Alfresco NYC Coalition Releases New Design Guidelines for Outdoor Dining

As Open Restaurants Program becomes permanent, new report calls for better structures, simplified processes, affordable & flexible design options, and equitable access to sidewalks

New York, NY, November 17, 2022 – As the City works to create a permanent Open Restaurants Program, the Alfresco NYC coalition, led by the Design Trust for Public Space, Regional Plan Association, and Tri-State Transportation Campaign, has released a new report, “The Future of Outdoor Dining in New York City.” listing design guidelines and policy recommendations for outdoor dining installations, based on months of site visits, roundtable discussions, research, and individual interviews.

Beginning as an emergency pandemic response, the Open Streets and Open Restaurants programs became a lifeline for community gatherings and over 12,000 participating businesses. Alfresco NYC calls for city streets to be reimaged as collective spaces for shared amenities and culture.

The Coalition urges the City to not only continue the benefits of these public space programs, but to use these guidelines to create a more responsible, equitable and sustainable program. The design guidelines focus on safety, public health, sustainability, a holistic approach to streetscape use, aesthetics, weatherization, affordability, as well as make a case for policy changes to create a standard, easy, and transparent review process.

Report recommendations include:
Create safe and flexible, lighter-weight designs with pre-approved products easily available to restaurants and small businesses.

Establish a one-stop-shop portal to serve residents, businesses and other stakeholders wishing to engage in the right-of-way, including Open Streets and Open Restaurants permits.

Consolidate public realm management for consistency, enforcement, support and investment.

Ensure an equitable pricing structure to remove barriers to entry for small businesses or local community groups.

Organize a working group of community representatives, designers and accessibility experts to help create a permanent program that centers universal accessibility.

EXPLORE ALL THE GUIDELINES HERE.

“Outdoor dining and open streets are widely popular, good for local economies, and have breathed new life and vibrancy onto our city streets,” said Matthew Clarke, Executive Director of the Design Trust for Public Space. “The Alfresco NYC coalition is committed to ensuring these programs are equitable and successful in the long-term for all New Yorkers by centering design excellence and increasing access to the city’s public space.”

“Open Restaurants and Open Streets should be the starting point of a larger conversation about how New York City uses streets and sidewalks to serve communities,” said Maulin Mehta, New York Director, Regional Plan Association. “The Alfresco NYC guidelines will bring more predictability and affordability to the city’s programs, enhancing equitable street life across the five boroughs.”

“The Alfresco NYC coalition has seen tremendous success throughout all corners of New York City, truly creating a whole new sense of community in places that, for too long, over-prioritized public space for storing private vehicles,” said Renae Reynolds, Executive Director of Tri-State Transportation Campaign. “With the Alfresco NYC guidelines, The City has an opportunity to turn a new leaf and see what’s possible when we reimagine street space with people as the first priority.”

Over the past year, Alfresco NYC has led a series of personal interviews, site visits, and roundtable conversations with stakeholders including open street operators, restaurant owners, designers, volunteers, accessibility and mobility advocates to work through the design challenges and opportunities associated with New York City’s Open Restaurants and Open Streets program.
Alfresco NYC launched the 2021 Alfresco Awards to recognize the city’s best outdoor dining spaces and open streets, and celebrate street life across the five boroughs, as well as implemented a grant program this summer to fund businesses and community groups in neighborhoods hard-hit by the pandemic.

Alfresco NYC is made possible by the generous support of The New York Community Trust and the Association for a Better New York, working to help support our coalition while investing in the public realm.

“Alfresco NYC’s newly developed outdoor dining guidance for local restaurants is another vital step toward supporting a resurging New York City” said Melva M. Miller, CEO of the Association for a Better New York (ABNY). “The Alfresco NYC outdoor dining design guidelines streamline a complex process to add more vibrancy to New York City’s streetscapes and the broader public realm. Equity is also at the forefront of these recommendations, providing hands-on support to smaller businesses and reducing cost-prohibitive barriers. These comprehensive guidelines are a win for local businesses, which serve as economic engines for their local communities.”

Alfresco spokespeople are available for further comment. Please contact Alexa Mauzy-Lewis (amauzy@designtrust.org) to coordinate.

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**About the Alfresco NYC Coalition**
Led by Design Trust for Public Space, Regional Plan Association and Tri-State Transportation Campaign, the Alfresco NYC Coalition advocates for the equitable implementation of Open Restaurants and Streets across NYC. Our groups are celebrating street life in New York City, providing information to businesses and community groups, and working to expand these programs to more neighborhoods.

**About the Design Trust for Public Space**
The Design Trust for Public Space is a nationally recognized incubator that catalyzes change and transforms New York City’s shared civic spaces—streets, plazas, parks, public buildings, transportation, and housing developments—to create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable city. Founded on the tenet that New York City’s cultural and democratic life depends on viable public space, the Design Trust focuses on social justice and equity, environmental sustainability, design excellence, and public engagement.

**About Tri-State Transportation Campaign**
The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a 28-year old advocacy organization that fights for an equitable, safe, multi-modal transportation network that provides options and supports the economies of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. TSTC works to fix our commutes, meet our climate goals, stop traffic deaths, and make transportation fair. Learn more at www.tstc.org.
About Regional Plan Association

Regional Plan Association (RPA) is an independent non-profit organization that conducts research, planning and advocacy to expand economic opportunity, environmental resiliency, improved health, and better quality of life in the New York metropolitan area. Since the 1920s, RPA has produced four landmark plans for the region. The most recent was released in November 2017. For more information, please visit www.rpa.org.