



# Administrative Report

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**To: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL**

**From: GREG KAPOVICH, WATERFRONT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

## **TITLE**

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE CREATION OF AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP AND A CITY COUNCIL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

RECEIVE AND FILE A REPORT ON THE ONGOING EFFORTS OF THE BUSINESS CONCIERGE PROGRAM

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On December 12, 2022, the City Council approved a Business Concierge Program (BCP) as a strategic initiative to improve the experience for businesses and developers who engage the City. Since its implementation two years ago, the BCP has enhanced internal communication, improved processes, and provided a new avenue of direct support to new and existing businesses in Redondo Beach. As part of the current Strategic Plan, the City Council directed staff to report on the impacts of the BCP. This report provides an update on the program's progress, including completed improvements, business success stories, and ongoing efforts to further refine and expand the program to better serve the local business community. This report also comes on the heels of the Community Development Department's organizational assessment and strategic planning efforts, both of which are aimed at identifying opportunities to improve the level of customer service provided by the Department.

Council also included the creation of an economic development working group as part of the strategic plan, which would actively review policies and procedures across Departments, as well as the Redondo Beach Municipal Code to identify regulatory barriers and help attract developers and businesses to Redondo Beach. The working group is intended to consist of a combination of staff from the Waterfront & Economic Development Department, Community Development Department, Public Works Department, and the City Manager's Office as well as representatives from the business community. Additionally, it is recommended that the City Council consider appointing an economic development subcommittee to participate in the working group.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Business Concierge Program was implemented at the direction of City Council in response to feedback from local businesses and the development community that found the City's permitting processes to be complex and difficult to navigate. Applicants shared that they encountered delays due to fragmented communication that spanned multiple City Departments. The permitting and licensing process often requires interactions with multiple Departments with no central point of

contact, which can create uncertainty and inefficiencies for applicants.

Recognizing these challenges, the City Council directed staff to explore ways to enhance the user experience and improve interdepartmental coordination. The goal was to create a more streamlined and supportive environment for the development community by providing clear guidance, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and ensuring personal assistance is provided to help applicants navigate, and progress smoothly through the permitting process. The BCP introduced several key improvements, including updated permitting systems, more centralized information, and dedicated staff liaisons from the Community Development and WED Departments to assist applicants through the process.

## **PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION & PROGRESS**

Over the past two years, the BCP has successfully implemented several key initiatives aimed at improving the user experience for businesses in Redondo Beach. Those initiatives are as follows:

### Updated Integrated Permitting Software

The Community Development Department is in the process of upgrading its online permitting software to provide a more intuitive and efficient system that reduces processing times and increases transparency. This software will be utilized by the Planning, Building and Safety, and Engineering Divisions to provide consolidated comments to applicants. It will help coordination efforts between Departments and Divisions and will include customized workflows to help ensure a more efficient process that provides applicants with the ability to track the status of their permit application through an easily-accessible portal.

### New Business Concierge Webpage and Informational Flyers

The Business Concierge Program webpage provides step-by-step guidance on obtaining permits and starting a business in the City. The webpage, [www.redondo.org/bcp](http://www.redondo.org/bcp), is supplemented by printed materials that are available at City Hall. Individuals and businesses can submit inquiries tailored to their specific needs through the online platform and receive prompt responses from staff without having to visit City Hall. The platform will also forward the inquiry to additional Departments and Divisions, if needed, to ensure the City provides a complete response.

### Improved Interdepartmental Coordination

City staff have established more structured communication channels between Departments to facilitate a more streamlined approval process. Staff holds regular meetings to coordinate application reviews across multiple Departments, provide status updates, and discuss any issues that are hindering progress for specific applications, or the process in general. The Waterfront & Economic Development Department (WED) takes the lead on organizing these internal meetings to gather updates for businesses utilizing the BCP. In addition to internal meetings regarding status inquiries, WED staff will also proactively reach out to the applicants directly when a significant amount of time has passed prior to a resubmittal, or if communication has stalled between the City and the applicant. The intent is to kick-start the project or identify why the project has stalled and provide solutions to advance the process.

### New Public Kiosks Installed at City Hall for Accessing City Services

Kiosks have been installed in key locations at the City permitting counters to allow a convenient option for business owners and residents to enter the queue to receive in-person assistance with their permit.

### Online Appointment Scheduling with Planners

Businesses and the development community can now schedule one-on-one meetings with planning staff through an online platform, improving accessibility, reducing wait times, and adding more certainty to scheduling for people engaging the City.

## **MEASURING IMPACT & BUSINESS SUCCESS STORIES**

Since its inception, it is estimated that 26 businesses have directly benefited from the BCP, and a number of others have benefited from improvements growing from the program that have improved the process overall. Businesses that have received direct support from the BCP include:

Beach E Biking, South Bay Food Company, Sonic (utility company), Mindful Weight Loss, GrubHaus, Traditional Praline, Sonesta Hotel, Tradewinds, Boo's Treasures, Pizzaforno, El Tarasco, Pita Cafe, Malibu Winery, Gift Shop on Artesia, Mychal's Café, and many more.

More specifically, the BCP has played a direct role in assisting the following businesses in successfully navigating the City's regulatory landscape:

**El Torito Restaurant** - After receiving assistance with permit approvals and site development planning for its expansion, El Torito encountered significant and unexpected issues during the construction phase, particularly with the existing gas utility connection. Representatives from El Torito reached out to SoCal Gas directly and were informed that the gas company mistakenly removed the gas meter serving the tenant space and were told it would take a few months for a technician to make the necessary repair. At that point, the restaurant was only one week away from a grand opening and was in the process of training 70 recently hired employees. The delay would have impacted the grand opening and likely would have resulted in a loss of recently trained employees that would not wait for their employment to commence. City staff quickly jumped in and coordinated with SoCal Gas to resolve the issue and streamline the replacement of the gas meter within three days' time, ensuring the business was able to open on-time and retain the 70 newly-hired and fully-trained employees.

**Boo's Treasures, and Tradewinds** - BCP liaisons coordinated with the Community Development Department to assist these International Boardwalk tenants to take advantage of the Storefront Improvement Program. Liaisons connected applicants with the applicable City staff from various Departments, assisted with answering questions from businesses on building code requirements, and helped streamline the permit review process by ensuring the first submittal of plans included all pertinent information for City staff to perform a complete review.

**Pita Café** - WED staff coordinated with the Building and Safety Department and the business to ensure the business properly navigated the permitting and construction/inspection phases of their project. Prior to engaging the BCP, the project had stalled due to construction work that had been completed that did not conform with the approved building permit. The Building and Safety Division had issued a stop work notice and BCP liaisons were able to communicate the issue to the applicant, prompting appropriate permit revisions from the applicant, which enabled construction to resume. This ensured the business was able to open, operate safely, and bring much needed economic development to Artesia Blvd.

**Sonesta Hotel** - WED staff coordinated with the Community Development Department to help the hotel obtain the proper permits to safely host an event for the LA Galaxy. Staff expedited the acquisition of permits to significantly reduce the timeline for the permitting process.

## **ONGOING & FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS**

While the BCP has made significant progress, City staff is aware that additional opportunities are available to improve services. Staff continues to refine and enhance the program to better serve the business community. Ongoing and planned initiatives include:

Additional software system updates are being developed to further streamline the Community Development Department application and approval process. Efforts to improve internal communication between Departments is ongoing.

Of particular note is ensuring the new permitting system is used to consolidate internal comments that are utilized across Departments to ensure any issues are identified and shared prior to an external comment letter being sent to applicants. The City is also increasing outreach efforts through partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce, North Redondo Beach Business Association (NRBBA), and other business organizations to conduct a survey to gather feedback directly from the businesses to understand the barriers that they face when working with the City. This will allow staff to seek solutions to those barriers, as well as generate ideas to attract new businesses to the City.

An initial internal Economic Development Working Group, consisting of representatives from WED, the Community Development Department, the Public Works Department, and the City Manager's Office, is review beginning to review policies and procedures across Departments, as well as the municipal code to identify potential regulatory barriers and to generate ideas to attract businesses to Redondo Beach. The group is also beginning to identify potential business representatives that could join the group and assist in the City's evaluation.

At this time, staff recommends the City Council receive and file the report on the progress and ongoing efforts of the BCP and consider appointing an economic development subcommittee consisting of two City Councilmembers and the Mayor to assist the working group's efforts.

## **COORDINATION**

This report was prepared by the Waterfront and Economic Development Department and coordinated with the Community Development Department.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no immediate fiscal impact associated with the preparation of this item. It is hoped that the working group will identify ways to attract new businesses to the City which will lead to increased revenue.

## **APPROVED BY:**

*Mike Witzansky, City Manager*

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Business Concierge Program Flyer