



RELEASED: June 9, 2020

COVID-19 RECOVERY RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITIES #2: USING PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAYS

Note: This is the second in a series of documents about COVID-19 pandemic economic recovery planning to be issued by DLCD. Additional technical resources will be shared over the coming weeks and months.

For land use planners and community and economic development professionals, the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to rethink how the public right-of-way is used. In this document, we look at flexible use of streets, sidewalks, and other public (and semi-public) spaces, to respond to the immediate challenges of Oregon's phased re-opening as well as the long-term vibrancy of our communities.

Public Spaces

There are a number of strategies that cities can pursue to generate activity in public spaces that may not require development code amendments (see the DLCD publication *COVID-19 Recovery Resources for Communities #3: Development Code Reform*). These can likely be implemented more easily and quickly than the code amendment process allows.

- Expand outdoor seating areas so that restaurants can more easily meet the physical distancing requirements¹ of the State of Oregon's [Phase 1 reopening stage](#) while serving the same number of customers. This may include using sidewalks, parking lots, on-street parking, and even blocked off travel lanes. For development codes that have off-street parking mandates tied to restaurant seating area, don't require additional parking for expanded outdoor seating.
- Open up public parking lots to other economic uses such as food carts, public markets, and pop-up stores. Private parking lots can be issued temporary use permits for these uses as well.

Convert automobile travel lanes to additional space for pedestrians and bicyclists. After experiencing important declines in hazardous air pollution since the COVID-19 pandemic began, many cities² are planning to make these changes permanent to protect the health of their citizens.

¹ Restaurant tables must be "spaced at least six (6) feet apart so that at least six (6) feet between parties is maintained, including when customers approach or leave tables."

² Seattle Times (May 7, 2020): ["Seattle will permanently close 20 miles of residential streets to most vehicle traffic"](#)

The Guardian (April 21, 2020): ["Milan announces ambitious scheme to reduce car use after lockdown"](#)

Office of the Mayor of London (May 6, 2020): ["Mayor's bold new Streetspace plan will overhaul London's streets"](#)
[Database of city responses worldwide](#), compiled by Tabitha Combs, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Resources

Here is a sampling of the ample resources that have been developed in recent months to guide communities in reallocating public space for human use, including the important consideration of ensuring that all people feel safe and welcome in public spaces:

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) has a page dedicated to [COVID-19 response](#), including the comprehensive guide “**Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery**” ([available in pdf](#)), which covers policy and design elements for bike/roll lanes, sidewalks, transit, slow streets, pick-up & delivery zones, outdoor dining, and public markets.

[“Walking and Walkability in the Time of COVID-19: New Policies and Practices”](#): a webinar from [America Walks](#) that “explores how walking . . . has been affected by physical distancing, stay-at-home orders, a slower economy, and racial and economic disparities in the impact of the virus” and how public spaces are experienced by people of color.

[“How do we make sure that open streets are truly open for everyone?”](#) (Streetsblog Chicago) addresses the importance of applying an equity lens to open spaces, including new open spaces that are being created as a response to COVID-19.

Summary

In summary, as an immediate first step we encourage cities to look at measures that can be implemented without development code changes, such as the flexible use of the public right-of-way and public spaces, as covered in this publication. The companion DLCDC publication, [COVID-19 Recovery Resources for Communities #3: Development Code Reform](#), has additional recommendations for how local governments can spur economic development through development code amendments. Typically, approval for reallocating the use of public space would be through action of the city manager or city council.

Questions? Need more information?

If you are interested in learning more about any of these topics, or need advice on local implementation, contact Laura Buhl, TGM Code Assistance Planner, DLCDC, laura.buhl@state.or.us or (503) 934-0073 or your [DLCDC Regional Representative](#).

If you have questions about the COVID-19 Recovery Resources for Communities series of publications, please contact: Matt Crall, Planning Services Division Manager, Direct: 503-934-0046 Cell: 503-798-6419 Email: matthew.crall@state.or.us