

Bangor Livable Communities Chamber of Commerce Survey



Draft Findings



Prepared for the
City of Bangor

By the
UMaine Center on Aging

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Key Findings

- An on-line survey was distributed to Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce business owners to understand employment and customer service practices involving older adults, perceptions of the accessibility of Bangor commercial districts, and recommendations for improving Bangor as a livable and age-friendly community. Sixty-one participants completed the survey.
- Participants indicated that experience, stability, and dependability are among the strongest assets that older adults provide to businesses. Participants reported having made a number of accommodations for older employees, the most common being flexible scheduling.
- A majority of participants (55%) indicated that they frequently market their goods/services to older adults. Most participants reported that they used a variety of marketing strategies, but the most common source of new business is the result of word of mouth/referrals.
- A majority of participants (73%) reported that they were within a half mile of a bus stop.
- A majority of participants indicated that they believed the sidewalks in their area to be in good repair and that their businesses would not benefit from extended service hours on public transportation.
- Most participants reported that their business were very handicap accessible and not in need of any modifications to become more accessible. However, when asked what changes they would make to their businesses if provided unlimited resources, many participants listed modifications to increase handicap accessibility, including installing elevators, automatic doors, and other improvements.
- Broadway, Hogan Road, and Stillwater Avenue received the lowest approval ratings in terms of the safety of the roads and their walkability, with more than half of respondents indicating that these areas reflected “poor” or “very poor” walkability.

Background and Methodology

An on-line survey was distributed to Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce business owners via the Chamber's membership email list. The goal of this survey was to supplement seven community discussions held in Bangor in the fall of 2016 with data on business perceptions of livability as it relates to older workers and consumers. The survey queried members about the age-friendliness of their own businesses, perceptions of the accessibility of Bangor commercial districts, and their recommendations for improving Bangor as a livable and age-friendly community. The survey was distributed to all members of the Chamber, totaling 4,170 recipients and 61 individuals completed the survey. However, the invitation to participate in the survey was addressed to business owners, which is a subset of the overall Chamber membership. Given this, it is difficult to calculate an overall response rate for business owners reached.

The largest concentration of business owners participating were individuals from Downtown businesses (29.5%). However, approximately 48% identified as being outside of the provided response options of Downtown, Hogan Road, Stillwater Avenue, and Bangor Mall. The following are some of the "other" responses indicated by participants: Odlin Road, Hammond St. Extension, near the Airport, Davis Road, Fairmount-area, Outer Union Street, Griffin Road, Bangor Industrial Park/Perry Rd, Penn Plaza, and State Street. Hogan Road, Stillwater Avenue, and the Bangor Mall were each represented by less than 10% of respondents.

Survey Results

Customer Interactions

Among respondents indicating the level of older adults they serve, over half indicated that between 25% and 75% of individuals they serve are older adults (Figure 1). Over half either frequently or very frequently do targeted marketing to older adults, while almost one third don't do any targeted marketing to this population (Figure 2). Although marketing methods used to reach this population were diverse, word of mouth and referrals were the most commonly identified methods (Figure 3).

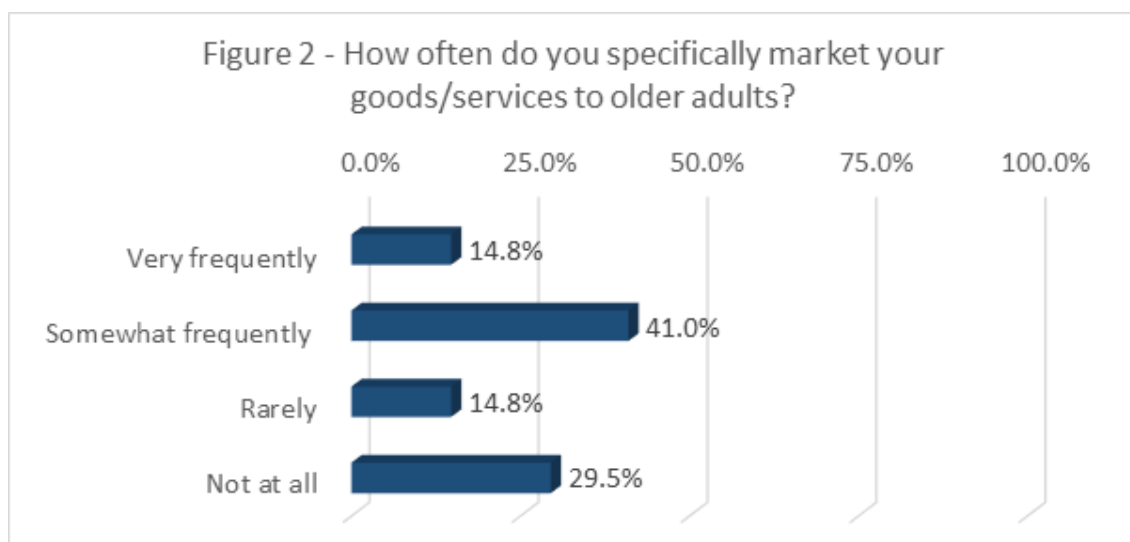
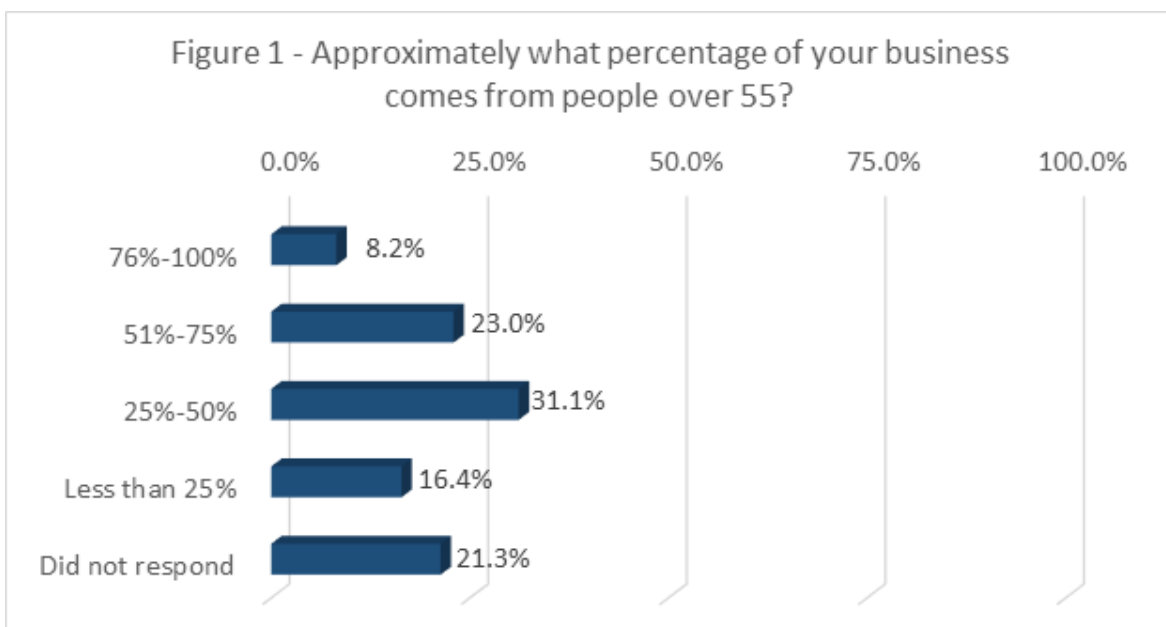
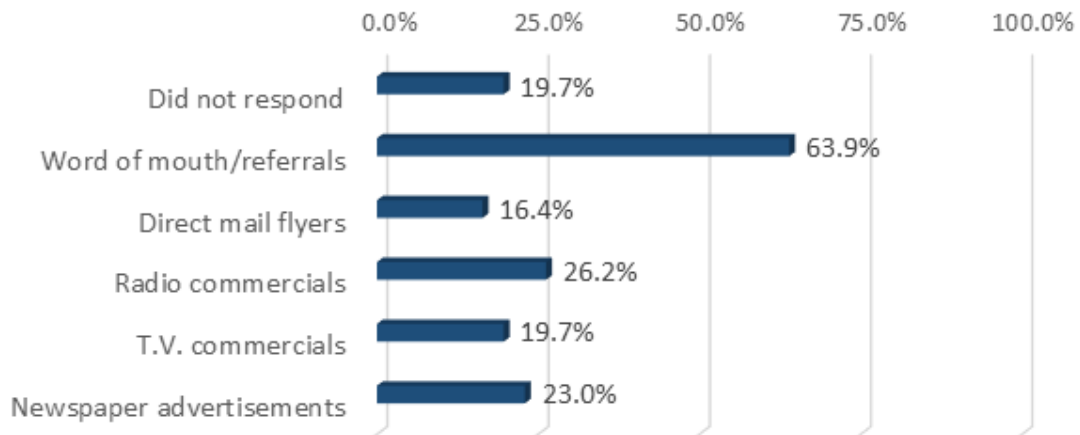


Figure 3 - How do you market your goods/services to the older adult population?



Workplace Accommodations and Accessibility

In terms of accommodations for older workers, less than half identified making any particular accommodation. The most common adaptation reported was flexible work hours and scheduling (45.9%) (Figure 4). The vast majority of respondents indicate that their retail space is very accessible (59.0%) or somewhat accessible (27.9%) (Figure 5).

Figure 4 - Have you made any of the following accommodations to your business for older people?

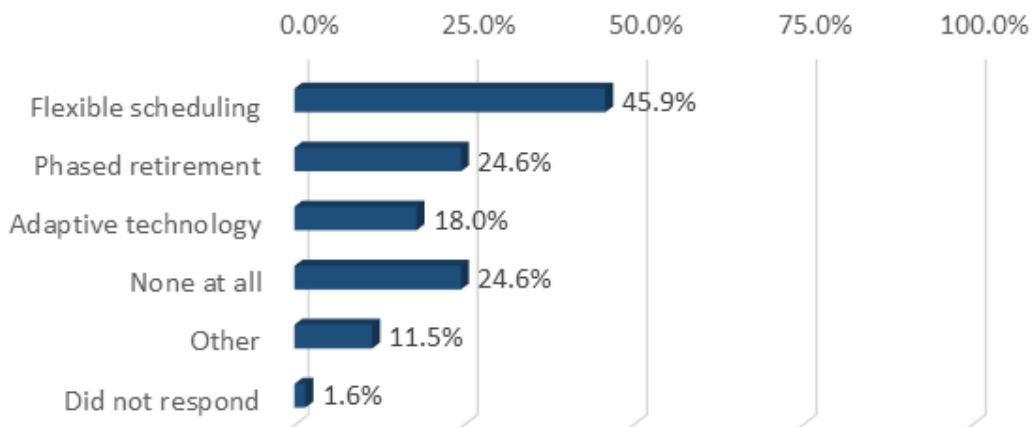
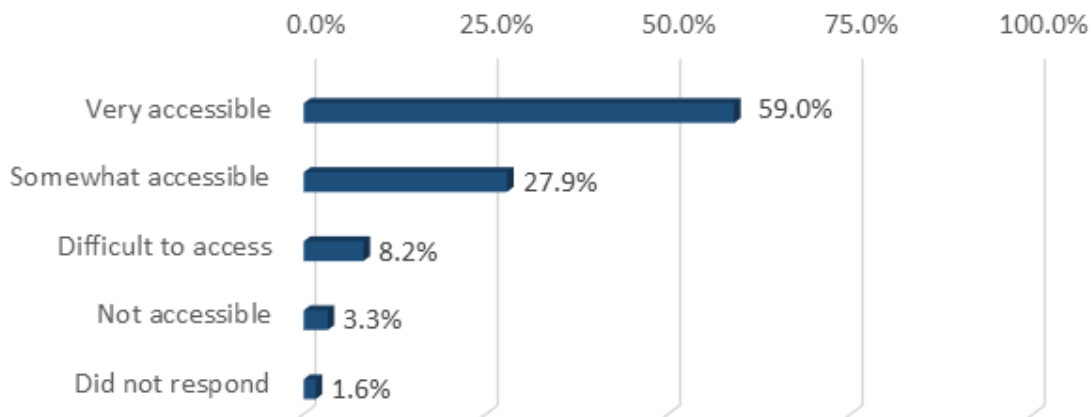


Figure 5 - Age friendly facilities often offer handicap accessible doorways and bathrooms, wide aisles and nearby parking. Based on this definition, how handicap accessible is your retail space?



Individuals were asked, if they had the resources, what steps they feel they could take to make their current space more accessible to people with disabilities or mobility challenges. Responses tend to focus on structural changes and upgrades to spaces such as building ramps and widening aisles. Respondents also suggested some changes to external infrastructure, including more parking. When asked about changes that could be made to retail space that might attract older customers, the vast majority (73.8%) stated that no changes were needed (Figure 6).

Structural Changes and Upgrades

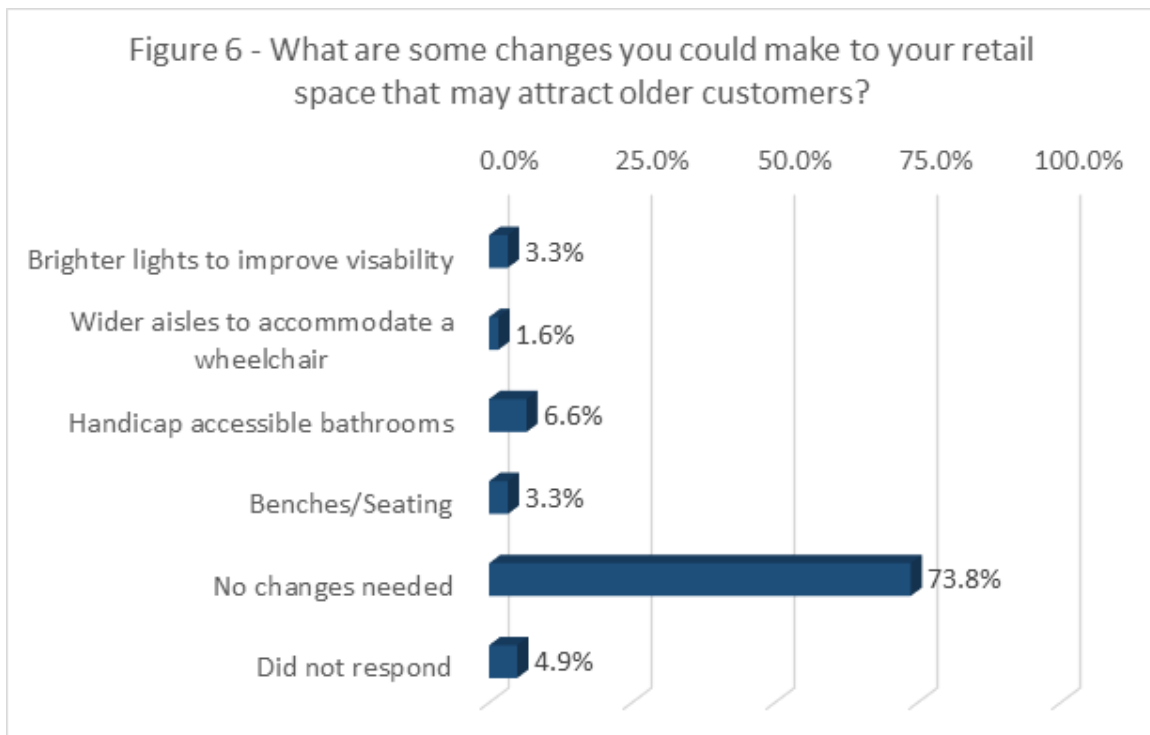
- “Elevator”
- “Change the foyer”
- “Ramp over the door lip”
- “Wider aisles”
- “Handicap accessible”
- “Ramps”
- “Flatter thresholds. Easier to open entry doors. Accessible bathrooms.”
- “Automatic door openers”
- “Leveled walkways”
- “Move to a building that is more handicap accessible”
- “More sitting space”

Changes to External Infrastructure

- “I need the city of Bangor to heighten the sidewalk for our downtown space. We have made

several attempts to get the city to do this but they seem to do nothing”

- “Heated sidewalks and walkways”
- “Better lighting in parking lot”
- “Better parking situation. Parking lot is very tight and hard to maneuver vehicles.”
- “Our biggest challenge is ample parking. Our retail space has wide aisles, handicap accessible bathrooms, and great lighting.”
- “Additional parking space dedicated”



Respondents were asked about the quality and availability of infrastructure that may support accessibility including conveniently available public restrooms and bus stops, well maintained sidewalks, and suitable parking. A significant percentage of respondents were unaware of the location of the nearest public restroom (Figure 7). In terms of sidewalks and walking areas, almost 70% felt that sidewalks near their location were in good repair or had relatively few problems (Figure 8). Approximately 90% felt that there was some or ample parking near their location (Figure 9). Approximately 57% of respondents stated that they were within a quarter mile of a bus stop (Figure 10). Most (59%), indicated they would see little benefit to their business as a consequence of expanded bus routes (Figure 11).

Figure 7 - How far away from your business is the closest public restroom?

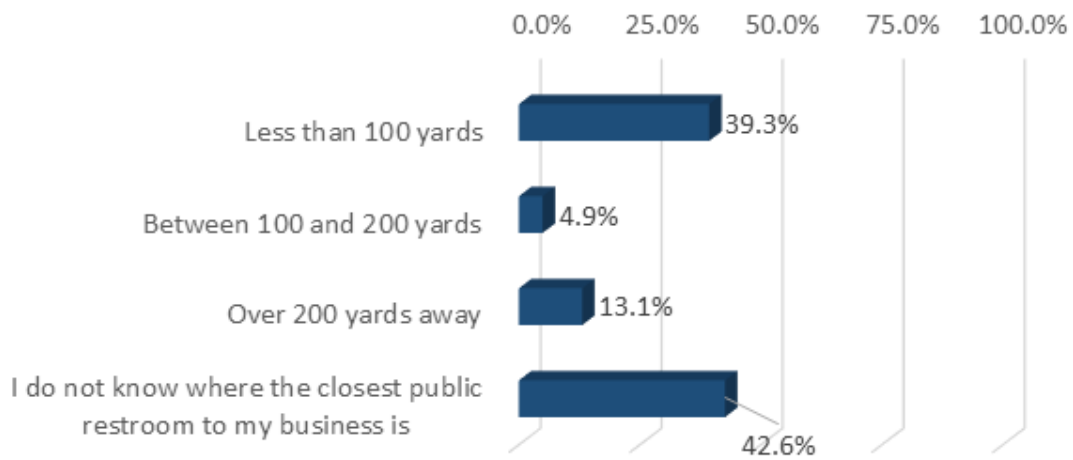


Figure 8 - Are the sidewalks and walking areas near your business in good repair?

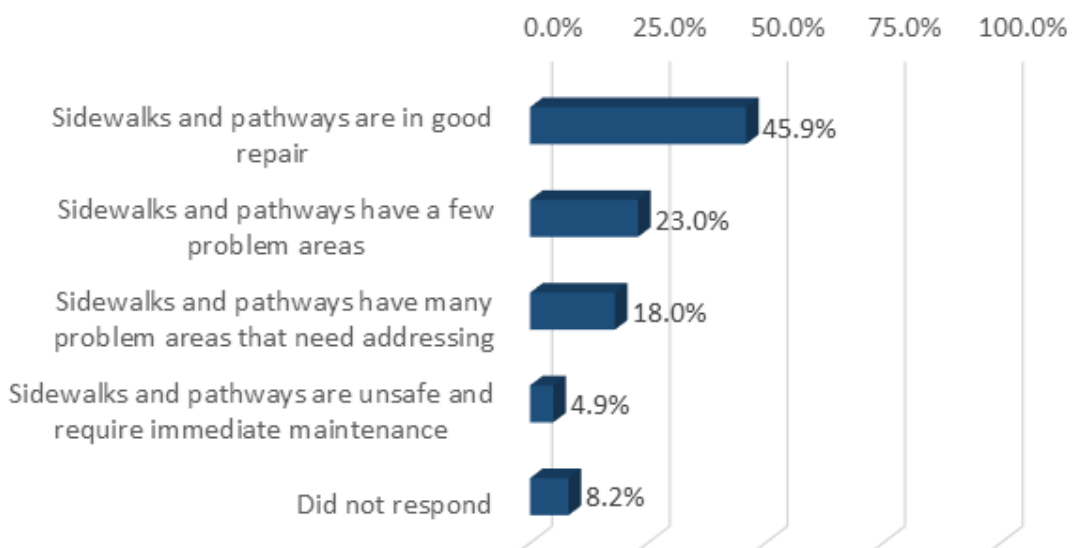


Figure 9 - Are there suitable parking options near your business?

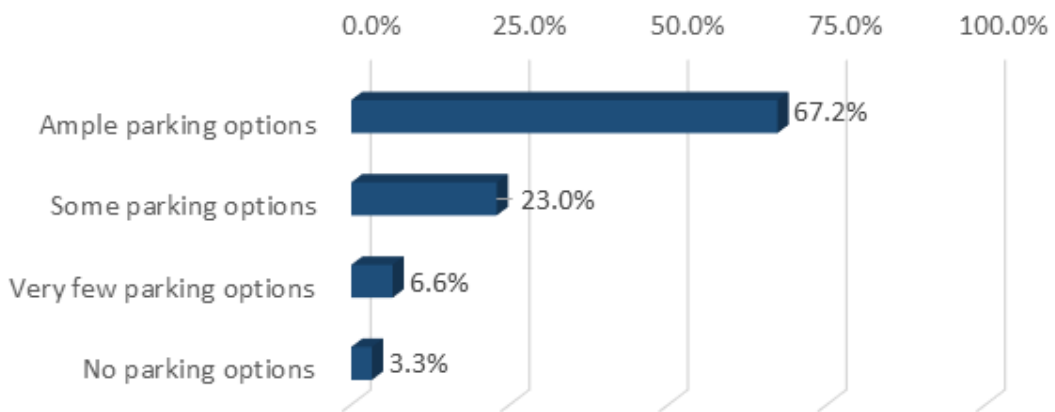


Figure 10 - How far is the nearest bus stop from your business?

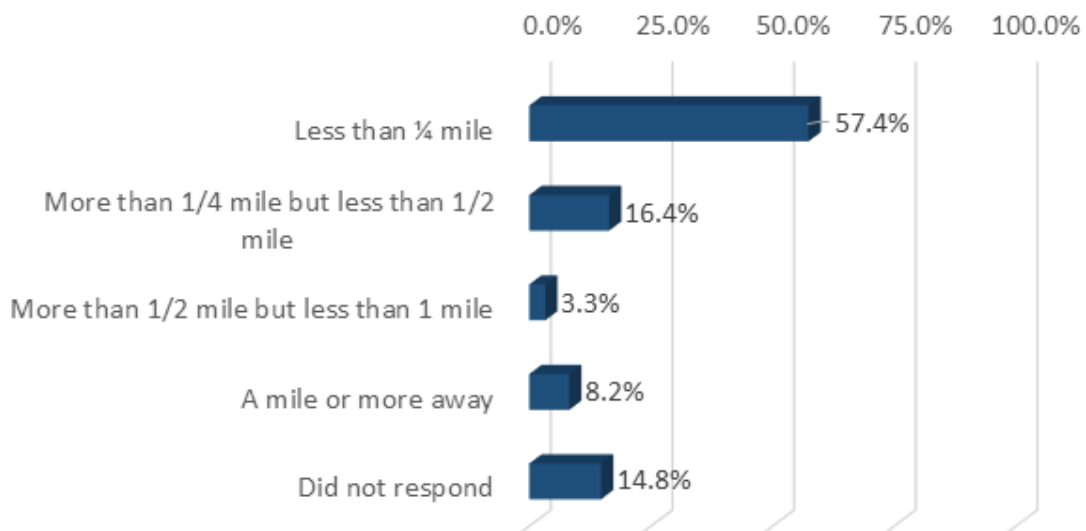
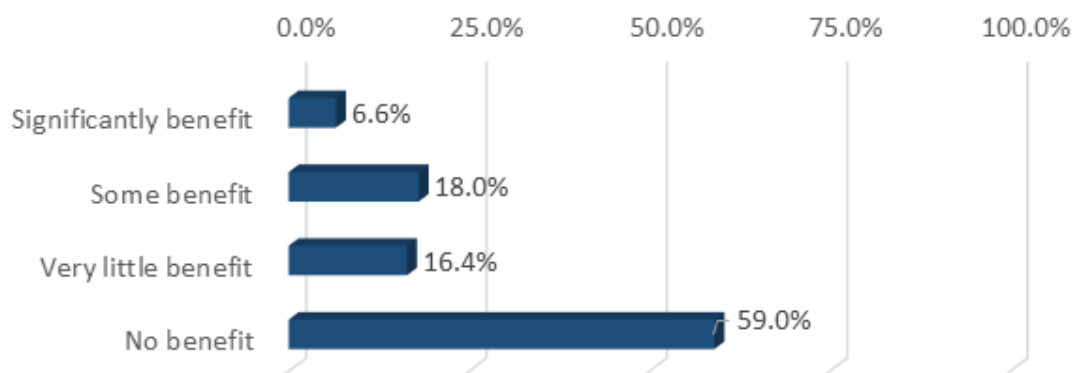


Figure 11 - Would your business benefit from extending public transportation service to include later nighttime and weekend routes?



Perceptions of Older Workers

To learn about respondents' perceptions of older workers, they were asked to identify some of the strongest assets that older workers bring to their businesses. A wealth of experience, a strong work ethic, high reliability, and significant knowledge were common themes based on the responses.

Experience, dependability, reliability, and a strong work ethic:

- “Dependability; life experience; loyalty”
- “Experience and a sense of personal ownership”
- “Experience and understanding”
- “Experience, wisdom, knowledge, problem solving abilities”
- “Wisdom, dependability, common sense”
- “Experience”
- “Strong work ethic, dependability”
- “Life experience, reasoning skills”
- “Knowledge and experience”
- “Experience and knowledge!”
- “Experience and life knowledge”
- “Experience, knowledge, patience”
- “Experience, deep knowledge, judgment”
- “Experience, strong work ethic, they typically can think on their feet”
- “Experience, knowledge and analytical skills”
- “Experience, excellent work ethics”
- “Experience, wisdom, a strong work ethic”
- “Experience and flexibility”
- “Experience”
- “Experience, loyalty, dependability”
- “Life experiences to share with younger generations”
- “Dependability”
- “Experience, work ethic”
- “Experience, guidance for newer [company] members, dedication towards the mission statement, and inspiration towards younger members”

Institutional knowledge and skills

- “Knowledge and reliability”
- “Institutional knowledge”
- “Knowledge, institutional memory, sense of humor”
- “Knowledge, experience and contacts (clients)”
- “Knowledge”
- “Knowledge, work ethic”
- “Knowledge and limitations of their health”
- “Knowledge, historical knowledge, skill”
- “Knowledge, flexible schedules, work ethic”
- “Institutional and industry knowledge, lifetime of contacts, work ethic and values”
- “Wisdom, experience, & stability”

Work ethic and integrity

- “A strong work ethic and knowledge of the industry”
- “Work ethic”
- “Work ethic”
- “Strong work ethic and institutional knowledge”
- “Strong work ethic and reliability.”
- “Wisdom, experience, more willing to work”
- “They are not afraid of work. Go the extra mile, always. Are honorable and are more likely to be trustworthy than subsequent generations. Social skills don't come from text messages, email or Facebook.”
- “Wisdom, common sense, work ethic, stamina, experience”
- “Maturity/Integrity”

Perceptions of Business District Accessibility

Individuals were asked about their perceptions of accessibility for five of the major business districts in Bangor. In terms of road safety, Broadway was identified as having the least safe roadways (37.7% poor, 9.8% very poor). Hogan Road was seen as having the least bus accessibility (16.4% poor, 1.6% very poor). Downtown was viewed as having the least accessible parking (34.4% poor, 9.8% very poor). Hogan Road was viewed as being the least walkable with 39.3% choosing poor, and 47.5% choosing very poor. Figures 12 – 16 present ratings for individual districts.

Figure 12 - Downtown

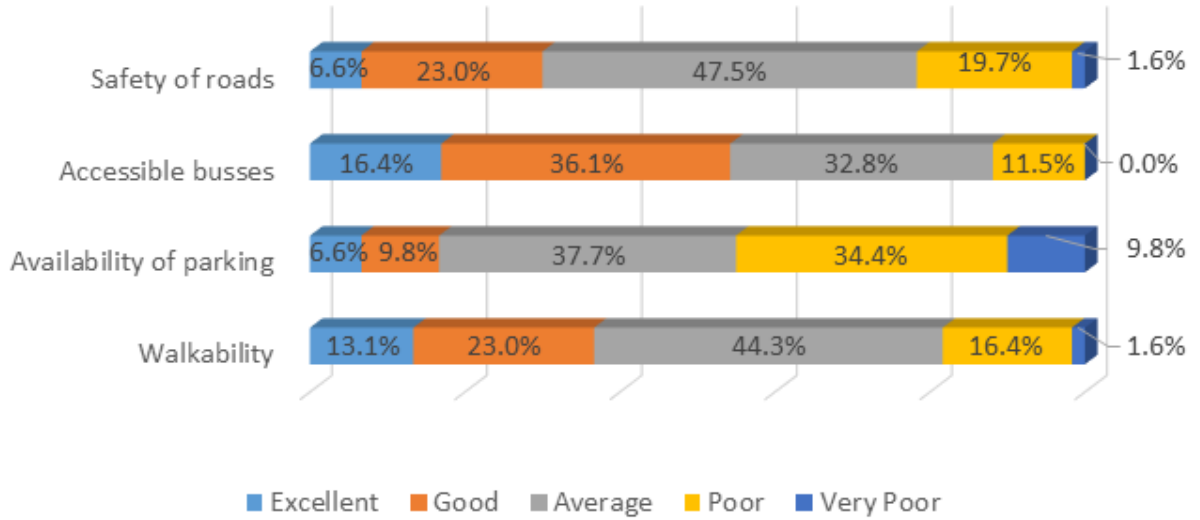


Figure 13 - Broadway

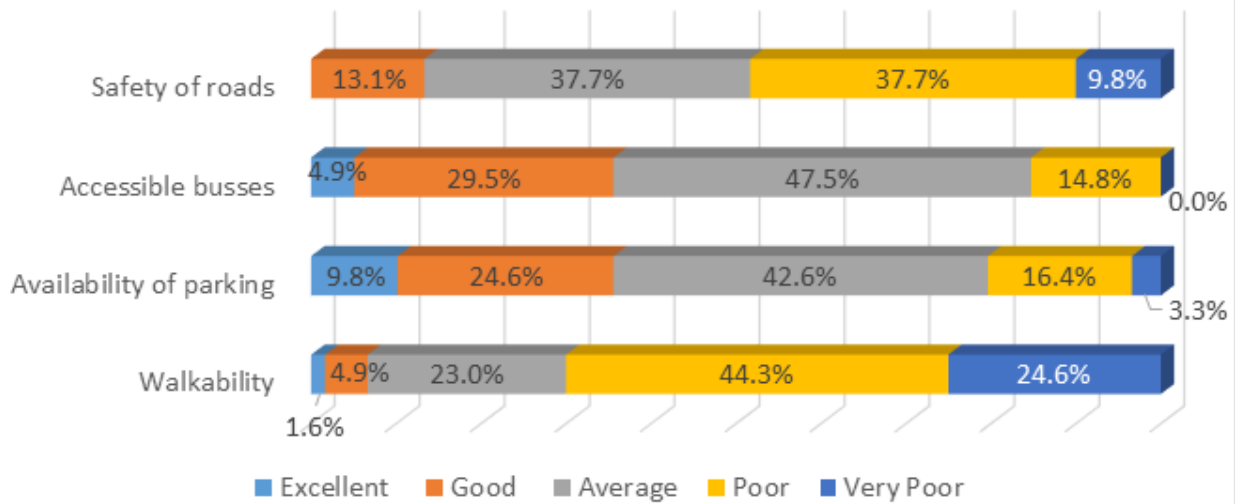
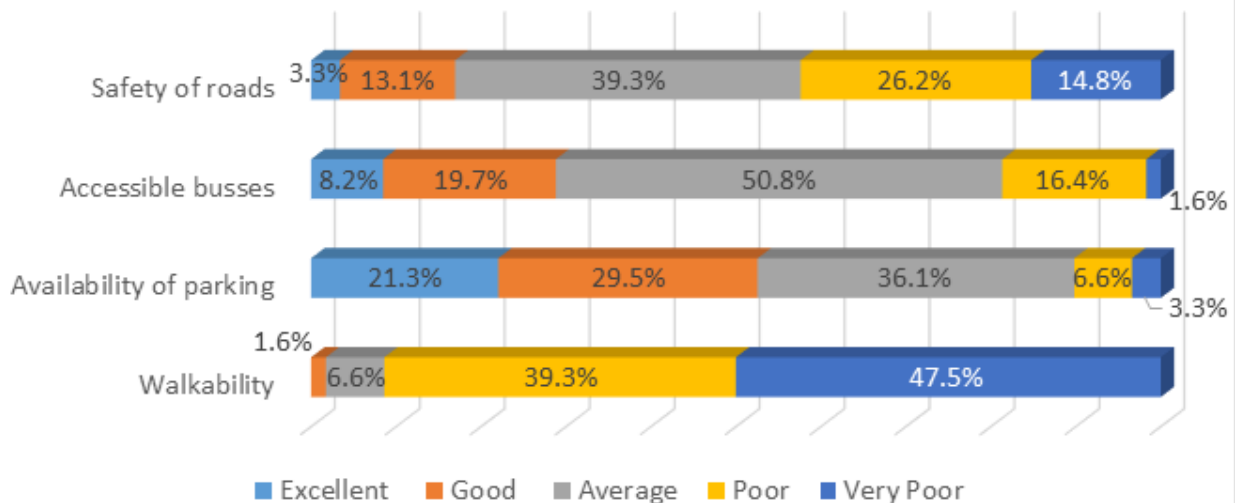
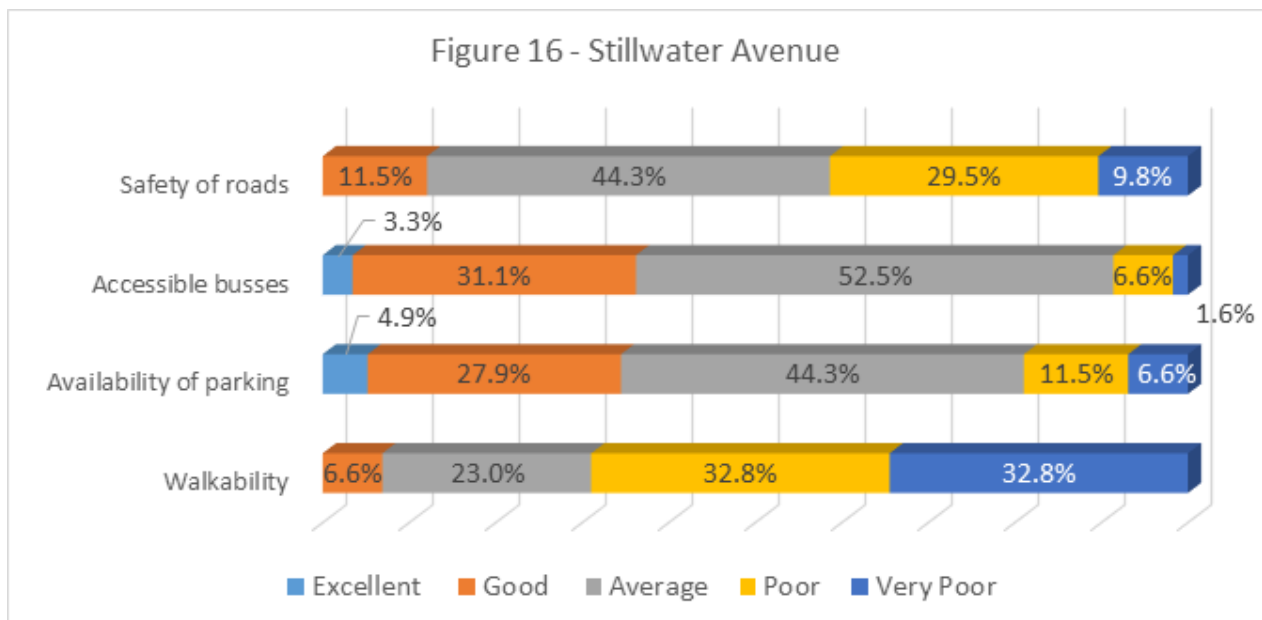
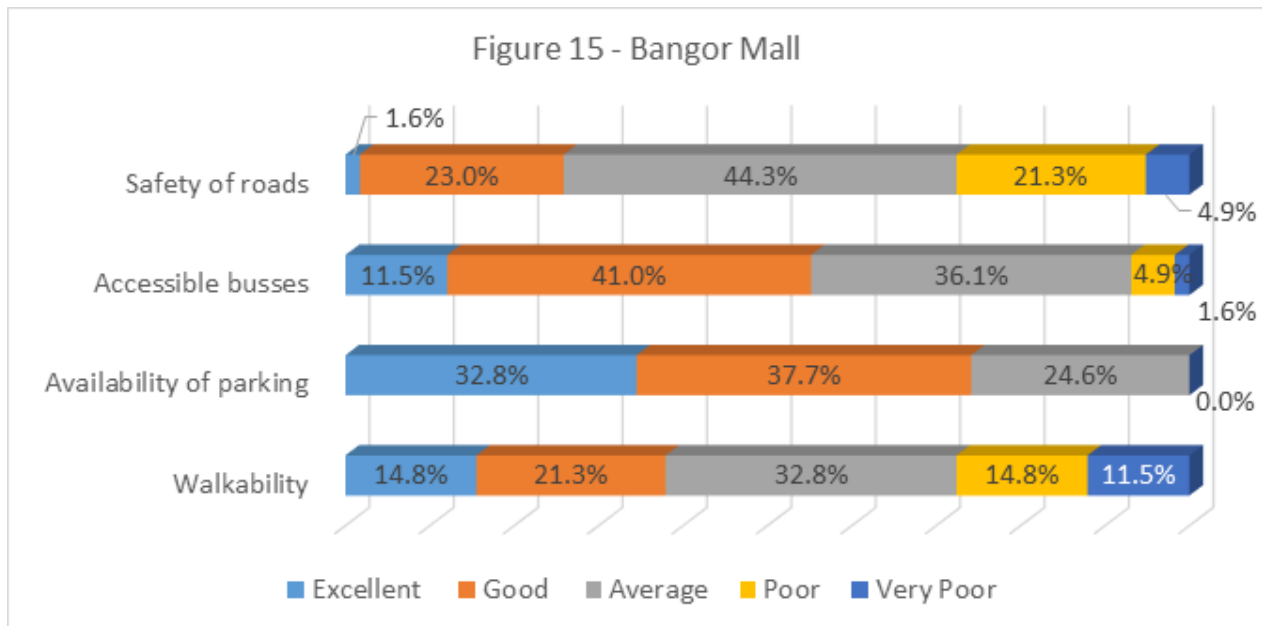


Figure 14 - Hogan Road





Recommendations for Improving Livability

Survey participants were asked to identify one improvement in Bangor that would make the city more livable for older workers and consumers. Supporting walkability was a significant theme among comments, as well as other infrastructure and transportation improvements, especially making Downtown pedestrian-only.

Sidewalks and Walkability

- “Fix the sidewalks and keep them clean”
- “Downtown has actually improved cross walks, signage and lights for pedestrians. I'd like to see more. Up on State Street between Miller Drug and Franks would be one place”

- “Improve parking and walking areas”
- “While good sidewalks and ease of access are important (too many neighborhoods don't have grocery shopping within a short walking distance, for example), so is physical safety”
- “Better walking areas. Especially sidewalks in busy area”
- “Better sidewalks!!! Everywhere!!!”
- “Improved walkability”
- “Wider sidewalks and additional trees and seats”
- “Do a better job at keeping the walking trails/sidewalks clear from obstruction”
- “Improved crosswalks”
- “Bigger sidewalks for bikes and walking. Moreover, City of Bangor needs to maintain the sidewalks it currently doesn't”
- “Bricks on downtown sidewalks are not always flat and sometime I and other people trip.”
- “Make the sidewalks safe and clean.”
- “Fix sidewalks”

Infrastructure, and Outdoor Spaces

- “Safer roads/bicycle paths. Revitalize downtown. Close the streets off and make common areas for pedestrians. However, to do this, you have to build an excellent parking garage that is safe, warm, and inviting, with businesses attached and security. Quit wasting time on buses, they are so outdated and unattractive. Let's build a monorail from the Hogan road area to Downtown so shoppers and tourist can visit both with ease. Let's do something big to change the face of Bangor. Imagine people parking at the Mall are monorailing to a waterfront concert. Maybe in coordination with Brewer and a monorail that makes a huge loop to transform Bangor and Brewer. Let's get it on!!!!”
- “Make the downtown segment of Main Street one-way traffic (extending the Central Street direction and lane) with more room for entering and exiting parking slots, deliveries, passenger pick-ups, etc. As it is Main Street is needlessly clogged up with through traffic that can be routed around the center of town.”
- “Another parking garage on the other side of downtown”
- “Somehow redirect pass-through traffic in downtown Bangor and make the whole area a walking mall with golf cart services”
- “Close off Central Street and make it pedestrian! Have better parking areas nearby or widen parking areas on the street. Better shoveled sidewalks. Or more parking lots closer to stores.”

Transportation

- “Free transportation and parking”
- “Free public transportation to people 62 and older”
- “Shuttle service from downtown to parking garage”

Other

- “A senior friendly indoor park for walking, exercise and socializing during winter months with ample parking, easy accessibility
- “An obvious police presence downtown is a very good thing”
- “More training on computers for older workers. For older customers more training for workers on how to work with older adult issues. Hearing and vision loss create barriers for communicating with older adults and many workers are not trained how to handle that”
- “Better information on assisted living. I have a seller that needs to get into a rental and we are not sure where to go for one-stop information on elderly housing.”
- “Not sure...overall pretty friendly I think”
- “Never thought of it. I'm 65 and have no complaints”
- “More income friendly senior housing. There are long wait lists for affordable housing and not many options in the Bangor area.”
- “Put day care businesses in assisted living facilities. Create free housing for college students who live in assisted living complexes with active elderly”

Discussion and Limitations

When examining the results of this survey, it is important to take into account certain limitations. The most significant limitation of this survey is the small respondent sample size relative to the number of businesses in Bangor as a whole. While the number of respondents was relatively small, individuals from all of the major business districts in Bangor were represented, as well as other areas of Bangor, which is important. Given the sample size, the data presented may not necessarily be generalizable to the overall population of business owners. Despite this limitation though, the survey provides initial evidence about business owner perceptions of the age-friendliness and livability of the city.

There are significant take-aways from the survey:

- It is clear that the sample of business owners who did participate in the survey have taken steps to implement age-friendly policies for older workers, with almost half stating that

they have flexible scheduling policies in place. However, almost a quarter indicated that they have not instituted phased retirement, flexible scheduling, adaptive technology, or other accommodations. Notably, very clear themes around the assets that older workers bring to businesses including reliability, work ethic and knowledge were present.

- When asked to rate the degree of accessibility of major business districts, the most significant challenges were identified in terms of the walkability of the Broadway and Hogan Road districts, while Downtown parking was highlighted as a challenge as well.
- In terms of recommendations from business owners meant to improve the livability and age-friendliness of Bangor, the theme of sidewalk maintenance and improvement emerged as a clear priority and an area where there is a significant overlap with feedback from the participants in the community discussions that were conducted. Additionally, there were a number of comments from business owners in the Downtown region advocating for changes to traffic flow or implementing pedestrian-only areas to increase walkability. Although there were responses to open-ended questions stressing the need for improved transportation options, among this sample, there was little support for extending bus system capacity from a business standpoint.