

# Business Retention Expansion (BRE) Project

Draft Summary Report for



February 14th, 2025



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the BRE Project

1. Furnish the Crossroads EDO with the full data sets from the research for reference and future project development
2. Recommend Crossroads strategic priorities and projects based on the BRE research.
3. Review the future operations of the Crossroads organization.

## 1.2 BRE Survey

### Purpose

Surveys were conducted with business leaders and government officials located within the County of Minburn, Town of Vegreville, Village of Innisfree and Village of Mannville who are highly familiar with the economic landscape of the region. A script was developed to cover a wide range of important areas such as products, labour, customers, suppliers, changes, and community factors. The online survey was developed mostly using closed-ended questions, designed to reach as large an audience as possible.

### Participation

The survey reached 77 completions from February to August 2022. Securing completions was sometimes a challenge, but the consistent effort put forward throughout the project made the survey a success. Incentives were offered to individual respondents (the Vegreville News Advertiser, VM Systems, and County 106 kindly provided an advertising and IT Support package valued at \$3,935.)

## 1.3 Community Survey

### Purpose

Surveys were conducted with citizens located within the County of Minburn, Town of Vegreville, Village of Innisfree and Village of Mannville to ensure as many people as possible had a chance to give Crossroads feedback on regional economic development priorities.

### Participation

The Community Survey was a great success, securing 267 completions in just over a month. Three Tim Horton's gift cards were offered as incentives, but the high response rate in a short duration should mostly be attributed to community interest.

## 1.4 In Depth Interviews

### Purpose

In-depth interviews were conducted with business leaders and government officials located within the four partner communities who are highly familiar with the economic landscape of the region. An interview script was developed to investigate the key underpinnings of economic development. The script consisted of several structured questions asked of each participant. However, discussions with respondents were also free flowing in nature and yielded more information than originally envisioned.

## Participation

Crossroads met with 106 businesses and completed interviews in 2024. The consensus is that an economic development alliance is necessary to support economic opportunities throughout this region for individuals, families, business and industry working together for the betterment of everyone. All businesses interviewed are within the region and most have been in business for a minimum of 3-5 years. It also included an interview with 4 municipal leaders, and it should be noted that all are familiar with business operations and business needs.

## 1.5 This Report

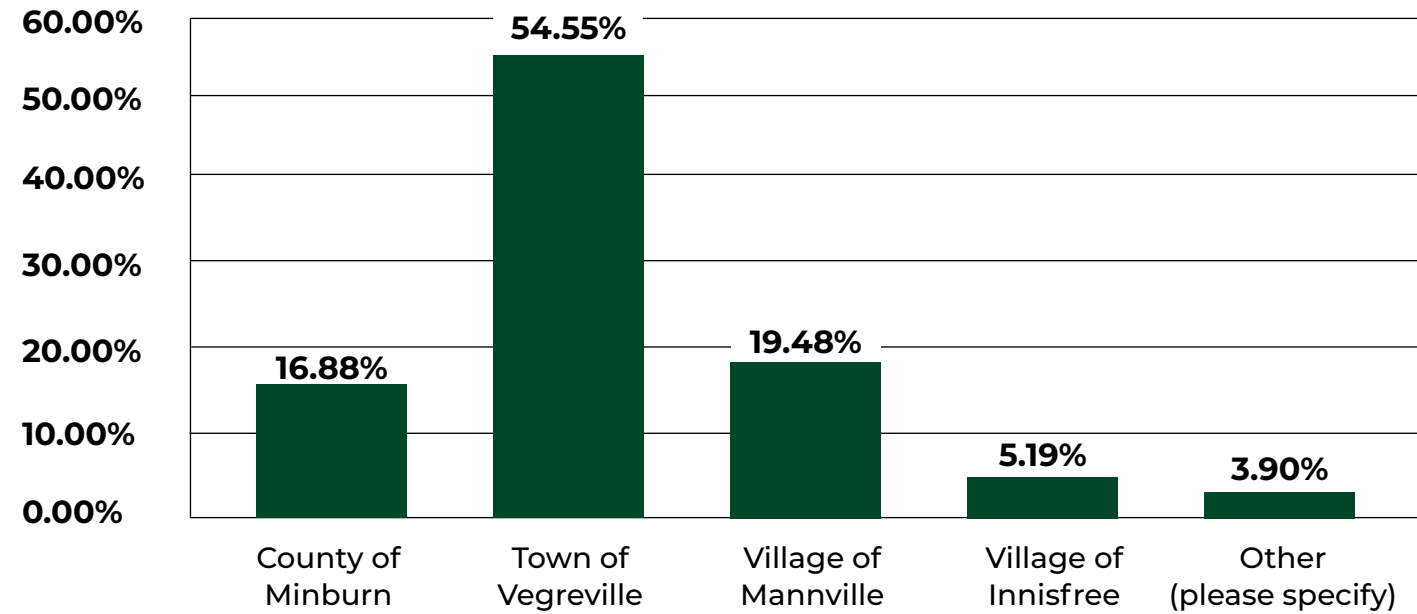
The following report is a summary of the full report submitted to the Crossroads Committee in December 2024. The full report and associated datasets are hundreds of pages long. This summary report was developed to provide highlights of year long BRE project and its three research instruments, along with an overview of recommended actions and strategies moving forward.



# 2. BRE Survey Results

## 2.1 Introduction

### 1. In what community is this business located?



Other:  
 County of Two Hills  
 Farm outside of Mannville

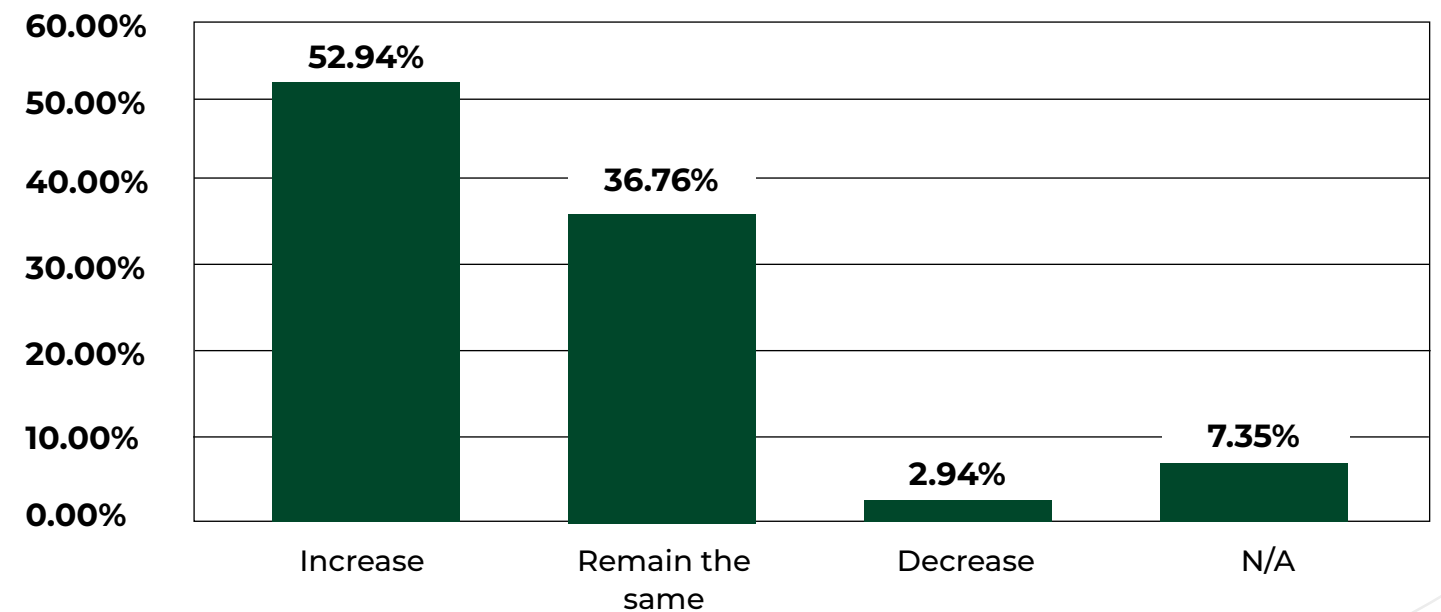
### 5. Which of the following North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) categories best describes the product / service that your organization provides?

Answer Choices	Responses
44-45 - Retail Trade	19.72%
Other (Please Specify)	16.90%
72 - Accommodation and Food Services	11.27%
11 - Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	11.27%
71 - Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	7.04%
54 - Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	7.04%
23 - Construction	5.63%
81 - Other Services (Repair & Maintenance services; Personal services, Religious services)	5.63%
62 - Health Care and Social Assistance	4.23%
22 - Utilities	2.82%

56 - Administrative and Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services	1.41%
52 - Finance and Insurance	1.41%
51 - Information and Cultural Industries	1.41%
31-33 - Manufacturing	1.41%
53 - Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	1.41%
48-49 - Transportation and Warehousing	1.41%
61 - Educational Services	0.00%
55 - Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.00%
21 - Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0.00%
91 - Public Administration	0.00%
41 - Wholesale Trade	0.00%

## 2.2 Products/Services Section

**7. Do you anticipate that in the next 2 years your product/service sales will:**  
 Over 50% of respondents saying that their sales will increase in the next 2 years is a highly positive sign in the local economy. Less than 3% said they expect sales to decrease.



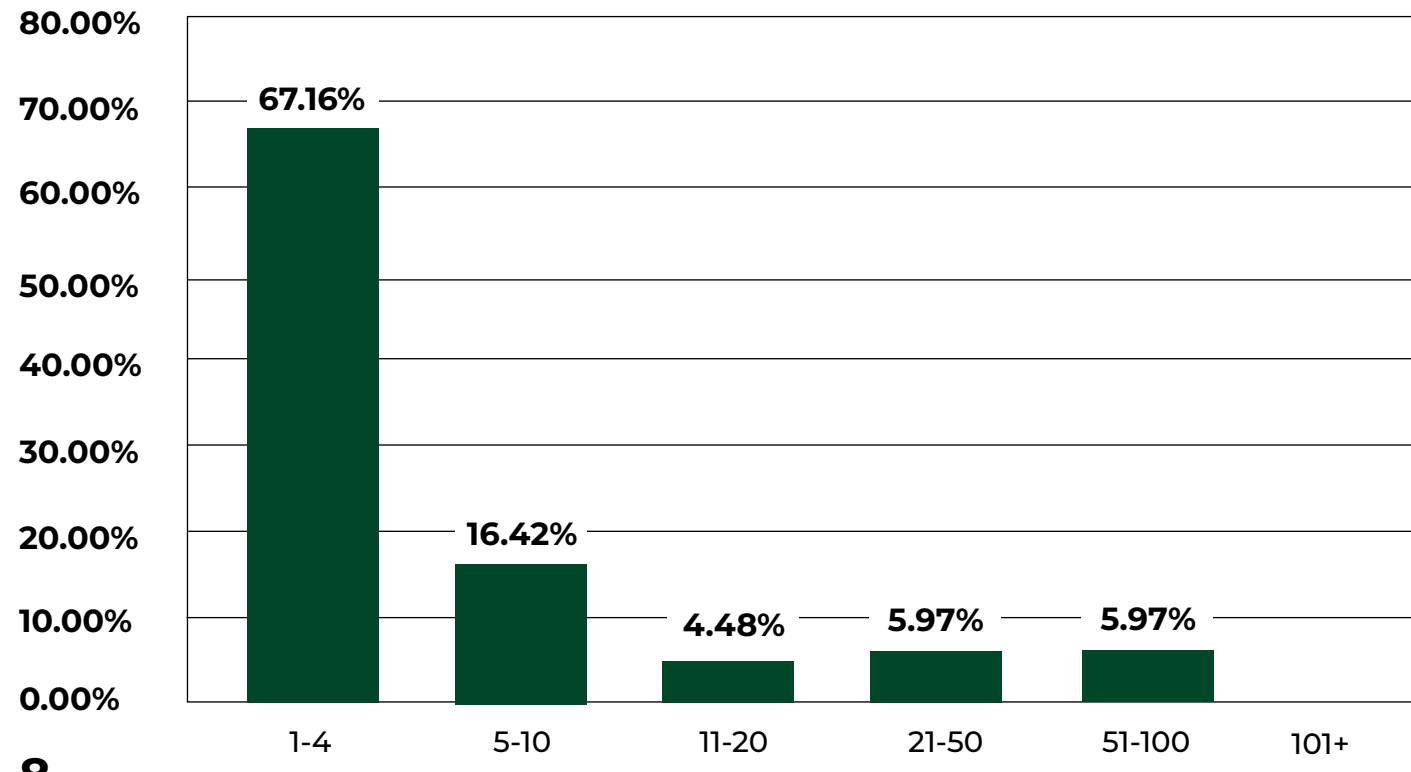
**9. What is your value proposition to customers. In other words, what do you feel the most important advantage(s) your business/organization has compared to your competitors?**

Most of the businesses that responded do not see “lower prices” as a key value proposition to customers. Not surprisingly in a rural community, business focuses on more on relationship-based offerings like customer service and quality. In addition, it can be difficult to operate on a larger economy of scale to offer lower prices unless you have high volume of business which sometimes is not easy in a rural community.

Answer Choices	Responses
Customer service	72.06%
Quality	63.24%
Expertise	58.82%
Convenient location	44.12%
Better selection	25.00%
Delivery	22.06%
Lower prices	20.59%
Safety	20.59%
Other (please specify)	14.71%
Speed	13.24%
Warranty	7.35%

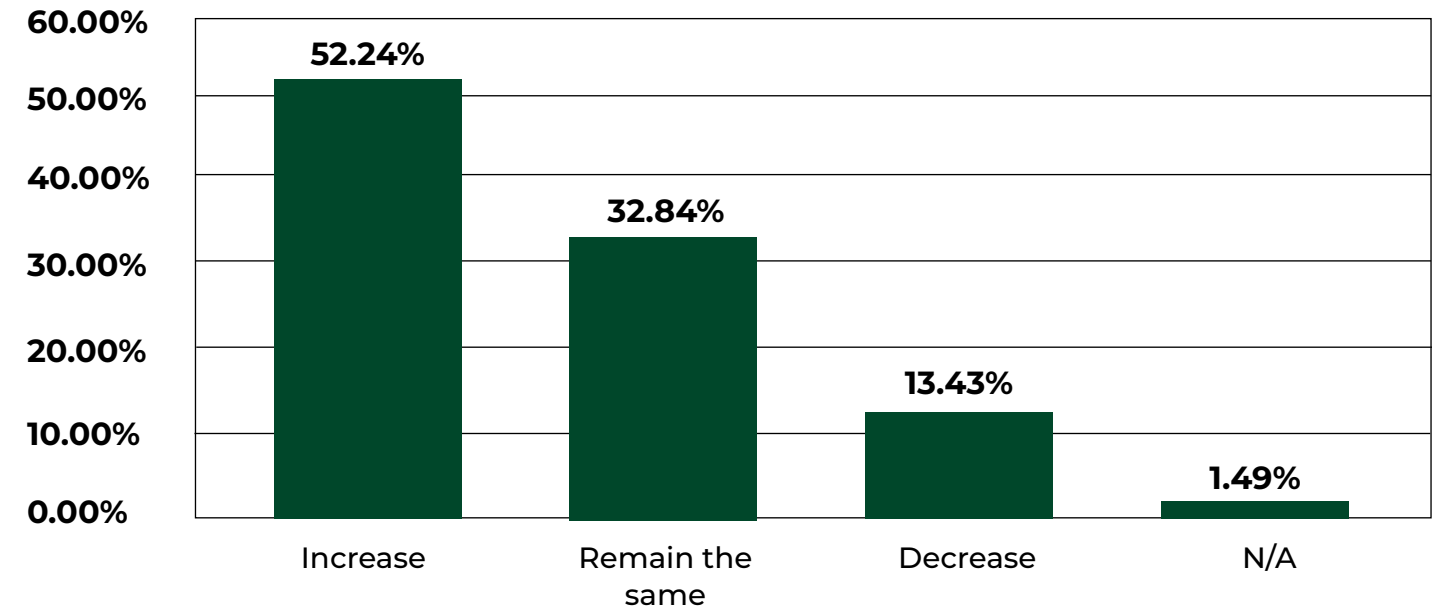
**2.3 Labour Section**

10. Number of employees in your organization in this region.



**14. Over the next two years, do you think the number of employees in your organization will increase, decrease or stay the same?**

Only 1 respondent from the entire survey says they think the number of employees will decrease is very positive.



**16. Are you currently experiencing any challenges RECRUITING/HIRING workers in these general categories? (Feel free to check more than one)**

It is encouraging that over 50% of the respondents are not experiencing any challenges in recruiting or hiring in these categories. But it is notable that apprenticeship trades are the highest listed category closely followed by basic labour. The comments below follow this trend.

Answer Choices	Responses
No	52.38%
Other	17.46%
Apprenticeship Trades	15.87%
Service or Production Labour (high school or less)	14.29%
Managers/Supervisory Staff	7.94%
Technical (requiring college diploma)	7.94%
Clerical/Administrative Staff	6.35%
Professional (requiring university degree)	4.76%

**17 If you are experiencing RECRUITING/HIRING issues, what are the top 3 reasons these positions are difficult to fill? (Please check 3 boxes)**

Answer Choices	Responses
No issues	38.60%
Lack of applicants	24.56%
Lack of technical skills (abilities and knowledge needed to perform specific tasks)	24.56%
Lack of motivation/poor attitudes	24.56%
Lack of work experience	19.30%
Lack of qualifications (education)	14.04%
Language barriers	10.53%
Candidates unwilling to relocate to the area	8.77%
Competition for employees	7.02%
Interested applications cannot access adequate childcare	7.02%
Interested applicants do not have adequate mode of transportation	5.26%
Interested applicants do not have adequate housing to relocate	5.26%
Candidates cannot pass screening (drug, criminal record check, etc.)	3.51%

**18. Are you currently experiencing any challenges RETAINING workers in these general categories? (Feel free to check more than one)**

It is encouraging that over 60% do not have retention issues, but as with recruiting, it is notable that apprenticeship trades are the highest listed category closely followed by basic labour. These types of workers appear more challenging to recruit and retain than professionals or managers.

Answer Choices	Responses
No	62.90%
Other	14.52%
Service or Production Labour (high school or less)	12.90%
Apprenticeship Trades	6.45%
Managers/Supervisory Staff	3.23%
Clerical/Administrative Staff	3.23%
Professional (requiring university degree)	1.61%
Technical (requiring college diploma)	1.61%

**25. What are your organizations top 3 recruitment methods?**

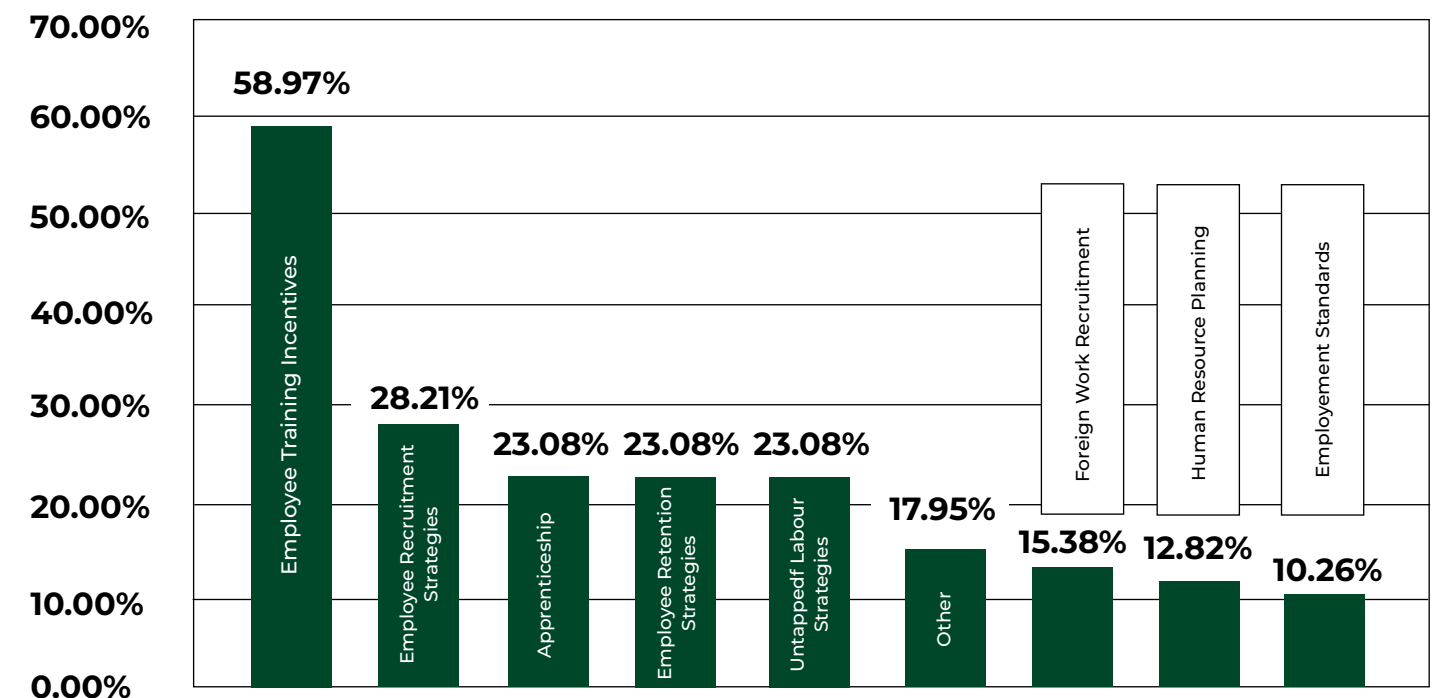
(Please check 3 boxes)

Word of mouth-related recruitment methods tend to be the most used and effective. This trend is amplified in rural communities with more widespread social connections across the community.

Answer Choices	Responses
Networking	50.94%
Social media	49.06%
Online job boards/postings	39.62%
Unsolicited resumes	22.64%
Your organizations own website	20.75%
Newspaper ads	20.75%
Trade or professional association publications/websites	15.09%
On site job signs or posters	15.09%
Onsite recruitment at schools, colleges, etc.	11.32%
Job fairs	7.55%
Executive search companies	3.77%
Government employment centres or websites	3.77%
Non-government or community employment centres	1.89%

**34. As an employer, I would like to know more about: (Feel free to check more than one)**

This is a question that is instructive to the Crossroads in terms of what type of labour information should be pursued and perhaps what type of projects and programs engaged in for workforce development.



## 2.4 Customer Section

We are interested in the location of your customers. Please 'estimate' the percent of your sales from the following locations:

The responses bends towards Local or Regional being the customer base of the businesses surveyed. This is unsurprising and many of the businesses are SMEs, and many of them are service based.

	0%	1 to 25%	26 to 50%	51-75%	76-99%	100%
<b>Local (within 40 km)</b>	5.45%	14.55%	23.64%	27.27%	25.45%	3.64%
<b>Regional (40 km -160 km)</b>	3.77%	45.28%	8.30%	11.32%	7.55%	3.77%
<b>Provincial</b>	29.17%	39.58%	16.67%	8.33%	2.08%	4.17%
<b>Outside AB but in Canada</b>	45.45%	47.73%	6.82%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>International</b>	70.73%	26.83%	0.00%	2.44%	0.00%	0.00%

37. If you export now, or previously exported, please identify problems, if any, that you have exporting your product(s)? (Feel free to check more than one)

Answer Choices	Responses
Transportation of product	33.34%
Restrictive provincial and/or federal regulations	33.34%
Inadequate knowledge of foreign countries/markets	16.67%
Border crossing wait times	8.33%
Lack of export financing	8.33%
Covid 19 related border/export issues	0.00%

## 2.5 Supplier Section

38. We are interested in the location of your suppliers. Please estimate the percent of your inputs from the following locations:

	0%	1 to 25%	26 to 50%	51-75%	76-99%	100%
<b>Local (within 40 km)</b>	26.19%	42.86%	11.90%	4.76%	7.14%	7.14%
<b>Regional (40 km -160 km)</b>	8.70%	28.26%	30.43%	15.22%	4.35%	13.04%
<b>Provincial</b>	15.79%	39.47%	13.16%	13.16%	10.53%	7.89%
<b>Outside AB but in Canada</b>	23.08%	33.33%	23.08%	10.26%	7.69%	2.56%
<b>International</b>	44.44%	27.78%	19.44%	2.78%	2.78%	2.78%

40. If your organization is purchasing products/services beyond local or regional suppliers, what is the reason? (Feel free to check more than one.)

Answer Choices	Responses
Not available locally/regionally (within 200 km)	65.85%
Cost	21.95%
Other	21.95%
Quality local/regional is not as good	12.20%
Head office does purchasing	4.88%

## 2.6 Changes Section

46. Are there any major technological innovations on the horizon in your industry that might affect your organization?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	20.97%
No	27.42%
Not Sure	51.61%

47. If you answered "Yes", what are these technological innovations?

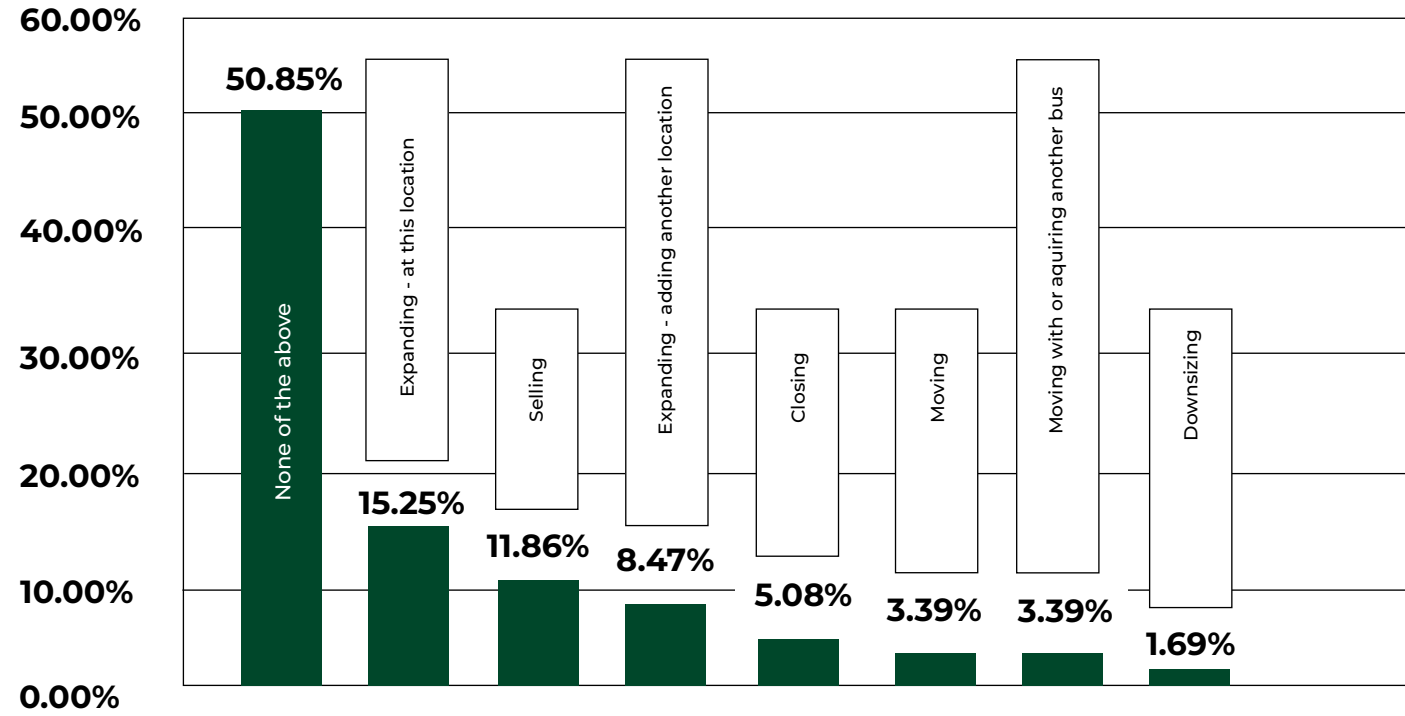
- Provincial implementation of electronic log devices
- Holographic technology, artificial intelligence
- Electronic Shelf labels
- Artificial Intelligence for inventory control
- Different types of laser and Medispa services are available.
- CNC engraving machines
- Better ovens and cooking appliances.
- Cloud storage, digital signatures, government regulations
- Robotics, new product lines etc.
- New apps for accommodation services

48. Do you have specific plans to modernize or expand your present buildings(s) or equipment?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	44.26%
No	55.74%

**53. In terms of locations, are you currently considering any of the following:**

Less than 7% are closing or downsizing. And almost 25% are planning to expand.



**56. What is the single biggest barrier to your business's expansion?**

This is a key question for the Crossroads EDO. Future projects should focus on this issue above most others in terms of BRE.

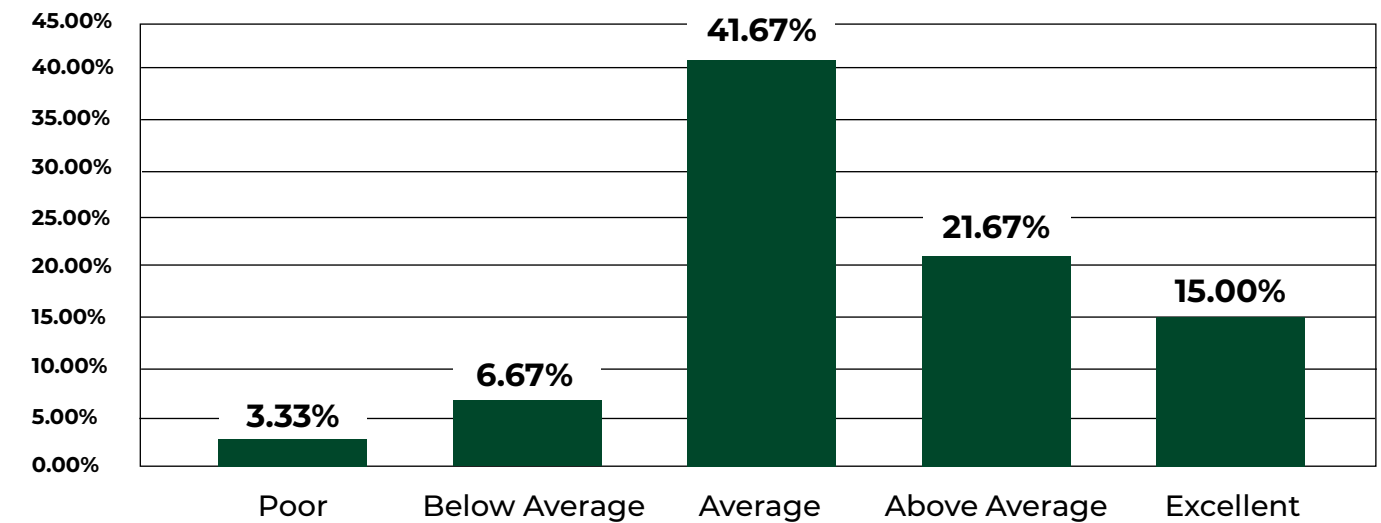
- High cost of expansion (mentioned 8 times)
- Enough qualified workers (mentioned 6 times)
- Availability of affordable space in the town.
- High taxation
- Attack on oil and gas by the federal government
- Lack of construction workers and trades people to come to our small town
- There is no longer room in my building to expand and buildings in town are hard to sell.
- Demand - we are highly dependent on activity in the town and region. Without regional growth, it's nearly impossible for us to grow.
- The size of the trade area

**69. What impact do the following programs, attractions and events have on your business?**

	Very Negative Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact	Positive Impact	Very Positive Impact	Don't Know
Recreation and sport activities	3.33%	3.33%	3.33%	36.67%	20.00%	3.33%
Arts and cultural events	0.00%	3.33%	38.33%	40.00%	15.00%	3.33%
Downtown atmosphere	6.78%	6.78%	45.76%	27.12%	11.86%	1.69%
Community diversity	6.90%	3.45%	44.83%	34.48%	6.90%	3.45%
Festivals & events	1.69%	3.39%	35.59%	33.90%	23.73%	1.69%
Historic atmosphere	0.00%	3.39%	42.37%	37.29%	10.17%	6.78%
Information for tourists	5.08%	1.69%	42.37%	32.20%	13.56%	5.08%
Lodging facilities	3.39%	0.00%	49.15%	32.20%	8.47%	6.78%
Meeting/conference facilities	5.08%	1.69%	44.07%	32.20%	10.17%	6.78%
Facilities & attractions	3.45%	1.72%	41.38%	41.38%	8.62%	3.45%
Eco-tourism	3.39%	1.69%	55.93%	23.73%	3.39%	11.86%
Outdoor recreation	1.69%	1.69%	37.29%	38.98%	15.25%	5.08%

**2.8 Summary Section**

**70. What is your overall opinion of your community as a place to conduct business?**



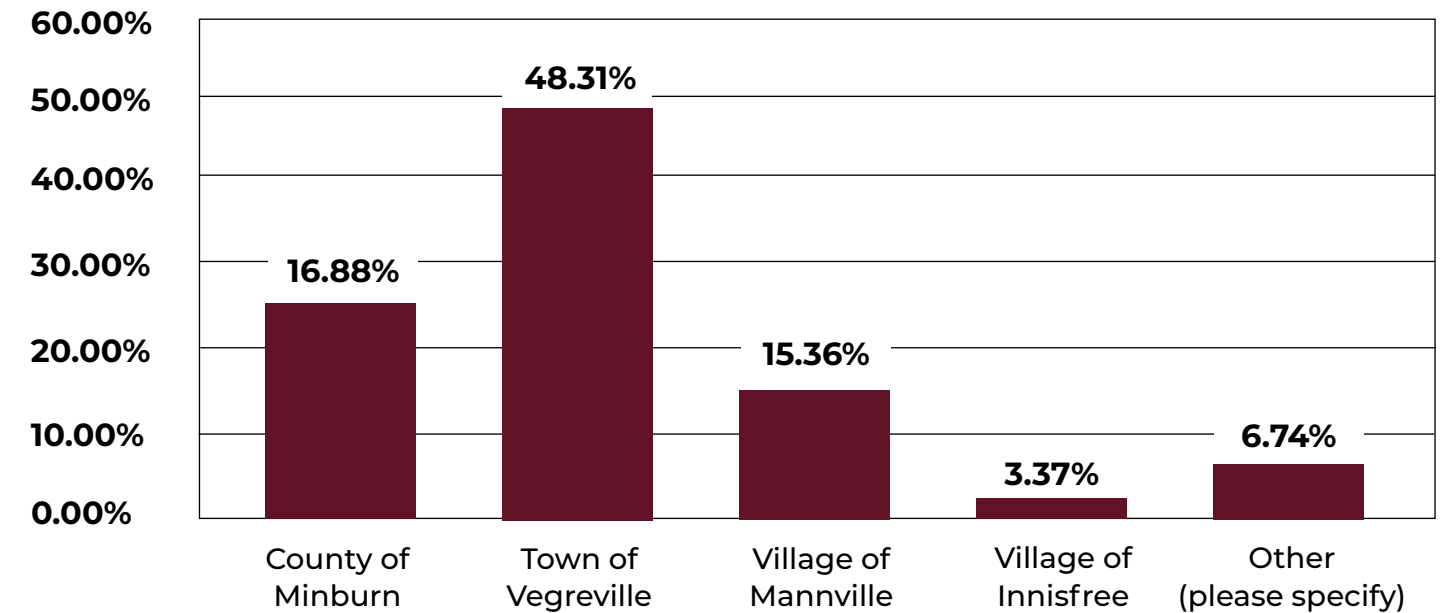
**72. We have covered many issues. Please help us set some priorities on how Crossroads can help your business or what we should work on to help all of our existing businesses grow and expand. Please provide any additional comments.**

- Advocate for lower taxes and energy costs.
- Focus on things that attract younger generations to want to move into town. More attractive downtown. Trendy private business i.e. quality coffee shop. Less pot shops / liquor stores.
- An economic development plan with implementation milestones and actions.
- Need to attract business to support local growth and retention of family members, manufacturing or agricultural production.
- Direct businesses to funding and expansion assistance.
- Promoting people in the community to shop locally.
- I think the region is the thing.
- Highlight the great summer events in our region.
- A regional recreational facility is greatly needed for the area. Please work together to build something amazing for communities to share!
- Start by connecting with the businesses and obtaining updated contact details so municipalities / Crossroads can easily share pertinent information with the business community.
- Bring more sustainable manufacturing and industry to town
- Make an effort to actually get on the phone or email business owners.
- Help attract workers
- A new look or plan for downtown zoning or main street.
- Focus on smaller projects for smaller villages and employee attraction.



# 3. Community Survey Results

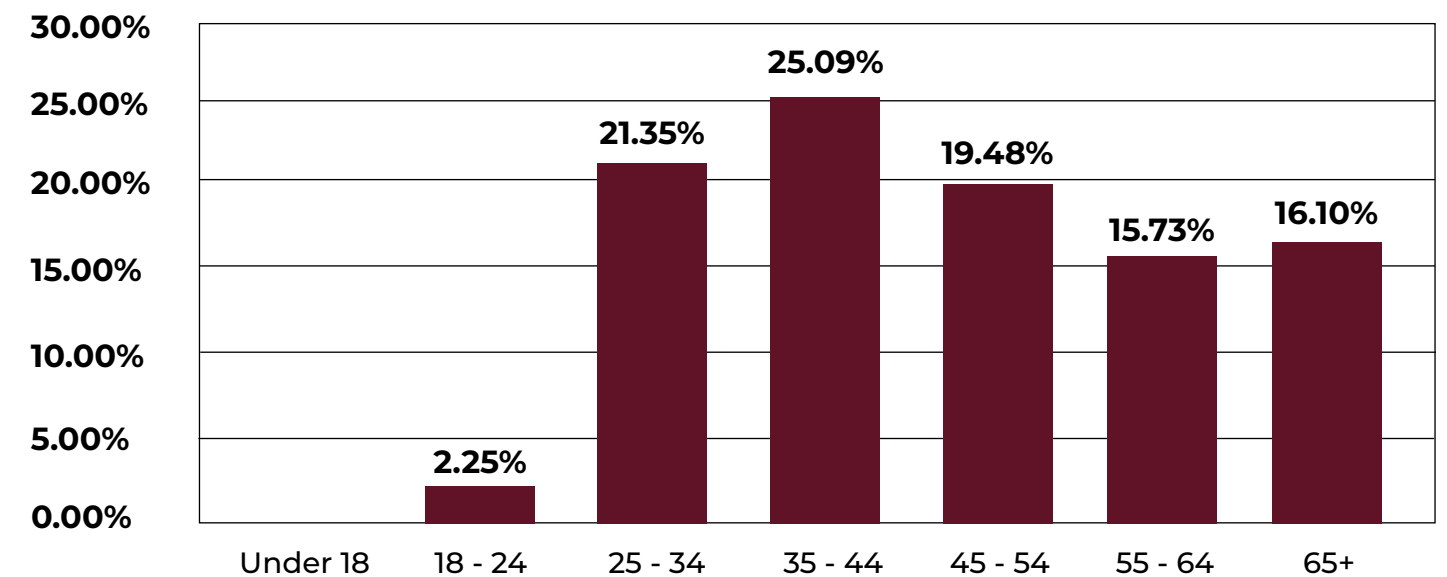
## 1. What community do you live in?



### Other:

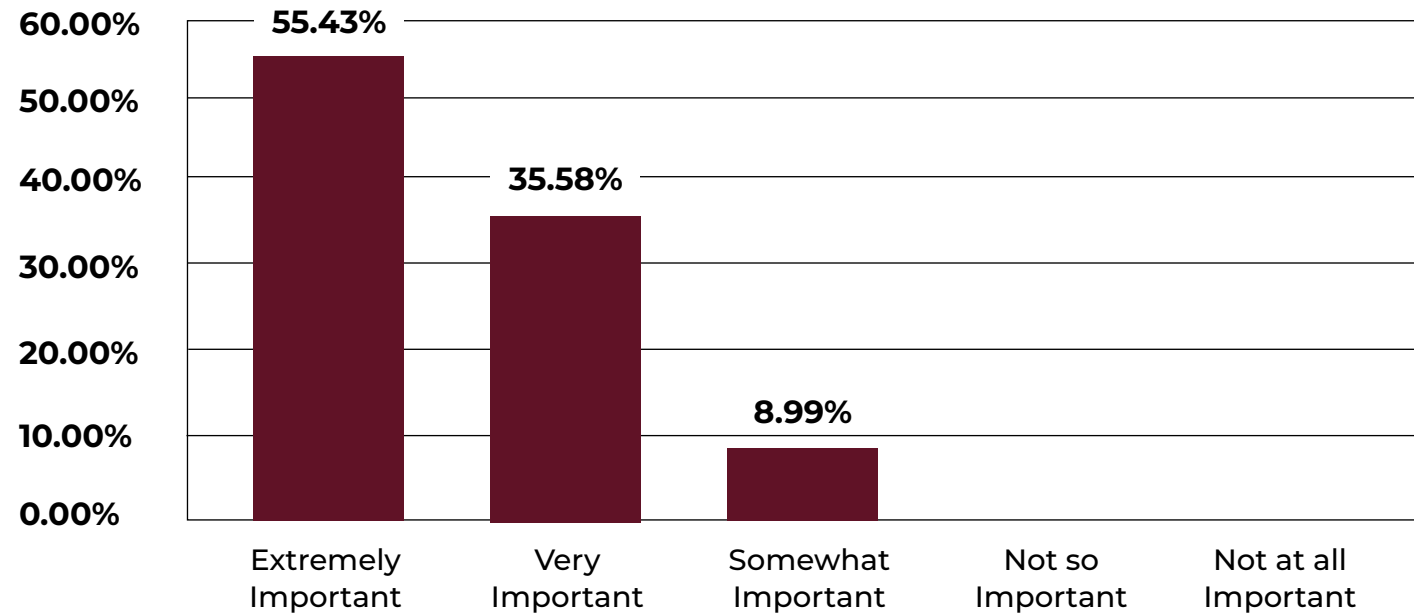
- Sherwood Park
- Lamont County
- Willingdon
- Rural Mannville
- Lamont County
- Beaver County
- Willingdon
- Lamont County
- County of Two hills
- County of Two Hills
- County of Beaver
- Smoky Lake County
- Lamont County
- Vermilion River
- Mannville Rural Area
- Vermilion

## 3. What is your age?



**5. How important do you feel economic development is to your community and the region?**

The BRE interviews and BRE survey both verified the importance of economic development in the business community, which was not a surprise. But the level of importance that is placed on economic development within the region as a whole is remarkable. This gives Crossroads a strong public mandate moving forward.

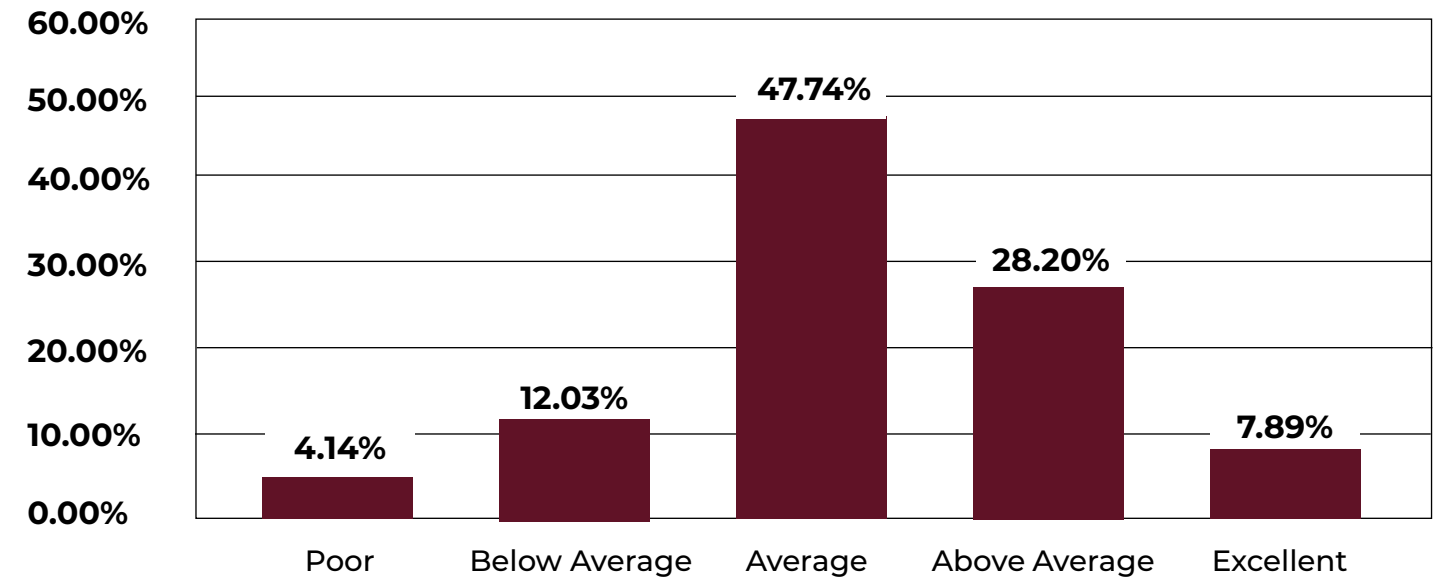


**6. Please rank what you feel the economic development priorities should be for your community and the region? (Please check 3)**

The most pressing strategic decision that the Crossroads Committee needs to make is determining the mix of time that the EDO will spend on Economic Development and Community Development. The EDO may be directed to dedicate her time fully to one, the other, or a prescribed % mix.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Business retention & expansion	56.34%	151
Community development - recreation	54.10%	145
Investment attraction	47.01%	126
Community development - housing	42.16%	113
Community development - special events	27.61%	74
Community/region marketing & promotion	24.63%	66
Labour attraction (including immigration)	23.88%	64
Tourism	23.51%	63
Advocacy for the region to government stakeholders	17.16%	46
Grant writing	9.33%	25

**15. What is your overall opinion of your community as a place to live and work?**



**Comments:**

- Overall lower cost of living combined with vibrant social service supports for those in need makes our community attractive place to live.
- For Vegreville to grow more we need some more major corporations to bring more jobs into Vegreville. Like Amazon or a meat packing plant. We also need another apartment complex. That is affordable and family friendly.

**Do you have any comments on how Crossroads can help grow local business in the region?**

- Support making development, permits, and tax incentives attractive.
- Promote region as an attractive place for people in larger centers to raise a family, and live. (Ad campaigns)
- Promote the intersection as the meeting point of many roads, naturally gathering people and vehicles from different directions.
- Increase the number of regional cultural tourism exhibitions and events
- Regular commercial activities, such as fairs, promotions, commercial exhibitions, etc. are held around the intersection to attract consumers and businesses to participate and promote the prosperity of local businesses. Support that.
- Strengthening infrastructure development in the region
- Crossroads can provide a platform for local businesses to showcase their products and services, attracting more customers. It can also facilitate networking among local business owners, enabling them to share ideas and resources. Additionally, Crossroads can organize events and workshops to enhance the skills and knowledge of local entrepreneurs, promoting business growth and innovation.
- Innisfree was meant to be a haven for retirees and snowbirds. Do things to keep it that way. Get a van up and running so the elders can get for groceries and appointments. It should not be up to neighbors to drive others around. A community van needs to get going.
- We need more housing – advocate for that

- Provide recommendation and ensure council follows up on it or sets actual plan to execute.
- Revitalize downtown. Look at Vermilion - drive through their downtown & compare it to Vegreville. Look at the small businesses. Do what they did because it obviously worked well.
- Help remove barriers to new business and incentivize people in developing business.
- Embrace diversity in all aspects of planning and delivery. People need to know they are seen and welcomed.
- Partner with other municipalities and provide shared incentives.
- Continue to promote our town as a tourist/day trip destination. Encourage investment in our community to bring more stable, better paying jobs.
- Should promote Vegreville as a commuter town to Edmonton.
- Support quality childcare to ensure employees/owners have childcare for children.
- Local businesses can actively collaborate with Crossroads to promote the development of the Crossroads area.
- Crossroads can help grow local businesses in the County of Minburn by acting as a hub for resources, networking, and support.
- Advocate for more senior housing.
- Let's look at mental health support too! That is a huge part of overall health - rural/farm mental health in this county where many residents are farmers! Let's get the conversation started.
- Help maintain Doctor and pharmacy in Mannville.
- Better promote the region as an AFFORDABLE place to work and play.



## 4. Interviews - Regional SWOT Assessment

All community participants were asked what they felt were the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the community and region. Following are the examples of the responses provided by businesses throughout the region of County of Minburn, Village of Mannville, Village of Innisfree and Town of Vegreville.

*Responses are almost verbatim, adjusted only for grammar and presentation.*

### 4.1 Strengths - Greatest Economic Assets

#### Location

A number of respondents mentioned the location of the communities in Crossroads as a major economic asset. The crossing of high load corridors and access trail along with the proximity to the Capital Region makes the Crossroads area ideal for all sorts of industrial and commercial opportunities.

Highway 16 is a major east-west corridor, linking the County to the Port of Prince Rupert. Highway 36 is a High Load Corridor with access to vast oil sands development areas. The intersection of Highways 16 and 36 has been identified by the province as a future interchange location. At this strategic location, approximately 1,500 acres of land has been identified for future industrial development and commercial uses.

- *"We are located on both a major railroad and a major highway. This is something that we should be able to capitalize on.*
- *In our community we are 45 minutes from anywhere. I believe that is what can draw newcomers to our town.*
- *I am happy to see that the county and other towns are finally working together to promote our area and hope they will focus on value added products due to our rail and highway.*

#### People Supporting Local

The people of the region were often seen as one of the biggest strengths for retaining and attracting business. "The residents in the County want to succeed. They fight hard for everything they can get. The people here want to back local businesses. It is like the businesses and the community want to work to make the County stronger. There is a feeling and a will to support one another." This sentiment carries through to the BRE interviews and survey.

- *People support local businesses throughout the region, and we appreciate that.*
- *Business owners are willing to think outside the box for new endeavors which allows employees to grow within the company*
- *The shop local mentality is very strong in this region compared to larger urban centers. The Chamber of Commerce promotes local businesses and drives a "shop local" promotion*
- *Locals are a large factor in supporting businesses through word of mouth and that can be better than any radio or news paper*

## **Agriculture**

This is a strength in the region. Most of the interviews completed showed recognition for our agricultural strength and ability for diversity. Businesses understand how fortunate this region is to have both agriculture and energy to rely on.

- *This region has the Alberta Innotech and Alberta research center. I wonder if they can help us to expand our agriculture industry*
- *We are rich with quality agriculture land and should take the commodities that we grow and value through processing to create new industries with a sustainable feed stock.*
- *Our region received an A Grading as a straw basin for alternative fuels. This shows a potential for protein products all of which will create jobs in new industry...Smart Ag.*
- *Why aren't we doing more for Agri-tourism?*
- *As a cattle farmer I want it noted that hemp is not what we need. We need our local farmers to continue to supply the grains to keep our cattle fed.*
- 

## **4.2 Weaknesses - Gaps**

### **Governance**

While there is a recognition of the positive moves being made by the municipalities in terms of economic development, there are of course some frustrations as well. Red tape is always a concern of business owners. But some of the issues related to government responsiveness in the EDS project have been mitigated by the municipalities' commitment to Crossroads and the visibility of this BRE project.

- *As a business owner I feel we lack industry, plain and simple. We need to build on this utilizing economic development and relationships with the regional municipalities.*
- *We need to make things easier for businesses. We need to allow business to grow rather than stopping them with red tape.*
- *Lack of signage for businesses affects walk in traffic. We need to get them off the highway.*
- *The reputation for doing new business in the community needs to be improved. There has been a lot of red tape and policies restrictive to business growth in the past (fees and permitting, primarily) that have kept people from looking at Minburn County as a place to go.*
- *The council needs to rezone the business store front for family living. This would attract women, young entrepreneurs and small families to the rural area.*

### **Lack of Communication/Advertising & Promotion**

There is a need for marketing strategies in some municipalities. Most businesses feel that there could be more diversity within the agriculture industry, but promotion is the main focus. A consideration for businesses may be through their local Chamber of Commerce. In addition, interviews showed there is a gap in signage whether it is on highway or within municipal boundaries.

- *There needs to be marketing strategies put in place to promote what we have in our region. Agriculture tourism could be very successful if we just market it better.*
- *People need to know about what is going on here in the region*
- *Communication and collaboration are lacking and with new strategies, everyone must be willing to give and take.*
- *Our municipalities should promote everything we do and what we provide.*

### **More Infrastructure Needed**

Lack of infrastructure was a regional concern in the interviews. Each community has its own issues that are likely best dealt with individually. But there is a possibility that Crossroads could engage in a regional infrastructure strategy or act in an advocacy and informational role.

- *Can not draw younger families due to poor infrastructure and lack of programs for youth.*
- *Infrastructure is weak. We are not prepared for anything, and we must get there first. Build it/clean it up and they will come type of idea. Vegreville is doing this, and I hope we all will see the benefits from it and maybe follow in their footsteps.*
- *We need to start by reinvigorating our communities. Clean things up, promote what we have to offer and encourage our councils to create better incentives.*

### **Lack of Housing**

Lack of housing, especially affordable housing is a concern across Canada, especially in rural areas. A detailed regional housing study maybe in order to understand and quantify the specific gaps and then produce a strategy to help fill these gaps.

- *Housing is nonexistent and we need builders to come to this region. Our municipal government needs to band together and get the resources needed to build residential housing.*
- *I need my employees to move to town but there is a lack of adequate housing*
- *The lack of suitable and affordable housing to attract workers for industry is a problem*
- *I think housing is the biggest need in our community, but I guess it is for the whole region as well*
- *There aren't very many houses that I would consider suitable for living in. How can we expect people to move here if that is all they have to choose from*

### 4.3 Opportunities - Potential for Business Development

#### Municipal Partnership for Economic Development

During interviews with the businesses, the overall attitude was positive regarding administration. They are pleased to hear that there is change happening and that their requests have been heard.

There are many who don't understand economic development and how it can help the community/region but are willing to work with Crossroads to build relations and promote the region. Crossroads has the opportunity to work towards a vision that this region is resilient, innovative and prosperous. Respondents believe we can sustain economic opportunities throughout this region for individuals, families, business and industry working together for the betterment of everyone. Many businesses are excited about this endeavor and hope it will continue to benefit everyone.

- *It is good to hear that the county is listening to their taxpayers. We asked for more partnerships with the town. There needs to be more collaboration and now we are getting it.*
- *Our Economic Development is an important part of our future, and I hope Councils will take it seriously and continue funding it. It will pay off in the long run.*
- *This alliance can market the region as a whole and be the middleman to keep communication open.*
- *We have good council, but they can only work with what they have. This alliance can help everyone.*
- *Economic Development can build partnerships with businesses and sharing services will tie everyone together.*

#### Lifestyle

Like many rural communities the municipalities in the Crossroads partnership have much to offer in terms of quality of life. Lower housing and living costs, safety, and strong sense of community. The Crossroads municipalities also have the benefit of being close to the Capital Region and the services offered there.

- *I'm In full belief that this is a very friendly region. The residents of the county are always willing to help each other.*
- *We need to show the public and businesses that they can grow here and become members of the community.*
- *There is an opportunity for business to grow and have a good work/life balance.*
- *It would be nice to see a new arena and swimming pool in town. Sports are important to our family, and we are willing to pay more taxes for better facilities if that's what needs to happen*
- *It would be nice if the region worked together to build proper recreational facilities for everyone to use*

#### Business Opportunities

- *There is a potential for Smart Ag due to the region receiving an A GRADING as a straw basin which will create jobs in new industry.*
- *Vegreville has built an industrial park and is industry ready.*
- *This region is capable of many business opportunities if we could market it better. I know Vegreville and the County are doing their best but there needs to be more. Whatever that looks like.*
- *Anything to do with the hemp industry should be a good fit. There are lots of things that can be done: straw blocks, insulating blocks, sheet boards - there is a lot of spin-offs from the hemp industry that can be taken advantage of.*

### 4.4 Threats – Economic Challenges

#### General Concerns

There are a number of general concerns that contribute to challenges in the local economy that are common across a lot of rural communities. Lack of services and labour are core to a lot of these challenges.

- *Our community needs daycare facilities and staff. Without daycare, we are losing families to the larger urban centres, and this affects business for employee purposes as well as new business coming to town.*
- *Healthcare facilities are overburdened and lack the ability to care for the residents in the region.*
- *People are sometimes not very considerate to newcomers and especially immigrants. Police are short staffed and can't respond to all the issues our region is having.*
- *Base assessments are not the same in rural as opposed to large urban centers.*
- *Skilled workforce is an external pressure due competing with urban opportunities*
- *Broadband is not reliable throughout the region.*
- *The energy sector is heavily swinging away from oil and gas. Concern for the environment and the political push away from oil is not going away. We need to keep working on things not related to oil since we will not be able to count on it soon.*

#### Land and Buildings

Currently, the County of Minburn and Town of Vegreville are promoting commercial and industrial land with Invest Alberta, social media promotions, etc. This is a positive reflection of our municipal leaders acting on the needs of this region. But there are still a few concerns about lack of land and buildings or buildings being in poor shape.

- *Our municipal leaders need to develop a plan like other communities. Investors will not wait, and we need to be ready.*
- *Development of commercial property needs to be a priority. Municipal leaders need to work together in this region to help each other grow.*
- *Our government must act on those businesses that have abandoned contaminated (brownfield) lots. Some of these lots are prime real estate.*

# 5. Go Forward Recommendations

## 5.1 Regional Needs

Based on the BRE interviews, here are the most common issues/needs within the region and associated preliminary project constructs:

**Lack of Housing** – Conduct a housing needs assessment and advocate together with local municipalities and the regional alliance.

**Labour Shortage** – Understand labour gaps and how to fill these areas through education, promotion, immigration, and advocacy.

**Marketing** – Crossroads and municipalities to promote the region and its communities as a place to live, work, and open businesses. Should include regional signage improvements.

**Communications** - Improvement in communication between businesses and municipal leaders/administration. Continue working towards inclusivity and better communication; share knowledge on courses and grant funding

**Health Care** - Advocate for the needs of the region through recruitment and retention.

**Childcare** – Continue discussions with group for daycare. Promote daycare within the region.

**Infrastructure** – Identify gaps and resources and advocate with the Government of Alberta.

**Police** - Work with the local police to address the concerns and advocate for better policing.

## 5.2 Priorities by Municipality

The in-depth yearlong consultation process with municipalities by the EDC (interviews, surveys, other communications) informs the following economic development priorities for Crossroads for each municipality:

### Village of Innisfree

- Assist with implementation of skilled labor opportunities
- Investigate environmental initiatives
- Promote affordable living opportunities
- Work towards investment ready projects
- Childcare Centre -Before and after School Care
- Consideration for recreational park (playground)

### Marketing Plan:

- Promotion of community events
- Signage
- Promotion of existing businesses
- Welcome package for newcomers

### Village of Mannville

- Work with Municipality/Administration for investment ready projects
- Investigate the possible need for childcare/before and after school care
- Continue to build on business relationships
- Business recruitment (retention and expansion)
- Promote affordable living opportunities
- Continue promotion of local chamber

### Marketing Plan:

- Signage
- Promotion of existing businesses
- Work with council on tax incentives and other options available for implementing positive growth

### County of Minburn

- Continue support of existing businesses – funding opportunities, government advocacy and business growth readiness.
- Work with Hutterite Colonies for funding opportunities, marketing, etc.
- Support IP&D and council for regional readiness
- Promote diversity and inclusion for existing and new businesses
- Engage with Council, IP&D and CEDA board member on possible initiatives

### Town of Vegreville

- Continuing relationship building with existing businesses – It needs to be noted that direct/face to face contact is key to supporting local businesses.
- Continue to be the direct liaison between businesses, Manager of Community Engagement and Economy and municipal leaders.
- Business retention and expansion
- Support training initiatives through Arctic Response
- Support needs of the manager of community engagement and economy
- Promote regional readiness for industry, commercial and residential



### 5.3 Crossroads Strategic Priorities 2025

#### Position Crossroads as the centralized economic development resource for the region

- Centralize coordination for economic initiatives and programs for the regional municipal partners.
- Support Councils with regional perspective on economic development trends, grants, government priorities and investment opportunities.
- Develop a centralized source for regional economic development information from municipalities, Government of Alberta, educational institutions, and businesses to foster information sharing, reduce duplication and leverage economies of scale.
- Build investment attraction capacity building and marketing across the region.

#### Support regional business retention, expansion and attraction

- Build on the relationship developed during the BRE project to continue understanding and supporting the needs of all businesses in the region.
- Leverage existing industry drivers within the region to increase economic potential across priority sectors: agriculture, retail and tourism.
- Identify new and emerging economic opportunities to diversify and grow the region
- Identify top site selection criteria in relation to priority industries

#### Acts as the regional community development resource for all partner municipalities

- Housing: research and support affordable living opportunities.
- Child Care: research and support new childcare options and opportunities to support labour attraction and retention.
- Policing: continue to work with provincial government to advocate the needs of the region regarding police.
- Community Events: support community events in each municipality by research grant opportunities and providing market support where possible.

#### Support regional economic development through partnerships and advocacy

- Build partnerships and advocate on behalf of the municipalities within and beyond the region (i.e. Industry, Associations/Organizations, Alberta HUB, Hutterites, Municipalities etc.).

#### Support the Crossroads Economic Development Alliance continuation

- Continue researching and applying for grants to support Crossroads initiative and individual projects
- Develop a 5-year budget at end of 2025 for municipal partners to consider as well as a path to move from the EDC model to an EDO model.



