CANADIAN FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS

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The small business vote

Priorities for Manitoba's Municipal election

2026

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) represents over 103,000 small and medium-sized businesses across Canada, including 5,800 in Manitoba which form the backbone of Manitoba's economy, creating jobs, driving innovation, and keeping main streets alive. But today, small businesses are being pushed to the brink as they try to navigate a particularly challenging and uncertain economic climate. Rising business costs, increasing exposure to crime, endless construction disruptions, and layers of red tape are making it harder than ever to keep their doors open.

Municipal decisions affect the conditions in which local businesses operate, including property taxes, regulations, public safety, infrastructure, and construction. Ahead of Manitoba's 2026 municipal elections, CFIB surveyed small business owners to identify the municipal issues affecting them and the actions they want local governments to take.

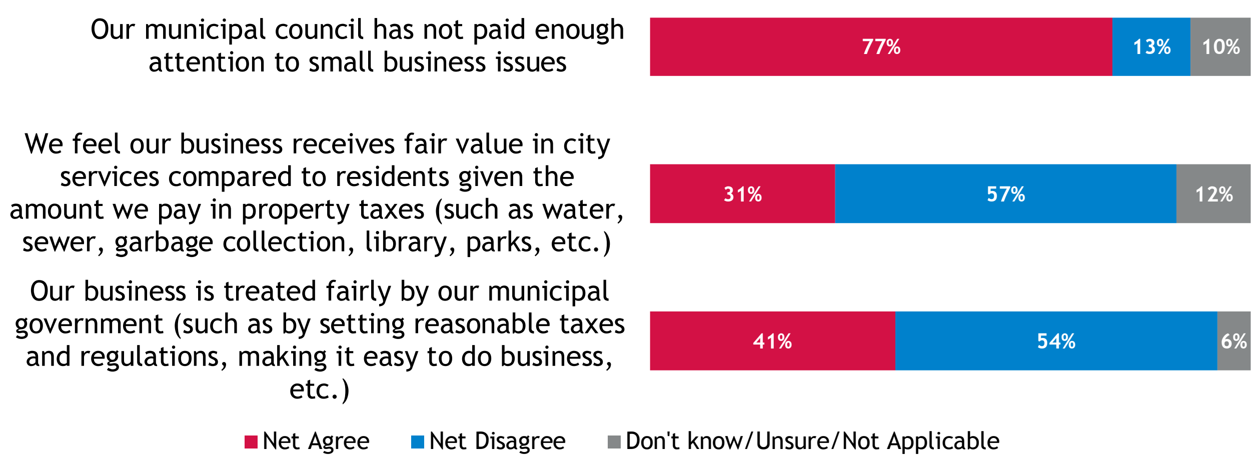
Over the past few years, too many small business owners have felt invisible to their local leaders. Small firms feel left to navigate their challenges on their own — as if municipal councils are more interested in raising costs and adding new barriers than supporting the very businesses that fuel our local economies.

CFIB survey results confirm this sense of frustration. Our research shows that over three-quarters (77%) of Manitoba small business owners say their municipal leaders have not paid enough attention to small business issues, while over half (57%) do not believe they receive fair value in services compared to residents, given the amount of property tax they pay (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

The majority of Manitoba small businesses say their municipal council has not paid enough attention to their issues, do not treat them fairly, and do not provide them with fair value in services

Questions: *Our business is treated fairly by our municipal government (such as by setting reasonable taxes and regulations, making it easy to do business, etc.); We feel our business receives fair value in city services compared to residents given the amount we pay in property taxes (such as water, sewer, garbage collection, library and parks, etc.); Our municipal council has not paid enough attention to small business issues.*



Source: CFIB, MB Municipal Survey, August 2026, Final Results n= 91.

When local leaders overlook small businesses, they overlook jobs, investment, and the vitality of their communities. Every time a small business cuts back or closes its doors, our neighbourhoods lose more than just a storefront, they lose the heartbeat of the community. In fact, for every dollar spent at a small business, 66 cents on average stays in the local economy, compared with only 11 cents when spent at a large multinational. Supporting small businesses means supporting the very fabric of our communities.

The urgency is growing here in Manitoba and across the country. CFIB has been warning of an entrepreneurial drought across Canada, with more businesses closing than opening. This trend threatens local job creation and the long-term strength of Manitoba's communities. Reversing it will require serious action from every level of government to make it more affordable to start, operate, and grow a business.

Municipal governments can't control trade wars or international instability. But they can choose to respect the time, money, and the hard work of their small business communities. This election is the moment for candidates to prove they understand a simple truth: when small businesses thrive, our entire community thrives.

With Manitoba's municipal elections taking place on October 28, 2026, local leaders have a choice: stand with small businesses or risk seeing more of them close their doors.

The results of CFIB's recent pre-election survey show that Manitoba's entrepreneurs are looking for municipal leaders who understand the realities of running a business and are committed to building competitive, safe, and economically vibrant communities. Informed directly by Manitoba small business owners, the following priorities and recommendations provide a practical roadmap for candidates seeking to strengthen their local economies.

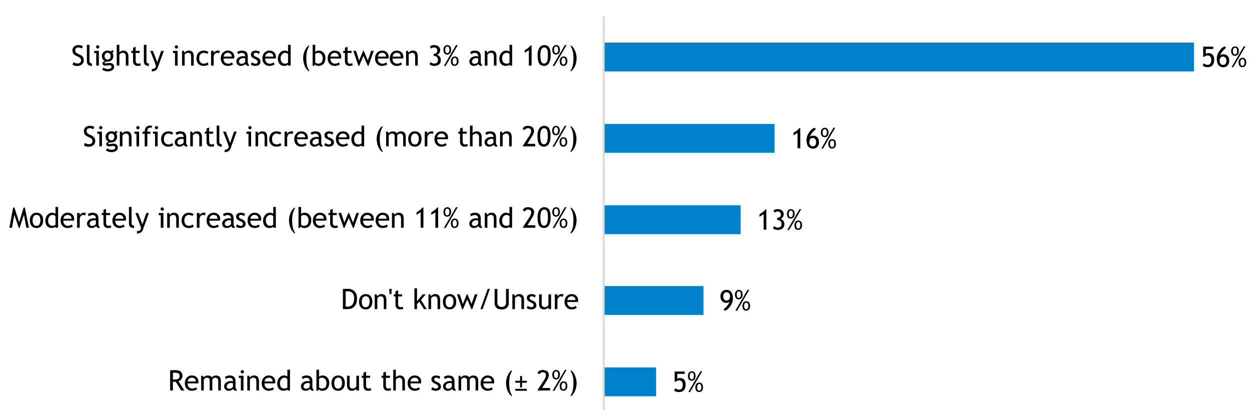
Priority 1: Keep Costs Fair & Predictable

Property and business taxes were identified as the top challenge for Manitoba business owners, with more than half (54%) identifying them as harmful and nearly three in five (59%) describing them as burdensome. As Figure 2 shows, almost all respondents faced a property tax increase over the past year, with many reporting double-digit increases (>10%).

FIGURE 2

Property taxes have increased for almost all MB small business in the last year

Question: *Over the last year, how have your business property taxes changed? (Select one)*



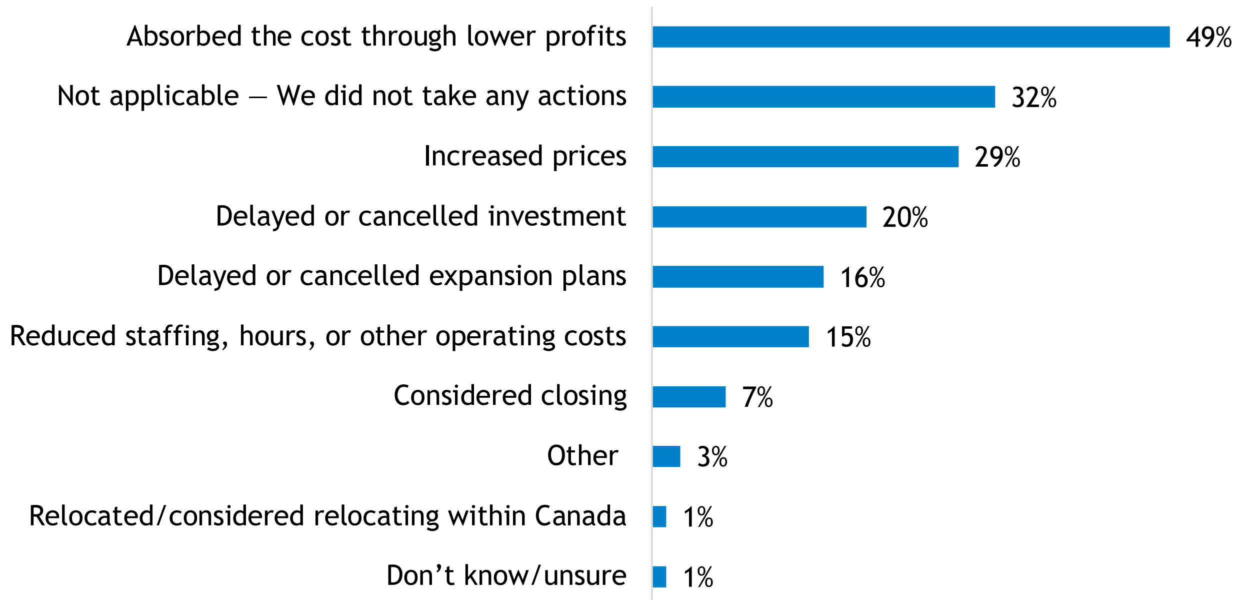
Source: CFIB, MB Municipal Survey, August 2026, Final Results n= 75.

These costs affect businesses whether they own or lease their premises. Among respondents, over half (55%) own or co-own their property and over a third (37%) lease or rent.

FIGURE 3

Businesses have responded to higher property taxes by absorbing costs through lower profits and/or increasing prices

Question: *Which actions has your business taken in response to property tax costs? (Select all that apply)*



Source: CFIB, MB Municipal Survey, August 2026, Final Results n= 75.

As depicted in Figure 3, rising property taxes force small businesses to make difficult trade-offs. Many absorb the added costs through lower profits, while others have to raise prices, delay or cancel investments or expansion plans.

At the same time, more than half (57%) believe their business does not receive fair value in municipal services compared with residents given the amount they pay in property taxes. When asked what municipalities should do, the leading response was to review municipal services and operations for cost efficiencies (42%), followed by introducing a small business property tax subclass (41%).

Small Businesses are raising concerns about Winnipeg’s Business Tax

Winnipeg’s municipal Business Tax is one of the few taxes of its kind in North America. It is calculated by applying a city-set rate to the assessed annual rental value of a business’s premises, meaning many Winnipeg businesses face both commercial property tax costs and a separate tax tied to occupying their premises. CFIB has heard concerns from Winnipeg businesses that this additional cost makes it more expensive to operate and invest in the city.

Results from CFIB’s recent Winnipeg Business Tax Survey reinforce these concerns. Among the businesses impacted, nearly all said the tax contributes to higher prices (95%) and increases their overall cost of doing business (91%). Respondents also linked the tax to reduced competitiveness (82%), less capacity to invest (73%), and greater difficulty hiring or retaining employees (59%).

Support for reform was nearly unanimous: nearly every respondent (96%) agreed that the City of Winnipeg should reduce and ultimately eliminate the Business Tax. The issue may also influence how business owners vote, with majority (86%) of respondents saying that reducing or eliminating the tax will be important when deciding which municipal candidate to support this fall.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Review municipal services and operations regularly to identify cost efficiencies before increasing property taxes or fees.
- ✓ Limit operating spending growth to a sustainable benchmark, with population growth used as a transparent reference point.
- ✓ Publish transparent, multi-year operating, capital and property tax plans so businesses can anticipate future costs.
- ✓ Assess the feasibility and fiscal design of a small business property tax subclass, including clear eligibility rules and transparent funding impacts.
- ✓ Evaluate the business impact of proposed property tax and fee increases before council approval.
- ✓ **For Winnipeg Candidates:** Develop a plan to phase out and eliminate Winnipeg's Business Tax, reducing the additional tax burden tied to occupying commercial premises.

Priority 2: Reduce Red Tape and Improve Municipal Service Delivery

Time spent navigating unnecessary regulations is time small business owners cannot spend serving customers, managing employees, or growing their businesses. Municipal regulations play an important role in protecting public health and safety, but they should also be efficient, transparent, and designed to minimize the administrative burden.

Across Manitoba, entrepreneurs continue to identify permitting delays, inconsistent interpretations of bylaws, licensing requirements, inspections, and administrative processes as barriers to investment and growth. For many businesses, the cost of regulatory delays extends far beyond application fees. Delayed approvals can postpone construction projects, hiring decisions, equipment purchases, and business expansion, increasing costs and creating unnecessary uncertainty.

Red tape emerged as one of the leading municipal concerns for Manitoba's small businesses. Almost half (48%) of respondents identified it as harmful to their business, making it the second-most cited issue after property taxes. More than half (57%) also agreed that municipal requirements, including signage rules, permits and business licensing, impose a burden on their business.

When asked which municipal regulations are most burdensome in terms of time and compliance costs, respondents indicated property and business taxes (59%) and building and renovation permits (31%).

Service interactions are not universally negative: nearly half (49%) agree that municipal service representatives are generally helpful and interested in solving their problems, compared with 29% who disagree. Municipalities should build on what works while making processes clearer, faster, and more consistent.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Set and publish service standards and processing times for permits, inspections, licences and development applications.
- ✓ Review building and renovation permits, property assessments, inspections, and land-use processes to remove unnecessary steps and duplication.
- ✓ Provide businesses with clear application requirements, checklists, timelines, and a named contact for complex files.
- ✓ Review existing bylaws on a regular schedule and consult affected businesses before introducing new regulatory requirements.
- ✓ Create a formal channel for businesses to identify regulatory irritants and report publicly on the actions taken.
- ✓ Measure business satisfaction with municipal service delivery and use the results to improve staff guidance and process consistency.

Priority 3: Address Crime and Safety Issues to Help Improve Community Safety

Municipal governments have an important role to play in maintaining clean, safe, and accessible commercial districts that encourage private investment and support economic growth.

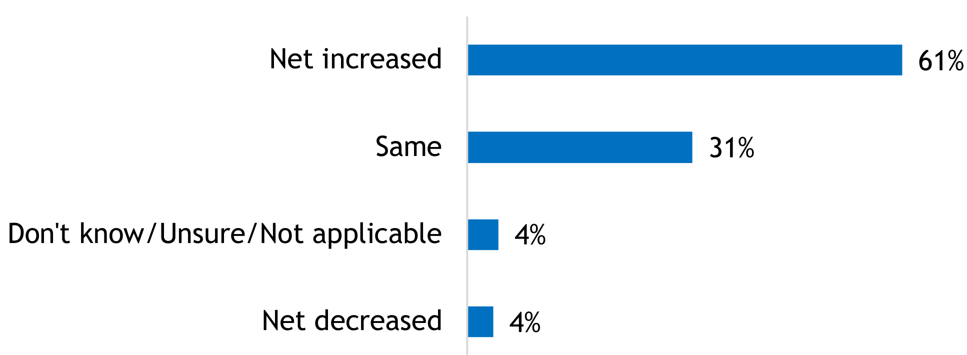
Crime and safety, including break-ins and increased drug use, were identified as harmful by almost half (47%) of respondents. These incidents create both financial and emotional burdens for small businesses. Owners face the direct costs of replacing stolen property, repairing damage, and investing in security, while also worrying about the safety of their employees, customers and themselves.

CFIB has been calling on municipalities across Canada to make crime and community safety a priority. Our 2024 report, *Broken Windows & Broken Trust: The Impact of Rising Crime on Small Business*, found that Manitoba has one of the country's highest rates of businesses directly affected by crime. Waste and litter, vandalism and break-ins, theft and shoplifting were among the most common issues reported by businesses nationally.

FIGURE 4

Crime is rising across Manitoba communities, putting small businesses under growing pressure

Question: *Over the last 12 months, how has the level of crime changed in the community where your business is located? (Select one)*



Source: Your Voice Survey - October 2025, Oct 9 - Oct 24, 2025, MB n= 137.

Our April 2026 analysis, *How Crime and Disorder are Reshaping Daily Life for Canada's Small Business*, draws on the experiences of small business owners across Canada, including Manitoba. It shows how crime and disorder disrupt daily operations, strain limited resources and erode the safety and peace of mind of business owners, employees, and customers. The majority of Manitoba small business owners feel that crime had increased in their communities over the past 12 months (Figure 4). These findings underscore the need for sustained action that delivers visible improvements in the communities where small businesses operate.

CFIB has welcomed measures such as Manitoba's Business Security Rebate Program and proposed federal Criminal Code reforms targeting repeat and violent offenders. While these are important steps, small businesses cannot continue to bear the financial, operational, and emotional consequences of crime and disorder alone. All levels of government must work together to make safety a priority, respond more effectively to the concerns of local businesses, and address the conditions that allow chronic disorder to persist.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Make crime and community safety a municipal priority and establish regular consultation among small businesses, police, bylaw services, community organizations, and other local partners.
- ✓ Track and publicly report service standards for commercial areas, including police response times and the resolution of reported safety and property concerns.
- ✓ Increase the visible police and bylaw presence in commercial districts, particularly in areas experiencing persistent theft, vandalism, harassment, and public disorder.
- ✓ Work with the provincial government to expand financial support for security upgrades, crime-related repairs, and other prevention measures.
- ✓ Improve the maintenance of commercial areas through timely graffiti removal, better lighting, regular cleanup of waste and hazardous materials, and the repair of damaged public infrastructure.
- ✓ Develop targeted strategies to address repeat offending and chronic disorder in commercial districts while connecting vulnerable individuals with appropriate housing, mental health, and addictions services.

Priority 4: Minimize Construction Disruptions and Deliver Infrastructure Upgrades and Transit Access More Effectively

Municipal infrastructure investments are necessary to support growing communities and maintain roads, bridges, water systems, and public spaces. However, poorly planned construction projects can impose significant financial costs on small businesses through reduced customer access, traffic disruptions, delivery delays, noise, dust, and extended project timelines.

For many businesses, months or even years of construction can result in substantial revenue losses while fixed expenses, including property taxes, rent, utilities, and payroll, continue unchanged. Municipalities should recognize these impacts and take reasonable steps to reduce unnecessary disruption while ensuring critical infrastructure projects are completed efficiently.

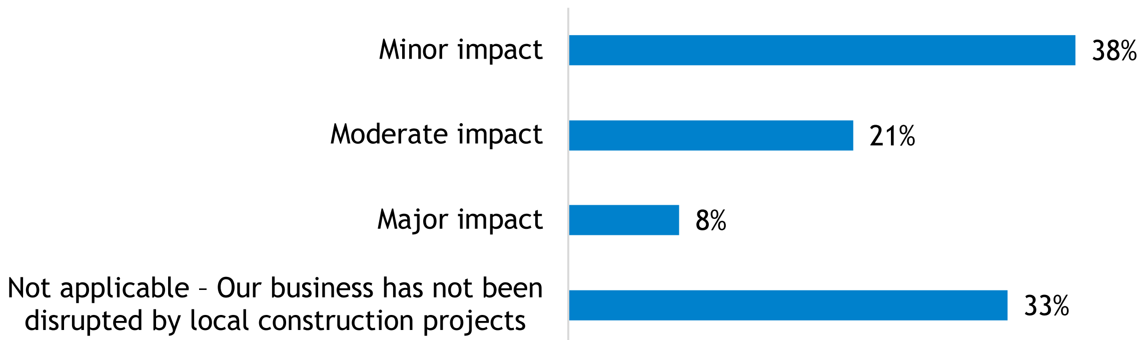
Effective project planning, improved communication, coordinated infrastructure investments, and stronger accountability for project delivery can significantly reduce the burden placed on local businesses.

Public construction projects were identified as harmful to over a quarter (28%) of respondents. Over two-thirds of Manitoba respondents (67%) said local construction projects had disrupted their business during the previous five years. When asked whether the government should compensate a business when a public construction project has a major impact on its operations, 62 per cent said yes.

FIGURE 5

Majority of MB small businesses have been impacted by local construction projects over the last 5 years

Question: *During the last five years, what impact, if any, have disruptions from local construction projects had on your business (road work, public transit upgrades, etc.)? (Select one)*



Source: CFIB, MB Municipal Survey, August 2026, Final Results n= 85.

CFIB's *recent [Hard Hats and Hard Times: Public Construction Impacts on Small Businesses]* report highlights the effects of public construction projects on small firms and calls for comprehensive construction-mitigation plans. CFIB has consistently called on municipalities across Canada to pair compensation with better advance notice, coordination, contracting, business liaison support, and clear responsibility among governments.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Establish a compensation program for cases where construction has a moderate to major impact on the revenues and operations of local businesses.
- ✓ Implement a no-surprise rule requiring the municipality to track the condition of its infrastructure and notify local businesses about construction well in advance. Consult businesses before changing parking, traffic management, transit access, or street design in commercial areas.
- ✓ Adopt a comprehensive planning approach involving the "dig once" principle and the phasing and timing of projects.
- ✓ Improve contracting processes with integrated mitigation provisions and a bonus-and-penalty system, especially for the early or late completion of a project.
- ✓ Designate a Business Liaison Officer with managerial authority for each project.
- ✓ Prioritize maintenance and renewal of core municipal infrastructure that businesses and customers rely on.

Conclusion: A Call to Action for Manitoba’s Municipal Leaders

Manitoba's small businesses are resilient, innovative, and deeply committed to the communities they serve. They create local jobs, support neighbourhood organizations, sponsor community events, and drive economic growth in every region of the province.

Municipal governments have an opportunity to strengthen this contribution by creating a competitive business environment characterized by responsible fiscal management, efficient regulation, safe commercial districts, and well-planned infrastructure.

The recommendations outlined in this platform reflect the experiences and priorities of Manitoba's entrepreneurs. By acting on these recommendations, municipalities can improve the business climate, encourage private investment, and help build stronger, more prosperous communities for all Manitobans.

On October 28, 2026, Manitoba voters will choose the local leaders who will shape their communities for years to come. CFIB is calling on every municipal candidate to demonstrate a clear commitment to small business by:

- **Addressing rising costs.** Exercising spending restraint, improving the value businesses receive for their taxes, and limiting property tax and fee increases.
- **Reducing unnecessary red tape.** Making municipal permitting, licensing, inspections, and other services faster, clearer, and easier to navigate.
- **Improving crime and community safety.** Strengthening local police response times, increasing police presence and helping ensure business owners are not left to manage dangerous situations alone.
- **Mitigating construction disruption.** Through better planning, advance notice, meaningful consultation, and compensation for businesses facing prolonged and severe impacts.

These priorities reflect what Manitoba’s small business owners need from their local governments. When small businesses succeed, Manitoba’s communities succeed.

For more information on this small business platform, please contact:

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