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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT PROPOSES BUSINESS-FRIENDLY REFORMS TO PUBLIC WAY USE PERMIT PROCESS

Reforms to shorten application time up to 60 days and remove duplicative city approval processes related to permit applications for signs, underground vaults, sidewalk cafes and other uses of the public way

CHICAGO – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today introduced an ordinance to streamline the process for obtaining a City Public Way Use Permit. The Mayor's proposal will remove the duplicative City Council approval requirement for these permits, preserving the local Alderman's right to review the application on the front-end, while eliminating the time that business owners spend waiting for permit issuance after they have already received Departmental and aldermanic approval.

Changes to the process are expected to shorten the application time up to 60 days, thereby reducing red tape and improving departmental service for thousands of businesses who undergo the permit process.

"Small businesses are the heart of Chicago's economy and critical to our neighborhoods," said Mayor Lightfoot. "This reform is something that has been brought to my attention from the business community many times throughout my tenure as Mayor, and I have listened. Small business reform is a fundamental part of my platform and I am committed to making city processes easier for all of our entrepreneurs. Business owners should know that they have an ally at City Hall."

Public Way Use Permits are issued by the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) for a five-year term. There are over 200 different types of permits, the most common of which are for Signs, Awnings, Light Fixtures, Sidewalk Cafes and Canopies. A Department of Buildings permit is also required if permanent installation is taking place, zoning approval from the Department of Planning and Development is required if there is signage or advertisement involved and Chicago Department of Transportation approval is required if anything is being installed to or under the public way. Currently, there are over 21,000 active permits.



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Currently, each individual Public Way Use Permit requires the application be signed by the local alderman, reviewed by relevant City Departments and then generated into an Ordinance that must pass City Council. Under the Mayor's proposal, the local Alderman's front-end review process will be preserved. The Alderman will have 30 days to review each application and provide a recommendation. BACP will ultimately review these applications to make a determination and issue the permit. This will remove the back-end City Council approval process and up to 60 days of unneeded wait time for applicants.

"Small business owners waiting for public way use sign permits cannot announce they are open for business and with each passing day, risk losing revenue and momentum." said Elliot Richardson, Co-Founder and President of the Small Business Advocacy Council. "Chicago business owners understand the importance of eliminating unnecessary red tape. This reform will have a real and meaningful impact on Chicago's small businesses and local economies."

Grounds for denial will not change under the Mayor's proposal- permits will be denied by BACP if they are not in the best interest of the public, if they will create a nuisance, if they will have a harmful impact on the community or if the public way use does not complement the quality of the existing landscape. As the authority on the character of the public way for the community they represent, BACP will look to the Alderman's recommendation when determining whether or not to issue the permit. Applicants will also have an opportunity to appeal decisions.

"Aldermen have a day-to-day familiarity with their wards that cannot be replicated by an administrative department," said BACP Commissioner Rosa Escareno. "That is why this proposal is a win-win: it removes an unnecessary burden from business owners while preserving the importance of aldermanic input and bringing about increased efficiency in our Department's processes."

This initiative is the latest in Mayor Lightfoot's efforts to reduce red tape and to provide much-needed support for Chicago's small business owners. Following passage by City Council this year, beginning on February 1, 2020, merchants that sell non-food merchandise from within a mobile vehicle will be able for the first time to receive a two-year, renewable Mobile Merchant license. Food Trucks, an essential part of Chicago's thriving culinary scene, will also be able to operate in the same location for up to four hours, doubling the potential profit time. On March 1, prospective business owners will be eligible through their business license application to apply for a permit for a basic sign that does not obstruct the public way. As part of Mayor Lightfoot's budget, Regional Small Business Centers are being



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developed to provide licensing support in neighborhoods throughout the city in by the end of 2020.

This public way reform is part of BACP's ongoing efforts to streamline the licensing and permitting processes and provide business education to all entrepreneurs. 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 in 2019. BACP also holds 100 workshops each year for entrepreneurs, along with five Neighborhood Expos, providing support to over 4,000 entrepreneurs annually. BACP is planning workshops and educational campaigns in the coming months to inform entrepreneurs of the Mayor's latest reform efforts.

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