

Evanston bakery uses Kickstarter to fund city's first 'parklet'

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Hewn bakery met its Kickstarter goal to fund Evanston's first "parklet." (Hewn photo)

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Most local parks are measured in acres and paid for with municipal bonds. But the next public space in Evanston will be crowdfunded, and the easiest way to describe its size is:

About the size of a car.

With the help of a successful Kickstarter campaign, a local bakery will build the city's first "parklet" — a small public seating and eating area that will occupy a horizontal parking space in front of the bakery. The Hewn bakery said in its Kickstarter campaign that the parklet will be made mostly from reclaimed wood and that it will include planters and a bike rack. The parklet will be portable and will be removed during winter.

The city is giving permission for use of the parking space but is not turning over ownership of any land, said Johanna Nyden, manager of Evanston's economic development division. Catherine Hurley, the city's sustainable programs coordinator, said the bakery likely will enter into an agreement with the city to maintain the public area.

As of early Tuesday, with less than a day to go in the Kickstarter drive, the parklet project raised a little more than \$15,000, exceeding the \$14,000 goal. Kickstarter funds will be used only for materials and construction of the parklet, which will rest on a 20-minute parking space.

Hurley said she hopes the open space, popularized in San Francisco and Seattle and building a small presence in Chicago, will give a small commercial stretch of Dempster Street a hip, welcoming feel. She said Kickstarter made sense for funding, both to spread construction costs and to confirm community support.

"Hopefully it will provide a restful and enjoyable outside space for people to connect," Hurley said. "We want it to be a place where people feel comfortable, invited and welcome."

Hewn co-owners Julie Matthei and Ellen King, who opened their bakery and lunch spot last year, emphasized that the parklet won't be for the exclusive use of bakery customers.

"We're piloting it," Matthei said. "But it's for the whole community."

Kristin Ihnchak, senior planner at the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, said a parklet in Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood was partially paid for with funds raised on Kickstarter. Ihnchak said it and another like it, at 2959 N. Lincoln Ave. in Lakeview, have been popular.

"The reason people like them is that they create a more active public space," Ihnchak said. "More people gathering in public spaces means more economic development for a business area."

Another Lakeview parklet is located at the corner of Southport Avenue and Addison Street, said Brian Bonanno, sustainability programs manager for the Andersonville Development Corporation.

Andersonville also has two parklets, Bonanno said. The one connected to Kickstarter, originally at 5228 N. Clark St., is being relocated to accommodate a loading area for a nearby dance studio. The second is at the corner of Clark Street and Olive Avenue.

Bonanno said use of Kickstarter seemed "seemed to us like a no-brainer. It was an awesome way to build community support for it." He said Kickstarter funds raised about \$7,000 of the approximately \$30,000 cost, with other money coming from private donations, as well as a Special Services Area tax fund targeted for local economic development.

"More people have grown used to (parklets) and seen that switching out a parking space for public space didn't end up killing any local businesses," he said.

King, Hewn's co-owner, is from Seattle, and she said parklets have improved neighborhoods there. They "kind of naturally help to slow cars, and just make the neighborhood more of an interesting place," she said.

King and Matthei said the structure will be built by Scott Simpson Builders, a Northbrook-based homebuilder that specializes in sustainable construction. That company designed Hewn, which features reclaimed wood and walls paneled with old metal roofing material from a barn. King said the parklet will include that type of paneling.

"I think it's a modern approach to building a sense of community, and I think Evanston really needs that," said Jason

Hall, co-owner of Paramour Bungalow, a home décor shop just up the street from Hewn. “I think it will have a good aesthetic. And it’s good to have places for people to congregate.”

The parklet will take up a little bit more than one parking space. Evanston's Nyden estimated the loss of revenue from the parking spot at less than \$1,000 annually. She said anticipated economic development likely exceed would that amount.

Hewn's King said: “That spot is taken by one person, typically, whereas, when we convert that small spot, it’ll be utilized by 10 to 15 people. A lot of our customers live in the neighborhood and walk.”

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