

The small business community and advocates for neighborhood revitalization are calling on policymakers to cut red tape, streamline processes, and reduce the costs of launching and expanding Chicago businesses. The following reforms will support small businesses, foster economic growth in neighborhoods, and improve the Chicago economy.

Streamline Zoning Requirements So Businesses Can Open and Thrive

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 who can least afford the delays and money needed to navigate the process. Chicago policymakers should:

- Eliminate the need for most special use permits to be approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals because the hearing process is costly, causes unreasonable delays, and is unnecessary in most situations.
- Streamline documents that must be submitted to obtain a special use permit, eliminating a one-size-fits-all approach.
- When hearings are needed, 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.

Process Improvements

- Require inspections to be done in a timely and consistent manner.
- Sidewalk café should have the option to automatically renew their license on an annual basis unless there is an objection by the alderperson or staff.
- The Department of Building should offer both online and paper options for the sign permit process.

Debt Checks and Holds

- Chicago conducts debt checks when entrepreneurs are seeking a business license. Unfortunately, these personal debt checks are often not accurate and result in extraordinarily long delays. Chicago should:
- Eliminate the delay of far-reaching debt checks that Chicago is otherwise not interested in collecting and are often inaccurate.
- Expedite the process of remaining debt checks and ensure inaccuracies are quickly corrected.

Communication

- Establish a firm policy that all license denials explain the legal standard applicants failed to meet in writing.
- Ensure business owners have an advocate to ensure they receive a uniform message from various departments and staff. Empower that individual with the ability to intervene when undue delays interfere with the ability of a business to open or operate.