

WHAT IS BR+E?

An internationally recognized process used to gauge the local business climate, and to help identify common issues, concerns and potential opportunities in the business community that can be used to help develop community-based, economic-development strategies.

Who was involved?

City of Orillia's Economic Development Committee (EDC) in cooperation with the Orillia Area Community Development Corporation (OACDC). Community support for the program came from the Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce, the Orillia and Area Manufacturers' Association, the Downtown Orillia Management Board and the Orillia and District Construction Association. Local funding for the program was provided by the City of Orillia (\$25,000) and by the OACDC (\$10,000) through a federal Community Adjustment Fund grant. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) matched the funding for the program through its Rural Economic Development (RED) Program.

What was done?

89 local businesses representing all sectors of the local economy were surveyed between June and November 2010. Results are considered accurate within +/- 10%. A Community Action Planning session was also held in March 2010 to discuss strategies to address issues identified in the survey.

What did we learn?

Among the positive findings from the survey were the following:

- Almost 50% of businesses experienced increased sales in the past 3 years
- More than 90% expressed optimism about the future
- Approximately 45% of businesses are considering and/or planning expansion in the next 3 years
- Orillia is a desirable place to run a business
- The downtown core and waterfront are significant community assets to further develop

Challenges and issues reported by local businesses included:

- Need for a more pro-development attitude at City Hall
- A sense of disconnect between businesses and City Hall staff and politicians
- Need for a one-stop business development approach at City Hall
- Increased competition from big box stores
- Declining customer loyalty on part of consumers and other businesses
- Minimum wage increases combined with heavy taxation
- Lack of business-related training



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What needs to be addressed?

4 priority areas have been identified from the research by community economic partners to address:

- Development of business-training opportunities
- Improvement of communication between City Hall and local businesses and development of business-friendly policies at City Hall
- Coordination of business requirements with local educational facilities to address skilled-labour shortages
- Development of a Buy Local campaign to strengthen customer loyalty, and to enhance business-to-consumer and business-to-businesses relationships.

What's happened so far?

As a result of a Community Task Force meeting, the following strategies are under way to begin addressing the results and recommendations from the study:

- 5 workshops have been offered to businesses covering marketing, succession planning, export, downtown revitalization and innovation with OACDC taking a co-ordinating role
- City of Orillia website is being updated to make it more user-friendly for businesses
- City of Orillia has introduced a 2-year moratorium on industrial development charges
- A review of the City's development approval process is currently underway
- Meetings have begun between EDC and Chamber of Commerce to address Buy Local campaign
- Training connection between Georgian College and local manufacturers needing skilled trades underway
- EDC and post-secondary institutions are leading skilled-labour meetings with community partners and working toward developing an action plan.



For a full report and further information about the Orillia Business Retention + Expansion Project contact:

Dan Landry,
Manager Economic Development

Tel: (705) 325-4900 Fax: (705) 325-1612

E-mail: dlandry@orillia.ca

Orillia Business Retention + Expansion Project Partners



Visit: www.orillia.ca

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