

Strolling and drinking starts in downtown Williamsburg on Monday

WHRO | By [Williamsburg Watch](#)

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Photo via the city of Williamsburg

Boundaries for the new Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area. This story was reported and written by WHRO media partner [Williamsburg Watch](#).

Sipping an alcoholic beverage while shopping at Merchants Square starts Monday, July 20.

Williamsburg announced a yearlong pilot program for what it calls a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area along Duke of Gloucester Street between College Corner and Henry Street.

Within those boundaries, adults can purchase an alcoholic beverage in an official cup and drink from it while shopping in participating businesses from noon to 9 p.m. There will be outdoor signs identifying the [boundaries](#) of the zone.

“We’ve seen how adding outdoor tables and chairs to Merchants Square has encouraged people to dine, gather and spend time downtown, bringing new life and energy to downtown Williamsburg in the past few years,” Mayor Douglas G. Pons said. “The DORA is an enhancement that makes our downtown even more dynamic, and I’m excited to see how trying new things like this continues to make Williamsburg a destination where people want to be.”

The concept of allowing people to walk with alcoholic beverages in designated areas has become significantly more common in the past decade, as cities look to boost downtown activity. It’s usually done through carefully regulated "social districts" or designated outdoor refreshment areas rather than by repealing open-container laws entirely.

The best-known examples may be the French Quarter in New Orleans and Savannah, GA, which allow to-go cups in much of the historic district.

Fredericksburg adopted a sip and stroll policy for its First Friday arts event, allowing adults to drink from to-go cups.

Williamsburg City Council approved the ordinance to allow the DORA two years ago, and the city has been working since that time to obtain the necessary license from the state alcohol control board and to sign up participating restaurants and businesses.

Businesses that will allow customers to bring in their beverages will have a sign on the door identifying them as participants, which means customers may bring the official cups inside. Businesses that choose not to participate can post a sign saying so. Restaurants that sell alcohol in the DORA cups will have a door sign identifying them.

The rules say you will not be allowed to enter a restaurant that serves alcohol carrying a drink purchased at a competitor, and no outside alcohol may be brought in.

The city’s ABC license for the pilot program expires June 30 of next year, according to a city press release. The city will evaluate the program before the expiration date and decide whether to continue the DORA and expand it.