

Local Perspective on Economic Development

Jamestown Community

Characteristics and Values of the Community

Jamestown, an entry community into Tuolumne County, embodies a blue-collar ethos with affordable housing that attracts younger families. This small town boasts a rich history rooted in the California Gold Rush of the mid 1800's. Its identity further shaped by the Railtown 1897 State Park. Known as "The Movie Railroad," the park preserves the historic core of the Sierra Railway and serves as a major tourist attraction, highlighting the area's logging history and its role in the film industry. However, Jamestown's historical narrative also includes the challenging legacy of the Gold Rush's impact on Native American tribes, who faced displacement and upheaval during that era.

The rural charm of Jamestown is a defining characteristic, with its green landscapes, ranches, and unique small-town feel. Jamestown was once a dining and nightlife destination but has seen a decline in visitors and local engagement. Efforts in beautification have enhanced the town's aesthetic, instilling a strong sense of pride and ownership among its residents. Its walkable downtown, picturesque architecture, and engaged community foster a welcoming environment where people genuinely care for one another.

Despite these strengths, the town has faced challenges. Tourism has declined since its peak in the 1980's and in the wake of COVID-19, including a decrease in stores and restaurants. And the closing of the hotels has meant fewer tourists are staying overnight. Some suggest that individuals' retail habits are also contributing to a decrease in foot traffic. Still, Jamestown's sense of community and historical allure remain central to its identity and appeal.

Vision for the Future

The vision for Jamestown's future focuses on strengthening its community and economic vitality by addressing key challenges and capitalizing on its unique attributes. A primary goal is to better understand and leverage visitation patterns to the area. By analyzing why people visit Jamestown, what draws them back, and what inspires them to share their experiences with others, the community can refine its appeal and ensure it continues to attract and retain visitors. This also includes studying the reasons behind the loss of businesses and events in recent years and fostering better organization among groups that can plan and run activities, creating a more vibrant calendar of events.

Another vital component of Jamestown's vision is revitalizing its business landscape. Programs designed to incentivize landlords to rent or sell vacant properties, particularly to support new startups, are seen as essential. Offering support and encouraging

improvements to the local environment can make Jamestown more appealing to entrepreneurs. These efforts aim to fill storefronts and create opportunities for small businesses to flourish, ultimately enriching the local economy and enhancing the town's character.

Developing a stronger food scene is another interest, with aspirations to make Jamestown a destination for both locals and tourists seeking unique dining experiences. Past efforts to grow the local farmer's market face challenges due to county permitting and regulation, but overcoming these obstacles could further enhance the town's culinary appeal. Additionally, the community recognizes the importance of modern infrastructure, such as high-speed internet, to attract higher-paying jobs and stimulate economic growth. With these strategies in place, Jamestown seeks to embrace its potential as a dynamic, welcoming community that preserves its heritage while fostering innovation and opportunity.

Needs of the Community

Jamestown faces several challenges that hinder its development and the well-being of its community. Leadership is a significant issue, with limited organized community groups and few elected representatives or districts to champion initiatives. Many local organizations rely heavily on older volunteers, with minimal involvement from youth, who often lack the time due to the need for dual incomes. While there is a willingness to volunteer, the absence of younger generations in leadership and civic participation poses a challenge for long-term sustainability.

The town, like the rest of the county, is also grappling with a loss of youth, as many young people leave for urban areas due to limited opportunities. This is reflected in the decline in participation in youth organizations. A recent chamber survey identified "brain drain", the loss of educated and skilled individuals. However, Jamestown does benefit from "generational visitation," where tourists and residents return due to childhood experiences in the area.

Housing and construction in Jamestown, like other areas in California, face significant obstacles. Rising housing costs, a utility moratorium by the Jamestown Sanitary District, and limited developable land restrict growth. With much of Tuolumne County's land tied up in government or Williamson Act agreements, only a small percentage remains available for private development, often encumbered by issues like infrastructure costs, topography, and water supply. The high cost of fire insurance further complicates development, leading projects down the corridor toward Jamestown, but then they encounter these challenges.

In addition, the County of Tuolumne strained budget threatens essential services, including recreation. The growing homeless population and the town's experiences with drug-related issues further affect its image.

Ongoing Projects

- **Arts in the Area:** A recent grant from the California Arts Council to Tuolumne County Arts will keep funds within the community, supporting local art initiatives. Residents express interest in creative placemaking, commenting on ideas such as "artist-led regeneration" or "cultural regeneration." These theories suggest artists often revitalize neglected neighborhoods by fostering creativity and cultural activities. An example art in the area is the popular Hand-Made Parade, which celebrates local creativity and community spirit.
- **Bazaar/Farmer's Market:** This brings fresh food and vibrant activities to the area, enhancing community engagement and foot traffic.
- **Opening of Chicken Ranch Casino:** The casino has become a major local attraction, boosting tourism and economic activity in the area.
- **Future Development Opportunities:** Projects under consideration include a racetrack, solar energy facilities, and manufacturing developments.
- **Homelessness Reduction Efforts:** Ongoing initiatives are effectively assisting a significant portion of the homeless population. However, challenges remain with those residing on Main Street.
- **Gold Rush Trail:** The Tuolumne County Transportation Council is planning a Gold Rush Trail to attract tourists and highlight the area's rich history. This project will serve as a "Non-Motorized Highway", or the backbone of active transportation travel, in Tuolumne County. The completed path will stretch over 14 miles to continuously connect the major, and historical, Tuolumne County communities of Jamestown, Sonora, and Columbia as well as the Chicken Ranch Tribal Lands.
- **Railtown 1897 State Historic Park:** Railtown continues to draw visitors, particularly during the Polar Express event in winter. Discussions are ongoing about potential private ownership or operational changes to expand activities and rejuvenate the park.
- **Sierra Sourced Initiative:** This co-branding and co-marketing effort aims to increase visibility and promote local products and businesses across the Sierra region.
- **Jamestown Beautification:** Project includes sidewalk improvements, street trees, drainage improvements, multiple improvements to Rocca Park, Town entry signage, and a mural.

Action Items to Bring Progress

1. Creative Placemaking and the Arts

Plan and construct a network of trails connecting key areas, including tribal lands, public spaces, and town centers. This project will enhance recreational opportunities, improve connectivity, and attract both residents and tourists to the area. In addition, leverage grants, such as those from the California Arts Council, to fund local art projects that encourage creative placemaking. This could include developing initiatives like a Creative Reuse Store to promote sustainable art practices and community engagement. Establish Jamestown's brand by developing a cohesive theme, visuals, and marketing campaign for promotional materials, signage, social media, or when promoting events.

2. Develop Amenities for Visitors and Residents

Improve infrastructure with projects like sidewalk construction and combined parking solutions to enhance accessibility and convenience. Repair and improve the existing Walk of Fame. The previously mentioned trail system will foster outdoor recreation and connectivity. Focus on enhancing amenities such as signage and tourist attractions that benefit both residents and visitors, bringing more foot traffic to the area.

3. Revitalize the Business Landscape

Facilitate mixed-use development projects to create dynamic spaces that integrate retail, residential, and highlight the local culture and history. Encourage partnerships to explore private management models for attractions like Railtown, ensuring year-round activities to boost economic growth. Support local businesses through initiatives like the Sierra Sourced co-branding and co-marketing program to increase visibility. Explore reasons for the growing number of vacant properties and the loss of tourism in the area and develop cohesive strategies to attract new businesses and year-round visitors. And explore how regulations and permitting can be streamlined and eased in order to make starting a business faster.

4. Develop a Stronger Food Scene

Strengthen the local food scene by enhancing the activities which showcase regional produce and food vendors. Partner with local chefs, farmers, and entrepreneurs to host food festivals or events that highlight the area's culinary offerings. Possibly incorporate food-based activities into community events like cleanups and trail openings to further attract and engage residents and visitors.