

# Parking remains a concern for businesses

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Parking remains a big concern for downtown businesses in Beloit, according to the Downtown Beloit Association Survey.

The Downtown Beloit Association received survey responses from 88 business and gathered the answers to better understand the circumstances of business owners.

The report, conducted by three summer interns, states 2,113 people work in the downtown district. On average, a downtown business employs 21 full-time workers. However, the median number of employees at a business is much lower as 67 percent of businesses employ no more than five full-time workers. More than half — 57 percent — of the responding businesses stated no intentions of expanding, adding business lines or selling within five years.

Parking is the greatest challenge business owners said they face downtown. Sixteen businesses said they do not have sufficient parking to satisfy customers. A frequent complaint was employees having to move their cars several times a day to avoid being ticketed. Perhaps worse is the fact that business owners said their customers are sometimes ticketed during brief visits to a store. The report suggests that hourly parking limits be eased so customers and employees may focus on their jobs or shopping rather than law enforcement.

An potential area for economic growth is the 16 businesses that reported having open space in upper floors of their building. The report suggests that those spaces be filled with dining and shopping stores.

The report also stresses the importance of social media advertising, highlighting how cost-effective online advertisements can be. In a college town, such an approach may be useful.

“(Online advertisements) are the best at reaching target demographics with factors including geographic location, age and interests,” the report states. “More Internet/social media platforms mean reaching a wider audience. Many platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram can be easily synchronized so anything posted on one platform is posted on the other platforms.”

The report does praise the fact that 61 percent of responding businesses do participate in some form of Facebook promotion. The report encourages businesses to continue utilize the social media tool and recommends that businesses work together online to conduct collective marketing strategies.