

This report provides the results of a business survey conducted during March and April of 2021. The survey is part of a program launched by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development to help communities develop Rapid Recovery Plans for downtowns and commercial districts. The survey was directed to owners or other appropriate representatives of business establishments located in the targeted commercial areas. (For Data Tables, see page 9.)

**Reading**

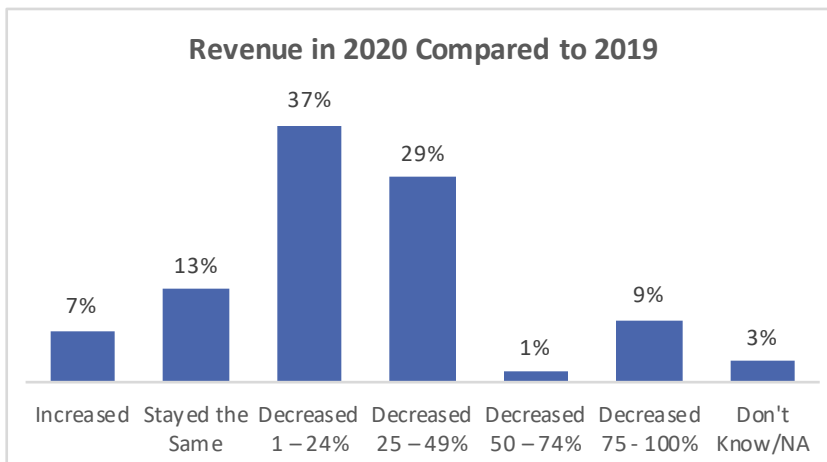
Targeted Commercial Area

Responses: 68

**Impacts of COVID-19**

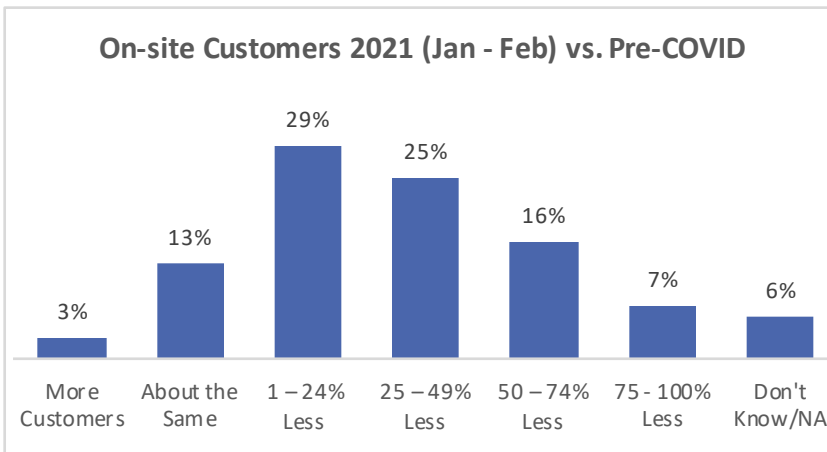
**Decline in Business Revenue**

76% of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019. For 39% of businesses, revenue declined by 25% or more.



**Less Foot Traffic in Commercial Area**

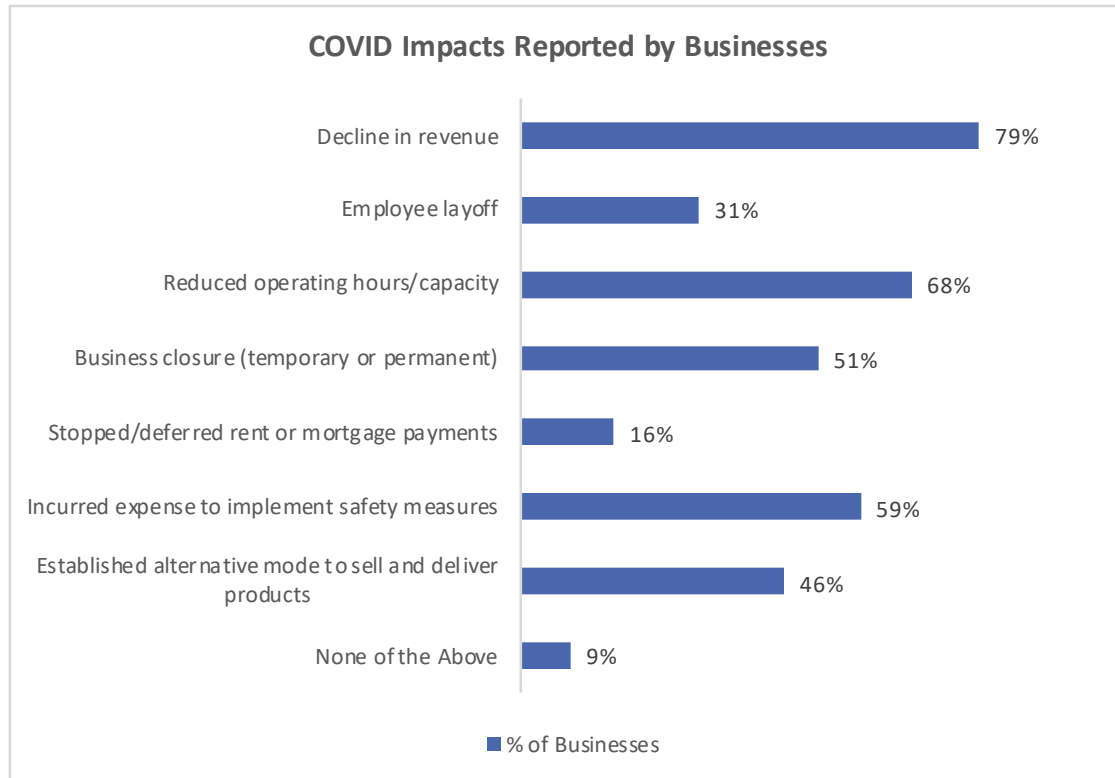
77% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID. 48% of businesses reported a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.



## Impacts of COVID-19 (cont'd)

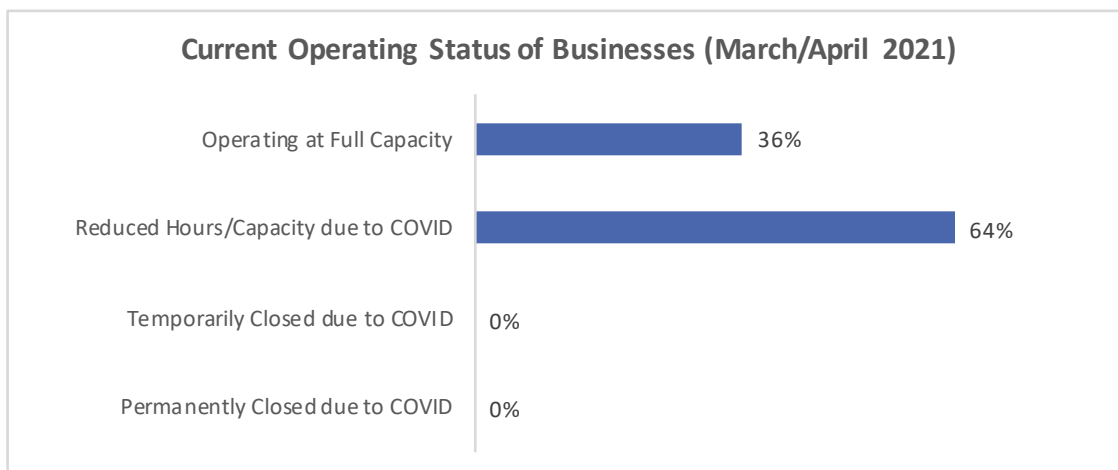
### Reported Impacts

91% of businesses reported being impacted by COVID.



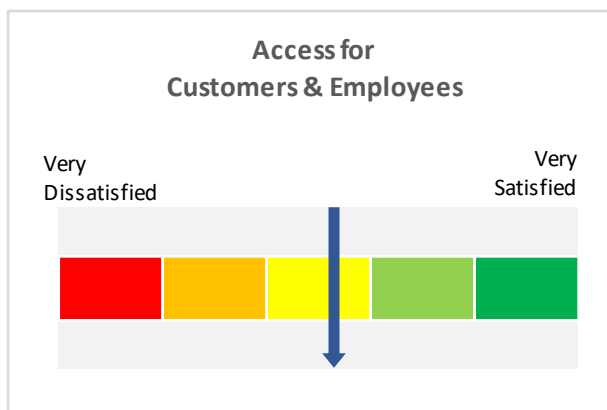
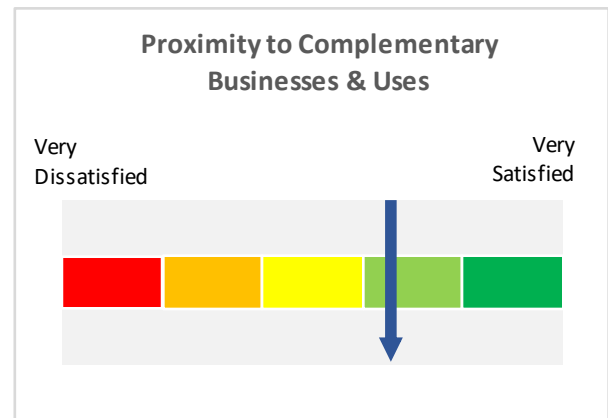
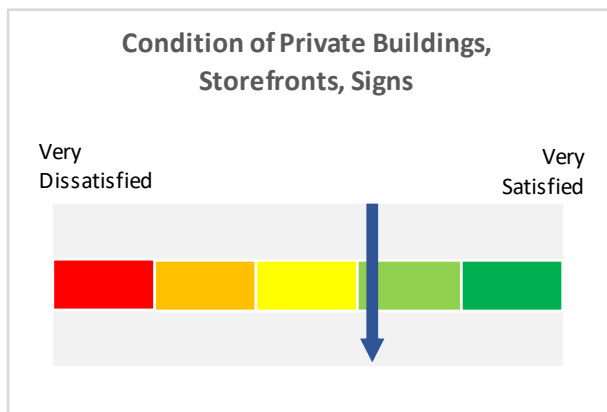
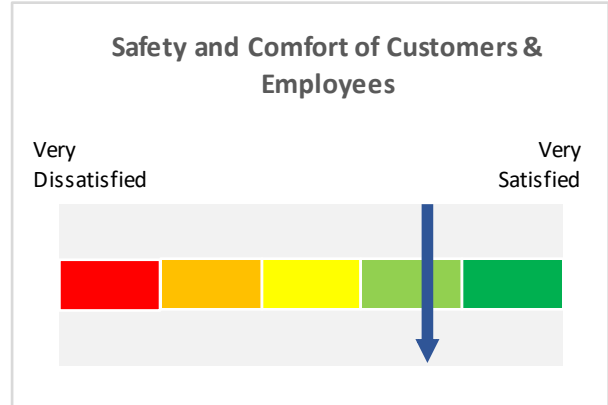
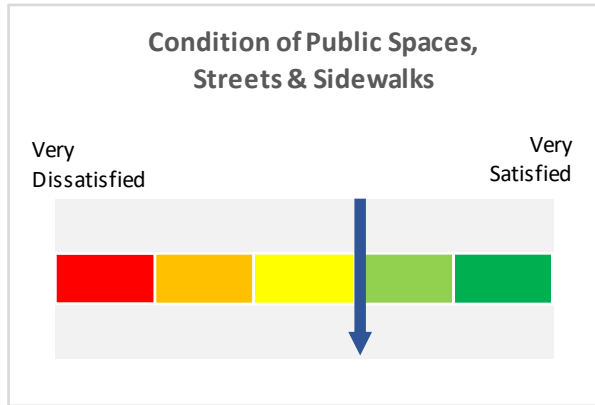
### Operating Status

At the time of the survey, 64% of businesses reported they were operating at reduced hours/capacity or closed.



## Business Satisfaction with Commercial District

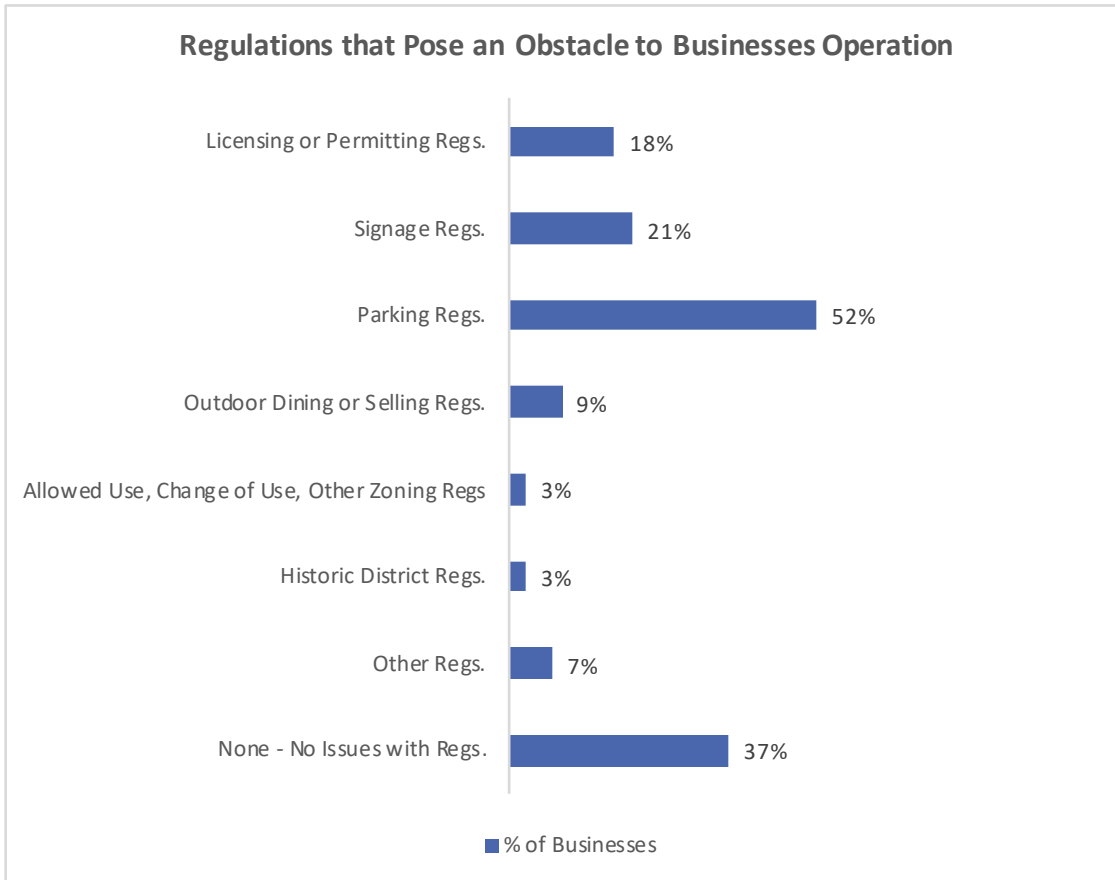
The charts below illustrate the average satisfaction rating among respondents regarding various elements.



## Business Satisfaction with Commercial District (cont'd)

### Regulatory Environment

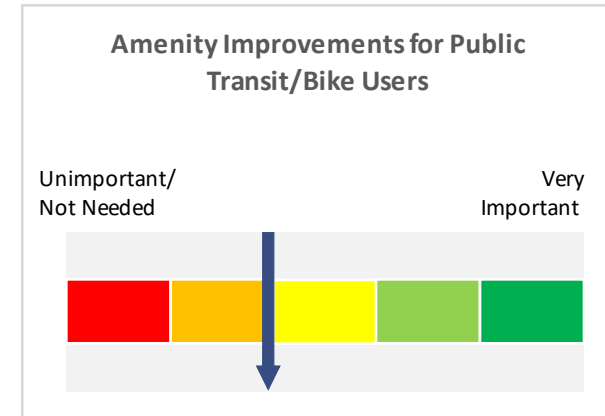
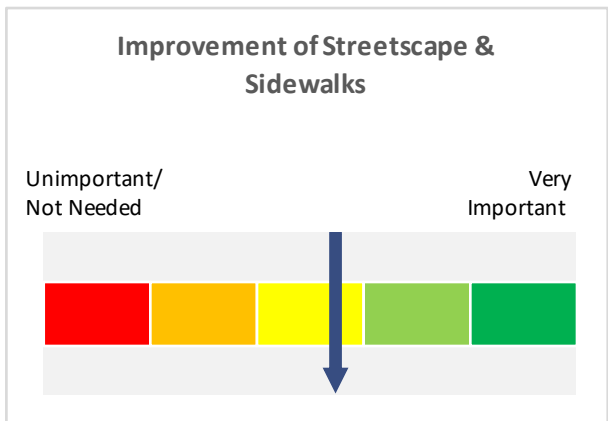
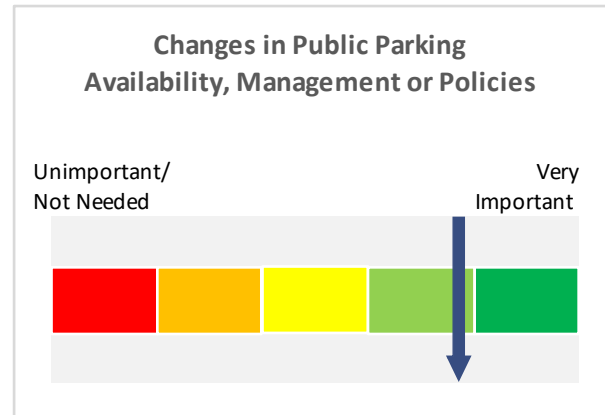
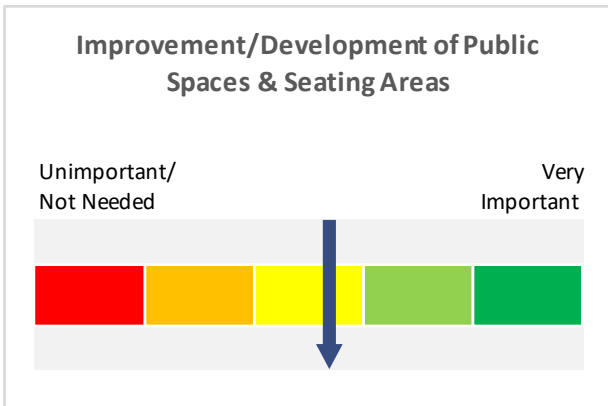
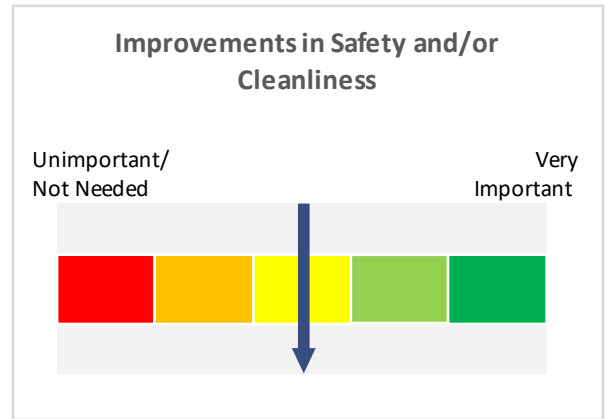
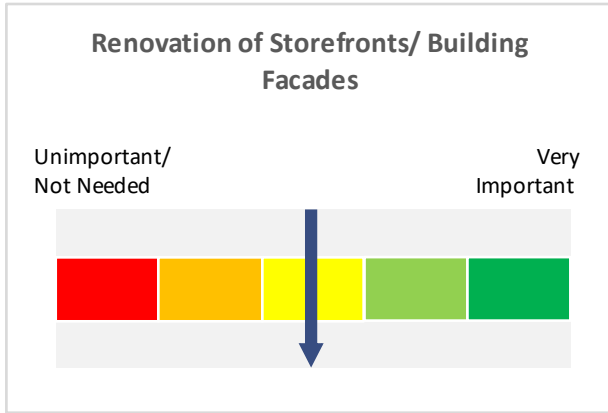
63% of businesses indicated that the regulatory environment poses an obstacle to business operation.



## Business Input Related to Possible Strategies

### Physical Environment, Atmosphere and Access

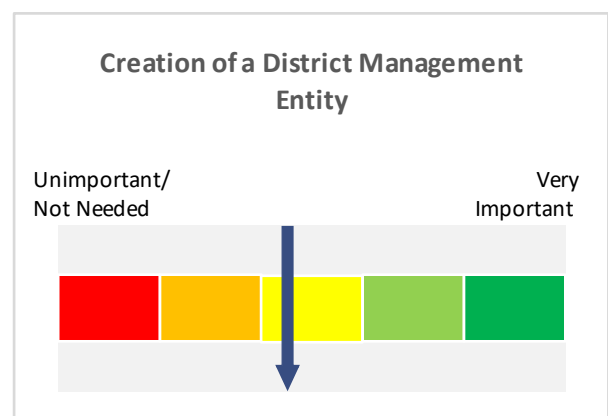
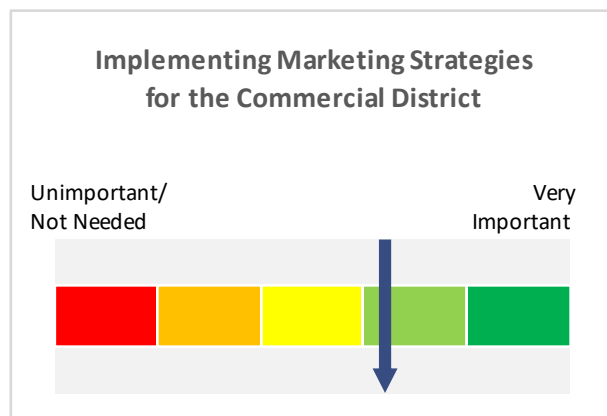
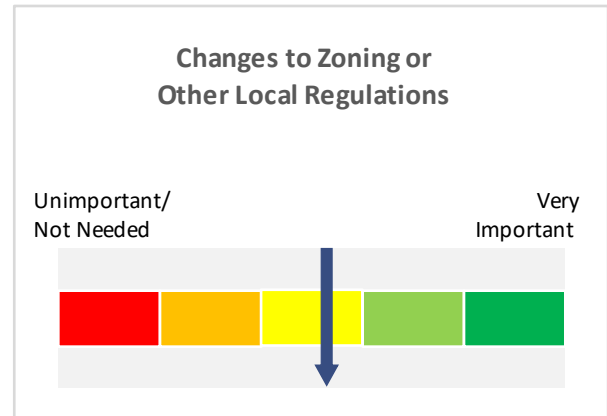
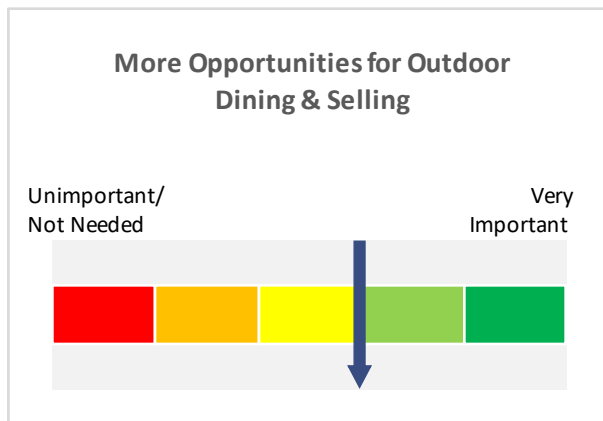
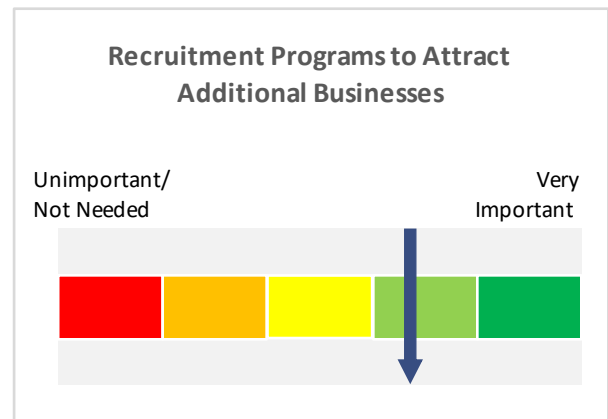
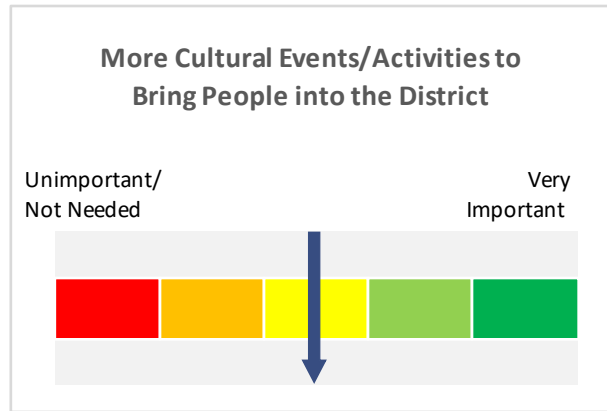
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.



## Business Input Related to Possible Strategies (cont'd)

### Attraction/Retention of Customers and Businesses

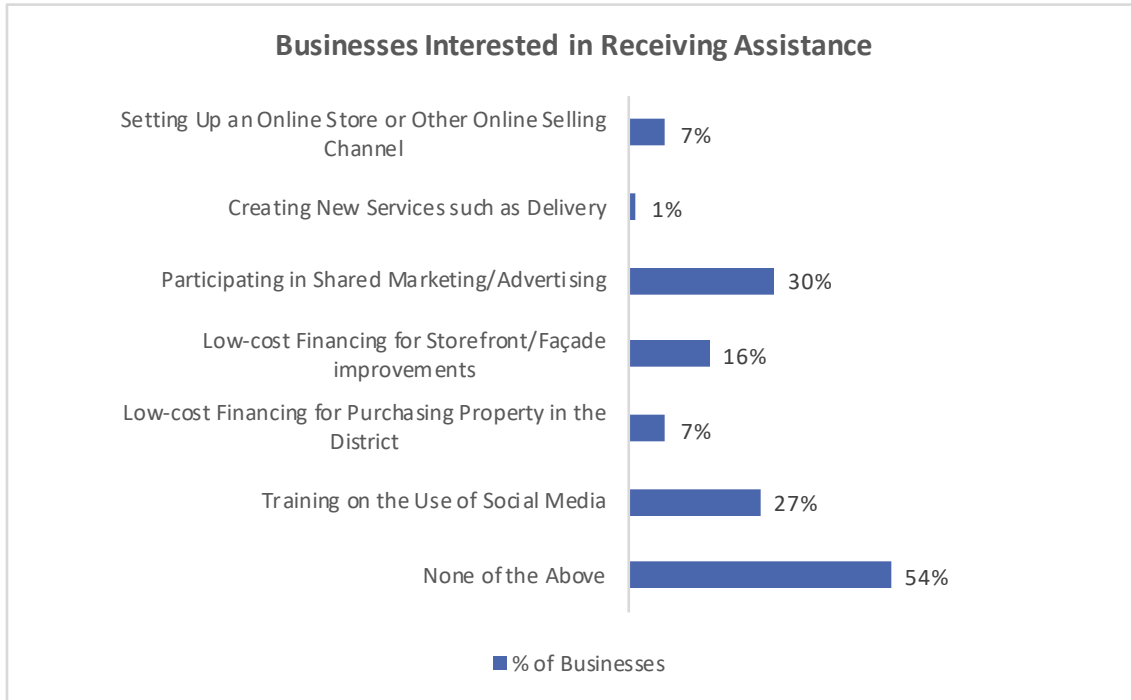
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.



## Business Input Related to Possible Strategies (cont'd)

### Businesses Support

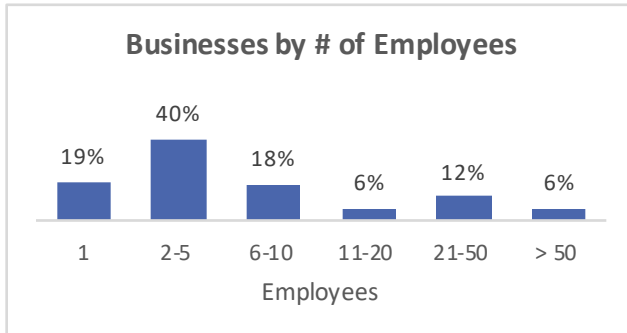
46% of businesses expressed interest in receiving some kind of assistance.



## Business Characteristics

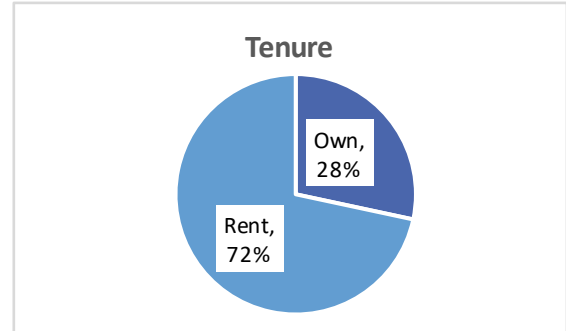
### Business Size

59% of businesses are microenterprises ( $\leq 5$  employees).



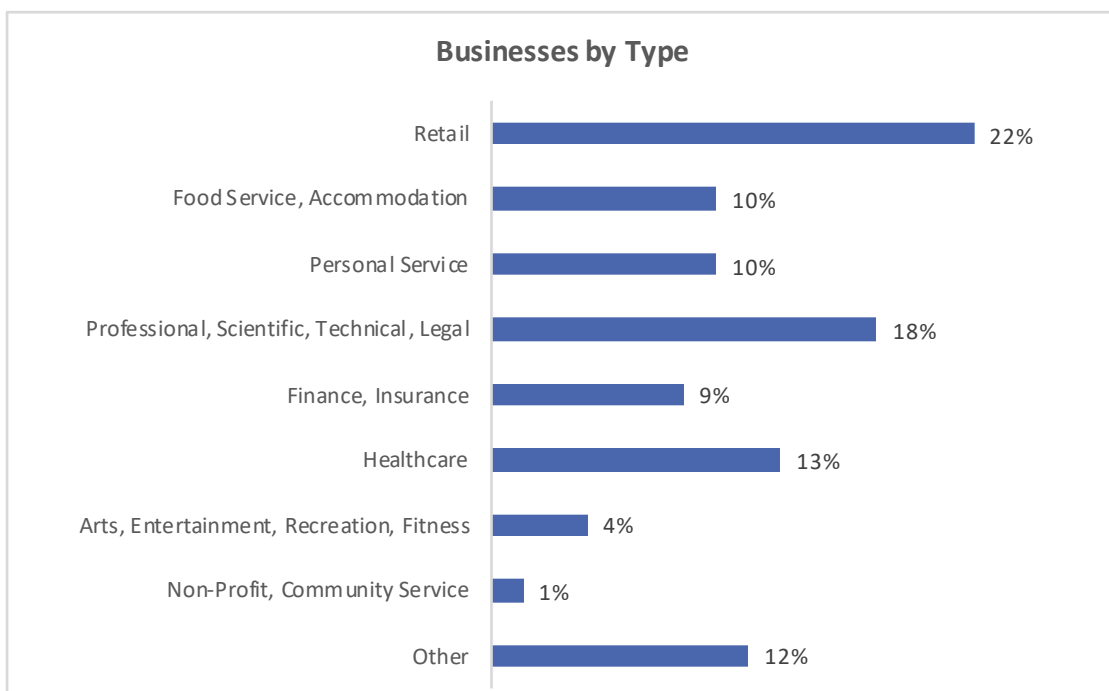
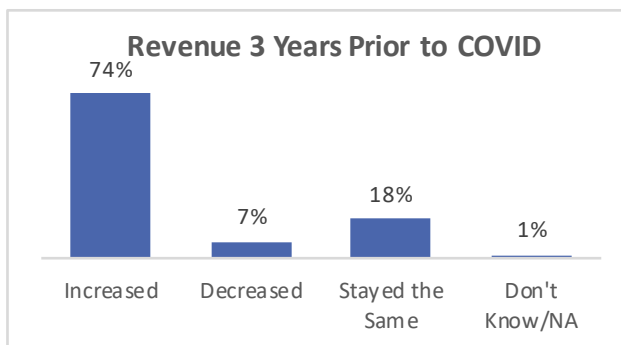
### Business Tenure

72% of businesses rent their space.



### Revenue Trend Prior to COVID

74% of businesses reported increase in revenue during the 3 years prior to COVID.





## Business Survey Results - Data Tables

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### Community Where Targeted Downtown or Commercial District is Located

1. Please select the community where your business is located.

Reading	68
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### Business Characteristics & Satisfaction with Commercial Area

2. Including yourself, how many people did your business employ prior to COVID (February 2020), including both full-time and part-time?

1	13	19%
2 to 5	27	40%
6 to 10	12	18%
11 to 20	4	6%
21 to 50	8	12%
More than 50	4	6%
Total	68	100%

3. Does your business own or rent the space where it operates?

Own	19	28%
Rent	48	72%
Total	67	100%

4. During the 3 years prior to COVID, had your business revenue . . . ?

Increased	50	74%
Decreased	5	7%
Stayed about the Same	12	18%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	1	1%
Total	68	100%

5. Please select the category that best fits your business.

Retail (NAICS 44-45)	15	22%
Food Service (restaurants, bars), Accommodation (NAICS 72)	7	10%
Personal Service (hair, skin, nails, dry cleaning) (NAICS 81)	7	10%
Professional Scientific, Technical, Legal (NAICS 54)	12	18%
Finance, Insurance (NAICS 52)	6	9%
Healthcare (medical, dental, other health practitioners) (NAICS 62)	9	13%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Fitness (NAICS 71)	3	4%
Non-Profit, Community Services	1	1%
Other	8	12%
Total	68	100%

**6. Please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of the Downtown or Commercial District where your business is located.**

**Condition of public spaces, streets, sidewalks**

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	11	16%
Neutral	22	33%
Satisfied	27	40%
Very Satisfied	7	10%
Total	67	100%

**Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage**

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	8	12%
Neutral	22	33%
Satisfied	32	48%
Very Satisfied	5	7%
Total	67	100%

**Access for Customers & Employees**

Very Dissatisfied	4	6%
Dissatisfied	14	21%
Neutral	23	34%
Satisfied	22	33%
Very Satisfied	4	6%
Total	67	100%

**Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees**

Very Dissatisfied	1	1%
Dissatisfied	1	1%
Neutral	16	24%
Satisfied	33	49%
Very Satisfied	16	24%
Total	67	100%

**Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses**

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	6	9%
Neutral	23	34%
Satisfied	28	42%
Very Satisfied	10	15%
Total	67	100%

**7. Do any local regulations (not related to COVID) pose an obstacle to your business operation?**

Licensing or permitting regulations	12	18%
Signage regulations	14	21%
Parking regulations	35	52%
Outdoor dining or selling regulations	6	9%
Allowed uses, change of use or other zoning regulations	2	3%
Historic District regulations	2	3%
Other regulations (not related to COVID)	5	7%
None - No Issues with regulations	25	37%

**Impacts of COVID**

**8. Did your business experience any of the following due to COVID? Select All that apply.**

Decline in revenue	54	79%
Employee layoff	21	31%
Reduced operating hours/capacity	46	68%
Business closure (temporary or permanent)	35	51%
Stopped/deferred rent or mortgage payments	11	16%
Incurred expense to implement safety measures	40	59%
Established alternative mode to sell and deliver products (on-line platforms, delivery, etc.)	31	46%
None of the Above	6	9%

**9. How did your 2020 business revenue compare to your 2019 revenue?**

Increased compared to 2019	5	7%
Stayed about the same as 2019	9	13%
Decreased 1 – 24% compared to 2019	25	37%
Decreased 25 – 49% compared to 2019	20	29%
Decreased 75 - 100% compared to 2019	1	1%
Decreased 50 – 74% compared to 2019	6	9%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	2	3%
Total	68	100%

**10. Please estimate how the number of customers that physically came to your business in January and February 2021 compares to before COVID.**

More customers than before COVID	2	3%
About the same number as before COVID	9	13%
1 – 24% less customers than before COVID	20	29%
25 – 49% less customers than before COVID	17	25%
50 – 74% less customers than before COVID	11	16%
75 – 100% less customers than before COVID	5	7%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	4	6%
Total	68	100%

**11. At the current time, what is the status of your business operation?**

Operating at full capacity	24	36%
Operating at reduced hours/capacity due to COVID	43	64%
Temporarily closed due to COVID	0	0%
Permanently closed due to COVID	0	0%
Total	67	100%

**Strategies for Supporting Businesses and Improving the Commercial District**

**12. A few approaches to address Physical Environment, Atmosphere and Access in commercial districts are listed below. Considering the conditions in your commercial area, in your opinion, how important are each of the following strategies?**

**Renovation of Storefronts/Building Facades**

Unimportant/Not Needed	9	13%
Of Little Importance or Need	9	13%
Moderately Important	26	39%
Important	20	30%
Very Important	3	4%
Total	67	100%

**Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas**

Unimportant/Not Needed	8	12%
Of Little Importance or Need	7	11%
Moderately Important	23	35%
Important	23	35%
Very Important	5	8%
Total	66	100%

**Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks**

Unimportant/Not Needed	9	13%
Of Little Importance or Need	7	10%
Moderately Important	23	34%
Important	18	27%
Very Important	10	15%
Total	67	100%

**Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness**

Unimportant/Not Needed	8	12%
Of Little Importance or Need	13	20%
Moderately Important	20	31%
Important	18	28%
Very Important	6	9%
Total	65	100%

### Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	3%
Of Little Importance or Need	5	7%
Moderately Important	9	13%
Important	21	31%
Very Important	31	46%
Total	68	100%

### Amenity Improvements for Public Transit Users and/or Bike Riders

Unimportant/Not Needed	15	23%
Of Little Importance or Need	15	23%
Moderately Important	22	33%
Important	12	18%
Very Important	2	3%
Total	66	100%

**13. A few approaches to address Attraction and Retention of Customers and Businesses in commercial districts are listed below. Considering the conditions in your commercial area, in your opinion, how important are each of the following strategies?**

### More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District

Unimportant/Not Needed	9	13%
Of Little Importance or Need	14	21%
Moderately Important	23	34%
Important	13	19%
Very Important	9	13%
Total	68	100%

### More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling

Unimportant/Not Needed	9	13%
Of Little Importance or Need	7	10%
Moderately Important	15	22%
Important	21	31%
Very Important	15	22%
Total	67	100%

### Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District

Unimportant/Not Needed	5	7%
Of Little Importance or Need	6	9%
Moderately Important	19	28%
Important	20	30%
Very Important	17	25%
Total	67	100%

**Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses**

Unimportant/Not Needed	6	9%
Of Little Importance or Need	7	10%
Moderately Important	11	16%
Important	22	32%
Very Important	22	32%
Total	68	100%

**Changes to Zoning or Other Local Regulations (not related to COVID)**

Unimportant/Not Needed	7	10%
Of Little Importance or Need	13	19%
Moderately Important	22	32%
Important	17	25%
Very Important	9	13%
Total	68	100%

**Creation of a District Management Entity (Business Improvement District or other organization)**

Unimportant/Not Needed	12	18%
Of Little Importance or Need	15	22%
Moderately Important	20	29%
Important	16	24%
Very Important	5	7%
Total	68	100%

**14. Are you interested in receiving assistance for your business in any of the following areas? Select All that Apply.**

Setting up an online store or other online selling channel	5	7%
Creating new services such as delivery	1	1%
Participating in shared marketing/advertising	20	30%
Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements	11	16%
Low-cost financing for purchasing property in the commercial district	5	7%
Training on the use of social media	18	27%
None of the above	36	54%

**15. Please list any specific suggestions or ideas for possible projects, programs or actions that could help support businesses and improve the commercial district. (Optional)**

**Comments**

—
Little Treasures Schoolhouse inc.
—
—
—
—
—
Community engagement, business spotlight. Town day type events etc.
—
improve parking
—
—
—
zoning relief for outdoor dining/fast tract process
—
Your CBD Store
—
—
—
Christopher`s Restaurant
More parking spots for customers. Increase the time limit. Free employee parking
—
Dynamik Sports
READING ICE ARENA AUTHORITY, INC.

DiCicco Sign
Renaissance Education LLC DBA The Goddard School
—
—
—
We need a parking facility or garage. The issue is not the customers, it's the business owners and employees that have no room to park.
Parking Issues the biggest problem we have in Reading and our selectboard is completely inept in handling this.
—
Your CBD Store
—
—
—
REMAX Renaissance
—
—
—
—
—
—
—
—
Law Office
Assistance offsetting the cost of changes mad, due to covid
Less condo development/workers taking over, add more retail and restaurants
—
Removing Covid restrictions
provide more parking and regulate existing parking regulations



—
—
Business owner and employee parking
Bunratty Tavern, Traditional Irish Pub, Reading
The Chocolate Truffle
—
—
—
—
—
—
—
—
parking will become a huge problem once these residential units fully open since they do not offer enough parking
REMAX RENAISSANCE
—
Cole Insurance Agency Inc
Employee parking is concerning because they cannot leave and move their cars throughout the day
—