

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION

Planning Commission

Issue Briefing

Topic: Outdoor Dining and Sales Resolution

Prepared by: Robert Duncan, Assistant Township Manager

Date: June 3, 2020

I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:

Adopt a Resolution and temporary regulations for outdoor dining and merchandise sales during the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:

Authorization to approve temporary outdoor dining and merchandise sales during the COVID-19 pandemic must be approved by the Board of Commissioners.

III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):

N/A

IV. Other Relevant Background Information:

Many businesses throughout the Township have been closed since mid-March and those that have been open have been subject to significant restrictions to help slow the spread of COVID-19. This has had a significant negative impact to the business community throughout the Township. On June 5, we anticipate the Governor will authorize Montgomery County to move to the yellow phase of the PA Opening Plan. If we do move to the yellow phase by the end of this week, our goal is to provide assistance to local businesses by authorizing greater flexibility for outdoor dining and sales of merchandise.

The yellow phase will allow many businesses to open but customer access to interior space to shop and dine will continue to be prohibited until we reach the green phase. Staff has been working with the Board of Commissioner to develop greater opportunities for outdoor dining and sales of merchandise. A Resolution and set of new temporary regulations have been drafted to reduce the current limits on outdoor dining and merchandise sales. These regulations would remain in place for a 90 day period with the ability for the Board of Commissioners to extend this approval after the initial 90 day period if the Board determines that additional time is needed to help businesses during the pandemic.

Another proposal the Township is considering is closing down specific small street segments in a few commercial areas during the weekend evening hours to allow local

restaurants to set up tables in compliance with current distancing regulations for outdoor dining in the street during the summer. A similar program has existed in Media Borough for a number of years and is very successful. This will also help meet social distancing recommendations by providing more space for tables and chairs. There are only a few streets that could qualify due to impacts to traffic flow and impact to residential areas but this will help restaurants be successful during this time of limited indoor occupancy. Staff will continue to work with the Board of Commissioners to implement this program as soon as practicable this summer.

V. Impact on Township Finances:

This would result in a small loss of parking meter revenue if restaurants use public parking lot metered spaces but this would be offset by the increased business tax revenue by providing more seating for restaurants and outdoor sales area for retail businesses.

VI. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board of Commissioners grant temporary approval to modify outdoor dining and merchandise sales regulations for a 90 day period.