

Sidewalk dining in Chu's sights

A proposal before the Board of Supervisors would lower the permit fees that restaurants pay to place tables on sidewalks.

Brent Begin, The Examiner

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SAN FRANCISCO - The sidewalk café has long been part of San Francisco's joie de vivre. Now, The City's newest supervisor wants to make it cheaper for restaurants and coffee shops to set up chairs and tables.

Interim Supervisor Carmen Chu's proposal would cut the cost of permits and fees required for businesses to serve an espresso in the crisp morning air. She told The Examiner that this is her first substantive piece of legislation since taking over Ed Jew's seat in September.

Chu said the cuts are possible because The City has become more efficient in the way it handles the inspection and filing process. That adds up to thousands of dollars in savings that should be "passed on to small businesses," she said.

"It contributes to the vibrancy of The City," Chu said. "It makes it easier for people to do business in The City."

The public works code currently requires businesses to pay more than \$134 to buy or renew a permit. The new ordinance would cut the initial cost to \$104 and the annual renewal cost to \$52.

Sidewalk cafés are also required to pay an inspection fee per square foot of occupancy. That fee would go down almost \$3 per foot if the ordinance were approved.

Chu said restaurants and cafés in San Francisco are already saddled with high costs, from health care fees to one of the highest minimum wages in the country.

"Every little thing counts," she said, adding that her own parents were restaurant owners.

Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi passed a law in September 2006 that allowed cafés all over The City, not just in special commercial zones, to serve customers in front of their buildings. The legislation's approval upped the number of establishments eligible to apply for permits from 380 to 539.

Existing law requires owners to keep at least six feet of sidewalk clear and tables and chairs cannot block driveways or ramps. Three violations per year could mean a revoked permit.

Those requirements would not change under Chu's ordinance.

bbegin@examiner.com