

QUICK GUIDE FOR NEW BUSINESSES IN DOWNTOWN WADSWORTH

The purpose of this guide is to provide a quick resource for information to new or potential business owners and operators seeking to locate in downtown Wadsworth, and to help them understand the various rules, regulations, and procedures that they may encounter, along with approvals and permits they may be required to obtain. Please be cognizant of these as you enter into a lease or purchase agreement.

1) AN INTRODUCTORY MEETING

The City of Wadsworth along with Main Street Wadsworth and the Wadsworth Area Chamber of Commerce are eager to welcome and support your new venture in the heart of our community. Contact the City's Economic Development Department, to set up an initial meeting: 330-335-2707.

2) DETERMINATION OF ZONING COMPLIANCE

Downtown Wadsworth is located in the Central Business Development (CBD) Zoning District, which allows for a wide range of commercial uses (retail, restaurant, personal, and professional services) as well as residential uses on the upper floors of multi-story buildings. One of your first steps should be to contact the City's Building and Planning Department (330-335-2753) to discuss your proposed new use and obtain **use change approval**, if it is determined to be necessary.

A **use change** occurs whenever a new business opens in an existing structure that is properly zoned for the proposed use, but where the proposed new use differs significantly from the previous use. A new business needs to be evaluated for both zoning compliance and **commercial building and fire code compliance**, which is discussed in the next section.

Zoning compliance for many new business uses in the CBD Zoning District can be approved by the Planning and Zoning Director, especially when the new use is similar to the former use. For example, a new restaurant may be proposed for a space previously occupied by a bar or restaurant. A clothing retailer that decides to occupy space formerly used for retail sales of office supplies is another example of *similar uses* that can be approved by the Planning and Zoning Director.

New business uses where the proposed use is *dissimilar* to the previous use (for instance, opening a retail shop at the site of a former restaurant) **may** require approval by the Planning Commission. Each application will have to be evaluated on its own merit.

New businesses that require site modifications, such as building additions, decks, patios, and off-street parking spaces will likely require Planning Commission approval regardless of the proposed use.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Contact the Building and Planning Department (330-335-2753) to discuss the proposed business venture and its location; determine zoning compliance.
- Complete and submit an application for Planning Commission (PC)/Architectural Design Committee (ADC) Review: <https://www.wadsworthcity.com/858/Design-Review>.

3) DETERMINATION OF BUILDING AND FIRE CODE COMPLIANCE

Even if a new business use is found to be in compliance with the City's zoning ordinance, it must still demonstrate compliance with the applicable commercial building and fire codes. In the City of Wadsworth, the Medina County Building Department (MCBD) is the permitting, review, and inspections authority for all structures used for **non-residential** purposes. Mixed-use buildings (i.e. those with commercial and residential components) and structures with four (4) or more residential dwelling units or apartments are considered commercial structures and are subject to oversight and review by the MCBD.

Because compliance with commercial building and fire codes is outside of the City's purview, the City cannot tell a potential business owner or operator what improvements, if any, they will need to make to ensure that the structure complies with the appropriate codes. Applicants should contact the MCBD (330-722-9220) to discuss the proposed use and find out whether the County will require a **special (or use change) inspection** for the proposed use.

If a **special inspection** is required and it is determined that improvements are necessary to bring the property into compliance with applicable codes, these modifications will need to be completed, inspected, and approved before the MCBD will issue a **Certificate of Occupancy** for the new use.

Because of uncertainties involved in determining building code compliance, applicants are strongly advised to retain an architect to do a "walk-through" inspection prior to signing a lease or purchasing the building. This inspection allows the architect to determine what improvements may be required to bring the property into compliance with applicable building codes and to provide estimates for the cost of these improvements.

If the new use also requires building additions, structural rebuilding, or modifications and upgrades to the building's electrical, HVAC, and/or plumbing systems (i.e. moving, adding, or building a new restroom, moving electrical outlets, walls, etc.), building permits, plan approvals, building permits, and inspections by the MCBD (or the Medina County Health Department for plumbing improvements) will be required. This is another reason why it may be advantageous to retain an architect or other design professional to help you navigate this step.

Finally, applicants should also contact the City of Wadsworth Fire Department (330-335-2849) to set up a fire safety inspection before opening for business.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Evaluate the scope of your project and what changes you plan on making to the building or its mechanical systems.
- Determine whether you would benefit from retaining an architect to determine what improvements may be required for code compliance and/or to assist with interactions with the MCBD.
- Contact the MCBD to discuss the proposed new use, modifications, and updates you plan to make to the building. Determine need for special inspection or other plan reviews required by Medina County.

3) EXTERIOR BUILDING MODIFICATIONS AND SIGNAGE

In addition to the possible commercial building permits that may be required, §154.071 of the City of Wadsworth Zoning Code states that all exterior changes to commercial and industrial buildings and structures, located anywhere in the City, shall be reviewed by the ADC. Exterior changes include many

things, such as, but not limited to: exterior painting, installation of new cladding materials, windows, doors, signage, window/door graphics, lighting fixtures, etc.

More specifically, downtown Wadsworth is an accredited Main Street Community with an established design review district and Historic Downtown Design Guidelines that apply to structures within the review district.

Any changes to the exteriors of buildings or signage will need to be reviewed by the ADC and found to be in compliance with the Historic Main Street Wadsworth Design Guidelines. Copies of the design guidelines and ADC application can be obtained on the City of Wadsworth's Building and Planning Department webpage, along with information about the design review application process and submission requirements: <https://www.wadsworthcity.com/858/Design-Review>.

ACTION ITEM:

- Complete and submit application for Planning Commission/Architectural Design Committee Review.

4) SIDEWALK CAFÉS

The City does have provisions that allow businesses serving food and drink to set up café-style seating on public sidewalks. To promote a consistent approach to street furniture and fencing associated with these seating areas, the City has adopted **Downtown Sidewalk Café and Street Furniture Guidelines**. Copies of the guidelines and application can be obtained at the City's Building and Planning Department webpage: <https://www.wadsworthcity.com/858/Design-Review>.

ACTION ITEM:

- Complete Sidewalk Café Application if applicable; submit application and associated fee directly to the Service Director's Office.

5) FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Downtown Wadsworth is a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA). The CRA program is an economic development tool offered and administered by the City to encourage commercial development and residential renovation in the downtown area. The CRA provides real estate tax abatements on the increased value of real property improvements within the CRA's target area.

The value of the tax abatement is determined individually for commercial projects and can reach up to a 100% abatement of the improved real property tax valuation for up to 15 years. Abatement terms and conditions are based upon individual project factors such as estimated annual payroll and costs associated with the purchase and rehabilitation of a structure.

Because the Wadsworth City School District is the primary recipient of property tax collections, abatement requests of greater than 50% will require the approval of the Wadsworth City School District Board of Education and the execution of a compensation agreement with the District.

Any property owners within the designated CRA interested in the program should contact the City's Economic Development Department for more information: 330-335-2707.

6) FURTHER ASSISTANCE

If you still have questions about opening a business in downtown Wadsworth, contact the City of Wadsworth Building and Planning Department for additional assistance: 330-335-2753.

7) ADDITIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information about opening a business in downtown Wadsworth, contact:

City of Wadsworth Economic Development Department	www.wadsworthcity.com/35/Economic-Development	330-335-2707
City of Wadsworth Building and Planning Department	www.wadsworthcity.com/319/Building-Planning	330-335-2753
City of Wadsworth Fire Department	www.wadsworthcity.com/315/Fire-Emergency-Medical-Services-EMS	330-335-2849
Medina County Building Department	www.building.medinaco.org	330-722-9220
Medina County Health Department	www.medinahealth.org	330-723-9688
Main Street Wadsworth	www.mainstreetwadsworth.org	330-331-4414
Wadsworth Area Chamber of Commerce	www.wadsworthchamber.com	330-336-6150