



TOWN OF ARLINGTON

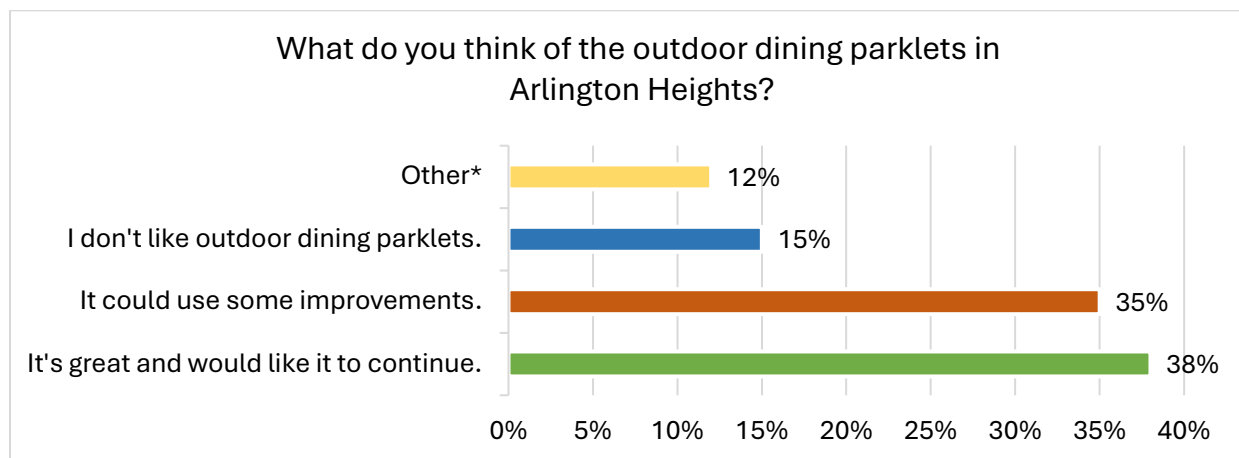
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Department of Planning and Community Development

MEMORANDUM

To: Diane Mahon, Chair, Select Board
CC: Jim Feeney, Town Manager
Britton Mallard, Office Manager
From: Katie Luczai, Economic Development Coordinator
Date: December 4, 2025
RE: Outdoor Restaurant Rules and Regulations – Parklet/On-Street Seating Policies

Arlington's restaurants are an important part of the cultural community and local economy, making up for 8% of the town's employment sector¹ and drivers of foot traffic for neighboring businesses. One recent survey completed focusing on Arlington Heights showed overall support for continuing the outdoor dining programs launched during the COVID-19 Pandemic.



As the Town has run the Outdoor Restaurant program it has become clear a few adjustments may be necessary to improve the overall success and longevity of the program.

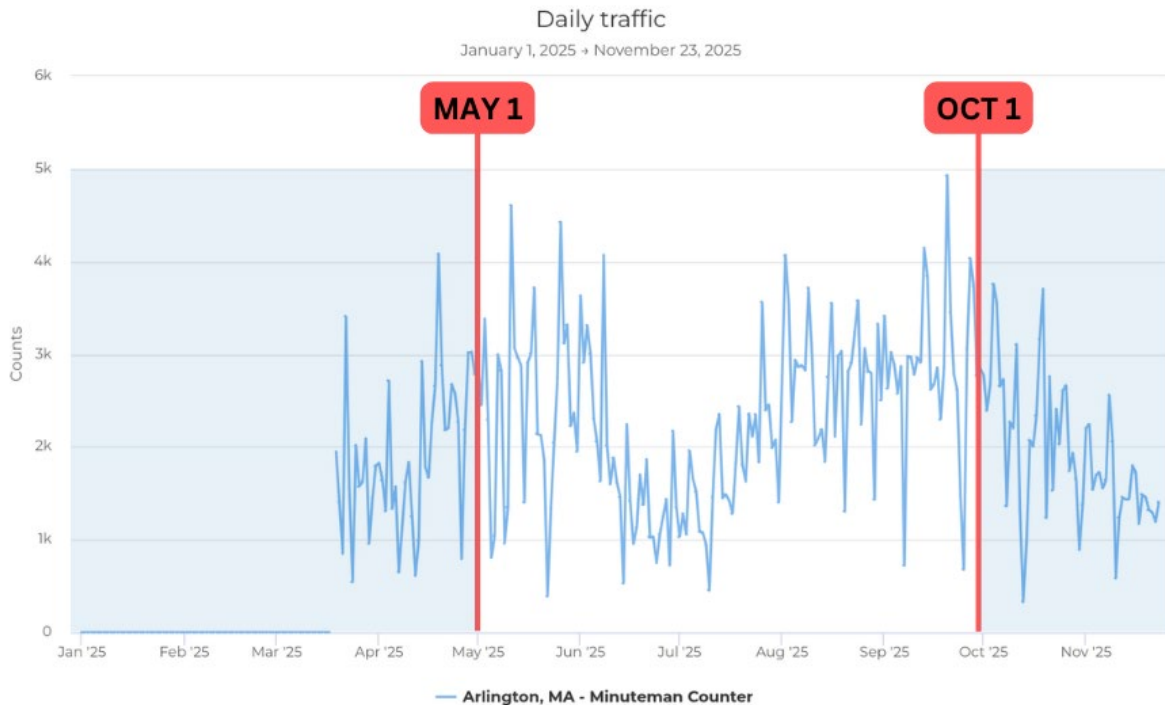
1. Recommendation: Shortening Parklet Season to May 1 – October 1

The current outdoor dining season in Arlington runs from April 15 through November 15. In recent years, however, we have observed slow activation of parklets at the beginning and end of the season. These inactive spaces fail to reflect the vibrancy of Arlington's restaurant scene and occupy valuable parking spots unnecessarily. To minimize underutilization, we recommend shortening the season to run from May 1 to October 1.

¹ Source: Town of Arlington Existing Economic Conditions by Ninigret Partners (2025)

*With the opportunity to provide comment, respondents offered that they would prefer to have wider sidewalks where dining could be located and more beautiful dining settings. Respondents also stated they would like it to continue if it helps the business economically.

For context, below is a daily traffic counter from the Minuteman Bikeway from 2025 to date with the initially recommended shortened dates superimposed.



Source: EcoVision, MassDOT, data pulled 11/24/25

2. Recommendation: Limit On-Street Parklet Footprint to Maximum of Two Public Parking Spaces or 36 ft. in Length total)

Currently, we do not limit the number of public parking spaces a restaurant can request to occupy with outdoor dining. To maintain sufficient public parking spaces for neighboring businesses, we recommend limiting parklets to a maximum of two public parking spaces, or the equivalent of 36 linear feet in length. (Parking spaces are generally 18 feet in length per space.)

3. Recommendation: Adjust Parklet Fee, Per Parking Space

The Town currently charges a flat annual fee of \$250 for participation in the parklet program, which does not account for the size of the parklet. We recommend adjusting parklet fees to be linked to the total parklet size (e.g., per parking space) to more fairly assess costs among applicants. For context, the parklets approved for the 2025 season ranged in length anywhere from 19' to 58', yet all applicants paid the same fee.

4. Recommendation: Sanitation Plans for Parklets

Ongoing sanitation maintenance has been a consistent challenge for many of the Town's parklets. Since the Town does not currently require specific sanitation plans, and given the observed issues, we believe all applicants must demonstrate a clear commitment to sanitation by submitting a formal maintenance plan. Once the plan is filed and approved, there will be a clear mechanism for maintaining compliance.

5. Recommendation: Semi-Annual Application Deadlines

Currently, restaurants can apply to participate in the Outdoor Restaurant and Retail program on a rolling basis throughout the season. When new eateries open and apply for a parklet during busy summer months, it becomes challenging to consider the collective impact these parklets will have on the business districts. To mitigate this, we recommend setting two application deadlines for the on-street parklet program: one in the spring before the season begins, and a second mid-season to accommodate new businesses. This approach will also reduce the operational burden on DPW staff who install the barricades. Restaurants will still be permitted to apply for sidewalk cafes on a rolling basis, as these do not require public infrastructure or affect public parking.

6. Recommendation: Allow Alternative Heavy Separation Barriers (Optional Town Barricades)

One of the most frequent pieces of feedback we receive concerns public dissatisfaction with the plastic orange barricades required of all parklet participants. Residents cite that the barricades are unattractive and detract from the overall outdoor dining experience and streetscape of Arlington's business districts.

The following comments were submitted as part of the Heights Visioning Survey (2025) in response to the question: *What do you think of the outdoor dining parklets in Arlington Heights?*

- "They are not so aesthetically pleasing, but definitely nice to have and would like to see more."
- "Not so attractive."
- "I love outdoor dining, but the orange barriers are so ugly."
- "I would like this but NOT with the terrible orange plastic barriers. Please look at how Belmont does it or our own La Victoria."

These barricades were purchased with a grant during the pandemic and are deployed by the Department of Public Works (DPW) to create a safer outdoor dining environment. Crucially, there have been no reported incidents involving vehicles and parklet patrons at these locations.

As municipalities transition their outdoor dining programs to permanent status, other communities have adjusted their barricade requirements. The Towns of Winchester and Brookline, for example, do not require Town-issued barricades. Instead, they encourage the use of outdoor dining furniture that provides both heavy separation and decorative elements.

If the applicant chooses to use the Town-provided barricades, we recommend including a separate fee to cover the Department of Public Works costs to supply, install and maintain the barricades each year. It should be noted that a percentage of the barriers will need to be replaced each year moving forward due to wear and tear. If this option is desired, a potential fee structure per barricade supplied can be proposed and implemented.

Examples from Neighboring Towns

Town of Winchester

Applicants must provide the location, size, and specifications of all heavy separation as part of their application (e.g., large planters, jersey barriers, water-filled barriers, concrete barriers, filled barrels, flexible posts, and delineators). Heavy separation furniture is subject to approval by the Town Engineer or their designee. Each type of separation (heavy and light) shall be uniform in its application (color, size, material, etc.). Large planters with live vegetation are preferred. Winchester has a balanced approach to parklet barricades that recognizes the need for a public safety element with emphasis on creating vibrant streetscapes.

Town of Brookline

Applicants can propose heavy separation that may consist of fences, railings, or planters. These elements should be self-supporting and easily removed from the sidewalk or parking area. All outdoor furniture, plantings, and amenities must be of a high quality and add to the appearance and vibrancy of the public way. Areas determined to be in poor condition or of poor-quality materials that detract from the public way will be asked to upgrade or remove the outdoor dining area.

Town of Newton (Alternative Requirement Model)

There are also Towns that do not provide barricades for restaurants but still require them, such as the Town of Newton. Barricades can either be water-filled plastic or concrete. Reflective elements are required to be incorporated on the street-facing side of each barrier. The Town provides a non-exhaustive list of companies in the area where restaurants can rent or purchase barricades. As Arlington's current barricades approach the end of their useful life, we encourage consideration of the Newton approach.

Given the feedback from residents and the business community regarding unattractive parklets, coupled with the lack of reported public safety incidents, we recommend adjusting the barricade requirement to make the Town-provided barricades optional, provided the applicant proposes an approved heavy separation furniture alternative.