



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 5, 2019

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND BACP ANNOUNCE REFORMS TO EXPAND ONE-STOP-SHOP SERVICES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURS

New Regional Small Business Centers and Fast-Track Business Signs initiative both to reduce red tape and bring much-needed licensing support to the neighborhoods

CHICAGO—Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) today announced two landmark programs to better support Chicago's small business owners by increasing community resources and removing red tape for thousands of entrepreneurs. As part of the Mayor's 2020 Budget, five new Regional Small Business Centers will be established next year to provide residents with easy access to business licensing support and information in their communities.

To make it even easier for entrepreneurs to get their business started, the City will also implement a new Fast-Track Business Signs initiative allowing businesses to apply for on-premise signs at the same time as their business license. Consolidating the process to obtain an on-premise sign with the licensing application will eliminate a complicated process and will expedite the process for obtaining on-premises signs from several months to the day they get a business license.

"No business should have to come all the way to City Hall for support nor wait months for permits they deserve," said Mayor Lightfoot. "Chicago's small businesses are fundamentally rooted in, hiring in and building wealth in our neighborhoods – which is why with these reforms, the City is coming directly to you and your communities to ensure local business owners and entrepreneurs have the resources they need to thrive."

BACP currently provides \$3.4 million annually in funding to 70 delegate agencies for a variety of general business assistance programs. However, specialized licensing support is only available at the Small Business Center at City Hall and at periodic events in the community. This 15 percent increase in funding in 2020 will be used to establish community liaisons at five Regional Small Business Centers, each with the training and expertise to engage and consult business owners regarding the licensing process year-round.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



“Small business owners are the beating heart of our communities,” said BACP Commissioner Rosa Escareno. “Now, new entrepreneurs will not have to come downtown for business license consultations, online license application assistance and license readiness support. This means less time spent on applications, quicker license issuance and more successful businesses.”

Currently, thousands of businesses must go through a complicated process to obtain a permit to hang a sign showing they are open for business. However, the application process to obtain this sign permit is separate from the business license application, which creates red tape that can hold up signs for several months. The Fast-Track Business Sign Program removes this obstacle by combining the on-premises sign application and payment into BACP’s license application process.

“For too long, small businesses have had to wait months for a sign permit before they could tell their neighbors that they were open for business. The Fast-Track Business Sign program will cut through red tape and make it easier for a new business to get started,” said Elliot Richardson of the Small Business Advocacy Council. “We applaud the Mayor’s Office, BACP, and the City Council in improving the City’s climate for small businesses and entrepreneurs.”

One Fast-Track Business Sign will be available for any ground-floor business as part of their business license application with BACP. The sign must advertise the business itself, be no larger than 16 square feet, and cannot extend over the public way. It must be located on the interior of a ground-floor window without dynamic imaging, flashing or video display and, if electrically hard-wired, the sign will still need a Department of Buildings (DOB) electric permit.

“We are constantly identifying ways to improve the permitting process for small business owners,” DOB Commissioner Judy Frydland. “This program is a product of multiple City Departments working together with small businesses to identify efficiencies and remove barriers to business success.”

These two programs are part of BACP’s ongoing efforts to streamline the licensing process and provide business education to all entrepreneurs. BACP issues over 60,000 licenses and 20,000 Public Way Permits. With over 30,000 consultations at their One-Stop-Shop Small Business Center, BACP has prioritized efficiency and training to reduce wait time by over 25 percent. BACP also holds 100 workshops each year for entrepreneurs, along with five Neighborhood Expos, providing support to over 4,000 entrepreneurs annually.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



“As Chairman of the City Council License & Consumer Protection Committee and Alderman of the 37th Ward, I am a long-time champion of promoting and expanding opportunities for businesses of all types - small, minority- and women-owned, as well as major retail, services, manufacturing and tech services throughout the 37th Ward and across the City of Chicago,” said 37th Ward Alderman Emma Mitts. “I thank Mayor Lightfoot and BACP for taking these proactive steps to ensure that businesses and entrepreneurs in every corner of the City have the tools they need to succeed. Strong economic empowerment initiatives are essential elements critical to the city’s success for today and the future. These reforms will make a difference for business owners in my communities, and I look forward to continuing to work with the Mayor and BACP to improve services for a diverse array of entrepreneurs and business owners.”

These initiatives are the next step in the City’s commitment to expanding opportunities for entrepreneurs in traditionally underinvested communities. Recently, Mayor Lightfoot announced INVEST South/West, a groundbreaking collaborative to coordinate investment in targeted communities. As part of this program, changes have been made to the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund (NOF) to allow more neighborhood entrepreneurs greater access to resources. BACP will be partnering with the Department of Planning and Development to coordinate trainings for NOF grant winners and applicants on construction, management, financing, bookkeeping and operations.

###