



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association Inc. (OANA)
www.OANA-NY.org

August 22, 2020

Call for Study of Astoria Streets for Open Streets Open Restaurants

It has indeed been a summer for the ages. We are living in times unique in history, and we are all discovering new ways to live, to view our communities.

Often in times of stress, everything gets accelerated. It becomes an opportunity to try new things, unimaginable just a few years before. These opportunities are often created to cure ills to our society.

In Astoria, one of our biggest assets, and best attractions are our cafes, restaurants and bars.

But the COVID pandemic has hit us hard.

We at OANA have prioritized helping small business, especially in Hospitality, survive this time of turmoil. Businesses that have a special place in our community are closing, and the losses can be unrecoverable!

We applaud the City of New York for creating their Open Restaurant program, which allowed restaurants and bars to serve outside, therefore protecting the public from the dangers of contagion in indoor environments, but allowing these businesses income to survive. And, they did this with a minimum of time-consuming regulation, allowing business to sign up and start operating immediately.



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However, since then, the bureaucracy has struck back, and started fining and over regulating these same businesses, often for issues that should be enforced by the government. They do not have the power of issuing summons, etc. so how can they be expected change behaviors.

Beyond this, we at OANA worked most of the summer to organize local restaurants to take advantage of [the Open Streets Open Restaurants](#) program offered by the city. This program actually closes streets with a large presence of restaurants in order to facilitate their business in a safe manner.

In a general matter of urban life, the move to reduce vehicular traffic in favor of pedestrians and personal transport (Bicycles, skate boards, mopeds, etc.) is gaining steam. As of August 17th, the city has granted such status to 76 open streets and nine pedestrian plazas allowing restaurant use.

This street closure includes an available 15 ft corridor for service vehicles. (Recently, a firetruck had to turn back on 30 Ave as it could not get through because of traffic)

In partnership with the 30th Avenue Business Association, OANA successfully signed up 20 restaurants on 30th Ave to apply for this program. It took a month of hard outreach, and we greatly appreciate those who helped us. We were encouraged by the city and elected officials to proceed with this project.



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Regretfully, in the end we were unsuccessful in closing 30 Ave to traffic. The stated reasons were traffic concerns, and unruly customers.

However, we disagree with this: Closing the avenue to traffic would:

1. Greatly increase safety, eliminating the possibility of a vehicle crashing into restaurant barriers, and saving lives.
2. Eliminate the fumes of grid locked vehicles. None of us wants a side of Carbon Monoxide with their pizza!
3. Most of the rowdy behavior which afflicted Astoria was caused by individuals who paraded their vehicles around in order to impress! This is the same crowd we have dealt with for years on Shore Blvd. in Astoria Park. And when they closed Shore Blvd to vehicles, everyone moved up to the Business District. Without vehicle access, these people have no interest in the neighborhood (They stopped coming to Shore Blvd). If we had closed Steinway and 30th ave to traffic, many of the problems would have been eliminated.
4. Increase area for social distancing, more pedestrian friendly, and hopefully a more family orientated destination.
5. Increase the number of outdoor tables for the restaurants.



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We only asked for closure from 5 PM to 12 PM Friday and Saturday, and from noon to 12 Pm on Sunday (For Brunch). We want to make sure we minimally affect other retail on the avenue.

The city has seen fit to close another avenue, not for increasing commercial viability, but to increase outdoor space for individual residents. We are not opposed to this in general, as long as it is done within a plan that includes its effects on the entire neighborhood. And this should not eliminate the possibility of other deserving neighborhoods and commercial districts to reap the benefits of street closures. Also, closure every day from 8 am to 8 pm seems a bit excessive. We wonder how this has affected local business.

Therefore, we call upon the City of New York to take a more Holistic approach for all of Astoria the next time the program is rolled out

The city should determine the best times and locations so that next years “Open Streets Open Restaurants’ program (promised by the Mayor) can be equally be enjoyed by all: Both residents and businesses. The two do not have to be exclusive.

Astoria has been called one of the best neighborhoods in the world by media: Let’s make sure our legacy is not the destruction of this.

Richard Khuzami

President OANA