



BUSINESS WALKS WEEK

City of Abbotsford

FACTS



Population: 133,497 (2011 Census)

Location: Mainland Southwest B.C.

SYNOPSIS

Talking about Ec Dev

In an effort to learn what supports local businesses need for retention and growth, the City of Abbotsford Economic Development (CAED) conducted a Business Walks initiative over a period of three days. A selection of “walkers” surveyed business owners to discover how best to target future follow up and economic development programming.

THE CHALLENGE

Connecting with the Local Biz

Retaining local businesses is a proven strategy to help keep the local economy healthy. How can economic development practitioners gain an understanding of the current local business dynamics and environment, and develop the tools needed to ensure support and growth?

THE SOLUTION

Walking and Talking

City of Abbotsford Economic Development (CAED) embarked on its inaugural Business Walks initiative in September 2015.

Over 143 short interviews were held with business owners and managers as one tool in CAED’s new Business Retention and Expansion Program (BRE). The BRE program is set to support over 6,000 licensed businesses currently operating in Abbotsford.

Business Walks allowed CAED to gather vital information from the business community to identify the types of support services needed for business growth. This information was a high level ‘temperature test’ for businesses in Abbotsford.

Thirty-eight volunteer walkers participated in the three days of walks across the Historic Downtown Abbotsford, Clearbrook/South Fraser Way, and Peardonville Industrial area. Walkers included MLAs, local elected officials, economic development staff, and associations such as the Chamber of Commerce CFIB and Small Business BC, as well as other organizations involved with small business.



RESULTS

Survey Says....

- 93% of Abbotsford businesses indicated steady or increasing business growth
- 58% of businesses rate 'Location' as #1 reason for doing business in Abbotsford
- 25% of businesses rate 'Clientele' as #2 reason for doing business in Abbotsford
- 71% of businesses interviewed do NOT have a succession plan
- 27% of businesses seek support with hiring/HR and are challenged with finding skilled workers
- 53% of businesses interviewed are looking to hire 1/+ new employee(s)
- More than 70 businesses have been identified for follow up support

OUTCOMES

Focused Learning

Since the walks, staff have connected with all businesses identified as needing follow up support. CAED will now be organizing three events to provide support to businesses in the areas requested:



- Workshop on business planning
- Workshop on succession planning
- Financing Fair on how to access capital for growth

NEXT STEPS

Keeping in Touch

The next business walk will include participants from both the University of the Fraser Valley and Tourism Abbotsford, and will provide and strive for:



**More connectivity
with the community**



**Support with
succession planning**



**Assistance with work
force development**



TESTIMONIALS

"You're doing an amazing job with this. It's clear that this is being so well received by the business community and will provide such a rich base on which to build." (Councillor Sandy Blue, City of Abbotsford)

CONTACT INFORMATION

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For more information: gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment