

Outdoor Cafes



OUTDOOR CAFES

Overview

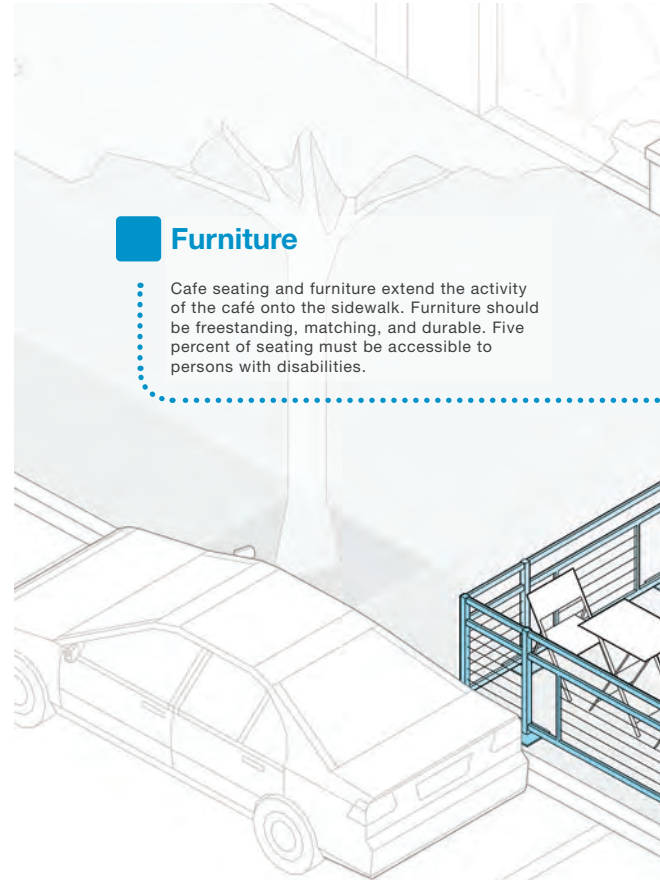
From spring through fall Boston has thriving outdoor cafes visible on the streets of Downtown, Back Bay, the South End, along the Greenway, and increasingly in neighborhood squares. Outdoor Cafes add activity and vibrancy to Boston's city streets, while seasonally providing an expanded space for businesses and a desirable experience for patrons.

Outdoor Cafes can take on a variety of configurations, but each must be limited in width to the frontage of the business with which it is associated. In addition to locating an Outdoor Cafe against a business façade, it is permissible to place an Outdoor Cafe on the sidewalk along the curb or on the street in a former parking space.

Outdoor Cafes are typically privately funded and maintained, and must clearly delineate the boundary between public and private areas, with an enclosure on all sides. An Outdoor Cafe must not obstruct public access along the sidewalk, and must provide accessible paths both along the sidewalk for the public, and between the restaurant and the outdoor seating for patrons and employees.



Outdoor cafe on Boylston Street in Boston

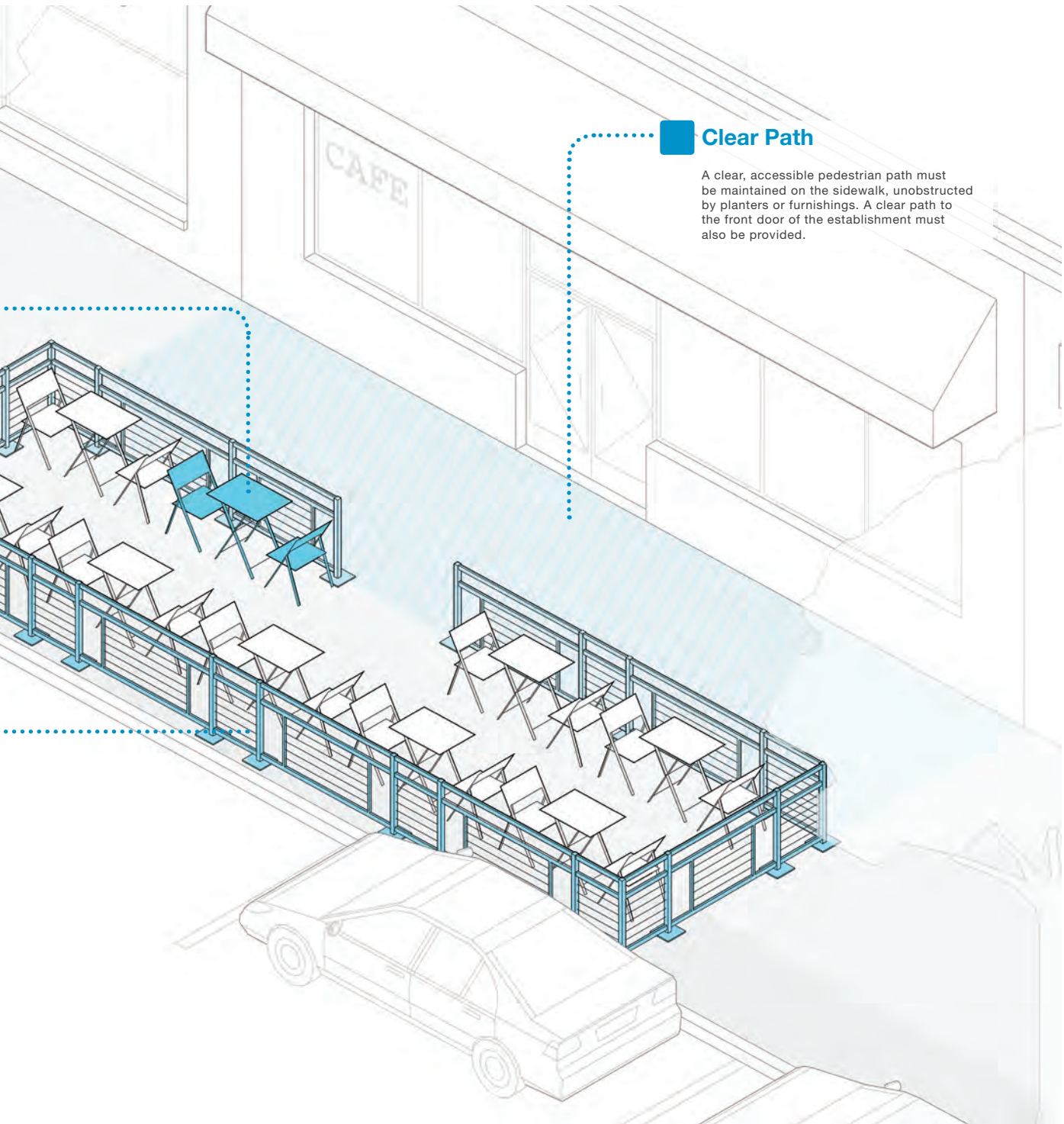
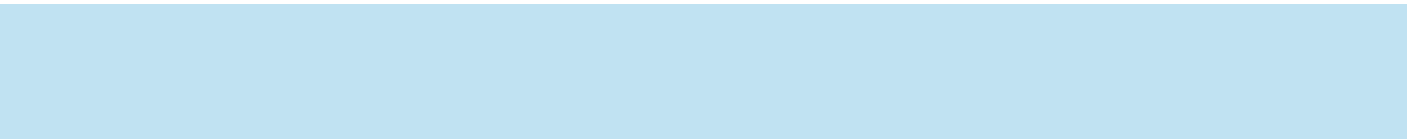


Furniture

Cafe seating and furniture extend the activity of the café onto the sidewalk. Furniture should be freestanding, matching, and durable. Five percent of seating must be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Enclosure

An enclosure is required on all sides of an Outdoor Cafe to separate it from the public right-of-way. Different types of enclosures can be used, such as fencing, bollards, or plant containers, but they must provide visibility between the seating area and the sidewalk. The enclosure must be attached to the ground where possible and must be cane-detectable.



Clear Path

A clear, accessible pedestrian path must be maintained on the sidewalk, unobstructed by planters or furnishings. A clear path to the front door of the establishment must also be provided.

Context and Location Criteria

Outdoor Cafes can be welcome amenities on many different kinds of streets, in all neighborhoods throughout the City. On streets with wide sidewalks, an Outdoor Cafe located adjacent to the building is appropriate **A**.

In some locations the sidewalk width between the building and the curb may be wide enough for an Outdoor Cafe, but trees or street furniture closer to the curb may make it more appropriate to locate the clear path along the building façade. In these cases, an Outdoor Cafe is best located adjacent to the curb, **B** in order to create less disruption for pedestrians.

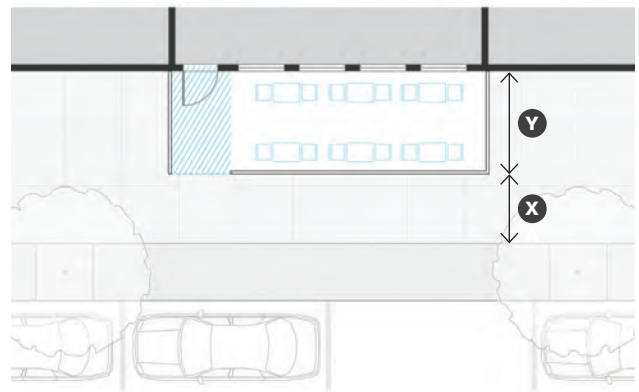
In many neighborhoods, sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate cafe seating adjacent to either the building or the curb. Yet, in many of these neighborhoods the businesses themselves are smaller and could benefit from expanded seating. Therefore, the City has expanded the options for Outdoor Cafes to allow them to be located on the street adjacent to the sidewalk. **C** In these cases, one or more on-street parking spaces can be converted to an Outdoor Cafe that is associated with the adjacent business. Outdoor Cafes located on the street are regulated in the same way as those on the sidewalk. Public Parklets may look similar to on-street Outdoor Cafes, but Parklets have lower permitting requirements, are open to all, and do not allow table service from any one restaurant or business.

General Requirements

Public Utilities	Outdoor Cafes must not block a fire hydrant.
Existing Public Right of Way	Outdoor Cafes cannot obstruct other street furniture, plantings, or signage unless permitted. Electrical cords may not be laid across the public right of way from a partner establishment to an Outdoor Cafe.
Assembly and Disassembly	All components of an Outdoor Cafe must be able to be dismantled for storage during periods of non-use.
Seating	Five percent of seating must be accessible to persons with disabilities.
Water Drainage	On-street outdoor cafes must not be installed over street drains unless accommodations for water flow are made.
Barriers	Barriers must be fixed and effectively immovable (bolted posts, planters, etc.).

A Façade Seating

Cafe seating adjacent to a building must provide a clear entry path through the seating area to the entrance of the cafe.



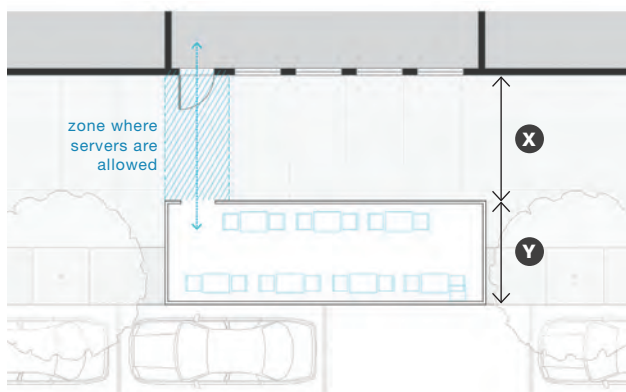
Clear Path Requirements

X	Pedestrian Clear Path	The minimum clear pedestrian path outside of the proposed seating area shall conform with the Pedestrian Zone “preferred and minimum widths for sidewalk zones” as noted in the Boston Complete Streets Guidelines.
Y	Seating Area Width	May not exceed 50% of total sidewalk width

For on-street Outdoor Cafes, see [Parklet Design Guidelines](#) for additional requirements (pg. 13).

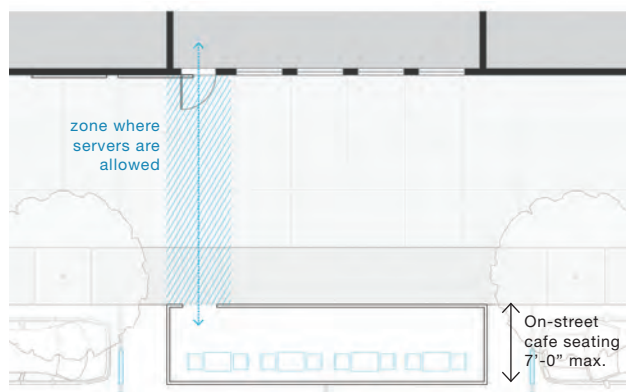
B Curbline Seating

Cafe seating along the curb must provide a proper enclosure on all sides of the seating area. Cords and furniture cannot obstruct the clear path between the establishment and the seating area.



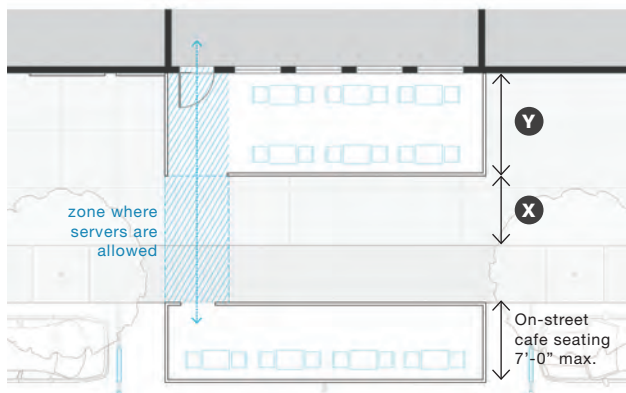
C Roadway Seating

The length of a seating area on the street cannot exceed three parking spaces. For other design requirements for on-street seating see Parklet Design Guidelines (pg. 13).



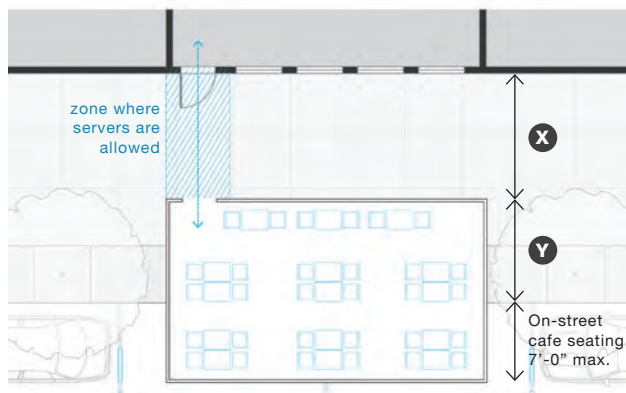
A/C Façade and Roadway Seating

Building-adjacent seating and on-street seating can be combined to create a large outdoor seating space with a clear pedestrian path running between adjacent and on-street areas.

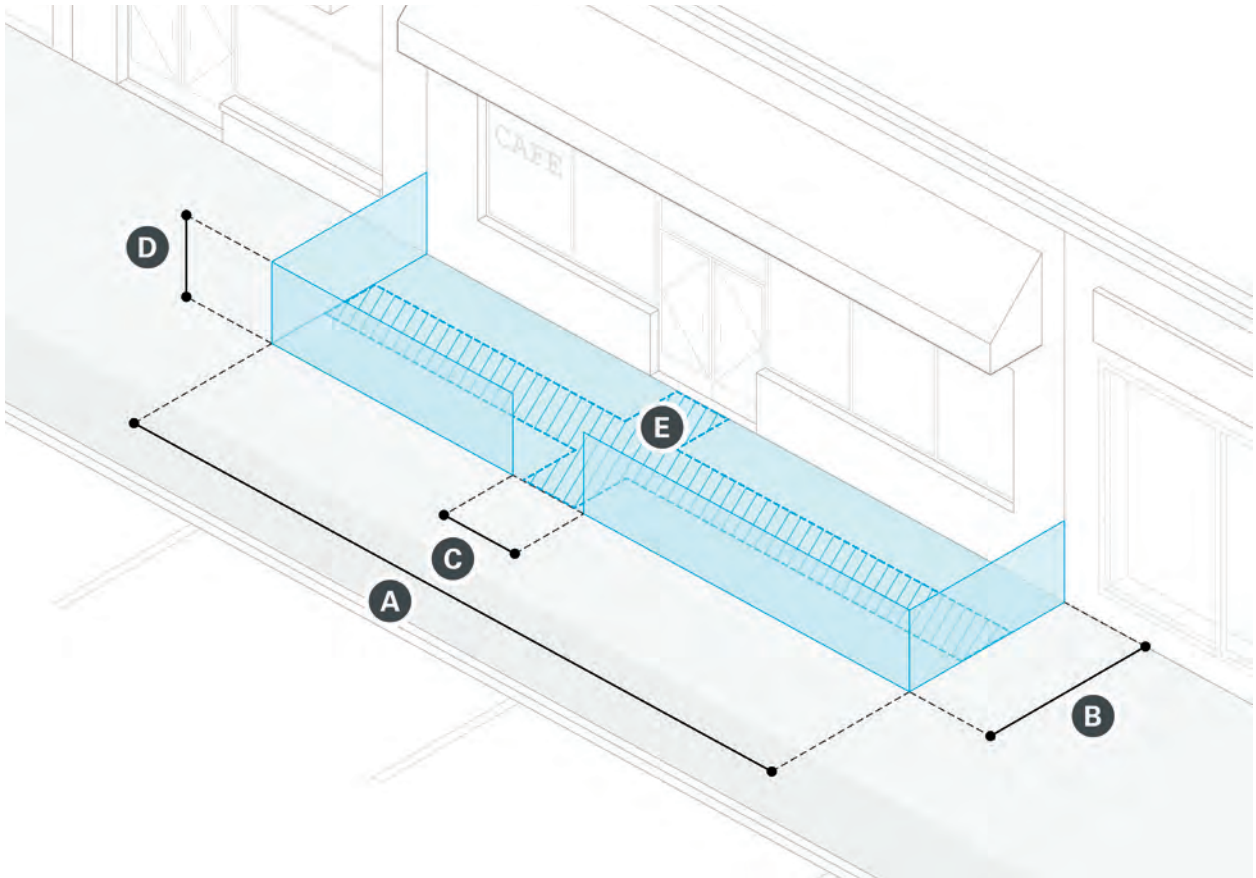


B/C Curbline and Roadway Seating

A combination of curbside seating and on-street seating can be used to create an expanded outdoor seating area along the street.

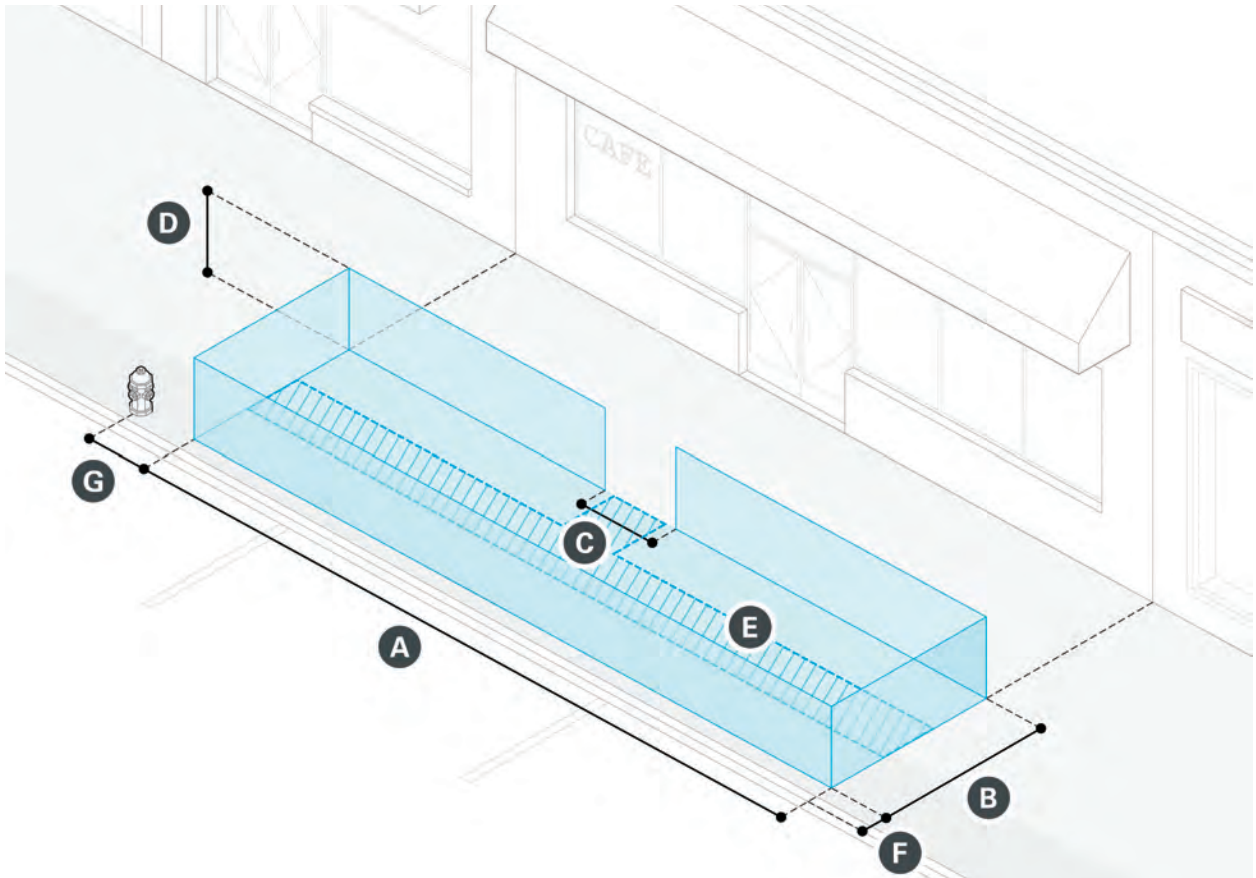


Design Guidelines



Façade Seating: Design and Placement

A	Seating Area Length	May not exceed beyond restaurant facility
B	Seating Area Width	May not exceed 50% of total sidewalk width
C	Entry Threshold	48" minimum clear zone at each entry
D	Enclosure Height	Fencing or chain and bollards: 36"–48" Planter boxes: 18"min.–24"
E	Circulation	36" wide minimum circulation path to entrance



Curbside Seating: Design and Placement

For on-street outdoor seating see [Parklet Design Guidelines](#) (pg. 13).

A	Seating area length	May not exceed beyond restaurant facility
B	Seating area width	May not exceed 50% of total sidewalk width
C	Entry threshold	48" minimum clear zone at each entry
D	Enclosure height	Fencing or chain and bollards: 36"–48" Planter boxes (non-street sides): 18"–24"
E	Circulation	36" wide minimum circulation path
F	Without parking meter	On curb edge
	With parking meter	18" minimum from parking meter
G	Distance from fire hydrant	3' minimum

Application and Implementation Process

Outlined below is general cafe guidance. For complete procedure, design guidelines, submission requirements, or additional information visit www.boston.gov/PIC or email PIC@boston.gov.

1 Prepare plans and documentation

- ▶ **Photograph(s)** provide eye-level photos of proposed location.
- ▶ **Plan and Elevation Drawings** prepared by a Massachusetts Professional Engineer (PE) or Professional Land Surveyor (PLS) show the site context and cafe layout with enclosures; dimension the proposed seating area and sidewalk clearances; and indicate any vertical obstructions.

2 Submit plans to private utility companies and the following public agencies for review:

- ▶ Boston Transportation Department (BTD)
- ▶ Inspectional Services Department (ISD)
- ▶ Boston Water and Sewer Commission (BWSC)
- ▶ Public Works Department (PWD)
- ▶ Mayor’s Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- ▶ Boston Parks and Recreation Department
- ▶ Boston Planning and Development Agency
- ▶ Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services
- ▶ Boston Landmarks Commission (if applicable)
- ▶ Contact PIC for additional agency and utility contacts.

3 Begin drafting License, Maintenance, and Indemnification (LMI) agreement and consult with:

- ▶ Public Improvement Commission (PIC) Staff
- ▶ Public Improvement Commission’s Legal Counsel
- ▶ Public Works Permitting Division (to establish the license fees)

4 Submit full submission to the PIC for review; submission includes:

- ▶ plans
- ▶ petition
- ▶ responses from all public agencies listed in step (2)
- ▶ utility company delivery receipts
- ▶ Manager’s Certificate or Certificate of Authority
- ▶ City Licensing Board documentation
- ▶ letter(s) from building owner and/or condo association
- ▶ copy of rental lease (if applicable)
- ▶ letter(s) of support from neighborhood association(s)
- ▶ areaway/vault letter (if applicable)
- ▶ Certificate of Insurance

5 Appear at a PIC Hearing under “New Business” and present the project

6 Make any revisions or amendments to the project as requested at the “New Business” Hearing

7 Appear at a PIC Hearing under “Public Hearing,” at which the PIC will review changes and vote on the petition

8 Upon approval, provide PIC staff one copy of the final plans on Mylar and receive the necessary permits

9 Applicant receives a license agreement for the use of public space and installs the cafe seating

Applicants may need the help of professional services to meet the engineering drawings (1) and LMI requirements (3).

Owner Responsibilities

Outdoor Cafes promote the use and enjoyment of public space. The success of an Outdoor Cafe as both a street feature and a business feature depends on the owner.

Regular Maintenance

- ▶ Cleaning, trash removal, and plant watering are the responsibility of the owner.

Day-to-Day Management

- ▶ Daily setup and breakdown of any items that cannot be left out overnight are the responsibility of the owner.
- ▶ Furniture should be secured together with cable and locks; furniture should not be stacked or locked to other objects, such as street lights, street trees, or the enclosure.

Temporary Removal

- ▶ In winter, all furniture and enclosures must be removed and stored inside the restaurant facility or off site, and any penetrations to the ground surface must be capped or filled.
- ▶ Cafe may be required to be removed for construction, repair, or utility work.

License Fees

- ▶ Cafe owners are required to pay an annual license fee.

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