

From: Mark Cooper <mcooper@wwhd.org>
Sent: Wednesday, June 23, 2021 11:15 AM
To: Perillie, Michelle <mperillie@westportct.gov>
Subject: RE: Outdoor Dining

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Michelle –

Whenever an application for a new/renovation/other food service facility is reviewed there are a number of things staff looks at. One of the first things reviewed is to ensure the proper food storage and preparation equipment is proposed, will be connected correctly, and positioned within the kitchen for efficient utilization. For those food service facilities using an onsite septic system, the septic system required is also tied into the number of seats. Facilities on the public sewer, this is not a concern. Next in order of importance is a look at the menu which shows staff the range, complexity, and number of potentially hazardous foods (as compared to non-potentially hazardous food items) which need more specialized attention to storage and handling practices. The menu items relate back to what would be the required equipment. Essentially, the more complex the food items, the more complex the equipment, preparation procedures, as well as to the number and training of staff .

The number of tables and chairs is an important design criterion as it relates to the capacity of the kitchen equipment and staff to be able to store, prepare and serve foods in compliance with the applicable public health food code requirements. The more seats in a food service facility usually requires larger storage capacity, preparation capacity and staff capacity.

Upon the completion of a food facility plan review, the staff note an approval with a maximum number of seats. During Connecticut's COVID19 pandemic's efforts to keep restaurants viable, outdoor dining was considered as a way for restaurants maintain some acceptable level of service because of the Governor's Directive that only 50% of the indoor capacity could be used. The WWHD supported the creation of safer outdoor dining areas, which basically gave food service facilities a way to get back closer to their maximum approved seating capacity – 50% inside and 50% outside.

All COVID restrictions (except some masking) have ended. Food service facilities are again allowed to fully fill all the seats within their facility. The WWHD is concerned that without some limitations on outdoor seating, some food service facilities might be able to double the number of seats increasing the potential to exceed the capacity of the kitchen and staff to safely prepare and serve menu items, as well as the septic system capacity for those no connected to the public sewer.

It has been public health 's experience that when a food service facility is nearing or exceeding it's kitchen or staffing capacity, inspection scores go down and customer complaints increase. The worst-case scenario is a full-blown food borne illness outbreak. We have seen it happen before.

In conclusion, it is recommended that the WWHD has an opportunity to review all outdoor dining proposals to evaluate the facilities capacity to handle additional seating safely.

Mark A.R. Cooper, Director of Health
Westport Weston Health District