

May 19, 2019

To: BOS

From: Ross Tartell

Re: **Update on Ideas to Increase Wilton Business Activity**

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent actions to mitigate its effect have caused enormous economic disruption. Many of Wilton's local businesses have been closed or forced to be very innovative in order to survive. Businesses have developed a wide range of strategies and tactics designed to help them weather the crisis. While very creative, the communication of potential effective practice has been done on an ad hoc basis. In addition, there has been little coordination of support to help individuals, private citizen groups or the town maximize the effectiveness of these business efforts.

Purpose

To gather representative examples of current practice that is helping Wilton businesses survive during the pandemic and provide ideas to help spur new business development possibilities (not an exhaustive list, merely examples).

Current Status

There has been progress. This document was discussed with Wilton's Economic Development Commission and a number of key stakeholders. Exemplars of ideas have been updated and attached.

Next Steps

There are four levels of initiatives that need to be put into place to help the Wilton business community:

- 1) Coordinated communication and marketing to the local Wilton community. The local residents have only a partial understanding of the businesses that are open, how best to access their products/services or what they have to offer. Customers cannot buy what they do not know about. An example is the New Canaan virtual market.
- 2) Sharing of current and good practice. With the highly splintered approach in Wilton's business community there are many highly effective practices that are in place, but not widely shared. Just knowing more about what is possible and the best way it can be done will enable Wilton's business community be better at business. An example is Facetime shopping.

- 3) Access to resources that have expertise. Many small businesses do not have the expertise to put simple measures into place. For example, many retail organizations could use a website that provides the products via curbside pickup or through delivery by a delivery service. Examples are Wilton Warrior Helpers and Blue Star Bazaar.
- 4) There is an emerging area that will also become increasingly important as we enter Phase 1 of opening for business. That area is understanding and application of the regulations and guidelines that will enable a safe opening of businesses. Because so much is new and the environment is changing so fast that expert advice will be incredibly important to a process that maximizes the creation of a strong business environment where the business owners and customers feel safe.

Ideas to Increase Wilton Business Activity

Ideas currently implemented that are working well

Idea	Representative Examples
Create a contest to win a gift card to a local retail store/restaurant.	Marion Filley & Compass Real Estate Wilton Fire Department
Eat Local, Win Local in Wilton – order at least \$15 and show the receipt.	Town of Wilton
Identify food donations from local restaurants for Norwalk Hospital & other local hospitals.	Wilton Warrior Helpers
Curbside retail pickup/delivery.	Ancona's Village Market Rings End Sweet Pierre's
Thank you signs given to takeout customers appreciating first responders.	Lisa Lombardi – In front of Wilton businesses and homes
Gift card match for food bank.	Village Market
Shopping for seniors or people at risk.	Wilton Warrior Helpers Wilton Helping Hands (Peg Koellmer)
Providing free services to the community to increase market awareness by doing good.	Bender Plumbing (local food banks) Pilates – Meditation to raise money for the Wilton Food Pantry Susan Bauerfeld, PhD, Chris Parrott, BPS, Janine Kelly, Esq., Ginna Yerrall, MSW - Free Weekly COVID-19 Parent Discussion Zoom Forum

Ideas being used in Wilton but that might be expanded across more businesses

Idea	Representative Examples
Find virtual ways to connect with current and new customers (i.e., specific videos about offerings or orienting people to the business).	Ancona's Wilton Historical Society Wilton Library
Use Facetime to create a personal shopping experience.	Open House Turnover Shop
Home delivery of goods & services.	Wilton Cleaners Silver Hanger Cleaners Stop & Shop
Internet order (click, purchase and mail/deliver).	Blue Star Bazaar Pinocchio Pizza The Painted Cookie Wilton Pizza
"What's open."	Good Morning Wilton New Canaan Advertiser Chamber of Commerce Shop Wilton website
Stay Safe Wilton (Wilton Community Information Bulletin Board).	Order gift cards, filter for type of service or shopping experience

New ideas or ideas being used in other towns

Idea	Representative Examples
Create a virtual marketplace for local retailers.	Partnership between New Canaan Library and Chamber of Commerce
Prepare to open Farmers Markets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive-through • Pay virtually • Physical arrangement 	Westport New Canaan Ridgefield
Create a centralized giving event/function to support key economic initiatives or charitable giving.	Giving Tuesday
Bundle potential gifts with the Wilton Birthday Parade.	
Create access to low-cost business loans. Funding sourced through wealthy Wilton residents and managed through a local lending institution.	