

# 2021 WEST DENVER SMALL BUSINESS REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## West Denver Small Business Coalition (WDSBC)

### ABOUT WDSBC

The West Denver Small Business Coalition (WDSBC) was formed in June 2020 and represents the first coordinated effort of local leaders to advocate for and support west Denver's small businesses, many of which are immigrant-owned and comprise some of Denver's most unique cultural corridors. WDSBC partners include the West Denver Renaissance Collaborative, BuCu West, Denver Streets Partnership, the West Colfax BID, the Sun Valley Kitchen, Mi Casa Resource Center, DEDO, NEST, OEDIT, and the District 3 Council Office.

In late 2020, the WDSBC secured grant funding from SPARCC and Mile High Connects to launch a west Denver focused project with the objective of identifying and better understanding the needs and priorities of small businesses in the area. **Through canvassing, the coalition partners identified more than 1,000 businesses, connected with over 600, and received surveys from 217 businesses.**

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

West Denver's small business owners shared stories of resilience and resourcefulness in the face of immense challenges. Some business owners took on second jobs to help cover expenses or enlisted the support of their friends and families to help staff their business or provide loans. Key takeaways from conversations with business owners and surveys include:

- 1. Many west Denver small businesses successfully pivoted their business model to adapt to the pandemic** by adopting online platforms, often for the first time, and offering virtual services. Others launched new businesses despite the challenges of the pandemic; more than one-quarter of businesses surveyed were less than two years old.
- 2. Many businesses in west Denver are not receiving resources because they are not formally registered or part of a district that tracks or partners to provide support.** Many business owners reported not knowing about resources that were available to support them during the pandemic.

### TYPES OF BUSINESSES IN WEST DENVER (OF TOTAL # OF BUSINESSES SURVEYED)

**23%** ARE MULTI-GENERATIONAL  
**FAMILY BUSINESSES**

**93%** ARE **MICROBUSINESSES**  
(1-9 EMPLOYEES)

**57%** PREFER **SPANISH** AS THEIR  
PRIMARY LANGUAGE

### DOES THE OWNER IDENTIFY IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING WAYS?

**77%** LATINO/A

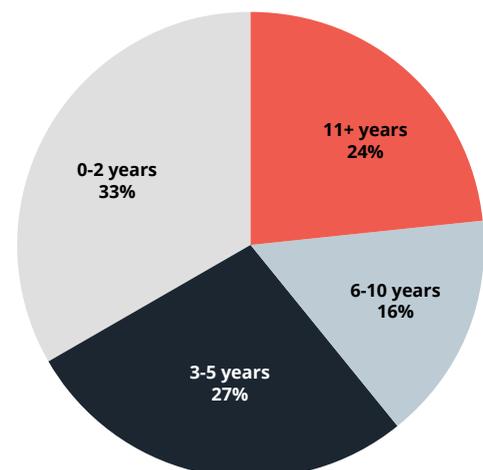
**45%** IMMIGRANT OR REFUGEE

**33%** WOMAN

**18%** WHITE

**7%** ASIAN AMERICAN OR  
PACIFIC ISLANDER

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN BUSINESS?



**3. Many business owners struggled to apply for grants or loans on their own, often because they did not have the required financial documents.**

Some did not qualify for grants or were fearful to apply because they did not have a Social Security number; others shared that they completed applications for relief funding but never heard back. Many owners expressed feeling demoralized by the challenge of keeping their business open and like there was no help available to them. A few remarked that meeting with a canvassing partner was the first time anyone had come by their business with resources.

**4. Safety and security were major concerns of business owners.** Several shared stories of attacks and robberies, and many expressed a desire for a stronger police presence in the area. Homelessness and graffiti were other areas of concern.

**5. Small business owners continue to be interested in how to grow their knowledge and expertise,** although many expressed limited capacity to attend trainings and classes because of business hours, reduced staffing, and the demands of running their business.

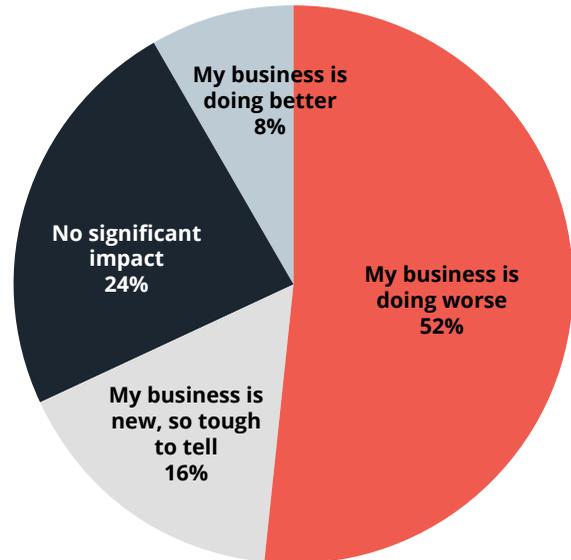
**6. Gentrification and rising costs are contributing to business closures in west Denver.** WDSBC identified at least 126 businesses that had closed or likely closed since 2019, approximately 10% of all businesses in the area. WDSBC was not able to verify what caused each business closure, but anecdotal reports suggest that changing neighborhood conditions were a factor in at least some closures and are serious concerns for many of the small businesses still operating in west Denver.

### NEXT STEPS

Drawing from the top priorities cited by business owners, WDSBC is planning or working together to meet the following small business needs, drawing the combined expertise and unique contributions of all coalition partners:

1. Leading the West Denver Rising initiative to bring together the Sun Valley, Little Saigon, and Morrison Road communities to host a series of international

### HAS COVID-19 IMPACTED YOUR BUSINESS?



marketplaces featuring local entrepreneurs and businesses that highlight west Denver's cultural diversity, with the goal of developing a sustainable, long-term business model for marketplaces

2. Maintaining a west Denver small business listserv to share information about resources and updates with small business owners
3. Connecting business owners in need with their neighborhood resources and technical assistance providers, such as Mi Casa Resource Center
4. Publishing a west Denver business guide to promote businesses in the region
5. Developing grant readiness workshops to support businesses in putting together needed documents, registering with the Secretary of State, and providing tax and accounting assistance
6. Developing a dedicated west Denver business website
7. Pursuing other marketing and promotional opportunities



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

With 83% of west Denver at risk of gentrification, the preservation of cultural businesses is critical to maintaining west Denver's sense of place, preserving community resources, and preventing involuntary displacement. Historic disinvestment and discriminatory policies have limited west Denver residents from accessing resources and capital, resulting in reduced support systems, financial instability, and low economic and job growth. Millions of dollars in new public and private real estate investments are driving up costs and creating change in west Denver, where thousands of residents have already been displaced. To ensure economic development and public improvements benefit west Denver's low-income population, these businesses and their employees need a broad range of supports to remain in place. Three recommendations for support include:

- 1. West Denver needs dedicated, sustainable funding to ensure that small businesses survive ongoing neighborhood change.** A permanent West Denver Business Hub attentive to all small businesses throughout west Denver and coordinated amongst service providers would be essential in providing the ongoing support that small businesses need to thrive.
- 2. Dedicated funding for experienced Community Connectors will ensure that resources, programming, and support services reach business owners and are accessible and responsive to their needs.** Locally-based Community Connectors were essential to this outreach effort; their language skills and familiarity with local businesses helped bolster the number of business owners and employees who felt comfortable sharing their stories and responding to the survey.
- 3. New policies and programs are needed to monitor, assist businesses, and prevent involuntary displacement that follows public investment.** Anecdotal reports from business owners and staff suggest that rising costs and changing neighborhood demographics are impacting their ability to stay in place, including prior to the pandemic. Businesses need technical assistance and flexibility with City policies in order to invest in their own properties. More work is needed to understand how businesses are being impacted by gentrification and to develop policies, tools, and programs that preserve west Denver's small and cultural businesses.

## VISIT:

[www.LittleSaigonDenver.com](http://www.LittleSaigonDenver.com) | restaurant guide for Little Saigon district (South Federal)

[www.WestwoodFood.com](http://www.WestwoodFood.com) | restaurant guide for Morrison Road (Westwood)

[www.MyWDRC.org/small-business](http://www.MyWDRC.org/small-business) | resources for small businesses and downloadable business directory

[www.ShopWestDenver.com](http://www.ShopWestDenver.com) | west Denver business guide (coming soon!)

The full West Denver Business Report highlights findings from different business corridors in west Denver and features stories of some west Denver businesses. These stories are representative of the experiences of many small businesses and provide insight into the challenges faced by west Denver's business community as well as their resilience to adapt and survive.

To read more stories and see the full report, visit [www.MyWDRRC.org/small-business](http://www.MyWDRRC.org/small-business)

Thank you to all of the WDSBC coalition members who made this work possible, and to our funders, SPARCC and Mile High Connects.

## **MARIBEL HERNANDEZ DE TREVIZO, TORTILLERIA COLORADO**

2050 W MISSISSIPPI AVE, ATHMAR PARK

Maribel and her husband David opened their tortilla factory in 2003. David had always dreamed of opening his own business, and he was inspired by his mother, who used to sell tortillas out of their home in Mexico. At first they had a hard time establishing themselves, but Maribel convinced clients to try their tortillas, based on her mother's recipe, by giving them samples to take home. The strategy was a success, and they were able to grow their business through word of mouth and eventually expand into small grocery stores and carnicerias.

Maribel and David were able to purchase their store with the revenue that they earned. However, in 2014

David was diagnosed with cancer and they had to slow production at the factory. David passed away in 2018.

Maribel has worked hard to maintain the store but has struggled to do so alone while caring for her children. David's dream was that their store could be a generational business that could be left to their children, but Maribel was on the point of closing down when she was connected to Mi Casa Resource Center through the WDSBC's outreach efforts. Mi Casa helped her apply for a grant of \$10,000 to support her business, which she was awarded. She plans to use the money to buy a new machine so that she can increase production, distribute to more stores, and advertise her business.

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**My business is very well-known, but it is difficult for me to maintain it with only my children. My husband always said that this business could be for our family and new generations.**

*- Maribel Hernandez de Trevizo*

