

## Policy Proposal- Facilitate the development of shared kitchens and commissaries

Vendors in Chicago have few options for safe, affordable kitchen space. Building your own fully equipped kitchen can be costly, ranging from \$50,000 to \$500,000 or more. That is why food entrepreneurs around the country are turning to shared kitchens, licensed commercial kitchens that rent space to aspiring or expanding food businesses and often serve as incubators. Despite growing demand, there is only one privately-operated shared kitchen in Chicago, leaving vendors with few alternatives outside of preparing food in their homes. Streamlining and facilitating the creation of shared kitchens offers an opportunity to support street vendors and other members of Chicago's growing local food industry.

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### *Now*

- Chicago licenses 2 types of shared kitchens:
  - Establishments whose primary operation is running a shared kitchen. This license is \$660.
  - Retail or wholesale food establishments that rent their kitchen space as a supplemental use. For example, a restaurant or banquet hall that rents out its kitchen during off hours. This license is \$330.
- Anyone who wants to use a shared kitchen must get a shared kitchen user license. It is \$330 for a two year license, and \$75 for a 90 day license.

### *Problem*

- Shared kitchens are only allowed in limited zones: B3, C1, C2, and C3.
  - These zones may not be located where vendors live and work, or where property is affordable; adding significant cost and transportation time.
  - Narrow zoning guidelines prevent community organizations and churches located in residential districts from starting kitchens. This zoning also limits anyone interested in opening a shared kitchen in industrial districts, where there may be unoccupied, food grade buildings.
- Legal and operational requirements for starting a shared kitchen are difficult to understand.
- Requirements for operating a commissary are unclear.

### *Compare*

- San Francisco is home to La Cocina, a thriving nonprofit kitchen incubator that provides kitchen space, training, and resources for low-income food startups.
- A firm in Brooklyn repurposed a 160 year old Pfizer plant closed since 2008 as a space for local food entrepreneurs. This new activity is expected to create hundreds of jobs.

### *Proposal*

- Amend the zoning law to allow shared kitchens within vendors' neighborhoods.
- Make city land or facilities available for vendors to prepare food and store carts safely and conveniently.
- Provide clear information about equipment requirements for shared kitchens and commissaries.

### *Impact*

- Vendors will have more options for affordable, accessible kitchen space that meets the Health Department's requirements.
- Shared kitchens could simplify the inspection process by allowing health inspectors to assess the facilities of multiple vendors at once.
- A communal shared kitchen space also offers opportunities for food entrepreneurs to network with others in their industry, learn best practices, and share resources. Kitchens in colleges, like the Washburne Culinary Institute at Kennedy King College, could connect vendors with resources like experienced chefs, business owners, and food scientists.
- In addition to creating safe, up-to-code space for food entrepreneurs, shared kitchens can breathe new life into unused buildings in economically depressed neighborhoods, create jobs for kitchen tenants and operators, and help grow Chicago's vibrant culinary scene.