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MAYOR BRANDON JOHNSON'S FIRST YEAR DRIVES GROUNDBREAKING ECONOMIC AND NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN CHICAGO

Mayor Brandon Johnson's transformative initiatives and strategic investments promote equitable growth and development across Chicago

CHICAGO – As a result of the first year of Mayor Brandon Johnson's leadership, Chicago has experienced transformative growth and development in business, economic, and neighborhood development. Several initiatives and funding opportunities have been successfully launched and executed, reinforcing Mayor Johnson's commitment to equitable and sustainable development across the city.

"I am deeply committed to ensuring that every Chicagoan benefits from our city's growth, fostering an environment where both businesses and communities can thrive," said **Mayor Brandon Johnson**. "The past year of initiatives represent our dedication to building a more equitable, dynamic, and prosperous Chicago for all."

A key driver of the Mayor's economic development strategy is the new \$1.25 billion Housing and Economic Development Bond, passed by City Council in April 2024. The bond helps move the City away from historic over-reliance on Tax Increment Financing, towards a more equitable and consistent funding source. Bond funding will be channeled into high-priority projects that will significantly benefit local communities, promoting sustainable growth and improved quality of life for all Chicago residents.

In support of making economic development a more equitable and efficient process, Mayor Johnson signed the 'Cut the Tape' executive order, which aims to cut down bureaucratic obstacles and foster more efficient collaboration between departments to speed up development.

As part of the executive order, Mayor Johnson released the '[Cut the Tape' report in April 2024](#), outlining over 100 recommendations for development process improvement including enhancements in internal and external communication, accountability, resource



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optimization, and the elimination of redundant processes – thus setting a clear roadmap for actionable steps to optimize development procedures and initiate progress.

Small Business Support

Under Mayor Brandon Johnson, the Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) enhanced the licensing experience, engaged extensively with local business service organizations, and curated business education resources.

BACP issued over 6,000 new business licenses during Mayor Johnson's first year in office, including more sidewalk café permits than any year since 2019. To support new entrepreneurs and existing business owners, the City's Small Business Center decreased the online license processing time from 17 days to 11. The City's licensing webpages have been overhauled to provide time-saving instructional information and step-by-step licensing guidance. Other enhancements include creating a real-time wait time tracker for both online and in-person licensing, and remote queuing for in-person visits.

The City grew the Neighborhood Business Development Center (NBDC) program by an additional 18 organizations, from 53 to a total of 71 community-based organizations. Five of the new local community and economic development organizations have a city-wide footprint. Through the concerted efforts of dedicated NBDC partners, there were 5,491 business consultations, 2,876 referrals, and 2,392 new business outreach impressions.

BACP provided a number of programs and resources to support businesses throughout their entrepreneurial journeys. BACP hosted over 100 webinars over the previous year, reaching over 9,500 attendees. Additionally, BACP redesigned the Entrepreneur Certificate Program. The free and optional program is available to attendees of BACP's free business education webinars. Since the revamp, which included launching a new user-friendly portal, BACP has seen a more than 400 percent increase in signups compared to the same time last year. Additionally, more people completed the program in the first quarter of 2024 than graduated in all of 2023.

BACP hosted three Chicago Small Business Expos from May 2023-May 2024. The expos provided entrepreneurs with a forum to obtain expert advice, connect with industry experts and government agencies, learn new business strategies, meet other business owners, and attend an inspiring keynote address.

Additionally, on May 8, 2024, the City held the first Youth Business Expo, in partnership with Chicago Public Schools. The free expo provided over 225 high school students with the opportunity to hear inspirational stories during the keynote panel, network one-on-one



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with exhibitors, attend a workshop with industry experts, and take professional headshots to use for marketing purposes. The students left the expo with actionable strategies and practical tips to implement directly in their current or future local businesses. The expo was a glimpse into how the City is creating opportunities for Chicago youth to create and innovate.

In February 2024, BACP hosted the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Driver Awards Ceremony where eight wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) taxi drivers were recognized for their premier customer service and dedication to riders with disabilities and each award recipient received a free taxi medallion license. The award highlights the City's effort to expand access to WAV taxis and serves as an incentive for taxi drivers to drive and operate wheelchair accessible taxis.

Finally, BACP advanced engagement with Chicago's businesses, workers, and consumers. The BACP Social Media toolkit webpage as a resource for BACP partners and the public to help share resources and information about Chicago's business education programs. Graphics and flyers, along with sample text, can be used to help cross-promote BACP's most popular programs. To learn more, visit Chicago.gov/BACPSocial. Also, to celebrate small businesses, the Shop Local Chicago outlines the benefits of shopping local such as the shopping experience, workforce contribution, and local economy boost. Learn more about the ongoing campaign by visiting Chicago.gov/ShopLocal.

Business Development

Mayor Johnson's administration has injected vitality into Chicago's local economy through the award of \$25 million in Community Development Grants to over 30 businesses and nonprofits, leveraging a total of \$110 million in new investment in Chicago. These funds have been instrumental in supporting small businesses and revitalizing neighborhood commercial corridors.

Additionally, the Small Business Improvement Fund was for the first time used within the Loop, awarding grants to six restaurateurs that are investing in Chicago's downtown. The expansion of grant programs further demonstrates the mayor's dedication to fostering a supportive environment for economic activity in the Loop.

The launch of the \$5 million Good Food Fund and the Early Stage Food Business Incubator Program by the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, under Mayor Johnson's guidance, marks a significant stride towards nurturing innovative food enterprises and supporting community health initiatives.



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"Through targeted investments and thoughtful initiatives, we are developing Chicago's economy, nurturing communities, and supporting local businesses," said **Deputy Mayor of Business, Economic, and Neighborhood Development Kenya Merritt**. "Our initiatives are focused on harnessing Chicago's full potential to ensure prosperity is widespread and accessible."

Community Investment

The administration has also allocated \$8 million in city support for historic preservation projects, safeguarding the architectural and cultural heritage of Chicago for future generations.

The commitment of \$1.3 million in city support for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development projects aligns with Mayor Johnson's objective to create affordable, accessible, and sustainable housing and development, promoting equitable growth throughout Chicago.

Mayor Johnson recognizes the importance of cultural engagement in community development. His administration's allocation of \$1 million in grants through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) for community programs through the Neighborhood Access Program (NAP) reflects an inclusive approach to cultural development. This commitment is part of the larger \$23.5 million in direct support to artists and cultural organizations provided through DCASE's annual and recovery grant programs in 2023, a 25% increase over 2022.

With DCASE, the administration announced \$6.8 million from the Mellon Foundation to support the creation of eight new Chicago monuments in June 2023. These eight projects will add—permanently and temporarily—to the City of Chicago's collection citywide and memorialize events, people, and groups that historically have been excluded or underrepresented. Additional funding from Mellon will also support ongoing programs that facilitate the continued engagement of artists and communities around monuments, public art, and cultural history.

Mayor Brandon Johnson's leadership has thus catalyzed a new era of growth and prosperity in Chicago, marked by significant investments and forward-thinking policies aimed at creating a more inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable city for all residents.

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