

SUPPORT CHICAGO SMALL BUSINESSES BY REDUCING RED TAPE

Policymakers can support small businesses and revitalize neighborhood business districts by cutting red tape, streamlining processes, and reducing the costs of launching and expanding Chicago businesses. This is a crucial time to break down barriers that cause unnecessary hardships for local businesses and curtail economic development. Examining and improving certain processes will also increase equity by reducing obstacles that have a profound impact on business owners in disinvested communities. This package of meaningful reforms should be promptly adopted by Chicago policymakers:

Special Use Permits

Many businesses that would like to open and expand in Chicago must obtain special use permits because their businesses do not fall within specific zoning designations. The process is antiquated, burdensome, and costly, hurting local entrepreneurs that can least afford the delays and money needed to navigate the process.

Recommendations:

- Eliminate the need for most special use permits to be approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals. The process of procuring a special use permit through the ZBA causes unreasonable delays and is often very expensive. Rather, allow administrators to approve special use permits unless there is an objection from the alderperson, which would then require approval by the ZBA.
- Streamline the documents that must be submitted to obtain a special use permit, eliminating a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Eliminate the requirement for expert witnesses to be present at Zoning Board of Appeal hearings when they are not needed.
- Eliminate the requirement for special use permit applications to be notarized.
- Eliminate the onerous notice-by-mail requirements for most special use permits in certain circumstances. Rely on a posted notice at the property and in common areas of condominiums or commercial properties.
- Reduce the cost of a special use permit for businesses with 50 or fewer employees from \$1000 to \$500.

Permits and Business Licenses

- All businesses applying for a business license should be connected with a coach/advocate to:
 - Provide guidance on the process.
 - Ensure they receive a uniform message from the various city departments.

- Intervene when undue delays interfere with the ability of a business to open, expand, or operate.
- Sidewalk cafes should have the option to automatically renew their license on an annual basis, unless there is an objection by the alderperson or city staff.
- The Department of Building sign permit process should move to be entirely online, should no longer require both paper and online permits.

Inspections

- Concrete time periods should be provided for inspections, so that permits can be granted in a timely manner.
- Guidelines should be established to ensure inspections are done in a consistent manner.

Transparency and Communication

- An ordinance should be passed to require BACP to post ordinances (including substitute ordinances), rules, and regulations that will impact small businesses on their website. This posting should include a brief description of the ordinance, rule, and/or regulation and its potential impact on small businesses. Small business owners and advocates should be provided ample time to elicit and submit comments, and ask questions about proposed ordinances, rules, and/or regulations.
- A task force should be appointed to examine, analyze, and make recommendations on how delegate agencies can be empowered to streamline city department processes. This task force should be comprised of policymakers, chamber and BSO leaders, and small business advocates.