

The County of Perth  
Business Retention + Expansion Project

Final Report  
July 2008

Manufacturing, Industrial &  
Trades Sector



# Contents

1	CAO's Message
2	Project Partners
5	The County of Perth
6	Member Municipalities
8	BR+E Process
10	Sample Selection
11	2007 Results
25	2007 Action Plans
34	2008 Results
41	2008 Action Plans
45	Conclusion
46	Task Force Team
47	Volunteers
48	Project Sponsors

## CAO's Message

The Government of Ontario places a high value on rural Ontario and its contribution to our quality of life. Perth County received Provincial Grant dollars from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to undertake a Business Retention and Expansion Project on the retail sectors in Mitchell, Listowel, Milverton and Shakespeare.

In addition to financial support, other resources from the Rural Economic Development Program at OMAFRA, enabled Perth County, together with its member municipalities, to focus on identifying challenges facing existing businesses and mitigating potential business defections.

The process recognizes that existing businesses sustain the local economy; those who live and work in a community know best its unique characteristics, its strengths and its potential. The most successful economic development initiatives are conceived and implemented from the local experts. This is what makes the BR+E program such a success.

Our program team worked with many volunteers who dedicated thousands of hours conducting interviews with local businesses. We have gained valuable feedback which will be used by the local Councils to implement changes, promote cooperation, and develop partnerships with our business community.

In addition to the Province of Ontario, we thank our funding partners, the Townships of Perth East, Perth South, Municipality of West Perth, the Municipality of North Perth and the Perth County Community Futures Corporation. Many thanks also, to the municipal staff for their assistance and for the use of their local resources.

~Ria Colquhoun, Chief Administrative Officer  
County of Perth



# Project Partners

## Municipality of North Perth

It is with great pleasure that the Council of the Municipality of North Perth says thanks to Bernia Wheaton Co-ordinator, the staff, the Committee, and especially the volunteers for including North Perth in the latest BR+E project.

BR+E projects can only help make out Community a better place manage, operate, and have a business.

~ Ed Hollinger, Mayor  
Municipality of North Perth



to

## Township of Perth East

On behalf of the Township of Perth East, I would like to thank all those who have participated in the Business Retention and Expansion project. The Township of Perth East is committed to sustainable development, and the information derived from this important study will be extremely valuable as the Township develops an economic development strategy which focuses on key objectives to promote growth in our area.

A volunteer, community based undertaking such as this demonstrates the commitment of the local business community and public representatives to the stabilization and growth of our local economy. This commitment will enable the opportunity to focus resources where they can achieve the best return for the community as a whole.



I would like to thank and congratulate all those who contributed to this undertaking, whether as a volunteer or as an interviewed business. The Business Retention and Expansion project will provide valuable information to Council and the community as a whole.

A significant amount of work is required to ensure the viability and competitiveness of a community and this study is a great foundation to build on.

~ Glenn Schwendinger, Chief Administrative Officer  
Township of Perth East

# Project Partners

## Municipality of West Perth

West Perth is proud to be a partner in the BR&E program with the expectation that the rural and urban residents, business people and municipal leaders can co-ordinate their activities, resources and expertise to work towards a common goal.

This project will assist the municipality in addressing barriers to economic growth within West Perth and ensure that rural and small town Ontario remains a viable, healthy and vibrant place to work and invest.

~Will Jaques, Chief Administrative Officer  
Municipality of West Perth



## Township of Perth South

The Township of Perth South is pleased to have been able to partner and participate in the Business Retention & Expansion Project. This project will enable the Township Council to fulfill its mandate to promote and assist sustainable economic development in Perth South in a proactive manner. The Township recognizes the value of its local business community and by undertaking these types of initiatives, in conjunction with the County of Perth and its other member municipalities, the Council is able to foster continued economic growth.

I would like to thank the many dedicated volunteers and business partners who gave of their time and local expertise to this project. It is through the combined efforts of many that success may ultimately be achieved for a more sustainable Perth South.

~Michelle Casavecchia, Chief Administrative Officer  
Township of Perth South



## Project Partners

### **Perth Community Futures**

The Perth Community Futures was pleased to support the Business Retention and Expansion Project at the invitation of the Municipalities and the Warden of the County.

Small Business is the driving force for employment in rural municipalities, including the serviced urban centers within these municipalities. Business enterprises in Perth County are predominately micro in size. Encouraging, supporting and enabling new and existing local business is a fundamental part of any municipal economic development effort.

Business Retention and Expansion is an excellent vehicle to kick-start and develop the municipal role in business and community growth. BR&E reaches out to the local business community, strengthening relationships and bridges between business, local business organizations and the municipality that become the foundation for future success. Identifying key strengths, opportunities and red flag concerns enables the community to develop clear priorities, tackle high profile issues, implement some quick wins and build partnerships and momentum for the future.

Our rural downtowns have tremendous history, architecture, heritage and character that can not be replicated by big-box stores in regional shopping destinations. However, rural downtowns still struggle to maintain high occupancy rates and attractive building facades given industry shopping trends. Focusing on the retail sector is an excellent way to determine how best to enable and assist our downtown revitalization, ensure an attractive main-street with local shoppers combined with increased visitors that will provide business and community success on main street well into the future.

Fully engaging, supporting and implementing BR&E in our local community sends a clear message that we are open for business!

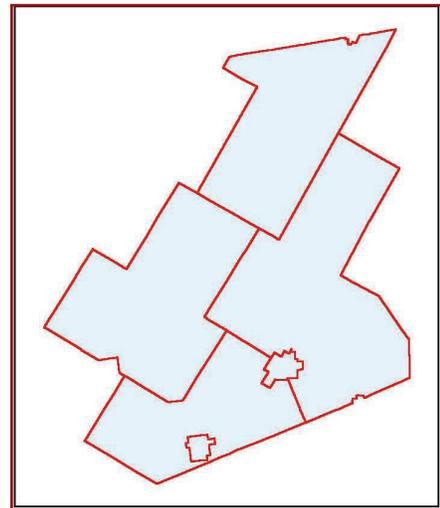
Together, we can grow the community one business at a time.

Congratulations to Perth County for taking this tremendous step forward!

~ Jaret Henhoeffler, General Manager,  
Perth Community Futures Development Corporation

## The County of Perth

The County of Perth, in the centre of southwestern Ontario, was created in January 1850 with eleven townships from the former Huron and Wellington Districts. With the opening of the first courthouse at Stratford in January 1853, the County was separated from the united counties of Huron, Perth, and Bruce to determine its own future. Five urban municipalities - Stratford, St. Marys, Mitchell, Listowel and Milverton - were incorporated over the years in addition to the townships. In January 1998, the municipalities within the county were reduced from fourteen to four, although the City of Stratford and the Town of St. Marys continue their separate existence outside the county government. The four new municipalities are the Town of North Perth and the Townships of Perth East, Perth South and the Municipality of West Perth.



The county is prime agricultural land and is known for mixed farming, dairying and hog production. In the past, it was well-known for its numerous cheese and butter factories, some of which are still in operation. The towns are known today for various industrial enterprises.

~ Stratford Perth Archives

## Member Municipalities

### Municipality of North Perth



The Municipality of North Perth is located in the northern reaches of Perth County. Consisting of the former townships of Wallace and Elma and the Town of Listowel, the new Town combines the best of small urban and rural environments.

Nestled in the 'Heart of South Western Ontario' and about a half hour West of Waterloo, North Perth's geographical location is ideal for all sizes of industry and commercial ventures. As a progressive and forward thinking Municipality that smartly combines small rural Ontario with a rapidly growing urban community coupled with many service clubs, religious faiths and countless leisure activities, North Perth offers residents amenities and a well balanced lifestyle.

The township has a total population of 12,254, with 4,800 households and a total land area of 49,300 hectares (493 km<sup>2</sup>).

### Municipality of Perth East



On January 1, 1998, the former Townships of Ellice, Mornington, North Easthope, South Easthope and the Village of Milverton officially restructured to become the Township of Perth East. The new municipality has over 71,000 hectares (715 km<sup>2</sup>), 4,000 households and a total population of approximately 12,000.

The Municipal Administrative Centre is in Milverton, which is the largest, fully serviced urban centre within the Municipality.

Major economic development within the new municipality includes: Agriculture, Farm Related Businesses, Millwrighting, Metal Fabrication, Water Pump Sales, Distribution and Repair, Tourism, and Home Based Businesses.

## Municipality of West Perth



Laid out and named by the Canada Company, Mitchell was the first area to see settlement in West Perth. In 1837 William Hicks, and his son John, purchased land in Mitchell and erected a log structure on the Logan side of the Huron Road, near the bank of the Thames River. In 1857, John Hicks replaced this early tavern with a grand new hotel, the focal point of the main street. By 1842, a number of settlers and businesses had located in Mitchell.

In 1855, Her Majesty Queen Victoria granted a charter to the Townships of Logan, Hibbert, and Fullarton to hold a fall fair in Mitchell. This fair was widely known as the "Mitchell Fall Fair", and is reputed to be the "Biggest Little Fair in Ontario".

Mitchell can also boast of being the home town of famous National Hockey League star Howie Morenz (1902-1937), who gained nation wide popularity playing for the Montreal Canadiens.

The township has a total population of 8,840, with 3,340 households and a total land area of 57,900 hectares (579 km<sup>2</sup>).

## Municipality of Perth South



The Township of Blanshard & Township of Downie amalgamated January 1, 1998 to become the Township of Perth South. The township has a total population of 4,132, with 1,480 households and a total land area of 39,202 hectares (393 km<sup>2</sup>).

## The BR+E Process

After months of focus on economic development and working together as member municipalities, the County of Perth approached OMAFRA to initiate a BR+E study.

Early in the project, the Leadership Team met in its official capacity to identify the scope of this Perth County project. There have been two phases to this project. The 2007 project focused on the Retail and Business Services sector. The 2008 project focused on the Manufacturing, Industrial and Trades sector. The geographic focus included the County's four member municipalities - North Perth, Perth East, West Perth, and Perth South.

With each phase of the project, business lists for each community were collected and verified. To promote the BR+E project and determine each community's readiness, numerous visits were conducted with representatives from each member municipality, business associations, educators, and community groups.

In January of 2007 a public launch of the Perth County project was held to provide business owners, potential volunteers, elected officials, and the media with more information on the benefits of getting involved with a BR+E project.

Numerous volunteers were recruited and trained for their role as interviewers during scheduled BR+E visits.

For the 2007 project, business visits began in early February and continued through until the end of June. After **1840** project team hours, approximately **545** volunteer hours, and **525** hours committed by our businesses, the interviewing process ended with **187** businesses participating.

Business visits for the 2008 project occurred between March and June of 2008. After **1560** project team hours, approximately **300** volunteer hours, and **200** hours committed by our businesses, the interviewing process ended with **97** businesses participating.

This provides solid input and direction on improving the economic and business climate in our communities.

## Perth County BR+E Objectives

The County of Perth and its member municipalities have attempted to create a workable economic development plan that would meet the diverse needs of the entire county. BR+E has proven to be the methodology to initiate such an action plan.

The County had both short-term and long-term objectives regarding this BR+E project.

### **Short-Term Objectives**

- ◆ Provide Community support for Local Businesses
- ◆ Identify and Address immediate business concerns

### **Long-Term Objectives**

- ◆ Increase the Competitiveness of local establishments
- ◆ Establish a Strategic Action Plan for Economic Development
- ◆ Increase Business Development and Job Creation
- ◆ Increase Community Capacity for Economic Development



## Sample Selection

It was determined that in order to capture an accurate snapshot of each community, a sample size of **50%** of existing businesses would be preferred. The list of businesses was compiled from a number of sources, including municipal lists, the Chamber of Commerce, Business Associations, the Perth CFDC, websites, the phonebook and more.

While businesses were randomly selected to participate in the interview process, careful attention was given to ensure that the following issues were addressed in the sample.

- ◆ Adequate representation of small, medium and large businesses
- ◆ Businesses included from various commercial districts within each community
- ◆ Apportioned representation from each industry sub-sector

The following chart represents sample selection in the County of Perth:

<b>Community</b>	<b>Total Businesses</b>	<b>Completed Interviews</b>
2007 – North Perth	202	90
2007 – Perth East	92	45
2007 – West Perth	102	48
2007 – Perth South	10	4
2008 – North Perth	80	28
2008 – Perth East	90	25
2008 – West Perth	90	32
2008 – Perth South	21	12

In addition to being invited to participate in the random sampling, ALL businesses within our chosen sectors were welcome to volunteer as interview participants.

Results

2007

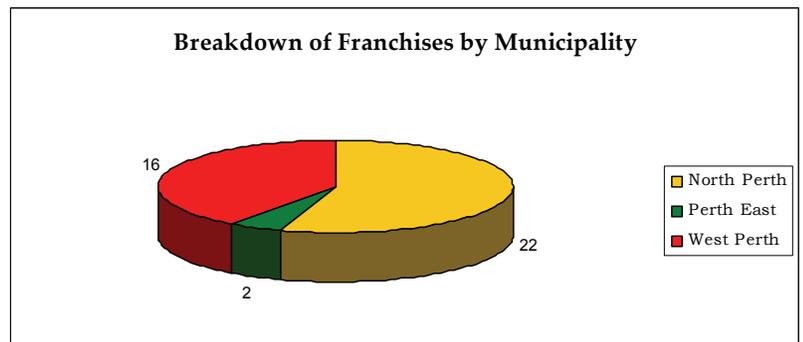
Retail & Business  
Services

## Summary of Businesses

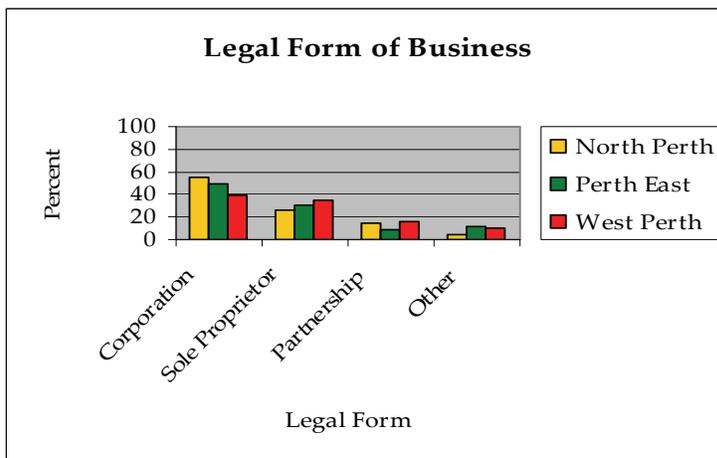
This section provides an insight into the demographics for businesses which were interviewed.

### 2007 Demographic Characteristics of Businesses Interviewed

- ◆ 72% have less than 10 employees
- ◆ 4% have more than 50 employees
- ◆ 75% of businesses owners are residents of the community where they operate
- ◆ 55% of facilities are owned by the business operator, while the remainder are rented or leased.
- ◆ 24% of businesses have been in operation for over 35 years
- ◆ 117 businesses are family owned
- ◆ Of the 187 businesses who participated, a total of 29 are franchises.



Of all businesses interviewed in 2007, the legal form of the businesses, were as follows:



## Business Climate

Through the interview process, we gain a glimpse into the general overview of the community, including factors which businesses believe are barriers to existing, expanding, or new businesses.

<u>Barrier</u>	<u>North Perth %</u>
Lack of Proactive New Business Recruitment	32
Availability of Skilled Labour	32
Resistance from local businesses	28
Business Taxes	28
Road & Highway congestion	28

<u>Barrier</u>	<u>Perth East %</u>
Water/Sewer Capacity	40
Availability of properly zoned land	36
Availability of Serviced Land	36
Availability of Natural Gas	36
Road and Highway congestion	31
Lack of Proactive new Business Recruitment	27

<u>Barrier</u>	<u>West Perth %</u>
Lack of Proactive New Business Recruitment	54
Skilled or Professional Labour	28
Approval Processes	28
Availability of Financing	26

The following Services provided by local government and local businesses organizations, received the ***Highest Levels of Satisfaction***:

- Services provided by Planning, Engineering & Zoning Departments
- Services provided by the County Health Unit
- Services provided by the Police Department (North Perth & West Perth)
- Services provided by Volunteer Fire Departments
- Services provided by Public Utilities
- Garbage Removal Services
- Health & Medical Services
- Recreational Facilities & Services (Perth East & West Perth)
- Library Services
- Schools

## Business Climate

The following Services provided by local government and local businesses organizations, received the ***Lowest Level of Satisfaction***:

Water/Sewer (Perth East – Shakespeare & North Perth – Atwood)

Services provided by Police Department (Perth East)

Street Repair (Perth East)

Snow Removal

### **Comments from Business Owners**

“Water & Sewer infrastructure is needed. Roads & Sidewalks need to be fixed.”

“Water & Sewer capacity needs to be increased to allow businesses to function and to expand.”

“Sewers are highly needed, as there is no room for a new septic system.”

“Snow removal is sketchy as to who is responsible for removing the snow and where.”

“Upkeep of sidewalks in front of stores, snow removal needs to be done by town, not by individual businesses. Each business is not doing a uniform or adequate job of snow removal.”

“Snow removal is a problem. If we arrive before 7am, we get stuck in the parking lot. It is frustrating that there is residential snow removal of sidewalks but not for businesses.”

“We need better Patrolling of the downtown to keep property from getting damaged. When the businesses try and decorate and clean up/make the downtown appealing, we seem to have property damage.”

“Roads and street repair need to be kept up.”

“We need Water/Sewer improvements, additional signs to direct people, and sidewalks are not welcoming or safe. The street lighting isn't adequate.”

## Future Plans

Businesses interviewed were asked to indicate their future plans within the community.

### Business Closures

Only **3** businesses plan on closing. The BR+E Task Force has been working with these businesses to reduce the chance of closure, or to make the transition to closure a smooth one for both the owner, and existing employees.

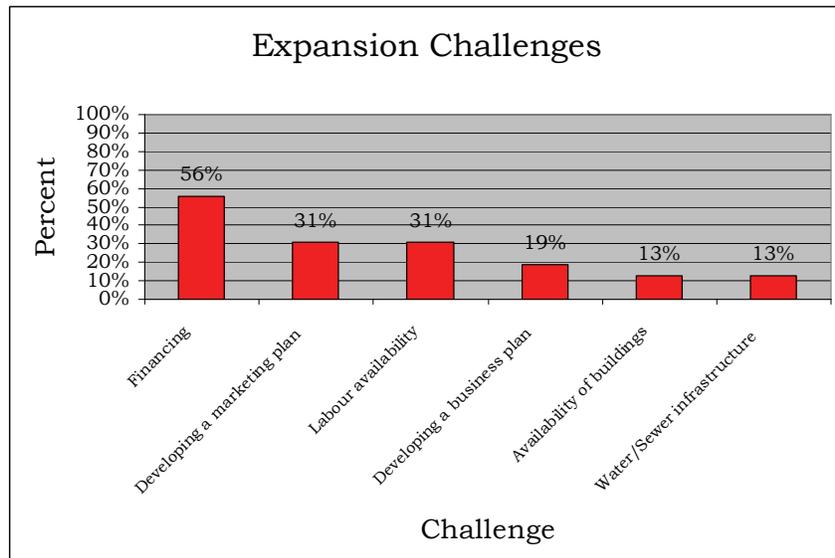
### Business Expansions

Fifty-three (53) businesses indicated that they have plans to expand their businesses within the next three (3) years. These expansion plans will lead to:

- ◆ An increase in Workforce 87%
- ◆ Additional Products or Services for Customers 85%
- ◆ Additional Investment in Equipment or Technology 73%
- ◆ Increased Floor Space 62%
- ◆ An Increase in demand for employee training 50%

### Challenges with Expansion

A total of 18 businesses indicated that they are having challenges with their expansion plans. Their challenges include the following:



## Business Markets

The following are insights into marketing issues, concerns, and challenges for Perth County businesses.

Numerous businesses are open to pursuing

Networking / Collaboration	<b>50%</b>
Joint Marketing	<b>40%</b>
Joint Purchasing	<b>15%</b>

Businesses also indicated that they would like assistance on marketing issues, including:

- ⇒ Identify Customer needs
- ⇒ Strategic Marketing
- ⇒ Marketing Locally
- ⇒ Dealing with the Competition

## Workforce Development

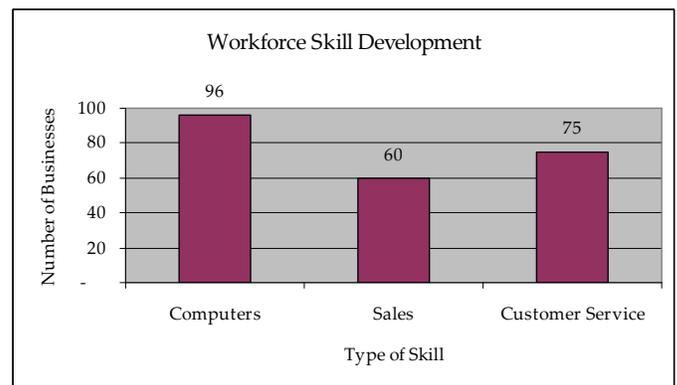
It is important to address and prepare for future employment needs, as this is a significant growth area for Perth County businesses.

Throughout the County, a total of **710** additional employees (new positions) are anticipated within the businesses interviewed during the BR+E process. This number is broken down into the following types of employee positions.

- ◆ Trained & Professional workers
- ◆ Apprentices
- ◆ Untrained workers
- ◆ Computer Technology
- ◆ Clerical
- ◆ Sales
- ◆ Business Administration

Employers believe that their existing employees could use additional training and support in the following skill areas

- ⇒ Computer Hardware and Software skills
- ⇒ Sales & Marketing and
- ⇒ Customer Service



Recruitment problems for some businesses are industry wide issues, while other businesses feel that the problem is limited to the community. In West Perth, **30%** of businesses are having problems with employee attraction and stability. In Perth East, **36%** of businesses are unable to recruit sufficiently qualified employees for their current vacancies. In North Perth, **31%** have the same challenge.

It can be noted that **83%** of businesses rely on an In-House training program for employees, while foregoing training opportunities such as:

- ⇒ Programs at Community College
- ⇒ Distance Education
- ⇒ Customized Training programs, and
- ⇒ University courses

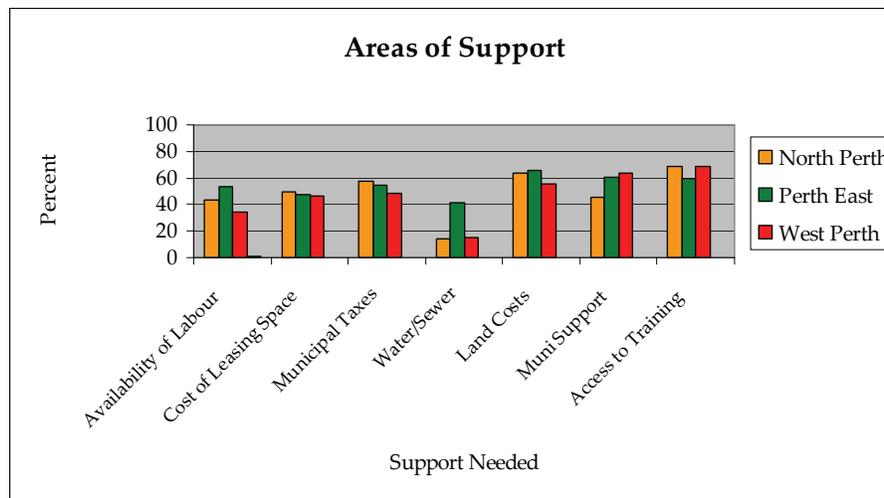
Businesses indicated that they choose to make use of in-house training programs, primarily because of 'Cost' concerns, as well as issues pertaining to the 'Loss of Productivity during the training period'.

## Local Community

The questions pertaining to the local community identify issues pertaining to Economic Development Plans, and the role each Municipality is taking in providing adequate business support.

A total of **33%** of participants believe that their community has an Economic Development Plan, while in fact none of the communities in Perth County currently have a written Economic Development Planning document. There were **10%** of respondents that did not believe that a Plan existed for their community, while **57%** were unaware of whether a Plan existed at all.

Participating businesses indicated that additional support is needed in the following areas, to ensure that their business can remain competitive within their community.



To assist the Retail and Business Services Sector, businesses indicated that Business Associations and Economic Development groups could:

- ⇒ Offer Business Networking Sessions
- ⇒ Offer Marketing Seminars
- ⇒ Provide opportunities for Joint Advertising and Marketing
- ⇒ Encourage and support Website Development
- ⇒ Offer Trade Shows

### Advantages & Disadvantages

Businesses were also asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages to doing business in their community. The following are some quotes from each of the communities in Perth County.

### **Listowel**

“We have a strong downtown business community.”

“This is a beautiful little town with great people.”

“Overall, it is a pleasure to be here.”

“Listowel has a very positive future because there is a large population base to draw from, with future population growth predicted.”

“There is a real spirit of cooperation in other communities, but it is like dealing with the enemy in Listowel. We need more cooperation and less adversarial communication.”

“Somehow, we need to encourage people to shop locally. More support from local people would really help the business sector in Listowel.”

“There is a need for the municipality and the community retailers to communicate better.”

“It would be great to have someone from the business associations and municipality, come to make you feel welcome. We also need more retail to retail support.

“We loose too many young people to urban centers.”

### **Atwood**

“We are located on a main highway.”

“It is a great community of people.”

“There is no sewer system.”

“There are not enough other businesses in town to draw customers in from out-of-town.”

“The Sewer and Septic issue is keeping us from growing.”

“We are too close to other big centers.”

### **Milverton**

“This community is a great place to operate a business and raise a family.”

“It is a friendly and safe community.”

“Great Recreation Center.”

“Not much industry, [We] need more.”

”There is a lack of a skilled labour force.”

“It would be good to see a business that would provide jobs to the Amish community.”

“The local dining experience isn’t appreciated.”

“There is a lack of support from some businesses.”

### **Shakespeare**

“We have a close proximity to Stratford”

[This community] “needs a proper business association.”

“There is no business association anymore, to help business promote themselves.”

“There are no public washrooms”.

### **Mitchell**

“There is great potential in town. The awareness of a need to support local businesses is increasing.”

“We loose business in the winter because of the amount of snow.”

“The municipality isn’t doing enough to help bring businesses to Mitchell.”

“We don’t look after new businesses.”

“There is separation between the downtown and businesses on the edge of town. (There is poor communication between the two.)”

### **Sebringville**

“We are on a major highway, we have a Post Office, and we have a Credit Union.”

“We can’t get much in town, so we have to purchase in London or Stratford”.

## Retail Sector

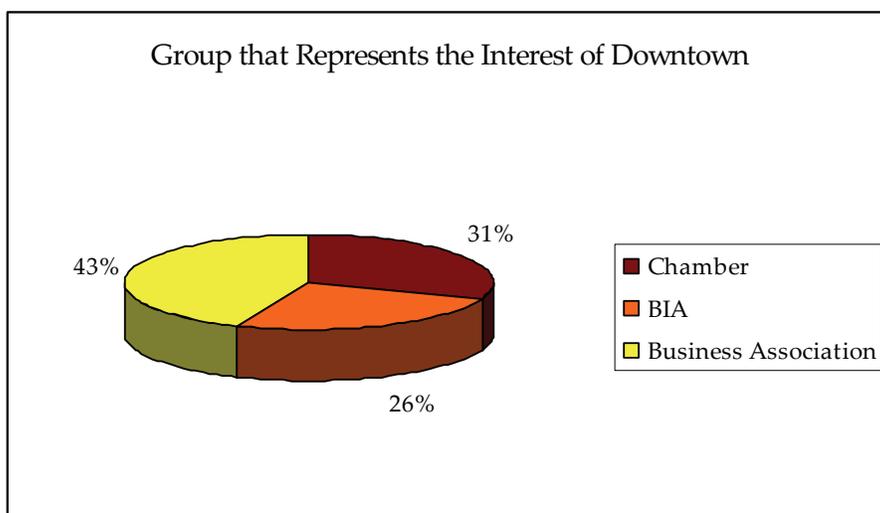
This BR+E Project allowed respondents to answer an additional set of questions dealing directly with issues faced by Retail and Business Services businesses. This section gives us insight into the state of the Commercial Districts in each of our communities, and provides suggestions into areas of improvement, primarily for our Downtown Cores.

**Eighty-seven percent (87%)** of participating businesses indicated that they are located in an ‘Identifiable Commercial District’, with **73%** identifying the ‘Downtown’ as their primary Commercial District.

### Promoting the Downtown

Only **21%** believed that there was a plan in place to promote their Downtown, and **79%** felt that the Plan in place was primarily focused on retail marketing and promotion only.

When asked if there is a group or organization that represents the interests of the Downtown, more businesses felt that their Business Association represented their interests, as opposed to a Chamber or BIA.



### Business Self-Improvement

Businesses recognize the need for improvement, and identified the following areas as the greatest need.

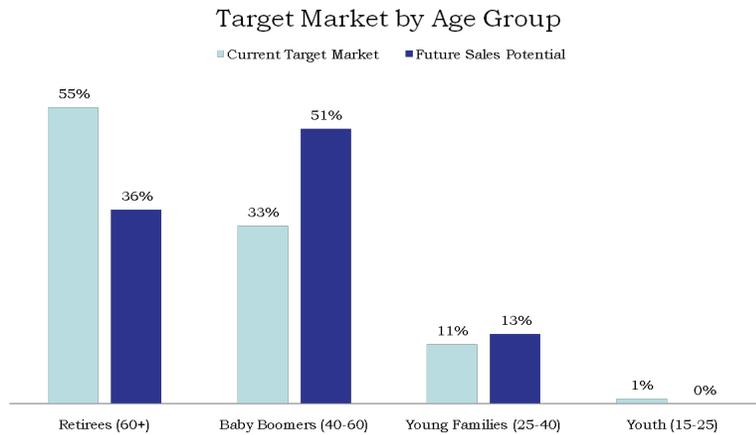
- ⇒ Joint Marketing
- ⇒ Networking Events
- ⇒ Physical Improvements to Public Areas
- ⇒ Business Directories, Brochures & Maps
- ⇒ Further Analysis on the Downtown Economy
- ⇒ Retail & Special Event Coordination
- ⇒ Marketing on the Web
- ⇒ Customer Service Training

In order for their business to be more competitive, the following number of businesses indicated that they would attend a seminar or workshop on the following topics.

<i><b>Seminar Topic</b></i>	<i><b>Number of Business</b></i>
Retaining Customers	87
Marketing	66
Customer Service Training	47
Financial Management	45
Dealing with the Competition	42

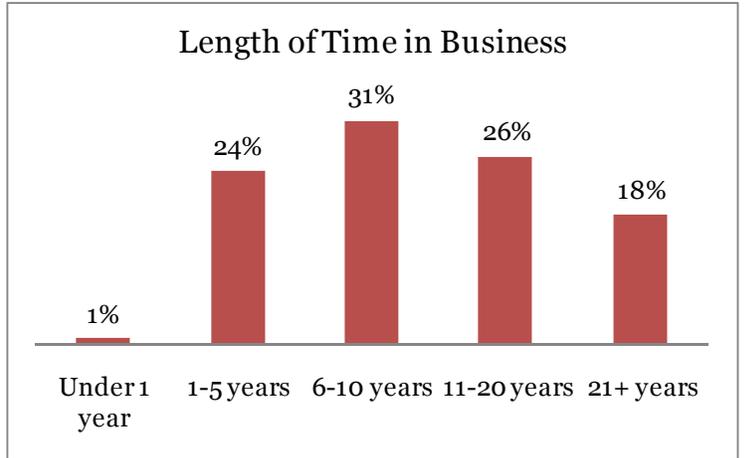
### **Target Market by Age Group**

Youth and Young Families are consistently neglected by Retail and Business Services enterprises in our communities. This focus on an aging population may have future consequences.



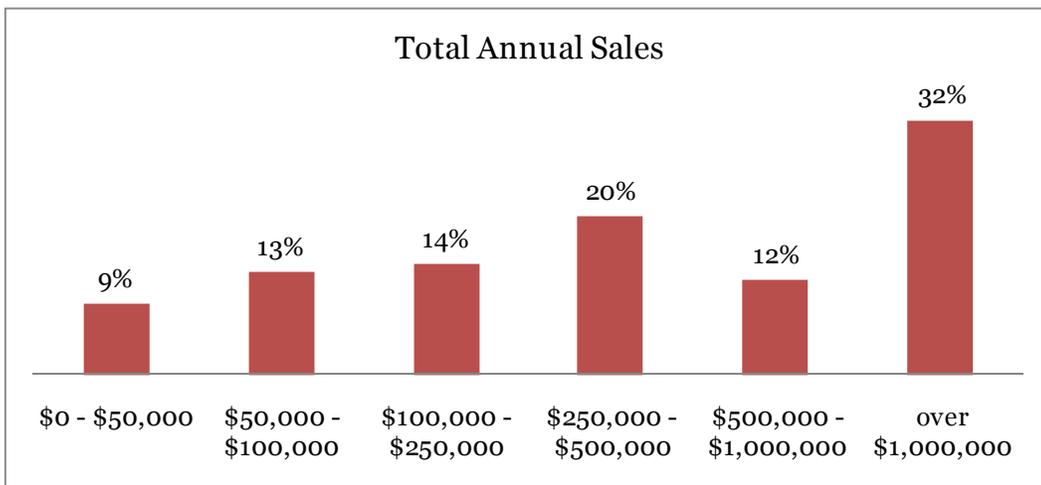
## Downtown Revitalization

There are very few young businesses in Perth County. The largest percent of businesses have been in the community for six (6) to ten (10) years.

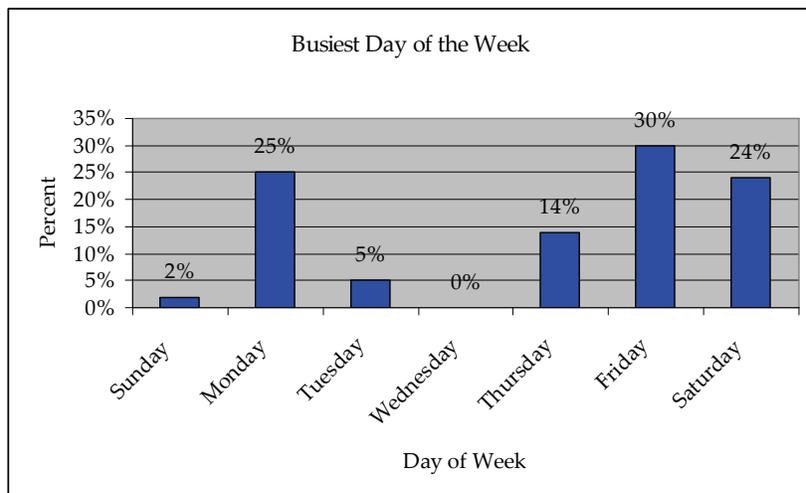


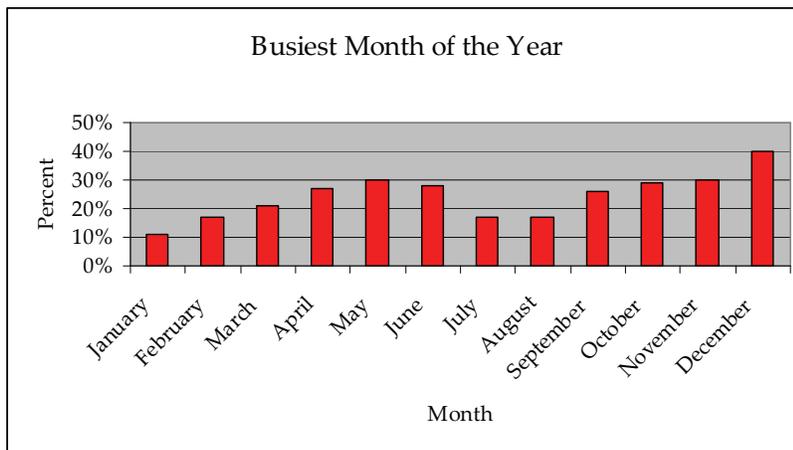
### Total Annual Sales

Of the businesses interviewed, 32% had Total Annual Sales in excess of \$1 Million.



Businesses were asked to indicate which day of the week and which month of the year was their busiest. Friday was by far, the busiest day of the week, with Monday and Saturday following closely behind. Throughout the County, Zero percent (0%) of businesses indicated that Wednesday was their busiest day.





As expected, December was rated as the busiest Month of the Year for Retail businesses, with May and November tied for second busiest.

### Rate the Downtown

When asked to rate the condition of the Downtown, businesses felt that the following areas needed the most improvement.

- ⇒ Public Washrooms
- ⇒ Number of Parking Spaces
- ⇒ Parking Signage
- ⇒ Number of Store Vacancies
- ⇒ Customer Service Programs
- ⇒ Advertising Campaigns

### Top 3 suggestions for improving the Downtown

#### North Perth

- ⇒ Improved Parking
- ⇒ More Accommodations
- ⇒ More or better Festivals & Events

#### Perth East

- ⇒ Repair 'eyesore' buildings
- ⇒ More entertainment
- ⇒ Create a focused Downtown Revitalization Plan

#### West Perth

- ⇒ More Accommodations
- ⇒ Improved Parking
- ⇒ Focused Downtown Revitalization Plan

### Top 4 Community Assets to Develop

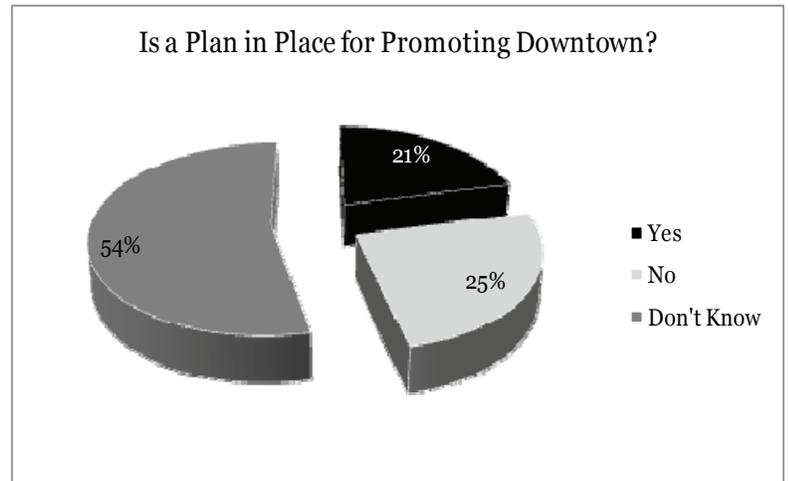
- ⇒ Public Washrooms conveniently located Downtown
- ⇒ Public Parking
- ⇒ Entertainment opportunities
- ⇒ Sports & Recreational Facilities

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 1 – Economic Development Plan

#### Supporting Data:

- 70% of respondents *Don't Know* if an Economic Development Plan exists.
- 48% are *unaware* of what the Municipality is doing in regards to Economic Development
- 36% of businesses don't believe the Municipality is taking an adequate role in Economic Development.



**Objective:** For each Municipality and/or The County to create and develop a 5-year Economic Development Plan which will:

- ⇒ Promote a positive corporate identity that positions the Municipality/County as a business friendly community with a superior quality of life
- ⇒ Create employment opportunities suited to the local labour pool
- ⇒ Support small business development, expansion and retention
- ⇒ Attract new investment that meets social, environmental and economic objectives
- ⇒ Expand and diversify the tax base

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ◆ Assist BR+E Task Force in preparing Strategic Action Plans and initiating Economic Development Plans
- ◆ Identify and promote improvements to and expansion of existing businesses and industry
- ◆ Identify and promote new business and or industrial opportunities
- ◆ Identify and Prioritize current Economic Development concerns/issues from BR+E data

## Action Plans

- ◆ Identify an Ideal of what needs to be accomplished
- ◆ Identify Roles and Responsibilities for community partners
- ◆ Prepare Economic Development Plan Document
- ◆ Implement Plan

### **Partnerships:**

The County of Perth

Municipalities (CAO & Council) with input from local Business Associations

Perth Community Futures (CFDC)

**Recommended Timeframe:** November 2007 + 5 Years to implement

## Action Plans

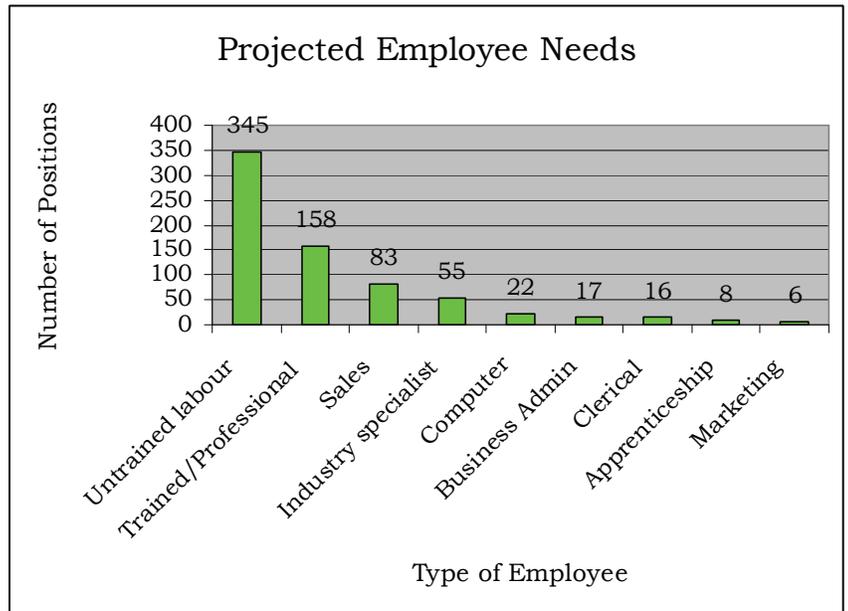
### Strategy # 2 – Workforce Development

#### Supporting Data:

**Objective:** To fill Perth County projected employee demands while encouraging Youth Retention

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ◆ Establish dialogue with Schools, School Boards and Training providers
- ◆ Certification Day
- ◆ Career Day or Work Fair
- ◆ Provide opportunities for Employee Training
- ◆ Increase awareness of local training and apprenticeship programs
- ◆ Develop a campaign to recruit skilled labour throughout County or from outside the region



#### Partnerships:

Schools – Listowel District Secondary School, Mitchell District High School, Stratford Northwestern Secondary School, St. Michael Catholic Secondary School

School Boards – Avon-Maitland District School Board, Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board

Employment Agencies

Service Canada

Grey-Bruce-Huron-Perth-Georgian Triangle Training Board

Stratford-Perth Technical Training Group

**Recommended Timeframe:** 2007-2008 School Year to initiate programming. Increase each year through 2012

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 3 – Business Support

#### Supporting Data:

**70%** of businesses identified Marketing as a needed area of Mentorship, while **51%** identified Business Planning, and 43% identified Financial Planning as a needed area for mentorship.

**17** Business owners/managers indicated that they would be willing to act as Mentors in areas of Business, Marketing, and Financial Planning.

**Objective:** To support businesses with an opportunity to **create and follow** effective Business, Marketing, Financial and Succession Plans.

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

Offer Planning, Marketing, Financial and Succession Planning workshops/seminars

Initiate a Mentorship Program

Create a Directory of businesses and associations that provide services relating to Business Planning, Marketing, Succession Planning, and Financial Planning.

Support and Promote partners in the community that work with entrepreneurs, like Stratford & Perth Business Centre, Community Futures and Community EFFORT

#### Partnerships:

Business Associations  
Chamber(s) of Commerce  
Perth Community Futures (CFDC)  
Stratford-Perth Business Centre  
Stratford-Perth Community EFFORT  
The County of Perth

**Recommended Timeframe:** Summer 2008 and ongoing

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 4 – Downtown Revitalization & Retail Leakage

#### Supporting Data:

Top 3 suggestions for improving the Downtown:

- ◆ North Perth = Improved Parking, More Accommodations, and More Festivals & Events.
  - ◆ Perth East = Repair ‘eyesore’ buildings, More entertainment, and create a focused Downtown Revitalization.
  - ◆ West Perth = More Accommodations, Improved Parking, and a Focused Downtown Revitalization
- 
- ⇒ **51%** (North Perth) and **57%** (West Perth) identified Parking as a Community Asset to improve.
  - ⇒ **35%** of North and West Perth businesses identified Parking as one of top 3 suggestions for improving the Downtown.
  - ⇒ **47%** of North Perth businesses identified the Number of Parking Spaces as Poor or Needs Improving. **54%** of West Perth businesses indicated the same.
  - ⇒ **35%** of North Perth employees regularly park in a Municipal Parking lot.

**Objective:** Ensure visual attractiveness of our communities to attract and retain customers

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ⇒ Study the Feasibility of installing conveniently located Public Washrooms
- ⇒ Promoting the location of existing Public Washroom facilities
- ⇒ Decrease the number of Store Vacancies
- ⇒ Implement Customer Service Programs
- ⇒ Identify and Encourage Uniform and Convenient Hours of Operation
- ⇒ Improve Parking and Parking Signage to provide Consumers, Business owners and downtown Residents with sufficient and convenient parking.
- ⇒ Develop a Façade Improvement program

## Action Plans

- ⇒ Improve Streetscape through an application to the Province for Community Improvement Plan funding
- ⇒ Recruitment & attraction of more niche and specialty shops
- ⇒ Recruitment & attraction of youth focused shops
- ⇒ Revitalize BIA Committee in Shakespeare

### **Partnerships:**

The County of Perth

Municipal Government

BIA/Beautification Committee

Province (funding)

**Recommended Timeframe:** Winter 2008 and ongoing

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 5 – Retail Leakage

#### Supporting Data:

**79%** of businesses Purchase products from outside the Municipality

**33%** of businesses rate the support from local businesses as Fair or Poor.

**26%** rate the support from local residents as Fair or Poor.

**44%** of businesses indicate that the competition is Increasing

When asked to name 3 disadvantages to doing business in the community, businesses regularly identified “out-of-town shopping”

**Objective:** Increase consumer and business shopping locally

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ⇒ Identify and Encourage Uniform and Convenient Hours of Operation
- ⇒ Initiate a Retail Gap Analysis study
- ⇒ Recruit businesses offering Youth Focused Products and Services
- ⇒ Education of Consumers on effect of out-of-town shopping
- ⇒ Create a Motto/Slogan to promote each retail community
- ⇒ Develop and Market a “Buy Local” Campaign
- ⇒ Coordinate Joint Marketing campaigns for retailers
- ⇒ Create and Implement Customer Appreciation / Rewards program

#### Partnerships:

Chamber (s) of Commerce

BIA

Business Associations

Economic Development Committees of Council

**Recommended Timeframe:** Autumn 2007 and ongoing

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 6 – Communication

#### Supporting Data:

“In our small community we have BIA and Chamber of Commerce, Retail Merchants and they don't work together - this hurts the downtown.”

“We need a clearer definition of group responsibilities eg. **BIA**, Chamber of Commerce, Retail Merchants Association.

“...really not that familiar with what any of the above organizations do, from what I do know, the Chamber and the **BIA** could benefit from working together.”

“We have Chamber, Retail Merchants Association and **BIA** and all go in different directions.”

“If the **BIA** & Chamber kept businesses in touch, made them more aware”.

**Objective:** Improve communication between businesses, business organizations & the Municipality/County

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ⇒ Determine what are the business issues and concerns
- ⇒ Promote and educate public on the role/responsibility of each community group and business association
- ⇒ Include Mission and Mandate of Business Associations in Business Directory (Action Plan # 3)
- ⇒ Develop a Strategy to welcome new businesses to town and educate them on role of each business association

#### Partnerships:

Chamber(s) of Commerce, Business Associations, BIA  
Municipalities (CAO)  
The County of Perth

**Recommended Timeframe:** Fall 2007 and ongoing

## 2007 Conclusion

There are many different initiatives that could be undertaken as a result of this BR+E data. The above Action Plans and Strategies merely address the critical issues identified through the study. It is reasonable to foresee that subsequent BR+E studies will add to the list of Action items, programs, and responsibilities of the volunteer Task Force.

In 2003, the County of Perth, its member municipalities and the Community Futures Development Corporation undertook an Economic Development Strategic Plan. One of the recommendations brought forward was that the County acquire an Economic Development Officer.

There is no doubt that sharing an Economic Development position between the County and its member Municipalities would assist in the implementation of the BR+E and other municipal strategies.

It is with this in mind, that the BR+E Task Force and Leadership Team suggest, that the County of Perth, in cooperation with its Member Municipalities, create an Economic Development position or department.

The applicant could work closely with County and Municipal Councils to:

- ⇒ attract and facilitate development of new business/industry
- ⇒ provide business support and services
- ⇒ support attraction and training for local employment projections
- ⇒ strengthen the property tax base of the community
- ⇒ implement other economic development initiatives identified by Council
- ⇒ Initiate other BR+E Projects

There is much work ahead for the BR+E Task Force, The County, Municipalities, Community Groups and Business owners alike. Addressing these critical issues will result in a more competitive and vibrant business community and will create an economically viable County for all to enjoy.

Results

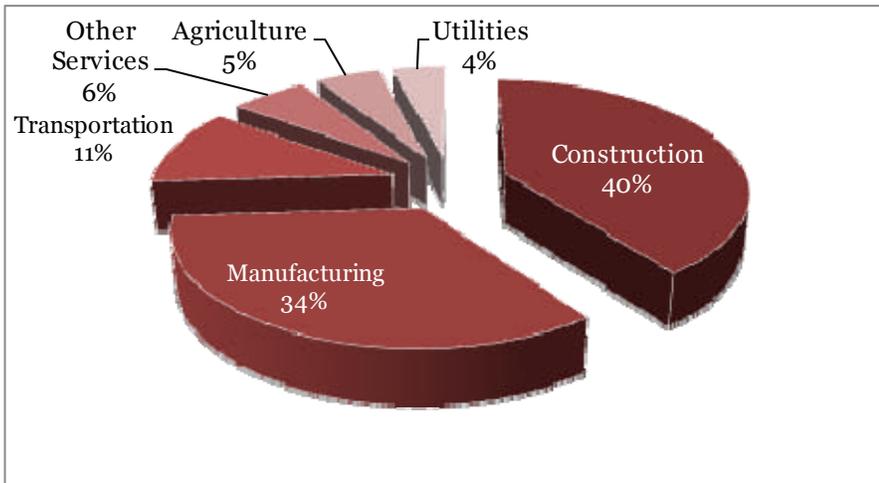
2008

Manufacturing,  
Industrial & Trade  
Sector

## Summary of Businesses

### 2008 Demographic Characteristics of Businesses Interviewed

- ◆ **42%** are considered small businesses, employing 10 employees or less.
- ◆ **46%** are considered medium sized businesses, employing between 10 and 49 employees.
- ◆ **7%** have more than 50 employees



- ◆ This is the headquarters for **86%** of businesses
- ◆ **82%** of businesses interviewed are 'family-owned' businesses
- ◆ In **89%** of businesses, the owner is involved in the day-to-day operations
- ◆ **97%** of businesses are non-unionized

- ◆ **38%** of businesses have been in business for over 35 years. Only **2%** have been in business for 3 years or less



## Business Climate

Through the interview process, we gain a glimpse into the general overview of the community, including factors which businesses believe are barriers to existing, expanding, or new businesses. The following barriers ranked highest

<u>Barrier</u>	<u>Count</u>
Availability of skilled labour	48
Businesses Taxes	31
Approval Processes	30
Availability of unskilled labour	23
Serviced Land	20
Availability of properly zoned land	20
Development charges	20
Business Insurance	17

The following Services provided by local government, received the ***Highest Levels of Satisfaction:***

- ⇒ Services provided by Volunteer Fire Departments
- ⇒ Schools
- ⇒ Health & Medical Services
- ⇒ Snow Removal Services
- ⇒ Services provided by the Police Department
- ⇒ Recreational Facilities & Services
- ⇒ Services provided by Public Utilities
- ⇒ Library Services
- ⇒ Garbage Removal Services
- ⇒ Services provided by the County Health Unit

The following Services, received the ***Lowest Level of Satisfaction:***

- ⇒ Availability of Public Transit & Affordable Transportation
- ⇒ Services provided by Planning & Zoning Departments
- ⇒ Street Repair

## Advantages and Disadvantages

### **Comments from Business Owners on the Advantages of owning a business in Perth County”**

“We have an outstanding quality of life”

“We have a stable economy, with a strong agricultural base”

“Perth County has good, hard working employees”

“This is a good community to live in”

“The rural environment is a positive factor”

“This is a well kept community”

“Our Taxes are reasonable, comparatively speaking”

“The prices of land are competitive”

“We have high employee loyalty”

### **Comments from Business Owners on the Disadvantages of owning a business in Perth County**

“Development Charges in Perth County hinder the building process”

“We are lacking a public transportation system which would provide urban employees the opportunity to work in rural and outlying areas”

“Access to the 400 Series Highways is lacking and a challenge for Transportation and Logistics”

“Our small towns are now just bedroom communities, that appear to have little interest in growth and development”

“We have a shortage of labour, both skilled and unskilled”

“There are few entertainment opportunities. Theaters are disappearing”

“Perth County isn’t attractive for Professionals”

“There is a lack of property available for expansion of existing businesses”

## Future Plans

Businesses interviewed were asked to indicate their future plans within the community.

### Business Closures

Only **2** businesses indicated they plan on closing—both due to retirement.

### Business Expansions

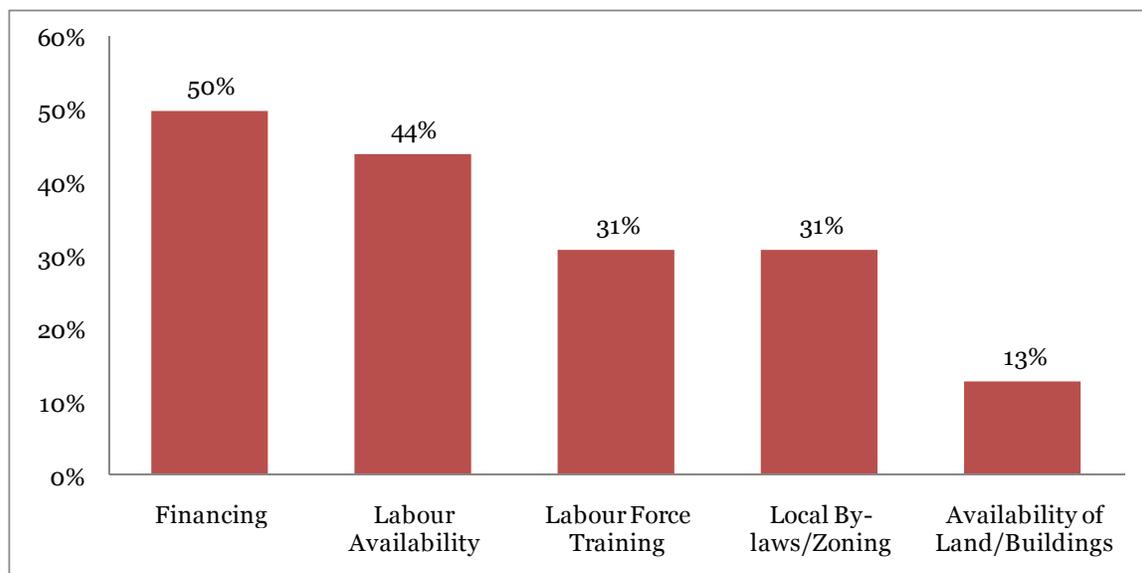
Thirty-eight (38) businesses indicated that they have plans to expand their businesses within the next three (3) years. These expansion plans will lead to:

- ◆ An increase in Workforce 78%
- ◆ Additional Products or Services for Customers 73%
- ◆ Additional Investment in Equipment or Technology 84%
- ◆ Increased Floor Space 59%
- ◆ An Increase in demand for employee training 70%

The remainder of businesses plan to remain the same size. There were no businesses planning to downsize, at this time.

### Challenges with Expansion

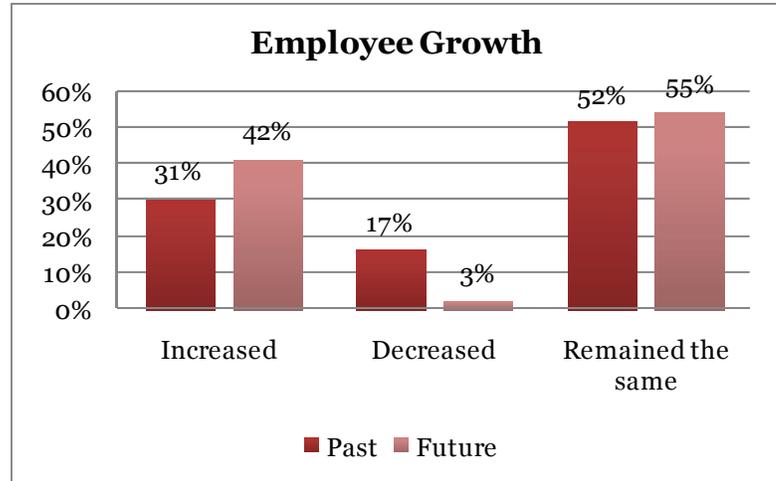
A total of 17 businesses indicated that they plan to expand, primarily because their current site is too small, and offers no opportunity for expansion. These businesses are having challenges with their expansion plans. These challenges include the following:



## Workforce Development

**17%** of employers have seen a decrease in the size of their workforce in the past three years. **52%** of businesses have remained the same, while only **31%** have increased the size of their workforce.

Employers seem to be optimistic about their hiring needs for the future, as **42%** plan an increase in labour force, while only **3%** project a decrease in the size of their labour force.



The majority of employers have remained the same size, and plan to remain the same size for the foreseeable future.

Seven businesses employ between 45 and 49 employees. Businesses have indicated that it is prohibitive to employ in excess of 49 employees. They cite compliance issues as a hurdle to business growth.

Employers believe that their existing employees could use additional training and support in the following skill areas:

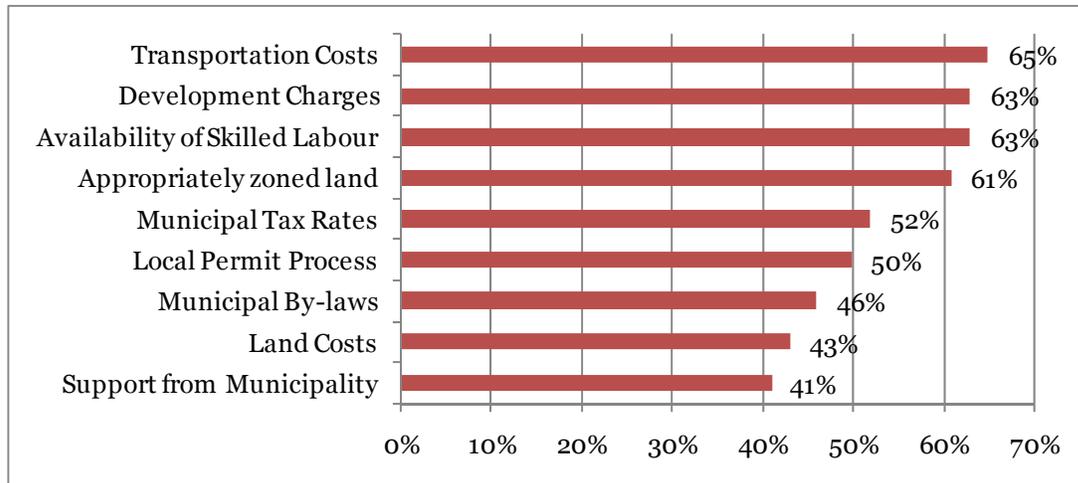
- ⇒ Oral & Written Communication
- ⇒ Supervisory
- ⇒ Working with others
- ⇒ Customer Service
- ⇒ Health & Safety

**93%** of businesses rely on an in-house program for training existing employees. **43%** of employers cite 'Cost', and **43%** cite 'Loss of productivity during training period' as the key obstacles to pursuing other training methods. **39%** indicate that the 'Distance to training facility' as an additional barrier to accessing training.

## Local Community

When asked if the local community has an economic development plan, **56%** of businesses ‘Didn’t Know’ if a plan existed. Additionally, **53%** indicated that they are ‘Unaware of what is being done’ when it comes to municipal involvement in economic development.

When asked about conducting business in our community, businesses assigned a rating of **Fair** or **Poor** to the following Factors:



Alternatively, the following factors received ratings of **Excellent** or **Good**:

- ◆ Quality of Life
- ◆ Access to Customers
- ◆ Support from local residents & businesses
- ◆ Water/Sewer capacity
- ◆ Access to Suppliers
- ◆ Availability of Utilities
- ◆ Telecommunication Infrastructure
- ◆ Labour costs
- ◆ Land costs

Businesses indicated that Business Associations and an Economic Development Office could offer assistance in the following key areas:

- ⇒ Workforce Planning, employee training and attraction
- ⇒ Trade Shows
- ⇒ Joint advertising and marketing
- ⇒ Business networking sessions

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 1—Barriers

#### Supporting Data:

- ⇒ **22%** of businesses do not have a current Business Plan. **26%** do not have a Marketing Plan.
- ⇒ **45%** do not have a Succession Plan—**48%** have been in business for over 25 years
- ⇒ Energy concerns: **45%** of business have concerns with respect to energy supply or efficiency, with **85%** identifying the Cost of energy as their greatest concern.

Barrier	Businesses citing barrier as a concern
Availability of skilled labour	60%
Business tax rates	39%
Approval processes	38%
Availability of unskilled labour	29%
Serviced land	25%
Availability of properly zoned and designated land	25%
Development charges	25%
Business insurance	21%
Water/sewage availability and capacity	15%
Lack of proactive new business recruitment	15%
Road & highway system	15%
Availability of variety of different sized parcels of land	14%
Availability of financing	14%
Public transit	10%
Availability of training opportunities	10%

**Objective:** Reduce or eliminate the Barriers, which businesses are experiencing in their daily operations, or potential expansions.

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ⇒ Create an inventory of publicly and privately held vacant land and buildings
- ⇒ Establish and promote a central location for information
- ⇒ Increase inventory of Municipally owned industrial and commercial land
- ⇒ Actively Recruit new business to Perth County
- ⇒ Support and assist existing businesses who wish to expand within Perth County
- ⇒ Facilitate the creation of an employee transportation system
- ⇒ Promote organizations offering Business, Financial, Marketing and Succession Planning
- ⇒ Connect businesses with companies offering Energy Audit and Energy Conservation programs
- ⇒ Encourage a shift in practice for Planning and Zoning Department
  - ◇ Review the Official Plan
  - ◇ Open discussion
  - ◇ Foster relationships with growing business and encourage open communication and discussion

#### Partnerships:

- ◆ County of Perth Economic Development Department
- ◆ Zoning Department
- ◆ Commercial Realtors
- ◆ Municipal and County officials

**Recommended Timeframe:** July—December 2008

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 2—Workforce Development

#### Supporting Data:

- ⇒ **83%** of business ranked the Availability of Labour as *Very Important* in ensuring that their business remains competitive
- ⇒ **60%** of business identified the Availability of Skilled Labour as a Barrier to business growth.
- ⇒ **29%** of businesses identified the Availability of Unskilled Labour as a Barrier.
- ⇒ **59%** of businesses rate the Availability of workers in the area as *Fair* or *Poor*
- ⇒ **49%** rate the Stability and Quality of workers in this area as *Fair* or *Poor*
- ⇒ **38%** of businesses indicated that they are unable to recruit sufficiently qualified employees
- ⇒ **29%** of businesses have difficulty retaining employees

**Objective:** To meet employer demands for Skilled and Unskilled Labour

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ⇒ Increase Youth Retention rates
- ⇒ Increase employee skill level
- ⇒ Attract Skilled Trades School to Perth County
- ⇒ Promote existing opportunities for skills training
- ⇒ Initiate a Student Retention Program
- ⇒ Initiate a “Perth County Wants You” campaign
- ⇒ Connect businesses with Educators
- ⇒ Support the Regional Technical Skills Program
- ⇒ Support and promote programs such as Certification Day, the Skilled Trades Education Partnership, and more.

#### Partnerships:

- ◆ County of Perth Economic Development Department
- ◆ Perth County Manufacturers Association
- ◆ Technical Training Group
- ◆ Avon-Maitland District School Board
  - Ken Bailey at Listowel District Secondary School
  - Mark Roth at Stratford Northwestern Secondary School
- ◆ Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board
  - Tim Martens at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School
- ◆ Perth CFDC
- ◆ Employment Agencies
- ◆ Service Canada

**Recommended Timeframe:** September 2008 through June 2009

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 3—Communication

#### Supporting Data:

“There should be a better discussions with local business people. Focus on the retention of existing business.”

“Local government committees should have more business people involved. They should be more progressive in their approach to the community”

“The lack of communication causes us a lot of extra work.”

⇒ **56%** of businesses Don't Know if the community has an Economic Development Plan

⇒ **41%** of businesses rate Support from the Municipality as Fair or Poor

**Objective:** Improve communication between businesses, business organizations, and Municipal Government

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ⇒ Conduct a Focus Group to determine what information business owners need to know
- ⇒ Provide and promote a central point of contact (Economic Development Department)
- ⇒ Prepare and distribute a municipal newsletter
- ⇒ Promote existing resources for business
- ⇒ Create and promote a website with up-to-date news, information, and links to provincial and federal government information

#### Partnerships:

- ◆ County of Perth Economic Development Office
- ◆ Member Municipalities
- ◆ MP and MPP offices
- ◆ Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Manufacturing Association

**Recommended Timeframe:** September 2008

## Action Plans

### Strategy # 4—Training

#### Supporting Data:

“The Cost of training through community colleges is going through the roof .”

Businesses identified the following areas of training for their existing employees:

Training Topic	Businesses identifying need
Working with Others	73%
Health & Safety	71%
Quality Assurance	64%
Supervisory	59%
Customer Service	58%
Written Communication	56%
Oral Communication	52%
Sales & Marketing	43%
Computer Software	42%
Numeracy	41%
Reading	33%
Computer Hardware	31%
Financial Management	30%

**Objective:** To provide existing employees and employers with affordable, meaningful, value-added, local training opportunities

#### Recommended Actions & Initiatives:

- ⇒ Provide opportunities for day, evening, weekend, and online training
- ⇒ Encourage employers to offer cost sharing programs to employees
- ⇒ Support and promote programs such as Certification Day, MedQuest, DocFest, the Skilled Trades Education Partnership, and more.
- ⇒ Attract funding for training facilities
- ⇒ Attract Skilled Trades School to Perth County
- ⇒ Promote existing opportunities for skills training

#### Partnerships:

- ◆ Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Manufacturing Association
- ◆ Technical Training Group
- ◆ BGHPGT Training Board

**Recommended Timeframe:** Initiate in September 2008

## Conclusion

As we complete this second phase of the Perth County BR+E Project, we acknowledge that there are many initiatives to be undertaken.

While there are distinct differences in the data results between 2007 and 2008, it is interesting to recognize the similarities in issues and concerns between the two sectors. Both the Retail/Business Services Sector, and the Manufacturing/Industrial/Trades Sector struggle with Workforce Development. Both sectors identified Training and Business Support as a much needed area of focus. Both sectors have identified Communication as a key issue. Both sectors have identified a need for an Economic Development Plan.

At the end of 2007, this Task Force encouraged the County and Member Municipalities to consider the creation of an Economic Development Department. It is encouraging to note that in early 2008, an Economic Development committee was created, and in July of 2008, an Economic Development Coordinator began working on the implementation of these BR+E strategies.

In this new position, the Economic Development Coordinator will work closely with County and Municipal Council and Staff to:

- ⇒ Attract new Investment to Perth County
- ⇒ Provide Business Support to existing business
- ⇒ Facilitate the expansion of existing businesses
- ⇒ Focus on Downtown and Community revitalization and beautification projects
- ⇒ Work toward increasing Youth Retention rates and improve Skill Development

As in 2007, there is a great deal of work ahead. It is encourage to see however, that many groups and individuals have already taken an active interest in implementing changes as a result of the information gathered through BR+E.

It has been a pleasure to speak with so many business owners who have been willing to share of their time and their concerns. It is obvious to see the entrepreneurial and community pride that our business owners have.

We are extremely proud of our many volunteers who have made this project so successful. You have made a significant investment in the future of your community.

I applaud the County of Perth and the four Member Municipalities for launching this BR+E initiative. This information has established a firm foundation for future growth and development. This has been a thrilling project to be a part of. Thank you for the opportunity to represent Perth County as Project Coordinator.

~ Bernia Wheaton  
BR+E Project Coordinator

## Task Force Team

The Task Force Team included representatives from each geographic region of the County. The members of this team came from a variety of backgrounds, including business owners, elected officials, educators, and community members. The Task Force met monthly throughout the duration of the project and continue to meet as they oversee the implementation of the resulting Action Plans.

The Task Force acted as a much needed Resource Network during the project, responded to Red Flag and other critical issues resulting from the business visits, and maintained an outstanding level of confidentiality throughout the project.

### **County of Perth Task Force Team Members:**

Ed Hollinger, Mayor, North Perth

Jeff Bannerman, Councillor, North Perth

Gayle Ritter, Retail Merchant, Chocolates on Main

David Hicks, Retail Merchant, Gemini Jewelers

Barbara Mallard, Citizen, Listowel

Rick Banks, General Manager, Mornington Communications

Mary Pines, Shakespeare Branch Manager, Mitchell District Credit Union

Bruce Aitcheson, Citizen, Shakespeare

Bob McTavish, Councillor, Perth East

Darryl Seigner, Councillor, West Perth

Susan Young, Business Studies Teacher, Mitchell District High School

Bert Vorstenbosch Jr., Councillor, West Perth

Bob McMillan, Councillor, Perth East

Bob Nothof, Robica Forman Tank Ltd.

Fred Groenestege, FGC Limited

Mary McIntosh, Citizen, Perth South

Ray Harsant, Stratford

Ria Colquhoun, CAO, County of Perth

Jaret Henhoeffter, General Manager, Perth CFDC

Nancy Ross, BR+E Consultant, OMAFRA

Bernia Wheaton, Project Coordinator

Nancy Rothwell, Coordinator of Volunteers

Judi Kennedy, Administrative Assistant

Cheryl Ruby, Project Administrator

Jessica Allin, Stratford Northwestern Co-op Student

## Volunteers

Our Volunteer Visitors were individuals with an active interest in business at the local community level. These volunteers were responsible for visiting businesses to conduct interviews, as well as inputting the resulting data into the BR+E online system. Each volunteer served in excess of 25 hours each, during the course of this project. We are truly thankful for their energy, dedication and commitment to confidentiality.

### **The Perth County Volunteers:**

Rebecca Schildroth

Sylvia Trudeau

Barbara Mallard

Kathy Newbigging

Tami Chauvin

Sherri McTaggart

Bonnie Buchanan (LDSS Co-op Student)

Jessica Allin (Stratford Northwestern Co-op Student)

Amos Gerber

Bill Coulter

Susan Young

Judy Wood

Bert Vorstenbosch Jr.

Jaret Henhoeffter

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The Province of Ontario