

Alexander Morris post via Nextdoor 12/15/2022

I'm not sure where I stand on this issue, but one thought I'd add to the discussion is:

History need not define our future. It must be considered and should influence how we choose to move forward, but places evolve, and their economies change. An industry that was once our lifeblood need not necessarily be our lifeline moving forward.

Case-in-point: before we were a vacation community, we were a logging community. Redwood lumber right now is worth more per board-foot than it ever has been. Yet the community has voiced that it no longer wishes to be a logging community, despite the clear economic advantages that sustainable logging may bestow to our community (I concede it has a lot of negatives - I don't support large-scale local logging - but it illustrates my point nicely).

Logging declined along the RR throughout the first half of the 20th century, tourism grew in its place. Tourism to the RR has declined since the 70s. There are challenges to growing tourism here, mainly having to do with flood mitigation and infrastructure maintenance. Those factors contributed to the decline of RR tourism, and those factors still exist. Wine and beer production for sale out-of-county have increased over this timespan, partially offsetting the lost economic activity from tourism.

Primary industries shift. Maybe we should be viewing this inflection point as an opportunity to build a local economy around sustainable practices of conservation. Imagine the economic benefit to the county if the Salmon population were to return, or if West County can capture our relatively abundant rainfall by soaking it into the ground and making the entire county more arable. I would point to Cazadero as an example: their tourism died in the 30s when the railroad left, but they've maintained a local economy built around sustainable forestry.

Heck, the local economy has already changed since COVID, by simple virtue of the increased share of people WFH in "Professional Services". These earners brought their revenue streams to West County from places like San Francisco, and this income is affecting local demand for goods and services. Would a gym/clubhouse/for-profit-community center better serve this new demographic and the long-term residents than a hotel? Perhaps. It could certainly provide similar economic activity. Maybe we don't need to bring more tourist dollars into West County, maybe we need to make it easier for the earners already here to spend their dollars locally. Maybe it is the case that a new hotel would bring the most economic benefit to the area.

This discussion should focus on actual expected effects of such a project, not on the history of a cherry-picked couple of decades of heavy tourism that caused tremendous damage to our local ecology.

There may paths toward economic invigoration that don't require resuscitating industries that faded away for a reason.