



JASPER BUSINESS VISITATION STUDY

Update One Year Later – Winter 2015/2016



WINTER 2015/2016
COMMUNITY FUTURES WEST YELLOWHEAD
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Jasper Business Visitation Program – Events of the last 12 months since the study

Jasper's business community has experienced many changes since the completion of the Jasper Business Visitation Program in the summer of 2014. This report is an update to the business climate in Jasper and an overview of the accomplishments of the past year. A number of factors influenced the business community in the past 12 months; mainly the changes in government at both the provincial and federal levels of government.

Changes to Minimum Wage in Alberta

Questions on labour in the Jasper Business Visitation Study (BVS) focused on the labour shortage in Jasper in 2014 because of changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TWFP). Since the BVS in 2014, the provincial government announced changes to the minimum wage in Alberta that includes a phased in approach to increasing the general minimum wage to \$10.20 from \$9.95 and the liquor server minimum wage to \$9.20 from \$9.05 as of October 1, 2015. It is the intention of the provincial government to reach a \$15 minimum wage by 2018 through four different increases and phase out the liquor server minimum wage by 2016.

This effect of the increase in wages for small businesses in Jasper is not known at the present time. As stated by the Government of Alberta, the typical minimum wage worker is found in the Accommodation and Food Services industry.¹ Wages in Jasper are not usually much higher than the current minimum wage as stated in the BVS². A larger number of these Jasper workers in the accommodation and food industry receive wages just above minimum wage that are most commonly supplemented by tips. As the Jasper BVS discovered that labour costs also greatly affect the pricing structures of retail products in the community³, prices of goods should also be expected to increase in the community. In short, minimum wage increases will affect the entire community and all businesses regardless if they are paying their staff the minimum wage or higher.

Any follow up studies in the next five years on the business community in Jasper should include information to gauge the effect of the minimum wage increases on businesses in Jasper.

Record visitor attendance in 2015

Given the drop in gas prices for consumers and the decrease in the Canadian dollar, it is no surprise that Jasper businesses saw an increase in visitors to the National Park in 2015. Both May and July experienced a 10% increase in visitors from the previous year; September, April and June also saw an increase from the previous year. The exception was August that had less than a 1% decrease from the previous year. Visitors to Jasper were on the rise since 2014 since there was an overall 7.3% increase in that year. We can assume that businesses that were experiencing an increase in visitors during the summer of 2014 during the BVS were even more crunched for available labour in the summer of 2015.⁴

¹ Government of Alberta document on Minimum Wage Demographics.

² As stated in the BVS, the average wage of non-managerial positions in Jasper is \$12.50 per hour and does not include any additional health, vacation or retirement benefits above the legal requirements in Canada (page 18).

³ While energy costs seemed to be the highest factor affecting the annual adjustment of prices (66%), the second most common response was labour costs (33% of businesses surveyed) (page 20).

⁴ Jasper National Park Visitor Attendance statistics are released monthly by Parks Canada.

Update on Jasper Business Visitation Recommendations: One year later

Area 1: Development Approval Process

- Goal: Revisit bylaws and regulations of the development approval process, licensing and inspections, zoning and permitting
- Goal: Streamline economic development process between Parks Canada and the Municipality of Jasper

In 2015, the Municipality of Jasper and Parks Canada collaboratively commissioned a review of the business licensing process between both organizations and propose a new system that improves efficiency, effectiveness and transparency in the business licensing process. Community Futures West Yellowhead and the Jasper Park Chamber of Commerce were asked to consult its clients and membership respectively to gauge opinions on the new proposed business licensing system. These recommendations were forwarded to council in November 2015. Parks Canada and the Municipality are working to streamline the process and make it more efficient for all parties, including businesses.

Area 2: Communication

- Goal: Increase transparency of communication from governing bodies to the business community and residents
- Goal: Increase and ease communications through regular email correspondence, website updates, community calendar and social media
- Goal: Create detailed documents or fact sheets to improve communication and encourage new business opportunities in Jasper.

In September 2015, the Tour of Alberta was in Jasper for two legs of the race. During the planning, the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) had representation from the business community. Road closures in the downtown area of Patricia and Connaught streets resulted in business losses for a number of retail operators who depended upon the Labour Day traffic for sales. While it appears that communication within the LOC was exceptional, there are complaints that the external communication process with the business community and local residents was not as effective as it should have been. The intention of the road closures was give motivation for a street party similar to the one held during Jasper in January; however, due to staffing pressures and a long tourist season, this did not occur and the business community was left with empty streets while the festival was focused on the JNP lawn at the Information Centre.

As part of their mid-term strategic plan evaluation, Council has identified a need to reach out to the business community to increase their communication with businesses not serviced by Tourism Jasper and/or the Jasper Park Chamber of Commerce. CFWY recommends a welcome package to new businesses with information from all business support organizations (i.e. Parks Canada, Municipality of Jasper, Tourism Jasper, Jasper Park Chamber of Commerce, Government of Alberta and Community Futures West Yellowhead). Another recommendation would be an annual business walk of Council, Administration and business support organizations to the business community. Small Business Week is an ideal time to do this event.

The Municipality is currently working on their social media strategy to examine their presence online. Currently various departments such as COS and the Activity Center have their own Facebook pages. The Municipality is working on a social media strategy as part of their larger communications strategy due in the upcoming year.

Housing

- Goal: Re-examine staff housing procedures and develop action plans for creative solutions.
- Goal: Facilitate public forum sessions to generate creative solutions and create community buy in
- Goal: Make affordable housing a priority for 2016

Housing continues to be a major concern in the town site; especially for businesses who require staff accommodation. The Jasper Community Housing Corporation (JCHC) is working to create a list of businesses interested in participating in the planning and design of staff accommodation units. The intent is to use land on Connaught and Turret streets to develop affordable housing units for business to purchase for staff accommodations. This is a proactive effort on behalf of the municipality to address the housing shortage in partnership with the business community.

Develop a strategic priority list and action plan

- Goal: To develop an inventory of existing properties and pricing structure, work towards community standards

The lack of new space for commercial businesses in Jasper requires innovative ideas on behalf of those who issue licenses as well as business startups. Home based services are an alternative however there is a need to protect the residential nature of the community and not make an already crisis situation in housing even worse because of home based business growth. A balance needs to be established between the natural growth of a community and the need to grow the business community. Creativity in balancing residential and commercial needs allows room for innovative businesses to grow. This was witnessed in the past year with the opening of the Jasper Hostel on Patricia Street. There continues to be room in the commercial areas of Jasper in both basements and second floor offices for those that are looking to move from home based businesses. Parks Canada will continue to try to balance the residential and commercial nature of the community and there is a need to update their policy and procedures regarding businesses in the national park. However, there is also a need for the business community, especially home based businesses, to understand the park requirements. There needs to be a balance between the two entities.

Signage

- Goal: Review community signage and bylaws for businesses, create a consistent, transparent inclusive document available for public reference
- Goal: Ensure consistency between messaging from the governing partners and staff towards the business community

Parks Canada is currently working on an update on business regulations on signage. These updates continue to be at least a year away and the current regulations are outdated and inconsistent within the community. There needs to be a focus on balancing national objectives as stated by the federal government while meeting the needs of the local community. There is much room for improvement within the current regulations.

Beautification initiatives such as the recent patio pilot project, farmer's market and busking in the summer of 2015 communicate a willingness for the Municipality and Parks Canada to explore new options for growth and expansion for businesses within existing regulations.

Council has addressed signage concerns within the current budget and will be working on establishing a theme that can provide direction to businesses but this will only apply to municipal signs. This is a wayfinding project that will increase communication and directions within the town boundaries. This will not address business concerns on the signage on Highway 16 which needs to be updated and more descriptive of the services in Jasper.