

WHITBY'S LOCAL BUSINESS WEEK

2024 Survey Report



whitby.ca/Business



OVERVIEW

The Town of Whitby organized Local Business Week with the aim of developing stronger and more meaningful relationships with the business community, gaining a better understanding of the local economy, and shaping policies and initiatives to better support local businesses. The first Local Business Week took place from June 17 to 21, 2024, and it was highly successful. During this week, the Town of Whitby Council, along with staff and representatives from external partner organizations such as the Business Advisory Centre of Durham and Chamber of Commerce, met with local businesses in person to gather feedback and gain insight into the current business environment in Whitby.

230 businesses were surveyed across the following sectors:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Downtowns and Lifestyle
- Information and Communication Technology
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- Other sectors

Top Issues Identified Included Staff Recruitment and Retention

Feedback gathered about staffing indicated this was the most significant issue affecting businesses across all sectors and included several contributing factors:

Lack of Experience: employers receive numerous applications when they post a job opening, but candidates often lack the necessary experience.

Salary Expectations: employers cannot match the increase in salary expectations due to the rise in inflation and cost of living post COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially evident in low-skilled jobs that are typically paid minimum wage. To retain and keep qualified line cooks, waiters, and bartenders, employers have to pay higher than minimum wage.

Housing Affordability: lack of affordable housing in the Durham Region and Whitby makes it difficult to attract qualified staff because prospective employees understand it will cost a significant amount of money to rent or buy a place to live.

Competitive Market: employees can be recruited by other employers with higher salary offers, which makes it difficult for Whitby employers to retain staff.

Other Concerns Received During In-Person Visits to Businesses

Safety: business owners, particularly in Downtown Whitby, expressed concerns about their safety. Several businesses reported experiencing break-ins, theft, and incidents of vandalism.

Parking: business owners, especially in Downtown Whitby, concerned about the lack of parking availability impacting their customers and staff. They also felt that the municipal lots were either full, cost too much, or were too far away from their location to be convenient. New developments in downtown Whitby, such as Station 3, are seen as exacerbating the problem.

Public Transit Access: businesses on Taunton Road are hoping for an improvement on the timing and frequency of bus routes that their employees use to get to and from home. Businesses in the industrial pocket of Whitby on South Blair Street and Hopkins Street also requested a bus route that their employees could use.

Garbage: business owners do not want to pay for garbage pick-up and wish that the government can provide waste collection for businesses similar to residential properties.

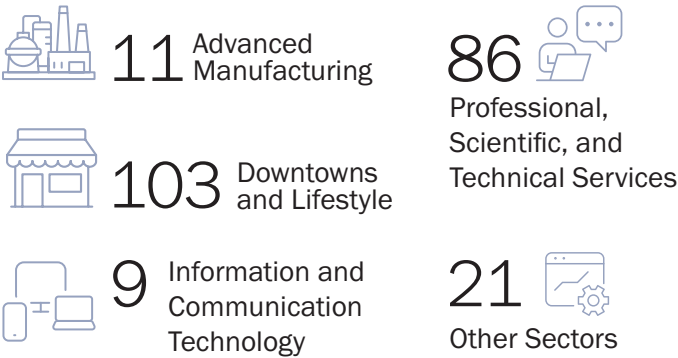
Inflation and rent: Businesses are extremely concerned about the increasing inflation, such as rising grocery and supply prices, as well as high rent prices. This is reflected in the average rating given by businesses to the Canadian economy, which stands at 2.3 out of 5.

OVERALL FEEDBACK FROM VISITS

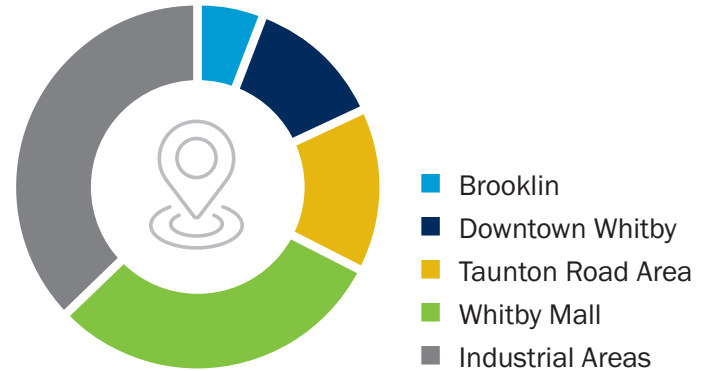
230 Businesses Surveyed
 Total Employees Represented = 3,477
 An initiative of Whitby's Community Strategic Plan
 Strategic Pillar 3: Whitby's Economy



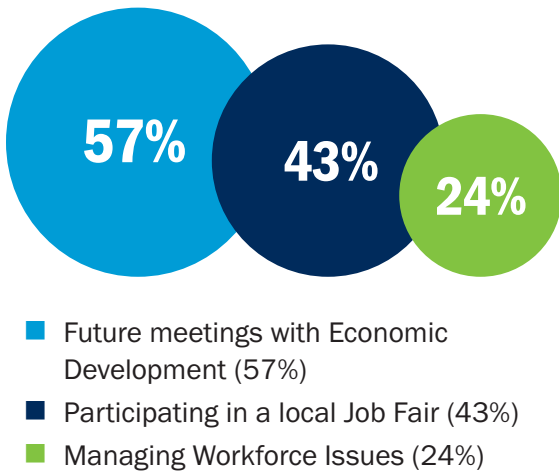
Sectors Surveyed



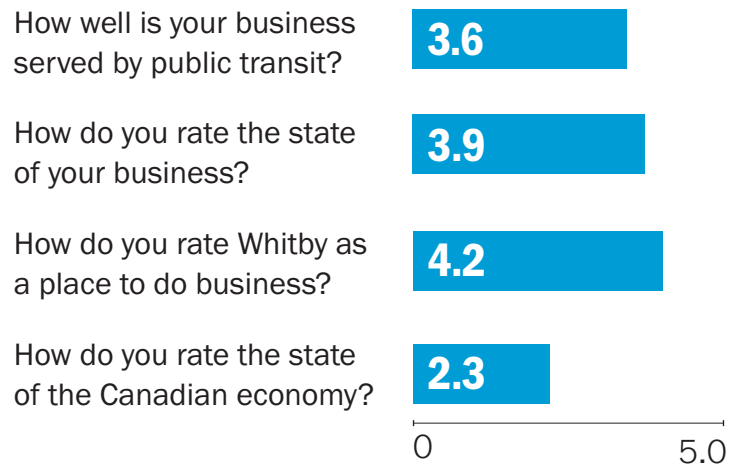
Business Locations



Top 3 Priorities



Survey Questions and Overall Responses



NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSIONS

The inaugural Whitby Local Business Week was a great success, with 230 businesses surveyed. The Town of Whitby Council, staff, and representatives from external partner organizations gathered valuable feedback to guide future initiatives. Economic Development staff are following up with businesses that requested a meeting and are planning a Whitby Job Fair in response to 43% of businesses indicating this need. By addressing these concerns, the Town aims to create a supportive environment for local businesses, ensuring their growth and success. The first event has set the standard for this initiative, and we hope to improve and expand on this event annually.

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