



Business Improvement District

October 12, 2010

Zoning Commission for the
District of Columbia
441 4th Street, NW
2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Outdoor Cafes in the Downtown Business Improvement District

Dear Members of the Commission:

I submit this letter on behalf of the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) in support of outdoor cafes in the Downtown of the District of Columbia. The Downtown BID is a non-profit organization that works to improve Downtown DC's public environment, economy and social equity. Our goal is to create a vibrant, inviting and smart place where people from all walks of life are able to explore, create and share remarkable urban experiences that inspire and revitalize.

While the BID does not support individual zoning cases or lobby on behalf of specific properties, it is the BID's policy to support programs that are available to all Downtown BID property owners and tenants. Thus, it is our policy to support outdoor cafes to enliven the streets of Downtown and to enhance its safety by placing more eyes on the street. An outdoor café tells pedestrians "it is interesting AND safe to walk on this block" and they also provide additional selling space that enhances the city's tax base. In particular, a single outdoor café on an otherwise outdoor-café-less block has a major beneficial impact. Thus, the BID works with all Downtown property owners and café operators and the DC government to increase the number of cafes in the Downtown BID area (16th Street to Massachusetts Avenue to Louisiana Avenue to Constitution Avenue to 15th Street to H Street to 16th Street in Northwest DC). See attached press release.

We urge the Zoning Commission to support action that will provide more outdoor cafes in Downtown DC.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gerry Widdicombe
Director of Economic Development

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO.

10-18

EXHIBIT NO.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 10-18
EXHIBIT NO. 8

Gerry Widdicombe

From: Downtown DC BID [webnews@downtowndc.org]
Sent: Thursday, August 05, 2010 4:23 PM
To: Gerry Widdicombe
Subject: Sidewalk Cafes Press Release



Downtown News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 5, 2010

CONTACT: Rick Reinhard
202.661.7566
rick@downton

SIDEWALK CAFES ENLIVEN DOWNTOWN STREETS Benefits Enhance the Urban Experience, Promote Use of Public

WASHINGTON, DC – Sidewalk cafes are “a true indicator of street life and a clear measure of place where people can have remarkable urban experiences,” according to Richard H. Brackman, Chairman of the Downtown DC Business Improvement District (BID).

Thirteen years ago, there were very few sidewalk cafes in Downtown DC; this summer, the annual inventory of Sidewalk Cafes shows there are 123, with a total of approximately 3,225 seats, up from approximately 2,665 seats a year ago—a 29.5% increase. The Downtown BID and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) have encouraged the increase in the number of outdoor cafes and supported their

Downtown BID Sidewalk Cafe Data Overview

	2009	2010	% increase
Cafes	95	123	29.5 %
Seats (est. rate)	2665	3225	21%

The Office of Planning’s (OP) 2000 Downtown Action Agenda identified outdoor dining as a key element of Downtown as a physical place. It proposed establishing a task force to develop a comprehensive set of procedures for public improvements in Downtown DC. Through its participation in various committees, the BID has actively promoted sidewalk cafes as a high priority amenity.

Also, as part of its placemaking initiative, the Downtown BID has made its staff available to help businesses best obtain sidewalk café permits through DDOT’s Public Space Permit office and occasional expedited application process. Among those who have received assistance:

Lawson’s Gourmet. “We hired lawyers and an architect to have plans drawn up for an outdoor permit for years and years,” said Shannon Creighton, Lawson’s manager. “The Downtown BID provided their assistance, we were able to present colorful drawings showing where the tables would be placed, manholes and grates were located. We gained valuable knowledge about things that were

previously unknown to us. Lawson’s received its sidewalk café permit in April. According to Creighton, revenues have increased and introduced a single row of six tables and 12 chairs and added a bit of character to the 13th

Oyamel. Rob Wilder, chief executive officer of ThinkFoodGroup, which owns several Downtown DC businesses, said the Downtown BID helped the company design the outdoor café at Oyamel, a popular Mexican restaurant.

“The Downtown BID provided invaluable assistance in planning and licensing a successful outdoor café,” said Wilder. “The BID staff helped us understand a variety of city agency regulations and required permits, and our team and the city to achieve the best outcome for all.”

Oyamel, located on the corner of 7th and D Streets, has 16 seats at its outdoor café. The café has contributed \$100,000 to ThinkFoodGroup’s annual sales and contributes more than \$10,000 per year to the BID. Wilder: “The additional seating brings life and energy to a ‘side’ street in our vibrant neighborhood.”

Absolute Thai. The Downtown BID helped the Chinatown restaurant, located at 521 G Street, develop a plan that was acceptable to the Public Space Committee. The Committee suggested that the eatery seek the Downtown BID's support to improve its permit application and Committee presentation. As a result of the BID's help, the restaurant launched its outdoor café in the spring. It has 12 seats and three tables.

The Downtown BID's 100 Safety/Hospitality and Maintenance employees, known as Downtown SAMs, and six-member Downtown Homeless Services Team have made Downtown streets a more inviting environment over the past decade. Working with partners in both the public and private realms, the organization is focused on creating remarkable urban experiences through exceptional placemaking. This entails refocusing attention on the quality of public spaces and infusing more sidewalk cafes into the landscape to create a sense of place and to make Downtown more vibrant, inviting and smart.

Whether enclosed or separated from pedestrians with decorative fencing, removable bollards or topiary trees, sidewalk cafes encourage more vibrant street life, offer a place to sit and relax, see and be seen and meet friends and bring more pedestrians to the neighborhood.

Sidewalk Cafe Seat Totals - per year (estimate)

Size of Cafes (in seats)	2009 total seats	2010 total seats	% change
1-10	95	130	36.8 %
11-20	405	570	40.7%
21-30	225	350	55.6%
31-40	350	420	20.0%
41-50	270	270	0.0%
50+	1320	1485	12.5%
Seat TOTALS	2665	3225	21.0%

From the simple to the sizeable, sidewalk cafes help animate streets in Downtown, throughout DC and in major capitals around the world. They not only promote the use and enjoyment of city space, they also enhance tourism, provide increased opportunities for handicapped accessibility to dining out and have a dramatic impact on urban streetscapes.

Internationally known placemaking expert Fred Kent, president of the Project for Public Spaces, enthusiastically supports sidewalk cafes as a way to add activity to public spaces. In 2008, the Downtown BID invited him to facilitate a daylong workshop as part of its placemaking initiative. Participants learned that simple elements—signage, traffic flow, street activation and seating options—could have a tremendous impact on an area's appeal.

The Downtown BID is making progress on the placemaking front. Besides promoting the cafes, the organization recently worked with the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) to create new regulations that will turn sidewalk vending into a more attractive amenity in the city. In addition, the Downtown BID has taken inventory of conditions in Downtown parks and has made recommendations and taken action to improve them.

"There's no rule that says public spaces have to be boring," according to Bradley. "Working along with our partners, we can transform the public environment in Downtown in ways that foster a sense of community and well-being."

Brian Gober, the Downtown BID's geographic information system (GIS) program assistant, conducts the Annual Inventory of Sidewalk Cafes during the summer months under the direction of Lito Tongson, the organization's streetscape manager.

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Vibrant, inviting and smart, Downtown DC is Washington's premiere destination for exploring, creating and sharing ideas and experiences. The Downtown DC Business Improvement District (BID) is a private non-profit organization that provides capital improvements, resources and research to help diversify the economy and enhance the Downtown experience for all. This special district, where property owners have agreed to tax themselves to fund services, encompasses a 138-block area of approximately 825 properties from Massachusetts Avenue on the north to Constitution Avenue on the south, and from Louisiana Avenue on the east to 16th Street on the west. As a catalyst, facilitator and thought leader, the Downtown BID promotes public/private partnerships to create a remarkable urban environment. For more information, visit www.downtowndc.org.

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