

# Brewster-Pateros Opportunity DRAFT#5

With about 5,000 residents, the Brewster-Pateros area of Okanogan County is agriculturally-focused with a young, diverse and work-oriented population.

As of the 2020 U.S. Census, Brewster was home to 1,983 residents with another 593 residents in Pateros. Over half the area's population resides within the two cities with the remainder in the surrounding unincorporated area.

Brewster-Pateros is served both by the Highway 97 and SR-20 North Cascade travel corridors – and remains oriented to the fruit industry, benefiting from confluences of the Okanogan and Methow Rivers with the Columbia River system.



## Pivotal Location in South-Central Okanogan County

- Area outlined in orange is the U.S. Census County Division (CCD) encompassing the Brewster-Pateros communities

## DEMOGRAPHICS

While currently slow growing, a young population and relatively high local wage levels suggest opportunity in the years ahead:

- The greater Brewster-Pateros area has experienced a population gain of about 2-3% since 2010.
- Pateros lost population in the last decade while Brewster's population has increased at about the same rate as for this combined south county area – albeit at rates of population increase well below what has been experienced county- and region-wide.
- At just over 33 years, the median age of Brewster-Pateros area residents is far younger than the nearly 43-year median age of all Okanogan County residents.
- At an estimated \$57,800, the annual median household income of the Brewster-Pateros area is 7% above the county-wide median.
- New housing is being built at a slower pace than county- or region-wide – with just 4% of existing homes built from 2014 to present as inventory has lagged behind demand.

## LABOR FORCE & EMPLOYMENT

Close to 66% of Brewster-Pateros area residents age 16+ are currently in the labor force – a participation employment rate that is among the highest in the 3-county North Central Washington (NCW) region. Of added note:

- As of 2019 (pre-pandemic), Brewster-Pateros area businesses employed 3,450 workers.

- With 24% of Okanogan County’s job base as compared with 11% of county-wide population, Brewster-Pateros serves as a significant employment center for the county and the greater NCW region.
- However, from 2010-19, employment in the Brewster-Pateros area declined by 8%, due largely to some reduction in agricultural-related job needs over the last decade.
- By comparison, Okanogan County experienced minimal job change over this pre-pandemic period while employment for the 3-county NCW region increased by 14% – with region-wide job growth focused in neighboring Chelan and Douglas Counties.
- Brewster-Pateros area job growth that did occur was focused on transportation and warehousing together with information, educational, lodging and food services.
- As compared to the rest of Okanogan County and the entire NCW region, adults employed in the Brewster-Pateros communities tend to be older (55 and over), male, Latino, with mid-range incomes – of whom 68% are employed in agriculture.
- An above average proportion of working adults have less than high school education; however, 72% have at least completed high school including those going on to college.

While not available at the local community level, more recent data region- and county-wide for 2020-21 indicates that employment has yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels. Natural resource, hospitality and local government employment have been most adversely affected. Conversely, employment has exceeded pre-pandemic levels in sectors as with construction, distribution, retail trade, and a range of business services. As employment in Pateros has been recreation and tourism-oriented, this suggests likely uneven local economic recovery to date.

## COMMUNITY ASSETS & PRIORITIES

**Assets** of the Brewster-Pateros area cited by community stakeholders include apple and other agricultural activity, tourism and recreation opportunities, the confluence of the Methow and Columbia Rivers, and emphasis on family. **Challenges** relate to current lack of economic diversity together with a limited base of retail businesses, infrastructure and affordable housing. There is little land for added housing; utility extensions are also needed.

**Community priorities** cited for Brewster and Pateros include:

- Attracting good paying industry and a more diverse set of downtown businesses
- Housing affordable to area residents and workforce, coupled with “technology equity”
- Street and water infrastructure with more properties for new industry and housing

When asked about a **vision for the future**, a Brewster survey respondent advocates an objective to “diversify the business district to allow for the down years.” In response to a similar question about what constitutes a thriving economy, a Pateros respondent describes a potential future with “less poverty, more local service delivery, safe and affordable housing, high quality public education, access to health care for all, youth engaged in positive activities.”

## OPPORTUNITIES

As the larger of the two communities with a complement of existing businesses, **Brewster** offers opportunity for added retail and service business catering to area ag-businesses as well as to an area-wide residential consumer base. For tourism, added RV camping space is greatly needed.



**Brewster at Lake Pateros fed by the nearby confluence of the Okanogan and Columbia Rivers.**

- Photo per City of Brewster,

<http://www.cityofwww.cityofbrewsterwashington.org>

In 2021, a *Downtown Strategic Vision* for Brewster was completed – organized around a detailed market analysis together with recommendations for policy and administration, design, tourism and promotion, and economic vitality.

Due to its immediate waterfront orientation and as the jumping-off point for the North Cascades Highway (SR 20), **Pateros** has underutilized opportunities for added tourism activity – catering to Columbia River destination as well as pass-through Canadian and SR-20 visitor traffic. Pateros also has an identified Opportunity Zone (OZ) property – situated at the southern end of the community. With a riverfront location and rail as well as highway transportation, the property is potentially suitable for a range of light industrial and destination commercial uses.

## NEXT STEPS

Building from strategic visioning for downtown Brewster coupled with initiative of the Pateros Brewster Local Investors Network and support of the two municipal governments, key next steps for these two communities could be to:

- Start with a steering committee to create and coordinate implementation of **an action plan** – drawing on the expertise of interested businesses, citizens and civic leaders
- Focus on identified **needs and opportunities** for improved community design and aesthetics, new housing, river recreation and tourism promotion, business recruitment and expansion including initiatives to fill vacant commercial and industrial spaces
- Look for opportunities to engage the community for near-term wins, **building momentum** for longer term initiatives that may require both local and outside funding

Here and throughout the NCW region, neighboring communities are encouraged to work collaboratively. As two Columbia River cities accessed by major travel corridors, Brewster and Pateros stand to benefit – more readily leveraging local with outside expertise and resources.

## JUMP IN NOW!

Of the many diverse communities of Okanogan County and the NCW region, the Brewster-Pateros area is most distinctive for its diversity of population together with a continued strong agricultural and work-focused orientation, providing mid-level wage and income opportunities. While local population is increasing slowly, the existing population base is younger than elsewhere in the county – offering solid prospects for continued if not improved *home-grown* economic vitality in the years ahead.

As a regional partnership, the Okanogan County Economic Alliance and North Central Washington Economic Development District (NCWEDD) encourage the identification and submittal of *shovel-ready* or *potential shovel-ready* economic and community development projects for project review and ranking.

Top-ranked projects will receive grant writing and administration support from the Alliance and NCWEDD. The closer to *shovel-ready*, the *better the opportunity* for successful funding.



**As the southern gateway to Okanogan County situated along U.S. Highway 97 and as the jumping-off point for the world-renowned North Cascades Highway (SR 20), Pateros offers great opportunity for destination commercial and large lot industrial development. Opportunity Zone designation creates additional potential for community and outside investment interest.**

- Photo courtesy of OlyMingo.com

This *opportunity profile* has been prepared by the North Central Washington Economic Development District (NCWEDD) serving communities of Chelan, Douglas and Okanogan Counties.

Data is compiled from sources including U.S. Census, Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM), Washington Employment Security Department (ESD), and the nationally recognized private firm Claritas.

For further information as to business and investment opportunities and economic development programs for the Brewster-Pateros communities and the greater NCW region, contact Alyce Brown, NCWEDD Executive Director via phone at 509-899-9321, email [director@ncwedd.com](mailto:director@ncwedd.com)

Or contact Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director for the Economic Alliance of Okanogan County, phone 509-826-5107, email [rholderdiefenbach@economic-alliance.com](mailto:rholderdiefenbach@economic-alliance.com)