



**Urban Land
Institute**

Chicago

ULI Chicago's "Front Stoop Series"
Small Businesses, Big Changes
May 21, 2020

A Conversation With:

Viktor Schrader, *Economic Development Director*, Oak Park Economic Development Corporation

Martin Sorge, *Executive Director*, Uptown United and Business Partners

Ginna Ryan, *Principal*, Mauge, Inc.

On May 21st, ULI Chicago Members convened for the Front Stoop Series to discuss "Small Businesses, Big Changes." The conversation was led by Viktor Schrader, *Economic Development Director*, Oak Park Economic Development Corporation, Martin Sorge, *Executive Director*, Uptown United and Business Partners, and Ginna Ryan, *Principal*, Mauge, Inc. This casual setting gave members an opportunity to have an open conversation and share their thoughts and on-the-ground experiences regarding the challenges presented to Small Business in their communities. Three themes were elaborated upon:

Navigating the PPP Paycheck Protection Program: challenges for small business - The panel noted that the short 'loan forgiveness window' (maximum of 8.5 weeks) – presented a challenge to restaurants, and all small businesses – as they remain closed, and unable to drive revenue. As a result, many businesses have returned or rejected PPP Loan's, as they're currently unable to rehire workers, just to remain closed. Their concern is that if they accept the funds, they would need to close again in 8.5 weeks, with no additional opportunities for funding.

The panel confirmed that these challenges, along with continued strains in lack of sales, may lead to many of their local Businesses closing permanents.

Maintaining client outreach + brand awareness - Ginna is focused on the great importance of small business (including older family owned restaurants, bakeries and retail outlets) and maintaining their outreach to their community, neighbors and customers. Ginna (and the panel) noted how they are actively coordinating with small businesses in their communities to encourage them to advance and increase their social media presence and outreach to customers. Examples provided were auto clients that have transitioned to digital + online sales, and delivery and repair drop-off.

Ginna, Martin, and Viktor also noted the challenge presented to older family owned businesses that typically lack a social or digital media channel, in maintaining awareness (E.g. that they remain open for curbside pick-up, that they offer meal kits, price fixe options) and letting their clients know they remain open to serve.

The panel reiterated that those businesses, from restaurant, coffeeshops, artists and boutiques, that can maintain their brand awareness (and drive business through delivery apps or online portal's), will likely be those that survive. Those groups that are unable to maintain their connections to their customers, will unfortunately struggle to stay viable.

Adapting zoning to support new market conditions - Viktor gave a thoughtful presentation regarding renewed attention with Oak Park (and other jurisdictions) to reviewing zoning ordinances to allow new mixed-uses in the downtown core. These uses include, allowing residential (and other mixed-use developments) to include non-retail (e.g. shared amenity, co-working space), space on their street level storefronts. This approach is being driven by a recognition that some businesses may struggle to remain, and to ensure that in the absence of retail that CBD and Downtown corridors remain active and full.

Summary written by Patrick Slattery, Associate, Business Development, Harley Ellis Devereaux