

# Outdoor Cafes/ Widened Sidewalks

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[www.worldworrywarts.com](http://www.worldworrywarts.com)

**Widening** sidewalks is an effective way of bringing new life to a street. Many cities are beginning to see the benefits of widened sidewalks and are opting to decrease the width of streets and use the space to widen the existing sidewalks, which are typically too narrow to handle large numbers of pedestrians.

The benefits of widening sidewalks are numerous. They not only encourage more pedestrian use, but also improve safety, calm traffic, and have the potential to revitalize the economy of the street.

Widened sidewalks can be applied anywhere there is a street. They are great for schools, suburban areas, and especially main streets. Pedestrians are attracted to areas that are appealing and inviting. If there is ample space for pedestrians they are more likely to use the space.

Main streets across America are suffering from the large competitor retailers such as Walmart and the small stores do not have enough customers to keep their small business open, but recently there has been great revitalization efforts being made by cities nation wide. They have realized the value in strong downtown core and see what the large commercial stores lack-character. Widening the sidewalks is one of the common steps taken by cities to improve their main streets, this is because the sidewalks provide a various range of opportunities, which include, shopping, strolling, and a great place for sidewalk cafes. This also works to enhance the overall appearance of the street. They have the potential of becoming colorful, friendly and vibrant spaces, which people will appreciate and frequent.

“An inviting, bustling street life is the most compelling feature of a great downtown. People walking to destinations or strolling for pleasure, storefronts luring shoppers, services conveniently located and restaurants providing atmosphere with scents and sounds all combine to create memorable experiences and increase the desire to return. These widened sidewalks with street trees, landscaping, directional signage, fountains, public art and improved street lighting have set the stage for a true revival of Downtown’s day and night street scenes” ([www.houstondowntown.com](http://www.houstondowntown.com)).



"Pedestrian activity makes residential areas more neighborly and commercial areas more vibrant." - [www.walkboston.org](http://www.walkboston.org)

Outdoor Cafes/ Widened Sidewalks

**Essential Elements**

There are numerous elements which contribute to a successful widened sidewalk and streetscape. Some of these elements include the paving itself. There are endless possibilities when it comes to paving pattern, texture, and color. These all can contribute to the space. Many cities use a contrasting paving from the street to signify a different zone, making drivers more cautious and adding interest to the sidewalk. A sidewalk is also a great opportunity for the display of public art. Bronze casting and mosaics are just a few of the possibilities.

Ideally, sidewalks should be permeable. There are a wide variety of permeable paving available on the market today and now that they have become more popular the cost for permeable paving is also reasonable.

Benches and street trees, and other landscaping should be added if possible to create a more pleasant atmosphere. Simply widening the sidewalk will not attract pedestrians, there are other elements that should be implemented as well to make the space more appealing and inviting. As mentioned before, sidewalk cafes are great enhancements to a streetscape. They add visual interest with chairs, colorful umbrellas and great people watching opportunities.

**Case Study: Delray Beach:**

Delray Beach is one of the cities that discovered how beneficial it is to make improvements to their current sidewalks. Their biggest goal was to get people out of their cars and get them to shop, eat, and walk the downtown strip. They were able to achieve this goal by improving the existing sidewalks. The improvements that were made were increasing the width of the sidewalks to encourage more pedestrian flow and the typical grey cement was replaced with a colorful and aesthetic new pavement treatment. They also decreased the width of the existing streets to slow traffic down. Cities nationwide can learn from Delray Beach as a example of what they can do to make their downtowns more pedestrian friendly and vibrant.

**Before:**



**After:**



Modesto, CA  
[www.visitmodesto.com](http://www.visitmodesto.com)



Lisbon, Portugal  
[www.vagabondboots.com](http://www.vagabondboots.com)

**Outdoor Cafes**



Cafe on Old Town Square, Prague

[www.pbases.com](http://www.pbases.com)

The exact definition of an outdoor/sidewalk café is an open-air seating area on a public sidewalk provided by a restaurant located on the adjoining property, where restaurant patrons can eat or drink.

The development of the outdoor café began with places that served coffee because it was a simple beverage to serve and consume outside, today's use is not limited to coffee, but has widened its reach to encompass a variety of other services.

Seattle sidewalks have only been legally available for use by restaurants and vendors since the late seventies. The first establishment to take advantage of the new ordinance allowing food service on the sidewalk was Das Gasthaus in Pioneer Square. Even though Das Gasthaus' outdoor section was apparently quite popular, few restaurants followed their lead. It wasn't until the invention of the espresso cart (another Seattle invention) in the early eighties that using the sidewalk as space to serve food and drink caught on (Eitner, 29).

**Essential Elements:**

There are many design elements that go into a sidewalk café which usually determine if a sidewalk café is successful or not. These elements include types of space occupied/location, orientation and exposure, methods of separation, size and density, and furnishings.

"Outdoor cafes make a significant contribution to the quality of public places and urban life. They provide an active street frontage that is alive and keeps changing. They offer the opportunity to withdraw from participating in the movement of the street and become an observer" (City of Sydney Outdoor Cafe Policy).



"Streets and their sidewalks, the public places of a city, are its most vital organs." -Jane Jacobs



Cafe overhang, Broadway Cafe  
[www.broadwaycafeandroastery.com](http://www.broadwaycafeandroastery.com)

#### Spaces Occupied/ Location:

There are a wide variety of spaces in which an outdoor café can occupy, and this plays a large factor in determining whether it is a successful café or not. Cafes thrive in the busiest intersections and not on quiet side streets. This is because one of the great attractions of outdoor cafes is that one can people watch. People want to observe exciting and diverse scenes, not an empty street. Because of this, cafes tend to clump together. Thus, is it ideal if cafes are located in popular area where people like to frequent. Outdoor cafes also tend to be located near other amenities such as, bus stops and news stands. They also tend to position themselves near the entry of the building. Most outdoor cafes are located on sidewalks, but there are many other possible locations such as in building recessions, parking lots, alleys, street side plazas, and raised areas.

#### Orientation and Exposure:

It seems as though the most successful cafes would be ones that had great views and sun exposure, but this is not true. As mentioned previously, the biggest attraction to outdoor cafes is people watching. A great view and exposure to sun is a bonus, but not a requirement. Research has shown that many people will choose to sit outside even in the worst of conditions if there is some shelter.

#### Methods of Separation:

There are many different methods of separation for outdoor cafes and these vary from city to city and country to country. Seattle for example only requires a barrier if alcohol is served, but most cafes in Seattle tend to have some separation device because people feel more comfortable if they feel some type of separation. This can come in many forms such as planting boxes, fences, overhangs, raised areas, or even a changing in paving can signify a different zone.

#### Size and Density:

The size and density of outdoor cafes can range from one table to fifty or more. Many American sidewalk cafes are typically one row of tables, even if the sidewalk is large enough to carry more. European cafes tend to have many tables. Cafes such as Cafe in Old Town Square in Prague have many tables. European cafes also tend to densify much more than American cafes. American cafes typically are spaced out to give customers privacy and make them feel more comfortable. We also have much larger tables than are necessary. Smaller tables would allow for more density and create more intimate spaces. The size and density of a cafe really depends on the amount of space, and even if there are only a couple of informal chairs, people will take advantage of them.

#### Furnishings:

During the mid-nineteenth century, there was an enormous increase in the number of coffee houses and cafes in Europe. This also was the time in which affordable and durable furniture was introduced. As a result, furnishing outdoor cafes became much easier. Today, the most popular furnishings are resin furnishings that are available in a numerous amount of colors, with the most common being white. Resin furniture is inexpensive and weather proof, and can be purchased at most home supply stores. Movable and fixed furniture is also an important thing to consider.



Cafe separation device.  
[www.emediawire.com](http://www.emediawire.com)



The infamous white resin chairs.  
[www.bestrentalservice.com](http://www.bestrentalservice.com)



Sidewalk Cafe in Sydney  
[www.access.nsw.edu.au](http://www.access.nsw.edu.au)

Fixed seating is quite unpopular compared to movable seating. This is simply because people can be unpredictable and prefer to have options. It is almost guaranteed that when someone chooses a spot to sit they will adjust the position of a moveable chair, even if it is slightest degree. People like to feel in control of their environment and giving them the option of where they want to sit provides some control.

There are many different regulations governing outdoor cafes depending on the city and country. Sydney, Australia, Penticton, B.C., and Seattle, Washington all have fairly different regulations.

#### Case Study: Sydney, Australia.

In Sydney, outdoor cafes are encourage and may be approved in all of Sydney's open spaces, whether public or private ownership, where local conditions are favorable for their operation, including streets, lanes, squares, parks and waterfront. Outdoor cafes may not be appropriate in civic or ceremonial spaces. The most important factor in considering the location of an outdoor cafe is pedestrian and vehicular circulation, convenience and safety of patrons and the general public.

#### Regulations:

\*In all locations, a clear distance of at least two meters must be maintained adjacent to the seating area for pedestrian circulation.

\*The cafes should enrich the pedestrian experience and public life. It is important for cafes to present an open, inviting image and that they are easily accessible to the public.

\*The use of all barriers including fences, framed fabric, and planter boxes are all excluded because they become a physical and psychological obstruction within the public domain and may have a detrimental impact on the use, enjoyment and safety of pedestrians and patrons.

\*Outdoor furniture and umbrellas should make a positive contribution to the street environment. Furniture should be practical and elegant and integrate well with the surrounding cityscape.

#### Case Study: Penticton, B.C.

#### Regulations:

\*An outdoor sidewalk cafe/pub is limited to the inside portion of municipal sidewalk and cannot cover more than one-half of the sidewalk or four feet, and in no case leave less than four feet of sidewalk clear for pedestrian use unless the operator provides a temporary sidewalk.

\*Businesses must be adequately insured with a 2,000,000 dollar minimum in case of any injuries or damages resulting from the use of the sidewalk.

\*Cafes must have a minimum of a 42 inch fence around the perimeter of the cafe.

\*Furniture and decor must enhance the building and existing streetscape.

\*Cafes must consist of a maximum of two chairs and two tables for each twenty-five



Bohemia Cafe, Sydney, Australia.  
<http://www.accommodationsydney.com>



"Sidewalk Cafes are an enjoyable addition to Seattle's vibrant collection of restaurants." -Seattle.gov



Seattle Cafe  
[www.seattle.gov](http://www.seattle.gov)

#### Seattle, WA.

##### Regulations:

- \*only established and operating restaurants can put up a sidewalk cafe.
- \*A master use permit and street use permit are both required to put up a sidewalk cafe.
- \*The dining area must leave five feet or more of clear sidewalk space between the edge and the curb to provide adequate pedestrian circulation.
- \*The dining area must be directly in front of the restaurant.
- \*Barriers are not required unless liquor is being served outside.

Outdoor cafes are excellent ways to improve and enliven a street. They not only bring flare to a city, but also enhance the economy. The implementation of cafes should be encouraged by cities, especially Seattle. Most cities provide free advice and information to help businesses through the application process. It is important to remember that although there are many benefits for outdoor cafes, there are also challenges including sidewalks appearing cluttered, and reduced pedestrian flow. Sidewalk cafes can also become unattractive if the outdoor furniture is not chosen well and is not properly maintained, because of this, it is essential for cities to carefully consider the regulations that business owners must follow.

##### Resources:

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Seattle Outdoor Cafe  
[www.urbanplanet.org](http://www.urbanplanet.org)

