



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association Inc. (OANA)  
[www.OANA-NY.org](http://www.OANA-NY.org)

Economic Recovery in Astoria

May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020

“Open Streets by local Restaurants”

Restaurants, bars, cafes, and small retail service businesses are the economic drivers of our Community. We are known throughout the city for having some of the finest food and hospitality services.

However, these are some of the hardest hit industries in the country, and OANA believes that their recovery should be our number one economic priority in Astoria. They are amongst our largest employers and their recovery is imperative.

There are obstacles. The weekend of May 15, 16 and 17 showed that opening without a proper infrastructure in place is a recipe for disaster. While our restaurants were able to offer window service (Including alcohol) those waiting for service on the sidewalks were not properly observing social distancing. This phenomenon existed throughout the city, and promises to get much worse as the weather warms.

Two solutions are unacceptable; (1) Closing the restaurants for pick-ups, and (2) using the NYPD to police social distancing. (You cannot mix alcohol and policing: Recipe for disaster).

We would like to offer a third solution: Infrastructure: Create enough space so that tables can be placed outside observing social distancing regulations.

This could be done by closing the street to vehicular traffic temporarily for part of the day: Let's say from 6 PM to 11 PM. This way deliveries and services will still be available during the day and local retail will not be negatively affected. This might be done under the Open Streets program from DOT. However the restriction against economic activity should be lifted, especially as funding for the program has been negatively affected.

We would look at sections of Ditmars, 30 Ave and Broadway that have a high density of restaurants and cafes.

This will make enforcement of social distancing much more feasible. Perhaps an association of business owners can work together to enforce these regulations, as they know that ignoring these can lead to the closure of their business completely.

When this proposal was brought up at a recent Community Board 1 meeting, there was significant push back stating that they did not want to close a bus route. However, we feel that buses are given wheels for a reason. A temporary route change down a neighboring street/avenue is a small price to pay for the jobs and economic activity this would create.



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Another negative would be that if anyone parked their car in the closed area, they would have to accept they cannot remove it until after the restrictions are lifted. Frankly after a few days of not being able to get to their car, habits would change. An example of this is when we close streets for use by our schools.

When one weighs the positive of increased economic activity plus more effective social distancing against the inconvenience of losing parking for a few hours or perhaps having to walk a block to get a bus, we think the conclusion should be obvious. During the quarantine, we have all shown a willingness to sacrifice for the greater good. This is a temporary extension of that attitude, again for the greater good.

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