

Snohomish BRE Survey Report

TBUS520: Managerial Economics

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Snohomish BRE Survey Report

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Executive Summary

Purpose

The City of Snohomish commissioned the University of Washington MBA program to conduct an economic research project aimed at understanding the current landscape of local businesses and identifying opportunities for growth and development. The project involved a comprehensive business survey, with the key objectives being to better understand business demographics, their perceptions of the local business climate and assess the economic health and challenges faced by those businesses.

Methodology

The research team worked with the Snohomish Economic Development Board to develop a list of 27 questions, which was distributed to 1,159 businesses identified to reside within city limits. The survey was conducted via Qualtrics and was intentionally kept short to encourage participation.

Findings

Of the 1,159 businesses contacted, 56 responded. Of those 56 respondents, 37 (66%) are businesses with single locations, 26 (46%) employ only one or two people and 28 (52%) owners live within city limits. 42 respondents (75%) have been in business for 6 years or more, with 28 (50%) businesses being women/minority/vet owned. 43 respondents (77%) are primarily retail businesses, with 17 (30%) expecting less than \$100,000 in gross sales for 2023. Most respondent's answers fell within the satisfied to very satisfied range, when evaluating their interactions with various city functions.

Recommendations

Although the survey had a relatively low response rate (4.8%), it successfully captured a diverse range of business perspectives within the Snohomish city limits with a true random sample of respondents. The data shows most Snohomish businesses are small retail shops, with a long history in the community. The survey team's goal was to conduct a survey resulting in a useful dataset the City can use to help guide their planning efforts, so questions surrounding growth such as, "What type of businesses to attract?", and "How best to help existing businesses grow?" are best left to the City to answer.

Increasing participation in future surveys is crucial. To ensure the survey reaches all current businesses, the City should attempt to partner with both the HDSA and the Chamber of Commerce to ensure a current and complete list of Snohomish businesses. The survey team recommends sending future surveys electronically and allowing for more time for completion.

Methodology

Background

One of the projects selected by the City of Snohomish (the City) for the Livable City Year program was a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) survey with the goal of gathering business data to inform the City's 2024 periodic update to the 2044 comprehensive plan. In the fall of 2023, a group of six University of Washington MBA students were selected to partner with the City's Economic Development & Outreach Coordinator to design and implement the survey and provide a detailed analysis of the results.

Survey Design

The survey was designed in October and November of 2023 and consisted of a series of 25 quantitative and two qualitative questions focused on the size, age, and industry demographics of businesses and their perceptions of doing business in the City of Snohomish. One additional question, "Is your business located within the Snohomish city limits?", was used to exclude data from non-Snohomish businesses who may have received the survey in error.

After meeting with the City to discuss survey objectives and specific areas of interest, an initial draft list of questions was developed by the University of Washington team and presented to the City for comment and approval. Question types included multiple choice, matrix-based, and seven-point Likert-type questions, with some limited options to provide qualitative feedback. After incorporating comments from the City, the survey was developed using the Qualtrics survey platform.

Identification of Respondents

The identification of potential survey respondents presented significant challenges to the survey team as the City was unable to disclose contact information based on business licensure due to legal constraints.

As an alternative, the survey team utilized the D&B Hoovers public-source business information database to gather a list of the physical addresses of 5,011 businesses licensed in the ZIP code that includes the City of Snohomish (98290). To isolate businesses within the city limits of Snohomish, the survey team converted the addresses of all businesses within the 98290 ZIP code to longitude/latitude data points, then used mapping software to exclude all data points outside of the Snohomish city limits, which yielded a cleansed list of 1,159 businesses mailing addresses. It should be noted that the database used may not be current, and it is possible that some of the listed businesses were no longer active at the time of the survey.

Survey Circulation

The survey was circulated primarily through a postcard explaining the survey, including a QR code and written link to the survey sent to all 1,159 businesses. Additional outreach was performed through emails to associated businesses sent by the Historic Downtown Snohomish Association (HDSA), the Chamber of Commerce, and the Snohomish Economic Development Board.

Responses were incentivized with a drawing for two \$100 gift cards for people who submitted their email addresses. Incentive winners were chosen through a random number generator, and electronic gift cards were emailed to them.

Responses

Between 11/17 and 12/2, the survey page received a total of 107 visits, but of those 107 visitors, 30 completed less than 30% of the survey, and 11 respondents answered ‘no’ to the question “Is your business located within the Snohomish city limits?”, and thus were removed from consideration.

In total, 56 responses are analyzed within this report.

Findings

Respondent Demographics

The business demographics are overwhelmingly small businesses at 82% as defined by Washington State [RCW 19.85.025](#). A slim majority at 51.8% of owners live inside the Snohomish city limits. Respondents owning or leasing one location is 66.1%, with the remainder owning or leasing two or more locations. A quarter of respondents have been operating in Snohomish for twenty or more years; 46.4% have been in business 11 years or more. Around one third at 32.1% are woman-owned businesses and only small portions of the respondents are owned by minority, veterans, or LGBT. Seventeen different North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes are represented in the City. The top five industries in the City are: 1) Professional, Scientific, and Technical Service; 2) Retail Trade; 3) Food Services; 4) Construction; and 5) Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation. Collectively, this makes up 58% of the respondents. A plurality at 31.4% of respondent businesses’ gross income is less than \$100,000 annually.

Livability

The majority of the questions related to city services had most responses fall into the satisfied to very satisfied range. Services questions that do not have the majority in the satisfied range are: Planning, Zoning and Historic preservation; Building and Fire Inspection; Permitting; Enforcement; and Parks and Recreation. Most responded as neither satisfied nor dissatisfied within those categories. Support for small businesses was overwhelmingly the most wanted *desire* among the respondents. A minority of respondents believe the City has become more friendly to significantly more friendly to businesses within the last five years. There is moderate interest in economic development and business programs across the board. Most respondents answered *neither disinterested nor interested in each program*.

Respondent Comments

There were 26 comments submitted in total with 13 specifically referencing the question related to whether Snohomish has become more or less business friendly over the last five years. The remaining 13 comments are generalized commentary. Many of the responses are positive and appreciate the outreach from the survey. Only a handful of comments have negative connotation. Some themes from comments include needed street repair, city or private events to bring in customers, taxes, and genuine care for the City.

Conclusion And Recommendations

Conclusion

The Survey yielded insightful data useful for informing the City of Snohomish’s comprehensive plan. Despite the challenges in identifying respondents and a relatively low response rate, the survey has

successfully captured a diverse range of business perspectives within the Snohomish city limits with a true random sample of respondents.

The findings reveal a predominant presence of small businesses in the area, with many having a long-standing presence in the community. These businesses span a variety of industries, with a significant portion operating on a relatively modest gross income. The respondents' feedback on city services indicates general satisfaction, though certain areas such as Planning, Zoning, and Historic Preservation, and Building and Fire Inspection, showed a need for improvement or indifference.

The survey also highlights a strong desire for support among small businesses and indicates a moderate interest in economic development and business programs. The comments from respondents, mostly positive, underline the community's engagement and interest in City affairs, particularly concerning business friendliness and the need for infrastructure improvements and events that could boost customer traffic. Overall, the survey serves as a valuable tool for the City of Snohomish acting as a base for future surveys and providing a clearer understanding of the business landscape in Snohomish. It is an essential step towards informed decision-making for the City's future planning and development strategies.

Recommendations

Considering the experiences and outcomes of this survey there are several recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of future surveys. Addressing the challenge of respondent identification is crucial. The survey team was limited to public-source business databases that may not always be the most up-to date. It is highly recommended for the City to use and partner with business associations and chamber commerce to develop the contact list for distributing the next survey.

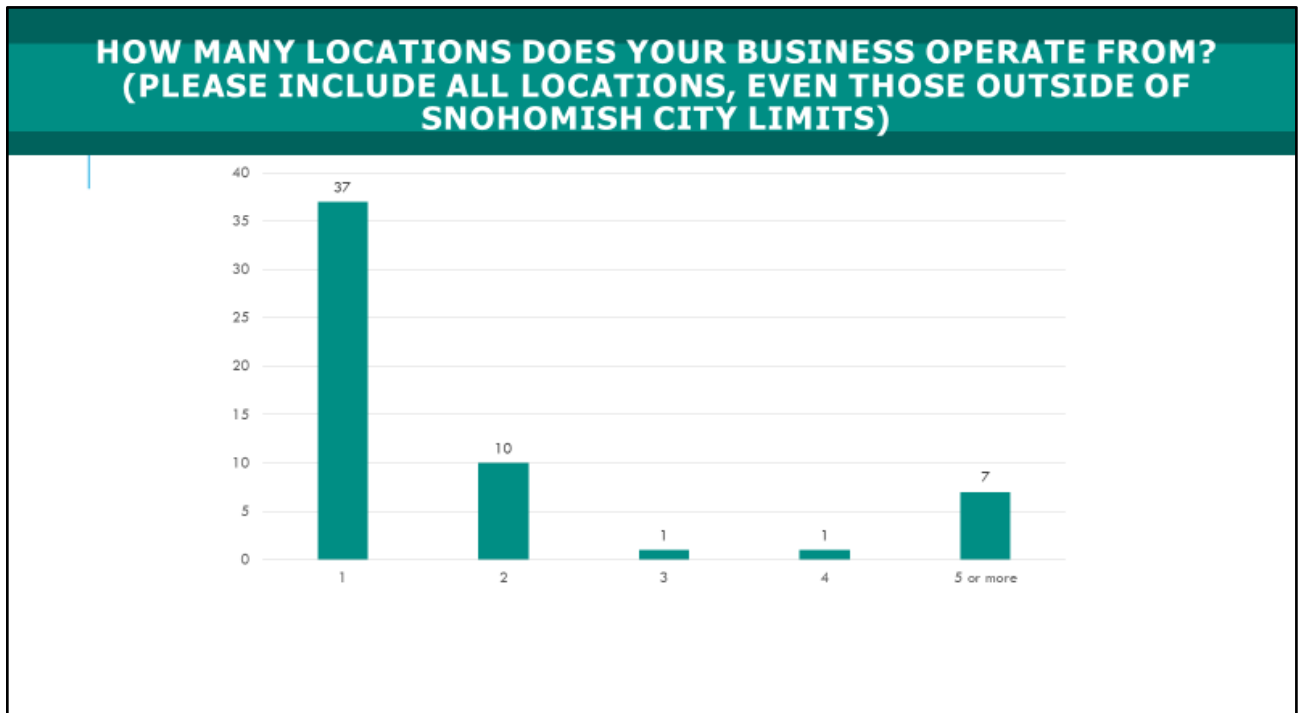
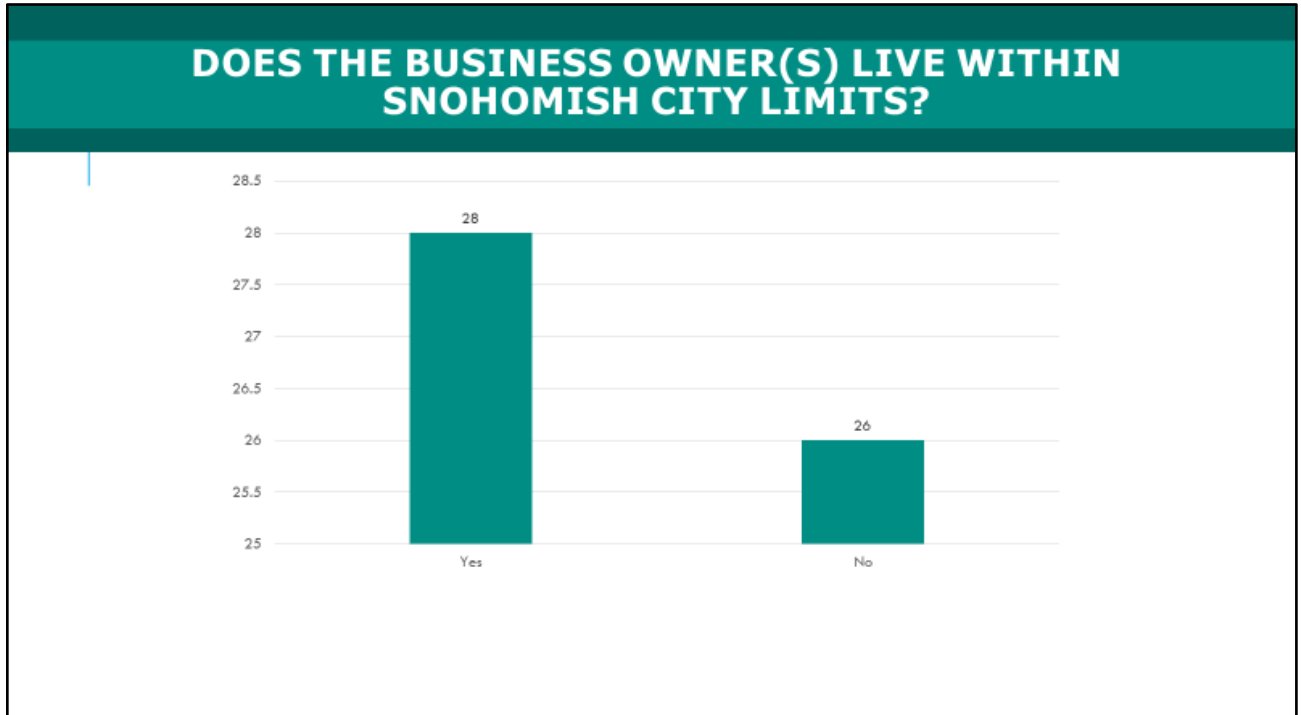
In future surveys, should the City access business licensure data to identify potential survey respondents, the information contained within the business licenses will provide valuable demographic data to the City and, if properly analyzed, will remove the need for the demographics section of the survey. One stated goal of the survey was to gain a better understanding of the business demographics within the City of Snohomish. If business license data is provided by the State, a thorough study of said data will provide a comprehensive understanding of all businesses within the City without relying on survey responses. Additionally, with individual email addresses, the City can utilize more robust survey tools to send personalized survey invitations to allow exact tracking of responses.

In terms of distribution, it is recommended to focus on sending the survey electronically. Beyond postcards and emails, leveraging digital platforms and social media channels could increase visibility and participation. Additionally, incentivizing survey completion, perhaps through local business promotions or recognition, might encourage higher response rates.

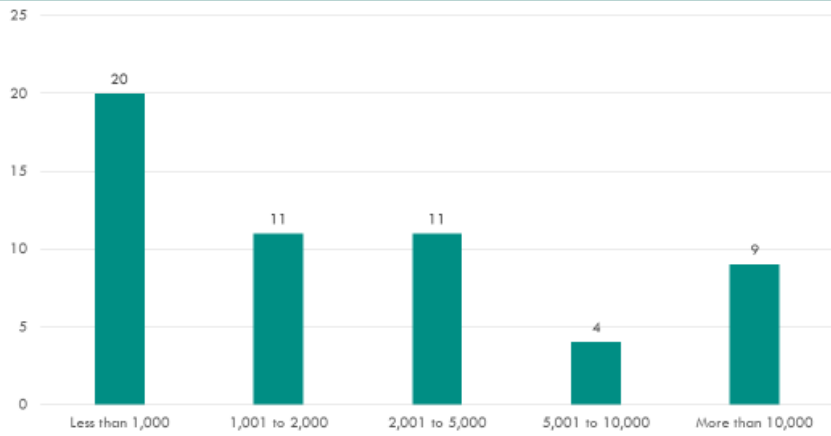
Lastly, the next survey needs time to be developed appropriately. Working under the time constraints of college quarters proved to be the greatest challenge with this survey. A minimum of four months is needed just for planning and development with at least a month, possibly two, for responses after distribution.

Appendix

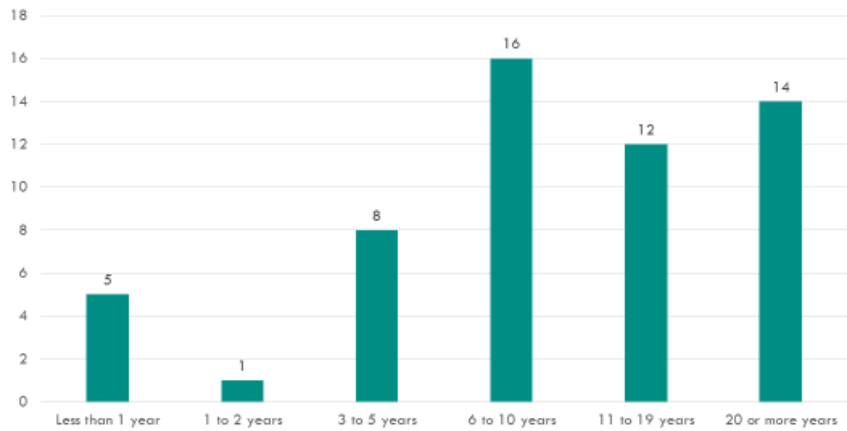
Survey Results:



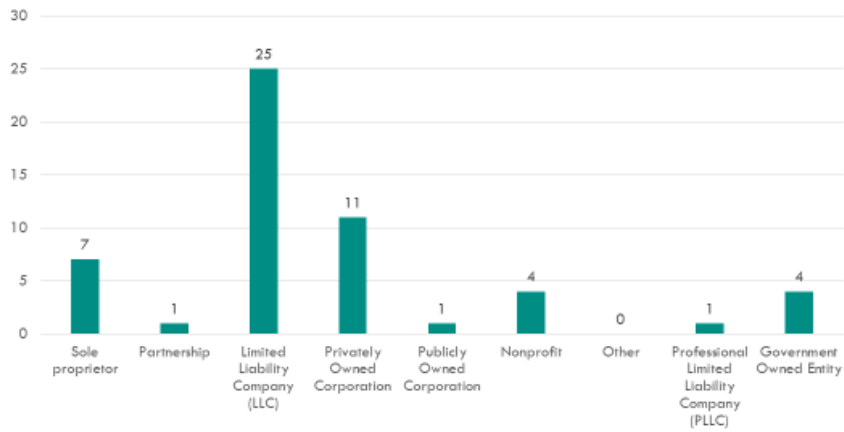
**WHAT IS THE SIZE (IN SQUARE FEET) OF YOUR PHYSICAL LOCATION(S)?
(NOTE: IF YOUR BUSINESS HAS MULTIPLE LOCATIONS, PLEASE PROVIDE THE
AVERAGE SQUARE FOOTAGE)**



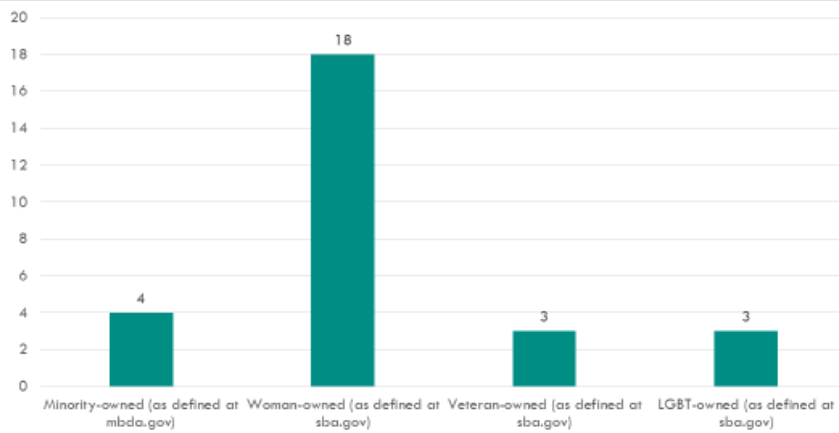
HOW MANY YEARS HAS YOUR BUSINESS BEEN IN OPERATION?



WHAT IS THE OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE OF YOUR BUSINESS?



DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING APPLY TO YOUR BUSINESS? (MINORITY, WOMAN, VETERAN, LGBT OWNED)

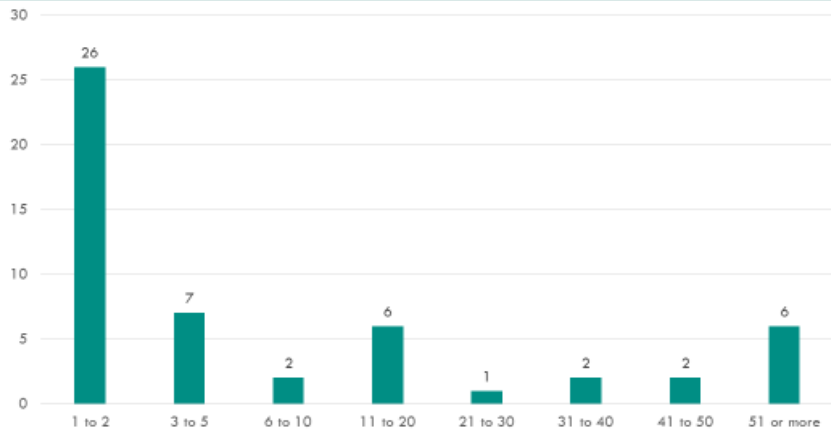


WHICH INDUSTRY, BASED ON THE NORTH AMERICAN INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM (NAICS), DOES YOUR BUSINESS BEST ALIGN WITH?

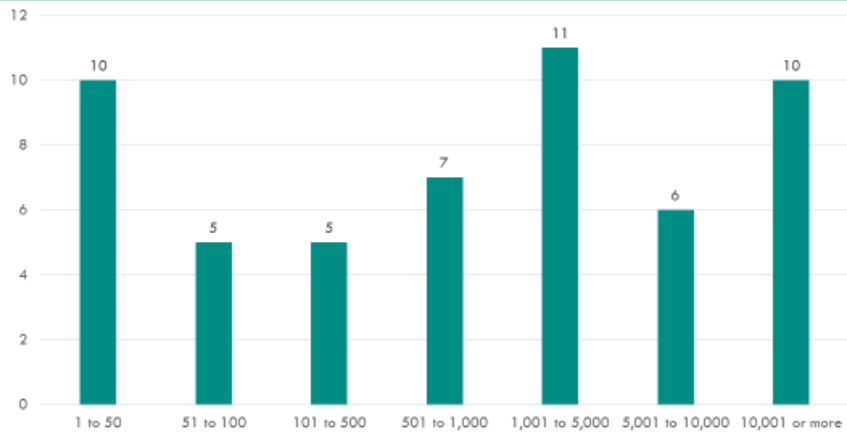
Column 2



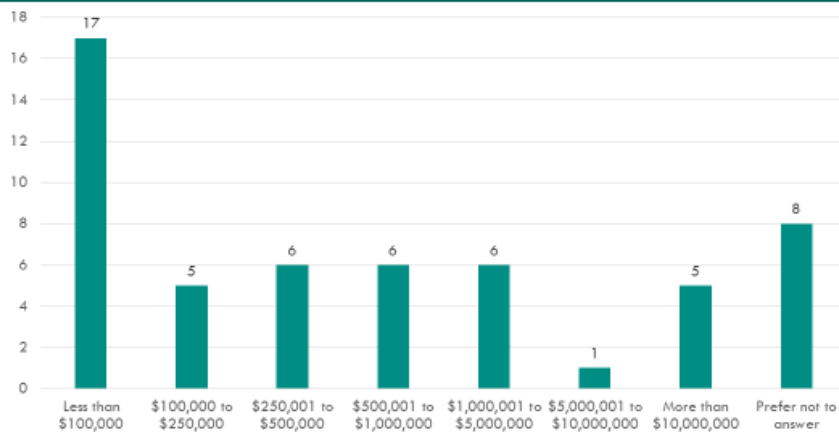
HOW MANY FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE) EMPLOYEES DOES YOUR BUSINESS EMPLOY?



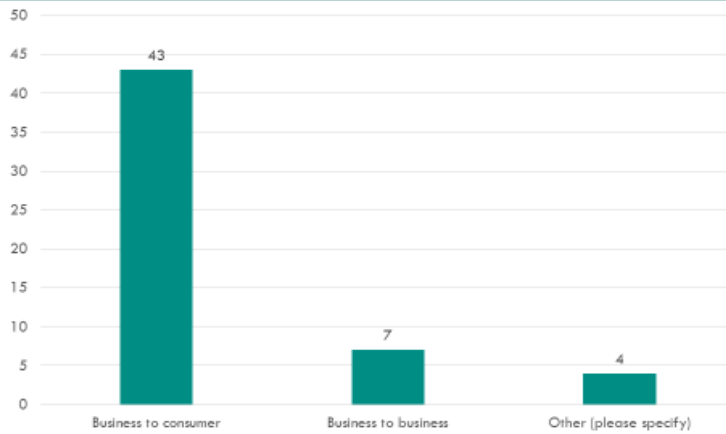
ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY CUSTOMERS DOES YOUR BUSINESS SERVE ANNUALLY?



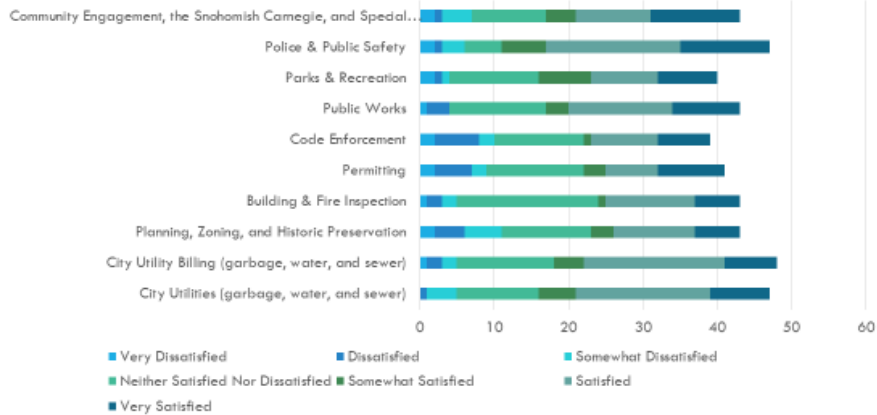
WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS' EXPECTED 2023 GROSS INCOME?



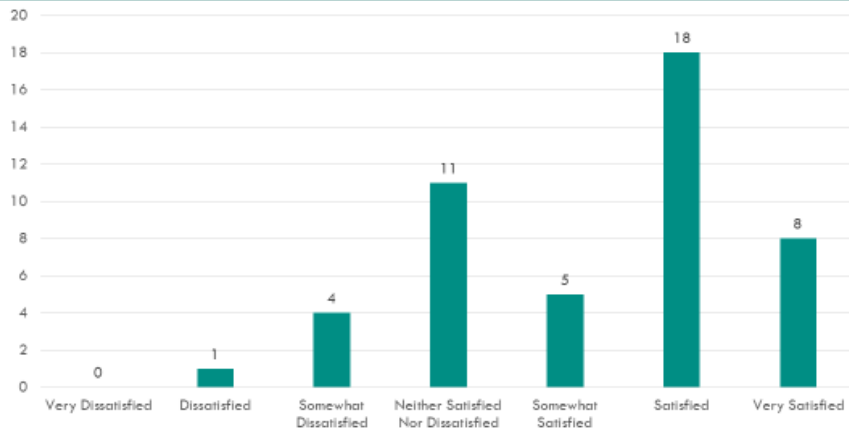
WHAT IS YOUR TYPICAL BUSINESS INTERACTION?



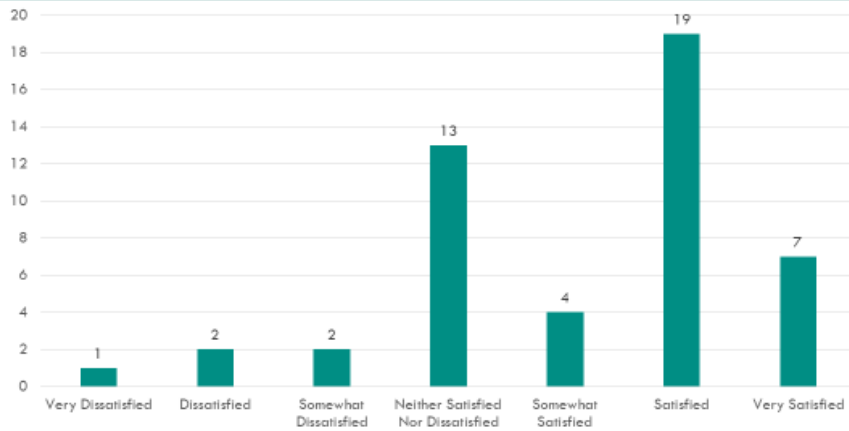
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? (OVERALL)



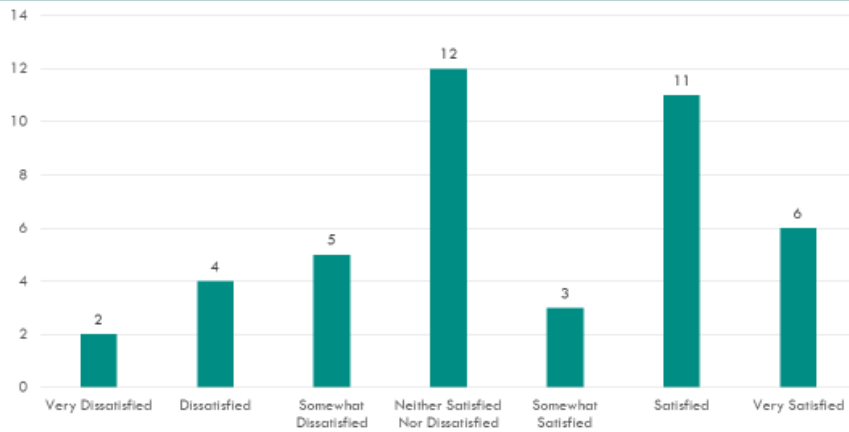
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? CITY UTILITIES (GARBAGE, WATER, AND SEWER)



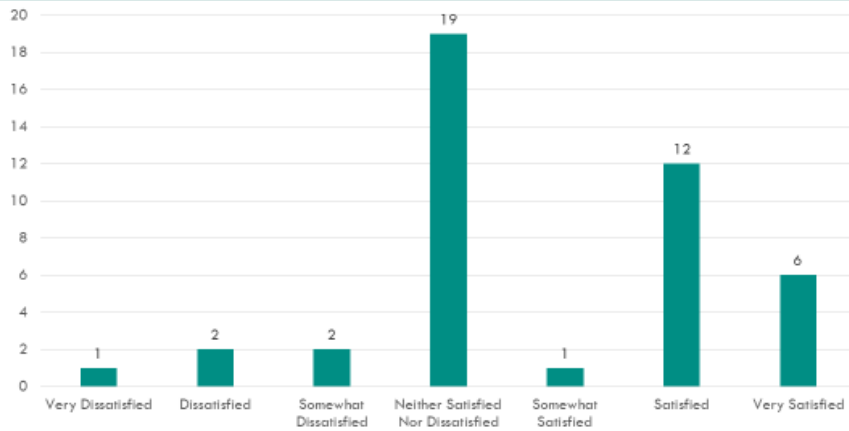
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? CITY UTILITY BILLING (GARBAGE, WATER, AND SEWER)



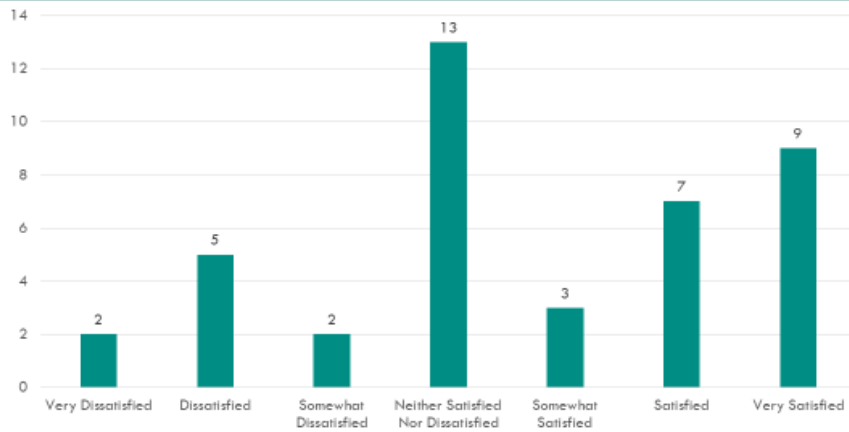
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? PLANNING, ZONING, AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION



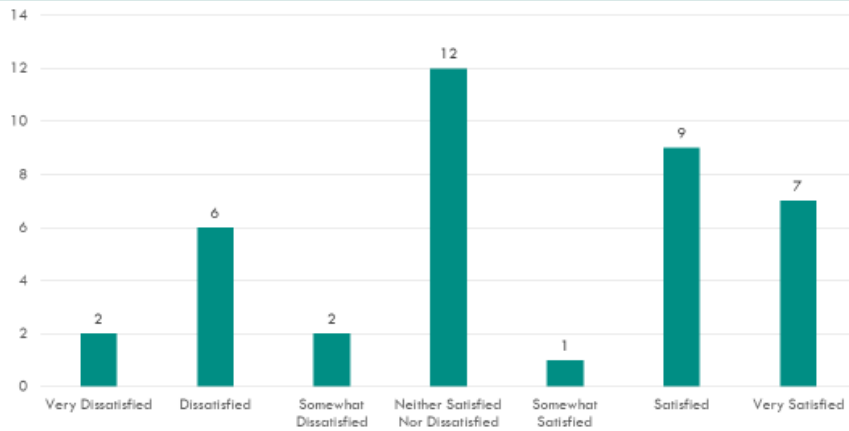
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? BUILDING & FIRE INSPECTION



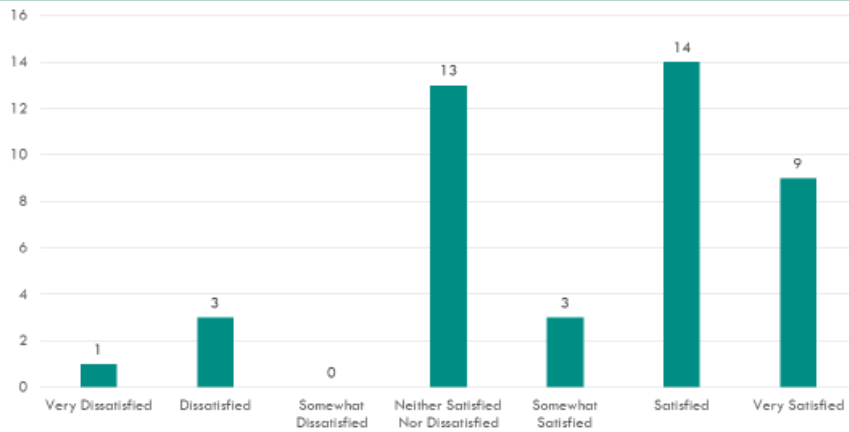
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? PERMITTING



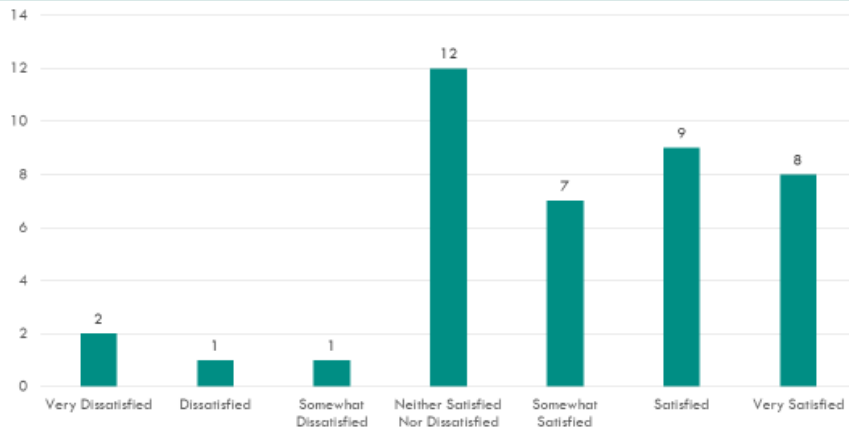
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? CODE ENFORCEMENT



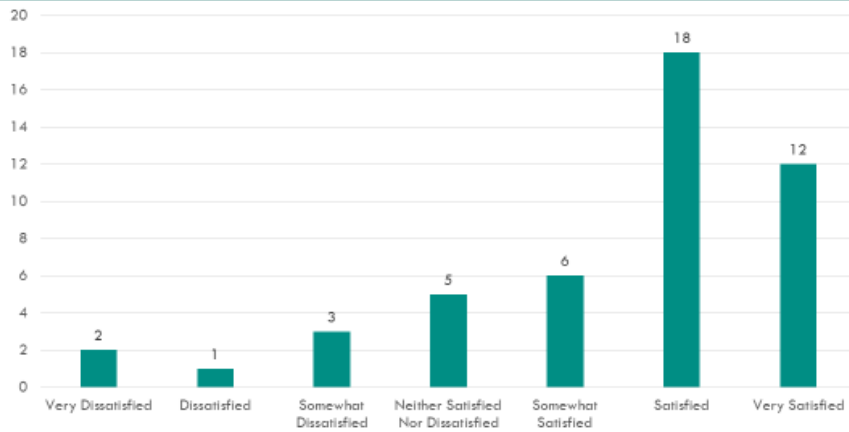
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? PUBLIC WORKS



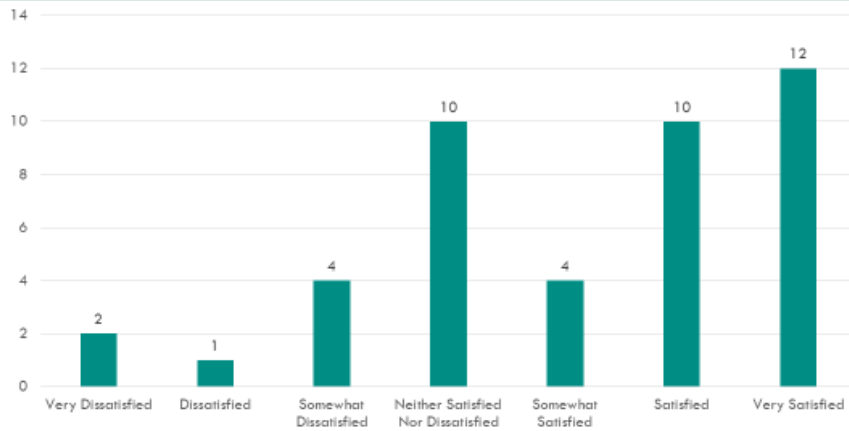
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? PARKS & RECREATION



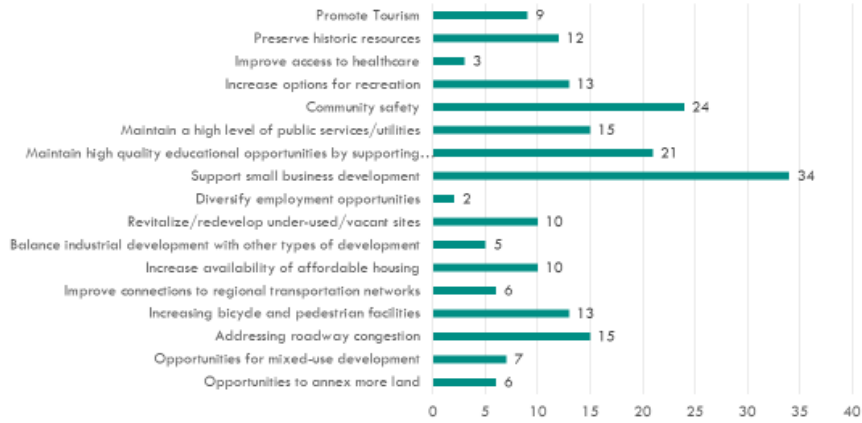
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? POLICE & PUBLIC SAFETY



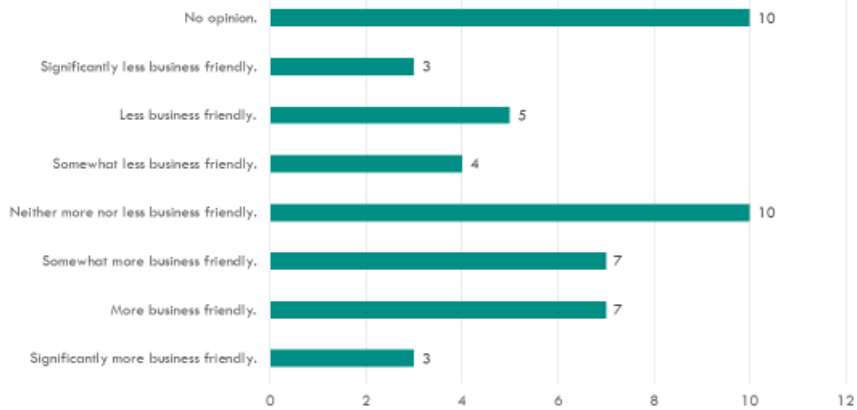
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE HAD WITH THE FOLLOWING CITY OF SNOHOMISH SERVICES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, THE SNOHOMISH CARNEGIE, AND SPECIAL EVENT PERMITTING



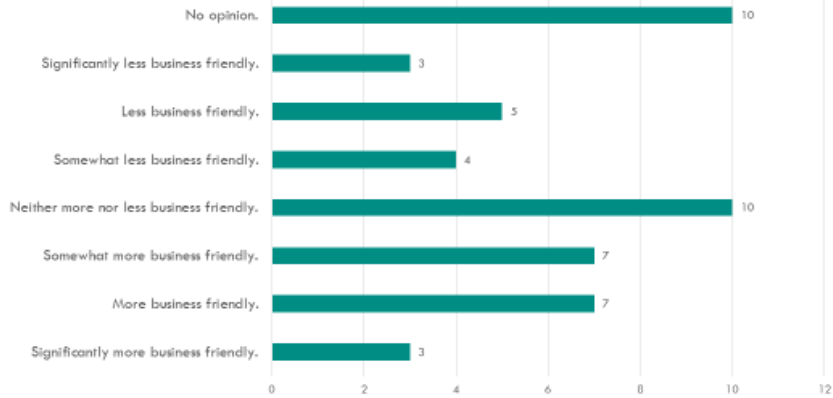
PLEASE SELECT UP TO FIVE NEEDS AND/OR DESIRES THAT YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR THE CITY OF SNOHOMISH TO ADDRESS IN ITS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.



PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: IN MY OPINION, OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THE CITY OF SNOHOMISH HAS BECOME...



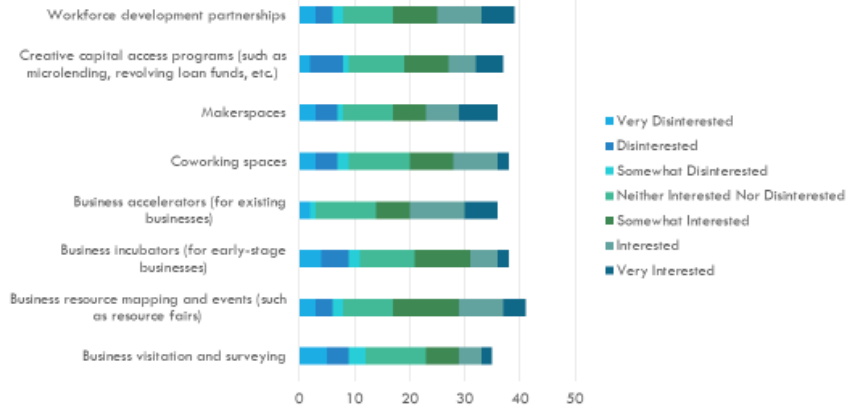
PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: IN MY OPINION, OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THE CITY OF SNOHOMISH HAS BECOME...



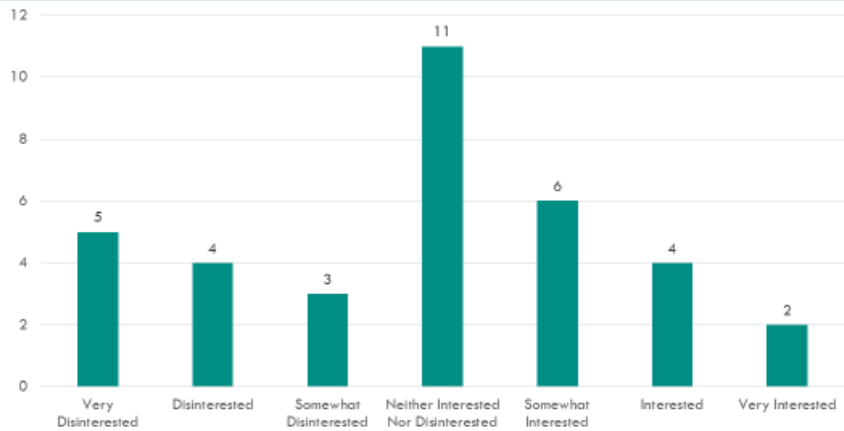
DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS REGARDING YOUR ANSWER (PREVIOUS QUESTION)?

- 1 Regarding our business, I feel the City has consistently been business friendly.
- 2 we had alot of contact w Sharon over the years-permitting, who has retired. No current contact w new hire.
-in the past have not needed a code enforcer but can see a need for that now
-preservation and neighborhood safety-driving speed/transients/drugs/panhandlers/vandalism/ theft and strong schools first over more development.
-quality of current city services/roads/safety/recreation over more building or more annexation or more multi family housing NO MORE STOP THE OVERLOAD ON INFRASTRUCTURE UNLESS YOU HAVE A MIRACLE GRANT WRITER AND CAN DO BOTH WITHOUT RAISING TAXES FOR HOMEOWNERS. STOP. We understand you believe you're doing good by adding a broader tax base for spending, but if the quality is not retained for the current stable devoted long term committed community homeowners, you push them out and more high paid Seattle/east side yuppies move in and it just becomes like every other city on the east side. People who do not actually care ab Snohomish and are not personally invested. Please stop or at least slow. The DR Horton mess on Terrace is a perfect example. Half or less of that number of homes would have kept quality of life in tact instead of pissing off every person who already lives there, bc that road will be irretrievably busy and a myriad of things issues will follow. All that to say, Hamlin/Sanders and Kartak furthered the efficiency of the city services-thank them for their service!
- 3 Lower taxes
- 4 Snohomish has become overly aggressive towards small business owners in enforcement of particular codes such as awnings/signage, access to permits for events that are not business friendly.
- 5 I have not engaged in any conversations with other business owners to have an opinion on the business climate. I do hear about exorbitant rent/lease expenses and assume it is difficult to find affordable options.
- 6 The city abandoned the Inn during covid. They were unresponsive and continue to maintain contracts with the utility services, such as the garbage service that continuously neglected to do their job last year and in years past. When applying for permitting it was a joke. There was no one available to ever talk to, and the only reason my project ever got done was because Sharon Petit was in the field and keeping the building inspections going. She was an undervalued asset to the city that the business owners, I'm sure, will dearly miss. Funds from the lodging tax were to be distributed to unrelated parties after a simple city council vote without consulting the members of the LTAC fund. When the Inn was struggling the most, these funds, previously collected by the Inn, could have really helped. We struggled to keep people employed, and people housed that were put out. When I asked an employee of the city when they would be returning to city hall, I was shocked when told they would be holding off as they did not want to have interactions with the public this went on over a year.
- 7 Despite only recently becoming a member of the business community, I've lived in Monroe or Snohomish most of my life. I've seen a lot of growth in the community especially in promoting small businesses within the community.
- 8 Covid time
- 9 Have not been in the city long enough to have an opinion.
- 10 I feel there is a lack of publicly available space for sports. The cost of renting a facility for sports has to go through the school district and it is very expensive for nonprofits. We feel more mixed use facilities need to be created, especially as our club grows to a profession soccer club for the city
- 11 My business is over the internet and I work from home. So havent had an opinion on more or less. Works fine!
- 12 Taking away events and not replacing them with new ones takes customers away. If events are overly crowded, adjust it to two nights instead of one. Let us use signs as we see fit instead of so many regulations on what we can or cant do
- 13 The Chamber of Commerce has made a lot of progress under new leadership

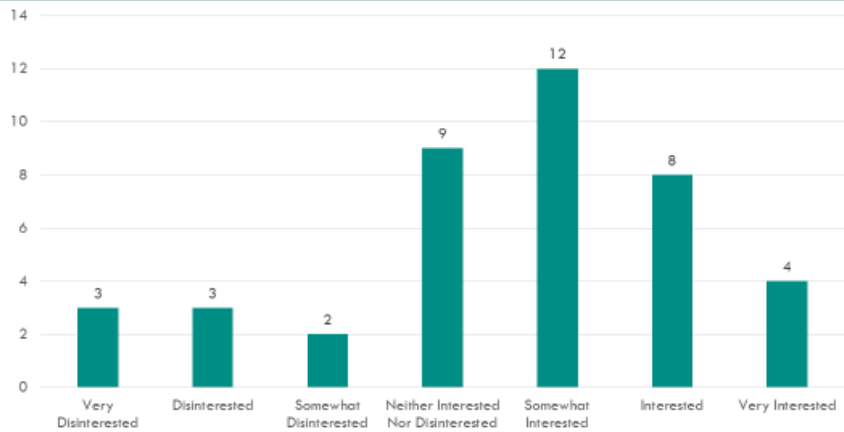
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: - (ALL)



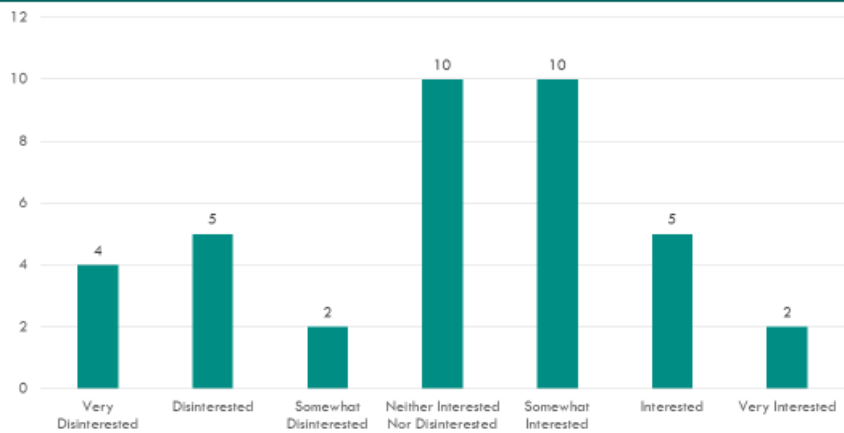
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: BUSINESS VISITATION AND SURVEYING



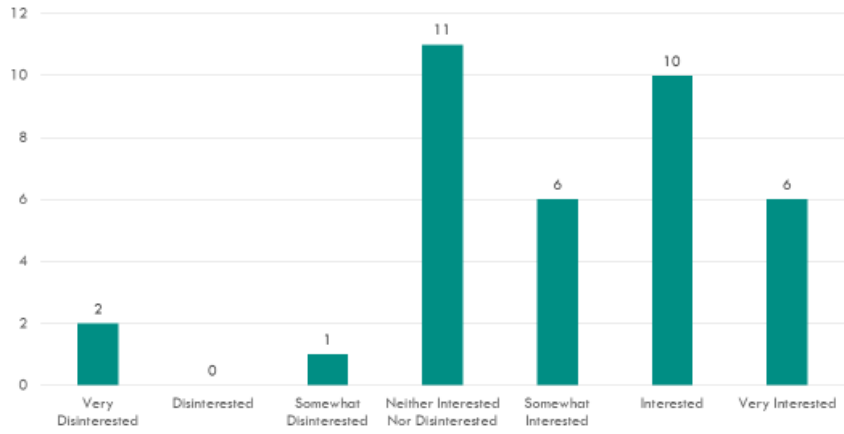
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: BUSINESS RESOURCE MAPPING AND EVENTS (SUCH AS RESOURCE FAIRS)



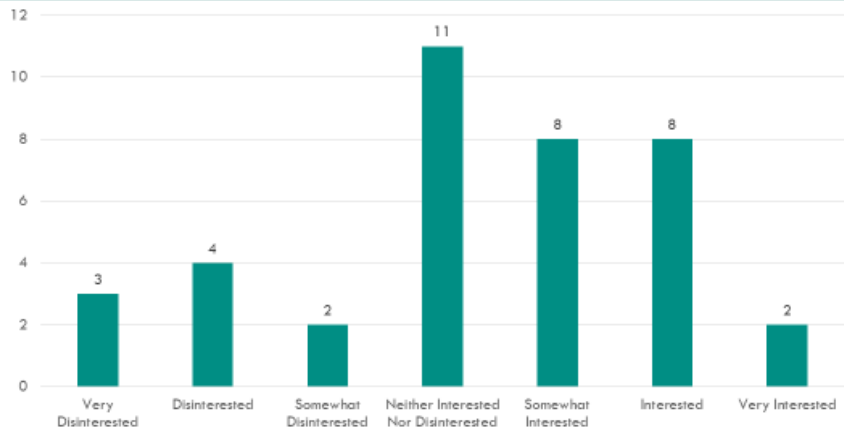
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: BUSINESS INCUBATORS (FOR EARLY-STAGE BUSINESSES)



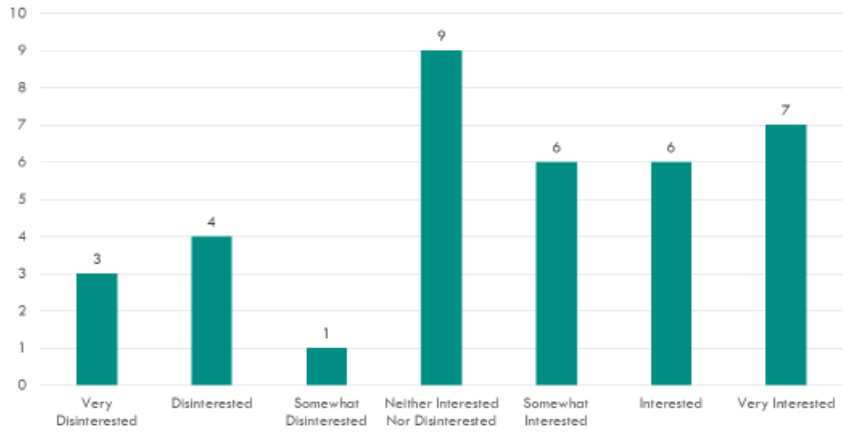
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: BUSINESS ACCELERATORS (FOR EXISTING BUSINESSES)



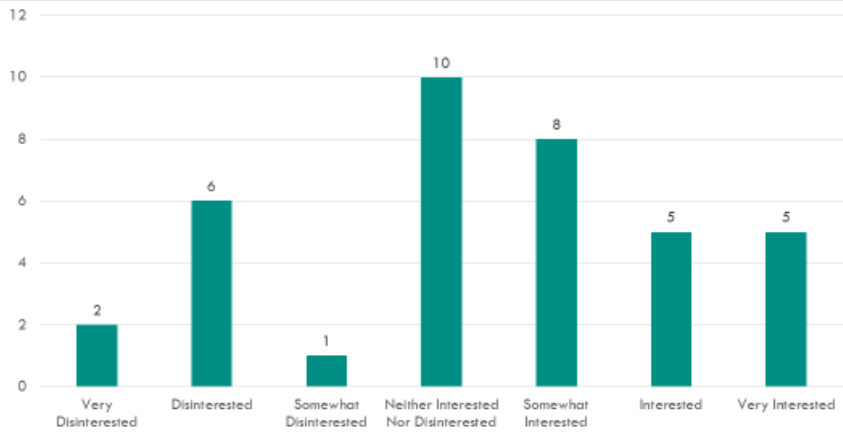
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: COWORKING SPACES



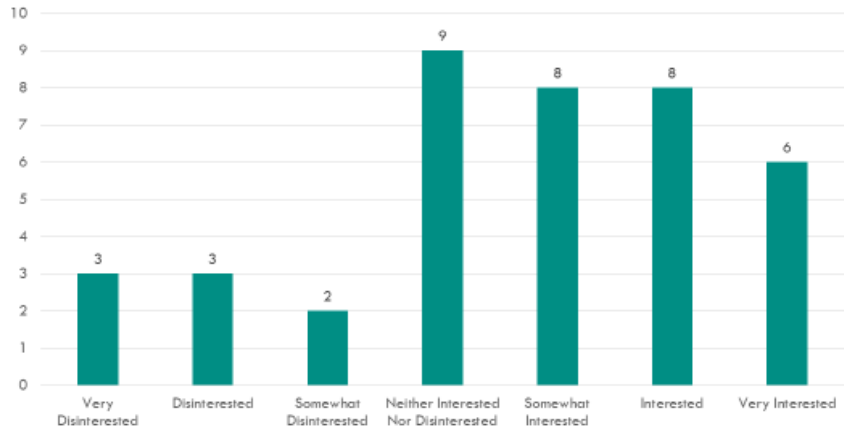
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: MAKERSPACES



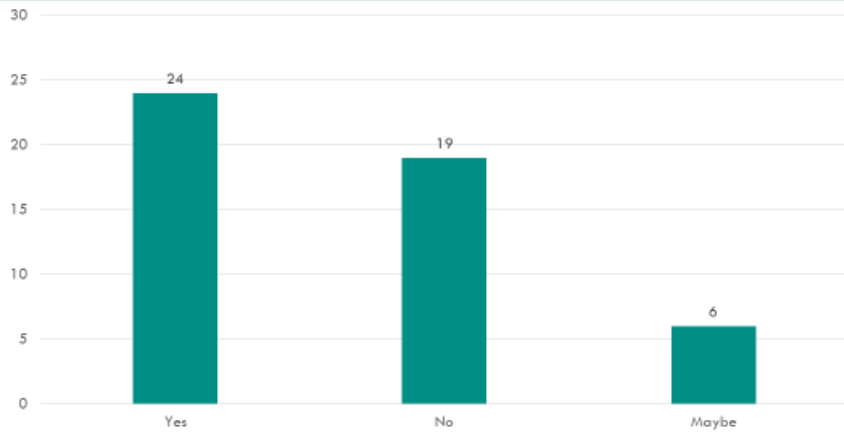
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: CREATIVE CAPITAL ACCESS PROGRAMS (SUCH AS MICROLENDING, REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS, ETC.)



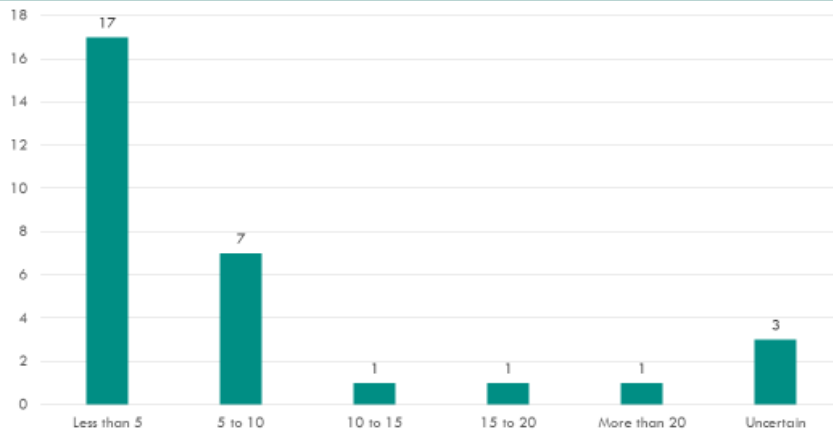
PLEASE RATE YOUR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS



DO YOU PLAN TO HIRE MORE EMPLOYEES IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?



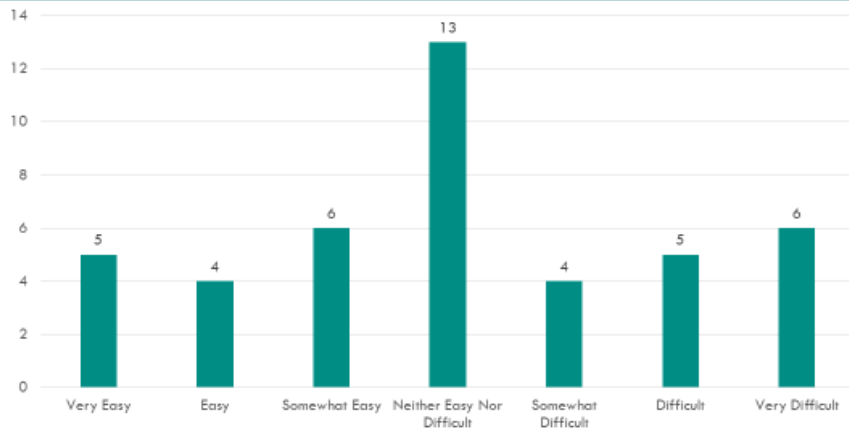
HOW MANY EMPLOYEES DO YOU EXPECT TO HIRE IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?



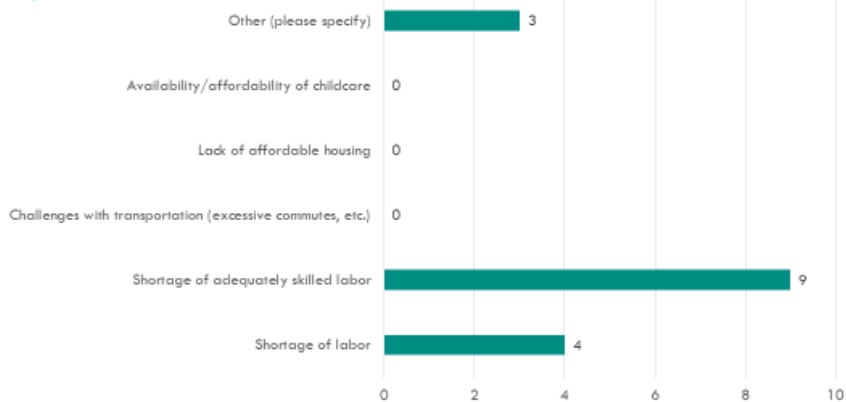
HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY RECRUIT PERSONNEL? - OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) - TEXT

- n/a
- We are an all volunteer organization with no paid staff. We recruit volunteers by word of mouth, posting on Volunteer Match, email/newsletter, and social media.
- Reader Board
- No need
- N/A
- business website
- Word of mouth

WHEN YOU ARE HIRING, HOW DIFFICULT HAVE YOU FOUND RECRUITING QUALITY PERSONNEL TO BE?

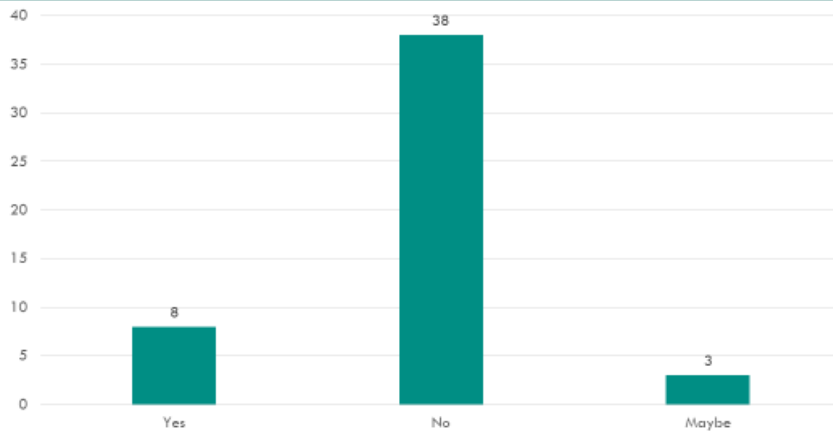


WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR DIFFICULTIES IN RECRUITING QUALITY PERSONNEL?

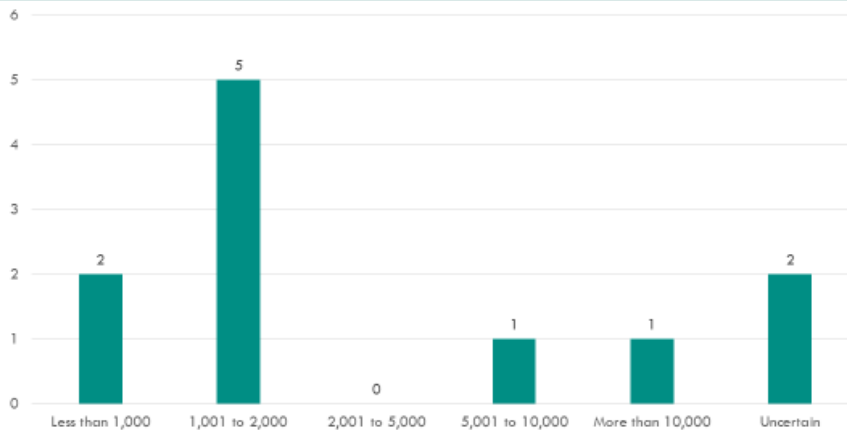


- Cost of labor.
- Time and resources to actively search for qualified volunteers, finding that the most qualified are already too busy or in prime of their working/family life or caring for elderly parents. Students and others seem to be only interested in very short term commitment, or need to be compensated and can't volunteer.
- funding for fair wages.

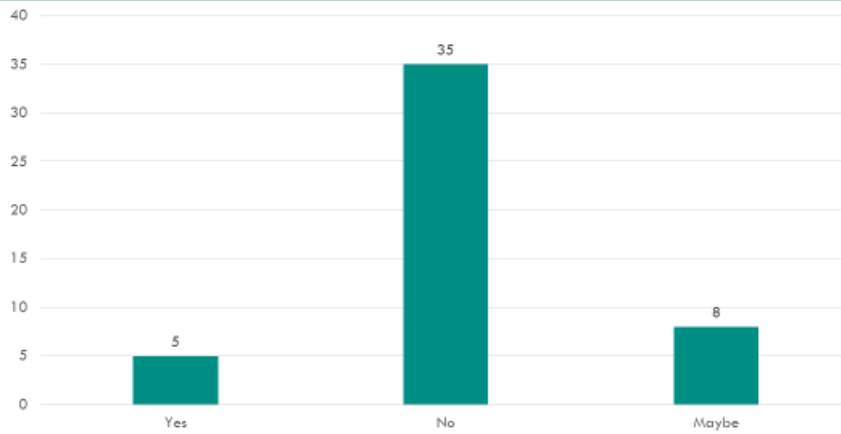
IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, DO YOU PLAN TO EXPAND YOUR PHYSICAL FACILITY?



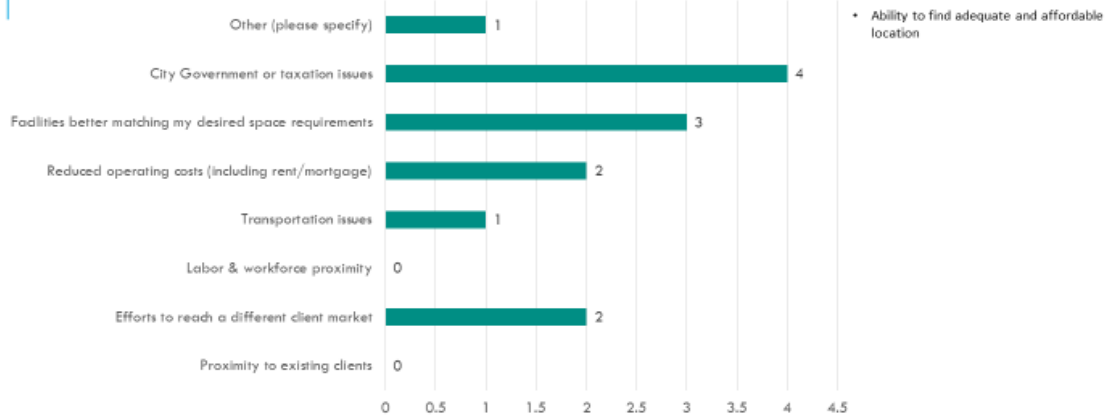
HOW MUCH ADDITIONAL SPACE, IN SQUARE FEET, DO YOU ANTICIPATE YOUR BUSINESS NEEDING?



IF GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY, WOULD YOU MOVE YOUR BUSINESS OUT OF THE CITY OF SNOHOMISH?



WHAT FACTORS WOULD MOST INFLUENCE THE DECISION TO MOVE YOUR BUSINESS OUT OF THE CITY OF SNOHOMISH?



Do you have any other comments that you would like to share with the City of Snohomish?

- The City is doing a great job! Thank you for your continued efforts! We appreciate you!
- We have struggled with getting the word out on vacant positions. We would like more support from the city on advertising open positions and getting the word out so we are not struggling with the shortage of people.
- We need to move away from being the "Antique Capitol" of PNW. That image is hindering us from growing and attracting younger generations and funding to the area. We also need to not create obstacles for ourselves and dream big and ask for big asks like reconstructing and developing both sides of the riverfront so that there is more riverfront outdoor dining and shopping with walkways. Look to other small river towns that have successfully developed their river fronts to make it more attractive for people to stay and spend money: aka; Sacramento River, Deschutes River, San Antonio, etc. If we never ask or dream, we will never see what could have been. If we position our city and surround ourselves with the right resources this town could really thrive.
- Snohomish is a great little city. I'm here for the long term.
- Love the city!
- I appreciate the increased communication and support.
- Sherwin is a very large company with over 4,000 locations throughout the US. Our district management is very careful when choosing new locations and we aren't going anywhere any time soon. Our Snohomish store is proud to be part of this community
- When you ask for business input, actually listen to it. - Streets need repaired that are literally washing away. When I brought this to your attention, I was told there was no funding in the budget. (7th street between Avenue K and J). The entire city that is paying taxes should be addressed not just the downtown district. You have some quality employees like Brooke in the permitting department.
- Our business would only move outside the City of Snohomish if there were no available suitably sized office space to lease at a reasonable rate.
- We love the City of Snohomish. It's an amazing, beautiful, vibrant town. We don't want to see it become a sprawling, crowded City and lose the small town vibe. Traffic and growth are real issues.
- "When answering these questions, I'm answering as a business owner and not a resident. I love Snohomish and feel blessed to do business there, but there is only so much the local city council should be involved in the business. I think we have so many groups who have different roles and it's best for everyone to be great at the job they are supposed to do. To me HDSA and the Chamber should be focusing on tourism and promotion and hopefully they have the support from the city to deal with permits and other needs.
- Setting clear roles and structure seems pretty important
- We appreciate the support! We highly value being part of this community
- Snohomish Pride was a bright spot this year. I encourage the City to support future inclusive events and opportunities for LGBTQIA individuals and businesses.