

# De Pere Business Walk

## September, 2025 Retention Visit Findings



BUSINESS  
*walk*

building community through business

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## Business Walk Highlights

The 2025 business walk included input from in-person visits and online responses. The combined effort resulted in 70 business responses – up by 12% from 2024 but still more than 25% below pre-COVID efforts. Participating businesses provided valuable input regarding the current state and near-term outlook for the business climate in De Pere. Key findings included:

- De Pere's business climate ranking dropped in 2025 for the first year since surveying started, dropping to a 4.0 out of 5, the same ranking as in 2018.
- An increased number of businesses report recent growth with 46% growing versus 36% remaining stable, a reversal of prior years.
- Businesses are also optimistic about the future, with 79% anticipating future growth in the community. Several businesses with growth plans indicated the potential to leave given current space constraints and limited opportunities in the community.
- Twice as many businesses report actively seeking employees in 2025 as in 2024, with 56% reporting openings. Openings are split between entry-level and skilled workers. Additionally, 18% are open to youth apprenticeships, interns or similar programs.
- By industry, manufacturing businesses were most likely to report reduced sales and concerns about the future. Most manufacturers were also actively hiring, with some indicating a lack of success in securing workforce.
- Of the half of businesses interested in funding assistance, space improvements and working capital were the most often mentioned needs.
- When asked to indicate preferred training categories, marketing was the most desired topic, with strong interest in AI and employee engagement. A popular write-in topic was networking and information-sharing, which was also a popular response last year.
- Businesses remain interested in being involved, with more than two-thirds interested in partnerships, volunteering, or sponsorship of community events. Additionally, a record 58% wanted a copy of survey results, and more than one-third requested follow-up to discuss individual business issues.

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

## Business Walk Overview

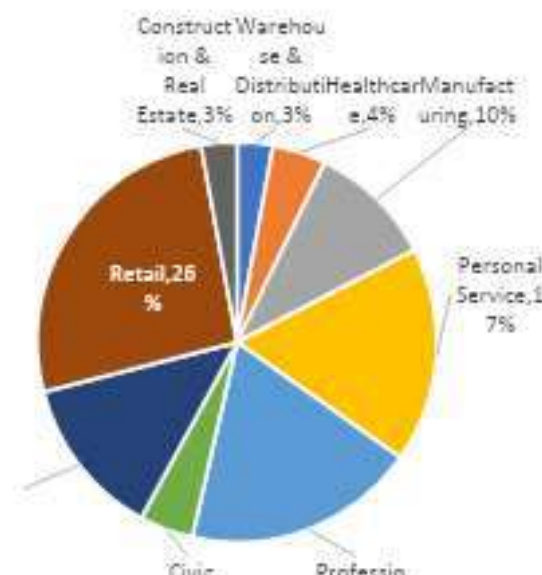
Business walks took place on September 23rd, with online responses collected both prior to and in the weeks following the visits. Volunteers visited businesses in the various geographic areas of the city in teams of two to ask a standard set of questions about the local business climate and business needs.

The walk, in its ninth year, was conducted in partnership with the De Pere Area Chamber of Commerce, the City of De Pere, Definitely De Pere, New North, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and received support from NAI Pfefferle and Community First Credit Union. The business walk 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. The 2025 business walk resulted in interviews with roughly 5 percent of City businesses, similar to prior years. This year's questions were largely the same as in prior years, continuing an effort to understand the desire of businesses to partner, sponsor or volunteer for community initiatives.

## Business Respondents

Businesses responding to the question represent a diverse mix of industries, as illustrated in the chart at right. Service businesses (personal and professional) represented 37 percent of businesses interviewed, retail and restaurant accounted for another 39 percent, and the remaining businesses were engaged in manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, contracting and healthcare. This mix is similar to prior years with a slightly larger emphasis on retail. In comparison to City-wide industry mix the sample over-represents retail businesses and under represents healthcare and restaurants.

Respondents by Industry



## Survey Results

### Business Climate

Since the inception, surveys have included an overall business climate question, asking businesses to rate the De Pere business climate on a scale of 1-5, with five representing a supportive business environment. In 2018, the inaugural score was 4.0. In 2022, when asked the same question, the average score was 4.1 out of 5, in 2023 it was 4.24 and in 2024 it was 4.27 indicating continued positive perceptions of the local economy. In 2025, the average reverted to the original 4.0. A large part of the drop was due to two manufacturing businesses giving a score of 1 out of 5, both of which indicated a recent decline in business, and both of which identified specific outreach to the City regarding challenges that have not yet been returned.

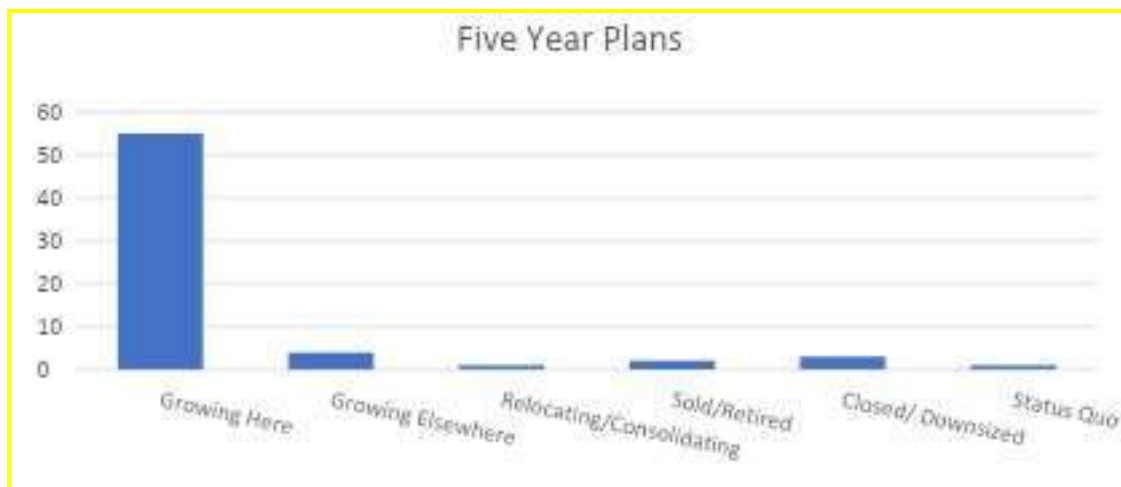
In contrast to the low rankings, a record high 41% of businesses gave the local business climate a 5 out of 5 ranking. This is up from one-quarter in 2018. Many businesses with this type of positive perception of the climate reported great relationships with neighboring and other industry businesses, loyal local customers and a growing market.

## Business Performance

Businesses were asked to indicate how their business has performed in the past two years. Businesses were generally positive, with slightly more businesses in growth mode than those reporting stability, which is typically the largest share. This year, 46% indicated that business has increased over previous years, 38% reported business at stable levels over the past two years and only 10% reported declining business. Four businesses indicated that they were two new or had significantly changed their business and could not offer a direct comparison. While nearly every industry had businesses responding in each category, a majority of professional service firms experienced recent growth, while manufacturing firms reported the greatest decline in business.

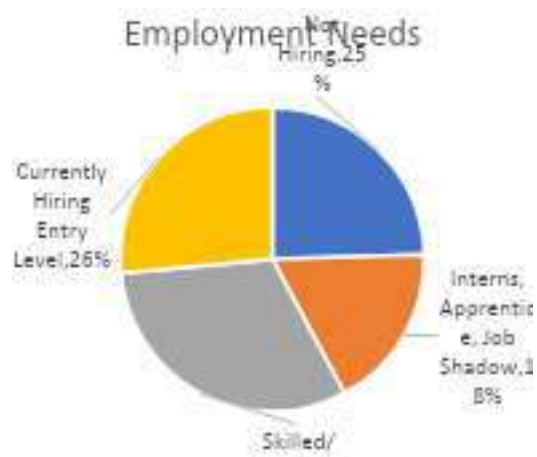
## Future Plans

Businesses in De Pere remain optimistic about the future. In 2025, 79% of businesses anticipate growing locally. Five businesses anticipate closing/retiring or downsizing in the next five years (a similar number to prior years), and four plan to expand elsewhere while remaining stable in De Pere. Of those growing in De Pere, 6% also plan to expand elsewhere.



Businesses were also asked about any limitations to their current location. The vast majority responded positively – 96% indicated satisfaction with their current location, and two have already made arrangements to accommodate future growth. Of the four businesses with location challenges, two have expansion needs that can't be accommodated in their present location, one is renting but plans to build and own a future space, and the third anticipates downsizing and moving. Of note – the firm that plans to build indicates frustration with the lack of options and support from the community for this effort.

Businesses were also asked if they were currently hiring, and, if so, for what type of employees. Results for this question were significantly different than prior years, with 56% of respondents actively hiring (compared to 25% last year). An additional 9% are not hiring, but are open to apprentices or interns.



As shown in the associated graph, hiring needs are roughly split between entry level and skilled workforce, with approximately one-third of companies looking to hire reporting open positions at multiple levels. Just under one-fifth of businesses are interested in working with interns, apprentices or job-shadow programs, including both companies that are currently hiring as well as those that are fully staffed.

New this year, companies were asked about any plans to reduce workforce. Two businesses indicated that they regularly reduce seasonally, one expects some retirements that will not be replaced, and a fourth indicated that the lack of workforce in some areas may result in a reduction in others (manufacturing sector).

### ***Funding & Partnerships***

Businesses were asked several questions related to their desire for additional services or partnerships with civic organizations. One question asked about interest in training that might be offered by the Chamber. Specific topics of interest included the following (note that these topics were new choices this year, and cannot be compared to prior years). In addition to the topics listed as options, 11 businesses wrote in a preference, with the majority of write-in responses related to networking and information sharing – ‘being in the know’.

- Marketing (57%)
- Using AI (43%)
- Employee Engagement and Performance (41%)
- Cybersecurity (36%)
- Succession Planning (29%)

The second question asked about their level of interest in alternative funding sources. Nearly half of businesses (47%) were interested in alternative funding, indicating slightly higher interest than last year. 33 businesses did express interest, specifically for funding that would assist with grants to remodel or improve existing spaces, but also for working capital. Many businesses specifically listed programs that they had explored but were not eligible for, and expressed interest in alternative or different options.

Businesses were also asked whether they’d be interested in partnering, sponsoring, or volunteering at community events in the next 12 months, 67% were interested in some level of engagement, slightly higher than last year. The largest share (55% were interested in sponsoring, but 46% were interested in volunteering, and 44% were interested in partnering.)

### ***Parting Thoughts***

Businesses were given one last opportunity to provide any other feedback that they wanted to share, either more details related to their answers, or input on questions not covered in the survey. The following are representative of the topics introduced in the survey:

Business Support & Marketing:

- Desire for more communication on business activity
- Desire for more avenues to support local business events and initiatives/successes
- Desire to meet with local officials to discuss business needs

Construction – several businesses mentioned concerns or actual impacts from road construction

Traffic & Parking:

- Very location-specific or co-tenant specific concerns over traffic/speeds/parking issues by 7 businesses

Beautification/Signage:

- Multiple businesses expressed frustration with sign ordinances and were looking for ways to increase visibility
- Several businesses identified areas that were not visually appealing near them that they would like improved

***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. In addition to an increase in survey participants this year, those that did take the survey were more interested in the results, with 58% requesting a copy of the results, up from 40% last year. Similarly, 33% of respondents requested specific follow-up, up from the 20-25 percent in previous years.

For future communications planning, more than 46% of respondents this year reported hearing about the walk, continuing an upward trend of the past three years. This includes a mix of individuals who had heard about it at meetings (largest share), via email or social media and those who participated in a prior walk.

## Business Walk Questionnaire

### 2024 Business Walk Survey



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How have you heard about the Business Walk?

- ☐ Email/Newsletter
- ☐ Word of mouth/meeting
- ☐ Website
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Signs
- ☐ Have not heard about it
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How is your business performing compared to the previous 2 years?

- 1. Increase in business
- 2. Similar to previous years
- 3. Drop in business
- 4. Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation if "Other" answered in #1:

Long answer text

2. When considering how challenging/collaborative/nurturing the business environment is in De Pere, how would you rate the business climate? (5 = excellent/1 = poor)

- 1. 5
- 2. 4
- 3. 3
- 4. 2
- 5. 1

Explanation (if needed) for #2:

Long answer text

3. Which of these best describes your business in 5 years? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Growing here
- ☐ Growing elsewhere
- ☐ Growing through acquisition
- ☐ Merging
- ☐ Consolidating
- ☐ Sold
- ☐ Closed
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation (if needed) for #3:

Long answer text

4. Does your De Pere location meet your current needs?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4.b. If the answer to #4 is "No", please tell us why and whether you own or lease your current space.

Long answer text

5. Is your business currently hiring? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Currently hiring skilled/experienced employees
- ☐ Currently hiring entry-level employees
- ☐ Open to Youth Apprentice-level employees, interns, or job shadowing
- ☐ Not hiring at this time

We will email you a copy of the survey report. To what email should we send it?

Short answer text: .....

Thank you to our 2025 Business Walk Sponsors

☐ Community First Credit Union



☐ NAI Pfefferle



...

6. Are you experiencing or planning a reduction in workforce?

☐ No

☐ Yes, due to automation or outsourcing

☐ Yes, due to business slowdown

☐ Yes, for lack of available workforce

☐ Other: .....

7. Would you like to learn more about alternative funding sources for your business from a city representative? (If yes, a city representative will follow up with more information)

☐ Yes

☐ No

Explanation (if needed) for #7:

Long answer text: .....

Explanation (if needed) for #8:

Long answer text: .....

9. Is there anything else you'd like us to know (announcements / changes / challenges) or would you like someone to follow up to discuss opportunities or issues you may be having? If so, please provide your contact information.

Long answer text: .....

10. Would you be interested in participating in trainings offered by the De Pere Chamber? If so, let us know what topics are of interest.

☐ All

☐ Succession planning

☐ Marketing

☐ Employee engagement and performance

☐ Cybersecurity

☐ Other: .....

Thank you for taking this survey. Please tell us which business you represent so we remove you from the in-person Business Walk visit on 9/23. \*

Short answer text: .....

8. In the next 12 months are you interested in partnering, sponsoring, or volunteering for community events (check all that apply)?

☐ Partnering

☐ Sponsoring

☐ Volunteering

☐ Not at this time