

Town of Madison Economic Development Commission

Survey of Downtown Businesses & Owners



May 2008

David Kadamus, Chair
Peter Thomas, Vice Chair
Margaret Lyons, Secretary
James Ball, Commissioner
Ryan Duques, Commissioner
Edwin Moore, Commissioner
James Satterwhite, Commissioner

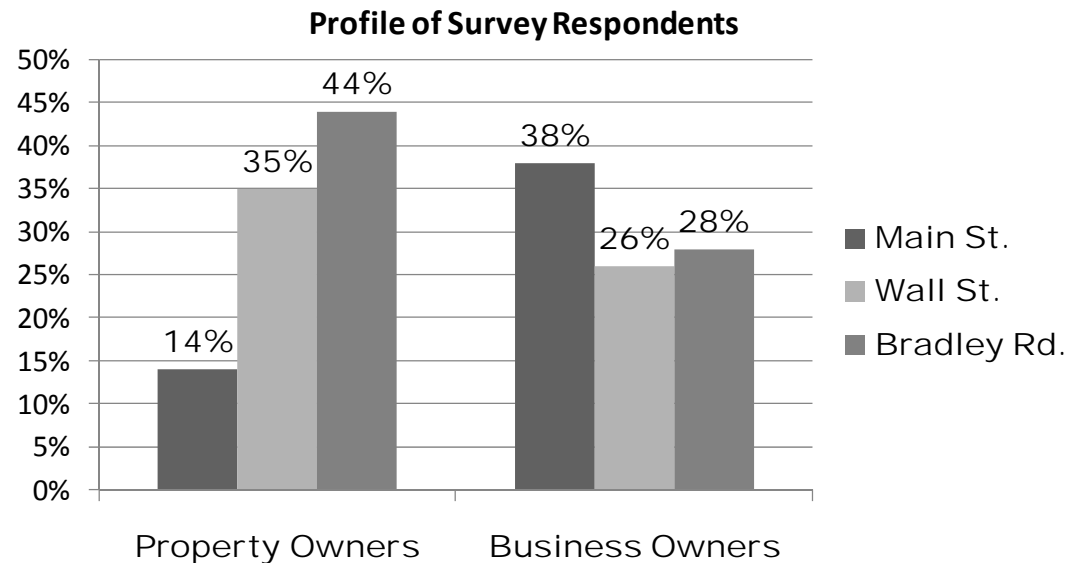


Introduction

The Town of Madison's Economic Development Commission (EDC) conducted a survey of the downtown business and property owners in order to better understand their concerns and needs in regards to the development of downtown Madison. Between December 2007 and May 2008, the EDC worked to complete this survey. To provide the technical support to define questions and to conduct the survey, the EDC retained the services of the

***University of Connecticut Center
for Survey Research & Analysis***

(CSRA). The EDC identified 172 property and business owners in the downtown area. These businesses are located on Main Street, Samson Rock Road, Wall Street, Bradley Road and Durham Road (Rt. 79). Of the 172 individuals, CSRA was able to complete personal telephone interviews with 84 of these individuals. As the chart to the right illustrates, the survey participation was strong for all of the streets that make up the downtown area.



The EDC, with support from the Town of Madison Planning & Zoning Commission, established the following goals for this survey:

- To assess their opinions on development of Downtown Madison
- To understand opinions on regulation and improvements
- To gauge plans for expansion
- To define areas of improvement



Overview of Findings

The detailed findings of the survey and the specific answers to all questions are provided in the document entitled "Town of Madison Economic Development Survey," which is on file in the Town offices, in the Scranton Memorial Library and is on the EDC web site - http://www.madisonct.org/Economic_Dev_Comm/edcreports.htm. This report by CSRA provides their summary of the findings and the specific answers to all the individual survey questions. Although there is significant information in this report, the EDC also believes that it is useful to provide a summary of the key findings as it applies to the development of the downtown area and the creation of a conceptual master plan to guide the development of the downtown area.

In summary, the EDC identified five areas that presented a clear opinion of the members of the downtown business community. These five areas were

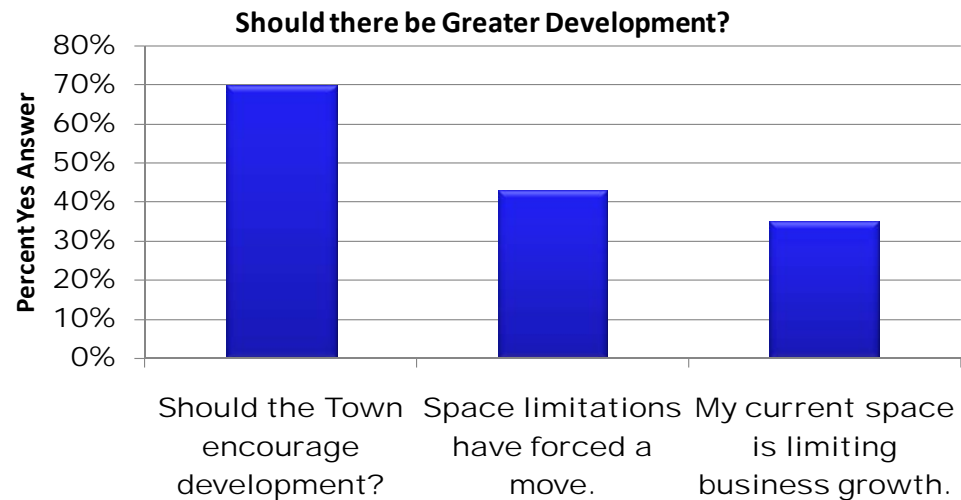
1. Yes to greater development. Of the total respondents, 70% supported greater development of the downtown area.
2. Of all the issues that limit development of the downtown area, a common waste water management system (coupled with a lack of public restrooms) was identified as the highest priority need that will improve existing businesses and spur greater growth.
3. Greater access to Tuxis Pond is seen as a benefit to businesses and the community
4. Creating a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to support and guide growth was seen as an important priority as 67% of the respondents supported this management approach.
5. The current scale and approach to buildings downtown should be continued. Of the total survey respondents, 72% stated that the current building scale (2-3 stories), a walking community, and the design pallet should be sustained. Parking remains a concern. The survey questioned if the sharing of parking is a viable option to address this concern, but the majority of respondents were clear that shared parking by regulatory mandate is not the preferred solution.



The Survey Detailed Findings

Yes to Greater Development.

Through the survey, respondents were asked a number of questions relating to downtown development and the current limitations on commercial space. As the chart illustrates, 70% of the survey's respondents supported further development in Downtown Madison. Over 40% of the respondents stated that space limitations forced a move of a business previously, and approximately 35% said that their current space is limiting the growth of their business today. The EDC believes that these answers indicate that there is a strong desire to expand businesses in Downtown Madison. Overall, 44% said there should be more businesses and 51% said there was the right amount. There was a general consistency by street – on Main Street 77%% felt that development should be encourages, 72% felt that way on Bradley Road, and 61% agreed on Wall Street.



Creation of a Common Waste Water Management System

CSRA concluded by the survey that “the availability of public restrooms and wastewater disposal tops the list of major improvements for business and property owners in Downtown Madison.” The survey indicated that there is great concern over the management of waste water and the reliability / capacity of existing septic systems in Downtown Madison. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents felt that there was a need for common waste water management and they would support connecting to a common system. In addition, **57% of the respondents said that they would pay to connect to a common system and support the waste water management system by paying annual usage fees. Only 19% said they would prefer to repair or replace their current system.**

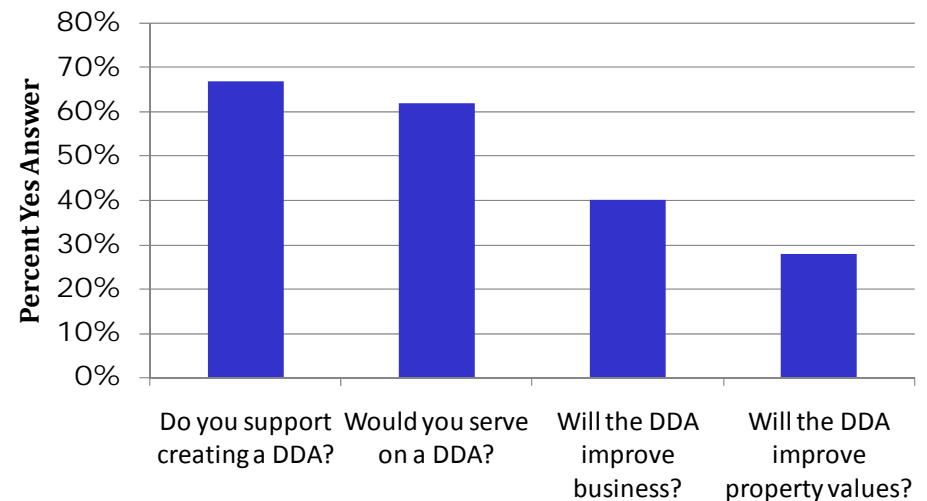
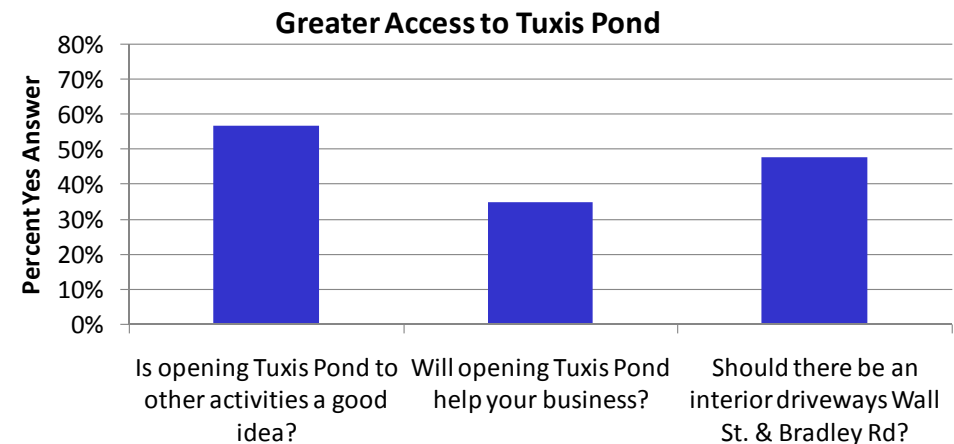


Greater Access to Tuxis Pond

The EDC planning efforts has used the incorporation of Tuxis Pond into the development of Downtown Madison, as a core planning principal. Opening Tuxis Pond to recreation, pedestrian walkways, and connecting drives has been recommended through the Bradley Road Vision Study. The survey tested this objective and the respondents agreed strongly (57%) that opening Tuxis Pond is good for Madison and the right thing to do for the Town. Additionally 48% of the respondents agreed with the concept of interior walkways and drives around the pond area. Although the greater access to Tuxis pond was strongly supported, only 35% of the respondents felt that greater access to Tuxis Pond will have a direct improvement to business. The survey had the strongest support for ice skating and water access (boating etc...), cultural events and walkways.

Creation of a Downtown Development Authority

The concept of creating a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was discussed with property and business owners. Specifically, the Bradley Road Vision Study recommends that the DDA be created. Specifically, the survey explained the DDA as follows: "The study recommended creating a Downtown





Development Authority, or DDA. It would be formed by property owners, business owners, and Town officials. A DDA would be a self regulating organization that would aid in the management of waste water, parking, signage, and promotions. The DDA could also encourage growth and enforce standards.” There was very strong support for the DDA – over 65% responding yes. Additionally over 60% of the respondents said that they would be willing to serve on a DDA. This level of support and the willingness to serve indicates strong support for the creation of a DDA. Finally, a fair number of respondents (40%) believed that a DDA would improve businesses but less than 30% of respondents felt a DDA would improve property values. The EDC interprets these answers as an indication that the business and property owners want greater involvement in the development and management of development in Downtown Madison. The role of the DDA may also be seen as a way to balance a mixed view of Planning and Zoning and ACCA (Advisory Committee on Community Appearance). The survey group in this area was far smaller and should temper any conclusion. Within this small group, the answers were approximately evenly split between satisfaction and dissatisfaction with these two agencies. In particular, only 25% of respondents felt that the design standards and regulations were consistently applied.

Retain the Scale and Architectural Profile of the Downtown Area

Most business and property owners responded that the small town charm of Madison is its greatest asset. Business and property owners were asked what qualities they most enjoyed about downtown Madison and nearly three quarters (72%) mention some variation of the small town, residential feel:

- Three in ten (31%) mention the “quaintness” or small town community feel of the town.
- About one in five (18%) mention the scale and unique architecture of downtown.
- 13% mention the walking nature of downtown.
- 5% mention unique features of the town.
- Another 5% mention the residential feel of Wall Street.

Of those that did not mention the small town atmosphere in some form, 20% mentioned the diversity of shops and services (12% mention shops, 8% mention services). When asked about which qualities they wanted to preserve with further development in Madison, more than half (56%) wanted to maintain the small town feel. Thirty six percent mentioned a desire to restrict development to preserve the quaintness of the town, and an additional 20%



would like the town to avoid heavy retail or commercial developments. There was very strong support (63%) for regulations that encouraged second or third floor residential use over first floor commercial use.

Business and property owners offered more varied opinions on what potential improvements, if any, the town requires. One-fifth (21%) mentioned a lack of parking, 15% voiced disagreement with current town regulations and practices, and 11% were not satisfied with the lack of wastewater capacity.

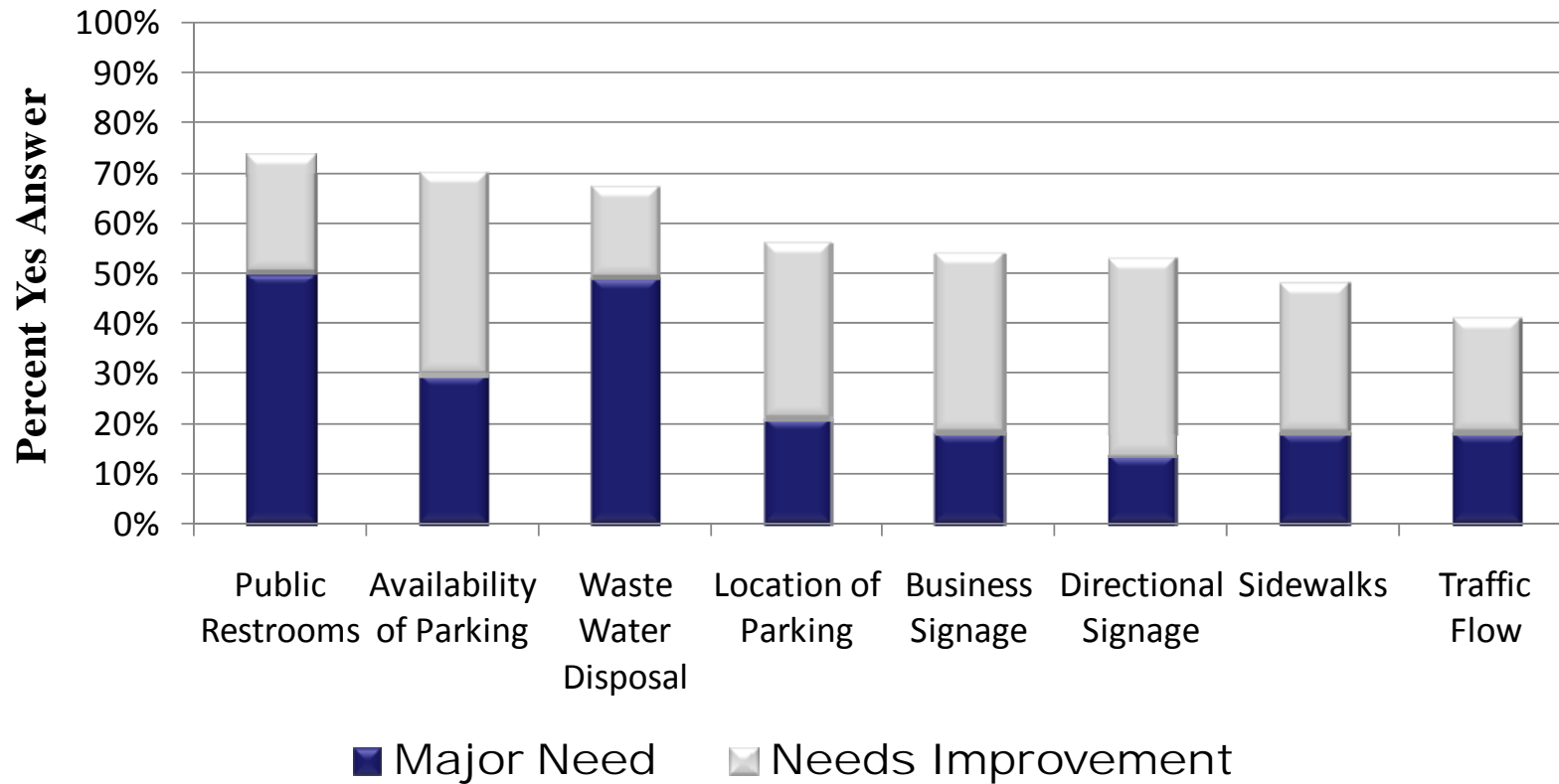
Improve Parking

The survey asked if parking, both the availability and the location were issues. The answers were divided between a “major need” and “needs improvement”. The availability of parking was an issue for 70% of the respondents – 30% saw availability as a major issue and 40% said the availability of parking needs improvement. As to the location of parking, 21% saw this as a major improvement need and 35% said it needed improvement for a total of 56%. The EDC analyzed these responses and saw that the parking issues were consistent for all of the streets.

Although parking was identified as an issue, the use of “shared parking” between property owners was not viewed as a preferred solution. The survey specifically asked if the respondents would support a regulation that would allow them to increase the commercial floor area of their building by agreeing to shared parking. Only 37% said that they would support such a regulation.

Other Issues

There were many other issues that were questioned. The following chart presents some of the other major issues that the survey detailed. Of the other issues, it was a bit surprising that only 30% felt that the new train station and parking deck would affect their business. This is understandable though as it appears that most view the train station traffic and parking as a regional issue – 45% on Bradley Road believed the new Train Station and parking deck will increase business, while only 27% on Main Street and 15% on Wall Street believed that the new Train Station and parking deck will increase business.



Concluding Comments

The EDC would like to thank the business and property owners who have participated in this survey. Their input has been very helpful to provide us with guidance as to our actions in the development of Downtown Madison. This input will now bring guidance to the creation of a conceptual master plan to guide the development of the downtown area.