

L.A. Seeks to Streamline Permitting

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Los Angeles city officials on Thursday unveiled a program to speed up permits for new restaurants, bars and grocery stores.

The program comes in response to complaints from local restaurant and bar owners that it can take up to two years to get city permits to open a restaurant in the city.

The goal of the program is to reduce the time to get restaurant and bar permits to six months by having case managers from various city departments expedite permit applications. It is part of a broader effort under way in the city to cut red tape for businesses.

“Getting a permit to open a restaurant is the most complicated approval process for small businesses in the city,” said Carol Schatz, chief executive of the Central City Association, which represents downtown business interests. “By cutting in half the time to get permits, this program will spur the creation of construction jobs and operational jobs once the restaurants open.”

The program, called “restaurant and hospitality express” was launched on a trial basis this past March and covered 14 restaurant applications. One of those is the First & Hope Supper Club, which recently opened across from the Disney Concert Hall and was scheduled to be the site of Thursday’s press conference.

“The period just prior to a restaurant opening is the most stressful and challenging,” said Steve Springer, general manager at the First & Hope Supper Club. “The expedited program offered us just what we needed at our most difficult and important phase. Many times inspectors would come at a moments notice to help ensure we met our opening deadlines. This certainly saved a great deal in startup costs as a result of otherwise inevitable delays.”

After restaurant owners complained about permit delays, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa hired investment banker Austin Beutner as his jobs czar and moved his economic development deputy Bud Ovrom to the Department of Building and Safety. Both were charged with expediting the city’s permit process to make the city more business friendly.

“We listened to our restaurateurs and heard their frustrations,” Beutner said. “We took action that provides measurable results for businesses and creates jobs in our city.”



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