

Background and Context Setting

Sidewalk cafes and outdoor patios add life to Downtown streets, business districts and main streets. Operation of a sidewalk cafe within a public road right of way requires permit approvals from the City and outside agencies if food handling and/or alcohol beverages will be served.

In 2012, concerns were expressed by applicants that Sidewalk Cafe approvals were taking an inordinate amount of time. Responding to this concern Administration examined a number of similar sized cities in Canada and provided a list of best practices that can be incorporated in our sidewalk cafe Guidelines and approval process to Executive Committee for information.

Following Executive Committee's endorsement, Administration advanced the Sidewalk Café Strategy to streamline the sidewalk cafe permitting processes and updated the Cafe Guidelines to enhance the quality of the cafe environment and applicants' experience. The strategies and specific changes are detailed in Attachments 1 and 2 of the April 15, 2013 Sustainable Development report 2013SCP013.

Why is this report here?

This report examines the 18 Sidewalk permit applications in 2013 and highlights the findings of the first full year operating under the revamped Sidewalk Cafe Program, with regard to cafe type applications and approval times. The intent is to determine whether or not the changes made by the Cafe types were successful and what can be still done to improve the process. Attachment 1 identifies the applications by cafe type (minor or major) and how many working days it takes for approval.

A Minor Sidewalk Cafe is defined as consisting of eight seats located adjacent to a business (or curb with adequate setbacks) and does not serve alcohol beverage. Additional parking is not required.

A Major Sidewalk Cafe provides for table service and may serve alcohol beverages within a fenced area in accordance with the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission requirements. A Sidewalk Cafe Licence is required by Transportation Operations to use the sidewalk.

What has happened to date?

The streamlined process and café type identification has reduced the average waiting time of all permit approvals from six to eight weeks in 2012, to just under three weeks for minor café type approvals and just over four weeks for major café type approvals in 2013. As a result 16 café applications were approved in 2013, resulting in an additional 200 seats being created for the patio season.

Who are the key Stakeholders?

The key stakeholders in this initiative involve the applicants or adjacent business owners, the City as owner/administrator of city sidewalks and as policy maker, and the public as user of the facility and the sidewalks.

What are their points of view?

Discussions with applicants and business owners during revision to the Sidewalk Cafe amendments and early implementation outlined the steps, how long it takes for permit approval, and the setback restrictions. Timely approval allows applicants to establish the cafe facility early to secure required furniture and capture the full cafe season.

The City has a stake in ensuring pedestrian safety, adequate access, enhancing the pedestrian environment and implementing City policies and standards.

The public, as end user, will benefit from more public places that they can safely relax and enjoy an active street life.

Why is this an important issue?

Implementation of the Sidewalk Cafe Strategies and approval of cafe permits in a timely manner will enhance social and economic activities, add vibrancy to street life and nurture a patio culture in Edmonton.