

Business Retention and Expansion Program Report

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From left to right: Bill Burns (EDC/OACC), Mayor Paul Reinke, Eric Hawkins (CEO of Park Tool), Chris Volkers and Andrew Gitzlaff (City of Oakdale).

BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION AND ATTRACTION PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The St. Paul Area Chamber and Oakdale Area Chamber of Commerce appreciate the opportunity to partner with the City of Oakdale on Business Retention and Expansion for the first year. The scope of this work includes the report detailing findings from the visits as well as recommendations for next steps.

Importance of Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction (BRE&A)

Retaining and facilitating the expansion of existing businesses is a vital component of any city's strategic plan for economic development. Studies have shown that as much as 80 percent of new jobs created are by existing businesses rather than by new businesses attracted to a community. As the City of Oakdale is poised for population growth, it's essential to support relationships and develop policies that facilitate this economic growth in alignment with its goals and values.

With increasing pressures on businesses and rapidly changing market conditions, focusing on the growth of existing small to mid-sized businesses can be more efficient than enticing a new business to move into a community with public financing commitments or other public subsidies. However, larger redevelopment opportunities can be an opportunity to attract additional businesses to an area,

especially if they are related to supply chain or somehow connected or complimentary to existing businesses.

Program Objectives

Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction programs set out to achieve a multitude of goals. Some of the goals identified by the City of Oakdale include:

- Express appreciation to local businesses and build positive and mutually beneficial relationships.
- Support local businesses by connecting them with resources for their growth and success.
- Understand real estate and investment plans of local employers and their needs. Identify where support or intervention is needed.
- Understand how city policies and practices impact business success and how to create and maintain a business-friendly environment in Oakdale.

Program Organization and Leadership

Executing a Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction program in a community takes a great deal of organization and leadership. Kim O'Brien from the St Paul Area Chamber and the Oakdale Area Chamber of Commerce, took the lead role in coordinating schedules between the businesses and with the Mayor, City Council Members, and Economic Development Commission (EDC) or Oakdale Area Chamber (OACC) members; and executing BRE&A visits. Andrew Gitzlaff, Community Development Director, was the city's lead on the Oakdale BRE&A program and was excellent to work with.

The Oakdale BRE Program kicked off with a City Council Workshop in which goals of the program were agreed to and business selection and possible survey questions were discussed. Next, a recruitment and training process commenced for program participants. Meanwhile, the City of Oakdale took the opportunity to create "Thanks for Growing in Oakdale" statue gifts for businesses and put together a City of Oakdale Business Resource Guide to leave behind. The city communication department worked closely with BRE program staff to highlight and post photos of the visits on the City's social media.

Follow-up with each business was a core goal of the program. The city wanted to ensure that the visits were beneficial to businesses and any questions or ideas that arose from surveys were addressed in a timely manner.

Program Participants

The Chamber would like to offer thanks to the Oakdale City Council, members of the Economic Development Commission, members of the Oakdale Area Chamber of Commerce, City Staff, and other partners for their participation in the project. The project enjoyed wide support and participation from these bodies, which is critical for a project of this kind.

Oakdale City Council Members:

Mayor Zabel*
Council Member Willenbring*
Council Member Ingebrigtsen*
Council Member Morcomb
Council Member Her
(Former) Mayor Reinke*
(Former) Council Member Swedberg*

Economic Development Commissioners:

Chair Bill Burns*
Vice-Chair Dave Halper
Jeff Bates*
Frank Orsello
Stacie Penn*
Erin Voca*
Bob Boullianne
(Former) Carrie Frost

Gary Severson
Robert Stiglich
Luccia Shetka

Oakdale Area Chamber of Commerce Board:

Nathan Keech
Holly Koep
Paul Balfanz
Eric Morley
Marc Cove
Stacie Penn
Tony Schwartz
Frank Orsello
Paul Tillman
Bill Burns*
John Larson
Larry Eberhard
Angie Propp*
Ryan Steinbauer

Terry Furlong*

City Staff:
Chris Volkers*
Andrew Gitzlaff*
Maxwell Lohse*
Lori Pulkabek

SPAC Staff:
Kim O'Brien*

**Participated in visits in 2022-2023*



From left to right: Andrew Gitzlaff, Council Member Susan Willenbring, Sam Yanz (employee of J.W.'s Bierstube), Bill Burns, Jim Yanz (owner of J.W.'s Bierstube).

Business Selection

Participants in the BRE program visited 18 businesses.

Recognizing that there is not the capacity to visit every business in the community, a strategy was developed to prioritize visits with the intent of gathering data and building relationships across a diverse cross section of Oakdale businesses. Using data from the Minnesota Secretary of State's office and Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) we identified approximately 683 companies in the City of Oakdale (as of 2021). We narrowed down the list to identify prominent industry clusters within the city, as well as "key industries" as defined by Greater MSP (Health Care and Social Assistance; Manufacturing; Professional, Scientific, Technical Services; Hospitality; and Retail).

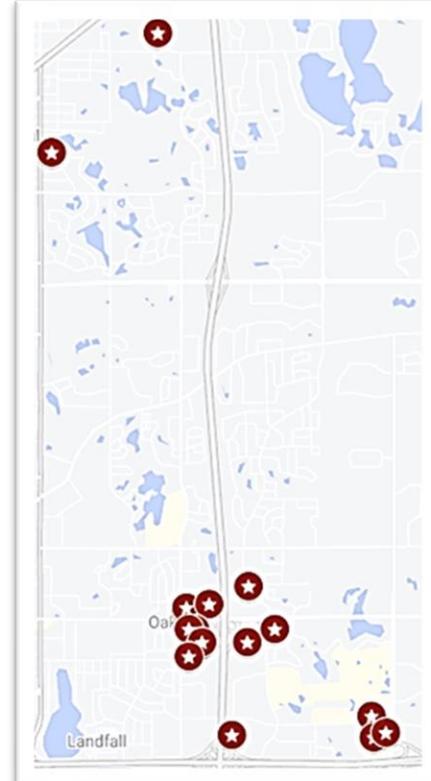
Working closely with city staff and the Oakdale City Council, we decided to target businesses that fit within one or more of the below categories.

- COVID-impacted
- Women-owned
- BIPOC-owned
- Legacy Employers
- Top Employment Sectors
- Geographic Diversity

Many successful visits were made possible by existing relationships made through the Chamber and the City. A few businesses in the manufacturing sector or new businesses in the city, were specifically targeted and offered an opportunity to introduce the Chamber to key employers.

Businesses Visited

- Animal Emergency and Referral Center (AERC) of Minnesota
- Carol Mathey's Center for Children & Families
- CCF Bank
- Crossroads Properties
- FlowFit Yoga & Fitness
- Greg Foote Jewelers
- Hampton Inn & Suites
- Hearing of America
- Hi Five Youth Sports Zone
- HyVee
- JW's Bierstube
- Little Inspirations Childcare
- Park Tool
- Platinum Bank
- Sgt. Peppers Bar & Grille
- Twin Cities Hardware (TCH)
- Victoria's Nails & Spa
- Warrior Nutrition



Survey Analysis/ Key Findings

An identical survey was given to each business visited. Survey questions focused on these categories:

- Business Details
- Facilities Information and Investment Plans
- Workforce Issues
- Transportation, Transit and Housing Insights
- Community Satisfaction and Connectedness

BUSINESS DETAILS

- Industries Surveyed:
 - Retail, Restaurant or Service (9)
 - Health Care or Education (4)
 - Manufacturing (2)
 - Financial/Professional (3)
- Age of Companies
 - Oldest business: Founded in 1938 (Twin Cities Hardware)
 - Oldest business in current location: Founded in 1970 (Carol Mathey's Center for Children and Families)
 - Newest business: Opened in 2022 (Hi Five Sports Zone)
- Size of Workforce
 - Largest employers: Hy-Vee at 425 employees
 - Honorable mentions:
 - AERC at 366; TCH at 290/125 daily in Oakdale
 - Smallest employer: Hearing of America at 2 employees
- Factors impacting businesses
 - COVID-19 changed habits
 - Technology evolving
 - Rising costs of materials and labor
 - General changes in consumer preferences
 - COVID had a disparate impact
 - Some saw a boom in sales
 - Others barely survived but for state and federal relief
- Majority of business either grew or stayed stable in the past year
 - Market correction back to pre-pandemic levels

FACILITIES AND INVESTMENT PLANS

- Half owned/ half leased property
- Majority did not have current plans to expand
- Most are not planning current capital investments
 - Manufacturers are investing in equipment, technology and machinery
 - Restaurants are considering investments in outdoor seating
 - Signage is important
- Not aware of programs to support business expansion or improvements
 - Chamber is key resource for those that have heard of programs

WORKFORCE

- 100% either planned to hire or keep labor levels stable in the next year
- Skilled workforce is in demand
- Wage competition for unskilled workers
- Employees are mostly able to find affordable housing nearby
- Most employees come from 10-mile radius (Oakdale, Woodbury, St Paul, Hudson)

TRANSPORTATION, TRANSIT AND HOUSING

- Oakdale is conveniently located on interstate highways
- 100% felt the current transportation system served their business well
- Biggest impact to business was construction
- Most prefer more pedestrian and bicycle amenities for commuting as well as break-time leisure. A few businesses reported unsafe crossings.
- Several businesses noted services like Metro Mobility and Uber as helpful options
- Majority of workforce arrives to work by personal vehicle
- 61% thought employees and customers would use transit if more accessible
- Interested in Gold Line investments and connectivity to their business
- E-bikes growth could encourage more bike commuters – if infrastructure was in place

COMMUNITY SATISFACTION AND CONNECTEDNESS

- All the businesses were very satisfied being located in Oakdale. Things they really appreciate about the city include:
 - Convenient and accessible location was #1
 - Small-town feel
 - Community-oriented - “People care about each other here.”
 - Affordable real estate compared to other markets
 - Police and Fire Departments are very responsive
 - City staff has been easy to work with
 - Great parks and trails
 - Room to grow and expand
 - 61% were Chamber Members at time of visit and several others became members following the visit
- Businesses shared helpful feedback on opportunities to make Oakdale better for business:
 - Transit investments will help connect employees and customers to businesses
 - Pedestrian and bike investments for both safety and livability
 - Better or more communication from the City and Chamber
 - Small business supports would help – especially in marketing (both online and on the street)
 - Improve city curb appeal: trees, flowers, grass, and less litter
 - Keep a “common sense approach” to business regulation
 - Improve public safety, support the police and fire departments, ensure community remains a safe place to live and work.
 - Continue community events and building Oakdale’s brand
 - Continue close relationships between City Officials and Businesses



From left to right: Kim O'Brien (Chamber), Thao Nguyen (Owner Victoria's Nails and Spa), Mayor Zabel, Andrew Gitzlaff (City of Oakdale)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Visit and Survey Generated Recommendations

The visits and surveys yielded many actionable findings. It is recommended that the City concentrate on a select few items that proved to be the most prominent themes identified through the BRE&A Program.

Recommendation 1

Challenges related to accessing workers was a theme during visits and is consistent with regional trends. While the quality of education in the community at the K-12 and Post-Secondary level is generally perceived as being favorable, there is a disconnect between the types of opportunities that exist in the community and the academic and training resources in the immediate area. Business leaders remain concerned about finding and retaining quality employees as well as the preparedness of the workforce.

It is recommended that the City, working with the Chamber of Commerce, build relationships with one or several local high schools and community and technical colleges (i.e. Tartan High School, Century College, Saint Paul College, etc.) in an effort to bridge the gap of skilled workers with local companies. Setting up a line of communication between businesses and schools can be valuable for everyone involved, and help the city stay informed about trends in education and workforce needs.

Recommendation 2

The desire for increased transit accessibility was a strong theme throughout the visits. It is recommended that city staff and elected officials and/or committees and commissions continue engaging in efforts to advance transit in the city – and to make connections between transit routes and businesses. The Gold Line will be vital for the City of Oakdale and long-term economic vitality. Assuming

thoughtful connections (including bus, bike, and pedestrian trails) between Gold Line stations and local employers are considered, this investment will open up new opportunities for businesses to access a broader pool of employees and clients.

Recommendation 3

Many companies in the City of Oakdale are growing, and the time available for owners and operators to seek out information is difficult to find. It is recommended that the City's communications department explore proactive ways to connect with businesses and "push" relevant information in ways that would be relevant and helpful to them. We note that the city has already created an online development map in response to this feedback. This is a fantastic step and could be augmented by a simple opt-in business email list with monthly or quarterly updates from the city. Updates may include new businesses or housing developments coming online, programs and resources from the city and local partners such as Washington County, the SBA, DEED, and opportunities to get involved in citywide and chamber events and promotions. Another opportunity would be to explore ways to better market the city to businesses, visitors, and future residents. Options could include city branding, advertising, and promotional materials.

Recommendation 4

The City of Oakdale and Oakdale Area Chamber of Commerce enjoy a uniquely positive and close working relationship. This strong connection between the city and its chamber is credited to having established many of the positive relationships established businesses have enjoyed with city officials. For businesses that are Chamber members and regularly attend General Meetings, they have learned of important city updates from these meetings. Indeed, the Chamber has appreciated a long-standing partnership with the city, even having a non-voting city staff member as a part of the Board, and regular participation from the Mayor of Oakdale, City Administrator, Community and Economic Development staff, and City Public Safety Officials. The City has experienced significant staffing and leadership changes in recent years, and its heartening to see new city officials adopt the same collaborative approach with the business community.

The City can ensure continuity of this positive relationship by continuing to attend Chamber meetings and events to represent the city and provide helpful updates, send a staff member to participate in Board and volunteer through the Chamber to support local businesses, and collaborate with the business community on citywide events and promotions that benefit everyone. The city might also consider partnering more on Chamber initiatives that support city efforts in economic development. For example, sponsorship of business community events, city staff participation or contracts for chamber staff and volunteers to do business community outreach and collect and collate important local business trends.



Ownership team at Twin Cities Hardware (TCO) with Mayor Zabel and Andrew Gitzlaff (City of Oakdale)

BRE&A RECOMMENDATIONS

Intensive BRE&A Programs, like this one, are an important part of an economic development strategy for a community. The data collected during this program represents a snapshot of ongoing BRE&A, which are critical efforts to maintain up to date information and relationship building with the business community.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that Oakdale continue its Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction efforts, identifying a targeted list of businesses to be visited throughout the year. For 2023-2024, consider continuing the strategy to focus on major retail employers (including corporate chains that were a challenge to connect with), as well as BIPOC-owned businesses and those outside of major retail centers to represent greater geographic diversity of businesses in Oakdale.

Recommendation 2

As part of the city's ongoing Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction efforts, we recommend that the St. Paul Area Chamber, Oakdale Area Chamber and other groups be leveraged to supplement Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction visits. Chambers conduct BRE&A visits on a regular basis. The city should continue to work with these organizations to coordinate visits and ensure the appropriate people are involved.

Recommendation 3

The City of Oakdale should consider reducing the number of business visits per year from 18 to 12. Doing 18 visits in the first year was a great way to get a solid base of information to build from. It is safe

to expect that – as the city aims to reach new businesses that may not yet have that existing relationship with the city or chamber – a more intensive outreach strategy will be needed to set-up visits as well. Completing visits within a shorter period will assure that data gathered is presented in real time with an opportunity for the city to be more reactive to business community needs.

CONTACT INFORMATION

ST. PAUL AREA CHAMBER WORKSTREAM

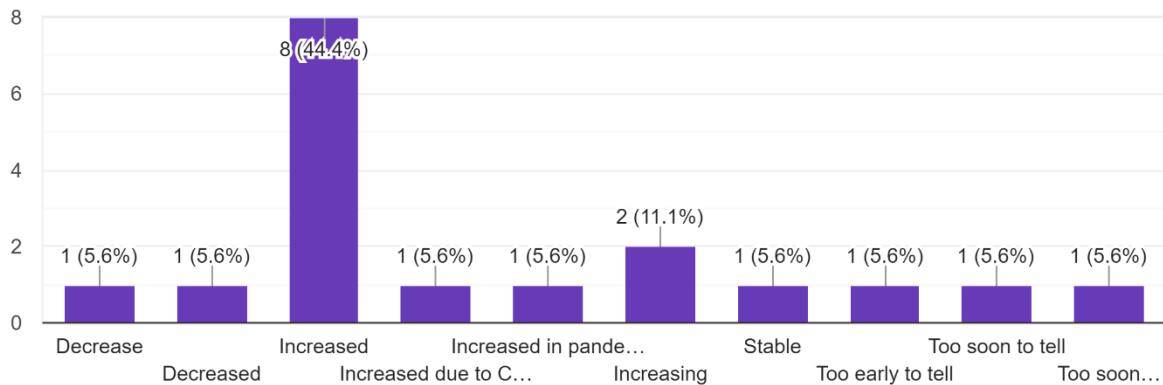
401 North Robert Street, Suite 150
Saint Paul, MN 55101 651.223.5000
www.stpaulchamber.com

Kim O'Brien
Vice President of Strategic Initiatives
(651) 265-2795
Kim@stpaulchamber.com

APPENDIX A – BRE&A SURVEY RESULTS

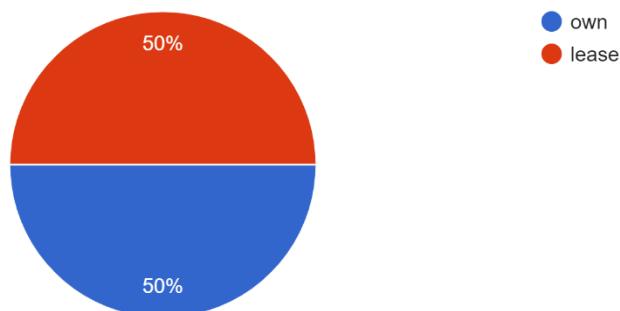
How has business been this year? How does it compare to last year?

18 responses



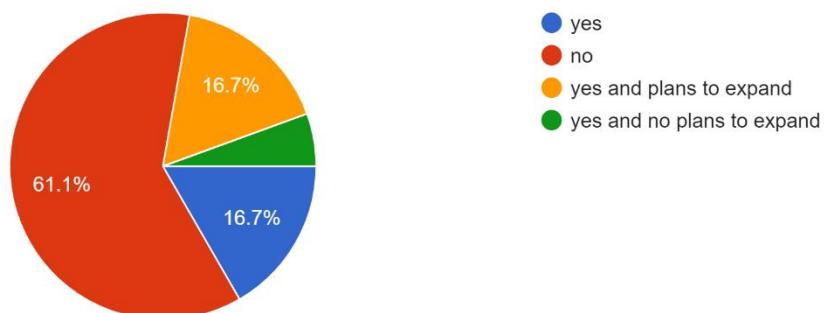
Do you own or lease the space?

18 responses



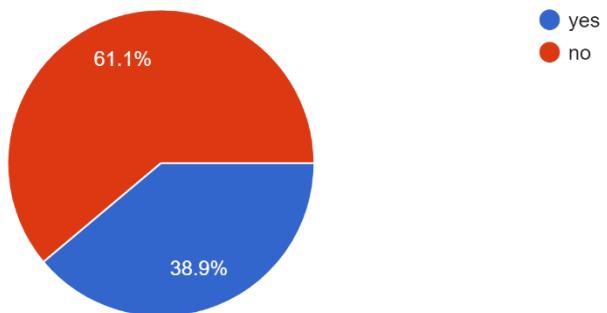
Do you have room to expand?

18 responses



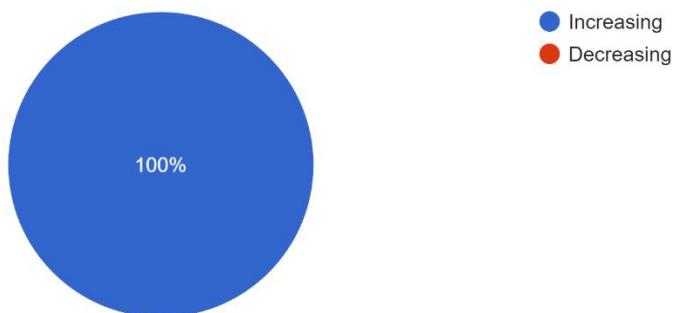
Do you plan to make any capital investments?

18 responses



Do you anticipate that number increasing/staying the same or decreasing next year?

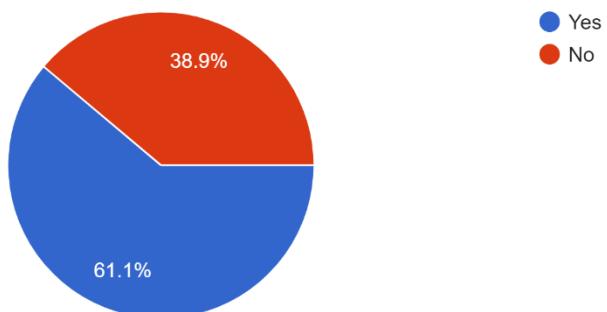
18 responses



*Number of employees

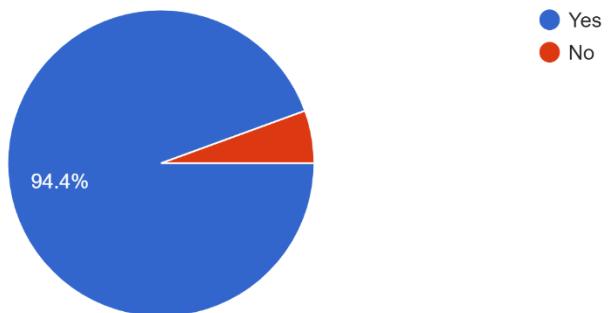
Have you had hard times filling specific roles?

18 responses



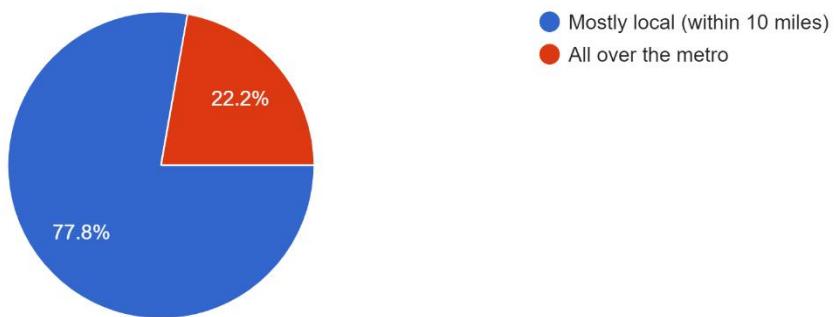
Does the existing transportation network adequately serve your business?

18 responses



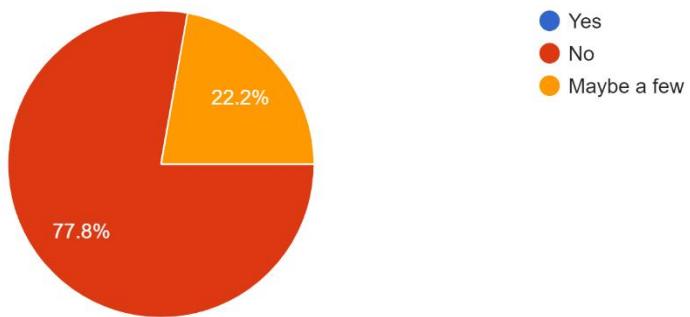
Where do your employees commute from?

18 responses



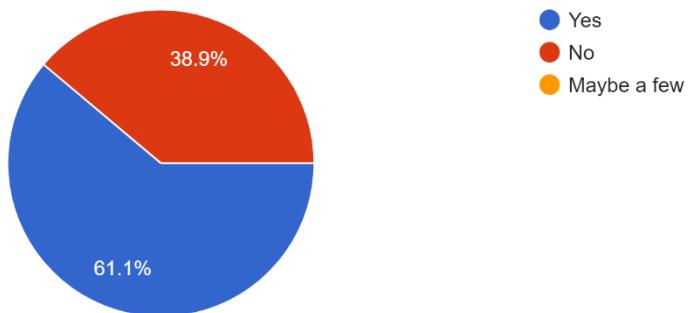
Do your employees utilize transit?

18 responses



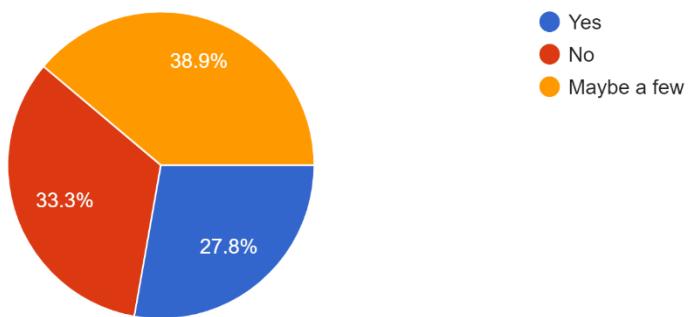
If transit were more readily accessible would more people use it?

18 responses



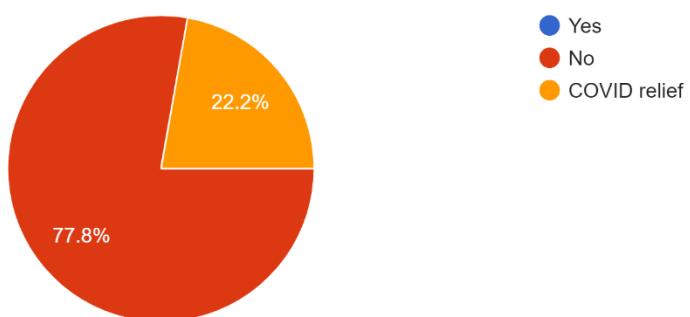
Do your employees or customers walk or bike to your business?

18 responses



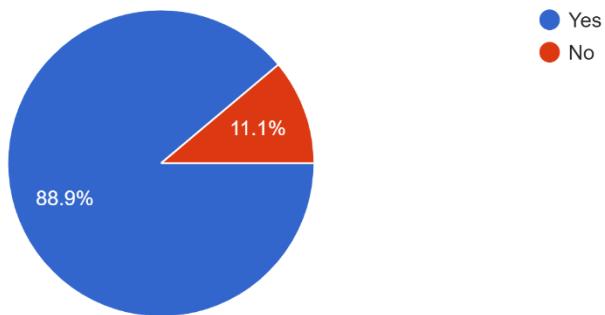
Have you used city, county, or other government entity supports in the past?

18 responses



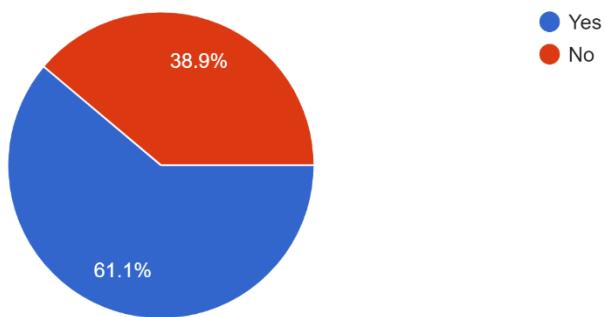
Would you be interested in learning more about resources the city and partners have to offer?

18 responses



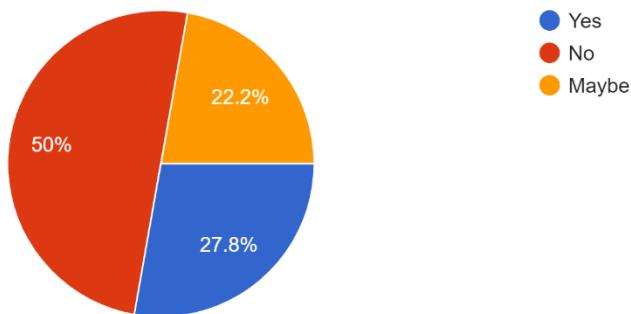
Have you attended City or Chamber events in the past?

18 responses



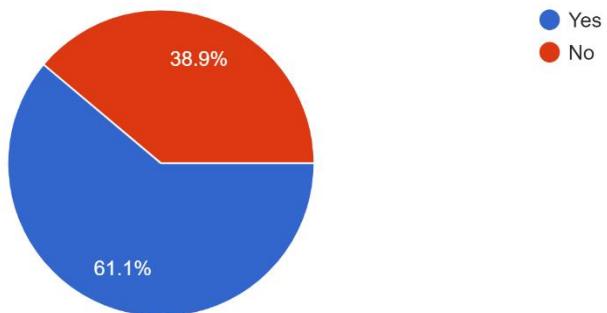
Are you interested in serving on the EDC?

18 responses



Are you a Chamber member?

18 responses



APPENDIX B – BRE&A SURVEY SCRIPT

Interview Guide Oakdale BRE&A 2022/2023

Business name:

Date:

Lead Staff name:

Additional Staff name:

Elected Official name:

Business Community Rep:

Data collector name:

INSTRUCTIONS:

[Instruction for interviewer: Interviewees likely will bring up topics early that later appear as questions. You can restate these later questions on topics that have already been covered. For example, “To go back to the issue of X, is there anything else you’d like to add or note, aside from what we’ve talked about already?”]

[Instruction for the data collector:

- Type up your notes within one to two days so you remember what they are referring to- email to Andy.
- Use yellow highlight on comments that might require immediate attention or a response from the City.

SCRIPT:

Introduction

Thanks for taking the time to meet with us. We’re here on behalf of the City of Oakdale, in partnership with the Oakdale Area Chamber of Commerce as a collaborative effort to understand your business’s perspectives of the business climate in Oakdale. The City has also conducted similar interviews with businesses in past years as an ongoing economic development best practice.

The insights and opinions you share will help The City learn about your needs and provide the City with input they can incorporate into their policies, to set economic development strategies and/or to use in long-range planning efforts. This discussion usually takes about an hour.

Additionally, we are here to establish connections and share any resources that might be of benefit to you. We have brought some materials for you to look over and if there are any other resources you wish to inquire about City staff will be happy to connect back to you with those after the visit.

Most importantly, before we begin- please know that we will not share or publish any information for general distribution that connects your name or your business’s name to the specifics you provide to us. Instead, the project report (which will be provided to you) will summarize the interviews collectively. If

we ask questions you'd rather not answer, please don't feel obligated. Additional staff from the City may be brought in as necessary to respond.]

Begin asking questions, **every other turn**.

Let's start with introductions from everyone (name, title, organization).

Business Details

When were you founded?

What is your ownership structure?

What types of products or services do you offer?

How has your industry changed in the past 10, 20, 30 years?

How has business been this year?

How does it compare to last year?

Facilities/Investment Plans

Do you own or lease your space? How many square feet do you use?

Do you have room to expand? Do you have any expansion plans?

Do you plan to make any capital investments such as in new equipment?

Would you like City staff to follow up with you about your expansion plans?

Local Employment and Workforce

How many people work here?

Do you anticipate that number increasing or decreasing in the next year?

What types of opportunities exist at your company?

Have you had a hard time filling any specific roles?

Would you like City staff to follow up with workforce resources?

Have your employees had any issues with finding housing that is affordable near your place of business?

Transit/Transportation/Housing

Does the existing transportation network adequately serve your business?

Where do your employees commute from?

Do you employees utilize transit (i.e. bus/rail?)

If transit were more readily accessible would more people use it?

Do your employees or customers walk or bike to your business?

Do you have any thoughts on the city's trail system or walkability?

Community

What types of support from the city, county, or other government entity have you utilized in the past, if any?

Would you be interested in learning more about resources City partners have to offer?

Have you attended City events in the past? Chamber events?

How do you learn about City issues and events?

Are you a Chamber member?

Would you ever be interested in serving on the Economic Development Commission?

What are some things that you appreciate about being located in Oakdale?

What are some things that you think the City could do to make Oakdale a better place to do business?

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Thanks again for your time. If you have any follow up questions or thoughts later on, please share them with us.

Findings from the interviews will be highlighted in a report on the project that will be provided to you when it is completed

APPENDIX C – BRE&A VISIT CONTACTS

Company Name	Executive Name	Address	Phone Number	Email	Website
Carol Mathey's Center for Children and Families	Stacie Penn	6060 43rd Street North, Oakdale, MN 55128	651-777-6688	spenn@cmmcc.org	https://cmmcc.org/
Sgt. Peppers Bar & Grille	Rob Kinski	930 Helena Ave N Oakdale, MN 55128	(651) 738-7052	rjkinsky1@msn.com	https://www.sgtpeppersgrille.com/
Hampton Inn & Suites	Alex Alejandro Castilleja	436 Imperial Ave N Oakdale, MN 55128	(651) 739-7436	alex.castilleja@concordhotels.com	https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/stpoahx-hampton-suites-st-paul-oakdale-woodbury/
Greg Foote Jewelers	Greg Foote	1075 Hadley Avenue North, Suite 100, Oakdale, MN 55128	651-227-7324	greg.footeprints1@gmail.com	https://gregfootejeweler.com/
Hearing of America	Jerry Zhou	1075 Hadley Ave N Suite 107, Oakdale, MN 55128	(651) 528-7868	jerryz@hearingofamerica.com; robynk@hearingofamerica.com	hearingofamerica.com
Hyvee	Devon Hartman	7180 10th St N, Oakdale, MN 55128	(651) 714-3160	1462director@hy-vee.com; dhartman@hy-vee.com	https://www.hy-vee.com/stores/detail.aspx?s=1509&utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=gb-listing
Little Inspirations Childcare	Kelli Dustin	7059 10TH ST N., Oakdale MN 55128	(651)-730-0280	kjdustin0610@gmail.com; LITTLEINSPIRATIONSMN@GMAIL.COM	https://www.littleinspirationsmn.com/
Platinum Bank	Dave Faust	7667 10th St N, Oakdale, MN 55128	651-332-5200	dfaust@platinumbankmn.com	https://platinumbankmn.com/
Park Tool	Eric Hawkins	5115 Hadley Ave N, Oakdale, MN 55128	(651) 777-6868	eric@parktool.com	https://www.parktool.com/en-us/form/contact-us
AERC of MN	Jayde Quigley	1163 Helmo Ave N Saint Paul, MN 55128	(651) 501-3766	heidibrenegan@aercmn.com	https://aercmn.com/contact/
FlowFit Yoga + Fitness	Alexandra Johnson and Ashlee Doheny	8302 3rd St N, Oakdale, MN 55128	(651) 730-1498	flowfityoga@gmail.com	https://www.flowfityogaandfitness.com/
Warrior Nutrition	Kelli Johnson	7173 10th St N, Oakdale, MN 55128	(651) 564-2664	warriornutritionmn@gmail.com	https://www.facebook.com/warriornutritionmn/
Victoria's Nails and Spa	Thao Nguyen	8362 3rd Street N. Oakdale, MN 55128	651-797-4630	victorianailsmn@gmail.com;	https://victoriaspanails.com/
Hi Five Youth Sports Zone	Jeff Smith	7057 10th Street North Oakdale, MN 55128	651-330-3162	jeffsmith@hifivesports.com	https://www.hifivesportsclubs.com/locations/oakdale/
CCF Bank Oakdale	Brian Wenz	7035 10th St N, Oakdale, MN 55128	651-578-0509	mtozier@ccf.us	https://ccf.us/location/oakdale/
Crossroads Properties	Amy Johnson	7200 Hudson Blvd. North, Suite 230, Oakdale, MN 55128	651-731-0708	dwessels@crossroadsproperties.net	https://crossroadsproperties.net/
JW's Beirstube	Jim Yanz	7121 10th St N, Oakdale, Minnesota 55128, United States	(651) 731-8381		https://thebierstube.com/jws-beirstube
Twin Cities Hardware	Ben Boomer, George Boomer, Lang Boomer	723 Hadley Ave N, Oakdale, MN 55128	(651) 735-2200	sales@tchco.com	https://www.tchco.com/

APPENDIX D: BUSINESS RESOURCE GUIDE