

# KEEPING THE TABLES TURNING

Strategies for Repurposing Outdoor  
Space for Restaurants in COVID-19

WXY Uber Eats

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# Purpose

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting public health measures have changed daily life as we know it. For many restaurants across the nation, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant and lasting damage, with mounting personal, financial, and community losses. Restaurants are central to the cultural and social vitality of cities, yet the pandemic continues to challenge the ability of many beloved dining institutions, small businesses, and entrepreneurs to reach customers, maintain revenue, and stay in business.

While these losses have been acute, one of the ways city leaders, business associations, industry advocates, and restaurants have come together and adapted to these circumstances is by embracing outdoor dining. Restaurants and their partners have gotten creative, with new custom-built designs, converted parking lots, pick-up areas, and events. From a parking lot converted to a drive-in restaurant to the reinvention of Main Street as Restaurant Row, outdoor dining has demonstrated the resiliency and ingenuity of restaurants to remain places of civic gathering and community healing.

*Keeping the Tables Turning* is a playbook of strategies for restaurant owners to support adapting their business models to changing conditions. The playbook provides health and safety guidance from experts, ideas on how to re-organize indoor and outdoor space to support socially distant dining activities, and guidance on implementing marketing initiatives, programs, and events.

## METHODOLOGY

The production and compilation of this work was based on a review of best practices for healthy, safe, and socially distant outdoor dining around the country and was informed by interviews with real restaurant owners and industry experts. Production was led by WXY architecture + urban design in partnership with Uber Eats and was based on insights from the small business advocacy group Brooklyn Level Up, Harlem Park to Park, VallIncPR, and EatOkra (a black-owned restaurant guide).

The development of the playbook grew out of a national campaign and commitment by Uber Eats to support black-owned businesses. The impact of the pandemic has been felt particularly hard by minority-

owned restaurants, which have traditionally been underserved by financial institutions and lack access to resources and capital. Reimagining dining spaces is part of Uber's commitment, along with financial support, marketing, education, and promotions, and will culminate in a series of winterized outdoor dining pilots in a number of cities across the country, beginning in Harlem in November 2020.

These types of pilots and outdoor dining experiences not only strengthen the financial health of restaurants during a difficult time; they reaffirm the value of cities as places of public gathering where entrepreneurship, creativity, and most importantly, food, celebrate civic and cultural identity.

# Goals & Structure



## starters

What are the best practices for prioritizing health & safety?



## mains

How can your restaurant rethink its outdoor spaces?



## sides

How can you promote and activate your business?



## dessert

How can you work with your neighbors (and city halls)?



## extras

Everything else but the kitchen sink.

*Keeping the Tables Turning* is structured as a menu of ideas, options, and strategies to guide restaurants, business associations and policymakers as they navigate the options and the opportunities for outdoor dining. Not every restaurant is alike, but the playbook tries to capture the challenges faced by businesses (and cities) large and small. The following six goals guided this effort:

1. Promote *creative strategies* for restaurants to take advantage of their exterior spaces
2. Illustrate key *principles of health and safety* to protect against COVID-19
3. Demonstrate how restaurants can *connect to key partners*, advocates, and policymakers to support them in their efforts
4. Offer a *menu of ideas* for restaurant operators on how to promote, market, and activate their restaurant during (and after) the pandemic
5. Provide *best practices* for policymakers and city leaders to set up consistent, effective, and streamlined outdoor dining policies



starters

# HEALTH & SAFETY

## How to Stay Healthy

Based on guidance from the CDC, the principal mode by which people are infected with COVID-19 is through exposure to respiratory droplets carrying the virus. The risk of spread is highest when people are in

close contact with one another, particularly indoors, in places with poor ventilation, and in crowded spaces. There are many behavioral changes that greatly reduce the risk of spread. Businesses should work

with employees, affiliates and customers to reinforce behaviors that lessen the risk for everyone. (Source: CDC Guidance for Restaurants and Bars)

## Cleaning & Sanitation



**HAND SANITIZER**  
at entry & pick-up points and high-touch areas



**DISINFECT**  
high-touch areas & shared items with EPA disinfection criteria



**AVOID SHARING**  
self-service stations, condiments, menus, pens, utensils, etc.

## Health & Personal Hygiene



**HAND WASHING**  
thoroughly for at least 20 seconds is the best means of sanitization



**STAY HOME**  
require employees to stay home if they are sick or exposed



**ROTATE**  
rotate or stagger shifts to encourage social distancing



**BASIC HYGIENE**  
employees should avoid touching their face and wear masks at all times



**TEMP CHECK**  
conduct staff and customer temperature checks



**MONITOR LOCAL GUIDANCE**  
check your local public health department for updates regularly including customer contact tracing guidance

## Personal Protective Equipment



**PROVIDE FACE MASKS**  
of various sizes for employees & delivery associates



**PROVIDE HAND SANITIZER**  
for employees, customers, & delivery associates

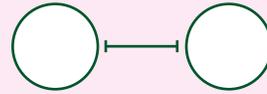
# HEALTH & SAFETY

**PLEASE  
WAIT HERE**

.....  
**25%  
Maximum  
Capacity**

## Entry protocols

Use clear and visible signs to indicate: capacity, protocols, changes in business hours, including dining time restrictions. Use floor decals, painting, or tape and signs to direct customers. Check temperatures upon entry and use QR codes for contact tracing where required.



## Keep Your 6'

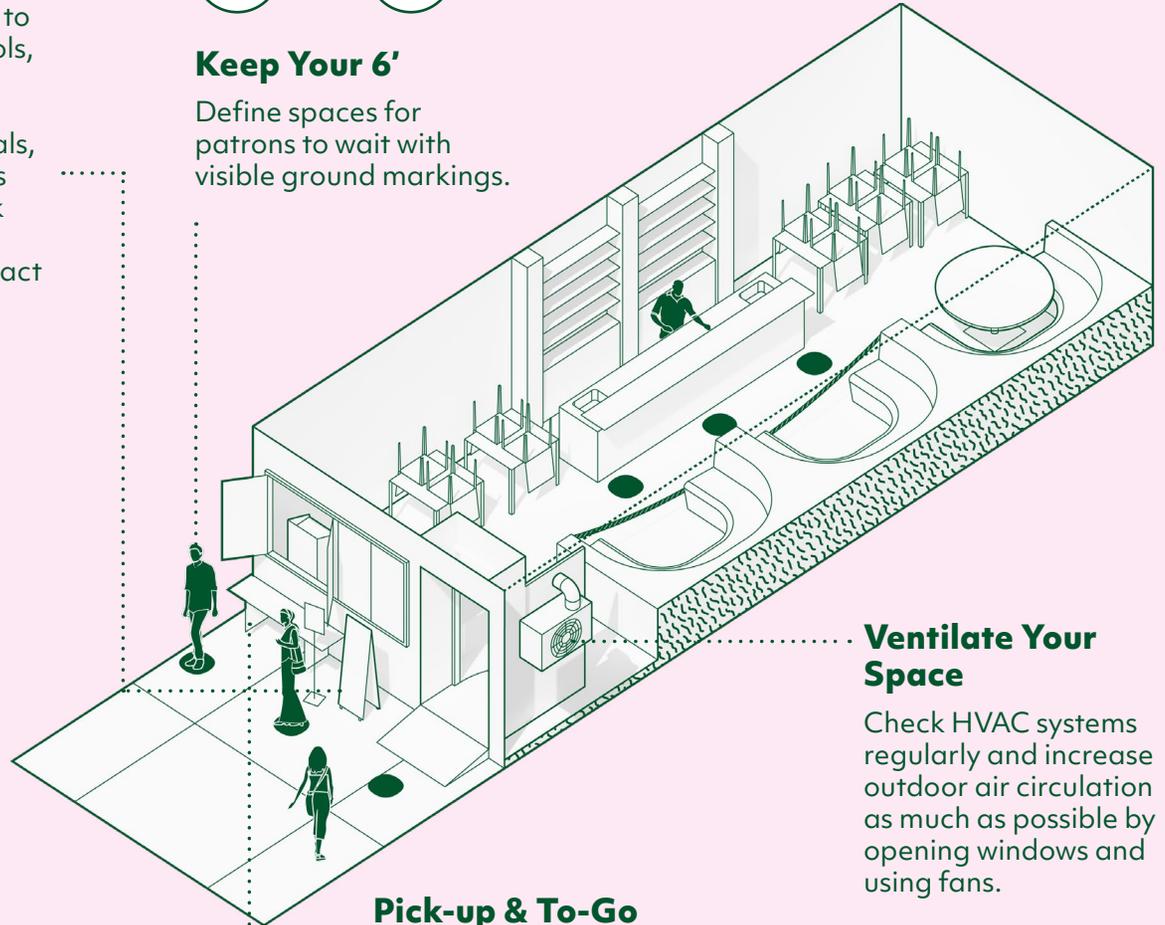
Define spaces for patrons to wait with visible ground markings.

## Maintain a Healthy Space

There are many operational, spatial and physical changes that contribute to a safer restaurant environment and help to reinforce behaviors that limit the spread of COVID-19.

## Consult the Experts

Public health guidance changes regularly. Make sure you know where to get up-to-date information. Reference your local requirements along with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for the most current guidance related to food safety and interacting with diners.



## Ventilate Your Space

Check HVAC systems regularly and increase outdoor air circulation as much as possible by opening windows and using fans.

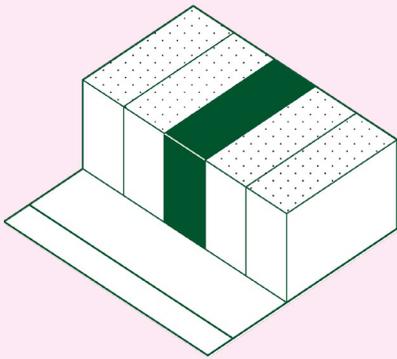
## Pick-up & To-Go

Designate a pick up area inside or outside the store. Encourage contactless pick-ups and deliveries.



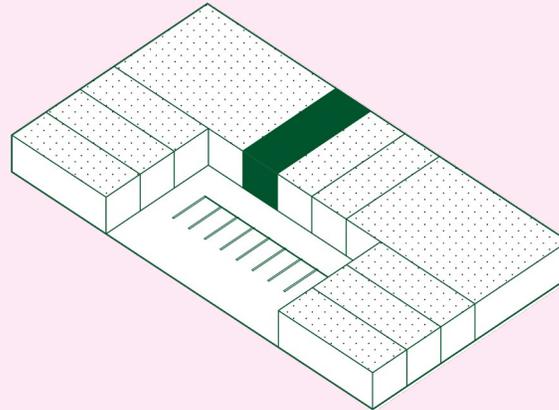
mains

# YOUR RESTAURANT



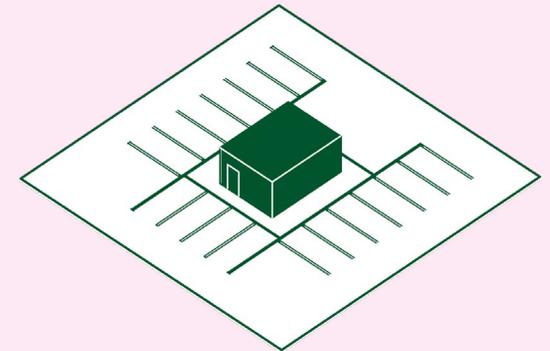
## The Block

City Blocks, Main Streets,  
Business Districts  
See pages 10-14, 18-19



## The Strip

Strip Malls, Markets,  
Motor Courts  
See pages 11-12, 15-19



## The Island

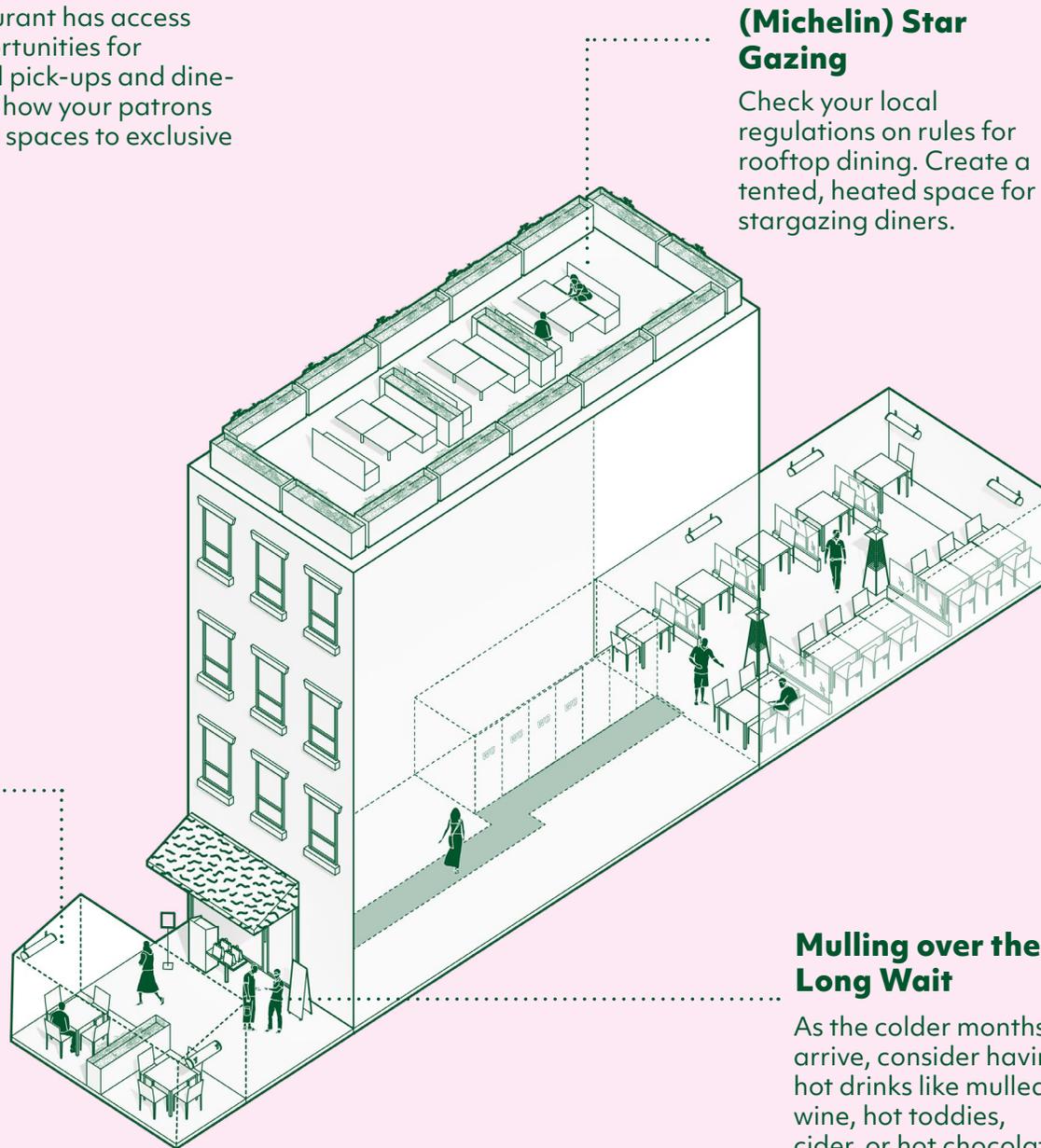
Freestanding with Parking,  
Highway Restaurants  
See pages 11-12, 16-19

# BUILDING

Exclusive spaces a restaurant has access to can offer unique opportunities for contactless ordering and pick-ups and dine-in experiences. Consider how your patrons move safely from shared spaces to exclusive dining spaces.

## “Parklets” & Sidewalk Cafes

Many cities have adopted outdoor dining guidelines that waive traditional fees for sidewalk cafes and allow restaurants to convert curbside parking to dining.

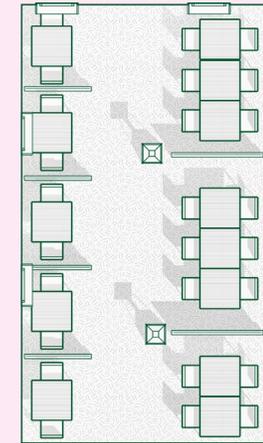
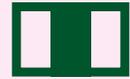


## (Michelin) Star Gazing

Check your local regulations on rules for rooftop dining. Create a tented, heated space for stargazing diners.

## Mulling over the Long Wait

As the colder months arrive, consider having hot drinks like mulled wine, hot toddies, cider, or hot chocolate available for waiting guests.



## Patio Seating

Backyard and patio spaces can provide an opportunity to invite diners into a more intimate and controlled environment. Many cities have more relaxed regulations for heating patio spaces.

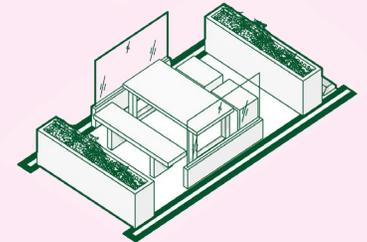
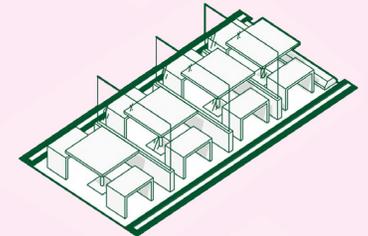
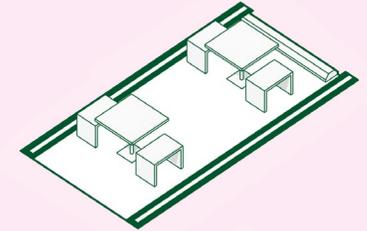
# PATIO SEATING

For many restaurants, the back patio has gone from a nice-to-have to a critical lifeline. Backyards, roofs, and patios open the potential to have a completely new dining experience in an intimate, warm, and garden-like setting.



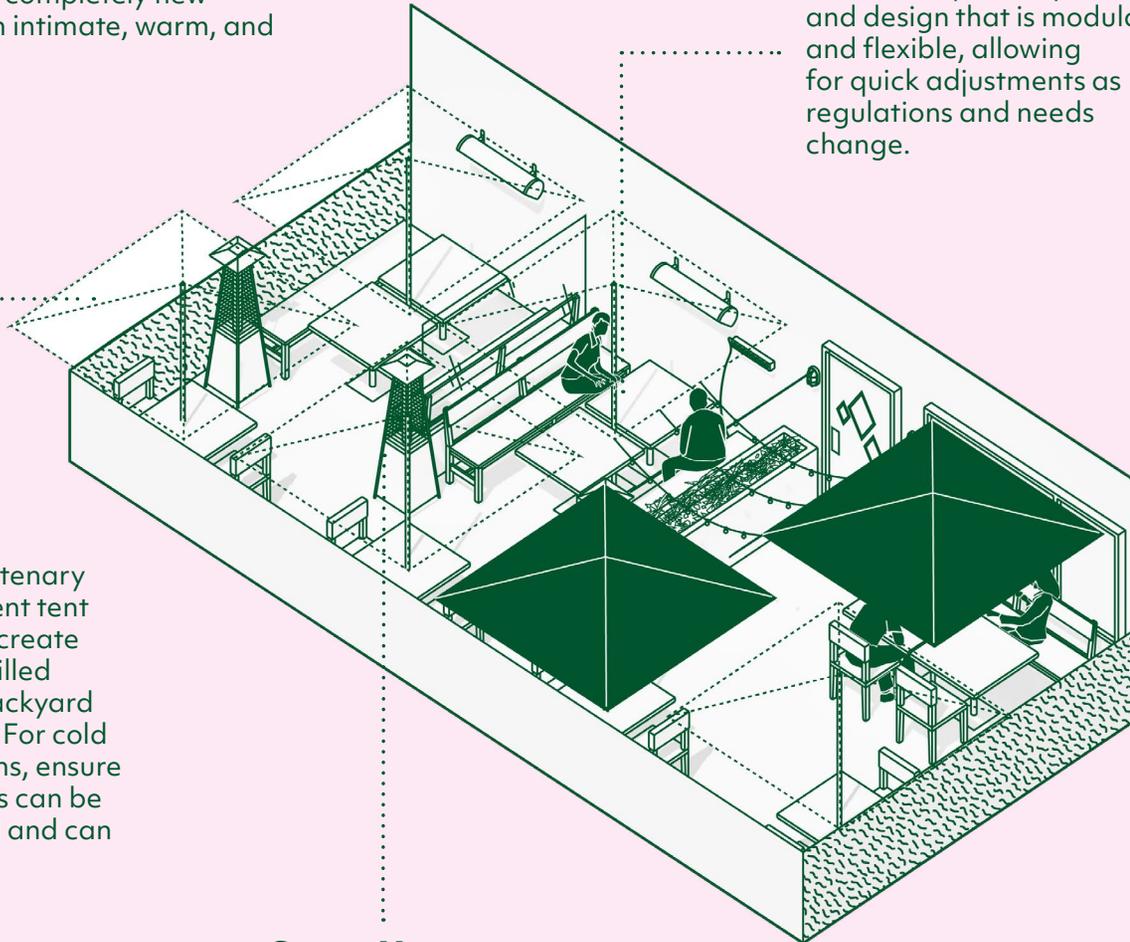
## Flexible Seating

Consider a patio layout and design that is modular and flexible, allowing for quick adjustments as regulations and needs change.



## Patio Coverage

Canvas awnings, catenary lights, and translucent tent structures can help create a winterized, light-filled experience in the backyard or restaurant patio. For cold and snowy conditions, ensure that patio structures can be easily disassembled and can handle snow loads.



## Space Heaters

Ensure a proper distribution and number of space heaters with sufficient coverage and placement to keep diners warm. Work with an electrician to project electricity costs and local grid capacity. Heaters

should be stored safely and in compliance with local regulations. Check your local fire department regulations for information on storage of electric and propane heaters.

# PARKING AREAS

Parking spaces adjacent to restaurants provide a much needed, flexible space for outdoor dining and other activities. Balance your need for curbside pick-up with a lively and flexible parking lot dining setup.

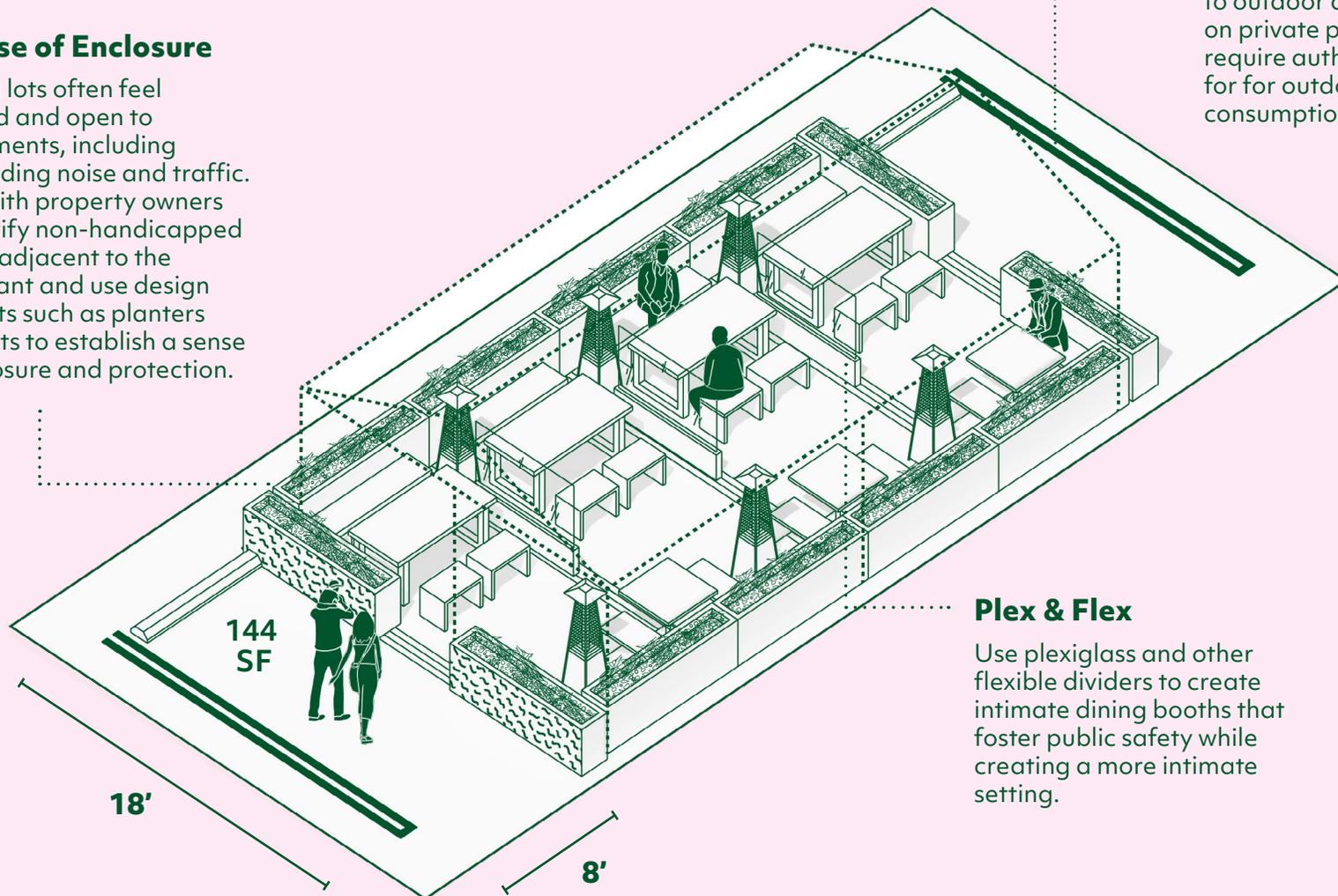


## My Spot

While many jurisdictions do not require permits for converting parking spaces to outdoor dining areas on private property, some require authorization for outdoor alcohol consumption.

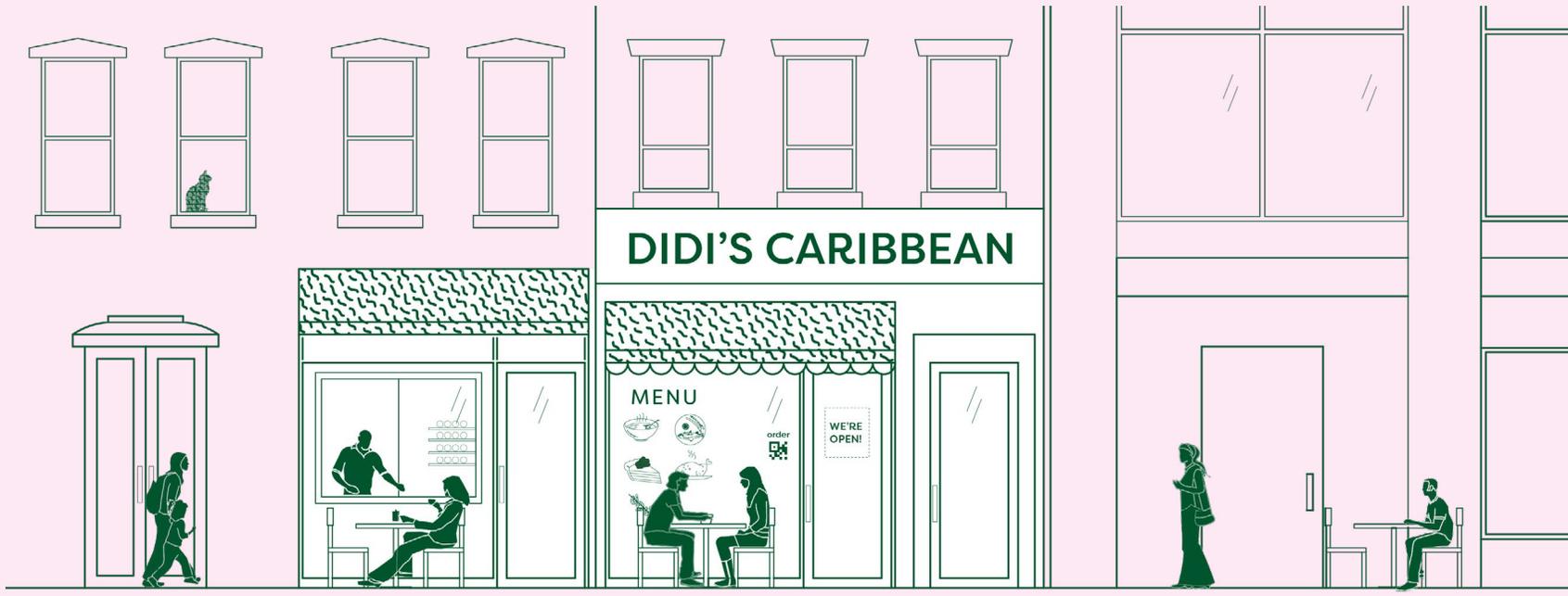
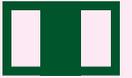
## A Sense of Enclosure

Parking lots often feel exposed and open to the elements, including surrounding noise and traffic. Work with property owners to identify non-handicapped spaces adjacent to the restaurant and use design elements such as planters and tents to establish a sense of enclosure and protection.



## Plex & Flex

Use plexiglass and other flexible dividers to create intimate dining booths that foster public safety while creating a more intimate setting.



### To-Go Window

Retrofit street facing windows to create a to-go window for coffee, drinks, and eats.

Check to see if local regulations allow for sidewalk seating with sufficient space.

### Face-out

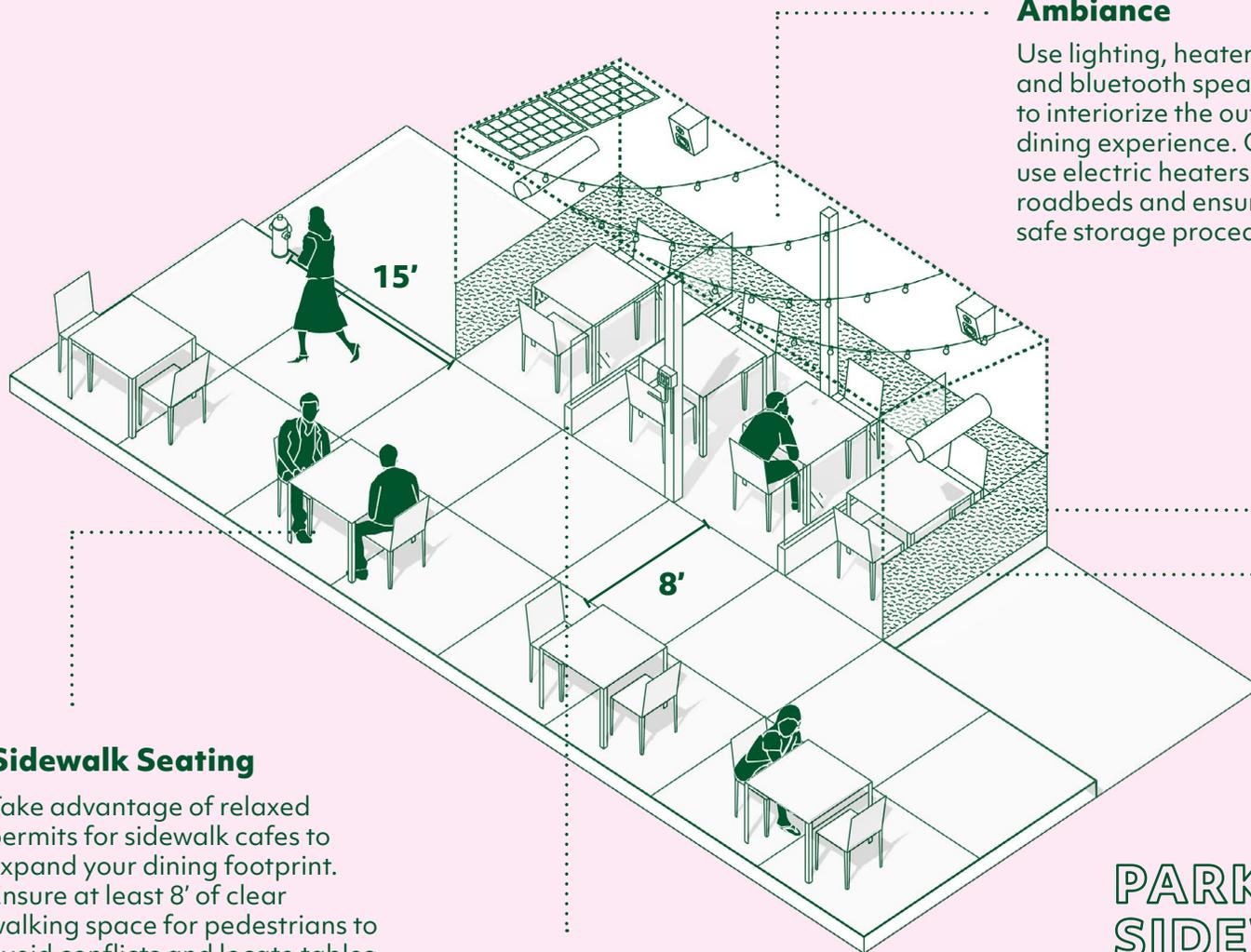
Rethink how window displays speak to passersby and work with your team to create a unique and outward-facing set of displays. Find creative ways of making your menu face outward.

### Super Graphics

Integrate social distancing rules into captivating exterior graphics to make sure your customers are paying attention to the important stuff.

### STOREFRONT

Reorient your business to face outward as opposed to inward by adopting creative storefront signage, branding, graphics, and interior design. Leverage in-house talent or work with local artists and designers to create a strong sense of identity both during the day and at night.



### Ambiance

Use lighting, heaters, and bluetooth speakers to interiorize the outdoor dining experience. Only use electric heaters on roadbeds and ensure safe storage procedures.

### Barriers

Use 18" weighted perimeter barriers to separate diners from the road and reflectors to maintain visibility. Check local dining capacity regulations to see how open a winterized structure should be (i.e. 50-70% open).

### Platform

To reduce tripping hazards, use a platform that raises the grade of the parklet to the sidewalk. Ensure that parklets are ADA compliant.

### Sidewalk Seating

Take advantage of relaxed permits for sidewalk cafes to expand your dining footprint. Ensure at least 8' of clear walking space for pedestrians to avoid conflicts and locate tables for two in narrower sidewalk areas. Ensure that you account for trees, poles, fire hydrants (15' away), intersections (10' away) and bus stops.

### Table Partitions

Table partitions are opportunities to market your business with artwork, posters, or fun quotes.

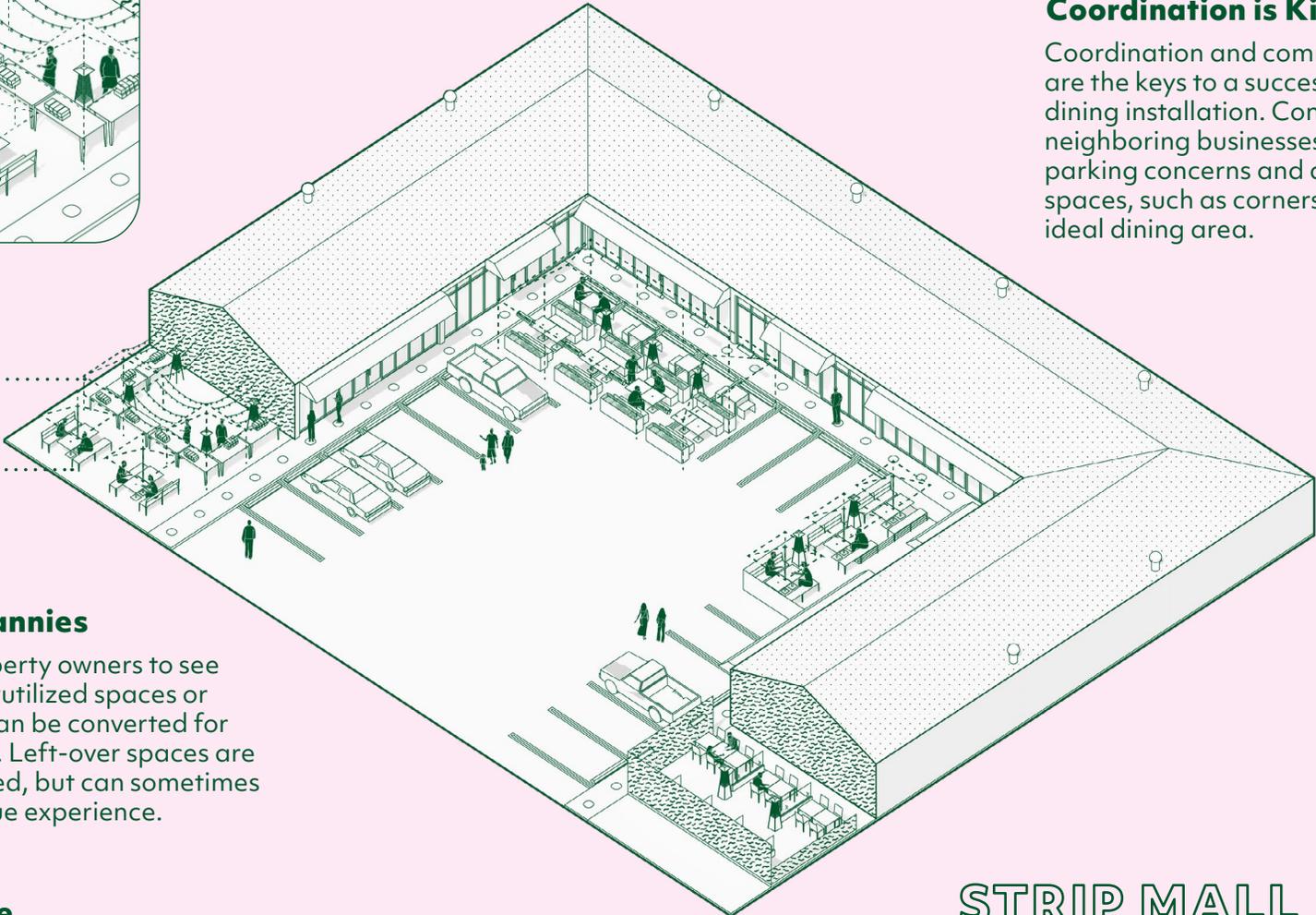
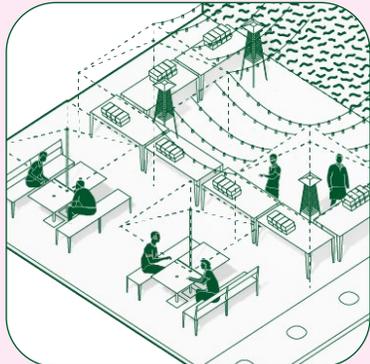
## PARKLETS & SIDEWALKS

Making use of shared spaces in curbside parking and on public sidewalks can greatly expand a restaurant's dining capacity and keep diners safe. There are several considerations to keep in mind to ensure a pleasant experience for patrons at all times of year. Restaurant owners need to clearly indicate the changes in use of public spaces to reduce confusion or potential friction with pedestrians on the sidewalk.



### Coordination is King

Coordination and communication are the keys to a successful outdoor dining installation. Connect with neighboring businesses to alleviate parking concerns and adapt key spaces, such as corners to create an ideal dining area.



### Nooks & Crannies

Work with property owners to see if certain underutilized spaces or service areas can be converted for outdoor dining. Left-over spaces are often overlooked, but can sometimes provide a unique experience.

### Shop 'N Dine

Work with non-restaurant businesses to align goals and partner on events that will create more business. Consider flea and farmers markets as an opportunity for off-peak activities.

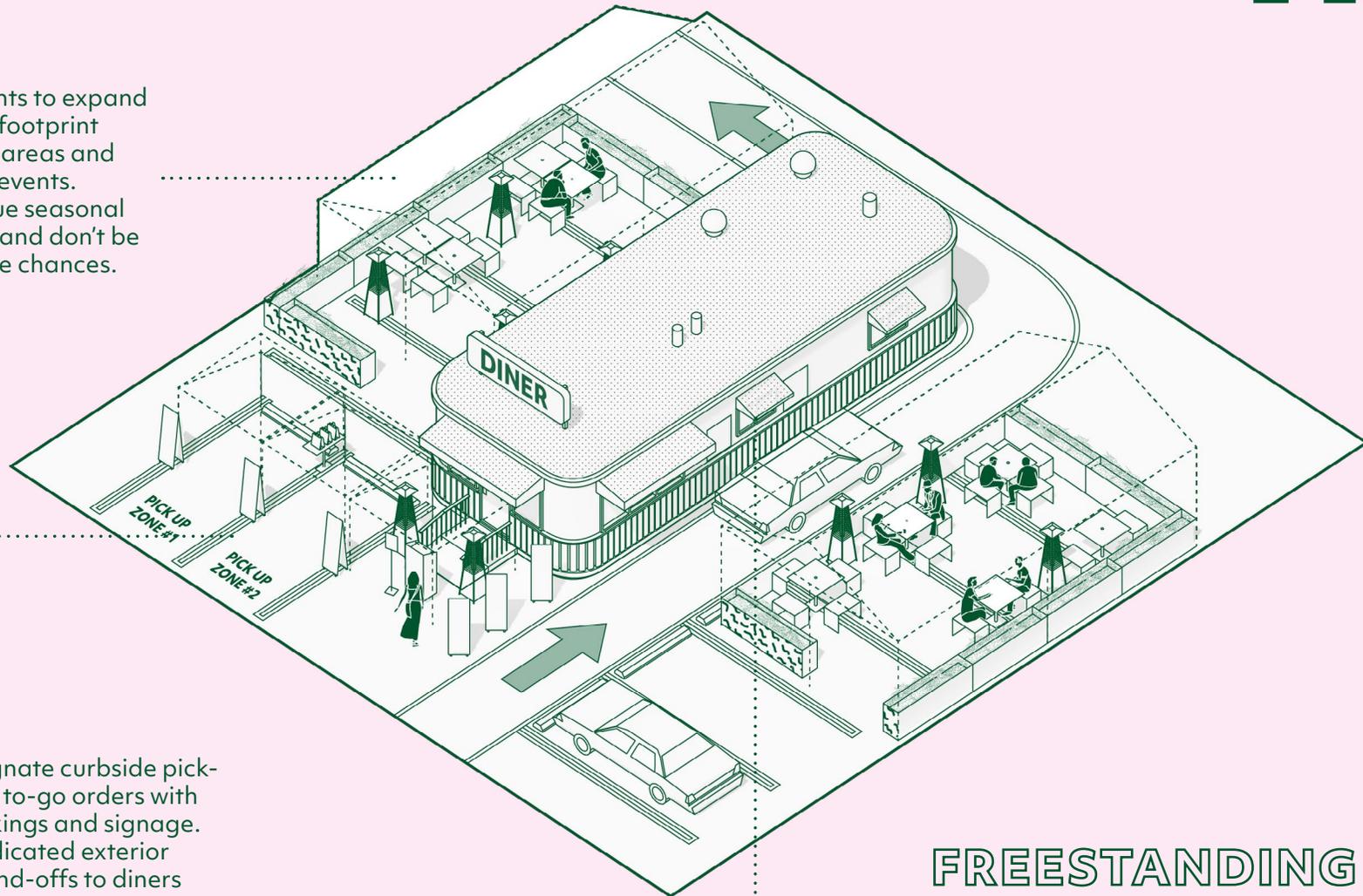
## STRIP MALL

Shared parking areas in strip malls and other shopping areas can present challenges of coordination, but they also have significant opportunities for more flexible and customizable spaces.



## Tenting

Use large tents to expand the building footprint into parking areas and host special events. Create unique seasonal experiences and don't be afraid to take chances.



## Pick-up

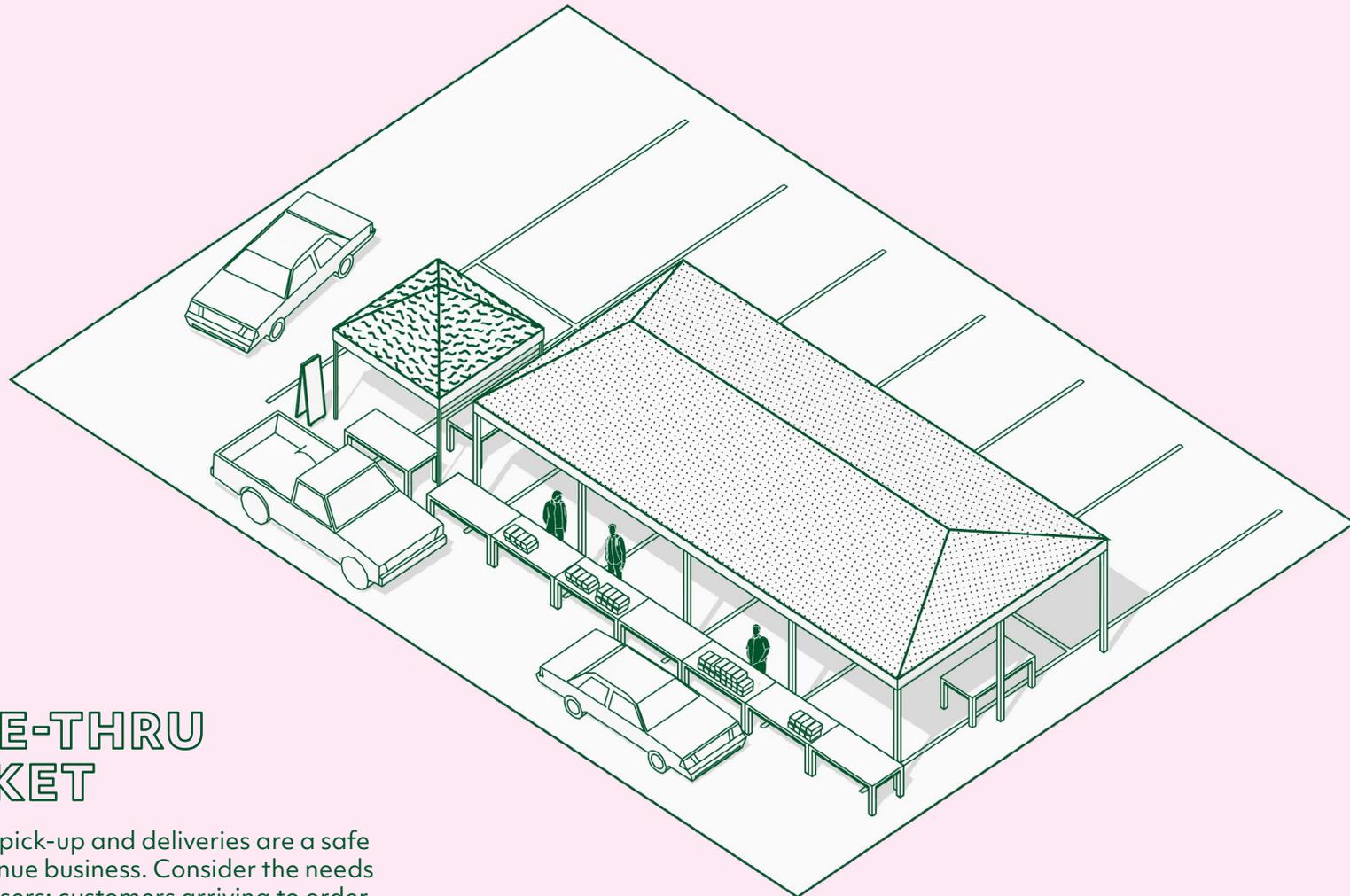
Clearly designate curbside pick-up points for to-go orders with ground markings and signage. Create a dedicated exterior space for hand-offs to diners and couriers.

## Drive-thru

Create a drive-thru option (if there is not one already) or create new outward facing pick-up windows.

## FREESTANDING BUILDING

Restaurants surrounded by parking or other open spaces have plenty of opportunity to create outdoor dining, but need to work harder to create a sense of enclosure for diners.



## DRIVE-THRU MARKET

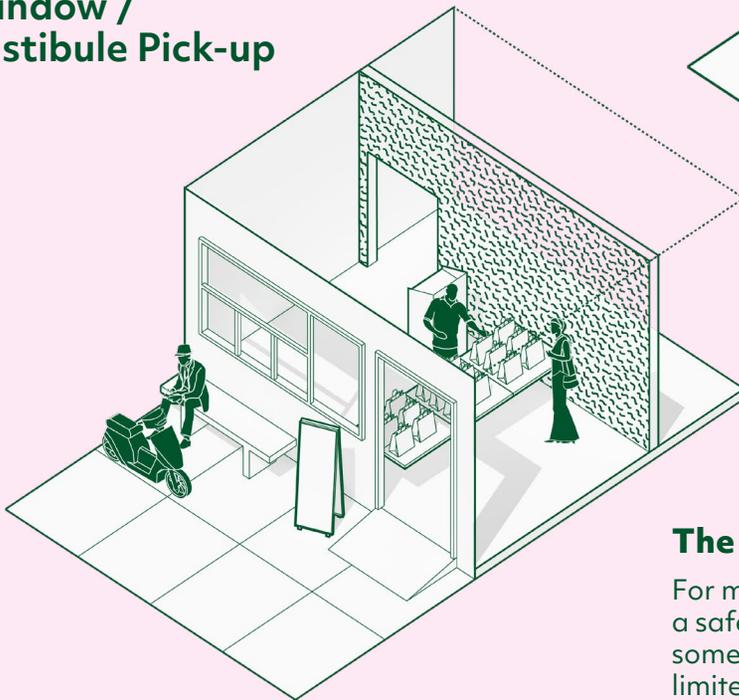
Contactless pick-up and deliveries are a safe way to continue business. Consider the needs of multiple users: customers arriving to order food or pick up previously ordered food, and couriers and delivery people arriving by bike, scooter or car to deliver to customers. Pay attention to the unique needs of each user group in designing your pick-up experience.

# PICK-UP

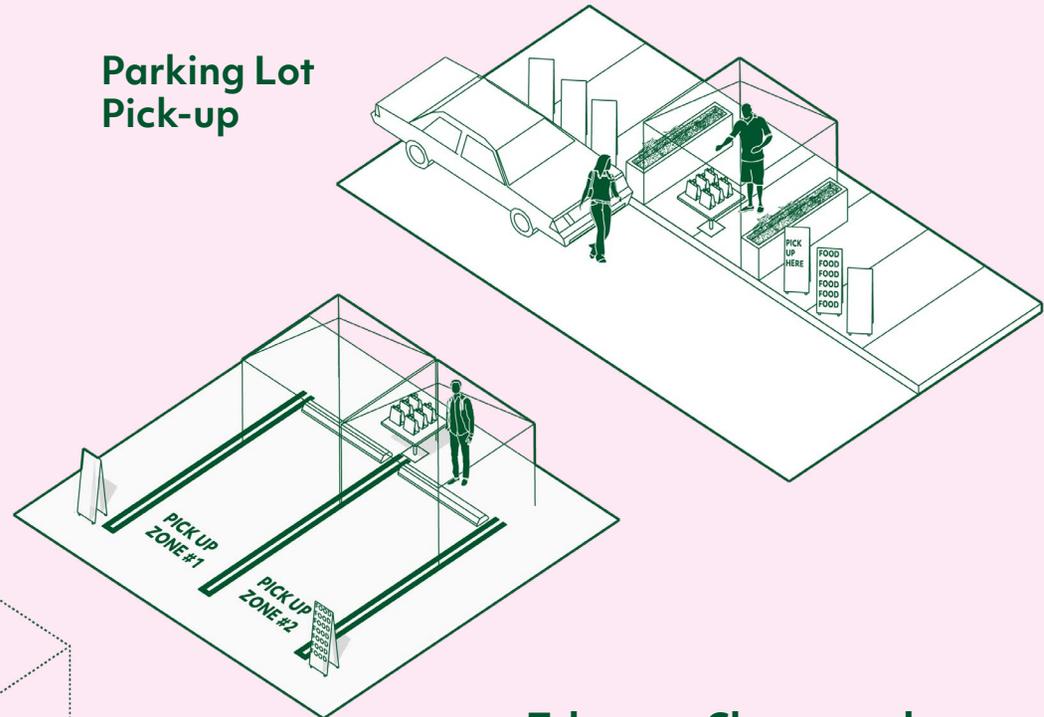
A safe and efficient pick-up and delivery area benefits from simple signage, clear markings, and ample hand sanitizer. Demarcate space for those who called ahead along with couriers and drivers working hard to get food from A to B.



## Window / Vestibule Pick-up



## Parking Lot Pick-up



## Takeaway Choreography

Delineate specific spaces for pick-up and control the takeout process with clear signage, staff coordination, and self-evident policies. For high-volume pick-ups, create spaces for a centrally staffed outdoor food bag pick-up table.

Develop signage that encourages delivery people and patrons to practice social distancing, discourage crowding, and keep doors and passages open.

## The Vestibule

For many restaurants, creating a safe waiting area requires some spatial ingenuity. Even with limited space, designate clear areas for pick-up, orders, and delivery drivers using bold signage, markings, and graphics.

# COMFORT STATION



Restaurants with lots of take-out orders and deliveries may consider developing a dedicated area or window for customers and delivery people to wait for their orders.

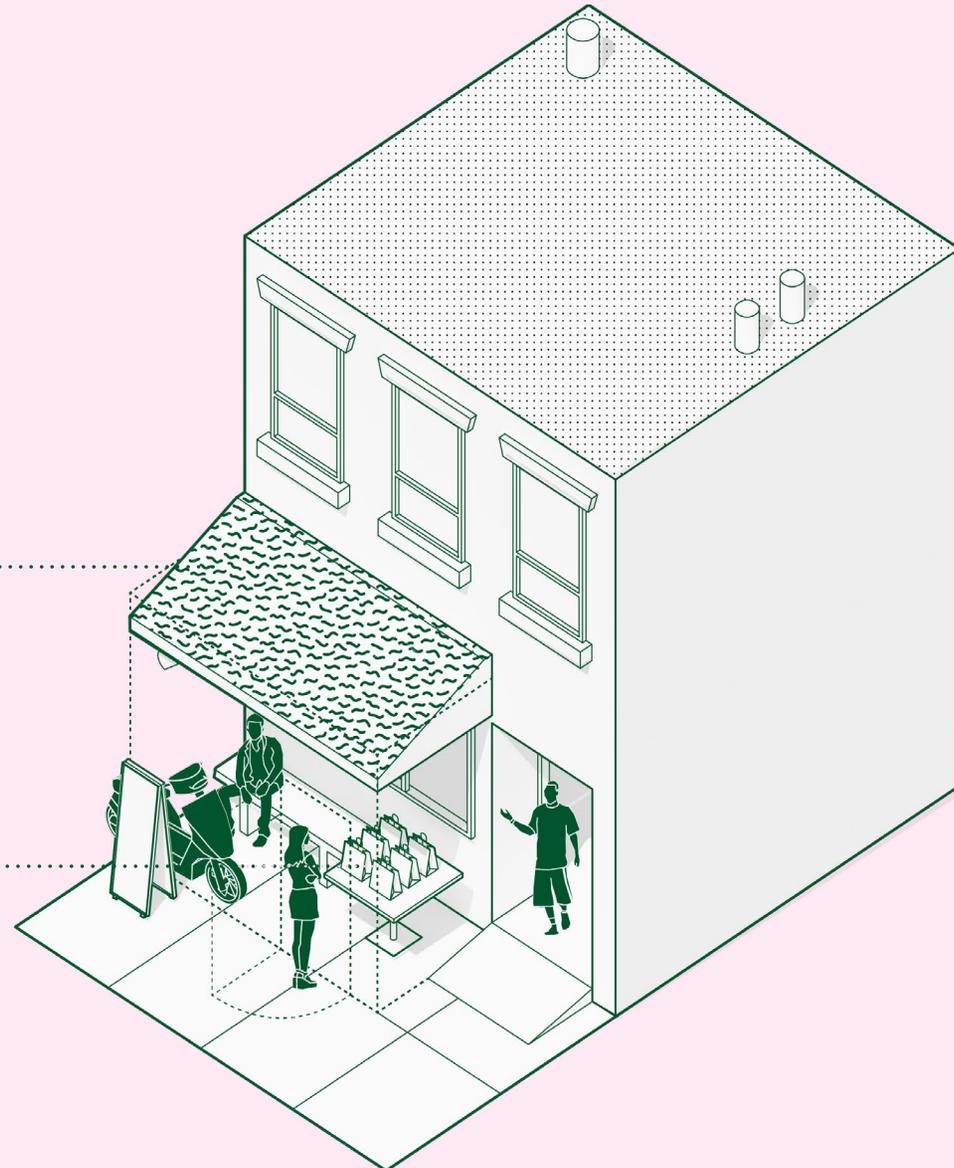


## Weatherize

Use awnings, heat lamps, and other features to keep couriers and customers out of the snow, rain, sleet, and hail.

## Streamline

Clearly delineate waiting zones and pick-up flows for customers and couriers. Whenever possible, create an intuitive pick-up system for orders going out for delivery separate from outdoor dining areas to keep operations running smooth.



# OUTDOOR CHECKLIST



## Weatherization

- Construct structures to withstand wind, rain, and snow loads

### *Plan for rainfall*

- Pitch roof to angle drainage away from diners
- Elevate dining platform above the roadbed
- Consider drainage to avoid pooling and puddling

### *Plan for heating elements in compliance with local regulation*

- Electric heaters for roadways and sidewalks
- Propane heaters may be subject to rules and regulations, as well as safe storage

### *Enclose outdoor spaces while keeping ventilation and air flow*

- Removable panels/windows/plexiglass



## Structural

- Stay ADA compliant by widening entrances, using ramps or platforms to mitigate grade changes
- Choose efficient, reusable and sustainable materials that can be repurposed in the future and are easy to clean
- Larger structures may trigger additional permitting restrictions



## Electrical

- Dedicate a circuit for outdoor electrical features
- Arrange and secure cords to reduce tripping hazards
- Only use outdoor rated appliances
- Consider installing an outdoor utility connection



## Safety, Security, Cleaning & Sanitation

- Clean outdoor spaces regularly
- Have a plan in place for pest management; keep trash bins separated from diners
- Secure down moveable items overnight
- Work with local leaders to help manage and oversee space off-hours



## Experiential

- Clearly demarcate restaurant dining space from shared spaces (sidewalk, street, and parking lot)
- Coordinate with delivery operations to ensure that couriers and drivers have a clear pick-up point and waiting area
- Incorporate low-maintenance plants, art, and other decorations
- Express your brand identity
- Consider music and bluetooth speakers

The background of the image is a solid green color with a repeating pattern of corn cobs. Each corn cob is depicted in a simple, stylized line-art style, showing the kernels and the husk. The cobs are arranged in a grid-like pattern, slightly offset from each other, creating a textured, repeating effect.

sides

# PROMOTION

## Marketing & Promotion

Even if your customers can't physically eat in your restaurant, there are lots of ways of keeping people engaged, excited, and hungry for what you have to offer.

Work across digital platforms, develop partnerships with chefs, influencers, and mixologists, and discover your inner extrovert. Food photography is your friend;

outdoor dining and events are your lifeline; and delivery apps are your partners. Make the most of a difficult time by extending your reach (and your menu) digitally.

### Signage



**HOURS**  
post your most up-to-date business hours and capacity



**SIGNAGE**  
"We're Open"  
"Back in Business"



**SIGNAGE**  
Indicate outdoor dining pickup/carside waiting areas

### Digital



**WEB PRESENCE**  
online ordering, invest in food photography, food descriptions



**SOCIAL MEDIA**  
to communicate hours, specials, events, etc.



**PROMOS & TARGETED MARKETING**  
discounts/coupons, target audience



**DIGITAL MENUS WITH QR CODES**  
display QR code that can be scanned



**DELIVERY APPS**  
work with third party delivery services to run targeted marketing campaigns to drive demand

### Partnership / Civic



**COLLABORATE WITH CHEFS & MIXOLOGISTS**  
Food & drink requirements



**FOOD PANTRY DISTRIBUTION POINTS**  
Donate food to food pantries (highly needed)

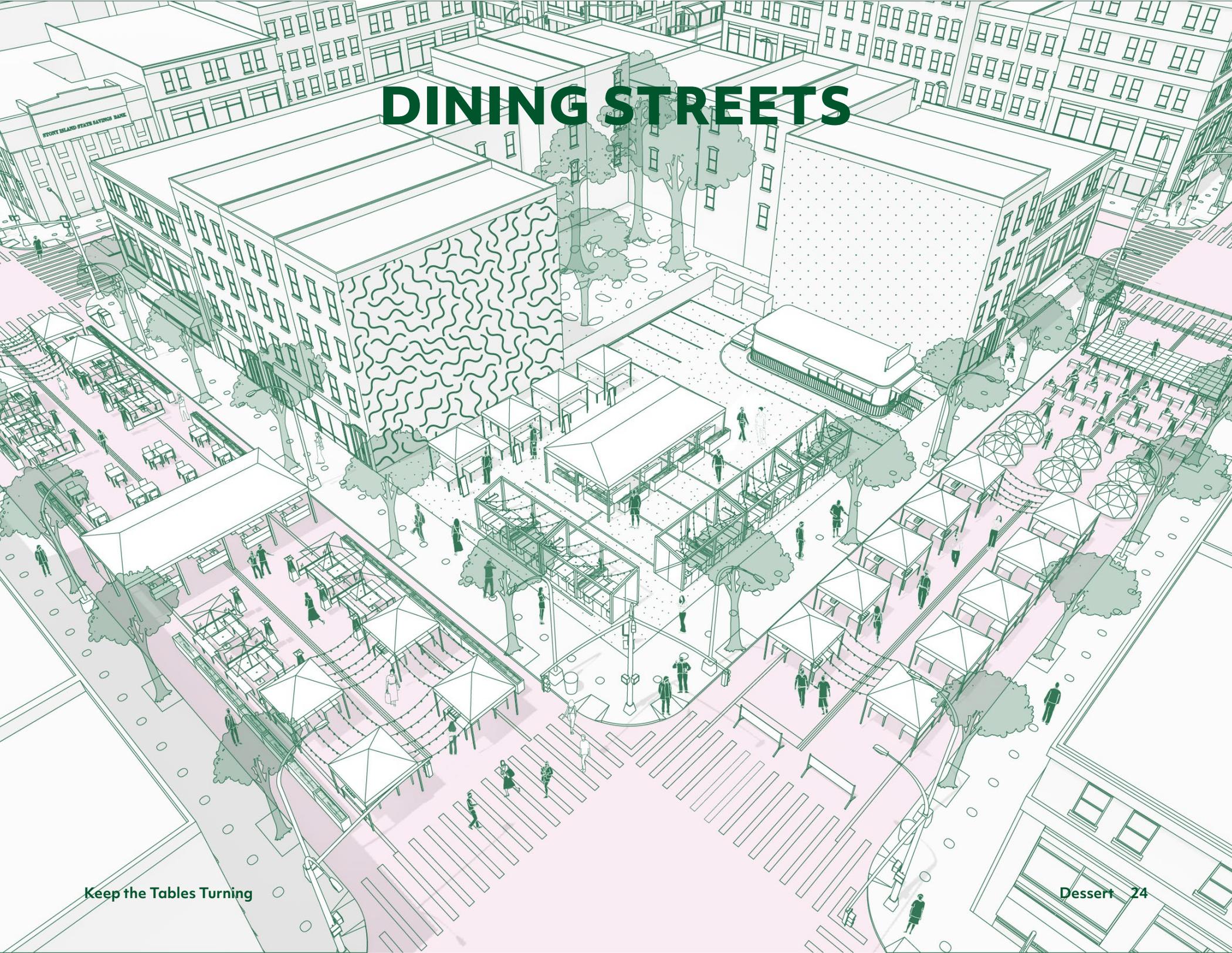


**CATERING FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS**



dessert

# DINING STREETS



# DINING STREETS

Outdoor dining doesn't have to be limited to one restaurant or property. In areas where there is limited sidewalk and curb space, restaurants can work with local business

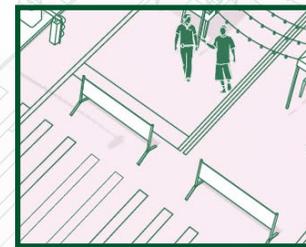
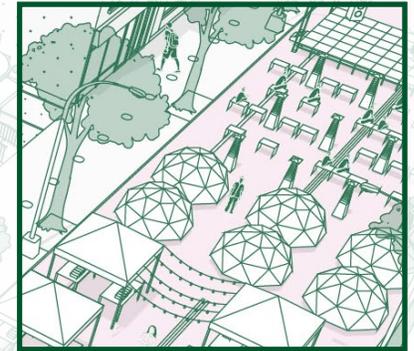
associations and city leaders to create an outdoor dining street. Be sure to work with participating restaurants to set clear safety protocols based on local public health guidance.

## Igloos & Dining Yurts

Eating outside in the cold should be an adventure. Nothing says adventure like drinking hot toddies in a yurt in January.

## Parking Lot Plaza

Work to identify parking lots and plazas that could function as a central gathering space to support businesses along a corridor. Municipal parking lots often host farmers markets and can be repurposed as dining areas. If you have your own parking lot, check your local regulations to see if you need to submit a permit application and confirm that you don't need approval for alcohol consumption.

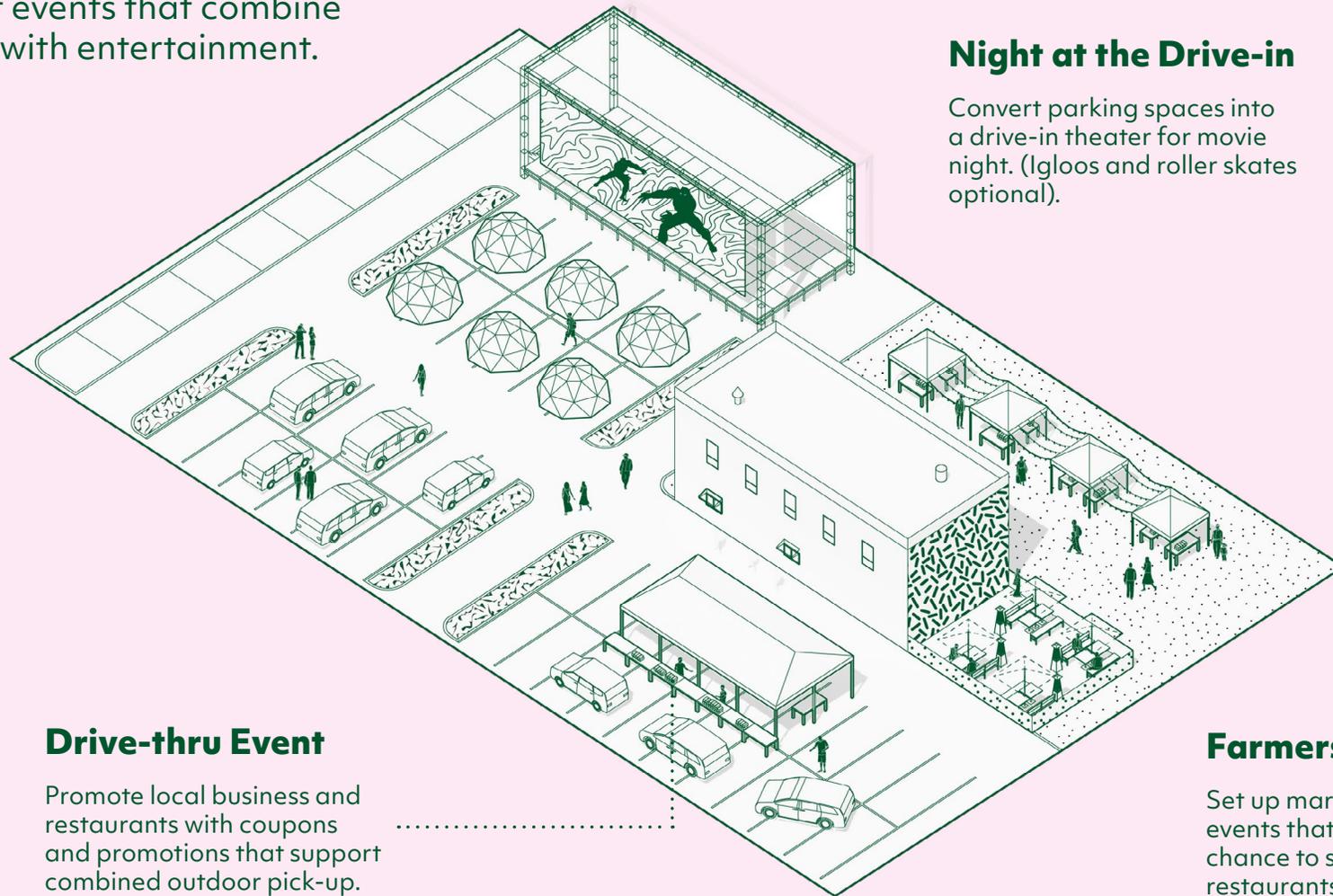


## Gateway Signs

Create clear signage describing hours of operation, how the street works and what the health and safety protocols are.

# EVENTS

Partner with neighboring restaurants to stage socially distant events that combine dining with entertainment.



## Night at the Drive-in

Convert parking spaces into a drive-in theater for movie night. (Igloos and roller skates optional).

## Drive-thru Event

Promote local business and restaurants with coupons and promotions that support combined outdoor pick-up.

## Farmers' Markets

Set up markets and tasting events that give people a chance to sample multiple restaurants at the same time.



extras

# YOUR PARTNERS



## Restaurant Owners

Restaurateurs are the star of this show. It's time to get creative and start building partnerships. Reach out to your local merchants groups and restaurant association to coordinate on strategy and make a plan. Stay up-to date with local regulations and federal guidance so that your investments do not fall out of compliance.



## Business Associations

Advocate for dining streets and outdoor dining campaigns. Work with third party delivery services to launch local marketing campaigns in their apps. Help restaurants get the right resources they need to stay open, including COVID relief state and federal funding.

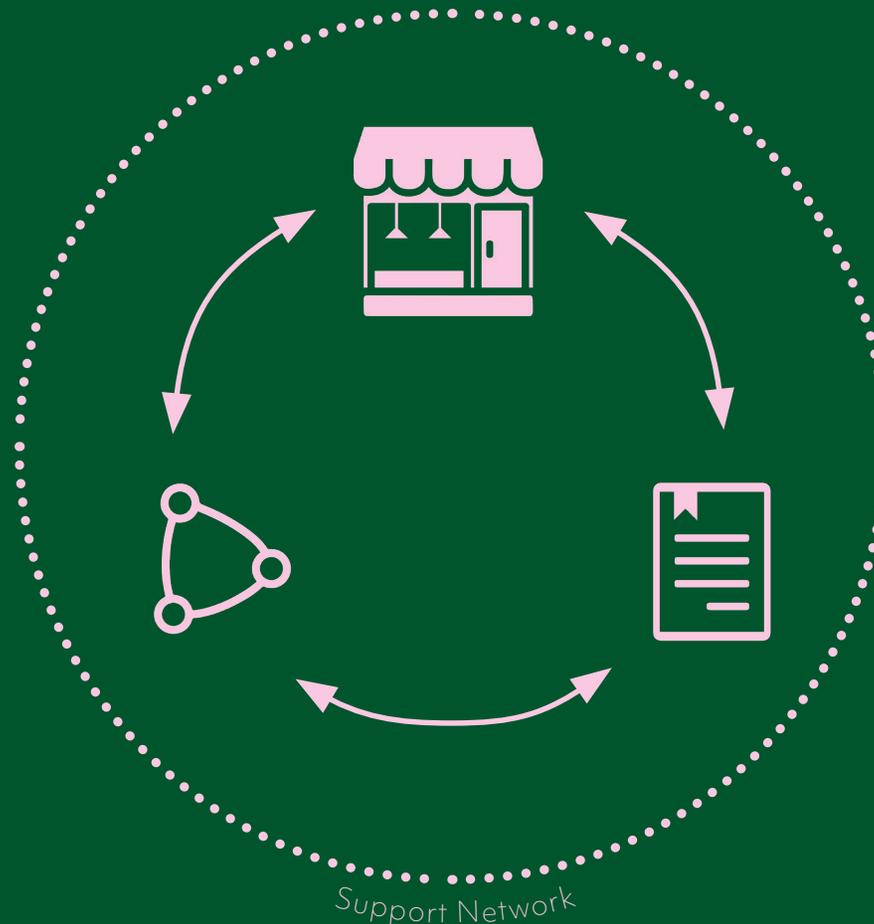
Keeping the Tables Turning



## Policymakers

Support restaurants in their efforts to stand up outdoor dining options by streamlining permit processes. Consider instituting self-certification processes and publish clear and consistent guidelines for outdoor dining design and public health and safety protocols. Find ways to support restaurants that lack outdoor space by creating programs and socially distant events to help spur business.

Good partnerships are the critical ingredient of a successful restaurant recovery. For businesses to stay afloat, restaurants, city policymakers, business associations, and the community at large all need to be aligned. Communication should be consistent, early and often.



# GETTING STARTED

## 1 Know the Rules: Consult your local regulations



An effective outdoor dining program begins with the right regulations that enable restaurants to take advantage of sidewalk and curbside space while maximizing safety.

Self-certification and clear city guidelines for health and design are a must. Publish basic diagrams describing your rules and spread them far and wide.

## 2 Develop Partnerships



Identify a project coordinator to develop and maintain relationships with local businesses, city officials, and city regulators and manages the design, construction, and approvals processes.

Collaborate with a *community-based partner* with close ties to local entrepreneurial communities to lead development of programing and marketing campaigns that resonate with local communities.

Talk to your neighbors, your landlord, community associations, and your fellow restaurants. The more people that get involved early, the better!

## 3 Design & Build



Partner with local architecture or design/build teams who can develop sustainable designs that take business needs into consideration and are in adherence with all public health guidelines and city regulations.

Use a parklet design template (see Appendix A) and hire local contractors who can help you build and modify spaces quickly. Nothing is more important than a great contractor who can get things done quickly and on budget.

Bring the ambience of your restaurant into your outdoor dining space. Create a feeling of enclosure and safety that gives your customers a completely new outdoor dining experience.

## 4 Promote & Program



Work with business associations and partner restaurants to develop corridor-wide strategies that will help drive business across a full calendar.

Work across property lines and parking lot lines to create inventive programming that will drive customers to your area. Socially distant events, like drive-ins, drive-thrus, and festivals can keep your neighborhood vibrant and bring the whole community together.

Collaborate with third party delivery services to launch marketing campaigns that increase orders and generate new customers. Consider designing your campaign around a specific holiday or event.

# RESOURCES

## Health & Safety Regulations

- National Restaurant Association, COVID-19 Safe Operating Guidance: A Guide for the Restaurant Industry, October 2020
- National Restaurant Association, COVID-19 Reopening Guidance: A Guide for the Restaurant Industry, April 2020
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UberEats

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WXY architecture + urban design  
Brooklyn Level Up

## **Project Partners**

EatOkra  
Harlem Park to Park  
ValincPR

Numerous restaurants provided direct input in the form of long interviews and in-depth surveys. These restaurants include:

Suede Restaurant  
5610 Clarendon Road, Brooklyn, NY

Footprints Cafe  
1377 Flatbush Ave, Brooklyn, NY

Lips Cafe  
1412 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn, NY

StephLova's Cafe  
952 Utica Ave, Brooklyn, NY

Tropical Paradise  
1252 Utica Ave, Brooklyn, NY