



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 9, 2012

I Scream, You Scream: San Francisco Red Tape Nearly Strangles Small Businesses

Despite their professed love of the small and local, however, the leftists in charge of the City by the Bay have made it next to impossible for anyone to start a small business in that town. Just ask Juliet Pries.

In January Pries opened the [Ice Cream Bar](#), an old-fashioned ice cream parlor, in the Cole Valley neighborhood of San Francisco. But before she could start serving up hot fudge sundaes and banana splits, she was forced to spend two years and hundreds of thousands of dollars — supplied by family and friends — navigating the city's labyrinthine planning codes and otherwise satisfying the bureaucrats' whims.



For example, writes the [New York Times](#): “Ms. Pries said she had to endure months of runaround and pay a lawyer to determine whether her location (a former grocery, vacant for years) was eligible to become a restaurant. There were permit fees of \$20,000; a demand that she create a detailed map of all existing area businesses (the city didn't have one); and an \$11,000 charge just to turn on the water.”

“Even after she acceded to all the city's demands,” the paper adds, “her paperwork sat unprocessed for months.” All this time “she still had to pay rent and other costs, going deeper into debt each passing month without knowing for sure if she would ever be allowed to open.”

“It's just a huge risk,” she told the *Times*. “At several points you wonder if you should just walk away and take the loss.”

Fortunately for her customers and her now 14 employees, Pries was unusually determined to get her business up and running. “Many times it almost didn't happen,” she told the *Gray Lady*. Only Pries' grit and natural optimism ensured that it did; and now the Ice Cream Bar, says the newspaper, “has become an immediate sensation, packed with both families and the foodie crowd, savoring upscale house-made ice creams and exotic sodas (flavorings include pink peppercorn and tobacco).”

Pries' travails are perfectly in keeping with the pro-government, anti-business bias of the Democrat-dominated city, in which “planning codes governing businesses ... ballooned over the years to become hundreds of pages long,” former Planning Commission president Christina Olague told the *Times*.

In fact, the code has become — as Olague put it — “so convoluted” that, in hopes of spurring reform, the Planning Commission itself created a web [cartoon](#) demonstrating how impossibly complex the code is. In the cartoon, a woman applies to the department to open an ice cream shop and is thoroughly confused and frustrated by the endless rules and regulations governing everything from the number of tables in the shop to whether the food is served on disposable or reusable dishes. Finally, after thanking the planning department bureaucrat for his “very informative” talk with her, she rubs her forehead and



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says in despair, “Perhaps I should keep my job as a cater waiter.”

The Planning Commission has already approved an ordinance that would simplify the process for opening a small business. City supervisors are expected to consider it in the very near future.

Passing that ordinance would be a good first step toward improving the environment for business in San Francisco. But as Mark Farrell — notably, the city supervisor with the most private-sector experience — remarked, “To change the inner workings of government is a longer proposition.”

What is needed is a complete rethinking of the whole notion of having city planners and requiring individuals to hop through hoops to do what anyone in a free country should be able to do without first seeking someone else’s permission: engage in commerce with his fellow man. That way lies greater prosperity and happiness for all; the other way lies poverty for all except the politically connected and a war of all against all for pieces of the shrinking economic pie.

Then again, maybe the latter is what the Left really wants. If so, they’re doing a bang-up job of achieving their dream, in San Francisco and [across the fruited plain](#).



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