



## NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING

### WHY IT MATTERS

Casper's unique context (scenic/recreational amenities + abundant energy resources + historic Western heritage & culture) creates the need for creative planning and policy approaches to housing. Maintaining an attractive and diverse housing stock is vital to ensuring that the City of Casper remains an appealing community for all types and ages of people, as well as attaining its economic development goals. Available homes must be suitable for all life stages and lifestyles in order to attract and keep a sustainable workforce. The cyclical Wyoming economy and changing demographics are altering the dynamics of the local housing market, requiring an updated understanding of local housing needs. The housing element of the plan includes a current depiction of the demographic and economic characteristics that impact housing affordability and preferences.

### KEY POINTS + ASSUMPTIONS

**Net migration, a function of local employment prospects, is the key driver of Casper housing needs.**

**Employment prospects in Casper have historically been volatile – rising and falling in response to both national business cycles and energy sector supply/demand forces.**

**Based on the natural increase rates, Casper has the potential for additional (but hard to predict) growth in housing needs.**

**Broader demographic forces--namely, growth in Baby Boomer and Millennial age cohorts -- will push higher-than-usual demand for smaller, low-maintenance housing and entry-level single-family housing, respectively.**

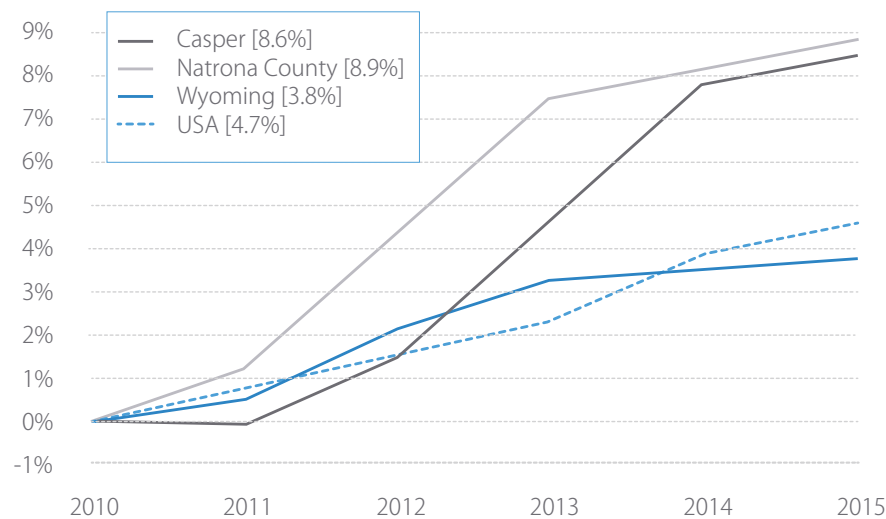
**Opportunities for infill to satisfy housing needs are prominent.**

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Overview

Wyoming is prototypical Great American West – extremely low density, self-sufficient, individualistic and outdoors-oriented – occasionally converging in a handful of larger urban centers, like Casper, where commerce, industry, culture, government and education come together. Here, a key housing policy question is “how to accommodate these strong Western values with quality and efficiently designed urban form?”

FIGURE 2-1. POPULATION GROWTH, 2010-2015

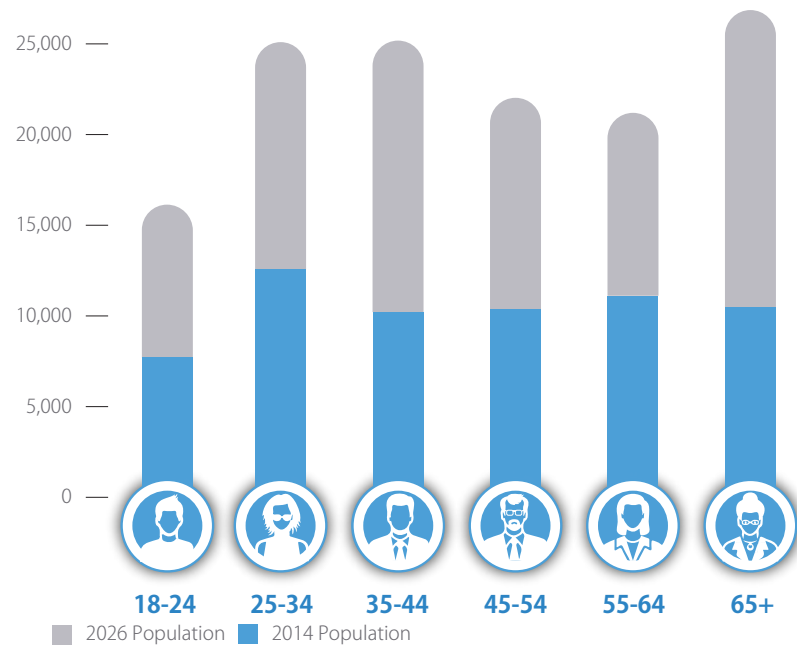


Source: US Census Bureau, Census 2010, Esri Forecasts for 2016 and 2021

## Population

Casper’s total population is estimated to be just over 60,000 residents, increasing from 55,000 in 2010 (**Figure 2-1**). The population growth in Casper over the next 5 years is expected to be around 1.5% annually. The recent economic downturn may reduce those projections; however, recent school enrollment figures do not show a decrease in students. This suggests some resiliency since the last downturn. As elsewhere, Natrona County’s growth in the next decade will be dominated by increases in the senior (age 65+) population and in the 35-44 category (**Figure 2-2**), driven by aging across the two largest generational populations, Baby Boomers and Millennials, respectively.

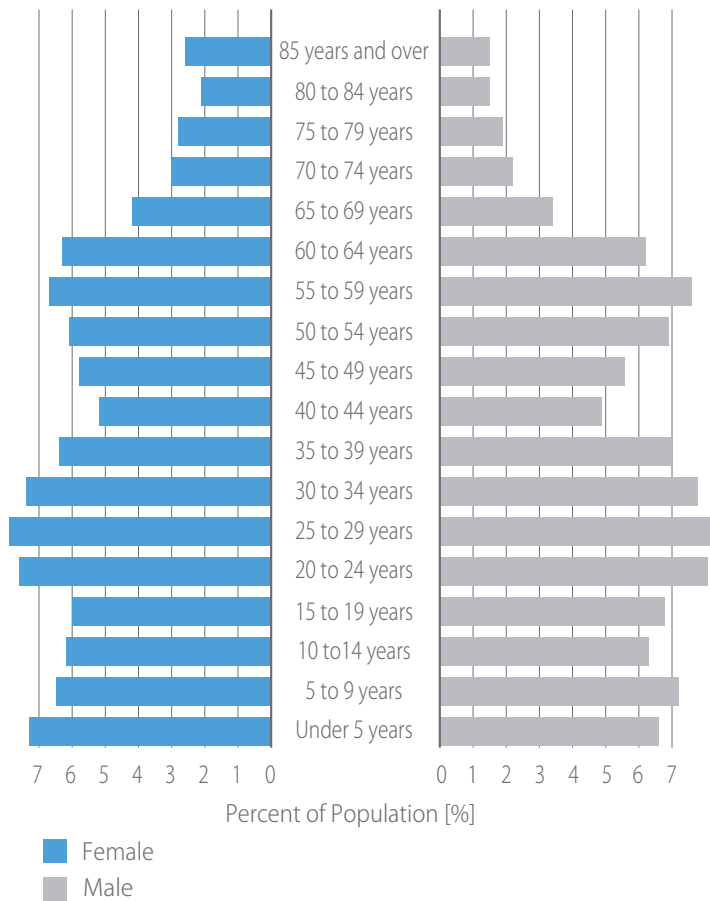
FIGURE 2-2. NATRONA COUNTY PROJECTED POPULATION GROWTH BY AGE GROUP



Legend: 2026 Population (Grey), 2014 Population (Blue)

Source: Wyoming Department of Administration and Information, Economic Analysis Division (<http://eadiv.state.wy.us>)

FIGURE 2-3. CASPER POPULATION PYRAMID 2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

As indicated in **Figure 2-3**, the Millennials (currently aged 20 to 34) are the second largest percentage of the population within the City of Casper. Boomers are the largest percentage of the population (currently spanning ages 52 to 70).

Boomers, at least nationally, should generally spur demand for smaller, lower-maintenance housing, along with more units geared towards seniors needing targeted amenities or even professional on-site care. In urban Wyoming, it remains to be seen how retirement living needs will translate into Western tastes: with some opting for low-density “mini-spreads” versus more typical smaller-footprint senior living arrangements. While Wyoming’s dry, sunny climate appeals to many retirees, the often harsh winters will lead other seniors to opt for more forgiving climates.

Boomers have been changing the urban landscape by spurring the completion of “Boomer Studies,” which have provided municipalities the opportunity to assess infrastructure and services throughout the community. Ultimately, what is being recommended (health care, workforce development, housing, accessible transportation, and community design) are best practices for community planning and services.

Millennials have recently helped fuel an upsurge in nationwide apartment demand as they pass through their twenties and early thirties. While that rental segment will remain large over the near term, its rate of growth will level off, replaced by greater need for starter homes for the next generation and their growing families.

The next generation, Generation Z, will continue to transform economics, urban form, and infrastructure. They were born with technology at their finger tips, becoming the most social, entrepreneurial, educated, and globally aware generation.

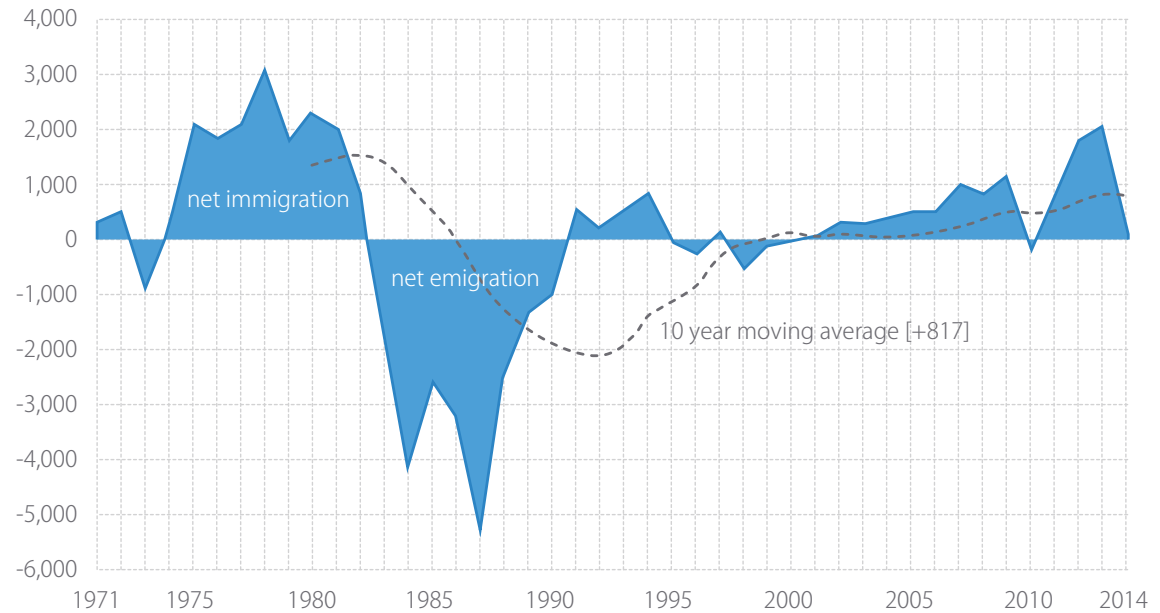
**“Families are the future; to thrive you need to appeal to all groups from single adults to young families, to growing families, empty nesters and retirement. The small town feel is important because it shows we care for each other, we look out for each other.” - Public Comment**

Net migration (**Figure 2-4**), one of the functions of local employment prospects, is a key driver of Casper housing needs. Population growth in the Casper area has historically been driven by major swings in net migration, depending on oil, gas and even coal industry hiring needs. That volatility is still being seen today, although perhaps not to the extent seen in the 1970s and 1980s. With data through 2014 only, **Figure 2-4** is missing the ongoing downswing being experienced with the latest downswing in petroleum commodity pricing.

Since the mid-1990s, rates of natural increase, due to rates of births and deaths, has settled into a reasonably steady average net gain of just over 400 new county residents annually. Casper has the potential for additional (but hard to predict) growth in housing needs.

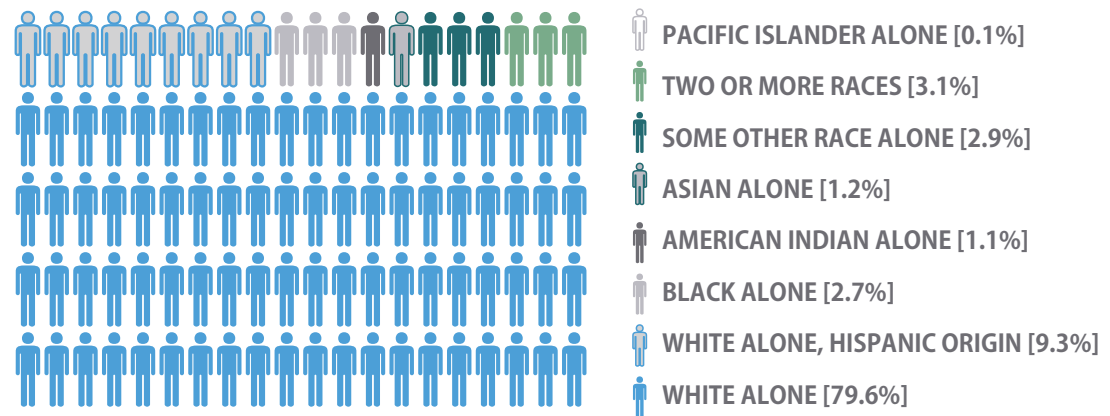
Casper is considerably less ethnically diverse than the nation. Its only major minority group, Hispanics, represent 9.3% of the population (**Figure 2-5**), up from 7.4% just six years ago. That share is considerably lower than the nationwide figure of nearly 18%.

FIGURE 2-4. ANNUAL NET MIGRATION, NATRONA COUNTY



Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Wyoming Department of Health

FIGURE 2-5. CASPER POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2016

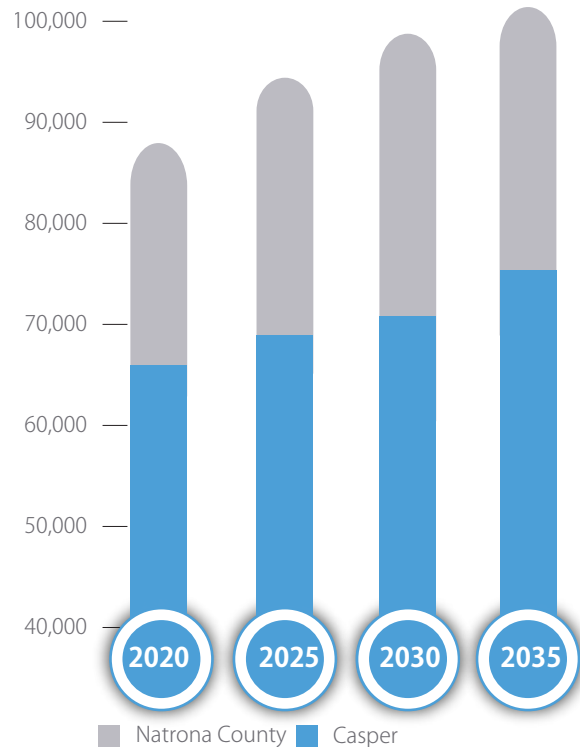


Source: ESRI, estimates based U.S. Census Bureau/ACS data

## Population Forecasts

The future population forecast is expected to be between 1-2% according to the Wyoming Economic Analysis Division. Within the planning horizon of this Plan of 10-20 years, Casper is expected to grow to about 70,000 to 75,000 people (**Figure 2-6**).

FIGURE 2-6. POPULATION FORECASTS



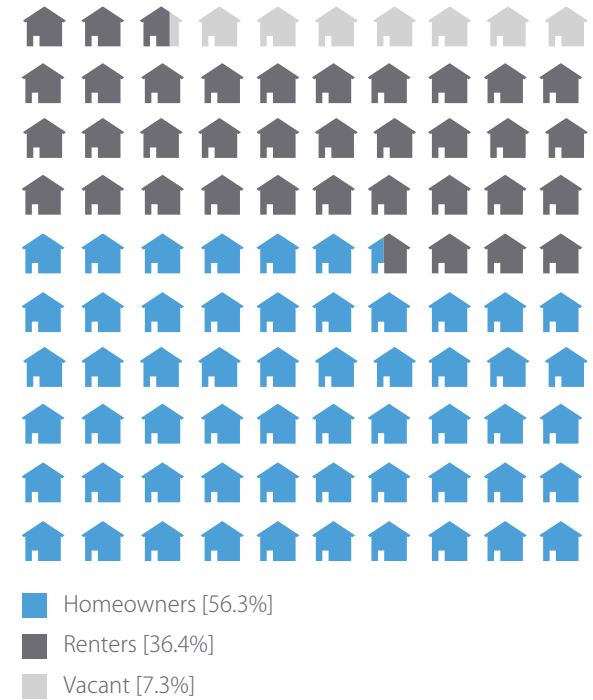
Source: Wyoming Department of Administration & Information, Economic Analysis Division, 2015

## Household Characteristics

As of 2016, the City of Casper had approximately 25,000 households residing in approximately 27,000 housing units, for a vacancy rate of 7.3%, compared to 11.3% nationally. Household ownership rates are just below that for the nation, with Casper having just over 36% renters (as a share of all occupied units). On average, there are 2.40 people in each Casper household, somewhat smaller than the national average of 2.59. In Casper, 28.5% of households have just one member, versus 26.7% nationally (**Figure 2-7**).

Casper has significantly more divorced residents, per capita, compared to the nation (16.5% versus 11.0%) – a phenomenon that can lead to greater need for flexible, more temporary housing arrangements (such as apartments) that would otherwise be suggested by age profiles alone.

FIGURE 2-7. CASPER HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS, 2016



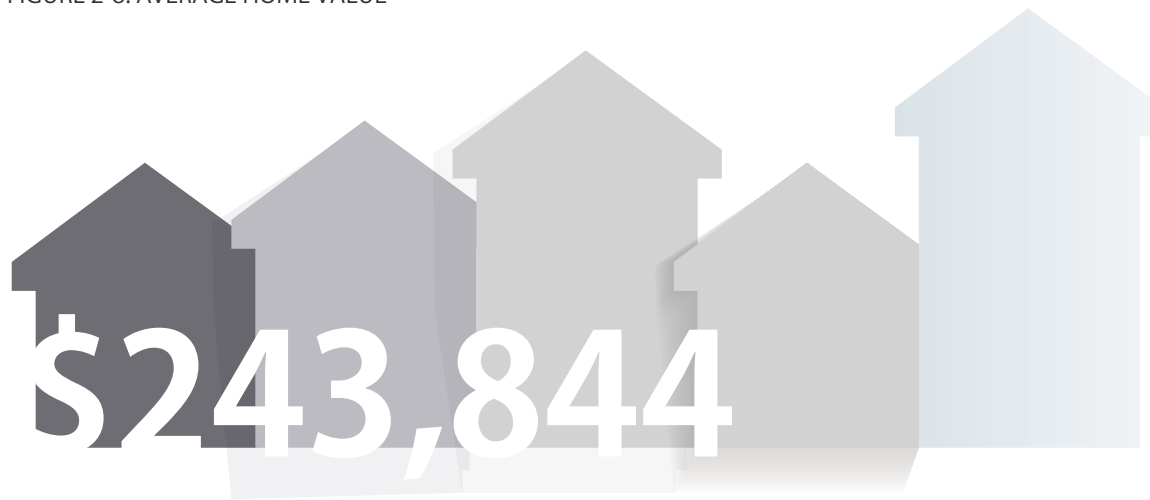
Source: ESRI estimates, based on U.S. Census data

The majority (70.2%) of housing units in Casper are single-family detached homes, with another 2.5% attached. Multi-family units make up 23% of the housing units. The average home value is \$243,844 (Figure 2-8). Casper's average per capita income of \$31,979 (discussed further in the next section) creates a gap, although not significant, in affordability.

There is currently a mix of historic and some new building stock in the urban center which are primarily three to four stories. There is the ability to go vertical without obstructing mountain views. New residential rooftops would add “eyes on the street” for safety and boost spending density in support of retail.

Outside of central Casper, there will always be demand for lower density homes with large private yards, even for the rental market. Rather than ignore this ingrained Western preference, planning can focus on ways to make such patterns more efficient.

FIGURE 2-8. AVERAGE HOME VALUE



Source: ESRI estimates, based on U.S. Census data



## Population Workforce

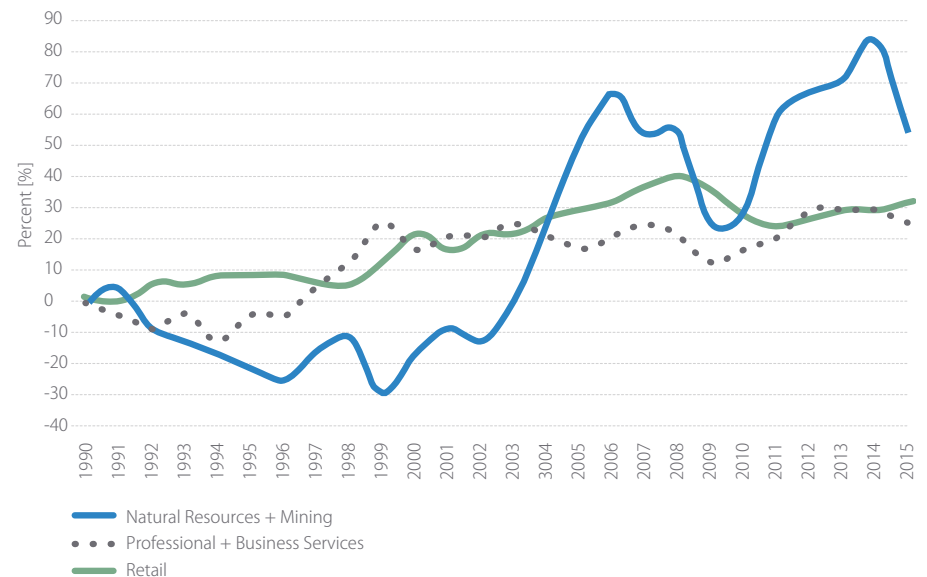
While Casper has fewer college grads (25.4% have a baccalaureate degree, versus 30.5% nationally), it actually has more adult residents that have attended “at least some college” when compared to the US overall (69.3% versus 59.6%). Casper has 26% of its population working in so-called “blue collar” occupations versus 21% nationally.

In boom times, the draw of relatively high-paying jobs in skilled trades can outweigh the perceived benefits of a lengthier university stay. It remains to be seen whether the current downturn will lead towards re-enrollment for some college students whose degree paths were interrupted by ready employment.

**Figure 2-9** reflects the relative volatility in traditional energy-sector industries, relative to more stable sectors such as professional services and retail, which tend to flourish in evenly-growing diversified economies.

**Figure 2-10** illustrates the major industry groups in which Wyoming residents are employed. Even though this graph does not reflect job losses occurring since the recent oil and gas downturn, it shows both retail and health/education services sectors as being a larger employer than mining/extraction. This understates the relative importance of oil and gas in the local economy. Mineral extraction is a so-called “basic-sector” industry – meaning that each job directly involved in oil/gas tends to indirectly increase employment in other sectors especially transportation, construction, wholesaling, lodging, and dining as money flows into the local economy from outside.

FIGURE 2-9. WYOMING EMPLOYMENT, GROWTH SINCE 1990

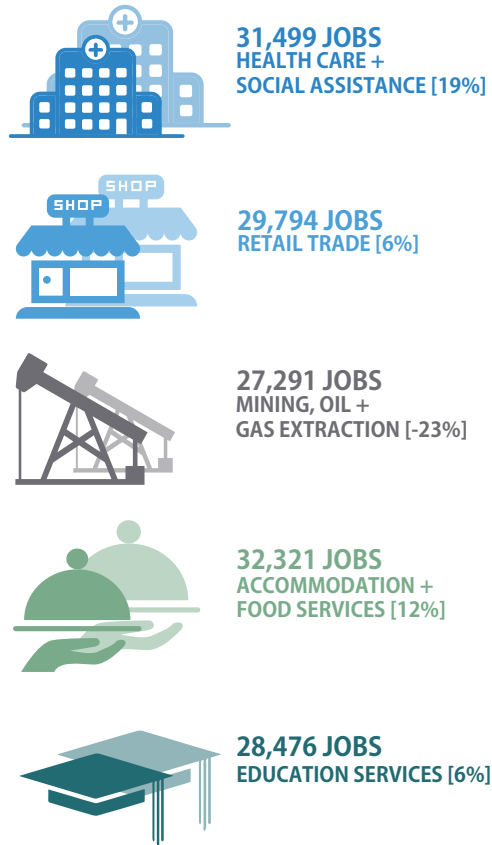


Source: Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (using BLS data)

While energy extraction can greatly benefit the local economy during boom times, the lack of economic diversity puts housing policy in reactive mode by chasing new construction when energy jobs boom and solving vacancy and affordable housing needs during decline periods. **Map 2-1** shows dots representing where workers live (by census block) in the Casper area.

Dots are sized proportionally by the number of worker residents and shaded to indicate their wage levels, with green shading indicating higher wage brackets (and more prevalent in south Casper). Brown-shaded dots are lower wage brackets, and are especially concentrated in north-central Casper. This shows a division in wealthier and lower-income neighborhoods.

FIGURE 2-10. 2014 TOP 5 WYOMING INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT AND 2024 GROWTH PROJECTIONS (%)



## CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVE

Consensus amongst Casperites is that there is a need for more types of housing stock in the urban center. More market-rate housing targeting young professionals is desired, along with housing for seniors and families, to supplement the existing affordable and assistance-based housing.

From a housing standpoint, Downtown Casper represents an underutilized asset. A large desire exists to add smaller format rental and ownership choices within a walkable urban environment with the potential to leverage and add to cultural/retail/dining amenities. These amenities will be harder to support without additional housing within the urban center.

Residents want more public places in each neighborhood, through neighborhood parks, community gardens, and corner shops or cafes, which contribute to preserving the small-town characteristics that Casperites love. Residents want more mixed-use development in residential neighborhoods that would provide a few amenities within walking distance from home.

The community values connected, safe, and friendly neighborhoods, and wants to see those characters preserved as Casper grows. This goes hand-in-hand with the small-town feel that is so appreciated amongst Casperites. As Casper grows and further develops the urban center, the public wants the City to preserve the small-town feel, especially in the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Source: Bullard, D. (2016). Wyoming Long-Term Industry Projections, 2014-2024. Research & Planning, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services. Retrieved from <http://doe.state.wy.us/LMI/projections.htm>Source:



MAP 2-1. CASPER WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION AND WAGE RATES

