

PUBLIC WORKS & GANG REDUCTION  
TRANSPORTATION

MOTION

As a result of the economic tumult resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses have taken a beating. As the contours emerge of what the next phases of public health orders will look, many small business owners are struggling to imagine how their enterprises will survive. One industry that will surely struggle with continued physical distancing rules is the restaurant industry — and the City needs to consider how it can help the industry alive, businesses thriving, and workers employed.

Most restaurants, even popular spots in the LA food scene, survive on thin margins. If restaurants reopen for dine-in service under distancing rules that shave their seating capacity dramatically, they will not likely survive. The impact to Los Angeles economy would be extreme. Prior to the current crisis, the restaurant industry had faster job growth than any other sector of the city's economy, employing more than 125,000 people and increasing 3.3% per year. Restaurant workers are among the most economically vulnerable in the city, with an average annual income of barely \$22,000. The collapse of the restaurant industry would be catastrophic for the city's economy and ruinous for its workers. These effects would be particularly acute in communities of color, where hourly wage jobs provide a lifeline for immigrant families and minority-owned restaurants provide an important pathway to the middle class.

While many restaurants have quickly adapted to takeout and delivery-only business models, returning to profitability and full employment will depend on restoring dine-in service. However, until there is a vaccine, physical distancing requirements are likely to require restaurants to cut indoor dining room capacity by 50% or more—far below what is required for profitability. There is an urgent need for innovative ways to expand dining capacity or neighborhoods will lose beloved local institutions and Los Angeles will lose one of its defining cultural assets. Temporarily allowing restaurants to use some available space in the public right of way is a relatively simple and cost-effective way of boosting their capacity and helping them survive.

As other sectors of the economy continue to telecommute, lower traffic volumes are likely to persist even as the economy starts to recover. Furthermore, with lower occupancy, restaurants will need less parking for customers. The City should create opportunities to repurpose underutilized street space and parking lots to support the economic survival and recovery of the restaurant industry. Expanding outdoor dining will help restaurants return to profitability, restore staffing levels and incomes for workers, and provide customers with a healthier and safer dining environment consistent with public health guidelines.

The City's existing sidewalk dining program offers one model for allowing restaurant expansion into the public right-of-way, but few sidewalks are wide enough to meet requirements and

restaurants report that the permitting process is cumbersome and expensive. Other programs, such as LADOT's People Street, convert underutilized roadways into parklets and pedestrian plazas, but don't currently allow for table service. A new program is needed that combines the best attributes of these existing programs, but is also flexible and affordable for struggling restaurants with limited funds and unique space constraints. The City should act urgently to adapt these programs to meet the current needs of the restaurant industry and ensure that they are available in time for the resumption of dine-in service.

**I THEREFORE MOVE** that the City Council direct the Department of Transportation (LADOT) and Bureau of Engineering (BOE) to report back with a streamlined and affordable program for permitting restaurants to provide dine-in service within the public right-of-way that can be launched as soon as allowed by public health rules.

**I FURTHER MOVE** that the City Council direct the Department of City Planning to report back with recommended actions to temporarily suspend parking requirements and other applicable codes to allow for the conversion of private parking lots to dining space at existing restaurants.

PRESENTED BY:



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SECONDED BY:

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