



Doing Business in Newtown 2010 Online Survey and Interviews

Report and Appendices

December 2010

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Business Climate Survey and Interviews 2010

Executive Summary/Methodology

In June 2010, the Town of Newtown Economic Development Commission (EDC) launched an initiative to assess attitudes and opinions among existing and prospective businesses throughout town. The project centered on an online survey and interviews with a cross section of business owners. The effort has enabled the EDC to identify real and perceived obstacles and opportunities for growth, so it and the Town can better address the needs of the business community.

The survey was promoted in late August and early September. A postcard announcing its availability via a Web link on the EDC website was mailed to 1,756 businesses, essentially the entire population operating in town. In addition, announcements by groups including the Chamber of Commerce and local media encouraged all business owners to participate.

The online survey drew 150 responses from a broad cross section of businesses, for an overall response rate of 8.5% (see breakout by industry, next page). This sample size assures a confidence level of 95% at a confidence interval of slightly better than 8.1*

The survey included 20 questions broadly covering:

- Assessment of Newtown as a business location
- Plans to stay, leave and expand
- What might enhance the business climate
- Experiences with Town departments, boards and commissions

The yes/no, multiple choice and ranked agree/disagree questions were supplemented with seven opportunities to provide anecdotal comment. The online survey was augmented with phone calls and visits to businesses to provide opportunity for more expansive discussion of their opinions and ask what the Town and the EDC might do to enhance business advocacy.

* This indicates we can be 95% sure the entire population would answer as indicated in the survey, plus or minus 8%. In other words, if 50% respond a certain way, we can be 95% sure that between 42% and 58% would give the same response.

Respondents by Industry	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	3	2.0%
Construction	12	8.0%
Manufacturing	5	3.3%
Utilities	0	0.0%
Transportation and Warehousing	5	3.3%
Wholesale Trade	5	3.3%
Retail Trade	24	16.0%
Accommodation and Food Services	6	4.0%
Finance and Insurance	9	6.0%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	6	4.0%
Information	1	<1%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	18	12.0%
Educational Services	5	3.3%
Health Care and Social Assistance	6	4.0%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	8	5.3%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	9	6.0%
Public Administration	0	0.0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	2	1.3%
Other	22	14.6%
No Responses	4	2.6%
Total	150	100%

Key Findings

The survey questions elicited a large amount of information about Newtown businesses from which to draw overarching conclusions and drill down into specific issues.

Business Climate

Generally, responses indicate that Newtown is a community of small, longtime businesses whose owners are generally satisfied with the climate for operating here.

- Eighty-three percent are either a sole location or home-based business with from one to nine employees.
- Nearly half (48 percent) have operated in Newtown for more than 10 years, 18 percent from five to 10 years, and 23 percent from one to four years.
- Seventy percent plan to stay in town for the next three years; five percent do not.

Respondents cite proximity to home, character of the town and location in the state as the top three reasons for locating here. More than half (58 percent) do not think more business support services are needed, or that public transportation (64 percent) or more affordable housing (nearly 67 percent) would benefit their businesses.

Forty-nine percent of respondents either agree or strongly agree that they know who in town government to ask for assistance, and 49 percent concur that town officials are

readily accessible. But 55 percent either disagree or strongly disagree that the town's land use regulations are conducive to economic growth.

When asked about factors involved in establishing, expanding and/or operating their businesses in Newtown, responses were divided:

- More agreed than disagreed that affordable lease space was readily available, Newtown has the appropriate workforce for their businesses, business services are readily available and traffic congestion is not an issue.
- A significant number (44 percent) disagreed or strongly disagreed that signage regulations are appropriate and 23 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that training opportunities were available for their employees.

Do you agree or disagree that the following were factors in establishing, expanding and/or operating your business in Newtown?						
1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Not Applicable						
<i>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Affordable lease space was readily available	7 5%	31 22%	23 16%	16 11%	10 7%	54 38%
Building lots were readily available	3 2%	12 9%	17 12%	12 9%	9 6%	87 62%
It was easy to get my building permits through	4 3%	15 11%	24 17%	10 7%	16 11%	71 51%
My business had little or no competition in the market area	14 10%	35 24%	21 15%	34 24%	11 8%	28 20%
Newtown has the appropriate workforce for my business	5 4%	40 29%	37 27%	12 9%	6 4%	38 28%
Training opportunities were available for my workforce	2 1%	10 7%	24 17%	20 14%	12 9%	71 51%
Appropriate business services were readily available	9 6%	39 28%	35 25%	16 11%	5 4%	37 26%
Public transportation to Newtown was not necessary for my business	23 16%	63 45%	7 5%	13 9%	7 5%	28 20%
Signage regulations were appropriate for my business	3 2%	13 9%	21 15%	21 15%	41 29%	40 29%
Traffic congestion was not an issue	12 9%	48 34%	27 19%	13 9%	11 8%	30 21%

This question provided an opportunity to add comments and the most common concerns were those on sign regulations and tax issues. All comments are included in Appendix B, Question 2, on pages 21 and 22.

Municipal Departments, Boards and Commissions

Municipal departments generally received good marks for “overall experience.” The town clerk’s office had the strongest favorable response. The Economic and Community Development office had the lowest percentage of “excellent-good” ratings but also the smallest sample size, an indicator that existing town businesses had little contact with the ECD office.

Think back to the last time you had interaction with the municipal departments listed below. Please rate your overall experience working with these departments. 1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Average, 4 = Fair, 5 = Poor, 6 = No Interaction <i>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Assessor's Office	34 23%	46 32%	22 15%	4 3%	11 8%	29 20%
Building Department	21 15%	38 26%	24 17%	9 6%	7 5%	45 31%
Economic & Community Development Office	18 12%	24 17%	10 7%	10 7%	10 7%	73 50%
Land Use Agency (Zoning, Inland Wetlands & Conservation)	19 13%	24 17%	12 8%	12 8%	20 14%	57 40%
Town Clerk's Office	41 28%	56 38%	16 11%	1 1%	4 3%	28 19%
Other, please specify	11 18%	1 2%	0 0%	0 0%	4 7%	45 74%

Respondents were asked to comment, and many cited the helpfulness of individuals or entire departments. Those who raised complaints noted issues such as land use and signage regulations, or things the commission could do to help businesses. All comments are shown in Appendix B, Question 4 on pages 22 and 23

Regarding Newtown’s boards and commissions, most respondents had “no interaction” and the sample sizes for ratings were small. “Others specified” included the Tax Appeal Board and Cultural Arts Commission. See chart on next page and comments in Appendix B, Question 5, page 24.

Think back to the last time you had interaction with the municipal boards and commissions listed below. Please rate your overall experience working with these oversight boards.

1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Average, 4 = Fair, 5 = Poor, 6 = No Interaction

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Borough Zoning Commission or Borough ZBA	7 5%	8 6%	7 5%	6 4%	9 6%	103 74%
Conservation Commission	6 4%	5 4%	14 10%	10 7%	7 5%	100 70%
Inland Wetlands Commission	7 5%	9 6%	9 6%	12 9%	10 7%	93 66%
Planning and Zoning Commission	11 8%	16 11%	19 13%	11 8%	11 8%	73 52%
Zoning Board of Appeals	7 5%	13 9%	8 6%	6 4%	8 6%	99 70%
Other, please specify	0 0%	2 3%	2 3%	2 3%	1 1%	61 90%

Business Retention and Growth

As for expansion plans, nearly 14 percent of respondents say they plan to purchase, lease or construct new facilities within the next three years. (See results breakout below, including plans to build within or outside Newtown).

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes, within Newtown. I expect the greatest challenge my company will face will be (please respond in box below):			17	11.3 %
Yes, outside of Newtown. We are leaving because: (please respond in box below)			4	2.6 %
No, we're not planning a new facility within the next three years			99	66.0 %
Don't know			24	16.0 %
No Response(s)			6	4.0 %
Totals			150	100%

Note: Number of responses and response ratio are out of all 150 people responding to the question.

This question drew a wide variety of comments, most describing expansion plans and facility needs. Among concerns raised were congestion on Rt. 25, signage rules and taxes. (See all responses in Appendix B, Question 7 on pages 24 and 25).

When asked if they would like to learn how the Town or the Economic Development Commission can help with purchase, lease or construction plans, 8.6 percent said yes.

Neighborhood Business Districts

Respondents overwhelmingly (90 percent) supported attracting firms to neighborhood business districts including Sandy Hook Center, Hawleyville Center, Botsford and the Borough Village. Just 5.3 percent did not support this concept (4.6 percent did not respond).

Attracting businesses and their customers to these districts could help reduce traffic congestion in the center of town. The survey question “Where are your customers located” indicates that that most businesses draw between 25 percent and 50 percent of their customers from Newtown and surrounding towns.

Where are your customers located (approximately)?					
1 = 100%, 2 = 75%, 3 = 50%, 4 = 25%, 5 = Less than 25%					
<i>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</i>					
	1	2	3	4	5
Newtown	11 9%	34 28%	26 21%	17 14%	34 28%
Surrounding towns (Danbury, Bethel, Brookfield, Monroe, Southbury, Redding, New Milford)	4 4%	11 10%	23 21%	46 41%	28 25%
Rest of Connecticut	2 2%	12 14%	11 13%	23 26%	40 45%
Outside Connecticut (within the U.S.)	7 9%	16 21%	2 3%	9 12%	41 55%
Outside U.S.	0 0%	0 0%	1 3%	5 16%	26 81%

Infrastructure

Although more than twice as many respondents said “no” than “yes’ when asked if more public transportation or more affordable or low-cost housing in Newtown would help their businesses, significant numbers did support both. Here is how the percentages broke out:

	Yes	No	No Response
Public Transportation	30.6%	64.0%	5.3%
Affordable or Low-Cost Housing	30%	66.6%	3.3%

And though more respondents (57.9 percent) said they did not feel there is a need for more business support services, more than a third (37.3 percent) said they did (4.6 percent did not respond).

Highlights of Comments from Surveys and Interviews

In addition to questions in specific subject areas, respondents were asked “What else would you like to add about doing business in Newtown?” Nearly a third responded (all

of their comments are included in Appendix B, Question 18, pages 26-30). In a separate effort, direct, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine business owners.

SWOT Analyses in 2009 and 2008

In February 2009 and October 2008, EDC members compiled reports on business owners' perceptions of Newtown's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) as a business location, and opportunities/threats to business growth. Both initiatives involved a small sample (about 20 persons). The consultants' overview of the earlier SWOT survey appears as Appendix C, pages 31-32

Consultants' Conclusions

Reviewing the most significant findings from the current survey along with insight from prior research tells us:

- Newtown's top strength is its location -- for business owners, for attracting workers from the southeast and central parts of the state, and for customers from surrounding towns and beyond.
 - Other strengths include its character (cited several times as a draw for customers as well as home and small business owners), and the overall business climate vis-à-vis lease space, workforce and the availability of business services.
- Newtown's biggest weaknesses vis-à-vis attracting businesses are sign regulations that prevent customers from patronizing restaurants and retailers, issues with land use regulations and specific town departments (see Questions 4 and 5, Appendix A, pages 22-24), and general issues with taxes and cost of living.
- There are a wealth of opportunities to attract and retain businesses from antiques and arts dealers to corporate headquarters. Suggestions range from marketing and events that draw attendees to the former, to some kind of tax breaks for larger businesses or franchises in select locations. The 90 percent of respondents in the 2010 study who support neighborhood business centers echo the optimism about business growth in ways that enhance customer and resident work, living and shopping experiences while preserving the rural New England feel of the town. More on "opportunities" in the next section of this report, "Recommendations."
- Threats to business growth include:
 - Signage regulations perceived as inhibiting commerce.
 - The perception that the town does not go out of its way to promote or support local business.
 - Land use regulations that businesses do not understand; enforcement perceived as overzealous and beyond scope of regulations.
 - A stigma associated with certain types of businesses (e.g. fast food and "box store") though similar towns viewed favorably by residents have them.
 - Lack of parking and sidewalks to promote commerce.

Consultants' Recommendations

To build on its strengths and address issues raised through the 2010 assessment initiative, there are many steps the Town and Its Economic Development Commission can take. They fall into three categories: Regulations, Infrastructure and Advocacy/Support. EDC might consider establishing a task force in each area and, of course, sharing survey findings beyond what will be communicated through general news release. Here are suggestions in each area.

Regulations

- Work in a positive manner to gain common understanding of signage rules and:
 - Determine changes that will help businesses attract customers, while preserving the town's character
 - Develop a document that makes the requirements understandable, for proactive communication to new and existing businesses.
- Determine a process that helps prevent land use issues involving new or expanding businesses from escalating into conflicts. Consider establishing a "buddy system" through which business owners are paired with someone who "knows the ropes" and can help them "make the case" for locating or expanding here.

Infrastructure

- Take the survey findings forward to appropriate Town groups and champion the kind of development the survey results encourage:
 - Expansion of neighborhood business centers in Sandy Hook, Botsford, Hawleyville and the Borough.
 - Creation of pedestrian- and parking-friendly features like sidewalks that enable people to move about safely among homes, retailers, restaurants etc.
 - Poll businesses further to determine needs for support services. Give heavier consideration to businesses seeking to locate or expand here that provide needed products and services.

Advocacy and Support

This is likely the area in which the Economic Development Commission can have the greatest impact. Survey findings suggest businesses would appreciate these kinds of help:

- Be a better "friend to business." Anecdotal responses tell us some businesses perceive both the Town and the EDC as "uncaring," "not willing to go out of their way," or "unresponsive." This can be resolved through processes as well as communication.

- Develop and formalize a process that establishes touch points with businesses in Six Sigma style – from initial query to a follow-up call or letter that expresses disappointment if the Town loses an opportunity to retain or attract a desired business.
- As mentioned – establish a “buddy system” through which a Chamber member or supportive business in town is asked to partner with a new or expanding business to help it accomplish its goals.
- When asked what “going out of its way to help” might mean, one respondent mentioned his experience setting up a commercial kitchen for the first time, and how much he would have appreciated someone like a Realtor with a facility for lease showing him an example. Create a packet or PDF document that provides essential information about how to get started establishing or expanding a business here, and how to work the process through to successful completion. One respondent suggested a “Newcomer’s Package.”
- Create a “meet the neighbors” program including one or more events that enable businesses to showcase their products and services to local residents. One respondent suggested sponsoring a “Taste of Newtown” event for all restaurants, such as a street fair or town-wide open house to introduce businesses to the public.
- Launch a “Marketing Newtown” effort grounded on activities that generate real traffic or leads. Suggestions from survey respondents include using social media – blogging, keyword links etc. to draw customers around subjects such as crafts, art and antiques. A number of respondents felt Newtown did not do a good enough job of promoting itself as a “destination” for those things, as towns like Woodbury do.
- Generate e-mail lists from the survey activity and other contacts; produce single-subject “e-booklets” on subjects such as signage, expanding your business, art and antiques in Newtown, etc. and send periodically to raise visibility of the EDC.

One of the primary goals of this assessment project -- to learn how the Town and the EDC might better serve as an advocate for Newtown business -- may be met through what one interview subject described as building community. “This doesn’t happen organically,” he said. “It takes a lot of effort by motivated individuals. ... There has to be a big encouragement for people to be a community vs. [seeing the Town as an entity that makes them overcome] hurdles. ... It’s about bringing people together – give them cause to come out of their houses and meet the neighbors.”

“Doing Business in Newtown” (survey questionnaire, report and recommendations) was developed by The WriteDesign Company LLC, a Newtown-based business communication consulting firm, in cooperation with the Town of Newtown Economic Development Commission and its Business Advocacy and Retention Committee.

Appendix A

Question 1: (This question also asked for comments – see Appendix B)



Question 2: (This question also asked for comments – see Appendix B)

Do you agree or disagree that the following were factors in establishing, expanding and/or operating your business in Newtown?

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Not Applicable

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option. N/A = Not Applicable.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Affordable lease space was readily available	7 5%	31 22%	23 16%	16 11%	10 7%	54 38%
Building lots were readily available	3 2%	12 9%	17 12%	12 9%	9 6%	87 62%
It was easy to get my building permits through	4 3%	15 11%	24 17%	10 7%	16 11%	71 51%
My business had little or no competition in the market area	14 10%	35 24%	21 15%	34 24%	11 8%	28 20%
Newtown has the appropriate workforce for my business	5 4%	40 29%	37 27%	12 9%	6 4%	38 28%
Training opportunities were available for my workforce	2 1%	10 7%	24 17%	20 14%	12 9%	71 51%
Appropriate business services were readily available	9 6%	39 28%	35 25%	16 11%	5 4%	37 26%
Public transportation to Newtown was not necessary for my business	23 16%	63 45%	7 5%	13 9%	7 5%	28 20%
Signage regulations were appropriate for my business	3 2%	13 9%	21 15%	21 15%	41 29%	40 29%
Traffic congestion was not an issue	12 9%	48 34%	27 19%	13 9%	11 8%	30 21%

Question 3:

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:						
1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Not Applicable						
<i>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
The town's land use regulations are conducive to the economic growth of the town.	15	32	44	34	15	
	3%	10%	22%	31%	24%	10%
Newtown town officials are readily accessible.	12	67	32	16	8	10
	8%	46%	22%	11%	6%	7%
I know whom to ask within the town government for assistance.	13	59	27	32	9	6
	9%	40%	18%	22%	6%	4%

Question 4: (This question also asked for comments – see Appendix B)

Think back to the last time you had interaction with the municipal departments listed below. Please rate your overall experience working with these departments.						
1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Average, 4 = Fair, 5 = Poor, 6 = No Interaction						
<i>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Assessor's Office	34	46	22	4	11	29
	23%	32%	15%	3%	8%	20%
Building Department	21	38	24	9	7	45
	15%	26%	17%	6%	5%	31%
Economic & Community Development Office	18	24	10	10	10	73
	12%	17%	7%	7%	7%	50%
Land Use Agency (Zoning, Inland Wetlands & Conservation)	19	24	12	12	20	57
	13%	17%	8%	8%	14%	40%
Town Clerk's Office	41	56	16	1	4	28
	28%	38%	11%	1%	3%	19%
Other, please specify	11	1	0	0	4	45
	18%	2%	0%	0%	7%	74%

Question 5: (This question also asked for comments – see Appendix B)

Think back to the last time you had interaction with the municipal boards and commissions listed below. Please rate your overall experience working with these oversight boards.						
1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Average, 4 = Fair, 5 = Poor, 6 = No Interaction						
<i>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Borough Zoning Commission or Borough ZBA	7	8	7	6	9	103
	5%	6%	5%	4%	6%	74%
Conservation Commission	6	5	14	10	7	100
	4%	4%	10%	7%	5%	70%
Inland Wetlands Commission	7	9	9	12	10	93
	5%	6%	6%	9%	7%	66%
Planning and Zoning Commission	11	16	19	11	11	73
	8%	11%	13%	8%	8%	52%
Zoning Board of Appeals	7	13	8	6	8	99
	5%	9%	6%	4%	6%	70%
Other, please specify	0	2	2	2	1	61
	0%	3%	3%	3%	1%	90%

Question 6

Is your business planning to stay in Newtown for the next three years?				
Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes			106	70.6 %
No			7	4.6 %
Don't know			30	20.0 %
No Response(s)			7	4.6 %
Totals			150	100%

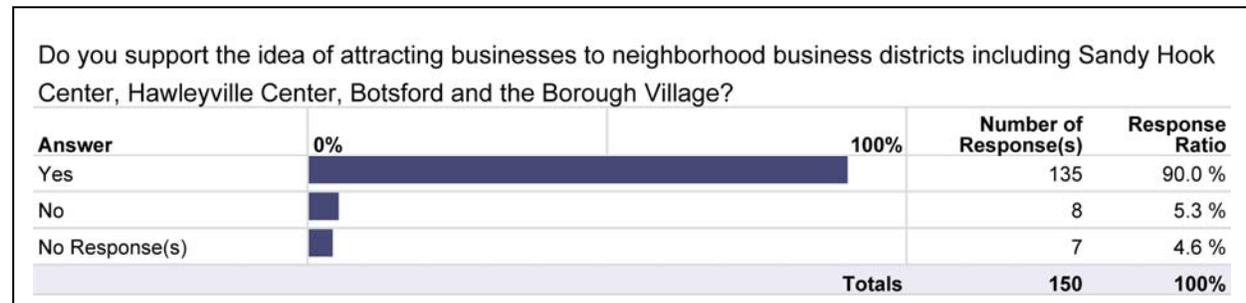
Question 7: (This question also asked for comments – see Appendix B)

Is your business planning to purchase, lease or construct new facilities within the next three years?				
Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes, within Newtown. I expect the greatest challenge my company will face will be (please respond in box below):			17	11.3 %
Yes, outside of Newtown. We are leaving because: (please respond in box below)			4	2.6 %
No, we're not planning a new facility within the next three years			99	66.0 %
Don't know			24	16.0 %
No Response(s)			6	4.0 %
Totals			150	100%

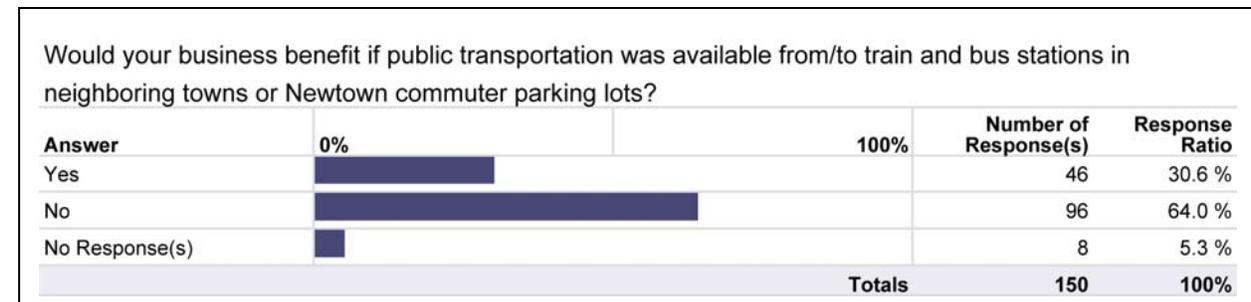
Question 8:

If you are planning to purchase, lease or construct new facilities within the next three years, would you like to learn how the Town or the Economic Development Commission can help?				
Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes (Please enter your contact information at the end of the survey)			13	8.6 %
No			35	23.3 %
We're not planning a new facility within the next three years.			90	60.0 %
No Response(s)			12	8.0 %
Totals			150	100%

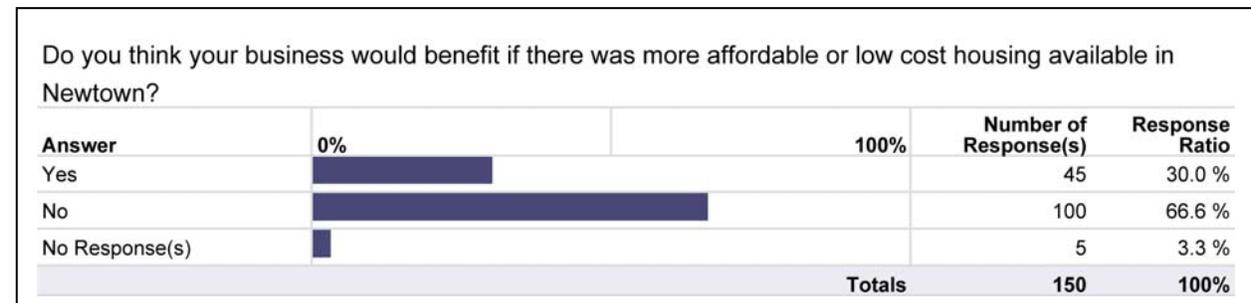
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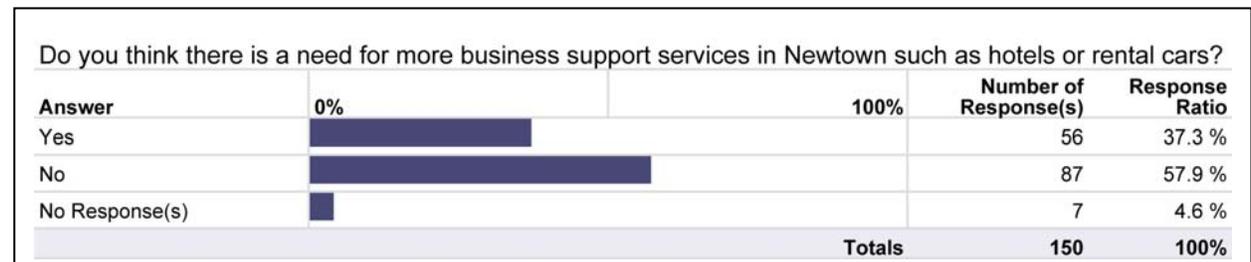
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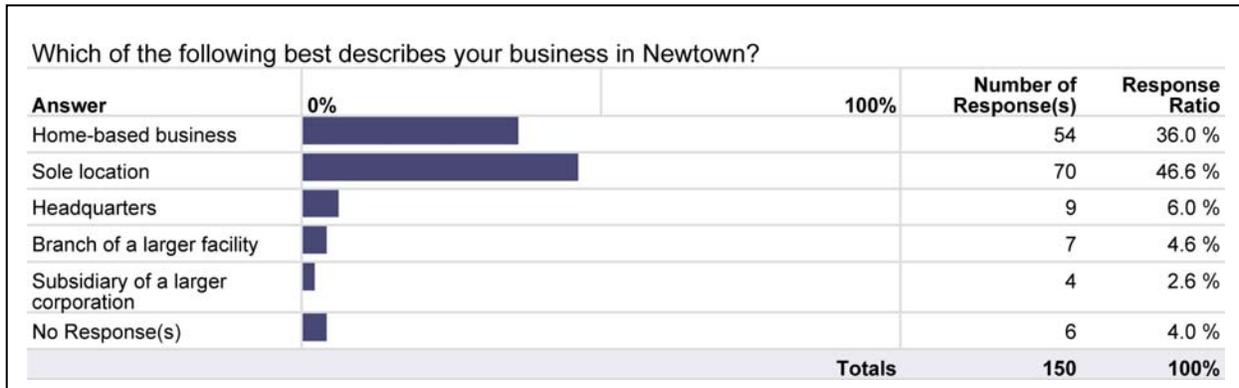
Question 11:



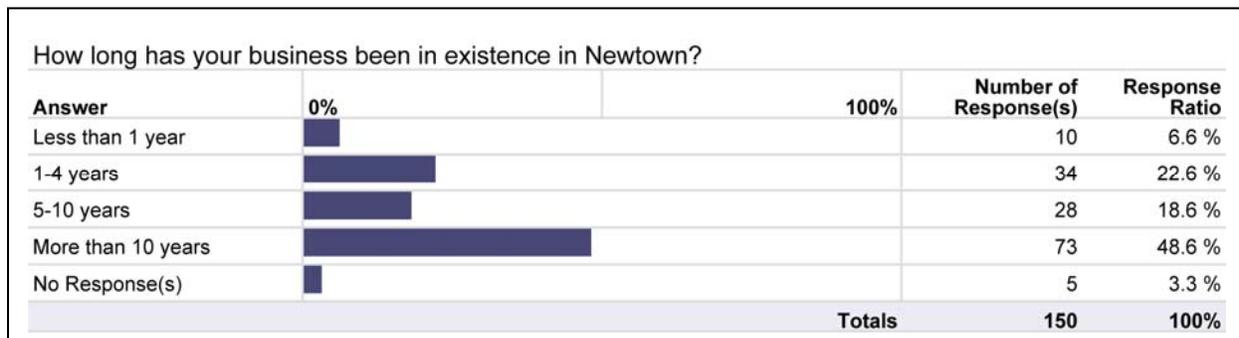
Question 12:



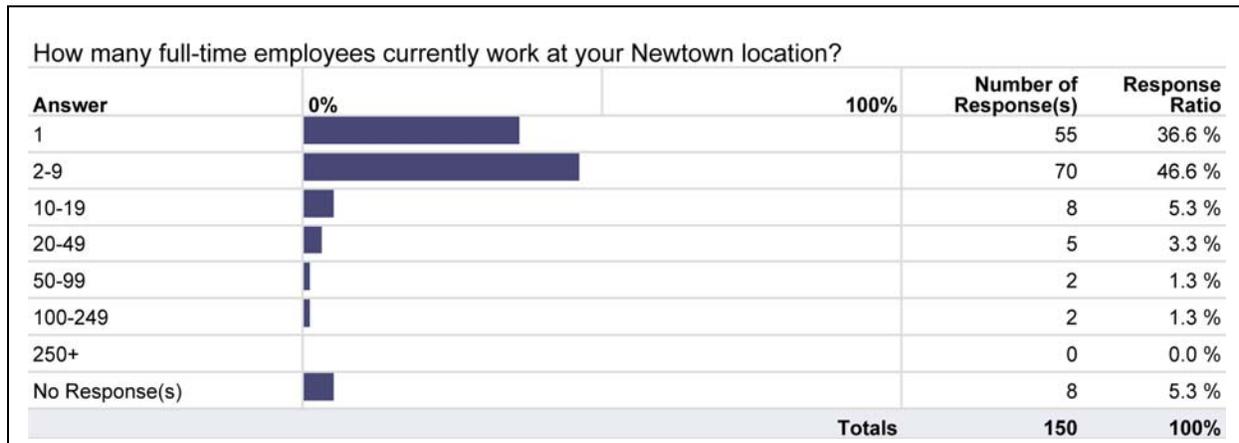
Question 13:



Question 14:



Question 15:



Question 16: (This question also asked for comments – see Appendix B)

What is your primary industry? (Please select one.)				
Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting			3	2.0 %
Mining			0	0.0 %
Construction			12	8.0 %
Manufacturing			5	3.3 %
Utilities			0	0.0 %
Transportation and Warehousing			5	3.3 %
Wholesale Trade			5	3.3 %
Retail Trade			24	16.0 %
Accommodation and Food Services			6	4.0 %
Finance and Insurance			9	6.0 %
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing			6	4.0 %
Information			1	<1 %
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services			18	12.0 %
Administrative Support; Waste Management and Remediation Services			0	0.0 %
Educational Services			5	3.3 %
Health Care and Social Assistance			6	4.0 %
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation			8	5.3 %
Other Services (except Public Administration)			9	6.0 %
Public Administration			0	0.0 %
Management of Companies and Enterprises			2	1.3 %
Other			22	14.6 %
No Response(s)			4	2.6 %
Totals			150	100%

Question 17:

Where are your customers located (approximately)?					
1 = 100%, 2 = 75%, 3 = 50%, 4 = 25%, 5 = Less than 25%					
<i>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</i>					
	1	2	3	4	5
Newtown	11 9%	34 28%	26 21%	17 14%	34 28%
Surrounding towns (Danbury, Bethel, Brookfield, Monroe, Southbury, Redding, New Milford)	4 4%	11 10%	23 21%	46 41%	28 25%
Rest of Connecticut	2 2%	12 14%	11 13%	23 26%	40 45%
Outside Connecticut (within the U.S.)	7 9%	16 21%	2 3%	9 12%	41 55%
Outside U.S.	0 0%	0 0%	1 3%	5 16%	26 81%

Question 18:

**What else would you like to add about doing business in Newtown?
(See Appendix B)**

Question 19:

Optional: Provide name and contact info: 60 responses, supplied separately to EDC.

Question 20:

CONTACT ME. I would like to meet with someone from the Economic Development Commission to further discuss my experiences doing business in Newtown, or how the Town or the Commission could help businesses operating or planning to locate here.		
	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes	18	12.0%
No	94	62.6%
No Responses	38	25.3%
Total	150	100%

Appendix B

Responses to Survey Questions Requesting Comments

1. Why did you or your company select Newtown as a business location? (Please select all that apply.) Other responses:

I have a home business and I live in Newtown

born in newtown

Bought from another owner.

I live here

bought existing bus.

home office

hometown

auxiliary to our dairy farm

purchased business and property

purchased from prev. owners 1982

pre existing barn

Started work from home and it has been growing

I live here.

located on owner's home property

bought an existing business

I have lived here since 1988 and currently work out of my home.

SCHOOLS

Existing business in town since 1951

Home based business

Moved for husband's work

I grew up in area.

home based operation

Home based business

Less Competition

Been here for 150 years

2. Do you agree or disagree that the following were factors in establishing, expanding and/or operating your business in Newtown? - Comments:

What public transportation?

Signage is confusing and not well-enforced

Church Hill road traffic is terrible and very poorly policed. Cross walks in the Hook are death traps as NO ONE even slows down, let alone stop

Your sign regulations are ridiculous. How do you expect a business to survive if it can not advertise it through signage?

We found a building at a good price, but I would say that the taxes are high here. I do not have any employees from Newtown.

Our business plan showed a good flow of traffic going past our location while the "rural character" of the "302 corridor" provided the kind of ambiance we needed.

the feeling of not wanting business in town

Overzealous enforcement officers for signage

The questioner did not ask or mention the most important question "what is the Tax Rate for Newtown compared to neighboring towns?"

Received registered letter saying I cant have sign saying OPEN. Personal touch would have been nice. Also would have saved town money.

Signage grandfathering in, otherwise would have been more restrictive

very obvious the failing business plan and future of sm. town politices an sence of improvments

This Town has a perfect opportunity to be the meca for antiques and arts in C.T."

Survey not appropriate for my business. I am an antique dealer.

Due to the type of business I am starting, Dog Grooming - I have been unable to find an appropriate location.

Although signage was not an issue for my company, a previous employer had difficulty obtaining the necessary permission for a sign when first entering Newtown. Signage is critical for any business as it literally drives in traffic and is responsible for a majority of the business opportunities.

Newtown is centrally located to the labor markets of Danbury, Bridgeport, and Waterbury. This was a key for us getting qualified employees.

Public Transportation would be very helpful to have available."

I bought an existing established business where I was already employed

One of my best friend's is a notable Danbury-based Commercial Developer. He tells me that he won't even bother proposing business development in Newtown, because our Planning and Zoning Departments are such a hassle to deal with.

I'M A PERSON WHO BELIVE THAT LOCOL ECONOMMY IS BASE IN EACH TOWN OR CYTY I WRILLY LIKE TO SEE ANY PROJECT THAT IS BEING CONSIDER SHOULD BE CONTACTED YOU LOCAL CONTRACTOR'S BEFFOR GOING OUT FOR BIDS OR ANY OUT SIDE COMPANY EVEN THAN SOME OFF WORK SHOULD SUB TO A LOCAL COMPANYWHO IS STABLISH IN THESE TOWN OFF NEWTOWN

As a new business owner in town, I was not aware of the signage regulations and the town caused me unexpected and excessive strain to comply. There should be a new business info packet available for new business owners. I also DO NOT AGREE with a single sign rule.

We closed our business in December 2009 closed

I have a consulting business out of the home (20 year business been living in Newtown 7 years) –

I have another business that is mostly B to B out of the home - advertising specialty - that I do not see appropriate for a location in Newtown. I just would not get enough traffic to warrant a location.

Moving out, to many new zoning regulations. Hard for the blue collar company to stay in town.

Taxes were low for business but my taxes were dramatically raised.

I work from a home office

I had a great experience with Town Hall. Everyone was wonderful, very pleasant and helpful.

"SIGNAGE IS A BIG PROBLEM. THE LAWS ARE TOO VAST AND DO NOT MAKE ANY SENSE? HIGH TRAFFIC AREAS NEED ONE TYPE AND HISTORIC VILLAGE ENVIRONMENTS NEED ANOTHER. THEY APPLY ALL THE SAME'ISH LAWS TO ALL AREAS AND IS ARE UN-FAIR AND NOT VERY ACCOMODATING."

Home base business practicing as a sole contributor.

Signage has been a SIGNIFICANT problem. Town regulations make it very difficult for business owners to capture drive-by and foot traffic--even to help prospective customers FIND a business.

Even with the ability to apply for "temporary" signage is really not a great option as it is quite pricey.ment officers for signage

4. Think back to the last time you had interaction with the municipal departments listed below. Please rate your overall experience working with these departments. Comments:

Health Department: Excellent

Health Department

Arts commission.

Park & Rec Dept is very helpful

I haven't had any interactions since first opening my business four years ago. I guess that's good in some way, but it doesn't me a basis to answer these questions.

We are a small office, 3000 sq. feet, five employees. We used to be allowed to take our garbage to the dump but several years ago were refused even through we pay our property taxes here. That is the one municipal service we would like to take advantage of but were refused. Can the EDC help with that? Thanks,

It's very disappointing with the economy the way it is EVERY lil bit helps, We were told to take down very nice, tasteful posters of local models to try and attract business. They weren't flashy, neon, poor-taste or detracting from the local beauty of our community. Yet a business has moved down the street w/ neon signs and flags. How is this fair? the woman who stopped was rude and very unprofessional.

As a small business owner in town this is VERY frustrating. How is it ok for 1 and NOT the o
(response ended here)

Everyone at town hall has been very supportive.

Land use officers overstep guidelines

Phone calls not returned from Economic and Community Development and Land Use Agency on a repeated basis. My firm, extremely well thought of within the state was called in to perhaps provide services to the town but other firms have been chosen. It is my personal policy that in-town capable firms should be first chosen or at least given a reasonable chance.

As my firm's owner, I cannot say that occurred.

A lot of my/our groups dealings are with the Board of Managers at the Edmond Town Hall who are always going above and beyond to help us.

Fire Department, Health Department

Town Clerk charged a fee for notarization. I already pay very high taxes.

Very arrogant, not helpful ,could barely care

This Land Use department is completely out of control going way beyond what other towns require. In attending an inland wetlands meeting I saw your board give a small family (kids in attendance) an extraordinary hassle over removing a tree that was a danger to their home b/c the tree happend to be in a wetland. This type of treatment is not condusive to attracting middle class families or businesses. My personal experience with this dept. has been no better.

First Selectman

I HAVE WORK WITH A BUILDING DEPARMENT LAND USE ASSESSOR'S OFFICE TOWN CLERCK IN SEVERAL OCCATION SERVICE IS EXELENT AND VERRY FRENDLY

We closed our business in December 2009

The Newtown Police Commission was very unfair in their ruling to disallow parking an stiping of parking spaces in front of our shopping center AFTER all of the plans were approved AND AFTER construction completed!

Highway Department -- Put in two 'work order' requests for storm drain to be cleaned and still waiting for work to be completed for over two months. Totally unacceptable.

I have contact with the health dept. consistently and they are always supportive.

Wetlands issue was a long drawn out process. Made more work than needed.

ECD office is the worst part of town government. That office hinders growth.

First Selectman

5 stars!

Suzette in the Health Dept. was excellent

5. Think back to the last time you had interaction with the municipal boards and commissions listed below. Please rate your overall experience working with these oversight boards. Comments:

No interactions at all with these boards and commissions.

Tend to listen to the zoning officer, often disregarding the facts.

50 South Main St. went thru a great deal of effort trying to expand. faced many obstacles concerning invasive species, who could decide which trees to remove, parking had to be in the back altho all other buisnesses in that area park in front. New plans had to be drawn up so finally expansion was cancelled. No new bldg., no new taxable site. No expansion.

See number 4 above.

WPCA very poor

THESE SERVICE IS EXELENT AS A BUSSINES OWNER AND HOME OWNER I HAVE EXPERIENCE FIRT HAND

We closed our business in December 2009

some signage rules and regs could use updating - the size of the type face allowed for road side readability on main roads is not adequate for normal recognition

Tax Appeal Board

THEY ALL SEEM TO BE ON SEPARATE PAGES AND NOT ON IN THE SAME TOWN?

Cultural Arts Commission is doing a good job

7. Is your business planning to purchase, lease or construct new facilities within the next three years? Comments:

The zoning board of appeals

ALSO OUTSIDE OF NEWTOWN BECAUSE WE OWN PROPERTY IN OTHER TOWNS IN CT

We are anticipating the need for more space within the next 1-2 years.

Surviving

We will be looking to build some industrial condos in about 3 years

RT 25 congestion and an upcoming management change. That said I will insure that the info on Newtown's EDC is forwarded to the new management.

The current sign limitations are frustrating and the rules are not clear. The town makes it difficult to advertise special sales or other events.

I will be planning on creating more professional lease space on south main street.

Taxes here are way too high.

Purchasing adjacent residential home to convert to a Masonicare Home Health and Hospice branch office. Will need a zoning change/variance.

"1) Finding quality tenants. 2) Getting financing 3) Town approvals with reasonable costs"

The greatest challenge is in having a small business, finding a suitable space and location at an affordable lease rate or purchase price.

Finding the right location to lease

We aren't leaving, but we aren't expanding here because of signage issues and overall decline in economics of the town.

Taxes

we are trying to stay open but with walgreens coming in it will be tough

We would expand if the zoning regulations would allow us to.

We are opening additional locations outside of Newtown but not closing our location in Newtown

Between the cost of living, and the taxes we pay we most likely will not be able to continue in business in Newtown. This is sad to say as we love it here.

I was looking at establishing a retail location with a new web business I am starting but would think of going into Danbury or lower Fairfield. I would not get enough traffic in Newtown - nor do I think people think of Newtown as a destination for goods and services.

I had been trying to expand but finding a correct property was difficult and the economy kind of put things on hold.

"I am probably planning to phaseout because of multiple reasons: 1) my equipment's hardware and software needs replacing neither are supported by suppliers; 2) retirement makes more sense than retooling"

Pleasing residents

Secure financing.

We currently own one building (22 Commerce Rd) and lease another (25 Commerce Rd). I plan on trying to purchase the leased facility.

16. What is your primary industry? (Please select one.) Other responses:

auto service center

Website and graphic design

WHOLESALE

Professional services (internal marketing)

Lawn Care and Tick Control

Marketing

Real Estate Development and Consulting

Publishing
antique restoration Lead abatement
web design
Clothing and Apparel
Dog Grooming
NonProfit Trade Assoc.
test
Commodity Trading Analysis
fitness
Contractor
graphics design and signage
insurance
promotional
Architecture
Business Coach & Recruitor

18. What else would you like to add about doing business in Newtown?

Environment for business has improved in past 50 years

"We are in great need of a business taxable base. we need some sense of community business environment including professional and retail.

Every business owner struggles over the signage issues."

The Property taxes are too high. A lot of my customers are moving out of the area. Of course the economy itself is not lending to people living in Fairfield County and Newtown in particular.

"Business taxation makes Connecticut undesirable. An "annual report" fee and being taxed on our use of office supplies (after already paying state sales tax) is not an investment in growing our business in the state.

On the bright side, there's a strong community of business owners here. Organizations like Newtown Savings Bank does a great job of connecting us. I'd like to see more opportunities for business owners to come together (e.g. a SCORE chapter in town)."

Keep the New England character intact.

Your sign regulations have to be reviewed. Also your rule on having the rear of the building facing the street is absurd and ridiculous looking. For instance the corner of church hill and queen and the new shopping center in Hawleyville. the shopping center in hawleyville has the rear of the building facing one of the busiest roads in town. so when you drive by instead of seeing the front you can now look at the chinese workers sitting on 5 gallon pails smoking cigarettes. You should be working with business's

instead of trying to over regulate them. we have an economic director for this town. what has she brought to this town in the last ten years? How is your Fairfield hills economic growth going? I dont have enough space for that one left. The town says they welcome business but their actions do not back it up. This town needs a enema.

"We feel that Newtown was the right choice for to move to. The values of realstate are good and the area is clean with very little crime. We enjoy it here and look foward to working with the town in the expansion of our facility.

In my experience the local banking community and municipal offices have always been a bit out of touch or slightly behind the curve. We gave up dealing with Newtown Savings Bank years ago. Their incompetence was stunning. Again, (to beat a dead horse) forbidding a local business that pays their property taxes to use the transfer station for small office refuse while simultaneously allowing people who have home-based businesses (some of which deposit considerable construction waste) seems an odd way to say thanks for doing business in our town, hiring local employees and spending some bucks locally.

While some of the regs make it a bit of a hassle to set up and continue business, if one adheres to them, town personnel are very helpful and seem to have an attitude of wanting to help our business keep going. Probably a large part of that is the aesthetics the farmland offers the town. We've been told more than once that realtors take potential clients past the farm, even when the house they are trying to sell is on the other end of town!

Tax base is too high. Find ways to reduce taxes. Stop trying to maintain the beauty of the town as the only priority, While important, the new generation of residents value cost of living reductions, a more robust selection of local business options and more activities for growing families.

"Newtown does not have the population or traffic to support the amount of small to midsized retail that is here already, as well as what is proposed. An example is 5 nail salons. 2 Hardware stores within 1/4 mile of each other, all the places to buy liquor and of course the never ending flow of new restaurants.

I understand that Newtown needs to increase the tax base but please keep the following in mind;

1) Every time you get a new business that offers similar or even the same services your tax base does not go up it just goes to the side because the exiting businesses sales will go down. That causes another problem. When sales go down the consumer loses because as cash flow goes down prices will rise to try and compensate and less donations will be made to the various organizations in town because we have no profits. All of this eventually will lead to closed stores and empty retail spaces. Newtown needs more businesses that we now have to travel for."

Our taxes should be lower in all of Newtown, especially the residential taxes. Way too high. Bring some hotels and other larger corporations in and do not give them huge tax breaks. Tax them better then other competing towns, but nothing for free. We need our tax base to be larger and then lower residential rates.

"While I understand the need to maintain the ""character"" of the borough area (after all, I live in this town, as well) the stringent regulations make retail business highly difficult. After more than four years in this location, we still have customers, or should I say potential customers, who don't know we are here, due to ridiculously stringent signage regulations (not to mention that the center we are in is turned inward, away from the streets.)

We have had people living in lower Sandy Hook going all the way to our store in Bethel because they didn't know we were in Newtown, even though we're right in the middle of town.

People move to a town for many reasons, but one of the most prevalent is the quality of the schools. Schools are supported by taxation, and making it difficult for businesses to succeed affects that future tax base. Just look at all the myriad of towns all over the state (and the country) whose school districts are in shambles. Don't let the same happen here."

I don't get a sense of business community in Newtown, I feel more as if I come and go and that's too bad. Previously, when my business was located in southern Fairfield County, there were many ways to be involved. Further, I get no sense of encouragement from the town for business involvement. In the town where the business was previously located for over 10 years, if the town needed assistance, it typically

looked to the businesses that existed in the town to provide that assistance. That seems to be contrary to the circumstances here or at the very least there would appear to be no policy of seeking to use the resources in the town that would grow the businesses in the town which would ultimately benefit the town in terms of taxes, economic growth and jobs.

Taxes are too high for the services received. We are considering relocation to Maine.

For Masonicare at Newtown, the Town has always been a good place to do business. We are committed to serving the Newtown community and the surrounding area well.

Town does not have the expertise to manage building projects such as the H.S. and Fairfield Hills. Significant taxpayer funds have been wasted during both of these efforts.

Long term facility planning by Town and Bd of Ed have been lacking."

The Town of Newtown would be enhanced by following the zoning regulations of the Town of Woodbury. Promotion of antiques in this bucolic setting seems to be by our newspaper "The Antiques and Arts Weekly" only. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our beautiful barns were chucked full of antiques and open for business well respecting our property and surroundings as they do in Woodbury.

Due to the fact that there water and sewage are limited to specific areas of town, it is very difficult to find a location where the landlord is comfortable with the water required for my business.

Newtown is an easy town to start a business in. Retail traffic is mainly confined to the surrounding towns hindering some small retail businesses from reaching a higher revenue potential. Newtown is not Danbury and isn't, in my opinion, striving to become it. There is a balance between the work and home life that makes Newtown a destination for home-based businesses, particularly those with families.

I think it is silly that we resist having fast food franchises in Newtown. They would be a good source of tax revenue. I also think we need to expand the commercial tax base to ease the burden on the residents. We could have a fast food franchises on South Main St, at Exit 10 and Exit 11, and on Route Six.

I LIKE TO SEE THAT WORK IN NEWTOWN PROBIDE FOR IT'S LOCAL CONTRACTOR'S SINCE WE PAY FOR THAT THAT TAXES AS DOING BISNES IN NEWTOWN SO FAR IN THAT 8 YEARS THAT I HAVE LIVE HERE I HAVE NEVER BEEN IVITED FOR A LOCAL PROJECT O BID I HAVE SEEN LOT OF COMPANIES FOR AOUT SIDE WORKINK IN ANY PROJECT

As a new business owner in town, I was not aware of the signage regulations and the town caused me unexpected and excessive strain to comply. There should be a new business info packet available for new business owners. I also DO NOT AGREE with a single sign rule. Especially as it relates to daily specials or events signage.

The Town of Newtown needs to go out of their way to promote local businesses. The Chamber of Commerce does a great job and I know the Town and First Selectwoman is very supportive of the Chamber, however, we need to do a better job at letting the people of Newtown know that supporting local businesses goes a long way in helping the economy of Newtown.

All the home-based business I know would love to expand, the the sum total of Newtown's rules and regulations don't allow it. Everybody would just prefer to stay under the radar.

I am not a business owner but a resident of Newtown. Instead of pushing the Tech Park why not promote existing commercial properties? Please, no more building. The EDC seems to address the same issues (Tech Park) over and over with no resolution. Just an observation. Thank you.

I would like to see regulations concerning signs so they are in keeping with the character of New England and the town of Newtown, much the same as Ridgefield has done. Signs such as the Blue Colony Diner in my opinion are totally out of place.

"I have had a successful consulting business (B to B) in the publishing industry for 20 years. I also own a premium and incentive company for the past 5 years.

Since we have lived here, I have become disgusted over Newtown's inability to use their imagination when it comes to creating business opportunities. It is a pity with the amount of available land etc. I do see some change (a couple development strip malls here and there) but the residents of this town are tired of picking up the tax bill on a town that doesn't know how to reinvent itself. We have all features of being a draw to corporate business, creating a perfect New England recreational business (ie. Sturbridge Village), Picking up on that - promoting the arts etc. etc but have not seized it at all. All we keep doing is adding more Banks and restaurants. There has to be some diversity of businesses to make the town exciting and the ""come to place"" - we have failed miserably."

"I love living here and doing business here. I am a small baked goods manufacturer/wholesaler. I market to school systems, supermarkets, restaurants, etc. The battles are primarily with larger corporations and those competitors whose strengths are in distribution. I focus on being ""local"" and supporting local businesses, offering premium quality at better than competitive pricing. It just bothers me that my own school system, where my children eat every day, opts to pay more for a lesser quality product and not support a ""local"" business. But that is not your problem, it is administrative politics within Chartwells, as well as a number of other companies like them.

I will continue my development into a larger facility, hopefully soon. There is a large potential work and training force within the culinary dept. at the high school, which I am very familiar with."

I think the mood is, there is no building going on, there is no growth. We have 20% of folks who are not working. I had to lay off 4 people. Let's be realistic, things are not good. I am a commercial composter who lost his lease. Looking for a site to compost in the region, I have towns willing to work with the idea, but none seem to have a suitable site. Amazing. So I know there is a need, but finding a home is another story. If the economic development commission thinks they may be able to help me, I welcome the call.

Newtown is a clean and pristine environment and should remain so preserving the colonial image of Fairfield County. This is what has attracted the core residents here and all businesses should respect and plan for it.

"In order to attract new Business, Newtown has to study and evaluate how other towns with similar population and taxes have done in order to attract new business. Newtown does not have to re-invent the wheel in order to succeed.

One suggestion I have is to rent or sale the buildings on the Newtown campus before they deteriorate to the point where the Town is forced to either tear them or fix them at a great cost.

Bottom Line: Cut costs and make it attractive for business to move here."

"Creating more communication outlets for business like this comprehensive website. Thank you for the survey. NETS, Inc."

Newtown needs an ECD team that listen to other people's ideas. I once heard a town official say " If it's not their idea, than forget it." And we found out on several different occasions how true that comment was. This town pays a hefty salary to a director who's favorite word is no. Good luck to us all.

Why is there so many of the same retail/restaurant businesses here in Newtown. Why is another Teacher Supply Store and yet another asian restaurant opening in the new shopping plaza??? Who is in charge of what type of businesses open in this town?

A single town center would be ideal. Fairfield Hills would be the perfect place to turn into a much needed town center to attract people to conduct business, the arts, recreation and town business. It is sorely lacking and while the various business districts are good mini centers of commerce for their neighborhoods, we will only begin to thrive and attract all sorts of people and town spirit if/when there is a center of town that can become known to locals and out of towners, much the way Ridgefield gelled as a town.

"I REALLY BELIEVE SIGNAGE AND PROMOTION IS THE KEY. GROUP ADVERTISING AND SHOPPING/RESTURANT DISTRICTS AND THEIR PROMOTION IS WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. I THINK THE EDC WEBSITE IS ""KILLER"" AND MAKES NEWTOWN SHINE! SPOTLIGHT THE CLEVER AND INNOVATIVE BUSINESS COMMUNITY MEMBERS, AND MORE WILL FOLLOW TO BE A PART OF IT! AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS ALSO KEY. BRING THE READY AND AVAILABLE WORKFORCE

HERE, SO BUSINESSES WILL GROW. OUTDOOR RECREATION IS ALSO A BIG PLUS. ""WHY DO PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE HERE? AND WORK HERE?"" THAT IS THE QUESTION."

The financial crisis had greatly hurt the construction industry. I have owned my own business for more than 25 years and am struggling to make ends meet. My family and myself are in the category that falls through the cracks...make too much for any support services and don't make enough to live. For the first time in my life, my wife and I are uninsured. The governor brings out a new state policy (Charter Oak) that is worthless. Sure, it will cover you even in you have pre-existing medical problems, but the price is still way too high to be affordable (\$306/month per individual) and even worse, none of my doctors participate in the plan. I am NOT going to switch doctors at this point. The problem is that I have PRE-EXISTING issues that have been treated for a long time by my doctor, I am not changing now. WHERE WILL THIS WHOLE FINANCIAL MESS END? Newtown needs to talk to the residents to see what we really need instead of turning their backs.

I have to drive to Southbury or Danbury for office supplies, it would be nice to have a store like that in Newtown. Real Estate taxes are so high that I can't consider paying for office space as well.

"We feel, and this includes our entire staff who are all residence of Newtown, that many of the town departments (Board of Education, Parks & Recreation, Highway Department, etc) have not spent anytime at all researching our business to see how our business can provide products and services that the town uses. The town departments may be able to provide a major boost to the economic viability of our type of business. After over a year in town there has been little or no interest in our business by the different departments, and very little economic activity.

We also feel the EDC should begin working in partnership with property and business owners as well as the town to try to control occupancy cost and taxes during these difficult economic times."

"We have been happy doing business here in Newtown. The people are very loyal; they love to shop in a neighborhood store and support us in good times and bad. The town itself, however, sometimes tends to make operating a small business difficult.

We understand that Newtown wants to retain it's small-town charm, but if this area (Queen St) is to be designated the ""business district"", some consideration needs to be made as far as signage is concerned. Also, approval of new stores/chains have been detrimental to small neighborhood businesses when for YEARS no chain stores or restaurants have been allowed.

Again, everyone understands the need to fill the tax base and empty storefronts - however - if Newtown wants to retain it's ""hometown"" feel yet still cater to the needs of it's citizens, perhaps the city leaders would consider small businesses rather than larger box stores."

"Offer of free space in the Edmond town Hall for start up businesses for 2 years.

Allow more than three non family members in home based businesses.

Exempt property taxes for several years to larger businesses."

"Real estate taxes and personal property taxes are very high in Newtown. It is very difficult to stay in business in this economic downturn, and turn a profit.

Newtown did not do a good job with the commercial development. The Rt. 25 commercial zone was not planned well at all. It does not retain the Colonial type of feel you get with Main Street and the character of the town. Business's are next to residential homes and anything goes. There seems to be no standard.

Recently the Zoning Board allowed an Industrial zoned site to be changed in spite of the opposition expressed by many people. Apparently Zoning is trying to encourage businesses to come into the town, but it is not being thought out to the benefit of the people, and appearance of the town.

Traffic in the town has become a problem also. I think business's suffer because of that issue. We need more traffic lights to allow people to safely enter and exit a business on the heavily traveled roads."

Too many parochial interests

Appendix C

This is the consultants' overview of the 2008 and 2009 Economic Development Commission reports on business owners' perceptions of Newtown's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) as a business location, and opportunities/threats to business growth follows. Both initiatives involved a small sample (about 20 persons).

Strengths

In the 2009 study, location on I-84 was cited as the top feature or characteristic that makes Newtown desirable for business and/or distinguishes it from surrounding towns. Sixteen respondents cited that location; four chose "good education," three chose "land mass available for development," two each cited "well educated workforce" and "historic New England town; one each cited "great community involvement" and "appealing town center." We may conclude that these responses reflect the opinions of larger businesses in town.

In 2008, when asked to name the top two features or characteristics that make Newtown desirable for their businesses, "Access to I-84 and "High Per Capita Income" were cited. When asked "Why is your business located in Newtown," "Close to business owner's home" received the top rating.

In the current (2010) survey (150 respondents and 9 in-depth interviews), "close to owner's home" was the top-ranked attribute, followed by "character of the town" and "location in the state" (see Question 1, Appendix A, page 20). These results are more reflective of the opinions of small and home-based businesses due to the larger sample size.

Weaknesses

When asked in 2009 to name two conditions that either limit business growth or may cause your business to relocate outside Newtown, "Lack of coordination among Town entities," "Lack of affordable housing" and "taxes" were the top three choices.

In 2008, "Cost of housing for local employees," "Newtown may not be business friendly," and "Limited signage" were respondents' top three concerns.

In the current study, signage and limited training opportunities emerged as the top concerns in the online survey.

Opportunities

In 2009, respondents were asked to name one action Newtown could take to make it more attractive for business retention and growth. The top three responses were: "Clear message and marketing," "No downtown central shopping area," and "Build extra rail line."

Respondents were asked the same question in 2008. Their top three suggestions were: "Town Tax Incentives," "Traffic-Church Hill/Flagpole" and "Business signs" were the top answers.

In 2008, respondents were asked what “affinity businesses” would strengthen the town’s business community. “Corporate headquarters” was the top choice, followed by “Technology companies” and “Book store.”

In the current study, clarifying and/or modifying signage regulations emerged as the top suggestion. Anecdotal comments from that survey and interviews with business owners yielded many other suggestions.

Threats

The 2009 query “Name two conditions that either limit business growth or may cause your business to relocate outside Newtown” was used to gauge threats as well as weaknesses. Top three responses are under “Weaknesses) on prior page of this report; other answers ranked as less important included (in descending order): “Lack of public transit,” “Lack of racial diversity,” “Lack of coordination among Chamber, Rotary, EDC etc.,” “Regulation (signage),” and “Poor traffic flow through center.”

In 2008, subjects were asked to name the top two pressures their businesses face or anticipate in the next three years. Top three responses were: “Lack of skilled labor force,” “Space for Expansion,” and “High health care costs.”

In the 2010 study, threats voiced through anecdotal comments to online questions and during interviews were not consistent with the earlier research.