2011 Business Visitation Report
Fort Macleod

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The following is a summary report based on information gathered over a two-month business visitation project conducted in Fort Macleod, Alberta from July through September, 2011.

Introduction

From July to September 2011 Community Futures Alberta Southwest (CFABSW), in cooperation with the Town of Fort Macleod Economic Development Commission and the Fort Macleod Chamber of Commerce conducted a Business Visitation Project (BVP). The project was designed to gather information that will allow Community Futures, the Town, the Chamber, and other community leaders to more fully understand the needs of local businesses.

With the understanding that small and medium-sized enterprises are catalysts in our communities (between 50 and 80 percent of all new jobs are generated by these businesses), it is Important to identify their needs and support their retention and growth in our community.

The objective of the project was to be comprehensive by contacting as many Fort Macleod businesses as possible in order gain an accurate picture of what the community requires to grow and where the potential for growth lies; gauging the pulse of the business community and equipping leaders with the information they need to make informed decisions about what affects our business community.

In addition the three organizations participating in the project wished to communicate to the business community their interest in understanding business concerns and assisting in their resolution where possible.

The Fort Macleod Project was the first of several similar projects designed to extend through many communities in the Community Futures Alberta Southwest region. The results of these initiatives and the information that CFABSW gathered will be used internally, and shared with our stakeholders, to assist in capacity building, entrepreneurial development and technical assistance.

Methodology

The Town of Fort Macleod provided CFABSW with a list of businesses in the community based on a listing of licensed businesses. Advance promotion of the program was conducted through local newspaper ads and articles beginning two weeks in advance of the project start date. Email, with attached letters introducing the project, was sent out to approximately 45 businesses.

- 265 businesses were enumerated in the community of Fort Macleod according to the list of businesses provided to CFABSW by the Town of Fort Macleod.
- Excluding churches, the remainder of these businesses included: 4 non-profit organizations with no defined business activity, 8 companies no longer in business in Fort Macleod, and 14 businesses owned/operated by the same individual or group (cutting back on an additional eight businesses to interview).
- This left the total potential number of businesses at 236. Of this number 75 businesses were home-based and 12 were located out of town.

Businesses were contacted to participate in a brief sit down meeting, interview format, with Community Futures staff to provide their feedback on a number of issues related to their business. Owners and managers were asked to address issues that ranged from basic business activities, to market conditions and the company's primary market base, to labour force requirements, and the community's strengths and weaknesses as a place to do business.

Each visitation, conducted as a survey, took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete; all information collected is to be kept in strict confidence and released only in summarized form. The design of the survey consisted of 39 questions (several with multiple parts) divided into six sections: Primary Business Data, About the Business, Market Conditions, Future Plans, Community Services, and Entrepreneur Support Services.

Initially businesses were contacted utilizing a cold call approach. This was an effective method in the downtown core, the industrial park area, and any location where businesses had storefront operations. A high percentage of surveys were completed during these initial contacts, and arrangements were also made for follow-up with other businesses at more convenient times.

After exhausting the process of cold calling businesses, phone call contact and follow-up was used as the primary tool to arrange meetings. A small number of respondents, 13%, chose to complete the survey on their own time for convenience and forward the form back to the CFABSW office. A survey was left for these individuals or emailed to them.

Upon completion of the project **one hundred and ninety-nine businesses had been contacted and 127 interviews were completed**. Thirty-six owners/operators declined to participate for one reason or another. Forty-one owners/operators were unable to complete the survey or arrange a compatible time to meet with the project coordinator. This left thirty-six businesses for which no contact could be made.

All information, statistics, and other data contained in this report will be based on the 127 interviews completed, 54% of 236 businesses available to survey.

The service and retail sectors dominate the businesses surveyed at 28% and 25% respectively. This probably paints a fair representation of the Fort Macleod business community. It should be noted that retail, service, food and beverage, professional services, trades and construction are well represented. However contacting and meeting with the 75 home-based businesses was more challenging. As a result, this segment of the Fort Macleod business sector is under-represented.

Business & professional services along with finance, real estate and insurance combine to make up 16.5%, while construction and manufacturing activities comprise another 10.4%. The food and beverage industry contributed 8.6% of the responses to the survey. The remaining 8.8%, or 11 responses came from wholesale/distribution, energy, agriculture, transportation, tourism/recreation, and, other sectors.

A blank copy of the survey has been included at the end of this report as Appendix A.

General Observations

- Seventy-one percent of owners/operators have over 16 years business experience, 55% have experience in the specific business they now operate;
- Sixty-three percent of businesses were started before 1994; only 25% have been started in the last 10 years;
- 74% of owners own a 100% stake of their business vs. 15% of operators who own no share;
- 69.8 percent of businesses feel word-of-mouth is their most effective form of promotion;
- Though 35% of businesses feel the pressure of increased competition, 51% feel their market share in the region is increasing;
- Trends in the questions on future plans for the business all seem positive with high percentages in the **likely** and **very likely** responses for all questions with the exception of expanding current facilities, redesigning current facilities, seeking additional financial capital, and adding unskilled labour;
- Though only 21% of businesses show job vacancies at present time, 50% of businesses expect to add new positions over the next five years. And only 35% of businesses expressed difficulty in obtaining employees for their needs.

Report Findings

Section 1 – Primary Business Data

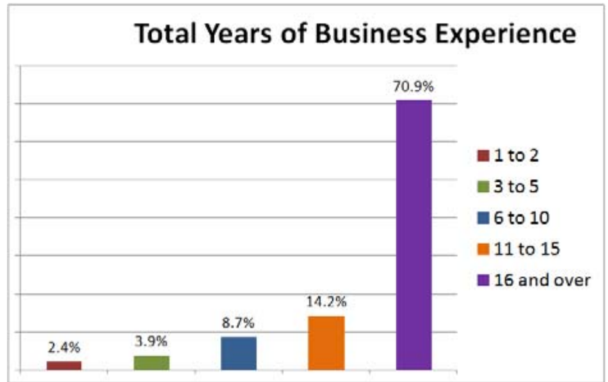
The only relevant observation to be made in section one is on the regular hours of operation the respondents observe. All other data in this section identifies the business, its owners, and contact information – all which is being kept confidential. Normal business operations for most respondents were based on a five day work week Monday through Friday.

- Twenty-eight percent of businesses open their doors at 8.00 AM and operate through the day until 5.00 PM – 6.00 PM. A small percentage of these close earlier or have slightly expanded business hours;
- Twenty-two percent of businesses open their doors at 9.00 AM and operate through the day until 5.00 PM. Again a small percentage of these close earlier or have slightly expanded business hours;
- Nine percent of businesses open at 7.00 AM. Nine percent also open at 8.30 AM. While only 4% open as early as 6.00 AM. Four percent of businesses also have 24 hour service;
- Thirteen percent of owners/operators have varying hours of business operation. The remaining 11% of businesses offer their business services at other times throughout the day and week.

The figures above indicate that a solid 76% of enterprises surveyed are engaged in business activity full-time during the week. An additional 35% of businesses have varying hours of weekend operation.

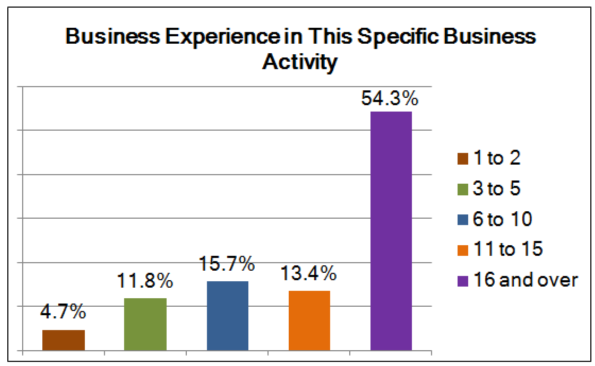
Section 2 – About the Business

Sixteen questions relating to business operations are analyzed in this section. The purpose of these questions was to define such factors as business history, organization, and business sector information. It also evaluates owner/operator experience and the reasons for establishing the business in Fort Macleod.



Eighty-five percent of all respondents have at least eleven or more years of business experience. While 15% are business owners or operators that have 10 or less year's experience.

This indicates both a wealth of established and experienced business knowledge in the community as well as an observable number of newer owners/operators entering the Fort Macleod business community.



Of those same respondents, 77% indicated that they had been operating in this specific business activity for at least 11 years. Twenty-three percent of those surveyed indicated that they were undertaking the specific activity they were being surveyed about for 10 or fewer years. The twenty-three percent trends towards the positive in that it indicates that there is a base of entrepreneurial spirit in the community.

Seventy-five percent of businesses themselves, or 95 enterprises, have been in operation for eleven years or more, with 25%, or 32 businesses starting operations in Fort Macleod over the last 10 years. Seventy-three percent of businesses are 100% owned by the respondents surveyed (another key indicator of entrepreneurship). Fourteen respondents (11.0%) indicated they owned a portion of the business with other investors, while only 16% had no ownership stake in the business. These respondents generally account for the managers or administers hired to operate the business.

This data compares to another question which queried respondents on the number of years they have operated the business. It illustrates an upward trend in ownership or operation of businesses surveyed over the last 10 years as follows:

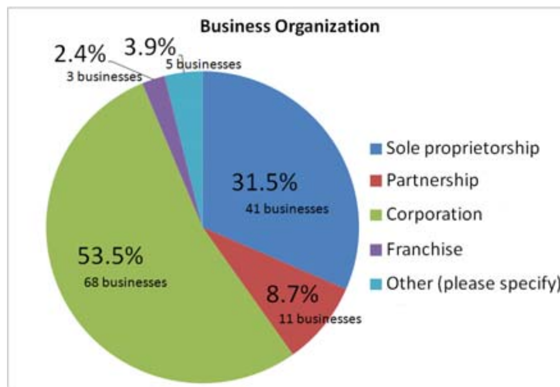
Years	Percentage	Number of respondents
2011 to 2005	38.6%	49
2004 to 1995	22.0%	28
1994 and before	39.4%	50

The reasons given for establishing business operations in Fort Macleod were relatively balanced between the "proximity to the market" at 41%, or 52 respondents, and the "proximity to home" at 36%, or 46 respondents. The remaining owners/operators indicated a "need for the service" at 11%, the recognition of a business opportunity, access to raw materials, and several other factors.

Forty-nine owners, 38%, purchased their businesses, while 58 owners, 47%, started their businesses. Fifteen percent of businesses, 20 respondents (15.0%) operated in a different capacity - management or executive staff. Nineteen were hired for their position; six of these were internal hires.

Businesses in the community are organized predominantly through incorporation (53.9%), with a smaller percent of businesses being operated as sole proprietorships (31.3%). The remaining eight businesses consisted of four non-profits, one cooperative and three franchises.

Fifty-seven businesses, 47%, have investment from family members in addition to the owner (him or herself).



Questions relating to the business premises solicited the following responses:

- Sixty percent (71) of business premises are owned;
- Thirty percent of business space (39) is leased;
- Ten percent (17) of businesses are home-based.

- Ninety-eight owners/operators (78%) found their business location accessible;
- Twenty-four owners/operators (19%) found their business location adequate;
- Only five owners/operators (3%) found their business location out-of-the-way.

- Ninety-two owners/operators (72%) found their business facility size adequate;
- Thirty-three owners/operators (26%) found their business location too small;
- Only two owners/operators (2%) found their business location too large.

Several observations may be made based on this information. In regard to ownership of the business premises, the sixty percent figure represents a high degree of business confidence in the community as a place to invest.

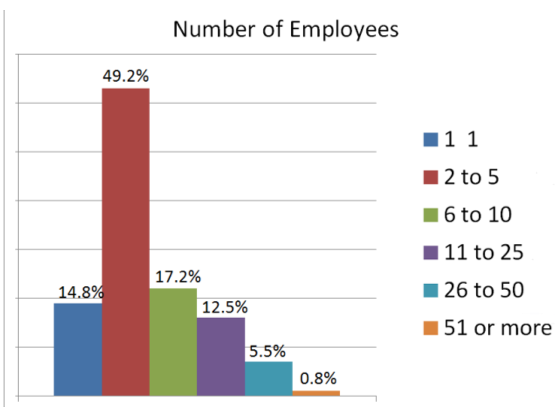
The thirty-three businesses that lease space potentially represent an opportunity for additional development of new space for businesses to purchase. When you consider that 10 owner/operators find their facilities too small, it is possible that a portion of these businesses are also the businesses that presently lease facilities. This may also provide further opportunity for expansion builds.

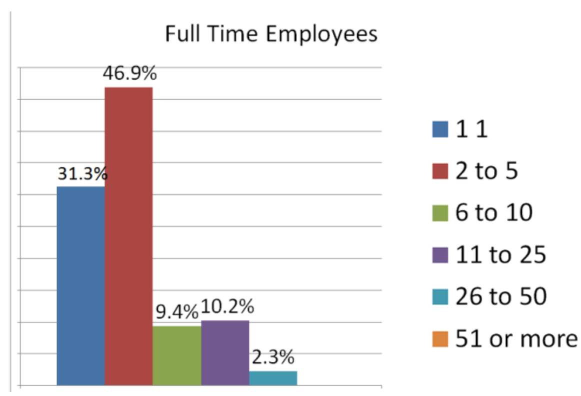
It would seem that most businesses are satisfied with where they are situated in relation to the customers they service. One hundred and twenty-two businesses find their present location either accessible or adequate, while only five businesses felt they were located in an out-of-the-way location.

Worth noting is the high percentage number of owner/operators who devote in excess of 40 hours to their business per week. This is typical with small and medium sized enterprises. Sixty-six percent, or two-thirds of all respondents indicated they spend over 40 hours a week with their business; twenty-three percent devote over 61 hours to operations.

Hours Devoted to Business	Percentage	Responses
1 to 20	6.3%	8
21 to 40	27.3%	35
41 to 60	43.0%	55
61 and over	23.4%	29

The size of operations can often be reflected in the number of staff employed by a business. Of the businesses interviewed, including single operator businesses, 81.2%, or 104 enterprises operated with ten or less staff. The largest segment, 49%, of these businesses employed between two and five employees. Of these same businesses, 112 employed the majority of their staff, 87.6%, full time. The largest segment, 47% (60 organizations), was again found in businesses with two to five employees. No businesses employ over 51 staff fulltime.





High ratios were recorded for businesses not employing part-time staff. Forty-six percent, 57 businesses hired no part-time staff at all. Twenty-one percent and 24% percent employed only one, or two to five staff respectively. That represents 94%, or 115 businesses that employ ten or less part-time staff.

The proliferation of full time employment is very good for the community of Fort Macleod. Full time employment indicates a degree of economic health and stability in the business community, and business confidence in its workers. It also provides attractive employment alternatives to workers and job seekers.

Section 3 – Market Conditions

The market conditions section looks at a series of questions relating to the environment business owners and operators are working within.

Business owners and operators defined their primary market area the following way:

- Seventy-nine businesses (61.7%) saw their market as regional, often including areas reaching into the cities within the province and inter-provincial markets (BC and Saskatchewan);
- Thirty-six respondents (28.3%) defined their market as local;
- Twelve owner/operators (9.4%) viewed their market as national in scope.

Queried as to where they felt their greatest market competition came from, fifty-one percent, or 65 businesses, felt they are competing regionally for work. Thirty-four-percent, or 43 businesses responded that they competed locally only. Surprisingly, eight percent, or ten businesses felt they had no competition in their market at all. In several cases this is due to a unique service or product that the business provides to the region. Support for businesses such as these, and possible attraction strategies for businesses which complement regional strengths should be encouraged. Finally, 5% of businesses (6) compete in the national market place and two percent (3) compete internationally.

The fact that 51% of businesses have expanded to compete regionally is another indicator of the strength of the Fort Macleod business community. In addition to this, the combined 7% of businesses that compete nationally and internationally indicates inroads that have been made into these markets and the possibility that these markets could be developed further in the future.

Asked what they felt their businesses greatest competitive advantages were, and allowed to provide more than one response, owners and operators responded accordingly:

What are your businesses greatest competitive advantages		
	Percent	Responses
Customer Service	72.7%	93
Product/Service	61.7%	79
Loyalty to the business	57.0%	73
Location	30.5%	39
Other (please specify)	18.8%	24

Customer Service emerged as the main advantage business owners/operators feel they are providing their patrons, followed closely by product/service and loyalty to the business. Amidst the other advantages listed were competitive pricing at 4%, name/brand recognition, mobile services, and the businesses' longevity in the community.

Questioned as to which target markets were essential to the success of their business an overwhelming number of owner/operators identified a specific client or market under the other category at 39%, while business to business sales weighed in at 22%. Many of the additional responses also contained specific clientele within an identified market.

Target Markets	Percentage	Responses
Other	39.0%	49
Business to Business	22.0%	28
Local & Regional Market	9.4%	12
Local Market	7.1%	9
Agriculture	6.3%	8
Tourism	6.3%	8
Families	6.3%	8
Seniors	3.9%	5

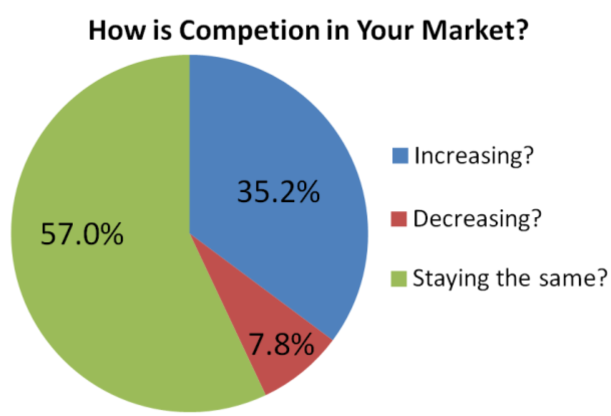
The fact that businesses can readily define their target market speaks to the strength of owner/operator understanding of their clientele. At 22%, business to business support is established as is marketing to local and regional markets at 16.5%. Tourism at 6.3%, and percentages that appear in the agriculture, family and senior markets are maintaining themselves. However these low numbers indicate they do require attention to recover and develop further. This is apparent in many of the comments made by the owner/operators in these sectors.

A follow-up query for owner/operators asked what aspect of their business offered the greatest potential for growth. The question solicited a wide range of responses given the variety of opportunities available to the businesses surveyed. Several themes did emerge as illustrated in the table below.

Opportunities For Business Growth	Percentage	Responses
Adding or Expanding Product and Services	32.2%	41
Increasing Marketing of Business Locally & Regionally	13.4%	17
Taking Advantage of Local Development Opportunities	9.4%	12
Adding or Expanding Facility Size	7.0%	9

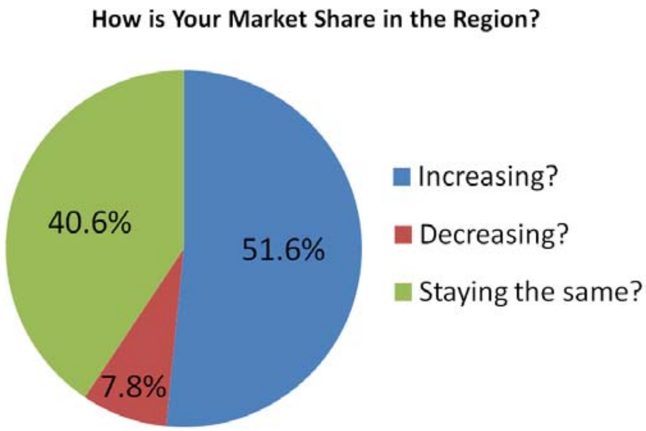
Consideration of these themes should be given by the municipality and other economic development stakeholders as areas to focus on when seeking to assist the business community.

Asked whether competition in their market was increasing, decreasing or staying the same businesses responded with the following:



An overwhelming number (92.2%) of businesses felt competition was either increasing or staying the same. Common reasons given for this were:

- New businesses, often larger, more price competitive, entering the market;
- The community's proximity to Lethbridge;
- Too many similar businesses in market leading to market saturation;
- The entry of many unqualified/unskilled individuals, often run as home-based businesses, into several sectors notably in construction, trades, and health and wellness.

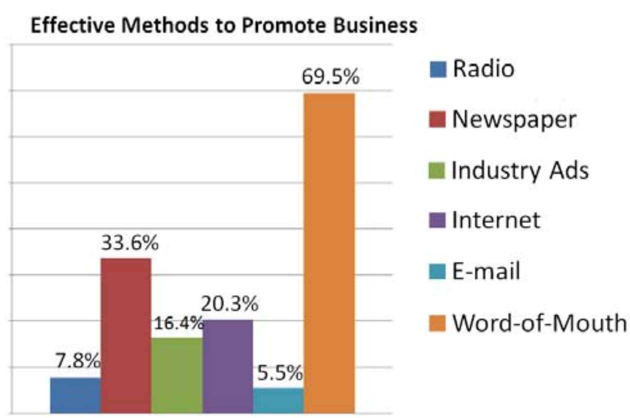


While the numbers above indicate consistent or increasing competition for businesses this second graph illustrates the confidence that business owners/operators have in their market share. Ninety-two percent felt that their market share is increasing or staying the same with a full 51.6% of that number, or 66 respondents indicating their market share was increasing.

Common reasons given for this were:

- Established, respected reputation;
- Constant or superior customer service;
- Delivering a high quality and standard of work;
- Lack of strong competition in the region, or lack of any competition at all;
- Offering customers a wider variety and superior quality of product.

When asked what methods of business promotion is most effective for their enterprise business owners, given the opportunity to select more than one answer, responded accordingly:



Word-of-Mouth was easily the most frequent response given with over 89 operators/owners suggesting this as the most effective, often the only method of promotion used. This is understandable in a rural environment where word travels fast and effectively around the community and region, and where businesses often have a small or non-existent budget for promotion. Word of mouth and a good reputation go hand-in-hand.

Two additional methods of advertising and promotion are worth noting. First a traditional method, the newspaper; 43 respondents utilize this form of advertising. This may reflect the aggressiveness with which newspaper staff pursue placements, placement effectiveness, and customer loyalty. The second is the Internet; 26 businesses use the Internet for promotional purposes. As more businesses become accustomed to the utility of using this technology to promote their operation, its products and services, the Internet is gradually being adopted as an effective way to market and promote.

Other methods of promotion mentioned included the yellow pages, road signs and billboards, mail flyers, event or team sponsorship, and tradeshows.

Several other marketing related questions elicited the following responses:

- Eleven percent of businesses, or 14 respondents, indicated they would benefit from rail services;
- Forty-three percent, or 55 respondents, have considered business ownership transition, 57%, 72 respondents, have not;
- Twenty-two percent, 28 respondents, indicate they would like further information on the business transition process.

Several owners/operators also suggested they would be interested in additional business training if it were offered by the Chamber of Commerce or another economic organization. These are opportunities that warrant further investigation.

Finally business respondents were asked what their greatest challenges and greatest advantages or opportunities were with regards to operating their enterprises in Fort Macleod. Again a range of responses were given. The most common responses included:

Advantages/Opportunities – Seventy-four advantages and 12 opportunities were provided by the businesses surveyed. They offered these responses:

- Twenty-six owner/operators (20.4%) feel their main advantage to being established in Fort Macleod is the central location they have to the markets they serve, their suppliers, and raw materials;
- Twenty businesses (15.7%) feel an established good reputation in the community is their main advantage and accounts for both new and return business;
- Eighteen businesses (14.2%) see customer loyalty as a major strength and advantage;
- Nine businesses (7.1%) indicated expansion in the community and economic growth brought on by the police training center and a renewed focus on capitalizing on economic development as opportunities they and the municipality will and should consider.

Challenges – of the eighty-four respondents that offered challenges:

- Twenty-four owner/operators, or 18.9%, indicated difficulty working with the municipality, council and/or EDC on zoning, permits, licensing, and other obstacles. They cited unfair treatment which prevented their business from thriving or expanding in the community;
- Ten, or eight percent, indicated competition locally and regionally was their main challenge;
- The size of the community was introduced as a challenge by eight businesses (6.3%) as an obstacle to overcome as this drove many clients and consumers to larger centres for the better selection as well as the perceived better deals and quality of services and product;
- Proximity to Lethbridge was mentioned by six owner/operators (4.7%)as a challenge;
- Finding and retaining good staff was a concern for seven respondents (5.5%);
- Eleven respondents (8.6%) had no comment or identified no challenges.

Section 4 – Future Plans for the Business

The future plans section asks business the simple question "How likely is your business to do each of the following in the next two years?"

The question was broken up into several sub-components designed to determine whether the business was in a growth, stagnant, or declining stage in its life cycle. Respondents were asked to rate 19 questions on a scale of one to five as to how likely or unlikely they were to undertake certain activities over the next two years;

- One - Very Unlikely
- Two – Unlikely
- Three - An Idea not Considered
- Four - Likely
- Five - Very Likely.

How likely is it that your business will do each of the following over the next two years?

Answer Options	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Haven't Considered	Likely	Very Likely
Add a new product or service	18	17	10	40	42
Sell to a new market	24	26	19	38	20
Research new markets	22	23	20	41	21
Expand distribution channels	28	26	16	39	18
Expand advertising and promotion	29	26	10	40	22
Invest in new equipment	16	22	4	49	36
Replace current equipment	16	18	2	47	44
Expand current facilities	55	30	9	18	15
Redesign current facilities	47	24	14	19	23
Seek additional financial capital	68	17	12	14	16
Computerize current operations	22	9	10	72	14
Upgrade computer systems	30	21	9	24	43
Redesign operating activities	34	27	11	38	17
Expand the scope of operating activities	34	19	18	35	21
Seek professional or technical advice	29	22	9	38	29
Add unskilled labour	47	21	7	33	19
Add skilled labour	31	16	6	55	19
Invest in onsite training for employees	30	6	6	28	57
Invest in off-site training for employees	41	8	7	32	39

The table above reflects solid numbers in most **likely** and **very likely** responses to most questions. This would appear to indicate a stable or growing business community. At a minimum it speaks to an environment which has the potential for growth. When this is considered with information gathered in section one regarding the experience within, and the longevity of, a large portion of the business community, these are strengths and motivations that could be engaged and fostered. Over the next two years:

- Sixty-five percent (84) of respondents indicate that it is **likely** or **very likely** they will add a new product or service to their business, 33% consider this **very likely**;
- Forty-six percent (58) of businesses feel it is **likely** or **very likely** they will sell to a new market, 29.9% consider this **very likely**;
- Forty-nine percent(62) of businesses consider it **likely** or **very likely** they will research new markets, 32.3% stated this a **very likely** activity;
- Forty-five percent (57) of owner/operators indicate they are **likely** or **very likely** to expand their distribution channels; 30.7% feel this is very likely;
- Forty-nine percent(62) of businesses consider it **likely** or **very likely** they will expand advertising and promotional activities, 31.5% consider this **very likely**;
- Sixty-seven percent (85) of businesses will **likely** or **very likely** invest in new equipment, 38.6% said this was **very likely**;
- Seventy-two percent (91) of businesses will **likely** or **very likely** replace existing equipment, 37% consider this very likely;
- Sixty eight percent (86) of operations are already computerized or it is **likely** or **very likely** they will computerize, 56.7% businesses consider this **very likely**;
- Fifty-three percent (67) of owner/operators are **likely** or **very likely** to upgrade their computer systems; 33.9% are **very likely** to do so;
- Forty-four percent (56) of owner/operators are **likely** or **very likely** to expand the scope of their business operations, 27.6% consider this **very likely**;
- Fifty-three percent (67) of businesses are **likely** or **very likely** to seek professional or technical advice, 29.9% are **very likely** to do so;
- Fifty-eight percent (74) of owner/operators are **likely** or **very likely** to add skilled labour to their organization, 43.3% of these respondents indicated this was **very likely**;
- Sixty-seven percent (85) of owner/operators will **likely** or **very likely** invest in onsite training for employees, 43.3% of businesses said this was already happening or was **very likely** to occur;
- Fifty-six percent (71) of owner/operators will **likely** or **very likely** invest in off-site training for employees, 30.7% of businesses said this was already happening or was **very likely** to occur.

There were only five questions which elicited negative-toned responses in the unlikely or very unlikely options. However certain information can be deduced from these responses:

- Sixty-seven percent (85) of businesses are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to expand their current facilities, 43.3% of owner/operators stated this was **very unlikely**;
- Fifty-six percent (71) of owner/operators are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to redesign their current facilities; 37% considered this very unlikely;
- Sixty-seven percent (85) of owner/operators are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to seek additional financial capital, 53.5% considered this very unlikely
- Forty-eight percent (61) of businesses are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to redesign their daily operating activities, **though 29.9% considered this an activity they would likely undertake;**
- Fifty-four percent (68) are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to add unskilled labour to their workforce, 37% of owner/operators considered this **very unlikely**.

The inferences that can be drawn from this information may include the following:

- A percentage of the businesses **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to expand their current facilities may include businesses that cannot find appropriate facilities in Fort Macleod – an opportunity for developers and contractors. Note: If they are not expanding they will likely not require capital.
  It may also indicate that several businesses are restricted from expanding due to development obstacles, bylaws etc. which impede, and delay or inhibit expansion. Many comments were made concerning this by both downtown and industrial park businesses. This is an issue the municipality will have to address;
- Similar conclusions may be drawn for the percentage of owner/operators that state it is **unlikely** or **very unlikely** they will redesign their current facilities;
- Finally, businesses owner/operators are more interested in hiring, and often require, skilled staff as opposed to unskilled staff for their organizations. Engendering a climate and developing a community with a desirable quality of life is important to attracting this demographic..

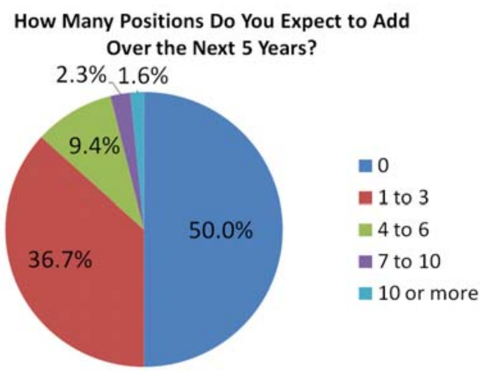
Businesses were also asked several specific questions about and staff:

1. Describe the positions required or for which you regularly seek staff.
   - Several respondents interviewed (14.2%), often sole operators, required no additional help and could not describe position requirements;
   - Seventy-one (55.9%) required skilled staff of one kind or another. These positions often required post-secondary training or certification. These included positions in the trades (19.7% of all positions required), automotive technicians, mechanics and machine operators (9.5%), sector specific technicians (9.0%), administration services (7.1%); automotive and equipment sales (5.5%), and transportation (4.0%);

Thirty-eight businesses (28.4%) indicated they utilize unskilled, untrained, or less experienced labour that normally did not require a post-secondary background. Many of these positions are temporary, seasonal, or casual in nature. Fifteen businesses (11.8%) require retail sales inventory and stock staff. Fourteen businesses, (11.0%) require casual or general labourers for a variety of tasks. Three percent require food services staff, and two percent require hotel/motel staff for various duties including housekeeping and front desk management. **A list of all these jobs is provided in Appendix B**

2. How many positions are presently vacant?
   - Seventy-eight percent of all businesses (99) interviewed, indicated they had no vacancies;
   - Twenty-one percent or 27 businesses presently have between one and five positions to fill;
   - Less than one percent, only two businesses, have between six and ten positions to fill;
   - No businesses presently have over ten vacancies.

3. What is the number of new positions you expect to add over the next five years?



- Fifty percent, or 64 businesses, expect to add no new positions over the next five years. While this does not include employees they will replace through loss, retirement, etc., it is a high number and may signify that these employers have little intention to grow or expand;
- Thirty-seven percent, 47 businesses, plan to add one to three positions;
- Nine percent, 12 businesses, plan to add four to six positions;
- Two percent, or three businesses, are planning to add seven to ten positions; while another two percent, two businesses are planning expansions in excess of ten positions.

4. Are you currently able to attract the required workers for your business?
   - Eighty-three owner/operators (64.8%) answered yes to this question, while only 44 respondents (35.2%) answered no. This two-third one-third ratio is positive. However, the fact that one third of employers are having difficulty filling vacant positions should not go unnoticed.

5. If you have unfilled positions, what are the types of skills you are currently unable to obtain?

Forty-five businesses responded with details on the positions they were seeking to fill. Thirty-five businesses (77.8%) required some type of skilled labour, while ten businesses (22.2%) were looking for unskilled labour.

Skills/Position Required	Number Required
Sector Specific Skills	12
Construction & Trades	9
Machinists/Operators/Mechanics	7
General Experience, Skill and Quality	7
Hotel/Motel	4
Food Services	3
Retail	3
Total	45

6. How many current employees do you anticipate will retire or leave over the next five years?

In response to this question 72 businesses (56.3%) expected no staff turnover. Fifty-one businesses (39.8%) anticipated losses of one to five employees. The remaining four businesses (3.9%) expected staff losses of up to six or more.

Owners and operators were asked three questions regarding exporting:

1. Do you export or plan to export to markets outside the region?

   One-hundred and twenty three businesses (96.9%) responded that they did not export nor did they have plans to export. Four businesses (3.1%) interviewed confirmed they do export or plan to export.

2. Do you require further assistance or information on export strategies?

   One-hundred and twenty three businesses (96.9%) also responded that they did not need assistance or information on export strategies with four businesses (3.1%) interviewed indicating they would appreciate information on export strategies. These businesses will be assisted directly.
   A potential opportunity to provide training, a course or seminar in the region, not only to the businesses requesting the information, but to a potential broader audience may exist.

3. What obstacles do you face in attempting to export?

   Eight obstacles were listed. Three dealt with lack of information on how to proceed and can be addressed directly. Three dealt with the financial challenges of strong Canadian dollar, while two dealt with legal issues; permits and legalities required to cross the border or export to international markets.

Section 5 – Community Services

The objective of the community services section was to query owners and operators on their perception and satisfaction with 19 community services located within Fort Macleod. Several of these services are provided by the municipality, others by the province and still others by organizations within the community. This section, in addition to evaluating the satisfaction level that business owner/operators have with these services, is designed to gauge these services in terms of quality of life provided in the community.

Respondents were asked to provide a rating from one to five for each service. A one "did not apply", two was "very unsatisfied", three "slightly satisfied", four "satisfied", and five "very satisfied".

- Nineteen of the 20 services listed **satisfied** or **very satisfied** responses first in each service. The only area which ranked **slightly satisfied** or **very unsatisfied** were the business support services;
- Sixteen of the 19 services which rank **satisfied** or **very satisfied** first in their category, ranked **satisfied** higher than the **very satisfied** option, possibly indicating there is always room for improvement;
- Ranked according to the largest number of responses in each option, traffic signs and lights water, gas services, sewer, highways, other quality of life factors, police services, and ambulance services were first by order in the **satisfied** option. Ambulance services, gas

services, water, police services, highways, other quality of life factors, sewer and traffic signs and lights ranked first by order in the **very satisfied** option;
- The three services which rank highest are gas, water, and ambulance services in that order;
- Local transportation, post-secondary training, and industry training ranked first in the **does not apply** option;
- Police and ambulance services, sewer, water and local roads, highways, and other quality of life factors all received responses of 100 or more in the **satisfied** or **very satisfied** options. That correlates to a total satisfaction rating of 78.8% for the provision of these services;
- Seven services – health care, electrical services, local roads, adequate/appropriate housing, education (K to 12), locally supplied services and goods, and local recreation and leisure facilities, though not ranking first in the **slightly satisfied** or **very unsatisfied** options, do capture a degree of dissatisfaction being expressed.

Please Rate Your Satisfaction With the Following Community Services.

Answer Options	Does not apply	Very Unsatisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Police Services	2	11	14	58	42
Ambulance Services	12	4	5	52	54
Health care	4	32	26	40	25
Electric Services	2	18	31	56	20
Gas Services	4	3	8	69	43
Sewer	4	7	14	67	35
Water	2	4	9	70	42
Local Roads	0	13	43	55	16
Traffic signs and lights	2	8	20	72	25
Highways	0	12	15	64	36
Adequate/Appropriate Housing	6	36	20	53	12
Local transportation	50	10	17	41	9
Education (K to 12)	30	12	24	47	14
Education (Post-Secondary)	53	6	15	48	5
Industry Training	75	13	10	26	3
Locally Supplied Services & products	5	23	31	63	5
Business Support Services	15	32	28	43	9
Local Recreation & Leisure Facilities	6	22	36	42	21
Other quality of Life Factors	3	9	15	64	36

Section 6 – Entrepreneur Support Services

This section of the survey was included to gauge respondent's awareness of and satisfaction with business and entrepreneurial support services provided to the community by various organizations. It included six questions:

1. Are you aware of Community Futures Alberta South West (CFABSW) and the services they provide?

   Sixty-eight respondents (53%) confirmed they are aware of Community Futures, though a smaller number, forty-one (32.5%), knew what services the organization provides.

Work is required to increase the visibility of the organization, its goals and programs for rural entrepreneurs. Information is available by contacting the CFABSW office at 403-627-3020 or checking out our website at www.cfabsw.com.

2. Have you utilized the services of Community Futures Alberta South West?

   Eight respondents (6.3%) of the 127 interviewed had utilized the services of CFABSW or its predecessor South West Alberta Business Development Institute in Fort Macleod. This indicates that inroads have been made in the community. However with an increased awareness of the organization's programs and the assistance we can provide entrepreneurs this number can increase.

3. Do you presently require any additional information on CFABSW services?

   Twenty-four respondents (18.8%) indicated they would like further information about Community Futures Alberta Southwest programs. Information packages will be forwarded to these businesses.

4. Are you a member of the Fort Macleod & District Chamber of Commerce?

   Forty seven respondents (36.4%) indicated they were Chamber members, while 80 respondents (63.6%) indicated they were not members of the Chamber.

5. Are you receiving value from your Chamber membership?

   Of the 47 owners/operators that indicated they were Chamber members, twenty-nine (61.7%) felt they were receiving value, while eighteen (38.3%) indicated they were not presently receiving value from their membership.

   The Chamber is currently on a membership drive. Many of the responses found in question six below may hint to why a certain segment of businesses do not have a Chamber membership, or do not feel they are receiving value for the membership they have.

6. List any additional information or information you would like to receive from the Chamber. (What can the Chamber do to assist your business and the business community?)
   - Fifty-seven respondents (44.9%) indicated they did not require any further information at this time, 20 owner/operators (15.7%) had no comment;
   - Twelve respondents (9.4%) indicated the Chamber is presently doing a good job representing business interests;
   - Fifteen owner/operators (11.8%) feel the Chamber needs to do more to advocate, promote and work with the business community and individual businesses. Suggestions of increased activities – promotional events, training and awards were mentioned;
   - Six respondents (4.7%) feel the Chamber needs to improve communication with its members and the business community. Notification of regular meetings with advance agendas, business visitations, especially with new members would be appreciated by

most respondents. Consideration of alternate meeting times to improve attendance and having substance (a speaker or presentation) would improve the value of attending these meetings;

- Six respondents (4.7%) also indicated that the Chamber needs to do more to engage their membership and the local business community. Several businesses feel that the expertise and experience that the business community has, both members and non-members, could be harnessed as a resource for other businesses through training, mentoring, networking, and other activities. Other respondents indicated that a volunteer Chamber cannot expect to thrive without the support of the businesses community so engagement should be a major focus for the organization;
- Seven owner/operators (5.5%) focused their comments on the municipality. Issues raised included: the obstacles and barriers presented by red tape, regulations etc. that impede development and expansion, the necessity for accountability in decision and policy making regarding the community in general and the business community specifically, and the need to share the designs and goals of the community's long-term strategic plans with the community and where possible clarify local issues and clear-up rumour.
- Four responses (3.1%) concerned requests for further information from Community Futures Alberta Southwest and will be responded to by the CFABSW office.

Conclusion

The results of the project provide an honest representation of The Town of Fort Macleod's business owner and operators' impressions on issues from basic business activities, to market conditions and the established primary market bases, to future plans and potential needs, labour force requirements, and the community's strengths and weaknesses as a place to do business.

Fifty-four percent, or 127 businesses responded to the survey over a two month period. The project had good representation from all the primary sectors in the community of Fort Macleod. Home-based businesses were the only under represented sector. However, of the 47% of businesses which were unreachable, or chose not to participate, home-based non-participation represents 30% of that total.

The feedback and analysis will provide input into what the community requires to grow and where the potential for growth lies. It will equip leaders with the information they need to make informed decisions about what affects our business community.

As expressed by many of the owners and operators interviewed, who made a commitment of time to participate in this project, this document provides valuable information and can be a useful resource if initiative is taken, and recommendations are considered and acted upon for the benefit of all stakeholders involved.

Appendix A

Business Visitation Survey

Date: ____________________

SECTION I: Primary Business Data

Survey Entry Number: ---------- ______________________________

Business Name: ------------------ ______________________________

Owner/Primary Contact: -------- ______________________________

Mailing Address: ------------------ ______________________________

Street Address: ------------------- ______________________________

Phone: ----------------------------- ______________________________

Cell Phone: ------------------------ ______________________________

Fax: --------------------------------- ______________________________

Email: ------------------------------- ______________________________

Website: ---------------------------- ______________________________

Hours of Business: --------------- ______________________________

SECTION II: About the Business:

1. How many total years of personal business experience do you have? -------------------- ____________
2. How many years of experience in this specific business activity do you have? ---------- ____________
3. What year was this business started? --- ____________
4. What percent of the business do you own? -- ____________
5. The business was established in Fort Macleod because of:
   proximity to market ________ proximity to home _________ other ____________
6. What year did you become the owner/manager of this business? -------------------------- ____________
7. Which best describes how you came to own/manage this business? ____________
   a) Purchased the business -- ____________
   b) Started the business -- ____________
   c) Inherited the business -- ____________
8. How is this business organized? ____________
   a) Sole proprietorship -- ____________
   b) Partnership -- ____________
   c) Corporation --- ____________
   d) Franchise -- ____________
   e) Other – (list: ____) ____________
9. How many family members are investors in this business? ---------------------------------- ____________
10. Is the business premises? owned __________ leased __________ home-based ____________
11. Is the business location? accessible ______ adequate _______ out-of-the-way ____________
12. Is the business facility size? adequate _________ too small __________ too large ____________
13. Which best describes this primary business activity? ____________
    a) Service -- ____________
    b) Retail --- ____________
    c) Food and Beverage --- ____________
    d) Finance/insurance/real estate --- ____________
    e) Business and professional services -- ____________
    f) Wholesale/distribution --

Primary Sector Activity

i. Energy-- ____________
ii. Agriculture-- ____________
iii. Manufacturing -- ____________
iv. Construction --- ____________
v. Transportation-- ____________
vi. Tourism/Recreation -- ____________
vii. Other -- ____________

14. Describe your primary product or service ____

____

____

15. In an average week, how many hours do you devote to your business?------------------ ____________

16. How many employees do you have?-- ____________

a. Full-time ____________________ b. Part-time _______________ ____________

SECTION III: Market Conditions

17. Where is your greatest market competition from?

Local ______ Regional ______ National ______ International ______ No Competition ______

18. What are your business' greatest competitive advantages?

Location ____ Product/Service ____ Customer Service ____ Loyalty ____ Other ____________

19. What target markets or customers are essential for the success of your business?

____

20. What aspect of your business offers the greatest potential for growth?

____

21. What methods of business promotion are most effective for you?

Radio _____ Newspaper _____ Industry Ads _____ Internet _____ E-mail _____ Other __________

22. Is the competition in your market: Why? ____

Increasing? ___________ Decreasing? ___________ Staying the same? ___________

23. Is your market share in the region: Why? ______________________________________

Increasing? ___________ Decreasing? ___________ Staying the same? ___________

24. Would your business benefit from rail services? Yes ________ No________

25. Have your considered succession planning or business ownership transition? Yes ____ No____

26. Do you require information on the business transition process? Yes _____ No_______

COMMENT: What are your businesses' greatest challenges and its greatest advantages or opportunities in its present location?

____

____

____

____

____

____

SECTION IV: Future Plans for the Business:

27. How likely is your business to do each of the following in the next two years?

Please use the following scale in answering these questions: Circle the Best Response.

1=very unlikely 2=unlikely 3=haven't considered this 4=likely 5=very likely

a. Add a new product or service ---------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
b. Sell to a new market---	1	2	3	4	5
c. Research new markets ---	1	2	3	4	5
d. Expand distribution channels ---------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
e. Expand advertising and promotion --------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
f. Invest in new equipment ---------------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
g. Replace current equipment------------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
h. Expand current facilities --	1	2	3	4	5
i. Redesign current facilities -------------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
j. Seek additional financial capital -------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
k. Computerize current operations------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
l. Upgrade computer systems ------------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
m. Redesign operating activities ---------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
n. Expand the scope of operating activities --------------------	1	2	3	4	5
o. Seek professional or technical advice ----------------------	1	2	3	4	5
p. Add unskilled labour---	1	2	3	4	5
q. Add skilled labour --	1	2	3	4	5

i. Description of positions required -------------------------- ______________________________

ii. Number of positions presently vacant --------------------- ______________________________

iii. # of positions expected to add over next 5 years ------ ______________________________

iv. Are you currently able to attract the required workers for your business? Yes ________ No________

v. If no, what are the types of skills that you are currently unable to obtain? ______________________________

vi. How many current employees do you anticipate will retire or leave over the next five years? ______________________________

r. Invest in onsite training for employees----------------------	1	2	3	4	5
s. Invest in offsite training for employees----------------------	1	2	3	4	5

28. Is your businesses' primary market

Local? ________ Regional? __________ National? ________ International? ________

29. Do you export (yes, no) or plan to export(yes, no), to markets outside the region?

30. Do you require assistance or information to develop an export strategy? Yes ______ No ______

31. What obstacles do you face in attempting to export? ______________________________________

SECTION V: Community Services:

32. Rate your satisfaction with the following community services

Please use the following scale in answering these questions: Circle the Best Response.

1=does not apply 2=very unsatisfied 3=slightly satisfied 4=satisfied 5=very satisfied

a. Police Services ---	1	2	3	4	5
b. Ambulance Services --	1	2	3	4	5
c. Health care --	1	2	3	4	5
d. Electric Services--	1	2	3	4	5
e. Gas Services ---	1	2	3	4	5
f. Sewer ---	1	2	3	4	5
g. Water--	1	2	3	4	5
h. Local Roads --	1	2	3	4	5
i. Traffic signs and lights ---	1	2	3	4	5
j. Highways--	1	2	3	4	5
k. Adequate/Appropriate Housing --------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
l. Local transportation ---	1	2	3	4	5
m. Education (K to 12) --	1	2	3	4	5
n. Education (Post-Secondary) -----------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
o. Industry Training --	1	2	3	4	5
p. Locally Supplied Services and products---------------------	1	2	3	4	5
q. Business Support Services -------------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
r. Local Recreation & Leisure Facilities ------------------------	1	2	3	4	5
s. Other quality of Life Factors ------------------------------------	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION VI: Entrepreneur Support Services

33. Are you aware of Community Futures Alberta Southwest (CFABSW) and the services they provide? Yes ___________ No___________

34. Have you utilized the services of Community Futures Alberta Southwest? Yes _____ No____

35. Do you require further information on CFABSW services? Yes _____ No____

36. Are you a member of the Fort Macleod & District Chamber of Commerce? Yes ____ No____

37. Are you receiving value from your Chamber membership? Yes _____ No____

38. List any additional services or information you would like from the Chamber of Commerce.

____

____

____

____

____

Appendix B

Positions Requiring Post-secondary Training, Certification, Skilled Labour		
Skilled Construction/Trades		
Basic labour, truckers, Truss designers		
Carpenters		
Carpenters		
Carpenters, steelworkers		
Certified technician with ASE certification.		
Construction labour, iron and carpentry apprentices, rental equipment personal.		
Drivers, mechanics		
Electrical, plumbing, concrete subcontractors		
equipment operators,, mechanics, maintenance hands		
General labour, machine operators		
General labour, machine operators		
general labourers, roofers, installers		
gutter installers, cleaners, unskilled labour		
Installation specialists		
Labourers/Carpenters who will listen well take care and control with their their work.		
Lead welders		
Machinists		
Mechanical technicians		
Mechanics		
Mechanics, operators, labourers, administration, management		
operators -, experienced truck drivers		
Shinglers, gutter and siding installers		
skilled tradespeople		
technicians, drafts-persons, engineers		
Welders	**Subtotal:**	25
Professional & Administration		
Accounting technicians		
accounting technicians		
tax preparation, accounting, bookkeeping	**Subtotal:**	3
Administrative Assistant		
Assistant		
Legal Secretary		
dispatchers, drivers, loaders, administration		
Mechanics, operators, labourers, administration, management		
wind service technicians, Inventory coordinators, administration		
Manager, servers	**Subtotal:**	6

Continued next page

Positions Requiring Post-secondary Training, Certification, Skilled Labour

Technicians

accounting **technicians**
Autobody **techs**,
Certified **technician** with ASE certification.
clerk, pharmacy **technician**
Clerks/cashiers, merchandising, cleaning, management, **pharmacy techs**
Mechanical **technicians**
Sales staff, Finance, Auto **technicians**, parts personnel, detail staff
Sales staff, line **technicians**, stucco applicators
Sales, servicing, mechanics, managers, **technicians**, detailers
technicians, drafts-persons, engineers
Tire **technicians**
wind service **technicians**, Inventory coordinators, administration — **Subtotal:** 12

Automotive Industry - Mechanics, Technicians, Sales

Autobody techs,
counter/ sales/ **parts**
equipment operators, **mechanics**, maintenance hands
General labour, **machine operators**
Mechanic, detail man, cleanup man, lot man
Mechanics
Mechanics, operators, labourers, administration, management
operators , experienced truck drivers
Sales and **shop personal**
Sales staff, Finance, **Auto technicians**, parts personnel, detail staff
Sales, servicing, **mechanics**, managers, technicians, detailers
Tire technicians — **Subtotal:** 12

counter/ sales/ parts
Drivers, Sales staff
Sales staff, Finance, Auto technicians, parts personnel, detail staff
Sales staff, line technicians, stucco applicators
Sales, servicing, mechanics, managers, technicians, detailers
sales-person/manager
Truck drivers, sales staff, production workers, office support
Sales and shop personal — **Subtotal:** 8

Trucking & Transportation

Basic labour, **truckers**, Truss designers
dispatchers, **drivers,** loaders, administration
Drivers, mechanics
Drivers, Sales staff
operators -, experienced **truck drivers** — **Subtotal:** 5

Positions Requiring Post-secondary Training, Certification, Skilled Labour — TOTAL: 71

General Labour, Unskilled, or Staff to be Trained On-site		
General Labour		
General labour		
General labourers		
General labour, grounds keeping		
general labourers, roofers, installers		
General labour, machine operators		
General labour		
gutter installers, cleaners, **unskilled labour**		
Basic labour, truckers, Truss designers		
Basic labourers to train		
Mechanics, operators, **labourers**, administration, management		
Cleaning and retail		
Clerks/cashiers, merchandising, **cleaning**		
Mechanic, detail man, **cleanup man**, lot man		
Fencing assistant		
	Subtotal:	14
Retail Sector		
Retail Staff		
cashier, stock-person		
Cashiers		
Cashiers		
cashiers, stock persons, supervisors		
Cleaning and **retail**		
Clerks who can multi-task		
clerks, cashiers, stock personal, customer service		
clerks, stock-persons, cashiers		
Clerks/cashiers, merchandising, cleaning,		
Retail Staff		
Sales clerks		
Sales clerks		
Sales staff	Subtotal:	14
Food Services		
Cook/server		
Kitchen staff, cashiers		
Manager, servers		
Servers	Subtotal:	4
Hotel/Motel		
Front desk, grounds keeping; laundry, housekeeping		
Healthcare aides, registered nurses, dieticians, housekeeping, laundry		
Housekeeping and front desk	Subtotal:	3
General Labour, Unskilled, or Staff to be Trained On-site	TOTAL:	35