

# Sidewalk Cafes

Sidewalk cafes on City streets can be a great way to encourage walking, add vitality to the street, and promote local economic development. Sidewalk seating associated with an adjacent business requires a Right-of-Way Occupancy Permit for Sidewalk Cafes. This sidewalk café permit accommodates permanent structures, such as awnings and bolted railings and allows the sidewalk café to operate year-round. Refer to tip sheet G-501 if you are interested in a Temporary Sidewalk Cafe.

## Permitting

- Application
- Site plan
- Certificate of Liability Insurance from an authorized representative of your insurance company
- Proof of ownership and proof signature authority



## How do I get started?

1. Review the site location and identify if the business is located on an arterial street.
2. Layout a site plan of your proposed sidewalk café and identify other items in the sidewalk and outside of the sidewalk. Think about how the sidewalk café will be accessible and detectable per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines.
3. Think about what types of changes you'll need to make to the building or property to accommodate your use. A Building Permit may be required if you are affixing anything to the building or sidewalk.
4. If you wish to extend your liquor license to include the sidewalk café, you will be responsible for obeying all City and State laws and ordinances, including those established by the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (WSLCB). They can be contacted at: WSLCB,

3000 Pacific Avenue SE, Olympia, WA 98504  
(360) 664-1600.

5. You are responsible for meeting the requirements of the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department. You may contact them at [food@tpchd.org](mailto:food@tpchd.org) or (253) 798-4711.
6. Consider meeting with City staff in person prior to submitting an application. Staff can help with questions and can also meet you at the property.

## Review Process Steps

1. Apply for a Sidewalk Café online at [TacomaPermits.org](http://TacomaPermits.org) and attach all necessary information (see above).
2. If you're proposing to make structural changes to the building, such as attaching an awning or deck to the building, you must obtain additional permits from Planning and Development Services at (253) 591-5030.
3. If you are installing signage, railings, canopies, decks, or other appurtenances, a Work Order Permit will be required for construction. The permit application is available at [TacomaPermits.org](http://TacomaPermits.org)
4. Your application will be evaluated by City departments for approvals, including traffic, fire, and utilities.
5. When all of the above requirements are met and approvals are final, the permit document will be routed for signatures which will complete the permit process.

## General Guidelines

The guidelines for sidewalk cafe design and placement of tables and chairs are general in order to encourage variety by the individual restaurant owner. Each approved sidewalk cafe shall:

- Directly abut the restaurant so patrons and servers do not cross the flow of sidewalk pedestrian traffic.
- Be adjacent to the restaurant's property (frontage or side).
- Leave sufficient unobstructed sidewalk width for the comfortable passage of pedestrians. This will be a minimum clearance of 5-feet on non-arterial roads and a minimum of 7-feet on arterials along the full length of the sidewalk café. Areas of high pedestrian volumes, such as those near intersections, may require additional clearance. Areas adjacent to angle parking must allow for a



*Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.*

*The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.*

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) (253) 591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).

TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

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2-foot buffer from the curb. See Site Plan Requirements below for details.

- Provide a site plan with proper dimensions between café footings, railings, curb, and obstructions.
- Provide a detailed site plan of the sidewalk café with proper dimensions of tables, chairs, and other accessories.
- Be configured so that all tables, chairs and attachments can be completely removed within 24 hours, if required. However, the railings and tables must be secured in place.
- Pedestrian pathways should be in a straight line and don't require people to jog in and out of cafes or around obstructions.
- Sidewalk cafés will not require a change to the occupancy permit for the associated business, provided the following standards are met:
  1. The total area of the sidewalk café is less than 75 square feet; or the total area of the sidewalk café is 75 square feet or more and a legal exit path can be provided directly to the public place.
  2. If the total area of a sidewalk café is 75 square feet or more and the only legal exit path is through the establishment, a City of Tacoma Development Services review is required. If City of Tacoma Development Services determines that interior alterations are needed to provide sufficient exiting, then a building permit application for the alterations permit will be required.
  3. Any sidewalk café less than 75 square feet must have egress directly to the public place. The egress must be free of obstructions, including gates of any type.
- Fencing must be between 30 and 42 inches in height, or 42 inches required by the WSLCB.
- Fencing must be detectable by cane.
- Fencing must be generally transparent, and constructed of high-end materials such as steel, glass, finished wood, rope, chain, and/or landscaping. No unfinished or pressure treated wood will be allowed. No plastic will be allowed.
- Sidewalk cafes must comply with noise standards set forth in Tacoma Municipal Code 8.122.
- Not block access to Fire Department connections, sewer, water, gas valves, or exits from adjacent buildings.

- Hold a valid business license.
- Have a Washington State liquor license if liquor is to be served.

## Site Plan Requirements:

In order to review your application in a timely manner, it is important that special attention to the development of site plan is provided. To assist with development of your site plan, ***please check off the following minimum requirements prior to submittal, acknowledging that the site plan addresses all requirements:***

- Label the property address, business name, street names, and north arrow.
- Show and label all existing sidewalk obstructions (such as fire hydrants, tree wells, street furniture, street lights, bike racks, utility covers and poles).
- Show the proposed sidewalk café layout, including the number of tables and chairs, umbrellas, railings, and utility connections.
- Provide accurate dimensions between the railing, if proposed, or the table and chairs, if no railing, and all sidewalk obstructions. The minimum allowed sidewalk clearance is 5 feet on a non-arterial street and 7 feet on an arterial street.
- Provide accurate dimensions within the sidewalk café, such as distance to the building and front door. (How much space do patrons have to walk around tables/chairs?)
- If you are proposing a railing or stanchions, show the style of railing or stanchion.
- If you are adding a deck or affixing something to the sidewalk, explain how that will be done and what it looks like.

## Renewal and Operating Requirements

Once your sidewalk cafe has been approved you may renew it annually by:

1. Submitting the \$90 annual renewal fee; and
2. Maintaining a current business license; and
3. Maintaining valid liability insurance policy with the City named as an additional insured.

## Applicable Codes and Regulations

2015 *International Building Code (IBC)*  
2015 *International Existing Building Code (IEBC)*  
2015 *International Fire Code (IFC)*  
2009 ICC A117.1 *Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities*  
Title 2 Buildings, Title 11 Model Traffic Ordinance, and  
Title 13 Land Use *Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC)*

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