

City of Fortuna

Listening Campaign Report

March, 2026

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Consults

for the City of Fortuna

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Fortuna
Chamber of
Commerce

In Appreciation

This report exists because people chose to show up — not just to meetings, but to each other.

To the Design Team: You shaped this process from the beginning, asking key questions about who needed to be heard and how to reach them. Your guidance ensured that this campaign listened broadly and deeply, including voices that don't typically show up in city planning. Thank you for your vision and your willingness to try something different. Also: thanks to Raven Ross, Cal Poly Humboldt Intern.

To the staff interviewers: You sat across from your colleagues and asked them to be honest — about their frustrations, their hopes, and what keeps them coming to work. That takes courage on both sides of the conversation. The candor in these pages reflects the trust you built, and the care you brought to every interview.

To the community interviewers: You gave your time to listen to your neighbors — some you knew well, others you were meeting for the first time. You asked people to share what they love about Fortuna and what worries them about its future. Those conversations are the foundation of everything that follows.

To everyone who agreed to be interviewed: Thank you for trusting this process with your honest reflections. Your words — about what you value, what you hope for, and what concerns you — are the heart of this report.

To Focus Group partners and participants: thank you for assistance with outreach, design, and for showing up to dig into rich conversations.

To Cal Poly Interpretation Students and the North Coast Interpreters and Translators: We are grateful for your time and effort to translate this report, related materials, and provide interpretation at upcoming workshops.

What emerges from these conversations is not just data. It's a portrait of a community that cares deeply about its future and is willing to do the work to shape it together. It will be useful to the City and community organizations for years to come — put it to work!

This report honors everyone's investment by presenting what was shared as faithfully and usefully as possible, so that Fortuna's next steps are grounded in the real voices of the people who call it home and the staff who work so hard to provide services for residents.

With gratitude,

Amy Nilsen, Fortuna City Manager

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Find the Executive Summary at: www.friendlyfortuna.com

[Or use this link to go directly to the project page](#)

1. A Journey of Discovery

Fortuna is a small city at a crossroads. This former redwood mill town tucked into the Eel River Valley faces big questions about its future — and this is the story of what arose when its community sat down to listen to each other.

What do Fortunans actually share, beneath the noise of everyday disagreements? That question — and what emerged when people across the community sat down to answer it honestly — is what these pages are about.

The story that follows will come to life in a series of spring workshops where the community will use what's here to shape Fortuna's path forward, and City staff and Council will turn that wisdom into planning guidance.

Planning for what? City leadership has decided that Fortuna needs a Strategic Plan and an updated General Plan (see section 2C for more about how these plans guide future City decisions). What follows is a journey to discover what the people who live in and work for Fortuna need most out of these plans – and from each other – to have the future they deserve.



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2. Why A Listening Campaign Kick Off to Fortuna's Planning Processes?

Fortuna's Crossroads

Historic industries are gone without equivalent replacement. The desire for small-town character is challenging the need for economic growth and state-mandated housing density. Since major changes in the timber economy, Fortuna has not come together to collectively imagine the future it wants to create for itself.

The Value of Listening First

Traditional planning processes often produce documents that sit on shelves. This Listening Campaign starts with understanding and establishing common ground before decisions are made. The result is not just better plans, but confident planning, smoother implementation, and ability to keep learning and adjusting.

An Adaptive Approach

Recognizing that in the complex, constantly changing environment we now live in, the best plans emerge through ongoing learning rather than top-down prediction, rigid structure, or "best practices." For a small city with limited resources, the ability to regularly adjust as needed matters as much as plans themselves.

This Listening Campaign was the first step in a deep, continuing conversation, not a one-time exercise.

I have participated over the years in strategic planning... This is an entirely different process. We felt heard... helping to address the 'us versus them' that exists in this world, with staff, in the community, and with our City government. This process is going to yield great benefits.

- Fortuna Chief of Police to the City Council, December 2025

2. Why A Listening Campaign Kick Off to Fortuna's Planning Process?

Objective: Create Core Principles to Guide the Planning Process

City planning typically jumps straight to specific priorities, tasks and policies: what services to prioritize, where should housing go, how do we fix this intersection. With **shared agreement on what Fortuna is trying to become** and what it values most, those conversations can avoid becoming battlegrounds where the loudest voice wins.

Coming up with and applying guiding principles — in this case, a **shared vision, clear values, purpose, and decision filters for making hard choices** — help policy conversations be more productive. When a contentious proposal comes before Council, shared principles offer a sounding board: does it align with who we said we want to be? They give leaders clear reasons for decisions and a response when pressure mounts to react to the loudest voices.

Council members expressed a clear need: "Having something like this prepared gives us guidance on how the people expect us to go." They want a long-term "plan that survives leadership changes" rooted in collective community values.

The goal is not a document that sits on a shelf, but a **living sense – shaped together by a broad diversity of community members, staff, and Council** – that informs how Fortuna makes decisions over the next decade.

I'm uninformed on what the vision is, or it doesn't exist.

- Staff Interviewee

Having something like this prepared gives us guidance on how the people expect us to go

- City Council Interviewee

3. City Planning Context & Project Approach

3A. What the City of Fortuna Does

Cities provide local services, manage local land use, and shape community investment priorities. Small cities, like the City of Fortuna, are constrained by a smaller budget and staff. A wider range of services are provided by the County of Humboldt and State of California. Elected City Councils make broad policy decisions and staff figure out how to implement them.

Streets & Sidewalks	Local road maintenance (inside City limits), sidewalks, streetlights, local traffic signals, pedestrian infrastructure
Parks & Recreation	City parks, trails, recreation programs, facility rentals (Monday Club and River Lodge)
Public Safety	Fortuna Police Department, code enforcement, emergency preparedness
Water & Sewer	Water system, wastewater treatment, utility billing
Land Use & Planning	General Plan, zoning, building permits, land development review, building design standards
Economic Development	Business attraction, business/land use development incentives, Main Street/Mill Site planning (not development)
City Facilities	City Hall, community buildings, public spaces
Communication	City website, public notices, community engagement, Council meetings

3B. Who Ensures Fortuna Runs Well?



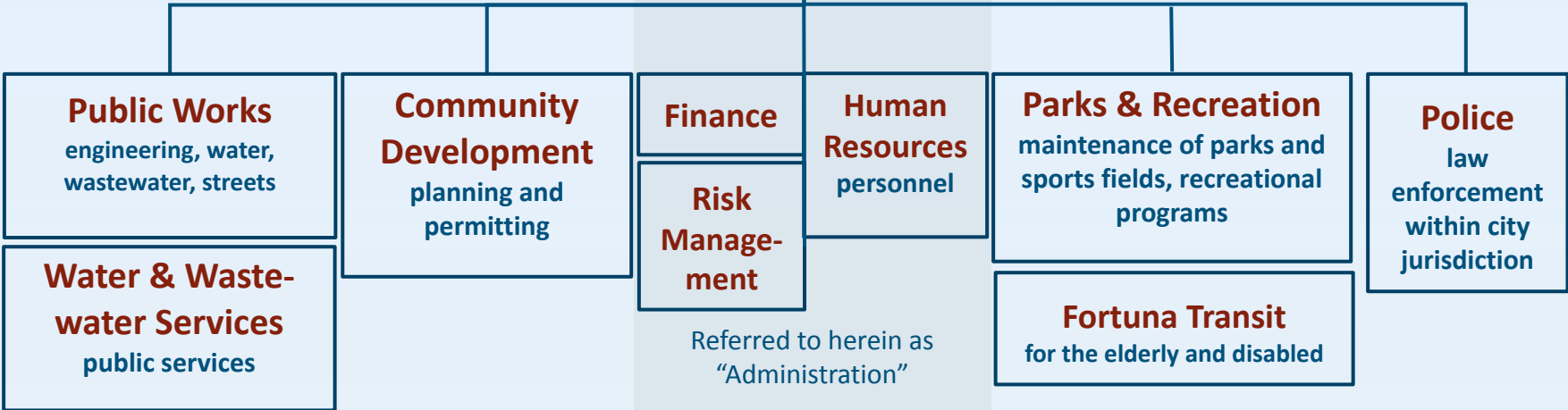
City Council (5, elected)

Mayor: Mike Johnson
Mayor Pro Tem: Tami Trent
Council Members:

- Kyle Conley
- Carlos Diaz
- Abe Stevens

City Manager: Amy Nilsen

City Manager



3C. Planning Process Focus: Strategic & General Plans

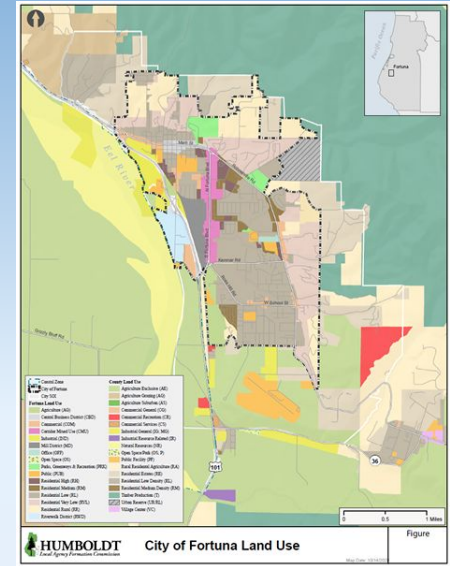
Shared vision, values, purpose, and decision filters for making choices will guide plan specifics.

City Strategic Plans

- A long-term roadmap defining a community vision and agency purpose
- Sets priorities
- Outlines targets and strategies to achieve them
- Serves as a guide for consistent, fair decision-making and resource allocation
- Ensures development of the City aligns with the aspirations of residents and meets capacity
- Good ones foster collaboration between departments while improving internal and external trust and engagement

City General Plans in California

- Required long-term legal framework that guides the future growth and development of the community
- Describes City vision for the future and contains goals and policies for issues such as housing, land use, transportation, and environmental protection
- A basis for land use decisions, infrastructure investments and development regulations
- [“Housing Elements”](#) are one of nine legally mandated GP components required to be updated every eight years to adapt to changing housing needs across the state
- Most California GPs are based on templates developed many decades ago
- The [Fortuna 2030 Plan](#) was written in 2010
- There is a [Specific Plan for the Mill District](#)
- Cities and Counties are required to complete regular General Plan Updates (GPU)



For example: the General Plan provides guidance about what type of development can occur in Fortuna and how and where more housing can be built.

3D. How We Listened to Diverse Perspectives & Voices

The Listening Campaign was built on **conversational interviews** — conversations designed to understand what people think and do, what they value, what concerns them, and what they hope for, anonymously. This approach surfaces "why" behind opinions, resulting in richer material for seeking common ground on which to build plans with broad public support and partnership.

Interview participants were selected to represent varied perspectives, for instance: long-time and newer residents, families and elders, business owners and service providers, staff across all City departments, elected officials, and youth and immigrant community members who do not traditionally participate in local government planning processes.

Diverse perspectives and viewpoints form a chorus with a strong sense of who they want Fortuna to be. The coming pages include community members' experience *living* in Fortuna, Council *governing* the City, and staff *operating* the City: **together, they form a fairly complete picture.**

For complete information on interview protocols, participant selection, and approach, see **Appendix A.**

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3E. Who We Listened To

Community Interviews (19): One-on-one conversations with residents from diverse backgrounds, tenures, and perspectives. Participants rated City performance on key dimensions and shared their hopes for Fortuna's future.

Staff Interviews (19): Confidential interviews with employees across all four city departments — Public Safety, Public Works/Utilities, Parks & Recreation, and Administration. Staff provided candid assessments of organizational effectiveness, governance, and priorities. Interviews included numerical ratings (0-10) on collaboration, clarity of vision, and guidance on housing/economic development.

City Council Interviews (5): Individual conversations with each Council member exploring their vision, priorities, and understanding of community concerns.

Staff Workshop (13): A facilitated session with senior staff in November where they synthesized internal interview results, drafted guiding principles, decision-making criteria, and strategic priorities.

Teen Focus Group (8): Structured conversation exploring young people's experience of Fortuna, sense of belonging, and desires for improvement.

Immigrant Focus Group (12): Conversation in Spanish exploring experiences of immigrants in the community, barriers to participation, and community priorities.

How Findings Are Weighted: Interview data carries primary weight in this analysis — these one-on-one conversations allowed for deeper exploration and follow-up. Focus group findings provide valuable perspective where more group reinforcement was possible, particularly on experiences less represented in the interview sample and traditional public engagement processes. For more about who we listened to, see the beginning of each Appendix.

This process itself models productive engagement.

- Staff Interviewee



4. The Voices of Fortuna

The following is an analysis of results from the combination of three sets of interviews and two focus groups. The fine detail and specific voices are and will be important to Fortuna for years to come – it is available in Appendices A-F. This is important documentation to honor the participants and as this material informs planning efforts inside and outside City Hall into the future.

Feels like my people here. Love the diversity of thought, where different cultures, good ol' boys, and transplants usually come together for a kind purpose.

- Community Interviewee

We make civilization possible.

- Staff Interviewee

Me encanta Fortuna, pero para ser honesto, ni siquiera sé cuáles son sus prioridades.

I love Fortuna, but to be honest I don't even know what its priorities are.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

I would love more street fairs where you can wander and shop. And an arcade for families.

- Teen Focus Group Participant

It's important to hear what the community really wants... We don't get to talk to everybody by the time we have to make a decision.

- Council Member Interviewee

We're at a different point here, because I don't think this agency has ever been this close to saying, "Well, if we can't fix our financial picture, then we could be eliminating positions and decreasing levels of service." - Staff Interviewee

From a business standpoint, a realistic market economy standpoint, you bring in a [large box] business, it will destroy some small business. That's how this works, right? You have to tear down to grow bigger. And this is where I feel like the competing push-pull comes into play, because nobody wants to impact those small businesses and say, 'I'm sorry, you're going to be negatively impacted.' - Community Interviewee

4A. Community Interview Results

The following is an analysis of results from 19 interviews with a diverse array of Fortuna community members. To find out more about who was interviewed, see Appendix pages A1 and B2.

If you don't know where you're going, you're liable to get there.

- Community Interviewee

Nobody questioned anything. It was just like a posse of people going up and down the street... Some of those people don't always get along, but in that moment, none of it mattered.

- Community Interviewee, about 2022 earthquakes response

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4A.1. Community Perspective: What Fortunans Care About Most

Widely shared community beliefs, ideals and interests will inform City guiding principles: vision, values, purpose, and filters for making hard choices.

1. Economic Development as Foundation

The shared value of family and being a welcoming community is threatened by the lack of economic opportunity. Without jobs, youth leave, family networks disperse, and the community loses its anchor. Economic development is not just a fiscal priority — it's **essential to preserving what community members love most about Fortuna.**

2. Communication as Trust

The ideal of clear direction is undermined by an undocumented vision and an information gap. Community members who feel "in the dark" lose trust in government and disengage from civic participation. **Transparent, accessible communication** isn't just operational — it's foundational to a City-residents relationship.

3. Youth as Future

Every value, ideal, and interest expressed by community members underlies concern for the wellbeing of Fortuna's youth. Productive activities are key to their development. When family networks can't stay, they break, community spirit fades, and town character changes. A youth retention thread connects all priorities.

4. Belonging as Identity Test

Fortuna's **self-image as "the Friendly City"** is challenged by **experiences of exclusion among some residents** — a pattern brought up and explored in both Focus Groups (Sections 4D-4E) and mentioned in interviews. Closing the gap between intent and impact would strengthen community cohesion and civic participation.

4A.2. Priority Community Challenges

Challenge	Why this challenge?	What does this mean for planning?
Economic Development & Revenue Generation	Historic industries have not been replaced. Retail leaks to Eureka-Arcata. Mill Site represents concentrated hope, yet faces infrastructure hurdles (3-5 year timeline). Main Street "closes at five." "... need to grow revenue."	Evaluate major decisions against revenue generation potential. Prioritize infrastructure that unlocks development. Establish metrics for retail leakage reduction and freeway capture.
Vision, Direction & Communication	"Hard to get behind unknown ideas." Information may exist but isn't reaching community. Desire for regular forums where residents can ask questions and receive updates.	Make the vision stick through plans that survive leadership transitions. Establish regular community forums. Create "State of Fortuna" communications. Require Council to publicly reference plan priorities when making decisions.
Youth Amenities & Retention	Insufficient activities and opportunities for teens and young adults. Theater closed; no entertainment venues. "Nothing to do but sit in parking lots." Lack of career pathways. Activities gap directly connected to substance use concerns.	Apply a "youth lens" to major decisions: Does this create reasons for young people to stay or return? Identify locations for youth-oriented amenities.

CONTINUED

4A.2. Priority Community Challenges, continued

Challenge	Why this challenge?	What does this mean for planning?
Civic Access & the “Friendly City” Promise	Fortuna's " Friendly City " identity is genuine — community members consistently describe neighbors helping neighbors and rallying in crisis. Yet some residents experience barriers : Spanish-speaking families navigating language gaps, newer residents feeling shut out, and many unsure who to contact or what the City's priorities are. As one service provider noted, Fortuna is welcoming "if you fit." The gap isn't intention; it's an opportunity to practice desired community culture. (See Section 4E for detailed findings from immigrant community members.)	Ensure communications reach all residents — including Spanish-language announcements for major decisions. Actively invite perspectives beyond the "usual voices." Consider whether all residents can meaningfully participate in and benefit from major initiatives.
Healthcare Infrastructure	Healthcare access directly connected to economic development and family retention . Specialist recruitment extremely difficult — "creates dangers for us" having to travel. Hospital viability uncertain.	Consider healthcare infrastructure as economic development opportunity. GPU could designate healthcare facility zones serving regional needs.

4A.3. Community Themes: What the Community Wants to See Change

Largely feedback suggests the greatest opportunities for improvement lie in **organizational direction, communication, and economic strategy**. The following strategic priorities emerged from community interviews.

- 1. Economic Development Strategy.** Business attraction/sustainability and revenue generation concern almost everyone. Community members want Mill Site infrastructure improvements, development support, and marketing, strategies to capture freeway traffic (hotel, charging stations, visible retail), and Main Street revitalization to extend business hours and draw visitors.
- 2. Vision, Direction & Council Leadership.** Community members expressed frustration that strategy “changes with every single new City Manager” and “if we knew what the focus was... it would help”. The Strategic Plan should establish clear priorities that survive leadership transitions and provide Council with decision filters to guide consistent action. Regular communication about progress toward stated goals would build trust and demonstrate purposeful direction.
- 3. Communication, Information Access & Transparency.** The community wants proactive updates on City priorities — not just information that “exists online” but active outreach through regular forums (monthly or quarterly) where residents can ask questions and receive updates. Making City work visible would also help to address the perception that leadership lacks direction.
- 4. Bilingual Services.** Staff who speak Spanish, multilingual announcements about City decisions, and genuine representation in ongoing engagement. Address structural language barriers, particularly for Spanish-speaking residents that make up 40% of Fortuna schools.
- 5. Youth Programming & Career Pathways.** Strategic investment in youth retention infrastructure and programming. Partnerships with schools and College of the Redwoods for career pipeline programs “starting in elementary school — not when they graduate.” Systematically engaging youth in shaping these decisions.
- 6. Regional Partnerships.** Regional economic development coordination with Eureka, Arcata, and major employers – what is Fortuna’s regional economic niche? What can Fortuna offer that other communities cannot or are not? Healthcare recruitment collaboration to address specialist shortages. Tribal partnership development with Bear River Band on shared interests (housing, amenities, entertainment).

4A.4. Community Themes: Land Use Areas of Opportunity

- 1. Address Fortuna's Pivot Point in the General Plan Update (GPU).** Primary historic industries are gone. The desire for small-town feel conflicts with a need for economic growth. The plan can navigate this tension honestly and directly rather than avoiding or underemphasizing it.
- 2. Mill Site as Catalyst.** The Mill Site represents concentrated community hope. The GPU could support mixed-use development with infrastructure investment (interchanges, roundabouts) as prerequisite and connections to Great Redwood Trail. "If it just becomes a giant distribution center where a handful of people work, and it's not pretty... I'm not sure that makes us any better off."
- 3. Main Street Reinvention.** Community sees Main Street as "raw material ripe for reinvention." The "bones are there." GPU could support downtown revitalization, walkability, greenscaping, and strategies to extend business hours past 5pm – and address the tension between maintaining historic feel with needs for modern economic infrastructure.
- 4. Youth Amenities.** Consider identifying amenity locations that both contribute to economic vitality *and* are attractive to youth to address the opportunity and retention crisis – gathering spaces, entertainment venues, recreational facilities, and career pathway infrastructure.
- 5. Walkability & Connectivity.** Consistent requests for connected pedestrian infrastructure — particularly linking residential areas to parks, schools, commercial areas, and medical facilities. Current gaps create safety concerns and limit economic activity.
- 6. Healthcare Infrastructure.** The GPU could address healthcare facility needs given recruitment challenges and travel burden for specialty care. "Internal medicine, cardiology, ENT, dental assistance — so we don't have to travel to distant cities." This could be an opportunity for Fortuna to address regional health care needs while bolstering City revenue.
- 7. Housing with Character.** The community values small-town feel while recognizing housing needs. The GPU could provide clear guidance on housing types and locations that support economic development while maintaining quality of life and "Fortuna feel." Some residents recognize that Fortuna could provide much-needed housing (that meet Regional Housing Needs Assessment requirements), that this will also demand conversations about how the community feels about growth, and increase the demand better infrastructure and economic support systems.

4B. City Council Interview Results

The following is an analysis of results from 5 interviews with current Fortuna City Council members.

The old way of thinking is still very prevalent.

- Council Member Interviewee

I need to start talking to people and getting a feel for what they feel that the City is lacking and what can we do as government agents to make that happen.

- Council Member Interviewee

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4B.1. Understanding the Council

Volunteerism As Identity

All five Council members describe extensive volunteer histories predating their Council service — emergency services, youth sports coaching, school boards, community events. They view Council service as an extension of this volunteerism, not as political ambition. They see their role as community service rather than political office.



Generational Motivation

Children and grandchildren were cited repeatedly as motivating factors. Council members want Fortuna to remain viable for future generations.

Deep Community Roots

Most Council members are multi-generational locals or chose Fortuna deliberately as adults. Their identity is tied to the community's success.

4B.2. Council Vision for Fortuna

Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Mill Site as a key opportunity● Attract business to generate sales tax revenue
Revenue Generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● "City needs revenue... can't just be a bedroom city"● "We have to have some good paying jobs"● Sales tax is primary revenue source
Staff Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● "Employees are our biggest assets"● Concern about turnover and competitive pay● Hiring freeze was a difficult but necessary decision
Long-Term Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Need a 15-20 year plan that survives leadership changes● Current listening campaign and GPU are an opportunity
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Mill Site access (e.g. roundabouts at Kenmar and 12th Street) are prerequisites for development● Working with Caltrans; getting the Kenmar Interchange "shovel ready"

4B.3. What Council Hopes to Learn from This Process

Council members expressed genuine interest beyond the "usual voices" and using this process to guide long-term decision-making.

Hearing the Full Community

"It's important to hear what the community really wants... We don't get to talk to everybody by the time we have to make a decision."

Recognition that current input skews toward the loudest voices.

Guidance for Decisions

"Having something like this prepared gives us guidance on how the people expect us to go."

Desire to move beyond individual beliefs toward shared direction.

Long-Term Stability

Need for a 15-20 year plan that "survives leadership changes" — not just a City Manager's vision, but the *City's* vision.

Productive Engagement

Frustration with lack of citizen engagement paired with hope that better engagement formats might change that pattern.

The Opportunity: Council members are signaling openness to being guided by broader community input. The planning process can strengthen this by providing clear, defensible priorities that give Council a framework for consistent decision-making — and a response when the loudest voices demand reactive choices.

4C. Fortuna Staff Interview Results

The following is an analysis of results from 19 interviews with a diverse array of Fortuna City staff members. To find out more about who was interviewed, see Appendix page C1.

Every City Manager we get has a different vision. So it's hard to put [things] into place... you have to hope that the next person has the same vision.

- Staff Interviewee

I stay because the people I work with — we have each other's back.

- Staff Interviewee

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4C.1. Staff Perspective: Deep Care About Running The City Well

Widely shared staff beliefs, ideals and interests inform guiding principles for the City: vision, values, purpose, and decision criteria for making hard choices.

1. Sustainable Public Service

Staff share deep *values* of **service and stability** and an *ideal* of **quality of life** for the community. Their *self-interest* in **fair compensation** represents an opportunity: aligning the level of pay with the loyalty that staff already demonstrate can shift staff retention from a vulnerability into a strength.

2. Coherent Governance

The shared *ideal* is **clear City vision** that guides decisions consistently. Staff *value* **focusing on core work** and have a *self-interest* in **protection from unsustainable workloads**. Documented decision-making frameworks can provide the stability staff seek while freeing elected leaders from case-by-case pressure.

3. Efficiency as a Revenue Tool

Staff *self-interest* in **growing City staff capacity and compensation** aligns directly with the *ideal* of **nimble, adaptive government**. Streamlining systems (e.g., electronic records, development processes) can unlock revenue to support both the mission and the people who deliver it.

4C.2. Staff Priorities Informing Strategic Decision-Making Criteria

Priority Issue	Key Insights & Barriers	Potential Decision-Making Criteria for Action
Revenue, Staff Financial & Retention Crisis	Staff retention is highest priority. Pay is low, causing staff to use the City as a " stepping stone. " The 34-hour week is not competitive compensation, so some staff rely on supplemental gig work.	Pay & Retention: Strategies could prioritize sustainable revenue streams to fund competitive wages and long-term monetary incentives . The cost of turnover/knowledge loss needs to be used in Council messaging.
Governance & Vision Gap	Council lacks clear documented vision and is sometimes viewed as making decisions based on " personal agendas. " The vision is not built in; lack of a "north star" for staff.	Governance: Base GPU and Strategic Plan on a clear, co-created City Purpose Statement that acts as a guiding filter (north star) for decisions. Mandate training and education for Council on roles and cost and impact of decisions on staff.
Maintenance & Project Planning	New projects (especially Parks acquisition) often lack long-term maintenance plans or dedicated staff . Creates an unfunded mandate on already overwhelmed crews. Limit land acquisition can overwhelm maintenance staffing/funding.	Project Planning: Mandate that all capital projects require fully burdened cost calculations for maintenance and staffing and secure signed input from the maintaining department (Parks & Rec, Public Works) before final approval.
Communication & Silos	Staff feel physically disconnected (field crews from office staff at City Hall). Public perception is poor; staff work is "invisible." Internal communication lacks coordination. Tech and filing need overhaul.	Collaboration & Comms: Implement a formal "invisible work" outreach strategy (e.g., video series). Create structured, non-admin time for departments to work together (e.g., shared training, simplified internal referrals).

4C.3. Staff Perspectives on the General Plan Update

Insights related to land use, growth, and long-term planning are highly consistent across departments.

1. **Address The Reality that Fortuna Is At A Pivot Point.** The main historic industry is gone. Desire for small-town feel can challenge the need for economic growth and housing density mandated by state requirements.
2. **Streamlining Development is Critical:** The current development approval process is viewed as a major impediment to economic growth. The Strategic Plan and GPU could focus on developing a clear, objective, and concise development framework to make Fortuna more competitive while addressing the regulatory burden that makes economic development challenging.
3. **Building Vision Into How The City Works:** The GPU was noted as the "guiding document that weathers changes in City Council and City Manager." The process must ensure the final plan is the "City's vision," not just the Council's or City Manager's.
4. **Maintenance Costs for New Assets:** The Strategic Plan and GPU could set up criteria for making decisions requiring that all new park acquisition, facility construction, or capital projects (even grant-funded ones) must include a fully burdened cost calculation and funding mechanism for long-term maintenance and staffing.
5. **Economic Development Imperatives:** The plan could identify opportunities to attract revenue-generating businesses (hotels, big box stores) and address specific local commercial needs (e.g., trucker travel centers).
6. **Addressing Housing Gaps:** While affordable housing is often seen as state-driven, the plan could provide clearer guidance.

4D. Teen Focus Group Results

The following is an analysis of results from a focus group with eight students from alternative Fortuna high schools. To find out more about who participated, see Appendix page E2.

Programs and activities drop off after you're out of elementary school.

- Teen Focus Group Participant

It feels safe in a lot of ways — small town, calm, quiet atmosphere.

- Teen Focus Group Participant

Photo:
Fortuna
Chamber of
Commerce

4D.1. Teen Voice & Vision

Teen Focus Group: Listening to Fortuna's Next Generation

8 Participants, October 2025, FUHS Wellness Center

- See Appendix E for participant characteristics and more detailed results
- Recruitment Assist: Teen Court, HCOE, FUHS Wellness Center

The Core Message

Fortuna's teens appreciate their community's safety and family feel, but experience a gap between belonging and having a place. They feel cared about but not always seen—and the lack of youth-focused spaces and activities shapes their daily experience.

Why This Matters for Fortuna's Future

Young people who feel invested are more likely to stay or return. Every teen who leaves represents lost potential. Youth amenities are infrastructure for community continuity — Fortuna's next generation of residents, workers, and leaders.

There's nothing to do here after school.

We need more things to do so kids don't get into trouble.

- Teen Focus Group Participants

GUIDING QUESTION:

What would it take for Fortuna's teens to say, "This is a place where I can build my life"?

4D.2. Teen Perspectives on Fortuna’s Strengths & Gaps

Teens have genuine affection for Fortuna — their critiques come from a desire for it to be better. When young people lack constructive outlets, boredom leads to risky choices; youth investment is prevention, not just enrichment.

Priority Issue	Teens See Strengths	What’s Missing In Fortuna for Teens
Safety & Welcoming	Small town vibe Calm, quiet atmosphere "Everyone knows everyone"	Feeling unsafe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As pedestrians ● As people who don’t fit the “norm” (e.g. homosexual, non-white/non-English speaking, pigmentation) ● At night, including on streets
Places To Go, Things To Do	Community events that bring people together Natural beauty and outdoor access	Town has a “flat” feeling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Few places to gather that aren't school or home ● Few activities that don't require driving to Eureka ● Lack of jobs and internships for teens
Support	High School teachers, staff, programs	Left out of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feeling like youth voice matters in community decisions ● Programs and spaces specifically designed for teenagers

The only time I see anything about the City is when they put out signs for you to vote for them. Like, I don't hear anything else.

- Teen Focus Group Participant

4E. Immigrant Focus Group Results

The following is a summary of results from a focus group discussion with 12 Spanish-speaking immigrant Fortuna residents. To find out more about who participated, see Appendix page E3.

A mí me encanta Riverwalk, pero sí me gustaría que lo arreglaran un poquito y que mejoren las partes feas.

Riverwalk is a source of pride but also has visible neglect.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

La ciudad de Fortuna es parte de mi sueño Americano.

The City of Fortuna is part of my American dream.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

Photo:
Fortuna
Chamber of
Commerce

4E.1. Immigrant Voice & Vision

Immigrant Focus Group: Listening to A Growing Population In Fortuna

12 Participants, FUHS Wellness Center, December 2025

- See Appendix E for participant characteristics and more detailed results
- Recruitment, facilitation in Spanish: Loleta (Eel Valley) Community Resource Center

The Core Message

Immigrant community members **experience Fortuna as both welcoming and exclusionary** — appreciating the friendliness and family feel while navigating barriers to full participation. The gap between intent and impact is real.

Why This Matters for Fortuna's Future

Immigrant families are a growing part of Fortuna's community — 40% of elementary students are Hispanic/Latino. Their **full inclusion strengthens everyone; their exclusion represents lost potential.**

La gente es amable, pero a veces no nos sentimos completamente incluidos.

The people are friendly, but sometimes we don't feel fully included.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

GUIDING QUESTION:

How can Fortuna become a community where all residents—regardless of background—feel they truly belong?

4E.2. Immigrant Perspectives on Fortuna's Strengths & Gaps

Immigrant families choose Fortuna and want to contribute. Their **feedback reflects investment, not criticism**. The paradox: Fortuna sees itself as friendly, yet **immigrants experience both friendliness and exclusion**. Both are true — and the gap is an opportunity.

Priority	Strengths Immigrants Recognize	What's Missing for Immigrants
Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendly people and welcoming atmosphere Family-oriented community values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences of discrimination, often subtle Feeling like presence is tolerated rather than truly welcomed Limited cultural representation in community events
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good climate, environment Job availability and economic opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not available in Spanish (including City priorities) Uncertainty about engaging City government
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General safety compared to other places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedestrian safety concerns, especially for youth

La información necesita ser más fluida para llegar a las personas que no están al tanto.

Information needs to be more fluid to reach non-insiders.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

4E. Where The Voices Come Together

I think a clear direction is helpful. Seems like sometimes we're bouncing back and forth, wasting time, instead of more of a straight line.

- Staff Interviewee

Me gustaría que hubiera recursos para los niños que quieren ser emprendedores.

I would like there to be resources for children who want to be entrepreneurs.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

I hear community leaders talk about “Friendly Fortuna” all the time, being really proud of it. And I think they need a bit of a reality check [that it’s not so friendly for everyone].

- Teen Focus Group Participant

It all starts with visionary, bold leadership and folks who can clearly articulate the issues: here's the plan, and yes, we will need to work together moving forward as a community.

- Community Interviewee

I stay because the people I work with — we have each other's back.

- Staff Interviewee

The raw material [for success] is here.

- Community Interviewee

4F.1. Fortunans Agree More Than You Might Think

Readers may have noticed similar themes appearing across different groups in the previous pages. That's not repetition — it's confirmation. When people who rarely sit in the same room arrive at similar conclusions independently, it represents genuine common ground upon which to build confident decisions.

Agreement Themes	Council	Community	Staff	Teens	Immigrants
Economic development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clear vision and direction needed	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Increase youth opportunities & retention	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community and security are key interests	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Staff quality is an organizational strength	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Address communication/engagement gaps	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community events, parks are valued assets	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mill Site is a key, urgent opportunity	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Streamline development process	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Infrastructure investment required	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

4F.2. How Themes of Agreement Inform the Planning Process

What's striking is that these groups often want the same things — they just can't always see it in each other.

Themes	Staff	Community	Council
Governance & Decision-Making	Lacking documented strategic direction, decisions feel reactive to immediate pressures vs. shared priorities ; need clear governance-operations boundaries	Need clearer, visible leadership direction ; some think decisions are reactive to a few who attend meetings rather than broader community	Sees challenges as external (funding, regulations, vocal critics); see themselves as community volunteers more than as elected leaders
Economic Development	Increase revenue for more effective operations; revenue increase only possible with economic development	Widespread motivation to change: empty storefronts, increasing local options for services and living-wage jobs	Recognition of the interrelated need for economic development that drives revenue to avoid tax measures
Fiscal Constraint & Approach	Fiscal constraint as "detriment" — seen as a way to avoid hard decisions, (e.g., staff pay, no evaluation of “sacred cows”)	Mixed : some appreciate fiscal conservatism, while others are frustrated by lack of investment and declining services	Values fiscal conservatism as stewardship during constrained times
Infrastructure	Maintaining what is acquired/added	Pedestrian safety concerns	Mill Site development barriers
Communication & Transparency	Work "invisible" to public ; want to show reality of operations	"If we knew what the focus was... it would help;" information not reaching them	Frustration that engagement efforts go unnoticed
Inclusion & Representation	Need to capture voices of "unrepresented or scared" residents ; City Hall is not comfortable for some	Become genuine “Friendly Fortuna” to all ; engage and represent a diverse cross-section of community	Interest in better outreach ; recognition that Hispanic community involvement lacking

4F.3. An Emerging Story: Vision, Values & Purpose of Fortuna

The intersection of what we believe in (values), the future we want (ideals), and what keeps us invested (interests) is a strong place to begin working from **common ground**.

The Future We Want: Ideals

*Economic Vitality • Clear & Lasting Direction
Quality Services Sustained • Adaptive Government
Genuinely Inclusive Welcome*

Where themes align across diverse perspectives, we find the **richest common ground and a foundation for shared vision and purpose to confidently guide decisions** over time.

A Complete Community Where Families Thrive

Youth have reasons to stay or return
Families find what they need
Everyone can be a welcome part of the community

Clear Direction That Lasts

Shared principles guide decisions
Vision survives leadership changes
Priorities are known and communicated

Quality Services by a Valued Team

Staff are supported and retained
Services are sustained, not eroded
"Invisible work" is recognized and resourced

What We Believe In: Values

Quality of Life
Economic Resilience
Connected, Caring Community
Clear Direction
Community Character
Committed Service*

An Economic Foundation That Sustains It All

Revenue supports services and staff
Development strengthens (not undermines) character
Fortuna captures its share of regional opportunity

What Keeps Us Invested: Interests

*Youth & Family Opportunity
Quality of Life*
Revenue & Resources
Capable, Supported Workforce
Mutual Community Support*

** Quality of Life appears as both a Value and an Interest — it's both something Fortunans believe in AND what keeps them invested. Workshop 1 will help define what "quality of life" means operationally for Fortuna.*

4F.4. Tensions To Navigate and Balance

Strategic planning in a turbulent world requires holding multiple values in productive tension. The Listening Campaign revealed a number of strategic tensions – paradoxes, or polarities – that Fortuna residents need to explore how to navigate together. These are not problems to solve but balance to seek. The goal is to maximize the benefits of both poles while avoiding the downsides of over-focusing on either.

Tension	On One Hand	On the Other Hand	Decision-Making Questions To Seek Balance
Stability & Growth Or: Tradition & Innovation; History & Possibility	Preserve small-town character	Evolve with changing times	How do we honor what we've been while becoming what we need to be?
Financial Constraint & Investment	Fiscal conservatism	Necessary spending on personnel/infrastructure	How do we steward resources wisely while investing in our people and our future?
Stability & Flexibility	Consistent direction	Adaptive response	How do we maintain clear principles and reliability while staying nimble, able to evolve?
Efficiency & Capacity	Do more with less	Have resources to do the job well	How do we maximize our efficiency while building sustainable staff and organizational capacity?
Local Control & External Forces	Self-determination	State mandates, market forces	How do we maintain our own agency while adapting to external forces beyond our control?

4F.5. Informing Mutually Reinforcing Plans

The frameworks for complementary General and Strategic Plans will arise from workshops during the spring of 2026. See Sections 5 and 6 for initial recommendations from the listening campaign.

Strategic Plan

Economic development and revenue generation as organizational priority

Youth livability and retention as a strategic focus

Updated communication and engagement systems; streamlined permitting

Assessment of long-term cost-accounting and staff ability to take on new projects

General Plan

Land use that supports revenue generation while balancing growth and character

Consider zoning for youth/family amenities and activities

Public vision as key to participation in land use decisions

Maintenance requirements for new development

The City really is at a pivot point right now. So having this future goal setting and long range planning... wow, that's huge.

- Staff Interviewee

4F.6. Putting Listening Campaign Insights to Work: 2026 Workshops

The information in this report informs three phases of workshops: 1) two public workshops in March-April to **coalesce community vision** and guideposts to achieve the desired Fortuna of the future, 2) **staff and Council workshops to apply public workshop results**, and 3) later in 2026 (with separate consulting team/s) **to apply what emerged in the spring to refine** Draft General Plan and Housing Element Updates.

	1a) Navigating Toward Future Fortuna	1b) Charting A Path to Future Fortuna	2) Staff & Council Planning	3) Land Use Planning
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a broadly-shared understanding of fundamental community interests and turn them into planning guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply guiding principles and strategic tensions to recommend policy and operational guidance on priority issues 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Staff turn public workshop results into priorities for planning consultants and Strategic Plan Framework Staff & Council feedback 	Consultants understand public policy preferences for Draft Gen. Plan and Housing Element
Activities (see next page)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Display listening campaign results; invite community additions and shared sense-making Surface guiding principles and balance prominent tensions that will guide future planning efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn about realities and possibilities for Fortuna that impact its future Display results from first workshop and listening campaign Apply principles to refine priorities at “collaboration stations” e.g. economy, youth, services, communications, infrastructure 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Turn public recommendations for principles and priorities into draft strategic and land use policy guidance Give feedback on and refinement of Draft Strategic Plan and guidance for land use consultants 	Apply spring workshops results to test draft policies on development: density, location, type, limits, revenue generation, infrastructure, maintenance, etc...
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A strong, cohesive sense of common ground and guiding principles guide priorities and decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared understanding of influences and options Guidance for Strategic & General Plan priorities and preferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and Council co-ownership of results Plans built on shared community and City needs 	Feedback on draft G.P. and Housing Element from community-generated vision

4F.6. Putting Listening Campaign Insights to Work: 2026 Workshops (continued)

Workshop 1 Activity Stations: Guiding Principles

- **City Vision:** Where are we going? What are we becoming? What does success look like?
- **City Purpose:** What's the unchanging reason the City of Fortuna exists?
- **City Values:** What do Fortunans believe that will help every choice be the right one?
- **City Decision Filters:** What needs to be true to realize purpose, vision, and values?

Workshop 1 & 2 Themes & Quotes: What Fortunans Experience & Hope Workshop 2 Collaboration Stations

Economic Development

- Revenue & Retail Capture • Development Process • Mill Site • Main Street • Living Wage Jobs & Pathways

Leadership & Communications

- Vision & Direction • Decision-Making • Communication & Transparency • Civic Engagement • Inclusive Access

Land Use & Community Character

- Housing • Growth & Density • Community Character • Main Street & Downtown • Mill Site Vision

Youth & Belonging

- Things to Do • Places to Go • Paths to Stay • Feeling Safe & Welcome • Having a Voice

Infrastructure & Safety

- Pedestrian Safety & Connectivity • Development Infrastructure • Utilities & Service Capacity • Maintenance Reality • Housing-Ready Land

Services & Programs

- Parks & Public Spaces • Public Safety • Maintenance & "Invisible Work" • Community Events • Healthcare Access

5. Strategic Plan Opportunities

The following is based on common themes across interviews and focus groups.

We're just kind of surviving.

- Community Interviewee and business owner

If I find a way to save money or earn more money for the City, it really is benefiting the whole community.

- Staff Interviewee

Me gustaría que hubiera recursos para los niños que quieren ser emprendedores.

I would like there to be resources for children who want to be entrepreneurs.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

Photo:
Fortuna
Chamber of
Commerce

5A. City of Fortuna Strategic Framework

The Listening Campaign revealed priorities for the City's near-term strategy.

Strategy for Adaptation in Turbulent Times

Why Traditional Strategic Plans Fall Short

Traditional strategic planning assumes a predictable future in a world with increasing levels of uncertainty — economic shifts, state mandates, leadership transitions. **The most important strategic capacity is not prediction but adaptation: learning, adjusting, and responding while maintaining clear direction.**

An Adaptive Approach to Strategy

City staff value and individually practice adaptability. “We all wear many hats and have to adjust constantly,” lacking the number of staff for specialist roles common in larger local governments. Rather than a list of tasks or a one-time planning event that attempt to predict a fixed future, an adaptive approach relies more on guiding principles. The mindset and behaviors are key: **we keep learning and adjusting as conditions change** — which matters especially for a **small city with limited room for error.**

Listening Campaign Strategic Planning Priorities

1. Economic Development & Revenue Generation
2. Clear Direction & Civic Engagement
3. Youth Opportunity & Retention
4. Organizational Resilience & Sustainability
5. Capacity- & Maintenance-Savvy Investments

5B. Strategic Opportunities from the Listening Campaign

Priority 1: Economic Development & Revenue Generation

The Challenge

Fortuna's historic industries are gone; retail leaks to Eureka and Arcata. The Mill Site sits undeveloped while infrastructure barriers persist, and the development process is seen as too burdensome to attract investment. Without new revenue stream/s, the City cannot sustain services or staff. Appendix F includes the results of a community-led survey of the business community about economic development opportunities and priorities.

Strategic Direction

- Prioritize Mill Site infrastructure (interchanges, roundabouts) as prerequisite to development
- Streamline development approval into a clear, predictable process
- Develop freeway capture strategies
- Pursue Main Street revitalization to extend business hours and draw visitors
- Identify Fortuna's unique regional economic niche and develop strategies to enhance related growth

I do wonder, at some point, did our process create something that's so burdensome that people are like, yeah, no, I'm good?

- Staff Interviewee

GUIDING QUESTION:

What will it take to build an economic engine that funds the Fortuna we want?

CONTINUED

5B. Strategic Opportunities from the Listening Campaign (continued)

Priority 2: Clear Direction, Communication & Civic Engagement

The Challenge

Community-wide vision has not been examined thoroughly in a long time, and has historically changed with City Manager transitions. Residents feel "in the dark"; staff lack a "north star," a business owner noted that "more info is better than less," and Spanish-speaking residents can't access basic City information. Council is perceived as reactive to the loudest voices rather than guided by consistent principles and strategy.

Strategic Direction

- Establish vision and guiding principles that survive leadership transitions
- Create decision filters that Council and staff apply transparently
- Build enhanced general and bilingual communication infrastructure
- Make City priorities visible in public deliberations

*Once City Managers leave, the vision and goals leave with them.
Everybody asks: what do we do now?
Where do we go?*

- Staff Interviewee

GUIDING QUESTION:

How do we become a City that knows what it stands for — and proves it?

GUIDING QUESTION:

How can "Friendly Fortuna" ensure its welcome reaches everyone — not just those who already feel at home?

5B. Strategic Opportunities from the Listening Campaign (continued)

Priority 3: Youth Opportunity & Retention

The Challenge

Young people leave because they see no future here. Teen programming drops off after elementary school—there's "nothing to do" beyond parking lots. Jobs are scarce, career pathways unclear, and housing costs push young families out. When youth leave, family networks break and community character erodes.

Strategic Direction

- Expand Parks & Rec programming for ages 12-18, including school breaks
- Develop career pathway partnerships with schools and College of the Redwoods
- Identify and zone locations for youth-oriented amenities and gathering spaces
- Engage youth directly in planning decisions that affect them

When kids are bored, kids don't always do things that are good.

- Teen Focus Group Participant

GUIDING QUESTION:

What will help young people feel like they are a valued part of the community and want to build their lives here?

CONTINUED

5B. Strategic Opportunities from the Listening Campaign (continued)

Priority 4: Organizational Resilience & Sustainability

The Challenge

Pay is the root issue — Fortuna ends up being treated like a "stepping stone" to higher-paying jobs. The current cost-saving measure of a 34-hour week helps morale but doesn't pay bills. When experienced staff leave, institutional knowledge leaves with them. Departments function as "islands."

Strategic Direction

- Analyze turnover costs and institutional knowledge loss
- Develop compensation structure tied to revenue strategies
- Create retention incentives for experienced staff
- Build systems and a culture of departments working together
- Require internal consultations with affected departments before any given decision
- Design systems for regular feedback loops, built-in ways of learning, and knowledge management to reduce dependence on individual memory

There's so little ego I feel in this group... we all just want to put forth the best product.

- Staff Interviewee

If nothing changes, I won't be working here — I could go somewhere else and make eight more dollars an hour.

- Staff Interviewee

GUIDING QUESTION:

How do we grow a team that not only can deliver, but wants to stay?

CONTINUED

5B. Strategic Opportunities from the Listening Campaign (continued)

Priority 5: Streamlined Development Options

The Challenge

Fortuna loses investment before conversations even begin. The internal development review process is described by staff as having evolved over time to be "jumbled" and "ad hoc" — lacking clear timelines, assigned leads, and coordination protocols across departments. When a developer encounters unpredictability, they go elsewhere. The problem isn't just what the rules require; it's that no one is sure how the rules will be applied, or by whom, or when. Staff are pulled into reactive, siloed processes that consume limited capacity without consistent standards to guide them. Meanwhile, revenue the City desperately needs doesn't materialize.

Strategic Direction

- Audit and redesign the internal development review workflow end-to-end, from pre-application to final approval
- Establish clear timelines, departmental leads, and interdepartmental coordination protocols for all project types
- Create a structured pre-application meeting process to front-load guidance and reduce back-and-forth delays
- Develop internal standards for consistent application of requirements across staff and leadership transitions
- Track and publicly report on development review performance as an economic development metric
- Coordinate with the General Plan Update process to ensure internal operations align with simplified regulatory standards (see Section 6D)

Developers are going to go with the easier option pretty much every time. - Staff Interviewee

GUIDING QUESTION:

How do we make Fortuna the most predictable, responsive place in the region to do the right kind of development?

CONTINUED

5B. Strategic Opportunities from the Listening Campaign (continued)

Priority 6: Capacity- & Maintenance-Savvy Investments

The Challenge

Projects get approved without budgeting or capacity analysis for long-term maintenance. Grant-funded acquisitions create unfunded mandates. Staff get "volun-signed" new duties without resources to support them. The City continues to acquire what it cannot sustain.

Strategic Direction

- Require life cycle cost analysis before any acquisition or construction
- Secure capacity confirmation from relative departments before approval
- Match maintenance staffing to current assets before adding more
- Build maintenance funding into project budgets from the start
- Evaluate "sacred cows" consuming resources without clear return

We hire companies to come in and plant things... and we have no idea what they're planting, and no plan for who maintains them.

- Staff Interviewee

GUIDING QUESTION:

Can we take care of what we have before we take on more?

6. General Plan Opportunities

The following is based on common themes across interviews and focus groups.

Fortuna has an uncertain future, waiting for bold, visionary leadership.

- Community Interviewee

The bigger you get, the more you lose that small town feel.

- Council Member Interviewee

Desire for small-town feel pushed away development for 10 years.

- Community Member Interviewee

6A. Listening Campaign Guidance for the General Plan Update

The General Plan Update (GPU) will be updated for the first time in over a decade in 2026, and offers an opportunity for a fresh start — the chance to create a guiding document that reflects current community vision and values, and survives leadership transitions. The Listening Campaign provides direct input on community priorities that inform land use and policy decisions.

Community Character Elements

What We Heard

Strong attachment to **Fortuna's small-town feel** — knowing neighbors, accessible local government, clean and safe environment, family orientation. And... **fear that growth could undermine these qualities.**



Photo:
Fortuna
Chamber of
Commerce

Planning Implications

- Articulate community character elements worth preserving
- **Develop design guidelines that protect character while allowing appropriate development**
- Consider scale and pace of growth
- Maintain commitment to aesthetics and maintenance: "basic services that make civilization possible"

6B. Connecting the General Plan to the Strategic Plan

Land use and zoning priorities that surfaced across all groups included the following.

Strategic Priority	General Plan Connections
1. Economic Development & Revenue Generation	Mill Site mixed-use development with infrastructure prerequisites (interchanges, roundabouts); Main Street revitalization and downtown vitality strategies; commercial zoning that captures freeway traffic; streamlined development approval processes; healthcare facility zoning as regional economic opportunity
2. Clear Direction & Civic Engagement	GPU public engagement process that models accessible, multilingual participation; land use decisions explicitly tied to stated community priorities; regular community forums built into implementation; transparency in how GPU policies connect to Strategic Plan direction
3. Youth Opportunity & Retention	Zoning for youth/family-oriented amenities (entertainment venues, gathering spaces, recreational facilities); locations identified for community pool, expanded community center, skate park; walkability improvements connecting youth to activities (especially near schools and amenities, Main Street lighting); housing types young families can afford
4. Organizational Resilience & Sustainability	Land use policies that generate sustainable revenue to support staffing; development patterns that don't outpace staff capacity; cross-departmental coordination built into GPU implementation; institutional knowledge preserved through documented decision filters
5. Capacity- & Maintenance- Savvy Investments	Infrastructure capacity analysis required before density approvals; long-term maintenance costs calculated for all new development; parks/facilities acquisition tied to maintenance funding mechanisms; development sequencing aligned with Public Works/Parks capacity

6C. Listening Campaign Land Use Opportunities

1. Mill Site as Catalyst

What We Heard: The Mill Site emerged as the top economic development priority across nearly all interviews. Suggestions ranged from distribution/warehouse facilities to commercial development to a travel center serving Highway 101 traffic.

The more the community can agree on how to use the site to achieve shared priorities — revenue generation, local retail, living-wage jobs, and activities for youth — the stronger the planning foundation will be.

Planning Implications

- Prioritize Mill Site in Economic Development Element
- Ensure zoning and infrastructure support desired uses
- Consider phased development approach and development incentives
- Balance revenue generation with community character

If [the Mill Site] just becomes a giant distribution center where a handful of people work, and it's not pretty... I'm not sure that makes us any better off.

- Staff Interviewee

2. Main Street Reinvention

What We Heard: Community members want a vibrant downtown with local businesses, walkability, and gathering spaces. Main Street represents Fortuna's identity and should be a priority.

Community sees Main Street as "raw material ripe for reinvention." The "bones are there" but the current reality — businesses closing at 5pm, vacancies, limited pedestrian activity—doesn't match the potential.

Planning Implications

- Support mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly development
- Consider design standards that preserve character, even for chain stores
- Address parking and accessibility
- Connect Main Street planning to economic development strategy

6C. Listening Campaign Land Use Opportunities, continued

3. Housing for Workforce & Families

What We Heard: Housing affordability affects both residents and the city's ability to recruit and retain staff. Some suggested emphasizing single-family homes for community stability; others noted need for diverse housing types. Broad interest in maintaining community character with new developments.

Community values small-town feel while recognizing housing needs. The GPU should provide clear guidance on housing types and locations that support economic development while maintaining quality of life and "Fortuna feel."

Planning Implications

- Provide clear guidance on housing priorities (currently rated low by staff) and where different housing types are appropriate
- Balance state mandates with local community character
- Consider workforce housing needs in context of staff retention challenges and future development priorities
- Address infrastructure/service capacity for and revenue drain of new development

4. Youth Amenities & Gathering Spaces

What We Heard: The activities gap for youth emerged across all listening campaign populations. Consistent requests were heard for more youth activities, facilities, safe gathering spaces, and family amenities. Teens want "more places to go and things to do."

GPU should identify locations for amenities that both contribute to economic vitality and are attractive to youth.

Planning Implications

- Inventory and identify gaps in existing youth-friendly amenities
- Zone for entertainment venues, gathering spaces, recreational facilities
- Consider youth-oriented commercial uses (arcade, movie theater, food establishments)
- Consider locations for new gathering spaces
- Connect amenity planning to maintenance capacity, including exploration of partnerships

CONTINUED

6C. Listening Campaign Land Use Opportunities, continued

5. Walkability & Connectivity

What We Heard: Consistent requests emerged for connected pedestrian infrastructure—particularly linking residential areas to parks, schools, commercial areas, and medical facilities. Current gaps create safety concerns and limit economic activity.

Planning Implications

- Prioritize pedestrian and bicycle connectivity in all land use decisions
- Address specific requests: traffic calming near schools and amenities; Main Street lighting; Newburg/12th intersection
- Connect residential development to existing services and amenities
- Design for multiple modes, not just vehicles

6. Regional Healthcare Infrastructure

What We Heard: Healthcare specialist recruitment is extremely challenging, and residents travel significant distances for specialty care. This creates both quality of life concerns and economic opportunity.

Planning Implications

- Research regional demand, needs, and sustainability thresholds
- Designate healthcare facility zones
- Consider healthcare infrastructure as economic development opportunity (serving regional needs)
- Use healthcare access as a factor in housing/development location

6D. Process & Regulatory Opportunities

Streamlined Development Review

What We Heard: Community members, business owners, and staff consistently identified the development approval process as a barrier to investment — but the roots of the problem are both operational and regulatory. While how the City manages review internally is a Strategic Plan concern, the General Plan Update has a direct role in reducing the regulatory complexity that triggers discretionary review and creates unpredictability for developers and property owners. The desire for predictability was consistent across groups: people want Fortuna to be a place where doing the right thing is also the easy thing.

Planning Implications

- Review zoning code for opportunities to expand by-right approvals for desired uses in priority zones (Mill Site, Main Street, freeway corridors), so that development that aligns with community vision doesn't require discretionary hearings
- Establish clear, objective design standards that reduce the need for case-by-case review while protecting community character — predictability and quality are not in conflict
- Consider form-based or performance-based standards for priority development areas that allow flexibility in design while holding firm on community values
- Align zoning designations with the community vision established through this process, so that desired development is permitted outright and undesired development requires justification — not the reverse
- Reduce permit triggers for small-scale improvements that support Main Street vitality (signage, façade improvements, outdoor seating)
- Write GPU policies with sufficient clarity and specificity that they translate directly into consistent staff decisions and don't require interpretation on a case-by-case basis

6D. Process & Regulatory Opportunities

Maintenance-Integrated Planning

What We Heard: Across staff interviews and the November staff workshop, a prevalent theme was the pattern of committing to projects — particularly grant-funded park acquisitions and capital improvements — without adequate planning for maintenance. The result is an accumulating set of unfunded mandates on already-stretched crews. Staff workshop participants described "making and getting stuck with commitments we can't afford" and "deferring issues that end up costing more later." Parks & Recreation staff were especially direct: grant-funded acquisitions can land the City with assets it cannot sustain. This isn't a failure of intent — it's a structural decision-making gap. Staff articulated a clear desired state: the City makes only commitments it can afford, achieves preventative rather than reactive maintenance, and has systems — fleet management, project management, utility maintenance tracking — that assesses the true costs of ownership before final decisions. The GPU can embed maintenance accountability into land use and development approval from the start.

Planning Implications

- Require fully burdened life-cycle cost analysis — including ongoing staffing, operations, and maintenance — for all new facilities, infrastructure, and land acquisitions before approval, including grant-funded projects
- Formally require: the maintaining department must approve acquisitions or capital projects pre-Council consideration
- Develop a framework to consistently calculate real costs of asset ownership across project types
- Build maintenance funding mechanisms into new development conditions to avoid obligations the City cannot sustain
- Educate Council about the real costs of maintaining what the City owns (Levels of Service, LOS) and the compounding cost of deferred maintenance, so the connection between today's approval and tomorrow's budget pressure is explicit
- Apply a maintenance feasibility filter in land use decisions (see Section 6E): if the City cannot maintain it, it should not approve it

Park acquisition is problematic because the City lacks the staff to maintain the new property... Long-term maintenance is often not thoroughly considered.

- Staff Interviewee

6E. Potential Land Use Decision Filters

These draft filters could be used guide land use and development decisions for City planners and Planning Commissioners — zoning, density, infrastructure investment, and physical development choices. These complement (but differ from) the operational criteria in the Strategic Plan.

Economic Development Filter

- Does this land use decision support revenue generation?
- Does it prioritize infrastructure investments that unlock development?
- Does it reduce retail leakage and capture freeway traffic?
- Does it support Mill Site, Main Street, or other priority development areas?

Maintenance & Capacity Reality Check

- Can the City maintain infrastructure this development requires?
- Are long-term maintenance costs calculated/funded before approval?
- Does the responsible department have capacity to sustain this?
- Does this align with Capital Improvement Program priorities?

Character Continuity Test

- Does this honor what makes Fortuna special while enabling necessary change?
- How does it balance historic character and the need for economic evolution and growth?
- Does it preserve the "Fortuna feel" community members value?
- Is this consistent with the community vision established through public engagement?

Accessible Community Standard

- Can all residents access services and amenities this enables?
- Does it serve populations across income levels and backgrounds?
- Does it support bilingual/multilingual access where relevant?
- Does it address pedestrian connectivity gaps?

Youth & Family Lens

- Does this create places and amenities for young people?
- Does it enable housing young families can afford?
- Does it support walkable access to youth-serving destinations?
- Will this help make Fortuna a place young people want to stay or return to?

Appendices A-F

Reference material especially for staff, planners, and community-based organizations.

- A. Listening Campaign Methods
- B. Community Interview Themes & Quotes
- C. Staff Interview Themes & Quotes
- D. Staff Workshop Highlights
- E. Focus Groups: Extended Analysis
- F. Community-Led Business Survey Results

City employees get to assist others in time of need.

- Staff Interviewee

APPENDIX A

Listening Campaign Methods

- A. Listening Campaign Methods
- B. Community Interview Themes & Quotes
- C. Staff Interview Themes & Quotes
- D. Staff Workshop Highlights
- E. Focus Groups: Extended Analysis
- F. Community-Led Business Survey Results

Photo:
r/dji (Reddit)

A1. Design Team Champions

The Design Team (DT) – that we later referred to as Fortuna Champions – **comprised of eight residents and staff members**, was formed to collaboratively provide project guidance and to tap diverse community networks to encourage participation.

- Members were chosen as community and staff leaders who were motivated about the need for Fortuna to refresh its sense of direction, the opportunity to listen to staff and community members to inform that direction, and who would help encourage participation in the process.
- The DT consisted of:
 - Four staff from different departments (most live in Fortuna), and
 - Four community leaders (including a Council member).

Most of the DT **participated as interviewers and all were interviewed.**

The **DT met** twice in the late spring and summer, and again twice with other interviewers for training and interview strategy development. They developed thoughtful decision-making criteria for guidance (included on this page).

DT Decision Criteria

Does the decision:

- Foster inclusivity?
- Empower community leadership?
- Build collaborative, diverse teams?
- Support DT member wellbeing and capacity?
- Lead with learning and innovation?
- Communicate with optimism and purpose?



A2. Strategy

Training & Strategy Sessions for Interviewers

In July and August, the DT, nine additional staff across departments, two additional community leaders, and a staff member from the regional community foundation attended:

- Interviewers participated in training on relational interviewing techniques, utilizing both in-person practice and an online module for remote access; and
- A strategy session to practice interview skills, consider and apply criteria for selecting interviewees, develop lists of potential interviewees (in two groups: staff and community), prioritize them based on the discussed criteria, and review process logistics.

All interviewers later signed an agreement that they would abide by the agreed process and keep the names of interviewees confidential.



A map of practice interview results by DT members and all relational interviewing trainees

A3. Interviews

At an August strategy session, 18 community volunteers and staff members worked in separate groups to provide **feedback to draft interview questions and to brainstorm lists of potential interviewees** that represented a broad variety of perspectives among:

- **Residents and business owners:** all ages, those with families, retired, young adults, a variety of employment sectors (e.g. schools, health care, construction), lifetime and more recent comers, Spanish-speaking, LGBTQ+, real estate and development community, a local tribal representative, and more – all people known to care about and be invested in the future of the community – see details in Appendix B.
- **Staff:** all departments, a variety of age ranges and backgrounds, residents, long-time and short-time staff, field- and office-based, and those with a lot of community engagement experience – see details in Appendix C.
- The City Manager noted that it would be helpful to she and staff to understand how **City Council** members view Fortuna’s strategic and development future. Two community members conducted interviews with all five Council members.

The City Manager and consultant selected final interviewees to represent a suite of perspectives. Interviewers were provided **instructions and interview conversation guides with questions** developed during the strategy session. They were assigned to conduct interviews in **pairs**: a lead interviewer and notetaker. Staff could interview those outside their department and those they did not supervise, so teams were adjusted for each interview. Staff each interviewed roughly three staff and one community member (the City Manager interviewed more than twice that number of staff and community members each). Community members each interviewed about four people. A total of 19 staff (23% of 81 full-time employees) and 19 community members were interviewed – four residents and five staff invited to be interviewed were unable to participate for a variety of reasons.

Interviewees signed a Consent Form informing them that interviews would be **audio recorded**, transcripts produced, and that names would never be used for the current planning processes or any other future uses of the results.

When interviews were complete, interviewers **uploaded audio and notes** files to a folder only accessible by the consultant.

A3. Interviews (continued)

Interview questions provided to all interviewers are below, minus most follow-up questions. Slightly modified versions of the community interview questions were provided for those interviewing youth and Council members; fewer similar questions were asked of focus groups.

Community Interviews

1. How do you usually describe yourself, and what perspectives do you bring?
2. What does Fortuna mean to you?
3. How do you describe your connection to Fortuna?
4. What are your hopes for the kids growing up here?
5. Can you tell me about a time in Fortuna that showed you what this community is really about? An example of something that will serve Fortuna well in the future? (A story about something you personally experienced, not theoretical.)
6. What about the community makes you feel welcome here? Not welcome?
7. What is something working well about the City and/or the community?
8. If you could wave a magic wand to change one or two things in Fortuna that would make everything else better, what would they be? If nothing changes, what's at stake?
9. What do you most hope for or expect of Fortuna City government? On a scale from 0-10, how would you rate the City on those expectations? When planning for the future, what do you think City priorities should be?
10. Do you ever interact with City Hall or individual City staff? If yes: How would you rate those interactions on a scale of 0-10 overall? What do you think the City does well, and why? What could the City improve, and why?
11. If you were bringing guests to Fortuna, what three places would you show them and why?

Staff Interviews

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself and how you ended up working for the City.
2. How would you describe key community values that guide City decisions?
3. Can you share an example of when you felt the City was really doing things right – an experience that reminded you why you work here?
4. If you gave the City a score of 0-10 on these three things, what would they be and why?
 - Ability to work with others and get things done effectively?
 - Clear vision, purpose, and steps to improve the City's future?
 - Clear guidance on how to achieve affordable housing needs and economic development that Fortuna wants?
5. Can you think of a time when you felt like you really fit in here at the City? Feel most comfortable and productive? Feel least comfortable and productive?
6. What do you understand the community really cares about?
7. When staff gather to discuss results from these conversations and City priorities, are there important things we should include that we never get time to discuss in our regular work?

A4. Focus Groups

There was enthusiastic interest at the Design Team to **engage teens in a robust way, and indications of widespread concern about particularly struggling teens**. Recognizing the risk of sampling only successful youth, the limited capacity was strategically allocated to engage teens in alternative schools or involved with the justice system.

During a meeting about project goals with the City Manager, Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, and County Supervisor Bushnell, the **Supervisor emphasized the importance of connecting with the immigrant community in particular**. There was also a concern that, while 41% of students in the schools are from Spanish-speaking households and there are many undocumented immigrants in the community, that these voices, experiences, and perspectives are difficult to engage – particularly during times when interacting with governments is scary.

Focus groups were not budgeted in the original project, but **Humboldt Area Foundation provided a small grant to listen to marginalized youth and immigrant community members**. That grant went to the Loleta Community Resource Center (LCRC, which serves the Eel River Valley, is a program of Providence Health), because the organization is trusted by the immigrant community and the Director is a DT member.

- Focus Group questions were drafted and reviewed by focus group project partners in each case. About half of the focus group questions involved small group discussions of 2-3 people first, before large group discussion, to encourage full participation.
- Because the LCRC Director has many relationships with immigrant community members, she reached out to a dozen who she understood to be interested and invested in the future of Fortuna. The focus group was planned from 5:30-7:15 p.m., and all twelve invitees attended. Nine participants completed a brief survey online, and two completed them on site. The LFRC Director facilitated in Spanish.
- Leaders who work with struggling teens and youth involved in the justice system became partners from the Humboldt County Office of Education, Teen Court, Eel River Community School, FUHS Wellness Center, and Two Feathers Native Family Services.
- Teen Focus Group partners suggested creating a flyer and an “application” to encourage participation, collect demographic information, indicate demonstrated interest in the future of Fortuna, and confirm consent about use of information and parental approval.
- After school from 3:30 - 5:20 p.m., eight students attended the Teen - Focus Group, plus two representatives of related schools/groups.
- The FUHS Wellness Center provided space for both focus groups. Results from both focus groups were captured in audio recordings for transcripts and in detailed flip chart notes. Grant-funded food and cash cards were provided to participants as incentives.

A5. Results Capture & Analysis

Pairs of interviewers uploaded files from interviews to a Microsoft Cloud folder that did not allow contents to be viewed by anyone but the consultant. **Files for each interview included audio, transcripts from audio (for some), notes (for most), and in some cases where notes were missing, an AI summary.**

- The consultant developed transcripts from audio for interviews that lacked them and transcribed handwritten notes via AI.
- Focus Group flip chart notes were translated into text and audio recordings were used to produce transcripts.
- Immigrant Focus Group results were checked and edited by a fluent co-facilitator from the Loleta Community Resource Center. Some interviews were conducted in Spanish, for which AI translated results into English.
- Results analysis and synthesis were performed using NotebookLM for its demonstrated accuracy in summarizing and reporting qualitative results, and, for some analysis and writing of this report, Claude.ai.
- Tables of key points and quotes addressing each question in each interview were made, without names or titles. An internal report was created on the results of each focus group and each set of interviews. The report on staff listening campaign results was presented to Council on December 15, 2025. Individual reports were coalesced for this final report.
- More detail is provided in Appendices A-E for those who want additional context, nuance, and transparency.

APPENDIX B

Community Interview Themes & Quotes

- 
- An aerial photograph of a town at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm orange glow over the landscape. The town is visible in the middle ground, with a river winding through it. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky.
- A. Listening Campaign Methods
 - B. Community Interview Themes & Quotes**
 - C. Staff Interview Themes & Quotes
 - D. Staff Workshop Highlights
 - E. Focus Groups: Extended Analysis
 - F. Community-Led Business Survey Results

B1. Community Interview Participants & Insights

Between August and November 2025, **19 community interviews** were conducted by pairs of staff and community volunteer interviewers. A long list of potential interviewees was developed and ranked by a large group of staff and community volunteers to represent varied perspectives: long-time and newer residents, business owners and service providers, healthcare and education professionals, and community members from diverse backgrounds including Spanish-speaking families and young people.

Key Insight

Community interviewees brought perspectives spanning generations, economic situations, and cultural backgrounds. **All expressed deep connection to and care for Fortuna.** Experiences of "belonging" varied significantly — from those for whom the community has "propped them up" through tragedy to those who experience Fortuna as welcoming only "if you fit."

Table 1. Community Interview Participant Perspectives

Self-Reported Attribute or Association	% Interviewees*
Long-time resident (20+ years)	58%
Fortuna native / Raised here	37%
Newer resident (under 10 years)	26%
Young adult (under 25)	11%
Parent of school-age children	47%
Immigrant / First-generation	21%
Spanish-speaking	32%
Senior / Retired	5%
LGBTQ+	5%
Business owner	32%
Service provider / Nonprofit	26%
Healthcare professional	16%
Education / Schools connected	21%
Community volunteer / Civic participant	42%

*Of the 19 community interviewees, some self-identified in multiple categories; not all perspectives are represented here; some did not share much about how they self-identify.

B2. Shared Community Values, Ideals & Interests

Values What Community Believes In That Guides Future Fortuna	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Family & Belonging: Deep emotional ties to place — "my whole life," "home," "a second shot at life." Family networks anchor people to Fortuna across generations.● Mutual Support: Strong community spirit during tragedy. Stories of rallying together: disaster response, events to support neighbors in crisis, community volunteer drives.● Small-Town Character: "Clean, safe, quaint," "friendly city," "perfect pace" — appreciation for knowing neighbors, being recognized at local businesses, and a sense of trust.
Ideals The Future Fortuna Community Members Want	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Economic Vitality: Jobs and industry so youth can stay and money stays local. Mill Site developed. Main Street reinvented.● Clear & Understandable Direction: A City with visible priorities and a plan that survives leadership turnover. Residents informed instead of "what the city's goals are."● Welcoming: A community where everyone feels they belong — not just those who "fit the institution."
Interests What Keeps Community Members Invested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Youth Opportunity: Career pathways, engaging activities, and reasons to stay or return.● Quality of Life: Safety, natural beauty, climate, cleanliness, and "space to live — not a sardine."● Community Events & Parks: Rodeo, Apple Harvest, Auto Expo, Farmer's Market, City Parks, Riverwalk — moments and places that bring people together and illustrate Fortuna's identity.

B3. What Fortuna Means to Community Members

Theme	Representative Perspectives
Home & Belonging	<p>"My whole life." "Home for me now." "Part of my American dream." Deep emotional ties across generations.</p>
Small-Town Character	<p>"Clean, safe, quaint." "Perfect pace." "Big enough to make a difference, but small enough not to get lost."</p>
Family Networks	<p>Family connections anchor people across generations. Multiple interviewees mentioned children and grandchildren as reason for investment.</p>
Space & Freedom	<p>"I don't feel the extreme pressure of a sardine. I have space to live." "The treasure of this place is its isolation."</p>



B4. Community Stories That Define Fortuna

When asked about moments that revealed Fortuna's true character, community members consistently pointed to **crisis response**.

Story Type	Examples Shared
Earthquake Response (2022)	"Nobody questioned anything. It was just like a posse of people going up and down the street... Some of those people don't always get along, but in that moment, none of it mattered."
Community Fundraisers	"Fortuna Strong" events, chicken dinners for crash victims, church food drives demonstrating "overwhelming love."
Neighbor-to-Neighbor	"Everybody living here needs a chainsaw" — about neighbors clearing trees for each other. Helping each other in difficult times.
Business Support	Community supported local businesses during COVID. FFA declined a booster club because "community already supports them so generously."

B5. Community Hopes & Concerns for Youth

Universal Priority: Every value, ideal, and interest expressed by community members underlies a concern for youth wellbeing.

Theme	Key Perspectives
Opportunity Gap	"Lack of opportunity/jobs for lower-educated/income youth." "My son is thinking of moving to Redding — pays like 30% more. Fortuna's pay scale is now like Rio Dell's. It's going to be a huge issue.." "When kids are happy, families want to stay; kids with good experiences want to return."
Retention Worry	"Jobs needed for grandkids to stay." Multiple interviewees noted concern children must leave to survive financially.
Activity Gap	"Right now, there is not much to do in Fortuna other than sitting in a parking lot with your friends."
Career Pipelines	Desire for "career enrichment" so youth can see opportunities to stay. Need for internships, scholarships so students don't "abandon education dreams."
Voice	Lack of access to information about or sense of inclusion in City efforts.

I don't know whatsoever what we are doing in City government. I have never learned about any projects they are planning to do... I am kind of just drifting in the dark while waiting for someone to tell me, because they never put out any information.

- High school interviewee

B6. Community on City Performance & Priorities

Dimension	Avg. Rank	Context
Staff Interactions	8.2	Consistently positive; "friendly, helpful"
City Events	9.0	Rodeo, Apple Harvest, Auto Expo highly valued
Clarity of Priorities	4.1	"I don't know what the city's goals are." "More info is better than less."
Development Process	3.8	"Nightmare," "too burdensome"

If you know what the City's direction is, people who develop programs like me can do what the community needs. Because if we don't know, and we aren't asked...

- Community Interviewee and staff of a community-based organization

What's Working Well

- Parks & Recreation programs and facilities
- Community events and volunteerism infrastructure
- Police responsiveness and professionalism
- Basic services (utilities, cleanliness, safety)
- (School system quality – though not a City responsibility)

Where Improvement Is Needed

- Economic development and job creation
- Clear communication of City direction; want to understand how staff and leadership work together
- Streamlined development approval process
- Youth activities and retention strategies
- Bilingual services and immigrant inclusion

From a business standpoint, a realistic market economy standpoint, you bring in a [large box] business, it will destroy some small business. That's how this works, right? You have to tear down to grow bigger. And this is where I feel like the competing push-pull comes into play, because nobody wants to impact those small businesses and say, 'I'm sorry, you're going to be negatively impacted.' - Community Interviewee

B7. If the Community Had Magic Wands...

Community members consistently identified desired improvements that would create a positive ripple effect.

1. Economic Development & Job Creation

- **Mill Site Development:** Mixed-use, connected to Great Redwood Trail, visible from freeway — "not just one big industry with little employment"
- **Freeway Draw:** Shopping center, Tesla charging station, name-brand hotel — get travelers to stop and spend
- **Revenue Generation:** Attract business to fund services; "bring jobs/industry so money stays in town"
- **Entertainment Venues:** Music venue, indoor recreation — "something that could draw people to Fortuna"

2. Infrastructure & Connectivity

- **Traffic Improvements:** Signals at Newburg/12th Street; roundabouts for Mill Site access
- **Walkability:** Connect broken sidewalk infrastructure — Rohnerville Road to park, Safeway to hospital, Ross Hill Road through Kenmar intersection
- **Riverwalk Maintenance:** Regular maintenance; overgrown vegetation deterring use despite beauty
- **Pedestrian Safety:** More crosswalks, cameras at intersections, better lighting

3. Welcoming to All: Youth & Community

- **Safe Spaces for Youth:** Places to gather beyond parking lots; address notable drug use
- **Drop-in Crisis Center:** Accessible location off school campus (for those with stay-away orders)
- **Bilingual City Services:** Spanish-speaking staff, Spanish-language announcements about City decisions
- **Indoor Community Center/Pool:** Winter recreation for families; draw tournaments

Unfortunately, I don't know anyone from City Council or where to find them.

- Community Interviewee



APPENDIX C

Staff Interview Themes & Quotes

- A. Listening Campaign Methods
- B. Community Interview Themes & Quotes
- C. Staff Interview Themes & Quotes
- D. Staff Workshop Highlights
- E. Focus Groups: Extended Analysis
- F. Community-Led Business Survey Results

C1. Staff Interview Participants & Insights

19 staff interviews (23% of full-time employees) were conducted between August and October 2025 by pairs of City staff interviewers. To maximize candid feedback across organizational boundaries, staff could not interview anyone from their own department or anyone they supervised.

Key Insight

Staff are fundamentally driven by an **internal culture of dedication, quality service, mutual support, and ability to adapt** to changing conditions. Their **frustrations center on systemic challenges** — vision instability, governance uncertainty, and resource constraints — not on commitment to their work or community.

We're at a different point here, because I don't think this agency has ever been this close to saying, "Well, if we can't fix our financial picture, then we could be eliminating positions and decreasing levels of service."

- Staff Interviewee

Table 2. Staff Interview Participant Perspectives

Department or Perspective	% Interviewees*
Administration (Finance, HR, CM)	21%
Public Works	26%
Parks & Recreation	21%
Police	21%
Community Development	11%
Field-Based (1/3: combination field-office)	63%
Newer Staff (< 3 years)	32%
Women	37%
Management Level	53%
Fortuna Resident	84%
High Community Engagement	58%

*Of the 19 staff interviewees, some self-identified in multiple categories; not all perspectives are represented here; some did not share much about how they self-identify.

**One-third of interviewees are combination field-office

***In City Limits or sphere of influence

C2. Shared Staff Values, Ideals & Interests

<p>Values: What Staff Believe Guides Fortuna</p>	<p>Service & Public Impact: Passion for contributing to the community, ensuring basic services that make "civilization possible," and seeing tangible results.</p> <p>Team & Loyalty: Fierce dedication to colleagues and mutual support.</p> <p>Integrity & Honesty: Being honest, communicating openly and applying common sense.</p>
<p>Ideals: The Future Fortuna Staff Want</p>	<p>City Stability & Vision: A clear purpose to guide decisions and survive leadership turnover.</p> <p>Adaptive & Nimble Governance: Flexible, responsive to change. Able to meet public demands.</p> <p>Sustained Quality Services: Maintaining aesthetics, safety, facilities, and a quality workforce.</p>
<p>Interests: What Keeps Staff Members Invested</p>	<p>Competitive Compensation & Stability: Achieving pay parity and securing monetary incentives for long-term staff.</p> <p>Capacity & Structure: Having a "good full staff" to manage workloads and receiving management support that protects staff autonomy.</p> <p>Autonomy & Support: Leaders who protect staff from Council intervention and support them professionally (e.g., training, tools).</p> <p>Economic Development & Revenue Generation: Successfully streamlining development to fund core operations. Implementation-focused General Plan with streamlined, clear, objective code.</p>

The mud in the water is starting to clear up.

- Staff Interviewee

C3. Core Staff Strengths

Staff are driven by an internal culture of dedication, quality service, interpersonal loyalty, and ability to adapt to changing conditions.

Theme	Description	Key Insight
Loyalty & Teamwork	Fierce dedication to colleagues and supporting the person “next to me.” This strong bond keeps the organization functioning despite external challenges.	Some staff sense that peer loyalty is exploited , leading staff to work high amounts of overtime and stay despite competitive pay issues.
Service & Quality	Staff are highly mission-driven, dedicated to providing core services (“what makes civilization possible”) and producing the highest quality work (“best product”).	Staff feel their efforts are “invisible work” and want transparency initiatives to show the public the dedication involved.
Ability to Adapt	Staff are skilled at improvising, pivoting, and handling high-stress situations (e.g., disaster response). Relationships are strong enough to “call anyone” for help across departments.	The organization relies heavily on individual improvisation due to a lack of City vision and planning stability.

I stay because the people I work with — we have each other's back.

- Staff Interviewee

C4. City Performance Ratings by Staff

Topic, Avg. Score	Ratings Context	Key Insights From A Diversity of Staff & Departments
Ability to Get Things Done Effectively: 5.7	Perceived collaboration, effectiveness – internally, externally.	Staff-to-staff collaboration scores are consistently high (7-9). The average score drops due to the impacts of turnover and the influence of Council's challenging decision-making.
Clear Vision, Purpose, & Steps to Improve the City's Future: 4.9	Clarity of long-term goals and strategic direction.	Highly polarized responses. Low average score reflects an absence of clear vision and strategic direction. Scores range from 1 ("no drive for progress") to 10 (optimism about this strategic effort). Pervasive low scores (2, 3, 4) and qualitative critique confirm vision is not built in and that staff experience a lack of governance and accountability.
Clear Guidance on Affordable Housing & Economic Development: 4.2	Perceived effectiveness of policy and planning in critical growth areas.	Highly polarized responses. Low score: lack of clear vision, development barriers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scores of 0 reflect the lack of a clear strategy and scores of 8-10 reflect enthusiasm for the current planning process. ● Staff view the current development process as too burdensome and lacking clear prioritization or department leads. Polar examples include frustration with regulatory limits to pride in attracting developers.

C5. New & Seasoned Staff Perspectives

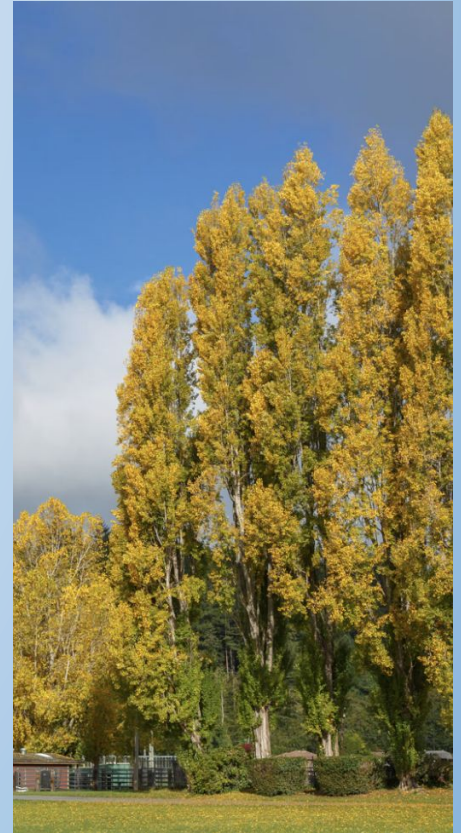
Responses reveal a distinct pattern based on tenure, particularly concerning institutional history and optimism about the City's future vision.

Theme	New Staff	Seasoned Staff
Vision & Optimism	Generally more optimistic about current efforts . One new hire scored vision 7.5 ("in the planning stages") and another scored it 10 ("really nailing that") due to the current strategic effort.	Deep cynicism regarding institutional history and long-term commitment. Vision scores consistently low.
Retention & Pay	Motivated by money and co-workers . Sense that turnover translates to lower quality staff. Appreciates management protecting staff boundaries .	Retention is seen as the " root issue ." They rely on loyalty ("doing it for the people we work with") which they feel the Council exploits. One staffer noted the goal of staying is retirement at 55 . They are less reliant on vision/mission statements than on core purpose being supported.
Governance	Newer staff perceive Council intervention and "personal agendas" as problematic. Pain of lack of institutional memory ("it's in somebody's head").	Seasoned staff perceive the Council as avoiding "hard decisions." They observe that leadership turnover creates perpetual discomfort.
Adaptability	Focus on new, creative solutions like using AI for spreadsheets and proposing social media solutions to show "invisible work."	Highly valued for institutional knowledge and ability to improvise, such as being praised for earthquake response performance when no set disaster plan existed.

C6. Staff on Marginalized Communities

Staff noted that fair engagement is crucial.

- **Capturing Underrepresented Voices:** The visioning process needs to capture the voices of those "unrepresented or scared" who do not attend public meetings (e.g., Chamber luncheons, Council meetings). City Hall is often noted as "not a comfortable place for the community."
- **Equity Implementation:** There is significant anxiety among leadership about equity work, fearing it feels "negative, ineffective" or alienating. The approach needs to be "more accessible" and clear.
- **Targeted Outreach:** The importance of deepening relationships with historically marginalized groups was stressed, often requiring staff to go "to them" at community events. Tangible, on-the-ground efforts (like working with organizations on gardens or job creation) are key to build trust.



C7. Staff Insights About Public Engagement

Staff with high public visibility (e.g., Police, Parks, City Clerk, Front Desk) shared insights regarding public perception and stress.

- **Invisible Work and Public Perception:** Staff feel the **public is unaware of the "invisible work"** (maintenance, process rigor) **required to deliver services**. Staff feel judged for standing around (e.g. during required safety meetings) and must take private breaks to avoid being reported.
- **Public Safety Focus:** The community heavily values public safety (police presence and quick response) and aesthetics (cleanliness, mowed medians). However, they often give **"mixed signals" that, on one hand, value the police while not wanting to pay for the service.**
- **The Squeaky Wheel Dynamic:** Staff shared their perceptions that City Council is **overly responsive to the "same few constituents."** This disproportionate influence of a small, vocal minority is seen as distracting staff from strategic priorities.
- **Solution? Transparency:** Staff suggested improving community relations and recruitment by creating a "behind-the-scenes video series" to show the reality of the work.

C8. If Staff Had Magic Wands...

Staff consistently identified two linked systemic improvements that would create a positive ripple effect:

1. Streamline Development, Generate Revenue & Reconsider Planning Norms

- Make the **development approval process "cleaner" and more streamlined** to attract tax revenue – the current process is "jumbled, ad hoc," and **too burdensome**.
- Modernize: historic "**small town feel**" **may no longer be economically or regulation viable**.
- Vision needs to translate downstream into plans and code to avoid conflict with developers and prevent the perception of "spinning wheels."
- Increase staffing to manage overwhelming workload.

2. Mandate Long-Term Cost Accounting

- **Maintenance Crisis:** Projects (especially grant-funded park acquisitions) are approved without budgeting for **fully burdened maintenance costs or staffing**.
- **Decision-Making Criteria:** **All new projects must include a fully burdened cost analysis for maintenance and staffing** – key to addressing the "maintenance crisis" and ensuring sustainability.



C9. Cross-Cutting Themes from Staff Interviews

- **The Detriment of Fiscal Constraint:** The City Council's commitment to fiscal constraint is identified as a "detriment to the city," often seen as a way to avoid **making tough decisions** (e.g., staff pay, addressing "sacred cows"). Potential adaptive guiding (or design) questions are:
 - How might we address the legal and safety vulnerability of Council maintaining a frugal value set?
 - How can we balance frugality with providing a high quality of life in all we do?
 - How do the following themes also challenge Council's prioritization of frugal operations?
- **The Silo & Communication Deficit:** The organization suffers from **siloeed departments functioning as "islands"** and a "big disconnect between field staff and City Hall." Staff lack "organic" time to connect across departments, which stifles collaborative efforts. This leads to proposals being written without engaging necessary departments and inefficiency.
- **The Cost of Instability:** High turnover in key positions (City Manager, Public Works Director) leads to **major organizational discomfort**, loss of institutional knowledge (losing what is "in somebody's head"), the necessity of constantly adapting to new leaders' perspectives, and inefficiency. This instability directly correlates with the lack of clear vision.

APPENDIX D

Staff Workshop Highlights

- A. Listening Campaign Methods
- B. Community Interview Themes & Quotes
- C. Staff Interview Themes & Quotes
- D. Staff Workshop Highlights
- E. Focus Groups: Extended Analysis
- F. Community-Led Business Survey Results

D1. Staff Workshop Overview

In November 2025, **13 senior staff gathered** at the Monday Club to begin to turn the results of their internal listening campaign (see Section 4C and Appendix C for results) into the **beginnings of a Strategic Plan**. They developed initial elements of a City Purpose, Core Values, Decision-Making Criteria, and maps of strategic priority action plans.

A primary outcome was the beginning of what became a **working draft of Operational Decision-Making Criteria** (Section D2, following page). These criteria are a flexible tool for staff to experiment with how to provide a balance of structure and flexibility in their day-to-day leadership and operations.



Special thanks to Cal Poly Humboldt Intern Raven Ross for their assistance with the Staff Listening Campaign Report and Workshop.



D2. Preliminary Operational Decision-Making Criteria Proposal

Draft Criteria	When, Why & How to Use & Test Them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is the mission being prioritized over comfort? ● Do we have the capability and resources (time/money)? ● How does this impact all affected employees? ● How does this impact the community? ● What is the financial impact? ● Is this a long-term decision? ● Are we avoiding difficult/necessary conversations? ● Who bears the brunt of this decision? ● Does it increase or decrease our capacity as an organization? ● Is there an alternative? ● Can we say no? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hiring Decisions/Interviews ● Department Heads and/or Division Meetings ● Pay Negotiations ● <u>Staff Reports</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Development Proposals ○ Budget ○ Large Purchases (e.g. equipment or land) ○ Program Development ○ Capital Improvement Program ○ Keep a project in house or contract it

Focus Concepts: Core Intent

- Mission before comfort
- Competence is care
- Consideration Employees
- Being an important part of the community
- Need new Industry in the area
- Recognize limitations: organization doing more with less
- Doesn't occur to staff to leave, time didn't matter
- Teamwork
- Satisfaction in what we do
- Autonomy

Frame Concepts: Important Context

- Helps retention
- Generates sustainable revenue
- Are we naming tradeoffs?
- Does it prioritize: purpose, personnel, projects
- Account for fully-burdened costs?
- Protect staff from Council micro-management?
- Honor staff's work and dedication
- Increase opportunities for cross-org and external collaboration
- Model adaptive leadership

APPENDIX E

Focus Groups: Extended Analysis

- A. Listening Campaign Methods
- B. Community Interview Themes & Quotes
- C. Staff Interview Themes & Quotes
- D. Staff Workshop Highlights
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E1. Focus Groups Summary: Key Distinctions

What Focus Groups Added

- **Support for seldom-heard voices** in civic engagement processes and the ability to share candid experiences
- **Teen perspective:** Voice of Fortuna's future that is rarely captured on civic matters
- **Immigrant perspective:** Experiences of exclusion that don't always surface in English-language interviews
- **Intensity of experience:** Focus groups captured emotional resonance and group dynamics on issues that individuals may not have had the confidence to bring up

What Interviews Provided That Focus Groups Did Not

- Depth of individual exploration and follow-up
- Quantitative ratings for comparison
- Broader demographic representation
- More detailed policy-relevant content

Appropriate Weighting

Focus groups provide valuable supplementary depth into particular lived experiences underrepresented in public processes. Interview results carry primary analytical weight due to depth and breadth of the diverse community sample. The detail in this section is maintained in part for partner organizations with specific interests in these groups.

It's hard to even imagine, because it doesn't work that way, right?

- Teen Focus Group Participant, when asked what ideal youth involvement in City government would look like

Me gustaría que hubiera recursos para los niños que quieren ser emprendedores.

I would like there to be resources for children who want to be entrepreneurs.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

E2. Teen Focus Group: Extended Analysis

Teen focus group participants from alternative schools revealed insights about experiences, needs, and aspirations of Fortuna youth.

Key Insights

- Teens drew a **keen connection between a lack of engaging opportunities and the relatively high rate of problematic activities and behaviors** among youth, including substance use and delinquency.
- There is a **stark service gap for teenagers**: Parks & Rec programming drops off after elementary school, leaving teens with "nothing" during school breaks and limited year-round options beyond "sitting in a parking lot."
- Participants reported **direct experiences of harassment and intolerance**, including racism, homophobia, and age-inappropriate attention from adults—particularly on Main Street after dark.
- Youth expressed pride when **community friendliness translates into tangible mutual aid**, like fundraisers for neighbors in crisis, while noting Fortuna lacks visible care infrastructure for vulnerable populations.
- Teens want **city leaders to come to them** — at school events, the Wellness Fair, and celebrations — rather than expecting youth to navigate channels like Facebook or come to City Council meetings.
- Participants asked to see **quick wins on “low-hanging fruit” in the near future**, and shared examples.

Table 3. Teen Focus Group Participants

Self-Reported Attribute or Association	Representation*
Average Age: 15.5 years	-
Gender: Female - Male ratio	3:1
Hispanic/Mexican	20%
Native American	30%
White	20%
Multi-Racial	30%
Fortuna resident and student	45%
Non-resident Fortuna student	35%
Participate in City Parks & Rec activities	35%
Eel River Community School	45%
East High School	35%
Academy of the Redwoods	10%
Teen Court Program	20%
Two Feathers Native Am. Family Services	10%

*11 completed a survey informing these results; eight of them attended the workshop; some students were also involved with a supporting program or organization

E2.1. What Teens Like Now & The Vibe They Want

What Teens Like About Fortuna

- Aesthetic beauty of surrounding nature and forest
- High school environment and school spirit
- Well-maintained parks
- Moments of genuine community friendliness

How Teens Describe Fortuna NOW

- "Boring" and "flat"
- "Small" and lacking activities
- "Friendly but..." with immediate caveats about harassment and safety

What Makes Teens Proud of Fortuna

- Crisis Response: Community rallying for neighbors in need (e.g., fundraiser for crash victims)
- Service: Clean-up and canned food drives
- Programming: some at Gene Lucas Center

How Teens WANT Fortuna to Feel

- "Fun"
- "Alive"
- "Peaceful"
- "Exciting"
- "Assertive"

I hear community leaders talk about “Friendly Fortuna” all the time, being really proud of it. And I think they need a bit of a reality check [that it’s not so friendly for everyone].

- Teen Focus Group Participant

Planning Implications

There are opportunities to work with partner organizations to intentionally understand teen interests and increase related programming.

The gap between current and desired descriptors reveals youth seeking a more dynamic, engaging community while maintaining the peaceful qualities they value. The "friendly but..." pattern echoes detailed discussions during the immigrant focus groups — residents appreciate friendliness where it exists, but experience barriers to feeling fully welcomed and safe.

E2.2. Teen Perspectives on Safety & Welcoming Spaces

Where Teens Feel Welcome

- School events (football games, school functions)
- Local shops with friendly interactions
- Fortuna High School as a central hub

Where Teens Feel Unsafe

- **Main Street After Dark:** Consensus that Main Street feels unsafe at night due to poor lighting and interactions with intoxicated individuals near bars
- **Specific businesses** where teens report receiving poor treatment
- **As pedestrians** on City streets, especially in front of schools and at night

Experiences with Harassment & Intolerance

Multiple specific reports emerged:

- "Old weird men" catcalling or questioning minors about their age
- Having rocks thrown at them due to **homophobia**
- Native Americans experiencing racist harassment for "speaking that Wu-Tang language" and called "China"
- Harassment based on physical differences

Lack of Accountability

Teens perceive a pattern that **adults and peers "get away with" and model negative behavior**, including inappropriate age-gap relationships and permissive all-ages drunkenness (e.g., at the Rodeo).

Planning Implications

- **Main Street lighting improvements** are a concrete, achievable way to demonstrate responsiveness to youth safety concerns.
- The pattern of harassment experiences reveals **fairness and safety gaps that affect multiple populations.**
- Public safety campaigns and/or bystander intervention training could signal that the City takes youth safety seriously.

E2.3. Teens' Desired Spaces, Activities, & Opportunities

The "Third Places" Gap

Teens emphasized the need for safe social environments that are neither home nor school. Without these "third" spaces, youth note their activities often consist of "sitting in a parking lot."

Commercial & Entertainment Requests

- Arcade and outdoor markets (repeatedly mentioned)
- Mall or centralized shopping area and clothing stores
- Specific chains: Dutch Bros, Trader Joe's, Chipotle
- Japanese cuisine, fusion bowls
- Movie theater
- Family fun center (e.g. bowling, mini-golf, go-carts, trampoline)
- Music venue for live events

Outdoor Recreation & Activity Requests

- Skate and bike park
- More river access; dock for fishing, kayaking, paddleboarding
- Running track around Newburg Park
- More trails and cleaner/maintained public areas/parks

Civic & Safety Infrastructure Requests

- Broad pedestrian safety requests
- Traffic calming near schools and amenities
- Improved lighting on Main Street
- "More actual housing" and utilization of vacant property
- Homeless shelter or visible care infrastructure

Youth Looking for Productive Opportunities

One participant shared that, among Teen Court participants, Fortuna youth experience higher rates of drug use than participants from other parts of Humboldt County. Teens attribute this to a systemic lack of structured opportunities — particularly for those who have aged out of elementary programs.

Participants repeatedly noted a need for local employment and internship opportunities.

Planning Implications

- Teen requests align with broader community desires for economic vitality and "things for youth to do."
- **Recreation programming gaps for ages 12-18 represent a strategic priority for Parks & Recreation.**
- Community events that already bring the town together could be leveraged for youth-specific programming or outreach.
- The High School's central role suggests opportunities for partnership in youth engagement and programming.

E2.4. Teen Views on Relationship with City Government

How Teens View Local Government's Role

- "Betterment of community"
- Addressing important challenges
- Doing what they believe is best for residents

Desired Engagement: "Come to Us"

Teens want leaders to engage students where they are:

- Guest speakers at school
- Attending school celebrations
- Presence at the Wellness Fair
- Meeting youth on their turf rather than expecting them to navigate City Hall

Planning Implications

- **Communication strategies need to extend beyond Facebook** to reach youth and other underserved populations.
- Direct engagement at schools and youth-serving events could **build civic connection and trust.**
- Youth-specific outreach for General Plan and Strategic Plan processes should **meet teens where they already gather.**

Information Access Challenges

The Facebook Silo: Teens note that City information is found almost exclusively on Facebook or through parents (most of whom do not seem to be connected). This practice excludes:

- Youth who aren't on Facebook
- Elders who don't use the internet
- Anyone outside established networks

City Visibility

Teens noted that candidates' lawn signs are the only time they see anything about the City.

I don't usually see teens this engaged for this long. I think it's because they were being so carefully listened to.

- FUHS Wellness Center staff about the Teen Focus Group participants

E2.5. With Magic Wands, Teens Would...

Highest Priority Changes

- **Create places to go and things to do** — "Third places" beyond home and school: arcade, skate park, hangout plaza, movie theater, or anywhere that isn't a parking lot
- **Close the teen programming gap** — Extend Parks & Rec offerings beyond elementary school and during breaks when teen programming is lacking
- **Make Main Street safe after dark** — Better lighting and reduced harassment so teens can walk downtown without fear
- **Create pathways to jobs and experience** — Internships, entry-level positions, and work opportunities for teens entering the job market
- **Have city leaders come to them** — Engagement at schools, Wellness Fair, and youth events rather than expecting teens to navigate City Hall or Facebook
- **Be taken seriously** — Adults who listen; accountability for harassment and inappropriate conduct toward youth

Planning Implications

Teen priorities reveal a desire for productive engagement over passive restriction. Their analysis—that boredom and lack of opportunity drive problematic behavior—suggests prevention strategies centered on meaningful activity, economic access, and visible investment in youth wellbeing.

These priorities align with other listening campaign findings: Main Street safety, pedestrian infrastructure, and authentic engagement. This convergence suggests **high-leverage opportunities with broad community support**.

I would love more street fairs where you can wander and shop. And an arcade for families.

- Teen Focus Group Participant



E2.6. Youth-Identified Quick Wins for Quality of Life

1. Close the School Break Activity Gap

- **The Issue:** While Fortuna Rec offers camps for elementary-aged children, there is "nothing for teens" during Winter and Spring breaks. This leaves teens bored and isolated, with limited options year-round.
- **The Opportunity:** Develop or coordinate teen-specific camps, workshop series, or community events like arts markets during school breaks. Create designated gathering spaces beyond parking lots and parks. Spaces that offer ongoing opportunities for activity like a skate park are of interest.

2. Academic/Employment Internships & Job Access

- **The Issue:** Teens feel there are no job opportunities for those entering the market and no mechanisms to gain work experience.
- **The Opportunity:** Encourage businesses and schools to develop internship programs (coffee shops, trades, organizations) where students can learn skills and potentially earn units toward GPA and college preparation.

3. Traffic Safety Infrastructure in School Zones

- **The Issue:** Specific complaints about speeding and safety near schools and amenities. A petition for speed bumps was previously submitted by teachers, but teens are unaware of any response or outcome.
- **The Opportunity:** Install traffic calming measures near schools and enforce stop-sign compliance to protect pedestrians and scooter riders.

4. Main Street Lighting & Safety

- **The Issue:** Main Street is perceived as dark and unsafe after hours, particularly due to bar proximity and lack of lighting.
- **The Opportunity:** Improve street lighting on Main Street to increase feelings of safety for pedestrians in the evening.

5. Accountability for Harassment

- **The Issue:** A pervasive sense that "people aren't held accountable for bad behavior" regarding street harassment and intolerance.
- **The Opportunity:** Visible public safety campaigns or bystander intervention training could signal that the City takes youth safety seriously.

Planning Implications

Several "quick wins" identified by teens align with priorities raised by other groups (immigrant focus group, community interviews): **pedestrian safety infrastructure, Main Street improvements, and programming gaps. This convergence suggests high-leverage opportunities with broad community support.**

E3. Immigrant Focus Group: Extended Analysis

Immigrant community focus group participants revealed insights about experiences, needs, and aspirations of Spanish-speaking Fortuna residents. They demonstrated a strong commitment to their community while identifying notable barriers to full civic participation. Key themes centered on: **safety, communications access, infrastructure quality, and the desire for genuine inclusion rather than tokenistic engagement.**

Key Insights

- The predominant theme across all questions was the **need for better communication and information access in Spanish.**
- Participants **consistently centered children and youth in their vision for Fortuna's future**, revealing both hopes and substantial concerns.
- There is a **stark contrast between what makes residents feel welcome** (job opportunities, Spanish-language services, friendly people) **and what makes them feel unwelcome** (discrimination, racism, intolerance, tokenism). This tension represents both a challenge and an opportunity for Fortuna's future.
- Participants connected improved education as a path to experiencing fair treatment, suggesting they see **educational access as the pathway to full civic participation and dignity.**
- Participants consistently emphasized the importance of **pedestrian safety** and **improving the Riverwalk and public spaces.**

Table 4. Immigrant Focus Group Participants

Attribute	Proportion*
Average Age: early 40s	-
Gender: Female	2/3
Gender: Male	1/3
Born in U.S.	1/3
Born in Mexico	2/3
Employed	8/9
Enough opportunity in Fortuna (range & average score, 1-10)	Range: 2-9 Avg: 6
Feel safe, welcome in Fortuna (range & average score, 1-10)	Range: 5-10 Avg: 8

*12 attended the focus group and eight completed the survey informing these results

E3.1. What Works Well & Favorite Spaces for Immigrants

What Works Well

- Good schools and good teachers
- Honesty and respect in community
- Tranquility and peace
- Opportunities
- Community connection and friendship

Planning Implications

An asset-based planning approach would leverage existing strengths – such as schools, natural beauty, community values – while addressing gaps.

Favorite Physical Places

- Rohnert Park
- Riverwalk
- Main Street
- Gene Lucas Community Center
- La Costa Mexican restaurant

Planning Implications

Areas the community already enjoys can serve as indications for future planning and design guidelines, and serve as assets to build upon for multiple purposes.

Prioritizing Riverwalk enhancement could serve multiple goals:

- Recreation
- Community pride
- Tourism and economic development, and
- City commitment to maintaining public spaces valued by diverse communities.



Photo:
Fortuna
Chamber of
Commerce

E3.2. Immigrants' Views On Fortuna & Youth

Fortuna Means:

- Family, security, and beauty emerged as the three dominant Fortuna descriptors
- Strong appreciation for natural environment and small-town character
- Recognition of local opportunity balanced with concern about friendliness
- Desire for the City to "take perspectives into account" and create a "better future"

An ideal Fortuna for youth includes:

Activities, Opportunity & Safety

- More activities for teenagers as an underserved age group in City/general programs/activities
- Resource center desired for entrepreneurs to boost economic opportunity for next generation
- Safety in streets and parks, including addressing homeless population aggressiveness concerns
- Continued quality in schools (a current strength)
- In general: support for special needs children

Pedestrian Infrastructure Improvements

- Better pedestrian infrastructure, e.g. crosswalks, lights, safe walking routes, traffic calming – especially at night

*Quisiera ver a la policía, no solamente en sus carros — me gustaría verla caminando, o en bicicleta.
I would like to see the police not only in their cars. I would like to see them walking or on a bicycle.*

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant

E3.3. Immigrants' Views on Communications & Infrastructure

Communication Barriers

- Lack of **Spanish-language City communications and difficulty accessing information** about City services and programs
- No Spanish-language announcements about City news and decisions
- Limited knowledge about how City government works

Planning Implications

- Communication access is not a "nice to have" but a fundamental fairness issue and is as important as service delivery.
- The Strategic Plan should include concrete strategies for multilingual communications.
- Plan for language access in all public engagement processes such as the General Plan Update.

Top Infrastructure Priorities

- Pedestrian safety repairs and better crosswalks
- Traffic light at Newburg and 12th Street (specific, recurring request)
- Better general street infrastructure and street maintenance
- Cameras at intersections (safety monitoring)
- Pedestrian lights and signals
- Housing: affordability and quality

Planning Implications

- Pedestrian safety infrastructure is a concrete, achievable way to demonstrate city responsiveness to immigrant community priorities.
- These improvements benefit all residents while addressing specific concerns raised by this community.

E3.4. Welcome & Engaged Immigrants

Current experiences that help people feel welcome and connected

- Job opportunities
- Free community college
- Spanish-language church services
- Good climate and friendly people
- Comfort and tranquility
- Spanish-speaking doctors
- Good schools and teachers

Planning Implications

Fairness needs to be embedded throughout planning processes, not treated as a separate initiative. Community members will assess authenticity of engagement efforts.

Superficial Inclusion

People distinguish between genuine engagement and performative diversity.

Some report experiencing being included for appearance rather than real participation.

This has profound implications for how the City conducts future engagement.

Entonces, ¿Para qué voy a perder mi tiempo en escuchar lo que ustedes van a decidir? ... Es el fenómeno que llaman tokenismo.

Then why am I going to waste my time listening to what you are just going to decide? ... It's the phenomenon they call tokenism.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant, speaking about being asked to participate in a community effort for her ethnicity to validate the process

E3.5. With Magic Wands, Immigrants Would...

Highest Priority Changes

- **City information communicated in Spanish** — Including priorities, decisions, and how to engage with City government
- **Genuine inclusion, not tokenism** — City commitment to engagement with diverse populations, not just check-the-box outreach
- **Better education and pathways to equality** — Community education leading to experience of equal treatment
- **Infrastructure improvements** — Streets, sidewalks, pedestrian safety, especially in neighborhoods with fewer vehicles per household
- **Access to health services**
- **Better support for special needs children**
- **Cultural events that celebrate diversity**

Planning Implications

Explore partnerships, programs, and systems for communications with and engagement of the Spanish-speaking population as strategic priorities. Address **infrastructure needs** in immigrant-heavy neighborhoods. Consider **cultural programming** in events planning. Plan for and **include immigrant voices** in ongoing engagement — not as an afterthought.

Me encanta Fortuna, pero para ser honesto, ni siquiera sé cuáles son sus prioridades.

I love Fortuna, but to be honest I don't even know what its priorities are.

- Immigrant Focus Group Participant



APPENDIX F

Community-Led Business Survey Results

- A. Listening Campaign Methods**
- B. Community Interview Themes & Quotes**
- C. Staff Interview Themes & Quotes**
- D. Staff Workshop Highlights**
- E. Focus Groups: Extended Analysis**
- F. Community-Led Business Survey Results**

February 19th, 2026

Ms. Amy Nilsen, City Manager
City of Fortuna
621 11th St.
Fortuna, CA 95540

Dear Ms. Nilsen,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input from Fortuna's business community to the Economic Development Element in Fortuna's 2026 General Plan Update and new Strategic Plan for the city. Sixty-four (64) business owners and senior management individuals from nine industry sectors completed a survey addressing the following four questions:

- What are the most significant issues facing Fortuna's economy today?
- What opportunities and challenges do you see for Fortuna's economic future?
- What actions in Fortuna, if any, do you believe would most benefit your business?
- What are key assets Fortuna could be known for that can be leveraged to develop a unique community theme and strong economy for Fortuna.

The attached report includes an Executive Summary of those findings and summary findings for each of the industry sectors. In addition, an overview of key events in Fortuna's economic history is provided for context.

The parallel timing of the substantial decline of jobs in the timber industry and the rapid increase in cannabis economic activity twenty years ago is significant. Cannabis appears to have cushioned what otherwise would have been a major blow to the local economy. With the recent collapse of the cannabis market, the question is now being asked: Does Fortuna, the

Eel River Valley and Southern Humboldt have any evidence of a developing replacement economy for the loss of those two economic anchors? Dozens of individuals were asked that question and the unanimous response was no. If that is accurate, Fortuna is facing a structural change in its economy instead of a normal business cycle and the need to have serious discussions about Fortuna's economic future is now.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to assist with this effort. Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Jon Sapper
(707) 498-6065
jsapper1965@gmail.com

Cc. Fortuna Chamber of Commerce
Downtown Merchants Association

**Survey of Fortuna’s Business Community Providing Input to the
2026 General Plan Update and Strategic Plan
February 18th, 2026**

Introduction

Healthy small communities across our country have one thing in common; a strong, sustainable and stable economy. It is this desire that brought people together to gather information in support of specific actions to improve the long-term economic health and vitality of Fortuna’s economy. The City of Fortuna is undergoing a General Plan Update and new Strategic Plan in 2026 and wants to include an economic development element with identified business and community needs in those plans. The city asked for help in compiling this information and those involved are volunteering their time toward this effort.

Individuals and business owners from nine business sectors in Fortuna provided input and guidance in drafting a report to the City of Fortuna with a request to include the findings in Fortuna’s 2026 General Plan Update and Strategic Plan. Those business sectors are:

- Ag/Horticulture/Natural Res.
- Ranching/Dairy
- Grocery and Beverage
- Restaurants
- Industrial/Manufacturing
- Health Care
- Hospitality/Tourism
- Retail
- Developers/Contractors

In addition, the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Merchants Association were also involved in helping to reach out to business owners requesting their participation and input.

Each business representative was asked to complete a survey responding to the following four questions:

1. What are the most significant issues facing Fortuna's economy today?
2. What opportunities and challenges do you see for Fortuna's economic future?
3. What actions in Fortuna, if any, do you believe would most benefit your business?
4. What are key assets Fortuna could be known for that can be leveraged to develop a unique community theme and strong economy for Fortuna?

All returned surveys were analyzed by North Coast Small Business Development Center staff in Arcata using a sophisticated AI tool to identify common themes and draft summary reports. A report was compiled for each business sector, in addition to an overall report reflecting input from all business sectors combined. Those reports will be provided to the City of Fortuna, Fortuna Chamber of Commerce and members of the Downtown Merchants Association. Business sector representatives will also be provided reports, upon request.

The initial goal was forty-five (45) responses. Employers were told that responses would be anonymous and no individual or business name would be included in the report. Sixty-four (64) surveys were returned with a mix of small and large businesses/companies participating. Employers with large employee numbers submitted responses.

The number of returned surveys by sector is as follows:

- Retail 11
- Downtown Merchants 8
- Developers/Contractors 7
- Restaurants 6
- Ranching/Dairy 5

- Industrial/Manufacturing 4
- Grocery/Beverage 4
- Ag./Horticulture/Natural Res. 3
- Health Care 3
- Hospitality/Tourism 1
- Other/Did not Declare 12

It is possible some Retail responses are Downtown Merchants, but they decided to complete the Chamber of Commerce distributed form instead of the Downtown Merchant form.

After completing forms, members from three sectors (Restaurants, Ranching/Dairy and Industrial/Manufacturing) wanted to attend separate group meetings to discuss their sector's results. Two to three notetakers also attended to capture any comments that were in addition to their returned surveys.

Length of Time in Business in Fortuna

- 3 respondents have been in business less than 1 year.
- 12 respondents have been in business between 1 & 5 years.
- 6 respondents have been in business between 5 & 10 years.
- 41 respondents have been in business over 10 years.

Executive Summary

The collective input from all sectors, restaurants, retail, developers and contractors, ranching and dairy, industrial and manufacturing, grocery and beverage, agriculture and natural resources, healthcare, hospitality and tourism, downtown merchants, and general respondents, reveals a consistent and clear narrative: Fortuna is widely viewed as a wonderful place to live, rich in natural beauty, community spirit, and strategic location, but economically underperforming relative to its assets. Business owners and stakeholders describe the city as stable yet stagnant, with significant untapped potential. Across nearly every sector, respondents expressed

pride in Fortuna's small-town character, riverfront setting, redwood identity, and family-friendly culture. However, they also emphasized structural economic weaknesses that must be addressed if Fortuna is to thrive long-term.

The most consistent concern across sectors is the lack of economic diversification and the loss of anchor industries such as timber and cannabis. Many participants described the current economy as retail and service heavy, without a strong base of high-paying employers to drive disposable income and sustained growth. Without new industry or exportable economic drivers, local spending power remains limited, retail leakage continues to neighboring cities and online platforms and municipal revenues struggle to grow. There is strong consensus that Fortuna needs to attract manufacturing, value-added natural resource industries, or other scalable economic engines to replace the industries that once supported middle-class wages.

Housing availability and affordability emerged as a second dominant theme. Nearly every sector identified housing as a direct barrier to workforce attraction and business expansion. Employers struggle to recruit and retain employees due to limited housing supply, aging rental stock, and rising costs. Healthcare providers report building their own housing units to accommodate staff, developers cite high fees and permitting delays that hinder new construction, and business owners consistently link workforce shortages to housing constraints. Participants emphasized that housing is not merely a social issue but a central economic development challenge that affects nearly every industry.

Downtown vitality and retail leakage were also repeatedly cited. Many stakeholders described Main Street as lacking vibrancy, cohesion, and destination appeal. Retail dollars are flowing to Eureka, Costco, and online retailers, while downtown struggles with limited variety, insufficient foot traffic, and an unclear identity. Respondents called for beautification, stronger visual appeal, more concentrated retail uses, and anchor attractions that would give residents and visitors a reason to stop and stay. Several bold ideas were proposed, including pedestrian-oriented redesigns,

historic district branding, expanded events, and leveraging the Great Redwood Trail and Riverwalk to activate the core.

Another cross-sector theme was the need for more efficient permitting processes, clearer regulatory pathways, and stronger city capacity. Developers, industrial operators, healthcare leaders, and downtown merchants all referenced delays, rising fees, and limited staffing capacity as obstacles to growth. There is widespread support for creating or strengthening a dedicated economic development function, improving interdepartmental coordination, and fostering a more proactive “how can we help you succeed” approach within city operations.

Finally, nearly every sector emphasized that Fortuna’s greatest competitive advantage lies in its natural and cultural assets—its redwoods, Eel River, climate, outdoor recreation, rural character, and friendly community identity. However, participants repeatedly stated that the city does not effectively promote or unify these strengths into a cohesive brand. There is strong interest in positioning Fortuna as a gateway to the redwoods, a river-centered destination or a sports and recreation hub. The Mill Site and riverfront redevelopment were consistently identified as catalytic opportunities that could reshape the city’s economic trajectory, if executed strategically.

In summary, Fortuna’s stakeholders see a city with strong foundational assets but lacking a diversified economic base, adequate housing supply, downtown vitality, streamlined development processes, and a unified identity. There is broad agreement that meaningful progress will require coordinated leadership, strategic industry recruitment, housing expansion, downtown revitalization, and a bold but practical branding and development strategy centered on Fortuna’s unique natural advantages. The community is ready for forward momentum; what is needed now is alignment, execution capacity, and a clear economic vision that translates pride in place into measurable growth.

See Appendix A for individual sector summary reports.

Overview of Key Events in Fortuna's Economic History

Following completion of surveys and input from local businesses, an overview of key events in Fortuna's economic history and a review of recent Fortuna's Sale Tax and Transient Occupancy Tax revenues is included in order to provide context to the survey findings and determine relationships, if any. That overview follows:

1860's through 1970

- The economic anchor in Fortuna, the Eel River Valley and Southern Humboldt was the Timber Industry during this time period. Agriculture, dairy and ranching was also a very important sector. The largest company, Pacific Lumber Company (PALCO), was founded in 1863, headquartered in Scotia and later included a sawmill operation in Fortuna and a mill operation in Carlotta. The company was stable and operated on a sustained yield basis where the board footage of lumber harvested annually was offset by the amount of board footage the company's timber holdings grew each year. PALCO provided living wage jobs, high quality benefits, pensions, health insurance and stock options for its employees. The company also provided free life insurance, bonuses and college scholarships for the children of its employees. In addition to PALCO, Eel River Sawmills, operated just north of Rio Dell during this time and was a significant contributor to the timber based sector. Fortuna's economy was stable with an abundance of blue collar, family living wage jobs for its citizens.

The 1970's and early 1980's

- The timber industry continued as the economic anchor for the Eel River Valley and Southern Humboldt with harvesting on private and US Forest Service land.
- During the early/mid 1970's, a movement of "back to the land" individuals, many from the SF Bay area, moved to Southern Humboldt and started small fledgling marijuana growing operations and other businesses.

This movement increased through the 1970's and by the early 1980's, Southern Humboldt started to become known throughout the country for cannabis.

1985 - Maxxam, Inc., led by Charles Hurwitz, initiated a hostile takeover of PALCO, which was completed in 1986. Maxxam accelerated harvesting timber beyond sustainable levels in order to pay off the debt it incurred as a result of the takeover.

The 1990's was the decade of the timber wars. Charles Hurwitz and Maxxam lit a firestorm of protests from environmentalists who criticized the significant increase in harvesting of old growth redwoods. These timber wars and protests were national news and became the lightning rod for increasing attacks on the timber industry. Debates over old growth protection and the Northern Spotted Owl led to the Northwest Forest Plan which drastically reduced volumes on US Forest Service lands to protect critical habitat.

1996 - Marijuana is legalized for Medical purposes in California via Prop 215. The underground black market begins to expand in Southern and Eastern Humboldt County.

Late 1990's and early 2000's - Pressure on the timber industry continues to increase. At this time, PALCO and Eel River Sawmills had a combined employment of approximately 2,000 employees (1,600 PALCO and 400 Eel River Sawmills). Those 2,000 living wage economic anchor jobs supported an additional 4,000 (6,000 total) jobs in local communities when using an employment multiplier of 2.0. Each base industry job in this sector averages 2.1+ additional jobs in the local economy. (retail, restaurants, services, trades, etc.) The majority of those jobs were in Fortuna, the Eel River Valley and Southern Humboldt.

- The black market in cannabis now is showing substantial growth

2004 - The Carlotta Mill owned by PALCO closed.

2005 - Eel River Sawmills closed laying off all 400 employees and PALCO closed its Fortuna Mill June 30th, 2005.

2007 - PALCO files for Bankruptcy Protection and lays off employees resulting in another major hit to the economic anchor of timber in the Eel River Valley and Southern Humboldt.

2008 - Humboldt Redwood Company takes over the assets and operations from Maxxam (PALCO), including the remaining 350 employees. Using the 2.0 employment multiplier (350 economic anchor jobs plus the 700 supported jobs remained.) There were now an estimated 1,050 total jobs in 2008 from the base timber industry employment and supported jobs combined, compared to 6,000 total jobs in 2000/2001.

2010 - City of Fortuna develops a Year 2010-2030 General Plan that includes an Economic Development Element acknowledging the reductions in the timber economy and recommending prioritizing the need to develop a stable and balanced economy, improve workforce development, re-define Fortuna's economic base, develop business attraction and retention strategies, promote increased tourism and develop economic related infrastructure.

Why wasn't the economic impact of losing 1,650 economic anchor jobs in timber and the expected loss of an additional 3,300 supported jobs in our communities realized? Did a high percentage of those who lost jobs find other jobs locally with wages at a similar level? Or, could it be the black market cannabis industry was cushioning what otherwise would have been severe economic impacts with that level of job losses?

2011 - A comprehensive economic study was done to determine the impact of cannabis in Humboldt County. That study, using a conservative methodology, estimated the annual economic impact of cannabis between 1.0 and 1.2 billion dollars countywide. If that is anywhere close to the actual number, cannabis softened or eliminated what would have otherwise

been the significant economic impact from the bankruptcy and sale of PALCO and the closure of Eel River Sawmills. Cannabis then, in fact, became the new “economic anchor”, especially in the Eel River Valley and Southern Humboldt.

2015 - There are an estimated 10,000+ cannabis grow sites in rural Humboldt County with approximately 58% of rural parcels having active grows according to county reports. The economic impact continues to expand.

2016 - Cannabis is legalized for recreational **use** in California. Black market cannabis explodes in Humboldt County, predominantly Southern and Eastern Humboldt.

2018 - Cannabis is legalized for recreational **sales** in California. Legal grows begin developing throughout the State.

2020 - COVID significantly impacts businesses and economic activity

2021 - The cannabis black market starts to show evidence of decline in Humboldt County with legalization. Sales tax revenue in Fortuna, Southern Humboldt and countywide showed a strong recovery post-COVID, but at the end of that period and into the next year, sales tax revenues began to trend downward.

2022/2023 - The cannabis market collapses in Humboldt County. 2022/23 Sales Tax Revenues declined 7.1% in the County and 7.8% in Fortuna after peaking in 2021/22. Transient Occupancy Tax revenue declined 17.7% in 2022/23 compared to the prior year in Fortuna and continues to trend downward. (The reported numbers are not adjusted for inflation).

City of Fortuna
Sales Tax & Transient Occupancy Tax Revenue
July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2025

	Sales Tax <u>Revenue</u>	Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) <u>Revenue</u>
2021/22	\$2,309,839	\$951,038
2022/23	\$2,129,109	\$782,808
2023/24	\$2,207,164	\$722,447
2024/25	\$2,142,353	\$710,118

Sales Tax and Transient Occupancy Tax revenues are important sources of funding for cities in California. Using 2021/22 as the benchmark year and hypothetically having flat or zero annual growth, Fortuna’s sales tax revenue in 2024/25, adjusted for inflation, should have been \$2,533,353. Using this same approach for Transient Occupancy Tax, the city’s 2024/25 amount collected should have been \$1,053,700. A stable, flat, zero annual growth from 2021/22 and adjusted for inflation would have yielded an additional \$734,582 in 2024/25 from these combined revenue sources.

Fortuna’s 2025/26 Budget states “..that rising costs of materials, insurance, utilities and labor will result in a need to reduce the budget or seek new sources of funding. Ongoing inflationary pressure continues to influence consumer spending behavior, project costs and labor market dynamics.” The Budget further states, “..that creating a community that attracts and retains businesses is highly competitive and will be key to keeping pace with expenditures. Focusing on economic growth and business support will be as important in the near future as it ever has been in the City.”

Timber companies and support businesses related to the timber/wood products sector are still very important economic contributors to the Eel River Valley and beyond. Health care and government employment is also significant. Agriculture, ranching and dairy continues as an important sector, as well. However, many small businesses in Fortuna are struggling and unsure of the future.

A few questions come to mind:

- From 2000 to 2020, did cannabis cushion what otherwise would have been a major economic upheaval in the Eel River Valley and Southern Humboldt with the loss of 1,650 timber related base industry jobs and the expected loss of 3,300 support jobs?
- If yes, are we now beginning to see the true economic impact of the loss of those timber related jobs with the collapse of cannabis?
- Or, is there another economic anchor that is developing or has developed in the last 10+ years that has or can replace those lost timber related jobs?

In summary, with the significant reductions over the last twenty-five years in the timber industry and the collapse of the cannabis market in the last 3-4 years, are the current economic challenges in Fortuna cyclical with economic vitality returning soon, or for the first time in over 130 years is Fortuna facing systemic and structural changes to its economy requiring Fortuna to redefine its economic future and take the necessary actions to make it happen?

Based on the answers to those questions, the needed strategies for Fortuna to grow and sustain a healthy, economically vibrant community that we all want are significantly different. Whatever direction is taken, it will take the entire community working together to achieve the desired results. For example, if it is determined that we are currently experiencing an economic cycle, doing more of the same with a few additional strategies would be satisfactory. However, if it is determined we no longer have the economic anchors of the past and there is no evidence of new foundations developing, then a new vision for Fortuna's economic future needs to be developed and steps in that direction need to be taken. Other small communities have faced these challenges and been successful. If needed, we can, too.

Fortuna's 2010 Economic Development Priorities

The last General Plan for Fortuna was approved in 2010 and included an Economic Development Element. That report states, "Economic Development was one of the driving forces behind the General Plan Update." Broad community involvement through public meetings was a part of that process. That document further states: "The Economic Development Element provides the goals, policy guidance and implementation measures to promote long-term job creation, business opportunities and prosperity."

Maintaining Fortuna's small town character and culture is stated as a key driver of the 2010 plan. A "snapshot" of Fortuna's economic condition as of 2005, was used to help inform the discussions and economic decisions for the 2010 - 2030 plan. Recent developments (at that time) of mill closures and forecasted implications were also noted.

Citywide **opportunities** identified in the plan included:

- The **Mill District** for economic drivers.
- **Downtown Revitalization** to create a unique destination and active pedestrian traffic.
- **Fortuna Blvd.** for a mixed use of economic and residential opportunities.
- **Riverwalk District** as a local, regional and tourist destination for shopping, recreation, lodging, conferences and civic/community activities.

Priorities in the Economic Development Element included:

- **A Stable and Balanced Economy** - Achieved through diversification, entrepreneurship and small business development, **removing regulatory hurdles and barriers to development** and investment in the city's assets. **The need to develop a strategic plan** for this work was noted.
- **Workforce Development** - Achieved through developing partnerships with Fortuna Union High School District, College of the

Redwoods and Humboldt State University (now Cal Poly Humboldt) and the business community to address local workforce needs.

- **Redefining the Economic Base** - Achieved through **addressing the local economic needs due to reductions in the timber industry**, such as; niche manufacturing, speciality agriculture, e-commerce, development of a business park, maintenance and expansion of health care, food processing and manufacturing,
- **Business Attraction and Retention** - Achieved through working with Fortuna's Chamber of Commerce and FBID by developing and implementing business attraction strategies, developing and offering business retention and expansion support services, **streamlining permitting processes**, revitalizing areas within the city, **starting a business incubator** including **support for entrepreneurs and small business start-ups, developing a trained and educated workforce and developing affordable housing and executive housing.**
- **Tourism** - Achieved by **promoting growth of tourism**, capitalizing on Fortuna's historical character, scenic beauty and small town charm.
- **Infrastructure** - Achieved through coordination of land use policies and decisions with future economic development infrastructure.

Conclusion

Fortuna's core economic needs, opportunities and strategies identified in 2010 remain relevant today. Addressing them now may be significantly more urgent due to prior losses in timber and the recent collapse of cannabis with no evidence of new economic anchors emerging. If that is the consensus, what economic development structure does Fortuna need to put in place to move this economic agenda forward?

Appendix A

Retail

Input was gathered from retail business owners operating in Fortuna.

Overall sentiment reflects a sector that is stable but economically pressured, with responses ranging from easy to neutral when describing the business environment.

Retailers report strong small-town advantages, including word-of-mouth marketing, friendly local shops, and community support. However, they are heavily impacted by online competition, big box pricing, rising operating costs, inconsistent foot traffic, and limited disposable income within the community.

Unlike the restaurant sector, retail owners did not overwhelmingly describe the economy as poor. However, they emphasized structural challenges that limit growth, including lack of economic diversification, retail saturation, missing retail categories (clothing, shoes, home goods), and residents shopping online or traveling to Eureka.

Retailers consistently expressed concern that Fortuna is overly retail-dependent without sufficient manufacturing or industrial employers to support balanced economic growth. Many believe that attracting industry and higher-paying jobs is critical to strengthening local purchasing power.

Despite these challenges, retailers see meaningful opportunity in coordinated promotion of local shopping, Main Street events, cross-business referrals, improved marketing, and leveraging Fortuna's identity as "The Friendly City." There is strong belief that collaboration among businesses and targeted growth strategies could improve economic vitality.

In summary, retail business owners believe Fortuna has a strong community foundation but requires economic diversification, improved foot

traffic strategies, and stronger promotion of local shopping to ensure long-term sustainability.

Downtown Merchants

Input was gathered from Downtown Merchants and small business owners operating primarily along Main Street and surrounding commercial areas. Overall sentiment is mixed — ranging from easy and steady to difficult — but strongly centered on concerns about economic stagnation, housing affordability, municipal capacity, and lack of economic diversification.

Many merchants describe Fortuna’s business environment as stable but not growing. Downtown location alone does not guarantee increased traffic. While several businesses report strong brand recognition and loyal customer bases, others cite zoning challenges, regulatory paperwork, and inconsistent city staffing as obstacles.

The most significant economic concerns include loss of high-paying industries (timber and cannabis), limited economic diversification, municipal budget shortfalls, housing affordability constraints, workforce attraction challenges, inflation, high energy costs, and retail leakage to Eureka and online shopping.

There is a strong desire for a unified community identity, revitalized downtown, strategic industry recruitment, and clearer economic development leadership. Merchants consistently emphasized beautifying downtown, improving permitting processes, expanding the commercial tax base, reducing red tape, and creating a dedicated economic development team.

In summary, Downtown Merchants believe Fortuna must redefine its economic identity, revitalize Main Street, attract higher-paying industries, strengthen collaboration, and create a predictable, business-friendly development environment to ensure long-term sustainability.

Developers/Contractors

Input was gathered from developers and contractors working in Fortuna. Overall sentiment reflects a sector that finds doing business in Fortuna difficult and increasingly burdensome, particularly due to permitting timelines, rising fees, and inconsistent regulatory processes.

Many respondents described the city's permitting and planning environment as slow, complex, and frustrating. Comparisons were made to neighboring jurisdictions, particularly Eureka, where projects reportedly move faster and staff are viewed as more collaborative. Developers cited increasing fees, connection costs (water/sewer), and regulatory uncertainty as major deterrents to new housing and commercial projects.

Housing was identified as a critical issue. High permit and hookup fees, sewer plant upgrade costs, PG&E connection costs, and rising development expenses can result in significant capital outlays before construction even begins. There is concern that Fortuna lacks sufficient housing for professionals and middle-to-upper income residents, limiting workforce attraction and economic expansion.

Developers also emphasized that Fortuna lacks economic diversification and higher-paying industries. The decline of timber and cannabis as economic drivers, combined with limited manufacturing and industrial presence, has weakened the local economic base. Many believe Fortuna must actively recruit industry and redefine itself as a regional hub.

Despite frustrations, respondents see substantial opportunity. Fortuna's natural beauty, freeway access, land availability, family-friendly character, airport, mill site, sports facilities, and educational institutions were repeatedly identified as strong assets. Developers believe that with clearer leadership, streamlined processes, incentives, and a defined economic vision, Fortuna could attract meaningful investment.

In summary, developers and contractors believe Fortuna has strong physical and geographic advantages but must reform permitting processes, reduce costs, clarify its long-term economic vision, and actively recruit industry to unlock its growth potential.

Restaurants

Input was gathered from owners of eight restaurants operating in Fortuna. Overall sentiment reflects a business community that is struggling to remain viable, with most owners rating the local economy as poor and none rating it as good or excellent.

Restaurant owners report being financially squeezed by rising costs—including food, utilities, insurance, housing, credit card fees, and regulatory compliance—while simultaneously facing reduced customer spending due to inflation and the loss of major local industries. Staffing challenges, lingering impacts from COVID-19, and increased petty crime further strain operations.

While Fortuna is not viewed as hostile to business, it is widely seen as not business-friendly. Owners cited excessive regulations, limited communication, and a lack of practical support from the city. Several expressed frustration that small-town businesses are governed with big-city policies, without adequate consideration of scale or impact.

Despite these challenges, owners see clear opportunities for economic improvement. Fortuna’s strongest assets include its family-friendly and safe image, Highway 101 visibility, natural surroundings, parks and river access, and a collaborative local business community. Tourism, sporting events, local festivals, and coordinated downtown activities were consistently identified as growth opportunities.

Business owners emphasized that increased events, regional marketing, downtown beautification, public safety, housing development, and economic diversification would provide the most immediate benefit. There is a strong desire for city leadership that better understands business operations and works collaboratively with local owners.

In summary, restaurant owners are committed to Fortuna but believe meaningful economic recovery will require lower barriers to doing business, stronger city-business communication, targeted cost relief, and active use of the city's existing assets to drive foot traffic and consumer spending.

Ranching / Dairy

Input was gathered from representatives within the Ranching and Dairy sector. Overall sentiment reflects a steady but cautious outlook, with emphasis on long-term economic sustainability rather than immediate regulatory frustrations.

Respondents identified the decline of traditional resource-based industries, an aging population, limited workforce opportunities, and housing shortages as major economic concerns. While agriculture remains stable, the broader economic base that once included timber and related industries has weakened.

There is strong belief that Fortuna must adopt a proactive, solution-oriented mindset — shifting from questioning why projects won't work to asking how they can succeed. Clear strategic planning, especially for the Mill site, was emphasized as essential.

The sector sees significant opportunity in leveraging natural resources, value-added agricultural production, tourism, education partnerships, and innovation. However, challenges include California's regulatory climate, limited manufacturing and technology jobs, and insufficient collaboration between the business community and local educational institutions.

In summary, the Ranching/Dairy sector believes Fortuna has strong environmental and agricultural assets but must focus on innovation, strategic planning, higher-end tourism development, and economic diversification to strengthen long-term stability.

Industrial / Manufacturing

Input was gathered from representatives in the Industrial and Manufacturing sector. Overall sentiment reflects a neutral but concerned outlook, with businesses operating steadily yet facing structural challenges that limit expansion and workforce stability.

Respondents identified workforce shortages, housing availability, infrastructure limitations, and lack of economic diversification as primary constraints. Many employers report difficulty attracting and retaining qualified workers due to housing costs and limited availability. Some are contracting work outside the region because they cannot find skilled labor locally.

Transportation and logistics costs are also significant concerns. Shipping in and out of the area is expensive, fuel costs are higher than many other regions, and limited local support industries (such as machine shops) restrict operational efficiency.

There is a shared belief that Fortuna has not invested aggressively enough in attracting new businesses or industries. Without diversification and stronger economic drivers, sales tax revenues may decline, placing further strain on the city's budget.

Despite these concerns, the sector sees strong opportunity in workforce development, tourism capture, downtown revitalization, sports and event-based branding, and leveraging Fortuna's climate, location, and natural beauty. There is clear consensus that Fortuna needs a defined economic vision and stronger branding to give travelers and investors a reason to stop, stay, and invest.

In summary, the Industrial/Manufacturing sector believes Fortuna has strong geographic and environmental advantages but must address workforce, housing, infrastructure, and economic vision gaps to create sustainable industrial growth.

Grocery/Beverage

Input was gathered from representatives within the Grocery and Beverage sector. Overall sentiment reflects a mixed outlook — day-to-day business operations are described as generally easy, but regulatory burdens and broader economic pressures create significant challenges.

Respondents cited taxes, fees, insurance, and state-level regulations as major burdens on small business owners. While Fortuna is viewed as somewhat easier than neighboring cities like Eureka and Arcata, California's overall regulatory climate is seen as restrictive and costly.

The most significant economic concern identified is declining disposable income due to the rising cost of living. Consumers are spending less, directly impacting grocery and beverage sales. Additionally, the loss of traditional industrial economic drivers (lumber, fishing, cannabis) and lack of new industrial development have weakened the valley's economic base.

There is strong sentiment that Fortuna must rebuild its industrial foundation to restore economic strength. Challenges include high living costs, crime concerns, lack of incentives for new industry, and difficulty transporting goods into Humboldt County.

Despite challenges, respondents see potential in positioning Fortuna as business-friendly and leveraging natural resource-based industries such as lumber, dairy, cannabis, and tourism centered on rivers, forests, ocean access, and the Lost Coast.

In summary, the Grocery/Beverage sector believes Fortuna's economic struggles stem from reduced disposable income, loss of industry, and regulatory burdens, and that revitalizing industrial development and reinforcing natural-resource-based identity are key to economic recovery.

Ag / Horticulture / Natural Resources

Input was gathered from representatives within the Agriculture, Horticulture, and Natural Resources sector. Overall sentiment reflects a generally positive view of operating in Fortuna, with appreciation for the community, tourism blend, and Chamber of Commerce leadership.

However, respondents identified structural economic concerns including lack of living-wage jobs, an aging population, rising labor and utility costs, and the continued shift of retail dollars to online platforms and neighboring cities.

There is concern that downtown retail is changing character, with fewer core businesses and more niche retail uses, and that shopping sprawl has diluted the city's commercial strength. Online shopping, Costco, and Eureka-area retail centers continue to pull spending away from Fortuna.

Opportunities center on strengthening Fortuna's small-town identity, supporting local food production, leveraging special events, improving walkability, capitalizing on the Eel River as a major recreational and tourism asset, and supporting infrastructure projects like the Great Redwood Trail.

In summary, the Ag/Horticulture/Natural Resources sector believes Fortuna's strengths lie in its natural assets, community feel, and event culture, but economic vitality depends on reinforcing downtown identity, protecting agricultural land, managing utility costs, and addressing retail leakage.

Healthcare

Input was gathered from representatives within the Healthcare and Medical sector. Overall sentiment reflects a community with strong potential but significant structural barriers related primarily to housing, downtown vitality, and economic positioning.

Healthcare leaders emphasized that affordable and quality housing is a critical issue — not only for residents, but for recruiting and retaining medical staff. Providers report difficulty housing medical assistants, technicians, and traveling staff. Some organizations have built their own housing units to accommodate employees. The aging population is increasing demand for Medicare and Medi-Cal services, placing additional strain on the healthcare system.

There is broad agreement that Fortuna lacks a defined business attraction strategy, downtown vision, and cohesive branding effort. Main Street is described as underperforming and not visually appealing or robust compared to neighboring cities. Respondents believe Fortuna has an image problem and does not effectively promote its strengths, particularly its family-friendly identity and natural beauty.

Opportunities include expanding airport utilization, leveraging Cal Poly Humboldt partnerships, developing higher-end lodging, packaging regional tourism assets, and capitalizing on climate migration trends. The medical sector sees potential in senior services expansion and tourism-based economic growth.

In summary, the Healthcare sector believes Fortuna’s economic future depends on improving housing availability, revitalizing downtown, strengthening branding, fostering business attraction, and leveraging its climate, educational institutions, and natural assets.

Hospitality / Tourism

Input was gathered from a representative within the Hospitality and Tourism sector. Overall sentiment reflects a generally positive view of operating in Fortuna, with business described as “easy.” However, the sector sees significant opportunity for stronger coordination, clearer messaging, and improved tourism promotion.

The most pressing issues identified include difficulty getting residents to shop locally, limited awareness of what businesses and services are available in Fortuna, and the need to boost tourism traffic. There is also a

desire for better public understanding of how local spending supports the community and circulates within the economy.

The hospitality leader emphasized that business owners, stakeholders, and event organizers must work more collaboratively. Improved communication, stronger marketing, and better alignment between events and lodging are seen as essential to maximizing overnight stays and visitor spending.

Challenges include limited youth employment opportunities and a perceived need for more open-mindedness in community decision-making.

In summary, the Hospitality/Tourism sector believes Fortuna has a strong foundation but must improve coordination, local promotion, tourism marketing, and event integration to unlock greater economic benefit.

Other / No Declaration

Input was gathered from respondents who did not identify with a specific sector. Overall sentiment trends positive regarding quality of life and ease of doing business, but concerns center around retail leakage, lack of economic diversification, limited downtown vitality, housing affordability, and insufficient municipal capacity.

Many respondents describe Fortuna as a great place to live and work, citing strong community support and natural beauty. However, recurring economic concerns include competition from Amazon and big box stores, lack of retail variety, limited exportable industries, expensive shipping, housing costs, and crime perception.

There is strong interest in revitalizing Main Street, developing the Mill site, expanding tourism, improving community gathering spaces, and creating anchor attractions that give people a reason to stop in Fortuna rather than pass through.

Several comments emphasized the need for a “big idea” — a transformative project such as a Main Street walking plaza, Riverwalk expansion, equestrian center, RV tourism hub, theatre reopening, or

river-based development strategy. There is also consistent support for building around Fortuna's natural assets and identity as a friendly, redwood-rooted community.

In summary, respondents believe Fortuna has strong assets but lacks a cohesive economic identity, sufficient downtown vitality, workforce housing, and municipal staffing capacity to execute transformative change.