



Takoma Park City Council Meeting – November 18, 2020 Agenda Item 3

Work Session

Resolution Supporting Small Businesses and Advancing Public Health by Allowing the Continued Use of Public and Private Space for Outdoor Seating, Sales, and Customer Pickup on Laurel Avenue and other Locations

Recommended Council Action

Consider a resolution to Support Small Businesses and Advancing Public Health by Allowing the Continued Use of Public and Private Space for Outdoor Seating, Sales, And Customer Pickup

Context with Key Issues

On June 3, 2020, Council approved the use of public space including sidewalks, roads, on-street parking and parking lots for outdoor dining and curbside pickup to assist Takoma Park's businesses, employees, and residents to continue to function under the public health emergency restrictions. In support of Takoma Park's small businesses, the Council authorized the closure of the northbound side of Laurel Avenue for outdoor seating, sales, and customer pick-up, beginning June 12, 2020 until December 31, 2020. The southbound lane of Laurel Avenue, the median, and the operation of the US Post Office on Laurel Avenue remain unchanged.

One lane on Laurel Avenue was closed on June 12, 2020 with adherence to County and State requirements for masks and social distancing. Two restaurants have outdoor seating for their customers and one restaurant has provided tables available to the general public. Customers also bring carryout from other Old Takoma restaurants to use the outdoor seating on Laurel. The City and the Old Takoma Business Association have coordinated the installation of an artistic traffic barrier at the alley into the parking lot and the addition of Adirondack chairs in the median area. The City already had in place the Outdoor Café Seating permit, which allows an individual business to apply to use the public space in front of their establishment.

Staff, in cooperation with OTBA and the businesses on Laurel Avenue, recommend an extension of the use of public space as the public health restrictions continue to impact businesses. Covid cases are on the rise in Montgomery County and Maryland. Effective November 10, Montgomery County Executive, Marc Elrich, issued Executive Order 122-20 that reduces limits for restaurants to 25% of capacity. The restaurants are investing in tents and outdoor heaters to enable the continued use of the outdoor space through the winter months, with support from Montgomery County's Reopen Montgomery Program grants. For the last several months, the comments on the feedback survey for the Laurel Avenue are generally positive as people have adapted to the changed traffic patterns.

Council Priority

- A Livable Community for All – Further efforts related to racial equity
- Environmentally Sustainable Community
- Engaged, Responsive & Service-oriented Government
- Community Development for an Improved and Equitable Quality of Life

Environmental Considerations

The closure of the north-bound lane on Laurel Avenue has led to an observable increase in pedestrian and biking in the public space and the feedback survey indicates that many people walk to the area, which may reduce vehicle emissions.

Fiscal Considerations

The survival of the businesses in Takoma Park ensures continued employment, maintains the value of the commercial properties, allows for the payment of rents and taxes, and enhances the circulation of money in the local economy. There will be no additional costs to extend the closure of Laurel Avenue.

Racial Equity Considerations

The authorization to continue to allow the use of public space for businesses is not expected to have a disproportionate impact on any racial group. Residents, visitors, customers and business owners of all races and backgrounds participate in the use of public space on Laurel Avenue.

Attachments and Links

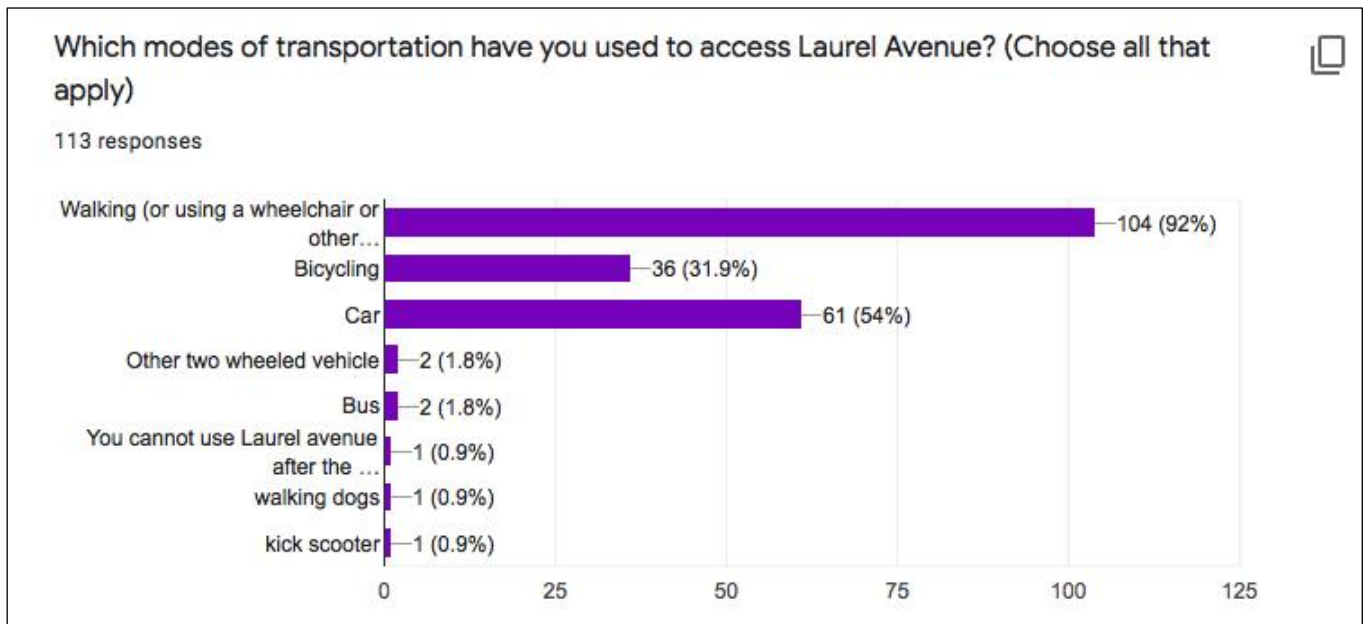
- [Resolution 2020-13: Supporting Small Businesses and Advancing Public Health by Allowing the Use of Public and Private Space for Outdoor Seating, Sales and Customer Pickup](#)
- Laurel Avenue Closure feedback survey summary
- City website page: Use Of Public Space: Covid-19 Response- Re-Opening Phase I <https://takomaparkmd.gov/initiatives/project-directory/use-of-public-space-covid-19-response-re-opening-phase-i/>
- Draft Resolution 2020-XX: Supporting Small Businesses and Advancing Public Health by Continuing the Laurel Avenue Street Closure

Community Survey Results for Closure of Laurel Avenue During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The following is a summary of results from a survey regarding the closure of Laurel Avenue. The survey was made available to the public in June and as of November 12, 2020 the survey has been completed by 113 respondents.

Seventy-six respondents (67.3%) indicated they are residents and 37 (32.7%) said they were not residents. When asked “Have you used Laurel Avenue during its closure?” 102 (90.3%) of respondents stated that they have used Laurel Avenue during the closure.

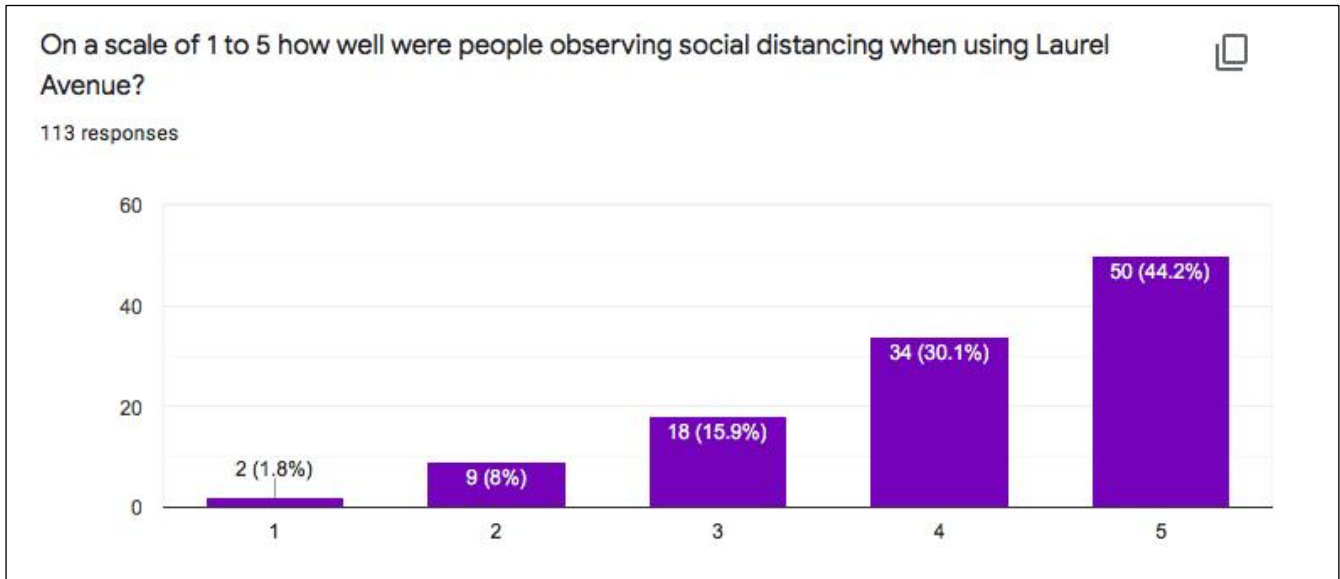
Respondents have accessed Laurel Avenue in different ways: 92% of respondents stated that they have accessed the space while walking or by wheelchair; 54% have accessed the space via car; and 32% have accessed the space via bicycle.



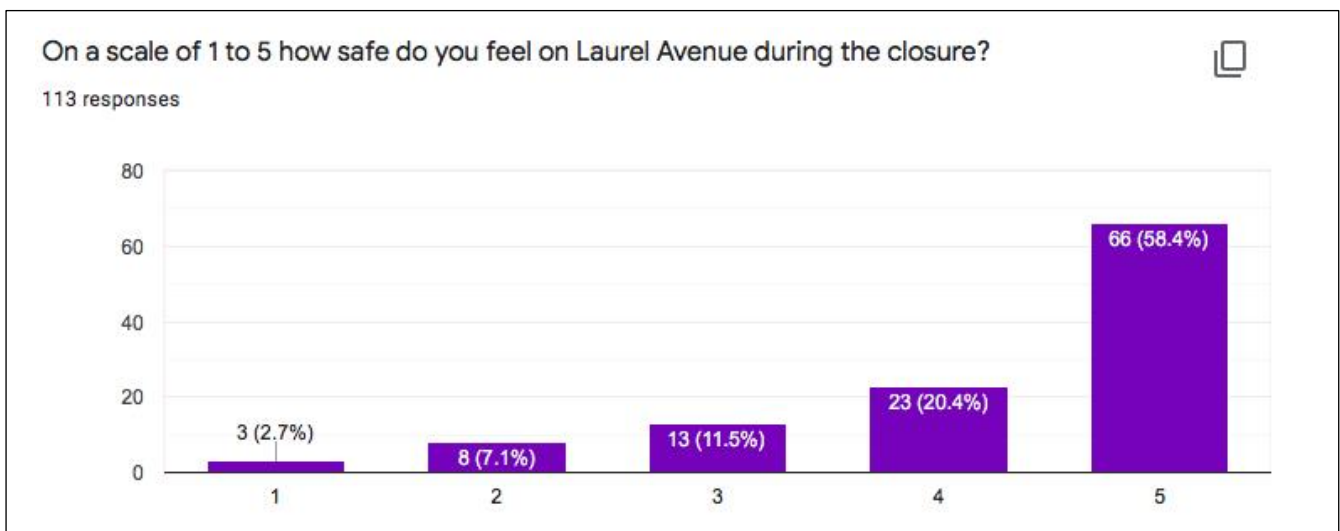
When asked “Have you observed any issues as a result of Laurel Ave’s closure?” 65.5% of respondents stated that “no issues were observed”, 20.4% stated that people were not observing physical distance guidelines, 17.7% stated “driver confusion”, and 10.6% stated there was increased traffic on adjacent streets. From June – September, 31 out of 69 respondents (45%) stated they observed/experienced issues with the Laurel Ave closure. Since September, 9 out of 44 respondents (20%) reported observing/experiencing issues with the Laurel Ave closure.

When asked, “Have you observed any impacts of the Laurel Avenue closure on adjacent streets?” 77.9% of respondents stated that they observed no issues, 11.5% stated “driver confusion”, 7.1% stated “speeding cars”, and 4.4% stated “parking violations”.

When asked “On a scale of 1 to 5 how well were people observing social distancing when using Laurel Avenue?” 44% of respondents stated 5, 30% stated 4, and 16% stated 3. From June – September, the average answer received from respondents was 3.8. From September – Present, the average answer received from respondents was 4.5.

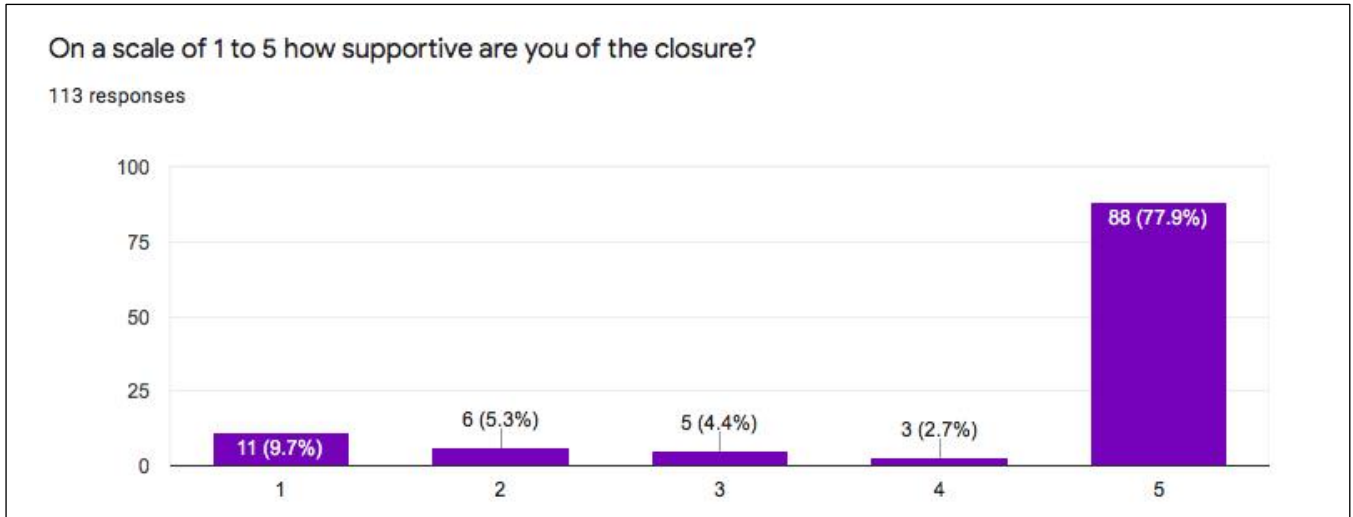


When asked “On a scale of 1 to 5 how safe do you feel on Laurel Avenue during the closure?” 58.4% of respondents stated 5, 20.4% stated 4, 11.5% stated 3, 7.1% stated 2, and 2.7% stated 1. From June – September, the average answer received from respondents was 3.9. From September – Present, the average answer received from respondents was 4.7.



When asked “On a scale of 1 to 5 how supportive are you of the closure?” 77.9% of respondents stated 5, 2.7% stated 4, 4.4% stated 3, 5.3% stated 2, and 9.7% stated 1. From June

– September, the average answer received from respondents was 4. From September –Present, the average answer received from respondents was 4.8.



When asked to optionally answer “Do you have any other comments not addressed in the above questions?” a few residents stated that they were displeased with the closure, stating it encouraged social gathering or that it over prioritizes the businesses. However, many residents openly seemed to support the closure and would even like to see both sides of Laurel Ave closed indefinitely for pedestrian access. Since September, when drivers were accustomed to the new traffic pattern, 21 out of 24 respondents who chose to answer this question stated that they were in support of the closure and many continued to advocate for closing the entire street.

Comments not addressed in survey questions (submitted after August 31 st)	
“Keep it going perpetually - this is a much better use of space.”	“Close more streets to pedestrians and bikers - make changes permanent”
“Great idea”	“People over cars! Keep it closed.”
“I think this should be permanent and also include the other side of the street.”	“make it permanent”
“Our city should be finding more innovative ways to encourage safe spaces for people to gather. With 3 parking lots within simple walking distance to Laurel Ave, there should be no need to worry about the loss of a few parking spaces, and traffic is never so bad that this is making life more difficult. Our lives are better when we can walk and safely feel part of a community. This street closure is a step towards that,	“Laurel avenue closure has been an amazing idea bringing the community closer while still maintaining social distance. It creates an incredibly festive downtown atmosphere that simply didn't exist prior. Plus, it promotes walking and pedestrian/bike safety and disincentives driving which from a climate change perspective is ideal. KEEP IT GOING! WOO!”

<p>and I encourage our city and business leaders to find additional opportunities for this.”</p>	
<p>“I live in Takoma DC, so am very nearby although not a resident of Takoma Park. I think it’s a great idea, and it makes me and my family feel much more comfortable patronizing the businesses in that stretch, knowing that we’ll have an outdoor area to eat or wait for each other. Please keep it as is!”</p>	<p>“The only reason I gave a "4" to how safe do you feel is that I think the other lane of traffic should be closed as well. I'll also add the Streeetry is *wonderful* for those of us with small children.”</p>
<p>“Love the Streeetry and honestly hope it becomes a permanent fixture. It’s a huge draw for the community. I frequent the businesses on Laurel almost daily because of the Streeetry.”</p>	<p>“We love the Streeetry and use it frequently. We hope you consider closing the other lane of traffic too, and making it permanent!!”</p>
<p>“My driving life is impacted dramatically, but it is totally worth given what is gained by the closure.”</p>	<p>“I love the Streeetry. Please keep it open. “</p>
<p>“Closing the street to allow for a community gathering space and extended commercial zone for restaurants was smart. It’s the best way to support our neighborhood businesses and community health. Do not change this for cars. Otherwise we will be crammed into the sidewalks only or face going inside - - neither of which makes sense during an ongoing pandemic and will almost certainly lead to negative health outcomes and business closures. I wish this street would stay permanently closed to encourage a safe walking, biking, and seating area in our community. While I technically live on the DC side and not Takoma Park MD, I have lived for 13 years just two blocks from the Street/downtown area. The street closure has made Takoma Park safer, more of a community, and more diverse. I have observed safe social distancing and mask wearing in the social area. If accessibility is an issue, we can figure out a way to better support a wider range of mobilities without falling back on cars ruling our streets and lives - there's got to be a compromise without eliminating the Laurel Ave closure and its value to our community. Some things should not go back to "normal" after the pandemic. The Laurel Ave closure is one of those revisions to our everyday lives and community that should stay now and into the future. “</p>	<p>“I don't believe the shops have suffered because we've lost one lane of traffic, I would argue we have gained tremendously, as was always the case pre-pandemic, by whom our neighbors are and, specifically with Takoma Beverage, what they are doing to their benefit that benefits us all.”</p>
<p>“Love the Streeetry and honestly hope it becomes a permanent fixture. It’s a huge draw for the community. I frequent the businesses on Laurel almost daily because of the Streeetry.”</p>	<p>“I support this being a permanent fixture in the city.”</p>

<p>"I think the closure is GREAT, at least for these times when traffic is lighter than usual. Speeding / disobeying traffic signs at Eastern and Laurel intersection have been common for years, especially with the frustration built up due to recent road work."</p>	<p>"I hope if and when the pandemic is over that the street will open again. The Farmer's market never closed even at the initial COVID onslaught, minimal if any social distancing and use of mask. We now avoid the area if we can, especially on Sundays"</p>
<p>As a local business owner, I am extremely grateful for the use of the space. As a resident, I've enjoyed a tiny bit of "normalcy" by having coffee outside, which feels like a life saver.</p>	<p>"I think the closure is an excellent move, and support making it permanent."</p>
<p>"The Streeterly supports the businesses, their employees and customers to the businesses on Laurel, their e"</p>	

The following is a list of results from optional self-identity questions at the end of the survey:

1. "What is your gender?"
 - a. 49% - Man
 - b. 46.1% - Woman
 - c. 2% - Nonbinary
 - d. 1% - Prefer not to answer
 - e. 1% - Family (answered jointly)
2. "How old are you?"
 - a. 43.3% - 25-44
 - b. 41.3% - 45-64
 - c. 15.4% - 65 or older
3. "Do you identify as someone with a physical disability?"
 - a. 95.1% - No
 - b. 4.9% - Yes
4. "Which of following best describes your race/ethnicity? Choose all that apply."
 - a. 93.6% - White
 - b. 7.4% - Hispanic/Latinx
 - c. 4.3% - Asian
 - d. 3.2% - Black or African American
 - e. 1.1% - Native American or Alaska Native

Introduced by:

CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

RESOLUTION 2020-XX

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES AND ADVANCING PUBLIC HEALTH BY ALLOWING THE CONTINUED USE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE FOR OUTDOOR SEATING, SALES, AND CUSTOMER PICKUP

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, Governor Larry Hogan issued the Emergency Order that required nonessential businesses to close and limited restaurant operations to carryout only; and these necessary health restrictions have had severe negative economic impacts to businesses, residents and local jurisdictions; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 cases are on the rise again in Montgomery County and Maryland and, on November 10, Governor Hogan announced a series of public health measures to slow the spread of the virus, including reducing the allowed capacity for indoor dining; and

WHEREAS, effective November 10, Montgomery County Executive, Marc Elrich, issued Executive Order 122-20 that reduces limits for restaurants to 25% of capacity.

WHEREAS, the Council, in Resolution 2020-13, Supporting Small Business and Advancing Public Health by Allowing the Use of Public and Private Space for Outdoor Seating, Sales and Customer Pickup, authorized the use of public space for businesses and the closure of the northbound side of Laurel Avenue for outdoor seating, sales, and customer pick-up, beginning June 12, 2020 until December 31, 2020; and

WHEREAS, City staff has worked with businesses, the business association and other stakeholders to address handicap parking, outdoor dining and curbside pickup, pedestrian safety and accessibility, bike access, and traffic patterns; and

WHEREAS, given the changing situation during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to react quickly to impacts, the extension of the authorization of temporary modification of the existing uses of public space including sidewalks, roads, on-street parking and parking lots for outdoor dining and curbside pickup would assist Takoma Park's businesses, employees and residents during this time; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of Takoma Park continues to support modifying existing uses of public space including sidewalks, roads, on-street parking and parking lots for outdoors dining and curbside pickup to assist Takoma Park's businesses, employees, and residents during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council directs the City Manager to work with key stakeholders including residents, businesses, and business associations to identify, implement and modify changes such as the use of sidewalks, on-street parking and parking lots to assist Takoma

Park's businesses, employees, and residents; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council authorizes the continued closure of the northbound lane of Laurel Avenue, as well as consideration of other locations, for outdoor dining and curbside pickup if determined to be beneficial in creating safe spaces while protecting public health; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution will be reviewed by June 30, 2021 by the City Council to determine if it should be continued or modified.

Adopted this ____ day of December, 2020.

ATTEST:

Jessie Carpenter, CMC
City Clerk