

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR KATHRYN BARGER

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SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESS RECOVERY IN ALTADENA

The Eaton Fire devastated the Altadena community, destroying thousands of homes and displacing both families and businesses. Small businesses — many of which serve as anchors in the community — are now working to navigate rebuilding, permitting, insurance, and recovery resources, all while struggling to remain viable. At a time when these businesses should be focused on reopening and serving their neighborhoods, they continue to face significant bureaucratic hurdles. This is of great concern, as the swift recovery and revitalization of Altadena’s businesses and commercial corridors — the community’s heartbeat — are essential for residents and the neighborhood to regain a sense of normalcy. Streamlined, hands-on support is urgently needed to ensure they can recover, reinvest, and continue contributing to the vitality and resilience of Altadena.

The County is committed to supporting the retention and recovery of small businesses operating within fire-impacted communities. In the wake of the January 2025 wildfires, LA County has supported thousands of businesses and workers through Disaster Recovery Centers; raised over \$27 million to provide grants to affected businesses and workers; approved parking lot activations for impacted small businesses; established the Altadena Disaster Relief Small Business Loan Program; and launched a One-Stop Permit Center in Altadena that, in addition to housing permitting departments, includes an Altadena Job Center and the County’s Office of Small Business, both operated by the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO).

Most recently, to support businesses that survived the fire, but are struggling to stay afloat amidst a decrease in consumers and residents, the County launched a *Shop Local. Dine Local. Recover Local.* campaign to promote and incentivize support for local businesses.

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Nonetheless, more is needed to expedite permitting and ensure businesses in Altadena's commercial corridors recover and rebuild in a timely manner — even stronger than before.

Four critical interventions can help:

1. Small Business and Commercial Property Concierge Program (DEO-Led).

Local business and commercial property owners have voiced the need for direct, personalized, coordinated assistance in navigating complex County processes. A concierge program — staffed by the DEO in coordination with the Department of Public Works (DPW), Department of Regional Planning (DRP), Treasurer and Tax Collector (TTC), and the Altadena Recovery Task Force — would provide a single point of contact to help businesses and commercial property owners acquire permits, navigate County Departments and processes, access financing assistance, and confront other recovery-related issues. This program would reduce delays, promote opportunity, and ensure that Altadena's small business community has the tools it needs to rebuild stronger. In addition, the Concierge Program would assist small businesses reopening in the area — including home-based businesses, commercial tenants, independent contractors, and other business types — in obtaining required local, state, and federal permits and licenses as well as connecting them to legal aid, capital, and other critical resources.

2. Streamlined Alcoholic Beverage Sales Permitting Pilot (DRP-Led).

The current Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process for alcoholic beverage sales takes 12–14 months, costs over \$15,000, and consumes large amounts of staff time. Critically, over the last decade, 98% of CUP applications for alcoholic beverage sales at restaurants in unincorporated County communities, and 100% of those applications in Altadena, were approved. This means small businesses and County staff are spending time and resources on a process that almost always yields the same result.

For restaurants in Altadena struggling after the Eaton Fire, this lengthy and costly process represents a significant barrier to recovery. A pilot streamlined alcoholic beverage sales permitting pilot in Altadena — modeled after the City of Los Angeles' Restaurant Beverage Program and the City of Santa Monica's Alcohol Exception — would provide staff-level approvals under standardized conditions, including limits on hours, food service requirements, security, and Responsible Beverage Service training.

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This approach would:

- Speed approvals for businesses,
- Lower costs,
- Maintain neighborhood protections, and
- Provide a scalable model for other unincorporated communities.

3. Streetscape and Public Realm Improvement in Major Commercial Corridors

Commercial property owners have expressed concern over rebuilding in an area that may not return to its previous state for years, fearing that investing in the rebuilding of their properties may not yield the return needed to repay loans required to rebuild. For residents and businesses to fully return to Altadena, it is critical that the County provide the support necessary to create walkable commercial corridors that are inviting to local and neighboring communities alike. The County should: 1) convene departments to develop goals and strategies for expediting the rebuilding and enhancement of the public right-of way in major commercial corridors in Altadena, including any allowances for outdoor dining beyond what is permitted through State law, 2) ensure the County's long-term recovery plan includes concrete actions, based on identified strategies, that the County can take to increase commercial corridor walkability, sustainability and resilience, and 3) identify needs and resources to achieve these goals and track progress through a multi-year strategy for rebuilding commercial corridors.

4. Access to County Contracting Opportunities (Led by DEO and ISD)

With many residents and consumers no longer in the area, small businesses in Altadena are facing significant challenges to remain viable. Without additional intervention, these businesses will continue to struggle until the neighborhood is fully rebuilt. The *Shop Local. Dine Local. Recover Local.* initiative — which aims to incentivize consumer spending and provide marketing education and support — represents an important step in the right direction. However, more comprehensive and sustained efforts are needed to ensure the long-term recovery of the local business community.

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County contracting should be explored as a strategic approach to help small businesses generate revenue and maintain operations during this period of recovery. This strategy could provide targeted assistance to help businesses obtain certification as Local Small Business Enterprises (LSBEs), making them eligible for the County's 15% price preference. It could also facilitate connections between local businesses and contracting opportunities aligned with the goods and services they offer, while providing the technical support needed to strengthen their competitiveness and capacity to successfully bid for contracts.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), in consultation with the Los Angeles County Departments of Regional Planning, Public Works, Treasurer-Tax Collector, Public Health, Fire, and County Counsel, to design and launch a Small Business Concierge Program for the community of Altadena, with designated staff that will seek to expedite permitting and provide personalized assistance to local small businesses and commercial property owners in navigating County permitting, licensing, financing, and recovery resources, as well as identify additional recommendations and strategies for rebuilding and increasing walkability in Altadena's main commercial corridors.
2. Instruct the Chief Executive Officer to identify any funding and staffing resources that may be available to support the implementation of the Small Business Concierge program, and engage philanthropy through the Center for Strategic Partnerships, for any funding sources to support small business fire recovery efforts.
3. Delegate authority to Department of Economic Opportunity to execute agreements and amendments with one or more vendors as needed, waiving the County's competitive procurement requirements, to support rapid program implementation and deployment of services.
4. Direct Department of Economic Opportunity to coordinate with the Altadena Chamber of Commerce, Altadena Recovery Task Force, and philanthropic and community-based partners to ensure comprehensive and effective outreach and resource distribution to small businesses and commercial property owners.
5. Instruct Department of Regional Planning, in consultation with County Counsel and relevant departments, to design and launch a Streamlined Alcoholic Beverage Sales Permitting Pilot in Altadena to replace discretionary Conditional Use Permit hearings with staff-level approvals under standardized conditions, consistent with best practices in the cities of Los Angeles, Santa Monica, and Pasadena, and to investigate the need for outdoor dining allowances beyond what is permitted through State law.

6. Direct the Department of Economic Opportunity and Internal Services Department, in collaboration with the Department of Aging and Disabilities, and other relevant County service departments, to identify and implement a process for connecting small businesses in Altadena impacted by the wildfires to potential contracting opportunities for which they may qualify — including those that procure goods or provide social services to communities in need. To the extent possible and allowable, these potential opportunities should include both those solicited through simplified solicitations and those procured through standard procurement processes.
7. Instruct the Department of Economic Opportunity, Department of Regional Planning, Department of Public Works, Treasurer and Tax Collector, Chief Executive Office and County Counsel to report back in 30 days with an implementation plan for both programs, including staffing/resource needs, proposed timelines, funding needs, outreach strategies (including multilingual communication), and evaluation metrics, and in 90 days, provide a written status update on the two programs, as well as recommendations and actions for rebuilding and increasing walkability and supporting the revitalization of Altadena's main commercial corridors.

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