

Shreveport, Louisiana

October 2024



Small Business Insights and Policy Recommendations Report





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Executive Summary

Shreveport has an abundance of resources to help small business owners thrive. While these resources can help entrepreneurs navigate many of the challenges they face, this support does not address a root barrier to entry that nonetheless exists: overly burdensome regulations that make it difficult to start a business. Often, regulatory barriers make the business startup process so expensive and complex that only those with the most resources are able to overcome them—effectively blocking access to entrepreneurship for people from modest backgrounds or first generation business owners learning the entrepreneurship ropes.

Shreveport's city government has the power to reform the regulatory environment and ensure

all individuals with determination and passion can have a genuine shot at becoming small business owners—with the city enabling rather than hindering them. Shreveport has taken initial steps to address this need by establishing the Mayor's Small Business Task Force (SBTF), which is committed to increasing access to entrepreneurship by reducing the regulatory barriers that stand in the way of so many individuals seeking to become business owners. This report was commissioned by the SBTF and produced by Cities Work—an initiative of the nonprofit Institute for Justice—with the goal of providing a comprehensive view of the status of regulations faced by small business owners in Shreveport and outlining strategies to reduce regulatory red tape.



Shonveyon Johnson
Good Cravingz Food Truck

Key Findings Include:

REGULATORY ANALYSIS

- Taxes and fees to start a small business in Shreveport are lower than in other mid-sized cities we have studied. However, the delays and complexity involved in navigating the business licensing and permitting process impose often unseen costs on entrepreneurs in the form of unforeseen compliance requirements, long wait times, and delayed business opening.
- The Uniform Development Code hampers business growth and innovation by making it incredibly difficult to meet city standards for development. The confusion caused by the code results in entrepreneurs being required to undergo multiple reinspections and pay reinspection fees accordingly, submit multiple versions of plans, and spend more money to comply.
- The lack of a functional, online one-stop shop makes the business start-up process unnecessarily complex and difficult to navigate.

ENTREPRENEUR INSIGHTS

- Consistent, easily digestible information can be hard to come by in Government Plaza. Entrepreneurs lacked clear guidelines for how to comply with city requirements and had trouble getting accurate information from the city's website and departments.
- Shreveport's planning and zoning processes are incredibly complex and

prescriptive. Entrepreneurs struggled with strict zoning requirements that lack flexibility for innovative business ideas, as well as burdensome requirements for site plan reviews.

- Entrepreneurs frequently expressed frustration with receiving conflicting information from city departments, not understanding why their applications were denied, and difficulty communicating with staff.

REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS

We synthesized the regulatory analysis findings and entrepreneur insights to prepare reform recommendations that address the main obstacles Shreveport entrepreneurs face. Recommendations center around the following themes:

- The regulatory process must be simplified to encourage greater infill development and small business creation.
- Regulatory requirements must be more clearly defined so that small business owners can pursue their entrepreneurial endeavors with greater certainty that they will be able to successfully comply. Adding greater transparency and navigability to city rules and regulations will greatly help entrepreneurs, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status.

This report does not address all the barriers entrepreneurs experience, but it does present solutions that will start leveling the regulatory playing field to increase access to entrepreneurship. In this report, we outline how we can work together to allow everyone in Shreveport to achieve their entrepreneurial dreams.

Regulatory Analysis

In February 2022, Cities Work published *Barriers to Business: How Cities Can Pave a Cheaper, Faster, and Simpler Path to Entrepreneurship*.¹ That study outlined the costs, delays, and complexity associated with starting a small business in 20 cities across the country and formed the basis of the work that Cities Work continues to do in partnership with cities nationwide. It also allows us to compare metrics across various cities and recommend policy solutions built on national best practices.

A complicated regulatory environment can be a large barrier to entrepreneurship as the time, money, and resources required to navigate the permitting and licensing processes are often prohibitively high for individuals without significant resources. The cost and process to obtain one individual license might not appear to be a prohibitive obstacle; however, starting a business requires multiple permits and licenses to operate in compliance with city code, and the cost of obtaining necessary approvals quickly adds up.

Notably, the permitting and licensing processes are particularly difficult for lower-income and historically disadvantaged entrepreneurs to navigate, as they often cannot afford to hire an agent to navigate this process for them or to spend the many hours (and make multiple trips to and from city offices) to comply with the necessary requirements. Burdensome regulatory

requirements make starting a business difficult for even the most experienced entrepreneurs as well—and make entrepreneurship even less accessible to individuals who are not wealthy, native English speakers, or highly educated.

The Cities Work team conducted in-depth research into the process required to start several common business types. We mapped out the specific permitting and licensing processes to open a restaurant, retail store, food truck, and home-based business, as well as to add a liquor license to a restaurant. We used the same methodology we used to analyze regulations in *Barriers to Business* so that we could compare apples to apples and offer best practice solutions based on what other cities do well. See the online appendix for full research results.

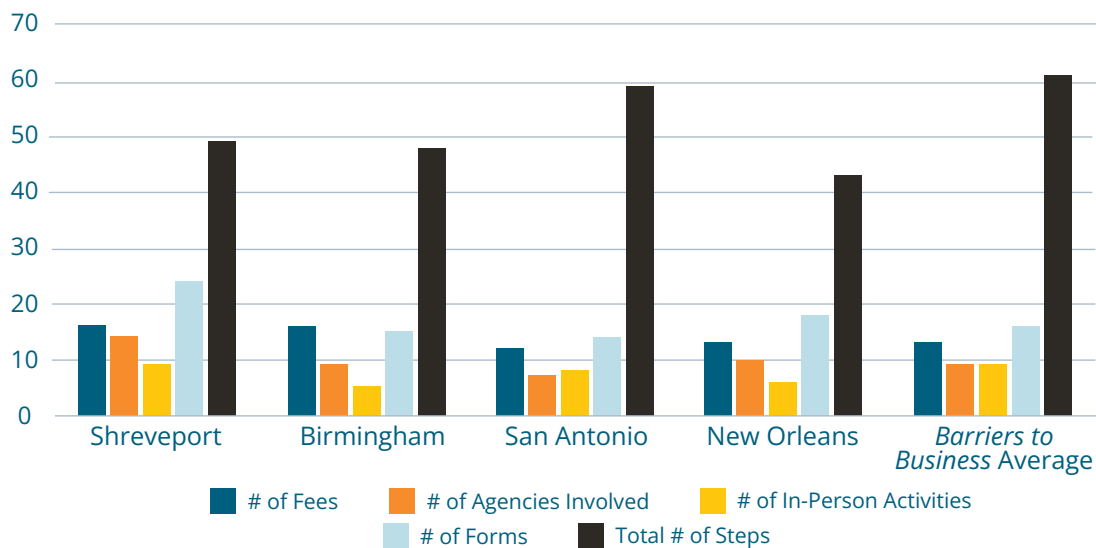
Our research demonstrates how individual compliance steps might feel simple or insignificant on their own, yet pose a steep barrier to entry when viewed in the full context of navigating the entire permitting and licensing process. As is common in cities across the country, we found that the process in Shreveport is incredibly complex and time-consuming for entrepreneurs just starting out.

“If you read that code book, you’ll never get anything done, because it’s prohibitive.”

— Shreveport Entrepreneur

¹ Meleta, A., & Montgomery, A. (2022). *Barriers to business: How cities can pave a cheaper, faster, and simpler path to entrepreneurship*. The Institute for Justice. <https://ij.org/report/barriers-to-business/>

OPENING A RESTAURANT IN SHREVEPORT VS. OTHER CITIES



CITY	Shreveport	Birmingham	San Antonio	New Orleans	Barriers to Business Average
Total Cost	\$1,847	\$4,403	\$2,477	\$2,253	\$5,358
Number of Fees	16	16	12	13	13
Number of Agencies Involved	14	9	7	10	9
Number of In-Person Activities	9	5	8	6	9
Number of Forms	24	15	14	18	16
Number of Steps	49	48	59	43	61

RESTAURANT

By the Numbers:

- Total Steps: 49
- Number of Fees: 16
- Total Cost: \$1,847
- Number of In-Person Activities: 9
- Agencies Involved: 14
- Number of Forms: 24

Opening a restaurant in Shreveport is a truly Herculean undertaking, asking entrepreneurs to summon a great deal of fortitude to navigate roughly 49 steps. The process can involve 14 different departments, cost nearly \$2,000, and some steps, such as verifying zoning compli-

ance, cannot be done online. These steps and others, such as contacting the Assessor's Office to have the property valued for ad valorem tax purposes, must be done by calling city offices.

Furthermore, there are multiple steps that require in-person action from the entrepreneur. The New Business License application must be picked up in person or printed out, and completed applications must either be faxed or returned to the Revenue Department in person. The entrepreneur must also be present to open and close the building for seven separate inspections before they can receive their Certificate of Occupancy.

Even online, the process introduces complications such as having to create five different online profiles, including GeauxBiz, Parish E-File, the Louisiana Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), the Louisiana Taxpayer Access Point (LATAP), and MyGovernmentOnline. The commercial remodel permit also poses an exceptional expense—nearly \$1,000 for our hypothetical restaurant. Although HVAC, plumbing, and electrical permits are necessary for safety, each carries with it a \$31.50 fee to obtain. And inspections run an entrepreneur \$68.50 per inspection, per permit. Many entrepreneurs need additional reinspections due to unclear requirements or inconsistent feedback between inspectors, which can quickly multiply into a painful price tag. As with retail, entrepreneurs are required to get a separate permit for their sign and pay a \$50 fee, even for a basic wall sign. Although many of these steps may be logical in themselves, in total they represent chokepoints that could tie up entrepreneurs in time-consuming delays.

LIQUOR LICENSES FOR RESTAURANTS

By the Numbers:

- Total Steps: 22
- Number of Fees: 5
- Total Cost: \$1,782
- Number of In-Person Activities: 6
- Agencies Involved: 2
- Number of Forms: 8

Restaurants that want the ability to sell alcoholic beverages face a labyrinth of expensive, time-consuming, and opaque regulations before they can do so. For instance, filling out the State of Louisiana's license application requires applicants to provide 14 different documents. While Shreveport can't control state-level laws, it is important to remember that entrepreneurs are inundated with regulations beyond city-level rules.

Once the applicant has registered with the state, they must apply for a local liquor license through the Shreveport Police Department, adding further costs. Shreveport also requires anyone working at the establishment to apply for an Alcoholic Beverage Ordinance (ABO) card, which is difficult to find on the city website and costs \$50 for owners or managers and \$27 for each employee, which can quickly add up. Even non-employee spouses of owners and managers are required to submit to an in-person background check. The application packet provided lists the required supplemental documents but does not elaborate on the requirements of all of them. For example, requirements such as "Distance Letter" and "Newspaper Article" are vague and require the entrepreneur to follow up with the city to obtain more information about how to satisfy the applica-

tion criteria. With only a vague timeline for document review and inspections, entrepreneurs are left clueless about how long this part of the process will take.

As in other cities and states, obtaining a liquor license comes with its own set of unique barriers. For example, applicants must have been a resident of Louisiana for two years or more to obtain their license. And the process is largely governed by the Shreveport Police Department, which is not set up or intended to deal with business permitting and licensing issues.

RETAIL

By the Numbers:

- Total Steps: 29
- Number of Fees: 8
- Total Cost: \$598
- Number of In-Person Activities: 7
- Agencies Involved: 11
- Number of Forms: 16

At first glance, opening a retail location in Shreveport is not an expensive process. For instance, opening a small bookstore in a space requiring no renovations would only cost \$598 in fees. However, at 29 steps, and involving 11 agencies, the process can be time-consuming and complex, resulting in lost revenue for prospective entrepreneurs who must still pay expenses while waiting for approval.

While many steps can be completed online, the business license application must be submitted in-person or by fax. Meanwhile, some steps can only be accomplished by calling the city, such as verifying that the business is allowed in the zoning district that governs the selected location. If the business isn't allowed in the zoning district, the process to get a variance or a special use permit adds considerable costs and delays to the process. Entrepreneurs are also required to get a separate permit for their sign and pay a \$50 fee even for a basic wall sign.

MOBILE AND TRANSIENT VENDORS

By the Numbers:

- Total Steps: 28
- Number of Fees: 7
- Total Cost: \$491
- Number of In-Person Activities: 3
- Agencies Involved: 11
- Number of Forms: 16

Supporting mobile vendors is crucial for fostering a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem. These vendors often represent the first rung on the entrepreneur-

ial ladder and allow entrepreneurs to reach their customers in a variety of ways. Low initial investment costs compared to brick-and-mortar stores allow individuals to test the waters of entrepreneurship, develop their skills, and refine their products. Additionally, mobile vendors often cater to underserved communities, bringing essential goods and services directly to residents who might lack easy access to traditional stores.

The process to legally open a food truck in Shreveport is more difficult than it may seem at face value. While the city does a decent job outlining the steps on the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) website to apply for and obtain a food truck vendor's license, the time and effort required to meet that criteria is needlessly high due to contradictory information, broken or missing links to important documents, and more.

One example of contradictory information for an entrepreneur is whether an occupational license is required to operate. In the checklist and guidelines section of the Food Truck Vendor's License Application Instructional Packet for Food Truck and Trailer Vendors, obtaining an occupational license is listed as a necessary step. Yet, under the Application Checklist sidebar on the same MPC page that the Instructional Packet is accessed from, it states, "Please contact our Plan Examiners at (318) 673-6442 to verify if an Occupational License is required." How are entrepreneurs to know if they are required to obtain an occupational license if in one guide they are told it is necessary, but on the same page, they are told to call to verify?

Furthermore, the MPC website and Instructional Packet fail to direct applicants to necessary documents. Across the checklist, they instruct applicants to reach out to various city departments at the provided phone numbers to learn what they need to do instead of directly linking them to the step. This process could be simplified significantly by linking the documents as a PDF, to cut out the time and hassle of calling each separate department. Where the document does include links, such as to the Fire Inspection Checklist, the user is frequently met with a 404 Error message that the page cannot be found.

Other various standards and limitations that make operation difficult include the requirement to submit a list of all foods and beverages that will be prepared and sold on the truck and at the commissary, and the sources of those ingredients. Businesses need to have the ability to offer specials—this burdensome requirement limits a business' ability to be competitive by disincentivizing innovation and creating barriers to adapting to the market. Further, minimum parking requirements and zoning rules limit the potential locations for mobile food vendors to conduct business in, and references to the Use Matrix leave entrepreneurs responsible for cross checking the zoning categorization anywhere across the city.

HOME-BASED BUSINESSES

By the Numbers:

- Total Steps: 15
- Number of Fees: 3
- Total Cost: \$225
- Number of In-Person Activities: 2
- Agencies Involved: 6
- Number of Forms: 9

Starting a business from home is a great way for entrepreneurs with big dreams but little cash to begin their entrepreneurial journey. Home-based businesses are crucial to the health of the American economy. According to the most recent census data, the United States is home to more than 15 million home-based businesses, representing about half of small businesses in the country.²

In fact, home-based businesses make up about a quarter of small businesses that have employees, making home-based business a job generator and an economic engine.³ This is especially true for women, who make up a disproportionately large number of home-based business owners, as they have reported it is easier to care for children while adding to their household income.⁴ The ability to start a business from home is a safe, non-capital-intensive way to get a business off the ground and start earning income. This option is especially important given that research suggests women and minorities tend to find it more difficult to secure

2 U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy. (2020). *Frequently asked questions*. <https://advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Small-Business-FAQ-2020.pdf>

3 Ibid.

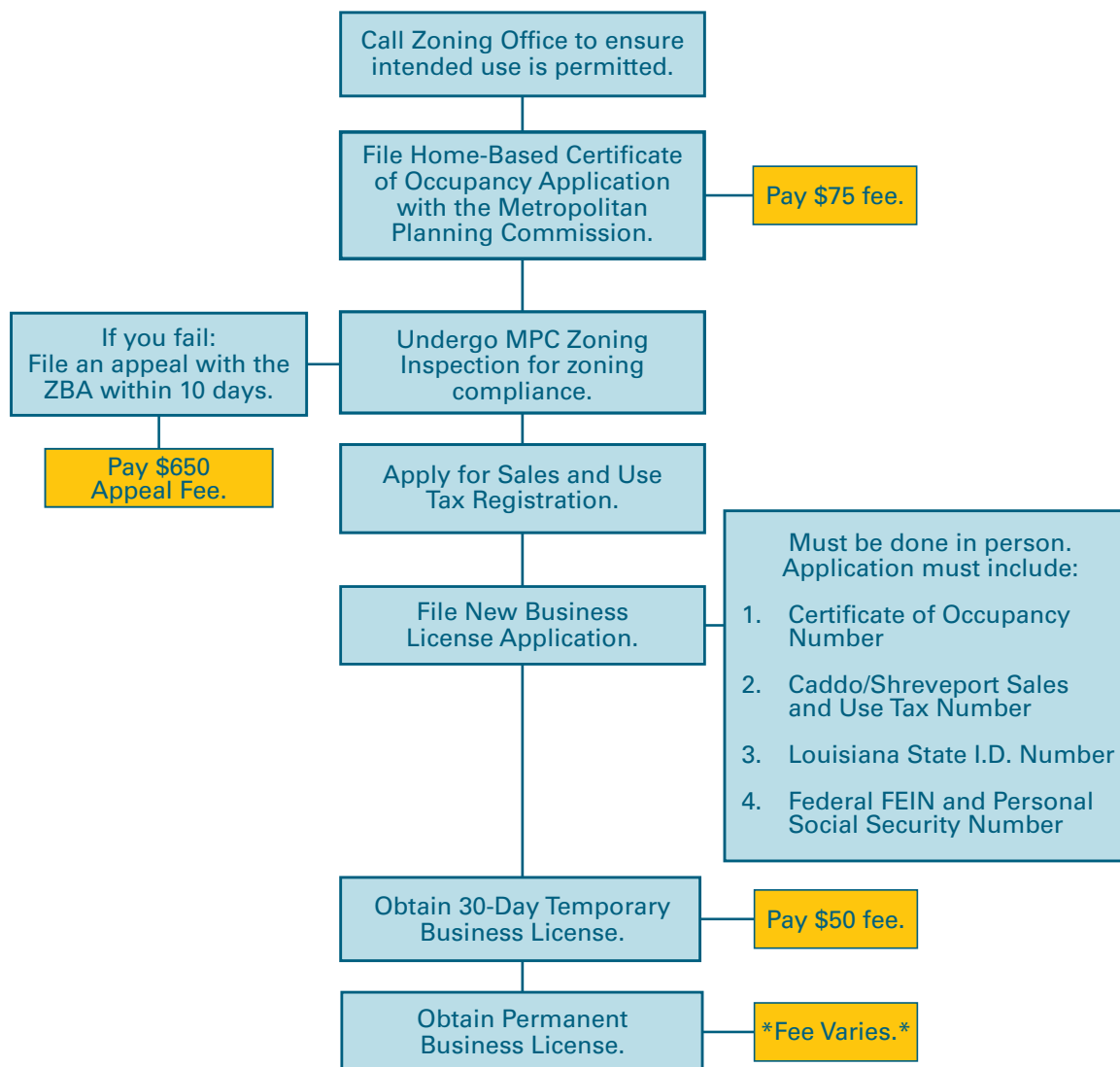
4 McDonald, J. (2019). The relationship between cottage food laws and business outcomes: A quantitative study of cottage food producers in the United States. *Food Policy*, 84, 21–34; McDonald, J. (2017). *Flour power: How cottage food entrepreneurs are using their home kitchens to become their own bosses*. The Institute for Justice. <https://ij.org/report/cottage-foods-survey/>; Loscocco, K., & Smith-Hunter, A. (2004). Women home-based business owners: Insights from comparative analyses. *Women in Management Review*, 19(3), 164–173; Breen, J. (2010). Gender differences in home-based business ownership. *Small Enterprise Research*, 17(2), 124–136; Osnowitz, D. (2005). Managing time in domestic space: Home-based contractors and household work. *Gender and Society*, 19(1), 83–103.

traditional loans or venture capital.⁵ For some, running their business from their home may be their only option. And given the regulatory hurdles previously outlined in this report, starting a home-based business is likely easier than obtaining brick-and-mortar space.

Unfortunately, Shreveport makes it more difficult to start a home-based business than many other cities. Even though most home-based

businesses are undetectable from the street, the city requires each home-based certificate of occupancy applicant to undergo a zoning inspection. And if applicants fail to pass the inspection, the fee to appeal the inspector's decision is a steep \$650. Most other cities only require an inspection for home-based businesses that necessitate higher health and safety standards, such as in-home hair salons or micro-restaurants.

PROCESS TO OPEN A HOME-BASED BUSINESS



⁵ Coleman, S., & Robb, A. (2009). A comparison of new firm financing by gender: Evidence from the Kauffman Firm Survey data. *Small Business Economics*, 33, 397-411.

One-Stop Shop

While the regulatory processes outlined above are onerous to navigate, entrepreneurs commonly struggle to even figure out what is required of them to get started. Cities' websites should serve as a one-stop shop for opening a business. They should guide entrepreneurs through the entire process for starting up and allow them to apply for all of the necessary permits and licenses through a single portal. Without an effective one-stop shop, Shreveport's entrepreneurs are often left in the dark as they attempt to figure out which regulatory steps to complete and in what order.


Shreveport's "Guide for Opening a Business" lays out the first five steps required of entrepreneurs when beginning their business within the city. While it does a decent job of

laying out what is required of new businesses and provides general links, it fails to provide a single log-in to complete the forms through a single portal. Instead, entrepreneurs are given mailing addresses and fax and phone numbers for the departments they must register with. Often, weblinks are broken and phone numbers are out of service. This leaves entrepreneurs to chase down departments on their own in order to be compliant with the regulations, with no estimate of how much time it will take to complete each step.

Compared to other cities, Shreveport lacks effective navigation of permitting and licensing requirements and does not give effective resources for tax registration. For these reasons, Shreveport's website scores just one out of five in our one-stop shop analysis.

ONE-STOP SHOP ANALYSIS

Shreveport's website satisfies 1/5 of our one-stop shop criteria.

-  **Connecting city requirements with processes from other levels of government.**
- [] **Completing forms and registrations through the portal, not through each agency's own website.** Many forms are only available as a PDF form that can be downloaded and sent in either through email or faxed. Some forms require in-person submission.
- [] **Covering all city requirements, not just requirements for getting a business license.** The business license guides are housed on a separate part of the website and only provide generalized links and information for the requirements of other departments or levels of government.
- [] **Providing a single log-in opportunity so entrepreneurs can organize information and track progress in one location.** Entrepreneurs must create five separate log-in credentials for the various platforms they use to complete regulatory requirements.
- [] **Guiding entrepreneurs effectively through the process.** While the city provides some guides to starting a business that can be helpful, they do not cover all of the city's requirements and are plagued with broken or general links that can leave entrepreneurs scrambling to know what to do next.

Kanya Michelle
Shreveport Biscuit Company



PLANNING AND ZONING

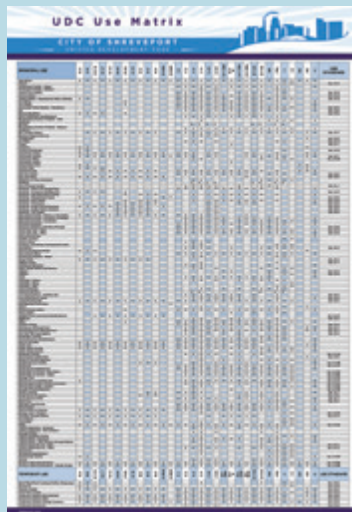
Nearly every entrepreneur and city employee we talked to expressed frustration with the Uniform Development Code (UDC), the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), and Shreveport's zoning laws. When the UDC—which contains the city's zoning regulations—went into effect in 2017, the MPC was led by a former planner from the city of Austin, Texas.⁶ As a result, entrepreneurs tell us that much of the UDC's components were borrowed from Austin—a city struggling with rapid growth that wants to slow down development.

This is the opposite of what Shreveport needs. Shreveport needs a code that encourages infill development and makes it easy for entrepreneurs to build new buildings and renovate existing ones.

Cities Work recommends a complete overhaul of the UDC that incorporates feedback from the community and keeps Shreveport's unique needs in mind. Depending on the level of reform that City Council and departments are comfortable pursuing, Cities Work is happy to help amend the UDC.

Included here are just a handful of problems that we believe are ripe for reform.

UDC Zoning Matrix



Zoning Matrix: The city's zoning matrix is far too complex and prescriptive. It contains 32 separate zones and several dozen use designations. Entrepreneurs must determine which use designation fits their business' needs—which offers little to no flexibility to innovative business models that don't fit into a previously-determined category—and then scour the MPC's

incredibly complex zoning map to search for an area in town that is properly zoned for their needs.

Plan Approval and the MPC: Entrepreneurs frequently describe long, confusing processes to get plans approved by the MPC. There is general confusion about whether certain projects must first obtain zoning or MPC approval and in which cases both approvals are needed. Often, projects remain in the MPC's queue for a long time before applicants learn that they should have first submitted their applications to the Zoning department.

Landscaping Requirements: Landscaping design standards have worthy intentions of promoting water conservation and biodiversity, but the meticulousness of the standards contained in the UDC are counterproductive and add considerable costs and delays to the development process. For instance, the standards require specific species of plants, as well as minimum height and trunk sizes for several varieties of trees and shrubs. These standards require developers to purchase the plants when they are more mature, more expensive, and more prone to fail. The standards also apply to areas used for industrial purposes, adding needless expense to projects such as warehouses and construction equipment facilities.

Building Design Requirements: The UDC sets forth extensive design criteria for a variety of zoning districts, including commercial, residential, and downtown. For instance, roof design guidelines in commercial districts seem overly detailed, stipulating that "an element of variegation on the roofline must occur at intervals of no more than 75 feet" and that "parapet walls must feature three-dimensional cornice treatments or other shadow-creating details along their tops." The UDC also "encourages" buildings in commercial districts to have green, blue, or white roofs, although the nature of how these paint colors are encouraged is unclear. Overall, the design criteria add additional cost and complexity to building and renovation projects.

6 McCarty, E. (2014, Jul. 30). New Caddo Parish MPC Director Selected. *KEEL 101.7FM & 710AM*. <https://710keel.com/new-caddo-parish-mpc-director-selected/>; Dickerson, S. (2017, May 16). Unified Development Code Goes Into Effect. *Shreveport Times*. <https://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/local/2017/05/15/unified-development-code-goes-into-effect-today/101705152/>

Entrepreneur Insights

The Cities Work team hosted multiple roundtables with entrepreneurs of diverse backgrounds and business types. The Chamber of Commerce also hosted a series of town hall listening sessions across the community, during which we heard from small business owners, as well as local advocates and other key stakeholders. These conversations highlighted the following recurring themes of obstacles entrepreneurs face while starting a small business in Shreveport:

General Confusion: Participants frequently struggled with being confused about where to start the compliance process, as well as which requirements they needed to follow and in what order. This confusion often contributed to projects going over budget and lasting longer than planned for.

Inspections: As in most cities, Shreveport's entrepreneurs struggle to comply with the several inspections that must be carried out by various city departments before businesses can open. Participants cited vague and subjective inspection processes, where they were unsure of the standards to which they would be judged. Often, entrepreneurs reported receiving conflicting information from different inspectors and not understanding why they failed a certain aspect of the inspection. Participants expressed the need for standardized inspection checklists and comments standards, as well as implementation of continuing education for inspectors to keep them abreast of current trends and requirements.

City Websites: Entrepreneurs expressed frustration that resources for small business owners are spread across multiple websites, including the Shreveport Caddo Parish MPC website, City of Shreveport Government website, Caddo Parish Assessor's website, and multiple state agency websites. Although some application processes are available on city and parish websites, entrepreneurs still must go between different sources to understand what information to provide and how to submit it. Some appli-

cations are required to be picked up in person and physically returned, mailed, emailed, or faxed in. And even when entrepreneurs can navigate processes online, they complained of outdated PDF applications and broken URL links.

Zoning: Small business owners reported having a very difficult time navigating Shreveport's complex zoning code. The zoning map is difficult to find on the MPC's website and even more difficult to interpret. There are more than 30 different zoning categories, creating particular challenges for food truck owners and other mobile entrepreneurs who must navigate the zoning map daily in order to ensure they operate in the proper zones.

Site Plans: In addition to entrepreneurs who own small businesses, such as restaurants and retail stores, the Cities Work team also heard a great deal from developers and other entrepreneurs

in the construction industry. These professionals cited particular confusion with the requirements for submitting site plans, including who is qualified to submit them for city approval. They also expressed the general feeling that standards for site plan review are subjective and often required for projects that may not necessarily need them.

Inflexibility: Entrepreneurs with innovative business models often reported feeling like the city's policies are too rigid, making it difficult to start a new type of business not anticipated by the code. For example, the incredibly strict zoning use matrix makes it difficult to open a unique business and can result in long project delays while staff attempt to decipher how the code should treat an innovative project—or entrepreneurs are left to navigate uncharted waters on their own. Some entrepreneurs expressed the belief that projects may be denied by the city if they were too new or complex because the city didn't know how to regulate them.

"I love the entrepreneurship, the support, the community. It's just the getting established in Shreveport that's difficult."

— Shreveport Entrepreneur

Nathaniel Cosby
Big Nate's BBQ and More



Interacting With the City: Some entrepreneurs felt they needed to have special connections in Government Plaza to get things done, particularly when they had trouble getting permits through the approval process. They also expressed concerns about the customer service experience in Government Plaza, which can make a difficult process even more frustrating to navigate. Some also observed a lack of transparency, accountability, and consistency throughout the regulatory process. Often, entrepreneurs received conflicting information from different city employees or departments and felt that departments were too siloed to effectively work together to assist small business owners.

Reform Recommendations



A meeting of the Small Business Task Force and Cities Work team.

The collaboration between Cities Work and the City of Shreveport centers on the overarching goal of making it cheaper, faster, and simpler to start a small business—especially for individuals who have traditionally been excluded from

this sphere in the first place. Detailed recommendation profiles, including drafted ordinance language and potential scope of impact, can be created upon request.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Transform Shreveport’s website into a true one-stop shop.

As part of this work, the city should remove old PDF applications from the website so entrepreneurs do not risk filling out outdated forms. All forms should be digitized and incorporated into the online portal to streamline and clearly outline the process.

The Cities Work team and members of the Small Business Task Force have already met with the City’s Chief Technology Officer about the current website’s capacity and improvements that can be made in the near term. We are delighted by the city’s commitment to improve its website and look forward to continuing to work together to make a one-stop shop a reality for Shreveport’s entrepreneurs. We also understand that it may be necessary for City Council to appropriate additional funds to purchase software and/or services that will allow all licensing and permitting to be conducted through a common portal.

Comparison of Effective One-Stop Shop Features	
KC BizCare – Kansas City, MO	MiamiBiz – Miami, FL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Received a 4/5 on our analysis.• A city department dedicated to the success of businesses in Kansas City.• Dedicated individuals ready to help businesses with the licensing and permitting process, regardless of where they are in the startup process.• Effective portal for submitting applications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Received a 4/5 on our analysis.• Primarily a web portal that connects entrepreneurs to all forms and electronic submissions.• Tracking for application material review times and progress.• Guides entrepreneurs through each step and connects them to guides for state and county requirements.

“This needed to happen yesterday. I’ve been doing this for three years, and I still feel like a chicken with my head cut off.”

— Shreveport Entrepreneur

RECOMMENDATION 2

Allow home-based businesses to operate by right, without requiring a zoning inspection.

Only those home-based businesses that have a legitimate, demonstrated potential to negatively impact residential neighborhoods should require special approval from the Zoning Board of appeals (ZBA). All others should be permitted by right, without a special inspection required. In cases where there is the potential for home-based businesses to impose negative impacts on their neighborhoods, such as by having several contractor employees meet at a home in the morning before heading out to the day's job site, the city can implement rules to protect against this added traffic. For example, a revised home-based business ordinance could limit entrepreneurs from having more than two business visitors at the home per hour. This way, entrepreneurs are aware of the limits placed on their activities, and if neighbors complain to the city, citations can then be issued against bad actors. This will serve to punish those not following the rules without limiting all home-based businesses unfairly.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Waive the plan approval process if projects utilize pre-approved plans.

Many projects involve common building plans, such as basic cafes and restaurants. Shreveport should offer a library of pre-approved plans for developers to choose from that allow them to bypass the plan approval process, as has been successfully done in other cities such as South Bend, Indiana.⁷ The city should also be explicit in which plans need to be signed by licensed architects or engineers and which can proceed without that approval.

For those plans that do need approval, provide clear guidelines and checklists online that include specific lists of what needs to be included in applications. When plans are rejected, require employees to provide consistent comments regarding required changes so that plans can be efficiently adjusted and approved.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Eliminate landscaping requirements from the UDC.

Overly prescriptive landscaping requirements like Shreveport's only serve to delay projects and increase costs. Often, builders install the necessary landscaping, and then business owners do not keep up with the expensive upkeep. This results in dead plants that end up making the area look worse than if it had no landscaping at all.

⁷ See https://southbend.in.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SBBT_Catalog_23-0506-lowres.pdf.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Consolidate zoning districts.

Shreveport's zoning districts are overly specific and difficult to decipher. Districts should be consolidated in order to allow greater flexibility for developers and small business owners. Specifically, consolidating the various commercial districts together, the various residential districts together, and various mixed-use and downtown districts would help encourage a more vibrant city center.

As part of this work, the city should simplify and clarify where mobile vendors are permitted to operate.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Cross-train MPC and Zoning employees on how projects should move through the approval process.

City departments across the country are often overworked and understaffed, and Shreveport is no different. Building out a one-stop shop with an effective zoning tool should help reduce the burden on staff to guide projects through the zoning and MPC approval processes. For projects that still need individualized attention, it would help speed up the queue if employees were cross-trained to help each other process applications when others are inundated with applications.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Streamline the liquor licensing process for restaurants.

Restaurants need liquor licenses in order to compete with chains. Shreveport must make it easier for restaurants to obtain a liquor license, both by streamlining the process and ensuring that the process can be done online. The requirement that owners' and managers' non-employee spouses pass a background check is invasive and overly burdensome, and it should be eliminated. Misinformation and broken links on the liquor licensing sections of the website must also be fixed.

Furthermore, consider moving the liquor licensing administration into a more traditional regulatory department and away from police headquarters. The police can still enforce the requirements for liquor licensees and sign off on granting licenses, but the job of administering the paperwork and website for applications and renewals would better fit within an agency that already administers other licenses.

The City of Chicago allows entrepreneurs to apply for conditional approval of their liquor license before their business is ready to open. Entrepreneurs apply for conditional approval before they begin construction or remodel work, allowing them to know whether their liquor license application will be approved once they have satisfied all regulatory requirements and obtained their certificate of occupancy.⁸ This maintains all safety and neighborhood feedback requirements, and simply allows entrepreneurs to invest in their business with confidence that they will be able to operate fully once their doors open. Shreveport should consider implementing a similarly innovative conditional approval process.

⁸ See https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/bacp/supp_info/classes_of_liquorlicenses.html#:~:text=Conditional%20Approval&text=This%20process%20ensures%20business%20owners,exception%20of%20the%20facility%20inspections.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Require departments to publish and abide by inspection checklists, document communications with applicants, and record justifications for deficiencies and decisions.

This will add clarity and consistency to the inspections process. Standardized comments regarding reasons for failing to pass inspections should also be required so that entrepreneurs can easily and quickly fix errors and pass reinspection without too many delays. Recording or documenting communications will enable review, improve transparency, and increase standardization.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Remove or address inefficient or confusing department processes and ordinances through a “spring cleaning” efficiency ordinance.

All departments will be required to submit to the Mayor a report of inefficient, confusing, costly, or unnecessary processes, steps, or requirements their department teams are responsible for administering and solutions that are suggested by the responsible parties. Teams will implement a metric and feedback system to track pain points, bottlenecks, or commonly failed processes and employee-suggested solutions to these issues. The Mayor will review each report and compile a set of recommendations to be presented to the City Council to accept or reject these items. The items accepted will be added to the annual “spring cleaning” efficiency resolution. This can be thought of as similar to the sunset review process conducted at the state level. All team employees should be encouraged to suggest items and solutions. As the experts in administering their respective processes, their suggestions should be thoughtfully considered. The feedback system should include optional anonymity for employees concerned about speaking up.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Partner with the business community to establish a Community Navigator to serve as liaison between entrepreneurs, expanding businesses, and Government Plaza.

While transforming Shreveport’s website into a true one-stop shop is a necessary first step to improving the process and experience of working with the city, often businesses are unprepared for or unaware of the structure and processes necessary to achieve their business goals. We heard routinely from both entrepreneurs and established businesses about wishing they had ‘someone to call’ to help them understand what is required, navigate the process, explain when they encounter issues, and intercede when necessary.

And it is not just interacting with the city. Shreveport has a wealth of entrepreneurial support entities which assist entrepreneurs at different phases in their business journey and offer different levels of engagement. There is also not currently a documented approach to moving through this support ecosystem.

Consequently, we recommend that the city partner with the business community to develop a community navigator to prepare, guide, and support businesses as they move through both the city’s process and the entrepreneurial support ecosystem. While this is not a silver bullet and must be accomplished alongside process reforms and streamlining, it will help entrepreneurs have more clarity and certainty as they navigate the city’s regulatory requirements.

A man with a beard, wearing a black baseball cap, a bright green t-shirt, a black apron, and blue gloves, is focused on his work in a commercial kitchen. He is standing at a stainless steel counter, possibly preparing food or cleaning. In the background, another person is visible, and the kitchen is equipped with various appliances and supplies. The lighting is warm and focused on the man.

Milam Street Kitchen Incubator
and Community Kitchen (MSKICK)

"I drive around, and I see vacant lots and buildings everywhere around this city. We need to get entrepreneurs into there, but the costs are too high and they're scared of the overhead."

— Shreveport Entrepreneur

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is a testament to the generosity and selflessness of the Shreveport entrepreneurs who graciously gave their time and welcomed us into their spaces, all with a shared goal of helping future generations of business owners. Their insights were invaluable in shaping the outcomes of this report, and it was a true privilege to meet and learn from them. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many incredible individuals who contributed to making this report a reality. Our deep gratitude goes to Tim Magner, the Greater Shreveport Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Shreveport Small Business Task Force, whose unwavering commitment to supporting Shreveport entrepreneurs

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"We're all out here struggling to make something that Shreveport needs."

— Shreveport Entrepreneur



To view a digital copy of this report, scan the QR code or go to citieswork.org/shreveport.

