

Economic Development Plan for Lamar, CO: A Competition with Neighboring La Junta, CO

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Describe the Problem

All across America's Midwest there are hundreds of small and medium sized communities that are struggling to remain alive, vibrant, and relevant to the families who live there. Many of these cities were established during the frontier expansion of the United States during the 19th century. They served as the highways and supply lines carrying eastern goods across the country and for delivering farm produce to both coasts. They are the typification of the term "Small Town America". However, as the wealth, resources, and opportunities of the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first century have greatly expanded in metropolitan areas, these small towns have remained stuck with low incomes and few opportunities for the next generation that is raised there.

This report uses Four Square location data and machine learning techniques to explore and compare two of these towns in Southeastern Colorado. The objective is to identify the advantages and quality of living in both towns. The data and report will be useful to the cities' leaders as they seek to develop a more robust economy for their community.

This report is structured as a consulting product commissioned by the city leaders of Lamar, CO to assist them in competing for economic opportunities with their historical rival, La Junta, CO.

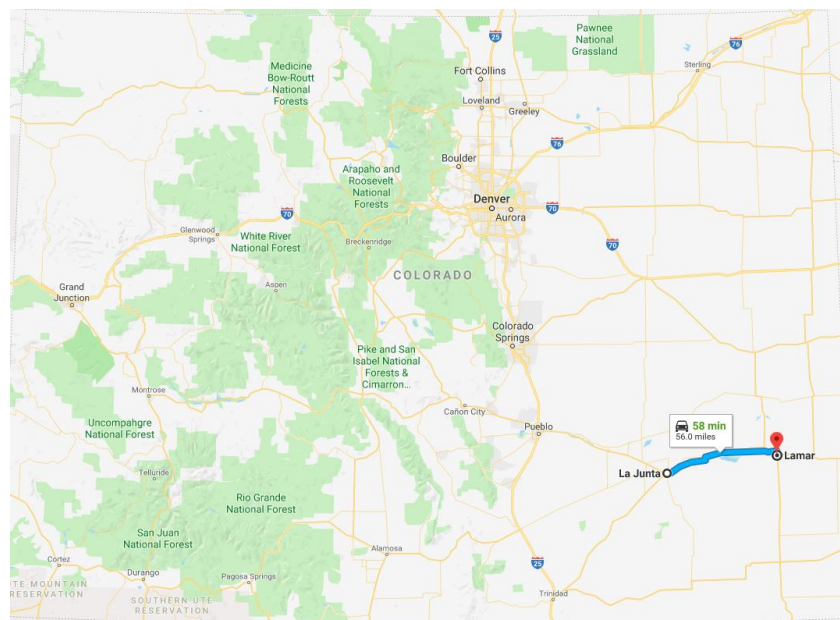


Image: produced with Google Maps

Discuss Background

The two towns selected for this study are Lamar, CO, and La Junta, CO. The towns have very similar histories, locations, economies, and population sizes. Both serve as the county seat and are the largest communities in their respective counties. Both towns were established in the 1880's along the Arkansas River and the Santa Fe Trail, which was the major commercial highway from Missouri to Santa Fe New Mexico from 1820 to 1920, with its peak occurring around 1880.

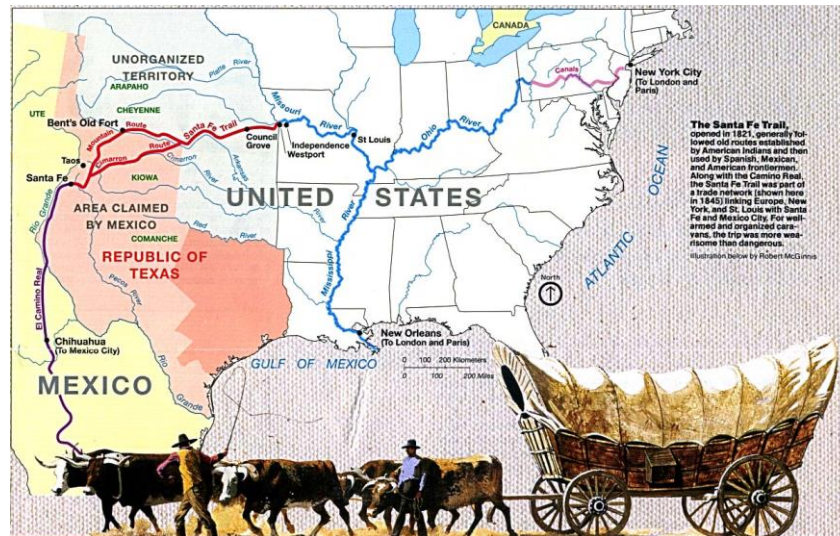


Image from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Fe_Trail

Lamar, Colorado

Lamar is the county seat for Prowers County and reports a 2017 population of 7,601. The census identifies it as 75% white and 44% Hispanic, with all other races having less than 2% each. (Note: census race categories are overlapping, so totals are always more than 100%.) Median income for the city is \$31,521. Per capita income is \$16,944.



Image from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamar,_Colorado

The towns largest industry is its surrounding agricultural and ranching production. Primary agricultural crops are dry land wheat, alfalfa, and corn. Primary animal products are beef with intermittent forays into pork.

La Junta, Colorado

La Junta is the county seat for Otero County and reports a 2017 population of 6,898. The census identifies it as 74% white and 44% Hispanic, with all other races having less than 2% each. (Note: census race categories are overlapping, so totals are always more than 100%.) Median income for the city is \$29,002. Per capita income is \$14,928.



Image from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Junta,_Colorado

The towns largest industry is its surrounding agricultural and ranching production. Primary agricultural crops are cantaloupes, watermelon, and alfalfa. Primary animal products are beef with a small number of chicken facilities.

Describe Data

Initial Four Square queries of activities and businesses in both cities provide the following overviews. This high-level review of the data indicates that the reports from the two cities are not collected and created according to the same criteria. It appears that for Lamar, many businesses are listed as both “Food” and “Breakfast” and the same has not been done for La Junta businesses. This fact will skew mathematical analysis and should be accounted for in the final analysis and recommendations.

	Lamar, CO	La Junta, CO
Food	30	8
Coffee	4	2
Nightlife	8	4
Fun	8	3
Shopping	8	4
Breakfast	14	4
Top Picks (Trans-categorical)	30	30

Four Square maps showing the “Top Picks” in the core of each town are provided.

Data Science Capstone: Week 4 Assignment

Top Picks: Lamar, CO

FOURSQUARE Top Picks Current Map View

Suggestions for Top Picks near Lamar

Filters: Specials Haven't Been Following Price Open Now Saved Liked

- 1. Thai Spicy Basil** (7.3)
Thai • \$\$\$ • View Menu
10 N Main St, Lamar
Save
Jeff H. • April 14, 2010
Probably the best place to eat in Lamar.
- 2. Happy Garden** (6.8)
Chinese • \$ • View Menu
Lamar
Save
- 3. SUBWAY** (6.6)
Sandwiches • \$ • View Menu
908 N Main St, Lamar
Save
- 4. SONIC Drive In** (6.6)
Fast Food • \$ • View Menu
1001 N Main St, Lamar
Save
Chris K. • January 8, 2012
not open at 8 am?
- 5. Dunkin Donuts** (6.5)
Donuts • \$ • View Menu
Lamar
Save

Map of Lamar, CO showing numbered pins (1-30) and landmarks like Riverside Cemetery and Willow Creek Park.

Top Picks: La Junta, CO

FOURSQUARE Top Picks Current Map View

Suggestions for Top Picks

Filters: Specials Haven't Been Following Price Open Now Saved Liked

- 1. El Azteca Mexican Restaurant** (8.1)
Mexican • \$ • View Menu
650-698 W 3rd St, La Junta
Save
Cody M. • August 18, 2011
Get the El Azteca burrito. Best burrito in town.
- 2. Bamboo Panda** (7.6)
Asian • \$\$ • View Menu
313 Colorado Ave, La Junta
Save
Elaine D. • January 7, 2012
Twice Cooked Pork and Pork Lo Mein are two of my faves
- 3. Lucy's Taco** (7.6)
Mexican • \$ • View Menu
1-99 E 3rd St, La Junta
Save
Mikeal Juli M. • November 20, 2013
Tried both the chili relleno burrito and a breakfast burrito
- 4. The Copper Kitchen** (7.0)
Diner • \$ • View Menu
116 Colorado Ave, La Junta
Save
Nikkie D. • February 6, 2018
Giant biscuits and gravy

Map of La Junta, CO showing numbered pins (1-30) and landmarks like Fairview Cemetery and La Junta High School.

The information about these two towns will be compared using machine learning techniques in order to estimate quality of living in the two towns, to identify weaknesses or unmet needs in each town, and to

recommend actions that might be taken by city leaders to stimulate growth, attract businesses, retain citizens, and improve the quality of living in the town.

Data Limitations

Throughout this course we have seen how extensive the databases are on major cities like New York and Toronto. It is also clear that managing and analyzing this volume of data is significantly aided by machine learning techniques. However, within the United States there are only 10 cities with a population of over one million. There are over 16,000 with a population of under 10,000. Therefore, it is important to understand to what degree the data and techniques from this course can be applied to these smaller communities.

Number of cities, towns and villages (incorporated places) in the United States in 2015, by population size

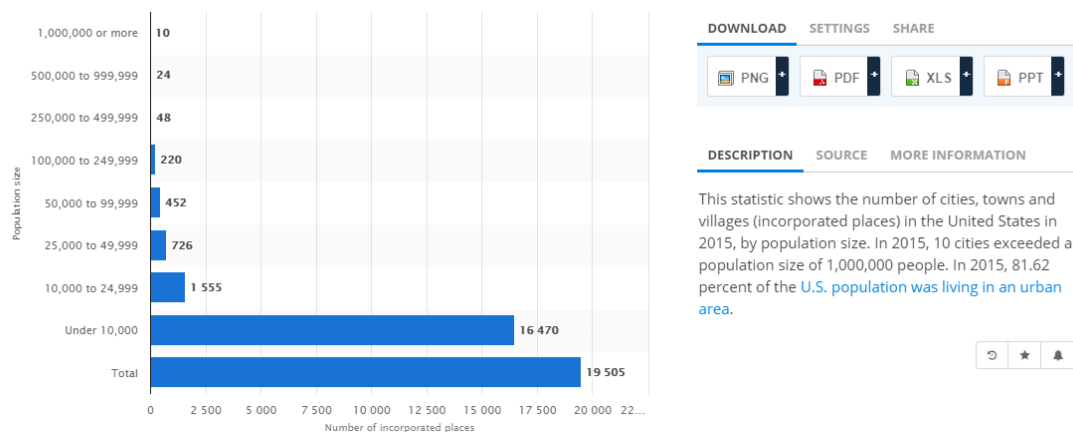


Image: from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/241695/number-of-us-cities-towns-villages-by-population-size/>

Author's Note

The author grew up in this area and experienced the various rivalries between these two towns for business, agriculture, government offices, external investment, and in high school sports.