

2013 Transforming Local Governments Conference COOL COMMUNITIES CASE STUDY SUBMITTAL



Outdoor Dining for Downtown Stuart Case Study Category: Economic Vitality City of Stuart Paul Nicoletti, City Manager

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*Consideration for an Innovation Award would be appreciated.
Do not wish to be part of the rapid fire session.*

2013 Transforming Local Government Conference

Cool Communities: Case Study

OUTDOOR DINING INITIATIVE IN DOWNTOWN STUART

INTENT OF THE PROJECT

Downtown Stuart is a small, quaint historic downtown on the St. Lucie River. This traditional downtown is lined with unique shops and restaurants. One of the areas that both the City of Stuart and the Downtown Business Association wanted to improve upon in the area is outdoor dining facilities. A detracting issue in providing such an opportunity is the small sidewalk which provides very little area for the tables and chairs needed to accommodate dining. Various restaurants tried pursuing this option in the past, but had been largely unsuccessful in implementing the program due to the lack of space. A few were able to achieve it due primarily to their location on the street; however a majority of the restaurants wanted to provide outdoor space to the patrons but could not.

With the collaboration of Stuart Main Street, the Downtown Business Association and the City of Stuart Community Redevelopment Agency a pilot program was established to allow additional opportunities for outdoor dining that utilize parking spaces with an outdoor deck for diners. This program was initiated and spearheaded by Stuart Main Street; and the City worked directly with the organization to develop an implementation plan.



The primary objective of the program was to provide further opportunities for local eateries in the downtown to enhance their financial bottom line, and become an entertainment draw to the downtown. Many saw this opportunity as innovative and forward thinking because the use of the parking spaces for the outdoor decks solved the lack of space to accommodate effective outdoor dining.

The program was established as a pilot program with just four restaurants seeking to participate in an 18 month program, in which the city would “license” the spaces out to the restaurant without a charge to the business. Traditionally, a public right of way license or lease has a cost to the business or property owner. In this case, the restaurateurs were asked to pay for the materials used to construct the decks, and the City workers constructed them.

The decks have created a sense of place along the downtown Osceola Street corridor at four locations. The decks are simple, and attractive, and are required to have outdoor dining furniture and all are required to have an umbrella for shade. All the participating restaurants have been very happy with the structures, and the potential to attract additional patrons to downtown.

COSTS

Other than staff time, there was no cost to the City. All the businesses that applied and were accepted to participate in the pilot program paid approximately \$5,000 for the platforms to be built.

INNOVATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT



The innovative feature of this program is that there are multiple benefits:

1. The restaurants were able to accommodate additional patrons;
2. Public pedestrian and seating space was added to the downtown;
3. Outdoor dining creates a sense of “place” on the street; and
4. The City met the goal of helping revitalize the area, by using public right of way.

The platforms were constructed over the top of the asphalt and are completely detachable. It was important to the City that the platforms were constructed in a temporary fashion for the City to be able to remove them for storms, and at the end of the pilot (if desired).

OBSTACLES

A major obstacle the City had to overcome was the perception that the perceived lack of parking would be worsened by the outdoor dining decks. Parking in the downtown is a controversial subject; merchants and the public feel there is not enough; however it is more of a perceived problem based upon the City’s 2010 Master Parking Plan which proves there is sufficient parking in the downtown. However, the City was aware that implementing this pilot program could result in an outcry from the merchants that the City was removing valuable parking. In response, the City Manager relocated all of City employee parking from lots adjacent to the downtown to a parking lot further removed from City Hall and the City Hall Annex. By relocating city staff, 28 additional parking spaces were utilized for downtown businesses. The City moved its employees, placed new signage at the parking lots making the public aware that this was now Public Parking. This effort has eased the issue and resolved claims that the outdoor dining platforms would negatively impact the parking in the downtown.

OUTCOMES

A positive outcome for the citizens of Stuart is that many of them can enjoy outdoor dining that was not available to them in the past. It also has made a positive impact on the businesses that have taken part in the pilot program.

APPLICABLE RESULTS AND REAL WORLD PRACTICALITY

The final result of this initiative is that we now have additional outdoor dining in a walkable downtown. The City has improved business relations in the City and added additional public seating areas in the downtown. This is very practical initiative that can be implemented quite inexpensively and easily with the support of the merchants.



PRIVATE CONSULTANTS

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PRESENTATION STYLE

Presentation style for this case study would be a brief PowerPoint, with interviews of the businesses and general public giving their insight on the impact of the outdoor dining space. This should be entertaining and educational. We may be able to do a live demonstration on the actual setup of the platform.