

BOS Report on Business and Economic Development

April 9, 2024

For this week's Business & Economic Development Report, I want to focus on two things:

- The slight differences and mostly similarities of Disaster Recovery in several communities and:
- The costs of not filling available jobs in Plumas County.

To start, I studied the Long-Term Business Development and Economic Recovery Plans in Paradise, CA, which we are all familiar with, and Greensburg, KS, which suffered a 95% loss of its town from an EF5 Tornado in 2007. Residents from Plumas County have visited both communities since their disaster. Hopefully, lessons learned in those two disaster towns will help us recover from the Dixie Fire of 2021.

Both Towns had 12 – 14-week community meetings and listening sessions.

Paradise developed 13 Vision Statements and condensed them down to 5 Action Steps and Greensburg pretty well did the same.

The first priority in Paradise was to make the Town safer by drawing up better evacuation routes and better lines of emergency communication.

Greensburg's first priority was the decision to go Green in building design and renewable energies. But that's where the differences ended.

For their second action step, both prioritize Housing. Paradise implemented Down Payment Assistance Programs, First-time Homebuyers Programs, and Low-interest Loans. Greensburg did the same but added several nuances to their bag of housing incentives by forming a Land Bank to collect and distribute delinquent and donated properties for housing starts and community needs, and also cash incentives for people building a new home. In addition, Greensburg added a Housing Resource Center, a one-stop-shop to give information on building permits and inspections, along with information on housing programs. Stacy Barnes, Greensburg's City Administrator, said: "The USDA literally saved our town with its housing programs."

Both chose economic development as their next action steps, and they wanted new economic models that would be sustainable.

Next, both focused on education, community engagement, and community capacity.

Lastly, both communities wanted to put the green back into their Towns and turn them into viable and pleasing communities to live, work, and start a business. Michaela Trammel will be presenting on her Dixie Fire Canopy Project that will put the Green back into Greenville.

Some additional similarities:

- In their recovery, both focused on starter homes and a variety of housing programs.
- Both Towns retained a younger demographic, as older disaster survivors left their communities to be closer to family.
- Both put investments into infrastructure and technology, which normally attracts a young subset of demographics.
- Newer, young people have also brought more entrepreneurs that want to build their own business and town.
- Prior to their disasters, both communities were suffering from disinvestments, an aging demographic, and a declining population that sounds much like Greenville and the rest of Plumas County.
- Both communities are still struggling with regaining critical mass. Since its disaster in 2007, Greensburg has regained only 800 of its former 1300 population. Paradise has gained almost half of the 24,000 people that left after the Camp Fire, but as Bruce Yerman, the Executive Director of the Camp Fire Collaborative said recently, “It doesn’t feel like we have reached the critical mass we need, but we are getting close.”

To summarize:

- Plumas County is full of aging communities with disinvestments.
- Depopulation is one of our biggest threats but often overlooked and least planned for issue.
- We need to consider as many investments as possible to save ourselves from the projected population declines in the decades ahead.
- We need a targeted demographic: families and young people to put kids in our schools, customers in our businesses, and entrepreneurs that want to start businesses. Paradise has excelled in doing that and we need to do the same.
- Housing and Economic Development – jobs, have to happen simultaneously to make a generational change in Plumas County.
- Like Greensburg and Paradise, we need to offer starter homes for our targeted demographic to make them affordable and appealing. My choice is a large, 2-bedroom, attached ADU, SMART Home that will appeal to younger, tech-oriented families and entrepreneurs. This model can help new owners

earn long-term rental income and convert to a larger, 3-bedroom home if the family grows to that need.

- **We need a marketing and strategic plan to get all of Plumas County growing again. Our population peaked in 2000; for the last 24 years it's been a downhill struggle. If we're going to work our asses off, then we need to be doing everything we can to improve our future and not suffer from it.**

Lastly, I wanted to comment on the 250 open jobs in Plumas County from just a handful of employers. If we could fill those 250 jobs, here are some benefits we might gain:

- **Filling 250 positions might bring additional family members.**
- **Every school-aged child would bring in \$10,500 to the PUCD.**
- **More customers would be in our businesses.**
- **At an average of only \$25 per hour, 250 jobs would produce \$12,900,000 in annual income. At 80% of that, \$10,320,000 disposable income could be spent in our county every year.**
- **There is a cost to not filling jobs, to not having people move to our communities, to not put kids in our schools, and customers in our businesses.**
- **After suffering several disasters in the last 10 years, we can't afford the direction we are headed in. We've lost enough people and businesses. Where will be when we lose another projected 5,568 people?**
- **In the coming days or weeks, I want to present a plan to help change that.**