

Local Perspective on Economic Development

Twain Harte Community

Characteristics and Values of the Community

The town of Twain Harte embraces diversity, with a mix of full-time residents, and part-time residents accounting for 30-40% of the population. It developed as a 4-season mountain resort community with homes, vacation cabins, and lodging options which encouraged families to come to visit and vacation in the area. Those with second homes remain connected and supportive, while renters may have a somewhat lesser degree of engagement. Twain Harte has an older retired demographic, with many eventually moving full-time into their vacation cabins. The COVID-19 pandemic saw a resurgence of people returning to their family cabins. Historically, the community is fiercely independent, cherishing freedom and a tranquil atmosphere. It's felt neighbors look out for one another and help when they can. Some visitors view Twain Harte as a starting point for adventures elsewhere. A common sentiment is that Murphys and Twain Harte businesses are similar but branded differently.

However, the size of the population has remained static for many years. Twain Harte has seen the shrinking of the business community and departure of families. School attendance has dwindled significantly. And the rise of short-term rentals has led to a perception of a separation between full-time and part-time residents, as well as concerns about noise, light disturbances, traffic, and a housing shortage.

Needs and Challenges of the Community

Many argue some fundamental issues need to be addressed before bigger projects can be planned.

The general infrastructure of the downtown area is aging and requires attention. This includes pedestrian pathways and lighting, and traffic management. Many roads are in urgent need of repair. Ensuring safety for residents and visitors is paramount. Reliable electrical, internet, and technology services, as well as 911 service, are essential.

While recognizing their economic contribution, the surge in short-term rentals has created issues. While many use the short-term rental model to retain their vacation home, it is felt they have encroached on neighborhoods and reduce the number of full-time and part-time residents. It has been argued the short-term rental industry has led to income leaving the area and not contributing as strongly to the local economy. Some restrictions on short-term rentals may be necessary to address noise, light, safety, and housing concerns.

Concerns over blight of both neglected homes and commercial buildings have been expressed. Some concern has been expressed over safety issues as well, noting the danger of residents trying to lessen the disturbances. And some worry the look of new developments will not be consistent with the rest of the community. This may affect the overall impression visitors have of the area. Some state additional planning and regulation are necessary for building aesthetics and zoning, as well as stricter enforcement of ordinances.

There is a request for more support for local entrepreneurs, making it easier for individuals to start and run business. Much emphasis has been put on addressing housing challenges, which includes increasing the number of full-time residents.

Enhanced communication among residents is a pressing requirement for the community's well-being. Within the community, there is a divergence of preferences; some residents seek increased activities, opportunities, and action for themselves and their children, while others prefer a quiet, serene town where the tranquil summer nights are undisturbed by community events. In this context, local support and unity hold a pivotal role in driving the success of community initiatives, bridging the gap between differing aspirations and ensuring collective progress.

Ongoing Projects

Twain Harte Community Services District is building a new 1-acre project, Meadows Park, as well as expanding and rehabbing pickleball courts, and reconstructing the tennis courts with a clay surface.

Current community engagement efforts involve groups like Twain Harte Partners, who coordinate activities in the community.

The Twain Harte Homeowners are addressing issues related to trails, lighting, signage, community maintenance, and litter removal. Discussions are underway regarding solar-powered downtown lighting, walking paths, signage, and charging stations. They are also initiating a beautification program.

There is currently a project to renovate the Twain Harte Shopping Village with condos and apartments which will increase the number of housing units in the area.

Visions of the Future

In envisioning the future, the community aims to preserve its unique charm and character as a mountain resort community and restore the area as a vibrant center of activity throughout all four seasons. This ensures residents and visitors can enjoy Twain Harte year-round.

With a focus on families and children, the vision includes ensuring a safe environment for families to live and visit, along with creating more opportunities for youth employment.

Moreover, there is a commitment to fostering an environment that encourages youth to remain and establish their lives within the area. It is recognized that many frequent visitors become future residents.

Regarding businesses and developments, there is a recognized need for new projects to contribute to the community's infrastructure. Additionally, the importance of retaining commercial space is highlighted, ensuring the economic vitality and diversity of the community. There was also mention of promoting the growth of wine and gin industries to encourage a community center similar to Murphy's.

Action Items to Bring Progress

1. Develop Local Support and Planning

The success of community initiatives strongly relies on the growth of local support, and cohesiveness within the community is considered integral for progress. The community's collective desire is to foster the local economy while preserving the picturesque, natural, and tranquil lifestyle that initially drew many here. A community group must be formed to review the design guidelines for Twain Harte, form ideas for a focused growth objective, and discuss projects to achieve this. Then develop plans for marketing to effectively showcase and promote the unique appeal of Twain Harte to a broader audience.

2. Infrastructure Improvements

Critical infrastructure enhancements must occur. A primary focus is ensuring residence and visitor safety, addressing traffic concerns, and maintaining public spaces like parks. This includes improving lighting and pedestrian pathways, as well as signage and parking. A possible solution is road improvements with an emphasis on traffic control.

3. Consideration of Local Regulation for Short-Term Rentals

The county will need to assess short-term rentals by quantifying the issues and studying similar ordinances in other communities and their effects when considering any changes to regulations. This must be in an effort to maintain the economic benefits of short-term rentals, while encouraging landlord accountability. This may include creating a permitting process, and implementing and enforcing noise, trash, safety, and light ordinances to maintain the community's peaceful atmosphere.

4. Business Growth

To enhance the business area, an essential focus is implementing incentives to attract and retain businesses within the vicinity. This may involve the introduction of programs designed to incentivize improvements to building facades, aiming to enhance the overall aesthetic appeal of the commercial area. Additionally, there must be an emphasis on encouraging property owners who rent out spaces to play a more active role in contributing to the betterment of the community, thereby fostering a sense of collective responsibility and investment in the area's growth and prosperity.