


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 4, 2022

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: YON LAMBERT, AICP, DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES 

SUBJECT: COMPENDIUM OF QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES RELATIVE TO PARKLETS FEES (DOCKET ITEM 42)

At the March 8, 2022, meeting, the City Council will consider a resolution to establish fees for parklet permits.

In October 2021, the Council [created a permanent parklet program](#) to support businesses and enable the continuation of outdoor, on-street dining. The Council's decision directed the Traffic and Parking Board to adopt Parklet Requirements (completed in November 2021) and recommended that the Council set fees for the program via Council resolution.

Over the last month, staff have been meeting individually with interested businesses about the parklet program and how to obtain a permit. The businesses have asked several questions about the program and the proposed fees that staff wanted to share with the Council as it may be helpful in considering this resolution. Below is an overview of the outreach we have done thus far and some of the common questions we are hearing from businesses.

OVERVIEW:

- There are currently 32 businesses that received an outdoor dining or retail permit under the temporary program that still have a parklet set up.
 - 17 businesses have responded to our initial outreach, none of which are retailers
 - 2 businesses that have not yet had on-street dining are interested in the program now that it is permanent
 - 1 business that physically cannot meet the parklet requirements due to its location has declined to participate in the permanent program
- As of Friday, March 4th, staff has met individually with 14 businesses to discuss the parklet permit for their specific business.
- Staff will be reaching out again to businesses we have not heard from to discuss the process for obtaining a parklet permit.

PARKLET PERMIT FEES:

Q: What criteria does the staff recommendation use to propose the fees?

A: The recommendation is built on criteria including use, location, and duration of a parklet:

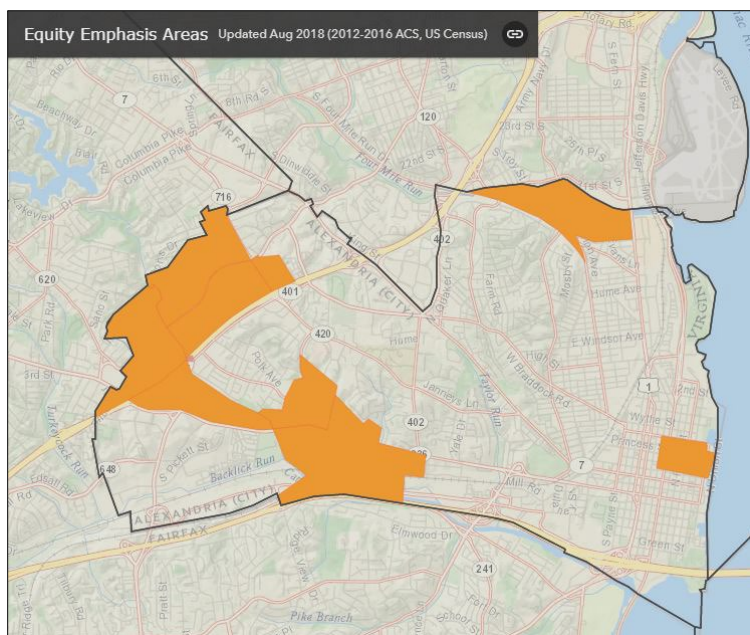
- Use:
 - *Public-use parklets* are proposed to have the lowest fees. These spaces will remain open to the general public at all times.
 - *Commercial use parklets* are proposed to have higher fees because these spaces will be used exclusively by commercial businesses.
- Location:
 - *Location* is a factor because of the value of the land/curb space, which is why staff propose to split the fees into three geographic categories based on value. The City often charges different fees (e.g. on-street paid parking and meter rates) based on the value of different locations.
 - *Equity Emphasis Area parklets* should have relatively discounted fees given their location within these economically disadvantaged areas to level the playing field across the city (see Figure 1 below).
- Duration:
 - *Pop-up parklets* are short-term (up to 7 days) parklets, for short term use of parking spaces.

Staff looked for similar examples of fees charged for the exclusive use of public right-of-way, summarized in [Attachment 3](#). These examples include:

- Average parking meter revenue
- Various City permit fees
- Carsharing parking spaces licensed to Zipcar
- License agreements for restaurants using public space

Staff adjusted each fee to compare to a linear foot of curb space, based on standard parking space dimensions.

Figure 1. Equity Emphasis Areas (EEA) in Alexandria per MWCOG:



Q: Can the permit fees be charged by month?

A: It could be possible, but charging permit fees by month would require additional resources dedicated to monitoring, billing, processing, and corresponding with each location. The City does not currently bill monthly for any other permits, so a new, appropriately resourced system would need to be established.

Q: Can the permit fees be a percentage of monthly sales?

A: It is possible, but the City does not currently have any permit fees with this structure. Implementing such a program would be administratively challenging and would require additional resources as noted above. The system would need to account for different charges for different businesses.

Q: Could we offer businesses a waiver or discount?

A: Yes. The proposed resolution includes a 50% discount for the first year of the program. However, the City could establish a threshold or criteria for businesses requesting/receiving a waiver going forward.

PARKLET REQUIREMENTS:

The [Parklet Requirements](#) for the permanent parklet program were adopted by the Traffic and Parking Board in November 2021. The requirements did not include any fees, which were to be set by the Council. Given the interest from businesses in the program, some common questions about the Parklet Requirements are below.

Q: How were the specifications determined?

A: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, cities around the country have been using Parklet programs as the basis for converting on-street parking into outdoor dining areas. The City’s own temporary on-street dining program was based on requirements from the City’s pilot public-use parklet program, approved in February 2020.

In developing a permanent program, the City looked to example parklet programs around the country as well as to best practices from national organizations.

Some examples include:

- The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) [Urban Street Design Guide](#)
- Arlington, VA [Parklet Design Guidelines](#)
- Washington, DC [Parklet Program](#)

These best practices informed the City’s requirements, including requirements about buffer space, size, location, and relationship to the sidewalk.

The Council approved a permanent parklet program in [October, 2021](#), directing the Traffic and Parking Board to develop specific requirements for parklet design.

The City’s Parklet Requirements were approved by the Traffic and Parking Board in November, 2021.

Q: How much does a parklet platform cost?

A: The cost of construction will depends on many factors, including size, materials, location (e.g., on a hill or flat), but estimates vary between \$5,000 and \$10,000.

Q: Why do businesses need to construct a platform?

A: Parklets are meant to be an extension of the sidewalk, and the City wants to ensure that these spaces are accessible. The [Parklet Requirements](#) (available on the City’s [Parklet website](#)) state that the surface “must be flush with the curb” to provide “a seamless connection” to the sidewalk and avoid tripping hazards. Additionally, parklets must conform to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. For most locations, this will require some kind of platform. However, the City is open to alternative designs to meet the same requirements.

Additionally, platform designs ensure parklets do not move over time and slide into the travel lane. The platform also provides a surface for adding edge barriers and railings which make the parklet more visible.

Finally, the City wants to provide a high-quality public realm. The program allows for year-round parklet installations, meant to justify investment in high-quality parklet designs that improve the public realm.

Q: Why are the platforms required to be removable?

A: The City's intent is for Parklet structures to remain in place as long as possible. The requirement to be removable is in the event that the City needs to make emergency utility repairs to the street, repave, or clear the right of way for some other reason.

While parklets must be designed to be capable of removal with 24 hours' notice, the City does not intend to frequently remove them. The Parklet Requirements document notes the City will provide at least 30 days' notice for any non-emergency removal.

Q: Will the City provide any technical assistance to help small businesses take advantage of this program?

A: City staff has been and will continue to meet with businessowners who are interested in the program to provide ideas and answer site-specific questions. Staff is also offering to guide each businessowner through the permit application process, provide ongoing communication and general support, and connect businessowners with others across the city and region for technical support and architect/contractor references.

Q: What are the requirements related to cleaning the parklet and rodent control?

A: The Parklet host is required to sign a maintenance agreement with the City and to keep the parklet clean and in good repair, and to provide pest control as necessary.

Q: Will tents be allowed on the platforms if well secured and replaced every 180 days?

A: No, tents and other similar temporary shade-providing structures will not be allowed in the public right-of-way beginning July 1, 2022. Umbrellas, however, will be allowed. Umbrellas must be stored indoors after close of business every night.

Q: Will businesses be required to get permission from other stakeholders beyond the City?

A: Yes, businesses will be required to collect letters of approval or support from the property's owner as well as the businesses, residents, and property owners of all buildings that the parklet is in front of.

Q: What if my parklet is currently in a loading zone, handicap parking, or otherwise designated curb space?

A: The curb restrictions must first be reviewed by the Traffic and Parking Board pursuant to Section 5-8-3(f) and recommended to be changed before construction on the parklet platform may begin.