Economic Vitality Committee

Wednesday, June 24, 2020 | 4:00 pm to 5:15 pm | Virtual Zoom Meeting

Option 1: Join from computer or smart phone by clicking this link:

https://zoom.us/j/92494029202?pwd=WUlRTFU3RWtERFJOcjdUK0VUSHphZz09

Option 2: Join from your telephone dialing 1-929-205-6099 and entering:

Meeting ID: 924 9402 9202 | Password: 168731

AGENDA

- Call to Order

- Administrative Matters
  - Approval of meeting Minutes from June 10, 2020
  - Status of additional committee nominations

- Updates from the Town
  - Reopening status
  - Community Development Block Grant
  - Henry Dane proposal

- Update from Concord Together
  - Local Business Survey results
  - Grants program
  - Summer Solstice promotion
  - Attracting foot traffic
  - Public picnic spaces
  - Flags and signage

- Updates from Committee members

- Recommendations to Consider
  - Waive relevant guidelines through 2020 (e.g., HDC and signage by-law) to allow merchants to fly flags and set up displays on the sidewalk to announce that the businesses are open.
  - Smooth the way for public picnic spaces and provide seating for visitors and trash cans with pickup service (e.g., Library lawn, Monument Square, West Concord pocket park).

- Other Business

- Open Session/Public Comment

- Adjournment

Economic Vitality MTG 06-10-2020

Economic Vitality Committee
Virtual Meeting, 4PM
June 10, 2020

PRESENT: Cato Anderson, John Boynton, Mark Martines, Jane Obbagy, Marcia Rasmussen, Dawn Rennert, Jennifer Schunemann, Debra Stark, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams

ABSENT: Jan Turnquist

ALSO PRESENT: Susan Bates, Select Board; Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Kate Hodges, Deputy Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Kate Carr, Concord Business Partnership; Henry Dane, Brigette Sanchez, Jennifer Ubaldino, Concord Community Chest; Leslie, Nick, Ralph, Sheridan, Remon Karian,

CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS – JENNIFER SCHUNEMANN
Jennifer Schunemann announced that she would chair the meeting and that some items on the agenda would be rearranged to allow the Town Manager to participate.

MINUTES
Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:
To Approve the Minutes of May 27, 2020 as amended.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Marcia Rasmussen	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

John Boynton and Jennifer Schunemann mentioned names of potential members and asked that other suggestions be forwarded to Select Board Liaison Susan Bates

MA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT – BETH WILLIAMS
Ms. Williams noted that the Regional Public Hearing on the allocation has occurred. $300,000 is being sought for award to eligible microenterprises in the region. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is taking the lead on this. Planning Director Marcia Rasmussen has learned that the State has records of 800 businesses in Concord. Ms. Williams stated that she will be marketing the grant opportunity widely. The application is very simple, and awards will be on the merits of the request. She stated that the funds are likely to be provided by August.

CONCORD-CARLISLE COMMUNITY CHEST – CONCORD TOGETHER GRANT PROGRAM – JENNIFER UBALDINO
Ms. Schunemann reported that private fund raising to benefit local businesses is also being undertaken. She introduced Jennifer Ubaldino who stated that the Chest and Concord Together are collaborating with lots of local support and a goal of $300,000 (striving to match the amount the Town has applied for under the HUD grant program). The grants of up to $5,000 from the fund will be available for a broad range of uses and variety and type of business. She is publicizing broadly.

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Mr. Boynton stated that we need to move quickly and that the potential fund-raising goal should be up to $500,000.

TOWN OF CONCORD OPTIONS FOR SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES – DISCUSS HENRY DANE'S PROPOSAL

Ms. Schunemann stated that there are 45 food related businesses in Concord. She noted that three retail businesses have decided to discontinue business in Concord – Gordon's Optical, Winston Flowers, and Colonial Stores. Perhaps they would have benefitted from community assistance such as Henry Dane's thoughtful proposal. This program could only be instituted during the emergency. Mr. Boynton stated that to make an impact during the crisis and avoid further shutdowns, funds are needed at the municipal level and it is worth exploring this and other options.

Henry Dane stated that his proposal based on the authority of the Civil Defense Act is unusual, creative, and has great potential. Town Counsel should research and opine to advise the Select Board. Once there is a vacancy in the retail district it makes business more difficult for all remaining businesses.

Discussion included: Ms. Rennert stated that she sees no downside to seeking further information on this opportunity; Ms. Stark stated that she knows of some tenants who may not be able to reopen, her tenant for one; she stated that we will be strengthened by partnership; Town Manager Stephen Crane stated that Bond Counsel has stated that Henry Dane's proposal is not lawful; he stated that the Board just voted to allow outdoor dining under the State guidelines; Mr. Crane indicated that it is difficult to get consensus on changes as what benefits one may disadvantage another. It is difficult to help those who do not indicate that they need help.

Ms. Schunemann stated that she could hear the pressure in the Town Manager's voice, and no one is criticizing his efforts. It is a stressful time and the Committee wants to explore all options.

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED by roll call:

To recommend that the Select Board investigate further the proposal to use emergency powers under the Civil Defense Act – or explore other funding options - to establish a low interest/no interest revolving fund program to help local businesses survive the current emergency.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Marcia Rasmussen	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	No

REOPENING CONCORD – STEPHEN CRANE

Stephen Crane stated that the Town is learning about businesses not reopening like everyone else has. Businesses may have not known to turn to the Town for support. He stated that the Select Board has approved a proposal to allow outdoor seating for restaurants under the Governor's guidelines- the space must be contiguous to the

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restaurant and meet COVID -19 mandates. The Town is ready to block Main St. and Commonwealth Ave. one day per week for outdoor dining as long as businesses want it. Ms. Schunemann reported that Concord Together could assist by reaching out to the businesses in the geographic area to gather their support. Concord Together would include questions in their next survey to further explore this point.

UPDATES FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Debra Stark stated that her business has remained open during the emergency with reduced staffing and saw panic buying at the beginning; that has now dropped off sharply. She had been providing 'hazard' pay' and other benefits for staff who remained on duty. The shop also launched online shopping that with the official reopening has stopped. Ironically, now that full staffing has resumed, there has been a reduction in sales.

Steve Verrill stated that the farm has seen something similar. After a period of larger orders by the limited number of customers allowed in the store, things are back to normal with the official reopening. He foresees problems with the 'pick your own' component of the business as it will be difficult to manage the limit of 114 people per acre in the fields.

Beth Williams noted that the Visitor Center will also have a learning curve. While a new brochure has been created, the message of 'touch one, take one' is awkward.

Dawn Rennert stated that the Bookstore is not yet open to the public although it has been providing curbside service since Memorial Day. She foresees difficulties with cleaning and sanitizing and welcomed input from Debra Stark on vendor and supply prospects. Both the Town Manager and Beth Williams offered help identifying vendors and materials to use.

John Boynton stated that more data is needed, from businesses about their needs. Concord Together could tackle this.

Remon Karian stated that Fiorello's has been closed one month and upon reopening has seen lowered volume. He stated that he has some experience in different towns and finds responses varied. In his opinion, Concord is way behind and doesn't know what it doesn't know. Businesses need access to the application for assistance as soon as possible. It does not need to be reinvented by each town.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ralph, Chef at Fiorello's, stated that Waltham has already closed off Moody St. for outdoor dining.

Remon Karian stated that every bit of help is appreciated; perhaps the 0.75% of meals tax that comes to the Town could over the short time, be given back to the restaurant instead go to the General Fund. There are 45 businesses generating this tax. In addition, restaurants paid licensing fees based on a year of operation; could there be adjustments or credits?

Stephen Crane stated that 80 Thoreau has completed its application and has been approved for outdoor dining and Paparazzi has started the application. This is happening by word of mouth.

Dawn Rennert stated that she has just learned that the Town is not collecting parking fees during the emergency. Perhaps others could also benefit from learning this.

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Cato Anderson stated that he had to complete forms for police and fire as a requirement for operating, perhaps we could turn to them for a full accounting of businesses in town.

Mark Martines stated that the committee and various entities working on the problem need to reach out for more data –ask about reopening challenges and needs; then channel to the Town and Chamber. Neighbors need to coordinate to face common challenges, even though it is difficult to reach consensus.

John Boynton stated that dialogue on these matters is vital, but not easy as it includes issues of livelihood. He thanked Beth Williams and the Town Manager for their continued participation and two-way feedback.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5:30 PM.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Marcia Rasmussen	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Respectfully submitted
Cato Anderson, Clerk
Approved:

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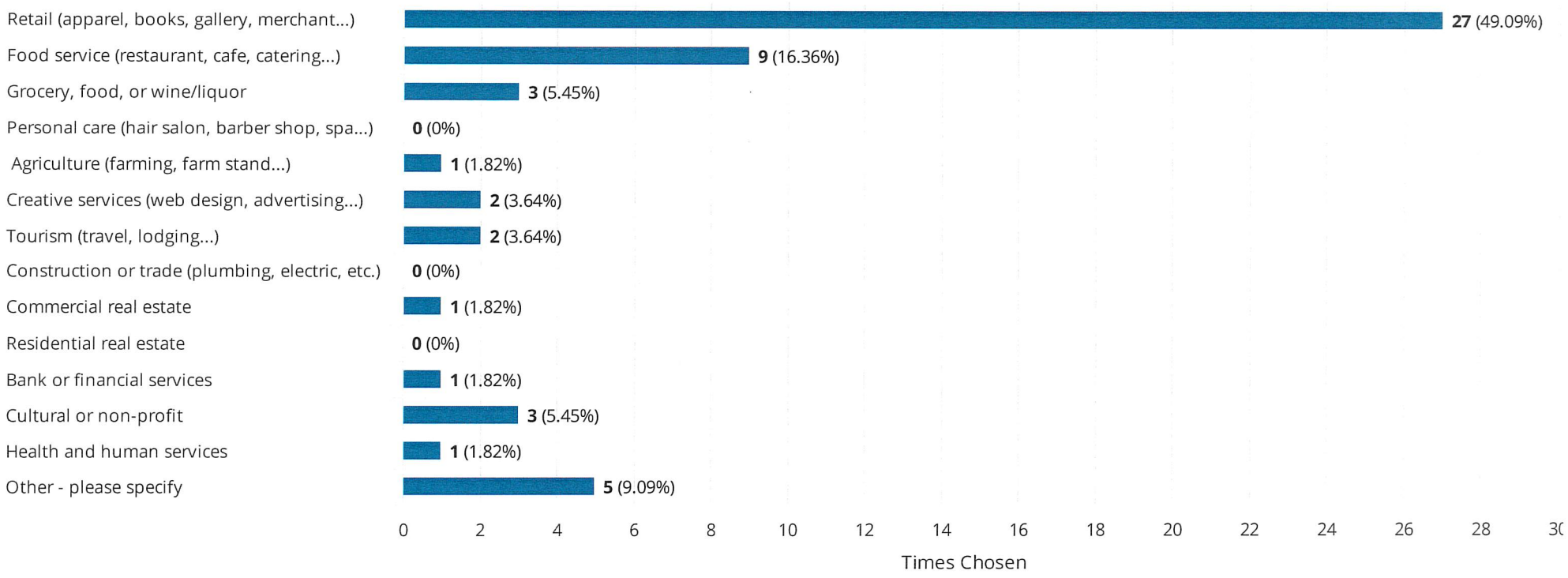
SurveyHero

Concord Together Local Business Survey - June 2020

1. Please select the option that best describes your business.

Number of responses: 55



"Other - please specify" text answers:

Architecture

Legal Services

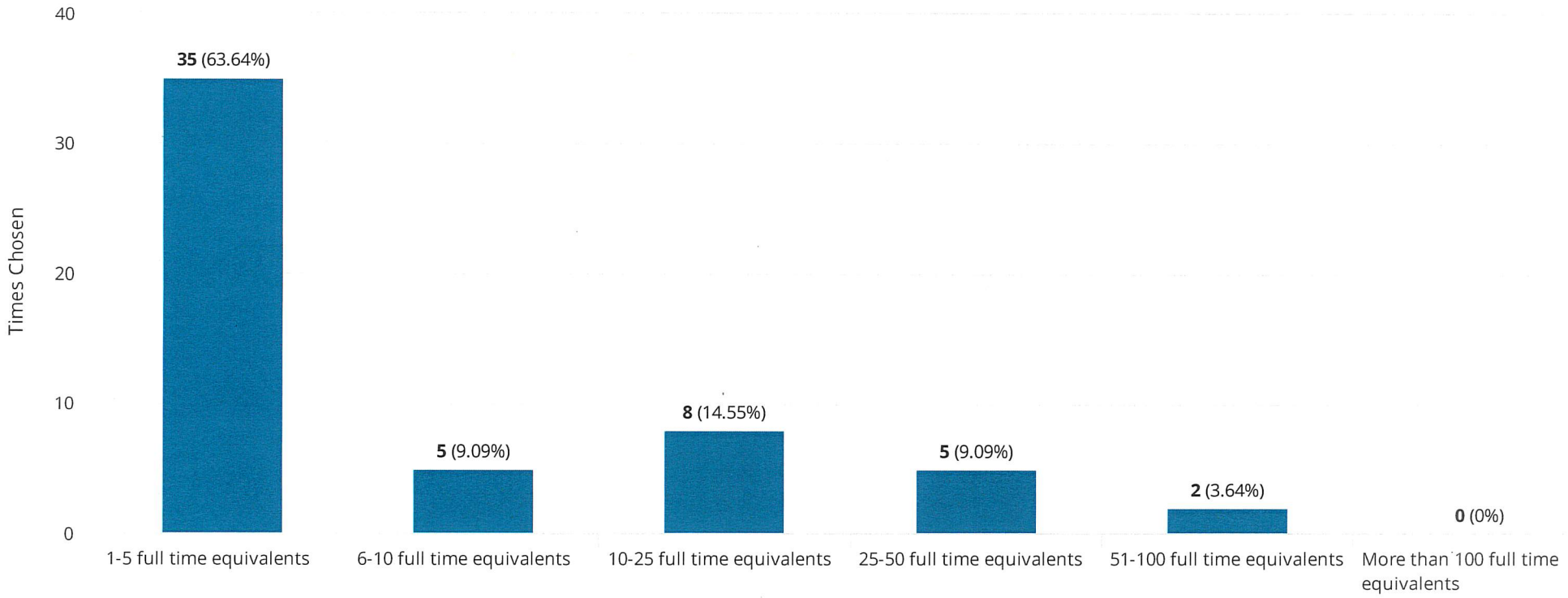
Tour Company, Public Education, and Event Planner

Auto Repair shop

Kitchen dealer and design build firm

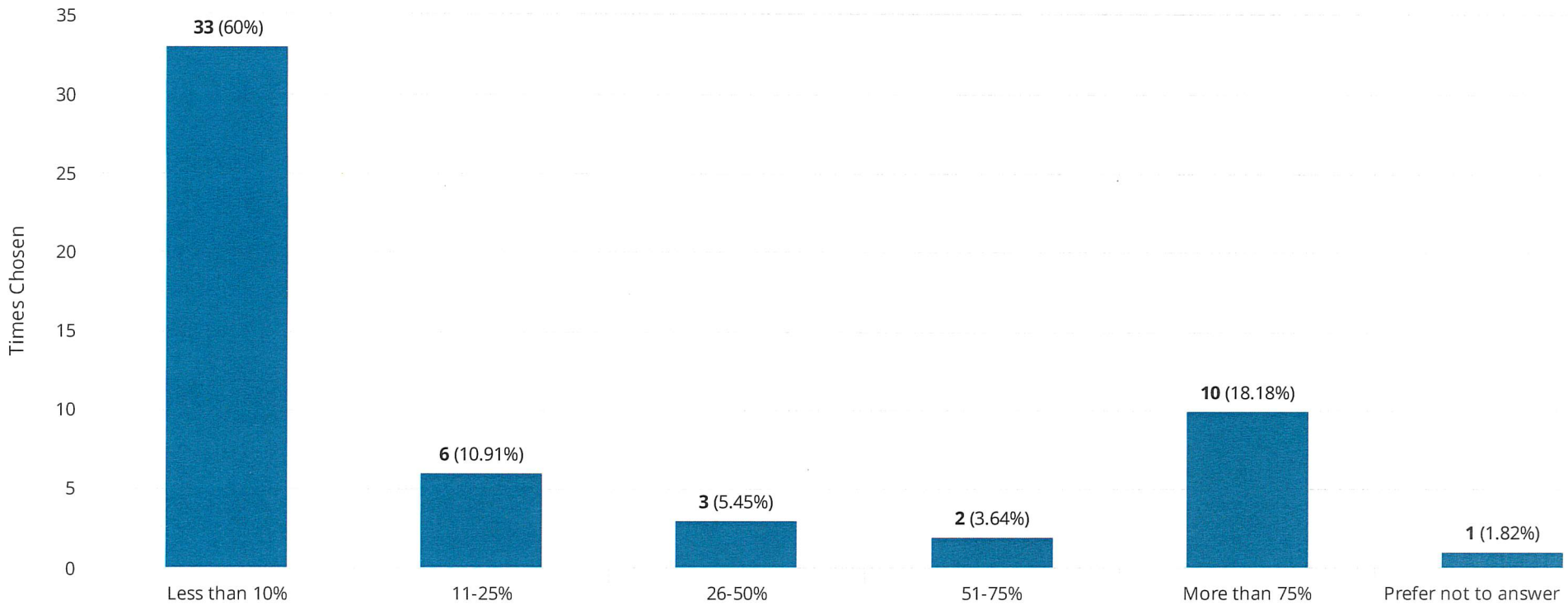
2. How many Full Time Equivalent people (FTEs), including yourself, does your Concord business employ?

Number of responses: 55



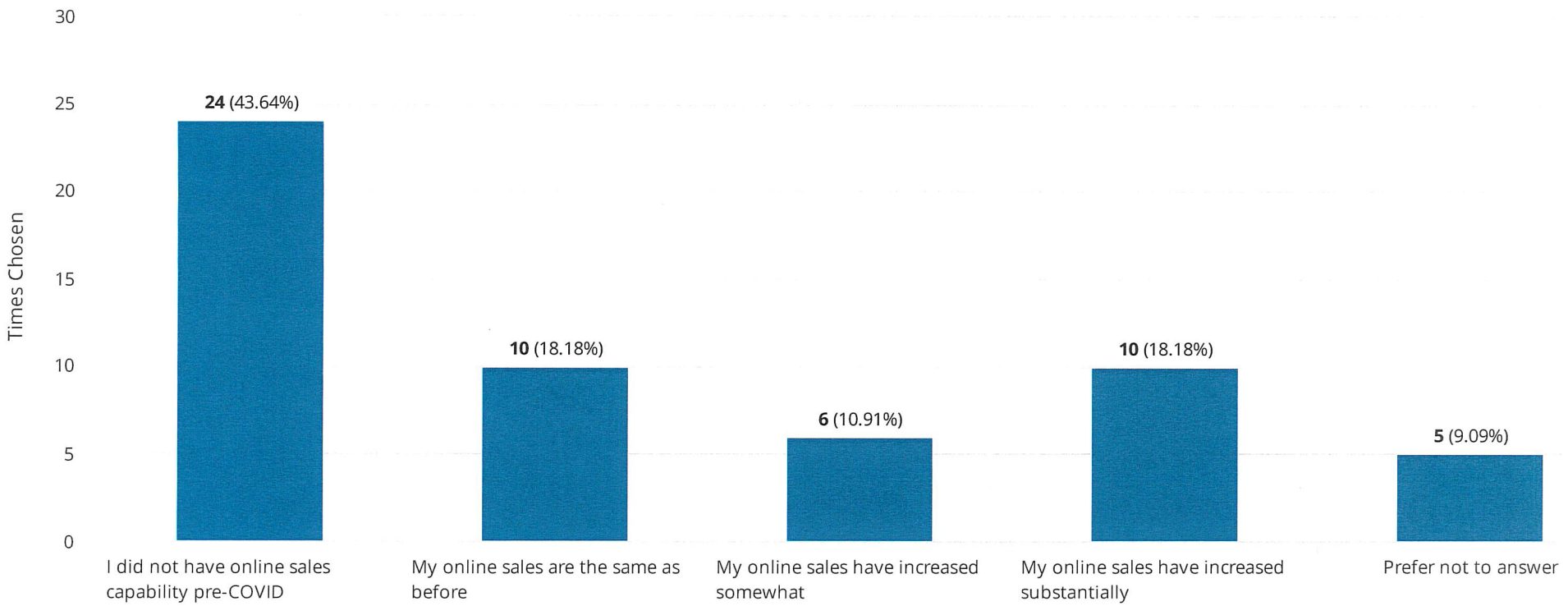
3. What percent of your sales are generated online (including orders online for curbside pickup)?

Number of responses: 55



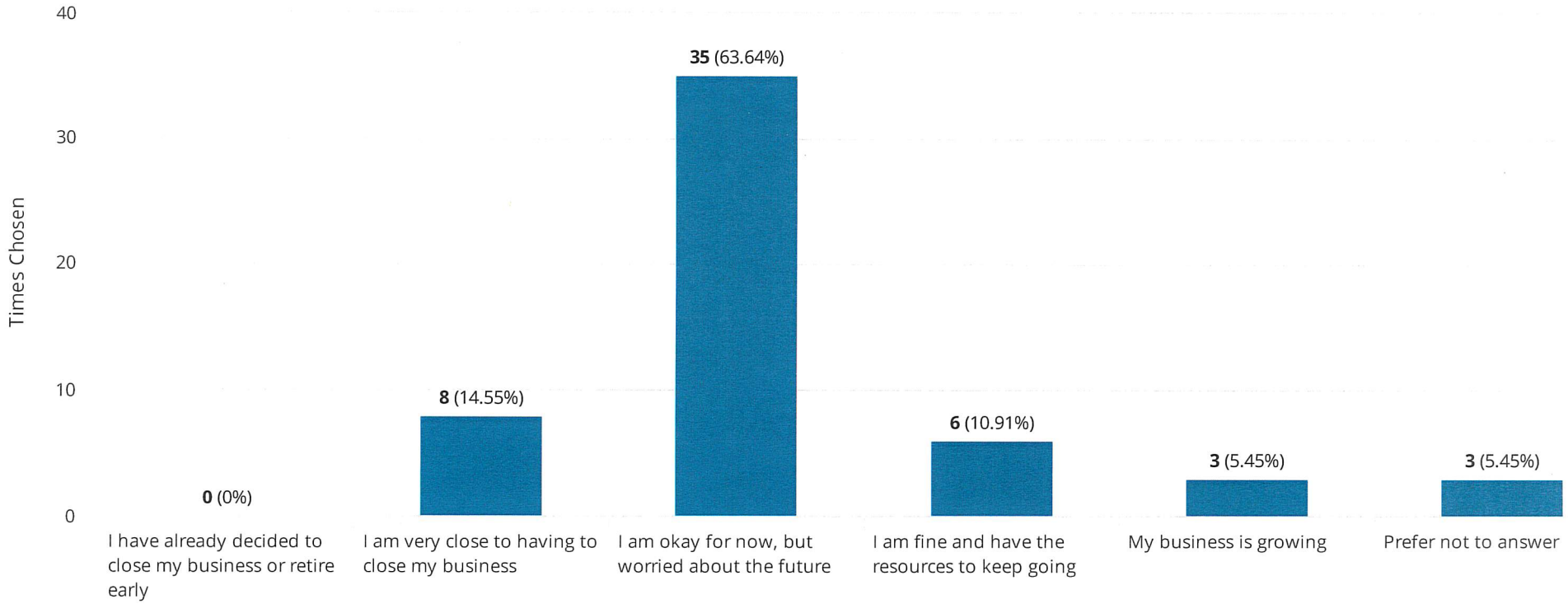
4. How do these online sales compare to pre-Covid 19 online sales?

Number of responses: 55



5. How close are you to going out of business due to the current crisis

Number of responses: 55



6. Please rank your most urgent needs, this week/month, with the most urgent being ranked first.

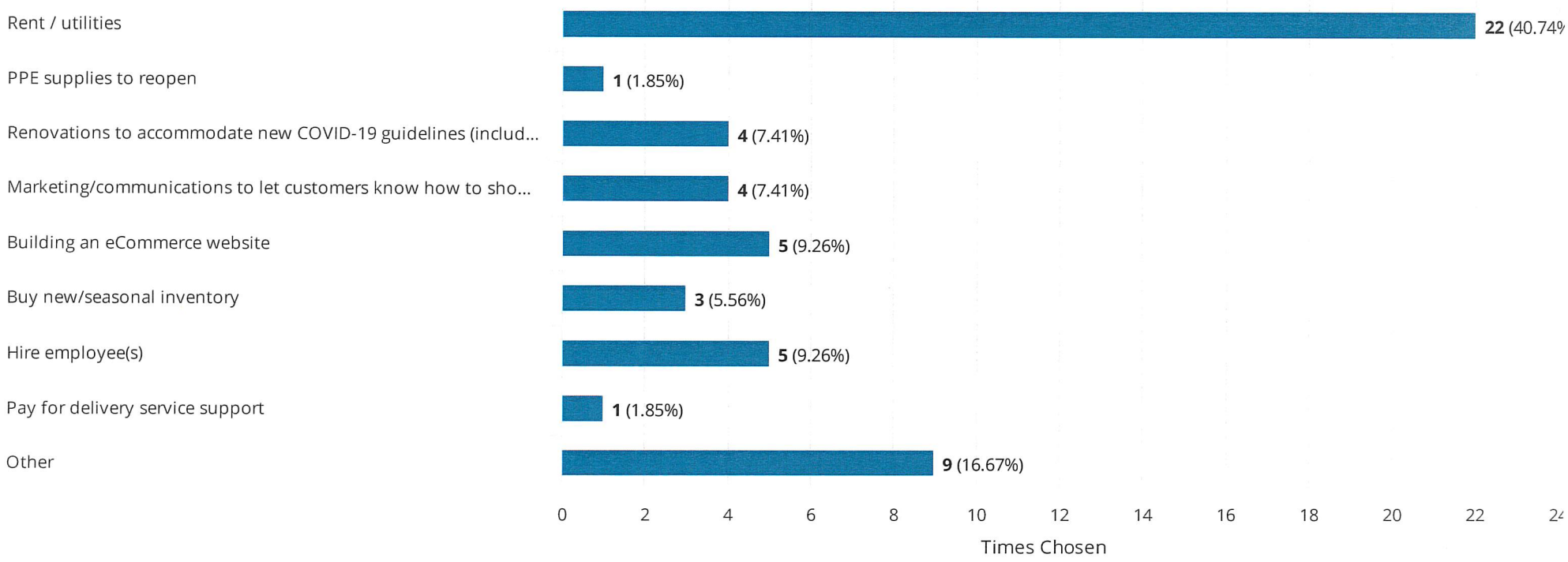
Number of responses: 52

Rank	Choice	Distribution	Score	Times Ranked
1.	Rent / utilities		277	48
2.	Marketing/communications to let customers know how to shop or buy from me (in person or online)		268	41
3.	Help understanding Town guidelines		194	35
4.	Help securing funding (loans, PPP, SBA, grants, etc.)		178	38
5.	Renovations to accommodate new COVID-19 guidelines (including inside shopping or outdoor dining)		176	35
6.	Help building an e-commerce website		173	33
7.	Need new/seasonal inventory		159	33
8.	PPE supplies to reopen		155	34
9.	Need delivery service support		121	33
10.	Need employees		116	34

Lowest Highest

7. If you had access to a small grant right now, what would you use it for first (what would best impact your abi to stay in business/grow your business)?

Number of responses: 54



"Other" text answers:

pay for current inventory

Other

None

Pay myself

Create an outdoor seating area.

help with extra expenses (payroll and otherwise) due to covid

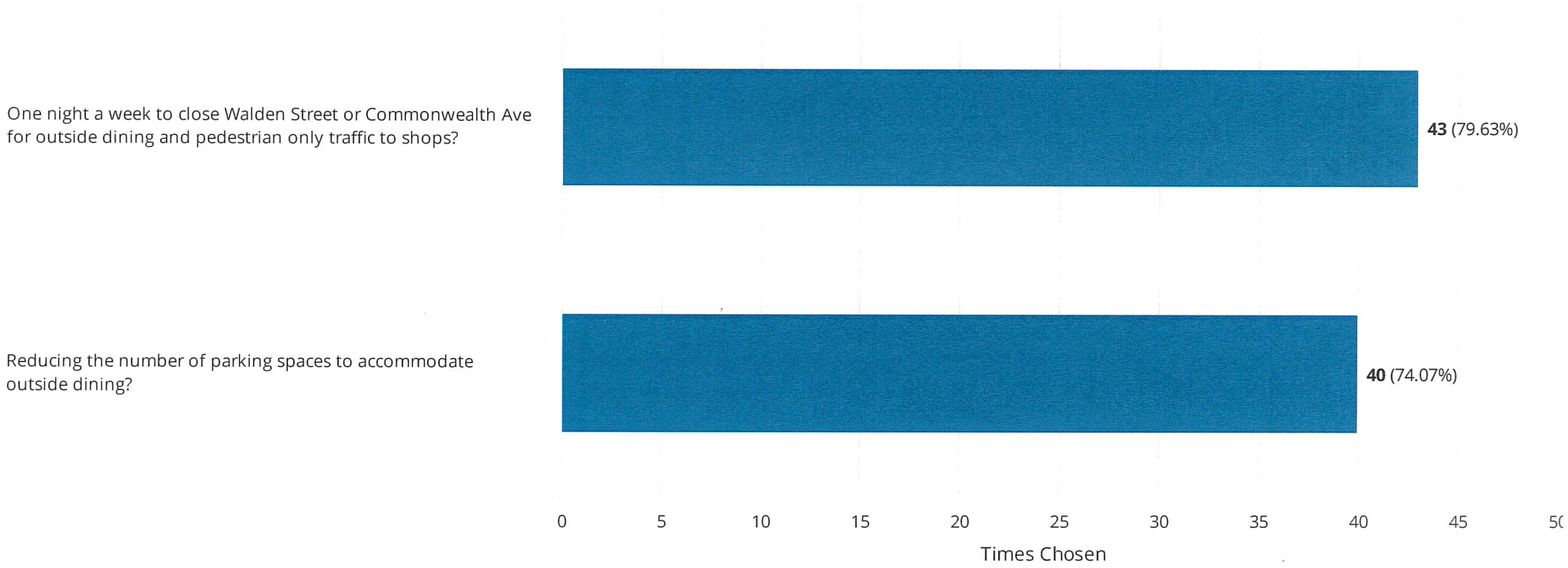
Refunds due to cancellations, rent, loan, utilities

pay past bills

Cover the gap in funding to allow me to print my publication and direct mail it more widely

8. In the name of solidarity with your fellow businesses, would you support:

Number of responses: 54



9. What is one thing that Concord Together can do to help you this week (aside from funding)?

Number of responses: 45

Text answers:

explaining how important it is to shop local for the survival of the town.

Drive traffic to our online ordering and to our pickup and delivery services from our cafe

Promote "Concord Strong" also promote small, local and safe shopping. Maybe launch "summer Saturday shopping days"

i would have selected closing commonwealth or walden - but AGAIN - it seems like the business on Thoreau street are completely forgotten. it wou be nice to waive parking meters - through the end of the year? (i am a fan of parking meters - but trying to think outside the box here). the twon co also waive the business taxes (personal property etc.) that small businesses pay yearly - but as a resident i get that the revenue has to come from somewhere...

Updates on who is opening/operating

Bring more customers in everyone is so afraid that I am not getting the customers in my store right now. People who find me on line are coming to up items And then they shop

Tell the Selectmen that their Town Manager is useless and doesn't make decisions or even provide meaningful help. His comments are what we ma and giving masks. He should have started a re-open campaign back when this started and instead took two months off. He missed a meeting the ot day because he told us he was playing golf. Must be nice.

Promote shopping in Concord.

Assist in zoning changes to allow more flexibility in commercial use .

Support the business and professional community

create more awareness of our business

Help find funding

more advertising about our retail shops/restaurants as a community reopening. Shop local, shop small

to try & get citizens of concord just how desperate we are. things are bad & customer are genuine surprised & to be honest a little embarrassed for when I tell them that I might not make it .

Promoting small businesses in Concord Center

Pushing the town to be more accomodating/less rigid about requirements for outdoor dining.

Reach out to concord residents to support local downtown

Continue to share information and resources.

Do marketing to let residents know the retail community is open along with encouraging them to shop in their 'neighborhood"

Advertise business is open to concord and surrounding towns

Find ways to highlight the ingenuity of business owners and help market their services / products

Push the Town to bring in jersey barriers and establish outdoor seating area in the parking lots off of Walden Street.

encouraging folks to shop local instead of on amazon

Include my business in whatever emailing they are doing to customers

Create a poll to find out what residents want or need to be encouraged to shop locally more often, and/or why they don't.

Marketing to local shoppers

Increase awareness that we are open for business

Publicity

A dynamic, frequently updated page about who in Concord is open/soon to open over the summer - free of charge. This would be a valuable resour for everyone to share with visitors, especially those of us who plan visitor itineraries and give recommendations about what to do in town.

Nothing

Publicity to shop local is about all. I don't really need any help now

Get people out spending. We had one okay day this week of sales

You seemed to have forgotten there are retailers on Thoreau Street!!!

Generate street traffic on Walden street

Open all retail shops today.

Marketing

share online opportunities offered by the local businesses/non-profits

Somehow let people know businesses are open and to increase foot traffic in West Concord

Advertise the daily changes businesses are making to re-open or stay open to accommodate customers while staying safe (trying not to lose MORE /deeper debt by doing so.)

Spread the word about discounted advertising being offered for our Summer issue to help businesses

Coordinate publication in the Concord Journal of an update from all businesses of what they are doing, e.g., curbside pickup, shopping by appointm fully open, etc. The paper should make this a weekly "article" that is free for businesses.

remind peope that small businesses need them to come out and shop. The Tourist influx is gone for now, we need the locals. If they want us here they have to spend thier money here, not on Amazon

Community marketing outreach to support local businesses and advocating the town to use public spaces for outdoor dining

advertising

communicate to residents that we need their support

10. What is one thing that the Town of Concord can do to help you this week (aside from funding)?

Number of responses: 42

Text answers:

Be pro-active in supporting ideas that help drive business to local stores

Nothing

perhaps there are students or other residents with web site buildiong skills that would be willing to volunteer some time. the town could help facilitate these relationships. I have tried contacting the high school in the past (even to put up a sign looking for help), but because i am not a par there i found them very unhelpful or interested in even hearing the question

Simplify process for reopening

I m worried if I don't get Concord customers and surrounding towns to come in and shop I won't want to come in. We need to help people come out shop and feel safe.

New leadership at the top position

Reaxamine regs to find ways to increase customer capacity

Save other businesses.

Make it easier for business community to maintain profitability

encourage businesses to support each other

Help find funding

more advertising about our retail shops/restaurants as a community reopening. Shop local, shop small

real estate tax relief for landlords so that they can in turn help us with rent reductions/forgivness

Continue to make the parking meters free

See above.

Promote shop local

Many of our employees live outside of Concord. Anything that makes their return to work easier [commute, parking], less expensive [retail, lunches] safer [clear COVID protocols], and engaging [things to do in Concord, hikes, tours, bike rides, workouts, access to resources, etc.]

Form a committee of retailers & possibly landlords to discuss the different challenges retailers face in the 4 sectors of town and discuss solutions t keep the town centers vibrant

Advertising

Promote small business and non-profits serving the community that do not have visibility or marketing funds (e.g., spread the word about services fundraising appeals)

See answer to number 9.

simplify messages. make sure they're consistent and do-able

Forgive electric bill for one month/ make parking meters free or Everything seems to involve money!

Make it easier for businesses to do free curbside recycling.

support outside activity

Provide incentive for building owners to rent to independent retailers/restaurants

clarify protocols and enforcement

Helping us to help visitors and locals know that we're open for business!

Nothing

I like the free parking so I hope that continues

Decrease taxes

Buy their own goods locally

See question 9

Keep our business and commercial property taxes low.

Extend FREE PARKING FROM NOW ON. THE NATIONAL ADV. IS RETAILERS LOOSE 25% BECAUSE OF PARKING METERS.

Reverse 911 was great. Advertise what businesses are OPEN! in the newspaper, social media, other online platforms. It constantly needs updating we are allowed to do more.

Continue to collaborate with the Tourism department

Education! Please visit stores to help them understand the health-based requirements, such as wearing masks. It is hard for store owners to enfo these requirements on customers when they are not implemented in all stores.

allow 1 or 2 spaces on the street for 5 minute parking to ease curbside pickup. When they have to double park to pick up their items its dangerous

create outdoor dining spaces and reduce red tape to provide outdoor seating

encourage through all media (website, facebook, etc. and town employees) to shop locally

Determine how to open up outdoor public benches and seating that meet their safety requirements

11. What else should we know?

Number of responses: 26

Text answers:

Promote local and safe shopping, keep our community strong, Concord Strong!

it has been very frustrating (although now mainly in the past) to watch a number of businesses operating during the shut down that should not hav been. it seems very arbitrary which rules are enforced and which arent. (for example I am watching a friend jump through numerous hoops to op outside dining (which is now allowed) -but shops were doing private shopping a curbside pick up when it had been prohibited by the governor;

Right now I'm ok and I've only been open for 5 days just praying more people come out! I did so well for 4 months I was closed during COVID that I c want to lose all that now.

Most business have deveoped a p

The Town of Concord only cares about certain preferred businesses.

i am not that close to closing, but I am not "alright" right now either...its in between...we are struggling to maintain...but I have faith!!

this is heartbreaking.

To ask for anything right now even a gift certificate is difficult. Maybe the chamber could buy go to give away

Nice work. I think Concord has been generally doing a very good job being proactive and communicative. This survey is a bit weighted toward retail which is probably smart. My group is professional services based which have slightly different needs and areas of focus.

Concord is not as cohesive of a town as everyone perceives it to be. All facets need to come together in order for the town to move forward as a wh 'unit'. This is a perfect time for the town to come together & BE Concord Together!

These surveys seemed geared to for-profit businesses - might there be a separate survey for non-profits?

Concord Together and the Chamber have been excellent in their leadership and support for all of us.

we really appreciated the advice from the board of health when we had two staffers who were ill (wasn't corona).

We are in this together. I am concerned about retail going forward. What do we have to do to keep Concord center intact?

We are waiting to be able to use fitting rooms and will increase our open hours in July

The question about online sales didn't have any responses that applied to my business so I had to pick prefer not to answer even though I wanted answer. The vast majority of our company's sales are generated online pre and post-covid-19. However, since Covid-19 our sales, whether online, ov the phone, or in person, have plummeted 100% and there has been no revenue, orders, or customers since March 14th, 2020. Same with question 4 none of the choices apply to our business except the first one, so they're not ranked in any order past that. Thank you so much for reaching out and caring about the small businesses in Concord!!

#6 was hard to answer because at this point I don't really need any help. If the recession lasts a long time that could certainly change but there are businesses with more urgent needs that should come first

There are shops closing. There will be more if the residents leave for the summer and sales are not regenerated by tourism which may not exist du the travel scares

See question 9

We are asking our landlord for a rent discount. It would be helpful if we had a talk of which landlords were giving rent discounts to build up are argument,.

MOVE THE POSTOFFICE , WALDEN ST. TO A REMOTE LOCATION LIKE ACTON. USE THE PRESENT building FOR AN INDOOR SMALL MALL.

This is SOOOOOO tough and our debts from closing so abruptly are making it almost impossible to feel like it is worth it because it is still so quiet.

Concord Together is awesome

I like the idea of occasional street closures on nice weather days to spread out the shopping experience. Historically this often occurs on Walden Street, which is great for the shops there, but it would be great if there was a way to sometimes extend these events to Main Street so those stores could also participate.

I personally feel there is more support and connectivity for Concord center versus West Concord

As an organization that primarily deals with large gatherings, we are not planning on fully opening in the near future. We are building on-line resources to provide programs and services.