

# Urban Design Guidelines for Commercial Uses

## Commercial Patio

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## Image Credit

## Contact and Resources

**Glossary:** See the urban design guideline page on Ottawa.ca for definition of terminologies (search “urban design guidelines glossary”).

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## INTRODUCTION

This section provides an overview of the purpose of this guideline document, explains its four key objectives for commercial patio design, clarifies the circumstances under which the guidelines should be used, and describes how they are to be applied in various contexts.

# INTRODUCTION

## Definition

Outdoor Commercial Patio is defined as an outdoor seating area, operated as part of a restaurant, bar, place of assembly or nightclub.

## Use and Application

These guidelines are to be used during the preparation and review of commercial patio proposals on public and private property. The guidelines are intended to be a resource for the preparation of temporary patio permits on public property and for the design of development proposals that include a commercial patio on public or private property. The location of each patio proposal will inform the application of these guidelines. Each individual guideline will not be appropriate to apply in every scenario or context.

## Objectives

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on how to create vibrant and accessible outdoor commercial patio spaces. These guidelines encourage commercial patios to be designed to support local economic growth, animate the public realm, foster social connections, and be accessible to everyone. The objectives are:

- Support local businesses and economic growth:
- Encourage an animated and vibrant public realm:
- Foster social connections and community building:
- Design safe and accessible spaces:

## Context and Issues

These guidelines aim to support the local economy by encouraging patio use and providing clear guidance on the City's expectations for patio design. The interest in creating outdoor commercial patios increased during the 2020 pandemic because outdoor patios provided an alternative to indoor dining and increased revenue opportunities. Commercial patios continue to provide establishments with additional opportunities for patronage and this document can help guide the development of these spaces.



Diagram 1

# INTRODUCTION

Patios can animate and enhance the beauty of the public realm with attractive features that promote pedestrian-friendly streets. As an outdoor space in the public realm, a commercial patio can create a vibrant street atmosphere by facilitating at-grade activity designed to engage people within the public realm.



Diagram 2

Patios can foster social connections within a community by offering opportunities for people to engage with each other and with local businesses. Patios can serve as a walking destination within neighbourhoods as well as a destination to visit from elsewhere in the city. As a local attraction, patios can aid in building a sense of community amongst people in the neighbourhood.



Diagram 3

Patios can contribute to community safety by increasing casual surveillance (or “eyes on the street”). They should also be designed to be accessible for all users.



Diagram 4

# INTRODUCTION

## Public Property

The City of Ottawa issues temporary permits for commercial patios that operate on public property (also known as the City's Right-Of-Way). The temporary permits can be issued for the summer season use, winter season use, or for year-round use. A business license, insurance, and other related requirements are mandatory to operate and receive a patio permit.

## Private Property

Commercial patios located on private property do not require a City-issued patio permit. Outdoor commercial patios located on private property are regulated by the City of Ottawa's Zoning By-law. Patios that do not serve commercial uses are not addressed in these guidelines and may be reviewed through the Building Permit and Development Review processes. In instances where there is a portion of the private property that is subject to a public easement granted by the City, commercial patios are prohibited on the area subject to the easement, unless otherwise permitted by the General Manager.



Figure 1



# 1.0 DESIGN OPTIONS

This section specifically applies to commercial patios located on public property. It outlines five design options:

- Café Seating Patio
- Wall-side Patio
- Curb-side Patio
- Street-side Patio
- Combined Patio

# 1 DESIGN OPTIONS

## 1.1 Café Seating Patio:

A Café Seating Patio is located on the sidewalk and is one table deep. These patios are generally located flush against the wall of the associated establishment and do not require partitions to delineate the space. To provide better pedestrian flow in specific circumstances, these patios may also be permitted to be located along the edge of the sidewalk (or “Curb-side”). This type of patio design is named “Café Seating” because, unlike the other patio designs that may accommodate a larger area and greater capacity, this design provides small-scale café-style seating.

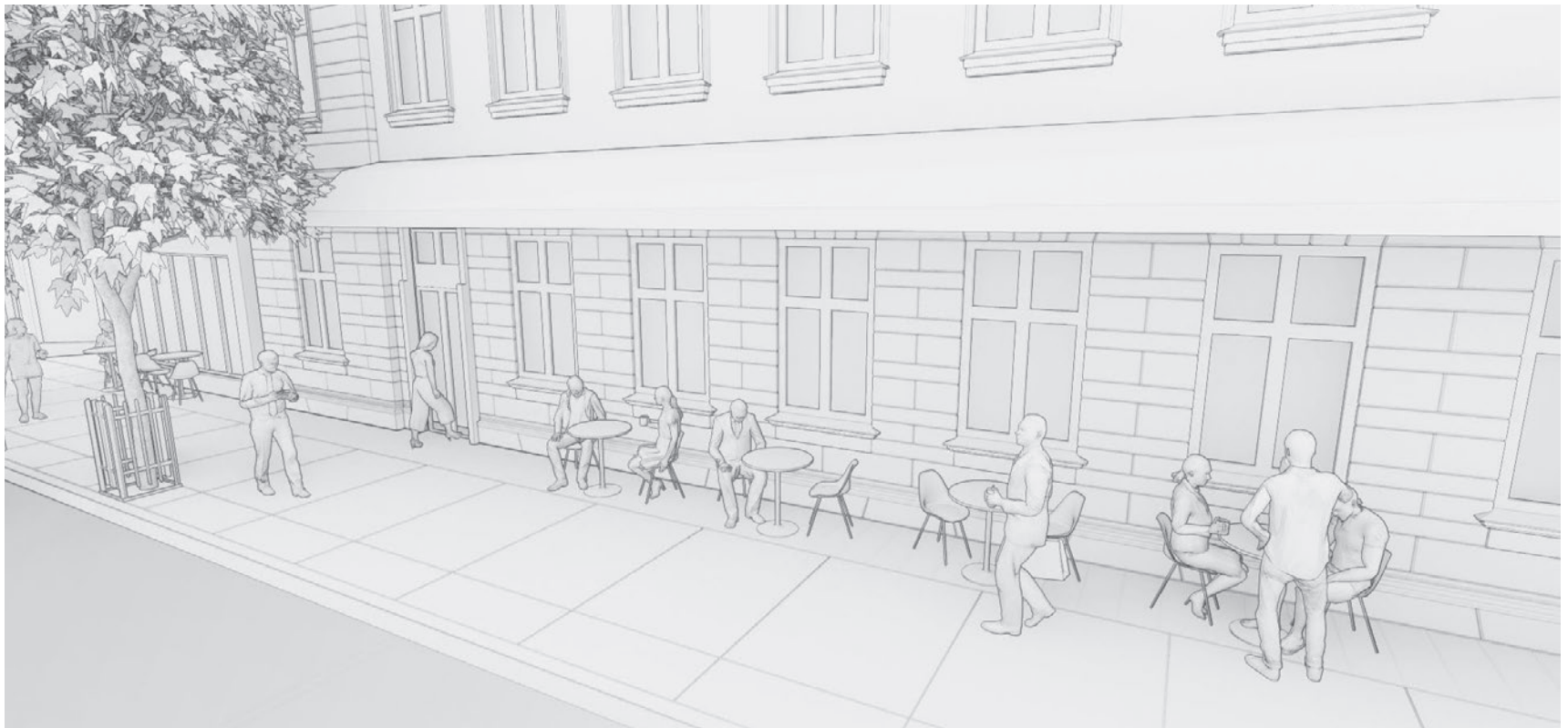


Diagram 5

## 1 Features:

- a. A simple and inexpensive option for establishments that wish to provide limited outdoor seating.
- b. Does not require the space to be delineated with partitions.
- c. Ideal for establishments that wish to offer seating at bistro-style tables against the building façade or, in specific circumstances, curbside.
- d. Ideal for establishments that do not wish to invest substantially in patio structures. All patio furniture must be brought into the business when it closes every day.
- e. May operate in the summer and winter seasons.
- f. May include patio elements such as: tables, chairs, and decorative planters.

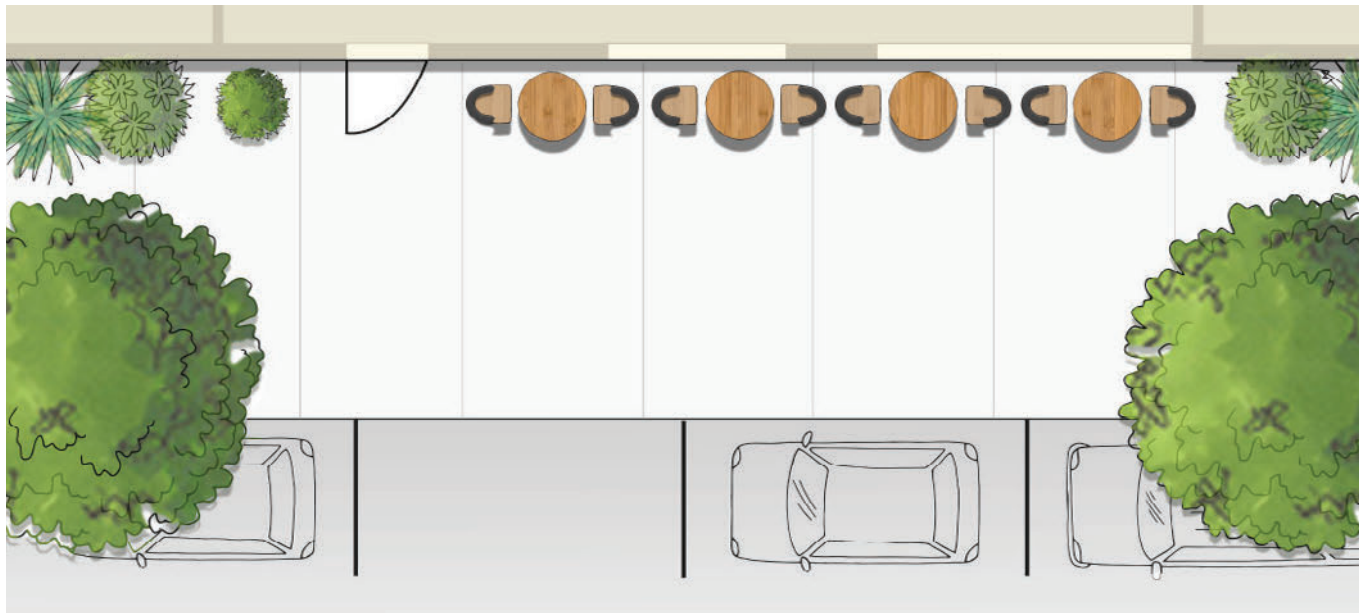


Diagram 6

# 1 DESIGN OPTIONS

## 2. Requirements

- a. A Café Patio Permit.
- b. Provide a pedestrian clearway at least two-metres wide, including between pinch points such as between the patio and street signs, bike racks, light standards, etc.
- c. Be one-table deep, with a maximum depth of 76cm.
- d. Each table is permitted a maximum circumference of 76cm and is permitted a maximum of two chairs.
- e. Not cause alterations to the boulevard surface
- f. Not use a platform.
- g. Be removed and stored on private property when not in use, or if in use, then at the earlier of the end of the business day or 2 a.m. of the next day
- h. Not place tables and chairs in any location other than against the building façade; unless a better pedestrian flow can be established with a curbside location, as determined by and to the satisfaction of the General Manager.
- i. Not be attached to any object.
- j. Be removeable at all times.
- k. Where located curbside, patio elements and/or elements from the existing streetscape may be required to delineate the patio space. Operators need to ensure the chairs and tables remain against the wall at all times.

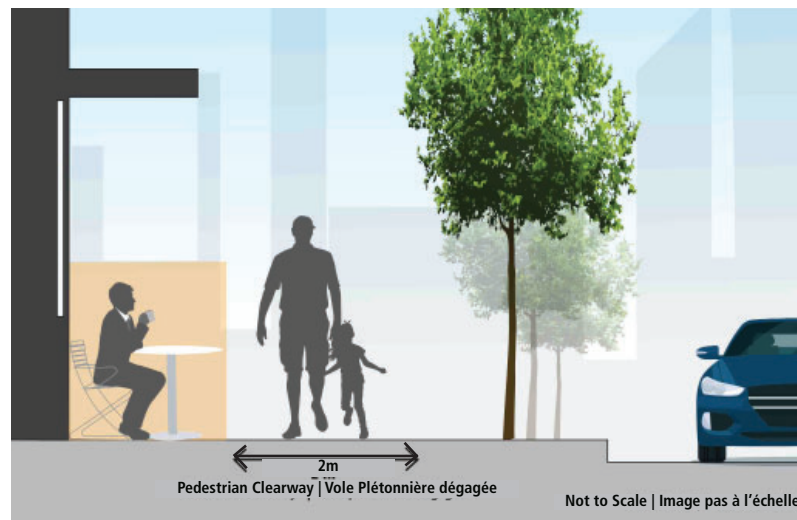


Diagram 7

## 1.2 Wall-side Patio:

A Wall-side Patio is located on the sidewalk and/or boulevard abutting the associated establishment, allowing the pedestrian clearway to extend from the patio to the sidewalk curb. It is named “Wall-side” patio because it is located directly next to the wall of the associated establishment, on the City sidewalk and/or boulevard.

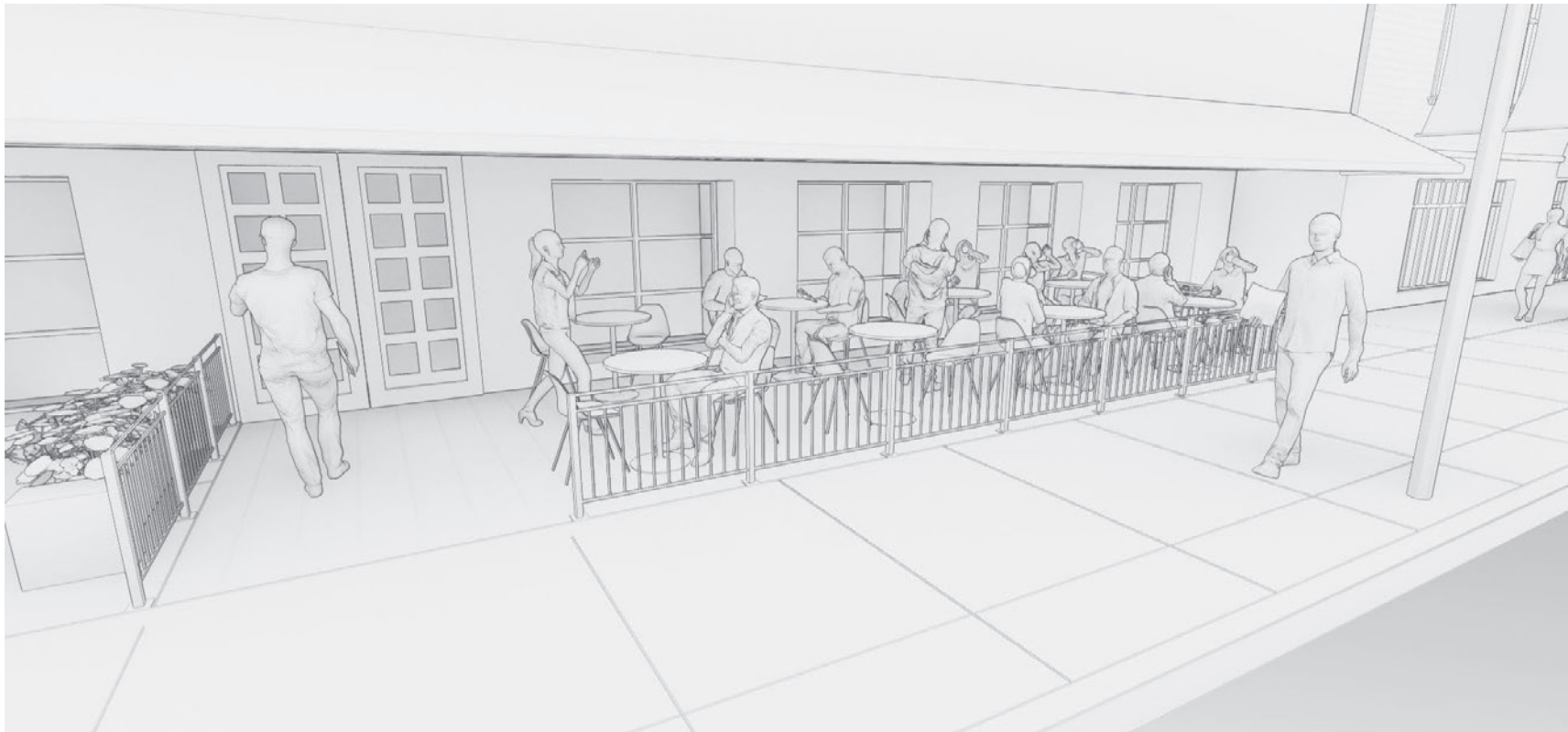


Diagram 8

# 1

## DESIGN OPTIONS

## Wall-side Patio

### 1 Features

- a. An option for establishments that wish to provide a patio on the sidewalk directly adjacent to their establishment. A Wall-side Patio is in a similar location to the Café Seating Patio, but it is larger in area and capacity and is subject different requirements under the Right-Of-Way Permit.
- b. Ideal for establishments that have a wide sidewalk or boulevard adjacent to their establishment and can provide a pedestrian clearway that extends from the patio to the sidewalk curb, that is at least two-metres in width.
- c. May operate the patio in the summer and winter seasons.
- d. May include patio elements such as platforms, partitions, tables, chairs, canopies, umbrellas, parasols and decorative planters.

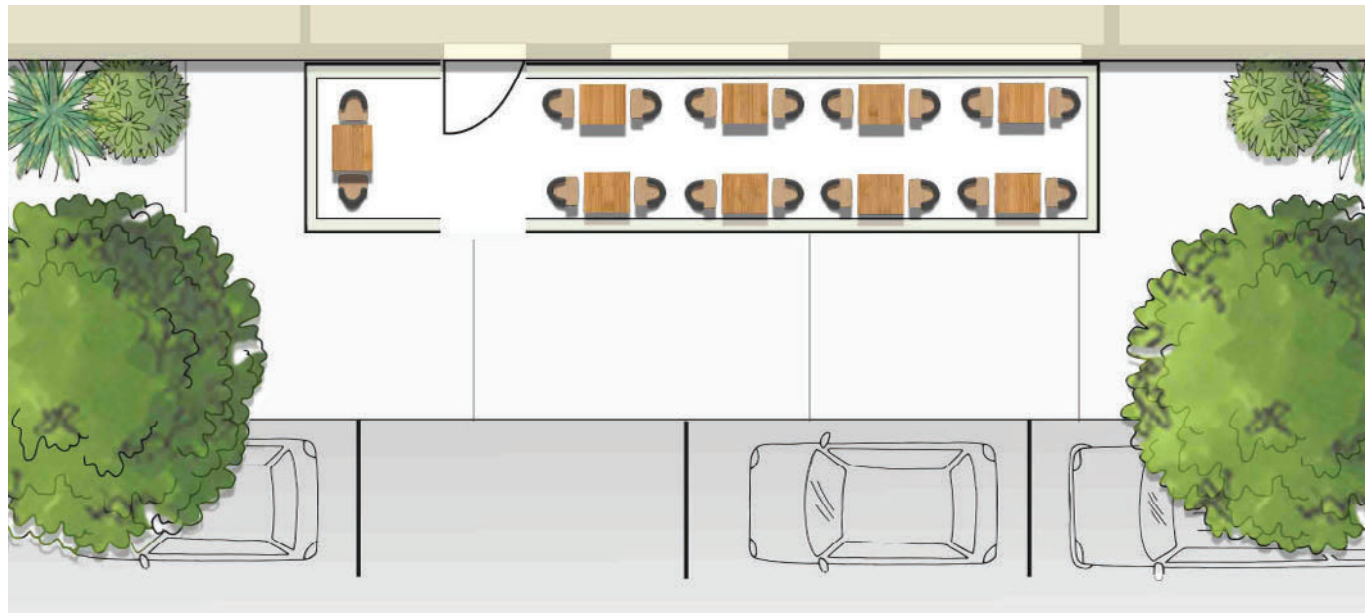


Diagram 9

## 1 Requirements

- a. A Right-of-Way Permit
- b. Provide a pedestrian clearway at least two-metres wide, including between pinch points such as between the patio and street signs, bike racks, light standards, etc.
- c. Provide site-specific dimensions on a site plan and elevation drawings submitted for permit approval.
- d. Capacity is limited to what space permits.

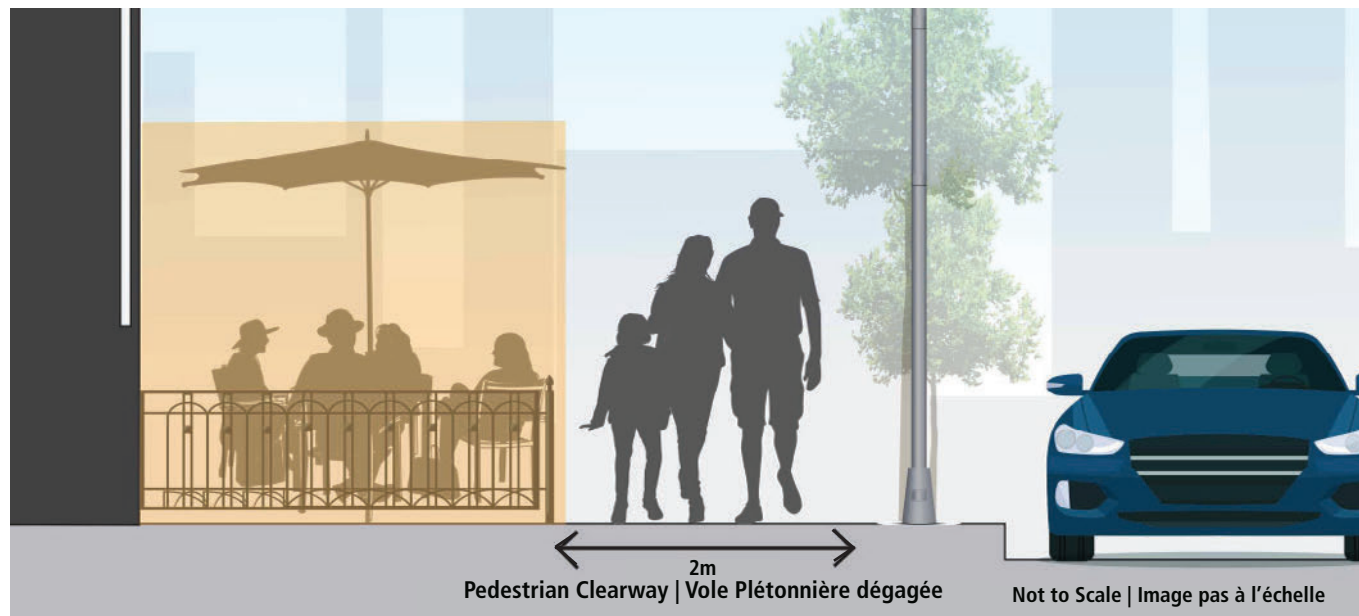


Diagram 10

### 1.3 Curb-side Patio:

A Curb-side Patio is located on the part of the sidewalk and/or boulevard that abuts the roadway, allowing a continuous sidewalk between the associated establishment and the patio. It is named “Curb-side” because it is on the side of the sidewalk and/or boulevard that abuts the curb, next to the roadway.

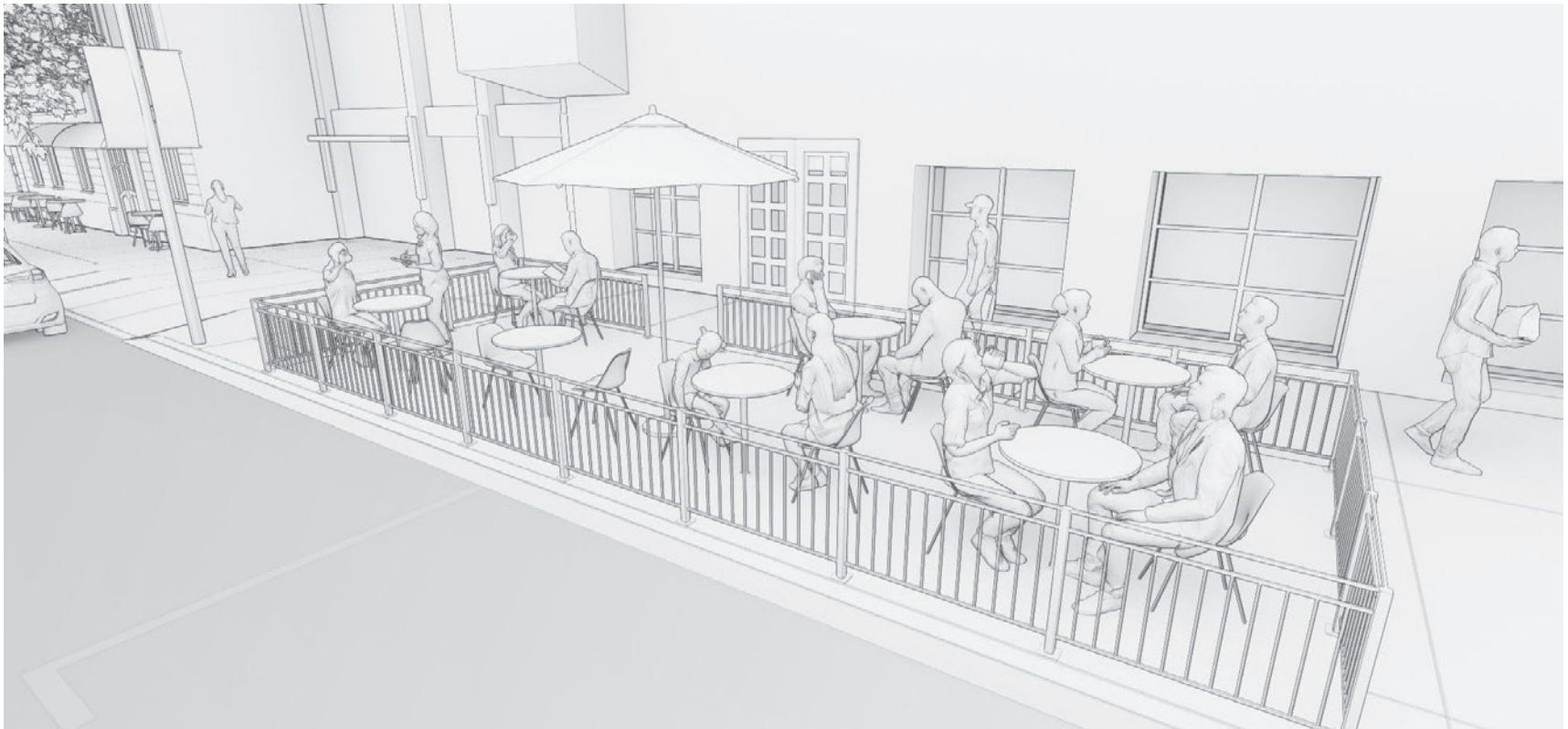


Diagram 11

## 1 Features

- a. An option for establishments that wish to provide a patio on the sidewalk and/or boulevard at the road edge.
- b. Ideal for establishments that have a wide sidewalk and/ or boulevard in front of their establishment and wish to maintain an unobstructed section of the sidewalk directly in front of their establishment. As this patio is located on the part of the sidewalk that abuts the sidewalk curb, it allows a continuous sidewalk between the associated establishment and the patio.
- c. May operate in the summer and winter seasons.
- d. May include patio elements such as platforms, partitions, tables, chairs, canopies, umbrellas, parasols and decorative planters.

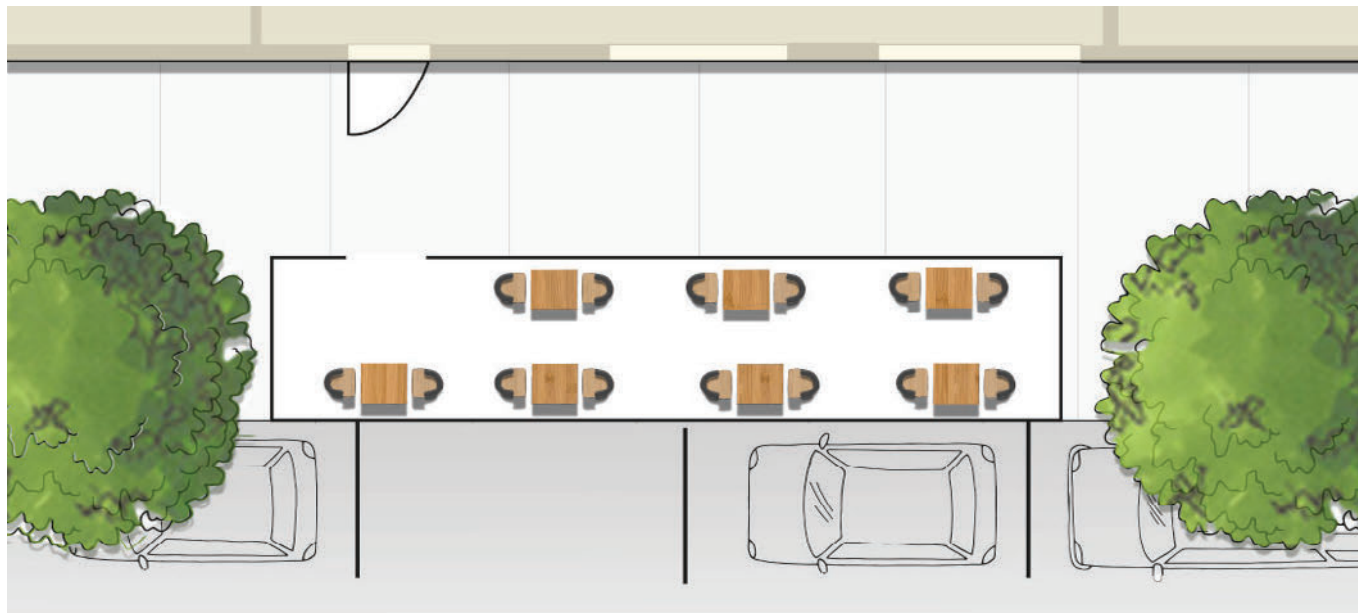


Diagram 12

# 1 DESIGN OPTIONS

## Curb-side Patio

### 1 Requirements

- a. A Right-of-Way Permit
- b. Provide a pedestrian clearway at least two-metres wide, including between pinch points such as between the patio and street signs, bike racks, light standards, etc.
- c. Provide a 0.8 metre setback from the edge of a curb that abuts a roadway, or where there is no curb provide a 0.8 metre setback from the roadway.
- d. Only operate under a tree canopy where there is a lowest canopy height of 2.4m.
- e. Not be located within a 3-metre sight triangle at an intersection.
- f. Not be located within 15 metres behind a bus stop, to allow for passenger movement.
- g. Not have any umbrellas or other items overhanging the roadway.
- h. Site-specific dimensions must be delineated on a plan submitted for permit approval.
- i. Capacity is limited to what space permits.

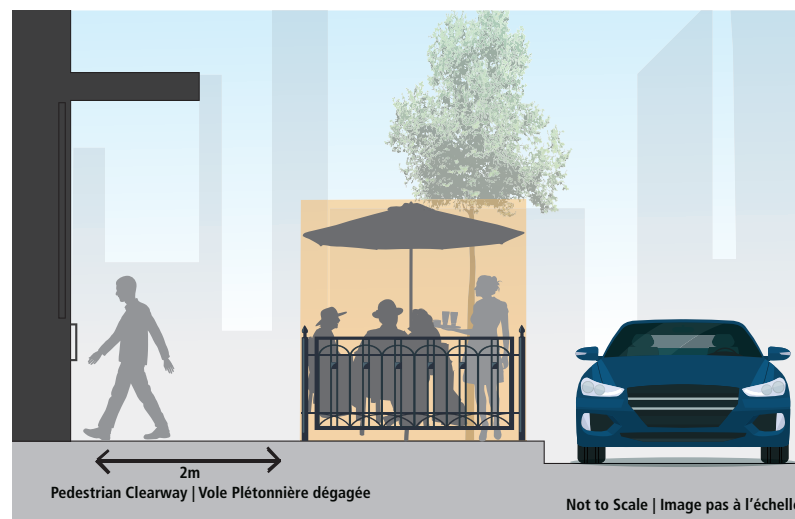


Diagram 13

## 1.4 Street-side Patio:

A Street-side Patio is located in a parking space that has been re-purposed in the outer lane of the roadway, in front of or beside the associated establishment. It is named "Street-side" because it is the only patio permitted to be located on the street/ roadway; all other patio designs are located on the sidewalk and/or boulevard.

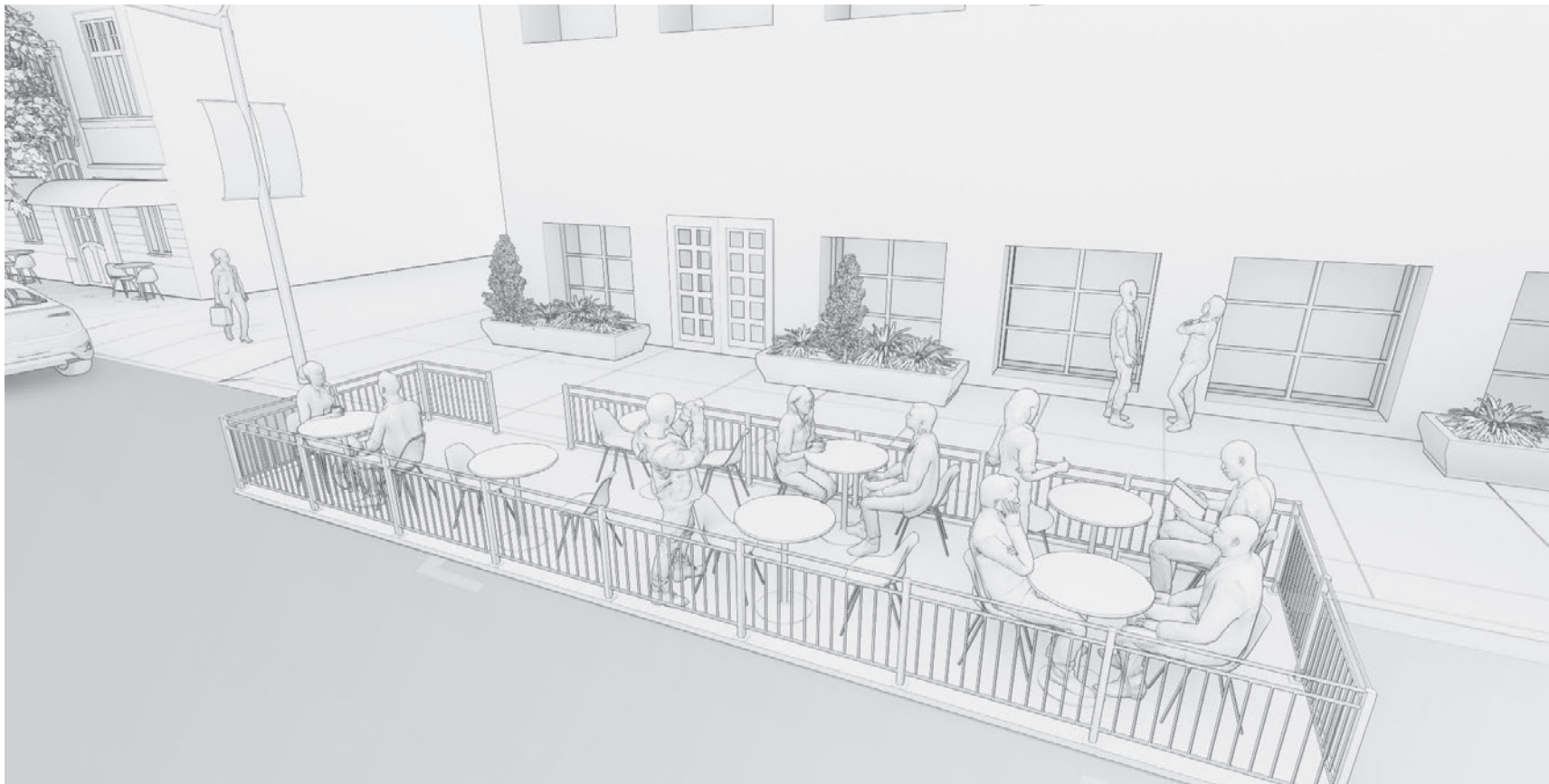


Diagram 14

# 1

## DESIGN OPTIONS

## Street-side Patio

### 1 Features

- a. An option for establishments that wish to provide a patio on the roadway.
- b. Ideal for establishments that have surface parking spaces located on the roadway in front of their establishments. This Street-side Patio design option is located in a parking space that has been re-purposed in the outer lane of the roadway and, therefore, requires parking space availability. To ensure the patio does not interfere with existing movement of vehicular traffic, these parking spaces must be available for parking at all times and not just available for parking during certain times of day.
- c. Ideal for establishments that wish to have the entirety of the sidewalk adjacent to their establishment clear of obstructions. As this patio is located in the roadway, no pedestrian detours would be required.
- d. Ideal for establishments that wish to operate the patio only in summer. Permits for winter season operations are not issued for Street-side Patios.
- e. May include patio elements such as platforms, partitions, tables, chairs, canopies, umbrellas, parasols and decorative planters.

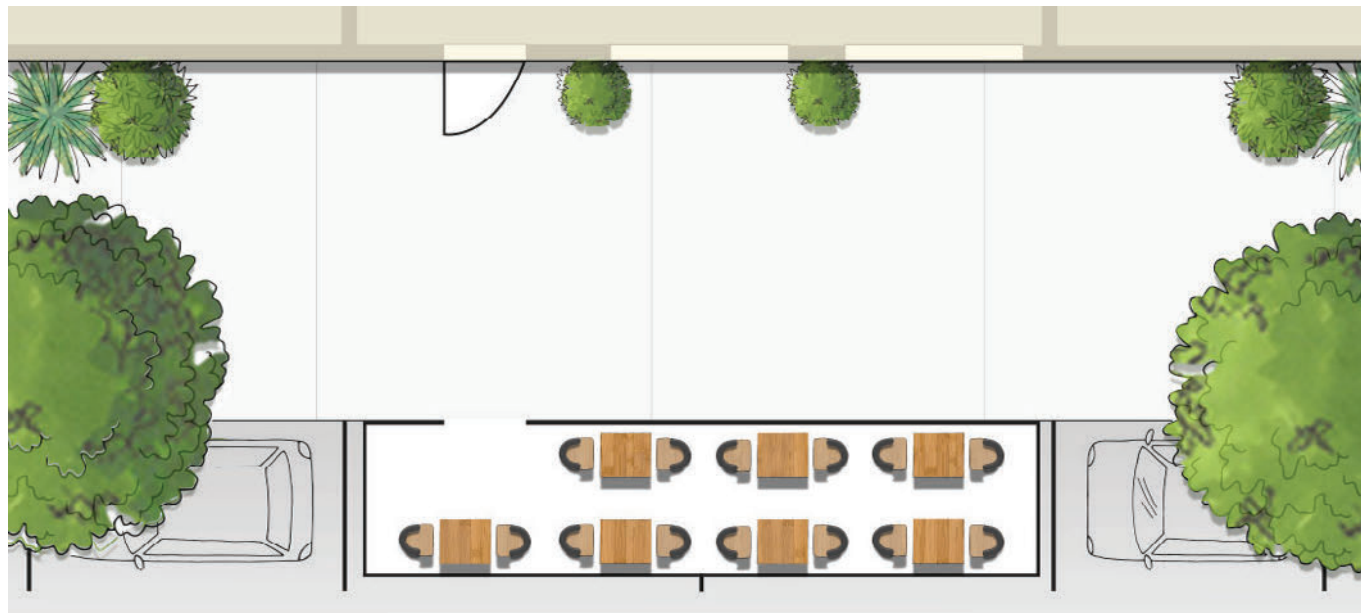


Diagram 15

## 1 Requirements:

- a. A Right-Of-Way Permit, only eligible for a summer season permit.
- b. Be constructed with a vertical barrier attached to the platform of a minimum 0.9m in height.
- c. Not have an overhead obstruction that extends beyond the boundary of the Street-side Patio on the travel lane side.
- d. Be on a street with a speed limit of 50 km/h or less.
- e. Be at a location where parking is allowed at all times.
- f. Be on a lane that is not a moving traffic lane at any time of the day.
- g. Be on a road that has a running slope of 5% or less and a cross slope, from curb to outer limit of the Street-side Patio or parklet, of 2% or less.
- h. Have the approval of Fire Chief, when a patio is setback less than 1.5 metres from a fire hydrant.
- i. Be for a summer season only; winter patios are not permitted.
- j. Site-specific dimensions must be delineated on a plan submitted for permit approval.
- k. Capacity is limited to what space permits.
- l. Refer to the City of Ottawa document Streetside Spots Standards for additional guidance.

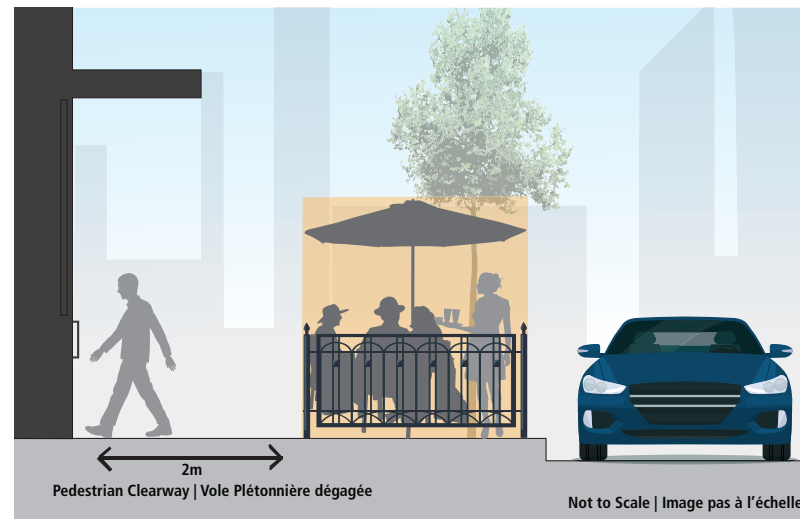


Diagram 16

### 1.5 Combined Patio:

A Combined Patio is a patio that is located within two distinct areas within the Right-Of-Way, using the previously outlined design options in this document. The example provided in the graphics below is a combination of Wall-side Patio and Street-side Patio.



Diagram 17

## 1 Features:

- a. An option for establishments that wish to provide a combination of patio design options.
- b. Ideal for establishments that ample room in the Right-of-Way to accommodate different types of patio design options.
- c. Ideal for establishments that are seeking to serve a large number of patrons and can meet all the requirements associated with the respective patio design options they select.

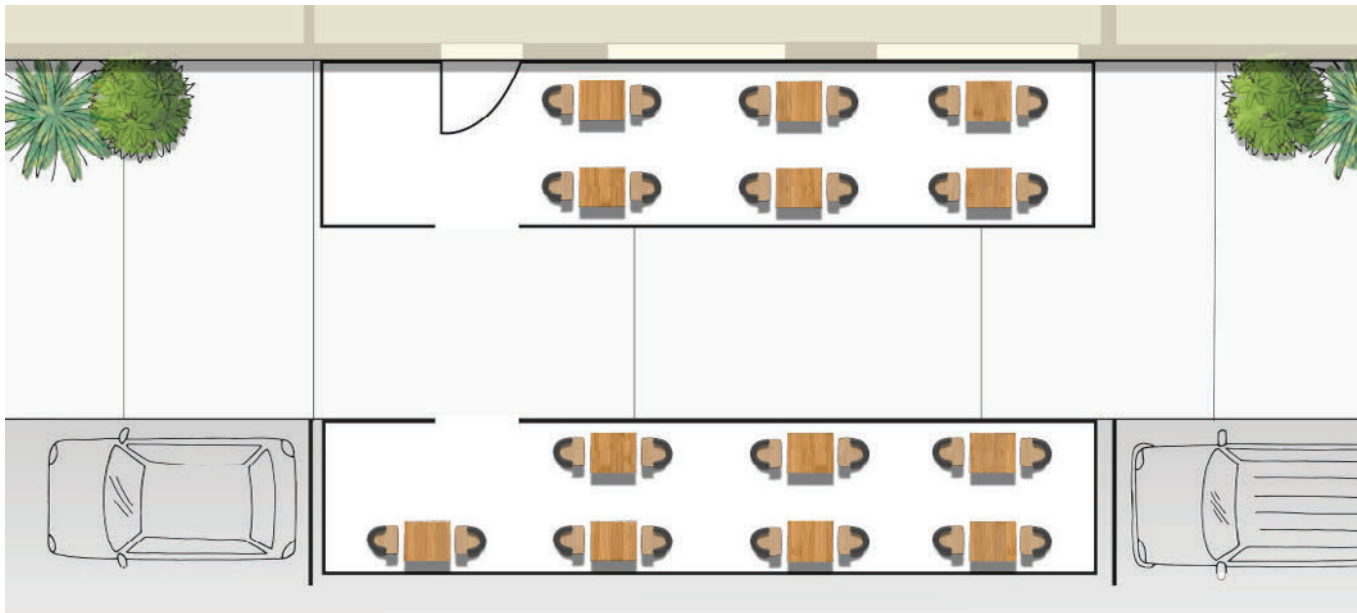


Diagram 18

# 1 DESIGN OPTIONS

## Patio

### 1 Requirements

- a. Subject to all the requirements associated with the patio design option selected.

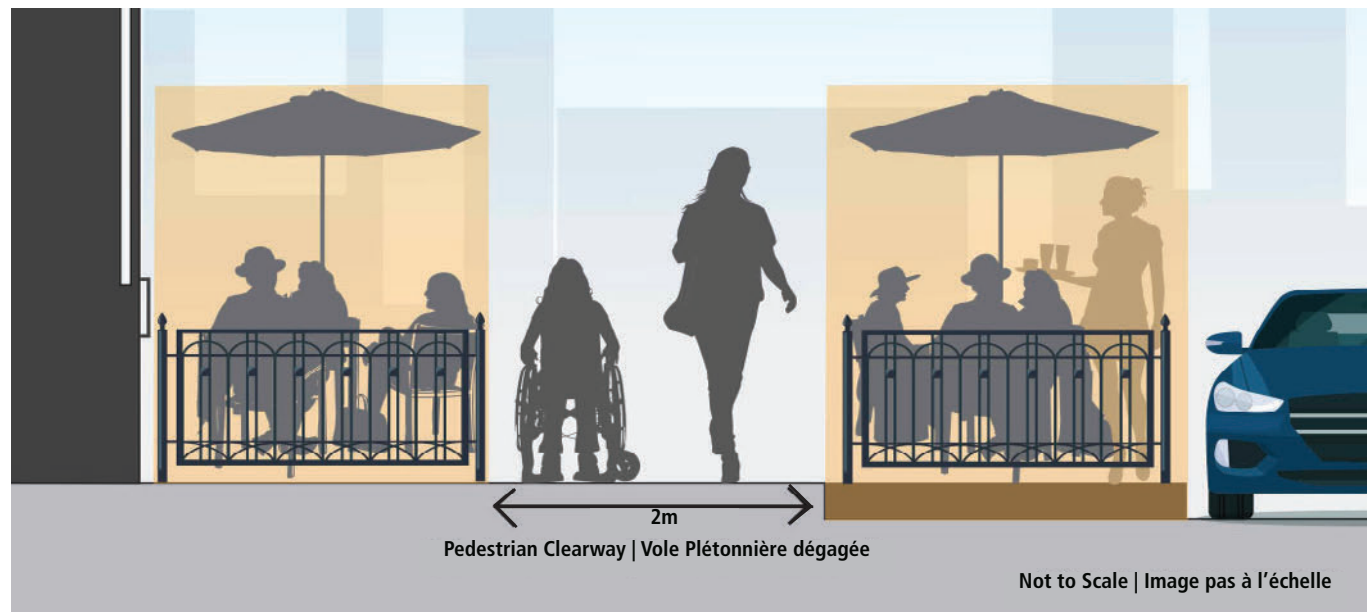


Diagram 19



## 2.0 DESIGN DIRECTIONS

This section outlines key design directions for commercial patios that may be located on either public or private property and address the following issues:

- Foster Good Neighbour Relations
- Patio Aesthetics
- Design Priority Areas
- Heritage

## 2 DESIGN DIRECTIONS

### Foster Good Neighbour Relations

#### 2.1 Foster Good Neighbour Relations:

To foster good neighbour relations and minimize any potential negative impacts of the patio on neighbouring residential uses, patio operators are encouraged to:

- 1 Proactively reach out to their neighbours to establish a point of contact so that if any issues arise with the operation of the patio, neighbours can contact the patio operators directly for a resolution.
- 2 Consider noise impacts by limiting the use of outdoor audio speakers or other amplified sound systems in ROW patios. Abide by the Noise By-law, Patio By-law, and the noise provisions in the Zoning By-law. Section 85 of

the Zoning By-law prohibits the use of amplified sound systems for private outdoor patios when within 30 m of an adjacent residential zone (Figure 2 & 3).

- 3 Consider privacy impacts by providing adequate screening of the patio and mitigating light spillover. Abide by the screening provisions in the Zoning By-law and consider using cut-off lighting fixtures that do not impact abutting properties.
- 4 Consider air quality impacts by locating designated smoking areas for patrons away from areas that are near neighbouring properties as well as a minimum of 9 metres away from where food and drink are being served.



Figure 2



Figure 3

- 5 Consider visual impacts by minimizing visual clutter with appropriately sized signs and banners.
- 6 Consider the general public's use of abutting public streets by:
  - a. Ensuring there is a pedestrian clearway, or an unobstructed travel path, at least two metres in width on the City sidewalk. Aim to have this pedestrian clearway as straight as possible for easy navigation by pedestrians (Figure 4).
  - b. Using a reservation system to avoid lineups that block the sidewalk and interfere with pedestrian flow along the street. Lineups for establishments must not interfere with the pedestrian clearway along the public sidewalk.
  - c. Locating A-frame signs to be flush against the building, so they do not block the sidewalk (Figure 5).
  - d. Ensuring patio structures and decorative features are fully contained within the patio footprint.

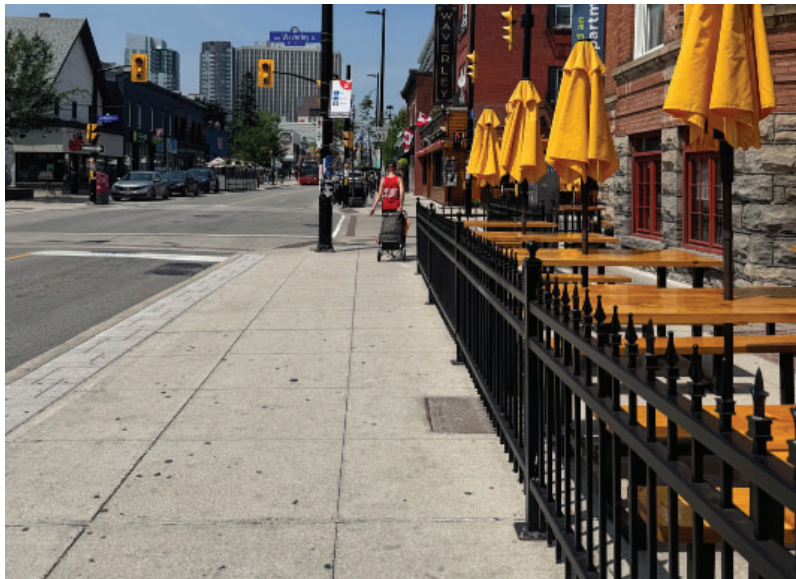


Figure 4



Figure 5

### 2.2 Patio Aesthetics

- 1 Choose a consistent theme for patio furniture and patio elements. Patio furniture includes tables, chairs, and lounge furniture. Patio elements include seasonal vegetation, non-vegetative decorative patio elements, umbrellas, partitions, and signs. The theme chosen should:
  - a. complement the architectural character of adjacent buildings and streetscape; (Figure 6)
  - b. have a consistent material choice, colour palette, and aesthetic; (Figure 7)
- 2 Create a cohesive experience for users, by ensuring patio locations and designs are compatible with programming and events within the City's Right-of-Way. To achieve this, patio operators are encouraged to coordinate and consult with the City of Ottawa and local authorities, such as Business Improvement Area organizations, Community Associations, local Councillors, and the National Capital Commission. This is of particular importance in areas that have multiple jurisdictional interests, such as the ByWard Market or Sparks Street.



Figure 6



Figure 7

## 2.3 Design Priority Areas

- 1 Patios located in Design Priority Areas, including in Special Economic Districts, and as defined by the City of Ottawa's Official Plan (as identified within the Official Plan Schedules C7-A and C7-8), are expected to provide elevated patio design. Patios in these areas are expected to provide for a high level of public realm investment, place keeping and design excellence, that will contribute to the overall image of Ottawa (Figure 8&9). These areas include:
  - a. ByWard Market
  - b. Parliament and Confederation Boulevard
  - c. Rideau Canal Special Districts

- d. Mainstreet and Minor Corridors within the Downtown Core Transect
  - e. Lansdowne
  - f. Ottawa River Islands Special Districts
  - g. Mainstreet Corridors and Hubs outside the Downtown Core
  - h. Village Cores
  - i. Kanata North Economic District
- 2 Patios that operate within Design Priority Areas in the winter should be:
  - a. Animated with lights and/or winter pot displays.
  - b. Cleared of snow and debris regularly in addition to the sidewalk cleaning as part of the City's Maintenance Quality Standards



Figure 8



Figure 9

### 2.4 Heritage

- 1 Respect and consider the cultural heritage value and attributes of designated heritage properties by having regard for Park's Canada's Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada and any applicable heritage conservation district guidelines or plans.
- 2 Patios constructed adjacent to designated heritage buildings should (Figure 10):
  - a. Avoid obscuring the facades of the buildings.
  - b. Include patio elements that are simple and subtle and do not detract from the heritage character of the adjacent building.
- 3 Patios and their elements should not be anchored into designated heritage building.



Figure 10



## 3.0 DESIGN DETAILS

This section delves into the specific design details of commercial patios, applicable to both public and private property. It addresses the following elements:

- Furniture
- Umbrellas and Parasols
- Partitions
- Lighting
- Vegetation
- Non-vegetative Decorative Patio Elements

### 2.4 Furniture

- 1 Patio furniture referred to in this section includes tables, chairs, and lounge furniture. Use weather-resistant, durable, and safe outdoor patio furniture that is intended for outdoor use in Ottawa weather. The use of untreated wood, breakable plastics, and non-waterproof fabrics is discouraged (Figure 11).
- 2 Ensure furniture is properly maintained, clean, and free of fading, corrosion, splinters, dents, and chipped paint (Figure 12).
- 3 Provide comfortable furniture that can also accommodate heavy use and weather.
- 4 Provide easily moveable furniture and smaller tables to allow for greater layout flexibility as well as access for mobility devices.



Figure 11



Figure 12

- 5 Provide varied table heights to allow people with mobility disabilities, older adults, and young children to easily access patio tables. Avoid exclusively offering high-top tables and bar stools.
- 6 Provide adequate distances between patio furniture within the patio area to accommodate people using mobility devices (Figure 13&14).
- 7 Provide a consistent accessible path of travel of at least 1.1m wide throughout the spaces and allow for a turning diameter of 1.7m to accommodate people using mobility devices.
- 8 Patios that operate in the winter should:
  - a. Be actively used by patrons.
  - b. Not be used as seasonal furniture storage when not in use.
  - c. Remain clear of snow and debris to remain accessible.



Figure 13



Figure 14

# 3 DESIGN DETAILS

## Umbrellas and Parasols

### 3.2 Umbrellas and Parasols

- 1 Provide shade and comfort to patrons with the use of umbrellas or parasols. These should be:
  - a. fully contained within the patio footprint (Figure 15&16)
  - b. when open, at a height that does not interfere with the pedestrian clearway.
  - c. made of durable material that is weather-resistant, such as canvas.
  - d. appropriately sized to fit the space. Consider that square umbrellas are more space efficient on patios with limited space.



Figure 15



Figure 16

### 3.3 Partitions

- 1 All partitions must adhere to municipal by-laws and provincial legislation by:
  - a. having a perimeter that is delineated as per Alcohol and Gaming Commission Ontario (AGCO) legislation requires.
  - b. meeting partition height requirements as per the City of Ottawa's Patio By-law
  - c. being free-standing, stable, and well-balanced
  - d. being able to be readily removeable from the public Right-Of-Way
  - e. being of sturdy construction
- 2 Use weather-resistant, durable and safe partition materials including metal or finished wood. Fabric, canvas, unfinished wood, and plexi-glass materials are discouraged (Figure 17).
- 3 To allow a person with sight loss to navigate around a patio partition, patio partitions must be designed to ensure that they will fall within the range of a cane being used for navigation, otherwise known as being "cane detectable". See the City of Ottawa's Patio By-law and Accessibility Design Standards for further information. To be cane detectable:
  - a. The individual posts that make up a partition must be no further than 0.5 metres apart from each other and include a toe rail. If a toe rail is not present, individual posts must be no further than 0.3 metres apart.
  - b. Consider using fencing, as it is the most cane detectable type of partition (rather than a rope, chain, or planters to delineate the patio).

- c. The bottom of partitions must be no more than 0.6m from the ground surface.
- d. Be cane detectable at the leading edge (the edge of the patio partition that someone on the sidewalk would encounter first) as well as at the trailing edge (the other edge of the partition).
- e. Use a colour for the partitions that contrasts with the colour of the ground surface for increased visibility.



Figure 17

### 3.4 Lighting

- 1 Lighting can provide animation and ambiance to patio spaces.
- 2 Lighting design should coordinate with patio furnishings and the streetscape design.
- 3 Consider pedestrian movement and the safety of patrons and staff when deciding on the location of patio lighting.
  - a. String lighting must be located high enough to allow people to move freely (Figure 18).
  - b. Consider having internal pathways and entrances within the patio be well-lit(Figure 19).
- 4 Lighting must not cause light pollution or directly face toward adjacent uses.
- 5 Decorative lighting on City-owned trees in the Right-of-Way are prohibited unless permission has been granted from Forestry Services, Public Works Department at the City of Ottawa.
  - c. Avoid tripping hazards from any power cords required for lighting.
  - d. All lighting on commercial patios must be powered by the establishment associated with patio operator.



Figure 18



Figure 19

## 3.5 Vegetation

- 1 All vegetation must be:
  - a. able to be readily removeable from the public Right-Of-Way.
  - b. contained within the patio footprint and not interfere with the pedestrian clearway.
- 2 All vegetation must contain a soil volume to support the planted material and must be watered either by hand or by a home-made or pre-made watering system.
- 3 Incorporate vegetation by using hanging planters, potted plants on the ground, or containers that are hung from the patio partitions or built into the patio itself (Figure 21).

- 4 Use vegetation that is in scale with the patio space.
- 5 Place vegetation in areas that are most visible to people. Consider that people’s eye-level when seated or standing is generally between two- to six-feet above ground level (Figure 20).
- 6 Create a full, voluminous profile for container plants by planting a large number of flowers or vegetation.
- 7 To lighten the weight of a container plant, consider filling the bottom half with light in-organic material and then use an insert filled with soil and vegetation on the top.
- 8 On private commercial patios consideration should be given to providing landscape screening between patios and drive-throughs and/or parking spaces.



Figure 20



Figure 21

# 3

## DESIGN DETAILS

## Non-Vegetative Decorative Patio Elements

### 3.6 Non-vegetative Decorative Patio Elements

- 1 Artificial vegetation can be effective at adding visual interest in patio spaces where living vegetation is not feasible. Consider the following options:
  - a. Artificial vines on patio trellis' to add ambiance and shade.
  - b. Artificial green walls on patio partitions where visibility through the partition is not a concern.
  - c. Artificial vegetation in winter pot displays on patios that operate in the winter.
- 2 Non-vegetative patio decorative elements can be used to visually unify patio spaces and create visual interest. Consider the use of (Figure 22 &23):
  - a. Ambient lighting
  - b. Colour
  - c. Murals
  - d. Art and sculptures
  - e. Chalkboards



Figure 22



Figure 23



## IMAGE CREDITS

# IMAGE CREDIT

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**Diagram 6 ,9,12,15,18 (Figure Ground and Section graphics of patio options):** By City of Ottawa rendered by Karanpreet Kaur.

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**Figure 10 (Illustration in black and white of a patio within a heritage context):** By A-Digit at istockphoto. Courtesy of A-Digit at istockphoto

**Figure 12 (Photograph of patio furniture):** By Timof at Shutterstock. Courtesy of Timof at Shutterstock.

**Figure 17 (Illustration in colour of a patio partition):** By A-Digit at istockphoto. Courtesy of A-Digit at istockphoto.

**Figure for “Image Credits” page:** By Karanpreet Kaur. Reproduction courtesy of Karanpreet Kaur.

# CONTACT AND RESOURCES

## Contact:

Right-of-Way (ROW) Patio Office: [ROWPatio@ottawa.ca](mailto:ROWPatio@ottawa.ca)

## Resources:

### City of Ottawa By-laws

Noise By-law 2017-255, as amended

Right of Way Patio By-law 2023-230, as amended

Road Activity By-law 2003-445, as amended

Signs on City Roads By-law 2003-520, as amended

Zoning By-law 2008-250, as amended

### City of Ottawa Guides

ByWard Market Public Realm Plan, City of Ottawa

City of Ottawa Accessibility Design Standards

Streetside Spots Standards, City of Ottawa

Summer Patios Fact Sheet, City of Ottawa

Tents, Patios, Awnings and Canopies Fact Sheet, City of Ottawa

The Good Neighbours (A-Frame Signs) Guide, City of Ottawa

The Good Neighbours (Patio Season) Guide, 2022, City of Ottawa.

## Other Resources

Clearing Our Path, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)

Patio Heater Safety Guidelines, Technical Standards & Safety Authority

Restaurant Patio Guidelines within the Right of Way, April 2022, Ontario Traffic Council, CIMA+

Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, Parks Canada