



Sidewalk Cafes

Sidewalk cafes add interest, vitality, and charm to commercial districts. The City of Milwaukee welcomes such uses. (City ordinances refer to them as “sidewalk area dining facilities”). However, because sidewalk cafes by definition involve private use of public spaces, a City permit is required. Permit application forms and assistance are available from the City’s Development Center, located on the 1st floor at 809 N. Broadway.

The City has adopted a set of guidelines, which address the location, design, and operation of sidewalk cafes. These guidelines are also available from the Development Center.

Applicants must submit:

- 1) the completed application form
- 2) a dimensioned diagram showing existing conditions in the area proposed for the sidewalk café
- 3) a dimensioned diagram illustrating the proposed layout of the sidewalk café
- 4) a written plan of operation describing such things as proposed hours the cafe will be open and other pertinent operational characteristics
- 5) a certificate of insurance with minimum \$25,000/\$50,000 and \$10,000 property damage
- 6) surety bond in the amount of \$1,000
- 7) application fee of \$115.00.

In addition to the initial application fee, the City charges an annual space rental fee of \$.28 (28 cents) per square foot of public right-of-way used. For example, if a sidewalk cafe takes 100 square feet, the annual space rental fee would be \$28.00. Once a sidewalk cafe has been initially approved, it can be renewed each year simply upon payment of the annual space rental fee.

While sidewalk cafes are generally desirable additions to urban life, there may be instances where problems could result. The City’s ordinance covering sidewalk cafes requires the local alderman to sign off on applications before permits can be issued. The alderman is most likely to be aware of any potential problems and, generally, should be consulted before a formal permit application is submitted.

If for any reason an applicant does not like a condition attached to an approved permit or if a permit is denied, an appeal to the full Common Council can be made. An appeal will typically take about a month to be resolved.

Approval of a sidewalk cafe permit does not eliminate the need to obtain related permits. For example, if alcoholic beverages will be served at the sidewalk cafe, the appropriate liquor license approvals must also be secured.

Business owners contemplating opening a sidewalk cafe are encouraged to contact the Development Center early in the concept development stage. Call (414) 286-8208. The Health Department’s Consumer Protection Division (414-286-3674) should also be contacted early on to determine applicable health codes.

QUICK FACTS

Application Fee: \$115

Related Fees: Annual lease payment required

Final Approval Given By: Milwaukee Development Center

Typical Review & Approval Time: 4-5 days (once a complete application is submitted)

For More Information Call: (414) 286-8208
