

City Talk for Dec. 28, 2022
Economic Development Department
Molly Spangler, economic development director

What is economic vitality?

As part of our 10-year Community Plan outreach, we recently held a Listening and Learning Session to discuss economic vitality and why it is important to the long-term sustainability of Sedona. So, what is economic vitality and why is that the approach of our Economic Development Department? In many communities around the state and nation, economic development is about more growth, more people, bigger buildings and the need for more resources. This version of economic development is not what we're striving for in Sedona for we know that "more at the sake of having more" does not align with our local values. Instead, we are seeking ways to have long-term economic vitality that yields a high quality of life for our residents for years to come.

To achieve economic vitality, we need to work on the foundational elements of ensuring businesses have access to resources, a sufficient workforce to address employers' needs, diversified business industries, workforce housing, higher-wage jobs/careers, developable commercial space, increased access to quality healthcare, recreational amenities and 21st-century utilities such as broadband. Since the last Community Plan was adopted in 2014, the city has been working on these efforts.

This work is ongoing and implemented by many of my coworkers through the city. Through the work of Economic Development Department and its partners, businesses have access to resources such as business planning, loans, industry data and training opportunities. In the past six years, the Economic Development Department has assisted over 150 local businesses and potential start-ups resulting in more than \$17.5 million of business financing and \$6.1 million of additional private investment. The current workforce is seeking recreational opportunities and many look to locate in beautiful regions of the world like Sedona. The shared-use paths, art spaces and park investments all contribute to the recruitment and retention of a local workforce. Workforce housing is a high priority for the city council, and this is key to the long-term economic vitality of our community. These efforts will ensure that Sedona has housing to retain a workforce that can help our community maintain its high quality of life.

The Economic Development Department's priorities for this year include two key ingredients for our vision of economic vitality: broadband and increased access to quality healthcare. Broadband remains a priority for the city for we know this helps our residents and businesses with fast, reliable internet service. The city council has indicated their interest in learning more about broadband solutions that offer decent rates, reliability, quality customer service and competition. As you may know, we were hoping to be part of Yavapai County's Final Mile Broadband Initiative, but Optimum informed the city they will not be able to move forward with their proposed expansion in Sedona. The Economic Development Department is continuing to look into different internet service providers (ISPs), learning about available federal funding

for broadband, and meeting with experts in the field to best determine what's the most feasible approach for increasing broadband access.

Healthcare is a targeted industry that will not only increase the provision of care but will create and retain jobs in a diversifying industry. The city is working with a citizen-led work group that has been discussing the issues and potential next steps to improve local healthcare. The next steps and potential remedies include holding a regional conversation, and possibly an assessment, on healthcare services and the associated gaps to have more open dialogue with existing healthcare providers and to better understand the barrier to attracting and retaining healthcare services and the healthcare workforce.

Healthcare and broadband will continue to be areas to improve upon as we work on the city's long-term economic vitality. We know that economic diversification and continuing to address workforce housing is also imperative. We invite you to share your thoughts on how to further goals of economic vitality in the city. The time is now to share your thoughts as we work on our next 10-year Community Plan. Please go to www.plansedona.com to learn more, participate and share your ideas.

The city's Economic Development Department serves our residents by focusing on the long-term economic sustainability of the community. This is done through supporting economic diversification, local business assistance, job creation and leveraging other opportunities in our community. For information on the above-mentioned services and other business support resources, contact me any time at mspanpler@sedonaaz.gov.