



Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: Introduction of Permit Partner System

Presenter:
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2/27/2023	1	City Council Work Session	received	

Introduction of Permit Partner System

Presenter:

Jacob Anderson, Citizen Engagement Specialist, Office of Communications
 Shawna Lippert, Senior Economic Development Specialist, Economic Development Division

Summary:

The City of Colorado Springs, in partnership with many local agencies, is launching a tool called Permit Partner to help citizens discover the permits, licenses, inspections, applications, and fees that may apply to them as they start a new business or plan a special event in Colorado Springs. This system will improve transparency, streamline the requirements of multiple agencies, and prepare users for the potential government processes that they will encounter.

Background:

Starting a business is not an easy task. Entrepreneurs have enough to learn while getting their operations started -- they shouldn't need to become experts in local government processes too. For entrepreneurs, Permit Partner can help future small business owners understand their upcoming needs for permits, consequences of zoning and location selection, process of inspections, estimated fees, and many of the other interactions with local government so they can focus on the work of building their business.

For special event planners, Permit Partner is now the event application process used within the City's Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services department to track event applications, route for approvals across multiple departments, and to help the event planner understand the requirements and estimated fees for their event.

With this system, Permit Partner asks the entrepreneur user questions that they know the answers to. Permit Partner translates that information into a packet that displays the estimated permits, applications, fees, processes etc. based on their entries and directs the user how to start the appropriate interactions with local governmental agencies.

This system will be an important step in making Colorado Springs the most small business-friendly City in America.

The vendor, OpenCounter, has a track record of being a trusted vendor to multiple municipalities in the U.S., including Orlando, San Diego, Cincinnati, and Atlanta. They have been in business for 10 years and have a record of improving permitting services in over 70 communities.

Previous Council Action:

N/A

Financial Implications:

Ongoing annual City contract with vendor, OpenCounter (2023-): \$113,021 within 2023 Budget

The annual fee includes ongoing support from the vendor and ongoing updates of modified processes, fee schedules, and zoning updates when applicable. The annual fee includes support for three portals that are customized for Colorado Springs: Special Events, Zoning, and Business portals.

Indirect financial implications exist related to saving businesses time and money by providing a much more streamlined, consolidated experience of the multi-agency governmental processes. This system will also result in savings of agency staff time across departments and agencies.

City Council Appointed Board/Commission/Committee Recommendation:

N/A

Stakeholder Process:

Colorado Springs for Small Business Advancement (COSSBA) is a network and a monthly meeting for all local agencies that interact with small businesses to meet, discuss issues, and try to streamline the process of starting a business in Colorado Springs.

COSSBA includes:

- City of Colorado Springs Economic Development
- City of Colorado Springs Clerk's Office
- City of Colorado Springs Department of Planning and Development
- Colorado Springs Fire Department, Division of the Fire Marshal
- City of Colorado Springs Office of Communications
- Colorado Springs Chamber & EDC
- Colorado Springs Utilities
- Pikes Peak Regional Building Department
- Pikes Peak Small Business Development Center
- Better Business Bureau of Southern Colorado
- El Paso County, Economic Development
- El Paso County, Public Health
- Downtown Partnership of Colorado Springs
- Bryan Construction

Several local entrepreneurs

These members have helped with the configuration of the Permit Partner program, including sharing the logic and details of their permits/licenses/applications, processes, fee schedules, etc. as well as helping staff craft the language that the system uses to communicate with the Colorado Springs user.

Staff have also conducted usability testing sessions with entrepreneurs convened by the Pikes Peak Small Business Development Center and by the Downtown Partnership of Colorado Springs. Configuration and improvements will be ongoing, and staff expect to work with the vendor to implement changes to agencies' fee structures, incentive zones, land use zoning, and other relevant facts.

For the Special Events portal, the staff at the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services department worked extensively with a group of special event planners for user testing and feedback of the system. In fall 2022, the team had an internal soft launch with event planners who host longtime annual events. Based on feedback from these stakeholders, Special Events continues to adapt the system to serve their users.

Alternatives:

N/A

Proposed Motion:

N/A

N/A