



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION Business Owner Survey Report



Building on Yesterday - Planning for Tomorrow

January 2022

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¹ This report was prepared by:

- Glen Macfarlane, Rural Economic Development Specialist, Invest Durham

Executive Summary

In August of 2020, the Township of Uxbridge launched a Downtown Revitalization project to develop an action-oriented plan for the future of downtown Uxbridge. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) provides a four-stage approach to Downtown Revitalization projects being undertaken in the Province of Ontario. Stage two of this process is “Collect Data & Analyze”. A key piece of this stage is the business owner survey, in which business owners throughout the Township are encouraged to have their voices heard on the future of downtown Uxbridge.

The Uxbridge Downtown Revitalization Business Owner Survey experienced modest uptake as it was completed by 53 unique Uxbridge businesses. Thirty-eight of these businesses are located in downtown Uxbridge as defined by the Uxbridge Downtown Community Improvement Plan (CIP) boundary, fourteen are located outside of downtown Uxbridge, and one business chose to remain anonymous.

General Business Information

- Survey respondents were made up of businesses from 14 unique industries with the most prominent being ‘Retail Trade’ (36%), ‘Accommodation and Food Services’ (11%), ‘Health Care and Social Assistance’ (9%), and ‘Finance and Insurance’ (8%).
- Approximately 42% of respondents have been in business in the Township of Uxbridge for 10 years or less. The remaining 58% have been in business in the Township for 11 years or more, with the majority being in the 11 – 50 year range.
- 62% of respondents rent the space in which they operate, while the other 38% own.
- 36% of those who rent their space are on a month-to-month lease, 22% have a lease term of 1 – 4 years, and the remaining 41% have lease terms of 5 years or longer.
- All but one respondent have at least one business owner involved in the front-line operations of the business.
- 64% of respondents have at least one business owner who is a resident of Uxbridge.
- Less than half of all respondents stated that they have a formal business plan developed (47%), 28% have a succession plan, and 26% have a formal marketing plan.
- The top self-rated competitive advantages of downtown Uxbridge businesses were ‘Better Customer Service’ and ‘Better Quality’.
- When asked where each business’ main competition is located, the most common responses were within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), within the Township of Uxbridge but outside of the downtown, and online.

Employee/Workforce Information

- The vast majority (74%) of business respondents have fewer than 10 employees.
- 53% of business respondents in the ‘Retail Trade’ sector have between 1 – 4 employees
- Businesses within the ‘Accommodation and Food Services’ sector typically have more employees, as 83% had between 5 and 19 employees.
- 40% of surveyed businesses stated that they are currently experiencing difficulties hiring.
- About two-thirds of these businesses attribute these challenges to an industry-wide shortage not a community-specific issue.
- Some of the most in-demand occupations as outlined by survey respondents are administrative roles, retail staff, drivers, cleaning staff, cooks, hairstylists, among others.

Typical Business Activity

- Only 37% of all business respondents are open on Sundays.
- Monday was the second most common day to be closed as only 71% of surveyed businesses are open on Mondays. This number drops to 63% when only looking at downtown businesses.
- 55% of respondents ranked October – December as the busiest time of year for their business and January – March as the slowest.

Doing Business in the Township of Uxbridge

- 87% of question respondents ranked Uxbridge as either a ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ place to do business
- The remaining 13% ranked the business environment as ‘fair’.
- No respondents said that the Uxbridge business environment was ‘poor’
- Those who ranked the business environment as ‘fair’ or ‘good’ had concerns around uneven distribution of resources throughout the downtown, a lack of collaboration between the Township and business community, high taxes, inadequate snow removal on downtown sidewalks, and a general lack of business owner involvement.
- Despite recent local and worldwide events affecting business, about two-thirds of respondents have not changed their opinion regarding the Uxbridge business environment in the past 5 years.
- Those who did change their opinion for the worse attributed this change to the Uxbridge culvert project, the rising cost of doing business in Uxbridge, the rate of growth being experienced throughout the Township, and worsening parking in the downtown.
- The main advantages of doing business in the Township of Uxbridge included the loyal customer base, the great people, the ability to form strong relationships, the small-town feel, the current business make-up, and the Townships location in comparison to the GTA.
- The main disadvantages included the limited customer base due to the Township’s small size, downtown parking, high costs of doing business, and the perceived unattractiveness of the downtown.
- The vast majority of respondents plan to expand, renovate or remain the same over the next three years.
- However, nine businesses did express an interest in relocating over the next three years. That being said, two stated that they will be staying in Uxbridge and six made no mention of leaving Uxbridge.

Tourism in Uxbridge

- 59% of respondents strongly agree and 30% somewhat agree that Uxbridge needs more overnight accommodations.
- 52% of respondents strongly agree and 39% somewhat agree that local businesses need to collaborate to enhance their product/service offerings to improve the visitor experience.
- 43% of respondents strongly agree and 39% somewhat agree that the Township needs to offer more events that attract visitors. However, 63% of respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed that tourists coming to Uxbridge for events also visit downtown businesses.
- Respondents feel that improving the look/feel of the downtown, attracting overnight accommodations, planning more festivals and events, building an outdoor gathering/event

space, and limiting truck traffic in the downtown will improve the Townships ability to attract tourists.

Downtown Priorities

- 77% of respondents saw reducing heavy truck traffic in the downtown as a high priority item.
- 68% wanted more festivals and cultural events in the downtown to be a high priority item.
- Other high priority items include making sidewalks/parking more available for retail/dining opportunities, improving the downtown connection to the trail system, and incentivizing the promenade level of Brock Street to be filled with mostly retail.

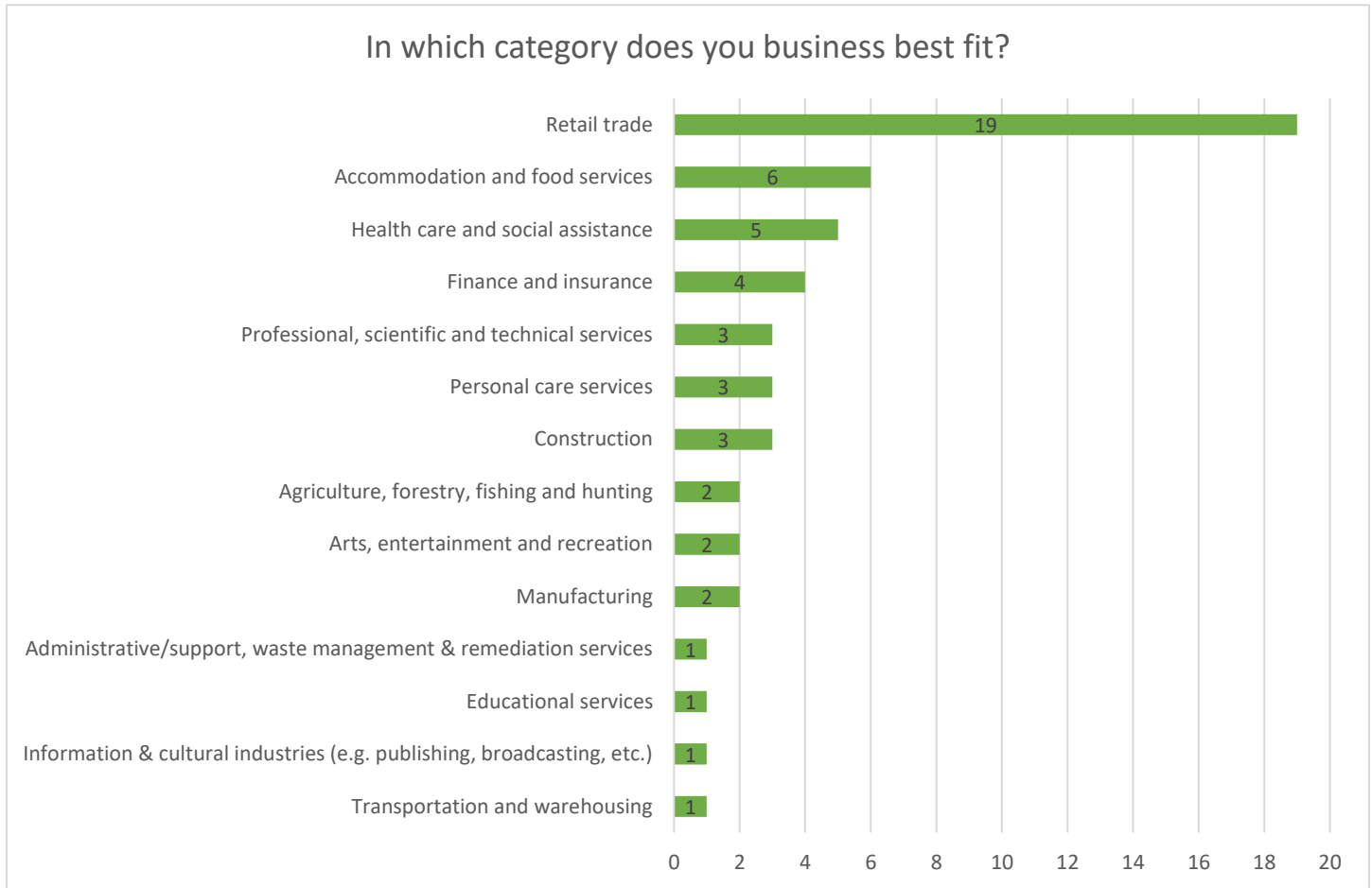
Proposed Additions to Downtown Uxbridge

- Proposed business additions to downtown Uxbridge include more ethnic cuisine, more diverse retail offerings, a grocery store, an artisan market, more cafés, more clothing stores, among others.
- Proposed non-business additions include more events, music, a business support centre, and a tourism information centre.

General Business Information

Breakdown of Respondents by Industry

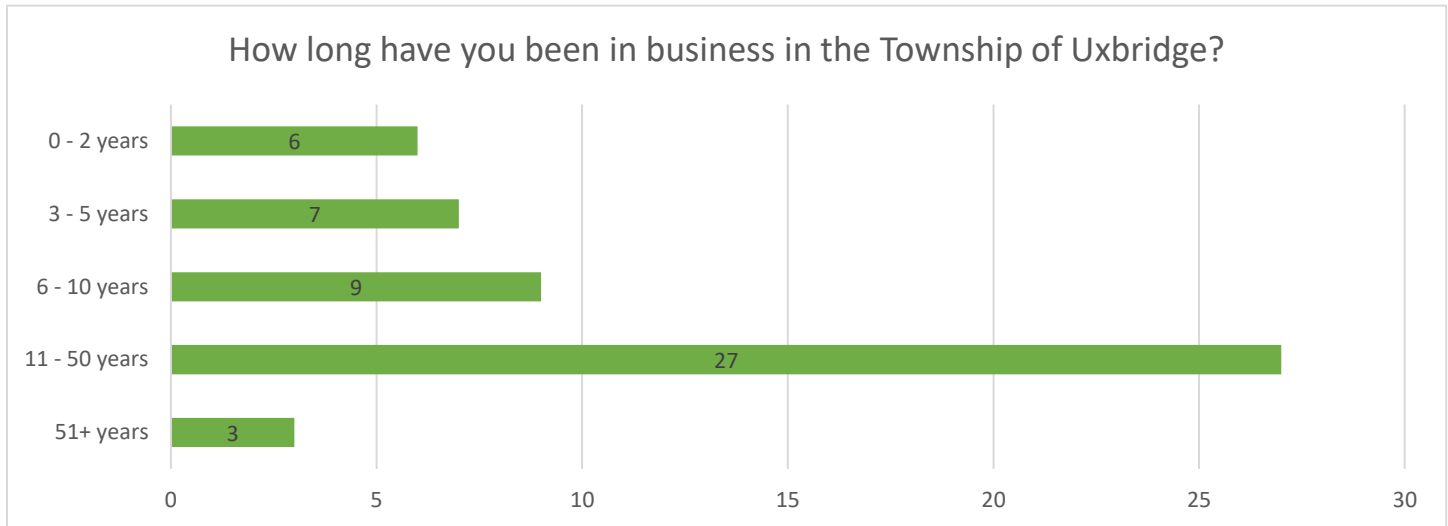
Total Respondents: 53



Survey respondents were made up of businesses from 14 different industries classified by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). The most common industry was 'Retail Trade' making up 19 of the 53 responses (36%). Other common industries included 'Accommodation and Food Services' (11%), 'Health Care and Social Assistance' (9%), and 'Finance and Insurance' (8%).

Length of Time Operating in Uxbridge

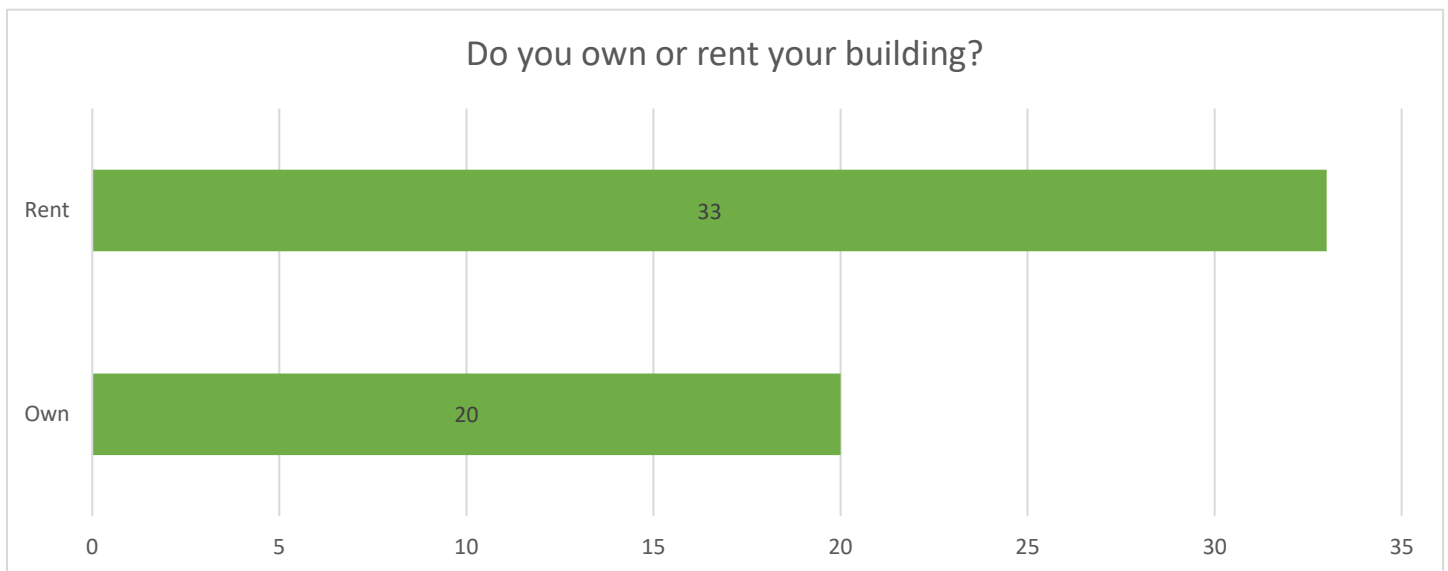
Total Respondents: 52



The Uxbridge Business Owner survey received a healthy mix of responses when it comes to age of businesses. Of the 52 businesses who responded to this question, 22 (42%) have been in business in the Township of Uxbridge for 10 years or less. The remaining 30 (58%) have been in business in the Township for 11 years or more, with the majority being in the 11 – 50 year range.

Building Ownership

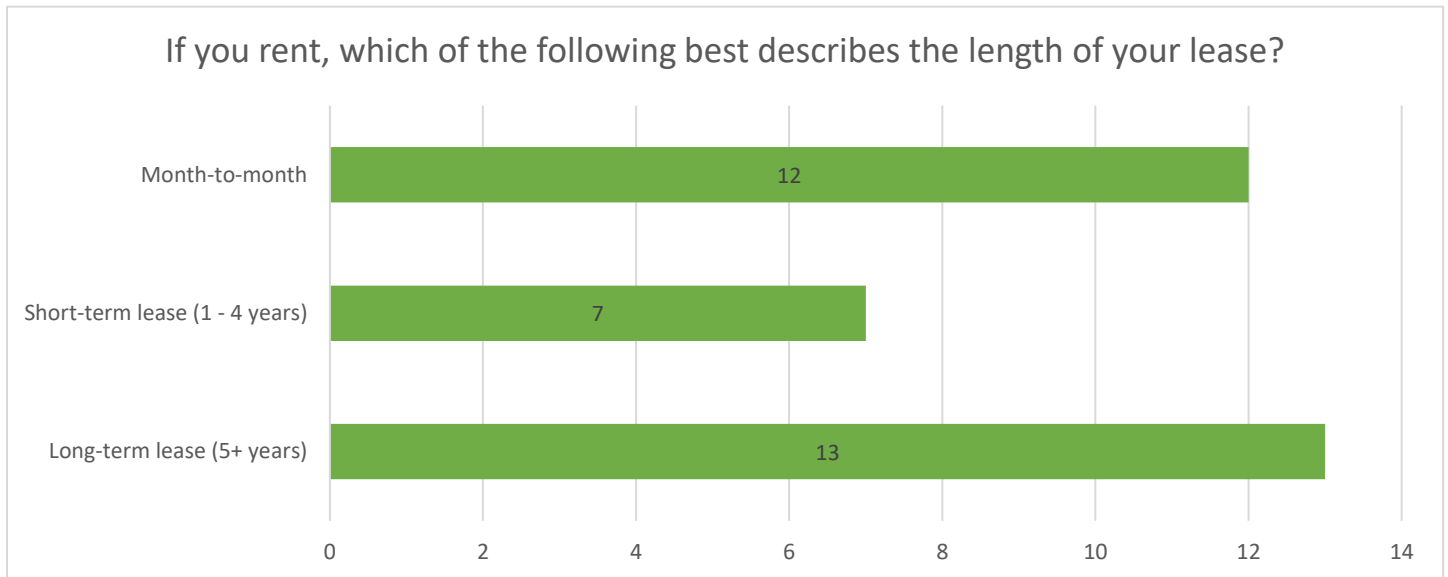
Total Respondents: 53



When asked about building ownership, 33 of the 53 respondent businesses (62%) stated that they rent the space in which they operate, while the remaining 20 (38%) own their space. There was no statistically significant relationship found between ownership form and business industry in this dataset.

Length of Lease

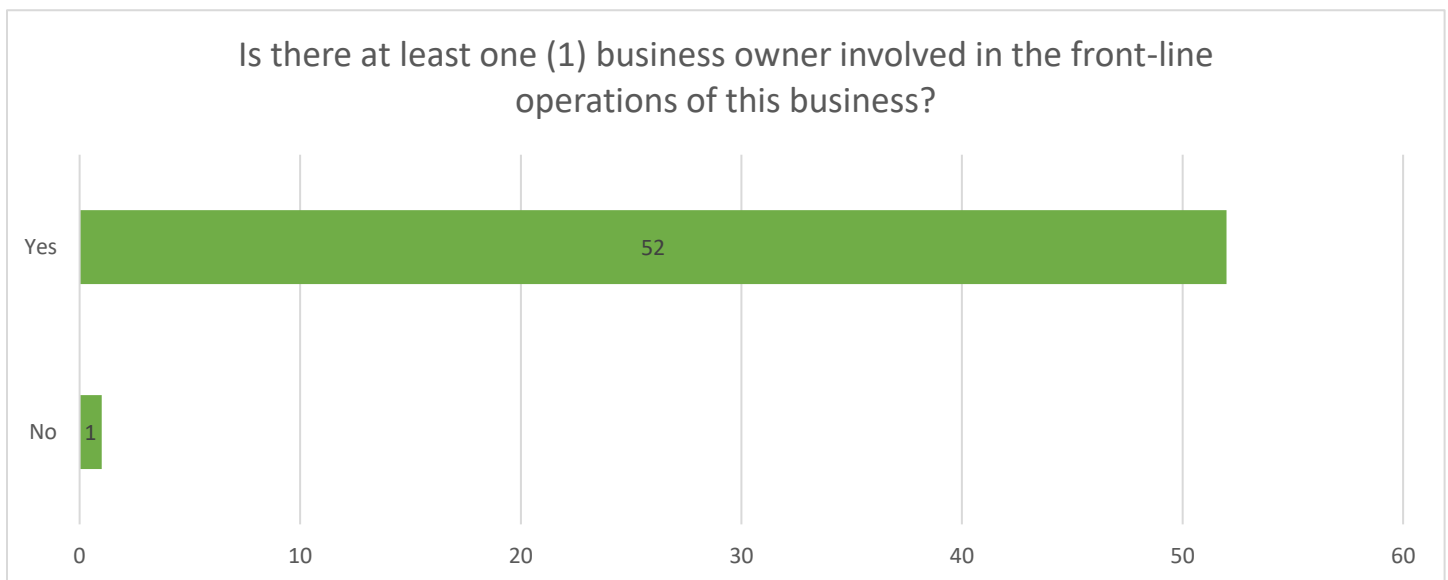
Total Respondents: 32



Businesses who stated that they rent their space were asked to provide further detail on the length of their lease. Of the 33 businesses who stated that they rent their space, 32 responded to this follow up question. As shown above, the length of lease terms amongst respondents is quite split. 12 (36%) are on a month-to-month lease, 7 (22%) have a lease term of 1 – 4 years, and the remaining 13 (41%) had lease terms of 5 years or more.

Business Owner Involvement

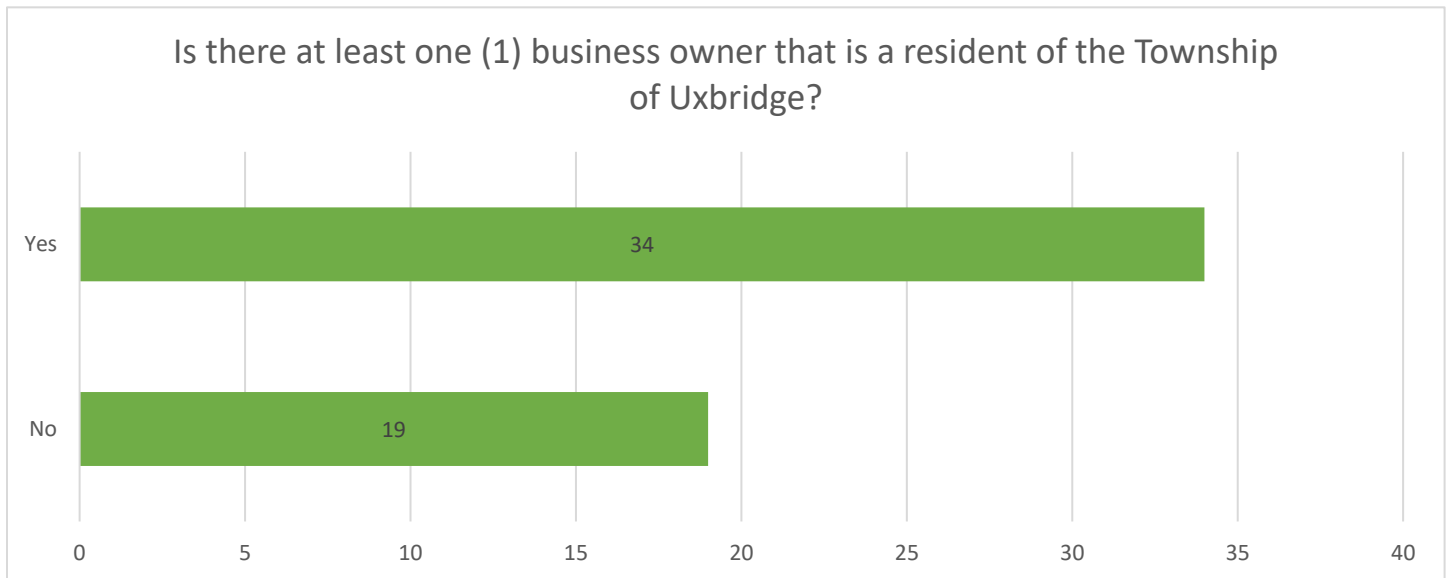
Total Respondents: 53



As shown above, almost all businesses who completed the Uxbridge Business Owner Survey have an owner who is involved in the front-line operations of the business.

Local Business Owners

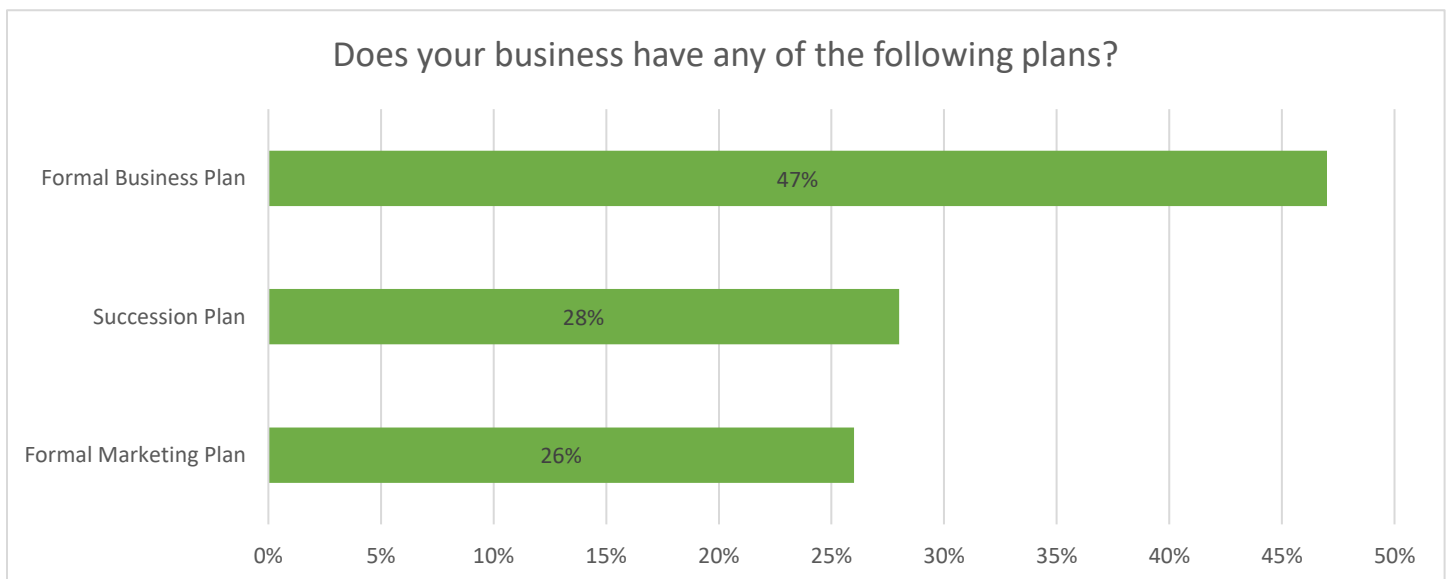
Total Respondents: 53



As shown above, 34 (64%) of businesses who responded have at least one business owner who is a resident of the Township of Uxbridge. The remaining 19 (36%) have a business owner who resides elsewhere.

Business Planning Documents

Total Respondents: 53



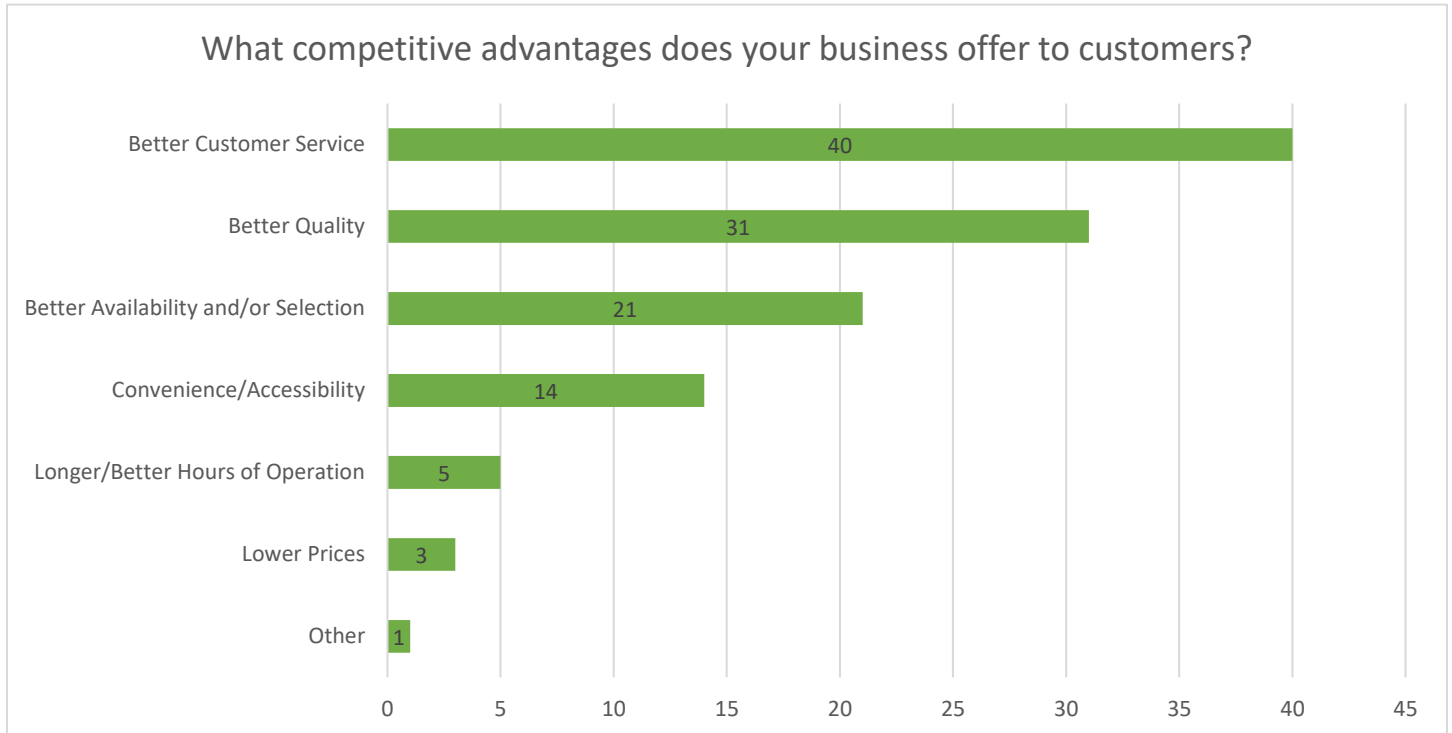
The question above sought to understand what forms of plans Uxbridge businesses currently have developed. See **Appendix A** for definitions of Business Plans, Marketing Plans and Succession Plans. Of the 53 businesses who completed the survey, more than half did not select any of the listed options, suggesting that they do not have any of these plans developed. The most common plan that survey respondents have developed was a formal business plan, as 25 businesses (47%) have one written. The second most common plan is a succession plan, as 15 businesses (28%) have one

prepared. Lastly, only 14 businesses (26%) have a formal marketing plan developed for their business.

When examining the development of these plans by industry, the accommodation and food services industry stands out as having below average rates of businesses with a marketing plan and succession plan. Just one of the six respondent businesses within this sector had either of these plans developed.

Business' Competitive Advantages

Total Respondents: 44



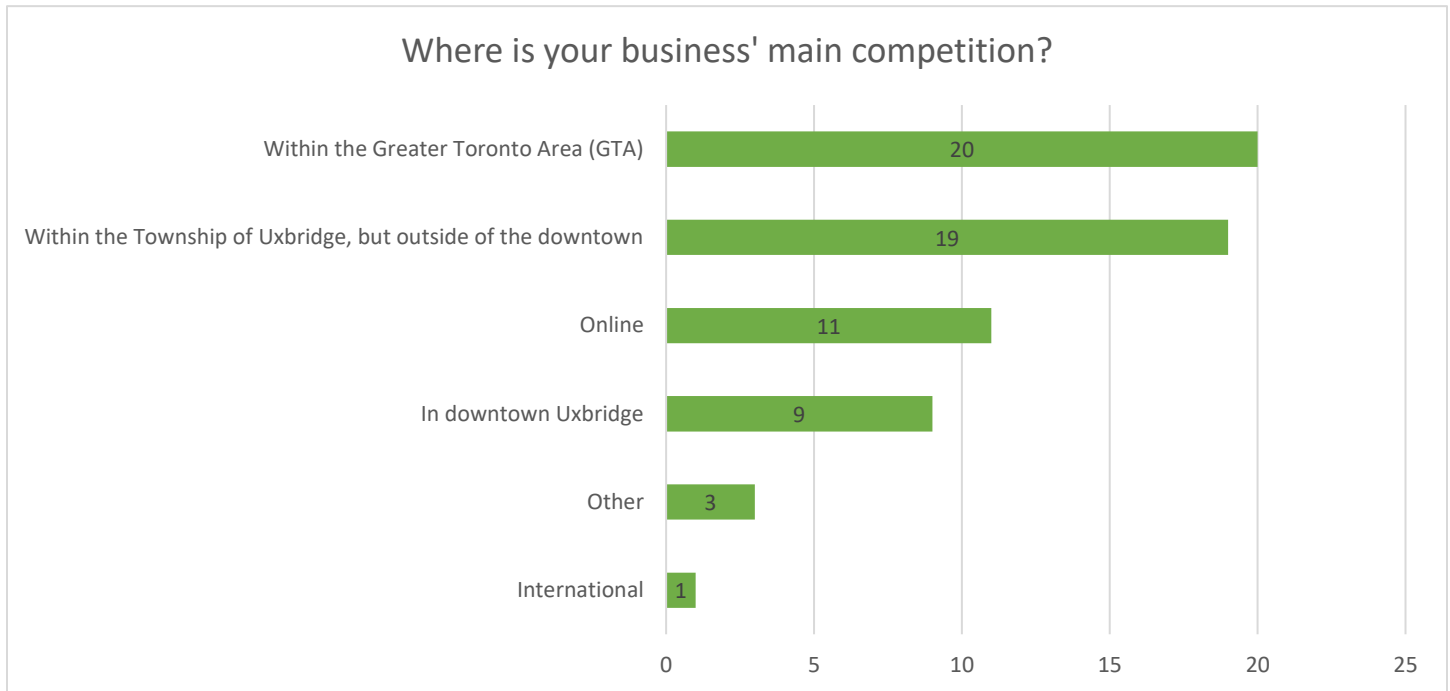
Note: Respondents were asked to select up to two (2) answers.

When business owners/respondents were asked about their business' main competitive advantages, the top two answers were 'Better Customer Service' and 'Better Quality'. When Uxbridge residents were asked a similar question as part of the Uxbridge Resident Survey, results aligned very closely with the above. Only 2% of Uxbridge residents stated that businesses **outside** of downtown Uxbridge offered superior customer service and 8% thought that they offered superior quality. Therefore, it is safe to assume that Uxbridge residents agree that customer service and quality of goods/services in downtown Uxbridge is superior.

Opinions between business owners and residents did not align so closely when it came to availability and selection of products. The top reason that Uxbridge residents chose to shop **outside** of the downtown was because they felt that other commercial areas offered better availability and selection. However, this was the third most common competitive advantage chosen by Uxbridge business owners. This also remained true when only looking at responses from businesses located in downtown Uxbridge. This is an area of misalignment between some business owners and consumers.

Location of Business' Main Competition

Total Respondents: 43



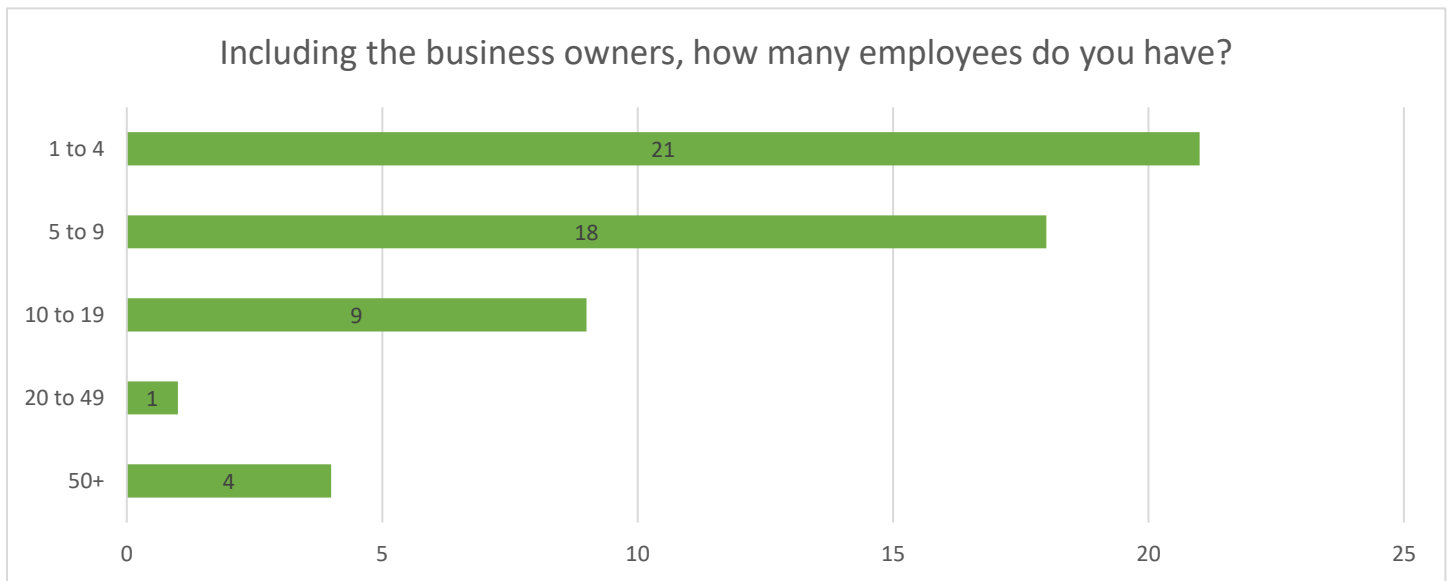
Note: Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

When asked where each business' main competition is located, the most common response was within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), followed by within the Township of Uxbridge but outside of the downtown. Online or e-commerce platforms pose as significant competition to 11 respondents. There were also nine businesses whose main competition resided in downtown Uxbridge. Of the nine who chose this option, six are located within downtown Uxbridge themselves. This points towards there being some overlap in the products/services provided in Uxbridge's downtown.

Employee/Workforce Information

Number of Employees

Total Respondents: 53



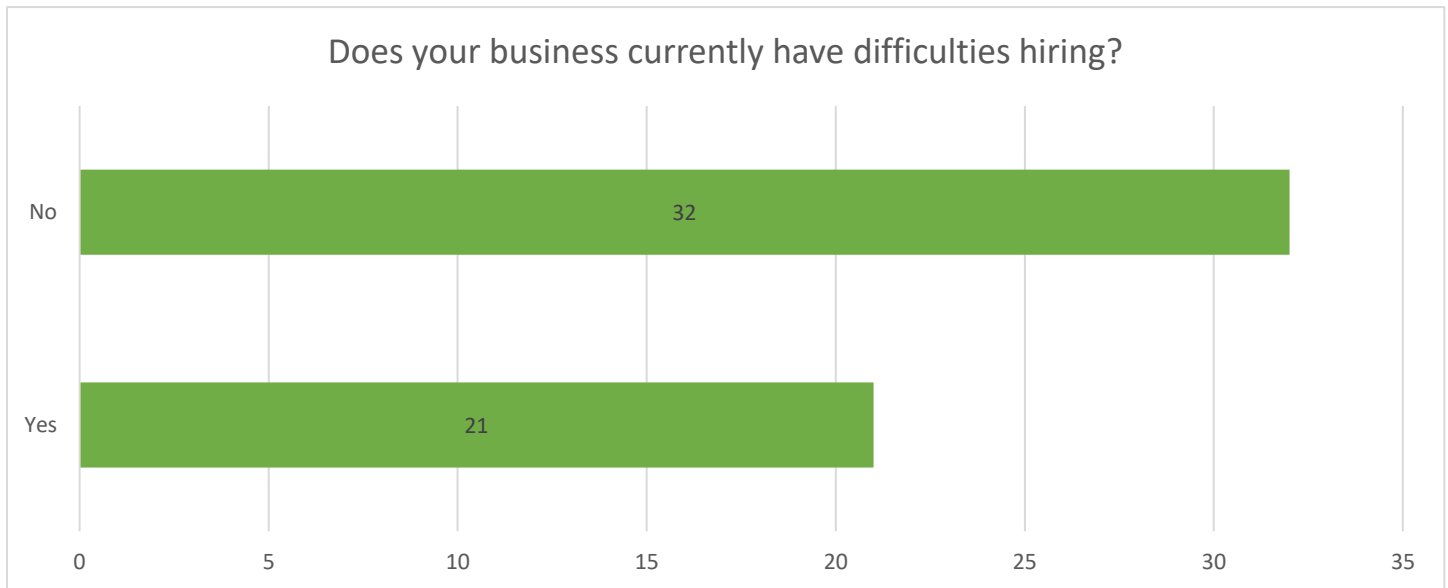
As expected, the vast majority (74%) of business respondents had fewer than 10 employees. This is expected since 38 of the 53 survey respondents (72%) were businesses located in downtown Uxbridge where there are very few businesses large enough to employ 10 or more people.

Below is a breakdown of number of employees by the top four most common industries surveyed. As shown, the majority of businesses in the Retail Trade sector had between 1 and 4 employees. Businesses within the Accommodation and Food Services sector (restaurants) typically had more employees, as 83% had between 5 and 19 employees.

	1 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 19	20 – 49	50+
Retail Trade	53%	26%	11%	0%	11%
Accommodation and Food Services	17%	50%	33%	0%	0%
Health Care & Social Assistance	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%
Finance & Insurance	0%	75%	25%	0%	0%

Hiring Challenges

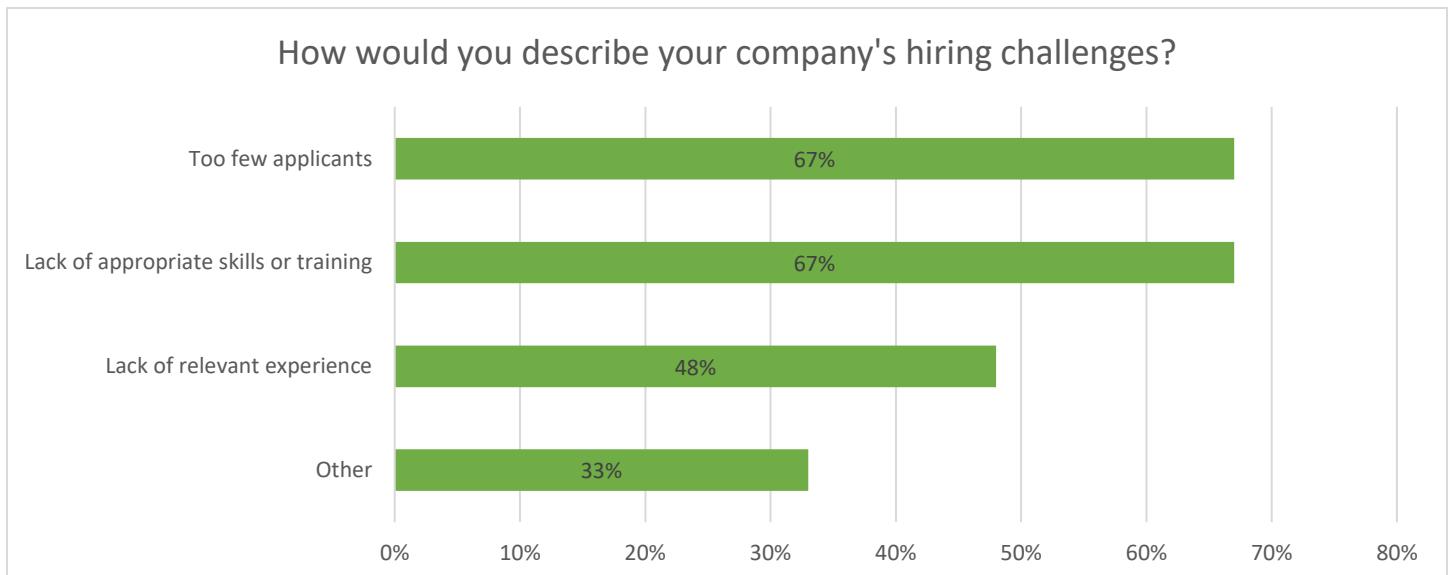
Total Respondents: 53



Respondents were asked whether their business is currently facing challenges when hiring. Of the 53 respondents, 32 (60%) stated that they do not currently have difficulty hiring. This, of course, means that the other 21 respondents (40%) do.

The 21 respondents who stated that their business **does** currently have difficulty hiring were then given a series of follow up questions. The first asked to describe the business' hiring challenges. Results are summarized below.

Total Respondents: 21



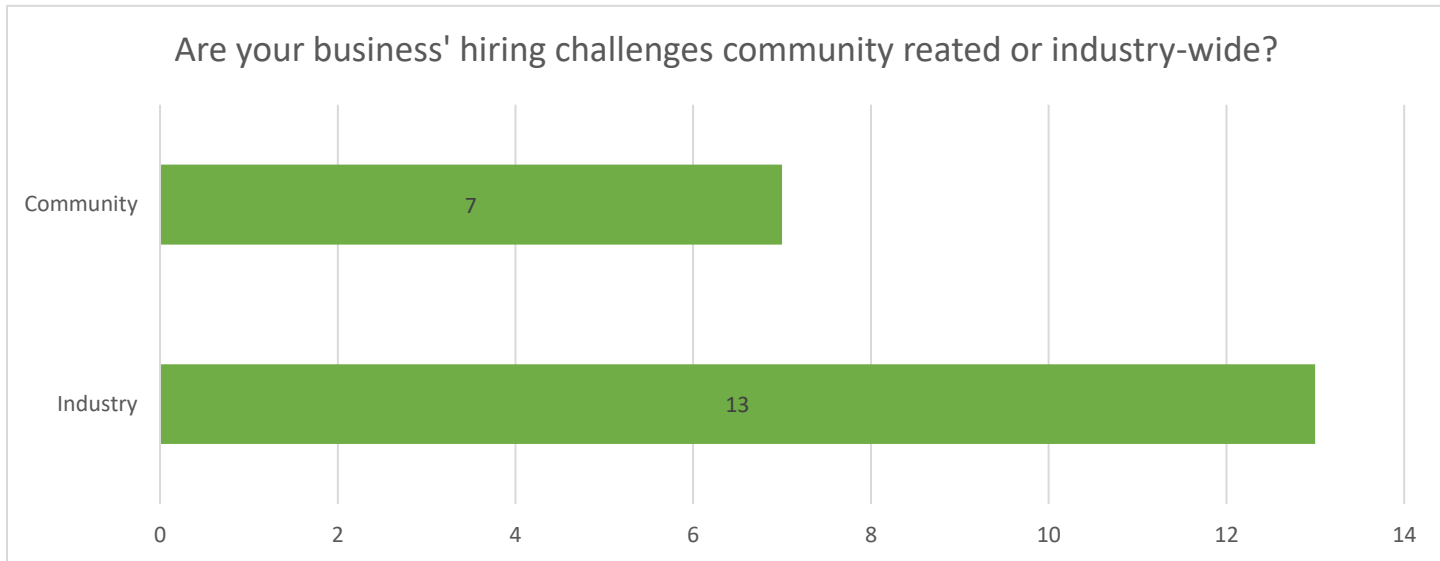
Note: Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

Of the 21 respondents who were given this question, 14 (67%) stated that too few applicants is a reason for their hiring challenges, 14 (67%) pointed to a lack of appropriate skills/training, 10 (48%) noted lack of relevant experience as an issue, and 7 (33%) noted other reasons. Of the seven

respondents who noted other reasons, three mentioned a lack of flexible availability of applicants, two mentioned difficulty attracting applicants to Uxbridge, one stated that they have difficulty hearing back from applicants once contacted, and one pointed to an industry-wide shortage.

Further to the point above, respondents were then asked if their hiring challenges are specifically related to an industry-wide shortage or if this is a community-specific issue. Of the 21 respondents who expressed their difficulty hiring, 20 responded to this question. As shown below, more than half attributed these challenges to the industry in which they are a part. These industries included 'Retail Trade', 'Professional, Scientific and Technical Services', 'Accommodation and Food Services', 'Manufacturing', 'Health Care and Social Assistance', among others. Interestingly, the most common industry who attributed their hiring challenges to the community was also 'Retail Trade'.

Total Respondents: 20



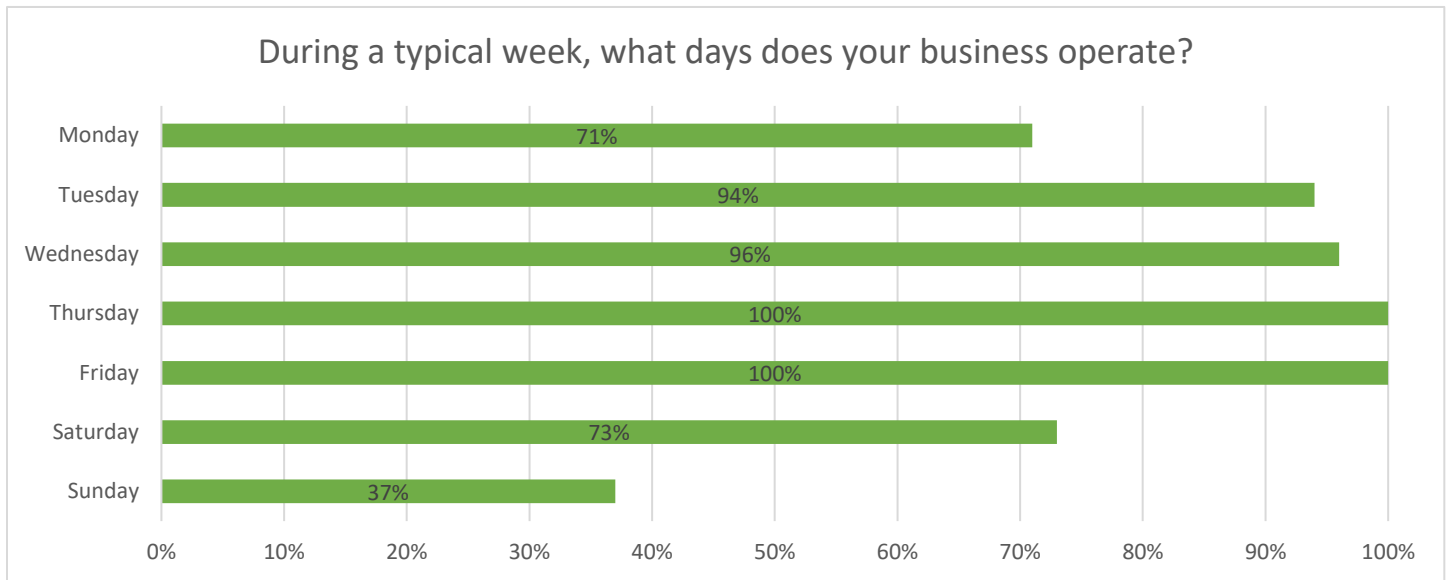
Lastly, businesses were asked to list up to three occupations in which they are having difficulty recruiting for. The word cloud below outlines some of the most in demand occupations outlined by survey respondents.



Typical Business Activity

Weekly Operation Schedule

Total Respondents: 52

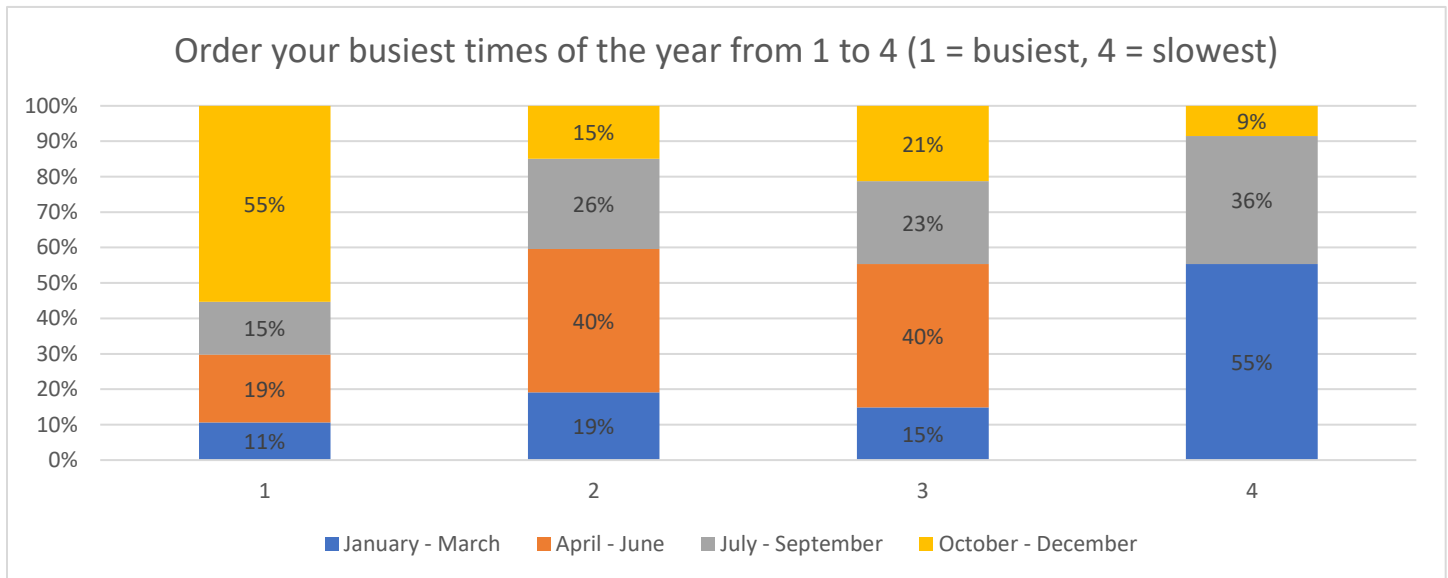


Note: Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

Respondents were also asked to outline which days of the week their business typically operates. As expected, Sunday tends to be the day in which most businesses are closed. It appears that some businesses close on either Saturday or Monday as well. When comparing data for businesses located within the Downtown Uxbridge CIP boundary versus businesses located somewhere else in the Township, the data told a slightly different story as only 63% of downtown businesses were open on Mondays versus 86% of businesses located outside of the downtown. A higher proportion of non-downtown businesses were also open on weekends with Sunday still being the most common day to close.

Busiest Time of Year

Total Respondents: 47

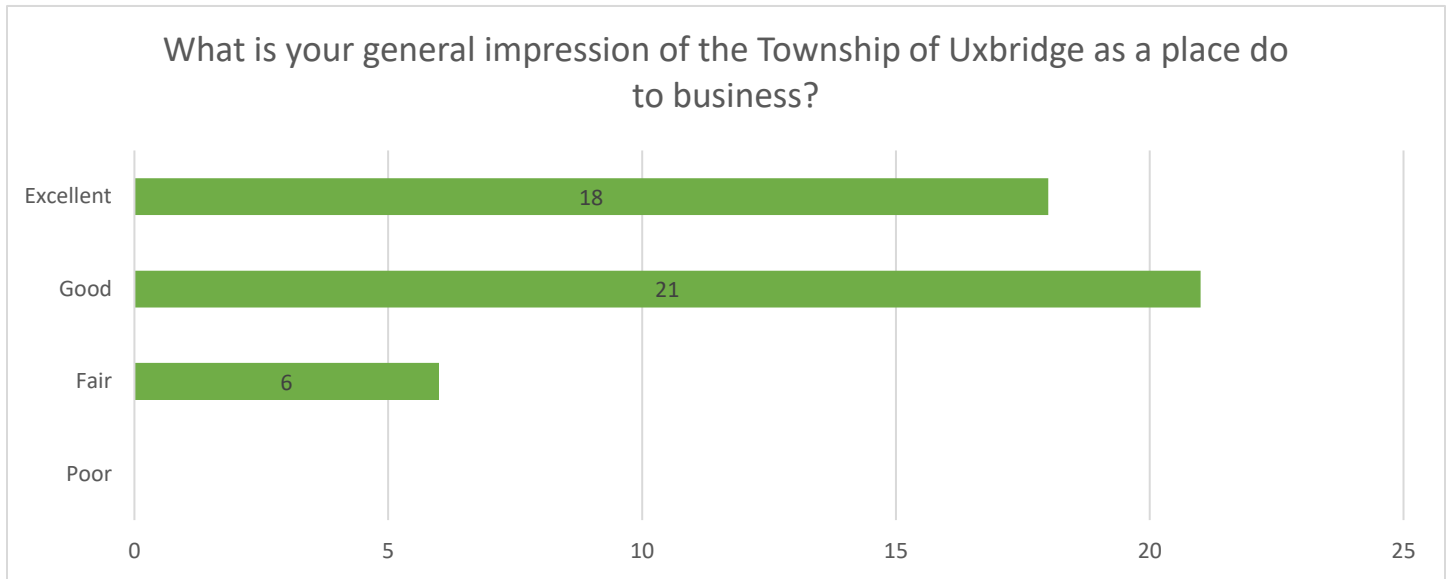


Respondents were asked to rank each quarter of the year from busiest to slowest with '1' being the busiest time of the year for their business and '4' being the slowest. There was a general consensus that the busiest time of year for most businesses was October – December and the slowest was January – March. April – June was also seen as a busy time of year as not a single business ranked this quarter as the slowest, and 59% of respondents either saw this as the busiest or second busiest quarter of the year. There was no consensus on the summer months (July – September) as they were split between all four quarters. That being said, only 15% of respondents saw the summer months as their busiest.

Doing Business in the Township of Uxbridge

General Impression

Total Respondents: 45



When asked to rate their general impression of the Township of Uxbridge as a place to do business, results were mostly positive. Of the 45 businesses who chose to answer this question, 39 (87%) said that Uxbridge is either a 'good' or 'excellent' place to do business. Six respondents (13%) stated that the business environment was 'fair', while zero said it was 'poor'.

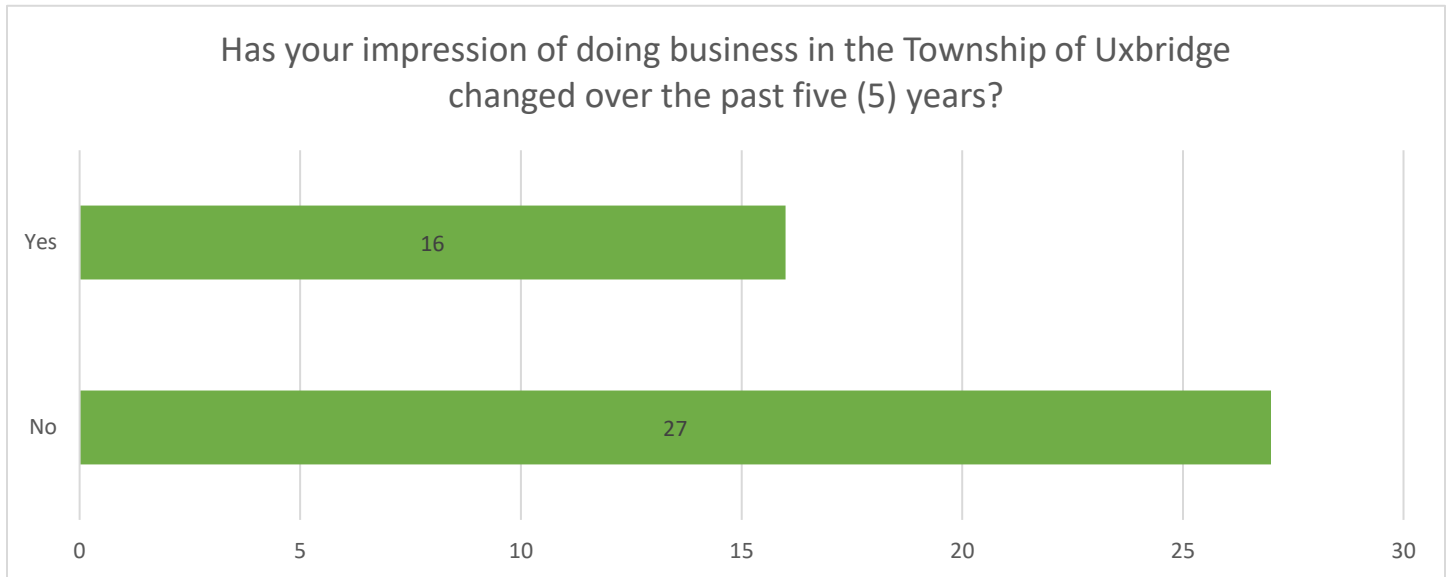
Respondents were also asked to expand on why they selected the response that they did.

Respondents who rated the Uxbridge business environment as only 'fair' or 'good' had concerns around the following issues:

- Lack of collaboration between the business community and Township
- Uneven distribution of business supports throughout the downtown
- Inadequate snow removal services on downtown sidewalks
- High tax rates
- General lack of involvement, participation and collaboration between business owners

Changes to General Impression

Total Respondents: 43



In an effort to understand whether current perceptions of the local business community are a result of recent events (e.g. culvert project, COVID-19, etc.) or longstanding sentiments, respondents were also asked whether their impression of doing business in the Township of Uxbridge has changed over the past 5 years. Of the 43 respondents who answered this question, 27 (63%) have not changed their opinion in the past 5 years, while 16 (37%) have. Comments from those whose impression has changed for the worse over the past 5 years mention the following:

- Downtown culvert project
- Rising cost of doing business in Uxbridge
- Rate of growth being experienced throughout the Township
- Worsening parking in the downtown.

It is important to note that the majority of comments were positive.

Advantages of Operating Uxbridge

Total Respondents: 39



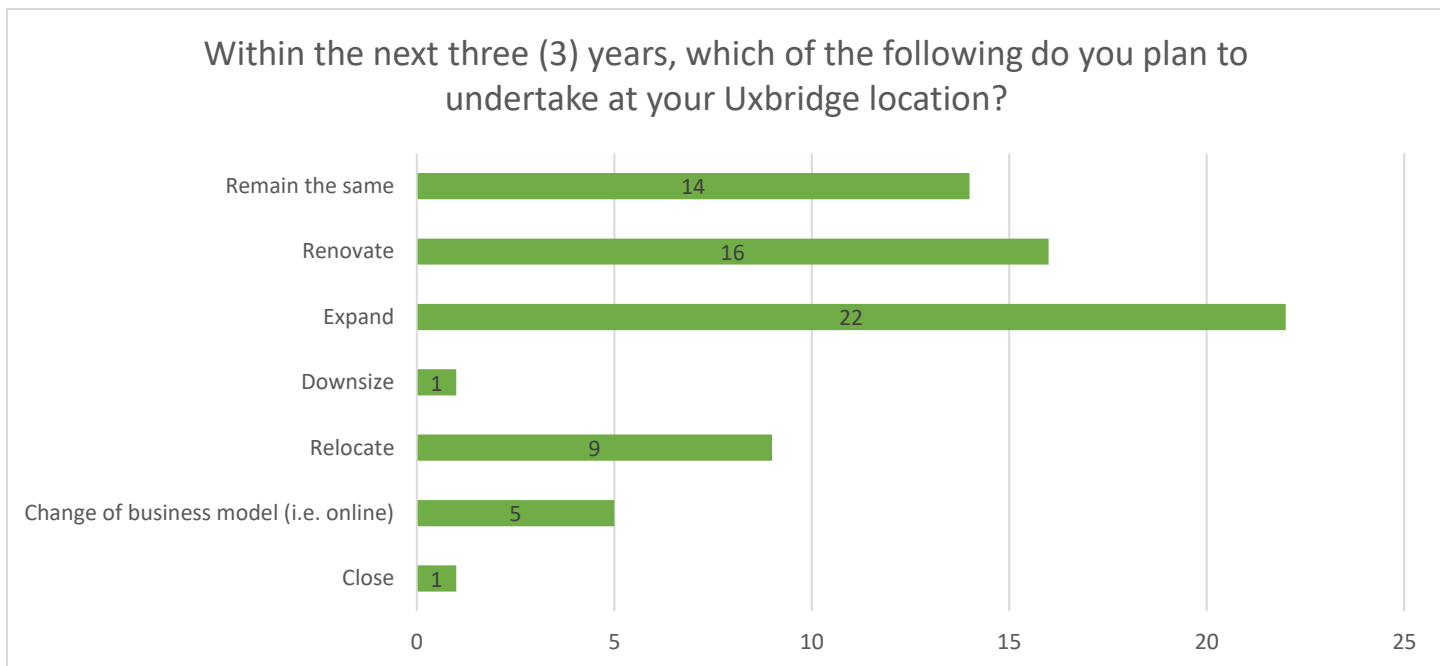
Disadvantages of Operating Uxbridge

Total Respondents: 32



Future Plans

Total Respondents: 43



Note: Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

The survey also sought to understand what plans respondents have for their business over the next three years. Respondents were encouraged to select all options that apply as it is possible that they plan to undertake multiple options. Encouragingly, the most common responses were to ‘expand’, ‘renovate’, or ‘remain the same’. Five businesses plan to change their business model. Since respondents could select multiple options, it is important to note that these businesses may simply be planning on adding an online component to their existing operation. As illustrated above, nine respondents stated that they plan to relocate their business. A follow up question was asked to understand where these businesses plan to relocate. Eight of the nine respondents chose to answer this question and the results were as follows.

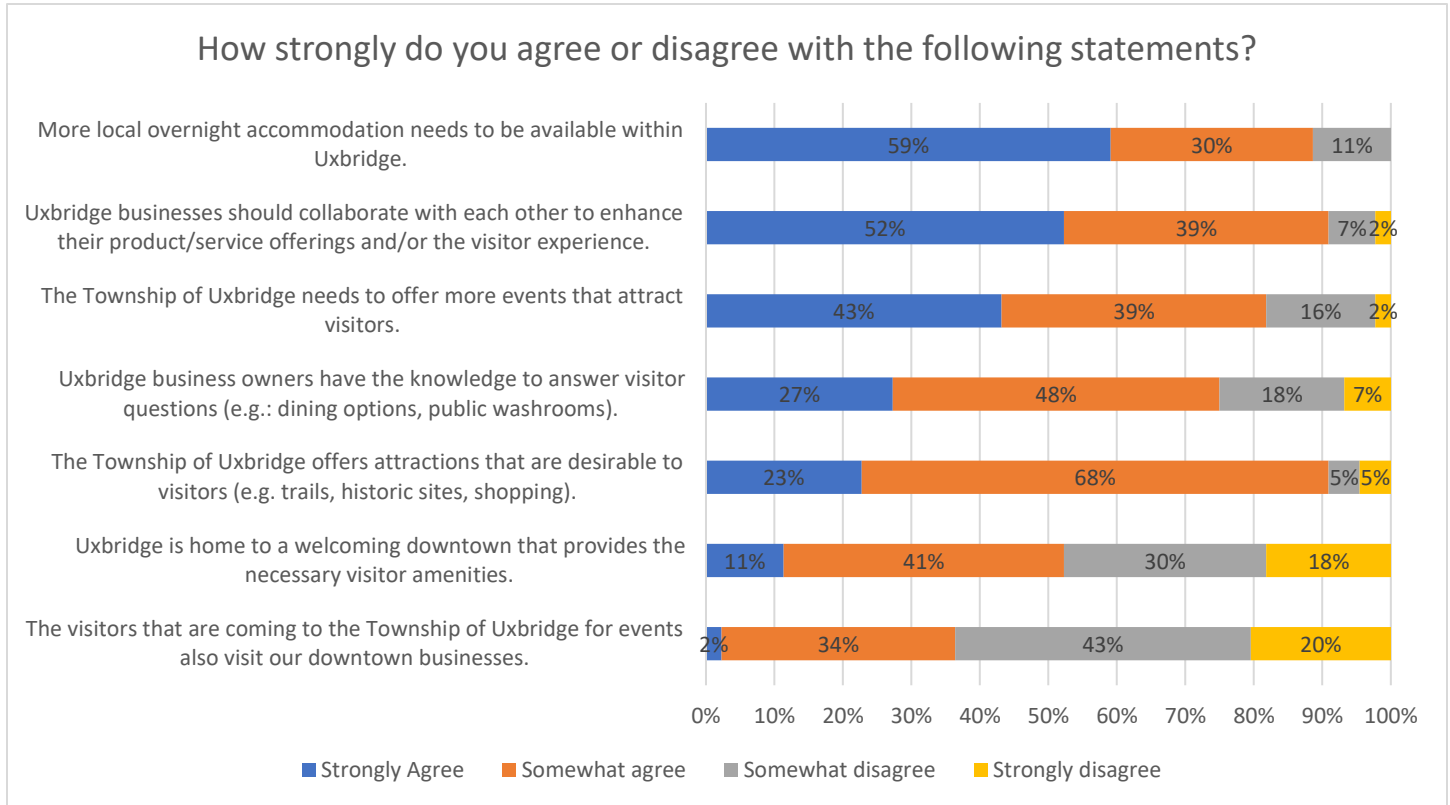
Planned New Location	Count
Undecided/Unknown	5
Remain in Uxbridge	2
Port Perry	1

Respondents were also asked if any assistance could be provided to support the upcoming changes to their business. Prominent responses included:

- Improved internet/broadband throughout the Township
- More grants/funding opportunities offered/communicated to the business community
- Improve/update the Downtown Uxbridge Community Improvement Plan (CIP)
- Simplify Township by-laws/policies
- Help promote/advertise small businesses throughout the Township
- Expanded eligibility of BIA programs (beyond retail)
- Infrastructural improvements (downtown sidewalks)
- Lower taxes

Tourism in Uxbridge

Total Respondents: 44



Note: Respondents were asked to select one (1) answer per statement.

In an effort to better understand business owners’ thoughts on tourism in the Township of Uxbridge, respondents were provided with a series of tourism-related statements and asked to rate their level of agreement on a 4-point scale. The graph above illustrates their responses.

Statements with the strongest levels of agreement speak about the need for more overnight accommodation in the Township, the need for more collaboration amongst Uxbridge businesses to enhance their product/service offerings and improve visitor experience, and the need for Uxbridge to offer more events that attract visitors.

The next two statements saw a very large proportion of respondents ‘somewhat agree’. While still agreeing with the statements, feelings were more neutral. These statements were around whether Uxbridge business owners have the necessary knowledge to answer visitor questions and whether Uxbridge currently offers attractions that are desirable to visitors.

The last two statements saw the majority of respondents either ‘somewhat agree’ or ‘somewhat disagree’. These statements also had the highest proportion of respondents who ‘strongly disagreed’ when compared to the other five statements. These statements were around whether Uxbridge is home to a welcoming downtown that provides the necessary visitor amenities and whether visitors attending Township events are also visiting downtown businesses.

Interestingly, business owners felt that the Township needs to offer more events that attract visitors, but they also feel that tourists who come to enjoy Township events do not visit downtown businesses.

This suggests that downtown businesses owners are not currently seeing the benefits of Township events when it comes to increased sales but do see their potential to do so.

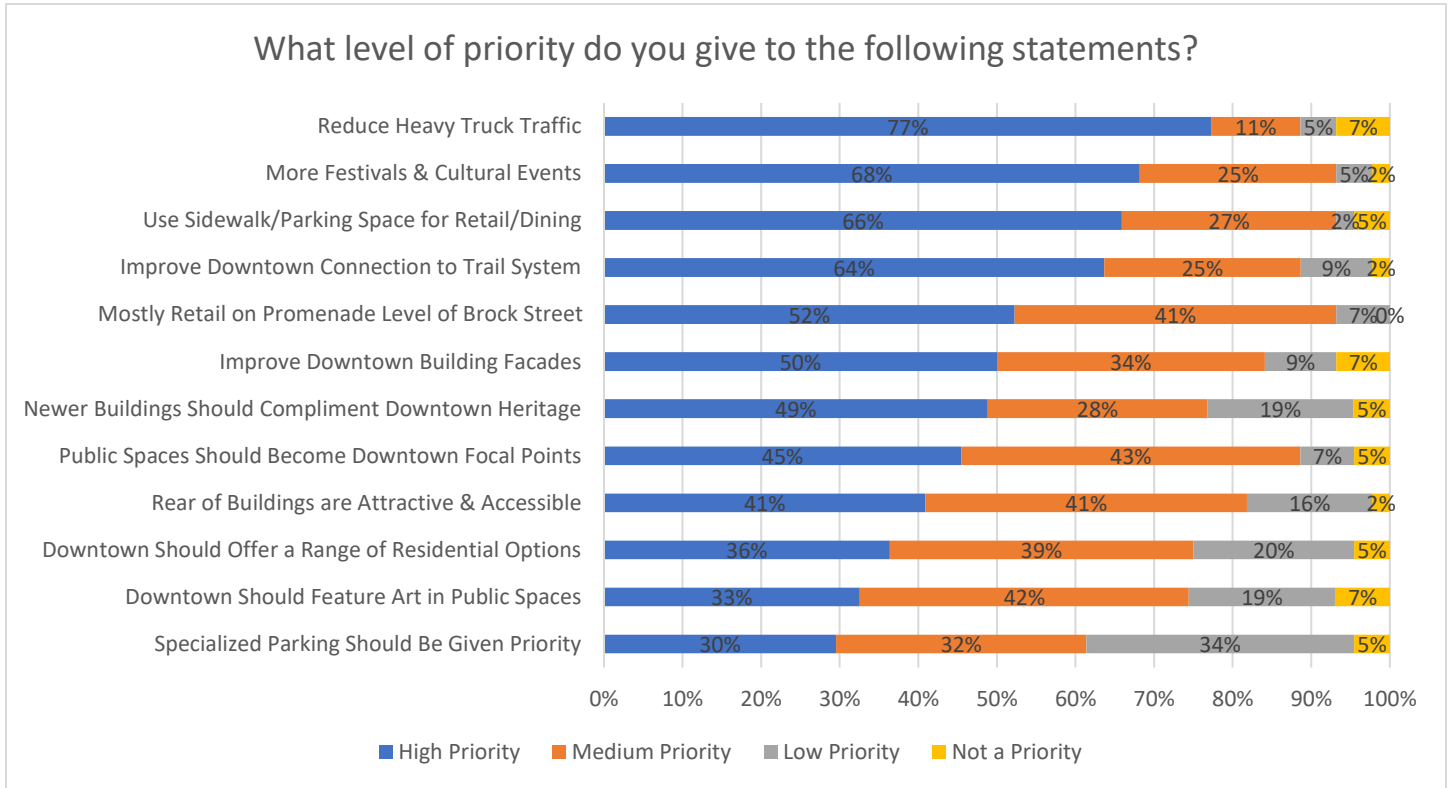
Respondents were then asked a follow up question related to tourism that read, "In your opinion, what can the Township of Uxbridge do to improve its ability to attract visitors and become a destination of choice?" This question received 36 responses. These responses were categorized and summarized in the word cloud below.

Total Respondents: 36



Downtown Priorities

Total Respondents: 44



Respondents were asked to assign a priority level to each statement related to proposed action items for downtown Uxbridge. As shown above, the highest priority items for downtown Uxbridge as determined by business owners include reducing heavy truck traffic, planning more festivals and cultural events, using sidewalk/parking space for retail/dining opportunities, improving the connection to the trail system, and ensuring that the promenade level of Brock Street is comprised of mostly retail.

See **Appendix B** for a more in-depth breakdown of each statement.

Proposed Additions to Downtown Uxbridge

Total Respondents: 24



Appendix A: Definitions

Business Plan: “A business plan is a written document that describes your business, its objectives and strategies, the market you are targeting and your financial forecast. It is important to have a business plan because it helps you set realistic goals, secure external funding, measure your success, clarify operational requirements and establish reasonable financial forecasts.”²

(Source: <https://sbs-spe.feddevontario.canada.ca/business-plan-guide>)

Marketing Plan: “Your marketing plan is an essential part of your overall business. When you are starting a business or introducing new products or concepts, this plan can help you assess the needs of your customers and develop a product or service to meet these needs, communicate the attributes of the product or service to the customer, [and] establish distribution channels to get the products/services to the customer.”³

(Source: <https://sbs-spe.feddevontario.canada.ca/marketing-plan-outline>)

Succession Plan: “Succession planning is a strategy for passing on leadership roles—often the ownership of a company—to an employee or group of employees. Also known as "replacement planning," it ensures that businesses continue to run smoothly after a company's most important people move on to new opportunities, retire, or pass away.”⁴

(Source: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/succession-planning.asp>)

² Government of Canada. (2021). Business Plan Guide.

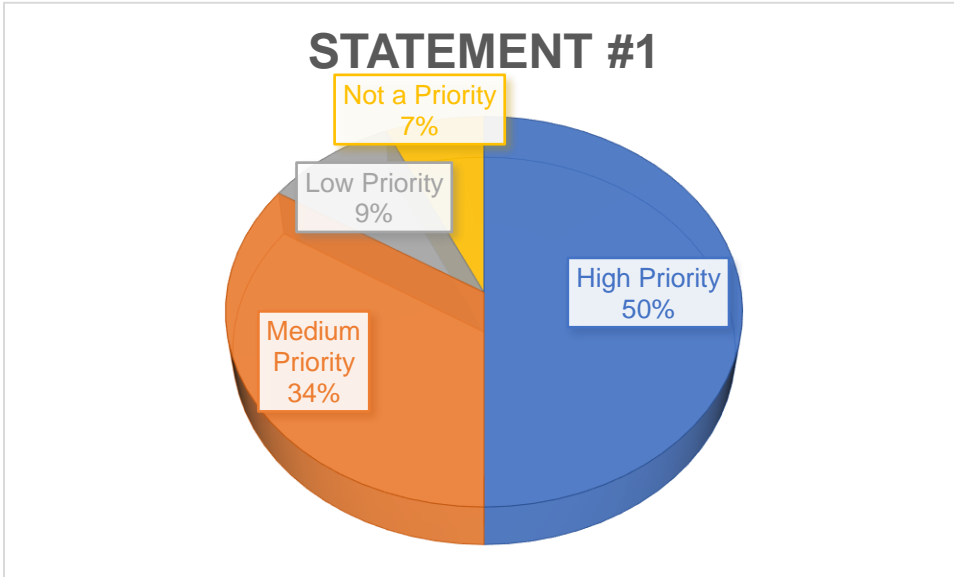
³ Government of Canada. (2021). Marketing Plan Outline.

⁴ Kenton, W. (2020). What is Succession Planning? *Investopedia*.

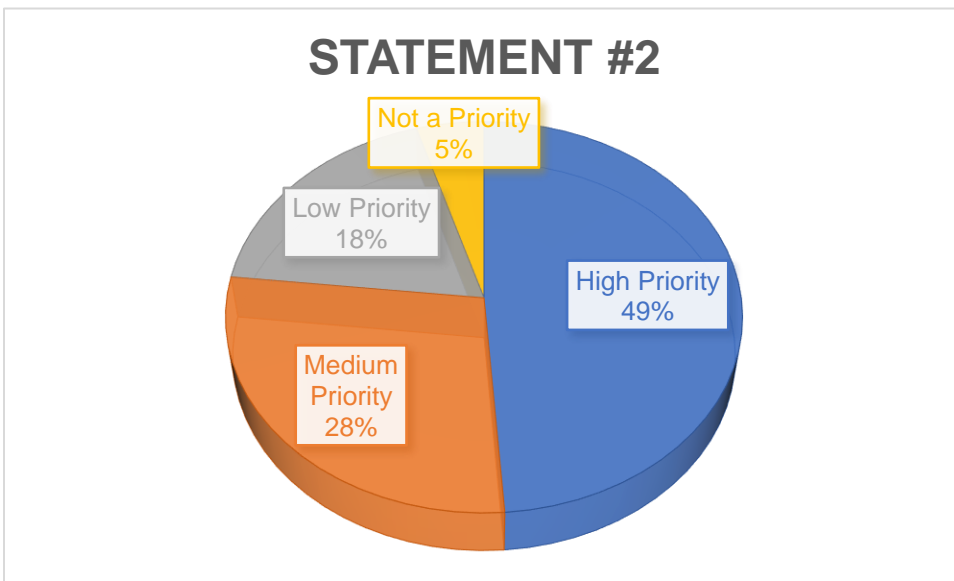
Appendix B: Downtown Priorities

What priority level do you give to the following statements?

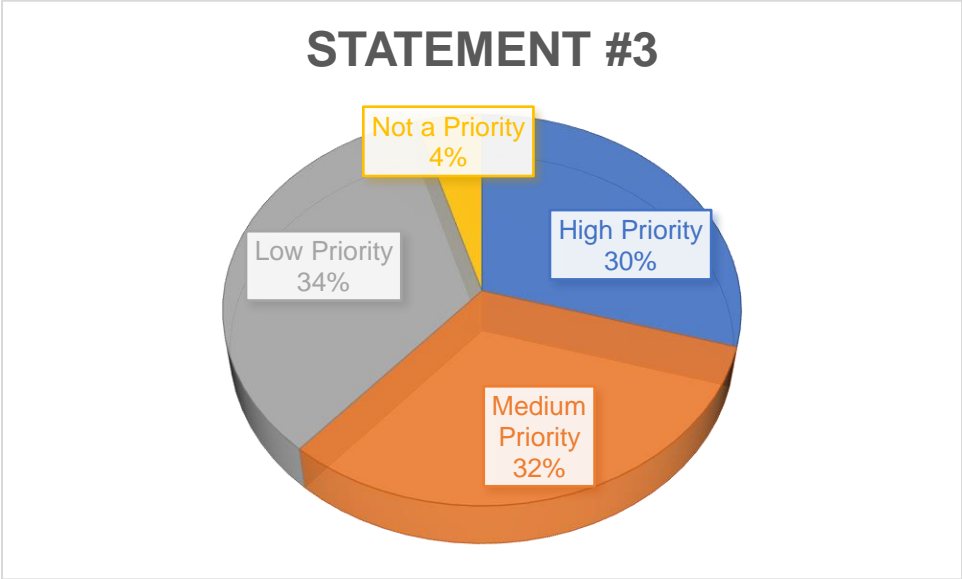
Statement #1: Improving downtown building façades should be a priority, with historic buildings displaying their original architectural features.



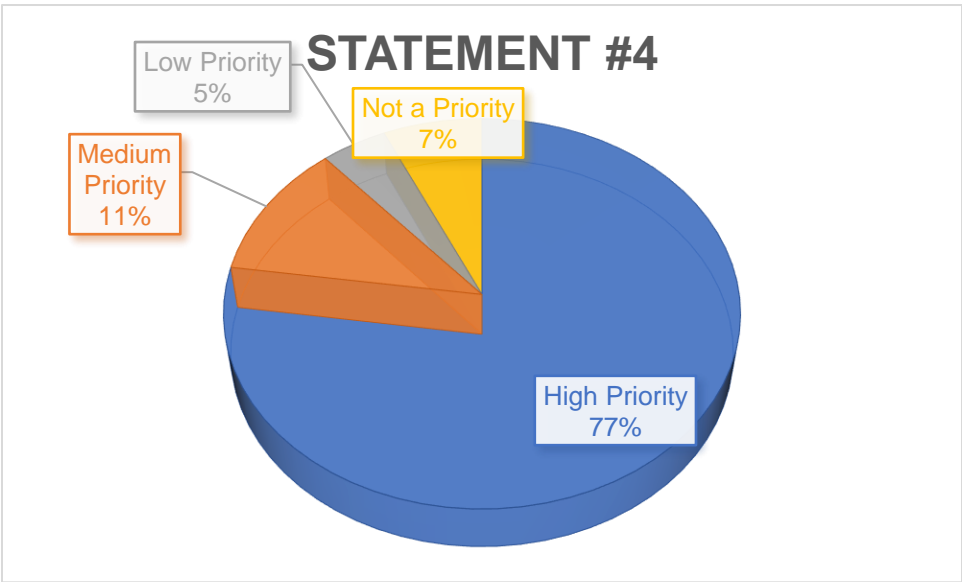
Statement #2: Newer buildings, while more modern, should be complimentary to the heritage of the downtown.



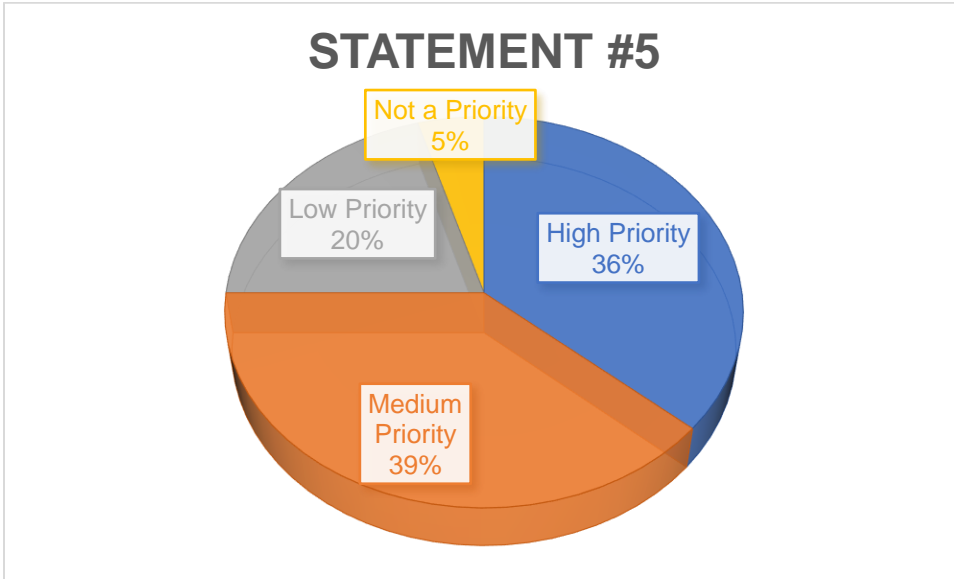
Statement #3: On-street parking in downtown Uxbridge should give priority to specialized parking (e.g. accessible, electric vehicle, and/or bicycle parking).



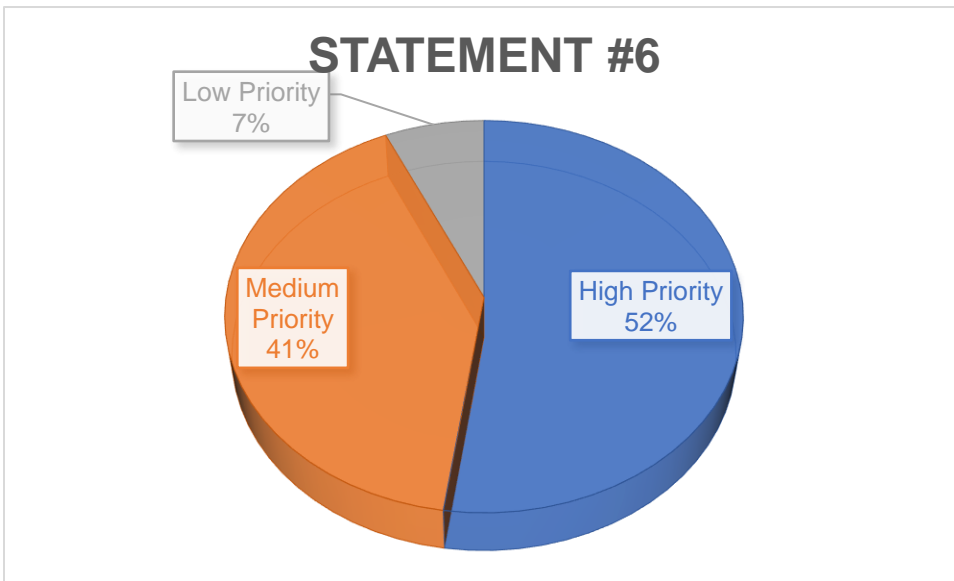
Statement #4: Downtown Uxbridge should focus on reducing heavy truck traffic on Brock Street.



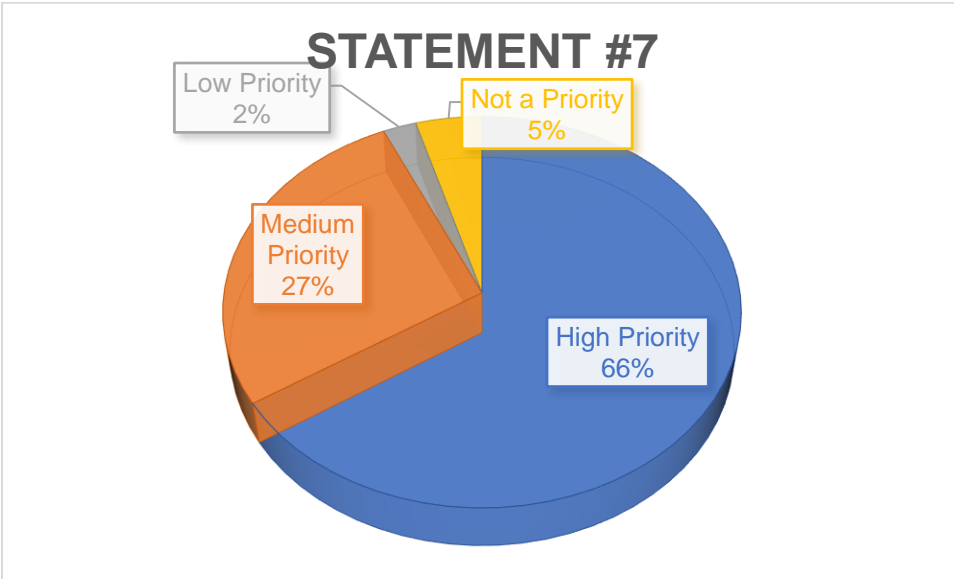
Statement #5: The Downtown should offer a range of residential opportunities that take accessibility requirements, economic factors and own and/or rent options into consideration.



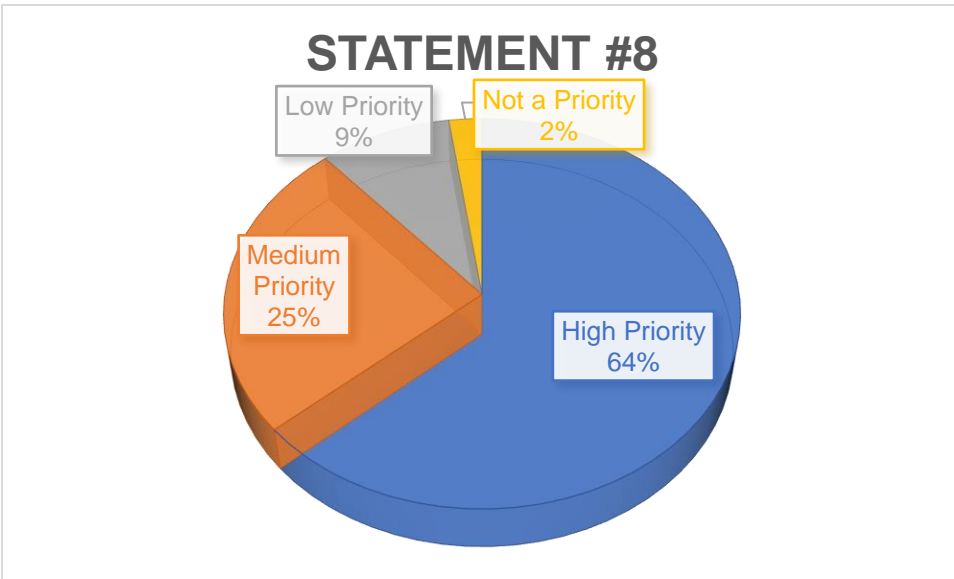
Statement #6: The promenade level of Brock Street should be predominately retail shops.



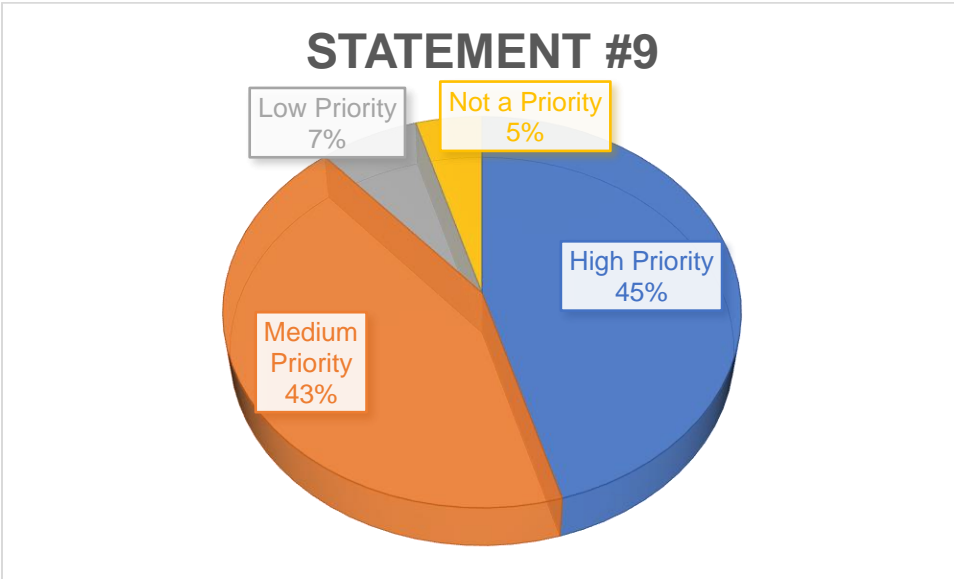
Statement #7: Stores and restaurants should be permitted to use sidewalk/parking space for retail/dining opportunities.



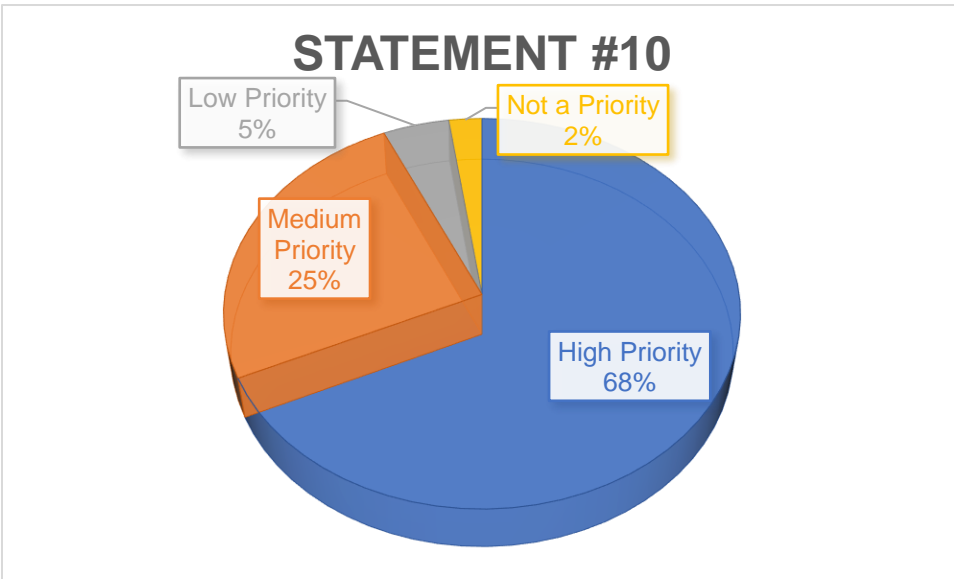
Statement #8: The Downtown should be an integral component of the Uxbridge Trail system.



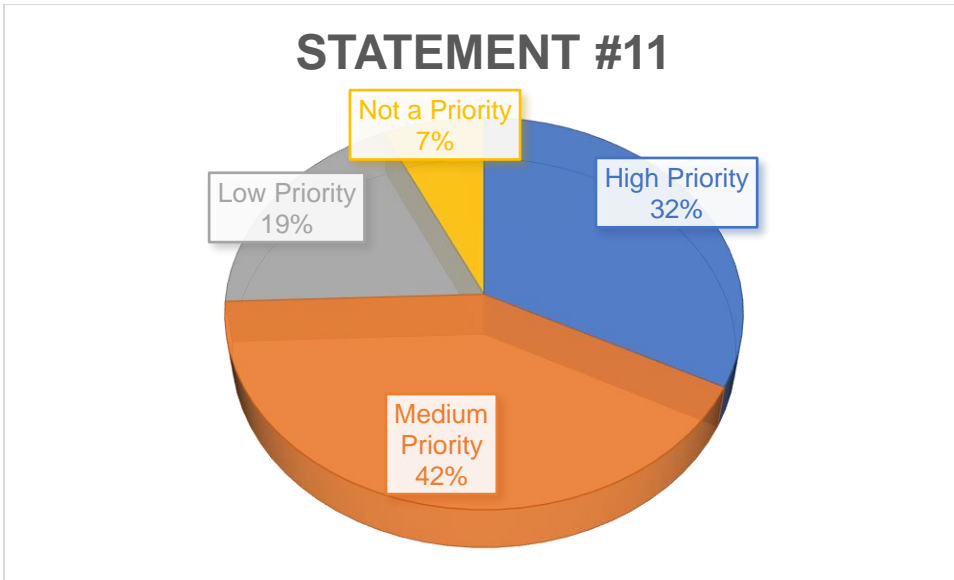
Statement #9: Public spaces (e.g. Centennial Park and the Uxbridge Brook) should become focal points for the Downtown.



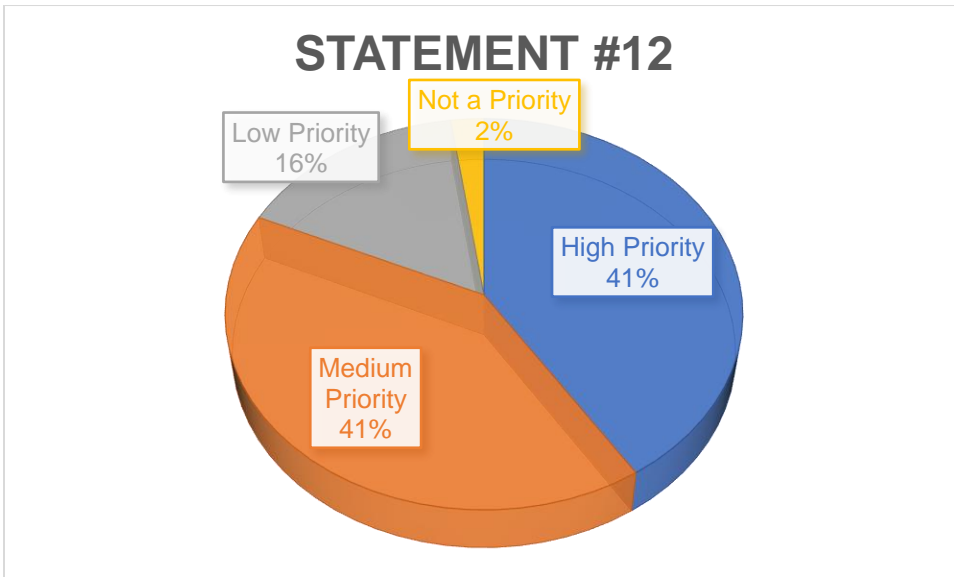
Statement #10: There should be more festivals and cultural events planned for the Downtown.



Statement #11: The Downtown should feature art in the public spaces.



Statement #12: The rear of downtown buildings should be both attractive and where possible accessible for the public.



This project made possible with funding from

