

RE: Denver Rapid Activation of Commercial Streets

Dear Mayor Hancock,

Unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have had far-reaching negative effects on our community, and the retail, restaurant, and hospitality industries are among those most devastated by this crisis – on average Denver restaurants reported a 76 percent year-over-year decline in sales in April 2020. Compounding this problem is the fact that only 15 percent of Colorado restaurants received federal Paycheck Protection Program support and an estimated 2 percent received Economic Injury Disaster Load funds.

Restarting the retail and restaurant sector is contingent upon our ability to devise spaces where the public is safe to engage in commercial activities and where adequate physical distancing measures can be applied. Your sound leadership in creating guidelines for some level of restaurant and retail activity to continue through the crisis has allowed many of these businesses to remain open, but there are many others that have not been able to benefit from these allowances because of space constraints within—and in proximity to—their places of operation. In this time, you have asked the community for innovative solutions that address the public health and economic challenges. We believe this is an innovative approach that will have a dramatic impact on our small businesses and provide vibrancy to neighborhoods and a safer environment during these times.

To spur an economically sustainable environment for these industries, with full considerations for the public health, safety, and welfare of our community, we believe that it is necessary to take swift action in creating a safe and flexible use of the public rights-of-way within nodes of commercial retail activity.

“In pandemic times, the asphalt shadows that adjoin most businesses could come in handy. What we know about the coronavirus suggests that it is mainly transmitted indoors, between people in close proximity, and that its transmission seems to slow in warmer weather. The summer, then, offers us an opportunity to restart social life in a way that reduces the odds of coronavirus transmission twice over, by keeping diners outside and well-spaced.”

[Street Food, Slate Magazine, April 29, 2020](#)

In order to provide a safe and manageable space for restaurants and retailers to comply with physical distancing measures we request that the city create an accelerated process that allows business districts and property owners and managers to apply for the removal of private vehicle through-traffic access and parking—freeing the space for greater use by a greater number of Denverites—in key downtown and neighborhood commercial districts.

The following is a preliminary list of commercial streets that could be considered:

- Glenarm Place – midblock between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> to midblock between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Streets (Upper Downtown)
- Larimer Street between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets (Larimer Square)
- Larimer Street between 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Avenues (RiNo)
- Tennyson Street between 38<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Avenues (Berkeley)
- 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue between Lowell and Julian (W Highlands)



- Wazee Street at 35<sup>th</sup> Street (The “L”)
- Pearl Street between Arkansas and Florida (Platt Park)
- South Gaylord Street between Tennessee and Mississippi (Washington Park)
- 2nd Avenue between Clayton and Fillmore (Cherry Creek North)

We recommend that these measures go into effect for a “pilot” period from Memorial Day to October 31st, with some allowances for a continuation following the pilot period where success has been measured.

The streets listed above have been identified based on a prior demonstration of effective street closures through permitted events. In addition, each of these locations is managed by a quasi-governmental entity or business organization that can represent the sum of businesses within each district and with some capacity to manage community outreach, maintenance, security, and programming. The included list of locations is a recommended starting point where specific conditions allow for rapid implementation; we believe other corridors should be considered for commercial street activation allowances particularly in city-identified Communities of Concern.

The benefits of this action will be multifaced. In general, this action allows restaurants and retailers to mitigate service capacity restrictions created by physical distancing protocols by utilizing space in the street. Where there are densely located business, closing streets to through-traffic will increase safety for people trying to maintain appropriate physical separation from others. Finally, immediate activation of streets allows the public to benefit from additional placemaking and programming features, such as seating and landscaping.

We recommend that each individual location be required to submit an application to the City that will establish a responsible managing entity, written support from local business organizations, as well as provide details about proposed uses of the public right-of-way, operational details, such as traffic control considerations, hours of operation, multimodal and ADA accommodations, etc. (See Attachment for proposed Checklist). It is recommended that the City identify specific items to be included in this application, recognizing the need for rapid City approval and implementation – a critical factor of success in this action. As such, we request the City consider waiving all fees and processes consistent with typical event and street occupancies limited to the condition of a pilot commercial street activation approval. We also believe that the formation of a common consumption rule be established to allow for local business to benefit from the controlled sale and consumption of alcohol within designated sites.

We greatly appreciate your leadership during this unprecedented time and believe that your expedited action and support in this effort will accelerate the economic recovery that our city so desperately needs.

Sincerely,

Tami Door  
President and CEO  
Downtown Denver Partnership



Attachment:

Recommended checklist for approval of Rapid Activation of Commercial Streets:

- Narrative that supports the basis for choosing the site and closure termini – e.g. Why Larimer Square?
- Narrative of the proposed use of the space – food/alcohol service, seating, entertainment venue, etc.; include proposed hours of operation; include the estimated capacity for # of people
- Basic graphic site plan (CAD level drawing preferred) that shows how physical distancing protocols will be instated; show how the design will incorporate existing and/or proposed bike traffic, bike parking, delivery services, passenger pick-up/drop-off; considerations for emergency access; considerations for ADA access; provision for transit service/detour
- Identification of traffic control placement and description of devices to be used.
- Signed letter of support from local property owners in the immediate area.