

Local Perspective on Economic Development

Tuolumne City Community

Characteristics and Values of the Community

The area's history is rooted in the growth spurred by the mining and lumber industries. Initially, the population resided in the town, with boarding houses accommodating seasonal workers. The community was not a “pop-up”, but had planned growth. In the past, the community flourished, boasting a larger presence with 21 churches and a vibrant dining scene featuring 18 bars and restaurants. Many still remember the train whistle as a familiar sound of the town.

Presently, there are notable attributes such as well-maintained park facilities, public pool, halls, community resilience center, horseshoe pit, baseball field, and the Big Dreams Universally Accessible Parks and Playground, as well as the nearby Black Oak Casino and the West Side Trail. It is a town which evokes a sense of the Midwest charm. There is a general belief the condition of the town’s infrastructure is doing well and is available for expansion. A noticeable trend is the increased presence of people out walking during the day, reflecting a diverse mix of ages engaging with the community. Community events have been on the rise in terms of attendance, drawing participants from outside the immediate vicinity, including some who occasionally travel from widespread areas.

Those who relocate to the community often do so due to the affordability, look and feel of the town, existing connections, and a sense of trust in the community. This influx of newcomers is reflected in the increasing enrollment at the elementary school, which currently accommodates 459 students, the highest number to date, suggesting a growing population within the school system. Notably, approximately 18% of the school population comprises individuals who have transferred in from elsewhere, underscoring the community's appeal to newcomers. Additionally, the Christian school in the area boasts a student body of 800, further indicating the attractiveness of the community to families seeking educational opportunities.

Several concerns loom over the area's current state. Notably, there has been a dearth of significant development in recent times, with only three single-family homes added within a span of three years. The median household income stands at \$ 56,429, indicating potential financial strain for many residents. Compounding the housing situation, families are forced to cohabitate due to a shortage of available homes. Many argue the shopping center's emergence on Tuolumne Road drove businesses away from the town center and hindered westside development, adding to the community's concerns about its economic vitality and future prospects.

Vision for the Future

The goal is to create a well-organized community where living and workspaces are strategically integrated to optimize land usage, while preserving the historic theme. Using history to guide development, the Community Plan serves as a unifying design element. There is room for expansion, including energy and utility infrastructure. Key priorities include a faster, cheaper process for road repairs, connecting trails to amenities, and creating jobs to attract new residents. This vision seeks to transform the community into a desirable destination, prompting questions about the necessary steps to achieve this goal.

Needs of the Community

The community faces a range of challenges and pressing needs that demand attention. Resources for development are scarce, exacerbated by the conversion of commercial spaces into living areas and the persistence of sub-standard housing.

The lack of available land for building homes further compounds this scarcity. In addition, existing structures are aging, and potential developers are uncertain with their current condition. Infrastructure concerns persist, with unpaved streets and the unavailability of trust land for taxation or public development posing barriers to growth. There is worry among some that annexation into trust areas could lead to a loss of tax revenue, adversely affecting school funding and modernization efforts. However, the Tribe plans to use some of the donated fees to mitigate this as per the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Expanding clinics and providing basic amenities are crucial to encourage people to settle here. There's a need to capture the business of visitors, particularly those drawn by the casinos. It has been mentioned that there is not retail or restaurants available to serve customers later in the day. There is a belief that county regulations have hindered expansion, although recent changes are seen as progress. Overall, the community must address these challenges collectively to foster growth and development.

Ongoing Projects

Several initiatives are already underway within the community.

The Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians have been making efforts to energize the area, appointing a board for Economic Development (ED) to explore revenue and growth options. They have undertaken civil work to develop a shopping center near Cherry Valley and are working on building a subdivision in Tuolumne City. They are currently seeking funding for these projects. The ultimate goal is to establish basic amenities, such as a supermarket, bank, shopping center, and restaurants. The current supermarket location and surrounding area will be evaluated for a potential 80-unit housing facility. The projects will be on a mix of fee land and trust land. In addition, the Tribe is creating a conservation corps, which may assist in constructing trails.

Tuolumne Sanitary District received three construction grants totaling \$9.5M through the Clean Water Small Community Grant, State Revolving Fund, Prop 1 Program. The WWTP Phase I Construction Improvement Project (1.6M) was completed in August 2022, WWCS Phase I Construction Improvement Project (5.7M) completed in March 2024, and a WWTP Phase II Construction Improvement Project (2.2M) currently in construction and expected to be completed the end of 2025.

The Board of Supervisors (BOS) is examining processes to improve roads treatment more quickly, possibly including purchasing new equipment.

Tuolumne City has a exceptional museum and cemetery which may be attractive to genealogical groups if advertised effectively.

Tuolumne Parks and Recreation has acquired the Turzich and Wilson Funeral Home through a lease arrangement and transformed it into a community center. This facility, managed by the district, serves as a hub for community engagement and activities. They are also in the process of constructing an outdoor theater and a bike park, with assessments underway for repurposing additional lots. Future plans include installing outdoor exercise equipment, pickleball, bocce ball, and disc golf courts. In addition, their list of events and activities continues to expand.

Action Items to Bring Progress

1. Implement Infrastructure and Beautification Projects

Initiate general infrastructure projects, including undergrounding utilities with PG&E, enhancing sidewalks, bike paths improving lighting, and boosting overall curb appeal. Focus on beautifying the town center and various other areas to make the town more attractive to residents, visitors, and potential investors. Ensure these projects prioritize walkability and reduce travel times within the town.

2. Revitalize the Local Economy Through Business Attraction and Community Events

Attract businesses back into town by examining zoning regulations for the downtown area, encouraging the establishment of cafes, restaurants, and other local businesses. Utilize community events and effective signage to draw individuals to the area, fostering a sense of connection and community. Explore the consolidation of special districts to better utilize resources and support the development of ancillary businesses that offer recreational activities and other amenities to visitors.

3. Establish an Economic Development Board in Tuolumne City

Form a dedicated board to oversee and drive economic development initiatives, focusing on attracting and supporting local businesses. This board will work to understand the needs of the area, promote businesses that align with those needs, and explore funding alternatives to support business growth and infrastructure projects.

4. Develop Assisted Living Facilities and a Community Center

Create assisted living facilities alongside a community center to provide dedicated spaces for seniors to socialize, engage in activities, and receive support services. These facilities will also bring new jobs to the area, contributing to local employment. Partner with local Parks and Recreation to assist in the planning and development process, ensuring the facilities meet the needs of the senior community.

5. Run a Monthly Art Gallery

A monthly art gallery event designed to showcase the exceptional talent of local artists may draw in individuals to the area which would then be directed to local businesses. In the interim, until a permanent gallery space can be established, the Tuolumne Community Center may serve as a temporary "Local Collective" venue. Initial steps would include reaching out to local artists to gauge interest and curate potential exhibits, coordinating with the Community Center management to secure scheduling and necessary resources, and developing promotional materials along with a marketing plan to ensure robust community engagement.