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City wants input on proposed changes on 'sidewalk cafes'

JOHN DEEM
Staff Writer
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The city of Winston-Salem is proposing changes to regulations for "sidewalk cafes" in the downtown business district.
ALLISON LEE ISLEY, JOURNAL

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As apartment development continues in downtown Winston-Salem, a growing number of residents find themselves nearer to nightlife.

And the noise that comes with it.

A surrender of solitude is one of the trade-offs for that kind of urban living, of course. But some downtowners have suggested the cacophony is out of control, particularly on pleasant nights when diners and drinkers take advantage of sidewalk seating.

Residents, business owners and customers will have a chance to weigh in on proposed changes to the city's rules governing "sidewalk cafés" in the downtown business district.

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"Sidewalk cafés help create the vibrant, walkable downtown environment that residents and visitors enjoy," said Jason Thiel, president of the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership.

But do existing regulations go far enough?

Thiel will moderate a pair of information sessions on possible ordinance updates Tuesday, Dec. 1, at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

“These public input sessions are an opportunity for business owners, downtown stakeholders and community members to learn about the proposed updates and share their perspectives,” he said.

What do current rules say?

Outdoor cafes may operate between 6 a.m. and 1 a.m. Sunday through Wednesday, and 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. Thursday through Saturday.

Other regulations include:

■ The business must front on and open onto the sidewalk where the cafe is proposed.

■ The cafe must leave at least 5 feet of unobstructed sidewalk for pedestrians.

■ Tables and chairs cannot block fire hydrants, entrances, exits, wheelchair ramps or emergency access.

■ A restaurant cannot extend its cafe beyond its own frontage without written permission from the adjoining property owner.

■ Outdoor seating cannot exceed 50% of the restaurant’s indoor seating capacity.

■ The cafe cannot operate when the restaurant itself is closed.

Proposed changes

Suggested amendments to the ordinance include:

• Defining when a sidewalk cafe is considered to be operating.

• Establishing specific closing procedures.

• Requiring furniture to be removed, secured, stacked or otherwise arranged after closing so that it is unavailable for public use.

• Clarifying businesses' responsibilities for preventing after-hours use and responding to unsafe or disruptive conduct.

• Creating a "progressive" enforcement process.

• Clarifying how violations are counted.

• Requiring sidewalk cafes to cease operation during suspension periods and establishing procedures for furniture removal following suspension or revocation.

• Authorizing immediate temporary closure in cases involving significant health or safety threats, loss of required insurance or permits, or other circumstances requiring closure by law.

The city encourages residents, business owners, property owners and other interested parties to attend and share their feedback on the proposed revisions.

For more information, contact the Winston-Salem Office of Economic Development at 336-7477472 or email **kenm@city-ofws.org**.

John Deem covers the Triad for the Winston-Salem Journal and Greensboro News & Record. Contact him at **john.deem@lee.net**

