



# Business Owner Survey

November  
**2011**

The survey results are a key component in the Downtown Revitalization Project. The key components of this initiative are to build community collaboration, promote market-driven business development, enhance built and natural environment and to promote a more lively and viable commercial area.



**DRAFT REPORT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- ❖ 31% of downtown businesses have been in operation for over 10 years
- ❖ 48% of respondents have operated a business downtown for between 3-10 years (24% between 3-5, 24% between 5-10)
- ❖ 67% of businesses rent their downtown building as opposed to own
- ❖ 23 of the surveyed businesses operate as a sole proprietorship while 21 are incorporated, 6 Family Owned, 5 Franchise and 2 Partnerships
- ❖ The vast majority of business owners (98%) are involved in day-to-day operations
- ❖ 74% of business owners work more than 40 hours per week at their businesses
- ❖ The top three issues businesses have highlighted is: shortage of parking spaces, issues with parking enforcement and availability of parking
- ❖ 63% somewhat or strongly disagree that there is plenty of convenient parking downtown
- ❖ 51% of responding businesses expressed that the resolution of parking issues would have the greatest positive impact on the growth of their businesses
- ❖ 99% of business owners somewhat or strongly agree that they always try to buy products and services locally
- ❖ 75% strongly agree that they always direct customers to other downtown businesses
- ❖ 49% somewhat agree that the existing downtown business mix helps this business
- ❖ 83% somewhat or strongly agree that downtown is an excellent place to have a business
- ❖ 52% strongly agree that they would support a new retail promotions event
- ❖ 81% somewhat or strongly agree that the look and feel of the downtown helps their businesses
- ❖ 41% somewhat agree that the building façade (or patio) draws customers into their businesses
- ❖ 49% strongly agree that their window and store display help their businesses
- ❖ 94% somewhat or strongly agree that their business is open when customers want to shop
- ❖ 93% somewhat or strongly agree feel safe downtown, even at night
- ❖ 39% somewhat agree that their taxes/BIA levies are fair
- ❖ 80% have a good or excellent impression of the community as a place in which to do business
- ❖ 25% of businesses find that they are busiest on Fridays, 26% are busiest on Saturdays and 18% are busiest on Mondays
- ❖ 34% of businesses are busiest from October to December, 25% are busiest from January to March and 25% are busiest from July to September

- ❖ 42% have a “good” general impression of services provided by the Town of Collingwood (ie. permits, bylaws, fees, snow removal, etc.) and its effects on their businesses
- ❖ 59% of businesses have not changed their attitudes about doing business in this community, 24% have a more negative attitude
- ❖ The downtown core’s visual attractiveness was found to be the main advantage of doing business downtown
- ❖ Issues with parking (shortage, fees, enforcement of bylaws) and high downtown business fees were identified as the top two disadvantages of doing business in the downtown
- ❖ Over the next three years, 18 businesses plan to remain the same, 10 are planning to expand and 3 are looking to relocate
- ❖ 58% of surveyed business owners currently track where their clients are from
- ❖ 60% of businesses participate in downtown events
  - 71% support these events by donating products or services
- ❖ 76% of surveyed businesses support downtown events
  - 49% currently track the impact of downtown events on their businesses
- ❖ 56% see downtown Collingwood as a distinct shopping destination
- ❖ 46% have identified big box stores and malls as the toughest competition for local business
- ❖ 43% of businesses responded that the majority of their customers are female while 54% can’t make any distinction
- ❖ 49% of businesses identified that their sales have increased over the last 3 years, 22% can’t identify any significant change and 15% have an uneven sales pattern
- ❖ 32 business owners market their businesses through websites, 22 use newspaper advertisements, 20 are currently on Facebook and 18 are frequent sponsors of town events
- ❖ 87% of businesses do not have issues with employee turnover
- ❖ 69% (31) of businesses would be interested in attending business seminars
  - 57% of business owners would prefer if information seminars were held during the evenings
  - 37% of business owners would prefer if seminars were offered during the Winter

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## INTRODUCTION

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In the fall of 2011, the management committee for Connect Downtown – Collingwood Revitalization Project committed to researching the attitudes and opinions of business owners and/or managers. A detailed business survey was conducted to achieve these goals and assist in the formation of a strategic plan for the downtown. In order for this strategic plan to be successfully adopted and implemented, the Downtown Revitalization guidelines emphasize the importance of including business owners and proprietors by providing them with the opportunity to participate in the process of creating Downtown Collingwood’s strategic plan. The business survey enabled the retail and service community to voice their opinions on general business practices, the existing business climate, marketing and sales, markets for business development, workforce development, information and assistance, and prospective investments. The input and information collected will be extremely valuable towards the development of short and long term goals, core components of the strategic plan. Together with the results from the Business Owners Survey, our short and long term goals will be determined from the results of several other studies and surveys, those being; the *Business Mix Analysis*, the *Resident Survey* and the *Customer of Origin Survey*.

The business owner survey is a key component of the downtown revitalization project, an initiative created through the partnership between the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Town of Collingwood and with the support of the Downtown Collingwood Business Improvement Area (BIA).

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## METHOD AND RESPONSE RATE

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The business survey was prepared by following Downtown Revitalization guidelines. Survey questions were collected from existing surveys that had been completed in pilot communities and modified to better address the issues unique to Collingwood.

The business survey was conducted two different ways. An announcement was made in the BIA newsletter in July and August informing the business owners of their options to complete the survey. The survey could be accessed online via Fluid Surveys or hard copies were available for owners to either fill out at their discretion or they could opt for an interview with the coordinator which was estimated to take approximately one half hour to complete. The coordinator spent time speaking with business owners about the importance of completing the survey and provided hard copies of the survey. The majority of business surveys were collected online (56) via Fluid Surveys with the balance (22) hard copy. The majority of surveys were completed in late fall of 2011.

A total of 78 surveys were collected from a total of 298 businesses that were open in Collingwood’s downtown at the time of survey distribution. This represents an overall response rate of 26 per cent.



## Downtown Collingwood Business Owner Survey

A minimum of 73 surveys had to be collected to ensure that the survey responses accurately reflected the opinions of downtown businesses. Having achieved this goal, the responses from this survey are valid and reliable representing a 95% confidence level with a +/- 10% margin of error. Respondents were not required to answer all questions; if they could not or did not want to provide an answer they were able to *skip* the question without providing an explanation.

Of those businesses that declined, the most common explanations provided included: too busy, lack of interest or confidence that their opinions would 'make a difference' and some were reluctant to share information. Each business owner who responded did so without having the coordinator present as they chose to use the online method, or the surveys were collected by the coordinator once completed.

All information provided by the businesses surveyed is confidential; responses are summarized as percentages or averages in this report and all others guaranteeing anonymity. Confidentiality agreements were highlighted on the surveys. The information provided by the business representative is to be used solely for the Connect Downtown – Collingwood Revitalization Project initiative.

The businesses within the identified "downtown" perimeter are located on portions of First Street, Hurontario Street, Pine Street, St. Marie Street, St. Paul Street, Second Street, Simcoe Street, Third Street, Ontario Street, Fourth Street East, Fourth Street West, Hume Street and Schoolhouse Lane which is identified in this map provided by Downtown Collingwood BIA (2010).



**ANALYSIS**

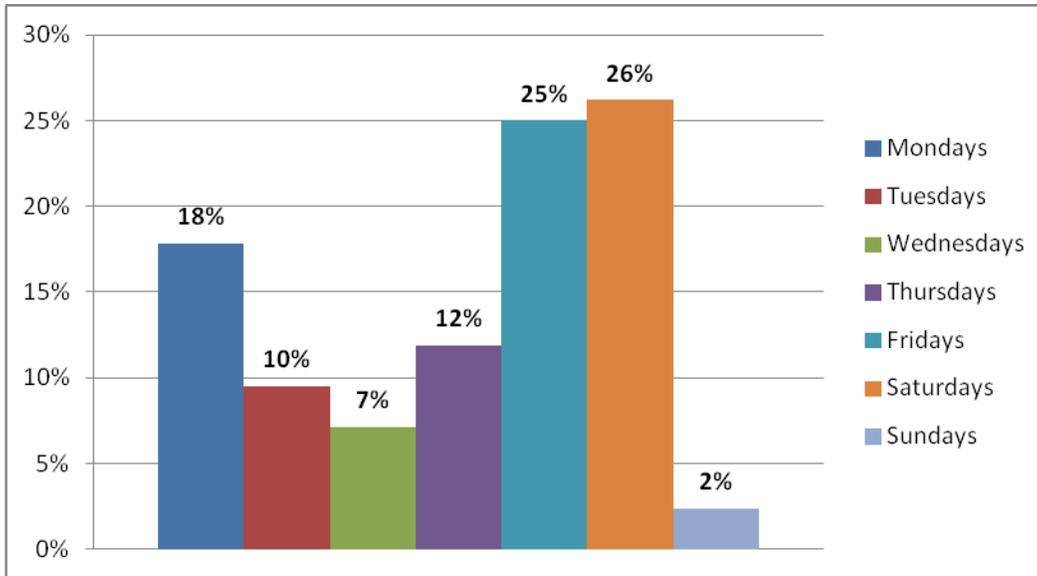
**What are the standard hours of operation for this business?**

The average opening, closing and daily hours of operation are listed in the table below. Please consider that all averages have been calculated to represent the hours of operation for the stores that are **open**. The averages have not been impacted by regular store closures or alternative holiday hours.

	Average Opening	Average Closing	Average Hours of Operation
Monday	9.28	5.89	8.60
Tuesday	9.33	5.76	8.43
Wednesday	9.37	5.82	8.45
Thursday	9.38	5.85	8.47
Friday	9.31	6.17	8.85
Saturday	9.47	6.04	8.57
Sunday	10.73	5	6.27

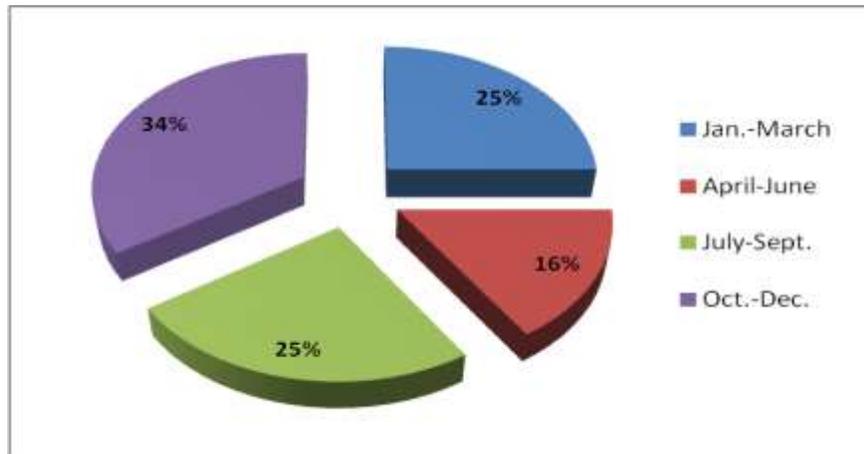
Most stores are closed on statutory holidays.

**During a typical week, is there a day or days that you would rate as your busiest? If so, what day(s)?**



Based on the results of the survey, Fridays and Saturdays seem to be the busiest days of the week. Being the first day of the regular work week, Mondays are also found to be quite busy as many downtown businesses are closed on weekends.

**Is there a season or seasons that you would rate as your busiest? If so – what season(s)?**



Most business owners have been finding that their businesses are busiest during the last four months of the year – particularly during the holiday season. The winter “ski season” and summer months are also found to be very busy as they are considered peak tourist times. Although there seems to be somewhat of a slowdown period during the spring months, Collingwood’s busy periods are fairly well spread out throughout the entire year.

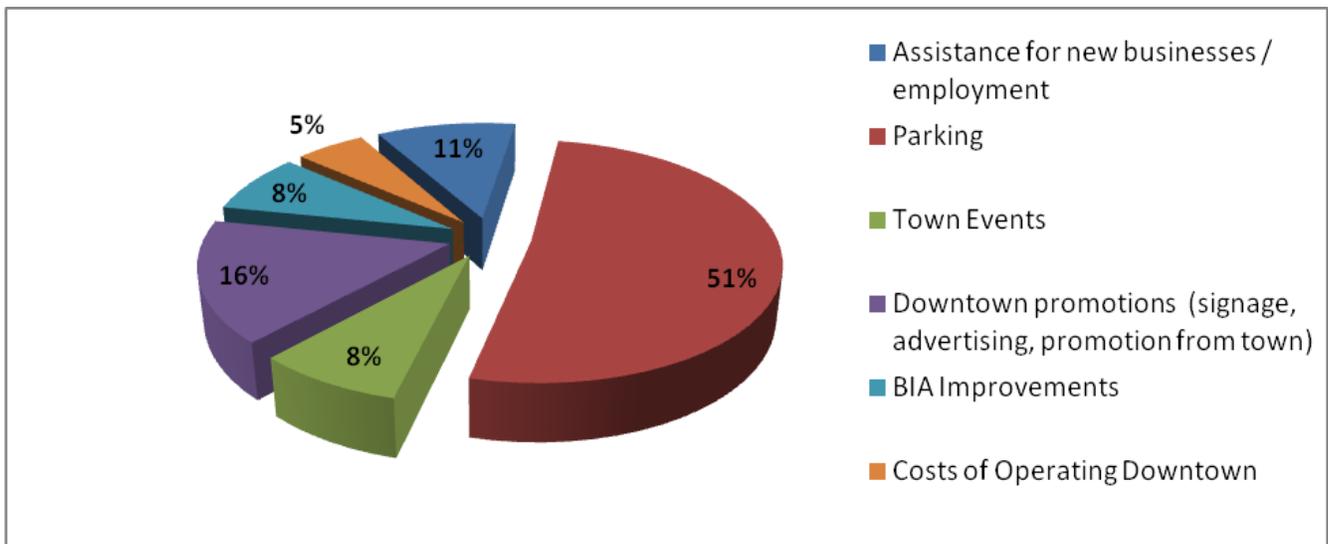
**How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement:**

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I always try to buy products and services locally.	34 (60%)	22 (39%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	57
I always direct customers to other downtown businesses.	42 (75%)	13 (23%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	56
The existing downtown business mix helps this business.	14 (26%)	26 (49%)	12 (23%)	1 (2%)	53
There is plenty of convenient parking downtown.	6 (11%)	15 (26%)	15 (26%)	21 (37%)	57
Downtown is an excellent place to have a business.	16 (29%)	30 (54%)	9 (16%)	1 (2%)	56
I would support a new retail promotions event.	26 (52%)	18 (36%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	50
The look and feel of the downtown helps this business.	16 (29%)	29 (52%)	10 (18%)	1 (2%)	56
My building façade (or patio) draws customers into this business.	14 (27%)	21 (41%)	12 (24%)	4 (8%)	51

Downtown Collingwood Business Owner Survey

My window and store displays help this business.	25 (49%)	12 (24%)	11 (22%)	3 (6%)	51
This business is open when customers want to shop.	26 (50%)	23 (44%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	52
I feel safe downtown, even at night.	26 (45%)	28 (48%)	4 (7%)	0 (0%)	58
I feel my taxes / BIA levies are fair.	5 (10%)	12 (24%)	19 (39%)	13 (27%)	49

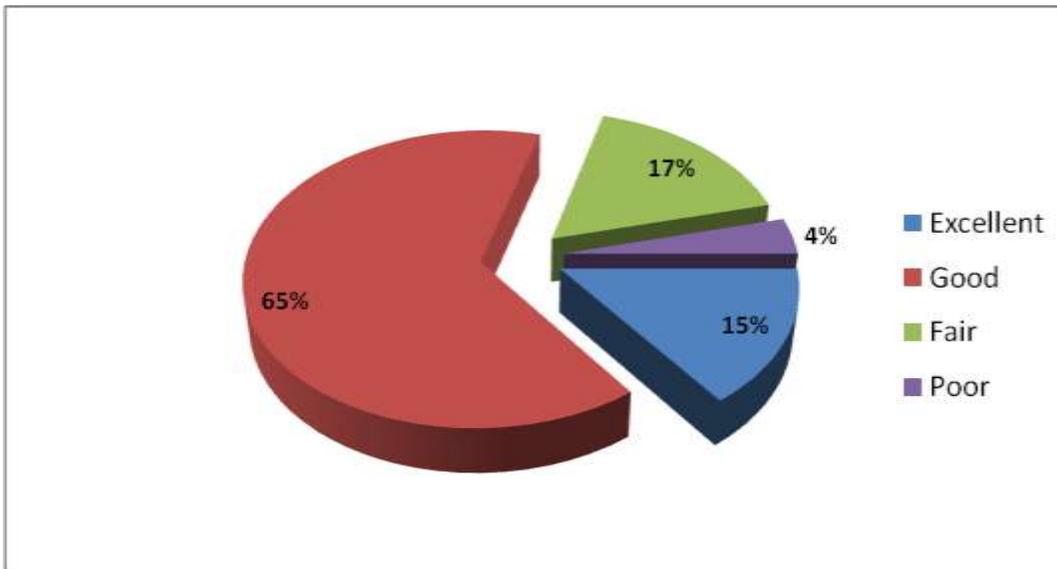
**What single issue, if resolved, would have the greatest positive impact on the growth of your business?**



Upon review of the results shown above, the vast majority of downtown business owners found parking to be the issue that is most in need of being resolved in Collingwood’s downtown. Many business owners also felt that promotions of the downtown through signage and mainstream-media marketing would have a great positive impact on the growth of their businesses. The following is a list of responses exerted from the Downtown Business Owner Survey:

- We need to get more people downtown on a consistent basis. Better parking options would help. We hear from customers all the time that the parking situation keeps them away more often than not.
- (Promote) the businesses below Loblaws and beyond the main core of the downtown
- All stores working together to promote downtown shopping. More advertising done for the downtown as a whole
- Recognition of downtown as a commercial centre
- Customers and friends are choosing not to come downtown because of parking

**What is your general impression of this community as a place in which to do business?**



The following is a list of responses exerted from the Downtown Business Owner Survey:

more support and less red tape when dealing with the town

Could be excellent with better advertising

people are generous and nice

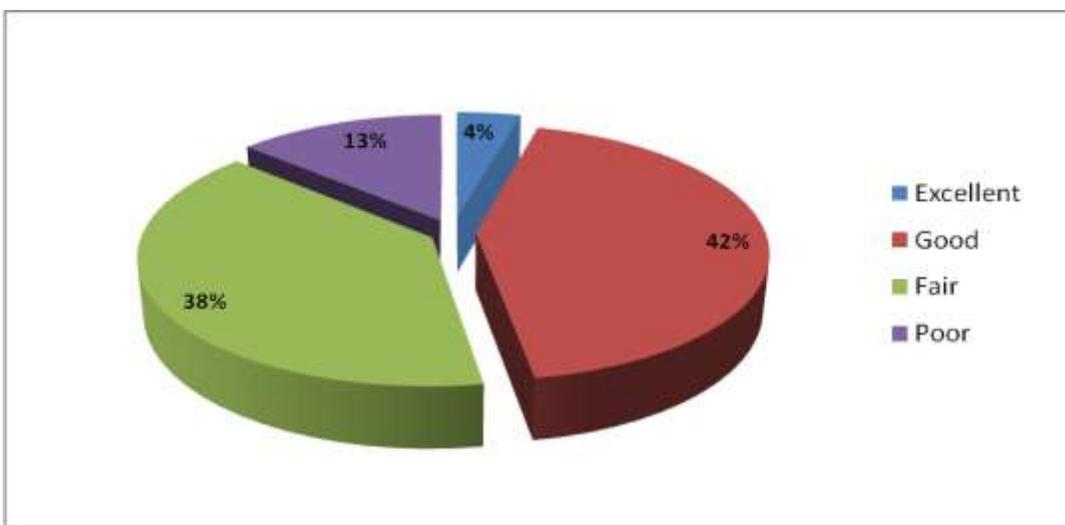
every year it gets slower

more events would help

some lack loyalty to town and shop based on price alone

used to be excellent

**What is your general impression of services provided by the Town of Collingwood (i.e. permits, bylaws, fees, snow removal etc) and its effects on your business?**



The following is a list of responses exerted from the Downtown Business Owner Survey:

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Way too many bylaws and fees

fees are high

Not consistent from one business to another, snow removal on pine street never as good as the main street

excessive by-laws and permits bog businesses down

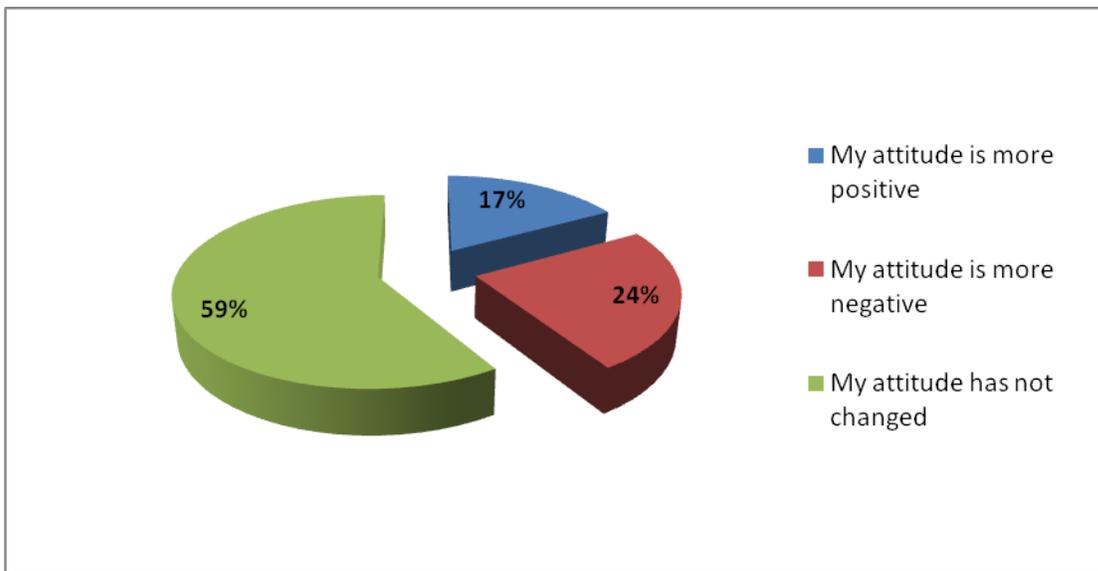
sidewalks need to be cleaned of garbage and debris more often

parking and snow removal are major problems

Permits - too much money, bylaws are not all enforced. snow removal is good

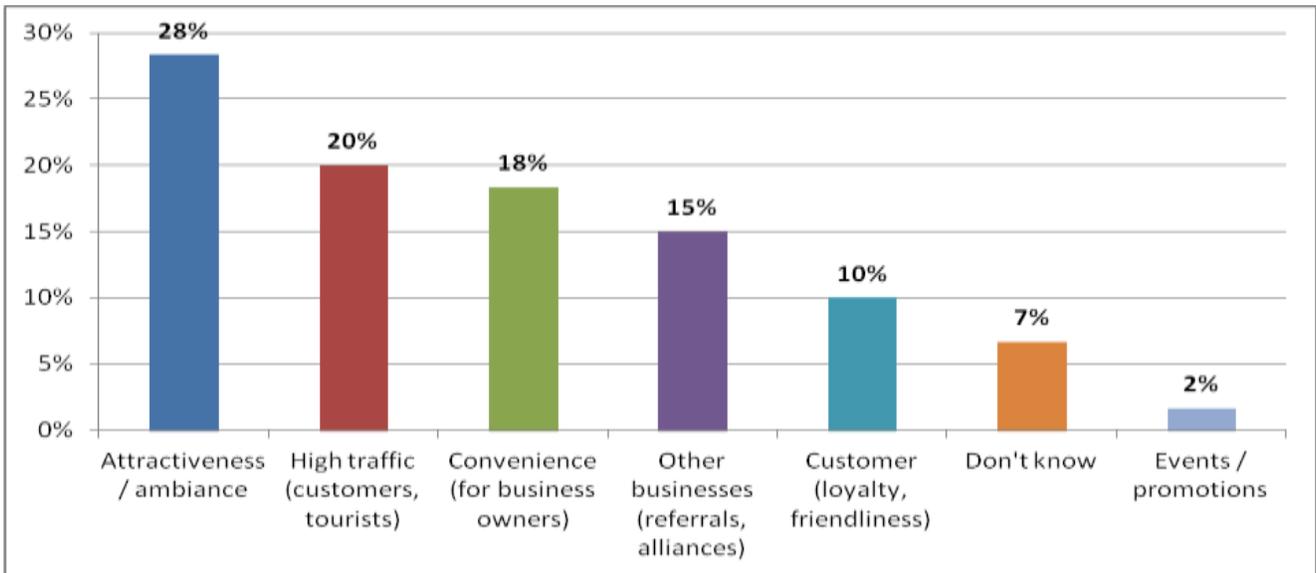
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**How has your attitude about doing business in this community changed?**



As can be seen in the results shown above, the majority of downtown business owners have not changed their attitudes with regards to doing business in the downtown core. Furthermore, it can be seen that more business owners are developing a negative attitude towards doing business downtown, rather than a positive one.

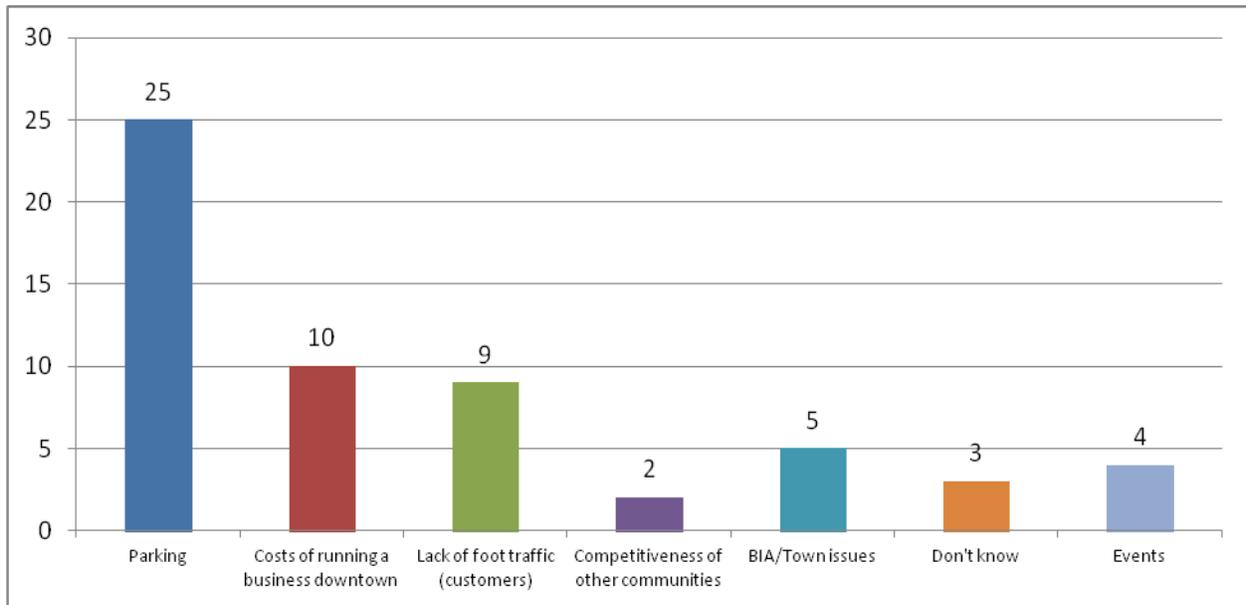
**What are the top two advantages of doing business in Downtown Collingwood?**



Most of the surveyed business owners found the attractiveness and ambiance of Collingwood’s downtown to be the most advantageous motive for operating a downtown business. Business owners also indicated that the downtown is typically a high traffic area for customers, a convenient place to open a business close to home and a suitable location for building alliances with other businesses. The following is what some business owners had to say about the advantages of operating a business downtown:

- Parking in front of business making it convenient for customers; the friendliness of the majority of business people
- There are many professional offices within the downtown area and making referrals is easy
- The promotion of events in the downtown area. However, more events may be advantageous
- Close proximity of a number of varied stores and services. Within walking distance of a number of customers
- Availability to community as a whole even those who walk as a primary mode of transportation
- Downtown is very inviting, beautifully done, nicely landscaped
- The downtown is beautiful and attracts tourists. Not very seasonal, therefore busy all year
- Pedestrian traffic is good because of attractive streetscape

**What are the top two disadvantages of doing business in Downtown Collingwood?**



The results of the Business Owner survey indicate that parking is the most common disadvantage of doing business in the downtown core. Business owners seem to be most dissatisfied with the availability and cost of parking, as well as the enforcement of the parking bylaws. Many business owners also expressed that the costs of operating a downtown business are too high and that there is a lack of customer foot traffic downtown. Many business owners offered their comments and feedback surrounding the disadvantages of doing business downtown. Some of the responses are outlined below:

Parking - with the redevelopment of the street, the loss of parking places and the new angle have created a negative, people abusing the parking and not getting tickets - means customers have nowhere to park

Very high fee and no free parking

Parking challenges for clients. Unable to do business when streets/lots are closed

Could be more events to bring people downtown and better marketing of our downtown and what it offers

By law enforcement officers need to use their discretion better

Very high fee and no free parking

Too many fees, have to even pay now to put your items on display outside

Tax levy for Professional offices

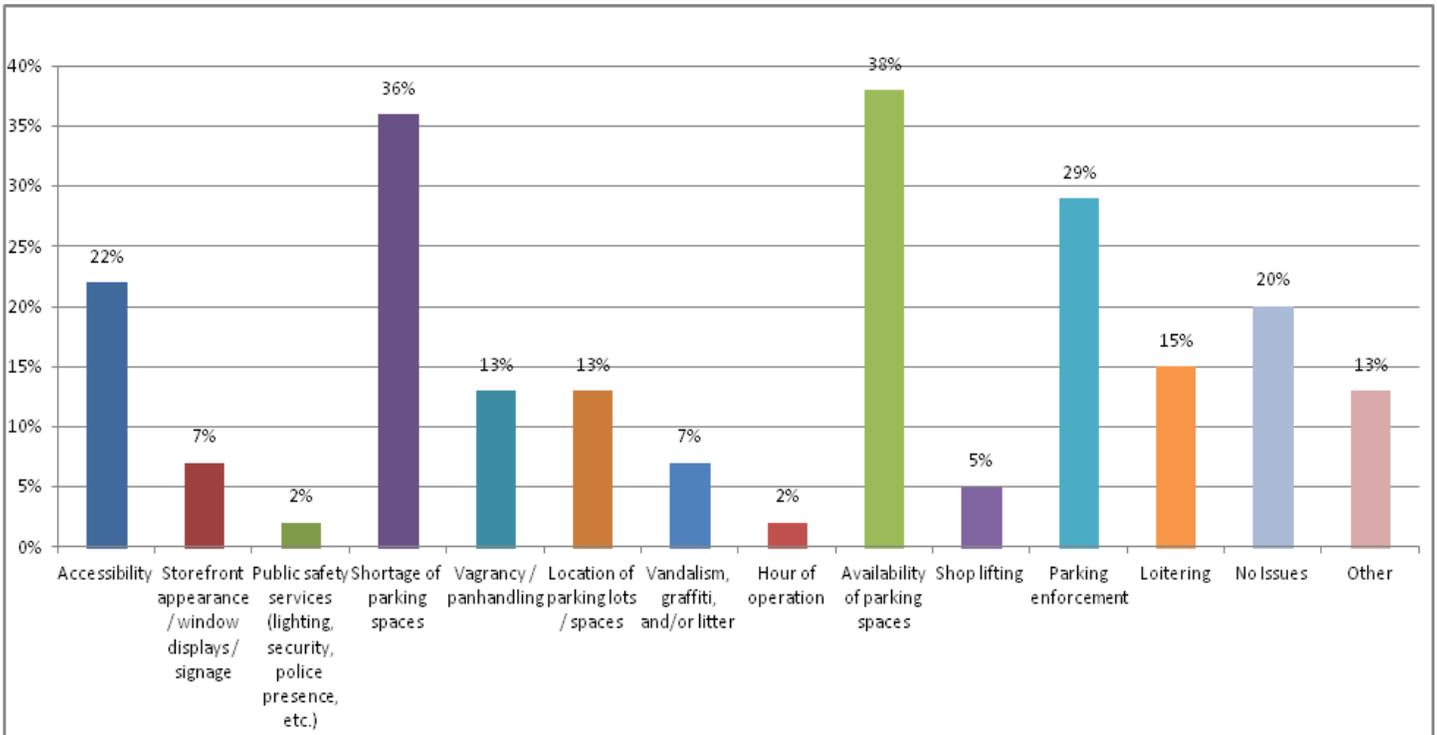
Accessibility; I would like to see more foot and active transportation happening in the downtown. I love it when the streets get closed and it is all foot traffic

High rents and the cost of advertising

Rent is way over the limit making it hard for businesses to stay in business

High taxes and rent

**Is your business experiencing any of these particular issues?**



Based on the responses above, the vast majority of downtown business owners found parking (shortage of parking, availability of parking and enforcement of parking) to be the issue that is most in need of being resolved in Collingwood’s downtown. Many business owners also felt that Accessibility was an issue.

The following is a list of responses exerted from the Downtown Business Owner Survey:

paid parking

Use of our parking lot for town related activities, used by other business staff, used by residents of the town that cannot find parking downtown as well as they do not want to pay for parking.

garbage and recycling services are non-existent and with no place for a garbage bin, this is very problematic

The parking situation is causing a lot of customer dissatisfaction; we should allow a 15 minute grace period or something similar.

Customers are VERY frustrated with paid parking. I've personally spoken to some at the mountain who plainly state they DO NOT come downtown anymore because of it

Smoking too close to buildings!

**Do you see Downtown Collingwood as a distinct shopping destination? (YES)**

Responses to this question are outlined below:

- beautiful surroundings and great stores and restaurants
- unique shopping
- Beautiful and activities in area
- Smaller, more personal stores/services
- its attractiveness
- park once shop many
- groceries/LCBO/banking
- well maintained
- Great number of varied goods and services and it is a very attractive location now
- downtown has a feel and a culture of its own
- The look and feel of Historical downtown. unique shops
- heritage, unique stores

**Do you see Downtown Collingwood as a distinct shopping destination? (NO)**

Responses to this question are outlined below:

- No...but it could be
- I see Collingwood as a distinct destination because of its beauty but not necessarily it's shopping
- It appears the patrons are window shoppers and have come to get out for the day; not with something specific in mind.
- the shops are not diverse enough they are getting better though
- not offering enough
- not enough retail
- not special enough and too many discounted things

**Please approximate what percentage of your business comes from each of the customer base described below?**

	100% - 75%	75% - 50%	50% - 25%	25% - 10%	Less than 10%	Total
In town	4 (9%)	17 (40%)	16 (37%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	43
Surrounding communities	1 (2%)	4 (10%)	23 (56%)	8 (20%)	5 (12%)	41
Simcoe County (within a sixty minute drive)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	8 (19%)	22 (51%)	12 (28%)	44
Outside Simcoe County	1 (2%)	5 (12%)	9 (21%)	13 (30%)	15 (35%)	43

**How do you support downtown events?**

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Donate products / services		71%	22
Sponsor		29%	9
Volunteer time / staff		16%	5
Other:		35%	11
<b>Total Responses</b>			<b>31</b>

Other: included categories listed below

- I attend and participate
- Through my BIA fees
- Promote in store and through advertising
- Doing whatever it takes
- Decorate the store – get involved

**Do you have an idea for a downtown event? Or comments to add regarding events?**

The following is a list of event ideas exerted from the Business Owner Survey:

Ice sculptures in winter

Something family-based downtown would be great. Like a live theater concert outside on the main street. Theater productions outside on the main street. And maybe a ladies shopping event

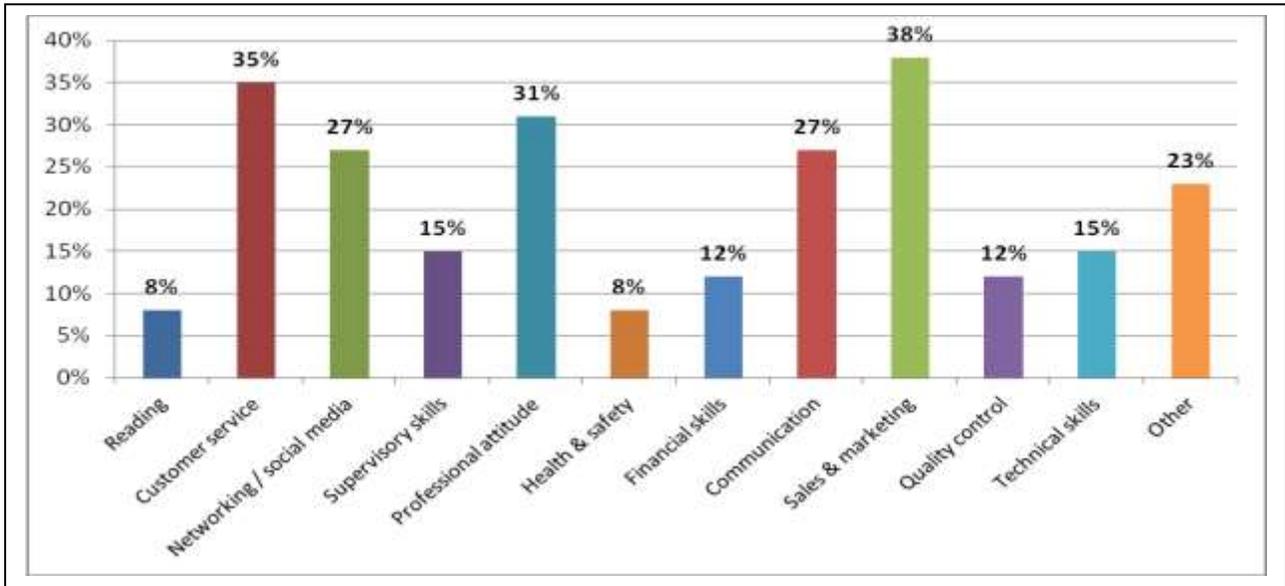
Summer and winter fests like years past. Music festivals, weekly markets on weekends. Close the main street for booths and foot traffic

Christmas event needs to be bigger (more like Halloween event) more festive and encompassing of all businesses

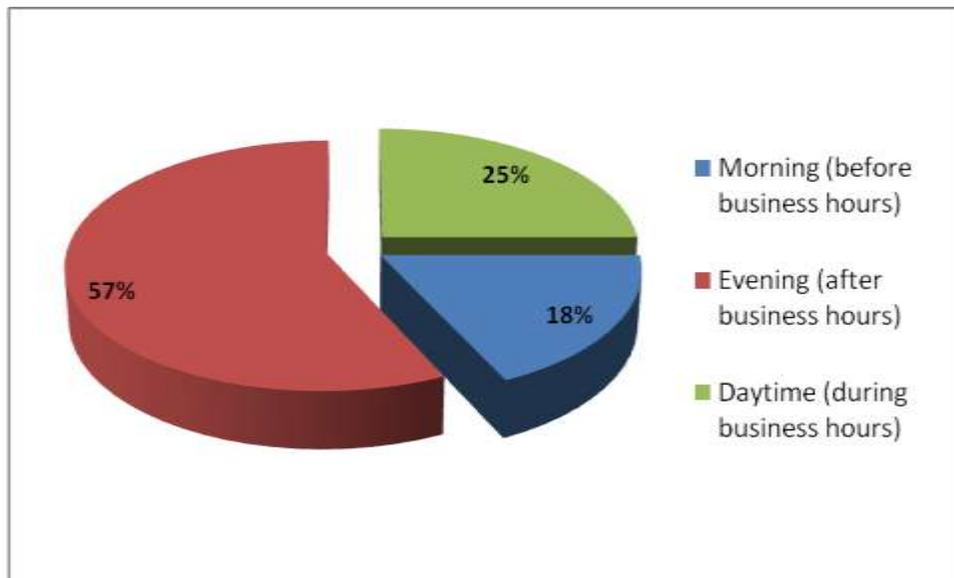
Women's event. Get them shopping. Do seminars and a nighttime event/concert

Less is more. Bigger is better. They should bring the focus to stores

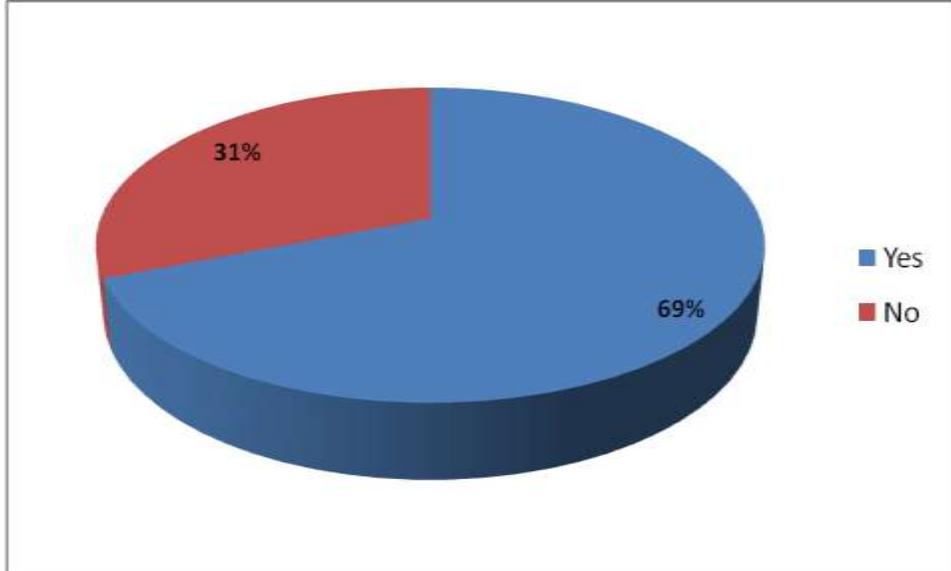
**Do Your Employees need to improve skills in any of the following areas?**



**If information sessions or seminars were offered (retail consultants, marketing, merchandising, employee incentive programs, etc.) what would be the best time to offer these sessions?**



**Would you be interested in attending business seminars / sessions?**



**What products or services would you like to purchase locally that you are now purchasing outside of the area?**

Most survey respondents were interested in purchasing the following items locally that they are currently buying outside of Collingwood’s downtown:

Reasonably priced men’s clothing

Stores that sell products that are everyday needs for customers

Better selection of clothing, especially for teens and kids

A hardware store (and) an electronics store

**What do you think defines Downtown Collingwood from other destinations?**

We aren't a destination - the mountain and the beach are destinations- we just happen to be located in-between.... Could we be a destination... You bet!!! but we have to get the non retailers out of prime retail space and have rents are a reasonable rate that will attract new businesses that will complement what we already have

The heritage feel and charm of small businesses. It is not all major store chains.

We have great independent business ownership on the main street the shop owners are creative

The number of unique stores, the waterfront and the "mountain"

good balance between tourism/local/part time residents and 4-season local attractions surrounding

The beautiful downtown and the water!

Unique shops!

It is an attractive and varied commercial area in the midst of equally attractive and varied recreational areas. Right in the middle, between the beach and the mountain.

Attractive streetscapes

friendly people

the architecture is unique and a big draw and Elvis

geographic location

heritage district, high quality restaurants/cafes

Unique stores and what attracts people to the area. Mountains, skiing, hiking, biking, water activities

**With your business mind, what three additional businesses / services would you most like to see available downtown?**

Bakery	Pet store	Men's clothing
Movie and CD store	Convenience store	Local produce
Hardware store	Quick service restaurants	Shoe stores

**Top 3 results:** Men's clothing, bakery, convenience store

**What do you see as the top three initiatives or projects that the Revitalization Project Management Committee through partnerships with the BIA and the Town of Collingwood could focus on that would benefit business in the downtown Collingwood?**

Increased signage to downtown	Smoking bylaws	Garbage pick-up
Eliminate parking fee	Increase parking availability	Fill vacant storefronts
Store cleanup incentive program	Downtown ad campaign	Continue with seasonal streetscaping

**Top 3 results:** Eliminate parking fee, continue with seasonal streetscaping, downtown ad campaign

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## CONCLUSIONS

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### STRENGTHS

Following an analysis of the preceding findings, there are a few positives that should be highlighted. Firstly, one of the core assets identified by the business community in Collingwood's Downtown is the quaint, historical and improved streetscape. Most businesses feel that we have a downtown that has a great ambience, is safe and is welcoming to visitors. Another core asset of our Downtown is pride in ownership. Many of the businesses are family operated and the owner (or at least one of the owners) is involved in the day-to-day operations. These family owned businesses are unique and can offer products and services not typically found in the south end business node. Most of our business owners are supportive of and would attend training seminars and workshops, specifically those dealing with sales and marketing, customer service and professional attitude.

With respect to Downtown events, most businesses provide support through participation, promotion and / or donations and most would like to see more events throughout the year.

### WEAKNESSES

Businesses interviewed made it clear that 'Parking' is the number one issue that if improved would have a positive impact on their business in Downtown Collingwood. The concerns fell under several categories including; fees, availability, use of lots, way finding signage and enforcement of parking. Many feel that if something is not done to improve the current situation; their local customers and tourists will simply stop coming downtown. Communication and opportunity for input with the businesses downtown as well as residents regarding parking concerns would be beneficial moving forward. Improvements to the lane/alley ways may help direct traffic and encourage the use of the back Municipal lots which are currently underused.

Our proximity to two major tourism drivers in our region (Wasaga Beach and Blue Mountain Resorts), was identified as strength however, most respondents felt that we need to capture that transient audience better through signage and marketing / promotions of our attractive heritage and business district. The installation of new way finding signage as well as the new marketing and promotion campaign(s) developed by the BIA should help with this concern. Continuous communication and collaboration with regional partners and stakeholders will also have a positive impact.

Lastly, a concern shared by businesses was the high/increasingly high operating costs. Many felt that the fees they pay to operate their business in Downtown Collingwood including levy's, taxes and rent are too high. There were a few responses which suggested that the high lease rates are having an impact on our increasing vacant space. Related to these concerns were comments about the costs / number of separate licenses required (a-frame signs, tents, outdoor merchandise table by laws), lack of garbage services and space to locate recycling bins as impediments to their business.

With respect to bylaw licenses; perhaps a business registration or licensing program could be established to provide a one stop/yearly fee to cover the various categories vs. an event or specific date permit.

With respect to vacant space; a database system could be established so that vacant space is tracked and up to date containing information about the space available, contact, price per square foot etc. This system should be accessible to the public and building owners could be given access to log in and enter vacant property information. A vacant space, business incubator program should be further investigated, which would support new start up businesses while building owners are searching for / negotiating long term lease situations. Continuous tracking of our Downtown business mix is also an important factor when dealing with vacant space.



## Downtown Collingwood Business Owner Survey

Consider: Should we break out recommendations separately?

Notes: