



2016 Merritt Business Walk Report



Report on 2016 Business Walk

Overview

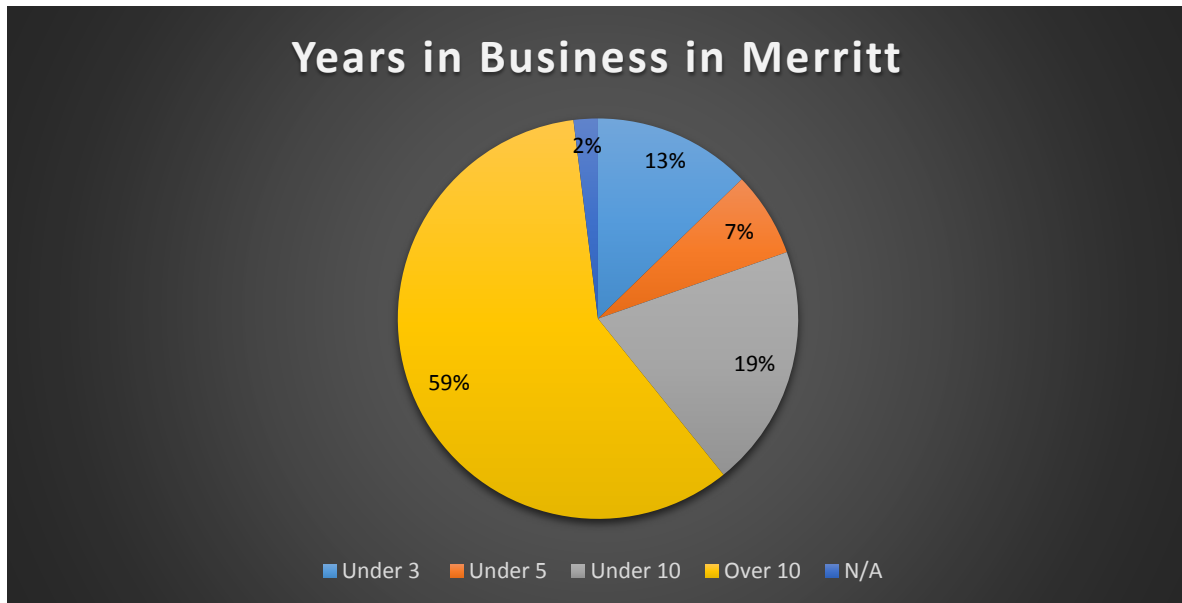
In 2015 the Business Walk Program was first brought to Merritt, with the event led by Nicola Valley Community Futures and partners. This year, the event was organized internally through the City of Merritt with plans to make the Business Walk an annual event.

On May 3, 2016 the City of Merritt along with 20 community volunteers completed the second annual Merritt Business Walk. The result included 102 business survey responses received, increased communication with the business community, and distributing business resource material. Collecting this information gives an updated snapshot of the Merritt business community, highlighting the challenges and successes that local businesses face. Individual responses are kept confidential throughout this report. The results of this report will assist City staff and Council with a better understanding of the local business community and provide direction moving forward.

Quick Facts:

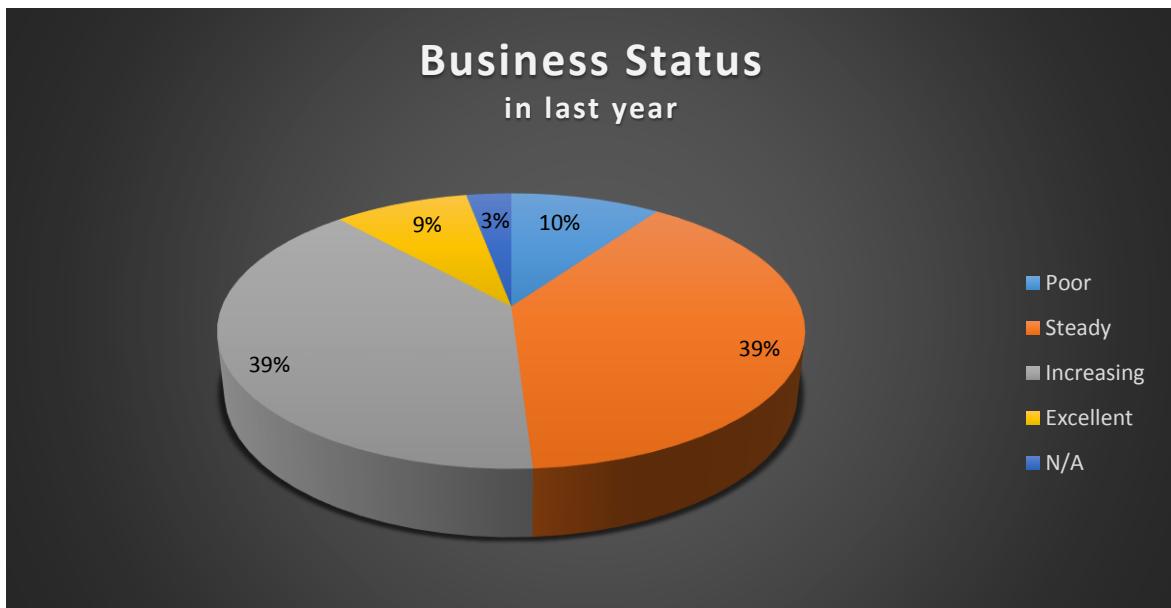
- **102** business survey responses received from 20 volunteers
- **7** questions were asked to business owners/managers to determine: how busy their business was, how many employees they have, challenges, reasons for doing business in Merritt, etc.
- This year the program expanded to cover a larger sample area from the business community
- **59%** of businesses have been operating over 10 years
- **87%** of businesses were doing steady or above
- **1,233** employees (full, part, contract) work for the companies surveyed
- Top 3 Reasons for Doing Business in Merritt consistent with 2015:
 - 1. Location**
 - 2. Clientele**
 - 3. Affordability**
- Top 3 Challenges/Threats identified as:
 - 1. Competition**
 - 2. Lack of Labour**
 - 3. Business/Customer Leakage**
- Top 3 Suggestions to Help Business Thrive were identified under the categories of:
 - 1. Downtown**
 - 2. City Hall**
 - 3. Signage**
- **13%** of businesses plan to retire in the next 5 years
- **3** businesses noted they would like to start up additional businesses in town

Years in Business in Merritt



The majority of businesses surveyed have been operating in Merritt for more than 10 years at 59%. There are many businesses which provide a stable base for the economy of Merritt and additional new businesses opening each year. This brings new amenities, services and capital into the local economy. In 2015 businesses responded that 56% had been in business for more than ten years.

Business Status



Survey results from 2016 noted 87% of businesses were doing steady or above. The majority of businesses responded their current status was either steady or increasing. Survey results from 2015 showed 67% of businesses being steady or above.

Employees from Businesses Surveyed

Of businesses surveyed in 2016, results were received from companies represented approximately 1,233 employees (full/part/contract). Employee numbers were not collected in 2015.

- Full: 793
- Part: 370
- Contract/Temp: 70
- Total: 1,233*

*From the Merritt Community Profile: 2,900 individuals were employed according to the 2011 stats. This included large employers such as: Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, City of Merritt, Tolko Industries Ltd., School District No. 58, Douglas Lake Ranch, Ministry of Forest, and Highland Valley Copper, which the 2016 survey results did not include.



Top 3 Reasons for Doing Business in Merritt



Location: 30%



Clientele: 23%

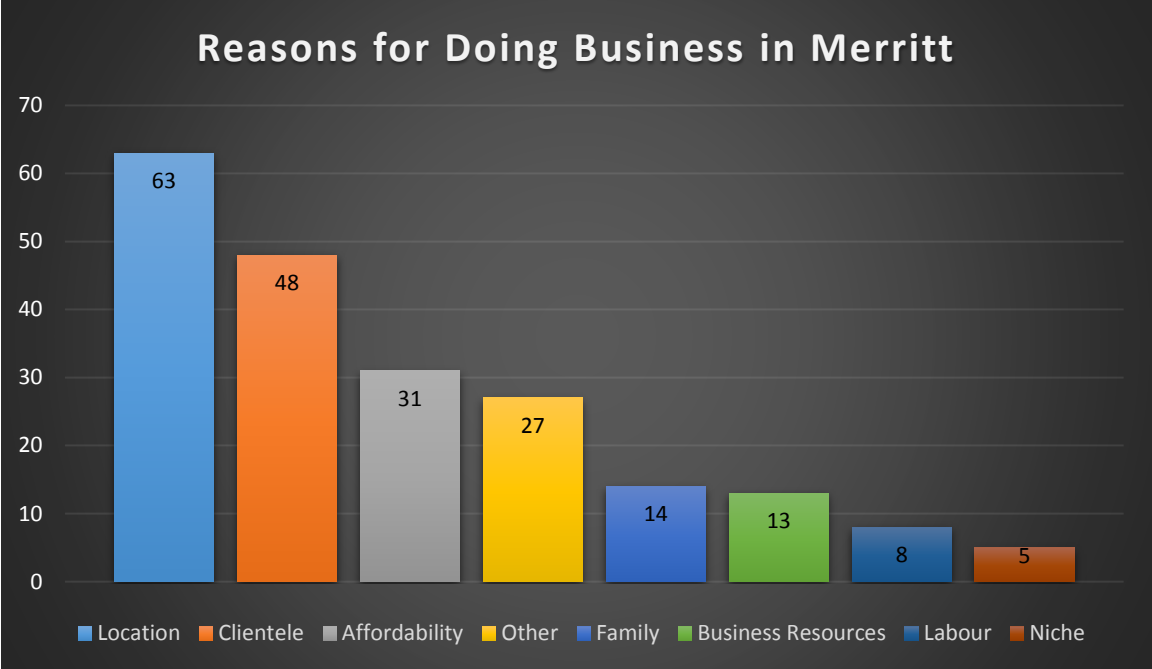


Affordability: 15%

“40+ years in Merritt (Invoices found dating back to early 60's)”

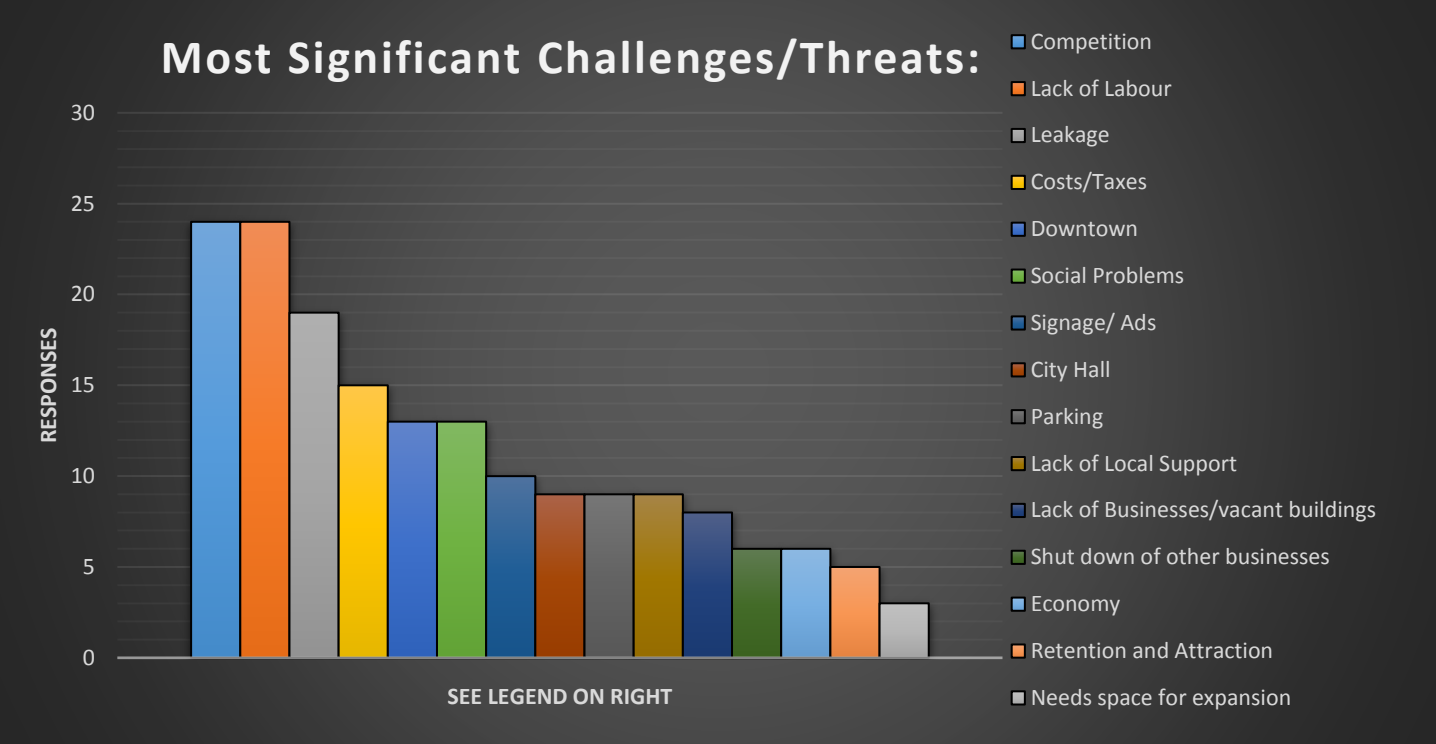
“Downtown businesses have noticed new Economic Development Officer”

“Pretty happy, has no complaints about taxes because it's necessary to support services”



The 2016 survey results stayed consistent from 2015 for the reasons businesses operate in Merritt. In 2015, survey results showed Location (65%), Clientele (35%) and Affordability (28%) as the leading reasons for doing business in Merritt.

Most Significant Challenges/Threats



The top 3 most significant challenges/threats were:

- **Lack of Qualified Labour** (24 responses)
- **Competition** (24 responses)
- **Customer/Business Leakage** (19 responses)

There were a wide variety of challenges and threats brought forward by the business community. The challenges mentioned will be reviewed by City staff and taken into account. The top 3 challenges and threats from 2015 were: Consumer Leakage, Lack of Local Government Support, and In-adequate Signage.

Top 3 Suggestions to Help Business Thrive

- **Downtown** (Clean up, encourage individuals towards central shopping areas, address downtown social problems, have more police presence) (38 responses)
- **Increase Signage** (21 responses)
- **City Hall** (Increase communication, less red tape, lower taxes, business friendly bylaws) (20 responses)

Others Included:

- *Increase number of people/businesses overall in Merritt (18 responses)*
- *Showcase Merritt/increase tourism (15 responses)*
- *Beautification projects (9 responses)*
- *Address leakage and have a shop local campaign (9 responses)*
- *More collaboration projects (8 responses)*
- *Offer/promote more business incentives (8 responses)*
- *Fix parking problem (5 responses)*



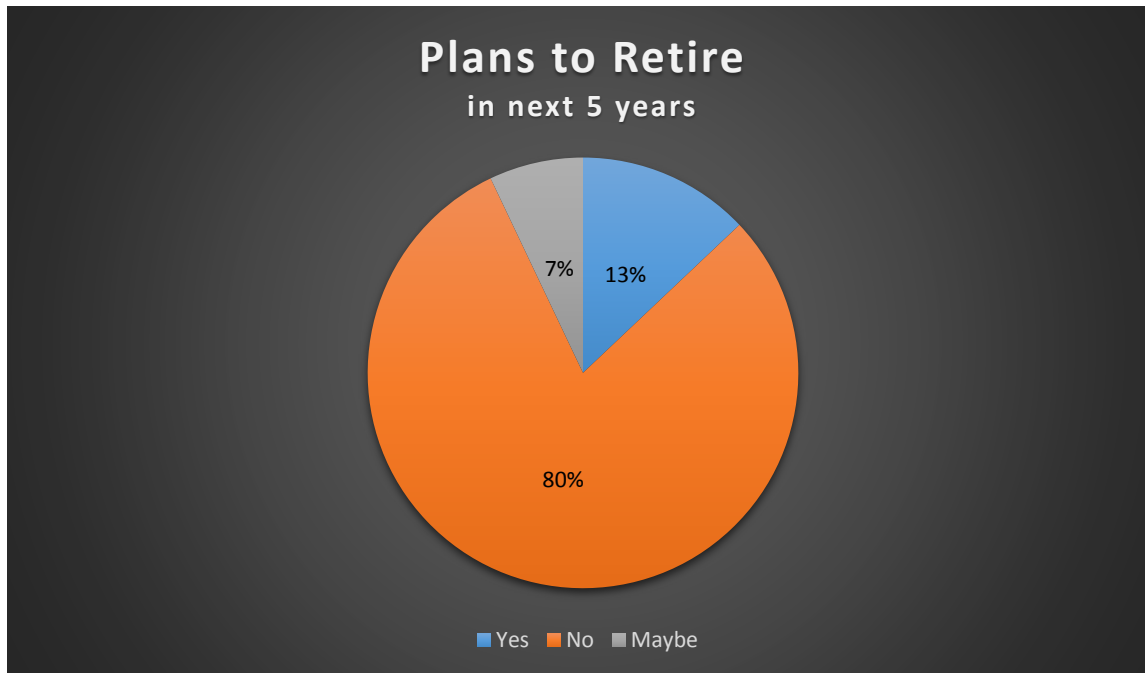
In 2015 the top 3 suggestions included: Improved Local Government Support, Improved Marketing, Improve Signage.

“Took over full ownership of business today (May 3rd, 2016)”

“The store has over 50 local artisans products”

“Over 100 years in operations beginning in 1912. Cool story: Tourists from Australia came by word of mouth to see mural next door”

Do You Plan to Retire in Next 5 Years?



If “Yes” or “Maybe” do you have a succession plan?

71% of those surveyed did not have a succession plan currently in place.

Other Comments Included

- *“No changes in downtown for far too long, negative social visuals”*
- *“Downtown needs to look better- so many extra storefronts”*
- *“Great idea to bring forward to Council as a shop local promotion”*
- *“The City should create information brochures for Tourism in Merritt”*
- *“Would like to see a theater and more shopping malls and restaurants”*
- *“Develop a community of entrepreneurs and a place where they can thrive”*
- *“Needs more tourism manufacturing, go after Tech industry, Merritt has cheap land and is a good distribution point”*
- *“Keep the communication open between the City and citizens”*
- *“Rockin’ River event is helpful and the free shuttle is a good addition”*
- *“Merritt a good place- need to revitalize the core of the City though. Parking bylaw needs to be revisited”*
- *“Bring people downtown and give them a reason to come downtown”*
- *“Would like to know about upcoming events and how to be involved”*

“Downtown businesses are gathering to discuss local issues”

“Recently opened second location in Merritt”

“Lots of space and looking to bring on 2 additional staff”

Staff Recommendations

Short Term Goals: (6 months)

- The report sent to business community and made available on City of Merritt website
- Report presented to City of Merritt Council, Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce, Nicola Valley Community Futures and other interested community organizations
- Follow up with businesses who requested 1:1 assistance or additional information
- Work with community partners to provide business resources and support
- Develop tourism information tools for distribution and information sharing

Long Term Goals: (+1 Year)

- Proceed with Business Walk as an annual event
- Continue to implement retention and expansion initiatives
- Continue to expand on business attraction initiatives
- Work through implementation plans in:
 - Wayfinding Strategic Plan, Age Friendly Action Plan, Economic Development Strategic Plan, etc.

Businesses would like follow up info on:

- *Subsidies, grants and programs*
- *Starting a business*
- *Information on Merritt Strategic Plan*
- *Nicola Ave Highway upgrades*
- *Would like welcome packages at store*
- *Parking bylaw information*



The City of Merritt would like to thank the following organizations for assisting with the 2016 Business Walk:

- City of Merritt Council and Staff
- Province of BC- Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training
- Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce
- Nicola Valley Community Futures
- Work BC
- And Other Community Members