



City of
OAKLAND
California

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City of Oakland Launches Flex Streets Initiative Allowing Businesses to Use City Sidewalks and Streets Under COVID-19

The City is waiving fees and streamlining the permitting process for use of sidewalk space and parking areas for businesses to expand while complying with revised Alameda County shelter-in-place order

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Oakland, CA – The City of Oakland announced today it will waive all fees and is streamlining permitting for business’ use of public rights-of-way, including sidewalks and parking lanes, to align with Alameda County’s updated Shelter-in-Place Order allowing outdoor dining and other merchant activities, under a new program called Flex Streets.

While essential in slowing the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus, Alameda County’s Shelter-in-Place Order greatly impacted Oakland small businesses, with many seeing sharp declines in revenues and the layoff of workers. On Thursday, Alameda County announced that as of Friday, June 19, the Health Officer Orders relax restrictions by reopening outdoor museums, outdoor restaurant dining, religious services, indoor/outdoor retail and outdoor fitness classes. Indoor and outdoor retail and outdoor dining will be allowed at reduced capacity to ensure physical distancing and safety plans are in place.

In support of outdoor dining and retail, the City of Oakland **launched the [Flex Streets Initiative](#) to streamline the permitting process for sidewalk, parking lane, and roadway encroachments**. The goal is to spur equitable economic recovery by making it easier for retailers, restaurants and other allowed businesses to use larger portions of the sidewalk, parking lanes and streets.

Flex Street Initiative Goals include:

1. Support local restaurants and retailers
2. Support Oakland residents
3. Improve traffic safety
4. Ensure and advance racial equity

To participate in the Flex Street program and use adjacent sidewalk or parking space, businesses allowed under the County Order may apply for a permit on the City of Oakland website www.oaklandca.gov/FlexStreets.

In advance of their application, businesses should review and be prepared to provide required proof of insurance, prepare a site plan, photograph their business and develop a social distancing plan. The City has provided guidelines and templates for each of these online. Once a business submits all

required application materials and provides a signed standard Conditional Agreement, they will automatically receive a permit. This will save a significant amount of time and help businesses reopen quickly while reducing administrative hurdles.

"Oakland's beloved business community has suffered a significant economic hit under the COVID-19 pandemic, and the City is rallying to support it with streamlined access to use the public spaces to aid their recovery," Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf said. "I'm incredibly proud of the city team that came together swiftly to support our businesses in their time of need. The Flex Streets Initiative joins a list of several innovative programs -- including Paint the Town! and Slow Streets -- the City of Oakland has developed to showcase how Oaklanders can use our street space creatively to meet the community's need, whether that's culture keeping, physically distanced recreation and now business recovery."

The City plans to implement the Flex Streets Initiative in phases, starting with sidewalk and parking lane areas. The City recognizes not all streets and neighborhoods are the same, and staff are developing options for businesses to safely extend their operations and physically distance their customers. Ideas are being developed now for a limited number of potential street closures and creative use of private parking lots, along with other uses of public space. The City will post signs around commercial areas notifying community members and businesses of the program and soliciting feedback for areas of improvement.

In recent weeks, City staff released a survey to seek input from the business community on how streets and sidewalks could be used by impacted businesses to recover from the COVID-19 crisis. The results to date show that 79 percent of survey respondents are "very interested" in using the outdoor public right-of-way (i.e., sidewalk, curb, street, etc.) to expand their business' capacity. More than 60 percent indicated they would use the additional space for outdoor seating, and about 22 percent indicated they would use it for physical distancing for customer pickup.

The Flex Streets Program also includes an expedited permitting process for mobile food vendors to help some of Oakland's smallest micro-businesses that are often owned by low-income people of color to help them operate safely during the COVID-19 Emergency. Specifically, Flex Streets removes the limit on the number of mobile food vending permits available, allows vending from multiple locations, and eliminates the mobile food vending permitting fee. Mobile food vendors must still demonstrate compliance with Alameda County Health, Fire Prevention Bureau, and Revenue Management Bureau requirements to ensure safe operations and tax compliance.

The City is additionally exploring how to provide opportunities for economic revitalization and community engagement through creative and flexible uses of privately-owned parking lots and other open outdoor areas. The initiative provides opportunities to streamline permitting requirements to provide additional space for Oakland businesses to operate as allowed by modifications to Alameda County's Shelter-in-Place order. More details will be announced soon.

In addition, the recently-launched Economic Recovery Advisory Council has identified the need for additional space to help businesses meet the safety requirements of reopening, and the need to streamline the permitting process and cost for outdoor use of the public right-of-way, as key issues. Similarly, staff has been in ongoing discussions with representatives from the chambers of commerce, business improvement districts and merchant groups throughout Oakland, and the need for fast and affordable permitting of café seating, outdoor dining, and parklets has been consistently voiced.

The City is still seeking feedback and input from our community and developing next steps. For additional program information, including application steps and the program survey, go online to www.oaklandca.gov/flexstreets.

Additional Alameda County Updates:

Beyond outdoor dining, the [updated Alameda County Order](#) allows for the following [additional business and community activities](#):

Retail:

- Permitted indoor/outdoor, including malls
- Stores must limit capacity to 50% of normal maximum capacity or the number of people who can maintain a distance of 6 feet from each other at all times, whichever is lower
- Stores may move goods outside for display or sales if local permits allow
- Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) recommends continuing curbside and delivery services as much as possible

Religious and Cultural Ceremonies:

- Limited to fewer than 100 people or 25% of the building/area capacity, whichever is lower
- Permitted indoors or outdoors; ACPHD strongly recommends a limit of 25 participants
- ACPHD strongly recommends continuing virtual services
- Food and beverage sales/distribution are discouraged
- Local guidance includes recommended modifications for common practices to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission

First Amendment Events:

- Outdoor in-person political gathering or protest permitted
- Everyone should wear face coverings and stay 6 feet apart

Outdoor Fitness Classes:

- Limited to 12 people at a time, spaced at least 6 feet apart at all times
- Person-to-person contact prohibited
- Sharing equipment is prohibited

Outdoor Museums, Outdoor Historical Sites, and Publicly Accessible Gardens:

- Members of the public may not access any indoor components of site

Dog Parks:

- Humans should maintain six feet physical distance from one another at all times
- Common water facilities should not be used
- Signage must be posted to tell people to avoid entering if they have a fever or cough

College Sports:

- Colleges may resume non-contact training activities with strict physical distancing
- Must be in stable groups of 12 or fewer
- Participants limited to only one group/activity

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