

Public Spaces Post Pandemic: Comparative and Typological Analysis of Curb Lane Cafés

Downtown Toronto

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Last but not the least a massive thank you to my incredible friends and family for being my boldest cheerleaders. I dedicate this research to you.

Introduction

In *Everyday Urbanism*, Margaret Crawford refers to a constant redefinition of public and private space as everyone tries to take greater sovereignty and ownership of their public space (Chase and Crawford, 2008). The COVID-19 global pandemic has closed institutions and businesses, forcing people to stay indoors. In Toronto, the lines between public and private space seem blurrier than ever as the government launches several new programs such as CaféTO and ActiveTO. to cope with the ever-lasting effects of COVID-19. The CaféTO program was inaugurated in 2020 to support restaurants and bars during the pandemic for outdoor dining on streets, sidewalks, and and private property (City of Toronto CaféTO, 2022). With more business and commerce than ever in pockets of public space, the CaféTO program has changed the

dynamics between all urban stakeholders. The city of Toronto's requirement and guidelines for outdoor seating has changed based on different waves of COVID-19 in the two years:2020-2021, 2021-2022. This research aims to compare and typologically analyze curb lane (street) cafés and how they changed the type of urban space during the summer of 2022 in Toronto through everyday urbanism and a post-pandemic lens.

With the strengthening variants, increasing spread of infection and rising restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of urbanized life: health access, education accessibility, public space, economic activity, connectivities, and social inequalities. Social distancing guidelines and closure of public spaces have had an adverse effect on people's social and psychological intimacy needs stemming from daily interaction in "third spaces- those places that are neither work nor home" (Martinez, and Short, 2021, 3295). The pandemic threatens the existence of these third spaces and public spaces as what was once the hub for interaction between diverse and different city dwellers who make up our social world is now a feared contagious space known to cause potential harm. Thus, forcing urban dwellers to rethink the nature of public space now more than ever to develop urban resiliency and form safer future cities.

Toronto is Canada's largest city by population, known for its density. It is the fourth largest city in North America. Downtown Toronto is the business and commercial hub at the heart of Toronto city, consisting of the largest pedestrian traffic with 38,333,392 annual pedestrian traffic in some parts of downtown in 2017/18 (Yonge and Dundas Square Board Data, 2018). With a highly important commercial sector and highly regulated policies, Toronto forms an interesting area to study post-pandemic urban space. This paper explores this fascinating dynamic between keeping the nature of public space as a space for social and political activation and making the space profitable and safe in a heavily regulated city such as Toronto. There is also a gap in

pandemic urban research that focuses on the visual and physical qualities of the emerging new spaces during COVID-19, and this research ambitiously tries to fill in the gap in the context of Toronto. Thus, the paper contributes to the academic community's dialogue in building urban resiliency and futureproofing the city post-pandemic.

This report begins by presenting the theoretical background of everyday urbanism and the role of public space and the street. It also provides a contextual background of the city of Toronto's CaféTO program guidelines. The methodology of using existing data and observational and photographic techniques is discussed next. Analysis and its results and evaluation are presented before concluding with a discussion of this project's prospects.

Background

Theoretical background

While the research question explores the patios' physical dynamics and visual qualities, it also builds on more profound ideas rooted in urbanism theory. This paper progresses the everyday urbanism narrative through a COVID-19 lens. The idea of what a public space should entail is ever-evolving. Habermas had a classical idea of the public realm where public spaces looked like areas of democracy and shared public interest, such as the town square. Nancy Fraser and others argued for a broader definition of public space and the public realm, where she envisioned a redefinition of public and private space for new zones of public expression. Davis believed in urban restructuring, opening new political arenas and producing new forms of insurgent citizenship with current status. Everyday urbanism studies began using the above theory as a starting point to understand activators of change in the urban realm. It showcased how people, through

appropriation and occupation, produce space through everyday actions (Chase and Crawford, 2008).

This research studies how shop owners use the street in their ways, given the outline of government guidelines and restrictions to create new ways and spaces that take greater sovereignty and ownership of public space. In a Canadian/North American context, the street has undertaken several forms and functions with a life cycle. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs describes the multi-faceted microeconomics of the street, where the vibrant street forms an integral space for social interaction and an asset to city safety. The "eyes on the street" (Jacobs 1961) was a visionary model well-received by Canadian cities from 1968 onwards. Toronto's urban planning has been heavily influenced by Jacob's ideas making it one of the few central cities with a historical urban plan and street orientation in North America. During the pandemic, these conventional roles of the street have been challenged. Several interventions such as street closures, bicycle lane openings and curb lane café patios have given pedestrians greater autonomy in moving away from the automobile-centric streets.

COVID-19 and North American Cities

In other cities, several studies have tried to examine the effects of COVID-19 on cities. Papers and media such as pandemic urbanism in New York, alleyway activations in Vancouver and North American street design for coronavirus have depicted space's innovative use and navigation during the pandemic in major cities. In Canada, a study on mid-sized Canadian cities shows the main themes for street reallocations during COVID to support mobility, recreation, and physical distancing in populous areas and bolstering COVID-19 recovery for businesses (Fischer, and Winters, 2021, 376-90). However, there seems to be no research on the progression of the use

of public space in Toronto throughout the pandemic that has shuffled from road closures, bicycle lanes, outdoor sidewalk queues, street accessibility ramps, parking lot patios, increased sidewalk patios and curb lane patios. This research paper tries to ambitiously fill in a piece of that missing middle pandemic urban conditions discourse.

City of Toronto pilot program and policy

During the pandemic, the city of Toronto developed several ways to boost business. The CaféTO program was among several other programs, such as the ActiveTO program. CaféTO program followed the protests of several business owners all over Toronto in several business improvement areas that protested the lockdown for its zero-income effect on several households. Streets of Toronto that have usually been automobile-centric or zoning measures to divided grided cities have been used as spaces of commerce, art and social gathering. As part of the CaféTO program, the city has allowed for three different patio styles to form within specific measurement restrictions: (1) Sidewalk cafes, (2) curb lane cafés (3) patios on private property. Figure 2 depicts the CaféTO types and descriptions according to the city. The city then subdivides the café types into sub-categories and provides plans, sections and other labelled drawings to describe the requirements for a café permit. The types of sidewalk cafés and private property patios can be found in the CaféTO application guides (Appendix I).

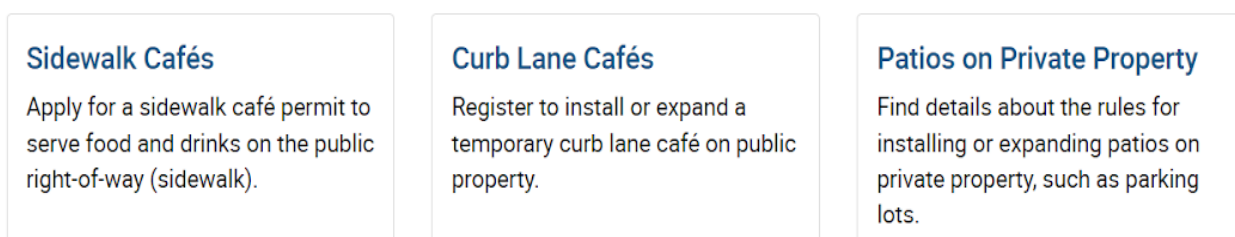


Figure 2: Three types of cafes/outdoor dining spaces permitted by City of Toronto

This research focuses on curb lane cafés that emerged during the COVID wave between 2021 and 2022. The city formulated specific guidelines on fencing, accessibility and other spatial requirements necessary to receive a permit, as seen in Figure 3. A significant shift was seen between the popularity of curb lane cafés from the widespread sidewalk cafés seen in the 2021 summer. It was as if everyone wanted to be outside and take greater control over their streets and public space. The curb lane cafés looked at in this research are some of the many curb lane cafés in Toronto as of 2022 seen in the map in figure 4. Thus, this research evaluates the effects of these pandemic pilot programs on present-day conditions and studies the conditions of these spaces and their different uses in the present day.

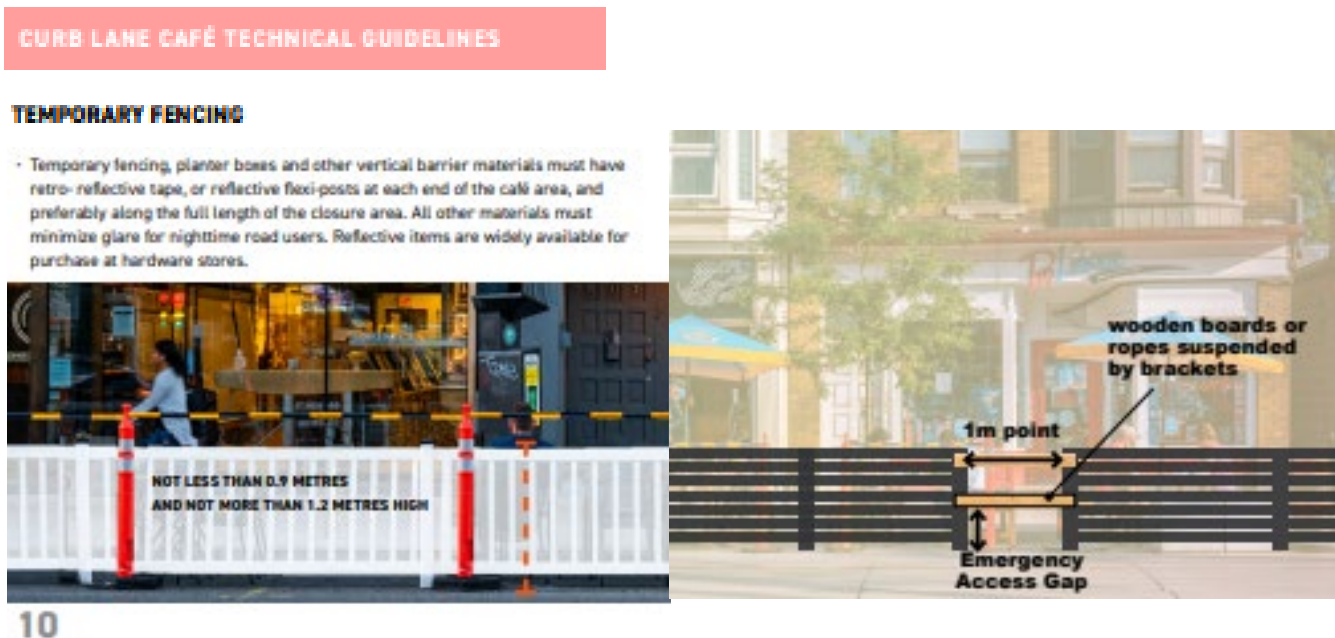
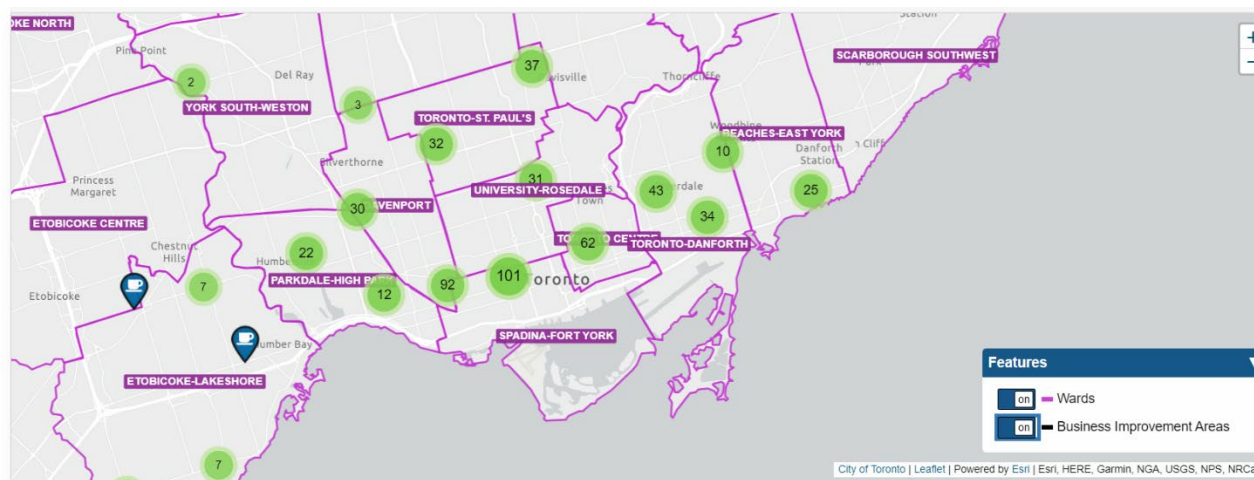


Figure 3: Fencing requirements from the City of Toronto Curblane Café application guide



CaféTO Curb Lane Café Locations List

Figure 4: A city of Toronto map of all the curblane cafes in Toronto

Research Question

This research seeks to answer two questions using Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in the old city of Toronto as my area of focus: (1) How has the cafeto program developed a new type of urban space? (2) What are the different typologies of curb lane cafés?

Methodology

The research began with a literature review to dwell deeper into everyday urbanism, pandemic spaces, streets, sidewalks and the role of urban space. The literature review helped develop the scope further and sharpen the everyday urbanism lens. To understand the visual qualities of space and representation, drawings from Interboro and the manual of sections were looked at. Similar catalogue studies in urbanism by the Duf lab were also referred to. The literature review stage also consisted of a media review to understand public space through an anthropological lens in Toronto during COVID. The media review helped form a contextual narrative of people and their problems with their immediate urban space, businesses and social

activities during the pandemic. Several news articles and blogs were looked at for perspective. However, they did not formally contribute to the research, course or gatherings. The literature review phase ended with the start of location gathering.

Location Selection

Several locations on various maps and their connections to patio hotspots were analyzed to gather specific locations representative of emerging spaces in the old city of Toronto area from which typologies could be categorized. The process of location gathering and selection has included a rigorous study of Business improvement area (BIA) maps in figure 5, cafeto location maps (figure 6), ActiveTO locations, patio restaurant locations map (appendix III) and high pedestrian traffic zones data provided by the city of Toronto and BlogTO. Following a brief general study of the above, possible locations were pinned down based on proximity to BIA, ActiveTO, high pedestrian traffic, and media coverage.

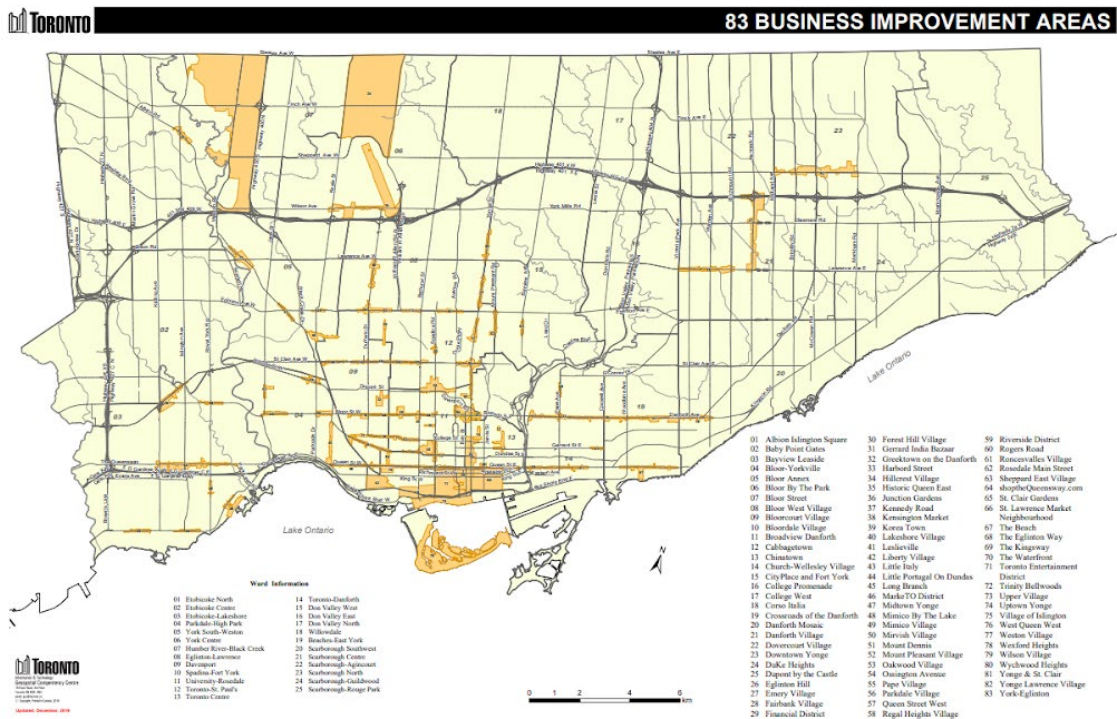
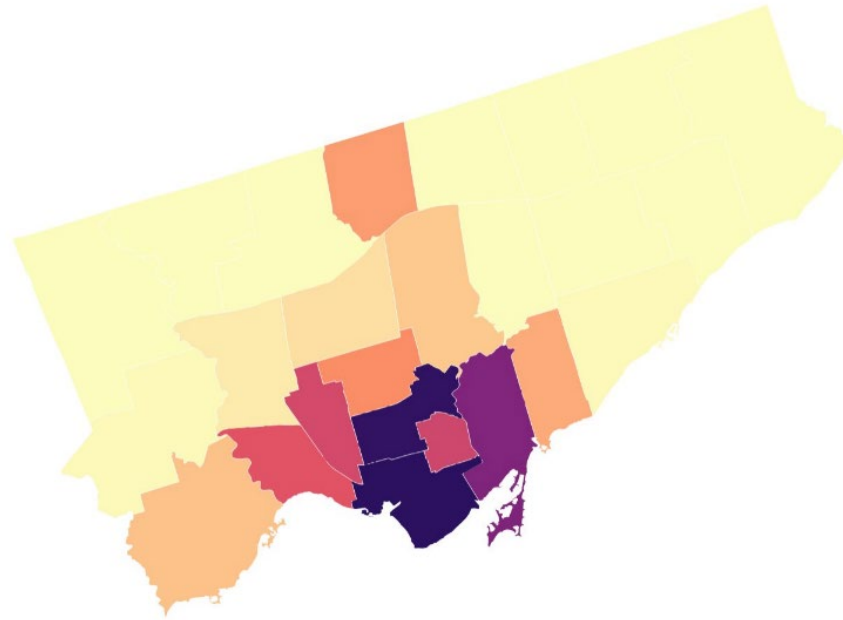


Figure 5: City of Toronto map of Business Improvement Areas

Restaurants supported by CafeTO, by ward

Restaurants supported with expanded sidewalk patios or curb lane patios



Map: Matt Elliott • Source: City of Toronto Report • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 6: Cafeto 2021 restaurants supported interactive map

Locations based on this initial filtration process were then visited. A broad category of coronavirus-emergent public spaces was found, such as parking lots, sidewalks, streets, laneways, backyards, bike lanes, road closures, courtyards and rooftops, as seen in figure 7. A map of the visited spaces was created, as seen in figure 8. A narrower focus was found because most of these categories existed pre-pandemic and were only widespread during the pandemic. Curb lane cafés seemed the unique addition to the COVID-19 street, especially in large quantities in BIA's. Thus, a focus group of 4 businesses representative of businesses from each BIA was used to look at curb lane cafés in more detail and complete the research in the six weeks timeline. Data on the curb lane café spaces was collected using a second round of site visits and photography. COVID-relevant and specific patios were verified using the city of Toronto curb lane café map. A new map

of locations analyzed in this paper was then created and referred to for data visualization.

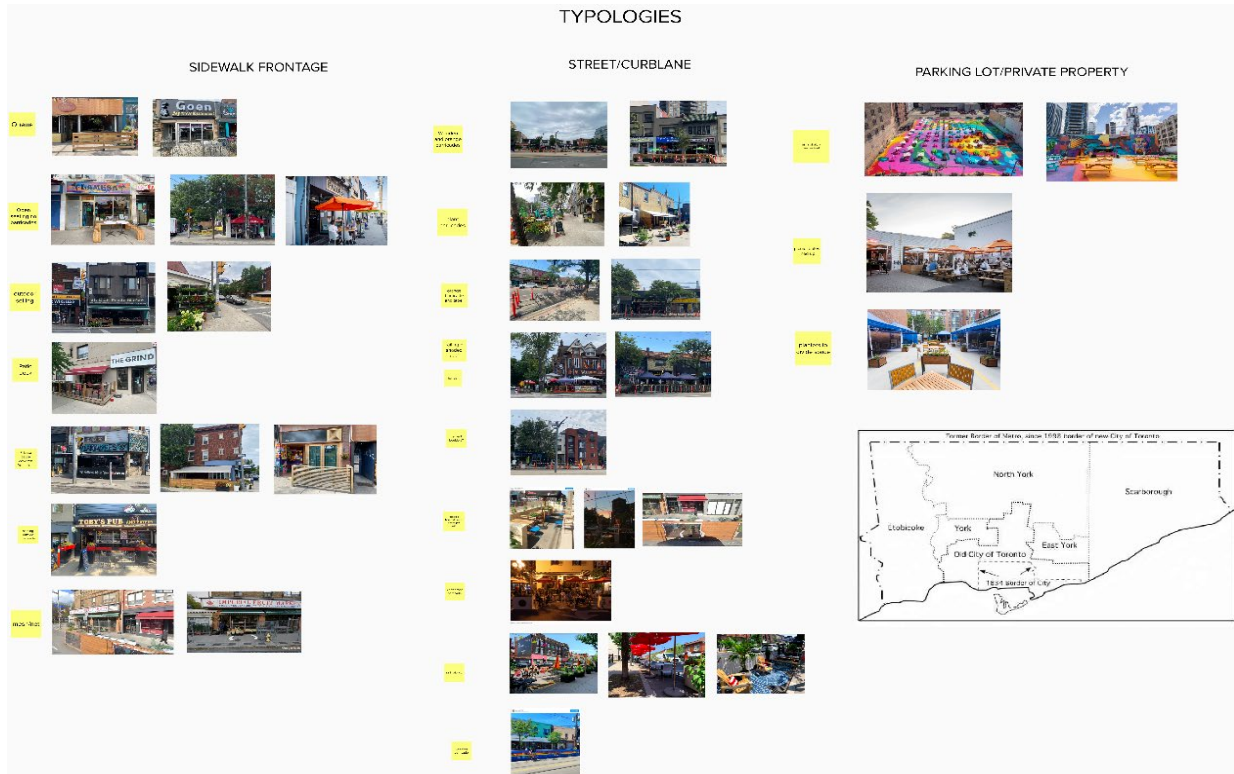


Figure 7: Initial analysis and documentation of spaces downtown Toronto in each of the three patio types

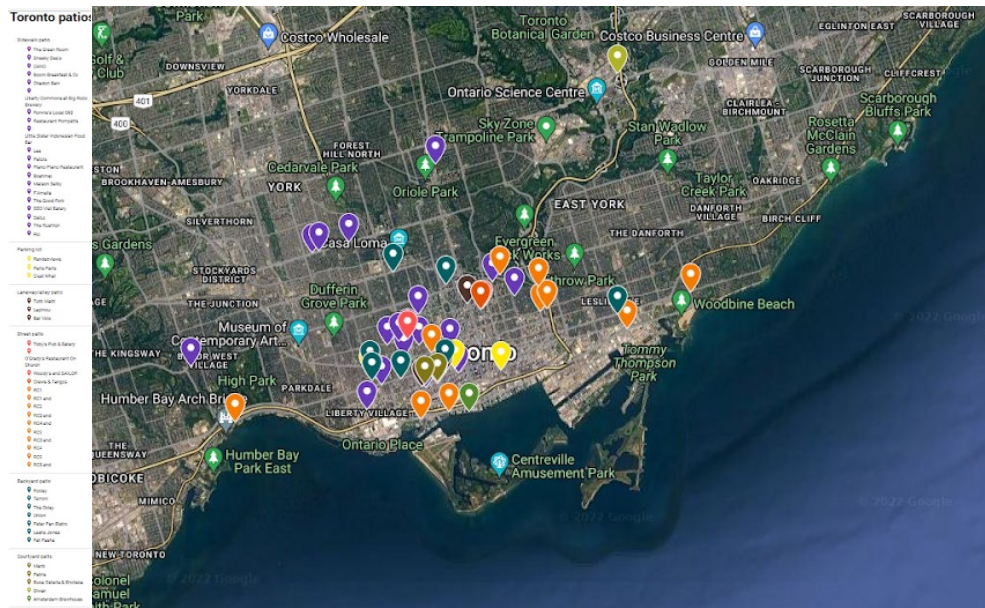


Figure 8: Map of initial patio locations documented briefly

Typological analysis method

A typological and comparative analysis method was then used to understand the curb lane café spaces better. Each location or business patio from a specific BIA referred to a point on the new map. The photographs from the BIA's were then curated and segregated into different categories such as layout, business type, social activity and furniture to analyze the spaces, as seen in figure 9. Location-specific icons were created next to form a taxonomy legend and typologically analyze business patios in each BIA location. Thus, this research tests a method to see if one can analyze spaces physically and visually and form typologies that refer to certain qualities of a space such as function, business, community or activity.

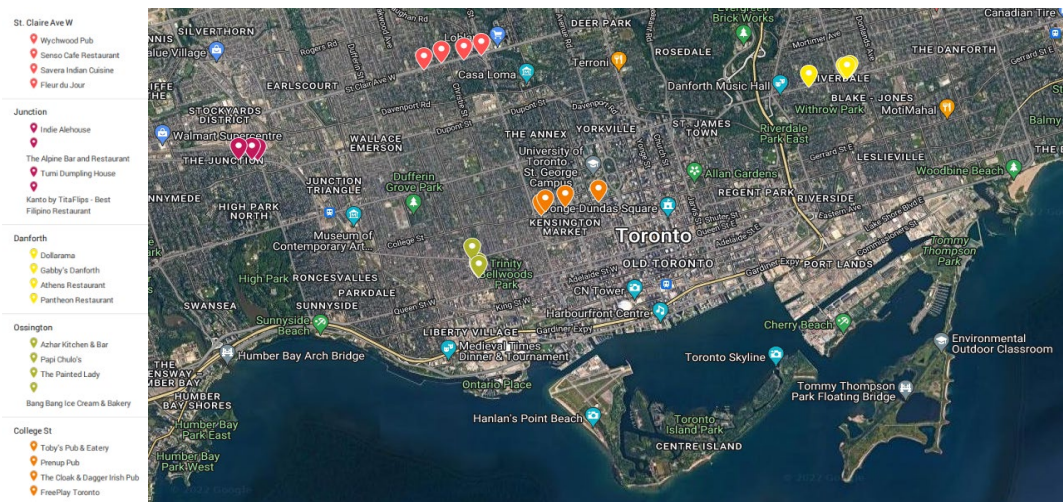


Figure 9: Curblane cafes in selected BIAs in Toronto

Analysis

Curb lane cafés in Toronto

Location (physical location, hours of operation), structure (barrier, furniture, ornament, flooring), function (less formal, more formal) and spatial layout (seating) are used to segregate curb lane cafés, as seen in figure 12.

Legend

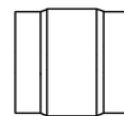
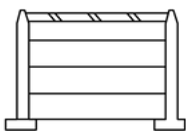
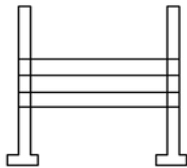
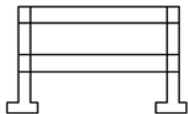
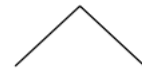
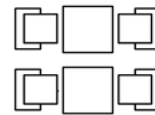
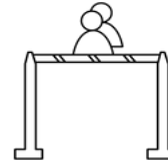
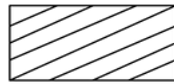
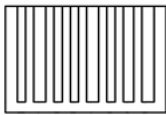
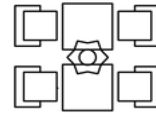
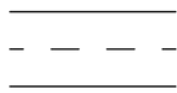
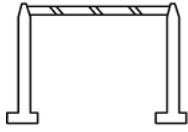
Barricade type

Flooring type

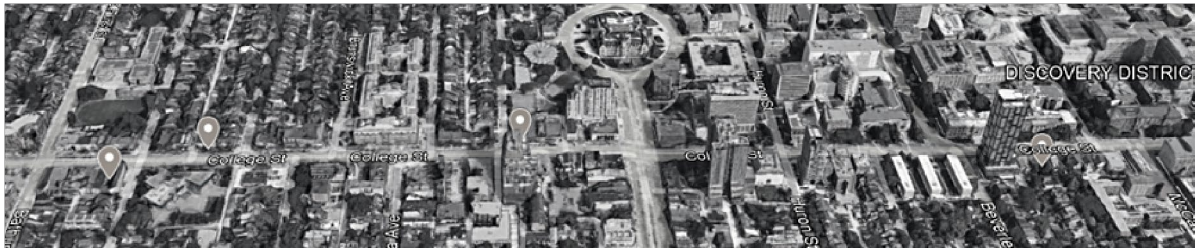
Hours of
Operation

Seating type

Other
Ornaments



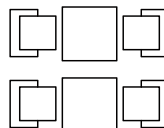
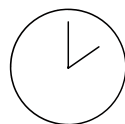
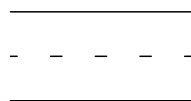
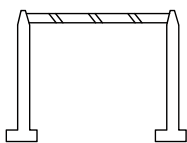
College Street



- ① Toby's Pub
- ② Cloak and Dagger Irish Pub
- ③ Freeplay Arcade Bar
- ④ Prenup Bar

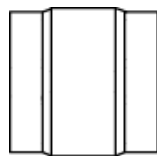
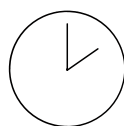
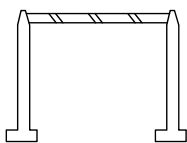
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Toby's Pub



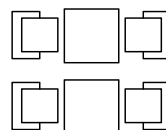
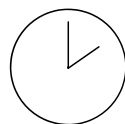
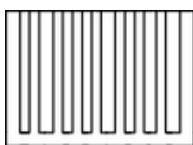
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Cloak and Dagger Irish Pub



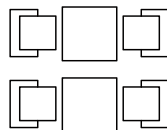
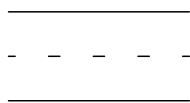
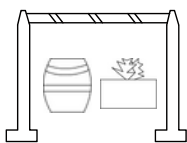
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Freeplay Arcade bar



4

Prenup Pub



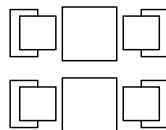
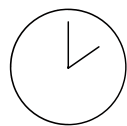
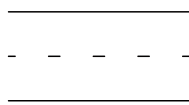
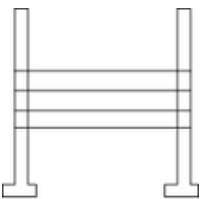
Ossington



- ① Azhar kitchen and bar
- ② Papi Chulo's
- ③ The painted lady
- ④ Bang Bang ice cream and bakery

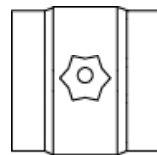
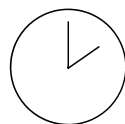
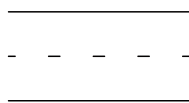
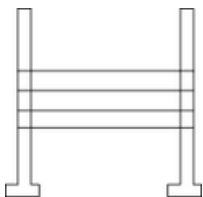
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Azhar Kitchen and Bar

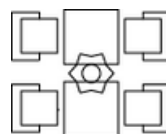
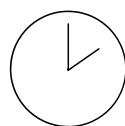
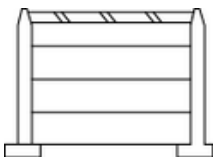
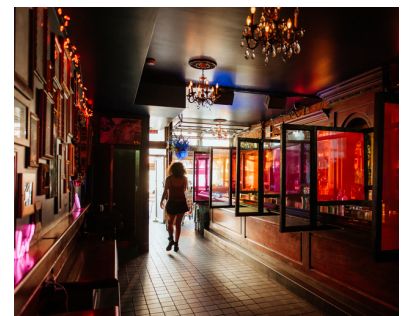


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Papi Chulo's

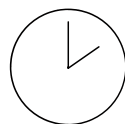
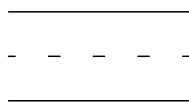
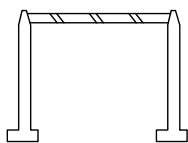
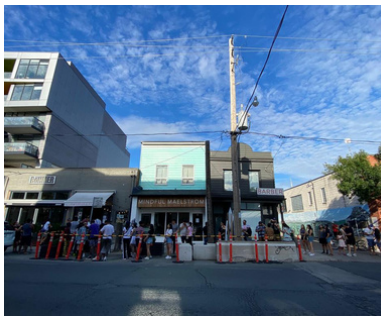


3 The Painted Lady



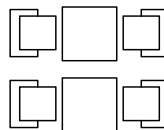
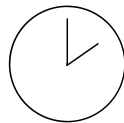
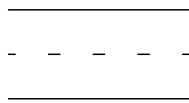
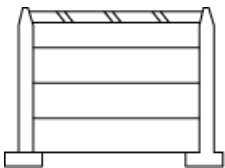
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Bang Bang Ice cream & Bakery



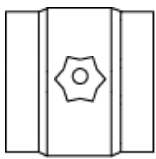
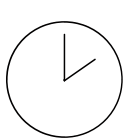
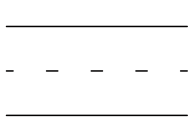
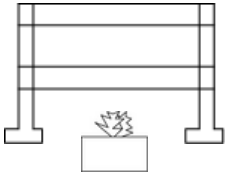
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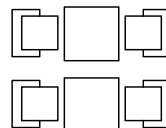
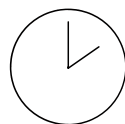
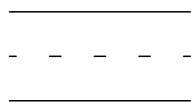
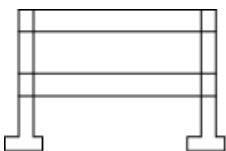
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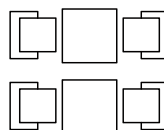
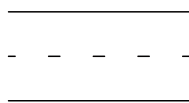
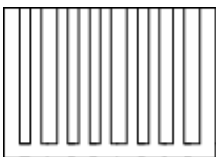
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Tumi Dumpling House



4

Kanto Street Food



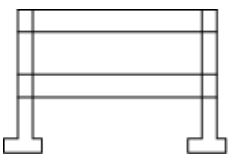
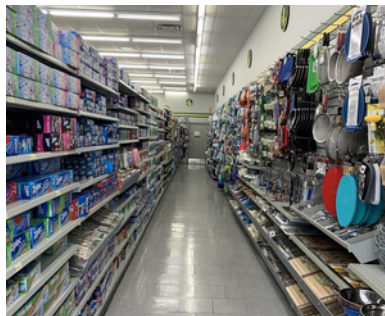
Danforth



- ① Dollarama
- ② Gabby's danforth
- ③ Athens restaurant and tavern
- ④ Pantheon

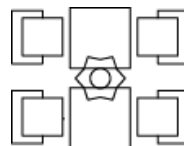
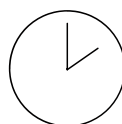
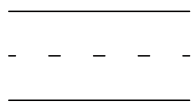
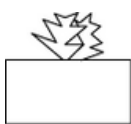
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Dollarama



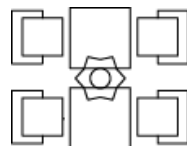
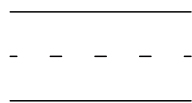
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Gabby's Danforth



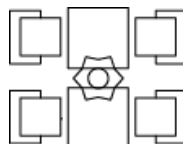
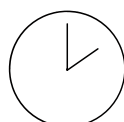
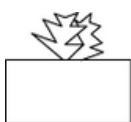
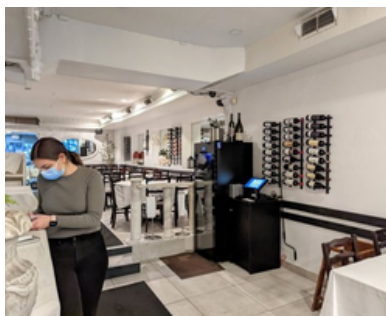
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Athens Restaurant & Tavern

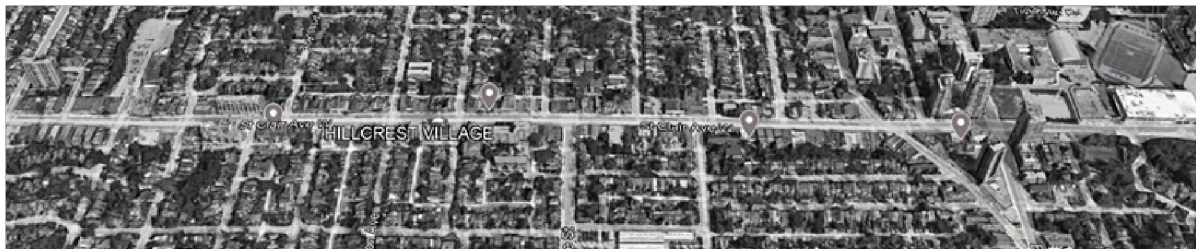


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Pantheon



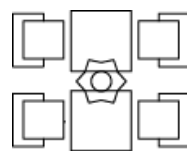
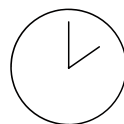
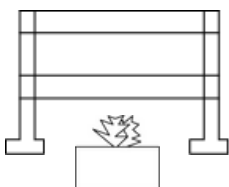
St. Claire Ave W



- ① Senso
- ② Wychwood pub
- ③ Savera indian cuisine
- ④ Fleur du jour

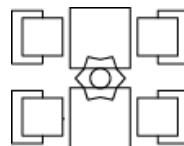
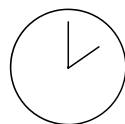
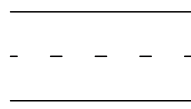
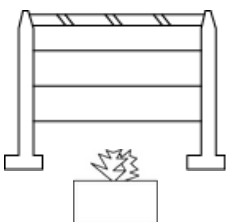
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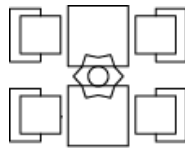
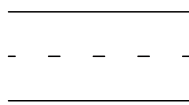
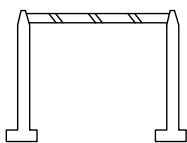
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Wychwood Pub

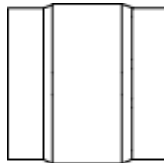
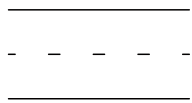
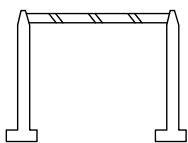
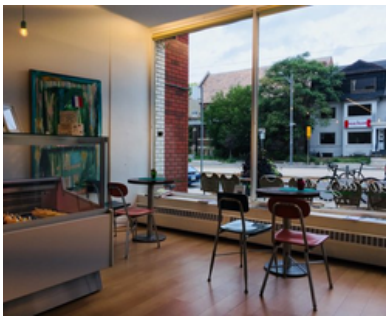


3

Savera Indian Cuisine



4 Fleur Du Jour



Unplanned moments of everyday urbanism



Evaluation

The above method of typology identifies physical characteristics. It is not definitive but rather an assessment of specific characteristics of curb lane cafes. From the visual analysis, several conclusions can be drawn that form one possible answer to the research question.

A new type of urban space

The infiltration of curb lane cafes has helped incorporate social distancing measures into the very infrastructure of the city. The streets provide a safe space away from the crowd of the sidewalks and help disperse pedestrian traffic. The increased occupation of the streets provides people with greater autonomy in their neighbourhoods. Since some of the patios are only open on certain days of the week or times of the day, there forms this "third space," which people can use as they please. This public space that is easily accessible to all city members now leads to more significant interactions between people of different socio-economic backgrounds and cultures. Thus, an exciting dynamic makes the curb lane cafes public and private spaces at different times of the week, fulfilling different social functions.

Furthermore, the curb lane cafes lead to reduced space for automobiles that, as a by-product of the cafeto program, aid the city in moving away from an automobile-centric layout. In this sense, the curb lane cafes futureproof the city for a greener future in a way where automobility is shared with more than fifty percent pedestrian access and street mobility. While patios on the street make the outdoors more covid-friendly, they also allow a larger number of people to be outside safely. With a rise in the popularity of curb lane cafes and the number of people on the streets, there seems to be a newfound demand for particular urban furniture such as umbrellas, barricades and lights. This increase in demand has led to a market niche of new manufacturers, such as patio wall manufacturers seen in figure 13. Some businesses have also taken the opportunity to renovate and

amp up their stores as they design their patios. Thus, booming businesses and helping revive the economy. The widespread success of the program, with the number of patios increasing each summer, showcases the commercial productivity of these new urban spaces. Thus, a new type of urban space is formed that gives ownership of the street to public stakeholders, fosters community in a neighbourhood and boosts economic productivity.



Figure 13: Gripblock company Patio wall

Typologies and observations

Icons used to describe each location of every BIA present a typological identity of the space, helping segregate the different spaces and defining their location, structure, function and spatial layout. Frequent use of specific icons can be grouped to form typologies of spaces. Several comparisons can be made between locations and businesses based on the icons used. There seems to be a general trend where several adjacent businesses share design elements and urban furniture types, such as the same type of barricade or flooring. Four of the five BIAs analyzed have incorporated an urban furniture identity that unifies businesses in the locality and helps form a unique sense of identity, community and connectedness in the neighbourhood. Based on the type of business, there seems to be a variation in the formality of the curb lane cafes. Certain BIAs,

such as the Junction, have more similar and formal business patios, while in others, like Danforth, where the type of businesses vary, the patio's formality also changes.

Limitations

The six weeks time constraint formed a critical limiting factor of the research report as it restricted the scope in several ways: (i) Fewer locations to analyze. (ii) Depth of analysis. While the project looks at the old city of Toronto area, conclusions have been drawn from a limited sample size of a preliminary study that can be reflective but not definitive of the curb lane typology. In addition, there have been several and constant variations in patio design and many businesses with patios open, as these decisions vary according to the status of the wavering pandemic.

Conclusion and Discussion

Throughout the pandemic, there has been a fast mobilization of resources to reactivate the recreational and economic sphere, leading to the creation of several new spatial prototypes in Toronto. These urban spaces have been tested, experimented with, and redefined during the pandemic. For example, the cafeto program that started as a response, hope and solution to the protests by business owners during the lockdown has created an urban impression on the city. Curb lane cafes have brought economic recovery, a new sense of community connection, anti-automobile-oriented streets, and a fulfilment of the need to be outdoors.

Generally, there seems to be a positive response to the increasing number of curb lane cafes as people finally enjoy time outdoors in a relatively safer fashion. Unlike other cities in Canada, such as Montreal and Vancouver, where there has been a greater focus on outdoor spaces such as parks and alleyways, Toronto has clarified that focusing on economic success drives public decisions. As spaces were born in the pandemic, curb lane cafes have had an evolution of their

own. They add another layer of life to the city as their discontinuous use during the week brings different stakeholders in and out of the spaces, whether done legally or illegally. Thus, the narrative of everyday urbanism continues through the pandemic and post-pandemic lens as coronavirus waves become less populous.

According to city guidelines, all curb lane cafés will be removed on November 7th, 2022. Questions of what these new pockets of public space leave behind and what their absence contributes to the life of the street and the city arise. What giving sections of the street to business owners means for the economic and equitable health of the city also arises. Some other thought-provoking ideas and themes curb lane cafes bring the right to equal ownership of public space, diverse and beneficial activities possible on the street, cause of resource mobility, people-centric street planning, accessibility, and safety-driven futureproofing of the city.

This research paper is a preliminary starting point. Future research could create typologies of safer and more accessible curb lane cafes that allow for gathering but prioritize social distancing and public health safety. Research presented in this paper can be built on to create a more robust typology that identifies more cafes and tracks them over a multi-year period. Therefore, this paper provides a beginning to understand the several interconnected chain reactions of changes the pandemic can and should bring to the urban sphere. At this point, where the post-pandemic reality consists of persisting COVID, urban design needs to calculate new incorporations of equitable and inclusive public health in design. Post-pandemic urban design should build urban resiliency while prioritizing spaces that provide a closer connection with nature and greater social interaction between urban stakeholders.

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Appendix

- (I) City of Toronto café guidelines Sidewalk Café: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/8b0f-Sidewalk-Cafe-Guidelines.pdf>

Figure 1.1

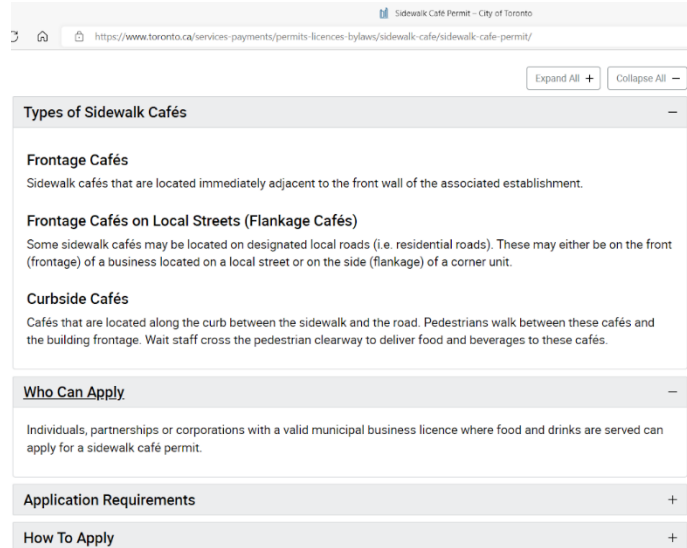


Figure 1.2

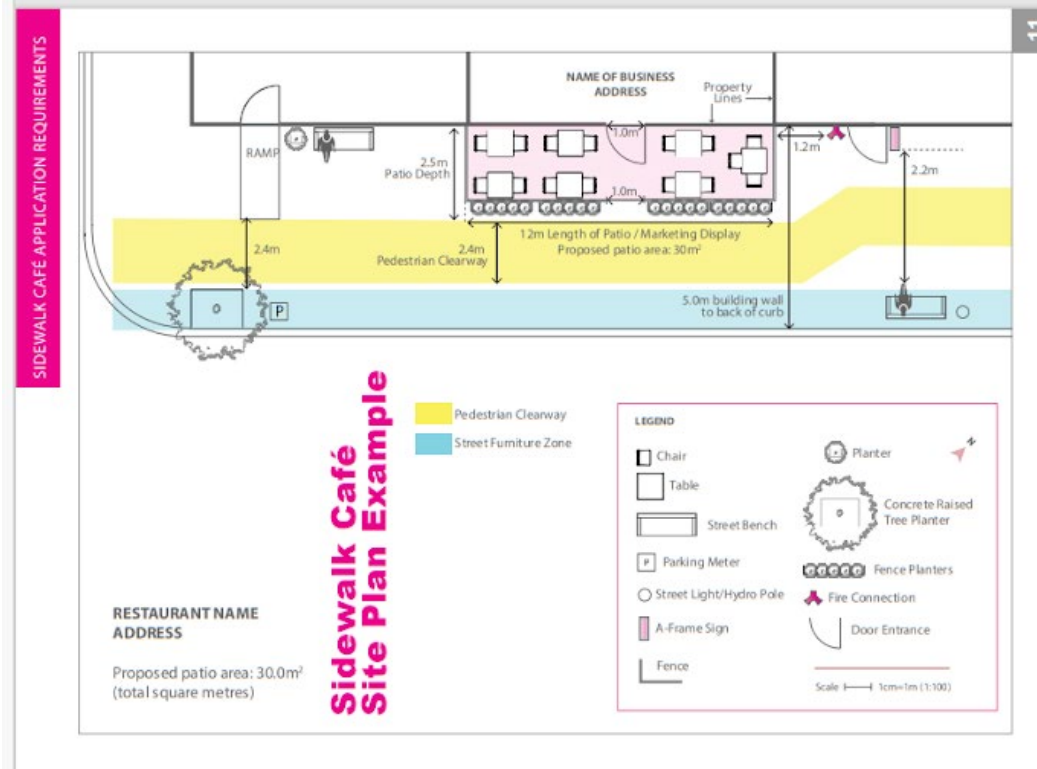


Figure 1.3

TYPES OF SIDEWALK CAFÉS

Frontage Cafés

- Located on the sidewalk adjacent to the frontage wall of a building.
- Sidewalk cafés may be expanded in front of a neighbouring business' frontage if written permission is granted from the directly adjacent tenant and/or property owner.
- This café type requires a permit.



Frontage Cafés

Small Frontage Cafés

- This café type does not require a permit with the City of Toronto but must comply with Article 8 of Chapter 742.
- Café is located directly against the building.
- Maximum size of a small frontage café is 0.8 metres deep by 5.5 metres wide or the width of the establishment frontage, whichever is less. If you exceed these dimensions, you MUST apply for a sidewalk café permit.
- Must have a planter or similar item with a solid base as a white cane navigation aid to make your café safe for people with low or no vision.
- Umbrellas, fencing, and enclosures are not permitted for this café type.



Small Frontage Cafés

Frontage Cafés on Local Streets (Flankage Cafés)

- Sidewalk Cafés located on **designated local roads** are subject to additional regulations for alcohol service and closing times.
- These may be either the frontage of a business located on a local road or the side (flankage of) a corner unit.
- This café type requires a permit.



Frontage Cafés on Local Streets (Flankages)

4

TYPES OF SIDEWALK CAFÉS

Curbside Cafés

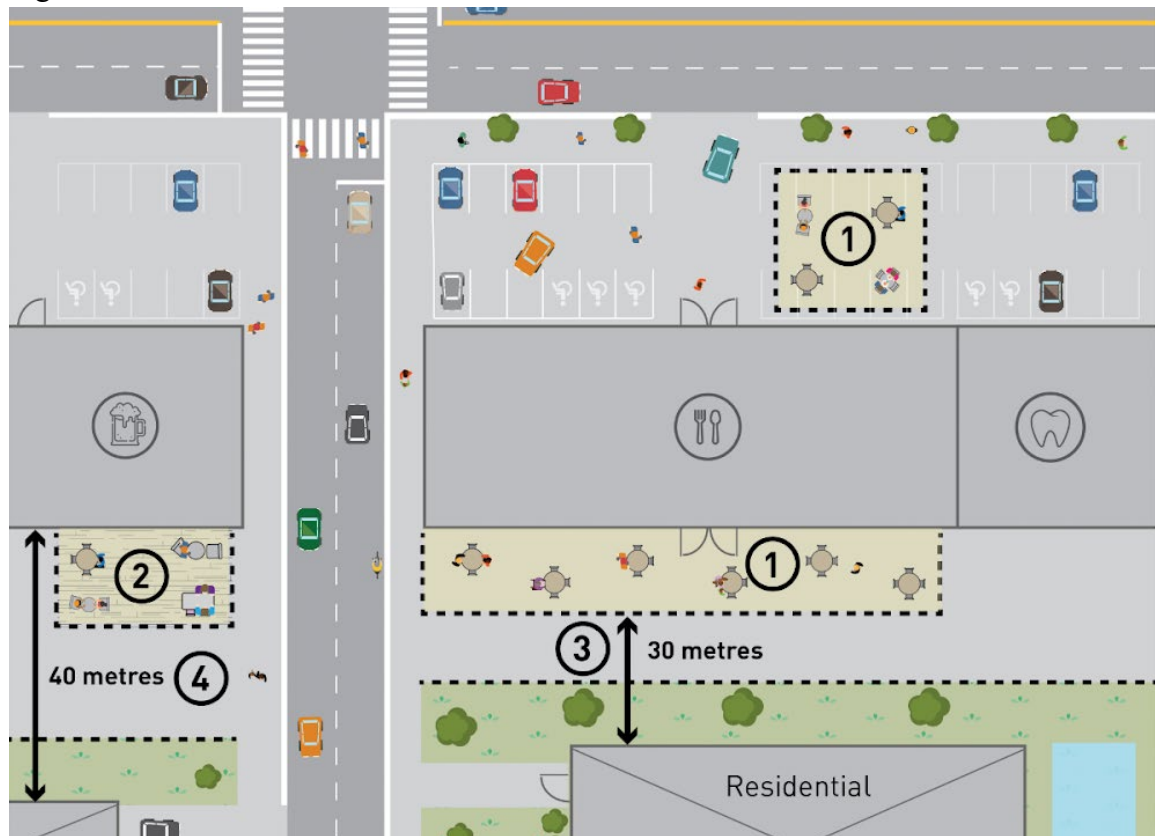
- Located on the sidewalk at the curbside (between the sidewalk and the road) in front of the associated establishment.
- Curbside cafés may be expanded in front of a neighbouring business if written permission is granted from the adjacent tenant and/or property owner.
- This café type requires a permit.
- To apply for a Curb Lane Café (café located on the street, requiring closure of a curb lane) please visit toronto.ca/CafeTO.



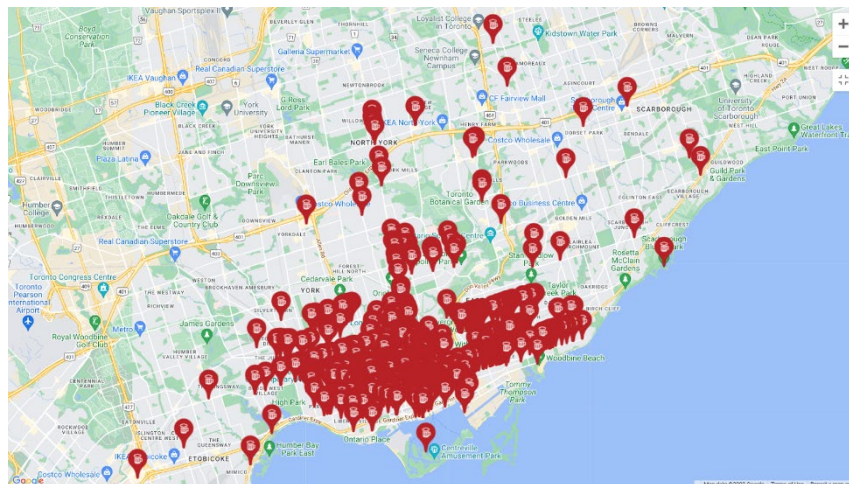
Curbside Cafés

- (II) City of Toronto café guidelines Patios on Private property:
<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/8ec3-TSPatios-on-Private-Property-Guide2022.pdf>

Figure 2.1



(III) Patio locations in Toronto Map blogto <https://patios.blogto.com/>



General pandemic patio overview in Toronto

Due to a limited number of types, several pandemic urban spaces could not be added to the curblane café analysis. However, the initial prospective locations analysis produced several

insights on interesting pandemic urban spaces that emerged in Toronto and lasted summer 2021 and 2022. There was an outburst of outdoor spaces as people tried to take greater autonomy of their private property, neighbourhoods and public space. A general rise was seen in the use of backyards, courtyards, rooftops, laneways, sidewalks, streets and parking lots for patios in the initial stages of the pandemic. Arts and recreation grew in the social sphere with art installations on patios as seen in figure 10 and road closure programs for cycling, walking etc such as the Activeto program seen in figure 11.



Figure 10: Parking lot patio mural at 229 Richmond Street West, Toronto.



Figure 11: Activeto road blocked for cycling

There seemed to be a trend in the types of patios preferred between summer 2021 and summer 2022. While patios were usually a summer treat in Toronto, they were open almost all year long during the pandemic. Initially, there was a rise in sidewalk patios in the summer of 2021 where there were accessibility ramps from the street and queue up spaces on the sidewalk. However, in summer 2022 there was an increase in street side or curblane cafes that included accessibility ramps and queue up lines on the street. There were several other general requirements such as hydro, electricity, sound, lighting, structure, deck, cleanliness, fencing etc for any patio listed out by the city in the permit guidelines handbook.