

Brussels Build

Honouring the Past ~ Shaping the Future

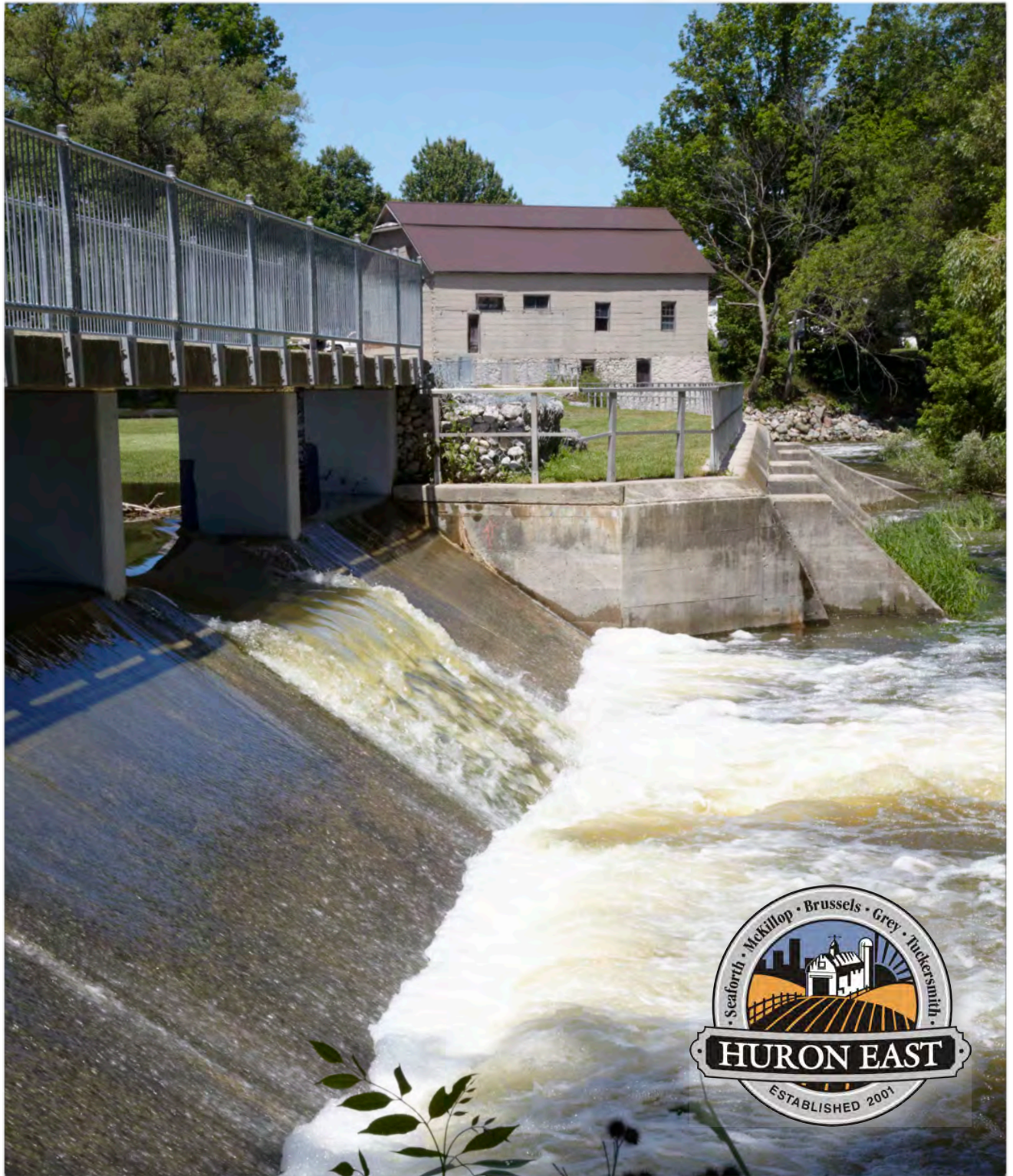




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Message from the Municipality of Huron East



The largest of Huron County's nine municipalities, Huron East is a composite of productive farmland, innovative technology, medical research, and a strong entrepreneurial spirit, positioning itself well within competitive markets. Its natural and built heritage is unmistakable, gracefully cloaking the towns, hamlets and open countryside that complement this area. The Municipality of Huron East is an unpretentious, resilient and caring community with an attractive blend of urban and country living.

Located to our north is the Village of Brussels, a vibrant agricultural and industrial hub, staged with magnificent old homes and the idyllic Maitland River, which winds its way through well-kept neighbourhoods. In stark contrast to the community's robust industrial and agricultural areas, is the Brussels' downtown district, which in part, has succumb to the effects of a slumping economy experienced during the past several years. Although the downtown area is no reflection of the economic vitality of the community at large, its inherent historic charm and location as a centre of commercial activity within the community does accentuate the need for a revitalization strategy.

As the survey results from the Brussels' Business Retention and Expansion project become published, and the findings are reported to the business community, I trust that this document will help in re-building the historic downtown shopping district, and inject a renewed energy into its commercial area.

On behalf of the Municipality of Huron East, I want to commend our administration, the members of the BR+E Task Force and its volunteers, whose collective efforts have been the driving force behind this project. The recommendations evolving from the business surveys, coupled with an implementation plan, are expected to contribute greatly, not only to the vitality of Brussels, but to that of the entire municipality. I believe that this document will serve us well in the future.

Equally gratifying is the partnership between the Municipality of Huron East and its funding partners, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, the County of Huron, and the Huron Business Development Corporation. It is not only their financial support that is greatly appreciated, but the resources and encouragement they provide on an on-going basis to our municipal staff. We look forward to continuing this healthy working relationship in the years to come as we strive to improve the economy in rural Ontario.

Best regards,

Mayor Bernie MacLellan

Introduction

Overview of Brussels

Brussels, Ontario was founded in 1854 as Ainleyville by William Ainlay of England. In 1872, the railway arrived in Ainleyville, the new infrastructure led to a building boom in the village and its name was changed to Brussels. By 1900, Brussels had a population of 1,800 people and close to 75 businesses.

Early prosperity was based on wheat and beef and was showcased through a fine Victorian-era commercial streetscape. Today, Brussels still retains much of its grandeur, however, the village is showing deterioration and decline.

There are several factors that have contributed to the demur of Brussels: the creation of the automobile gave mobility to residents to leave the village, the desire to live closer to urban centres lured residents away, and big-box development created competition for small independent businesses.

Trade area reports reveal (2004) that approximately 3,775 people resided in the trade area, which included 1,345 households, with an average annual household income of \$50,852. Opportunity for downtown renewal in Brussels is challenged by a shrinking population in the trade area, lower incomes and spending power, retail leakage to competitors, shortage of local entrepreneurs and deterioration of building stock. Recent renovations, adaptive reuse of building stock and new business ownership are encouraging signs for the future.

Introduction to Business Retention & Expansion

Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) is an action-oriented and community-based economic development tool that was developed by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs to encourage the growth and stability of local businesses. It offers a comprehensive interview and data gathering/analyzing process, which helps to determine the viability of the local economy. It takes a unique approach of engaging the community to actively invest in the health of local businesses. BR+E promotes job growth by helping communities learn about issues, concerns of, and opportunities for local businesses and then sets priorities to address those needs.

The Brussels & District's BR+E project began in the fall of 2009 with the assistance of the Municipality of Huron East Economic Development Committee, County of Huron, Huron Business Development Corporation, Ontario Ministry of Food & Rural Affairs, the Huron East Chamber of Commerce and the Brussels Business Group.

A total of 46 businesses participated in the project. The project is consistent with the OMAFRA program and involved direct communication with the business community. The end result is the identification of some challenges and opportunities which are categorized as Priority Areas that need to be addressed to encourage future growth and progress of businesses within Brussels & District.

The objectives in completing the Brussels & District BR+E project were to:

- Identify the needs, concerns, and opportunities of existing local businesses.
- Learn of future plans of the area's local businesses with respect to expansion, relocation, retention and assess where assistance can be provided.
- Demonstrate the community's pro-business attitude and develop an effective means of communication with local businesses.
- Have the community actively involved in economic development. In turn, this survey information will be used to plan future economic development activities.

This project utilized the OMAFRA Rural Economic Development secure web-based tool "Executive Pulse" to manage the data collected.

The survey questions were comprised of the following sections:

- Core survey questions: (116 questions)
 - Company Information
 - Current Business Climate
 - Future Plans
 - Business Development
 - Business Markets
 - Financial Development
 - Workforce Development
 - Local community
- Local Community Specific Sector
 - Retail/Service (11 questions)
 - Manufacturing (14 questions)
 - Downtown Revitalization (19 questions)
- Community Questions (15 questions)

The average length of time for the one-on-one interviews that were conducted took between 1.5-2 hours per person.

Project Organization and Management

The project was coordinated through the efforts of Huron East Economic Development Officer, Jan Hawley, and Economic Development Consultant, Nancy Ross, with support from members of the Brussels BR+E task force, and a team of enthusiastic interviewers.

As a result of Nancy Ross's extensive background in rural economic development, combined with her strong facilitating skills, the project produced valuable insight into Brussels' commercial community. The municipality was very fortunate to have had her on its team. Furthermore, Debra Anderson, who entered all survey data was meticulous in her entries, analyzing past practices and making recommendations to Executive Pulse to better assist in interpreting the results.

Brussels BR+E Project Team

A special thank you to the dedicated members of the Task Force & Interview Team.

Brussels BR+E Task Force Team

- Debbie Seili, Business Owner
- Lois Lee, Business Owner
- David Blaney, Municipal Councillor, Business Person
- Alvin McLellan, Municipal Councillor, Business Owner
- Gemma Mendez-Smith, Executive Director Four County Labour Market Planning Board
- Paul Nichol, Business Owner, Resident
- Kathy Nichol, Business owner, Resident
- Kerri Herrfort, Downtown Revitalization Coordinator, County of Huron
- Frank Stretton, Municipal Councillor, Avon Maitland School Board
- Tim Prior, Business Owner
- Rene Richmond, Resident, Business Person
- Sandra Weber, Planner for the Municipality of Huron East
- Jan Hawley, EDO Municipality of Huron East, BR+E Coordinator
- Nancy Ross, BR+E Coordinator
- Debra Anderson, Data Entry

BR+E Interviewers

- Nancy Ross, BR+E Coordinator
- Jan Hawley, BR+E Coordinator
- David Blaney, Municipal Councillor, Business Person
- Rene Richmond, Resident
- Sherrie Oliver, Huron East Staff & Resident
- Ralph Watson, Huron East Economic Development Committee
- Catherine Campbell, Huron East Chamber of Commerce , Resident
- Patricia Clarkson, Resident

Profile of Businesses Surveyed

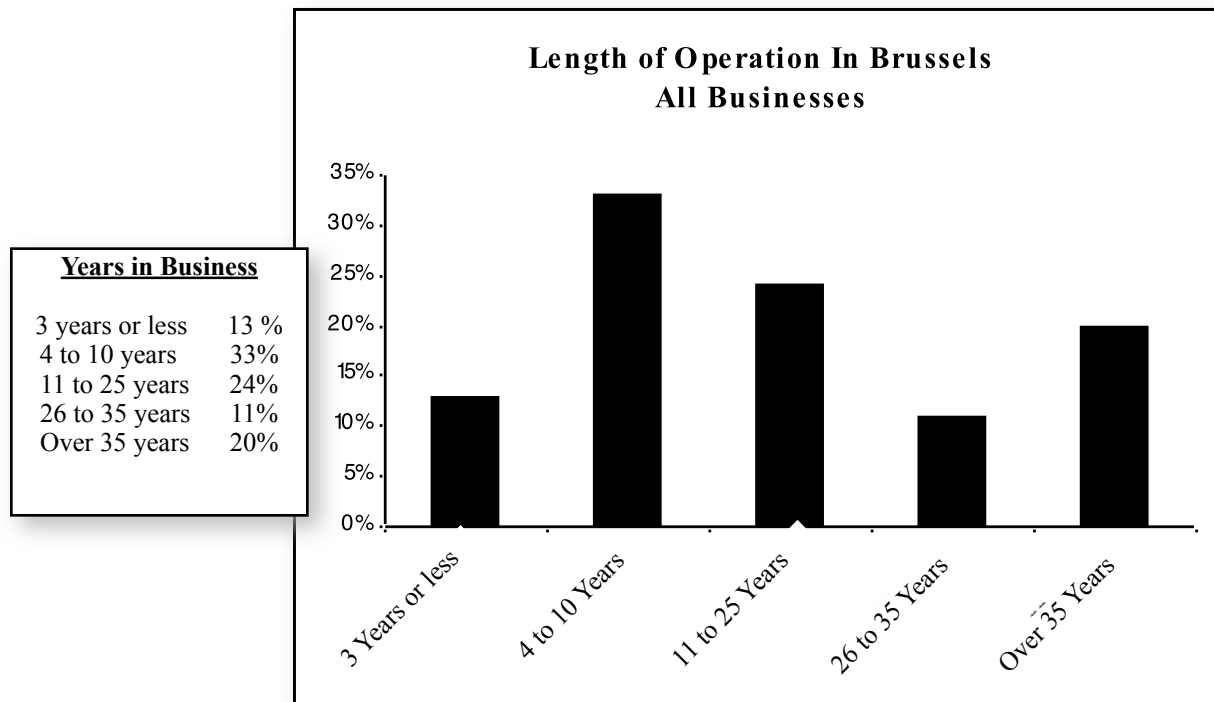
Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) projects offer an opportunity to either survey a cross-section of community businesses or to focus on a specific sector(s). A modified approach was used that would provide a cross-section profile of the key sectors contributing to the economy, namely retail/service and manufacturing. In addition, the downtown core received a special focus.

Ninety-nine businesses were identified in the Brussels & District from the Municipality of Huron East business directory. A total of 46 businesses agreed to participate in the program, which represented 46% of the total businesses. The majority (31) were Retail/Service businesses and the balance of those interviewed were from Downtown (10), Tourism (3) and Manufacturing (1) sectors. Forty – six businesses completed the General Survey and the Community Questions.

The surveys were conducted under an agreement of anonymity and confidentiality to ensure those being surveyed would be able to provide their comments and suggestions in an unbiased environment.

Of those 46 businesses surveyed, 41% (19 businesses) were sole proprietorship, 35% (16 businesses) corporations, 13% (6 businesses) partnership, 7% (3 businesses) non- profit corporation. Sixty per cent (60%) of that business were family – owned with 98% of the business owners involved in the day-to-day business operations and 96% of those business owners residing in the community.

More than 55% of the businesses indicated that they have been in business longer than 11 years in Brussels and 20% longer than 35 years.



Forty-eight percent (48%) of businesses had a business plan, and 28% of businesses had a marketing plan, while only 16% of businesses had a succession plan.

The size of businesses ranged from one employee/owner to businesses that had over 100 employees. However, the majority (78%) of businesses indicated that they had less than 9 employees. Thirty-six (36) businesses are operating with less than 10 employees and only 5 businesses operating with more than 20 employees.

Range of Business Sizes

Owner(s) - 15 companies
1 to 4 employees - 13 companies
5 to 9 employees - 8 companies
10 to 19 employees - 5 companies
20 to 29 employees - 3 companies
100 to 299 employees - 2 companies



Forty-five businesses (98%) are non-unionized while only one business (2%) reported being unionized. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of their employees live within the municipality while 10% live outside of the municipality, but within the county.

BR+E Survey Results

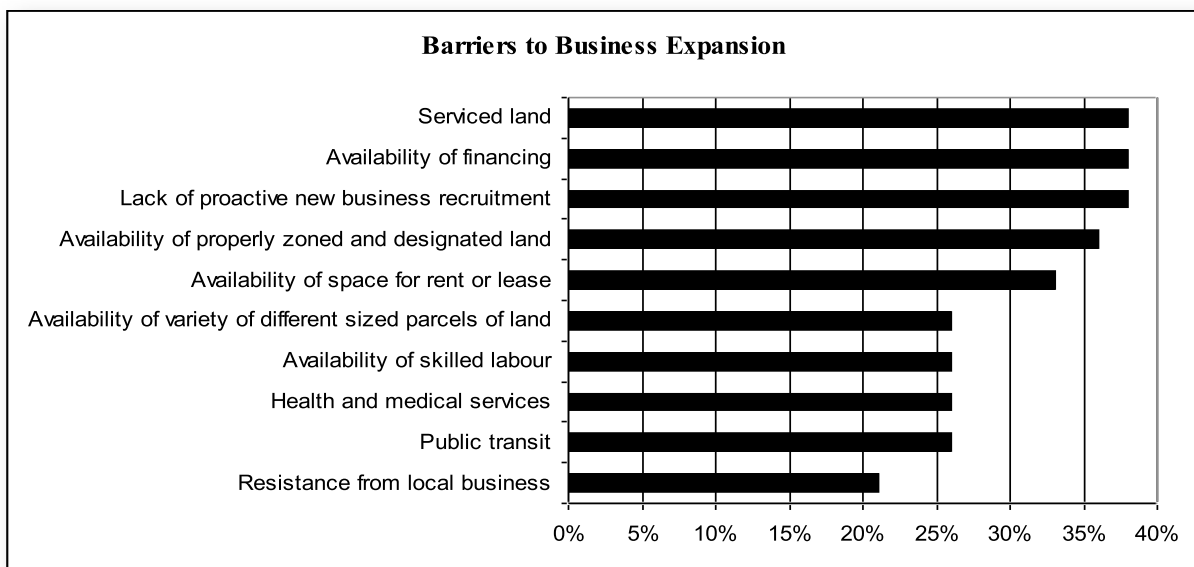
Business Climate

The Business Climate portion of the interview reviewed the climate for doing business in Brussels. It covered the owner/managers' perception of the climate and factors, which facilitate/hamper the development of business in the town.

Overall, the businesses' general impression of Brussels as a place to do business was very positive. The majority rated it as good to excellent (71%). Sixty-eight percent (68%) indicated no change in attitude in the last three years. The province of Ontario was viewed as good to excellent as a place to do business by 87% of the businesses.

Businesses were asked to identify factors, which are barriers to the expansion of existing businesses and the development of new businesses in the community. Those barriers identified as 20% or more are:

<u>Business Barriers</u>	
Serviced land	38%
Availability of financing	38%
Lack of proactive new business recruitment	38%
Availability of properly zoned and designated land	36%
Availability of space for rent or lease	33%
Availability of variety of different sized parcels of land	26%
Availability of skilled labour	26%
Health and medical services	26%
Public transit	26%
Resistance from local business	21%



The business climate portion of the survey also measured levels of satisfaction with services provided by the local government and other organizations. Those services which had a high level of satisfaction (very to somewhat satisfied) of 75% or more were; Fire prevention and services (98%), snow removal (93%), recreational facilities (93%), public utilities (85%), garbage removal (84%), schools (82%), policing (81%). Only two services had a dissatisfaction level higher than twenty percent, which were street repairs, of which 27% of respondents were either somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied and medical services, of which 27% of respondents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Recommendations to improve the local business climate include;

- Extend library hours & days of operation
- Develop the available commercial space in Downtown District
- Reduce property, local sewage/water costs
- Make the downtown core more attractive & appealing
- Address parking configuration on Main Street i.e. Angle parking
- Form committee (Think Tank) in Brussels area, including Councillors & Real Estate Representatives
- Make general information about town, where to find supplies, how to operate a business in Brussels more accessible
- Provide information on effective marketing strategies for Brussels businesses
- Beautify the community, making it "cute" and quaint
- Cultivate a positive attitude among businesses
- Address access to Health Care Provider issues
- Upgrade community centre, town gardens. i.e. Have Municipality support 6-15 hours/week to maintain community gardens
- Develop a town theme: i.e. Cattle town - saloon on Main Street
- Address issue of absentee landlords.
- Work at overcoming community resistance to change
- More collective promotions among businesses
- Keep the Brussels Public School
- Sidewalk repairs
- Keep pricing in stores reasonable so people don't go out of town

There were a number of survey questions regarding the province and its ministries as well as federal government departments and local business organizations. A large majority of the businesses surveyed rated “No Contact” with the provincial and federal agencies as their response. This may be a cause for concern considering the impact that they have on business as well as being a valuable resource yet the majority of businesses interviewed never had contact with them.

The key issues identified, which would have the greatest impact on the growth of businesses included;

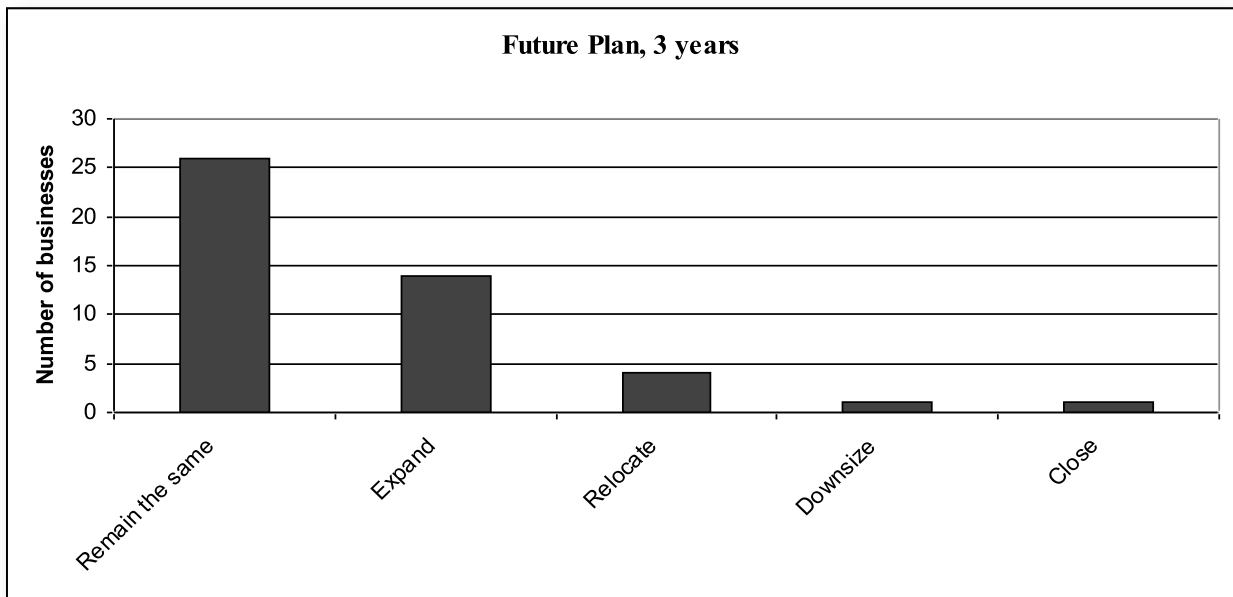
- Resolution of the impact of HST on business
- Financing
- Acceptance of business by local residents.
- Greater access to grants available - Federal / Provincial / Municipal
- Transportation
- Skilled Health Care Workers
- Improving appearance of downtown core and more businesses on Main street would be an asset
- Brussels Business Group is not welcoming. Need to involve more business owners in meetings and decision making
- Have more complimentary Businesses in downtown: Have a more and inviting & attractive downtown
- Population Growth
- Ministry of Tourism - Injection of Tourism dollars - Recommendations to develop Regions - Brand - Experiences
- Fees charged to customers by municipality makes it complicated for customer getting the permit and costs
- Attracting more local shoppers
- Medical Centre also important to seniors locating to Brussels
- Large Employer (manufacturer for example); More Main Street Retail

Overall, business owners/managers were satisfied with the business climate in Brussels.

Future Plans

A series of questions were asked to assess the future plans of the Brussels businesses. Specific topics included expansion plans and factors affecting expansion. The results when asked ‘Within the next 3 years, which of the following do you plan to undertake at this site?’

<u>Future Plans</u>	
Remain the same	- 26 businesses
Expand	- 14 businesses
Relocate	- 4 businesses
Downsize	- 1 business
Close	- 1 business



Inadequate facilities in terms of building space was the motivating factor for 50% of the businesses who were planning to relocate. However of those businesses intending to relocate (2 businesses relocating and 2 businesses exploring the possibility), 75% intend to relocate within the community. The one business that does intend to close indicated the reason was lack of profitability and closure could be prevented if a prospective purchaser could be found.

Of those expanding, 62% planned to expand their building and 92% planned to invest in new equipment. These expansions were believed to have the following results:

- Additional investment in equipment and technology 86%
- An increase in workforce 86%
- Additional services for customers 71%
- Additional product line(s) 71%
- An increase in demand for skills training 64%
- An increase in floor space 57%
- Process improvements 50%

Of the 14 businesses planning expansion, 50% (7 businesses) are experiencing difficulties with their expansion plan. The difficulties identified included financing (57%), labour force training (57%), local by-laws (43%), warehousing (29%) and finding/developing strategic alliances (29%).

The businesses plan to finance their expansions by the following methods:

- Cash 7 businesses
- Line of credit 5 businesses
- Private investment 4 businesses
- Long Term Bank Loan 4 businesses
- Short Term Bank Loan 3 businesses
- Venture capital 2 businesses
- Credit Card 1 business

Business Development

The Business Development portion of the survey considered the factors and strategies that impact growth of the business. These ranged from site considerations, technology implemented, and factors which make a business competitive in its market.

Eighty-three percent (83%) of those surveyed said their location was the only one the business had while the other 17% were part of multiple locations. These locations included 3 within the municipality, 4 outside the municipality but within the county, 2 elsewhere in Ontario and 1 in another province.

Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the businesses surveyed were completely satisfied with the location of their business and 26% were somewhat satisfied with their location. Those that were not completely satisfied with their location (15 businesses) had the following concerns: no opportunity for expansion (27%), general appearance of community (27%), site is too small (20%), location is inconvenient for customers (20%), community business support (20%), availability of skilled labour (7%), location is inconvenient for employees (7%), roads & highway system (7%), business taxes (7%).

Thirty-three percent (33%) of the businesses surveyed indicated that their business is a home-based business operated from their residence. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of businesses own their own facility while the remaining 32% lease their facility. Only 1 business anticipates a problem in renewing their lease.

In an attempt to better understand what energy sources businesses were using, the businesses were asked to identify what they were currently using and what they would prefer to use. One hundred percent (100%) of those surveyed acknowledged using electricity/hydro; 86% used natural gas. The preferred energy source is electricity/hydro (40%) and natural gas (57%). Over 30% of businesses expressed interest in alternative energy sources including wind and solar. When asked why they didn't use the type of energy they preferred, 22 businesses responded giving the following reasons: cost of installation, not available to my site, price and not available in this community.

The majority of respondents (70%) did not have concerns with respect to energy supply, management or efficiency. But those 30% who did were concerned with cost of energy, and inconsistent supply/periodic brownouts. Thirteen of the businesses surveyed felt they would benefit from engineering or technical support with respect to energy conservation and efficiency.

Information technology used in most of the businesses surveyed included computers, digital phones and the Internet. High speed cable and high speed wireless were used by the majority of businesses for Internet connectivity and 13 businesses reported using Internet-ready devices such as the Blackberry.

Internet was cited by 36 businesses as being important for the following uses: email (97%), finance and accounting (61%), business on own website (60%) and business on own website (58%).

Following in popularity were customer service, marketing, and broadening market potential reported by 53% of the users. Respondents reported that 86% of them used digital phones while 73% used cell phones. For those wanting to implement new technology, start-up cost and on-going cost of service were identified as the biggest barriers. Forty-one percent (41%) of the 27 companies who responded to this question said they had what they need.

Participating firms were asked to indicate how important certain factors will be ensuring that their business remains competitive in the next three years. Those factors considered to be very important include:

- Improved customer service (66%)
- Availability of telecommunication services (63%)
- Market development, locally (62%)
- Energy costs (55%)
- Water/sewer availability (53%)
- Product research and development (50%)
- Water/sewer costs (49%)
- Market development, outside local area (48%)
- Industry/professional standards (46%)
- Workforce skill development (45%)
- Availability of labour (44%)
- Strategic alliances (joining with other businesses) (44%)
- Workforce health and safety (43%)
- Business planning (41%)
- Improving worker productivity (40%)
- Add or change in products or services (40%)

Forty percent (40%) of businesses in Brussels belong to a buyer/supplier network, while another 49% felt it would be beneficial for their business to belong to one. Twenty-six percent (26%) said there is a concentration of firms in the area that could provide complimentary products or services.

Business Development – Markets

This section of the survey considered what businesses do in their market quest to identify customer needs, stay competitive and increase their sales.

Forty-nine percent (49%) of the businesses surveyed were interested in joint marketing, 46% would like to collaborate in the forms of networking and information sharing and 29% were interested in pursuing joint product purchasing.

The businesses surveyed indicated that sales outside of the area, but within the rest of Ontario have increased by 3% in the past three years. However sales within Brussels have decreased by 2% from 64% three years ago to 62% today.

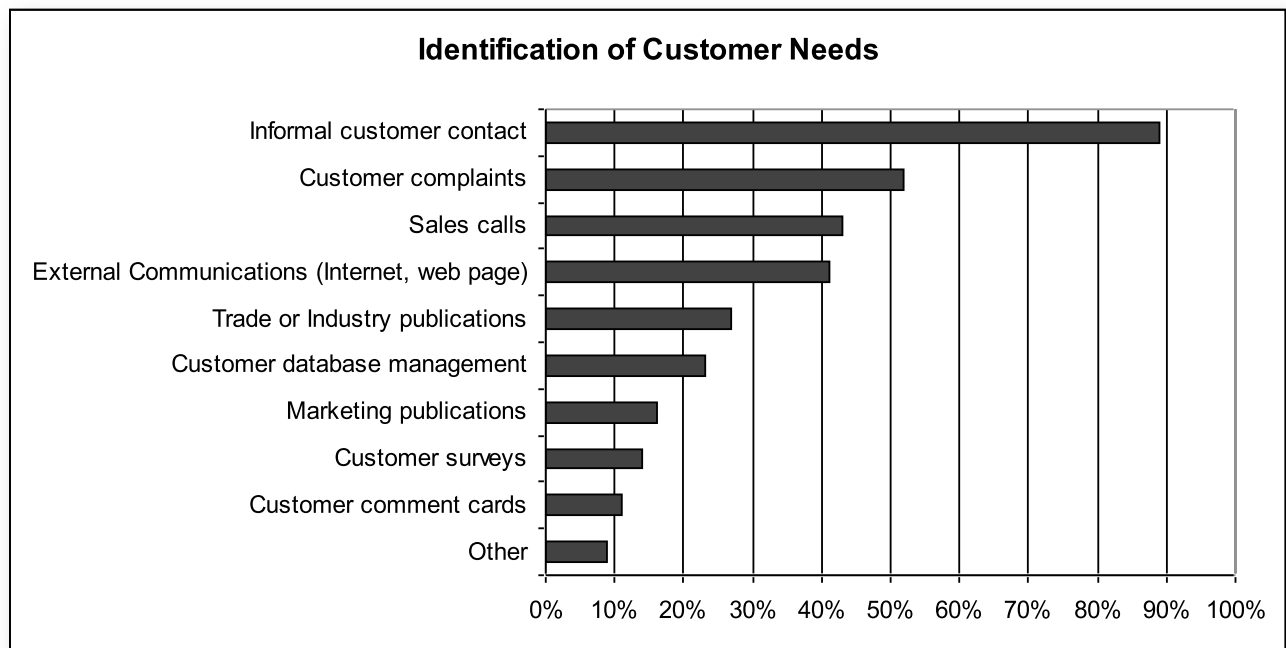
Forty –four percent (44%) of the businesses reported an increase in sales over the past three years with 19% reporting a decline in sales. However 23% businesses reported same/no significant change and 14% reported uneven sales pattern. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the businesses surveyed

expected to have higher sales next year, 30% expected to stay the same and 7% expected to have lower sales. In terms of competition, 55% of the businesses surveyed felt it was staying the same while 39% thought it was increasing.

Information and market research are key components of operating a successful business. The surveyed businesses received their market research information from trade shows (63%), suppliers (63%), industry or sector websites (56%), industry or sector newsletters (54%) and business networking (46%).

Customer needs were identified in 89% of cases through informal contact and in 52% of cases by customer complaints. Sales calls (43%) and electrical communication (Internet, web page) (41%) were the next most common forms of customer need identification.

Most common methods of marketing their products and services were business cards (35 businesses), the Internet (25), flyers/brochures (25), sponsorship of events (24) and general publications (23). Thirteen businesses requested information and assistance related to marketing plans.



In conclusion, a significant proportion of businesses indicated interest in collaborative activities especially networking/information sharing and joint marketing. The majority used informal customer contact (89%), customer complaints (52%) and sales calls (43%) as the method of identifying customer needs while less than 23% employed customer database management and only 14% used customer surveys.

Other responses in this category included:

Word of Mouth, Social Networking and stickers with business name.

Business Development – Financial

This section provided an insight into the inner workings of local businesses including: Lending sources investigated, secured, used for operations and expansions. It also includes the behaviours regarding planning and reviewing of financial performance.

Chartered banks were the primary financial source investigated, secured, and currently 27 businesses are using it for operations and 1 business plans to use this source for expansion. The next most common was Private, followed by Credit Union and the Community Futures Development Corporation.

In regards to financial planning, there was a variety of time frames used, however the highest percent (30%) plan and review their financial performance monthly while the next highest group (18%) plan and review on a yearly basis. It is important to note that 14% of the surveyed businesses do not plan their financial performance at all.

Work Force Development

Uncovering the dynamics of the local labour force is necessary to understand a significant driving force of business growth and development. This section of the survey looks at current employment, labour supply and needs, recruitment, skills training, and mentoring.

In the sample, 26% of the businesses surveyed reported an increase in employees in the past three years. The main reasons reported were: an increase in sales (69%), introduction of new products or services (44%), an increase in market share (31%) and effective management (31%). Thirty-seven percent (37%) think that the number of employees will increase in the next three years. The same reasons as above were noted to be responsible for this increase, an increase in sales (79%), introduction of new products or services (71%), an increase in market share (43%), effective management (43%), as well as entering a new market (50%).

Availability of workers was deemed good to excellent by 67% of the businesses interviewed and fair to poor by 33%.

- Lack of skilled labour, harder to attract skilled labour to this area
- Limited population to draw on making it more difficult to find workers who are dedicated
- Being able to afford employees is a concern
- Fewer experienced farm workers available

The quality of the workforce in the area was rated as good to excellent by 81% of the businesses. Only 3 % of businesses found the workforce to be of poor quality. The major concerns noted were;

- Some people are poorly trained and really don't want to work.
- Restricted by TSSA (Technical Safety Standards Association). Must meet their regulations, easier to not hire someone.
- Fewer farm experienced workers.
- Workers have less accountability, particularly students and those under 30 years of age.

Stability of the workforce was rated as good to excellent by 80% of the businesses. Eighteen percent (20%) rated the stability as fair with 0% rating it poor. Many businesses noted that they did not have turn-over problems; however those that did mentioned;

- Many move on to larger operations
- Need to engage the youth. Families are leaving town because there is not enough for the young people to do. Library only entertainment in the core and has limited hours.

Sixty-nine percent (69%) of businesses believe that they were able to recruit sufficient qualified employees, while 31% were having trouble recruiting labour. The recruitment difficulties were noted to be related to both the industry sector and the availability of qualified skilled resources locally. A large majority of the businesses surveyed are having no difficulties retaining employees (88%). Those that were having problems retaining employees cited wages (50%) and seasonal needs (50%) as the main reasons for these difficulties.

Workforce skill improvement needs were cited in computer software, customer service, working with others and sales and marketing. When asked where their employees received training, the businesses reported the following means: in-house (73%), customized training (54%), local community college (30%), distance education (14%), outside of the area (11%) and university (3%).

The most significant barrier to training cited was the cost (61%). Additional barriers were availability of training locally (52%), distance to training facility (52%), loss of productivity during the training period (39%) and lack of awareness of existing training programs (32%).

Business participants were asked if a mentoring program would benefit businesses in the community. A positive response was received from 58% of the businesses while 25% were unsure of the benefit.

Mentoring programs most beneficial according to participants would be in:

<u>Mentoring Program</u>	<u>Benefit to Business</u>	<u>Willing to be participate as mentor</u>
Marketing	65%	36%
Business planning	42%	14%
Technical	38%	36%
Financial	35%	21%
Human Resources	27%	7%
Production	19%	14%

Local Community

This section explores local economic development efforts and strengths of operating in the local community.

Business owners/managers participating in the survey were asked if they would be interested in participating in a Business Ambassador program and 49% agreed to participate. When asked if they knew of a business that would be interested in locating to Brussels, 91% said “No”.

New suppliers of products or services that the surveyed businesses would like added to the community are:

Top Five

- Drugstore
- Family apparel & work wear
- Dining (Fine, Family)
- Medical Practitioners
- Dollar Store
- Accommodations

Others

License Office, Legal, Accounting, Additional Grocery Store, Car Dealership, Bakery, Hardware, Notions, Gym/Fitness, Gas station, Major truck parts, Business/Computer, Hobbyist supplies, Sports equipment, Tool rentals, Tim Horton's, Solar Panel production, Tourism services.

A total of 55% of those interviewed believe that the local community has an economic development plan and 36% were unaware of whether a plan existed or not. While in fact the Municipality of Huron East does not currently have a written Economic Development Plan document, it does have a structured municipal committee of council, namely the Economic Development Committee comprised of two municipal councillors and a cross-section of local business people. For those that believe there is an economic development plan, 43% thought the plan was being effectively implemented, while 39% didn't know and 17% said no, it wasn't being effectively implemented.

The survey respondents were asked if they felt the municipality took an adequate role in economic and business development. Forty-four percent (44%) believes the municipality plays an adequate role, while 37% are unaware of what is being done and 19% does not think it plays an adequate role.

Comments included:

- They are doing one on one contact, getting to know the community at all events and paying attention to needs.
- Not consistent in business meetings.
- Don't see anything being done to attract businesses. Comments from other businesses is that municipality is not doing enough.
- Think they are doing something, but don't know what.
- It is a benefit having an Economic Development Officer.
- No long term plan, no long term financial stability.
- Municipality has good intentions, but political will is not there.
- Have been helpful working with businesses.
- They are trying, not recognized or apparent. Cannot see that anything has or is happening, but they are trying.
- Lack of participation (attendance) in Brussels Business Group, not available to attend.

A community's advantages as a place to do business are key factors in maintaining existing businesses while encouraging new business to establish. The following items were cited as the top five advantages to doing business in Brussels;

- Cost of land
- Low tax rate
- Road service
- Medical centre, school, bank, grocery store
- Central location
- Population base
- Everything is within walking distance
- Customer service is personalized

In terms of disadvantages of doing business in Brussels, the following factors were cited;

- Small population to support new businesses
- Location, not on a major highway, off beaten track
- Downtown unattractive, run down, empty storefronts
- Lack of properly zoned/serviced land
- No drawing card to attract visitors to the area

These elements were identified again in the quantitative questions, which rated factors for doing business in Brussels. The highest rated factor was quality of life, which was rated good to excellent by 97% of respondents. The following chart shows those factors achieving a rating of good to excellent by over 70% of respondents.

Highest ratings (good to excellent):

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Quality of life	98%
Water and sewer capacity	95%
Availability of utilities	93%
Telecommunication infrastructure capacity	85%
Cost of construction	82%
Labour costs	78%
Support from local residents	74%
Support from local businesses	73%
Support from municipality	71%
Land Cost	70%

Lowest ratings (fair to poor):

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Access to training facilities	75%
Size of local market	63%
Availability of transportation	59%
Municipal taxes	50%
Availability of appropriately zoned land	49%
Access to research and development	48%
Access to suppliers	45%

When asked how the local business associations and/or economic development office could assist your business sector the following activities were suggested: Joint advertising and marketing (66%), business networking sessions (47%), trade shows (47%), marketing seminars (47%), attraction of related supply and service businesses (39%) and E-marketing (39%).

Retail/Service Business

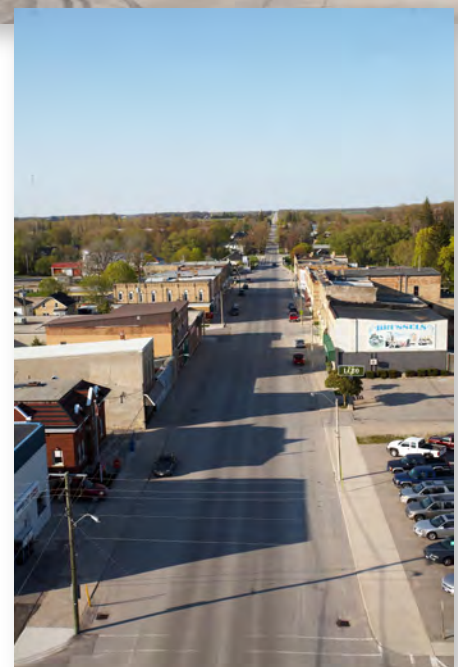
A total of thirty-one businesses answered these questions which deal directly with issues faced by the Retail and Service Businesses in Brussels and district.

When asked if there is an organization or group that represents your commercial district, 62% felt that Brussels Business Group represented their interest, as opposed to the BIA (35%) or the Chamber of Commerce (27%).

Participants were also asked to rate the condition of their commercial district (downtown). Percentages shown are for those that selected “excellent to good”.

Condition – Excellent to Good	Percent
--------------------------------------	----------------

Physical Setting:	
Street furniture (lights, benches, waste cont.)	77%
Public Amenities (parks, fountains, washrooms)	62%
Plantings, trees, flower boxes	89%
Graffiti and litter	70%
Transportation	
Sidewalks, pedestrian environment	72%
Traffic flow on streets in the area	90%
Adequacy of public transit	0%
Accessibility for people with disabilities	53%
Parking	
# of parking spots/facilities	86%
Parking signage	65%
Fees, enforcement	64%
Gateways/Entrances	
Highway signage/tourism directional signs	76%
Roadside advertising	40%
Visual Identity of the area- unifying banners	20%
Storefronts	
Exterior appearance of facades	13%
Window displays	13%
Signage	36%
Other Issues/Social Conditions	
Vagrancy/homelessness/panhandling	84%
Vandalism	44%
Public safety services –lighting/security/police	65%
Conditions of housing stock	47%
Competitive Position	
Appropriate mix of businesses	28%
Appropriate range of quality/price	41%
# of vacancies/turnover	11%
Joint Marketing/Promotion	
Organization of special events	50%
Uniform hours of operation	50%
Customer service programs	46%
Advertising Campaigns	44%



The following number of businesses felt that they could benefit from the following programs or services;

	# of businesses
Business directories, brochures, maps	22
Cooperative advertising/joint marketing	17
Networking events	16
Mentorship programs	15
Customer service training	15
Marketing on the web	13
Retail and special event coordination	12
Physical improvements in public areas	12
Succession planning	12

Participants were asked for their top three suggestions to improve the retail business environment:

Suggestions:l	Percent
1. Repair or remove eyesore buildings	90%
2. Focused downtown revitalization strategy	55%
3. More niche market specialty shops	35%

Also high on the list were:

29% - Improved streetscape

26% - Financial support to improve store front facades

23% - More restaurants and entertainment facilities

In order for their businesses to be more competitive, the following number of businesses indicated that they would like to see the following retail skills improved and would attend a seminar/workshop on the topic:

Retail skill improved	# of businesses	#Attend workshop
Retaining/attracting customers	18	11
Marketing	14	12
Evaluating market opportunities	14	13
Customer service training	14	11
Assessing new technologies	12	9
Dealing with the competition	12	10

The following costs of operation were identified to be a serious concern to the success of their business (ratings for those that said “yes”).

Insurance	61%
Cost of utilities	59%
Business & property tax structure	52%
Cost & availability of full- time employees	42%
Cost & availability of part-time employees	38%
Rents & lease costs of buildings	17%

The top four community assets businesses would most like to see developed in their community are;

1. Walking & bike trails 69%
2. Farmers' Market 62%
3. Sports or recreation facilities 55%
4. Public washrooms located in the downtown 48%

Also high on the list was public cultural facilities (libraries, museums, entertainment centres) at 45%.

Downtown Revitalization:

Ten out of the forty-six businesses surveyed completed the downtown revitalization survey and all are located in the downtown core. There was a wide range in the number of years that these businesses had been in operation.

Under 1 year	2 businesses
1-5 years	3 businesses
6-10 years	1 business
11-20 years	3 businesses
Over 20 years	1 business

The great majority of businesses (7) reported having annual total sales between \$0 - \$50,000. The majority of activity in these businesses is foot traffic (49%), telephone based (39%) and internet based (12%). The average weekly foot traffic is less than 100 for the majority of businesses surveyed in the downtown (80%), while 20% reported having between 100 -500 customers per week.

The busiest day of the week varied for most of the businesses (70%), however Friday was reported by 20% to be the busiest day of the week followed by Monday (10%). The three busiest months of the year were identified as December (50%), May and June (40%) and April, September and November (30%). The majority of the businesses do plan major sales/specials (60%) and especially in the months of March, November and December (67%).

Brussels is fortunate to have strong support from the local business community for special events and festivals that take place. Ninety percent (90%) of those businesses surveyed support community events, even though only 56% responded that the community events increase their sales.

Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the downtown businesses surveyed do not have specific target markets and there was no distinction in terms of gender for 78% of the respondents. Seventy percent (70%) of the businesses track where their customers are from by informal means.

In terms of competitiveness, 63% of businesses believed that their main competitive edge was their service, other popular responses were location, price, selection, and quality all at 38%. The majority of the downtown Brussels businesses target the average to mid-point price range (56%) or low- end price range (22%). Seventy-one percent (71%) thought the toughest competition for their business was located in the community and 75% believed that local independents followed by national franchises (60%) were their toughest competitors.

In terms of parking, 100% of the businesses revealed that their customers typically park on the street in the closest available spot. Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents said that they and their employees park on the street in the closest available spot, 10% said in a customer parking lot that the business owns or rents and the remaining 60% said in other places, which included;

- Park behind the building, which includes my home. Parking space on my property.
- Parking lot at rear of building in supplied spaces.
- Side Street
- Walk to work

Currently, the Municipality of Huron East offers a “property improvement” incentive through its Heritage Tax Relief Program; however, out of the 10 businesses responding to this question, 2 businesses believe the municipality does not offer any programs, 2 businesses believe it does, and the remaining 6 did not know.

In terms of issues faced by businesses in the downtown 44% of respondents had no issues while the following were identified as the issues identified by the other businesses:

- Accessibility
- Availability of parking spaces
- Storefront appearance/window displays/signage
- Vandalism, graffiti and litter
- Shop lifting
- Loitering
- Public safety services (lighting, security, police presence)

Downtown businesses appear to be supportive of each other. In reference to the statement “I always try to buy products and services locally” 70% said they strongly agree and the remaining 30% said they somewhat agree. In reference to the statement “I always direct customers to other downtown businesses” 100% said they strongly agree. Other statements that had a strong rate of agreement (strongly agree) include:

- I would support a new retail promotions event (80%)
- Employees of this business show great customer service (78%)
- There is plenty of convenient parking downtown (60%)
- I feel safe downtown, even at night (60%)
- This business is open when customers want to shop (50%)
- Downtown is an excellent place to have a business (50%)

However, it should be noted that 90% of the surveyed businesses either somewhat or strongly disagreed with the following statement “The look and feel of the downtown helps this business”.

Brussels Community Questions

These questions were developed by the Brussels BR+E task Force Team. A wide range of questions were brainstormed for this section by the Task Force Team and the narrowed down to the most important fifteen questions. All 46 businesses were required to answer these questions.

When asked “Does the current slogan for Brussels, ‘Ontario’s Prettiest Village’ reflect the image of the community?” respondents answered 60% No and 40% Yes. In answer to the question “What issues deter people from shopping, doing business or visiting Brussels?” 93% said goods/services are not available, 91% variety of shops, 45% hours of business, 27% customer service and 14% other.

Other responses included:

- Myth is that it is cheaper to buy elsewhere
- Weather, people do not want to drive in winter.
- Pricing
- Cost of groceries
- Appearance of downtown is a turn-off
- No organic food products

In terms of special event development, the businesses were asked, what special events did they feel, benefit or would benefit, Downtown Brussels. The results are as follow:

Special Event	Benefit # of businesses	Would benefit # of businesses
Sidewalk Sales	22	8
Heritage Week	4	16
Golf Tournaments	2	6
Street Festivals	7	20
Christmas Parades	35	3
River Front Activities	18	20
Scarecrow Festival	2	10
Shop in Brussels program	12	10
Christmas Caroling along Main Street	6	9
Farmers’ Market	3	28
Celtic Festival	1	8
Brussels Appreciation Day	4	22
Other (<i>See below</i>)	3	6

Other responses included:

- Baseball Tournaments, Special Event Day, Yard Sales, Doors Open, Funfest, Music Festival, Kite Festival, Car Show, 5 or 10 year “Old Boys Reunion”.

Seventy–four percent (74%) of the surveyed businesses felt that additional residential accommodation would improve the downtown core.

There are numerous things that can be done to make the community a more physically appealing area. The following is how respondents rated the suggestions that were given:

- Address buildings in poor condition (96%)
- Have Main Street property standards and enforce them (80%)
- More niche market specialty shops (69%)
- More entertainment options/facilities (53%)
- More restaurants (51%)
- Green Energy initiatives (42%)
- Improve signage (40%)
- Information Centre (38%)
- Improve the general appearance of the roadside (31%)

- Other (11%)
 - Bury hydro lines on Main Street
 - Information centre in summer
 - More street benches
 - Better signage to river front area
 - Attract diverse businesses that don't need to be located in large centres, mostly all their business is done through the internet.

When asked, “What community assets would you most like to see developed in Brussels?”, the following suggestions were rated the highest by the respondents.

- Walking and biking trails (79%)
- Farmers’ markets or open markets (72%)
- Public washrooms conveniently located (56%)
- Public cultural facilities – library, museum, entertainment centres (51%)
- Sports or recreational facilities (49%)
- Parks and green space (37%)

The surveyed businesses were also asked, “What additional Retail Stores or Businesses Services would you like to see in your community?”, and to prioritize their selections. The following were ranked in the top five by the following number of businesses.

Additional Retail Stores/Business Services	In top Five # of businesses
Accommodations	22
Health & Fitness	22
Retail (clothing)	22
Other*	18
Medical & Dental	17
Restaurants/Coffee shops	16
Continuing Education	10
Transportation	8
Professional Services/Accounting/Legal	7
Financial Institutions	7
Grocery Store	5
Building Supply/Renovations/Trade/Construct.	5
Agriculture	4
Real Estate	1

Retail (*please specify type, i.e. Workwear clothing*) included:

- General Merchandise – children’s items, basic essentials, personal items, shoes but costs need to stay reasonable, i.e. Giant Tiger
- Workwear
- Pharmacy
- Bakery
- Butcher
- Office supplies, computer supplies, books, movies, CDs

* Other category included the following suggestions:

- Drugstore/Pharmacy
- Dollar store
- Farmers' Market
- Walk in tutoring/education centre with computers to help students after school with homework. Needs to be volunteer run so it's free
- Environmental Green Businesses
- Gas station (another for competition – maybe help keep gas prices lower)

Businesses were also asked what they believe are the primary products that attract visitors to their particular business and the area, now and in the future. The results are as follow:

Primary product	Currently # of businesses	Future # of businesses
Agri-tourism	9	18
Arts and Culture	3	12
Cycling/Motorcycling	12	16
Culinary/Food	15	20
Eco-tourism	0	10
Fishing/Hunting	5	9
Canoeing	5	12
Recreational facilities	25	16
Parks	17	13
Heritage buildings	9	13
Music/Performing Arts	7	12
Museum	0	6
Shopping	9	9
Trails/snowmobiling	28	15
Sightseeing	8	14

The final question concerned what they felt should be the economic development priorities for their community. The top five choices were:

Economic Development Priority	# 1 Choice # of businesses	In top Five # of businesses
Downtown development	22	38
Small Business support and development	2	29
Attraction of visitors and tourism	2	27
Health care services and recruitment	4	23
Support to farm community and agri-business	5	19
Community Infrastructure	3	13
Development of recreational facilities	0	12
Green Energy Initiatives	1	10
Heritage and Cultural promotion	1	8

Actions to date:

Throughout the interview process businesses were able to request information or assistance on a variety of issues. Resolving critical business concerns is an important element of the BR+E program. These issues known as ‘Red Flags’ may pertain to business expansion, closure, relocation or issues that significantly impact business operations. Red Flags were addressed by the EDO at the time they were received.

A summary of actions undertaken to date are as follows:

- Two (2) Red Flags that were brought forward , investigated and addressed
- Colours of Brussels - “**Communities Connected - Stronger Together**” Initiative

During the 2010 BR&E survey process, it became apparent that a “hands across the county” theme was evolving, an opportunity for inter-community networking.

The project, “Brussels Build: Honouring the Past, Shaping the Future,” involved developing multi-media promotional material, and including professionals from various Huron County communities.

“Communities Connected—Stronger Together” was launched to promote the economic, artistic and historic links between the county’s towns, villages and hamlets. Through this initiative, joint projects and events involving individuals, businesses or organizations developed, encouraging inter-community cooperation, pooling of resources and mutually beneficial ideas—creating partners in planning, promotion and pullin’ it off.

Combining the talents of a Brussels graphic designer, a Goderich photographer and fine arts framer, a Clinton author/journalist, and two Goderich art galleries, an one-of-a-kind multi-media display was produced. Photos, collages, renderings, banners, business profiles, (*Schedule 1 - Advertorials*) historical fiction, the Brussels story and slide shows were part of two successful Communities Connected events.

The June 22nd, 2010 Goderich event and the October 6th, 2010 Brussels (*Schedule 2 - Marketing*) evening were well attended. Visitors enjoyed a bounty of treats for the senses, including artwork in various forms, ongoing slide shows, music by Clinton and Brussels musicians, readings performed by the writer, spa therapy, and food provided by a Brussels restaurateur.

Media coverage (*Schedule 3*) and ‘word on the street’ were very favourable. An enquiry has even been received from nearby London, Ontario about the possibility of taking the show “*on the road*”.

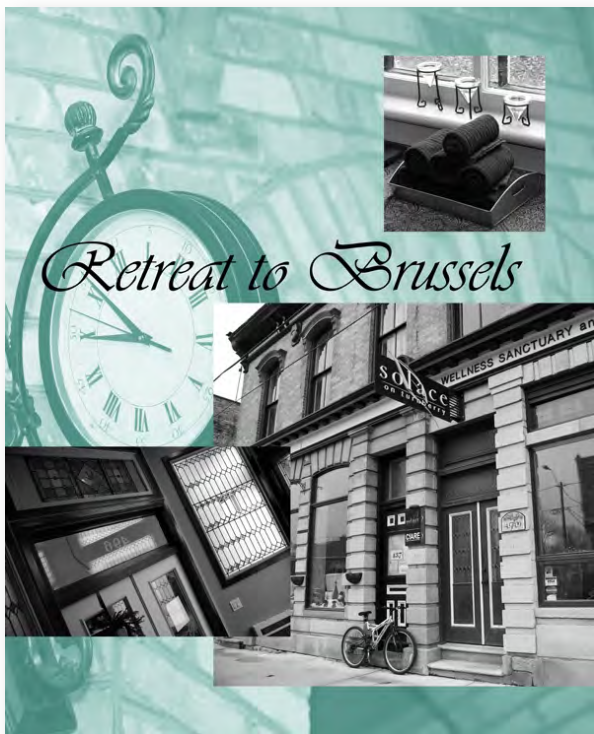
In that this is the first undertaking of its kind in this area, the “Communities Connected” initiative positions Huron County in the forefront of cooperative project development. It is a unique initiative that encourages communication and collaboration, rather than turf protection.

Retaining professionals, who are leaders in their respective fields to develop the material and to create the events, guarantees top quality results. In addition, hcreates Graphic Design, Westcoast Photography, Elizabeth’s Art Gallery, The Goderich Co-op Gallery, Cinnamon Jim’s Café, Solace on Turnberry Wellness Spa and Sanctuary, writer Carolyn Parks, and musicians Jim Lee, James Mintz and Grammy Award Nominee Lyndon JohnX, have been the recipients of monetary and promotional benefits as the result of exposure through “Communities Connected-Stronger Together.”

Combining business and art has resulted in a new economic development implement with wide audience appeal. People are talking. People are “moving.” The Village of Brussels is on the map again.

Success leads to success. “Communities Connected-Stronger Together” encourages thinking outside the box. Other centres are replicating parts of the initiative and calling the Municipality of Huron East for information. An innovative tool has been developed that promotes the economic, artistic and historic assets of small town Huron County.

Schedule 1



Solace on Turnberry Wellness Spa

The Place

435 Turnberry Street in Brussels, Ontario • (519) 887-9682

The Management

Kathy Nichol

The Story

Solace on Turnberry is a lovely space in a beautiful 19th century building on Brussels’ main street. Located in the Leckie Block built in 1876, it is a place of wellness and renewal. A sense of calm envelops clients as they pass through its entrance.



The warm furnishings, period woodwork and magnificent fire place invite patrons to slow down, enjoy a cup of organic tea, sit back and relax before having treatment.

Providing a full range of wellness and aesthetic services, Solace uses only natural products. Nail polishes contain no formaldehyde. Facial and body products are all essential oil based. Spray tanning is done using 98% organic shell of walnut tint and bronzers that give a healthy glow even in winter.

Body and soul therapy, such as massage or a body booster, eradicates stress and leaves you feeling brand new. Hydrating facials, hand/foot therapy and the ultimate in self-care, chocolate wraps, guarantee your visit will be an exceptional experience, whether it’s a girlfriends spa day or a time just for you. Little divas will enjoy a very special birthday party at Solace. And the man in your life can avail himself of Solace’s hockey player’s tune up, reflexology or a manly pedicure.

Book your appointment today. You deserve it. And you’ll love it!

Communities Connected Event showcases colours of Brussels

Carolyn Parks-Mintz
For the Singal-Star

A very special evening is planned for June 22 at the Goderich Co-op Gallery, one that celebrates the diverse talent within Huron County under the auspices of "Communities Connected — Stronger Together."

"Communities Connected" promotes the economic, artistic and historic links between Huron County towns, villages and hamlets. Through this initiative, joint projects and events involving individuals, businesses or organizations are developed that encourage inter-community cooperation, pooling of resources, and mutually beneficial ideas.

With funding from the Huron Business Development Corporation, Huron East's Economic Development Officer, Jan Hawley, embarked on a revitalization plan for the downtown core in the Village of Brussels earlier this year.

"The Brussels project has been rather organic," says Hawley. "It seemed to germinate and grow of its own volition, and I was soon considering a multi-media promotional plan."

Under Hawley's direction, a Business Retention and Expansion Survey was also underway in Brussels.

"A 'hands across the county' theme came to me," she goes on. "The opportunity for inter-community networking presented itself and things took off from there—'Communities Connected' was hatched."

Hawley then engaged talented Lynn Moreland of Westcoast Photography of Goderich to photograph Brussels and some of the commercial operations there.



Graphic designer, Heather Logan of hCreates based in Brussels, skillfully created stylized composites on canvas from Moreland's beautiful photographs and included wording on each of them.

Eventually, Elizabeth Profit of Elizabeth's Art Gallery, Goderich, added picture-perfect framing to the photographic canvases.

Author and journalist, Carolyn Parks-Mintz from Clinton, was retained to write and develop the stories of the village, its people and its businesses.

"With all that great material on hand," Hawley says, "I wanted to find a way to showcase it and Brussels. And so 'The Colours of Brussels' was put together."

Things kick off at 7:00 pm on June 22 and will feature a plethora of things to delight the senses.

Cinnamon Jim's Café of Brussels will be serving their delicious food and beverages. Café owner, Jim Lee, will also provide music during the evening, along with talented vocalist/guitarist James Mintz from Clinton and Juno nominated reggae/roots singer, Lyndon JohnX of Brussels.

Carolyn Parks-Mintz will read from her Brussels work, including historical fiction and anecdotes about colourful Brussels personalities, past and present.

In addition, demonstrations by Kathy Nichol, owner of Brussels' Solace on Turnberry Wellness Spa, will feature body and soul therapy.

A flat screen, ongoing media presentation will roll through the highlights of Brussels and area.

Readings, music, and spa demos will take place at various times throughout the evening, allowing time for mingling and taking in the photographic exhibits and banner displays.

Sponsored by the Municipality of Huron East, the Goderich Co-op Gallery and Elizabeth's Art Gallery, this no-charge intercommunity event will be unique and undoubtedly a success.

Schedule 2



TO SEPTEMBER "Where else can I spend an evening with two of my favourite people celebrating the arts? It's a fun girls night out where we don't spend a lot of money!"
Cassidy & Tatam Bedard and Jodi Kuran
Goderich, ON

Canadian Theatre
BLYTH FESTIVAL
JUNE 23 - SEPTEMBER 4 2010

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BLYTHFESTIVAL.COM

STARTING AT
\$22

The Municipality of Huron East
invites you to attend.....

The Colours of Brussels

An entertaining evening filled with tunes, readings & art.
Featuring Author & Journalist, Carolyn Parks-Mintz
& Art Display by the Goderich Co-Op Gallery

Wednesday, October 6th, 2010 ~ 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm
Brussels United Church, 61 King Street in the Historic Village of Brussels
Refreshments Cinnamon Jim's Cafe & Music by James Mintz & Jim Lee
No Cost for Admission

For further information contact Jan Hawley at 519.527.0160 or 888.868.7513

DEVELOPMENT OF ACTION PLAN

After the completion of all the surveys, the data was compiled and analyzed by the Task Force Team. As a result of this analysis, the Task Force Team identified seven (7) priority areas that need to be addressed.

The seven priority areas that were identified include:

1. Downtown Core Revitalization
2. Rebranding Brussels
3. Improve Communication
4. Local Training
5. Available Land /Buildings
6. Explore ideas and opportunities
7. Environmental Awareness

Please note at this stage in the BR+E process, the themes, or ‘potential actions’ have simply been identified. A full action plan addressing the priority issues will be completed at a later date.

Downtown Core

- Incentive programs
- Community Improvement Plan
- Downtown revitalization program – based on the Four Point Approach (organization, promotion, physical improvement, economic development)
- Establish theme and branding
- Investigate possible opportunities by engaging external assistance – speakers & presentations – find out what is being done in other communities
- Start as soon as possible with small wins (short term, low cost and maintain consistency in approach)
- Develop community partnerships

Rebranding Brussels

- Possible brand - ‘Quality of Life is Tops’
- Important to consider both the past and future in branding exercise
- Inventory key assets in Brussels
- Consider relevance to all age groups – youth to elderly
- Hold a contest: ‘What does Brussels mean to you?’ Engage the school in the contest and provide prizes

Improve Communications

- Important to utilize multiple media sources
- Press articles reporting on BR+E survey findings
- Utilize social media to engage youth
- Improve communication links to business owners
- Brussels Business Group – needs to redefine its focus and broaden member involvement

Local Training Opportunities

- Provide county training and raise awareness of training opportunities
- Tap into the County Customer Service Excellence program
- Brussels Business Group could host or organize a training project
- Volunteer mentoring program
- Involve youth in customer service training program – get them job market ready. School could be potential partner

Available Land/Buildings

- Economic Development Committee is currently working on this.
- Continue to have ongoing dialog with landlords

Explore Opportunities

- Re-visit the First Impressions Report - identify the recommendations and what has been done to date.
- Look for inexpensive actions that have impact.
- Look for sponsorship for speakers outside of the area/region – ideas for planning for the future.

Environmental Awareness

- Provide recycling containers in a variety of materials
- Focus on sustainability – Integrated Community Sustainability Plan
- Strive to be an environmental friendly community
- Community planning should be done through an environmental lens – what is the impact of the action?

For further information contact:

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The Municipality of Huron East



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The County of Huron



Huron Business Development Corporation

