

Executive Summary
Martin Way District – Sustainable Communities
Business Outreach
Prepared for: City of Olympia



Introduction:

The Thurston Economic Development Council (EDC) is pleased to partner with the Thurston Regional Planning Council as a recipient of the Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant. The EDC was contracted to conduct outreach to local businesses located within the Martin Way District of Olympia, Washington.

Project Overview:

The project was managed by EDC staff lead, Renée Sunde, Deputy Director. Joshua Cummings, Business Development Manager and Kyle Wiese, Research & Project Coordinator, provided primary staffing throughout the project. In coordination with City of Olympia staff, the EDC worked to develop an outreach strategy and set of survey questions designed to better understand the mix and characteristics of businesses in the district. The survey was intended to solicit input from local businesses on issues and opportunities currently impacting their business and provide feedback to the city for future improvement of the district.

Through outreach to the Martin Way District, approximately one out of three businesses contacted, participated in the survey. The targeted area of outreach which was rectangular in shape included the corridor of Martin Way from Lilly Road to Wilson Street and the corridor of Pacific Avenue from I-5 to the intersection of Martin Way and Pacific Avenue. (See enclosed copy of the outreach letter, Local Business Profile/Visitation Form [survey], outreach map, and a complete report of outreach results)

Summary of Findings:

A total of 54 surveys were completed, representing the following industry categories: professional services, financial, transportation, utilities, healthcare, retail, restaurant and hospitality.

Market & Sales

A majority of survey respondents represent service related industries whose primary customer base is regional. Of the 54 businesses surveyed, 89% indicated they are stable or growing and 47% indicated their sales are increasing. The survey results show that between 2011-2013, 24% of the businesses surveyed had laid-off employees while 18% of businesses had hired employees.

Primary Market		Life Cycle		Market Share		Sales	
Local	5	Emerging	1	Increasing	23	Increasing	25
Regional	46	Growing	24	Stable	24	Stable	22
National	2	Maturing	24	Decreasing	6	Decreasing	6
International	1	Declining	5				

Fluctuation of Employees By Business 2011-2013		Total Employees 2011-2013	
Increase	7	2011	921
Stable	34	2012	945.5
Decreased	13	2013	948.5

Facility & Location

When asked to describe the positive attributes of their location we received similar responses across industry categories. Businesses located in the Martin Way District like the high volume of traffic on Martin Way and Pacific Avenue ; especially businesses that are located closer to Wilson Street, where Pacific Avenue and Martin Way meet.

Following is a summary of the most common responses:

- Well established business location
- Good visibility
- Inexpensive rent
- High volume traffic
- Central location in Thurston County and surrounding cities (Lacey, Tumwater)
- Close to home

Negative attributes described by business owners in this district focused on problems with vagrancy such as: panhandling, graffiti and homelessness. In addition, several businesses indicated the need for road, sidewalk and intersection improvements. Signage restrictions and various building regulations were depicted as having a negative impact on many businesses, within the district. Suggestions that signage reform coupled with a more predictable permit process would help create a more business friendly perception throughout the district.

Following is a summary of the most common responses:

- Vagrancy issues
- Frontage/Signage limitations
- Rundown buildings
- Parking limitations
- Building permitting
- Poor road conditions

Improvements

When asked, “What are the three most important improvements you would like to see in the Martin Way District,” a majority of the answers were directed toward infrastructure improvements such as pedestrian crosswalks, street lights and road repairs. Cleaning up the district and creating a more business friendly environment seemed to resonate across the district.

Following is a summary of the most common responses:

- Clean it up
- Road repairs
- More crosswalks
- More street lights
- Revise signage regulations
- Make area more pedestrian friendly
- Help with homelessness
- Help decrease panhandlers
- More commercial development
- Nothing

Attraction

When asked, “What additional businesses, commercial or other types of uses would you like to see locate in the district,” the responses were fairly consistent. The most common responses were; quality restaurants and professional service providers to fill office vacancies. Many businesses felt that “any sort” of attraction would be good. Businesses would like to see the Martin Way district act as more of a destination rather than a corridor.

Following are the top responses:

- Quality and higher-end restaurants
- Professional service providers
- A mix of small businesses
- Content with everything that is here

When asked, “Would you like to see housing along Martin Way or the side streets? If so, what type (apartments, townhouses, single family)? If not, why?” **Forty one percent said yes**, with the majority of the responses indicating they would like to see condos and/or apartments built on side streets within the district. Some respondents added the notion that bringing in housing would help, bring in business.

Conversely, **37% answered no**, with the majority of the responses indicating that the Martin Way district should be kept commercial and that more housing will only increase congestion. They also expressed concerns that theft and the potential for the area to get “run down”. **Twenty two percent** had no comment or didn’t care either way.

Local Challenges

When asked, “What are the biggest local challenges impacting your industry today,” a majority of the respondents indicated, the current state of the economy. A few others mentioned challenges related to competition (big box stores, saturation of market, internet sales), government regulations, connection to customers while a handful of respondents indicated there were currently no local challenges concerning them.

2013 and Beyond

When asked, “How do you feel about the future – 2013 and beyond,” a very large majority of the responses were positive. Words like pretty good, awesome, optimistic, getting better and hopeful seemed to resonate across the district.

Although there were a slight handful of responses indicating concern for the future, for the most part businesses in the Martin Way District appear fairly positive about their business and economic future.

Summary:

Although just 1/3 of the businesses contacted were willing to participate in the outreach survey; the businesses that did participate were generally positive and pleased to provide feedback.

Of the 54 businesses surveyed, 95% of the businesses serve a local or regional market. Approximately 87% of businesses surveyed indicated their business was emerging, growing or maturing with 13% indicating a decline in overall business.

In terms of both market share and overall sales, 89% of the businesses were either increasing or staying stable whereas 11% indicated a decline? Although there were some fluctuations in employment levels throughout the district, a majority of those surveyed have maintained stable employment numbers between 2011-2013.

There was a great interest expressed in the future of the Martin Way District, our hope is that this initial outreach with business and community stakeholders will help lay the groundwork for future dialogue and engagement with the local business community.