

Pedestrian Zone Helps Restaurants and Boosts Energy Along Pine Avenue

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The new Pine Avenue pedestrian zone, a result of the Open Streets Initiative approved by the Long Beach City Council, is helping restore the vibrant energy that is a hallmark of an evening spent in the heart of Downtown. Closed to vehicular traffic from First to Third Streets beginning August 14, the closure is designed to allow businesses to safely expand their operations outdoors while adhering to government health regulations. It is also a way for them to promote being open and operating during the pandemic.

“Business is booming,” said Michelle Kagasoff, General Manager of [B0-Beau kitchen + rooftop](#), one of the restaurants located within the two block closure area. “We’re extremely excited that the City and the Downtown Long Beach Alliance (DLBA) have allowed us to open up our streets and help Long Beach get back

to its former self.”

The positive reaction from Downtown visitors has made its way back to City Hall. “People love the Pine Avenue closure and we are happy to support this innovative approach,” said Mayor Robert Garcia. “We would like to send a huge thanks to DLBA and the Pine Avenue restaurant and business owners for their work and support.”

The idea to open the street to pedestrians took shape during discussions about how to best implement the Open Streets Initiative. Diko Melkonian, Deputy Director of the Long Beach Public Works Department, explained: “The intent of the closure is to allow appropriate businesses an opportunity to provide their services outside, where it is safer to utilize those services, to socially distance, and to provide better safety for both employees and patrons.”

Guidelines for the vehicle closure were created by City traffic engineers. Outdoor dining areas extending onto street pavement within the pedestrian zone were required to conform with spacing protocols for emergency vehicles, pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and accessibility requirements established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Affected businesses were invited to a preliminary walk-through with City and DLBA staff to ask questions and clarify operating rules during the closure.

When the closure was implemented, representatives from DLBA and the City’s Public Works, Health, Special Events, and City Code Enforcement offices were on hand to make sure the new open street configuration met all regulations while serving the needs of businesses and their patrons. “Modifications were made that day to better meet the needs of businesses and still provide space,” said Melkonian. “Some of the layout was tweaked a little bit after hearing the requests and concerns of the affected businesses.”

Businesses that have expanded their operations into the street have received positive feedback from patrons. “People are getting excited about the closure and adding to the energy because they see how other people are responding to it,” said Ron Hodges, who owns [Shannon’s Irish Pub and Sports Bar](#) and its next-door steakhouse, [The Carvery](#), at the northwest corner of Broadway and Pine.

Just across the street, [King’s Fish House](#) has also expanded its outdoor dining into the street. “It’s almost a brand new restaurant,” said Joe Hernandez, General Manager of King’s Fish House at the southwest corner of Pine and Broadway. “Guests are loving it: We are loving it. The closure has brought life to the street and to the restaurant itself. Pine Avenue almost has a festival feel to it now.”

As a result of largely positive feedback, other locations are being evaluated for similar street closures through the City’s Open Streets Initiative. “Not every closure is going to look the same,” said Melkonian. “It is possible we could implement partial closures. We are in the beginning stages of evaluating the extension of the Pine Avenue closure northbound from Third Street.

“We encourage all the businesses to make sure they understand the requirements and protocols that need to be followed for everyone’s safety,” added Melkonian. “This includes how far they can encroach into the street, how they’re delineating their space, and making sure the servers wear both masks and face shields.” To review these requirements, visit longbeach.gov/pineclosure. Businesses in need of assistance may contact DLBA Placemaking Manager Mariah Hoffman at MariahH@dlba.org.

The Pine Avenue pedestrian zone is a concrete example of how collaboration between the City, DLBA, and businesses can result in an expedient and flexible solution. “It’s been a great partnership with DLBA, getting some exciting changes

done in order to help us get through this pandemic the best way possible," Melkonian said.

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