



2017 Merritt Business Walk Report



Overview

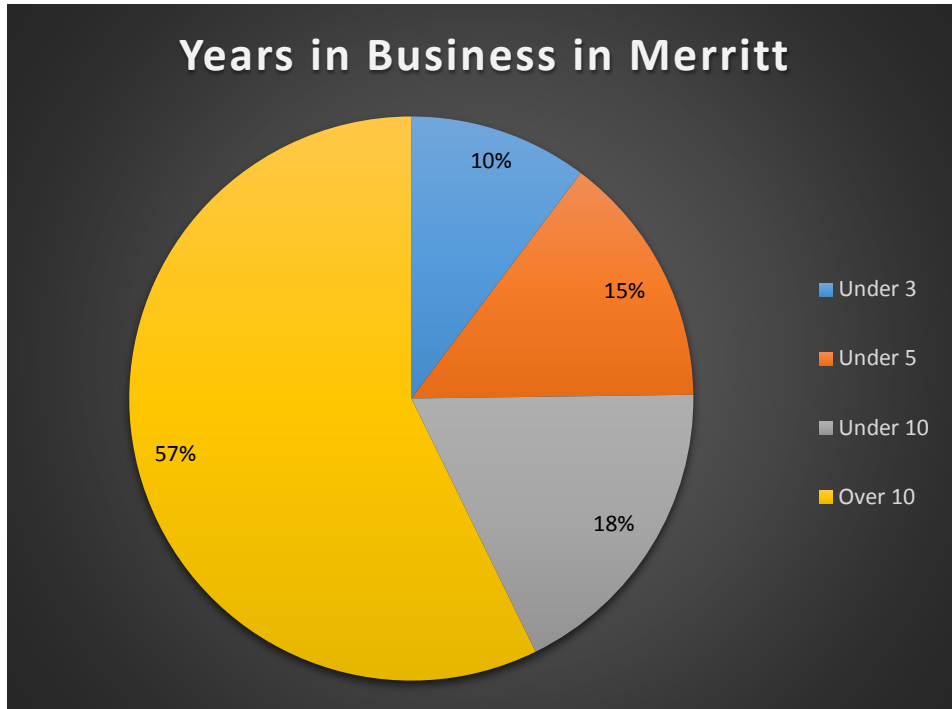
The Business Walk program was first brought to BC in 2012 in the Central Okanagan. In 2015, the Business Walk Program operated for the first year in Merritt with partnerships between Community Futures Nicola Valley, the Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Merritt. Since then, the event has been organized internally through the City of Merritt as an annual event. The 2015 walk resulted in 85 survey responses received and a report on the findings created. In 2016, the Business Walk Program returned for a second year with 102 survey responses received and a report of findings created.

On May 11, 2017, the City of Merritt, along with 20 community volunteers, completed the third Merritt Business Walk. The results included 117 business survey responses, increased communication with the business community, and distributed business resource material to local businesses. 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:

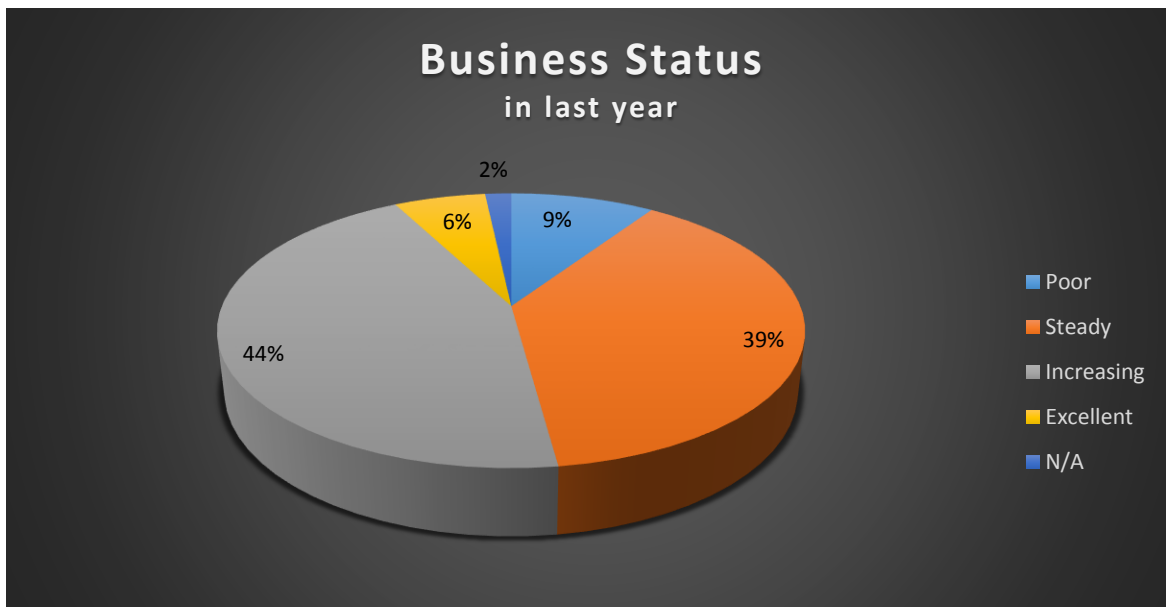
- **117** business survey responses received
- **7** questions were asked to business owners/managers to determine how busy their business was, how many employees they have, challenges, reasons for doing business in Merritt, etc.
- **57%** of businesses have been operating for 10+ years
- **89%** of businesses were doing steady or above
- **1,364** employees (full, part, contract) work for the companies surveyed
- Top 3 Reasons for Doing Business in Merritt consistent with 2015 and 2016:
 1. **Location**
 2. **Clientele**
 3. **Affordability**
- Top 3 Challenges/Threats were identified under the categories of:
 1. **City Hall/Taxes**
 2. **Lack of Qualified Labour**
 3. **Signage/Advertising**
- Top 3 Suggestions to Help Business Thrive were identified under the categories of:
 1. **Attract More Residents, Businesses and Jobs to Merritt**
 2. **Increase Signage, Advertising and City Marketing**
 3. **Cleanup City (downtown), Beautification and Facade Improvements**
- **16%** of businesses plan to sell/retire in the next 5 years
- **Over 27** businesses noted they have been operating in Merritt for over 20+ years
- Survey sample reflects approximately **33%** of the Merritt business community

Years in Business in Merritt



The majority of businesses surveyed in 2017 have been operating in Merritt for more than 10 years at 57%. There are many businesses which provide a stable base for the economy of Merritt and additional new businesses opening each year. In 2016, businesses responded that 59% had been in business for more than ten years.

Business Status



Survey results from 2017 noted 89% of businesses were doing steady or above. Survey results from 2016 showed 87% of businesses being steady or above.

Employees from Businesses Surveyed

In 2017, survey responses were received from businesses employing approximately 1,364 (full/part/contract) individuals. Compared to approximately 1,233 employees from businesses surveyed in 2016.

- Full: 853
- Part: 434
- Contract/Temp: 77
- Total: 1,364

From the Merritt Community Profile: 2,900 individuals were employed within Merritt according to the 2011 stats. This included large employers such as: Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, City of Merritt, School District No. 58, and Ministry of Forest which the 2017 survey results did not include.



Top 3 Reasons for Doing Business in Merritt



Location: 38%



Clientele: 18%



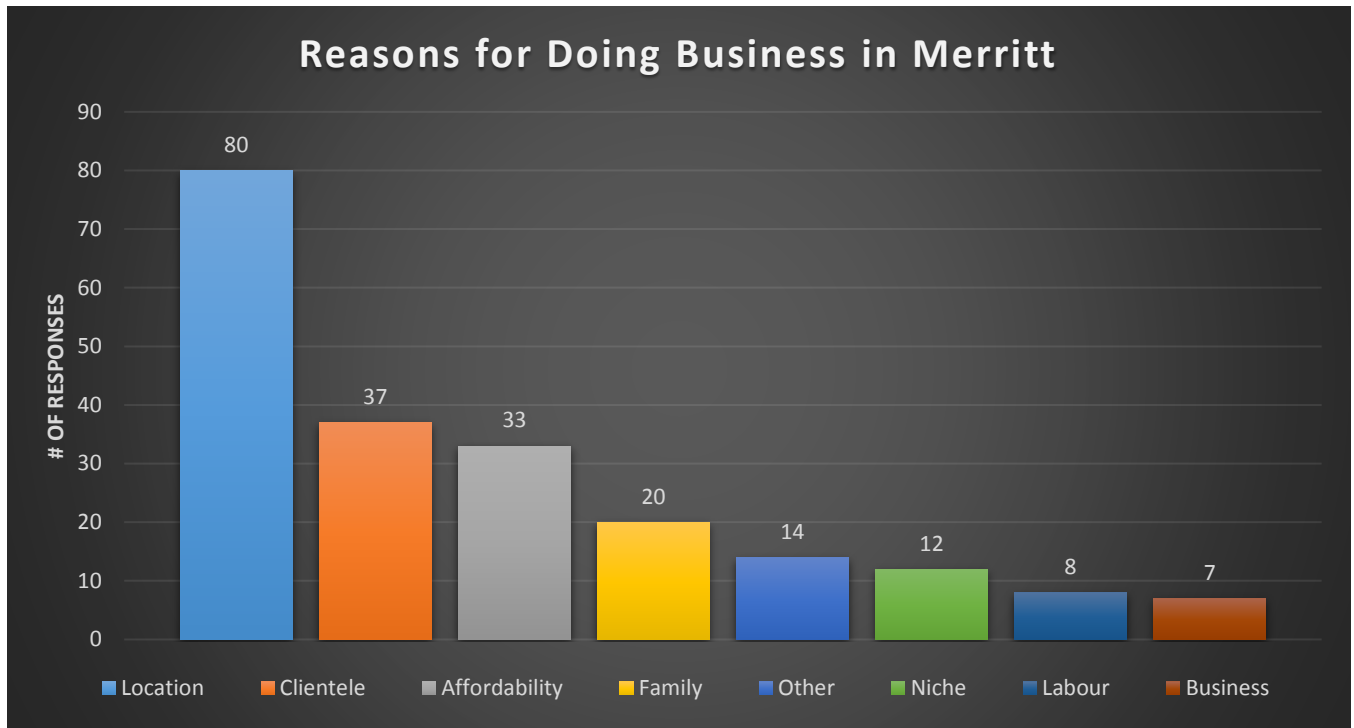
Affordability: 16%

“Business has been in the family for three generations!”

“21 years local; We believe in our youth!”

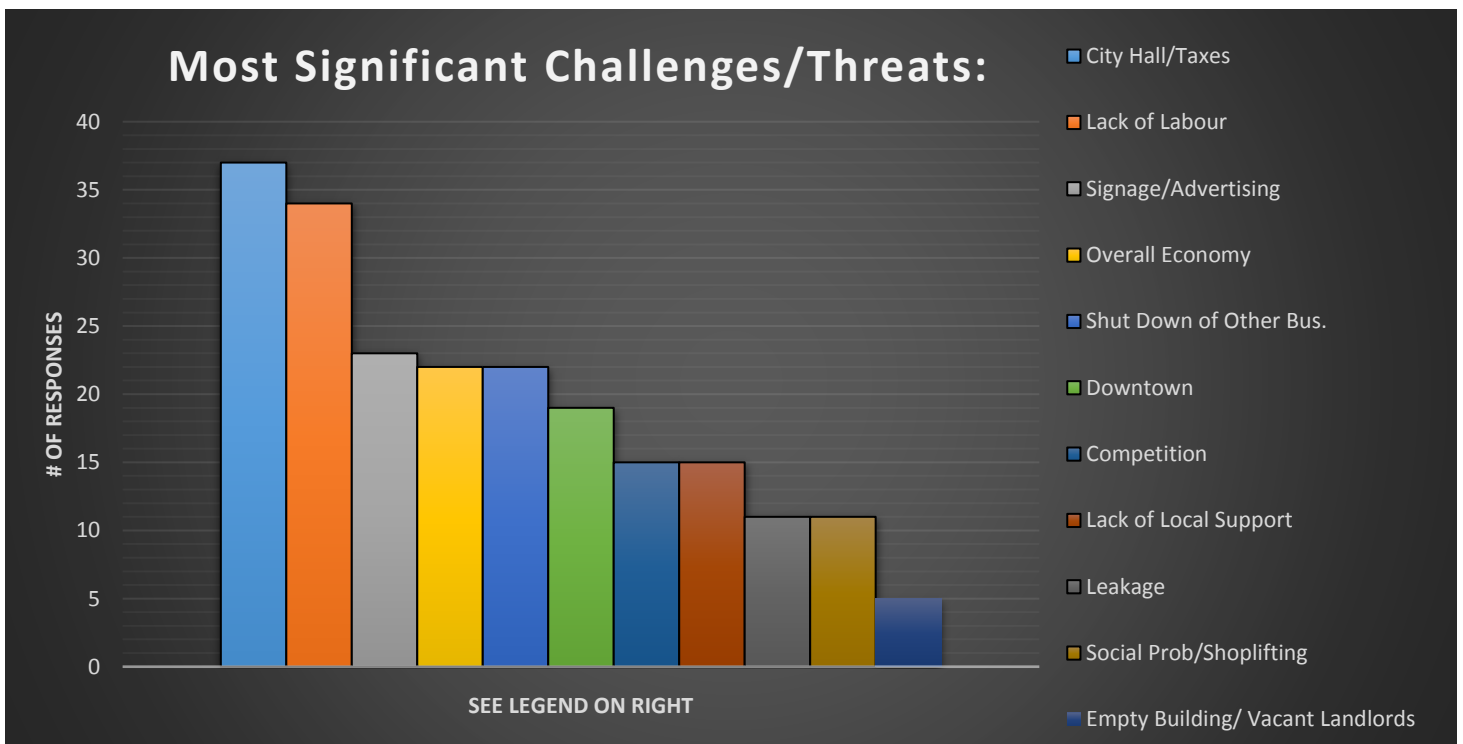
“Almost doubled business in 4 years!”

Reasons for Doing Business in Merritt



The 2017 survey results stayed consistent from 2015 and 2016 for reasons businesses choose to operate in Merritt. In 2016, survey results showed Location (30%), Clientele (23%) and Affordability (15%) as the leading reasons for doing business in Merritt.

Most Significant Challenges/Threats



The top 3 most significant challenges/threats were:

- **City Hall/ Taxes** (37 responses) 17%
- **Lack of Qualified Labour** (34 responses) 16%
- **Signage/ Advertising** (23 responses) 11%

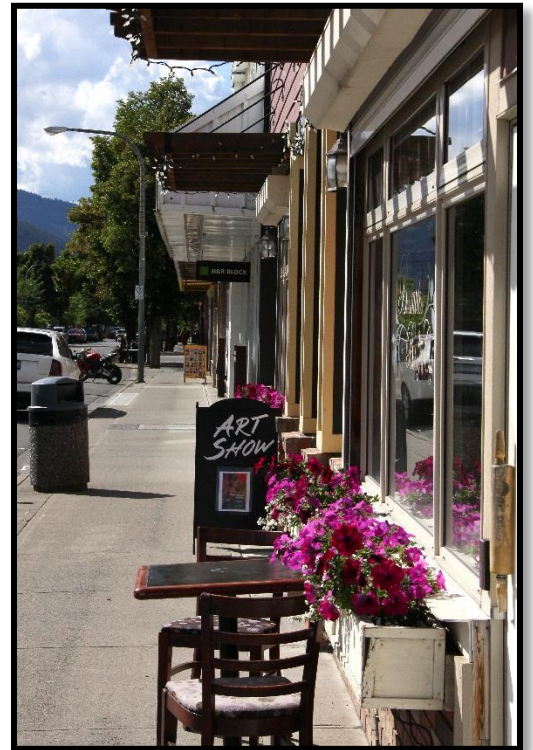
There were a variety of challenges and threats brought forward by the business community. The challenges mentioned will be reviewed by City staff and taken into account during strategic planning. The top 3 challenges and threats from 2016 were: lack of qualified labour, competition, and customer/business leakage.

Top 3 Suggestions to Help Business Thrive

- **Attract More Residents, Businesses and Jobs to Merritt** (29 responses) 15%
- **Increase Signage, Advertising and City Marketing** (26 responses) 14%
- **Clean up City (downtown), Beautification and Facade Improvements** (26 responses) 14%

Others Included:

- *City Hall- Increase communication, less red tape, lower taxes, easier to start a business (22 responses)*
- *Encourage Shop Local (10 responses)*
- *Have More Events/Things to Do (5 responses)*
- *Increase Tourism (4 responses)*
- *Improve Services*
- *Monitor Parking*
- *Expand/Grow Town Evenly*



In 2016, the top 3 suggestions to help businesses thrive were:

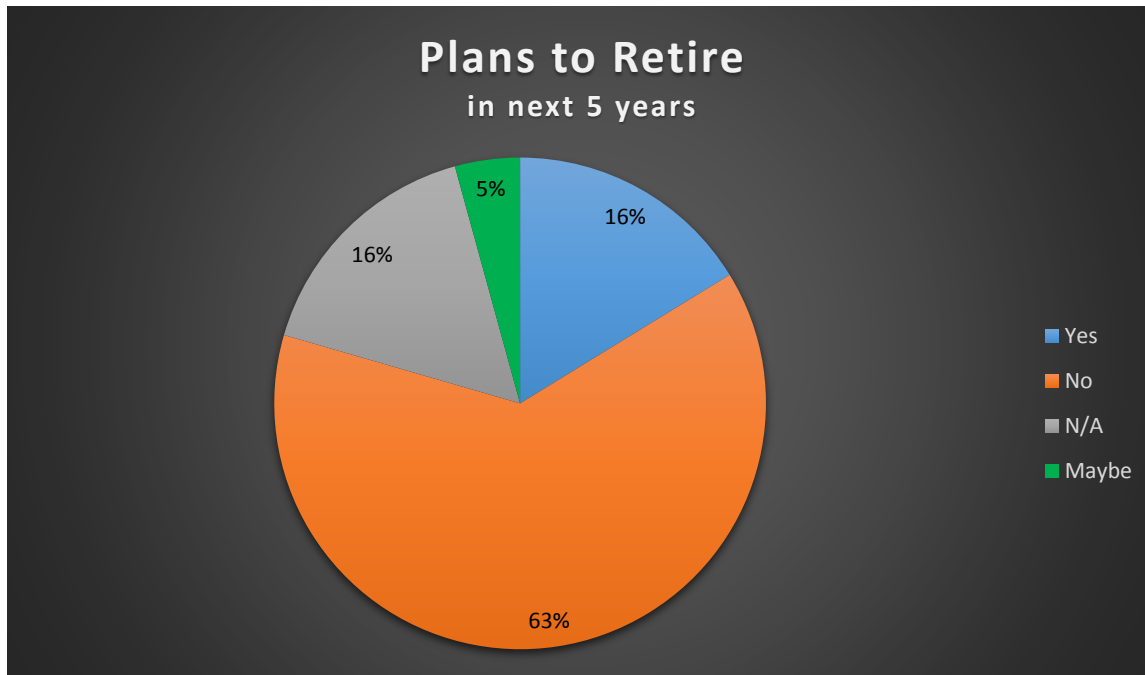
- Downtown
- Increase Signage
- City Hall

“5 year anniversary coming up, May 2017!”

“Business is great, been here 6 months and made more money than in past community for 6 years! Easier to attract business, community better at supporting family”

“Celebrating 70 anniversary as a family owned business”

Do You Plan to Retire in Next 5 Years?



Looking to Expand?

Of the businesses surveyed, three noted they would like they expand their operations shortly.

Other Comments Included

- *"The City needs to attract new businesses to Merritt"*
- *"Help the Coldwater Hotel fix the look of their building"*
- *"Incentive programs for new industries like tax breaks"*
- *"Cleanup downtown, have better lighting downtown at night"*
- *"Have someone at the City Hall who can help get through the red tape, step-by-step"*
- *"Rockin' River Fest is going great! Helping the industry and population"*
- *"Install signage to bring tourists/travelers downtown, rather than gasoline alley"*
- *"Good year last year, lots of events happened"*
- *"Closure of Tolko taking a toll to the downtown area for success in business"*
- *"No real hit from Tolko closure"*
- *"Involve the youth in the community, inexpensive activities to keep kids busy"*
- *"Assistance with reducing the struggle of getting passed red tape"*
- *"Information on amenities and programs would help the City to potential employee/customers"*
- *"More information/advice on attracting investment to existing industries and attracting new industries to Merritt"*

"Been the owner of my business for over 20 years! Absolutley love my job!"

"New, young business partners!"

"Almost at 50,000 sales!"

Staff Recommendations

Short Term Goals: (6 months)

- That the report be sent to the business community and made available on City of Merritt website
- That the report be presented to City of Merritt Council, Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce, Nicola Valley Community Futures and other 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 information packages 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
- City staff use the Business Walk Report as a resource when creating annual work plans
- Work through implementation plans in:
 - Wayfinding Strategic Plan, Age Friendly Action Plan, Economic Development Strategic Plan, etc.

Businesses would like follow up info on:

- *Wage Subsidies*
- *Available Grants*
- *Community Programs*
- *Assistance on starting a business*
- *Business Workshops*
- *Upcoming events*
- *City Permits*



The City of Merritt would like to thank the following organizations for assisting with the 2017 Business Walk. This event would not be possible without the help of the community volunteers.

- 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
- WorkBC
- And all community members who participated