

City of Richmond

# Sidewalk Café Design Guidelines

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A Placemaking Initiative of the  
City of Richmond  
Department of Planning & Development Review  
November 2012



Dwight C. Jones, Mayor



**Storefront** for Community Design

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## Authority

These Sidewalk Café Design Guidelines are promulgated in accordance with Chapter 90, Article II, Division 10 of the City of Richmond Code of Ordinances. The design guidelines were adopted by resolution of the City Planning Commission on November 19, 2012, and may be amended from time to time by Commission resolution.

## Definition

Sidewalk café means any group of tables, chairs or other seating fixtures and all related appurtenances maintained within the public sidewalk and intended for the purpose of consumption of food or beverage by patrons, when such is located adjacent to a food or beverage service establishment having the same operator. A sidewalk café shall not be considered an “encroachment” as defined in Article I of Chapter 90 of the City of Richmond Code of Ordinance so long as all outdoor facilities related thereto are temporary in nature, are not permanently affixed so as to extend below, on or above the sidewalk, involve no penetration of the sidewalk surface, are not attached to any building and are readily removable without damage to the surface of the sidewalk.

## More Information

For more information, visit <http://www.richmondgov.com/PlanningAndDevelopmentReview/SidewalkCafe.aspx>. At this website, applicants can access the Sidewalk Café Guidelines Ordinance, Sidewalk Cafés Design Guidelines and sidewalk café worksheets and application materials. Applicants may also contact the City of Richmond Department of Planning & Development Review by calling (804) 646-4169, or via email at [sidewalkcafe@richmondgov.com](mailto:sidewalkcafe@richmondgov.com).

## Purpose

Sidewalk cafés contribute to a vibrant urban culture and make Richmond streets more dynamic places to walk, socialize and dine. Sidewalk cafés are temporary dining areas that occupy part of the public right-of-way during eating establishment hours. This document is a guide to creating temporary sidewalk cafés that are safe and attractive to restaurant patrons and pedestrians.

The Sidewalk Café Design Guidelines provide acceptable dimensions for café access and for public right-of-ways, sidewalk café barriers, and the layout of outdoor service areas. The City of Richmond encourages the use of durable and high-quality outdoor furnishings and materials to increase the safety and comfort of residents and visitors of sidewalk cafés. The diagrams in this document illustrate examples of sidewalk café design and photographs show acceptable and unacceptable sidewalk café furnishings.

Sidewalk cafés enhance the public realm and motivate city and regional residents to patronize Richmond's eating establishments. Restaurant and café owners who offer sidewalk cafés shall comply by these guidelines, which are applicable in all city zoning districts where outdoor dining is a permitted use.

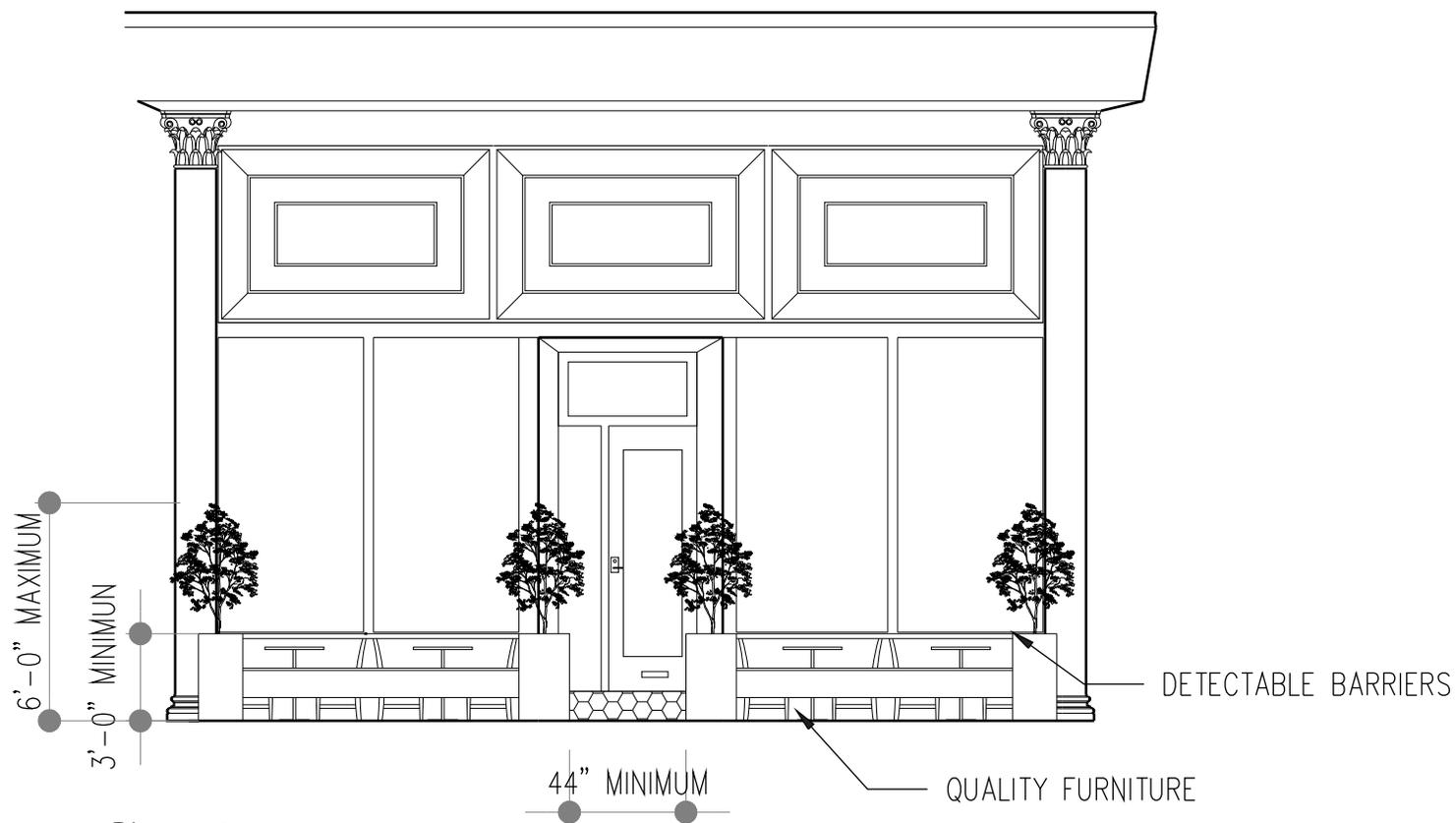


Image 1

Sidewalk cafés enhance the urban environment.

## Sidewalk Café Elements

Elements of a typical sidewalk café include: barriers, planters, tables, chairs, umbrellas, menu display, heat lamps, and access point. If wait service is not provided in the sidewalk café area, the eating establishment is required to supply a waste receptacle. If wait service is provided, the restaurant operator is not permitted to place a waste receptacle in the sidewalk café.



# Chapter 1 Barriers

## 1.1 Barriers Required

The perimeter of sidewalk cafés that extend more than 3 feet into the public right-of-way shall be enclosed by barriers that are durable, removable and maintained in good condition.

## 1.2 Sidewalk Cafés Serving Alcohol

Sidewalk cafés that serve alcohol must be surrounded by a barrier in all cases. Barrier access point must be controlled by the restaurant establishment. Restaurant and eating establishment owners should maintain compliance with Virginia Alcohol and Beverage Control standards for serving alcohol outside of enclosed businesses.

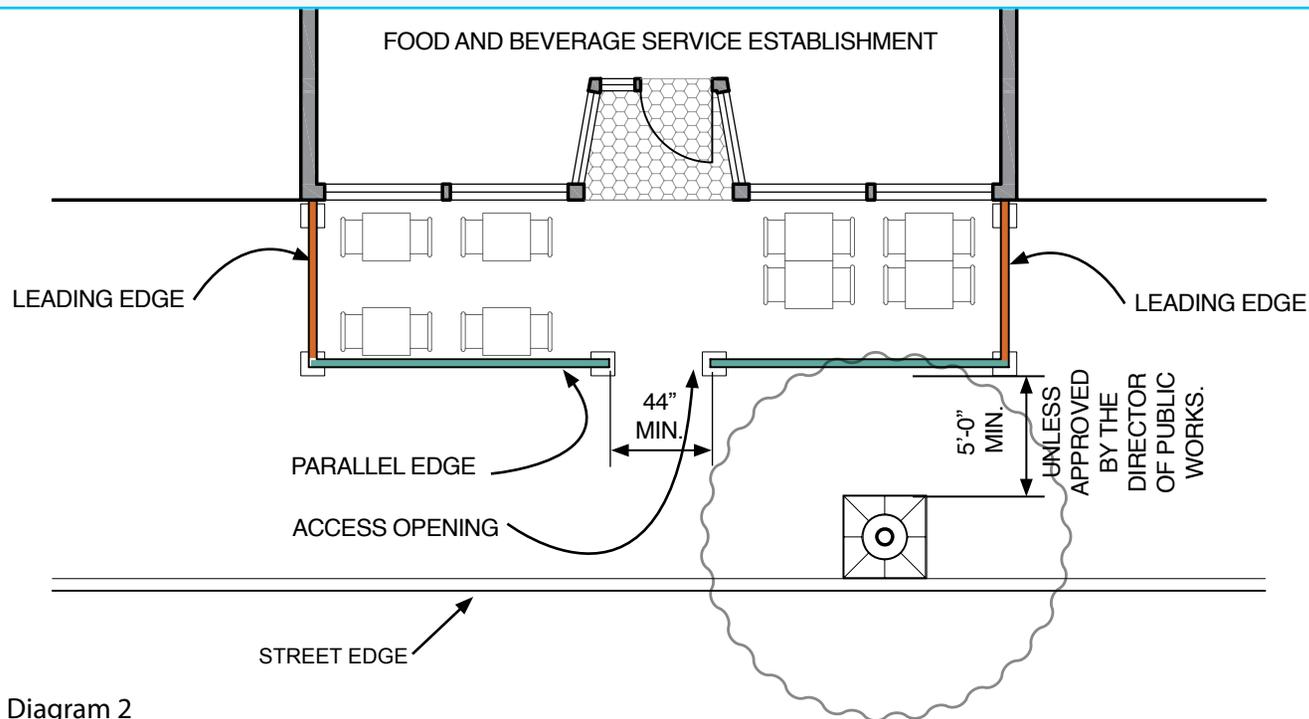


Diagram 2

Plan view of a sidewalk café that extends more than 3 feet or more into the sidewalk.

### 1.3 Barriers are Not Required:

Sidewalk cafés that extend 3 feet or less into the public right-of-way and do not serve alcohol are not required to be enclosed by a barrier.

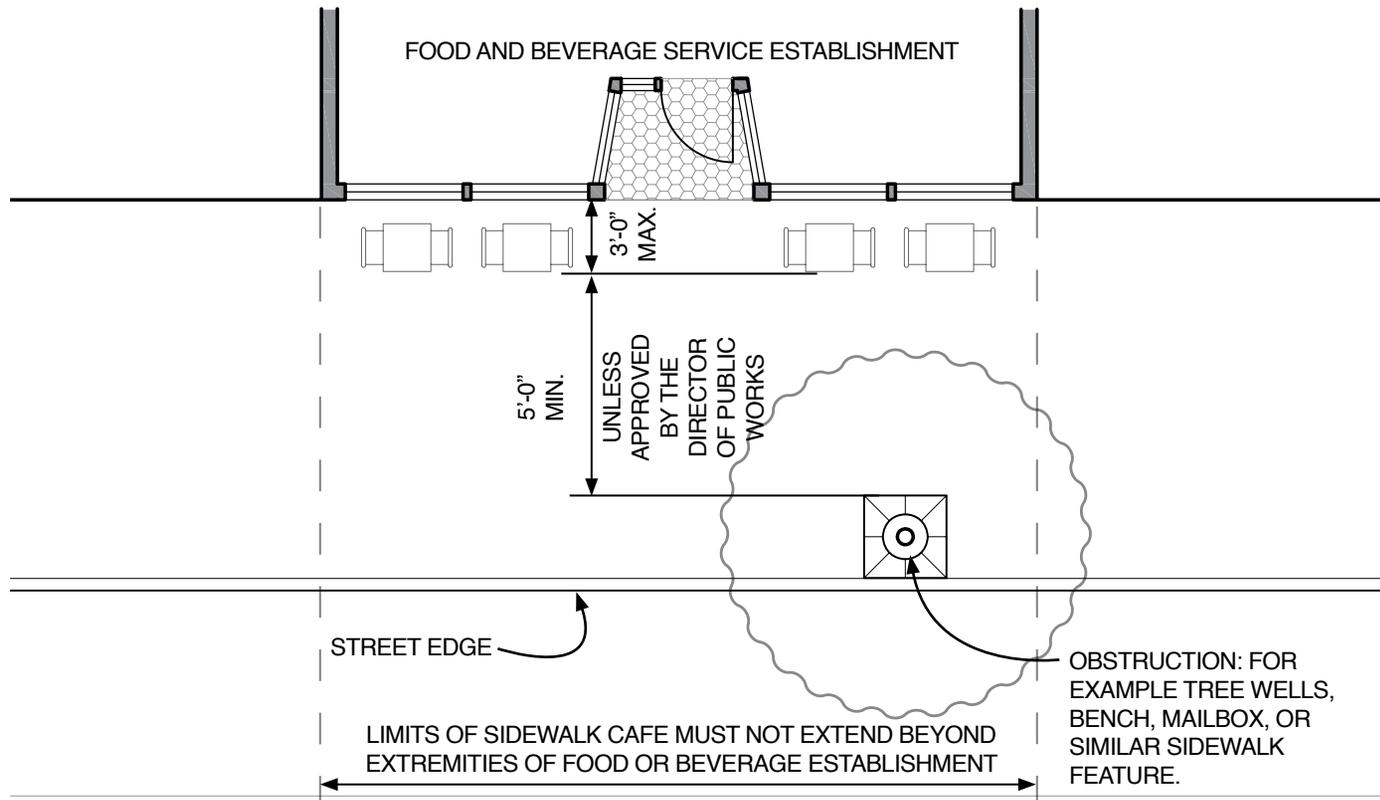


Diagram 3

Plan view of a sidewalk café that extend 3 feet or less into the sidewalk where *alcohol is not served*.

## 1.4 Barrier Design

Various styles of barriers are acceptable for sidewalk cafés. Generally barriers should be 36 inches in height, and must be free-standing, stable, and removable. Barrier segment bases should be flat with tapered edges that are between 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick.

### Types of barriers:

1. **Sectional Fencing:** Rigid fence segments may be placed end-to-end to create the appearance of a single fence. Footing shall be flat. Sectional fencing shall be composed of metal or wood and painted or finished in the owner's choice of color, subject to the approval of the Department of Planning & Development Review. Sectional fencing may be composed of aircraft cable, fabric, steel or iron elements.
2. **Planters:** Outdoor planters may be used as a barrier component and should be placed at the corners and entry of the sidewalk Café. Planters must be no more than 3 feet in height, shall be kept in clean condition, and shall be removed at the end of each business day.



Image 2

Sectional fence with flat footing.



Image 3

Planters used as café barrier elements.

## 1.4 Barrier Design, continued



Image 4-6

Examples of acceptable sectional barrier materials (from left to right, cable, wooden lattice and fabric barriers).



Image 7-9

Examples of planters used as barrier elements. From left to right: movable pots, planter boxes and flower boxes are acceptable barrier elements.

## 1.4 Barrier Design, continued

### Barrier qualities

1. Free-standing: Barriers must not be permanently attached to any structure or sidewalk.
2. Stable: A barrier must be well-balanced and difficult for pedestrians to topple, trip over or remove.

### Prohibited barrier materials

1. Chain link
2. Rope rails
3. Chain rails
4. Other materials. The use of materials for barriers that is not specifically designed as fencing, such as buckets, flag poles, newspaper stands and waste receptacles is prohibited.



Image 10-12

Examples of barriers and barrier elements that are not acceptable for sidewalk cafés. From left to right: unstable sectional fencing, rounded barrier bases, and waste receptacles are unacceptable barrier elements.

## 1.5 Barrier Measurements

The following barrier measurements should be utilized in order to guide pedestrian traffic and establish the separation of sidewalk cafés from the street:

### Height

Sidewalk café stanchions, posts and sectional fences shall not be less than 36 inches in height.

### Open Appearance

Sidewalk café fences shall allow patrons and pedestrians to see from the Café to the street and vice versa.

### Maximum Distance from Ground

The lowest point in the barrier should be no more than 6 inches in height. This is to ensure that visually-impaired pedestrians who use canes will note the barrier.



→ The barrier is 36 inches high.

→ The lowest point in the barrier may be no more than 6 inches in height.

Image 13

A sidewalk café should allow patrons and pedestrians to see from the café to the street and vice versa.

## 1.6 Access Openings

### Location

The access opening should be located along the front or parallel edge of the sidewalk café barrier. The access opening must be kept clear of other materials.

### Minimum Access Width

All access openings should measure no less than 44 inches in width.

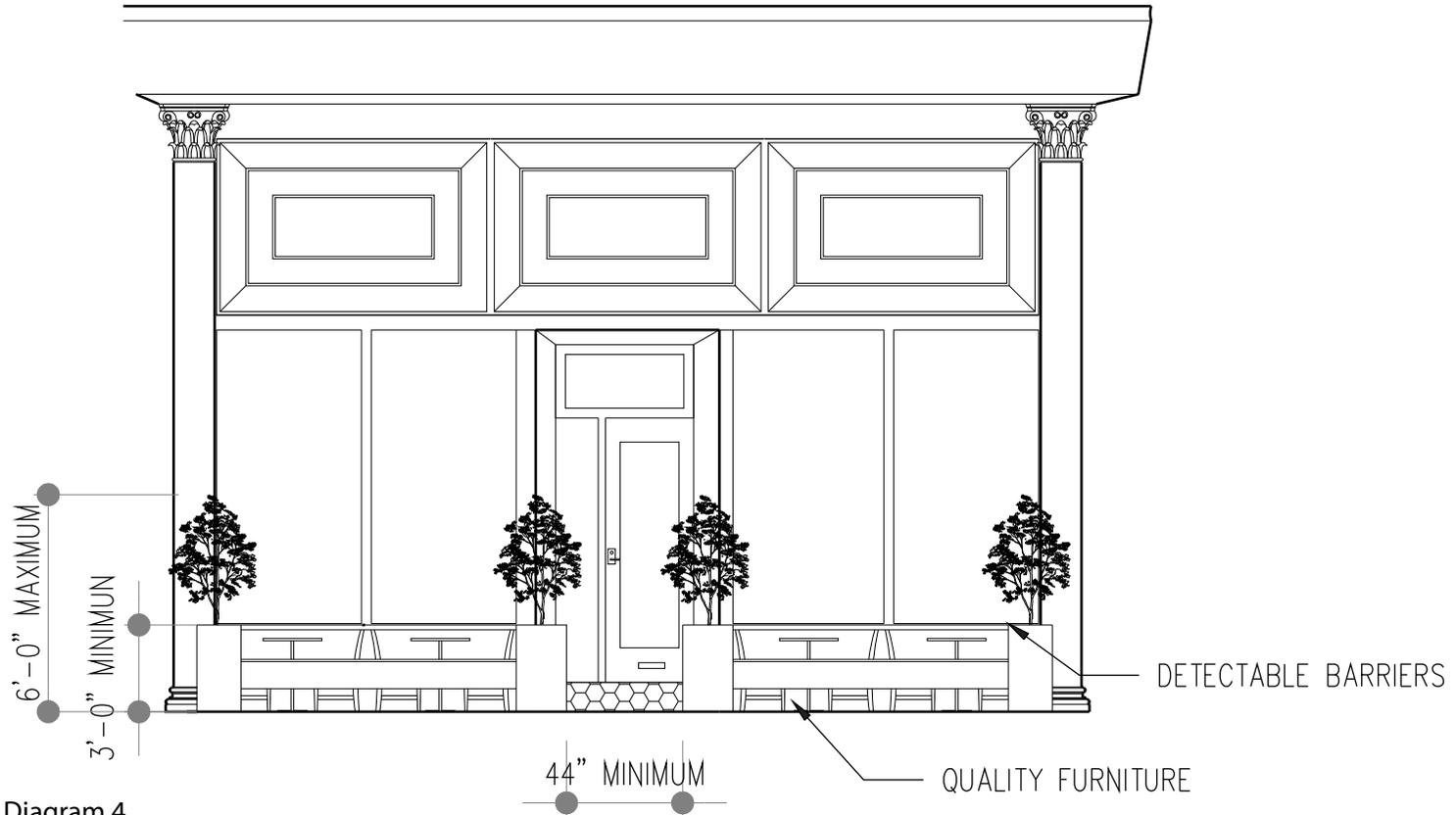


Diagram 4

Elevation view of a sidewalk café showing café elements and access opening.

## 1.7 Planters & Planter Boxes

Planters or planter boxes are appealing barrier elements in sidewalk cafés. Planters must be removable and stored after the close of business. Planters may be used in sidewalk cafés that do not have barriers to separate them from the public right-of-way, in cases where outdoor eating areas do not extend 3 feet or more into the sidewalk, and where no alcohol is served.

### Maximum Height

Planters may be no more than 3 feet in height; planted materials may be up to 6 feet tall. Planter boxes may be installed on 36 inch high barriers.

### Planted Materials

Planters and the plants they contain should be well-maintained and kept free of litter and debris. Planters shall contain living plants.



Image 14

Planters should be no more than 3 feet in height.

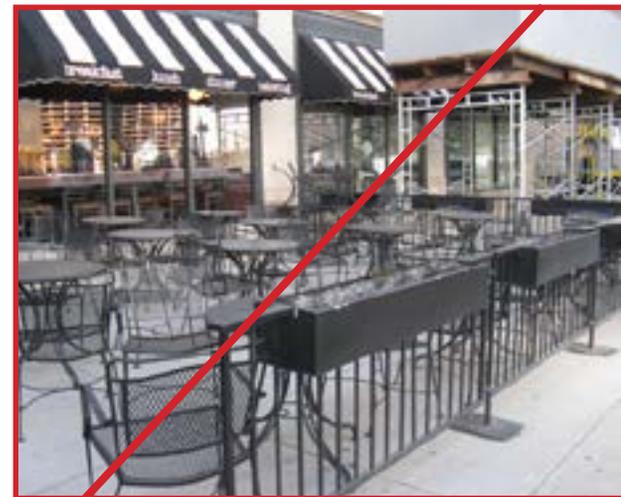


Image 15

Planter boxes must contain living plants.

## Chapter 2 Furniture & Fixtures

### Quality, Context & Variety

Sidewalk cafés bring pedestrians, economic investment, and liveliness to the street and visually enhance the urban environment. It is important for sidewalk cafés to utilize quality furniture and fixtures that contribute to the safety and attractiveness of the public realm. Furniture and fixtures must be durable and of sturdy construction; able to withstand severe weather without blowing over.

Sidewalk cafés influence the character of urban areas, and restaurant owners should be mindful of their surroundings when planning cafés. While a variety of tables, chairs and umbrellas are acceptable, operators are advised to consider the context of the neighborhood and nearby buildings when making decisions concerning furniture and fixtures. A range of furniture styles, colors and materials are permitted, however furniture and fixtures must be clean and free of fading, corrosion, splinters, dents, tears, and chipped paint. The following chapter is a guide to appropriate sidewalk café furniture and fixtures.



Image 16

Features such as decorative plants, attractive barriers, and quality furniture contribute to a dynamic urban aesthetic.

## 2.1 Discouraged Types of Furniture

### Prohibited Furniture

Sidewalk cafés are impermanent eating areas, and furniture that is permanently affixed to the sidewalk or exterior of a restaurant or café is prohibited. Tables, chairs, umbrellas, heat lamps, menu displays and barrier elements are the only acceptable outdoor furniture items. Waste receptacles are required only in sidewalk cafés that do not provide wait service; otherwise, waste receptacles are not permitted.

### Prohibited Café Elements

Shelves, serving stations, loud speakers, sofas, and televisions. Refer to Chapter 90, Article II, Division 10 of the City of Richmond Code of Ordinances, and see Section 90-280, Part C for a complete list of prohibited sidewalk café elements.

### Freestanding

Neither furniture nor other sidewalk café elements may be tied or otherwise secured to trees, lamp posts, street signs, hydrants at any time.



Images 17-19

Images of prohibited materials in sidewalk cafés: from left to right, flimsy plastic tables and chairs, unfinished wooden materials, and sofas are prohibited furniture types.

## 2.2 Tables

Tables must be functional and well-maintained. Tables may be any shape, but may not be over 36 inches in height. Table and chair colors are subject to Department of Planning & Development Review approval.

Smaller tables are encouraged, as they provide more layout flexibility. Square or rectangular tables can be combined to create a larger table if necessary. Table edges and corners should be rounded and safe for passing pedestrians.

**Encouraged table materials:** metals, finish grade woods, sturdy recycled materials

**Discouraged table materials:** breakable plastics, unfinished lumber



Images 20-22

Examples of acceptable sidewalk café tables, which may be a variety of shapes, materials and colors.

## 2.3 Chairs

### Durability

Chairs should be able to withstand weather factors such as sun and wind and remain in good condition. Chairs should be of sturdy construction. Chairs should not show evidence of deterioration or damage to structure or finishes.

### Fabrication

Chairs may be fabricated of metal, finish grade wood, or composite material. Chairs may incorporate fabric elements or may be upholstered, but must be maintained in clean condition. For upholstered chairs, water resistant textiles are strongly encouraged.

### Color

The color of chairs is the owner's choice, and subject to the approval of the Department of Planning & Development Review. Chairs may be painted, stained or unpainted in color, but must have surfaces that are properly finished such that there is no rust, splintering or other deterioration.



Images 23-27

Images of acceptable sidewalk café chairs.

## 2.4 Umbrellas

Functional and aesthetically pleasing, umbrellas provide shade and enclosure for patrons of sidewalk cafés. Umbrellas must be contained within the defined sidewalk café area. Square or rectangular market-style umbrellas are recommended for sidewalk cafés for space-efficient design.

### Height

When open, umbrella canopies should be between 7 and 10 feet tall.

### Materials & Design

Umbrellas should be suitable for outdoor patio use. Canvas is preferred. Umbrella colors are the owner's choice and should be compatible with the sidewalk café furniture. No lettering is permitted on sidewalk café umbrellas.

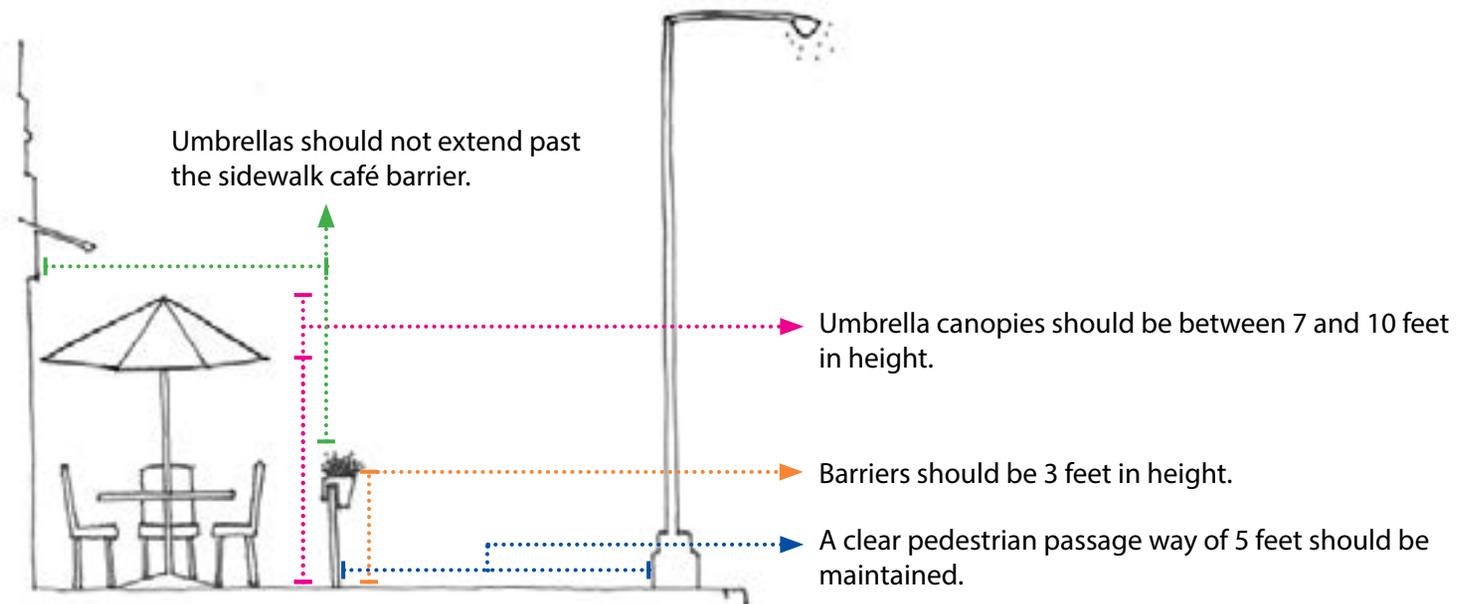


Image 28

Sidewalk café section. Drawing is not to scale.

## 2.5 Sidewalk Coverings

No alterations or coverings should be made to sidewalks or placed over the sidewalk café space. Platforms, artificial turf, paint, or carpet in sidewalk café areas are prohibited.

## 2.6 Signage & Displays

All signage and printed materials that are displayed must be within the sidewalk café area enclosure.



Image 29

Astroturf or any other sidewalk covering or treatment is prohibited in sidewalk café areas.



Images 30-31

Free standing menu displays are acceptable sidewalk café signage.

## 2.7 Circulation Room

### Outside Sidewalk Café

Sidewalk cafés must allow for a minimum of 5 feet of unobstructed pedestrian passage way on the sidewalk. The pedestrian passage way allowance may vary to a greater or lesser degree based on a determination of the Department of Public Works. No element of the sidewalk café, including umbrellas, plants, barriers or signage elements, may obstruct the pedestrian passage way. Light poles, tree wells, fire hydrants, and other items may not fall within the pedestrian path allowed between the curb and the leading edge of the sidewalk café.

### Inside Sidewalk Café

If sidewalk café barriers are utilized at dining area perimeters, a minimum of 3 feet should be allowed for patrons and waitstaff circulation inside the dining area. Waitstaff shall not serve patrons from outside of the café barrier.



Image 32

Eating establishment operators should ensure that 5 feet of pedestrian passage way is unobstructed from the edge of the café to permanent objects on the sidewalk or the back of the curb.

## 2.8 Setback from other Businesses & Residential Zones

Restaurant and café owners and managers should ensure that sidewalk cafés do not unreasonably obstruct the visibility of neighboring businesses. In such cases a sidewalk café operator will be required to adjust the layout of the outdoor dining area.

Sidewalk cafés must be a minimum of 100 feet of and fronting along the same street as property in a residential zoning district.



Diagram 5

Plan view of a sidewalk café in relation to the pedestrian passage way and adjacent businesses and residential zones.