

6/17/2022

State Street Interim Operations Ad Hoc Committee  
City of Santa Barbara  
PO Box 1990  
Santa Barbara, CA, 93102

**RE: Upcoming State Street Interim Operations Recommendations**

Dear State Street Interim Operations Ad Hoc Committee:

Thank you each for attending the Chamber's recent State Street Business Owner Roundtables, having open and honest conversations with the attendees, and for your work on these issues regarding the State Street interim operations.

The Chamber, downtown businesses, and downtown stakeholders identified various issues of concern, potential solutions, and guiding principles for the interim operations of State Street. Top of the list of concerns was the issue of a portability requirement for parklets. Having recently learned that the issue of portable parklets would be returning to Council in the upcoming staff report, we wanted to offer feedback on the impracticality of this proposal as soon as possible.

Following the implementation of outdoor dining, many downtown restaurants have seen a notable increase in business, which many owners attribute directly to the attraction of their unique parklets. Residents, visitors, and business owners have spoken up time and time again about the success of the State Street promenade, and the key role parklets play in that success. In the recent survey of Santa Barbara residents, with 4,764 respondents, 85% said that the pedestrian promenade should either stay the way that is or be expanded. Additionally, many retail business owners, who initially opposed the closure of State Street to vehicular traffic and parklets, now support both after experiencing the boom in business that has been brought about by the success of their restaurant neighbors.

The proposal of a parklet portability requirement fails to acknowledge *why* parklets have been so successful on the promenade and threatens to undermine all the success the promenade has seen thus far. Business owners have continually highlighted three main reasons parklets have been so beneficial to the business climate downtown: The unique outdoor dining experience they create, and the additional guest comfort they provide; the overall environment of vibrancy they create and inspire downtown, drawing in residents and visitors alike; and the creative element they afford business owners to differentiate themselves from one another, attracting residents and visitors with a diverse range of preferences. The implementation of a portability requirement on parklets would severely reduce the effectiveness of all three factors by limiting the creativity and quality of outdoor dining on State Street.

We understand that portability is being proposed as a solution to issues surrounding parades, storm water management, pest, and debris control. However, there must be alternate solutions that can be explored, whether they come in the form of alternate parade routes, functionality guidelines, and/or procedures which could address these concerns.

This brings us to another topic of concern – design guidelines. While guidelines related to quality and safety standards are understandable, we must be careful not to hinder the effectiveness of parklets with overregulation. Things like overhead coverings and outdoor heaters are key to guest comfort and could reduce visitor frequency if they are taken away. Design guidelines can also threaten the vibrancy of the promenade by limiting the previously mentioned creative aspects and uniqueness, creating a stale and “samey” environment. The Funk Zone is a perfect example of the type of economic success we can expect to see when we allow our local businesses to flex their creative muscles.

As you saw in our meetings, the group is also working to establish Chamber Guiding Principles for State Street businesses regarding the interim operations. We would like to offer this first draft for your feedback and consideration.

- a. The continuation of the State Street Pedestrian Promenade is at the heart of the continued economic success of the downtown corridor, for all downtown businesses.
- b. Any changes made in the interim should reflect and shape the ultimate long-term goals of the State Street Master Plan.
- c. Businesses are willing to invest in change, based on the premise that a subsequent change will not undo previous investments.
- d. Addressing housing needs by utilizing mixed-use zoning and other creative solutions is key to the continued growth and success of the downtown promenade.
- e. Ensure vibrant pedestrian and vehicular traffic to the downtown corridor, whether through shuttles, traffic circulation alternatives, or new parking solutions.
- f. Establish a consistent standard of cleanliness for the downtown corridor.
- g. Address issues of safety as they pertain to homelessness and e-bikes.
- h. Create a level of certainty regarding the downtown corridor, which will in turn attract new businesses and fill vacancies.

While the State Street Master Plan should address many of these principles in the long-term, these principles highlight actions we can take, and concerns we can address in the present. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the City and other community members to ensure the success of the State Street Promenade. Thank you for continuing to support downtown businesses and a thriving local economy.

Sincerely,



Kristen Miller  
President & CEO  
Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce