HOW CAN WE USE OUR STREETS TO HELP BUSINESSES?

Communities across the region are considering how to use their public spaces to help businesses meet the requirements of COVID-19 restrictions. Adaptive streets are one such idea. This concept extends commercial space into public roadways so that people can shop, dine, visit, and recreate while socially distancing.

There are basic guidelines that each community or business district will need to address to successfully adapt their streets and parking lots. They include:

**TRAFFIC:** Unless a commercial corridor is closed entirely, local officials must ensure that vehicles can still make deliveries and/or be routed through or around the area.

**LEGAL:** Local officials must consider whether emergency ordinances, temporary permits, or zoning code changes are needed to allow business activities in parking lots or along public streets.

**SHARING SPACE:** Every community will need to address accommodating a variety of users—pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and retail patrons—in limited physical space while still following public health requirements.

**AMENITIES:** Visitors need to feel welcomed with amenities that enliven the streets, add comfort, and meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) while still keeping people safe.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Some businesses need additional space to operate while meeting COVID-19 health restrictions.
- Adaptive streets allow businesses to occupy public roadways and parking lot areas for commerce.
- There are many practical issues to be considered when executing adaptive streets.

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

- Phoenixville Borough, Chester County, completely closes the 100 and 200 blocks of Bridge Street on a temporary basis each weekend. Doing so provides ample room for people to shop, dine, and travel while staying apart.

- The Chickie’s and Pete’s restaurant along Trooper Road in Lower Providence Township repurposed part of its drive aisle and parking spaces to install temporary covered outside seating.
“We had one of our local restaurants come to us and ask to close the borough-owned street directly adjacent to their restaurant, which we did. They were able to take advantage of Friday and Saturday night outdoor dining during the yellow phase, and it worked out extremely well for them.”

– John Ernst, AIA, Lansdale Borough Manager

RESOURCES

Sit-down dining is back! As long as it’s outside, as Lehigh Valley enters yellow phase. lehighvalleylive.com

Phoenixville to Open Temporary Open Air Business Setup
MyChesco

City: Rehoboth Avenue Barriers Are for Safety
Cape Gazette

Streets for Pandemic Response & Recovery
National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)

City of Tampa’s Lift Up Local Economic Recovery Plan
City of Tampa, Florida

RELATED TOPICS

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• Outdoor Markets
• Municipal Strategies
• Open Space Reimagined

Flexibility and ingenuity will be keys to successfully adapt streets and other vehicular areas. General recommendations on how local officials can start adaptive streets efforts, based on lessons learned from other nearby communities, such as Phoenixville, Allentown, and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, include:

• Establishing a COVID-19 safety plan that identifies the basic guidelines for all businesses
• Coordinating with the business community to identify needs and acceptable strategies
• Including solicitors, public works, police departments, fire departments, and other staff in the discussion
• Ensuring that parking and vehicular detours are properly marked and publicly promoted
• Ensuring ADA access is provided and public pedestrian paths are preserved
• Ensuring spaces are comfortable and protected from the elements
• Considering the careful placement of barriers to limit their number while ensuring a safe environment
• Being open to various options that may not have been considered before

County residents have reduced their travel as a result of COVID-19. According to data compiled by the University of Maryland, the average number of miles county residents are traveling each day continues to be lower than pre-pandemic levels. Adaptive streets are a tool that communities might continue to use to encourage local shopping and community cohesiveness even after the pandemic restrictions are relaxed.

During the yellow phase, Lansdale closed a one-block stretch of borough-owned North Wood Street for outdoor restaurant seating.

The Village at Valley Forge, in Upper Merion Township, accommodated both outdoor dining and vehicle traffic by using barriers to close a row of parking spaces along Bryce Lane.