

HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

How much and what kind of housing is available in Thermopolis? What are the existing and future housing needs? When planning future land uses, these questions need to be considered.

In 2006, the Town of Thermopolis hired Pedersen Planning Consultants to prepare a detailed analysis of housing in Thermopolis, East Thermopolis, Kirby, and the rest of Hot Springs County. The Hot Springs County Housing Assessment, completed in December 2006, examined existing and future housing and included recommended action strategies to address anticipated housing needs over a ten year period through 2016.

The following discussion of the Thermopolis housing situation summarizes key findings of the Hot Springs County Housing Assessment and supplements those findings with additional research and analysis.

EXISTING HOUSING

Households and Group Quarters

The U.S. Census Bureau has two general categories for housing type--households or group quarters. The census defines households as a person or group of people who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence. The number of households equals the number of occupied housing units in a census. Group quarters include non-institutionalized and institutionalized settings. Non-institutionalized quarters include group homes and homeless shelters. People in institutionalized group quarters are under formally authorized, supervised care, or custody.

Thermopolis and East Thermopolis have a much higher proportion of persons in institutionalized quarters than the state or the nation. A total of 145 persons were reported in institutional care in 2000 (133 in Thermopolis and 12 in East Thermopolis).

PERCENT OF POPULATION IN HOUSEHOLDS OR GROUP QUARTERS IN 2000				
	Total Population	% in Households	% in Institutional Group Quarters	% in Non-Institutional Group Quarters
United States	281.4 million	97.2	1.4	1
Wyoming	493,782	97.1	1.6	1.3
Thermopolis	3,172	95.8	4.2	-
East Thermopolis	274	95.6	4.4	-

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000. Table DP-1.

Housing Numbers and Characteristics

Pedersen Associated conducted a windshield survey of every street and alleyway in Thermopolis in July 2006. By this count there were 1,756 housing units in Thermopolis in July 2006, including 192 units in the Pioneer Home and Canyon Village Manor.

HOUSING UNIT COUNT FROM THE 2006 HOT SPRINGS COUNTY HOUSING ASSESSMENT				
HOUSING STOCK BY NUMBER AND TYPE OF HOUSING UNITS TOWN OF THERMOPOLIS 2006				
Stick-Built Single Family Detached	Single Family Manufactured Housing	Single Family Attached*	Apartment Units	Total
1,177	200	83	296	1,756

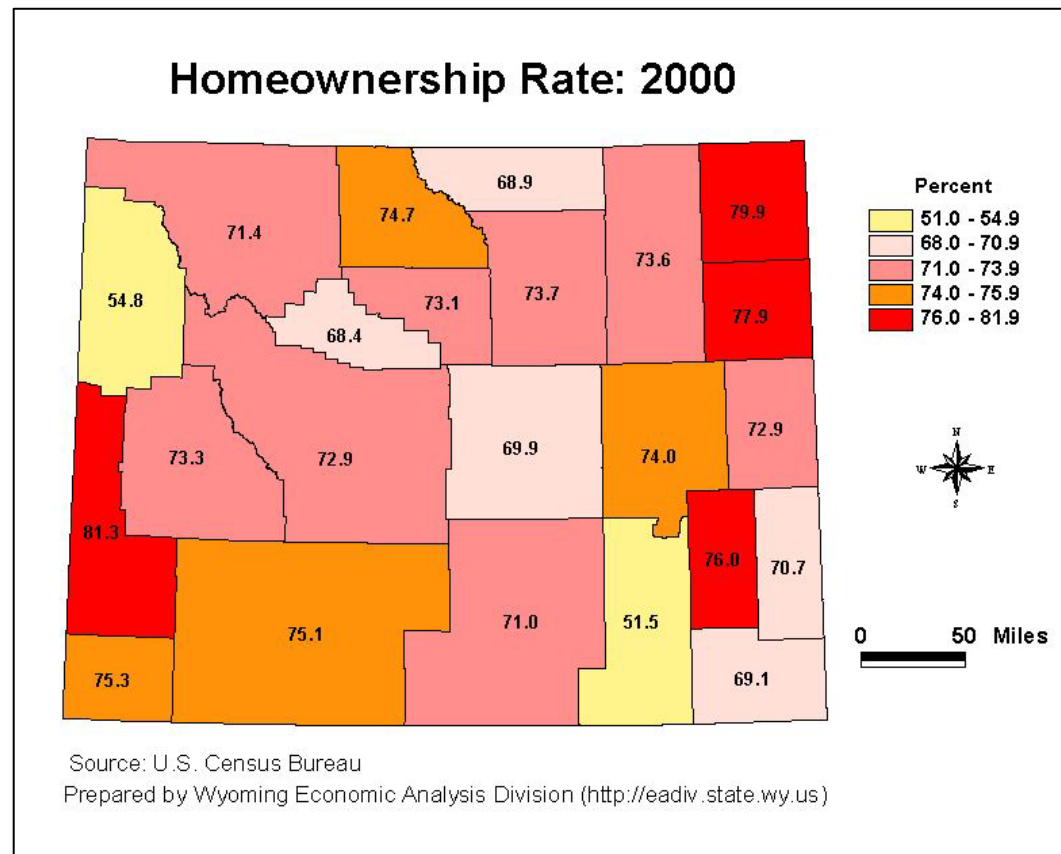
*Note: Single family attached units include duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and townhomes.

Source: Pedersen Planning Consultants, 2006

In April 2000, 68% of all occupied housing stock in Thermopolis was occupied by persons who owned the home; the remaining 32.3% was occupied by renters. A total of 226 housing units were vacant (US Census 2000). Of these about 22% were vacant because they were for sale, another 17% were vacant because they have part-time or seasonal use. (Pedersen 2006) The vacancy rate for rentals was 12% (US Census 2000). The remaining vacant housing units may be vacant for a variety of reasons, including absent landowner, lack of demand, or substandard

conditions that make the unit either undesirable or uninhabitable. Although age is not always an indicator of housing condition, most homes (53%) in Thermopolis were built prior to 1960, so in 2010 are now over 50 years old. (US Census 2000) The Pederson Study did not include detailed analysis of existing condition of housing stock, but the study did address need for replacement housing in its recommendations.

In July 2006, the Pedersen survey counted 186 housing units in East Thermopolis. Of these 43 were single family detached, 66 were manufactured housing, and 77 were apartment units (with 61 units at Canyon Village Apartments. (Pederson 2006) East Thermopolis has a very high rental rate, measured at 51 percent of total occupied housing stock in the 2000 census. By comparison, renter occupied units accounted for 34% of all housing nationally and 32% for the state of Wyoming. (US Census 2000)



FUTURE HOUSING

Future housing needs will be affected by various demand factors such as population change, specialized need components (families, seniors, persons with disabilities), cost/affordability; and also by supply factors such as mix of single family, multi-unit, and care facilities, suitability of existing housing stock, and potential for new housing construction.

Future Housing Demand

The Hot Springs County Housing Assessment's future housing demand is based on population projections generated by Pedersen Planning Consultants. These projections are higher than those of the U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the Wyoming Economic Analysis Division's projections (as released in 2008), and the "Very Strong Growth Scenario" of the 2008 Wyoming Housing Needs Forecast (prepared for the Wyoming Housing Database Partnership). Pedersen projected Thermopolis's population in 2016 at 3,576. The Wyoming Economic Analysis Division estimated the 2016 population at 2,897, a difference of approximately 679 persons.

Based on Pedersen Planning Consultants' population projections and formulas for determining need for additional housing units, 96 new housing units would be needed in Thermopolis by 2016. These would be additional to the 1,756 units of the 2006 baseline survey. In addition to the 96 new units, the model assumes that approximately 16-18 existing houses per year would be significantly rehabilitated or be replaced with a new residence on the same property.

Pedersen Planning Consultants also projected special needs demands. An additional 21 independent living units, 30 additional assisted living units, and 58 additional nursing home units would be needed by 2016. Pedersen indicated there would be 1,078 residents with disabilities in Hot Springs County by 2016, an increase of 122 persons compared to the 2000 Census.

The Hot Springs County Housing Assessment examined housing affordability. Based on average residential sales price of \$88,653 in Thermopolis during 2004 and 2005, the study indicates that the average priced home would be affordable to a two-income household, assuming no debt/credit problems and sufficient savings for a down payment.

Since the time the Housing Assessment was conducted, it may have become more difficult for the workforce and lower income households to afford housing. Information from the 2009 Profile of Wyoming Demographics, Economics, and Housing indicates that housing prices rose

sharply in Hot Springs County after 2005. Average housing price in the county in 2006 was \$122,544, up nearly 26% from the 2005 average price of \$97,453. Prices rose more slowly in 2007 (2.5%) and 2008 (6%) to an average housing price of \$133,421.

Information from the 2000 census also indicates that roughly one in six households spent 30% or more of total household income on housing. A housing cost burden is defined as spending 30 to 50% of household income on housing. A severe cost burden is experienced if more than 50% of income is spent on housing. In 1999, 17% of all homeowners and 28% of all renters in Thermopolis had a cost burden or severe cost burden. In East Thermopolis, 42% of all homeowners and 15% of all renters had cost burdens. (US Census 2000, Table DP-4)

Future Housing Supply

The 2006 Hot Spring County Housing Assessment identified residential expansion areas in Thermopolis and East Thermopolis (refer to Figures 4-2 and 4-3 excerpted from the Housing Assessment). In Thermopolis, the identified expansion areas totaled 34 acres and could potentially accommodate 100 new housing units. It was noted however that some of the expansion areas may not be attractive to residential development because of utility easement restrictions, electric power lines, and in some cases soil characteristics undesirable for structural foundations. The expansion area in East Thermopolis was almost 30 acres (east of the Wyoming Dinosaur Center and south of the platted portion of the community). The most likely expansion area for the unincorporated area of the county was identified as the area south of Thermopolis (refer to Figure 4-6 excerpted from the Housing Assessment).

The Housing Assessment also indicated need for significant rehabilitation or replacement of approximately 10 percent of the total housing stock.

PROGRESS TOWARD STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2006 Hot Springs County Housing Assessment included recommended strategies for senior housing, residential expansion areas, housing considerations for persons with disabilities, replacement and rehabilitation of sub-standard housing, and lower income and affordable housing. The Thermopolis Housing Committee has identified affordable rental housing the number one priority and is working with the Wyoming Housing Network to that end. (Strausborger)

CONCLUSIONS

Thermopolis is unique in many respects—but the mineral hot springs and relatively mild and very dry climate make it stand out and likely account for the higher than average senior population and resultant senior housing needs. Thermopolis's unusually high proportion of residents living in care facilities is a unique housing consideration as is the very large ratio of persons with disabilities in the community.

These factors and overall demand for housing were considered in the 2006 Hot Springs County Housing Assessment. Projected housing demand in the Assessment is higher than projections made in 2008 by the Wyoming Economic Analysis Division and Wyoming Database Partnership, but the recommended strategies make sense for a range of future housing demands. Even without increased population and overall increased housing demand, shifts in demographics (e.g., more senior residents, greater proportion of lower income workforce residents) as well as aging and deteriorating housing stock will create new housing needs. The strategies for addressing housing rehabilitation, lower income affordable housing, and considering needs of seniors and disabled populations will likely be needed in any future housing scenario.

SOURCES:

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

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