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INTERLUDE 1

LOOKING BACK
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Looking Back

**Pre-1970’s**

The earliest US Census data for population that is available for Washoe County is the year 1900, when the area had 9,141 residents. From 1900 to 1970, the total population grew to 111,927 residents, which is an average increase of 1,599 people per year. Of course, population growth does not occur in an equal distribution, and there are some decades that show more growth. For example, between 1900 and 1910, the population of Washoe County almost doubled, with an increase of 90%. More recently, Washoe County saw a large rise in residents between 1950 and 1960, with 34,538 additional people, equal to a 68.8% increase.

The footprint of development across the landscape between 1900 and 1970 was relatively small, compared to today’s standards. By 1970, there were 41,487 housing units in the Region. This map shows the total footprint of development pre-1970, with 45.68 miles developed.

**1970’s**

Between 1970 and 1980, the population in the Truckee Meadows grew by 72,555 residents, an increase of 59.9%. This decade was the first of many to see significant population growth in the Region. This was partially fueled by employment change, especially in the entertainment sector. The gaming industry, historically characterized by small-to-medium sized casinos under family ownership, saw a shift into corporate ownership, and the attempt to mimic the large-scale resorts being built in Las Vegas. A prime example of this trend was the construction of the MGM Resort in 1978 (known today as the Grand Sierra Resort) outside of the Reno downtown ‘red line’, which limited large gaming facilities to the downtown core. Other properties that developed or expanded during this time include Harrah’s, Eldorado, Bordertown and the Sparks Nugget.

Also, convention facilities were expanded in 1977, setting up the region to attract more tourism and convention business, and Interstate 80 was constructed on the north edge of downtown Reno and the south edge of downtown Sparks. Coincident with the development boom during these years, the significant construction and service industry job growth led to a housing crisis in the Truckee Meadows. This need for additional houses led to the eventual expansion of Reno into the land south of the Truckee River. In all, 35,700 housing units were built in this decade.
1980’s

From 1980 to 1990, the Truckee Meadows experienced an increase of 61,044 residents, which equates to 31.5%. The Region saw the continued expansion of large gaming facilities outside of the Reno downtown area, including the Peppermill, Atlantis, Boomtown and Gold Ranch. This decade also saw the development of geothermal plants near the Mt Rose/Hwy 395 intersection, foreshadowing the increasing importance that alternative energy production would have in the region.

With additional job and population growth, the need for more housing in the area continued. Land in the Double Diamond Ranch area saw considerable development interest. The approval of Double Diamond Ranch opened a wide swath of land for potential housing, and increased the size of the footprint of the region. Today, 30 years later, portions of this area are still being built out. In all, 26,987 housing units were built in this 10-year time frame.

The legislation that created the current version of Regional Planning in the Truckee Meadows was passed in the 65th Session of the Nevada State Legislature, which occurred in 1989.

Leann McElroy, former City of Reno employee,

“Getting into issues that regional planning had to face, questions of annexation were really prominent in the 1980s, it seemed. Some of the largest ranches in the truckee meadows were being converted into developments at that point—Caughlin Ranch, Double Diamond Ranch, Damonte Ranch.”

1990’s

According to the US Census Bureau, Nevada had a 66% growth rate in this decade, the fastest of any state in the nation. Locally, Washoe County saw an increase of 78,899 people, which represented a 31% increase in population. The population in the City of Reno rose by 36.6%, and in the City of Sparks by 24.5%. This large population influx put substantial pressure on planning on the Region.

Interest in developing the Spanish Springs area followed in the early portion of this decade, with large acreage property owners beginning to sell land to developers. In order to provide for planned growth in this area, Washoe County and the City of Sparks develop the Spanish Springs Joint Plan to act as a blueprint for the development of Spanish Springs from its adoption in 1995 to today.

Greg Evangelatos, former planner at the City of Sparks,

“I think what Regional Planning did at least for that near term was to bring us back together. And it really did. The Spanish Springs Plan was a joint plan developed between ourselves and Washoe County. And I also got the six major land owners—it was like 7,000 acres, 11 square miles out there. I was planning a new community. Basically I planned a new town with the county. And it was approved unanimously by the Planning Commission of the City of Sparks, the Planning Commission of Washoe County, the Washoe County Commission, and the City Council meeting jointly. The Regional Plan allowed for the Spanish Springs Plan to occur and it gave us a growth corridor that is still being implemented. It’s sixty percent developed. This is almost thirty years ago.”
Similarly, Washoe County and the City of Reno created the Reno-Stead Corridor Joint Plan to address growth and development in the northern valleys of the Truckee Meadows. This joint plan is still being used today.

As this decade marched forward, investment continued in the region’s downtowns, as well as residential units. Projects undertaken in this decade include the downtown Reno parking garage, National Bowling Center and the Silver Legacy in Reno; and the Nugget tower expansion and opening of the Century Theater and garage in Sparks. A total of 33,452 housing units were added to the Region’s inventory in this timeframe.

2000’s

The Truckee Meadows Region saw a significant housing development boom in the early to mid-2000’s, with 42,059 homes added to the area. The majority of these units were added to support the growing population of the Region. The Truckee Meadows started the decade with 333,566 residents, a number that would grow to 417,379 by 2010.

As with many western metropolitan regions, the growth in the Truckee Meadows occurred mostly before December 2007, which marked the start of the Great Recession. The downturn in the economy resulted in housing prices falling dramatically and a substantial increase in home foreclosures in the region. This slowdown in the housing market also left a variety of approved housing development projects in a state of limbo, leading to uncertainty about the future of housing construction in our region.

Nevada was also hit hard by unemployment in this decade, often exceeding the national average for unemployment. In fact, during December 2011, the nation’s unemployment rate was falling, from 9.8% to 9.4%. At the same time, Nevada’s unemployment rate increased to 14.5%, the worst the state had ever seen. These trends were also reflected locally. The Truckee Meadows started the decade with 236,006 jobs, and by 2010 had only added 13,542 more. This job growth of approximately 1,300 jobs a year is small compared to the population growth of almost 8,400 residents a year.

Downtown investments continued to occur in the 2000s, with the creation of the Sparks Marina in 2001 and the Reno Events Center in 2004. The Legends at Sparks Marina, a large mixed-use project including retail, housing and entertainment options, opened in 2008. Many stand-alone large retail centers also premiered in this decade, with the Summit Sierra Mall opening in 2006, Cabela’s in 2007 and Scheel’s in 2008.

2010 to Today

In 2010, the population of the Truckee Meadows was 417,379. By 2017, (the latest year this data is available for) the Region had added 34,544 residents. The City of Reno had 217,282 residents, and the City of Sparks had 92,331 residents. During this time, 17,043 housing units were added to the Truckee Meadows.

One of the largest downtown investments in the last ten years is Greater Nevada Field, which opened in April of 2009. Originally scoped as the stadium for the Minor League Baseball Team the Reno Aces, Greater Nevada Field added the United Soccer League’s Reno 1868 Football Club in 2015, increasing the sports available for viewing in the area.
The Southeast Connector, a major road project that was discussed for over 20 years in the Region, opened in 2018. Now known as Veterans Parkway, this $300 million infrastructure investment created a second north-south higher-speed link in addition to the I-580.

As the Region began to recover from the Great Recession, there was a shift in jobs in the area. Wholesale and retail trade both saw decreases in employment share, as did government employment. The Truckee Meadows saw growth in the transportation and service based employment sectors. In their 2011 report, “Unify, Regionalize, Diversify” the Brookings Institute cited that the ‘Logistics and Operations’ sector was prime growth opportunity for Nevada.

The Tri-Center, a one-of-a-kind industrial park that helped to bring companies and jobs to the larger Northern Nevada region, has also created a variety of impacts that its’ neighbors must address, especially in the Truckee Meadows. The lack of housing, schools and services in Storey County means that the majority of the employees employed at the Tri-Center live in a neighboring community.

The Truckee Meadows also saw employment growth in this timeframe, with warehousing and logistics jobs increasing and new companies coming to the area. Many well-known firms are now located in the Truckee Meadows, including Apple, Amazon and Microsoft Licensing. The resulting increase in population from this economic growth has contributed to the current housing crisis in the region.

In September 2014, then Governor Brian Sandoval announced that the Tesla Gigafactory would be locating in the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center (Tri-Center). This business park is a 107,300 acres, with a 30,000 acre industrial complex. The largest industrial park in the country, it is home to over 100 companies and their logistics and fulfillment centers.

For more information about the Tri-Center please visit: http://tahoereno.com/

The region’s housing market is tightening, with low vacancy rates and rising costs. As a result, housing is more difficult to access.

Various factors are responsible for the growing housing issues in the Truckee Meadows, including:

- An increase in home (+11.8%) and rental (+9.6%) values, which reduces the amount of home that is affordable;
- A decrease in vacancy in apartments (less than 2% in 2018), which means fewer options for renters;
- A mismatch of housing types, with more ‘missing middle’ housing needed to accommodate shifting age, family and residential demographics; and
- Incomes not keeping pace with the rising costs of housing in the Region. According to 2016 American Community Survey data, the median household income in the Region is $60,042. The median income needed to rent in the area is $59,200 and to buy is $75,640.
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