

## Northville leaders seek more input on platform dining for downtown

### Local planning commissioners to review first

By Pam Fleming • STAFF WRITER • April 8, 2010

Although most seem to like the concept, city council members aren't ready to pull the trigger on approving what's referred to as platform dining in Northville.

A packed city council heard a lengthy discussion Monday night on the subject, as downtown merchants were asked to come to city hall.

If approved, platform dining would be added as an amendment to the current outdoor dining ordinance.

It involves restaurants that don't have enough sidewalk space for outdoor dining to be able to place a wooden platform in a parking space close to their restaurant during the outdoor-dining season.

Council did agree to accept a "first reading" on the amendment ordinance, and planning commissioners reviewed the concept at their Tuesday night meeting.

### PART OF STRATEGIC PLAN

Lori Ward, executive director of the Northville Downtown Development Authority, said at the meeting that outdoor dining was listed as a priority with residents in the 2006 Downtown Strategic Plan. Anyone who's strolled through downtown Northville

in nice weather can attest to the popularity of Poole's Tavern's, Edward's Cafe and Table 5's outdoor dining areas on E. Main Street as well as seating outside Rebecca's and the Tuscan Caf  on N. Center Street.

The platforms would only be available to restaurants with less than 16 feet of sidewalk outside their building.

The platforms would also be ramped for handicapped accessibility.

Currently, the only restaurants that would meet this criteria are Table 5, Edward's Caf , le George (opening soon) and Red Pepper Deli.

The Historic District Commission has reviewed the amendment and approved three railing designs around the platforms. Any other design would have to be approved by the commission.

### WOULD SUBMIT PERMIT

A business owner would have to submit a platform dining permit to the city for a nominal fee. The owner would also be responsible for the construction and storage of the platform, which would only be up during the outdoor dining season. This would leave parking spaces open during the **holiday shopping season** in the fall.

"We believe this would add charm, character and appeal to downtown Northville," Ward said.

The concept has been well-received in downtown Birmingham. So far, Table 5 and le George owners have both expressed interest in the idea.

The platforms would accommodate six-eight tables and would have umbrellas that would have to match or complement the building facade.

Mayor Chris Johnson thought it would be a good idea to keep the platforms open for the public to use during [parades](#).

## UNFAIR TO OTHERS?

Council member Nancy Darga was concerned that using parking spaces for the platforms might take business away from nearby merchants that weren't restaurants. She wants more input from other merchants before approving the ordinance amendment.

Many discussed the issue of the platforms eliminating the already too-few parking spaces downtown.

"I don't want to give a business an advantage over another," she said. "I don't think there's a clear understanding by the merchants of this (concept.) I think there are a lot of things that aren't resolved yet before we jump into this shallow pool."

But Mary Starring of Starring "The Gallery" on W. Main Street said when the former NOMI restaurant across the street from her was open, its outdoor dining area attracted customers to her store.

Three planning commissioners attended the council meeting Monday night. Although they had some positive comments about the concept, they said they, too, didn't have enough facts to make a decision yet.

One commissioner had safety concerns about children playing around the platforms, and another thought public space for private use was inappropriate.

"We want to review it (the amendment) before it comes to council," said Jay Wendt, planning commission chair.

"We need to have merchant buy-in, and I don't have a sense of that," Darga said. "We don't want a lawsuit (initiated by merchants near the platforms)."

Johnson said the city's never going to get 100 percent buy-in from the merchants.

Some of the issues to be reviewed concerning platform dining include: communication with downtown merchants on the idea, standard railings, a dedicated bus parking area, fee structure, [insurance](#), limits (how many will be allowed in the city), parking and accessibility to the public of the platforms when they're not in use.

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