

June 17, 2020

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf
Oakland City Council
Oakland Economic Recovery Council
via email

RE: Recommendations for Immediate Ground Floor Business Recovery

Dear Mayor Schaaf, Oakland City Councilmembers, and members of the Oakland Economic Recovery Council,

Thank you for your dedication to public service in these stressful and unprecedented times.

We're all aware that retail was already in a state of flux before the pandemic. COVID-19 has only accelerated the urgency of determining how to best support human and economic activity, particularly on our main streets and commercial corridors. In this time of crisis, SPUR believes that several principles should guide cities' actions in helping businesses, particularly small, neighborhood-serving businesses that occupy our neighborhood storefronts, to survive:

Move quickly and remain flexible. Waive or suspend regulations not needed for health and safety purposes. Provide or connect businesses with technical assistance and support, and dial back enforcement actions. Adjust the approach to the needs of specific neighborhoods.

Focus on neighborhoods, including downtowns. Neighborhood-serving storefronts are particularly in need of assistance. Ensuring the continued operation of businesses owned and operated by people of color, in particular, is not just an economic benefit but also a safeguard on sense of place and belonging. In places where the infrastructure exists, leverage the capacity of merchant associations, business improvement districts and community benefit districts. In places where these types of organizations are less well-resourced or non-existent, the city must step up to provide supplementary support and resources.

Prioritize the provision of financial, technical and language assistance to businesses serving low and moderate-income households and people of color, including those that have suffered recent damage to their storefronts. These businesses were likely already more fragile to begin with, and the pandemic has served to only exacerbate existing inequities.

SPUR has just released a policy brief (www.spur.org/groundfloor) making recommendations to cities in the immediate term. This report does not look at what cities might do to support ground floor activity in the transitional phase after the immediate crisis-period, nor does it consider a broader re-envisioning of what the future of the ground floor might look like. SPUR will continue to focus on these issues in the coming months.

As of this writing, Bay Area cities are in the midst of writing new policies and revising existing ones in order to safely and quickly reopen retail stores and restaurants. The attached recommendations are actions

for cities to undertake immediately to assist businesses in opening promptly following the gradual lifting of shelter-in-place restrictions. These recommendations will allow businesses to open more quickly and increase the likelihood of their survival, will enliven and increase safety on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and will help bolster the health of the local economy and city budgets in the long-term.

SPUR appreciates Oakland's rapid response to the changes brought on us by the pandemic. Oakland was an early adopter of slow streets (including the Essential Places approach) and has applied the same thinking in creating the Flex Streets Initiative. Oakland also acted quickly in enacting a moratorium on commercial evictions for nonprofits and small businesses. We hope our set of recommendations will provide some additional ideas to aid in your current efforts to support the survival and growth of Oakland's small businesses.

Thank you again for your work to protect Oakland's residents, workers, economy and neighborhoods, which all play a critical role in this city's identity. Our neighborhood-serving businesses are not just economic drivers but also key members of the community and contributors to the places where we live, work and meet. Please reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'ROGILVIE', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert Ogilvie
Oakland Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KWANG', with a circular flourish at the end.

Kristy Wang
Community Planning Policy Director

CC: Alexa Jeffress, Director, Oakland Department of Economic and Workforce Development
William Gilchrist, Director, Oakland Department of Planning and Building
SPUR Oakland Board of Directors