



## Business Roundtable Tabletop Conversations

### 1. What are the good things that happened to your business as result of the pandemic? What are the bad things?

#### GOOD:

- client/consultant team tightened
- creative thinking on how to make dollars increased
- W-K Time people questioned the news and saw new interest
- people changed perceptions
- community focused
- caught up on maintenance
- able to scale and get back to the basics; less employees/less headaches
- hours shifted prompting work life balance; 3 days per week
- forced demographic that's older to shop online
- ability to work remotely, reducing overhead costs
- greater focus in setting priorities
- focused on things that meant something; strategy
- increased creativity; Zoom solutions
- forced acceleration with tech; better equipment
- residents learn to engage with government
- resilience and courage; community support
- side hustle/part time business
- ecommerce
- strong consumer spending
- restaurants – rapidly innovating/curbside servers
- C.O.C. – better communications
- Zoom
- relief funds
- global connectivity

#### BAD:

- loss of staff helps
- playing multiple roles within the company
- Retail – had to scale back, have to adapt from strictly brick and mortar
- staffing and training lacking
- strapped because of labor shortages
- business owner's pay dropped in order to cover employees
- balance and trying to keep the business open
- offering more dollars and still can't get people to work
- lack of fact-to-face interaction



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- commercial real estate downturn
- fewer events (lodge-outside rentals took a \$10K-12K hit)
- daycare was half capacity and did layoffs; reduced demand
- reduced capacity
- restaurants hit; Grub Hub hitting local staff hard
- people's "going out" habits have changed
- life became decentralized
- city/MSD support with stormwater
- loss of revenue
- stress
- new technologies
- applying for relief
- lack of clear guidance from government for retail/restaurant
- hospitality industry highly impacted
- expensive cleaning protocols and air filtration
- higher unemployment costs
- lack of city support with mandates to keep staff and customers safe
- cost of PPE and cleaning supplies
- hours were cut, not allowed to work from home and had to rotate
- made to use vacation time to cover lost time when having to quarantine
- staffing challenges
- training of new employees
- cost of COVID testing
- loss of personal contacts with customers and clients
- senior living facility:
  - additional cost to operate a COVID-only wing (senior living facility)
- additional cost of "hazard pay" for employees working in COVID wing
  - costs associated with account for use of PPE paid for by the State

## 2. What is the #1 challenge facing your business in the next year and why?

- staffing is a big issue, huge shortage of employees in multiple types of businesses
- getting new customers
- older generation not willing to change
- media; blogging vs. print
- productivity and figuring out how to scale capital to meet future needs
- inventory management



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- “humans for quality”
- rent vs. building ownership
- bad customers
- burnout
- maintaining higher level of customer service
- finding new clients
- getting new business with new customers
- looking for office space
- paying for additional overhead
- workforce/wages/benefits
- reevaluating business and organizations; what to keep doing and what to stop doing
- keep customer spending up
- need to support small business
- city marketing/advertising and webpage
- more flexibility with short term rentals
- more flexibility with restaurant and retail use of outdoor spaces (accessory structures)
- getting back those outside rentals that took a hit
- people more apt to yell; on edge and ready to act out/lash out
- masks represent more than just a mask, they also relay a belief system
- what is the new normal and how do we get there
- adjustment period of a least a year
- supply chain issues; hard to plan when things keep changing
- pricing with supply
- staffing; pay changes, retirements, part-time preferred
- finding facts vs. political speak
- companies have to remarket themselves

### **3. What challenges, roadblocks, or issues do you face from the City’s regulations or funding? (i.e. permits, ordinances, bureaucracy, etc.)**

- refused a permit because of needing historical permission on garage falling down
- lack of consistency in information
- there is a perception that WG is tough to do business with
- you have to check all the boxes
- regulations need to be consistent and don’t need to constantly change
- need to document everything



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- CUP process is a good set process
- accessory structures – restrictions in ordinances that limit the ability of retail and restaurants to use outdoor spaces and arbors with heating in front of building both permanent and temporary
- traffic management and safety for pedestrians (#1 appeal for WG is walkability)
- understanding the impact of architecture and design in success of retail and restaurants outdoor spaces will continue to play a strong role in the success and health of businesses
- business license fees – calculating income is not clear; by the honor system
- signage issues
- need to change the attitude of the City to be pro-business and protect the storefronts and faces of WG
- determining what resources the university or the City provide
- landlords to leaving storefront property vacant (i.e. Provalo Deli, Massage Envy, etc.); why is this allowed; what can the City do about problem landlords
- why is the special business district tax different between districts (Old Orchard vs. Old Webster)
- managing different codes and such for each municipality is a challenge
- differences in staff personalities equals differences in application; not consistent City employee to City employee
- occupancy inspections not consistent inspector to inspector
- \*getting all of St. Louis County on same codes (i.e. plumbing)
- \*you don't want St. Louis County to control coding/permit processing for WG, they are the most difficult and "nastiest" to work with of all the municipalities in the County

\*NOTE: These two notes are from two different tables.

### 4. What is needed to help your business and those surrounding you increase profitability and/or scale up?

- staffing, more employees
- parking
- now there are less bus line routes = harder to get to work
- networking meetings (MOB/WOB)
- building ownership to local business owners so they can build equity; can the City buy back buildings from landlords, incent landlords that leave their storefronts vacant to sell
- sales tax is very high – can you give locals a discount on sales tax to shop local



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- can funds be appropriated to give discounts to shop local
- utilize/partner with Webster University to use internship programs for small businesses; can the City help facilitate those partnerships
- business co-op space in WG
- more flexibility in ordinances and codes for outdoor spaces, events, use of space
- parking – funds to increase underground and above ground parking garages; acquire new properties for parking
- pedestrian – bigger sidewalks, safer pedestrian crosswalks, add pocket squares of shops and restaurants

### **5. Laying aside federal rules, what kind of program do you want to see the City fund from the ARP that would benefit you and your business?**

- capital and infrastructure improvements (Masonic Lodge)
- hospitality infrastructure improvements
- dedicated Emergency Operations Center
- business accelerators and incubators
- public safety excellence – high number of career fire and police
- repurpose unused businesses for business incubator
- entrepreneurship in HS
- tax advice, LLC off the ground, market strategy
- give to teachers, first responders, healthcare workers
- business promotion initiative
- marketing
- parking
- walkability
- destination retail
- architectural plan for facades
- buy property for parking
- carpool incentives
- MBE & WBE – open house hosted by the City, business opportunities, networking, how to's
- local street design
- make Watson Road a business district that attracts a larger business footprint
- PPE money programs
- buy the house on Elm next to the former Porter Paints location and also possibly the one east of it on Alma, raze them and thread parking behind the Crossroads business district



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- nuisance stormwater issues
- North Old Webster - fix/add/update neglected items the rest of the District already enjoys, i.e. sidewalks, lamp posts/lights, roads, amenities, etc.
- Improvements to business "neighborhoods" such as Zeta Dell (Marshall & Summit)
- a program to promote people come work in WG
- informational, possibly solar-powered business kiosks in the business districts and neighborhoods
- adding electrical outlets to the lampposts in the business districts
- provide a discount for residents that shop local
- facilitate landlords to sell their buildings to tenants/businesses
- wayfarer signs/stands with maps to show where you are to increase and promote walkability
- free secure Wi-Fi within the business districts
- model or partner with other municipalities on programs to take advantage of scale on costs and get more bang for the buck
- shared workspaces run by the City; co-working spaces for business owners
- free shuttle/golf carts to take customers/people between businesses
- "off-site" employee parking with free shuttle