

# 2021 FEDERAL ADVOCACY PLATFORM: ROADMAP TO RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY

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On November 8, 2018, the Camp Fire left the Town of Paradise largely destroyed, forever changing the future of the community. The Town is focused on rebuilding the community into a safer, stronger, and more resilient Town. The federal government has been crucial to the Town's recovery thus far and will continue to play a key role as Paradise rebuilds for the future. The 2020-21 Federal Advocacy Platform: Roadmap to Recovery and Resiliency highlights the successes of the Town's partnership with the federal government and outlines how this partnership can be used to address the critical recovery needs that remain.

**Approved by Town Council on December 8, 2020**



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# TOWN OF PARADISE, CA



**Steve Crowder**

Mayor

**Jody Jones**

Vice Mayor

**Greg Bolin**

Councilmember

**Steve "Woody" Culleton**

Councilmember

**Rose Tryon**

Councilmember

\*\*\*\*

**Kevin Phillips**

Town Manager

Paradise Town Hall

5555 Skyway

Paradise, CA 95969

(530) 872-6291

[www.townofparadise.com](http://www.townofparadise.com)



# 2021 FEDERAL ADVOCACY PLATFORM



SUCCESSES: THE ROAD SO FAR

IMMEDIATE NEEDS:  
INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING



LONG-TERM GOALS:  
OUR RENEWED COMMUNITY

LESSONS LEARNED:  
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS





# SUCCESSSES: THE ROAD SO FAR

*The Town's Partnership with the Federal Government*

## RURAL COMMUNITY DESIGNATION

**Need** After the Camp Fire, the Town of Paradise's population fell from 26,800 to approximately 2,034. Paradise's original population exceeded thresholds for grant and loan programs offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). However, the post Camp Fire population met USDA population requirements.

**Result** In order to help bridge the gap between the official population counts for the Town, Congress approved legislative language in Section 108 the FY 2019 Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act (P.L. 116-20) that allowed the Governor to designate the Town as rural in nature until a revised population count was conducted as part of the 2020 Census. The designation qualified the Town to apply for immediate assistance under the USDA Rural Development programs.

## FEMA COST SHARE INCREASE FOR CATEGORIES A & B

**Need** Camp Fire emergency response and debris removal needs are extraordinary. While final costs of these activities are still unknown, they are estimated to be millions of dollars. This does not include the expense of staff and employee time, which is non-reimbursable under Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Public Assistance Program. The Town's share of the local match required for Categories A (debris removal) and B (emergency response) continues to climb, with required local matches far exceeding local resources.

**Result** Understanding the exceptional nature of the damages produced by the Camp Fire, Congress approved an increase in the federal share of assistance for Category A & B damages under FEMA's Public Assistance Program from 75% to 90% in Section 309 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019.



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## REMOVAL OF STANDING BURNT TREES

**Need** The removal of standing burnt trees is critical to the overall recovery of the Town. Tens of thousands of trees must be removed, and FEMA plays a critical role in this effort. Historically, FEMA has not funded the removal of standing burnt trees on private property that were threatening the public right-of-way. The Town worked with FEMA to explain how critical the removal of these trees is to the safety and recovery of the Town.

**Result** In 2019, FEMA approved the use of Public Assistance Program funding for the removal of standing burnt trees located on private property that are threatening a public right-of-way. The Town continues to advocate for the use of Public Assistance Program funding for the removal of standing burnt trees located on private property that are threatening private/orphan roads, but the decision made by FEMA thus far regarding trees threatening the public right-of-way has been significant and critical to the Town's recovery efforts.

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## USDA GRANT FOR BUILDING RESILIENCY CENTER

**Need** After the Camp Fire, the Town needed a place that could be used as a one-stop-shop for residents who are rebuilding or considering rebuilding in the Town of Paradise. Ensuring that residents have the resources to rebuild is essential to the recovery process.

**Result** USDA awarded the Town a \$148,300 grant to renovate a building donated by the Bank of America for use as the Town's "Building Resiliency Center" (BRC). The BRC was one of the first major community projects completed since the Camp Fire. The Town's building department is located inside the BRC, where residents can ask questions, apply for permits and get all the information they need to rebuild their home. The BRC also offers housing counseling services to help residents understand grants and other resources available for their housing needs. During COVID, the BRC is open by appointment only.



# IMMEDIATE NEEDS: INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING

*Supported by the Fiscal Year 2020/21 Disaster Recovery  
and Capital Improvement Plan*

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## FEMA COST SHARE FOR CATEGORIES C - G

**Background** The current reimbursement rate for FEMA Public Assistance Categories C-G is 75%. The Town anticipates one of its largest expenditures in recovery efforts to be the repair and replacement of damaged roads. Public roadways fall under FEMA's jurisdiction under Category C (roads). Early estimates predict total road repairs to be in the tens of millions of dollars, putting the Town's share at a level that could exceed its annual operating budget for normal road maintenance. The final cost of needed road repairs will not be known until further in the recovery effort as truck and freight movement in and out of the Town for debris removal, tree removal, and reconstruction continue. An increase in the federal cost share of FEMA Public Assistance funding would significantly reduce the Town's unmet funding needs.

**Goal** Advocate for an increase of the federal cost share for FEMA Public Assistance Categories C-G from 75% to 90% which is the same level of federal reimbursement for Categories A and B.

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## HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND REBUILDING

**Background** The Paradise Community Village, an affordable housing community in the Town, was lost in the Camp Fire. This housing community must be rebuilt to replace the lost housing and services. Currently, the Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP) is required to replace the lost housing and services in partnership with the Town of Paradise. After this first phase of housing is replaced through CHIP, there will be a need for a second phase that meets the additional community needs.

**Goal** Support funding for the rebuilding of affordable housing in the Town.



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## ROAD AND TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

**Background** A total of 100 miles of roads within the Town were destroyed by the Camp Fire. These same roads continued to experience damage as heavy vehicle traffic inundated the town during the fire response and clean-up. As reconstruction and recovery efforts continue, heavy construction vehicles continue to place a toll on the Town's on-system and off-system roads. In order to improve evacuation routes and pedestrian walkways, the Town must repair and improve roads that are within the circulation and evacuation option routes. The Town's damaged roads need to be repaired to not only support the ongoing recovery efforts, but to ensure our community has a safe and reliable transportation network. To date, an estimated \$100 million is needed to repair the Town's transportation system and the Town has been approved for \$77.3M in federal funding for the reconstruction of on-system and off-system roads. Funding for ongoing maintenance of the Town's public right of way remains a concern with the Camp Fire population decrease. Ongoing maintenance of the public right of way includes drainage system, fire fuels reduction, snow removal, hardscape, and annual road maintenance projects.

**Goal** Seek funding opportunities for the rebuilding of damaged roads within Paradise as well as those arterial roads that provide access to and from the Town. Seek funding for ongoing maintenance of the public right of way to further the Town's objectives.

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## WATER SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

**Background** The water system in the Town sustained physical damage as a result of the Camp Fire disaster, and repairing the system is a top priority for recovery and fire safety. The Town of Paradise supports the Paradise Irrigation District (PID) in its mission to restore potable water to the area. In order to repair the water system, PID is sampling all service laterals and mains in the distribution system for volatile organic compounds, replacing contaminated service laterals, and restoring potable water service to the system.

**Goal** Support and secure funding for PID's recovery and repair efforts to the Town's water system.

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## SEWER SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

**Background** Paradise has been seeking the means to install a sewer system to replace the current septic system throughout the Town. A critical first step in achieving that goal is to install a sewer system in commercial areas to incentivize economic growth and reduce environmental impacts. Commercial sewer system improvements would allow for cluster uses, such as restaurants and businesses, that currently are not feasible with the septic system, may be done in part with overall central business district revitalization.

**Goal** Secure funding to support the establishment and construction of a sewer system in the central business district of the Town.



# LONG-TERM NEEDS: RENEWED COMMUNITY

*Supported by Town of Paradise Long Term Recovery Plan*

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## EVACUATION ROUTES

**Background** The Town of Paradise places a priority on improving the evacuation routes for the community, which serve as the main roads into and out of the town. In order to best improve these routes, Paradise seeks to gather the empirical data needed to seek funding that would best improve the main evacuation routes including making improvements to roadway widths, eliminating ditches, and adding direction and message signs. Funding from the Economic Development Administration is being used to develop a Transportation Master Plan for the Town that incorporates evacuation routes.

**Goal** Secure funding to support the traffic study, planning, and construction of evacuation routes improvements.

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## EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

**Background** Reliable communications between emergency response agencies and the Town's citizens was critical to ensuring the safe evacuation of our community during the Camp Fire. As part of the Town's Long-Term Community Recovery Plan, the Town prioritized the installation of an early warning system that would improve the existing voluntary notification system, implement a mass notification system, and create an audible/alarm notification system. The system will allow the Town to communicate specific messages for emergency events, including the presence of a fire, as well as provide redundant and timeline alerts in addition to existing notification tools. The Town secured a Hazard Mitigation Grant to develop a Design & Scoping Plan for the project.

**Goal** Secure funding for construction of an Early Warning System within the Town.



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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

**Background** The Town of Paradise experienced economic damage and financial instability as a result of the Camp Fire and seeks to develop an economic strategy for recovery. A commercial market study may be the first step in developing this strategy and provide a foundation for the future of business and job creation. The study would then be used to develop a comprehensive Economic Development Plan to set policy direction and identify strategies and projects to improve the economy.

**Goal** Pursue funding and seek support for the economic development of Paradise including an initial economic study as well as longer term funding for the economic development plan and overall promotion of economic growth in the Town.

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## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Background** The Camp Fire resulted in a loss of jobs and businesses for many in Paradise. A Workforce Development Plan would ensure that the workforce needs of Paradise are understood and that there are opportunities available to adequately address those needs. Paradise seeks to develop a plan in partnership with Butte County, NoRTEC, and the Alliance for Workforce Development to ensure relevant training options and short- and long-term job opportunities for residents.

**Goal** Secure funding for vocational, training, and workforce development opportunities.

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## RESIDENT FIRE MITIGATION EDUCATION

**Background** Paradise should be a location for the study of fire safety, fire hazard area ecology, disaster recovery best practices, hardening research, vocational training, building in harmony with nature, etc. The Town of Paradise would like to pursue partnerships with educational institutions that could lead to programs and a potential space downtown.

**Goal** Chico State has expressed interest in creating a healing recovery and resiliency center and Paradise should partner with Chico State to do this. With Chico State as the lead for this project, Paradise should seek subsequent funding to support their development of the center. Potential federal funding opportunities for the center include DOI's Joint Fire Science Program, USDA's State and Private Forestry: Cohesive Fire Strategy Program, and FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program.

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## PUBLIC SAFETY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

**Background** The Town's public safety and law enforcement agencies were critical during the response to the Camp Fire event and remain a critical element of our recovery efforts. While the Town's population has declined post event, the community's public safety and law enforcement needs have not. In fact, their needs are even greater as they rebuild their damaged fleets and infrastructure and replace critical technology vital to fulfilling their roles in our community. In addition, it is a top priority of the Town's to ensure our public safety and law enforcement personnel remain safe.

**Goal** Secure funding to support the rebuilding of critical public safety buildings, restore damaged fleets, and upgrade aging and damaged technologies for the Town's police and fire departments.



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## WALKABLE AND WORKABLE DOWNTOWN

**Background** Paradise has previously been awarded funding for sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, and drainage facilities in the central business district. By coupling this investment with a focus on helping to revitalize the central business district of Paradise, the Town can increase the downtown area's walkability and workability, through public transportation and recreational opportunities.

**Goal** Secure funding and support from federal programs aimed at increasing access to the central business district and overall revitalization of Paradise's downtown area.

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## INTERCONNECTED PATH SYSTEM

**Background** In order to account for the future changes to the Paradise evacuation routes, new pathways and pedestrian lighting will be required along evacuation routes. These improvements will provide both a network for first responders to use in the event of a disaster as well as increased daily mobility for residents in addition to the reduction of vehicle traffic and increase in pedestrian connectivity.

**Request** Secure funding and support from federal and state programs that address pedestrian connectivity and pathways.

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## HIGH-SPEED DATA NETWORK

**Description** As part of the overall revitalization of the central business district and economic growth of the Town, Paradise needs improved internet connection and internet service distribution. The improved internet connection would be developed underground with other utilities to increase the safety of the lines and prevent additional utility poles from blocking evacuation routes. A potential route for federal funding could be to combine the internet connection with applications to overall downtown revitalization and economic growth through capital grants. The Butte Strong Fund, a local non-profit established to help Camp Fire recovery efforts, partially funded the development of a Broadband Feasibility Study with the Town of Paradise.

**Goal** Secure funding and support for a high-speed data network either through direct federal assistance or through a public-private partnership with an internet service provider in combination with federal funding assistance.

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## ENTREPRENEUR SUPPORT AND PROMOTION

**Background** Before the Camp Fire, Paradise had a small maker community for businesses and entrepreneurs which was affected by the fires and now needs assistance in recovery and revitalization. This renovation would coincide with the Town's internet and downtown revitalization goals and would expand upon current available room that exists to house business start-ups and provide affordable workspace.

**Goal** Seek funding and support to assist start-up business and local entrepreneurs, including further workforce enhancement and training.



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## FIX AND IMPROVE PARKS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE

**Background** Improving the park and path system is important to the overall recovery of Paradise as a baseline amenity. Specifically, recovery is needed to repair the fire damage to parks and recreation facilities including the replacement of the maintenance shop and burned playgrounds. In order to capitalize on the current park facilities in Paradise, a link of pathways is needed to provide greater accessibility to the Town’s recreation opportunities. Due to the ongoing risks of wildfire, the Town also wants to explore “shelter in park” options and the creation of neighborhood parks as evacuation zones.

**Goal** Secure funding to construct pathways, bikeways, and recreation facilities.

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## PUBLIC BUILDINGS

**Background** The Town of Paradise’s Town Hall is in need of improvement and repair as part of the Town’s recovery efforts. In addition, Fire Station 83, which was destroyed during the Camp Fire, must be relocated. Co-locating Town Hall with the police and fire stations into a new civic center facility located in the heart of the Town would increase safety and bring these critical facilities into conformance with Wildland building regulations. In addition, this renovation would centralize the revitalization of downtown.

**Goal** Seek funding and support for the redevelopment and relocation of a civic center for the Town that includes the fire station, Town Hall, and police facilities.

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## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

**Background** The Town of Paradise is working with the Butte County Association of Governments to plan the future of public transportation in Paradise including exploring unmet transit needs along Pentz Road and west of Skyway. Services will target increasing access to employment, housing, and education.

**Goal** Secure funding to improve and extend the current public transportation system in Paradise.

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## IMPROVE STORMWATER AND DRAINAGE SYSTEM

**Background** As the community of Paradise continues to rebuild, providing for adequate stormwater and drainage will be critical to the redevelopment processes. Sustainable stormwater and drainage investments would decrease the quantity of runoff and improve the quality of water. A study is needed to assess the additional erosion control management needed to prevent erosion, the number of open ditches along evacuation routes that need to be eliminated, and the detention basins and bioswales abilities to slow down and clean stormwater before it reaches natural systems. The Town has received some Hazard Mitigation funding for the repair of stormwater systems.

**Goal** Secure funding opportunities to upgrade and redevelop the current stormwater and drainage system in Paradise.



# LESSONS LEARNED: FUTURE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendations to protect communities and help them  
rebuild after major wildfire disasters*

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## DISASTER ZONE DESIGNATION

**Background** The Town of Paradise was devastated by the amount of destruction from the Camp Fire and faces a long road ahead for full economic recovery as the residential and business communities are rebuilt and reestablished. Building upon the Opportunity Zone program, the establishment of a Disaster Zone would help communities face rebuilding with support from federal agencies as well as private industry to spur the long-term investment needed for a full recovery. Assistance provided to communities under a Disaster Zone designation should also include direct federal assistance for grant administration as well as an expedited disbursement of federal aid from programs such as CDBG-Disaster Recovery and FEMA Hazardous Mitigation Grant Program.

**Goal** Advocate for the establishment of a Disaster Zone designation for communities with significant destruction in the aftermath of a major natural disaster.

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## INCREASE EFFICIENCIES IN POST-DISASTER RECOVERY EFFORTS TO ALLOW FOR FASTER IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMS

**Background** Post-disaster recovery efforts after the Camp Fire required close coordination between the Town, state agencies, and federal agencies, not to mention the Town's citizens, employees, contractors, and partners. The Town found that, at times, laborious and tedious processes to access federal and state resources often slowed down the implementation timeline for much needed recovery projects and programs. For instance, implementation of the Government Hazard Tree Removal Program was delayed several times in 2020 due to protests on the tree-felling bidding process. The delays resulted in the hazardous trees remaining a threat to the people and property in Paradise, delaying reconstruction in some cases, and resulting in trees falling and damaging standing homes and rebuilds.

**Goal** Advocate for the implementation of efficient processes and procedures that allow local, state, and federal agencies to respond quickly after a disaster and enable them to accelerate planning for and implementation of projects and programs that are vital to a community's immediate and long-term recovery efforts.



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## CREATE CENTRALIZED FEDERAL FUNDING APPLICATION

**Background** In the days, weeks, and months that followed the Camp Fire, the Town, its residents, and its businesses applied for federal assistance from a variety of sources, including from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Small Business Administration, and other federal agencies. Each agency and each program required a different application process and documentation which created a laborious process for not only the Town, but also for Paradise citizens. Establishing one centralized portal that gathers information and documentation once from applicants would create a more efficient flow of information, services, and assistance.

**Goal** Advocate for the establishment of a centralized disaster aid application process that provides simple and efficient access to federal resources for public agencies, business, and citizens in the aftermath of a major natural disaster.

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## EXPAND FEDERAL ROLE IN PERMANENT HOUSING AID FOR DISASTER SURVIVORS

**Background** Section 408 of the Stafford Act (42 USC 5174) provides FEMA with the authority to provide financial or direct assistance for permanent housing construction in “insular areas outside the continental United States and in other remote locations in cases in which—(A) no alternative housing resources are not available; and (B) the types of temporary housing assistance...are unavailable, infeasible, or not cost-effective.” If temporary housing assistance is not available, feasible, or cost-effective, FEMA should be able to assist with providing permanent housing solutions or at a minimum helping survivors attain permanent housing in the continental U.S. as well. In addition, a 2019 CRS report titled “Disaster Housing Assistance: Homeland Security Issues in the 116th Congress,” (IN11054) states that “FEMA provides temporary housing assistance to meet short-term and interim disaster housing needs; however, clearly defining the use of these programs and identifying a process to assist some disaster survivors with attaining permanent housing may be needed to comprehensively address disaster housing needs throughout all phases of recovery.”

**Goal** Advocate for Congressional evaluation of how and when federal agencies should assist disaster survivors in attaining permanent housing.