

Prepared for:
Town of
Plainville

Town of Plainville Business Survey

December 2008

PREPARED BY:
CERC[®] *start here*
Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc.

Town of Plainville Business Survey 2008

Table of Contents

Key Findings and Executive Summary 1

Introduction 5

Method 5

Survey Responses 7

Local Business Climate 10

Workforce..... 15

Growth Prospects 21

Infrastructure 25

Quality of Life 31

Conclusion..... 34

Key Findings and Executive Summary

The Town of Plainville was interested in better understanding the opinions of the business community. The Town can use the information gleaned from the survey findings to better serve the business community, thereby enhancing its economic competitiveness.

With 801 invitations to take the survey mailed out and 149 completions, the Town of Plainville's survey response rate was 19 percent. This response rate is sizeable, considering that mail surveys typically receive a 10 percent response rate.

The survey findings found some differences in opinion among businesses in various industries and larger companies:

Manufacturing

Manufacturing had a relatively positive opinion of the business climate in Plainville (0.75)¹. Manufacturing felt the strongest about the failure of land use regulations to contribute to a positive business climate (0.47). Additionally of concern to the Manufacturing industry were the cost and availability of commercial real estate (0.53) and the burden of the tax system (0.39). While 31 percent of manufacturing respondents indicated that they were planning on expanding their facilities within the next three years, 21 percent of manufacturing respondents also indicated that they lack necessary customized job training for their employees and future hires.

Retail

As indicated in the survey, the industry least satisfied with the overall business climate in Plainville was retail trade (index of concurrence = 0.42), sending a strong message to the Town that they need to pay that industry more attention. Of specific concern to the retail industry were land use regulations (0.55), which are seen as impediments to economic growth. Similarly, they decided that regulations and zoning were not competitive advantages (0.50) for the Town of Plainville. Retail trade respondents also determined taxes in Plainville were a competitive disadvantage (0.36). Interestingly, 53 percent of retail respondents indicated that their suppliers were located outside of Connecticut.

¹ Where applicable, an index of concurrence was calculated that represents the extent to which the respondents agree or disagree with a particular statement. The calculation is [(Strongly Agree + Agree) divided by (Strongly Agree + Agree + Disagree + Strongly Disagree)]. If the index is greater than 0.5, then the degree of agreement is stronger. If the index is less than 0.5, then more respondents indicated disagreement with the statement.

Professional/Scientific/Technical Services

This industry was not convinced that the Town's land use regulations are conducive to a strong business climate (0.57). Also, not a single respondent from this industry said that they were definitely planning on expanding their Plainville facilities. On a positive note, 57 percent of the Services workforce resides in Plainville, a far higher proportion than any other industry. This indicates that this industry has some staying power in Plainville, and efforts should be made to encourage expansion of facilities and employment.

Construction

The Construction industry in Plainville registered a lukewarm response to the overall business climate in Plainville (0.57). Like the rest of its counterparts, the Construction industry does not entirely support the Town's land use regulations as being conducive to economic growth (0.57) and thought Town regulations were not a competitive advantage (0.50). More so than any other industry, the Construction sector was strongly dissatisfied with the tax system (0.20). Also, 27 percent of respondents within the industry noted that they lacked necessary customized job training.

Businesses of 50 or More Employees

Large businesses in Plainville expressed a strong disagreement with the manner of taxation in Plainville (0.36). Fifty-six percent of large businesses satisfy the majority of their employment needs from within 10 minutes of their respective locations. However, 69 percent of 50+ employee businesses are explicitly not planning on expanding their facilities within the next three years, which represents a significantly larger portion of businesses than either of the other size classes.

The major themes expressed by Plainville's business community include:

Business Climate

The major concern about Plainville's business climate as expressed by business owners is that the Town fails to develop a strong business climate by not attracting or retaining businesses effectively. However, nearly as many respondents described the business climate as adequate or good. The Town's most agreed upon strategic advantage (0.97) is its central location. Both infrastructure (0.89) and community security (0.89) were also valued as strategic advantages for Plainville. Taxes (0.53) and regulations (0.67) were expressed as the greatest strategic weaknesses.

Workforce

While only 21 percent of Plainville businesses obtain the majority of their labor from the Town itself, 77 percent of the businesses have a majority of employees that live outside of Plainville, but within 30 minutes away. These facts imply that Plainville is a commuter-based economy that could benefit from commuter

programs (ridesharing, public transportation from nearby cities, etc.) and advertising of open Plainville positions in cities within 30 minutes away. Nineteen percent of all respondents indicated that their businesses require customized training that is not available to them. A wide range of unavailable industry specific training that respondents identified included heating & plumbing, small engine repair, sheet metal fabrication and installation (2), software development (2), OSHA and safety programs, machine installation, salesmanship, driving instructor certification, accounting, engineering, and other industry-specific skills. As illustrated by respondents looking to hire new employees, the labor market in Plainville tends to favor unskilled labor: there are 49 businesses looking to hire those with high school education or less, while there are only 21 businesses looking to hire those with college level or higher of education.

Growth Prospects

As intuition would dictate, relatively new Plainville businesses are more likely to be looking to expand than those that have existed in Plainville for more than 10 years. Similarly, businesses with greater than 50 employees are less likely to expand than smaller businesses. The greatest perceived challenges to expansion in Plainville were finding affordable rents or real estate, finding the appropriate office or facility, and obtaining zoning approval or permits. Eighteen of 30 respondents indicated that they did not have the means to expand the facilities on their current site, which is somewhat problematic as they might look elsewhere for future facilities. However, seven respondents indicated that there is a property in Plainville to which they are considering expansion.

Infrastructure

Respondents are relatively unaware of Town programs: 66 percent are unfamiliar with the Enterprise Zone Program and 87 percent are unfamiliar with Plainville's Revolving Loan and Tax & Business Incentive Programs. The Town clearly needs to make a greater effort to educate the business community about these opportunities. Popular responses for ways that the Town assists business development were tax abatement (60 percent), investment tax credits (57 percent), access to low-interest loans (53 percent), and plant/equipment tax credits (52 percent). The greatest portions of respondent's suppliers were between 10 and 30 minutes away (41, 30 percent). Nearly the same number of respondents indicated that the majority of their suppliers were outside of Connecticut (within the U.S.). Plainville businesses are largely reliant on regional suppliers and to a lesser extent, interstate suppliers.

Quality of Life

In terms of Quality of life, Plainville scores well, with particularly high scores for public schools, quality of housing, affordability of housing, cost of living, and public safety. The high quality of life is a cohort of the most popular appeal of doing business in Plainville, its small town feel (26). Other popular responses were the town's central location (19), the temperament of the residents (15), and access to highways (10). The three most common responses for the worst parts

of doing business in Plainville were the prohibitively high taxes/high cost of living (7), lack of vibrant business climate/urban decay (7), and faulty management of traffic infrastructure (7).

Based on the survey findings, there are opportunities within its control for Plainville to enhance its business climate.

Marketing Opportunities:

- Market the Town's strategic advantages including its central location, existing infrastructure, quality of life and community security.
- Publicize available land and commercial properties in the Town to encourage businesses looking to expand that there are opportunities.

Workforce Opportunities:

- Explore job training opportunities that could be accessed by a variety of industries. Creating customized job training programs are most likely out of the Town's control.
- Partner with companies that are offering jobs that need formal education in order to get the word out – a greater proportion of higher paying jobs in Plainville could translate to higher levels of patronage for Plainville businesses, as well as a larger base of tax base due to the well educated professionals that would decide to live in Plainville.
- Maintaining the quality of the Town's public education system and building stronger linkages with nearby technical schools will help the companies looking for workers to fill lower-skilled or technical occupations.

Business Assistance:

- Create a program for newer companies to address perceived challenges such as finding affordable rents or real estate, finding the appropriate office or facility, and obtaining zoning approval or permits.
- Consider commuter programs such as ridesharing or public transit options since the majority of businesses have employees that live outside of Plainville but within 30 minutes away.
- Publicize Plainville's Enterprise Zone Program and Revolving Loan and Tax & Business Incentive programs to encourage more business use.

Municipal Regulations:

- Review land use regulations and the tax system to see if there are ways to make them more business-friendly.

Overall, the survey findings are positive and should be useful for Plainville to identify strengths to market and opportunities to change. The challenge now for the town officials is to identify and prioritize projects to further enhance the business competitiveness of Plainville.

Introduction

The Town of Plainville was interested in better understanding the opinions of the business community. To that end, the Town commissioned the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc. (CERC) to conduct a business survey. The survey probes the business respondents about issues related to doing business in the Town including the accessibility of the municipal departments, workforce, infrastructure, use of services and chamber activities. The Town can use the information gleaned from the survey findings to better serve the business community, thereby enhancing its economic competitiveness.

Method

A press release announcing the launch of the online survey was published in four local newspapers including the *New Britain Herald*, *Hartford Courant*, *Plainville Citizen* and *Bristol Press* in July 2008.

A letter was mailed to all of the businesses in Town in late July 2008, as identified by a business list vendor, D&B Sales & Marketing Solutions. A follow-up letter was mailed approximately six weeks later in order to encourage those business members who had not yet responded to the survey. The letters directed the business members to a web site on the Town's home page where the survey was located.

Notices about the Plainville survey were regularly emailed to all of the members of the Plainville Chamber. A direct mailing was completed to all of its members, compliments of the Plainville Chamber.

Since the survey web site was launched in the middle of summer, the survey was available until the end of September, to ensure an adequate response rate.

With 801 invitations to take the survey mailed out and 149 completions, the Town of Plainville's survey response rate was 19 percent. This response rate is sizeable, considering that mail surveys typically receive a 10 percent response rate.

The survey (found in the appendix) included multiple-choice and open ended questions that covered a variety of business-related topics. Some examples include opinions regarding Plainville's business climate, real estate opportunities, utilities, and general likes and dislikes about doing business in the area.

The survey responses were analyzed as a whole to find out what all businesses were reporting and then looked for differences between new and existing companies, company size, industry (construction; manufacturing; retail; professional scientific, technical services; other), and chamber member versus

non-member. For example, did small companies respond differently than large companies?

Where applicable, an index of concurrence was calculated to determine a sense of the overall level of agreement with a statement. An index of concurrence represents the extent to which the respondents agree or disagree with a particular statement. Data for those who select 'neutral' or 'don't know' options are not considered in the calculation.

Therefore, the calculation is $[(\text{Strongly Agree} + \text{Agree}) \div (\text{Strongly Agree} + \text{Agree} + \text{Disagree} + \text{Strongly Disagree})]$ to derive the index of concurrence. If the index is greater than 0.5, then the degree of agreement is stronger. If the index is less than 0.5, then more respondents indicated disagreement with the statement. This analytic approach allows the comparison of individual questions and groups of questions in order to highlight strengths and weaknesses.

Survey Responses

1. *Which of the following best describes your business operation in Plainville?*

Nearly four out of five respondents to this question identified their business operation as a sole location. The remaining fifth of respondents identified that they were part of a larger organization, either as a headquarters, branch or subsidiary.

Business Type	# and % of Responses
Sole location	111
	79%
Headquarters	15
	11%
Branch of a larger facility	11
	8%
Subsidiary of a larger corporation	4
	3%
Total	141

2. *Do you own or lease your facility?*

There is a nearly fifty-fifty split between those businesses that own their facility versus those that lease their facility. Those that lease their facilities possess a certain degree of flexibility in terms of their ability to change locations in the future. Logically amongst the respondents, the proportion of businesses owning their own facility increases as the length of business operation in Plainville increases. Interestingly, 64 percent of Construction companies in Plainville own their own facilities while only 38 percent of Manufacturing companies do.

Response	# and % of Responses
Own	70
	50%
Lease	69
	50%
Total	139

3. *When is the lease on your facility due?*

Of the 69 businesses that are currently operating in Plainville by leasing their facility, there is a fairly even distribution between those with their leases due in less than a year, between one and three years, and more than three years.

Twenty-nine percent of the businesses have less than a year remaining on their leases, indicating that a significant portion of Plainville businesses could be on the move to a new location inside or outside Plainville.

Response	# and % of Responses
Less than 1 year	20
	29%
1 - 3 years	25
	36%
3+ years	24
	35%
Total	69

4. *How long has your business been located in Plainville?*

Eighty-four, or 60 percent, of the 140 business respondents in Plainville have been there for more than 10 years. Of businesses with 50 or more employees, 81 percent have been located in Plainville for 10 or more years. Thirteen of 15 respondents that identified themselves as Retail had been located in Plainville for at least 10 years.

Response	# and % of Responses
Less than 1 year	4
	3%
1 - 4 years	25
	18%
5 - 10 years	27
	19%
More than 10 years	84
	60%
Total	140

5. *How many employees currently work at your Plainville location?*

The most prevalent employment group is 1-9 employees at 40 percent (57 respondents). Businesses of 10-49 employees represent 29 percent (41). Self employed businesses are 18 percent of respondents. There were only six respondents who indicated that they employed 100 or more employees.

Response	# and % of Responses
Self-employed	26 18%
1-9	57 40%
10-49	41 29%
50 – 99	11 8%
100 – 249	3 2%
250+	3 2%
Total	141

6. *What is your primary industry? Please select one.*

The top industries in Plainville - Other (40 responses, 29.6 percent), Manufacturing (29 responses, 21.5 percent), Retail Trade (15 responses, 11.1 percent), and Construction (12, 8.9 percent) – comprise 71.1 percent of surveyed businesses in Plainville.

Industry	# Responses	% of Total Responses
Mining, quarry, asphalt and/or concrete processing	1	0.7%
Forestry, landscaping	0	0.0%
Utilities	1	0.7%
Construction	12	8.9%
Manufacturing	29	21.5%
Wholesale trade	3	2.2%
Retail trade	15	11.1%
Transportation & warehousing	2	1.5%
Information (e.g. computer design, Internet providers)	1	0.7%
Finance & insurance	4	3.0%
Real estate & rental & leasing	0	0.0%
Professional services (e.g. lawyers, accountants)	11	8.1%
Scientific & technical services (e.g. architects, engineers, computer or advertising services)	4	3.0%
Management of companies & enterprises	0	0.0%
Administration & support	0	0.0%
Waste management & remediation services	1	0.7%
Educational services	3	2.2%
Health care and social assistance	6	4.4%
Arts, entertainment & recreation	1	0.7%
Accommodation & food services (e.g. hotels, restaurants)	1	0.7%
Other, please specify	40	29.6%
Total	135	100.00%

Local Business Climate

7. *Local Business Climate in Plainville: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.*

Overall, the attitude is fairly positive about the business climate in Plainville, with all five questions receiving more positive responses than negative ones. The respondents felt strongly positive about the accessibility of town officials (index of concurrence greater than 0.5 indicates a positive response to the question – the further away from 1.00 an index of concurrence is, the more conflicted the responses are) with a value of 0.81. Respondents also indicated positive associations with the statement about the business climate of Plainville, with a value of 0.71. To lesser extents, respondents felt positive about business support

services (0.67), knowing who in government to contact about business assistance (0.68), and effective implementation of land use regulations (0.64).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A	Total	index of concurrence	mean
The business climate in Plainville is Good	9	53	52	16	9	2	141	0.71	2.70
	6%	38%	37%	11%	6%	1%	100%		
Business support services are readily available in Plainville.	7	51	48	17	11	6	140	0.67	2.81
	5%	36%	34%	12%	8%	4%	100%		
Plainville town officials are readily accessible.	21	60	36	15	4	4	140	0.81	2.42
	15%	43%	26%	11%	3%	3%	100%		
I know whom to ask within the town government for assistance.	13	52	40	22	9	5	141	0.68	2.72
	9%	37%	28%	16%	6%	4%	100%		
The land use regulations and their enforcement are conducive to the economic growth of the town.	9	37	55	15	11	11	138	0.64	2.86
	7%	27%	40%	11%	8%	8%	100%		

In response to the first statement about the general business climate, it is interesting to note that the index of concurrence for those within the retail trade industry was 0.42, by far the lowest of any industry group. Manufacturing had the next lowest index of concurrence value at (0.57).

In response to business support services, businesses of 1-9 employees (0.57), the manufacturing industry (0.58), and the retail trade industry (0.60) were the three lowest indices of concurrence, and merit further investigation.

In response to the statement about knowing who to contact within town government, businesses with 10-49 employees had an index of concurrence of 0.50 which indicates mixed positive and negative responses. Retail trade and professional/scientific/technical services both had encouraging indices of concurrence of 0.90.

The final question about land use regulations had the lowest overall index of concurrence at 0.64. Construction, Manufacturing, Retail, and Professional/Scientific/Technical services industries all had indices of concurrence of 0.57 or less, illustrating Plainville's relative dissatisfaction with current land use regulations.

8. *Please provide comments pertaining to the business climate in Plainville.*

A variety of comments were expressed by respondents about the business climate in Plainville. The most popular response, numbering approximately 14, was that the town of Plainville fails to provide sufficient customer traffic for its businesses and/or that town government needs to focus on attracting new businesses. Interestingly, the next most popular comment (13) was that the

business climate in Plainville is adequate or good. With 10 related comments, downtown revitalization was an issue of some controversy (its failure, its success, its lack of apparent necessity, etc...). Seven described their dissatisfaction with the lack of business assistance provided by the town and the town's feeble efforts to provide benefits for existing businesses. Seven more complained of problems with street signs, parking, or roads. Two respondents claimed that Plainville was not a positive business climate and two more described the inter-town flow of customers as a positive feature of Plainville.

9. *Why did your company select Plainville as a business location?*

The most common response as to why a respondent chose Plainville as a location was its centralized location within the region and/or its easy access to nearby customers and vendors (26). The next most common responses were that the respondent lived there prior to establishing their business (19), a prior owner chose the location (18), and convenient highway access (12). Other popular responses included a perceived good business climate (9), affordable land prices (8), a strategic or high exposure facility location (6), facilities appropriate for needs (4), and that Plainville is a nice, quiet place to raise a family (3).

10. *If, within the past year, you had any interaction with any or all of the staff in the municipal departments and boards listed below, please rate their overall responsiveness.*

Overall, the indices of concurrence for interaction with government offices were quite positive. The Assessor's Office, the Fire Department, and the Health Department all received 0.95 values. It should be noted that the Economic Development department received a relatively low value among business owners that operated in Plainville for less than five years. The lowest index of concurrence experienced by an office was the Town Manager (.69); businesses of 1-9 employees and non-members of the Chamber of Commerce experienced individual indices of concurrence of 0.45.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor	No inter-action	Total	index of con-currence	mean
Assessor's Office	16	37	10	2	1	62	128	0.95	2.02
Economic Development Dept	9	16	6	2	3	82	118	0.83	2.28
Finance Department	2	4	4	1	0	104	115	0.86	2.36
Fire Department	25	17	5	2	0	73	122	0.95	1.67
Health Department	13	7	5	0	1	93	119	0.95	1.81
Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission	1	6	4	1	1	104	117	0.78	2.62
Planning & Zoning Com.	8	17	10	2	4	81	122	0.81	2.44
Police Department	40	32	6	4	4	40	126	0.90	1.84
Recreation Department	11	10	2	1	1	95	120	0.91	1.84
Revenue Collection	19	27	13	2	2	65	128	0.92	2.06
Senior Center	5	5	4	0	0	103	117	1.00	1.93
Social Services	2	3	5	0	1	104	115	0.83	2.55
Technical & Physical Svcs	2	5	5	1	1	101	115	0.78	2.57
Town Council	6	5	9	1	3	96	120	0.73	2.58
Town Manager	12	10	6	2	8	80	118	0.69	2.58
Youth Services	4	3	3	1	0	101	112	0.88	2.09

11. *Competitive Advantages and Disadvantages*

As previously determined in the open ended survey of the reasons to select Plainville for business operations (Question 9), respondents in this question described, via the index of concurrence, that the strongest competitive advantage of Plainville is its centralized location (0.97). Both infrastructure and community security earned indices of concurrence of 0.89. The greatest perceived impediments to growth in Plainville were taxes (0.53) and regulations (0.67) Notably, the manufacturing industry (0.53) had problems with the cost and availability of commercial real estate. Businesses of 1-9 employees (0.57), the construction industry (0.50), and the retail trade industry (0.50) all deemed regulations (zoning and permitting) relative detriments to the business climate of Plainville. Businesses of all sizes and experiences had issues with taxes in Plainville, but businesses of 50 or more employees had an index of concurrence

of 0.36. Construction (.20), Manufacturing (.39), and Retail Trade (.36) are similarly dissatisfied with the tax system in Plainville.

	Critical Advantage	Moderate Advantage	No Effect	Moderate Disadvantage	Critical Disadvantage	Total	index of concurrence	mean
Location (access to customers, trans, suppliers)	43	72	19	3	0	137	0.97	1.87
Workforce (availability, cost, diversity, skills)	8	61	52	13	2	136	0.82	2.56
Infrastructure (trans, telecom, utilities)	14	49	64	7	1	135	0.89	2.50
Commercial real estate (availability, cost)	11	57	45	16	7	136	0.75	2.64
Crime/security (perceptions, reality)	18	74	34	11	0	137	0.89	2.28
Regulations (zoning, permitting)	14	37	58	20	5	134	0.67	2.74
Taxes (real estate, property)	4	46	41	35	9	135	0.53	2.99
Responsiveness of town government	10	44	63	13	6	136	0.74	2.71
Actions of Chamber of Commerce	14	33	68	7	8	130	0.76	2.71

12. Other Advantages and Disadvantages

The responses were varied but included location (6), highway access (2), cleanliness of the town, friendliness, and the benefits of Norton Park and associated activities. Another respondent declared, “few prospects, much attention given,” or what I interpret to mean, because there are few business prospects, they are given a lot of attention by the public. One respondent optimistically declared, “too many [advantages] to list”. Alternative comparative disadvantages included: “not a lot of land for development,” traffic, taxes (2), construction, lack of parking, elderly drivers, lack of aesthetic appeal (4) of downtown, and competition.

13. Have you ever used the Plainville Public Library for business purposes?

The majority of the business respondents have not used the Plainville Public Library to conduct business activities.

Response	# Responses	% Total of Responses
Yes	27	19.6%
No	110	79.7%
Don't Know	1	0.7%

14. *What library services would be useful for your business (choose any that apply)?*

Response	# and % of Responses
Business research	51
	55%
Use of the Internet	14
	15%
Use of the meeting rooms	39
	42%
On-line newspapers and magazines	20
	22%
Other (please specify)	13
	14%
Total	93

As noted by question 13 that most respondents have not utilized library resources, the most common uses of the library were for business research (55 percent), meeting rooms (42 percent), and online magazines and newspapers (22 percent).

Workforce

15. *Where do the majority of your employees reside?*

Response	# and % of Responses
Plainville	28
	21%
Outside of Plainville, within 10 minutes of business	41
	30%
Between 10-30 minutes of business location	63
	47%
Within Connecticut (more than 30 minutes from business)	3
	2%
Outside Connecticut (within U.S.)	0
	0%
Outside U.S.	0
	0%
Total	135

About 21 percent of business employees in Plainville actually live within the town borders. Nearly four fifths (77 percent) of Plainville employees live outside of Plainville and within 30 minutes of their business, indicating the existence of a strongly commuter-based economy. This implies that commuter programs (Ride

sharing, public transportation from nearby cities, etc...) and advertising of open Plainville positions in cities within 30 minutes away, may serve to smooth out any inconsistencies in the labor market of Plainville. The remaining two percent of respondents indicated that the majority of their employees commuted more than 30 minutes to work. Notably, 57 percent of employees of the Professional/Scientific/Technical Services Industry in Plainville are residents of the town, and 62 percent of the businesses with more than 50 employees meet their labor needs within 10 minutes of their location.

16. Please indicate the extent you agree or disagree with the following statements related to local/regional workforce and training issues.

The attitudes expressed about the workforce in Plainville are somewhat less positive (0.59-0.75) than those about the business climate, as seen in the figure below.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Dis-agree	Strongly Dis-agree	N/A	Total	index of concurrence	mean
The available workforce is sufficient for our business needs.	5	54	34	28	2	14	137	0.66	2.74
Basic skills of new hires are sufficient.	2	48	42	25	3	16	136	0.64	2.83
The work ethic of the workforce is adequate for our needs.	6	49	37	24	5	13	134	0.65	2.78
The math abilities of the workforce are adequate for our needs.	2	57	40	17	3	17	136	0.75	2.68
The communication skills of the workforce are sufficient for our needs.	3	55	37	25	0	15	135	0.70	2.70
The mechanical and technical skills of the workforce are adequate for our needs.	3	57	29	23	4	20	136	0.69	2.72
Local and regional educational and training resources meet our needs.	2	38	40	20	8	26	134	0.59	2.94

While businesses of less than five years of existence in Plainville (0.85), the Professional/Scientific/Technical service industry (0.89), and the Retail Trade Industry (0.89) indicated that the workforce was adequate, the Construction (0.40) and Manufacturing (0.56) industries were much less optimistic. Those two industries also indicated that they were not satisfied with the skills of new hires (0.33 and 0.43 respectively). The Construction industry indicated an index of concurrence of 0.00 in regards to the adequacy of the work ethic of their employees. Manufacturing registered a 0.45 value towards the adequacy of their workforce's communication skills. Finally, Manufacturing expressed a general dissatisfaction with the mechanical/technical skills of its employees (0.39) and the regional educational and training resources available to them (0.33). The

attitudes from the Construction and Manufacturing industries are not isolated to Plainville; this is indeed a larger regional issue.

17. *Are you able to provide a retirement program for your employees?*

Almost half of the respondents are able to provide a retirement program for their workers.

Response	# and % of Responses
Yes	66
	49%
No	62
	46%
Don't Know	7
	5%
Total	135

18. *Are you able to provide a medical plan for your employees?*

More than two-thirds of the respondents indicated that their company provides a medical plan for their workers.

Response	# and % of Responses
Yes	91
	68%
No	42
	31%
Don't Know	1
	1%
Total	134

19. *Are you currently providing training services for your employees?*

Seventy-two percent of businesses with nine or fewer employees, 83 percent of businesses with 10-49 workers, and 100 percent of businesses with more than 50 employees indicated that they were able to provide training services for their employees.

Response	# and % of Responses
Yes	92
	68%
No	43
	32%
Don't Know	1
	1%
Total	136

20. *From where do you obtain training?*

Fifty percent of respondents in the construction industry and 38 percent in Professional/Scientific/Technical Services indicated that their employees received training from community and technical schools. Ninety-four percent of businesses with 10-49 employees and 100 percent of businesses with 50 or more employees indicated that they used some form of in-house training while 63 percent of businesses with nine or fewer employees indicated that they used the same method. Ninety-five percent of manufacturing businesses and 100 percent of retail businesses surveyed use in-house training.

Response	# and % of Responses
Community/technical college	10
	11%
Regional, vocational school	8
	9%
Private occupational school	6
	7%
Adult education	4
	4%
In-house training program	75
	82%
Other (please specify)	20
	22%
Total	92

Other sources of training volunteered by respondents included vendor-based training, continuing education courses, private training sessions, member

organizations, federal training sessions, conventions, industry training and on-line training.

21. *Do you need customized job training that is not readily available?*

Response	# and % of Responses
Yes	26
	19%
No	100
	74%
Don't Know	10
	7%
Total	136

Notably, 27 percent of the Construction and 21 percent of the Manufacturing businesses in Plainville indicated that they needed job training that is currently not available. Nineteen percent of all of the respondents indicated that they need job training that is not available.

22. *What type of customized job training do you need that is not readily available in the region?*

Specific areas of specialized training not available in or around Plainville included: heating & plumbing, small engine repair, sheet metal fabrication and installation (2), software development (2), OSHA and safety programs, machine installation, salesmanship, driving instructor certification, accounting, engineering, and other industry-specific skills.

23. *Will your firm be adding or reducing the number of positions in Plainville over the next year?*

At the time the survey was administered, fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they were planning on maintaining their current levels of employment throughout the next year, while 36 percent indicated that they were planning on increasing their staff, and only six percent of respondents were planning on cutting back on jobs. Forty-eight percent of Manufacturing respondents and 36 percent of Construction respondents were planning on increasing their number of positions available; nine percent of Construction respondents, seven percent of Manufacturing respondents, and seven percent of retail respondents indicated that they were planning on reducing their number of positions; 87 percent of Retail respondents and 80 percent of Professional/Scientific/Technical services respondents planned to keep their employment levels stable during the coming year. The dramatic turn of events in

the economy during Fall 2008 may dampen this outlook. Nevertheless, during Summer 2008, most respondents in Plainville were stable or upbeat regarding their employee levels.

Response	# and % of Responses
Adding new positions	50
	36%
Reducing positions	8
	6%
No projected change in employment	80
	58%
Total	138

24. *How many positions do you plan to add?*

In compiling the data for the table below, if a respondent listed a range (Ex: 1 or 2 new positions), the greatest number of positions a respondent was considering to add was used. Nearly half of all respondents considering adding positions were considering adding two positions. Nine respondents were planning to add five positions each. The greatest number of positions a single respondent was planning on adding was 20.

Max. New Positions Being Considered	Frequency
1	3
2	20
3	4
4	3
5	9
More than 5	7
Total	46

25. *What level of education will the new hires need? Check all that apply.*

Sixty-four percent of respondents described that they were going to require new hires with a high school education. In contrast, only 26 percent of respondents declared that they were going to need new hires with a college degree. Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated that they would hire employees with no formal education; only 16 percent of employers required new hires with a professional degree. These results indicate a labor market that is relatively dependent on unskilled labor (49 opportunities for those with high school education or less); there would appear to be somewhat of a lack of positions for those with college and or advanced degree (21 opportunities).

Response	# and % of Responses
On the job training (no formal education required)	17
	34%
High school graduate	32
	64%
College graduate	13
	26%
Professional degree	8
	16%
Total	50

26. *By how many positions do you plan to reduce?*

There were only a few meaningful responses contributed. Respondents listed that they were planning to (or did during the course of the last year) reduce by two, 10, and 17 employees. One business was going to move, resulting in the dislocation of 40 employees. One other business was considering closing down and thus laying off all employees.

Growth Prospects

27. *Is your company planning to purchase, lease or construct new facilities within the next three years?*

Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated that they were not planning on improving their facilities within three years; 22 percent responded that they were planning on improving their facilities during the next three years; 23 percent said they did not know.

Response	# and % of Responses
Yes	30
	22%
No	76
	55%
Don't Know	32
	23%
Total	138

Looking at the distribution of responses to the expansion question sheds light on some interesting trends. First of all, the amount of time a business has been in Plainville appears to be negatively related to expansion plans. In relative terms (percentages), the three business “age” groups (<5 years, 5-10 years, and >10

years) progressively become more likely to say no to expansion as time operating in Plainville increases. While businesses with less than 50 employees tend to favor greater expansion as the company size increases (self employed, < 1-9, < 10-49), companies of 50 or greater employees seem reluctant to commit to new facilities. And while the manufacturing industry appears poised to expand their facilities (31 percent yes), construction (nine percent yes) and professional/scientific/technical services (zero percent yes) felt less inclined to do so.

Upgrading Facilities		Yes		No	
Existence in Plainville	Less than 5 years	10	36%	11	39%
	5 - 10 years	7	26%	15	56%
	More than 10 years	12	15%	50	61%
Number of Employees	Self-employed	2	8%	13	52%
	1-9	13	23%	31	54%
	10-49	12	30%	21	53%
	50+	3	19%	11	69%
Industry	Construction	1	9%	7	64%
	Mfg	9	31%	14	48%
	Retail Trade	2	13%	9	60%
	Prof/Sci/Tech Svcs	0	0%	11	73%
	Other	17	27%	33	52%

28. Are you planning on staying in Plainville?

Response	# and % of Responses
Yes	12
	40%
No	2
	7%
Don't Know	16
	53%
Total	30

There appears to be some apprehension among business owners about any expansion plans in Plainville. Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated that they were not sure about whether they would continue to operate in Plainville. Only two respondents (seven percent) indicated that they did not plan to continue to operate in Plainville.

Notably, seven of nine manufacturing firms that responded to this question said that they were not sure if they were going to continue to operate in Plainville; seven of 12 firms that have existed in Plainville for more than 10 years said that they were not sure if they were going to remain in Plainville. On the contrary,

seven of 10 firms with less than five years experience in Plainville indicated that they were planning to remain in Plainville, rather than to relocate elsewhere.

29. *If you are planning to expand in Plainville, what do you expect will be the greatest challenge your company will face?*

The most common response to this question (8) was finding affordable rents and real estate. The next most common responses – finding the appropriate office or facility and obtaining zoning approval or permits – received four responses each. Other responses included finding the right location (2), financing business operations (2), obtaining tax incentives (2), the expenses associated with moving business operations within Plainville (2), parking, and high taxes.

30. *Why are you planning to expand outside of Plainville?*

There were only two responses to this question. The first response was that there just was not a large enough business community to support their enterprise and that there was not enough customer traffic through Plainville. The second response was from a manufacturing firm that lacked facilities with proper height and space specifications.

31. *Do you have the ability to expand your facilities on your current site?*

Response	# and % of Responses
Yes	10
	33%
No	18
	60%
Don't Know	2
	7%
Total	30

Three in five businesses (60 percent) that responded to this question indicated that they could not expand their facilities on their current site. A third (33 percent) of businesses indicated that they could expand their current facilities. The inability of 60 percent of respondents to expand facilities on their current site has potentially negative implications for the future of Plainville, because Plainville businesses may be looking elsewhere for future expansion.

32. *Is there available property in Plainville on which you would like to expand?*

Response	# and % of Responses
Yes	7
	39%
No	2
	11%
Don't Know	9
	50%
Total	18

Of the 18 businesses that responded to this question, seven (39 percent) indicated that there was available property onto which they would like to expand. This is an indicator that Plainville has the available properties necessary to satisfy the needs of expanding home grown businesses. Only two respondents indicated that there was not a property in Plainville onto which they would like to expand. Nine respondents were unable to provide a yes or no answer.

33. *Please identify the potential property, if possible.*

Of seven respondents who described that there was a property in Plainville onto which they were considering expansion, only two provided specific properties. Those were 153 Whiting Street and Robert Jackson Way.

34. *Would you like assistance from the Town in your relocation or expansion plans?*

Of seven respondents to this question, three indicated yes, two indicated no, and two indicated that they were unsure.

Infrastructure

35. *How familiar are you with the Town of Plainville's enterprise zone program?*

Only 10 percent of respondents (13) indicated that they were very familiar with Plainville's enterprise zone program. 24 percent of respondents (33) indicated that they were somewhat familiar with the program. Two thirds of respondents (66 percent, 90) indicated that they were not familiar with the program. This is a strong indicator that the town should improve efforts to provide the Plainville business community with information about this program.

Response	# and % of Responses
Very Familiar	13
	10%
Somewhat Familiar	33
	24%
Not Familiar	90
	66%
Total	136

36. *How familiar are you with the Town of Plainville's Revolving Loan and Tax & Business Incentive programs?*

Only a combined 13 percent of respondents considered themselves very or somewhat familiar with Plainville's Revolving Loan and Tax & Business Incentive Programs. An alarming 87 percent (118) of respondents described themselves as not familiar with the program. This lack of knowledge within the business community about the program brings into question the effectiveness of the program altogether.

Response	# and % of Responses
Very Familiar	4
	3%
Somewhat Familiar	14
	10%
Not Familiar	118
	87%
Total	136

37. *What incentives, programs, workshops or other information could the Town or Chamber provide to assist with business growth?*

Response	# and % of Responses
Investment tax credits	65 57%
Plant and equipment tax credits	59 52%
Transportation incentives	22 19%
Workforce incentives	45 39%
Tax abatements	68 60%
Job creation credits	49 43%
Low-interest loans	60 53%
Current event workshops	11 10%
Job training workshops	13 11%
Wireless internet "hotspots"	19 17%
Communications through newsletter/email	27 24%
Other (please specify)	12 11%
Total	114

The most popular response, with 68 of 114 respondents in agreement (60 percent) was tax abatement. As has been alluded to in other sections of this survey, the level to which businesses are taxed in Plainville is widely considered one of the town's greatest drawbacks. Other popular responses were investment tax credits (57 percent), access to low-interest loans (53 percent), and plant/equipment tax credits (52 percent).

38. *Turning to utilities, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements comparing Plainville to other towns or regions with different utility providers.*

The opinions about utilities in Plainville varied quite a bit, but were on the whole quite positive. However, in regards to commercial electrical rates, respondents felt negatively, as indicated by the index of concurrence of 0.48. Midsized businesses (0.38), large companies (0.36), the manufacturing industry (0.35),

and the retail trade industry (0.30) are all especially dissatisfied with electricity rates. However, respondents felt very positively about the promptness of natural gas repairs (1.00). Although respondents were somewhat lukewarm about commercial natural gas rates (0.60), they were very positive about availability (0.95) and the infrequency of gas interruptions (0.95). Waste water treatment (0.91), water service (0.88), and promptness of electric utility repairs (0.88) also received high marks.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A	Total	index of concurrence	mean
Commercial/industrial electric rates are competitive.	2	36	42	31	11	10	132	0.48	3.11
Electric service interruptions are infrequent.	19	63	18	21	8	3	132	0.74	2.50
Electric utility repairs and services are prompt.	13	73	30	9	3	5	133	0.88	2.34
Natural gas service is readily available.	16	63	24	3	1	26	133	0.95	2.16
Commercial/industrial natural gas rates are competitive.	4	28	43	19	2	36	132	0.60	2.86
Natural gas service interruptions are infrequent.	29	46	20	2	2	33	132	0.95	2.01
Natural gas repairs/customer services are prompt.	14	39	38	0	0	39	130	1.00	2.26
Public wastewater treatment systems are accessible to our business.	13	55	29	5	2	27	131	0.91	2.31
Public water service is adequate.	14	77	20	11	2	8	132	0.88	2.27

39. *Regarding telecommunications please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.*

Plainville received very high marks for telecommunications infrastructure. Overall, telecommunications services were considered (0.90) to be adequate. The vast majority of respondents (0.98) agreed that high speed internet services are important to business growth in Plainville. Similarly, the majority of respondents (0.97) agreed that high speed internet service is available.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Dis-agree	Strongly Dis-agree	N/A	Total	index of concurrence	mean
Telecommunications services are adequate for our needs.	15	86	19	8	3	4	135	0.90	2.22
High-speed internet services through fiber/cable/DSL are important to our business growth in Plainville.	57	58	10	2	0	8	135	0.98	1.66
High-speed internet service through fiber/cable/DSL is available.	39	70	14	1	2	7	133	0.97	1.87

40. The following statements focus on transportation. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A	Total	index of concurrence	mean
We can move products in and out of Plainville easily.	27	75	7	0	0	28	137	1.00	1.82
Freight rail service is important to my ability to ship goods.	5	5	18	16	13	79	136	0.26	3.47
Customers have convenient access to our Plainville facility.	27	67	15	8	1	18	136	0.91	2.06
Bus services are important for our employees' commutes.	4	16	23	16	15	63	137	0.39	3.30
Commuter rail service is important for our employees' commutes.	2	4	21	16	22	70	135	0.14	3.80
Vanpooling and ridesharing services are important for our employees' commutes.	1	9	25	14	18	70	137	0.24	3.58
Taxi services are important for our employees' commutes.	0	8	18	17	21	71	135	0.17	3.80
Access to the interstate highway system is adequate.	49	78	6	2	1	1	137	0.98	1.74
The local traffic road system is adequate for our customers and suppliers.	23	78	16	9	3	7	136	0.89	2.16
Local street identification signs make it easy to locate our business.	19	73	19	16	7	2	136	0.80	2.40

There appear to some strong opinions about the importance of various modes of transportation to business in Plainville. It is easy to move products in and out of Plainville (1.00). Freight rail service is a relative non-factor in shipping goods (0.26). Customer access to Plainville facilities is convenient. Bus services (0.39), commuter rail service (0.14), vanpooling/ridesharing services (0.24), and taxi services (0.17) are all unimportant to employee commuting. Access to the interstate is adequate (0.98).

41. Where are the majority of your suppliers located?

Eighty-six percent of respondents' suppliers are located outside of a ten minute radius of Plainville. Fifty-six percent of suppliers are located further than 30 minutes away. The greatest portion of suppliers was between 10 and 30 minutes away (41, 30 percent). Forty respondents indicated that the majority of their

respondents were outside of Connecticut (within the U.S.). The results suggest that Plainville businesses are largely reliant on regional suppliers and to a lesser extent, interstate suppliers.

Notably, 47 percent of businesses with 50 or more employees, 64 percent of construction businesses, and 45 percent of manufacturing businesses use regional suppliers that are between 10 and 30 minutes away. Fifty-three percent of the retail trade industry obtains supplies from outside Connecticut.

Responses	# and % of Responses
Plainville	5
	4%
Outside of Plainville, within 10 minutes of business	14
	10%
Between 10-30 minutes of business location	41
	30%
Within Connecticut (more than 30 minutes from business)	35
	26%
Outside Connecticut (within U.S.)	40
	30%
Outside U.S.	0
	0%
Total	135

42. *Where are the majority of your customers located?*

Responses	# and % of Responses
Plainville	15
	11%
Outside of Plainville, within 10 minutes of business	17
	13%
Between 10-30 minutes of business location	50
	37%
Within Connecticut (more than 30 minutes from business)	30
	22%
Outside Connecticut (within U.S.)	22
	16%
Outside U.S.	2
	1%
Total	136

The greatest concentration of customers within one of the given geographical areas is the 10-30 minute area (50, 37 percent). However, the spread of customers is for the most part evenly distributed across local, regional, state, national and international levels. Nearly a quarter of customers are located within

10 minutes of Plainville. Twenty-two percent of customers are located beyond 30 minutes away from the business, but still in Connecticut. Sixteen percent of customers are located in the rest of the United States, and two respondents (one percent) indicated that the majority of their clientele are located outside of the U.S.

Quality of Life

43. *Please rate the following "Quality of Life" factors regarding the impact each has in keeping your business in Plainville.*

In terms of the factors that define the way that business owners feel about Plainville as a place to live, Plainville scores quite well. All indices of concurrence reflect positively on the town, with particularly high ratings for the public schools (.86), quality of housing (.93), affordability of housing (.89), cost of living (.93), and public safety (.97). Scoring not quite as well were recreational facilities (.83), open space/nature preservation (.72), and cultural opportunities (.77).

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Somewhat Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N/A	Total	index of concurrence	mean
Plainville public schools	29	33	34	4	6	30	136	0.86	2.29
Quality of housing	31	47	28	3	3	23	135	0.93	2.11
Affordability of housing	32	49	23	6	4	21	135	0.89	2.13
Cost of living	39	55	21	4	3	14	136	0.93	1.99
Public safety (police, fire)	65	52	13	3	1	2	136	0.97	1.68
Recreational Facilities	17	48	35	7	6	23	136	0.83	2.44
Open space and nature preservation	21	38	35	14	9	19	136	0.72	2.59
Cultural opportunities	14	45	40	8	10	20	137	0.77	2.62

44. *How often do you attend local Chamber of Commerce events?*

Chamber of Commerce events are fairly poorly attended, according to these respondents, with 67 percent of businesses indicating that they never attend and only seven percent of respondents indicating that they frequently attend. Businesses that consistently avoid the Chamber of Commerce include those that have been in Plainville for 5-10 years (85 percent avoidance), self-employed businesses (84 percent), and the construction industry (91 percent).

Responses	# and % of Responses
Very Often	9
	7%
Occasionally	37
	27%
Never	92
	67%
Total	138

45. *What do you like most about doing business in Plainville?*

The most popular appeal of doing business in Plainville by a significant margin is the small town feel and sense of community (26). The other popular responses were the town’s central location (19), the temperament of the residents (15), and access to highways (10). Other themes shared by multiple respondents were the pleasure of dealing with customers (4), proximity to home (3), and convenient access to commercial services (2). Other responses submitted by individual respondents included competitive prices, town services, the downtown area, and “stability”.

46. *What do you like least about doing business in Plainville?*

The responses to this question seem to be more scattered than those of the previous question. There was a three way tie for most popular response – prohibitively high taxes and or cost of living (7), lack of vibrant business climate and or urban decay (7), and faulty management of traffic infrastructure (7). There were only 5 other responses shared by more than one respondent: lack of support for local business and town services amongst residents (5), the parking situation (4), party politics and the failure of local government (3), inappropriate allocation of town funds (3), and finding clients (2). Other miscellaneous responses included “the mean spirited, ignorant, Home Town Connection and those who work for it,” zoning laws, lack of a bus service, the prevalence of middle and lower class income brackets, the failures of the downtown merchant

association, inadequate drainage infrastructure, “Town support in CDA,” and finding affordable facilities.

47. *Are you a member of the Chamber of Commerce?*

Responses	# and % of Responses
Yes	69
	51%
No	67
	49%
Total	136

There are nearly equal parts membership and non-membership of the Chamber of Commerce amongst Plainville businesses. Business groups with particular low membership are the Professional/Technical/Scientific Services Industry (33 percent), the Self Employed (17 percent), and the Construction Industry (10 percent).

48. *Would you like more information regarding programs and services offered by the Chamber?*

Responses	# and % of Responses
Yes	14
	21%
No	39
	57%
Don't Know	15
	22%
Total	68

Some businesses are interested in more information about the programs and services of the Chamber of Commerce. Those business groups that expressed the most interest were businesses that have been in Plainville for less than five years (33 percent), businesses of 10-49 employees (36 percent), and the retail trade industry (40 percent). Business groups that wanted little more to do with the Chamber included those of more than 50 employees (zero percent), current members of the Chamber (zero percent), the manufacturing industry (8 percent), and the construction industry (11 percent).

Conclusion

Based on the survey findings, there are opportunities within its control for Plainville to enhance its business climate.

Marketing Opportunities:

- Market the Town's strategic advantages including its central location, existing infrastructure, quality of life and community security.
- Publicize available land and commercial properties in the Town to encourage businesses looking to expand that there are opportunities.

Workforce Opportunities:

- Explore job training opportunities that could be accessed by a variety of industries. Creating customized job training programs are most likely out of the Town's control.
- Partner with companies that are offering jobs that need formal education in order to get the word out – a greater proportion of higher paying jobs in Plainville could translate to higher levels of patronage for Plainville businesses, as well as a larger base of tax base due to the well educated professionals that would decide to live in Plainville.
- Maintaining the quality of the Town's public education system and building stronger linkages with nearby technical schools will help the companies looking for workers to fill lower-skilled or technical occupations.

Business Assistance:

- Create a program for newer companies to address perceived challenges such as finding affordable rents or real estate, finding the appropriate office or facility, and obtaining zoning approval or permits.
- Consider commuter programs such as ridesharing or public transit options since the majority of businesses have employees that live outside of Plainville but within 30 minutes away.
- Publicize Plainville's Enterprise Zone Program and Revolving Loan and Tax & Business Incentive programs to encourage more business use.

Municipal Regulations:

- Review land use regulations and the tax system to see if there are ways to make them more business-friendly.

Overall, the survey findings are positive and should be useful for Plainville to identify strengths to market and opportunities to change. The challenge now for the town officials is to identify and prioritize projects to further enhance the business competitiveness of Plainville.