

A CHICKEN IN EVERY POT...AND 1.1 JOBS FOR EVERY HOUSE!

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In the language of the community planner, it's called “jobs/housing balance.” As a resident of Nevada County, it's something you need to be concerned about.

A winning baseball team is one that has gone a long way to achieving balance between power, speed, defense and pitching. Teams eliminated from post-season play can typically point to a glaring deficiency in one or more of these necessary areas—areas that play off each other to the benefit of the team as a whole.

Ideally, a community should find an equilibrium that allows for maximum employment opportunity for its residents. From a planning perspective, the State of California holds out a ratio of 1.25 jobs per housing unit as ideal. In its General Plan, the County of Nevada has adopted a goal of 1.1 jobs per housing unit. In fact, the last time such a ratio was measure here in Nevada County, we were at a ratio of .92 jobs per housing unit, which in part explains why we have 27% of our local workforce commuting out of town for work.

Regardless of what specific numeric ratio a community happens to settle on, the reality is that successful communities must achieve a balance between the number of jobs in the community and the number of dwelling units. An disproportionate number of jobs to housing means that the community will import bodies to fill the jobs during the day, returning workers to other communities after hours. Conversely, an over-abundance of housing compared to jobs means that a large percentage of workers will have to commute to their job in another community.

It is well established that Nevada County has needed to expand its job base for some time, and in fact, there has been some progress made toward that goal. However, we are now finding that companies founded here are having some difficulty finding industrial properties on which to expand their companies. There is a far too common perception that somehow Nevada County has a supply of industrial land that will satisfy demand for hundreds of years into the future. Although there may be industrial designations showing on a land use map, the majority of these properties are entirely unimproved—far distant from necessary infrastructure such as adequate roads, sewer, etc. Others, because of topographical limitations, allow for only a very small building envelope. In truth, there are today only a handful of properties locally that can accommodate an industrial building in the near future.

It becomes extremely important, then, that we pay close attention to the amount of industrial ground set aside in the review of proposed annexations. If we set our sights on building too many houses without reserving adequate property for jobs, we will find that we will simply see more and more cars leaving each morning for their commute down the hill. If a decision is made to annex property, it should promote a balance that will strengthen our community—a balance between jobs and housing.