

Business Walk Purpose

A business walk is an opportunity to chat with local businesses face-to-face to gather knowledge that will help foster a more prosperous business climate. The De Pere Business Walk was a one day visitation program to assess concerns that local businesses are facing. The information gathered is to be used to help prioritize economic development initiatives and guide business assistance.

2020 Business Walk Talk Highlights

The 2020 Business Walk was conducted virtually as a 'business talk' inviting businesses to take an online survey and having volunteers make phone calls to businesses that had agreed to participate. This 'talk' format resulted in interviews with 103 businesses, down 25% from the previous year. However, participating businesses provided valuable input regarding the state of the business climate in De Pere. Some interesting findings included:

- 62% of businesses implemented some form of operational changes in response to the pandemic.
- 81% of businesses that made operational changes anticipate that at least some of these changes will be sustained after the pandemic situation is resolved.
- 70% of businesses are experiencing negative revenues for 2020.
- 62% of businesses implemented some form of wage reduction program, including reduced hours, furloughs, temporary or permanent layoffs, or reduced/eliminated owner salaries.
- Retail, entertainment, hospitality and food service businesses experienced the most severe revenue impacts, with 100% of entertainment venues and more than half of retail, hospitality and restaurant businesses experiencing YTD declines of more than 50% in total revenues – in some cases up to 90% reductions were reported.
- Four percent of businesses experienced an increase in revenues for 2020, and 30% experienced no impact or have seen revenues return to normal after an initial decline.
- 70% of businesses were able to take advantage of at least one financial assistance program at the federal, state or local level. A majority of those that did not indicated a lack of need was the reason for not pursuing assistance.
- 29% of businesses are highly uncertain about the future, while 8 percent anticipating a lack of viability within 3 months and an additional 12 percent within 6 months if circumstances do not improve.
 - Businesses in danger of closure include 4 retailers, 4 personal service businesses, 2 entertainment venues, 2 restaurants, 2 professional service firms, 1 medical office and 1 non-profit
- The top three priorities for additional assistance to aid their business included direct financial assistance (primarily retail and personal service), financial assistance/wages to increase customer demand (professional services) and renewed access to customers (entertainment and hospitality).
- 85% of businesses identified at least one silver lining as a result of the pandemic, including a mix of business-related (improved operations, better customer/employee engagement) and personal (increased sense of togetherness, family time, exercise)

A more detailed overview of the business walk process and more specific insights gained through the walk are included in the following sections.

Key Take-Aways



Business Walk Overview

Business talks took place over a four-day period from September 21-24th with additional time for online survey responses. Rather than dropping in on businesses within a specific geographic region, volunteers donated time to call businesses during time slots identified by the participating businesses. The 2020 business walk resulted in interviews of 103 businesses throughout the greater De Pere area, which represents just under 11 percent of businesses. Interviewed businesses included a mix of in the City of De Pere including retail, service, construction and manufacturing firms. The walk, in its fourth year, was conducted in partnership with the De Pere Area Chamber of Commerce, the City of De Pere, Definitely De Pere, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. The business talk is designed to take the pulse of the local business community, uncover opportunities and challenges for doing business in the De Pere area, and identify ways that local partners can help enhance and grow the local economy and create a business-friendly environment. This year, the talk focused on the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business operations and revenues and identify supports that could help businesses sustain and/or grow over the next year.

Interviews were completed by phone and online with respondents answering nine questions about their current business operations and needs. They also had the option of receiving a follow-up visit from a community partner to discuss specific opportunities or challenges identified by the visit, and could choose to receive a copy of the completed report.

The results from the business visits, including both the quantitative survey results as well as additional comments and insights provided as part of the interviews are summarized in this document.

Business Respondents

Businesses responding to the survey represent a diverse mix of industries, as illustrated in the chart below. Service businesses (personal and professional) represented 38 percent of businesses

interviewed, retail and restaurant accounted for another 31 percent, and the remaining businesses were engaged in manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, contracting and healthcare.

This year, more than in previous years, industry played a significant role in influencing responses, with shutdowns in certain industries and subsequent declines in consumer activity impacting entertainment, hospitality, food-service and retail businesses. It should also be noted that several civic or non-profit businesses anticipate that trickle-down effects will impact their operations next year.

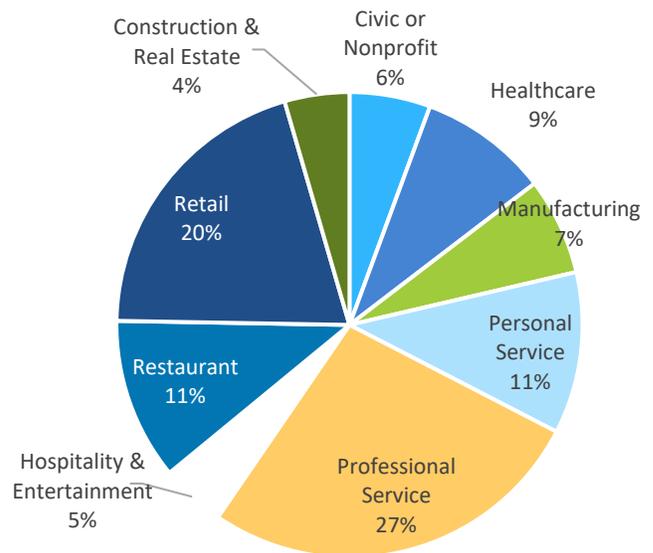
Survey Results

COVID-19 Impacts

Nearly all businesses surveyed were impacted in some way by the pandemic, stay at home orders or shifting consumer behaviors. Only 8 percent of responding businesses reported no business operational adjustments during the pandemic. Three-quarters of businesses increased their online presence to reach customers, half of the businesses added remote work or adjusted business hours, and just over one-third added delivery or curbside offerings during 2020.

Businesses also were forced to make adjustments to the workforce. Sixty-two percent of businesses implemented some form of salary reduction, as indicated in the chart at right. These changes were driven largely by reduced revenues. While 26 percent of businesses indicated that they experienced no change in revenues or that revenues had returned to normal since closures in late spring, seventy percent of businesses experienced measurable declines in revenue for the year. These businesses are evenly split between businesses experiencing less than a 25 percent decrease, a decrease of 25-50 percent, or a decline of greater than 50 percent for the year. Four percent of businesses experienced an increase in sales for 2020, all of which are in the professional services or manufacturing sectors. Only six retail, entertainment, food or hospitality businesses were reflected in the pool of businesses that have seen sales rebound since the pandemic. Conversely, only one business experiencing revenue declines of greater than 50 percent was outside the retail, entertainment, hospitality or food services sectors.

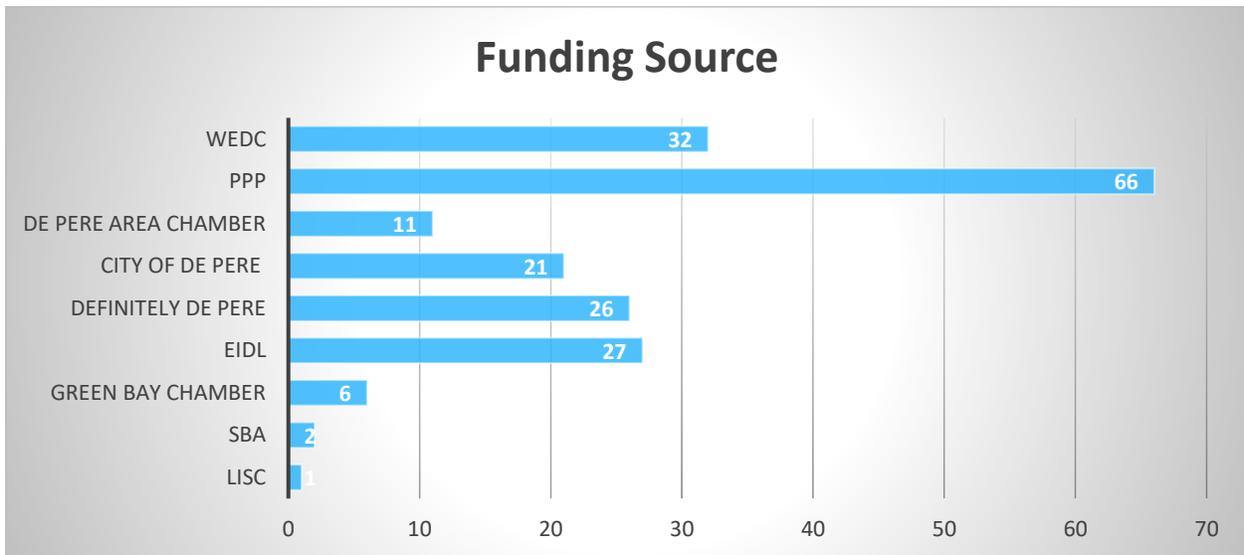
Respondents by Industry



Percent Implementing



A majority of businesses (69%) took advantage of at least one of the financial assistance programs offered at the federal, state, or local levels. Of those that did not utilize these assistances, the most common reason was lack of financial need (50%). Other businesses indicated a lack of eligibility or a desire to remain debt-free. Only three businesses indicated that they were not aware, or that they had applied but did not receive funds. The most frequently used program was PPP (85% of those receiving assistance), City/Chamber/Definitely De Pere funds (41%) and WEDC (38%). Only 4% utilized funds from the Green Bay Chamber. Of those that received assistance, businesses accessed an average of two sources of financial aid.



Future Plans

Many businesses anticipate that some operational shifts implemented during the pandemic will continue. For instance, 80 percent of businesses that increased online sales presence anticipate this change remaining permanent, 78% of those adding curbside or delivery services anticipate retention of these offerings, and half of respondents that implemented remote work or changed business hours plan to make all or part of these changes permanent.

Businesses were also asked to describe their business outlook relative to current revenue trends. While 37 percent of businesses do not anticipate any operational concerns under current scenarios, 8 percent indicated a concern about viability beyond three months, 12 percent beyond 6 months, and 14 percent if circumstances do not change in the next 12-24 months. Just under one-third (29%) are highly uncertain about the future, with many indicating that future shutdowns, outbreaks or other changes could significantly impact future viability.

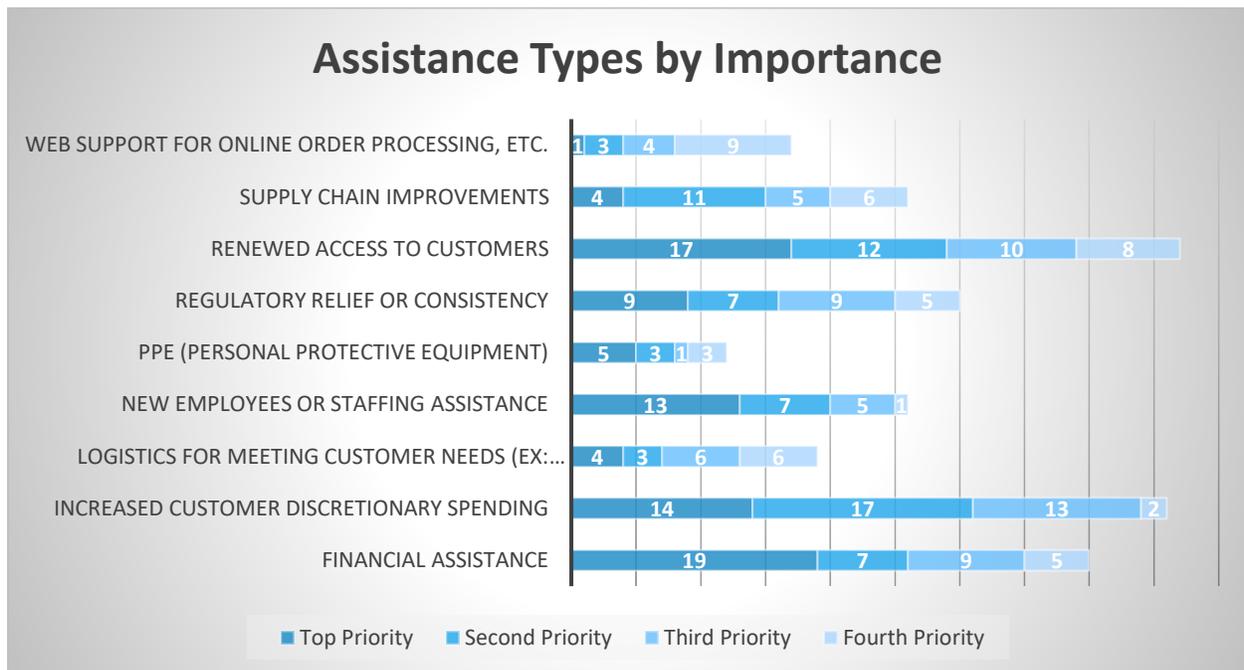
While significant uncertainty and concern over the future exists in the De Pere business community, it should also be noted that the vast majority of respondents (85%) identified at least one positive experience that came out of the pandemic period. The most frequently mentioned positives are listed below.

- ❖ Additional time with family - 32%
- ❖ Forced to improve business practices (online, organization, paperwork) - 21%
- ❖ Greater engagement with employees, customers, landlord, vendors – 20%

- ❖ More time for exercise, healthier lifestyle – 10%
- ❖ Support for local businesses more evident – 8%
- ❖ More empathy for others evident in community, stronger relationships
- ❖ Accomplished 'to do list', more free time

Assistance Desired

Respondents were asked to identify any specific types of assistance that would benefit their business. Businesses were allowed to identify up to four specific types of assistance that would be beneficial, in order of priority. The degree to which particular types of assistance would be beneficial is indicated in the chart below. Financial concerns remain the most critical element of recovery, with desire for direct financial assistance to businesses, financial assistance to customers to increase discretionary spending as two of the top three priorities. Renewed access to customers was also seen as critically important, although this likely means different things to different businesses.



By industry, hospitality and food service businesses also prioritized regulatory stability to plan ahead for operations. Professional service, medical and transportation firms continue to struggle to find employees to fill open positions, and while retail and personal services desired direct financial assistance, professional service firms preferred stimulus to increase customer demand.

Follow-up

The most important element of a business walk is the opportunity to follow-up with individual businesses regarding specific challenges, and to identify strategies or initiatives that will be undertaken as a result of the information learned during the survey. Of those surveyed, 11 percent requested that an individual follow-up with them to address their specific issues. A majority of respondents provided an email address to receive a copy of the results.

Business Walk Questionnaire

2020 Business Walk Questions:

De Pere Area Chamber - Business ~~Walk~~ Talk

(For all questions there will be an "Other" or "Comment" box for surveyors to fill in so they don't have to read all the answers. Then they can go back and check any that are applicable for compiling survey results. This should be explained in their training and in their script with suggested prompts.)

1. How has your business adjusted operations during the pandemic? *(check all that apply)*

- Remote work (past or currently going / will continue)
- Increasing online presence (past or currently going / will continue)
- Adding delivery or contactless/curbside pickup options (past or currently going / will continue)
- Changes in hours of operations (past or currently going / will continue)
- Other: _____

2. *How have you handled your payroll and/or workforce? *(check all that apply)*

- Temporary layoffs
- Temporary cuts in hours
- Permanent dislocation/separation
- Working without salary
- Furloughs
- No change
- Business has closed permanently
- Other: _____

Comments: _____

3. To what extent do you feel your revenue has been impacted since the original stay at home order? _____%

Comments: _____

4. How long can your business weather the impact from COVID-19 given any recently implemented changes in operations? *(select one)*

- 0-3 Months
- 3-6 Months
- 1 Year
- 2 Years
- Unsure
- Not an issue

Comments: _____

5. *What are your most pressing needs? (Rank the top 4 from 1 to 4)

- Financial assistance (type: _____)
- Regulatory relief or consistency
- New employees or staffing assistance

- Renewed access to customers
- Increased customer discretionary spending
- Supply chain improvements
- PPE (personal protective equipment)
- Web support for online order processing, etc.
- Logistics for meeting customer needs (Ex: outdoor patios / drive up windows)

Comments: _____

6. Please select any financial assistance programs you were successful in receiving. (*select all that apply*)

If none, would you be willing to share why? (requirements, borrowing limitations or concerns, etc.)

- PPP - Paycheck Protection Program
- EIDL – Economic Injury Disaster Loan
- SBA Debt Relief
- SBA Express Bridge Loans
- IRS Employee Retention Credit
- Facebook Small Business Grants Program
- US Chamber Save Small Business Fund
- KIVA Microloans
- LISC Small Business Relief Grants
- WEDC – We’re All In Grant Program
- WEDC – Ethnic Minority Emergency Grant
- WWBIC – COVID-19 Fast Track Loan Program
- Verizon Small Business Recovery Fund
- Associated Bank COVID-19 Relief Program for Customers
- Bay Lake Regional Planning – Disaster Recovery Microloan Program
- City of De Pere – Small Business Pandemic Response Loan
- De Pere Area Chamber – Business Transition Grant
- Definitely De Pere – Business Relief Grant
- Greater Green Bay Chamber Back to Business Grant
- None (Indicate reason: _____)

Comments: _____

7. Have you had any positive experiences during the pandemic you’d like to share?

(Ex: more family time, improved employee relations, opportunity to be more active, eating healthier, sped up online adoption)

Comments: _____

8. Would you like someone to follow up with your company? Yes / No

(If yes: City / Chamber / Definitely De Pere)

(If yes: Contact information: _____)

9. We will email you a copy of this year’s Business *Talk* results. What email should we send it to?

Email: _____

Q8. Have you had any positive experiences during the pandemic you'd like to share?

(Ex: more family time, improved employee relations, opportunity to be more active, eating healthier, sped up online adoption)

- lots of cleaning and sanitizing time
- Greater vision with operations and keeping safety in the forefront. Understanding possible other ways to push and pull business toward us.
- Family time was great but the stress of the business was unbelievable.
- More family time, got that "to do" list done
- Got my sample room and catalogs cleaned out.
- Many new customers in the Retail, and animal feeds.
- More time to help out the community.
- A time to reset and re-evaluate everything. The opportunity to make changes in the business that were a long-time coming.
- We created Downtown Faces Forward as a way to promote small business and it created a great following and sense of positivity for our community--and for other downtowns.
- Funding sources approving Telehealth has been a very important change.
- more family time, spending time at home
- We were lucky enough to rent our biz' space from an awesome landlord who redid the heating and cooling while we were forced to be closed. A pro-active forward-thinking landlord is the best!
- work team coming together while facing uncertainty and obvious challenges
- Slowed things down for a bit which was nice to have a break from the day to day.
- More family time
- More family time has been great.
- Closer community of patients. We made it a goal in our office to do and act as normal. Be the place of normalcy in a world of chaos. We were very specific about never talking about COVID.
- Family Time
- Families have not been able to be with their loved ones during their most vulnerable and needed times nor for normal family visits. We have seen nothing positive in dealing with the elderly and family members of the elderly in the community. It is heartbreaking to listen to family's whose parents/grandparents/siblings have died alone because family is not allowed to be with them.
- Not really! lol.
- More family time, opportunity to grow as a team and adapt utilizing more technology
- Closer community of patients. We made it a goal in our office to do and act as normal. Be the place of normalcy in a world of chaos. We were very specific about never talking about COVID.
- More family time and more active.
- I guess the most positive thing, not that there's been much, was that our online performances allowed some of our out of town alumni to participate. That said, online comedy shows are tough.
- Our business has continued to be very steady
- Our members have really been very supportive, and we took the time we were closed to make improvements to the club.
- No. But we saw enough people wanting to help local business more than before by wanting to visit them but the rules made it harder.
- I have never worked in the same room with my husband prior to the pandemic. Now that we are both working from home, I have a clearer understanding of what he does and how hard he works everyday and I think he has the same with me.
- The fortitude of business owners and loyal customers has ruled

- Forced refinement of business operations.
- It has given me pause to know that anything can happen. People matter and a chance to show empathy
- My landlord was kind enough to cut rent by 50% in the first two months, as we all stayed at home. The increased family time with everyone home for dinner and indoors at night has been a wonderful return to my childhood patterns in the 1970's. I've had time to really focus on my health and feel better now than ever.
- Forced me to do things with my business that I wouldn't have done otherwise like online ordering and now I plan to keep it around because it's been working well.
- More family time some increase in productivity
- I was able to go for daily walks outside.
- Got to communicate how chiropractic helps the immune system.
- Sped up online adoption
- my life hasn't changed...maybe a little more family time. We were categorized as an essential business so we never shut down...just had some waves of slow down - we used that time in increase training and do some housekeeping. With all the "how to operate" changes our business was very busy just keeping up - seems the guidelines change with the day of the week. There is work in furloughs and bringing people back. We are fortunate that we brought everyone back to work. We are looking to hire - we are always looking to hire, especially techs and sales. It is interesting to hear about all the financial assistance programs - I had only heard of the one. I would like to know more about the others - maybe not so much me, but for my HR. For example the IRS one you mentioned, I would have thought that was the same as PPP. For my family there was also a lot of cancellations to manage with my kids - my daughter is very active in softball ball and her season was canceled so we worked hard to find alternative tournament solutions. Looking to the future, I see using less of our office space.
- Zoom meetings has freed up more time try to network and work with the non-for-profits that are aligned with the company.
- All attendees were very appreciative for being able to attend the fair and to show their animals. Even with the added stress of putting on the fair, the happiness and appreciation of the attendees made it a positive for all involved.
- NO Positives. The political climate has to change soon.
- Capitalized on the opportunity to work more together as a team to help each other and clients during difficult times. The creating of Downtown Faces Forwards social media campaign further business networking and low cost business marketing opportunity that might not have been utilized outside of COVID
- More family time
- More pool time
- more family time, the chance to really look at my business and make decisions for my ideal life
- More time with family, better work life balance, more "in office" time to complete workflow projects and internal efficiencies, implementation of new technology to better serve clients, more active, eating healthier
- Just keeping our head down and working.
- Every day presents new challenges. It is beginning to wear us down. Trying hard to stay positive.
- Clients appreciated the fact that we had a game plan in place prior and simply executed the plan to continue providing first rate service
- More family time and time to make improvements to our business.
- Family time, break from work.
- We have had some positive experiences throughout this pandemic. We've spent more time as a family and had more opportunities to get outside together. We also were able to make some improvements to our business during the months we were closed.
- Nothing has changed.
- Connected with people; eating healthier

- Changing our hours a bit gave me more time with family.
- Changing our hours a bit gave me more time with family.
- More customers purchasing our product than ever before.
- Checking more to-do list items off
- More quality time with family and physical activity
- Deeper connection with clients and employees
- More family time, healthier eating
- It slowed things down which is always nice to have a break but that lasted too long.
- We reduced our hours for a period, and I was able to spend more time at home with my family
- It has been nice to be relieved of the necessity to attend lots of events. I will start to miss them but it has been nice to simply go home at the end of my day.
- More family time
- able to eliminate underperforming employees
- hands down more family time and discovering the things you take for granted.
- More family time
- catch up on paperwork
- More pool time with the warm weather.
- More family time, customers wanting to support local
- more time at home, better online business practice
- Eating healthy and exercising more.
- loyalty of staff and customers
- Members and friends more likely to check on each other using other forms of communication
- More Family Time and an Increased Sense of Community
- our young boys being home together has built a very strong bond/friendship between them.
- We've learned that we could easily transition into remote work and it has had a huge positive impact on our employees who previously worked at the office.
- Streamlined operations
- Increased family time benefited our relationships
- More family time and time to exercise.
- The closure on Main Avenue has allowed us to make necessary renovations in order to return in a more economically viable position and prepared for any future inside service closures. Parking remains to be a potentially insurmountable obstacle for a quick service business.
- We have gotten very good at carryout
- more family time
- More family time
- Sorry; nothing positive has come from this, less stress on one hand, accompanied by more stress on the other, such as worrying about the future!
- Family time
- Other small businesses in De Pere bannin together to do small promotions, work together to try to cross promote, etc.
- Closer to employees
- I rode my bike on the trail and kayaked to relieve stress. Online store! still worked a lot.
- Downtown Faces Forward and informal support from other business and property owners.
- Closer family unit, stronger connection with patient base

- People taking care of other people - ie a customer picking up 15 bags of popcorn to drop door by door in a De Pere neighborhood
- I think the best thing, is being able to see how the community comes together. Our clients have expressed their concerns for our business and have strongly supported us. Local businesses also rally together to support each other. I have a greater appreciation for De Pere and very proud to have my business here!
- More family time
- We have gotten very good at carryout
- Closer to employees
- business as usual
- That's a tough one...other than knowing that you learn you need to work together to get thru something so impactful to all