

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

This chapter presents an overview of current land use patterns and recent development activity within the Town of Thermopolis.

CURRENT LAND USE

The Town of Thermopolis encompasses 1,595 acres or about 2.5 square miles. About 404 acres of Hot Springs State Park lies within the town limits (with another 638 acres in the County). About 26 percent of the town (413 acres) is used for residential purposes, mostly single family homes in neighborhoods and subdivisions.

The Town of Thermopolis owns 76 acres in town and most of that is for the water plant and sewage lagoons (63 acres). The Town also owns the Legion Golf Course (119 acres) just outside the town limits. Other tax exempt land in town includes land owned by schools, churches, the post office, the county, utility companies, and the like.

Commercial areas, which include businesses and apartment buildings, cover 107 acres in Thermopolis or 6.7 percent of the town. Only three properties in Thermopolis are classified as industrial and are all located in the southeast part of town; together these comprise only 8 acres. Some tax-exempt properties including the Town's sewage lagoons and the Western Power Administration's electric power substation could also be considered as industrial uses.

LAND USE SUMMARY TABLE		
Land Use Category	Acres	Percent
Residential	413	26.0%
State Park	404	25.3%
Rights-of-way (streets and alleys)	290	18.2%
Vacant	212	13.3%
Commercial	107	6.7%
Town Land	76	4.8%
Other Tax Exempt (schools, churches, etc.)	49	3.1%
Big Horn River	32	2.0%
Industrial	8	0.5%
Multi-Use	4	0.2%
TOTAL	1,595	100.1%

Residential Neighborhoods

According to the 2006 Hot Springs County Housing Assessment there are 1,460 single family housing units (including site-built, manufactured, townhouses, and condominium units) and 296 apartment units in Thermopolis. Most single family homes in Thermopolis are situated on properties of 8,000 to 10,000 square feet made up from more than one original city lot (original city lots are typically 4,200 square feet).

There are several residential areas of town that could be considered as small, separate neighborhoods:

- Lying west of the Big Horn River and east of the railroad tracks between Amoretti and Arapahoe Streets is the area platted as McManigal's 2nd and 3rd Additions. A portion of this area is in the 100-year flood plain while almost all of the area is in "flood zone X" which has a minimal chance of flooding and in which flood insurance is not necessary. Half of the homes here are site-built and another third are manufactured homes.
- Another residential neighborhood, all of town north of Broadway and west of the railroad tracks, has many historic homes in the Craftsman architectural style. Over 80 percent of the homes in this neighborhood are site-built and very few manufactured homes. About one-fifth of the housing here is in the form of apartments.
- A neighborhood in the South Central part of town (everything east of 8th Street, west of the railroad, and south of Broadway) is also an older area dominated by site-built homes with few manufactured homes.
- The neighborhood around Candy Jack Park (east of 14th Street, west of 8th Street, and south of Broadway to include the home on Amoretti, Richards, and Washakie Streets) has a range of housing including the Candy Jack Mobile Home Court and the higher-priced Realing Addition (O'Dell and Johnson Avenues). Over 80 percent of the homes here are site-built and there are no apartments in the neighborhood.
- The residential areas west of 14th Street, including the Cedar Ridge, Candy Hills, and Meadowlark subdivisions is almost exclusively site-built, single-family housing.
- The neighborhood around Canyon Hills Road (east of 14th Street, including Waldorf Acres and Belvedere subdivisions and south to include Grandview Court) contains the least site-built, single-family housing of any neighborhood (35 percent of the housing unit). In this neighborhood, manufactured homes are one-quarter of the housing and apartments account for another one-third.

Business Districts

Downtown Thermopolis is the town's central business district. The downtown is roughly a four-block by four-block area centered on the intersection of Broadway and Fifth Street. The downtown includes the Town Hall, the Hot Springs County Courthouse and new Annex, the U.S. Post Office, as well as numerous business offices and retail stores. The downtown includes an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places.

Thermopolis also has a commercial strip area along U.S. Highway 20 (Park, 6th, and Shoshoni Streets). A smaller highway commercial area extends from the main State Park entrance to the downtown. A larger highway commercial area extends south from the downtown about one mile to the town limits at the south end of town on U.S. 20.

Hot Springs State Park

In terms of land use, Hot Springs State Park has many more variety of land uses than ordinary state parks. Some of the noteworthy land uses on state park land (and their approximate locations) include the following:

- North of Park Street and west of the Big Horn River: Fairgrounds, County maintenance shop, County Recreation ball fields, National Guard Armory, State Park office, Chamber of Commerce office, and a possible future site of the Nature and Discovery Center.
- South of Park Street and west of the river: high school, elementary school, County Library, and a County office building.
- South of Park Street and east of the River: Days Inn, Wyoming Pioneer Home, Hot Springs Memorial Hospital, two medical offices, and the Gottsche Rehabilitation Center.
- North of Park Street and east of the River: Plaza Hotel, Tepee Pools, State Bath House, and Star Plunge.

Vacant Land

There is a fairly substantial amount of vacant lots and land in Thermopolis. Vacant lots and land make up about 13.3 percent of the town. There are about 204 vacant residential parcels, as categorized by the County Assessor. Some larger tracts are included in this count. However, when parcels larger than one acre are excluded, there is only 27 acres of vacant residential land in 194 lots, most of which are already subdivided or platted. 134 of these are typical original town lots of 1/10th of an acre in size (4,200 square feet) and about 13 acres all together. Most are in the areas north of Arapahoe Street or west of 14th Street. (Refer to Vacant Land Map.) There are few opportunities for infill development on these parcels.

There are 20 large parcels in town that are substantially vacant--only a relatively small part of the parcel is occupied by a residence or business and the vacant remainder could possibly be subdivided for new building sites. These 20 parcels amount to 198 acres. However, much of this land area has limitation that might preclude extensive development:

- In the southeast part of town, the 30-acre former refinery site (south of Amoretti Street and east of the railroad tracks) has issues with contamination from when the refinery was in operation. The site includes some 100-year floodplain; however most of the site is above the floodplain.
- At the north end of town, about 250 acres in several properties from Round Top Drive down slope about one-half mile to the drainage channel are quite steep and are not suitable for development.
- South of the drainage channel and north of the platted areas of town, there is another 50 acres of land that is steep in parts but has potential for development.
- On the western edge of town, there are a few smaller tracts with development potential. These include: two acres owned by the State Highway Department where the old highway meets the new Highway 120; six acres owned by the school district behind the middle school; and seven acres between Kinney's 2nd Addition and Waldorf Acres Subdivision.

VACANT LAND		
	Acres	Parcels
Commercial Vacant	11.0	92
Industrial Vacant	0.3	1
Residential Vacant	200.3	204
Total Vacant	211.6	297
Substantially Vacant	198.8	20

These larger sites offer few opportunities for additional development within the current town limits.

The limited inventory of vacant, developable land within the Town limits has undoubtedly contributed to the recent development along U.S. Highway 20 south of town. New stores and a motel have been constructed south of town and the Red Rocks Business Park has been developed.

Issues and options for accommodating additional growth and development in and around Thermopolis will be examined in a subsequent chapter on Future Land Use.

DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

In recent year, building construction activity has been fairly modest in Thermopolis. In terms of residential construction, only 28 housing units were constructed in the town from 2000 to 2009. Due to a similar number of demolitions, there has probably been little or no net increase in housing stock. (Crosby) In terms of subdivision development in Thermopolis, only four subdivisions totaling 35 lots have been created from 2000 to 2009.

RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION 2000 - 2009			
Item	Buildings	Units	Construction cost
Single Family	28	28	\$ 4,782,704
Two Family	2	4	\$ 497,824
Three and Four Family	0	0	\$ -
Five or More Family	0	0	\$ -
Total	30	32	\$ 5,280,528

Source: U.S. Census and Town of Thermopolis

THERMOPOLIS SUBDIVISIONS 2000 - 2009		
Subdivision Name	Year	Lots
Buffalo Ridge	2009	15 lots
Canyon Hills	2001	7 lots
Parkview	2007	8 lots
Spring View Estates	2001	5 lots

Source: Hot Springs County Clerk

SOURCES

Crosby, Fred, Town Codes Administrator. Personal communication. March 23, 2010.

Hot Springs County Housing. Pedersen Planning Consultants. December 15, 2006.

U.S. Census, Permit Index. www.census.gov/const/www/permitsindex.html.