



COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council
From: Administration
Date: November 29, 2018
Subject: Business Walks 2018 Results

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receives this report for information.

BACKGROUND:

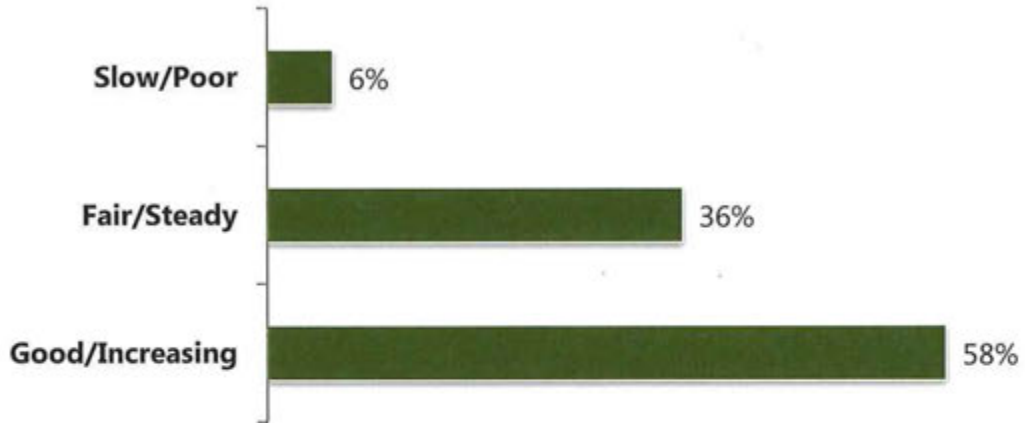
On October 4, 2018 the District of Mackenzie, in partnership with WorkBC, the Northern Development Initiative Trust, Mackenzie Chamber of Commerce, the College of New Caledonia, as well as Community Futures Fraser-Fort George, completed Mackenzie's second business walk exercise. Teams of elected officials, District staff, and the business service representatives visited store-front town and industrial site businesses for short interviews with business operators to identify ways we can help business thrive here in Mackenzie. Phone interviews were conducted with a number of businesses that were not available on October 4th. By taking the time to answer our questions, business owners provided valuable information that the District and our business support agencies will be able to use to develop programs and services that will better assist our local businesses. An online survey was also distributed to further reach businesses that may not have a storefront. Overall, the exercise was successful in reaching 55 businesses and the following feedback was obtained:

General Information

In regard to District programs and services, the District saw a slight increase in the number of business licenses acquired and Love Mackenzie memberships in 2018. To date there are 272 licensed businesses, up four from 2017, and 38 Love Mackenzie memberships, up three members from 2017.

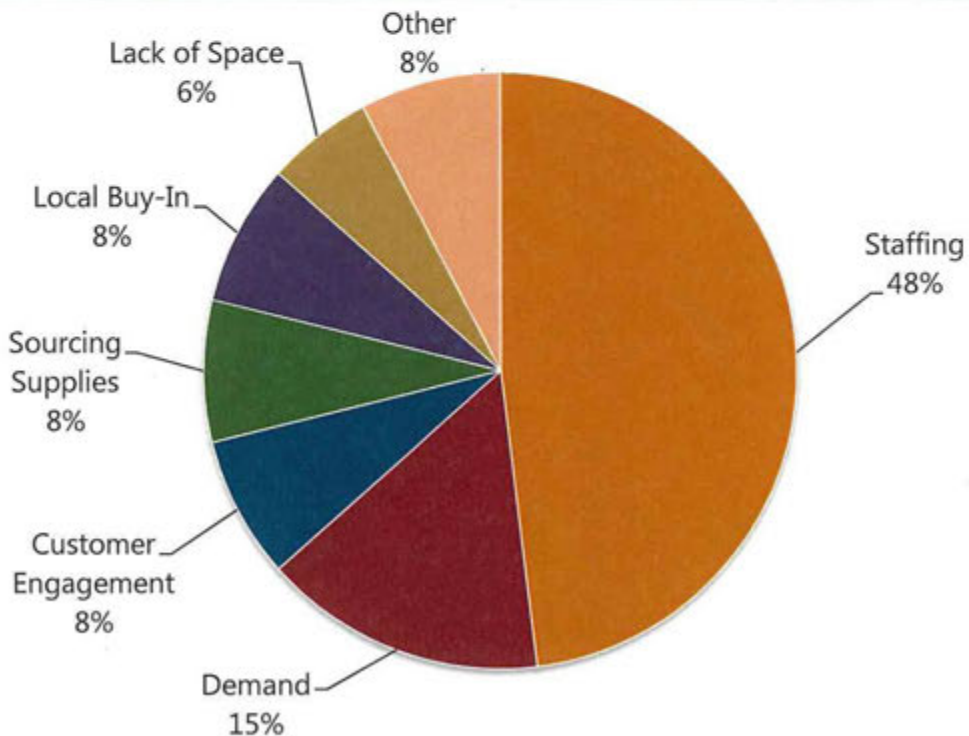
Business owners reported an average of fifteen years operating in Mackenzie, with the oldest Mackenzie businesses being established over 50 years ago, and the youngest businesses opening within the last year. Participant businesses average six full-time, three part-time, two contract/temporary and two seasonal employees.

Business Climate: Partly cloudy.....but generally warm!



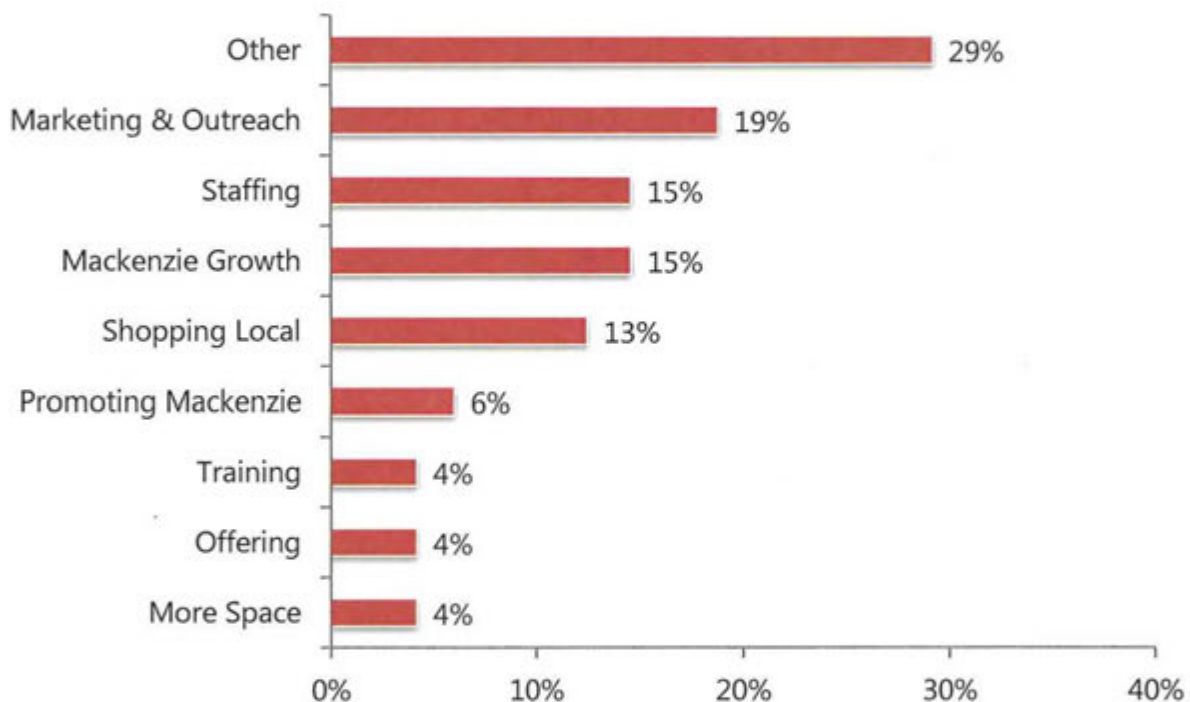
Operators were asked how they felt business had been going over the past two years. **58% of businesses reported growth**, while **36% reported steady business** and only **6% reported declines**. Of these, **55% projected growth** and/or expansion over the next year. The remaining **35% of businesses plan to maintain steady operations**, while **10% plan to retire or sell** their businesses within five years.

Challenges Facing Our Businesses



Staffing was reported as a major challenge by 48% of businesses this year, similar to 2017. **Demand** for goods and services - including difficulties related to **seasonality, lack of exposure, the need to diversify, and the size of the community** - was another hurdle faced by 15% of local businesses. Other challenges include **customer satisfaction and engagement** (8%), difficulty **sourcing supplies** (8%), **competition with out-of-town retailers and service providers** (8%) and **lack of space to expand** (6%).

Growth Factors



19% of operators felt that investing in their **marketing** efforts would contribute to the growth of their business. Growth of the community as a whole – including an increase in resident **population, industry, and locally available amenities** - was also cited as a primary benefit by many businesses (15%). **Hiring more staff** would enable growth for an additional 15%. **Community engagement** and promoting “**shop local**” for both commercial and industrial goods and services were considered beneficial by 13% of businesses. Other activities that would result in growth and expansion reported by local businesses include improved **relocation and tourism marketing initiatives of Mackenzie, availability of space to expand, and diversification of goods and services**, as well as more **training** and experience to improve business offerings.

Business Recruitment

Most local businesses believe that recruiting new business to town would benefit their operations, both through the availability of new products and services and the associated increase in the population/customer base. 17% support the recruitment of **industry and industrial parts** businesses, while 12% suggest recruiting more **auto shops and auto parts** suppliers. **Restaurants, grocery stores, a dentist, land developers** and **skilled labour contractors** were also projected to benefit the operations of local businesses.

Training



60% of businesses were interested in attending or having staff attend professional development training. **Customer service, marketing, profession specific training, computer training, and business training** accounted for the majority of the suggested workshops and courses. Other training suggestions/requests included **workplace safety, food health and safety** and **First Aid**.

Next Steps

- Provide Community Futures, WorkBC, Chamber of Commerce and Northern Development with customized contact lists of businesses that expressed interest in a follow up conversation with a specific focus.
- Follow-up with all businesses that expressed interest or would like to provide feedback on the Love Mackenzie Program and/or the Business Façade Improvement program.
- Share the findings of the 2018 business walks with the business community in Mackenzie.
- Use the information to complement District business policy and 2019 project development.



COUNCIL PRIORITY:

Economic Vitality

- Develop business and investment friendly policies and initiatives
- Strengthen our industrial base and support economic diversification
- Invest in the development of strategic partnerships locally, regionally with First Nations, governments, industry and the business community

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rita", written over a horizontal line.

Rita Dubman
Local Government Management Intern

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, looped shape, written over a horizontal line.

Approved for Submission to Council