

# DEFOREST WINDSOR AREA BUSINESS WALK

## Post Summary Event Report

### DeForest Windsor | June 13, 2023

The Village of DeForest, Village of Windsor, and DeForest Windsor Area Chamber of Commerce partnered with Alliant Energy and Madison Gas and Electric to present the first DeForest Windsor Business Walk on June 13, 2023. A Business Walk is an economic development initiative that, in a short amount of time, allows local leaders to get the pulse of how a business community is doing. The ultimate goal of each walk is to better understand the opportunities and challenges the local business community faces, monitor that information over time, and then offer assistance where and when it is needed. In total, 32 volunteers, comprised of business and civic leaders, visited 134 businesses in three hours. Of those businesses, 42 requested, and received, follow up assistance.

### Post-Event Report

The conversation with these 134 businesses focused on four basic questions:

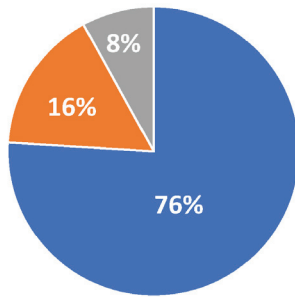
- **How's Business?**
- **What do you like about doing business in DeForest / Windsor?**
- **What can be done to improve doing business in DeForest / Windsor?**
- **Would your company like to be followed up with a specific question after the Business Walk?**

### Summary Results

The DeForest-Windsor business community contains a diverse blend of manufacturing, biotechnology, research and development, agriculture, and large and small commercial and retail establishments. The compiled results from the business visits show that the area as a whole has a lot of great opportunities, but also deals with a few challenges that need to be addressed. When asked "How is Business?", 92% cited that business was at least steady / fair if not good / great. When asked what they liked about doing business in the DeForest / Windsor area, two things stood out: 1) location and 2) community/customers. Although most businesses are steady and/or succeeding, some businesses have been struggling since the pandemic started. When volunteers asked what could be

done to improve business in the area, the most frequent themes coming up were: 1) hiring / staffing, 2) signage / visibility, and 3) community investment. Although businesses discussed challenges they faced, it was very rare to hear businesses say they were planning to leave the DeForest / Windsor area or were considering closing down. The remainder of this report will provide additional detail on the responses to each question as well as the steps the Villages, Chamber of Commerce and supporting partners are taking to further improve the local business climate in the DeForest Windsor area.

## QUESTION 1: HOW'S BUSINESS?



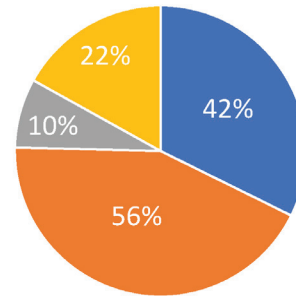
■ Good / Great ■ Fair / Steady ■ Slow / Poor

In response to the question “How is business?”, respondents provided a variety of answers from “business is strong and continues to grow” to “steady, a lot going on but also has down times” to “slow with challenging times due to staffing and inflation.”

Seventy six percent (76%) of businesses stated that business was **good/great** indicating that they are succeeding due to various reasons: great location, close to the interstate for clients and vendors, relationships built with the community and culture, booming industry, and being resilient in the face of global health challenges and the inflationary environment. The sixteen percent (16%) of businesses that are **fair/steady** mentioned that they have been doing “fine” but could always use more business, while others mentioned they tend to fluctuate due to seasonal business. Some in this category also indicated that business is still picking up after a drop-off during the height of the pandemic. Overall, many seemed content to be stable at this point.

The other eight percent (8%) of businesses interviewed mentioned that business has been **slow/poor** due to their industry experiencing a downturn, challenges with staffing and hiring, slow seasonal activity, impacts from the pandemic, and/or inflation and the economy. Despite some of the setbacks, businesses overwhelmingly stated they want to stay in this area and hope to stay in business.

## QUESTION 2: WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT DOING BUSINESS IN DEFOREST / WINDSOR?



■ Location ■ Community / Customers ■ Amenities ■ Other

A strong sense of **community and great customers** are two prominent reasons that fifty six percent (56%) of respondents chose as why they like doing business in DeForest / Windsor. Many described the community as having “reliable clients” with “many goals that align with their business”. They mentioned the small, friendly, safe community as a reason they are here. Several stated that they grew up in the community and described the area as a good mix of white-collar and blue-collar workers and customers.

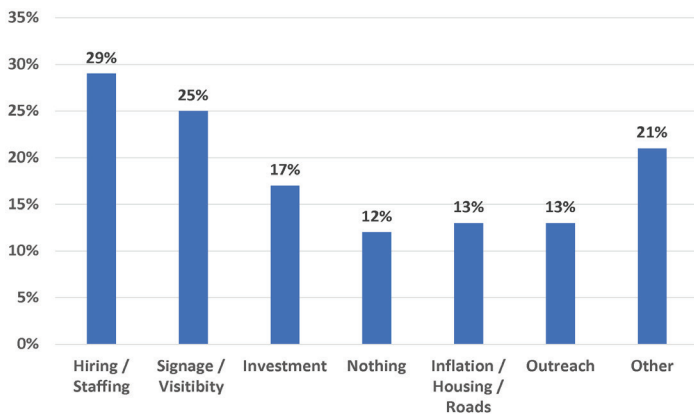
Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents listed **location** as a reason for why they chose DeForest / Windsor for their business. Many described the area as being very accessible for their clients and employees due to the central location of the area and easy access to the interstate. Several of the businesses have additional locations in other parts of the state and/or country and this location offers them the opportunity to be easily found and/or distributed from. The location also offers employees the opportunity to live and work in DeForest / Windsor or have an easy commute to work. They also are able to draw from Madison resources, colleges and staff if needed.

Various village and community **amenities** were also mentioned by ten percent (10%) of the surveyed businesses. Businesses were happy with the support provided by the Villages of DeForest and Windsor and Chamber. Access to walking paths, local restaurants, having an active Chamber of Commerce, community events (parades and festivals), and activities were all a big draw. There is also a good relationship with the police and fire departments creating a safe community to live and work in.

In addition, several respondents provided “**other**” reasons for feeling good about doing business in DeForest / Windsor, including:

- Aggressive business recruitment
- Good village services (the local fire inspector was mentioned multiple times)
- Recent working relationship between the Villages of DeForest and Windsor. Many would like to see this continued and strengthened.

### QUESTION 3: WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE BUSINESS IN DEFOREST / WINDSOR?



The largest area for improvement focused on **hiring / staffing**. Twenty nine percent (29%) mentioned high turnover and lack of a qualified workforce to fill positions as a problem for their companies. Many stated that “we need to figure out the labor shortage problems soon.” Businesses suggested multiple solutions such as: hosting a job fair, creating apprenticeship programs in the community, providing more government funding (business incubators), and the Villages advocating at the state level to offer more funding for financial packages to attract and retain staff. The need for staffing is reflected in all industry sectors from small retail, to large commercial, manufacturing, education, etc. Additionally, many small businesses reported that they can't compete with the higher wages some large chains are able to provide.

Challenges pertaining to **Signage / Visibility** are a concern for twenty five percent (25%). Promotional campaigns to buy local,

more advertising and events to connect local businesses to local clients, and the ability to have more signage up would be helpful. Local businesses would appreciate an opportunity to bid on local projects instead of only seeking bids from companies outside of the area. Various businesses are looking for more communication amongst fellow business owners to stay informed and connected.

Seventeen percent (17%) would like to see various **investments** in the community. This would include more diverse restaurants options (not chains), food trucks in the business park, investment in funding for more residential and commercial properties, creating a more “downtown feel”, better internet access, more community events, and additional funding for child care establishments. **Housing, Roads, and Inflation** were all a topic of conversation for thirteen percent (13%) of the businesses. Many asking for more affordable housing options feel that it would help the staffing concerns, saying the demand for affordable housing is outweighing supply. Many roads need to be re-paved to address safety concerns. Inflation is also affecting costs all around making it hard to do business and slowing things down.

Thirteen percent (13%) of respondents said they wanted **more outreach** to their businesses, whether it was from the Chamber of Commerce, Villages, police department, or other Village staff. Businesses really appreciated people stopping in and saying “Hi” and seeing how they were doing. More cross over between the businesses and civic leaders and more collaboration between the two villages would be beneficial. Twelve percent (12%) of businesses stated that **nothing** needed improvement, noting that they were not facing any major challenges.

In addition, respondents provided several “**other**” improvements and changes needed in DeForest / Windsor, including:

- Keeping a place for mom and pop stores and restaurants
- More communication about licensing and regulations
- Concerns about larger commercial and retail businesses impacting smaller ones

## FARMERS ROUNDTABLE:

On June 5th the Village of DeForest, Village of Windsor and the DeForest Windsor Area Chamber of Commerce took part in a **Farmer's Roundtable** discussion. Many of the farms in the Windsor/DeForest community are family owned and many are multi generational farmers. Every farmer we spoke with understands they are an important part of the business community and wants to provide a great service and stay in business.

The hour-long conversation took place with eight farmers who focused on the following questions:

1. **What are some challenges and opportunities that affect the farming community?**
2. **What can the Villages do better to support growth of the farming community?**
3. **Do you support the Village of Windsor continuing its policies on farmland preservation**

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## QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT AFFECT THE FARMING COMMUNITY?

The main topic of discussion was regarding **traffic safety** on rural roads within the Village of Windsor. The farmers would like the Villages and Chamber to help educate the public on how to respect the right-of-way to farming equipment and machinery when approaching on rural roads, passing on rural roads, and yielding at the entrances to farms and farm fields. The farmers suggested the Villages encourage residents to the use US 51 as the main north-south thoroughfare during harvest season, as well as, increasing law enforcement patrolling to aid in enforcement. Safety is their main concern for their workers, themselves, their farm equipment and machinery, and their land. The Villages will look into an education awareness campaign using its newsletter and/or social media forums.

## QUESTION 2: WHAT CAN THE VILLAGES DO BETTER TO SUPPORT GROWTH OF THE FARMING COMMUNITY?

**Regulations:** The farmers discussed how federal, state, county and local policies continue to make it difficult for farmers to be stewards of the land. The farmers would like the Villages and the Chamber to assist them with representation on/before federal, state, county and local agencies/boards in efforts to educate the policy makers on farming practices and preservation of agricultural land. Farmers understand that regulations are necessary; however, current regulations are hurting the farming community and making farming practices counterproductive. The farmers want to work cooperatively with federal, state, county and local agencies/boards to find a balance between policy making and implementation so that the farming community can not only survive but thrive.

**Labor Supply:** Like many of the businesses visited on the walk, the farming community stated that good labor is hard to find. They have had to get creative on how to source their labor. Many mentioned young people do not want to work long hours doing manual labor and rely on Hispanic, Amish, or college students for their workforce. Solar energy infrastructure was also a topic of discussion. The farmers would like the Villages to consider regulatory ways to preserve and protect farmland from becoming overrun with solar energy installations. The popular opinion was that Dane County has great soil for farming and solar should be placed in areas where the soil is less suitable for farming. Creating ways for small farmers to buy land should be supported. Many are unable to afford land prices and big farms or developers scoop it up. For many of the farmers in the group, their farm is their only source of income.

## QUESTION 3: DO YOU SUPPORT THE VILLAGE OF WINDSOR CONTINUING ITS POLICIES ON FARMLAND PRESERVATION?

All of the farmers would like the Village of Windsor to preserve farmland and support the Village's policies and regulations on farmland preservation and the Agricultural Enterprise Area. There is concern from all of the farmers that they will be slowly pushed out to create room for even more subdivisions. They all hope to continue farming and to continue providing for their families and

the community. The farming community would like to have more of a voice, and appreciated this discussion. It was viewed as a good first step that they hope continues.

After the discussion, the Village representatives discussed having this roundtable happen a few times a year, bringing more people into the conversation to make sure the farmers have their voice heard.

## BUSINESS WALK FOLLOW UP:

The DeForest Windsor Area Chamber of Commerce, Village of DeForest, and Village of Windsor would like to thank Alliant Energy and Madison Gas and Electric for their sponsorship, and the volunteers that came out to assist us with our Business Walk in 2023.

Most importantly, we want to extend our biggest thank you to all the businesses who opened their doors to us for the event and shared their stories. Your collective input will help us refine our Economic Development strategy so that we can make sure we are being responsive to the needs of our growing business community. With this report, our next steps involve collaboration between the Chamber and the Villages to develop programs and initiatives that address the issues and opportunities identified through the business visits. An event like this is only as good as the implementation that follows. We are committed to continuing to engage with our existing business community, to welcoming new businesses into the fold and to providing high-quality resources that support the local economy. Thank you for taking the time to answer survey questions and give us your feedback to help guide our activities into the future.

## THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES!

A-1 Sewer Service Inc.  
A&J Property Restoration  
ABC Supply Co. Inc.  
Accounting Answers, Inc.  
Ace Hardware  
Affair with Hair  
AKA Automotive  
Alpine Liquors  
American Bottling Co.  
American Girl  
Anytime Fitness  
Capital Millwork Inc  
Arby's  
Art's Electric & Heating Inc.  
Artisan Boat & Body  
Repair Inc.  
Association of Wisconsin  
Snowmobile Clubs  
B & R Veterinary Clinic  
Bakke Chiropractic  
Balanced Chiropractic &  
Wellness  
Bayer  
Beckman Builders, LLC  
BeneSys, Inc.  
Best Bet Auto Repair, LLC  
Brookens Construction  
Capitol Warehousing  
Corporation  
CarTopia  
Casey's  
Chase Lumber  
Chief Manufacturing

Chr. Hansen Inc.  
Circle B Inc Landscape  
Supply  
Complete Mobile  
Dentistry, Inc.  
Covered Bridge Residences  
DeForest Area Community &  
Senior Center  
DeForest Collision  
Repair Inc.  
DeForest Dental  
DeForest Family Restaurant  
DeForest Liquor Mart  
Demco, Inc.  
Diversified Seed  
Producers, LLC  
Door Creek Church  
DynaVap  
Eagle Point  
Elementary School  
Earthscape Curb &  
Mulch, LLC  
Edge Fitness  
Edward Jones  
Ehlenbach's Cheese  
Chalet Inc.  
El Alegre Mexican  
Restaurant  
Essential Family Vision Care  
Event Essentials  
Family Dollar  
Fisher Family Dental  
Fleet Farm

Fox Chimney Service LLC  
Franklin Fueling  
Systems, LLC  
Frog Pond Bar & Grill  
FSS CPA LLC  
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Ginger Bread House (2)  
Gloss Styling Studio  
GRB Academy  
Green Acres Pet Resort  
Hair by Amanda LLC  
Hairtopia Salon & Tanning  
Heartland AG Systems  
Heartland Credit Union  
Holiday Inn Express  
Holistic Home Health &  
Wellness  
Kwik Trip  
Lake Windsor Country Club  
Landmark Bar & Grill  
Legacy Cleaning  
Services, LLC  
Little University of Vienna  
Loffredo Fresh Foods  
LT Heating & Air  
Madison Family  
Dental Associates  
Madison Stove Works  
Midwest Drilled Foundations  
& Engineering, Inc.  
Miller-Bradford &  
Risberg, Inc.

Millwork Specialists of  
Wisconsin, Inc.  
Mobile Gas  
Norski Nutrition  
Northern Laser Systems  
Oakbrook  
Old Dominion Freight Line  
Paradise Paws Camp &  
Resort, LLC  
Parks Automotive - Auto  
Repair and Towing  
Paulson & Associates, LLC  
Penske Truck Rental  
Pick 'n Save  
Pieper Electric, Inc.  
Pomp's Tire Service, Inc (2)  
Prairie Truck & Auto Sales  
Preferred Wealth Advisors  
Pro Metal Works, Inc.  
Quercus Land  
Stewardship Services  
R&D Engineering and  
Machining, Inc.  
RHD Plumbing, Inc  
Roland Machinery Co.  
Rose Cottage Floral & Gifts  
Rude's Family Catering +  
Rude's Lanes  
ServiceMaster DSI  
Settler's Best Credit Union  
Shell Gas Station  
Sienna Meadows  
Memory Care

Speedway  
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Therapeutic Massage  
Suncor Inc.  
SW Bridge Engineers, LLC  
T. Wall Enterprises  
Tax Airfreight, Inc.  
The Hair Studio  
The Koselig House  
The Legacy of DeForest  
Mousehouse Cheesehaus  
The Premiere of Windsor  
The Sage Apothecary  
The Timber's  
Tiger Mart  
TKS Exterior Cleaning Inc.  
Tri-County Paving Inc.  
United in Christ  
Lutheran Church  
United States Postal Service  
Walgreens  
Water Wells Inc.  
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Windsor Family Dental  
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