



The County of Renfrew Business Retention and Expansion Survey 2004

Executive Summary

The County of Renfrew Business Retention and Expansion Survey 2004 is a compilation of five individual Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) surveys conducted concurrently. Geographically, the County of Renfrew is the largest county in the Province of Ontario encompassing 7403.6 square kilometers, with 95,138¹ residents and a business sector of 4425 enterprises. Within minutes of Canada's fourth largest population center and national capital, the County of Renfrew offers unmatched rural beauty and opportunity, and as will be seen, remains a value to development and growth.

A year ago it was decided to take a 'snap shot in time' of our beautiful valley and its unique blend of urban and rural communities, by surveying the whole county. Our goals were to listen to our business community, benchmark our self internally and appreciate the diversity of our multicultural landscape. The seventeen townships were divided into five regions, surveys were obtained from

¹ Statistics Canada 2001 Census Published 2003. All population dependent statistical data within this report includes the non-municipal body of the City of Pembroke; pop. 13,498 (cir. 2001), Stats Can. This data could not be modified to reflect two singularities as calculated by Stats Can's complex algorithms.

Business Retention and Expansion International, Inc. (BREI) and five concurrent programs commenced.

Now, nine months later as the five BR&E surveys wind down and nine different final reports evolve, the success of the program is clearly evident on many levels. Regular visits and updates to council meetings focused media attention back upon the communities and brought the business development office and local economic initiatives to the front page. Interaction between officials, business and community leaders has increased many folds. In fact, economic development was a desired agenda item expressed by every reeve and mayor last December during his or her respective inaugural municipal address. New alliances have been created. New opportunities are being investigated. The core teams are aggressively challenging local concerns highlighted within the surveys. One exciting development has been the desire for the action committees and core teams across the county to meet, share successes and build together. We even have communities planning barbeques for other communities to open the lines of communication and move forward towards shared economic development and growth. Additionally, many local councils are supporting more than just a planned public presentation of the results. The public will have an opportunity to participate during a series of town hall format meetings bringing together local government, supportive provincial departments, commercial, business and economic development agencies. Finally, many of the core teams, which already encompass local expertise, have expressed a willingness to continue into the future in a volunteer "think tank" role.

The County Council, the municipal councils and senior administration within the County of Renfrew were absolutely excellent; very supportive in diverse ways needed to overcome unexpected challenges. The results speak for themselves and we now have that 'snap shot in time', which we will move forward and incorporate within our communities, economic and business development.

Preface

The survey was licensed by the Business Retention and Expansion International and sanctioned by the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's Rural Economic Development Initiative as a community based development action program. The survey costs were supported primarily by the "Ontario Small Town and Rural Economic Development Program" (OSTAR), and supplemented by the County of Renfrew and sixteen of the seventeen municipalities, which participated².

Logistically, the municipalities were subdivided into five regions, and five individual surveys were conducted. The compilation of these five surveys eventually formed the foundation of the County of Renfrew composite BR&E report. Through this process, the business community is able to speak directly to the individual municipalities and the County of Renfrew Council, and these same municipalities are able to benchmark among themselves and to the whole of the County of Renfrew. Soon, the Ontario government through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing it is promised, will be publishing survey results from across the province and participants will be able to view their standing within a much larger community.

The "**North**" region consisted of Head, Clara & Maria Township and the Town of Deep River. The "**Central**" region included the Town of Petawawa, Laurentian Valley Township, Laurentian Hills Township and Whitewater Region Township. The "**West**" region surveyed Madawaska Valley Township, North Algona Wilberforce Township, Bonnechere Valley Township, Killaloe Hagarty Richards Township and Brudenell, Lyndoch & Raglan Township. The "**East**" region included Horton Township and Admaston Bromley Township and the "**South**"

² The Renfrew Industrial Commission through the auspices of the Town of Renfrew chose not to participate in the survey, as they ostensibly have their own business visitation program.

region consisted of the Town of Arnprior, Greater Madawaska Township and McNab Braeside Township.

The BR&E survey process is designed to maximize the number of community volunteers it involves as they assimilate current data and subsequently identify concerns, encouraging the volunteers to take ownership in a proactive fashion. Thus, local citizens are developing local solutions to local concerns.

“Most new jobs are created by existing, smaller businesses. Beyond that, the return on the investment of financial and human resources is much greater when invested on local businesses than on new business recruitment. And lastly, a happy and healthy local business climate will actually make new business recruitment much easier as existing businesses become ambassadors for the community.”³

The methodology prescribed by BREI, in their own words “is evolving”, and consultants need to be flexible to changing times, conditions and environments. The consultant training program taught by BREI in Bismarck, North Dakota, emphasizes two critical factors necessary for program success. Firstly as mentioned, the program must involve the local community and secondly, the program must achieve timely results for the primary stakeholders. We used two methods of volunteer involvement to accrue the surveys results, and found that there was no difference in the success, quality of results or percentage achievement between the two methods.

³ Grants Pass / Josephine County, Oregon, USA “Summary data from business visitations and surveys, 2002”, pub Minnesota Extension Service, 2003.

Survey Process #1

The first method involved recruiting a core team of five individuals for each survey, which acted as the survey management. These individuals were designated to structured positions such as survey leader, volunteer coordinator, information officer, etc. This core team of five persons then recruited additional volunteers from within the communities. All of the volunteers then made appointments from a targeted list of local businesses, which had been randomly selected. They visited these companies' executive and completed the survey forms. The finished surveys then flowed back to the survey core team management. Concerns, if any, were addressed immediately and the survey results as a whole were tabulated and recorded. Outwardly, the advantage of this method is that it does require and involve a large community volunteer participation of 80 volunteers. The disadvantage of this method is that it required the solicitation of volunteers for each survey. Therefore, county wide this would mean the solicitation of 400 survey volunteers. Each of these 400 persons would require training to ensure consistent survey techniques and methodology. Additionally, there was the major concern of replacing and retraining new volunteers, as some original volunteers would assuredly be lost through attrition. Lastly, given the real world experience that not every volunteer is successful, it was doubtful that 425 "active" volunteers (including the core teams) could be found within our communities, given our small population and the heavy workload many community volunteers already carry.

The North region and one half of the Central region were surveyed using method #1.

Survey Process # 2

The second method of survey census was more easily controlled from a management viewpoint and ultimately also proved to be successful. A volunteer core team of very well known individuals was recruited from each region. In addition, each respective local municipal government was given a BR&E presentation and additional “community-involved”, respected persons were recruited, including elected representatives. These new core teams consisted of between 5 and 12 people. Each core team member was given a list of randomly selected businesses to contact by telephone. Core team members were given preference to contact business owners whom they personally knew. The business executive to be surveyed was asked personally on the phone if he / she would complete the survey. Once agreed, it was mailed to them. Specially printed, large, formal, full color envelopes with the County of Renfrew crest were used to mail the survey. In addition to including the survey, each package included a letter from the Warden of the County of Renfrew endorsing the BR&E survey, a business card for the Business Development Officer for the County of Renfrew, a large self addressed stamped envelope in which to return the survey and a special gift for participation. The gift was an expensive solid brass bookmark, embossed with the County’s crest in vivid color.

During the “phone-in” phase, volunteers reported each business owner who agreed to complete a survey. It was personalized and mailed immediately, direct from the central office. Each volunteer had 20 calls to make over a two-week period. Concurrently, there were news releases and status reports to local media, including print, radio, television and service clubs.

All outgoing surveys were recorded, and volunteers were contacted to follow-up any survey not returned within 10 working days. A survey in arrears by 15 working days prompted a second phone call by the volunteer, and subsequently albeit rare, from the Business Development Officer (and BR&E Consultant).

Survey Actions

Regardless of the method of survey delivery, whether through direct volunteer visitation or through direct and targeted mailings, envelopes containing completed surveys were returned on a daily basis and entered into the BR&E database program by a dedicated data input person. The central office dealt with all information requests, which incidentally included some 80% of all surveys. Red flag issues were rare and alerted to the Business Development Office for immediate review and action.

Once all of the information had been recorded, the individual region results were tabulated and five separate record sets generated. Where enough information to produce statistically valid results was gathered from a subset within a region, such as a town center, an additional results portfolio was prepared. These results were illustrated as charts and graphs to demonstrate relationships and facilitate comparisons.

The results in the form of both a slide show and a verbal synopsis were then presented to a special private meeting within each region. Named, "the business retreat", each region was represented by their core team of volunteers and additional community leaders who were invited to review the material. They assisted in the analysis of the material and suggested "ways and means" of solving these problems. During each of the meetings a scribe was on hand to record (without names) every comment and suggestion made, to take full advantage of the brain-storming sessions and ensure all ideas were considered.

Business Retreats

Perhaps it was the nature of the survey or the participants during the retreats, however it was their preference to deal with large issues and discuss and analyze core values of the County of Renfrew, as identified as challenges within the survey results. Broad community issues were discussed in exhaustive detail, with many members requesting the opportunity to volunteer in community lead initiatives to everyone's mutual benefit. One issue which became very clear, there are members within our communities who desire to become active and have a role in their long-term community development.



An agenda was presented and the project consultant assisted to ensure that the groups did not become too focused on any one topic to the exclusion of the concerns of the group as a whole. It was during this stage in the BR&E process the greatest advantage was achieved of having one consultant conduct all of the surveys. Trends across BR&E regions quickly became evident. It became clear that in spite of established political borders within, the County of Renfrew is one economic region onto itself.

After literally hours of discussion and review, none of the retreats finished on time and one group even received a subsequent meeting to ensure all of their thoughts and feelings were discussed. Where relevant this report includes supporting data from outside sources including Stats Canada, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Financial Post Canadian Market Demographic and Micro-Media Canadian Almanac & Directory.

Synopsis

Our survey results coupled with recent data from Statistics Canada show us that 7 % of our businesses are new, a further 27 % are less than 10 years old and 65 % are between 10 and 35+ years in age. Our population's age is more mature than that of the provincial average and most of our anticipated business closures in the next 2 years, some 125 in all, will be mainly due to retirement. Only 1 % of our total business enterprises are new venture start-ups. This indicates our business community to be very stable, however declining through attrition. Our youngest generation is 2.5 % smaller than the provincial average and declining with a lower birth rate compared to both the province and Canada, while our senior population is 6 % greater and increasing.

Our business community is made up of a vibrant mix of all industry sectors, and is very stable due to the small size of the average business. Eighty percent of our businesses employ 9 or less employees, two-thirds of those employing fewer than five. Seventy percent of all those businesses surveyed anticipate renovations or expansions in the next 2 years, with 50 % of those businesses expecting sales to increase and to increase their numbers of employees. Our businesses indicated their major plans include increasing customer service and services, increase their product lines, and increase exports.

Identified problems for our business community on the survey included a small local market and customer loyalty, especially prominent in the regions closest to the greater Ottawa market. The lack of new business was not indicated specifically in the comments of the survey however is a clear indicator of a problem in the future. High business taxes are mentioned a number of times as a weakness to business, however not consistently throughout the survey as a barrier to entry. Other items brought forward include the lack of financing for capital assets and inventory, the unavailability of commercial transportation, and related to the smaller market, the large geographic span of the county. One

problem consistently shared by all sectors surveyed was seen to be the lack of telecommunications infrastructure throughout the county.

Identified strengths in the survey were foremost the quality of life in the County of Renfrew and the low cost of labor compared to other markets for like industry sectors. Strong work ethic, strong business community support, close proximity to the Ottawa market, beautiful scenery, great recreation, lower land costs, lower residential taxes and cheap housing were also mentioned as advantages to do business here.

The business community indicated an awareness of the business development office within the County of Renfrew; however felt there is a need for more communication between the two groups. They report a need for more information regarding available funding grants and incentives and were unaware of any ongoing development initiatives.

The retail sector specifically commented on poor parking in the urbanized areas, very poor uniformity of hours of operation, accessibility to roadside signage, their desire to have an improved local business improvement association, their desire to have a stronger retail sector association, their desire to have a stronger chamber of commerce, their desire to be able to participate in special events and promotions and markedly, the retail sector felt there is a distinct lack of any strategic plan for retail marketing in the County of Renfrew.

The tourism sector specifically reported their largest barrier to business is their inability to take advantage of the distinct seasonality of the region. Further they point out their difficulty in accessing capital and venture financing and to a lesser extent have highlighted undefined municipal and provincial policies as a problem.

Recommendations

It was not within the scope of this project to make recommendations to the County of Renfrew. The Council stipulated that each and every suggestion was to be reported for their consideration, where all material could be reviewed en masse and taken into a countywide context. While a detailed review of those suggestions can be found starting on page 41, as a brief summary:

1. Build a countywide infrastructure for community and business communication and development, unfettered by political borders.
2. Host a series of partnership meetings countywide, using a town hall format to assist individuals and alliances to create new business.
3. Create a literacy fellowship of business, government and education sectors
4. Work with local commerce promoting the county's retail sector
5. Develop a long-term strategic vision and action plan regarding demography
6. Actively encourage and foster strategic business immigration
7. Proactively instruct small business on strategic long term planning
8. Conduct a dynamic skills inventory and future industry labor needs analysis.
9. Mediate the signage requirements of municipal bodies vs. the signage regulations of the Ministry of Transport
10. Take an active role establishing improved transportation terminus facilities
11. Initiate a detailed 'quality of life' study for promotional purposes

Observations

Legal Forms of Business

The County of Renfrew's business community is dominantly an incorporated community on a 2 to 1 ratio of corporations over proprietorships and unincorporated partnerships. There are exceptions to this generality within the County of Renfrew, which corresponds loosely to the average age of the businesses and the sector that they are in. The eastern region consisting of Horton Twp and Admaston / Bromley Twp for example, which are predominantly agricultural based, are skewed towards proprietorships and registered partnerships. This was the common form of business status within the farming community in the past and continues as a cultural trend, as farms are passed on within families. Other rural sectors and specifically the forestry sector, which is still strongly represented in the western region of the County of Renfrew, have traditionally been made up of incorporated bodies and are reflected as such within our survey. This in part because of the larger number of persons employed per business entity and the stereotypical perception of the forestry sector being more of a business than a livelihood.

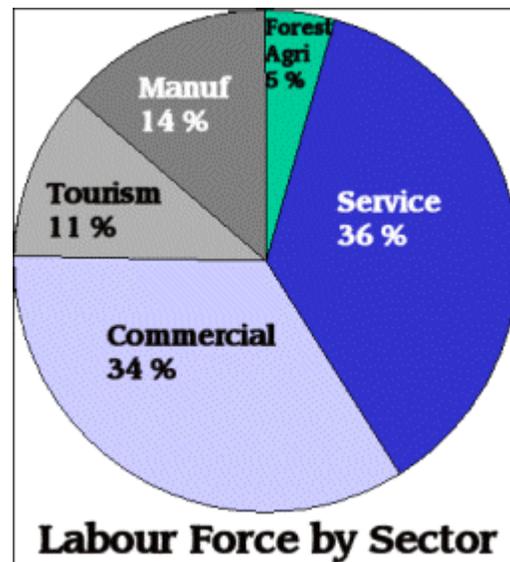
Business Activity

Based upon numbers of businesses, by a factor of ten, the greatest business activity in the County of Renfrew is retail trade with a further 25% of activity centered upon tourism, food services and accommodation. Combined, these make up 70% of all business activity.

Primary industries sector activity vs. secondary processing is 20% of all activity based upon numbers. Agriculture is the largest primary industry in the county based upon total numbers of registered business operations, however in total numbers employed, which may be a better indicator of economic contribution and

dollars, forestry and forestry sector companies rank in first place. Within the county there are regional variations of reliance upon primary industries, with significant differences between East and West, North and South. For example, Horton Admaston / Bromley no longer has any significant forestry influences in their industry mix as compared to their agricultural reliance. This is the result of their decreased marketable inventory of prime logs for lumber.

Other primary industries include mining, construction, arts and entertainment, manufacturing & fabrication and other manufacturing sector companies. Secondary industries include professional, scientific and health care. Based upon businesses and number of employees within the County of Renfrew, it has been determined using the “Economic Base Analysis Method”⁴, that the County of Renfrew has an astounding Full Time Equivalents (FTE) ratio of 5.45.

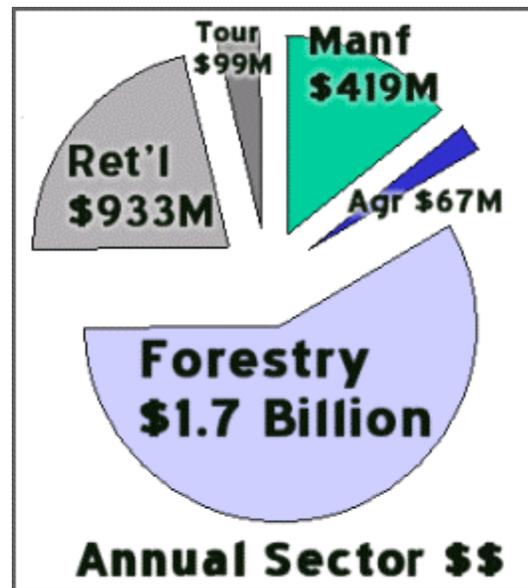


In actual numbers there are approximately 1340 registered farming businesses and approximately 420 forestry sector businesses in the County of Renfrew. These sectors represent directly and indirectly 20 % of all business activity in the County of Renfrew and 70% of the east and west regions encompassed by this survey. Thus, their health and status are of critical importance. There are representatives of each of these two sectors found in every part of the County, and even some small business enterprises which have facets of both sectors, however they are generally speaking skewed towards farming in the east and forestry in the west, following the divisional line of business status.

⁴ University of Waterloo, Economic Development Program I, “Local Economic Impact Analysis”, by Dr. Emanuel Carvalho, November 18, 2003. Sponsored by The Economic Developers Association of Canada and in association with FedNor / Industry Canada.

Mixed farming will continue to be the primary agricultural sector participant, however population and business longevity trends discussed later in this report will suggest a declining number of farming operations into our future. High costs of entry into the farming sector, coupled with successive years of mediocre returns, increased foreign market competition and heavy a reliance on trade have made the farming operations within the County of Renfrew very much a part of the world market. Concurrent to the survey period was the B.S.E. (mad cow disease) crisis. This highlighted that 940 of our farm businesses were contributors to the beef “stream”. Recent legislations placed upon our agricultural community such as the Nutrient Management Act, while hailed as both good and bad, have created additional barriers to entry.

Forestry sector operations have been under negative pressure for many years and are experiencing change within the County of Renfrew. All indications are that the total number of businesses and their total economic contribution will decline into the future. A century ago the forestry industry was controlled by a very small number of family groups. Over time smaller operations developed that chipped away at niche markets, as

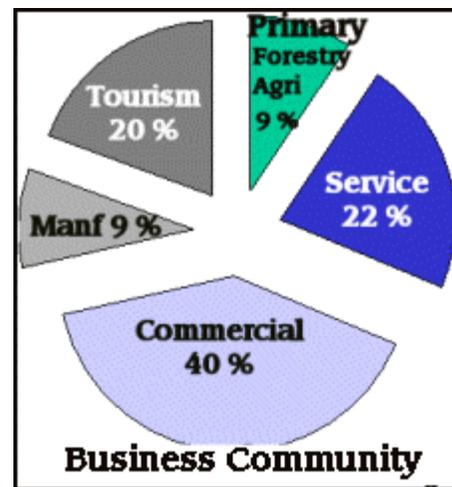


standing inventories of quality trees for prime lumber declined and caused the demise of these “Baron” holdings. Presently there are 24 significant mill operations within the County of Renfrew, and a large number of secondary and ancillary services.

There are tremendous barriers to entry into the forestry sector within the County of Renfrew, which unfortunately are all beyond our control. Foremost, are the

continued dwindling inventories of quality logs to supply the mills. Intra-county bidding pressures have increased markedly for the few remaining privately held woodlots. Crown lands remain an ongoing source of inventory, however are much more expensive to harvest and thus somewhat undesirable. Existing operations must also deal with 'heritage wood residual' piles of sawdust, bark and chips that have been deemed a hazardous waste by the Ontario Ministry of Energy and Environment.

There are relatively few primary industry operations, specifically forestry sector businesses, when compared to the greater number of retail and secondary industry businesses within the County of Renfrew. Statistically, in sheer numbers alone these businesses are virtually non-existent. Given their significant contribution to such an extremely high FTE, it is very important that primary industry be given a strong voice and advocacy.



Length of Time in the Community

The County of Renfrew and all the municipalities are showing the same characteristic that the majority of the businesses are between 15 and 25 years old. It appears that there were two major periods of significant economic growth in the last 50 years between 1975 and 1985 and before that between 1955 and 1965. The number of older companies drops significantly with age due to the previously identified trend towards sole proprietorships and a lack of operational continuity. There has been a large drop in agricultural businesses since 1980.

It is significant that countywide there have been very few new business start-ups (1 %) since 1999/2000. Thus, not only are we currently in a period of slow

growth, we do not currently have the new business and industry commencing their products life cycle here within the county, to facilitate our need over the next 3 to 10 year period to attract or maintain new individuals to our aging workforce.

Numbers of Employees

The number of employees in all municipalities per business demographic indicate we are heavily skewed to very small businesses with 80% of our businesses having 9 or less employees overall. This includes a subgroup in which 66% of the companies have less than 5 employees. There is one significant exception to the numbers of employees trend, which coincides with the very labor-intensive primary sector industries, notably forestry.

Thus, in Barry's Bay, we have the most equitable sharing of employee groupings in the County of Renfrew, given its reliance upon forestry. Arnprior proper, with a 1 to 1 ratio is showing the strongest overall economic base in the county with its greater manufacturing sector. Petawawa is also showing a 1 to 1 ratio, however theirs is based upon service sector industries. This orientation may be due to its reliance upon the military market as a single industry cluster with traditional service sector businesses.

Importantly, it is the historic growth of our small business that has supported the ongoing and continued economic development within the County of Renfrew and not the sudden (albeit welcome) advent of a single large manufacturer or employer, and 75% of new jobs in the future will come from our existing large, 'small business' enterprises.

It is point of fact that our small business community represents all sectors of the economy, and creates employment for 46,800 persons with incomes between minimum wage and 6 digits. That we have such a healthy, varied and vibrant

small business community, while asking for our continued support, is already an attribute to be proud of among many other municipalities across Canada.

Employment Status

County wide, 40% of all employment is full time work with full benefits. Part time employment make up 28% of the current work force and 32% of our job opportunities are classified as temporary employment. Given that temporary employment was virtually unheard of 25 years ago, it shows there has been a significant shift in employment status, and the degree of flexibility in our people and our workforce. This interesting value does vary from township to township, however to be of any real comparative value we need to be able in the future to compare a broader range of municipalities and counties across the province. Undoubtedly conditions have changed within the County of Renfrew, and it will be reassuring to know our changes are not unique.

Labor Costs

Across the county, labor cost and the associated costs of labor are considered to be an extremely large advantage to doing business in the County of Renfrew. Depending upon the municipality, it can be the single greatest advantage with a positive opinion ratio by the business community of 6 –1. Some municipalities have indicated a satisfaction ratio of 10 – 1, which competes with “Quality of Life” as the number one positive factor for operating a business here.

This opinion is support by statistical information from Stats Canada, which reports the median total annual income of employed residents within the County of Renfrew to be 79.6 % dollars of the provincial average, with male residents as a specific subgroup of the total achieving 76.0 % dollars of the provincial average.

It is not within the scope of this BR&E report to delve into the many factors used in the determination of the “standard of living” of residents. Suffice to say, it is the common opinion of surveyed businesses, that while the cost of labor is low, they do not perceive this as a concern by their employees as the “cost of standard of living” in the County of Renfrew is perceived to be lower than elsewhere in the province.

Skilled labor availability

County wide, surveyed businesses considered the availability of skilled labor as a business attribute to be a slight disadvantage. Outwardly, this one to one ratio appears somewhat average (nearly one to one), however it does not reflect the equal but opposite polarization between the positive urbanized areas and the negative rural areas within the county. For example, closer analysis of the data indicates Petawawa businesses felt the availability of skilled labor was a positive advantage to their business community by a factor of 2 to 1, while a slightly smaller number of surveyed businesses in Barry’s Bay felt that the availability of skilled labor was a distinct negative factor in locating there, by a factor of - 2.5 to 1.

The opinions in the rural communities, especially in the west, which are skewed towards primary industry may be in part due to the changing requirements of their traditional primary industries, and past extremely heavy reliance upon manual labor. These same industries have been welcoming new and more advanced technologies, which now require their employees to achieve a minimal of entry level technological skills. A prime example of change regarding minimal skills requirements for new employees is readily found within the forestry and mining industries when one reviews province-wide industry sector comments and educational requirements for ‘entry level’ positions.

The business communities' opinions pertaining to skills available within the county are by definition, of course correct. Additional information provided by Stats Canada indicates however, the County of Renfrew may actually be in an enviable position versus much of the province regarding skilled trades availability. Specifically, 17.4 % of all males and 9.6 % of all females between the ages of 20 –34 living in the County of Renfrew have a trade's diploma vs. 9.5 % and 6.2 %, respectively for the province. Similarly, between the ages of 35 and 44, 17.5 % of our residents have a trade's diploma vs. 11.5 % for the province, and this trend continues into the aged 45 – 64 years category.

One employment related concern highlighted in the surveys is that only 21 % of all businesses have conducted a formal future skills requirement analysis of their own operations and have no formal long term staffing strategy. This information is of critical importance to assist our educational facilities in their long term curriculum planning. Specific skills identified in the survey results as being in short supply were in the areas of general technology in business, sales and selling skills, computer literacy, physicians and the traditional trades persons, such as welders, mechanics and millwrights.

Academia

Related to “skills availability”, Statistics Canada has reported that the County of Renfrew has an illiteracy rate of 34 %. They define illiteracy as a deficit of a wide range of skills ranging from primary character and number recognition to being able to function in today's stereotypical office / team environment where information is read, reports are written, and an individual has materials comprehension and basic computer skills, such as word processing. Assuredly, such a report is contentious, and in fairness of comparison, similar and higher numbers can be found in areas across the province. Academia is important to this BR&E survey, and the overall economic health of our community for two reasons. Firstly, the educational profile of a community has surpassed, “location, location, location”, as the number one consideration by major employers when

reviewing communities when considering relocation or expansion. Secondly, while most people may know of, or have heard of someone who became rich or successful with little or no formal education, the fact remains that entrepreneurs are 1600 % more likely to have a formal post secondary education⁵.

Upon review of the population between the ages of 20 and 34 within the County, 18 % of men and 14 % of women have not achieved a high school certificate. This compares to 15 % and 11 % for the province, respectively. These numbers diverge further with higher learning. Between the ages of 20 and 34, approximately 11 % of our population has an university degree or diploma. This compares to 26 % for the province. In the 35 – 44 age category, 10 % have an university degree or diploma compared to 25 % for the province. Finally in the 45 – 64 age category, 14 % have an university degree vs. 24 % for the province.

This may tell us we have been aggressively streaming children into the trades and away from higher education for at least the past 45 years, or that once achieving their senior matriculation, students have been leaving the County of Renfrew to achieve their university degrees and subsequently have started new careers elsewhere. This former demographic segment represents individuals in their childbearing years, and therefore skews our family statistics as children are raised elsewhere. As noted previously, the County of Renfrew has a FTE ratio of 5+, which clearly suggests the tremendous lost economic value and jobs never created by this group, whom repeatedly have been proven themselves to be societies' entrepreneurs⁶.

⁵ Quoted by Mr. Paul Knafelc, maes, CEO and Managing Director of Community Benchmarks, Inc of Waterloo, Ontario during a speech regarding rural economic development in Winnipeg Manitoba, November 14th, 2003. Community Benchmarks is a self-described profiling organization with clients in the commercial re-location industry.

⁶ To extrapolate the economic impact of outward emigration, The County of Renfrew has exported 11,600 individuals with university degrees, which by compounding “interest – like” and adding 1.7 children per family using a ratio of .68 marriages per couple equates to 54,600 persons (in age category 19 – 64) with an annual pre-tax income (2001 dollars) of \$2.58 billions per year.

Finally, one last moot question regarding academia and pertaining to the previously accentuated point of lower labor costs. Are the proven lower labor costs because overall, we do not have that segment of the population who would achieve the provincial average incomes within their category and thus increase the average income figures for the whole county, **or** has that segment not returned to the County of Renfrew because of the lower incomes (20.1 %) they might expect to achieve, subsequent to their graduation. This, given the assumed availability of work and increased markets if they were here⁷. Cost of living is an extremely complex consideration, with variables far beyond the scope of this report. For example, while it is true the average home in the county is valued at 57.4 % of the provincial average, the purchase of external family services such as university tuition is done at prevailing market prices and imported inter-regional goods may even be higher than the provincial averages. The market value of tuition services may in themselves be a barrier to entry, directly proportional to the decreased rate of income per FTE⁸.

Educational Training Facilities

There is a distinct impression within our business community of a severe shortage of training facilities within the County of Renfrew. Outwardly the statistics do not bear out the perception. There have been no school closures in the county in the last ten years, and attendance figures in the school system have continually dropped on average by 250 students per year. Family data derived from Stats Canada information indicates there is no significant pocket of pre-school infants within Renfrew County, which would reverse this trend, and in fact our population of adults of childbearing age has decreased 1.3 % since 1996. While the County of Renfrew has a greater percentage of married couples

⁷ Professional incomes as a function of lower county-wide incomes (ref. Cost of labor) was a point of concern brought to the floor of the Central Region business retreats which included Laurentian Valley Twp, Laurentian Hills Twp., Whitewater Region Twp, and the Town of Petawawa.

⁸ The first year's tuition fee towards a 5-year engineering degree at the University of Toronto is \$6500, plus living expenses, while the first year's tuition fee towards a 7-year medical degree is \$145,000. plus living expenses, albeit year 6 & 7 stipend and residency will negate costs, excluding accrued interest.

per capita than the rest of the province, these couples have on average 7 % fewer children per family unit than the provincial average. The county also has a significantly higher % of common law families than found elsewhere in the province, however these families have again fewer children; 17 % fewer children than their married provincial counterpart. Based upon the above, one might assume classroom sizes to be getting smaller.

HRDC has reported the number of apprenticeship placements has increased again for a third consecutive year.

Algonquin College in Pembroke has reported record applications, many from abroad, and is continually developing new programs to meet new and changing demands.

Land Costs

The County of Renfrew unanimously hailed land costs as being an advantage to business with a positive opinion rating ratio of 6 to 1. Some prime real estate is becoming somewhat more expensive, thus opinions do vary from region to region with Arnprior giving an approval rating of 2.5 to 1 and Madawaska Valley, Greater Madawaska, Bonnechere Valley and the Eastern Region giving approval ratings of 10 to 1.

One point of interest in the discussion of land values is the degree of perceived value vs. actual market values. While there is no statistical evidence to support a case for property values one way or the other, excepting historical charting of assessment, there is a tremendous sense of hope and anticipation in both the Southern and Eastern Regions with the new four lane highway from Ottawa to Arnprior, and hopefully soon to Renfrew.

Property owners are anticipating an increase in real estate values. Townships are anticipating an increase in assessments and local business development

offices are hoping for an increase in enterprise activity and employment. The core groups feel the first two 'anticipations' are quite realistic in accordance to the Kemptville experience after the opening of Highway 16 south of Ottawa to the 401. Business activity will be a function of markets timing as population move into the less expensive hamlets.

Currently 800 cars drive by Arnprior on a daily commute into Ottawa towards employment and markets. With the advent of improved surface roads and services on the new highway 17, I rather suspect this number to increase quite quickly, as it did first in Richmond, then Carleton Place and then Munster Hamlet in the mid-nineties.

Zoned Lands

The general topic of zoned land garnered a very subdued response by respondents in the surveys and likewise, later at the core meetings. It is either a topic, which held no interest or concern, or people are simply not aware of the status. Generally, no one in the survey felt that there was a shortage of zoned lands for any given business enterprise, and it was mentioned that with variances possible, local government was quite supportive of business activity. The western region's participants felt that their currently zoned properties suitable for business gave them a distinct advantage over the rest of the county with local business scoring an approval rating of almost 3 to 1. Meanwhile those polled in the greater Arnprior were not quite certain, one way or the other.

Local & Municipal Taxes

Comments received on the surveys themselves and during the core team business retreats indicated a feeling or concern, voiced in many ways, that urbanized areas with increased population densities might have rates of taxation,

which are disproportionately low, or that the more rural areas perceive a lesser return on their taxation investment. There was a distinct feeling that assessments values have not been calculated, determined or applied equally across the county, especially in the south.

Overall and countywide business opinions were split on average between municipal taxes being an advantage and a disadvantage, with municipalities showing wide variation. The East Region (2 – 1), Petawawa (3 – 1), and Central Region (2 – 1) felt tax rates were an advantage to doing business, while in Barry's Bay (3 – 1) and the West in general (2 – 1) felt taxes were a disadvantage. Arnprior (1 – 1) and the South Region (1 – 1) believe that the tax rates are reasonable.

Access to Transportation (availability)

...Commercial

Transportation availability and costs were identified on the survey as very significant barriers to business activity and growth in the County of Renfrew. This was also a topic of concern brought up during two of the business retreats. While distance to market was not considered overly important, the actual availability of transportation was thought to be. This attribute was given a negative factor ratio of 4 – 1. Excluding the towns Petawawa and Arnprior, every municipality agreed at least with the countywide ratios with some regions being more definitive. The west region including Madawaska Valley was very negative with qualified opinions of negative 10 – 1. Transportation hubs have closed in Petawawa, Renfrew, and Arnprior leaving two competing facilities in Pembroke.

...Residential

Three of the core groups identified the lack of intra-county busing or public transportation as a business issue. Firstly, as a means of expanding their current target markets and secondly as a public service, which may need to be in place

as the county population ages and districts within the county target seniors housing and services as a product line in the future. This second point will be discussed further within the report.

Public transportation was not an issue specifically surveyed however became an issue during core retreats based upon the conviction of the retreat participants.

Access to Supplies (raw materials)

County wide access to raw materials and supplies is considered a disadvantage to doing business here with remote areas feeling the strongest with a satisfaction rating of negative 3 – 1. No one area felt that access to supplies was an advantage. Subsequent comment however has indicated that when hoping to deal with international markets, an extra hour or two by land is not significant. Somewhat satisfied with access to supplies, which presumably includes much more than raw materials to a manufacturing process were Petawawa and Arnrior. Greatly dissatisfied were all of the other regions with ratios as high as negative 4 – 1.

This degree of satisfaction would outwardly appear to be relative to the degree of urbanization however seems to be contrary to the primary industries' requirements to be close to their sources of natural resources.

Energy Sources

Our BR&E survey definitely indicated both a significant reliance and dissatisfaction with electricity as the primary source of energy in the County of Renfrew. The notable trend towards high satisfaction with natural gas for heating and in the manufacturing processes fluctuated greatly from township to township depending upon availability. Price of electricity or fuels was not considered a factor of much importance in any of the energy sources, and in fact comments lend that electricity was thought to be a very good value. What was greatly

criticized were all of the other charges concurrent to the electrical bill such as acquisition cost, debt recovery, delivery charges, etc. These add-ons it is felt removes electricity from the preferred list and encourages alternative shopping.

For those companies who desired an alternative to electricity, their issues were accessibility of natural gas on a ratio of 4 – 1, followed by the cost of conversion and installation of the natural gas lines.

All costs aside, the feature most often discussed pertaining to energy in the county was the availability (supply) of electricity. Predominantly in the south and west regions there is a concern with both black outs and brown outs. The numbers of interruptions and duration of outages has been a major problem. Furthermore, it is reported by a number of businesses that metering the supply lines often showed wide variations in service, such as 90 volts rather than 110 volts. Apparently, this is serious enough to affect production lines and facilities and damage machinery.

Plans to Close

As a result of the survey 10 businesses were identified as having the intention and plans in place to close their business and cease operations within the next two years. Each of the businesses was investigated and found to be very small, with aging senior ownership and the prevailing reason for closure was retirement. There was no continuity built into the operation and few had any plans to try and sell the business. The reason for the complete cessation of activity being they lived in the same premise as the business. Extrapolated within sectors, this equates to perhaps as high as 125 businesses in the county and a possible 400 jobs being lost in total. Examples of these businesses were a Bed and Breakfast, which did not care to sell and lose the property, and a family farm operation with no family members or relations to carry on the business.

On the other hand, the survey did show a positive outlook by existing business owners for the future of the county with 70% planning to significantly renovate or expand operations. Of note, the businesses in the rural areas while smaller in size are hoping to take the lead in this growth of expansion and renovation. The urban community seems to be somewhat more reserved in its projections.

Impact of Growth

Countywide results indicate that the impact of anticipated expansions over the next two years will be:

- 50 % are expecting to expand their work force
- 40 % are expecting to increase their accessible floor space
- 40 % have expressed plans to expand their product lines
- 100 % wish to increase their customer service
- 90 % believe their expansion will require the purchase of improved technology as part of their program
- 15 % believe their expansion will increase their demand for (manufacturers) imports
- 17 % expect their expansion will result in increased exports of commodities and finished goods
- 40 % of all companies expressing a desire to expand are anticipating in advance that financing will be a major problem to be over come
- 15 % expressed there may be a slight difficulty in locating suitable land or buildings into which they will might expand
- 50 % of all expanding businesses voiced a concern about the cost and availability of utilities
- 33 % of all businesses surveyed, which indicated a desire to expand also indicated they have concerns with local by-laws. Unfortunately the survey does not into asking for specifics on this issue

- 63 % of businesses have experienced a sales increase over the past two years, of which 24 % feel they will be able to maintain these improved sales and a further 57 % have expressed they feel sales will increase still again into 2004 & 2005

Advantages to Doing Business

By far, “Quality of Lifestyle” was identified as the number one reason for having your business in the County of Renfrew. Business endorsed this attribute with regional satisfaction ratios as high as 15 – 1. It is quite interesting that no one has actually tried to define what quality of lifestyle means. This unanimous approval really does indicate a further need in the future to identify those intangible factors in the lifestyle “equation” which are desirable, and which factors we might like to mitigate. However, as an all-encompassing statement this was believed to be true.

This high level of satisfaction supports that those businesses already existing in the County of Renfrew are somewhat secure in their placement, and have no plans to leave.

Tourism Specific Barrier

The results of the tourism based questions resulted in “seasonality” being identified as the single largest barrier to their industry, with access to capital to build towards and promote year round functionality as the second largest concern. Within the surveys other barriers were identified however the only trends that approached commonality or consensus regarding tourism were increased professional marketing and local government policies. These were highlighted often enough to justify additional research or query, as they were never expanded upon with any specifics. During the actual business retreats, it was provincial government policies that were focused upon. The operators feel

the new “Environmental Protection Act” and the “Safe Drinking Water Act” are unfairly, negatively affecting local tourism operations and attractions such as special events.

Our Business Community Speaks:

...a compilation of topics discussed at the business retreats

Communication

The bringing together of concerned local citizens to discuss local issues and subsequently have an opportunity for those discussions to be brought forward to local government was hailed by all groups as a positive action, which must continue.

The groups indicated they were unaware of current initiatives or services offered by the County of Renfrew’s Department of Development and Property, Economic Services Office.

The groups unanimously expressed a desire to be part of community development and assist in the development of a long-term strategic plan or defined set of community goals.

The groups expressed a desire to see each municipality with their own economic development department, which would involve local citizens and business associations, which would work together to create alliances between municipalities under a unified county-wide Economic Development umbrella, not divided by political borders.

The groups felt there was a need to bring the many Chambers of Commerce together, along with Business Improvement Associations in order to discuss, “what is being done by whom”. To identify and reduce any possible redundancy and work together with a set of publicized common goals.

Transportation

The groups noted the County of Renfrew has been injured by corporate and government cut backs within the transportation sector. Specifically, only two shipping terminals remain (Pembroke: Smurfit and Manitoulin), which is a barrier to small business in areas such as Petawawa, Renfrew, Barry's Bay and Arnprior. Most rail terminals have been closed and most are removed, affecting both commercial and public transportation.

It was reported that 800 automobiles commute daily from the County of Renfrew to work in the Ottawa market. There is a need for increased inter-county and intra-county busing services. Busing, with three exceptions in the county is non-existent. Outwardly, these 800 daily commuters do indicate that there may be a possible business case in support of increased busing services.

Finally, in spite of some of the finest airport facilities available for our size of market, there is no commercial air service option. In the past six months three companies have been approached and refused the opportunity to service our market.

Broadband and Cellular Phone Access

The groups noted that the County of Renfrew did not have broadband (high-speed internet access) service throughout, and that cellular phone service was restricted to the urban areas. It was acknowledged that both broadband and cell phone services were provided by private companies, which are installing the required infrastructure and service based upon anticipated market usage and business case profits as fast as they can.

While any of the providers would be happy to accept government assistance to this end, the group noted this was not a problem that money alone could not already solve for an individual with a business requirement. Specifically, satellite service is already available for broadband delivery and satellite phones are

locally available to rent by the day or on a long-term lease. To the issue of costs pertaining to these service options, two years ago unlimited regular Internet service cost \$115 per month, and is now available for \$19.95. Similarly, other service costs should also decrease in time.

Signage

The ability to advertise and the guidelines for signage by the MOT were brought up as a community issue by every one of the business retreats. This indicates signage policy is a countywide concern within our business communities. Additionally, towns, villages and hamlets that lay along major routes would like some input on the signage restrictions within their respective limits. Similarly, the County of Renfrew itself should have some say in the overall governance of signage within its borders. Of note, the Central Region business retreat was able to give specifics of inconsistent policy adherence within the province. They noted Durham Region Farm Fresh Marketing Association was allowed to use regular “commercial” signage to advertise their area’s tourist attractions. The groups all agreed upon signage being crucial to drawing passing potential customers into the many downtown cores of our municipalities.

Illiteracy

The ‘lay-person’ participants of the business retreats were generally quite surprised and questioned the statistical findings of Statistics Canada. However, there were also representatives from two different school boards at two of the retreats that felt under a broad definition of illiteracy, the statistics were probably true. This acknowledgement led to lengthy discussions within those particular groups. Interestingly enough, once the issue was de-stigmatized, there was a very fast adherence within the groups regarding how could they work together to begin dealing with this problem. From an economic development perspective, some that felt this statistic may be one that we might not wish to over emphasize in our promotional material. There were other individuals who noted that this information was already publicly available, and we needed to look inwardly at

solving the problem, the success of which would become an economic competitive advantage.

Currently, information provided to professional site selectors and like corporations by Statistics Canada indicates there is a 34% illiteracy rate within the County of Renfrew, which equates to approximately 32,500 persons. The statistical information does not indicate the degree of literacy, and it was felt the word itself is misleading.

<Aside> This figure was arrived at by Statistics Canada's own proprietary algorithms, and while quite contentious, is being used to benchmark the degree of literacy in communities from coast to coast. This becomes a somewhat greater concern when viewed by investor companies in foreign countries, which may be self-assessed with a more complimentary set of algorithms. The County of Renfrew is not alone in having a large indicated percentage value of illiteracy by Statistics Canada. Kitchener-Waterloo with its more urbanized environment and many educational facilities has a value of 29% and some northern communities have values as high as 70%; there is a full range of values in between. The City of Cornwall and area have partnered with the Province of Ontario, local educational institutions, service clubs, general public and significant business participants such as Bell Canada and Ontario Hydro and commenced their own "Smart City" program, which is endeavoring to address the problem and attain a marketable competitive advantage. Research indicates many new "Smart Community" programs are just now starting up in the Southern States.

Local Municipal Services

Within the BR&E surveys, a number of times municipal policies are cited as being a barrier to retention or expansion. However even within the business retreats there was a marked difference in understanding which level of government was responsible for which service or related, which policy. While this may not account for all displeasure with government policy in general, it may

have a bearing on the allocation of 'fault' (for lack of a better word), and the constituent relationship. In the words of one business retreat,

“We need to be able to discern between municipal and provincial policies.”

Hours of Operation

The groups mentioned that uniform hours of operation were a concern.

“We do not cater to the people coming into our village – we turn them away by being closed. We need to build a retail trade and (also) cater to the tourism industry, but we have to be open ... ”

It was suggested that a meeting be held for the local business people, and the importance of uniform hours of operation be stressed. The fact remains, noted proprietors within the groups, that we cannot force them (local government) to regulate individual business hours of operation.

Shop Locally

It was the general feeling within the groups that our stores have what we need, and that they have what we want, at a price that is competitive and often lower than prices within the Ottawa marketplace. However, as a group we do not promote local shopping and these “reseller” dollars are bleeding out of our communities rather than creating local employment. Perhaps a “Shop County” program is needed, with a logo and campaign towards local shopping.

<Aside> The County of Renfrew's new (March, 2004) business directory is working towards this goal, and does indicate retail products through the use of key words.

Population

Two groups discussed the changing demographics of the County of Renfrew in relation to age categories. Both groups acknowledged this was both a problem and an opportunity. Firstly, there is a need to attempt to stop the flow of our younger people out of the county, while attempting to bring back some of those whom we have already lost to places unknown. Secondly, retirees are moving into the county. Both groups suggested pro-actively targeting the provision of core services to seniors and encouraging their emigration into the region. This, it suggested would require the formal planning of up-scaled quality apartments, public transportation and improved healthcare to cater to the aging population.

Regardless of any long-term strategic plan towards economic development which may be produced in the near future, there will be a need to provide defined quality of life commodities to the seniors of the county as the intrinsic population continues to age, or risk the seniors becoming a second group to migrate elsewhere.

Education

Of paramount importance, our industry, education and communities must come together to address the current 17% drop out rate by our young people from the 'high school' matriculation stream. As we consider ways to give our youngest generation the best possible start in life and to improve our comparative literacy rating, we must find a means not to exacerbate the problem.

It was not believed that the County of Renfrew had fewer persons as a percentage of its population with an university degree or post-secondary achievement, rather it was believed that these successful persons had moved out of the region.

The concern was raised that the lower annual incomes within the County of Renfrew may preclude many families from being able to send their children to

university. In lieu of there being the possibility of attaining an university within the county, there may be other very proactive avenues that the county, industry and educational institutions could partner upon to bring formal secondary training to the county.

Education: Skilled Trades

That the County of Renfrew has an extremely high 'trades certificate' percentage as compared to the rest of the province is not a point of concern. It appears the 'system' is aggressively addressing the needs of many of many constituents. In fact, the statistics indicate that we have a marketable competitive advantage in skilled trades labor over much of the province, which should be aggressively promoted. Attention should be given to ensure that future training involves skills and apprenticeship streams that will be in heavy demand into the future.

Education: Community Partnering

The Northern Region business retreat suggested that given the broad range of skills required by Stats Canada regarding their definition of literacy, many within the communities could benefit by a community partnering program specific to basic computer skills. That much of the routine functionality such as word processing and internet research which all of our current high school students are familiar with, is all that is required in order to raise our community standard.

The Southern Region noted that there may be many opportunities for non-working persons and persons desiring to re-enter the workforce to work in existing offices on a volunteer or apprenticeship basis.

The community partnering experience has the potential to avail to many high school students an opportunity to achieve their required 40 hours of community service as required within the senior matriculation program.

Quality of Life

Embedded within the survey results and presumably our culture is the belief that we offer an unparalleled excellent “quality of life”. This attitudinal attribute is so pervasive that it achieved a near perfect 95% approval rating. Unfortunately, there were no questions within the survey that attempted to define the meaning of quality of life. Further, a review of like surveys from across Canada and the United States indicates that local residents from small rural communities to large industrial urban centers all make a similar claim.

Night clubs, museums, expansive shopping malls, art galleries and underground parking may all be features which define quality of life for an urban dweller which would preclude the individual from adopting our cultural belief.

Having said this, obviously those yet undefined qualities within our own communities’ make-up the ideal environ for own constituents and should be investigated.

Medical Services

There are 665 physician opportunities currently available in Ontario within 134⁹ communities. The widespread shortage of doctors has created significant competitive advantages for those regions that do have a full complement of professionals. The Northern retreat group represented a region that is blessed with a beautiful hospital facility, however like the rest of the County of Renfrew, does require additional professional staff. The group felt that communities do need to consider spousal employment opportunities when targeting physicians, as many spouses do work. Further, communities need to be encouraging the province to increase the number of, and responsibilities inherent to nurse practitioners.

⁹ The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care has published an exhaustive review of Ontario’s physician requirements.
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/uap/listof_areas/gp_ladau.pdf

<Aside> The Ontario Ministry of Health has determined and published that the County of Renfrew requires 9 general family practitioners. The Ministry is offering incentive grants to doctors moving to designated areas for full time practice and an eligible return-of-service for free tuition program. There are four provincially designated community contact persons regarding provincial medical programs within the county. Additionally, there is a local initiatives recruitment committee called the “Pembroke and Area Physician Recruitment Committee”, which has announced significant success.

Industry Buying Groups

It was noted by the southern retreat that local buying groups / cooperatives may assist local business to purchase inventories and thus compete with the ‘big box’ stores. There are already buying groups in our communities, which benefit school boards and health facilities. The retreat members queried whether the County of Renfrew itself could assist in the formation of cooperatives.

Population Statistics

The County of Renfrew exclusive of the City of Pembroke has a population of 81,640 persons. Combined our population as reported by Stats Canada (2001) is 95,138 persons. This population figure indicates a 1.1 % decline over the previous five years by 1086 people. Similarly, this figure compares to proportionate declines of student enrollment within the school boards.

Demographic analysis of the net change during these two census periods indicates that our losses were predominantly either families in their childbearing and ‘mid-stream’ career years or single adults aged 19 – 24 years. Both groups are valuable members within our work force and our community. The addition of these people to our community rather than the loss would be rightfully reported a marked success.

Meanwhile, during this same 5-year period the Province of Ontario increased by 6.1 % or over 650,000 people, the majority of whom were newcomers to Canada; persons and families aged 5 – 44 years of age. This boom in growth circumvented the County of Renfrew. This in part accounts for the fact that the County of Renfrew is aging demographically faster than the province as a whole. It also follows that if this trend continues our available workforce will decline functionally, directly inversely proportional to provincial growth rate minus the numbers of persons who will exit our existing workforce due to circumstance or retirement. Unabated this calculates to an exclusive population of 77,300 persons and a decrease in our available workforce of 11,200 persons by the year 2010, while our median age increases from 39.2 to 44.1 years.

The County of Renfrew is an active participant in the global economy and changing times. Population shifts are but one of the marked differences occurring around the world as competitive advantages are honed within home markets. The Southern Retreat discussed the issue of immigration into Canada and Ontario noting that immigration into the County of Renfrew has thus far been extremely low.

<Aside> Visible minorities make up 1.6 % of the residents of the County of Renfrew, while these same groups make up 18.2 % of the total population of the Province of Ontario. Similarly, persons of non-Christian religions make up ½ of 1 % of the residents of the County of Renfrew, while provincially, members of these religions make up 9.1 % of the total population. Presumably there may be marked cultural differences as well.

Without the necessary information at the time, the concerned retreat members were only able to ask important questions, which in themselves may offer direction or lead to consideration.

- Are immigrants directed to some parts of the province and not others?
- Can we encourage business immigrants from all walks of life with entrepreneurial experience to move to the County of Renfrew?

- How can we assist the creation of support groups to assist newcomers?
- Would newcomers themselves be able to assist us in attaining more newcomers?
- Can we receive assistance & benefit from newcomers already in our community?
- Can we seek the assistance and referrals of newcomer associations in Ottawa?
- How do we market ourselves as a welcoming community?
- Do we need to educate our current population? (i.e. advantages, cultural differences)
- How do we attain feedback from groups to better improve our support/?
- Do we need to make adjustments within the schools?

Training Facilities

It was identified upon the surveys and there was agreement at the retreats that there is a lack of training facilities within the County of Renfrew. This was identified as a distinct disadvantage to business, albeit none specifically were identified. It was also discussed that training facilities and services do require a period of time to establish, and currently very few companies have done any long-term strategic planning or needs assessment regarding staffing. The educational facilities appear very receptive to suggestions, re: strategic direction, however lack the industry involvement they seek.

Importantly, an indication by business and industry of their future skills and staffing requirements might assist persons, including newcomers as well as previous residents, living outside the county to move to the county. Additionally, future employment requirements and trends may help our existing residents in the decision making process to stay.

Development Charges

Two of the business retreat groups voiced dissent with municipal development charges, and also the inconsistency at which these charges are levied throughout the county. As an example, the East Region group noted there are no development charges in Admaston / Bromley, however Horton Township charges \$700.00. The general opinion of the group suggested promoting low or non-

existent development charges as a distinct advantage of doing business in the County of Renfrew. Cited were examples of communities west of Algonquin Park where base rate development charges started at \$25,000.

Also, both groups made mention that they were disappointed that they were now in direct competition with counties to the North which are able to offer 0 % tax incentives to new business.

“We have difficulty competing with areas to the North of us that are offering 0% tax incentives to new business, as well as with parts of the United States that not only offer no tax but other benefits as well.”

Suggestions by the Business Retreats

Communication

Develop and foster a volunteer network of economic and community development offices across the county with the support of the Council of the County of Renfrew.

Facilitate a first economic and networking symposium including municipal government, City of Pembroke, Chambers of Commerce, BIA, education officials and trades groups to begin building 'bridges', common knowledge and a long term strategic community development plan.

Improvements to Business Development Office

- Commence community information sessions
- Coordinate municipal business and community development offices
- Increase relationships with other CED associations for best practices
- Increase exchange with other municipal BDO for best successes
- Begin building business alliances across the County of Renfrew

Transportation

Approach companies that currently have full service docking facilities within the affected communities, such as AECL of Chalk River, Base Petawawa, Times Fiber of Renfrew, Boeing and Pfizer of Arnprior and investigate the possibilities and opportunities to share their core competencies and infrastructure in warehousing and shipping.

Investigate the possibility of reopening a rail terminus as a central rail hub for the County of Renfrew. This investigation would require a formal study and business case. One option might be to consider Renfrew or Haley's Station as a possible location, which may also avail a daily rail service from the "central county"

through to the Ottawa terminal, where daily commuters could then link directly to Ottawa Transpo.

Intra-county and inter-county busing has two hurdles to overcome before any company can even begin to consider a business case for service based upon market conditions. The biggest hurdle is the ability to obtain a license for any public service and secondly, the cost and availability of insurance. While the County of Renfrew cannot mitigate insurance costs, the licensing issue may be an area where the county can intercede.

The Pembroke airport is a multimillion-dollar unrestricted facility that currently services both civilian and military traffic. It is a community asset that should be promoted and the search for a commercial service provider should continue.

Signage

The County of Renfrew needs to examine the signage regulations and meet with the Ministry of Transport concerning the issues of policy adherence, policy variance and limited self-governance.

Illiteracy

A committee of learned business and educational sector persons, with the support of the Council of the County of Renfrew, need to report on this concern by reviewing our current degree of literacy, calculating the degree at which improvement may be possible, verify current local services, investigate the achievable gaps within our community, research existing provincial and/or federal program assistance and determine which of many possible routes would best suit our culture. Perhaps the “Smart Community” program is an option worth considering.

Local Municipal Services

Information pertaining to the provincial government's "Local Service Realignment" program is already available to the general public, however perhaps municipalities might better communicate to their constituents recent changes and especially those changes which had a specific impact on local service provision.

Hours of Operation

It is suggested that the local Chambers of Commerce be advised of the concerns of the business retreats regarding hours of business operation, and that the issue of consistency be discussed by the affected business communities and associations.

Local Shopping

It is suggested that local government participate with the local Chambers of Commerce and Business Associations to spearhead a "Shop County of Renfrew" campaign designed to educate the public as to what products and services are available locally, and promote the local values of price and convenience.

Population Young Adults

It was suggested that a quarterly newsletter be produced and emailed to young adults who have moved from the County of Renfrew to assist in their repatriation. An upbeat newsletter could discuss housing, opportunities, culture, arts, and local events and illustrate some of the beauty of the county. It was hoped many of their email addresses might be obtained from their parents, who presumably are still here. This document could be posted on the County of Renfrew's website, in addition to our facilitating online email registration.

Population Seniors

As a target market towards business development the accommodation of senior citizens is thought by many to be a viable and growing venture. As a strategic

goal in long-term economic development, given the inherent aging of the current demography, this is also believed by many to be sensible objective. It has been suggested to the Economic Services Office by a number of local municipal development offices that this is an area for growth the respective municipality would like to consider. “Economies of Scale” may benefit the municipalities by working together to create alliances to this end, their first goal perhaps being the preparation of a business case for investment and an impact study on their respective community.

Education

Brief correspondence with the Renfrew County School Board has shown the director is extremely interested in finding ways to partner with the community towards tailoring our facilities to our future needs. It might behoove the county to grasp this opportunity to build an alliance.

Education: Entrepreneurs

It has been suggested elsewhere that an effort be made to contact those persons who have left the County of Renfrew, to share with them an ongoing newsletter. Given that some of those ex-patriots have those attributes, which predisposed some individuals to becoming entrepreneurs, let us invite targeted individuals ‘home’ to share their stories of success and speak of entrepreneurial opportunities which may local.

Education: Skilled Trades Promotion

Additional research should be done into the specifics of our apparent competitive advantage in skilled trades labour within the County of Renfrew. This attribute should be heavily promoted in our trades advertising, especially targeted at industries requiring those skill sets and especially targeted at regions throughout Canada and the United States where research proves these skills are in short supply.

Education: Community Partnering

It is suggested that the County of Renfrew work closely in conjunction with the service clubs and school boards to facilitate training of basic computer and office practices, upgrading community skills by introducing our existing populations of high school students and business owners who would like to benefit from the sharing experience.

Quality of Life

An extremely detailed investigation of the ‘Quality of Life’ attribute needs to be initiated for both our own community and for the communities from which we are hoping to attract new persons and businesses. Firstly, to better know ourselves and secondly, to advertise and promote specific attributes which would be attractive to newcomers. Given that every community promotes it’s own quality of life as being paramount, its singular undefined promotion as an attribute has little more value than an indication of local cultural acceptance.

Medical Services

Medical care access is considered a significant “quality of life” factor¹⁰. It is suggested that the County of Renfrew review the current status of constituent medical care access and determine whether existing services are adequately addressing the existing needs.

Industry Buying Groups

It is suggested that the County of Renfrew support in principle, organizations such as the local Chambers of Commerce in developing cooperative buying groups where numbers and demand by the business community warrant such a service as an advantage. It was not suggested in practice that the County of Renfrew actively become a member of the business community or risk being in competition with any existing member.

¹⁰ Area Development, Site & Facility Planning. 2004 Corporate Service Survey. Halcyon Business Publications, Inc.

Newcomers

It was believed by the business retreat participants that the County of Renfrew will experience dramatic changes in its demography before the end of this decade. The retreat participants suggested that the county administration actively encourage and participate in this inevitable change. It was suggested that targeted growth based upon a recruitment policy centered upon business immigrants and emigrants would provide positive long-term benefit to residents.

Training facilities / Skills Requirements

It is suggested the County of Renfrew working in conjunction with Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) conduct a very detailed skills assessment of our current labor force. Concurrently, solicit employers within the county and industry advocacy groups outside the county for their needs estimations. Additionally, the group might utilize and include the Ministry's own labor force projection figures to prepare a skills gap analysis, to use as a foundation for discussion with the school boards and training institutions.

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John Murphy
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Andreas Vornweg
Lorna Hudder
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Brian Cheadle
David Foote
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It will be for historians to look back and ultimately determine whether this first BR&E project was an adjunctive factor in the long-term success of the County of Renfrew. Interim, it has been a tremendous learning experience and opportunity for converging groups to build upon. I would like to thank all of the mentioned persons and organizations for affording me this wonderful opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,



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