

Executive Master of Business Administration  
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Revitalization of Downtown Amherst

By

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# Revitalization of Downtown Amherst

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# **Revitalization of Downtown Amherst**

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## **Abstract**

The decline of the downtown community is occurring throughout North America. The downtown is the heart of a town or city. It is the center, the core, from which all else flows. Many towns and cities alike have taken on revitalization efforts to breathe economic activity back into the vacant buildings and streetscapes. A review in the literature revealed numerous research studies on this topic. Research on the topic of downtown revitalization emphasized the importance of the engagement of the business community.

This research study included surveying the downtown business community to gather information to further enhance the revitalization efforts that began in 2009 when the Town of Amherst, Nova Scotia hired a consulting firm to create a downtown revitalization plan. This study was descriptive in nature and focused on gathering information to establish a business mix, identify strengths and challenges businesses face establishing in the downtown, assessment of economic activity and target market population, feedback from business owners on the obstacles preventing future growth and identified needs of the downtown business owner for future prosperity.

Businesses responding were from a mixture of four sectors; 12% from government and non-profit, 15% from professional services, 27.5% from retail and 45.5% was from the services industry. The findings were correlated with findings from the literature review.

The results of this study suggest that the downtown business community is interested in having an active role in the revitalization efforts and looks for Downtown Amherst to be a strong economic centre both locally and regionally. This will require effective partnerships of the public and private sector to maximize the revitalization efforts.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

Revitalization of Downtown Amherst Nova Scotia is occurring at an active pace. The business community along with the citizens and town council are embracing the value in this town rich in history and cultural diversity. It has become no longer acceptable to just sit back and watch the decline and decay of buildings and closing of small businesses.

### *Background on the Town of Amherst, Nova Scotia*

Located at the northern end of Nova Scotia, Amherst is strategically located at the center of the Maritime Provinces. The population on this small town was reported to be 9717 in the 2011 statistics Canada Census report. (Statistics Canada, 2011) This was an increase in population by 2.2%. The provincial population growth rate for same period was only 0.9% however the national population grew by 5.9% during the same time period. (The Amherst Daily News, 2012)

Amherst is rich in history, first settled in 1764 by New England settlers after the expulsion of the Acadians. The town's first industry was a grist mill and tannery. Amherst became home to shipbuilding, rail transportation and manufacturing operations. (Ekistics, 2010) The town has a history of rum runners who are rumored to be the builders of the beautiful Victorian homes all along Victoria Street, which is Amherst's main street. Many of the buildings were built with local red sandstone and remain to this day.



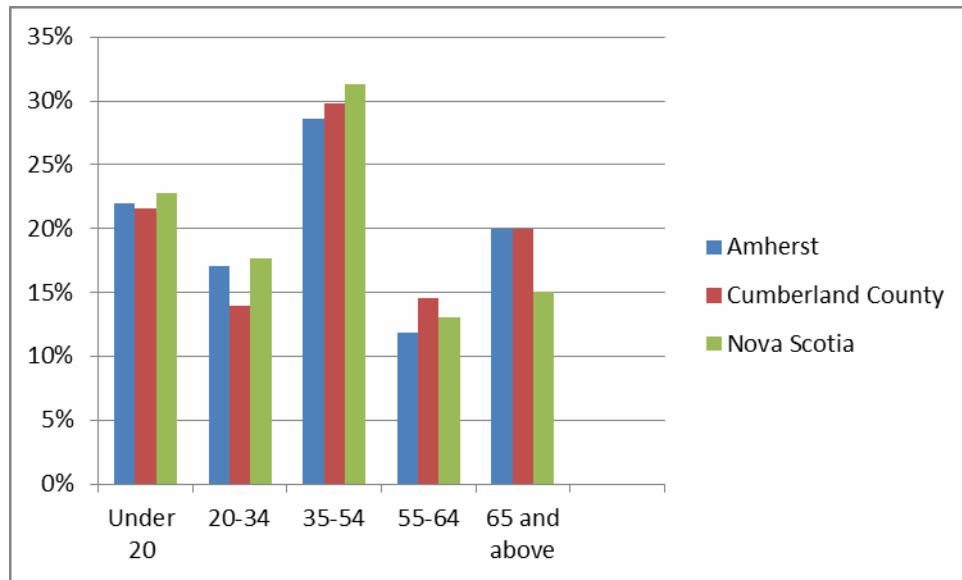
Land area is 12.02 square kilometers with a population density of 808.4 persons per square kilometer. This compares to the provincial land area of 52,939.44 square kilometers with a population density of 17.4 persons per square kilometer.

**Figure 1: Map of the Town of Amherst, Nova Scotia (with permission from the Town of Amherst, Nova Scotia)**



The demographics of Amherst, Cumberland County and Nova Scotia as reported by the Nova Scotia government website are illustrated in Figure 2 below. This data was taken from the 2006 Canadian Census. (Community Counts, 2012)

**Figure 2: Demographics of Amherst, Cumberland County and Nova Scotia**



In 2011, Amherst (Town) had 4,403 private dwellings occupied by usual residents. The change in private dwellings occupied by usual residents from 2006 was 6.0%. For Canada as a whole, the number of private dwellings occupied by usual residents increased 7.1%. The Town on Amherst experienced a growth in population of 2.2% from 2006. (Statistics Canada, 2011)

While the Town of Amherst has experienced an overall growth of 2.2% in population, there is a perception the downtown area has had a decline in the business community and an increase in vacant and deteriorated buildings in recent years. The actual number is not known as this information has not been kept up-to-date by anyone. The causes of the decline of the downtown core is not directly linked to one specific cause however it

is likely to be similar to other downtowns across North America, which will be discussed further in the literature review.

### *Revitalization efforts of the Town of Amherst*

The town of Amherst, Nova Scotia, has been undertaking several initiatives to restore and revitalize its Downtown core. In 2009, the Town partnered with Cumberland Regional Economic Development Agency to commission the development of an innovative action strategy for Downtown Amherst. Ekistics Planning and Design, in association with Form: Media, SNC-Lavalin, and Colliers International began an extensive, nine-month long public consultation and design study, holistically examining development and planning issues, and developing a detailed plan that would guide the future development and investment for Downtown Amherst. (Ekistics, 2010) The municipal government has embraced the twenty year plan that was created. An article posted in the Canadian Business Journal has statements made by the current Mayor Robert Small: “We’re focused on our five-year downtown development plan, with an investment of \$15 million.” Part of that plan includes changing traffic flows, looking at town signage, and improving accessibility. “We want to bring people back to our downtown,” Small says. “We want local businesses and industry to know we’re going to improve on conditions that allow people to live in the downtown and enjoy it, while working there.” (The Canadian Business Journal, 2010)

The Town has already completed many of the recommendations of the downtown action strategy. Jason MacDonald, town planner, reports the first phase included projects including entrance signs, kiosks, directional signs, street lights and granite curb and new street furniture. The second phase included Victoria Street development, Victoria

Square, Church / Albion Intersection, King and Electric and Church Street redevelopments and Victoria Street crosswalks. In addition, 2012 the town completed Havelock and Church Street crosswalks, bought new street furniture and set up internet wifi access in the downtown. Approximately \$3,550, 000 dollars have been spent thus far and has come from a mixture of federal, provincial and municipal funds. Mr. MacDonald reports the town have been implementing some of the „soft“ recommendations as well. Festival assistance, programming in Victoria Square (movie nights/noon tunes) are examples implementing some of the „soft“ recommendations. Also included are the policy, capacity building, programming, and committee development. The establishment of a Downtown Business Advisory Committee is an example of committee development.

The town government and management team have created a formal partnership with the business community through the creation of the Downtown Business Advisory Committee. This committee consists of seven downtown business owners, two town councillors, the director of economic development and the development officer. This committee began in April 2012 and meets monthly. The DBAC is the voice for the downtown business community in Amherst and the conduit to Amherst Town Council. See *Appendix A* for Downtown Business Advisory Committee Policy.

#### *Downtown Decline Common Concern*

The decline of the downtown core is a problem that many municipal governments are facing. In a recent article in the Chronicle Herald, the author Roger Taylor cautions government to take action before it is too late. He writes of businesses that have “moved out of the downtown (Halifax) completely to relocate in a business park or the suburbs

where the taxes are lower, rents are cheaper, there's more parking and doing business is easier." He also quotes Michael Turner, president of Turner, Drake & Partners Ltd., who says demographics are also working against the downtown, and something must be done quickly to save it, or, he fears, the downtown will not recover. As the population ages, he says, there will be less need to have a downtown as more and more people retire. What is needed is more people living downtown, he says, and while there are some attempts to do just that, it is not happening fast enough. (Taylor, 2013)

Turner, a well-known Halifax real estate consultant, says by allowing the proliferation of office buildings in industrial parks, the city is helping to kill the downtown. The answer is to not allow office buildings to be constructed outside of the downtown area. (Taylor, 2013) The town council in Amherst, Nova Scotia are now having similar discussions. They are looking to restrict government offices to the downtown core through a proposed amendment to its land-use bylaw. Dave March who is a town councillor "said the Centre First Downtown Action Strategy recommends that all office uses be restricted to the downtown". (The Amherst Daily News, 2013)

The town of Truro recently had a heated meeting with the premier Darrell Dexter. Truro was one of many towns throughout the province that had its government office "Access Nova Scotia" moved out of its downtown core to the outskirts of town. "Access Nova Scotia probably attracted 100,000 person visits a year to the downtown," John Starratt, a downtown businessman, told the premier. I don't see what business model could support taking that traffic out of the downtown. Some of those people would have gone out for lunch, gone shopping or got a hair-cut while in the area, supporting our local businesses." (The Chronicle Herald, 2013) The recent frustrations of downtown Truro

emphasize the importance of the role of planning and strategy at all levels of government with private industry. Downtown revitalization planning can be demoralized by what may seem as a small decision but has an exponential impact on many.

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations on the revitalization of Downtown Amherst. As presented in the literature review, the decline of the downtown core is a common concern by most towns and cities. Through a purposeful plan, the downtown core can once again become the jewel in the crown of any town or city. The information gathered for this research, including the survey results from the business community of downtown Amherst, will provide a foundation of knowledge to use in the revitalization efforts.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to the topic of revitalization of downtowns throughout North America.

### *History of Downtown Decline*

There is an abundance of literature on downtown revitalization and it is dominated by analysis of the decentralization of population and employment. There is a direct relationship between sprawl (excessive decentralization) and downtown vitality. (Faulk, 2006) The decline of traditional downtown areas can be traced back to the demand for housing after World War II and the availability of financing for single-family housing, along with the automobile and improvements in the nations road system (Norquist, 1998) (Burayidi, 2001) which facilitated movement out of the traditional city. As the population grew in the suburbs and residential population declined in the downtown areas, retail and commercial activities followed. The development of suburban commercial malls began in the 1950's. This led to high levels of commercial vacancies and abandonment in the traditional downtown areas of cities. By the 1970's and 80's, many cities realized that proactive measures were needed to counteract vacancies. Thus began the beginnings of many organizations with the purpose of revitalization of downtowns. (Faulk, 2006)

Examples of the organizations formed to foster downtown revitalization were Business Improvement Districts, Downtown Development Associations and the most commonly heard of is the Main Street Approach. Towns could adopt a "Main Street Program" and be officially affiliated with the National Main Street Center. The Main Street Approach consists of four principles: (Tyler, 2000)



1. Organization of downtown interests
2. Design and historic preservation to enhance the built environment
3. Economic restructuring to diversify the downtown economy
4. Marketing and promotion of the downtown

The literature on downtown revitalization presents several examples of towns and cities that have used one of the above or similar organizational models to create change. These include different policies and projects. There are prescriptions on how to approach the revitalization process. Many of the cities that completed an evaluation of part of the process state those towns that have failed to establish a “sense of place” have often tried to adopt policies and projects without modifying to reflect their own strengths and character into the plan. (Faulk, 2006) This emphasizes the importance of each downtown creating a revitalization plan that is based on the characteristics of their own business mix, culture and heritage.

A common theme to most downtown revitalization plans began with an assessment of the current conditions. Some of the tools and techniques that are available to begin a downtown revitalization process include an on-line Downtown and Business District Market Analysis Toolbox which was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the Wisconsin Department of Commerce Main Street Program (2004). This on-line tool helps communities to understand market conditions, identify market opportunities by sector (retail, service, dining, entertainment, residential, office and lodging). (Ryan, Fall 2004)

In an article on the development of the downtown of New Richmond, Wisconsin, a town with a population of about 6300, the following steps were taken: (Ryan, Fall 2004)

- A market analysis was completed looking at the number and types of businesses the downtown community.
- The size and shape of the downtown area was clearly established
- The demographics and customer characteristics were gathered
- Local economic trends and consumer research assessed

### *Implementing revitalization programs in small cities*

Burayidi (2001) presented case studies on downtown development in non-suburban small cities with populations under 100 000. The results of these case studies provide guidance for implementing programs so that the community feels ownership of the process. He recommends promoting both physical and economic renewal by creating a sense of place in the downtown; monitoring downtown revitalization programs and progress so that the effectiveness of these programs can be evaluated; involve many constituencies – business owners, tenants, and landlords, government officials, workers and residents in revitalization efforts; establish a long-term vision for downtown; and find out about programs in other communities. (Burayidi, 2001)

### *Role of Local Government*

The local municipal government needs to take a leadership role in the development of a downtown revitalization program. A clear vision with strategic goals must be established. The revitalization of most downtowns requires a partnership of the local government and the business community. In a study on urban development, author

Michael Mason writes on the topic of collaborative partnerships featuring intergovernmental and/or the public private sector. In his paper he analyzes the five procedural attributes of the partnership: resource sharing, leadership, community involvement, mutual learning and horizontal accountability. (Mason, 2007; Volume 39)

Collaborative partnerships or alliances will propel the revitalization process forward however it will not be without complications. Regime theory, most known by Clarence Stone, theorizes that in any society there is an existence of a relatively small group that monopolizes decision- making power. (Leo, 2003) Effective partnerships can occur however each of the members need to be given a chance to communicate and have an active role in the decision making process. Having a good facilitator is essential and needs an appropriate level of resource and support. Collaborative alliances are essential to effective downtown revitalization programs however the members need to understand these alliances can be ambiguous, complex and dynamic. Those involved need to comprehend the enormous challenges which collaboration presents. (Lederer, 2005)

### *Vacant Buildings*

Some of the common areas that local government focus on in revitalization programs are vacant buildings and commercial property tax. Vacant and unused buildings are a result of market failure. There is an excess supply of buildings in downtown locations while new structures are built in the fringe areas. This recently occurred in Amherst. The provincial government decided to move the Land Registry of Deeds from the downtown core to a fringe area. (Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, 2012) This decision seemed contradictory to most as the provincial government provided some of the funding for the Centre First Strategy to revitalize the downtown. From an economic

perspective, the government has the ability to develop vacant land and influence policy and is a rare situation where government intervention may improve market efficiency. (Faulk, 2006) The local government also has a role in leadership which involves making downtown revitalization part of the strategic plan. Vacant buildings or underutilized buildings are referred to as “White Elephants”. They are often the impetus for downtown revitalization efforts. (Wilke, 1999) These vacant buildings represent a lack of economic activity. The cause of this is often due to absentee landlords that may live in another city and do not take care of their property. Sometimes the building may require updating of the electrical or heating systems which require large capital investment. The landlord may not see the financial benefit for these costs and choose to leave the building vacant hoping that the property value will increase. This is often not the case and usually the value decreases due to the inactivity and deterioration of the building. (Wilke, 1999)

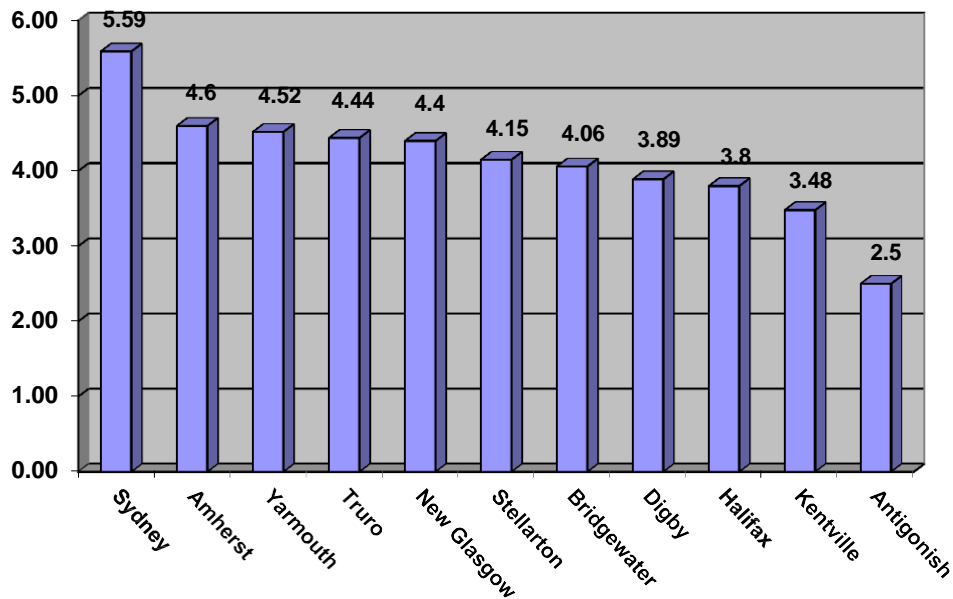
The Town of Amherst created a “Vacant Building By-Law” in May 2011. This was in response to several buildings in the downtown had been owned by the same landlord that did not live in the area and was leaving the buildings vacant, without repair and care. Since the creation of this by-law two buildings have been bought by the town and demolished, another was bought by the town but is still sitting in disrepair.

### *Taxation*

The issue of tax base is of large concern to most municipal governments as well as to most property owners that have been experiencing rising costs. One common recommendation seen throughout the literature on downtown revitalization projects is to lower commercial property taxes.

Currently Amherst, Nova Scotia has one of the highest commercial property taxes in Nova Scotia at a rate of \$4.55 per \$100 of assessment. See Appendix B for a list of commercial property rates across Nova Scotia. (Finance, 2012)

**Figure 3: 2011/12 NS Communities with population Over 4000 Commercial Tax rates**



The Figure above compares Amherst with other towns across Nova Scotia that has a population greater than 4000 persons.

The Nova Scotia Chamber of Commerce issued a document entitled “Municipal Property Taxation: A Time for Real Change” in October 2012. It states “Property tax rates in an area that is in need of reform can be a very significant factor for economic development. For this reasons, it is in the interest of all municipalities, the provincial government and business to look more closely at our property tax system as a means to

build our economy”. (NS Chamber of Commerce and Collins Barrow Chartered Accountants, 2012)

One common concern raised in Nova Scotia is the comparison of residential and commercial tax rates. In Amherst the commercial tax rate is 2.74 times the cost of the residential tax rates. There is no discernible difference in services delivered by the municipality. This is a common finding throughout Nova Scotia. New Brunswick currently has a cap on the multiple between residential and commercial rates of 1.5 or 150%. (NS Chamber of Commerce and Collins Barrow Chartered Accountants, 2012)

The Amherst Town Council did remove a downtown business area tax in April 2012. It occurred at the same time that DARS (Downtown Amherst Revitalization Society) disbanded.

### *Incentives*

Downtown revitalization programs can include incentives to entice new businesses to the startup in the downtown, building owners to renovate and make building improvements. Incentives must be designed to effectively address the issues of greatest concern and/or to take advantage of existing untapped opportunities.

### *Evaluation of Downtown Revitalization programs*

Burayidi (2001) identifies two problems in evaluating the effectiveness of downtown revitalization programs. Many cities have no clear definition of “downtown”. Measures such as Central Business Districts (CBD), Tax Increment Financing Districts (TIF), and Business Improvement Districts (BID), all of which may exist “downtown”, are not coterminous, complicating the measurement issue. This should not be an issue for

Amherst. See Appendix D to see a map of the clear boundaries of the Downtown of Amherst, Nova Scotia.

Second issue is many cities have not collected data on the effects of revitalization efforts; changes such as change in tax base, real property investment, office space occupancy, number of businesses, population density, residential population by income, and employment by industry classification. (Faulk, 2006)

According to Robertson (1999), seven key elements are pivotal in defining a strong downtown sense of place:

1. Downtown is distinct from other commercial settings: A distinctive business district provides a welcome alternative to its competition and can build on its intrinsic historical, cultural, and physical assets.
2. Downtown represents the unique heritage of the community. Downtowns reflect much of the heritage – both in terms of physical structures and personal experiences – of a broad spectrum of people in the area.
3. Downtown is multifunctional: The multiple functions (ie. Shopping, eating, employment, tourism, government, religion, entertainment, housing) found within walking distance in most downtowns result in more people including downtown as a destination at different times for different purposes.
4. Downtown is pedestrian friendly: A downtown's sense of place is best experienced on foot, and this increases walk-by-traffic for businesses.
5. Human activity is vital to sense of place: The presence of human activity will make downtown look livelier and induces additional activity.

6. Downtown encourages people to linger: The longer people stay downtown, the more downtown's image will be enhanced and the more money they are likely to spend at downtown establishments.
7. Downtown engenders a high level of community ownership: The more people who feel some connection to downtown, the more they will use it and care about its future.

A review of the literature on downtown revitalization suggests having an organization whose sole function is to advocate the interests of downtown. Many of the articles reviewed emphasize that revitalization efforts need to be tailored to the needs of the community. The goal should be to develop a distinctive downtown in which people enjoy spending time and money (Faulk, 2006)



## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### *Introduction to Research Design*

A descriptive research design was employed with the intent to gather information from the downtown business community. See Appendix D for a map of the area. The literature review process identified the importance of gathering information from the downtown business community and using this information in future planning for revitalization strategies.

### *Sampling Design and Data Collection*

When the research study on Revitalization of Downtown Amherst began, there was no available up-to-date database of businesses in the downtown. The researcher gathered data from Town Hall and the Amherst and Area Chamber of Commerce and gathered a total list of 91 businesses in the downtown. Two of these businesses belonged to the researcher therefore a total of 89 surveys were hand delivered. Of these surveys delivered: 15 (17%) were in the Government and Non-Profit Sector, 9 (10%) were in the Professional Sector, 22 (25%) were in the Retail Sector and 43 (48%) were in the Service Industry Sector.

Each survey was in a sealed envelope. Included in the envelope were 2 copies of an informed consent, both to be signed by the business owner. One was to be kept and one was to be returned with the completed survey. Also included in the sealed envelope was a letter to the business owner explaining the purpose and intention of the survey. There was a stamped envelope to return the completed survey confidentially. See the appendix

section which includes a copy of all documents that were included in the package given to the business owner.

### *Survey Questionnaire Design and Measurement Procedure*

The survey design was completed with the purpose of gathering information of the downtown business mix in Amherst. The first question provides the owner to identify which business sector they are in. To measure and compare effectively, four sectors were used to categorize each business: professional (lawyers, accountants, physicians, etc), retail, government and non-profit and the service industry.

The questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 are all based on gathering data on the strengths and challenges of having a business in Downtown Amherst as well as an assessment of the general economic activity of the businesses.

The questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 are based on accumulating data to create marketing plan for the area. The responses to questions 12, 13 and 14 can be used to plan for business development strategies as well as education planning by organizations such as Nova Scotia Community College.

Question 15 was included to gather ideas from the business community to further develop vacant buildings and properties. Question 16 is open-ended with the intention to give business owners an opportunity to express any other ideas and concerns that they have not already included in the survey responses.

The exit page thanked the respondents for completing the survey and asked for the mail and email contact information so that a copy of the final research findings could be sent to them.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

The surveys were returned by one of two methods: mailed directly to the researcher or hand delivered to the researcher's business location which is in the downtown area. It was indicated on the survey that there was return deadline of August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012. The completed surveys were kept confidential and only reviewed by the researcher.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

The surveys were completed on paper with a combination of types of survey questions ranging from demographic, open-ended, ranking and comment sections. This non-electronic format, created a large workload. The organization of the data and subsequent analysis was cumbersome. Analysis was limited due to some problems with the questions. Some respondents didn't fully understand the instructions in the questions that required them to rank their responses in order of importance. Some respondents just placed check marks on the answer area instead of ranking in order of importance 1-5. This applied to questions 3, 4, 7, 12 and 14. In some questions up to 31% of the respondents answered with check marks instead of ranking in order of importance. Once the data was organized manually, correlation analysis was completed.

## Chapter 4 Survey Results

Since the survey was completed in the summer of 2012, the Communications Committee of the Downtown Business Advisory Committee (which is a sub-committee of the Amherst Town Council) has compiled an accurate list of businesses and organizations in the downtown Amherst area. There are many more businesses and organizations than was originally surveyed for this study. As of March 1, 2013, 193 businesses and organizations were identified in the following sectors:

**Table 1: Businesses and Organizations in Downtown Amherst by Sector**

Number	Percentage	Sector
50	26%	Governments and Non-Profit Sector
23	12%	Professional Sectors
37	19%	Retail Sector
82	43%	Service Industry Sector

For a full list of businesses and organization refer to Appendix C. The discrepancy between the number of businesses known by the town and Chamber as compared to the accurate list of businesses and organizations that was compiled emphasizes the need as identified in the literature review to complete a market analysis (Ryan, Fall 2004) to look at the number and types of businesses in the downtown community.

The table below identified the number of businesses that were given a business survey to complete for this study.

**Table 2: Survey given out to businesses in the summer of 2012**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Sector</b>
15	17%	Governments and Non-Profit Sector
9	10%	Professional Sectors
22	23%	Retail Sector
43	48%	Service Industry Sector

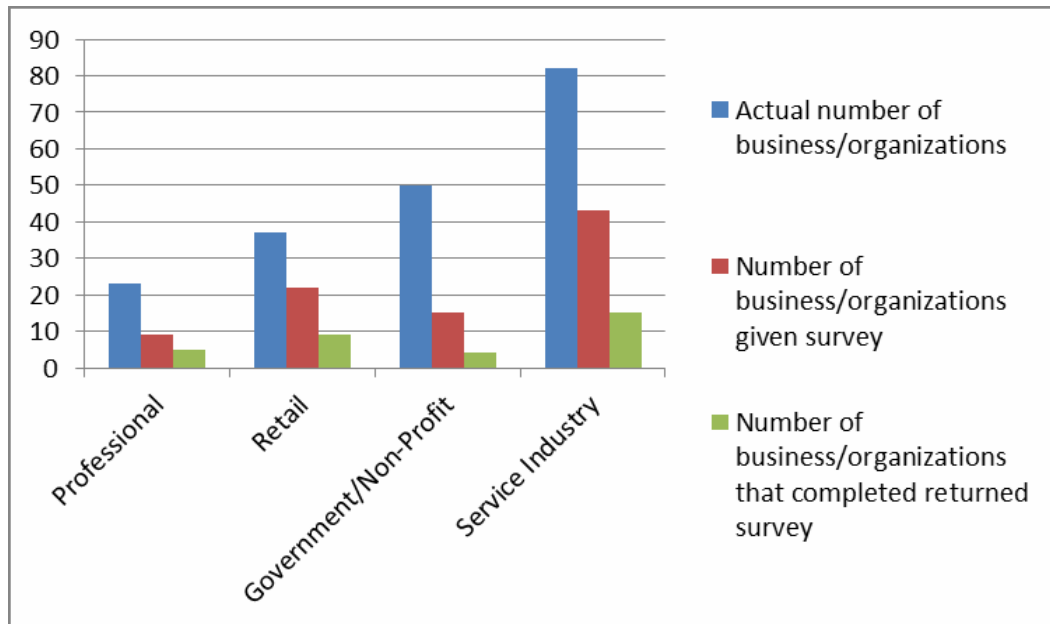
Eighty-nine surveys had been given out in the downtown business community. There were a total of 33 respondents who provided usable replies. This represented a response rate of about 37%.

The first question on the survey helped to identify the sector of the business. The table below reveals the business and sectors of the 33 survey respondents.

**Table 3: Business Sectors represented in survey respondents**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Sector</b>
4	12%	Governments and Non-Profit Sector
5	15%	Professional Sectors
9	27.5%	Retail Sector
15	45.5%	Service Industry Sector

**Figure 4: Comparison Chart between actual number of Businesses and Organizations in the Downtown of Amherst with number of surveys given out and returned**



The results of the survey are correlated to the sector where appropriate throughout the reporting of survey results.

The next question (refer to Appendix D for sample of survey) was an open-ended question asking what the advantages are of having their business located in the downtown. The majority of responses were in relation to location of services; especially banking, the courts, legal, accounting, and investment services. Parking was also emphasized as strength associated with having their business in the downtown.

The following chart shows the responses of the top five ranked reasons that the business was **attracted** to being located in the downtown. Several of the respondents did not answer the question that was asked. Instead of ranking the answers in order of importance, 10 of the respondents only placed check marks on their responses.

Therefore this data below is only based on 23 respondents.

**Table 4: Reasons businesses were "Attracted" to being located in the Downtown**

Order of importance	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Location</b>	70%	13%	13%	9%	0
<b>Lease Costs</b>	13%	17%	4%	4%	8%
<b>Events &amp; Activities</b>	0	8%	4%	4%	4%
<b>Taxation</b>	0	4%	0	4%	0
<b>Demographics</b>	8%	4%	8%	17%	4%
<b>Competition</b>	0	8%	17%	8%	4%
<b>Current Business Mix</b>	4%	8%	17%	17%	17%
<b>Traffic</b>	0	22%	22%	0	17%
<b>Services Available</b>	13%	13%	13%	26%	22%

The rankings echoed the previous open-ended question with **location** ranking number one by 70% of the respondents and services available was consistently ranked high.

The following chart shows the responses of the respondents of the top five ranked reasons that would **prevent** them from establishing a new business in Downtown Amherst. As in the previous data results, 9 of the 33 respondents did not respond to this question with ranking but rather a check mark only. Therefore the dataset is based on 24 respondents.

**Table 5: Reasons that would "prevent" a business from establishing a new business in the Downtown**

Order of importance	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Location</b>	8%	0	8%	4%	16%
<b>Lease Costs</b>	4%	25%	4%	16%	16%
<b>Events &amp; Activities</b>	0	0	0	4%	4%
<b>Taxation</b>	21%	46%	8%	0	8%
<b>Demographics</b>	16%	4%	4%	8%	4%
<b>Competition</b>	4%	0	12%	8%	4%
<b>Current Business Mix</b>	16%	8%	16%	16%	4%
<b>Traffic</b>	25%	8%	8%	16%	12%
<b>Services Available</b>	4%	4%	4%	0	8%

Taxation was highly ranked as a deterrent to establishing a new business in the downtown. The Town of Amherst did remove the *downtown area* commercial tax rate as of April 1, 2012 after meetings with the downtown business community. Amherst currently has a commercial tax rate of \$4.55 per \$100 of Assessment. The issue of taxation is shared across Nova Scotia. The President of the Nova Scotia Chamber of Commerce Chris Atwood said “commercial rates are 2½ times that of residential rates in most municipalities, and many business owners have reached the limit of their ability to pay.” (The Chronicle Herald, 2012) The issue of taxation is of concern not only to the business residents of downtown Amherst. The newly elected municipal government of Halifax Regional Municipality have publicly admitted the commercial tax system is



flawed and are looking for new formulas to base the commercial tax rate on. One suggestion given by Councillor Bruce Fisher is to tie the commercial tax rate to Gross domestic product. (The Chronicle Herald, 2012) This may not be the ideal solution however status quo is not a viable option.

The neighbouring province of New Brunswick has already undertaken a study of the taxation system. (New Brunswick, Department of Finance Province of, 2012) Their government implemented a temporary three per cent assessment cap for a two-year period, allowed the necessary time to analyze the current taxation system and to develop the first major change to property tax in decades. One of the recommendations of the study was to develop a property tax and assessment reform plan. Through the study the final recommendation was to lower the commercial property tax rate by 0.33 cents per \$100 assessment over a four year period to lessen the tax burden on businesses. (New Brunswick, Department of Finance Province of, 2012)

Amherst is located on the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick border and has a close relationship with neighbouring towns and cities such as Sackville and Moncton. New Brunswick has a lower hst by 2% than Nova Scotia. (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013) The Rotary Club recently hosted a luncheon with the Premier of Nova Scotia, Darrell Dexter and the number one concern that the Rotarians expressed was the “differing regulations and tax systems are making it difficult for companies on both sides of the border”. (The Amherst Daily News, 2012) Recently three Senators reignited the discussion of the Union of the three Maritime Provinces. (The National Post, 2012) While the three premiers disagreed to the union they did suggest that they should also strive for ways to share government services and administrative burdens, and to

eliminate trade barriers. (The Maritimes should remain three provinces but share costs, 2012) This concept of Maritime cooperation could lead to coordinated efforts with regards to areas of concern such as commercial property taxes.

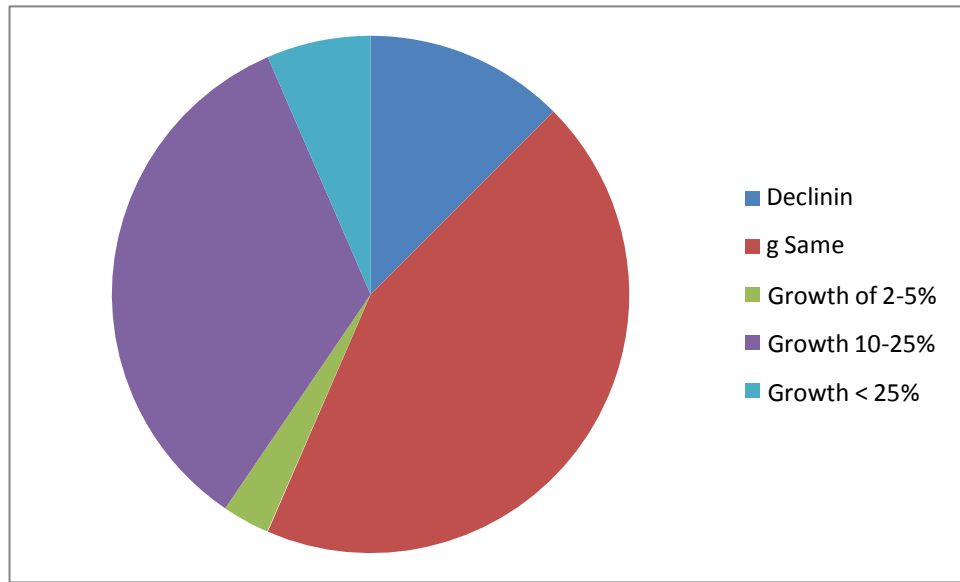
Taxation incentives are available in the Atlantic Provinces however none are available in relation to commercial property taxes. They vary in type of incentives from payroll rebates to research and development. (Reed, 2012) These non-commercial property tax incentives could be explored and shared with the business community.

Lease costs were ranked second most important reason by 25% of respondents. Lack of customer traffic was also ranked highly as a deterrent which can be attributed to an assumption of decreased traffic flow. It is interesting to compare these results with the previous question in which some respondents actually rank Traffic is highly important (22% rank it as number 2 and 22% rank it is number 3 in order of importance) as a reason their business was attracted to the downtown. This topic should have further study with business owners.

### *Business Activity*

The general social economic climate would cause a researcher to predict an overall decline in business activity. However when asked how they would characterise their business, only 4 (12.5%) of the 32 respondents answered with declining sales. Fourteen (44%) respondents answered that their business was holding its own with same level of business activity. Eleven (34%) of the owners responded with a growth between 10-25% and 2 (6%) stated they have experienced a rapid growth of more than 25%. One business documented a mild growth of 2-5%.

**Figure 5: Economic activity of downtown businesses**



The businesses experiencing rapid growth are both in the health & wellness industry; one in the service sector and one is in the non-profit sector. The businesses experiencing moderate growth of 10-25% growth include 45% is in the service sector, 18% professional, 27% retail, and 9% non-profit. These percentages closely reflect the sectors present in the downtown mix, indicating that no one sector is experiencing growth over another.

### *Marketing*

The current hours of operation vary widely amongst the businesses. In an attempt to correlate the data with economic activity, the hours of operation were analyzed in relation to the level of economic activity reported. There could be assumptions that if a business is open on weekends and evenings it may experience greater prosperity.

The two businesses that reported rapid growth are open both weekends and evenings. The businesses reporting moderate growth of 10-25%, 5 (3 service, 1 professional and 1

retail) are open 9-5 and 5 (2 retail, 1 non-profit and 2 service) are open also on weekends and evenings. The businesses that reported they were holding their own include 6 retail that are open weekends and evenings, 5 service that are open 9-5, 1 professional that is open 9-5 and 2 government and non-profits open 9-5. Of the four businesses reporting a decline in business activity, 2 are professional and are open 9-5; 2 are service, one of which is open 11-4 and one is accessible 24/7 with main desk open 8-4.

The retail sector reports 8 out of 9 businesses are open regular hours including weekends and evenings. The professional sectors reports 4 out of 5 businesses are open regular hours of 8:30-4:30 or 9-5 with the exception of one which is open some Saturdays and Sundays. The service sector reports 10 out of 15 businesses are open 9-5 and 5 out of 15 are open some weekends and evenings. The government and non-profit report 2 out of 4 open 9-5 and 2 out of 4 open weekends and evenings.

There is little correlation between hours of operation and reported economic activity. Initially a correlation can be made in the two businesses that are both open regular hours as well as evenings and weekends and the increased accessibility could be a factor in the rapid economic growth of more than 25%.

Further research could include a study to see if there is a correlation between number of years in business and current economic activity of the business. This would reflect the business cycle.

The primary market areas from which businesses receive the majority of their sales are described in the following table. Thirty of the 33 respondents answered this question by ranking only one primary market. Only a few respondents ranked several markets 1-5.

**Table 6: Location of Primary Target Market**

Order of importance	1	2	3	4	5
Amherst area	77%	13%	0	0	3%
Cumberland County and Westmoreland County	17%	50%	17%	0	0
Truro and Halifax	0	0	10%	13%	0
Dieppe and Moncton	0	7%	20%	13%	10%
Travel and Tourism	3%	0			
Internet	3%	10%	3%	0	0

The largest primary market encompasses Cumberland and Westmoreland Counties (this area includes Amherst). None of the businesses indicated Truro and Halifax or Dieppe and Moncton were their primary target market. Twenty-three percent of businesses consider Truro and Halifax as their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> most important areas where there sales come from as well as 36% consider Dieppe and Moncton as part of their market area. Travel and Tourism are part of 40% of the businesses market and 16% include the internet. This suggests marketing campaigns developed for Downtown Amherst should include the ability to include all of these market areas to some degree.

The target market population question was completed by 28 respondents. The **tween and Teen** market population is only included in 5 (17%) of the respondents and on average represent 5% of their target market.

**Generation Y** (born 1979-1994) is a target market for 100% of the businesses ranging between 5-50%. The average for the service sector is 22% of the market is Generation Y. The average for the professional sector is 9% of the market is Gen Y. The average for the retail sector is 14% and government/non-profit is 13%. Average over all sectors is 14%.

**Generation X** (born 1966-1978) is a target market for 100% of the businesses ranging between 15-45% of the customer base. Service sector average is 29% Gen X; professional sector is 24%; retail sector is 30%; and government/non-profit is 25%. Average over all sectors is 27%.

**Baby boomer** (born 1947-1965) is a target market for also 100% of the businesses ranging between 5-50% of the market. There is only one business which ranks it low at 5% and it is a professional accounting business. Service sector average is 37%; professional is average of 50% (with one outlier of 5%); retail is 56%; and government/non-profit is 33%. Average over all sectors is 44%.

**Senior** (born prior to 1947) is a target market for 90% of the businesses ranging between 2-30%. Service sector average is 12%; professional is average of 12%; retail sector is average of 13% and government/non-profit is 17.5%. Average over all sectors is 14%.

This analysis provides some interesting percentages. The small number of businesses represented does limit the usability of the data however for an overall assessment of the downtown it is likely to be fairly representative. The largest target market is consistently the baby boomer especially in the professional and retail sectors.

The Tween, Teen and Generation Y target market population may be an untapped market that could be investigated for future potential business. For example, refer to Figure 2 earlier in this document for the demographic breakdown of percentages per age bracket. The population from 0-20 includes approximately 22% of the population yet only 17% of the businesses surveyed included them in their customer base and among them it only accounted for 5% of their business. Generation Y accounts for 22% of the population base yet only 9% of the sales in the service industry are from this customer base. The average for Gen Y is 17% of sales which is below the demographic of 22%.

The Baby Boomers are the smallest demographic in Cumberland County and Amherst yet account for 44% of business activity in the downtown. The Senior population account for 20% and only account for about 14% of the business.

The gender of the customer base in the downtown survey results are 42.3 % male and 57.7% female. Analysis of the sectors reveals similar to the overall results.

**Table 7: Customer based on gender**

<b>Business Sector</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Professional	55%	45%
Retail	43%	57%
Government/Non-Profit	43%	57%
Service Industry	47%	53%

An assumption exists that woman do most of the shopping. In fact many books and articles are written on this topic. One book entitled “Why She Buys” states that “Women

are the engine of the global economy, driving 80% of consumer spending in the U.S. alone.” (Brennan, 2009) If the data is correct, the consumers in Downtown Amherst businesses do seem to contradict this assumption. The retail industry does include a third generation Men’s Clothing Store and a recreational vehicle business which may attract more men to the downtown.

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents checked that this gender breakdown was a guess and 33% checked that this was accurate. The data presents differently if only the responses that were checked as accurate are used to calculate the gender percentage in the customer base. The data for the accurate responses is 33 % male and 67% female.

Fifty-five percent of the overall customer base is walk-in traffic and 45% are phone and internet based customers. The customer base organized in sectors is: Professional – 41% walk-in traffic/59% internet and phone, Retail – 70% walk-in traffic/30% internet and phone, Service – 45% walk-in traffic/55% internet and phone, and Government and Non-Profit – 80% walk-in traffic /20% internet and phone.

Major issues or obstacles facing downtown business owners today range widely over a variety of areas. Current economic conditions are the most significant issue facing businesses today. Low customer traffic and general operating costs also were ranked by many of the owners as obstacles.

See table below for a full list of issues and obstacles and the rankings given by business owners. Thirty out of 33 of the business owners answered this question.



**Table 8: Major Issues or Obstacles Facing Business Today**

Order of importance	1	2	3	4	5
Customer traffic (not enough)	17%	23%	3.3%	6.7%	6.7%
Computer/technology issues	3.3%	0	3.3%	3.3%	6.7%
Availability of employees	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%	6.7%	6.7%
Insurance Costs	3.3%	0	3.3%	6.7%	6.7%
Competition	13%	6.7%	0	0	6.7%
Payroll costs	3.3%	6.7%	10%	10%	3.3%
Parking	0	6.7%	3.3%	0	3.3%
Public safety/crime	3.3%	0	6.7%	0	3.3%
Current economic conditions	30%	20%	17%	3.3%	0
Skill level/prep of employees	0	0	6.7%	6.75	0
Town/County/Provincial codes or regulations	0	0	0	6.7%	0
Outdated machinery/technology	3.3%	0	0	3.3%	0
General operating costs	6.7%	17%	10%	13%	10%
Cash Flow/working capital	0	3.3%	13%	0	3.3%
Cost of rent/property	0	3.3%	6.7%	10%	6.7%
Property improvements	0	3.3%	0	3.3%	6.7%

The information or assistance that business owners need to keep their business healthy and competitive are listed in the table 9. This question (14) had 30 respondents answer the question by ranking the answers in order of importance. Three of the respondents

checked off box however did not give a ranking order so therefore their results were not used in the analysis.

Current socioeconomic conditions were identified as the most significant issue facing businesses in the downtown today. General operating costs were also ranked high overall through the rankings. Over the past few years the power rates have increased for businesses as well as the minimum wage requirement.

In the following question in the survey, respondents were asked to expand on some of the obstacles noted in the previous question. The most common response was that the customer traffic had decreased over recent years. Another popular answer was that the current socioeconomic conditions in the county are poor and are declining. Other more popular comments were that the commercial tax rate was too high (one of the highest in the province), the decline of small businesses and the need for a younger population base. The Town of Amherst has one of the highest commercial tax rates in the province of Nova Scotia. See Figure 3 Comparison of commercial tax rates.

The types of information and assistance that owners rank as important is quite varied. No one issue ranks highly. Business owners did rank marketing advertising programs as the number one ranking and ranks between 23 and 10% for each ranking. Business flow planning and cash flows and Business expansion and relocation tie as the second highest ranked number one issue for business owners.

**Table 9: Information and assistance needed to keep Business Healthy and competitive**

Order of importance	1	2	3	4	5
Business expansion/relocation	13%	0	10%	6.7%	3.3%
Employee hiring/skills training	4%	20%	6.7%	3.3%	3.3%
Market identification	10%	10%	10%	10%	3.3%
Marketing advertising programs					10%
Business planning and cash-flows	13%	6.7%	6.7%	6.7%	3.3%
Using internet for e-commerce	6.7%	6.7%	17%	10%	3.3%
Assistance with loan prep	3.3%	3.3%	0	0	3.3%
Business management training	0	3.3%	6.7%	17%	10%
Property and façade improvements	3.3%	0	6.7%	3.3%	10%
Computer technology assistance	6.7%	17%	10%	6.7%	6.7%

The last two questions on the downtown survey were open-ended and asked the business owner for feedback.

The types of businesses and/or services that the respondents think should be recruited to Downtown Amherst to improve its attractiveness as a shopping and business options are listed below.

**Table 10: Types of Businesses to Recruit to the Downtown**

<b>Housing</b>	<b>Retail</b>	<b>Services</b>	<b>Cultural</b>
Condominiums	Craft shop/ Artisans	Subway restaurant	Music/Art Center
Adult Housing	Boutiques for Niche market	Professional Services	Gallery
Affordable quality housing	Flower shop	Hotel with Convention Center	Theatre
	Sporting goods	St Hubert's restaurant	
	Bookstore	Fine dining	
	Shoe store	Organic coffee shop or Starbucks	
	Farmers Market on Saturday	Computer/tech store	
	Children's clothing store		

Many comments emphasized the importance of increasing the number of businesses so that overall customer traffic increased.

The business mix provided earlier in the document revealed 26% Governments and Non-Profit Sector, 12% Professional Sector, 19% Retail Sector and 43% in the Service Industry Sector. The ideal business mix was not identified in the literature review however based on the previous survey question, many suggestions were made of what types of businesses should be added to the downtown, specifically residential housing, restaurants, a cultural centre and several other service and retail businesses.

There are currently two housing projects that will address the affordable housing needs. One is in the construction phase now (redevelopment of an old elementary school) (Labour Market Monitor, 2012) and the other is in the planning phases to be built in the same location of an apartment building that was destroyed by fire in August 2012. (Daily Business Buzz, 2013)

Recently a sports store has opened near the Amherst stadium. The remainder of the retail, service and cultural suggestions for the downtown can be explored by the business recruitment committee which is a sub-committee of the downtown business advisory committee.

The survey ends with general comments.

Topic	Comments
Parking	<p>-Parking and accessibility are issues with downtown. While the town states there is ample parking spaces, most are occupied by employees of downtown businesses. With the relocation of town hall to downtown, additional public parking will be eliminated</p> <p>-As mentioned, parking signage to clarify availability to visitors for all downtown businesses.</p> <p>-Parking in downtown is excellent but we need more variety to keep people there</p>
Business	<p>-Amherst is a hard market. The operating costs of the business continue to increase. This in turn cripples business as we have no choice to put increase prices for the same product</p> <p>-Feel very strongly that by overtaxing hurts downtown more than helping. Lower taxes would help a smaller business keep going.</p> <p>-The cost of doing business tax is high for a town this size and a research program to look into this comparing other towns our size, etc, would be a good start</p>
Marketing	<p>-Should be an annual event calendar set up.</p> <p>-One of our biggest challenges is effectively marketing our business without breaking the bank. We know we can compete with other businesses (ie. Big box stores) locally and regionally with our products and services. Because we are tucked away in the downtown I think people very often forget about us. To say it very plainly, we need to get in their (local customers) faces and remind them we are here.</p>
General	<p>-We are moving in the right direction and we need to just keep going. Great things are starting to happen and we have to be positive and progressive</p> <p>-I want to congratulate all of you involved in this survey and project. Let's motivate our citizens in the surrounding area to establish pride in our town. Take from our great past and recreate and build this town into a great place to live, shop, visit, eat and work now and in the future. Let's discover our niche in Nova Scotia Canada and in the world and pursue it with vigor, enthusiasm and commitment. Let's make sure our municipal and provincial politicians work in harmony with each other (not town and county</p>

	<p>bickering) and decrease “red tape” for people establishing businesses downtown. Make Amherst open for Business across Canada and around the world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-I believe the Town and its committees are on the right track as there have been many positive visual changes during the past few years</li> <li>-I believe Downtown Amherst has greatly improved in the last few years. Events that attract traffic are always welcomed. The downtown area is moving in the right direction. Keep up the great work</li> <li>-The reality is because we are a border town, 40 minutes from a large city with a vast variety of everything and the consumers in our area feel the need to shop outside our town, the suggestions made in question 15 alone would not survive.</li> <li>-In a perfect world the consumers in our area would support the existing businesses as well as any new ventures that were open and insist on shopping locally. Sadly this will not happen.</li> <li>-We believe that it is essential to have a healthy retail environment which can only be achieved by attracting good professional and manufacturing companies to our industrial park or downtown business district (ie. Polycello, IMP, Indian Affairs, etc.)</li> <li>-When I think of a thriving and vibrant downtown, I think of lots of variety so people can shop, eat, and socialize all in one place</li> <li>-The park renovation is a great start</li> </ul>
Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Old vacant buildings – most importantly the Old Legion building are an obstacle to desirable façade and parking/green space would be useful</li> <li>-Downtown condos and housing to have people living there. We need more offices and retail to generate economic activity during the days</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Our downtown is being overrun with dozens of bums who are from nowhere close to this area. I am all for looking after and taking care of our own but why do we make it so easy for bums from Vancouver to land here and we feed them and pay them to wreck our beautiful downtown. In my opinion if you were not born in NS you should not be able to “collect” in NS.</li> <li>-Community support seems to have increased to downtown however I still believe there is an issue of loitering in some areas of the core. More should be done there.</li> <li>-My pet peeve, like many others, is the undesirables hanging around the church and Victoria street intersection, especially at the end of the month. I understand that Truro has banned smoking in the entire downtown area and this has effectively eliminated their problem with this. I have raised this problem and the Truro solution at least twice to no avail.</li> </ul>
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-From a tourism perspective, there is no place to park a vehicle a trailer or a RV so why stop? We encourage tourists to visit Amherst; however most drive thru, videotaping our town from the front seat of their car or RV.</li> <li>-The outdoor events this summer (2012) were great! Lots of people attended from outside of town! Good “drawing” events.</li> <li>-Having approached town officials on several occasions regarding possible</li> </ul>

events that would, in my opinion, bring significant economic benefits to the area; the reception was rather cool. Items and questions such as “Who is going to cover the costs of additional policing?” and “No we can’t close the street as that is the authority of the traffic authority”, certainly provides roadblocks for anyone trying to bring events to Amherst. The only events that appear to be approved are ones that town organizes or want here for specific reasons.  
-The Town now seems to be on the right track with festivals, etc., proving that it has been missing from our downtown core too long

Many of the comments in this section of the survey were identified throughout the survey questions. The specific comments can be used by the public and private parties for the revitalization efforts. Many of these issues, specifically the social concerns, take a multi-faceted approach with all parties working together for the betterment of everyone in the community.

## **Conclusion**

The active revitalization of Downtown Amherst, Nova Scotia has been occurring over the past two years. The literature on downtown revitalization projects emphasizes the importance of the participation of the business community in the processes. Success is dependent on a healthy partnership between public and private industry for the greater good of the community.

The survey of the downtown business community provides valuable information that can be used in the continuation of revitalization of Downtown Amherst, Nova Scotia.

Unfortunately the database of the downtown business community was neither accurate nor up-to-date which led to a deficiency in results. After the survey was completed the Communications committee of the Downtown Business Advisory Committee compiled an accurate data base which revealed 193 businesses and organizations were located in the downtown community. This pales in comparison to the 89 businesses that were surveyed for this study of which 37% responded. One of the findings in the literature review is that a revitalization program should have a database of the business mix of the downtown. This data base is used to create effective strategies that are based on the existing business community.

Location was the most significant reason businesses set up in the downtown. The current business mix and traffic flow were also ranked by business owners as factors in locating their business in the downtown.

Taxation was by far the most highly ranked reason that would prevent a business from establishing a new business in the downtown. Lease costs were also ranked highly which



would be related directly to the taxation issue. Commercial tax rates in Amherst are one of the highest in the province. Although the Town Council did remove the extra downtown area tax last spring, more needs to be done to attract business investment into the downtown. The Nova Scotia Chamber of Commerce does recommend a complete overhaul of the municipal taxation system. New Brunswick has already begun this work and has made a recommendation to reduce the commercial property tax rates by 0.33 per \$100 of assessment over the next four years. The cooperation of the three Maritime Provinces could lead to a unified approach to economic development for the area. This would lead to greater prosperity for everyone in the Maritimes, especially communities like Amherst that sit on a border next to a province that has lower commercial property tax rates as well as hst.

The economic activity of the downtown community is in a more positive state than one would expect based on the current economic conditions both locally and globally. Forty-four percent of the businesses reported revenues staying the same while 34% reported revenue growth over the previous year between 10-25%. Two businesses reporting revenue growth greater than 25% were both in the health and wellness industry.

The hours of operation of downtown businesses are reflective of the sector. There is a large professional sector in the downtown and the majority of those businesses are open weekdays 9-5. Eight out of nine retail businesses were open on evenings and weekends. No correlation was found between strength of economic activity and hours of operation.

The primary target market for downtown businesses is primarily Cumberland County and Westmoreland County (in New Brunswick). Close to 40% of the businesses do

consider Halifax/Truro, Dieppe/Moncton and Travel and Tourism in their primary target market.

The questions relating to target market population revealed interesting results; especially in the gender base. Results indicated 43% of the customers are male and 57% female. The ratio of men to women is higher than estimated based on common literature that women do most of shopping and purchasing. In Amherst, it looks like men have almost near equal buying power. This could be used to market more to men or this may be more of an opportunity to draw women into the downtown that is currently spending elsewhere.

A comparison can be made between the demographics of the area (Amherst and Cumberland County) with the customer base which reveals there is a large untapped potential in the “under 20” age group. Only 17 % of the businesses include this age group in their customer base and then estimate only 5% of their sales are generated from them. Baby boomers are the largest group of customers however have the smallest population base of all the age groups in Figure 2. This most likely reflects their purchasing power. Future marketing plans should take into consideration the untapped potential in the other age populations.

On average throughout the sectors, 45% of the customers in downtown Amherst are phone and/or internet based. This is likely to grow based on the age of technology and telecommunications.

Obstacles and major issues facing businesses today threaten the revitalization efforts.

The economics of the global economy have been felt throughout the world and Amherst

is no exception. Current economic conditions were identified as the largest issue that businesses face based on survey results.

Marketing advertising programs were ranked as the most important assistance that business owners would like to have. Other areas that owners would like more information on are business planning and cash flows as well as business relocation and expansion.

Business owners have many ideas of new businesses that could be opened in the downtown. Some of the ideas given are already in progress such as affordable quality housing and adult housing. There are currently no condominiums in the downtown and the addition of these would increase traffic flow.

The remaining suggestions in the areas of retail, services and cultural businesses to recruit to the downtown can be further explored by the business recruitment committee which is a sub-committee of the downtown business advisory committee.

The final comments shared in the survey give additional information to the study and address some of these specific concerns that can work to advance the revitalization efforts. Many of the findings in the literature review emphasize that revitalization efforts need to be tailored to the needs of the community.

This study provides specific information that can be used to promote and support the revitalization efforts in Downtown Amherst, Nova Scotia through effective partnerships between the downtown business community and the public sector.

The following recommendations are made based on the study of the topic of downtown revitalization and the survey of businesses in Downtown Amherst, Nova Scotia:

**Recommendation #1:**

The Town of Amherst Economic Development Department and the Downtown Business Advisory Committee keep an accurate up-to-date list of businesses and organizations in which are located in the downtown and use this to database to market the core downtown business community; as a draw for new capital investment as well as to grow the current economic base.

**Recommendation # 2**

The province of Nova Scotia follow in New Brunswick's lead and complete an overhaul of the municipal taxation system with the goal of creating a fair and equitable system that will encourage economic development in the region. This new system should consider the current property assessment formula as well as the commercial property rate. The municipal taxation system should be designed in a manner to encourage capital investment in the areas of new development as well restoration of existing vacant and old buildings that are need of repair. The Nova Scotia government should collaborate and create partnerships with the neighbouring provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island with the goal of creating municipal taxation systems that create an attractive business environment for economic investment to the Maritime Region

### **Recommendation # 3**

The Town of Amherst examine the current commercial property tax rate provincially and regionally and reduce the rate over a four year period to create a competitive landscape for business investment and development in all areas of the Town, including the Downtown area.

### **Recommendation # 4**

A marketing plan should be developed for the downtown community. This plan should be accomplished through active public-private partnership between the Town of Amherst, the Downtown Business Advisory Committee, and the downtown business owners. The plan will take into consideration the untapped target market potential which includes age and gender. The marketing plan should focus both increasing local as well as regional (Maritime) customer base.

### **Recommendation # 5**

The Downtown Business Advisory Committee should plan annual spring and fall business education sessions for downtown businesses based on the identified needs. The first two sessions held in the Fall of 2013 and the Spring of 2014 would be on the topics of business planning/cash flows and business expansion and relocation.

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## Appendix A

TOWN OF AMHERST POLICY

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**DEPARTMENT:** Community and Economic Development

**TITLE:** **Downtown Business Advisory Committee Policy**

Minutes reference date: 28 May 2012

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### **PURPOSE:**

The Downtown Business Advisory Committee is the voice for the downtown business community in Amherst and the conduit to Amherst Town Council. The Committee shall:

Provide advice and guidance to Town Council on matters including policies and programs related to the downtown;

Suggest and recommend to Town Council ways the Town can support, retain and/or attract business investment to the downtown core;

Assist in dissemination of information from the Town Council to the downtown business community;

Assist in coordinating existing and planned downtown projects, initiatives, marketing programs and other new opportunities to increase use of Downtown Amherst.

### **DEFINITIONS:**

The Downtown Business Advisory Committee area is defined in the map attached as appendix "A".

### **ROLE OF COMMITTEE:**

To strengthen and enhancing pride in the downtown by Amherst residents;

To provide support on specific opportunities and projects as requested by Council;

To advise on promotional and marketing opportunities that will increase traffic to downtown businesses and motivate participation by all stakeholders;

To act as an informed resource for Council by responding to requests for information or advice sent directly to the Advisory Committee by Council;

**TOWN OF AMHERST POLICY**

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**DEPARTMENT:**     Community and Economic Development

**TITLE:**             **Downtown Business Advisory Committee Policy**

Minutes reference date:     28 May 2012

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To participate in, monitor and regularly evaluate and/or make recommendation on all the Town's plans and policies which are expected to have an impact on the downtown;

To act as a liaison between Council and the downtown community by anticipating and responding to the information needs of both.

**MEMBERSHIP:**

Council shall appoint members to the Downtown Business Advisory Committee by resolution. The Committee will include:

At least five (5) members and no more than seven (7) members at large from the downtown business community;

Two (2) members of Amherst Town Council;

The Mayor will be appointed as an ex-officio member;

The Director of Community and Economic Development will be a non-voting member and will participate in meetings as required.

The following is the criteria for members:

Members at Large must be business owners or managers or designates doing business in the Downtown Core Area District;

Members need to demonstrate a positive attitude on growing the downtown and be willing ambassadors promoting the downtown to Amherst residents and visitors alike.

Members from Amherst Town Council will be appointed every two years.

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**DEPARTMENT:**     Community and Economic Development

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Minutes reference date:     28 May 2012

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At the beginning of the first meeting of each fiscal year the Committee will elect a chairperson as well as a vice-chairperson. Terms for such shall be one year. The chairperson and vice chairperson may be re-elected.

Members will be appointed as required for either two or three year terms effective April 1<sup>st</sup> of that year on the Committee.

**MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Take the leadership role in planning initiatives, events and promotions in support of downtown business;

Help identify problems or issues the Town needs to deal with to assist downtown business;

Help identify opportunities and leads for potential new business investment for the downtown;

Facilitate and lead in the implementation of the Centre First – Downtown Amherst Action Strategy;

Consult with relevant downtown stakeholders regarding issues and opportunities related to growing Downtown Amherst;

Report to Council regarding the status of the Centre First – Downtown Amherst Action Strategy and other initiatives carried out in support of Downtown Amherst.

**MEETINGS:**

Meetings will be scheduled by the Chairperson in consultation with the Director of Community and Economic Development;

All meetings are open to the public;

**TOWN OF AMHERST POLICY**

**NUMBER 10350-23  
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**DEPARTMENT:**     Community and Economic Development

**TITLE:**             **Downtown Business Advisory Committee Policy**

Minutes reference date:     28 May 2012

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Meeting agenda packages are to be delivered to Committee members and the CAO at least 48 hours prior to any scheduled meeting.

**APPLICATION PROCESS FOR APPOINTMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:**

In January of each year, if any terms are about to expire or vacancies have occurred, advertisements will be posted in the local media and the Town’s website requesting expressions of interest from the public to serve on the Downtown Business Advisory Committee.

All expressions of interest will be reviewed by the Committee and a recommendation made to Amherst Town Council for appointments.

Amherst Town Council may at any time by resolution repeal this policy and therefore release the committee members of their obligations as members.

## Appendix B

### NOVA SCOTIA MUNICIPAL PROPERTY TAX RATES

These rates are applied to property assessment (based on market value) which can change from year to year.

The convention is to express the tax rate as per \$100 of assessment e.g. Amherst's residential rate is \$1.67 per \$100 of assessment.

[NOTE: Municipalities may also have additional area rates for specified services on top of the general rate.](#)

	Residential				Commercial			
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
<b><u>TOWNS</u></b>								
AMHERST	1.67	1.67	1.67	1.66	4.31	4.60	4.60	4.55
ANNAPOLIS ROYAL	1.65	1.70	1.70	1.70	3.05	3.15	3.15	3.15
ANTIGONISH	0.90	0.93	0.97	1.00	2.36	2.47	2.50	2.53
BERWICK	1.59	1.61	1.62	1.59	3.62	3.88	3.91	3.88
BRIDGETOWN	1.85	1.85	2.01	2.10	3.63	3.63	3.79	3.90
BRIDGEWATER	1.63	1.67	1.67	1.65	3.72	4.06	4.06	3.99
CLARK'S HARBOR	1.65	1.66	1.65	1.65	5.14	5.58	5.58	5.58
DIGBY	1.92	1.92	1.92	1.94	3.89	3.89	3.89	3.99
HANTSPORT	1.63	1.66	1.66	1.69	3.35	3.55	3.69	3.85
KENTVILLE	1.29	1.36	1.36	1.36	3.23	3.46	3.48	3.47
LOCKEPORT	2.21	2.23	2.28	2.28	5.28	5.31	5.36	5.36
LUNENBURG	1.30	1.30	1.28	1.21	3.30	3.30	3.26	3.19
MAHONE BAY	1.18	1.19	1.18	1.15	2.83	2.94	2.90	2.88
MIDDLETON	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.78	4.17	4.30	4.30	4.26
MULGRAVE	1.37	1.27	1.30	1.28	4.50	4.40	4.43	4.42
NEW GLASGOW	1.77	1.80	1.82	1.82	4.02	4.15	4.40	4.40
OXFORD	1.56	1.56	1.59	1.59	4.55	4.95	4.98	4.98
PARRSBORO	2.04	2.04	2.04	2.00	3.93	4.17	4.17	4.15
PICTOU	2.06	1.99	1.88	1.86	4.40	4.40	4.40	4.39
PORT HAWKESBURY	1.80	1.78	1.62	1.62	4.26	4.38	4.25	4.27
SHELBURNE	2.04	2.06	2.06	2.06	3.81	3.81	3.81	3.81
SPRINGHILL	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	5.38	5.53	5.53	5.53
STELLARTON	1.82	1.82	1.82	1.82	3.55	4.15	4.15	4.15
STEWIACKE	1.70	1.70	1.70	1.70	3.24	3.41	3.41	3.41
TRENTON	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	5.49	5.49	5.49	5.49
TRURO	1.73	1.75	1.76	1.76	4.11	4.44	4.44	4.44
WESTVILLE	2.13	2.13	2.13	2.09	3.75	3.75	3.80	3.80
WINDSOR	1.90	1.96	1.96	1.96	3.90	4.08	4.08	4.08
WOLFVILLE	1.40	1.43	1.43	1.43	3.49	3.57	3.55	3.55
YARMOUTH	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	4.21	4.52	4.52	4.52
<b><u>MUNICIPALITIES</u></b>								
ANNAPOLIS	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.98	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80
ANTIGONISH	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	1.48	1.48	1.48	1.48
ARGYLE	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.07	2.20	2.25	2.25	2.25
BARRINGTON	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	2.63	2.63	2.63	2.63
CHESTER	0.61	0.63	0.64	0.64	1.51	1.53	1.54	1.54
CLARE	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.96	2.07	2.07	2.07
COLCHESTER	0.79	0.82	0.83	0.84	2.10	2.25	2.25	2.25
CUMBERLAND	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	2.47	2.63	2.63	2.63
DIGBY	1.30	1.30	1.30	1.30	1.85	1.85	1.85	1.85
<b>GUYSBOROUGH:</b>								
Guysborough - See note 1	0.59	0.59	0.61	0.61	2.35	2.56	2.58	2.58
Canso - See note 1	2.35	2.35	2.35	2.35	4.08	4.08	4.08	4.08

HANTS, EAST	0.87	0.90	0.89	0.88	2.67	2.70	2.70	2.71
HANTS, WEST	0.89	0.90	0.91	0.94	1.57	1.59	1.60	1.68
INVERNESS	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.85	1.85	1.85	1.85
KINGS	0.85	0.85	0.85	0.85	2.16	2.29	2.29	2.29
LUNENBURG	0.79	0.81	0.84	0.84	1.92	2.06	2.08	1.98
PICTOU	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.81	1.71	1.82	1.82	1.82
RICHMOND	0.72	0.75	0.75	0.75	1.90	2.01	2.01	2.01
SHELBURNE	1.30	1.30	1.28	1.28	1.82	1.82	1.82	1.82
ST. MARY'S	0.81	0.84	0.82	0.82	2.12	2.15	2.13	2.13
VICTORIA	1.22	1.22	1.22	1.20	2.19	2.19	2.19	2.15
YARMOUTH	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15	2.15	2.15	2.15	2.15

#### NOVA SCOTIA MUNICIPAL PROPERTY TAX RATES

These rates are applied to property assessment (based on market value) which can change from year to year.

The convention is to express the tax rate as per \$100 of assessment e.g. Amherst's residential rate is \$1.67 per \$100 of assessment.

	Residential				Commercial			
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
<b>CAPE BRETON REGIONAL</b>								
DOMINION	1.99	1.99	2.02	2.05	4.67	4.89	4.92	4.95
GLACE BAY	2.01	2.01	2.04	2.08	4.67	4.89	4.92	4.95
LOUISBOURG	1.94	1.94	1.97	2.00	4.67	4.89	4.92	4.95
NEW WATERFORD	2.00	2.00	2.03	2.06	4.67	4.89	4.92	4.95
NORTH SYDNEY	2.03	2.03	2.06	2.09	4.67	4.89	4.92	4.95
SYDNEY MINES	1.91	1.91	1.94	1.97	4.67	4.89	4.92	4.95
CITY OF SYDNEY	2.19	2.19	2.22	2.25	5.31	5.56	5.59	5.62
CAPE BRETON MUN-Suburban*	1.61	1.61	1.62	1.64	4.49	4.70	4.72	4.74
<b>HALIFAX REGIONAL</b>								
HALIFAX	1.27	1.29	1.27	1.22	3.69	3.83	3.78	3.60
HALIFAX URBAN CORE	1.29	1.31	1.28	1.24	3.71	3.84	3.80	3.61
DARTMOUTH	1.29	1.31	1.28	1.24	3.71	3.84	3.80	3.61
BEDFORD	1.28	1.31	1.28	1.24	3.71	3.84	3.80	3.61
COUNTY URBAN	1.28	1.31	1.28	1.24	3.69	3.84	3.80	3.61
COUNTY RURAL	1.23	1.24	1.22	1.17	3.22	3.39	3.37	3.17
COUNTY SUBURBAN	1.25	1.27	1.25	1.21	3.67	3.83	3.78	3.60
<b>REGION OF QUEENS</b>								
LIVERPOOL	1.85	1.87	1.81	1.84	2.96	3.01	2.95	2.98
QUEENS CO.	0.88	0.90	0.90	0.93	1.99	2.04	2.04	2.07

\* The Cape Breton Suburban rate is an average of 8 various rural suburban tax rates within

the county of Cape Breton. Source: Statement of Estimates and or other budget data

submitted by Municipal Units

**These tax rates are for general reference only, for official rates please contact the appropriate municipality.**

Note 1: The Town of Canso only operated for three months in the 2012-2013 fiscal period.

The town became part of the Municipality of the District of Guysborough as of July 1, 2012.

For the remaining 2012-2013 fiscal period the Town of Canso will continue to use the pre-dissolution property tax rates.

## Appendix C: List of Downtown Amherst Businesses and Organizations

Service	A D MacEachern Insurance
Gov	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development
Prof	Alan Baldock, Dr
Service	Allen's Locksmithing Paint and More
Retail	Alweather Windows & Doors
Non-prof	Amherst Ariels, Gymnastics
Non-prof	Amherst Chamber of Com.
service	Amherst Changes School of Hair Design
Prof	Amherst Chiropractic
Retail	Amherst Country Co-op store
Non-prof	Amherst Curling Club
Non-prof	Amherst 50 plus Club
Retail	Amherst Farmer's Market
Gov	Amherst Fire Department
Non-prof	Amherst Food Assistance Network
Service	Amherst Insurance: A division of Johnson Insurance
Gov	Amherst Justice Centre
Non-prof	Amherst's Lions Club
Non-prof	Amherst Little League Baseball Club
service	Amherst Montessori School
Retail	Amherst Music Store
Gov	Amherst Police Department
Gov	Amherst Town Hall
Service	Archway Insurance - Barnes
Service	Art of Eating Deli
Service	Atlantic Dance Academy
Service	Bank of Nova Scotia
Service	Bambinos Restaurant
Retail	Bargain Bennies
Prof	Beaton Blaikie
Service	Bell Aliaint
Service	Bella's Café & Bistro
Service	Bellissimo Salon
Prof	Belliveau 's Law Office



Retail	Bike Specialist / Skate Sharpening
Service	Brando's Transport Service - (Your Cab)
Non-prof	Bridge Adult Service Centre
Non-prof	Bridge Workshop Laundry
Service	Brown's Guest Home
Retail	Buzzell's Auto Parts
Retail	Carter's Sports Cresting Ltd.,
Service	Campbell's Funeral Home
Non-prof	Canadian Association of Community Living
gov	Canada Post
Service	Casey Realty
Service	CFTA 107.9 FM, Tantramar Community Radio
Service	Changes Hair Studio
Service	CIBC
Service	CIBC Wood Gundy
Non-prof	Christ Church
Gov	CRDA
Service	Coldwell Bankers
Service	Community Credit Union of Cumb. and Colchester Ltd
Prof	Creighton & Shatford
Service	Crescent Hair Styling
Service	Crescent Trading Post
Gov	Cumberland Adult Network for Upgrading
Non-prof	Cumberland African NS Assoc. CANSA
Non-prof	Cumberland Community Alternative Society
Gov	Cumberland Development Corporation Ltd.,
Non-prof	Cumberland County Genealogy Centre
non-prof	Cumberland Early Intervention
Gov	Cumberland Health Authority
Gov	Cumberland Mental Health
Gov	Cumb. North Constituency Off.
Gov	Cumberland County Transportation Service - CCTS
Service	Cutting Room
Service	Czara Nail Art
Service	D & J Taxi

service	Damaris Spa Wellness
Retail	Dayle's Dept.Store
Retail	Deanna Fitzpatrick Rug Hooking Studio
Gov	Department of Community Services
Retail	Dick's Discount
Service	Dick's Jamboree
Service	Dogs to Divas
Service	Dooly's
Prof	Doucette's Accounting
Service	Downtown Wash & Lube/Hertz Independent Agent
Retail	Duffy's Esso Service Station
Service	Duncan's Pub
Service	Easy Storage
Service	Elm Tree Tavern
gov	Emergency Health Services
Prof	Fairbanks Law Office
Service	Fast Unlock Cellular
Non-prof	First Baptist Church
Service	Flesh Impressions
Retail	Flow Lifestyle Boutique
Retail	Focal Point
Retail	Foodland
Retail	Fort B Flowers
gov	Four Fathers Memorial Library
Retail	Frenchys Guy's Clothing Store
Service	Furlongs -Jones Funeral & Cremation Services
Service	Gallery 8
Service	Gateway Development Inc.
Service	Greasy Groove
Service	Greco
Prof	H & R Block
Service	Hairstyles by Ryan
Service	The HATHA Yoga Room
Service	the Barber
Retail	Home Hardware

Prof	Hicks,Lemoine
Non-prof	Holy Family Parish
Retail	Hub City Auto Paint and Supplies Ltd
Non-prof	IODE Thrifty Things
Service	IR Mapping
Gov	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Prof	Investors Group Financial Services Inc.
Gov	James Layton Ralston Armoury
Service	Jamieson's Baber Shop
Prof	Jerry Langille Inc.
Prof	Jennifer Tucker, DR
Retail	JG Jewellery Store
Service	JTW Natural Health and Guidance
Prof	Jorgensen & Bickerton Inc.
Retail	Ken`s Rite Stop
prof	Kim Maddison Dentist
Service	Kimberly Smith
Service	King Pin Bowling Ltd.,
Non-prof	Knights of Columbus Hall
Prof	Krystian Szczesney, Dr
Retail	Lawton's Drug Store
Prof	Legal Aid Nova Scotia
Service	Lifemark Physiotherapy
Service	Little Lambs Child Care Centre
Service	Looking Good Hair Salon
Service	M B Sheet Metal Ltd.,
Retail	McCully Market & Things
Prof	Mclsaac-Darragh Chartered Accountants
Prof	MacKenzie Tax Service
Retail	Mansour's Mens Wear
Service	Maritech Construction Inc.
Retail	Moore Automotive & Recreation
Retail	Morash Homes Ltd.
Retail	Needs Convenience
service	New Figure Fitness

Retail	Nibs Top Quality Used Furniture and Appliances
gov	Nova 4 Enviro Ltd
Non-prof	Nova Scotia Highlanders Regimental Museum
gov	Nova Scotia Liquor Commission
Service	Old Germany Restaurant
Retail	Pages and Stitches
Service	Paramount Theatre
Prof	Paul MacEachern Dentist
Service	Paul's Hairstyling
Service	Pole Star Transport/ Armour Transportation
Service	Pushing Ink
Retail	Quality Reusable
Service	Rayel Services Ltd.,
Non-prof	Red Cross
Service	Remax Country
service	Rhodes Manor Bed and Breakfast
Retail	Riptide Fly Fishing
Prof	Rosemary Markaran, Dr
Retail	Roy's Eyewear
Service	Royal Bank
Non-prof	R C A F Association No. 105
Non-prof	Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 10
Service	Royal LePage, Cumberland Realty
Service	Royal LePage, Preview Realty
Non-prof	St. John Ambulance
Non-prof	Robb's Centennial Sports Complex
Retail	San Lilies Bridal Boutique
gov	Scott Armstrong, MP
Service	Scotiabank
gov	Service Canada Centre
Retail	Sharon's Closet
Service	Shine Depot
Service	Shear Impressions
Service	Simply For Life
Service	Snow White Laundry and Convenience Store

Service	Sun-N- Style
Service	Steph`s Total Body Esthetics
Service	Styles By Ryan
Service	TD Canada Trust
Prof	Tina Frizzle, Dr
Service	Tim Hortons Store 658
Non-prof	Trinity St. Stephens United Church
Retail	Top Line Rentals Inc.
Retail	Underfoot Flooring
Prof	Vince Byrne & Associates Consulting
Service	Victorian Motel
Non-prof	VON
Service	Wanda's Tips 2 Toes
Service	Warehouse Café & Lounge
Prof	Weatherbee & Associates
Retail	Windjammer
Service	Your Place
Non-prof	YMCA



**Appendix D: Downtown Area Map**

(With permission from the Town of Amherst)



**Appendix E: Downtown Survey**

**Downtown Revitalization Study**

**REB file # 12-274**

**Amherst, Nova Scotia**

**August and September 2012**





**Amherst Downtown Business Survey** REB file # 12-274

**Thank you for completing this survey. The information collected will be used to create a strategic plan to assist in the Revitalization of Downtown Amherst.**

1. What is the nature of your business

- Retail
- Consumer Services
- Business Services
- Health Professions
- Legal Services
- Non-Profit (ie.Church, Food Bank)
- Government Services
- Other , Please describe \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name up to three advantages or strengths you associate with doing business in Downtown Amherst?

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3. In locating your business in Amherst, what were the reasons that attracted you to the Downtown? (Please check the Top Five and rank in order of importance)

- Location
- Lease Costs
- Events and Activities
- Taxation
- Demographics
- Competition
- Current business mix
- Traffic Flow
- Services available (financial, government, etc.)

4. What would prevent you today from establishing a new business in Downtown Amherst? (Please check the Top Five and rank in order of importance)

- Location
- Lease Cost
- Events and Activities
- Taxation
- Demographics
- Competition
- Current business mix
- Traffic Flow
- Lack of available services

5. How would you characterize your current business' activity level (i.e. last 12 months of Operation)? Choose one below.

<b>_____ Business is rapidly expanding (growth of more than 25%)</b>	<b>_____ Holding your own (same level of business, fairly steady )</b>
<b>_____ Business is moderately growing, increasing (growth of 10- 25% )</b>	<b>_____ Declining business activity (fewer clients, fewer sales, less income)</b>

6. What are the current hours of operation of your business?

Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

7. What is the primary market area from which the majority of your sales are derived? (Choose markets that are applicable to your business then rank in order of size).

- Amherst
- Cumberland County/Westmorland County
- Truro - Halifax
- Dieppe - Moncton
- Travelers/Tourists
- Internet
- Other

8. What target market population best describes your customer base? (place % beside your answer totaling 100%).

Market	Tween	Teen	Generation Y Born 1979- 1994	Generation X Born 1966- 1978	Baby Boomer Born 1947- 1965	Senior Born prior to 1947  Age 65 &up
	Age 9- 14	Age 15- 17	Age 18-33	Age 34-46	Age 47- 65	
Example	10%	0%	10%	25%	50%	5%
Your Customers						

9. What gender population best describes your customer base?

Market	Male	Female
Example	35%	65%
Your Customers		

10. Are your answers above based on:

\_\_\_guess                      \_\_\_accurate evaluation (survey of customers)

11. What percentage of your customer base is:

\_\_\_walk-in customer              \_\_\_internet/phone customer

12. What are some of the major issues or obstacles facing your business today?  
(Please check the TOP FIVE priority issues and rank them in order of importance to your business)

- Customer traffic (not enough)
- Computer/technology Issues
- Availability of employees
- Insurance costs
- Competition
- Payroll costs
- Parking
- Public safety/crime
- Current economic conditions
- Skill level/preparation of employees
- Town/County/Provincial codes or regulations
- Outdated machinery/technology
- General operating costs
- Cash flow/working capital
- Cost of rent/property
- Property improvements (façade, etc.)
- Other

13. Please expand on any of your answers to the question above. Please explain the issues or obstacles.

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14. To keep your business healthy and competitive, which of the following types of information or assistance are important? ((Please check the TOP FIVE priority issues and rank in order of importance to your business.)

- Business expansion/relocation
- Employee hiring/skills training
- Market identification
- Marketing advertising programs
- Business planning and cashflows
- Using internet for e-commerce
- Assistance with loan prep
- Business management training
- Property and façades improvements
- Computer technology assistance
- Other





Thank you for completing this survey. Please complete your contact information below so that a copy of the results can be forwarded to you.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Owner \_\_\_\_ Manager \_\_\_\_  
Both \_\_\_\_

Address

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail address

\_\_\_\_\_

Please place completed survey in the stamped envelope provided and mail to:

Elizabeth Smith  
16 Church Street  
Amherst, Nova Scotia  
B4H 3A0

Or drop off the survey in a sealed envelope at the address above.

## **Appendix E: Letter to Business Owner**

**Sobey School of Business  
Saint Mary's University  
923 Robie Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 3C3**

July 21, 2012

Dear Business Owner

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study.

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to establish a database for downtown businesses to assist in making plans for revitalization of Downtown Amherst.

Once all the data is collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the Amherst Downtown Business Advisory Committee and the Town of Amherst. No individual responses will be shared. Your individual responses will be kept confidential.

If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at either the phone number or email address listed at the bottom of the page.

If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know by providing me with your email address or mailing address. When the study is completed, I will send it to you. The study is expected to be completed by August 31<sup>st</sup> with the actual research project to be completed by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013.

As with all Saint Mary's University, projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by and received research ethics approval through the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about ethical matters, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at 902-420-5728 or ethics@smu.ca.

Researcher: Elizabeth Smith EMBA student  
Research Supervisor: Dr. Gordon Fullerton Marketing Professor SMU  
Saint Mary's University  
Sobey School of Business  
Local address is  
16 Church Street  
Amherst, NS  
B4H 3A0  
902-669-0299  
Elizabeth.Smith1@SMU.CA

## **Appendix F: Informed Consent**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

#### **Downtown Amherst Revitalization REB File # 12-274**

**Researcher Elizabeth Smith EMBA Class 2013  
Research Supervisor Dr. Gordon Fullerton  
Sobey School of Business  
Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3C3  
Phone #902-669-0299; Fax #902-660-3322; Email: Elizabeth@echh.ca**

### **INTRODUCTION**

I am member of the Downtown Business Advisory Committee which has recently been established by the Town of Amherst. I am the owner of Damaris Spa & Wellness Centre and the Simply For Life franchise both located on 16 Church Street, Amherst, NS. I am currently studying business at Saint Mary's University and am enrolled in the Executive Master's of Business Administration. I will graduate May 2013. As part of my master's research project, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Gordon Fullerton. He is a professor of Marketing at Saint Mary's University.

You are invited to participate in this research study. You are invited to complete the attached survey which will be given to all Downtown Business and Organizations.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary.

### **PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH**

The purpose of this research study is to study Downtown Amherst and then create a strategy to support revitalization of Downtown Amherst and increase economic growth of this area. The revitalization of downtown districts is a common need for many downtown areas across Canada and throughout United States. The growth of suburbia and growth of malls for retail businesses has contributed to many downtowns having a high number of vacant buildings. There has been similar research completed in various communities throughout North America.

### **WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART? (OR WHO IS BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?)**

Each business and organization that is in the downtown of Amherst, Nova Scotia will be invited to participate in this survey.

### **WHAT DOES PARTICIPATING MEAN? (OR WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO?)**



Participation in this study involves each participant completing the survey based on their own business experience. The survey results will be used in the development of a plan to create a revitalization strategy for the Downtown of Amherst.

The estimated time commitment for completion of the survey is thirty minutes.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH?**

Potential benefits of this research are improved economic growth of the Amherst Downtown Business Community.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS FOR PARTICIPANTS?**

There are no foreseeable risks that could emerge by participating in this research study.

**HOW CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?**

Participants of this survey can decide to withdraw from this study at any time up to the date of publication. Please contact researcher if should decide to not participate. The research is expected to be completed by March 31, 2013.

**WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH MY INFORMATION? (OR WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO IT?)**

The data from this survey will be shared with the Amherst Downtown Business Advisory Committee which is a committee of the Town of Amherst made up of business owners. The data will be made public but individual responses will be kept confidential. The data will be kept on file in a confidential manner for ten years.

**HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION? (OR HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY?)**

There is a place on the survey to document your name and contact information. A copy of the results of the survey will be sent to the address you provide.

Researcher: EMBA Student Elizabeth Smith email address: [Elizabeth@echh.ca](mailto:Elizabeth@echh.ca)

Research Supervisor: Dr Gordon Fullerton email address: Gordon Fullerton [Gordon.Fullerton@SMU.CA]

**Certification:**

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters, you may contact the Chair of the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board at [ethics@smu.ca](mailto:ethics@smu.ca) or 420-5728.

**Signature of Agreement:**

I understand what this study is about and appreciate the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time.

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.**