

Downtown West Orange Alliance 66 Main Street West Orange NJ 07052

Dear Planning Board,

We received notice that the outdoor café ordinance is scheduled for review at tonight's Planning Board meeting. While we appreciate the Township Council's efforts in adopting Ordinance 2935-25 to provide clear standards for outdoor cafés, we have some concerns with certain provisions that may unintentionally create challenges for our local businesses.

We strongly support the goals of safety, accessibility, and maintaining a welcoming downtown environment. However, specific requirements such as restrictions on amplified music lack clarity and may be overly prohibitive. A blanket ban on outdoor amplified sound feels overly regulated. Additionally, the requirement that all doors and windows remain closed if amplified sound is used indoors could stifle the inviting atmosphere many establishments aim to create, especially during warmer months or special events. We recommend allowing limited, regulated outdoor music (e.g., acoustic or low-volume amplified) within reasonable hours to enhance ambiance without disturbing nearby residents.

We also support the 8:00 a.m. opening time; however, the uniform 10:00 p.m. closing time appears overly restrictive. To better support our restaurant community, particularly those that rely on evening service we recommend extending outdoor hours to 11:00 p.m. on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, especially during the warmer months when outdoor dining is most active.

Another area of concern is the annual renewal process. This creates recurring costs and administrative burdens for businesses still recovering from the pandemic. While we agree that an annual inspection is appropriate, we suggest that permit fees be extended to a three-year cycle for businesses that remain in full compliance and have no violations. Additionally, the ordinance does not specify what the annual fee will be, leaving business owners without critical cost information.

We appreciate the Council's commitment to enhancing the vitality and safety of our downtown through this ordinance. While we support its overall intent, we respectfully urge consideration of the adjustments we've outlined to ensure the ordinance protects public interests while also giving local businesses the flexibility and fairness they need to succeed. At a time when we are actively working to attract new businesses to the area, we are concerned that overly restrictive regulations may discourage future investment. By working together, we can strike the right balance—one that safeguards community standards, encourages responsible outdoor dining, and strengthens West Orange as a vibrant, welcoming destination for residents and visitors alike.

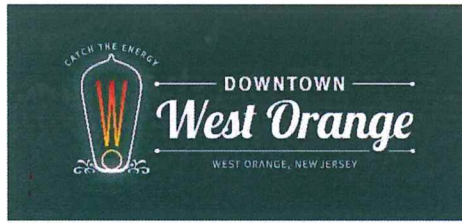
Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important economic policy.

Respectfully submitted,

Meg Brill

Executive Director, Downtown West Orange Alliance

Downtown@westorange.org & 973.325.4109



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