

# CHAPTER 7

## Economic Development



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## 7.1 Introduction

In the ever-evolving business development environment of Storey County, the need for a completely new master plan chapter has become more relevant than ever. This new version reflects a significant shift from previous iterations, driven by rapid changes in economic and business development growth. As businesses and industries continue to expand and diversify at an unprecedented pace, the challenges and opportunities facing Storey County have transformed.

In 2023, Storey County released a comprehensive white paper titled "Storey County Regional Impacts: An Overview of Economic Contributions, Abatements, Responsibilities, and Community Planning." This document, included as an Appendix G, offers an in-depth analysis of the county's business landscape and its economic development initiatives. It examines not only the local impacts but also situates these developments within the broader context of the region and the state. The white paper highlights key economic contributions made by various sectors, outlines the implications of tax abatements, and discusses the responsibilities associated with sustainable growth.

This chapter is significantly different from the 2016 version, as each chapter subsection is now a brief overview. This reflects the comprehensive information contained in the white paper referenced above.

## 7.2 Employment Trends

### 7.2.1 Economic Overview

Storey County has experienced notable employment growth in recent years, driven primarily by the expansion of industrial and tech sectors. The development of the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center (TRI-Center)—one of the largest industrial parks in the world, and county's proximity to the Reno-Sparks metropolitan area and have attracted major companies, such as Tesla, Switch, and Google, significantly reshaping the local job market.

Key employment trends include:

1. **Shift to High-Tech and Manufacturing Jobs:** With the presence of large technology firms and manufacturers, there has been a surge in demand for skilled labor in areas like advanced manufacturing, data centers, logistics, and renewable energy.
2. **Increased Job Opportunities in Logistics and Warehousing:** As a hub for regional and national distribution, Storey County has seen an uptick in employment opportunities in logistics, warehousing, and transportation-related sectors.
3. **Growth in Construction and Infrastructure Development:** The rapid pace of industrial growth has spurred increased activity in construction, both in terms of residential development to accommodate the growing workforce and commercial infrastructure.
4. **Higher Wages and Competitive Employment Market:** With the influx of high-tech industries, wages in the region have become more competitive, particularly in sectors requiring specialized

skills. However, the demand for labor has created challenges for local recruitment, particularly in skilled trades and professional positions.

These trends have positioned Storey County as a key employment hub in Northern Nevada, reflecting broader changes in the regional economy while creating opportunities for continued growth and diversification.

## **7.2.2 Employment Rates**

Storey County's employment rates have been influenced by the region's rapid industrial growth. This economic expansion has played a significant role in stabilizing employment and creating job opportunities, leading to relatively low unemployment rates compared to state and national averages.

Storey County has maintained a low unemployment rate over recent years, largely due to the growth of the industrial sector. The influx of companies has provided a steady stream of job opportunities, particularly in manufacturing, technology, and logistics.

While the overall employment rates have remained stable, like many regions, Storey County has experienced occasional fluctuations due to broader economic factors, such as changes in demand for goods and services and shifts in national or global markets. However, these impacts tend to be moderated by the long-term investments and developments in the county.

Employment rates have benefited from an expanding labor market, with the creation of thousands of new jobs in industries such as advanced manufacturing, data centers, and distribution. As these sectors grow, the county continues to attract workers from surrounding areas, including Reno and Sparks, contributing to regional employment growth.

Despite the strong employment landscape, the county faces challenges in filling highly skilled positions. As demand for specialized roles grows, gaps in the local talent pool have led to recruitment efforts beyond the immediate region.

Storey County's employment rates reflect the positive impact of its industrial and economic development. While unemployment remains low, the county continues to focus on addressing workforce development needs to ensure sustained growth in both employment and economic resilience.

## **7.3 Income Trends**

Income trends in Reno, Sparks, Storey County, Carson City, and Lyon County have been significantly shaped by the region's ongoing economic transformation, with Northern Nevada emerging as a hub for technology, manufacturing, and logistics. Reno and Sparks, in particular, have seen robust income growth driven by the rise of tech companies, advanced manufacturing, and the expansion of the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center in Storey County. The influx of large employers, such as Tesla and Switch, has resulted in higher-paying jobs, which has pushed up household incomes across the region. These economic changes have fostered higher median incomes in Washoe County and Storey County, surpassing state and national averages, while also creating new opportunities for wage growth in surrounding areas.

Carson City and Lyon County have also experienced moderate income growth, benefiting from their proximity to the booming Reno-Sparks area. Carson City, with its mix of government jobs and small business growth, has seen stable wage increases, though not at the same pace as Reno and Storey County. Lyon County, historically more rural, is experiencing a gradual rise in income levels as new industries and developments spread outward from Reno. While wage growth in these areas is still catching up to Northern Nevada's industrial hubs, the overall trend is positive, with the region becoming increasingly attractive for both employers and workers seeking competitive incomes and a diversified economy.

### **7.3.1 Per Capita Income**

Per capita income in Storey County has risen significantly in recent years, largely due to the county's transformation into a major industrial hub. As a result, the county's per capita income has consistently been among the highest in Northern Nevada, reflecting the benefits of rapid industrialization and a shift toward a more diversified, high-tech economy. In 2021, Storey County's per capita personal income reached \$40,032, positioning it just below Douglas County in the region.

Across Northern Nevada, per capita income has also seen steady growth, particularly in areas like Washoe County (Reno-Sparks) and Carson City, which have benefited from similar economic diversification. The tech-driven boom, paired with a strong logistics sector, has elevated incomes in urbanized areas, though rural counties within the region have experienced slower growth. While income levels in Northern Nevada still vary by county, the trend is toward higher wages as industries expand and diversify beyond traditional sectors like tourism and mining. Storey County remains a standout in this shift, with its industrial growth serving as a catalyst for broader economic prosperity in the region.

### **7.3.2 Income of Families**

Family incomes in Storey County and Northern Nevada have risen significantly due to the industrial growth. In Storey County, this economic shift has driven median household incomes to around \$81,000, reflecting the influx of higher-paying jobs in tech, manufacturing, and logistics. Similarly, in Reno-Sparks and Carson City, median household incomes have increased due to the growth of higher-wage industries.

### **7.3.3 Average Annual Wage by Job Type**

In Northern Nevada and Storey County, annual wages vary significantly by job type, reflecting the region's diverse economic landscape. In high-demand sectors such as technology and advanced manufacturing, annual wages can exceed \$100,000. For example, software developers and engineers in the tech industry typically earn between \$90,000 and \$120,000 per year.

In contrast, jobs in the service and hospitality sectors, which remain significant in the broader Northern Nevada economy, tend to offer lower annual wages, generally ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000, depending on the specific role and experience level. Retail and administrative support roles also fall within this range. However, with the ongoing growth of high-paying industries in Storey County, the region is increasingly shifting towards higher wage averages, leading to greater overall income potential for residents as the economy diversifies.

## 7.4 Industries

Northern Nevada boasts a diverse array of industries that contribute significantly to the region's economic growth and resilience. One of the most prominent sectors is technology, corresponding to the growth in the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center. This has fostered a burgeoning tech ecosystem focused on advanced manufacturing, data centers, and logistics. Additionally, the region is home to a strong mining industry, particularly in gold and silver extraction, which has historically played a vital role in Nevada's economy. The service and hospitality industries also remain significant, particularly in areas like Reno and Sparks, where tourism, gaming, and retail continue to provide essential employment opportunities.

In addition to technology and mining, Northern Nevada has seen growth in renewable energy, healthcare, and construction sectors. The push for sustainability has led to an increase in solar and wind energy projects, positioning the region as a player in the clean energy movement. The healthcare sector is also expanding, with the establishment of new medical facilities and services to meet the growing population's needs. Furthermore, the construction industry is thriving due to ongoing residential and commercial development, fueled by the influx of new residents and businesses. Overall, the diverse industrial landscape of Northern Nevada not only supports economic stability but also provides a wide range of job opportunities for residents.

## 7.5 Overall Economic Conditions

<b>Nevada Competitiveness SWOT Summary</b>	
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low taxes</li> <li>• Business friendly regulatory climate</li> <li>• Historically has been a high-growth economy</li> <li>• Good quality of life (although this is under-recognized)</li> <li>• Extensive entertainment and recreation assets</li> <li>• Proximity to West Coast population centers, markets, transportation routes, and ports</li> <li>• Excellent airport infrastructure (in both Las Vegas and Reno)</li> <li>• Excellent natural and physical resources (for mining, energy, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce skill level is low (esp. at higher education levels, although this has been improving)</li> <li>• K-12 educational system is underperforming</li> <li>• Healthcare system is underperforming</li> <li>• Energy costs are expensive (relative to other Western states)</li> <li>• Land transportation connections can be challenging (in some parts of state)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political leadership is closely engaged in revamping and renewing economic development activities</li> <li>• Ease and cost of living is attractive compared to neighboring California</li> <li>• Growing urban/arts districts in Las Vegas and Reno</li> <li>• Large number of tourists/visitors/conventions – an opportunity to “sell” Nevada for future workforce/residents/businesses</li> <li>• Infrastructure for innovation is in place (at UNR, DRI, UNLV), but not at its full potential</li> <li>• Relatively strong Science &amp; Engineering (S&amp;E) workforce and students in Reno</li> <li>• World-class Internet connectivity opportunities (such as the Switch data center in Las Vegas)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extreme economic cycles and volatility</li> <li>• Limited state economic development resources dispersed through fragmented regional efforts</li> <li>• Existing image issues can be a barrier in attracting higher skilled workforce</li> <li>• Federal land ownership can hinder land usage/development in much of the state</li> <li>• Water shortages</li> <li>• Shortage of workforce especially technically skilled</li> <li>• Housing shortage, both for purchase and rent.</li> <li>• Lack of sufficient electric infrastructure</li> <li>• Lack of adequate highway infrastructure</li> </ul>

## **7.6 Economic Development Strategies**

### **7.6.1 Business Development Specific Staff**

In July 2021, Storey County created a new Business Development Officer position. This position is responsible for recruitment and retention of businesses throughout the entire county. The Business Development Officer is committed to collaborating with and connecting businesses to the resources to grow and thrive. The TRI-Center is a substantial part of the Business Development Officer's focus, to create a robust complex for both the businesses and their employees.

### **7.6.2 Active Public-Private Engagement**

Business development efforts are pursued in Storey County to promote the location and development of business in the county. The business development team also strives to:

- Diversity and expand the local job base;
- Recruit new businesses to the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center, communities, and other areas in the county;
- Respond to requests for demographic, labor force, and other information;
- Link businesses which are interested in locating to Storey County with tax and other funding incentives potentially available from the State, the federal government, or others;
- Help existing and prospective employers find out about continuing education, professional development, and job training opportunities for their employees;
- Help existing and prospective employers with providing for reliable and efficient transportation means for their employees.

### **7.6.3 Regional Cooperation and Partnerships**

The Storey County business development team cooperates with several economic development entities in the region including, but not limited to, the following:

- Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada;
- Western Nevada Development District;
- Northern Nevada Development Authority;
- Governor's Office of Economic Development

### **7.6.4 Strategies for Development and Diversification**

The following are strategies that the county employs to promote economic growth and diversity:

- Maintain land use, zoning, and conservation policies and regulations that promote commercial,

industrial, and mixed-uses in the county;

- Continue establishing more job training and professional development partnerships with local employers and education institutions;
- Coordinate water and sewer facilities planning with the need to bring these utilities to areas zoned for commercial and industrial uses;
- Continue coordinating with the Nevada Department of Transportation and the Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe on the widening of Interstate 80 and alternative routes to the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center and more local control over portions of State Route 341 (“C” Street) in downtown Virginia City;
- Coordinate with the Washoe County Regional Planning Agency on the development of regional market analyses and economic asset management, including identifying assets and constraints, labor forces, education resources, commercial and industrial sites and providers, and transportation networks;
- Actively encourage and participate in regional committees and efforts of which goals are to improve the economy in Storey County and the region by fostering the creation of higher paying jobs. A related goal of this effort will be to diversify the economic base so that the county is better able to withstand and accommodate future economic change.

### **7.6.5 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy**

The Economic Development Strategies identified above are consistent with the following items. This should be considered an Action Plan for Storey County’s Comprehensive Business Development Strategy.

- Maintain tourism and hospitality as a primary economic industry in Gold Hill and Virginia City but diversify toward more industries and services to address local needs;
- Promote downtown redevelopment in Virginia City in order to revitalize tourism and market cultural and historical resources;
- Identify and plan for future growth industries:
  - Attracting uses and commercial endeavors that are synergetic and promote tourism on the Comstock. Uses may include, but are not limited to, movie and film production and related development, uses involving the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, encampments and uses featuring authentic and interactive western heritage, and integration of tourism and education into modern as well as historic mining;
  - Promoting “green-energy” such as solar, wind, geothermal, waste-to-energy at McCarran and other areas of the county where impacts to adjacent uses will be minimized;
  - Attracting unique high-intensity industries including those that conduct research, development, and testing of volatile compounds, weapons, civilian and military apparatus, wastes, fuels, and energy to McCarran and other remotely located industrial areas in the county;
  - Commercial business which is directly associated with serving the needs of local residents.
- Provide for the development of necessary infrastructure to provide a competitive business

environment.

- Ensure accessibility to and expansion of transportation, utility, and information- technology services serving businesses;
- Provide for appropriate level of development and re-development of affordable workforce housing;
- Emphasize on infrastructure holistically and not just focus on individual projects.
- Provide for the development of a sustainable, high quality workforce.

## 7.7 Goals, Policies, and Objectives

### Goal 1: Continue to enhance diversification of economic opportunities within the county.

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Policy 1.1</b>	Maintain and continue to update, as needed, standards for industrial and commercial development within the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center and other parts of the county.

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Policy 1.2</b>	Promote commercial business activity in the county that will benefit not only tourists and visitors, but residents and local businesses as well.

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Policy 1.3</b>	Promote commercial business activity within the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center which will serve employees, transportation, contractors, vendors, and visitors to the area.

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Policy 1.4</b>	Expand programs and improve inter-local communication and collaboration with existing local, state, and federal economic development and diversification agencies.

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Policy 1.5</b>	Promote commercial and industrial developments within the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center by facilitating efficient and straightforward permitting processes and enhanced communication between prospective businesses and local government agencies.

Policy	
<b>Policy 1.6</b>	Collaborate with the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada and the Northern Nevada Development Authority to coordinate development of prime industrial land within McCarran and other appropriate areas within the River District.

Policy	
<b>Policy 1.7</b>	Promote county-wide mobility infrastructure and projects to support job access.

**Goal 2: Support the development of the county's significant mineral resources while ensuring that negative impacts to the land and adjacent land uses are minimized.**

Policy	
<b>Policy 2.1</b>	Maintain a close collaborative relationship between county agencies and mining operations throughout the permitting process and thereafter to minimize negative impacts.
Objectives	
<b>Objective 2.1-1</b>	Adopt standards or policy statements concerning mineral development on or near the Comstock Historic District which are distinct from development standards in outlying areas.
<b>Objective 2.1-2</b>	Refrain from duplicating permit applications requirements and fees which have been established by state and federal agencies.

**Goal 3: Design zoning districts to allow for a mixed land use development.**

Policy	
<b>Policy 3.1</b>	Prohibit land use permits adjacent to brothels which are deemed incompatible therewith.
Objectives	
<b>Objective 3.1-1</b>	Encourage commercial development within industrial zones that provides goods and services (e.g., restaurants, entertainment, dry goods, food, etc.) to the maximum limit allowable by zoning code.

<b>Objective 3.1-2</b>	Encourage clustering of commercial land uses in industrial areas in order to reduce automobile travel time, congestion, and cross traffic on major throughways.
<b>Objective 3.1-3</b>	Encourage high density development and commercial uses in CR Zones.

**Goal 4: Expand McCarran’s ZIP Code to include other Storey County Communities.**

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Policy 4.1</b>	Maintain a close collaborative relationship between county and federal agencies to fulfill Objective 4.2-1.
<b>Objectives</b>	
<b>Objective 4.2-1</b>	Submit requests to the United States Postal Services to have a ZIP Code assigned exclusively to McCarran, Painted Rock, Hafed, Lockwood, and other River District communities in Storey County.

**Goal 5: Maintain and enhance primary job base.**

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Policy 5.1</b>	Continue to coordinate the county’s ongoing planning efforts and Land Use Map with major employers where applicable to ensure compatibility with their facility master plans and expansion efforts.
<b>Objectives</b>	
<b>Objective 5.1-1</b>	Retain and promote the expansion of major employers already established in the county, including Gold Hill and Virginia City, the River District, and the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center.
<b>Objective 5.1-2</b>	Promote activities that have the potential to upgrade the skill and wage levels of the county’s resident and non-resident labor force and those likely to enter the labor force (e.g., local college graduates). Encourage educational opportunities for the development and/or upgrade of skills required for employment, advancement and entrepreneurship.

**Goal 6: Promote expansion of a regional retail service base.**

Objectives	
<b>Objective 6.1-1</b>	Encourage the development of retail and premium amenities, consisting of shops, restaurants, entertainment venues, offices, and hotels in existing commercial centers and in proposed mixed- use communities.

**Goal 7 Recognize and adapt to the impact of technology on work and workforce patterns.**

Objectives	
<b>Objective 7.1-1</b>	Encourage the incorporation of home-based occupation businesses and live/work units that are consistent with the character of surrounding properties, land uses, and land use designations.
<b>Objective 7.1-2</b>	Continue to work with regional service providers to provide low-cost, easily accessible, state-of-the-art telecommunications and other technology services throughout the county.
<b>Objective 7.1-3</b>	Use technology to increase information available to residents and businesses regarding growth patterns, economic conditions, development activity, and other elements of the competitive landscape. Where possible, these elements should be interactive.

**Goal 8 Promote tourism activities and amenities that highlight the Virginia City National Historic Landmark and other cultural resources.**

Objectives	
<b>Objective 8.1-1</b>	Support tourism activities associated with the major historic resources within the county, such as the V&T Railroad, the various cultural institutions, and the historic buildings and stories of the Comstock, by ensuring that future development supports the functions and visual character of these resources.
<b>Objective 8.1-2</b>	Encourage the development of historical opportunities, interpretive signage, and other amenities that complement and enhance the county's historic resources. Continue to explore opportunities to expand downtown walking tours and interpretive signage exhibits and identify new opportunities to showcase the county's historic resources.
<b>Objective 8.1-3</b>	Support artists, arts organizations, the Storey County School District's arts programs, and related cultural institutions because of their significant contributions to the county's overall healthy business climate; their role in creating a cultural environment that attracts other living wage employers, as well as tourists, to the region; and the substantial benefits they provide to the residents and communities.

**Goal 9                    Promote and maintain the pro-economic development county government.**

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Policy 9.1</b>	Recognize that business cycles will occur, and the competitive landscape is rapidly evolving. Provide planning flexibility that can be responsive to unforeseen or changing economic conditions and community needs within the context of the master plan.
<b>Objectives</b>	
<b>Objective 9.1-1</b>	Maintain land-use policies and permitting procedures that are understandable, predictable, and can be accomplished within reasonable time periods.
<b>Objective 9.1-2</b>	Leverage, whenever possible, statewide economic development efforts to help attract business investment to the county and promote the benefits of the region.
<b>Objective 9.1-3</b>	To the extent of the county’s control, maintain a balance revenue system that is competitive for business and other investment.
<b>Objective 9.1-4</b>	Recognize the unique nature of Nevada’s tax system and promote economic development alternatives the result in a net positive fiscal impact for the county.