2012 Business Visitation Report Claresholm & the Municipal District of Willow Creek

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The following is a summary report based on information gathered during a business visitation project conducted in Claresholm and the MD of Willow Creek, Alberta over a three-month from March through May, 2012.

Introduction

From March through May 2012 Community Futures Alberta Southwest (CFABSW), in cooperation with the Town of Claresholm Economic Development Committee, the Claresholm & District Chamber of Commerce and the MD of Willow Creek (MD), conducted a Business Visitation Project (BVP). The project was designed to gather information that will allow Community Futures, the Town, the Chamber, the MD, 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 Claresholm and MD businesses as possible in order to gain an accurate picture of what the communities require 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 the business community.

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

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

Methodology

The Town of Claresholm provided CFABSW with a list of businesses in the community based on their listing of licensed businesses. A listing of businesses in the MD was accessed online. These lists were refined by further research conducted by CFABSW staff. Some businesses were added and others, that were no longer in operation, were removed.

Two hundred and twenty-two businesses were enumerated in the community of Claresholm once the research had been completed. Eighty-eight businesses were confirmed in the Municipal District within the boundaries of the CFABSW region. This provided a total of three-hundred and ten businesses.

Thirty-six businesses were owned or operated by the same individual or group cutting back on an 21 businesses to interview. This left the total potential number of business owner/operators to interview at 289. Of this number 68 businesses were home-based.

Advance promotion of the program was conducted through local newspaper ads and articles beginning two weeks in advance of the project start date.

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, from labour force requirements to the community's strengths and weaknesses as a place to do business.

Each visitation, conducted as a survey, took approximately 20 minutes to complete; all information collected to be kept in strict confidence and data released only in summarized form. The design of the survey consisted of 41 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 a storefront presence. A high percentage of surveys were completed during these initial contacts and arrangements were also made for follow-up with businesses at times more convenient to their schedule.

After exhausting the process of cold calling businesses, phone call contact and follow-up was used as the primary tool to arrange meetings. Fourteen percent of respondents 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 **contact had been attempted with two hundred and seventy-eight businesses and this resulted in 183 interviews completed (63.3%)**. Forty-three owner/operators declined to participate for one reason or another. Fifty-two owner/operators were unable to complete the survey or arrange a compatible time to meet with the project coordinator. This left eleven businesses for which no contact could be made.

Of some interest, twenty-nine home-based businesses (13% of the community total) were interviewed in Claresholm. Eighteen home-based businesses (21% of the area total) were interviewed in the MD excluding the Town of Claresholm.

The service sector is represented dominantly with 32.8% of all business interviews. The retail sector comprises 22.4% of all interviews. Business and Professional Services, Food & Beverage, Finance/Insurance/Real Estate, Construction, and Manufacturing are represented by 10.4%, 8.7%, 7.1%, 6.6%, and 3.8% of all interviews respectively. The Agriculture, Transportation, Wholesale/distribution, Non-Profit, Energy, and Tourism/Recreation sectors represent a total of 15 interviews (8.1%).

This probably paints a fair representation of the Claresholm and MD of Willow Creek business communities. It should be noted that retail, service, food and beverage, professional services, trades and construction are well represented.

Of the 68 home-based businesses enumerated, 69% were interviewed successfully for the study, more than double the response of the Fort Macleod and Pincher Creek projects. These businesses were largely services in the trades, general contractors, and various personal and professional occupations. Of some interest, twenty-nine home-based businesses (13% of the community total) were interviewed in Claresholm. Eighteen home-based businesses (21% of the area total) were interviewed in the MD excluding the Town of Claresholm.

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

General Observations

- Sixty-three percent of owner/operators have over 16 years experience (the average: 22 years);
- Forty-eight percent of owner/operators have over 16 years business experience in the specific sector they now work in (the average: 17 years);
- Forty-five percent of businesses were started before 1994; 40% started in the last 10 years;
- 74% of owners own a 100% stake of their business vs. 17% of operators who own no share;
- Close to 50% of owners have started up or taken ownership of their present business in the last eight years vs. 25% who took up ownership between the years 1995 and 2004, and 25% who took up ownership in the year 1994 or before;
- Fifty-five percent of all businesses were started up by the present owner vs. 27% of businesses which were purchased by the present owner. The remaining 21% either inherited the business or manage the business for the owners;
- 85% percent of respondents feel word-of-mouth is their most effective form of promotion;
- Though 39% of businesses feel the pressure of increased competition, 45% feel their market share in the region is staying the same, and another 39% feel it is increasing;
- Strong interest was indicated by respondents in courses on marketing and market research (41%), business planning and plan updating (35%), social media (34%), accounting (32%), customer service (30%), financing (26%), business transition planning (24%);
- Trends in the 19 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 distribution channels, expanding or relocating their current facilities, redesigning current facilities, seeking additional financial capital, and adding unskilled labour;
- Though only 23% of businesses show job vacancies at the present time, 61% of businesses expect to add new positions over the next five years (Average number of vacancies per business: 1.8). However, 43% of businesses expressed difficulty in obtaining employees for their needs.

Report Findings

Section 1 – Primary Business Data

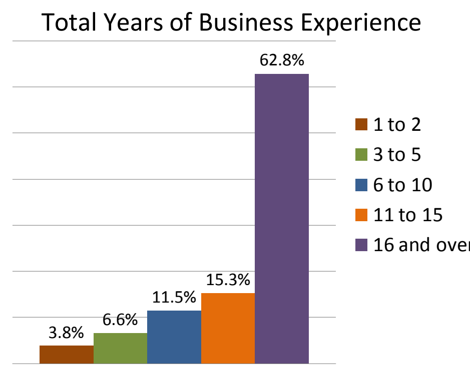
The only relevant observation to be made in section one is on the regular hours of business operation the respondents observe. All other data in this section identifies the business, its owners, and contact information – all which is being kept confidential. Normal business operations for most respondents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

- Forty-two percent of businesses open their doors between 8.00 and 9.00 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 – Five percent of owner/operators open their businesses Monday to Friday , but later in the day;
- Twenty-three percent of companies keep business hours which vary, while another 23% businesses keep evening and/or weekend hours;
- Sixteen percent of businesses operate at other times throughout the day and week;
- Thirteen percent are open seven days a week; four percent of businesses have 24 hour service;

The figures above indicate that a solid 78% of enterprises surveyed are engaged in business activity full-time during the week. At 23%, the number of businesses open evenings and weekends may reflect the make up the survey sample; however, encouraging retail and certain service sector businesses to expand business hours would be practical should there be a demand for these services.

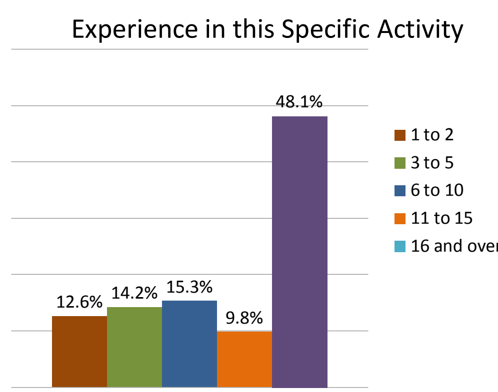
Section 2 – About the Business

Sixteen questions relating to business operations are analyzed in this section. The purpose of these questions is 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 Claresholm.



Seventy-eight percent of all respondents have at least eleven or more years of business experience. While 22% are business owners or operators that have 10 or less year's experience.

This reflects the existence of an established, experienced business-base in the community with a representative number of new, more recently established owner/operators entering the Claresholm business community. The average number of years of business experience from all respondents was 22 years.



Of those same respondents, 58% indicated that they have experience with this specific business activity for at least 11 years. Forty-two percent of those surveyed indicated that they were undertaking the specific activity for 10 years or less. This again would seem to indicate a significant amount of new business activity being undertaken, a strong indicator of entrepreneurial activity.

Sixty percent of the businesses themselves, or 110 enterprises, have been in operation for eleven years or more, with 40%, or 73 businesses starting operations in Claresholm over the last 10 years.

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

Years	Percentage	Number of respondents
2011 to 2005	49.2%	85
2004 to 1995	25.1%	49
1994 and before	25.7%	30

Seventy-four percent of businesses (135) are 100% owned by the respondents surveyed. Seventeen respondents (9%) indicated they owned a portion of the business with other investors, while 17% (32) had no ownership stake in the business. These respondents generally account for the managers, administrators and executive officers hired to operate the business.

The reasons given for establishing business operations in Claresholm were relatively balanced between the "proximity to home" at 37.7%, or 69 respondents, "proximity to the market" at 30.6%, or 56 respondents and "pursuing a business opportunity" at 28.4%, or 52 respondents. The remaining seven owner/operators cited location, a low cost of operation, and an identified need as factors in their decision.

One hundred owners, 55%, started their businesses, while 49 owners, 27%, purchased existing businesses. Twenty-one percent of businesses, 34 businesses were owned/operated through different circumstances. Several businesses utilized management or executive staff: thirteen were hired internally; twenty-two were hired externally. Two owners inherited their businesses.

Forty-five percent of businesses (82) are organized through incorporation, while thirty-nine percent (72) operate as sole proprietorships. Seventeen businesses (9%) self-identified as partnerships and seven (4%) as franchises. The remaining five businesses (3%) consisted of three non-profits and two cooperatives. Notably, sixty-one businesses (33.3%) have investment from family members in addition to the owner.

Questions relating to the business premises solicited the following responses:

- Forty-nine percent of business premises (90) are owned;
- Twenty-five percent of business space (45) is leased;
- Twenty-six percent of businesses (48) are home-based.

- One hundred and twenty-seven owner/operators (69%) found their business location accessible;
- Forty-three owner/operators (24%) found their business location adequate;
- Thirteen owner/operators (7%) found their business location out-of-the-way.

- One hundred and forty owner/operators (76%) found their business facility size adequate;
- Thirty-six owner/operators (20%) found their business location too small;
- Only seven owner/operators (4%) found their business location too large.

Several observations may be made based on this information. In regard to ownership of the business premises, there are large percentages of premises leased and home-based businesses. While this may indicate a convenience for business operators and caution due to the uncertain economic conditions, it may also indicate that there is a shortage of adequate business and commercial property to purchase, or that the cost of purchase relative to the quality of the property is too high for businesses to invest in.

This point was made by several respondents in their observations regarding the adequacy of downtown properties in Claresholm in particular. High property valuations, deterioration of many downtown premises ideally located for businesses, the unwillingness of existing owners to acknowledge these deficits, was a frustration voiced by many businesses and home-based businesses who would otherwise consider purchasing or leasing property in the downtown core. There is an opportunity for the Town to address this issue, develop policy, and consult with property owners to address this issue.

Another observation simply stated is the 51% of businesses that are home-based or presently leasing space may indicate a shortage of adequate properties to suit business needs in the community, an opportunity for development to meet these needs. The sixty-seven businesses that lease space do potentially represent an opportunity for developers to invest in new space for businesses to purchase. When you consider that 33 owner/operators find their facilities too small, it is possible that a portion of these businesses are also the businesses that presently lease facilities. An investigation into the availability of commercial and industrial space to lease and purchase and the costs associated with each would clarify this further.

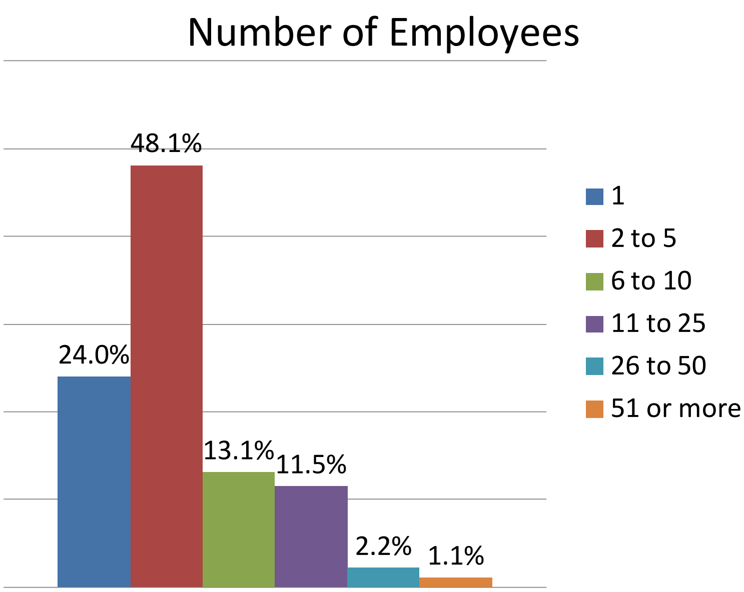
While it appears most businesses are satisfied with where they are situated in relation to the customers they service, 127 businesses find their present location accessible, a level of dissatisfaction is evident in the 56 businesses (31%) that find their location out of the way or only adequate.

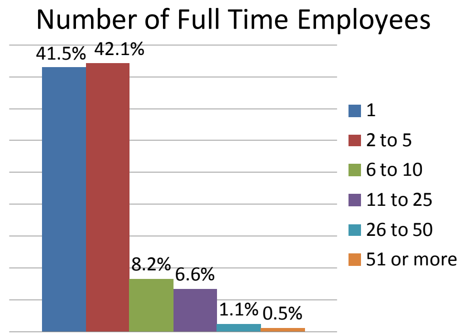
Looked at together, these responses to facility size and facility location provide evidence for the consideration of capacity building.

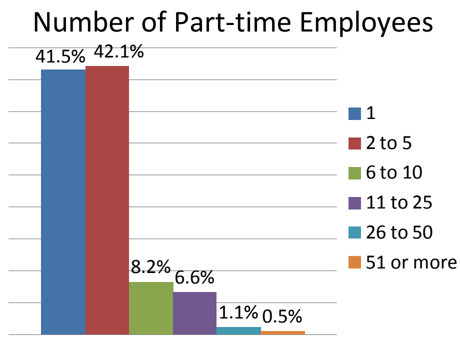
Shifting to the workplace, owner activities and employment, it is worth noting the high percentage of owner/operators who devote in excess of 40 hours to their business per week. This is typical with small and medium sized enterprises. Sixty-three percent, almost two-thirds of all respondents indicated they spend over 40 hours a week with their business; twenty percent devote over 61 hours to operations. All respondents collectively averaged approximately 50 hours per week.

Hours Devoted to Business	Percentage	Responses
1 to 20	8.2%	15
21 to 40	28.4%	52
41 to 60	43.7%	80
61 and over	19.7%	36

The size of operations and economic impact a business has on its community can often be reflected in the number of staff employed by a business. Of the businesses interviewed, including single operator businesses, 81.2% (156 enterprises) operate with ten or less staff. The largest segment, 48.1%, of these businesses (88) employ between two and five employees. All organizations collectively averaged 5.9 employees per business.







Of those businesses employing fewer than ten staff, 91.8% employ the majority of their staff full time. There was a virtual equal split between businesses with one staff member (representing a large number of single operator enterprises) at 41.5% (76 businesses), and two to five employees at 42.1% (77 businesses). Fifteen businesses (8.2%) hire between 6 and 10 staff. Twelve businesses (6.6%) hire between 11 and 25 staff fulltime, while two businesses (1.1%) employ between 26 and 50 staff fulltime and one business surveyed employs over 51 staff fulltime. All organizations collectively averaged 3.9 fulltime employees per business.

Compared to fulltime positions, businesses hired a smaller percentage of their workforce as part-time staff. Fifty-three percent, 96 businesses, hired no part-time staff at all. Seventeen percent, 31 businesses, employ only one part-time staff, while 24%, or 44 businesses, hire between two to five part-time staff. Six businesses (3.3%) hire between six to ten part-time staff. That represents 80.3%, or 146 businesses interviewed that employ ten or less part-time staff. The number of part-time employees averaged just below two employees per business.

The ratio of full time employment to part time employment is important. The strength of full time employment is very good for the community of Claresholm and the MD. Full time employment indicates a degree of economic health and stability in the business community, and business confidence in its workers. It reflects well on the businesses themselves, and also provides an attractive employment incentive 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 work within.

Owners and operators defined their primary market area the following way:

- Eighty-nine businesses (48.6%) saw their market as regional, occasionally including areas reaching into the cities within the province and inter-provincial markets (BC and Saskatchewan);
- Eighty-two businesses (44.8%) defined their market as local;
- Five owner/operators (2.7%) viewed their market as national in scope;
- Seven owner/operators (3.8%) viewed their market as international in scope.

Queried as to where they felt their greatest market competition came from, forty-six percent, or 84 businesses, felt they are competing locally for sales. Forty-four percent, or 80 businesses, responded that they competed in the regional market. Eight businesses (4.3%) defined their competition as the national or international marketplace. Eleven businesses, or six percent, felt they had no competition in their market at all. These are businesses which tend to provide a unique service or product to the market. Support for businesses such as these, and possible attraction strategies for businesses which complement existing regional strengths should be encouraged.

The fact that 49% of businesses define their primary market as regional is a strong indicator of the interest and potential to grow this market. Though only four percent of organizations identify their business with national and international markets, a question later on in the survey did elicit ten requests for information on developing import/export strategies. A combined twenty-one businesses already do, or are planning in the future, to export products they produce. Consideration of business retention and attraction strategies which foster development of these markets should also be investigated further.

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	79.2%	145
Product/Service	68.9%	126
Loyalty to the business	67.2%	123
Location	51.9%	95
Other (please specify)	16.4%	30

Customer Service emerged as the main advantage business owner/operators feel they are providing their patrons. Product/service and loyalty to the business were also considered important components, both above 67%. Location also appeared as a competitive advantage mentioned by 52% of businesses.

Other advantages included experience, uniqueness and product/service added value at 7.7%, solid relations and reputation at 2.7%, and competent, experienced staff and competitive pricing both at 2.2%

Questioned as to which target markets were essential to the success of their business, owners and operators identified their markets in a number of ways. Some specified a target market or audience, others associated with a particular sector, others identified a particular age demographic, and finally many saw their market as local, regional, or open to all clientele. The following table illustrated the responses given:

Target Markets	Percentage	Responses
All Markets	21.3%	39
Agricultural Sector	15.8%	29
Specific Age Demographic	14.2%	26
Local and Regional Markets	12.6%	23
Specific Audience	10.9%	20
Oil, Gas & Other Primary Sectors	9.8%	18
Business-to-Business	6.6%	12
Homeowners	5.5%	10
Women	3.3%	6
Total:	**100.0%**	**183**

To the extent that businesses can readily define their target market speaks to the strength of owner/operator understanding of their clientele.

Twenty-one percent of businesses (39 businesses) are liberal in the identification of their market seeing all markets as potential consumers of their product or service. Twenty-nine businesses (15.8%) service the agricultural sector, with 26 businesses (15.8%) categorizing their market by a specific age demographic and 23 businesses (12.6%) defining local and regional markets as their key audiences. Specific target audiences are recognized by twenty businesses (10.9%).

Primary sector markets (excluding agriculture) make up the market for eighteen businesses (9.8%). The business-to-business market is defined by 12 businesses, while homeowners represent the target market for 10 businesses (5.5%). Finally, sales to the female demographic alone (3.3%) accounted for six businesses. A note should be made that viewed in a larger context the agricultural, primary sector, and business-to business markets all represent a business-oriented target market and therefore the figures for these segments combined would represent a market of 59 businesses (32.2%).

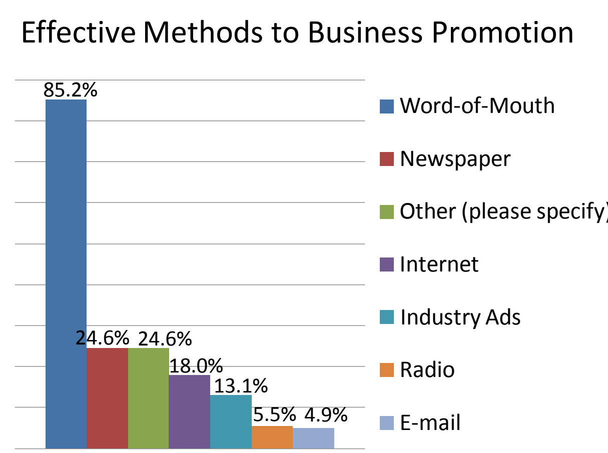
A follow-up question for owner/operators asked what aspect of their business offered the greatest potential for growth. The question solicited a wide range of responses given the variety of opportunities available to the businesses surveyed. Several themes did emerge as illustrated in the following table:

Opportunities For Business Growth	Percentage	Responses
Expansion or Growth of Existing Services or Products	36.2%	67
Growth of Market Area & Growth in Regional Population	25.4%	47
Within a Targeted Demographic	11.4%	21
Through Improved Customer Service	10.8%	20
The Addition of New Products and Services	8.1%	15
Through the Development of All Business Aspects	5.9%	11
Presently No Opportunities for Business Growth	2.2%	4

Consideration of these perspectives should be taken by the municipality and other economic development stakeholders as areas to focus on when seeking to assist the business community as they give insight into what businesses in the community are thinking.

A significant number of businesses have considered future growth. The majority of those expanding or growing with existing products and services, those targeting a specific demographic, businesses focused on improved customer services and those adding new products or services (approximately 2/3s of all businesses) appear to have a plan. Companies waiting on or anticipating market or community growth, those who plan to develop all aspects of their business, and those businesses which presently see no opportunity for business growth, 1/3rd of all respondents, seem to have a less focused or less optimistic perspective about their future.

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

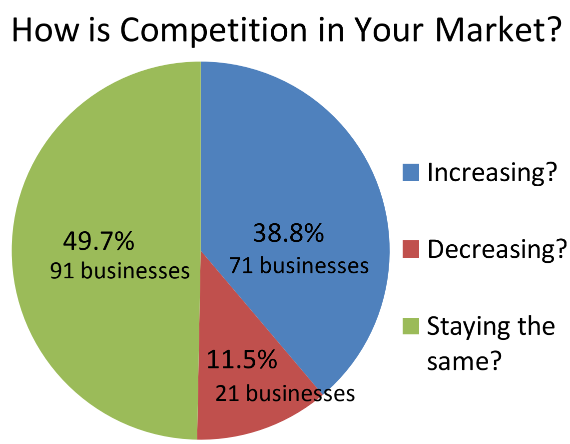


Word-of-Mouth was easily the most frequent response given with over 156 owner/operators suggesting this as the most effective, often the only method of promotion used. This is understandable in a rural environment where word travels fast and effectively around the community and region, and where businesses often have a small or non-existent budget for promotion. Word of mouth and a good reputation go hand-in-hand.

Three additional methods of advertising and promotion are worth noting. First a traditional method, the newspaper; 45 respondents utilize this form of advertising. This may reflect the aggressiveness with which newspaper staff pursues placements, placement effectiveness, and customer loyalty. The second is the Internet; 33 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. Finally, 24 businesses utilize industry advertising as an effective way of reaching their audience in the region.

Forty-five businesses found various other methods of promoting their products and services useful. Some of the methods mentioned included direct mail flyers and posters (17 businesses), referrals (11 businesses), signage (8 businesses), sponsorship (6 businesses), social media (4 businesses), and the phonebook (4 businesses).

Asked whether competition in their market was increasing, decreasing or staying the same an overwhelming number of businesses (88.5%) felt competition was either increasing or staying the same. Common reasons given for this were:

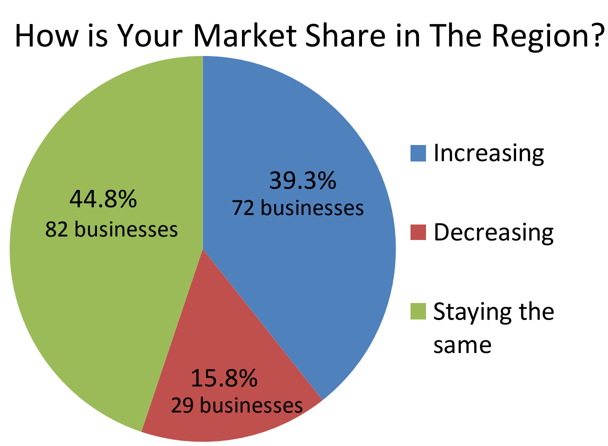


- New businesses, often larger, creating price competition, entering the market;
- Regional competition, fueled by the diversity of selection and the entry of big-box store competition;
- The expansion of service and product offerings by many local businesses seeking to capture a larger market share;
- The entry of many individuals (some unqualified/unskilled), into the market, often running operations as home-based businesses, in several sectors notably construction, the trades, and health and wellness;
- The introduction of the Internet and its market which is eroding the local market;
- Too many similar businesses in the market, leading to market saturation;

While the numbers above indicate consistent or increasing competition for businesses in the region, this second chart illustrates the confidence that business owner/operators have in their market share.

Eighty-four percent of businesses felt that their market share is increasing or staying the same, 39.3% of that number, or 72 respondents, indicated their market share was increasing.

Common reasons given for this were:



- Expansion of market and increased demand for services;
- Constant or superior customer service with a strong reputation and good word of mouth referrals;
- Aggressive approaches to marketing and going after business locally and in the region;
- Delivering quality services and product to their market;
- Lack of strong competition in the region, or lack of any competition at all.

Two questions were asked to assess business training needs in the community. The first queried business owners as to whether they or their staff had taken courses on any of eight different topics. One hundred and nine respondents answered this question:

Have you or your staff taken any courses/programs on?	Percentage	Responses
Customer Service	76.1%	83
Accounting	64.2%	70
Marketing and Market Research	47.7%	52
Business Planning and Plan Updating	46.8%	51
Financing	43.1%	47
Social Media	22.0%	24
Business Transition Planning	17.4%	19
Bidding on Government Contracts	0.9%	1

Customer service was covered by 76% of businesses, 64% of owner/operators and their staff had training in accounting. Training in marketing and market research, business planning and plan updating and financing was taken by businesses to a lesser extent. Training in social media and business transition planning each came in at 22% or below. Bidding on government contracts was noted by only one business.

Eighty-three percent (86 respondents) indicated that training, post-secondary and subsequent training, was taken externally (not part of an internal training program), while 17% (18 respondents) indicated that their training was conducted as part of their organization's in-house program. This was often apparent with chain stores, financial institutions and other businesses that were part of a bigger entity.

When asked whether they or their staff would be interested in taking any of the above listed courses if they were offered locally or regionally 106 respondents replied the following way:

Would you or your staff attend one of the following courses?	Percentage	Responses
Marketing and Market Research	40.6%	43
Business Planning and Plan Updating	34.9%	37
Social Media	34.0%	36
Accounting	32.1%	34
Customer Service	30.2%	32
Financing	26.4%	28
Business Transition Planning	23.6%	25
Bidding on Government Contracts	11.3%	12
Other (specify)	5.7%	6

The demand for marketing, business planning, social media training, accounting, and customer service, indicate an interest of between 30% and 40%. The need for training in the other three categories was also identified by lower demand between 11% and 26%. Six businesses expressed interest in other training including: food safety, how to run a business, merchandising, public relations, spreadsheet design and development, and telephone marketing. Options for delivery of training to address this demand should be considered by the appropriate partners.

Finally business respondents were asked what their greatest challenges and greatest advantages or opportunities were with regards to operating their enterprises in Claresholm and the MD. Again a range of responses were given:

Advantages/Opportunities – One hundred and forty-nine advantages and opportunities were provided by the businesses surveyed. They offered these responses:

- Sixty-five owner/operators, or 37.4%, feel their main advantage to being established in Claresholm is the community itself, the support they receive by having a strong network of loyal customers, a good reputation and word-of-mouth referrals. This is true for both new and return business;
- Thirty-seven businesses, or 21.3%, indicated the central location they have to the markets they serve, their suppliers, and raw materials as their primary advantage;
- Twenty-two businesses; or 12.0%, noted the cost of living, the cost of business operation and low overhead as a major advantage. This was even more prevalent among the businesses interviewed in the municipal district;
- Eighteen respondents (9.8%) indicated lifestyle for themselves and their employees is not only an attraction, but an advantage for their business. Closely aligned with comments made on the community itself in the first point, size, pace, and atmosphere were specifically cited;
- Six businesses (3.2%) mentioned that being home-based offered flexibility and opportunity they would otherwise not have;
- Twenty-six respondents (14.2%) could identify no immediate advantages or opportunities.

Challenges – One hundred and forty-five businesses responded to the question on challenges:

- Fifty-four owner/operators, or 29.5%; found the small/limited or shrinking size of their defined market as the major challenge for their business;
- Twenty-nine owner/operators, or 15.8%, view competition, existing or increasing, as a challenge to their business. According to comments made, much of this competition is coming from new businesses entering the local/regional market, existing businesses expanding their service/product offerings, and competition from businesses outside the region providing service and product to the local/regional market;
- Twenty-six owner/operators, or 14.2%, indicate finding and retaining good, qualified staff as the primary issue they continue to face;
- Sixteen respondents (7.7%) indicated difficulty working with the municipality, council and/or the EDC on permits, licensing, and other obstacles, citing unfair treatment and lack of focus on the business community which prevented their business from thriving or expanding. Specific issues include problems with signage bylaws, lack of municipal planning and business support services;
- Eleven businesses (6.0%) broached the issue of the community not supporting local businesses as a challenge;
- Thirty respondents (16.4%) could identify no immediate challenges.

Section 4 – Future Plans for the Business

The future plans section asks respondents 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 evaluate 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	25	22	23	48	**65**
Sell to a new market	23	48	30	**53**	29
Research new markets	19	40	43	**50**	32
Expand distribution channels	31	**46**	28	44	34
Expand advertising and promotion	25	40	26	**55**	37
Invest in new equipment	19	29	16	53	**66**
Replace current equipment	19	29	18	52	**65**
Expand or relocate current facilities	**86**	36	17	23	21
Redesign current facilities	**67**	41	13	41	21
Seek additional financial capital	**77**	36	31	24	15
Computerize current operations	15	10	11	32	**115**
Upgrade computer systems	48	24	12	**51**	48
Redesign operating activities	36	36	30	**53**	28
Expand the scope of operating activities	34	27	32	**57**	33
Seek professional or technical advice	33	25	20	**55**	50
Add unskilled labour	**62**	27	11	45	38
Add skilled labour	44	37	15	**59**	28
Invest in onsite training for employees	30	30	8	49	**66**
Invest in off-site training for employees	42	29	12	46	**54**

The table above reflects solid numbers in most **likely** and **very likely** responses to most questions. These results would appear to indicate a stable business community and faith in its future growth. 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 existing longevity and experience within the business community, and the growth in new business over the last decade, these are strengths and motivations that should be engaged and fostered.

Of some concern should be the number of businesses not considering facility expansion or redesign, and those not considering an injection of financial capital as this may indicate some degree of stagnation.

Over the next two years:

- Sixty-two percent of respondents (113) indicate that it is **likely** or **very likely** they will add a new product or service to their business, 65 businesses consider this **very likely**;
- Forty-five percent of businesses (82) feel it is **likely** or **very likely** they will sell to a new market, 29 businesses consider this **very likely**;
- Forty-five percent of businesses(82) consider it **likely** or **very likely** they will research new markets, 32 businesses stated this as a **very likely** activity;
- Forty-three percent of owner/operators (78) indicate they are **likely** or **very likely** to expand their distribution channels; 34 businesses feel this is **very likely**;
- Fifty percent of businesses (92) consider it **likely** or **very likely** they will expand advertising and promotional activities, 37 businesses consider this **very likely**;
- Sixty-five percent of businesses (119) will **likely** or **very likely** invest in new equipment, 66 businesses said this was **very likely**;
- Sixty-four percent of businesses (117) will **likely** or **very likely** replace existing equipment, 65 businesses consider this **very likely**;
- Eighty percent of operations (147) are already computerized or it is **likely** or **very likely** they will computerize, 115 businesses consider this essential under the **very likely** category;
- Fifty-four percent of owner/operators (99) are **likely** or **very likely** to upgrade their computer systems; 48 businesses are **very likely** to do so;
- Forty-three percent of owner/operators (81) are **likely** or **very likely** to redesign their current facilities; 46.3% considered this a **very likely** activity. Though this is under the 50% threshold, 16.4 % had not considered this activity at all;
- Forty-nine percent of owner/operators (90) are **likely** or **very likely** to expand the scope of their business activities, 33 businesses consider this **very likely**, 18% had not considered the activity;
- Fifty-seven percent of businesses (105) are **likely** or **very likely** to seek professional or technical advice, 50 businesses are **very likely** to do so;
- Forty-eight percent of owner/operators (87) are **likely** or **very likely** to add skilled labour, 28 businesses see this as **very likely**. The challenge here is availability to locate and attract staff;
- Sixty-three percent of owner/operators (115) will **likely** or **very likely** invest in onsite training for employees, 66 businesses indicated this was already happening or was **very likely** to occur;
- Fifty-five percent of owner/operators (100) will **likely** or **very likely** invest in off-site training for employees, 54 businesses said this was already happening or was **very likely** to occur.

There were only four questions which elicited negative-toned responses with unlikely or very unlikely responses. However certain information can also be deduced from these results:

- Sixty-seven percent of owner/operators (122) are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to expand or relocate their current facilities, 86 businesses considered this **very unlikely;**
- Fifty-nine percent of businesses (108) are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to redesign their current facilities, 67 businesses considered this **very unlikely;**
- Sixty-two percent of businesses (113) are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to seek additional financial capital for their business, 77 businesses considered this **very unlikely;**
- Forty-eight percent of businesses (89) are **unlikely** or **very unlikely** to add unskilled labour to their workforce, 28 owner/operators considered this activity **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 are satisfied with their current situation. Some businesses may not be able to find appropriate facilities in Claresholm. This could lead to an opportunity for developers and contractors. Also, it may also indicate caution. If however, they are not expanding they will likely not require capital unless it is necessary for an investment in equipment;
- It may also indicate that several businesses are restricted from expanding due to development obstacles, bylaws etc. which impede, and delay or inhibit expansion. Several comments were made concerning consistency in municipal government decisions, open regular communication on Town and/or MD policies and programs, and the necessity of developing a strategic development plan which continues from one council to another These are issues the Town and the MD 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. Redesigning facilities that are leased or where the business is uncertain about its future location or existence impedes decision making in this area. This is a situation where improved communication with the business community can address an issue. It also illustrates another potential opportunity for developers to evaluate;
- Finally, business owner/operators are more interested in hiring, and often require skilled staff as opposed to unskilled staff for their organizations. Presently as the numbers illustrate, there is a preference for skilled labour, however many businesses are impelled to hire un-skilled staff to fill vacant positions due to shortage of skilled labour. Developing a community with a desirable quality of life is important to attracting this demographic. The ground work for this already appears to exist as evidenced by the high number of respondents, Eighty-three, that identified the town and its lifestyle as primary advantages to their business.

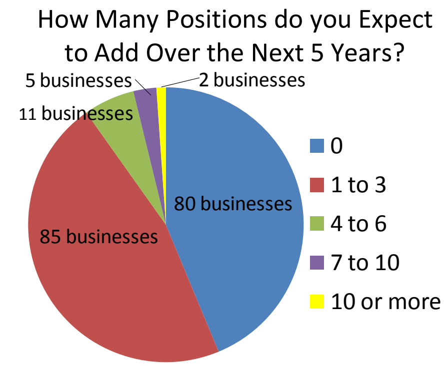
Businesses were also asked several specific questions about their staff:

1. **Describe the positions required or for which you regularly seek staff.**

   One hundred and thirty businesses (71%) required skilled staff of one kind or another. A majority of these positions often required post-secondary training or certification. These included positions in the construction, the trades, truck drivers and equipment operators (40 positions) and technicians and semi-professionals in different industries and persons with unique skill sets (32 positions). Twenty three businesses (12.6%) require business support staff, while twenty-two businesses (12%) require managerial or administrative staff,

   Seventy-nine businesses (43.2%) 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. Thirty-nine businesses (21.3%) require retail sales inventory and stock staff. Twenty businesses (10.9%) require food services staff, and hotel/motel staff for various duties including housekeeping and front desk management. Eighteen businesses, (9.8%) require casual or general labourers for a variety of tasks. **A list of all these jobs is provided in Appendix B**

2. **How many positions are presently vacant?**
   - Seventy-nine percent of all businesses (145) interviewed, indicated they had no vacancies;
   - Twenty percent (36 businesses) presently have between one and five positions to fill;
   - Only two businesses had over five vacancies at the time of the survey;
   - Of the thirty-eight businesses presently looking for staff, the average number of vacancies is slightly above two persons.
3. **What is the number of new positions you expect to add over the next five years?**



   - Fifty-six percent, 103 businesses, plan on adding new staff to their operations over the next five years. The challenge in many instances is, as was noted above, locating and retaining the staff with the qualifications they require;
   - Forty-four percent, or 80 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 still represents a high number and may signify that these employers have little intention to grow or expand. This could also be an indicator of a stagnating local/regional economy;
   - Of the 78 businesses planning to add new staff, the average number of positions to be added is just over three persons per business.
4. **Are you currently able to attract the required workers for your business?**

   One hundred and seventeen owner/operators (63.9%) answered yes to this question, while only 66 respondents (36.1%) answered no. This indicates that employers are reasonably successful in meeting their staffing needs, whether through qualified or untrained staff. Still there are over one third of all employers who are having some difficulty. The challenge of filling these present vacancies and preparing for future economic growth requires an affirmative commitment be made to employee attraction and retention both by the business community and community development stakeholders.
5. **If you have unfilled positions, what are the types of skills you are currently unable to obtain?**

   Seventy-five businesses responded with details on 81 positions they were seeking to fill. Fifty businesses (61.7%) required some type of skilled labour, while 31 businesses (38.3%) were looking for unskilled labour. "Unskilled" should be qualified as positions not necessarily requiring experience or training. Many staff are trained once they are in their position.

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

   Eighty-two businesses (44.8%) expected no staff turnover. Ninety-four businesses (51.4%) anticipated losses of one to five employees. Only three businesses (1.6%) forecast losses of six to ten employees and eleven to twenty staff, while one business (0.5%) forecast losses of over 20 staff over the next five years. The fact that over fifty percent of these businesses expect staff losses over this period should again indicate the importance of addressing this issue.

   Of the one hundred and one-businesses anticipating staff turnover, the average number of positions lost is calculated to be approximately three employees per business. When seasonal employment is averaged in, this number is estimated at just over two employees per business, still a significant figure.

   If you consider the number of businesses with only one employee (effectively the owner) at forty-four businesses and cross-reference that with the number of those businesses that anticipate one employee to retire from or leave the business, eleven of the businesses interviewed in Claresholm and the MD of Willow Creek have plans to close their doors unless some plan for transition is in place.

Owners and operators were asked four questions regarding importing and exporting:

1. **Do you export or plan to export to markets outside the region?**
   One-hundred and sixty-two businesses (88.5%) responded that they did not export nor did they have plans to export. Twenty-one businesses (11.5%) interviewed confirmed they do export or plan to export.

2. **Do you import or plan to import to markets outside the region?**
   One-hundred and forty-eight businesses (80.9%) responded that they did not import nor did they have plans to import. Thirty-five businesses (19.1%) interviewed confirmed they do import or plan to import.

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

   One-hundred and seventy-three businesses (94.5%) also responded that they did not need assistance or information on export strategies. Ten businesses (5.5%) interviewed indicated they would appreciate information on export strategies. These businesses will be assisted directly by CFABSW.

Skills/Position Required	Number
Sector Specific Skills	26
Construction & Trades	19
Skilled Labour – experience and quality	5
Retail	10
General Labour – unskilled and/or unseasoned	8
Food Services	8
Hotel/Motel	5
Total	81

The 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.

4. **What obstacles do you face in attempting to export?**
Sixteen obstacles were listed. Thirteen dealt with legal issues; permits, duties, legalities, time delays, and the paperwork required getting items across the border or export to international markets. Three dealt with lack of information or request for information on how to proceed and can be addressed directly by CFABSW.

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 Claresholm and the MD of Willow Creek. Several of these services are provided by the municipal jurisdictions, others by the province and still others by organizations within each constituency. 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 region.

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”:

- Eighteen of the 20 services listed **satisfied** or **very satisfied** responses first. Two areas ranked first as **did not apply**, these were post-secondary training and industry training ;
- Sixteen of the 18 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, sewer services, gas services, other quality of life factors, highways, adequate/appropriate housing, local roads, water quality and service, electric services, local recreation & leisure facilities, business and municipal signage, education (K to 12), locally supplied services and products, local transportation, and business support services were first by order in the **satisfied** option. Ambulance services and health care ranked first by order in the **very satisfied** option;
- The six services which rank highest and can be affected by the municipal jurisdictions are traffic signs and lights, sewer service, other quality of life factors, adequate/appropriate housing, local roads ,and water quality and service. These should be viewed as positives for the communities involved in the project, but they should not be taken for granted;
- Natural gas services, highways, ambulance services, sewer services, traffic signs and lights, health care services, water quality and services, police services, other quality of life factors, and electric services all received responses of 140 or more responses in the **satisfied** or **very satisfied** options. That correlates to a total satisfaction rating of 80% for the provision of these services;
- Seven services – locally supplied services and products, business support services, business and municipal signage, local roads, local transportation, local recreation & leisure facilities, and

education (post-secondary) though not ranking first in the **slightly satisfied** or **very unsatisfied** options, do capture a degree of dissatisfaction being expressed each holding between a 25.0% to 42.0% **slightly satisfied** or **very unsatisfied** ranking. An eighth, industry training, is notable for the 53.6% of respondents that indicated it **did not apply** as these services were not present in their community.

Please Rate Your Satisfaction With the Following Community Services					
Answer Options	Does not apply	Very Unsatisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Police Services	5	9	22	**81**	66
Ambulance Services	7	2	13	73	**87**
Health care	4	8	18	72	**81**
Electric Services	2	11	30	**96**	44
Natural Gas Services	3	2	13	**106**	59
Sewer Services	12	5	10	**111**	45
Water Quality and Service	6	12	15	**97**	53
Local Roads	1	15	41	**98**	27
Traffic signs and lights	5	6	18	**120**	34
Business and municipal signage	7	27	39	**90**	20
Highways	0	6	13	**101**	62
Adequate/Appropriate Housing	16	8	31	**101**	27
Local transportation	44	22	33	**71**	13
Education (K to 12)	26	14	23	**84**	36
Education (Post-Secondary)	**65**	11	35	64	8
Industry Training	**98**	16	28	38	3
Locally Supplied Services and products	18	32	45	**75**	13
Business Support Services	36	24	46	**66**	10
Local Recreation & Leisure Facilities	7	23	28	**93**	31
Other quality of Life Factors	1	8	28	**102**	42

In addition to the rating chart comments were captured on these services where offered:

- Under **Police Services**, twelve comments were made. Five concerned response time to reported incidents or requests for assistance, four mentioned the lack of a visible presence in the community, and three comments focused on lack of organization;
- The five comments made regarding ambulance services discussed response time, location and concern over recent changes made to the delivery of the service in the region;
- Twelve comments were made concerning **Healthcare and Ambulance Services**. Six comments discussed limited access to healthcare services regionally and service cutbacks, three mentioned understaffing issues both with doctors and other medical staff, the remaining three comments opined the importance of using a team approach, having healthcare professionals collaborate to deliver services, and to be open to alternative forms of healthcare and medical practitioners;
- Twenty-three comments were captured on **Electrical and Gas Services**. Four concerned the high cost of these services, while the remaining nineteen comments concerned poor local capacity, poor reliability and service, and sporadic power outages leading to loss of office and business productivity;

- Twenty-seven comments were made about **Water and Sewer Services**. Eleven of these concerned issues with poor drainage, sewer back-ups, flooding, and the need to replace an old infrastructure in certain areas of the town. Sixteen comments concerned the poor quality, palatability and over chlorination of water in the region;
- Feedback on **Local Roads** was provided by 47 businesses. Forty-four of these responses commented on the general poor repair of roads in the community from potholes to unattended repairs, inadequate resurfacing, and pooling of water leading to erosion. Three comments were made regarding poor snow plowing and snow removal. Finally the issue of poor planning leading to traffic diversion around businesses, roads not accommodating large machinery and alleyways requiring attention was introduced;
- Eleven respondents commented on **Traffic Signage**. Five comments referred to the lack of appropriate and directional signage. Three respondents mention the need for additional signage, while three discuss the congestion and confusion some existing signage creates;
- Forty-nine respondents commented on **Business and Municipal Signage**. Twenty-four indicated that there is presently not enough signage and what does exist is small, obscured, or does not provide direction to businesses. Sixteen businesses felt that the Town, the MD and the Claresholm & District Chamber of Commerce should support businesses by assisting in signage to promote regional businesses. Nine businesses feel existing signage bylaws and legislation are too restrictive and need to be reviewed;
- Response to the condition of **Highways** in the region evoked eight responses. All eight consisted of general comments concerning poor repair, grading, and the need for repaving;
- Thirty comments were received concerning **Adequate & Appropriate Housing**. Twelve respondents noted the discrepancy between the high prices in the existing housing market and the affordability for potential homeowners. Market prices are presently out of sync with affordability. Eight respondents pointed out the shortage of low-income or affordable housing in the community. Three comments were raised regarding the shortage of rental properties. Three respondents commented that the housing market was in good condition and met all needs. Three additional comments concerned housing: abandoned houses that raised concerns for neighbours ;
- **Local Transportation** was commented on by 27 respondents. Twenty-one owner/operators felt that the present services do not sufficiently meet the community's needs. Seven respondents indicated the local taxi services are insufficient and often unreliable; four responses pointed to inadequacy of service for seniors, while three of the twenty-one businesses felt bus services to and from the community are insufficient and require improvement. Six of the twenty-seven respondents indicated local transportation, primarily taxi service, is too expensive;
- Seventeen responses were provided regarding **Education (K-12)**. Twenty-one comments were received concerning education. The quality of education, standards and expectations, and poor methods of program delivery were mentioned by nine respondents. Six responses addressed the lack of access to, and the availability of, optional courses and classes to students in the community. Five comments were made concerning the impact ongoing renovations were having on students and the disruptions they were creating, impact of budget cuts on school funding courses and activities. Finally, the increasing cost of education and extracurricular activities was mentioned by one respondent;

- Feedback on **Post-Secondary Education** was provided by 15 businesses. Thirteen respondents feel that there is a shortage of post-secondary course offerings locally and that improvements could be made. Two respondents acknowledge the benefit of having The Consortium in Claresholm for the opportunities it provides individuals to begin their studies;
- Responses to **Industry Training** reflected a similar trend as post-secondary education. Thirteen comments were offered. All indicated that there was no, or very limited, opportunity for industry training in the region;
- Fifty-nine businesses commented on the **Supply of Local Products and Services**. Twenty-six indicated that local businesses could not address much or any of their demand for business to business products and services and that it was necessary to shop outside the community for many items. Closely related to this were the eighteen respondents that indicated local and regional businesses could meet their needs to a limited degree. Six businesses mentioned their product and service needs could be completely met by local and regional businesses. Six owner/operators introduced competitive pricing as an issue and that in order for them to provide competitive rates to their customers they needed to seek outside suppliers. Three respondents suggested the quality of goods and services was not always reliable;
- Thirty-three comments were made regarding **Business Support Services**. Thirty-one respondents feel the Town and the Claresholm & District Chamber of Commerce do a poor job at supporting the business community. They must become more involved in supporting business growth; they need to address long-term strategic growth. Eighteen businesses associate this issue with the Town, while 16 include the Chamber in their comments. Communication between the Town, the Chamber and the business community was an issue for four businesses. Two businesses mentioned specific initiatives the Town must undertake concerning garbage and recycling. Two respondents acknowledged that recent improvements were being made by the Chamber;
- Thirty-seven responses were received regarding **Local Recreation & Leisure Facilities**. Seventeen comments suggest a lack of adequate facilities and recreational/leisure activities available in the communities surveyed, six of these specifically indicate a shortage of youth facilities and activities. Six respondents extolled the quality of these facilities for the size and population in the region. Four respondents recommended specific facilities that were required in their community. Four respondents also mention the lack of programming or the lack of access at certain times as an issue Finally, two comments pointed to the poor quality of several facilities and the need for upgrades to these facilities;
- **Quality of Life** was commented on by twenty-one respondents. Nine indicated lack of certain amenities as leading to a slightly less than satisfactory quality of life. Seven respondents found their quality of life quite satisfactory with a great small town atmosphere, location to larger communities, and the number of available activities. Three comments were made regarding general dissatisfaction with the quality of life in their community for several reasons, while two comments were made regarding specific civic issues which affected the respondent's perspective on quality of life in their community.

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 nine questions:

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

   Only sixty-four respondents (35%) confirmed they are aware of Community Futures and the services they provide.

   Almost two-thirds, 119 businesses were unaware of CFABSW. Hopefully this project has had some impact on awareness of the organization and the services we can provide. However, we will have to continue our work to increase the visibility of the organization, its goals and programs for rural entrepreneurs. Information is available by contacting the CFABSW office at 1-800-565-4418 or checking out our website at www.cfabsw.com.

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

   Again, only eighteen respondents (9.8%) of the 183 interviewed had utilized the services of CFABSW or its predecessor Southwest Alberta Business Development Institute (SWABDI) in Claresholm. This indicates a need to find effective tools to promote our organization to businesses and potential entrepreneurs in the region. With an increased awareness of the organization's programs and information about the assistance we can provide to entrepreneurs, a secondary goal of this project, this number can increase.

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

   Twenty-six respondents (14.2%) 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 Claresholm & District Chamber of Commerce?**

   Seventy-four respondents (40.4%) indicated they were Chamber members, while 109 respondents (59.6%) indicated they were not members of the Chamber.

5. **If not a member, Why?**

   Of the one hundred and nine respondents that indicated they held no Chamber membership, 31 indicated there was no particular reason they could give, 27 respondents indicated they were too busy running their own business and with other activities to become involved, 26 could see no benefit to their business from having a Chamber membership, ten had considered it , but hadn't yet purchased or had not been approached to purchase a membership, eight respondents had never considered joining, and three felt that the Chamber was an ineffectual organization in the community and district.

6. **Are you receiving value from your Chamber membership?**
   Of the 74 owner/operators that indicated they were Chamber members, fifty-three (71.6%) felt they were receiving value, while twenty-two (28.4.0%) indicated they were not presently receiving value from their membership.

   This reflects a reasonable satisfaction level for the Chamber among its members. However, there is also a level of dissatisfaction expressed by a percentage of members and suggests some improvements need to be made.

   Many of the responses found in question eight 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.

7. **As a business owner, do you feel the Chamber provides value to the community?**
   One hundred and thirty-one respondents (71.6% of all businesses surveyed) felt the Chamber did provide value to the community and district, 23 businesses (12.6%) suggested the Chamber did not provide value to community and district, while 29 businesses (15.8%) indicated they did not have enough information on Chamber activities to comment.

8. **What specific initiatives would you like the Chamber to undertake?**
   For fifty-six of the 183 owner/operators surveyed (30.6%) no ideas immediately came to mind although they were encouraged to contact the Chamber should they have thoughts to share in the future. Forty-six owner/operators (25.1%) did not have enough information on chamber activities to comment. This left 81 businesses that expressed ideas or initiatives they thought the Chamber should undertake.

   Twenty businesses expressed the need for the Chamber to improve business advocacy and support services, 18 businesses suggested the Chamber could assist the business community in advertising and promotional initiatives. Sixteen businesses would like to see the Chamber engage itself in discussions with the Town and the MD on strategic planning to assist with regional business development and another 14 would like to see the Chamber involved in business attraction initiatives. Eight businesses would like to see the Chamber, the Town, and the MD establish a closer working relationship to address issues of business concern, while another three respondents indicated they would like to see the Chamber establish better lines of communication with the business community.

9. **List any additional comments you have or information you would like to receive from the Community Futures Alberta Southwest, the Claresholm & District Chamber of Commerce, the Town of Claresholm, or the MD of Willow Creek.**

   CFABSW – One hundred and fifty-four respondents (84.2%) indicated they did not require any further information at this time from CFABSW. Nineteen owner/operators (9.8%) requested a basic information package. Three businesses requested specific information on loan products, while another three requested a copy of the final summary report. Of the remaining five requests, two concerned training; two concerned import/export information, one for transition planning material, and one for regular information on the southwest Alberta economy.

Claresholm & District Chamber of Commerce – Ninety-four respondents (57.3%) indicated they did not require any further information from the Chamber at this time. Fifteen businesses (9.0%) suggest that communication with membership and the business community is something the Chamber must address to be more effective. Thirteen businesses feel the Chamber is not effective as an organization that can meet its needs; several suggested a local value-added proposition was needed. Eleven businesses (6.7%) feel the organization is beginning to change and become more effective in the community. Four businesses felt the "Shop Local" promotion is a good program. Nine respondents (5.5%) are looking for the Chamber to offer more networking opportunities. Five businesses are looking for the Town and the Chamber to work more closely on addressing business issues in the community.

Town of Claresholm & the MD of Willow Creek– One-hundred and twenty-eight (69.9%) indicated they did not require any further information at this time from the Town or the MD (including the towns of Granum and Stavely). Thirteen respondents (7.1%) suggested that jurisdictions must improve their efforts to support business community needs by becoming more business friendly, developing a policy of "supporting local businesses first", and promoting local businesses within and outside the region. Eleven businesses indicated the Town should focus its efforts on business attraction with an emphasis on small industry businesses that generate good employment and can attract young families. Another seven respondents noted that the Town needs to expend more effort on organizational issues and developing a long-term strategic plan.

Five businesses (2.7%) indicated the Town must improve its communication and transparency with its stakeholders and the business community in order to move forward constructively in support of the business community. Five respondents feel the Town must address the issue of vacant downtown properties and absentee landlords as it affects the appeal of the downtown core. Several of these properties are not in tenable condition as they presently exist. Five businesses also expressed the need for their corresponding jurisdiction to address taxation issues. High business taxes in Claresholm were an issue. Home-based business taxes were a concern for businesses residing in the MD. By-law enforcement was mentioned by five businesses specifically as it related to unlicensed operators practicing business in the region, and the signage regulations. Four Claresholm businesses (2.2%) also indicated the Town needs to deal with the recycling issue.

Conclusion

The results of the project provide an honest representation of the Town of Claresholm and the MD of Willow Creek's business community's 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.

Sixty-three percent, or 183 businesses responded to the survey over a three-month period. The project had good representation from all the primary sectors in the community of Claresholm. Home-based businesses were the only under represented sector. Of the 37% of businesses (106 businesses) which were unreachable, or chose not to participate, home-based non-participation represents 36% (38 businesses) of that total.

The feedback from and analysis of this study 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

SECTION I: Primary Business Data Date: ______________________

Survey Entry Number:- ____________________
Business Name: -------- ____________________
Owner/Primary Contact ____________________
Mailing Address:-------- ____________________
Street Address: --------- ____________________
Phone: -------------------- ____________________
Cell Phone: -------------- ____________________
Fax: ------------------------ ____________________
Email: --------------------- ____________________
Website: ------------------ ____________________
Regular Business Hour ____________________

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 originally started? -- ________
4. What percent of the business do you own?-- ________
5. The business was established in Claresholm 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) Other-- ________
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 ---
    g) 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 (List)_____________

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 ___ Newsppr ___ Industry Ads ___ INet ___ E-mail ___ Word-of-M ___ Other (list)_________

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. Have you or your staff taken courses/programs on?

Marketing and Market Research ☐ Financing ☐ Accounting ☐ Business Planning and Plan Updating ☐ Customer Service ☐ Business Transition Planning ☐ Bidding on Government Contracts ☐ Social Media ☐

25. Would you or your staff attend one of the following if offered in the region?
Marketing and Market Research ☐ Financing ☐ Accounting ☐ Business Planning and Plan Updating ☐ Customer Service ☐ Business Transition Planning ☐ Bidding on Government Contracts ☐ Social Media ☐

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

SECTION IV: Future Plans for the Business:

26. 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 --------------------------------					
b. Sell to a new market---					
c. Research new markets ---------------------------------------					
d. Expand distribution channels---------------------------------					
e. Expand advertising and promotion -------------------------					
f. Invest in new equipment -------------------------------------					
g. Replace current equipment-----------------------------------					
h. Expand or relocate current facilities ------------------------					
i. Redesign current facilities ------------------------------------					
j. Seek additional financial capital ------------------------------					
k. Computerize or have presently computerized operations					
l. Upgrade computer systems ----------------------------------					
m. Redesign daily operating activities--------------------------					
n. Expand the scope of your operating activities ------------					
o. Seek professional or technical advice ---------------------					
p. Add unskilled labour---					
q. Add skilled labour --					
r. Invest in onsite training for employees---------------------					
s. Invest in offsite training for employees---------------------					

i. Description of positions you hire for ---------------------- ______________________________

ii. How many positions are 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? ______________________________

27. Is your businesses' primary market
Local? ________ Regional? _________ National? ________ International? ________

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

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

30. Do you require assistance or information to develop an export/import 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 --					
b. Ambulance Services --					
c. Health care ---					
d. Electric Services--					
e. Gas Services ---					
f. Sewer ---					
g. Water--					
h. Local Roads ---					
i. Traffic signs and lights --					
j. Signage – Business and Municipal ---------------------------					
k. Highways--					
l. Adequate/Appropriate Housing --------------------------------					
m. Local transportation --					
n. Education (K to 12) ---					
o. Education (Post-Secondary) ----------------------------------					
p. Industry Training --					
q. Locally Supplied Services and products---------------------					
r. Business Support Services ------------------------------------					
s. Local Recreation & Leisure Facilities ------------------------					
t. Other quality of Life Factors -----------------------------------					

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 Claresholm & District Chamber of Commerce? Yes ____ No____

37. If not a member, why? ____

38. As a member, are you receiving value from your Chamber membership? Yes _____ No____

39. As a business owner, do you feel the Chamber provides value to the community? Yes ___ No ___

40. What specific initiatives would you like to see the Chamber undertake? ________________________

____

41. List any Comments you have, or additional services or information you would like from Community Futures Alberta South West, the Chamber of Commerce or the Town.

____

____

____

____

Positions Requiring Post-secondary Training, Certification, Skilled Labour		
Management/Administration		
Admin/sales, parts, service technicians		
Bulk delivery driver, office **admin**, customer service		
Cashier, **manager**		
Cashier/ stock-person; **manager**		
Courtesy clerks, butchers, bakers, department **managers**		
Drivers, office **administration**		
Housekeeping, **management**		
Management		
Management and labourers		
Manager		
Managers, servers, packagers, meat cutters		
Mechanics, sales staff, **managers**, detailers		
Members Service Representatives, Executives, **Administration**		
Sales staff, **management**		
Sales, stock/setup personnel, assistant **manager**		
Sales. **management**, customer service		
Tax preparation, **administration**		
Truck Drivers, mechanics, dispatchers, office **administration**		
Working warehouse **manager**		
Clerk/**Supervisor**		
Supervisor/Cashier	Subtotal:	21
Business Support Personal (Assistants)		
Accountant **Assistants**		
Administrative assistant		
Assistant		
Assistant (licensed planner)		
Assistant stylist		
Assistant therapist		
Assistant; assistant accountant		
Clerical		
Clerical		
Clerical		
Clerical staff		
CSR Insurance Broker, **Reception**		
General **assistan**t with experience in the equine community		
General labourers, Class 1 drivers, **office personal**		
Grooming/boarding **assistants**		
Legal **assistants**		
Office and yard staff		
Office Assistant		
Office clerk		
Office personal		
Secretarial position		
Truck drivers, Mixer operators, **Office staff**		
	Subtotal:	22

Positions Requiring Post-secondary Training, Certification, Skilled Labour

Technicians/Professionals & Semi-professionals

Admin/sales, parts, service technicians	
Bookkeeper	
Bookkeeper, file maintenance, junior partner	
Bookkeeper, file maintenance, junior partner	
Bookkeeping, communications technician, researchers	
Bookkeeping, communications technician, researchers	
CSR Insurance Broker, Reception	
Funeral director, embalmer	
Heavy-duty mechanic, mechanical engineer or technician experienced in a number of disciplines	
Insurance Broker, Registry Clerk	
Insurance Broker, Registry Clerk	
Lawyer, support staff	
Licensed Realtors	
Para-professionals/aides for behavioral problems with two year diploma	
Pharmacists, pharmacist technicians, sales clerks, merchandise support staff	
Photographic technician to scan negatives	
Professional clerks	
Reporters, graphic designers, clerical staff	
Sales, parts and service, professional detailers, automotive service technicians	
Sales, pharmacists	
Specialized computer technician	
Technician; secretarial staff	
Teller	
Tellers, Financial planners	
Tire Technician, Mechanic	
Travel Consultant	Subtotal: 27
Travel Specialist	

Truck Drivers & Heavy Equipment Operators

Bulk delivery driver, office admin, customer service	
Class 1 drivers	
Delivery	
Drivers, general labourers	
Drivers, office administration	
Equipment operator	
Truck driver	
Truck drivers	
Truck drivers, labourers	
Truck drivers, mechanics, dispatchers, office administration	
Truck drivers, Mixer operators, Office staff	Subtotal: 11

Positions Requiring Post-secondary Training, Certification, Skilled Labour

Trades Staff

Aircraft maintenance engineers
Apprentice mechanic in auto repair
Apprentice plumber, general labourer
Apprentice through a mentor-ship
Apprentice welder/machinist, casting operator
Automotive blast technician
Automotive blast technician
Cabinet assembly personnel, finishing assistants, clean-up staff
Cook and counter sales
Cook, baker
Cook; server/front-end staff
Cooks, servers and dishwashers
Cooks/waitresses
Courtesy clerks, butchers, bakers, department managers
Courtesy clerks, butchers, bakers, department managers
Experienced carpenters and tradespeople
Heavy-duty mechanic, mechanical engineer or technician experienced in a number of disciplines
General mechanic
Grocery attendant, baker, meat cutter, sales clerk
Grocery attendant, baker, meat cutter, sales clerk
Journeyman auto mechanic
Labourers, carpenters
Meat cutters
Mechanical technicians
Skilled trades people - plumbing, electricians
Skilled trades people - plumbing, electricians
Skilled welders
Welders
Window installer — Subtotal: 29

Unique Skill Sets

Apprentice or senior stylist
Artistic skills
Barber apprentice
Experienced ranch hands
Experienced semi-skilled labour
Fitness trainers and dance instructors
Floral Designer
General labourers, office personal
Graphic designers
Graphic/website support
Groomer or shampooer
Grooming/boarding assistants
Hair stylist
Hair stylists
Personal trainer
Press operator
Saddle maker
Skilled labourers
Skilled labourers, general labourers
Webpage designer
Website administrator — Subtotal: 21

Positions Requiring Post-secondary Training, Certification, Skilled Labour: Total: 131

General Labour, Unskilled, or Staff to be Trained On-site		
Apprentice plumber, general labourer		
Drivers, general labourers		
General Labour		
General labour		
General Labour		
General labour		
General labourer		
General labourer		
General labourer		
General labourer		
General labourers		
General labourers		
General labourers		
General labourers		
General Labourers		
General labourers, Class 1 drivers, office personal		
Helper, general labourer		
Sales staff and greenhouse labour		
Skilled labourers, general labourers	Subtotal:	19
Food Services/Hotel & Motel		
Cashier/server		
Cook; server/front-end staff		
Cooks, servers and dishwashers		
Customer service, maintenance, safety		
Floor sweeper		
Front desk, housekeeping, grounds maintenance		
Front desk, housekeeping, grounds maintenance		
Front-desk, housekeeping		
Housekeeping, cooks, night and casual staff, call-ins, maintenance		
Housekeeping, cooks, night and casual staff, call-ins, maintenance		
Housekeeping, grounds maintenance		
Housekeeping, grounds maintenance		
Housekeeping, management		
Kitchen help, unskilled labour		
Kitchen help, unskilled labour		
Line workers and general labour		
Maintenance		
Managers, servers, packagers, meat cutters		
Part time cashier/server		
Servers		
Servers and cleaners		
Servers and cooks	Subtotal:	22

General Labour, Unskilled, or Staff to be Trained On-site		
Retail - Sales/Customer Service/Clerks (unskilled)		
Admin/sales, parts, service technicians		
Cashier/clerk, stock-person		
Clerk/Supervisor		
Clerks		
Clerks		
Clerks		
Clerks and cooks		
Cook and counter sales		
Counter assistant, planter		
Courtesy clerks, butchers, bakers, department managers		
Customer service		
Customer service representatives		
Customer service, maintenance, safety		
Data entry clerk		
Food counter attendant, Baker		
Front counter attendants, Cooks		
Grocery attendant, baker, meat cutter, sales clerk		
Grocery attendant, baker, meat cutter, sales clerk		
Mechanics, sales staff, managers, detailers		
Pharmacists, pharmacist technicians, sales clerks, merchandise support staff		
Pharmacists, pharmacist technicians, sales clerks, merchandise support staff		
Professional clerks		
Retail sales		
Sales		
Sales and service		
Sales clerk		
Sales clerk		
Sales staff		
Sales staff		
Sales staff and greenhouse labour		
Sales staff, management		
Sales staff, support staff, bookkeeping, janitorial		
Sales staff; stock-person		
Sales, pharmacists		
Sales, stock/setup personnel, assistant manager		
Sales, truck drivers		
Sales. management, customer service		
Store clerk	Subtotal:	39

Notes

Community Futures

Growing communities one idea at a time.

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Western Economic Diversification Canada

Diversification de l'économie de l'Ouest Canada