

City gets its first ‘parklet’ outside Maldaner’s

By Jamie Munks

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Downtown Springfield now has one more thing in common with much larger metropolises such as Chicago, San Francisco and Denver — its first “parklet.”

The parklet, a deck built Friday on two Sixth Street parking spaces, will serve as an extended outdoor dining area for Maldaner’s Restaurant, 222 S. Sixth St. But parklets, which can be either public or private and are in many cases small, movable sidewalk extensions, also can serve as places to put greenery, sitting areas or art displays.

“It adds another dimension to the street.

There are a lot of ways to go with it,” Maldaner’s owner and chef Michael Higgins said as he watched a crew construct the wooden deck in front of his restaurant. “It’s a focal point, a revenue generator, a little bit of a coolness thing for the city, and there’s a traffic-calming factor.”

The thought of putting a parklet in Springfield came to Higgins about a year ago when he was visiting San Francisco. Higgins said he could see them popping up elsewhere throughout Springfield, and he’s willing to help others who decide to develop them.

Victoria Ringer, executive director of Downtown Springfield Inc., said parklets can expand the downtown business area or be used for recreation. Some communities have used them for outdoor chess or backgammon. “It kind of extends your blueprint for commerce. It’s more floor space for your money,” Ringer said. “A lot of people love dining outside, socializing outside. That can really lend to the value of your evenings.” Ringer said she’s been considering putting in a parklet at the Old Capitol Farmers Market, which would take up vendor spaces but would give people a place to sit and eat.

For the Maldaner’s parklet, Higgins submitted plans to the city and then incorporated some redesign elements public works staff suggested into the final draft, including a 42-inch railing, accessibility for people with disabilities and features that aid water drainage, he said.

The work, which began Friday morning, was expected to take several hours to complete. The space will be able to accommodate up to 20 people. The deck is made up of four separate pieces and constructed so everything can be removed in time for snow removal. Higgins expects the deck to be removed in October and then come out again at the beginning of May.

Landscaping firm CopperTree is partnering with Higgins on the project and did the design work and construction. With the basic deck down, Higgins can landscape the space how he wants it. He plans to eventually place planters and umbrellas there.

“The city is giving that freedom as long as it doesn’t impede traffic,” he said.



*Caption: Workers from CopperTree Landscape and Fencing install the city’s first parklet Friday in front of Maldaner’s.
Rich Saal/The State Journal-Register*