

BOS Meeting January 16, 2024

Plumas County Business & Economic Development

- Later today the Plumas County Economic Development Core Committee will have its first working organizational meeting to develop an RFP, Request for Proposal for a Consultant to provide oversight of the grant program to help businesses in Greenville. As for timeframes, after the RFP, we are charged with designing the grant program, followed by marketing the grant program, and culminating in accepting, vetting, and awarding grants to applicants.
- On Saturday at the Greenville Community Meeting, there will be elections for positions on the Steering Committee and a presentation on future business grants by ChicoSTART, the largest Innovation HUB in northern CA.
- The Indian Valley Innovation HUB is putting the finishing touches on its Plumas Business Directory. We started with 1,000 business names and vetted all of them to eliminate those no longer in service; referenced Yellow Pages, cross referenced Google Maps, and searched for their real Google location on misplaced addresses. Our Directory is classified by the type of business, and then a simple click will take you directly to the business contact information. We hope to show you a demonstration early next month. Our goal is to finish the Business Directory this week or next week, and then complete our Virtual Store for our Made in Plumas County Program.
- I'm not going to read the entire letter that was recently featured in The Mountain Messenger regarding the state of economy in Sierra County from the perspective of a couple that owns several businesses. It's full of stories regarding shuttered businesses and businesses open, but barely hanging on. It's about a County with no economic development direction, abandoned commercial property, empty houses, no gas station in Downieville yet people fearful that it might become a Truckee someday, and tourists

arriving with their own groceries because they have no choices to buy any once they get there. It's no secret that many of our rural communities are facing extinction. At best, they are retirement communities with a short future. In March of 2021, I spoke about the challenges of our small communities and our Chambers of Commerce to the Chamber in Loyalton. I was met by a BOS that stoked the fear of Loyalton becoming another Truckee, and that Sierra County would be overrun by Renoites, despite the High School only graduating 7 students and that for the first time since its settlement, Sierra County dipped below 3,000 people. In 1865 the population of Sierra County was 16,500.

- I say this not to blame the BOS in Sierra County for its gradual demise, nor do I blame you for the economic ills of Plumas County. My point is if we are to breathe life back into our small towns, start more businesses and industries, and capture the people that want to move to our wonderful communities, we will have to think more creatively and act differently.
- We spend a lot of money on planning, studies, and surveys that have merit, when perhaps we should also be offering young families a free or next to free parcel in one of our communities that will allow them to buy or build a home, put their kids in our schools, and customers in our stores. Rural communities across America are not only considering this approach to resettling lost populations, they are also doing it. We need to implement creative ideas like this and more or watch our County lose another 20% of our population in the next couple of decades as predicted. We have lost hospitals in our communities before, and we face losing some high schools again.
- As the author of the article in the Mountain Messenger said so well, the time to act is now. Thank you.

Clint Koble
Hamilton Branch

As you drive up the Hwy 49 Scenic Corridor past Downieville, through Sierra City, and back down into the Sierra Valley, you certainly won't find a more beautiful and geographically diverse county in perhaps the whole country. That's largely why we all live here.

You will also see a collection of shuttered businesses in the commercial districts, and most businesses that are still open are struggling to survive. It should be no wonder that Sierra County's GDP ranks #58 out of California's 58 counties. Dead last. Even Alpine County, with just over one-third of the population of Sierra County, ranks above us.

It really shouldn't be a surprise if you look at the fact that Sierra County is the only county in the state of California that has no focus and no plan for economic growth beyond increasing fees and taxes. The number of businesses throughout this county that shutter year after year steadily outpaces any new businesses. Those that remain find themselves shouldering more of the tax burden, and a good number of them are struggling to survive, let alone turn a profit. There are fewer and fewer places to eat and no incentive for anyone to start one, given the costs. Most of the establishments in Downieville, for instance, stay open pretty much for charity to ensure that their employees have jobs. This is unsustainable.

Business, workforce, and housing are intricately linked in a downward economic spiral.

In Downieville, over 50% of commercially zoned property is vacant. We have no gas station, very few places to eat, and limited grocery options that locals can afford.

COVID has provided the opportunity for people to live and work remotely as broadband and 5G coverage continues to expand. I have met a good number of people over the past several years who are fed up with the urban rat race. They would prefer the mountain lifestyle and would live here full-time, be a part of our community, and put their kids in our schools. However, there is nowhere to live despite having a plethora of empty houses. While the short-term rental

ordinance should be good for us in the long term, it won't make a difference to someone wealthy who just wants a vacation home to come to a few times a year and doesn't need rental income.

It's not all doom and gloom as quietly there has been a small influx of people from their early 30s to mid-50s making the difficult transition that has been filling the gaps in our workforce, but we still mainly rely on a senior volunteer workforce that isn't being replaced. The Sierra County government, local businesses, and the USFS struggle to fill critical jobs. The county needs more full-time residents. For that to happen, they need a place to live, eat, and work.

Tourists know this now as well and come prepared often with their own groceries or plan to keep driving for gas and food options, making us less and less of a destination and more of a pass-through. This only exacerbates the problems in our economy, which is highly dependent on tourism.

There seems to be a pervasive fear from some that "flatlanders" like myself will ruin Downieville and turn it into Truckee. This is ridiculous. Beyond our geographic isolation, we have done a good job in this county over the decades to prevent that, but protection without a plan for economic growth just leaves us slowly and painfully dying.

We are too small of a community not to have an overarching plan that brings us all together. Our ecosystem is too fragile. Our economy depends on people living and visiting here. Our schools need children to fill the classroom. Instead, we are in a vicious cycle.

The communities on the east side of the county in Sierra Valley face a different problem, where it has slowly been overtaken by the growth of Truckee and Reno, looking for more affordable housing options. Both sides of the county share the same problem: no roadmap for economic development. Instead, we all slowly watch our precious communities picked apart and dying by a thousand cuts.

Comparing us to Alpine County again, the Sierra County General Plan was last updated almost 12 years ago in 2012. Alpine County was updated in 2021. Most counties establish 5-year plans that they regularly update, not every twelve-plus

years. Right now, this burden falls on the Planning Department, which isn't where this process lies in other counties, and they don't even have the personnel or resources to focus on this. Sierra County did have an Economic and Business Development Committee, but it last met in June of 2015.

We need to sober up to the reality of the situation. The benefit of being a small community is finding common ground to bring this county back to life. Just as cancer doesn't heal itself, ignoring the problem and believing it will solve itself certainly isn't working; it's only a roadmap to vacation ghost communities.

It's time we all come together and take this seriously. We can change this, but it has to start now.