

Business Retention & Expansion Study and Action Plan



THE MUNICIPALITY OF
LAMBTON SHORES

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Executive Summary

The Municipality of Lambton Shores has undertaken a Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Study to support its local business community.

The goal of the BR+E is to identify specific action items that can be achieved over a ten year period. It is not sector-specific, and instead an inclusive action plan to strengthen the local business climate identified through this study.

Engagement from local business owners and managers has led to a stronger understanding of the business environment in Lambton Shores.

As a result of this study, a number of proposed actions are being recommended to assist both the business community and the Municipality of Lambton Shores.

Study participants have demonstrated a general level of satisfaction with the business environment in the Municipality. They have also provided insight into a number of proactive and constructive steps that can be taken to improve the business environment and develop new opportunities for business growth.

The business world is changing. Today's era of e-commerce, remote working, home-based business, online payment processing, cloud-based systems and beyond is opening up the opportunity and a need for more local networking and collaboration. Local business owners are looking for information outside of traditional organizations that provide business advocacy or industry support.

An overwhelming finding of this study is the desire for improved communication between businesses and the Municipality of Lambton Shores. There is an opportunity for the Municipality to play a role in providing access to small business resources and act as a partner in business growth and development.

Through consultation with local business owners, this BR+E has identified 4 distinct pillars of support for the business community in Lambton Shores:

Identified Pillars

1. Increase Communication & Collaboration
2. Improve Quality of Workforce
3. Municipal Support and Services
4. Business Attraction

In turn, a number of clearly actionable tasks, projects and campaigns have been identified to add strength and substance to these pillars.

There is no question that Lambton Shores is seen as a great place to do business. Existing resources and partnerships can be leveraged to offer greater support leading to an even more thriving business climate that supports businesses looking to stay and grow here, as well as businesses looking to call Lambton Shores their new home.

Doing business in the Municipality of Lambton Shores

Lambton Shores has a healthy variety of industry. A diverse group of new businesses are establishing themselves to augment the many established ones - some of which have been in operation for over 100 years. While the findings of the study that follow may introduce some opportunities for improvement, there was one overarching theme: Lambton Shores is a great place to do business.

Lambton Shores benefits from a booming tourism industry and serves a growing number of year-round residents and businesses. This provides potential for businesses that already exist and others that may be thinking of moving their operations to the area. In short, there's a market here for everyone.

Local businesses play a critical role to the ecosystem that is Lambton Shores. They contribute by not only providing products and

services to residents, visitors and beyond, but by also giving back to community groups, employing residents, contributing to the tax base, and overall being an active contributor to the success of the community.

In partnership with the municipal government local business owners have indicated a readiness to come together and collaborate on initiatives that foster a healthier, and more prosperous economic climate for the benefit of all.

This Study and Action Plan has been created with the input and collaboration of local business owners and reflects not only the invested resources available to the Municipality, but also the needs and opportunities identified by businesses.

BR+E Goals for Lambton Shores

The diversity of enterprise in Lambton Shores and surrounding area represents tremendous opportunity. That said, challenges also exist related to extended resources, lack of clear information sharing, too many unseen businesses, and unclear common objectives community-wide. This Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) study accompanied by strategically planned actions will identify unique opportunities for the Municipality of Lambton Shores and its local businesses to develop relationships leading to mutually beneficial, long-term growth.

In 2014, the Lambton Shores Economic Development Action Plan identified the need for a BR+E in order to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy and explore opportunities for growth across industries, including how to “attract a healthy mix of local and franchise businesses.” (Objective 4.1)

This report will enable Lambton Shores to be strategic towards business and community growth, as well as: provide the insight, tools and action plan to strengthen the agri-business and food industry locally; provide the insight and action plan to develop, retain, and attract businesses, entrepreneurs and investors; and, identify the gaps that need to be addressed to strengthen local businesses that target both tourists and local residents, leading to a stronger tourism industry and population growth in Lambton Shores.

The execution of this project serves to unify business owners, and business associations and address Strategic Action #7 of Community Growth & Support as outlined in the municipality's 2019-2020 Strategic Priorities: "Together with the Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership, the Municipality of Lambton Shores will promote itself as an outstanding environment for new and existing businesses."

The Business Retention & Expansion (BR+E) Project

Small and medium-sized businesses are the foundation to an economically healthy and sustainable community. Creating a supportive and growth-driven environment for these businesses to succeed has a compounding effect that ripples not only through the lives of these business owners but also through their employees, their families, their networks, and their community: Lambton Shores.

A Business Retention & Expansion (BR+E) report is a local study performed to identify key decision points within the community for businesses.

As explained by the Province of Ontario and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), the BR+E program allows eligible organizations to "support local businesses so they can grow, create jobs and stay in [their] community; write and implement an action plan to foster business development, investment and job creation; and collect business and market data to support economic development planning"

"Through the Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) program, you can learn how to make your community a great place to do business."

The Ontario Ministry of
Agriculture, Food and
Rural Affairs

The project was completed in four phases using OMAFRA's process for BR+Es as a guide to execute the study and build an action plan that will be effective for Lambton Shores and its local business owners.

PHASE I: Preparation

This first phase was focused on setting goals, understanding the scope of the project and establishing a work plan, as well as preparing the study questions and establishing the rules for data collection. See Appendix A for the approved questions asked during interviews in Phase II. The questions followed OMAFRA's recommendations, adapted slightly to meet the needs of this study for Lambton Shores and to fit within a similar project by Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership.

PHASE II: Collect and analyze

The second phase focused on data collection and analysis of the findings. Based on OMAFRA's process, data collection was primarily done by the BR+E Consultant through in-person interviews to strengthen relationships and foster conversation. Where face-to-face interviews were not possible due to scheduling conflicts, data collection was done over the phone. Data was also collected in collaboration with and shared by Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership while they conducted interviews for their BR+E study.

A media release and posts on social media were published to communicate the project and invite businesses to participate. Businesses were also contacted at random by the BR+E Consultant, keeping in mind the distribution of businesses by community and industry.

Raw data and notable trends were presented to Municipal key staff to review before transitioning into Phase III.

PHASE III: Develop action plan

The collected data from Phase II was then compiled into a report with findings and an action plan for the Municipality, its partners, and local businesses to execute.

A component of Phase III was hosting a brainstorming session, or "Task Force Retreat" as coined by OMAFRA, to discuss the findings with local businesses and other stakeholders. It was also designed to discuss potential recommendations for inclusion in the Action Plan.

The retreat was hosted on January 16, 2020 at the Port Franks Community Centre. 15 participants and other members of the business community attended and discussed possible solutions for obstacles discussed during Phase II. See Appendix D for results based on discussion.

PHASE IV: Implement and tracking

This phase focusses on developing a program for implementation of recommendations and putting the necessary measures in place to track implementation of the Action Plan.

For Lambton Shores, this also means that Phase IV is ongoing. The findings of this study are communicated to the business community, local business groups and partners, and the implementation process of the recommendations in this report begins.



Overview of findings

The study findings identify that there are both obstacles and opportunities shared by business owners across the Municipality of Lambton Shores.

While these commonalities form the focus of this Action Plan, it is important to recognize the differences as well and acknowledge that individual industries or even individual communities within Lambton Shores may require specific attention to address unique issues.

For example, it was clear through interviewing businesses in Grand Bend that availability of parking to meet the demands of traffic flow is a concern during the high season for retail. In contrast, businesses in Forest and Thedford felt that parking availability is quite sufficient for the needs of their businesses.

For the purpose of this Action Plan and to ensure the most effective results, the primary focus is on Lambton Shores-wide concerns for all businesses.

Improved communication and a strong desire for increased collaboration *with* both the Municipality and with other business owners was a notable trend amongst the data collected.

Noteable comments and trends include opportunities for the Municipality and business community to foster relationships, exploring ways to retain and support residents (and therefore employees), and finding ways to revitalize the business community through business attraction, entrepreneurship and the promotion of new development.

Appendix C to this report includes a summary of general comments provided in anonymity by survey participants.

The data pool

Before exploring key findings from Phase II, it is important to understand the businesses and their owners that participated. The findings from this study are ultimately comprised of their insights and experiences associated with running a business in Lambton Shores.

Overall, 88 businesses were contacted to participate. 63 businesses participated in Phase II, of which, 24 were interviewed by Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership and 39 by the BR+E Consultant. 25 selected businesses did not respond or chose not to participate.

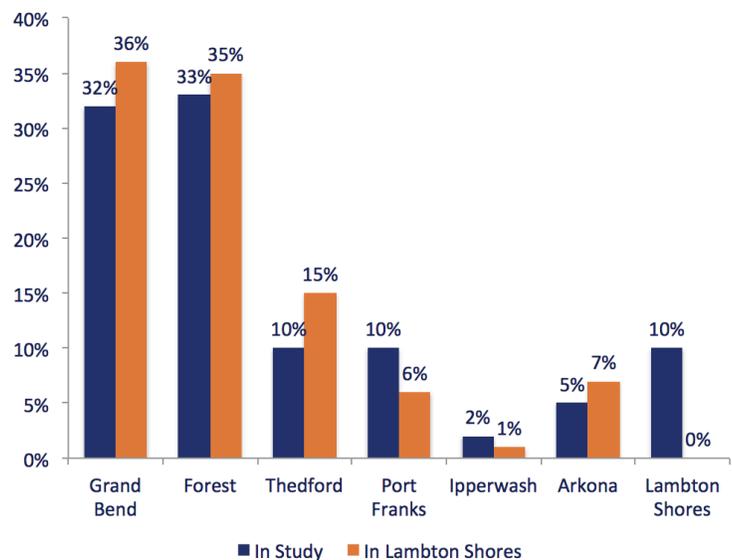
OMAFRA suggests a sample size no smaller than 30 participants for a BR+E Study. The target for this study was a sample size of 60, which gives a 90% confidence level with less than 10% margin of error based on an estimated 359 businesses in Lambton Shores.

Businesses contacted to participate varied in workforce size, industry and time under operation. This was to ensure a well-rounded snapshot of the business climate in Lambton Shores. It was a priority of Phase II to ensure the distribution of participants in each community and industry in Lambton Shores reflected the natural distribution of all businesses in Lambton Shores. This “natural distribution” was derived and estimated from regional business directories.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

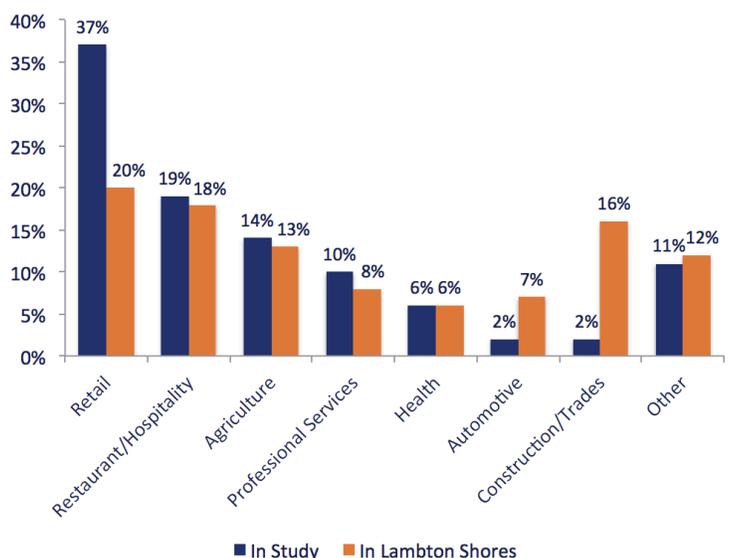
To ensure that all communities within Lambton Shores received proper representation, the number of businesses interviewed in each community was determined based on the total estimated number of businesses operating within each location. This was derived from regional business directories.

“Lambton Shores” indicates data from Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership where the specific community was not defined.



INDUSTRY REPRESENTATION

As with community representation, it was critical to ensure that a wide diversity of industry was represented in the findings. Retail businesses have different needs than those in agriculture, for example. It is important to capture insights from all industries present in Lambton Shores. The estimation of industry distribution was derived from regional business directories.



AGE OF BUSINESS

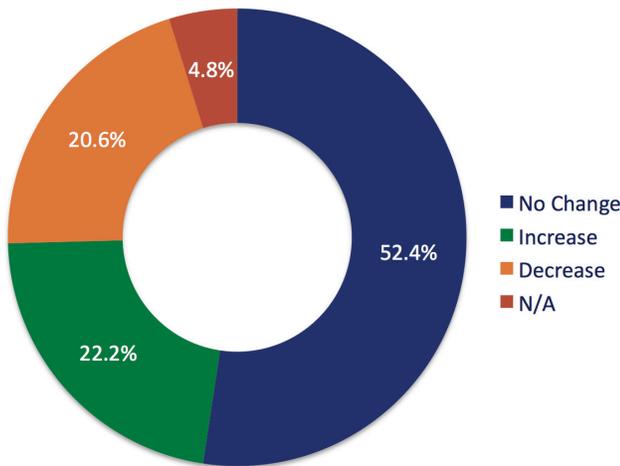
The average age of businesses in Lambton Shores based on the data pool is 28.8 years. The youngest business is 6 months and the oldest have been in operation for 129 years.

The workforce

Surveyed businesses in Lambton Shores have an average of 10.5 (and a median of 4) employees. During Phase II of the BR+E project, workforce was one of the most notable areas of discussion. While general trends in reported employment do not represent any significant red flags, it should be noted that the majority of local businesses state that they have a challenging time attracting - and then retaining - qualified and committed team members.

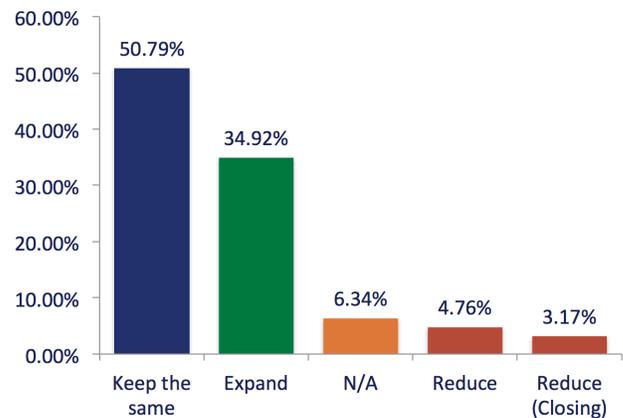
CURRENT WORKFORCE

Local businesses were asked how their current workforce size compared to their team in the past. There is a relatively equal number of businesses that have either grown or reduced their workforce.



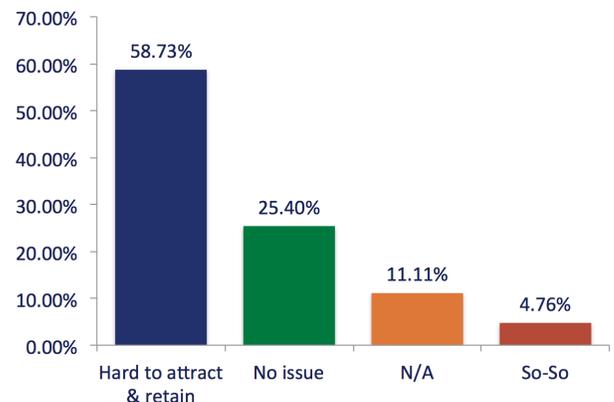
PLANS FOR WORKFORCE

When asked if they had plans to grow or reduce the size of their workforce, one half of business owners indicated that they had no plan to change the size of their teams; however it is notable that roughly 35% of businesses do plan to expand their workforce in the near future.



EXPERIENCE FINDING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES

With nearly 35% of businesses looking to expand the size of their workforce, the survey results clearly indicate that the majority of businesses are experiencing difficulties in attracting and retaining employees.



The current climate

A key objective of this study is to seek insight into what “is working” for local business owners and what is not. The following data represents primary concerns related to managing their businesses on a day-to-day basis, including perceived strengths and obstacles for getting customers and clients in the door.

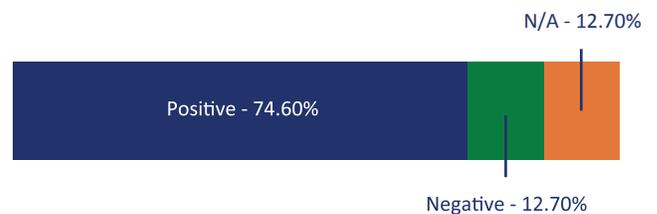
PRIMARY CONCERNS

The following were identified concerns by participants when asked “What keeps you up at night?”



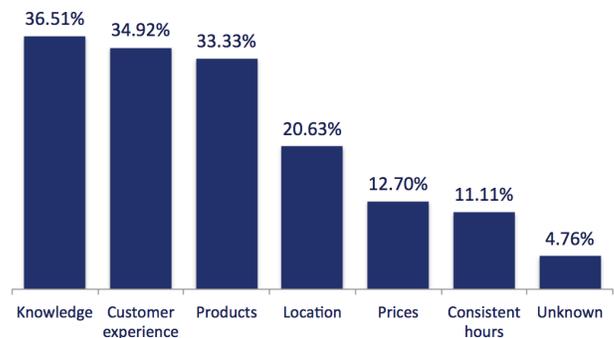
SUCCESS MANAGING SUPPLIERS

The majority of local businesses that work with suppliers have a positive experience.



COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

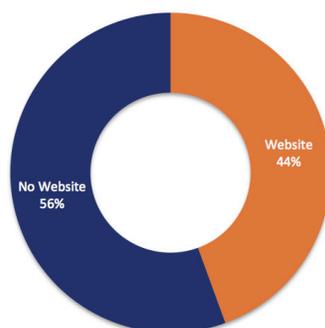
The following are self-identified advantages that business owners feel they have over their competitors. Participants could offer more than one response.



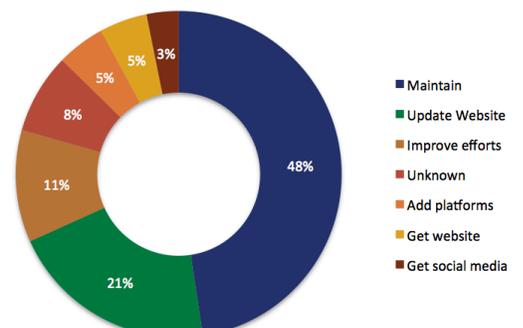
DIGITAL MARKETING

44% of participants have a website for their business. Of all participants, almost half plan to continue their digital marketing efforts as is.

Business Website v. Not



Plans for Digital Marketing

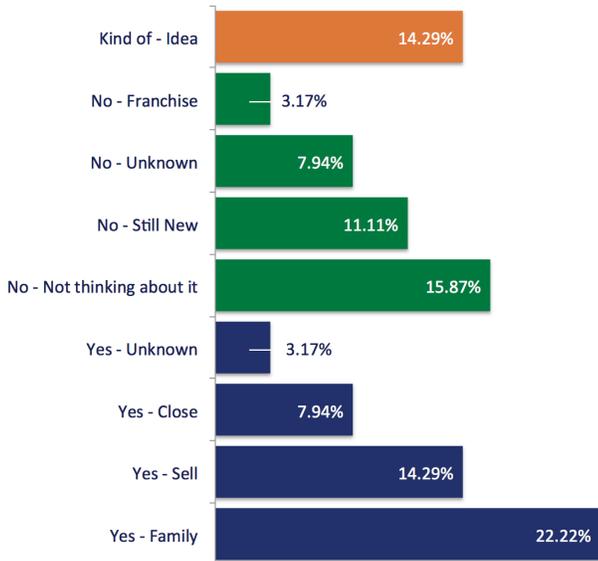


Looking to the future

A number of the questions posed to participants focused on future plans for their businesses. This includes not only any upcoming plans during current ownership (and if they have the means to execute those plans), but also what happens once the current owner is ready to step away from their business: i.e. *Will this business remain active in Lambton Shores?*

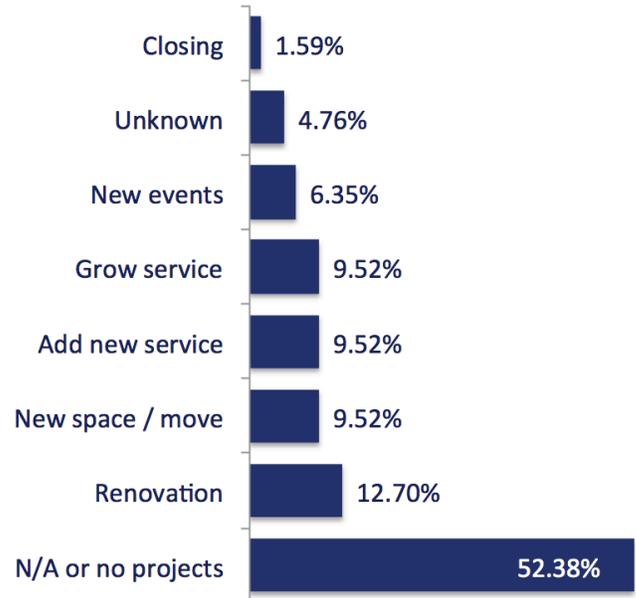
SUCCESSION PLANNING

Identifying challenges and opportunities related to business continuity when the current owners are ready to move on is key to a business' ongoing success. Roughly 40% of the surveyed business owners are not yet planning for succession.



UPCOMING PROJECTS

Apart from knowing the future of a business beyond its current ownership, this study also considers immediate plans for business growth or development. Over 50% of study respondents indicate no plans for any specific upcoming projects. Participants could offer more than one response.



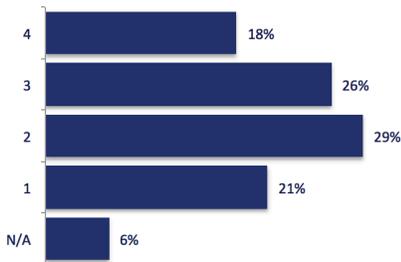
ACCESS TO FUNDING

Business owners were asked of their awareness of funding opportunities for current or future projects. Two thirds of respondents were unaware of any available funding opportunities. This demonstrates the opportunity to not only increase partnerships with organizations that offer funding, but also the need to increase communication about existing programs with potential funding partners.

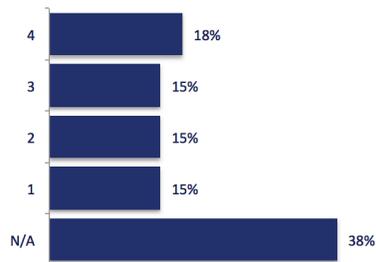


Local amenities and services

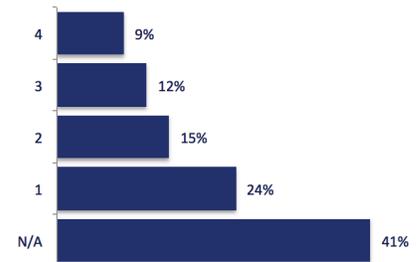
Survey data was also collected in relation to the respondents perception of strengths and weaknesses associated with doing business specifically within the Municipality of Lambton Shores. Respondents were asked to rate the following municipal-wide factors from 1 being “Not At All Satisfied” and 4 being “Very Satisfied”. “N/A” indicates that they had no experience or comment about one of the listed factors.



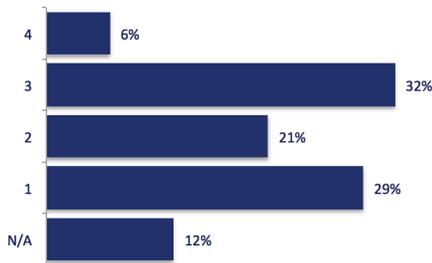
Workforce refers to the availability of qualified employees in Lambton Shores.



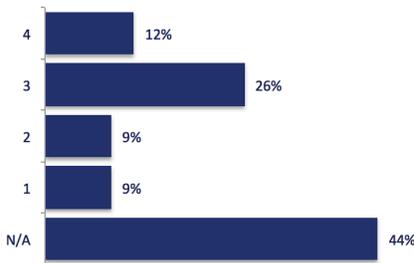
Serviced land refers to the availability of land with municipal service (utilities).



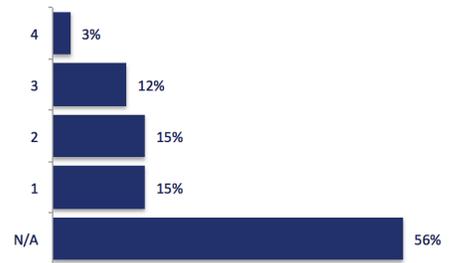
Land cost refers to the overall perception of value and availability of land in Lambton Shores.



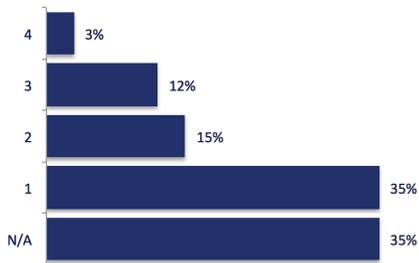
Property taxes refers to the perceived value that the participants receive compared to what is paid in commercial property taxes.



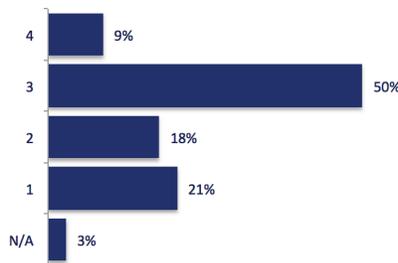
Permit process refers to the individual’s experience acquiring a permit for development or renovation.



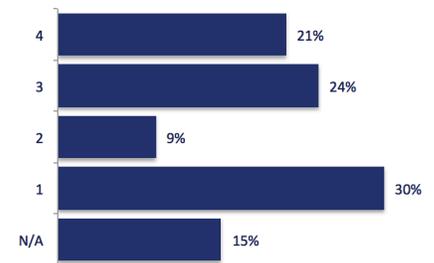
Development charges refers to the perceived value of the fee to Lambton Shores for any development projects.



Space for Lease refers to the availability and affordability of commercial space for lease.



Roads and streets refers to the quality of road infrastructure around their business.



Parking refers to the overall impression of availability of parking for their business.



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Identified pillars and priority levels

Defined trends were recognized throughout the data collection phase (Phase II) and can ultimately be grouped into the following four pillars of opportunity:

(1) Pillar One - Increase Communication & Collaboration: There is an opportunity to improve communication between local businesses and the Municipality of Lambton Shores. In the business consultations during data collection there were noteworthy comments suggesting that the businesses in their community do not feel seen and the contribution that their business brings to their community goes unrecognized (*see Appendix C: Recognition & Communication*). Improving communication not only builds a stronger relationship between the Municipality and business owners, but also allows the Municipality to address potential misinformation and provide guidance to support and services.

Additionally, there is a unique opportunity to create channels for the local business community to support each other by increasing communication and collaboration amongst business owners as well. Again, often expressed during the business consultations was a desire for municipal-wide business coordination. Local business owners want to connect and problem solve together.

(2) Pillar Two - Support a Diverse Workforce: It was made clear during the business consultations that local business owners are faced with the challenge of filling available employment opportunities with a workforce that has both the necessary qualifications and the desire to remain in Lambton Shores. Comments during interviews include questions and concerns around why qualified employees would relocate to Lambton Shores when there are more opportunities in larger urban centres, as well as concerns for housing and training opportunities to support a workforce that they need to grow to support upcoming projects. The recommendations that follow for Pillar Two focus on communicating opportunities more effectively as well as skill building to meet necessary qualifications.

(3) Pillar Three - Municipal Support and Services: The Municipality of Lambton Shores can play a pivotal role in both the retention and attraction of businesses. Positioning the Municipality as a partner in business success and local economic growth will reinforce corporate commitment, and encourage resident support. While constructive feedback was given from participants in the business consultations addressing how the Municipality could better support their businesses, there was also a general consensus that business owners are happy to be doing business in Lambton Shores (*see Appendix C: Municipal Services*).

Recommendations for Pillar Three focus on leveraging existing resources including facilities, partnerships and already available information to offer enhanced support and services to local business owners.

(4) Pillar Four - Business Attraction: In addition to supporting existing businesses in Lambton Shores, economic development efforts and other municipal services should also be focused on attracting new business. There was a common theme during the business consultations that in order for existing businesses to thrive, effort also needs to be made on attracting business and diversifying services available to residents, visitors and businesses alike. Whether these new businesses fill a community need, foster healthy competition in the market, provide further employment opportunities to local residents or fill a business need as a supplier to an existing business, the benefits of resources focused on business attraction are clear. Each of the recommended actions address one or more of the following goals.

Goal 1: Support Residents

A focus on attracting new business not only supports existing residents but also attracts new ones, meaning stronger communities and more potential employees to support existing businesses. New business creates a healthy level of competition, improving the quality of service offered by existing businesses as well as filling gaps in consumer needs and services. By being strategic and working with the community, Lambton Shores can identify specific businesses to attract that will create healthier downtowns, offer more services and consumer choices, and ultimately happier residents.

Goal 2: Support the Tourism Market

Business attraction can also enhance tourism in the area. Identifying opportunities that businesses can address to attract more tourism to the area, whether it be companies that offer unique experiences or capitalizing on market trends like craft brewing can guide marketing efforts and strategic outreach done by the Municipality. These new businesses in turn provide employment to existing residents, and promote the value of Lambton Shores to potential future residents.

Goal 3: Foster a Culture of Entrepreneurship

At the core of entrepreneurship is a sense of community, the drive to scale and the mission to solve a problem and serve. Lambton Shores already has a wealth of assets that could support a thriving entrepreneurial community. And with a strong business community rooted in the lifestyle of entrepreneurship comes more entrepreneurs and business owners looking to make Lambton Shores their home.

Creating this exciting culture around business creation and community attracts all ages of business owners, including a younger generation that is attracted to the nature and adventure-focused lifestyle of Lambton Shores. These new entrepreneurs have the potential to take the place of existing businesses as they close or their owners retire.

Goal 4: Economic Development

Business attraction efforts can also be focused on sharing a message that encourages development to the area. This could lead to more affordable housing for employees (a need identified during consultations) and residents, business concentrated areas like the Forest Industrial Park, and amenities to support further tourism-related businesses such as hotel and restaurant franchises.

Each of these pillars and their recommended action items have also been identified based on priority level:

IMMEDIATE

Within 2 years. These immediate areas are action items that have been identified as critical to maintain and improve the current business climate or is recognized as an action item that can be executed with existing municipal resources.

NEAR TERM

Between 3 and 5 years. Near term action items are projects, campaigns and tasks that have been identified as necessary in the near future. Many are conditional on the execution of the Immediate actions.

LONG TERM

More than 5 years. Action items categorized under this priority are programs, partnerships and campaigns that should be executed for the long-term sustainability, health and growth of the Lambton Shores business climate.

How to read the recommendations

A table at the beginning of each Pillar summarizes the recommendations for that respective pillar. Recommendations are designed to be implementable, actionable, and specific to Lambton Shores. The tables identify for each recommendation the strategic direction, timing anticipated for implementation (as outlined above), and the key players associated with implementation.

	Strategic Direction	Timing	Implementation
#.#	Describes the action / recommendation to be undertaken	Describes the anticipated timeframe	Identifies the key players associated with implementation of the action

Strategic Direction		Timing	Implementation
Pillar One: Increase Communication and Collaboration			
1.1	<p>Facilitate the creation of a Lambton Shores-wide business group</p> <p>It is recommended that there exist an “Association” that represents businesses across the Municipality of Lambton Shores, working in the interest of all communities, increasing cross-community collaboration and improving direct access to Municipal Support and Services (See Pillar 3).</p>	IMMEDIATE	Key municipal staff, Local business owners
1.2	<p>Establish regular communication with updates on business news and events</p> <p>To improve communication between the Municipality and local businesses, it is recommended that a channel such as an email newsletter be coordinated and sent by a dedicated member of staff (see 3.1). This direct communication may be tied into existing communications efforts or stand alone as a distinct channel. The ultimate goal is to keep the business community informed about upcoming opportunities with municipal partners, events open to the business community, and information about services offered as business support by the Municipality.</p>	IMMEDIATE	Key municipal staff

Strategic Direction		Timing	Implementation
1.3	<p>Coordinate networking and learning opportunities across Lambton Shores</p> <p>It is recommended that regular, reoccurring events are held to allow local business owners to network and connect in partnership with agencies such as Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership, Sarnia-Lambton Business Development Corporation and the Sarnia-Lambton Workforce Development Board, and other business groups.</p>	NEAR TERM	Key municipal staff, Partners (eg. SLEP, SLBDC, SLWDB), Local business owners, Business groups
Pillar Two: Support a Diverse Workforce			
2.1	<p>Coordinate training sessions with business and learning partners</p> <p>Engage business groups to determine training needs that could be facilitated on a broader scale to allow for more businesses to access trainings.</p> <p>These training sessions could be, for example, WHMIS, First Aid or Working at Heights certifications or Customer Service or Computer Skills learning sessions.</p>	NEAR TERM	Key municipal staff, Partners (eg. SLEP, SLBDC, SLWDB), Business groups

Strategic Direction	Timing	Implementation
<p>2.2 Collaborate with educational institutions to strengthen co-op placement programs</p> <p>A unique opportunity to address the quality of local workforce <i>before</i> it becomes a concern is to work with the local High School and Post-Secondary Institutions to strengthen and build their Co-Op Placement Programs.</p> <p>Improving communication and providing resources to the high school and colleges in the area to promote the program amongst local students would strengthen their programs with two mutually beneficial results: (1) Employment gaps would be filled for local businesses, giving them the support they would need to tackle upcoming projects and grow their businesses; and (2) Students would acquire unique skillsets in various trades and industries as well as demonstrating the value that local job opportunities have to offer.</p>	<p>NEAR TERM</p>	<p>Key municipal staff, High School, Local Post-Secondary Institutions, Local business owners</p>
<p>2.3 Coordinate and host an annual job fair</p> <p>It is recommended as a long term strategy to host an annual job fair to not only showcase local businesses and provide them with a channel to advertise any gaps in their team, but also to provide an opportunity for residents to explore local employment opportunities.</p>	<p>LONG TERM</p>	<p>Key municipal staff, Partners (eg. SLEP, SLBDC, SLWDB), Local business owners, Business groups</p>

Strategic Direction		Timing	Implementation
Pillar Three: Municipal Services			
3.1	<p>Dedicate primary Municipal contact for businesses and economic development</p> <p>The key to the success of this Action Plan is having dedicated Municipal contact available to the business community. Having a member of staff committed as a consistent, reliable point of contact and overall coordinator for business efforts as implemented by this Action Plan is a critical element to expanding, retaining and even attracting local businesses.</p>	IMMEDIATE	Key municipal staff
3.2	<p>Conduct a Community Improvement Plan</p> <p>Community Improvement Plans are designed to stimulate targeted reinvestment and coordinate planning efforts. The Community Improvement Plan will create an action plan for revitalization or rehabilitation projects that may need to be undertaken to improve the overall experience for residents, visitors and business owners.</p>	IMMEDIATE	Key municipal staff, Consultant, Business groups
3.3	<p>Expand the Municipal website to include a digital business resource and information centre for businesses seeking support and tools</p> <p>By leveraging existing resources offered by both the Municipality of Lambton Shores and its partners, there is an opportunity to streamline communication by centralizing this information in one consistent, reliable location: The Lambton Shores website.</p>	NEAR TERM	Key municipal staff, Partners (eg. SLEP, SLBDC, SLWDB)

Strategic Direction		Timing	Implementation
3.4	<p>Establish a business resource centre</p> <p>Taking resources and space into consideration, this action item presents another opportunity to strengthen partnerships for business support services and provide access to general office equipment for operations like printing, photocopying, etc.</p>	LONG TERM	Key municipal staff, Lambton County library system, Partners (eg. SLEP, SLBDC)
3.5	<p>Establish a Lambton Shores business directory</p> <p>There is a need for a centralized, up-to-date (i.e. maintained) source of information identifying what businesses are in operation across Lambton Shores, as well as how to get in contact with them.</p> <p>Establishing a Lambton Shores-wide business directory centralizes information available not only to customers, clients and residents, but also to businesses looking to collaborate and do business with local suppliers.</p>	LONG TERM	Key municipal staff
3.6	<p>Establish a Lambton Shores commercial space listing directory</p> <p>There is an opportunity to provide both existing and prospective new businesses with web-based access to commercial business space and venture opportunities. As with 3.5, by partnering with local real estate agents and local landlords, there is an opportunity to enhance communication to all businesses in Lambton Shores (or those looking to move their businesses here) in relation to available business spaces and opportunities.</p>	LONG TERM	Key municipal staff

Strategic Direction		Timing	Implementation
Pillar Four: Business Attraction			
4.1	<p>Enhance the “Starting a Business in Lambton Shores” resource guide on the Lambton Shores website</p> <p>Understanding there already exists a “Starting your Business” page on the Lambton Shores website, there is an opportunity to enhance this to a voice of partnership versus simply providing basic information.</p> <p>This resource area should promote a message of celebration, support and resourcefulness. While the foundational information is there, it can be reevaluated and restructured. To do this and to improve certain resources that extend beyond the Municipality, Lambton Shores can work with partners such as Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership, as well as readily available information from the Province of Ontario, to centralize this information and improve the experience for new business owners.</p> <p>This will eventually compliment and work cohesively with Action Item 3.3.</p>	<p>IMMEDIATE</p>	<p>Key municipal staff, Partners (eg. SLEP, SLBDC, SLWDB)</p>

	Strategic Direction	Timing	Implementation
4.2	<p>Community Positioning Project: Establish a brand for each community from a business / destination perspective</p> <p>Lambton Shores attracts new residents and visitors year-round. There is an opportunity for similar marketing to be put towards attracting businesses. Establishing a niche for each community and promoting them as destinations for starting a business will attract those specific businesses (and other businesses that support <i>those</i> businesses) that fit within the market created.</p> <p>It is important to note that each individual community brand should fit within the overall brand for the Municipality of Lambton Shores. This is not about individualizing communities at the expense of the Municipality as a whole. These established “sub-brands” should primarily be used for business attraction and tourism communication.</p>	<p>LONG TERM</p>	<p>Key municipal staff, Local residents, Local business owners</p>

	Strategic Direction	Timing	Implementation
4.3	<p>Attract and encourage new business in vacant properties through pitch competitions</p> <p>Work with existing “Win This Space” competitions offered through Sarnia-Lambton Business Development Corporation to facilitate a similar project in Lambton Shores. This will not only help get new businesses on their feet, but it will also:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate revitalization and fill otherwise unused spaces in Downtown areas 2. Encourage other entrepreneurs to follow suit, whether they participate or win the competition or not. 	<p>LONG TERM</p>	<p>Key municipal staff, Partners (eg. SLBDC), Local business owners</p>
4.4	<p>Establish a long-term promotional campaign to attract and encourage development, retail and services</p> <p>Work with Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership to develop a long-term campaign to proactively attract businesses that fill gaps in the current business mix.</p>	<p>LONG TERM</p>	<p>Key municipal staff, Partners (SLEP)</p>

A final note

The Municipality of Lambton Shores is a great place to do business. There is room for improvement. There could be a stronger, collective effort as a government, as business owners, and as members of this community. This Business Retention & Expansion Study and Action Plan is the first step to that.

Real concerns have been identified by *real* business owners, operators and employers of Lambton Shores. These concerns, experiences and ideas are foundational in helping the Municipality move forward in supporting existing and new businesses.

It is important to understand the critical role that businesses play in maintaining and growing healthy communities for all Lambton Shores residents and visitors.

Their commitment to the success of their business, to the wellbeing of their employees, and to the growth of Lambton Shores is admirable, inspiring and appreciated.

It is time to work together. **It is time to ride the tide of economic growth in Lambton Shores.**

For further information:

The Municipality of Lambton Shores
7883 Amtelecom Parkway
Forest, ON, N0N 1J0, Canada

 519-243-1400

Appendices

- A Data collection survey
- B Raw data charts
- C Interview takeaways
- D Results from discussion on January 16, 2020

APPENDIX A

Data Collection Survey

Basic Information

1. Date:
2. Business:
3. Name:
4. How long has the business been in operation?
5. How long as the business been under your ownership?
6. Could you briefly describe what your business does?
7. Would you say that your primary market is local, regional, national or international?

Employment

8. How many employees do you currently have?
9. How many of these are full-time, part-time and seasonal?
10. Overall, would you say your workforce size is up or down from historic numbers?
11. Any plans to expand or reduce your workforce?
12. What is your experience getting qualified employees?
13. Do you have a succession plan for your business?
14. If so, what is it? If not, what do you see for the future of your business?

Business Climate

15. How is business? What factors (positive and/or negative) are impacting the business?
16. What business concerns keep you up at night?
17. Do you have any upcoming projects (like new services, building renovations, etc.) planned in the next 18 months?
18. Are there any projects you would like to pursue but haven't taken place, why?
19. Are you aware of any potential government funding opportunities for current projects? Would you like more information?
20. What is your experience finding and managing suppliers?
21. What customers would you like to reach but are unable to or haven't yet? What's holding you back from reaching out to them?
22. Who are your main competitors?
23. What is your competitive advantage?
24. Does your business have an online presence? (website, social media)
25. What are your plans in this regard?
26. Are there inputs/services you need for your business that you are unable to source locally?

Business in Lambton Shores

27. How would you rate the following factors of doing business in Lambton Shores?
(N/A, 1: Poor, 4: Excellent)
- a. Workforce
 - b. Availability of serviced land
 - c. Land costs
 - d. Availability of space for rent or lease
 - e. Development / building permit process
 - f. Development charges
 - g. Municipal property taxes
 - h. Local roads and streets
 - i. Parking
28. What could the municipality or others do better to support your business and others in the area?
29. What opportunities do you feel exist in the Lambton Shores economy that businesses could fill?
30. Other Notes:

APPENDIX B

Raw Data Charts from Phase II

Data Pool

The following represents the number of businesses interviewed versus the estimated total of businesses per community and per industry within Lambton Shores. The aim was to keep the proportion of community and industry representation similar from Sample Size to Population Size.

COMMUNITY DISTRIBUTION				
	Interviewed	Representation	Total	Representation
Grand Bend	20	32%	127	36%
Forest	21	33%	122	35%
Theedford	6	10%	56	15%
Port Franks	6	10%	22	6%
Ipperwash	1	2%	7	1%
Arkona	3	5%	25	7%
Lambton Shores	6	10%	0	
TOTAL	63	100%	359	100%

INDUSTRY DISTRIBUTION				
	Interviewed	Representation	Total	Representation
Retail	23	37%	72	20%
Restaurant/Hospitality	12	19%	65	18%
Professional Services	6	10%	46	13%
Agriculture	9	14%	28	8%
Health	4	6%	23	6%
Automotive	1	2%	25	7%
Construction/Trades	1	2%	57	16%
Other	7	11%	43	12%
TOTAL	63	100%	359	100%

The following table represents the customer/client base of those interviewed in Phase II.

PRIMARY MARKET	#	%
Local and Regional	28	44.44%
Local	24	38.10%
Regional	8	12.70%
Provincial	1	1.59%
National	1	1.59%
Unknown	1	1.59%
TOTAL	63	

Workforce

Participants were asked the size of their workforce, as well as how their workforce is distributed between full-time employees, part-time employees and seasonal employees.

EMPLOYEES	
Average # of employees	10.5
Avg. full-time	60.40%
Avg. part-time	26.35%
Avg. seasonal	9.52%
Unknown	23.81%

Participants were asked about their experience finding employees.

GETTING EMPLOYEES	#	%
Hard to attract & retain	37	58.73%
No issue	16	25.40%
N/A	7	11.11%
Okay	3	4.76%
TOTAL	63	

Business Climate

Participants were asked what their experience is like finding and managing suppliers, both local and otherwise.

SUCCESS MANAGING WITH SUPPLIERS		
Yes	47	74.60%
No	8	12.70%
N/A	8	12.70%
TOTAL	63	

Participants were asked whether the size of their workforce was up or down from historic team sizes.

WORKFORCE	#	%
Same	33	52.38%
Up	14	22.22%
Down	13	20.63%
N/A	3	4.76%
TOTAL	63	100.00%

Participants were asked what their plans were with regards to the size of their workforce, ie. plans to hire or reduce team size.

PLANS	#	%
Keep the same	32	50.79%
Expand	22	34.92%
N/A	4	6.35%
Reduce	3	4.76%
Reduce - Closure	2	3.17%
TOTAL	63	

Participants were asked if they were aware of any funding opportunities for upcoming projects.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIE	#	%
Yes	15	23.81%
No	42	66.67%
N/A	6	9.52%
TOTAL	63	

Participants were asked what their plans were for their business when they would be ready to step away from ownership/management.

SUCCESSION PLAN	#	%
Yes - Family	14	22.22%
Yes - Sell	9	14.29%
Yes - Close	5	7.94%
Yes - Unknown	2	3.17%
No - Not thinking about it	10	15.87%
No - Still New	7	11.11%
No - Unknown	5	7.94%
No - Franchise	2	3.17%
Kind of - Idea	9	14.29%
TOTAL	63	

Participants were asked if there are any customers or clients that they have not been able to reach and/or attract.

UNREACHABLE CUSTOMERS	#	%
N/A	28	44.44%
Locals	10	15.87%
Younger demographic	7	11.11%
Unknown	6	9.52%
Tourists	3	4.76%
Surrounding area	4	6.35%
Online	1	1.59%
Low income communities	1	1.59%
International	1	1.59%
Middle age group	1	1.59%
Public sector / Not for profit	1	1.59%
TOTAL	63	

Participants were asked what their main concerns were, posed as the question: "What keeps you up at night?"

MAJOR CONCERNS	#	%
None	19	30.16%
Staff	15	23.81%
Finances	14	22.22%
Customers	6	9.52%
Regulations	4	6.35%
Traffic flow	4	6.35%
Local business	3	4.76%
Online competition	2	3.17%
Weather	2	3.17%
TOTAL	69	

Participants were asked to expand on why they have been unable to reach a certain customer segment that they want to bring in and sell to.

WHY UNREACHABLE	#	%
Cost of advertising	3	4.76%
N/A	28	44.44%
Traffic	1	1.59%
Unknown	28	44.44%
Workforce	2	3.17%
Lack of community support	1	1.59%
TOTAL	63	

Participants were asked if they had any planned projects coming up in the next 18 months for their business. Some businesses listed more than one upcoming project.

PLANNED PROJECTS	#	%
N/A or no projects	33	52.38%
Renovation	8	12.70%
New space / move	6	9.52%
Add new service	6	9.52%
New events	4	6.35%
Grow service	6	9.52%
Unknown	3	4.76%
Closing	1	1.59%
TOTAL	67	

Participants were asked who they considered to be their business' main competitors. Some businesses listed more than one competitor.

COMPETITORS	#	%
Similar local business	31	49.21%
None	16	25.40%
Department Stores	9	14.29%
Online	6	9.52%
Urban Centres	5	7.94%
International	3	4.76%
TOTAL	70	

Participants were then asked if there were any projects that they want to pursue but have not been able to - and why they were unable to go ahead with any projects.

UNPURSUED PROJECTS	#	%
Finances	10	30.30%
Workforce	8	24.24%
Time	6	18.18%
Age	3	9.09%
Lack of knowledge	3	9.09%
Space availability	3	9.09%
TOTAL	33	

Participants were asked what they considered to be their competitive advantage. Some businesses listed more than one competitive advantage.

COMPETITIVE ADV.	#	%
Knowledge	23	36.51%
Customer experience	22	34.92%
Products	21	33.33%
Location	13	20.63%
Prices	8	12.70%
Consistent hours	7	11.11%
Unknown	3	4.76%
TOTAL	97	

Participants were asked what channels they currently use to digitally market their businesses. Some businesses listed more than one.

ONLINE PRESENCE	#	%	
Website	28	44.44%	of 63
Facebook	25	39.68%	of 63
Unknown	27	42.86%	of 63
Instagram	9	14.29%	of 63
None	6	9.52%	of 63
Email	2	3.17%	of 63
Twitter	1	1.59%	of 63

Participants were asked what their plans were for their current digital marketing efforts.

ONLINE GOALS	#	%
Maintain	30	47.62%
Update website	13	20.63%
Improve	7	11.11%
Add platforms	3	4.76%
Get website	3	4.76%
Unknown	5	7.94%
Get on social	2	3.17%
TOTAL	63	

Lambton Shores-Specific Factors

Participants were asked to rate each of the following factors of doing business in Lambton Shores from 1 being “Not at all satisfied” to 4 being “Very satisfied”. Participants were also given the option to indicate if the factor listed was not applicable to their business or their experience as a business owner. This question was not included in the Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership survey and therefore was not collected from their interviews.

	N/A	1	2	3	4	Unanswered	AVERAGE
Workforce	2	7	10	9	6	29	2.44
Serviced land	13	5	5	5	6	29	2.57
Land cost	14	8	5	4	3	29	2.10
Space for lease	12	12	5	4	1	29	1.73
Permit process	15	3	3	9	4	29	2.74
Development charges	19	5	5	4	1	29	2.07
Property taxes	4	10	7	11	2	29	2.17
Roads and streets	1	7	6	17	3	29	2.48
Parking	5	10	3	8	7	30	2.43

APPENDIX C

Interview Takeaways

PROPERTY TAXES

General comments made regarding property taxes revolve around a concern that taxes are being paid but it is unclear where that money is going.

Additional comments come specifically from Grand Bend with some participants feeling that Grand Bend supports the Lambton Shores tax base.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Comments about services and general interaction with the Municipality include the positive impact that Communities in Bloom has on downtown areas, and that overall staff is supportive, cooperative and helpful.

Some concerns came up regarding communication, including providing updates on the new school - which can help bring new residents (and customers) to the area - as well as difficulties navigating and finding information on the Lambton Shores website.

A comment was also made that improving services such as internet and natural gas could also help businesses diversify and have a more sustainable business model to support Lambton Shores long-term.

RECOGNITION & COMMUNICATION

Some comments were made during the data collection phase that members of the Port Franks community feel forgotten by the Municipality and feel as though they are not seen as a viable business destination.

Overall comments were made across other communities as well that participants did not feel supported and feel an overall lack of support for small business within Lambton Shores.

It was suggested that communication could also improve regarding services, programs and roadwork.

BUSINESS IN LAMBTON SHORES

Overall, participants are happy to have their businesses in Lambton Shores. Other comments made were more targeted to other business owners, including the need to care about storefronts and the wellbeing of their communities overall.

There was a notable concern that resources were being given to one area of the Municipality and not equally distributed amongst each community, as well as a concern that the aging demographic is hindering the creation a healthy business climate.

BY-LAW

There were concerns made about the effectiveness of existing by-law enforcement measures, influencing parking availability for paying customers during the busy summer season.

SUPPORTING WORKFORCE

A common theme amongst the comments regarding workforce in Lambton Shores was the concern of how to support employees when there is limited availability of affordable places to stay.

Additionally, there is a need across every community to attract a younger demographic to fill support employment needs.

ATTRACTING NEW BUSINESS

Comments regarding attracting new businesses focused primarily on how to reduce barriers to and ultimately encourage more development in Lambton Shores.

There was also an acknowledgement that, in order for new businesses to come to Lambton Shores, there needs to be the services to support and attract year-round residents.

GETTING CUSTOMERS

When it comes to businesses attracting customers, comments were made questioning how to attract visitors here for longer durations and leverage existing assets like the Pinery Park and the race track.

There was also a general concern that downtown areas are not inviting new customers and that there needs to be more of an effort to encourage residents to shop local.

TRANSPORTATION

Ideas regarding improving transportation in Grand Bend include a municipal parking lot outside of town with a shuttle to reduce the use of business' parking spaces by beach go-ers. Another suggestion included traffic mirrors in Port Franks.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Some additional thoughts brought up during interviews that were not necessarily relevant to the BR+E-specific questions include:

- Create a “plough plan” (register business hours to create more effective roads maintenance plan)
- Establish a process to bring in and integrate more immigrants to support workforce and community
- Move Farmers Markets to the weekend for greater accessibility
- Improve communication and awareness of “mobile” services that are available through the county, like the produce truck that goes to Thedford
- Explore how other communities approach business attraction, development and fostering a stronger sense of community and innovation

APPENDIX D

Ratings from Community Discussion on January 16, 2020

Attended: 15 Completed ratings: 11
 Attendees were asked to rate each idea from 1 being "Not at all important" to 10 being "Very important"

Pillar	Action Item	Average
Beautification & Storefront Standards	Storefront standards bylaw	8.50
	Beautification fund/grant	6.00
	Incentive to keep business hours open longer	4.00
Improving Quality of Workforce	Workforce training	6.00
	Job fairs	6.33
	Accessible housing	6.67
	Municipal point of contact	7.90
Municipal Support & Services	Channel for municipal-wide business news	8.00
	Local business centre	7.11
	Best practices and doing business resources	7.44
	Lambton Shores-wide business association or committee	8.67
	Municipal-wide business directory	8.89
	Attract targeted businesses	8.30
Business Attraction	Brand communities to position as destinations	8.00
	Pitch competitions	7.33
	Municipal-wide commercial space listing	8.89



THE MUNICIPALITY OF
LAMBTON SHORES