

## City of North Vancouver swaps parking for patio space

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Gusto di Quattro owner Patrick Corsi is one of five restaurateurs in the 100 block of Lonsdale who can either extend their patios across the sidewalk or set up dining tables over parking stalls as part of a pilot project the city is hoping will enliven Lower Lonsdale this summer. photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

Would you like to sit inside, or in what used to be a parking spot?

That question may become commonplace in Lower Lonsdale following the City of North Vancouver council's unanimous decision to swap parking spots for patio space Monday.

The city's current law limits an eatery's patio to the 2.5 metre area directly in front of the restaurant, usually allowing for a maximum of two rows of tables. However, the new pilot project would let all five Lonsdale Avenue restaurants south of Esplanade plant patios over parking stalls. In the event the new patio covers the sidewalk instead, the restaurateurs would be on the hook for a sidewalk extension that would run through the former parking stalls.

Parking tends to be a sensitive issue in municipal politics but the removal of eight stalls near the foot of Lonsdale is a small price to pay for the benefits of outdoor dining, according to Coun. Linda Buchanan.

"I appreciate the concern about the parking but I think what businesses will see is that the generated revenue from this expanded seating ... will far exceed their concerns about the parking loss, because I think we'll be able to find parking elsewhere," she said.

Council's move was trumpeted by the five affected restaurateurs, each of whom signed a letter supporting the experiment.

"We feel that an increased focus on pedestrian traffic and outdoor dining would enhance the block," the letter stated.

Customers enjoy eating on the patio, but "their only complaint is that there isn't enough outdoor dining space," wrote the restaurateurs.

Allowing increased patio space should be seen as a "long overdue" first step, according to Coun. Craig Keating. "I think this is great. I think we should go further." Alleys and back lanes could be converted into dining areas, he suggested.

Also, a few renovations and a spiral staircase would allow for rooftop dining on many of Lonsdale Avenue's one-storey restaurants, according to Keating.

The demand for outdoor dining will only increase with the lengthening summer seasons, Keating noted. "I guess that's one of the side benefits of climate change."

Mayor Darrell Mussatto playfully suggested the new bylaw would be to his benefit.

"I always have trouble getting a spot at a restaurant and have to wait at least half an hour," he said. "So it might help that out a little bit."

If the restaurateurs decide to participate in the pilot project they'll have to pay for the parking spot patio or the sidewalk extension. The restaurants will also need to purchase liability insurance.

Outdoor dining is becoming a significant initiative to "bring life back to the streets," according to a staff report written by the city's business services manager Larry Orr.

"We only need to look to the success of the outdoor patios at the new Tap and Barrel restaurant in The Shipyards and the Friday Night Market food trucks to see the demand for outdoor dining," he wrote.

Couns. Pam Bookham and Rod Clark did not attend the meeting.

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