

RESOLUTION NO. 20210729-116

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated Austin's local economy for nearly 18 months, leading to the permanent closure of dozens of local restaurants, shops, and music venues; and

WHEREAS, the Downtown Austin Alliance determined that of 740 storefronts open in the pre-pandemic time period, 88 have closed permanently, with an uncertain future for an additional 96 businesses; and

WHEREAS, of those closures, more than 55 are local restaurants and 10 are live music venues; and

WHEREAS, federal relief combined with City of Austin funds have assisted many small businesses that include music venues, retail shops, and restaurants; and

WHEREAS, Council initiated innovative methods to assist businesses over the past 18 months; and

WHEREAS, one such innovation was the Shop The Block pilot program that allows businesses to extend their operations outdoors to promote a safe and vibrant shopping and dining experience; and

WHEREAS, 34 shops and restaurants are benefitting from Shop The Block, with some permits encompassing several businesses along the length of a city block; and

WHEREAS, customer survey data on the Shop the Block program indicated

that 100% of respondents would be interested in continuing the program past the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, Development Services Department staff recommended improvements to the program to Council over the past year based on the feedback gained from the surveys; and

WHEREAS, with Austin's economy on the rise again, lessons learned from innovative strategies should be built into City programs going forward to continue the momentum of recovery; and

WHEREAS, Shop The Block demonstrates an innovation that strikes a healthy balance between ease of permitting and appropriate government oversight to maintain public safety; and

WHEREAS, as a pilot program, Shop The Block is scheduled to expire on December 1, 2021 with renewals possible to continue use of the program by applicants only partially into 2022; and

WHEREAS, the City offers permanent programs that offer similar services as Shop The Block, but all existing programs present a variety of barriers to access including a complex review and approval systems combined with multiple fees; and

WHEREAS, the City offers a central application process through the Austin Center for Events (ACE) that allows event organizers to apply for special event permits that involves multiple City departments; and

WHEREAS, the application process used by ACE may also be an example for other application processes that involve more than one City department and require similar levels of review; and

WHEREAS, it is the desire of this Council to see Shop The Block continue as a paradigm to more permanently innovate and improve existing programs; **NOW**,

THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Council directs the City Manager to prepare one or more ordinances that accomplish, to the extent feasible, the following objectives:

1. synchronize the uses allowed to participate in the Sidewalk Café program established in City Code Chapter 14-4 (*Sidewalk Cafes*) with the uses allowed to participate in the Shop The Block pilot program; and
2. create a program, similar to the Sidewalk Café program, that allows private parking lots to be used, temporarily, for uses described in Ordinance No. 20200604-047.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Council directs the City Manager to explore options, including placemaking or design assistance, that will increase participation in the City's street patio program; and to provide Council with a memorandum identifying the options considered and recommendations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

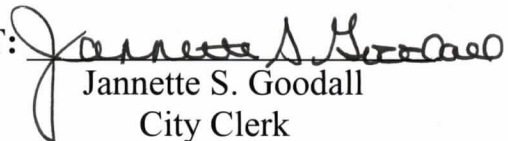
The City Council encourages the City Manager to implement an application system that allows an applicant to apply for one or more of the programs described in this Resolution using one application.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Council further directs the City Manager to return to Council with the ordinances and changes to the fee schedule, if necessary, no later than December 9, 2021. If the City Manager encounters challenges with preparing ordinances that accomplish the objectives listed above, the City Council directs the City Manager to communicate the challenges before September 30, 2021, so that Council can provide additional direction to the City Manager.

ADOPTED: July 29, 2021

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk