**DOWNTOWN OLYMPIA**

Business Outreach & Executive Summary

Prepared for City of Olympia
Date of Transmittal – September 30th, 2015

# **Introduction**

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The Thurston Economic Development Council (EDC) is pleased to partner with the City of Olympia. The EDC was contracted to conduct outreach to local businesses located within Downtown Olympia core.

# **Project Overview**

The project was managed by EDC staff lead, Kyle Wiese, Project Manager. Mark Rentfrow, Thurston Energy Manager and Joseph Little, Senior Fellow, provided primary staffing throughout the project along with additional community volunteers. In coordination with the City of Olympia, the EDC developed an outreach strategy and set of survey questions designed to understand the characteristics of businesses located in the target area. The survey was intended to solicit input from local businesses on issues and subjects currently affecting business, and provide feedback to the City of Olympia.

Between August and September the EDC staff and community volunteers canvassed the target area and reached out to approximately 425 businesses and organizations located within the designated area that was defined by the City of Olympia. The goal was to complete a minimum of 80 surveys with businesses and organizations located within the target area of Downtown Olympia. At completion of the project, 104 businesses within the area had participated in the survey process (see enclosed copy of outreach letter, Local Business Profile/Visitation Form [survey] and a complete report of outreach results).

# **Survey Findings**

A total of 104 in person surveys were completed representing the following industry categories: retail, office, food, entertainment, industrial and personal.

**Market & Sales**Of the 104 participants surveyed, 65% indicated that their business is either emerging or growing while 30% are maturing and 5% are in are declining within their lifecycle. Businesses identified their primary markets to be 34% local, 47% regional, 13% national and 6% international. Market share and general sales for have shown to be fairly linear. 55% have increased their market share while 64% have increased in sales. 41% indicated a steady market share while 30% have remained stable in sales. 4% have indicated a decrease in market share while 6% have experienced a decrease in sales. The following table is a summary of responses:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Primary Market** | **Life Cycle** | **Market Share** | **General Sales** |
|
| Local | 35 | Emerging | 9 | Increasing | 57 | Increasing | 63 |
| Regional | 49 | Growing | 59 | Stable | 42 | Stable | 30 |
| National | 14 | Maturing | 31 | Decreasing | 4 | Decreasing | 6 |
| International | 6 | Declining | 5 |   |   |   |   |
| *\*No Response* | *0* | *\*No Response* | *0* | *\*No Response* | *1* | *\*No Response* | *5* |

A total of 24 businesses indicated that they sell to the government. Of these 24 businesses, 46% of indicated an increase in government sales while an additional 46% remained stable and 8% experienced a decrease. The following table is a summary responses:

|  |
| --- |
| **Government Sales** |
| Sell to Government | 24 | Increasing | 11 |
| Do not sell to Government  | 72 | Stable  | 11 |
| *No Response* | *8* | Decreasing | 2 |

**Workforce**Businesses were asked to provide general information regarding their overall workforce. Questions asked encompassed current and future needs in addition to the availability of a quality workforce. Based off of workforce trends from 2013 to 2015, x% of businesses increased their workforce while x% remained stable and x% declined.

Following is a summary of pertaining to the overall workforce of businesses surveyed:

In addition to previous workforce trends, 32% of businesses indicated that they have a current job opening at the time in which the survey was conducted. These job openings varied between part-time and full-time work throughout the retail, office, food, entertainment, industrial and personal industries.

Following is a list of job openings during the time of participating in the survey:

* Personal Assistant
* Legal Assistant
* Sales
* Stylist
* Food Preparers, Cooks, Expediters
* Delivery Driver
* Baristas
* Bartender
* Cashier
* Dishwasher
* Independent Contractor
* Inspector
* Project Manager
* Principal
* Tax Preparation Professional
* Auto Technicians
* Upholster
* Software Developer
* Branch Manager
* Fish Husbandry
* Broker

In addition to current job openings, 45% of businesses indicated that they will be looking to increase their workforce within the next two years while 55% plan to remain stable. Of the businesses that indicate an increase in their workforce, their projected positions will encompass part-time and full-time work throughout the retail, office, food, entertainment, industrial and personal industries.

Following is a list of future job openings between now and 2017:

* Management
* Coaching
* Sales
* Investments
* Marine Technician
* Baristas
* Drivers
* Office Support
* Tasting Room Manager
* Distilling Teacher
* Lawyers
* Optician
* Principal
* Mechanics
* Receptionist
* Data Technician
* Customer Service
* Consultants
* Service Technician
* Bartenders
* Upholster
* Teller
* Cashier
* Researchers
* Architect
* Software Developer
* Stylists

Businesses were asked to rate the availability of quality workers that have previously gone through hiring process and/or are currently going through the hiring process. The scale ranges from one to seven. If a business rates the availability of quality workers as a “one”, this would indicate that they cannot find someone to fulfill their needs. If a business rates the availability of quality workers as a “seven”, this would indicate that the workforce in which they are recruiting is highly qualified and will fulfill their needs. 69% of business indicated that they generally have access to a quality workforce when summarizing responses for ratings of 4-7.

Following is a summary of responses:

|  |
| --- |
| **Availability of Workers** |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5% | 12% | 14% | 20% | 11% | 9% | 29% |
| *\* No Response = 11 businesses* |

**Facility & Location (Waiting for Marko)**When asked to describe the positive attributes of their business location, respondents provided similar feedback across all industry categories. Generally businesses in the Meridian Campus like the fact that they are located within close proximity to Interstate-5 with relatively easy access to their operations. Additionally, businesses recognize that the general area has potential for growth and they are happy with the aesthetics of the campus as a whole.

Following is a summary of the most common survey responses:

* I-5 accessibility
* Area has potential for growth
* Meridian Campus is a nice area

When asked to describe the negative attributes of their location, many businesses shared similar concerns. Traffic related concerns mainly focused on the intersection of Hogum Bay and Willamette. The vast majority of businesses expressed safety concerns with the intersection and noted that accidents happen frequently which leads to many employees who purposefully avoid the Hogum Bay and Willamette intersection. Businesses hope for a stop light to be implemented (there was a strong consensus that implementing a roundabout is not desirable). Other negative attributes include lack of access to public transportation for employees and that their business is difficult to locate.

Following is a summary of the most common responses:

* Safety concerns at the intersection of Hogum Bay and Willamette
* Access to public transportation for employees
* Their business is difficult to find

Businesses were asked what factors they considered in choosing their business location. This question accumulated responses that clearly indicated that businesses strategically located within the Meridian Campus. Respondents reasoned their locating in the Meridian Campus due to geographical proximity to markets and other corporate facilities as well as access to I-5 and available buildings/land that adequately suited their needs.

Following is a summary of the most common responses:

* Access to I-5
* Proximity to markets
* Proximity to other corporate facilities
* Favorable zoning for their use
* Available space
* Adequate buildings that were move in ready

When asked if the telecommunication infrastructure was adequate for their needs, all business indicated “Yes”.

**Financial**Businesses were asked if they anticipate using outside financing to fund growth, expansions or acquisitions in the next 18 months. About three-fourths (3/4) of businesses indicated that they do not anticipate using outside financing.

Following is a summary of responses:

|  |
| --- |
| **Anticipate using Outside Financing** |
| Yes | No |
|  |  |

**Community**Businesses were asked if they anticipate using outside financing to fund growth, expansions or acquisitions in the next 18 months. About three-fourths (3/4) of businesses indicated that they do not anticipate using outside financing.

Following is a summary of responses:

|  |
| --- |
| **Areas of Difficulty or Concern** |
| City Permitting | State Permitting | Regulations | Transportation | Supply Chain | Changing Market |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

**General Survey Questions**

Businesses indicated various challenges when asked, “What are the biggest local challenges impacting your industry today?” Multiple businesses found that access to public transportation has an effect on their business along with regulations such as taxes and signage. Additionally, access to a quality workforce and I-5 traffic were also a challenge.

Following is a summary of the most common responses:

* Access to public transportation
* Taxes
* Signage regulations
* Workforce issues specifically pertaining to accessing a quality workforce
* I-5 traffic

The final question of the survey provided an opportunity for businesses to express their opinions to the City of Lacey. The question asked, “From your perspective, what are some of the things that the City of Lacey should be doing to foster the success of your business?” The majority of businesses indicated overall contentment with the City of Lacey while also making suggestions on ways the City of Lacey can help to foster the success of their business. These suggestions were related to traffic safety and signage regulations.

Following is a summary of the most common responses:

* City of Lacey has been good to work with
* Fix traffic issues at Hogum Bay and Willamette
* Revise signage regulations

# **Summary**

The general tone from businesses who participated in the Meridian Campus business outreach survey was positive. This was reflected through their optimistic responses when questioned about current market trends and sales as well as their positivity regarding future growth.

Of the 25 businesses surveyed, about two-thirds serve a local or regional market, while the remaining participate in national and international markets. All survey respondents indicated that their business was emerging, growing or maturing with zero indicating declines. From 2013 – 2015, 80% of businesses indicated their workforce is either stable or increasing, while the remaining businesses experienced a slight decline in employment. The most consistent responses throughout the survey were 1.) Access to public transportation is desired, and 2.) The intersection of Hogum Bay and Willamette is unsafe and needs to be improved.

Respondents were happy to take part in the survey and many expressed a warm “thank you” for involving them in the process. Through this initial survey effort, the Thurston EDC is optimistic that the outreach will aid in laying the groundwork for future dialogue and engagement between the City of Lacey and the local business community.