

# Municipality of East Ferris

## Report to Council

Report No.: COMM-2026-02

Date: January 27, 2026

Originator: Connor Montgomery

Subject: Information Report - Business Retention and Expansion Plan and Community Organization Outreach and Review

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### BACKGROUND

In 2022, the Municipality of East Ferris updated its Economic Development Strategy. In the updated version, various goals are set that are to be implemented over five years. One such goal, under *Strategic Priority: Business Support Services*, is to “enhance outreach and supports to the business and non-profit community to foster a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem.” A suggested action item to achieve this is to “Develop an annual business outreach initiative, modelled after the Business Retention + Expansion program as a mechanism to connect with businesses and organizations to identify challenges and opportunities and assist with eliminating any barriers to growth.”

In 2024, municipal staff reviewed the municipality's Business Retention + Expansion Plan. The municipality's plan was completed by Karen Jones Consulting Inc. in 2015, using the then standard formalized process and methodology of the Ontario BR+E program. The 2024 survey was modified from the 2015 plan survey by streamlining the more than ninety questions to a more manageable twenty-six questions and changing some of the format of questions to allow for business owners to provide more open-ended answers. The substance of the questions was not significantly changed from the original 2015 plan survey.

Over the course of two months, eighty-seven businesses were contacted for this survey, fifty-one businesses responded with fourteen stating they had closed, providing a sample size of thirty-seven. In the 2015 plan, one-hundred-thirty businesses were contacted and thirty-one responded. The objective of the 2024 plan was to gain insights into the business conditions in East Ferris, with particular attention to land, labour, and capital. In addition, the survey provided business owners the opportunity to provide feedback to the municipality about services as well as plans for their firms.

From the information gathered, the municipality was able to identify possible resources for businesses to help solve their unique challenges. These resources included information on the expansion of fiber optics, business networking institutions, intermediaries to connect businesses with potential employees, assistance for businesses to train employees, planning process and building permit aid, and succession planning resources. Based on the feedback, the respondents who indicated that the lack of internet access, poor internet speed, or internet

costs were informed of the progress made by the municipality, who advocated to the Federal and Provincial governments, and Bell Canada to provide highspeed internet access to East Ferris. According to Bell Canada, the project is on schedule and work will continue throughout 2026.

Business owners who indicated the need for business networking resources were directed to the North Bay District Chamber of Commerce – in accordance with previous Council instructions – as well as information regarding the Small Business Enterprise Centre and the East Ferris Trade Show. For those business owners who stated that they had workforce problems, they were directed to two organizations - Yes Employment and Canadore College, as both organizations have job portals as well as generous subsidy programs for businesses who hire workers from their networks. If employee training was mentioned as a barrier, the business owner was notified of the Canada-Ontario Job Grant which is a grant program that subsidizes a portion of employee training costs. Some business owners expressed difficulty navigating the planning process and building permits required in East Ferris. They were given the contact information of those municipal employees who can assist them. Lastly, those business owners who indicated that they wanted to sell their business were given the contact information of a third-party consulting firm that specializes in succession planning.

In addition to contacting businesses, municipal staff also contacted and interviewed fifteen community organizations to better understand the challenges of running a private non-profit organization in East Ferris. The information taken from this survey, found in Appendix 2, can be used as a proxy indicating the level of civic participation, or social capital. Stated very briefly, the general consensus in the literature is that high social capital exists prior to, and independent from, desirable economic situations, as seen in measurements from productivity to the standard of living. Therefore, the information taken from the Community Organization Outreach and Review Questionnaire should supplement, and not replace, the information taken from Business Retention and Expansion Questionnaire.

### **Key Points from the Business Retention and Expansion Questionnaire:**

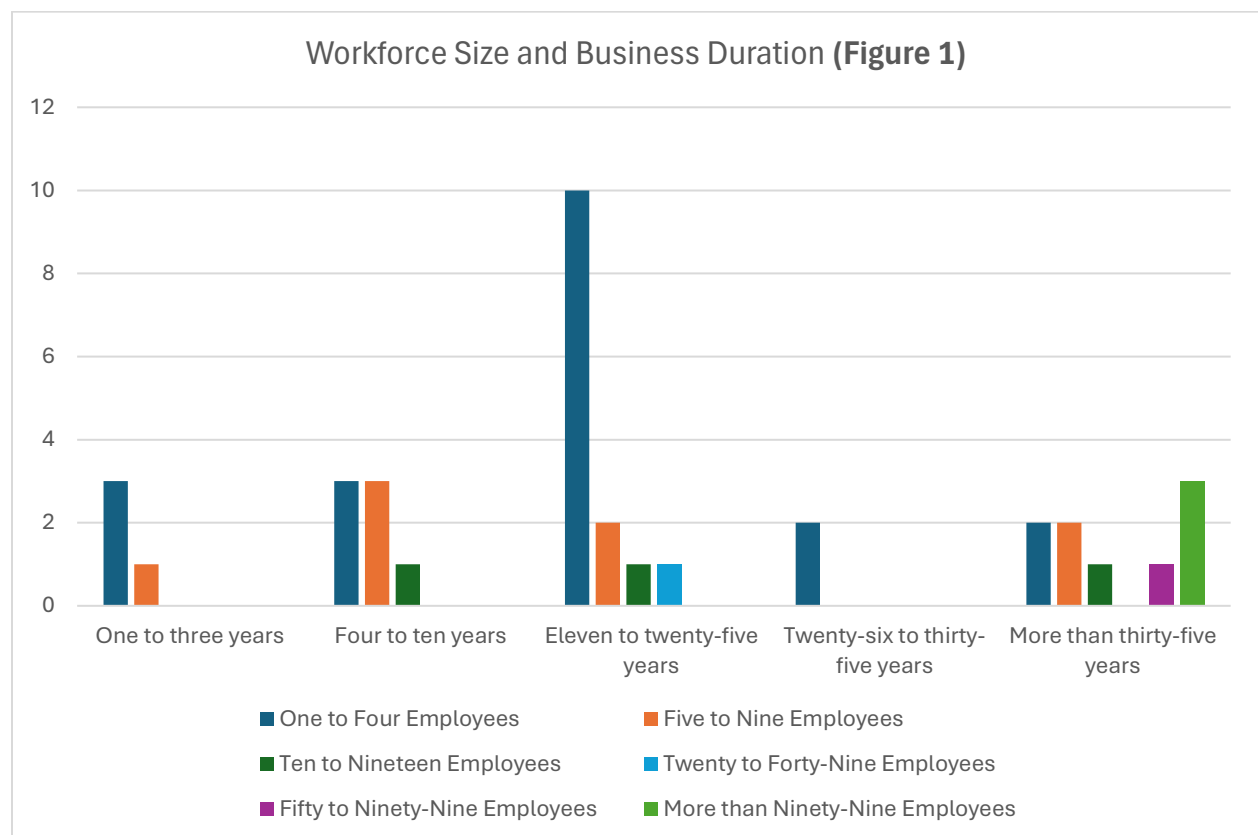
- 35% of business owners have a business plan
- 88% of business owners indicated the primary market of their business is local
- 81% of business owners stated this community is a good place to do business
- 29% of business owners have plans to expand within the next eighteen months
- 56% of business owners expected their projected revenues in the next year to increase
- 82% of business owners own the facility from which they operate
- 36% of business owners indicated some difficulty hiring employees
- 8% of business owners expressed difficulty retaining employees
- 44% of businesses participate in a co-op, internship, or apprenticeship programs
- 8% of business owners stated there are barriers for their employees receiving the necessary training

- 31% of business owners rated internet service and natural gas availability as the most in need of improvement to help do business in the community
- Garbage and recycle collection, followed by street and road repair, was rated as the community service most in need of improvement

### Key Points from the Community Organization Outreach and Review Questionnaire:

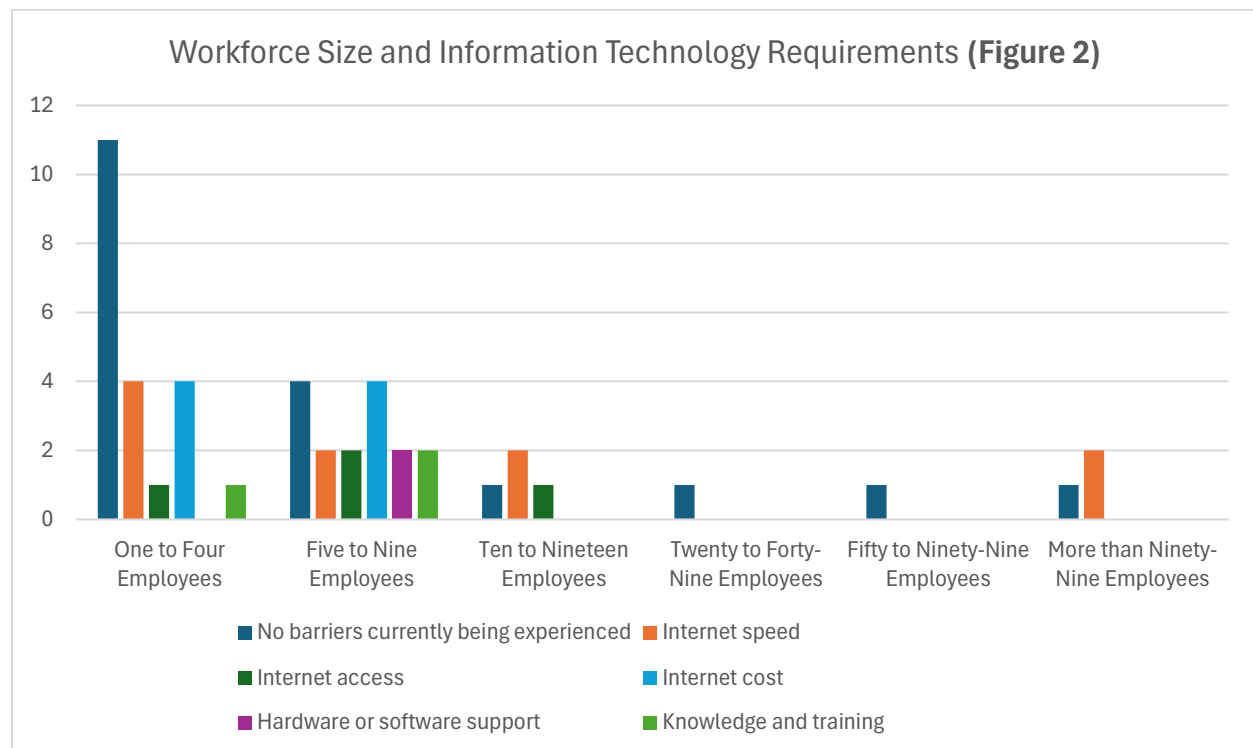
- 73% of community organizations have operated for twenty-five years or more
- 66% of community organizations rely, in part or totally, upon senior participation, either as managers, volunteers, or members
- 53% of community organizations have more women than men; only 33% have more men than women
- 26% of community organizations had a decline in the total number of volunteers
- 53% of community organizations currently have difficulty finding volunteers

## CORRELATION ANALYSIS

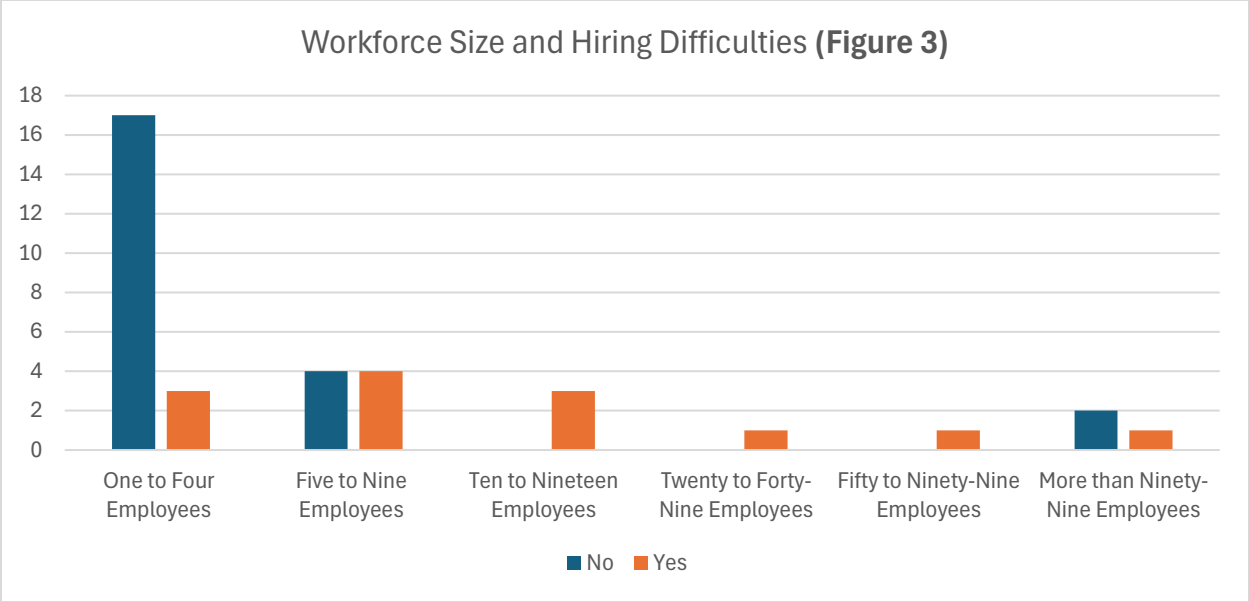


**Figure 1** shows the correlation between business size, measured according to the number of employees, and the duration a business has operated in East Ferris. The Y-Axis is the number

of businesses; the X-Axis shows five groups of businesses by the approximate length of their operations as well as the number of workers each business employs. Two positive inferences can be made from **Figure 1**: firstly, continuous business creation and retention is evidenced by an even rate of businesses across each time group (1.3, 1.16, 0.93, and 0.2 per year per time cohort respectively); secondly, three of the four businesses employing more than fifty employees began as much smaller firms and have grown to their current size. This suggests that the business environment in East Ferris can allow firms to expand given sufficient time and economic demand. Lacking in the sample is an example of large external private sector investment creating a business in East Ferris that employs more than fifty workers.

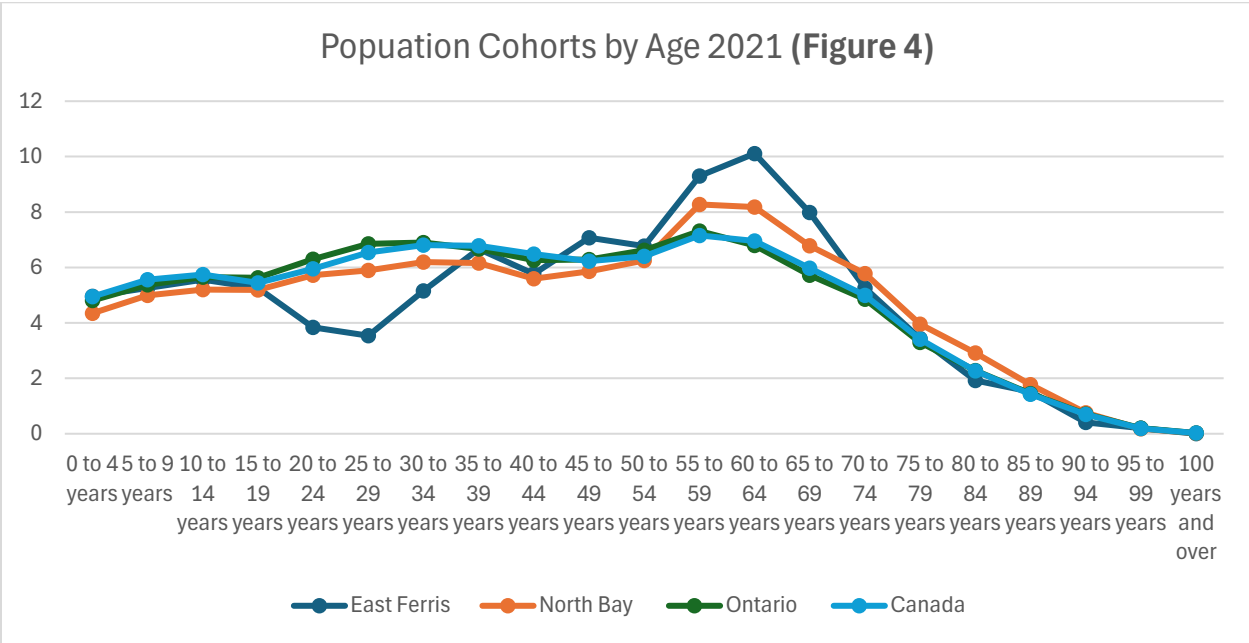


**Figure 2** shows the correlation of business size with the business' information technology needs. The Y-Axis is the number of businesses; and the X-Axis shows five groups of businesses by the approximate length of their operations and their reported technology needs. Most technological challenges are faced by businesses with fewer than ten employees. If the supposition that the number of employees is an effective proxy for business size, then it is probable that smaller businesses have not reached an economy of scale at which it is cost effective to either employ or contract a tech specialist to overcome some of these challenges. Also, some technical challenges, such as internet speed, are dependent upon the broader infrastructure. Such challenges lie outside business' discretion.



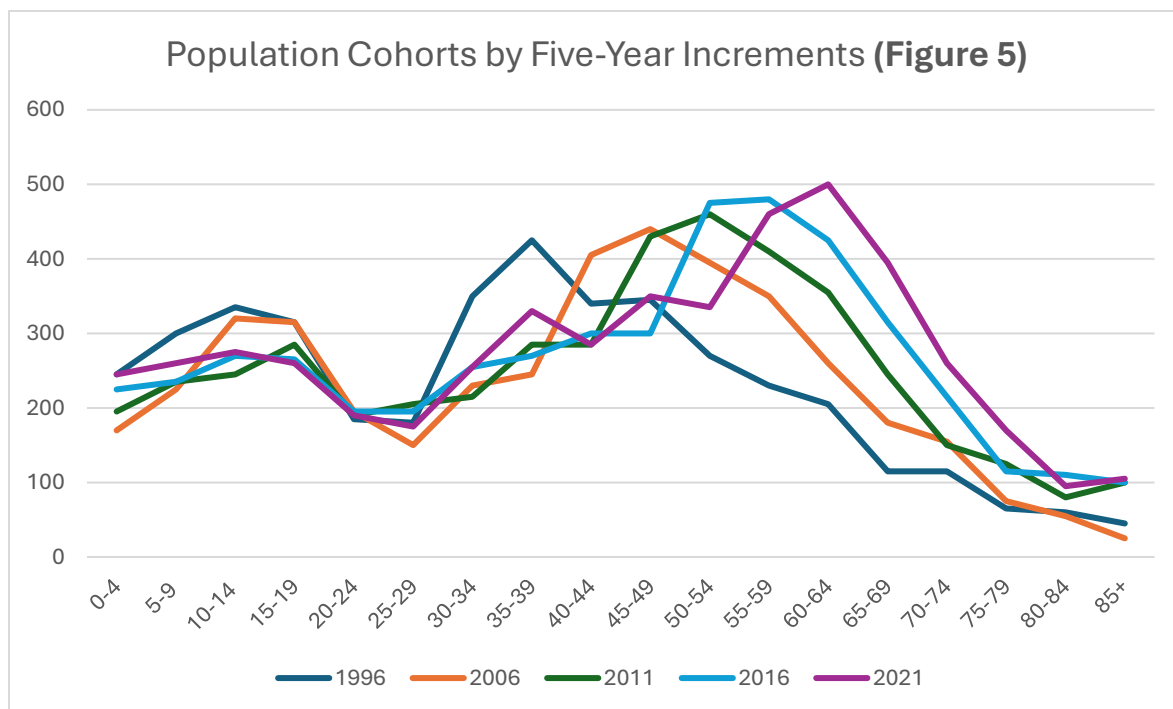
**Figure 3** illustrates the correlation between business size and self-reported difficulties hiring new workers. **Figure 3** shows businesses of all sizes face difficulties hiring workers. It also shows that a vast majority of businesses do not face challenges hiring workers when they employ four or fewer workers. It is likely that these businesses are run solely by the owner and family; or, along with the four businesses employing five to nine workers that also do not face challenges hiring workers, have no need or intention to increase their workforce. Nevertheless, businesses of all sizes face challenges hiring workers.

## FURTHER ANALYSIS



**Figure 4** shows the populations of East Ferris, North Bay, Ontario, and Canada distributed by each age cohort's total percentage of its respective population. So, for example, the age cohort 60-64 constitutes 10 percent of East Ferris's total population. Broadly, Ontario and Canada have a very similar population profile, which, doubtlessly, is caused by the fact that Ontario makes up a large portion of Canada's population. Compared to Ontario and Canada, North Bay has fewer people as a percentage of its population in every age cohort from 0-4 to 50-54, after which, it has more old people as a percentage of its population from 55-59 until the 90-94 age cohort. Regarding East Ferris, it has a similar portion of youths aged 0 to 19 as the province and country, but from the ages 20 to 29 sees a very large trend of emigration. The trend of out-youth migration seems not to fully recover until the 35-39 cohort, after which, East Ferris is not exceptional until one observes the 55-59 cohort. East Ferris has a total of 1,355 residents in the three age cohorts, 50-54, 55-59, and 60-64, which constitutes 27 percent, or more than one quarter, of its total population.

There are many implications, both economic and social, to having an aging population. First, firms usually operate with a pyramid structure, with more entry-level or frontline workers than middle managers, and with more middle managers than senior executives and owners. Accordingly, the shortage of young workers imposes a constraint upon possible business growth. This could be mitigated in practice if businesses were willing to compensate young workers from North Bay to commute to East Ferris; however, this would increase labour costs, which itself imposes a limitation of business growth. Further insights into the social and economic implications become clear when considering past and future trends.



**Figure 5** shows the population of East Ferris distributed by each age cohort's total population from the census years 1996, 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021 – census year 2001 had poor data, and so it has been excluded. Before considering the future implications of East Ferris's age profile, three things about the past trends should be noted: one, the trend of out-youth migration has existed since at least the middle of the 1990s and has involved a consistent number of East Ferris's young adults. This suggests that the causes are perennial and structural, and therefore, likely irremediable from the point of view of a municipal government. Two, the total population has been growing gradually from 4,139 in 1996, to 4,945 in 2021. This is an increase of almost 20 percent. And three, the baby boom generation is the largest generation in history, as can be seen in the peaks in **Figure 5**, and the disparity between the baby boomers and all subsequent generations is greater in East Ferris than it is nationally. **Figure 5** shows the baby boom generation as it has aged.

This raises the second implication, as the baby boomers continue to age, they will enter retirement and work less, they will spend less money – spending peaks, usually, in one's late forties or early fifties, – and some will sell their homes to downsize or move into assisted living. In some instances, the needs of the elderly will be better accommodated outside of East Ferris, therefore, it is probable that East Ferris will experience out-senior migration. Coupled with the facts found in an actuary table, East Ferris's population growth may stall or reverse. To avoid too much speculation, one can merely ask the questions: What will the effects on the housing market in East Ferris be, both in terms of house construction and house prices, if population growth stops or reverses? What will be the effects on municipal finances if the tax base stops growing or declines? How will municipal services change, or not change, when a larger portion of the population becomes less independent?

The third implication, and one closely connected with the second, is that the number of businesses in East Ferris may decline as many baby boomers retire. Some of these businesses will have in place a succession plan that allows for the continued operation of the business, and business creation will continue, but there will likely be a shift in the ratio of businesses closing to businesses opening. The increase in the number of businesses closing, even if completely counteracted by the creation of new business, will lead to an increase in the turnover of the workforce.

Beyond possible economic effects, there are social effects to an aging population. In terms of social capital and its relationship to civil participation, baby boomers not only participate more than Generation X in absolute terms – due to its greater size – but per capita, the average baby boomer volunteers more, is a member to more organizations, and donates more than the average member of Generation X. Generation X does so more than Generation Y (millennials), and Generation Y does more than Generation Z (zoomers). This disparity exists both when comparing one generation to another now and when comparing generations when they are the same age. In other words, the disparity cannot be attributed to life-cycle factors. So, for example, older generations in their twenties did more than younger generations do in their twenties; and older generations do more today than younger generations will do when they

reach the same age. Consequently, certain social organizations that are flourishing now will likely experience membership and volunteer recruitment challenges.

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## CONCLUSION

This report is intended to provide an overview of the data collection process that took place in 2025 and offer some potential insights into the implications of the data. At this time, staff are not recommending any direct actions based on this information; however, the data will be used to support and guide future review processes and decisions in relevant projects.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Connor Montgomery  
Economic Development Officer

I concur with this report,  
and recommendation



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Greg Kirton, RPP, MCIP  
Director of Community Services



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Jason Trottier, HBBA, MPA, CPA, CMA  
CAO/Treasurer



## APPENDIX ONE

### Business Retention and Expansion Questionnaire Answers

1. Did you participate in the 2015 Business Retention and Expansion Plan Survey?

Yes	3
No	27
Unsure	7

2. Does your business have a business plan?

Yes	13
No	24

3. How many years has your business been operating in this community?

Less than one year	0
One to three years	3
Four to ten years	9
Eleven to twenty-five years	14
Twenty-six to thirty-five years	2
More than thirty-five years	9

4. Including owner(s), how many employees work at this location?<sup>1</sup>

One to four	20
Five to nine	8
Ten to Nineteen	3
Twenty to Forty-nine	1
Fifty to Ninety-nine	1
More than Ninety-nine	3

5. The primary market of your business is<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No distinction is made between parttime or fulltime workers, nor between employees and subcontractors, *etc.* Additionally, not all workers are residents of East Ferris. Moreover, one respondent indicated that they did not work in East Ferris, and consequently, they have not been included in this count.

<sup>2</sup> Two respondents replied, "local and national" and "local, national, and international". They are not included in the final count.

Local <sup>3</sup>	31
National	0
International	4

6. What is your general impression of this community as a place to do business?<sup>4</sup>

Good	29
Neutral	1
Conditional good	1
Bad	3
Does not do business in East Ferris	1
No opinion	1

7. In the past three years has your attitude about doing business in this community changed?

No Change	28
Improved	5
Worsened	3

8. Within the next eighteen months, which do you plan on doing?<sup>5</sup>

Remaining the same	24
Expanding	10
Downsizing	0

9. In terms of the number of employees working at your business, how great will the increase or decrease be?

Out of twenty-four business owners who plan on expanding, nine have plans to increase their workforce and one is unsure. No business owners plan on cutting their workforce.

10. If eligible, would you like to receive information on potential federal or provincial programs or services that might assist with your expansion?

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<sup>3</sup> “Provincial” has been included under the “Local” option.

<sup>4</sup> One respondent did not answer questions 6 through 26.

<sup>5</sup> One respondent stated that their expansion was dependent upon available space; another respondent stated that their plans were dependent upon market conditions. They have not been included in the count.

Out of those eligible businesses, ten would like to receive information on potential federal or provincial programs. One eligible business would not like to receive such information.

11. If your business is facing difficulties with your expansion plans, what support could the municipality provide to support your expansion?

Answers included: publicity from the municipality; building a new facility on Corbeil Road; information on the facade improvement grant.

12. Are your projected revenues in the next year expected to<sup>6</sup>

Increase	20
Decrease	4
Remain the same	10
Unsure	2

13. Is your business currently experiencing any barriers related to your information technology requirements?

No barriers currently being experienced	19
Internet speed	10
Internet access	3
Internet cost	8
Hardware or software support	1
Knowledge and training	3
Other (please specify)	

14. Does your business own or lease its facility or facilities?<sup>7</sup>

Own	28
Lease	6

15. Does your business own or lease its facility or facilities - Do you anticipate any problems in renewing the lease?

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<sup>6</sup> Answers prefaced by “hope” or general expressions of preference have been placed in the “Unsure” option. An expected increase predicated upon inflation is, obviously, placed in the “Remain the Same” option; however, it is unclear whether respondents were in fact incorporating future inflation into their expected revenue streams.

<sup>7</sup> One company does not operate from a facility. Another company does not operate from East Ferris, but rents in North Bay. Neither company has been included in this count.

Yes	0
No	6

16. During the past three years, by how many people has your workforce changed?<sup>8</sup>

Increase	7
Decrease	3
No change <sup>9</sup>	18

17. How would you rate the following factors in this community for your business needs?<sup>10</sup>

Availability of qualified workers	13
Stability of the workforce	3
Ability to attract new employees	9
Ability to retain new employees	6
None of the above	19

18. Does your business currently have difficulty hiring

Yes	13
No	23

19. Does your business currently have difficulty hiring – How would you describe your company's hiring challenges?<sup>11</sup>

Too few applicates	7
Lack of appropriate skills or training	7
Lack of relevant experience	6
Other	1
None of the above	20

20. Does your business have difficulty retaining employees?

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<sup>8</sup> The number listed signifies the number of respondents who indicated an increase, decrease, or no change, rather than the change in the number of employees. No distinction is made between total change and turnover.

<sup>9</sup> This option was not explicitly given to the respondents. Moreover, this answer does not distinguish between employers without employees and employers with employees.

<sup>10</sup> There was no "none of the above" option available on the survey. In addition, each number represents a negative rating to each factor.

<sup>11</sup> There was no "none of the above" option available on the survey. Moreover, despite the obvious connection between question 18 and question 19, three respondents answered "No" to question 18 and yet still provided an affirmative answer to question 19.

Yes	3
No	33

21. Does your business currently participate in any co-op, internship, or apprenticeship programs?

Yes	16
No	20

22. Does your business currently participate in any co-op, internship, or apprenticeship programs? – If no, are you interested in information?<sup>12</sup>

Yes	5
No	31

23. Are there currently any barriers for you or your employees receiving the necessary training?

Yes	3
No	33

24. Which would you rate as the most in need of improvement to help do business in this community?

Availability of serviced land	3
Land costs	4
Availability of space for rent or lease	6
Development or building permit process	3
Development charges	1
Availability of adequate housing	4
Municipality property taxes	4
Local roads and streets	5
Availability of health and medical services	4
Cellular phone service	6
Internet service	11
Cost of electricity	5

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<sup>12</sup> Some businesses that already participated in a co-op, internship, or apprenticeship program did want additional information, others did not. Therefore, answers for question 22 and 23 cannot be viewed as mutually inclusive or exclusive, and no correlation can be drawn without further analysis. Additionally, one respondent said “maybe” and another said “possibly”. Both answers have been included in the “Yes” option. Moreover, despite the obvious connection between question 21 and question 22, four respondents provided affirmative answers to question 22.

Availability of natural gas	11
Cost of natural gas	

25. From the perspective of your business, rate your level of satisfaction with each of the following community services<sup>13</sup>

Workforce planning and development board	0
Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade	1
Business Improvement Area (BIA)	0
Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC)	1
Small Business Enterprise Centre	1
Planning, engineering, zoning, and building permits	1
Health department and health unit approvals	0
Police services	1
Fire services	0
Library services	0
Recreational facilities	2
Cultural facilities	0
Parks and open spaces	0
Street and road repair	5
Snow removal	1
Garbage and recycle collection	6
Economic development services	2
None of the above <sup>14</sup>	18

26. What assistance or opportunities would be beneficial to support your business?

Updating business plan	3
Succession planning	2
Marketing seminars	8
Access to capital seminars	5
Trade shows	5 <sup>15</sup>
Business networking sessions	8
Export development programs and services	0
Joint advertising and marketing	11
Attraction of related supply and services businesses	0
Workforce planning, employee training and attraction	4

<sup>13</sup> The numbers represent *negative* responses to the question of satisfaction.

<sup>14</sup> This option was not available on the survey.

<sup>15</sup> This number includes the request for an autumn trade show.

Productivity improvement workshops	0
E-marketing, social media, and online content workshops	7
Other (please specify)	7 <sup>16</sup>
None of the above <sup>17</sup>	7

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<sup>16</sup> Shop local campaign, access to government grants and programs for mechanics, increase local business awareness, the establishment of an industrial park with at least two hundred acres per lot, grant application assistance, a restaurant, and general workshops.

<sup>17</sup> This option was not available on the survey.

## APPENDIX TWO

### Community Organization Outreach and Review Questionnaire Answers

1. Which of the following describes your organization?

Locally operated, with one location	8
Locally operated, with more than one location	3
Branch or division of a regional, national, or international organization	4

2. For how many years has your organization been operating in this community?

Less than one year	0
One to three years	0
Four to ten years	2
Eleven to twenty-five years	2
More than twenty-five years	11

3. What are the member requirements for this organization?

Membership	10
Membership (free)	2
Other	1
None	2

4. Including management how many volunteers volunteer at this organization?

One to four	3
Five to nine	4
Ten to Nineteen	3
Twenty or more	5

5. Including managers and volunteers, how many members are a part of this organization?

One to four	2
Five to nine	2
Ten to Nineteen	0
Twenty or more	11

6. Including managers, volunteers, and members, how many community members does this organization serve?

Six nonmembers, twenty or more (2), 100, 100-130, 142, 240 and 110, 300, 450, 860, 150, whole community (3), thirty-eight families



7. Including managers, volunteers, and members, what is the age distribution of participants? (Answer either negatively regarding an age group, *i.e.*, no children are allowed admission, or positively, *i.e.*, young adults, middle-aged adults, and seniors).<sup>18</sup>

Children (0-17)	1
Young adults (18-35)	1
Middle-aged adults (36-65)	1
Seniors (above 65)	2
Other <sup>19</sup>	9

8. Including managers, volunteers, and members, what is the sex distribution of participants?<sup>20</sup>

Men only	2
More men	3
Evenly split	2
More women	7
Women only	1 <sup>21</sup>

9. The primary area of activity for this organization is

Local	15
National	0
International	0

10. What is your general impression of this community as a place to operate your organization?

Positive	13
Poor	1
Non-answer	1

11. How has your attitude about operating an organization in this community changed since you began?

Better	3
Worse	3
No change	7
Unsure	1
Non-answer	1

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<sup>18</sup> One respondent did not provide information for the age distribution of participants.

<sup>19</sup> This option was not available on the survey

<sup>20</sup> One respondent did not provide information for the sex distribution of participants.

<sup>21</sup> This organization does have a man in a particular role adjacent to the organization while not being a member of it.

12. Are your projected revenues in the next year expected to

Increase	5
Decrease	2
Remain the same	6
Not sure	1
NA <sup>22</sup>	1

13. What are your primary sources of revenue?<sup>23</sup>

Membership (5) and registration fees (2); provincial (2), municipal (1), other community organizations (2), and businesses (1); donations (2); miscellaneous event fund raisers (7); bingo hall (1); minor retail (2)

14. Is your organization currently experiencing any barriers related to your information technology requirements?

No barriers currently being experienced	9
Internet speed, access, or cost	2
Hardware or software support	3
Knowledge and training	2
Other (please specify)	1 <sup>24</sup>

15. Does your organization own or lease its facility or facilities?

Own	5
Lease	4
Lease per event	3
NA <sup>25</sup>	3 <sup>26</sup>

16. Do you anticipate any problems in renewing the lease?

Yes	0
No	7
NA <sup>27</sup>	8

17. How do you currently recruit new volunteers?<sup>28</sup>

Through your personal network	8
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<sup>22</sup> This option was not available on the survey

<sup>23</sup> This list is not an exhaustive list of revenue sources, but merely a list of *primary* sources of revenue. The list is presented in no particular order.

<sup>24</sup> Website assistance was mentioned.

<sup>25</sup> This was not an option on the survey.

<sup>26</sup> One organization indicated that they do not pay to use a space.

<sup>27</sup> None of these options were listed on the survey.

<sup>28</sup> More than one answer could be chosen.

Local media advertising	2
Your own website	3
Referrals from friends or current volunteers	10
Social media applications such as LinkedIn or Facebook	7
Other (please specify)	

18. During the past three years, by how many has the total number of volunteers changed?<sup>29</sup>

If increased, by how many?	7
If decreased, by how many?	4
No change <sup>30</sup>	3

19. Does your organization currently have difficulty finding volunteers?<sup>31</sup>

Yes	8
No	7 <sup>32</sup>

20. Does your organization have difficulty retaining volunteers?<sup>33</sup>

Yes	5
No	10

21. How would you rate the following factors of operating an organization in this community?<sup>34</sup>

Volunteers (both quality and quantity)	2
Availability of space for rent or lease	0
Municipal property taxes	0
Support from the municipality	1
Support from other organizations	1
Schools	1
Police services	0
Fire services	0
Library services	0
Recreational facilities	0
Cultural facilities	0
Cellular phone service	0
Internet service	2

<sup>29</sup> One interviewee did not give an intelligible answer, and thus, only fourteen answers are here provided.

<sup>30</sup> This option was not on the survey.

<sup>31</sup> This question was presented as open ended.

<sup>32</sup> One organization has taken no steps to recruit more volunteers. That organization has been placed in the 'No' group.

<sup>33</sup> This question was presented as open ended.

<sup>34</sup> This question was framed in such a manner to illicit negative responses from the interviewee. Therefore, each number suggests that an interviewee did not rate the factor positively.

Cost of electricity	1
Street and road repair	1
Snow removal	0
Garbage and recycle collection	0
Other?	0
None <sup>35</sup>	9

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<sup>35</sup> This option was not listed on the survey.