



2018 Merritt Business Walk Report



Overview

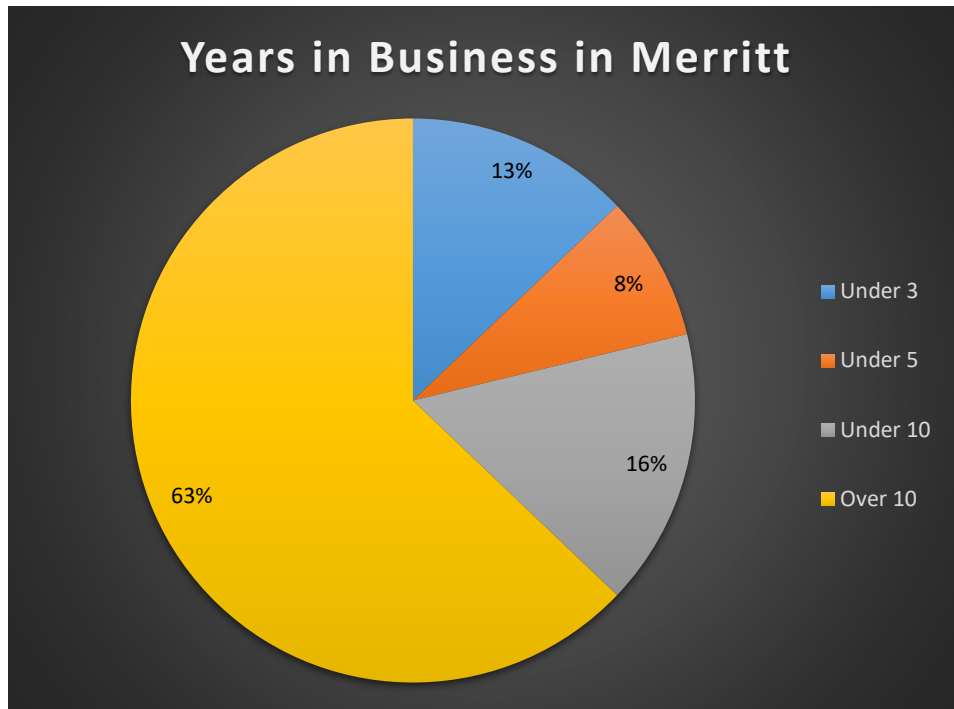
The Business Walk program was first brought to BC in 2012 in the Central Okanagan. The City of Merritt operated the Business Walk Program for the first time in 2015 with partnerships between Community Futures Nicola Valley, and the Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce. Since then, the event has been organized through the City of Merritt as an annual event. Survey responses have increased over the years from 85 responses received in 2015, 102 in 2016 and 117 in 2017, with a report of findings created each year.

On May 30, 2018, the City of Merritt, along with 18 community volunteers, completed the fourth annual Merritt Business Walk, which generated 133 business survey responses. The Business Walk provided an opportunity to increase communication with the business community, and distribute business resource material to local businesses. The information collected gives an updated snapshot of the Merritt business community to highlight the challenges and successes that local businesses face. This report also acts as a business attraction resource when showcasing Merritt. 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:

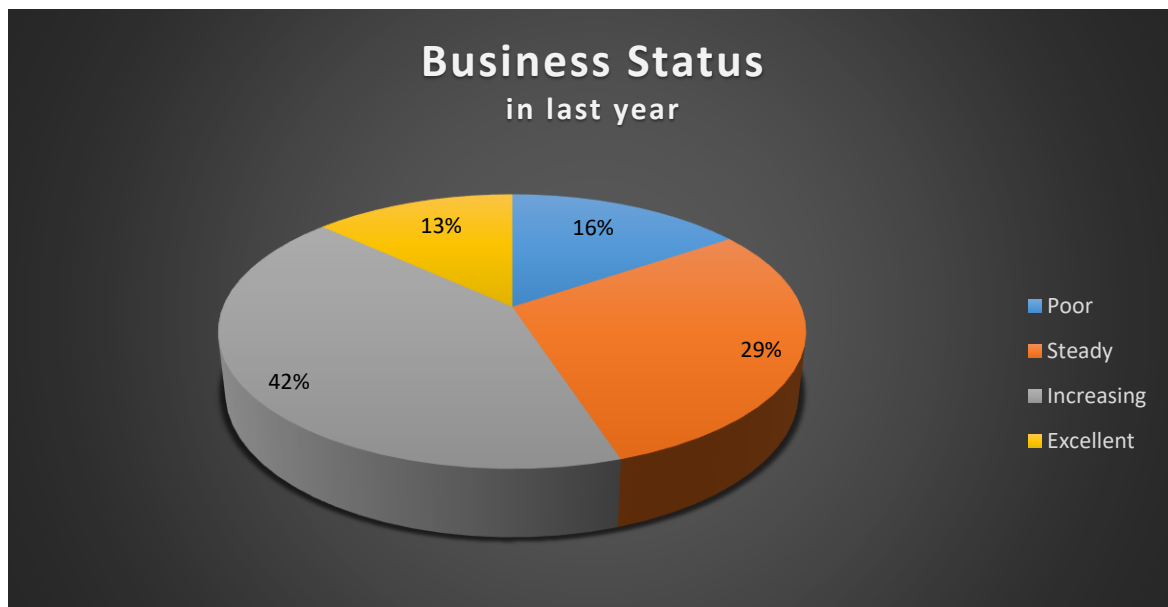
- **133** business survey responses received
- **7** questions were asked of business owners/managers to determine how busy their business was, how many employees they have, challenges, reasons for doing business in Merritt, etc.
- **62%** of businesses have been operating for 10+ years
- **85%** of businesses were doing steady or above
- **1,311** employees (full, part, contract) work for the companies surveyed
- Top 3 Reasons for Doing Business in Merritt consistent with 2016 and 2017:
 1. **Location**
 2. **Clientele**
 3. **Affordability**
- Top 3 Challenges/Threats were identified under the categories of:
 1. **City Hall/Taxes**
 2. **Overall Economy**
 3. **Lack of Qualified Labour**
- Top 3 Suggestions to Help Business Thrive were identified under the categories of:
 1. **Attract More Residents, Businesses and Jobs to Merritt**
 2. **Increase Advertising, Overall Community Marketing and Signage**
 3. **Increase Communication from City Hall to Local Businesses**
- **19%** of businesses plan to sell/retire in the next 5 years
- Other info, such as updated business contact info and good news stories were collected from each business
- Survey sample reflects approximately **one third** of the Merritt business community

Years in Business in Merritt



The majority of businesses surveyed in 2018 have been operating in Merritt for more than 10 years. These businesses provide a stable base for the economy of Merritt. In 2017, businesses responded that 57% had been in business for more than ten years.

Business Status



Survey results from 2018 noted 85% of businesses were doing steady or above. Survey results from 2017 showed 89% of businesses being steady or above.

Employees from Businesses Surveyed

In 2018, survey responses were received from businesses employing approximately 1,311 (full/part/contract) individuals. Compared to approximately 1,364 employees from businesses surveyed in 2017.

- Full: 823
- Part: 423
- Contract/Temp: 65
- Total: 1,311

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 the Ministry of Forests which the 2018 survey results did not include.



Top 3 Reasons for Doing Business in Merritt



Location: 37%



Clientele: 20%



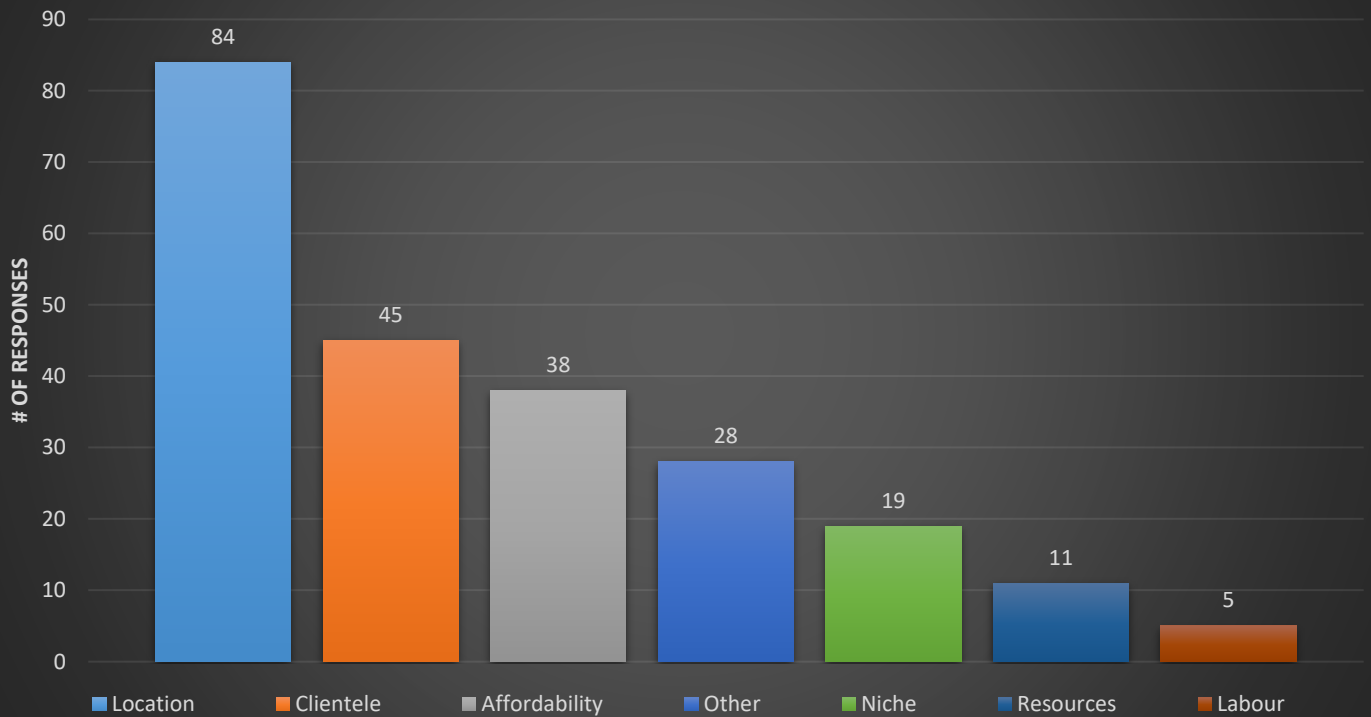
Affordability: 17%

“Business has been in the family for three generations and over 62 years!”

“Winning the People’s Choice Award was a great feeling”

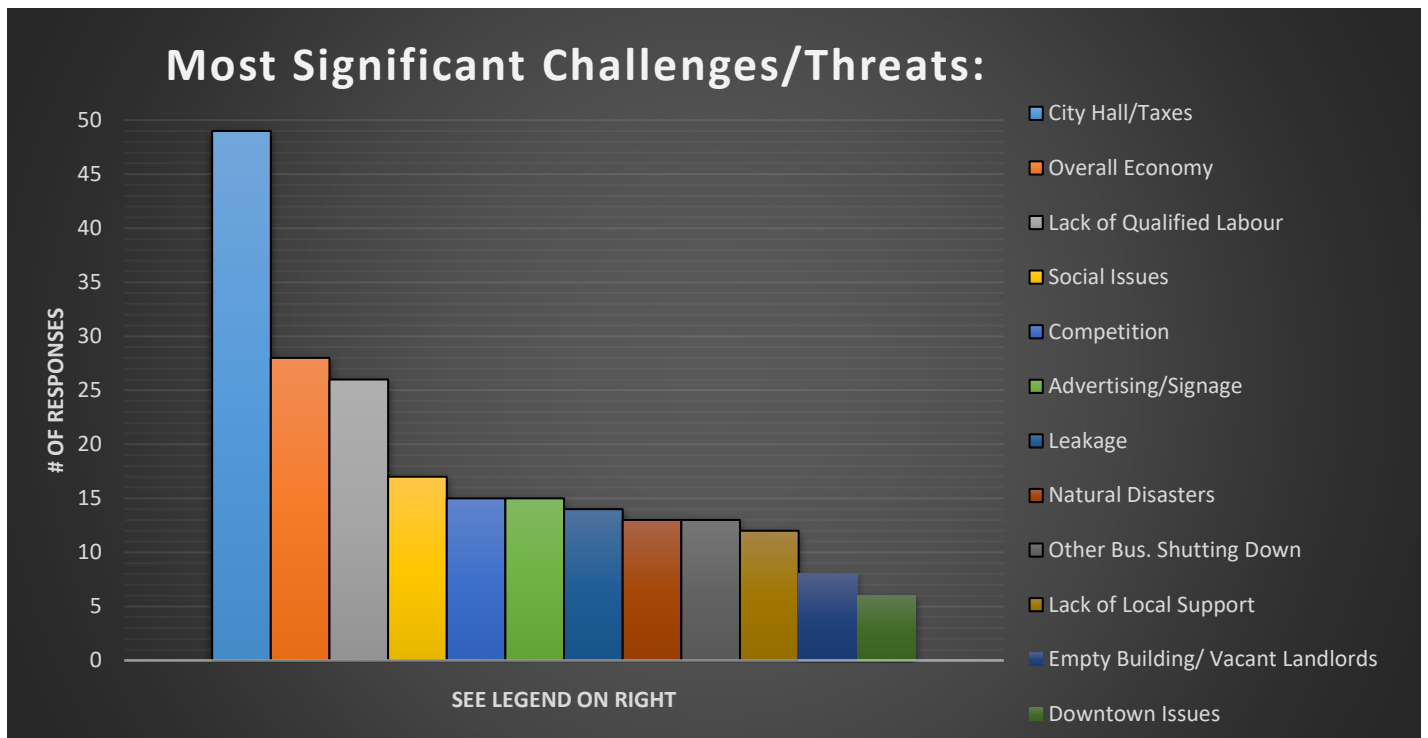
“We have recently expanded and now have products all over North America”

Reasons for Doing Business in Merritt



The 2018 survey results stayed consistent from 2016 and 2017 for reasons businesses choose to operate in Merritt. In 2017, survey results showed Location (38%), Clientele (18%) and Affordability (16%) as the leading reasons for doing business in Merritt.

Most Significant Challenges/Threats



The top 3 most significant challenges/threats are listed in the below categories:

- **City Hall/ Taxes** (49 responses) 23%
- **Overall Economy** (28 responses) 13%
- **Lack of Qualified Labour** (26 responses) 12%

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 2017 were: City Hall/taxes, lack of qualified labour, and signage/advertising.

Top 3 Suggestions to Help Business Thrive in Merritt

- **Attract More Residents, Businesses and Jobs to Merritt** (48 responses) 32%
- **Increase Advertising, Community Marketing and Signage** (33 responses) 24%
- **More Communication from City Hall to Local Businesses** (20 responses) 14%

Others Included:

- *Lower Taxes (11 responses)*
- *Attract More Tourists (9 responses)*
- *Host More Events (8 responses)*
- *Better Parking (7 responses)*
- *Fill Currently Empty Buildings (4 Responses)*
- *Create a Guide for New Businesses (3 Responses)*



In 2017, the top 3 suggestions to help businesses thrive were:

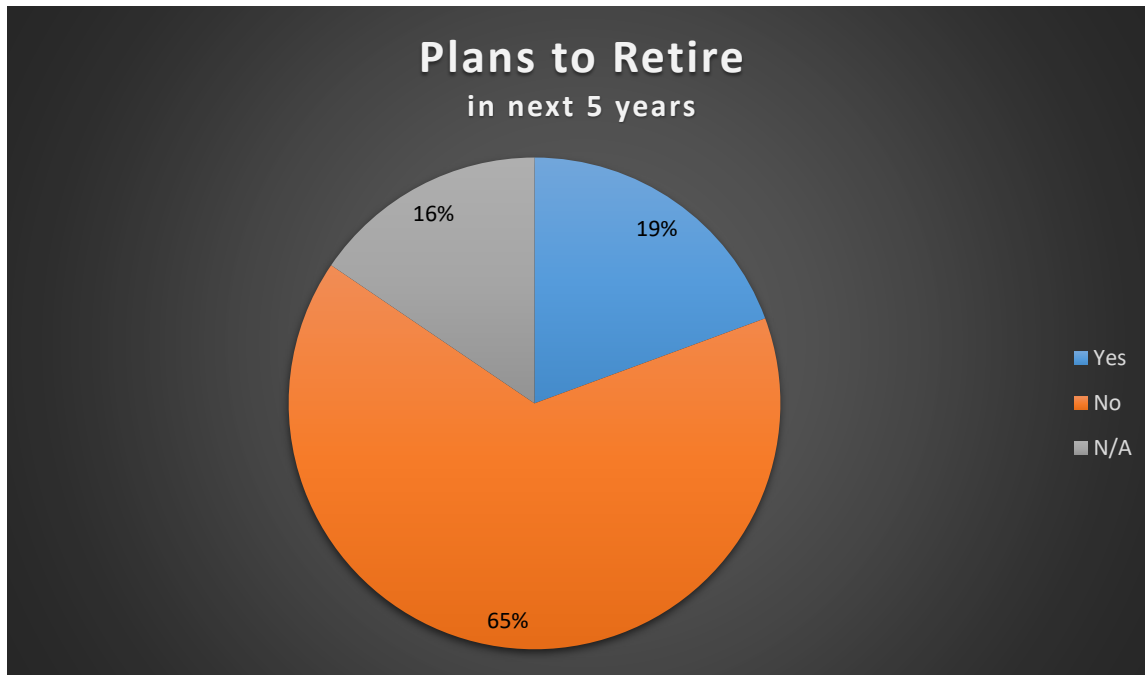
- Attract More Residents, Businesses, and Jobs to Merritt.
- Increase Signage, Advertising and City Marketing.
- Clean up City (downtown), Beautification and Façade Improvements.

“Highest year in sales last year. Working hand in hand with the Merritt Centennials”

“Committed to a 10 year lease, because that is how much we believe in Merritt”

“Expanded our products all across North America”

Do You Plan to Retire in Next 5 Years?



Looking to Expand?

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

Other Comments Included

- *Something needs to happen at the old Tourism Centre at exit 286*
- *Increase in buses since the BC Visitor Centre Closed*
- *Bring more fast food restaurants, downtown Merritt*
- *City website has been a great resource*
- *Would like more direct and regular contact from the City*
- *More beautification and trees to the downtown core*
- *Create How to Guide to Run a Business when applying for a business license*
- *Improve infrastructure to walking/biking within city to improve quality of life, which will draw in quality workers*
- *Every year, we add something new to our services*
- *Started in our home, now own a store front business*
- *Proud to work with the Merritt Centennials*
- *The Rotary Bike Park upgrade was a great success for the community*

“Started 15 years ago with one vehicle now have steadily increased to 12 trucks.”

“Have a lot of repeat customers from out of town!”

“Expanded and opened a new business since last year”

Staff Recommendations

Short Term Goals: (6 months)

- The report be sent to the business community, business support organizations and made available on City of Merritt website
- 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)

- Continue to implement retention and expansion initiatives
- Continue to expand on business attraction initiatives
- City staff to use the Business Walk Report as a resource when creating annual work plans
- Work through implementation plans in:
 - Economic Development Action Plan, Merritt and Nicola Valley Tourism Plan, Age Friendly Action Plan, etc.

Businesses would like follow up info on:

- *Business Loans and Financing*
- *Revitalization Tax Exemption*
- *Wage Subsidies*
- *Business Workshops*
- *Bylaw Issues*
- *Zoning Information*



The City of Merritt would like to thank the following organizations for assisting with the 2018 Business Walk. This event would not be possible without the help of the community volunteers.

- City of Merritt Council and staff
- Royal Bank of Canada
- Interior Savings Credit Union
- 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