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Ask the Mayor

Muriel Bowser
Mayor

Mayor Bowser Announces Plans to Open "Streateries" and Lower Citywide Speed Limit as DC Reimagines Roads and Public Space

Friday, May 29, 2020
DC to Permanently Lower Speed Limit on Local Roads to 20 MPH

(WASHINGTON, DC) – Today, Mayor Muriel Bowser and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) announced several policies as part of the District's re-imagination of public space during the ongoing coronavirus public health emergency, including the buildout of "streateries." Streateries expand beyond individual parking lane uses and close one or more lanes of an entire block or more to vehicle traffic to allow for outdoor dining and table service.

"As we begin a phased reopening, or what I like to call 'Stay-at-Home Lite,' we are reimagining the use of public space to support restaurants, retail, and recreation," said Mayor Bowser. "With Streateries, Slow Streets, and a lower speed limit, we can support residents and businesses by sharing roads and sidewalks and making room for the social distancing that is critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19."

As part of the District's Phase One reopening, restaurants may open outdoor seating with physical distancing and safeguards measures. Restaurants that are not already permitted for outdoor space, or that want to expand their outdoor space, can apply at coronavirus.dc.gov/phaseone. Restaurants can apply to use expanded sidewalk space, alleys, parking lanes, and travel lanes for table seating. Retailers can use the same link to apply for space for curbside pickup and delivery.

Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC)-licensed establishments and restaurants not serving alcohol with existing sidewalk cafes and summer gardens that plan no changes to their previously approved perimeters are not required to register under the new process and may start operations immediately. Any new or expanded spaces must be clearly delineated from any preexisting licensed space. All businesses providing outdoor table service on licensed sidewalk cafes or summer gardens or in a new or expanded space must comply with DDOT-issued guidelines, including seating configurations and patron queueing. Approved hours of operation are 8 am – 12 am, seven days a week.

The Mayor also announced plans to permanently lower the default speed limit on local roads from 25 miles per hour (MPH) to 20 MPH as part of her Vision Zero initiative to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries in the District. The new speed limit will go into effect on Monday, June 1.

"The faster cars are traveling on our residential streets, the more likely they are to

cause death and serious injury to pedestrians," said DDOT Director Jeff Marootian. "Mayor Bowser's plan to reduce the default speed limit and install Slow Streets makes our streets safer, especially now as residents are traveling to and from essential businesses, essential jobs, and families are exercising to support overall physical and mental health during the pandemic."

Additionally, DDOT will also roll out at least 20 miles of DC Slow Streets across all eight wards over the summer. Slow Streets are restricted to local traffic only and the speed limit is set at 15 mph to support neighborhood-based safe social distancing while walking, running, or cycling. Drivers should only use a designated slow street if their destination is within two blocks of the slow street. Residents, emergency vehicles, deliveries and trash collection vehicles will continue to have access to Slow Streets. Streets with bus routes will not be eligible. DC Slow Streets will be in place for the duration of the public health emergency.

In 2019, Mayor Bowser lowered speed limits to 15 MPH on roads adjacent to schools, playgrounds, pools, recreational facilities, athletic fields, and senior centers. The new rules will reduce the default speed limit to 20 MPH unless another limit is otherwise posted. These rules will be in the form of an emergency and proposed rulemaking that will be published in the DC Register. The rules would amend Chapter 22 of Title 18 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations.

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