

**Efficiency Review:
Small Business Permitting &
Licensing
Spring 2021**

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Purpose

As part of the City of Cambridge's ongoing efforts to implement recommendations resulting from prior planning efforts, including the recently completed "Envision Cambridge" Master Planning process and the Community Development Department's 2017 Retail Strategic Plan, this project has been undertaken to identify action steps to streamline permitting and licensing processes for new businesses.

Project Scope

The scope of this review extends to the City's Community Development Department (CDD), License Commission Department (the "License Commission"), and Inspectional Services Department (ISD) – three of the City departments with which most new businesses interact – to better understand their processes and procedures as they apply to three common types of businesses: food-service businesses, general retail, and businesses with live entertainment.

The study was undertaken with the following goals to be accomplished:

- (1) Present an overall state of the City's current small business permitting and licensing processes;
- (2) Provide a summary of current small business and licensing requirements and identify new efficiencies and how to improve them;
- (3) Highlight the City's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats ("SWOT") relating to supporting new small businesses opening in the City, as well as replicable methodology; and
- (4) Identify recommendations of short- and long-term key actions and best practices the City might consider to enhance its small business permitting and licensing processes.

Process

Beginning in early 2020, the project began with a research phase that included reviewing existing regulations, forms, applications, fee schedules, the City's website, and the ease of access to this information. The public outreach component of the project began in February and consisted of meeting with local business leaders, an online survey of business owners conducted during March 2020, and interviews with local business owners and City staff, which were conducted remotely due to COVID-19.

Conclusions

When viewed comprehensively, the City of Cambridge offers its businesses an extremely high level of service and quality programs, but easy access to information remains a challenge.

Access to information was a key issue cited by nearly every participant in this study. The regulatory requirements at the statutory and local levels are interrelated and can be excessively complicated and at times conflicting. Understanding what is required by whom and when, what it will cost, and how long it will take varies by each business, what they are attempting to do, where they are located, and the potential impacts they could have on the surrounding neighborhood. The degree of difficulty a business may encounter can come from zoning, licensing, building, and/or health code regulations – at the local or state level - which are often decades old and inadequately reflect modern uses and needs. Further complicating this process is that each department works separately, maintains different portions of the City’s website, and generally processes applications within their individual departments. When businesses have not neatly fit into the existing definitions, they often felt discouraged by the process and have opted to locate elsewhere with fewer regulatory barriers. Minimizing these lost opportunities is possible with better support to the businesses and increased coordination on the local level during the permitting and licensing processes.

Key Findings

- The City’s website should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to remove broken links and should include up-to-date information with a timestamp (particularly with respect to linked policy documents and guides).
 - *Update: The City has an automated tool that every department web master gets giving them broken link information. Pages on the new city template have timestamp built into the footer area (90% of the page templates)*
- Information regarding what requires a permit/license, application requirements, and fee schedules should be made available in full without a Viewpoint account through journey maps and online documents that should be updated on a regular basis.
- Businesses with non-standard applications (those requiring licenses for alcohol, zoning relief, variances from building/health codes) should be provided a one-stop meeting with CDD, ISD, and/or the License Commission to coordinate and satisfy regulatory conflicts.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The desire to streamline permitting and licensing requirements on the local level can be hindered by state regulations. Addressing local issues while clarifying statutory requirements, particularly those that add time and expense, is a key part of the messaging to businesses as to what they can expect.

- Many licensing requirements are established by State law including amusements, entertainment, and alcohol. These processes must be administered concurrently or in conjunction with local processes and are not subject to local discretion.
- Applications requiring zoning relief (a special permit or a variance) are subject to state statutes and local ordinance requirements regarding the grounds under which relief may be granted as well as state statutory timeframes for hearings and decisions.
- Applications requiring building permits are subject to the State’s building, plumbing, electrical, sanitary, and housing code regulations; accessibility requirements (under State and Federal law); as well as the locally adopted stretch code, Zoning Ordinance, and other sections of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

Similar to local regulations, those at the State-level can be outdated and are particularly poorly suited to address current issues and opportunities such as temporary uses like popups and experiences, and the utilization of semi-outfitted spaces.



Photo by Kyle Klein

Background

Zoning is the first step a new business will encounter when trying to locate in Cambridge. The Zoning Ordinance controls what types of businesses can locate in the city, where they can locate, and how much parking and/or loading facilities they require. It is important to note that not all Planning Board and Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) applications are for small businesses, so the City's communications around zoning must cater to all constituents.

In Cambridge, the Zoning Ordinance involves many different parties responsible for different aspects of zoning:

- City Council is responsible for adopting the Zoning Ordinance and any amendments
- Community Development Department is responsible for planning efforts, which includes recommendations for amending the Zoning Ordinance pursuant to planning objectives, as well as providing support staff to the Planning Board (PB) in its review of (some) special permit applications and zoning petitions. CDD and ISD have taken responsibility for providing general information to the public, though only ISD department issues permits.
- Inspectional Services Department is responsible for interpretation and enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance (along with other applicable codes), including providing support staff to the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). ISD also provides a significant amount of general information related to the permitting and building process to the general public.

Access to Information

While the City's website utilizes a number of interactive mapping platforms and an online assessor's database, it can be difficult for the average user to be able to determine the district in which a space they are interested in is located [or will be located in the case of new construction] due to a combination of information overload and a lack of a feature specifically designed for this function. CDD's zoning page¹ currently has an option to view PDF zoning maps which are useful, but it would be helpful to provide a link to one of the City's interactive online mapping platforms which are searchable at the address level, and for this to clearly display zoning data. Further, even if a user were able to identify the zoning district, they would

¹ <https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/zoninganddevelopment/Zoning>

then need to access the Zoning Ordinance to determine if their business is allowed in that zoning district or overlay district, which may present additional challenges if the type of business is not easily classified due to outdated descriptions and use categories. As a result, there is a certain degree of sophistication required from a business owner to perform even a cursory review as to whether their aspirations will be viable, and some contact with City staff is likely to be necessary at this point in the process.

By and large, CDD's website is organized to present information about the work the Department is doing, but the website was not designed for someone seeking to apply for zoning relief. It is easy to find pending applications, relevant documents, related meeting minutes, etc. It is difficult to find the City's Viewpoint application portal, which is used for special permit and variance applications, because it is not directly linked from CDD's website. Most businesses requiring zoning relief require a special permit or variance from the BZA, though certain special permits are processed by the Planning Board. Should a user look for application instructions, one is better served by looking for instructions on ISD's webpage² than CDD's zoning webpage as ISD's site is more oriented toward new applicants rather than those seeking information about pending applications. Unfortunately, ISD's instructions on how to apply for zoning relief to the BZA does not lead directly to the Viewpoint portal³. The instructions about process, however, are generally accurate and should be reviewed and reissued in accessible formats with a new date so users can have more confidence in the reliability of the information. A useful page with a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) can be found on ISD's site⁴; however, this page needs to be reviewed and updated. Given the difficulty of finding the portal and the necessity to create a separate account, it makes more sense to shift CDD's applications to Viewpoint which businesses use for all other permits. Finally, having a small business website link to one page that contains the following items would be useful:

1) Explicit links to the Assessor's Property Database and Cityviewer page⁵ so people can find the property's zoning district

1) Updated process documents (2013) and Zoning Guide (2004) (Currently being updated into a more web-friendly format)

² <https://www.cambridgema.gov/inspection/Zoning>

³ <https://www.cambridgema.gov/iwantto/applyforavarianceorspecialpermit>

⁴ <https://www.cambridgema.gov/Services/varianceorspecialpermit>

⁵ <https://www.cambridgema.gov/GIS/interactivemaps/Cambridgecityviewer>

Process

Cambridge’s Zoning Ordinance (CZO) was first adopted in 1924, and while it continues to be updated and amended, the practical application of the CZO to modern business uses remains a challenge and offers staff limited discretion to process routine reviews.

Zoning Type	Permit (use as of right)	Process Required	Avg. Time & Application Fee
None allowed	(use as of right)	<i>Staff level review and sign-off</i>	n/a
Special Permit		<i>Board level review at public hearing. Notification requirements, hearing timeframes, and appeals periods apply.</i>	4-8 months (depending on the case)
Variance		<i>Board level review at public hearing. Notification requirements, hearing timeframes, and appeals periods apply.</i>	4-8 months Prices varies
Common zoning issues requiring special permits or variances: type of use, some fast order food, change of use, nonconforming uses, parking waivers, and live entertainment.			

In the *Retail Strategy for the City of Cambridge: Market Analysis and Recommendations Report* permitting, and in particular, discretionary permitting (such as those permits authorized by the Board of Zoning Appeals or the Planning Board) were identified as one of three critical structural challenges facing local business owners (Larisa Ortiz Associates, 2017). Requirements for discretionary approvals lead to uncertainty in permitting, as well as delays, which can impact investor confidence and willingness to locate (or in some cases, continue operations) in Cambridge. **At present, it takes an average of nine months between the signing of a lease and the opening of a new business. For those that require discretionary permits for zoning relief, approvals take an average of an additional four to six months, and generate on average, at least \$3,000 in additional costs for permitting (City of Cambridge, CDD, 2019).**

Modernizing the Zoning Ordinance’s Table of Uses, increasing staff authority to process routine cases such as minor changes of allowed use and routine parking waivers that do not require zoning relief, and eliminating cumbersome requirements such as the Special Permit for Fast Order Food businesses (which dramatically impacts small local businesses far more often than the chain outlets the regulations were designed to discourage), and live entertainment which would be better processed through licensing, would reduce inefficiencies currently experienced by businesses seeking to locate in Cambridge. The current retail and home occupancy zoning petitions will solve some of these barriers and make it easier to do business in Cambridge.

Zoning Recommendations

- Develop a small business webpage that includes links to the Assessing Department's Property Database and/or Cityviewer Zoning tool. Continue with modernization work on the Retail Section of the Zoning Ordinance to reduce permitting inefficiencies resulting from missing uses, parking requirements, and other issues that are currently being addressed by CDD.
- Develop better guidance documents, such as a checklist, to help people determine if there business use is allowed in certain zoning districts.

Inspectional Services

Access to Information

Once zoning has been satisfied, the next interaction a prospective new business owner will have with the City is likely to be obtaining a building permit for an interior fit-out of their space, a sign permit, and possibly permits for façade alterations (unless the building is new construction). Instructions for how to apply⁶, fee schedule⁷, and required documents⁸ are all easy to find on the City's website.

While applying for a permit is easy, accessing information to ensure regulatory compliance with the various codes ISD oversees is a challenge, and ISD often recommends that new business obtain professional advice. Business owners frequently stated that requests to inspectors for interpretations on code for basic things such as how many sinks their food use will require - whether made in person, over the phone, or in writing - were often unclear and the responsibility often lands back on the business owner to ensure compliance. As a result, businesses may compensate for ambiguity and overbuild out of an abundance of caution in order to ensure their fit-out will pass inspections. This adds cost and time for small business owners. On the other hand, while ISD can provide business owners with information about code requirements, as discussed below, ISD inspectors cannot advise an applicant about what is required for a particular project while a project is being developed and until a complete

⁶ <https://www.cambridgema.gov/iwantto/applyforabuildingpermit>

⁷ <https://www.cambridgema.gov/inspection/buildingelectricplumbingpermits/buildingfees>

⁸ [https://viewpointcloud.blob.core.windows.net/profile-pictures/Building_Permit_Application_Checklist_\(002\)_Mon_Dec_17_2018_14:19:17_GMT+0000_\(Coordinated_Universal_Time\).pdf](https://viewpointcloud.blob.core.windows.net/profile-pictures/Building_Permit_Application_Checklist_(002)_Mon_Dec_17_2018_14:19:17_GMT+0000_(Coordinated_Universal_Time).pdf)

application is received because otherwise ISD does not have all relevant information, and requirements for the project could change.

While most business owners were positive about their experiences working with ISD overall, some businesses did state that they felt a lack of support on the part of ISD to try to facilitate the success of their projects; that they had difficulty getting responses to specific questions and that communication is particularly challenging if you do not know an exact person within the City to contact to accomplish specific tasks. It is important to note the ISD will not issue a formal zoning or code review until an application is received. This is why it is common for ISD staff to recommend that a new business obtain local legal counsel, architectural services, or other professional advice to assist with permitting, as hiring someone with professional experience with these processes and local contacts can help business owners understand legal requirements and obligations when opening a business.

Process

Upon receipt of a complete building permit application, pursuant to State law, ISD has thirty (30) days to act upon the application – they may deny, approve, and or request additional information within this timeframe – and for a building permit to remain valid, it must be acted upon within 180 days of its issuance. Construction activities requiring a building permit are regulated by State law, as are requirements for inspections. Most business owners do not perform their own construction. Therefore, their contractors handle the building permits and inspections since professional licenses are required to obtain most permits. In addition, depending on the work performed, it is likely that inspections will be required. ISD typically schedules inspections within 72 hours of a request, and permit fees are based upon construction value. There are several common types of other permits that a business is likely to require prior to opening. All businesses require a Certificate of Occupancy from ISD before they can legally open, regardless whether or not they require a building permit to perform construction work. A major improvement to this process was achieved when Viewpoint was put into common use, as business owners no longer have to physically go from department to department to receive signatures and can monitor the progress of their application online.

Permit Type	Description	Avg. Time & Application Commercial Permit Fee* *Fees as of July 2020. Fees are subject to change.)
Addition/Alteration	Construction that changes the structure, the footprint, or the volume of the building. Including decks, porches, and additions. Any	\$20 per \$1,000 of construction cost

Permit Type	Description	Avg. Time & Application Commercial Permit Fee* *Fees as of July 2020. Fees are subject to change.)
	reconstruction, renovation, or repair to an existing structure.	
New Construction	A permit to build an entirely new structure.	\$20 per \$1,000 of construction cost
Certificate of Occupancy	A Certificate of Use and Occupancy is required for expansion of existing habitable space, all major alterations, changes of use, or new buildings. If the building requires zoning relief, then relief must be granted before a Certificate of Occupancy can be issued. Applicants are responsible for securing signatures for all departments and inspectors selected upon initial review of the application.	Varies by project \$100 plus \$50.00 per 1,000 sq. ft.
Dumpster License	A license is required for both temporary and permanent dumpsters on private land. This is for a stand-alone dumpster license only. Please note that you may apply for a dumpster permit as part of the Building Permit application that ISD issues. (Traffic, Parking & Transportation issues dumpster permits on streets and public property.)	\$100.00 per Dumpster
Trade Permits	Application to submit when applying for a permit to perform electrical, plumbing, gas, sprinkler, or mechanical work.	>30 days per state law
Food Establishment	Restaurants, schools, bakeries, daycares, mobile food trucks, and package and retail stores serving food require food establishment permits. Areas of focus include management and employee health, hygiene practices, approved food and water sources, time and temperature control, protection from chemicals, equipment and utensil use, sewage and disposal practices, plumbing and toilet facilities, pest control, and the overall state of the establishment.	Varies by Type of Establishment due to state & local licensing requirements \$100 plus \$50.00 per 1,000 sq. ft.

Permit Type	Description	Avg. Time & Application Commercial Permit Fee* *Fees as of July 2020. Fees are subject to change.)
Sign Permit	A sign permit (subject to the Zoning Ordinance) is required to install façade signs – projecting signs over the public sidewalk are subject to approval by City Council.	>30 days per state law \$10 per \$100 rounded up to the next hundred of the sign cost
Temporary Uses	Tents, food trucks, and temporary food service for events all require permits that could impact a new business or pop up business.	>30 days per state law \$15.00 per \$1,000 rounded up to the next thousand of the construction cost (\$50 minimum fee)
<p>Code Variances: From time to time, it is not possible to comply with a literal enforcement of the regulations – an issue that can be particularly acute in older buildings. When these situations arise, a building code variance issued at the state level may be required. This process can add additional time and expense.</p>		

For most new businesses, ISD works well and runs smoothly and in a predictable manner. Hiring contractors who have experience working in Cambridge and understand the local requirements and procedures, points of contact, and timeframes tends to benefit new businesses in terms of achieving efficiency during this phase of their permitting. This is not to say that outside professionals unfamiliar with Cambridge cannot do the same things. Given how frequently business owners cited a local tradesman as being key to their success, it is worth mentioning that some have found it helpful for ensuring that they stayed on schedule.

However, when a business has a non-standard application – which is to say that it requires zoning relief, does not neatly fit into building code categories or has significant code issues, and/or extensive licensing requirements – the more common it is for that business to be discouraged. This practice represents lost economic opportunities when further discussion and consideration of the business and their ideas may have yielded a different result with more assistance. In general, business owners felt that the City staff hesitate to commit to how they will apply the code to specific applications prior to final inspection. This is particularly the case when there is some ambiguity as to how to satisfy the code or if there are concerns about contradicting other staff, the result of which is inefficiency in the process for small businesses. While this is understandable, it does present some issues with customer service delivery.

ISD Recommendations

- Work together with CDD to create code compliant policies and permit procedures that increase the viability of uses to reduce barriers to entry for new businesses.
- Train staff to recognize non-standard and complex applications and adopt a policy to conduct an interdepartmental meeting with CDD, Licensing, and the prospective applicant with unique, complex proposal to discuss and review their plans. The purpose of these informal staff consultations should be to identify zoning and building code items across departments. This reduces the amount of staff time required to process interdepartmental complex applications, provides more surety in permitting to business owners, and may reduce the number of businesses discouraged from locating in Cambridge.

Licensing

Access to Information

Whether or not a business needs licenses to operate will depend on the type of business, whether they offer alcohol or entertainment, if they hold events, and if they sell certain types of merchandise. Licensing is typically performed concurrently with ISD processes, and the most complicated applications tend to be alcohol related – which is also controlled at the State level. The Cambridge License Commission is comprised of the Police Commissioner, the Fire Chief, and a chairperson. The Commission is responsible for issuing licenses/permits and enforcing rules, regulations, local ordinances and State laws that regulate the service and sale of alcoholic beverages, operation of restaurants, hotels and lodging houses, indoor and outdoor entertainment, hackney drivers and vehicles, parking lots and garages, flammables, peddlers, fortune tellers, second hand goods stores, letting and sale of motor vehicles (including used car dealers), jitney drivers and companies, commercial leaf blower operators, and one-day licenses for alcohol and/or entertainment.

The License Commission's webpage⁹ is oriented toward applicants, and its documents and resources section contain clear, up to date information, having copies of all applications and fee schedules readily accessible. Given the lack of ambiguity in the regulations, the ability to receive clear instructions is generally not at issue, and communication with the License Commission generally presents few issues.

⁹ <https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/licensecommission>

Process

The application process is straightforward; the applications are available on Viewpoint. Most licenses require hearing notifications and legal ads per State law, which can add two (2) weeks to the process. While the License Commission has several periods throughout the year where they process different types of annual licenses and renewals, simple applications can generally be processed within a matter of weeks. Some licenses, such as alcohol, require approvals and certifications at the State level before they can be processed locally, which can add several months to the process. While alcohol related applications are generally complex, only about half of the businesses applying for licenses serve alcohol (License Commission, 2020). New alcohol-related applications can potentially take 6-12 months to resolve at the State level; the simplest applications involving alcohol are transfers of ownership with no other changes, which can be processed in as quickly as eight (8) weeks.

For most businesses, licensing was not a difficult process, but did present some surprises with respect to unexpected fees and license requirements. Massachusetts State laws are somewhat archaic with respect to licensing regulations. For example, regulations regarding fortune tellers and pinball machines remain on the books and require a license to operate, as does use of individual TV screens. The regulations, while reasonable and purposeful from a regulatory perspective, can simply present some surprises, particularly with respect to one-day and temporary licenses. Where confusion arises or a business owner has a question, the License Commission is staffed and accessible during business hours. The chief complaint about licensing from businesses was a feeling of being “nickel and dimed” by the City with respect to the number of fees and their total overall cost. To help businesses, the License Commission pro-rates all new licensing fees over \$100, charging only for the months open. For example, a new business with an all alcohol license opening in July would only pay \$3,500 for six (6) months of operation rather than the \$7,000 annual fee.

License Type	Applicability and Process	Application Fees (as of July 2020. Fees are subject to change.)
Alcohol, Common Victualer, and Entertainment	<p>Every establishment with the capabilities for cooking, preparing, and serving food and which provides seating for the immediate consumption therein, is required to have a Common Victualler License.</p> <p>Applications are submitted online and reviewed by Licensing. A hearing is scheduled when the fees are paid. The Commission reviews the application and issues a decision. A license is only issued after a Certificate of Occupancy has been issued.</p>	<p>\$100 hearing fee + \$75 advertising fee (if applicable) + \$50 administrative fee</p> <p>Common Victualler: \$100 + \$1 per person (based on approved occupancy)</p> <p>Alcohol Licenses: \$25 application fee Retail Store - \$1800-\$2400 Pouring - \$2,000-\$7,000 + additional fees</p> <p>Entertainment Licenses: Live Entertainment - \$500-\$1,500 max (capped) Amusements - \$100-\$135 per amusement. First 3 screens free, \$50 per additional screen. Stage - \$750</p>
One Day	<p>One day licenses are required if a business is providing/offering any of the following entertainment categories: amplified music/sound, DJ, performers/patrons dancing, live/recorded music, theatrical exhibition/floor/live/recorded show, audio visual show or light show.</p>	<p>Entertainment: \$50 per day Vendor/Raffle: \$10 per day Amusement: \$5 per day per amusement Alcohol < 100 people: \$55 beer/wine, \$100 liquor Alcohol > 100 people: \$75 beer/wine, \$120 liquor</p>
<p>Amusements: Amusements are defined by state law and include the following: background music w/o a common victualler permit, music above conversation level, television screens, shows (acrobatic, beauty contest, body building, comedy, dance exhibition, floor, light, live music, wrestling, poetry reading, and magic), DJs and dancing, karaoke, trivia, pool tables, bowling alleys, juke boxes, theatrical stages & accessory stages, cinema screens, videogames, pinball machines, and other similar automatic amusements.</p>		

Licensing Recommendations:

- Fee schedules have been recently reviewed and are clearly posted. Applications are available in Viewpoint with preapplication requirements clearly displayed. While most applications are straight-forward, new alcohol applications tend to be the most difficult and labor intensive, and applicants are most likely to require additional assistance. Joining ISD and CDD in an informal interdepartmental staff meeting for non-standard applications would likely clarify the process and reduce licensing issues.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Term

- Increase interdepartmental cooperation to support local businesses.
 - Establish a formal criterion to define non-standard applications to assist staff in flagging applications that would benefit from a “one-stop” application meeting with ISD, License Commission, and CDD.
 - *Progress: CDD and ISD staff have begun ISD/CDD Monthly Counter/Office Hours and will coordinate setting up appointments during this time with the include License Commission.¹⁰*
 - Establish a reasonable timeframe in which all Departments will commit to attend one-stop consultation meetings with applicants to review concepts, answer initial questions, and their strategies to clarify issues and increase retention of prospective businesses.
 - Provide more guides and check lists to help applicants understand City and state codes and regulations required to open their business. By providing new guides, it will assist applicants with code compliance. Without these practices, the City of Cambridge looks inaccessible to smaller business owners who do not have large budgets for attorneys and “store-bought” plans stamped and signed by registered engineers or architects for spaces they may not be able to use up front.
 - *Progress: Staff are producing journey maps, checklists, and other useful tools for common small business applications.*

¹⁰ During the COVID-19 pandemic, these group in-person sessions have been paused but will continue in the future.

- Update landing pages for permit applications to include a fee schedule and ensure that all landing pages list required application documents - while this is done on some pages, it is not consistent across all Department/application landing pages. Language should also be added clarifying that payments may be made with physical checks that are not subject to service fees in addition to online payments. Not all businesses can afford to pay Viewpoint's service fees – particularly those that penalize businesses that do not have ready access to funds and must pay on credit.
 - *Progress: Various departments are working on a small business landing page maintained by CDD's Economic Development Division that includes common questions and resources about how to get licenses, permits, etc. For different types of businesses.*

Long Term

- Revise the zoning portion of CDD's website to contain information that is oriented toward applicants. The current site provides excellent information regarding Department initiatives, pending projects, and regulations, but lacks clear information directed at applicants with respect to how to apply for zoning relief.
 - Update Zoning Guide (2004) and BZA instructions (2013), as both documents are useful but may be out of date.
 - *Progress: CDD and ISD are updating these documents as they pertain to all topics, not just small business applications.*
 - Transition from Energov to Viewpoint application platform
 - *Progress: Staff are already transitioning Energov applications to Viewpoint.*
- Empower CDD's Small Business Liaison working in collaboration with the Assistant to the City Manager for Community Relations to provide coordination for interdepartmental activities, act as a liaison between the City and the business community to address administrative issues, regulatory procedures, processes, permits, and licenses across City departments.
 - The City has made great strides in making its processes, applications, fees, and requirements as clear and transparent as possible. However, it remains to be a lot of information to navigate and involves numerous checklists, staff members, Departments, user IDs, applications, etc. The reality is that the regulatory environment can only be simplified so much while addressing concerns for complying with State laws. The fact that the processes are straightforward does not change the fact that there are processes in the first place. Some assistance to the local business community to navigate all that is required is needed at all Departments because one

has to respect the fact that it takes experience to do it successfully, and actual skills are involved – frequently ones that the business applicant does not have. This is compounded when the business owner does not have internet skills, language skills, or financial means to hire outside experts.

- Because experience **is** required, these concierge services are currently being provided by the private sector at the individual cost of each business. This will reduce both duplication of effort and significant costs incurred by the businesses. An investment on the City's part to support small businesses trying to establish in Cambridge without private sector experts would make a significant difference in removing barriers to entry.

APPENDIX

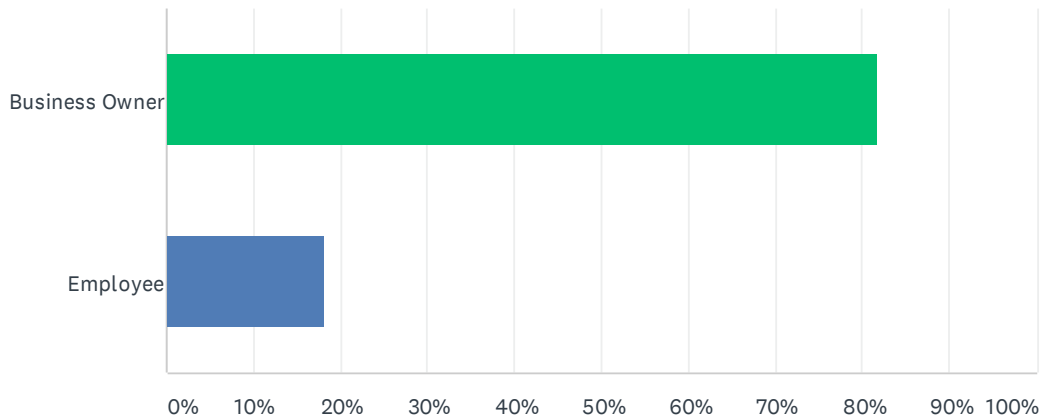
Business Survey Results

Resources

Useful Links

Q1 Are you a business owner or employee in Cambridge? (If neither, please do not continue with this survey).

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0

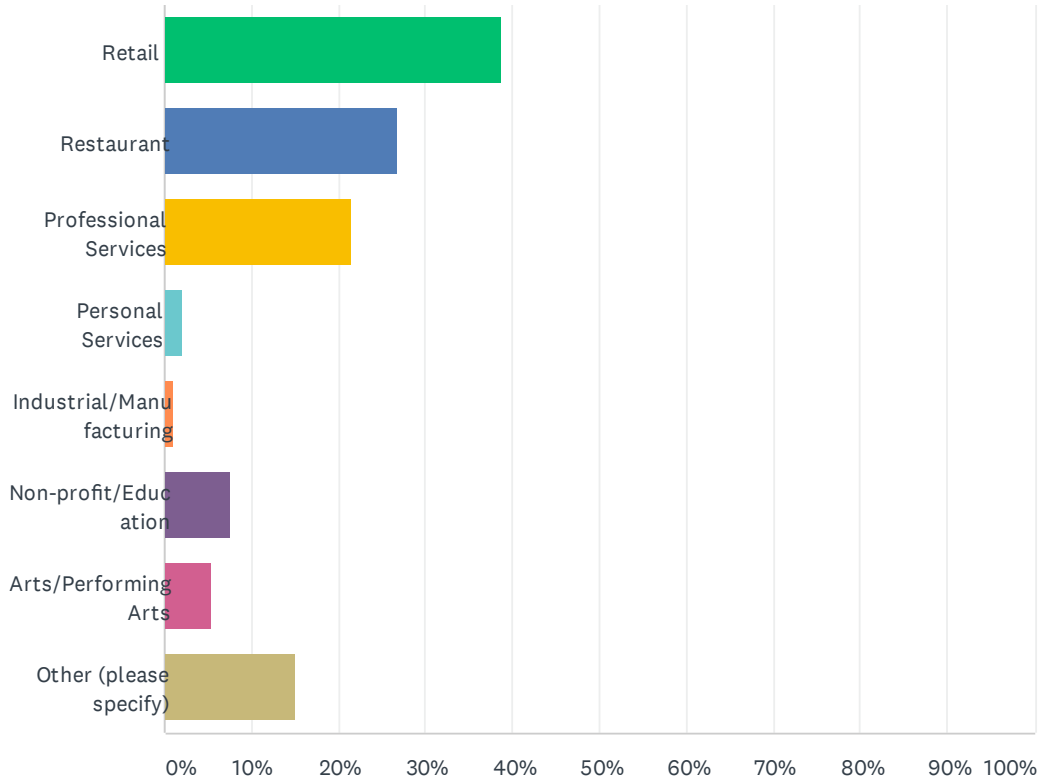


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Business Owner	81.72% 76
Employee	18.28% 17
TOTAL	93

Q2 What type of business do you own/are employed by? (select all that apply)

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



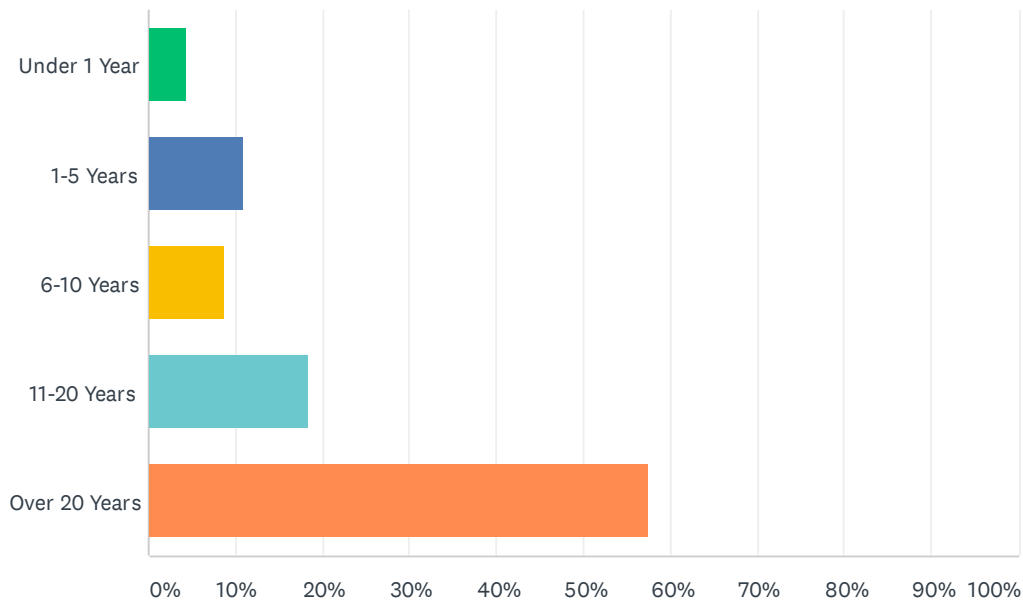
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Retail	38.71%	36
Restaurant	26.88%	25
Professional Services	21.51%	20
Personal Services	2.15%	2
Industrial/Manufacturing	1.08%	1
Non-profit/Education	7.53%	7
Arts/Performing Arts	5.38%	5
Other (please specify)	15.05%	14
Total Respondents: 93		

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Home. Improvement	3/12/2020 7:50 PM
2	Cafe	3/9/2020 5:31 PM
3	HOTEL	3/9/2020 12:10 PM
4	Bank	3/9/2020 10:55 AM
5	leasing office space	3/9/2020 9:37 AM
6	Production	3/7/2020 5:00 PM
7	Gelato shop	3/6/2020 6:06 PM
8	Solutions at Work, Inc. - distribute material aids to homeless	3/6/2020 4:47 PM
9	Contractor	3/6/2020 4:45 PM
10	retail bank	3/6/2020 4:01 PM
11	Catering company	3/6/2020 2:40 PM
12	Music Lessons	3/6/2020 11:13 AM
13	Lodging	3/6/2020 10:37 AM
14	Bookkeeping	3/6/2020 7:58 AM

Q3 How long has your business been in operation? (Include time at this and any previous locations)

Answered: 92 Skipped: 1

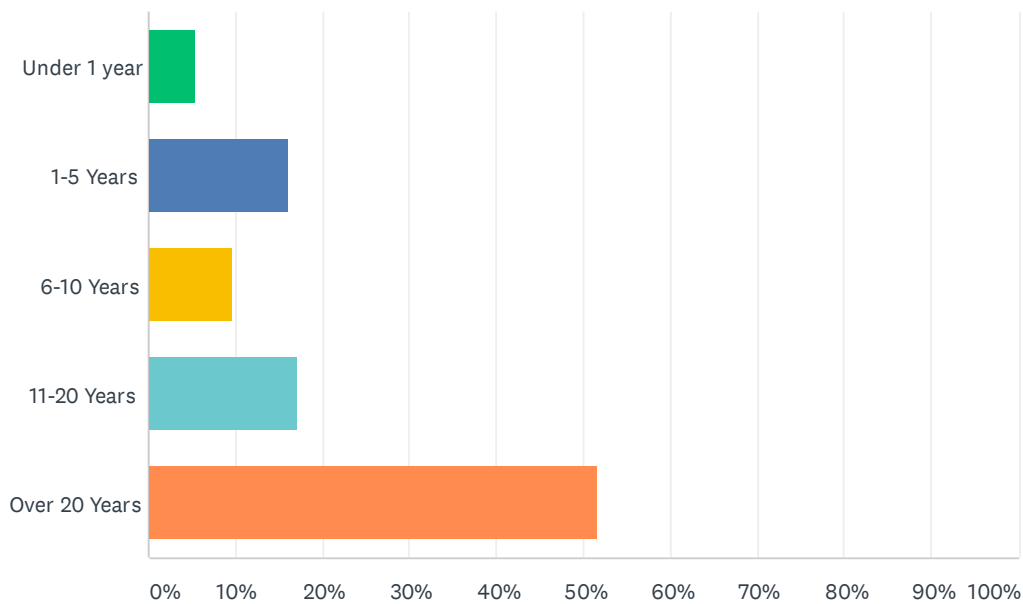


Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 1 Year	4.35%	4
1-5 Years	10.87%	10
6-10 Years	8.70%	8
11-20 Years	18.48%	17
Over 20 Years	57.61%	53
TOTAL		92

Q4 How long has your business been in operation in Cambridge?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0

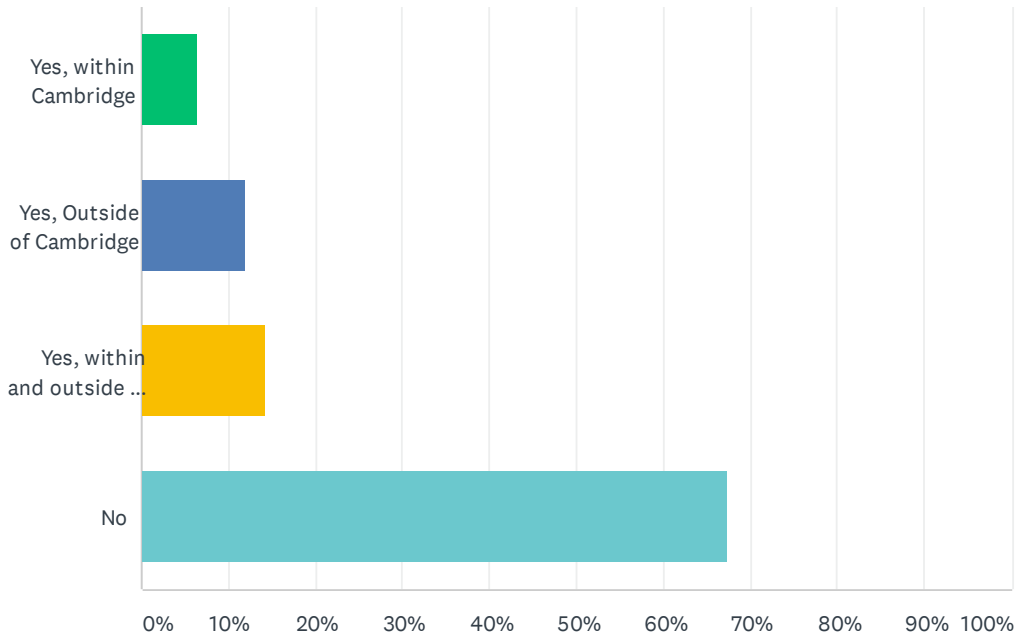


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 1 year	5.38%	5
1-5 Years	16.13%	15
6-10 Years	9.68%	9
11-20 Years	17.20%	16
Over 20 Years	51.61%	48
TOTAL		93

Q5 Does your business have more than one location?

Answered: 92 Skipped: 1

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

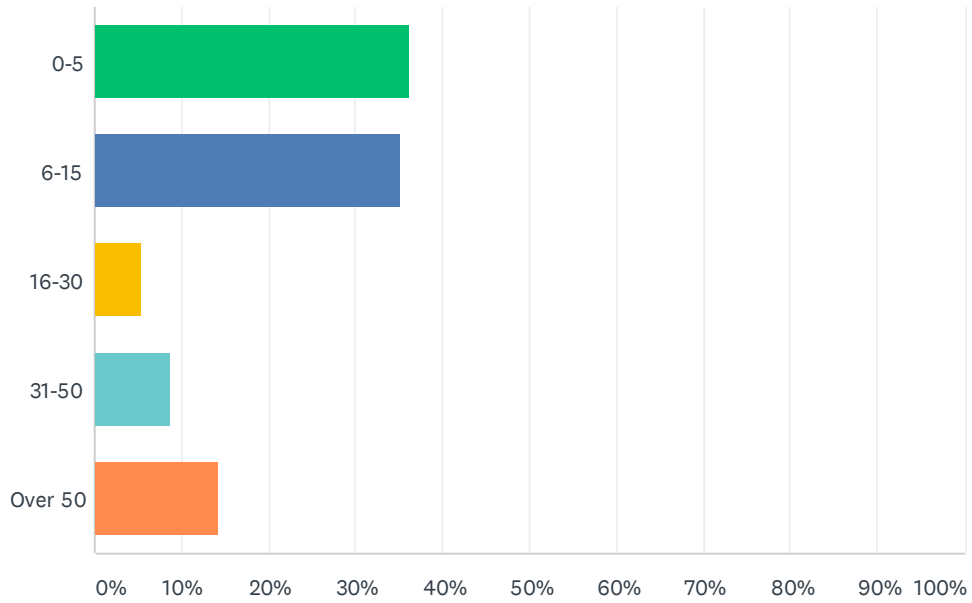


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, within Cambridge	6.52%	6
Yes, Outside of Cambridge	11.96%	11
Yes, within and outside of Cambridge	14.13%	13
No	67.39%	62
TOTAL		92

Q6 How many people does your business employ at your location in Cambridge?

Answered: 91 Skipped: 2

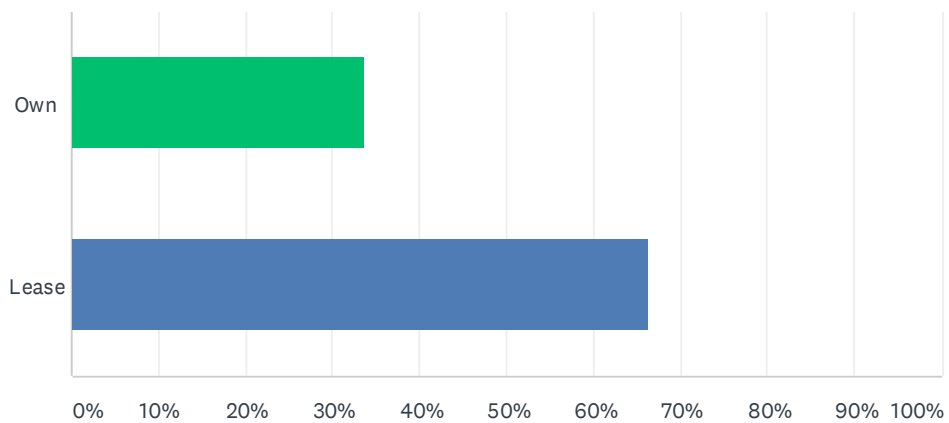
Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-5	36.26%	33
6-15	35.16%	32
16-30	5.49%	5
31-50	8.79%	8
Over 50	14.29%	13
TOTAL		91

Q7 Does your business own or lease the space in which it is located?

Answered: 92 Skipped: 1

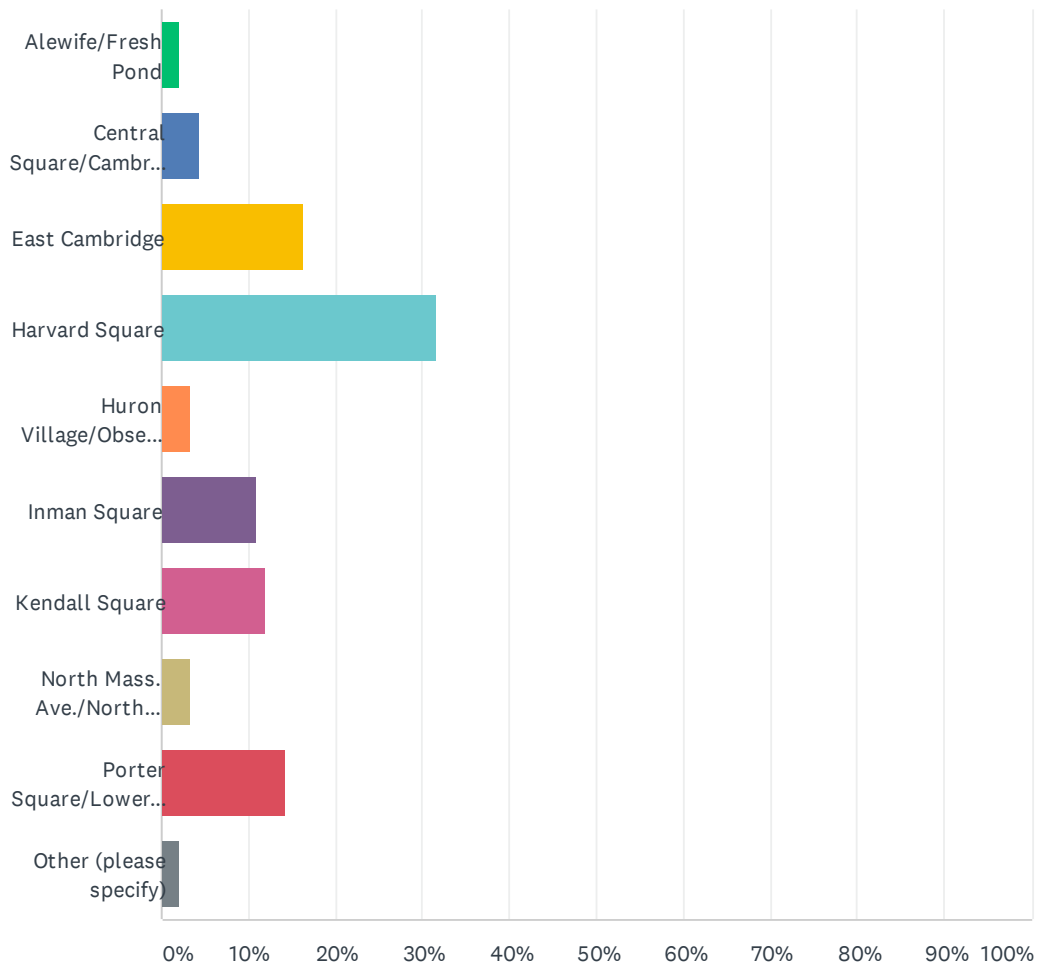


Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Own	33.70%	31
Lease	66.30%	61
TOTAL		92

Q8 In which neighborhood is your business located?

Answered: 92 Skipped: 1



Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

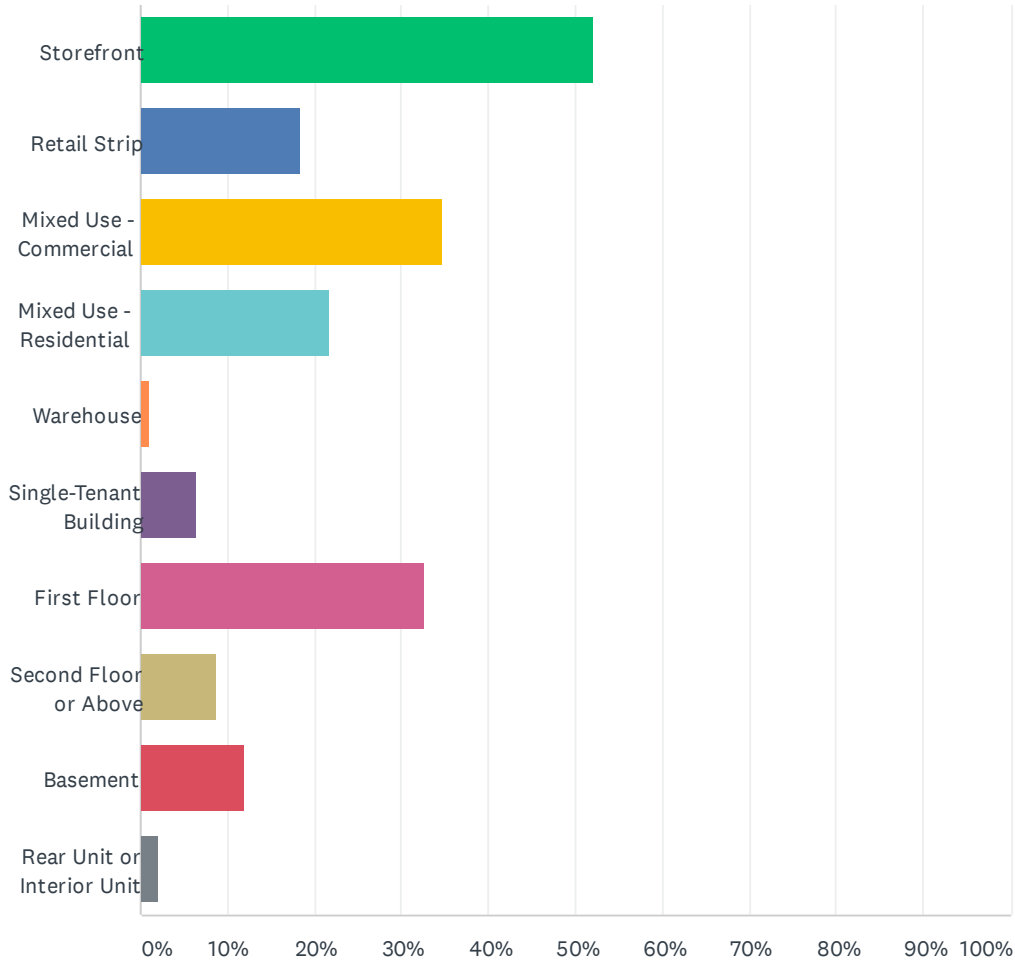
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Alewife/Fresh Pond	2.17%	2
Central Square/Cambridgeport	4.35%	4
East Cambridge	16.30%	15
Harvard Square	31.52%	29
Huron Village/Observatory Hill	3.26%	3
Inman Square	10.87%	10
Kendall Square	11.96%	11
North Mass. Ave./North Cambridge	3.26%	3
Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave.	14.13%	13
Other (please specify)	2.17%	2
TOTAL		92

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Paddys corner	3/6/2020 4:23 PM
2	Alewife/Fresh Pond, Kendall Square, and Harvard Square	3/6/2020 12:54 PM

Q9 What type of building is your business located in? (check all that apply)

Answered: 92 Skipped: 1

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

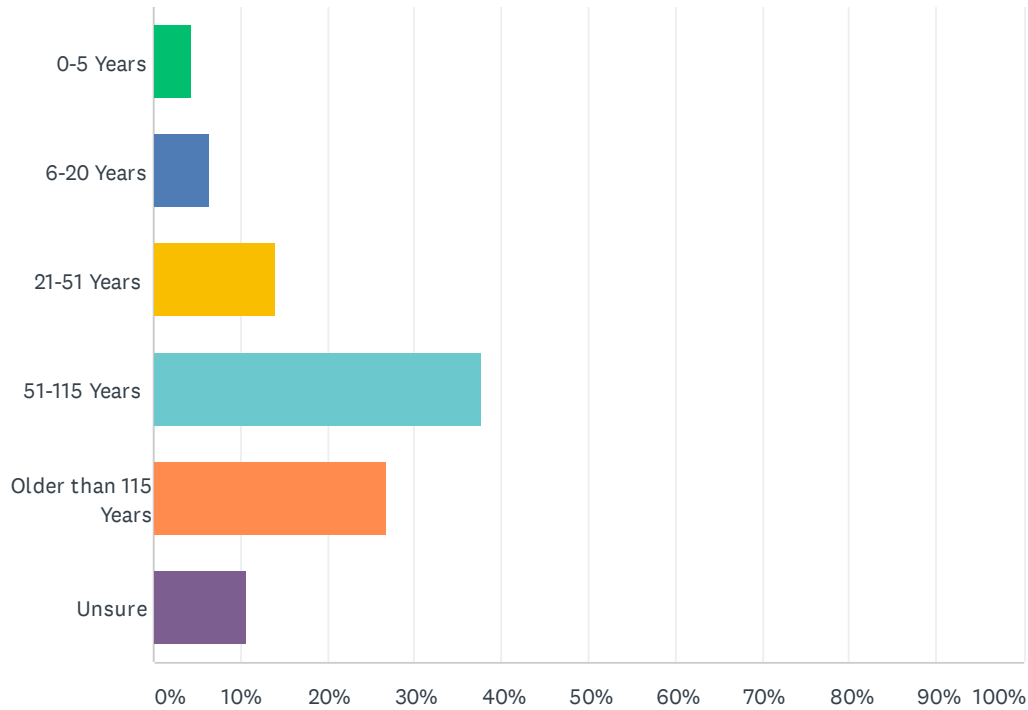


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Storefront	52.17%	48
Retail Strip	18.48%	17
Mixed Use - Commercial	34.78%	32
Mixed Use - Residential	21.74%	20
Warehouse	1.09%	1
Single-Tenant Building	6.52%	6
First Floor	32.61%	30
Second Floor or Above	8.70%	8
Basement	11.96%	11
Rear Unit or Interior Unit	2.17%	2
Total Respondents: 92		

Q10 Approximately how old is the building your business is located in?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

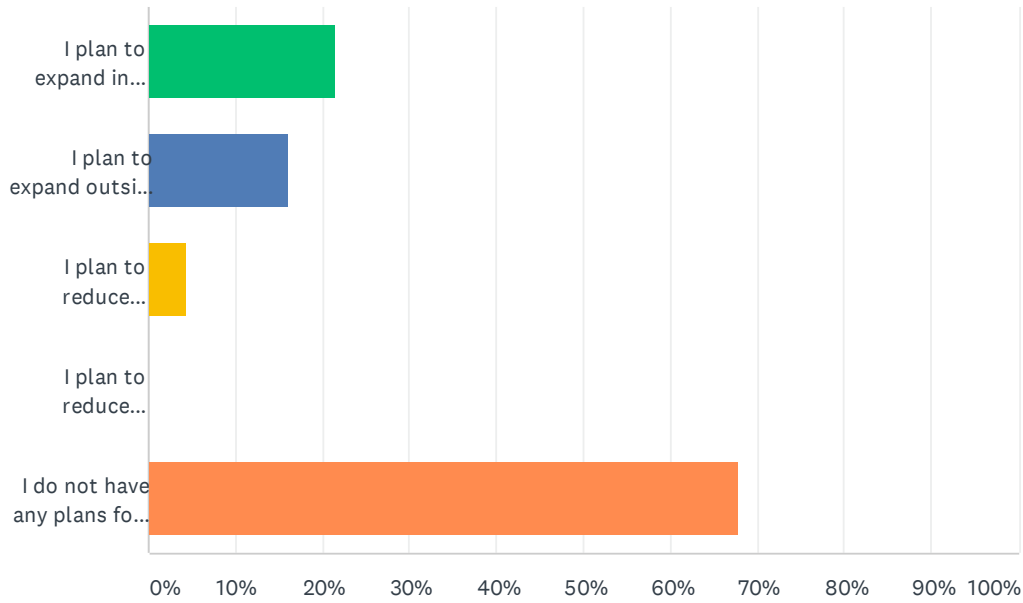


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
0-5 Years	4.30% 4
6-20 Years	6.45% 6
21-51 Years	13.98% 13
51-115 Years	37.63% 35
Older than 115 Years	26.88% 25
Unsure	10.75% 10
TOTAL	93

Q11 Do you have plans to expand (add products, services, employees, square footage, new locations, etc.) or reduce operations for your business in the foreseeable future? (check all that apply)

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

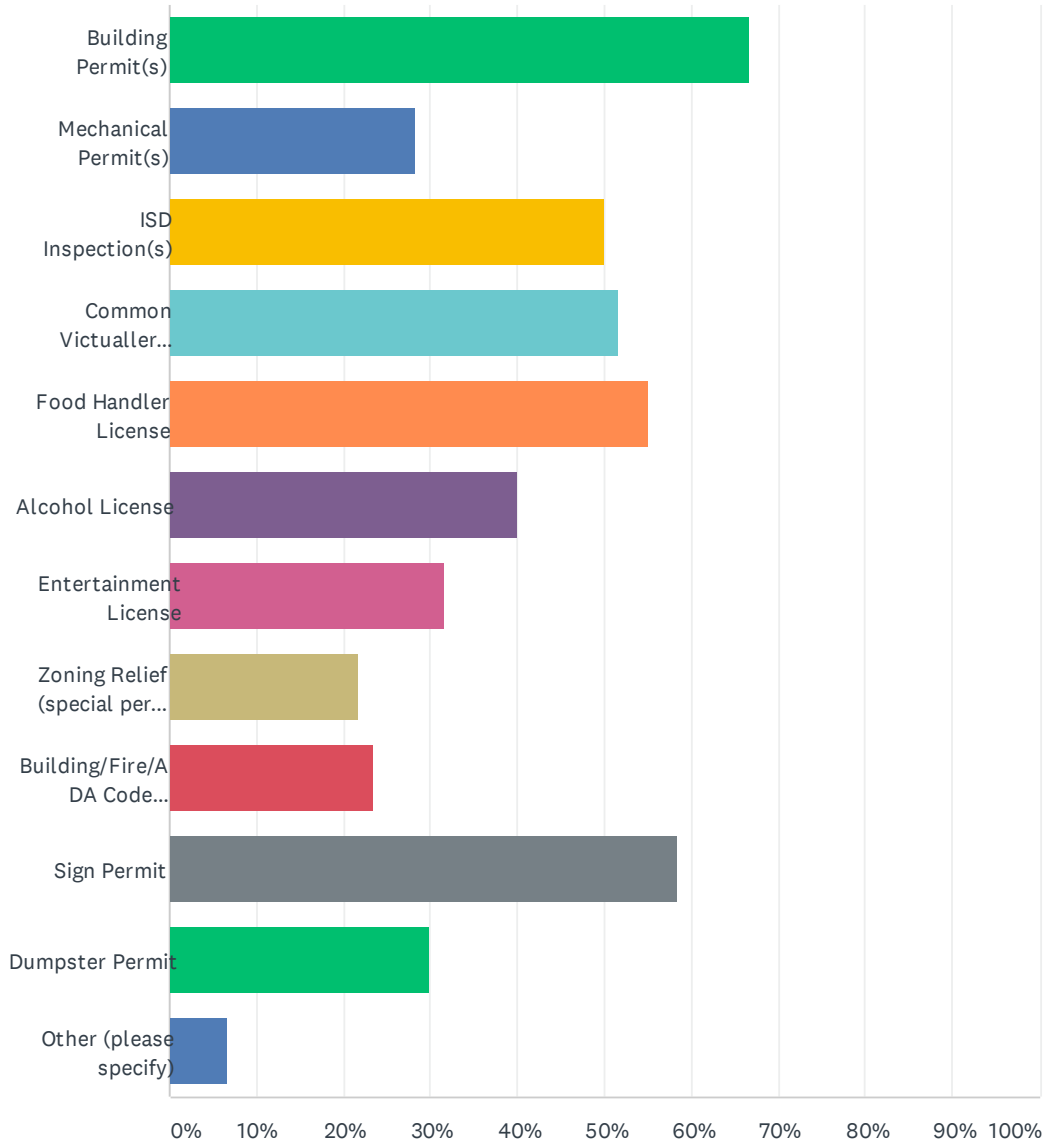


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I plan to expand in Cambridge	21.51%	20
I plan to expand outside of Cambridge	16.13%	15
I plan to reduce operations in Cambridge	4.30%	4
I plan to reduce operations outside of Cambridge	0.00%	0
I do not have any plans for changes right now.	67.74%	63
Total Respondents: 93		

Q12 Did your business require any of the following from the City of Cambridge to open? (check all that apply)

Answered: 60 Skipped: 33

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



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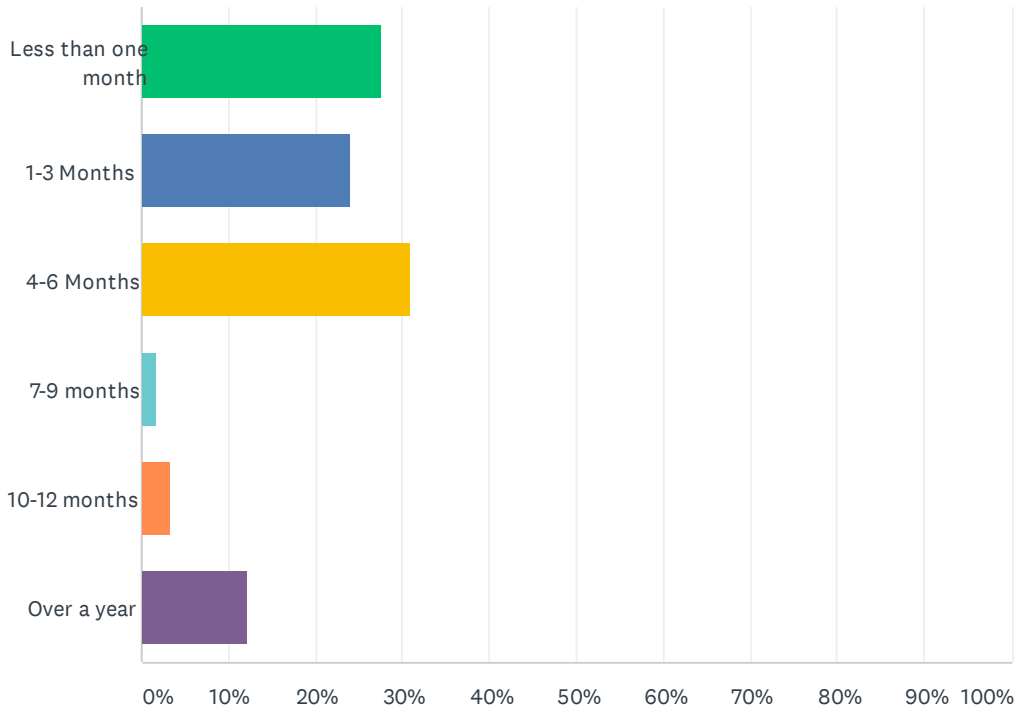
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Building Permit(s)	66.67%	40
Mechanical Permit(s)	28.33%	17
ISD Inspection(s)	50.00%	30
Common Victualler License	51.67%	31
Food Handler License	55.00%	33
Alcohol License	40.00%	24
Entertainment License	31.67%	19
Zoning Relief (special permit or variance)	21.67%	13
Building/Fire/ADA Code Variance	23.33%	14
Sign Permit	58.33%	35
Dumpster Permit	30.00%	18
Other (please specify)	6.67%	4
Total Respondents: 60		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Engineering, Architectural	3/6/2020 5:19 PM
2	Hawker Peddler	3/6/2020 3:43 PM
3	Fire Inspection	3/6/2020 11:16 AM
4	Lodging House license, ADA/AAB compliance	3/6/2020 10:38 AM

Q13 How long did it take you to receive all required permits, licenses, and approvals from the City of Cambridge to open your business?

Answered: 58 Skipped: 35

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

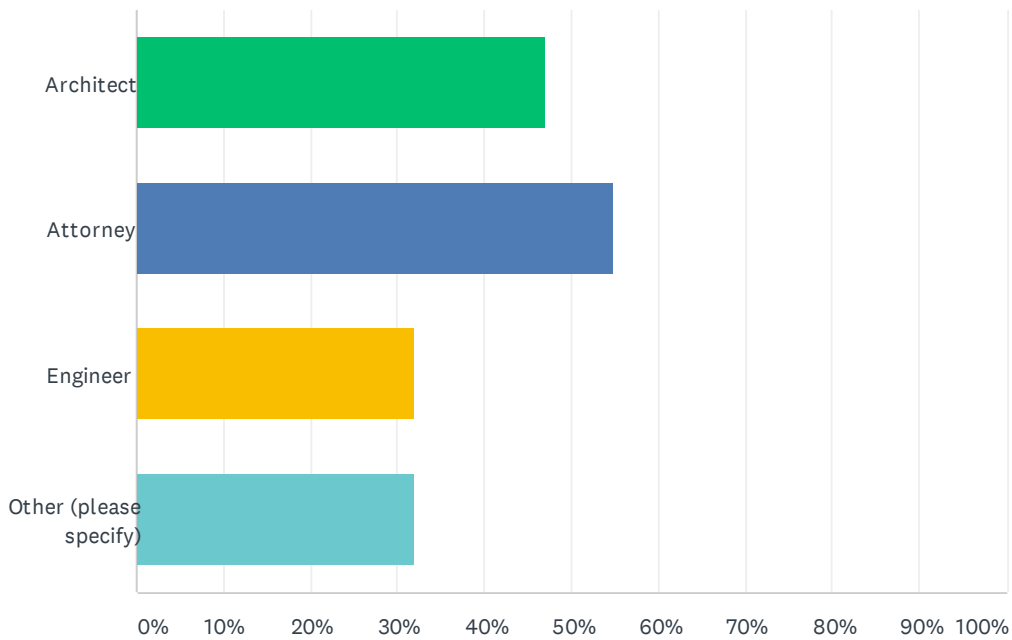


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Less than one month	27.59% 16
1-3 Months	24.14% 14
4-6 Months	31.03% 18
7-9 months	1.72% 1
10-12 months	3.45% 2
Over a year	12.07% 7
TOTAL	58

Q14 Did you need to hire anyone to help you obtain all necessary approvals required by the City of Cambridge to open? (please check all that apply)

Answered: 53 Skipped: 40

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



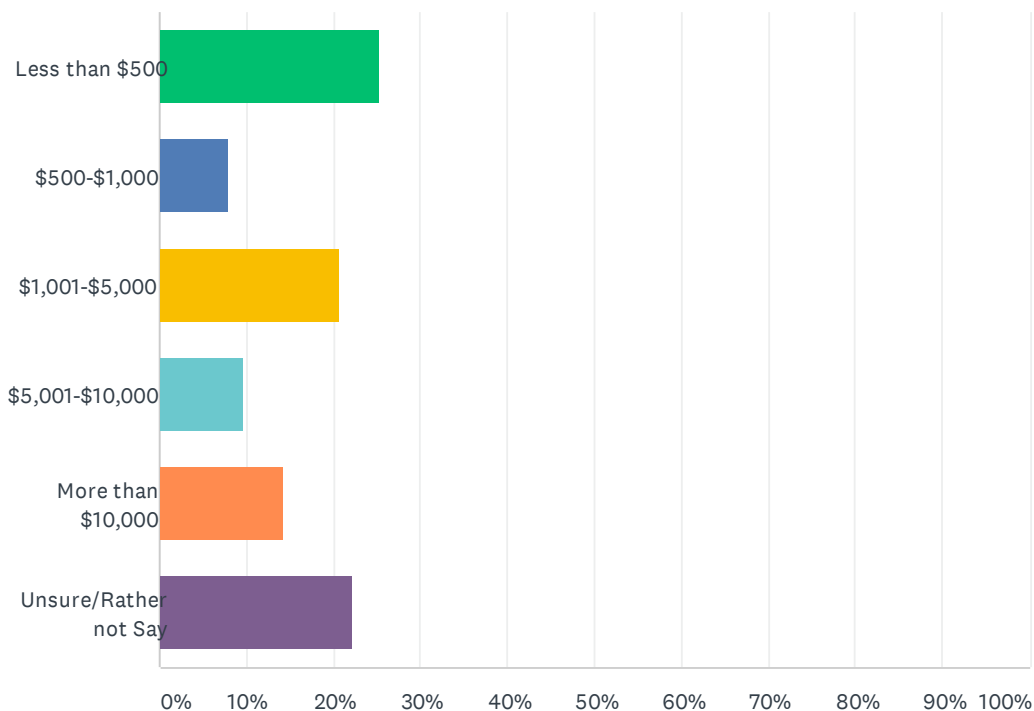
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Architect	47.17%	25
Attorney	54.72%	29
Engineer	32.08%	17
Other (please specify)	32.08%	17
Total Respondents: 53		

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	No	3/17/2020 11:55 AM
2	Management Consultant	3/11/2020 11:40 AM
3	I am an architect - my contractor applied for bldg. permit	3/9/2020 9:27 AM
4	No	3/8/2020 5:51 PM
5	Builder	3/7/2020 5:02 PM
6	Would have had to hire architect, but the project provided.	3/7/2020 4:30 PM
7	No	3/7/2020 3:10 PM
8	Electrician and carpenters	3/7/2020 9:03 AM
9	expeditor	3/6/2020 6:08 PM
10	Construction company	3/6/2020 4:24 PM
11	none	3/6/2020 4:17 PM
12	none	3/6/2020 3:43 PM
13	workman to install flooring	3/6/2020 1:08 PM
14	NA	3/6/2020 9:36 AM
15	no	3/6/2020 9:12 AM
16	No	3/6/2020 9:06 AM
17	Sign fabricator	3/6/2020 8:51 AM

Q15 Approximately how much did it cost to obtain all necessary approvals required by the City of Cambridge to open your business?

Answered: 63 Skipped: 30

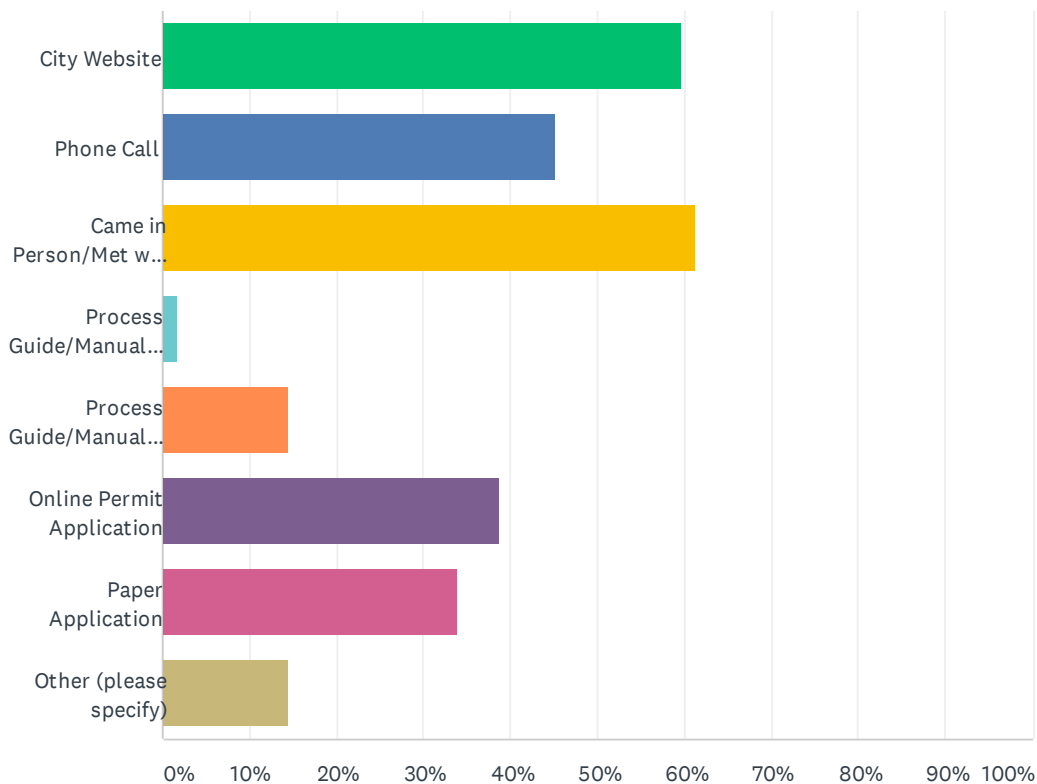


Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than \$500	25.40%	16
\$500-\$1,000	7.94%	5
\$1,001-\$5,000	20.63%	13
\$5,001-\$10,000	9.52%	6
More than \$10,000	14.29%	9
Unsure/Rather not Say	22.22%	14
TOTAL		63

Q16 Which of the following did you use to obtain information from the City of Cambridge on how to open your business? (check all that apply)

Answered: 62 Skipped: 31



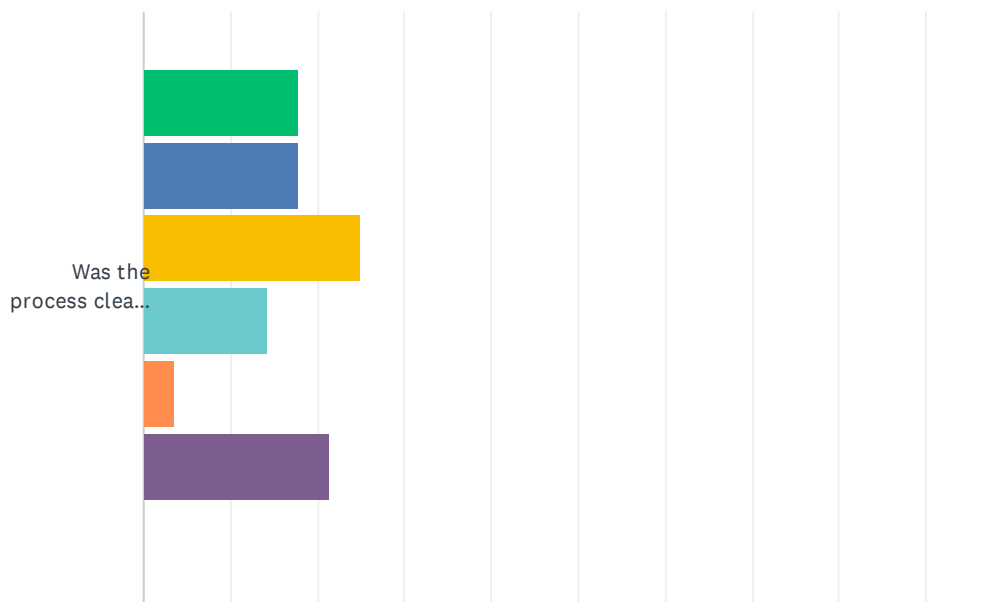
Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
City Website	59.68%	37
Phone Call	45.16%	28
Came in Person/Met with City Staff	61.29%	38
Process Guide/Manual (print edition)	1.61%	1
Process Guide/Manual (online edition)	14.52%	9
Online Permit Application	38.71%	24
Paper Application	33.87%	21
Other (please specify)	14.52%	9
Total Respondents: 62		

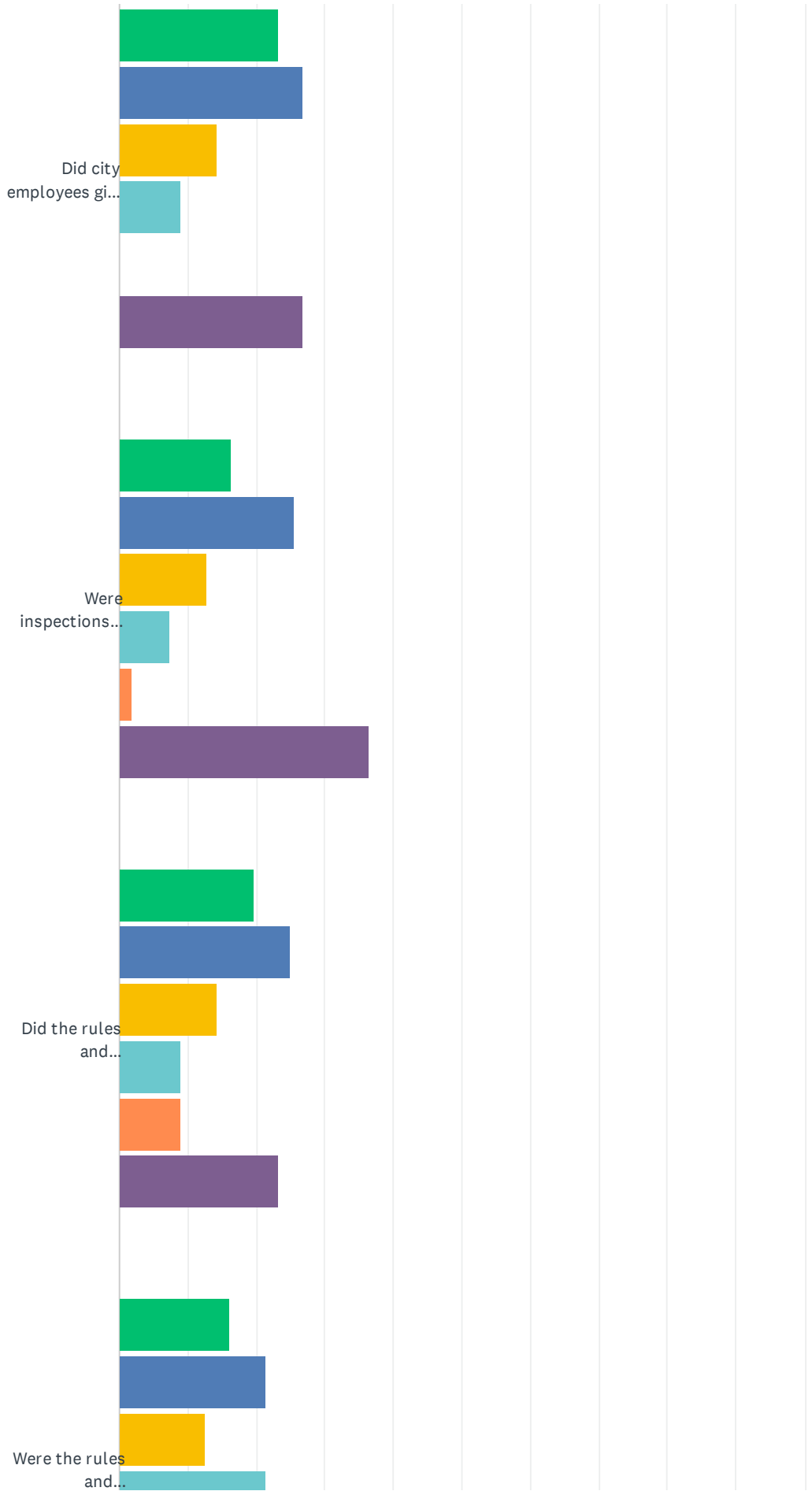
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	from the attorney that we hired	3/9/2020 2:45 PM
2	Need to check with our Buliding Agents.	3/9/2020 10:58 AM
3	unsure	3/9/2020 10:35 AM
4	experience	3/9/2020 9:39 AM
5	No	3/8/2020 5:51 PM
6	Attorney	3/6/2020 5:19 PM
7	Our business opened in 1971 and again in 2001 so we have worked with the city in a number of ways over the years	3/6/2020 10:34 AM
8	NA, been open forever	3/6/2020 9:36 AM
9	Lawyer	3/6/2020 8:51 AM

Q17 Please rate your experience opening a business in Cambridge:

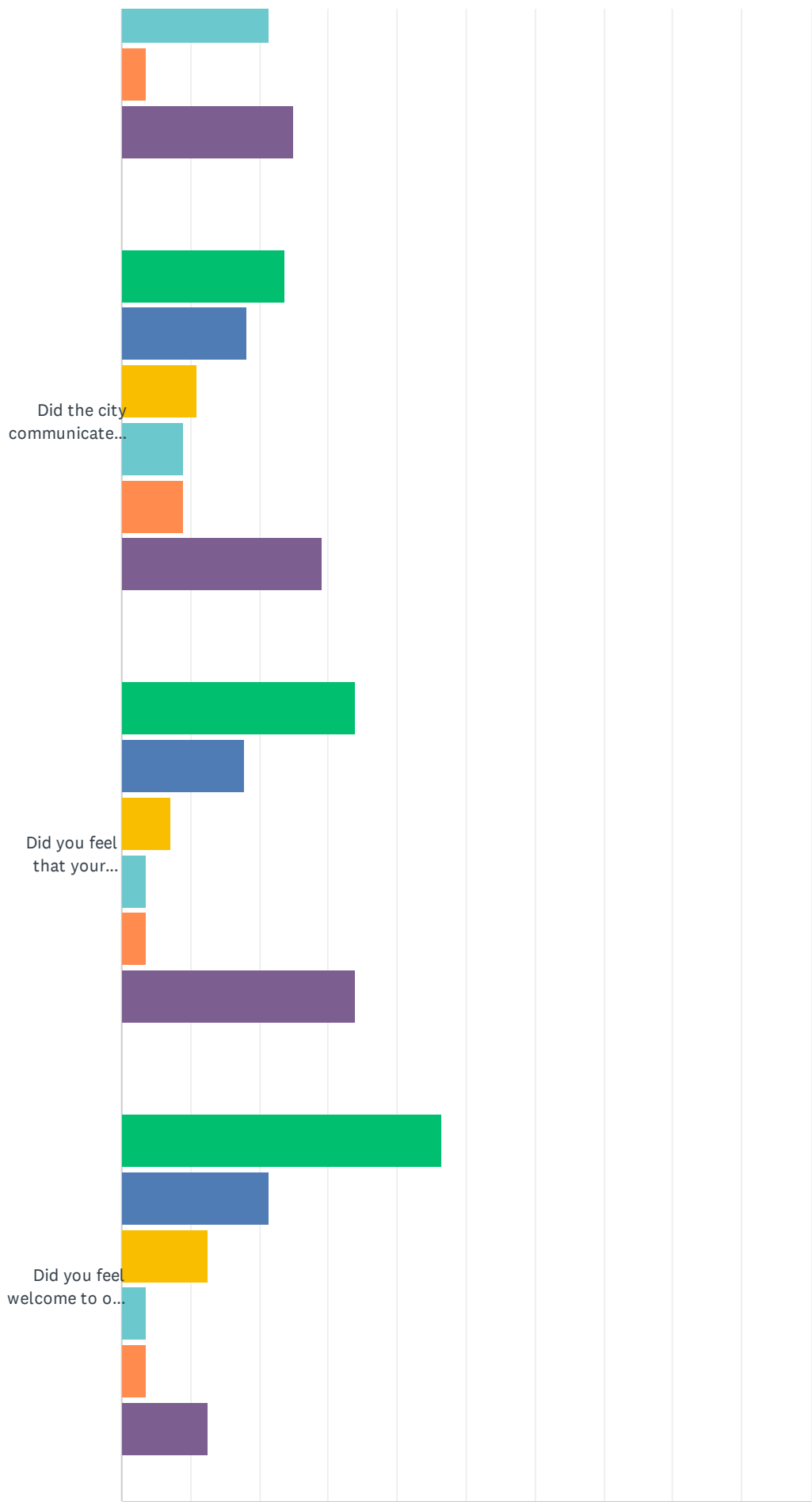
Answered: 56 Skipped: 37



Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



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0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Agree
 ■ Mostly Agree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree
■ N/A

	AGREE	MOSTLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	N/A	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Was the process clear from the outset?	17.86% 10	17.86% 10	25.00% 14	14.29% 8	3.57% 2	21.43% 12	56	0.41
Did city employees give consistent information/guidance?	23.21% 13	26.79% 15	14.29% 8	8.93% 5	0.00% 0	26.79% 15	56	0.88
Were inspections timely?	16.36% 9	25.45% 14	12.73% 7	7.27% 4	1.82% 1	36.36% 20	55	0.74
Did the rules and requirements make sense?	19.64% 11	25.00% 14	14.29% 8	8.93% 5	8.93% 5	23.21% 13	56	0.49
Were the rules and requirements easy to find?	16.07% 9	21.43% 12	12.50% 7	21.43% 12	3.57% 2	25.00% 14	56	0.33
Did the city communicate clearly and in a timely manner about your application(s)?	23.64% 13	18.18% 10	10.91% 6	9.09% 5	9.09% 5	29.09% 16	55	0.54
Did you feel that your hearings were fair and that you were treated with respect?	33.93% 19	17.86% 10	7.14% 4	3.57% 2	3.57% 2	33.93% 19	56	1.14
Did you feel welcome to open your business in Cambridge?	46.43% 26	21.43% 12	12.50% 7	3.57% 2	3.57% 2	12.50% 7	56	1.18

Q18 Is there any reason for the ratings you gave above?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 62

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

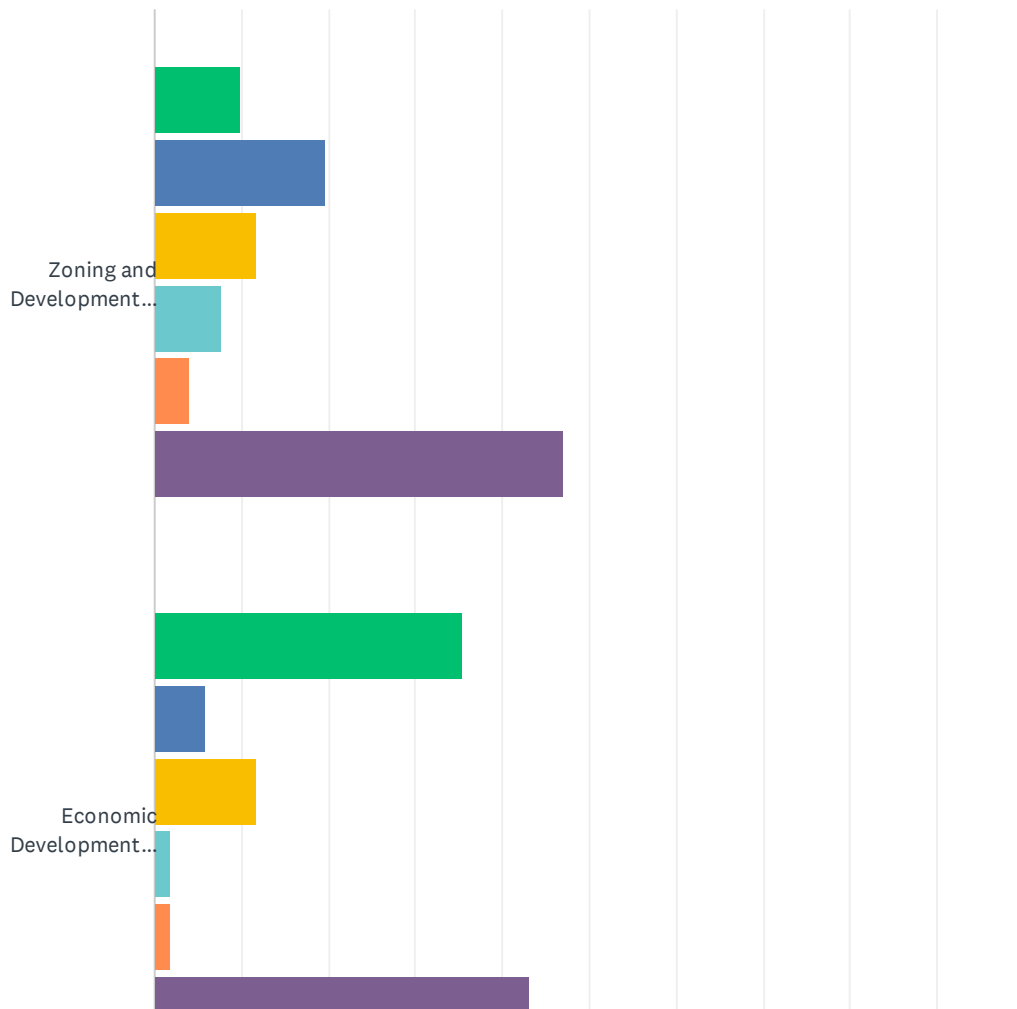
#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	N/A	3/11/2020 11:43 AM
2	We were new to opening a retail business so were attentive to what our attorney and city depts had for guidance.	3/9/2020 2:27 PM
3	The City was welcoming and cooperative and assisted us thru the process	3/9/2020 12:20 PM
4	I do not make these decisions for our bank.	3/9/2020 11:01 AM
5	I was not involved in the opening of the business	3/9/2020 10:37 AM
6	previous to my experience	3/9/2020 9:41 AM
7	I only needed a business license and that process was straight-forward. However, I don't know how long I can afford to keep my business (law firm) in Cambridge as I see that small businesses are constantly being driven out to Malden/Woburn etc. to make room for condos. Also, it is really going to be harmful to my business that the Lechmere station will be shut down for some unknown amount of time. My clients often live in East Boston or Chelsea and also don't use email so they have to meet me in person. There is absolutely no parking near my office building (189 Cambridge Street). It will take multiple hours to get to my office via the 2-3 buses that will be necessary with no T service. I really wish that the MBTA and the city would do something besides say "sorry for the inconvenience."	3/9/2020 9:09 AM
8	The political climate toward business is quite harsh right now. Cambridge's natural gas ban is absurd. Where do they council believe their electricity comes from? It's natural gas- sourced. How is anyone going to afford a heating bill supplied by electric? How is a restaurant going to cook without natural gas?	3/9/2020 8:40 AM
9	Since our non-profit bookstore opened almost 50 years ago, and there have been many changes in staff since then, I'm afraid we have no one here who can remember.	3/8/2020 3:27 PM
10	My process is ongoing and I have gotten great information from several employees across several different offices. One employee gave information that was incomplete or incorrect resulting in a delay. Another employee requested answers to questions I didn't fully understand. Except for the last employee I just mentioned, every single employee made me feel welcome to ask as many questions as I wanted and seemed to truly want me to understand what I needed to do. For the most part they've all been very pleasant and helpful.	3/7/2020 4:35 PM
11	Not specifically	3/7/2020 3:12 PM
12	No	3/7/2020 1:46 PM
13	I have had bad experience with Zoning official.	3/7/2020 7:04 AM
14	Process is disjointed and hard to follow without lawyers and architects which added to cost to open	3/6/2020 7:58 PM
15	On-line system is difficult. Understanding ISD and License Commission differences isn't clear. Getting determinations in a timely understood manner is up in the air - meanwhile, you're still paying rent. This alone drives up costs enormously. On the other hand, this city has been very good to my business. It's just a difficult process to get through. I doubt I would ever opt to build out a new location from scratch. I would far prefer to take over someone else's already licensed and permitted location.	3/6/2020 5:30 PM
16	Good opening with help from city.	3/6/2020 5:19 PM
17	It's very difficult for a small local buisness to navigate the complexity of the process	3/6/2020 5:19 PM
18	No they target my trucks and purposely tell the meter maid to rocket them Where another contractor could park in the same spot and not be ticketed	3/6/2020 4:48 PM
19	Easy	3/6/2020 4:45 PM
20	not involved in the permitting process	3/6/2020 4:18 PM
21	In business since 1854	3/6/2020 4:02 PM
22	No	3/6/2020 3:31 PM

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

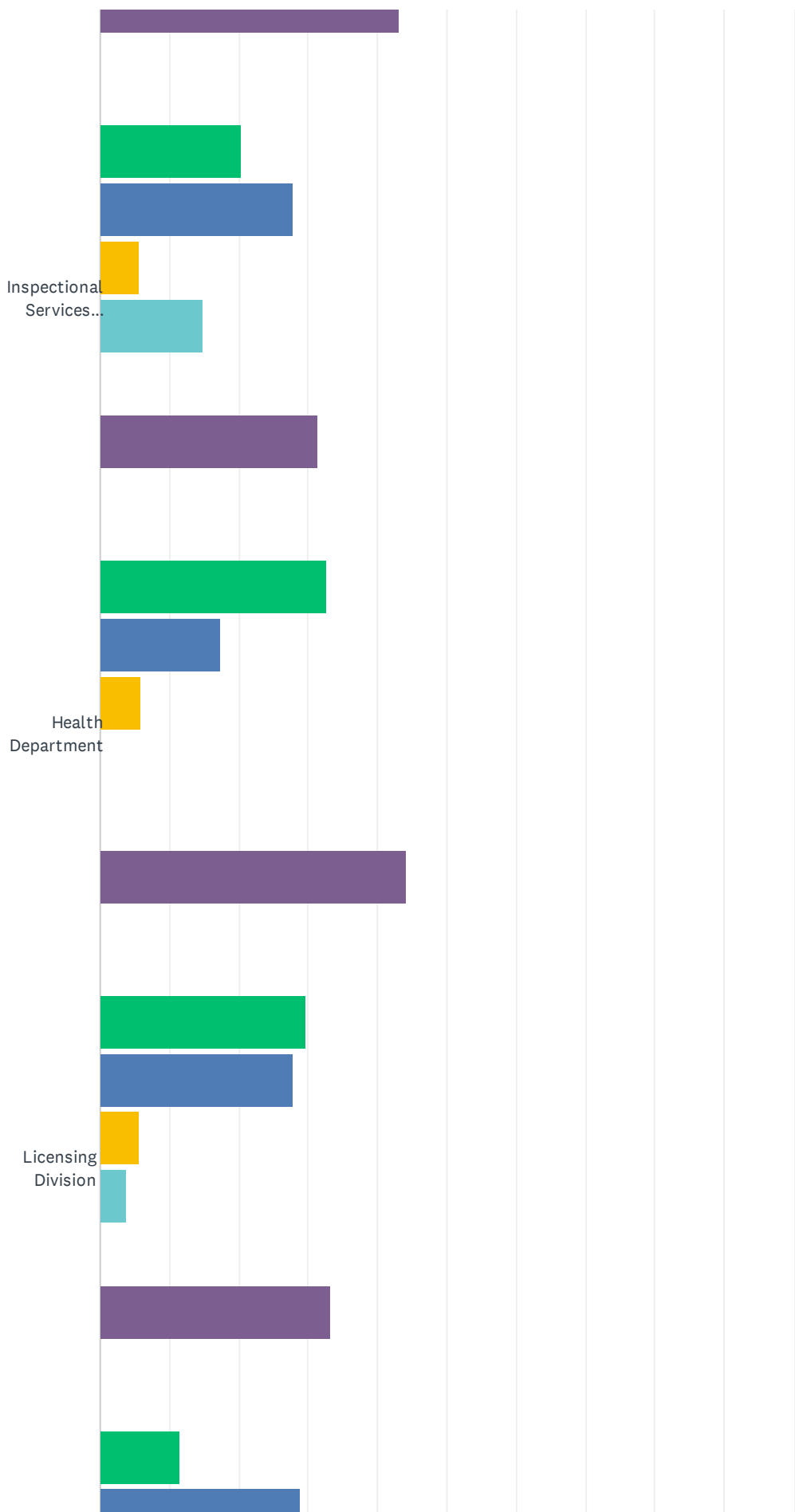
23	I bought an existing business , so I wasn't responsible for permits 35 years ago.	3/6/2020 3:24 PM
24	yes	3/6/2020 3:01 PM
25	I feel the connectivity between departments- not knowing the flow, who to contact---not always feeling knowledge is shared beyond the contact person's point of view/knowledge....and that the website can be a labrynth...	3/6/2020 11:16 AM
26	We were treated unfairly back in the 1990s. It cost us enormous amounts of money in legal fees and lost revenue for years. And we still operate on an unloved playing field	3/6/2020 10:42 AM
27	Again, I don't think it's appropriate to provide feedback for a process we went through generations ago	3/6/2020 10:37 AM
28	Our business has been open forever	3/6/2020 9:38 AM
29	yes	3/6/2020 9:26 AM
30	The store was opened in 1964 I was not the person applying for the permits, the person who did the process has pasted away.	3/6/2020 9:18 AM
31	Based on what I think because my experience was 18 years ago however my experience is when I have to go up to City Hall have always been great ones everyone's been very friendly and has assisted me with what I need.	3/6/2020 9:09 AM

Q19 Please rate your experience with the following City Departments when opening your business:

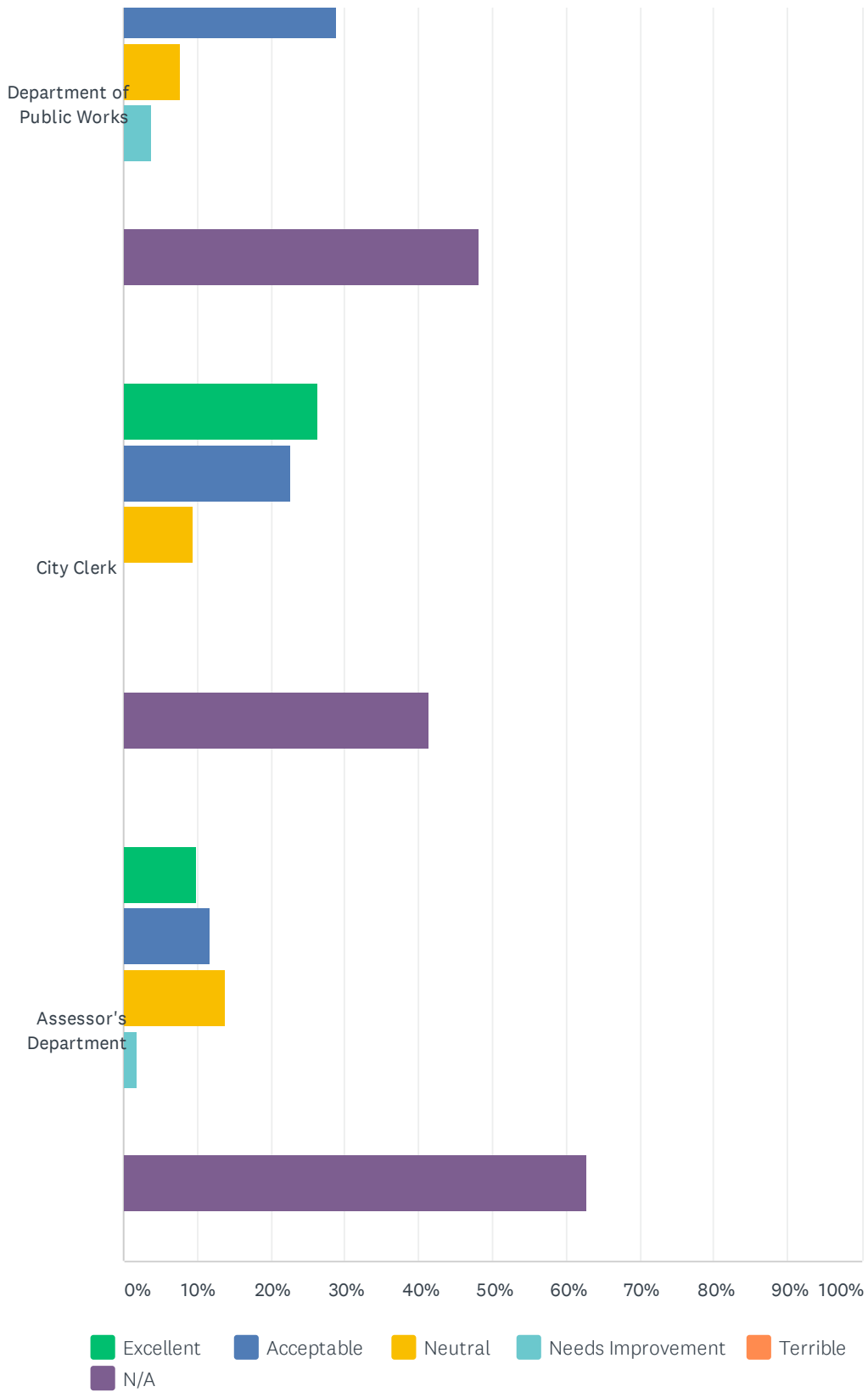
Answered: 54 Skipped: 39



Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

	EXCELLENT	ACCEPTABLE	NEUTRAL	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	TERRIBLE	N/A	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Zoning and Development Division	9.80% 5	19.61% 10	11.76% 6	7.84% 4	3.92% 2	47.06% 24	51	0.44
Economic Development Division	35.29% 18	5.88% 3	11.76% 6	1.96% 1	1.96% 1	43.14% 22	51	1.24
Inspectional Services Department	20.37% 11	27.78% 15	5.56% 3	14.81% 8	0.00% 0	31.48% 17	54	0.78
Health Department	32.69% 17	17.31% 9	5.77% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	44.23% 23	52	1.48
Licensing Division	29.63% 16	27.78% 15	5.56% 3	3.70% 2	0.00% 0	33.33% 18	54	1.25
Department of Public Works	11.54% 6	28.85% 15	7.69% 4	3.85% 2	0.00% 0	48.08% 25	52	0.93
City Clerk	26.42% 14	22.64% 12	9.43% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	41.51% 22	53	1.29
Assessor's Department	9.80% 5	11.76% 6	13.73% 7	1.96% 1	0.00% 0	62.75% 32	51	0.79

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	I do not make these decisions for the bank.	3/9/2020 11:01 AM
2	Elizabeth in licensing is excellent.	3/7/2020 4:35 PM
3	In business since 1854	3/6/2020 4:02 PM
4	not pleased that licences have been raised without notice....	3/6/2020 11:16 AM

Q20 Is there any reason for the ratings you gave above?

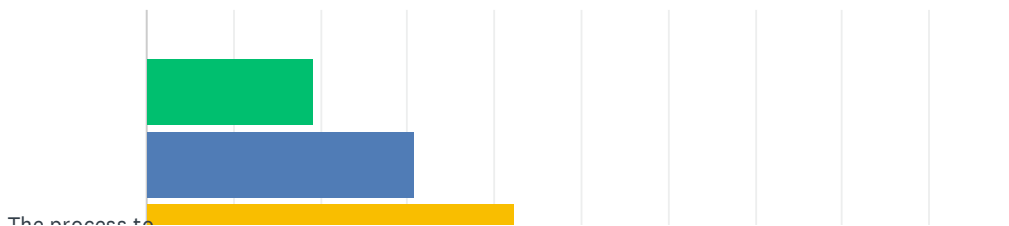
Answered: 25 Skipped: 68

Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

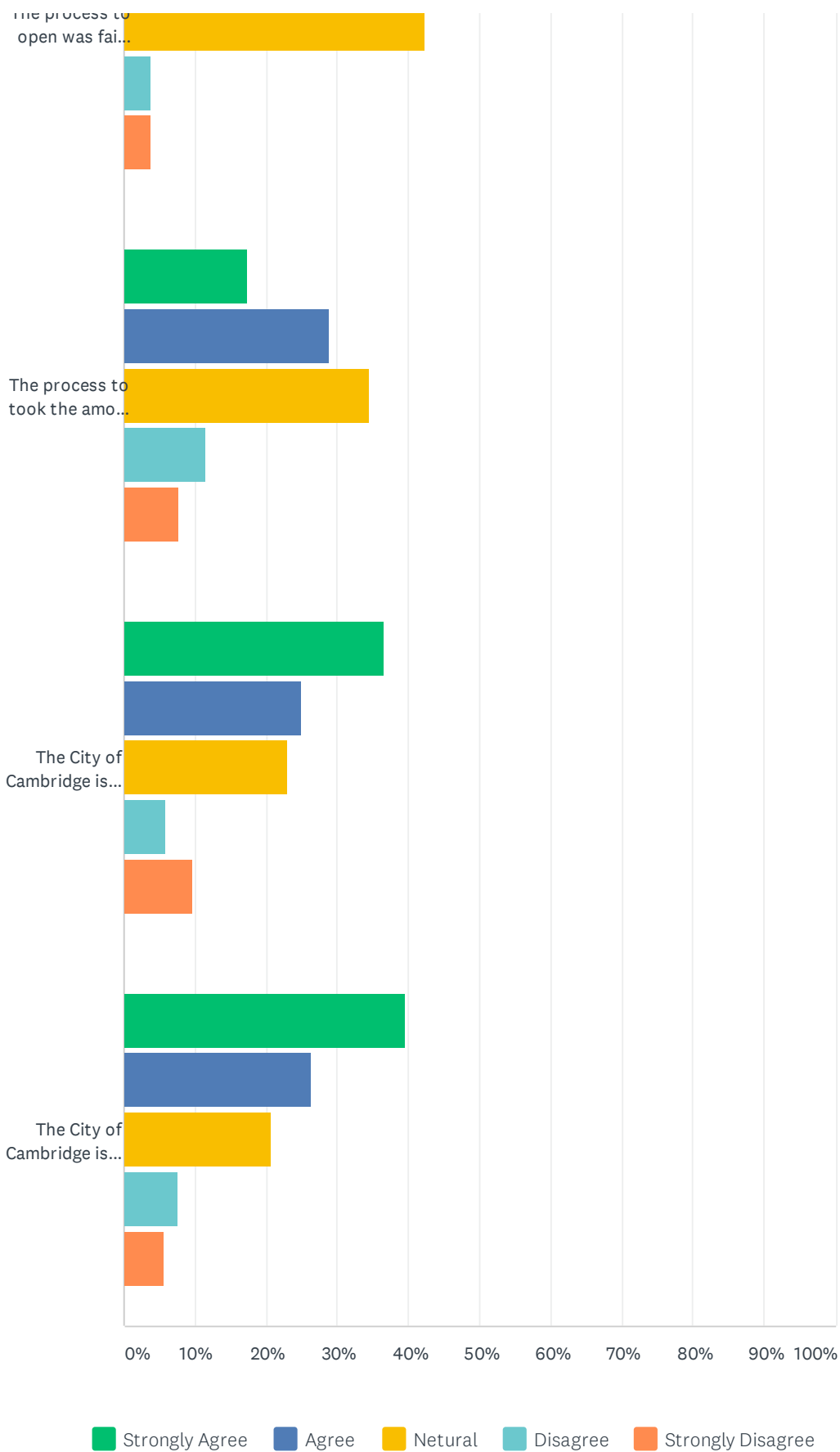
#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Policies are inconsistent and they change year to year, especially in relation to having events with alcohol. Also, City's policy very different from Boston's policies and the ABCC regulates both cities. I think there is too much left to interpretation.	3/17/2020 12:00 PM
2	Assessor never got back to me even after contacting them twice.	3/11/2020 11:43 AM
3	See above.	3/9/2020 11:01 AM
4	As stated above	3/9/2020 10:37 AM
5	none	3/9/2020 9:41 AM
6	Very helpful people in the assessors department.	3/9/2020 8:40 AM
7	Mixed experience with licensing Dept.	3/7/2020 4:35 PM
8	Not specifically	3/7/2020 3:12 PM
9	No	3/7/2020 1:46 PM
10	Told to hire a lawyer	3/6/2020 7:58 PM
11	I think all of the people in the individual departments are doing the best they can and there are some really great people working for the city. It just seems that the system and the requirements that everyone has to work within is the problem.	3/6/2020 5:30 PM
12	N/A	3/6/2020 5:20 PM
13	Easy to work with city departments.	3/6/2020 5:19 PM
14	No	3/6/2020 4:45 PM
15	.	3/6/2020 4:18 PM
16	In business since 1854	3/6/2020 4:02 PM
17	No	3/6/2020 3:31 PM
18	yes	3/6/2020 3:01 PM
19	well, yes- they've been good	3/6/2020 11:16 AM
20	It has been difficult to see people either casually or by appointment. And neighbors' fears are given way too much weight, especially when they are entirely unfounded. And then the laws are not equally enforced.	3/6/2020 10:42 AM
21	See previous	3/6/2020 10:37 AM
22	Most are NA	3/6/2020 9:38 AM
23	Yes	3/6/2020 9:26 AM
24	same as above the person who did process is no longer here.	3/6/2020 9:18 AM
25	Because of my experience with working with City Hall and the other city businesses to get my business off the ground my experience has been excellent	3/6/2020 9:09 AM

Q21 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Answered: 53 Skipped: 40



Small Business Efficiency Project Survey



Small Business Efficiency Project Survey

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NETURAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The process to open was fair and reasonable	19.23% 10	30.77% 16	42.31% 22	3.85% 2	3.85% 2	52	2.42
The process to took the amount of time I thought it would	17.31% 9	28.85% 15	34.62% 18	11.54% 6	7.69% 4	52	2.63
The City of Cambridge is supportive of small businesses	36.54% 19	25.00% 13	23.08% 12	5.77% 3	9.62% 5	52	2.27
The City of Cambridge is an excellent place to have a business	39.62% 21	26.42% 14	20.75% 11	7.55% 4	5.66% 3	53	2.13

Q22 Contact Information:

Answered: 28 Skipped: 65

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Name	100.00% 28
Affiliation	71.43% 20
Address	0.00% 0
Address 2	0.00% 0
City/Town	0.00% 0
State/Province	0.00% 0
ZIP/Postal Code	0.00% 0
Country	0.00% 0
Email Address	96.43% 27
Phone Number	89.29% 25

Useful Links

Inspectional Service Department

[Building Permit Instructions](#)

[Building Permit Checklist](#)

[Step by Step Building Permit Guide](#)

[ISD Staff Contact Information](#)

[ISD Applications](#)

[Fee Schedule](#)

Community Development Department

[Special Permit & Variance Applications and Instructions](#)

[Fee Schedule](#)

[BZA Procedures](#)

[Steps to Opening a Restaurant Guide](#)

[Steps to Starting Your Own Business](#)

[Small Business Assistance Programs](#)

License Commission

[License Commission Rules and Regulations](#)

[Licensing Applications](#)

[Alcohol Fee Schedule](#)

[Entertainment Fee Schedule](#)