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'Many are already facing closure': Oakville restaurants and small businesses can use town lands as outdoor space

Initiative would not take effect until province lifts restrictions

NEWS 12:00 PM by [David Lea](#) ✓ Oakville Beaver



A busy downtown Oakville in 2016. - Graham Paine/Torstar

When provincial restrictions lift, many restaurants in Oakville will have an opportunity to open more patio space to accommodate customers while still respecting social distancing rules.

Oakville council voted unanimously on Monday, May 25 to pass a Commercial Recovery Initiative that will allow businesses, like restaurants, to temporarily use town lands in and adjacent to commercial areas at normal cost.

Existing restaurants and retail businesses can use this town land to offer outdoor commercial services, including expanded patio service or pop-up facilities.

According to the motion, the space can also be used for an outdoor sale or to display merchandise.

The initiative is subject to permit requirements and will come into effect once the relevant provincial orders prohibiting in-restaurant dining and other outdoor activities are lifted.

Ward 1 Coun. Sean O'Meara spoke about the importance of giving restaurants, in particular, this extra space.

"From what we hear in some of the jurisdictions that are opening up is that restaurants are only going to be allowed about a 25 per cent occupancy rate. When you speak with restaurateurs, those numbers don't add up to a successful business. Many are already facing closure," he said.

"They need these types of resources, they need to be able to expand their footprint in order to protect the health and safety of the patrons, of people walking by, and to ensure they can still run a successful business model."

The initiative will incorporate physical distancing measures in these areas to address safety.

"Town council and Oakville's Economic Task Force want to be proactive and identify opportunities to support small businesses and restaurants. Converting available outdoor space to allow customers to shop or dine, while following proper physical distancing, will restore confidence in in-person shopping and dining when the provincial order allows restaurants to restore their full services," said Oakville Mayor Rob Burton.

"In line with recommendations from our local BIAs, the town will also be waiving the municipal portion of patio and bistro application fees. We know restaurants have been among the hardest hit as a result of the emergency order relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and we will continue to do everything we can to support our local restaurants who are an essential part of our community and local economy."

The mayor said he would also be writing the province to request that the Alcohol and Gaming Commission start processing these applications in anticipation of provincial restrictions being lifted.

He said he would also request that they streamline this application process and waive any provincial fees for restaurants and small businesses.