

Outdoor Dining/Sidewalk Café and Retail Display Areas

Downtown Business Meeting
8:00 am – 9:30 am
Thursday, August 7, 2025



Today's Agenda

1. Quick Introductions and Meeting Purpose
2. Brief History of Outdoor Dining and Retail Display
3. Plan Area - where new standards would apply
4. Outdoor Dining/Sidewalk Cafes
5. Retail Display Areas on the Sidewalk
6. Tree Strip Zone
7. Q&A, Input, Other Comments/Considerations
8. Next Steps (Aug 25 City Council Study Session)

Brief History of Outdoor Dining and Retail Display Areas in San Carlos

- Since 1991: Municipal Code outlines operation, maintenance, and design standards for outdoor dining (sidewalk cafes) and retail display areas
- 2016: Temporary Pilot Program for On-Street Dining
- 2020: COVID parklets
- 2023: Permanent Closure of the 700 block of Laurel Street (Dec 11, 2023)
- 2025: Downtown Streetscape Master Plan (adopted April 28, 2025)
- Nov. 10, 2025: Adopt Downtown Specific Plan
 - standards for current condition of downtown, AND
 - standards *based on future streetscape improvements*

Meeting Purpose

Ultimate Goal: Establish standards for outdoor dining and retail display areas in the Downtown Specific Plan.

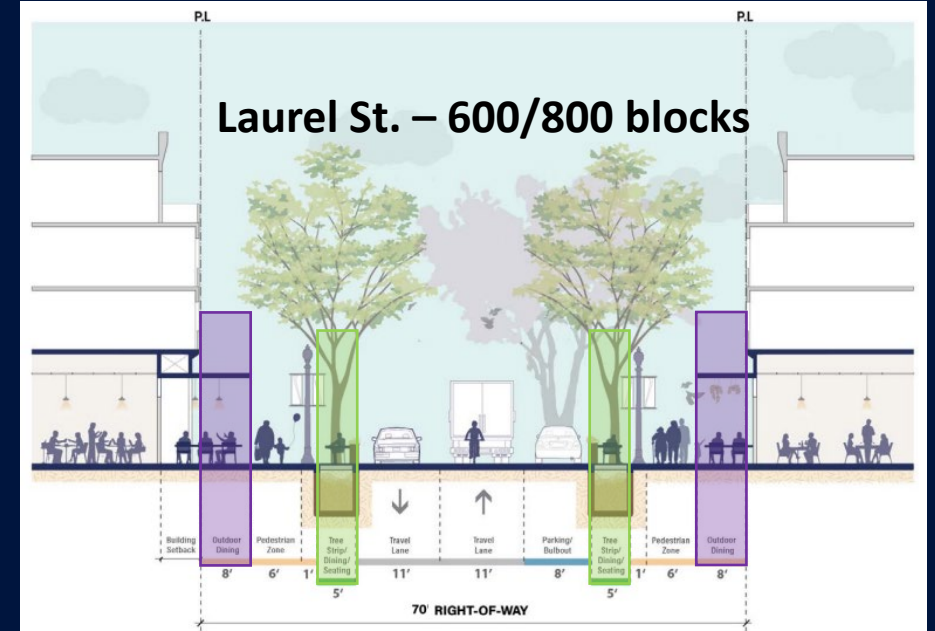
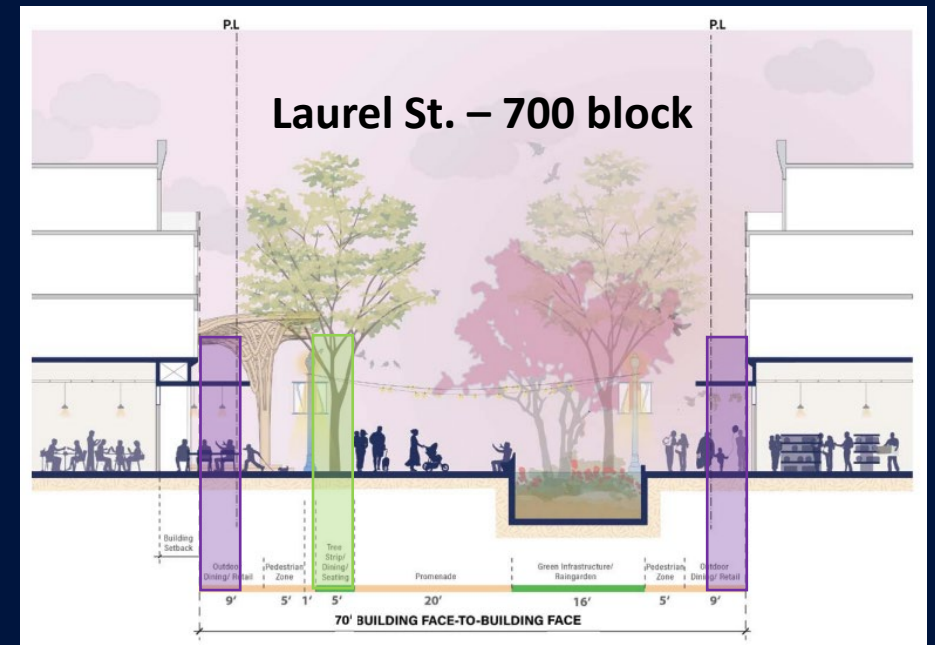
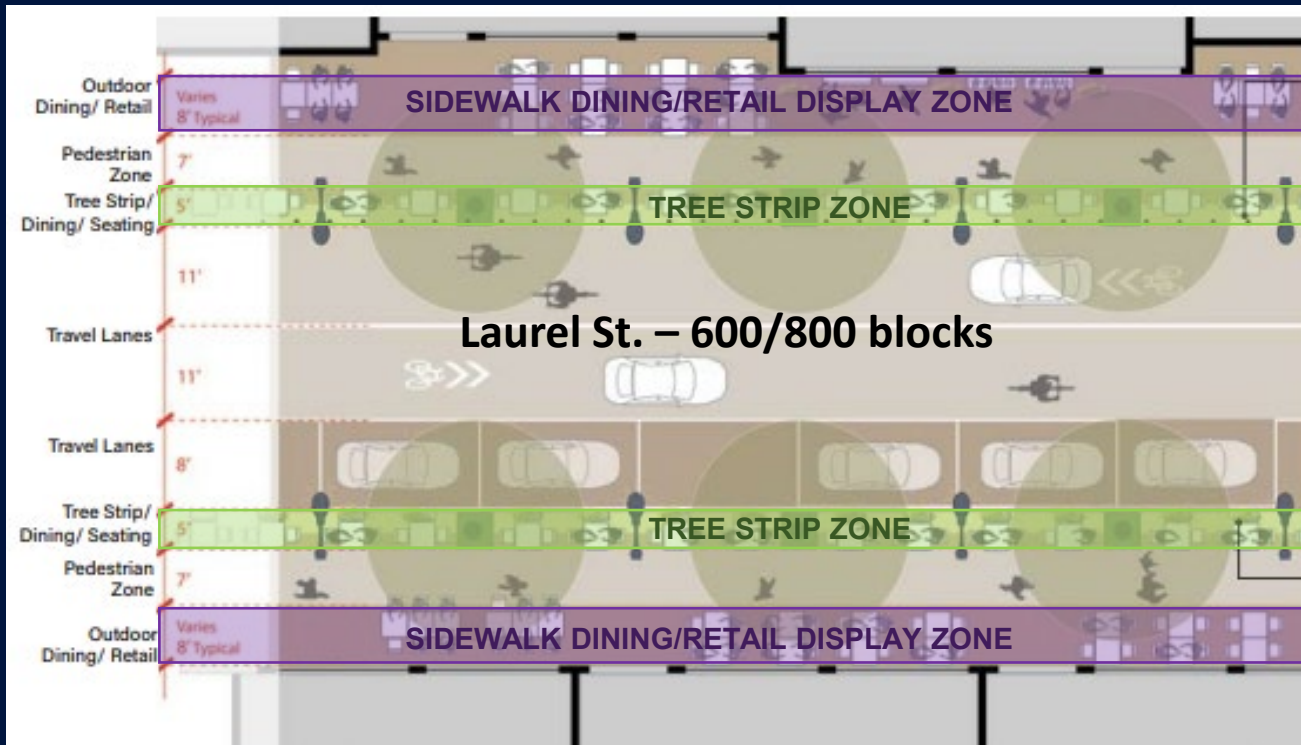
How we get there:

- ✓ To identify business needs / receive input from San Carlos downtown business operators.
- ✓ City Council to provide direction on Monday, Aug 25, 2025
- ✓ Downtown Specific Plan/Standards Adoption, Nov. 10, 2025

Downtown Specific Plan Area



Downtown Specific Plan Outdoor Dining and Retail Display Area locations



Future Sidewalk Cafe/Retail Display Areas



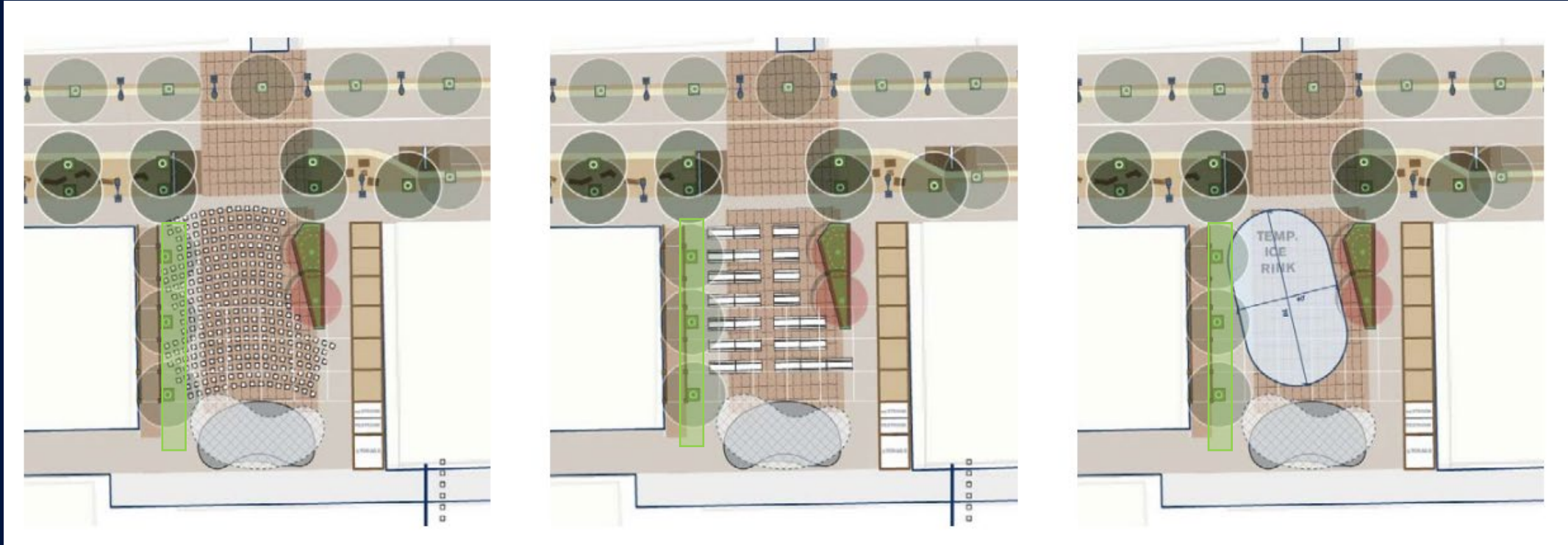
Sidewalk Café/Retail Zone:

- Laurel Street
 - 600 and 800 blocks: 8 feet from building face
 - 700 block pedestrian mall: 9 feet from building face
 - South of Arroyo: 4 feet minimum sidewalk clearance
- San Carlos Avenue: 8 feet from building face
- El Camino Real: 5 feet from building face



New Plaza in the 600 Block, Laurel

(between Blue Line and Paris Baguette)



- No dining/retail within the tree strip.
- Public seating in the plaza (except during special events).

Outdoor Dining/Sidewalk Cafe Areas

Outdoor Dining – Standards

OPERATION

- No amplified sound (live music/entertainment – Minor Use Permit)
- No outdoor cooking or open flames
- Portable heating devices subject to Fire approval
- No bussing stations or trash storage
- Okay to leave furnishings overnight
- No subleasing to another business

MAINTENANCE

- Business shall maintain area, adjoining street and gutter in neat, clean, orderly condition
- Dining activities shall not interfere with pedestrian zone, parking, or traffic
- Furniture must be kept in good condition; umbrellas shall be kept secure in windy conditions and shall be fire-treated

Outdoor Dining – Standards

- No permanent attachments and no permanent shelters over outdoor eating areas
- Barriers not required, but if desired they may include planter boxes (but no wrought iron fencing)
- Improvements and furnishings shall be commercial-grade and made for outdoor use
- Umbrellas shall be of a solid color (using City official color palette and white); no advertising or signage

Outdoor Dining – Standards

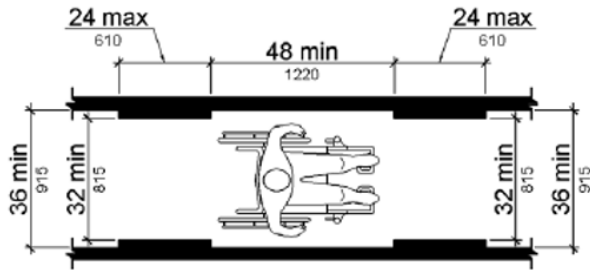
Permit outdoor dining furniture, umbrellas, and appurtenances to remain within the dining zone overnight

Provide more clarity that seating shall not have its back toward the pedestrian zone.

Prohibit subleasing of outdoor space (and from acquiring more space from your neighbor)



Outdoor Dining – Standards



Specify that outdoor dining shall comply with ADA access and clear zone requirements

Permit built-in overhead heaters on overhead trellis if they meet Fire Code



Emphasize that portable heaters must meet Fire Code and be set back from trees and flammable objects



Outdoor Dining – Standards

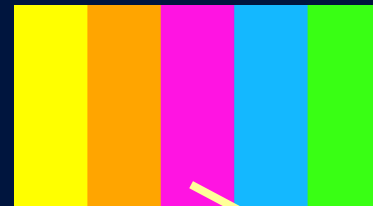
- No permanent attachments on the ground and no permanent shelters over outdoor eating areas











Outdoor Dining – Standards



Umbrellas to be solid color using San Carlos' Official Color Palette ***plus white*** (*no advertising or signage*).



But exclude neon and dayglow colors

Navy	
Gold	
Orange	
Coral	
Green	
Teal	
Sky	
Crimson	

Outdoor Dining – Standards

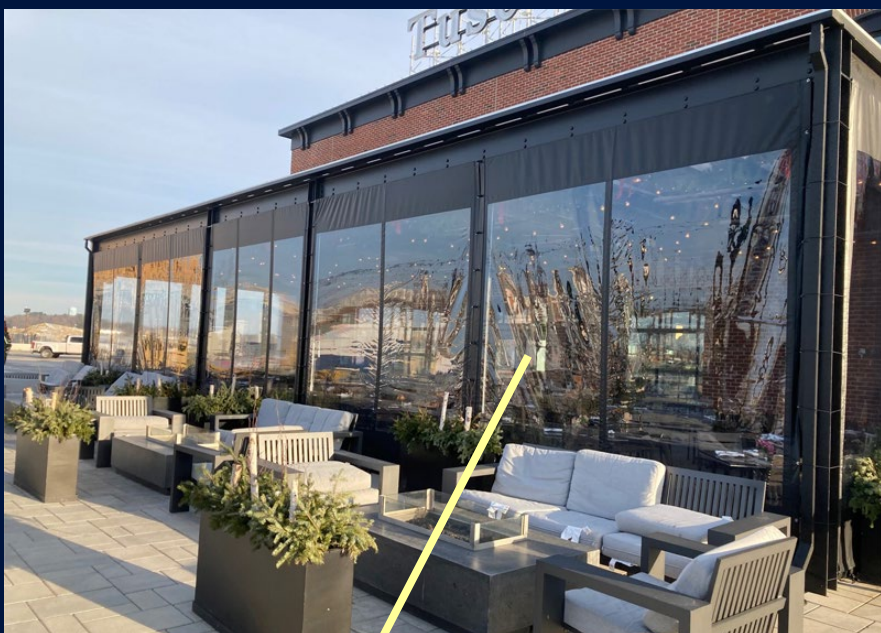


Permit a **projecting**
open lattice



Permit **patterned** or solid color
awnings; still no advertising

Outdoor Dining – Standards



Street-facing awnings may include retractable windscreens as long as they are transparent and only used in inclement weather



Retractable curtains permitted perpendicular to building façade to block wind or create privacy from neighboring businesses

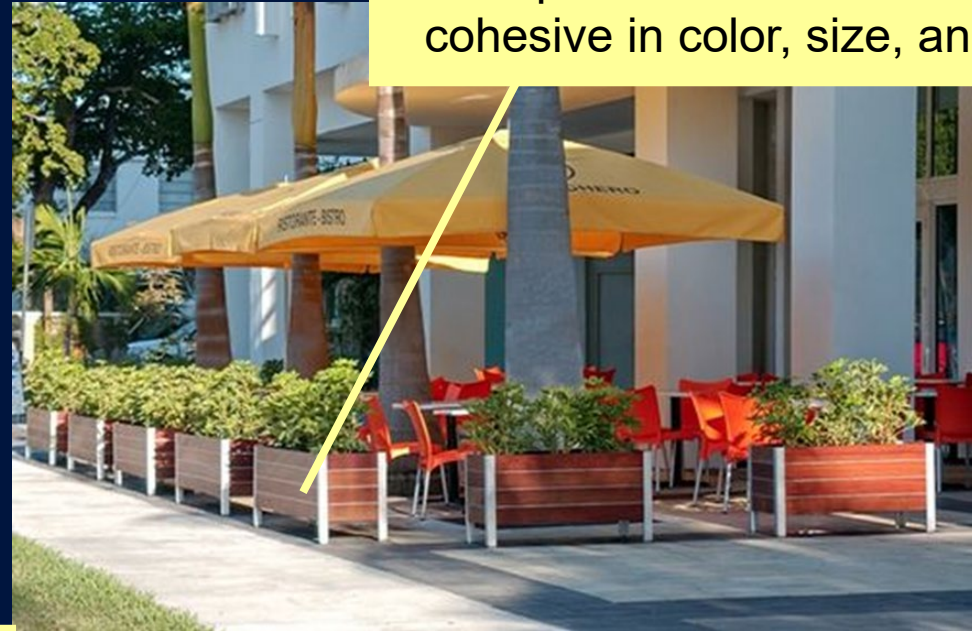
Outdoor Dining – Standards

Barriers, not required, but if provided...

- Barriers may include planter boxes (but no wrought iron fencing)
- Improvements and furnishings shall be commercial-grade and made for outdoor use



Encourage gaps between planter boxes or barrier elements



Require that barrier elements be cohesive in color, size, and material

Outdoor Dining –Standards

Barriers, not required, but if provided...

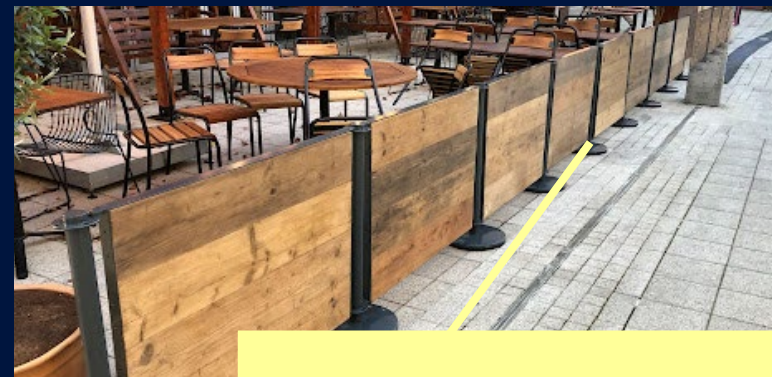


Discourage continuous wall.
Gaps preferred.



Prohibit faux plants and hedges

Maximum barrier height of 3 ft;
4 ft height including plants



Do not allow – tripping hazard.

Outdoor Dining – Standards



Prohibit rope barriers, metal crowd barriers, and jersey barriers



Prohibit platforms and floor coverings



Outdoor Retail Display Areas on the Sidewalk

Outdoor Retail Display – Standards

OPERATIONS:

- Display may only be in front of the business
- Merchandise displayed outdoors must be the same as sold inside store
- Allow appurtenances to remain overnight or stored inside the business
- No subleasing
- No speakers, nor amplified music

MAINTENANCE:

- Business shall maintain area, adjoining street and gutter in neat, clean, orderly condition
- Retail activities shall not interfere with pedestrians, parking, or traffic
- Furniture must be kept in good condition

Outdoor Retail Display – Standards

- All display elements shall be made of commercial-grade materials and capable of withstanding weather
- Merchandise and displays shall be between two and six feet in height
- Displays and appurtenances shall be stable and secure in all wind and weather conditions
- Umbrellas shall be solid color canvas. Awnings can be patterned or solid. Follow City color palette, plus white. No generic advertising or signage is permitted
- **Remove** → The display and sales area shall not exceed twenty-five percent of the width of the frontage of the associated business storefront

Retail Display – Standards



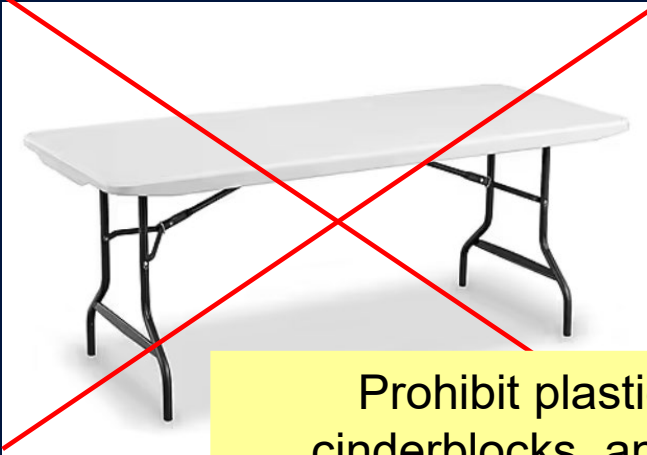
Allow patterned or solid color awnings

Clarify that nothing may be bolted or attached to the ground



Prohibit outdoor display figures

Retail Display – Standards



Prohibit plastic card tables, cinderblocks, and cardboard as display elements

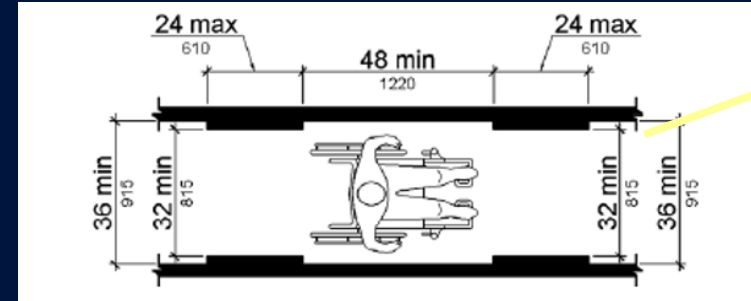


Prohibit platforms or floor coverings

Retail Display – Standards



Allow more than 25% of frontage to be used, consistent with dining



Reference ADA accessibility and clear space requirements

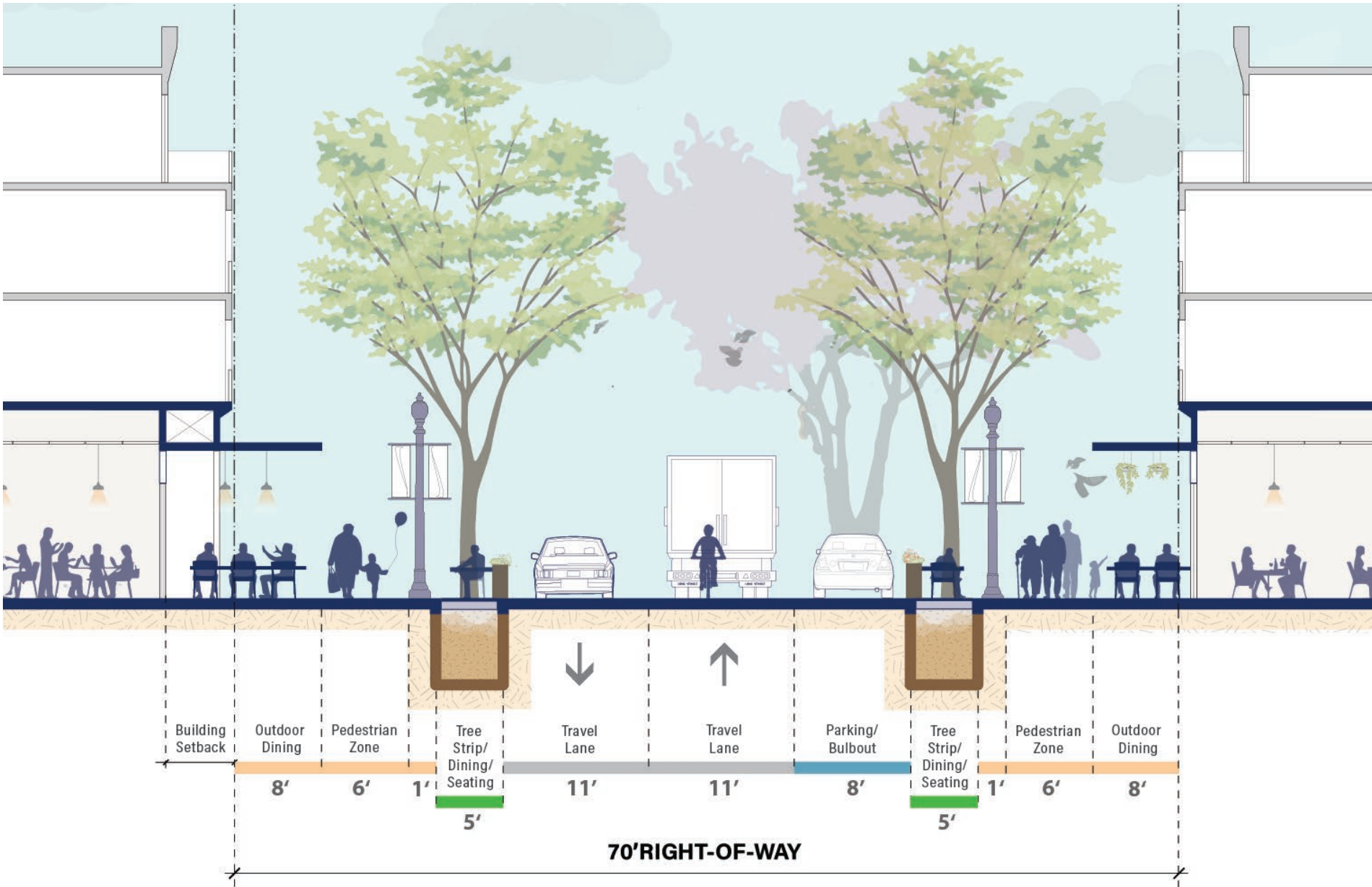
Zoning Administrator may consider any anomalies



Tree Strip Zone

**Laurel Street
600 and 800
Block**

(Looking South)





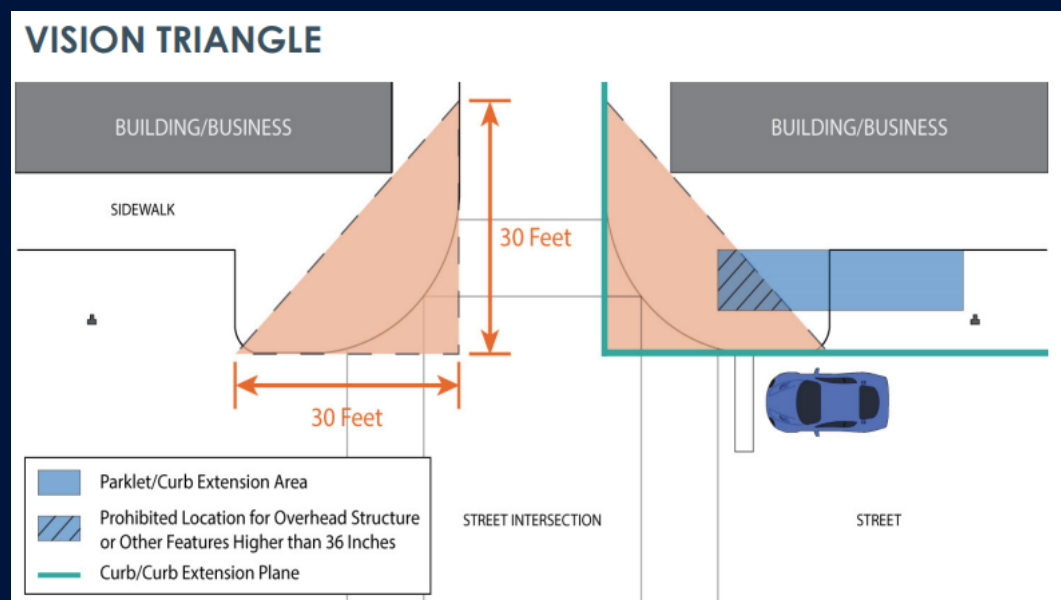
Tree Strip Zone – Policy Considerations

- For restaurant use, not general seating. Owner takes responsibility.
- Each business is not guaranteed a space, as other streetscape elements may limit equal opportunity.

Tree Strip Zone – Standards

- Tables and chairs set back 2.5 feet from a curb face or bollard to allow passengers to enter and exit their vehicles (where parallel parking occurs)
- 5-foot buffer between adjacent tree strip dining areas
 - so pedestrians can access the sidewalk
- Tables and chairs set back four feet from utility access panels, survey monuments, and manholes
- Tables and chairs, setback three feet from fire hydrants or Fire Department Connections
- ADA parking locations require 3 ft wide clear path for each door – affects placement of tables/chairs
- Establish maximum table size
- Tables and chairs in the tree strip zone to match tables and chairs in the dining zone
- Tables and chairs in from tree strip zone may be stored overnight
- No umbrellas
- No portable heaters
- No barriers
- May not string electric lines or lighting between business and tree strip zone

Tree Strip Zone – Special Considerations cont.



- No objects within the sight distance triangle of an intersection



- Tables & chairs must be set back 2.5 feet from a curb face or bollard (where parallel parking occurs)

Thank you.

Next Steps:

1. City Council Study Session: August 25
2. Release Public Draft Downtown Specific Plan: September 15
3. Planning and Transportation Commission recommendation: October 20
4. City Council adoption: November 10
5. City Council 2nd reading: November 24
6. Downtown Specific Plan goes into effect: December 24, 2025



Questions, Comments,
Input, Considerations?

Existing Standards Zoning Ordinance

Existing Outdoor Dining Standards

18.23.140

Eating and drinking establishments with outdoor dining areas shall be located, developed, and operated in compliance with the following standards:

A. Application Information. Applicant shall **submit a site plan and description of the proposed outdoor dining area**. The plan shall be drawn to scale showing the location of buildings and structures and in the case of dining in the public right-of-way, the location of street furnishings and trees, curb and on-street parking, adjacent to the proposed outdoor dining. The plan shall **show locations, number and the arrangement of planters, fencing, umbrellas, sun screens, tables, chairs**, and other portable or affixed appurtenances proposed. **Colors and commercial grade materials shall be specified**. An **electrical plan, when applicable**, shall include any lighting and electrical connection proposed including specification of fixtures, type and location. In addition to any other application materials required, an application for an outdoor dining area shall state the anticipated periods of use during the year, and the proposed hours of daily use, including Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays; and whether any liquor will be sold or consumed in the area to be covered by the permit.

B. Hours of Operation. **Hours of operation** shall be limited to the hours of operation of the associated eating and drinking establishment and shall be open for a minimum of two service periods per day, except when the establishment is open for only one service per day.

Existing Outdoor Dining Standards

C. Permits and Licenses. The applicant shall obtain a **City of San Carlos zoning clearance/minor architectural review approval and an annual business registration**. The applicant shall also obtain **approval from the San Mateo County Health Department**. In the case of outdoor dining in the public right-of-way, an annual City of San Carlos **encroachment permit is required** pursuant to Chapter 12.36. As applicable, a **current and valid liquor license** issued by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverages Control is also required.

D. Outdoor Dining Area in the Public Right-of-Way.

1. Encroachment Permit Required. An encroachment permit approved by the City Engineer is required for any outdoor dining area located in the public right-of-way. **No part of an outdoor dining area shall be permanently attached to the building, public right-of-way or sidewalk.**

2. Minimum Clearance. For outdoor dining in the MU-DC zoning district, the outdoor dining area may be **located no further than the extent of the brick demarcation** line that is closest to the front property line. For all other areas, a **minimum of four feet of unobstructed sidewalk** must remain available for pedestrians. For purposes of the minimum clear path, parking meters, traffic signs, trees, tree grates and all similar obstacles shall constitute obstructions within the sidewalk area.

Existing Outdoor Dining Standards

- a. Adjacent to Street. Where the outdoor dining area is located adjacent to a street, an **eighteen-inch clearance shall be maintained from the face of the curb to the outdoor dining area** unless there is parking parallel to the street, in which case a **two-foot clearance** is required.
 - b. No Obstructions. Minimum width of access opening shall be forty-four inches. No outdoor dining area shall obstruct any points of building ingress and/or egress.
 - c. Corner Lots. On a corner lot, the outdoor dining area shall not be located within the area bound by the extensions of the corner building walls between the building and the curb.
 - d. Vertical Clearance. **Vertical clearance of seven feet** shall be maintained.
3. Design.
- a. **No Permanent Attachments. Roofs, awnings or umbrellas may be used in conjunction with an outdoor eating area, although permanent shelters over an outdoor eating area are prohibited.** Awnings shall be adequately secured, retractable, and shall comply with the Building Code.
 - b. Barriers. The outdoor **dining area may be delineated by an edge** perpendicular to the sidewalk, but is not required, by the use of barriers such as **planter boxes or wrought iron fencing**.
 - c. Design. The design of all improvements and **furniture shall be of a quality** to sustain weather and wear, and shall be of **commercial grade materials**.

Existing Outdoor Dining Standards

- i. **Furniture shall be of durable materials such as wrought iron, wood, steel, or cast aluminum. Tables shall be a size suitable for seating of two to four patrons. Plastic chairs and table and vinyl or plastic tablecloths are not permitted.**
 - ii. Planter boxes shall be of quality materials such as finished wood, precast concrete, terra cotta, or other pottery.
 - iii. **Umbrellas and awnings shall be solid color canvas.** Sun screens shall be a durable fabric and retractable. No generic advertising or signage is permitted.
4. Operation.
- a. Noise Limits. No entertainment or use, operation, or playing of any musical instrument, loudspeaker, sound amplifier, or other machine for the production or reproduction of sound is permitted in the outdoor dining area.
 - b. No Outdoor Cooking or Open Flames. No electrical appliances, heating or cooking of food or open flames shall be allowed in the outdoor dining area. Use of portable heating devices may be permitted with approval from the Fire Marshal.
 - c. No Storage. No structure or enclosure to accommodate the serving or clean-up stations, storage of trash or garbage shall be erected or placed on, adjacent to, or separate from an outdoor dining area on the public sidewalk or right-of-way.

Existing Outdoor Dining Standards

- d. Parking. Outdoor dining areas are exempt from the parking requirements of Chapter 18.20, Parking and Loading.
- e. No Overnight Use. All umbrellas, tables, chairs and other portable appurtenances **shall be removed from the outdoor dining area at the end of each business day. No storage in the public right-of-way shall be permitted.**
- 5. Maintenance.
 - a. The permittee and the property owner shall maintain the outdoor dining area and the adjoining street, curb, gutter and sidewalk in a neat, clean and orderly condition at all times, regardless of the source of the refuse and litter.
 - b. Activities involving the outdoor dining area shall be conducted in a manner that does not interfere with pedestrians, parking or traffic.
 - c. If necessary, the permittee or the property owner shall clean the surface of the sidewalk by washing or buffing to remove any stains, marks, or discoloration and in accordance with prevailing stormwater and water quality regulations.
 - d. Furniture and appurtenances shall be kept clean and in good condition. Umbrellas shall be kept secure in windy conditions, and fire-treated. (Ord. 1480 (Exh. C (part)), 2015; Ord. 1438 § 4 (Exh. A (part)), 2011)

Existing Outdoor Retail Sales Standards

18.23.150

Outdoor retail sales shall be located, developed, and operated in compliance with the standards of this section.

A. **Temporary Outdoor Display and Sales.** The temporary outdoor display and sale of merchandise shall comply with Section 18.23.240, Temporary uses, and Chapter 18.31, Temporary Use Permits. An encroachment permit is required for any temporary outdoor display and sales within the public right-of-way; reasonable conditions of approval of such permits may be imposed to ensure unobstructed pedestrian movement in a minimum clear zone and to maintain clean sidewalks.

B. **Downtown Outdoor Display and Sales.** Outdoor display and sale of merchandise in downtown districts shall comply with this section and Title 12. Outdoor display and sale of merchandise is permitted on private property in the MU-DC, MU-D, MU-N and the MU-SB. Outdoor display and sale of merchandise is permitted on public property and in the right-of-way in the MU-DC, MU-D with frontage on Laurel Street and San Carlos Avenue, MU-N with frontage on Holly Street, MU-N south of Arroyo Avenue and the MU-SB with frontage on Laurel Street. The display area shall not encroach in a public right-of-way, street, alley, sidewalk or other public property without first obtaining an encroachment permit.

Existing Outdoor Retail Sales Standards

1. General Requirements.
 - a. Application Information. **Applicant shall submit a site plan** and description of the proposed outdoor display and sales area. The plan shall be drawn to scale showing the location of buildings and structures. In cases where outdoor sales are proposed for location in the public right-of-way, the site plan shall include the location of street furnishings and trees adjacent to the proposed outdoor display and sales area. The **plan shall show locations, number and the arrangement of portable appurtenances proposed. Colors and commercial grade materials shall be specified.** In addition to any other application materials required, an application for an outdoor display and sales area shall state the anticipated periods of use during the year, and the proposed hours of daily use, including Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.
 - b. Hours of Operation. Hours of outdoor display and sales shall be limited to the hours of operation of the associated commercial establishment.
 - c. Permits and Licenses. The applicant shall obtain a City of San Carlos zoning clearance/minor architectural review approval and an annual business registration. In the case of outdoor display and sales in the public right-of-way, an annual City of San Carlos encroachment permit is required.

Existing Outdoor Retail Sales Standards

2. Outdoor Retail Sales Standards.

a. Design.

- i. The design of all improvements, **sales racks and furniture shall be of a quality** to sustain weather and wear, and shall be of commercial grade materials. Vinyl or plastic tablecloths are not permitted.
- ii. The merchandise in the outdoor display and sales area including but not limited to the display **racks, tables and stands shall not exceed a height of six feet and in no case be lower than two feet.**
- iii. Display and sales area fixtures and appurtenances shall be stable and secure in all wind and weather conditions. **Umbrellas and awnings shall be solid color canvas.** Sun screens shall be a fabric and retractable. No generic advertising or signage is permitted.
- iv. The display and sales area shall not exceed twenty-five percent of the width of the frontage of the associated business storefront.

b. Operation.

- i. Outdoor display and sales conducted by a business shall be **located in front of the associated business storefront.**
- ii. All merchandise or services displayed outdoors shall be of the same types ordinarily sold indoors at the business conducting the sale. All sale transactions shall be conducted indoors.