

BACKGROUND

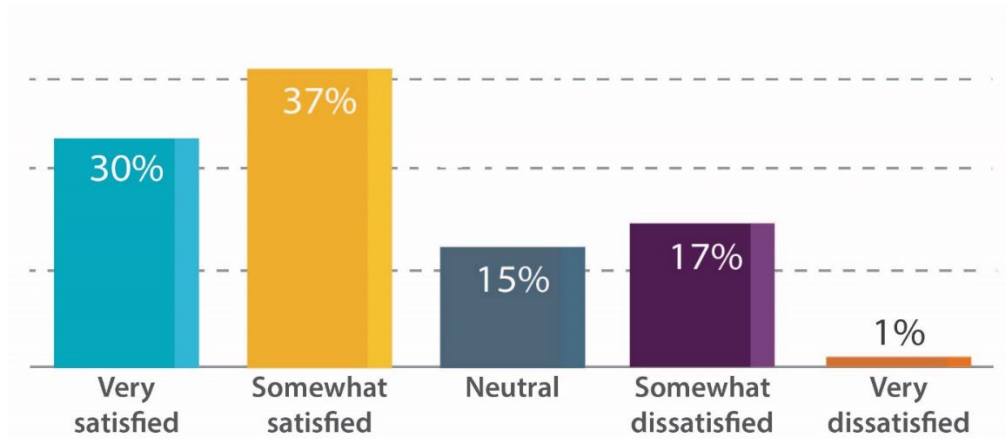
On May 15, 2023, Administration presented a draft Non-Residential Tax Incentive Bylaw for Council's consideration. As part of the resulting discussions regarding the proposed Bylaw, Council requested that Administration conduct a survey of local businesses to provide useful data and a baseline for which to evaluate the effectiveness of future economic development initiatives.

An online survey was held from May 23 to June 13, 2023. A hard copy of the survey is included in Appendix A. The survey was advertised on the Town's website and social media platforms as well as in the Westlock News. In addition, the Town's Economic Development Officer made in-person visits to all local businesses with a storefront to promote the survey. A total of 82 responses were received.

WHAT WAS SAID SUMMARY

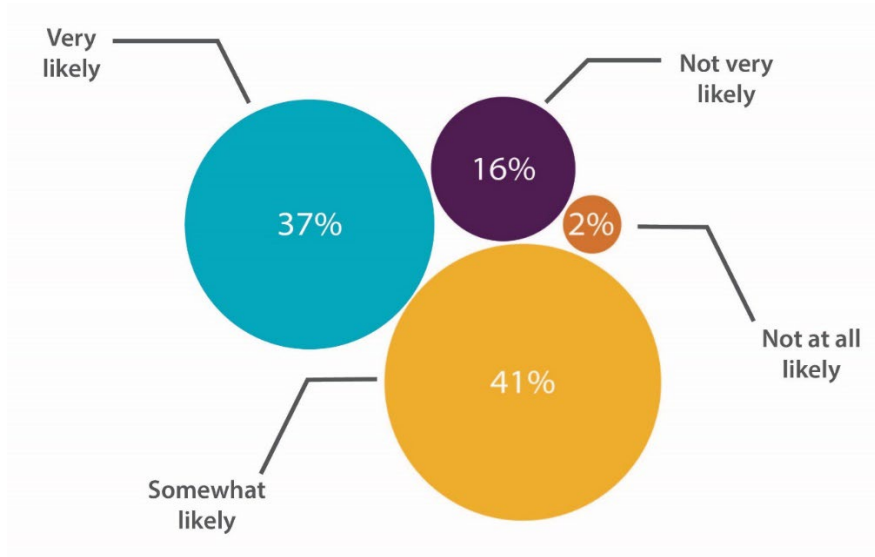
1. Overall, how satisfied are you with the Town of Westlock as a place to own and operate a business?

The majority of survey respondents were either very satisfied (30%) or somewhat satisfied (37%) with Westlock as a place to own and operate a business. 15% of respondents responded that they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with the Town as a place to do business.



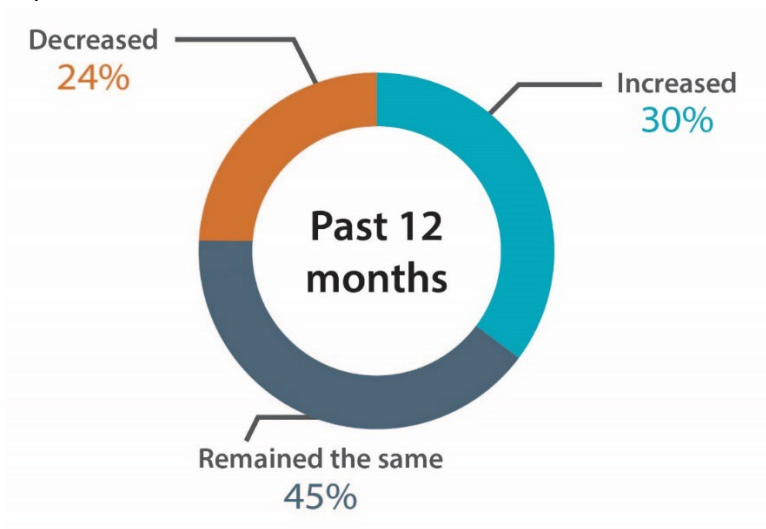
2. How likely would you be to recommend the Town of Westlock as a place to own and operate a business?

The majority of survey respondents responded that they were either very likely (37%) or somewhat likely (41%) to recommend the Town as a place to do business. The remaining 22% of respondents indicated that they were not likely to recommend Westlock as a place to own or operate a business.



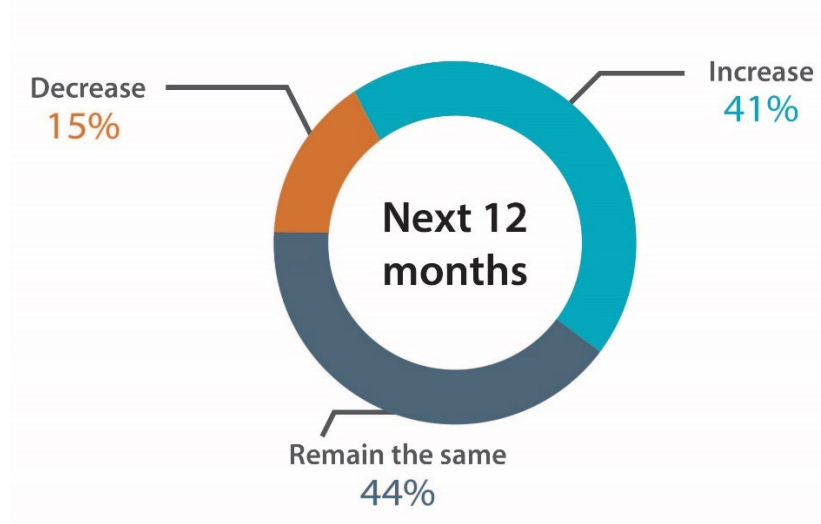
3. Over the past 12 months, would you say that the total revenue at your business has:

Most respondents (45%) reported that over the past 12 months, their total revenue had remained the same. 30% of respondents saw revenue increases over the past year, while 24% experienced decreased revenues.



4. Over the next 12 months, do you expect the total revenue at your business to:

The majority of respondents indicated that they expected their revenue to either increase (41%) or remain the same (44%). 15% of respondents forecasted a decrease in revenue.



5. What percentage of your business revenue would you say is allocated to paying for property taxes?

Of those who provided an allocation of property tax expenditure, the majority reported an expenditure of 5% or less of revenue on property taxes. 10% of all respondents reported spending over 10% of their revenue on property taxes.

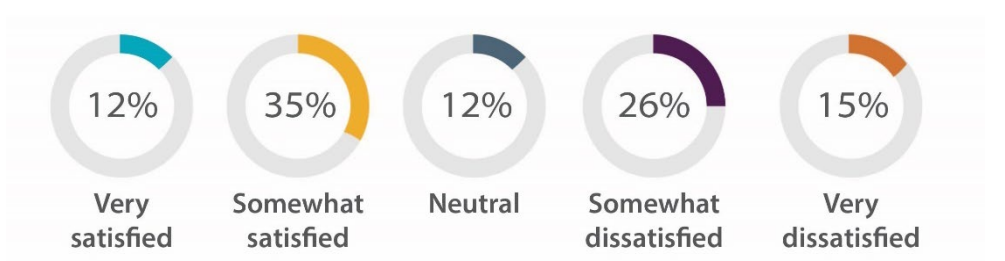


6. How satisfied are you with each of the following factors as they relate to doing business in Westlock?

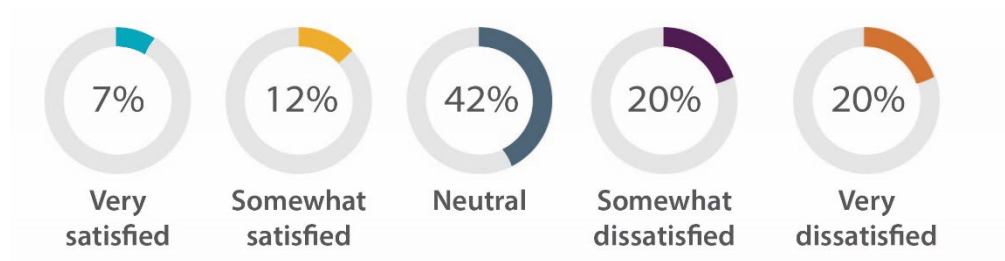
Respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with the availability of health and medical services, internet/fibre service, support from local residents and other business, the business license process and cellular phone service. Low levels of satisfaction were reported for municipal property taxes, the availability of skilled labour, and the availability of space for rent, lease or purchase. Factors that received mixed or split levels of satisfaction included local roads and streets, support from the Town of Westlock, the availability of unskilled labour and the availability of adequate housing.

The following graphs illustrate the satisfaction results for each factor:

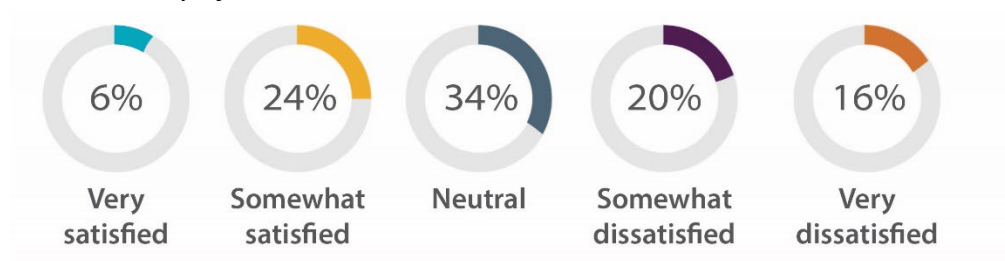
Local roads and streets



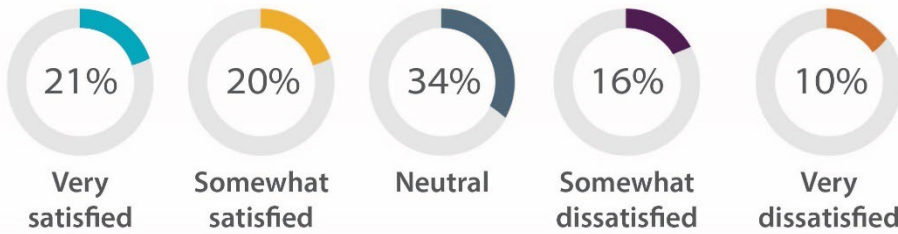
Municipal property taxes



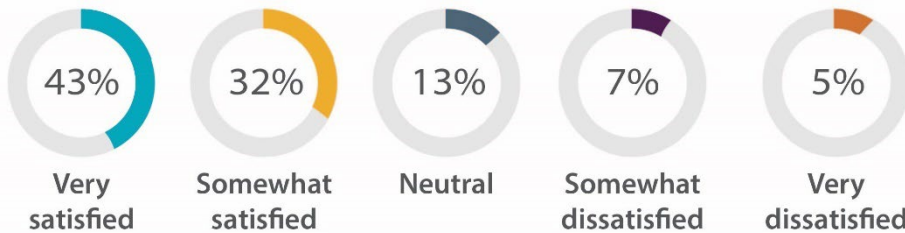
Availability of skilled labour



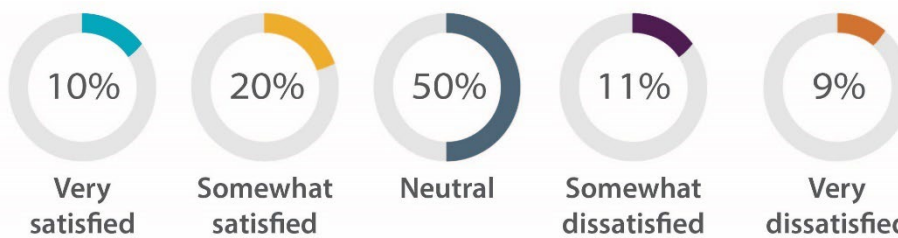
Support from the Town of Westlock



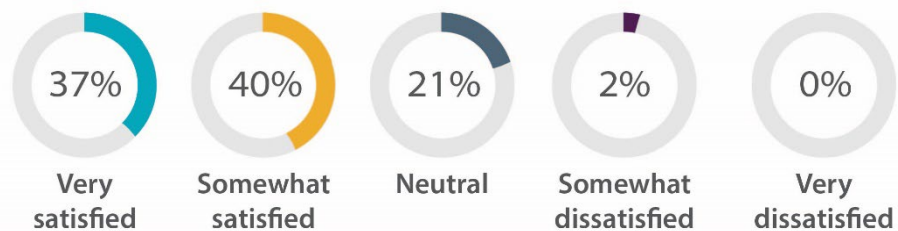
Availability of health and medical services



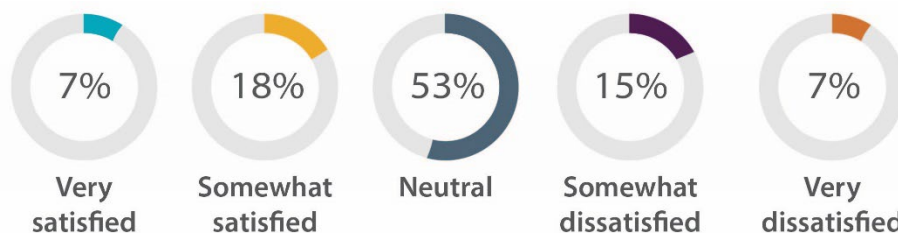
Availability of unskilled labour



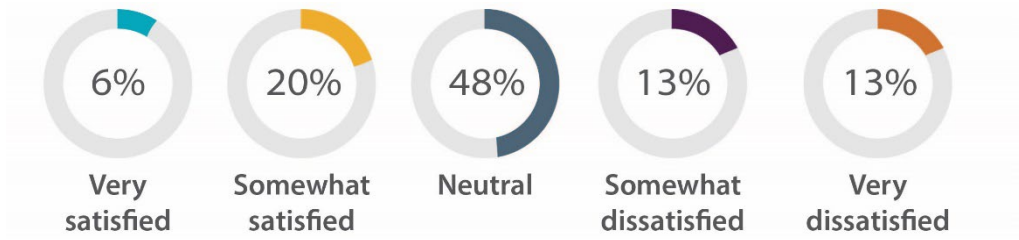
Internet/fibre service



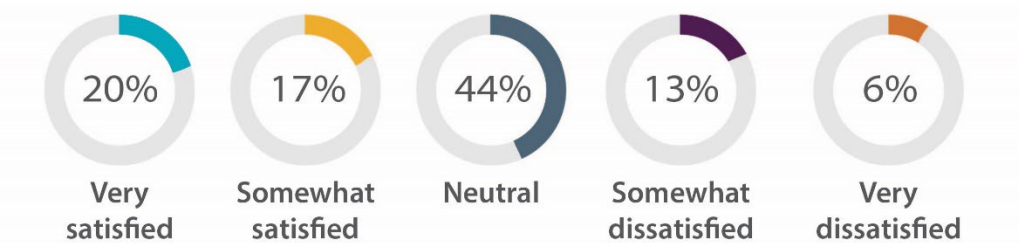
Availability of developable land



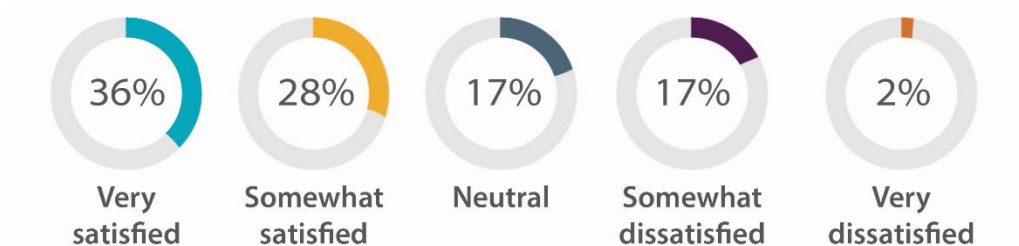
Availability of space for rent, lease or purchase



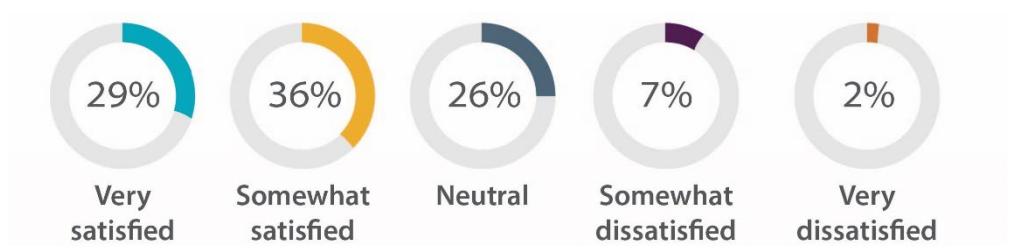
Development and building permit process



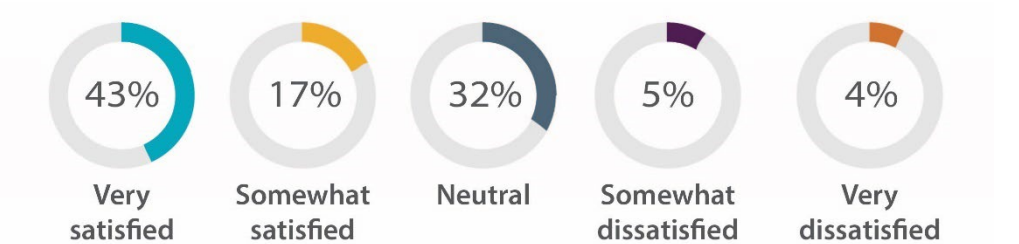
Support from local residents



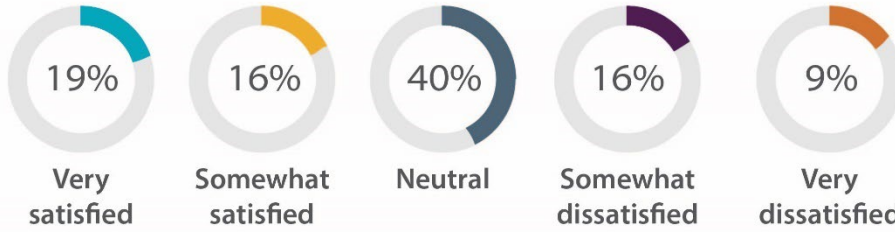
Support from other businesses



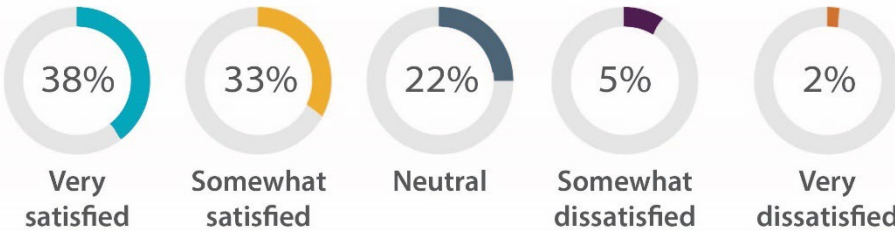
Business license process



Availability of adequate housing

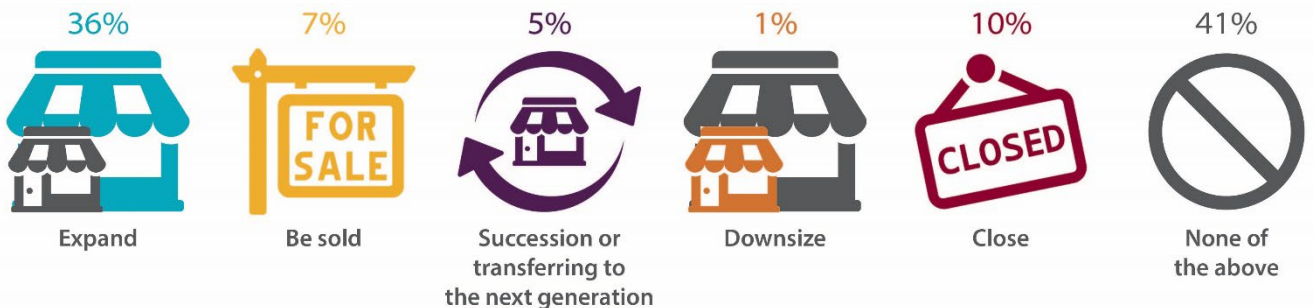


Cellular phone service



7. Which of the following will apply to your business within the coming two years? Do you anticipate your business will:

36% of respondents indicated that they expect their business to expand within the next 2 years. 41% did not foresee any changes to their business. Also notable, was 10% of respondents who saw their business closing within the next 2 years. Smaller percentages of respondents forecasted their business being sold (7%), transferring to the next generation (5%), or downsizing (1%).



8. What supports would encourage you to expand your business or start a new business?

Respondents were able to provide long-form verbatim responses to this question. A number of themes emerged from these responses, as summarized below:

**Theme 1: Property Taxes**

14 respondents mentioned high property taxes as a barrier to business expansion or creation. In particular, the tax increase following an expansion or renovation was noted as a major downside to adding investment into one's business.

**Theme 2: Streets and Infrastructure**

10 respondents mentioned that investment in infrastructure, in particular improvements to streets, was needed. Other improvements including lights, benches, trees, and accessible parking were also requested.

**Theme 3: People and Housing**

13 respondents mentioned that a major barrier to business growth in Westlock was the availability of staff, both skilled and unskilled, as well as housing for that staff. Multiple respondents recommended a push to attract people and retain young, educated people in the community through more recreation opportunities and family-focused activities. Other ideas included the addition of a post-secondary or college location in Westlock.

**Theme 4: Shop Local**

7 respondents noted that a push to shop local was needed. Some noted that there has been a trend towards online-shopping and ecommerce and that locals should be encouraged to shop within the community.

**Theme 5: Downtown Revitalization**

8 respondents noted that the current condition of Downtown was a barrier to business expansion and growth. A desire for a greater investment in the appearance of the Downtown core, as well as upgrades to derelict or vacant storefronts was expressed.

**Theme 6: Town of Westlock Support and Incentives**

27 respondents expressed the need for increased support and incentives from the Town of Westlock. Requests included improved responsiveness to inquiries, reduction of red tape and streamlined application processes, reduction to fees, more options for signage in the current bylaws, better advertisement and communication of available supports (both internal and external), property tax incentives for renovations or new construction, fiscal restraint, investment through grants and/or loans, and better communication of initiatives and bidding opportunities.

**Theme 7: Cost and Availability of Land and Rental Space**

11 respondents noted that the cost of land and rental space was a barrier to businesses. Some respondents noted that rent is expensive and there is lack of available, adequate rental space and land for development.

APPENDIX A – COPY OF SURVEY10003-106 Street, Westlock, AB T7P 2K3
(780) 349-4444 | planning@westlock.ca**TOWN OF WESTLOCK**
2023 BUSINESS SURVEY

We want to better understand the needs of our business community and discover how businesses view the Town as a place to do business. The information gathered will be used to provide guidance for developing programs and supports for local businesses.

The survey will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete and responses will be confidential.

QUESTION 1: Overall, how satisfied are you with the Town of Westlock as a place to own and operate a business?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

QUESTION 2: How likely would you be to recommend the Town of Westlock as a place to own and operate a business?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

QUESTION 3: Over the past 12 months, would you say that the total revenue at your business has:

- Increased
- Decreased
- Remained the same

QUESTION 4: Over the next 12 months, do you expect the total revenue at your business to:

- Increase
- Decrease
- Remain the same

QUESTION 5: What percentage of your business revenue would you say is allocated to paying for property taxes?

- Less than 1%
- 1% to 5%
- 5% to 10%
- Over 10%
- Don't know/prefer not to say

QUESTION 6: How satisfied are you with each of the following factors as they relate to doing business in Westlock?

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Local roads and streets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Municipal property taxes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of skilled labour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support from the Town of Westlock	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of health and medical services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of unskilled labour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet/fibre service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of developable land	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of space for rent, lease or purchase	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development and building permit process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support from local residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support from other businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business license process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of adequate housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cellular phone service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

QUESTION 7: Which of the following will apply to your business within the coming two years? Do you anticipate your business will?

- Expand
- Be sold
- Succession or transferring to the next generation
- Downsize
- Close
- None of the above

QUESTION 8: What supports would encourage you to expand your business or start a new business?

Thank-you for your participation! Don't forget to enter the draw for a free 2024 Business License Renewal!