



A SMALL BUSINESS AFFORDABILITY AGENDA FOR NYC

Introduction

The new mayoral administration has an opportunity to strengthen affordability and advance equitable economic development in New York City neighborhoods by centering the needs of small businesses that serve as cultural anchors and economic engines, but are especially vulnerable to threats of displacement. We urge the Mayor-elect to prioritize policies and programs that help owner-operated brick-and-mortars, street vendors, and other small businesses owned by immigrants and people of color in low- to moderate-income neighborhoods.

CONTEXT: UNAFFORDABILITY AND SMALL BUSINESS IN NYC

Despite the City's definition of small businesses as those that have fewer than 50 employees,¹ ANHD's members focus on providing support to New York City's smallest businesses, which are most often overlooked by existing policies and out of reach of limited resources. These small businesses – such as eateries, bodegas, hair salons, laundromats – make up the cultural fabric of our neighborhoods. Especially in our immigrant communities and communities of color, residents rely on their local storefronts for essential, culturally relevant goods and services, as well as jobs. Yet, they face rising rents, harsh enforcement, and major structural barriers to accessing City support.

Like housing costs, the cost of running a small business continues to rise in New York City. Rent is one of those rising costs for commercial tenants. During a time of recovery from the economic hardship caused by the pandemic, commercial rents have risen vastly beyond pre-pandemic levels,² which were already burdensome for many small businesses. These rising rents are more prevalent in communities that are predominantly people of color. Within this landscape of rapidly rising rent, the lack of legal protections for commercial tenants puts small businesses at risk of landlord harassment and displacement pressure.

In addition to the rising cost of rent, utilities, and other overhead costs, the fines and fees associated with procuring necessary permits and complying with strict regulations make doing business even more expensive, especially for the businesses that don't have the financial, technical, or language capacity to navigate complicated city processes on their own. These are often immigrant-owned businesses, especially street vendors, in under-resourced neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by punitive regulatory enforcement. These businesses also spend their time and money working to improve safety and sanitation on the corridors often neglected by relevant agencies.

Although there are city, state, and federal programs that support small businesses, these resources have not been distributed equitably and are not reaching the most vulnerable small businesses. Tailoring small business policies and programs to protect and resource commercial tenants, street vendors, and other vulnerable small businesses, making it more affordable for them to operate, can benefit not only citywide economic development, but also racial and economic justice.

WHAT THE NEXT MAYORAL ADMINISTRATION CAN DO TO SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES

In order to make the types of legislative and budgetary changes that will make it more affordable for small businesses to thrive in New York City, we need merchants to lead. And in order to build the leadership of such merchants, we need community-based organizations (CBOs) to do deep, grassroots organizing in commercial corridors. Merchant organizing is hard and takes time, especially in a landscape that encourages competition and favors big business. **The next mayoral administration can strengthen affordability and advance equitable economic development by treating the CBOs that support small businesses on the ground as partners, strengthening the laws that protect commercial tenants and street vendors, and investing in the public realm.**

| a. | Create funding streams for CBOs to expand their community organizing work in commercial corridors

Beyond Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and merchant associations, CBOs working across the neighborhood development sector provide essential support to small businesses and bring collectivity to commercial corridors. These trusted organizations meet the businesses most vulnerable to displacement exactly where they are. And through genuine relationship building, CBOs ensure small businesses access legal assistance, navigate regulations, and know about City information and opportunities. These CBOs need dedicated funding in order to put in the work necessary to organize merchants and develop their leadership.

¹ https://edc.nyc/sites/default/files/2023-05/Small_Business_Dynamism_in_NYC.pdf

² <https://www.anhd.org/report/change-nyc-storefront-rents-2019-2022/>

³ <https://anhd.org/blog/new-yorks-small-businesses-left-out-paycheck-protection-program/>



Mayor-elect Mamdani has already proposed a 20-million-dollar funding increase for one-on-one small business support through the Business Express Service Teams (BEST) program. A portion of that funding should be directed toward the CBOs that these teams rely on to provide information about corridors and connect them to small businesses. This funding should be expansive enough to ensure wide-ranging language access and consistent on-the-ground outreach from trusted organizers and merchant leaders, not just sporadic “walkthroughs” from BEST.

Another critical program is the Commercial Lease Assistance program, which currently provides free legal support to commercial tenants, but its limited funding prevents the program from reaching enough small businesses before they sign an unfair lease or are under threat of eviction. In order to be effective, this program must be funded at a level that enables rigorous on-the-ground outreach through collaboration with CBOs that allows lawyers to proactively negotiate lease terms and intervene in disputes with landlords.

| b. | **Work with City Council to protect small businesses**

A lack of protections for commercial tenants, the criminalization of street vendors, and the prevailing power imbalance between property owners and both tenants and vendors makes the possibility of displacement an everyday worry for countless small businesses. In order to combat these threats, we need stronger laws aimed at stopping commercial landlord harassment, ending unfair commercial lease terms, and legalizing expanding safe street vending.

| c. | **Invest in public realm improvements**

Small business owners and employees are some of our most reliable stewards of public space but they are often not recognized as such. In order to bring foot traffic into commercial corridors, they clean sidewalks, decorate storefronts, and activate space in creative ways. In neighborhoods that lack a BID, the cost of this maintenance falls on individual businesses. The city can do more to provide reliable sanitation, improve lighting, and invest in CBOs that can bring new programming to public spaces, help build temporary installations and test permanent improvements, and develop community-driven visions for public spaces. A [Fund for the Public Realm](#) could effectively resource CBOs and cultivate public spaces in every neighborhood.

⁴ <https://urbandesignforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2025-LocalCenter-Mayor-City-Hall.pdf>

Conclusion

The city's small business policies and programs can make it cheaper for all New Yorkers to open and maintain a business. And it can do so in a way that advances racial and economic justice, by starting with the businesses and the neighborhoods that have been historically left out of investment. From the East Village, to Richmond Hill, to Sunset Park, to the South Bronx, New Yorkers rely on their local businesses, and these businesses rely on CBOs to access what they need to thrive and lead in their communities. The next Mayor can support this ecosystem through equitable small business policy that centers commercial tenants, street vendors, and more of our smallest businesses.

ABOUT US

The Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD) is a membership organization with over 80 neighborhood-based and city-wide nonprofits that have affordable housing or equitable economic development as a key part of their mission. The Citywide Merchant Organizing Project (CMOP) is an ANHD program that works toward increasing coordination and collaboration among organizations who are providing support to small businesses and organizing merchants. ANHD is also a member of United for Small Business NYC (USBnyc), a coalition of community organizations across New York City committed to protecting small businesses, including street vendors, and commercial tenants from the threat of displacement.



ANHD's current CMOP cohort includes organizers from Chhaya CDC, Cooper Square Committee, Street Vendor Project, and WHEDco.

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