Business Retention & Expansion Survey Report

January 16, 2018
City of Homer Economic Development Commission

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The City of Homer's Economic Development Commission (EDC) conducted its first Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) survey in 2017 with four primary goals:

- Develop and encourage communication with local businesses;
- Obtain business owners' perspectives and ideas on Homer's business environment;
- Identify business needs and concerns that may be addressed by the City;
- Develop strategies and actions that will continue to support small business retention and expansion.

The EDC's BR&E initiative was motivated by the fact that local business' commitment to community and the jobs they create are critical components of a strong economy. Working with existing businesses is also an effective way to foster economic growth. Studies show that up to 76% of job growth and local economic investment comes from existing businesses, especially in rural areas.

METHODOLOGY

The EDC developed the BR&E survey in the spring of 2017 after a review of online resources and with guidance from the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District who had recently conducted a State-initiated BRE survey within the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

The EDC launched its 54-question survey on July 1, 2017 using an online Google Form survey platform. The survey period ended October 13, 2017. Paper copies of the survey were also available; the responses from paper surveys were entered manually into the Google survey form by EDC staff. A copy of the complete BR&E survey is provided in Appendix 1.

To promote the survey and gather broad business representation, postcard advertisements went out to 1,680 area business license and commercial fishing permit holders.

Notices with a QR code link were displayed at City of Homer reception areas (City Clerks, City Hall Main Desk, Port & Harbor Office and Public Library) and on the City of Homer Website.

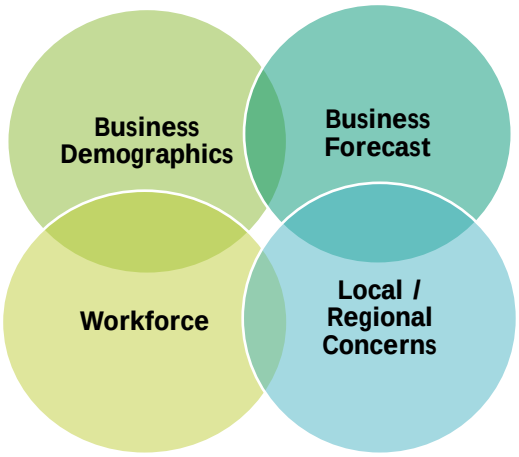
EDC Commissioners personally reached out to area businesses, distributed fliers to local businesses and bulletin boards and outreached to Rotary Clubs, the Homer Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, Farmers Market, Board of Realtors, the Homer Marine Trades Association, National Pacific Fisherman's Association, the Health & Wellness Coalition and Bed and Breakfast Association. The BR&E effort was also featured in the Homer News and Tribune, and on KBBI and the Radio Realty radio program.

112 BR&E surveys were completed. Twenty-two respondents (21%) requested a follow-up interview. While the response rate (at 7%) is too small a sample size to draw comprehensive conclusions about the local business environment, the information provides good input to start building our local understanding, serves as an indicator of some business concerns and a basis for directions the EDC can pursue.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

95% of the businesses that responded to the City of Homer's Business Retention & Expansion survey are locally owned and operated, with 80.4% located within City limits. While the EDC outreached to all business-license holders, and received feedback from 14 major industry types, 43% of respondents came from within the retail, tourism and arts & entertainment sectors. Some businesses reported they work across a couple industry categories.

Report Summarized in 4 KEY AREAS:



88% of survey respondents originally started their business in Homer. Quality of life and proximity to home were listed as the primary reasons for 54% of respondents starting or keeping their business in Homers. Homer's recreational and entertainment opportunities were named by 29% of respondents, followed by quality of schools and to be near extended family each at 11%. The majority of respondents started and continue their businesses in Homer because they are attracted here as a place to live.

Only 12% of respondents said they moved their already established business to Homer - on average 17 years ago and for many of the same reasons businesses started up in Homer, quality of life.

Of the businesses responding, 75% utilize help to operate their business, primarily employees on payroll and casual laborers. The vast majority of employers report hiring one to three full-time, part-time and/or seasonal employees.

Overall, 65% of respondents rated Homer as either a good or excellent place to do business. 91% rated Homer as either a good or excellent place to live.

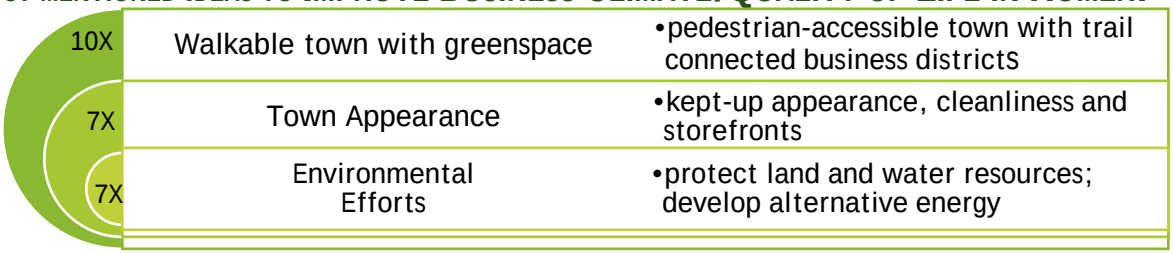
Survey responses indicate increasing businesses activity overall. When asked to gauge change over the past three years, half the respondents reported increased numbers of customers and total revenues, with a quarter reporting no change and 18% reporting decreases. 40% reported an increase in profits in those three years. Businesses also reported a very slight increase overall in the number of employees in those three years.

Workforce issues emerged as a challenge for most businesses. 83% of businesses utilizing labor reported recruitment challenges, with poor work attitudes and inadequate labor skills cited most frequently. While fewer survey-takers reported retention challenges (53%), the highest ranking retention challenge matches recruitment challenge: poor work attitudes among labor force. Many of the employers responding to the survey indicated a need for a larger pool of better trained and more highly skilled local workforce and cited difficulty in finding and hiring professionals with highly specialized skills.

The EDC also wanted to hear business owner thoughts on what contributes positively to Homer's business climate, and other factors that impact local business retention and expansion. Although the BR&E survey respondents are only a small representation of the entire Homer-area business community, responses to several open-ended questions provide some insight into areas that the City and other government and business organizations might want to address as a starting place to improve business and economic development through the community.

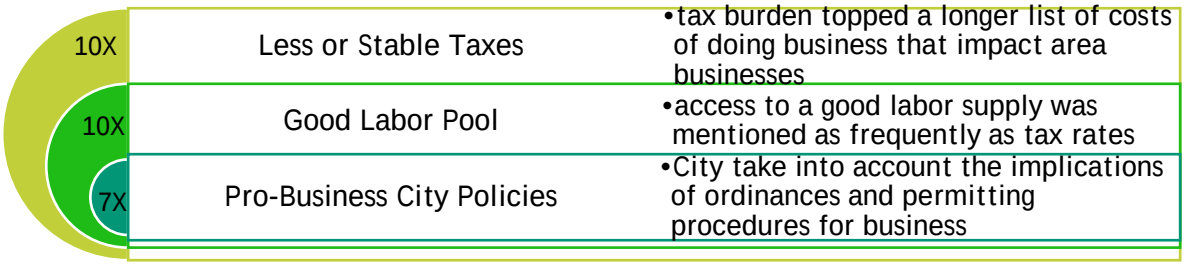
The Commission based broad take-away themes on the assumption that the more frequently an answer came up, the more value it had to this group of respondents. Themes from these open-ended question responses are summarized on the following page. Less frequent responses and insights gained during interviews were also included in the EDC's discussions, leading to an initial list of topics the EDC proposes to begin their work to address business retention and expansion concerns.

Most mentioned Ideas to Improve Business Climate/Quality of Life in Homer:



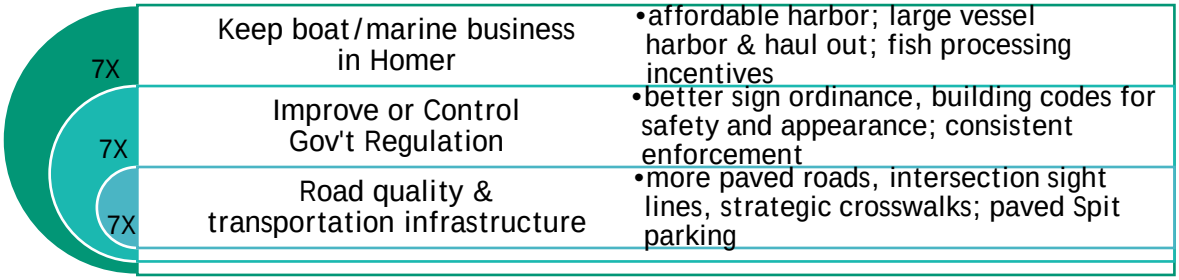
Walkable town with greenspace	•pedestrian-accessible town with trail connected business districts
Town Appearance	•kept-up appearance, cleanliness and storefronts
Environmental Efforts	•protect land and water resources; develop alternative energy

Most mentioned Ideas to make it easier to expand or keep business in Homer:



Less or Stable Taxes	•tax burden topped a longer list of costs of doing business that impact area businesses
Good Labor Pool	•access to a good labor supply was mentioned as frequently as tax rates
Pro-Business City Policies	•City take into account the implications of ordinances and permitting procedures for business

Most mentioned suggestions for City of Homer Infrastructure & Services:



Keep boat/marine business in Homer	•affordable harbor; large vessel harbor & haul out; fish processing incentives
Improve or Control Gov't Regulation	•better sign ordinance, building codes for safety and appearance; consistent enforcement
Road quality & transportation infrastructure	•more paved roads, intersection sight lines, strategic crosswalks; paved Spit parking

EDC Proposed Action Items

Local business concerns the EDC proposes to work on in short-term:

- ✓ Clarify specific City regulatory barriers in the areas of zoning options and the permit process, sign ordinance (particularly in regard to several businesses co-located in one building) and lease policy and procedure -- while keeping safety, town appearance and quality of life elements in the balance;
- ✓ Explore public-private partnership to create a master plan for a more vibrant, connected central commercial district with attention to appearance, trail connections, way-finding, arts, wi-fi zone, etc.
- ✓ Support efforts to develop large vessel haul-out;
- ✓ Share survey results with other organizations/government units engaged more directly in the issues as a catalyst for solutions;
- ✓ Educate ourselves and others about the actual scope of City government reach in the various challenges brought out by the survey and connect individual business owners with information about the organizations and resources available for to address concerns and for business assistance.

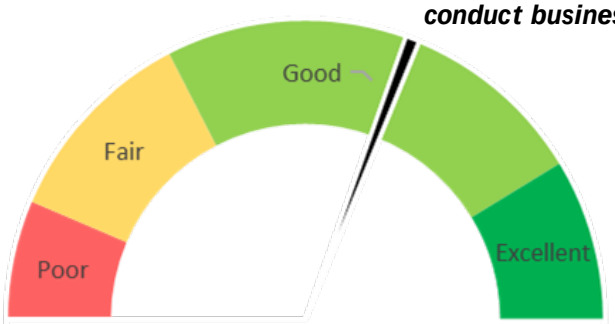
Longer-term issues that cut across many businesses and require various stakeholder involvement in both strategy development and implementation:

- ✓ Explore City participation in coordinated public-private initiatives to recruit workforce;
- ✓ Support large vessel harbor development with attention to competitive rates and multi-use Spit management.

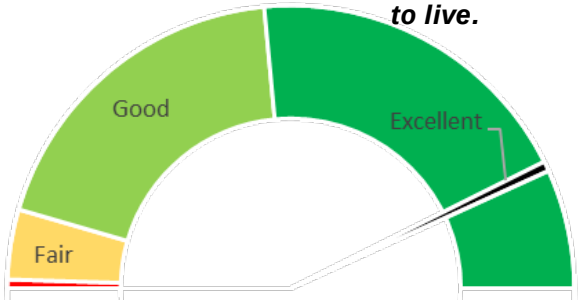
HIGHLIGHTS

SATISFACTION WITH HOMER

***65%** rated Homer as either a good or excellent place to conduct business.*



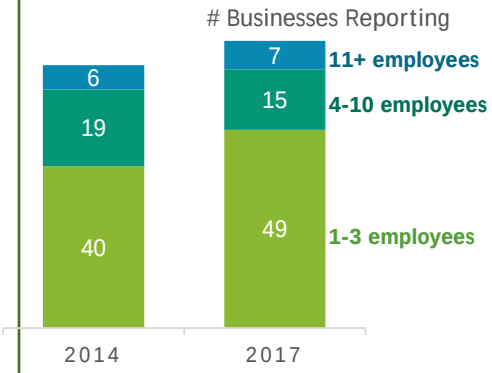
***91%** rated Homer as either an excellent or good place to live.*



WORKFORCE

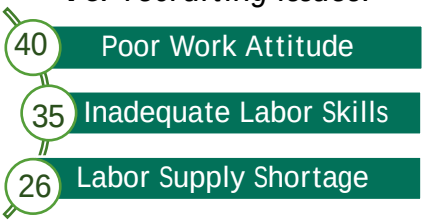
STABLE HIRING

From the data collected, hiring has been relatively stable over last three years.



***73%** reported challenges with recruiting employees for positions.*

***TOP** recruiting issues:*



LOCAL ISSUES – WHAT WE HEARD

1. **Maintaining the quality of life** elements in Homer that attract residents, especially young families as well as visitors is important to improving the business climate.

2. **Keeping the cost of doing business down**, including limiting tax burden, improving the quality of the local workforce and access to a skilled labor increase the odds that local businesses will succeed.

3. **Local government needs to have the reputation of responding to local business** needs through review of zoning, sign ordinance, and other regulations. Consistent enforcement also helps business.

4. **Infrastructure to support our economy includes an affordable harbor with expanded infrastructure to support marine industry**, including shipping, a large vessel haul-out and harbor. Road infrastructure and traffic planning is also important.

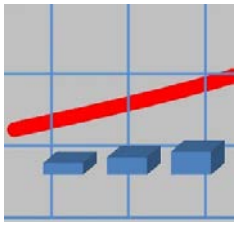
BUSINESS FORECAST

Over Past Three Years:

50% *report increases in customers and revenues*

25% *report no changes*

18% *report decreases*



40% *report increased profits*

22% considering business expansion

47% not considering changes

31% considering downsizing or selling

#1 *reason for possibly downsizing moving or closing: Retirement*

SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

BUSINESS CLIMATE / QUALITY OF LIFE CONSIDERATIONS

88% respondents originally started their business in Homer. Quality of life and proximity to home topped the chart for the primary reasons respondents started or keep their business in Homer, each being mentioned by 54% of the respondents. Homer's recreational and entertainment opportunities were named by 29% of respondents, followed next by schools and to be near extended family each at 11% of respondents.

> "I THINK HOMER HAS DONE A GREAT JOB SINCE ORGANIZING AS A COMMUNITY AFTER THE 1964 EARTHQUAKE - ONLY 53 YEARS AGO. WE HAVE LIGHTS, SCHOOLS, HOSPITAL, WATER, SEWER STREETS, TELEPHONE, INTERNET. WE ARE JUST GETTING STARTED. MAKE GOOD LONG RANGE CHOICES TO IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE. CELEBRATE AND SUPPORT THE VOLUNTEER SPIRIT THAT BUILT HOMER.

This indicates that respondents started and continue their businesses in Homer because Homer is a place they are attracted to as a place to live. 12% of respondents moved their already established business to Homer — on average 17 years ago — and for many of the same reasons businesses started up in Homer, related to quality of life.

Correspondingly, the top three recommendations to improve business climate/quality of life in Homer were accessible, walkable town with greenspace, town appearance and environmental efforts to protect land & water resources, keep clean air and views and to promote alternative energy options.

Pioneer Avenue has been the focus of revitalization efforts recently, and it was mentioned several times in the survey with suggestions to make it a more vibrant commercial zone through appearance, better walkability with connections to other business districts in Homer, and curb cuts that are aligned with business parking lots. The EDC will explore participating in a private-public partnership to develop a master plan that strengthens Homer's central commercial districts.

A traditional business consideration such as "where my customers are" was only mentioned by 9% of the respondents; cost of doing business, workforce availability and access to business support services were only mentioned on average 4% of the time. This points to some of the challenges of doing business in Homer.

Factors That Would Make it Easier For You To Keep or Expand Your Business In Homer

When asked what would make it easier for businesses to stay in Homer or expand, the costs of doing business and improvements to the labor pool topped the list of responses. Local workforce challenges are detailed on page 7. In looking at the costs of doing business, lowered or at least stable sales tax was mentioned most often. Tax burden concerns included keeping Homer goods and services competitive in light of no sales tax in Anchorage, and the uncertainty around the potential for new taxes proposed by the Borough and/or the State. Other respondents advocated for a bed or seasonal tax to take some tax pressure off local residents, with another advocating for a bed tax for funds to expand marketing and visitor services here.

Other affordability concerns included energy and utilities, materials shipping, commercial lease/rental rates and childcare costs. Labor costs were also mentioned as a business expansion challenge by some respondents, specifically the challenge of keeping up with health care costs and wage rates necessary due to a lack of affordable housing, affordable childcare options and high cost of goods and services.

Making the 'regulatory environment' more conducive for business establishment and/or expansion ranked third in the responses. A variety of City regulations were referenced by respondents. Many mentioned zoning limitations--particularly that Homer would benefit from expanding the General Commercial 1 (GC1) District to support manufacturing or retail trade businesses requiring a larger footprint. One respondent suggested that the lack of available commercial real estate keeps commercial property values artificially high; another pointed out that tax revenues would increase with expanded commercial property.

Signage was mentioned by several respondents. Some are dissatisfied with the City's sign regulations as it contributes to difficulty in marketing their business and they in turn advocated for less restrictions in their responses. An equal number of respondents advocated for stricter enforcement of the current sign ordinance as it relates to town appearance. Other comments more generically pointed to making City codes, policies and procedures and customer service more businesses-friendly, with specific efforts to minimize red tape.

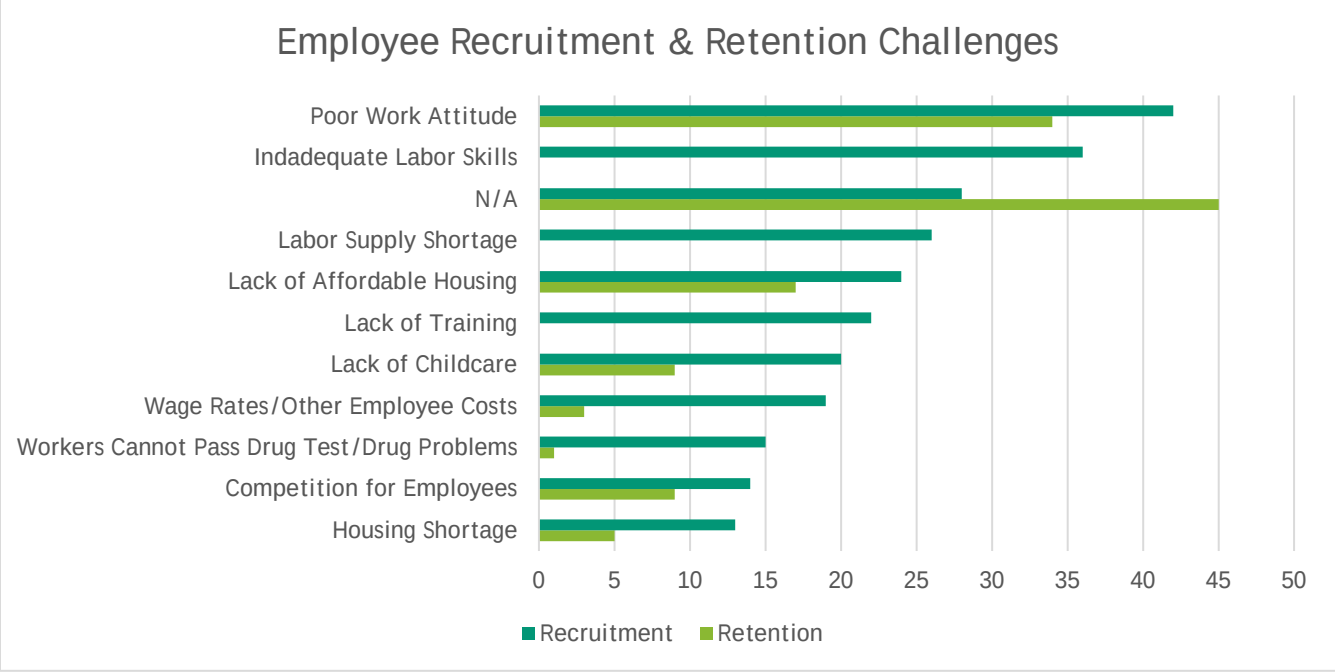
As a result, the EDC proposes to conduct follow-up research to clarify City regulatory barriers and work with other advisory commissions and City staff on concerns cited by respondents. Areas of inquiry will include zoning options and the permit process, sign ordinance (particularly in regard to several businesses co-located in one building) and lease policy and procedure — while keeping safety, town appearance and quality of life elements in the balance. These areas were moderately expressed as a concern and could become more of a concern in future years as Homer's business community continues to grow.

Survey-takers said that increasing Homer's year-round consumer base was important for the long-term health of the community and business retention and expansion. Responses suggested that the community, the workforce, and business development and succession would benefit from a larger year-round resident population with more young families and professionals. Several businesses also mentioned that more visitors in Homer in the slower shoulder and winter seasons would create the ability to expand into more year-round business.

One of the EDC's longer-term recommendations is exploring how the City might participate in a coordinated public-private workforce recruitment initiative, perhaps as part of a general workforce development effort within the community and across the region.

WORKFORCE

73% of the businesses utilizing labor reported recruitment challenges. Many businesses reported problems recruiting qualified employees from the Homer area and difficulty attracting specialized, skilled employees from outside the area. The most cited recruitment challenges included applicants' poor work attitude and not meeting necessary qualifications. Other challenges cited include the area's limited labor pool, and the gap between local wages and the costs of living. A larger supply of better trained workers was also one of the two top responses to the survey question asking what factors would make it easier for respondents to keep or expand business interests in Homer.



While fewer survey-takers reported retention challenges, the highest ranking retention challenge is similar: poor work attitudes among the labor force. While some comments pointed to structural challenges to retention like seasonality of commerce and an abundance of non-career jobs in Homer, most cited a need for a larger pool of better trained, more skilled local workers and employees more committed to training and advancing their skills once on the job.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES: WORKFORCE EDUCATION

- Better life skills/character building lessons taught by parents and schools
- Stronger partnerships among city, borough and state governments, private sector and schools to provide career education/work skills development opportunities and challenge Homer's youth to higher achievement.

> "
>
> THERE COULD BE BETTER CAREER TRAINING IN HOMER TO FILL ENTRY LEVEL POSITIONS IN TOWN WITH LOCALS WHO WANT TO LIVE AND MATURE HERE.

One proposed EDC action item is to explore City participation in a coordinated public-private initiative to recruit a skilled workforce; another is to share information about local vocational training initiatives, and to share information with the high school, community college, Borough and State regarding the need for programs to address local workforce development needs.

A shortage in labor supply ranked as the third highest recruitment challenge. Looking ahead, Homer's aging population is likely to add to the labor supply challenges. Alaska's senior population growth rate is one of the fastest in the nation: the number of Alaskans age 65 or older more than doubled between 2000 and 2016. (Alaska Economic Trends Dec 2017). On the Kenai Peninsula specifically, population projections to 2042 show a decrease in the Borough's economically active population, from the current 60% to 52% of all residents, even as the total number of residents will increase slightly. (KPB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2016 p14.)

Additionally, population projections provided by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development suggest that in coming decades' population growth on the Kenai Peninsula will be fueled more by net migration (people moving to and from the area) than by natural increases (birth and death rates). "Over time, the Borough's workforce will increasingly rely on work-age individuals relocating to the region rather than births, putting an additional pressure on a small labor market." (KPB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2016 p13.)

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FOCUS ON INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROGRAMS THAT ATTRACT EDUCATED YOUNG FAMILIES WITH SKILLS TO THE COMMUNITY.

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AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND CHILDCARE

Suggested Strategies: Recruitment

- Attract more young professionals and year-round residents with high quality of life, accessible healthcare, and recreational activities
- Lower cost of living; availability of affordable housing and childcare
- Affordable health care
- Ensure internet connectivity to allow for remote work from Homer

Employee Training

Many of the respondents indicated that they provide training to employees to augment skills in some areas. 86% of respondents perform in-house or on-the-job training (86%). 20% of respondents conduct employee training through self-taught instruction utilizing manuals/videos, etc., 13% send employees to workshops, 11% take advantage of distance learning, and 7% utilize apprenticeships. 6% mentioned contracting with private or public vendors like the college as part of their employee training program.

Only 25% of respondents indicated that their business would benefit from local training opportunities. Top priorities included general workforce development and training in vocational-technical fields.

Suggested Types of Employee Training Needed

- Workforce development in vocational-technical fields such as marine trades, industrial sewing, etc.
- Basic computer, computer specialties and networking
- General job readiness/social/ life skills such as parenting classes, customer service, basic computer, cash handling, accountability and work ethics
- Help with how a business can conduct mentorships / job training apprenticeship program
- Food safety
- Master gardener classes

City Services and Infrastructure

The City provides infrastructure and associated services in support of the business community. The survey asked what specific City services would improve business operations. One of the common suggestions was to keep boat and marine industry business in Homer. These comments recognize Homer's Port and Harbor as an economic asset with the potential for it to play a bigger role in supporting marine and commercial fishing industry. Comments addressed both the desire to support expanded infrastructure (large vessel haul out and large vessel harbor), and the need to keep rates competitive.

The other most common infrastructure responses mentioned roads and other transportation infrastructure. These included paving more roads and paving parking lots on the Spit; maintenance for clear lines of sight at intersections, and addition of crosswalks and street lights where needed. Some comments also stressed the importance for City leaders to carefully consider traffic patterns for safe and efficient flow as they look to develop facilities or zone for future development.

The third most common category of comments, again, regarded City codes. Many commented that the City should take steps to improve town appearance, encourage good building practices and building safety. Zoning and sign code inadequacies were mentioned as well. Some were dissatisfied with the sign ordinance, while others supported increased enforcement, citing town appearance concerns.

Suggested Strategies:

- Address zoning limitations
- Ensure strong City leadership for long-term planning and management of infrastructure (streets, traffic flow, drainage)
- Clean up and improve the town appearance and provide an accessible and walkable town with greenspace
- Promote efforts that improve and protect the local natural environment

> "IT'S ALL ABOUT ZONING FOR YOUNG AND NEW BUSINESSES…THE CITY SHOULD ATTEMPT TO EXPAND REVENUE… BY EXPANDING COMMERCIAL ZONING…AND CREATING NEW COMMERCIAL SPACES.

A few comments encouraged the City (and other large businesses like hospital, hotels, etc.) to prioritize buying local and using local services. Increasing local purchases by businesses is a common strategy to strengthen the economy. 41% of survey participants reported that they purchased "a little" (from 1-39%) of their supplies, raw materials and services within Homer; only 27% said they purchased most (80-100%) of their supplies locally.

Price and availability were the overwhelming factors that influenced where surveyed businesses made their purchases. Shipping costs and local taxes make it challenging for local price competitiveness, especially given tax-free and at times free shipping by major online retailers.

Other comments encouraged City leadership to look at ways to get freight moving across Homer docks to decrease shipping costs, as well as developing incentives that welcomed and nurtured industry and manufacturing.

The EDC's second long-term goal will be to look for ways it can play a role in supporting the large vessel harbor expansion, with attention to competitive rates and multi-use Spit management.

Borough and State Services

When asked what specific Borough and State services would improve business operations, answers varied widely.

Several mentioned access to business capital through small business loans, grants or other investments in assisting business start-ups.

Supporting the school district and university system was also mentioned.

Legislative action is another factor that affects businesses. Several participating businesses anticipate legislative changes will impact their current business operation — responses focused largely on finding a sustainable solution to the State's fiscal crisis. While participants did not all agree on the exact actions to reach a solution, many did agree that not finding a solution will negatively impact their current business operation.

"

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE SCHOOLS WOULD IMPROVE LIFE IN HOMER AND IMPROVE OUR BUSINESS.

THE SCHOOL BUS SYSTEM IS A MAJOR CONCERN TO PARENTS WHO ARE EMPLOYEES.

INCREASE SMALL BUSINESS LOANS AND GRANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR START UPS.

Private Sector Services Needed

Suggestions included warehousing and other services to support regular shipping to Homer; large vessel haul-out; IT support services; large general merchandise/grocery store and a conference or convention/hotel facility.

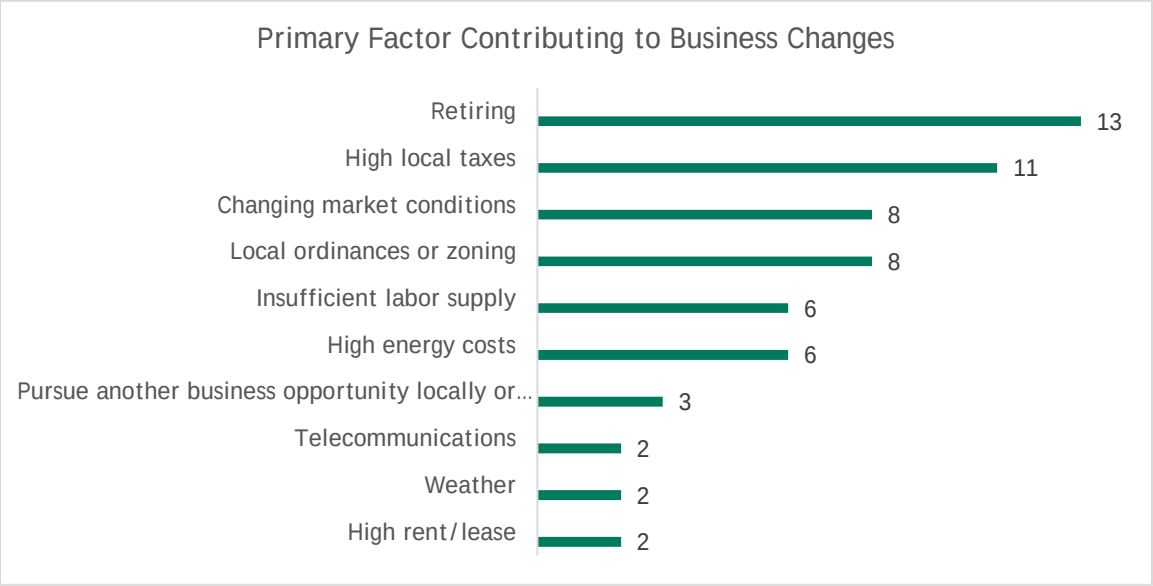
Business Outlook

Survey responses indicate that businesses activity has been increasing. When asked to gauge change over the past three years, half the respondents reported increased total revenues and numbers of customers, while only a quarter reported no change and 18% reported decreases. 40% reported an increase in profits in those three years, with only a very slight increases reported overall in number of employees.

The EDC recognizes that the last three years coincide with the State's dramatic economic downturn. From a local economic perspective, it is encouraging that half the reported increased customers and revenues. This perhaps is a positive result of Homer's relatively diverse economy.

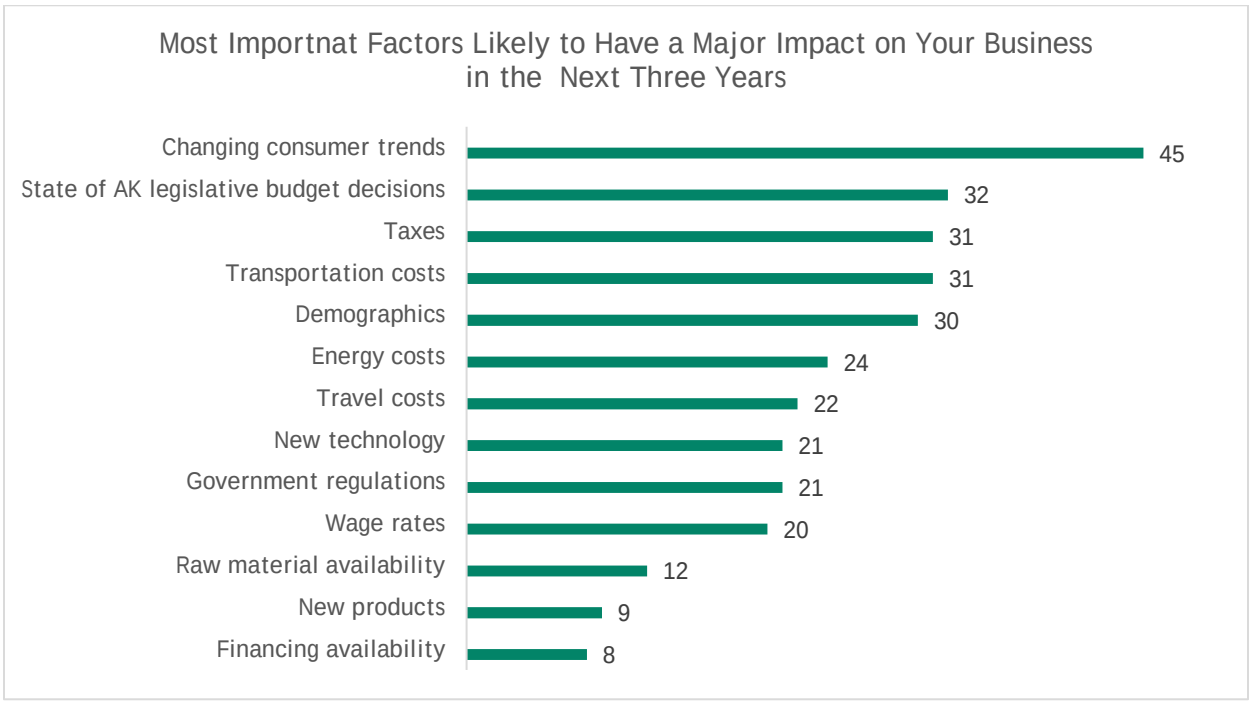
93 survey takers responded to whether they are currently considering changes to their business:

Another positive signal is that 38% of businesses participating are not considering changes with another 18% considering expansion. 44% are considering downsizing, closing or selling, though, which is a concern. The following were listed as contributing factors:



Retirement is the most frequently mentioned reason for closing a business. High taxes ranked second.

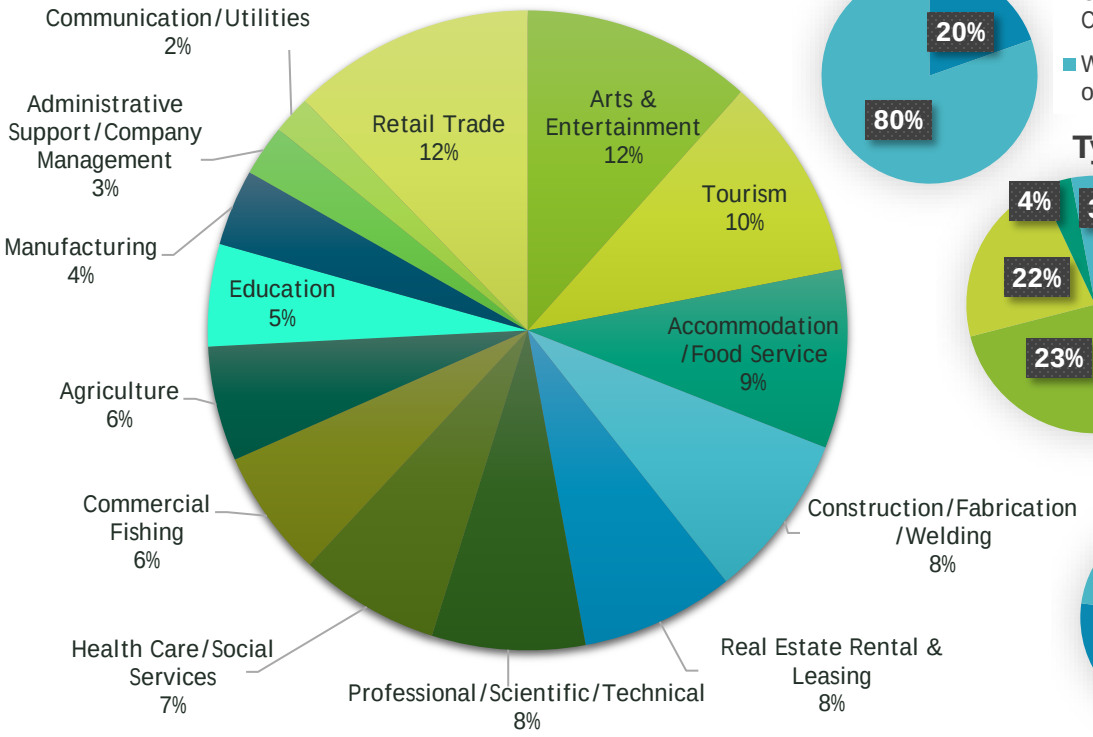
When asked the most important factors likely to have a major impact on your business in the next three years, 104 survey takers responded:

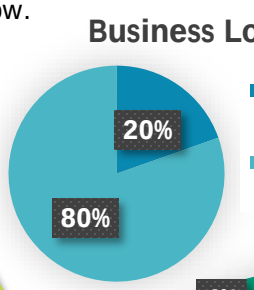


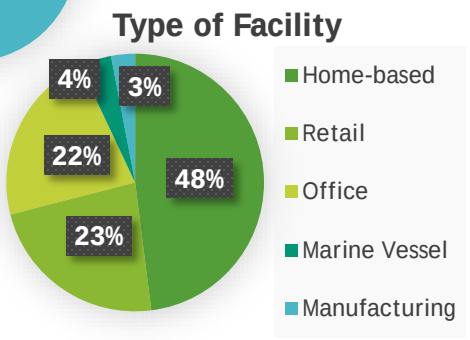
Changing consumer trends outpaced all the other factors, followed by the uncertainty of State budget decisions in its potential to impact future business.

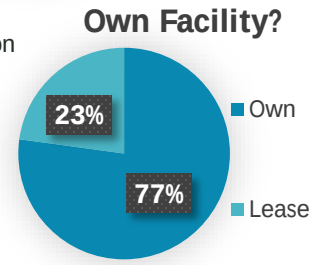
BUSINESS DEMOGRAPHICS

95% of the businesses that responded to the survey are locally owned and operated, with 80.4% located within City limits. The diversity among industry types is displayed below.

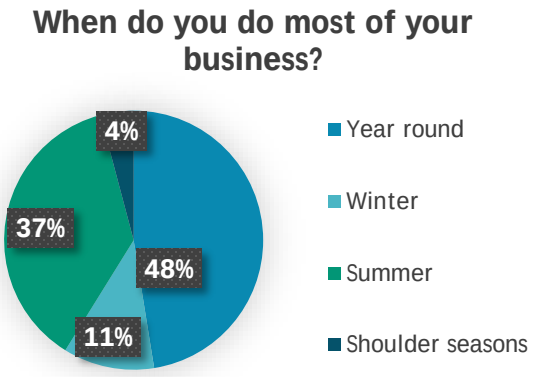


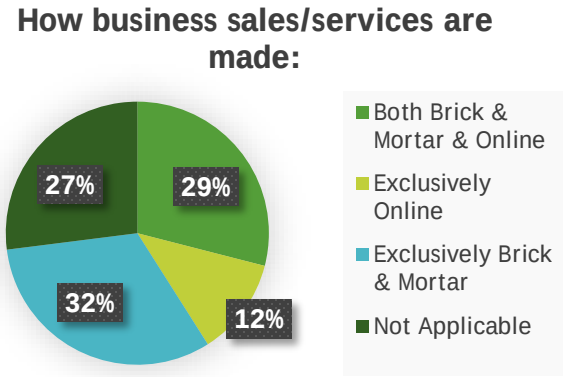






While the majority of respondents came from within the retail, tourism and arts & entertainment sectors, the survey successfully reached participants from many sectors. Some businesses reported they work across a couple industry categories, leading to 181 industries listed. For instance, a business that is in the Arts & Entertainment category may also sell retail goods or provide a separate but related service such as accommodation.

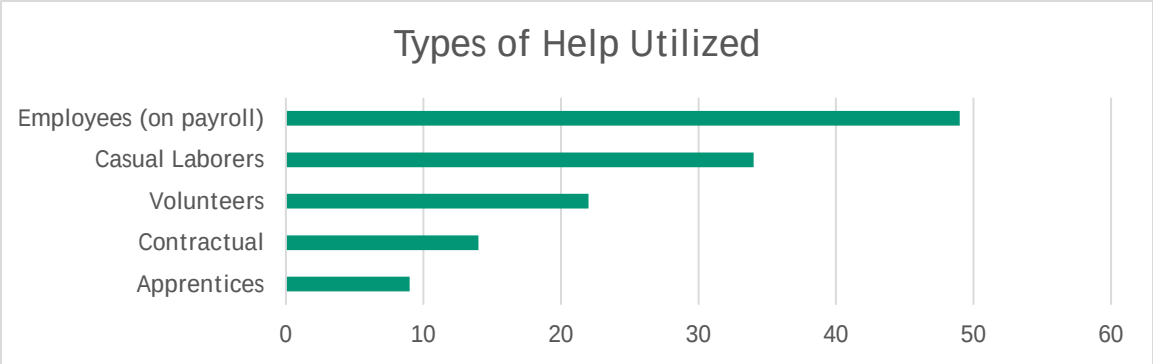




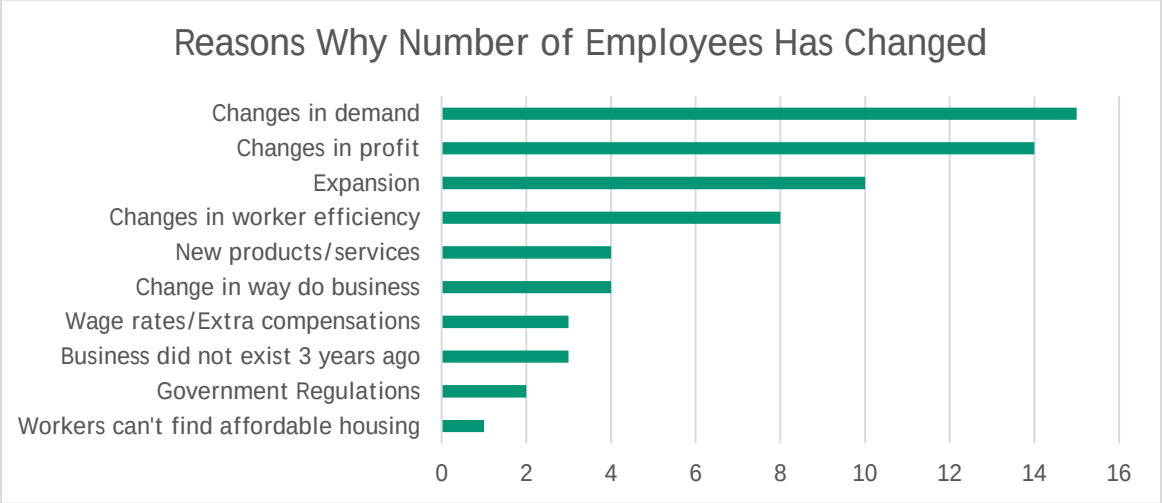
The average responding business has been operating for 24 years. The oldest establishments have been operating in Homer for just over 50 years and the newest less than 1 year. Of the businesses responding, the vast majority reported employing one to three full time, part time and/or seasonal employees. This number is consistent the predominance of small businesses in Homer.

Employment

75% of respondents said they currently or in the last three years utilized help to operate their business.



The survey shows that local businesses are generating jobs. 62% report they currently hire 1-3 full time employees; 27% hire 4-10 full time employees and 9% have 11+ full time employees. Of the businesses that hire part time employees, 49% hire 1-3 part-time employees. When asked how the number of employees has changed over the past three years, the notable changes were that the number of businesses with 1-3 employees increased from 40 to 49 in that time while the number of businesses with 4-10 employees decreased in that time from 19 to 15.

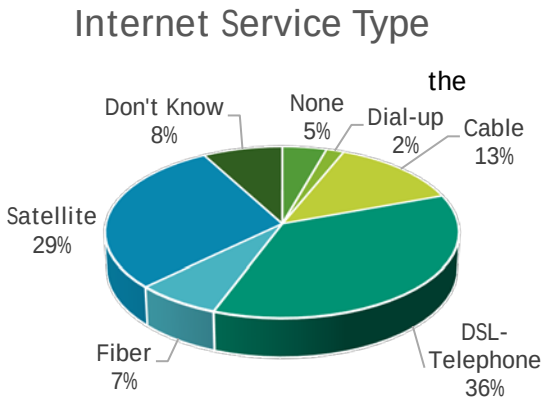


Businesses were asked to report all marketing channels used so multiple responses were recorded. 80% of participating businesses rely on word of mouth as the means to market their goods and services; digital online advertising ranked as the second most frequently used method. 73% of respondents have or advertise on social media and a business website, whether the site is specifically developed for the business or on third party websites like Trip Advisor, Craigslist and VRBO. The main reasons respondents gave for not having a website included: No need (48%), Time commitment (28%), Cost (12%), No IT support (12%). The majority of respondents (73%) shared advertising expenses with other businesses for the promotion of their business.

Internet infrastructure has often been identified as a challenging factor for economic development in Alaska. It was identified as a key economic development point, both for businesses and for schools, in the Kenai Peninsula 2016–2021 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy developed by the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District.

In the BR&E survey, 55% of respondents were satisfied with their internet access. Intermittent slow speeds and unreliable or intermittent connection were the most mentioned concerns about internet for business use. Cell phone dead zones were an issue for 46% of participants.

Only a small percentage, 7% of respondents, said they sell their products and/or services exclusively online. 25% reported sales from both a storefront and online. Businesses that participated in both were asked their percentages of sales conducted exclusively online. 36% said online sales accounted for 1-30% of sales, while another 32% said online sales accounted for anywhere from 31% to 90%.



Acknowledgments: This report is intended to assist the City of Homer Economic Development Commission (EDC) with assessing the business community and developing strategies to address current and future needs of local businesses for overall economic development in Homer. It would not be possible without the many business owners who took the time to provide their feedback. We look forward to continuing the conversation! Finally, the EDC extends a special thanks to the City of Homer for financial support of our BR&E outreach.

Appendix 1:

Business Retention & Expansion Survey Report

City of Homer Business Retention & Expansion Survey 2017

This survey will take you between 10-15 minutes to complete. Homer's Economic Development Commission hopes this survey is a start to a lasting dialog between the City and the business community. We hope that your answers will help provide a clearer understanding of the benefits and disadvantages to doing business in Homer. Through your engagement, we will work to find ways the City can promote and encourage business retention and long-term success in Homer. Thank you for your participation! The survey is open until October 6 - please share widely.

1. Where is your business located? *

- ☐ City of Homer
- ☐ Outside of the City, within the Kenai Peninsula Borough
- ☐ Other:

2. Which of the following best describes your business?

- ☐ Locally owned and operated
- ☐ Regional chain
- ☐ National chain
- ☐ Franchise
- ☐ Other:

3. What are your primary reasons for locating or keeping your business in Homer?

- ☐ Access to suppliers
- ☐ Proximity to home
- ☐ Cost of doing business
- ☐ Workforce availability
- ☐ Financial incentives
- ☐ Access to business support services
- ☐ Quality of life
- ☐ Recreation facilities/entertainment
- ☐ Quality of housing
- ☐ Safety services (police, fire)
- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Other:

4. Did your business begin its operations in Homer?

- ☐ Yes (*skip ahead to #8*)
- ☐ No (*please go to #5*)

Moving To Homer

This section is for businesses who chose to move from another location to Homer

5. Where did you move from (City, State)?

6. When did you move your business to Homer?

7. Why did you choose to move your business to Homer?

Business Description

For all businesses, please generally describe your operations

8. Which of the following industries describe your business? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Mining, Oil/Gas
- ☐ Construction
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Transportation and public utilities
- ☐ Wholesale Trade
- ☐ Retail Trade
- ☐ Finance, insurance, real estate
- ☐ Accommodation/Food Services
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Health Care Services/Social Assistance
- ☐ Professional/Scientific/Technical Services
- ☐ Other:

9. What kind of facility do you operate this business from? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Home-based
- ☐ Retail sales facility
- ☐ Office facility
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Branch
- ☐ Headquarters
- ☐ Other:

10. Do you own or lease your facility?

- ☐ Lease
- ☐ Own
- ☐ Other:

11. What are the major products or services offered by your business?

12. Over the past 3 years, sales of your major products are:

- ☐ Increasing
- ☐ Decreasing
- ☐ Stable

13. Over the last three years, have the following increased, stayed the same, or declined:

	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same	N/A
Number of customers				
Sales - Total Revenue				
Profits				
Employees - Full Time				
Employees - Part Time				
Employees - Year Round				
Employees - Seasonal				

14. When do you do most of your business?

- ☐ Summer
- ☐ Winter
- ☐ Year-round
- ☐ Other:

15. How many of your purchases for your business are made:

	Most	Some	None
Locally			
Within Alaska			
Over the internet			
Outside/Lower 48			

16. What are the major factors influencing where you make business purchases?

Marketing

17. Does your business have a website?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If no, why not?

- ☐ No internet access
- ☐ Slow internet connection
- ☐ No IT support
- ☐ Cost
- ☐ Time commitment
- ☐ Need more information
- ☐ Other:

18. What are the types of advertising you use most?

- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ TV
- ☐ Direct Mail
- ☐ Visitor's Guides
- ☐ Brochures/flyers/rack cards
- ☐ Word of mouth
- ☐ Social media (Facebook, etc)
- ☐ Other:

19. Do you share advertising expenses with other businesses for the promotion of your business area?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

20. If you don't share advertising expenses, under what circumstances would you consider advertising with other businesses?

Employment and Training

21. Identify the number of FULL TIME employees working in your business, including you and family members.

	1-3	4-10	11+	N/A
Currently				
Three years ago				
Over the internet				
Outside/Lower 48				

22. Identify the number of PART TIME employees working in your business, including you and family members.

	1-3	4-10	11+	N/A
Currently				
Three years ago				
Over the internet				
Outside/Lower 48				

23. Identify the number of SEASONAL employees working in your business, including you and family members.

	1-3	4-10	11+	N/A
Currently				
Three years ago				
Over the internet				
Outside/Lower 48				

24. If the number of employees changed from three years ago, why? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Business did not exist three year ago
- ☐ Changes in profits
- ☐ Changes in demand
- ☐ Government regulation
- ☐ Change in contracting
- ☐ Expansion
- ☐ Technology changes
- ☐ New products/services
- ☐ Changes in worker efficiency
- ☐ Other:

25. How would you rate the quality of the local labor pool as it relates to your business?

	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	I don't know/NA
General labor					
Skilled labor					
Clerical					
Sales					
Professional/management					
Temporary/contractual					
Youth employees					

26. Describe any recruitment/hiring challenges for your business.

Labor supply shortage					
Competition for employees					
Poor work attitudes					
Inadequate labor skills					
Available housing					
Affordable housing					
Lack of childcare					
Wage rates					
Workers cannot pass screening (drug, criminal, etc)					
Lack of training					

27. Do your employees require training when they are hired?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ On a case-by-case basis

28. How do you currently train your employees?

- ☐ Do not provide employee training
- ☐ Self-taught (manuals, videos, training materials)
- ☐ In-house training (one-on-one by supervisor or co-worker, etc)
- ☐ Send employees to workshops
- ☐ Contract with private vendors
- ☐ Contract with public vendors (colleges, etc)
- ☐ On-the-job training (government supported)
- ☐ Apprenticeships
- ☐ Distance learning
- ☐ Other:

29. Would your business benefit from training and outreach opportunities within your industry?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

30. Do you have any other comments or suggestions on employment and training for your business?

Technology & External Forces

31. What kind of internet service does your business use?

- ☐ None
- ☐ Dial-up
- ☐ Cable
- ☐ DSL-Telephone
- ☐ Fiber
- ☐ Satellite
- ☐ Don't Know

32. Are you satisfied with your current internet service? If NO, why not?

33. What are the most important factors likely to have a major impact on your business during the next three years?

- ☐ New products
- ☐ Changing consumer trends
- ☐ Demographics
- ☐ Government regulations
- ☐ Raw material shortages
- ☐ Energy costs
- ☐ Transportation costs
- ☐ Wage rates
- ☐ New technology
- ☐ Financing availability
- ☐ Taxes/government policies
- ☐ Travel costs
- ☐ Other:

Homer Area

34. What are the greatest advantages of operating your businesses here, as opposed to elsewhere? (For example: community features, population, etc)

35. What are the greatest disadvantages?

36. What is your overall opinion of Homer as a place to do business?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ No Response

37. What is your overall opinion of Homer as a place to live?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ No Response

38. What recommendations do you have for improving the business climate or quality of life in Homer?

39. Are there new local businesses or specific companies/services that would improve your business operations and/or profitability?

40. Do you have any other questions, comments or concerns that haven't been covered?

Contact Information (OPTIONAL)

Please provide your contact information if you would like follow-up information or if you have further questions or concerns you'd like us to contact you about!

Name:

Business Name:

Email address:

Phone:

Business website (if applicable):