

## **Communication from Public**

**Name:**

**Date Submitted:** 10/19/2020 11:41 AM

**Council File No:** 20-1074

**Comments for Public Posting:** Please see attached letter.



October 19, 2020

Councilmember Mike Bonin, Chair  
Transportation Committee  
200 N. Spring St.  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Re: LA Al Fresco Outdoor Dining & Slow Streets Programs**

Dear Councilmember Bonin,

Founded in 1924, Central City Association (CCA) is committed to advancing policies and projects that enhance Downtown Los Angeles' vibrancy and increase investment in the region. You and the City Council are aware of the extreme economic damage that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. DTLA has been hit especially hard as its dynamic mix of uses make it a neighborhood unlike any other in the city and it faces many issues that will hamper its recovery unless proactively addressed.

One of these issues is the state of our restaurants, cafes and bars which supported DTLA's robust tourism, dense burgeoning residential neighborhoods and thriving business districts over the last two decades helping to make DTLA an international attraction and a major economic driver for the City of Los Angeles. Yet, a recent [Eater LA article](#) paints a sobering picture, describing "most restaurants currently in survival mode...if conditions don't improve and businesses fail to receive the support they sorely need, the coronavirus could undo the neighborhood."

DTLA's unique zoning, mix of residential and commercial uses make it the perfect place for the Al Fresco and Slow Streets Programs; however, these factors are not taken into account in the programs' design. We write this letter to provide clear recommendations on how each program could be modified to meet DTLA's needs.

**We recognize the lifeline that Mayor Garcetti's LA Al Fresco Program has been for many restaurant owners across the City. Some DTLA business owners have been able to take advantage of the program to continue operations and employ their staff; however, it has been difficult to implement the program to scale in DTLA.** Of about 2,500 total applications for Phase 1 of the Al Fresco Program which includes sidewalk dining permits, about 200 were from within Council District 14's geographic boundaries. We estimate that about 30% of those applications were from Downtown businesses which is surprising given that there are so many restaurants, cafes and eateries without private parking lots or patios that would benefit from participating in the Al Fresco program. Lack of existing outdoor space is compounded by our narrow sidewalks that make it challenging to provide adequate space for socially distanced seating while ensuring ADA access.

**We're glad to see the City Council's efforts to continue the LA Al Fresco program by exploring how to make the program permanent as indicated in Councilmember Ryu's motion and strongly support the City creating a permanent, streamlined outdoor dining permit process.** We also thank Councilmember Krekorian for his motion to allocate CARES funding to support the LA Al Fresco Program. This motion directs the Department of Transportation (LADOT) to report with a process for applicants to fund their own Al Fresco curbside and in-street dining options.

**We know there is demand for an expanded LA Al Fresco program and want to ensure that the next phase can meet the needs of businesses operating in dense, urban areas like DTLA. We ask that you and the City Council approve the above motions with the following respective amendments so that struggling restaurant owners**



**across the city can realize this program's benefits as soon as possible to ensure their businesses remain solvent and can continue to employ their staff members while serving the community.**

**Recommendation (Motion 20-1263): Allow external partners to fund curbside and in-street dining now.** The motion as written would not allow restaurants and community organizations to fund their own curbside dining and street closures, respectively, until after the \$2M in CARES funding is exhausted through LADOT's allocation. We know that LADOT set a goal of using 55% of its resources to support businesses in communities with higher concentrations of Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), BIPOC-owned businesses or businesses located in neighborhoods heavily impacted by job losses due to COVID-19 as described in its [October 5 report](#). LADOT is still working to realize this goal and is planning different outreach efforts to ensure that impacted communities have the necessary information and technical resources.

**We encourage the City Council to amend the motion so that businesses that would like to bypass the opportunity to receive City-funded support can do so immediately and utilize their own funding to provide the necessary materials for curbside dining or in-street use.** Providing this option frees up resources to serve communities that are in need and ensures that business owners with the means to fund their own expanded Al Fresco dining can do so now and continue employing staff, many of whom fit the criteria identified by LADOT for priority.

**Recommendation (Motion 20-1074): Ensure the streamlined design guidelines provide necessary flexibility.** The first phase of the LA Al Fresco Program allowed restaurant owners to apply for a permit to use their sidewalks or private parking lots for expanded dining use. The permitting process was straightforward and simple, allowing businesses necessary emergency relief to meet our Health Officer Orders which currently preclude indoor dining. **We urge the City Council to provide LADOT with the maximum level of discretion during the next phase of the program to encourage use of innovative typologies that meet the needs of different street configurations and neighborhoods across the city. DTLA sidewalks have many competing uses. More restaurants in DTLA could successfully participate in the program if creative designs that expand sidewalk use and parklets become options.**

**Recommendation (CF 20-0838-S1): Modify the Slow Streets Program criteria to include non-residential streets and allow external partners to fund street closures.** Large portions of DTLA were ineligible to participate in the Slow Streets program because of street designations (Arterial) despite the fact that some streets in DTLA could be safely closed or partially restricted for pedestrian-only activity. The Slow Streets Program would be a perfect opportunity to pilot more pedestrian-only activity, and we urge the City Council to account for dynamic areas like DTLA when developing citywide programs. DTLA is home to 85,000 residents that would benefit from access to more open, active recreation space. The Slow Streets program should also be modified to allow external partners to fund the necessary equipment for the closure. This would free up City funds to support Slow Streets in under-resourced neighborhoods.

We thank the City Council, Mayor Garcetti and LADOT for implementing initiatives to reduce financial burdens on restaurants including expanding food pick-up curb space and automatically extending CUPs for restaurants. We appreciate your consideration of these requests and remain committed partners in supporting our city's recovery from the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Jessica Lall  
President & CEO,  
Central City Association of Los Angeles

cc: Councilmember Joe Buscaino  
Councilmember Paul Koretz  
Councilmember David Ryu  
Councilmember Paul Krekorian  
Deputy Mayor William Chun