

UPTON
BEST TOWN ON
EARTH

Upton Housing Report

August 2024

An analysis of the general housing needs of the Town of Upton, Wyoming

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Introduction

The Town of Upton desired to have a housing report completed to compile data on current and future housing needs in the area. With no professional companies available to complete the report, Town of Upton staff took on the task in the Fall of 2023 by initiating a community survey.

Goals

The multiple goals of the report include:

- ▶ Analyzing of the existing housing
- ▶ Identify gaps in or unmet housing needs
- ▶ Engage with developers to address housing
- ▶ Share the true needs for housing in Upton

Methodology

Resources utilized to obtain information for the Housing Report included a public survey, studies from surrounding areas and the Wyoming Community Development Authority Housing Needs Assessment released in February 2024. Staff collected and analyzed data from 2023 to 2024. Data sources included:

- U.S. Census Bureau
- Wyoming State A&I Department, Economic Analysis Division
- Records and data from the Town
- Interviews with City officials, community leaders, housing stakeholders, etc.
- WCDA
- Surrounding area completed studies
- Citizen survey
- Harvard Growth Lab Pathways to Prosperity study

Limitations

This Housing Report represents an analysis performed by staff with the relevant data available at the time of the Report. The findings and recommendations are based upon current solutions and the best available information. Significant changes in the area's economy, employment growth, federal or State tax policy or other related factors could change the conclusions and recommendations contained in this Housing Report.

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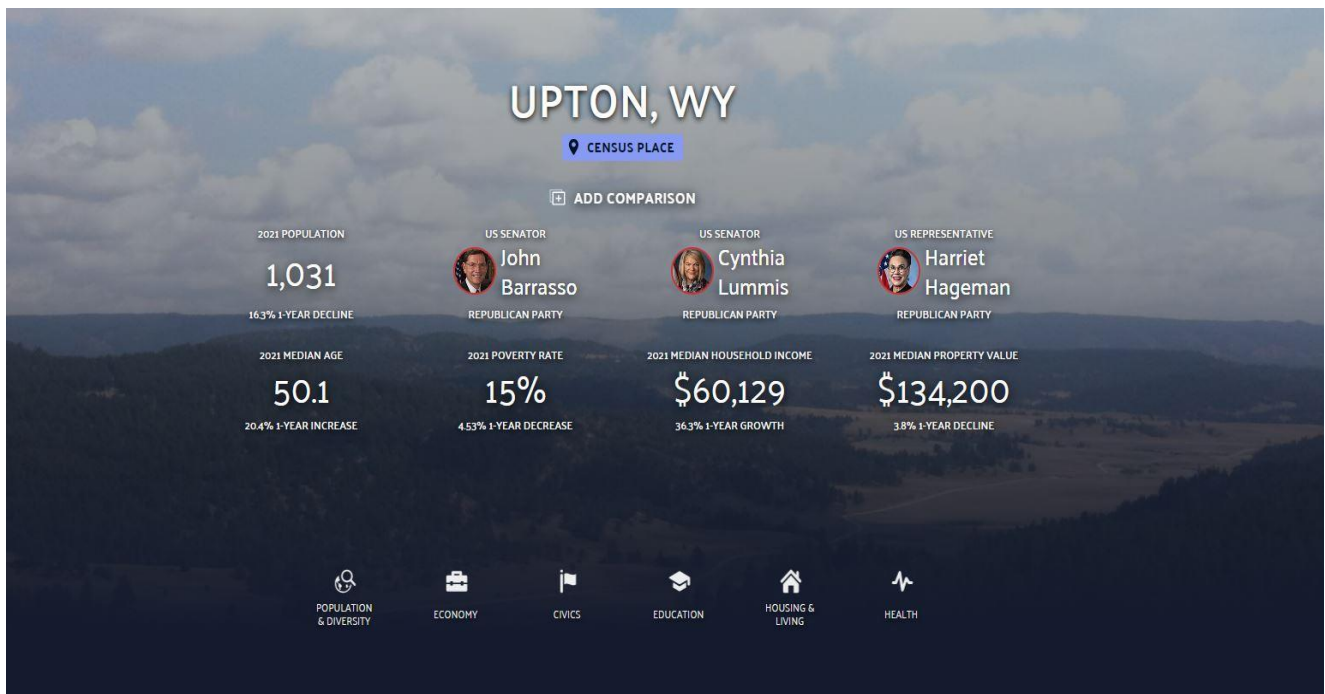
Demographic Data Overview

Sources of Data

The following pages contain demographic data obtained from a variety of local, state and national sources for the Town of Upton, a surrounding Market Area, and Weston County. The Upton Market Area includes the Town of Upton, the City of Newcastle and unincorporated areas of Weston and Crook counties.

At the time that research was completed for this Report, updated information from 2021 was available from the U.S. Census Bureau. Many cities and towns in Wyoming have questioned the accuracy of the 2020 decennial census, though none have officially challenged the findings to date, including Upton.

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the WCDHA Housing Needs Study, the Harvard Growth Lab's Pathways to Prosperity study and the Wyoming Economic Analysis Division proved most helpful in compiling the demographic information contained in this Report.



Source: U.S. Census

Population Data and Trends

Table 1 Population Trends - 1990 to 2020							
	1990 Census	2000 Census	% Change 1990-2000	2010 Census	% Change 2000-2010	2020 Census	% Change 2010-2020
Upton	980	872	-11%	1,100	26.1%	898	-18%
Newcastle	3,185	3,065	-4.8%	3,532	8.7%	3,374	-4%
Market Area	11,812	12,531	4%	14,291	12%	14,264	-
Weston County	6,518	6,644	2%	7,208	8.5%	6,838	-5%

Source: Economic Analysis Division

- ▶ The release of population totals from the 2020 U.S. Census has established a new benchmark for the number of people residing in each jurisdiction. The Census total had an effective date of April 1, 2020.
- ▶ The Census records people and households based on their place of permanent residence. Those living in the area only seasonally or those who did not respond to the census survey may not be accounted for in the 2020 U.S. Census.
- ▶ In 2020, the population for the **Town of Upton** was 898 people. When compared back to the 2010 Census, the Town had lost 228 permanent residents, for a population decrease of 18%.
- ▶ Since the release of the 2022 U.S. Census information, Upton has seen an influx of new residents from all over the United States.
- ▶ In 2020, the population for the **City of Newcastle** was 3,374 people. When compared back to the 2010 Census, the City had lost 158 permanent residents, for a population decrease of 4%.
- ▶ The population level for the entire **Market Area** decreased slightly between 2010 and 2020. The combined area jurisdiction experienced a net loss of 27 permanent residents, for a nominal decrease.
- ▶ In 2020, the population level for all of **Weston County** was 6,838, down by 370 people since 2010 for a population decrease of 5%.
- ▶ Current benchmark data was updated and released in 2022.

Population by Race/Ethnicity

- ▶ In 2020, nearly 95.2% of **Weston County's** residents were identified as White for race. The next largest racial designation was for people listing "Two or more races", at nearly 3.6% of the County's population. Native Americans represented less than 0.1% of the County's population. Just 4.3% of residents were identified as Hispanic/Latino for ethnicity.
- ▶ Due to the limited diversity in Upton, no further demographic details are provided in this document based on race or ethnic origin.

Population by Age Trends: 2010 to 2021

The following table compares population by age in 2010 and 2021.

Table 2 Weston County Population by Age - 2010 to 2020			
Age	2010	2020	Change
0-9	881	735	-146
10-19	830	815	-15
20-29	843	584	-259
30-39	846	801	-45
40-49	985	823	-162
50-59	1,217	940	-277
60-64	457	624	164
65+	1,149	1,516	367
Total	7,208	6,838	-370

Source: Economic Analysis Division via U.S. Census Bureau

The age-based estimates show an aging population and the appearance of an out-migration of those between the ages of 20-29 from 2010 to 2020. The median age in **Weston County** in 2010 was 42.3 and in 2020 fell to 38.8.

Population Projections

The following table presents population projections from the Economic Analysis Division, who used U.S. Census data. The projections extend to the year 2031 and are based on the U.S. Census 2011-2018 estimates and data trended by the Division. 2020 Census totals are provided for comparison.

Table 3 Population Projections Through 2031				
	2020 Census	2021 Estimate	2031 Projection	Change
Upton	898	1,062	1,056	-6
Newcastle	3,374	3,389	3,369	-20
Market Area	14,264	14,530	15,050	520
Weston County	6,838	6,940	6,900	-40

Source: Economic Analysis Division

- ▶ Based on the 2020 Census, the Division has overestimated the population level for **Upton** in 2021. The Town was expected to add 164 residents by 2021 but projected to lose 6 over the following 5-year projection period.
- ▶ The estimates show some growth but remain steady when compared to historical data.
- ▶ Based on the 2020 Census, the Division has also overestimated the population level for **Newcastle** in 2021. The City was expected to add just 15 residents in 2021 and then projected to lose 20 over the following 5-year projection period.
- ▶ When compared to the 2020 Census, the Division has also overestimated population for the **Market Area**. Projecting future growth of more than 786 people by the year 2031.
- ▶ **Weston County** is expected to lose 40 people between 2021 and 2031, per the information from the Division. While the **Market Area** is estimated to grow by 520 people in the same period.

Household Data and Trends

Table 4 Household Trends - 1990 to 2020							
	1990 Census	2000 Census	% Change 1990-2000	2010 Census	% Change 2000-2010	2020 Census	% Change 2000-2010
Market Area	4,311	4,932	13.6%	5,942	17%	5,732	-4%
Weston County	2,419	2,624	7.8%	3,021	13.1%	2,789	-8%

Source: Economic Analysis Division

- ▶ Due to a lack of reliable and readily available data for individual cities and towns, the above table includes information for **Weston County** and the **Market Area** only.
- ▶ According to the 2020 Census, **Weston County** had 2,789 permanent resident households in 2020, down by 232 households, or -8.3% from 2010.
- ▶ **Weston County** appears to have held steady on the number of households in the 1990s and 2000s with a 7.8% increase during that period. While the 2020 Census showed a minor loss of households of 8.7% from 2010.
- ▶ The **Market Area** had 5,732 households in 2020, down by 210 households from 2010.
- ▶ While the entire **Market Area** has had growth from decade to decade, with a decrease of only 3.5% from 2010 to 2020.

Median Income Data

Information on median income levels is available at the city and county level through the American Community Survey. These estimates are for 2022. (Since the Market Area is a collection of individual jurisdictions, no median estimate exists, but an approximate median can be extrapolated from the distribution data.)

Table 5 Median Household Income - 2010 to 2022			
	2010 Median	2022 Median	% Change
Upton	\$47,500	\$65,664	28.0%
Newcastle	\$53,625	\$71,597	25.0%
Market Area*	\$58,853	\$70,330	16.0%
Weston County	\$58,853	\$71,800	18.0%
Wyoming	\$53,512	\$70,042	24.0%

Source: ACS *Extrapolated Median

- ▶ The median household income in **Upton** was at \$65,664 in 2022, and had increased by more than 28% from the median in 2010. Despite the recent increase, the Town’s median was lower than the comparable medians for the County and the State.
- ▶ The median household income in **Newcastle** was at \$71,597 in 2022, and had increased by more than 25% from the median in 2010. Newcastle’s median was 2% higher than the comparable median of the state, and right in line with the median of the County, which makes sense since Newcastle is the county seat and population center.
- ▶ An extrapolated median for the **Market Area** in 2022 showed an approximate median at \$70,330. The Market Area median was higher than in **Upton**, but lower than **Weston County**, and was only slightly above the median household income for the State of \$70,042. Using the commonly accepted standard that up to 30% of gross income can be applied to housing expenses without experiencing a cost burden, the median income household can be converted to a monthly amount that is available for housing costs.
- ▶ A median income household in **Upton** in 2010 could afford approximately \$1,188 for monthly housing costs, compared to \$1,642 in 2022.
- ▶ A median income household in **Newcastle** in 2010 could afford

approximately \$1,341 for monthly housing costs, compared to \$1790 in 2022.

- ▶ A median income household in **Market Area** in 2010 could afford approximately \$1,471 for monthly housing costs, compared to \$1758 in 2022.

Building Permit Trends

Upton has experienced very little housing construction activity in recent years but has seen an influx of manufactured homes moved into the corporate limits. The following table identifies the units that have been permitted from 2015 through 2023.

Table 6 Upton Housing Unit Construction Activity: 2015 to 2023				
Year	Single Family	Two Units	Three+ Units	Total Units
2023	7	0	0	7
2022	3	0	0	3
2021	4	0	0	4
2020	1	0	0	1
2019	1	0	0	1
2018	2	0	0	2
2017	3	0	0	3
2016	5	0	0	5
2015	2	0	0	2
Total	28	0	0	28

Source: Town of Upton

- ▶ Over the 9-year period from 2015 through 2023, there were 2 permits issued for traditional single-family, stick-built homes and 19 permits issued for mobile homes. No permits for multi-family housing were requested or issued. Permits issued for non-housing purposes ticked up substantially in 2022 and 2023. Building permits approved in the first six months of 2024 have already outpaced all of 2022 & 2023 combined.
- ▶ Based on annual permit reporting, there were no multifamily structures with three or more units constructed since 2010. The last identified new construction multifamily rental project in Upton was a 10-unit senior housing development in the early 2000's.

Housing Unit Data

Housing counts released from the 2020 Census included information on occupancy and vacancy. The following table compares information from 2010 and 2020 to track changes over the decade as reported by the Census.

Table 7 Housing Units, Occupancy and Vacancy - 2020									
	Total Housing Units			Occupied Units			Vacant Units		
	2010	2020	Change	2010	2020	Change	2010	2020	Change
Upton	494	441	-53	394	365	29	100	76	24
Weston County	3,553	3,564	11	2,870	2,870	0	663	694	31

Source: U.S. Census and Wyoming Economic Analysis Division

- ▶ According to a reconciliation of decennial Census data, **Upton** added 42 housing units between 2010 and 2020. This increase is greater than the number of units that can be tracked through building permit issuance between 2010 and 2023, as reported on a previous page.
- ▶ Although **Upton** added housing units over the decade, there was a no change in units occupied by permanent residents. However, the Town did add 42 units of unoccupied housing. Only 93 of the occupied units were considered rentals in 2010, and the same was reported in the 2020 census information as well.
- ▶ For the entire **Market Area**, including all of Weston County, the Census reconciliation showed a net loss of 141 total housing units, and a significant drop of 361 occupied units by 2020. The Market Area also added 220 unoccupied units. The housing market has remained relatively stagnant over the decade between census counts.

Existing Home Sales – Upton

Existing home sales data was not verifiable from sources at the time of this report. Observation data from 2022, 2023 and the partial year 2024 were compiled by staff and are displayed below.*

Table 8 Upton Residential Sales Activity - 2016 through 2021				
Sales Year	Number of Sales	Median Sale Price	Highest Sale	Lowest Sale
2024**	5	\$283,580	\$595,000	\$20,000 (lot only)
2023	12	\$283,580	\$370,000	\$99,000
2022	8	\$144,000	\$545,000	\$99,000

Source: Town of Upton staff observations* and www.zillow.com

**through July 2024

Home prices have been climbing since 2020 as the Town saw an influx of new residents, who were very likely not accounted for in the decennial count, who purchased homes for cash within days of the homes being listed. This trend led to a statewide rise in property taxes, Upton and Weston County were no exception.

Senior Housing and Services

Unit Inventory

There is one senior with services project in Upton and there are three senior housing options in Newcastle. Upton’s Senior Apartments are an independent living arrangement with low rents as the project just recently came out of WCDA federal rules when the building’s mortgage was paid in full in 2022. There are 10 single room apartments in this project, which is currently at capacity and has a waiting list.

In Newcastle, there are independent living senior apartments available in the facility connected to the Weston County Senior Center, an older, remodeled school building. Mondell Heights Retirement Community is also located in Newcastle, with 24 units, where residents have access to 24-hour nursing care, prepared meals, and group activities. The Weston County Manor is a part of the Weston County Health District’s services. There are currently 58 semi-private rooms.

Table 9 Upton Area Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory

Name	Number of Units /Bedroom Mix	Rent	Vacancy/ Wait List	Tenant Mix	Comments
Howard White Rentals	4- 1 bedroom 3 -3 bedroom 1- 4 bedroom <u>1 -5 bedroom</u> 9 total units	Range from \$500 to \$1,500 plus utilities	No vacancies	General Occupancy	Four one-bedroom apartments that are quite dated, a recently remodeled building with two three-bedroom units and one five-bedroom unit, one four-bedroom home, one three-bedroom home
Bujarski Enterprises	9-12 single family, older model manufactured homes;	Range from \$500 to \$1,200 plus utilities	3-5 current vacancies	General Occupancy	This is a privately owned mobile home park with RV hook ups available on all existing lots. All 12 units are located within the park with 1st Street access.
Finn Brothers	12 single-family, older model manufactured and trailer homes;	Range from \$750 to \$1,000 plus utilities	1 current vacancy	General Occupancy	This is a privately owned mobile home park with RV hook ups available on all existing and two additional undeveloped lots. 6 units face East Street access, 1 unit faces Kellogg Street access, and 5 units have in park access

					from Pine or Kellogg Streets.
Haptonstall Rentals	2 unit apartment building, 1 two bedroom house	Range from \$450 to \$650 with utilities included	No vacancy	General Occupancy	This is a building converted from an old clinic into living units with access to Hwy 116.
Keller Duplex	2 two-bedroom townhome style units	Range from \$850-\$1,000 plus utilities	No vacancy	General Occupancy	This is a connected, two-unit property with access off of Ash Street/Hwy 116 N.
Scott 4-plex	4 two-bedroom apartment units	Range from \$500-\$850 plus utilities	No vacancy	General Occupancy	This is a 4-unit complex where units A & C, and B & D share water service connections with the usage split 50/50 to each unit. Units A & B have access to Ash Street/Hwy 116 N, and units C & D have alley access only.
Goose Landing	9 active full hook up units are currently online	Rents range from \$300-\$500	8 vacancies, with other units ready to come online	General Occupancy	This is a privately owned RV park with full hook up sites, primitive cabins and a make-shift shower facility on the premises. The site is not always adequately

					staffed and has not seen any influx in patrons due to activities in the area as of current.
Antelope Heights Senior Housing	10 Independent Living Units	Set by Appointed Board of Directors	0 vacant independent units	Senior housing, over 55	Antelope Heights Senior Housing is managed by a Town appointed Board of Directors. There are 10 one-bedroom apartments, a common area, and laundry room. The property was originally a WCDA property for ultra-low-income seniors over 55. Some restrictions may be lifted as the property is no longer under the WCDA rules.

Source: Town of Upton staff

Employment and Local Economic Trends

Many factors influence housing needs, most predominantly employment opportunities in an area (i.e. commercial or support services, education, agriculture, public administration, and other industries). The correlation to affordability for housing corresponds with wages, and often housing prices.

Labor Force and Unemployment

Employment information is available at the County level. This table presents information based on place of residence, not by the location of employment.

Table 10 Weston County Average Annual Labor Force: 2010 to 2023						
Year	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate - County	Unemployment Rate - WY	Unemployment Rate - US
2010	3,992	3,784	208	5.2%	6.9%	9.6%
2011	3,911	3,723	188	4.8%	6.0%	8.9%
2012	3,925	3,761	164	4.2%	5.4%	8.1%
2013	3,899	3,758	141	3.6%	4.6%	7.4%
2014	3,925	3,789	136	3.5%	4.2%	6.2%
2015	3,930	3,798	132	3.4%	4.2%	5.3%
2016	3,960	3,761	199	5.0%	5.3%	4.9%
2017	3,765	3,611	154	4.1%	4.2%	4.4%
2018	3,784	3,650	134	3.5%	4.1%	3.9%
2019	3,789	3,675	114	3.0%	3.7%	3.7%
2020	3,786	3,640	146	3.9%	5.8%	8.1%
2021	3,714	3,594	120	3.2%	4.5%	5.4%
2022	3,823	3,725	98	2.6%	3.4%	3.6%
2023	3,876	3,795	81	2.1%	2.9%	3.6%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

The labor force statistics for Weston County show some up and down movement in labor force with the most notable drop between 2016 and 2017 when the area coal mines had large layoffs due to declining production levels. Labor force levels remained steady through the pandemic, though unemployment rose by over 2% due in part to the changes made in unemployment benefits during that time.

Over the 14-year period recorded in Table 10, Weston County’s labor force has remained relatively stable with unemployment trending down since 2016.

Summary of Findings on Growth Trends

Upton and Weston County

Over the last decade Upton has experienced notable population changes, most recently a slight increase since the pandemic and 2020 election. The population fluctuations in Upton and throughout Weston County have allowed the labor force, home sales and unemployment to remain relatively steady with ups and downs of 0.5%-2.5%, always trending below the state and U.S. in unemployment. The area may be anticipating some growth but may not experience large fluctuations over the next five to ten years unless changes to the core industries and supportive services change in such a manner to effect past trends.

Summary of Findings on Projected Growth

Projected growth in the area is tied to mineral and extractive industries with bust/boom cycles. Upton recently saw its first new retail store open in June 2024. The area is also anticipating the outcome of a rare earth element processing plant. Should that technology prove out, Upton, Weston County and all of Northeast Wyoming could see rapid changes in labor force, home sale prices and inventory, as well as swings in median income and population.

Findings on Housing Unit Demand and Tenure

Demand due to Growth - The state of Wyoming is estimated to need to add between 20,700 and 38,600 new rental and ownership units by 2030 to accommodate for growth. Upton anticipates needing to add 10-30 units of multi-family housing and 10-20 single family homes between 2024 and 2030.

Aged Owner-Occupancy Units – Much of the Town of Upton’s population are retired and/or fixed income households. With few affordable options for retirees to live in Upton, many citizens “age out” in their homes leaving very few attainable starter homes available for rent or purchase.

Pent-Up Demand -There was no specific data regarding pent-up demand for housing in Upton, however, it is assumed that there will be some pent-up demand as industries grow and develop in the area.

Strengths for Housing Development (rental or ownership)

The Best Town on Earth has many strengths that include:

- ▶ **A Top-Rated Educational System** – Weston County School District #7 is often touted as “the district to model”. The District led the way through the pandemic with online learning, a practice that they had been perfecting for a number of years prior.
- ▶ **A Limited, but Local Health Facility** – Upton is home to a branch of the Weston County Hospital District’s Upton Clinic and includes tele-pharmacy services available five days a week. The physicians are up on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to serve the communities healthcare needs and can make referrals for higher levels of care as needed.
- ▶ **Infrastructure** – The Town of Upton has been very proactive over the last two and half decades in replacing and repairing aged infrastructure. Over 20 miles of asbestos concrete water and clay tile sewer lines have been replaced and funding has been secured for the final six miles to be reconstructed over the next three to four years. The Town’s Superintendent feels strongly that the existing infrastructure needs to be sustainable and secure before extending new lines to annexed areas or outlying areas. This is the kind of responsible leadership that makes Upton a great place to live and work.
- ▶ **Economic Development Opportunities** – Upton has several lots available for business development. The lots are shovel ready in areas of downtown and near the logistics park. There is also a newly annexed property available for subdivision or as needed development just across from the logistics park near the new hotel.
- ▶ **Employers** – Employers in the Upton area are great about recruiting and hiring locally and offering good benefits whenever possible. You’re likely to get to see every home game your kids participate in working for a business in or around Upton.
- ▶ **Senior and Lower Income Housing** – The Town of Upton created the Upton Housing Authority in the early 2000’s and commissioned the building of a 10-unit facility for independent, low-income senior living through WCDA loan programs. The facility is now out of the WCDA’s monitoring period after paying the loans in full and is looking towards future

development of additional units to serve the senior and lower income populations.

- ▶ **The Black Hills and Keyhole Recreational Areas** – Upton lies on the edge of the beautiful Black Hills where recreation opportunities abound and is just over an hour away from the iconic Devil’s Tower. Within 25 minutes you can be enjoying the cool waters of Keyhole Reservoir or hitting the links at the local Cedar Pines course, the Newcastle Golf Course, the Sundance Golf Course, or Pine Haven’s course right on the lake.
- ▶ **Local Businesses** – If a local business such as the Upton Hardware Store or Joe’s Food Center doesn’t have what you need in stock, they are more than willing order what you need and can often have it delivered within the week. The businesses of Upton give back at every chance through donations, services and internships for local high school students.
- ▶ **Available Land and Lots for Development-** When the Town of Upton plans an infrastructure project, those plans include running services to empty lots with potential for future development. That allows the lots to be more “shovel ready” and nearly eliminates the need for street cuts to install services.
- ▶ **An Environment of Volunteers** – Upton relies heavily on volunteer work. Whether it is for the Upton Volunteer Fire Department and Ambulance Service, the Upton Chamber of Commerce, the Upton Housing Authority, the Upton Senior Center Board or any of the many county-wide boards Uptonites selflessly serve to ensure that the Best Town on Earth is well represented, volunteers are at the heart of Upton! We start at the pre-school level engraining volunteerism into our citizens, and we appreciate the work that would otherwise not get done.

Barriers or Limitations to Housing Activities

Here are the barriers and/or limitations we see for housing in Upton:

- ▶ **Age and condition of the housing stock** – The limited amount of housing stock in Upton is outdated and some would be considered uninhabitable. Older homes can be nice but are almost always very dated in regard to electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems, as well as comfort features like cabinetry, flooring and fixtures. The additional cost of updates can be a deterrent for those looking to purchase in Upton.
- ▶ **Lack of housing inventory and median home price** – The median home price in Upton is being skewed by the number of homes for sale and one home being priced at over a half million dollars. Other homes in the rural areas around Upton also negatively impact the actual median home price for the area.
- ▶ **Lower paying jobs** – Upton has many job opportunities, however, some jobs are at the lower end of the pay scale and employees with these jobs have limited housing choices whether they are looking to purchase or rent.
- ▶ **Proximity to Gillette and Newcastle**- Being less than 30 miles from a medical facility and 50 miles away from big box store shopping is an advantage, however, there is also access to more amenities and sometimes higher paying jobs as well that draw some of the population to those city centers. Those with a need for a higher level of health care are also drawn out of Upton in order to have faster access to providers. We've seen at least one local business relocate to Gillette in order to garner the workforce volume needed to keep their operations successful.
- ▶ **Competition with rural lots** – Many buyers coming to the area are enticed by the wide-open spaces that lie just outside of the corporate limits of Upton. These are beautiful, spacious properties with the advantages of privacy and quick access to local amenities. We've seen many residents save up and purchase available rural lots to build on or purchase the rarely available completed property and move out of town to enjoy the benefits of rurality. The expense of drilling a water well keeps many of these property owners tied to the town for potable water whether it be through service line extensions or use of the water dock.

- ▶ **Lack of lending options** – Upton is home to a branch of FirstTier Bank, headquartered in Kimball, NE. This small bank does not often have the capability to keep mortgages in-house or offer reasonable interest rates. Other lenders in the area and FTB have made efforts to accommodate buyers, however, the market is still relatively difficult to navigate as far as affordability and availability. We have seen more manufactured home businesses stepping in to help first time or limited means buyers get into homes recently, which is freeing up some lower end rental trailers.

- ▶ **Commercial development** – This could also be in our strengths narrative as well, though it appears in barriers due to the slow growth of commercial business Upton has seen over the last decade. The first new retail property opened in recent months and was met with mixed reviews in the planning stages. We are hopeful that one new business will cascade into more opportunities taking advantage of Upton’s location at the crossroads of US Highway 16 and WY Highway 116 as well as the ever-evolving logistics park.

Recommendations, Strategies and Opportunities

Based on the research contained in this report, and the housing strengths and barriers identified above, we believe that the following recommendations are realistic options for Upton. They are based on the following strategies.

- ▶ **Be realistic in expectations for housing development** - The scale of housing activities proposed for the future should be comparable with the area's potential for growth, align with a long-term outlook and keep in mind that Upton has been a bedroom community for decades. Efforts to shift that dynamic will take time a careful planning but should embrace the value of being a place people want to live even if they do not work locally. There also needs to be consideration given to the future value of development weighed with the fiduciary responsibility the local government is charged with maintaining.
- ▶ **Proactive community involvement** - New home and/or apartment construction will more likely occur in Upton if there is proactive support from the Town, local businesses and the Wyoming Community Development Authority. In the past, the Town has not been involved in much housing development as that competes with the private sector. However, without private sector investment and a willingness to fill the housing gap, state and local governments have identified a need to step into the space in some capacity.
- ▶ **Protect the existing assets and resources** - The Upton area has many assets including a top tier K-12 school district, access to community college level classes and degree programs, several high-quality employers, a rural health facility, recreational and tourism opportunities nearby, a strong connection to our history, natural amenities, etc. These are strong assets that make Upton a desirable place to live in and are key components to the Town's long-term success and viability. These assets must be protected, maintained and improved.
- ▶ **Develop an attainable action plan with goals and timelines** - The Town should continue to engage with local and out of area developers to garner interest in development investments, and be willing to adapt, where possible and responsible, to the needs of the area.
- ▶ **Promote access to all available resources for housing** - Building partnerships is a strength for Upton and should continue to be a focus in discussions regarding housing. Most area lending institutions are already willing partners and working within their available means to make

financing homeownership and new build construction attainable.

Summary of Findings/Recommendations

The findings/recommendations are as follows:

Rental Housing Development

1. Develop 15 to 30 general occupancy market rate rental units
2. Promote the revitalization or remodel of current area rental units to meet modern codes and adapt to the comforts of new technologies
3. Develop 15 to 20 additional senior and/or lower income living units
4. Explore the reality of downtown living with new development on available lots that would include mixed use ground level business accommodations

Single Family Housing Development

5. Continue to encourage responsible development of available lots with a goal of 5 to 10 additional single family housing units over the next three years
6. Partner with developers, contractors and funding sources to promote development of attainable twin home/town home/villa development for seniors/empty nesters, teachers, first responders, etc.
7. Partner with area employers to assist with their needs for single family housing and drill down on the expectations

Housing Rehabilitation

8. Promote rental housing rehabilitation
9. Promote the revitalization or remodel of current area rental units to meet modern codes and adapt to the comforts of new technologies
10. Promote owner-occupied housing rehabilitation and/or abatement and rebuilding efforts

Other Housing Initiatives

11. Promote commercial rehabilitation and development
12. Encourage employer involvement in housing

13. Share findings with housing funding agencies and lending institutions to further develop a plan to promote home ownership

Other Initiatives

1. Promote Commercial Rehabilitation and Downtown Development

Findings: The Town of Upton has the advantage of the Scenic Bi-way US Highway 16 carving through the downtown area and should do better to encourage businesses to take advantage of the potential for tourism traffic through marketing, special offers and other “deals” enticing the passing through traffic to stop over in Upton. There are several under-utilized or seemingly abandoned properties in Upton’s downtown that could be rehabbed for a new purpose. Traditionally, downtown is a focal point for anyone looking to move to an area and often plays a big part in a family’s decision to relocate to a specific community.

Recommendation: The Town could further partner with the Chamber of Commerce and/or the Upton Economic Development Board to create a fund for downtown businesses to help revitalize the area and reward improvements with recognition or funding or both.

2. Encourage employer involvement in housing

Findings: The connection between economic development and housing availability has become an increasingly critical issue as low statewide unemployment rates dictate the need to attract new workers into the state, even in a rural community like Upton. With current and anticipated growth of industry in the area, workforce housing is already becoming an issue of scarcity.

Recommendation: The Town of Upton, Chamber of Commerce, Weston County School District #7 and the Upton Economic Development Board should encourage businesses to, and participate to the extent appropriate in, commitments to expanding housing inventory in the area. Whether it be through program partnerships or direct funding of development.

Wyoming funding agencies favorably view program applications that include employers in the problem-solving process.

Involvement can include direct assistance to their employees such as a grant, loan, forgivable loan, deferred loan, down payment assistance, loan guarantee, etc. In many cases, employers do not wish to provide assistance to specific employees but are willing to contribute to an overall city project such as a subdivision or a rental project.

3. Develop a plan and a coordinated effort among housing agencies

Findings: There are not adequate town resources in funding, expertise or staff to develop standalone housing programs.

Recommendation: The Town of Upton should foster deeper partnerships with WCDA and USDA Rural Development to assist homebuyers through the process of homeownership.

4. Work with local partners to provide more entertainment and recreation opportunities

Findings: Entertainment and recreation opportunities are limited in Upton. Events are held by the Upton Chamber of Commerce or other similar groups, but the options for the median aged Uptonite to have something to do on any given evening are limited, unless they have children participating in activities or they go to a local bar. Upton is very well versed at creating opportunities for children and teens through the PTO, Bobcat Adventures and Booster organizations, but the evolving dynamic of the economy, changes in preferences through generations, and the need for two income households has allowed a gap to develop.

Recommendation: The Town of Upton should work closely with the Upton Chamber, the Upton Economic Development Board and other interested parties to develop additional entertainment and recreation opportunities for all ages but focusing on the those for the median age group. This could foster more community involvement as well.

Agencies and Resources

The following regional and state agencies administer programs or provide funds for housing programs and projects:

Wyoming Community Development Authority

155 N Beech Street
Casper WY 82601
www.wyomingcda.com

USDA Rural Development

100 East B Street, Room 1217
PO Box 11005
Casper WY 82601
(307) 233-6700