

VI. Economic Development Element

A. Intent

The intent of this Economic Development Element is to create a plan that supports the economic vitality of Twisp and the Methow Valley, and the high quality of life that Twisp resident's value, by identifying baseline conditions of the economy, setting goals and policies that seek to improve those conditions, and providing an action plan for implementation of the element. The goals, policies and action items are intended to support the economic vision of the Town of Twisp, which is as follows:

The communities of the Methow Valley envision a diversified and sustainable year-round economy built upon enhancement and expansion of businesses that respect local history, the environment, small-town values and the diverse needs of residents and visitors

The Town of Twisp and the Methow Valley enjoy some wonderful assets, which provide a solid foundation for long-term economic vitality. The following are key examples:

Natural Amenities - The area has clean air, abundance of clean water, fertile soil, a warm, dry summer climate with a cold, snowy winter, and climatic conditions that range from marine to mountainous to desert.

Topography - The area's topography varies from gently rolling hills to a steep mountainous valley containing the Twisp and Methow Rivers and their tributaries.

Pre-existing Development & Infrastructure - In-place infrastructure includes water, sewer, reliable and low-cost power, incorporated Town government, housing, commercial and retail enterprises.

Extensive Public Land Ownership - Over 85 percent of land in The Methow Valley is publicly owned. This allows easy access to the backcountry and an abundance of recreational opportunities. This also focuses most economic development responsibility for retail and businesses into the towns.

Tourism Industry - The area is established and recognized as a summer resort and winter cross country ski destination.

Vibrant Arts Community – The Methow Valley is home to a large community of resident artists, and Twisp proper is home to four non-profit arts advocacy organizations and several businesses that support local and traveling performance and visual artists to the great benefit of the community.

In addition to these immense assets, many challenging conditions affect the economy in the Methow Valley. Future prosperity depends on meeting these challenges. Specifically, if the Town is to encourage economic development, it must address the following problems:

- 1) Average income in the Twisp and Methow Valley area is 58% of the median income

- for Washington State;
- 2) A large percentage of the town population is retired or absentee property owners;
 - 3) Seasonality of existing agriculture and tourism industries contribute to high poverty and unemployment levels;
 - 4) The agricultural sector is declining, including cattle ranching and fruit orchards;
 - 5) Wage levels have not kept pace with inflation;
 - 6) Housing costs continue to rise ahead of wages.
 - 7) Economic impact resulting from fossil fuel depletion, rising fuel costs and the Town's distance from other markets.

Five of the most important present and future economic sectors in the Town of Twisp and the Methow Valley are discussed below.

Agriculture

Small-scale agriculture, such as direct sale vegetable farms, dairies, ranches and orchards, are an important part of the character and identity of the Twisp community. The primary support the Town of Twisp can provide to encourage new local and sustainable agriculture businesses is to support the local farmer's market and other agricultural products marketing opportunities

Tourism

Tourism is a leading revenue producer in the Twisp area. The Methow Valley is well recognized as a premier summer vacation recreation destination. Unfortunately, this industry is also quite seasonal in nature. Typically, the resort industry flourishes in the summer and mid winter, but shoulder seasons are very quiet. Developing high quality recreational and cultural opportunities are key to the creation of a successful year-round tourism industry.

Manufacturing

Historically large-scale, higher wage industrial and manufacturing jobs were provided by the Wagner Mill and the businesses that served it. With the closure of the mill in 1985, the industrial and manufacturing industries in Twisp consist of small-scale, dispersed businesses such as welders, cabinetmakers and excavating contractors. Continuing to remove obstacles for location of clean, light industry is one of the priorities of this Element.

Rezoning the old Wagner mill site and land along the Methow River within the Town of Twisp is an example of the community's effort to attract desired manufacturing, software development and programming, high technology, recreational equipment manufacturing, and other similar growth industries. Diversifying the economy to include more manufacturing jobs should increase the wage scale.

Retail

Twisp serves as a services center to the greater Methow Valley. There is significant leakage to the larger retail and service centers of Wenatchee, Omak, and Seattle. Retailers struggle because the residential market base is small and the visitor market is minimal during the fall and spring seasons. This Plan is intended to encourage the development of the retail and service sector on a year-round basis.

Broadband/High Technology

Twisp is fortunate to have both private and public fiber optic and wireless capability that provide redundant connections. In order to take advantage of the economic potential of the existing fiber

networks, this technology must be readily available to businesses and residents in the Town.

B. Challenges, Needs and Opportunities

As mentioned in the Introduction, Twisp and the Methow Valley have many important assets, or strengths: Natural Amenities, Topography, Pre-existing Development & Infrastructure, Extensive Public Lands, an established Tourism Industry and a Vibrant Arts Community. These qualities were clearly identified by the community in numerous public workshops during two years of updating the Comprehensive Plan. During that process, community members also identified challenges, needs and opportunities.

CHALLENGES

Lack of water - All other threats pale in comparison to the town's inability to provide water for new growth. The principle reason for this inability is that Twisp lost a majority of its water rights in a lawsuit in the late 1990's. Conservation efforts in 2007-2008 have been successful in freeing up a modest quantity of water rights to allow up to 96 more connections (as of April 2008) or approximately 20% of our current usage in additional equivalent residential units.

Slow shoulder season economy – The various economic engines in the Methow Valley are seasonal in nature with most activity focused on summer and mid-winter activities. Many businesses which run at or near capacity during the summer, struggle through the slow winter months.

Overlapping layers of regulation - The general feeling among the community is that overlapping layers of regulation and associated fees, charges, rates and taxes represent a significant impediment to community economic prosperity. Whether the regulation is land use related or business related (e.g. minimum wage laws), the community is concerned about the impact on businesses and families.

Lack of public access to the Methow and Twisp Rivers – The majority of people that use the local rivers access them in places not in or near the Town of Twisp with the exception of the Twisp Park. It is imperative that more access be made available to one of the Towns most important assets.

Rapid growth at the expense of existing residents A planned strategy for economic growth that considers the desires and impacts on existing residents and businesses is paramount to this planning effort. This especially applies to not allowing “big box” retail stores into the Town.

Lack of project follow-through – One of the long-standing problems with local economic action planning is the failure to focus on a project through to completion. It is critical that the plan contain items that are achievable through carefully crafted short, medium and long-term strategies if the elected officials, community leaders and volunteers are to maintain a commitment through successful implementation

Unmet consumer expectations – Unattractiveness of some Town facilities and businesses, especially along the highway corridor, and poor roads and infrastructure affects residents and visitors alike to the Twisp experience.

Lack of lodging – There is a lack of lodging in Twisp, forcing potential visitors to vacation elsewhere.

Fluctuating Fuel Prices - A strategy for addressing economic changes resulting from fluctuating gas prices.

Leakage of retail sales – The growth of the retail section in the other areas is a threat to Twisp area businesses. Many residents choose to shop and spend their food, clothing, hardware, budgets at the larger stores in the Omak or Wenatchee area. The availability of greater variety and perceived lower prices is a draw not easily overcome by businesses in the Twisp area.

Winter highway closure – Early closing and late opening of the North Cross highway affects winter business.

NEEDS

Economic Development Coordinator - within the Twisp Town government responsible for attracting or helping new businesses locate to our area.

Developed recreation facilities - Twisp has an excellent pool and public park with playground, basketball court, an outdoor stage and picnic area. It also has a crude soccer and baseball field on the edge of town, and indoor basketball at the Community Center. The town could use an improved soccer and baseball field, a skate park, tennis courts, public restrooms and a park area designated for dogs.

Improved pedestrian pathways Safe pedestrian and bicycle routes are an important part of transportation for the community and should be considered as important as the automobile in the planning of our Town's growth. Sidewalks, bicycle lanes, crosswalks and the consideration of pedestrian activated lights and street lights need to be implemented with all new road construction as well as arterials and collectors.

Grant Writer – Twisp should identify a staff person, existing or new, to track and pursue grants related to Economic Development projects and infrastructure development.

Convention Center – Twisp should encourage the development of a business and cultural center.

Housing – With the rising cost of real estate and an increasing emphasis on lower wage, service based employment, Twisp is in need of a variety of housing, to include rentals, starter homes, condominiums, and townhouses.

OPPORTUNITIES

Stronger Identification with outdoor sports – The Methow Valley has access to all major forms of outdoor sports - Alpine and Nordic skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, mountain biking, hiking, kayaking, rafting and fishing. It also has one of the best-groomed and most extensive system of cross-country ski trails in the country – the MVSTA trail system - and is a prime location for accessing other facilities and trail systems in North Central Washington. Twisp should work closely with MVSTA to develop direct links to the MVSTA trail system, and host MVSTA events.

Agri-tourism – Growers in the Methow Valley have taken the lead in North Central Washington on development of opportunities for agri-tourism. Organic farms and dairies have been developed and local organizations are exploring ways to bring consumers closer to the orchards and farms in the area.

River access – Public access to the rivers is at a premium in and around Twisp. Fortunately, opportunities for creating a variety of small points of public access are available where un-built street rights-of-way exist and public ownership exists. An opportunity also exists to develop a Methow River walk and pedestrian bridge linking downtown and the former Wagner Mill site and south to the Burton Street neighborhood. See the Parks and Recreation Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Growing retirement community – The Twisp area is a desirable place for retirement. The climate, low crime rate, friendly small town atmosphere, landscape and reasonable cost of living are all factors. Retirees represent economic opportunities for a wide range of businesses and services.

SR 97 Corridor and North Cascades Highway – The designation of the portion of Highway 97 from Pateros north to the Canadian border as a Heritage Corridor, and the North Cascades Highway as a scenic bi-way, provides increased visibility for Twisp and Methow Valley area.

C. Goals and Objectives

The purpose of developing Goals and Objectives is to identify broad concepts for improving the Economy in Twisp (the Goals) and creating a list of specific tasks to meet those goals (the Objectives). Citizen and local business owner comments during the process of updating the Comprehensive Plan have guided the creation the following inputs Economic Development Goals and Objectives:

ED Goal 1: Maintain, enhance, and create partnerships.

Improving the economic well being of the Town of Twisp is more than a single local association or government can accomplish on its own. A wide range of partnerships with appropriate public and private entities will be required for successful implementation of this Element. The most critical ingredient for implementation of this element is leadership and involvement by the private sector.

Objective 1: Encourage close working relationships, including joint business ventures, between government agencies, private business interests and non-profit organizations.

Objective 2: Establish and maintain positive working relationships with the Chamber of Commerce, the Twisp Public Development Authority, downtown merchants, regional and state tourism, economic, community and downtown development and local tourism promotion groups.

Objective 3: Establish and maintain a positive working relationship with the school district.

Objective 4: Establish an Economic Development staff position within Twisp Town Government.

ED Goal 2: Maintain, improve and expand public infrastructure

Ensure the availability of adequate, efficient infrastructure with capacity for existing and planned growth and development.

Objective 1: Obtain sufficient water rights to support growth.

Objective 2: Develop and implement capital improvement plans for water, sewer, storm drainage, streets, bridges, park and recreation facilities, community and pedestrian facilities including public restrooms.

Objective 3: Encourage deployment of high speed, high bandwidth telecommunications services throughout the Town.

Objective 4: Identify town staff responsible for pursuing economic development grants. Support efforts by the Twisp Public Development Authority in their grant pursuits.

Objective 5: Install indirect pedestrian lighting on Hwy 20 Bridges crossing the Twisp and Methow Rivers. (see Transportation/Circulation Element, pg. 40).

Objective 6: Establish a Parking Committee to identify current and proposed parking areas and develop signage to facilitate visitor use. (see Transportation/Circulation Element, pg. 40).

Objective 7: Ensure Town development standards encourage proposed streets adequately

address the Town's goals for safety, pedestrian/bicycle compatibility, lighting and snow removal. (see Transportation/Circulation Element, pg. 40).

Objective 8: Develop non-motorized transportation links, such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes and a trail system, connecting the town with parks, neighborhoods and businesses (see Transportation/Circulation Element, pg. 40, and Community Identity Element, pg 46).

ED Goal 3: Remove barriers to and improve viability of agricultural industries.

Review and update existing land use and infrastructure plans and regulations to ensure, without limiting uses, that there are a variety of locations ready for development or expansion of agricultural support and processing facilities.

Objective 1: Promote and support efforts to diversify the agricultural industry through agri-tourism, farmers market and other value-added agricultural products, and produce stands.

ED Goal 4: Enhance and expand tourism and recreation in Twisp and the Methow Valley

Tourism has played a major role in the history and development of the community. Along with agriculture and construction, tourism and related development is an essential part of the economic life-blood of Twisp.

Objective 1: Support and facilitate development and enhancement of recreational amenities, facilities, activities and events.

Objective 2: Use "hotel/motel" tax dollars to build infrastructure and capital improvements to support tourism and promotional.

Objective 3: Support and facilitate the development of a cultural and community center that supports tourism, small town quality of life, and entrepreneurial efforts in the Town.

Objective 4: Consider design and redevelopment of private and public waterfront areas for mixed-use development projects that include retail shops, living spaces, overnight lodging, boardwalks.

Objective 5: Facilitate the improvement of existing public accesses, and the development of new accesses, to the Methow and Twisp Rivers, such as the Methow River Walk.

Objective 6: Facilitate the creation of a marketing plan providing for marketing, promotion, education and product development for tourism in Twisp.

ED Goal 5: Identify suitable sites for light/low impact business and industry

Development of the infrastructure, funding and capacity to accommodate existing businesses, and recruit new businesses and industries, is central to the creation of a year-round, diverse and sustainable economy.

Objective 1: Review and update existing land use and infrastructure (water, sewer, streets, storm drainage, and emergency services) plans to identify locations available and ready for commercial and industrial development and expansion.

Objective 2: Make development, adoption and implementation of fair, consistent and timely permit review and land use regulatory processes a priority.

Objective 3: Facilitate the development of the proposed mixed use Riverfront Commercial District.

Objective 4: Pursue grants and other “outside” funding to offset the impact of development costs on area citizens and businesses.

ED Goal 6: Create a strategic plan for a downtown “renaissance”

A centrally located, easily accessible, strong, and interesting downtown is important for the community’s economic well being and adds to the quality of life. Efforts to enhance or revitalize downtown must include a wide range of partners, each with specific roles. While the local government can provide a catalyst to initiate an effort, implementation and success rest with the business and landowners. See also the Community Identity and Historic Preservation Element.

Objective 1: Review and update existing land use and infrastructure (water, sewer, streets, storm drainage, and emergency services) plans and regulations to ensure that the downtown area is clearly defined, pedestrian friendly, well served by utilities and ready for commercial development and expansion.

Objective 2: Develop a consistent directional signage program for parks, retail services, restrooms, parking, and other points of interest.

Objective 3: Work with the Chamber of Commerce, downtown merchants and land owners, citizens and other regional and state entities to maintain a vibrant downtown.

Objective 4: Participate in a positive disposition and use for the Forest Service compound in downtown Twisp.

Objective 5: Protect and enhance the Community Center and the role it plays in the community.

Objective 6: Complete and pass a sign ordinance.

Objective 7: Develop a Highway 20 corridor and Twisp downtown beautification plan.

ED Goal 7: Protect the quality of the natural and social environment in the Town

Clean air and good water quality are essential to the quality of life and an important factor in decisions that make Twisp a popular destination. These important environmental factors should not be compromised as a result of growth.

Objective 1: Review and update existing land use and infrastructure (water, sewer, streets and storm drainage) plans and regulations to ensure compliance with County, state and federal statutory requirements for protection of the environment.

Objective 2: Create and adopt incentives that encourage new development to take advantage of the sites, terrain, and natural features with minimal disturbance.

Objective 3: Review and update existing land use and infrastructure (water, sewer, storm drainage, transportation, parks and emergency services) plans and regulations to ensure that appropriate planning for land uses and infrastructure precedes significant development.

Objective 4: Encourage the creation of publicly accessible open space in Planned Developments.

Objective 5: Support, revise as needed and implement the Town's Forestry Management Plan.

Objective 6: Review and update existing nuisance ordinances (see Section V.A.1, Community Identity, Community Vision of the Comp Plan).

ED Goal 8: Support and facilitate, as opportunities arise, access to secondary education and alternative training opportunities in the Methow

A long time stated need in the community is for living wage employment opportunities. Part of attracting or building sustainable business is having a trained work force. By providing opportunities for career enhancing training, the dual purposes of building workforce capacity for new businesses and offering opportunities for locals to obtain living wage employment are met.

Objective 1: Support partnerships that can create educational opportunities in Town.

Objective 2: In planning for public resources like the Forest Service property and Community Center, prioritize education and job training opportunities including alternatives like business incubators and small business development.

Objective 3: Encourage development of adequate childcare and after school programs.

D. Action Plan

The Action Plan is intended to pull out specific tasks from above Goals and Objectives above, and prioritize those tasks over time. As part of the Town of Twisp Comprehensive Plan, the actions and recommendations in this element focus on those items or areas where the Town has the authority to affect change, has primary responsibility for taking action or a significant role in a process/project initiated by others. In some cases other entities are identified as the lead for a particular action or recommendation (e.g. Chamber of Commerce). In addition, the actions and recommendations are intended to focus on things that are "doable."

General Priority Actions		
Timeframe	Action Item	Activities/Tasks
1-5 years	Enhance and create partnerships.	Maintain active membership in Chamber of Commerce – promote participation by town staff and elected officials
		Use the town budget process to remind local citizens how local sales tax revenues are used by the Town to fund parks, fire, police, library, planning, etc...
		Include School District in development of projects and plans
		Invite the Community to participate in annual capital projects planning by Council through public workshops
		Hold annual “spring-cleaning” Planning Commission workshops with focus on hearing from community and reviewing progress on implementing the Comp Plan
	Promote the Community	Maintain current inventory of developable lands with listed attributes, in cooperation with Okanogan County and area realtors.
		Enlist volunteers, using incentives, in implementation of community priorities
		Encourage establishment of higher education campus in Twisp.
		Encourage Town pride/beautification among businesses and residents
		Pursue state and federal programs geared toward regional economic development (e.g. Economic Development District)
		Create and maintain a community profile to help market the area to businesses looking to expand or locate in the Twisp area.
		Encourage a strategy to incubate new businesses that fill gaps in local market
	Encourage buying local	Enact Town policies, resolutions and/or ordinances that require, whenever possible and practical, that the Town buy materials, supplies and services from Twisp and Methow Valley businesses and vendors
		Encourage Chamber of Commerce to promote “buy local”
		Encourage development of co-ops
		Encourage other governmental organizations operating in the Twisp Area (i.e. PUD, Fisheries, Port, Schools, USFS) in the use and development of local services, vendors and suppliers
	Improve access to broadband telecommunications	Review local plans and regulations to eliminate unnecessary or redundant limitations on deployment of high-speed, high-bandwidth telecommunications throughout the community
		Cooperate with public and private telecommunications providers and community businesses and residents to develop the market demand required for cost effective deployment of high-speed, high-bandwidth telecommunications infrastructure

General Priority Actions		
Timeframe	Action Item	Activities/Tasks
	Improve Town Outreach	Adopt a policy that allows staff, with the Mayor's written approval, to participate in appropriate community activities as part of their job duties
		Support development of regional Small Business Development Center
		Support the efforts of the North Central Washington Business Loan Fund
	Grants	Support staffing or volunteer personnel that provides for a Town grant administrator for economic and infrastructure development

Infrastructure

Infrastructure includes a wide range of public and private physical projects that provide the utilities, facilities and services required for a community to thrive. This strategy area is intended to build upon the community's strong public water, sewer, streets and parks utilities/facilities, address identified weaknesses (e.g. the need for new and expanded community recreation facilities), and encourage private efforts to take advantage of community development opportunities in order to overcome identified weaknesses. The strategy area includes Projects/Themes and has a primary role in realization of all the goals and implementation of the policies contained in Chapter III. The projects/themes within this strategy area are:

Infrastructure Priority Actions		
Timeframe	Action Item	Activities/Tasks
1-5 years	Planning	Create an updated 6-year recreation plan with community input to make Town eligible for funding sources for parks, trails and recreational opportunities
		In planning, include pool as high priority.
		Develop non-motorized transportation links for Twisp, ensuring planning and regulatory support for its implementation
		Implement the Capital Facilities Plan (CFP)
		Update CFP project lists annually and the entire plan on a five year cycle
		Appoint Parking Committee
		Continue to support the existence and work of the Twisp Public Development Authority in planning efforts
		Work with Okanogan County and the Department of Transportation to insure projects identified through cooperative efforts are priorities in the County's Six-Year Street Plan, the Regional Transportation Plan and other appropriate documents
		Seek funding through state (RTPO, WSDOT) and federal (TEA-3) for design and construction of identified improvements
		1-5 years
Support the Wagner Memorial Pool Foundation in its efforts to maintain the community pool		
Support development of Festivals, Events and Facilities		
Support development of additional amenities at airport		
1-5 years	River Access	Continue working with adjoining property owners, businesses and utilities to prepare an acceptable plan to provide safe, convenient and aesthetically pleasing pedestrian access on the Methow River
		Design, permit, and construct Comprehensive Trail System (see Pedestrian Trails in Section IV, Parks and Recreation Element)
		Identify and develop town-owned properties with river access (see Proposed Park Sites in Section IV, Parks and Recreation Element)
		Provide incentives to property owners to provide public access

Infrastructure Priority Actions		
Timeframe	Action Item	Activities/Tasks
		Create ordinances for development to include public access to river and trail system
		Investigate feasibility of partnering on the Salmon Recovery site on the Twisp River.
		Identify funding sources, design, permit pedestrian bridge over the Methow River in Twisp
5 to 10 yr		Construct Methow River pedestrian bridge
1-5 years	Festivals and Events Facilities	Work with the School Districts, Chamber of Commerce and local arts and recreation associations to inventory existing venues, identify barriers to utilization of existing facilities and prepare a list of improvements needed to expand the type and scope of the events held in the area
		Support the development of a large multi-purpose conference/meeting/performing arts space
		Support creation of a parks/events coordinator position or committee, centralizing events scheduling, and to act as an advocate for removal of barriers to park use
1-5 years	Colville Tribes	Develop a cooperative and coordinated relationship with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

Agriculture

The third strategy area is Agriculture, one of the historic and desired future cornerstones of the Methow Valley's economy. Agriculture, specifically agri-tourism, orchards and value-added products was identified as a high priority. This strategy area is designed to encourage efforts by local agricultural interests in exploring new and direct marketing crops, developing a value-added industry and increasing the tourism draw to agricultural enterprises.

Agriculture Priority Actions		
Timeframe	Action Item	Activities/Tasks
1-5 years	Farmers Market	Cooperate with the Famer's Market Board in their efforts to market and plan for expansion of the Farmer's Market
	Agri-Tourism	Support Town staff and/or elected officials' participation in agri-tourism and agricultural promotion oriented groups
		Support community "agri-tourism" workshop with focus on hearing from a variety of sources about strengths, weakness, threats and opportunities facing local agriculture
		Encourage the Twisp Public Development Authority to include Agri-tourism in planning efforts
	Value-added Industries	Encourage the development of a local agricultural products marketing cooperative
		Support local participation in the Highway 97 Corridor project to promote the development of agri-tourism in the Methow Valley
		Identify and remove barriers to the placement of crop signs in the area
		Encourage the development of a brochure to promote agriculture in the Twisp area. The brochure should highlight the areas crops and products, provide a "guided" tour of the area and encourage visitors to patronize local farmers and provide links to town vendors in marketing chain
		Encourage the creation of an "incubator" in Twisp with a focus on development, production and marketing of value-added agricultural products (possible Community Kitchen)

Tourism

The fourth strategy area is Tourism, another historic and desired future cornerstone of the Town of Twisp's economy. Tourism, specifically agriculture and recreation oriented, was identified as the top priority¹ through the process used to develop this element. This strategy area is designed to encourage efforts by local businesses, interest groups and governments to improve and expand the scope and reduce the seasonality of tourism in the Methow Valley. Most of the top strengths and promising opportunities are related to this strategy area. The strategy area includes nearly all of the Projects/Themes priorities, however, only the higher priority themes are addressed below.

Tourism Priority Actions		
Timeframe	Action Item	Activities/Tasks
1-5 years	Enhance tourism and recreation opportunities in Twisp	Identify Town staff, and appoint Council member and Planning Commissioner to work directly with MVSTA to strengthen ties and coordination between the Town and MVSTA and establish a dialogue on winter recreation
	Beautification	Appoint a Twisp Beautification Committee (see Section V, Community Identity Element)
	River Access	Develop a plan for public access to the Methow River including means to develop a trail system
	Facilities	Support the development of existing community resources (like the Forest Service property and the Community Center) that have strong tourism elements