

Executive Summary

This document explains the purpose, procedure and outcomes of a student economic development study done for the Township of Guelph/Eramosa in July and August of 2003. The major focus of the study was a Business Visitation Survey, which was used to gather information from local business operators. Participants gave their opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of operating a business within the Township of Guelph/Eramosa. The results concluded that many of the obstacles businesses face are due to a lack of unity within the community and could possibly be resolved with the formation of a Business Improvement Association. Other challenges facing the community could not be resolved at the municipal level. In terms of the community's strengths, markets such as alternative agriculture, equestrian products and custom made goods proved to be quite strong.

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Purpose

The Township of Guelph/Eramosa's Economic Development committee initiated this study in order to assess the local business community's needs and to determine if there are actions the municipality can take to facilitate growth and economic development in the area.

Procedure

Finding the Businesses: Database Creation

When the study began the township did not possess a comprehensive list of businesses within the municipality. The most accurate record was found under property tax files. A list of roll numbers for all those who pay commercial property tax helped to identify many businesses; however, this did not solve the problem. Firstly, not all commercial properties house a business (some support storage, or are undeveloped, etc). Secondly, because businesses often rent spaces and change locations a roll number lists the name of the property owner and not the name of the business or business operator. This meant that a contact for the current business at each particular address still needed to be found. To do this, addresses on the roll numbers were cross-referenced with addresses in phonebooks, EWAG Listings (East Wellington Advisory Committee) and Internet searches. This helped to uncover the majority of businesses located in urban areas, however rural businesses were even more challenging to find due to the Rural Route system. The township's property tax files use a modern address system based on road names and fire numbers, while business listings use Rural Routes. This only narrowed a business location down to a road. The only way to find a rural business's location is to drive to the roll number address and write down the corresponding business name. In addition, a rural community such as the Township of Guelph/Eramosa is home to a number of small, home based businesses which are not required to pay a commercial property tax, yet these operations should still be included in a business survey and database.

The Survey

A business survey was created based on a model survey provided by the Business Expansion and Retention program. The survey was divided into categories such as General Business, Local Community, Agriculture, Technology, Natural Resources and Store Front Retail Business.

Testing the Survey

The survey trial run began in Rockwood. An interviewer approached random storefront retail businesses, with a letter of introduction from the Township CAO, in the town and asked if an owner, manager, or knowledgeable employee would be interested in volunteering their time to participate in the municipality's economic development business survey. If the response was positive a time was scheduled for the interviewer to return and carry out the survey orally with the volunteer participant.

Interviewing in Rockwood continued for the next three to four weeks while at the same time attempts to schedule interview times with operations in other locations with high

concentration of commercial activity such as Highway Number Six North and Wellington County Road Twenty-Four South.

Rural businesses were initially contacted about the study by phone. If this method did not succeed a trip to the business location was the next course of action. If no progress was made in person, finally a fax was sent in hopes of reaching a contact that was interested in participating.

The study period was coming to a close and results were compiled in part by the student researcher and completed by the Township-Planning Assistant.

Participants

The participants of the survey must be taken into account when analyzing the results of this study. The majority of the participants were local residents, operating out of a single location, with less than five employees. The businesses were started within the community and vary in age with a high number that are under four years and a high number over ten years. Participants frequently were unable to knowledgably reply to plans, and municipal government. Answers were based on each individual's personal opinion therefore the results depict the views of business owners rather than actual business community conditions.

An effective way of analyzing the results this way was to apply a general opinion for each geographic region and then research to find out if opinion held by the community is valid and if it is false, and then find out what is leading the community to form such an opinion.

For example, if the business community holds the opinion that there is no available commercial land and in actual fact it is quite abundant, the municipality needs to find out why the public holds this view and how to educate them on the actual situation.

Additional Research

Other Resources were consulted for information regarding the local economy. The government of Canada REDDI Economy Analysis Tool was used and for a Competitive Advantage Sector Classification.

Observations

In this section some of the more relevant statistics from the survey have been displayed graphically. A complete listing of the statistics has also been included. After interviewing a few businesses it became apparent that some questions were not applicable. Therefore participants were no longer asked these questions. These questions related to local technical support, finances and specialized technology not used in the area.

The businesses that were surveyed were concentrated in three major geographic areas as shown on the maps below.

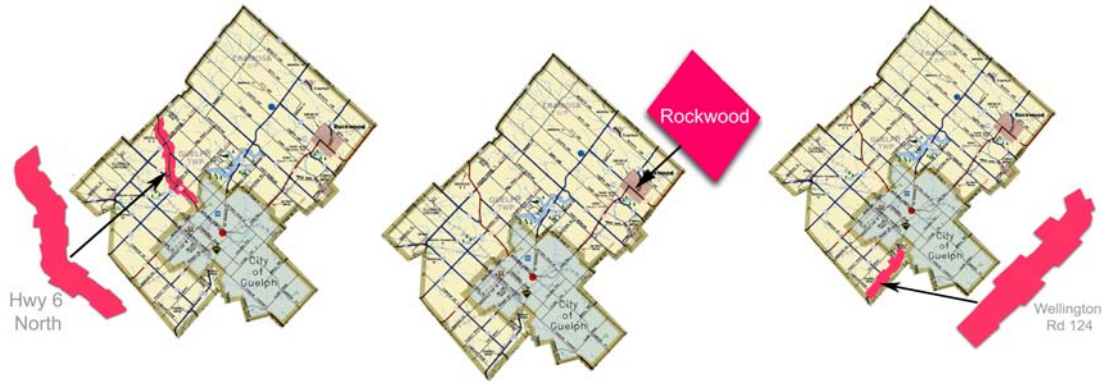


Figure 1. Geographic Locations: Hwy 6, Rockwood, and County Rd 124

Participation in Survey by Geographic Area

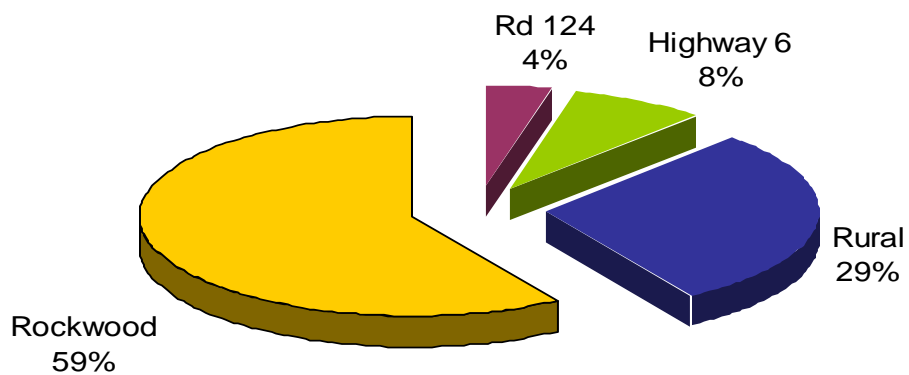


Figure 2 The majority of survey participants came from the Rockwood area

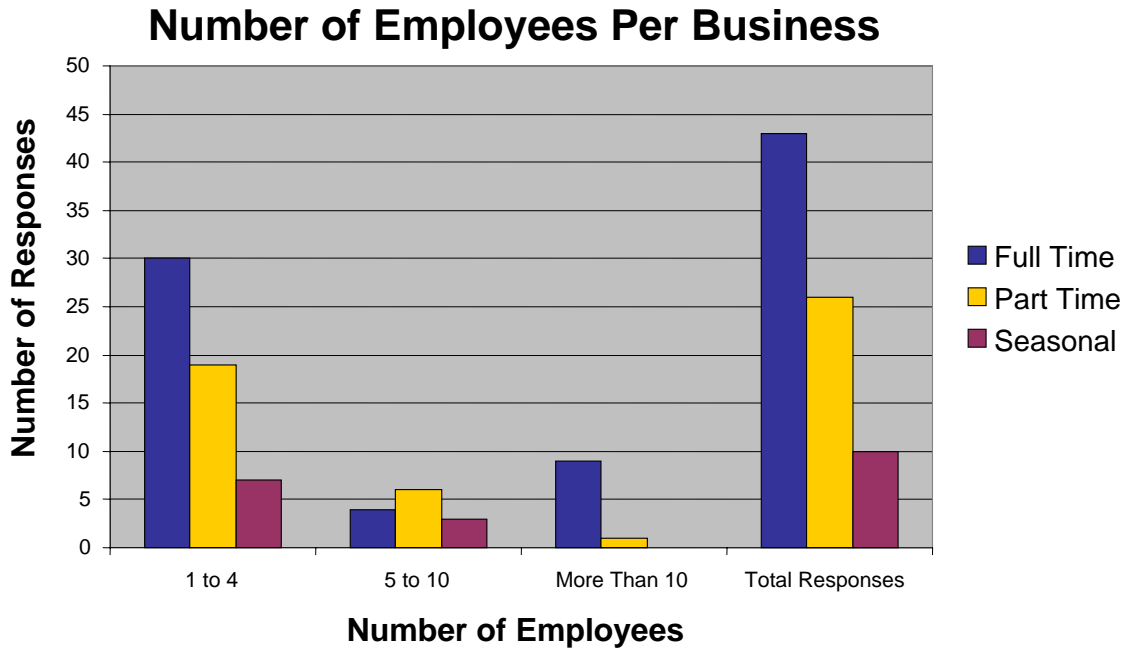


Figure 3

A high number of small businesses with only one to four employees participated in the survey. These businesses usually only had one location and were owner operated, with the owner residing in the local community.

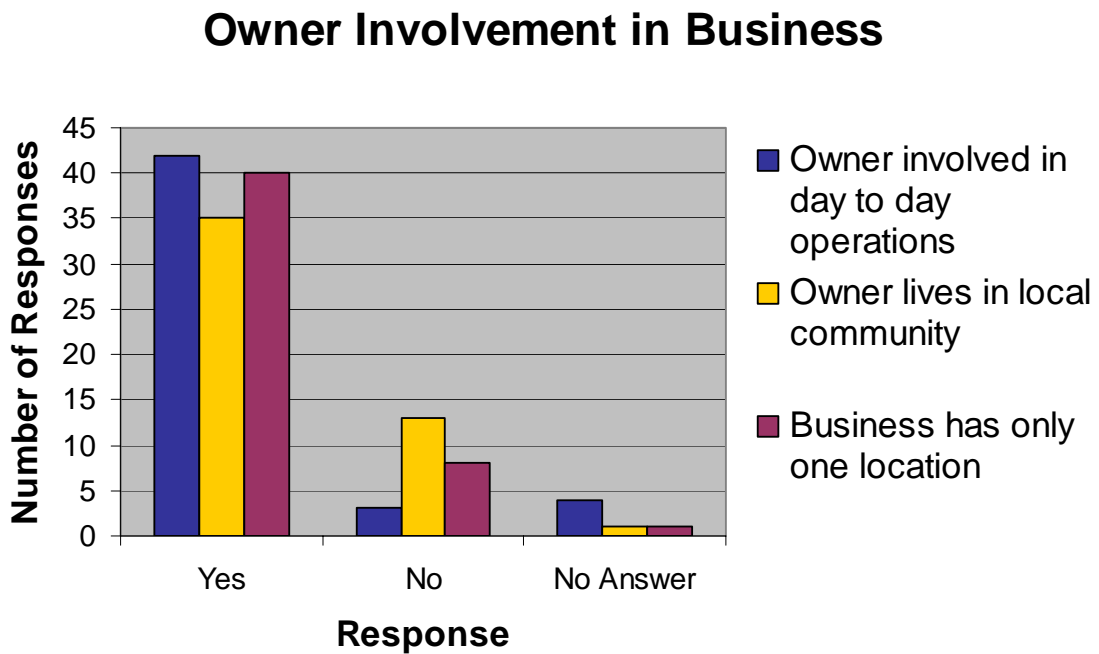


Figure 4

Business Location: Rent or Lease

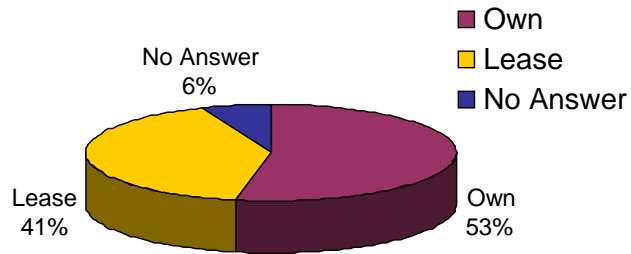


Figure 5

Business Age

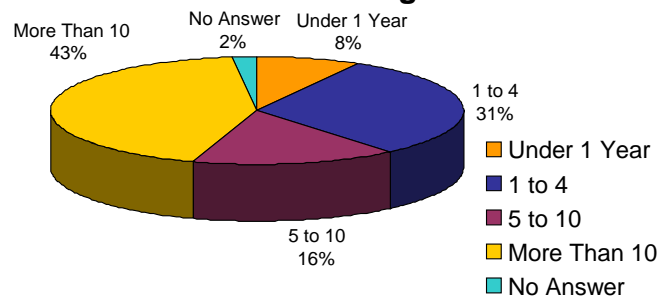


Figure 6

Was the business started in Guelph/Eramosa?



Figure 7

Energy Sources Used by Businesses

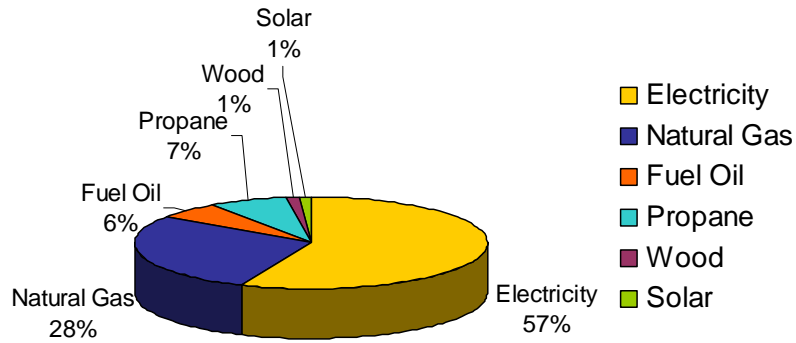


Figure 8

Reasons for Not Using Natural Gas

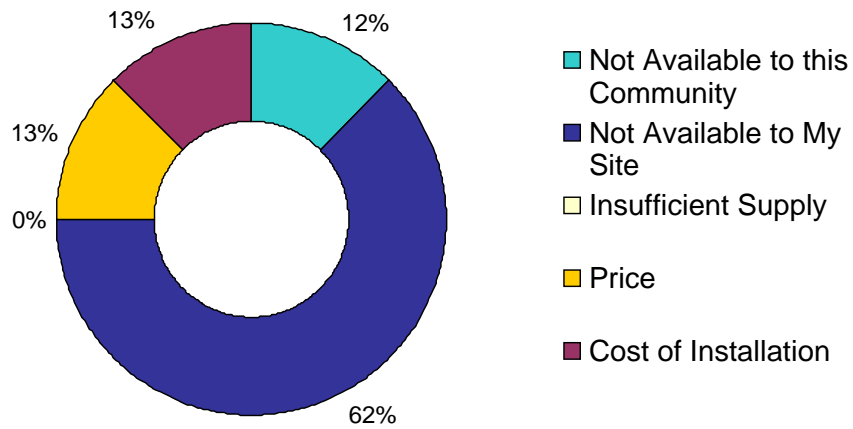


Figure 9

Figure 10

Are Businesses Planning Expansion in the Next Two Years?

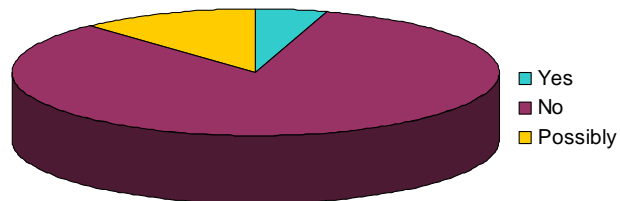


Figure 11

Avantages to Doing Business in Guelph/Eramosa Township

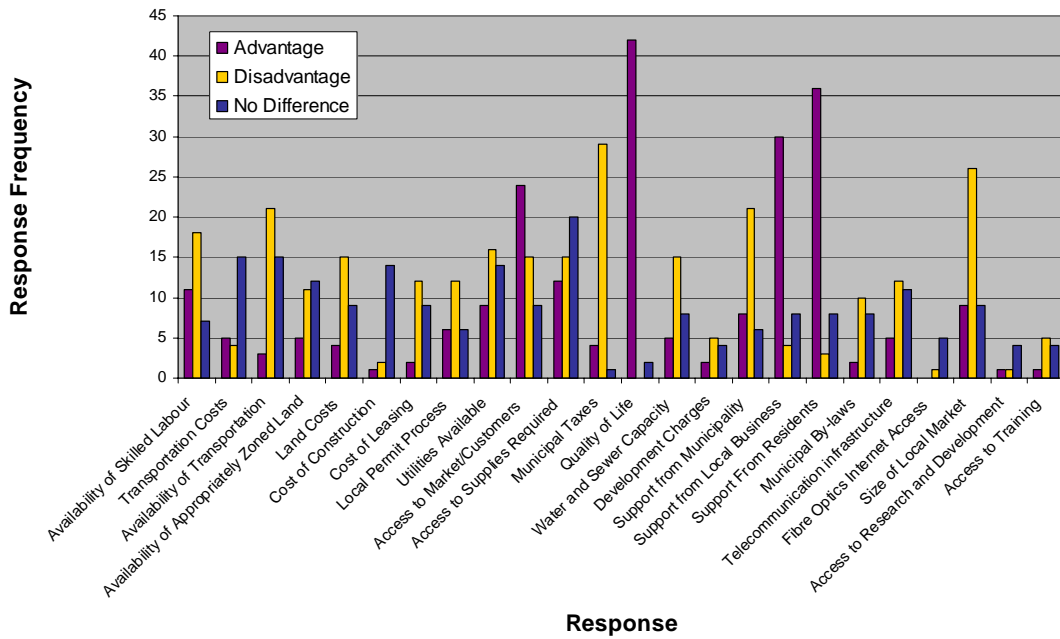


Figure 12

Barriers to Growth

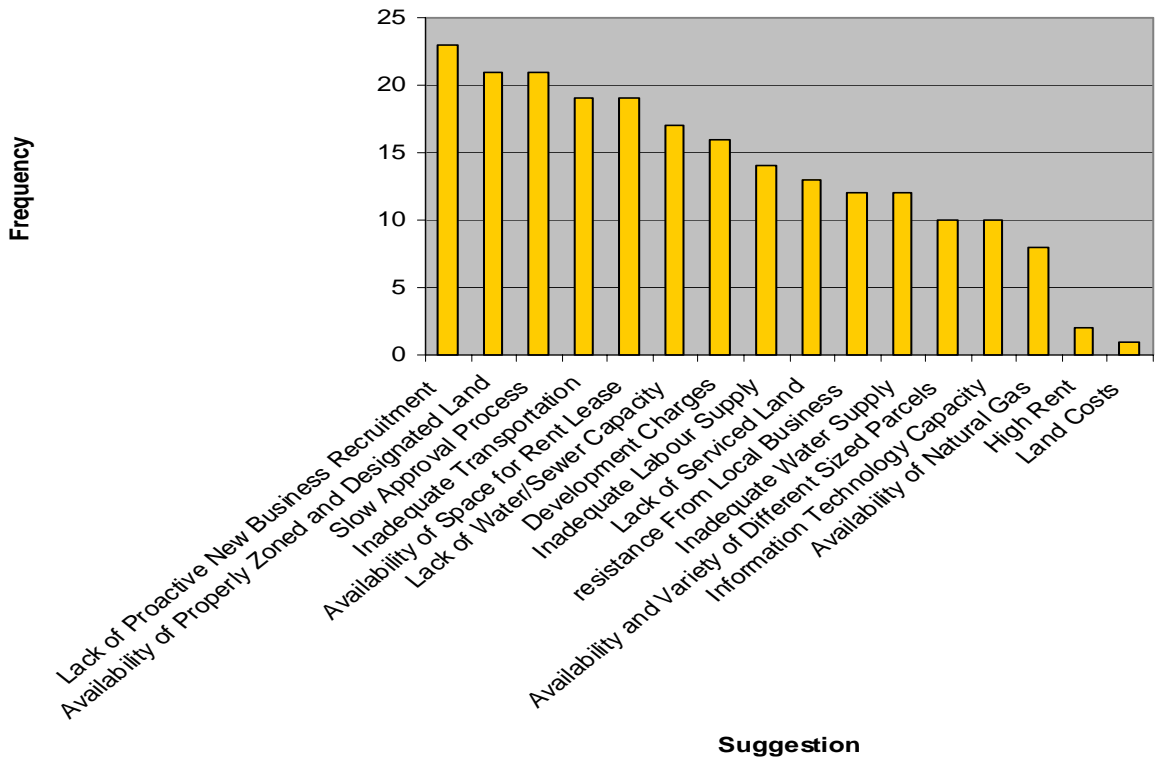


Figure 13

Suggestions for Strengthening the Local Economy

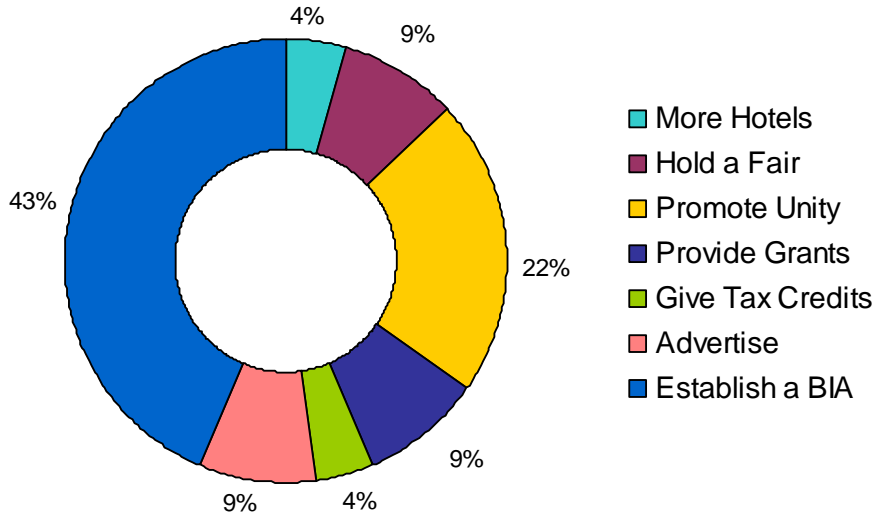


Figure 14

What Could a Local BIA do to Promote Business

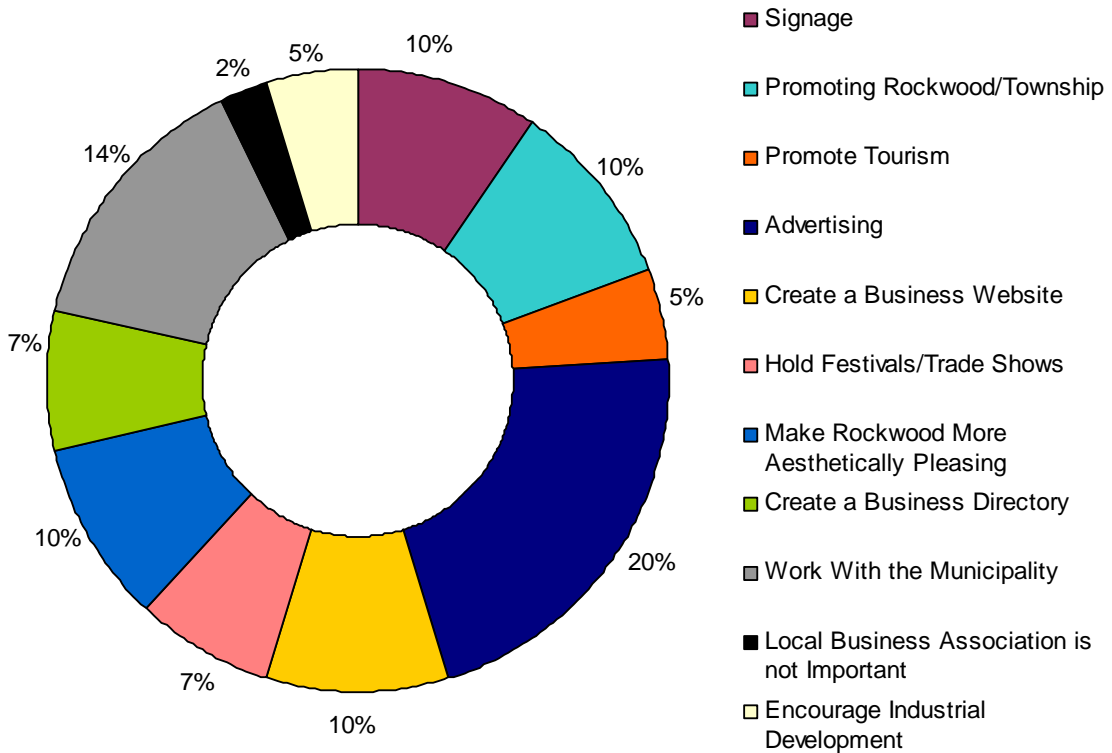


Figure 15

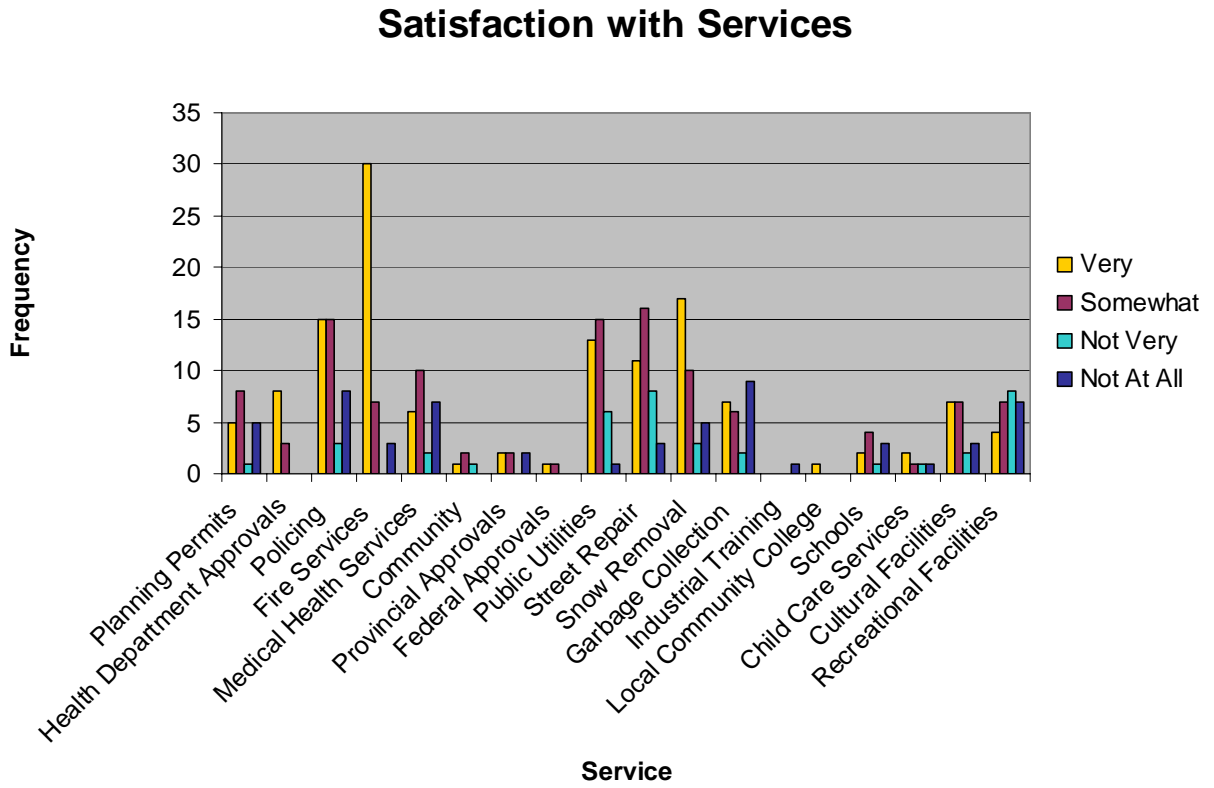


Figure 16

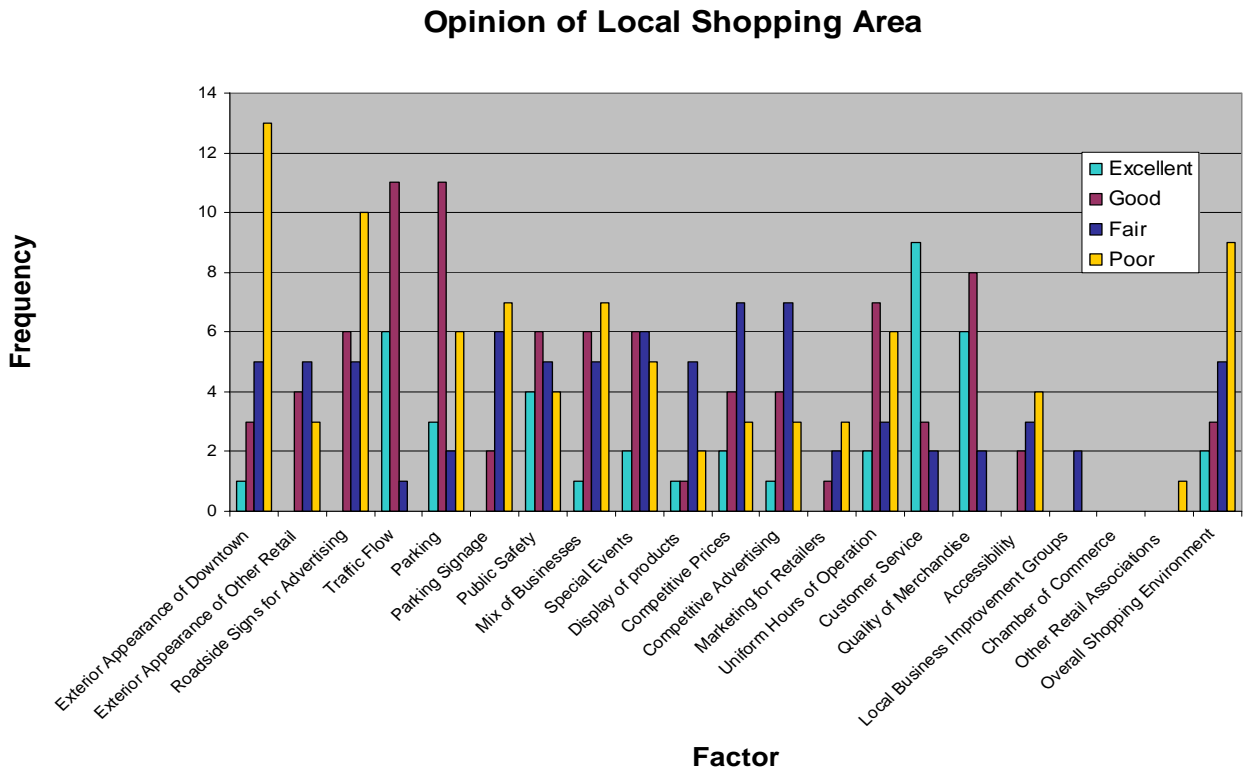


Figure 17

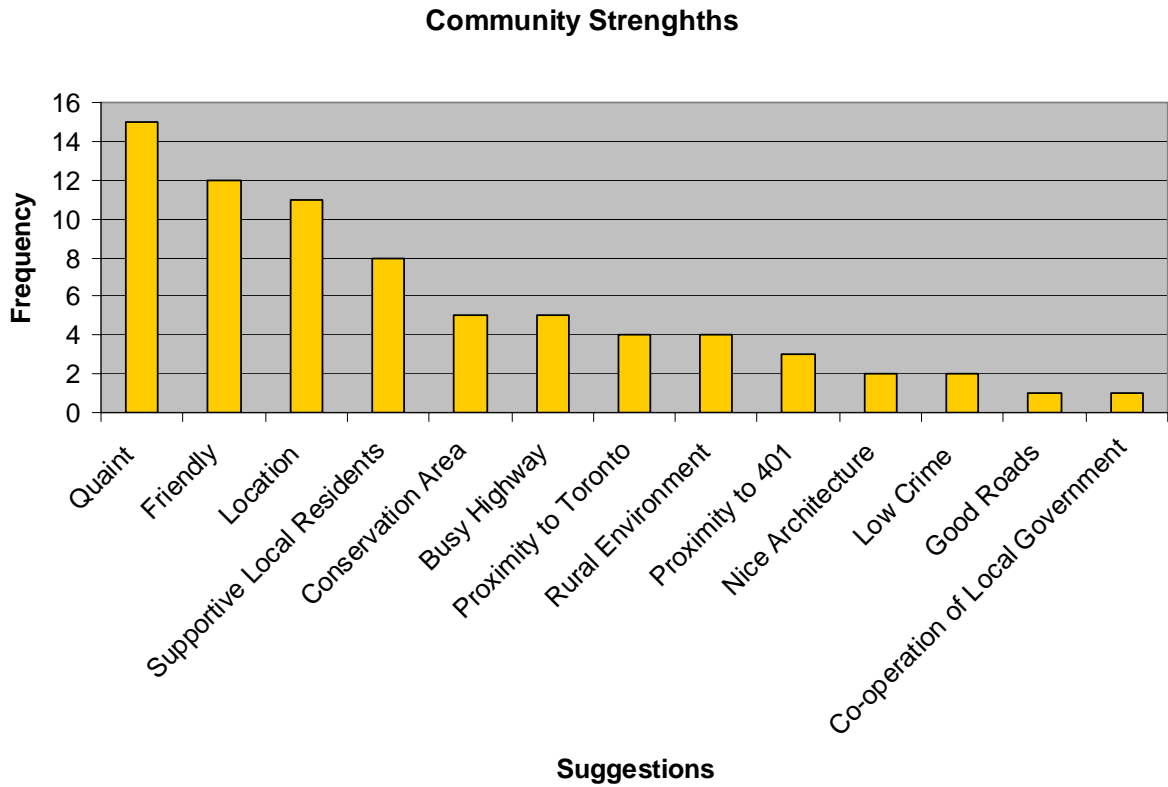
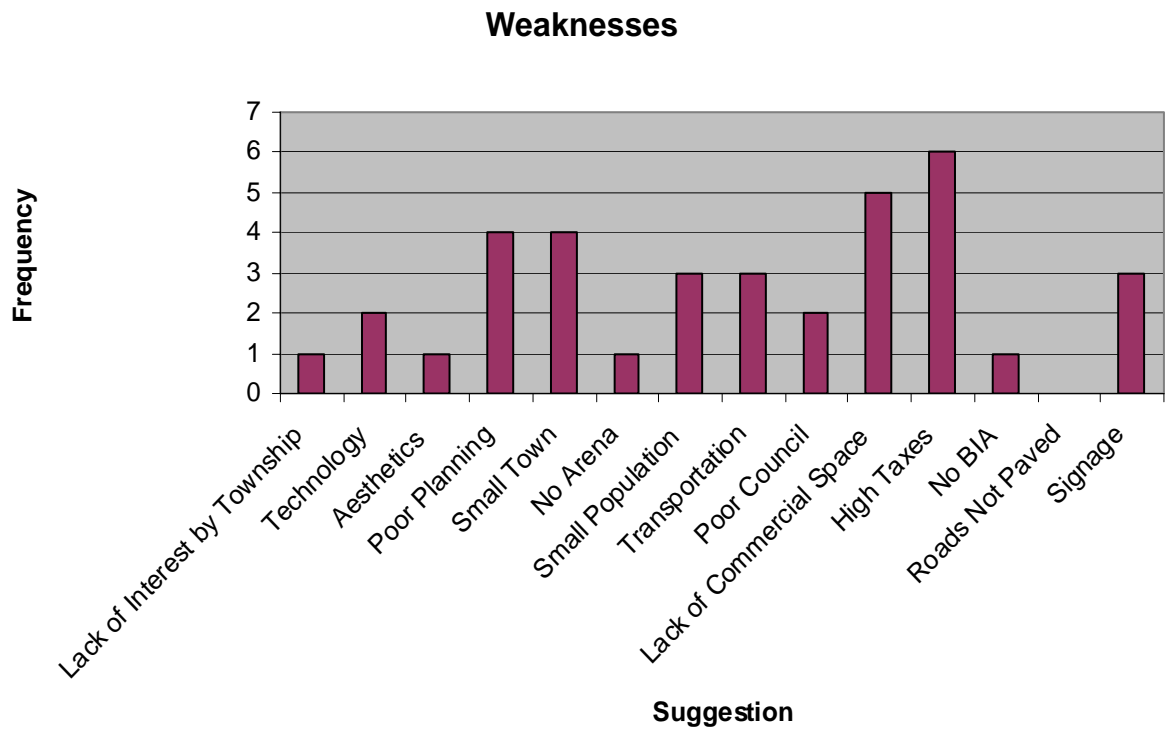


Figure 18



Conclusion

The Township of Guelph/Eramosa is situated to the northwest of the city of Guelph, a geographic area that demonstrates a transition between urban and rural lands. This creates a challenging and opportunistic environment for the business people within the municipality.

Rockwood and Eramosa Township

Survey participants stated that having such a close proximity to Guelph and being located on highway seven gave them immediate access to supplies and customers; however this was also one of their biggest challenges. In order to be successful it is necessary to draw people, including local residents, away from the urban centres.

Improving pedestrian and vehicular accessibility and circulation is the first step to overcoming this obstacle. Creating pedestrian linkages (possibly green corridors) between recreational facilities, residential developments, educational institutions and commercial areas would help improve pedestrian circulation and instill a sense of community. It would also be ideal to have a crosswalk located at the downtown park. The park and adjacent flood plain area also has great potential to be developed over time and become a central green space which unifies the community instead of dividing it. Redesigning the vehicular entrance and parking at the park would increase use at the park.

Vehicular circulation in the rest of Rockwood is satisfactory and roadside parking is abundant, however merchants stated that their customers are unsure where parking is permitted. Parking signage would encourage the public to use roadside spaces and alleviate confusion. Another accessibility issue is the fact commercial operations are spread out so widely. Long term planning strategies and growth will help to centralize retail and commercial business.

Survey participants were also very interested in beautification and community advertising. Establishing a marketable, unified visual concept for the municipality would help to create an image to entice visitors. Other suggestions regarding aesthetic improvement included improving private and public signage, additional street furniture (waste receptacles, benches, and planters), community cleanup days, and pressuring the upkeep of privately owned buildings. In addition, business owners showed a keen interest in participating in a township wide business directory and annual trade show. People need to be made aware of what is available locally.

Building upon local events and festivals is another way to advertise the community. Businesses need to support these events and cash in on visitors. Gearing events towards local markets is also a good idea; it was found during the survey that the township has a high number of equine enthusiasts and agriculturally related businesses. This theme could easily be incorporated into an event such as pioneer days.

All of the issues brought up in the survey were very useful; however the real question is whether or not they are the responsibility of a township wide municipality such as Guelph/Eramosa. The real challenge is finding a group to take on the responsibility of tasks such as beautification and community advertising. Currently there is no chamber of

commerce of BIA in the community and the formation of such a group would enable the community to tackle issues that are not appropriate for the municipality to undertake.

Businesses, residents and the municipality need to unite themselves and work as a team for the greater good of the community. Open sharing of information between these three parties will help to determine what services need improvement. Businesses suggested that the municipality hold regular information sessions regarding economic development and service improvement. They also asked the township to provide information on government grants for small businesses, signage bylaws and waste collection agencies. It was also requested that the municipality have resources at their offices to answer public questions about the local businesses and services.

Participation in other two geographic regions of the township was much lower than that in Rockwood. The businesses on highway six and Wellington Road 124 were generally much larger and more corporate in nature. In general these businesses were satisfied with the services they were receiving and stated that Guelph/Eramosa Township had all the benefits of an urban centre without the urban costs.

These businesses were also interested on conversing with the municipality to investigate which service upgrades to invest in to benefit the most people. High-speed Internet access and a more comprehensive website were concerns which are already being addressed by the municipality.

In general the municipality and businesses need to continue and further develop the dialogue that was started with this business survey. The municipality should be responsible for facilitating and providing resources for processes such as BIA formation, community discussions and service investments.