



Takoma Park City Council Meeting – July 21, 2021 Agenda Item 10

Work Session

Discussion of continuation of the Laurel Avenue streetery

Recommended Council Action

Approve the Resolution Supporting Small Businesses by Allowing the Continued Use of Public and Private Space for Outdoor Seating, Sales, and Customer Pickup

Context with Key Issues

Council approved Resolutions 2020-13 and 2020-28, authorizing the use of public space to assist Takoma Park's businesses, employees, and residents in response to the public health emergency restrictions. The resolutions specifically included the closure of the northbound lane of Laurel Avenue. The southbound lane of Laurel Avenue, the median, and the operation of the U.S. Post Office on Laurel Avenue remain unchanged. The resulting Takoma Park Streetery, as the pedestrian plaza on Laurel Avenue is known, operates as a gathering space for informal and programmed uses and includes outdoor seating for the general public as well as customers of businesses located on Laurel Avenue. The closure is currently set to expire on September 30, 2021.

Though public health restrictions are abating, the new variants in Covid are currently causing an increase in case numbers in the region. Montgomery County reported an 84% increase in the last 14 days as of July 15. The community continues to safely use and enjoy the outdoor space on Laurel Avenue. The businesses and the business association have invested in amenities such as seating, tents and tables for public use and use by customers of the businesses there. The City partnered with the Old Takoma Business Association on the addition of seating in the median area and the installation of an artistic traffic barrier at the entrance.

Initial concerns about the closure of Laurel have been addressed: assurance of public space available for general use; provision of handicap parking; access to the U.S. Post Office; establishment of safe pedestrian and bike conditions; adherence to all current County and State requirements for masks, limits on the size of gatherings, and social distancing.

The Takoma Park Farmers Market, which operated on Laurel Avenue on Sundays prior to the coronavirus, has relocated to the parking lot behind the Laurel Avenue businesses. The lot provides more space for the Market for both farmers and customers. The Market currently has an arrangement with the property owner to use the space and plans to engage the owner for longer term use. The property owner has expressed his support of the Laurel Avenue closure.

Staff recommends the continuation of the closure of the northbound lane of Laurel Avenue with the closure automatically renewing on January 1 of each year for a period of twelve months, unless the City provides notice of intent to discontinue the use of the public space by July 1 of the previous year. This arrangement mirrors the agreement the City has with the Takoma Park Farmers Market, which has operated successfully in this manner for decades.

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. The feedback survey conducted in 2020 indicated that many people walk to the area, which may reduce vehicle emissions.

Fiscal Considerations

There are no additional costs to the City to extend the closure of Laurel Avenue. Local businesses in Takoma Park provide employment, maintain the value of the commercial properties, allow for the payment of rents and taxes, and enhance the circulation of money in the local economy.

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 ages, races and backgrounds currently participate in the use of public space on Laurel Avenue.

Attachments and Links

- 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 2021-XX Supporting Small Businesses by Allowing the Continued Use of Public and Private Space for Outdoor Seating, Sales, and Customer Pickup
- [Resolution 2020-28: Supporting Small Businesses and Advancing Public Health by Allowing the Continued Use of Public and Private Space for Outdoor Seating, Sales, and Customer Pickup](#)
- [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](#)

Introduced by:

CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

RESOLUTION 2021-XX

**SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES 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, 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, the Council, in Resolution 2020-28, affirmed support of the businesses and the Laurel Avenue street closure, and authorized the continued use of public space for businesses and the closure of the northbound side of Laurel Avenue for outdoor seating, sales, and customer pick-up, until September 30, 2021; 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 continuing uncertainty regarding the coronavirus and the need to react quickly to possible changes in public health regulations, the flexible use of public space including sidewalks, roads, on-street parking and parking lots for public gathering and outdoor dining would assist Takoma Park's businesses, employees and residents; and

WHEREAS, the Takoma Park Streetery has proven to be a very popular addition to the community, contributing to the vibrancy and appeal of the Old Takoma area and enjoyed by a wide range of people.

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; 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 as well as consideration of other locations, for

outdoor dining and curbside pickup if determined to be beneficial; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council authorizes the continued closure of the northbound lane of Laurel Avenue, with the closure automatically renewing on January 1 of each year for a period of twelve months, unless the City provides notice of intent to discontinue the use of the public space by July 1 of the previous year; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution will be reviewed periodically by Council to determine the usefulness of its continuance.

Adopted this ____ day of July, 2021.

ATTEST:

Jessie Carpenter, CMC
City Clerk