

Strengthening Support, Resources, and Services for Restaurants in Los Angeles

County

Los Angeles County is home to a world-renowned culinary scene showcasing authentic flavors from virtually every community across the globe. Many visitors from other states and countries specifically travel to Los Angeles to take part in our unrivaled food options that range from casual to fine dining. Consequently, the food industry also serves as a driver of one of our biggest economic sectors - tourism - with visitors enjoying our unique local food experiences and spending accordingly.

Restaurants also often serve as community hubs, providing spaces for family and friends to gather and celebrate, thereby fostering community. Food is central in many cultures and the act of breaking bread and sharing one’s cuisine strengthens ties and connections. In addition to contributing to the vitality of neighborhoods, the food industry provides avenues for entrepreneurship for immigrants and underrepresented communities. Restaurants generate jobs that have a low barrier to entry and offer career advancement opportunities. The impact of the food industry also crosses multiple other sectors, including agriculture, real estate, and technology.

MOTION

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The County of Los Angeles plays an important role in ensuring the health and safety of the public. To this end, all restaurants must submit plans to the Department of Public Health – Environmental Health (DPH-EH) which comply with the California Retail Food Code (CRFC) in order to be permitted within Los Angeles County. DPH-EH provides information and resources for restaurant operators and their consultants on its website. Despite this, many restaurant operators continue to find the plan check and permitting process complex and cumbersome. This results in the submission of incomplete, inaccurate, and non-compliant plans. This increases the time and resources restaurant operators and DPH-EH expend during the plan check and permitting process.

To address this issue, other local jurisdictions provide support and consultation so businesses clearly understand requirements and the process so they can obtain a permit as soon as possible. The City of West Hollywood has offered technical assistance to businesses prior to submission of initial plans, thus avoiding the typical back-and-forth between parties that adds time and therefore cost to the process. West Hollywood has found that this service ensures restaurants have needed information upfront, which in turn helps streamline the process. The City of Los Angeles also offers a case management program for businesses going through the permitting process so that issues can be addressed before submission of initial plans.

As state and local policies change, it is critical that the County provide clear communication and resources to support restaurants in understanding how to comply with updated laws and regulations. Last year, the State legislature took action to support the restaurant industry. Specifically, AB 671 (Wicks, 2025) streamlines the permit process for restaurant tenant improvements by creating a voluntary expedited path. It requires

local building departments to allow qualified licensed architects or engineers – at applicant’s expense – to certify that restaurant renovation plans comply with building codes. It also establishes 20- and 10-day timelines for the review of completed applications initial plans, resubmittal, and approval of plans by local building and health departments. If these timelines are not met, a permit is issued. AB 592 (Gabriel, 2025) permanently allows “open kitchens” wherein restaurants can operate with open windows, folding doors, or non-fixed storefronts with a food safety risk mitigation plan.

It is critical that the County provides additional support and guidance, so restaurant operators understand policy changes, the CRFC, and the DPH-EH plan check and permitting process. By increasing awareness of DPH-EH's resources and formalizing opportunities for technical assistance, restaurant operators can better navigate the path to a public health permit and submit accurate and compliant plans. By supporting restaurants in submitting compliant plans, timelines for permitting can be reduced and restaurants can open and operate sooner.

Additionally, restaurants and other businesses have faced multiple challenges in the last five years, including rising costs, significant economic disruptions from the global pandemic, dual entertainment strikes, and wildfires as well as workforce disruptions due to federal immigration raids. Given these hardships, it is even more important that the County takes action to streamline processes to make it easier to open restaurants so they may flourish and support economic development.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Public Health to report back 30 days in writing on their implementation plans for AB 671 and AB 592. Specifically, the report back should include:
 - a. Current process for reviewing and approving restaurant plans, including how new legislative timelines will be met;
 - b. Capacity and operational/financial impacts associated with implementing these policy changes;
 - c. Identification of any gaps, challenges, and needed resources to support implementation; and
 - d. Any policy, programmatic, or system recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of AB 671 and AB 592.

2. Direct the Department of Public Works to report back in 30 days in writing on their implementation plans for AB 671. Specifically, the report back should include:
 - a. Current process for reviewing and approving restaurant plans, including how new legislative timelines will be met;
 - b. Capacity and operational/financial impacts associated with implementing these policy changes;
 - c. Identification of any gaps, challenges, and needed resources to support implementation; and
 - d. Any policy, programmatic, or system recommendations to ensure successful implementation of AB 671.

3. Direct the Department of Public Health, in consultation with the Department of Economic Opportunity, and any other relevant County Departments and stakeholders to:
 - a. Within 120 days, update Department of Public Health website(s), checklists, and toolkits utilized by restaurants during the permitting and plan check process to reflect best practices in other environmental health jurisdictions and create more user-friendly tools to promote the submittal of more accurate, complete, and compliant plans to the DPH-EH plan check process.
 - b. After completion of the work outlined in Directive 3(a), provide a written report back to the Board within 15 days outlining the changes.
 - c. Within 90 days of updating communication methods, conduct outreach and education to widely promote materials developed in ~~Directive 23(a)~~ to target business associations - including but not limited to, Chambers of Commerce, California Restaurant Association, Independent Hospitality Coalition, Food Safety Advisory Council - and restaurants.

4. Direct the Department of Public Health, ~~in collaboration with Department of Economic Opportunity, Department of Public Works, and stakeholders,~~ to report back in writing in 60 days on ways to enhance or expand its existing program that provides tailored consultations for restaurant operators prior to the submission of plans for Environmental Health plan check review and approval ~~and establishing and/or expanding existing Concierge programs that provide more accessible, tailored consultations for restaurant operators prior to the submission of plans.~~

Public Health should obtain stakeholder feedback in developing this report back and should include information on:

- a. How many restaurants could be served by the current program, or an expanded program;
 - b. The scope of providing one-on-one virtual or in-person guidance and support, including when the support would be provided (e.g. before the first plan check submittal);
 - c. Existing information and services available to support restaurants with permitting and plan submissions via phone, online, and in-person during office hours at various locations across the County;
 - d. The resources needed to ~~implement~~ expand the program, including additional costs to applicants served; staffing requirements, and any other operational costs;
 - e. A proposed timeline for expansion implementation; ~~and,~~
 - f. Metrics to evaluate the program, including feedback from stakeholders; and,
 - g. Appropriate language accessibility for applicants;
- ~~5. Instruct the Chief Executive Officer to identify any funding and staffing resources that may be available to support the implementation of the Concierge program.~~

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