Re: Support Small Businesses With a Comprehensive Business Licensing and Permitting Portal

Dear Honorable Members of Chicago's City Council,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write in strong support of Alderman Martin's proposed Order directing the Mayor's Office Business, Economic & Neighborhood Development Team (BEND Team) and the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) to develop an implementation plan for a One-Stop Shop Business Licensing and Permitting Portal. This thoughtful proposal represents an important step toward modernizing Chicago's business licensing and permitting system, reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, and making it easier for entrepreneurs to open and grow businesses throughout the City.

Small businesses are the backbone of Chicago's neighborhoods. They create local jobs, foster economic development, strengthen our communities, and contribute to the City's economic vitality. Yet many small businesses are facing an array of challenges, including rising costs, disruptive trade policies, and economic uncertainty. Chicago small businesses also face difficult, time-consuming, and costly processes.

Restaurant owners, for example, may need to use at least three different City portals while coordinating permits, inspections, and licenses. Installing a business sign on the public way requires two separate permit applications and reviews by four City departments. These are only examples of how antiquated and fragmented licensing and permitting processes impact Chicago small businesses. Every day a small business must wait to open its doors because they cannot procure licenses or permits is a day of lost revenue for the business and lost tax revenue for the City.

Alderman Martin's proposed Order will direct the Mayor's Office BEND Team and BACP to formulate an implementation plan for a "One-Stop Shop Business Licensing and Permitting Portal" through which small businesses in Chicago can:

- apply for or renew all licenses, or permits,
- request and reschedule inspections,
- coordinate directly with the most relevant City Department liaisons, and
- find accurate information including the status of their permit or license application, the status of their inspection request, and information about inspection requirements.

In addition, the plan will assess common reasons for application denials, the stages in which applications are most often denied, the frequency in which a single application requires multiple inspections, and the average timeline for key steps of applications.

The plan must identify the required technological and operational changes necessary to create the portal and must include an estimate of the cost of new or updated systems and the qualifications of third-party vendors that may be needed.

Read the full Substitute Order here.

These reforms can produce meaningful results. Pennsylvania developed a unified business licensing portal that reduced the time required to obtain an initial corporate license from eight weeks to two days. New York City has likewise undertaken efforts to streamline business licensing and permitting to improve outcomes for entrepreneurs.

A comprehensive and coordinated licensing and permitting system will reduce the time and costs of starting or growing a business in Chicago. The proposed portal will support small, local businesses without the resources to navigate difficult and time-consuming processes.

We respectfully urge you to co-sponsor this Order and to vote in favor of its passage.

Thank you for your consideration.

Albany Park Chamber of Commerce
Andersonville Chamber of Commerce
Belmont-Central Chamber of Commerce
Building Owners and Managers Association of Chicago
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce
Edgewater Chamber of Commerce
The Foundation of Little Village
Gladstone Park Chamber of Commerce
Greater Bridgeport & South Loop Chamber
Greater Northwest Chicago Development Corporation
Greater Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce
Greater Roseland Chamber of Commerce
Greater Southwest Development Corporation
Illinois Restaurant Association
Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago
Institute for Justice Clinic on Entrepreneurship
Innovation Metropolis SMART Tech District
Jefferson Park Chamber of Commerce
Lakeview East Chamber of Commerce
Lakeview Roscoe Village Chamber of Commerce
Lawndale Business Renaissance Association
Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce
Lincoln Square Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce
Logan Square Chamber of Commerce
National Federation of Independent Business
New Covenant Community Development Corporation
North Branch Works
North River Commission
Northcenter Chamber of Commerce
Old Town Merchants & Residents Association
Polish American Chamber of Commerce
Pulaski Elston Business Association
Quad Communities Development Corporation
Rogers Park Business Alliance
Six Corners Chamber of Commerce
Small Business Advocacy Council
Small Business Majority
Strong Towns Chicago
South East Chicago Commission
South Shore Chamber of Commerce
Uptown Chamber of Commerce
Washington Park Chamber of Commerce
West Town Chamber of Commerce
Wicker Park Bucktown Chamber of Commerce
Woodlawn Chamber of Commerce
Woodstock Institute