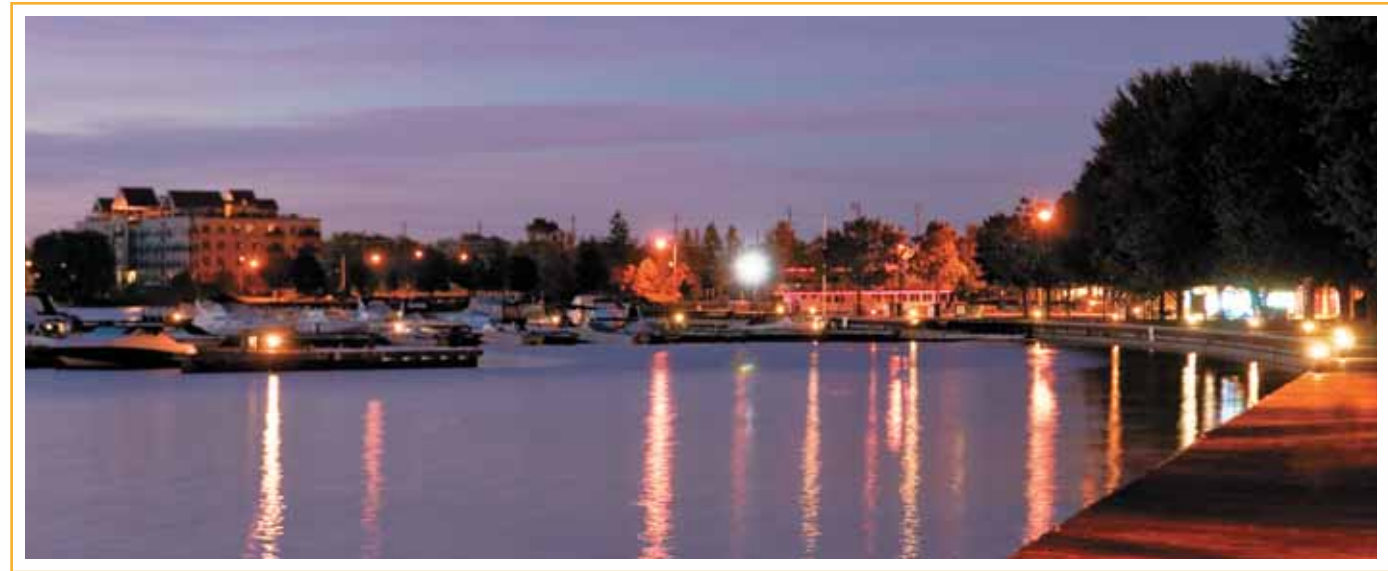




# B R + E

Orillia Business Retention and Expansion

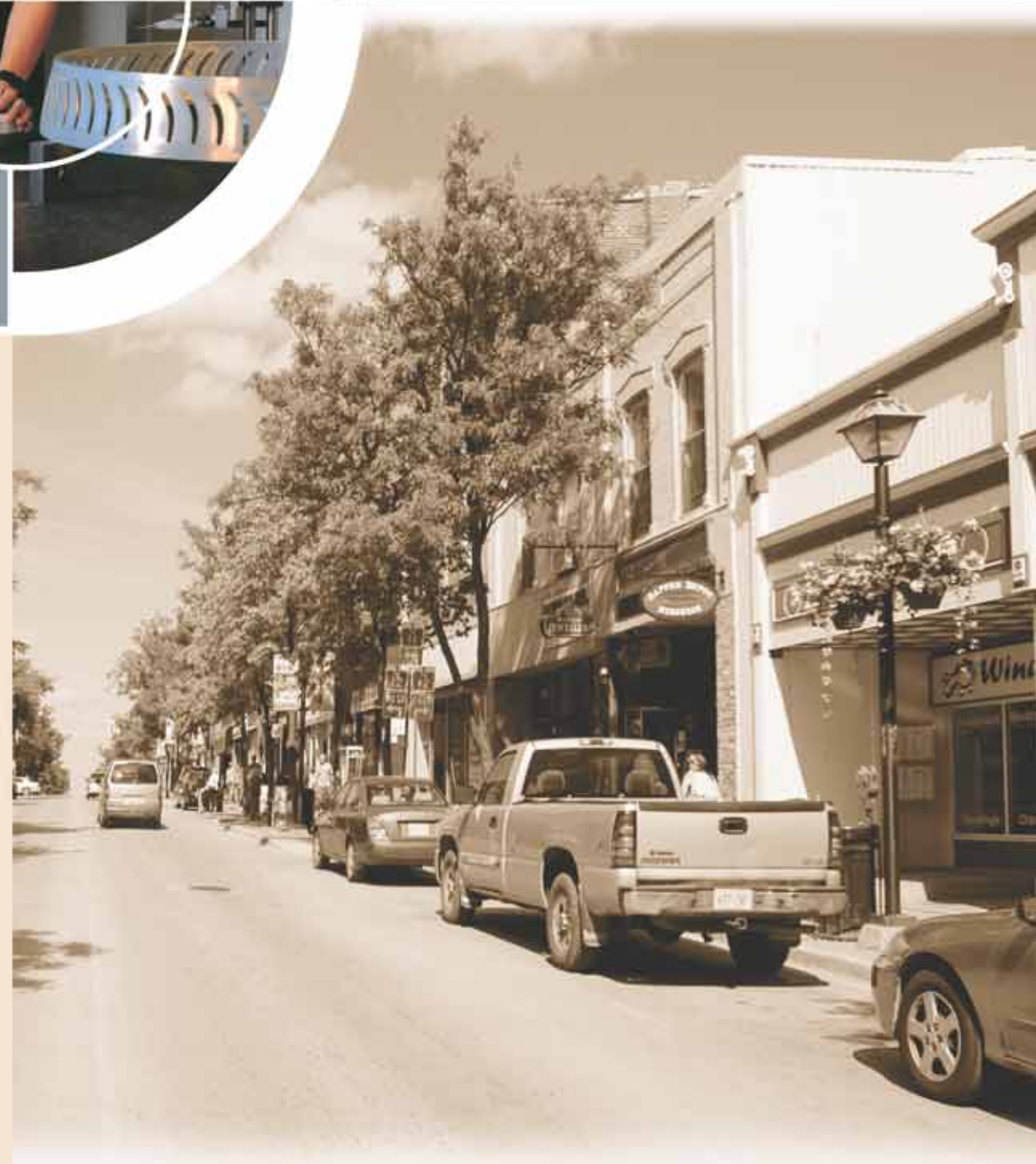
## *Growing Together*



[www.orillia-bre.ca](http://www.orillia-bre.ca)



[www.orillia-bre.ca](http://www.orillia-bre.ca)



# B R + E

## PROJECT REPORT 2011

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements:</b>	2
<b>Introduction and Background:</b>	3
• Rationale for BR+E study	3
• Purpose	3
• Community partners	4
• BR+E phases	4
• Overview	5
• Timeline	5
<b>Methodology:</b>	7
• Business selection/sampling	7
• Survey process	8
• BR+E project Leadership Team	8
• Methodology summary	9
<b>Findings:</b>	11
• Positive findings	11
• Challenges	12
• City and community-related issues	12
<b>Recommendations:</b>	12
• Narrowing down the issues	12
<b>Community Action Planning:</b>	13
• Introduction and purpose	13
• Methods summary	13
• Small-group activities	14
• Recommended actions	14
<b>Next Steps:</b>	15

For more information visit:  
[www.orillia.ca](http://www.orillia.ca)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*This project was made possible thanks to the 89 local business owners and operators who took the time to meet with us and provide us with their valuable input.*

### BR+E Leadership Team

**Dan Landry**, City of Orillia  
**Wendy Timpano**, Orillia Area Community Development Corporation  
**Donna Hewitt**, Orillia Area Community Development Corporation  
**Carol Trinier**, BR+E Project Co-ordinator  
**Michael Hawke**, BR+E Project Assistant

### Task Force

**Megan Fenton**, Georgian College  
**Kimberley Glaze**, Georgian College  
**John Hammill**, Orillia Packet and Times  
**Susan Lang**, Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce  
**Kathy Low**, Northern Lights  
**Kathryn Manners**, Ministry of Government Services  
**Rob Mauro**, CMA  
**Kathi Shropshire**, Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce  
**Gini Stringer**, Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce  
**Sandy Terry**, Northern Lights  
**Lisa Thompson-Roop**, Downtown Orillia Management Board  
**John Smalley**, Orillia Area Community Development Corporation  
**Ian Sudgen**, City of Orillia  
**Kim Feddersen**, Lakehead University  
**Mary O'Farrell-Bowers**, Georgian College  
**Graydon Cragg**, Orillia Economic Development Committee  
**Larry Schweyer**, Orillia Economic Development Committee

### Volunteers

Kellie Beasley	John Connor	Tom Jarvis	Dave Love	Karen O'Coin	Sharon Street	Gregg Weatherill
Tim Bourne	Debra Edwards	Sue Knox	Britt McKerrow	Carolyn Oliver	Paul Taylor	Michelle Weber
Bob Brown	John Epstein	Ed Konda	Stewart McNeely	Greg Parker	Tony Telford	Karen Woolcox
Mike Bunn	Deane Ewart	Victor Koby	Anne McNeil	Marian Parrott	Jennifer Tindale	
Susan Burt	Jill Galloway	Theresa Latter	Ken Moorehouse	Karen Phillips	Wade Tower	
Pete Bowen	Warren Howes	Randy Lucenti	Gerry Murphy	Andrew Plunkett	Deborah Wagner	
Cathy Campbell	Linda House	Brian Jeffs	Judy Noel	Angela Rowney	Bruce Waite	
Ellen Cohen	Brendan Hughes	John Locke	Shawn Nugent	Cheryl Sleep	Trevor Walker	

For more information visit: [www.orillia.ca](http://www.orillia.ca)



### Thanks also to:

**Cindi Harmer**  
**MacComm Social Marketing**  
**Reality Click**  
**Executive Pulse Inc.**  
**Adcore Design**



**Lynn Dare and the Post-Graduate Research Analyst Program**  
 Georgian College

**Lynda Gourlay, Cheryl Govier,**  
**Sharon Gardiner, Michael Florio,**  
 Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

**Debra Muenz, Lois Irvine, Sylvia Bumstead**  
 North Simcoe Community Futures Development Corporation

**Simcoe North MP Bruce Stanton**  
**Simcoe North MPP Garfield Dunlop**

**Downtown Orillia Management Board**  
**Orillia Area Community Development Corporation**  
**Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce**  
**Orillia Manufacturers' Association**  
**Orillia and District Construction Association**  
**Georgian College**  
**Lakehead University**  
**City of Orillia Staff**  
**City of Orillia Councillors**



Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) is an economic-development initiative supported by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Funding was made available through the Rural Economic Development Program. Through a structured business survey, the BR+E project promotes a dialogue with local businesses to identify issues, concerns and potential opportunities in the business community. Findings from the BR+E survey are used to develop community-based economic development strategies.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### Rationale for study

The Orillia Economic Development Committee (EDC) Strategic Plan, adopted by City Council in 2008, identified the implementation of a Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) program as a key priority.

The BR+E program is an internationally recognized process undertaken to enhance the business environment in a municipality by eliminating barriers to economic growth.

### Purpose

According to statistics, the majority of new job growth in any community — up to 80 percent — comes from existing business. In Orillia, the BR+E process was initiated as a means to survey area businesses. The survey was expected to provide a picture of the local business climate and identify major issues that may be impeding the success or expansion of local business operations. Information gathered through this survey was

designed to enable the Economic Development Office and community partners to assist local business in identifying and realizing growth potential and opportunities. The BR+E program would also provide the Economic Development Office with the perspective of local business on the economy, community and relationships with the municipality and other key stakeholders.



### Phases of the BR+E project:

1. Promoting project;  
Recruiting volunteers;  
Scheduling interviews
2. Conducting interviews
3. Compiling and analyzing data
4. Community action planning
5. Promoting findings and presenting a final report

### Community partners

The Orillia Business Retention and Expansion project was spearheaded by the City of Orillia's Economic Development Committee (EDC) in co-operation with the Orillia Area Community Development Corporation (OACDC).

Community support for the program came from the Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce, the Orillia 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) provided matching funding for the program through its Rural Economic Development (RED) Program.



In 2008, Orillia City Council recognized the importance of a BR+E program by supporting it as a priority within the Economic Development Committee's (EDC) Strategic Plan.

## OVERVIEW

### Phase 1

In December 2009, the EDC initiated the implementation of a BR+E program. Carol Trinier was hired on contract as the BR+E Program Co-ordinator. Trinier and EDC Manager Dan Landry took part in BR+E training sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). Additional assistance, including database support, came from Michael Hawke, with other contract support being obtained later in the program.

Trinier, Landry and Hawke, along with Orillia Area Community Development Corporation (OACDC) Manager Donna Hewitt (and later Wendy Timpano), formed the Leadership Team that directed the project from December of 2009 until June of 2011.

The initial phase of the BR+E project included promotion to the business community. From March 1 to May 15, 2010, the Leadership Team implemented an awareness campaign using an information brochure, a local website,

several media releases and presentations to local service clubs and stakeholder organizations.

One presentation was a community information session that attracted approximately 50 local business and community leaders. From this session, approximately 12 attendees were recruited to form the Community Task Force, the core working group that would guide the program's implementation.

A direct-mail campaign and telephone follow-up were also part of the campaign to make local businesses aware of the venture and to invite them to take part in the BR+E survey.

In late April and early May of 2010, approximately 50 people took part in two training sessions for volunteer interviewers. Of these, approximately 35 became active interviewers.

Survey questions were developed between April and May of 2010. The survey was comprised of general questions plus 15 questions created by the BR+E Task Force members to reflect the local area. The survey also included questions from one or more OMAFRA-developed sectoral surveys, which reflected the subcategories of businesses being interviewed.

Businesses were randomly selected for inclusion as survey subjects in April 2010. A direct-mail campaign and telephone follow-up were undertaken to invite these businesses to participate.



### Phase 2

BR+E surveys were conducted between June 15 and November 19, 2010. The interviewers met with 89 businesses representing a cross-section of the local economy in order to deliver a clear and concise picture of the local business climate.

### Phase 3

Inputting of data gathered from the surveys began in June 2010. Inputting was completed and refined during the months of November, December and January, 2011.

Preliminary analysis of the survey data was completed in February. Statistical results were generated from the OMAFRA database system. Reality Click, a company providing database analysis and marketing, and students of the Graduate Research Analyst Program at Georgian College were engaged to analyze and compile the comments provided by local businesses.

A summary report of the BR+E project was released on February 14 and shared with Task Force members and other community stakeholders.

### Phase 4

A Community Action Planning session held on March 1, 2011, had three goals: 1) to give community participants an overview of the BR+E project; 2) to review the research and analysis results; and 3) to invite input from community stakeholders on developing subsequent community action plans.

Action Plan follow-up meetings were held in April and May of 2011. The findings from the Community Action Planning session were incorporated into the overall BR+E results, as were initiatives currently underway within the community. The Task Force then consolidated the recommended next steps.



### Phase 5

The final BR+E report was compiled between June and September 2011. The preliminary findings were promoted to the community and stakeholders, and where possible, actions were taken to address immediate issues and needs identified by the study. Overall findings from the BR+E survey have culminated in this final report to be used to develop community-based economic development strategies.

### Timeline:





## METHODOLOGY

### Business selection/sampling

Calculations made during the OMAFRA-sponsored BR+E training sessions indicated that, for the results of the survey to be statistically accurate to within plus or minus 10 percent, at least 80 local businesses, representing small, medium and large employers from all sectors of the Orillia economy, would need to be surveyed.

The Community Task Force employed a random sampling method for selecting survey participants that guaranteed inclusion of particular subgroups of interest within the business community. Part of this process involved members

of the Task Force using the two-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) business sector coding to ensure adequate representation of businesses randomly chosen from each sector of the local economy.

Invitations to participate in the survey were issued to 120 local businesses. A total of 89 businesses were surveyed, achieving the degree of accuracy required by OMAFRA guidelines. The number of businesses surveyed from each sector was representative of the percentage of businesses in each sector of the Orillia economy. Surveys of businesses

conducted above and beyond the required number focused on manufacturing to help understand that sector even more.

Businesses that had agreed to participate were invited to post their availability for interviews on an online booking system developed by the Orillia BR+E team. Interviewers were invited to sign up for these timeslots as they were posted, and reminder cards confirming the date and time of the appointments were mailed to the businesses.

### Survey process

Each business to be interviewed received advanced digital copies of the relevant surveys. All surveys were conducted in person, with at least one member of the BR+E project Leadership Team present to record responses and a volunteer or another Leadership Team member on hand to ask the survey questions.

The BR+E project interviewed 89 local businesses using six different surveys, reflecting the different types of businesses involved.

Every volunteer began the interview process by asking questions from the Main and Community Question (Local) survey.

Next, questions from more specific surveys based on the subject's location or business type were asked. These included a downtown survey, a retail survey, a tourism survey and a manufacturing survey.

Interviews lasted an average of two hours. Overall, businesses indicated they were happy to be involved in the process and to have their views solicited.

The Leadership Team member was responsible for filling out the survey in an effort to keep entries consistent. The goal was to input survey data into the OMAFRA database as quickly as possible after the interviews were completed so that comments could be captured accurately.

The survey teams had completed approximately 70 percent of the interviews by early September. As fall progressed, business owners and operators grew increasingly busy, and more effort was required to finalize interviews. Inputting data from the surveys was completed and fine-tuned between November, 2010 and January, 2011.



### BR+E Project Leadership Team:

#### EDC Manager

Dan Landry

#### OACDC Managers

Donna Hewitt  
and Wendy Timpano

#### BR+E Project Co-ordinator

Carol Trinier

#### BR+E Project Assistant

Michael Hawke

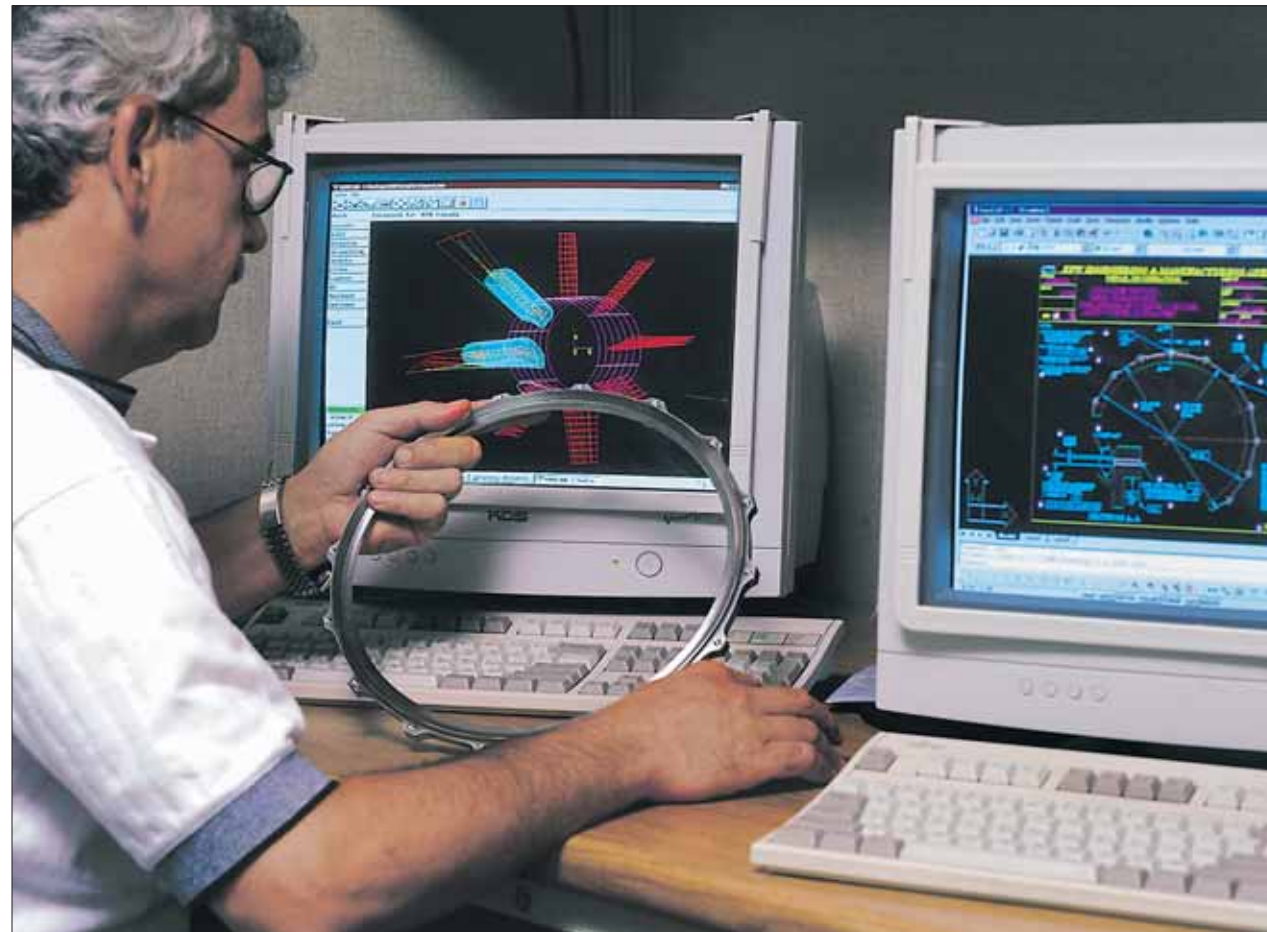
Businesses were selected randomly to represent a cross-section of small, medium and large enterprises. Volunteers conducted 89 interviews for a statistical accuracy of +/- 10 percent. During each interview, a member of the BR+E Leadership Team was paired with a community volunteer to ensure consistent data recording.

## METHODOLOGY SUMMARY

### Statistical Analysis:

The OMAFRA database system was provided by Executive Pulse (EPulse) and produced excellent statistical results. These results indicated how businesses answered each question in the various surveys. The EPulse database also provided a breakdown by percentages, highlighting how businesses were relating to specific issues. For example, it was possible to identify the percentage of businesses that agreed the business climate in Orillia had improved over the past three years.

However, the EPulse system was limited when it came to analyzing qualitative data — comments that were made during conversations with the businesses surveyed. To sort and tabulate these comments, the Leadership Team employed the services of the post-graduate Research Analyst Program (RAP) at Georgian College. Reality Click, a firm specializing in database analysis and marketing, helped compile all of the reports for cohesive presentation.



### Comments Analysis:

Georgian College students analyzed the qualitative data gathered through the open-ended comments recorded in the six surveys. Working in small groups, they used NVivo, a qualitative data-analysis software, to code these responses into themes. Coding involved careful reading of all text and extracting comments related to the main research questions. The comments were grouped in categories, or nodes, for analysis.

In qualitative data analysis, categories are either planned or become apparent from reviewing the data. In the BR+E study, planned categories were based on survey questions that allowed general comments as responses. Emergent categories were the predominant themes that were identified across all questions. Double-coding allowed answers to be placed in more than one category, thus revealing themes within questions as well as main themes across all questions, and was performed as necessary.

Once Georgian College students completed their analyses, each small group authored a report on its findings. Recurring main themes were evident from these reports and are included in the Findings section of this document.

Due to the fact that not all subjects answered the open-ended questions, the ability to draw conclusions about the population as a whole was limited.



## FINDINGS

Several positive aspects of the local business climate were highlighted in the statistical analysis of the BR+E survey results. The analysis also detailed common challenges that businesses owners and operators face. Most importantly, the results underscored the issues that businesses feel need to be addressed in order to foster growth and sustainability in Orillia.

Businesses reported that Orillia is a desirable place to run a business because of its location, recreational opportunities, heritage features and safe family environment. Generally, businesses were positive about local infrastructure, such as roads and highways, and felt it provides them with good access to target markets.

### Positive findings

Among the positive impressions reported by business owners were the following:

- Businesses saw both the downtown core and the waterfront as significant community assets to further develop.
- More than half of the businesses surveyed had weathered the recent recession well; almost 50% experienced increased sales in the past three years.
- More than 90% expressed optimism about the future.
- Approximately 45% were considering and/or planning to expand their business in the next three years.
- Employee retention among Orillia businesses was perceived as high.

### Challenges

Challenges identified through the BR+E survey were categorized as City-related issues and general community-related issues.

**City-related issues** included the need for an improved attitude towards development at City Hall. Respondents felt there were policies and regulations that are not business-friendly. Businesses also reported experiencing a sense of

disconnect and distrust between themselves, City staff and politicians. They also noted the need for a one-stop business development approach at City Hall. Businesses indicated they wanted political leadership that would address business concerns.

**Community-related issues** included competition from big-box stores and lack of customer loyalty on the part of

both consumers and other businesses. Other reported challenges included minimum-wage increases and heavy taxation, parking issues in the downtown, a high degree of part-time employment and a shortage of skilled labour. Businesses also expressed a need for business-related training on topics such as marketing, business planning, financials, customer service and succession planning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The BR+E process yielded key recommendations on City-related issues. Businesses surveyed advised that Council and staff should connect, communicate and co-operate more with business. They recommended that a more pro-business attitude and approach at City Hall be encouraged. Approval processes, they said, should be streamlined where possible, with minimal red tape. They also endorsed the exploration and development of business-friendly policies.

Recommendations on community-related issues included the development of a Buy Local campaign geared to consumers and business. Encouraging creative solutions to parking issues and ensuring consistent hours of business operation was also advised. Businesses recommended drafting a cohesive plan for improvements to the downtown core and the waterfront, as well as a

comprehensive tourism marketing and promotion program. Businesses recommended that transit and traffic flow in the downtown core be improved. The provision of business training was also recommended.

### Narrowing down the issues

The Community Task Force met several times to discuss the BR+E key findings and recommendations. The group evaluated the initiatives that already existed or had been initiated to address issues raised through the survey process. The Task Force then listed potential action items, prioritizing those that presented the greatest likelihood of successful results within one year of the final report delivery. This effort resulted in the identification of four issues to be addressed by a Community Action Planning exercise:

### Priority Issues

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

## COMMUNITY ACTION PLANNING

### Introduction and purpose

On March 1, 2011, approximately 20 community stakeholders attended a Community Action Planning session. The purpose of the session was to present community stakeholders with an overview of the BR+E project, review the research and analysis results and solicit attendees' input on developing subsequent Community Action Plans. Community stakeholders brainstormed ideas the EDC could then use to help form the Community Action Plans. Consensus was reached about the most important, realistic and attainable action items for the community of Orillia to pursue.

### Methods summary

To facilitate the process, the agenda for the Community Action Planning session included three main components.

The first was a lunch-and-learn, designed to provide participants with an overview of the BR+E survey results.

Next, participants in small planning groups were invited to discuss one of four topics: instituting a **"Buy Local" program**; improving **business training**; improving **communication** between City Hall and local businesses and developing **business friendly policies**; and co-ordinating business needs with educational facilities to address the **skilled-labour shortage**.

The third component involved having the small groups present their results and allow all participants to identify possible, overall priority action items.



### Small-group activities

Facilitators led and recorded the discussion in each small planning group. For each group, the same general, three-step process was followed:

**A.** Brainstorming ideas/solutions for addressing that group's particular topic.

**B.** Selecting the top three possible action items, considering these criteria:

- Will it make a difference related to addressing the issue/topic?
- Is it realistic?
- Is it attainable within one year?

**C.** Fleshing out the details for the top three ideas. Key factors for each item they were asked to consider included:

- What are the specific action items?
- Who needs to be involved to make the action happen?
- When will the action item be completed?
- What are the expected outcomes?
- How will it be known if the desired outcome has been reached?

Each group was to then note their top action items and present back to the larger group.

### Results

After each group had presented its results, participants voted on their first, second and third choices overall according to importance. The following action-item possibilities were identified:

#### 1 To promote buying locally:

Increase business-to-business awareness; capitalize and expand on what's already been done.

#### 2 To improve communications and relations between City Hall and business:

Have a City Hall "greeter" to direct and answer business enquiries; develop a web site combining resources of the City and the EDC; examine opportunities for improved relations between businesses and City Hall.

#### 3 To address skilled-labour shortage:

Recruit a panel of experts; hold a skilled-labour and trades fair; facilitate industry tours.

#### 4 To advance training for business:

Develop a centralized hub where training could be offered; provide training to business owners and staff; engage seniors and mentors to provide relevant guidance to businesses.

## Recommended Actions

1. Promote buying locally
2. Improve communications and relations between City Hall and business
3. Address skilled-labour shortage
4. Advance training for business

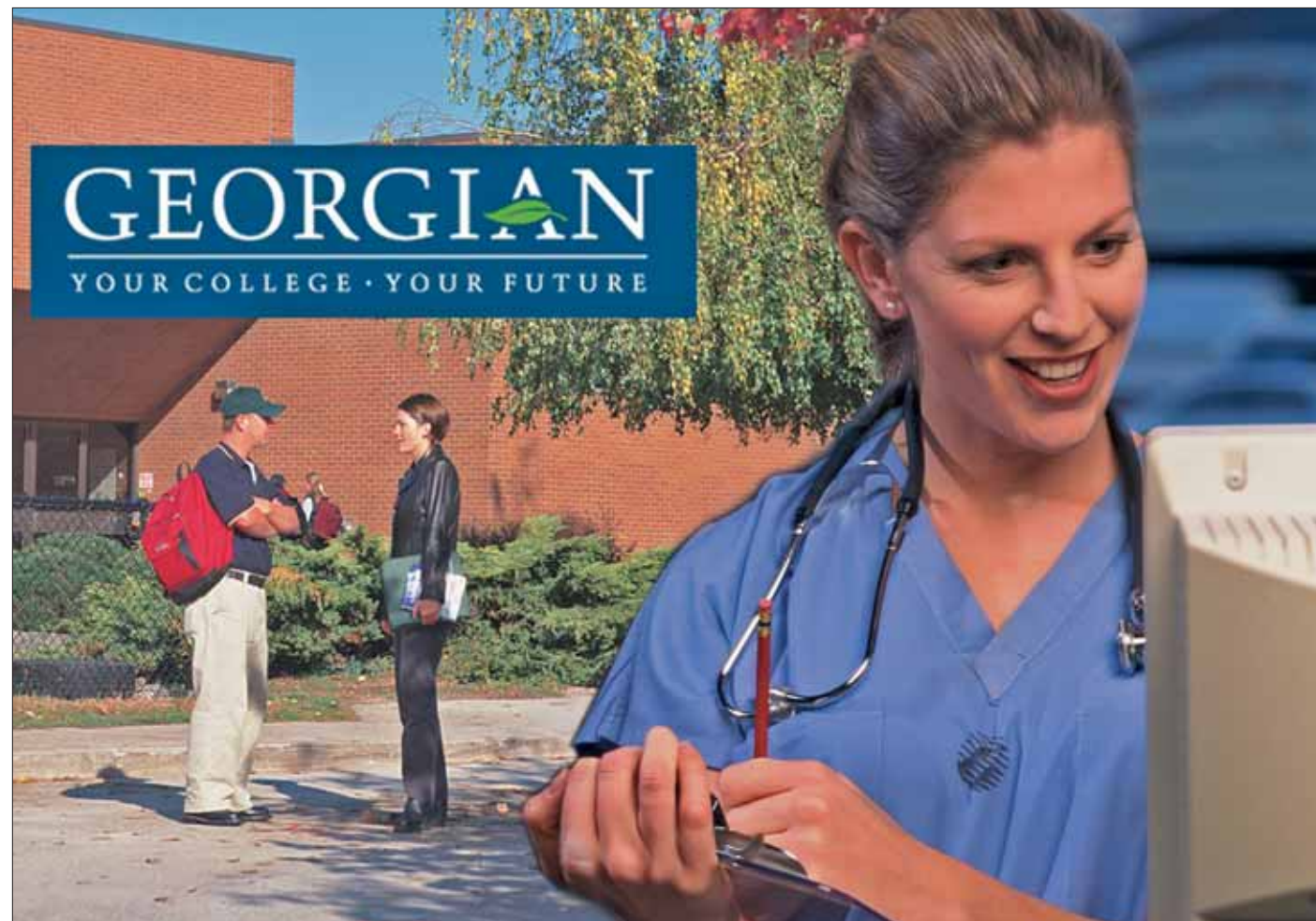
Following another Community Task Force meeting, the results from the Community Action Planning session were considered within the context of the overall BR+E findings, as well as current initiatives within the community.

## NEXT STEPS

The Task Force identified existing initiatives that are addressing issues raised in the BR+E survey. They include a restructuring of the EDC by the incoming City Council with a stronger focus on tourism, marketing and downtown and waterfront development, and a review of the City's development-approval process by the Planning Department. A 'People's First Committee' at City Hall is also being created to discuss enhancing the level of customer service, and the City is conducting a comprehensive

parking study. The Task Force also noted the development of a Downtown/Waterfront Revitalization Plan by the City.

With this information, the Task Force reached consensus on the following recommended next steps for the four key areas and reflected on recommended leads, suggested approaches and progress updates.



## ONE

### Business training

The recommended lead for this initiative is the Orillia Area Community Development Corporation (OACDC) in partnership with the Economic Development Committee, the Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce, and the Downtown Orillia Management Board.

Suggested training topics included Succession Planning, Marketing 101, International Trade, Human Resources Planning, and Customer Service.

Additional ideas for addressing this area include tying in to Business Week activities, developing a centralized website for promoting training opportunities, and engaging seniors and other mentors to coach local businesses.

To date, OACDC, in partnership with the EDC, the Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Orillia Management Board, has made progress by joining with other partners, including Georgian College and Lakehead University, to provide or participate in a number of training and information workshops.

These included two marketing-for-small-business workshops, which were sold out; a succession-planning workshop; two export-related workshops; a downtown-revitalization workshop; and a Central Ontario Innovation symposium.



## TWO

### Improved communications and relationships with businesses

The recommended leads are the City of Orillia and the Economic Development Committee.

Suggested approaches for addressing this issue include forming a Communications Committee; making the City website more business-user-friendly; offering a business-friendly greeter at City Hall to direct business inquiries; and examining policies to promote expansion among local businesses and to foster better working relationships between business and City Hall.

Progress is reflected in a number of initiatives that have taken place or are currently underway. For example, the City website is being updated to make it more user-friendly for businesses, and is expected to launch in November, 2011. The redesign will include an interactive business directory, as well as utilities for e-newsletters, online surveys and contact-management functions. The City has also hosted a full-day customer-service workshop for front-line staff.

Additionally, as recommended by the EDC, the City has imposed a two-year moratorium on industrial development charges.

As a direct result of this initiative, important expansion announcements have been made by leading manufacturers in the community.

A review of the City's development-approval process is currently underway. This evaluation is expected to lead to reduced costs and shorter wait times for approval of development and expansion projects. The City has also created a checklist—available on the website—to better inform businesses and developers of applications, fees and permits early in the development process.

The EDC also sponsored a small and home-based business trade show to promote goods and services to consumers. Additionally, the City spearheaded a cooperative tourism-marketing project involving the Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Orillia Management Board. The project promoted the "Sunshine City" brand to residents and visitors within a 60-to 80-kilometre radius of Orillia.



## THREE

### “Buy Local” campaign

The recommended lead is the Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce, partnering with the EDC and the Downtown Orillia Management Board.

Suggested approaches for addressing this priority include hosting a trade show for local businesses; enhancing marketing materials with the use of testimonials; developing and distributing a catalogue listing services for local businesses; engaging the media to increase awareness of local businesses; and researching best practices of other communities.



Progress has taken the form of preliminary, informal discussions between the EDC and the Chamber of Commerce. A work plan is to be completed.

## FOUR

### Skilled-labour needs

Recommended leads are post-secondary institutions and local employment services, in co-operation with the Orillia and District Construction Association, the Orillia Manufacturers’ Association, and the Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce.

Possible ways to address this priority area include conducting research to evaluate skilled-labour needs, shortages and services, and developing avenues to connect services to those needs. Other possible steps include holding trades/career fairs and organizing meetings between employers and potential employees. Efforts should also be undertaken to better inform and encourage secondary school students to consider careers in areas identified to have labour shortages.

Progress so far has seen the EDC assist in establishing a connection between Georgian College and local manufacturers for training purposes to help address impending skilled-labour shortages. The Economic Development Committee and the key partners are working toward a full work plan, with preliminary and informal discussions underway.



*Building A Strong, Viable, Local Economy!*