Report on Interviews of Members and Former Members
of the Tumwater Area Chamber of Commerce

December 10, 2018

Summary

- In the Summer of 2018, our Chamber conducted the interviews to learn about members' priorities, growth plans and how we can better serve our members.
- Forty-six (46) persons participated in Interviews—27 (58.7%) *current* members and 19 (41.3%) *former* members. The 27 current members comprise 3/8 of 72 total active members.
- Respondents employ 535 people (average 16 per business).
- Two-thirds say that their business will grow moderately in the next 3 years, and 25% say they plan to grow rapidly; only 7% plan to stay about the same size.
- Respondents plan to hire 130 employees in the next 3 years (average 5 per business), mostly in: sales, food preparation, food & beverage service, customer service, journalism.
- Most pressing issues for members' businesses (in descending order of frequency):
  - Getting and keeping customers.
  - Promoting and growing their businesses.
  - Networking with other businesses and potential customers.
  - Exposure to the public and community.
  - Finding high-quality employees.
- Most pressing issues facing the Tumwater community:
  - Homelessness, lack of affordable housing.
  - Blight of the abandoned brewery.
  - Traffic congestion, poor road conditions.
  - Promoting good growth and marketing Tumwater business opportunities.
  - Disunity. No downtown.
- Most important benefits the Chamber provides:
  - Networking, connecting with other businesses, and exposure.
  - Sense and support of community.
  - Many respondents don't know enough about the Chamber's benefits to them.
- What the Chamber can do better:
  - Hold more events; e.g., Forums, networking mixers (some in evening), educational events, "Spotlight on Business" (5-minute presentation of members' businesses).
  - Publicize more about what we do and the benefits of membership.
  - Distinguish the Chamber from competing organizations.
  - Strengthen sense of community (e.g., bring back Christmas promotions, celebrations).
- Chamber performance scorecard:
  - Sixty-four (64) percent would recommend joining the Chamber to a business owner they know, 23% are unsure, and 5% didn't answer.
  - On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 high, respondents rated the benefits of Chamber membership an average of only 6.7 (43% of the ratings were 8 or above).
  - Most members say that membership is beneficial and is improving.

Responses and Findings

Interviews of *current* members	27	58.7%
Interviews of *former* members	19	41.3%
Total Interviews	46	100.0%

- The 27 current members interviewed represents about 3/8 of all 72 current members as of August 30, 2018.

3. Briefly describe your experience as a Chamber member? [Questions 2 and 3 are contact information.]

- Most interviewees say that membership has been a beneficial experience and is improving. "We rejoined the Tumwater Chamber last year. It has been a beneficial experience. Lots of positive changes."
- However, there is low participation in Chamber events, due to low turnout at events (e.g., Forum luncheons) and little awareness about upcoming events. "Member for 10+ years. Active at first, then my attendance dropped off. Tumwater is smaller; not as much business influence. But, things have picked up."
- Recent Forum luncheons have been better, due to more people attending, good networking opportunities, and good speakers on interesting subjects. "Joined about 6 mos ago. Great experience, especially Forums, which are good networking opportunities."
- Chamber experience has improved under the new leadership.

4. What is the most pressing issue for your business? (In descending order of frequency)

- Getting and keeping customers.
- Promoting and growing our business. "Growth. Company doubled our goals. Had to hire 4 persons. Staffing is an issue."
- Networking with other businesses and potential customers. "Networking, connections, potential sponsors and business buyers."
- Exposure to the public and community. "Need speaking engagements."
- Finding high-quality employees.
- Increasing regulation by local governments.
- Traffic congestion, insufficient parking. "Too many changes by City of Tunmwater, specifically too many bad ideas for traffic (e.g., traffic circle at Capitol and Custer; trees down Capitol Blvd and reducing traffic lanes from 2 to only 1 each way."

5. In the next three years, do you expect your business in Thurston County to [31 responses]:

Grow rapidly	25%
Grow moderately	67%
Stay about the same	7%

6. Approximately how many people do you currently employ in Thurston County? [29 responses]

- Total employees: 507
- Average: 17.5

7. In the next three years, how many positions do you expect to add in Thurston County, and in what occupations? [25 responses]

- Total new hires: 133
- Average: 5.3
- Occupations: Sales, real estate sales, food preparation, food & beverage service, customer service, journalism

8. What, in your opinion, are the most pressing issues facing the *Tumwater community*? (In descending order of frequency)

- Homelessness, lack of affordable housing. "Transient community: people try to sleep in our office entry; try to get in our office, especially in winter. We worry about safety of our employees."
- Blight of abandoned brewery. "Getting government out of the redevelopment of the brewery to keep pace with the projected urban growth. Opportunity exists to massively improve both flow of traffic and commercial revenue by allowing developers to bring it out of the early 20th Century."
- Traffic congestion and poor road conditions.
- Promoting good growth and marketing Tumwater business opportunities. "There's no downtown Tumwater; need more of a core, cohesiveness among City, State and high schools. . . .Growth, ability to expand (e.g., the pocket gopher hinders growth). Having a positive community vision, so we can attract more families."
- "Disunity. No downtown. No lights at Xmas; need to get more businesses to do that. Have community wine tastings. Rotating food and beverage tours. Scavenger hunt.

9. What is the most important benefit the Chamber provides (provided) to you?

- Networking, connecting with other businesses and exposure. "Helping grow my business. I need more new customers, so networking options are important to me."
- Sense of community. "Community support and business representation and voice."
- "I think the new meeting have been nice. Meeting NEW people, vs other chambers it's always the same people at every event. Getting to know business and each different topic each month."
- Don't know enough about the Chamber benefits. "Can't comment on this. I don't know what Chamber does…." I don't know much about the benefits. Our firm belongs to more than one Chamber and like organizations. Haven't seen a correlation of what we pay and benefits."

10. What could the Chamber do better?

- Hold more events. "Promotion of Forums. More networking mixers, perhaps some in the evening. Educating small business persons."
- Don't know (too new to Chamber, not enough information about what the Chamber does). "I don't really know what TACC does yet. Reach out to members regarding the benefits."
- "Our firm belongs to more than one Chamber and like organizations. Haven't seen a correlation of what we pay and benefits."
- Increase members and their participation.
- "Promotion of Forums. More networking mixers, perhaps some in the evening. Educating small business persons."
- "Provide Spotlight on Business (e.g., 5 minute presentations by members). Develop enthuisam. Inclusiveness."

- "Bring back the Christmas promotion (shop Tumwater)"

11. Would you recommend joining our Chamber to a business owner you know?

Yes 64%

No 6%

Unsure 23%

Didn't answer: 5%

12. Rate the benefits of Chamber membership to your business, using a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being high. [28 responses]

Average rating: 6.7

Ratings 8 or higher: 46%

Rating Frequency

Rating	Frequency
1	2
2	1
3	0
4	1
5	4
6	4
7	4
8	5
9	3
10	4