

Winter Parking Patio Pilot

ISSUE

Council Policy No. C09-013 - Use of Sidewalks, Boulevards and Parking Stalls - Vending (Policy), permits on-street parking stalls to be temporarily used by a restaurant for the purpose of operating a parking patio. The Policy directs that parking patios be subject to further regulation outlined in the Sidewalk Café and Parking Patio Guidelines, which currently permit their operation between April 1 and October 31. Should the guidelines be amended to permit parking patios to operate throughout the year?

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services recommend to City Council that the Sidewalk Café and Parking Patio Guidelines be amended to permit parking patios to operate year-round, subject to development standards, as outlined in Appendix 1 of this report.

BACKGROUND

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, at its Regular Business Meeting held on June 29, 2020, City Council adopted several resolutions aimed at making parking patios more financially viable for businesses. City Council resolved, in part:

- “2. That parking patio fees be waived and current permit holders' fees be adjusted to reflect this discount for 2020 and 2021;
3. That a trial be engaged for the 2020/2021 winter season whereby patio owners be permitted to leave patios in place if they are to be used at least periodically through the fall and winter.”

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Results of the 2020/2021 Pilot

The City of Saskatoon (City) issued seven parking patio licenses in 2020; three patios operated during the winter. The following comments were offered by operators:

1. Parking patios were used frequently in the Fall, but were used infrequently in December, January and February.
2. Public health restrictions, such as reduced capacity and social distancing requirements, limited opportunities for patio usage during the winter months.
3. Heating the parking patios was a challenge because propane and other fuel heaters are prohibited on wood surfaces. Installing an outdoor 220-volt electrical outlet needed to operate most models of electric heaters is cost-prohibitive.
4. There were no issues related to safety, vandalism, or crime.

While utilization in the core winter months was limited, businesses were able to operate parking patios later into the fall and earlier in the spring than in previous years. Even though the program typically runs from April to October, most patios were installed in June and removed in September. Extended operations in March, April, May, October, and November are the primary benefit of permitting winter parking patios. With the patio infrastructure in place, businesses can take advantage of warm weather when it occurs.

The pandemic and related restrictions, early snowfall, and extreme cold conditions presented challenges for businesses that contributed to reduced outdoor dining opportunities. Underutilized patios have a negative impact on streetscapes. It is anticipated that with parking patio fees being reinstated in 2022, patios are more likely to be removed if the business is not intending to utilize it during the winter. Administration is recommending the guidelines include a requirement that the parking patio be used periodically.

The guidelines require that the business clear snow and ice from the parking patio. Administration did not receive any complaints related to the parking patios which remained in place in the winter of 2020. City equipment removing snow on streets were unaffected by winter parking patios.

Permitting parking patios to operate throughout the year will reduce the number of paid parking spaces available to vehicles in the business improvement districts. Further, permanent parking patios that increase seating capacity may impact building requirements, such as washrooms. Administration is recommending the guidelines be amended to include the Building Standards Department in the application review group, to ensure applications for parking patios are in compliance with the National Building Code and existing permitting requirements for decks constructed on private property. Additional administrative amendments updating the names of divisions and departments are also identified in Appendix 1.

Engagement with Business Improvement Districts

Business Improvement Districts were also contacted to provide feedback on the pilot program. Downtown Saskatoon and the Riversdale Business Improvement District advised they support winter parking patios and do not have concerns with their operation.

The Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) also wished to express their support for a permanent asphalt patio program to allow operators to utilize protective barriers in lieu of constructing a deck or boardwalk, and to allow businesses, other than restaurants, to participate.

Asphalt parking patios were permitted on a temporary basis during the COVID-19 pandemic. A permanent program would require amendments to the Council Policy and Bylaw No. 8770, Zoning Bylaw, 2009. Administration requires direction from Committee to conduct further research and reporting on possible amendments.

The BIDs also expressed concerns with the parking patio fees and noted that the fees are a barrier to participation. The parking fees are based on a resolution of City Council and are approximately 50% of the fee schedule for the Temporary Reserve Parking Program. The fees will be reviewed as part of the future Temporary Reserve Parking Policy review and update.

Winter Parking Patios Support City Initiatives

In September 2020, the WintercityYXE Strategy (Strategy) was received for information by the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services; the Implementation Plan was received in May 2021. The Strategy is an intentional effort by the City and community to celebrate what makes Saskatoon an inviting, vibrant, safe and prosperous place during the winter, while also recognizing the challenges vulnerable populations face during winter months. An objective of the Strategy is to develop a strong winter economy. One of the actions identified to achieve this objective is to develop and support winter and shoulder-season outdoor cafés. During engagement activities for the WintercityYXE Implementation Plan development, community members identified this action as a medium priority. Winter parking patios will support this objective.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Business License Program is not supported by the mill rate and is funded through business license application fees. The staff time to review parking patio applications and monitor for compliance with the approved site plan will be covered by the parking patio fees and carried out as part of the Business License Program.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

No other legal, social, or environmental implications are identified.

NEXT STEPS

Bylaw or policy amendments are not required to permit year-round parking patio operation. If approved, Administration will update the City website and Sidewalk Café and Parking Patio Guidelines accordingly. Information will also be provided to stakeholders including the application review group, Business Improvement Districts, and current parking patio operators.

APPENDICES

1. Sidewalk Café and Parking Patio Guidelines

REPORT APPROVAL

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