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## **BUSINESS WALKS FINDS MAJORITY OF BUSINESSES GROWING**

*Staffing Continues to be Major Challenge*

**PRINCE RUPERT, JUNE 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022** – If you're looking for work in Prince Rupert, you're in luck. Sixty-eight per cent of businesses surveyed in the 2022 Business Walks indicated that they are growing, with 65% of them indicating one of their biggest challenges is to find staff. Across the 66 small-medium sized businesses who completed the questionnaire, there was also a total anticipated increase of 130 jobs in the next three years to support growth.

“We know that the pandemic has been an incredibly challenging time for our local business community,” said Paul Vendittelli, City Director of Economic Development and Transportation. “It was heartening to know that as we are starting to emerge from the most difficult time, that the businesses that were able to stick it out are starting to rebound and even grow. Most even noted they were growing as compared to pre-pandemic levels.”

Prince Rupert Economic Development Office, in partnership with Community Futures, the Province of BC, Prince Rupert and District Chamber of Commerce (PRDCC), and the Prince Rupert Port Authority (PRPA) conducted the Business

Walks in June of this year – asking businesses about how they’re doing, their main challenges, and what they may need assistance with.

“What we heard on the Business Walk reflects what we are seeing in our office” said John Farrell with Community Futures. “We are seeing local businesses expand their footprint, invest in new equipment, and launch their products and services on-line. There is a growing demand for our coaching services and financing which tells me the business climate has turned a corner in Prince Rupert.”

“The Business Walk came at a great time with immense insight to the PRDCC. As we prepare for next year, the post-COVID needs and wants of our local businesses will be a great focus for us,” said Daphne Thomson, Chamber President. “Knowing what the community businesses need, the growth expectations and challenges help us to be more relevant whilst serving and supporting the community and our members with excellence in the way they need it.”

In addition to staffing and training, as well as parking, difficulties relating to the pandemic, such as supply chain delays, were also noted as a major challenge for some. However, the most requested support by far and away was HR/labour recruitment assistance.

Given the known challenge of staffing across sectors of Prince Rupert’s economy, the City, PRPA, and Community Futures completed a Labour Study in 2019 as part of the Redesign Rupert program, which led to the launch of a Recruitment Brand called “Make Prince Rupert Home”. The program pushes out advertising to geographic areas with higher levels of unemployment, like Alberta, with the intent to encourage people to choose Prince Rupert when they’re looking to relocate. The website at [www.makeprincerupert.com](http://www.makeprincerupert.com) highlights our local lifestyle benefits, real estate availability, and allows businesses to register to post their job listings to the site for free. Surveyors from participating organizations took time during the Business Walk to share information on the program with businesses, which also is now doubling as a local job board.

“Business retention initiatives like Business Walk are important opportunities to engage directly with local business owners to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges they face,” said Ken Veldman, VP of Public Affairs & Sustainability with the Prince Rupert Port Authority. “The local business sector is a strong, interconnected network of community members that operate a variety of critical commercial activities in this town. We know our collective success needs to

be mutual, and we're committed to ensuring their needs and interests are recognized within our operations and with local government.”

Related to the labour shortage is the lack of availability in the housing supply, which is why the City has opened up new multi-family lots for development and has also been enacting a number of policy changes and a downtown revitalization tax incentive program to encourage an increase to the housing supply. Labour supply issues are a multi-faceted problem, which will need action to be taken across a number of fronts, by both government and non-government actors to be fully addressed.

This was the first Business Walk conducted since 2019 due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Community partners anticipate continuing this survey in the coming years to measure the success of business programming efforts, and look forward to touching base again with local business in 2023.

See below for full report on 2022 Business Walks Survey.

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Veronika Stewart, Communications Manager

**Office:** (250) 627 0976

**Cell:** (778) 884 6285

**Email:** [veronika.stewart@princerupert.ca](mailto:veronika.stewart@princerupert.ca)