



middlesex
centre

in the centre of it all

Local Businesses Survey Report 2021

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Project Sponsor: Michael Di Lullo, Chief Administrative Officer

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Municipality of Middlesex Centre is located at the north, northwest and westerly limits of the City of London, Ontario. The major communities that form Middlesex Centre are Ilderton, Komoka-Kilworth and Delaware with a growing population of approximately 20,000 residents who enjoy both urban and rural amenities. In collaboration with Western University's Master of Management of Applied Science program, a local business retention and expansion (BR&E) study was developed. This focused on examining the current state of businesses within Middlesex Centre and their future needs in order to expand this vibrant community. The team consulted multiple stakeholders to gain data resources and perspectives on the current business climate in Middlesex Centre. An updated business directory was then created and organized by industry category. The business directory includes contact information (Email and Phone Numbers), and corresponding social media networks (Ex. Company website and Facebook) for future reference. The final business list for survey outreach was condensed to 124 businesses, successfully contacting 121. The survey creation platform utilized was SurveyMonkey with a total of 16 questions. The total number of responses was 37, with a response target of 30 businesses. The survey achieved a response rate of 31%.

The survey consisted of multiple choice, rank, and open-ended questions. Questions 1 to 5 are demographic-specific questions. Questions 5 to 16 are business-specific questions. In addition, Question 6, Question 12, and Question 16 included direct responses and recommendations from the local business community.

The BR&E study was analyzed by the project team and includes considerations and recommendations for the municipality to implement in the future to support business growth and reduce business leakage.

These top recommendations were extracted from key survey insights gained directly from the community.

- Refresh municipal financial incentives such as the Community Improvement Plan
- Marketing Aid for local businesses (ex. Increased Signage)
- Influence Internet Service providers to facilitate the community need for stronger Internet

Disclaimer

An industry representation breakdown is included within the study as certain survey questions may not apply to a category of businesses. For example, tourism is not necessary for all types of businesses. In addition, there were 3 business respondents from surrounding areas of Middlesex Centre.

Note from Project Team

We would like to express our deepest appreciation and thanks to all consultant stakeholders, Heather Kepran (Communications Specialist), all business owner participants, and our Project sponsor Michael Di Lullo (Chief Administrative Officer, Municipality of Middlesex Centre) for their support and guidance throughout this project.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

In collaboration with Western University's Master of Management of Applied Science program, a local business retention and expansion (BR&E) study was developed. The results of the business retention and expansion survey will allow the municipality to gain insight on the perspectives of current business owners and their ability to conduct business within in Middlesex Centre. This will aid Middlesex Centre in understanding current weaknesses and strengths to determine specific objectives that need to be carried out to reduce the risk of business detracting and support business growth.

The survey attempted to answer the following:

1. What type of living features are keeping businesses in Middlesex Centre?
2. What are the current demographics of business owners in Middlesex Centre?
3. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected local businesses?
4. How can Middlesex Centre leverage its strengths to help businesses expand and grow?
5. What kinds of services do the communities currently require to promote growth?
6. Inform business owner perspectives on the goals of the Strategic Plan of 2021-2026.

Methodology

To gather an accurate depiction of the current business climate, the survey was only delivered to local businesses through a business directory created by the project team. This business directory was compiled based upon the 20 business categories obtained from website and stakeholder resources. The survey was delivered to a total number of 124 businesses. An introductory email approved by the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer was sent to the business directory to inform the community about the survey on February 13th, 2021. Recipients were individually e-mailed a SurveyMonkey link in order to complete the survey. However, some emails bounced back reducing the number of businesses to 121. The survey included a mixture of multiple choice, rank, and open-ended questions. The survey was distributed on February 15, 2021 and officially closed on March 1, 2021, providing respondents a two-week window to complete the survey. Reminder emails were sent on February 22nd and February 28th to encourage participation.

Representation

The survey aimed to obtain a substantial response rate of 25%, with data retrieved from a variety of local businesses throughout Middlesex Centre (Table 1). This was to be obtained within the outlined timeframe. Of the 121 surveys distributed, the total number of responses received was 37. The survey was successful in meeting its success criteria, achieving an overall substantial survey response rate of 31% by the end of the surveying period.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1 Please provide the full legal name of your business:

Answered: 37 Skipped: 1

Q2 What community is your business located in?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 1

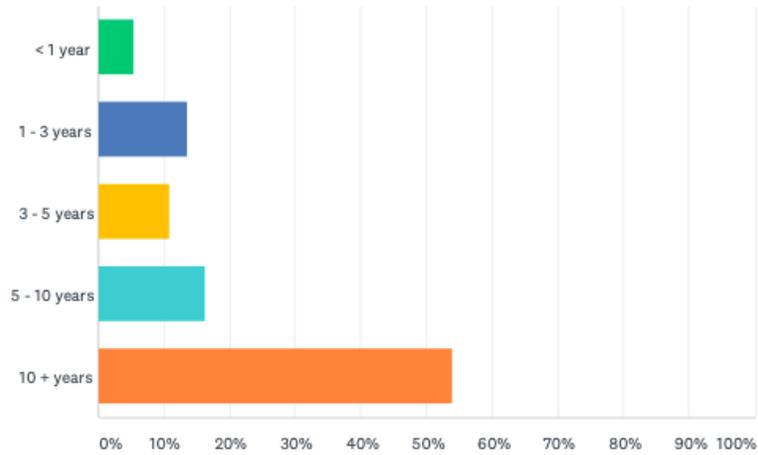
Q3 What is your business social media handle?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 9

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Facebook	100.00%	29
Instagram	62.07%	18
Twitter	27.59%	8
Pinterest	6.90%	2
TikTok	6.90%	2
YouTube	20.69%	6

Q4 How many years has your business been in Middlesex Centre?

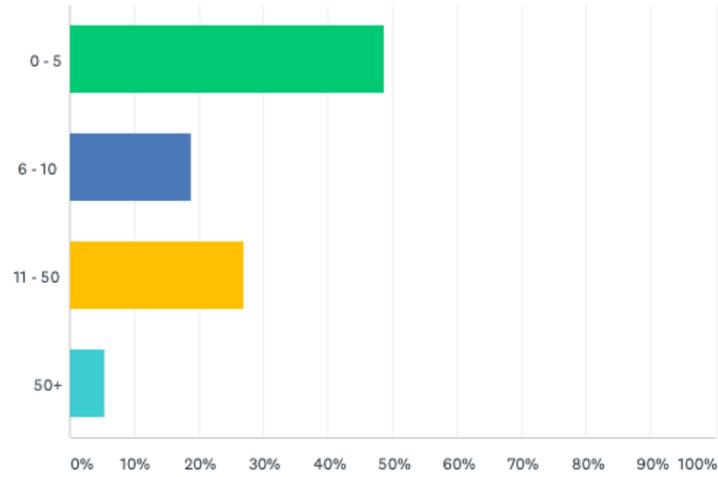
Answered: 37 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
< 1 year	5.41% 2
1 - 3 years	13.51% 5
3 - 5 years	10.81% 4
5 - 10 years	16.22% 6
10 + years	54.05% 20
TOTAL	37

Q5 How many employees are involved in your business?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 1



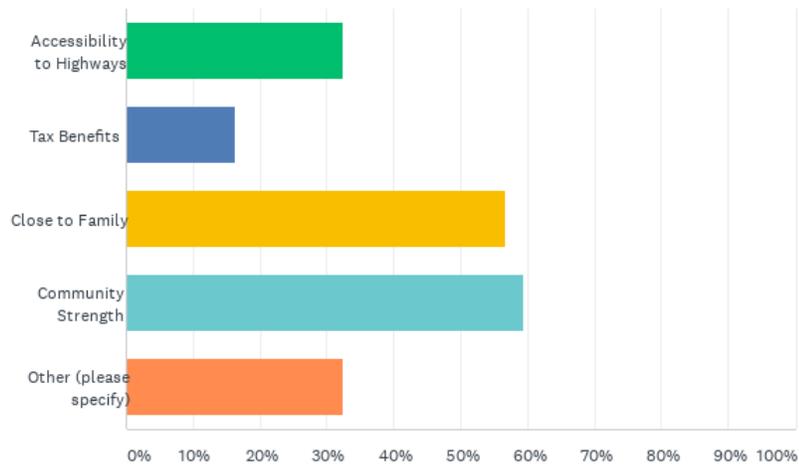
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0 - 5	48.65%	18
6 - 10	18.92%	7
11 - 50	27.03%	10
50+	5.41%	2
TOTAL		37

Q6 What are the top challenges facing your business? Please indicate your top concern in each category.

Answered: 33 Skipped: 5

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Financial	54.55%	18
Staffing/HR	54.55%	18
Supply Chain	51.52%	17
Marketing	48.48%	16
Physical Space	60.61%	20
COVID-19 Related	63.64%	21
Other	18.18%	6

Q8 What type of living features is keeping your business in Middlesex Centre?

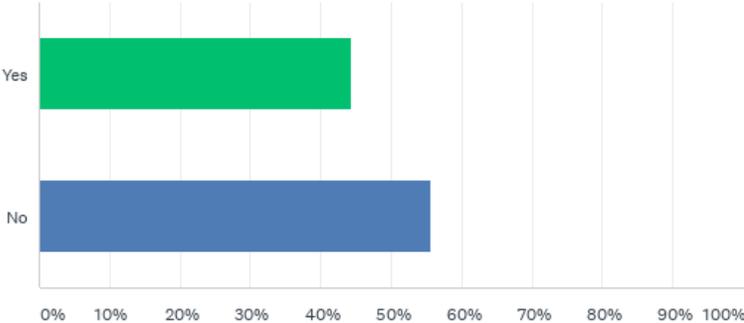


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Accessibility to Highways (easy transport)	32.43% 12
▼ Tax Benefits	16.22% 6
▼ Close to Family	56.76% 21
▼ Community Strength	59.46% 22
▼ Other (please specify) Responses	32.43% 12
Total Respondents: 37	

- property ownership
 2/15/2021 1:00 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- Location is essential
 2/15/2021 9:28 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- On family farm
 2/15/2021 9:18 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

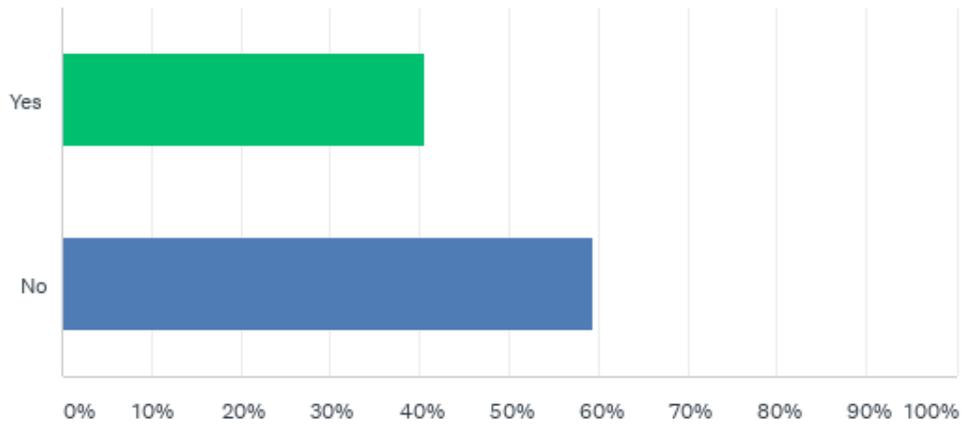
<input type="checkbox"/>	my home is here and my business is in my home	2/27/2021 4:50 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	We have been known in this community for 40 years	2/24/2021 7:56 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nothing actively looking to leave as expanding in this township is expensive and challenging	2/18/2021 6:44 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Close to key market area we serve	2/17/2021 11:49 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	High demand for our industry in this area	2/17/2021 11:27 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Golf Course	2/16/2021 10:24 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	I've been in this area now for 23 years.	2/15/2021 4:46 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Track already there, huge investment to relocate	2/15/2021 3:14 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	We need land to operate a business			

Q10 Can you operate your business with all/some staff working from home?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	44.44%	16
No	55.56%	20
TOTAL		36

Q11 Would an increase in tourism help your business?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	40.54%	15
No	59.46%	22
TOTAL		37

- Perhaps through further exposure?**
 2/18/2021 9:45 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#) ▼

- Our business is not seeking tourists as clients**
 2/18/2021 6:44 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#) ▼

- Need spectators**
 2/15/2021 3:14 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#) ▼

- We are a destination place with 1.25acres of gardens and ponds**
 2/15/2021 3:04 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#) ▼

<input type="checkbox"/>	We do not really on tourism dollars 3/1/2021 7:18 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable 2/28/2021 10:05 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Service based business for businesses 2/28/2021 9:10 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	more traffic may mean more possibilities of Increased Interest in being a client of mine 2/27/2021 4:50 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strictly residential 2/24/2021 7:02 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	More tourists means more money influx into local economy 2/24/2021 10:52 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	The more people we draw to our community the better off we will all be. 2/23/2021 2:09 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bring more people 2/22/2021 7:56 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼

<input type="checkbox"/>	Our clients are typically industrial in nature.	2/22/2021 2:01 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	I work with businesses and not a business to consumer market	2/22/2021 11:55 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Our main source of income is dog boarding	2/22/2021 11:31 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	not at all relate to tourism	2/22/2021 9:40 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Perhaps through further exposure?	2/18/2021 9:45 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Our business is not seeking tourists as clients	2/18/2021 6:44 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Need spectators	2/15/2021 3:14 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	We are a destination place with 1.25acres of gardens and ponds	2/15/2021 3:04 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am a mobile medical aesthetics provider	2/15/2021 12:25 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes and no. More traffic. More retail sales, but most of my customers are local	2/15/2021 11:31 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	I do have signage that tourists would see as they drive by	2/15/2021 9:56 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	Increases in skaters locally generally drive people to search us out if in need of our services.	2/15/2021 9:54 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▼

Our business has a specific automotive clientele that are not brought in by tourism

2/15/2021 9:48 AM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

Cut your own Christmas tree farm= activities for our community to support

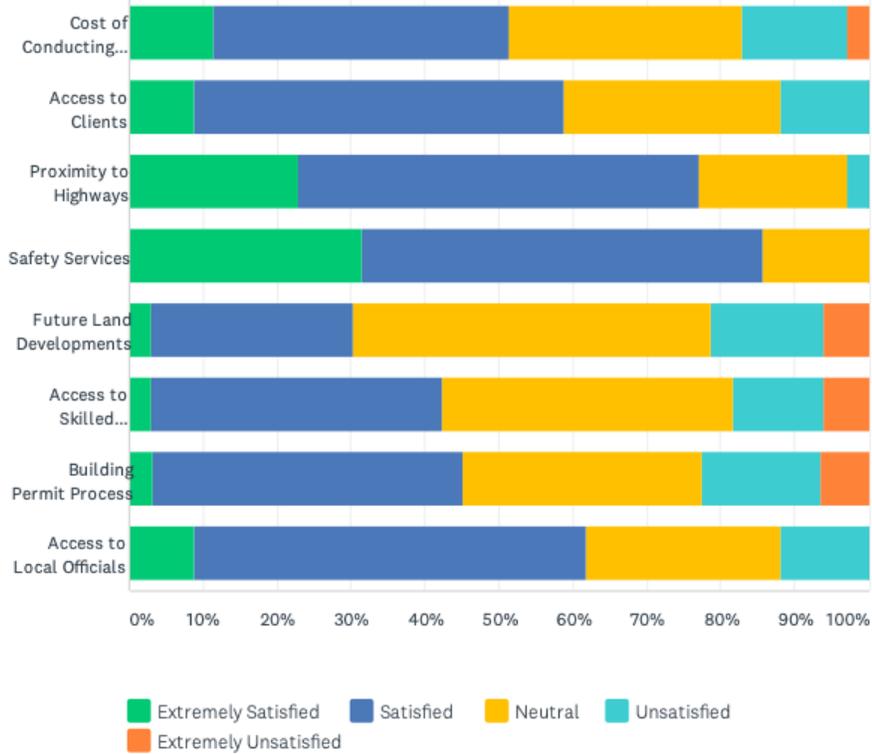
2/15/2021 9:09 AM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

Q13 How satisfied are you with Middlesex Centre's current business features?

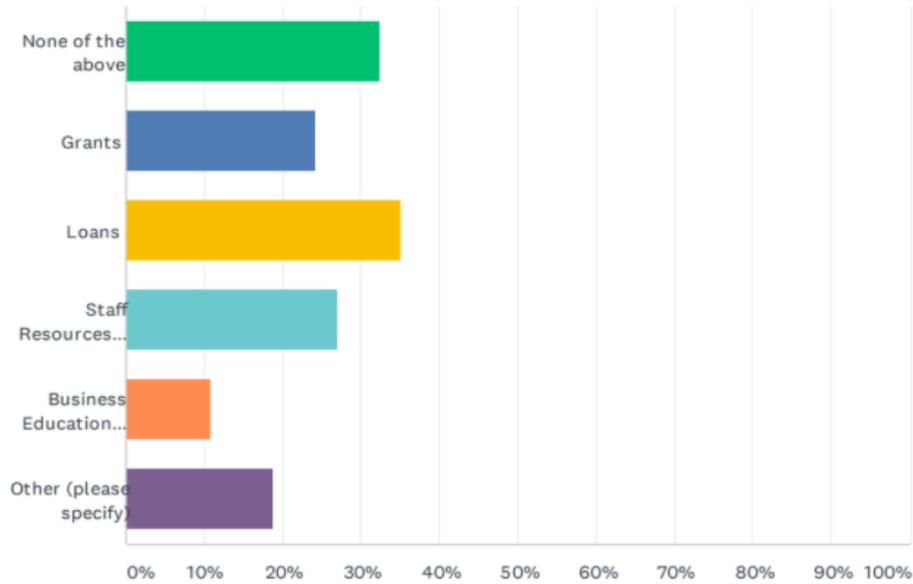
Answered: 37 Skipped: 1



	EXTREMELY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	NEUTRAL	UNSATISFIED	EXTREMELY UNSATISFIED	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Cost of Conducting Business	11.43% 4	40.00% 14	31.43% 11	14.29% 5	2.86% 1	35	2.57
Access to Clients	8.82% 3	50.00% 17	29.41% 10	11.76% 4	0.00% 0	34	2.44
Proximity to Highways	22.86% 8	54.29% 19	20.00% 7	2.86% 1	0.00% 0	35	2.03
Safety Services	31.43% 11	54.29% 19	14.29% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	35	1.83
Future Land Developments	3.03% 1	27.27% 9	48.48% 16	15.15% 5	6.06% 2	33	2.94
Access to Skilled Workforce	3.03% 1	39.39% 13	39.39% 13	12.12% 4	6.06% 2	33	2.79
Building Permit Process	3.23% 1	41.94% 13	32.26% 10	16.13% 5	6.45% 2	31	2.81
Access to Local Officials	8.82% 3	52.94% 18	26.47% 9	11.76% 4	0.00% 0	34	2.41

Q14 What resources has your business utilized for COVID-19 relief?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
None of the above	32.43%	12
Grants	24.32%	9
Loans	35.14%	13
Staff Resources (CERB)	27.03%	10
Business Education Resources (ex. webinars, business help centres)	10.81%	4
Other (please specify)	18.92%	7
Total Respondents: 37		

I have applied for grants but so far have not met the requirements. As a sole proprietor we have seemed to fall short of any assistance
 2/23/2021 2:09 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▼](#)

CEWS program
 2/22/2021 2:01 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▼](#)

CEBA
 2/22/2021 11:55 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▼](#)

CEWS
 2/17/2021 11:49 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▼](#)

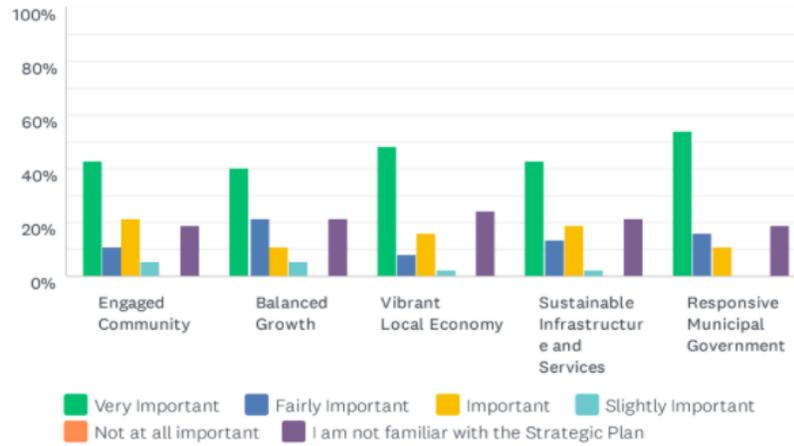
CEWS
 2/15/2021 1:00 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▼](#)

Industry associations, Ontario Waste Management Associations and other
 2/15/2021 10:04 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▼](#)

Labour Market Impact Assessments (LMIA) and skilled immigration labour stream
 2/15/2021 9:48 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▼](#)

Q15 In 2021, the Municipality of Middlesex Centre adopted a new strategic plan (middlesexcentre.on.ca/stratplan). Please rate the importance of the priorities in this plan to your business.

Answered: 37 Skipped: 1



	VERY IMPORTANT	FAIRLY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	SLIGHTLY IMPORTANT	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE STRATEGIC PLAN	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Engaged Community	43.24% 16	10.81% 4	21.62% 8	5.41% 2	0.00% 0	18.92% 7	37	1.87
Balanced Growth	40.54% 15	21.62% 8	10.81% 4	5.41% 2	0.00% 0	21.62% 8	37	1.76
Vibrant Local Economy	48.65% 18	8.11% 3	16.22% 6	2.70% 1	0.00% 0	24.32% 9	37	1.64
Sustainable Infrastructure and Services	43.24% 16	13.51% 5	18.92% 7	2.70% 1	0.00% 0	21.62% 8	37	1.76
Responsive Municipal Government	54.05% 20	16.22% 6	10.81% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	18.92% 7	37	1.47

Q16 Please share any other comments you have below:

Answered: 7 Skipped: 31

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	The future looks uncertain about traditional retail and commercial activities	2/28/2021 10:05 AM
2	In one of the above questions It asked to rate the importance of them to your business to be helped question no:9 one of them it would let me rate the one about marketing support- this one I would rate at a 5-6 importance to grow my business, thanks very much	2/27/2021 4:50 PM
3	Delaware need sewers if that was to happen it would flourish with over there at our schools will die our businesses will die	2/24/2021 7:56 AM
4	We need to open! PPE and any other conditions will be followed but we need to open with spectators in May 2021!!	2/15/2021 3:14 PM
5	Major concern re: development on Glendon Drive happening prior to road widening and traffic management measures. It's a disaster waiting to happen.	2/15/2021 12:25 PM
6	Local economies are not engineered. They are most effective when organic. The municipality must engage their business community and integrate what works, not what is suggested by outside professionals and templates. Thanks for this opportunity	2/15/2021 10:04 AM
7	The community has definitely been the main reason we are able to be successful. People have gone out of their way to support local, especially during the pandemic, and we appreciate it. Keep up the good work!	2/15/2021 9:54 AM

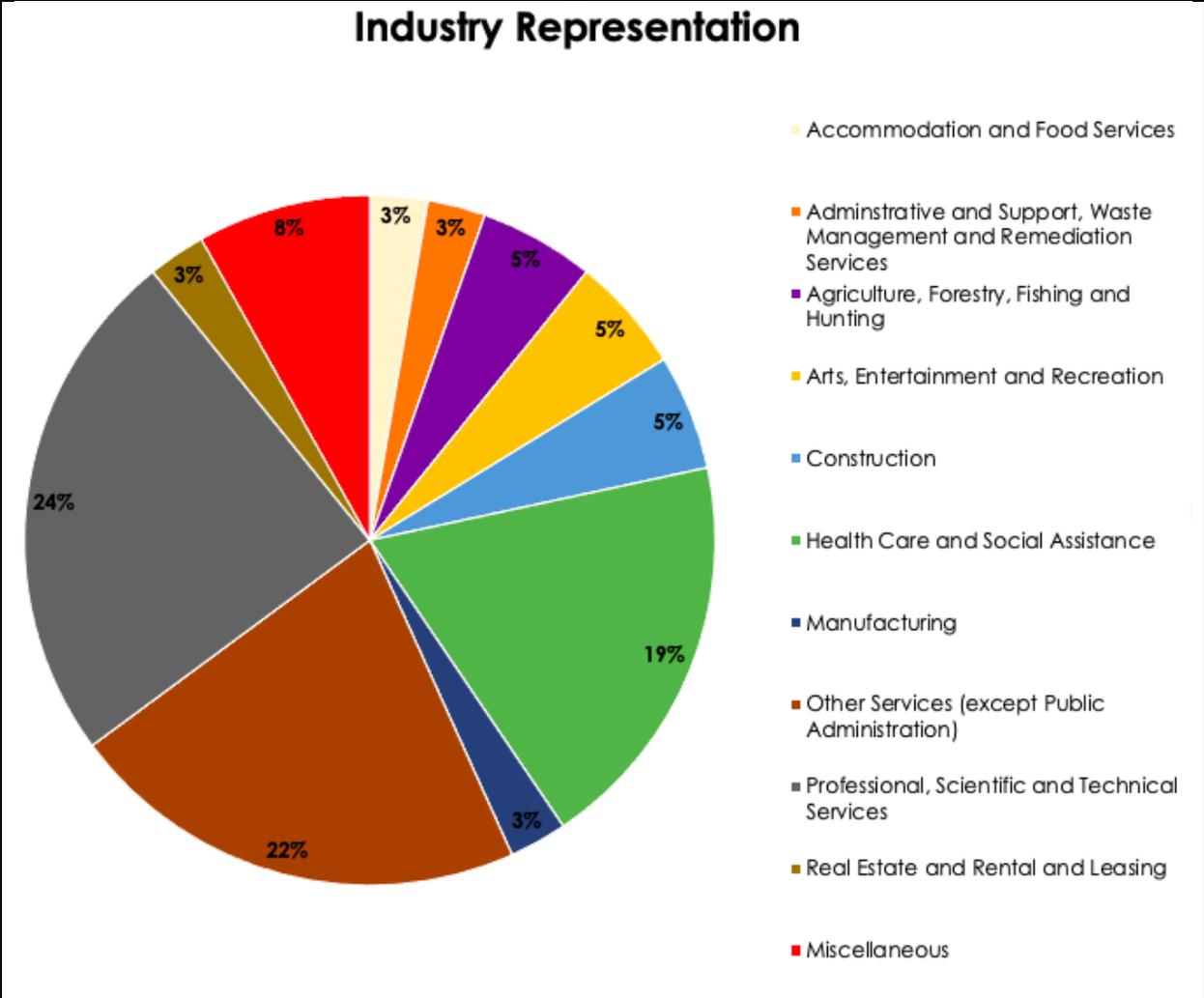
SUMMARY SURVEY DATA

Table 1. Survey Response Summary

Survey Responses	Total number of businesses contacted	121
	Target response rate	30 responses (25%)
	Total number of responses	37 responses
	Final survey response rate	31%
	Survey completion rate	89%

Table 2. Survey Demographic Summary

Survey Question Number	Middlesex Centre Communities	
2	Ilderton	11
	Komoka- Kilworth	16
	Delaware	3
	Lobo	2
	Arva	2
	Middlesex County Communities	
	Strathroy	1
	Granton	1
	Mt.Brydges	1
	1	Industry Representation
Accommodation and Food Services		1
Administrative and Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services		1
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting		2
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation		2
Construction		2
Health Care and Social Assistance		7
Manufacturing		1
Other Services (except Public Administration)		8
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services		9
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing		1
Miscellaneous		3



BREAKDOWN OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Question 3: What is your business social media handle?

The business owners use Facebook (29 businesses) as their primary social media platform. 9 businesses skipped this question, inferring that they do not utilize any social media platform for their business.

Question 4: How many years has your business been in Middlesex Centre?

54.05% of respondents have had their business in Middlesex Centre for over 10 years.

Question 5: How many employees are involved in your business?

48.65% of respondents have a hired staff number of 0 - 5 employees for their business. This indicates a high prevalence of small businesses in Middlesex Centre.

Question 6: What are the top challenges facing your business?

Highest number of responses: COVID-19 related challenges.

Financial

- New clients/access to more clients
- Closures due to COVID-19 (ex. Reduction in income, revenue loss due to declining demands)
- Resource pricing high (ex. lumber)
- Shipping costs of business materials
- Spectator income
- Increasing taxes and regulatory approval times
- Consistent cash flow
- Finding grants

Staffing/HR

- Staffing shortage
- Parttime workers are hard to find
- Finding qualified tradesmen or skilled workers not readily available
- Not enough work for remote staff
- Less motivation of staff due to incentives (ex. subsidies) and COVID fatigue which increases employer responsibilities
- Finding grants available to expand business team
- Seasonal business cannot support fulltime employees year round with quick turnover after each year

Supply Chain

- Suppliers have issues sourcing and delivering materials
- JIT – just in time is gone
- Having courier service come to their area to pick up parcels
- COVID specific barriers in supply chain (usually a strong network)
- Windows, doors, etc have long lead times
- Low supply of Christmas trees
- Pricing
- Race team's money shortages
- Difficult to get syringes, needles, sharps, containers (medical supplies)
- Due to closed physical space, virtual visits in MD offices are a challenge
- Importing from other countries have delays

Marketing

- Not enough funds for marketing
- Local marketing opportunities are lacking
- Lack interconnections between businesses
- New business owners lack funds for large opening events
- Increase expenditure (ex. Google ads) on web marketing to maintain level of income

- Lack of education/experience for marketing their business
- Due to COVID, past word of mouth strategy is less successful and businesses that rely on this strategy are facing this challenge

Physical Space

- Limited space for commercial development
- More opportunities/constraint for expansion
- Cost of warehouse increasing (ex. Taxes, utilities, rent)
- Expand site plan and building permits
- Access to industrial land
- Agricultural zoning prohibiting
- Slow approvals and direction at all levels of government
- Outgrowing space due to cohort requirements
- Rent is cost prohibitive in the local plazas

COVID-19 Related

- Closures – shutdown from May 2020
- Loss of original client base due to periods of closing down and reopening
- Decrease in consumer budgets
- Paperwork
- Safety of clients and employees (ex. Access to PPE, COVID procedures)
- Increase costs and expenses due to pandemic related PPE
- Difficult for businesses to plan ahead
- Sourcing and getting deliveries of needed materials
- Fear, little science and much confusion to evaluate risk and support employees
- Travel restrictions, so no boarding

Other

- Municipality communication
- Poor internet connection
- Increasing business awareness – marketing
- Only a percentage of spectators allowed for business
- Increased employer responsibilities, bureaucratic delays, and taxation on businesses

Question 7: As a business owner, rank the importance of the following to your business:

Highest number of respondents that selected the category at corresponding rank between 1 to 11 (1 is most important). Due to overlapping categories some categories were ranked based on the second highest number of respondents. This discrepancy occurred due to improper/incomplete ranking of categories (totals varied from 34 to 37).

Most Important (1): Competitive Labour Costs (8 respondents)

(2): Broadband/Highspeed Internet Access (7 respondents)

(3): Lower property taxes (6 respondents)

(4): Quality of Life (5 respondents)

(5): Proximity to London (7 respondents)

(6): Available Skilled Workforce (6 respondents)

(7): Supportive Business Climate (5 respondents)

(8): Community Interactivity (5 respondents)

(9): Land availability (6 respondents)

(10): Market Share (4 respondents)

Least Important (11): Affordable energy/Utilities Cost (7 respondents)

Question 8: What type of living features is keeping your business in Middlesex Centre?

The top strength of Middlesex Centre is Community Strength (59.46%), closely followed by Close to Family (56.76%).

Other responses:

- Long term established businesses (Refer to Q4)
- Demand for industry
- Too expensive to relocate
- Expansion in municipality is expensive and challenging

Question 9: What kinds of services does your business currently require to grow?

The following answers are based on the Rank Score that was calculated by SurveyMonkey.

The services the businesses require to grow are:

- Majorly accessibility to more clients (4.57)
- Stronger internet (4.49)
- Land space and marketing support have equal and average demand (3.91)
- Financial support services (4.05)
- Workshop services (ex. Website design) (2.60)

Question 10: Can you operate your business with all/some staff working from home?

55.56% of businesses cannot work from home.

44.44% of businesses can work from home.

Question 11: Would an increase in tourism help your business?

40.54% of businesses would be aided by tourism.

59.46% of businesses would not be aided by tourism.

Comments:

No:

- Not needed or Not Applicable for certain industries

Yes:

- Will create more traffic to drive more clients to businesses

Question 12: What is one action that the municipality of Middlesex Centre can do to support and grow its local businesses?

Main Themes (in no specific order):

1. Lower Taxes
2. Downtown revitalization and beautification
3. More advertising - more signage around local communities for awareness – ex. use of empty billboards
 - More flexible restrictions and regulations for signage around township (Ilderton)
4. Ilderton grocery store
5. Start "cutting the red tape" ie. Building projects/building expansion
 - Zoning expansion
6. Bring sewers to Delaware
7. Promote commercial growth in village centers during development
8. Improve financial incentives (ex. Further grants/funding) for development and growth of businesses
9. Increase opportunities for accessibility of labor
10. "think outside of the box, do things differently, encourage new and different diversity to business"
11. Industrial land expansion (ex. Industrial park in Middlesex center to help attract businesses)
12. Build another hockey arena
13. "Encourage and foster young folks who want to have an opportunity to own land/start an agri-business"
14. More communication required between businesses and municipalities in terms of growth opportunities for businesses
15. More marketing with Instagram and other social media
16. Influence internet providers to provide in highspeed in all industrial/commercial areas to increase efficiency
17. Encourage and celebrate entrepreneurship for business owners started by younger individuals (ex. Seminars geared towards young entrepreneurs, or a club to develop the business minds of the future)
18. Advertising to London and surrounding London areas to attract businesses and clients to move out of the GTA

Question 13: How satisfied are you with Middlesex Centre's current business features?

Businesses were satisfied with all categories of business features except for future land development which was neutral (16 respondents = 43.24%).

Access to skilled workforce/employees was tied for 13 respondents each at 35.14% for "satisfied" and "neutral".

Question 14: What resources has your business used for COVID-19 relief?

35.14% of businesses utilized loans for COVID-19 relief

Other: CEWS, CERB, CEBA, Industrial Association - Ontario Waste management associations, Labour Market Impact Assessments (LMIA), Skilled Immigration Labour Stream

Question 15: Please rate the importance of the priorities of the Municipalities' 2021 Strategic Plan:

Business owners ranked the Strategic plan goals at very important

The most important goal was a responsive municipal government with 20 respondents (4.05%).

The number of respondents who were not familiar with the Strategic plan ranged from 7 to 9.

Question 16: Please share any comments you have:

Open Ended – Additional direct comments from various respondents

RECOMMENDATIONS

Positive Feedback from Community

- Strong sense of community strength and hometown identity
- The local business community are very appreciative of the support they have received
- Contactless porch drop offs and pickup are working great
- Increased support in shopping local

Recommendations for Middlesex Centre

- Question 12 provides direct feedback on actions the municipality can take towards the growth of the business community
- Refresh municipal financial incentives such as Community Improvement Plan
- A more direct line of communication between the municipality and its local businesses (ex. A separate municipal e-mail for business inquiries)
- Marketing Aid for businesses (ex. Increased Signage)
- Encourage and celebrate entrepreneurship with municipal student programs
- Influence Internet Service providers to facilitate the community need for stronger Internet

Future Survey Recommendations

- In person marketing/flyer handout techniques
- Additional outreach: (Facebook, direct Messages, cold calls)
- Extend survey time period allowing extra time for respondents (Ex. One additional week)
- Continual update of the established business directory for easier survey conduction

CONCLUSION

Overall, survey responses identify that Middlesex Centre's current business community consists of a strong presence of small, longstanding businesses (Table 2).

The type of living features (ex. accessibility to highways) that are keeping businesses in Middlesex Centre are community strength and ability to be close to family. However, the business climate has been majorly impacted by COVID-19 in multiple operations including Finance, Staffing, Physical space, Supply Chain (resources), Marketing. The financial assistance businesses utilized in the past year were loans for COVID-19 relief (ex. CEWS). Assistance is essential as most businesses cannot work from home.

The services the businesses currently require to promote local growth is the ability to majorly access more clients and stronger internet. Dependent on industry, an increase in tourism was identified helping local businesses as it will generate more traffic to drive more clients to businesses.

There were also a variety of personal suggestions from the business community to the Middlesex Centre in order to support and facilitate local growth. These can be categorized into following key themes and ideas:

- Increase financial incentives for the development and growth of businesses (Ex. Lowering taxes, increasing community funding, increasing the number of grants given)
- Increase the current marketing platforms used by the community (Ex. more signage around the Municipality and throughout London, Ontario)
- Increase the rate at which commercial and industrial land development can occur
- Encourage young entrepreneurs to invest in Middlesex Centre
- Increase the level of communication between businesses and municipalities in terms of growth opportunities for businesses
- Increase the development of local facilities and amenities (ex. Grocery store in Ilderton, additional hockey arenas)

It is important to note that Middlesex Centre needs to continuously leverage its current strengths to help businesses expand and grow. The top 3 strengths that the respondents felt were the most important included competitive labour costs, highspeed Internet access, and lower property taxes. Overall, the respondents are satisfied with all the businesses features and services that Middlesex Centre has to offer. The features that had the highest amount of "satisfied" selection included the of conducting business, access to clients, proximity to highways, safety services, and access to local officials.

In addition, for the local business community, the most important goal from the Strategic Plan of 2021-2026 was a responsive municipal government.

The key to long-term success and growth will be for the municipality to continue its dialogue and work with local businesses to build a strong, resilient, and thriving community. By working together and keeping open lines of communication between the municipality and its local businesses, there will be positive outcomes for all parties.