

# Rehoboth Beach Main Street

## Economic Vitality Survey

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction
  - a. Background
2. Methods
3. Findings
4. Proposed Solutions
5. Conclusion



# Introduction

# Background

- Our Client:
  - Rehoboth Beach Main Street (RBMS)
  - Karen Falk: Executive Director
  - Ryan Schwamberger: Economic Vitality Committee Chair, Manager of Dogfish Head Brewing and Eats Restaurant in Rehoboth Beach
- RBMS offers membership to hundreds of local businesses
- Businesses along Route 1 (Coastal Highway) attracting clientele away from downtown Rehoboth Beach
- Parking is an issue during the beach season
- Side streets are losing business to Rehoboth Avenue
  - Wilmington Ave, Baltimore Ave, Lake Ave, Olive Ave, First and Second Streets

# Project Objectives, Problem Definition, and Stakeholders

- Project Objectives
  - Economic Vitality of Business District
- Define the Problem
  - Parking Issues
  - Real Estate
  - Main St versus Coastal Hwy
- Stakeholders
  - Business Owners
  - Local Residents
- Plan of Action
  - Bridge communication gaps
  - Gauge opinions of business owners
  - Cover all areas of downtown Rehoboth

# Methods

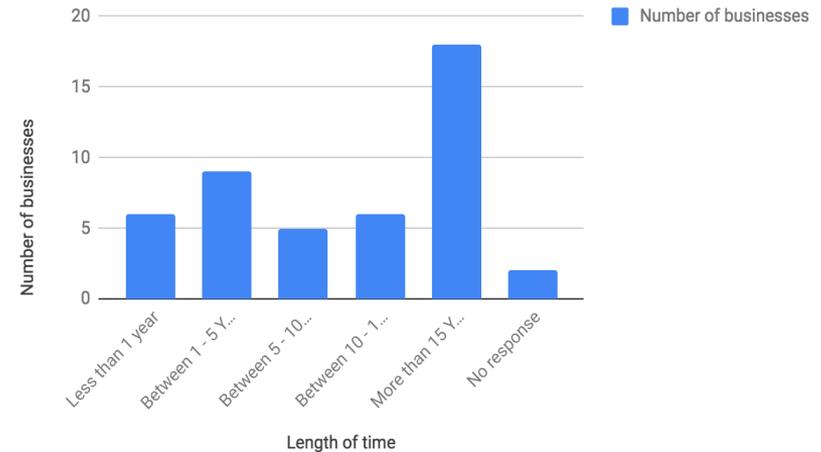
- **Research survey methodology and Rehoboth Beach Main Street itself**
- **Create the survey keeping in mind...**
  - Importance of community involvement
  - Preservation of community assets and history
  - Involving relevant stakeholders
  - Learning about business trends
  - Understanding prior perceptions of issues by subjects being surveyed
- **How we conducted the survey**
- **Data**
  - Recorded and organized data
  - Presented our findings to our client

# Findings

# Q1: How long have you been at your business location?

- Most businesses in Rehoboth have been operating at their location for over 15 years.
  - Many of the businesses that answered less than that had actually been in town for longer but had just moved buildings for a larger space, better location, etc.
- Signifies that Rehoboth business owners are loyal to the town, and have strong long-standing connections to it.

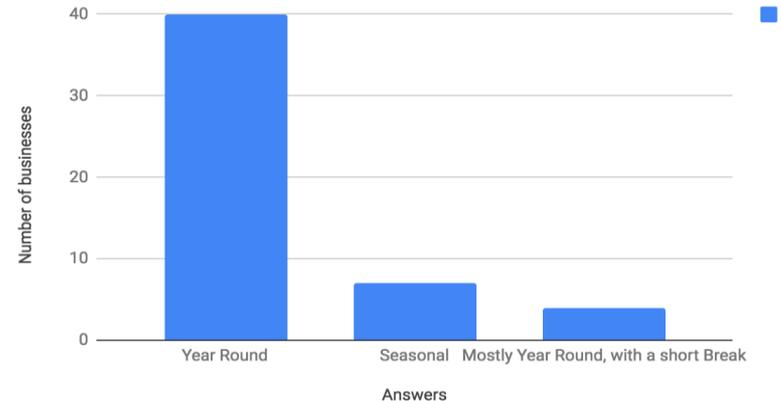
How long have you been at your business location?



## Q2: Is your business open year round or seasonal?

- Most businesses in Rehoboth are open year-round.
- Owners commented that Rehoboth is changing to become a more year-round town
  - While this is good for the town's economy, it also could add have negative externalities such as a loss of availability and a rise in price of parking in the off-season, and businesses could have further trouble finding year-round employees.

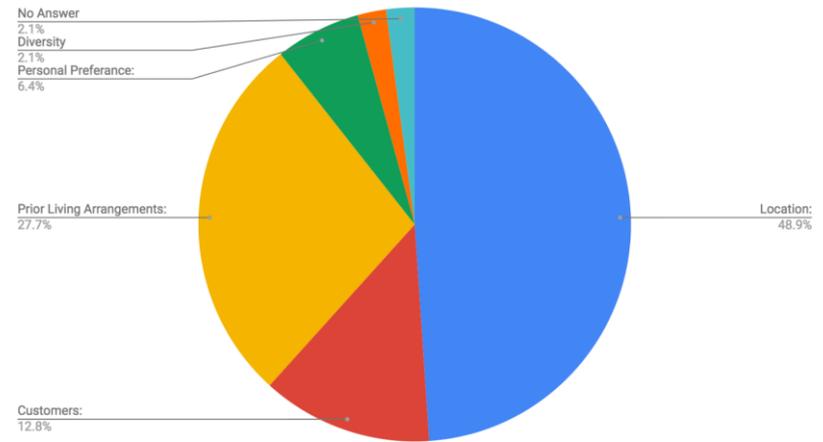
Is your business open year round or seasonal?



# Q3: What made you select Rehoboth Beach for your business location?

- Roughly 49% of all businesses surveyed cited that location was the reason that they chose to locate their business in Downtown Rehoboth.
- Said that the beach town atmosphere was conducive to their business success, and the higher-income bracket of residents and tourists also was a draw for them.

What made you select Rehoboth Beach for your business location?



## Q4: Has your clientele changed in recent years and is there a correlation between that and the success of your business?

- Biggest consensus was that clientele in Downtown Rehoboth has not changed significantly in recent years.
- *BUT...*
  - Many businesses also said that they have had to update their merchandise and offerings to a more modern crowd
  - Many also mentioned a new wave of “day-trippers” coming in that are of lower-income levels

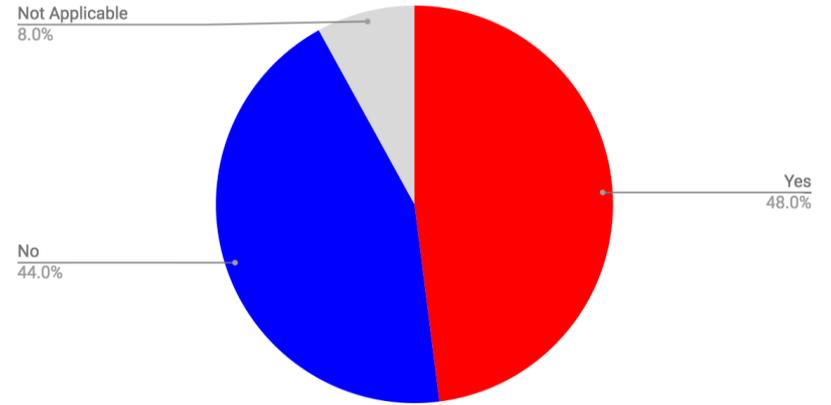


Source: delawareonline.com

## Q5: Do you have any issues related to seasonal and/or year round employment?

- More than half of the businesses surveyed expressed that they had problems with gaining reliable seasonal and year-round employees.
  - Mainly attributed to a lack of affordable housing in town for untrained employees, as well as the high price of employee parking and park-and-ride services.
  - Seasonal employees often are not inclined to stay year-round, making the pool of employees smaller in the off-season.

Do you have any issues related to seasonal and/or year round employment?



Q6: Do you have any opinions regarding downtown parking in RB? What is your opinion regarding public transportation and means of bringing visitors to the downtown business area?

- While there was a wide variety of differing opinions on how to improve parking in Downtown Rehoboth, mostly all agreed on one thing: the situation as it is is hurting their business.
  - Many expressed that the meters are too expensive, and public transportation is either insufficient or not applicable to their higher-end clientele.
  - A few also expressed the need for a parking garage with variable rates for more parking during the summer months.

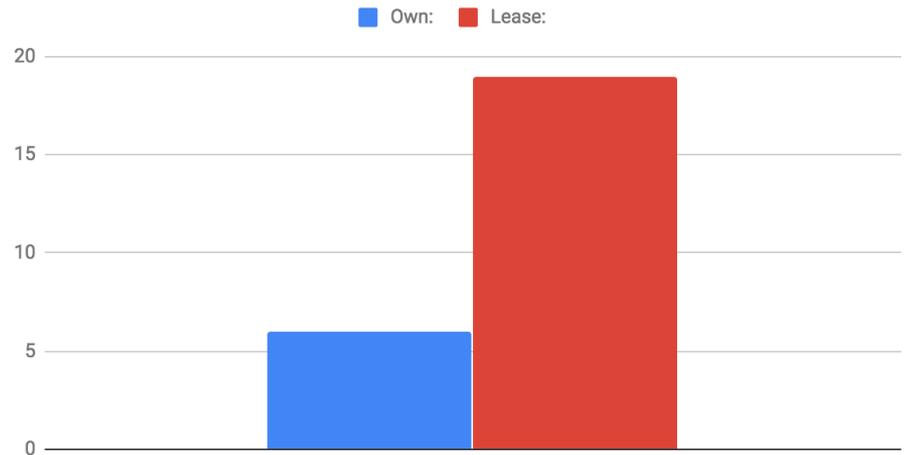


Source: [cityofrehoboth.com](http://cityofrehoboth.com)

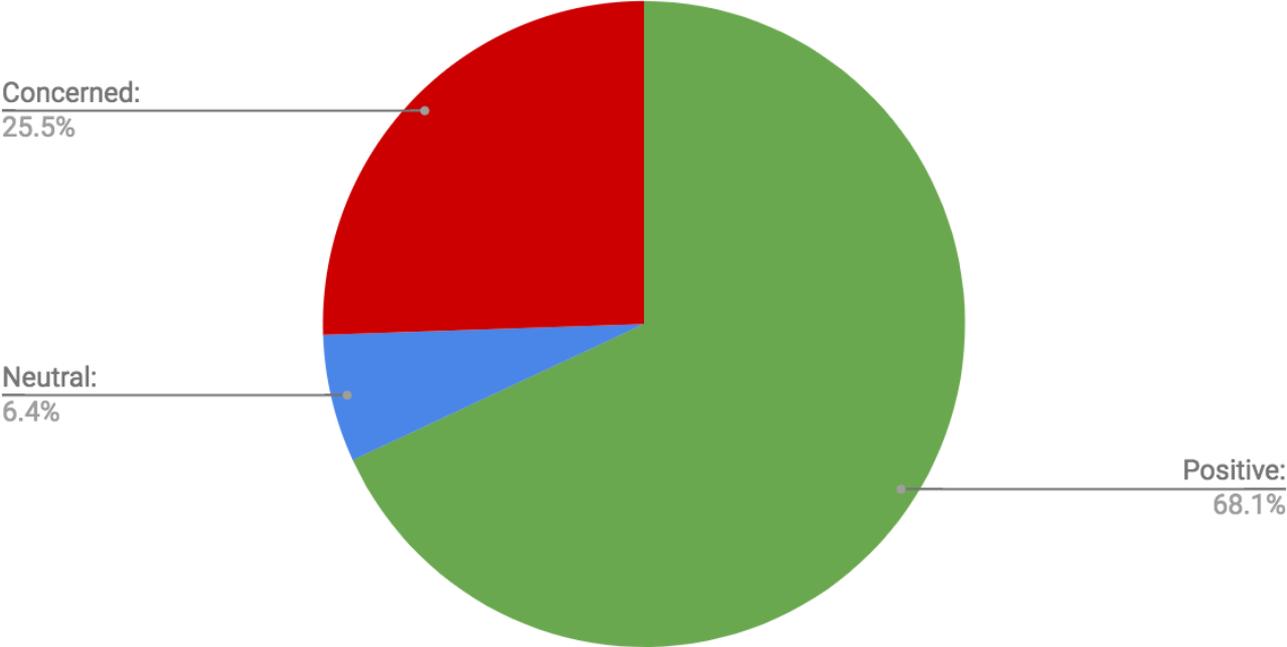
# Q7: Do you own your commercial business property or do you lease?

- Most people lease their commercial business property
- Out of 25 responses, 19 businesses leased their location and 6 owned.
- Of those that lease, there were mixed responses regarding rent rates. Some felt that their lease rates were fair and they believed their landlords were very fair. Some others felt that the leases were too high, and getting more expensive every year.

Do you own your commercial business property or do you lease?



Overall, are you positive, neutral, or concerned about the future of your business in Rehoboth Beach?



Q8: Overall, are you positive, negative, or neutral about the future of your business in Rehoboth Beach?

# Business-type specific questions:

Restaurant: Does your business have available space to create outdoor eating? If so, is this something you would consider adding?

- Most business did not have the space for outdoor eating, but they would consider having it if available.
- Those that did have the space already used it to become outdoor eating.
- Other businesses were in the process of building outdoor eating space - Atlantic Boardwalk Grill

Retail: Do you feel Rehoboth Beach as a whole attracts the customers that most closely fit the profile of your target audience?

- Yes!
- Charm, characteristics of the town, restaurants, and the beach definitely help attract their ideal customers
- A few outliers claimed that there were too many day-trippers, and they were taking parking of the desired clientele.

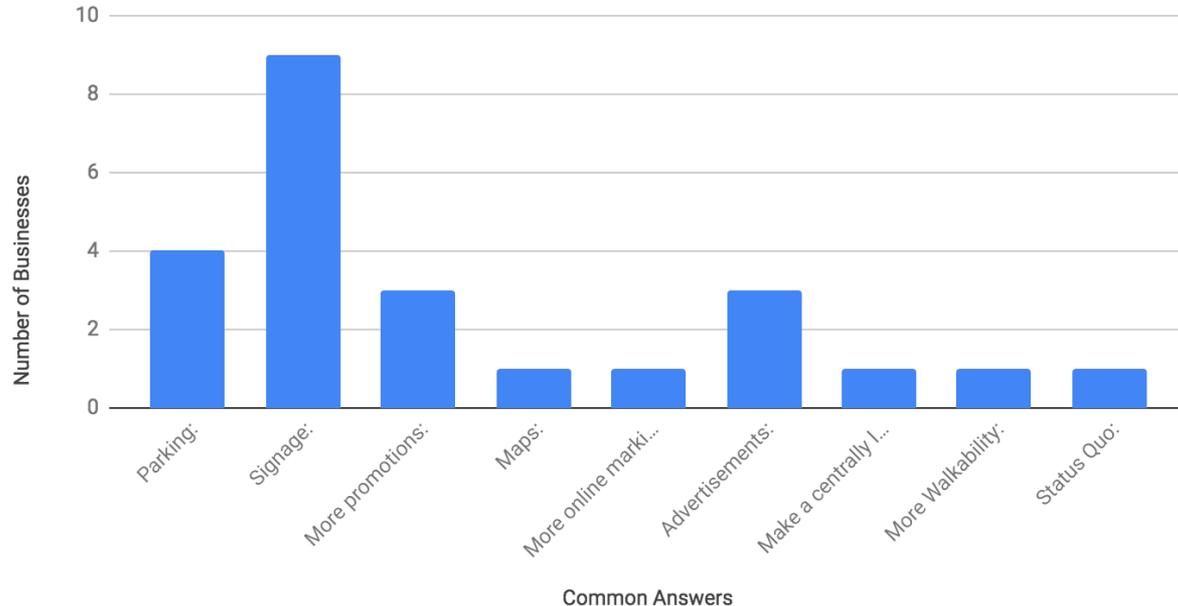
# Side Street Businesses

**Do you feel that the visitors to Rehoboth Beach are aware of the variety of stores and restaurants on side streets?**

- NO!
- Many of these side street businesses feel that most of the shoppers concentrated on Rehoboth Avenue.
- They would like to see more promotion of their stores to attract customers on to their streets. They would also like to see more maps and signs throughout Rehoboth that highlight their stores; this way, customers are more aware of where these businesses are located.
- Overall, we found that these businesses had a more **negative** outlook on the future economic vitality of their business than ones on Rehoboth Avenue.

# What is one thing you think can be done to attract more customers and businesses to your street?

What is one thing that you think can be done to attract more customers and businesses to your street?



# Proposed Solutions

1. Streetscape Improvements
2. Advertising
3. General Parking Solutions

# Streetscape Improvements- Side Streets

- One of the largest concerns of the side-street businesses on Wilmington, Baltimore, Lake, and Olive Avenues was that there is not enough done to draw customers off of Rehoboth Avenue to their street.
- Design principles of *wayfinding*- the practice of spatially aligning an individual in an unfamiliar environment and influencing their navigation effectively
  - Create an identity at each location, different from all others.
  - Use landmarks to provide orientation cues and memorable locations.
  - Create well-structured paths.
  - Create regions of differing visual character.
  - Don't give the user too many choices in navigation.
  - Use survey views (give navigators a vista or map).
  - Provide signs at decision points to help wayfinding decisions.
  - Use sight lines to show what's ahead (Foltz, 1998).



Source: [smartgrowthamerica.org](http://smartgrowthamerica.org)

# Streetscape Improvements (continued)

- Recommendations- Make a more memorable location that is easily navigable
  - Putting attractive signage that is easy to read and navigates people to specific businesses at the end of sight lines- could even be murals on sides of buildings
  - Providing attractive landscaping within the bare curb strips- would make street more attractive without an expensive sidewalk renovation
    - Local businesses could sponsor these projects
  - Artistic motifs on benches, decorative bollards, etc.

# Advertising

## Online:

- Advertise more of the businesses, events, and other community features of Rehoboth Beach
- Social media
- Tourist websites
- RBMS Webpage
- Highlight the character, charm, quality, and uniqueness

## Cross-Branding:

- Cross-branding between multiple businesses
- Create coupons that promote other shops, restaurants, and businesses
- Strengthen community ties this way and stimulate business between these different groups

# Parking

## Increase of Metered Spots

- Allows for an increase of foot traffic on side streets.
- May lower the congestion of Rehoboth Avenue
- Free parking in metered spots during the offseason can cost the city money
  - Free parking considered a public good that has to be maintained and cared for
  - All year operational meters will create a steady stream of revenue

## Building a Parking Garage/Incorporating More Pay to Park lots

- Makes use of any abandoned property or vacant lots
- Building a garage = High Cost \$
- Price of parking should be correlated with demand for parking (High demand, low price)
- Number of spots should be based on demand
- Higher occupancy of spots makes it possible for the city to get a return on its investment
- Three major goals
  - Ready Availability
  - High Occupancy
  - Revenue

# LB BLOBS

REHOBOTH BEACH  
MAIN STREET

Conclusion

Thank you!