residents or general public.

**14. LED screen for displaying sporting events:** Many downtowns across the country have LED screens capable of airing live sporting events that are popular for outdoor gatherings. These include playoff games for local pro and college teams, World Cup games involving the U.S. soccer teams and other prominent events such as the ACC basketball tournament and national championships. Airing these games does involve securing legal rights to do so and other costs associated with special events, but an LED screen would make these games much easier to show in public and this investment would have some durability given the large number of sporting events that could be shown. Restaurants and bars benefit from these events, too, so some modesty in the number of events shown would be necessary to not undercut these establishments, but a balance can be achieved and places may benefit from pre and post event traffic.



*Urban Multi-Sport Court*



*Outdoor Sporting Event Viewing*

# IMPLEMENTATION

In order to facilitate a renewed public realm in Downtown Raleigh, an implementation plan will be necessary for ensuring this stakeholder feedback is incorporated into policy changes and future programming. As these ideas cut across many departments, organizations, and both public and private entities, coordination will be critical to success. Below are some ideas for how to organize implementation for these ideas and proposals.

Study Issue	Departments Potentially Involved	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
<p><b>Permanent Expansion of Outdoor Dining:</b> Due to having an existing temporary program and pre-pandemic policies, the City of Raleigh staff is already well-suited to take on these changes.</p>	Special Events & Emergency Management, Transportation, Parking, Urban Design Center, Planning & Development.	Build a cross-departmental team to study needed policy/ regulatory changes for permanent outdoor dining. This group should agree on safety, aesthetic, maintenance, insurance, ADA standards and jointly develop final guidance to businesses for permitting program.	Assign management and ownership of the Outdoor Dining permitting program to one primary department with clear point of contact for businesses.	Consider utilizing feedback group of businesses on final rules, guidance, standards to ensure they align with ability of businesses to follow and meet these standards.	Aim for new process in place later in year or extension of temporary program until standards and process finalized.
<p><b>Curbside Pickup Zones</b></p>	Parking, Transportation	Parking & Transportation Departments assess recommendations and build new structure.	Consider proactive communication with interested businesses and nearby property owners on implementation of more permanent zones including sharing designs and ideas for shared zones.	Aim for new program by end of temporary measures in fall.	

Study Issue	Departments Potentially Involved	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
<b>Small-Scale Activations Permitting Process</b>	Special Events & Emergency Management	Assess recommendations on new small-scale activation process	Consider permanent or pilot program for later in 2021 to facilitate people coming back downtown		
<b>Infrastructure, Investment, Re-Positioning Public Spaces Coordination</b>	Convention Center/ Performing Arts Center, Raleigh Arts, Parking, Parks & Rec, Special Events & Emergency Management	Assign specific City department to oversee additional investments in public spaces	Assign department or organization for hosting monthly meeting of departments, orgs programming downtown spaces	Assign department or group ownership of Market & Exchange Plazas as home for interactive or dynamic art installations	Assign department or organization responsibility for a dynamic beautification effort
<b>Potential Investments</b>	Consider a small-scale activations fund to cover costs.	Fund small investments in public spaces for shade, sound, LED screen, Wi-Fi, furniture, art installations	Fund a special events series in downtown with specific goal and timeframe identified. Could include Thursday night series, performances identified	Major interactive display in fall/ holiday season, as well as ice rink	Beautification effort that is identifiable and attractive similar to Dix Park sunflowers

#### ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

- 1. Regularly convene a working group to implement recommendations:** To facilitate and ensure timely execution, empower a working group composed of City of Raleigh and DRA staff to meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to oversee implementation of recommendations.
- 2. Schedule a report back to City Council on the status of recommendation implementation this fall:** To ensure implementation progress and provide an opportunity for course correction, built-in return for update on and additional authorization to proceed with short-term and medium-term policy recommendations, schedule a report back to City Council this fall once implementation is underway.

## CONCLUSION

After a year of unparalleled challenge, Downtown Raleigh needs support to continue recovery. Our downtown community, and particularly our downtown businesses need the support of the City and the community to rebuild, recover, and renew itself in this new normal. As Raleigh continues to face new challenges and recovers from the effects of the pandemic, this moment provides an opening to proactively rethink our public realm, use lessons learned from the past year, and improve our policies to position Downtown Raleigh as a more flexible, creative and inclusive city of the future.

Through a robust community engagement process, peer city policy review, with feedback and coordination from City staff, and led by a team of consultants, DRA has produced a list of actionable public realm recommendations. We believe these recommendations represent a real opportunity to implement common-sense and consensus measures to not only support Downtown Raleigh as it continues to recover from the pandemic but also build Raleigh into a policy leader in the management of public space and the downtown environment.

Throughout the process to produce this report DRA gathered feedback from over 1,000 downtown stakeholders via multiple engagement channels and opportunities, including hearing directly from businesses, residents, employees, partners and community members. This report reflects countless hours given to this study by downtown stakeholders and the public to produce and refine these recommendations- all to the collective goal of building recommendations that are by and for the downtown community.

A huge thank you and acknowledgment is due to the community for coming together through this report and in this unprecedented time of need to provide direction, refinement, and community vision in support of Downtown Raleigh's recovery.

Building back a thriving public realm in downtown will not occur through one action alone but will instead result from the combination of many initiatives implemented in concert. Through these recommendations, DRA is excited to advance towards a better, more flexible, and more vibrant Downtown Raleigh for *everyone*. Thank you for your consideration.



DowntownRaleigh  
Alliance

# PUBLIC REALM STUDY

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dan Douglas, Urban Strategy Group (*lead consultant*)

Toole Design (*policy review*)

yellowDog : creative (*report design*)

Innovate Raleigh (*community listening sessions*)

A special thank you to Raleigh City Council and City of Raleigh staff from many departments:

- Convention Center, Red Hat Amphitheater, & Performing Arts Center
- Economic Development & Innovation
- Emergency Management & Special Events
- Parking
- Parks
- Planning & Development
- Transportation
- Urban Design Center

Thank you to the hundreds of downtown stakeholders who participated throughout the process, providing valuable input, time, and support.

**Report prepared by:**

Downtown Raleigh Alliance

# EXHIBIT A - CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS

CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS		Immediate (Now)	Near Term (<3 Months)	Short Term (<6 Months)	Med. Term (<1 Year)
<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>					
1	Regularly convene a working group to implement recommendations	X			
2	Schedule a report back to City Council on the status of recommendation implementation this fall		X		
<b>PERMANENT EXPANSION OF OUTDOOR DINING PREMISES</b>					
1	Build a straightforward process for permanent extension of outdoor dining premises			X	
2	Continue to allow for outdoor dining premises to expand to neighboring frontages with permission of property owners	X			
3	Create clear and attainable safety and aesthetic standards for in-street dining areas			X	
4	Consider a process that allows for 2-3 year pilot permit period to balance higher investment required by businesses			X	
5	Lower fee structure than pre-COVID process important for continued participation in a successful program			X	
6	Centralize authority and decision making for outdoor dining permit review in one City department			X	
7	Build a broader notification system for property owners within certain radius when outdoor dining expansion permit under consideration			X	
8	Allow for outdoor dining expansion hours of operation to be consistent with business hours for indoor premises			X	
9	Do not allow amplified noise on outdoor dining expansions			X	
10	Create consistent standards on heating elements and storage for these spaces			X	
11	Establish standards on maintenance, cleanliness and securing tables/chairs			X	
12	Examine insurance requirements to consider if the current requirements are necessary			X	
13	Ensure ADA accessibility with all outdoor dining spaces and/or adjustments to pedestrian paths			X	
14	Consider an easily accessible grant program to fund outdoor dining expansion materials and elements			X	
15	Study the potential for expanding the sidewalk width permanently where appropriate				X
16	Continue to extend emergency and temporary policies until durable measures are ready to be implemented			X	
<b>CURBSIDE PICKUP ZONES</b>					
1	Institute a new application process for businesses still interested in having curbside pickup zones		X		
2	Use application process to identify any possible areas for shared zones that are within half block of interested businesses		X		
3	Create a more durable design for these zones that utilizes permanent signage and consider painting zones bright color to stand out in time for holidays			X	
4	Allow for continued flexibility in curbside pickup zone implementation		X		
5	Adequately fund enforcement for curbside pickup zones		X		
6	Provide a temporary deployment of cones/signs for holidays to facilitate shopping			X	
7	Continue to extend emergency and temporary policies until durable measures are ready to be implemented			X	

## EXHIBIT A - CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS

CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS		Immediate (Now)	Near Term (<3 Months)	Short Term (<6 Months)	Med. Term (<1 Year)
<b>SMALL-SCALE ACTIVATIONS</b>					
1	Institute a new application process, fee structure, insurance policy requirement, a common set of standards and flexible thresholds that keep small scale activations within a quick and easy approval process		X		
2	Provide quarterly comprehensive training and/or guide to event hosts to educate them on the process, and requirements		X		
3	Preplanned layouts for certain spaces		X		
4	Examine scaling security and barricade expenses for smaller scale activations		X		
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT &amp; RE-POSITIONING PUBLIC SPACES</b>					
1	Invest in basic infrastructure to better facilitate small-scale activations and activity in public spaces			X	
2	Create a fund for covering the basic costs of small-scale activations		X		
3	Reposition downtown public spaces for specific activations that play to their strengths and reduce potential redundancy and competition among spaces				X
4	Create activations working group for coordination, communication and amplification of existing and upcoming events to reduce duplication and use assets more effectively		X		
5	Implement beautification efforts across the public realm to improve experience				X
6	Invest in and allow wayfinding directing patrons to businesses at events			X	
7	Hire a special events producer for a dedicated and coordinated series of programs in public spaces		X		
<b>IDEAS FOR ACTIVATIONS &amp; PROGRAMMING IN DOWNTOWN</b>					
<i>Music &amp; Performances</i>					
1	Thursday evening concert series on City Plaza		X		
2	Jazz in the Park or Plaza		X		
3	Lunchtime concert and performances at regular time/day on City Plaza	X			
4	Dance Performances at regular time in City Plaza or Moore Square		X		
5	Theater in Park or Union Station Plaza			X	
6	Movies in Moore Square		X		
<i>Art, Play &amp; Games Installations</i>					
7	Major interactive art installation in fall/during holiday season			X	
8	More permanent visual installations at Market and Exchange Plaza			X	
9	Light Art Projection Festival			X	
10	Target certain plazas and streets for Play installations & possible summer camps		X		
11	Museums in Plazas			X	
12	Games in City Plaza			X	
<i>Sports and Sports-Related Gatherings</i>					
13	Temporary active sports facilities in plazas			X	
14	LED screen for displaying sporting events			X	

