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## Discovery Report

Town of Davidson COVID-19  
Recovery & Resources  
Solution

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# Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many small businesses in the Town of Davidson to close or severely limit their operations. Many business owners have tried to engage customers in new ways to sustain revenue streams. With no distinct end to the global pandemic in sight and uncertainty around continued government aid, business owners are increasingly anxious and continually asking questions on how to both maintain and strengthen their businesses during this unprecedented time.

In an effort to support its local businesses, the Town of Davidson contracted *bloom.* to provide a COVID-19 Recovery & Resources Solution for its business owners. The following is an outline of key themes and notable ideas that we collected through a community assessment.

- Feedback was derived from a total of 22 one-on-one interviews.
- We spent time with 14 business owners to understand their business adaptations, pivots, and needs.
- We also talked to 8 active community members to gather insight into how consumer behavior has evolved due to our health crisis and what that might mean for how they engage with local businesses moving forward.

# Feedback

## Business Owners Interviewed

Karen Toney (Ben + Jerry's)  
Liz Connally (Elisabeth Rose Social Stationary)  
Mariano Doble (Davidson Village Inn)  
Robert Maynard (Famous Toastery)  
Zach Whitt (Good Drip Coffee)  
Jenny Brule (Davidson Ice House)  
Doug Surratt (Carrburritos)  
Krissy Feighery (The Casual Creative)  
Van Crawford (Wooden Stone Gallery)  
Beth Drinkwater (AR Workshop)  
Cristal Moncur (Homewood Suites)  
Dr. Lexi Lain (Summit Vitality)  
Kim Clark (Hearts on Fiber)  
Abigail Jennings (Lake Norman Realty)  
[Matt Santos (Davidson Provision Company)]

## Community Members Interviewed

Christina Shaul  
Shannon O'Geen  
Jana Watt  
Matt Santos  
Mary Kim Folds  
Ellen Donaldson  
Diana Merrifield  
Eleanor Young

# What we learned ...

## from business owners

- Loss of Davidson College events, summer camps, visiting parents, prospective students, and corporate travel via Ingersoll Rand and Lowe's has had a major impact on many businesses.
- Most businesses were able to keep staff through government grants and loans, but there is growing concern about lack of additional funding opportunities when business is far from "back to normal."
- Retail and restaurant owners are becoming increasingly convinced that in-person dining and in-person shopping will be changed forever. In an age where everything is now available online, small businesses must sell "experiences" rather than remain completely transactional.
- Several business owners fast-tracked an online ordering process, rolling it out to customers in just days or weeks. Some were supported by larger corporate efforts via franchise membership, while others were assisted by their POS providers who added new systems in response to the pandemic. Most restaurant owners don't like the delivery services (DoorDash, Uber Eats, GrubHub) due to the fees, but many are still using them to stay on customers' radar.

# What we learned ...

## from business owners

- Since March, business owners got creative with new revenue streams, adding new products and services or even shifting their focus to varying levels of success. Some included:
  - The Davidson Village Inn hosted wine classes for local residents.
  - Ben & Jerry's created ice cream cake kits and partnered with Hawthorne's Pizza to sell them with make-your-own pizza kits.
  - AR Workshop began selling and shipping DIY craft kits.
  - Elisabeth Rose Social Stationary shifted her event/paper business to sell hand-poured candles.
  - Dr. Lexi Lain began offering virtual appointments and online classes.
  - Davidson Ice House sold frozen family meals.
- Business owners realize there is more they can be doing but many lack the time, and some just don't want to pour more energy into a pivot.
- South Main business owners feel people often don't know they are there, and COVID-19 has just intensified this.

# What we learned ...

## from community members

- On the whole, people have had far less interaction with all businesses due to safety concerns.
- Many people have gone through “COVID-19 stages” — in the beginning, many people stopped eating out, including takeout. As time has gone on, some people are still eating most meals at home with limited takeout, while others are comfortable eating at restaurants, primarily in outdoor settings.
- There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the additional outdoor seating options and dedicated curbside pickup parking spots.
- People are doing a lot of online ordering during COVID-19, relying on Amazon or other online retailers, because of ease and convenience. Some said they were ordering frequent takeout from local restaurants, just to support them financially and make sure they would stay in business.

# What we learned ...

## from community members

- The desire to support local businesses remains very strong; many just don't know how best to do so. Everyone can't wait to return to their "normal" Town activities — eating in the restaurants, walking through the shops, engaging with their favorite business owners.
- Several people mentioned that it is difficult to know what businesses are open and when during the pandemic.
- The Summit & Kindred coffee and donuts drive-thru collaboration was a bright spot — even if it wasn't their drink/food of choice, many still went to be a part of the experience and feel the excitement in Town.
- Professionals who live in Davidson and frequently travel out of town/state for work anticipate doing far less travel in the future. They are working from home and locally a lot more now.

# Praise for the Town

Business owners were unanimous in the ways they praised the Town for its support during the pandemic. Many who interact with other communities via multiple locations claimed that Davidson was by far the most helpful.

They specifically mentioned:

- Tremendous overall support from Kim Fleming
- Continuous updates related to government aid
- Curbside parking options
- New outdoor seating
- Relaxing the outdoor sales and signage rules



## And what else ...

We had a lot of engaging conversations that became brainstorming sessions. The result? Plenty of intriguing ideas about how to enhance the Town both during the pandemic and beyond.

We hope what follows is just a starting place!

# Continued Support During COVID-19

- Assist in clarifying and enforcing the mask policy. Business owners believe it is still too ambiguous, and they are varied in when they enforce it and how they interpret it.
- Help get the word out to residents that the Town is “Open For Business” — spread the word about store hours, any modified services/offerings, etc. Consider implementing a “support in-town businesses” marketing campaign similar to Turn Around, Shop In Town. Help galvanize the community to support businesses and continue to educate them on how to do so.
- Visit and showcase each business in a fun, light-hearted social media “tour” of Town; highlight business offerings as much as possible in newsletters, featuring artwork, products, food, etc.
- Help restaurants accommodate patrons in outdoor seating areas in the colder months — consider adding heaters, tents, awnings, etc.
- Promote Davidson as a local destination to nearby travelers to help the hospitality businesses.
  - Note: We really liked this [Our State Magazine video](#) as a marketing tool!

# Continued Support During COVID-19

- Identify new places and spaces in town to display artwork/showcase makers.
- Help businesses see opportunities for collaboration — for example, could the idle meeting space at Homewood Suites be used in a different way since corporate business meetings are infrequent?
- Design a safe space for business owners to share their struggles. (“Nobody wants to admit their businesses are tanking right now.”) Consider a meeting to problem solve together or email address for private consultation.
- Keep the takeout parking options and consider adding “to go” windows for quick pick-up.

# Christmas in Davidson: the COVID-19 version

- Produce an “old school” catalog of gifts to buy from local vendors and utilize an online ordering system; consider the Farmer’s Market model where people could schedule to pick-up items on different days of the week.
- Set up a mailbox for Letters to Santa where every child gets a response from the “North Pole”.
- Focus only on Davidson businesses to give it more of a hometown feel.
- Create exclusive Town of Davidson packaged gift boxes with items from several businesses.
- Christmas in Davidson Road Show — people stay in their neighborhoods, but aspects of CID will travel, such as carolers and artisans, to visit different neighborhoods on different nights.

# What if we could ...

- Designate an area for employees to park to leave more open spots for customers?
- Make the backyard seating area on Main Street more robust — add trash cans, larger performance area, and connections between businesses?
- Develop a South Main Makers/Craft Market — think Davidson Farmers Market with local artisans? Consider hosting once per month on Saturday to catch the DFM crowd and encourage traffic to businesses on South Main.
- Showcase local artists by painting the new outdoor tables? Consider adding QR codes that lead to artist's work for sale.
- Facilitate regular collaboration among Davidson business owners to solve problems and reach goals?

## Next steps ...

After reviewing the feedback from all of our conversations, we put together the following list of proposed learning and collaboration opportunities for local business owners in the Town of Davidson.

# Learning Session Topics ...

weekly sessions beginning october 14

## Session I: What Do Your Customers Really Want?

If we don't know what's right, we can't do more of it. If we don't know what's wrong, we can't do less of it. How do you gather and use customer feedback?

## Session II: Unlocking the Power of a Small Town – Part I

How do you get the biggest bang for your marketing dollar as a business owner in a small town?

*\* We have a potential guest expert in mind for this session.*

## Session III: The Power of the Pivot

How do you experiment with new products or services? What do you need to do to build a Minimum Viable Product?

*\* We'd like to include a brief Q&A with business owners who made pivots during COVID-19 (Elisabeth Rose, Ben & Jerry's, Davidson Village Inn) as part of this session.*

# Learning Session Topics ...

sessions to be completed in nov/dec

## Session IV: Unlocking the Power of a Small Town (Part II)

What does an 11-star experience look like at your business? How do you create powerful customer moments that become your marketing strategy?

## Session V: New Year, New You: 2021 Goal-Setting and Planning

A global pandemic taught us you can no longer rely on the things you have always done — let's work together to set a 3-year vision, 1-year goals, and 90-day action items.

## Session VI: Collaboration Design Session

What is the best platform to facilitate regular collaboration among business owners?

*\* This is a facilitated design session to create a preferred way for business owners to engage.*



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