



# The Grapes of Wrath: Mitigating the Negative Effects of Wine Tourism in Walla Walla, WA



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# **The Grapes of Wrath: Mitigating the Negative Effects of Wine Tourism; A Case Study of the Walla Walla Valley**

## **Introduction**

Wine tourism is the practice of visiting places to taste, consume or purchase wine (Getz, 2000). It can also be more broadly defined as visitation to wine events, shows, vineyards or wineries for which tasting and experiencing the wine region are the primary motivating factors for the tourist (Hall et al, 2000). Many regions throughout the country (and the world) have embraced the practice of wine tourism as a way to bolster local economies. Wine tourism, however, can bring a lot of business to small towns that may or may not be ready to handle the influx on their infrastructure (Swarbrooke, 1996).

This paper focuses on proposing economic development strategies for mid-sized rural communities dealing with rapidly increasing tourism as a result of their wine industries. These development strategies are aimed at mitigating any negative effects to the community resulting from increased wine tourism while capitalizing on the positive effects.

This paper focuses specifically on Walla Walla, Washington but several of the findings and recommendations can be carried forward towards other research and applied to other communities throughout the country.

The paper explores some of the issues surrounding rapid economic development due to tourism. It also describes elements of economic and socio-cultural sustainability that are important to developing a healthy and viable economic development strategy.

## About Walla Walla

The City of Walla Walla is located in the South East corner of Washington State just over the Columbia River from Milton-Freewater, Oregon. The City has about 30,000 residents and operates as the county seat for Walla Walla County (City of Walla Walla, n.d.). All told the County has approximately 57,000 residents; this makes Walla Walla the largest municipality in the County (City of Walla Walla, n.d.).

In addition to wine grapes, the Walla Walla valley produces many other types of agriculture including crops of barley, corn, wheat and peas (Tourism Walla Walla, 2003). In addition to being a center of agricultural production, Walla Walla also offers many institutions of higher education. These include Walla Walla Community College and Whitman College. The community college houses the Center for Viticulture, which will be discussed later in this paper.

In addition, Walla Walla serves as the medical, employment and cultural center for most of the County and much of the Southeastern corner of the state. Important cultural events in the City include the longest running symphony west of the Mississippi, the Hot Air Balloon festival which occurs every spring, and the Walla Walla Fair and Frontier Days (Tourism Walla Walla, 2003). Only recently has the wine industry become a cornerstone of the community.

## The Wine Industry in Walla Walla

Wine making and grape growing in the Walla Walla Valley started in the 1800s with Italians who had immigrated to the area (Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance (WWVWA), 2003). In 1950 the Pesciallo family started the first post-prohibition winery named Blue Mountain Vineyard. This winemaking operation lasted several years before folding under the pressures of both the economy and the climate (WWVWA, 2003).

In 1984 the Walla Walla Valley was named an American Viticultural Area (AVA) (WWVWA, 2003). Walla Walla's AVA also includes a portion of land in Oregon (WWVWA, 2003). By 1990 there were just six wineries in the AVA and the amount of land devoted to wine production stood at just over 100 acres. The early 1990s saw the entrance of the first major outside investor in the form of Chalone Wine Group that started Canoe Ridge Winery (WWVWA, 2003).

By 2000, Walla Walla had twenty-two wineries and 800 acres of grapes. At this time the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance was formed, this organization represents every winery in Walla Walla and 98% of the planted acreage. Today there are more than 90 wineries and 1200 acres of grapes within the Walla Walla AVA (Washington State Liquor Control Board, 2003; WWVWA, 2003).

The Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance claims that many fledgling wineries have been able to make their start thanks to the benevolence of already established wineries in the area. Waterbrook Winery started the trend by opening their production facility to new wineries and offering any help that might be needed.

The Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance estimates the economic impact of the wine industry in Walla Walla at over 100 million dollars (WWVWA, 2003). The total acreage of the AVA is 303,500 with a total of 1,052 acres planted as of 2001. This planted acreage accounts for 648 acres in Washington and 403 in Oregon.

Wineries in this AVA primarily produce Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Merlot. These wineries also produce Sangiovese, Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, and Viognier (WWVWA, 2003).

## Literature Review

### Impacts of Rural Tourism (Negatives and Positives)

This section discusses both the risks and rewards of rural tourism in an effort to paint a picture of the potential issues that may be experienced by Walla Walla and other rural areas experiencing an influx of tourists.

#### Benefits

In order to develop a sound economic development strategy it is important to recognize the benefits of tourism so as not to demonize any one industry. Many rural towns have aggressively pursued tourism as an economic development strategy that will “save” their town. Many towns have also seen the benefits of this approach—these include job creation and redevelopment or new development. These benefits are discussed below.

#### Job Creation

The number one goal of any economic development strategy is usually job creation. Tourism usually manages to bring a large amount of job creation because new facilities and amenities are built to attract visitors to the area (Roberts and Hall, 2001).

#### Redevelopment

Economic development also usually brings redevelopment with it—this is especially true in historically rich areas (like Walla Walla). Old buildings are rehabilitated to accommodate new uses, vacant lots are cleared of weeds and new structures are built (Roberts and Hall, 2001). This can help not only to create new jobs, but to revitalize the general population of the community. Areas that are considered eyesores both by residents and visitors are often quickly spruced up.

**New Development**

Small rural towns often have limited options in terms of retail and living choice, increasing tourism can change both of these things. With an influx of visitors comes new construction such as restaurants, hotels and boutiques (Bosselman, Peterson and McCarthy, 1999). This has the double benefit of creating more options for local residents in terms of spending capital, but also creates even more jobs.

Due to the unique nature of wine tourism, both in terms of product and visitor, there are some benefits are particular to this type of tourism. These benefits are outlined below.

**Preservation of open space or agricultural land**

Because growing and producing wine is primarily an agricultural pursuit, a large amount of agricultural land is often preserved than might otherwise be the case in rural towns that experience sudden economic growth (Hall et al, 2000: 223). This is a benefit to the town because it helps maintain the isolated character and overall natural beauty that drew many of the residents in the first place. This need to preserve agricultural land may also help to limit sprawl.

**Influx of capital into the economy**

Because wine tourists are often affluent, they are likely to spend a larger amount of money than most tourists in an average visit (Tourism Assessment and Strategic Plan, 2004). Because many wineries are locally owned and operated, this means that there is a large amount of capital flowing into the community. In addition tourism increases the tax base for the community which increases local government's ability to develop and enhance the community (Bosselman, Peterson and McCarthy, 1999).

### **Promotion of products and region at a wide scope**

Because wine tourists are a unique breed, they will often travel great distances to taste and experience the wines of a certain region—this means that the toured region might achieve great notoriety at both a national and international level without much cost in the way of tourism promotion (Hall et al, 2000). Additionally, because wine can be mass distributed to grocery and wine outlets, it is quite possible for a person who has never heard of a small rural area (like Walla Walla) to taste and enjoy the wine and consider a visit. This type of promotion is much more easily achieved for a wine tourism region than one that relies on recreational tourism.

### **Risks**

Tourism research also points to several possible problems or issues that may be experienced by host communities. These include traffic congestion, loss of identity (cultural or otherwise) increase in home values in areas close to the tourism center and loss of agricultural land (Getz, 2000). Each of these issues (how they are caused and experienced) will be discussed below.

### **Traffic**

Many smaller towns (especially isolated rural ones) are ill equipped for a sudden influx of population. One of the biggest consequences of this is an increase in traffic (Poitras & Getz, 2006). Just like traffic congestion in urban areas, congestion in rural areas is frustrating. Often times it can be even more frustrating for rural areas because it is unexpected and it interrupts the isolated character of the place.

### **Loss of Cultural or Rural Identity**

When an isolated rural area experiences an influx of new people, it is possible for the existing people (and thus the place overall) to experience a shift in culture and values (Hall et al,

2000). Getz writes, “[wine tourism] leads to a shift from a mind-set associated with agricultural production to one in which rural residents view themselves and their countryside as being “consumed” by visitors within a service economy” (2000). A shift from a mindset of ‘production’ to a mindset of ‘consumption’ can have effects on what residents value in their town and what they perceive as important. This kind of attitude shift can change patterns of development and policy within municipalities.

### **Social Exclusion**

Beyond a shift in culture, visitors to rural areas can have other adverse effects. In areas experiencing wine tourism it is often the case that the new visitors are more affluent than the existing populations (Hall et al, 2000). For example the average tourist to the Walla Walla Valley wine region is between 35-54 years old and makes (on average) \$82,025 per household (Tourism Assessment and Strategic Plan, 2004). The lifestyles of the tourists can be different than the one enjoyed by the current residents of a rural area which can lead to a feeling of ‘social exclusion’ (Roberts and Hall, 2001).

### **Increase in Real Estate Costs**

Because wine tourists are more affluent than the general tourist, they generally have the ability to purchase properties in the areas that they are visiting. This increased interest in both the existing real estate, and in constructing new real estate, often drives up the value of land in the host community (Hall et al, 2000: 285). This can increase property taxes and make homes unaffordable for people who have lived there for generations. In addition, this can make new construction very expensive, which can make homeownership very difficult.

This jump in the cost of real estate also makes it difficult for young people to settle in the host community. This means that many people who grew up in the area may find it difficult to purchase property and choose to move elsewhere—thus resulting in an outflow of the original population and further affecting the shift in cultural values (Roberts and Hall, 2001).

### **Loss of agricultural lands**

There are two ways the increase in tourism can decrease agricultural lands. The first is a loss of land as a result of development to service the tourism industry. This kind of development is the loss of land from subdivisions, grocery stores and restaurants. Many visitors to places may later decide to move there, presuming there is not enough housing to accommodate all interested parties there will be new homes.

With this increase in population and housing new stores and restaurants may be necessary to accommodate the needs of the new residents. Rural towns are often surrounded by agricultural land and the only place for new development to go is onto those lands (Hall et al, 2000: 221).

The second way that agricultural lands begin to disappear as a result of tourism is through development directly related to the tourism. If the tourism is related to recreation the agricultural lands may be developed as trails or green-ways, in the case of wine tourism it may be lost to the development of vineyards or tasting rooms (Hall et al, 2000: 284; Roberts and Hall, 2001: 5). It can be argued that vineyards are still agricultural lands and thus do not count as a loss of agricultural lands, but this overlooks the loss of crop diversification.

### **Influx of large wineries**

As wine tourism becomes an even larger part of the landscape it is possible that bigger and bigger wineries will opt to do business in rural towns. This creates a dichotomy between the small independent wine producer and the larger corporate sponsored wineries (Getz, 2000). As the number of large wineries increases the character of the town will once again shift—these larger wineries may gain more influence in local politics, but may not have to experience the outcomes of their decisions as keenly as the smaller artisan wineries.

### **Successful Economic Development In Rural Areas**

The Sierra Business Council (SBC) has developed a set of best practices for economic development in a rural area experiencing rapid tourism growth. Although these findings are focused on the Sierra Nevada region, the lessons can be extended to other rural communities.

Important considerations include:

- Safeguarding the rural character by maintaining a clear edge between town and country
- Preserving historic assets
- Building to create enduring value and beauty
- Enhancing the economic vitality of small towns through on-going reinvestment in the downtown core
- Anticipating and enhancing the housing needs of all community residents
- Conserving and showcasing each community's natural assets
- Maintaining the economic productivity of a region's agricultural lands and forests
- Maintaining the health of the natural systems which support life in the region
- Expanding local and regional transportation options to reduce traffic congestion (Sierra Business Council, 1997).

These best practices are designed to be used in a rural area experiencing rapid growth from any kind of tourism, not just wine tourism in particular. This list is particularly useful to Walla

Walla for two reasons. First, Walla Walla has a rich historic history (and has previously focused tourism dollars on encouraging visits to Fort Walla Walla and the Whitman Mission), second, this list emphasizes the need to maintain the productivity of existing agriculture which is important in an area that has a long history of wheat and onion farming.

More specifically, Donald Getz argues that there are several conditions that will maximize the benefits of economic development from wine tourism. These include:

- Maximization of the length of stay;
- Ownership of wineries and other businesses remains local;
- Most products including wine and food are produced locally and include largely local ingredients; and,
- The fact that employees of the industry are mostly local residents (2000).

These points are important for Walla Walla to consider as it continues to encourage wine tourism to develop in the area. Getz maintains a strong emphasis on ‘local’ throughout his recommendations, which is important for several reasons. Keeping ownership of wineries and other businesses local allows a larger amount of capital to remain in the community. Limiting the outflow of capital helps to build the economic base within the community more quickly than if the capital is being redistributed to large national (or international) interests.

### **Economic Development in Walla Walla**

The Port of Walla Walla is the main agency in charge of economic development throughout Walla Walla County (Port of Walla Walla, 2007). The Economic Development Plan for the Port for 2007 lists as its core elements of work:

- Small Business Development
- Business Retention/Expansion

- Business Recruitment, Marketing and Advertising
- Site and Infrastructure Development
- Economic Profiling; and
- Economic Development Advocacy (Port of Walla Walla, 2007).

In conjunction with this the City of Walla Walla includes a section on economic vitality in its comprehensive plan. This comprehensive plan is currently being updated and thus, the information that appears here is from the 2007 draft version of that plan. The Economic Vitality section of this plan presents a set of twelve policies that the City has identified as critical to the economic vitality of the community (see Appendix A for the complete list). This set of policies emphasizes the need for family wage jobs, a diverse economic base and the importance of tourism to the local economy.

Providing family wage jobs is very important to the overall economic health of the Valley. Without family wage jobs people will be may be unable to purchase homes and reinvest capital into their community. In addition, personal investment in the community may go down if the economy cannot support family wage jobs; people may be forced to work more than one job to keep their family afloat, and thus, may be unable to participate in the civic activities, which are important to the overall vitality of the community.

A diverse economic base will help to provide family wage jobs to the community. One of the major arguments against using tourism as an economic development strategy is that it only produces service economy jobs, and that these jobs cannot adequately support a family. For this reason, it is important that the City focus on developing jobs both within and outside the tourism sector.

The fact that the City recognizes the necessity for these types of policies is very important for the overall implementation of successful economic development strategies in line with the best practices outlined above.

Building upon the recommended tenets of economic development for rural communities and integrating the policies and goals of the agencies responsible for economic development in the Walla Walla Valley, the author has developed several recommendations focused on mitigating the negative effects of wine tourism. Local economic development as defined by Blakely and Bradshaw is, “a process that emphasizes the full use of existing human and natural resources to build and create wealth within a community” (2002). These authors also emphasize that successful economic development strategies take into account elements of specific strategic approaches including locality development, business development, human resource development, and community-based employment development (2002). The economic development strategy proposed by the author attempts to incorporate each of these elements to create a successful and well-rounded economic development plan for the City of Walla Walla.

## Methodology

This section will discuss the design of the qualitative research portion of this study. It includes a discussion of the interview methodology and the limitations of that research. The goal of this study was to identify the effects of wine tourism on the Walla Walla Valley. Furthermore, the author wished to make economic development recommendations based on the findings in the Walla Walla Valley. Due to the fact that a large part of this study was based on issue identification qualitative interviews were an appropriate choice. The open-ended nature of these interviews allows stakeholders to choose their own issues and concerns, rather than letting the researcher define the issues. Especially because the researcher is not from Walla Walla, it would have been difficult for her to accurately assess the issues at hand.

The qualitative portion of this study was conducted through a series of phone interviews and e-mail questionnaires with a variety of stakeholders in close proximity to Walla Walla. These stakeholders come from a variety of viewpoints and sectors of society. A total of 15 (8 phone interviews and 7 e-mail questionnaires) interviews were conducted with representatives from the wine industry in Walla Walla, from the tourism industry, local government and citizen organizations. The e-mail questionnaires were distributed solely to winery owners and operators.

As a condition of this study participants were provided anonymity meaning that none of the findings presented here will be identified with names of individuals or organizations. Each interview was assigned a number and is identified that way in the text. This condition of anonymity is designed to both build trust with the interviewer and to allow the speaker to feel as though they are free to say what they desire. In addition, these interviews were recorded through typewritten notes, the interviews were not captured by recording device.

Initially, the researcher contacted all 58 wineries listed on the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance Map and 10 additional people in organizations throughout the by e-mail to see if they would like to participate in these interviews. Those that did not respond received a follow-up phone call to further inquire as to whether they would like to participate. Those interviewees that chose to participate in the study were then given a 20-30 minute interview by phone.. Because of a low initial participation rate, the author chose to send out an e-mail questionnaire (containing the same questions as the interview) to all wineries listed on the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance map to solicit further participation. Exact interview questions can be found in the Appendix B of this report.

## Results

This section discusses the findings from the phone interviews with stakeholders in the Walla Walla Valley. The findings in this section feed into the recommendations for economic development.

### Benefits of Wine Tourism

Each interviewee was able to identify several positive benefits that the community has experienced from wine tourism. These benefits fall into three main categories:

- Positive impact on existing businesses
- Increase in vitality/revival of downtown core
- Job creation

Each of these themes is described below.

#### **Positive impact on existing businesses**

Several of the interviewees described a ‘synergistic’ relationship between the wine industry and the existing businesses in Walla Walla. Existing hotels and restaurants such as the Marcus Whitman and 26 Brix were most often identified as being the beneficiaries of this relationship. One interviewee said, “Well, I certainly think it has been a synergistic relationship between restaurants and hotels [and the growth of the wine industry]—The Marc has been able to house a lot of people. It is a nice hotel and it is a place people want to go” (Personal Interview (2)). According to the respondents, the success of these businesses is due in large part to the existence of the wineries and the influx of wine tourism. One interviewee cited the success of her own business (an art gallery) as proof of the benefits of the wine industry growth.

**Increase in Vitality/Revival of Downtown Core**

Several interviewees noted an increase in vitality in the community. Interviewees linked this vitality to a revival of the downtown core in Walla Walla. The revamp of Walla Walla has been a major focus for the City of Walla Walla in recent years and the main street was awarded “Best Main Street” by Sunset magazine (Sunset Magazine, 2002). As one interviewee noted, “What goes on in downtown does affect whether people are willing to visit Walla Walla and the wineries. So far people like what they see and they have been very positive about the [re]development” (Personal Interview, (4)).

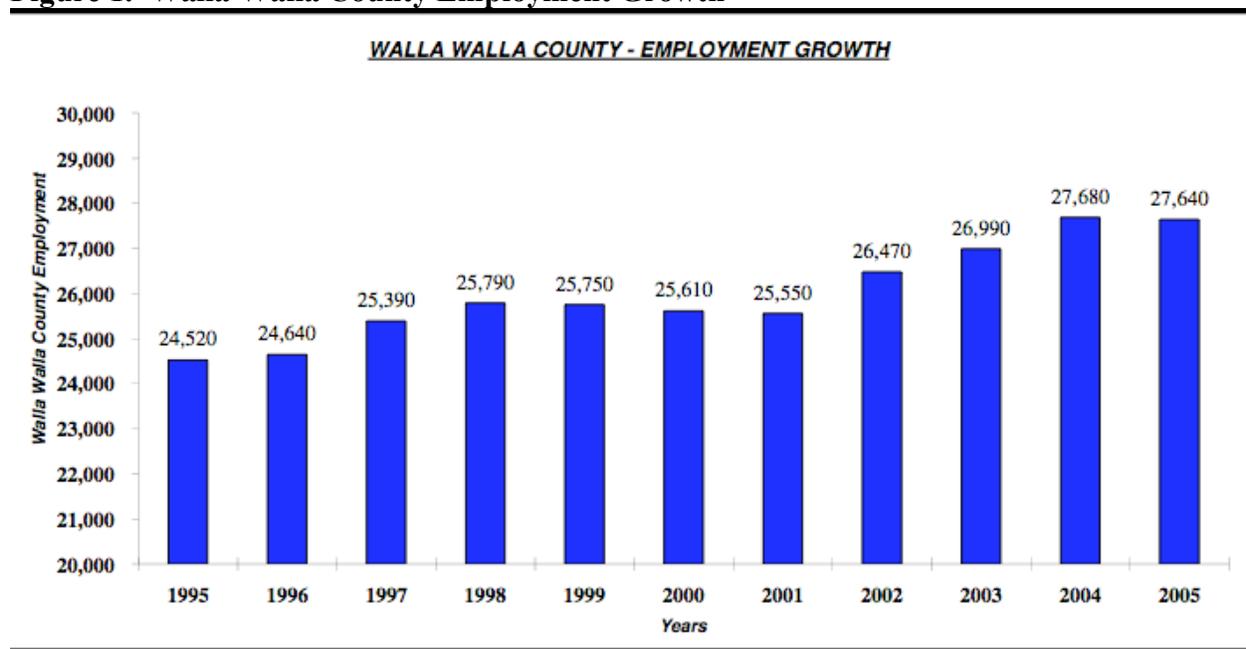
**Job Creation**

With the growth of the wine industry there has also been an increase in jobs available in the community. Many of these jobs are related directly to the wine industry. Several winery owners cited jobs in tasting rooms and in the bottling phase of wine production. This type of job creation is beneficial for the residents of the community, and for students in local education programs. One interviewee noted that the wine industry “has been very beneficial for our students; it has encouraged them to start their own wineries and has allowed them to gain cellar positions as assistant winemakers” (Personal Interview, (3)). Job creation keeps people and capital within the community. One winery owner noted, “We employ a lot of locals in our tasting room and during the bottling process” (Personal Interview (10)). This type of local employment is in keeping with Getz’s recommendations for successful economic development.

It is difficult to tell whether this assertion of job creation is supported by the most recent economic census. Unfortunately, comparative data between the 1997 and 2002 economic status is only available at the County level, which makes it difficult to assess what trends exist at a city level. The economic census breaks economic activity out by industry using the North American

Industry Classification System (NAICS). Under this classification wine production is considered part of the manufacturing industry. In 1997, this industry had 66 establishments in the County and 2,400 paid employees (2002 Economic Census). In 2002, this industry had 88 establishments, but only 1,661 paid employees (2002 Economic Census). While this appears to be a decrease, it may not have anything to do with the wine industry, as manufacturing is a broad category. A related industry, food and accommodations, had 113 establishments and 1,482 paid employees in 1997, but in 2002 had 116 establishments and 1,638 employees in 2002 (2002 Economic Census). This latter statistic may be a more accurate assessment of the impact of wine tourism because it is not as broad a category as manufacturing, on the other hand it is not a direct assessment of wine production. Figure 1 below, provided by the Port of Walla Walla, also shows a generally steady increase in overall employment since 2001 (it is difficult to know whether the decrease in 2005 is a trend or an anomaly).

**Figure 1. Walla Walla County Employment Growth**



Source: Port of Walla Walla

In short, further study of the actual impact of wine tourism on employment growth in the Valley is needed.

## **Negative Effects of Wine Tourism**

Although interviewees were able to identify negative effects from tourism none of them expressed regret that the City had decided to pursue tourism as an economic development strategy, and furthermore, none of them indicated that the City should not continue to pursue this strategy. This finding is corroborated by a survey conducted for the City in which 54% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “The City of Walla Walla should continue to develop as a tourism destination” (City of Walla Walla, 2007). It is important to consider this generally positive attitude towards tourism when examining the negative effects.

These negative effects are divided into themes and described below:

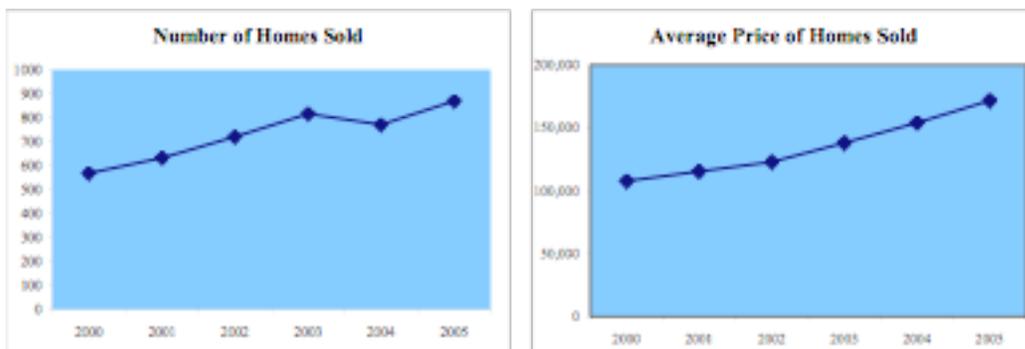
- Decrease in affordable real estate
- Shift in sense of place in Walla Walla
- Overdevelopment
- Traffic

### **Decrease in Affordable Real Estate**

Several interviewees noted the spike in home prices in the area. This lack of affordable real estate has several effects on the community. Expensive real estate means that people who own property may find it difficult to continue to pay property taxes (especially if they are on a fixed income), and young homebuyers may be priced out of the market. In addition, those on smaller incomes may be forced to seek housing in nearby communities and commute into their

place of work. As one interview noted this is a phenomenon seen in communities like Glenwood, Colorado (adjacent to Aspen) and Madras, Oregon (near Bend). This kind of in-commuting can have an adverse effect on the character of a community. Figure 2 and 3 (below) show that real estate costs are indeed rising in Walla Walla. In fact, the percent change in home prices over five years was 41%.

**Figure 2. Number and Average Price of Homes Sold in Walla Walla**



Source: City of Walla Walla Draft Comprehensive Plan, 2007

**Figure 3. Walla Walla County Home Prices vs. Washington State**

	Walla Walla County		Washington State	
	Existing Home Sales	Median Home Prices	Existing Home Sales	Median Home Prices
<b>2000</b>	1,050	\$96,600	119,390	\$176,300
<b>2001</b>	1,130	\$111,900	125,260	\$179,900
<b>2002</b>	1,310	\$119,900	133,200	\$188,500
<b>2003</b>	1,410	\$131,000	156,880	\$203,800
<b>2004</b>	1,330	\$139,500	169,560	\$225,000

	Walla Walla County		Washington State	
2005	1,650	\$157,000	183,320	\$260,900

Source: City of Walla Walla Draft Comprehensive Plan, 2007.

In addition to the rise in home real estate costs, there has been a rise in rents particularly in the downtown district. One interviewee noted that much of the real estate in downtown is being leased by tasting rooms and realtors. This creates a lack of diversity in terms of businesses downtown and makes it difficult for local entrepreneurs to enter the market (Personal Interview (4)).

### **Shift in Sense of Place in Walla Walla**

The shift in ‘sense of place’ was noted by several of the interview respondents. Although this particular effect is difficult to quantify, it is apparent in responses from one local business owner and head of a citizen group, “there is a different crowd of people around. I am a little person and the tourists and the newcomers barely take notice of me. [It is] different than it was four or five years ago” (Personal Interview (3)).

This loss of identity with the community may lead to a feeling of disenfranchisement or frustration, especially among long time residents. As one interviewee from a local college noted, the feeling of inequity “is almost palpable” (Personal Interview (7)). This interviewee also said, “We need to think about certain qualities that we want to preserve and preserve them. There is no plan to protect Walla Walla Valley nor is there a plan to make a plan” (Personal Interview (7)). This need for a plan will be addressed in the discussion section of this paper.

The feeling of loss extends beyond personalities and relationships to the physical character of the town. Walla Walla has long been known for its historic buildings and rich place in history, and yet much of that seems to be disappearing. One interviewee complained that the City seems more concerned with bringing in big box retail than funding the historic preservation council (Personal Interview (4)). Several of the interviewees also noted the entrance of “big box” retail into the economy, which is connected to both the loss of physical character and the general feeling of overdevelopment as described below.

### **Overdevelopment**

The concept of overdevelopment noted by some of the interview subjects is embodied both by the construction of “big box” retail and by the proliferation of second homes and “Mc mansions” throughout the Valley. Walla Walla has long been surrounded by wide expanses of rolling wheat fields—some of this farmland is now undergoing a drastic change as subdivisions get developed on the outskirts of town. One interviewee worried, “you hate to see a lot of sprawl, it [the development] is at a crossroads as to what happens now—30 years from now the Valley might just be homes” (Personal Interview (2)). Another participant noted that, “Open spaces are getting built-up and property prices are out of sight. The huge mansions are gobbling up farmland (Personal Interview (6)).

Again, this development changes the character of a place as it brings new attitudes and perspectives in. Additionally, this type of development may affect the investment of locals into their town. One respondent noted that people who own second homes often only live in a community during part of the year and that as a result may not be as committed to the social life

town, or if they are, that that commitment may take a different form than that of year-round residents (Personal Interview (7)).

### **Traffic**

One of the most quantifiable concerns of residents was an increase in traffic that the City infrastructure may not be able to accommodate. Interviews highlighted that there was no organized dissatisfaction with traffic flow, but several separate interviews raised it as a concern. One interview subject noted that it was a little weary having all these tourists because it was becoming difficult to move around downtown, especially on weekends (Personal Interview (1)). Another said that while he would be unable to actually quantify it he was quite certain that traffic was increasing (Personal Interview, (2)). While traffic may not seem like a major negative effect it certainly can be frustrating and can ruin an idyllic setting which leads back to a feeling of a loss of sense of place.

### **Barriers to Increasing Tourism**

In addition to the benefits and drawbacks of tourism interview participants were asked to identify barriers to improving tourism in the Walla Walla Valley. The leading barrier that was identified both by people working directly in the industry and other residents was the lack of hotel accommodations available in Walla Walla. One interview participant said, “rooms—lack thereof—is our greatest barrier” (Personal Interview (3)). This lack of hotel beds is primarily a problem during the peak weekends between March and October, but also becomes a problem in December during the holiday barrel tasting event. It is difficult to increase tourism if there is nowhere for the visitors to stay.

Interviewees also identified the relative isolation of Walla Walla as a barrier to improving tourism. Several interviews suggested that there are not enough flights in and out of Walla Walla and that the planes are not large enough to accommodate all the people wishing to travel to the Valley. One participant involved with economic development said, “I know one of the big issues we’ve talked about are the number of flights in and out of Seattle. A lot of people still think it’s a long way to go” (Personal Interview (8)). This lack of transportation not only makes it difficult for people to travel in and out of Walla Walla, but also makes it less affordable for residents of the Valley to use air as a mode of transportation.

The need for customer service training was also mentioned as a barrier to improving tourism in the Walla Walla area. Several respondents commented that the tourism experience extends beyond the tasting rooms and vineyard tours and that it was important for area residents and employees to recognize this and make an effort to treat tourists with care in order to enhance their overall experience. One winery owner noted, “Everyone needs to understand that tourism is the experience. And, when they visit Walla Walla, they encounter us all” (Personal Interview (11)).

## **Summary of Results**

Overall, the interview findings generally agree with the literature. While study participants identified most benefits of tourism discussed in the literature, preservation of agriculture was not a benefit identified by those in the Walla Walla Valley. In fact, two interview participants mentioned that there was some contention between winery or vineyard owners and the wheat farmers in the Valley. The Sierra Business Council recommendations also stress the importance of protecting the natural resources of an area. Interestingly, protection of the environ-

ment did not seem to be a real concern for interview participants in Walla Walla. Only one interviewee mentioned issues of water resources, other than that natural resources did not seem to be a big concern.

Aside from these variations, however, Walla Walla Valley stakeholders identified similar concerns and benefits as were highlighted by the literature. This could mean that studies on wine tourism could be more widely applied than much of the literature has previously indicated.

## Limitations

There are several limitations to the way this study was designed. Due to the distance between Eugene (the location of the author) and Walla Walla it was necessary to conduct interviews by phone, but it would have been better to conduct these interviews in person so as to better assess the interviewee's body language and mannerisms to determine how they felt about a particular question or subject. Meeting with a person can also allow the interviewer to build rapport with the subject which allows them to ask question that the interviewee might be less willing to answer.

Another limitation of this study design is the fact that the interviews were not recorded. This means that the author had to take notes during the interview and then remember the exact tone of voice or phrase with little or no help from their written notes. Although this is not a big limitation it does mean that some of the quality of the data is degraded.

In addition, the e-mail questionnaires provide even less opportunity for interaction with the research subject. Written responses allow little room for further clarification or detail that may be necessary to improved understanding.

The final limitation of this study design is that it is focused on the Walla Walla area which is a relatively isolated rural area with some unique features. This means that while some of the findings from this study can be extended to a greater understanding of wine tourism and economic development, some of them are useful strictly for the Walla Walla Valley region. Presuming that the City chooses to continue its current course of development it is important to approach any economic development strategy from the standpoint of continuing to enhance tourism.

### **Areas for further study**

This section discusses possible directions for further research in this area. Wine tourism and its relationship to economic development is a relatively unexplored field, especially in relation to the United States. This means there are several possibilities for further discussion or exploration.

### **General Wine Tourism**

As previously stated there is little research on wine tourism (especially outside of Australia). In the United States wine tourism has been mainly focused on California (with some research in Texas). Many authors are careful to preempt their research by saying they are unsure that their findings can be extended to other countries around the world.

Because of varying terroirs (a group of vineyards from the same appellation), styles of grapes and differing cultural issues it is difficult for some of the findings in California to be translated to the rest of the country. It will be important for researchers to continue to conduct research in new and emerging wine regions to offer findings that are applicable to varying climates and concerns.

### **Wine Production and Tourism and the Latino Population**

The question of laborers does not seem to be addressed by much of the literature reviewed for this report. At least one interviewee in Walla Walla said that the field laborers are almost a hidden population in Walla Walla. The interviewee stated that, “this is a population that is not found in the downtown tasting rooms or clothing boutiques, and certainly not at Starbucks” (Personal Interview(7)). And yet, the Latino population is undoubtedly growing. How are cities supporting this population? How are they planning for the increase in the use of social services? How about any increase in crime?

Further research needs to be done on this population that almost necessarily comes with the increase in wine industry in the area. There may be other racial populations that increase in other areas, but in Walla Walla it is Latinos that are increasingly finding work at the vineyards.

### **Wine Tourism and Education Initiatives**

Wine tourism offers several opportunities for education to occur. This is true of both the visiting populations and the resident populations of the areas seeking to grow their tourism industry. This presents an opportunity for both the wineries in the area and the municipalities. The community college in Walla Walla has addressed the increase in wine tourism by developing a program that focuses on enology through the Center for Viticulture. More research is needed on both this program and others like it for other developing wine areas to consider modeling a program after.

Wine tourism experts have written that education is important to offering both a quality tourism experience and developing solid relationships with the host community. More research is needed to determine how to best integrate the educational institutions available in the community with both the tourists and the current residents.

## Discussion

This section details the economic development recommendations formed by the author and based on the issues identified by the interview subjects. Because this economic development strategy is focused on mitigating the negative effects of wine tourism as experienced by the residents, each of these negative effects and accompanying strategies will be addressed in turn.

### Decrease in Affordable Real Estate

The city currently has several organizations that address issues of affordable housing including the Walla Walla Housing Authority (WWHA). The WWHA oversees a number of housing and rental assistance programs (City of Walla Walla, 2007). From the commentary provided by interviewees (and the trends outlined earlier in this paper) it is clear that there is still a lack of affordable housing within the city limits. In addition to the numerous programs already offered by the WWHA, development of a community land trust should be considered. A community land trust (CLT) is a program in which ownership of the home and the land are separated (Green and Haines, 2002). Retaining the land in trust allows the CLT to control the resale price of the home and maintains affordability for future purchasers (Green and Haines, 2002). The major problem for this approach to increasing affordable properties is often a lack of financing, in this case, however, WWHA provides a stable base and well-established program through which to pursue grants. In addition, if the City is truly committed to providing affordable housing as outlined by their draft comprehensive plan, they may consider partnering with WWHA to make this type of program a more viable reality.

## Shift in Sense of Place

Several interview participants indicated being worried that Walla Walla did not feel the same as it did even four or five years ago. As tourism continues to increase it is possible that for some, their sense of place could deteriorate even further. The author suggests that to stem further loss of this sense of place the City of Walla Walla consider engaging in a vision planning process. Visioning is the practice of imaging what the residents, businesses and local leaders want the city to look like 10 or 20 years into the future. The beginnings of this visioning process took place during the development of the latest comprehensive plan, but needs to be extended in the future. The visioning plan and process should be treated as a separate document from the comprehensive plan. Having a clearly articulated vision that is endorsed by all stakeholders in the community will better guide development efforts into the future and will help to protect those assets important to the community.

## Overdevelopment

As identified earlier, overdevelopment is apparent in two manifestations, both the proliferation of second homes and the development of “big box” retail. This concern over development of commercial space can be addressed in a manner that protects the cultural aspects of the city, emphasizes the necessity of education as outlined by Policy 12 of the Draft Comprehensive Plan and addresses the lack of accommodations provided in the city limits.

The City should encourage the development of small hotels and bed and breakfasts that fit with the historical and cultural nature of the town. In addition to this development policy the City should consider partnering with Walla Walla Community College to develop a hospitality management program that will train students to own and run these types of establishments.

These new bed and breakfasts can be used as training facilities during the off-season when the demand on accommodations is typically low. The same is true of any type of commercial development such as restaurants or bookstores, which can be used to train business or restaurant management as well as culinary students in the off-season. This will avoid the problem of empty commercial space and will serve as an important education base for the community's workforce.

## **Traffic**

Traffic is both a source of frustration for existing local residents and a potential detractor to the overall tourism experience for visitors to the area. One possible solution to help alleviate the traffic issue is to encourage more usage of alternative modes of transportation throughout the Valley. Seventy-two percent of survey respondents indicated that "There is a need for official bike lanes in Walla Walla" (City of Walla Walla, 2007). Building on this suggestion the City should consider developing bike lanes throughout town and work with Tourism Walla Walla and the County to develop a bicycle tour route that incorporates several of the wineries. This type of infrastructure development could lead to the development of a bicycle rental or tour company to become part of the business community in Walla Walla.

Fortunately for Walla Walla, the weather allows for reasonable use of bicycling during much of the year meaning that this infrastructure improvement would probably be well used even outside of peak tourist season.

## **Summary of Economic Development Recommendations**

The recommendations presented here are by no means an all-encompassing economic development strategy, but are aimed at addressing the negative effects of wine tourism as identi-

fied by key stakeholders in the Walla Walla Valley. These recommendations are made in accordance with the goals and policies set forth by both the Port of Walla Walla and the City of Walla Walla as well as the best practices for economic development in tourism communities as outlined above. It is the hope of the author that these recommendations will be evaluated for their financial feasibility and likelihood for implementation.

## Summary

This paper explored the issues of wine tourism in a mid-sized rural community, specifically Walla Walla, Washington. The study found that many of the negative impacts experienced as a result of other types of tourism are also found in areas with wine tourism. The study utilized stakeholder interviews and e-mail questionnaires to identify the positives and negatives of wine tourism in the Walla Walla Valley. Using these issues, and the goals and policies of both the City and the Port as guiding tenets, the author proposed several economic development strategies aimed at mitigating the negative effects as identified by the interview respondents. This paper also identifies several areas where research in this area can be expanded.

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## Appendix A: City of Walla Walla Policies for Economic Vitality

- Policy 1. Strategies to assist and support local entrepreneurs should be identified and pursued
- Policy 2. Strategies to attract family wage jobs should be identified and pursued
- Policy 3. A diverse economic base should be developed to maintain a stable economy
- Policy 4. Appropriate commercial development should be allowed in neighborhoods
- Policy 5. Opportunities for public-private partnerships to implement development projects should be identified and pursued
- Policy 6. Owners of vacant commercial land should be encouraged to actively pursue development that is consistent with the City's vision for the future
- Policy 7. Regional economic development agencies should cooperate fully to ensure that all avenues of economic development are pursued to increase wealth and opportunity in the community
- Policy 8. Investment by the City in City infrastructure sets the stage for private development and should be a priority
- Policy 9. Tourism in Walla Walla is a significant contributor to the local economy. The continued development of tourism should focus on high quality experiences to complement the wine industry, including ego-tourism, heritage and culture seeking and adventure tourism
- Policy 10. A Wine Route should be established to better define and celebrate the winery experience in the Walla Walla area and to link wineries and tasting rooms
- Policy 11. Agriculture is a critically important part of the economy and culture of Walla Walla and it should be preserved within the region for the benefit of the region as a whole
- Policy 12. The region's institutions of higher learning are economic development, cultural and educational assets to the community. They attract and retain a high quality workforce and contribute to its stability. Their value to the community should be recognized and they should be included in efforts to enhance the vitality of Walla Walla

(City of Walla Walla, 2007).

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### Interview Protocol

**Proceeded by verbal consent script.**

#### Questions for City Officials

1. Is there an official economic development strategy for the City? (Probably ask during initial correspondence so that I can read it).
2. Please describe the overarching goals of Walla Walla's economic development strategy.
3. Is the City interested in maintaining its sense of rurality? Is this interest based on the desire of current residents?
4. When was this economic development strategy implemented? Last updated?
5. How effective has the strategy been in helping the City to reach its goals? How is this measured?
6. Please describe the role of the wine tourism industry in the City's economic development strategy.
7. What are the biggest barriers to increasing/improving tourism in Walla Walla?
8. Have citizens expressed any concern over increased tourism?
9. If so, what are these concerns and how has the City sought to address them?
10. Is there a method for predicting future infrastructure needs?
11. How are/should the effects of increased tourism be measured?
12. Are there any other policies or goals related to economic development and tourism that you'd like to discuss with me?

#### Questions for heads of Citizen Groups

1. Please describe the relationship between your organization and the wine industry.
2. Please discuss any recent activities or projects related to economic development, tourism or the wine industry your group has engaged in.
3. How many citizens would you say your organization represents?

4. From your organization's perspective, what have been the benefits to the community of the wine industry growth? Please describe any positive impacts you (or others in your organization) have experienced from the wine industry.
5. Please describe any negative impacts.
6. What recommendations would you have to the City for developing policy around economic development, tourism and the wine industry? If the City were to develop a new economic development strategy, please outline principles that would be important for you or your organization.
7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

### **Questions for Vintners or Representatives of the Wine Industry**

1. Where were you before moving to Walla Walla? What has the transition been like?
2. How many years has your vineyard been in operation?
3. Please describe the relationship between your winery/vineyard and the general community.
4. Are you part of the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance? Is there an overall business plan for this organization and what kind of growth does the WWVWA expect for the industry?
5. Please describe the relationship between your vineyard (or the wine industry at large) and the City.
6. Do you offer wine tastings or tours? If so, how often and in what season are the tours?
7. How many people visited your winery in 2007? Is this an increase over previous years? By how much?
8. Are you involved with any tourism organizations in the area? In what ways has involvement in this organization been beneficial for your winery?
9. How important is the promotion of wine tourism to the success of your business?
10. In what ways will wine tourism positively or negatively affect your winery? Your community?
11. What are the biggest barriers to improving wine tourism in Walla Walla?
12. What actions or policies would be most important to you in terms of improving wine tourism?
13. Does your business sponsor or participate in community events?

14. Does your winery hire local residents? In what capacity?

15. Are there any other policies, recommendations or issues you'd like to discuss with me today?