

# West LIFE

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## Sidewalk dining offers opportunities for owners and guests

By Allison Pritchard

### LAKWOOD

Lakewood may soon resemble a European town full of sidewalk cafes.

With the help of councilwoman Nickie Antonio and the Planning and Development department, the city recently revised its outdoor dining ordinance. Now, restaurants can place tables and chairs in the public right of way on the sidewalk.

When city council passed the ordinance March 2, "I really was one of the driving forces behind the sidewalk dining," Antonio, who was elected in 2002, said.

Establishments must go through the planning department before adding seats to the sidewalk, Antonio said. The added seats outside will "create some excitement and interest" and let people "appreciate the nice weather," she said.

The council passed the ordinance "to help meet the needs of local restaurants and provide more seating choices for residents and visitors," according to a recent press release.

Director of Planning and Development Nathan Kelly said the ordinance was part of the efforts to fix up the Detroit Avenue streetscape. It will improve the look and feel, and add vibrancy, he said. Along with Antonio, "the department took the lead and made it a reality," Kelly said.

Because in Lakewood many restaurants don't have much space between the building and the sidewalk, an ordinance like this was needed, Kelly said.

The ordinance basically is the first time private businesses (those in conjunction with service of foods) are allowed to use right of way for outdoor dining, Kelly said.

Sidewalk dining can help raise the value of property and benefit businesses as well, Kelly said.

It's important to note sidewalk dining will not change parking requirements, Kelly said. The idea is to encourage walkability in the city, he said.

Antonio spoke of relaxing regulations to encourage processes (sidewalk dining) to happen, while insuring restaurants are acting as good neighbors as well.

The Planning Commission has talked to restaurant owners and put a lot of lot of time and attention into the ordinance, Kelly said. Antonio is "excited to see who will take advantage of it," she said.

As of now, about two dozen establishments have shown interest, and will probably start sidewalk seating this summer, Kelly said. Establishments must work with the architectural review board beforehand to get their sidewalk dining approved, he said.

Originally, the owner of El Tango Taqueria had been pushing for several years to get a sidewalk dining ordinance passed. When Antonio brought it up in a meeting, things took off from there, she said.

El Tango Taqueria general manager Gil Taggett said the restaurant is talking with the planning department to add tables outside. It will help "breathe a little life into Madison Avenue," he said.

"People just aren't aware how interested businesses are in having something like outdoor sidewalk seating," Liggett said. "This really does rejoin a sense of community," he said.

The ordinance may also open up the community to new business, Liggett said. Someone may notice a restaurant that he may have "driven by a hundred times" but may be attracted to the new look of festive outdoor seating or umbrellas, he said. Sidewalk dining can be used as a marketing tool, he added.

The style of street seating reminds Liggett of places he's been in Europe, he said. "It [sidewalk dining] looks heartwarming," and brings a "sense of community back to the street, instead of just a road between destinations," he said.

Sidewalk dining shows "the community is active and participates," Liggett said. "At the end of the day, everyone wins," he said.

Because the establishment doesn't sell alcohol, it will have less safety guidelines to follow. The restaurant is working on plans for a semi-permanent fence that will be taken down in the winter, Liggett said.

El Tango Taqueria will also meet the safety guidelines including proper walking space for the sidewalk. Additionally, the portion of seats outdoors can't be more than 10 percent of the establishment's seats, Liggett said.

Other rules include regulations about what kinds of furniture can be used and ensuring an overall appealing look that enhances the community, Antonio said. The kinds of material used and signage are also considerations, Kelly said.

Antonio also recently helped bring the two discussions about how arts and culture impact the economy to Lakewood, as well, which she says are similar issues.

"People might say this is a hard economic time...let's get down to serious stuff," Antonio said. "For me, that's exactly what we're talking about—we're talking about jobs and we're talking about economic vitality through encouraging these types of enterprises [sidewalk dining and arts and culture]."

Antonio cited Mayfield Hill in Little Italy as an example of what the city is going for in terms of sidewalk dining.

El Tango Taqueria is located at 14224 Madison Ave, Lakewood.

For more information about Lakewood's new Outdoor Dining Ordinance, please contact Dru Siley, assistant director of planning and development, at (216) 529-6634.