

JUNE LAKE

More so than any other Mono County unincorporated community, June Lake has a well developed, coherent set of planning policies and objectives. These policies fully support the community's own vision of itself, based upon the results of the July 15 and 16 workshops.

Instead of refining these policies as we have done in other communities, our recommendations for June Lake focus more on specific action steps the community can take to help realize its vision. We focus on three key areas related to job creation and economic development: transportation, economic development and the IntraWest proposal for June Mountain.

Transportation

There are several key transportation issues that will need to be addressed in June Lake over the next five to 10 years:

- Given its geography and development patterns, June Lake is ideally suited to travel by foot, bicycle and cross-country skis. Unfortunately, adequate pathways and bike lanes are missing. What funding is available to widen Hwy. 158 to add shoulders and bike lanes? What opportunities are there to create easements for multi-use trails throughout the area and off the highway? Where do such projects fit within the overall priorities of the community and the county's Local Transportation Commission?
- What opportunities are there to improve parking and multimodal circulation along Main Street in June Lake Village? A limited sidewalk project is planned, but this project does not connect with other key community facilities.
- Parking capacity in the village is limited, and may need to be increased in the future to capture more visitors heading to June Mountain.
- Some planners have suggested the street be converted into a one-way loop, but are the benefits of the proposal worth the costs in terms of confusing circulation? Many communities around the country now are switching their one-way street systems back to two-way.
- The June Mountain development and the Mammoth airport improvements have the potential to greatly increase the need for transit in June Lake. As part of the June Mountain development process, the community should explore shuttle connections to the airport and the development of parking lots outside the community with shuttles to the Mountain.
- June Lake should consider teaming with Mammoth Lakes to establish Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy transit service to Yosemite.
- If roads or wide trails are not cleared of snow in the winter, horse-drawn sleighs could be used as taxis.

Economic Development

More than most communities of its size, June Lake already has a fairly well developed marketing strategy and economy in general. There is considerable debate in the community about the "right" level of development for June Lake, with some residents believing that there should be no increase in building or in numbers of tourists. Likely the greatest economic problem for June Lake is the seasonal nature of business there. For better or worse, this problem is likely to be solved by Intrawest's development proposals for June Mountain.

Key economic development issues that need further refinement in June Lake include:

Marketing Plan

There appears to be a high level of consensus about the image June Lake should promote of itself. Much of this image comes in reaction to what visitors find at Mammoth. Unlike Mammoth, June Lake promotes itself as a place for relaxation, families, quiet, solitude, bargain prices and no lift lines. June Lake is a "best-kept secret" in the Eastern Sierra.

While June Lake businesses appear to be investing their limited advertising dollars well, there is surprisingly little cooperation among business owners who—like it or not—are highly interdependent on one another. Each business produces its own materials for visitors, and there are no widely distributed materials that detail all of the attractions of the June Lake area. Some residents appreciate keeping some of the finer attractions a secret, but this lack of information makes June Lake less competitive with other resort areas in terms of attracting and retaining visitors.

We strongly recommend the community gather to develop a more cohesive, cooperative marketing plan. Fortunately, there is a large number of agencies with resources to help the community do just this (see Appendix A—Key Resources).

Year-Round Business Plan

If June Lake does nothing else, it should work to spread its business season out to a greater number of days of the year. Now, in summer, a small number of businesses struggle to serve a large number of visitors, forcing owners and employees to work long hours, and keeping them from focusing on "big picture" efforts. Later, in winter, many businesses will lay off employees or shut down entirely. Some businesses that remain open will not be able to pay their overhead with the small amount of revenue they generate.

All of these seasonality problems may disappear — or reverse themselves — if Intrawest's June Mountain proposal moves forward. In that event, June Lake's biggest issue will be how to strategically position itself to capture the greatest benefit from that project while not being overwhelmed by it. This issue is discussed in greater detail below.

Should Intrawest choose not to invest further in June Mountain, June Lake can position itself to attract more winter guests through the promotion of various types of activities:

- *Cross country skiing:* If multi-use trails are developed around the Loop, June Lake could become one of the premier cross country ski destinations in the West.
- *Ice climbing:* There is already an ice climbing industry set up in June Lake with world-renowned guides. Development of an ice climbing festival here could place the town on the winter activities map.
- *Ice fishing:* Working with California Department DFG, the community could attempt to create a new fishing season at specific locations. Ice fishing is a very popular activity in many other parts of the country, but there are few opportunities to enjoy it in California.
- *Achievement Clubs:* Clubs of Achievement, such as the Sierra Slam Club (four species of fish in one day), Size Matters Club (catch a fish over 24 inches), The Gauntlet (a set of difficult cross country ski trails) or an ice climbing club.

Employee Recruitment and Retention Plan

Despite many business owners' complaints about the difficulties of attracting and retaining quality employees, some people feel that it is important to place barriers to finding a job here. That is, would-be job applicants should have to struggle to find a job here in order to prove their mettle to endure the sometimes difficult conditions in June Lake. There are therefore no central information resources for finding either jobs or housing. People are expected to show up in town and ask around for a few weeks until they find a place to work and a place to live.

While this onerous process certainly helps to maintain community character and a sense of shared pain, there is ever-increasing competition for skilled young workers in California. Provided there was a clear description of what the June Lake community really means, development of a modest information program could help increase the number and quality of potential job applicants without compromising the needs of the community.

Central to the community's ability to attract more employees in a growing economy is the provision of affordable housing. The county should pursue Community Development Block Grants and other funds for the updating of existing housing and the construction of new housing for low- and moderate-income workers. Such housing should be scattered in small developments throughout the community rather than clustered in isolated areas, and it should respect the design character of the community. All developers should be offered tax incentives or given requirements for the provision of new housing to accommodate new workers brought to the area.

Community Design

June Lake is unique among California resort communities in that it is located away from a major highway and forms a distinct, walkable, charming village. It should capitalize on its existing sense of "place" with modest improvements including:

- *Design "theme":* Some residents have urged that the community develop and implement a design "theme," such as Solvang, Calif., or Helen, Georgia, have done

with tremendous economic benefit. Others fear this will result in kitsch. Before the community settles on a theme, it should first develop a strategic marketing plan to determine whether such an investment will encourage or discourage the type of visitor it wants to attract. Absent a unifying architectural theme, the community could instead create very flexible design requirements that emphasize the cozy, funky fishing village aspects of the community. Such requirements could describe how buildings should relate to the street in order to maintain the walkability of the community, they could suggest preferred building materials and they could mandate that large bulky structures be broken up into more visually interesting shapes.

- *Facility upgrades:* While most buildings and landscaping in the community are immaculately maintained, others could use minor upgrades. Low-interest loans are easily available for such items, and some of these resources are detailed in the appendices to this paper. If the community decides to form or join a business association, expert advice is oftentimes available free or for a small fee as to the most cost-effective upgrades and how they should be done.
- *Public facility upgrades:* Who controls the Oh! Ridge Overlook facilities and can they be improved? Similarly, can the Down Canyon Forest Service facilities be upgraded?

Intrawest Development Proposals

Likely the most difficult issue facing June Lake is the very large development proposal Intrawest has for the June Lake community. With the potential for 7,000 new visitors, this development more than any other issue will drive the future of the community. Depending on how it is designed and implemented, June Mountain has the potential to be a great asset to the community with few negative impacts, or it can destroy many of the qualities current residents cherish most.

In order to make the project turn out for the best, residents need to organize now and decide what they want from Intrawest. As a shareholder-held corporation, Intrawest is clearly in the business of making money, but it is not in their interest to make their neighbors angry. As a major, successful developer, they are experts at the development process and making smart compromises to keep their projects on schedule.

The following are five points of advice for working with Intrawest:

1. Decide what you want.

The June Lake Citizens Advisory Committee is a ready forum for discussing what the community really wants from the June Mountain development. Key questions to address include:

- Who is the target visitor?
- What should the project design look like?
- How should transportation issues be handled?
- How should it be phased?
- Where will employees live?

- What mix of services will be available?
- How will water, sewer and power needs be met?
- How can the community partner with Intrust in order to create the greatest economic benefit for everyone?

It is important to try to create a compelling vision of what you would like to see in the project and to be able to communicate that vision to others. For example, instead of trying to replicate Whistler or Vail, why not build something more like St. Anton in the Alps? What if there were no automobile parking on-site, except for disabled visitors? Installing off-site parking and a shuttle system would dramatically shift the design of the project, creating a true village with a fair-like atmosphere. If the parking were placed east of June Lake Village, visitors would shuttle past the village on the way to the lifts, greatly increasing the visibility of existing businesses, and creating a transit system that would be useful for existing residents and businesses.

2. Enlist allies.

There is a large number of special interest groups in the greater Sierra region whom you can partner with to gain a better understanding of the complex issues surrounding the development. Environmental groups, the Mono Lake Committee, the Sierra Business Council, the Local Government Commission and other groups all have an interest in ensuring that development is as sound and sustainable as possible.

3. Understand the development process.

Meet with county officials to understand clearly the whole development process from start to finish, including opportunities for public involvement. The county is very interested in making sure that development projects have the support of community members.

4. Work with key agencies.

Mono County has development approval authority in June Lake, but the June Lake Public Utilities District (PUD) and the Forest Service will also need to take action in order for the project to move forward. The PUD is very important because it will need to approve the water and sewage treatment plan for the project. The community should make sure that the project does not damage water quality in the Loop and does not affect water levels in the lakes. Furthermore, the Forest Service will need to approve any expansion of lifts on the Mountain. With its land-exchange policies, the Forest Service may prove to be a key ally by buying up remaining undeveloped private parcels in the area or offering up a remote parcel for off-site parking

5. Be prepared to compromise.

The entire development process is based upon careful compromises. It is therefore important to learn early on what is most important to the existing community and what is most important to the developer. Be prepared to lose on small items in order to win on the big ones.