

2021 POST EVENT REPORT



BUSINESS walk

building community through business

Presented By



In Partnership With



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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.

2021 Business Walk Highlights

The 2021 Business Walk included both in person visits and online responses. The combined effort resulted in 104 business responses – similar to the totals from the 2020 phone outreach, but down 25% from prior in person efforts. Participating businesses provided valuable input regarding the state of the business climate in De Pere as the community emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key findings included:

- More businesses have experienced a net growth since the pandemic, with 30% reporting increased sales. In contrast, 20% report a net decline in sales to date.
- More than 2/3 of businesses expect growth in their business in the next five years. An additional 1/3 of businesses anticipate growth elsewhere, although 80% of these expect growth in multiple locations. The remaining 20% plan to relocate due to space constraints. Eleven businesses plan to close, merge, sell or retire.
- Businesses are positive about general economic trends, with 46% expressing a positive outlook for the community based on growth projections and infrastructure/development patterns.
- Labor shortages were identified as a major short-term concern by 16% of businesses, but a similar number have concerns over supply chains or consumer spending shifts.
- Businesses indicated a desire for marketing support, although the overall interest in such assistance was reduced over last year. Most also indicated interest in training/assistance on Talent Development or Internship programs.
- There were 517 open jobs represented by the respondents, with 57% of businesses having at least one open position. Entry and mid-level positions were most common, with drivers the single most in-demand position.

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

Internships
rank highest
for workforce
recruitment

30% of
businesses
report
increased sales

Increased
communication
by civic
partners
desired

Business Walk Overview

Conversations with businesses took place on September 28th, with online responses collected for another week following the visits. Volunteers visited businesses in the various geographic areas of the city as in previous years, although all visits were completed in the afternoon, rather than in two shifts.

The 2021 Business Walk resulted in interviews of 104 businesses throughout the City, or just under 11 percent of City businesses. Interviewed businesses included a mix of businesses in the City of De Pere and surrounding area including retail, service, construction and manufacturing firms.

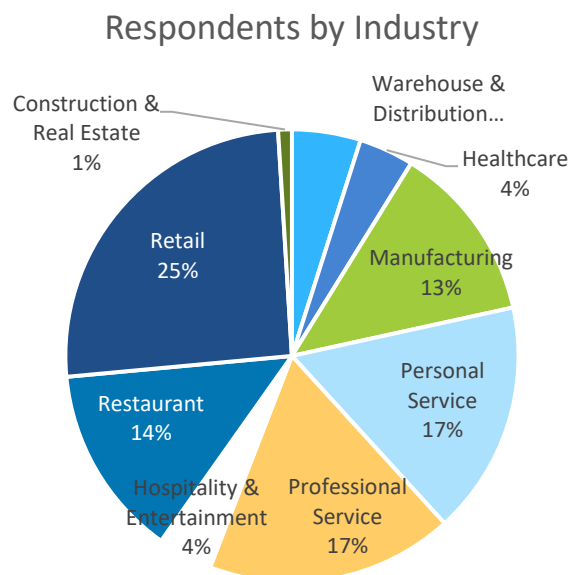
The Walk, in its fifth year, was conducted by the De Pere Area Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the City of De Pere, Definitely De Pere, New North, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and received support from Wolter Group/Wisconsin Lift Truck and Denmark State Bank.

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. This year, the talk also provided an opportunity to assess the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business operations and revenues and identify support that could help businesses sustain and/or grow over the next year.

Business Respondents

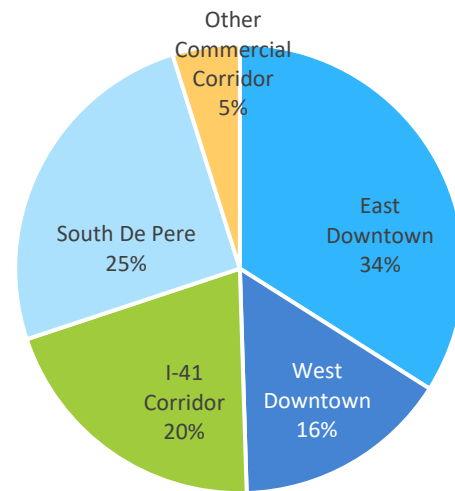
Businesses responding to the question represent a diverse mix of industries, as illustrated in the pie chart to the right. Service businesses (personal and professional) represented 34 percent of businesses interviewed, retail and restaurant accounted for another 39 percent, and the remaining businesses were engaged in manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, contracting and healthcare.

This year, more than in previous years, industry played a significant role in influencing responses, primarily because the impact of COVID-19 impacted industries differently. For instance, half of restaurant respondents indicated that they have not yet seen business return to pre-pandemic levels, while more than two-thirds of service businesses reported no impact on revenues or an increase in business over the past several years. The industry of respondents also impacted the nature of labor constraints, discussed in greater detail later in this report.



Interviewers (and mailers) were sent out to many commercial areas within the City. However, responses were not equal across areas, perhaps because of access to decision makers or the more limited time of day during which interviews were conducted this year. The chart to the right illustrates the relative geographic mix of business respondents. However, unlike the industry mix, the geography of respondents did not significantly impact responses to questions, other than concerns about parking, which are limited to downtown businesses (both east and west).

Respondent Location



Survey Results

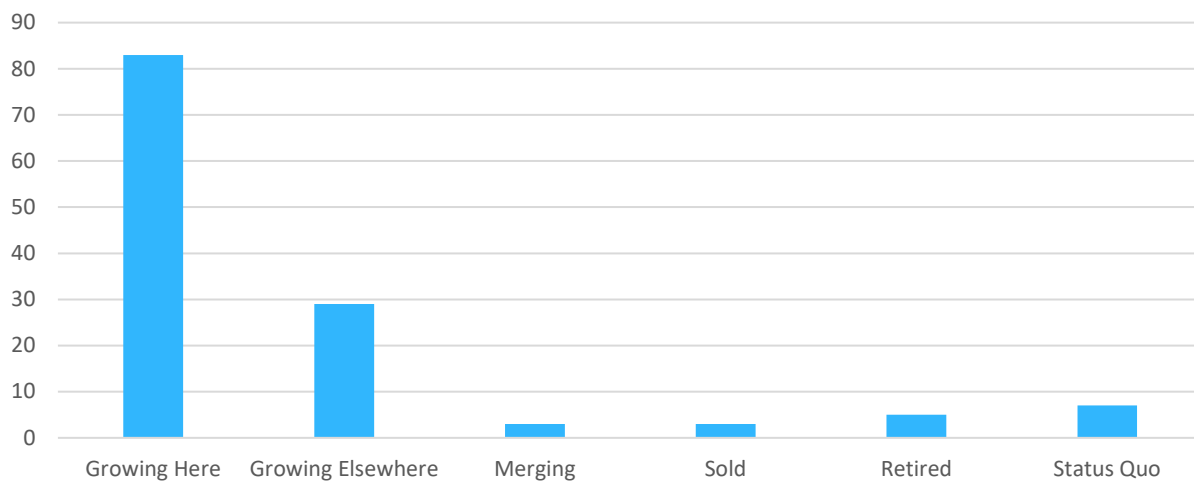
COVID-19 Impacts

Most businesses surveyed were impacted in some way by the pandemic, stay at home orders or shifting consumer behaviors. Only 29 percent of responding businesses reported no impacts on revenue from the pandemic. Another 20 percent reported a decline in business that has not rebounded, while an additional 30 percent saw increased sales. The remaining businesses had been impacted but have since seen sales recover.

Future Plans

Businesses in De Pere remain optimistic about the future, with the vast majority anticipating growth in De Pere within the next five years. An additional 30 businesses anticipate growth elsewhere, although 80% of these businesses anticipate growing locally as well as elsewhere, either through acquisition or opening additional locations. The remainder anticipate a potential move, largely due to space constraints at their current location. Of businesses not anticipating growth, three anticipate a sale of the business, with a similar number anticipating merger or acquisition to an outside entity, and five owners plan to retire and close. The remaining businesses do not anticipate any changes, or are still uncertain about the future.

Five Year Plans



Changes Anticipated

Respondents were asked to identify any specific positive or negative changes that they anticipate with regard to the business climate in the next year or two. A majority of respondents were primarily positive, with 46 percent indicating positive changes, while 16 percent identified negative changes and 7 percent anticipated both positive and negative impacts. The bullets below highlight the most frequently identified topics within each category:

Positive:

- Of respondents anticipating positive change, 27 percent cited general economic expansion and growing consumer confidence and an additional 16 percent indicated local housing development and the addition of new businesses as positively benefitting their business.
- Another popular source of positive transformation was associated with specific improvement projects, with 16 percent citing the Mulva Center, and a similar number indicating that the completion of the proposed Southern bridge would have a positive impact.
- Other aspects driving positive change mentioned by multiple individuals included community leadership, events, growing support for local businesses and specific consumer trends related to their industry.

Negative:

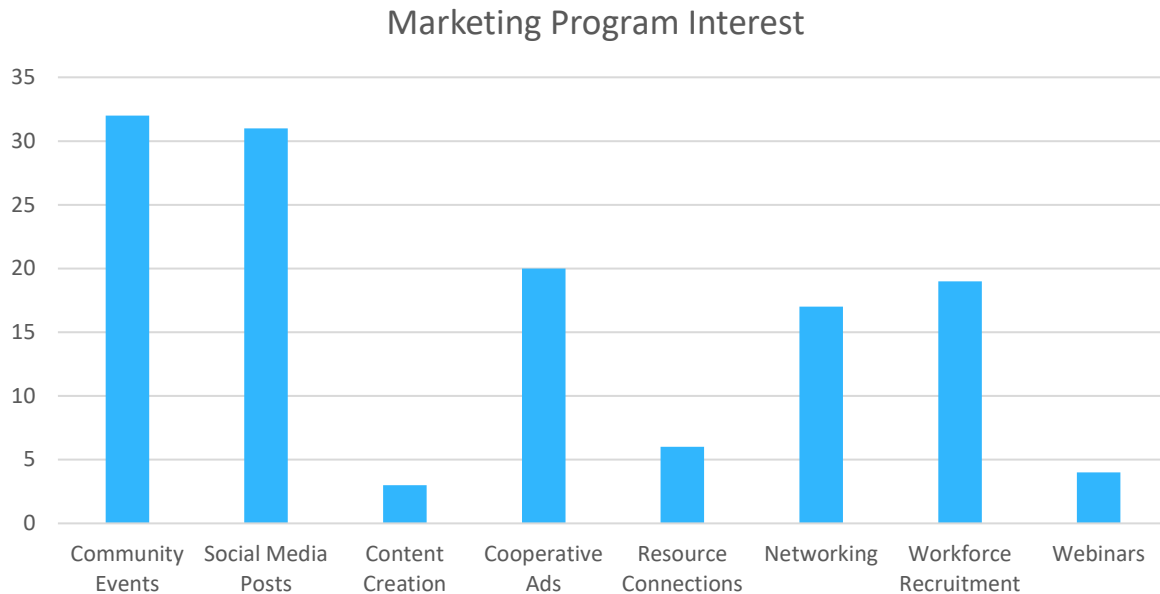
- Negative comments were focused on parking, mentioned by half of those with a negative outlook. The specific issue cited varied greatly, ranging from employee parking, time limits and enforcement. All businesses citing parking were located downtown, but on both the east and west side of the district.
- A concern about labor and the ability to recruit employees was mentioned by 16 percent as a short term concern, the second most often indicated negative concern.
- Other items mentioned by multiple individuals included disruption from planned construction, supply chain pressures and the continuation of individuals working from home reducing foot traffic downtown.

In addition to a near-term outlook, businesses were asked to identify any other challenges that they faced or concerns they have about doing business in De Pere. Approximately one-third of respondents identified one or more concerns, including both businesses with overall negative outlooks and those with more generalized concerns or needs. Concerns identified in this section can be roughly divided into three main categories:

- Need for more outreach/increased communication. Many businesses indicated that they do not regularly receive communications from civic partners, or feel unaware of community initiatives. Many specific comments requested assistance in creating customer awareness and engagement between companies in the area, either through events or other means.
- Access & Parking. Businesses (including those without a current parking challenge) identified a concern over future parking challenges, as well as transportation or land use changes that they anticipated might create limitations on access to their property for customers.
- Business concerns: Concerns about mergers and acquisition activity and labor shortages were common areas of concern in this category.

Interest in Programs and Services

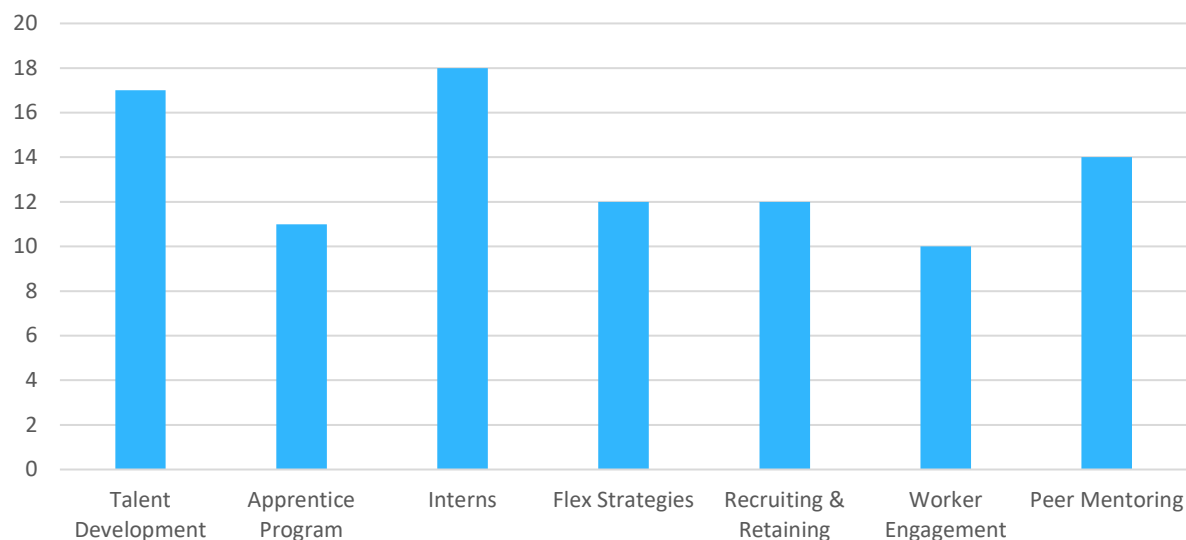
Businesses were asked two questions related to their interest in services from the Chamber and other partners on marketing and workforce initiatives. Businesses were asked to express interest in potential programs within each of these areas. The number interested in each of the proposed initiatives is illustrated in the below graphs.



Several of the marketing support programs identified in this year’s survey were also included last year (networking, resource connections and cooperative advertising). Although respondent numbers were similar in both years, the level of interest in all types of marketing support is reduced in this year’s survey. This may mirror a general trend of burnout seen among businesses statewide that have been consistently forced to innovate and adapt for the past several years. There were some trends associated with levels of interest in marketing programs by industry, with retailers and restaurants most interested in events, social media and cooperative advertising, while manufacturers and wholesale/distribution businesses were more likely to value workforce solutions and networking. Service businesses valued all of the above items equally, while healthcare and real estate were the least interested in any type of marketing assistance.

Among strategies to address workforce concerns, intern and talent development programs had the most interest (several respondents specifically identified connections to schools and colleges as a desire), with strategies to facilitate peer mentoring and knowledge transfer as a close third place topic of interest. It should be noted that among those interested in the remaining topics (apprenticeship, flex strategies, recruiting & retaining and worker engagement), a majority of respondents in each category selected all of the topics as of interest, rather than specifically identifying interest in any one of these strategies. There was no pattern of workforce assistance interest by industry, with businesses of all sizes, types and locations indicating an interest in one or more types of assistance. The exception to this was apprenticeships, which were largely of interest to manufacturing businesses.

Workforce Assistance Program Interest

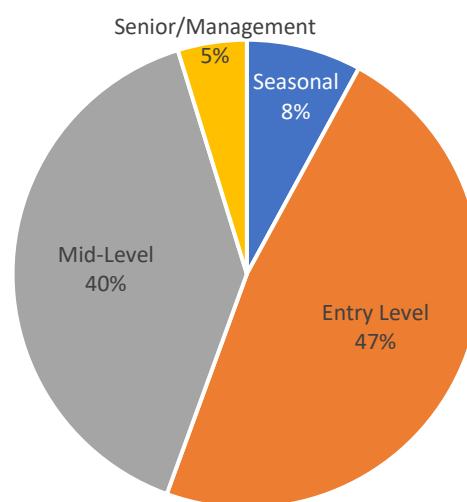


Job Vacancies

Respondents were asked to indicate if they had any current position openings at their business. A total of 517 open jobs were identified, with 57% of businesses indicating they had one or more open position. A majority of businesses with open positions (80%) had five or fewer open positions, but several firms had a dozen or more, with one firm reporting 200 open jobs.

By skill level, jobs are centered on entry and mid-level positions, as indicated in the chart at right. Specific position openings indicated in discussions with businesses included drivers (most often cited), welders, mechanics, machine operators, kitchen staff, professional office staff and temp workers.

Open Positions



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, 62 provided contact information and expressed an interest in individual follow-up or to receive a copy of the survey results. For future communications planning, it is also important to note that approximately half of respondents were unaware of the Business Walk in advance, and those that heard about it did so primarily through email newsletters (25% of all respondents), followed by word of mouth/at a meeting.



Business Name: _____	# De Pere Employees: _____
Address: _____	
I spoke with: _____	Map No. _____
Attach business card	

2021 Business Walk Questions

1. **Have you heard about our 'Business Walk'?** Yes/No *(by what means?)*

Email/Newsletter

Website

Social Media

Signs

Word of Mouth/Meeting

Did Not Hear

Other: _____

2. **Compared to Pre-Covid, how is your business performing today?**

Rebounded fully / Rebounded partially / Never affected / Increased business / Severe drop in business

Other: _____

3. **In the next year or two, are there positive or negative changes to the De Pere business climate that you foresee may impact your business?**

4. **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: _____

5. **How can the De Pere Area Chamber help you drive more leads and revenue?** *(check all that apply)*

Hold more community events

Have more business networking events

Posts to social media

Help with content creation

Organize cooperative advertising

Connect to resources

Help with workforce recruitment

Host webinars

Other: _____

6. **Please tell us if you have current job vacancies you are actively trying to fill.**

A) No. of openings: _____

B) What are the skill levels of the job vacancies? *(check all that apply)*

Seasonal

Entry

Mid

Senior/Management

No vacancies/NA

Comments: _____
