



SPUR

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

June 9, 2020

San Francisco Mayor London Breed
San Francisco Board of Supervisors
San Francisco Economic Recovery Task Force
via email

RE: Recommendations for Immediate Ground Floor Business Recovery

Dear Mayor Breed, Supervisors and the San Francisco Economic Recovery Task Force,

Thank you for your dedication to public service in these stressful and unprecedented times.

We're all aware that retail was already in a state of flux before the pandemic. COVID-19 has only accelerated the urgency of determining how to best support human and economic activity, particularly on our main streets and commercial corridors. In this time of crisis, SPUR believes that several principles should guide cities' actions in helping businesses, particularly small, neighborhood-serving businesses that occupy our neighborhood storefronts, to survive:

Move quickly and remain flexible. Waive or suspend regulations not needed for health and safety purposes. Provide or connect businesses with technical assistance and support, and dial back enforcement actions. Adjust the approach to the needs of specific neighborhoods.

Focus on neighborhoods. Neighborhood-serving storefronts are particularly in need of assistance. Ensuring the continued operation of businesses owned and operated by people of color, in particular, is not just an economic benefit but also a safeguard on sense of place and belonging. In places where the infrastructure exists, leverage the capacity of merchant associations, business improvement districts and community benefit districts. In places where these types of organizations are less well-resourced or non-existent, the city must step up to provide supplementary support and resources.

Prioritize the provision of financial, technical and language assistance to businesses serving low and moderate-income households and people of color. These businesses were likely already more fragile to begin with, and the pandemic has served to only exacerbate existing inequities.

SPUR is releasing a policy brief (see attached) today making recommendations to cities in the immediate term. This report does not look at what cities might do to support ground floor activity in the transitional phase after the immediate crisis-period, nor does it consider a broader re-envisioning of what the future of the ground floor might look like. SPUR will continue to focus on these issues in the coming months.

As of this writing, Bay Area cities are in the midst of writing new policies and revising existing ones in order to safely and quickly reopen retail stores and restaurants. The attached recommendations are actions for cities to undertake immediately to assist businesses in opening promptly following the gradual lifting

of shelter-in-place restrictions. These recommendations will allow businesses to open more quickly and increase the likelihood of their survival, will enliven and increase safety on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and will help bolster the health of the local economy and city budgets in the long-term.

San Francisco has been at the forefront of addressing many issues faced by businesses in this pandemic. The city has acted with unprecedented speed to provide information, convene partners and offer financial assistance to the organizations and individuals most in need of help. In particular, we note the centralized information on the city's website, the Shared Spaces initiative, the moratorium on commercial evictions for small and medium-sized businesses and financial relief in many forms, including direct assistance as well as the deferral of many city fees.

Where San Francisco is making good progress but has further to go, is around permitting and approvals requirements and process:

Recommendation 1: Create “one stop shop” permitting and PPE stations at city hall and at newly established neighborhood sites. These “one stop shop” locations throughout the city would be staffed with representatives from regulatory agencies (planning, building, public works, transportation, fire, economic development) on hand to help streamline the approval of urgent permits and acceptance of proposed permit-less scopes of work.

Recommendation 8: Create a permit-less registration process for COVID-19 alterations. Implement a no-cost same-day process for project sponsors to register a scope of limited set of improvements to existing facilities for the purposes of safety and business survival. Defer full permit approval of permanent improvements to a future date.

Recommendation 9: Relax planning and zoning requirements to give existing businesses greater operating flexibility on a temporary basis. Initiate an executive order or draft legislation that allows existing businesses in neighborhood commercial districts to change/shift among commercial uses without requiring a change-of-use permit for the next year. Allow flexible retail in neighborhood commercial districts citywide. Move to a performance-based standard for requiring businesses to engage with the public and the street.

Thank you again for your work to protect San Francisco's residents, workers, economy and neighborhoods, which play a critical role in this city's identity. Our neighborhood-serving businesses are not just economic drivers but also key members of the community and contributors to the places where we live, work and meet. Please reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,



Kristy Wang
Community Planning Policy Director

CC: Rich Hillis, SF Planning
Joaquin Torres, OEWD
SPUR Board of Directors