



2022 Business Survey Results

**BLUE MEANS BUSINESS**



# Table of Contents

Summary and Common Themes	01	Doing Business in The Blue Mountains	06
General Business Information	02	Business Support Services	07
Workforce	03	Explore Blue	08
COVID-19 Impact	04	Business E-Newsletter	09
Future Business Operations	05	Final Thoughts	10

# 01 Summary and Common Themes

The Blue Means Business survey is conducted annually to gain insight into the opportunities and challenges facing the local business community and entrepreneurs in The Blue Mountains.

The survey results are used to benchmark and track the implementation progress of the Town's 2021-2025 Economic Development Strategy to ensure that the strategy remains relevant to the needs of the business community and continues to address economic development initiatives and opportunities to benefit The Blue Mountains community.

The 2022 survey was conducted throughout April and May and received a total of 139 responses from local businesses. The survey included 35 questions grouped into seven sections that aimed to understand the local business environment. The survey provides in-depth insight into the growth and business operation pressures that local entrepreneurs are working hard to overcome. Outside of the responses, the survey provided a great opportunity for the Town's Economic Development staff to reconnect with existing businesses and to meet new businesses in the community.

## Seven common themes emerged in the survey results:



**Workforce attraction and retention across all industries and for businesses of all sizes is the most significant economic challenge.**



**The supply and stock of affordable and attainable housing should be a top priority**



**The Town has unique, small-town charm but is facing increased pressures as a growing community**



**The protection and preservation of the natural environment should be considered within decision making by both businesses and governments**



**Businesses benefit from a supportive and loyal local customer base**



**There is a need for increased/improved public transit services in the community to help connect and mobilize the workforce**

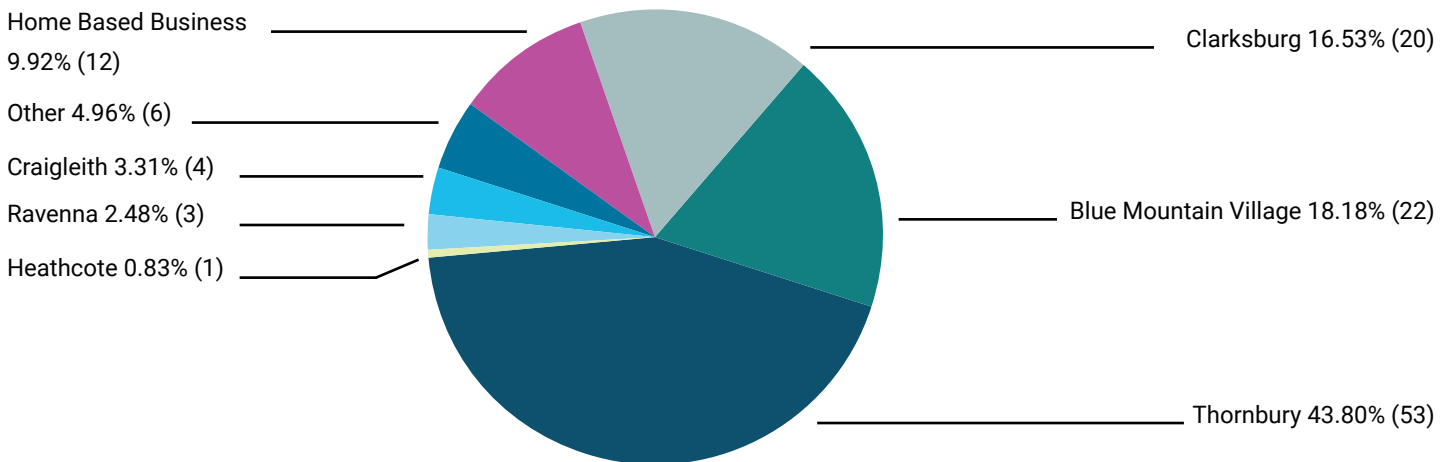


## 02 General Business Information

The opening set of questions in the survey asked for general information to help categorize responses and to determine the range of businesses participating.

### QUESTION 1

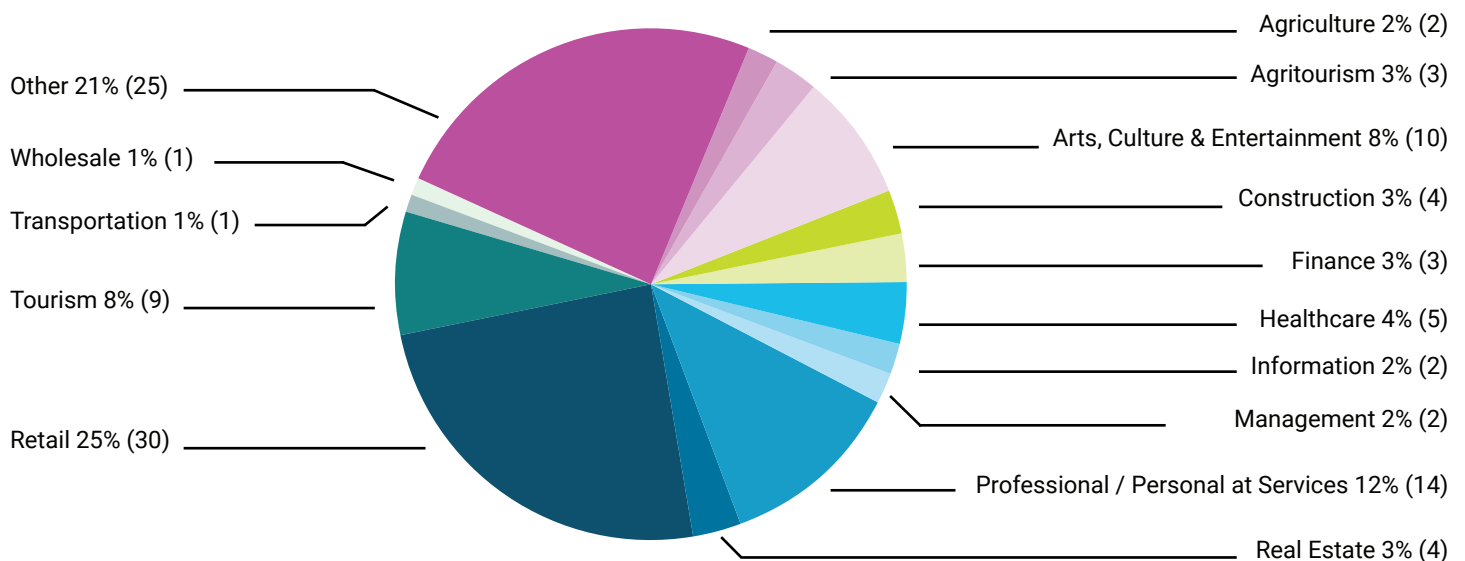
**If your business operates from a physical location, where is your business located in the Town?**



### QUESTION 2

**Which industry does your business operate within?**

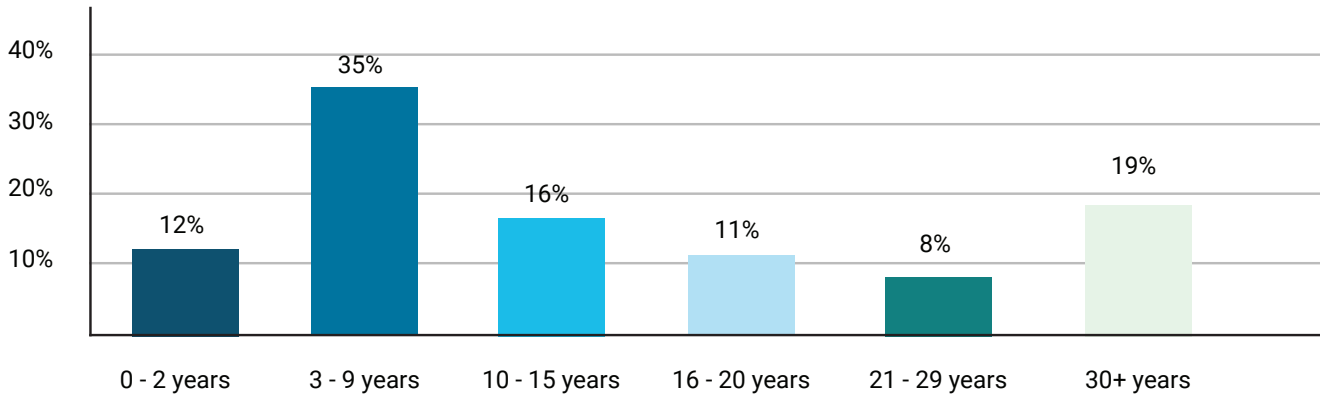
Businesses indicated a wide range of options, with Retail being the most common accounting for 25%, followed by Food Service & Hospitality as indicated in the "other responses". Professional services was third at 12% and Arts, Culture and Entertainment in fourth with 8.5% of responses.



### QUESTION 3

#### How long have you operated your business in the Town?

35% of businesses indicated that they have operated their business between 3-9 years. 30+ years was the second most common response at 19%. Of interest, 12% of respondents indicated that they opened their business within the past two years.

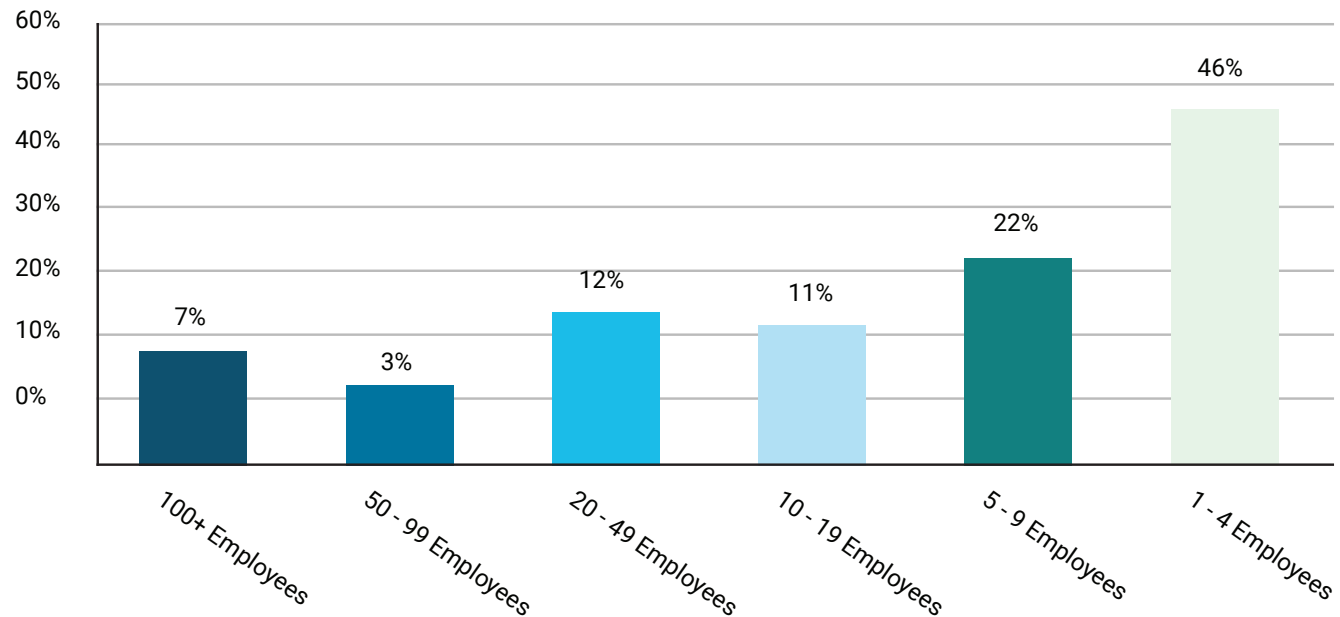


## 03 Workforce

### QUESTION 4

#### How many employees does your business currently employ?

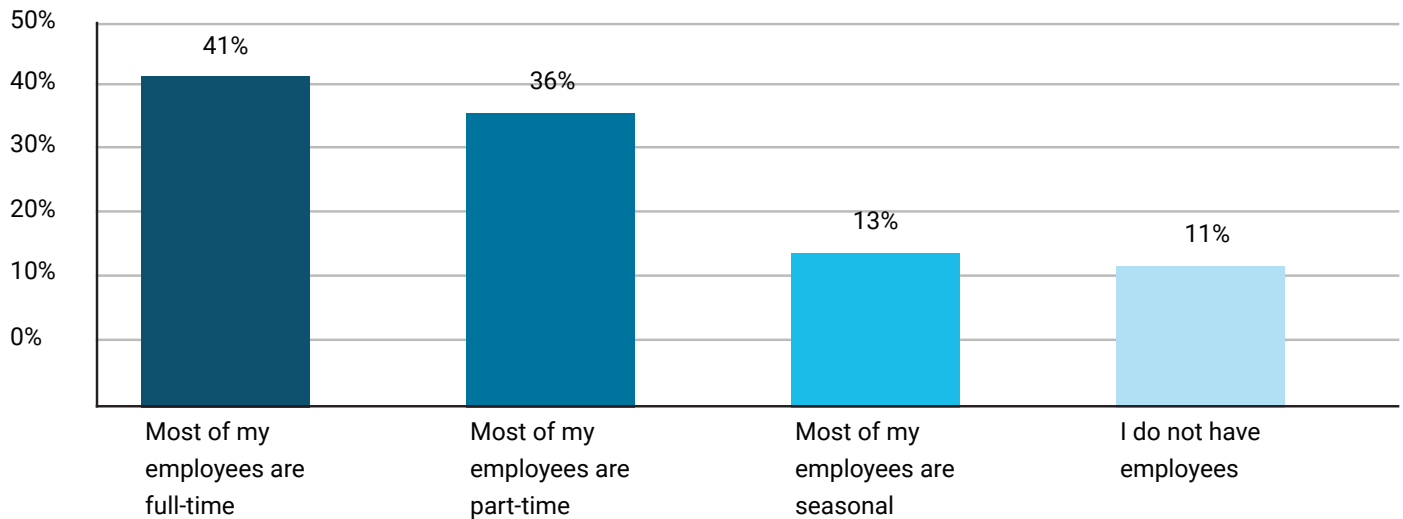
The next section of the survey asked respondents about their workforce, including full-time, part-time and season employees. 46% of businesses indicated they have between 1-4 employees and 22% responded that they have between 5-9 employees. 10-19 and 20-49 were similar at 11% and 12% respectively, with 3% of businesses employing between 50-99 and 7% over 100 employees.



## QUESTION 5

**In your opinion, do you consider most employees in your business to be full-time, part-time or seasonal workers?**

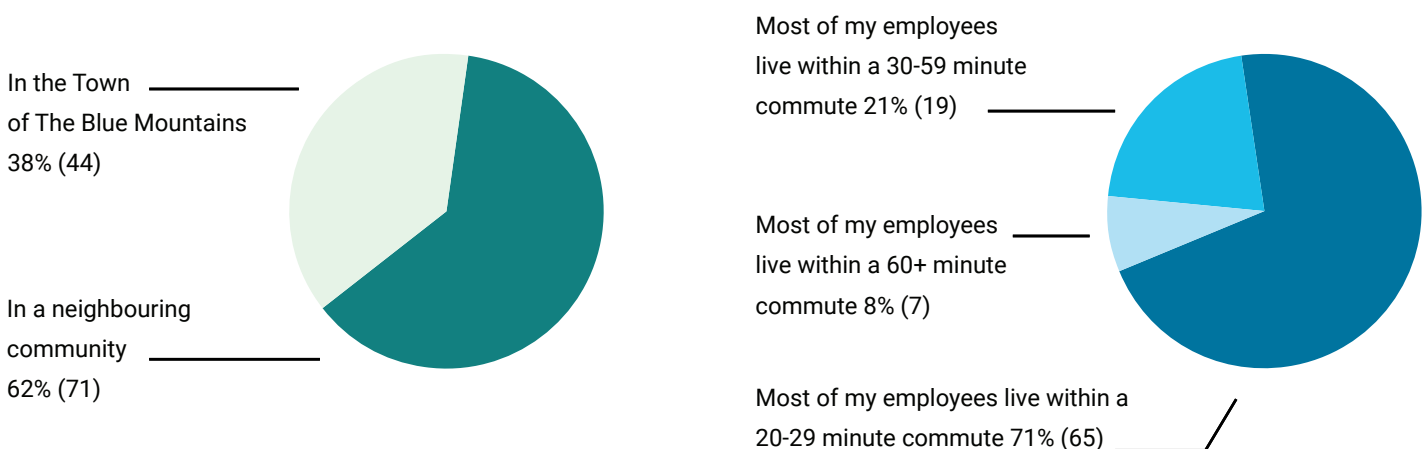
The top two responses to this question were very similar with 41% indicating that most employees are full-time and 36% responding most employees are part-time. 13% of businesses indicated that they employ mostly seasonal workers and 11% are the sole employee of their business.



## QUESTIONS 6 & 7

**Where do your employees live and how far do they have to commute?**

62% of businesses responded that the majority of their employees live in a neighbouring community. Of respondents who indicated the majority of their employees come from out of town, 71% said that most of their employees live within a 20-29 minute commute. 21% said that most of their employees live within 30 minutes to an hour, and 7% said most of their employees commute for over an hour.



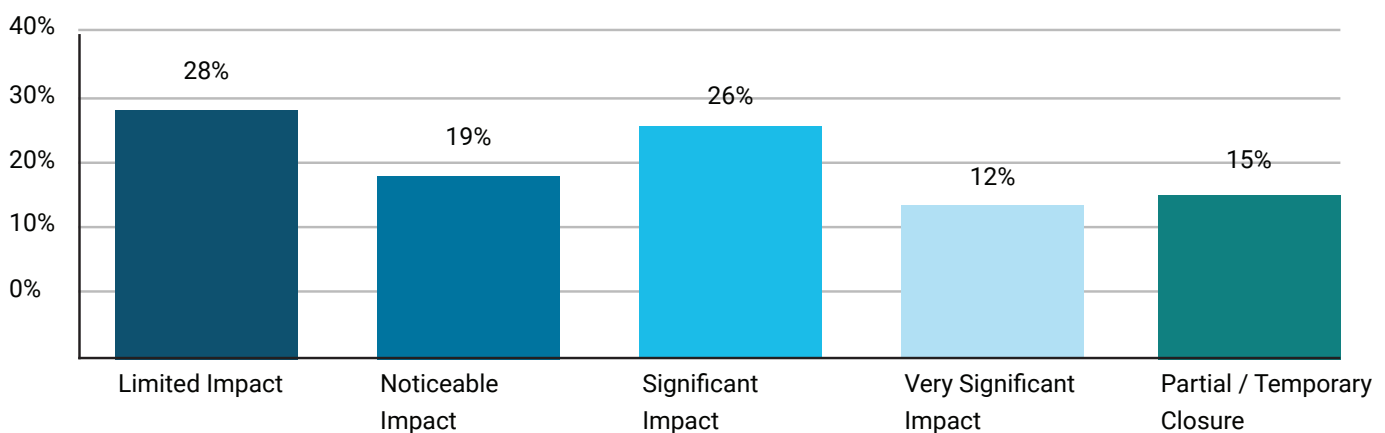


## 04 COVID-19 Impact

### QUESTION 8

**How has COVID-19 impacted your business operations?**

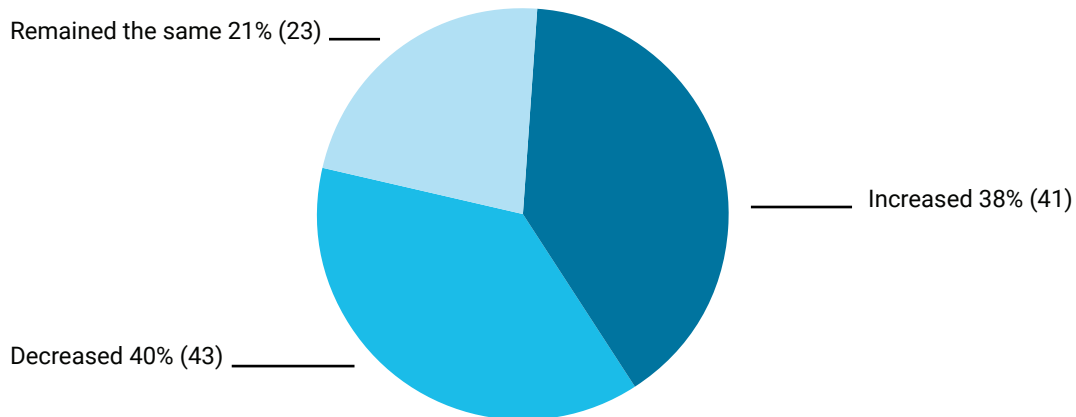
Over 72% of businesses indicated that their operations were impacted by varying degrees as a result of COVID-19. Of which, 38% of businesses indicated that the impact was significant to very significant and 15% of businesses indicated that their businesses faced a partial or temporary closure.



## QUESTION 9

### Did your business revenue increase, decrease or remain the same in 2021?

In total, 61% of businesses said that revenue either decreased or stayed the same in 2021, whereas 38% saw an increase which supports the understanding that the pandemic impacted industries differently.

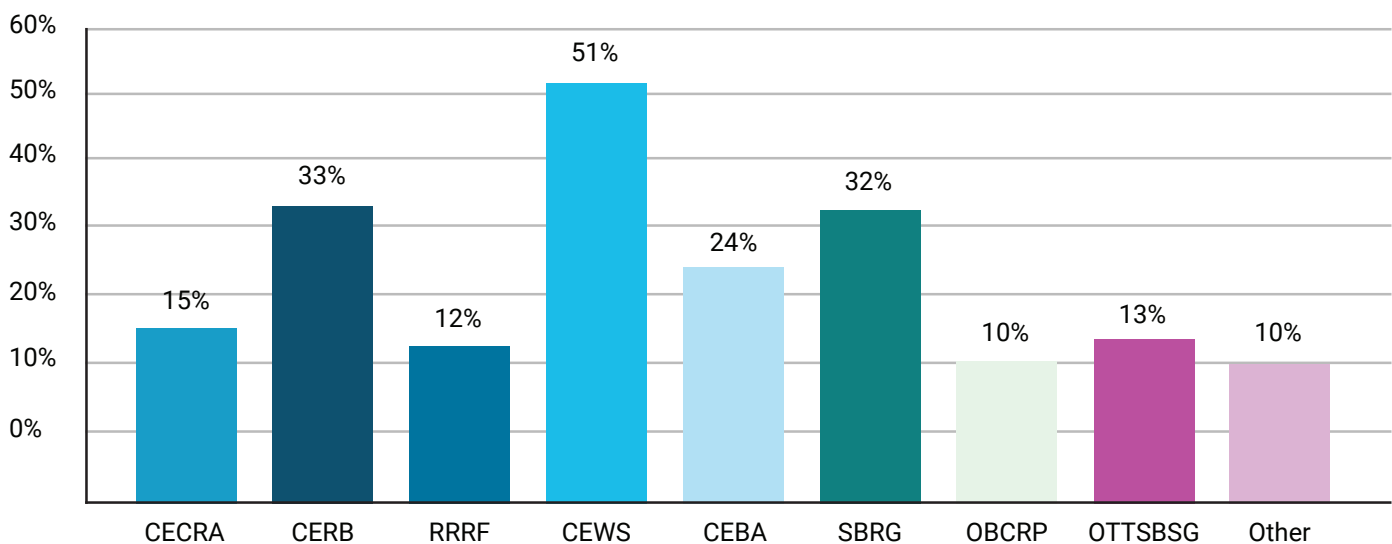


## QUESTIONS 10 & 11

### Did your business access government financial support programs during the pandemic and if yes, which programs?

70% of businesses indicated that they accessed government financial support programs to assist with operations during the pandemic, with over half (51%) accessing the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy.

The next most accessed programs were the Canada Emergency Response benefit and the Ontario COVID-19 Small Business Relief Grant, at 33% and 32% respectively. The Canada Emergency Benefit Account was also popular with 24% of respondents indicating they accessed the program.



## QUESTIONS 12 & 13

### How have you responded to the pandemic?

While 35% of businesses said their operations did not change due to COVID-19, 65% of businesses indicated that their operations changed either through reduced hours, increased online presence, new service delivery methods (contactless pickup, delivery, ecommerce), or closed during lockdown and have since reopened with loosened restrictions.

Of the businesses that indicated that their operations changed, 57% said they introduced curbside pickup or contactless options and 49% began using new social media platforms to reach new and existing customers. 40% went further and launched an e-commerce shop online and 34% renovated or expanded their current space to assist COVID-19 operations.

## QUESTION 14

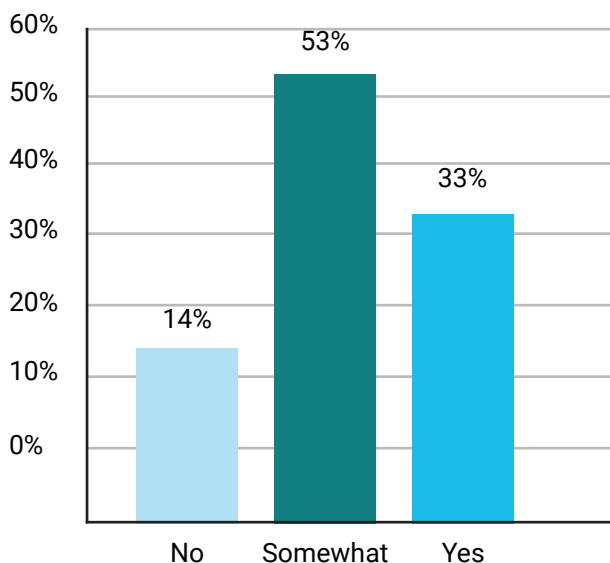
### Understanding the shift to online platforms, e-commerce opportunities, and remote work during COVID-19, in your opinion, how satisfied are you with current internet/broadband speed in the Town?

49% of businesses indicated that they were satisfied with internet connectivity and speeds within the Town. However, 24% of businesses indicated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The remainder answered as N/A.

## QUESTION 15

### Has the Town been responsive to the business community's needs during the pandemic and recovery?

86% of businesses indicated that the Town was responsive or somewhat responsive to the needs of the business community throughout the pandemic. The remainder indicated that the Town was not responsive during the pandemic and recovery phases.



## QUESTION 16

**In your opinion, how can the Town further support the business community and your business operations throughout the pandemic and during recovery?**

Affordable housing remained the top priority, with a sample of other suggestions from businesses listed below:

“

*“Consider different types of businesses when making decisions”.*

*“Home-based businesses were impacted but left out of all supports.”*

*“Helping promoting the many business communities, not just always focusing primarily on Thornbury.”*

*“Continue to support initiatives to bring traffic to the business communities and encourage development.”*

*“Continue to educate and communicate with business owners about programs that can help support businesses throughout the current climate.”*



## 05 Future Business Operations

### QUESTION 17

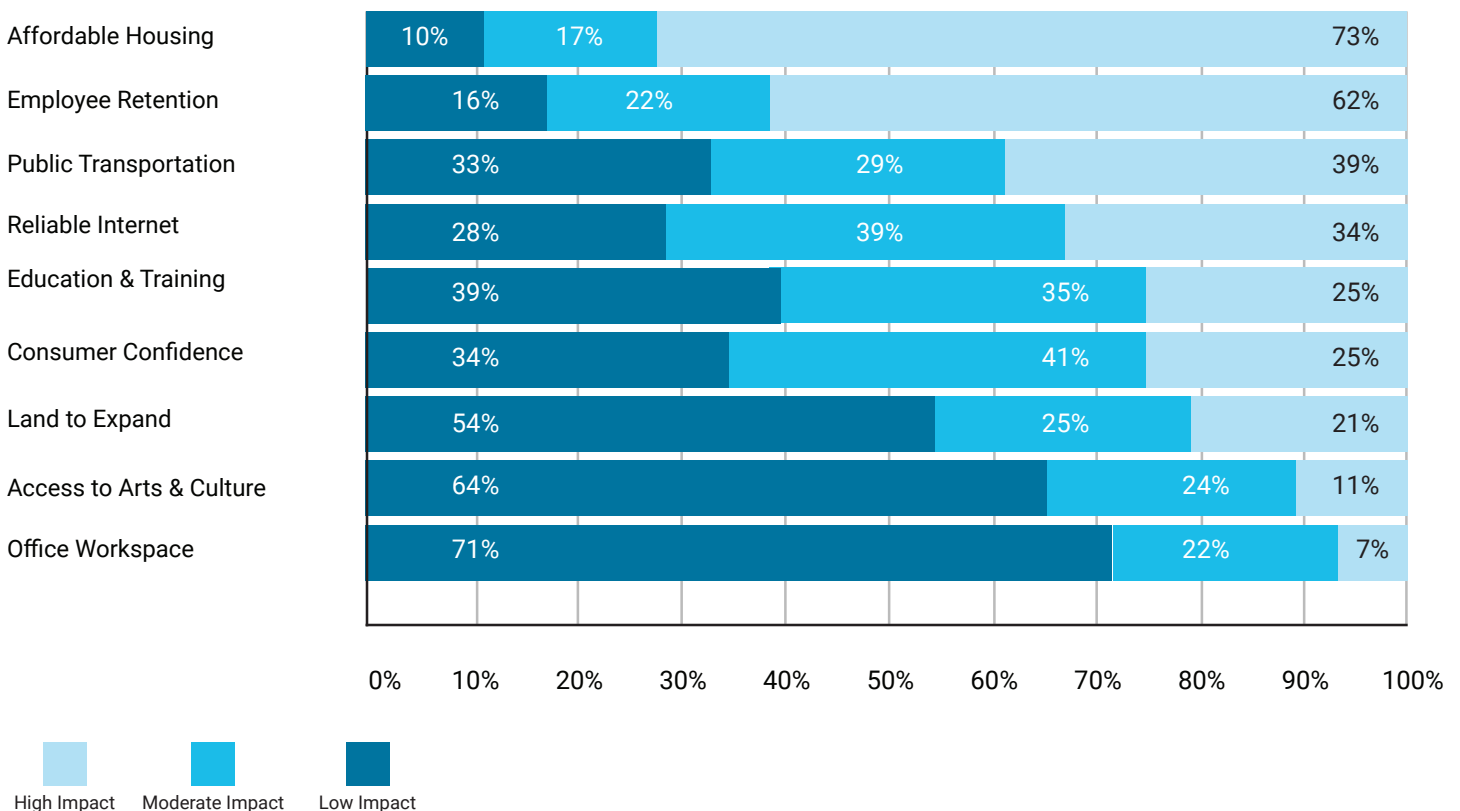
**In the next 1-3 years, do you anticipate your business operations to .....? And, do you anticipate your number of employees to increase, decrease or stay the same?**

Businesses were very optimistic about the short-term future with 56% indicating that they expect to expand and 34% indicating that they expect their operations to remain the same. Only 5% of businesses indicated that they anticipate their operations to be downsized or that they intend to retire, relocate or close.

### QUESTION 18

**When it comes to growing and/or continuing your business operations in the Town of The Blue Mountains, please rank the following challenges/barriers by their impact:**

73% of businesses indicated that the availability of affordable and attainable housing is the most significant barrier facing their operations due to the difficulty of attracting and retaining employees. This is further supported as employee and talent retention was ranked as the second highest barrier by 63% of businesses. Issues including public transit, reliable internet, education and training and consumer confidence rounded out the majority of moderate impact rankings.

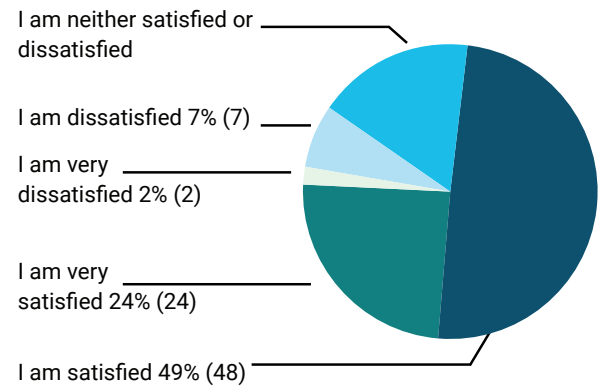


## 06 Doing Business in The Blue Mountains

### QUESTION 19

**Overall, how satisfied are you with operating your business in the Town of The Blue Mountains?**

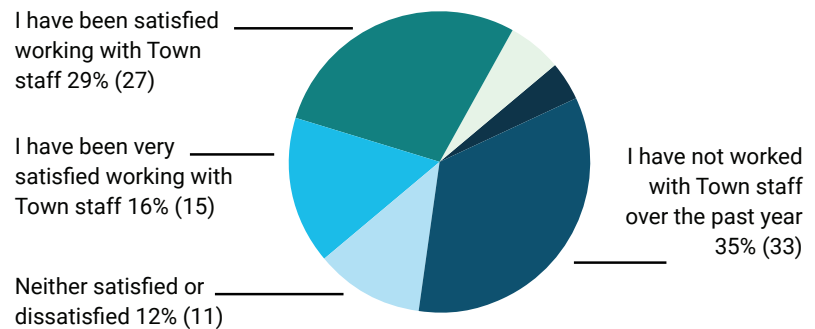
73% of businesses indicated they were either satisfied or very satisfied with operating their business in the Town of The Blue Mountains.



### QUESTION 20

**Over the past year, if you have contacted the Town for a business-related inquiry, what was your overall satisfaction of working with staff?**

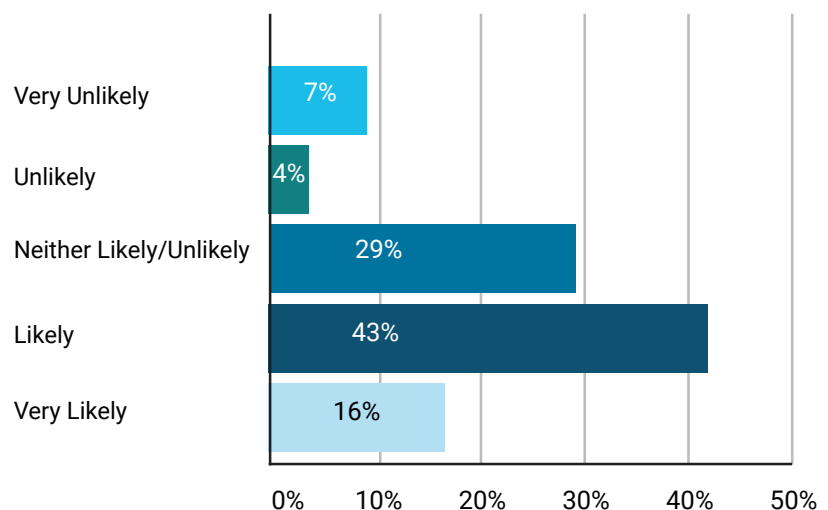
While 36% of businesses indicated they have not worked with Town staff in the past year, 69% of respondents who have worked with staff have either been satisfied or very satisfied. Only 12% of respondents who have worked with Town staff indicated they have been dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.



### QUESTION 21

**How likely would you recommend the Town of The Blue Mountains to another business owner/entrepreneur as a place to own/operate a business?**

61% of businesses said they would be likely or very likely to recommend the Town as a place to own/operate a businesses, with 11% indicating they would be unlikely or very unlikely. The remaining 28% indicated neither likely or unlikely.





## QUESTION 22

**In your opinion, what are the main advantages of investing and doing business in the Town of The Blue Mountains compared to other communities in Ontario?**

The question received a variety of responses with a focus on four-season tourism, the fast-growing community and the natural environment. Sample responses are listed below:

“

*“Wonderful community and support”*

*“More people are discovering our beautiful area all the time”*

*“It is a place where people want to come which is essential for any business”*

*“The Blue Mountains has remained unique in its offering. The charm of the area is increasing, along with the necessary amenities.*

*“Fast growing, four-season community with a lively arts and tourism support system.”*

*“Climate is excellent for specialty agriculture and close enough to GTA for large sales volume. Beautiful area with great family owned business.”*

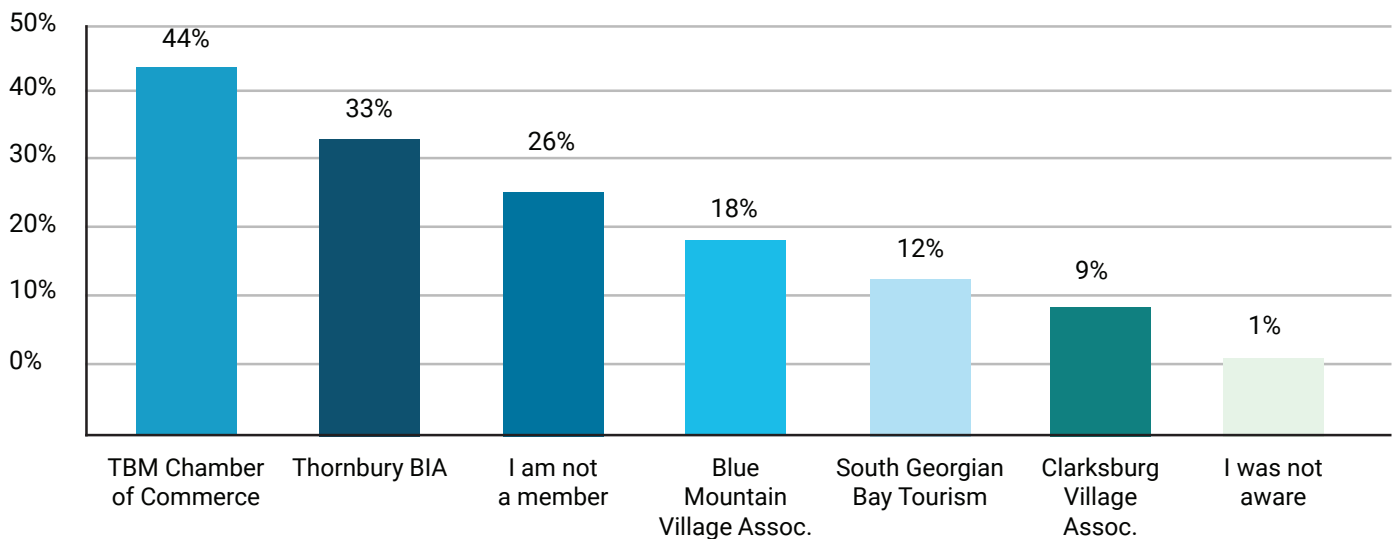
*“Like-minded female business owners.”*

## 07 Business Support Services

### QUESTION 23

**Are you currently a member of any local business organization or associations in the Town of The Blue Mountains?**

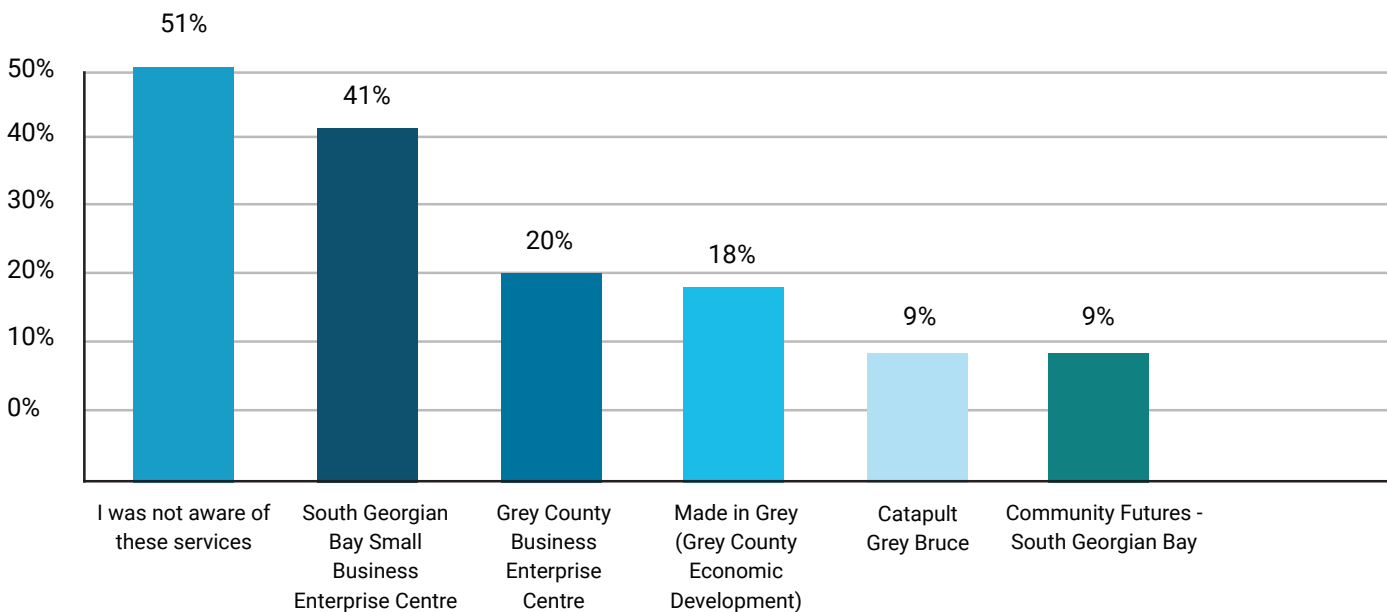
The Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce was the most represented organization with 44% of businesses indicating they were a member, followed by 33% of businesses being a member of the Thornbury Business Improvement Area. 26% of businesses indicated that they are not a member of any local organization, but awareness is high as only 1% of respondents indicated they were not aware of local associations in the Town.



### QUESTION 24

**Are you aware of the business development and business support services that are available to business located within Town of The Blue Mountains?**

At 51%, the majority of businesses indicated that they were not aware of the support services that are available to businesses in The Blue Mountains. This was followed by the South Georgian Bay Small Business Enterprise Centre having the highest level of awareness at 41%.



### QUESTION 25

**Has your business accessed any of the business development/business support services that are listed above?**

25% of businesses indicated that they have accessed business development/support services, with the balance indicating that they had not accessed the services or that they were not aware of the available services.

### QUESTION 26

**The Town is currently evaluating and reviewing opportunities of creating a co-working space for local businesses. Would you utilize a co-working space in The Blue Mountains?**

Only 20% of businesses indicated they would utilize a co-working space.

### QUESTION 27

**Outside of online job boards, does your business currently use any of the following local job portals to promote employment opportunities?**

60% of businesses indicated that they do not utilize local job boards to promote employment opportunities and instead, rely on social media and online job boards such as Indeed. Of the local options listed, Tracks Employment Services, YMCA (Owen Sound Grey Bruce) and The Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce job boards were the most utilized.

## 08 Explore Blue

### QUESTION 28

#### Have you visited the Town's Explore Blue website?

47% of businesses indicated that they have visited the Town's Explore Blue website. The response indicates a clear opportunity for strengthened engagement by the business community.

### QUESTION 29

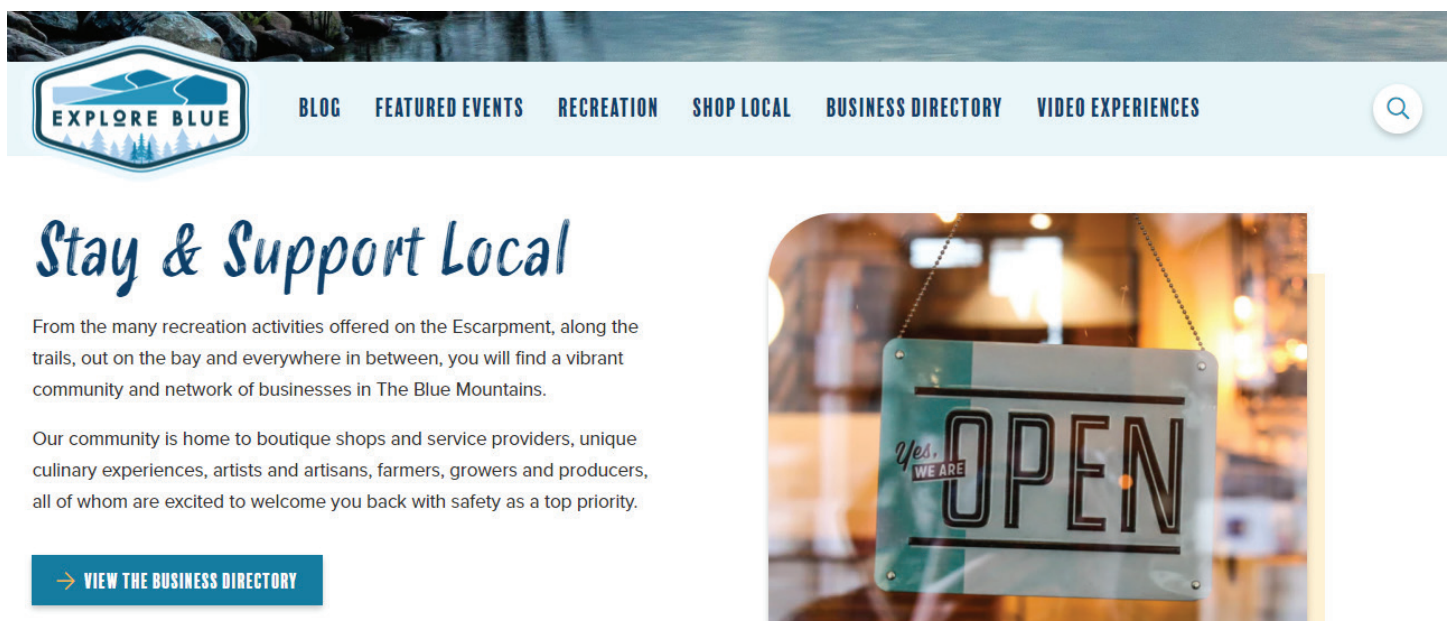
#### Is your business currently listed in the Town's business directory on the Explore Blue website?

70% of businesses indicated that their business is listed on the Explore Blue business directory. The balance of businesses indicated that they do not wish for their business to be added to the directory.

### QUESTION 30

#### In your opinion, how can the Town of The Blue Mountains enhance or improve the current explore Blue website/brand? Please select all that apply.

The majority of businesses indicated that increased marketing and promotion and a strengthened social media presence would help to improve the Explore Blue website and brand. Followed by 41% of businesses indicating that improved content development and/or more regular content would enhance the website. Other responses to the question included comments about the opportunity to showcase profiles and stories on local businesses to highlight the entrepreneurs.



The screenshot shows the Explore Blue website. The header features a navigation bar with the following links: BLOG, FEATURED EVENTS, RECREATION, SHOP LOCAL, BUSINESS DIRECTORY, and VIDEO EXPERIENCES. A search icon is located on the right side of the header. Below the header, the main content area has a large heading "Stay & Support Local" in a blue, cursive font. Underneath this heading, there is a paragraph of text: "From the many recreation activities offered on the Escarpment, along the trails, out on the bay and everywhere in between, you will find a vibrant community and network of businesses in The Blue Mountains." Below this paragraph, another paragraph reads: "Our community is home to boutique shops and service providers, unique culinary experiences, artists and artisans, farmers, growers and producers, all of whom are excited to welcome you back with safety as a top priority." At the bottom left of the main content area, there is a blue button with a white arrow pointing right and the text "VIEW THE BUSINESS DIRECTORY". On the right side of the main content area, there is a photograph of a glass door with a hanging sign that says "Yes, WE ARE OPEN".

## 09 Business E-Newsletter

The Town recently launched its Blue Means Business e-newsletter. This tool will serve as a guide for businesses to get the latest news, information and resources that are widely available for our local entrepreneurs and business owners/operators. Topics throughout each edition will include – but are not limited to – Town news, Grey County information, government funding programs and grants, local business supports, surveys, events and training opportunities.

### QUESTION 31

**Are you interested in subscribing to the business e-newsletter?**

38% of respondents indicated they are already subscribed. An additional 44% said they would like to subscribe to the newsletter with the remaining respondents not interested.



## 10 Final Thoughts

### QUESTION 32

**Please provide any additional comments, thoughts, or feedback regarding the improvement of economic and business activity in the Town of The Blue Mountains.**

Within the final question, the majority of businesses responded that there is an immediate need to address the issues regarding affordability, specially related to workforce housing. The opportunity to focus on the attraction and retention of a younger workforce was also mentioned several times and correlates with the need for affordable housing in the Town.

Within the responses there was also a clear opportunity identified to enhance tourism services through increased marketing and promotion to encouraging visitors to explore outside of the main settlement areas of Thornbury and Craigeleith. Comments were also provided regarding the opportunity to open a physical tourism information centre to help provide in destination tourism services to visitors.