



Service on the Sidewalk



A Compliance Audit of the City of Syracuse Sidewalk Cafe Permit Ordinance

The Problem:

No Active Enforcement or Inspections: Businesses operate without oversight, creating safety and accessibility risks

Widespread Noncompliance: Over two dozen unpermitted cafes and several permitted ones are found to be in violation of city rules or lack fire safety approvals

Outdated System: Fees haven't changed since 2011, generating under \$4,000 a year while wasting staff time and increasing city liability.

Key Findings

Revenue: The program generates less than \$4,000/year, despite incurring heavy administrative costs; this amount could be doubled simply by bringing all businesses into compliance.

Enforcement Gaps: Mandated inspections are not being completed. Some businesses are allowed to operate Sidewalk Cafes even without critical City safety permits.

Legal Violations: Audit identified potential violations of state liquor law, businesses failing to file documents with State.

Unpermitted Cafés: 20 businesses operate without valid sidewalk café permits.

Accessibility: Multiple violations of ADA-required six-foot clear space for mobility access.

Reccomendations

No Permits Without Paying Taxes: The City should not issue permits to businesses whose owners or landlords owe back taxes, fees, or other charges.

Equitable Enforcement: Ensure all businesses with sidewalk service are following the rules through better education, regular inspections, and issuing citations where necessary.

Overhaul the Permits: Replace sidewalk cafe permit with multi-tier Sidewalk Service permit.