ABBOTSFORD

Sector Roundtable

HOSPITALITY

Summary

November 6, 2025

Produced for the City of Abbotsford

Sector Roundtable **HOSPITALITY**

Background

The Sectoral Roundtable initiative is a research and business retention and expansion project managed by the City's Economic Development department. The goal of the Sectoral Roundtable initiative is to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in key sectors of the Abbotsford economy.

This research initiative supports both *Principle 3: Vibrant and Growing Economy (Invest in Building Relationships that Facilitate Alignment)* of Council's 2022-26 Strategic Plan and the Business Retention and Expansion Strategy's *Goal 3: Strengthen Relationships and Communication with the Business Community.*

As part of its mandate, the City's Economic Development Department is responsible for supporting business retention and expansion as a key contributor to the vibrancy and resiliency of the community, providing employment opportunities, and generating revenues that allow the community to continue to grow and prosper.

The City's Economic Development Department is seeking insights into the Hospitality industry in the current economy and looking for feedback on how the City and business organizations within Abbotsford can support and attract new businesses to strengthen Abbotsford's Hospitality sector.

Senior-level business representatives from eight businesses within Abbotsford's Hospitality community participated in the facilitated roundtable at Abbotsford City Hall on November 6, 2025. The roundtable was moderated by a third-party consultant and included dot voting exercises and question-based facilitated discussion. This roundtable is the final in a series of four sector roundtables hosted in 2025 by the City of Abbotsford.

Roundtable Composition and Framework

Each sectoral roundtable is sector-specific in discussion orientation. The format of each of the four roundtables will remain consistent. Each roundtable will have the capacity to host up to 15 participants who will be secured through sector outreach and invitation. Senior-level business representatives from eight businesses within Abbotsford's Hospitality sector participated in the November 6, 2025 roundtable. This included representatives from the following industries: accommodations and conference centre, theme park, food and flora farming, agri-tourism, food and beverage manufacturers and providers.

The objectives of the session were to:

- Share insights from businesses within Abbotsford's Hospitality industry,
- Discuss industry challenges and opportunities in Abbotsford,
- Identify specific actions needed for tangible outcomes to occur in Abbotsford,
- Suggest ways in which the City's Economic Development Department can best support Abbotsford's Hospitality industry.

A discussion guide was developed which formed the basis for the development of roundtable activities that promoted participant engagement and dialogue. The roundtable was moderated by a third-party consultant and included dot voting exercises and question-based facilitated discussion.

Key Insights Shared

From both the dot voting exercise and questions-based roundtable discussion, the following items emerged as key insights shared that resonated across all participants:

Abbotsford Strengths

- Abbotsford's ethos, culture, character
- Abbotsford is a growing community with great potential
- There is a strong community of hospitality businesses striving to build/grow Abbotsford
- Abbotsford is proximate to a significant customer base within 1.5 hours driving radius in both Canada and USA

Challenges in Abbotsford

Provincial/ Regional Challenges

- Provincial regulations protect land, not farming / agri-tourism businesses and its economic potential,
- Tourism Abbotsford is perceived to be inadequately funded to lead initiatives that are instrumental to hospitality sector,
- Need for more public transit routes and frequencies.

Municipal Challenges

- Prospective investors/businesses see Abbotsford as a small town, a farm town – not a suburban centre,
- Perception that City undervalues direct, indirect and induced spend generated by businesses in Abbotsford's hospitality sector,
- City Hall is not regarded as being business-friendly; it's easier to start a business elsewhere,
- 'One-size-fits-all' municipal regulations are challenging for small business to manage,
- Need for investment in additional sports and entertainment infrastructure.

Opportunities for Abbotsford

- Abbotsford is an agricultural community that should focus on investing to become a major "food hub",
- Visitors come to Abbotsford for events. There is potential to increase overnight stays and spending by investing in sports and entertainment infrastructure.
- Need for Council to better understand the hospitality sector and advocate for changes to regulatory barriers,
- Work closer with farmers on flood protection,
- Increased parking would encourage "park and walk" and "park and shop" opportunities.

Participant-Identified Recommendations for City and Business Organizations in the Community

- Be open to exploring 'who' Abbotsford is today; the community is changing and not what it was before
- Evaluate the value of the visitor economy in Abbotsford and the cost of hospitality
- Invest in, develop, and promote Abbotsford as a 'hospitality hub'
- Establish a municipal grant program directed at providing funding support for investments in hospitality businesses
- Adopt CEPCO model; mandate proactive economic development initiatives and require accountability to the business community
- Provide increased funding to Tourism Abbotsford to deliver key initiatives
- Launch a business concierge service at City Hall to position businesses for success in the economy; there is an expectation that businesses understand all requirements which is inaccurate and problematic
- Communicate broadly the actions taken resulting from Business Walks

- Reduce municipal red tape; businesses feel they first need to reflect on if and when to approach City Hall because of predictable red tape
- Ensure uniform interpretation of regulations and permit requirements by City staff; currently experience different info / responses from different staff
- Reduce barriers to talk with / meet with Council
- Explore transit shuttle options to bring in consumers from other municipalities

Key Observations

Throughout the roundtable, participants spoke openly and consistently about issues and opportunities regardless of the industry the business was in within the hospitality sector.

In the current economic climate, businesses in the hospitality sector are increasingly experiencing pressure to deliver 'top tier' experiences at static pricing. Participants noted that their costs have risen which in turn causes their products to be more expensive. They also noted that consumers appear to be more willing to pay increasing cost of groceries but are less willing to pay even nominal price increases on hospitality food and beverage. Businesses are continuously managing tariff uncertainty and cost volatility. At the same time, profit margins are dwindling causing businesses to re-evaluate their future viability.

While Abbotsford is recognized as having a strong network of hospitality businesses that are committed to building and growing in Abbotsford, there is a perception that the hospitality sector is undervalued by the City in terms of the direct, indirect, and induced spend that it generates for Abbotsford's economy. Sector businesses are looking to the City to better understand the sector and advocate for change to imposed regulatory barriers on the sector's businesses.

Based on the insights shared, participants are looking to the City to:
- Invest in things that matter to Abbotsford's economy including sports and entertainment infrastructure
- Initiate City-funded programs to sponsor non-municipal visitor attraction events and to fund investments in hospitality businesses (e.g. grant programs for patios, façade improvements, signage etc.)
- Launch a business concierge service at City Hall to position businesses for success in the economy
- Be more transparent about the City's workplan to work with and engage businesses
- Reduce municipal red tape and ensure uniform interpretation of regulations and permit requirements by City staff
- Hold 'Town Hall' with Council and sector businesses to build and foster relationships