DOWNTOWN HOUSTON

storefront & streetscape
design guidelines

STOREFRONT & STREETSCAPE DESIGN GUIDELINES OVERVIEW

BASIC STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENTS
Increasing Transparency
Lighting
Historic Rehabilitation/Preservation
Blank Walls
Awnings, Canopies and Balconies

SIDEWALK CAFES
Café Enclosures
Umbrellas
Tables and Chairs
Lighting

LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS
Hanging Baskets, Flower Boxes & Planters
Plant Maintenance

SIGNAGE
The Basics
Types of Signs Encouraged in Downtown
- Projecting Signs
- Hanging Signs
- Wall Signs/Murals
- Awning and Canopy Signs
- Window Graphics/Signs
- Illuminated Signage
Types of Signs with Limited Use in Downtown
- Ground Signs
- Spectacular Signs
- Freestanding/Movable Signage

APPENDIXES
Guidelines Relating To Sidewalk Café Policies and Procedures
The Downtown Houston Storefront and Streetscape Design Guidelines have been created by the Houston Downtown Management District (HDMD) as a tool to promote a higher level of quality and design of retail storefronts and streetscapes. Storefronts play an integral part in a neighborhood or commercial area as they serve to visually unify and provide consistency within a commercial district. HDMD encourages improvements to buildings and streetscapes that add character to the area and contribute to the building and neighborhood’s economic vitality. Studies have shown that thoughtful design improvements often lead to greater sales for a business.

A wide range of design elements can be used to make the public realm more inviting. The following guidelines articulate high quality standards for design elements that are typical to urban, pedestrian friendly environments. They seek to promote positive design characteristics, create a sense of place and preserve the existing architecture throughout downtown Houston.

It is the goal of these guidelines to:

- Stimulate investment in, and strengthen the economic vitality of Downtown Houston
- Strengthen property values
- Revitalize and improve the appearance of downtown’s historic buildings
- Activate the downtown environment by improving the pedestrian experience

It is not the intent of these design guidelines to eliminate design freedom or discourage innovative design. The design guidelines provide good examples of appropriate design solutions and design interpretations of the various regulations. The guidelines are intended to complement, but not replace, existing codes and ordinances related to the building and environment that are enforced by the City of Houston and other governmental agencies.

HDMD advocates these design elements through a matching grant program available to building and business owners. The Storefront and Streetscape Grant Program provides funding to business and/or property owners to enhance the exterior of their buildings and the streetscapes located adjacent to their buildings. The applicant must be a tenant or property owner of a street level business with street front presence and access. Preference will be given to businesses located in the Key Retail Zones (Historic District, Shopping District, and Theater District, and along the Main Street Corridor connecting the three districts.) HDMD will provide dollar for dollar matching grants from $500 to $20,000 to property/business owners who present eligible projects that will activate the streetscape using high-quality, pedestrian-oriented design elements. Projects must exceed $1,000 in total costs to be considered for a grant.

For more information on the Storefront and Street Improvement Program please contact:

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BASIC STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENTS

- Rehabilitation
- Transparency
- Lighting
- Activate Blank Walls
- Awnings, Canopies & Balconies

DOWNTOWN HOUSTON storefront & streetscape design guidelines
A customer’s first impression of a business is the attractiveness and vibrancy of its storefront. Many business owners regard the exterior appearance of their establishment as secondary to the more immediate concerns of running a business. However, the storefront is a crucial part of a business, as the outside reflects what is inside and can be the deciding factor of whether a patron will enter the establishment. A well-designed storefront should be clean, attractive, and inviting. The storefront should have transparent, unobstructed windows allowing patrons to view into the space. In the evenings, the interior and exterior should be lit with ample, diffused lighting.

Downtown Houston’s buildings range from two-story historic buildings to modern skyscrapers. When considering improvements, the building’s architectural style, materials and colors should be the foundation for guidance. In general, building materials should complement a building’s overall design. The color of exterior materials, signs, window frames, cornices, storefronts and other building features should be coordinated. Choice of colors should be determined by the nature of the building. The exterior colors of historic buildings should be chosen with their historic character in mind. More contemporary designs may allow for a larger range of colors. It is important that the distinction between individual storefronts, the entire building façade, and adjacent properties be maintained.

Historical buildings and all buildings located in the Historic District must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness through the City of Houston for any improvements that alter the façade of the building. Go to the City of Houston Historic Preservation webpage at www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/
HISTORIC REHABILITATION/PRESERVATION

Many historic buildings in downtown are in poor condition or have been altered to cover-up their original character-defining features. Items that conceal historical elements, such as textured plywood, metal panels, stucco, and false-brick veneer should be removed. Cleaning or replacing the brick, stone, woodwork and tile in order to preserve and rehabilitate the original historic façade is encouraged. Restorative building materials used should, to the best ability, match original building material palate. Materials and colors consistent with those dominant in the area should be used or, in the case of a rehabilitation or addition, consistent with the architectural style and period of the existing building.

Buildings with a historical designation and all buildings located in the Historic District must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness through the City of Houston for any improvements that alter the façade of the building.
INCREASING TRANSPARENCY
Improvements that facilitate visual transparency from the exterior to the interior of a business can be beneficial to a business. See-through windows and doors add visual activity to the street that and allow pedestrians to see inside and feel safe knowing exactly what environment they are entering.

Display cases and window graphics should be attractive and enticing and should not completely obstruct the view of pedestrians. The removal of burglar bars, roll down grates and large window graphics that block visual transparency is strongly encouraged.

ABOVE Clear windows and doors with small graphics or graphics located above/below the sightline are encouraged.

ABOVE Clear glass allows passerbys to see the activity inside space and also patrons to still feel connected to the urban street life.

ABOVE & BELOW Burglar bars make the space appear unsafe and should not be used. Large pictures and graphics block views and make give the storefront a cluttered appearance.

ABOVE & BELOW Frosted, smoked, and dark tinted windows should be avoided, as they block the view into the space and make the space feel unsafe and unwelcoming.

ABOVE Clear glass allows passerbys to see the activity inside space and also patrons to still feel connected to the urban street life.
STOREFRONT LIGHTING
A storefront that is well lit during evening hours promotes the business and plays a large role in increasing the illumination of sidewalks, making them feel safe to the nighttime visitor. Exterior light fixtures should be appropriate to the building and its surroundings in terms of style, scale and intensity of illumination. The fixtures should draw attention to window displays, signs, and a building’s architectural details. Direct light should not glare or shine onto the street or adjacent properties. Lighting that attracts attention to itself, such as flashing, animated or intermittent lighting is not encouraged, as it competes with the building architecture and is hazardous to motorists. String lighting, wrapped around plants or strung from canopies and other permanent fixtures, can also add charm and vibrancy to a streetscape.

ABOVE Display windows should be lit at night to provide ambient street illumination, thereby contributing to a lively and safe pedestrian environment.

ABOVE & BELOW Strategically placed lights on buildings can add character and “light-up” a building, drawing customers inside.

ABOVE & BELOW Exterior fixtures should complement the entire façade. For example, gooseneck lights are a popular historic lighting treatment.
BLANK WALLS

HMD encourages creative methods to activate blank walls, doors and other large bare surfaces adjacent to and visible from pedestrian walkways. These blank spaces limit pedestrian's interaction with the building, effectively “deadening” the street environment where they occur. They provide opportunities for defacement with graffiti and encourage other undesirable activities. High quality public art in the form of a mosaic, mural, decorative masonry pattern, sculpture, merchandising display windows or landscape that will grow up a vertical trellis or frame are examples of ways to activate a wall.

NOTE: If the mosaic, mural or decorative masonry pattern contains advertising, logos, or commercial messages, it qualifies as a sign. If the mural does not contain advertising, then it does not need City of Houston approval.
AWNINGS, CANOPIES & BALCONIES
Awnings, hard canopies and balconies can be both a decorative and a functional addition to a storefront. Visually, these elements can add character and interest to a storefront. Practically, the addition can provide a sheltered space and additional seating for customers.

Decorative fixed awnings and canopies can be constructed from several different materials, including canvas, vinyl, and aluminum. Fabric is the least expensive type of awning, but requires more maintenance and cleaning. Fabric awnings should be weather-treated before installation. Awnings and canopies should enhance, not cover, architectural details. The colors should be compatible with the overall color scheme of the facade. Internally lit awnings should be avoided. The City of Houston requires that all awnings and canopies have a minimum clearance of seven feet (7'-0") and can project up to two-thirds (2/3) the width of the sidewalk as long as the outer supports are located two feet (2'-0") clear of the curb.

Creative awning shapes and edges must be carefully designed and coordinated with the overall appearance of the building.

Awnings can add character and interest to a storefront.

Awnings should have a color and shape complementary to the building, and should be located where it respects an existing sign or awning line established by adjacent stores.
EXAMPLES OF **RECOMMENDED** AWNINGS, CANOPIES & BALCONIES

EXAMPLES OF **NOT RECOMMENDED** AWNINGS, CANOPIES & BALCONIES
SIDEWALK CAFES

- Cafe Enclosures
- Umbrellas
- Lighting
- Furniture

DOWNTOWN HOUSTON storefront & streetscape design guidelines
SIDEWALK CAFES

Sidewalk cafes allow customers to sit outside, enjoy a meal or drink, while taking in the sounds and sights of urban life. Houston's temperate climate enables sidewalk cafes to be used practically year-round. They are an important part of downtown's vibrant, pedestrian streetscape and can be an economic benefit to a restaurant or bar, as many customers seek out establishments with outside seating.

Most sidewalks in downtown are owned by the City of Houston. The City of Houston allows up to one half of the sidewalk to be used as a sidewalk café as long as a minimum of six feet (6'-0") remains clear for use by pedestrians, and a four feet (4' – 0") minimum path is kept clear between the sidewalk café and any obstruction such as lighting poles, sign posts, trees, etc. The clear path shall be measured from the outermost part of the café to the curb or the nearest obstruction. No portion of the sidewalk café should obstruct public utilities. The pedestrian path of travel should be straight and not involve sharp or jagged turns that would impede pedestrian circulation. In situations where an obstruction prevents a four foot pathway, a sidewalk café could use conforming railing to allow for appropriate clearance.

Permits for sidewalk cafes are issued by the City of Houston Department of Public Works, and the area of a sidewalk café remains City of Houston property. There is an initial cost of $150 for a permit and an annual cost of $75 to renew the permit. The sidewalk café should be used only for dining and drinking. The floor surface inside the café area shall not be modified or elevated. Painting, staining, or otherwise modifying the existing brick paving in the public right-of-way is also prohibited. See the Guidelines Relating To Sidewalk Café Policies and Procedures for a complete guide to City of Houston sidewalk café permit process.
CAFÉ ENCLOSURES
Railings for sidewalk cafes define the boundary between public and private areas. Although they are not required by the City of Houston or TABC unless the business holds a Mixed Beverage Liquor License, HDMD encourages the use of café enclosures, especially if the establishment sells food and/or any alcoholic beverages. Enclosures assist in creating a safe, controlled environment for downtown pedestrians and cafe patrons. Semi-permanent railings that can be securely affixed to the sidewalk are preferred in downtown. No signage or advertising should be placed on the railing. It is recommended that enclosures be a minimum of 3 feet in height and a maximum of 3.5 feet in height to allow visibility to the street for patrons.

LEFT Free standing planters can act as sidewalk cafe barriers, but should not obstruct the view of patrons.
RIGHT Attractive plastic walls, hung from an awning, allow a sidewalk cafe to function year round.

ABOVE Light weight or movable handrails that may be hazardous during times of intense pedestrian crowding should be avoided. Chains, ropes and unsupported railings are NOT acceptable materials.

ABOVE Decorative elements incorporated into the railing design are encouraged.

ABOVE Example of a permanent barrier, which is NOT allowed on City sidewalks.

ABOVE Example of a sidewalk café featuring railing that conforms around barriers to allow a 4 feet minimum clearance.
UMBRELLAS

Umbrellas are used to provide shade and shelter for sidewalk café patrons; they are also an inexpensive way to add a splash of color and catch pedestrian’s attention. Umbrellas should be designed for outdoor commercials use and made of canvas or other non-vinyl materials. Umbrellas shall have a minimum height clearance of seven feet (7'-0") and should not extend beyond the boundary of the licensed sidewalk cafe area.

Umbrellas can be freestanding or table-anchored, and may not be fastened to the ground in the public right of way.

Careful consideration should be given to umbrellas used in conjunction with awnings or canopies, as sometimes used together create a visually cluttered environment.

Umbrellas should NOT contain generic advertising.
SIDEWALK CAFÉ LIGHTING
During evening hours of operation, low intensity lighting can provide outdoor cafés with supplemental lighting beyond what is provided by street lights and adjacent storefronts. Votive candles and string lights can also assist to create an enchanting ambiance. Votive candles should be in shielded glass holders or use flameless LED. String lights should be securely hung from a sturdy fixture and should hang no lower than seven feet (7’-0”). Soft white lights, no brighter than the illumination provided by ornamental street lights, are encouraged. Lights should not blink or flash.
OUTDOOR FURNITURE
Outdoor tables and chairs should match and materials should complement the building's architecture. The materials chosen should be made of sturdy, durable materials such as wood, wrought iron, steel or cast aluminum and should be manufactured for outdoor commercial use. Furniture made with plastic, glass, and cloth material is not recommended, as they are difficult to clean and maintain. All furniture should be maintained and cleaned regularly.

Aluminum furniture is lightweight and durable, and is ideal for buildings with awnings or canopies. The look is more modern and is more appropriate with modern buildings.

Wrought iron and steel furniture are sturdy and durable, and usually complement historic facades.

Wicker furniture is lightweight and cool in the summer; however it is difficult to clean and requires more maintenance than wood or metal furniture. A darker wicker is more efficient at hiding dirt.

Small round or square tables that comfortably seat two to four people are recommended.

Plastic tables and vinyl tablecloths are NOT recommended.

Glass tabletops and cloth materials are NOT recommended.

Furniture designed for residential use is NOT recommended.
downtown Houston storefront & streetscape design guidelines
Strategically placed trees and plants in pots are an inexpensive way to add color and warmth to a storefront. Given Houston’s mild climate, seasonal live flowers and plants are feasible year-round. Hanging baskets, flower boxes and planters can be used to enliven streetscapes and facades. Plants should be attractive and placed in planters made of safe, sturdy, durable materials that are not easily moved. Plastic containers should not be used. To promote a vibrant and interactive sidewalk café environment, the plant material should not obstruct the view of patrons from inside the restaurant or from a sidewalk café.

PLANT MAINTENENCE
Plants require a good deal of maintenance and upkeep. The use of native plants is strongly encouraged, as they are well-suited to the climate of Houston and thus require less watering and maintenance. It is the responsibility of the owner/operator to ensure that all boxes are planted and properly maintain the planter boxes by prompt removal of dead blooms. Drainage from planters must be provided as not to stain the sidewalk surface. Built-in irrigation systems or landscaping services may be used to water and/or maintain the plants. Business should have a maintenance plan in place for flower baskets, boxes and planters.

LEFT Generous sized containers may be used to define the entrance into the sidewalk café.
ABOVE Hanging plants and building-mounted flower boxes may be used to enliven building façades. They should be made for outdoor use and must be securely attached to the building façade.
Plants should not obstruct the view of sidewalk cafe patrons.

Planters should be made of sturdy, durable material that is not easily moved.

Planter boxes may be mounted on the fence enclosure and could face the sidewalk providing that they are located within the authorized sidewalk cafe area.
DOWNTOWN HOUSTON storefront & streetscape design guidelines
Properly designed signs add a visual richness to the walkway and street corridor. Poorly done signs are unattractive and create clutter. A sign can attract or detract from an establishment’s ability to draw in customers, especially in a pedestrian-oriented environment such as downtown.

HDMD has created the following design criteria to encourage and coordinate well-designed signs. The City of Houston Building Code, Sign Code Chapter 46, has regulations to control the type, size, location, and number of signs. With few exceptions, a new or refurbished sign will require a permit from the City and installation by licensed bonded sign contractors, who are familiar with the City of Houston Sign Code. For this reason the following sign guidelines are not intended to provide a comprehensive explanation of the City’s sign regulations, but rather explain basic requirements for types of signage encouraged in downtown.

Historical Buildings and all buildings located in the Historical District must obtain approval through the City of Houston for signage. See Appendix X for specific guidelines for guidelines relating historical properties.

THE BASICS
Number of signs
The City of Houston allows up to five (5) signs per business, but more is not always better. Too many signs create a cluttered exterior. Certain sign types also have a limit to the number allowed, and these restrictions are explained on the following pages.

Placement/location of signs
Since downtown is used by just as many pedestrians as automobiles, an establishment should consider its location and how its sign can draw the attention of both pedestrians and motorists. A building’s architecture often provides guidance for appropriate sign locations on the building. Signs should not overpower the façade or cover significant architectural components.

Color
A substantial contrast should be provided between the color and material of the background and the letters or symbols to make the sign easier to read in both day and night. Color is most effective when used simply; generally light colors on a dark background makes the letters much easier to read and eliminates the glowing effect from the signage. Natural, muted tones are better than bold, flashy colors. Too many colors, particularly accent colors, may distract the reader, reduce legibility, and make the sign less effective.

Content
A sign does need to contain a lot of information and be imaginative to communicate a concept and catch people’s attention. Signs should provide information simply and legibly, and should be limited to advertising the business name and its main good and services; too much additional information makes the sign look muddled.
CREATIVITY
Creative signs bring fun and vitality to downtown streets and are strongly encouraged. Below are signs that incorporate the establishment’s concept into the signage. These signs convey a lot of information and catch the attention of passersby without being too flashy or displaying too much information. A sign does not have to be expensive to express creativity.
PROJECTING SIGNS

Projecting signs are signs attached to the face of the building and project more than 12 inches from the wall surface. Projecting signs are strongly encouraged in downtown since they are visible to pedestrians from blocks away. Projecting signs can be made of wood, plastic, fabric or metal and can be internally or externally illuminated. Materials and colors chosen for projecting signs should complement the character of the building. If plastic is used, careful consideration should be given to the style and content, as it can be difficult to craft a creative, high quality plastic projecting sign. Projecting signs should be sized and scaled and placed on the building in location that draws the attention of pedestrians (not automobiles).

Only one (1) projecting sign is allowed per business (unless the building frontage is more than 350 SF, then two (2) or more are allowed). Projecting signs should be at least 14'-0” feet in height above the ground and cannot exceed 42.5 feet in height. Signs cannot extend above the roofline. Projecting signs may extend up to 10 feet outward from the building to which they are attached, as long as such extension is no more than two (2'-0") feet behind the curb line. The size of any projecting sign shall not exceed 200 square feet.

LEFT The red, white and blue sign in this picture is not in scale to the building and is too high, it may be visible to distant motorists, but could be missed by pedestrians. RIGHT Projecting signs should be oriented so they appear in the line of sight of approaching pedestrians.

ABOVE Fabric projecting sign.
HANGING SIGNS

Hanging Signs are similar to Projecting Signs in that they stand out and catch the attention of pedestrians from blocks away. However, hanging signs (considered MARQUEE SIGNS by the City of Houston) are signs that hang under a portion of the building, such as a canopy. Hanging signs can be made of wood, plastic, fabric or metal and can be internally or externally illuminated. Materials and colors chosen for hanging signs should complement the character of the building. If plastic is used, careful consideration should be given to the style and content, as it can be difficult to craft a creative, high quality plastic hanging sign.

A hanging sign should be hung perpendicular to the face of the building and must be supported by a frame or pipe, not chains. The lowest point of a hanging sign shall be at least eight (8) feet above the sidewalk. A sign may extend the entire length and width of the canopy, but should not extend or project beyond the building or canopy.

Hanging signs must be supported by a frame or pipe support extending beyond a building, not chains.
WALL SIGNS
Wall Signs are attached to or painted on the exterior wall of a building, and do not project more than twelve inches (12”) from the building wall. A wall sign can consist of sign board, metal or channel letters mounted directly to a wall or painted directly on brick (wall signs painted directly on brick must be artistically and professionally done to meet the intent of these guidelines). Up to four (4) wall signs are allowed per business; however, one wall sign for each storefront that faces a public street is usually sufficient. Since wall signs lay flush against a building and cannot be seen by pedestrians approaching them from the sides, they should be used in connection with a projecting sign, awning sign or banner sign. Wall signs should be compatible with the storefront in scale, proportions, and color. The City restricts wall signs from exceeding 1,000 square feet or occupying more than 25 percent of the total wall surface.

LEFT The placement and materials of this wall sign does not compliment the architectural integrity of the building.

BELOW Plastic box cabinet signs and plastic covered channel letters are not appropriate for historic buildings.
AWNING AND CANOPY SIGNS are painted on or attached to an awning or canopy. Awnings and canopies often enhance building architecture, and add color and interest to the streetscape, the incorporation of a sign can add more character. Metal sign panels can utilize raised lettering on metal bands. Printing and lettering can also be applied directly to a flat metal sign band with letters consisting of wood, acrylic or metal. See previous section relating to Awnings and Canopies for more information on size, color and placement.

The improvement of a cloth awning to this building is apparent. The dark colored awning with light accents complements the light colored building.

These awning signs complement the vertically proportioned windows.

Canopy sign and projecting sign. Size, shape and color of awning compliment the building.

Awning signs and projecting sign. Size, shape and color of awning compliment the building.

Three dimensional metal panels on a hard canopy.

LEFT AND ABOVE Awning signs with vinyl material, that are internally illuminated or with oversized graphics are NOT recommended.
WINDOW GRAPHICS/SIGNS

An easy and inexpensive, creative way to enliven a storefront is to place creative graphics, logos, and signage on the interior of windows that face the sidewalk. Well-designed window graphics attract attention while still allowing pedestrians to view store interiors. Colorful graphics, such as painted or vinyl adhesives, which cover twenty percent (20%) or less of a glass storefront do not require a permit from the City. Window signs should only be used on first level glass, and should not obscure visibility into and out of the

Window signs can express business concept through graphic logos or colorful images.

BELOW Too many signs and pictures give the windows a clutter appearance and are NOT recommended.
ILLUMINATED SIGNAGE
Well designed, brightly lit signs can add to the energy and vibrancy to a streetscape and serve as a beacon to draw customers to an establishment in the evening hours. Illuminated signs with no flashing, blinking lights are recommended. Neon, back-lit, halo-lit illumination, and channel letters with halo illumination are highly encouraged. Below is a more detailed description of these types of signs.

NEON
For about a 100 years NEON signs have lit the way to shops, restaurants. Neon signs can give a historic building a vintage look or a modern building pizzazz. Neon has proven amazingly effective as a business tool, as it greatly increases a business’ visibility and has been proven to increase walk-in traffic.

CHANNEL LETTERS
Channel letters are custom-made 3-dimensional metal or plastic letters that are commonly used on the buildings. They come in variety of styles, and most often are internally illuminated with Neon or LED.
SIGN TYPES WITH LIMITED USE IN DOWNTOWN

Ground Sign/Monument Signs
A monument sign is a freestanding sign and is located at ground level. Monument signs are generally used for multi-tenant building and should be set back from the public right-of-way, which makes their use in downtown somewhat limited. Monument signs are recommended to be placed perpendicular to the street and should be located to ensure that

Electronic Message Boards
Electronic message signs are allowed on non historic buildings and all buildings not in the Historic District. In general, these types of signs are designed for establishments that host numerous events. The message should be simple and should not change at a rate faster than one message every 5 minutes.

Freestanding/Movable Signage
A-frame signs (sandwich boards), white boards, blackboards and chalkboards are not allowed in the public right-of-way; however, they can be used within the property or a sidewalk café. If a business is able to use an A-frame sign, then the sign should be made with sturdy, durable materials, such as wood or metal. A-frame signs are strongly encouraged to be artistically done. Please see examples of creative A-frame signs. Plastic A-frame signs should not be used as they are unattractive and can be blown over by wind. Information on the sign should be easy to read and not flashy or loud.

Examples of recommended A-frame signs.

BELOW Examples of A-frame signs NOT recommended.
BACKGROUND
This document provides the procedures, terms, and conditions regarding sidewalk café permits at street level. The City of Houston manages and administers the permit process for sidewalk cafes and the use of public sidewalks.

DEFINITIONS
Sidewalk Café: means any street level portion of public sidewalks in which tables, chairs, and associated exterior property are placed for the sole purpose of patrons consuming food and/or beverages served by a food establishment adjacent to the public sidewalk.

Clear Path of travel: Measured from the outside edge of the sidewalk café fencing, fence post base or other sidewalk café related obstruction (that limits passage) to the back of the curb or nearest obstruction (i.e., tree well, parking meter, bike rack, public service utility, light pole, etc.). Measurements must be clearly identified in the site plan.

PERMIT REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS
Applicant must complete and sign the sidewalk café permit application. To submit a complete permit application, the applicant must provide the City of Houston with one copy of a legible site plan with clearly identified measurements including the following information:

- Location of property lines and all contiguous, adjacent properties
- Name of all street(s) within 25 feet of the abutting property
- Location of building entrances and any public use fixtures attached to the building (e.g. gas line, water line, fire hose line)
- Dimensions of sidewalk proposed for café use and all adjacent sidewalk(s)
- Sidewalk width remaining for clear path of travel
- Location of existing fixtures (e.g. utility poles, fire hydrants, parking meters or pay stations, bike racks, bus shelters, traffic signs, sign posts, public service utilities, vaults, tree wells) and the distance of each to the sidewalk café
- Outdoor seating plan with location and dimensions of any proposed improvements associated with the sidewalk café. Such as: tables, seating, fencing and signs
- Letter from insurance agent agreeing to provide coverage (see below) if applicant is approved for permit
- A copy of a title policy covering the abutting property and verification by the owner that there has been no change in ownership since the issuance of that policy

City staff will review application documents, conduct site visit, and contact applicant. If application is approved, City staff will issue invoice for permit fee. Applicant will pay permit fee and obtain original certificate of insurance and letter of endorsement from insurance provider. Applicant will deliver to City original certificate of insurance and letter of endorsement from insurance provider and proof of invoice payment. City staff will review documents and, if documents complete, will issue permit.

Annual Fee
The initial fee for a one-year sidewalk café license shall be one hundred and fifty dollars ($150.00) with an annual renewal fee of seventy-five dollars ($75.00) in the form of a cashier’s check or money order made out to the City of Houston.

Sidewalk café permits are non-transferable and non-assignable. Renewal of existing sidewalk café permits will require a renewal application and annual fee. A new sidewalk café permit will be required when a business changes ownership.
SIDEWALK CAFÉ STANDARDS
The following standards will apply to all sidewalk cafes located on street level, public sidewalks.

Clear Path of Pedestrian Travel
The clear path of travel is measured from the outside edge of the sidewalk café fencing or fence post base to the nearest obstruction (i.e., tree pit, parking meter, bike rack, planting strip, etc.). If no obstruction exists, the clear path of travel is measured to the back of the curb.

Upon inspection, the traffic engineer will determine the amount of sidewalk width required for public use;

- Up to one half of the sidewalk area shall be generally available for use as a sidewalk café as long as a minimum of 6 feet remains clear for use by pedestrians.
- At least 4 feet minimum shall be kept clear between the sidewalk café and any obstruction such as power or lighting poles, sign posts, trees, etc.

The traffic engineer may re-evaluate the pedestrian pathway width based upon temporary construction, pedestrian volumes and geometric changes to the right of way.

The pedestrian path of travel should be straight and not involve sharp or jagged turns that would impair pedestrian circulation. If the sidewalk café causes a change in pedestrian travel, appropriate repairs to the right-of-way in the immediate vicinity may be required to accommodate the change. A-frame, portable signs or any other encroachment is not allowed in the pedestrian clear path of travel.

Sidewalk Café Adjacent to Curb
Sidewalk café seating is allowed adjacent to the curb only if the clear path of travel requirements described above is met. Sidewalk cafes must be a minimum of 2 feet from the curbline.

Railing
Railing can be used to delineate the sidewalk café from the pedestrian path of travel. Railing must be 36 inches or less in height above the sidewalk. Fencing must be detectable by cane to warn visually impaired persons of potential hazards in the path of travel.

Fence posts should be attached to the sidewalk with bolts or utilize free-standing bases. When bolted fencing is removed, the bolts must be removed from the sidewalk, the holes must be filled, and the sidewalk must be restored to original or better condition. Fencing must be generally transparent. Solid sheet fencing surfaces are not permitted. Landscaped planters may be used in lieu of fencing. All seating and tables must be movable to accommodate wheelchair access.

Insurance Requirements
Personal injury, one million dollars ($1,000,000.00) per person and three million dollars ($2,000,000.00) per occurrence.

The city shall be named as an additional insured on each such policy and such policy shall include a provision to the effect that the city will be notified in writing by the insurance company ten (10) days prior to the cancellation of such policy. The licensee shall then have five (5) days to replace that coverage or the licensee's license shall be deemed revoked without further action on the part of the city. The notice provisions for subsection (d)(7) shall not be applicable for revocation of the license for this reason. The licensee also agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the city, it's officers, and employees against any loss, liability or damage, including expenses and costs for bodily injury and for property damage sustained by any person as a result of the licensee's operation of a sidewalk café on public property.