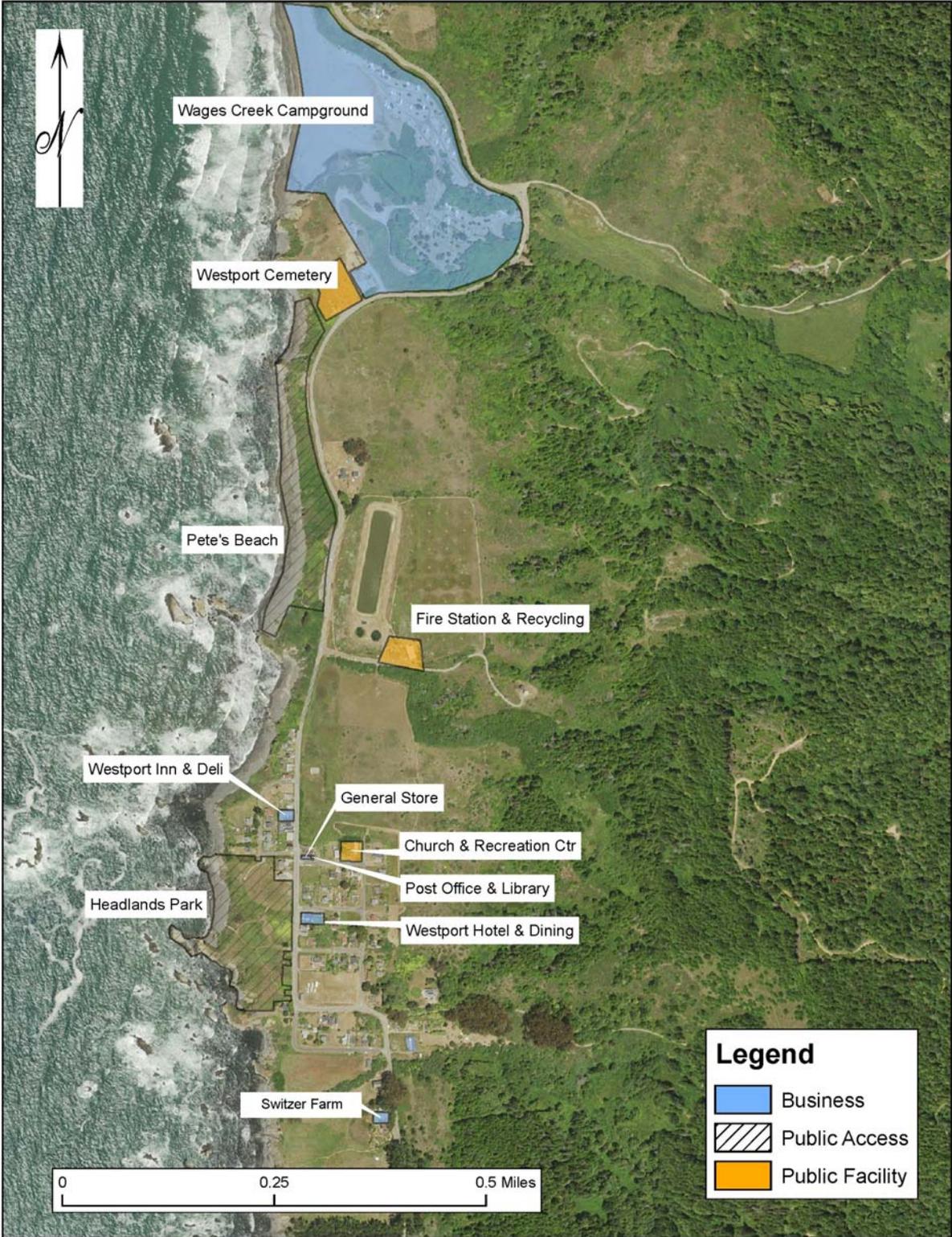


# WESTPORT'S ECONOMIC RESILIENCY PLAN



## WESTPORT'S ECONOMY

Westport is a small community in a remote and dramatic setting along the northern Mendocino County coast. Established in the 1860s, the economy initially focused on timber production and small scale farming connected to the global marketplace by shipping. With the decimation of local forests the last local mill closed in 1920. Shipping ceased in 1930 as roads were improved.

The population of the community has remained less than 300 permanent residents for the past century. There is a post office, public water and sewer district, a volunteer fire company, a community center and church, a transfer station, a cemetery, and a community park managed by a local nonprofit. The community is close-knit and participates in local gatherings that include three major fundraising events in March, May, and August popular with visitors and residents alike. A community vegetable garden is an ongoing project at the Community Center.

The economy is increasingly dependent on tourism and distant jobs, with minor contributions from agriculture, cottage industries, and trades/professions. Tourism supports the hospitality and retail sectors that are the only visible commercial establishments. Four commercial lodging facilities, two campgrounds, and numerous vacation rentals host visitors. Retail businesses include a general store, restaurant, winery, and rock quarry. Other trades, artisans, and professional people operate in the community without storefronts.

The rural village of Westport is unincorporated with most of the population living on surrounding lands. It is zoned Rural Village and lies in the Coastal Zone. Coastal access is a major tourist attraction, with public lands available at the headlands in the village, Westport Union Landing State Park to the north, and the Bruhel point property owned by Caltrans to the south. Route 1 is part of the Pacific Coast Bicycle Trail and thousands of bicyclists visit the town annually.



Today, only half of the houses in Westport are occupied year round. The locals mix with part time residents and increasing numbers of tourists. Part time residents form an active part of the extended community, contributing and participating in the life of the village. Westport has not been self sufficient since the timber boom ended a century ago. It relies heavily on Fort Bragg for its economic, educational, and cultural opportunities and income derived from visitors. Local livelihoods are in most cases marginal, often supplemented with work or income from outside the community. Businesses boom in summer and must weather lulls in winter when tourism is down.

## **PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS**

Local residents have actively participated in several planning efforts relevant to the local economy. About 15% of the population participated in a community planning study that resulting in the report *Crafting Westport* by the Architecture Department of the University of California, Berkeley in 2004. That study found residents strongly favored development that sustained the community, but were more divided about growth. There was overwhelming support for preserving the character of the town and creating more affordable housing. The input favored modest growth that offers year round economic opportunities for the local population.

A 2011 study funded by a state transportation grant had a comparable participation rate, resulting in the *Westport Area Integrated Multi-Use Coastal Trail Plan* submitted to MCOG. A collaboration of the Westport Municipal Advisory Council and the former Coastal Land Trust, it analyzed priorities for non-motorized transportation in the local area. Paved shoulders on Route 1 from Branscomb Road to Westport were regarded as the single highest priority to safely connect the community with outlying residences. Efforts to obtain funding have so far proven unfruitful.

Another study called *Vision Mendocino 2030 Blueprint Plan* by MCOG sought input from Westport residents, but drew only modest participation. It provided no specific recommendations for Westport. To supply local input on the current Economic Resiliency Plan under preparation for the County by EDFC and MOVE2030, the Westport MAC met July 7, 2020. Six people attended, half of them owners of local hospitality and restaurant businesses. This document summarizes input on local Strengths, Opportunities, Challenges, and Suggested Actions that came from that discussion.

## **WESTPORT STRENGTHS**

We are a friendly, tight-knit community in a beautiful and remote place that is a good place to get away, enjoy nature, and have time to oneself. Many visitors enjoy participating in local events such as fundraisers, classes at the community center, and other local activities published in a monthly community newsletter. Locals identified the following strengths and community values:

- Small, quaint, isolated community (a good place to get away)
- Natural beauty
- Excellent coastal access (fishing, kayaking, surfing, and other coastal recreations)
- Gateway to the Lost Coast (last place to pick up supplies)
- Strong sense of community and historical character
- Municipal services can accommodate growth
- High speed internet is available in the village (but lacking in surrounding areas)
- There is high participation by locals and visitors in community events

## **ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES**

Most economic opportunities envisioned by locals pertain to activities that derive income from visitors, but the possibilities of cottage industries is recognized and considered compatible with the existing character of the village. The desire is for sustainable modest growth with more affordable housing that retains the character of the village while supporting residents. There is a largely unrealized potential for cottage industries, increased retail of local products, telework, and services such as construction and landscaping.

- Tourism (lodging, dining, retail, healing services like massage)
- Services catering to campers (retail, dining)
- Ecotourism (provisioning, hostelry for bicyclists, equipment rentals)
- Cottage Industries (locally made products such as Pacific Star Winery, etc.)
- Restaurants, cafes, dispensary, wellness center
- Artist's cooperative (outlet for our many talented local artists)
- Seasonal outdoor markets (local goods and produce)
- Services such as construction, landscaping, and cleaning
- Home-based professional services
- Internet-based cottage industries
- Small scale agriculture (truck farms, boutique marijuana)

## **LOCAL CHALLENGES**

Westport residents feel there are many challenges or obstacles to economic growth. One force that has had negative consequences is real estate speculation, which prices many locals out of marketplace. Wage labor is generally low paying in tourism and retail sectors. Better internet and shipping capabilities are needed to support growth of cottage industries.

- Not enough affordable housing for workers
- Unaffordable real estate due to outsider speculation
- Excessive regulatory hurdles, permit costs, and permit processing timelines suppress growth
- Low tourist visitation in winter (sustainable economy must market to locals or encourage winter tourism)
- Power outages (mostly in winter, but now also planned summer outages for fire safety)
- Difficult transportation access (remote location promotes and deters tourism)
- Not enough local prepared food services (restaurants, cafes)
- Need for improved high speed, affordable internet access throughout local area
- Need for improved landline and cell telephone service throughout local area
- Improved shipping capability needed

## **SUGGESTED ACTIONS TO IMPROVE THE LOCAL ECONOMY**

Initial discussions identified a range of actions that might improve the resiliency and sustainability of Westport's economy. The County and other governmental partners could improve the resiliency of the local Westport economy by taking or supporting the following actions. These actions are not presented in any particular priority order. Actions on any of these items would have positive economic impacts.

- Ease permit requirements, reduce permit costs, and expedite permit processing (Planning Department CDP and building permits; Health Department event permits)
- Prioritize enforcement of actions against owners of derelict properties that give the village a blighted appearance (vacant/collapsing/unsafe structures)
- Improve local streets in the village and address drainage problems (Department of Transportation)
- Spend more Visit Mendocino/TOT to advertise and fund Westport events that attract tourism
- Work with MCOG and Caltrans to build the priority Coastal Trail along highway shoulders between Branscomb Road and Westport village (connecting the surrounding community and campgrounds to village by non-motorized transportation modes)
- Incentivize construction of affordable and perhaps even low-income ownership of housing in Westport village (a possible model is the Habitat for Humanity approach)
- Approve ADU ordinance in coastal zone to incentivize availability of affordable housing
- Support microgrid in Westport to address power outages and support undergrounding of utilities in the village.
- Work with lenders to make small loans more readily available for startups like cottage industries and ease permitting of those startups in existing buildings.

## **REFINING THIS DOCUMENT PRIOR TO SUBMISSION**

Further input will be sought from Westport area residents, local businesses, workers, and those who are un- or under-employed. Comments may be sent to the Westport Municipal Advisory Council at PO Box 307, Westport CA 95488 or by email to: [WMAC95488@wildblue.net](mailto:WMAC95488@wildblue.net) no later than July 31, 2020.