

Recent survey paints positive picture for businesses across D-C

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COVID-19 numbers are continuing to rise while much of Ontario moves into its second wave of the pandemic, but a presentation from Dufferin County's economic development department last week showed an "optimistic" view for local business owners prior to the recent influx in cases.

During the Dufferin County Council meeting last Thursday (Oct. 8) Karisa Downey, the County's economic development officer, gave a presentation sharing the results of the COVID-19 Business Retention and Expansion survey, held through August and September. Done in collaboration with both Orangeville and Shelburne's Economic Development departments, a total of 142 business owners from 20 different sectors were interviewed. The number businesses and sectors interviewed, Downey said, "allowed us to really get an idea of how COVID-19 has impacted all of the sectors that exist within Dufferin County".

Speaking to the results of the survey, Downey added it "gave a bit of a picture of the business climate" in the county at the current moment.

In the peaks of the first wave of COVID-19, concern surrounded the number of small business that could close permanently as a result of the pandemic. The survey conducted by Dufferin County found that 1 percent of the businesses that participated had to close permanently due to the pandemic, while 64 percent of businesses never had to fully close, and 35 percent reopened through the gradual phases.

"We do know for sure that there are more than that obviously within the county," said Downey, indicating that more than one percent of businesses have closed, just that they didn't participate in the survey and so weren't included in the results.

Businesses that have generally been most impacted by COVID-19 in the community, Downey said, have been the restaurant sector as well as retail.

With fears of a Canadian, or even global recession resulting in higher unemployment and layoffs, the survey found that the 142 local businesses had a similar number of employees prior to and after the first wave of COVID-19.

"We are managing this storm pretty well," said Downey during the presentation.

While numbers of positive cases dropped in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, looking ahead into 2021, Downey said that some businesses owners were "optimistic".

"Take into consideration that these surveys were done in some cases up to a month ago at this point, and as we know things have changed significantly since then as far as COVID-19 numbers have gone," said Downey.

Prior to the second wave of COVID-19, some business owners in the survey spoke of being "uncertain", "exhausted" and "nervous", underlining the still unknown economic future.

"There's definitely still a lot of anxiety in our business community and rightfully so as we kind of go through this roller coaster of this pandemic," said Downey.