

Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Program Survey Report

*Findings from the Town of Stony Plain's
2026 BR+E Survey and Action Planning Workshop*

Prepared by the Cities Institute
University of Alberta
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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Town of Stony Plain's 2026 Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Survey. The survey serves as the primary evidence-gathering component of the Town's BR+E Program and is supplemented by insights from a collaborative workshop involving local businesses and business resource network partners. The Town provided the survey data to the Cities Institute at the University of Alberta for analysis and reporting.

A total of 89 businesses participated in the survey, representing a broad cross-section of Stony Plain's economy, including retail, professional and personal services, health and education, goods-producing industries, arts and recreation, and agriculture. Respondents ranged from sole proprietorships to businesses employing more than 50 people. Together, the survey and workshop findings provide an evidence-based understanding of local business conditions, challenges, opportunities, and growth intentions.

The overall outlook for business retention and expansion is optimistic. Over 60 percent of respondents expect sales to increase over the next two years, while almost half plan to expand their operations. In contrast, only a small minority anticipate downsizing or closing their business. Business sentiment toward Stony Plain also remains positive. More than 80 percent of respondents rate it as a good or excellent place to do business, and two-thirds report that their perception of the community has remained stable over the past three years. Among those whose views have changed, positive perceptions outnumber negative ones by nearly three to one. Overall, these findings point to a resilient and confident business community with a positive outlook for future growth.

Despite this positive outlook, the survey identifies several challenges affecting local businesses. Rising operating costs remain a significant concern, with materials, insurance, utilities, and labour cited as the primary cost pressures experienced in recent years. Labour market conditions are more mixed. While businesses are generally confident in their ability to retain employees, confidence in recruiting skilled and unskilled workers is lower. Respondents also emphasized the importance of housing availability in supporting workforce attraction and retention. At the same time, the availability of commercial and industrial space emerged as a more direct constraint on business expansion, with many businesses identifying limited space as a barrier to future growth.

Survey results also reveal meaningful differences across sectors and locations. Retail businesses, which represent the largest share of respondents, report the lowest levels of optimism, the weakest expansion intentions, and the highest proportion of businesses facing elevated risk. Businesses located in downtown Stony Plain report less favourable perceptions of the local business environment than those located elsewhere in the community, despite deriving greater benefits from municipal events and activities. In contrast, businesses in the goods-producing and professional services sectors report the strongest outlook, with higher levels of optimism and growth intentions. These findings suggest that business experiences and growth opportunities are not uniform across the community.

The survey further indicates that Stony Plain's business community remains predominantly local in its ownership. Businesses also expressed a clear preference for direct and personal communication with the Town. This highlights the importance of maintaining strong connections and ongoing dialogue between the Town and the business community.

Overall, the findings portray a business community that is optimistic about its future and committed to continued growth. While rising costs, workforce challenges, and commercial and industrial space constraints remain important considerations, businesses generally view Stony Plain positively and continue to see opportunities for success. The findings provide valuable insight into current business conditions and establish an evidence base to inform economic development initiatives, municipal planning, and future engagement with the local business community.

Background

Communities compete for residents, workers, businesses, and investment. Employment opportunities attract people to a community, while population growth creates demand for additional goods, services, and businesses. As a result, economic growth and community growth are closely connected.

Expanding the local economic base remains a fundamental objective of municipal governments. Stony Plain, a growing and dynamic community west of Edmonton, is no exception. While the Town seeks to attract new investment, it also recognizes that existing businesses are the primary drivers of local employment, investment, and economic resilience.

Recognizing the importance of supporting existing businesses, the Town initiated a Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Program, structured around a survey. The survey provided a structured opportunity to engage directly with local businesses, strengthen relationships, better understand business conditions and future plans, and gather insights to inform economic development, municipal planning, and service delivery.

This approach reflects a well-established principle in economic development: people and businesses choose locations that offer the conditions they need to succeed. For residents, those conditions may include housing, services, amenities, and quality of life. For businesses, they include access to customers, talent, infrastructure, land, and a supportive business environment.

The BR+E Program reflects the Town's commitment to understanding how local businesses experience Stony Plain as a place to invest, operate, and grow. By identifying strengths, challenges, and opportunities within the local business environment, the survey helps the Town better understand where its actions and investments can have the greatest impact.

The Cities Institute at the University of Alberta collaborated with the Town to analyze the survey results and facilitate discussions with local businesses and business resource network partners. The resulting findings provide an evidence base to support future decision-making and help ensure that economic development initiatives remain aligned with the needs of Stony Plain's business community.

Introduction

Stony Plain is a growing community of nearly 20,000 residents located 40 kilometres west of downtown Edmonton, with direct access to major highways and regional trade corridors. Over the past fifteen years, the community has grown by nearly 31 percent, and Council has established a long-term vision of a connected community of 30,000 residents.

The town is home to more than 1,100 businesses, including approximately 750 locally owned businesses serving local, regional, national, and international markets. As Stony Plain continues to grow, the retention and expansion of its existing business base have become a central economic development priority. Established businesses account for most local employment and investment, while their experiences provide valuable insight into whether municipal policies, services, infrastructure, and planning efforts are keeping pace with growth.

This report presents the results of the 2026 BR+E Survey and examines their implications for the Town's economic development and planning priorities. The remainder of this introduction summarizes the strategic and policy frameworks that provide context for the survey and help guide the interpretation of its findings.

Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Program

Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) is a structured economic development process that strengthens relationships between local businesses, municipalities, and community partners. The approach recognizes that existing businesses are a community's primary source of employment, investment, economic resilience, and future growth. Through direct engagement with business owners and operators, BR+E helps communities better understand local business conditions, identify opportunities and challenges, and coordinate actions that support business success.

The Town of Stony Plain established its BR+E Program to create a structured and ongoing process for engaging with the local business community, gathering business intelligence, and responding to emerging opportunities and challenges. The program emphasizes relationship-building, evidence-based decision-making, collaboration, and continuous engagement with businesses and community partners. Through these efforts, the Town seeks to strengthen the local business ecosystem, improve support for existing businesses, and ensure that business perspectives inform municipal planning, service delivery, and economic development initiatives.

BR+E Program Objectives

The objectives of Stony Plain's BR+E Program are to:

- 1. Strengthen and nurture relationships with local businesses**

Foster long-term, trusted relationships through consistent engagement, active listening, and timely follow-up, ensuring business feel valued and heard, while upholding confidentiality and program credibility.

- 2. Understand business issues, opportunities, expansion, and retention needs**

Gather local business intelligence to surface key issues, identify businesses planning to expand or close, and better understand the local business and workforce environment.

- 3. Support business development and retention**

Deliver targeted support, advocacy, and referrals based on business feedback, helping address immediate concerns and reinforce satisfaction with Stony Plain as a place to do business.

- 4. Expand and align the resource network**

Coordinate with service providers and regional partners to connect businesses with relevant supports, while identifying gaps in service and emerging needs within the local business ecosystem.

- 5. Guide internal coordination and action**

Enhance cross-departmental collaboration to ensure a unified approach to business engagement, align municipal efforts with emerging business needs and opportunities, and ensure consistency with the Town's strategic priorities and plans.

6. Inform strategy, promotion, and planning

Leverage data-driven business insights to guide policy development, economic and workforce planning, and strategic initiatives, ensuring decisions are based on facts rather than assumptions. Facilitate connections to gather testimonials, photos, and stories that showcase Stony Plain's business-friendly environment.

The BR+E Program establishes a framework for ongoing dialogue between the Town and the business community. By maintaining strong relationships and regularly gathering business intelligence, the Town can better understand changing business needs, respond to emerging issues, and ensure that business perspectives continue to inform economic development priorities over time.

Economic Planning Initiatives

Strategic Plan (2026–2029)

Approved in March 2026, the Town's Strategic Plan organizes Council's commitments around four themes:

1. Civic Responsibility;
2. Collaborative Leadership;
3. Community Building; and
4. Economic Opportunity.^[1]

Under the Economic Opportunity theme, the Plan positions Stony Plain as "the western gateway to the Edmonton Metropolitan Region" and identifies attracting new businesses and supporting existing businesses as a shared commitment that contributes to long-term community prosperity and well-being. The Strategic Plan also recognizes the importance of housing in supporting economic growth. Under the Community Building theme, it commits the Town to encouraging innovative and diverse housing options.

Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan (2024–2029)

The Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan provides the primary policy framework for the Town's Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Program. The Strategy is organized around four strategic priorities:

1. Create an Attractive, Investment, and Future-ready Community;
2. Bolster Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations;
3. Enhance the Local Business Ecosystem; and
4. Optimize Municipal Services.^[2]

Strategic Priority 3 specifically calls for the implementation of a comprehensive BR+E program, including an engagement process to gather information on the needs, challenges, and opportunities facing existing businesses, as well as a feedback mechanism to support continuous improvement. The Strategy also identifies workforce attraction and retention, target-sector growth, and the optimization of municipal services and business communications as key priorities. These themes are reflected throughout the survey, allowing the findings to be considered within the context of the Town's economic development objectives and strategic priorities.

Concurrent Planning Initiatives

The Town is concurrently undertaking three significant projects: an update to the Uniquely Stony Plain Municipal Development Plan (MDP) ^[3], the Old Town Community Plan (OTCP) ^[4], and Culture and Tourism Master Plan. While these initiatives are not the primary focus of this report and are developed independently of the BR+E process, this report provides valuable business community insight that is relevant to each. The survey generates evidence on commercial and industrial space, downtown conditions, workforce attraction and retention, housing, visitor-serving businesses, business perceptions, and sector-specific growth opportunities. As a result, the findings can help inform land-use planning, downtown revitalization, tourism development, cultural programming, and broader community-building initiatives. Beyond informing these projects, this report is intended to serve as a reference document for future municipal planning and decision-making. By documenting the perspectives, priorities, and experiences of Stony Plain businesses, the BR+E findings provide an evidence base that can support the development, implementation, and evaluation of Town strategies, plans, and initiatives over time.

Methodology

Survey Design

The 2026 BR+E Survey was the primary data-collection instrument designed and executed by the Town of Stony Plain as part of its BR+E Program. The instrument was structured around seven thematic modules:

1. Respondent and Business Profile
2. Business Outlook and Cost Conditions
3. Markets and Seasonality
4. Labour and Civic Conditions
5. Municipal Events and Segment Differences
6. Operations and Business Conditions
7. Workforce, Training, and Expansion

Questions combined categorical and ordinal (Likert-scale) items with multiple-select lists and open-text fields, the latter coded thematically during analysis.

Sample

A total of 89 businesses participated in the survey. Respondents represented a broad cross-section of Stony Plain's business community, with retail and service-based businesses comprising the largest share of participants. Based on the Town's inventory of more than 755 local businesses in 2024, a response target of 86 completed surveys was established, equivalent to a 95 percent confidence level and a 10 to 15 percent margin of error under standard sampling assumptions. The final response count exceeded this target.

Not all questions applied to every business. As a result, the number of responses varies by question. For example, questions related to labour force conditions were directed to businesses with employees, while questions regarding lease conditions applied only to businesses that rent their premises. Similarly, questions about the impact of municipal events were limited to respondents who completed that section of the survey. Where applicable, the number of respondents used in the analysis is identified throughout the report to provide context for interpreting individual results.

Analysis and Presentation

Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis across business characteristics, including industry sector, business size, and location (downtown and non-downtown). For questions that allowed respondents to select multiple answers, results are presented as the number of mentions rather than percentages, since individual businesses could select more than one option. Single-response questions are generally presented as a percentage of valid responses.

To support meaningful comparison, detailed industry categories were grouped into six broader sectors:

- Goods-Producing Industries

- Professional and Business Services
- Health and Education
- Personal Services, Hospitality, and Other Services
- Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
- Retail and Wholesale Trade

These groupings improve comparability while maintaining sufficient sample sizes for analysis.

Two considerations should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings:

1. Some analyses are based on relatively small subgroups of respondents and should be viewed as indicative rather than definitive.
2. The survey captures the perspectives and intentions of participating businesses at a specific point in time. While the findings provide valuable insight into the respondent base, they should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the entire business community.

Primary Results and Findings

This section presents the survey results across the seven thematic categories. Results are presented first in aggregate and then, where the data allows, disaggregated by sector, size, and location.

Respondent and Business Profile

The respondent base reflects the breadth of Stony Plain's economy while being anchored, as the local economy itself is, in retail and consumer-facing services. As Figure 1 displays, retail trade in clothing, decor, and similar goods is the single largest category, with 17 of the 89 respondents, followed by other services (11) and three categories at nine respondents each: professional, scientific and technical services; health care and social assistance; and arts, entertainment and recreation. Construction (6), wholesale trade (4), and food and beverage manufacturing (4) form a second tier, with many single-respondent categories including transportation, educational services, and several manufacturing sub-sectors. The diversity of the respondent base is itself a finding: Stony Plain's economy is not monolithic, and retention efforts must service businesses with different cost structures, customer bases, and growth dynamics.

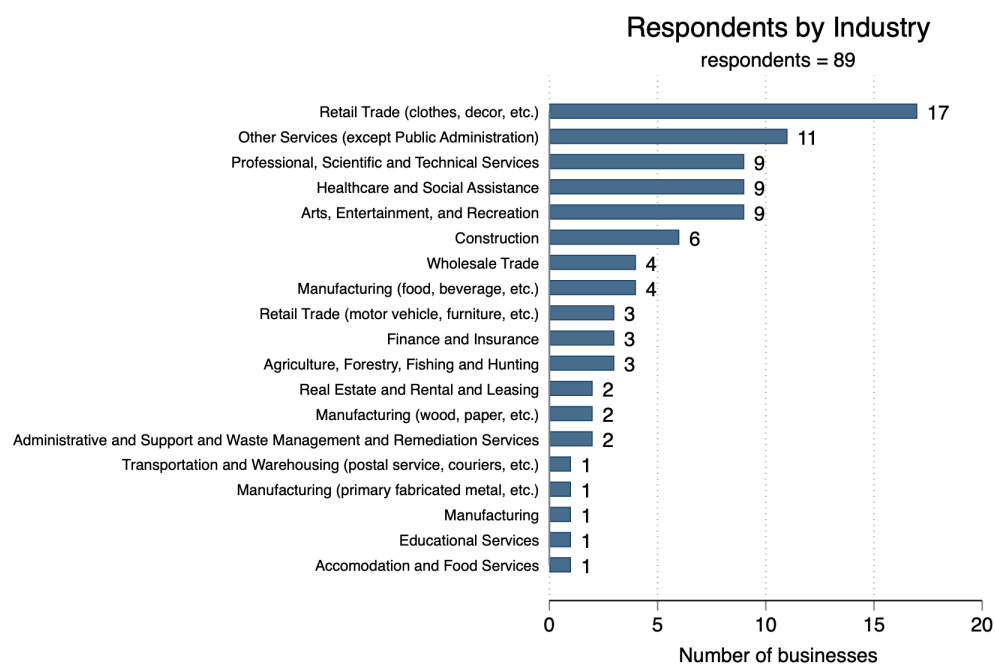


Figure 1. Respondents by industry (n = 89). Retail trade is the largest single category, followed by other services and a cluster of professional, health, and arts/recreation firms.

The ownership profile from the sample is mostly local. Figure 2 shows that 79 of the 89 respondents are locally owned and operated from a single location, with a further eight locally owned but operating from more than one location. Only one franchise and one branch or division of a larger company appears in the sample. This near absence of externally controlled firms means that retention decisions in Stony Plain are

made overwhelmingly by local owners whose business and personal lives are embedded in the community.

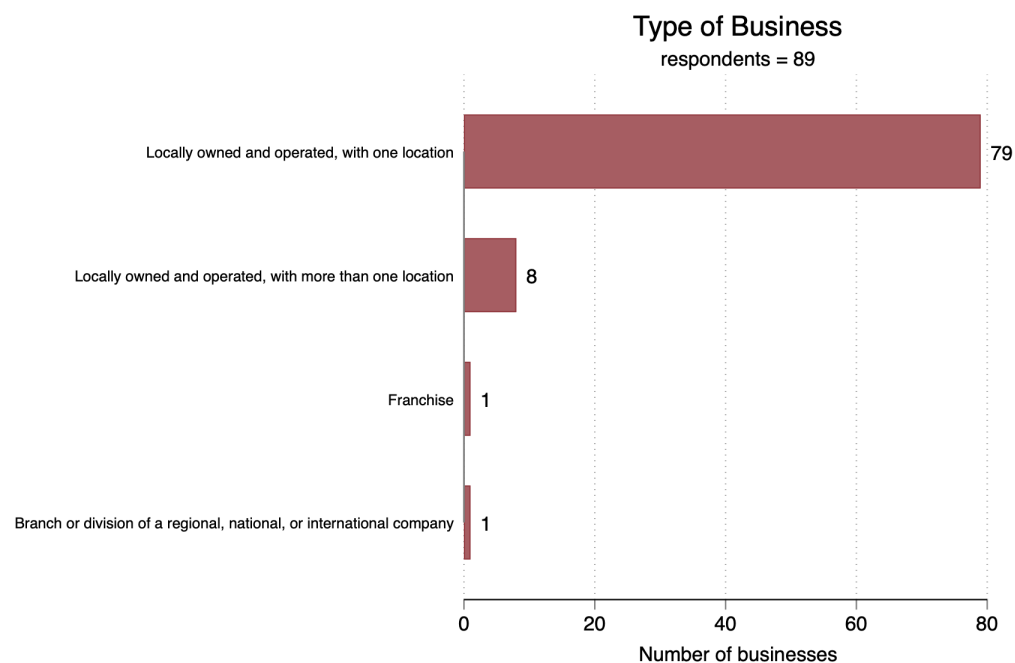


Figure 2. Type of business (n = 89). Single-location, locally owned firms dominate the respondent base; franchises and branch operations are negligible.

Figure 3 reinforces this local character and adds two operationally important facts. Eighty percent of respondents report at least one owner residing in Stony Plain, confirming the community-embedded ownership finding. Sixty percent rent rather than own their premises, making lease conditions and commercial space availability important factors in retention. One quarter of respondents are located downtown, and 17 percent are home-based, indicating that downtown accounts for a minority of the respondent base.

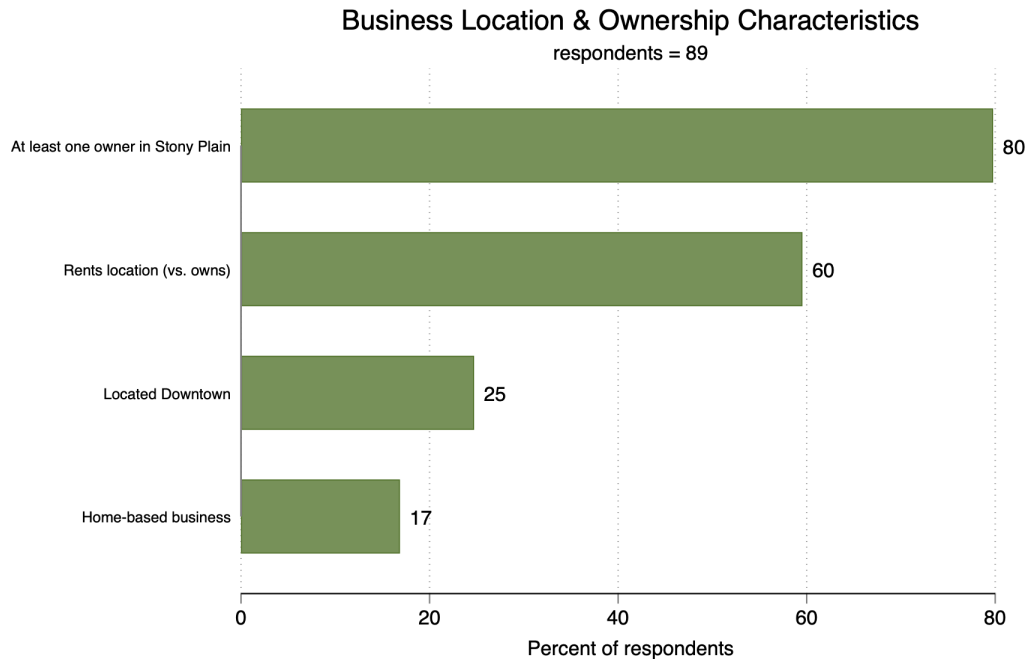


Figure 3. Business location and ownership characteristics (percent of respondents, n = 89). Most firms have a local owner and rent their premises; downtown and home-based firms are minorities.

Finally, Figure 4 confirms that the responding businesses in Stony Plain are overwhelmingly small. Forty-seven of 89 firms employ between one and four people, and a further 27 employ five to nine, so roughly five of every six respondents are firms with fewer than 10 employees. Only nine respondents, or about one in ten, employ twenty or more people. This size distribution has direct implications for the design of business support: micro and small firms typically have little spare management capacity, are highly sensitive to input-cost shocks, and tend to adopt new tools or access government programs when the perceived payoff is immediate and clear. These constraints recur throughout the findings that follow.

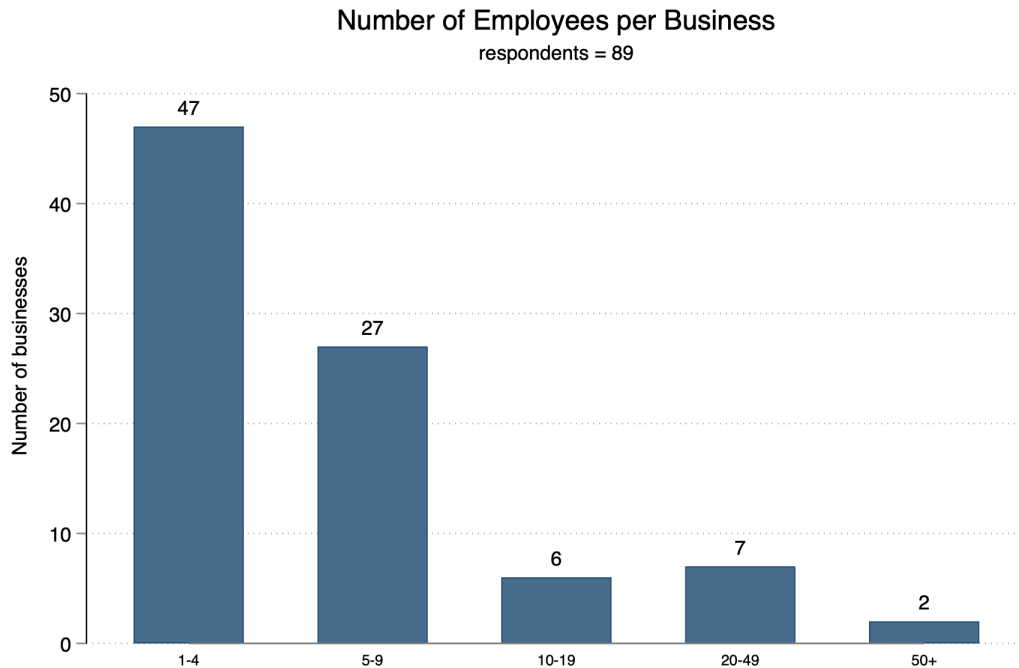


Figure 4. Number of employees per business (n = 89). Micro firms (1–4 employees) are the most common, and only about 10 percent of respondents employ twenty or more.

Outlook and Costs

Business sentiment in Stony Plain is positive but tempered by cost pressure. Figure 5a shows that 63 percent of respondents expect their sales to increase over the next two years, against just 3 percent who expect a decrease; 16 percent anticipate stable sales and 18 percent are unsure. The scarcity of pessimists is as notable as the prevalence of optimists: very few firms foresee contraction, which suggests that the principal risk to the business base is not widespread decline but rather the possibility that growth-oriented firms encounter constraints such as labour, space, or cost that prevent them from realizing their expectations. The open-text responses provide some insight into the widespread optimistic outlooks. Respondents cited the expansion of Stony Plain’s population and customer base, as well as improvements in digital communications and outreach as common enabling factors.

Expectations remain positive after disaggregating the data for downtown and home-based businesses. Figures 5b and 5c show sales expectations for downtown and home-based businesses, respectively. Among downtown businesses, a majority report anticipating an increase in sales, and 23 percent anticipate stable sales. The proportion projecting a decrease is still a small minority (9 percent), though notably higher than the overall sample. Conversely, no home-based businesses reported a pessimistic outlook for sales, though a significantly higher proportion indicated uncertainty regarding sales expectations.

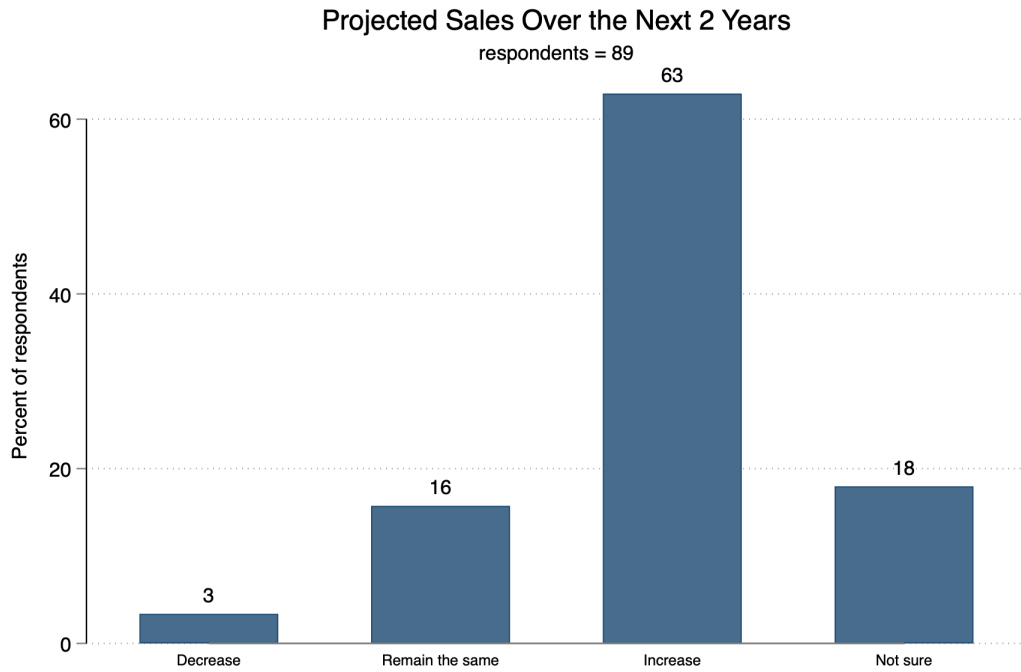


Figure 5a. Projected sales over the next two years (percent of respondents, n = 89). Expectations are strongly tilted toward growth, with very few firms anticipating decline.

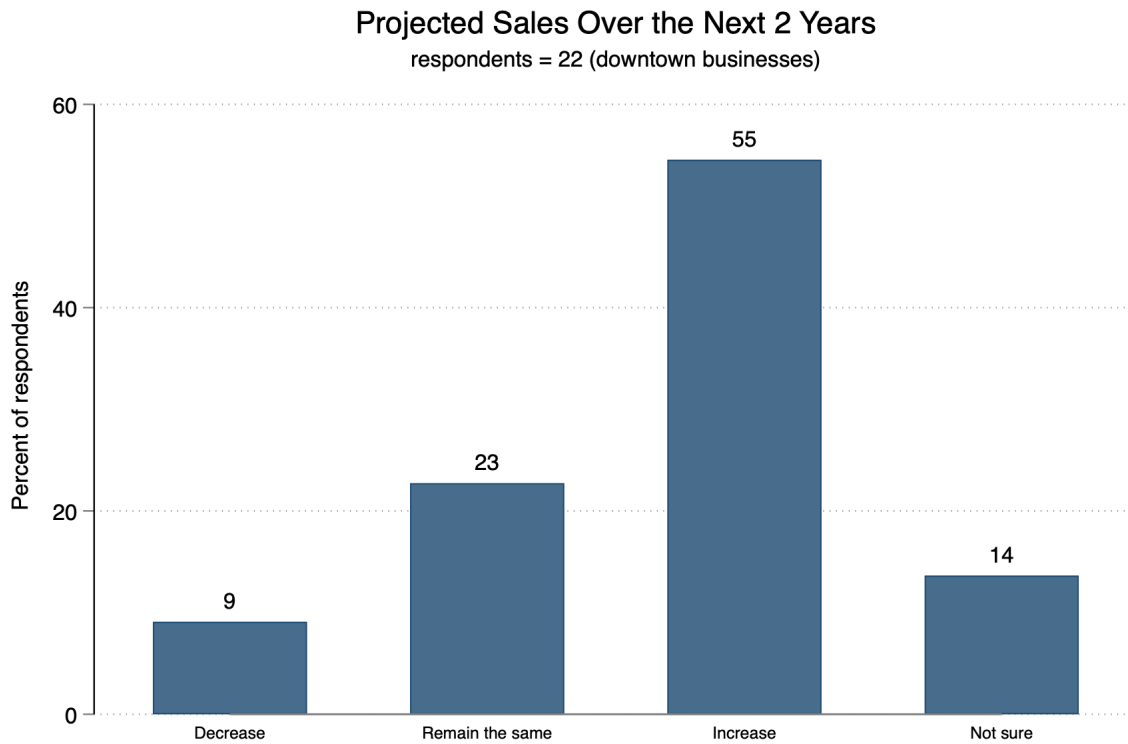


Figure 5b. Projected sales over the next two years among downtown businesses (percent of respondents, n = 22).

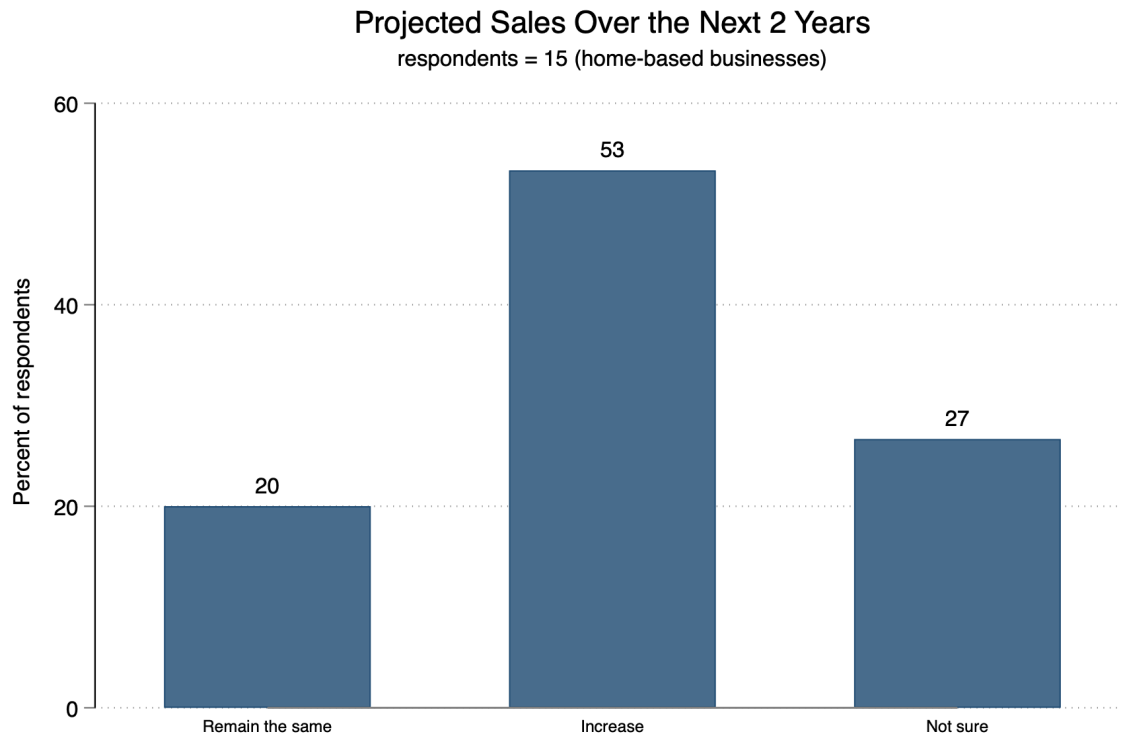


Figure 5c. Projected sales over the next two years among home-based businesses (percent of respondents, n = 15).

Intentions track sentiment. As Figure 6 shows, 49 percent of respondents plan to expand over the next two years and a further 39 percent plan to remain the same, while relocation (8 percent), closure (2 percent), and downsizing (1 percent) together account for just over one in 10 firms. The dominance of expansion and stability is an encouraging signal for the local tax base and employment, but the 8 percent contemplating relocation warrant attention: relocation intentions are often an early indicator of unmet needs around space, cost, or service, and represent retention risk that targeted engagement could address.

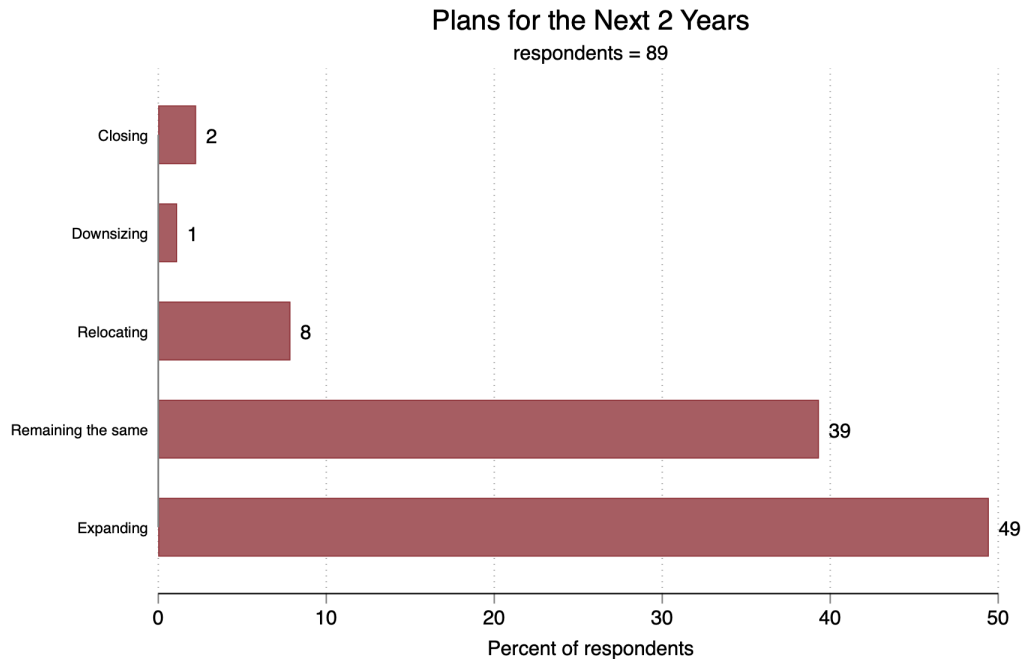


Figure 6. Plans for the next two years (percent of respondents, n = 89). Expansion and stability account for the large majority of intentions; closure and downsizing are rare.

Respondents' overall impression of Stony Plain as a place to do business is favourable. Figure 7 shows that 49 percent rate the town "good" and 34 percent "excellent," for a combined positive share of 83 percent; 16 percent rate it "fair" and only 1 percent "poor." This is a strong endorsement of the local operating environment and a sound foundation on which to build. As later segmentation shows, however, this favourable average masks meaningful differences across sectors and locations that are more informative for policy than the headline figure. When asked to comment on the general advantages of Stony Plain as a place to do business, respondents cited community growth and support; lower costs; and access to nearby locations for commuting. Common sources of disadvantages included the lack of transportation options (public transit), and the perceived excessive focus on downtown businesses.

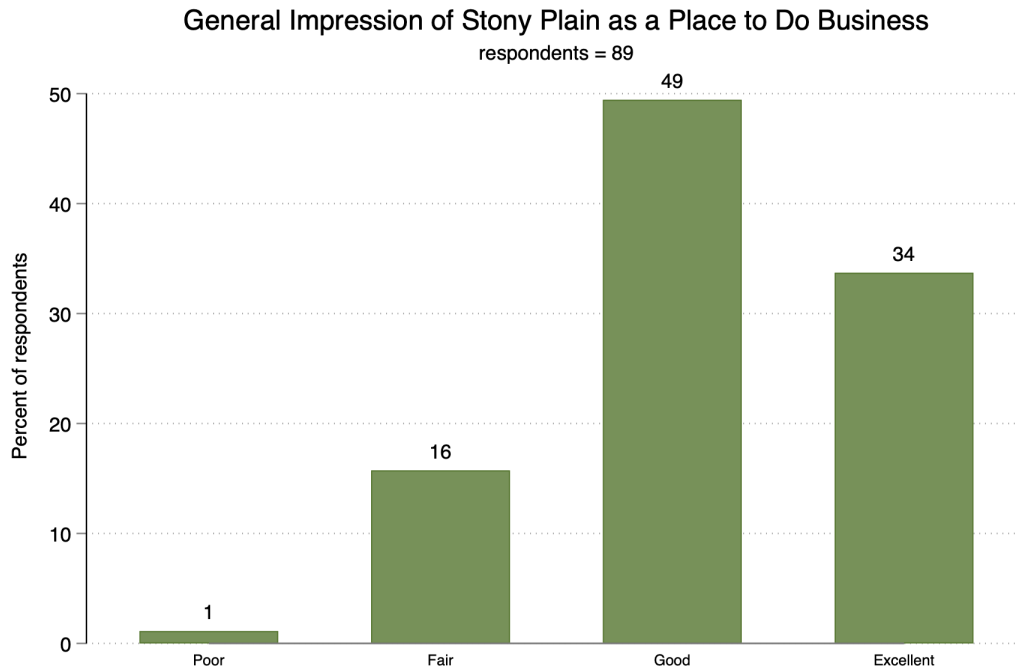


Figure 7. General impression of Stony Plain as a place to do business (percent of respondents, n = 89). Good and excellent ratings together account for more than four-fifths of responses.

Sentiment has also been stable over time. Figure 8 shows that two-thirds of respondents (66 percent) report no change in their attitude toward doing business in Stony Plain over the past three years. Among those whose attitude has shifted, positive movement (25 percent) outweighs negative movement (9 percent) by nearly three to one. Stability with a positive tilt is characteristic of a mature, settled business community rather than one in flux. This is a reassuring backdrop, but one in which the minority reporting deterioration deserves scrutiny, particularly given the sectoral concentration of negative shifts discussed later. Through the open-text responses, those who reported a positive change mostly reported positive experiences with community support and local programs. Those who reported a more negative change mostly cited a lack of public support, especially for small businesses.

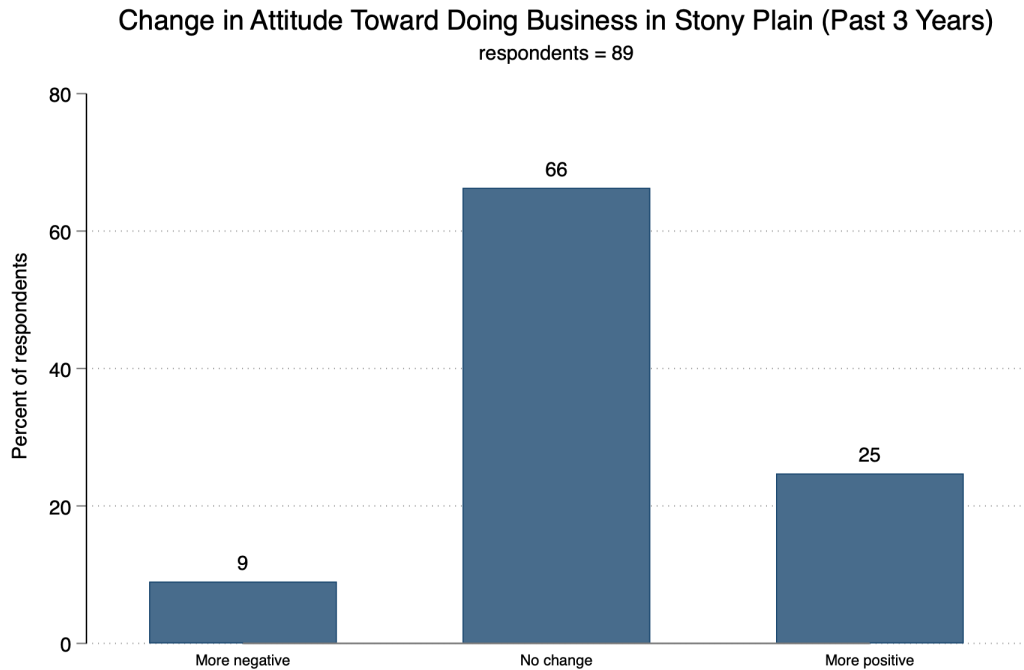


Figure 8. Change in attitude toward doing business in Stony Plain over the past three years (percent of respondents, n = 89). Most report no change; positive shifts outnumber negative ones.

Cost pressure, by contrast, is the clearest source of strain in the data. Figure 9 reports the cost areas businesses identified as having increased most over the past two years. Materials or supplies lead with 42 mentions, followed closely by insurance (38), utilities (34), and labour (32). A second tier, rent (19), shipping (18), marketing (15), property taxes (14), and technology (13), shows that cost pressure is broad rather than concentrated in any single line item. Most of the leading drivers (materials, insurance, utilities, shipping) lie largely outside municipal control, but several, rent, property taxes, and the regulatory and permitting costs touched on elsewhere, fall within the Town's sphere of influence and represent the most actionable levers for cost relief.

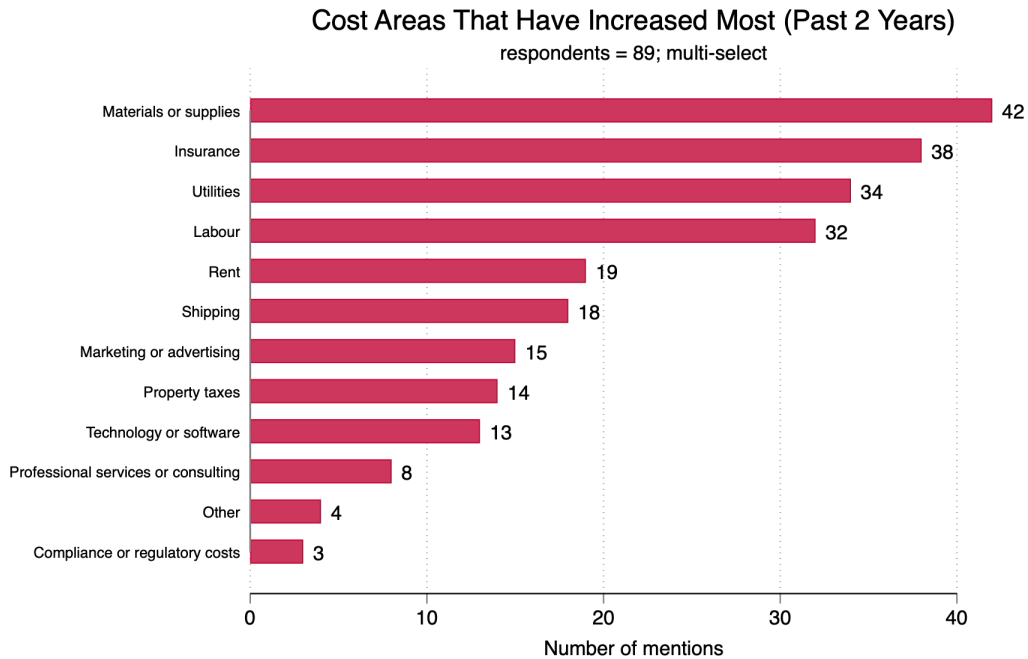


Figure 9. Cost areas that have increased most over the past two years (mentions; multi-select, n = 89). Materials, insurance, utilities, and labour lead, but pressure is broad across categories.

Despite this pressure, most firms find their costs reasonably predictable. Figure 10 shows that 45 percent rate operating-cost predictability “good” and 43 percent “fair,” with only 3 percent rating it “poor” and 7 percent “excellent.” The concentration in the middle of the scale indicates that, while costs are rising, they are not doing so erratically; firms can plan around them. This distinction matters for retention: predictable cost growth is manageable through pricing and planning, whereas volatility undermines the confidence on which expansion decisions depend.

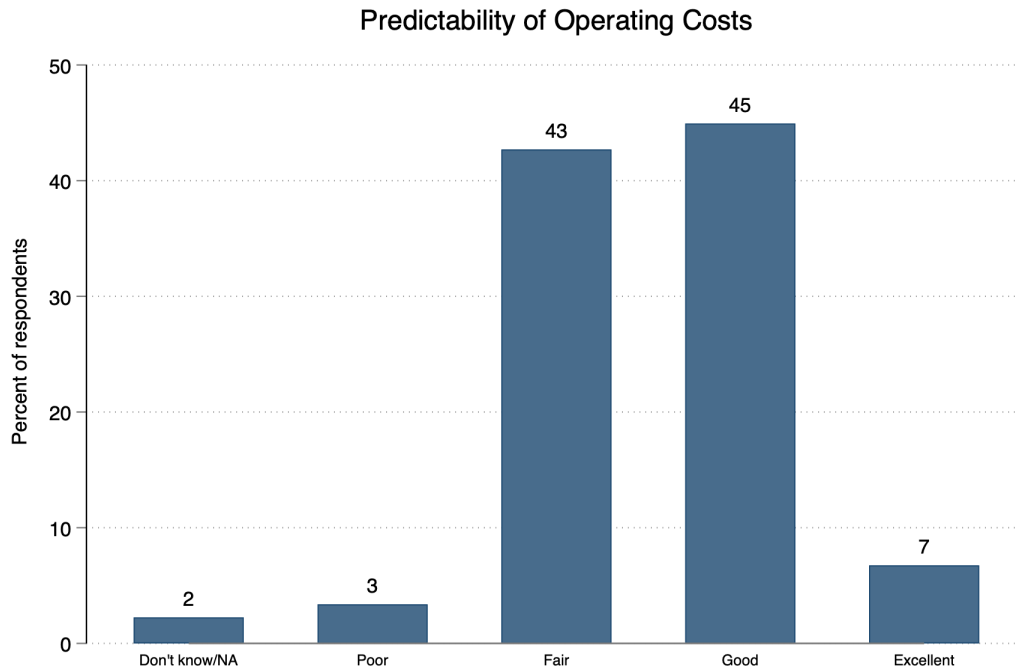


Figure 10. Predictability of operating costs (percent of respondents, n = 89). Most firms rate predictability fair or good, with few at either extreme.

Markets and Seasonality

Stony Plain's businesses serve predominantly local and regional customers. Figure 11 shows that “local” markets received (61) mentions and “regional” (36), far ahead of national (12) and international (3) reach. This local orientation means that the health of the respondent base is tightly coupled to local and regional household spending and population growth, reinforcing the strategic link between economic development and the Town's broader growth and community-building agenda. It also implies that improvements in local foot traffic, resident spending power, and regional connectivity translate relatively directly into business performance.

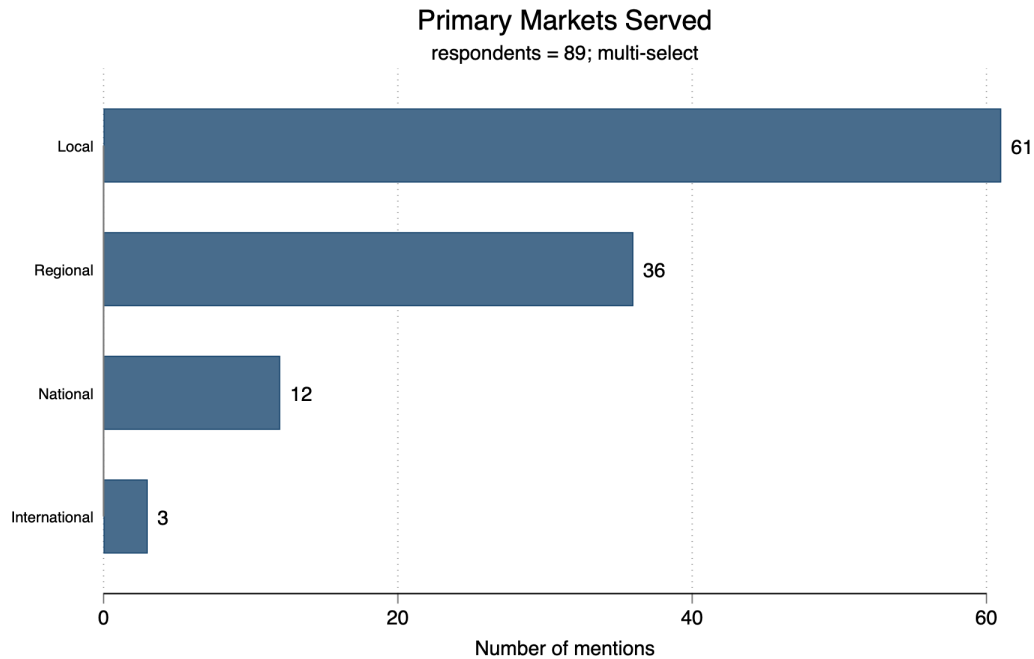


Figure 11. Primary markets served (mentions; multi-select, n = 89). Local and regional customers form the core market base; national and international reach is limited.

Demand is markedly seasonal, and the pattern is best understood by reading the busiest- and slowest-month charts together. Figure 12 shows that the October-to-December period is the most frequently cited busy season; December (32 mentions), November (31), and October (30) form a clear year-end peak, with a secondary spring-and-early-summer rise from April through June. Figure 13 shows the mirror image: January (55 mentions) and February (41) are overwhelmingly the slowest months, with a secondary mid-summer lull in July (29) and August (27).

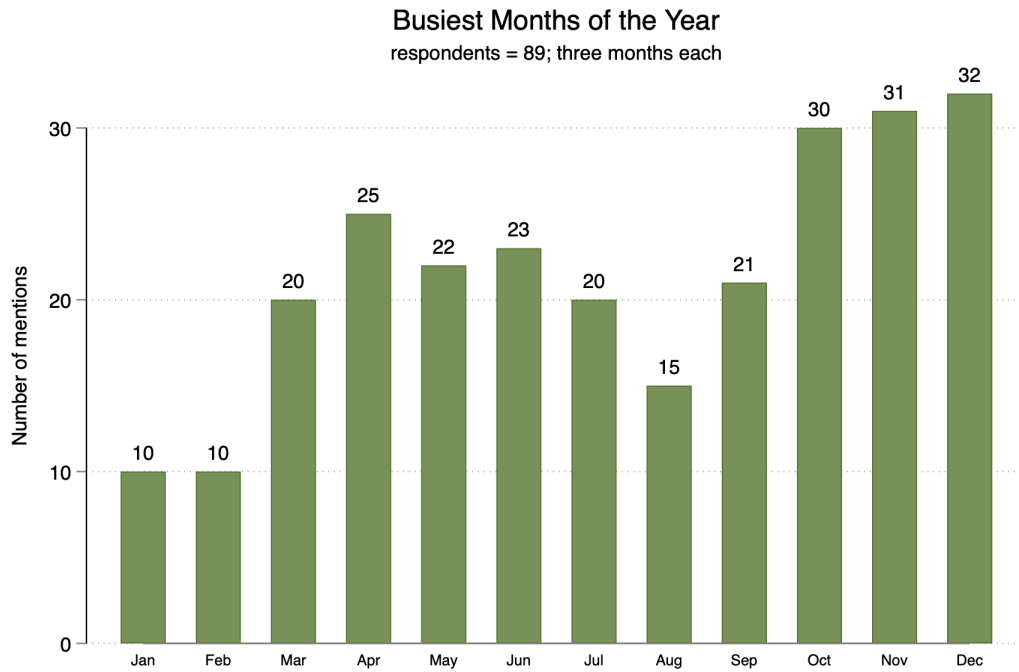


Figure 12. Busiest months of the year (mentions; respondents selected up to three, $n = 89$). A pronounced October–December peak is complemented by a spring rise.

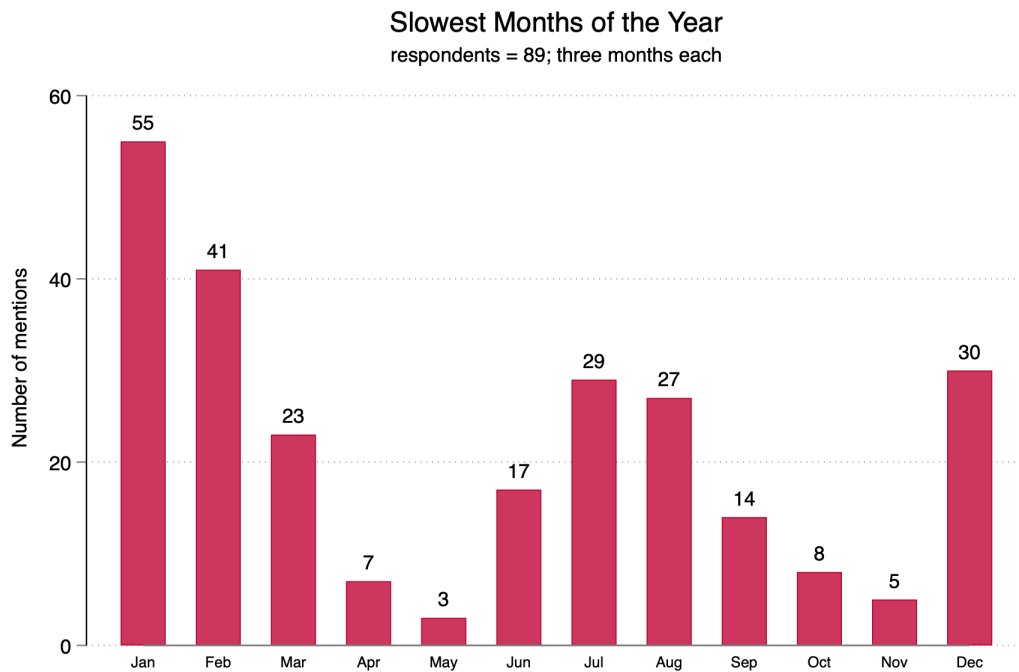


Figure 13. Slowest months of the year (mentions; respondents selected up to three, $n = 89$). The winter slowdown is concentrated in January and February, with a secondary summer lull.

The overlap between the two charts is instructive. December appears prominently as both the busiest month (for retail and consumer services) and, for a smaller group, the slowest month, while the summer months show the same split. This confirms that seasonality in Stony Plain is industry-specific rather than community-wide: the year-end retail peak coincides with a slow period for some service and goods-producing firms, and vice versa. For the Town, this argues against treating “the slow season” as a single window and in favour of event programming and support measures timed to the distinct cycles of different sectors, for example, sustaining downtown activity through the January–February retail trough.

Labour and Civic Conditions

Labour is the area where business satisfaction is most uneven. Figure 14 reports satisfaction across six labour-market dimensions among the 68 respondents who employ staff. The pattern is consistent: firms are most satisfied with their ability to retain employees, where positive ratings clearly dominate, but markedly less satisfied with their ability to attract new employees and with the availability of both skilled and lower-skilled labour. Satisfaction with post-secondary alignment is difficult to read because a large share of respondents selected “don't know,” which itself signals that the connection between local employers and post-secondary institutions is weak or unfamiliar to most firms. The clear implication is that Stony Plain's businesses can hold onto the workers they have but struggle to grow their workforce, precisely the constraint that matters most for a business base oriented toward expansion.

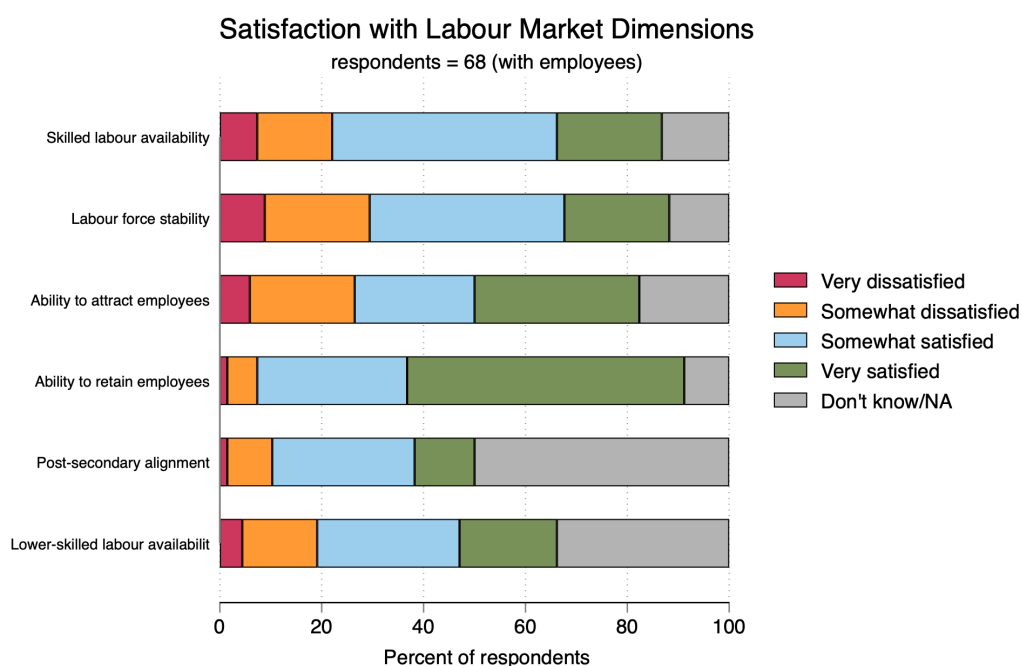


Figure 14. Satisfaction with labour-market dimensions (percent of respondents with employees, n = 68). Retention is the strongest dimension; attraction and availability are weaker.

Digital adoption is broad at the basic level but thins out for transactional tools. Figure 15 shows that websites (79 mentions) and digital marketing (72) are near-universal, but online booking or payments (46)

and e-commerce (31) are used by roughly half and a third of respondents, respectively. Only a handful report limited or no use of digital tools. The picture is one of businesses that are digitally present but not necessarily digitally transacting, consistent with the in-person orientation documented later in the operations module.

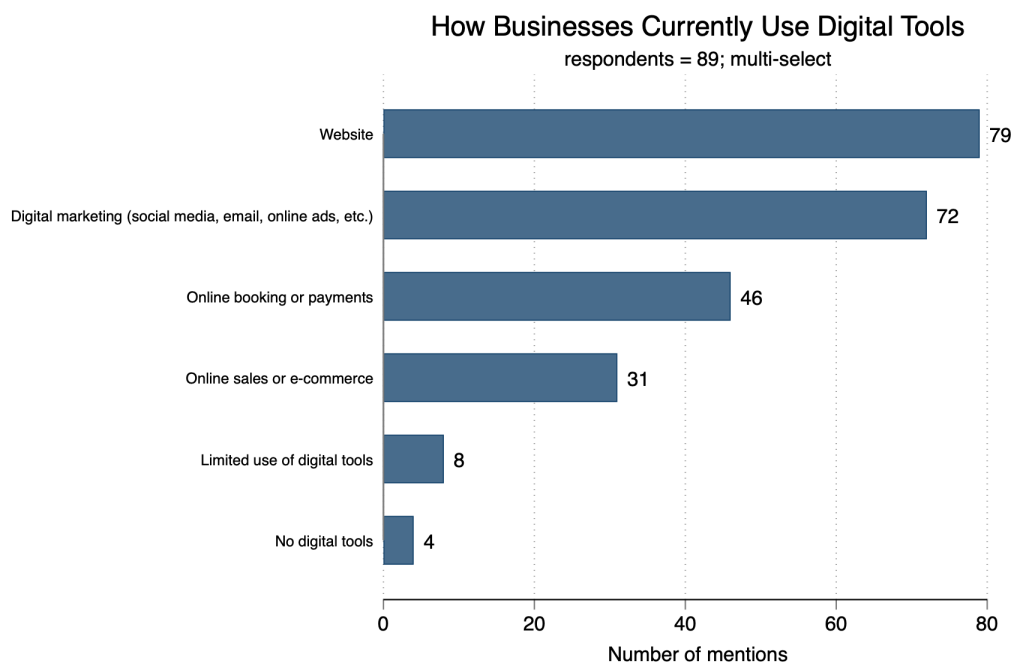


Figure 15. How businesses currently use digital tools (mentions; multi-select, n = 89). Websites and digital marketing are common; e-commerce and online booking are less so.

Figure 16 explains why adoption plateaus. The leading barriers to greater digital use are time or staff capacity (34 mentions), cost (30), a perception that further tools are “not relevant” (29), and a lack of skills or training (26). Difficulty measuring return on investment (19), cybersecurity concerns (13), and technology limitations (6) follow. Crucially, these are predominantly capacity and relevance barriers rather than awareness barriers: firms are not unaware that digital tools exist; they lack the time, money, and confidence in payoff to adopt them. This points toward hands-on, low-cost, business-specific support to help select and implement the right tool for a given firm.

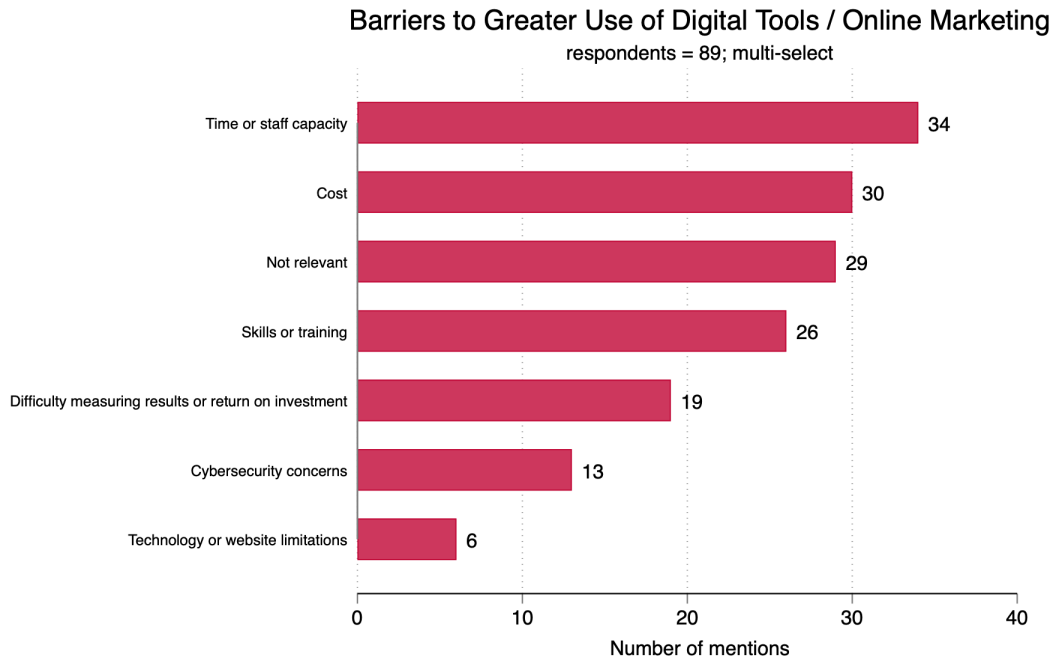


Figure 16. Barriers to greater use of digital tools and online marketing (mentions; multi-select, n = 89). Time, cost, perceived relevance, and skills dominate.

The workforce predominantly originates from the immediate vicinity. Figure 17 illustrates that, among employing firms, Stony Plain is the most prevalent place of residence for workers (58 mentions), followed by Spruce Grove (42), Parkland County (34), and other communities within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region (32). This concentrated geographic labour shed results in two significant consequences. First, it links the capacity of local employers to staff their enterprises with the availability and affordability of housing throughout the Tri-Municipal Region, thereby connecting the labour-attraction issue depicted in Figure 14 to the housing-supply concern presented in Figure 18. Second, it emphasizes the importance of regional collaboration in workforce development, as the labor market transcends municipal boundaries.

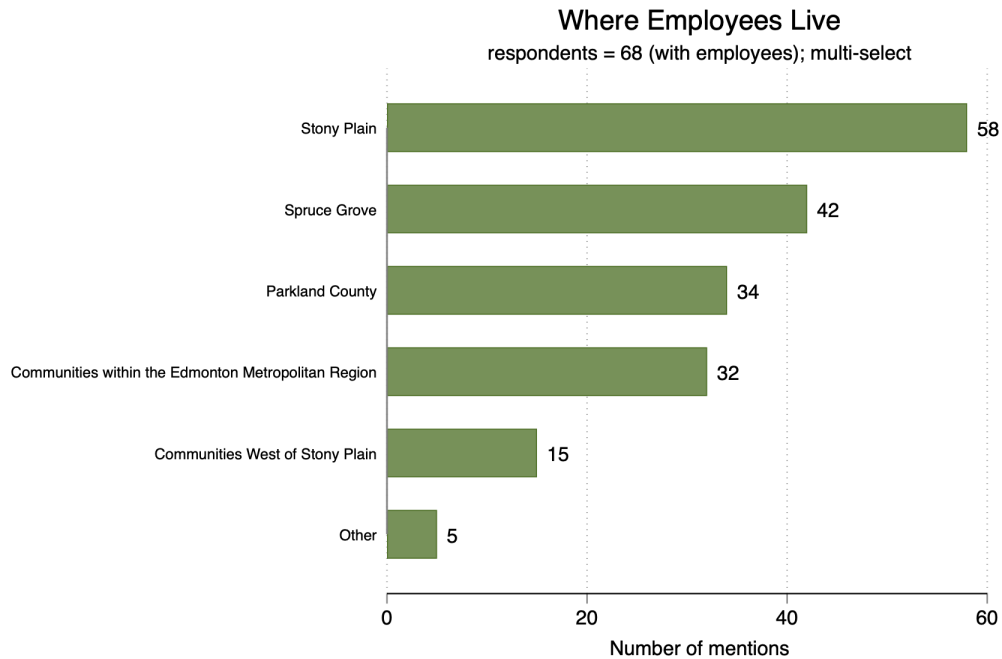


Figure 17. Where employees live (mentions; multi-select, respondents with employees, n = 68). Workers come mainly from Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Parkland County, and the wider region.

Figure 18 assesses how businesses rate seven dimensions of the local environment. Quality of life is the standout strength, rated good or excellent by a large majority, an asset for talent attraction and a recurring theme in the Town's own strategy. Proximity to transportation also rates well, which seems in tension with the open-ended responses, where transit challenges were frequently cited. The two findings likely reflect differences in who is affected and how. Businesses that value highway access and regional connectivity rate transportation well. On the other hand, firms whose workers or customers mostly depend on public transit experience it as a constraint. Follow-up engagement could establish which businesses fall into the latter group, and what kinds of transit issues are affecting businesses. Of the three weakest dimensions, two are directly economic: housing supply for employees and the availability of commercial and industrial space, both of which attract substantial “poor” and “fair” ratings. Development and building permits and operating-cost predictability occupy the middle ground. The juxtaposition is the key finding of this module: the town is widely seen as a desirable place to live and move through, but the supply-side foundations of business growth, specifically, space for businesses and housing for their workers, are seen as inadequate.

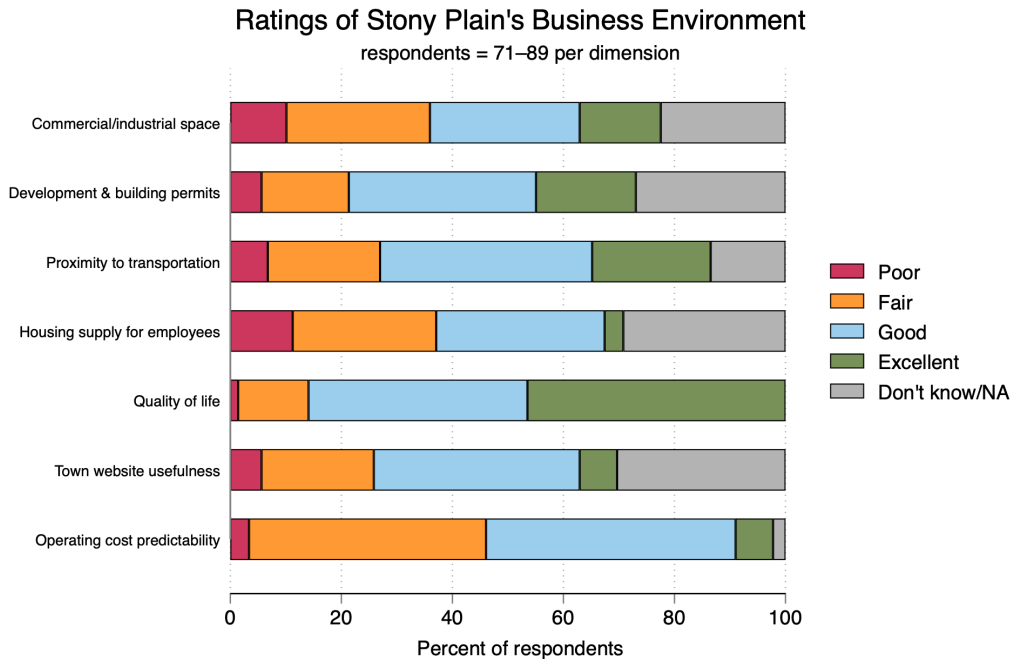


Figure 18. Ratings of Stony Plain's business environment across seven dimensions (percent of respondents; n = 71–89 per dimension). Quality of life rates strongly; employee housing and commercial/industrial space are the weakest dimensions.

Municipal service responsiveness is generally satisfactory. Figure 19 shows that, excluding the 26 percent for whom the question was not applicable, the largest group of respondents (33 percent) reports that service-request response times meet expectations, and a further 27 percent report faster-than-expected or much faster-than-expected service. Approximately 15 percent report a slower-than-expected or much slower-than-expected response. Most businesses, in other words, are well served, but a non-trivial minority experiences service that falls short. For the Town, this is a group worth identifying and engaging directly, since service friction is both within the Town's control and corrosive of business confidence.

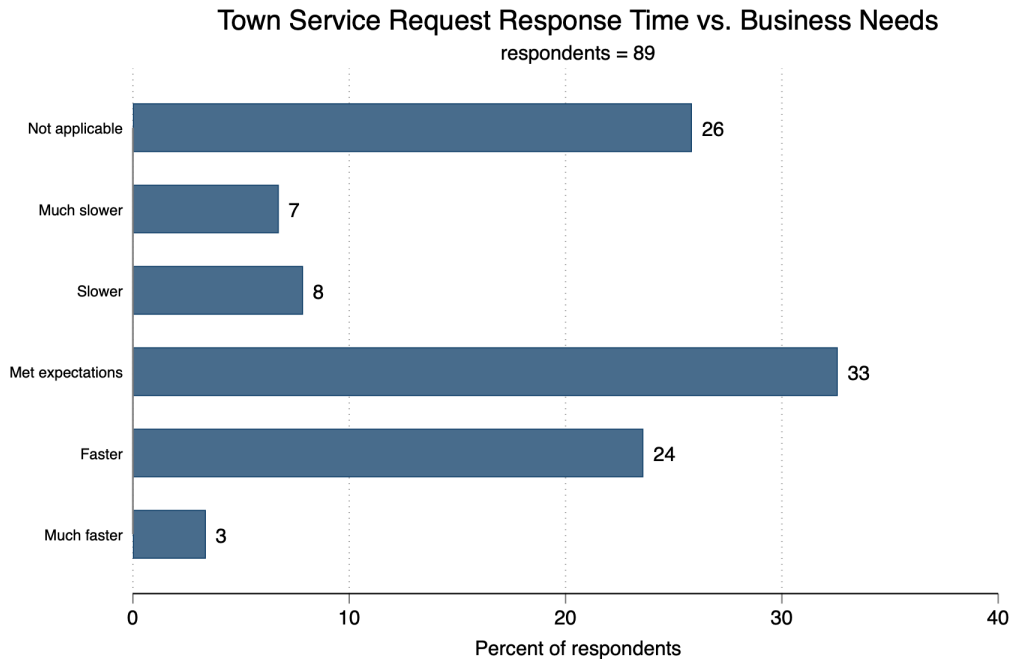


Figure 19. Town service-request response time versus business needs (percent of respondents, n = 89). Most report service that meets or exceeds expectations; about 15 percent report slower-than-expected response.

Events and Segment Differences

Municipal events are valued by a substantial share of businesses, though the data require careful reading. Figure 20 shows that, among the 63 respondents who answered, 44 percent report that municipal events increase their awareness or sales while 56 percent report that they do not. The benefit of events is genuine though not universal: a large minority of businesses derive a direct commercial advantage from events, while a slight majority do not perceive one. As the segmentation below makes clear, this aggregate conceals a sharp divide in which events are highly valuable to some segments and largely irrelevant to others. Thus, the headline figure understates their importance to the businesses they do reach.

Do Municipal Events Increase Awareness/Sales for Your Business?

respondents = 63

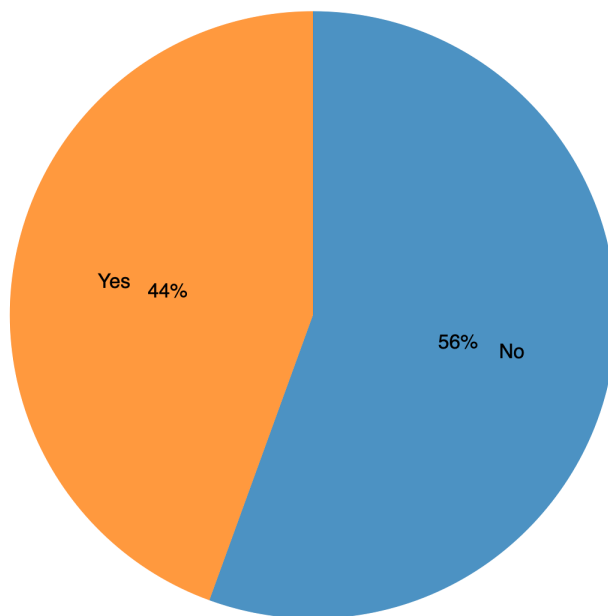


Figure 20. Whether municipal events increase awareness or sales for the business (percent of respondents answering, n = 63). A substantial minority report a direct benefit; benefit is concentrated in particular segments (see Figures 28–29).

Among firms that do benefit, particular events stand out. Figure 21 shows that Farmers' Days (17 mentions) and Midsummer Thursdays (15) are by a clear margin the events most often credited with supporting local business, ahead of Summer Sessions (8), Canada Day (7), Winter Fest (6), and Alberta Culture Days (6). These two flagship events, one a signature summer festival, the other a recurring downtown activation, are the Town's most effective existing tools for driving business activity and a sound foundation on which to build.

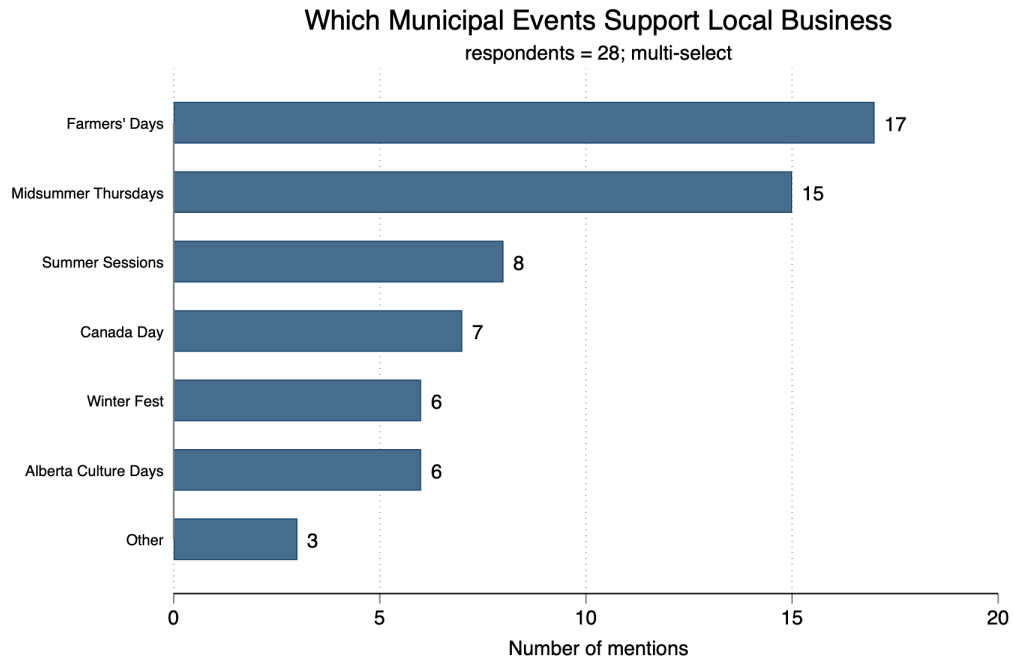


Figure 21. Municipal events that support local business (mentions; multi-select, n = 28). Farmers' Days and Midsummer Thursdays are the most frequently named.

Businesses are clear about how they want to be heard by the Town. Figure 22 shows that direct email is the overwhelmingly preferred communication channel (80 mentions), far ahead of phone (31), in-person visits (22), the business e-newsletter (22), text messaging (20), social media (20), and the town website (14). This is an actionable operational finding: a well-maintained direct email channel is the single most effective way for the Town to reach its business community and should anchor any retention and expansion strategy.

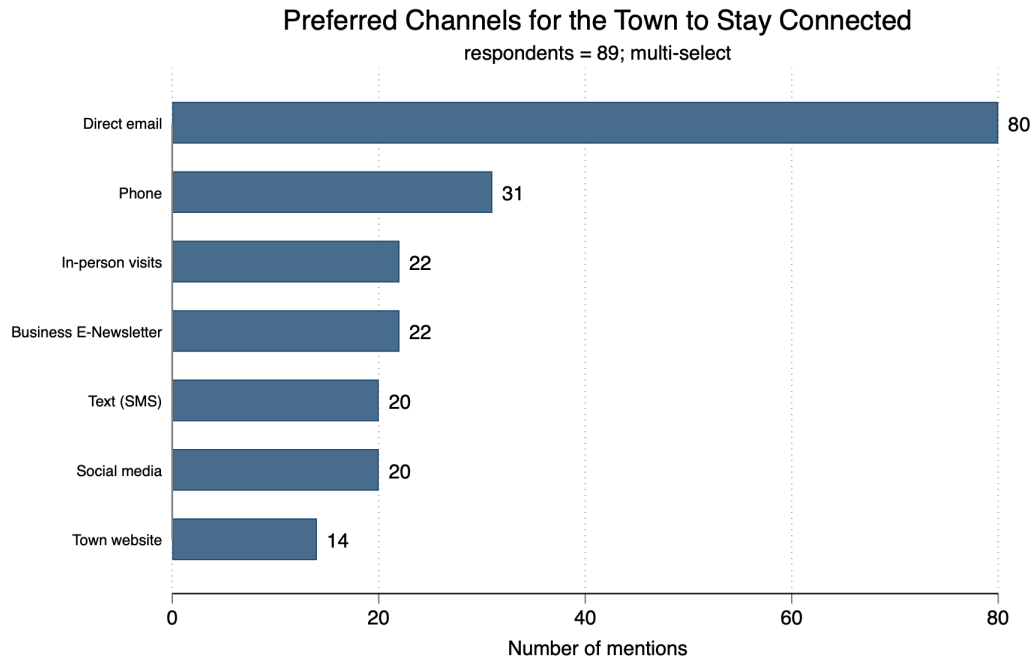


Figure 22. Preferred channels for the Town to stay connected with businesses (mentions; multi-select, n = 89). Direct email is preferred by a wide margin.

The remaining figures in this module disaggregate overall impressions and intentions by segment, and together they form the most policy-relevant part of the survey. Figure 23 shows that general impressions of Stony Plain vary substantially by industry. Goods-producing firms are the most positive, with “excellent” ratings dominating; professional and business services and health and education also rate the town highly. Retail and wholesale trade is the weakest segment, as the only group to register “poor” ratings and the one with the largest combined “poor-and-fair” share. Given that retail is also the largest single segment of the local economy, its comparatively weak sentiment is a strategically important signal.

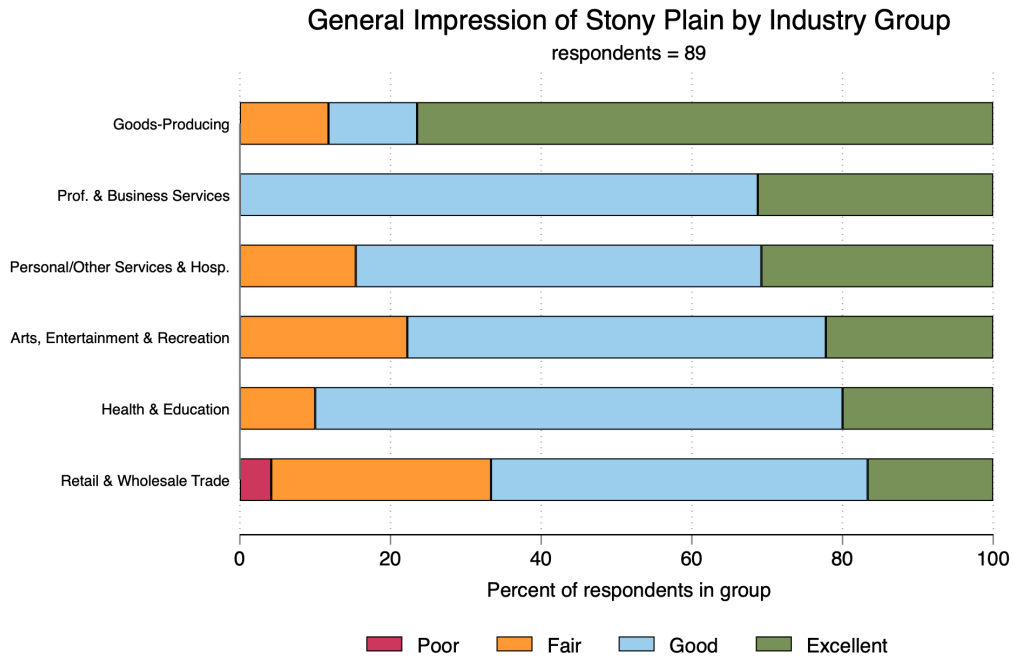


Figure 23. General impression of Stony Plain by industry group (percent of respondents in group, n = 89). Goods-producing firms are most positive; retail and wholesale trade is the weakest segment.

Impressions also vary modestly by firm size. Figure 24 shows that both micro firms (1–4 employees) and small-to-mid firms (5 or more) lean positive, but small-to-mid firms register a larger “excellent” share, while micro firms account for the small number of “poor” ratings. Perceptions, in other words, skew slightly less positively among the very smallest businesses, the segment least able to absorb cost and labour pressures, consistent with the broader pattern that vulnerability and dissatisfaction travel together.

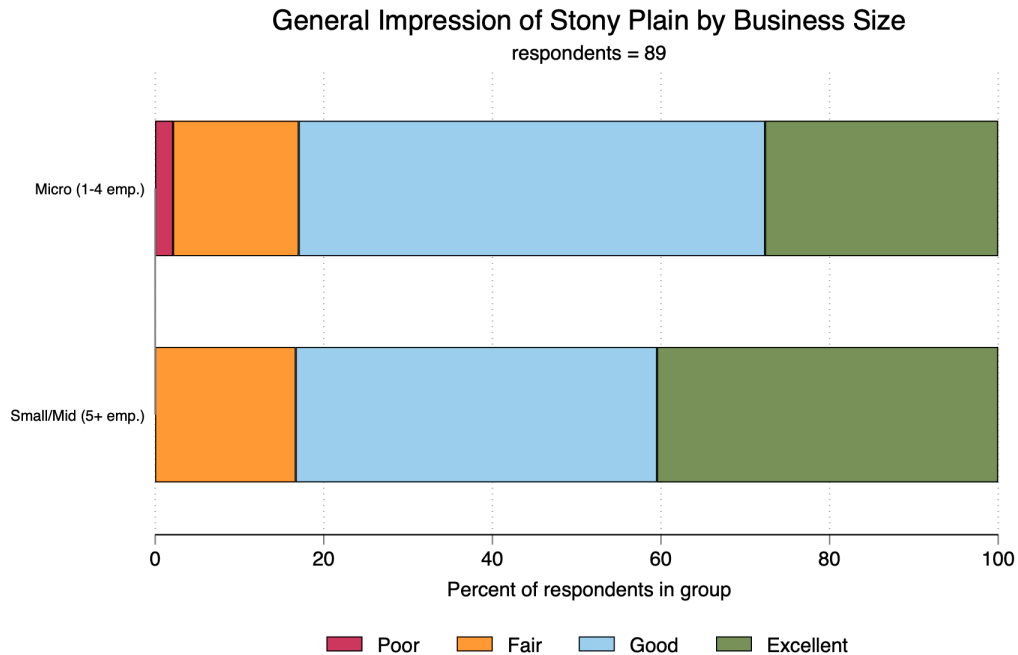


Figure 24. General impression of Stony Plain by business size (percent of respondents in group, n = 89). Small and micro firms both lean positive, but perceptions skew slightly less positively among micro firms.

Location matters as well. Figure 25 shows that downtown respondents hold softer impressions than non-downtown respondents: the “excellent” share among downtown firms is roughly half that of non-downtown firms, and the downtown group has a larger “fair” share. This is a notable result given that, as shown below, downtown firms benefit more from municipal events than any other location group. The combination of greater event benefit but weaker overall sentiment implies that events provide downtown businesses with episodic relief but do not resolve the underlying structural conditions (such as property condition, lease costs, or everyday foot traffic) that shape their day-to-day experience. At the same time, a vibrant, frequently-visited downtown is an asset for the city as a whole, not just for businesses located there. A vibrant downtown draws residents and visitors whose spending circulates across the town, and its character distinguishes Stony Plain from neighbouring markets. The Town can address perceptions of excessive focus through communication efforts which clearly articulate what a vibrant downtown area means to the community.

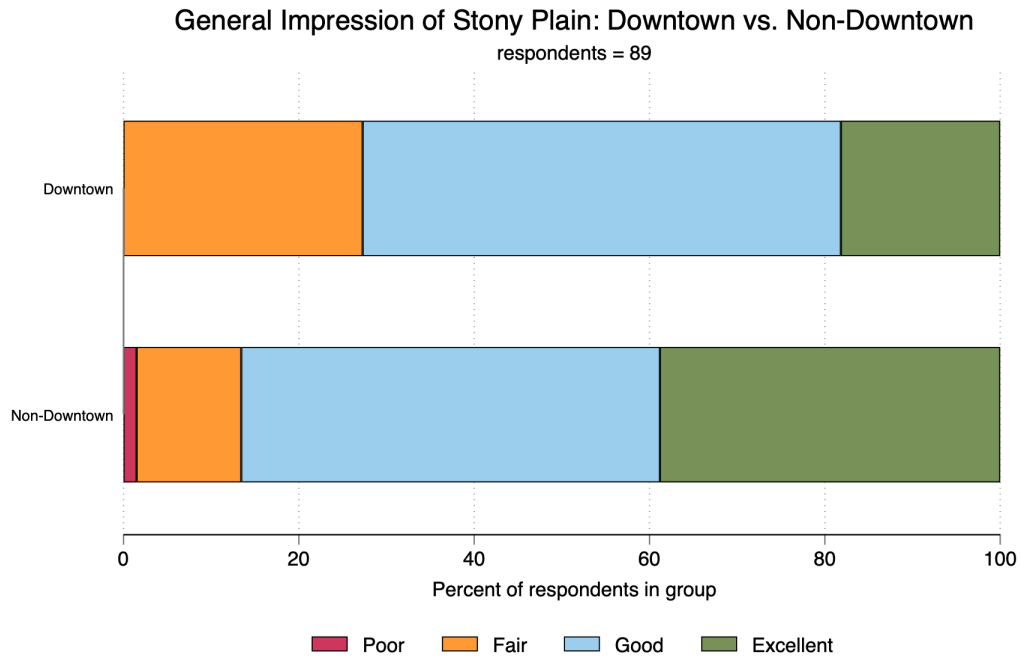


Figure 25. General impression of Stony Plain, downtown versus non-downtown (percent of respondents in group, n = 89). Downtown respondents report a weaker overall impression.

Expansion intentions reveal the same sectoral hierarchy. Figure 26 shows that health and education, professional and business services, and goods-producing firms have the strongest expansion signals, with health and education showing essentially no “at-risk” firms. Retail and wholesale trade sits at the opposite end: it has the lowest share of expanding firms and by far the highest share of “at-risk” firms, about a quarter of the segment. Read alongside retail's weak sentiment in Figure 23, this identifies retail as simultaneously the largest and the most fragile part of the respondent base, and therefore the clearest priority for targeted retention effort. Because retail is also the largest cohort in the sample, its concerns naturally weigh heavily in the overall results. With these results in mind, sector-specific actions should respond to retail's particular fragility, while preserving equity of attention across sectors.

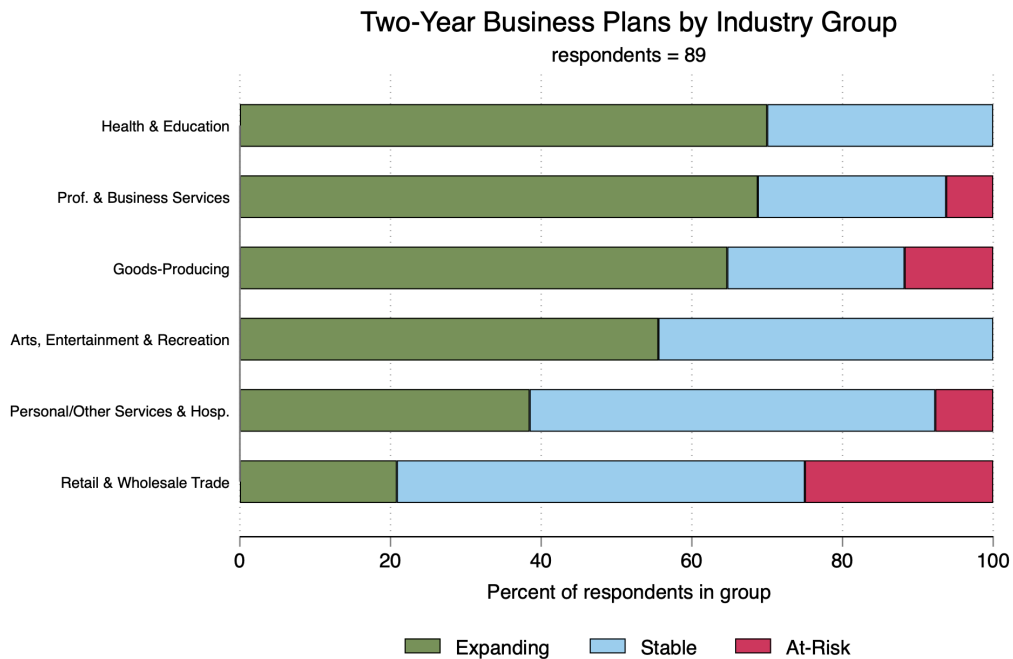


Figure 26. Two-year business plans by industry group (percent of respondents in group, n = 89). Health, professional services, and goods-producing firms show the strongest expansion signals; retail shows the most at-risk firms.

Figure 27 corroborates this through the lens of attitude change. Positive three-year shifts are concentrated in goods-producing and professional-services firms, while retail and wholesale trade shows the lowest share of positive movement and a notable share of negative movement. The consistency across three independent measures (overall impression, expansion intention, and attitude change) gives confidence that retail's relative weakness is a genuine structural signal rather than an artifact of any single question.

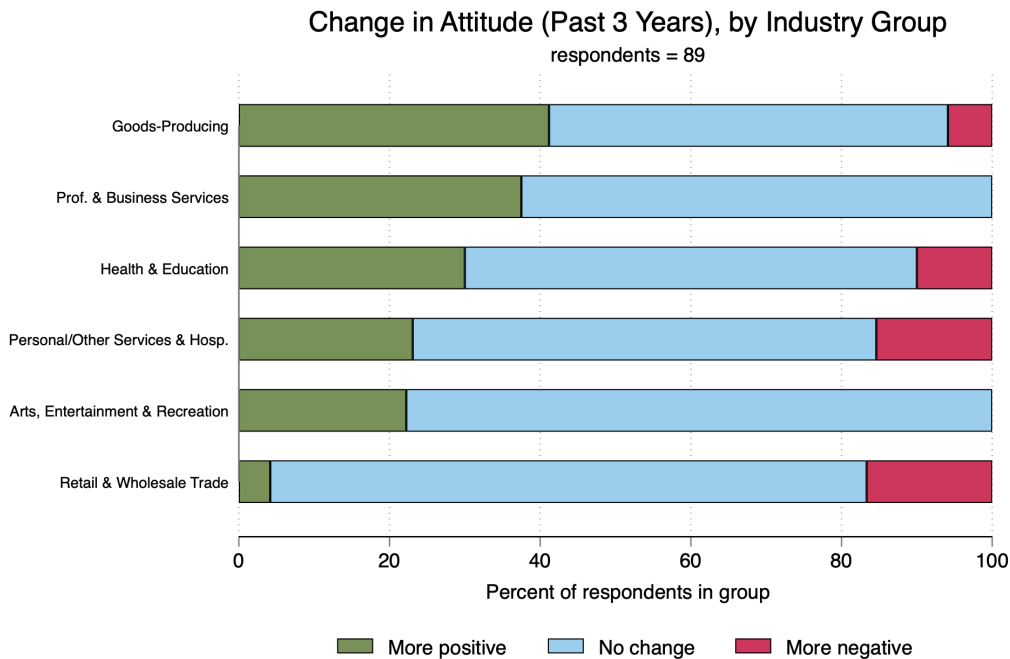


Figure 27. Change in attitude over the past three years by industry group (percent of respondents in group, n = 89). Positive shifts concentrate in goods-producing and professional services; retail shows more negative movement.

The two concluding figures in this module illustrate the divided-aggregate perspective on events. Figure 28 illustrates that the perceived advantages of municipal events are markedly sector-dependent: goods-producing firms consistently report benefits, with arts, entertainment, recreation, retail, and wholesale trade also indicating significant advantages, whereas personal services, other services, and hospitality report minimal benefits. Figure 29 demonstrates the analogous location effect: approximately two-thirds of downtown firms affirm that events positively impact their businesses, compared with about one-third of non-downtown firms. Collectively, these figures redefine the primary conclusion of Figure 20: events are not uniformly beneficial but are substantially advantageous to specific segments (namely, goods-producing, consumer-facing, and downtown firms) and are predominantly neutral for others. Consequently, event strategies may be confidently tailored to target segments and locations where the potential returns are maximized. Two qualifications apply. Municipal events serve multiple competing objectives (civic engagement, community identity, and tourism among them), and business benefit is not the sole test of success. Benefit is also not automatic as the businesses that tend to gain most from events tend to be those that prepare for them, and firms must be proactive in converting event traffic into sales and lasting customer relationships. Business success through the municipality's events is a collaborative effort between both local businesses and the Town.

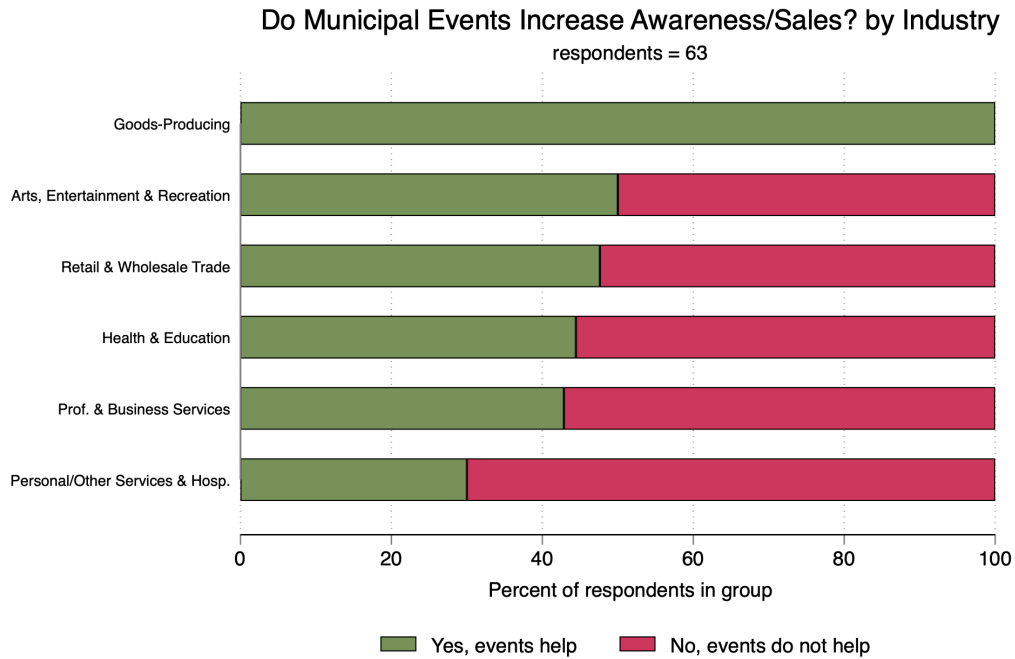


Figure 28. Whether municipal events increase awareness or sales, by industry (percent of respondents in group answering, n = 63). Goods-producing firms report the strongest benefit.

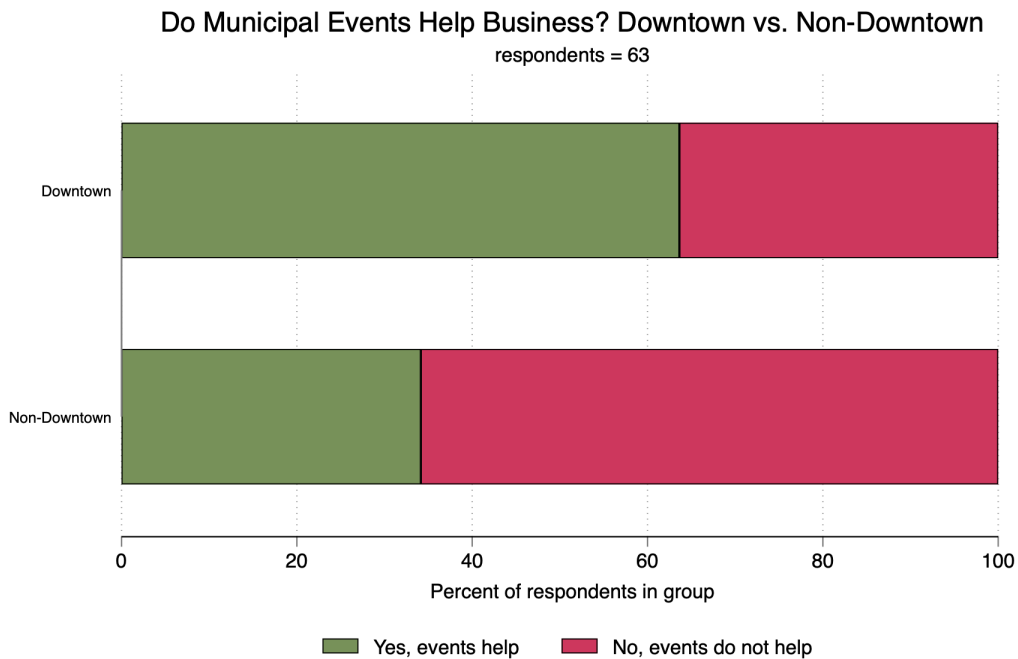


Figure 29. Whether municipal events help business, downtown versus non-downtown (percent of respondents in group answering, n = 63). Downtown firms report substantially greater event benefit.

Operations and Business Conditions

The operations module describes how businesses interact with customers, plan, and manage their premises and external supports. Among the 22 downtown respondents who answered the customer-interaction question, Figure 30 shows that customer activity is predominantly in-person: 15 describe their activity as “mostly in-person” and a further seven as in-person and online but still mostly in-person. None reported a primarily online model. This reinforces the picture from the digital-tools module: Stony Plain's businesses are physically rooted, and their performance depends on physical foot traffic and local presence rather than on e-commerce reach.

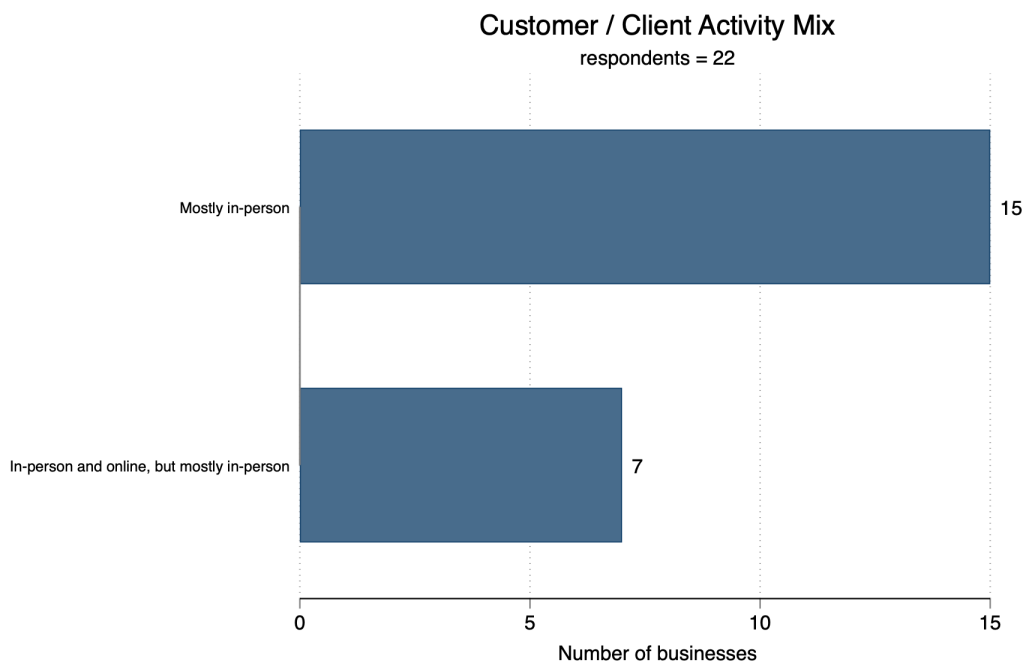


Figure 30. Customer/client activity mix (number of businesses answering, n = 22). Customer activity is predominantly in-person.

Formal planning is common but not universal. Figure 31 shows that 62 percent of respondents have a business plan while 38 percent do not, indicating a substantial minority operating without a formal plan. Among those that do plan, planning is generally current: Figure 32 shows that 58 percent of plan-holders updated their plan within the past year and a further 33 percent within one to three years, leaving fewer than one in 10 working from a plan more than five years old. The combination suggests that the firms that plan do so actively. However, a meaningful segment of the business base could benefit from basic planning support, a natural complement to the training and advisory services discussed below.

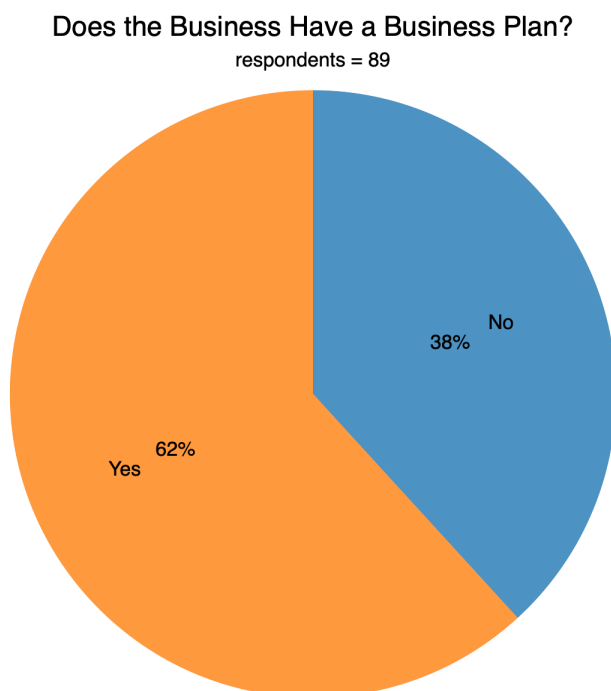


Figure 31. Whether the business has a business plan (percent of respondents, n = 89). Most, though not all, respondents report having a business plan.

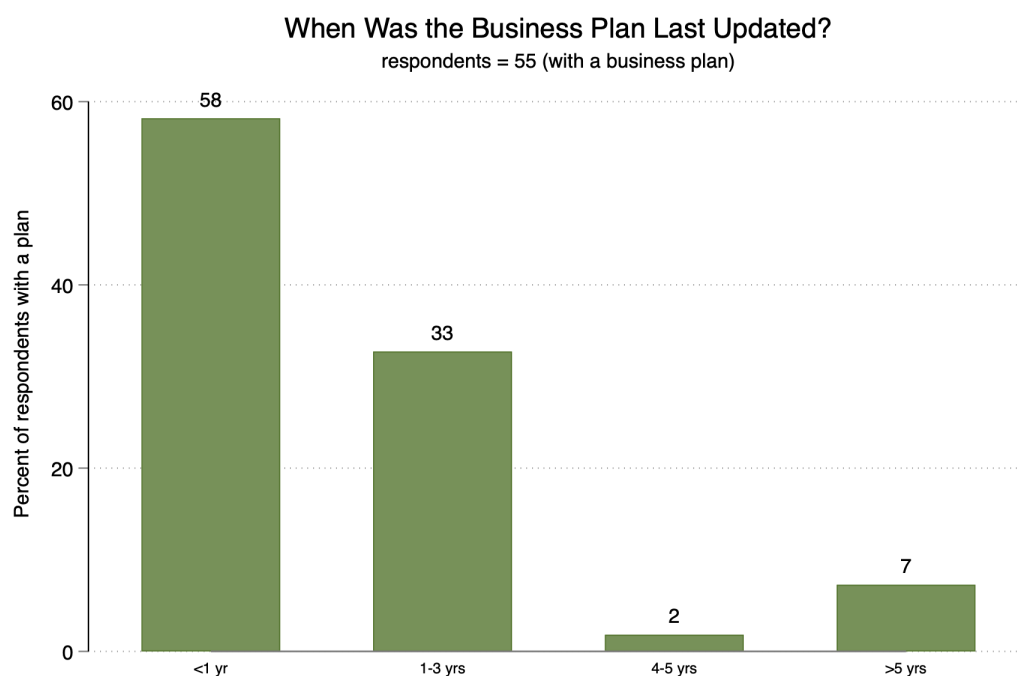


Figure 32. When the business plan was last updated (percent of respondents with a plan, n = 55). Recent updates are far more common than older planning cycles.

Because 60 percent of respondents rent their premises, lease conditions are a material retention factor. Figure 33 shows that lease expiries among the 53 renting respondents are spread across the coming years, with a concentration in 2027 (17 firms) and a near-term cluster in 2026 (11 firms). Figure 34 provides reassurance on the associated risk: 85 percent of renters do not anticipate problems renewing their lease, while 15 percent do. The near-term renewal cluster combined with the minority anticipating difficulty defines a specific, identifiable group of firms. Specifically, for renters facing 2026–2027 expiries who expect renewal problems, proactive engagement could prevent avoidable relocations or closures.

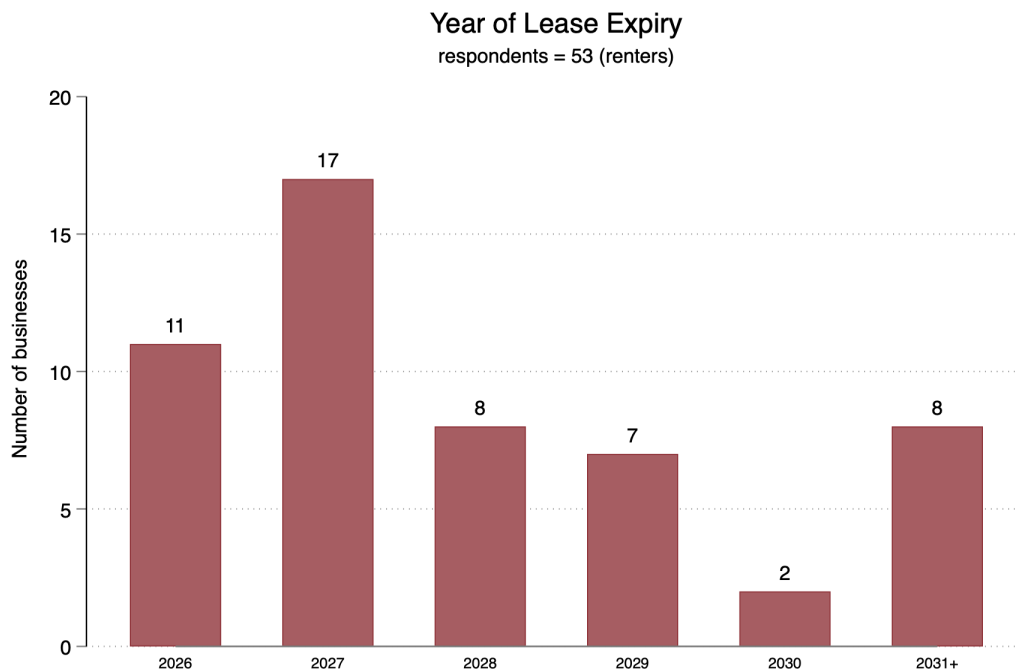


Figure 33. Year of lease expiry (number of renting businesses, n = 53). Expiries are distributed across coming years, with a concentration in 2026–2027.

Anticipated Problems Renewing the Lease
respondents = 53 (renters)

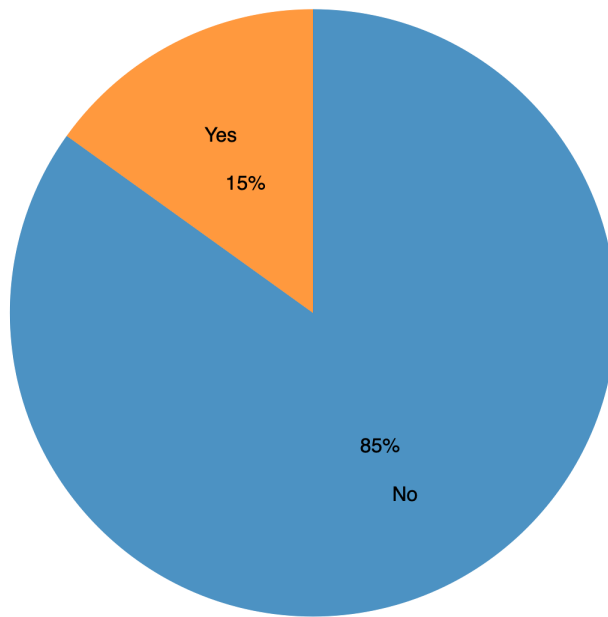


Figure 34. Anticipated problems renewing the lease (percent of renting respondents, n = 53). Most renters do not expect renewal problems.

Engagement with external support programs is limited. Figure 35 shows that 75 percent of respondents do not plan to access federal or provincial programs, against 25 percent who do. This may reflect either satisfaction with current resources or, more likely, given the documented capacity constraints, limited awareness of and difficulty navigating available programs. Either way, it identifies an opportunity for the Town to add value by connecting businesses to external funding and support. This is precisely the kind of “concierge” and “one-stop-shop” function envisioned in the Economic Development Strategy.

Planning to Access Federal / Provincial Programs?
respondents = 89

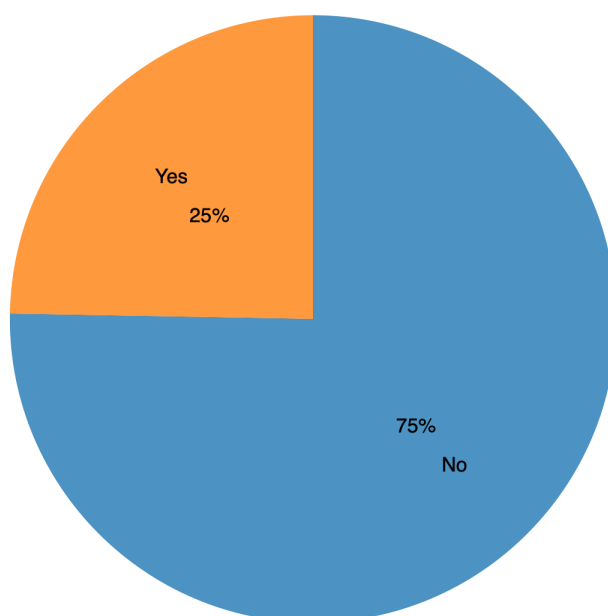


Figure 35 . Whether the business plans to access federal or provincial programs (percent of respondents, n = 89). Most do not plan to access such programs.

Finally, the survey examined the diversity of business ownership. Figure 36 shows that 87 percent of owners do not identify with an equity-seeking group, while 13 percent do. Among that minority, Figure 37 shows that the identities are distributed across several categories: women (11 mentions) most prominently, followed by persons with disabilities (5), and smaller numbers identifying as youth, visible minorities, LGBTQ2S+, newcomers to Canada, Indigenous peoples, and members of French-language communities. While this is a small sub-sample and should be interpreted with caution, it indicates a real, if modest, presence of equity-seeking owners whose distinct needs the Town may wish to understand through more targeted engagement, consistent with the inclusion commitments in its Strategic Plan. More generally, the survey cannot identify why particular subgroups are dissatisfied. Direct outreach and engagement, whether with equity-seeking owners, downtown firms, or the minority reporting slow service response, can pinpoint the reasons behind lower satisfaction and specific policy actions which would remedy it.

Owner Identifies with an Equity-Seeking Group
respondents = 89

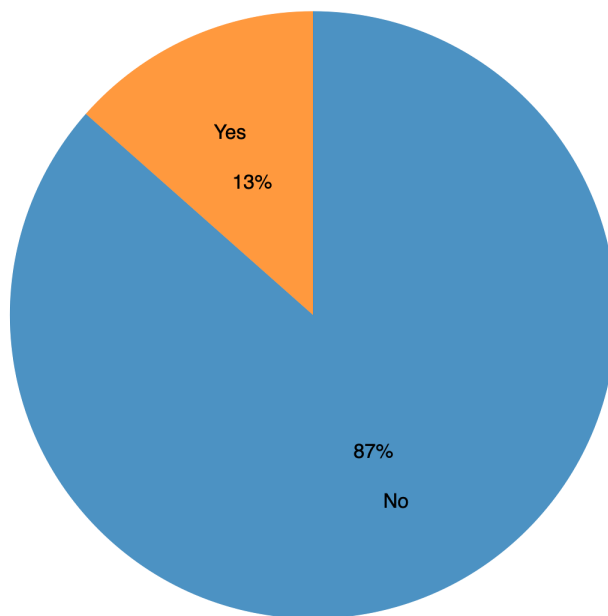


Figure 36 . Whether the owner identifies with an equity-seeking group (percent of respondents, n = 89). Most owners do not identify with an equity-seeking group.

Equity-Seeking Group Membership
respondents = 12; multi-select

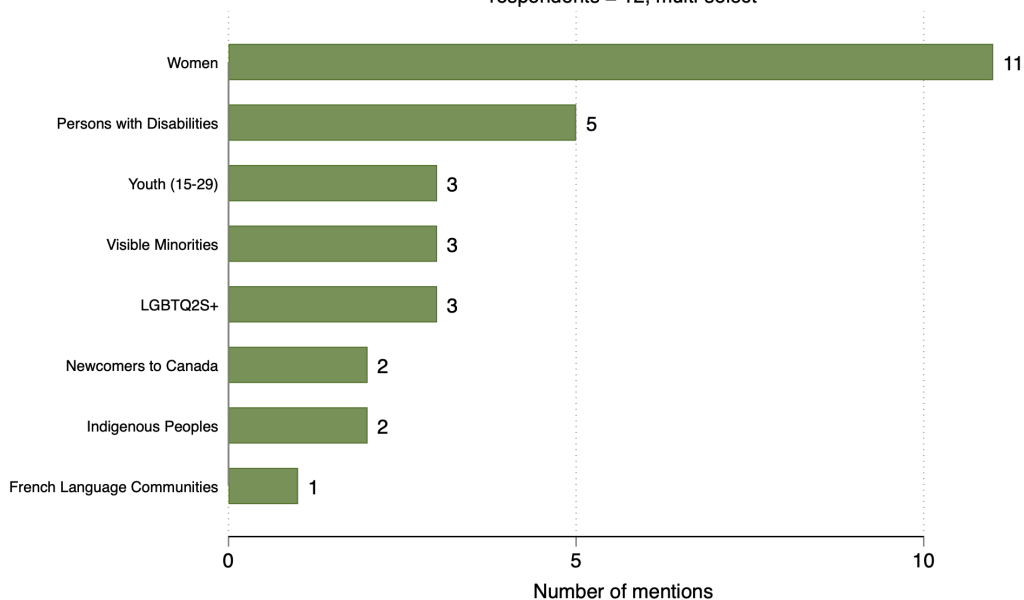


Figure 37. Equity-seeking group membership among owners who identify with one (mentions; multi-select, n = 12). Identities are distributed across several categories, led by women.

Workforce, Training, and Expansion

The final module examines staffing, skills, and the anticipated shape of business growth. Figure 38 shows that permanent roles dominate the reported staffing mix: permanent full-time positions received 69 mentions and permanent part-time 45, far ahead of temporary or seasonal staff (17). The prevalence of permanent employment signals stable, established businesses and reinforces the earlier finding that these firms are oriented toward retaining a core workforce rather than relying on transient labour.

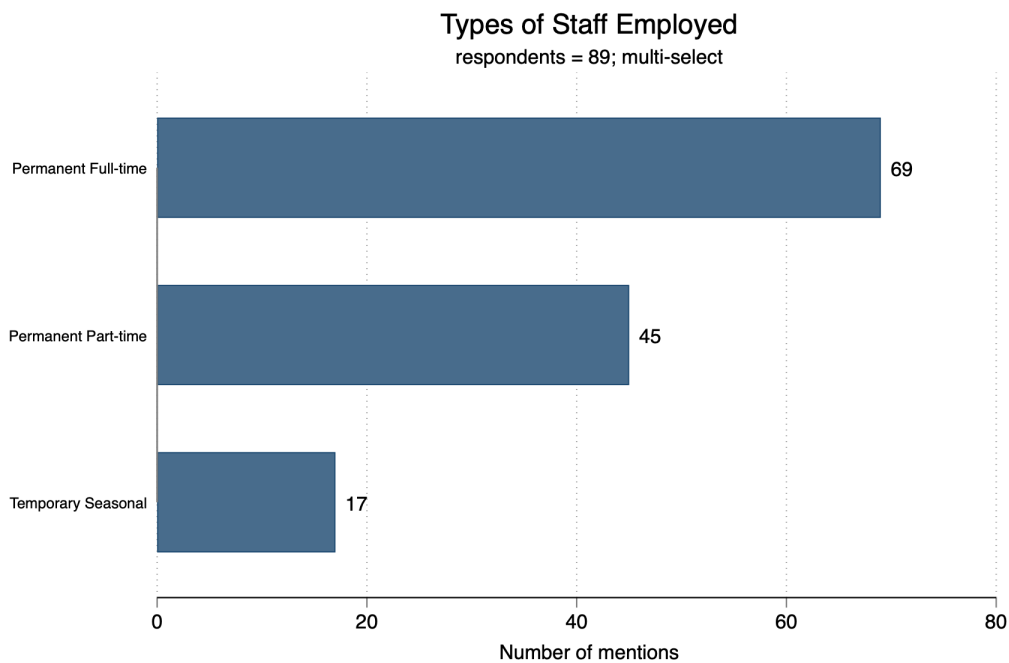


Figure 38. Types of staff employed (mentions; multi-select, n = 89). Permanent full-time and part-time roles account for most of the staffing mix.

Staffing intensity varies sharply by sector, as Figure 39 shows. Goods-producing firms report the highest average full-time headcount (9.2) but few part-time staff (1.4), while health and education firms are large on both measures (8.8 full-time and 6.5 part-time). Retail and wholesale trade carries a balanced and substantial load (6.6 full-time and 6.6 part-time), reflecting its reliance on part-time and shift labour. Professional and business services and personal and other services operate with much smaller teams. These differences explain why labour constraints are felt unevenly across the economy and why workforce support should be tailored to sector-specific staffing models rather than applied uniformly.

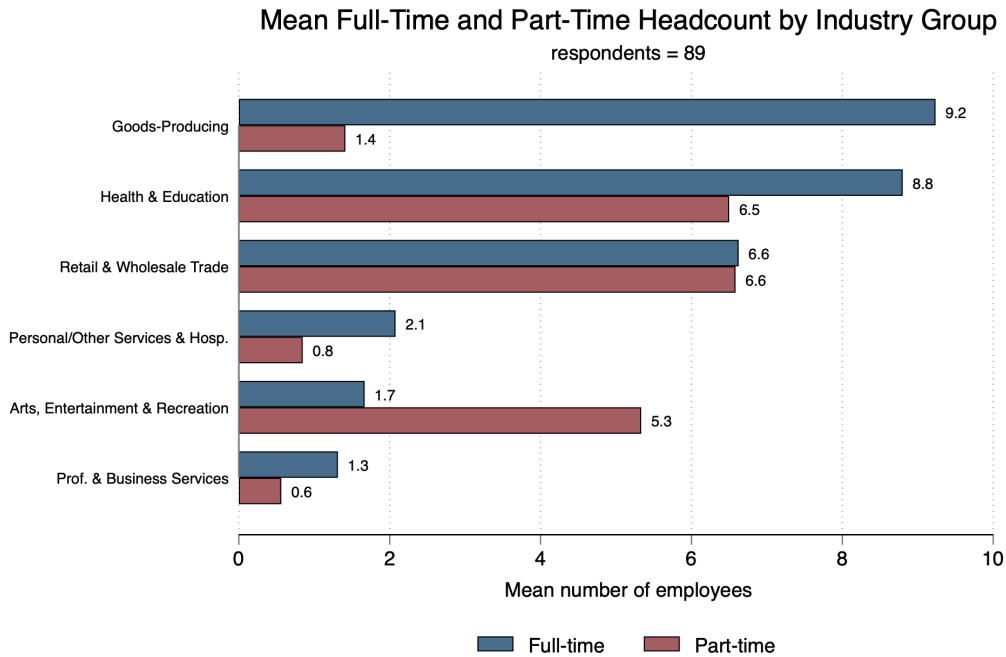


Figure 39. Mean full-time and part-time headcount by industry group (mean number of employees, n = 89). Staffing intensity varies materially across sectors.

Engagement with structured talent pipelines is limited. Figure 40 shows that only 25 percent of respondents with employees participate in co-op, internship, or apprenticeship programs, while 75 percent do not. Given the labour-attraction difficulties documented in Figure 14 and the regional, locally-resident workforce shown in Figure 17, this low participation represents significant untapped potential: work-integrated learning is among the most direct mechanisms available for building a local talent pipeline, and expanding it is a natural area for partnership between the Town, employers, and post-secondary institutions.

Participation in Co-op / Internship / Apprenticeship Programs
respondents = 68 (with employees)

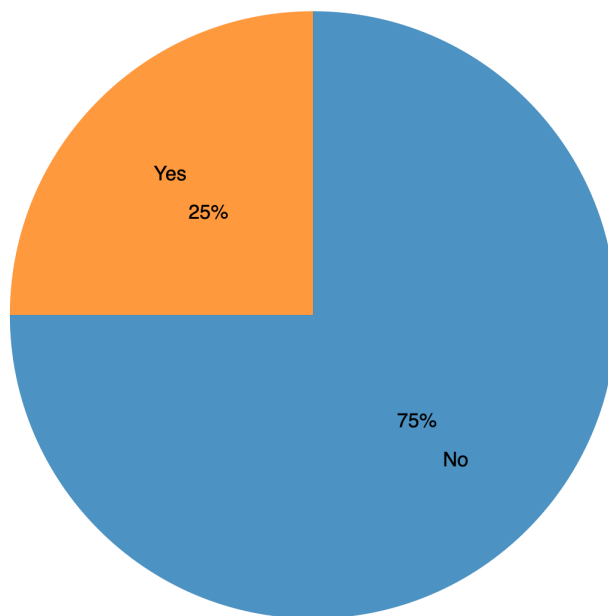


Figure 40. Participation in co-op, internship, or apprenticeship programs (percent of respondents with employees, n = 68). Work-integrated learning is uncommon.

Training demand is present but is not the majority view. Figure 41 shows that 38 percent of respondents believe that training programs would benefit them or their employees, while 62 percent do not. This is an important nuance: although a meaningful minority want training, most firms do not currently perceive a need for training. Therefore, training-based support will be most effective if it is targeted at the receptive segment (the minority of businesses that indicated training would benefit them) and framed around concrete, immediate business value rather than offered as a broad, generic program.

Would Training Programs Benefit You and Your Employees?

respondents = 89

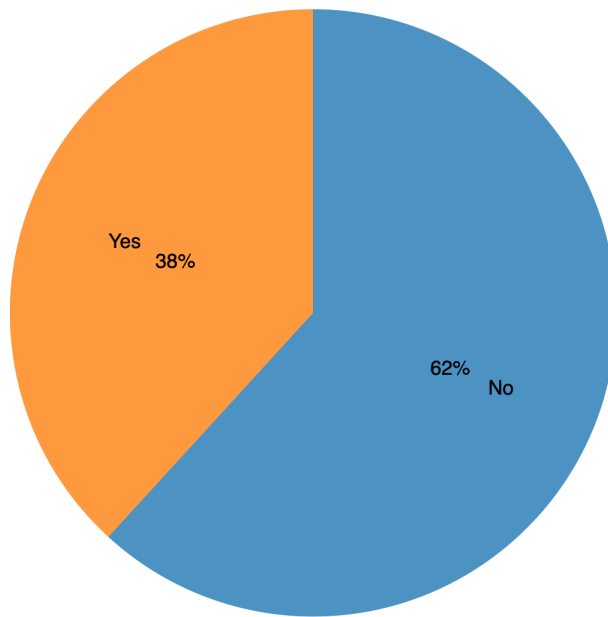


Figure 41. Whether training programs would benefit the business or its employees (percent of respondents, n = 89). A meaningful minority sees value in training; most do not currently perceive a need.

Among the 34 respondents who specified useful training topics, Figure 42 shows that demand clusters around practical business fundamentals. Safety and first aid (6 mentions) lead, followed by marketing, sales and social media; leadership, human resources and mentoring; and industry-specific skills (5 each), with finance and bookkeeping and computer and digital skills close behind. The clear lesson is that the appetite is for grounded, applied skills, safety, marketing, people management, and basic finance and digital capability, rather than advanced or specialized training. Support designed around these everyday competencies is most likely to be taken up.

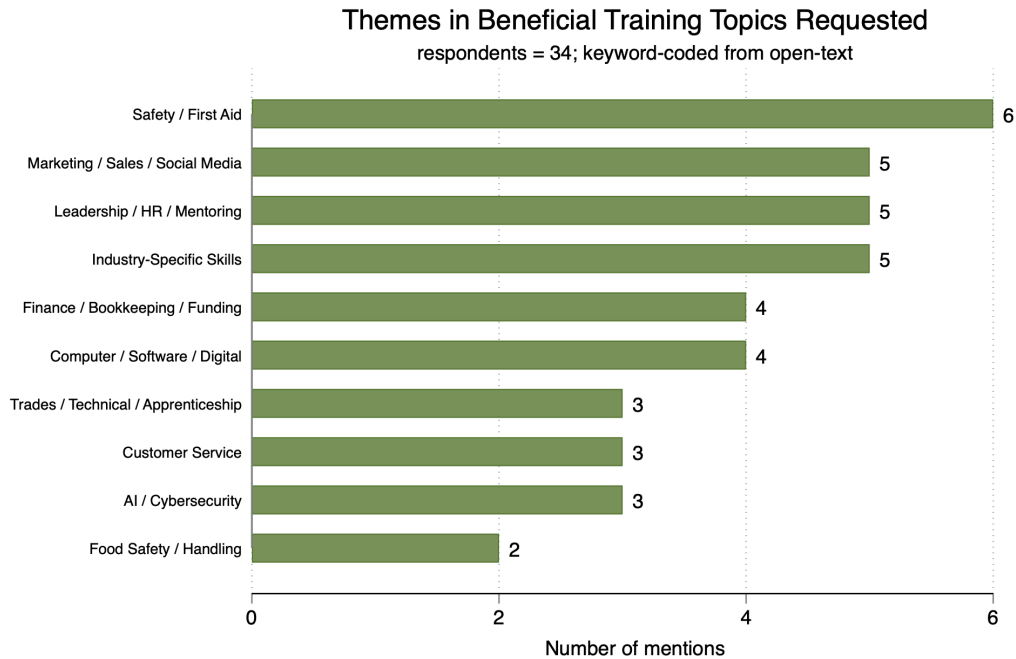


Figure 42. Themes in beneficial training topics requested (mentions; keyword-coded from open text, n = 34). Requested topics concentrate in practical business fundamentals.

Finally, Figure 43 shows what expansion actually means to the 44 respondents who plan to grow. The most-cited consequence by a wide margin is an increase in workforce (37 mentions), followed by additional services for customers (27), an increased need for employee training (18), and additional floor space (18). Process improvements (16) and additional product lines (15) follow. The dominance of workforce growth ties the entire survey together: the firms most likely to expand intend to do so chiefly by hiring. Yet hiring is precisely the dimension on which they report the greatest difficulty (Figure 14) and the area in which housing and labour-availability constraints (Figures 17 and 18) bite hardest. Resolving labour and housing constraints is therefore not a peripheral concern but the central enabler of the growth the business community is signalling it wants to pursue.

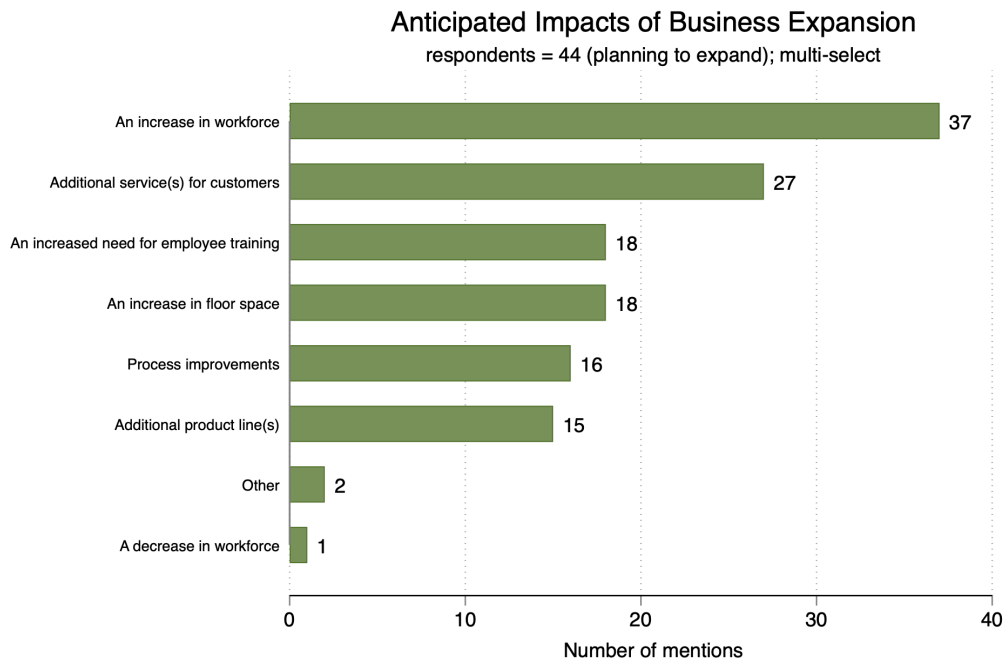


Figure 43. Anticipated impacts of business expansion (mentions; multi-select, respondents planning to expand, n = 44). Workforce growth and additional services dominate expansion plans.

Discussion of Results in Relation to Economic Planning Initiatives

The survey findings map closely onto the four strategic priorities of the Town's Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan and the Economic Opportunity commitments of its Strategic Plan. This section reads the results against those frameworks and draws out the implications for implementation.

Strategic Priority 1: An Attractive, Investment, and Future-Ready Community

The survey identified two weaknesses along environmental dimensions, namely employee housing and commercial and industrial space (Figure 18), which speak directly to Strategic Priority 1. The Strategy's Objective 1.1 calls for maintaining a development-ready supply of non-residential land and for exploring public-private partnerships to create investment-ready properties;^[2] the survey confirms that businesses themselves perceive space availability as a constraint, lending demand-side weight to those supply-side actions.

The availability of commercial and industrial inventory deserves particular emphasis. Among the 44 firms planning to expand, 18 anticipate needing additional floor space, and workshop participants confirmed that available commercial and industrial space is often too scarce, too small, or too costly. If inventory availability doesn't match businesses' expansion plans, expansion-minded firms represent a concrete retention risk. The survey did not capture the size of these firms nor their specific space requirements; post-survey follow-up with them should establish both.

Likewise, the Strategic Plan's commitment to "encourage innovative and diverse housing options"^[1] is validated by the finding that the local workforce is drawn overwhelmingly from Stony Plain and adjacent communities (Figure 17) and that employee housing is rated a weak point: housing supply is, in effect, labour-supply infrastructure for the business community. The Town's Housing Strategy is the established policy vehicle on this front and should be reviewed against the survey findings to confirm that its actions address the workforce-housing gap businesses identify as a barrier to growth. Because expansion-minded firms intend to grow primarily through hiring (Figure 43), the housing and commercial-space agendas are not merely quality-of-life concerns but core enablers of business retention and expansion.

Strategic Priority 2: Bolstering Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations

Strategic Priority 2 of the Economic Development Strategy rests on the recognition that Stony Plain cannot achieve its economic goals alone. The survey's findings reflect this, indicating that regional problems invite regional solutions. The clearest issue identified, which directly relates to Strategic Priority 2, is transit. Businesses rate proximity to transportation well, yet transit challenges recur throughout the open-ended responses (Figure 18), which may reflect the difference between highway-access oriented businesses and those whose workers and customers depend on public transit.

Transit constraints often cross municipal boundaries, and Supporting Action 24, which commits the Town to exploring joint investment in infrastructure with member municipalities through Community Economic Development, is the natural lever for addressing it. Joint investment could address the transit concerns that no single municipality can resolve alone. Action 25's advocacy for key regional projects, such as the

Highway 628 expansion, complements this by strengthening the connectivity that businesses already rate as a strength.

The Strategy's second objective under this priority, that strategic partners support target sector investment attraction and business development, speaks directly to the sectors the survey identifies as more fragile, retail foremost among them (Figures 23, 26, and 27). Supporting Actions 26 through 28 indicate ways through which strategic collaboration could support these sectors. An enhanced presence at target sector industry events, the introduction of sector partners to key forums such as Growth and Commerce Committee meetings, and the collection of industry intelligence to make connections that advance sector development. Moreover, the 89 detailed business records generated by this survey are precisely the industry intelligence Action 28 envisions. The Town can use them to broker introductions between local firms in fragile sectors and the industry partners, sector organizations, and regional bodies best placed to support them.

Strategic Priority 3: Enhancing the Local Business Ecosystem

This survey is itself the first deliverable of Supporting Actions 32 and 33, which call for a data-driven BR+E engagement program and an associated feedback mechanism. ^[2] Its results define where ecosystem support should concentrate. The clearest signal is the relative fragility of retail (Figures 23, 26, and 27): as the largest single segment of the local economy and the one with the weakest sentiment, lowest expansion intention, and highest at-risk share, retail warrants dedicated retention attention, plausibly through the downtown-focused measures the Strategy already contemplates (the Facade Improvement Program and downtown destination-building under Objective 1.7). The labour-attraction difficulty documented in Figure 14, combined with the very low uptake of work-integrated learning in Figure 40, points squarely to the Strategy's talent objectives (Objective 1.5) and its actions on post-secondary partnerships and apprenticeship, an area where the survey suggests both clear need and substantial unused capacity.

The event's findings (Figures 20, 28, and 29) also refine ecosystem strategy. Rather than treating municipal events as a broad business-support tool, the data show that their commercial benefit is concentrated among goods-producing, consumer-facing, and downtown firms. This allows the Town to target and time event programming, and its marketing to businesses, toward the segments where the return is demonstrable, while being realistic about the limited direct commercial benefit to other segments. The strong, consistent preference for direct email (Figure 22) gives the Town a clear, low-cost backbone for the sustained communication that a feedback-based BR+E program requires.

Strategic Priority 4: Optimizing Municipal Services

Service responsiveness is broadly satisfactory (Figure 19), but the minority reporting slower than expected service, together with the limited uptake of external programs (Figure 35) and the capacity-and-relevance barriers to digital adoption (Figure 16), all point toward the service-optimization actions in Strategic Priority 3, particularly the proposed customer-relationship-management system and the “one-stop-shop” concierge function. ^[2] The 89 detailed business records generated by this survey provide a ready foundation for such a system, allowing the Town to track engagement, flag at-risk firms (for example,

renters facing near-term lease expiries who anticipate renewal problems, per Figures 34 and 35), and close the feedback loop that Supporting Action 33 envisions.

Cross-Cutting Themes and Links to Concurrent Planning

Four themes cut across the strategic priorities. The first is labour and housing: the survey finds that the business community's growth ambitions are partly constrained by its ability to hire, which, in turn, is restricted by regional housing supply and labour availability. The second is land and space availability, which is also a broad expansion constraint for respondents. Businesses have taken initiative by co-leasing commercial spaces, and subletting space from businesses with redundant capacity, indicating a potential role for the Town as a facilitator. The third is cost pressure, which is broad and persistent (Figure 9); while most drivers lie outside municipal control, the Town's influence over property taxes, lease-relevant land supply, and permitting offers real, if bounded, levers. The fourth is segmentation: nearly every meaningful pattern in the survey is sharper at the sector and location level than in the aggregate, which argues for differentiated rather than uniform support.

These themes connect naturally to the Town's concurrent planning work. The Municipal Development Plan update ^[3] can draw on the survey's evidence of demand for commercial and industrial space and for employee housing when setting land-use direction, while the Old Town Community Plan ^[4] can be informed by the survey's downtown-specific findings; softer overall sentiment (Figure 25) coexisting with strong event benefit (Figure 29) and a fragile retail base (Figure 26). In summary, the BR+E results offer those projects a grounded, business-side evidence base on the conditions that shape retention and expansion in precisely the areas they address.

Feedback from the Business Community Workshop

This section documents the feedback received during a workshop with business representatives in Stony Plain, held on June 9, 2026. The workshop was organized by the Town of Stony Plain and facilitated by the research team at the Cities Institute. It served as the consultation component of the BR+E Program, complementing the survey and data collection phases that preceded it.

The workshop included 42 members of the community, including 22 representatives from local businesses, 6 colleagues from the Business Resource Network (Community Futures Capital Region, the Greater Parkland Regional Chamber, Business Link, and MacEwan University), and 11 Town staff members. Three members of the Growth and Commerce Committee also attended, and the Mayor of Stony Plain was present to witness the deliberations. The support from the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration is also recognized.

The Town's economic development team and the Cities Institute researchers designed the workshop to have the attendees divided into four groups, with a facilitator and a notetaker assigned to each table to manage and guide the conversations. Rather than facilitating an unstructured dialogue, facilitators organized the discussions around themes that had emerged as primary concerns in the data collection phase, such as labour force recruitment and retention and seasonality in business demand. What follows is an abridged and thematically organized account of those deliberations.

Profile of Attending Businesses

Most business representatives in attendance were owners of small businesses, spanning hospitality and food services, not-for-profit organizations, senior care, service-oriented retail, and home-based enterprises. Most of the businesses represented employed fewer than five workers. The perspectives documented here are therefore largely representative of small, service-oriented businesses rather than large manufacturing firms, and the findings should be read with that composition in mind.

Worker Recruitment and Retention

Worker recruitment and retention was the most frequently cited challenge. The pool of available workers in and around Stony Plain is not large enough to serve the diverse needs of local employers, some of whom require part-time staff while others seek more skilled labour. The mismatch between what employers need and what the local labour market supplies was a recurring frustration across tables.

Employers reported that they now expect to train new workers because green talent arrives raw, making onboarding increasingly time-consuming and expensive. At the same time, workers appear more interested in guaranteed income than in commission-based pay or performance bonuses, which compounds the difficulty of attracting and retaining staff in roles traditionally structured around variable compensation.

The recruitment challenge is most acute for casual and entry-level positions. Participants observed that younger workers expect higher wages and higher-order work, while older skilled workers are retiring and are not being replaced in sufficient numbers. The tightening of immigration channels has further

constrained the supply of temporary workers on whom many entry-level roles depended. In response, some businesses have improvised by reaching into previously untapped labour pools, including stay-at-home parents and semi-retired workers willing to re-engage at a lower level of commitment. Others have pursued school-to-work pathways offering apprenticeship-style opportunities for academic credit, and some not-for-profits have created volunteering opportunities in return for academic credit.

Many employers also noted that younger graduates struggle with soft skills, particularly interacting with customers and colleagues and presenting themselves professionally at work. This suggests that workforce development efforts should address workplace readiness alongside technical training.

Businesses cited the lack of adequate platforms to publicize workforce opportunities. Some suggested that the Town consider hosting a digital job board where employers could list openings and prospective employees could announce their availability for work.

A notable strategy that emerged for addressing labour shortages was labour pooling, under which businesses would share casual workers among themselves. Individually, each business can offer only part-time hours, but collectively the participating businesses could assemble full-time hours for workers, improving both retention and the attractiveness of local employment. The concept of shared resources could extend beyond labour to IT support and even equipment, such as a shared photocopier serving multiple businesses in a building.

Seasonality in Business Demand

Numerous small businesses, especially in retail and hospitality, identified seasonality as a persistent concern. Demand for products and services rises during certain periods, such as the lead-up to Christmas, while foot traffic slows in the deep winter months of January and February and again in summer when families travel for vacation.

Interestingly, some business owners framed slow seasons as an opportunity rather than merely a constraint. During peak periods, owners are consumed by meeting customer demand and have little time for forward planning. Slowdown periods allow operators to review sales, revisit strategies, and plan for future months and business cycles.

Participants also observed that occasions such as Christmas and Mother's Day give people a reason to gather, which in turn creates demand for local products and services. In seasons when there is no reason to gather, foot traffic declines. This observation carries a practical implication: community events and programming that create reasons to gather during slow periods could help smooth seasonal demand for local businesses.

Space to Grow

Many businesses identified a lack of adequate space as a constraint on future growth. Even where opportunities to expand existed, commercial real estate was found to be either unavailable or expensive. The available space is often too little, too small, or too costly. Some participants suggested that land ownership in the town is concentrated in the hands of a few, which has raised land prices and pre-empted or slowed new construction.

Businesses have approached this constraint in a notably communal fashion, identifying opportunities to co-lease commercial spaces, sublet space from businesses with redundant capacity, and approach churches and faith-based organizations holding surplus real estate. The general sentiment among businesses favours owning space rather than renting, since investments in renovating a rented premises are viewed as sunk costs that cannot be recovered.

Participants suggested that the Town could facilitate infill development with retail at the street level and housing above. Such mixed-use development would add to the stock of retail space while simultaneously expanding the housing supply, addressing two constraints with a single intervention.

Artificial Intelligence and Business

Many businesses expressed an interest in deploying artificial intelligence in their operations. The primary constraints they identified were a lack of time and a lack of know-how in determining how AI could best serve their businesses. Most learning about AI among businesses currently happens through peer-to-peer interactions, suggesting an opening for structured programming, such as workshops or a shared advisory resource, to accelerate adoption.

Business Planning Capacity

Many small businesses reported struggling with planning and growth management. Participants identified a lack of training in the formal structures of business planning and suggested that the Town could offer business planning workshops targeted at small businesses and sole proprietors.

Emergence of New Retail Models

Businesses were cautiously optimistic about the new Costco being built in the town. They anticipate additional competition for local retail enterprises, but they also see an opportunity: customers from outside Stony Plain visiting for a trip to Costco could generate subsequent and secondary sales at other businesses in town. The net effect will depend in part on how effectively local businesses and the Town position the downtown and other commercial areas to capture spillover traffic.

Community and Belonging

The most commonly cited reason businesses have stayed in Stony Plain is an appreciation of the town's sense of community and belonging. The town has cultivated an environment in which businesses see themselves as part of a larger socio-cultural ecosystem, with their products contributing to what makes the town unique. This sense of identity is a genuine asset, and it is critical for the Town to build on it as it rolls out services and programs for business retention and expansion.

A healthy dose of competitive rivalry with the neighbouring municipality of Spruce Grove was also evident. Because Stony Plain lacks sufficient entertainment outlets, such as movie theatres, Spruce Grove draws visitors from Stony Plain in search of entertainment, and with them, spending that might otherwise remain local.

Some businesses highlighted that their enterprises are not discoverable on the internet; a Google search for their services would not surface them. This points to an opportunity for the Town to create shared services in social media and digital marketing for small businesses, a low-cost intervention with potentially meaningful returns for visibility and sales.

Some businesses also complained of inconsistency in municipal services, particularly after new vendors took over garbage and waste collection. While a relatively minor theme, reliability of basic services shapes the day-to-day experience of operating a business in town.

While community belonging emerged as an asset, it also poses structural constraints. Some existing residents and business owners resist growth, fearing that expansion will transform the small town and erode its charm. Yet maintaining the small-town character of Stony Plain comes at a cost: service delivery costs rise over time, and without growth they must be distributed across a smaller number of taxpayers. For municipal affordability, population growth is required to sustain infrastructure and to keep escalations in the cost of municipal service delivery in check.

Participants accordingly suggested that the municipality should explain to residents and businesses why population and business growth is critical to keeping property taxes and other costs in check. Making the fiscal case for growth, clearly and repeatedly, may be as important as any individual program the Town undertakes.

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Note on figures: All figures in this report are drawn from the Cities Institute / University of Alberta analysis of the 2026 Town of Stony Plain Business Outlook Survey (draft, May 28, 2026).