

May 20, 2020

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We write today to ask that you put a plan in place to expand outdoor seating for restaurants and bars as part of our economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. With the possibility of restaurants eventually reopening with 50 percent less indoor capacity for diners, small restaurants throughout the city that already had limited capacity face a tough road ahead. As we expand space for pedestrians to socially distance, the City should follow a plan that we have called for which was recently outlined by Speaker Corey Johnson and the NYC Hospitality Alliance to use sidewalks, streets, and open spaces to help small businesses that have been among the hardest hit.

Cities across the country—and around the world—have already taken up this approach. Boston’s Mayor said last week that they are considering using car lanes to give restaurants the seating capacity to restart. Tampa is closing stretches of roads for restaurants as part of their economic recovery plan. In Cincinnati, indoor seating is temporarily not allowed, and even once it is, will require parties to sit six feet apart with a physical barrier—so its Mayor found shutting down streets and lanes necessary. The Mayor of San Jose came to the same conclusion. In Canada, the city of Victoria is looking to open space for restaurants, and in Lithuania’s capital, restaurants will be allowed to set up outdoor seating in plazas and squares free of charge.

As Speaker Johnson wrote in an op-ed with Andrew Rigie earlier this week, the City should work with restaurants, Business Improvement Districts, and Community Boards to identify areas that would work as a pilot program. Implementation of a citywide program could be done through expanding the existing Street Seats program, or a new temporary permitting system. We have seen this elsewhere—just north of Atlanta, the city of Brookhaven set up a “Temporary Outdoor Restaurant Operations Permit,” a 90-day outdoor dining permit that requires landlord permission and a site plan. Of course, the City must ensure that restaurants are still following ADA rules so that sidewalks continue to be accessible.

New York City faces urgent crises on many fronts—but we must make sure that our bars and restaurants are able to survive and recover. This means listening to organizations like the Hospitality Alliance, who have been fighting to make outdoor space available to restaurants, not only to save businesses, but also to bring back vitality to the city.

Thank you for your consideration, and with any questions please contact our offices.

Sincerely,



Council Member Keith Powers



Council Member Brad Lander



Council Member Antonio Reynoso



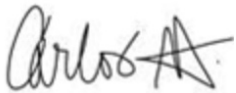
Council Member Donovan Richards



Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo



Council Member Ben Kallos



Council Member Carlos Menchaca



Council Member Justin Brannan



Council Member Costa Constantinides



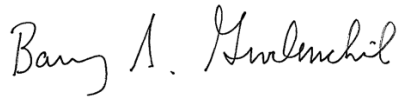
Council Member Paul Vallone



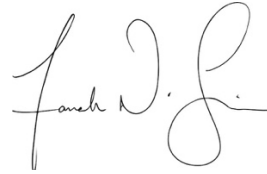
Council Member Daniel Dromm



Council Member Alan Maisel



Council Member Barry Grodenchik



Council Member Farah Louis



Council Member Rafael Salamanca



Council Member Margaret Chin



Council Member Andrew Cohen



Council Member Diana Ayala



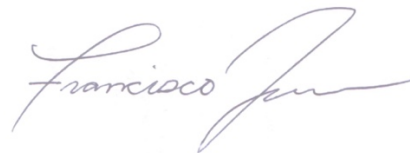
Council Member Mark Gjonaj



Council Member Adrienne Adams



Council Member Rory Lancman



Council Member Francisco Moya



Council Member Joseph Borelli



Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer