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**SUPERVISOR KATY TANG HOLDS HEARING AT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ON
STREAMLINING PERMITTING PROCESS FOR RESTAURANTS IN SAN FRANCISCO**

City departments presented process improvements to address cumbersome restaurant permitting process

Supervisor Katy Tang held a hearing this week at the Board of Supervisors Budget and Finance Sub-Committee to identify ways for the City to streamline permitting processes and improve the customer experience for those looking to start and expand restaurants in San Francisco. Those present included staff from the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), Planning Department, Office of Small Business, Office of the Treasurer and Tax Collector (TTX), Fire Department (SFFD), Department of Public Health (SFDPH), and Department of Building Inspection (DBI).

A previous hearing on the subject was held in July 2015, at which the Controller's Office presented [a report](#) mapping the process of permitting a new restaurant in San Francisco. Findings from the report resulted in recommendations including better department collaboration and improving customer service for permit applicants. At that time, city staff presented improvements including the launch of the [San Francisco Business Portal](#), the City's online tool for navigating how to start, manage, and grow a business in San Francisco. Another major focus of the hearing was the soon-to-launch Small Business Acceleration Program, which would focus on providing customized support to those looking to start or expand a restaurant in San Francisco.

"I am always thrilled when a new restaurant wants to open in the Sunset District," said Supervisor Tang. "But the reality is that months or even years often pass between signing a lease and welcoming the first customers, which can be cost prohibitive in an already risky industry. I am glad that our departments have made some improvements, but there is certainly more work ahead."

The San Francisco Business Portal program Director Jason Hemmerle provided an update on new features of the website, which launched in 2014. Since the launch, the platform has continually improved and released new features including user profiles for online permit storage, progress tracking, and online permit submission. Since August, the site has seen over 1,600 user-generated profiles with over 4,000 users each month. By fall 2017, the site will allow electronic payment and data pre-fill from the user-profile.

The newest program to provide tailored assistance to restaurants is the Small Business Acceleration Program (SBAP). SBAP Manager Katie Skjerpig shared objectives of the program, which include a holistic and collaborative experience between business owners and city departments. To date, the SBAP has assisted over 70 businesses, and will continue to grow its client base as well as identify process improvements while working with small businesses. The SBAP will also open a business resource center in the coming months at 1650 Mission, housed in the same building as Planning and DBI, where Planning and DBI staff can offer department referrals to SBAP.



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New small business owners are typically unfamiliar with the city permitting process and therefore benefit greatly from the customized assistance that the SBAP can provide. The 2015 Controller's Office report found that the average new restaurant required 86 days to open along with 26 hours of permitting work alone. There were many forms that were only available in paper form, a variety of different fees that could not be paid online, and many permits and payments required in-person visits to city offices.

"San Francisco's permitting process has been notoriously challenging for restaurateurs to navigate," said Golden Gate Restaurant Association (GGRA) Executive Director Gwyneth Borden. "The Small Business Acceleration Program is a huge step in the right direction that will help restaurateurs successfully obtain the permits they need to open their doors. This is a positive step forward for keeping San Francisco as a vibrant restaurant community."

"City staff were able to share many process improvements at the hearing, but there is still more work to be done," said Supervisor Tang. "As a city we should be using all tools at our disposal, especially technology, in order to remove every inefficiency or barrier to opening a small business. Small businesses offer the services and quality of life our residents desire while also providing jobs to our citizens."

Below is a summary of the improvements announced by departments at the hearing:

Office of Economic and Workforce Development

- Implementation of and continued improvements to the San Francisco Business Portal.
- Development and launch of Small Business Acceleration Program in collaboration with city departments.

Planning Department

- Community Business Priority Processing Program (CB3P) – ongoing implementation of a streamlined Conditional Use process for small and mid-sized businesses that qualify, with a 100% success rate for eligible restaurants.
- Continuation of Small Projects Team for those that do not qualify for CB3P, with a focus on Change of Use applications.
- Provide a 30-day timeline for referrals from the CA Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) and SFDPH along with concurrent review from Planning.

Treasurer and Tax Collector

- Reduction from 3-week processing of paper applications to 15 minutes with new business registration online.
- Consolidated two-step registration process with Treasurer-Tax Collector and Assessor-Recorder's Office.
- Improved processing time with city departments by providing real-time data sharing about registered businesses, tax compliance and account updates.
- Expanded partnership with SFDPH to bring workflow management solutions, streamline and digitize processing, and reduce restaurant license processing time by one month.



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Department of Public Health

- Now accepting credit cards and moving toward online payments.
- Providing online kiosk in reception area for permit application filing and to ensure completion of application with staff available to assist applicants.
- Weights and measures inspectors to combine visits with food inspectors.
- Permitting process reduced from 1 year to 30-45 days.

Department of Building Inspection

- Developed comprehensive permit and inspection services guidelines for restaurant alterations and new construction.
- Information sheet G-25, detailed step-by-step instructions and newly developed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) are all now available online at www.sfdbi.org.

Fire Department

- Increased staffing at SFFD headquarters front counter and developed permit check list.
- Staff are identifying problems with occupancy requirements and business licensing earlier in the process.
- Staff now trained to understand permit processes for other departments to better assist applicants with incomplete requirements.
- Combining inspections with other departments.

Following today's hearing, Supervisor Tang will continue to work closely with city departments on the next steps they have outlined for further improvements, including consolidating permits and payments, providing more online permit and payment capabilities, and creating consistent requirements and messaging between departments. For more information, please contact Supervisor Katy Tang's office at (415) 554-7460 or Ashley.Summers@sfgov.org.

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