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Council OKs guidelines for platform dining

Two restaurants to try concept

By Pam Fleming
STAFF WRITER

After many lengthy discussions by planning commission, city council and the Northville Downtown Development Authority, council members set guidelines on platform dining Monday night.

Rather than make changes to the existing city ordinance, council decided instead to just set up guidelines for the design and operation of the platform dining structures.

The structures will be used on a trial basis to see how they fit into the downtown.

Restaurants will simply have to obtain a right-of-way building permit from the city for the platforms.

So far, only two restaurants - Table 5 and the new Middle Eastern restaurant, le George - will have the dining platforms set up in parking spaces outside the locations on E. Main Street.

Owners of Edward's Caf^e are not interested in investing in a platform, which has been estimated to cost \$7,000, according to local builder Mike Miller.

OPEN FOR SIX MONTHS

The plan is to have the platforms, that will extend from the sidewalk into a parking space near each restaurant, open for six months out of the year. The platforms will be taken down and stored during the cold-weather months, opening up those parking spaces for holiday shoppers.

Lori Ward, executive director of the DDA, presented the concept of platform dining to council on April 5. The issue was tabled so that council members could receive more information. The idea was also presented to members of the Northville Central Business Association on April 13.

Ward said 16 businesses were represented at the meeting, with about 14 in favor of the concept.

Three railing designs have been approved by members of the Northville Historic District Commission.

If Table 5 or le George owners want a different design, they would have to have it approved by the commissioners.

Council wanted DDA staff to present a dedicated bus parking plan since two parking spaces will be taken up by the new dining platforms.

Ward presented four options to council for bus drop-offs — in front of the Marquis Theatre, on Mary Alexander Court, behind the Marquis Theatre and in front of Orin Jewelers on E. Main Street at Center Street.

Ward said the Marquis Theatre brings in about 130 buses a year, mainly from January through March, with most drop-offs at 10 a.m.

Genitti's Restaurant brings in about 30 buses a year between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Mayor Chris Johnson said the bus drop-offs have been more of a problem by the Marquis Theatre than in front of Genitti's. But, Ward said the theatre's owners have done a good job managing the bus drop-offs lately.

Council member Doug Bingham, whose office is right across the street from the theatre, said he has not seen any problems recently with traffic being backed up on Main Street due to the buses.

Nancy Darga said with school budget cuts that there may not be as many field trips to the Marquis Theatre as in the past as well.

Darga, who schedules buses to bring visitors on tours of historic Northville, said those buses use Mary Alexander Court or Mill Race Village, and that they would use the new walkway on E. Main Street when it's built.

She didn't think Orin Jewelers would be a good location for bus drop-offs, as the buses would have to extend into the intersection at Main and Center streets to park there.

PARKING COMMITTEE

Members of the DDA Parking Committee met on April 15 to review the platform dining concept, among other issues. Ward said all of the members seemed to be in favor of the idea, although one person did have some concern about the safety of people using the structures.

The concept has been successful in downtown Birmingham, with eight in operation, so Ward contacted merchants there for feedback on the platforms. "The retailers thought it was a tremendous boost to business," Ward said.

The platforms are no longer used in downtown Plymouth because of renovations in their streetscape project. Council member Jim Allen said that he thought the platforms should be open to the public when they are not being used by the restaurant. Table 5 is only open for dinner, so this would particularly apply to that restaurant.

Mishelle Lussier, Table 5 owner, said that she would not have a problem with people using her platform during off-hours. "People do that now with our sidewalk seating," Lussier said.

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