

**THE HERMOSILLO**

**Should Los Angeles Make Its AI Fresco Dining Program Permanent?**

Urban Planning 251

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April 28, 2022

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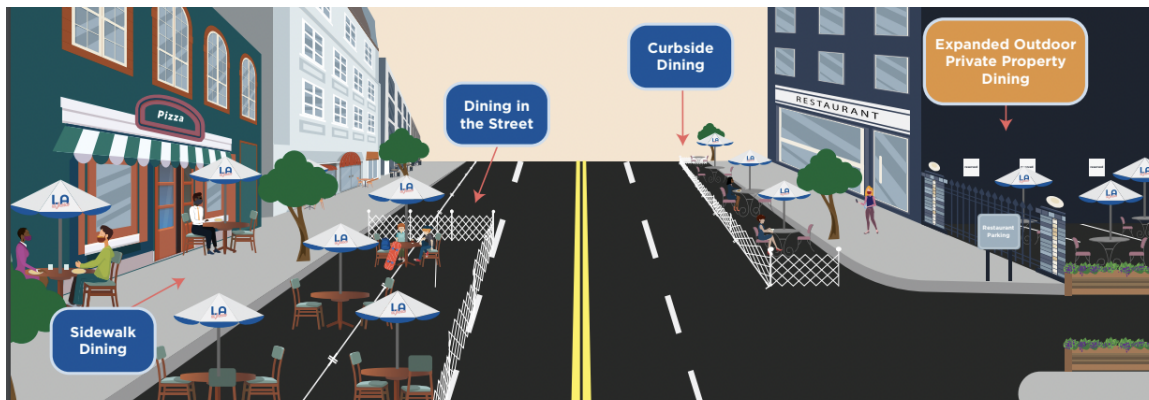
## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Office of the Manager of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation  
**FROM:** Erik Felix, Intern  
Purva Kapshikar, Intern  
**DATE:** April 28, 2022  
**SUBJECT:** Should Los Angeles Make Its Al Fresco Dining Program Permanent?

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In May 2020, the City of Los Angeles began the Al Fresco Dining Program, a temporary emergency program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (LADOT, n.d.-b). This program streamlined review for and allowed outdoor dining in areas such as sidewalks, streets, and parking lots (LADOT, n.d.-a). This increased the space restaurants and bars could offer while complying with public health requirements, such as physical distancing between tables (Sentinel News Service, 2020). There are four outdoor dining options: Curbside Dining, Dining in the Street, Sidewalk Dining, and Expanded Outdoor Private Property Dining (see Figure 1) (CicLAvia, n.d.). In May 2021, the City Council voted to begin steps to make Al Fresco permanent (Tawatari, 2021).

**Figure 1.** *Al Fresco Dining Options*



*Note.* Reprinted from “L.A. Al Fresco – Outdoor Dining.”

The potential issue with allowing restaurants to convert parking lots into dining areas is that the city has specific off-street parking requirements for restaurants. The city’s municipal code states that there should be at least one parking space per 100 square feet of restaurant or bar floor area if the gross floor area exceeds 1,000 square feet (Sec. 12.21.4, n.d.). Increasing the dining area would generally increase the required parking spaces these establishments need to provide. However, Al Fresco increases dining area while simultaneously reducing parking area, which raises doubts about the need for such parking requirements.

**Figure 2.** *The Hermosillo*

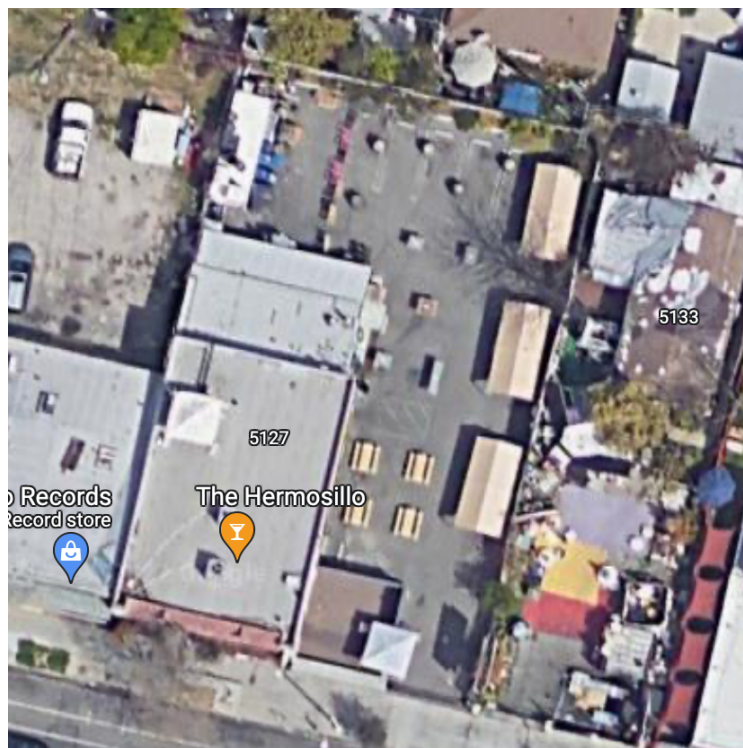


(Author’s photo, 2022)

## 1. Introduction: The Hermosillo

We use The Hermosillo as a case study to assess whether the city should permanently allow dining in restaurant parking lots. The Hermosillo is a restaurant and bar located in the Highland Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. It features “Extended Outdoor Private Property Dining,” as defined by the Al Fresco guidelines, which involves setting up tables and chairs in a restaurant or bar’s parking lot (LADOT, n.d.-b). Figures 3 and 4 show where tables and tents are set up in the parking lot. The restaurant has utilized this space in the past: after opening in 2012, it initially invited food trucks to park outside before it began offering its own menu. In addition to metered curb parking along York Boulevard, there are also two large public, metered parking lots nearby.

**Figure 3.** *The Hermosillo’s Outdoor Dining (Aerial view)*



*Note.* Aerial imagery taken from Google Maps. Using Google’s “Measure distance” tool, the area of the parking lot comes to be about 6,025 square feet.

**Figure 4.** *The Hermosillo’s Outdoor Dining (Street view)*



(Author’s photo, 2022)

## **2. Advantages of the AI Fresco Program**

The AI Fresco dining program stimulates the economy, better meets the diversity of consumer preferences, and improves public health outcomes.

### *Stimulates the Economy*

Al Fresco increases a restaurant's dining area. Since restaurant revenue depends partly on the number of customers that can be seated, a larger dining area directly increases a restaurant's revenue potential. The server at The Hermosillo did not have access to the restaurant's finances but, based on how much busier they are, believes revenue has increased since Al Fresco (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022). One customer interviewed is part-owner of a bar called The Grasshopper that converted their parking lot in a similar manner to The Hermosillo. They shared that their revenue has not changed from Monday to Wednesday, but has increased 100 percent from Thursday to Sunday when crowds overflow into the outdoor space (Customer #8, personal communication, April 24, 2022). Similarly, increasing the number of dining tables increases the need for staff, thus boosting local employment opportunities (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022) (Restaurant Engine, n.d.). Al Fresco also increases generated sales tax and shifts drivers into paid parking lots — both of which increase city revenue. This revenue can be invested in the restaurant's business district, such as pedestrian, bike and transit improvements to further promote sustainable modes of transportation (Mouw, 2020).

### *Meets Diversity of Consumer Preferences*

Al Fresco gives The Hermosillo the opportunity to meet a broader set of consumer needs, resulting in higher potential revenue. With this program, The Hermosillo is able to serve families with children, something they are legally unable to do in their indoor dining area (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022). Two customers emphasized that outdoor dining gives them the option to bring their dogs, which the restaurant also cannot accommodate indoors

(Customer #1, personal communication, April 20, 2022) (Customer #5, personal communication, 2022, April 24, 2022). Customers have different comfort levels eating indoors in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022), and Al Fresco allows them to comfortably dine out. Lastly, some customers simply prefer to dine outdoors (Customer #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022) (Customer #3, personal communication, April 20, 2022).

### *Promotes Better Public Health Outcomes*

Al Fresco discourages driving and sprawl, encourages active modes of transportation, and allows for social distancing. Off-street parking makes driving easier and spreads out land uses, further encouraging driving, which is one of the primary sources of greenhouse gasses (Shoup, 2017b) . Al Fresco reduces available off-street parking, making driving less convenient, consequently reducing pollution and encouraging active modes of transportation like walking and biking (McCahill et al., 2018). These modes improve health and environmental outcomes (Perez, et al., 2017). Outdoor dining can also maintain social distancing, a practice known to slow the spread of COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

### **3. Disadvantages of the Al Fresco Program**

The removal of off-street parking raises concerns regarding where customers and employees will park and loss of business revenue, which are addressed below.



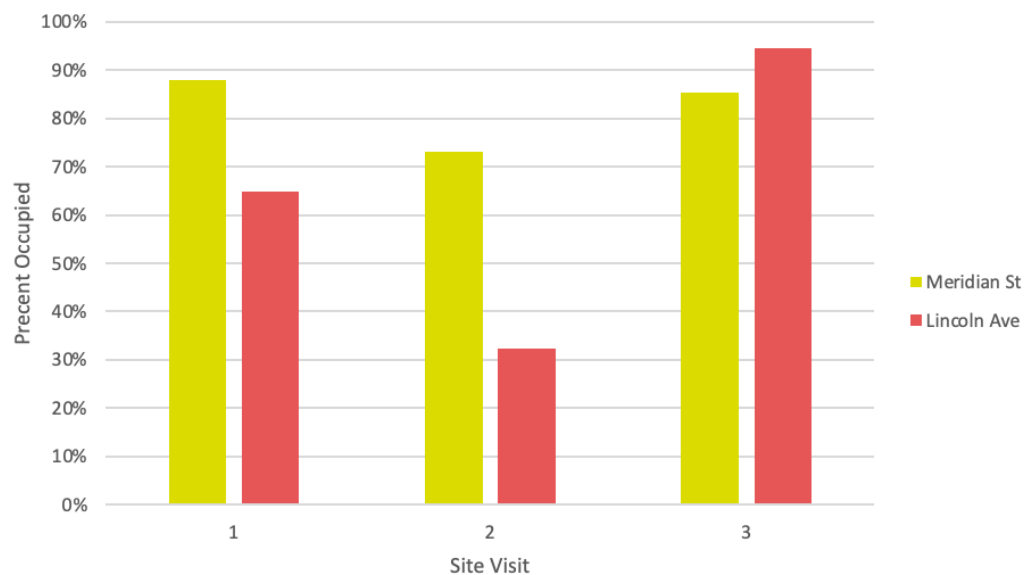
*Where will customers park?*

Not all customers drive to restaurants, and those that do can park elsewhere or shift modes.

Our survey of The Hermosillo patrons found that four in eight, or 50 percent, do not drive to the restaurant (see Appendix). Those that do find free curbed parking “immediately” in the residential neighborhood (Customer #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022) (Customer #5, personal communication, April 24, 2022) (Customer #6, personal communication, April 24, 2022)

(Customer #7, personal communication, April 24, 2022). The Hermosillo is also a block away from two public parking lots. Three separate parking surveys found that, on average, public lots maintain an occupancy rate of 73 percent. If free curbed parking was fully occupied, our survey indicates the paid parking lots could accommodate drivers. If these become fully occupied, dynamic pricing can better allocate parking and encourage mode shifts (Shoup, 2017c) (Krishnamurthy and Ngo, 2018).

**Figure 5.** *Occupancy Rate of Public Parking Lots on York Boulevard*



*Note.* Site visit #1 and #2 were conducted on a weekday night (April 20, 2022 and April 21, 2022) and site visit #3 on a weekend day (April 23, 2022).

#### *Where will employees park?*

Our survey of The Hermosillo employees found that the majority of staff do not drive (five in eight) (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022) (Server #5, personal communication, April 23, 2022). Staff that drive easily find free curbside parking in the neighborhood (Server #1, personal communication, April 20, 2022) (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022). The rest use active transportation. During the pandemic, employees moved closer to work (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022). Our survey indicates that the necessity for restaurants to provide off-street parking for staff is overstated.

#### *Not offering free off-street parking will hurt local business*

Free off-street parking has the potential of stifling local business revenue. Having patrons pay the right price for parking increases turnover and ensures spaces are available for other customers, which equates to higher revenues (de Place, 2012).

## **4. Parking Recommendations for Restaurants**

### *Parking for Existing Restaurants*

Based on our conversations with employees and customers of The Hermosillo, there is overwhelming support for converting parking into dining space. This can be done gradually – the amount of parking that is to be converted does not need to be prescribed in advance.

The Hermosillo offers various outdoor seating options, including a front patio, picnic tables, and tables set up under tents. These were installed in phases: initially, the outdoor space began as a few tables, but expanded to include tents and barrels as tables (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022). The owner had wanted to build a front patio prior to the pandemic, but struggled to get permits (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022). Once the city launched the AI Fresco program, the owner was able to receive approval for the patio, which was finally installed (see Figure 6) after the tables and tents in the parking space were expanded (Server #2, personal communication, April 20, 2022).

**Figure 6.** *Front patio of The Hermosillo*



(Breijo, 2020)

We believe that customer demand and employee feedback is the best indicator for existing restaurants to estimate how much parking space should be converted. In The Hermosillo's case, the incremental expansion of the outdoor dining area allowed the restaurant to better evaluate demand and determine how much expansion was appropriate. Additionally, this allowed the immediate implementation of the modular tables and tents, before turning to construction of the more permanent, costly front patio.

#### *Parking Requirements for New Restaurants*

Given both employee and customer enthusiasm for Al Fresco at The Hermosillo, we believe there is potential in eliminating minimum parking requirements entirely. Parking requirements are often determined based on peak parking demand for free parking (Shoup, 2017a).

Consequently, for places like restaurants that may experience varied temporal demand, parking may be underutilized. Requirements are often determined by either surveying nearby cities or relying on the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) *Parking Generation Manual*, but both have shortcomings (Shoup, 2017a).

It is important for establishments to provide parking based on the needs of their employees and customers, especially disabled drivers. Thus we provide a methodology that can be used by restaurants and bars when considering how much parking to offer. Our method expands upon the ITE model which reports a "parking generation rate" solely based on peak parking occupancy and gross floor area of a given land use (Shoup, 2017a).

We believe that incorporating other variables in a linear regression creates a more robust model that can better predict parking demand. We use square footage of dining space instead of floor area, as this includes both indoor and outdoor space. We recommend using variables that indicate proximity to alternative modes of transportation or nearby public parking lots. For instance, distance to the nearest transit stop, protected bike lane, micro-mobility station, public parking lot, and R1-zoned neighborhood could be additional covariates. People might take public transit, bike, or walk to the restaurant if there is reliable and accessible infrastructure. Public parking lots can help meet the demand for parking. Single-family homes are required to have two covered parking spaces and often have a driveway, which can give residents at least three off-street parking spaces, leaving the curb parking available for visitors (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 2013). In the case of The Hermosillo, every driver indicated curb parking in the surrounding neighborhoods was easily found.

We can collect this data from restaurants that are currently participating in the Al Fresco program, and create a linear model with square footage of parking space as the outcome variable. We can then predict parking amounts for new establishments by using the coefficients determined by the linear regression. The regression equation would be:

$$Parking\ area\ (ft^2) \sim Dining\ area\ (ft^2) + X$$

where *Parking space* and *Dining space* are single-dimension arrays and *X* is a matrix that includes the proximity variables mentioned above, such as distance to transit. An example of using this methodology is provided in the Appendix.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on our research and qualitative analysis of The Hermosillo, we make the following recommendations regarding parking requirements for restaurants in the City of Los Angeles:

***A. Make the Al Fresco program permanent and convert parking requirements to parking recommendations***

Two years of Al Fresco has proven that restaurants thrive without off-street parking requirements.

***B. Allow existing restaurants to supply parking based on customer demand and employee feedback***

Eliminating parking requirements will give existing restaurants the flexibility to use their land as they deem appropriate, be it for parking or outdoor dining.

***C. For new restaurants, use a regression model that calculates parking demand based on land use and a diverse set of variables that influence demand such as proximity to transit, protected bike lanes, public parking lots, and single-family residences***

To build an effective regression model:

- Require restaurants to submit square footage of existing total dining and parking area (including curb space immediately in front of restaurant)
- Research the distance of the suggested parking demand determinants in relation to every restaurant in the city

***D. When businesses are closed, adopt their off-street parking lots for public use***

For example, across the street from The Hermosillo is a post office parking lot that sits vacant after business hours and all of Sunday. This surplus of parking can be used to ease

the pressure for businesses to provide off-street parking. Any revenue generated from the parking lot can be split between the business and city.

***E. Change the public parking lot flat fee to dynamic pricing to better allocate parking***

All customers surveyed were in favor of dynamic pricing for public parking lots. Doing so would better allocate parking, increase local business revenue, and generate funds for improvements to the area (de Place, 2012) (Mouw, 2020).

## **6. Conclusion**

Los Angeles' Al Fresco dining program reveals that removing off-street parking requirements for restaurants stimulates the economy, better meets the diversity of consumer preferences, and improves public health outcomes. Our survey of The Hermosillo staff and customers indicates that the demand for free off-street parking is overstated, and our survey of nearby public parking lots indicates there is a surplus of parking. Our proposed regression model incorporates determinants that better predict the likelihood of a customer needing parking, and if existing land uses can accommodate them. Parking should not be banned. But businesses, with consultation from customers, should decide for themselves what is the highest, best use of land formerly used exclusively for parking.

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## 8. Appendix

**Figure 7.** *Travel mode share counts for employees and customers*

Travel Mode	Employee	Customer
Drive	3	4
Bike	2	0
Walk	2	3
Roll	1	0
Rideshare	0	1

### ***Predicting parking area recommendations for new restaurants***

We use the following equation to predict parking area for new restaurants:

$$\text{Parking area (ft}^2\text{)} \sim \text{Dining area (ft}^2\text{)} + X$$

The following table indicates data from restaurants and bars that are currently participating in the AI Fresco program, and the values have been fabricated. For this example, we will only consider the additional covariate of “Distance to nearest transit stop or station” for X:

$$\text{Parking area (ft}^2\text{)} \sim \text{Dining area (ft}^2\text{)} + \text{Distance to nearest transit stop/station (ft)}$$

Additionally, we are only considering a sample size of four restaurants for this example. In reality, we would aim to have a larger sample size in order to get a better estimate unaffected by outliers.

**Figure 8.** *Parking, dining, and proximity measures for example restaurants that are participating in Al Fresco program*

Restaurant	Parking area (ft <sup>2</sup> )	Dining area (ft <sup>2</sup> )	Distance to nearest stop/station (ft)
A	500	1000	200
B	300	500	1000
C	3000	1750	1500
D	600	800	400

*Note.* The above data is fabricated.

After running this regression, we have the following coefficients:

**Figure 9.** *Coefficients from performing linear regression using data from Figure 7*

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error
Intercept	-1323.980	273.536
Dining area (ft <sup>2</sup> )	1.793	0.287

Distance to nearest transit stop/station (ft)	0.785	0.259
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*Note.* The programming language R was used to perform the linear least-squares regression.

Using the coefficients from Figure 8, we can predict parking area for a new restaurant E that has the following measures:

**Figure 10.** Dining, and proximity measures for new Restaurant E

Restaurant	Dining area (ft <sup>2</sup> )	Distance to nearest stop/station (ft)
E	2000	100

*Note.* The above data is fabricated.

The predicted parking area for Restaurant E based on this linear model is: 2341.095 square feet.

### **Questionnaire and participant responses**

Questions to employees:

- **What are the modes of travel you use to get here? Where do you park? How long does it take for you to find parking?**
  - Server #1: they drive to work. They usually park in the residential neighborhood.
  - Server #2: they drove to work today and parked in the neighborhood a block away. It's easy to find free curb parking in the residential area. They often walk to work, though. He and his wife only own one car.
  - Server #3: bikes to work
  - Server #4: bikes to work
  - Server #5: skates to work
  - Server #6: walk to work
  - Serer #7: walk to work
  - Server #8: drives to work
- **Has revenue improved, stayed the same, or worsened since dining was extended to the parking lot?**

- Server #2: Isn't sure if revenue has increased since opening their Al Fresco dining area. That would be a question for the owner. Based on how busy they are, he would assume it has increased. Al Fresco dining has diversified their clientele.
- **Was the outdoor dining area installed all at once or in phases (e.g. based on customer demand or on costs of installation)?**
  - Server #2: initially, the outdoor space was just a few tables. Then they expanded to four times the size (with tents and large wheel barrels as tables). The owner wanted to build a patio pre-COVID but couldn't get the permits. Once the Al Fresco dining program was launched, the owner began the process again and was able to successfully receive approval for the patio. The patio came after the outdoor space (tables and tents) was expanded.
- **How would you like the City to treat parking requirements for restaurants/bars moving forward?**
  - Server #1: they don't feel like they need the outdoor parking lot.. "It's nice to have outdoor space".
  - Server #2: likes not having the parking lot because it encourages people not to drive, which is great because that means people are drinking and not driving.
- **Before the pandemic, would you say the lot provided too much parking or not enough parking?**
  - Server #1: they didn't work here before the pandemic
  - Server #2: the parking lot maintained mostly full occupancy before the pandemic. But he still prefers to keep the outdoor space.
- **Do you know what the Al Fresco program is? Would you like Al Fresco to be legal or would you prefer to have the parking spots back?**
  - Server #2: No complaints - "it's been great!" Very enthusiastic about Al Fresco dining. It's nice to have an outdoor option.
- **How have customers reacted to the outdoor dining option?**
  - Server #1: They have never heard any complaints about the loss of parking from the customers
  - Server #2: Some people have different risk levels and are not ready to eat inside. Also, some people want to bring their children but they are not allowed inside because of their license. Having the outdoor space allows them to bring their children.
- **Have you had trouble hiring staff because the restaurant does not provide parking?**
  - Server #2: half the staff doesn't own a car. Most staff live in the neighborhood. He feels like the staff became more localized during the pandemic, implying that staff moved closer to work during the pandemic. In fact, they had to hire more staff due to having more tables.
- **How do you receive deliveries? Has Al Fresco dining made receiving deliveries difficult in any way?**
  - Server #1: Hermosillo receives deliveries from the street. Delivery trucks park in the passing lane and wheel deliveries across the street to the door.

Questions to customers:

- **What are the modes of travel you use to get here?**
  - If you drove, where did you park? How long did it take for you to park?
    - Customer #1: walked tonight! Other times they bike
    - Customer #2: drove tonight - parked in the parking lot. It usually takes them 1-3 minutes to find parking.
    - Customer #3: walked tonight! They live two blocks away. They do own a car, though. When they are looking for parking in the neighborhood, they rarely park further than two blocks from their home.
    - Customer #4: Walked!
    - Customer #5: Drive - he usually parks in the residential area off of Ave 52. They find parking immediately.
    - Customer #6: Drive - he usually parks on Lincoln Ave in the residential area. They find parking immediately.
    - Customer #7: Drive - he usually parks on Lincoln Ave in the residential area. They find parking immediately.
    - Customer #8: Rideshare
- **Does the outdoor dining area make the restaurant a better/more attractive option than other restaurants/bars in the area?**
  - Customer #1: likes having the outdoor option. They own a dog and it gives them the option to bring the dog to dine out.
  - Customer #2: they generally prefer to dine outside.
  - Customer #3: he usually likes to sit outside. Loves having the space.
  - Customer #5: Yes, it allows him to bring his dog if he'd like. He also knows outdoor dining is preferred amongst some of his friends. He doesn't necessarily prioritize outdoor dining, but having Al Fresco at Hermosillo makes it a viable option when deciding where to dine with friends that do.
  - Customer #6: Yes, they don't necessarily care if they dine indoors or out, but having the outdoor dining area makes The Hermosillo less crowded which he does value
  - Customer #7: it makes no difference. "Al fresco doesn't influence me, but I recognize the public benefit of having outdoor" space
  - Customer #8: Yes, it is better than having parking spaces
- **Have you used the metered off-street parking lots nearby? Currently, the cost is a flat fee by the hour. How do you feel about fluctuating/dynamic parking fees?**
  - Customer #2: likes the idea of a dynamic pricing program as long as it subsidizes the cost for low-income drivers. Would only support it if low-income drivers were subsidized upfront, not after payment.
  - Customer #3: would support dynamic pricing instead of a flat fee in the public lots.

- Customer #4: indifferent towards dynamic pricing for parking.
- Customer #5: Yes, used to park there many times. Yes, likes “dynamic payment” - more rational. “As a consumer, I like variable pricing because sometimes it’ll be free and it’ll benefit me. And the times that I go that are free are more often than the peak hours.” If they were to go during peak hours, it would be brief, so he wouldn’t pay that much. Plus, the cost would be offset from all the times he parked there for free.
- Customer #6: Yes, rarely though, because the lots are always full. Indifferent towards dynamic pricing - he would pay regardless of the price. He likes dynamic pricing in theory
- Customer #7: Never parked in the lots. Agrees with dynamic pricing
- Customer #8: Yes - indifferent towards dynamic pricing
- **The Al Fresco program allows restaurants to offer more outdoor dining options: on the sidewalk, in the curb lane, in the whole street, and in off-street parking lots. Is there anything you would change to the existing program?**
  - Customer #1: doesn’t mind the loss of parking. Would like to see more Open Streets, streets closed to vehicles for active transportation users.
  - Customer #2: fine with Al Fresco dining program as it is.
  - Customer #3: Likes the Al Fresco dining program. He thinks the current program is not fully committing, though. He would like to see the outdoor space fully converted. He thinks it’s weird that it still feels like a parking lot.
  - Customer #4: Likes program but had a slight negative reaction when I mentioned that it replaces parking. She thinks other cities are better equipped for Al Fresco dining because they are more walkable. Everyone in LA drives. But she does not know enough about the program to suggest ways to change it.
  - Customer #5: Likes Al Fresco. He thinks it’s a bit unfair that some restaurants have the outdoor space to expand their dining area and others don’t. Because of this, he thinks that some driving lanes should be converted for outdoor dining for those restaurants with no outdoor space. A restaurant’s geographic location dictates whether they can have outdoor dining. Some places can close off their lots, curb space; while other places don’t have that option. He understands you can’t close off major thoroughfares. Before, Hermosillo's lot accommodated some cars . Now those cars are parking on the street. Thinks “Al Fresco” should be consistent because outdoor space is valuable.
  - Customer #6: He wishes there could be both outdoor space and a parking lot, but he recognizes that is not possible and is appreciative of the outdoor dining area
  - Customer #7: It should be permanent
  - Customer #8: Not make it temporary. He is a co-owner of a bar in Long Beach called The Grasshopper. Their revenue has increased since Al Fresco. From Monday-Wed, revenue is the same, most people sit indoors. But Thursday-Sunday, customers spill into the outdoor space, and revenue has increased 100% compared to pre-Al Fresco. He is a fan of the program. The city gets more tax dollars. Less people are driving, less DUIs, less harm on the street. He’s had only two complaints about lack of parking in the two years since they added Al Fresco space. Most customers arrive by rideshare and e-scooters. It is common to find 6-8 scooters parked outside the bar.



## Writer's Diet Score

### The Writer's Diet

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<input type="checkbox"/> be-verbs	<input type="checkbox"/> zombie nouns	<input type="checkbox"/> prepositions	<input type="checkbox"/> ad-words	<input type="checkbox"/> it, this, that, there

**📄 FIT & TRIM**  
This document has 1764 eligible words.

▶ We use The Hermosillo as a...

Note. Aerial imagery taken from Google...

Al Fresco gives The Hermosillo the...

Not all customers drive to restaurants,...

Our survey of The Hermosillo employees...

The Hermosillo offers various outdoor...

Given both employee and customer enthusiasm...

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