

Wilton Economic Development Commission (WEDC)

Business Survey and Resident Survey Recommendations

Draft V4 – November 15, 2023 – ~~August 24, 2023~~ Redline

RESIDENT SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WEDC surveyed residents regarding Wilton signage. The survey received over 237 responses with a good cross-section of respondents.

- Over 75% of the respondents said they were in town 3 or more days per week and approximately 50% have been residents of Wilton for over 15 years.

Survey results:

- Over 70% of the respondents say that signs really help them find new business or locate one that they were looking for.

- Approximately 50% would be more likely to explore a new business if the sign was clearly visible and attractive and the same proportion said that Wilton has too few signs that are barely effective. 68% seek more prominent signage.

- Over 70% said there were specific areas where signs could be improved of which most cited lack of visibility and almost the same proportion would support more directional signage to find obscure businesses.

The results support that visible signage is important to business and directional signage should be provided. Residents would like added signage to help locate obscure businesses and would also like signs that are clearly visible depending on the location. Most are willing to accept more signage but many would prefer attractive and cohesive looking signs in addition to visibility. The signage at the new Sharp Hill square business location seemed particularly favorable – probably for its clean and simple black on white background. The results support the recommendations stemming from the business survey.

WEDC surveyed Wilton businesses regarding Wilton sign regulations. A survey of Wilton residents regarding signage is forthcoming. 34 responses were received from businesses located in town center and along route 7 north and south of route 33.

Many business respondents noted that signage was extremely important for both advertising and visibility of their locations and that current regulations did not meet their needs. Based on the survey, we have identified two key areas that we recommend be addressed with the current regulations. We believe that some added discretion should be granted to the Zoning commissioner to allow for variances

to the existing restrictions to address unique business location circumstances that warrant some added signage and that meets the many purposes stated in the existing Supplementary Regulations 29-8 Section A.1.

1. Obscured Businesses That Rely on Foot or Car Traffic for Visibility.

While there were some limited comments seeking larger signs and internal lighting, many comments were focused on the desire for added signage to address lack of visibility to traffic.

There are a number of B2C businesses that are not street facing or otherwise obscure yet rely heavily on foot traffic or car traffic to generate or direct traffic to their business. Absent added visible signage these businesses will continue to struggle to gain awareness and visibility. A variance to the current regulations should be made to allow these businesses to seek a permit to allow for a permanent (but perhaps during business hours only) ~~A-frame~~ sign to be placed in an agreed upon location to highlight their business and direct traffic to its location. To avoid clutter, the Zoning Office would need some discretion to identify those specific businesses that rely heavily on foot or car traffic for whom this exception would be allowed. Different visibiliity standards should be established for town center versus route 7 businesses (which are less dependent on foot traffic and vehicle traffic travels at a faster speed; i.e., larger signs). Uniform size, border and color standards could be developed to maintain some conformity and attractiveness in the signage permitted..

2. Improvements to the Process

We believe that the process for temporary added signage consistent with the current regulations should be automated and quickly and easily accessible to businesses so that businesses can readily receive a permit to add a temporary sign to place during business hours for an event or special offering. The specific requirements should be clearly explained in the online process including any costs for non-conformity. Temporary signage of this sort may be up during business hours only and include clear limitations on location, spacing, duration and frequency. Clear photo examples of permitted temporary signs should be made available as part of the online process.

With the improved temporary sign process, business should be directed to the process for approval. Notice of the improved process should be directed to businesses (e.g., via the Chamber of Commerce) and enforcement of non-complying temporary signs should be enhanced and consistent. Lack of consistency in enforcement was a concern raised by businesses. The improved signage process should be made accessible through the town website.

The EDC has created a "sign guidebook" identifying the various types of signs and showing examples to familiarize business owners with sign nomenclature. This guidebook should be available as part of the permit application process.