



Downtown Mall Sidewalk Cafe Rules and Regulations

January 2026

The Downtown Mall in Charlottesville, Virginia (“City”), is a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly area that spans eight (8) blocks in the heart of the City. The use of this important public space is granted as a privilege extended to the public. This privilege carries an obligation to comply with all applicable laws, ordinances, and City policies. The City reserves the right to restrict or revoke the use of this public property at any time.

Sidewalk Cafes on the Downtown Mall are regulated by the [City of Charlottesville City Code Chapter 28 Article VI](#), and the [Charlottesville Architectural Design Control Districts Design Guidelines Section V.E](#). Sidewalk Café operators are responsible for knowing and complying with these regulations.

All licensed restaurants wishing to operate a sidewalk café on the Downtown Mall must:

- Apply for and obtain approval for an Annual Permit to operate an outdoor sidewalk café;
- Obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the City’s Zoning Administrator; and
- Maintain public liability insurance listing the City as an additional insured.

Summary of Rules and Regulations for Downtown Mall Vendors

- The operation of the outdoor café shall comply with all provisions of state and local zoning and building codes and health laws and regulations regarding the service and preparation of food and alcohol.
- No furnishings or equipment may be located within any fire lane at any time.
- The Downtown Mall pedestrian experience shall be prioritized. Size and placement of railings, furniture, planters, planting, and other elements shall not create visual barriers.
- No food preparation shall be performed in any area of the outdoor café.
- All food dishes and utensils shall be promptly removed after each customer has left. The entire outdoor café area and sidewalk(s) shall be thoroughly cleaned after the close of each business day.
- An outdoor café shall be in operation only during hours that the restaurant with which it is associated is open.
- Use of City power supplies/outlets is prohibited.

- Space heaters may only be used, if their use/operation fully comply with all applicable building and fire codes. At no time will a space heater be allowed within ten feet (10') of any tree or flammable item. Each heater must be approved by City Staff.
- All furniture, planters/plants, and other elements/equipment must be kept within the limits of the allotted square footage of the café space. This includes the bases and open tops of umbrellas.
- All tables, chairs, planters/plants, and other elements/equipment located within an outdoor café shall be maintained in good, clean (and live) condition. Black or silver tone, wrought iron, or metal elements are preferred.
- Only single color, single pole umbrellas may be used. No canopies or tents are allowed.
- No tables, chairs, enclosures or service furnishings are permitted within two feet (2') of any tree trunk. Nothing may be attached to or wrapped around the trees.
- The following elements are not permitted: screening, trellis, lattice; upholstered or oversize furniture; firepits, fire tables and open flames; coverings on the Mall floor; electrical wires or cords on the Mall floor; logos, text or branding, except as allowed by the City's Sign Ordinance; bare galvanized metal, plastic, unfinished wood; artificial plants; and other items as found in the applicable City regulations.