

## **Customer Service and Support for Business Opportunities in Long Beach**

At their meeting of July 28, 2015, as part of their efforts to identify ways to streamline the permitting process, the Commission discussed a variety of options that are intended to service, support and grow small businesses in Long Beach. The Commission intends to further discuss these options at their meeting on August 25, 2015. The root problem has been couched as a Customer Service Issue that should try to address the public's perception of the City as not business friendly. These perceptions may be held by a small percentage of visitors to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floor of City Hall, but they generate a large percentage of the negative feedback.

Another element adding complexity to the problem is securing funding, if needed, for the preferred options. During these restrictive economic times, securing ongoing funding for a City-sponsored program(s) will be very problematic. On the other hand, seeking volunteers to staff a business-sponsored program could be equally challenging. The preference of a City-sponsored or Business-sponsored program needs discussion. The Commission also discussed the possibility of forming an Ad Hoc Committee to move the process forward more quickly. Further discussion on this topic is also warranted.

The Commission was somewhat bipartisan regarding personal, or "high touch" options versus technical, or "high tech" options. I have tried to summarize the comments by the Commission into these two categories to help focus the options.

### **1. High Touch:**

- Business ombudsman in the Lobby
- Concierge or reception desk in the Lobby
- Bring Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to the Lobby
- Direct parties to the SBDC at 309 Pine Avenue
  - Should we drop the "S" from their name?
  - Can SBDC estimate application and permit fees?
  - There should be one point of contact to guide and assist through the entire process
- Chamber support by providing business-to-business expertise and experience
- Conduct Business Workshops
  - How to Open a Business
  - Preparing a Business Plan
  - Understanding the Permitting Process
    - What projects go to Zoning Administrator?
    - What projects go to Planning Commission?
    - How long will it take?
    - How much will it cost?
- Conduct a Small Business Forum
  - Similar to the Developer's Forum but for small businesses

### **2. High Tech:**

- Offer Open Counter services through BIDs and possibly on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floors

- Offer City Mart and Open Data software platforms to further guide applicants through the permitting process
- Video on City website that walks through the permitting and entitlement process and asks the right questions
- Migrate toward an electronic plan check process

**I have tried to capture what was discussed and offer the above for consideration. The recommendation of the Chair was to bring 3-5 ideas to the next meeting of the Economic Development Commission for more extensive discussion.**

**Please let me know if you have any questions or comments.**

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