

Proposal  
Coventry Economic Development Commission  
Annual Business Climate & Business Retention Survey

## **I. Purpose**

This proposal recommends that the Coventry Economic Development Commission (“EDC”) adopt an annual Business Climate and Business Retention Survey as a recurring EDC project and deliverable in an effort to fulfill the EDC’s statutory duty to research economic conditions and report annually on its activities and recommendations.

The purpose of the survey is to:

- Collect structured, repeatable data on the experience of doing business in Coventry
- Identify barriers to business retention, expansion, and attraction
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing Town and regional business-support tools
- Provide a factual basis for recommendations to Town leadership
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## **II. Background and Context**

### **A. Recent Revaluation and Tax Base Concerns**

The Town’s most recent revaluation demonstrated that:

- The commercial and industrial portion of the grand list is relatively small
- Residential property owners carry a disproportionate share of the Town’s tax burden
- The proportion of commercial/industrial value may have declined recently relative to residential property.

While the EDC does not control taxation, infrastructure investment, or zoning, it *is* the Town body charged with promoting economic development and understanding local economic conditions. At a time when residents are increasingly concerned about rising taxes, it is appropriate for the EDC to take a proactive, data-driven approach to understanding and improving the local business environment.

## **III. Statutory Authority.**

Connecticut General Statutes charge municipal economic development commissions with:

- Conducting research into the economic conditions and trends of the municipality, and
- Annually preparing and transmitting a report of the Commission’s activities and recommendations for improving local economic conditions.

This proposal recommends formalizing one key component of that obligation through an annual survey and summary report.

## **IV. Survey Framework and Methodology**

The proposed survey will use a standardized, neutral business climate assessment approach designed to collect actionable, repeatable information about the experience of operating a business in Coventry.

The framework will be guided by the following principles:

### **A. Focus on Systems and Processes, Not Individuals**

The survey will be structured to evaluate:

- Town processes
- Communication channels
- Regulatory clarity and predictability
- Awareness and use of available resources

The survey will not seek to evaluate individual Town employees or single out specific departments by name. Questions will be framed at a systems level to identify patterns, bottlenecks, or information gaps.

### **B. Emphasis on Quantitative Data with Limited Qualitative Input**

To ensure results can be summarized, compared, and tracked over time:

- Most questions will use scaled response formats (e.g., 1–5 ratings)
- A limited number of optional open-ended questions will be included to provide context and examples
- Open-ended responses will be analyzed thematically rather than quoted selectively

This approach balances statistical usefulness with the ability to capture nuance.

### **C. Designed for Repeatability and Trend Tracking**

The survey will be designed so that:

- Core questions can be reused annually
- Changes in sentiment or experience can be measured year-over-year
- The Commission can identify whether conditions are improving, worsening, or remaining stable

This allows the EDC to move beyond one-time feedback and toward longitudinal insight.

#### **D. Neutral Framing and Clarity of Purpose**

Survey questions and introductory language will:

- Clearly explain the purpose of the survey
- Emphasize that feedback will be used to improve systems and communication
- Acknowledge that feedback may include criticism, which is expected and appropriate
- Avoid leading or emotionally charged language

The intent is to encourage honest participation while maintaining a constructive tone.

#### **E. Evaluation of Existing Town and Regional Tools**

In addition to general business climate questions, the framework will include targeted questions to assess:

- Awareness of existing Town and regional business-support resources
- Actual usage of those tools
- Perceived value and barriers to participation

This ensures that the Commission can evaluate whether current resources are effective before recommending new initiatives.

#### **F. Applicability Across Business Types**

The survey will be structured to be relevant to:

- Home-based businesses
- Professional services
- Retail and hospitality
- Trades and contractors

Where appropriate, questions will allow respondents to indicate that a topic is “not applicable” to their business.

#### **G. Data Integrity and Anonymity**

To promote candid responses:

- Individual survey responses will be anonymous
- Results will be reported only in aggregate
- Open-ended responses will be summarized thematically

## **V. Survey Goals**

The Commission should formally identify the goals of the survey. Some samples include:

1. Understand the Business Experience in Coventry
  - Permitting, inspections, approvals, communication, and predictability
2. Identify Barriers to Business Retention and Expansion
  - Regulatory friction, infrastructure constraints, zoning limitations, or information gaps
3. Evaluate Existing Town and Regional Business Resources
  - Including awareness and use of event promotion and marketing tools
4. Improve Communication Between the Town and Businesses
  - How businesses learn about events, opportunities, and Town initiatives
5. Support Evidence-Based Recommendations
  - Provide actionable findings to Town leadership
6. Establish a Repeatable Baseline
  - Allow year-over-year tracking of trends rather than anecdotal discussion

## **VI. Acknowledging the Nature of Survey Feedback**

The Commission should explicitly acknowledge that:

- Business surveys typically generate more criticism than praise
- Respondents may express frustration with Town processes or requirements

This survey is intended to:

- Identify systemic issues, not assign blame
- Improve clarity, predictability, and outcomes for both businesses and Town staff
- Inform process improvements and communication strategies

This acknowledgment should be included in:

- The survey introduction
- The final summary report

## **VII. Scope of the Survey**

### **A. Business Survey**

Target Audience

- All licensed and operating businesses in Coventry, including:
  - Home-based businesses
  - Retail and service businesses
  - Professional offices
  - Contractors and trades

Content Areas

- Overall satisfaction with doing business in Coventry (1–5 scale)
- Ease and clarity of permitting and inspections

- Consistency of requirements
- Communication with Town departments
- Awareness of Town and regional business resources
- Participation in Town or regional events
- Likelihood of expanding or reinvesting locally
- Perceived gaps in the local business ecosystem

#### Design

- Predominantly 1–5 scale questions
- Limited, optional open-ended questions
- Anonymous responses

### **B. Optional Public Survey**

The Commission may also consider a separate, shorter public survey to assess:

- Resident perceptions of the business climate
- Desired businesses or services not currently available
- Shopping and dining leakage outside Town

This would be clearly labeled and analyzed separately from the business survey.

### **VIII. Promotion of CTCountryside.org**

Coventry has already invested in a regional economic development and placemaking initiative through CTCountryside.org, which allows businesses and civic organizations to:

- Post events
- Feed a regional calendar
- Gain exposure through regional marketing and social media

The survey could be used as a tool to increase awareness and measure:

- Awareness of CTCountryside.org
- Usage by Coventry businesses
- Perceived value and barriers to participation

#### Example Question Areas

- Awareness of the platform
- Whether businesses have posted events
- Reasons for non-use (lack of awareness, time, usability, relevance)
- Perceived effectiveness of Town and regional events in driving customers

This allows the EDC to assess whether existing tools are being fully utilized before recommending new initiatives.

### **IX. Timing and Outreach**

#### Timing

- Align survey launch with a Town Newsletter distribution (issued four times per year)
- Keep survey open for approximately 2–3 weeks
- Allow sufficient time for analysis and reporting

## Outreach Channels

- Town Newsletter blurb
- Town website and social media
- Direct email to business license holders (if feasible)
- Local Facebook and business groups
- EDC-maintained mailing list (if developed)

## X. Possible Survey Platforms

- Microsoft Forms  
(Often included with municipal Microsoft 365 licenses)
- SurveyMonkey  
(Common municipal subscription)
- Qualtrics  
(More advanced analytics; higher cost)
- Google Forms  
(Free; limited analytics)

Does the Town already has access to any of these tools.

## XI. Data Context and Reporting

Survey findings should be contextualized using baseline economic data from:

- Connecticut Economic Resource Center  
(Industry mix, employment, and commercial/residential trends)

This ensures the report reflects both perception and structural conditions.

## XII. Deliverables

1. Annual Business Climate & BRE Survey
2. Written Summary Report including:
  - Key findings
  - Thematic analysis of comments
  - Baseline metrics for future comparison
  - Practical recommendations
3. Optional presentation to Town Council

## XIII. Conclusion

By adopting an annual Business Climate and Business Retention Survey, the Coventry Economic Development Commission can move from informal anecdotal discussion to structured, evidence-based insight, better fulfilling its statutory mission and providing Town leadership with actionable recommendations at a time of heightened concern about economic balance and tax burden.