

ORDER

WHEREAS, small businesses contribute significantly to the cultural fabric of Chicago by providing opportunities for upward mobility and strengthening Chicago's diverse economy; and

WHEREAS, it has become increasingly and prohibitively expensive to open and maintain a small business in Chicago; and

WHEREAS, small businesses are too frequently forced to manage high opening and operating costs due to many factors, including commercial rents, labor and overhead costs, uncertainty around tariffs, and changing consumer habits; and

WHEREAS, the City must continuously review—and when appropriate adjust—its licensing and permitting regulations, operations, and fees to ensure that they are not outdated, unnecessary, or creating undue hardship for small businesses; and

WHEREAS, the timeline to receive a businesses license is unpredictable, ranging from 2 to 9 weeks after submission of a license application; and

WHEREAS, in order to open a restaurant with an enclosed, weatherized sidewalk cafe, a small business must navigate at least three City portals: the Building Permit Portal, the Inspection, Permitting & Licensing Portal, and the Business Direct Portal; and

WHEREAS, to put up a business sign on the public way alone requires two permits—one submitted as a hard copy and the second submitted online—and separate reviews from the Department of Transportation, the Bureau of Zoning, the Department of Buildings, the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, and the local Aldermanic office; and

WHEREAS, in 2023, the State of Pennsylvania sought to support small businesses by creating a unified web portal in-house where small businesses could find information on license and permitting requirements, apply for licenses and permits, communicate with Pennsylvania government staff, check the status of their application, and request refunds if their application was not reviewed in a timely manner; and

WHEREAS, due to the unified web portal and promise to refund fees for untimely review, Pennsylvania cut the timeline to receive an initial corporate license from 8 weeks to 2 days; and

WHEREAS, New York City is following suit by auditing their licensing and permitting process and promising to cut fees and timelines in order to improve outcomes for their small businesses; and

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago maintains a Small Business Licensing website that includes general overviews of business license application processes and requirements and links to relevant websites but does not include relevant permitting information or allow for direct permit or license applications, instead redirecting to Chicago Business Direct. Nor does the Small Business Licensing website include inspection requirement information, status information for small businesses' permit and license applications, or general or personal expected review timelines; now, therefore,

BE IT ORDERED, that we, the Members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, hereby direct the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) to formulate an implementation plan for a "One-Stop Shop Business Licensing and Permitting Portal" through which small businesses in Chicago can (1) apply for or renew all licenses or permits, (2) request inspections, (3) coordinate directly with City Department liaisons, and (4) find personalized information including the status of their permit or license application, the status of their inspection request, and information about inspection requirements; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED, that in crafting this implementation plan, BACP, in consultation with the Departments of Buildings, Public Health, Fire, and Transportation, shall review the various applicable licenses, permits, inspections, applications, certificates, or other required approvals by the City of Chicago for small businesses; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED, that the implementation plan should include at a minimum the following information regarding each license, permit, inspection, application, certificate, or other required City approval for small businesses: (1) name, (2) issuing City department, (3) initial and renewal fees, (4) average timeline to successfully obtain, and (5) legislative process by which the fee for the required approval can be amended (e.g., City, State, or federal legislation, rule, or regulation); and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED, that the implementation plan should take into consideration existing City-operated portals, websites, directories, and other search engines where small businesses can locate initial and renewal approval requirements; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED, that BACP shall submit this implementation plan to the City Council within 90 days of passage of this Order. Within 30 days after plan submission, the Commissioner of BACP shall appear at a subject-matter hearing of the City Council Committee on License and Consumer Protection to discuss the contents of the implementation plan.



Matthew J. Martin
Alderman, 47th Ward