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Getting a permit could get a lot easier

Portland Business Journal - by [Andy Giegerich](#) Business Journal staff writer

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Aubrey Lindley wants to expand his Cocoa drink chocolate empire one store at a time. In order to do that, he'll need to apply for permits. Lots of permits.

For small business owners, the process can be a nightmare, with trips to several offices in one day.

That could change.

Both the city and the state want to streamline the process so entrepreneurs like Lindley spend more time behind cash registers and less time at city hall. If successful, the reforms could boost small businesses, the workhorses of the Oregon economy.

Next month, City Council will consider a proposal from Commissioner Randy Leonard to consolidate several Portland agencies.

The reforms are desperately needed, say small business owners.

Leonard is hammering out details that would put the permitting functions of five bureaus — transportation, water, the Bureau of Development Services, the Bureau of Environmental Services and the parks department — under one roof. The functions might also take place in the same location.

The city issues about 10,000 permits a year, with about 8,000, from contractors, requiring reviews by multiple agencies.

Similar proposals have been made over the last decade, but anxiety from bureau employees tended to quash them, said Ty Kovatch, Leonard's chief of staff.

Leonard and Mayor Sam Adams discussed the idea last year and pledged to enact some sort of reform, he said.

"It's taken 10-plus years to do this, and it always gets about 30 percent done before the bureaus kill it," he said. "Sam and Randy said there's no way that'll happen this time."

The state will also take up the challenge.

Secretary of State Kate Brown wants to meld the Office of Regulatory Streamlining with the governor's Economic Revitalization Team.

The move would help businesses navigate regulatory.

"It's fair to say there's a growing awareness among the political leadership that we have to have a vibrant economy," Brown said. "That means we need to keep Oregon's businesses, large and small, functioning, and also make it easy for them to start."

When done right, streamlining can make it easier to run a business.

For instance, since Gov. Ted Kulongoski opened the Office of Regulatory Streamlining in 2003, the state's Department of Environmental Quality reduced the time it takes to enforce noncompliance issues from an average of 86 days to 33 days. The process used to take 156 steps. It now takes half that many, said Kate Marx, manager of the Office of Regulatory Streamlining.

The Central Business Registry, which electronically provides businesses with ways to procure and file forms, will enter its third phase this July. The registry will allow customers to use the registry to update business registrations and receive renewal notices online.

The new system, which began operating two years ago, allows the state to better communicate with businesses, said Peter Threlkel, Oregon's corporation division director. The system will save money, but will cost \$300,000 to implement.

The department is still working out details, including whether the changes would affect the state's budget.



Cathy Cheney | Portland Business Journal

Cocoa's Aubrey Lindley welcomes changes that will make it easier to get city permits.

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