



WCD

DEC 2015

Waterfront Commercial District Business Visitations Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

PROJECT SCOPE

In 2015 the Sylvan Lake Chamber of Commerce was engaged by the Town of Sylvan Lake, at the direction of the Business Recruitment Team to conduct visitations with businesses in the Waterfront Commercial District (WCD) of Sylvan Lake. The survey goal was to identify issues, hurdles and challenges faced by businesses in this district. An additional section of the survey was also used to determine the level of interest businesses would have in the establishment of a Waterfront Commercial District entity as a subsection of the Chamber.

Using a survey format with questions approved by Vicki Kurz, Economic Development Officer of Sylvan Lake, as well as Keri Pratt, Board Member of the Chamber who oversees the WCD portfolio in 2015. Surveys were conducted by Denise Williams, Executive Director of the Sylvan Lake Chamber of Commerce, with Chamber Director Keri Pratt as the portfolio owner on the project.

PROVISION OF SERVICES

In addition to the direct in person surveys that were conducted, between May through December, the Chamber also partnered with the Town to coordinate and promoting the following events:

- April: Open House kick-off event with theme of cooperative marketing and tourism. A Tourism Alberta representative as guest speaker presenting marketing insights and opportunities.
- September – October Roger Brooks Webinars to educate and motivate WCD businesses and property owners with on how other North American communities have overcome similar challenges and revitalized their downtown areas.

PROFILE OF BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS

A sample size of 87 business visitations were conducted:

- 25 Retailers
- 15 Restaurants
- 20 Professional/Essential Service
- 11 Salons/Spa/Tattoo
- 4 Non-Profit Organizations
- 8 Hospitality/Recreation
- 4 Automotive/Service

SURVEY SUMMARY

Survey Summary

NUMBER OF BUSINESSES SURVEYED THAT HAVE A CURRENT BUSINESS LICENSE

- 100%

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION IN CURRENT LOCATION

- 90% businesses surveyed stated they were satisfied with the location of their business
- 8% businesses surveyed stated they were moderately satisfied with their location
- 2% stated they were unsatisfied with their location

This question in the survey was to gain an indication of whether surveyed businesses/organizations felt their location offered them the best opportunity for success in Sylvan Lake. The majority indicated they were satisfied. Those who were not satisfied cited that they felt they would have better success in the newer commercial area of Sylvan Lake, or that they needed more space which is not available in the WCD. That said, this does not mean that businesses surveyed were without challenges/concerns.

OVERALL PERCEPTION OF THE WATERFRONT COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

- 43% Happy with improvements
- 52% It's good but needs more improvements
- 5% Believe it substandard to what it should be

The majority of businesses and organizations in the WCD recognize that Lakeshore Drive is aesthetically pleasing, and when they indicated improvements were needed were referencing areas outside of the central area of Lakeshore Drive. Those who believe it is substandard have major concerns with past decisions made (losing parking on both sides of the street, washrooms blocking view, development on lake side).

SURVEY SUMMARY

NUMBER OF BUSINESSES WHO ARE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEMBERS

- 40% Chamber Members
- 60% Non-Chamber Members

References whether business/organization was a Chamber Member at the time of the survey. Post survey, 4 businesses initiated membership and 15 have indicated they are considering or will become Chamber Members in 2016. Additionally, all non-members but two opted to receive emails from the Chamber.

BUSINESS SPACE – LEASED OR OWNED?

- 21% of those surveyed own space they are in
- 79% lease the space they are in

PLANS FOR EXTERIOR BUILDING IMPROVEMENT

- 5% of businesses indicated they expected to make exterior building improvements
- 36% of businesses indicated no exterior building improvements would be made
- 59% stated that they were unaware if exterior building improvements would be made

*The majority of businesses surveyed were not property owners as shown in the question above and therefore could not confidently speak for the plans of the property owners to make any exterior modifications or improvements. **Several businesses in older buildings who leased spaced stated that improvements would help/enhance their business but that they have no influence over those decisions.***

DOES A COMMITTEE/GROUP NEED TO BE FORMED TO REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF BUSINESSES/PROPERTY OWNERS/ORGANIZATIONS IN THE WCD

- 62% businesses surveyed feel that there should be a committee/group established
- 35% maybe – we need more information
- 3% said they do not think it's necessary

The majority of those surveyed felt that it would be a good idea have a dedicated group to oversee the WCD, though conversations indicated a lack of interest in being an active part of the committee themselves. My

SURVEY SUMMARY

opinion is that this question would be better answered when more information can be given on responsibilities and opportunities and role an organized body would play.

SHOULD THIS COMMITTEE OVERSEEN BY THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

- 34% businesses surveyed strongly believe that the Chamber should be involved
- 46% businesses surveyed Chamber involvement in a waterfront entity would be a good idea
- 7% said the Chamber should definitely NOT be involved and that it should be an independent body
- 13% people stated they could not give an opinion without more information

When presented with the option, the majority indicated that they felt it would be appropriate for the Chamber of Commerce to be involved, with the understanding that the Chamber needs to represent Chamber Members and Membership would be required. Those who indicated no, did so stating that it did not necessarily need to be organized/overseen by the Chamber or fell into the group that did not think a WCD entity is needed at all.

Parking

Parking was identified as a key issues of concern in the WCD in the summer months.

BUSINESSES WITH PRIVATE STAFF PARKING

- 40% have a few dedicated staff parking stalls.
- 60% do not have dedicated staff parking stalls or enough of them with staff parking wherever they can.

Many businesses have a few dedicated parking stalls for their staff which is fine for businesses and organizations with only a few staff. Others have staff park where they can find stalls. Many complain of summer visitors taking their stalls on occasion and try to monitor as well as they can.

IS THERE ENOUGH PARKING FOR CUSTOMERS/CLIENTS

- 62% There is enough convenient parking for my customers/clients
- 38% There is not enough convenient parking for my customers/clients

While the majority indicate there is enough parking for their customers with several stating part of the reason is that there are so many vacancies in the WCD and that it was a bigger problem in the past – *should that change they would have more challenges*. Professional Services that work by appointment, businesses close to parking lot on corner of 50th and Centennial have sufficient parking.

The majority of businesses surveyed that were restaurants and retailers indicated that there is not enough parking mostly in the peak tourism season which is attributed to people taking up prime spots for the entire day, even where there is a time limited parking spot. While they agree more monitoring is needed, they don't want to "over" monitor either and discourage visitors by handing out too many tickets.

PARKING

CENTENNIAL PARK – PAID PARKING

- 53% of those surveyed believe that charging for parking in Centennial Park is a good idea
- 47% think it would not be a good idea.

This could potentially be a hot topic of concern in the WCD. While more of those surveyed were for paid parking, the split is very close and everyone had an opinion.

Those opposed believe that charging visitors to park will be a deterrent noting that the number of visitors seems to have declined from their perspective. Several voiced whether this would be the right time to make a move to paid parking. Concerns that this will only encourage people to park where they should not park and add to the problem, or will keep people from visiting Sylvan Lake.

Those who believe charging visitors to park is a good idea referencing other towns that they have visited that charge for parking. They recognize that the people who use the lake should have to pay for the privilege especially if the fee is reasonable.

HOW SHOULD PROFITS USED IF TOWN CREATES PAID PARKING AT CENTENNIAL PARK?

- To maintain the WCD
- To maintain Centennial Park
- Acquire/create more parking
- Use funds to create more festivals/concerts
- Hire more staff to maintain the WCD and monitor parking and maintain park (create jobs)
- More Fireworks
- More entertainment to draw locals and visitors to Sylvan Lake
- Public Murals on buildings

PARKING ISSUES/CONCERNS

- Accessible parking for the physically disabled to essential services like medical clinics, pharmacies, and banks needs to be made a priority by the town.
- The narrowing of Lakeshore Drive – taking away parking on both sides of the street has hurt their business is an opinion held by a few, however other businesses stated that they felt the decision has made Lakeshore Drive safer for visitors.
- With plans to revamp Centennial Street there is concern about the negative impact road work will have on their businesses.
- Concern that making part of Centennial Street one-way will impact vehicles towing boats/trailers, add to parking problems and deter people from the area.
- Speed bumps are too high, guests/visitors comment on difficulty to tow boats/trailers for example.
- Better signage is needed to direct visitors to parking lots
- Make use of underground parking at corner of Lakeshore Drive and Centennial Street if possible
- Better/more efficient monitoring of parking violations needed
- Quicker road clearing is needed in the winter months to not interrupt parking

ISSUES/CONCERNS

The following are areas of concern for businesses surveyed and a collection of their comments about other factors affecting the area, followed by suggestions/solutions/ideas.

- Area Aesthetics
 - High number of vacant store fronts
 - Run-down exteriors
 - Out-dated signage (signs advertising business no longer in existence)
 - Increase in litter and vandalism
 - Restrictive Land-Use bylaws
 - Grading of roads not being done in a timely manner
 - Weeds/landscaping on the west side of Lakeshore Drive and other areas outside of the main part of Lakeshore Drive
 - Sidewalk needs completion
 - Other areas of WCD outside of Lakeshore Drive need some TLC
 - Weeds/still/swampy water at 33rd Street by gas station
- Lack of competition
 - Need more retail shops
 - Need more family/child friendly businesses in the area
 - People don't think of Sylvan Lake as a place to shop
- Signage
 - Better signage needed to direct visitors to shops/services in other areas of WCD
 - Better signage needed to direct visitors to parking
 - Better signage to direct to washrooms
 - Too many restrictions on signage
 - Types of signs and where they can be located
 - Not enough places for posters to drive people to other businesses/events
- Traffic
 - Closure of Hwy 781 has impacted traffic/accessibility to WCD
 - No regular shuttle service to/from Red Deer
 - Concern about making a portion of Centennial Street a one way
 - Impact on parking
 - Accessibility for people with mobility issues
 - Navigation difficulties for vehicles towing trailers/boats

ISSUES/CONCERNS

- Impact on business/general accessibility/sales during the street work
- Tourism
 - Needs to be better managed
 - More promotion of Sylvan Lake needed outside of Sylvan Lake (radio/print)
 - Better promotion of events in Sylvan Lake
 - Not a “town for all seasons” more winter events so less dependency on the summer season alone
 - Noticeable decrease in tourism in 2015
 - Lack of a beach
 - No affordable boat launch in town – better communication needed to let people know where to launch
 - No mooring to encourage visitors to shop/eat/play for the day
 - Beach Ambassador Program needs improvement
- Mobile Vending
 - Splitting dollars does not make sense when businesses are not thriving
 - Mobile venders do not have to pay the high costs of a bricks and mortar business
 - Bad timing
- Other:
 - High property taxes for businesses in WCD
 - Lack of or slow responsiveness from the town to complaints, questions, inquiries
 - Town website hard to navigate to get answers
 - Unsafe train crossing
 - Tourism lot is not well lit
 - Public Washroom needed on south end of Lakeshore Drive
 - Speed Bumps on Lakeshore Drive discourage visitors with boats/trailers
 - Speeding on west part of lakeshore drive

SOLUTIONS/IDEAS OFFERED

- Tourism
 - Create and promote more off-season events
 - Ice festival
 - Sleigh rides
 - More lights/music/hot chocolate at outdoor skating rink
 - More businesses putting up Christmas Lights

ISSUES/CONCERNS

- Sylvan Lake/Red Deer shuttles
- Shuttle from the parking to beach so people with kids and equipment can be dropped off
- Better signage to direct people to all areas of WCD
- Dedicated location for bulletin board promoting upcoming events at the beach/posters
- More advertising outside of Sylvan Lake (radio/print)
- More music festivals – and encourage them to use local vendors for food etc
- Bring back the beach
- Create day mooring
- Affordable boat launch
- Encourage editors of travel publications to visit/press releases
- Businesses cross promoting one another
- Improve the Beach Ambassador Program
 - Constant promotion of upcoming events
 - Referrals to different businesses/shopping/areas
 - More engagement with visitors
- Attract the locals back to the WCD
 - Businesses should come up with incentives to bring locals to the area. Shared ideas included:
 - “Best Burger” competition
 - Food Festival like Taste of Calgary/Edmonton
 - Food, music, hot chocolate, lights at the outdoor rink
 - Moonlight Madness Events
 - Businesses partnering together with marketing programs / events
 - Moonlight Madness Events
 - Treasure Hunts
- Chamber Marketing Programs
 - Local Discount Cards
 - Re-introduce Chamber Bucks Program
- Other suggestions
 - Re-introduce VLT’s
 - Re-open Hwy 781
 - Better lighting of parking lot on corner of Centennial and 50th
 - Complete the sidewalk on Lakeshore Drive to improve foot traffic
 - Another washroom on south end of Lakeshore Drive
 - Reduce the size of the speed bumps

ISSUES/CONCERNS

IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES FOR A WATERFRONT COMMERCIAL DISTRICT ENTITY

- Steady/regular out-going communication stream with businesses in the area under an organized banner through a monthly newsletter.
 - Improved communication from town/chamber/tourism
 - Direct links to resources
 - Regular opinion polls to the newsletter list for quick feedback on upcoming initiatives and challenges
 - Sharing of marketing opportunities that would benefit the area
 - Suggestions/information sharing of programs and ideas
- Dedicated website/facebook page/twitter feed for the WCD area used only for promotional purposes, actively monitored to ensure it is not being abused
 - Use to promote joint marketing initiatives, special events
 - Links to/from the Sylvan Lake Tourism Site, Town of Sylvan Lake, Chamber
- Improved cross-promotion where it makes sense
 - Stretch marketing dollars
 - Drive locals to the area