

Business Survey 2002

Sponsored by

Branford Economic Development Commission
Branford Chamber of Commerce



BRANFORD



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Executive Summary

The Town of Branford's Economic Development Commission, in partnership with the Branford Chamber of Commerce, commissioned the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC) to conduct the Business Survey 2002 and prepare the analysis and report. This survey enabled the Commission and the Chamber to learn more about the business climate in Branford by identifying obstacles and opportunities for growth to better address the needs of the business community. This mail survey was carried out during the first quarter of 2002 and involved three waves of mailings to more than 1,400 businesses located in the community.

In total, 267 replies were received and validated for an overall response rate of 18%. The number of completed surveys and the industry response rate is shown in the table below.

Response Rate by Industry Sector					
Industry	# firms	% of firms	# responses	% of responses	response rate
Agric, const & mining	196	13.2%	25	9.4%	12.8%
Manufacturing	107	7.2%	17	6.4%	15.9%
Transp & utilities	57	3.8%	9	3.4%	15.8%
Wholesale & retail	391	26.4%	70	26.2%	17.9%
Finance & Insurance	109	7.3%	24	9.0%	22.0%
Services	615	41.5%	121	45.3%	19.7%
Other	8	0.5%	1	0.4%	12.5%
Total	1,483		267		18.0%

Given this response rate and the number of businesses in the community, the overall confidence level for this survey is 95 percent, plus or minus six percent.

Key Findings

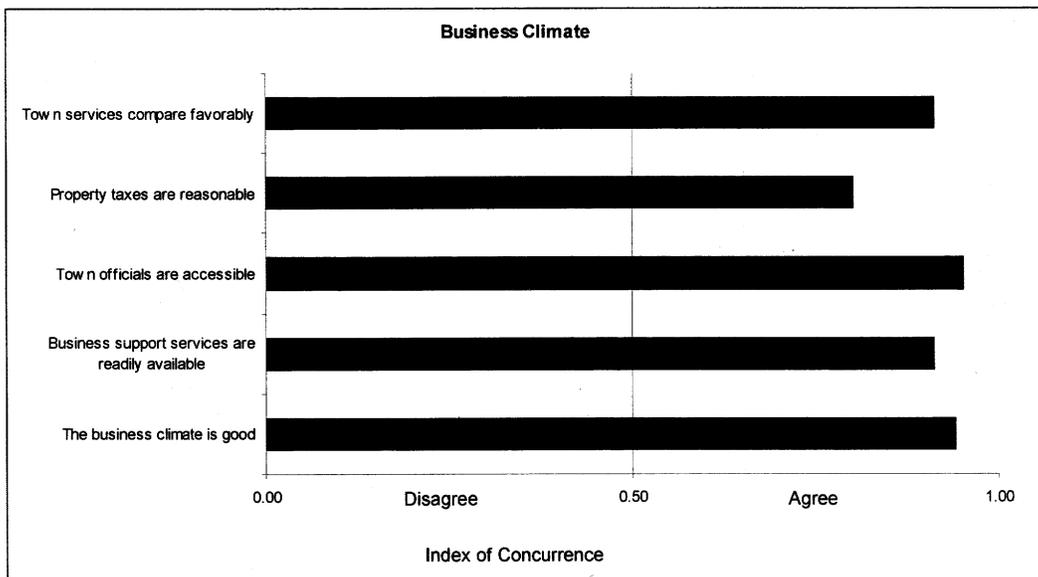
Branford: Strengths, Challenges and Business Climate

The survey included several open-ended questions, which gave respondents an opportunity to comment on numerous topics. The item that asked respondents what they liked 'most' and 'least' about Branford generated an unusually high level of comments. More than half of all respondents took the time to write in comments about the favorable attributes of the community while almost four of 10 businesses offered comments about what they least like.

A common theme underlying most of the comments reflected on the community's quality of life attributes such as --- proximity to coast; small town feeling; proximity to New Haven and New York; the green and parks; the residents; and great restaurants. In general, respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with community life in Branford.

On the flip side, numerous businesses indicated that the greatest challenge facing the community was traffic congestion-both on Route 1 as well as I-95. Other respondents mentioned over-commercialization and a skilled-workforce shortage as being problematic.

Several questions dealt with issues related to the local business climate, addressing issues such as tax rates, business support resources and the level of town services. As the chart indicates, there is a very high level of agreement or satisfaction with these elements. Even taxes, an unpopular topic in every town, are seen by most businesses as being reasonable. There was near unanimity among respondents regarding the accessibility of town officials and the overall business climate-both are critical elements in business decisions to grow in place or relocate.



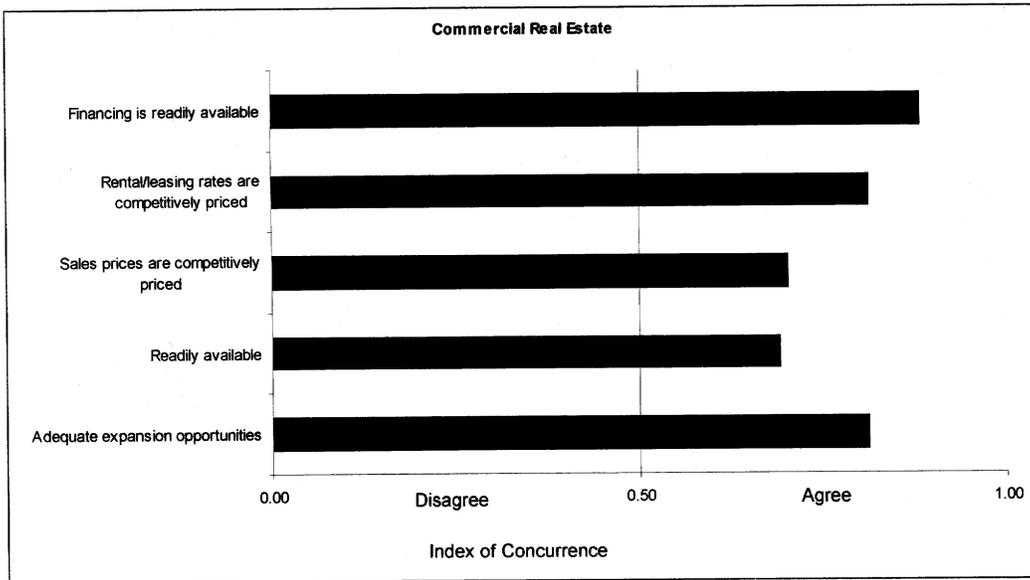
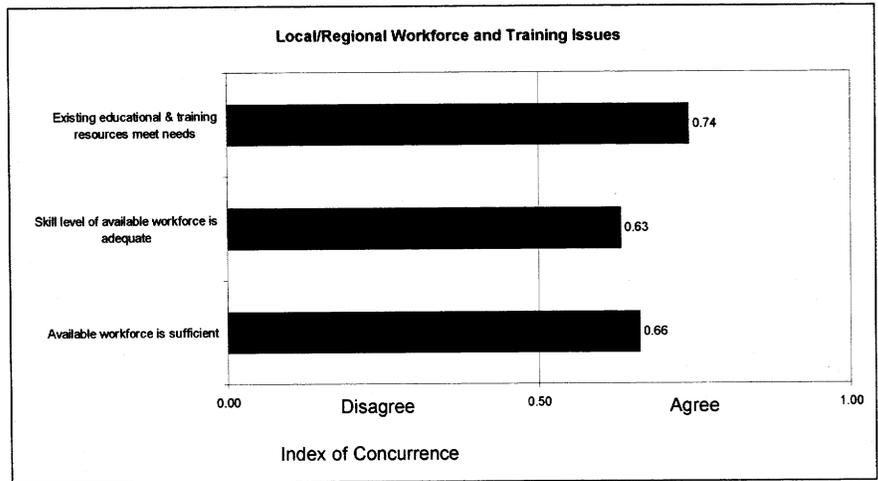
Job Growth

When asked about plans for adding jobs in 2002, one out of four businesses indicated that they planned to do hiring this year while another 36 percent indicated they were not sure. Another 37 percent replied in the negative. Altogether the 66 firms that indicated they would be adding jobs plan to hire 421 people this year with 321 being full-time or part-time while the balance would be seasonal jobs. By a 2-to-1 margin over other industry sectors, retailers were more likely to indicate that they would be adding jobs.

Based on the data from this question, one might reasonably infer that about 350 of Branford's more than 1,400 businesses will be adding jobs this year---a testament to employer confidence in the future of their business in Branford.

Workforce

The agreement index was mildly positive for the questions dealing with workforce availability, quality and training. Respondents were most likely to agree that there are sufficient training resources in the region and least likely to agree that existing skill levels are adequate for their business purposes. Overall, the differences among the three questions were slight, as shown below.

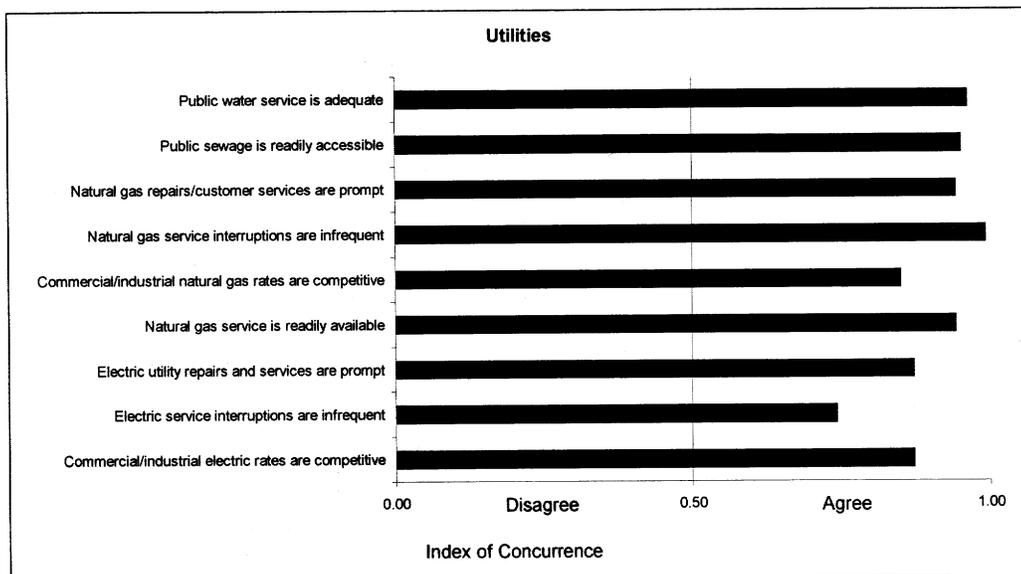


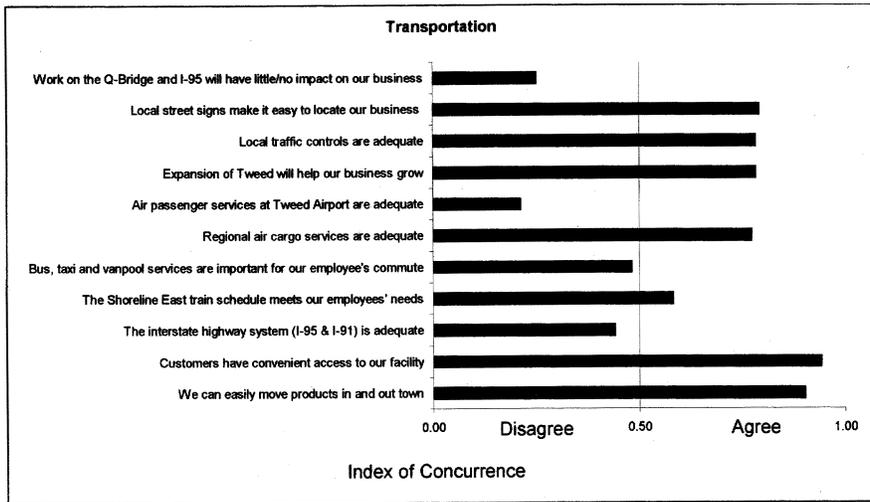
Real Estate

Several questions in the survey dealt with real estate issues--- including availability and price. The results to this set of related questions are summarized below. Among businesses responding to this question, it is apparent that the majority feels that Branford has adequate available real estate and that prices are competitive relative to surrounding communities. Lack of available real estate has been related in numerous studies to business relocation decisions.

Utilities

Overall, business respondents indicated that local electric, gas, and water services were adequate for their needs. As shown in the figure below, on average, business sentiment regarding utilities was surprisingly strong as respondents were much more likely to agree with statements about utility service and prices than not.





Transportation

In the area of transportation the findings were mixed. In terms of customer access and moving products in and out of Branford, businesses were very upbeat with agreement indices registering in the low .90s. The greatest area of concern for local businesses is the Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge (Q Bridge) renovation---almost two of three respondents indicated that this would have an impact on their business.

In the matter of Tweed Airport, businesses indicated that cargo services are adequate and that Tweed expansion would be good for business. However, on a 4-to-1 basis, respondents felt that current air passenger service was inadequate.

Conclusions

Both the Town Economic Development Commission and the Chamber should find these results encouraging. Branford businesses are upbeat about the quality of life in the community and it's small town feel. They also are confident in their own prospects as about one in four indicated that that they plan to add new employees this year.

Respondents expressed concerns that both parties need to be cognizant of. First, the issue of transportation emerges as a hot button for the business community. Traffic congestion on I-95 and Route 1 is chronic and the Town and the Chamber, in collaboration with appropriate regional and state agencies, need to be focusing on strategies to alleviate this situation.

Second, businesses are very concerned with the Q Bridge renovations---almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that this would impact their business. Finally, air passenger capacity at Tweed is rated rather low suggesting that there is local demand that the airport, in its current capacity, is unable to satisfy.

Overall, the Town of Branford has a strong business climate and is generally viewed in a positive light by local businesses. Certain issues regarding transportation deserve closer scrutiny but, at the end of the day, the community clearly has an enviable location, business climate and quality of life.

