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If you're a baker  
you'd better have  
lots of dough to  
open a business  
in Santa Monica.

# Another real-life nightmare trying to cope with City Hall red tape.

*Jeff Glaser recaps what happened during an extraordinary 2 year wait and \$200,000 expense to open a cookie shop in Santa Monica.*

By Jeff Glaser

This year, my wife and I realized our dream to open our own gourmet cookie shop, Schmerty's Cookies on 28th Street and Ocean Park. Dealing with the bureaucrats at City Hall turned our dream into a nightmare.

Rather than putting out the welcome mat, the City shuts its door. Our story is a perfect example of why you should think twice before trying to open a business in Santa Monica.

In July 2002, we signed our lease for Schmerty's Gourmet Cookies (named after my wife Syrna's nickname.) We hoped to open our doors within a few months. Two years and almost \$200,000 in bills later, Schmerty's baked its first cookies.

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To say this process took the fun out of opening our new business would be an understatement. Except for one sympathetic councilmember, the Santa Monica City Council turned a blind eye to our needs and sat by as one department approved our plans while another department rejected them, causing endless delays and costing us thousands and thousands of wasted dollars.

Our experience is indicative of what is wrong with the City of Santa Monica. On everything from minor details to major structural issues, we received conflicting instructions from the City. The biggest



roadblock was over the ramp they wanted us to install. Our store is 700 square feet and only 15 feet wide. We proposed to build a short concrete ramp like other merchants on our block. The City rejected our plan.

In the end we were forced to attend a public hearing and build a ramp that takes up half the store. Think about that. What other business in any other city in the world is required to build a ramp that takes up half the store when none of the other merchants on the same block are required to?

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**But when the book hasn't been written, and the rules change every day, it's confusing.**

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Santa Monica City Council needs to make changes – now. Six months for a ramp and two years to open a cookie shop doesn't make sense. The City needs a handbook for new businesses instead of issuing confusing and contradictory regulations. They need a central office with decision-making power, not competing fiefdoms that give conflicting messages.



Above all, the City needs a new attitude. My wife and I represent a typical small business. We are hardworking, loyal and dedicated. We care about our community. We want to do everything by the book. But when the book hasn't been written, and the rules change every day, it's confusing. It's hostile to business. It's disheartening to new business owners. It causes unnecessary delays and clogs up the City Hall system. Think about how many other problems the City could deal with – homeless people, traffic, crime – if they streamlined the business regulation process.

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Unfortunately, I don't think that will happen with the current City Council. That's bad news for business. Bad news for customers. And bad news for citizens who want a fair and balanced council that works for everyone. We need a City Council that will refocus the priorities of the city on issues that matter most, and make small business more welcome in Santa Monica.