

**Economic Development Committee
January 24, 2023 Meeting
Wildwood Business Forum Report**

Overview

During the Economic Development Committee meeting in October, the Department proposed the installation of quarterly business forums. These forums were designed to help the City get direct input from the Wildwood business community. The Economic Development Committee approved the plan, and the City hosted its first business forum on January 12, 2023. The business forum took place within the Community Room at City Hall.

The Wildwood Business Forum was well received by the Wildwood business community. Many businesses thanked the City for providing a platform for businesses to provide their thoughts on economic development in Wildwood. The City had over 35 businesses attend the first business forum. Some notable attendees included the West St. Louis County Chamber of Commerce, STLCC-Wildwood, YMCA-Wildwood, Rockwood School District, Anthology of Wildwood, Benedetto's, Lindell Bank, RL Jones Properties, La Salle Retreat Center, and others.

During the forum, Chair Ottenberg and the Department gave a brief presentation. The Department has included the presentation in the agenda for your review. While presenting, the City announced the release of the 2023 Business Survey. The 2023 Business Survey was sent out to all Wildwood businesses on January 12, 2023. Moreover, Officer David Weinhold gave a brief presentation about Wildwood's police services and safety tips for business owners.

Open Discussion

After the presentation, the City held an open discussion about the issues facing Wildwood businesses. A few attendees mentioned signage as an issue. Specifically, the owner of Network Technology Partners (NTP) mentioned that he had applied for a sign variance but was denied. His business is located at 16442 Village Plaza View Dr. He stated that if he put up a 24-inch sign, it would be too small for his property's façade. City code states that a sign's height cannot exceed 24-inches. Attendees argued that the size of a sign should be determined by the size of a property's façade. They claimed that it shouldn't be 24-inches across the board. A few business owners proposed that the height of all signs, including logos or other representations should be based off the height and width of a property's façade. They stated that instead of limiting a sign's height to 24-inches, the City should ensure that a sign's height does not exceed a certain percentage of the façade's height. Other businesses brought up similar signage concerns.

A representative from Anthology of Wildwood stated that their business is having trouble with visibility because their sign is too small. The Executive Director of Equine Assisted Therapy, Inc and the owner of Sweet Hope Bakery mentioned that the City needs to allow promotional signs for business events. The Executive Director of Equine Assisted Therapy, Inc also claimed that internet access is an issue for some parts of the City east of Hwy 109. The owner of Elegant Designs Day Spa stated that she is currently going through the permitting process for her business's signage. She claimed that she was facing similar issues. Some participants stated the City should allow new businesses to put up temporary banners, so

they wouldn't have to open without signage. Currently, the City does allow businesses to put up temporary banners for special events. Guidelines on temporary banners can be found below:

Temporary Banners Guidelines:

- Zoning authorizations for temporary banners are required of all businesses situated in any Commercial "C" Districts for special events.
- The banner must be located on the property of the business.
- One (1) banner is permitted to be erected at a maximum size of thirty (30) square feet.
- Temporary banners may be erected for a maximum of three (3) weeks per year. This timeframe can be three (3) consecutive weeks or a combination of separate occurrences not to exceed three (3) weeks.

Follow-Up Email to Attendees

After the business forum, the Department emailed follow-up information to all the attendees. The Department sent out the following items.

- 2023 Business Survey link
- Wildwood's guide to sign regulations (includes information on temporary banners)
- Business Forum Summary
- Wildwood's 2023 City Calendar
- Next Economic Development Committee meeting date, time, and Zoom link
- Next City Council meeting date, time, and Zoom link
- Hometown Heroes program information

Feedback on the Business Forum's Format

The Department did receive some feedback regarding the business forum's format. Attendees suggested that future forums devote more time to Q&A and open discussion. That being said, participants stated that this event was a great way for the City to engage with local businesses. Many business owners have already confirmed that they will be attending the next forum.

Conclusion

Overall, the business forum felt like a great success and was received with very positive feedback from all the businesses that attended. The City will be holding these business forums quarterly, so the second forum should take place sometime in the Spring.