

SUMMARY REPORT: 2024 BUSINESS RENTAL HOUSING NEEDS POLL



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Executive Summary

The **2024 Business Rental Housing Needs Poll**, conducted by the Southern Gulf Island Community Resource Centre, provides critical insights into the ongoing rental housing challenges faced by businesses across the Southern Gulf and Salt Spring Islands. With participation from 55 local businesses, this expanded study builds upon the findings from the 2023 poll to assess the impact of housing shortages on employment and business growth.

Key Findings:

- **Impact on Hiring and Growth:**

- ❖ **45%** of businesses reported modifying hiring processes due to housing shortages.
- ❖ **64%** indicated that the lack of rental housing directly hindered their ability to expand operations.

- **Housing Needs:**

- ❖ Single-occupancy units emerged as the top housing priority, with 26 respondents identifying this as critical.
- ❖ Multi-family dwellings were also highlighted, with 18 participants underscoring their importance for the workforce.

- **Service Preferences:**

- ❖ Employers expressed strong interest in Homeshare services, particularly in reference checks (29 votes), move-in/move-out support (26 votes), and rent collection (20 votes).

Business-Specific Insights:

Participants proposed innovative solutions to address housing shortages, including:

- **Tiny Home Developments:** Interest-free loans to support construction on zoned properties, providing affordable housing for workers.
- **Pet-Friendly Housing:** Incorporating pet allowances into affordable housing to reduce pet surrenders.
- **Utilizing Underused Spaces:** Developing second-floor residential rentals above retail shops in downtown Ganges, supported by tax incentives and zoning changes.

Recommendations:

To address the housing challenges and their economic impact, the report recommends:

1. Developing diverse housing solutions, including single-occupancy units and multi-family dwellings.
2. Expanding Homeshare services to meet employer demands for tenant screening, conflict mediation, and property management.

3. Advocating for regional and provincial partnerships to secure funding and policy changes, such as tax incentives for housing development.
4. Establishing the Business Rental Housing Needs Poll as an annual initiative to monitor trends and inform strategies.

Conclusion:

The report underscores the urgent need for targeted action to resolve rental housing shortages and their ripple effects on businesses and the broader community. By leveraging the proposed solutions and prioritizing workforce housing, the Southern Gulf and Salt Spring Islands can foster sustainable growth, economic stability, and vibrant communities. This collaborative effort between businesses, policymakers, and regional stakeholders will be essential to creating lasting change.



Introduction

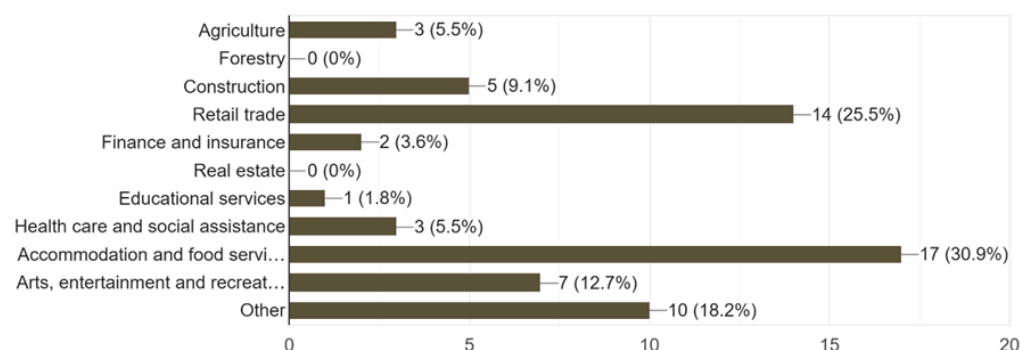
As a continuation of the 2023 Business Rental Housing Needs Poll, the Housing NOW team conducted the 2024 edition with expanded questions and greater outreach efforts. This initiative, led by the Southern Gulf Island Community Resource Centre, aimed to deepen the understanding of how rental housing challenges affect local businesses and organizations. The data collection took place over a 10-week period, from late September to mid-December, and received participation from 55 businesses across the Southern Gulf (SGI) and Salt Spring Islands.

Participant Overview

The businesses that participated in the poll represented a variety of sectors, reflecting the diversity of the local economy. Accommodation and food services were the most represented category, with 17 participants indicating this as their primary sector. Retail businesses followed closely, with 14 respondents identifying themselves within this industry. Seven participants reported being part of the arts and entertainment sector, while five represented construction. An additional ten businesses categorized themselves under "Other," showcasing the wide range of services and operations present within the SGI community.

What type of business do you operate?

55 responses



Poll participants were asked questions such as their location, timeline of operation, and year-round and seasonal employee details. They were also queried about their hiring processes and how these may have been affected by rental housing challenges. Additionally, respondents provided insights into their known experiences and recommendations regarding housing types needed by the SGI workforce, such as single-occupancy and multi-family dwellings. They were also asked about services they might like to see offered generally within a housing service for the Southern Gulf Islands.

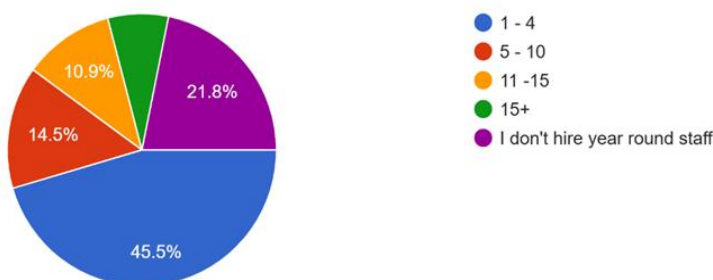
The longevity of these businesses varied significantly. A notable 31% of respondents indicated that their business had been operating for two to five years, reflecting a significant number of relatively new enterprises. Another 18% of participants reported being in operation for six to ten years, demonstrating stability and growth within the community. Interestingly, 9% of the businesses

surveyed had been operating for over 30 years, highlighting the presence of well-established organizations within the region.

Employment patterns among the respondents revealed a reliance on small teams. Nearly half of the businesses, approximately 45.5%, employed one to four staff members year-round.

How many staff members do you employ year round?

55 responses



Additionally, 39% of respondents reported hiring one to four staff on a seasonal basis, underscoring the seasonal nature of many SGI businesses.

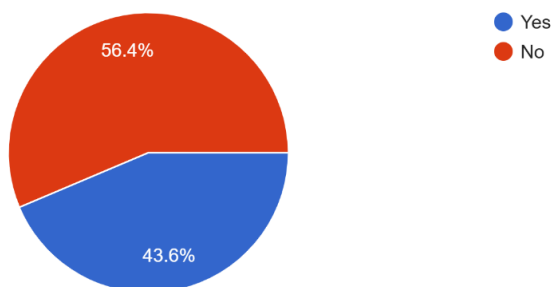
Key Findings

The 2024 poll revealed several critical insights into how rental housing shortages are impacting businesses across the Southern Gulf Islands:

- Nearly half of the respondents, or 45%, reported that they had been forced to adapt their hiring processes due to the lack of available rental housing.

10. Has your hiring process changed due to the rental housing shortages?

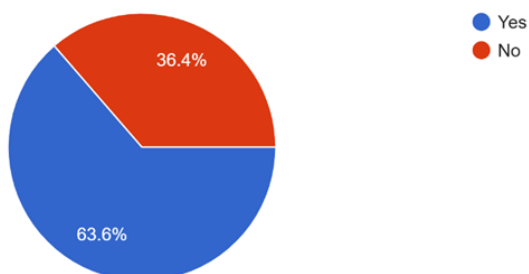
55 responses



- 64% of participants stated that the shortage of rental housing directly impeded their ability to build or expand their business capacity.

Do you believe that the lack of rental housing in your home community, is affecting your ability to build or increase capacity within your business/organization?

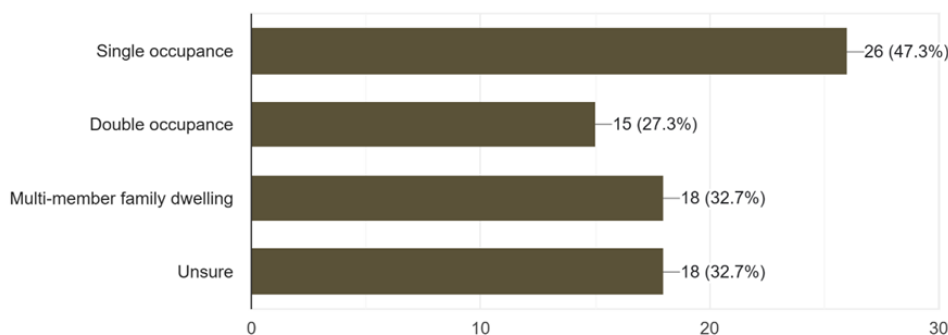
55 responses



- Single-occupancy units were identified as the top housing priority, with 26 respondents selecting this option. Multi-family member dwellings were also considered crucial, with 18 participants choosing this category.

To help us better understand our communities rental housing needs, can you please share the top 2 housing categories utilized by staff?

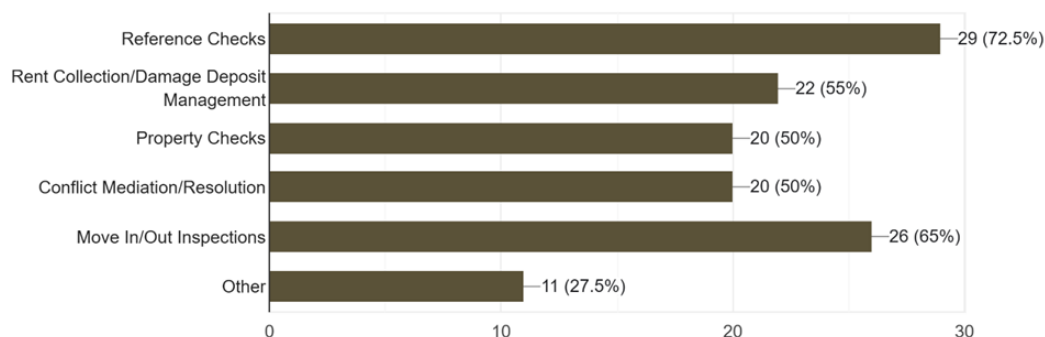
55 responses



- Housing NOW's Homeshare services received strong interest, with the following features highlighted as most valuable:
 - ✓ Reference checks (29 votes)
 - ✓ Move-in and move-out support (26 votes)
 - ✓ Rent collection, property checks, and conflict mediation (20 votes each)

If a rental housing service existed - what would you like to be offered? (Choose all that apply)

40 responses



These findings emphasize the need for diverse and accessible housing solutions tailored to the SGI workforce.

Business-Specific Feedback

Participants provided valuable suggestions and observations that highlight potential solutions and broader concerns:

- Tiny Home Developments:** A Mayne Island business proposed that the Province and CRD should offer interest-free loans to support the development of tiny homes on zoned properties. These homes, costing \$100,000 to \$150,000, could offer an affordable solution for workers.
- Pet-Friendly Housing:** A representative from the Salt Spring Island SPCA raised concerns about the lack of pet-friendly housing, which has led to an increase in pet surrenders. They stressed the importance of incorporating pet allowances into affordable housing options to address this issue.
- Underutilized Living Spaces in Ganges:** Several Salt Spring Island businesses pointed to the potential of second-floor residential rentals above retail shops in downtown Ganges. One business suggested that tax incentives, along with changes to zoning and building codes, could encourage landowners to develop these spaces. This solution could enhance the vibrancy and safety of the area while providing much-needed housing for retail and service staff.

These comments reflect the creativity and determination of SGI businesses in addressing housing challenges and underscore the need for policy changes and targeted support.

Concluding Thoughts

The 2024 Business Rental Housing Needs Poll has reaffirmed the critical housing challenges facing SGI businesses, with significant ripple effects on local economies and community well-being. Employers emphasized: the lack of rental housing is a major barrier to growth and stability. These challenges demand action—and the creative solutions highlighted by poll participants, such as tiny home developments, second-floor residential rentals in Ganges, and enhanced incentives for landowners, offer practical starting points.

The housing styles identified as top priorities for workforce housing can serve as critical guides for elected officials, regional staff, and nonprofits across the SGI and Salt Spring Islands as they plan and define their development strategies. Aligning priorities, timelines, and building schedules with this data will ensure the best use of resources and funds to address rental housing concerns effectively.

Housing NOW's confirmation of the services most requested by SGI employers, including move-in/move-out support and tenant reference checks, demonstrates that these targeted offerings are not just beneficial but essential. Expanding the Homeshare platform to meet these needs will directly support businesses and strengthen the housing pipeline for employees.

Advocacy efforts must also intensify to secure increased investment and collaboration from regional and provincial partners. Establishing the SGI Business Rental Housing Needs Poll as an annual initiative will be key to staying ahead of shifting needs, providing actionable insights to inform policies and programs.

By leveraging these findings and focusing on innovation, we can empower sustainable community growth and vibrant local economies across the Southern Gulf and Salt Spring Islands. The path forward is clear: informed planning, innovative housing solutions, and a unified commitment to addressing our regional rental housing challenges.