



## How To: Activate Your Plaza Downtown Austin Alliance Toolkit

### 5 Simple Things You Can Do Today to Add Value, Enhance and Activate Your Space:

#### 1. Accommodate a Range of Uses

- Creating a design that is flexible for many uses (temporary and/or permanent)
- Think about the human scale –how the space is, or could be, used
- Landscaping and design – softening the space

#### 2. Add Amenities for the End User

- Furnishings – tables and chairs
- Free WiFi
- Food & Beverage
- Retail/Shopping
- Bike Racks
- Plants - Green it Up
- Shade and protection from the elements (sun, rain, wind, etc.)

#### 3. Infrastructure

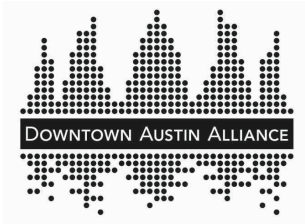
- Electricity (is it available, do you need generators?)
- Security
- Access to restrooms
- Access to water

#### 4. Inviting

- Welcome and inviting
- Security as a service/hospitality
- Signage and marketing

#### 5. Make it Interesting

- Event Programming
- Cultural activities – art, music
- Retail engagement/shopping
- Games – Giant Chess, Imagination Playground



## **OVERVIEW**

When people think about great cities, it's often the intangible qualities—vitality, sense of place, and positive experiences—that they remember most. One way to create vitality is to activate underutilized areas such as plazas, parks, and open spaces by turning them into attractive, comfortable, and social public spaces. The DAA's initiative to help transform Congress Avenue from a good street into an exceptional place will engage the public and private sectors to create experiences that add to the quality of life in downtown for all users, as well as add value to that place.

### **Activating a Privately Owned Plaza**

The first thing a property manager/owner should do is get a site plan exemption for the plaza/privately owned space. The exemption will provide a load card for the plaza that will enable use of the space for daily use and/or special events. Once the site plan exemption is complete, no other permits are needed to create an event as long as you do not have amplified sound, alcohol, or on-site food.

### **How to Get a Site Plan Exemption –**

Getting a site plan exemption is an administrative process at the City; the following outlines the process:

- First, prepare an exhibit of the space, to scale, as is and with any minor improvements planned.
- Then, meet with a site and zoning reviewer at the Development Assistance Center (DAC, 505 Barton Springs Road, One Texas Center, First Floor - walk-in hours Mon-Fri, 9am - 12 am). They will help you with what is allowed under the current codes, offer suggestions to changes to the exhibit to improve chance of approval, additional information needed, etc.
- The Land Development Code is available to review on-line (Section 25-5-2)  
<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/online-tools-resources>



- The application has additional instructions - submit application and plans at the DAC. ([http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Applications\\_Forms/30\\_site\\_plan\\_exemption\\_form.pdf](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Applications_Forms/30_site_plan_exemption_form.pdf))
- Prepare for iterations of meeting with reviewers to address comments and re-submittals of plans.

The site plan exemption fee is \$75.

### **Amplified Sound**

If the event requires amplified sound, you will have to get a sound permit. You can have acoustic music or other performance events as long as there is no amplified sound. The current (2012) rules to obtain an amplified sound permit:

- One-Day Permit – Can only be applied for once in a 30-day period of time.
- Multi-Day Permit – You can get a permit for four consecutive or non-consecutive days for a 30-day period for up to four times a year on the same site/property.
- Annual Permit – This is a much more difficult permit to obtain if the plaza does not have the infrastructure to hold musical events including a permanent stage, sound system, and support.

### **Exception to the Amplified Sound Rules**

If your plaza has a restaurant as a user (sidewalk café area) connected to the building, they are exempt from a sound permit and could use their area in the plaza to host events with amplified sound. The current example is the plaza at the W Hotel. They host a wide variety of events without an amplified sound permit through their connecting restaurant tenant. This is permitted under the City's Land Development Code.



### **Food & Beverage**

City code requires permits for temporary food services. Ensure your food and beverage vendors have this type of permit. For more information contact the Health and Human Services Department at (512) 972-5600 or visit their website at

[www.ci.austin.tx.us/health/eh\\_pemits+apps.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/health/eh_pemits+apps.htm)

State Law requires TABC licensing if alcohol is being served/sold at an event. For more information contact the TABC directly at (512) 206-3333 or online at

<https://www.tabc.state.tx.us/>