

Curbside 2025-2026 Code Considerations

Considerations for Converting Outdoor Spaces into Temporary Seating Spaces

These considerations are meant to supplement – not replace – any state, county, local health and safety laws, rules, and regulations with which businesses must comply.

TEMPORARY VS. PERMANENT

While the intent of this guidance is to address temporary seating areas, it is necessary to clearly define the time period that any associated structures will be set in place, and not just used. The International Building Code (IBC) clearly requires that temporary structures are only to be erected for a period of less than 180 days per Section 3103. Further, temporary tents, umbrella structures and other membrane structures must comply with NFPA 1, 101, & 701 and again be erected for a period of less than 180 days. If these structures, including tents and other membrane structures, are to be erected for a period of 180 days or greater, they are not temporary structures and must comply with the IBC, NFPA, and all other applicable codes and standards as referenced. With the specific time periods given above it is also important to note that under IBC Section 108 the building official is authorized to grant extensions for demonstrated cause. Local building, flood, and shoreland permitting are still required.

LOCATION

1. Temporary outdoor seating should be located so as not to negatively impact the existing accessible parking spaces or accessible routes.
2. Temporary outdoor seating areas should be separated from designated food and beverage pick-up locations.
3. Temporary outdoor seating should be separated from adjacent automobile travel lanes by an approved barrier or adequate separation distance.
4. Access to fire hydrants, fire department connections for automatic sprinkler systems, and entrances and exits of all buildings cannot be obstructed at any time by barriers or seating.

ENCROACHMENTS INTO THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY

State and local permits may be required for encroachment onto a public right-of-way. In addition, depending on the proposed new layout, construction documents may be required to be submitted for the Code Officer's review and approval. The construction documents should include a site plan indicating the location and quantity of the temporary outdoor seating and information delineating the means of egress and the projected total occupant load.

Chapter 32 of the International Building Code (IBC) covers temporary and permanent encroachments into public right of ways.

OCCUPANT LOADS AND MEANS OF EGRESS

The overall occupant load of both existing and the proposed new seating areas, along with the use of temporary or permanent structures, must be taken into consideration when evaluating the overall effect on fire safety, means of egress, accessibility, light, ventilation, bathroom and sanitary requirements.

Chapter 10 of the IBC addresses occupant loads for areas having fixed seating and areas without fixed seating

ACCESSIBILITY

Section 1009 of the IBC requires accessible means of egress.

Section 1104 of the IBC requires that at least one accessible route connect accessible buildings, facilities, elements and spaces on the same site.

Section 1105 of the IBC requires at least 60% of all public entrances to be accessible. Section 1108.2.9 specifies that dining and drinking areas, whether interior or exterior must be accessible and on an accessible route with some given exceptions. Further where dining surfaces are provided for the consumption of food or drink at least 5%, but not less than one must be accessible.

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WEATHER RESISTANCE

Consideration should be given to limiting the size of canopies, umbrellas or awnings. All of these structures should be provided with an adequate means to resist wind, rain or other similar loads.

FIRE PREVENTION

Fire ratings and protective measures are important, as the associated requirements are typically based on the risk associated with the building's occupancy and use. Expanding or adding outdoor seating areas can sometimes present an increased challenge. If the outdoor seating areas include awnings, canopies, umbrellas, marquees or tents on sidewalks, parking lots or green spaces, consideration should be given to the following:

1. The combustibility rating of the materials used should be evaluated and approved for the intended use. Both permanent and temporary tents and membrane structures must comply with flame propagation performance, including required labeling, and a certification affidavit per NFPA 701
2. The spacing between temporary tents or membrane structures must further comply with NFPA 1 and 101 which requires that these structures be at least 10 feet from other buildings, other tents or membrane structures, parked vehicles or internal combustion engines with some given exceptions.
3. Approved portable fire extinguishers should be provided and placed in locations approved by the fire code official.

PLUMBING, MECHANICAL, FUEL GAS AND ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS

Existing plumbing, mechanical and electrical system designs may not be adequate for added outdoor seating in some cases. While in general, outdoor seating is being used to offset reduced occupant loads within existing structures, the overall occupant load of both existing and proposed outdoor seating areas must be taken into consideration and its effect on light, ventilation, bathrooms and sanitary requirements.

Plumbing

Where the toilet rooms provided in an existing structure will serve the anticipated occupant load of both the indoor spaces and proposed outdoor seating areas:

1. UPC Table 422.1 requires seasonal outdoor seating and entertainment areas to be included when determining the minimum number of toilet facilities required.
2. Travel distance should be considered.

Mechanical and Fuel Gas

Proposed designs for temporary climate control of the outdoor spaces should meet the minimum requirements of the International Mechanical Code (IMC), NFPA 54, and NFPA 1. All equipment and appliances must be listed and labeled for the intended use and installed in accordance with the codes and the installation instructions.

Permanent tents and membrane structures.

1. Heating and cooking equipment, including related components, must be installed per the International Mechanical Code (IMC), NFPA 54 and approved by the building and code official. Gas, liquid and solid fuel burning equipment that is designed to be vented must be vented to outdoor air per the IMC and NFPA. Where vents or flues are installed, all portions of the tent or membrane structure must be no less than 12 inches away from any flue or vent.
2. Cooking and heating equipment must be located at least 10 feet from exits or combustible materials.
3. Designated "cooking-only" tents, with sidewalls or drops, must be separated by other tents or membrane structures by no less than 20 feet.
4. Electrical heating and cooking appliances must comply with NFPA 70.
5. LP-gas storage, handling and use along with the use of LP-gas equipment must comply with NFPA 54

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Electrical

1. When connected to public utility power or generator sources, outdoor seating areas or temporary tent and membrane structures will need to comply with NFPA 70.
2. NFPA 101 requires exit signage for temporary tents or membrane structures where an exit serves an occupant load of 50 or more. Further, these exit signs are required to be internally illuminated or externally illuminated. Where the exit signs are externally illuminated two separate circuits, one of which must be separate from all other circuits, is required for occupant loads of 300 or less. Two separate sources of power, one being an approved emergency system must be provided where the occupant load exceeds 300.
3. NFPA 101 requires means of egress illumination with a light intensity of not less than 1 foot candle at the floor level for temporary tents and membrane structures while occupied. Further this means of egress illumination must be supplied from a separate circuit or source of power.
4. NFPA requires generators or other internal combustion power sources to be separated from tent or membrane structures by a minimum of 20 feet and isolated from the public with fencing or an enclosure.