Manager's Report

November 9, 2021

AVL Shares Space

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Presentation Overview

- Overview of the Program
- Community Engagement & Impact
- Next Steps

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Key Takeaways

- COVID-19 is an on-going public health & safety issue
- This is a popular program (businesses & community)
- Should pursue long-term, equitable, resource-supported processes
- Fee structures need to be evaluated
- Managing the program and transitioning to long-term takes significant time, money and community engagement
- Currently taking an incremental & program-specific approach to permanency
- There will not be an immediate path to permanency in all cases
    - Substantial ordinance and/or policy changes would be required
    - Building & fire safety will continue to be prioritized
- More information and updates are available on the city's website, **www.ashevillenc.gov/AVLSharesSpace**

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What is AVL Shares Space?

Temporary opportunities for businesses & organizations to utilize outdoor spaces to support alignment with public health guidelines and other community goals during the pandemic



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What is AVL Shares Space?

- Expansion on **private property**
- Expansion on **public sidewalks**
- Expansion into on-street parking spaces (**parklets**)
- Expansion into on-street parking along an entire corridor (**shared streets/pedestrian priority zones**)
- **10 min curbside pick-up zones** - downtown and West AVL
- **Equity Markets** - vendor support in partnership with the Business Inclusion Office

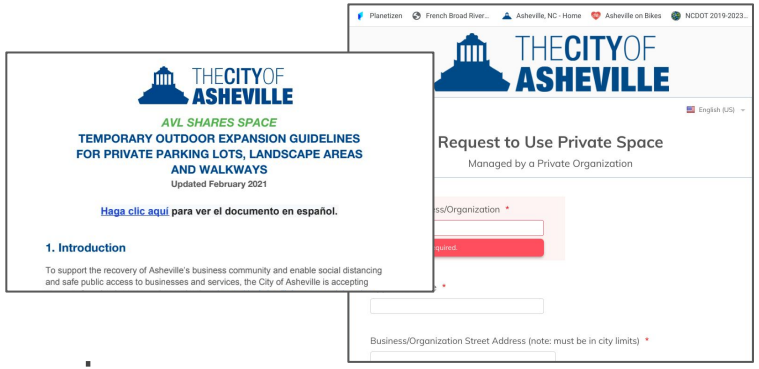






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Approach



- Organized an interdepartmental team
- Established guiding principles
- Developed program guidelines
- Created expedited online application & review process
- Assembled working teams
    - Core team, parklet review team, DSD processing, coordination team
- Worked in coordination with business organizations & public health officials
- Engaged directly & extensively with businesses organizations
    - Additional proactive approach in shared street areas: The Block, South Slope, Wall Street

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What is AVL Shares Space?

- **Expansion on private property**
  - Up to 50% of parking (aligned with temp capacity restrictions)
  - Expedited process (1-2 days) and no fees







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What is AVL Shares Space?

- **Expansion on public sidewalks**
  - Same as existing requirements (6 ft. clear space)
  - Expedited process (1-2 days) and no fees





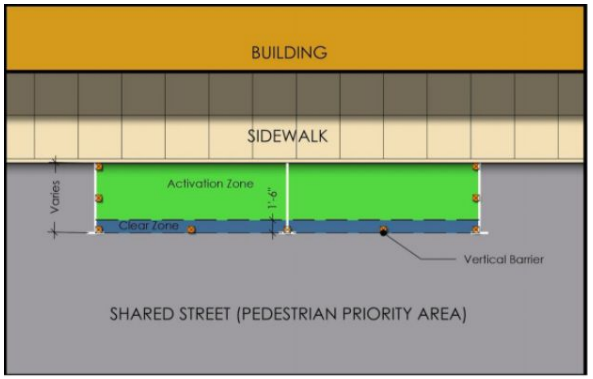




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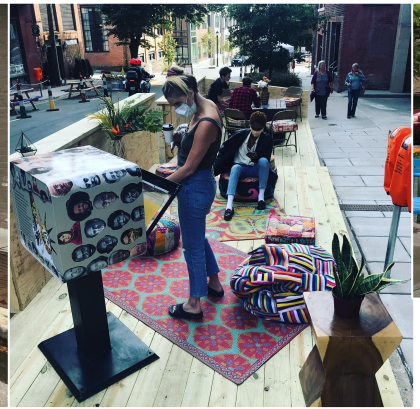
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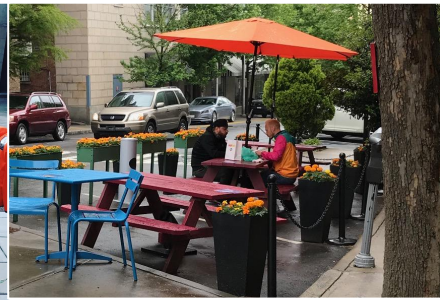
- **Parklets - expansion into on-street parking**
  - 1-3 spaces adjacent to storefront
  - For dining, queuing, merchandise and/or programming
  - Elevated or “at-grade”
  - On City-managed streets











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What is AVL Shares Space?

- **Shared Streets / Pedestrian Priority Zones - expansion into on-street parking along an entire corridor**
  - Reduce (in some cases re-route) vehicular travel
  - Pedestrian priority zone signage
  - Proactive initiation & coordination with community










Program Timeline & Extensions

- Pilot launched in May/June 2020 → Initial end date Oct 31, 2020
- Fall 2020 **extension #1** → new end date January 3, 2021 or lifting of local emergency order
  - plus new guidance & process for winter accommodations
- Fall 2020 transitioned shared streets to parklets
- Dec 2020 **extension #2** → new end date 30 days after lifting of local emergency order
- June 2021 **extension #3** → new end date **January 3, 2022**; no new elevated parklet applications after **July 1, 2021**
- July 2021 - some fees re-introduced (TUP, signage)

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Participation

- Currently, **94** businesses are authorized for temporary outdoor expansion through the program
  - **48** utilizing private property
    - *generally parking lots along commercial corridors outside of downtown, i.e. Merrimon Avenue, Haywood Road, etc.*
  - **27** utilizing public sidewalks
    - *generally downtown*
  - **19** utilizing on-street parking spaces (parklets)
    - 24 authorized; 5 discontinued in 2021
    - *All downtown/South Slope*
- Almost all spaces are being utilized for outdoor dining (though not a limitation of the program)

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Community Engagement & Impact

- September 2020 - participating business survey:
  - **87%** were able to **hire/rehire staff** (avg. 3.6 people)
  - **84%** indicated positive impacts to bottom-line
  - **100%** wanted to continue beyond Oct 31
  - Comments = appreciate **ease** and **speed** of process & **staff support**
- September 2021 - participating business survey:
  - **92%** "**very positive**" impacts to biz & bottom line
  - **~70%** reported no increased negative impacts to parking
  - **76%** "**definitely**" interested in continuing even if fees and upgrades required
  - Comments = positive impacts on **staff retention**, **morale** and/or **sense of safety** for staff (as well as customers)

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Community Engagement & Impact

- Sept. 2021 public survey results (*634 responses*):
  - > **75%** reported a "**very positive**" experience with each core initiative
  - > **60%** reported the initiatives helped them feel ***much safer*** and ***very much*** encouraged accessing local goods & services
    - > **75%** specifically for expansion on private lots
  - **87%** "**very supportive**" of continuing parklets/shared streets longer-term; 5% "somewhat supportive"
  - **86%** "**very supportive**" of continuing expansion on private lots longer-term; 10% "somewhat supportive"
  - **63%** "**very supportive**" of continuing curbside pick-up zones longer-term; 20% "somewhat supportive"

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Lessons Learned

- Primarily utilized by restaurants
- Privatization of public space policy should be considered
- Public areas generally empty/unused space during off-hours
- No fees being charged
- Not all businesses are in suitable locations (is that fair/equitable?)
- Enforcement challenges
- Significant staff time & resources to manage
- Maintenance issues (i.e. stormwater, street cleaning)
- Public Space Management Framework in-progress
- Development of longer-term programs will take more time, input & staff resources (planning + future management)

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What's Next?

- Expansion on private property
  - Extending to allow for time to transition
  - 1-on-1 coordination with development services staff for path to permanency
- Expansion on public sidewalks
  - Begin permitting for 2022
  - Revise fees & potential adjustments to permit/encroachment standards
- Parklets
  - 1. Allow limited temporary program to continue through July 1 (no new applications)
  - 2. Develop a long-term program for public parklets
  - 3. Consider a long-term program, fee structure, etc. for private business "streeteries"
- Shared Streets
  - Long-term implementation on Wall Street in-progress
  - Otherwise on-hold until additional resources can support development of a long-term program, engagement, ongoing coordination & management

What's next?

- Resource Development
  - During the next 6 months, staff will explore funding options to support a reasonable work plan for transitioning elements of the pilot program into permanent services (e.g. City's supplemental; budget, ARPA grant application, and other outside funding sources)
- Communications
  - Participating businesses should expect to begin hearing from staff this week!

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THANK YOU!

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Guiding Principles & Goals

- Align with the guidance of state and local **public health** agencies
- Support the **recovery** of the local economy & overall vitality of Asheville's commercial areas
- Expand opportunities for **safe public access** to businesses and services
- **Be flexible** to accommodate the changing operational needs of businesses and organizations
- Introduce **new or different uses of public space** that support the health, safety and well-being of our community
- Provide a framework that incorporates opportunities for implementation across **varied geographic areas** and **equitable engagement** in decision-making
- **Consider longer-term implementation** of successful tools and strategies
- Recognize that **balancing** the needs and uses of public space often requires compromise
- Aim to maximize public benefit while 1) prioritizing **responsiveness to the recovery** needs specific to COVID-19 and 2) using an **equity lens** to weigh particular uses over others
- Ensure initiatives **respond quickly** to needs without compromising public safety
- **Use public resources responsibly**

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