



## **Local News**

# Santa Barbara's Jason Harris to Recommend Date Extension for State Street Promenade

*The economic development manager expects the need for outdoor seating will continue, and he's preparing a report to present to the City Council*



Jason Harris, Santa Barbara's economic development manager, says the State Street promenade has helped many businesses survive the COVID-19 pandemic, and he plans to propose that the City Council keep the promenade in place past Sept. 8. (Joshua Molina / Noozhawk file photo)

By Joshua Molina, Noozhawk Staff Writer  
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[Jason Harris](#), Santa Barbara's economic development manager, plans to recommend to the [Santa Barbara City Council](#) extending the State Street promenade past Sept. 8.

Harris said he is preparing a report to take to the full City Council in August.

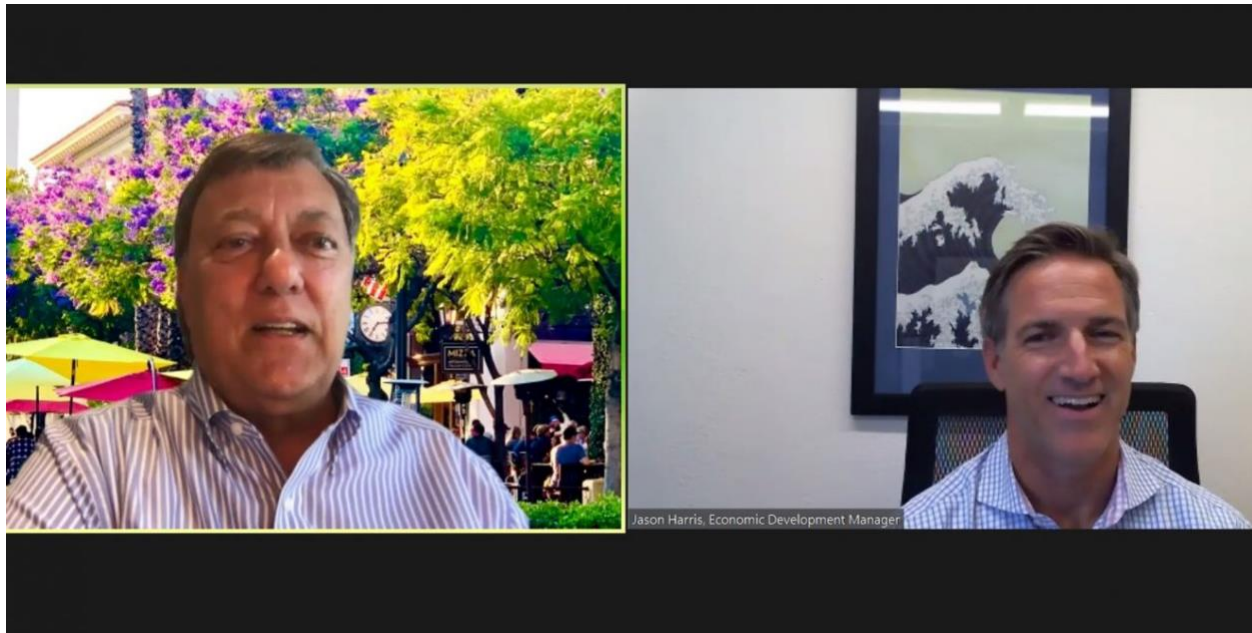
The council closed nine blocks of State Street to vehicles and opened it to pedestrians and bicyclists over the Memorial Day weekend. The opening, however, was an emergency action, meant to allow restaurants to serve customers outdoors to comply with social distancing requirements amid the [COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Harris said it's unlikely that the need for outdoor seating will go away soon.

"We are going to be wearing masks in public, I would foresee, for the foreseeable future," Harris said. "There will still be a desire for the public to be in open air environments as much as they possibly can to a certain extent."

Harris made the comments during Wednesday's [Santa Barbara Leadership Team](#) meeting with former Mayor Hal Conklin and about 100 members of the business community. The group meets online weekly. Conklin has hosted a variety of guests, including Santa Barbara Councilwoman Meagan Harmon and Councilwoman Kristen Sneddon, and city officials such as Rob Dayton, the city's transportation and parking planning manager.

Conklin typically banters with his guests, and brings a sense of history and context to the conversations.



Hal Conklin, left, and Jason Harris attend Wednesday's online Santa Barbara Leadership Team meeting, (Joshua Molina / Noozhawk photo)

Harris, who joined the city from Santa Monica in March, said that many questions remain about the future of State Street.

If the council were to decide to make the promenade permanent, there would need to be a community process with a lot of input.

The question of whether to allow bicycles, and how to regulate them, and whether to maintain the amount of outdoor dining space are among the questions that would have to be answered once the council transitions from the temporary opening to an interim situation.

After that, the city would have to decide on the streetscape, and what changes would need to be made on a permanent basis.

"We are talking, in actuality, a multiyear effort," Harris said.

Even the restaurants that have outdoor dining would have to seek formal approval and licensing eventually, if the temporary condition transitions into something permanent.

"We have a process today for outdoor dining," Harris said. "There is a license agreement. There is an application. We have just suspended all of that. Once we determine, yes, we want to retain it, then I think we would direct all of those operators, 'You need to get your actual space licensed.'"

He said there would have to be a discussion about conformity and to what degree there should be strong standards and guidelines for outdoor dining.

"The guidelines we established, those were done in an ad-hoc, quick manner to create safe conditions and address the basic conditions, but there wasn't an extensive process of design guideline development, architectural features and consistency of materials," Harris said. "We would want to have that discussion to a certain extent."

He said he has been impressed with the positive feedback he has received from opening the street. Many State Street businesses are doing better financially during the pandemic than during prior years because of the new promenade, he said.

Still, he said, too many businesses are closed.

"It is still concerning to see a number of businesses not opening, and not necessarily knowing if that's a corporate business decision waiting for public health conditions to improve or some other underlying issues," Harris said.

Conklin suggested that Harris and the city should look at examples of what other cities are doing with redevelopment and outdoor spaces. Conklin said he recently visited Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade and believes Santa Barbara is in a better position.

"In many ways, Santa Barbara looked more appealing to me than the promenade in Santa Monica," Conklin said. "It looked like it had its day, and all of a sudden Santa Barbara is the new place."

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