



Date: July 8, 2021

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: John Keisler, Director of Economic Development 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Storefront Reopening and Board-Up Removal Program**

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On March 16, 2021, the City Council adopted a [recommendation](#) to receive a presentation on the Proposed Long Beach Recovery Act (LBRA) plan. As part of the recommendation for economic recovery, the City Council approved up to \$250,000 for “Storefront Reopening and Board-up Removal.” The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the City Council with an update regarding this program and recommend next steps to begin the removal of storefront board-ups as part of a broader campaign to reopen and recover.

## **Background**

Over the last 15 months, Long Beach businesses and commercial property owners faced many economic and social challenges due to the economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest related to the murder of George Floyd, which led to over 125 business and commercial property owners covering broken windows and storefronts with plywood board-ups. Although plywood board-ups are typically not allowed by the Long Beach Municipal Code (LBMC) for extended periods of time, the City worked with business owners crippled by the economic recession to keep their buildings secure until resources were available to repair storefronts and reopen for business.

### *American Rescue Plan Act*

On March 16, 2021, the City Council approved a recommendation as part of the Proposed LBRA to fund a Storefront Reopening and Board-up Removal (SRBR) program. Included in that recommendation was the allocation of \$250,000 of anticipated [H.R. 1319 American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#) (ARPA) grant funding to support the establishment of a Property Reopening Ombudsman and grants to assist business and property owners with reopening and the removal of plywood board-ups, basic repairs, façade improvements, and beautification of high-need commercial corridors impacted by civil unrest, COVID-19 closures, and other safety or quality of life impacts.

After initial review of ARPA interim guidelines, the SRBR program elements included in the City Council recommendation appear to be consistent with the goals, objectives, and eligible uses of the ARPA to “provide a wide range of assistance to individuals and households, small businesses, and impacted industries,” including the following two objectives stated by the legislation:

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- Supporting small businesses, helping them to address financial challenges caused by the pandemic, and to make investments in COVID-19 prevention and mitigation tactics, as well as to provide technical assistance. To achieve these goals, recipients may employ this funding to execute a broad array of loan, grant, in-kind assistance, and counseling programs to enable small businesses to rebound from the downturn; and,
- Speeding the recovery of the tourism, travel, and hospitality sectors, supporting industries that were particularly hard-hit by the COVID-19 emergency and are just now beginning to mend. Similarly impacted sectors within a local area are also eligible for support.

Consistent with the summary of eligible uses described above, the following section provides a summary of the priorities and policy goals of the SRBR program approved by the City Council that staff believe are eligible to be funded with federal ARPA grant funding.

### *Board-Up Removal*

On June 11, 2020, staff from the Public Works Department (PW) conducted an assessment and survey of business and commercial property affected by civil unrest. The survey included an inventory of storefronts that had plywood board-ups. On June 2, 2021, staff from ED conducted a follow-up field survey identifying 65 storefronts that still have plywood board-ups. Businesses and commercial properties with plywood window/storefront coverings can be found citywide. However, the locations are primarily concentrated in City Council Districts 1, 2, 6, 8, and 9, along commercial corridors including Anaheim Street, Atlantic Avenue, Long Beach Boulevard, Pacific Avenue, and Pine Avenue.

Removing plywood board-ups citywide is the first recommended program to be launched as part of LBRA. The SRBR will be aimed at encouraging businesses and property owners to remove window/storefront coverings (plywood) consistent with LBMC Section 8.76.017 (Prohibited Materials—Commercial). The program would begin implementation July 12, 2021 and consist of two parts: (1) community outreach; and, (2) financial assistance. The following section contains staff's recommendation as to how the SRBR program may be implemented.

### *Community Outreach*

Starting July 12, 2021, the community outreach component of the program will consist of an advertisement campaign and targeted letters to the 65 businesses and property owners identified in the Field Survey promoting ReopenLB and request for the removal of their board-ups. If the Council offices, business improvement districts or other groups have identified businesses who could benefit, staff can reach those as well. The letter would be followed by outreach by ED staff. After 30 days of the initial communication, the Code Enforcement Division may follow with noticing and require compliance with LBMC Section 8.76.017 (Prohibited Materials—Commercial).

### *Financial Assistance*

The financial assistance component of the program will include assistance with the cost and labor associated with removal of the window/storefront coverings (plywood) and repair of windows or facades damaged by the unrest. Through its contracts with City “on-call” property management consultants, ED staff will leverage its existing contract for property management services for work related to the removal, haul away and disposal of window/storefront coverings (plywood). Please see the attached Program Summary Flyer (Attachment).

It is anticipated that approximately \$50,000 will be allocated as part of the program for removal and haul-away costs for up to 65 storefronts identified in the Field Survey, anticipating a maximum grant of \$600 per business or commercial property plus contingency. In addition, approximately \$25,000 in costs are anticipated for staffing to administer the SRBR and other ReopenLB programs available to property owners during a 90-day period. The budget also assumes up to \$25,000 for marketing, promotion, and technical assistance provided through grants to local business support associations such as the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce, Council of Business Associations (COBA), and community-based organizations in areas hit hardest by the civil unrest. In total, the SRBR program is anticipated to cost approximately \$100,000 to implement.

### *Eligibility Requirements*

To qualify for assistance, applicants must meet the following eligibility requirements:

1. Must be a nonprofit or for-profit business within Long Beach as its location of business;
2. Must have an active Long Beach Business license;
3. Must have 50 or fewer full-time employees;
4. Must have experienced financial hardship resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and State and local Health Orders;
5. Must be a physical location in Long Beach;
6. Must be in compliance with local Health Orders; and,
7. Must not be permanently closed.

Removal of up to 30 pieces of plywood, including dumping fees and labor estimated at \$600 will be paid for and coordinated by ED staff for each location. Work does not include replacing glazing damaged during the COVID-19 pandemic or civil unrest.

### *Application Process*

Beginning July 12, 2021, the application intake and review process will include the following steps:

1. Applicant visits City’s SRBR webpage;
2. Applicant reviews SRBR program eligibility requirements;
3. If eligible, applicant submits application and required documentation via DocuSign application portal for staff review;

4. City staff screens application for eligibility to receive SRBR assistance;
5. City staff informs applicant of SRBR Program eligibility;
6. City staff contacts approved applicant to review and sign agreement for assistance and other pertinent documents;
7. City staff works with applicant to schedule contractor visit (priority will be provided to business and commercial properties located in Low- and Moderate-Income Areas).

#### *Application Assistance*

Applicants who require assistance completing the online SRBR application may call the City BizCare Hotline to receive assistance (562) 570-4BIZ (4249) Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. As part of the outreach and assistance program, staff will provide businesses with information about a range of small business resources that can help them to open and recover from the economic fallout created by the COVID-19 pandemic and State and local Health Orders. Additional support may include grants, loans, digital inclusion, rental assistance, or other technical assistance.

#### **Equity Lens**

There are several important strategies staff recommend promoting equity and inclusion for the outreach, support, and reporting of SRBR program results. The following section highlights supportive services for applicants to ensure the resources of the SRBR program are reaching those property and business owners in need who have experienced the greatest economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Consistent with ARPA goals and objectives, staff will ensure grant funding and technical support is focused on equity and helping those most vulnerable, among other criteria. Additionally, if Code Enforcement has begun citing businesses who have their board-ups vandalized or have graffiti, staff will collaborate with Code Enforcement to determine if the grant funds should be focused to address violations and to help businesses avoid fines. The removal of vandalized board-ups in low-median-income areas will be prioritized.

To further promote equity and access, the City will contract with a range of community-based organizations with connections to the commercial corridors and business owners in the areas hardest hit by COVID-19 and civil unrest. An emphasis will be placed on promotional activities and technical assistance providers who can provide language access. Individuals who require assistance completing the online SRBR Program application may call the City BizCare Hotline and can speak with a BizCare Hotline representative by calling (562) 570-4BIZ (4249) or complete applications at BizCare Pop-ups with technology and internet access located in low-median-income communities. Services will be available in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Khmer, and Tagalog.

#### *Tracking and Reporting Equitable Results*

In addition to targeted outreach and partnership with business organizations, staff will collect data that details the geographic areas where the SRBR program is implemented and the

demographic makeup of property and business owners that are applying for assistance through the program. This data will inform business outreach strategies focused on ensuring that assistance is equitably distributed geographically and by race, ethnicity, and gender. Staff will translate all marketing material (including advertisements) into multiple languages.

### **Next Steps**

The SRBR Program is another critical economic support program identified in the LBRA plan. To expedite the implementation of the program, ED will utilize a staffing agency to immediately place a Property Reopening Ombudsman on a temporary basis for a period of at least 90 days, finalize the grant application, and begin outreach efforts to business owners and property owners of storefronts identified through the recent field survey. Additionally, ED will leverage its existing contract for on-call property management services for work related to the removal, haul away, and disposal of window/storefront coverings (plywood).

Total costs of the SRBR program are estimated at \$100,000 including the cost of board-up removal, promotion and outreach, temporary staffing, and BizCare Hotline staffing. The department will begin incurring program costs using its existing General Fund appropriation as LBRA program parameters have not yet been finalized. It is anticipated that all SRBR program costs will be recovered from LBRA future proceeds.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me directly at [john.keisler@longbeach.gov](mailto:john.keisler@longbeach.gov) or by phone at (562) 570-5282.

#### ATTACHMENT

CC: CHARLES PARKIN, CITY ATTORNEY  
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DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS