

My colleague, Cheryl and I have a lively ongoing debate about why people move to a new community. My side of the argument is that people move for jobs. Her side is that people move for amenities, family, or some other reason and then find a job. We share articles with each other that support our own sides of the issue.

Thinking back, I have moved for a job twice and for location once. When my wife and I got married, we worked in different towns, so we picked a town in between and moved there and both commuted for a while. Other than that, we moved simply because I got better jobs in other communities. When applying for different jobs in the past, I have always looked at the community before applying to see if the salary being offered was able to purchase a similar or better home than what we currently have. In some communities, Estes Park, Colorado for example, I could double my current salary and still end up living in a trailer house because that is all we could afford. So yes, housing and amenities do come into play, but I'd never move anywhere without having a job lined up first, I'm just too risk averse. Do jobs in your community pay enough to purchase adequate housing for a family?

Recently, I seem to be on the losing end of this debate more than I would like to admit. There were many articles that came out in the past year or so like this one from Fortune that said people moving for a job hit a record low. <https://fortune.com/2023/05/16/new-job-relocate-moving-pandemic-hybrid-work-mortgage-rates/> It may be that remote and hybrid positions have changed how things worked...or it may be that I am wrong, but I'd never admit that.

My colleague argues that the majority of people decide to move first for better amenities and quality of life, then they look for a job. There are many studies and surveys that show that to be true. Ben Winchester from University of Minnesota Extension has done research into what he calls the Rural Brain Gain Migration. (<https://extension.umn.edu/economic-development/rural-brain-gain-migration>) His findings suggest that people migrate to communities for a simpler life, safety and security, affordable housing, outdoor recreation, and quality schools. He goes on to talk about how many high school graduates return to rural areas in their 30's and 40's. They are looking for the qualities listed above.

Winchester goes on to say, "There are people choosing to move to your town for what you are today and what you will be – not what you were." Is your community living in the past? We used to have 2 grocery stores, our downtown used to be full, we used to have a k-12 school. Instead of we now have a dynamic new coffee shop, we now have a great grocery store, our downtown has 3 spots

open for new entrepreneurs. Sometimes those looking at your community see things that you can't see while you live there. When I visit the communities in my area I like to drive around before talking to anyone. I'll ask those that I'm talking to about new and interesting things in their community and a lot of the time they have no answer and I will be able to list off two or three new or interesting things that I saw during my drive around town. It is easy to fall into the trap that says our community is boring or that it never changes. Communities change all the time, and people who are looking to move to a rural place for a simpler life can sometimes see that the community has a lot more going for it than the locals realize. Take time to explore your community with fresh eyes, talk to people who move into your community.

If you are interested in learning more about this topic, please look at my colleague Marilyn Schlake's article found here:

<https://ruralprosperityne.unl.edu/rural-movers-studies-people-are-moving-community-attributes-and-jobs>

If your community could benefit from any of the Rural Prosperity Nebraska ideas that I've discussed in this column, please reach out to me. I'd love to speak to your community about these topics. You can reach me at [jason.tuller@unl.edu](mailto:jason.tuller@unl.edu) or at the Thayer County office at 402-768-7212.

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