



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

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## OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET ANALYST REPORT

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# Follow-Up on Suggestions Made at the City's Regulatory Relief Workshop

## OVERVIEW

On November 14, 2011, the City Council held a Regulatory Relief Workshop to solicit suggestions as to how the City could improve processes and regulations that impact businesses. Business owners, consultants and representatives from business industry associations were encouraged to provide the City Council with specific recommendations that could be considered for implementation. As a first step to initiate follow-up actions, this report summarizes and preliminarily comments on the numerous suggestions provided to the City Council.

## FISCAL/POLICY DISCUSSION

### Suggestion Matrix

The IBA has summarized suggestions made to the City Council in Attachment 1. Although businesses were asked for detailed recommendations, remarks ranged from customer service suggestions to ideas for regulatory reforms and process improvements. In many instances, additional information is required to better understand suggestions and best assess their viability. In an effort to understand and note some of the suggestions, the IBA was able to obtain further clarification by following up with a few of the suggestion makers.

To better understand these suggestions and associated issues, the IBA recommends that a working group be formed consisting of DSD, Office of the City Attorney, the IBA and other appropriate staff. Proposed regulatory amendments and/or process reforms will require time to research and implement as they typically raise important related issues (policy, legal, budgetary, organizational, environmental, etc.).

In order to best assess and take action with regard to feasible suggestions, the Committee may wish to invite the makers of certain suggestions and/or appropriate City staff to elaborate on impacts, concerns and implementation options. This would enable the Committee to receive additional information regarding suggestions of interest, gain feedback from expert City staff and provide direction for follow-up. Additionally, the IBA understands that other groups (i.e., an ad-hoc group of the Technical Advisory Committee) are already planning to further evaluate some of these suggestions. Insights and feedback from these groups can further assist the Committee in contemplating suggestions.

#### Information about the City's Small Business Liaisons and Other City Business Resources

Several business representatives commented on the need or value associated with having small business liaisons to assist businesses who may not be familiar with the City's processes or resources. Other speakers provided examples of issues that might be more easily resolved if a business liaison or ombudsperson were available. Councilmembers and speakers noted the recent restoration of the Small Business Liaison position in the Development Services Department (DSD).

The City currently has a Small Business Liaison in DSD and a Small Business Ambassador in the Economic Development Division. These positions are excellent staff resources for small businesses. The following paragraphs identify these key individuals, provide their contact information and clarify responsibilities for each specialized business resource position:

**Laila Iskandar – Small Business Liaison:** Leila is a Supervising Plan Review Specialist with 12 years of permitting experience (ministerial and discretionary) in the DSD and serves as the primary point of contact for small business inquiries. Small business owners are encouraged to contact Laila at (619) 446-5297 or via email at [liskandar@sanidiego.gov](mailto:liskandar@sanidiego.gov), before signing a lease, committing to a site or making a major business decision involving development permits. Laila will go over the various requirements with the customer, identify potential issues and means for resolution, and lay out the key steps in the process. Laila can also provide referral information to other government agencies dealing with small businesses. Additionally, Laila attends numerous meetings related to small business, including those put on by the Business Improvement Districts and the Small Business Advisory Board. She is available to make presentations to groups about small business permitting topics, and to provide tours of the Development Services Center.

**Lisa Gordon – Small Business Ambassador:** Lisa Gordon works in the Office of Small Business within the Economic Development Division, and has served as the first Small Business Ambassador since February 2010. Lisa's primary role is to serve as an ambassador and "information clearinghouse" on behalf of the City, and provide targeted outreach programs and services to the City's small business community. Within the Office of Small Business, Lisa serves as a first point of contact for small business inquiries, and collaborates with local, state, and federal governmental agencies and business development and assistance organizations to identify training, technical assistance and counseling services available to small businesses throughout the region. She also participates in business assistance and development seminars and other forums to promote the City's loan and grant programs, storefront improvement program, and other small business enhancement programs, and makes recommendations and referrals on business start-up inquiries. Lisa Gordon has also played a key role in creating and launching the City's first Small Business Development Pilot Program, and she serves as Ambassador and staff liaison for the [Small Business Advisory Board](#). Lisa can be contacted by phone at (619) 533-6474 or via email at [lgordon@sanidiego.gov](mailto:lgordon@sanidiego.gov).

The Mayor's Office of Economic Growth Services (EGS) works closely with other City departments to facilitate the expansion, attraction and retention of business throughout the City. EGS is comprised of two work units: the **BEAR (Business Expansion Attraction Retention) Team** is led by Russ Gibbon and the **Government Incentives Team** is led by Lydia Moreno. These work units provide general assistance to businesses of all sizes while also administering business incentive programs and endeavoring to support/grow key sectors of the City's economy.

The BEAR Team provides direct assistance to businesses which meet the criteria in Council Policy 900-12 - the "Business & Industry Incentive Program." When businesses are considering relocation to, or expansion in the City of San Diego, the BEAR Team works closely with the applicable departments such as Development Services, Fire, Public Utilities, and Real Estate Assets to evaluate available land and buildings and to determine permit requirements, zoning interpretations, and other development considerations. If a San Diego site is selected and leased or purchased, the BEAR Team may authorize an expedited permit review through the Development Services Department and may also act as a liaison throughout the development process. Although the BEAR Team provides some assistance to retail, hospitality, and service sector businesses, most of the assistance is provided to manufacturers ranging in size from small proprietorships and partnerships up to and including large multi-national corporations.

The Government Incentives Team administers two incentive programs: a State Enterprise Zone Program and a Federal Foreign Trade Zone Program. These programs provide unique incentives for a broad spectrum of businesses in targeted areas within the City. In the course of administering these programs, the Government Incentive Team strives to assist and link businesses to other useful resources.

#### Soliciting Additional Regulatory Relief Suggestions


In his opening remarks on November 14th, the Council President noted it had been a decade since the City had offered a Regulatory Relief Day Workshop to receive suggestions from the business community. The new Economic Development & Strategies Committee offers the City Council a venue to regularly receive regulatory relief suggestions. The Committee may wish to consider having a standing docketed item on their agendas for a restricted amount of time (i.e., 10 minutes) to receive comments, ideas and suggestions from the business community.

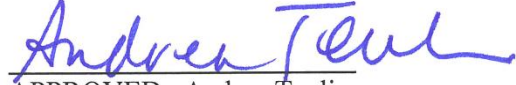
In preliminarily discussing this possibility with the Office of the City Attorney, we understand that such an item could regularly be docketed to receive and gather information. If, after some initial discussion the Committee wished to further evaluate a regulatory relief suggestion, then direction or requests for additional information could be made to relevant staff and/or interested parties. The matter could then be subsequently docketed and properly noticed for a future Committee meeting.

## CONCLUSION

At the request of the Committee Chair, this report summarizes and preliminarily comments on business suggestions provided to the City Council at the Regulatory Relief Day Workshop held on November 14, 2011. Most of these suggestions will require considerable further evaluation to determine whether or how to proceed. The Economic Development & Strategy Committee provides a great public forum to receive additional information from the makers of suggestions and expert City staff who may be best able to elaborate on impacts, benefits, concerns and implementation considerations.

As more than one speaker commented on the importance of the City having a business ombudsperson(s), this report provides information about the City's Small Business Liaison in DSD and our Small Business Ambassador in the Economic Development Division. We also briefly describe business assistance offered by the Mayor's Office of Economic Growth Services. Finally, the IBA suggests the Committee consider having a standing docketed item on their agendas for a restricted amount of time (i.e., 10 minutes) to receive and preliminarily discuss comments, ideas and suggestions from the business community.

  
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Attachment: 1. Regulatory Relief Day Suggestion Matrix