

Business Retention and Expansion Report August 2022



Prepared for: the Township of Whitewater Region

Prepared by: Scott Hamilton Business Outreach Officer

August 2022

Acknowledgements

The BR+E was made a success thanks to the 79 local business owners and operators who took the time and effort to provide us with their valuable insight. As well as the volunteers who helped inform the project and participate in the survey delivery. This project was only possible thanks to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) funding and their support, guidance, and insight.

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Jeff Black - Glasshouse Botanics

Chris Thompson - Whitewater Brewery

Bill McGill - Summerhill Resorts

Councillor Dave Mackey- Whitewater Council

Special thanks goes to Whitewater Council and staff for supporting this initiative:

Mayor Michael Moore

Reeve Cathy Regier

Councillor Charlene Jackson

Councillor Dave Mackay

Councillor Daryl McLaughlin

Councillor Neil Nicholson

Councillor Chris Olmstead

Ivan Burton Manager of Community Development

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Tatia Wallace

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The Business Retention and Expansion report with its suggested action plan are one of the documents that will be considered when finalizing future municipal economic development strategy and annual action/work plans. When developing strategies, consideration will also be given to future trends, opportunities, resources, and partnerships.

Background

What is a Business Retention and Expansion program?

The Business Retention & Expansion (BR+E) is a structured, action-oriented, community-based approach to business and economic development. This program helps to promote job growth and assists with setting priorities for future projects. The BR+E program is the creation and deployment of an anonymous survey & in-person interviews to allow all businesses to provide feedback to the Township. Then as part of the BR+E program, this feedback is taken and analyzed to create action plans for future business improvement in the region. The BR+E program in some form has been in place since 1998. This program is guided by OMAFRA and has been used by over 230 communities to help with business growth and development.



Why Undertake a BR+E?

There are many benefits to undertaking a BR+E project. One of the reasons to undertake a BR+E is to get direct input from businesses in Whitewater Region. The survey format of the BR+E allows for businesses to answer honestly and anonymously. The structure will enable businesses to express positive and negative opinions about doing business in Whitewater Region without predigest. BR+E also provides an early warning system for communities and allows the Township to be proactive instead of reactive to business concerns. Finally, the BR+E program highlights the importance of existing businesses in the township. Existing businesses create anywhere from 76 to 90 percent of all new jobs in a community. These local businesses are already heavily invested in this community. They become ambassadors for the Township, and it is vital to support their success and to improve the community awareness of these businesses.

Four stages of the BR+E Process

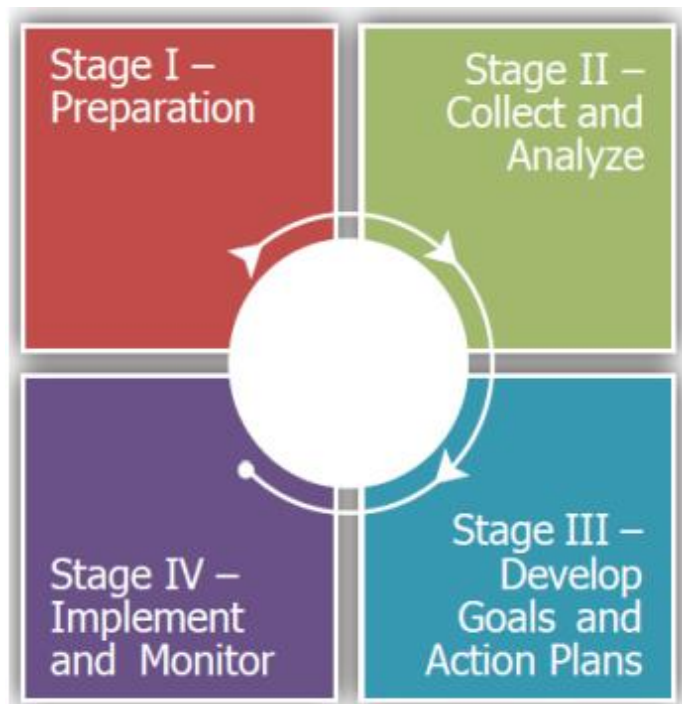
The BR+E program is broken down into four main stages. These stages are outlined below. The publication of this report is considered the end of stage three.

Stage I is Preparation. The steps in this stage include assessing community readiness, forming the leadership team, hiring a Coordinator to manage all activities, developing the project focus and work plan, recruiting and training volunteers and publicly launching the project. This stage started with hiring a business coordinator in October of 2021 and concluded with launching the business survey on February 1st, 2022. The leadership team was formed by local business leaders in a variety of fields. These business people were asked to volunteer their time to help advise the project and assist with the creation of the overall project goals.

Stage II is Collection and Analyze. The steps in this stage include conducting the business interviews using the BR+E survey, addressing immediate business issues and opportunities identified and generating a preliminary analysis of the data. As part of the program, OMAFRA provided the survey outline, which had to be adapted to the Whitewater Region and our unique mixture of businesses. This included adding community-specific questions and removing questions that were not relevant to Whitewater Region.

Stage III is to Develop Goals and Action Plans. The steps in this stage include hosting a BR+E task force retreat to identify key findings from the survey and develop goals and action plans to address the results. This stage also includes preparing the final report and action plan and communicating the results to the public and business community.

Stage IV is Implement and Monitor. The steps in this stage include implementing the action plans and selecting performance measures to monitor and track progress and positive impacts that have occurred in the community related to the BR+E project. This is the stage of the BR+E that will be ongoing for the next few years as the action items are implemented.



Timeline for BR+E

The BR+E Survey project usually lasts between nine months and a year. However, implementation and monitoring of action plans can last for years depending on the action plan and funding requirements.

- **October 19th, 2022- BR+E Coordinator Hired**
- **December 16th, 2021- Launch of the BR+E & website update to provide more details to the public and businesses.**
- **February 1st, 2022- Survey launch date to all businesses in Whitewater region**
- **April 24th, 2022- Survey official close date and collect all the paper survey copies.**
- **May 18th, 2022- Survey preliminary results presented**
- **June 17th, 2022- Community Partners Action Plan meeting**
- **August 3rd, 2022- Final report & Action Plan Presentation to Council**

Whitewater Region Business Statistics

To find out how many businesses were in Whitewater region, the BR+E used an analysis program called Analyst. According to the Analyst data provided by OMAFRA from 2021:

There are currently 402 businesses in WWR with a NASIC code. These are businesses with 30K in reported revenue, employees on the payroll, or incorporated. These include registered self-employed professionals, Agriculture farmers, and traditional businesses.

As part of the survey, we contacted businesses by phone, email, in person and using mailed paper flyers. Our goal was to contact as many businesses as possible and ensure they were aware of the ongoing project. As a result of the effort made, we reached 356 businesses totalling 88% of all registered businesses. Of which 175 were farms or agriculture-related, and 181 businesses were listed as non-agriculture businesses.

Seventy-nine different businesses answered the survey. This leaves the BR+E with just under a 20% successful response rate on the survey. The survey has a confidence level of 95%, with a 10% margin of error based on our sample size.

Objectives for the Whitewater BR+E

The project goal was to create a strategic BR+E Action Plan to assist local industry leaders in retaining employees and creating new jobs in a post covid environment while also identifying business enhancement opportunities to elevate our local economy. To this end, six main objectives were determined to help focus the project and guide the survey questions to answer these objectives. The volunteer leadership team created these objectives with assistance from Whitewater staff to outline themes that the business community would like to see. These objectives cover a broad range of the Township's short- and long-term goals.

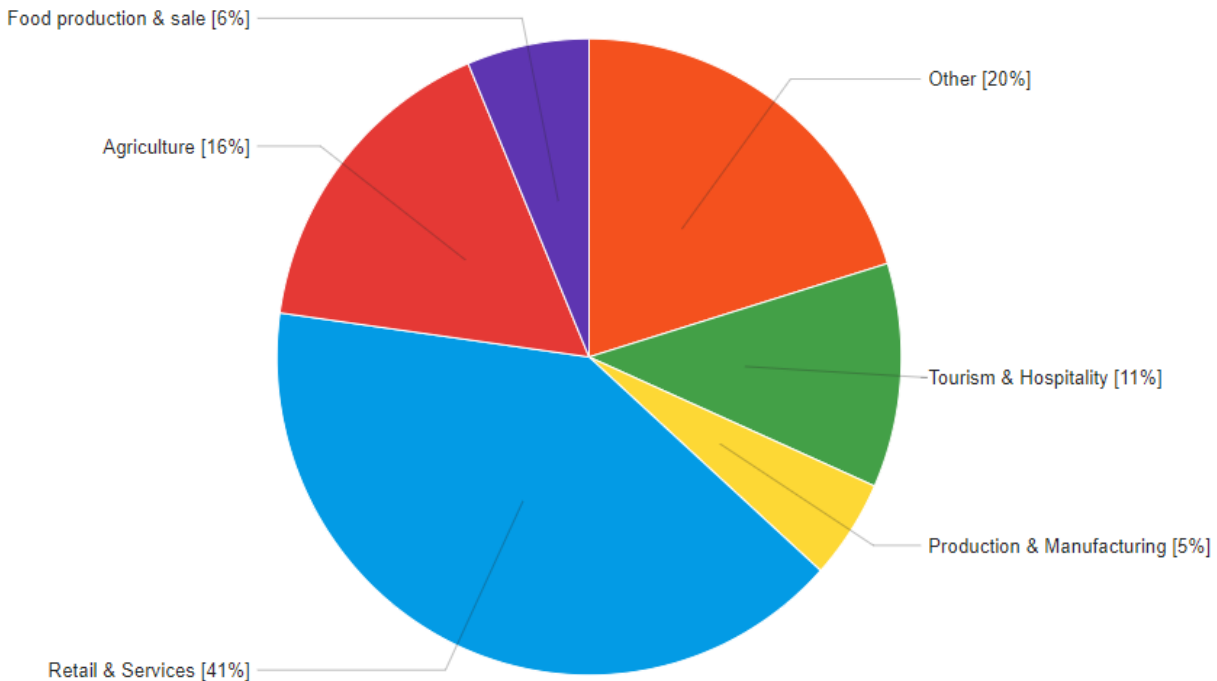
The Objectives of the project are to:

1. Increase the competitiveness of businesses within the Township.
2. Enable business development, investment, and job creation.
3. Identify the positive and negative attributes of the community as a place to do business.
4. Establish and implement a strategic action plan to support existing businesses.
5. Build and improve relations with existing businesses and the Township.
6. Provide businesses with a resource network for communication with the Township and government funding opportunities.



Business Profile

There were 79 businesses that participated in the survey process. The survey was broken into two sections. The first section was the base survey asking general questions about businesses, community questions and multiple open-ended questions for improvement ideas from business owners. The second section was business sector-specific surveys that covered the following industries: Agriculture, Tourism, Retail & Services, Manufacturing, and Local Food. This sector mix is represented in the chart below.



Other category includes Health services, Education, Construction, Information Technology & multi-sector businesses

The BR+E survey also asked business owners questions to build a general profile of the overall business health in Whitewater. And to help understand the demographics of businesses in the region.

In Whitewater Region:

- 92% (Q8) of businesses are locally owned and operated.
- 29% (Q13) of businesses have been in business for less than three years
- 25% (Q13) of businesses have been open for more than 25 years.
- 75% (Q15) of businesses have less than five employees.
- 78% (Q19) of businesses consider Whitewater Region a Good or Excellent place to do business.
- 47% (Q11) of Whitewater businesses surveyed have a written business plan
- 84% (Q17) of the businesses surveyed have a primary market for businesses as local and regional.

- **77% (Q19) of Business Owners rated Whitewater Region as a Good or Excellent place to do business.**
- **48% (Q27) of businesses surveyed are planning on expanding within the next two years**
- **70% of businesses reported their industry as growing or being stable**
- **Finally, 94% (Q23) of Business Owners rated Whitewater Region as having Good or Excellent overall quality of life.**

General Township Feedback

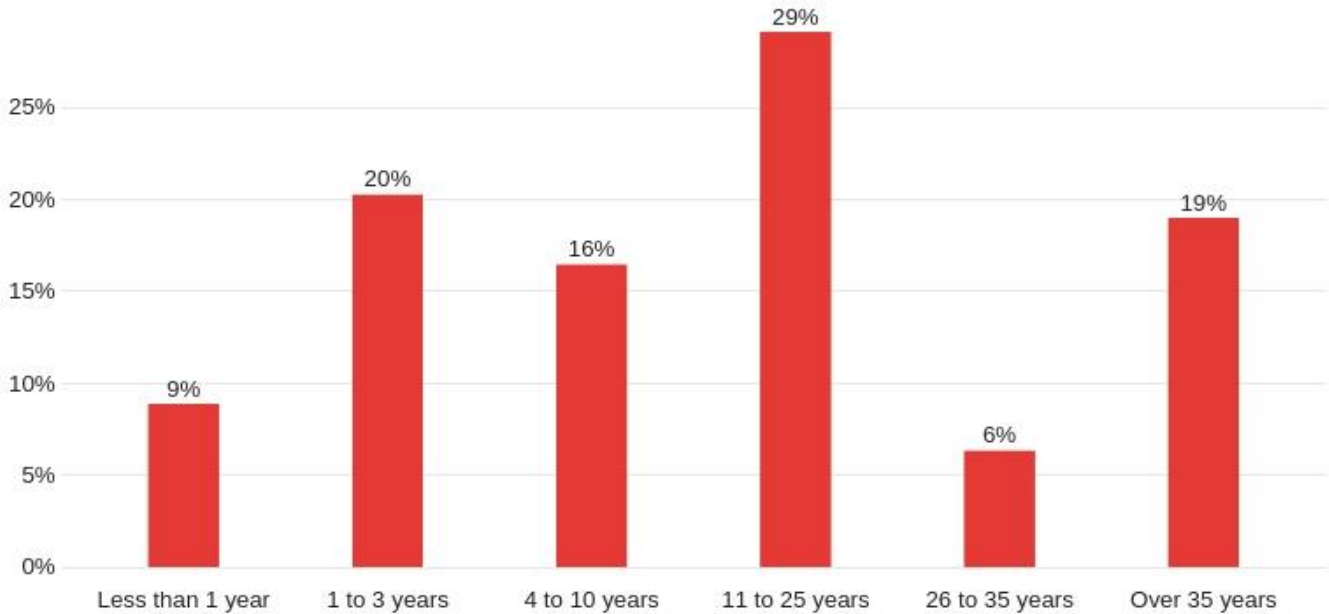
Business owners did have many positive things to say about Township services. Fire services, Library services, public parks, snow removal, garbage and recycling and building permits were all rated as good to excellent. In contrast, business owners felt Whitewater Region could do better with street and road repair and access to the Ottawa River whitewater rapids. Many business owners thought the BR+E was a significant first step in better communication with the Township and were very appreciative of being included in the survey process.

Overall, businesses were either looking to remain the same over the next two years or were looking to grow. As part of this survey, only 33% of businesses reported having any sort of succession planning in place. Of the few businesses looking to downsize or close their doors in the next two years, it was almost all reported due to age and looking to retire soon.



Q13 - How many years has your business been in operation in this community?

79 Responses



Task Force Meeting

The aggregated survey data was then presented at the BR+E task force meeting. This meeting took place on June 17th with members of the BR+E leadership team, local business owners, Whitewater Council members and Economic development partner organizations in Renfrew County. At the task force meeting, there was good attendance from a wide range of local organizations. Organizations in attendance were: Renfrew County Economic Development, Algonquin College Co-Op office, ONTRAC, Community Futures Development Corporation Renfrew County, Local Immigration Partnership of Lanark & Renfrew, OFA, Labour Market Group of Renfrew and Lanark and the Upper Ottawa Valley Chamber of Commerce.

From this task force, **Four Main Focus Areas** were identified based on the aggregated data and the general comments from the survey. These areas were identified as Infrastructure, Marketing and Promotion, Business Support and Workforce and labour. After each focus area was identified, the members were broken into small groups to develop action plans for each area. These action plans were to help address the problems or assist with the growth potential identified as part of the survey.

Main Areas of Focus

Infrastructure

The business community of Whitewater Region made clear their request for greater infrastructure support. The lack of available retail space to rent was rated as poor, cellular phone coverage was rated as poor, and internet service coverage was rated as poor. Businesses are also looking for support when it comes to utilities with water fees, cost of electricity, availability of natural gas and the cost of natural gas, all rated as fair to poor in the Township. Some businesses listed the lack of these utilities and services as barriers stopping their growth and expansion.

Action plans for Infrastructure:

- Continue support for expanding the cell phone and internet access in Whitewater Region
- Continue improvement of road surfaces with trucking routes taken into consideration
- Creation of a new Business Park or Expansion of the current Business Park
- Encourage new commercial rental space creation in our communities
- Investigate a dig once policy when installing utilities
- Encourage the expansion of utility services to supply more businesses
- Support for the continued creation of hiking/cycling trails



Marketing and Promotion

Business owners reported that marketing and promotion was something many businesses would like assistance with improving. Many business owners were involved in local community events with sponsorship or donations. But these business owners were looking for additional ways the Township could get people to stop in our area and visit the local businesses. Many business owners suggested new highway signage to attract travellers and better tourism visitation options, highlighting the region's local attractions and outdoor vacation opportunities.

Action plans for Marketing and Promotion:

- Creation of a Whitewater Ambassador program / Historical & Cultural Whitewater documentation for inclusion in new welcome packages, employee training, and local schools
- Creation of new local tourism experiences (maps, brochures) that focus on Whitewater's natural outdoor assets
- More significant promotion of the Rural Rewards program and encouragement of businesses to join the program
- New Wayfinding signage program to direct visitors off the highway
- Create marketing strategies and promotional material for three distinct travel groups – Adventure tourists, Lifestyle tourists, and Vacation tourists
- Promotion of local historical & cultural attractions in the area for visitors to see
- Promotion of existing services (park and ride center, public parks, community events)
- Acknowledgement local businesses for accomplishments in the WWR monthly newsletter. (Anniversary in Business, Special events, relocations, and grand openings)

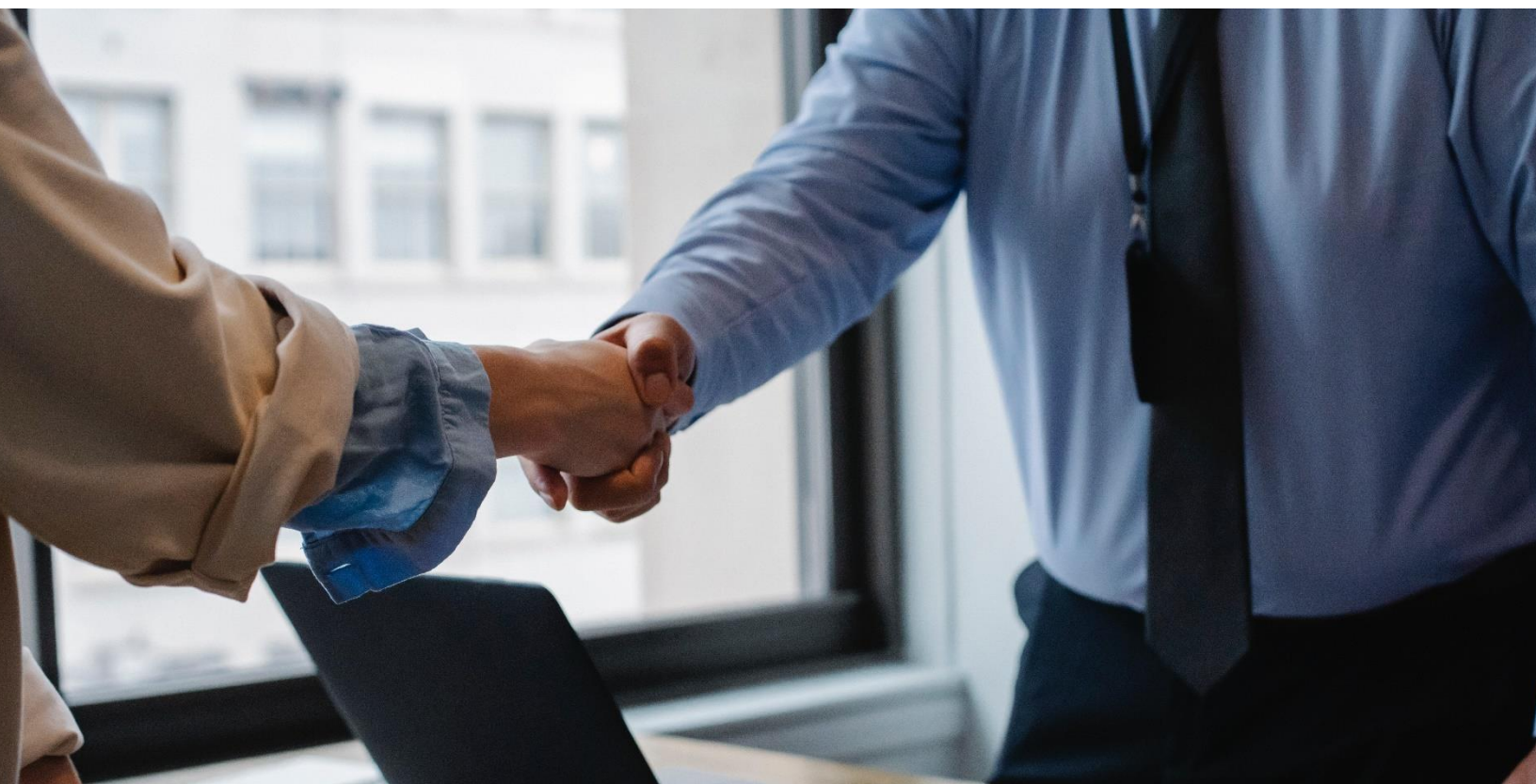


Business support

The majority of business owners rated support from residents and other businesses as good or excellent, but they rated support from the municipality as poor to fair. Businesses were looking for help from the municipality in the form of funding and grants, increased communication, collaboration, and opportunities for joint marketing, informational seminars, networking sessions and social media promotion.

Actions plans for Business support:

- Create a Business Advisory Committee that is open to all Whitewater businesses on a rotating membership basis
- Update of the business page on the WWR website- including:
 - info for new businesses
 - opportunities to purchase businesses
 - Rental spaces availability
 - Funding opportunities
- Host business networking sessions for Whitewater region semi-annually
- Partnership with local farmers' market to support local Whitewater businesses to join
- Promotion of business information sessions, marketing strategies and skills training offered by other Renfrew County Organizations
- Continue to attract new businesses to Whitewater region:
 - including outlining requirements for when a business wants to open
 - focusing on new essential community businesses (gas stations, restaurants, grocery, accommodations)
- Create clear communication between the Township, including permit requirements for new or expanding businesses



Workforce and labour

The majority of businesses reported that the availability of qualified workers was poor in Whitewater region. With the ability to attract new employees rated fair to poor by most businesses. 34% of businesses surveyed reported some current difficulties in hiring staff. However, once businesses manage to hire staff, 89% of businesses reported no issues with staff retention. And 87% say no problems with staff receiving proper training and external knowledge required to do the job.

Actions plans for Workforce and Labour:

- Create a partnership with local Highschool Co-Op and Algonquin College to promote jobs and Co-Op placements in Whitewater Region
- The Creation & Promotion of local ridesharing options
- Promotion of Central Job Hubs to local residences and businesses
- Assist in planning a local Job Fair for WWR businesses to encourage outside workers to relocate here.
- Focus on the creation of affordable housing options in WWR
- Creation of an Immigration strategy to promote WWR as a possible destination for new workers.



Summary

In conclusion, the business community in Whitewater Region has survived the pandemic, and many of the businesses are ready to grow. This protentional for growth is to be supported by the Township whenever possible. As part of supporting business success and growth, the developed action plans will be included and implemented as part of the overall strategic goals for the Township. This BR+E project provided lots of creative ideas, future protentional partnerships and critical concerns from our local businesses. Looking forward, developing more precise communication between businesses and the Township is essential to address problems rapidly. This would allow for future assistance to businesses by the Township whenever possible.



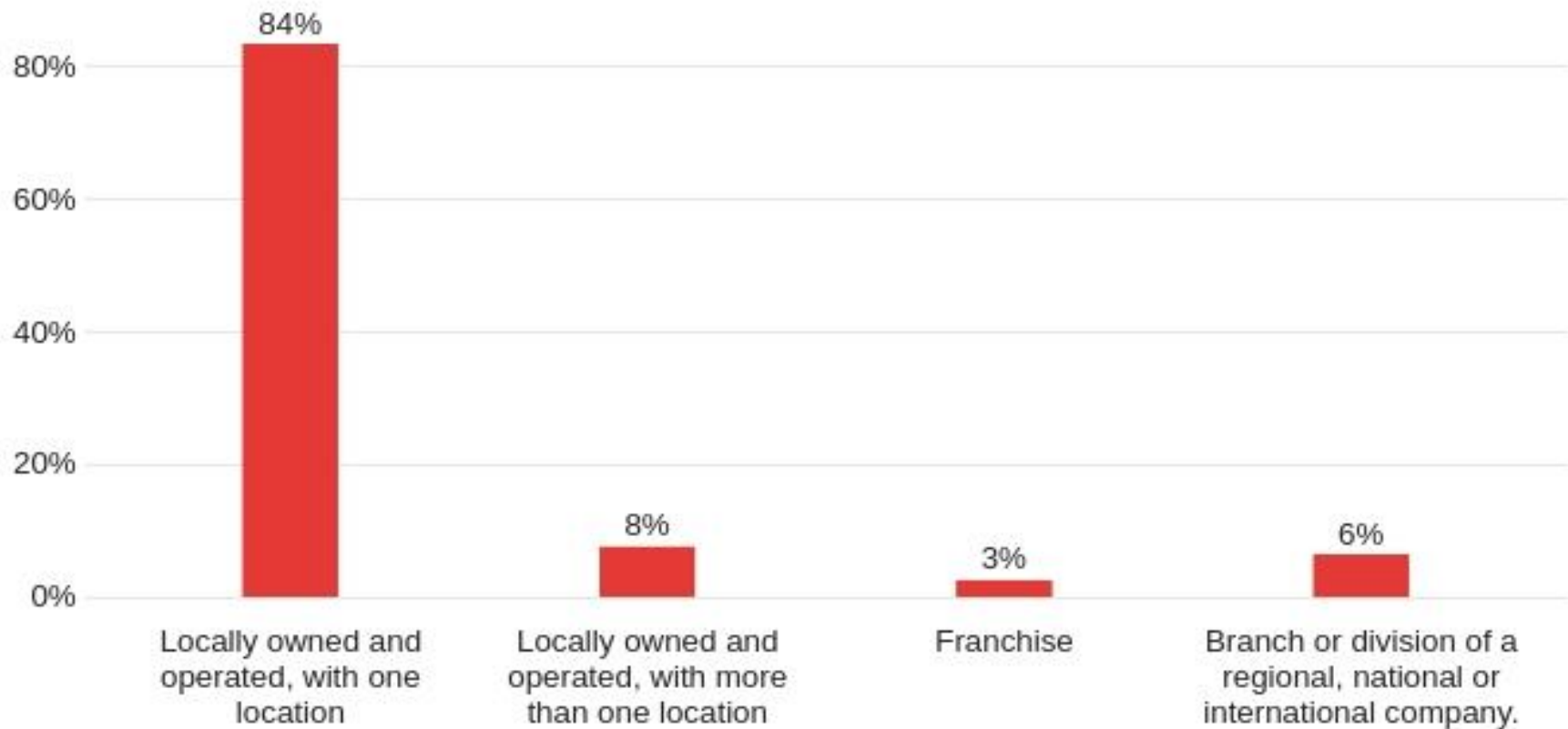
Appendices

Below are the graphs listed in the above business profile section of the report. If you would like to view the complete aggregated data, it can be found on our website. Also listed below will be the action plans chart with a cost estimate, timeline and potential partner organizations that can assist us with project completion.

Graphs

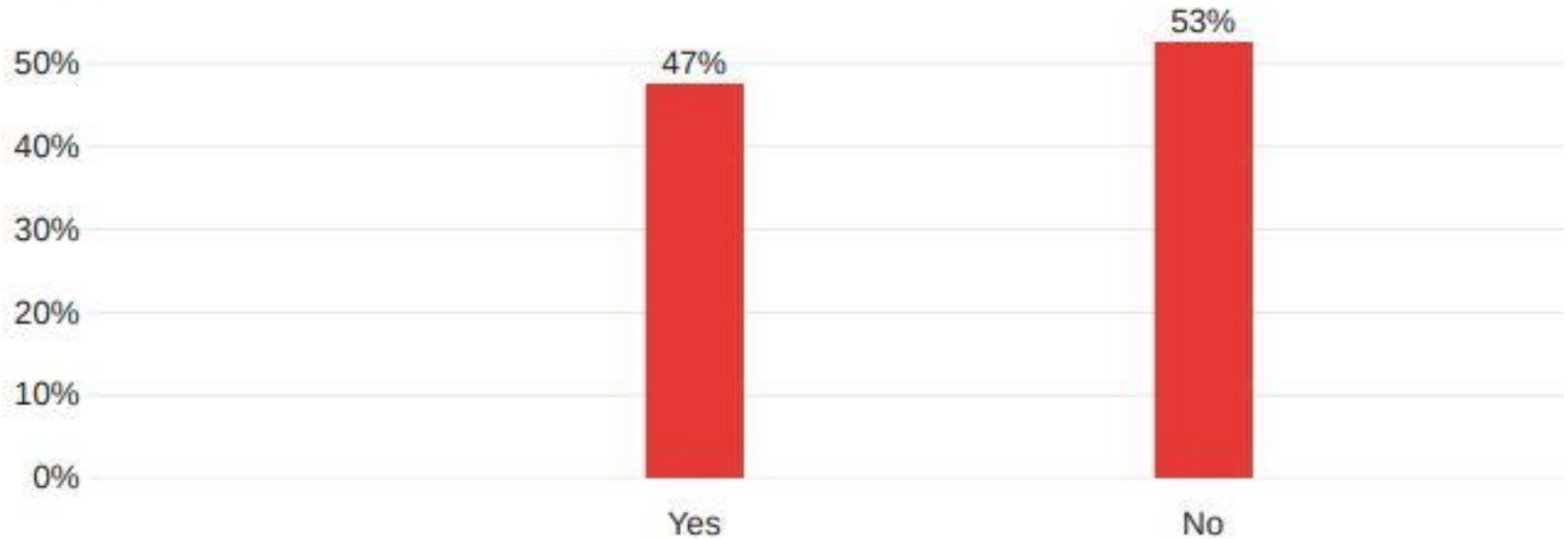
Q8 - Which of the following best describes your business?

79 Responses



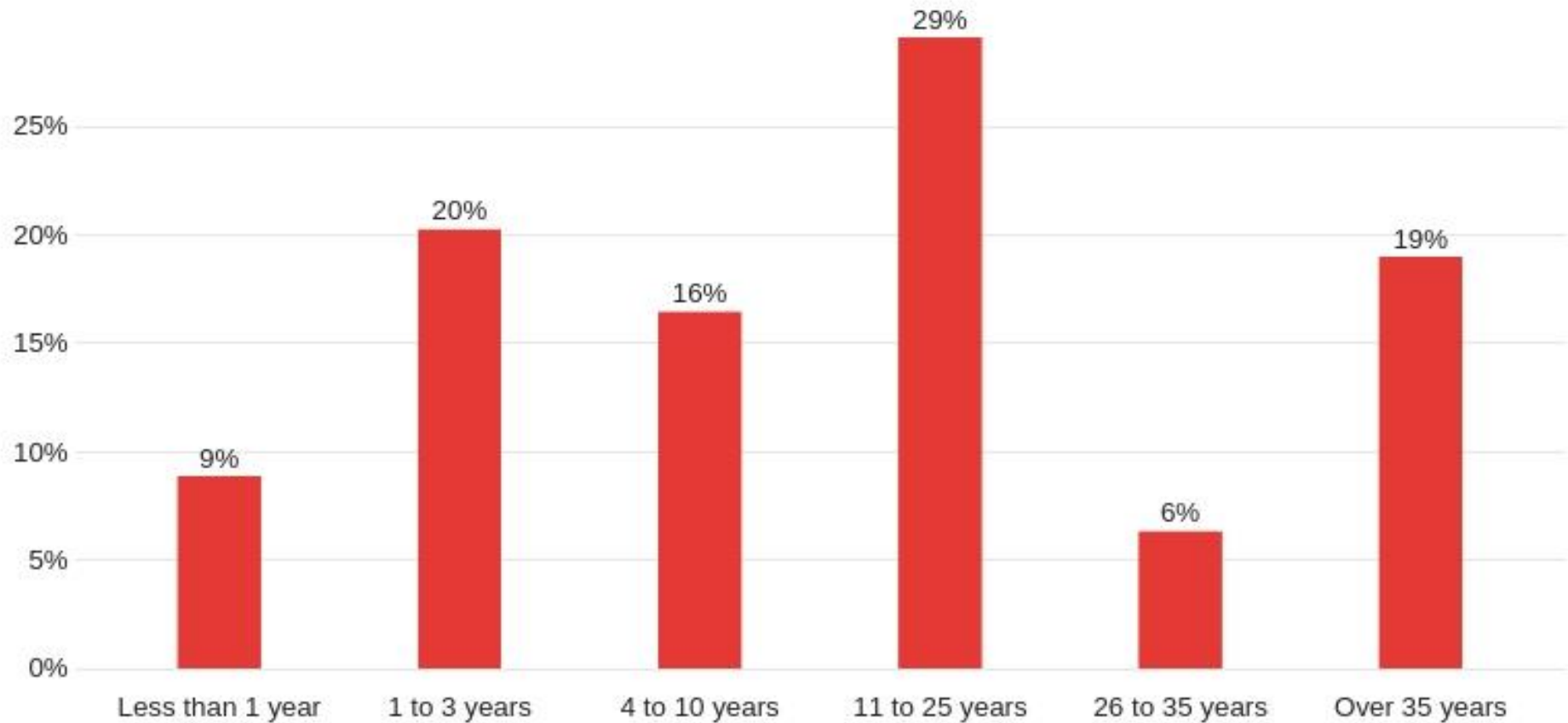
Q11 - Does your business have a business plan?

76 Responses



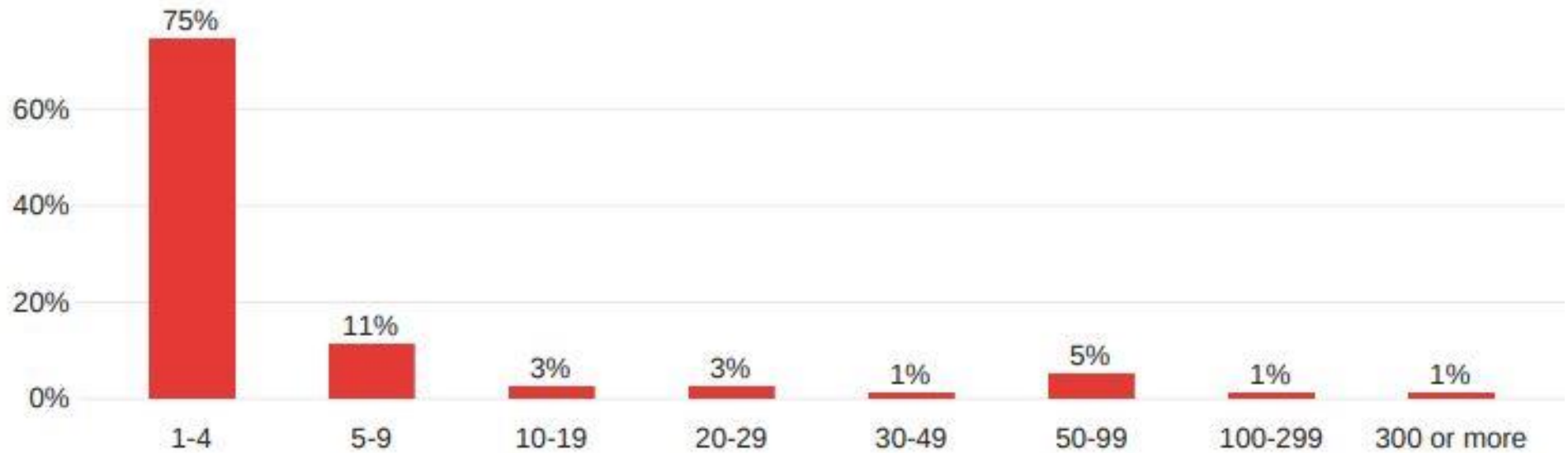
Q13 - How many years has your business been in operation in this community?

79 Responses



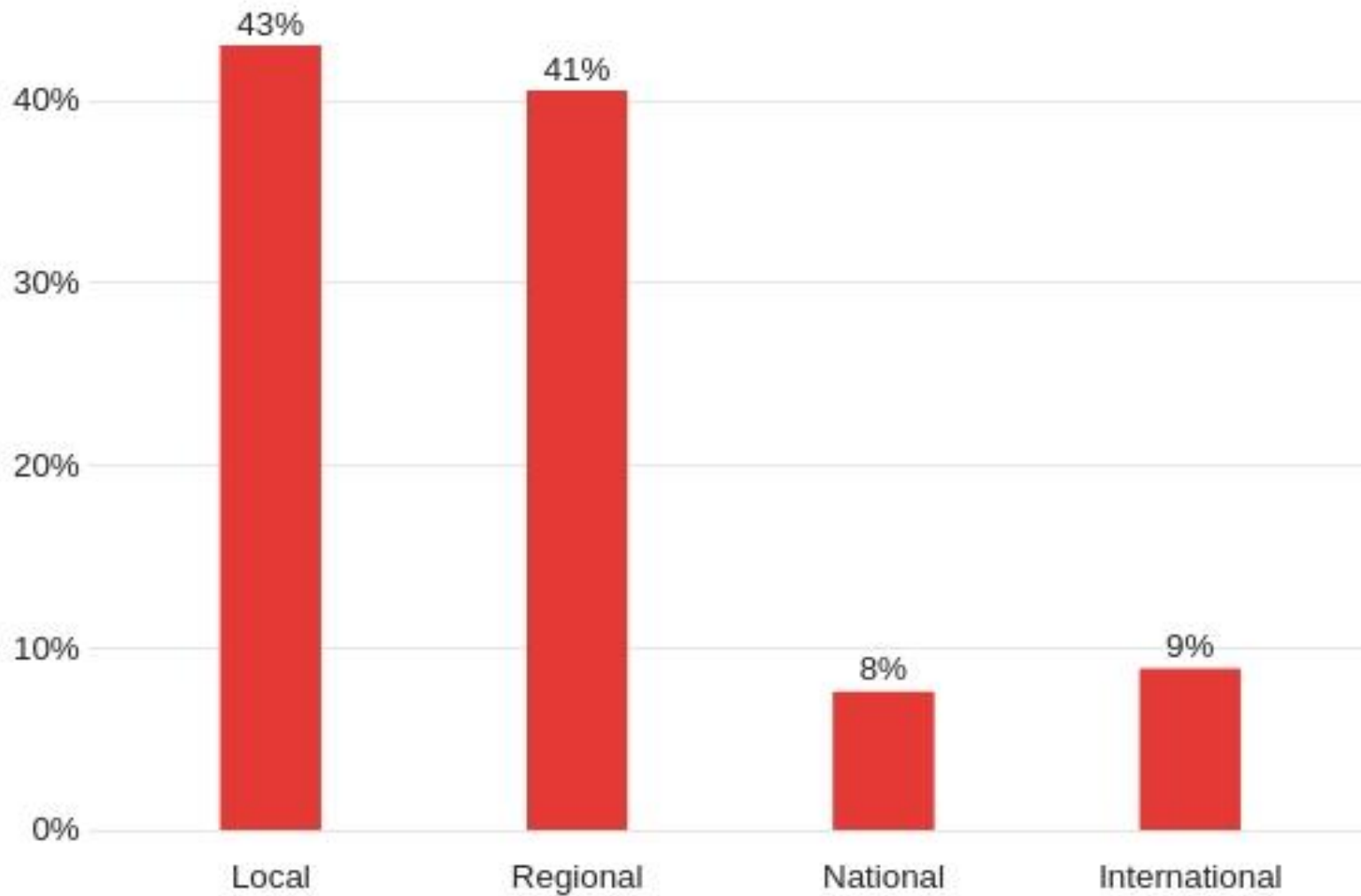
Q15 - Including owner/owners, how many employees work at this location?

79 Responses



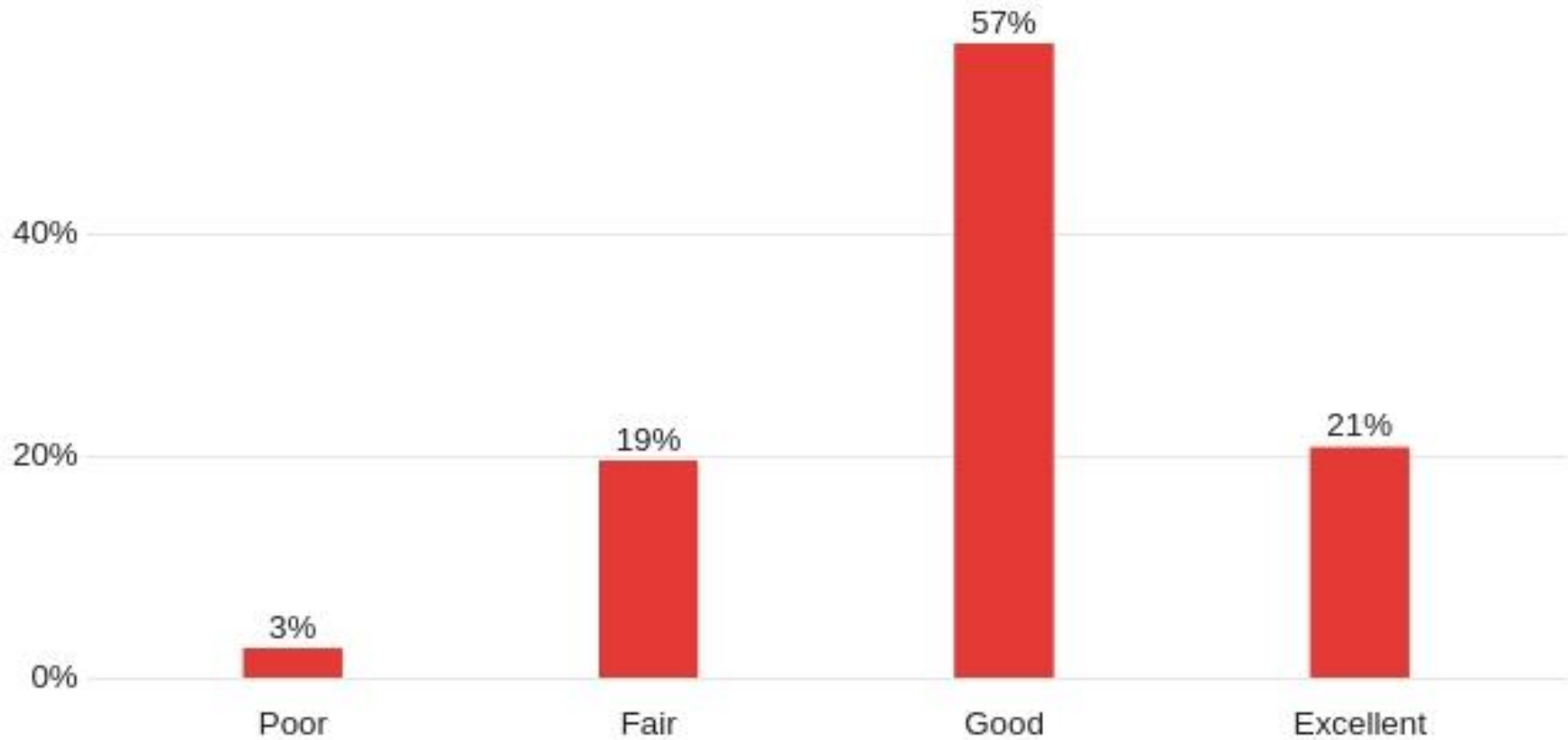
Q17 - The primary market of your business is:

79 Responses



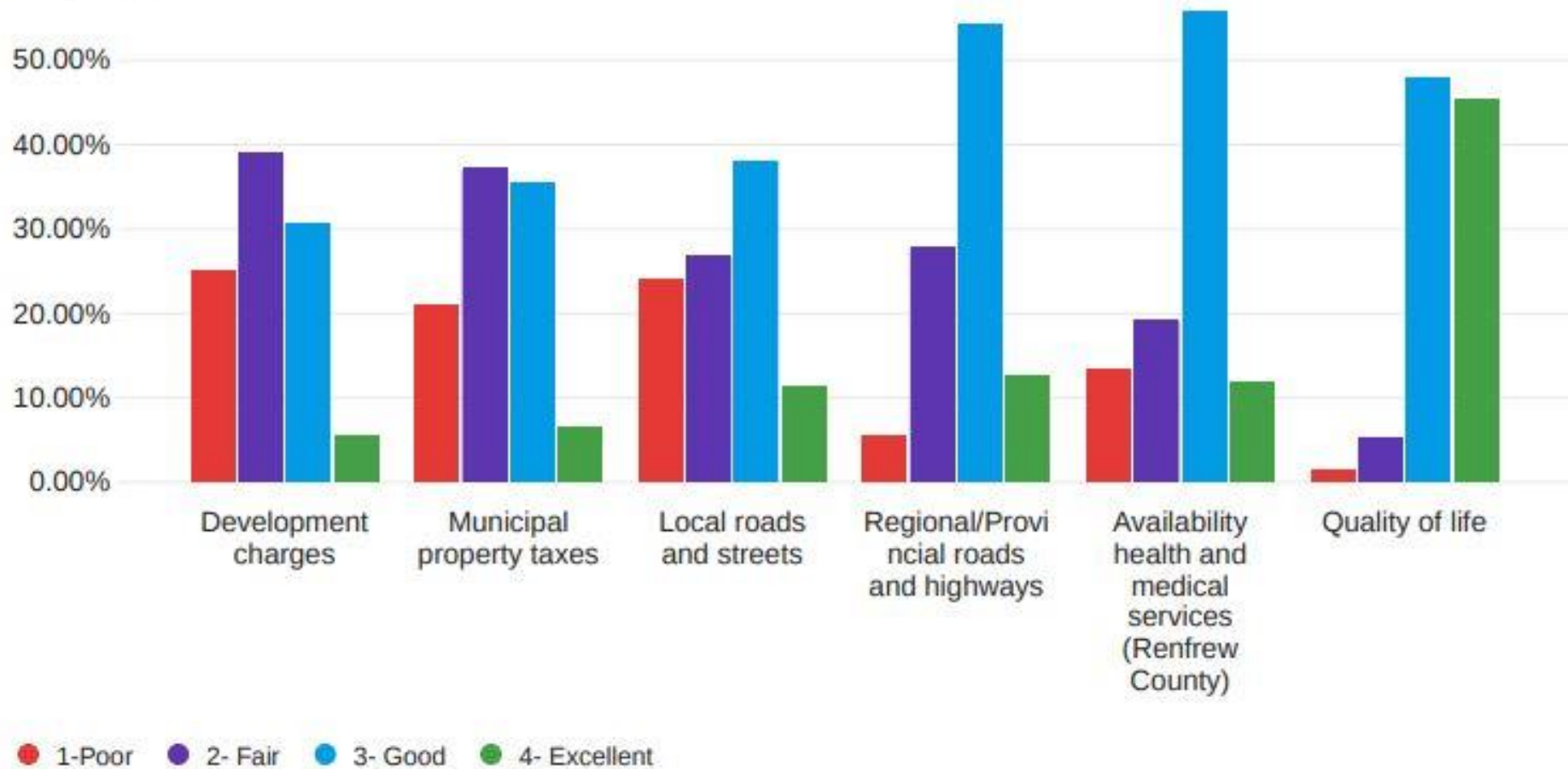
Q19 - What is your general impression of this community as a place to do business?

77 Responses



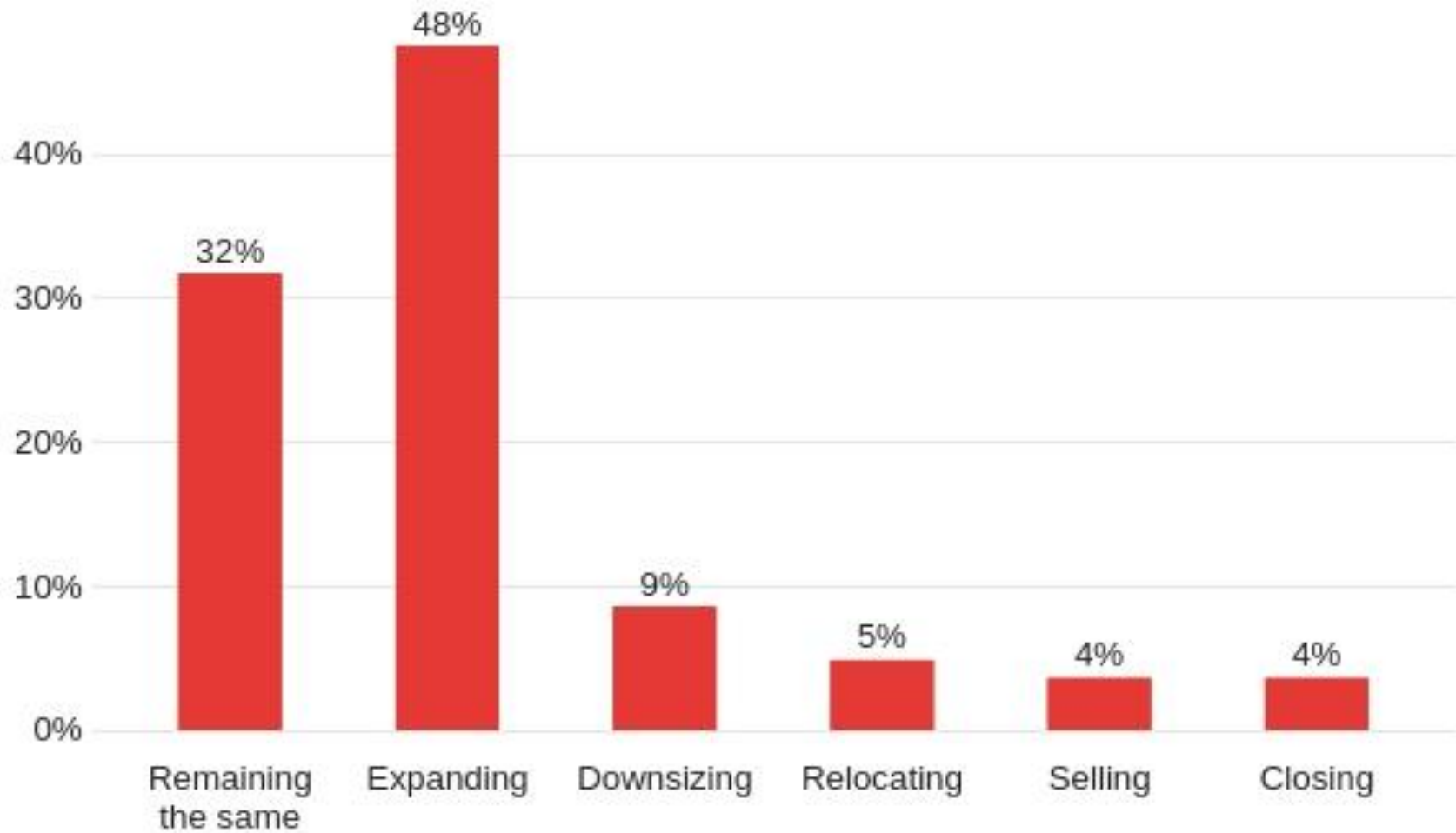
Q23 - How would you rate the following factors of doing business in this community

76 Responses



Q27 - Within the next 24 months, do you plan on:

74 Responses



Action Plans

Timing: Ongoing (the project has already started), Short term (2023-2025), Long term (2025+)

Priority: High (requires immediate attention), Medium (can be tackled incrementally), Low (future consideration)

Cost: \$ (in house), \$\$ (on-going and less than \$50,000), \$\$\$ (over \$50,000)

Partner Organizations short forms: Labour Market Group of Renfrew and Lanark (LMG), Local Immigration Partnership-Lanark & Renfrew (LIP), Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC), Whitewater Region Staff (WWR Staff), Ottawa Valley Tourist Association (OVTA), Ontario Highlands Tourism Organizations (OHTO)

Infrastructure			
Action Plans	Timing	Cost (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$)	Partner Organizations
Continue support for expanding the cell phone and internet access in Whitewater Region	Ongoing	\$	Whitewater Internet, NRTC, Rogers, and Bell
Continued improvement of road surfaces with heavy trucking routes taken into consideration	Ongoing	\$\$\$	WWR Staff
Creation of a new Business Park or Expansion of the current Business Park	Long Term	\$\$\$	WWR Staff
Encourage new commercial rental space creation in our communities	Ongoing	\$	WWR Staff
Investigate a dig once policy when installing utilities	Long Term	\$\$\$	WWR Staff
Encourage the expansion of utility services to supply more businesses	Long Term	\$\$\$	WWR Staff
Support for the continued creation of hiking/cycling trails	Short Term	\$\$	WWR Staff, local recreation associations

Marketing and Promotion

Action Plans	Timing	Cost (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$)	Partner Organizations
Creation of an Ambassador program or historic Whitewater documentation program for inclusion in the welcome packages	Short Term	\$	Whitewater Historical Society
Create new regional tourism experiences that focus on natural outdoor assets (maps, brochures)	Ongoing	\$\$	OVTA, WWR Staff
Greater promotion of rural rewards program and encouragement of businesses to join the program	Ongoing	\$	Municipal partners
New Wayfinding signage program	Ongoing	\$\$	OHTO, WWR Staff
Create marketing strategies and potential material for three distinct groups – Adventures tourists, Lifestyle tourists, and Vacation tourists	Short Term	\$\$	OVTA, WWR Staff, LMG
Promotion of historical attractions in the area for visitors to see	Ongoing	\$	Whitewater Historical Society
Promotion of existing services (park and ride center, public parks, community events)	Ongoing	\$	WWR Staff
Acknowledge local businesses in the monthly newsletter. Years in business, special events, and grand openings	Ongoing	\$	WWR Staff

Business Support			
Action Plans	Timing	Cost (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$)	Partner Organizations
Create a Business Advisory Committee that is open to all businesses on a rotating basis	Short Term	\$	WWR Staff & Council, CFDC, LMG
Update of the business page on the website- including - info for new businesses, opportunities to purchase businesses & Funding opportunities	Short Term	\$	WWR Staff
Host business networking sessions for Whitewater region semi-annually	Ongoing	\$	WWR Staff & Council
Partnership with the Farmers market to encourage local businesses to join	Short Term	\$\$	Cobden Farmers Market, WWR Staff
Promotion of information sessions, strategies and training offered by our partners	Ongoing	\$	Partnerships with CFDC, LMG and Enterprise Renfrew County
Continue to attract new businesses to Whitewater region- including outlining requirements when a business wants to open	Ongoing	\$	WWR Staff
Create clear communication between the Township, including permit requirements for new businesses or expanding businesses	Ongoing	\$	WWR Staff

Workforce & Labour

Action Plans	Timing	Cost (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$)	Partner Organizations
Create a partnership with local Highschool Co-Op and Algonquin College to promote jobs and Co-Op placements in Whitewater Region	Short Term	\$	LMG
The Creation & Promotion of ridesharing options	Ongoing	\$	Partnership with Renfrew County, The Ride Shark program and the LMG
Promotion of Central Job Hubs to local residences	Ongoing	\$	LMG, WWR Staff
Assist in planning a local job fair for WWR	Short Term	\$	WWR Staff, Renfrew County, CFDC, LMG
Creation of an Immigration Strategy	Long Term	\$\$	WWR Staff, LIP



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