

Qualicum Beach and Region Business Walk Report

December 2015



2015 Qualicum Beach and Region Business Walk

The Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce hosted Qualicum Beach's first Business Walks on October 14th, 2015.

Participants included representatives from;

- The Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce,
- B.C. Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training,
- Michelle Stilwell – Minister of Social Development and Innovation
- Town of Qualicum Beach,
- Qualicum Beach Downtown Business Association,
- Parksville Qualicum Beach Tourism Association,
- Lighthouse Country Business Association,
- Island Coastal Economic Trust,
- Community Future Central Island
- Local services providers.

These volunteers went door-to-door surveying a total of 59 businesses that are located downtown, along Highway 19A, Qualicum North, Qualicum Bay and the Bowser area.

The Qualicum Beach Business Walk was supported by the Economic Development and Tourism and Small Business Division of the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training. As well, a special thank you to Economic Development Association of BC for use of their survey template and mentoring in getting the survey complete – thanks Dale!

The Business Walk model is a tool to gather and track the pulse of the local business community and help community leaders identify measures and actions that ensure jobs, goods and services stay in a community.

The Business Walk program helps civic and business leaders to gather information that enables them to identify and remove barriers to doing business in their municipality. Chambers of Commerce and other business associations can use the walks to communicate the supports that are available to businesses and use the information gathered to tailor their services to meet the needs of businesses they serve.

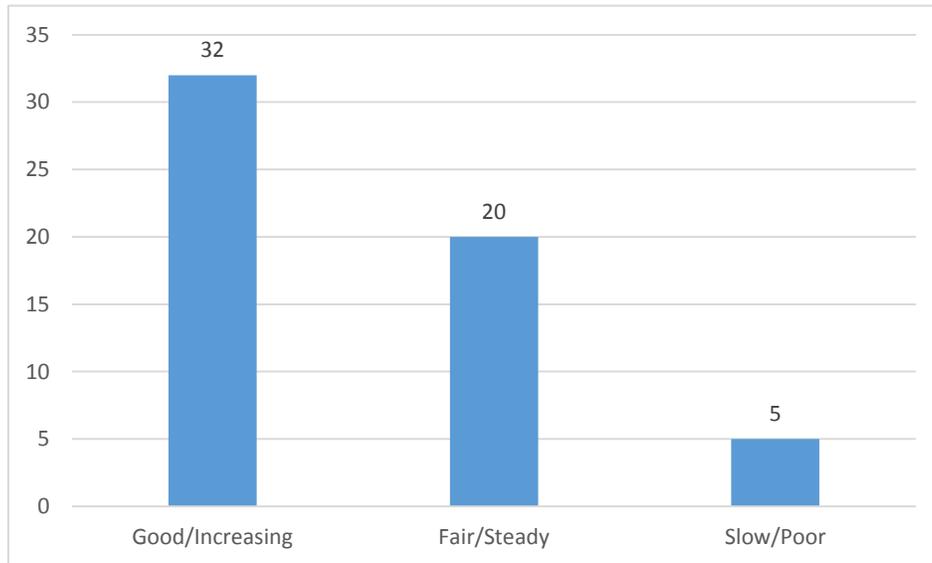
Businesses surveyed were asked the following questions:

- Rate the current state of your business.
- What do you like most about doing business in Qualicum Beach?
- What do you find most challenging about doing business in Qualicum Beach?
- What can be done to help your business thrive?
- What specific information would you, like to have access to locally?

A total of 59 businesses were surveyed between 10:00am and 12:00pm on Wednesday, October 14th, 2015. The businesses in Qualicum Beach and surrounding areas were visited by teams of two or three people and generally included a Chamber representative and a civic leader.

Summary of Results

Question 1: Rate the current state of your business.



Notes: Of the fifty-nine participating businesses two did not answer this question.

When asked "Rate the current state of your business" 91% of respondents answered that business was either "Fair/Steady" or "Good/Increasing".

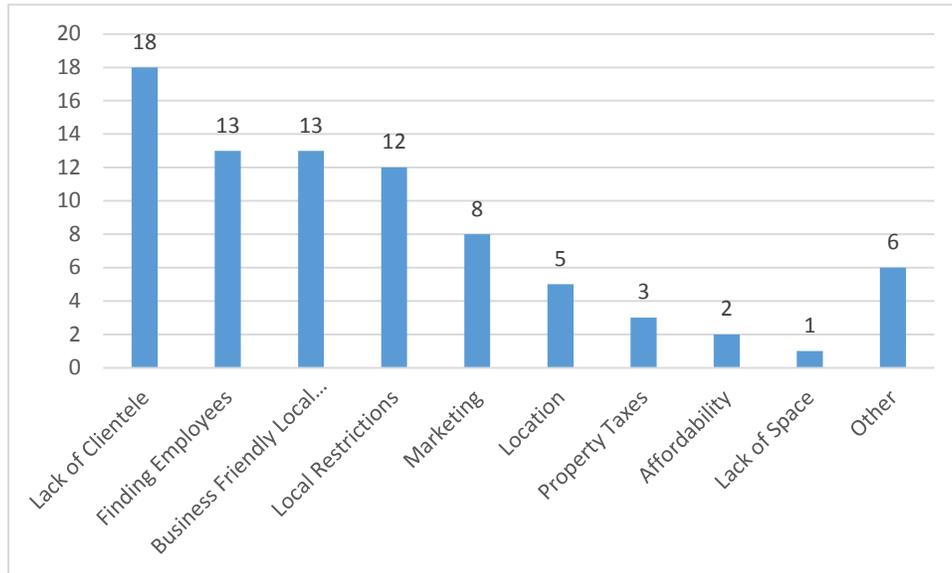
Question 2: What do you like most about doing business in the area?



Notes: Some respondents selected more than one answer.

When asked what they like most about doing business in the Qualicum Beach area, location and clientele were the most common responses. In particular, respondents highlighted the “close knit community”, “loyal clients” and “village atmosphere” as some of the area’s most redeeming qualities.

Question 3: What do you find most challenging about doing business in the area?



Note: Some respondents selected more than one answer.

When businesses were asked what they found most challenging about doing business in Qualicum Beach, the two most common responses were “lack of clientele” (22%) and “finding employees” (16%). It should be noted that over 30% of respondents indicated that “local restrictions” and “business friendly local government” are a challenge to doing business in the Qualicum Beach region.

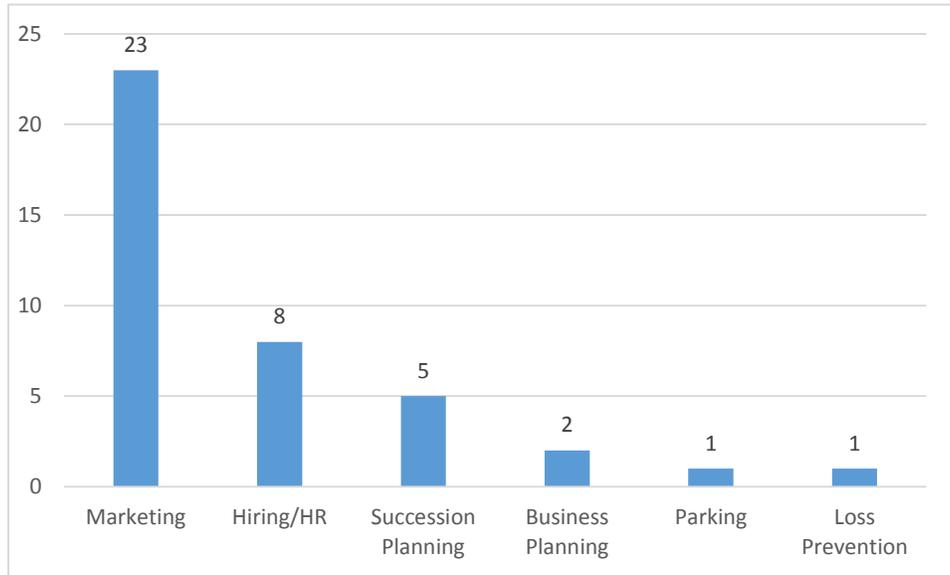
A number of respondents also cited the cost of BC Ferries and other transportation issues as a significant challenge to doing business.

Question 4: What can be done to help your business thrive?

When asked to discuss what can be done to help their businesses thrive, respondents cited a diverse range of local issues as well as many opportunities for increased support. In particular, many respondents suggested how a more business friendly local Town Council could support businesses through more lenient sign bylaws and by supporting business development initiatives. Respondents also noted the potential benefits of localized marketing support and a “shop local campaign”.

A significant proportion of respondents discussed broader issues within the Qualicum Beach area such as the need for more young families and affordable housing.

Question 5: What specific information would you like to have access to locally?



Note: Some respondents did not answer this question.

More effort towards supporting businesses with marketing was identified by 59% of respondents as a key element that could help their business thrive.

Hiring/HR issues were identified by approximately 20% of respondents. This further suggests the lack of available and talented labor in the Qualicum Beach area. Additionally, a combined 16% of respondents requested support with business planning and/or succession planning.

Moving Forward:

The 2015 Business Walks Survey suggests that business in the Qualicum Beach area is good and that business owners and managers are overwhelmingly optimistic. Despite the high proportion of successful businesses in the area (91%) and the many positive responses to survey questions, this survey suggests that there are three main areas where businesses need more support.

First, businesses noted their need for more clients and more talented labor. The Town’s ongoing efforts to attract ‘lifestyle entrepreneurs’ and young families, combined with efforts to extend the tourism shoulder seasons have the potential to increase the number clients and employees for area businesses. Additionally, the Chamber’s previous “shop local” campaign was anecdotally viewed as a success within the business community and many respondents would like to see the campaign repeated.

Second, survey results suggest that Town Council and local restrictions are perceived as a challenge to doing business in the Qualicum Beach area. An issue of particular significance to respondents is the current Sign Bylaw. Respondents suggest that a more lenient bylaw would increase the visibility of businesses to residents and visitors alike.

Third, survey results indicate key areas where businesses need additional support. In particular, many businesses requested support with individual and group marketing strategies. A smaller proportion of businesses also requested support with hiring/HR, as well as with business and succession planning. A coordinated effort between the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Business Association and other local business organizations could offer direct support in these areas through educational seminars and one-on-one sessions.

The inaugural Qualicum Beach Business Walks event served as an opportunity for businesses, civic leaders and other stakeholders to connect through face-to-face interactions and for civic leaders and stakeholders to take the pulse of the Qualicum Beach business community. Although the inaugural Business Walk should be considered a success as a single document, the value of Business Walks events will increase from year to year as it continues to forge stronger relationships in the community and as survey results begin to indicate attitudinal trends within the business community.

It is important to note that this initial survey was delivered to as many participants as possible. We clearly could not get around to all of our businesses. In future years it is the intent of the Chamber of Commerce to reach out to a wider group of businesses to get input from a wider variety of organizations in the Oceanside community. Look for us in October next year!

Next Steps:

In November and December follow up meetings were held to discuss responding to expressed needs and assistance plans rising from the 2015 Business Walk. After much discussion it was suggested that supports be put in place to assist with:

- Business Succession Planning
- Marketing Training
- Potential Tourism Business Reverse Trade Show and
- Health Professionals Networking Trade Show

Watch in your local paper and the Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce weekly newsletters for opportunities to build a stronger business.

Thank You

The Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce extends its sincere gratitude to all the businesses, individuals and organizations who contributed to the 2015 Qualicum Beach Business Walk.