



# Dufferin Business Survey Results

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April 2024

## **Introduction**

The Dufferin Board of Trade (DBOT) is a nonprofit, community-building organization dedicated to helping local businesses thrive. We focus on providing businesses with connections, promotion, cost savings, and advocacy.

Much of our advocacy works is shaped by the results learned through our Annual Business Survey. This is the sixth year for our survey and where possible we have provided comparison data from previous years' surveys. Comparisons are also made between our local data and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's (OCC) 2024 Business Confidence Survey report<sup>1</sup>.

## **The Process**

The Dufferin Business Issues Survey was conducted using the Survey Monkey platform. The survey was open from January 12<sup>th</sup> until February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and 109 responses were collected. The survey was open to all businesses in the area, regardless of membership in DBOT. The survey consisted of 15 questions, followed by the opportunity to provide general comments or concerns, and the option to enter contact information to be used in a draw to win one of three \$50 gift cards.

## **Survey Results**

This report contains a breakdown and graphical representation of survey responses. In instances where data exceeds a total of 100%, respondents were permitted to select more than one answer on the survey. General comments provided are listed in the appendix section of this report.

## **Summary Report**

### **Business Information:**

- The Dufferin Business Issues Survey collected data on various aspects of respondents' organizations, including membership status, size, sector, location, years in operation, and the position of the person completing the survey.
- 67% of the 109 respondents were members of the Dufferin Board of Trade.
- Most respondents were self-employed (27%) or leaders in small businesses, with 19% having 2-5 employees, 28% with 6-20 employees, and 10% with 21-50 employees.
- Business longevity is strong, with 39% of respondents operating for over 20 years.
- Various industries were represented, with business and professional services (14%) being the top sector.
- Orangeville, with approximately half of Dufferin County's population base, contributed 51% of the responses.
- The majority of respondents (63%) were business owners or partners.

### **Business Confidence:**

- On average, businesses rated their performance as a 6 in 2023, similar to previous years.
- In 2024, the rating dropped to 6, indicating a slight decline compared to the previous year.
- Marketing and advertising remained a top priority for respondents, followed by growth and getting connected in the local business community.
- Inflation/rising costs emerged as the primary concern (60%), followed by attracting employees and competition.
- Factors driving economic growth included creating a live-work community, affordable housing, and attracting large companies.

### **Workforce Questions:**

- Employment levels remained steady in 2023 compared to previous years.
- 61% of respondents successfully filled their vacancies with suitable candidates.
- Networking with local businesses and professional development opportunities were prioritized activities.

### **Policy Issues:**

- Respondents believed DBOT should be involved in economic development, local government accountability, and addressing housing costs.
- Other important issues included addressing the skills gap, planning, and education and training.

**Conclusion:** The Dufferin Business Issues Survey provides insights into the local business landscape, highlighting areas of strength, such as business longevity, and areas of concern, including rising costs and workforce challenges. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategic decisions and policy initiatives to support economic growth and prosperity in the region.

# Full Report

## Business Information

Within the business information section of the Dufferin Business Issues Survey, respondents were asked questions pertaining to their organization's membership status, size, sector, location, years in operation, and position within the company of the person completing the survey. This information was gathered to ensure adequate representation across Dufferin's municipalities, as well as to allow for further segmentation of the data by municipality and industry sector.

### Question 1:

Are you currently a Dufferin Board of Trade member?

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

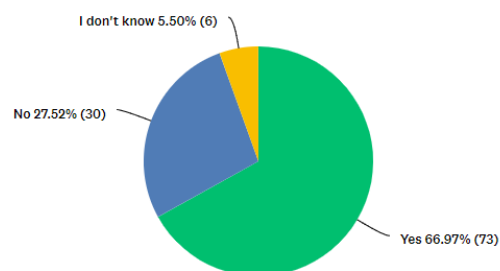


Figure 1: DBOT membership

Of the 109 respondents, 67% were currently members of the Dufferin Board of Trade.

### Question 2:

Approximately how many employees does your organization have?

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

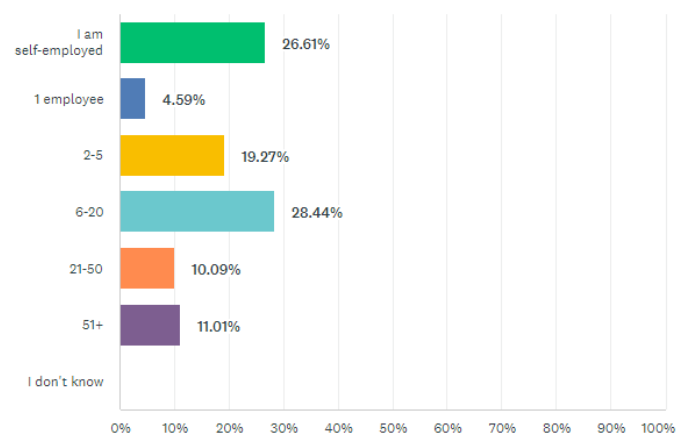


Figure 2: organization size

Survey respondents are primarily self-employed (27%) or leaders in small businesses - 19% have 2-5 employees, 28% have 6-20 employees, and 10% with 21-50 employees. Larger businesses, with 51 or more employees, made up 11% of the survey respondents.

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### Question 3:

How many years has your current business been in operation?

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

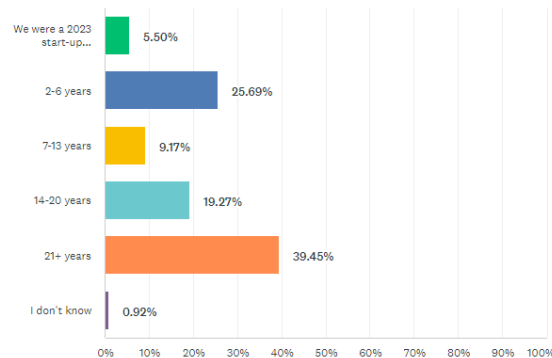


Figure 3: organization age

Business longevity is strong in Dufferin, with 39% of respondents operating their current business for over 20 years. Businesses operating for 14-20 years made up 19% of responses, 7-13 years 9%, 2-6 years 26% and new start ups 5.5% of responses.

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### Question 4:

What industry or sector is your business?

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

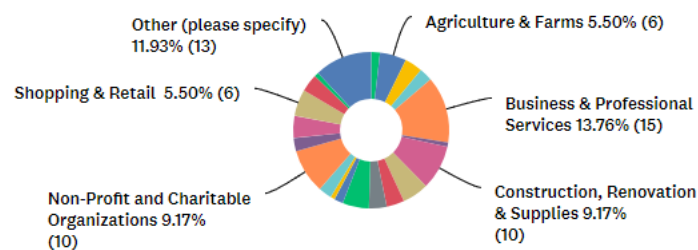


Figure 4: industry sector

A wide range of industries were represented in this survey. Business and professional services (14%), non-profit and charitable organizations (9%), construction, renovation, and supplies (9%), were the top, with agriculture & farms, education & childcare, health care, and shopping & retail each with 5.5% of responses. The “other” responses can be found in the attached appendix.

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### Question 5:

Where is your organization primarily located

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

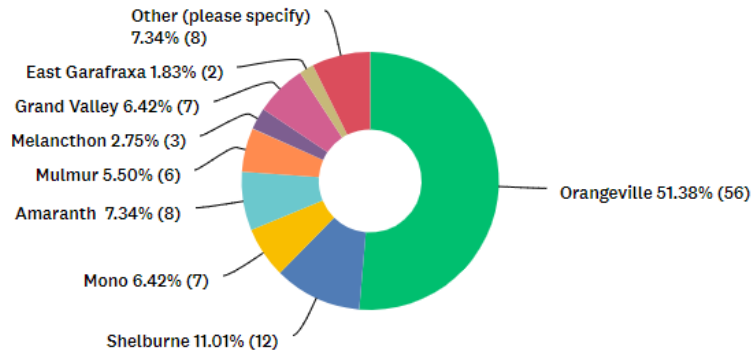


Figure 5: Location

The majority of respondents are located in the most populated municipality, Orangeville (51%). The remaining respondents were from Shelburne (11%), Mono (6%), Amaranth (7%), Mulmur (5%), Melancthon (3%), Grand Valley (6%), East Garafraxa (2%). "Other" responses are located in the appendix.

### Question 6:

What position do you hold in your organization

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

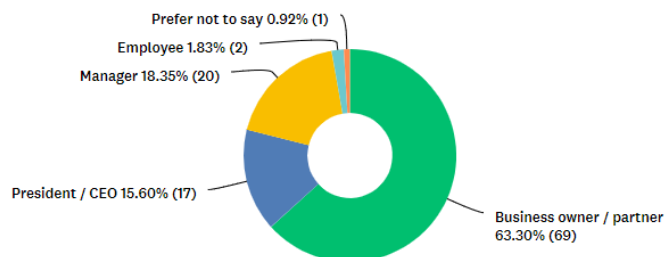


Figure 6: Respondent's position

The majority (63%) of respondents were the business owner or partner, 18% a manager, 16% the president/CEO, 2% an employee, and 1% preferred not to say what position they held within their organization.

**Business Confidence**

The next questions asked businesses to compare look at their performance, priorities, areas of concern and employment levels.

**Question 7:**

How did your business perform in 2023 compared with 2022

Answered: 109   Skipped: 0

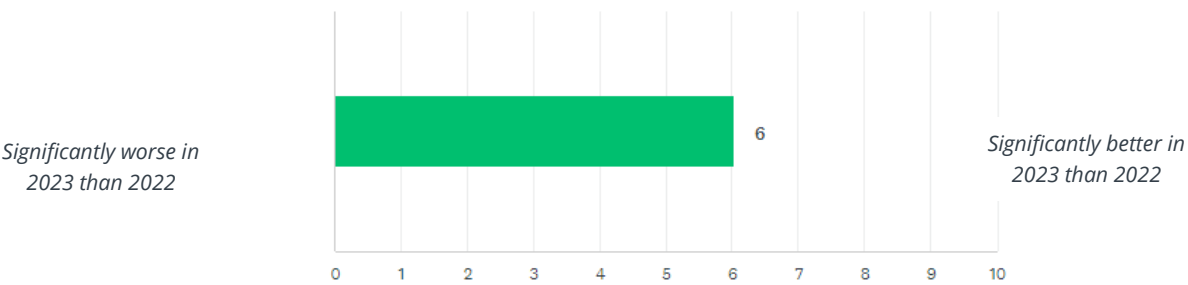


Figure 7: business performance – last year

On a sliding scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being “significantly worse in 2023 than 2022” and 10 being “significantly better in 2023 than 2022”, businesses averaged a 6 in their responses. In the 2022 and 2023 surveys, businesses had a similar feeling comparing their last year’s performance with the year before.

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**Question 8:**

How do you think your business will perform in 2024 compared with 2023

Answered: 109   Skipped: 0

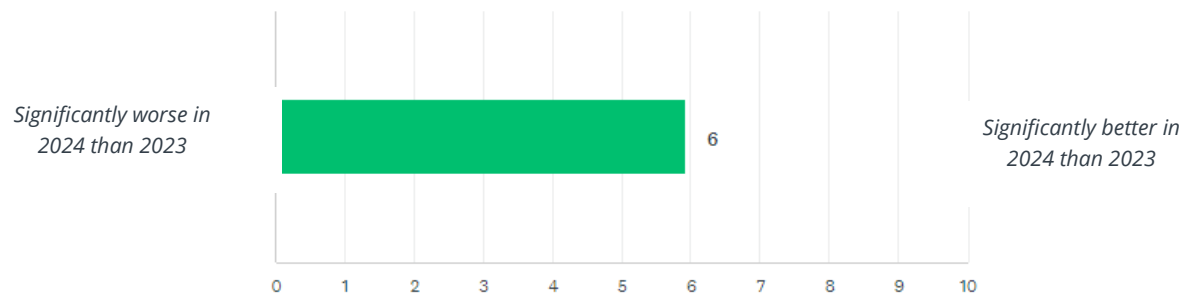




Figure 8: business performance – this year

On a sliding scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being “significantly worse in 2024 than 2023” and 10 being “significantly better in 2024 than 2023”, businesses averaged a 6 in their responses, a full point less than the 2023 survey. On the provincial level, the OCC reports that 53 percent of businesses expect to grow their business in 2024. (Source: OCC Business Confidence Survey<sup>1</sup>)

### Question 9:

What are the top priorities your company will focus on in 2024? (please select 1-3)

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

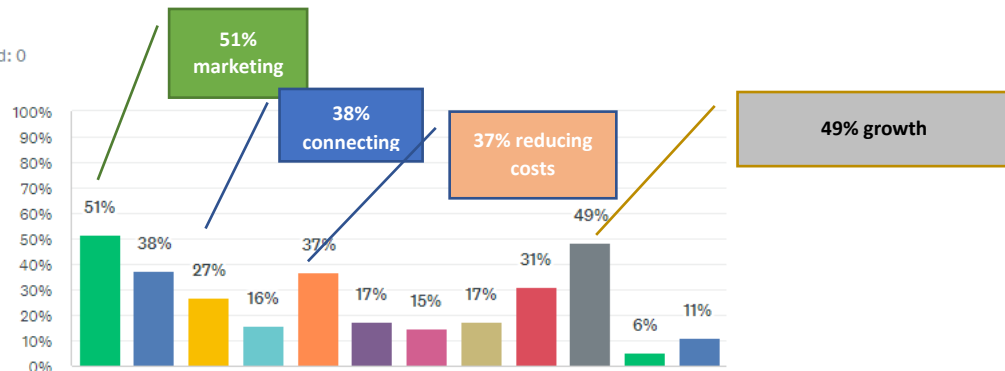


Figure 9: Top priorities

Marketing and advertising was once again a top priority for respondents with 51% this year and 53% last year indicating it as a top priority. Growth was a priority this year for 49% of respondents, while last year it had a few respondents answer growth in the “other” comments. Getting connected in the local business community was at 50% in 2023 and only 38% this year. Reducing operating costs came it at 37% this year compared to 28% last year. Strategic planning was 31% this year, compared with 37% last year. Attracting employees was 27% this year and 24% last year. Access to business supports and training or skills upgrading of workforce both had 17% of respondents, with employee retention at 16% and better leveraging technology at 15%. “Other” responses are in the appendix.

In previous years marketing has consistently been in the top three priorities, with reducing operating costs scoring higher (46%-53%) in all previous years’ reports. Attracting workers has been a declining priority, with 44% of businesses in 2019, 35% in 2020, and 17% in 2021 identifying it as a top priority.

Question 10:

Which of the following do you anticipate will be the biggest issues of concern your company will face in 2024? (Please select 1-3 responses)

Answered: 109    Skipped: 0

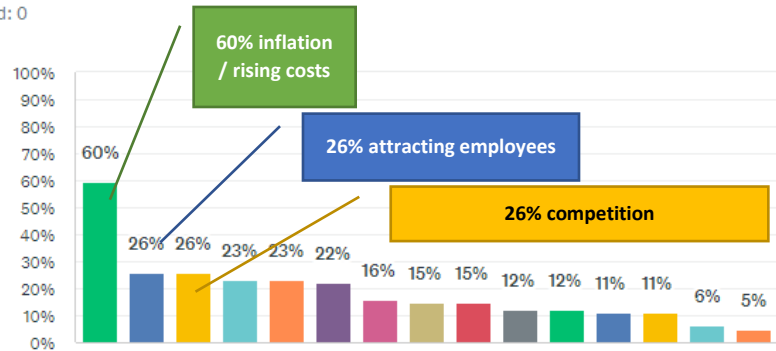


Figure 10: issues of concern

Inflation/rising costs is by far the biggest concern of local businesses this year with a whopping 60% ranking it in their top three. Last year’s top concern was attracting employees (30% in 2023), with it in a tie for second along with competition this year, both at 26%. Followed by business taxes and government red tape and regulations (23% for both), then cost of rent/lease at 22% up from 16% last year. Other concerns are barriers to expansion/scaling-up (16%), decreasing consumer confidence (15%), retaining employees (12%), global markets/trade up from 6% last year to 12%, access to capital (11%), high speed internet (11%), access to business supports (6%) and transportation/infrastructure (5%). “Other” responses are included in the appendix. Provincially, through the Ontario Chamber of Commerce’s Business Confidence Survey businesses shared that their top policy concerns were:

Government Policies

The policy priorities of Ontario’s business community reflect their major pain points, including business and living costs, consumer spending, and workforce gaps (Table 1).

The top priority cited by all sectors is reducing or simplifying business taxes (50 percent of all businesses, and 83 percent of businesses in the accommodation and food services industry). This puts policymakers in a difficult position; simply lowering taxes would lead to lower revenues and less capacity to invest in critical infrastructure, services, and support programs. In 2024, governments will need to be strategic and targeted about how they balance concerns about long-term fiscal prudence with the need to alleviate cost pressures.

Table 1: Top 10 policy priorities among Ontario businesses

Priority	Share of respondents
Reduce/simplify business taxes	50%
Encourage Ontarians to buy/travel locally	34%
Invest in workforce development	33%
Support affordable housing development	33%
Enhance access to credit/capital	26%
Support businesses with technology adoption & innovation	25%
Address health care capacity	24%
Expand mental health and addictions programs	23%
Strengthen local supply chains & manufacturing	22%
Invest in broadband internet infrastructure	22%

**Question 11:**

Which of the following are the most important factors driving Dufferin County's economic growth and prosperity? Please select 1-3

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

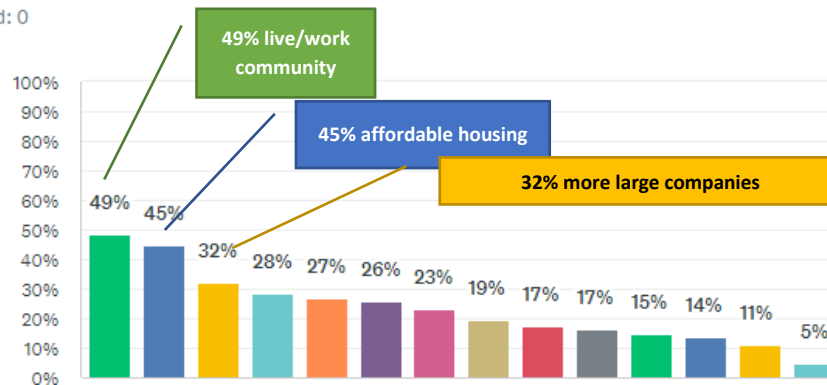


Figure 11: Dufferin's economic growth factors

The top three factors have not changed since last year, with the majority of respondents (49%) feel that creating a live-work community, so more people both live and work in Dufferin is the top factor driving Dufferin County's economic growth and prosperity (53% last year). Affordable housing is still second but with a much higher rating this year (45%) compared to 35% this year. Attracting more large companies to Dufferin remained fairly consistent at 32% this year versus 30% last year. Other factors include: Access and affordability of high-speed broadband (28%), support for growth and expansion of existing businesses (27%), attracting new talent to work in our community (26%), attracting more small companies to Dufferin (23%) up from 15% in 2023, utilities such as hydro costs and availability of natural gas (19%), developing new businesses and entrepreneurs (17%), better connect young talent with employment (17%), business occupancy costs (15%), availability of space (14%), access to public transportation (11%). "Other" responses are listed in the appendix

## Workforce Questions

### Question 12:

What happened with employment levels in your company in 2023 compared with 2022?

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

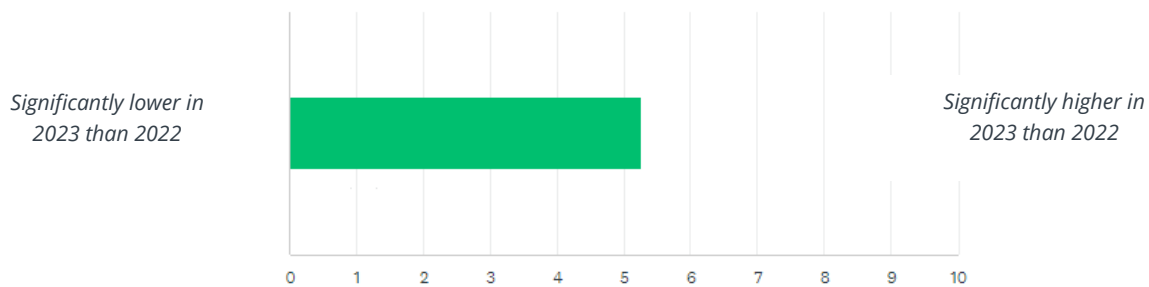


figure 12: employment levels

On average businesses stated that employment levels remained roughly the same in 2023 compared with 2022 and 2021.

### Question 13:

Within the last year have you been able to fill all of your positions with candidates that meet your needs and requirements?

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

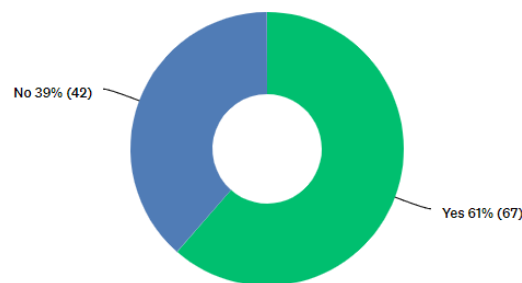


figure 13: filling vacancies

The majority of respondents (61%) were able to successfully fill their vacancies with candidates that met their needs and requirements. Locally, we have seen similar responses year over year. Provincially, "Labour shortages have eased somewhat this year, but demand for workers continues to exceed supply in certain sectors. Overall, 40 percent of organizations are directly experiencing a labour shortage, down from 55 percent last year." (OCC OER Report)

### Question 14:

The following activities are undertaken by the Dufferin Board of Trade. Please rank them in order of importance.

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

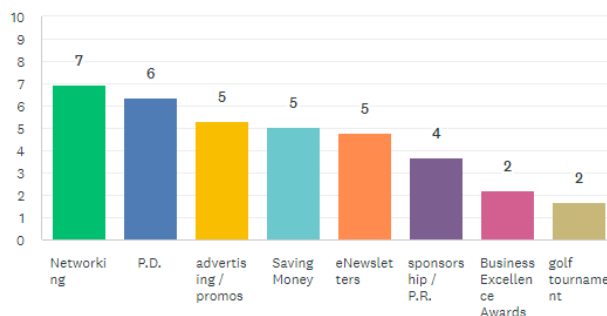


Figure 14: activities

Similarly to last year, respondents selected opportunities to network with local businesses as the most important activity, followed by professional development opportunities, eNewsletters, opportunities to save money, advertising and sponsorship opportunities, with the annual golf tournament and business excellence awards ranking lowest in the priorities.

### Question 15

Please indicate the top 1-3 policy issues you would like to see DBOT involved in

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

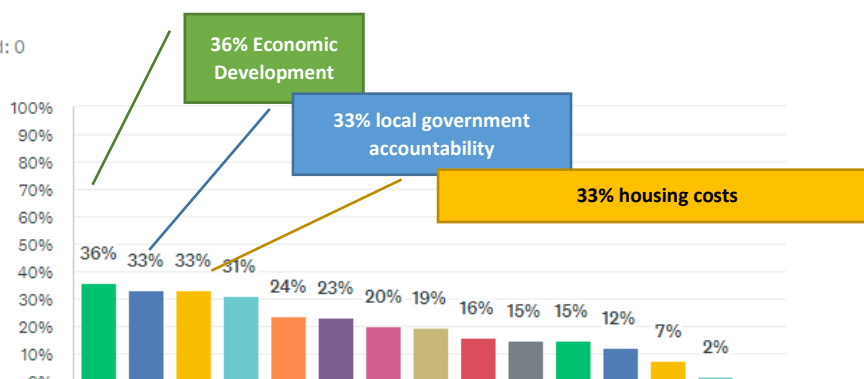


Figure 15: policy issues

Respondents felt that DBOT should be involved in: Economic development – 36%; Local government accountability / governance - 33%; Housing costs – 33%; Addressing Skills Gap (lack of qualified talent to fill existing positions) – 31%; Planning - business land zoning; residential density – 24%; Education and training – 23%; Access and affordability of high-speed broadband – 20%; Property Taxes – 19%; Energy - Cost of Hydro – 16%; Public Transit – 15%; Environment / sustainability – 15%; Social & Human Services – 12%; Crime/Safety – 7%; Signage By-laws – 2%; Flooding - prevention and response – 0%.

In 2023, the top responses were: Economic development – 46%; Access and affordability of high-speed broadband – 30%; Addressing Skills Gap (lack of qualified talent to fill existing positions) – 28% “Other” responses can be found in the appendix.

## Appendix

**Question 4: What industry or sector is your business in? Other responses:**

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	
Shopping, retail, tattooing, piercing	
Heritage Education/ Consulting & Travel	
Brand Strategy + Photography	
Merchant services	
Security	
Travel	Cleaning Service
signs	Charitable and Pet Supply
Industrial Safety and Custom Apparel	SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
Landscaping	Government

**Question 5: Where is your organization primarily located?**

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Fergus
online
GTA and Dufferin County
Mansfield
Collingwood
Dufferin/Caledon
Erin
Newfoundland and Labrador

**Question 9: What are the top priorities your company will focus on in 2024? (please select 1-3)**

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
growth - financial grant opportunities
improving quality of service
gaining new customers and community awareness of our products and services
finding funding and food to meet the increase in need
Completing renovations which did not happen because of the impact of covid and rising cost of everything
Educating our elders to protect the from the increase in fraudulent activity and cyber security.
Funding- high speed
Avoid bankruptcy
Better internet
Combo of marketing and community engagement ("getting connected")
Gaining new clients
better supply of product for resale

**Question 10: Which of the following do you anticipate will be the biggest issues of concern your company will face in 2024? (Please select 1-3 responses)**

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Attracting new patrons
Time!
attracting clients
digital promotion
Advertising in a saturated market
Marketing to the right audience to attract customers
Fraud
Awareness and Adoption of service
Increasing community awareness
Collecting on my A/R
Small businesses that need support won't be able to afford it due to the terrible economy
interest rates
interest rates
Red tape not only government (CRA, ONCA, etc.) but also grant-makers and onerous grant application/reporting processes.
This question doesn't make sense
Getting new customers
Economic factors that impact occupancy rate. It could go the other way, people don't want to travel as far and take less expensive weekend trips.
residual Covid related issues.
Government funding and volunteers

**Question 11: Which of the following are the most important factors driving Dufferin County's economic growth and prosperity? Please select 1-3**

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
The question isn't clear - we feel these are the most important things preventing growth and prosperity
affordable land
diversity vs invasion
Improvements to hwy 109, and expanding from Mono to Grand Valley
Support for growth and expansion of existing LOCAL independent businesses - not box stores and chains. ;)

**Question 15: Please indicate the top 1-3 policy issues you would like to see DBOT involved in**

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Supporting businesses or advocating govt and local govt to support small business in scaling up, making town related requirements like planning more accessible and affordable for small businesses
Don't know why you'd be involved in any of this
Roadway improvements especially along Hwy 109 from Grand Valley to Orangeville

**Footnote:**

The Ontario Economic Report, produced by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (of which DBOT is a member), based upon the OCC's 2024 Business Confidence Survey, which can be found at:

<https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024-Ontario-Economic-Report-1.pdf>