

# Town of Mills

## Economic Development Strategic Plan



June 2, 2020

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Town of Mills (the “Town”) hired Better City in September 2019 to create an Economic Development Strategic Plan. This Plan includes the findings from interviews with stakeholders, review of prior plans, economic assessment, land use analysis, comparative analysis, and industry cluster analysis. It also includes an overview of local and state economic development organizations, Mill’s Opportunity Zone, the Natrona County Airport’s foreign trade designation, business incentives for Mills (and those in Casper). The Plan identifies a method to promote mixed-use development, outlines a model for a Business Retention and Expansion program, and lists incentives to attract businesses are available through the Wyoming Business Council, Advanced Casper, and tax increment financing. The final section contains an implementation plan which provides specific tasks separated by category. Below is a high-level summary of the contents of the Economic Development Strategic Plan.

### Interview and Observations Summary

- The Riverfront project is supported.
- There are continuing education opportunities.
- The Town lacks family infrastructure such as a grocery store and elementary schools. It also is unattractive due to unmaintained properties and needs code enforcement.
- A potential school solution is to form a new district.

### Prior Plans Review

- The Riverfront Plan is for a mixed-use outdoor recreation and commercial space development.
- The Transportation Plan provides goals for connectivity and enhanced real estate values.
- The Comprehensive Plan highlights the large industrial zones and housing affordability.

- The Comprehensive Plan includes initiatives to achieve the plan’s vision, including regulatory changes, capital projects, and planning initiatives.
- The Framework Maps outline planned development and improvement areas in Mills.
- The Intermodal Planning Study provided options for the development of an industrial park.

### Demographics

- Population increase is due primarily to natural increase.
- The Town’s median age is 37 and there are relatively few individuals 60 years or older in the Town.

### Workforce

- Of working age adults in Mills, 59 percent are employed.

### Land Use

- The Median Household Income (MHI) in Mills is relatively low within the Casper area.
- Better City recommends increasing the Riverfront Development to incorporate a sufficient stretch of the river to catalyze impact on the land value in the area.

### Comparative Analysis

- Mills had the second highest unemployment rate out of the five compared communities.
- The industry which saw the most significant job losses over the period due to industry factors for each of the Counties was “Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction.”
- Natrona County’s highest employment concentration is in “Wholesale Trade,” followed by “Healthcare & Assistance.”
- The only industry which saw significant growth in Natrona County in the past few years was “Transportation & Warehousing.” This same industry declined in Big Horn and Fremont. “Construction” shows some regional advantage in Natrona yet didn’t grow as it did in both Big Horn and Fremont.

### **Industry Analysis**

- The three largest industries by employment in Mills are Educational Services, Health Care, Social Assistance; Retail Trade; and Construction.
- The three largest industries by payroll in Natrona are Government & Government Enterprises; Health Care & Social Assistance; and Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction.
- The nationally collected data does not provide a granular understanding of the industries in Mills, and so a local Business Retention and Expansion program is needed to systematically collect data for the Town.

### **Economic Development Organizations**

- The Town should align local initiatives with the state’s 20-year economic diversification strategy—ENDOW—to increase potential for obtaining state funding.
- The Town should keep an open line of communication with the Wyoming Business Council to be in the loop for opportunities and assistance.
- The Town can assist local business owners and entrepreneurs identify and connect with the organizations such as the Wyoming Technology Business Center, Manufacturing Works, UW Technology Transfer & Research Products Center, Wyoming Small Business Development Center, and the Wyoming Women’s Business Center; which provide services to assist businesses with a variety of challenges.
- The Town has access to the Pathways Innovation Center, Wyoming Contractors Association, and Casper College. Each of these entities are valuable resources for any workforce development initiatives.

### **Opportunity Zones**

- Natrona County is in an opportunity zone.

### **Foreign Trade Zone**

- The Natrona County Airport’s Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) Designation covers the entirety of the Town of Mills.
- There are currently no businesses which have applied with the airport to take advantage of the FTZ.

### **Wyoming State Loan & Investment Board**

- Grants and loans provided include ones for capital construction projects and agricultural projects.

### **Wyoming Business Council (WBC) Incentives**

- The WBC utilizes a variety of programs to assist with business recruitment, including Administration of Community Development Block Grant funds, Business Ready and Business Committed Community Grant & Loan Partnerships, and other loan programs.
- Requests for assistance for the River Project should clearly show the project will add commercial space and create a draw to bring people and investment to the area.

### **Advance Casper Incentives**

- Advance Casper is available to partner with Mills on projects as they have in the past.

### **City of Casper’s Incentives**

- Options to finance development in Casper include New Market Tax Credits, Economic Development Assistance Program loan guarantee program, and the Economic Revitalization Revolving Loan Fund.
- Casper’s Urban Renewal District, the Old Yellowstone District, utilizes Form Based Code, a Façade/Storefront Renovation Grant Program, and a Brownfield Assessment Grant (through the EPA) to support development.

### **Promote Mixed-Use Development**

- Form Based Code regulates design elements and ensures that developments contribute to a vibrant mixed-use walkable commercial core.

- Better City recommends that the riverfront area is carved out and covered by Form Based Code Zoning to ensure that new developments accommodate the variety of uses desired for the area and that development also supports the lifestyles, transportation options, social interactions, and aesthetics needed for a regional destination.
- The Wyoming Business Council and Advance Casper both provide incentives. This section includes details on these programs and a review of the incentives used by Casper.

### **Business Retention & Expansion (BRE)**

- Form a BRE task force and establish clear roles, with goals and accountability for decision makers and subgroups.
- Define desired results, milestones, and indicators of BRE success, along with friction points and likely conflicts.
- Implement outreach and relationship building efforts; and gather information on employers and historical trends.
- Inventory economic development efforts and interview local companies and community influencers.
- Conduct an annual SWOT analysis.

## ***IMPLEMENTATION PLAN***

### **Workforce Development**

- Facilitate quarterly meetings with employers and workforce development partners at an industry level.
- Create a workforce development plan.

### **Entrepreneurship**

- Conduct feasibility study for industrial arts creative space.
- Facilitate a business community quarterly gathering.

### **Riverfront Redevelopment**

- Move forward with expanded Riverfront Masterplan.
- Create and implement Riverfront Area Form Based Code.
- Create a Tax Increment District in the Riverfront Area.

- Obtain letters of interest from businesses that would be interested in expanding to the Riverfront Area.
- Bring WBC to Mills to showcase the community and apply for the Community Readiness Grant.

### **Outdoor Recreation**

- Complete a business plan for the Wagon Wheel. Move forward with the acquisition and renovation of the facility.
- Create a Trails Plan and connect to the Platt River Trail System.

### **Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E)**

- Create a local BR&E Program and a Business Resource Guide to share with business owners and entrepreneurs.

### **Other Projects**

- Move forward with initiative to create a Mills' School District. Hire a consultant, write operation and tax plan, and collect signatures on petition for commission.
- Update census population to reflect the recent annexation.
- Identify potential grocery store locations, create an informational brochure, and conduct outreach.
- Assemble parcel information for the industrial park and create an informational brochure. Work with Austin Engineering and the State for assistance with their relocation, perhaps conduct a feasibility study for the relocation (funded by WBC or EDA).
- Determine next steps for possibility of turning the former Mountain View Elementary school into senior housing.
- Develop rapport with the property owners of the Lariat Mobile Home Park and the Trailer Park on Platte Avenue to keep option open for Town acquisition of their properties should they ever decide to exit.
- Communicate progress in economic development initiatives to the business community and residents to generate support and enthusiasm.



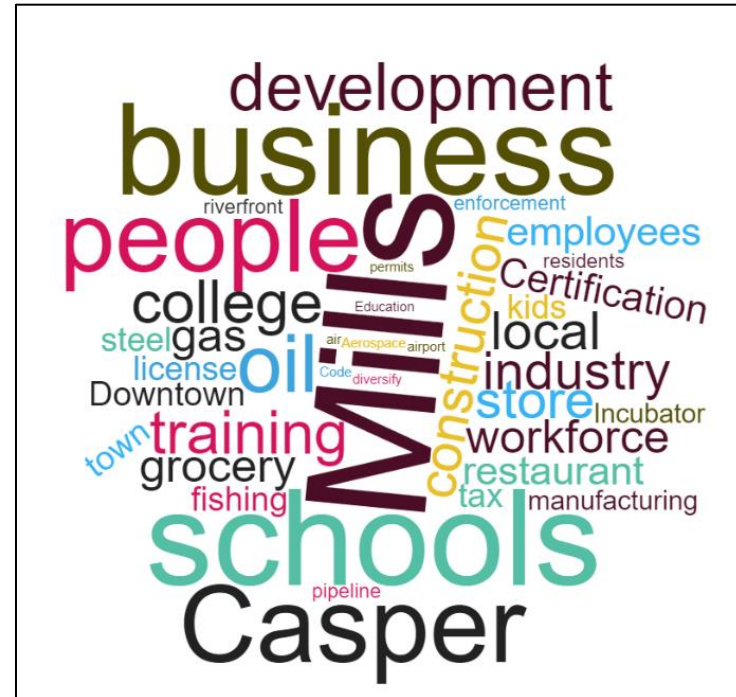
# ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

## INTERVIEW REPORT

Better City conducted 23 one-on-one interviews to 1) interface directly and build relationships with community leaders and members from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds, 2) learn about a variety of local stakeholder perspectives on community issues and goals, and 3) find and understand the community's local strategic assets.

Major themes that were brought up during this week are shown in Figure 1, and helped guide the economic development strategy. Common themes included:

- Support for the riverfront project with the Town acting as a horizontal developer in a public-private partnership.
- Great fishing is a local asset.
- The Town is business friendly.
- Workforce lacking in Accounting, IT, Truck Drivers, and Heavy Equipment Operators.
- Location lacks family infrastructure.
- No central business district or places to walk.
- Too many trailers and utility vehicles.
- The Town needs to focus on code enforcement.
- The Town needs a grocery store and restaurants.
- The Town needs local business preference when soliciting RFP's.
- School of Choice has destroyed the sense of community.
- The Town needs an afterschool program for students.
- There is a significant need for a Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) effort.



SOURCE: Wordclouds.com, Better City

Figure 1—Interview Word Cloud

### School of Choice

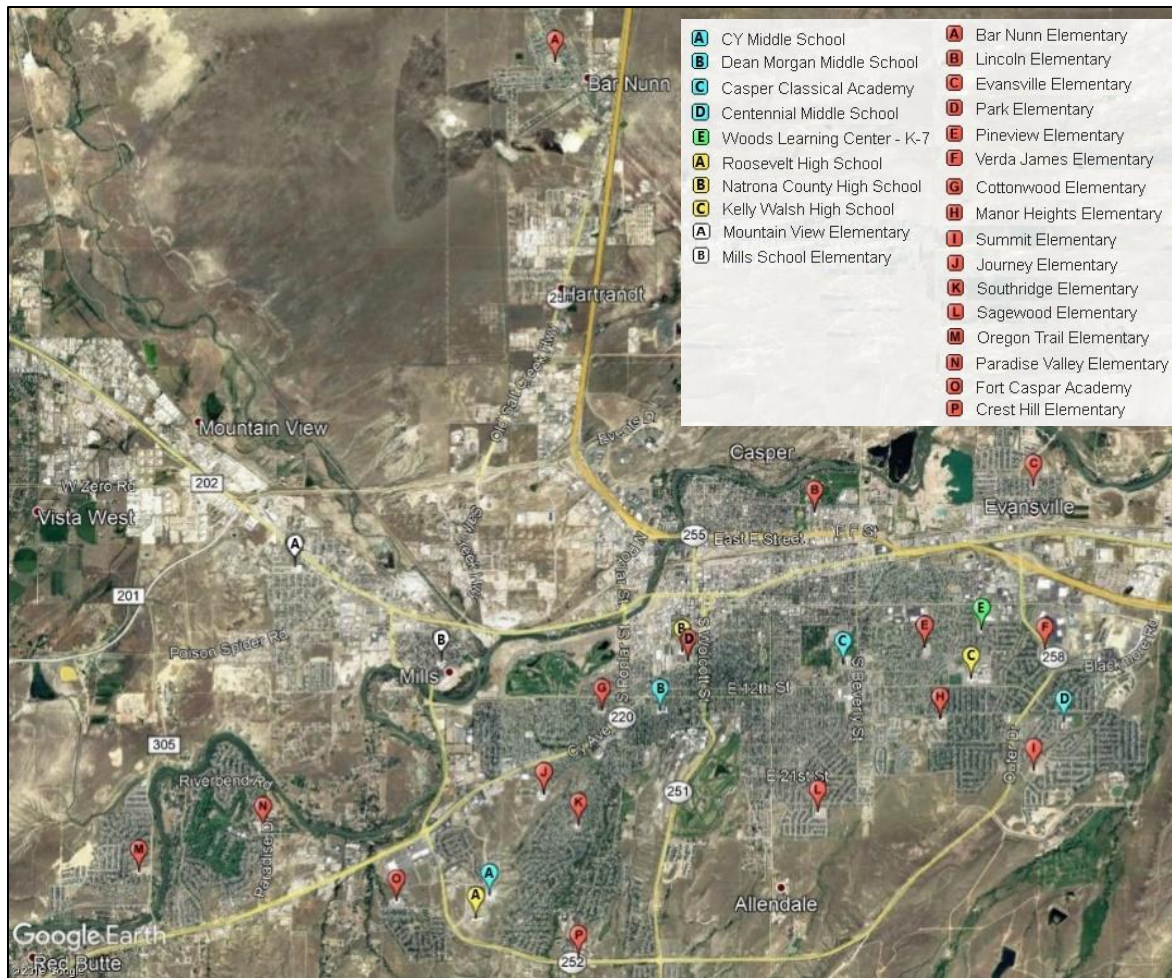
In 2018 the Natrona County School District (NCS D) closed the elementary school in Mills. This decision by the NCS D may have unintended consequences on the sustainability of Mills as a community. These consequences include not being able to attract and retain young families in the future, long bussing times for children, a fragmented community, and residents experiencing a growing sense of isolation.

NCS D offers open enrollment with parents choosing from any of the 28 schools in the district for their children to attend, regardless of where they reside in the County. The NCS D uses a lottery system to select which students are enrolled in each school with younger siblings of existing students given preference. The

school of choice system has resulted in children from the same neighborhoods attending different schools with many spending an inordinate amount of time each weekday being bussed. In the past, neighborhood schools were important contributors to creating a sense of community. With ‘school of choice’ Mills is now a fragmented community with families experiencing a deepening sense of isolation.

There are four potential alternatives:

1. Work with NCS D to revoke the “school of choice” program so that students within the same geographic area can attend school with their neighbors.
2. Form a separate Mill’s school district.
  - i. According to WY 21-6-208, this entails specific demographic requirements. Mills may want to work with communities to the north and west to accomplish this.
3. Work with NCS D to reopen a school in Mills.
  - i. The Town attempted to sue NCS D, but the case was dismissed for lack of standing. For this option to be viable, one or more families would need to take on the suit, and the Town could cover legal fees.
4. Open a Charter School in Mills.
  - i. According to regulations provided in WY 21-3-306.



SOURCE: Wordclouds.com, Better City

Figure 2—School District Map

## PRIOR PLANS REVIEW

This brief overview highlights the key points and elements applicable to economic development from the Riverfront Plan, Transportation Plan, First Street Park Plan, Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Plan, and Intermodal Planning Study. It also provides a summary of the planned initiatives from the Comprehensive Plan.

### Riverfront Plan

The riverfront concept is a mixed-use outdoor recreation space and commercial development.

- Primary features include restaurant, splash pad, outdoor patio/porch, and connection to trail system.
- An industrial modern west character is suggested for the architecture.
- The planned stepping terrace creates multiple views and multiple types of play for visitors.

A larger town planning study is needed to answer the questions about what becomes the center of a commercial core to Mills, this site is insufficient to provide that core.

### Transportation Plan

Pages 11 and 12 of the Transportation Plan review community goals established during a citizen’s workshop in 2016. Key goals include:

- Improve connectivity across multiple modes including vehicular, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian.
- Support creation of pedestrian-oriented businesses.
- Use transportation infrastructure to help create an attractive community.
- Improve access to jobs and education.
- Maintain and enhance real estate values.

- Strengthen the connection between transportation and land use.
- Select new projects that can be efficiently funded and maintained.

### First Street Park Master Plan



SOURCE: Norene Kilmer Park & First Street Park Master Plan

Figure 3—Location for Trailhead

One of the projects identified in the First Street Park Master Plan is the designation of a Trailhead at First Street Park, northeast of the intersection of Northwestern Avenue and First Street.



SOURCE: Platte River Trails

Figure 4—County Trails Connection to Mills

### Comprehensive Plan

Mill’s Mission defines the priorities of providing a clean and sustainable community, developing and growing as a vibrant community through investments and partnerships, and informing and involving the citizens.

## Workforce

- **Demographics:** Slightly more males than females, primarily white (with expected Hispanic growth), and even age spread (with slightly more 15- to 34-year-olds).
- **Employment:** Primarily wholesale trade (26 percent), manufacturing and retail trade (30 percent), and services and construction (10 percent). The Town is a net importer of employment.
- **Income:** Most households have income in the \$15k-\$75k range, and Median Household Income is \$33,786.
- **Education:** Mills is in the Natrona County School District, and at the time of the report, there was one school (elementary) within Town limits, which has since been closed.

## Economy

Mills became a town as business grew to support the oil refinery businesses in the early 1900s. The Town has a boom and bust extractive industry economy.

- The primary economic generator is the production and supply of industrial goods and services.
- Residents primarily obtain goods and services from the greater Casper area, so many goods and services are not provided within the Town.

## Development

- Established Industrial is the largest zoning category (due to the construction and mining companies).
- Developable zoning land is residential (15 percent), business (7 percent), and industrial (1 percent).
- Most dwellings (57 percent) are owner-occupied.
- 28 percent of housing units were built in the 1970s.

- Majority of housing units are single-family; 40 percent are detached homes and 47 percent are mobile homes.
- 36 percent of homeowners and 16 percent of renters spend less than 15 percent of their income on housing.
- Housing affordability and relative rural character is a key factor for making it an attractive place to live and work.

## Connectivity

Mills is well connected via the SW WY/Blvd, West 13<sup>th</sup> Street, and the West Belt Loop. There is no direct connection to I-25.

Sections of the River are Blue Ribbon Waters, with quality recreational fisheries. The River Front Feasibility Study proposes extending the trail across the river via a pedestrian bridge.

## Comprehensive Plan – Key Initiatives

The initiatives in the Comprehensive Plan are below, categorized by type of task: regulatory, capital projects, and planning.

### Regulatory Tasks

- Establish Riverfront Corridor District.
- Adjust zoning to allow Accessory Dwelling Units.
- Create a regulatory environment that favors high-quality, small-scale housing.
- Develop parkland dedication requirements for new residential subdivision developments.
- Require sidewalks in all future residential developments.

### Capital Project Initiatives

- Capitalize on the proximity to the airport by expanding commercial areas with hotels and restaurants.
- Expand the commercial center at West Yellowstone Highway and SW Wyoming Boulevard.
- Enhance pedestrian connections and safety crossings.

- Enhance connections with West 13th Street to Casper as a major inbound corridor.
- Install and improve sidewalks. Provide sidewalk from SW WY Blvd to old Mills School/Future Community Center, Platte River Parkway to King Blvd, and widen SW WY Blvd sidewalk on east side of bridge and add a pedestrian/bicycle lane on west side.
- Apply for Safe Routes to School grants.
- Develop a connected trail and pathways system that links all parks, community destinations, and schools via greenways or off-street bicycle corridors.
- Construct Old Town Bicycle Loop.
- Build pedestrian connections over the North Platte River to connect Mills to the regional trail system, Fort Caspar, and Paradise Valley Park.
- Improve existing parks and pathways with additional landscaping and amenities.
- Expand Mills Memorial Park.
- Create a plaza-like festival space that includes a band shell, usable greenway, and splash pad, etc.
- Develop recreational areas along the River to encourage visitors and to attract river recreation businesses.
- Develop a unique downtown destination for residents and visitors to gather and celebrate the community.
- Provide adequate infrastructure (technology, transportation, and utilities) to attract businesses.
- Complete water and sewer projects as outlined in the Capital Improvement Plan.
- Provide health and wellness services.
- Provide modern, flexible library/community space.
- Facilitate the development of a new elementary school to be opened in 2020.

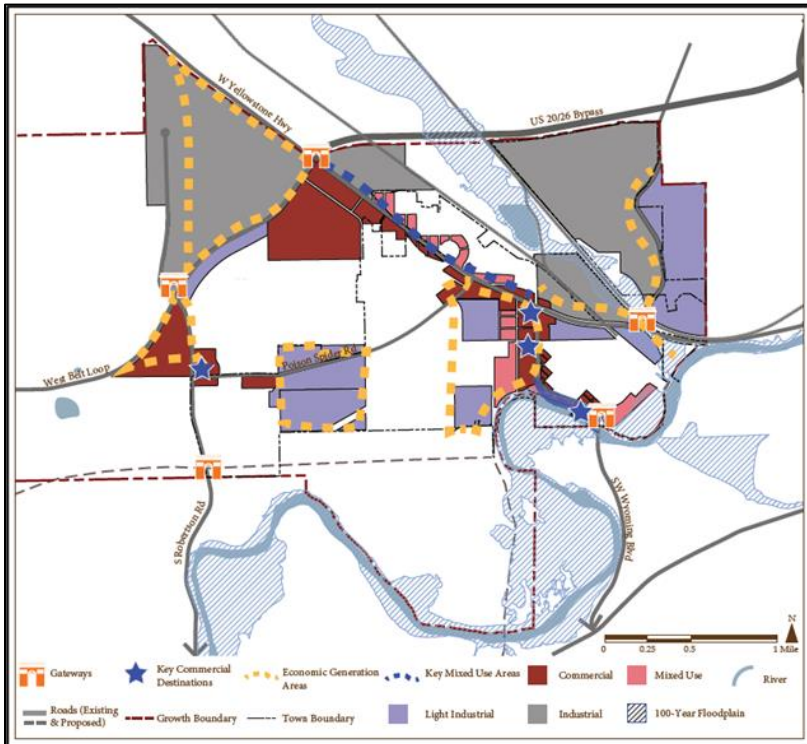
### Planning Initiatives

- Create an economic development program and provide incentives to bring industries into the community.
- Develop a Park Master Plan.
- Organize community events Downtown such as movies, bands, and farmers' markets.
- Initiate community-led organization to create/maintain community garden at Freden Park.
- Consider addition of parking lot west of underpass.
- Feasibility Studies for developing a community complex, and health, library, and community services.
- Continue to budget for replacement and maintenance (utilities and infrastructure) projects whenever possible.
- Create & Implement SW WY Blvd Improvement Plan. Promote a balance of traffic flow, beautification, and safety along SW Wyoming Boulevard.
- Conduct traffic study for SW WY Blvd to address signals, crossings, underpass.
- Investigate the possibility of limiting truck traffic on SW Wyoming Boulevard through coordination with WYDOT and utilization of the West Belt Loop.
- Improve the small-town aesthetics of corridors.
- Create & Implement Gateway Signage Beautification Plan.
- Create & Implement Street Light Expansion Program.
- Utilize Mills' assets, history of tradition and innovation, affordable living, etc. in establishing the identity.
- Create a Design Handbook for Developers. Establish an identity for the Town through streetscape, community branding, light poles and banners, wayfinding, and business improvements in the commercial areas. Encourage the use of the same brick throughout town and provide incentives to use local products.

## Framework Maps

### Self-Sufficient Community

- Gateways
- Key Destinations
- Economic Generation Areas
- Key Mixed-Use Areas

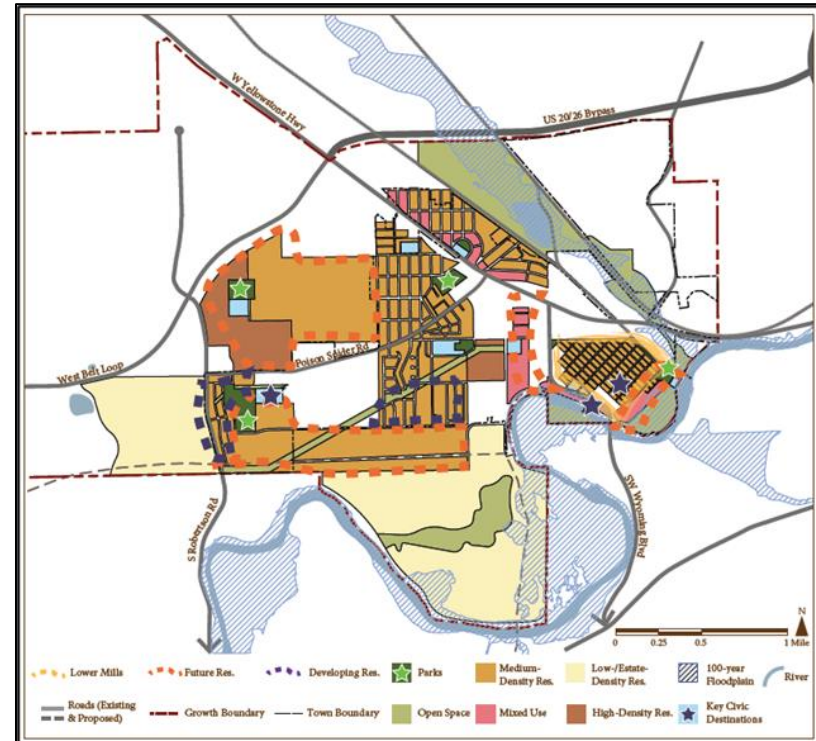


SOURCE: Uniquely Mills, 2017 Comprehensive Plan

Figure 5— Self-sufficient Community

### Complete Neighborhoods

- Future Civic Sites
- Lower Mills
- Future Residential
- Developing Residential
- Variety of Housing Types

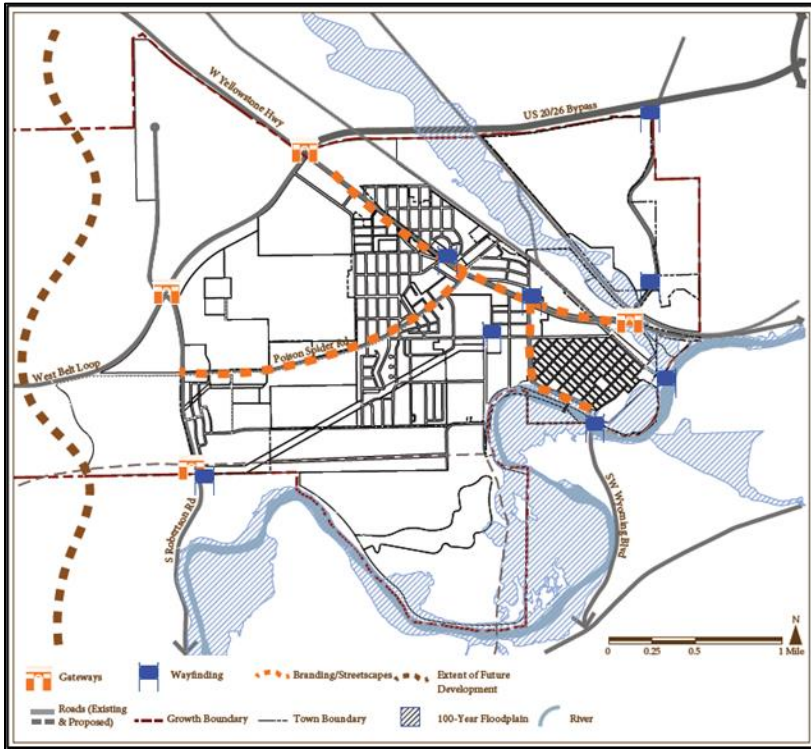


SOURCE: Uniquely Mills, 2017 Comprehensive Plan

Figure 6— Complete Neighborhoods

### Strategic Growth

- Gateways
- Wayfinding
- Branding/Streetscape
- Extent of Future Development

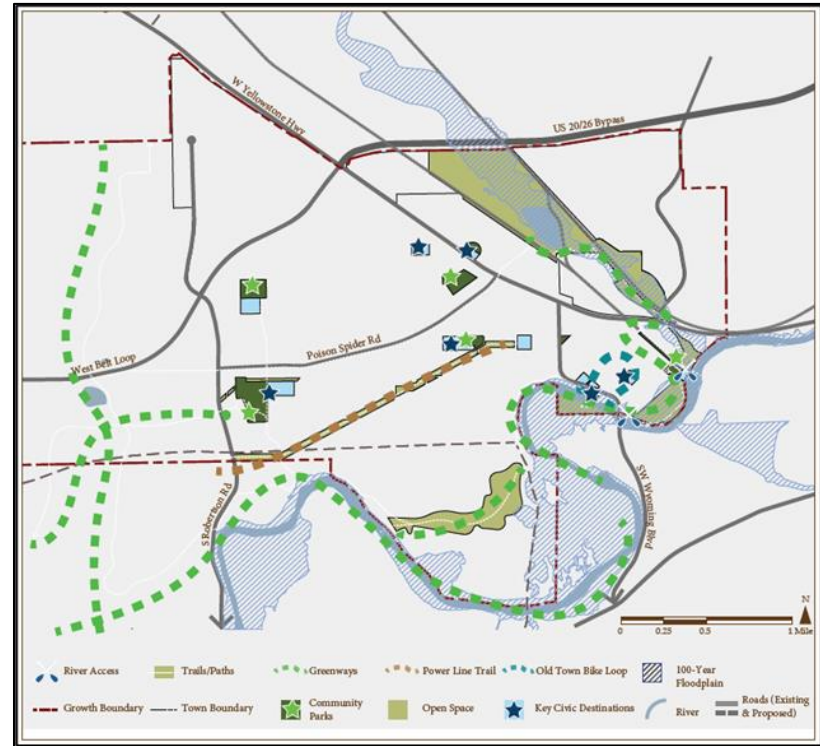


SOURCE: Uniquely Mills, 2017 Comprehensive Plan

Figure 7— Strategic Growth

### Natural Assets & Amenities

- Neighborhood-Centered Parks
- River Access
- Greenways
- Power Line Trail
- Old Town Bike Loop
- Key Civic Destinations

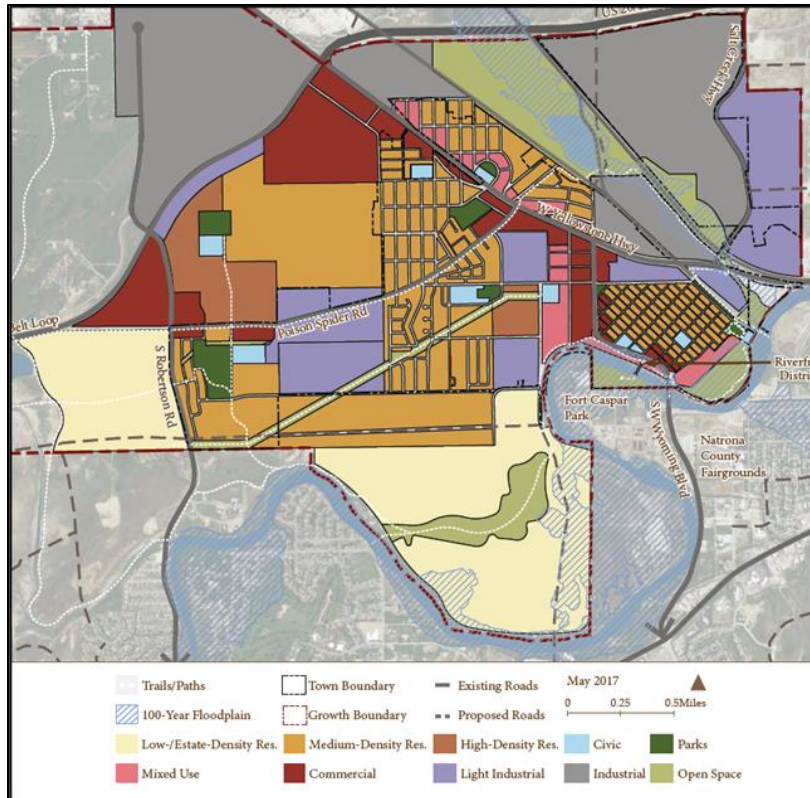


SOURCE: Uniquely Mills, 2017 Comprehensive Plan

Figure 8— Natural Assets & Amenities

## Future Land Use Plan

The intent of the Future Land Use Plan is to identify categories of land use as the Town of Mills continues to grow and develop. It is anticipated that infill development will continue to occur, along with additional growth to the west through annexation.



SOURCE: Uniquely Mills, 2017 Comprehensive Plan

Figure 9—Future Land Use Plan

Annexed areas must comply with Mills’ Plans. Public facilities and amenities must be constructed as part of annexation and development agreements for any land annexed to the Town to

ensure that public needs are met. Mills will take over maintenance of public facilities once annexed. Mills will participate in regional planning activities and review all annexations to determine their potential benefit and financial burden.

## Intermodal Planning Study

This analysis identifies three alternatives for the development of an industrial park, each with roughly the same (\$20 Million) cost, see Table 1. The costs are comprised of both road and rail elements for all three alternatives. There are active pipelines that cross the northern half of the study area, and a few major public and private utilities pass through the property. Access to the study area is poor, and the floodplain is the greatest obstacle to the development of the Mills Intermodal rail park.

Alternate	Cost
Alt 1—West Side Loop	\$19,610,000
Alt 2—New Half Interchange	\$21,774,000
Alt 3—Cross Connector	\$22,031,000
Hybrid—Preferred Alternative	\$11,780,000

SOURCE: Mills Intermodal Park Plan

Table 1—Alternative Development Costs

The preferred alternative determined by the steering committee was a hybrid of the three alternatives initially identified and eliminated the big-ticket items including the rail loop, half interchange, and crossing connector.

The developable area of the study site consists of 129 acres which are currently pastureland or vacant greenfield, with an estimate of 24 lots and 884,940 building square footage. Due to few owners and expressed interest from public meetings, assembling the parcels needed should not be a limiting factor.



## Casper Area Strategic Plan

Advance Casper leads, encourages, and facilitates diversification and expansion of the Casper area economy. Their priorities are to promote the expansion of existing businesses, contribute to the development of high-value start-ups, and recruit companies that complement the existing business base.

### Prosperity

Business Attraction & Local Business Retention & Expansion

- Help existing businesses grow and expand
- Create primary jobs
- Recruit complementary businesses
- Facilitate infrastructure and development projects



### Skills & Innovation

Workforce Development & Education & Entrepreneurship & Small Business Supporting

- Identify market gaps or new market opportunities
- Maintain a network of entrepreneurial service providers
- Breakthrough 307- a unique program that creates a pathway for entrepreneurs to access angel investors



### Livability

Economic & Community Transformation

- Support the continued development of Quality of Life Initiatives within the community



- Drive diversification of the economy by partnering with local industry leaders for long-term economic growth

Based on discussions with local businesses, Advance Casper and the Town of Mills can strengthen its service offering in the area of BR&E. This can be accomplished by visiting with local businesses to understand their needs, provide information on available services, and conducting surveys.

### Primary Industries

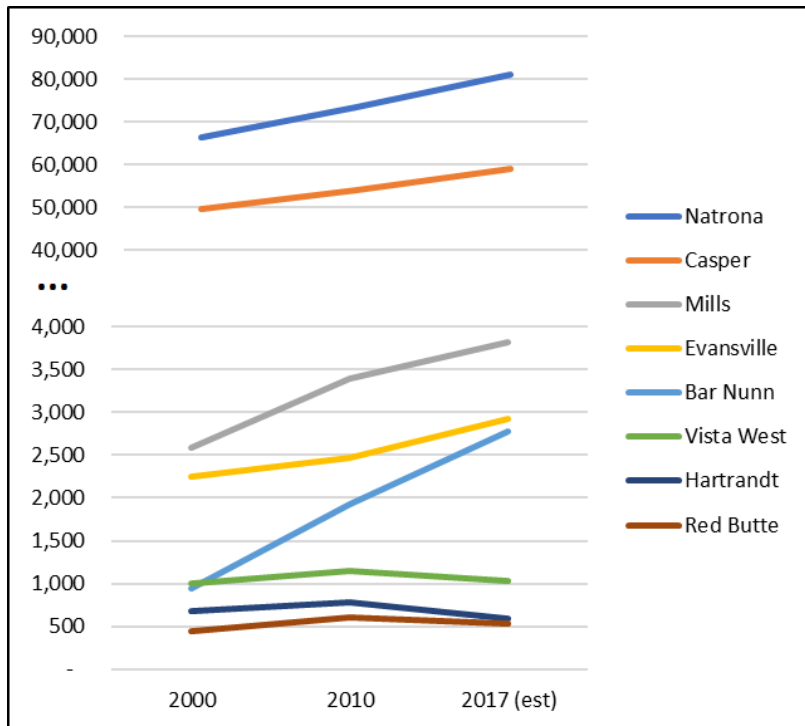
In 2017, Advance Casper identified five industries of focus for the region based on existing capacity, community assets, and future diversified growth prospects. By emphasizing these five industries, supporting stakeholders like education, real estate, and construction will all benefit from the focused direction. The five industries are Advanced Manufacturing (specifically Aerospace & Defense and Outdoor Recreation), Energy (specifically Petrochemical and Renewables & Wind Energy), Finance, Medical, and Technology.

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic trends reveal information about the makeup and movement of the residents of the Town. An analysis was conducted to examine the Town and Natrona County (the “County”) demographic trends.

### Population Growth



SOURCE: County and Town Intercensal Datasets

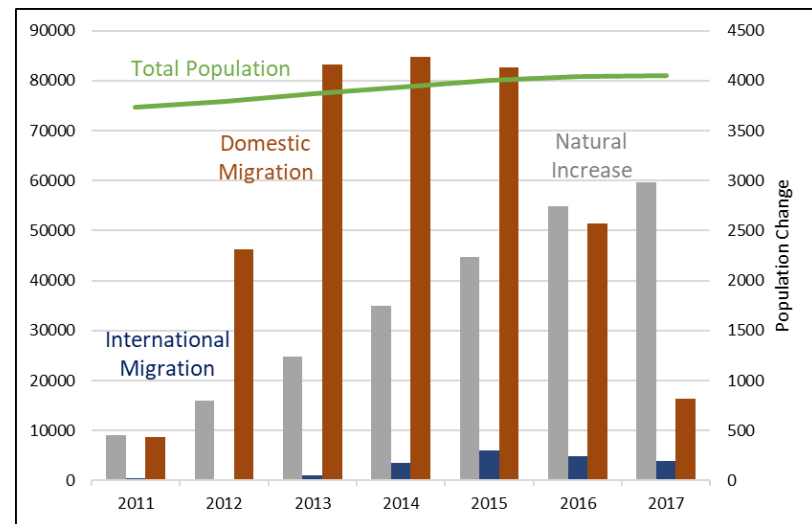
Figure 10—Natrona & Casper Area Population Trends

While both the County and Town have experienced an overall increase in population over time, there is a stark difference in the rate of growth. The growth in the County is primarily due to

increases in Casper and Bar Nunn, which had an average population growth of 560 per year and 108 per year respectively from 2000 to 2017.

Between 2000 and 2017 the Town population increased 47 percent, with average growth of 2.78 percent per year. In the same period the County population increased by 22 percent, with average growth of 1.28 percent per year.

The survey area is too small to determine factors of population change within the Town. An analysis of the County data reveals that the steady increase from 2011 to 2017 is due largely to the natural increase (more births than deaths). There has been some fluctuation in domestic migration, with a slight increase in international migration within the past five years.



SOURCE: US Census Annual Population Estimates 2010-2017

Figure 11—Natrona County Population Trends

### Race & Language Profile

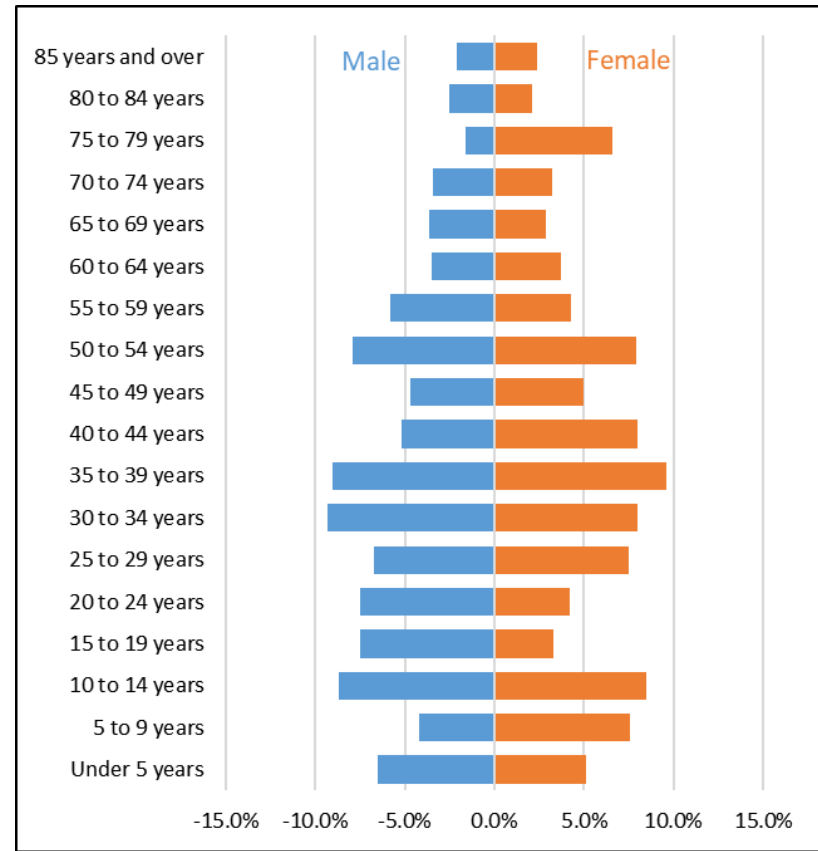
According to 2017 Census estimates, Mills is racially homogenous, as over 98 percent of survey respondents identified as White. The County has slightly more diversity as about 93 percent identified as white, 1.3 percent as Black/African American, and 3.7 percent as other.

English is the only language spoken at home in 94.6 percent of the Town’s households, 3.6 percent speak Spanish, and 1.1 percent speak other Indo-European languages.

### Age Comparison

The median age in Mills is 37, which is on par with the median age in Natrona County (36) and Wyoming (37).

The largest share of ages in the Town are 35 to 39 years with 19 percent of the population, followed by ages 30 to 34 years and 10 to 14 years (17 percent each). Most Town residents are within working ages, representing a strong workforce. Each of the age ranges from 60 years and over represent less than 9 percent of the population. Since there are not many retirees living in the area, there may be a lack of age-in-place infrastructure in the community (see Figure 12).

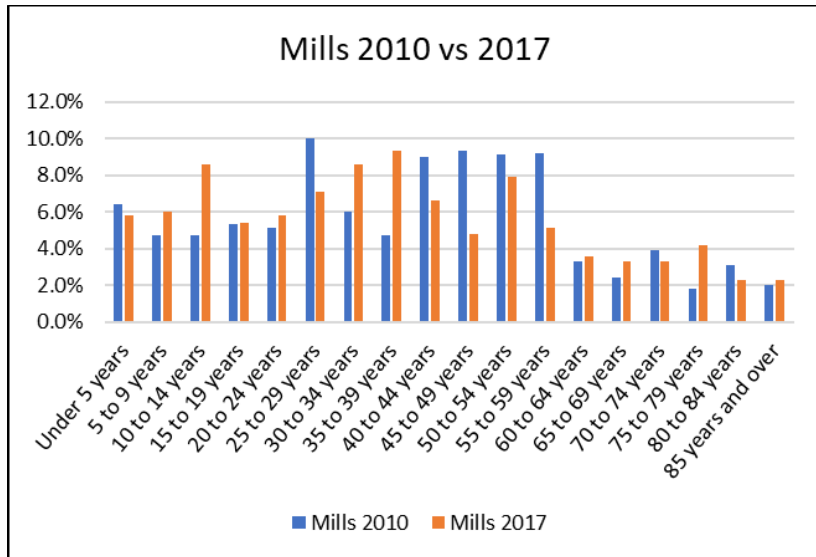


SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 12—Mills Age Demographics

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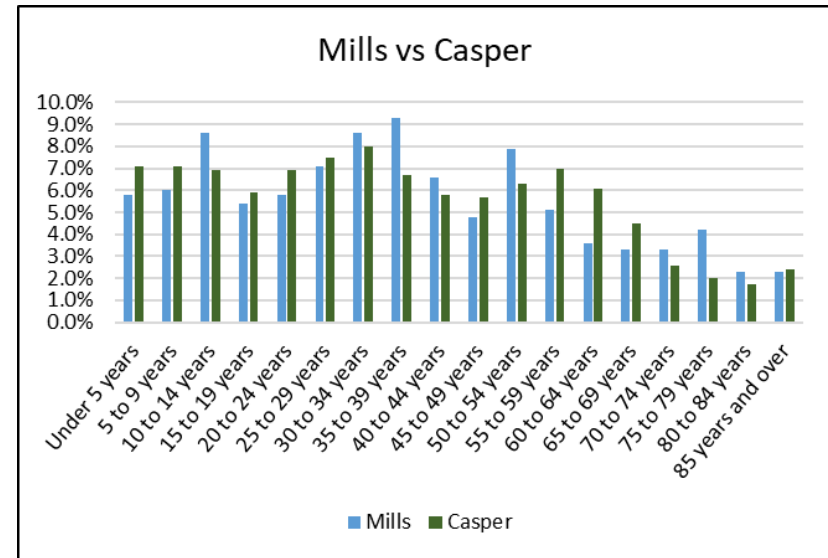
Since 2010, the share of teenagers and individuals in their 30's in the Town increased, with a decrease of individuals in their 40's and 50's. This may indicate that Mill's provides opportunities for early career professionals, but that people may be transitioning elsewhere towards the end of career (see Figure 13).



SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 13—Mills Demographic Changes (2010-2017)

When the age demographic data of Mills is compared to that of Casper, there is a higher percentage of the population in Casper between the ages of 55 to 69 (see Figure 14).



SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 14—Mills Ages vs Casper Ages (2017)

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## WORKFORCE

For the health of the labor market and surrounding economy, it is important to have a stable workforce with a wide range of skills and experience. A robust workforce benefits the community because it leads to more citizens that are engaged in civic affairs, self-sufficient, tax-positive, and have disposable funds to spend on local services. An analysis of the current workforce was conducted and is discussed in this section of the report.

### Age-Dependency Ratio

A sustainable ratio between dependents and workers is important for a healthy economy. Some age groups, such as children and retirees, contribute to the economy through purchases of goods and services, and economic transfers (i.e. social security, pensions, and 401(k)'s) but do not contribute to the economy through labor and entrepreneurship. An age dependency ratio is good at highlighting these shares to make sure that a proper balance is achieved. The ratio is calculated by showing how many working aged adults (ages 16-64) are supporting children and retirees.

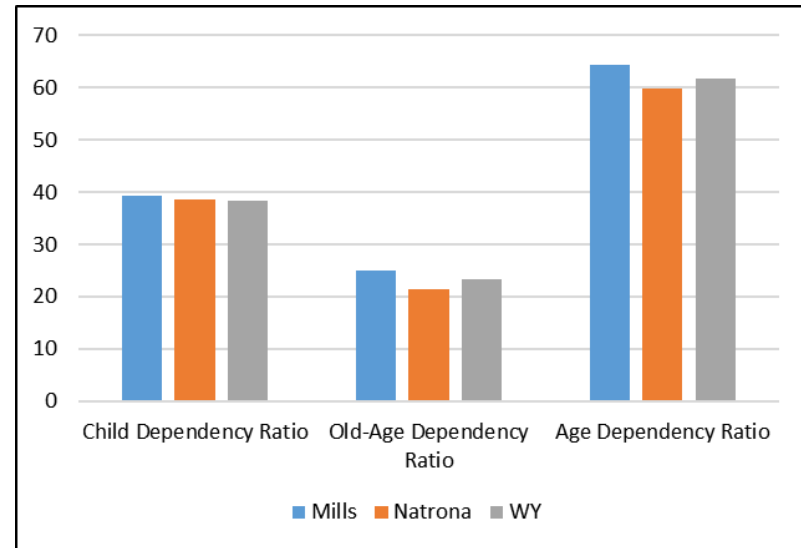
The age dependency ration is calculated by dividing the amount of the dependent population (ages zero to 14 and ages 65 and greater) by the amount of the population in the “productive ages” (ages 15 to 64). It is expressed as the following formula:

$$\frac{(\text{Population ages } 0 - 14) + (\text{Population ages } 65+)}{\text{Pop. ages } 15 - 64} \times 100$$

The formula can also be used to determine the child dependency ratio or the old-age dependency ratio by excluding the corresponding factor in the equation. There is not a target ratio amount; rather, the ratio is valuable in showing trends or pressures in a population over time. A child dependency ratio of

50, for example, would mean that for every 100 adults, there are 50 children dependent on them.

The age dependency ratio in Mills is slightly higher than that of the County or the State, the old-age dependency ratio is quite high, at 64.3. In comparison, Natrona County has an age dependency ratio of 59.7, and the State of Wyoming has an age dependency ratio of 61.7.



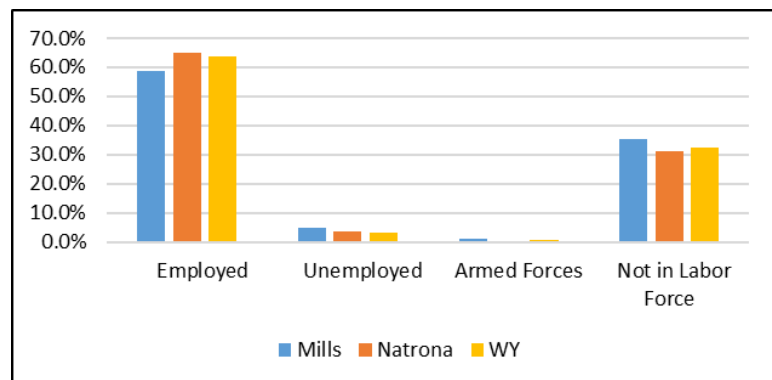
SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 15—Dependency Ratio Comparison

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## Employment Status

According to the most recent estimates, 58.7 percent of working-age adults in the Town are employed. This is just less than the County (65.1 percent) and the State (63.9 percent).



SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 16—Employment Status Comparison

A total of 35.5 percent of the working age adults in the Town are not in the labor force. This is only slightly higher than the State (32.4 percent) and the County (31.3 percent).

Economists traditionally define an economy at full employment when the unemployment rate is at five percent. Mills is at 4.9 percent, which means that it is at or near “Full Employment.”

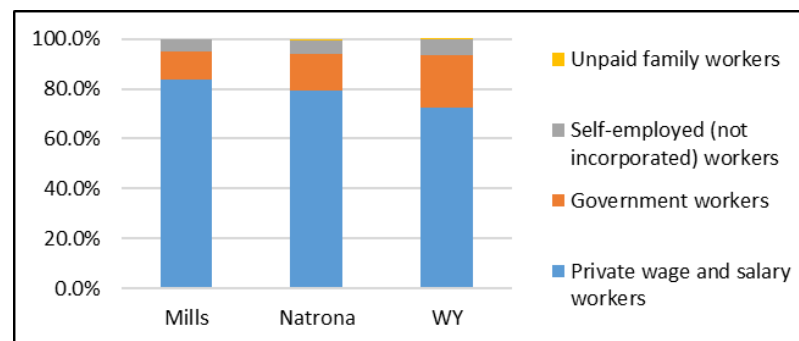
“Unemployed” represents the segment of workers age 16 and above who are willing and able to work but are not yet employed. With such a small share of these types of workers in the County, it may be difficult for new businesses to find employees from the current labor pool. New businesses will need to:

- 1) Search for workers in the “Unemployed” segment, which only represents 3.5 percent of the County and may be too limiting.
- 2) Pull workers from the “Not in Labor Force” segment.
- 3) Hire workers from outside the County and bring them in.
- 4) Take workers from other employers in the County by offering better wages, better benefits, or both.

All four of these options require extra effort from the business to secure good labor. This is good for workers, since it means they can secure higher wages and benefits, but it also makes it more difficult for small or new businesses that are trying to establish a presence in the community.

## Type of Worker

A significant share of the Town’s workforce is employed by private entities (83.9 percent). The remaining are employed by government (11 percent) or are self-employed (5 percent). This mirrors the County and State breakdown, except that in the both the County and State the share of government workers is larger while the share of private entity workers is larger in Mills.

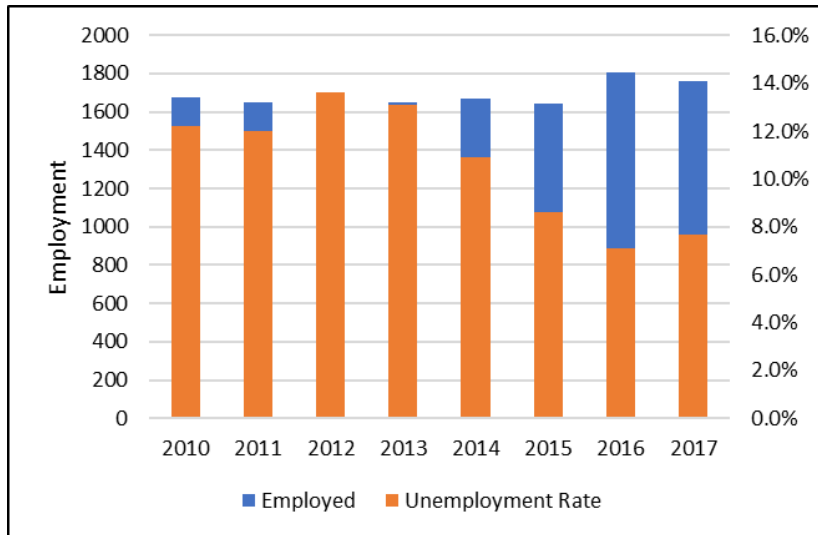


SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 17—Class of Worker Comparison

## Unemployment Rate

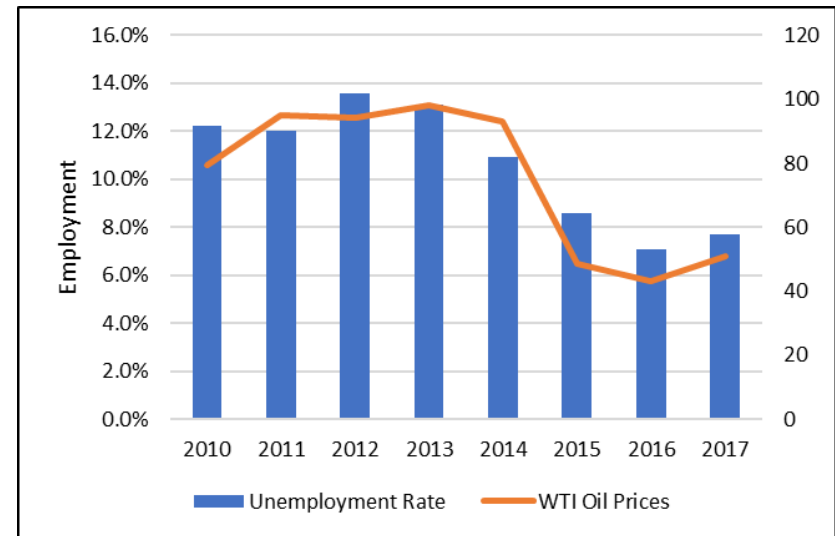
The Town's total employment remained fairly constant, with an increase of 85 workers between 2010 and 2017. Mills has experienced a fluctuation in the unemployment rate in the last decade (see Figure 18). It peaked in 2012 at 13.6 percent and was at its lowest in 2016 at 7.1 percent. Fluctuations in the unemployment rate are expected for such a small community. A gain or loss of 1 percent in the rate can occur because of the gain or loss of just 25 jobs, for example.



SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 18—Town Employment & Unemployment Rate

To determine how much of an impact the volatility of the extraction market has on the local economy, the West Texas Intermediary (WTI) crude oil spot prices provided by the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) were overlaid with the historic unemployment rate in Mills (see Figure 19). Surprisingly, there is a strong positive correlation (0.93 correlation coefficient), with changes in the Town's unemployment rate moving in tandem with the prior year's fluctuation in oil prices. That is, when oil prices increase, so does the Town's unemployment rate. When oil prices decline, so does the Town's unemployment rate. These should be in a negative correlation, that is the opposite should be occurring: when oil prices go up, unemployment should go down and vice versa.



SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates, EIA WTI Crude Oil Spot Prices, Better City

Figure 19—Unemployment Rate vs Oil Prices

## LAND USE

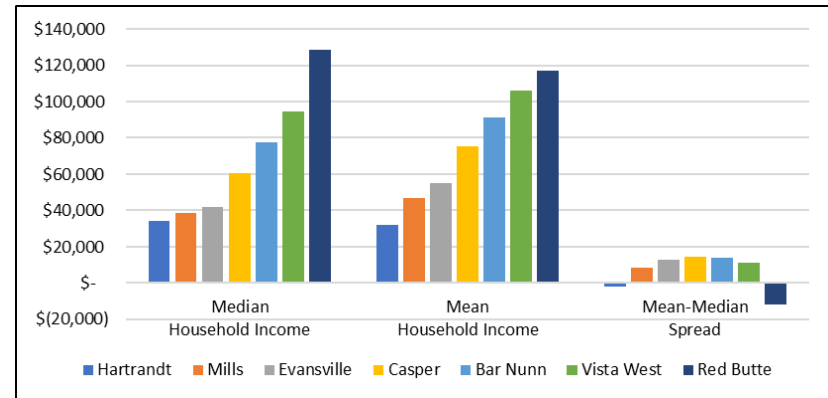
Land use economics are a key factor when there are multiple municipalities in close proximity, as they influence the dynamics which determine where businesses and people locate in an area.

### Income by Area

Mills competes for workforce and businesses with the other towns, cities, and census designated places (CDPs) in the Casper area. Many people choose to locate in areas where there are readily available services and recreation businesses, and these businesses will use median household income (MHI) as a primary determinant when deciding where to locate. This can create a cycle which over time attracts the businesses which improve quality of life to the towns with the higher income levels with residents following suit to be close to these businesses. Proactive steps should be taken to ensure that there is median household income appeal for a good mix of businesses within the community which includes service and recreational businesses.

Income estimates were analyzed to see how the MHI factor may impact Mills as businesses select a location within the greater Casper area. As shown by Figure 20, Mill’s MHI is \$38,512. This is within a close range between the MHI for Hartrandt and Evansville, yet Mill’s MHI is \$21,958 lower than Casper, and \$90,238 lower than Red Butte.

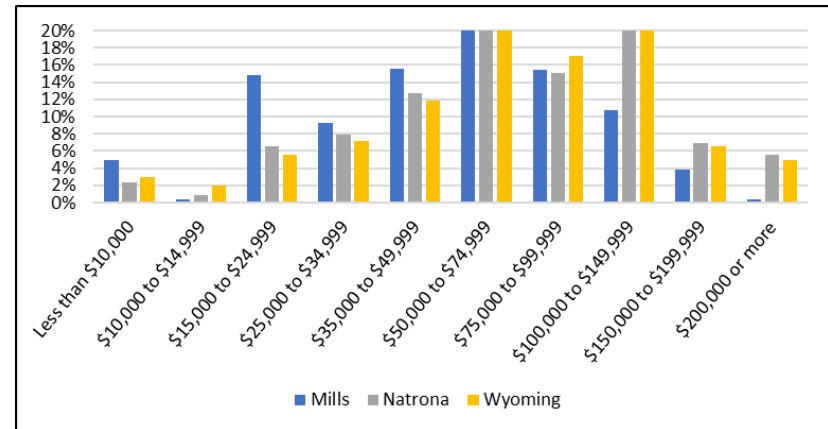
Mean household income estimates in the area are not significantly larger than the median. A small spread between mean and median household incomes can be interpreted as the equality level of the income levels in the area. In other words, the mean is not being pulled significantly by a small segment of high-earning individuals who receive a significant portion of the area’s incomes.



SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 20—Household Income Comparison

As shown in Figure 21, in a comparison to the County and State, Mills has a many more income earners in lower ranges (especially \$15,000 to \$24,999 and \$10,000 and Less) and has fewer earners in the higher income brackets (those earning \$100,000 or more).



SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 21—Income Comparison





SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates, Better City, QGIS

Figure 22—Heat Map of Casper Area MHI

A heat map of the MHI by Census Block Group shows that within Casper City there are areas where higher income brackets are clustered, and that Mills actually represents some slightly higher MHI than the block group neighbors bordering three out of four of the Town's sides.

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## Potential Focus Areas

As outlined in the Mill’s Comprehensive Plan, the majority of the established land (31 percent) is industrial, most of which is located along the Town’s main corridors. It would be more feasible to focus catalytic projects in areas of the Town which are less established. Two potential focus areas include the Lariat Mobile Home Park and the River Area.

### Lariat Mobile Home Park

The owners of the Lariat Mobile Home Park have been entrepreneurial in acquiring adjacent properties and expanding their rental units and real estate holdings. This has created a unique redevelopment opportunity at this central location of the community as 10-acres are under common control of one property owner, as shown in Figure 23 and Table 2.

The owners should be approached about entertaining a redevelopment opportunity, which could include a mixed-use development with multi-family housing, light industrial and commercial uses. Redevelopment poses several benefits to the current property owners depending on their preferred deal structure. These could include benefits such as Opportunity Zone tax treatment, 1031 exchange, and less property management demands if they were to rollover their proceeds into another property. Conversely, they could find a development partner and contribute their land as equity into a redevelopment project.



SOURCE: WLC Engineering and Surveying, Google Earth, Better City

Figure 23—Lariat Mobile Home Park Parcels

LMHP Area	
Number of Parcels	9
Number of Owners	1 <sup>1</sup>
Total Acreage	10.04
Total Land Value	\$550,707
Total Improved Value	\$224,406
Total Assessed Value	\$775,113

SOURCE: Natrona County Assessors Website

Table 2—Lariat Mobile Home Park Parcel Information

<sup>1</sup> Erlich purchased the parcels from McCue, and seller financing results in two owners currently shown of the property records.

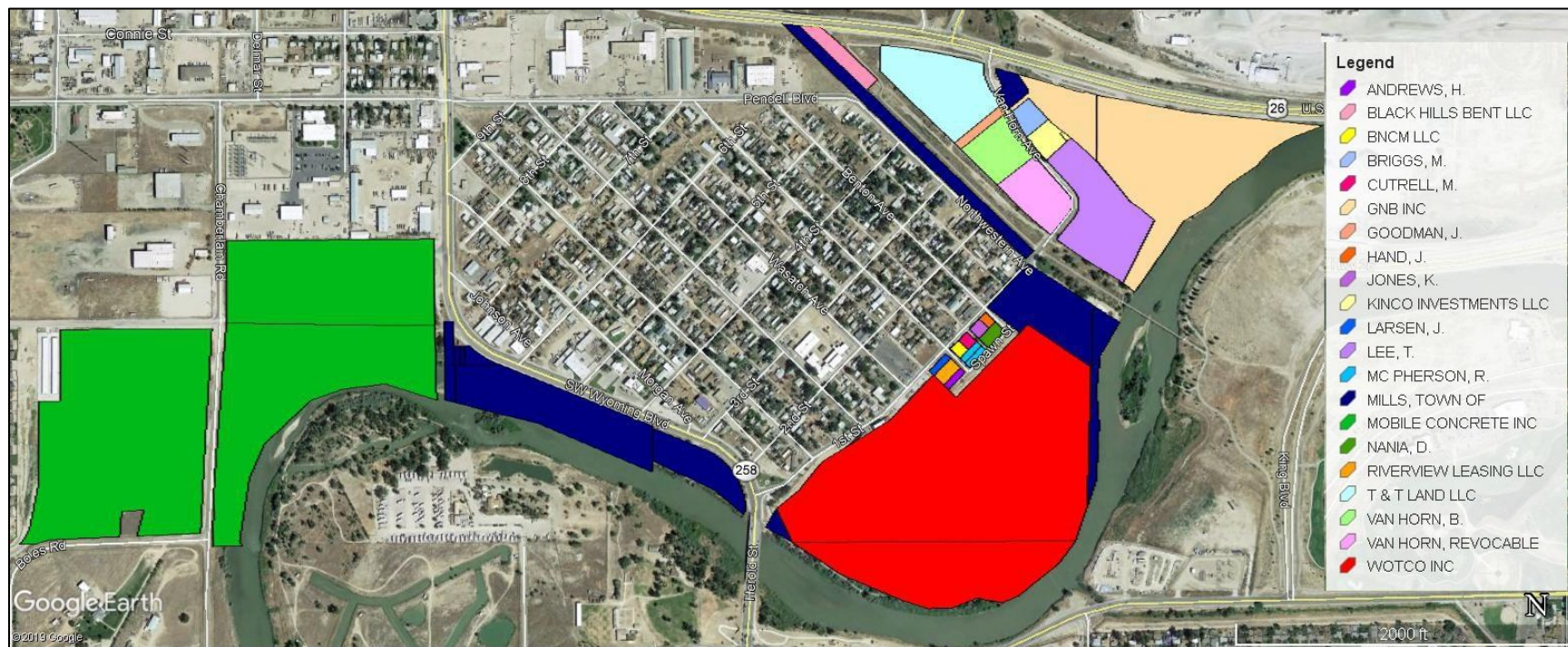
### River Area

The Mills River Front Plan identifies the stretch of riverside property owned by the Town as a project site. In order to transition this concept into a catalytic project for the Town's economy, Better City recommends that the project area be expanded to the stretch of river outlined in the map below. This would create a project with sufficient scale to catalyze investment in adjacent areas.

River Area	
Number of Parcels	37
Number of Owners	21
Total acreage	163.01
Total Land Value	\$5,227,423
Total Improved Value	\$7,149,909
Total Assessed Value	\$12,377,332

SOURCE: Natrona County Assessors Website

Table 3—River Area Parcel Information

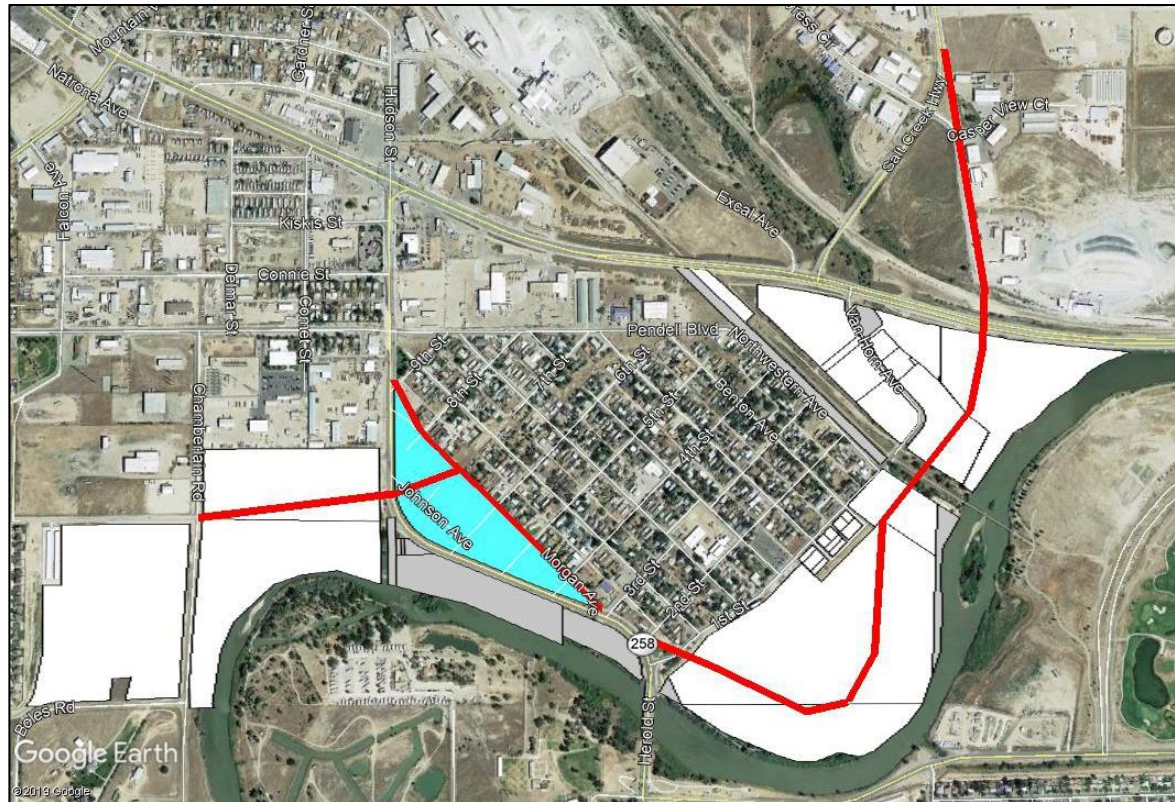


SOURCE: WLC Engineering and Surveying, Google Earth, Better City

Figure 24—River Area Parcels

The Riverfront is a feasible project area in primarily due to logistics of transitioning one primary property owner to another location, as opposed to potential projects along Yellowstone Highway which would require the location adjustment of numerous industrial businesses. It is possible for the community to stay true to their core as an industrial Town, while creating a place which provides a both a commercial core and recreational opportunities, thereby increasing the Town residents' quality of life.

Figure 25 shows how the roads could be realigned to create lots with sufficient depth along Wyoming Blvd to accommodate larger commercial uses. This road realignment would also provide improved access to the riverfront area, encouraging safe and simple access to draw more people to the area.



SOURCE: WLC Engineering and Surveying, Google Earth, Better City

Figure 25—River Area Road Realignment

Once commercial uses and amenities are developed within the Riverfront project area, demand for the supportive residential area neighborhoods will increase. This will cause private market forces to engage—resulting in improvements or redevelopment to the residential homes along with increasing property values.

The process will include the following steps:

- Open discussions with business owners and local managers to explore relocation;
- Secure land contracts;

- Perform engineering studies;
- Raise base elevations for building sites to remove them from the floodplain and go through the process for FEMA floodplain map adjustments;
- Determine what infrastructure improvements are needed; and
- Work with the private sector to bring in a developer who will acquire and develop the riverfront properties.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

To understand how Mills' economy compares to other similar communities, a comparative analysis was conducted on the median household income and unemployment rate of five selected comparable towns/cities, as well as an industry cluster analysis on the four counties in which these towns/cities are located.

The county level data provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) relevant to industry clusters were analyzed using the shift share and location quotient methodologies for each of the four counties in which a comparative community resides: Big Horn, Fremont, Natrona, and Niobrara. The analyses will be described in detail.

### Selection Logic

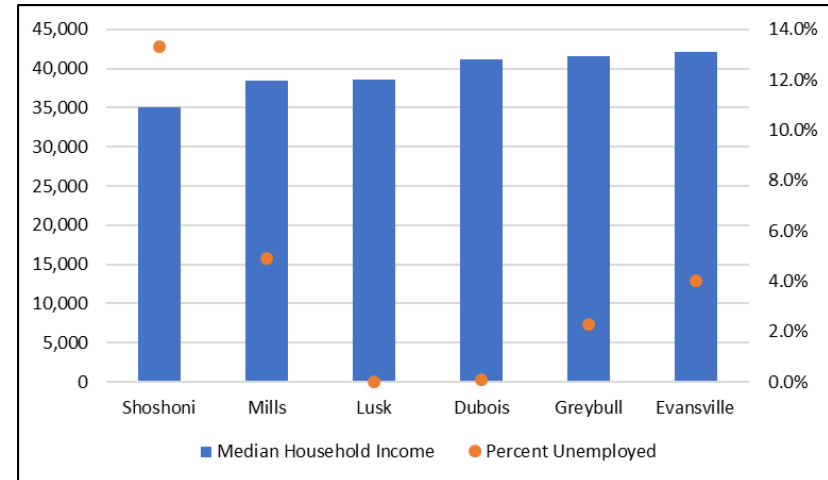
In order to identify communities with a similar balance of industries and earning potential, all the cities and towns in Wyoming were compared to Mills based on their percent of population employed in the Town's top five employment industries (Agriculture/Mining, Construction, Retail, Education/Healthcare, and Arts/Recreation) and their Median Household Income (MHI).

The difference between the Town's percentage of employment and that of other communities were calculated. The communities which had less than 10 percent difference in each of the five industries and an MHI within \$5,000 of Mills' MHI were included in the comparative analysis. These five communities are Shoshoni, Lusk, Dubois, Greybull, and Evansville.

## Median Household Income & Unemployment

The MHI in Mills is \$38,512, and it ranks as second lowest in the comparative analysis, with Shoshoni as the lowest with \$35,000 MHI, and Evansville the largest with \$42,140 MHI.

The percentage of the population unemployed varies between 0.0 percent in Lusk, and 13.3 percent in Shoshoni. In Mills, 4.9 percent of the labor force is unemployed.



SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-year Estimates

Figure 26—Median Household Income & Unemployment Rate

According to a recent community development plan for Lusk, the decline in population correlates with an increase in the rate of employment. This is possibly due to the fact there are fewer residents of employment age while the number of jobs has remained relatively the same.

Dubois has benefited from Tourism (service jobs) for a long time. The proximity to Jackson and the Yellowstone South Entrance are big influencers in the Dubois economy.

## Shift Share Analysis

Shift share analysis is a method of dissecting job growth into its component parts. This helps to better understand the factors contributing to growth. The following are components of the analysis:

### State Share

The portion of job growth that can be attributed to general economic growth throughout the State. It is calculated by multiplying the number of jobs created in a given industry by the State's overall growth rate. For example, a change in the real estate agents may be the result of the State's overall economic growth (or decline), and not because of local industry or regional trends.

### Industry Share

The industry share represents the portion of job growth that is attributable to the industry's state-wide expansion or contraction. It is calculated by multiplying the number of jobs in the County at the beginning of the time period (2014) by the State's growth rate for a specific industry and taking out the State Share. This share shows expansion or contraction trends for a given industry that cannot be explained by the State Share.

### Regional Share

This is the most important component of job growth for the local analysis. It is calculated by subtracting the industry share and the state share from the total number of jobs gained or lost in the selected industry at the local level. This highlights the change in employment that is attributable to the County's economic conditions. Regional shares highlight aspects of the region which

may be working with or against the other trends and can reveal strengths of weaknesses of the area for selected industries.

### Total Job Change

The total number of jobs (full-time and part-time) gained or lost in an industry during the period analyzed (2014-2018). This number is based on estimates provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

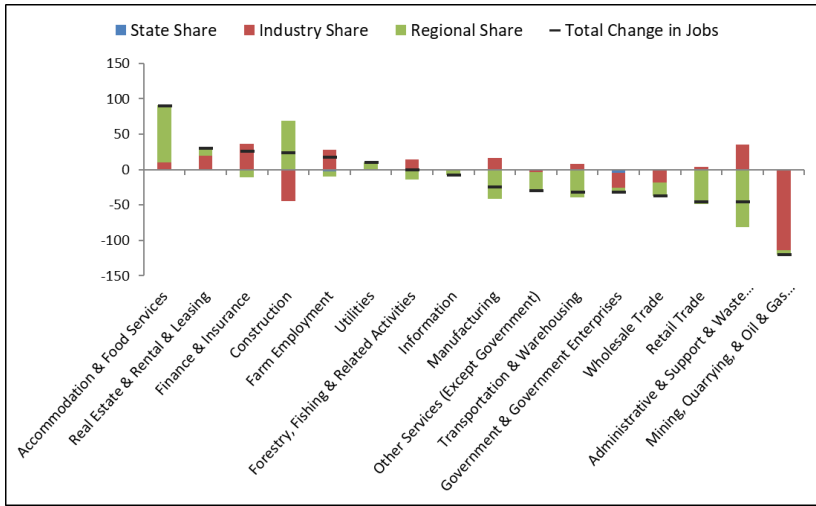
### Findings

According to BEA estimates, a different industry experienced the largest amount of growth in each of the comparison counties. In Natrona it was "Transportation and Warehousing," in Big Horn it was "Accommodation & Food Services," in Fremont it was "Manufacturing," and in Niobrara it was "Real Estate & Rental & Leasing."

The industry which saw the most significant job losses over the period due to industry factors for each of the Counties was "Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction."

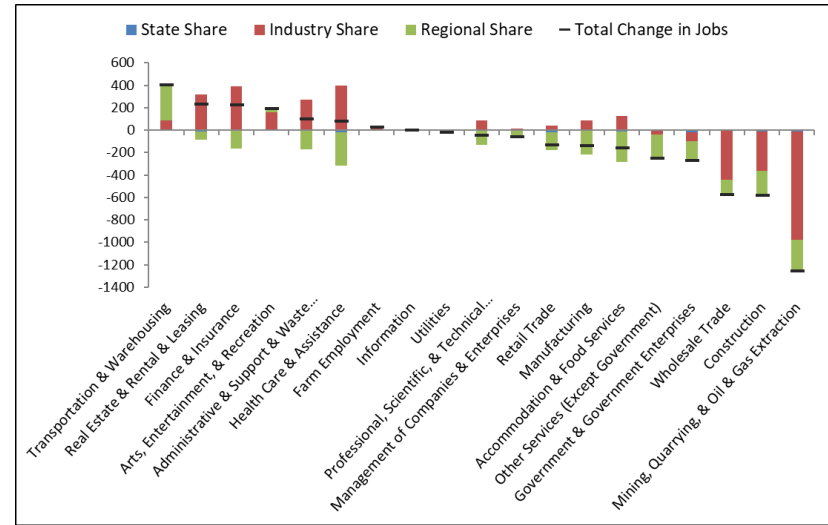
The small size of many industries in Niobrara cause them to be excluded from the dataset. About 20 percent of Niobrara County residents leave the county to work elsewhere.

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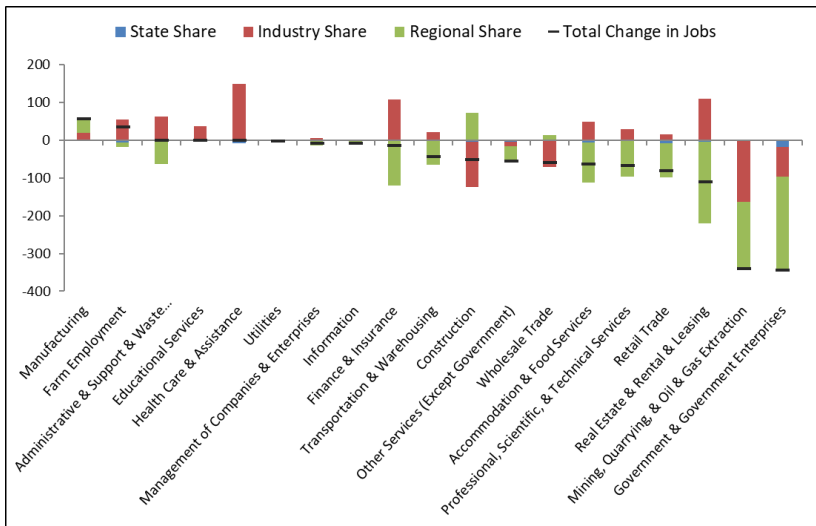
SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 27—Big Horn County Shift Share Analysis (2014-2018)



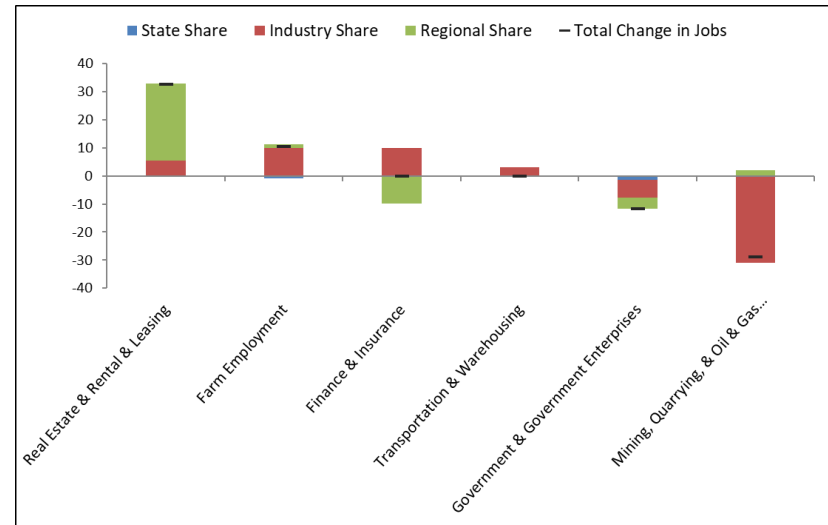
SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 29—Natrona County Shift Share Analysis (2014-2018)



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 28—Fremont County Shift Share Analysis (2014-2018)



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 30—Niobrara County Shift Share Analysis (2014-2018)

## Location Quotient Analysis

An employment location quotient (LQ) analysis is a method of quantifying the concentration of an industry cluster in an area when compared to the State averages. This tool allows the County to see which concentrated clusters it can leverage for future economic growth.

The LQ is calculated as shown below:

$$\text{Location Quotient (LQ)} = \frac{\text{Local Proportion}}{\text{State Proportion}}$$

Where the local and state proportions are calculated as follows:

$$\text{Local Proportion} = \frac{\text{Employees in the County in Industry X}}{\text{Total \# of Employees in the County}}$$

$$\text{State Proportion} = \frac{\text{Employees in the State in Industry X}}{\text{Total \# of Employees in the State}}$$

For example, there were approximately 2,492 employees in the “Wholesale Trade” industry in Natrona County in 2018. This cohort represents 4.6 percent of the County’s total 54,024 employee estimate in the same year. For the State, the share of the “Wholesale Trade” industry to total State employment was significantly lower, at a mere 2.2 percent. Dividing the former number by the latter equals 2.0. This means that the “Wholesale Trade” industry is approximately two times as concentrated in Natrona County than it is in the State as a whole. A LQ of 1.0 indicates that the local concentration is in parity with the State.

Industries with LQ values greater than 1.25 are typically beneficial to the local economy because they become export-oriented, providing a good or service from the County that goes to

customers outside of it. These industries not only provide jobs local but also have a multiplier effect, creating jobs in other industries that are dependent on the concentrated industries. A LQ value that is below 0.75, on the other hand, is an industry that has very low concentration and is typically unable to serve local demand, resulting in a “leakage” of goods and services outside of the County.

## Findings

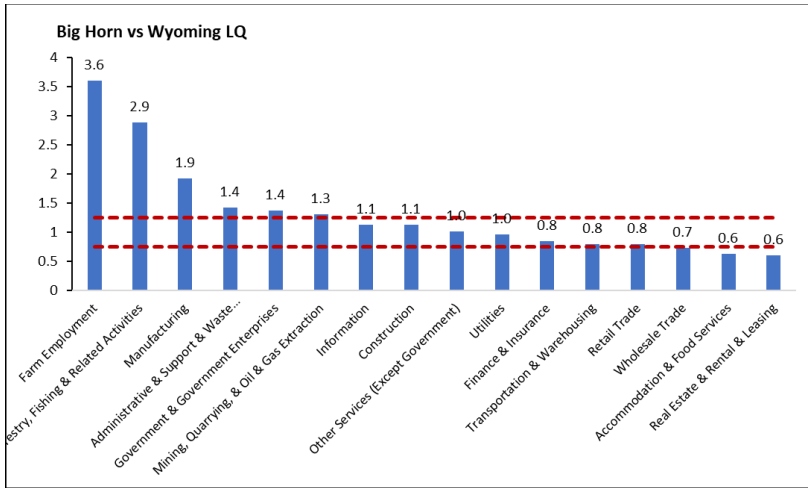
The industries with the greatest employment concentration within each of the comparative counties can be seen below. Natrona’s highest employment concentration is in “Wholesale Trade,” followed by “Healthcare & Assistance.” These represent significant industry sectors to the County and should be viewed as the County’s economic base.

In each of the counties “Mining, Quarrying, Oil, & Gas Extraction” has an LQ between .17 (Niobrara) and 0.5 (Fremont), so even though it is a large economic contributor through payroll, it doesn’t represent the highest concentration for employment.

“Farm Employment” is the highest LQ for Big Horn and Niobrara, while it has the lowest LQ for Natrona. “Educational Services” has the highest LQ for Fremont, while that data was small enough to get redacted for Natrona.

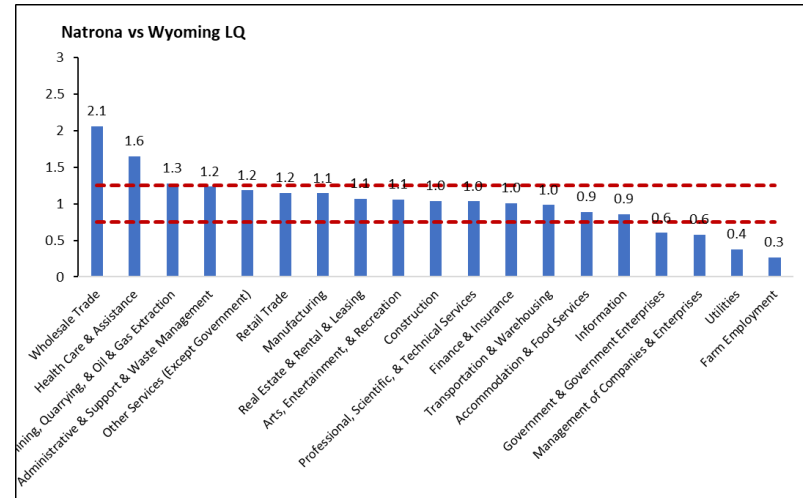
The industries which fall below the 0.75 threshold may have a regional disadvantage that needs to be mitigated. It may also represent industries that have room to grow and which could likely be supported by the local economy. Industries that fall far below the threshold often represent the low-hanging fruit in terms of reducing economic leakage. These industries should be targeted first.





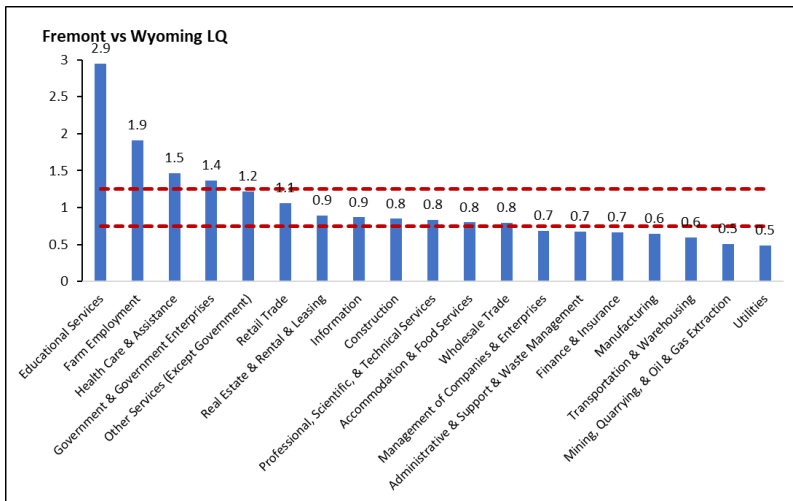
SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 31—Big Horn Location Quotient vs Wyoming (2018)



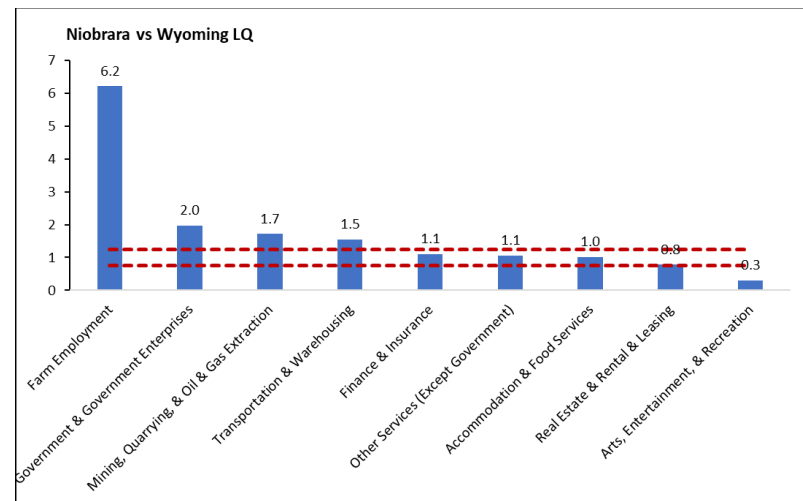
SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 33—Natrona Location Quotient vs Wyoming (2018)



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 32—Fremont Location Quotient vs Wyoming (2018)



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 34—Niobrara Location Quotient vs Wyoming (2018)

## Industry Cluster Matrix

Shift Share, location quotient, and wealth creation measures can be combined into a simple matrix that provides a more comprehensive view of the County's economy. The method used in this report plots industries in a two-by-two matrix using normalized LQ estimates on the x-axis and the regional shift on the y-axis. The graph adds a bubble size to represent total payroll, a proxy for the industry's wealth generation for the County. The graph can be interpreted according to where the point is placed in comparison to the origin as well as the relative size of the point.

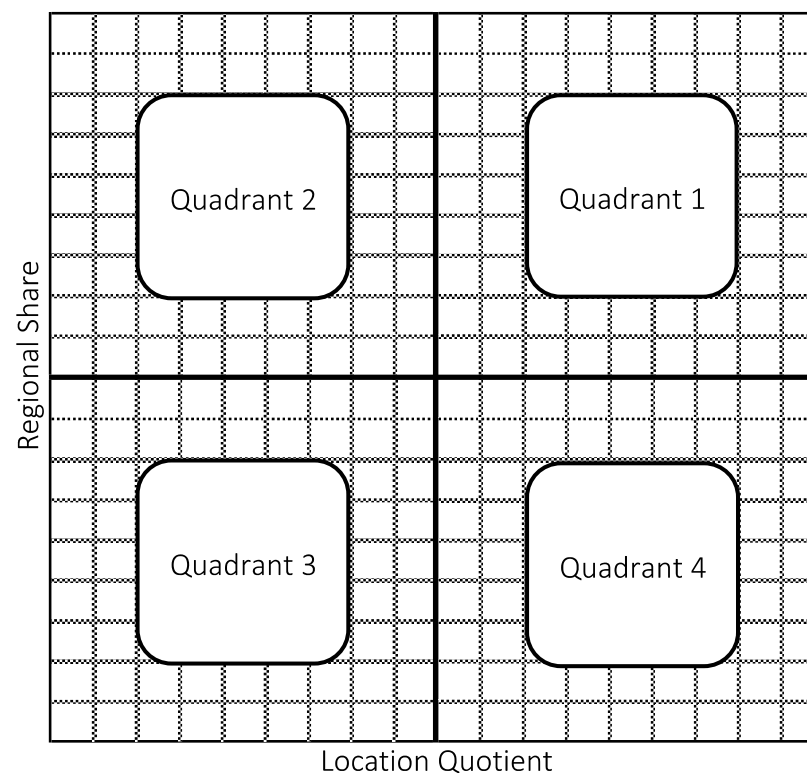
Industries in this **Quadrant 1** are concentrated in the region and growing due to regional advantages. Large industries in this quadrant distinguish the regional economy as they increase workforce demand. Small industries in this quadrant are possibly emerging exporters that should be developed.

Industries in **Quadrant 2** are growing over time but are still less concentrated than the State average. Depending on the industry, it may settle at the State average or continue to grow and move into Quadrant 1.

Industries in **Quadrant 3** are less concentrated than State average and are losing ground relative to State growth. Such industries may face competitive disadvantages due to area factors.

Industries in **Quadrant 4** are declining but are still more concentrated than the State average. If a large industry is in this quadrant, the region is often losing its export base. The region should plan and invest accordingly.

The size of an industry (according to its relative wealth generation, as represented by the size of the bubble) is key to identify short-term economic impacts. Growth or contraction in industries with high payrolls will have a large impact on the local economy. Small industries will take time to have a significant impact. Smaller industries are usually dependent on the growth or contraction of the larger ones, so a trailing effect is common in this analysis.



## Findings

In Natrona County most of the bubbles are clustered just below the regional share (horizontal) line, signifying a minor decline in these industries between 2014 and 2018. The only industry which saw significant growth in Natrona in the past few years was “Transportation & Warehousing.” Growth in this industry is likely due to the county’s central location in the state. Natrona sits on a north-south interstate, is served by rail and an international airport, and provides transportation and warehousing (and typically other support services) for minerals (oil, gas, coal) and wind energy businesses/projects in neighboring counties. There is currently quite a bit of activity going on in the surrounding counties.

The “Transportation & Warehousing” industry declined in Big Horn and Fremont. “Construction” shows some regional advantage in Natrona, yet it didn’t grow in Natrona while it did in both Big Horn and Fremont.

Big Horn saw growth in “Accommodation & Food Services” and “Construction.” Three principal industries in Big Horn County are gas/oil development, bentonite mining and tourism. The growth can probably be attributed to construction activity in the pipeline and minerals industry. The county has been recognizing quite a bit of activity in oil and gas recently.

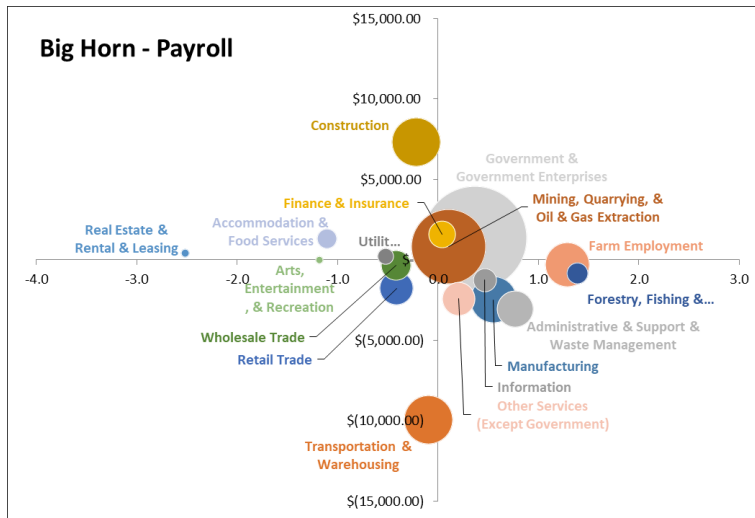
Big Horn County also benefits from Tourism because of its proximity to Buffalo, Sheridan, Cody and Yellowstone's East Entrance. Much of the growth in Accommodation & Food Services can be attributed to the increased growth in tourism in this region.

Fremont saw growth in “Manufacturing” and “Construction,” probably associated with oil and gas activity in the region. However, this seems to be in decline right now. There are some

manufacturing companies in Riverton who continue to remain steady and have recognized some small growth in terms of jobs.

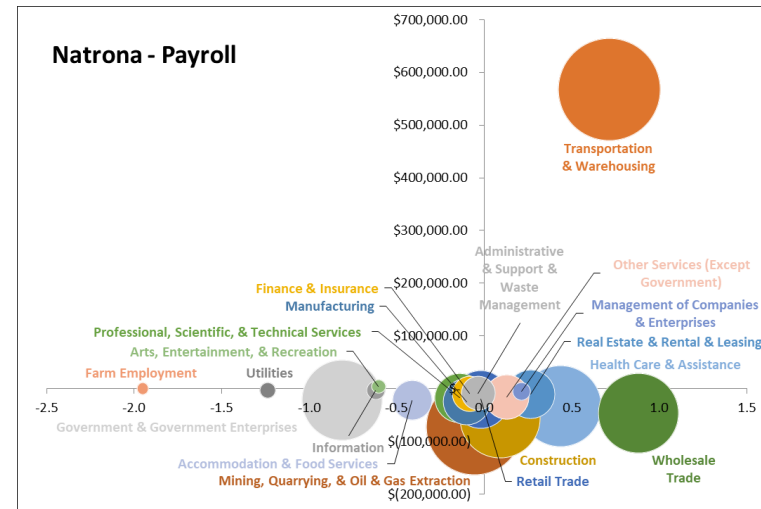
It's unclear why “Rental, Real Estate, & Leasing” shows growth in Niobrara. According to data from the 2016 Housing Report and the 2017 Cost of Living Index Report for the County, approximately 244 units are needed to meet the present demand in Niobrara County. There has been no new housing or commercial building construction. And there are several commercial or industrial buildings that have been vacant for quite some time (they are available for sale or rent).

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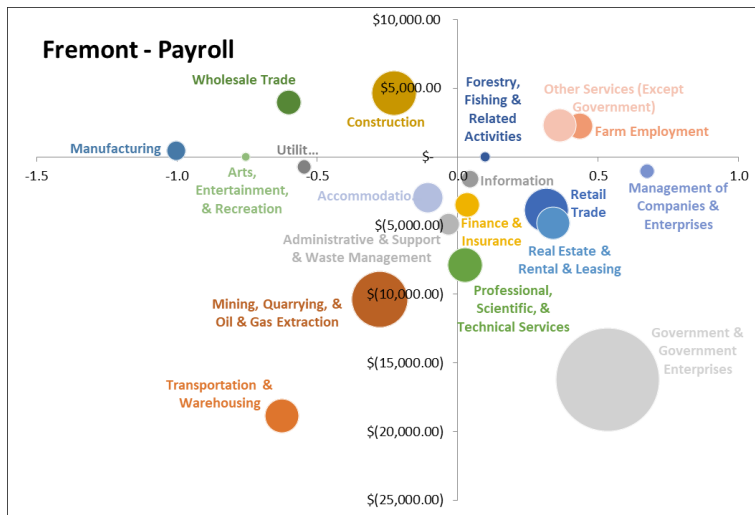
SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 35—Big Horn Industry Cluster Analysis (2018)



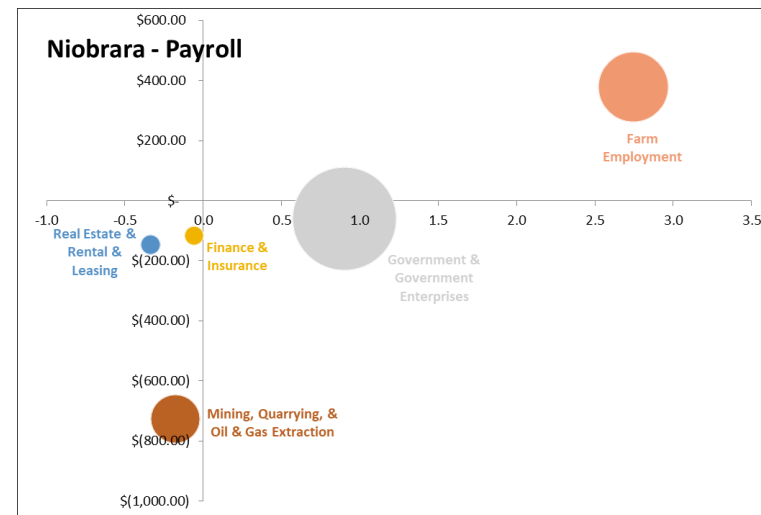
SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 37—Natrona Industry Cluster Analysis (2018)



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 36—Fremont Industry Cluster Analysis (2018)



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 38—Niobrara Industry Cluster Analysis (2018)

# SWOT ANALYSIS

	Helpful to achieving the objective	Harmful to achieving the objective
Internal Origin (organizational attributes)	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
External Origin (environmental attributes)	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis reviews and characterizes a community's characteristics. This exercise facilitates understanding of a community's native assets, those factors which could impede progress and provides ideas about future direction. The SWOT analysis reflects a synthesis of information gleaned from the stakeholder interviews, demographic, financial and business research, community forums and meeting with City staff and leaderships. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of everything about the City that could be characterized as a strength, weakness, opportunity or threat, but rather is a prioritized, filtered compilation of those things that are most significant; such as:

- “Built Environment” contemplates aspects of the physical environment that contributes to quality of life and the character of the community including: the appearance and layout of the community; quality of housing, neighborhoods, and commercial centers; code enforcement; and a sense of place.

- “Riverfront Redevelopment” contemplates the planning, infrastructure, river improvements, recreational attractions, vertical improvements, commercial activities, and events that will introduce new demand drivers and improve the market for real estate along the Town’s riverfront to create a place where residents want to live, work, and play.
- “Entrepreneurship” considers those factors that facilitate an entrepreneurial ecosystem, business start-ups, capital investment, and human capital skillsets.
- “Workforce Development” considers all the factors that affect the size, quality and skills of the workforce, including education.
- “Business Retention and Expansion” considers those factors that affect the ability of the City to effectively administer a BR&E program.
- “Outdoor Recreation” considers the efforts being made to develop assets, brand, marketing, and promotions to position the community as an outdoor recreation destination.
- “Sustainable Economic Development” refers to everything that deals with dedicated resources and investment made by the Town in economic development assets such as staff, planning, programs, incentives, infrastructure, land, and buildings.

The attributes of Town of Mills relative to these categories are listed below.

## BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Strengths – Built Environment	Weaknesses – Built Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The road infrastructure is well maintained along main corridors.</li> <li>• There are visually appealing buildings along Wyoming Blvd.</li> <li>• Great views of the surrounding mountain landscape.</li> <li>• Industrial uses provide an economic engine for the region.</li> <li>• The Town is located along the North Platte River and has miles of riverfront property.</li> <li>• The Town is not built-out and has the ability to grow through annexation and re-define its brand.</li> <li>• Rural classification allows new homebuyers to qualify for USDA 502 mortgage loans with little down, driving demand for new housing in the community that is being constructed by residential developers.</li> <li>• A concentration of ownership provides the conditions for redevelopment in certain areas of the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industrial uses are not restricted to industrial parks and proliferate the main highway and periphery roads throughout the Town.</li> <li>• Many highly visible properties are not maintained, contain blighted conditions, and impede value and wealth creation in neighboring properties.</li> <li>• Storage and equipment yards are visible from the main highway.</li> <li>• Zoning allows a variety of uses within close / relative proximity such as industrial and residential.</li> <li>• No downtown, no sense of place.</li> <li>• Poor freeway access, no opportunity for traditional regional commercial.</li> <li>• Mills is viewed as being a lower-income community, which perception may limit real estate investment in non-industrial uses.</li> </ul>

Opportunities – Built Environment	Threats – Built Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screening can shield unsightly properties from view along main highways.</li> <li>• Population growth can continue through annexation and housing starts fueled by favorable financing terms.</li> <li>• Workforce housing demand can be leveraged to accomplish strategic redevelopment.</li> <li>• State programs are available to catalyze redevelopment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Casper and other outlying communities have more favorable land use economics, freeway access, and demographics and will continue to attract desirable uses such as retail, office, and hospitality.</li> <li>• Mills and the surrounding region are subject to fluctuations in oil and gas, with properties de-valuing as demand weakens when commodity pricing falls.</li> </ul>

## RIVERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT

<b>Strengths – Built Environment</b>	<b>Weaknesses – Built Environment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a concentration of ownership along the river with fewer and larger parcels as compared to other areas of the Town. This should make assemblage less challenging, comparatively.</li> <li>• The Town has acquired a key strategic piece of property along the river that is across from Town Hall.</li> <li>• There are incredible assets along the river that border or are in close proximity to the Town including: Fort Caspar Campground, Izaak Walton Club House, Fort Caspar Museum, Central Wyoming Fair and Rodeo, Three Crowns Golf Club, Tate Pumphouse Trail Center, and the White Water Park.</li> <li>• Soils along the river are very favorable for development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Along the river, there are a number of industrial uses with substantial investment in plant and equipment that would need to be relocated.</li> <li>• Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, and other regulatory bodies will need to be approached in order to navigate through their approval requirements regarding bank stabilization, river health, hydrology, floodplain and floodway, and natural habitat conservation. These are costly and time-consuming issues that would need to be addressed prior to certain activities being undertaken along the river.</li> <li>• The rural location and limited market size may be an impediment to attracting significant private sector investment to riverfront redevelopment projects.</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities – Built Environment</b>	<b>Threats – Built Environment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The riverfront location may be less suited for the operations of industrial uses and relocating to an industrial park setting may be preferred, if the economics could be justified.</li> <li>• Riverfront redevelopment is untapped and represents an opportunity to create a major change in the local real estate market. A large riverfront redevelopment can attract desirable commercial, hospitality, and residential uses to the community.</li> <li>• State and Federal programs are available to catalyze redevelopment.</li> <li>• Form based code should be considered to define and guide the standards for redevelopment along the riverfront.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flooding from the North Platte River.</li> <li>• Global recession and commodity pricing fluctuations may tamper investor enthusiasm for real estate redevelopment projects.</li> <li>• Property owners may be unwilling to sell at market values.</li> </ul>

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Strengths - Entrepreneurship	Weaknesses - Entrepreneurship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mills is a community that has been built largely by entrepreneurs and has a rich history of successful businesses that have been started and grown locally.</li> <li>• The community is business-friendly and many successful business owners continue to invest in the Town.</li> <li>• The University of Wyoming, Wyoming Technology Business Center - Casper is a business incubator that is located across the river and within a quarter mile of the Town's northeastern boundary.</li> <li>• Start-up competitions are being held by the WTBC to encourage entrepreneurship and business creation.</li> <li>• Casper College offers a degree in Entrepreneurship through the School of Business and Industry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The WTBC Casper location has been ineffective in creating direct jobs that have produced a positive economic impact in the Town of Mills.</li> <li>• There is a general lack of access to capital and entrepreneurial infrastructure which limits the ability of entrepreneurs to start- new businesses.</li> <li>• There has not been a strong link between the Town and entrepreneurial ecosystem stakeholders.</li> <li>• The WTBC extension offices have had inconsistent program support.</li> </ul>
Opportunities - Entrepreneurship	Threats - Entrepreneurship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the hiring of an Economic Development Director, the Town will be in a position to define what role it would like to play in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.</li> <li>• Opportunities may exist to collaborate and provide input in defining entrepreneurial industry-driven programming to support the industrial arts and manufacturing clusters.</li> <li>• Manufacturing space could be made available to allow for rapid prototyping and creative fabrication in support of entrepreneurial endeavors.</li> <li>• Shared commercial kitchen or co-cooking space could be developed to facilitate business start-ups in the culinary arts and assist local cottage industry businesses to grow their distribution.</li> <li>• Revolving Loan Funds, in-kind contributions, and cash grants (through private donations) could be established to assist local entrepreneurs with capital.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surrounding communities rich in amenities and home to a skilled workforce may draw talented entrepreneurs to relocate their businesses out of the Town.</li> <li>• The State of Wyoming and University of Wyoming may redefine their incubation programming, shift funding, and change strategy which may impact or compete with the Town's entrepreneurial efforts.</li> </ul>



## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Strengths – Workforce Development	Weaknesses – Workforce Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low wages, which are prevalent in the community, are often attractive to businesses looking to expand or relocate, assuming all else is equal in comparative communities.</li> <li>• The Town of Mills has a higher concentration of the workforce demographic as a percentage of population than Casper.</li> <li>• Mills is one of the fastest growing communities in the State of Wyoming and is an attractive community to the workforce demographic as new, attainable housing stock is being developed.</li> <li>• The Pathways Innovation Center provides technical training in various disciplines to high school students and continues to enhance and improve its offerings.</li> <li>• The McMurry Training Center administered by the Wyoming Contractors Association provides customized training for employers and certificate programs that support local industries.</li> <li>• Casper College offers continuing adult education and non-credit courses designed to help develop local human capital to qualify for higher skilled positions.</li> <li>• Laramie County Community College has assisted in the past with aligning programming for local employers.</li> <li>• The Wyoming Electrical and Joint Apprenticeship Committee administered by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers provides training programs for electricians.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Casper School District has closed the local schools in Mills, requiring students to be bussed to Casper schools. This may be an impediment in attracting young families with school-aged children to the community.</li> <li>• Local businesses face workforce shortages and quality of workforce issues.</li> <li>• In general, the community is losing its high school graduates as they seek to further their education and/or seek job opportunities elsewhere.</li> <li>• There are few job opportunities requiring college degrees within the community.</li> <li>• The Town has a lower median household income than surrounding communities, which may indicate a lower skilled workforce.</li> <li>• The small population size of Mills may limit its ability to influence workforce development partners to meet the human capital needs of its local employers.</li> </ul>

Opportunities – Workforce Development	Threats – Workforce Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a new school district that is focused on meeting the needs of the residents of the Town of Mills will be instrumental in attracting and retaining the local workforce demographic.</li> <li>• With the hiring of an Economic Development Director, the Town will be in a position to define what role it would like to play in workforce development.</li> <li>• Developing a strong Business Retention and Expansion effort is an opportunity to work with local businesses in identifying human capital needs and working with workforce development partners to fill those needs.</li> <li>• Attracting and retaining human capital that creates and strengthens businesses and communities is key to building a thriving community in the knowledge economy. Strategies to target location neutral professionals that appreciate the Town’s recreational offerings should be pursued.</li> <li>• The Town leadership and staff have existing relationships with a number of members of the Wyoming Workforce Development Council. These relationships could be leveraged to better define supportive programming to fill the human capital needs of local employers.</li> <li>• Developing a commercial riverfront district will position the community to attract and retain the workforce demographic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surrounding communities that have more amenities and offerings which may position them to be more successful in attracting and retaining the local workforce demographic.</li> </ul>

## BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

Strengths – Business Retention & Expansion	Weaknesses – Business Retention & Expansion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town of Mills has earned a reputation for being a business-friendly community.</li> <li>• Some in Town leadership and staff have experience in running small businesses and understand the challenges associated with being a small business owner.</li> <li>• The Town has hired an Economic Development Director who will be able to lead efforts in BR&amp;E including conducting site visits, identifying needs, coordinating services with strategic partners, and collecting data.</li> <li>• The Town staff and leadership know many of the local business owners and have good personal relationships with many of them.</li> <li>• The Town is in close proximity to the Natrona County Airport, with commercial air service providing frequent flights to larger metropolitan areas, connecting local businesses to external markets.</li> <li>• The community and many of its businesses have freight rail service through BNSF.</li> <li>• The Town is close to I-25 which provides access to the north to Montana and south to Colorado.</li> <li>• The State of Wyoming has a very favorable tax structure, which has been a factor in attracting businesses to the State.</li> <li>• Favorable land use economics have resulted in a disproportionate amount of industrial uses in the Town and surrounding areas, making it an economic engine for the region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town BR&amp;E efforts may have to rely on strategic partners to provide assistance to local businesses such as the SBDC, workforce development partners, or other stakeholders and may not be able to control their responsiveness to local business needs.</li> <li>• The Town’s BR&amp;E efforts with local businesses may be impeded by landlord-tenant relationships and lease agreements that may negatively impact the Town’s ability to retain a business or assist with its expansion.</li> <li>• The Town’s rural and remote location may hinder its access to major metropolitan areas, skilled human capital, and suppliers, making it harder for businesses to be successful.</li> <li>• Transportation infrastructure and a lack of support of highway patrol to assist in transporting oversize loads may negatively impact local businesses.</li> <li>• Local businesses may not have an ownership succession plan, which may result in a loss of locally-owned businesses.</li> <li>• There is no major highway with east-west access.</li> <li>• Seasonality and cold winters may restrict the community’s ability to retain and expand certain businesses.</li> </ul>

Opportunities – Business Retention & Expansion	Threats – Business Retention & Expansion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town will be able to invest in training for the Economic Development Director and local volunteers to conduct and sustain a BR&amp;E program.</li> <li>• Through a consistent BR&amp;E program administered by the Economic Development Director, the Town will be able to identify business needs and assist in aligning service partners, working with their legislative delegation, or adjusting Town policy to address those business needs, as appropriate.</li> <li>• The Economic Development Director will be able to enhance the Town’s reputation of being a business-friendly community, attract additional private sector investment, facilitate job creation, and strengthen relationships with the business community.</li> <li>• The Town should gather information from local businesses such as source of inputs from local suppliers, geographic area of customer base, attendance at trade shows, efforts to penetrate new markets, e-commerce revenue vs. local revenue, etc.</li> <li>• Strengthening local businesses and being vested in their success could lead to positive outcomes in other areas such as business attraction, tax base growth, and wealth creation.</li> <li>• The Town may be able to guide local businesses in gaining certifications and facilitating their ability to compete for federal government contracts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Macroeconomic forces and a lack of industry diversification may negatively impact local businesses and in turn, the community’s ability to retain and expand its economic base.</li> <li>• E-commerce may negatively impact local businesses that are dependent on the local economy.</li> <li>• The State may need to re-evaluate its tax structure due to budgetary concerns, which may result in the imposition of unfavorable taxes.</li> </ul>

## OUTDOOR RECREATION

<p><b>Strengths – Outdoor Recreation</b></p>	<p><b>Weaknesses – Outdoor Recreation</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town is well positioned in terms of outdoor recreational offering amenities such as boating facilities, campsites and campgrounds, group facilities, and resorts at attractions such as the North Platte River, Isaak Walton Park, Fort Caspar Campground, Three Crowns Golf Course, Alcova and Pathfinder Reservoirs, Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge, Grey Reef, Fremont Canyon, Caspar Mountain/Hogadon Ski Resort.</li> <li>• Many activities are available—such as boating, camping, rock climbing, educational programs, equestrian activities, fishing, ice fishing, hunting, picnicking, backpacking, hiking, wildlife viewing, snowmobiling, downhill skiing, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, mountain biking, river floating, kayaking, paddle boarding.</li> <li>• The Town is in proximity to the Natrona County Airport, providing visitors with convenient access to recreational assets and expanding the Town’s total addressable market for visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mills in not viewed as a recreational destination.</li> <li>• The County Travel and Tourism office, Visit Casper, provides marketing for the county but is Casper centric.</li> <li>• Mills does not have a hotel or collect lodgers tax, which is the primary source of funding for Visit Casper.</li> <li>• The Town does not have access to visitation and stay patterns or a way to measure results.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities – Outdoor Recreation</b></p>	<p><b>Threats – Outdoor Recreation</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town can pursue alternative lodging options (such as glamping, tiny homes, retro/vintage airstreams, cabins, yurts, wagons, shepherd huts, treehouses, and teepees) to capture revenue from those that want to stay in non-traditional lodging.</li> <li>• The Town should develop annual recreational events that will create activity and drive demand for new lodging.</li> <li>• Redeveloping and activating the riverfront and trail development will help rebrand the community as a recreation destination.</li> <li>• Developing outdoor recreation will improve the community’s ability to attract and retain the workforce demographic.</li> <li>• The Town can subscribe to visitation data to understand its target demographic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town will have to compete with other, more established recreation destinations and communities that have developed recreational infrastructure.</li> <li>• Macroeconomic forces may negatively impact wages and disposable income, reducing the amount of visitation and spending in the community.</li> <li>• Flooding from the North Platte River.</li> </ul>

## SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Strengths – Sustainable Economic Development	Weaknesses – Sustainable Economic Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town has invested in the hiring of an Economic Development Director that will increase the Town’s capacity to conduct a sustainable program of economic development in the Town.</li> <li>• The Town has invested in the creation of an Economic Development Strategic Plan, a document that will guide economic development initiatives for the next few years.</li> <li>• Town leadership is enthusiastic about economic development and have dedicated their time and allocated resources to pursue critical initiatives and local capacity building.</li> <li>• The Town has invested in an industrial park feasibility study that includes developable acreage, infrastructure cost estimates, etc. for the build-out of the park.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are a number of stakeholders in the economic development landscape that the Town may be reliant upon in certain areas such as business recruitment, legislative changes, and other programming and may not be able to influence how these stakeholders carry out their mission or their effectiveness in doing so.</li> <li>• The planned industrial park will require a substantial investment in infrastructure to create shovel ready sites available for business expansion and relocation.</li> <li>• Historically, there has been a lack of strategic planning and an adequate decision-making framework for allocating City resources among different initiatives / priorities.</li> </ul>
Opportunities – Sustainable Economic Development	Threats – Sustainable Economic Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town can enhance its human capital by investing in staff and providing resources for training in pursuit of a Certified Economic Developer certification (CEcD) through the International Economic Development Council.</li> <li>• Through the Economic Development Director, the Town can strengthen its relationships with stakeholders in the economic development ecosystem such as the Wyoming Business Council, Advanced Casper, Wyoming Workforce Development Council, etc.</li> <li>• Should the Town invest in the planned industrial park, it will be able to provide shovel ready sites for business expansion and relocation.</li> <li>• The Town should develop relationships with those business leaders in corporate positions (located outside of the community) that are decision makers over subsidiary operations (located inside the community).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Macroeconomic trends may constrict the Town’s tax base and reduce the availability of resources to invest in a sustainable program of economic development.</li> <li>• The regional economy is heavily concentrated in oil and gas, making it subject to fluctuations in global commodity prices.</li> <li>• Some of the largest employers in the community are subsidiaries of a larger company headquartered elsewhere. Resource allocation, hiring decisions, strategy, and decision-making may be driven by corporate leadership.</li> </ul>

- Create cross-functional teams and involve various departments (like Public Works) in addressing strategic initiatives.
- Dedicate additional resources to and strengthen ordinances to create a robust code enforcement division in order to improve public safety and community appearance.
- Increasing coordination and communication among entities, organizations and businesses to help establish dialogue and improve the ability of the community to address critical issues and build consensus with key stakeholders. This could be accomplished through a weekly “Community Coffee”, which is a concept borrowed from Lake County, Colorado, whereby stakeholders come together to share what their organizations are doing and make requests for input and support. This weekly forum has been extremely effective in keeping everyone informed of what is happening in the community, reducing duplication of efforts, and garnering community support for key initiatives.
- Formally adopt a guiding framework for decision-making on how to best allocate City resources among different initiatives and strategic priorities.



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# INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

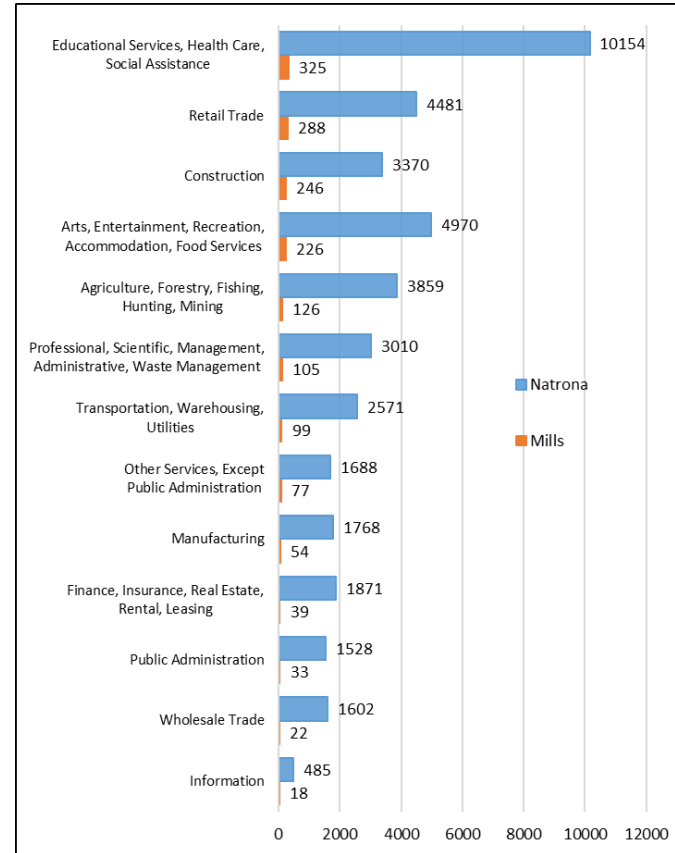
This section analyzes industry trends and measures the industry clusters in the Town and the County by the number of jobs as well as the economic value provided by payroll estimates.

## Industry Clusters by Jobs

The American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that the Town has a total of 1,658 jobs. According to estimates provided by ACS, approximately 52 percent (859 total) of the jobs in the Town are in the Town’s three largest clusters.<sup>2</sup>

The “Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance” cluster represents the largest number of jobs in the Town (325 jobs), followed by “Retail Trade” (288 jobs) and “Construction” (246). Due to the high-level industry categories provided through the ACS, there is a lack of granularity available from this data. For example, it does not reveal the specific job types within the “Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance” industry, of which there are many.

It is important for Mills to have a local Business Retention and Expansion program, so that the Town can gather and track reliable data which would include NAICS codes, occupation, occupational wages, and benefits offered. The systematic collection of local data provides the community with a clear understanding of the exact economic framework of the Town.



SOURCE: ACS 2018 5-year Estimates

Figure 39—Number of Jobs by Industry Type, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Estimates from the Bureau of Economic Analysis may differ from Census estimates due to differences in the way BEA analyzes economic data. Not all industries are represented by the data. Some industries do not have enough workers or businesses represented so the

data was suppressed to prevent personally identifying information. The industries where the BEA data was suppressed in this report include Educational Services and Forestry, Fishing, & Related Activities.



## Industry Clusters by Payroll

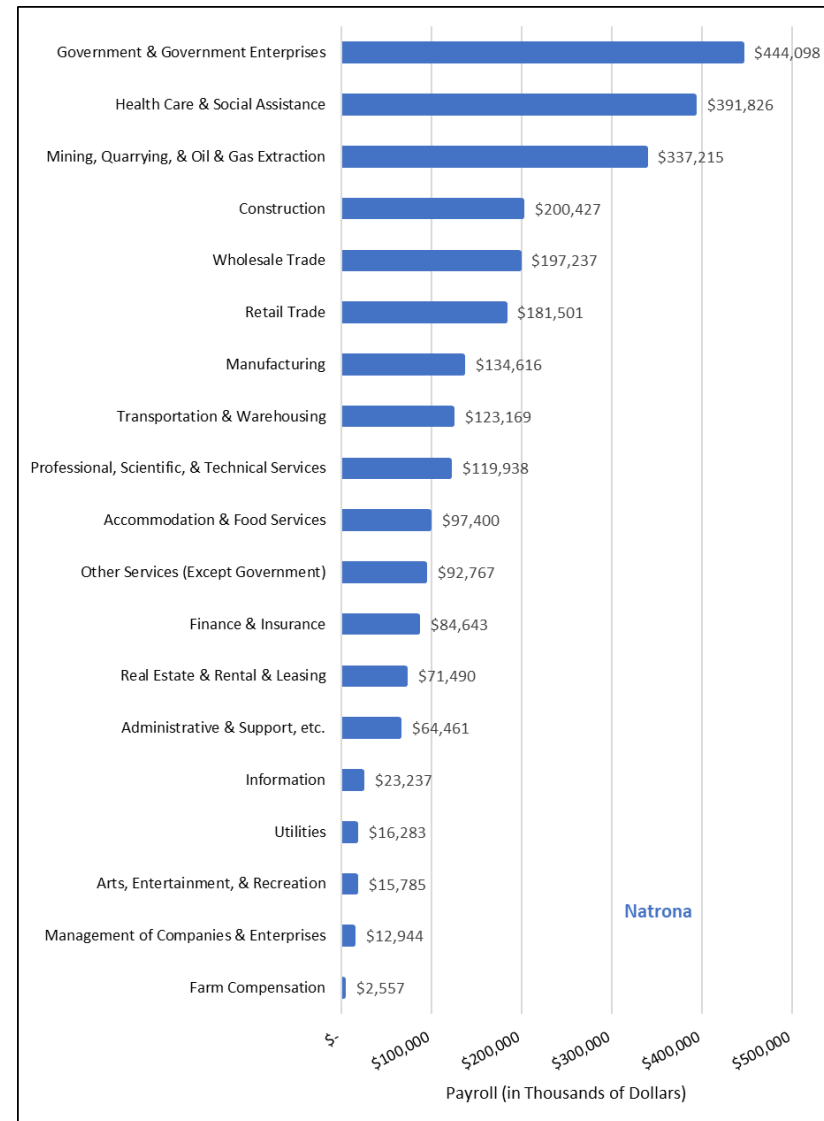
Not all jobs have the same economic value for the community. Figure 40 shows the economic value of the industry clusters by payroll. A larger payroll value means that a given industry contributes more to the economy since incomes turn into local spending.

The larger the payroll value, the more reliant the County's economy is on the industry. According to estimates from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the employment in Government and Government Enterprises makes up a significant share of the County's economy, equaling 17 percent of total payrolls. The Health Care & Social Assistance cluster is the second largest, which makes up about 15 percent of total payrolls.

Because the BEA smallest data level is that of the County, this is another area in which a local Business Retention and Expansion program would be able to provide more targeted and likely more relevant information.

The first steps would be for the Town to:

1. Compile a list of locally licenses businesses
2. Categorize them by industry
3. Obtain information from the respective businesses regarding number of employees, occupation types, occupational wages, and benefits offered.



SOURCE: BEA; not all industries represented (see Footnote 2)

Figure 40—Total Payroll by Industry, 2018

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

The review of the local economic development organization Advance Casper – Casper Area Economic Development Alliance was provided in the Economic Assessment.

This section provides a review of the economic development organizations categorized by their functionalities: Business Attraction & Development, Entrepreneurial Infrastructure, and Workforce Development. Each review includes their areas of focus and the services they provide.

### Business Attraction & Development

#### Economically Needed Diversity Options for Wyoming (ENDOW)

The ENDOW initiative provides a 20-Year strategy to coordinate and expand ongoing efforts in economic diversification across the state. ENDOW's aspirations for Wyoming 2038 include:

- 100,000 + new jobs, 35% in rural communities
- 79% personal income growth
- 82% GDP growth
- 108,000 new residents
- Decrease youth outmigration to 30%

The Diversification Strategy identifies targeted sectors. As key areas of focus, by aligning Mill's initiatives with those of Wyoming, the Town will increase potential for obtaining state assistance as projects are implemented. The targeted sectors include:

- Stronghold Resources (coal, gas, CO2, trona, bentonite, uranium)
- Untapped Resources (wind, solar, rare earth elements, metals, gems, other minerals, water)

- Natural Resources as a tool to grow other sectors (advanced manufacturing, knowledge and creative economies, and others)
- Retail (shops, rental, recreation gear, sporting goods, firearms, knives, specialty clothing, boats, RVs, other vehicles)
- Service (accommodation restaurant, transportation, entertainment, outfitters, guides, concessions)
- Manufacturing (firearms & ammunition, knives, optics, recreation gear, sporting goods, clothing boats / RVs / other vehicles)
- Crop & Livestock Production
- Value-Added Agricultural Products
- Industrial Equipment
- Energy & Energy Storage
- Recreational Goods
- Advanced Composites & Textiles
- Aerospace
- Medical Devices
- Pharmaceutical
- Financial & Professional
- Healthcare
- Digital & Technology
- Arts & Culture

The Diversification Strategy also identifies building blocks of the economy which the State will focus on strengthening, including:

- Promote and incentivize the creation of modern apprenticeship, internship and training programs for both new and seasoned workers.

- Develop portable and stackable credential programs that are recognized by employers and give workers access to more advanced jobs and wages.
- Significantly expand the University of Wyoming’s footprint beyond Laramie to ensure Wyoming residents have physical and digital access to a wide range of bachelor and graduate degree programs.
- Invest in conservation, recreation, tourism, the arts, community amenities and infrastructure.
- Evaluate the development of additional transportation systems, including preparing for and facilitating bold and transformative systems.
- Work with power companies to create a new rate to attract and expand development.
- Enable shared infrastructure – including Federal and university laboratories – to facilitate productivity gains and enable companies to market new products at speed.
- Invest 2 percent of Wyoming’s investment portfolio in home-grown companies.
- Ensure Wyoming has a presence, including appointing global ambassadors, in each major financial center in the U.S. to enable attraction of significant capital.
- Create business development and innovation zones where industry has access to research and development facilities, special permitting, and tax incentives.

### Wyoming Business Council

The Wyoming Business Council was founded by the State of Wyoming and tasked with building a strong job creation base. The Business Council functions as the economic development agency for the state. There is an office in Casper, and the Town should keep an open line of communication with the Wyoming Business Council to be in the loop for opportunities and assistance.

The Business Council offers infrastructure development grants to accommodate new and expanding businesses; recruits new companies to the state; provides small capital grants to startups; delivers expertise to small businesses; assists in the redevelopment of downtowns; participates with banks to fill the gap in business financing; and partners with nonprofits, local governments and local economic development organizations to assist in community and business projects around the state.

### Wyoming Economic Development Association (WEDA)

WEDA is a non-profit professional association representing nearly 200 economic development members and organizations who support economic development through their local economic development groups by providing members with the tools to create, retain, and expand jobs; attract businesses; and develop a skilled workforce. WEDA offers professional development scholarships, training conferences, newsletters and publications, a reference library, list-serve and networking opportunities, a website, and lobbying efforts.

### Wyoming Business Alliance

The Wyoming Business Alliance promotes and advocates a growing economy by connecting business leaders from across Wyoming, representing business interests and issues, and partnering with key business organizations and trade associations.

## Entrepreneurial Infrastructure

The Town can assist local business owners and entrepreneurs identify and connect with the organizations below, which provide services to assist businesses with a variety of challenges.

### Wyoming Technology Business Center – Casper

The Wyoming Technology Business Center (WTBC) is an innovation-driven business incubator, which advises and supports high-growth startups in the early stages of business development. Established in 2006, the WTBC works to advance the University of Wyoming's mission to support economic and community development.

The WTBC offers free business counseling/mentoring services to anyone in Wyoming through the main UW facility in Laramie and through our partner Innovation Centers in Casper and Sheridan. Generally, mentoring is focused on comprehensive business model development, sales and marketing, organizational structure, financial and information systems, and ongoing strategic planning. However, this service differs depending on the stage of development and specified needs of the client. Outreach business mentoring services can be provided through email, phone, or video conferencing.

Generally, incubator graduation occurs when the company has reached a space limitation within the building or stabilized enough to ensure a move will not endanger the continued growth and development of the company. Most clients graduating from the incubator have begun to develop a mature management team and can project positive cash flow for at least 6 months.

The WTBC sponsors entrepreneurship platforms to stimulate entrepreneurship in Wyoming. These are collaborative challenges for entrepreneurs to develop, plan and launch new companies.

Participants receive support and advising from WTBC staff to refine business concepts and maximize their performance.

### Manufacturing Works

Manufacturing Works (MW) delivers services and solutions by coordinating a network of experts to help Wyoming manufacturers achieve success and sustainably grow their operations in an efficient manner.

MW provides broad-technical assistance, engineering solutions, general-business assistance, marketing assistance, and financial counseling. MW is committed to helping businesses, in conjunction with others, by delivering complete solutions with the intention of creating revenue. MW is a not-for-profit organization with professionals positioned throughout Wyoming, with a nearby office in Casper. Services provided by MW include:

- Operations Leadership
- Quality Management Systems
- Automation and Data Exchange
- Cybersecurity Strategies
- Supply Chain Integration
- Export Expansion
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Government Contracting Guidance
- Markets and Messaging
- Idea and Product Development
- Intellectual Property Strategies
- 3-D Printing/Prototyping
- Technology Driven Market Intelligence

### UW Technology Transfer & Research Products Center

For an inventor, getting an idea from the drawing board to the market can be a daunting task. The Wyoming Technology Transfer and Research Products Center (RPC) was established to simplify this process. The staff at the RPC can assist Wyoming inventors in technology transfer, the process of protecting, of marketing and of licensing innovations. Any one of these tasks can be intimidating to undertake as an inventor, but the RPC staff has the resources and skills to help inventors in all aspects of getting their ideas to the market.

The Wyoming Technology Transfer and Research Products Center offers no-cost assistance to Wyoming inventors regarding patents, trademarks, copyright protection and commercialization. This includes reviewing proposals to evaluate ideas from a patenting perspective and matching Wyoming Inventor's technical needs with resources and technical expertise at the University of Wyoming.

### Wyoming Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

The Wyoming SBDC Network is a partnership between the University of Wyoming, the Wyoming Business Council, and the U.S. Small Business Administration offering business expertise and technical assistance to help entrepreneurs and business owners start, grow, reinvent, or exit their business.

The Wyoming SBDC Network provides no-cost, confidential training and one-on-one advising to help entrepreneurs and small businesses succeed. The office closest to Mills is in Casper.

The Wyoming SBDC Network also assists qualified small businesses and individuals in accessing funding opportunities provided by the Small Business Innovative Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs.

### Wyoming Women's Business Center (WWBC)

The WWBC's mission is to enable and empower Wyoming entrepreneurs. The WWBC assists entrepreneurs, especially women who are economically or socially disadvantaged, through counseling, training, and micro-finance programs to start or expand small businesses in the state of Wyoming.

### Workforce Development

In many cases residents and employers may be unaware of the programs available for workforce development. The Town has access to the Pathways Innovation Center, Wyoming Contractors Association, and Casper College. Each of these entities are valuable resources for any workforce development initiatives.

### Pathways Innovation Center

The Pathways Innovation Center (PIC) is an extension of Natrona County's high school system. Pathways courses of study include college-preparatory curriculum, industry certifications, portfolio development, and internships. PIC offers advanced and professional coursework in the 11th and 12th grades which builds on introductory experiences. Experiences are aligned to student interests which fulfill community needs.

Companies are on PIC's advisory board—which is responsible for programming—and PIC's instructors come from within relative industries.

At PIC students attain real world applications focusing on industry standards and college or career readiness. PIC offers advanced courses and a partnership program with Casper College for dual enrollment. Sequences of courses are offered, starting with entry level courses at home schools, grades 9 and 10. Advanced level courses are offered for only 11th and 12th graders at PIC, resulting in industry certifications and or portfolio development.

All students from each of the four high schools have the choice to attend their home school for a half day and the other half at PIC.

PIC's morning session features the intensive block schedule (Kelly Walsh model) and the afternoon session at PIC features the alternating block schedule (Natrona County High School model). Students can choose either, depending on individual student needs. PIC courses include:

- Veterinary Science
- Horticulture, Agriculture, & Construction
- Art Portfolio, Visual Communications, & Film/TV
- ProStart (culinary arts/restaurant management)
- Nursing
- Computer Science & Programming
- Welding & Metal Fabrication
- Auto Certifications

### Wyoming Contractors Association

The Wyoming Contractors Association (WCA) Training Center provides industry-driven, short-term, high-intensity training programs that allow students to focus on developing knowledge and skills for a career in a high demand industry. Their primary focus is placement and career development. They have industry partners which both hire graduates and invest in the program, ensuring that the WCA understands the employer's needs and hiring patterns at a ground floor level. Member companies and local businesses may send their apprenticeships to WCA for training.

Most courses require students to be at least 18 years old. For those who qualify, WCA has grants that provide a variety of funding solutions for the students.

The WCA is accredited through the International Association of Drilling Contractors and the National Center for Construction Education and Research. Courses are offered for the following industries:

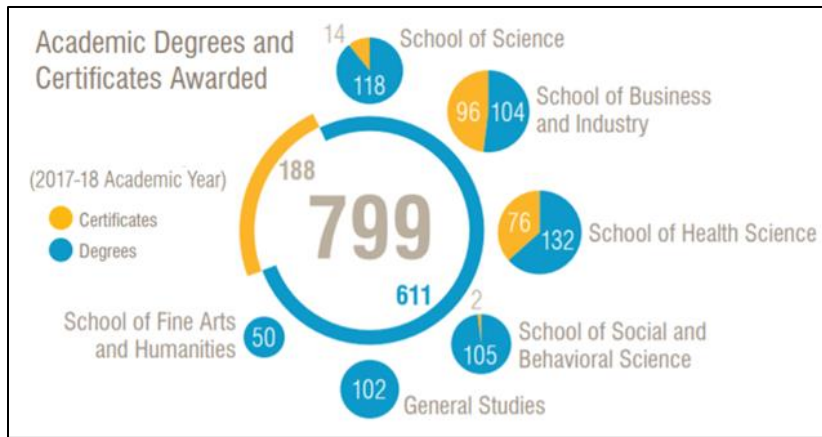
- Construction
- General
- Healthcare
- Leadership
- Oil & Gas
- Transportation
- Welding

WCA also provides the Youth Challenge Program through the National Guard Federal/State cooperative which teaches soft skills to at-risk youth; and the Next Gen Initiative for construction.

### Casper College

Casper College is one of the largest and most comprehensive community colleges in the region, with more than 140 academic transfer and technical and career programs (107 degrees, 39 certificates, and 8 advanced degrees via university partnership programs). It is a public two-year institution with a primary focus on student success that provides learning opportunities to enrich the lives of our students and community.

According to the 2017-2018 Annual Report, the school which issued the most degrees was Health Science (132) and the school which issued the most certificates was Business and Industry (96). There were more full-time students than part time, and there were more female students than male students.



SOURCE: Casper College 2017-2018 Annual Report

Figure 41—Academic Degrees & Certificates Awarded

The primary goals in the Casper College Strategic Plan include:

- Community
  - Strengthen the college’s proactive culture that anticipates the needs of the community and state through curricula, program offerings, and partnerships.
- Quality
  - Sustain transferability of coursework and applicability of skills.
  - Improve retention, completion, graduation, and student success.
  - Maintain and promote a safe learning and living campus environment.
- Growth
  - Manage programs and enrollment to meet the needs of the community and state.
- Financial

- Implement a data-informed decision-making process based on the success of students.
- People
  - Sustain a culture that encourages and empowers people to voice ideas, thoughts, and opinions.
  - Recruit, develop, and retain qualified employees.
  - Create a supportive environment that encourages lifelong development rooted in critical thought and reflection.

Casper College provides continuing education services which assist individuals entering new careers or expanding in their existing careers. The college’s continuing education goals include:

- Strengthen and grow relationships with business community.
- Grow the number of workforce programs offered, conferences managed, and camps offered.
- Grow enrollments for Training and Development and Community Education.

The College also has a custom fit training program. An initial needs assessment can be provided to the business at no cost, then the employer pays for the training. (The State provides some funding through the Department of Workforce Services.) Workforce trainings can be provided both on campus and at the business’ location.

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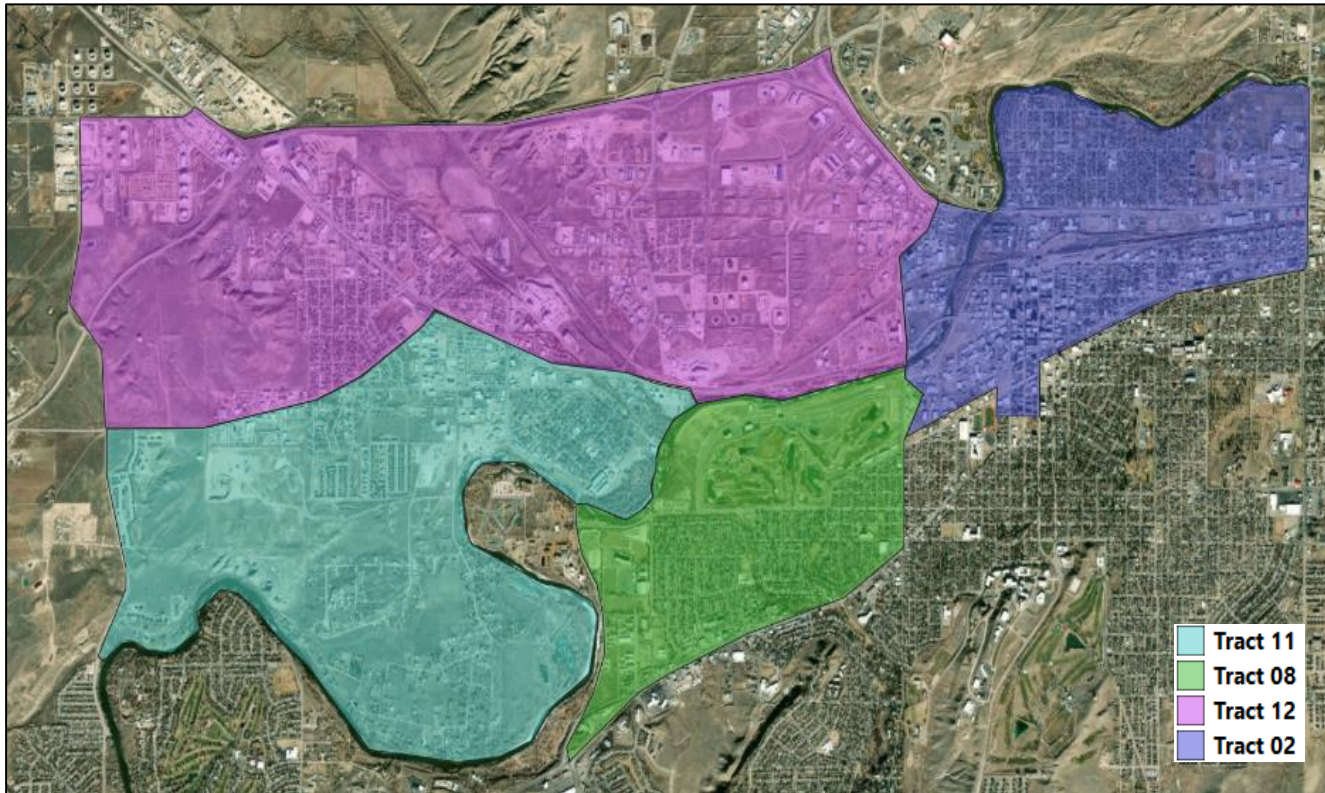
## OPPORTUNITY ZONES

An Opportunity Zone is an economically distressed designated census tract in which certain types of investments, made through Opportunity Funds, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment.

A taxpayer can defer capital gains taxes by reinvesting those gains in a qualified opportunity fund—a qualified opportunity fund is

any investment vehicle that holds at least 90 percent of its assets in qualified opportunity zone investments, including:

- Property (e.g. real estate, equipment, infrastructure) within an opportunity zone
- Stock or equity in a trade or business whose owned or leased property is in a qualified opportunity zone



SOURCE: Better City, QGIS

Capital gains taxes decrease as the investment is held in the fund. If the investment is held in a qualified opportunity fund for 10 years, the basis of the investment is equal to the fair market value of the investment.

Wyoming couples the federal opportunity zone advantages with state incentives like no personal or corporate income tax, low sales and property taxes, and a large sovereign wealth fund.

There are four opportunity zones in Natrona County, one of which (Census tract 56025001100) covers the entirety of the Town of Mills.

Figure 42—Opportunity Zones in Natrona County



## FOREIGN TRADE ZONE

A Foreign-Trade Zone (FTZ) is a specific area where any form of imported merchandise may be stored, packaged, assembled, manufactured, cleaned, sorted, and graded without the expense of Customs duties or taxes.

The Casper/Natrona County International Airport has an active Foreign-Trade Zone which was just approved for an alternative site framework that extends the FTZ a 60-mile radius from the

airport. This designated area was expanded to cover most of the county—and the entirety of the Town—in 2017. A company must apply through the airport for benefits of the FTZ, and the airport supplies brochures with additional information on this process.

There are currently no businesses within the county which have taken advantage of the FTZ.



SOURCE: World Trade Center St. Louis

Figure 43—FTZ Benefits

# INCENTIVES & MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT

## WYOMING STATE LOAN & INVESTMENT BOARD

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The State Loan & Investment Board provides a variety of grants and loans. Below are summaries of the programs which can be used to fund capital or agricultural projects.

### Countywide Consensus Grants

The Countywide Consensus (CWC) program awards grants to construct, replace, or improve a fixed asset or public service facility; and major building and facility repair and replacement.

Certified countywide consensus lists and supporting documentation must be submitted to the Office at least thirty-five calendar days prior to any regular or special meeting of the Board.

### Joint Powers Act Loan Program

The Joint Powers Act program awards loans for capital construction projects of local governmental entities. Current interest rate is set at 5.37%. The application fee is 1%. The term of the loan shall not exceed thirty years and may be for a shorter term. Loans shall be repaid in annual installments. Loan applications must be received sixty days prior to the SLIB meeting.

### Capital Construction Loan Program

The Capital Construction Loan (CCL) program awards loans to assist cities, towns, counties, community college districts and school districts fund infrastructure projects that do not have many other funding options. The CCL program also awards loans for road and street projects, but those are limited to cities, towns and counties. Loan funds can be used for the following purposes:

- Purchase of land, buildings, and improvements associated with capital construction (applicant will be responsible for ensuring an appraisal is completed)
- Renovation or upgrade of existing infrastructure
- Planning and construction

Terms are between five and twenty-five years. The interest rate is based on the term of the loan: 1% plus 0.075% for each year of the loan term in excess of five years. Origination fee is 0.5% of the approved loan amount. Loan applications must be received by the Office ninety days prior to the SLIB meeting.

### Farm Loans

The Farm Loan program awards loans to:

- Purchase lands used principally for raising agricultural products, livestock, or dairying,
- Purchase livestock, fertilizers, and equipment calculated to maintain or increase the earning capacity of the borrower's agricultural operation,
- Purchase, construct, or install improvements calculated to maintain or increase the earning capacity of the borrower's agricultural operation, or
- Liquidate debts of the borrower incurred in the furtherance of the borrower's agricultural operation.

To be an eligible applicant, individuals must be able to demonstrate that they are qualified Wyoming Electors, and legal entities must be able to demonstrate that most of the ownership is by individuals who meet the qualifications for an individual.

The interest rate for these loans shall be in accordance with current interest rates. The application fee is \$100 and there is a 1% origination fee. The term of each loan shall be set by the Board, not to exceed thirty years. Loans shall be payable in equal, annual installments. Loan applications must be received by the Office of State Lands and Investments at least eight days prior to any regularly scheduled SLIB meeting.

## WYOMING BUSINESS COUNCIL INCENTIVES

The Wyoming Business Council (WBC) works with local lenders, federal agencies, the Wyoming State Treasurer, and cities, towns, counties or state authorities to support businesses with capital needs. WBC administers funds that can be used by municipalities or a joint powers board for economic development projects. The Wyoming State Constitution prohibits public funds from being provided directly to businesses and so the WBC programs are focused on the provisioning of infrastructure and shovel-ready sites to promote business expansion and relocation.

### Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

The WBC administers \$2.2 million to \$3.75 million in Federal CDBG funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Wyoming is given broad authority to design and structure a program to meet local community and economic development needs. Any project funded with CDBG funds must benefit low- and moderate-income families, eliminate slums and blight, or meet an urgent community development need that pose a serious and immediate threat to the health or welfare of the community.

Once CDBG funds are accepted from the Federal government, they lose their Federal designation. As such CDBG funds can be utilized as matching funds for Federal grant programs.

Applications are accepted quarterly on March 1<sup>st</sup>, June 1<sup>st</sup>, September 1<sup>st</sup>, and December 1<sup>st</sup>.

## Business Ready Community Grant & Loan Partnerships

This program finances publicly owned infrastructure to serve development needs. Under this program the community can apply for a variety of project types, including:

- **Business Committed Projects**—Infrastructure to facilitate the start-up, retention, expansion, or location of a specific committed business. The maximum grant and loan amount is \$1,500,000 and an applicant may request an additional amount up to \$1,500,000 in special assistance loan funds. An applicant may also request, with a single application, grant or loan funds up to the annual maximum amount for a multi-year project for a period not to exceed three fiscal years.
- **Managed Data Center Cost Reduction Funding**—A center whose primary purpose is the centralized repository for storage, management and dissemination of data and information for multiple businesses. There are four project tiers used to evaluate and qualify projects.
- **Community Readiness**—No specific business is committed to expand or locate in the community. Infrastructure to prepare a community for future business development supported by community planning documentation.
- **Community Enhancement**—Assists communities improve the aesthetic character or quality of life. This could be landscaping, recreational or convention facilities and infrastructure to facilitate the start-up or expansion of

a childcare or senior-care facility. Efforts must make the community more attractive for business development.

- **Planning Grants**—There are five types:
  - **Economic Development Plans.** Maximum award of \$50,000 with a 25% cash match of the total project costs. These plans address the community as a whole and identify potential future economic development opportunities and further develop a community's economic development strategy.
  - **Feasibility Studies.** Maximum award of \$25,000 with a 25% cash match of the total project costs. These site-specific or industry-specific plans determine the feasibility of a project or plan for a project with an economic development objective.
  - **Promotional Plans.** Maximum award of \$25,000 with a 25% cash match of the total project costs. These plans address the promotion of a community's economic development asset(s), such as branding or downtown development.
  - **Tourism Plans.** Maximum award of \$25,000 with a 25% cash match of the total project costs. These plans address economic development opportunities for a defined region or community that specifically focuses on the tourism and hospitality industry.
  - **Regional Targeted Industry Plans.** Maximum award of \$50,000 with a 25% cash match of the total project costs. These plans encompass a defined region and potential targeted industries for economic development growth.

The purpose of this program is to fund infrastructure to prepare a community for future business development supported by community planning documentation. Public infrastructure that is

eligible for funding includes water; sewer; roads; airports; rights of way; telecommunications; land acquisition; speculative buildings; amenities within a business park, industrial park, industrial site or business district; landscaping, recreation and educational facilities; and other physical projects in support of primary economic and educational development.

Non-recourse loan is secured is secured by a pledge of collateral, typically real property. A Business Ready Community Loan shall be made at the following interest rates as recommended by the Council and established by the Board and reflective of market rates.

- (a) A floor of zero percent for non-revenue generating projects.
- (b) A floor of one percent for revenue generating projects.
- (c) Loans have an annual servicing fee of \$125 for the life of the loan.
- (d) Fees such as origination, documentation, filing appraisal and any additional fees will be paid by the applicant.
- (e) The term of the loan will be based upon the useful life of the asset not to exceed 30 years.

	<b>BRC Required Match Cat. 1 Applicant</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Business Committed	10% (Half Cash)	\$3 Million
Managed Data Center	125% (Based on Payroll & Capital Investment)	\$2,250,000
Community Readiness	10% (Half Cash)	\$3 Million
Community Enhancement	25% (Half Cash)	\$500,000
Planning	25% (All Cash)	N/A
Loan Program	N/A	\$3 Million

SOURCE: Wyoming Business Council

*Table 4—BRC Required Match for Category 1 Applicant*

## Other Loans

The WBC helps businesses navigate through the process of finding and securing the financial assistance necessary to launching a

startup or expanding an operation. Below are a variety of programs for eligible businesses seeking financing.

	Max Participation Amount	Partner Member/ Borrower	Interest Rate	Loan to Value	Max Term	Max Amortization	Loan Fee	Other Info
Challenge Loans	50% of project cost; no to exceed \$1M	Local Economic Development Organization	Minimum of 4%	N/A	20 Years	Varies (could be longer than term)	Minimum of 1%	Loan must be adequately secured
Bridge Loan	35% of project cost; not to exceed \$1M	Commercial Lender	Minimum of 4% (fixed for first 5 years)	85% max	10 Years	25 Years	Minimum of 1%	Loan must be adequately secured
Guaranteed Loan Participation	50% of project cost; not to exceed \$2M	Commercial Lender	Minimum of 4%	N/A	10 Years	25 Years	Minimum of 1%	Must have federal guarantee (SBA/USDA)
Main Street Loan Participation	75% of project cost; not to exceed \$100K	Commercial Lender	Minimum of 4%	85% max	20 Years	Varies (could be longer than term)	Minimum of 1%	Business must provide at least 15% of total project cost
Loan Guarantee	80% of loss; not to exceed \$100K	Commercial Lender	N/A	N/A	10 Years	Amortization may be longer than term	1% of initial principal balance of note	Business cannot qualify for federal guarantee
Large Loan	\$5M - \$25M	Business Entity/ Commercial Lender	Minimum of 1%	75% max	Dependent on cash flow & useful life of collateral	Project dependent	1% of loan amount	Must submit simultaneous apps. to WBC, Gov. office and Treasurer office
Natural Gas Infrastructure	75% of cost	Business Entity	Minimum of 3.5%	Lesser of 75% of cost or value	10 Years	Up to 20 years	Minimum of 1%	Adequately secured and deferred payments for 2 years
Value-Added Ag Loan	75% of loan; not to exceed \$200K; minimum of \$20K	Commercial/ Ag Lender	Min. of Wall St. Journal Prime as of loan date	85% max	10 Years	Up to 25 years	Minimum of 1%	Interest rate may be fixed or variable depending on project

SOURCE: Wyoming Business Council

Table 5—WBC Funding Assistance

## ADVANCE CASPER INCENTIVES

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Advance Casper is Natrona County's Economic Development Organization (EDO). Projects which they participated in for Mills in recent years include:

1. Funding for the sewer and water line extension to the Natrona County Airport,
2. Low interest loans for business expansions and job creation, and
3. Crude to rail business park development.

Advance Casper is open to any projects that enhances business community and livability.

Advance Casper doesn't recruit businesses that will compete with existing companies. Advance Casper has a very active private membership along with a collaborative relationship with the county, towns and city, and are available to assist with facilitating projects.

## CASPER'S INCENTIVES

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An inventory of incentives being provided by the City of Casper was conducted to identify what programs are available in surrounding communities. The Town of Mills should use this information to understand how its incentive policy compares to other communities and strategically position itself for private sector investment.

### Options to Finance Development

#### New Market Tax Credits

For applicable projects (typically greater than \$1.5 million in value) the City can facilitate the use of New Market Tax Credits, a program administered through the U.S. Department of the

Treasury. This provides federal tax credits to businesses which locate in targeted areas.

#### Economic Development Assistance Program

Funding via Section 108 of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development federal loan guarantee program. Below-market loans from the City are available in partnership with a local financial institution. The loan must be tied to job creation and apply to 30 percent of the total project value. It is available to projects in the downtown core or redevelopment area.

#### Economic Revitalization Revolving Loan Fund

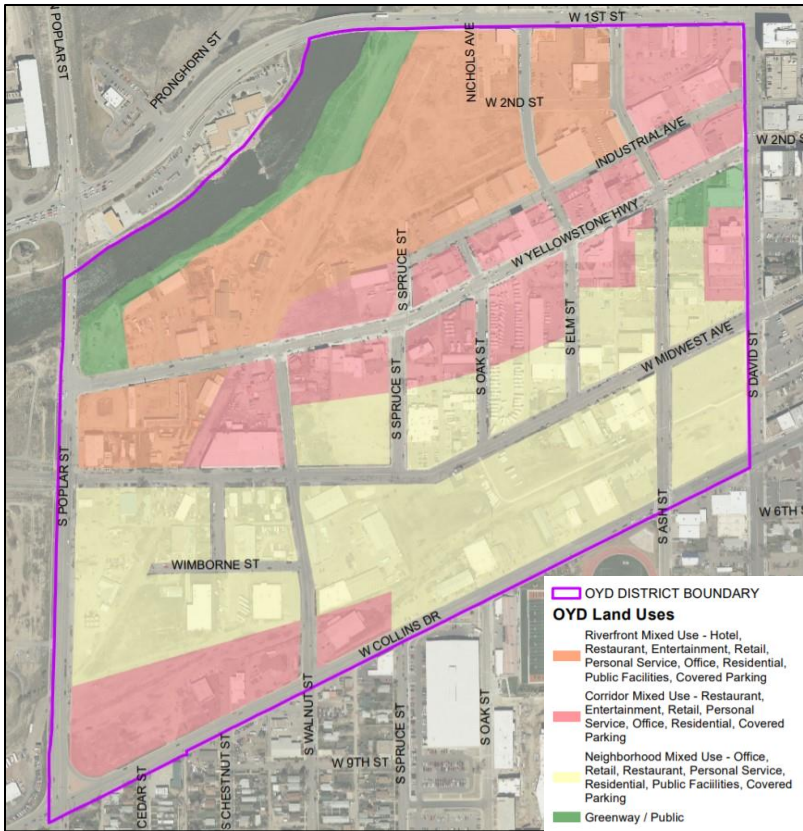
Funding is capitalized by the City of Casper's CDBG allocation which is appropriated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Below-market loans from the City are available in partnership with a local financial institution and must be tied to job creation. The loan would apply to 10 percent of the total project value.

The maximum loan amount would be \$50,000 at 2.5 percent for 10 years. The City facilitates this program for qualifying projects. It is available for real estate acquisition and/or real estate construction in the downtown core or redevelopment area.

#### Urban Renewal District

In 2002 Casper created an Urban Renewal Plan to inventory and analyze the targeted urban renewal area, which is now known as the Old Yellowstone District.



SOURCE: OYD Land Use Map

Figure 44—Old Yellowstone District

There were efforts to establish a TIF district in Casper in March 2017 in the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Area. Tax increment would be collected for 25 Years and the City would guarantee \$125,000 of revenue to the DDA and the DDA would agree to share TIF revenue with the City 50/50. TIF would apply to the Regular Sales Tax only – not to any property tax or One Cent tax. It’s unclear if the TIF district was adopted by the City Council.

### Form Based Code

The Old Yellowstone District and South Poplar Street Corridor are under a form-based code Regulating Plan, intended to integrate urban design, building form, placement, use and design. The form-based code consists of a Regulating Plan, building envelope standards, and design standards.

### Façade/Storefront Renovation Grant Program

The City of Casper has a Façade/Storefront Renovation Grant Program financed through Community Development Block Grant funds. It is the intent of this grant program to provide financial incentives to property and business owners in the Central Business District to assist them in renovating and rehabilitating façades to achieve compliance with the goals and intentions of the Form-Based Code adopted by the City Council in 2008.

### Brownfield Assessment Grant

The City of Casper was awarded a \$400,000 US Environmental Protection Agency Brownfield grant to assess petroleum and hazardous impacts in the Old Yellowstone District. The money was required to be used within a 3-year timeframe.

### Recommendations

WBC will be more likely to support the River Project if it is clear that the project is more than just a river walk or natural space, that it will provide additional commercial space and create a unique draw to bring further investment and development to the area. Any requests for funding should emphasize that the Mills River Project will draw people in and create revenue.

In addition, the Town should consider continually applying for CDBG funds from the WBC to establish a revolving loan fund, establish an Urban Renewal District along the riverfront to develop local capacity, and adopt a FBC as well.

## PROMOTE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

Euclidean Zoning divides developments based on uses, such as residential, commercial, industrial, etc. This zoning is standard practice across America and enables municipalities to avoid many negative effects of placing incompatible uses next to each other (such as industrial noise in a residential neighborhood). See Figure 29 for layout of Mill’s current Euclidean Zoning.

An issue with Euclidian Zoning is that it allows for large variations in design, so the built environment is not restricted to a cohesive style. Specifying that a zone is for ‘mixed-use’ development won’t necessarily fulfill the vision of what the community desires in the area when development is complete. In order to address this dilemma, many municipalities use a hybrid zoning code to carve out a section of the Town where Form Based Code Zoning applies.

### Form Based Code

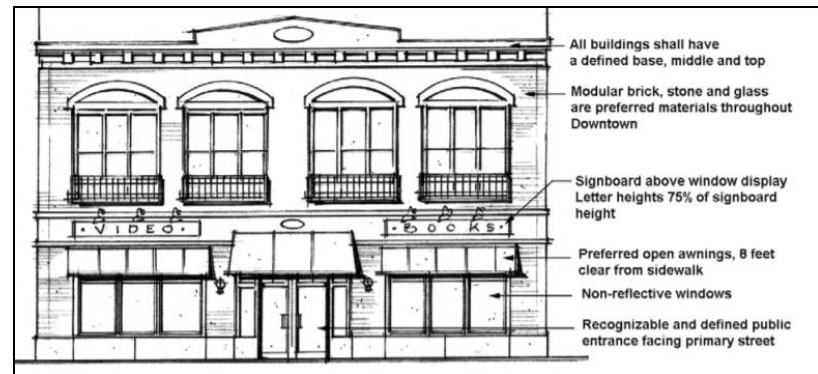
Form Based Code (FBC) regulates design elements rather than use. Therefore, it will specify the size, style, and placement of buildings (one-story, 1,000 SF) instead of the use (industrial).

FBC Zoning is more prescriptive than Euclidean Zoning (which specifies the use, minimums or maximums in height, setback, etc.) and requires specific ranges for height, bulk, setbacks, and minute design details like signage, landscaping, and architectural ornamentation. These requirements define the physical character of development. FBC Zoning is a tool ensure developments contribute to a vibrant mixed-use walkable commercial core.

According to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, “comprehensive form-based codes have the potential to encourage and facilitate development more effectively than

conventional regulations. Form-based codes are often easier to follow than conventional codes and ultimately more comprehensive, providing municipalities and potential developers with a system that...is more transparent, predictable, and thorough. As an added benefit, the need for review by a discretionary body such as a planning commission or design review board is often eliminated.

In addition, form-based codes typically—but not always—reduce regulation of what uses are allowed within buildings. This can expand the potential market for new development and result in structures that are more adaptable to different kinds of tenants, today and throughout the evolution of the community.”<sup>3</sup>



SOURCE: Downtown Antioch FBC by The Lakota Group and S.B. Friedman & Co

Figure 45—Example 2-Story Mixed Use Building

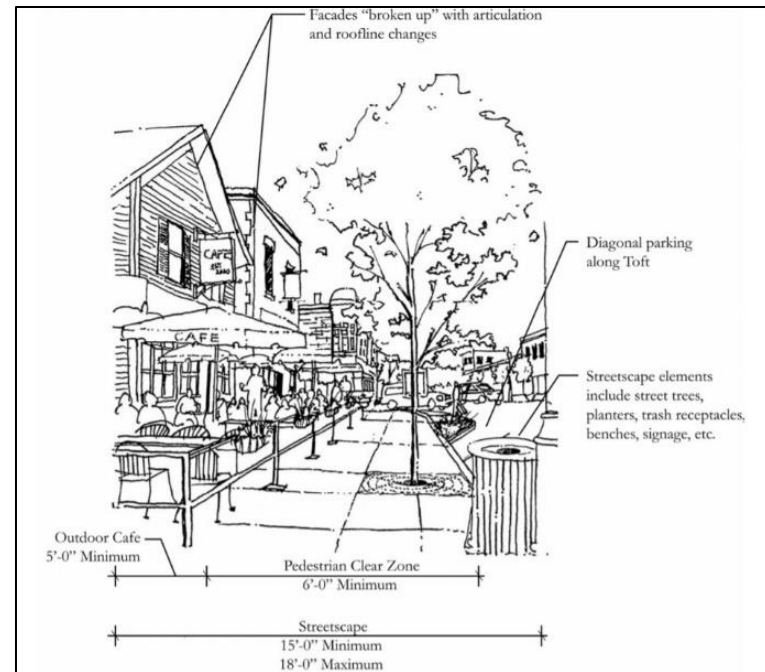
<sup>3</sup> “Form-Based Codes: a Step-by-Step Guide for Communities”, Page 11.



## Recommendations

We recommend that the riverfront area is carved out as an area covered by Form Based Code Zoning. This will ensure that new developments accommodate the variety of uses desired for the area while ensuring that development also supports the lifestyles, transportation alternatives, social interactions, and visual appeal which will make this area a regional destination.

The FBC Zoning would specify building types and development regulations regarding configuration and features, and it would specify street types and parking, width, and other features. This ultimately enables the Town to “brand” the River Project Area with a specific look and feel, which improves the areas ability to attract businesses and visitors.



SOURCE: Downtown Antioch FBC by The Lakota Group and S.B. Friedman & Co

Figure 46—Example Streetscape Design

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# BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION PROGRAM

Applicable to all businesses in a community, Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) is a core program of any economic development plan.<sup>4</sup> An effective BRE assists with issues that could force a company to fail and subsequently close. BRE also helps prevent companies from relocating to a new community. The primary objectives of business retention and expansion programs are to:

- Understand the needs of specific local firms, especially those firms that are at risk of closing or relocating elsewhere
- Respond to those needs using a wide variety of services, such as technical assistance, workforce development, financing, and building new markets
- Address local issues that detract from a healthy business climate in which local businesses can prosper and grow

A good business retention and expansion program will retain jobs and tax revenues within a community, foster the growth and development of local firms, and enhance a community's reputation as a good place in which to do business. Note that it is easier to sustain and grow a local economy by retaining an existing company and helping it to grow than to attract a new company. A formal BRE program identifies the hurdles and challenges facing local businesses and assists in addressing those issues.

Technical assistance provided through a BRE program can help a local business to increase its competitiveness in the wider

marketplace through economic gardening initiatives, business intelligence, and analytics programs to foster expansion and adding new jobs, including site selection assistance. Economic development incentives at the city, county and state levels can help keep business from relocating to other areas and to survive economic difficulties through business continuity planning, pre-disaster planning, and post-disaster recovery help. A key role of BRE is to help businesses connect to networks such as manufacturing extension partnerships, chambers of commerce, regional cluster initiatives, and angel investment networks.

A successful BRE program provides the data and intelligence to strategically attract new companies to a community and to foster the creation of new businesses. Business retention and expansion programs also supply the community with up-to-date data on the local economy, on the competitive strengths and weaknesses of the local area as a business location, and on the strength of the local economy – the number of business expansions and new investments, for example.

BRE prioritizes areas of interest and concern that can be used to formulate public policy, enhance development efforts, or improve the local business climate, addressing issues such as workforce availability and capability, regulatory issues, access to capital, speculative building, or industrial park development. A critical component is to understand the current workforce and the workforce needs of the business community.

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<sup>4</sup> Portions of this discussion are adapted from Business Retention and Expansion; IEDC (2016).

In pursuing a BRE strategy, an economic development organization will use many of the same tools and techniques used in business recruitment and new business development programs.

These include:

- Marketing
- Assistance with land and buildings
- Infrastructure
- Financial assistance, including linking companies with available sources of capital
- Development of a competent workforce through training and retraining
- Technical assistance and assessments
- Availability of technology resources
- Export assistance
- Assistance in reducing energy costs and complying with environmental regulations
- Assistance with permitting and licensing
- Various forms of tax and non-tax incentives

### Get Organized

First, form a BRE task force representing business, government, healthcare, education, and other stakeholder organizations, assuring that each participant is passionately committed to the region’s recovery, that no one is “window dressing”—all are committed and involved—and that everyone at the table is treated as an equal. In addition to the core task force, a number of others might be invited to view updates virtually to keep them informed. Don’t assign tasks to subgroups and leave them alone: too often such groups see a tangential problem and assume another group is taking it on, and some things fall through the cracks. The umbrella group needs to establish clear principles

and goals to guide problem-solving and require regular brief reports. For the task force itself to be accountable, it is necessary that an oversight or sponsoring board be defined, if one does not currently exist, comprised of the community’s key stakeholders, decision-makers, and businesses that are strategically important to the community. Clearly define BRE roles, as exemplified in Table 6.

	EDOs	Local Gov’t	County Gov’t	Chambers	Educational Institutions	Business leaders
Manage	◆					
Advise	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆
Financially support	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆
Collect data	◆	◆	◆	◆		
Evaluate data	◆				◆	◆
Solve problems	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Identify SMEs	◆			◆	◆	◆
Technical assistance	◆			◆	◆	◆
Ensure sustainability	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆
Advocate	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Recruit participants	◆			◆	◆	◆
Report results	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

SOURCE: Better City

Table 6—Example of BRE Roles

A more effective approach, with the same table, is to clarify and define roles and responsibilities using “RACI.” Although there are many ways to define RACI, ours is the following. Every person so indicated is **Responsible** for success or failure of a project; all

members with an “R” are in it together, the doers. One person, and only one, should be Accountable, meaning that person has the “A” and accounts for or explains what is going on—the bucks stops here. She or he is the person ultimately answerable for activities and decisions and has those with an “R” backing him or her up. Various individuals would be Consulted, particularly in collecting and evaluating data. Many groups would be Informed about plans, decisions, progress, and results. Using RACI enables relevant stakeholders in any decision-making process to remain engaged, and in the right roles—depending upon the appropriate scope of their involvement.

The leadership umbrella team will be most functional as they:<sup>5</sup>

- Trust each other—ask for help and listen.
- Embrace conflict—extract and build on each other’s ideas.
- Commit—truly buy into the critical few tasks; make mistakes and learn from them.
- Account—hold your own feet to the fire.
- Focus on collective results—be all-in, focused on the goal.

Many boomers remember hearing President John F. Kennedy state in 1962 that “This nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and bringing him safely to the earth.” That visionary statement energized the nation! It was what everyone talked about. However, in speaking to Congress, President Kennedy articulated three other goals: funding for the Rover space exploration system, space satellites for world-wide communications, and satellites for world-wide weather observation. Going to the moon captured the public’s imagination, but which of the four programs ultimately had the most impact?

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<sup>5</sup> Based on Lencioni, Patrick. *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002

## Analyze Existing Business Retention & Expansion Needs

Define desired results, milestones, and indicators of BRE success—for the community and, separately, for the collection of businesses. Identify friction points and likely conflicts. Engage community influencers and leaders and gain their support. Strive to build a “great group<sup>6</sup>” of diverse, talented, and driven individuals.

Implement outreach and relationship building efforts, including periodic surveys, targeted focus groups, and in-person visits to key businesses. This will help to identify relevant past and future trends in the community’s economic base. Define how those trends have affected and are likely to affect local industries and firms. Understand first-hand the needs and priorities of local firms. Survey local firms to learn what issues and opportunities they face and what their plans are to address them. Develop a clear understanding of the industries and firms comprising the local economic base. What industry-wide trends will influence the competitive advantages or disadvantages of local firms relative to external competitors? Who is strong and resilient? Who is threatened? Identify red flags—what keeps them up at night?

Gather information about primary employers, including jobs, sales, market share, plant capacity, and property ownership. Particularly emphasize historical trends, which provides insights not visible in current or year-on-year data and shows a picture of long-term health. Identify their priorities, challenges, and strengths. By identifying trends such as declining sales or market share, this data may be used to forecast trouble for a company or community, oftentimes considerably in advance of reaching crisis

<sup>6</sup> Bennis, W. G., & Biederman, P. W. (1997). *Organizing genius: The secrets of creative collaboration*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.

modes. In addition to paying close attention to quantitative information, also ask open-ended, qualitative questions of companies in order to scrutinize long-term trends, including queries about infrastructure, employee relations, safety, energy costs, equipment, and so. Ask companies to rank these factors by order of importance, which helps to target assistance accordingly.

### **Inventory Existing Business Development Programs**

Inventory existing economic development efforts locally and understand what is going well and what is not. Review previous studies, no matter how old—there is often gold in apparent dust. In one situation, an economic development group had suffered through a series of political changes over the years, each with a new short-term imperative. When a consultant was brought in to help address a particularly vexing issue, he was handed a binder from the 1970s. “We have faced this problem a number of times over the years. The analysis and answer are in that binder. We just haven’t executed,” the consultant was told.

Interview local companies, community influencers, and decision-makers to determine their concerns, intentions, and opinions about the business climate—present and future.

Conduct a literature search of other BRE’s, seeking not only “best practices,” but also searching for failures and identifying what can be learned from them. Seeking best practices is not about the processes used—it’s about understanding the underlying principles that guided the successful effort. In the 1980s a host of automobile manufacturers flew to Japan to understand the Toyota Way. Most did not. Instead, they came back with methods like quality circles, process flow charts, control charts, plant layout

diagrams, and other processes used by Toyota and missed the main point. Toyota has succeeded for many years because their “Way” is an integrated system “designed to provide the tools for people to continually improve their work.”<sup>7</sup>

Here are examples of case studies which provide examples of BRE programs:

- [Ohio State University](#)
- [University of Minnesota](#)
- [State of Indiana](#)
- [University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill](#)
- [University of Illinois](#)
- [Florida State University](#)

### **Develop Programs to Assist & Retain Existing Businesses**

The next step is to conduct an analysis of the community’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). This process iterates between analysis by the task force and reports to the sponsoring organization and back again in order to come to consensus on a roughly-right picture. It is useful to review the SWOT analysis once each year to learn what might have materially changed. Winston Churchill said that “perfection is the enemy of progress.” One organization spent three years perfecting its strategic plan and associated performance metrics. By the third year nothing had been implemented and their environment had changed enough that they had to go back to the drawing board to create another strategic plan. This time they decided to be directionally correct and to modify their plan as needed,

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<sup>7</sup> Liker, Jeffrey (2004). “The 14 Principles of the Toyota Way: 14 Management Principles from the World’s Greatest Manufacturer”. McGraw-Hill Education (2004).

reviewing it in a short meeting every quarter or so—similarly to what is now referred to as being “Agile.”

The SWOT analysis should be conducted by a task force comprising community leaders from business, government, academia, and community organizations. SWOT analysis should aim to provide a clear picture of community assets that are important to local businesses, as well as community weaknesses that need to be addressed. Build on strengths and shore up weaknesses—relative to other communities.

Every few years or so, it is good to test the SWOT analysis by benchmarking against similar communities. One organization found it was the best at several functions and celebrated. They then met—feeling somewhat prideful—with some others they had compared themselves to. Each group explained how they went about addressing a variety of similar issues. It quickly became apparent that benchmarking was more useful learning from each other about how they went about solving problems than about what the solutions were.

IEDC published a comprehensive set of key factors for a SWOT analysis, *Business Retention and Expansion*, Washington, DC, December 2016, pages 17-20.

### Role of the Economic Development Team<sup>8</sup>

The economic development team has several responsibilities in a BRE program. These include: bringing partners in the community together for the sponsoring board and for the BRE task force, being a resource for sources of funding, integrating sources of funding with the organizations needing assistance, having ready a compendium of potentially-available sites and buildings as well as a knowledge of the history of those locations, maintaining regular contact with key influencers, and constantly communicating with the various interested groups, including the media and the public.

There are several funding sources that are likely to apply to a rural-based community, such as the USDA Rural Development Program, The USDA Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grants, and the USDA Community Facilities Direct Loans & Grants. Specifically for Wyoming, USDA business and loan guarantees can be found here: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-industry-loan-guarantees/wy>

Use the Eligibility Tool at <https://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov> to determine whether one is qualified to apply.

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<sup>8</sup> IEDC, *Business Retention and Expansion*, Washington, DC, December 2016, page 11.

# IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Related sections of the Stewardship Matrix are included at the end of each section. For the Steward Participant abbreviation key, see Table 7. For the full Matrix, see Table 8.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

For the health of the labor market and surrounding economy, it is important to have a stable workforce with a wide range of skills and experience. A robust workforce benefits the community because it leads to more citizens that are engaged in civic affairs, self-sufficient, tax-positive, and have disposable funds to spend on local services.

Residents and employers need to be aware of the programs available for workforce development. The Town has access to the Pathways Innovation Center, Wyoming Contractors Association, and Casper College. Each of these entities are valuable resources for any workforce development initiatives.

### Task 1.1. – Workforce Development Meetings

The Town should facilitate quarterly meetings with employers and workforce development partners at an industry level. The outreach for which businesses are invited to attend would be regional—but focused on the industries that impact Mills' economy. Ensure all local major employers, manufacturers, and other businesses which have needs for office support staff are included in the meetings along with people from Casper College and other workforce development partners.

Industries which need to have their own meeting include:

- Manufacturing

- Oil & Gas
- Recreation
  - Even though there are not already those businesses here, it will demonstrate that the town is looking to establish these relationships and support this industry.
- Construction
- Office Support Staff (Accounting, HR, Bookkeeping, etc.)
- Workforce Services & Educational Providers (Wyoming Contractors Association, Pathways Innovation Center, Casper College)
  - This meeting should be held after the others and the industry leaders should also be invited to attend this meeting, which will facilitate discussion directly between the sectors.

These meetings should be scheduled and held on a quarterly basis. After each meeting the Community Development Director should develop action items based on the discussion points from these meetings.



SOURCE: Pixabay

### Task 1.2. – Workforce Development Plan

The Town needs to create a workforce development plan. This plan can be developed over time and will memorialize employer needs and workforce development opportunities. The plan should be Town specific but allow for broader integration across the region. Potential categories to include in the workforce development plan include:

- Alignment with Regional & State Plans
- Focusing Our Work – Existing Needs & Opportunities
- Challenges to Comprehensive Workforce Development
  - Awareness Barriers
  - Education & Skill-Building Barriers
  - Geographic Barriers
  - Childcare Efforts
  - Limitations of the Business Community
  - Limitations of Prospective Job Applicants
  - Definition of Success – Metrics from Outcomes, Not Outputs
- Keys to Success – Short/Mid/Long-Term Goals
- A Connected, Comprehensive Approach to Talent Development to Drive Economic Development

- Include a Section on Each Industry
- Building the Region’s Talent Pipeline
  - Awareness
  - Policy
  - Business Engagement
  - Leadership
  - Mentorship/Internship/Apprenticeship/Externship
  - STEM-H/STEM/STEAM Proficiency
  - High School Graduation
  - Career Certifications & Two-Year College Completion/Four-Year College Completion
- Trade Area Development & Remote Work Certification

This plan will be developed by the Community Development Director (“CDD”) based on the insights gleaned through the quarterly workforce development meetings. Alternatively, the Town could consider obtaining a planning grant from the WBC to cover the costs of an outside firm or organization developing this plan.

Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
1.1. Workforce Development Meetings	Short-Term Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule Meetings</li> <li>• Facilitate Discussion</li> <li>• Develop Action Items post-meeting</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend Meetings</li> <li>• Share Insights</li> </ul>	WCA, PIC, CC, Businesses
1.2. Workforce Development Plan	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Plan</li> </ul>	CDD *or Consultant
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund Consultant's Planning Assistance</li> </ul>	WBC



## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Fostering and supporting local businesses is important for the Town’s economy. Establishing and maintaining a support network in the community will help companies navigate their first years and to grow their business beyond the local area to capture demand in the region. Supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem will also brand Mills as a business-friendly community.

### Task 2.1. – Industrial Arts Creative Space

The Comprehensive Plan mentions the possibility of creating a multi-purpose facility that supports entrepreneurship. Due to the industrial nature of Mills’ economy, an Industrial Arts Creative Space would align with entrepreneurial needs. In addition to the usual maker space equipment it would provide industrial manufacturing equipment (welding, CNC, wood working, commercial kitchen, 3d Printing, etc.). The Industrial Arts Creative Space could be in an industrial building with separate 1,500 SF bays for each different type of equipment. Mills would own the equipment and rent the space and use of the equipment.

- **Subtask 1:** Conduct a Feasibility Study to understand the market for an Industrial Arts Creative Space. This study should help the Town fully understand the need for this type of space, what services would be included, how to

incorporate into existing infrastructure vs Town run independently, funding options, and potential for getting an entrepreneur to take the lead on setting it up.

- **Subtask 2:** Consider a partnership with the Wyoming Technology Business Center. They could bring in funding and assist with applying for grants (WBC, EDA). The Town would need to ensure that any partnership would be contingent on their ability to provide value since there is a potential disconnect between the services they offer and the actual job creation potential within the community.

### Task 2.2. – Business Community

Facilitate a business community by hosting quarterly gatherings where business owners discuss topics of relevance to them. This will create a sense of community and provide a support network within the local economy of business owners sharing best practices and advice. The Community Development Director will schedule these meetings and invite local business owners to attend. This does not need to be a highly structured meeting; perhaps poll the local business owners to see if they would appreciate presentations on topics of interest, and what topics those would be. Individuals from organizations in Workforce Development or other sectors can be invited to attend and provide a presentation on the given topics. Alternatively, Mills could organize 1Million Cups meetings for business owners.

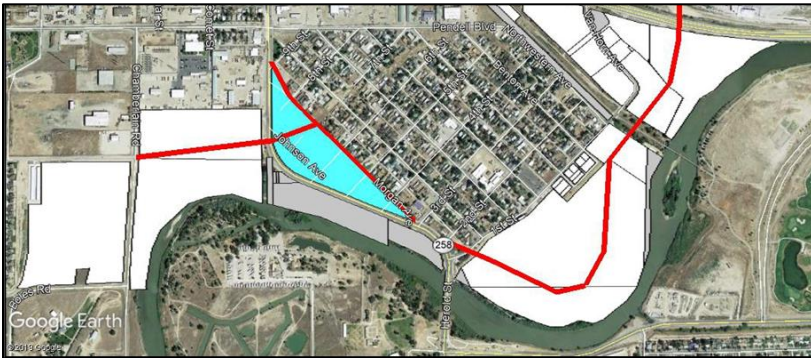
Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
2.1. Industrial Arts Creative Space	Long-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release RFP for Feasibility Study</li> <li>• Evaluate WTBC Partnership</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct Feasibility Study</li> </ul>	Consultant
2.2. Business Support Community	Short-Term Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan &amp; Host Meetings</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in Meetings</li> </ul>	Businesses

## RIVERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT

The Town of Mills lacks a location with a central business district and walkable retail and entertainment. It is possible for the community to stay true to their core as an industrial Town while creating a place which provides a both a commercial core and recreational opportunities to increase the residents' quality of life.

### Task 3.1. – Riverfront Masterplan

The Mills River Front Plan identifies the stretch of riverside property owned by the Town as a project site. Expanding that area to cover the stretch of river outlined in the map below will be a catalytic project for the Town's economy. This project has sufficient scale to shift the land use economics and catalyze investment in adjacent areas.



SOURCE: WLC Engineering and Surveying, Google Earth, Better City

Figure 47—Expanded River Project Area & Road Realignment

- **Subtask 1:** Revised Conceptual Plan
  - Have the consultant who did the river plan create an update with the additional commercial space. Include office space to generate a demand for future restaurants. Ensure the new design

concept covers the entire stretch of river shown in Figure 47.

- **Subtask 2:** Phasing Plan
  - Create a phasing plan to break up the riverfront project into actionable elements.
- **Subtask 3:** Identify Developer
  - Create and release an RFQ for a private sector developer who will acquire and develop the riverfront properties. (Using an RFQ instead of an RFP allows the Town the flexibility to work out the project details once there is a developer selected and enables the developer to help provide market insight to the project plan.)
- **Subtask 4:** Property Acquisition
  - Open discussions with business owners and local managers to explore relocation and secure land contracts. (See Task 6.5.1 regarding moving Austin Engineering.)
- **Subtask 5:** Funding
  - Create project pro-forma.
  - Bring the Wyoming Business Council out to Mills to showcase the community.
  - Define the project with the developer, then take the concept to the Wyoming Business Council for grant funding. (In funding request emphasize that the Mills river project is to draw people in and create revenue.)
  - Submit application for the WBC Community Readiness Grant.
- **Subtask 6:** Initial Implementation
  - Determine what infrastructure improvements are needed and perform engineering studies.
  - Raise base elevations for building sites to remove them from the floodplain and go through the process for FEMA floodplain map adjustments.

- Determine road realignment to create lots with sufficient depth along Wyoming Blvd to accommodate larger commercial uses. This road realignment would also provide improved access to the riverfront area, encouraging safe and simple access to draw more people to the area.

### Task 3.2. – Form Based Code

The Town should carve out the riverfront area and convert it to Form Based Code Zoning. This will ensure that new developments accommodate the variety of uses desired for the area while ensuring that development also supports the lifestyles, transportation alternatives, social interactions, and visual appeal which will make this area a regional destination.

The Form Based Code Zoning would specify building types and development regulations regarding configuration and features, and it would specify street types and parking, width, and other features. This ultimately enables the Town to “brand” the River Project Area with a specific look and feel, which improves the areas ability to attract businesses and visitors.

- **Subtask 1:** Create and release an RFP for a planning firm. Get a sense from what Wyoming firms charge for code-based work (the estimated budget is \$75,000 to \$100,000).
- **Subtask 2:** Hire a planning firm to create design standards for Riverfront and area.

**Note:** an alternative is to purchase a template for Form Based Code, but this alternative comes with potential problems and unforeseen costs if the template doesn’t fit precisely with the area and ends up needing continual revisions to accommodate for location realities. If the Town wants to purchase a template, it is

important to conduct due diligence beforehand to see if the template would be suitable for the intended use. There need to be nuances which incorporate the riverfront element. Also consider possibilities for getting the template tailored as needed.

### Task 3.3. – Tax Increment District

A Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District is an economic development tool that enables municipalities to assist projects to move forward that otherwise would not be feasible. This tool can be used to bridge financing gaps, especially for the first few projects which help create the initial positive momentum.

The Town should Hire a firm to assist with the formation of a TIF District for the riverfront area. They will help define the project area, develop budget and plan, coordinate with property owners, and negotiate participation among taxing entities. The firm would compose the Statement of Blight, and then assist the Town through the process of passing the resolution and developing a plan for the district.

There are two options on timing, the first is to setup the TIF and be ready to pull the trigger just before investment occurs. The second is to enact it right away—however the clock starts ticking and a couple years could be lost for potential projects, so ideally this would occur when private sector investment is occurring. It is good to start the TIF creation process 12 to 18 months in advance of when you anticipate the investment occurring.

### Task 3.4. – Business Interests

It would be helpful to know which businesses in the community are poised to expand and would be interested in opening an additional location in the Riverfront Redevelopment area. The intention is to determine if businesses are interested in expanding, not on relocation.

- **Subtask 1:** The Backwards Distillery expressed interest in opening a consumer sales location in the riverfront development. Contact the owner about getting a letter of interest.
- **Subtask 2:** Put out feelers to the general community if to find out if there are other businesses that would be

interested in expanding to the Riverfront. If there are, try to get letters of interest from them.

The letters of interest from businesses interested in a Riverfront location can be used in outreach to the development community, to show that there are already local businesses interested in being tenants in the space.

Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
3.1. Riverfront Masterplan	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise the Conceptual Plan</li> <li>• Conduct Engineering Study</li> </ul>	Consultant (different for each role)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Phasing Plan</li> <li>• Release RFQ for Developer</li> <li>• Discuss Property Acquisition with Businesses &amp; Property Owners</li> <li>• Apply for Grant for Bank</li> <li>• Release RFP for Engineering Study</li> <li>• Invite WBC to Visit Town</li> <li>• Submit Application for WBC Community Readiness Grant</li> <li>• Approach Businesses about Contributing to Project</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide Grant Funding</li> </ul>	WBC
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire &amp; Develop Property</li> </ul>	Private
3.2. Form Based Code	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release RFP for Planning Consultant OR Conduct Due Diligence on Template</li> </ul>	CDD
	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and adopt FBC Standards</li> </ul>	Consultant / Town
3.3. Tax Increment District	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release RFP for Consultant</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define Project Area, Develop Budget &amp; Plan, Coordinate with Property Owners &amp; Taxing Entities, Compose Statement of Blight, &amp; Assist with Resolution</li> </ul>	Consultant / Town
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pass Resolution</li> </ul>	Town Leaders
3.4. Business Interest	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify Interested Businesses</li> <li>• Share Letter of Interest with development partners</li> </ul>	CDD

## OUTDOOR RECREATION

Outdoor recreation is an area of opportunity for the Town. The purchase of the Wagon Wheel enhances the potential for development in the Town's outdoor recreation offerings.

### Task 4.1. – Wagon Wheel

Develop the Wagon Wheel into an outdoor recreation asset for the Town. It can become a community center and basecamp spot for accessing the Town's trail system. Potential uses which could be provided at Wagon Wheels include:

- A visitor's center kiosk to provide information and make it the basecamp for outdoor recreation.
- Improvements along the creek to enable wading or splash area and other flat-water activities.
- Look to assemble property and create accommodations such as campgrounds and glamping.
- Setup rentals for bikes or scooters that people could take on the trails.
- Provide a space for STEM programming, and possibly sports such as soccer or basketball.
- Provide convention space.

Turning the Wagon Wheel into an outdoor recreation hub will also help position the Town in a favorable light to accomplish the long-term plan of attracting a hotel. Placing a hotel near convention space is highly strategic. The Town should continue to explore ways to connect a hotel to the Wagon Wheel, keeping tabs on potential nearby properties and development plans.



SOURCE: Google Maps

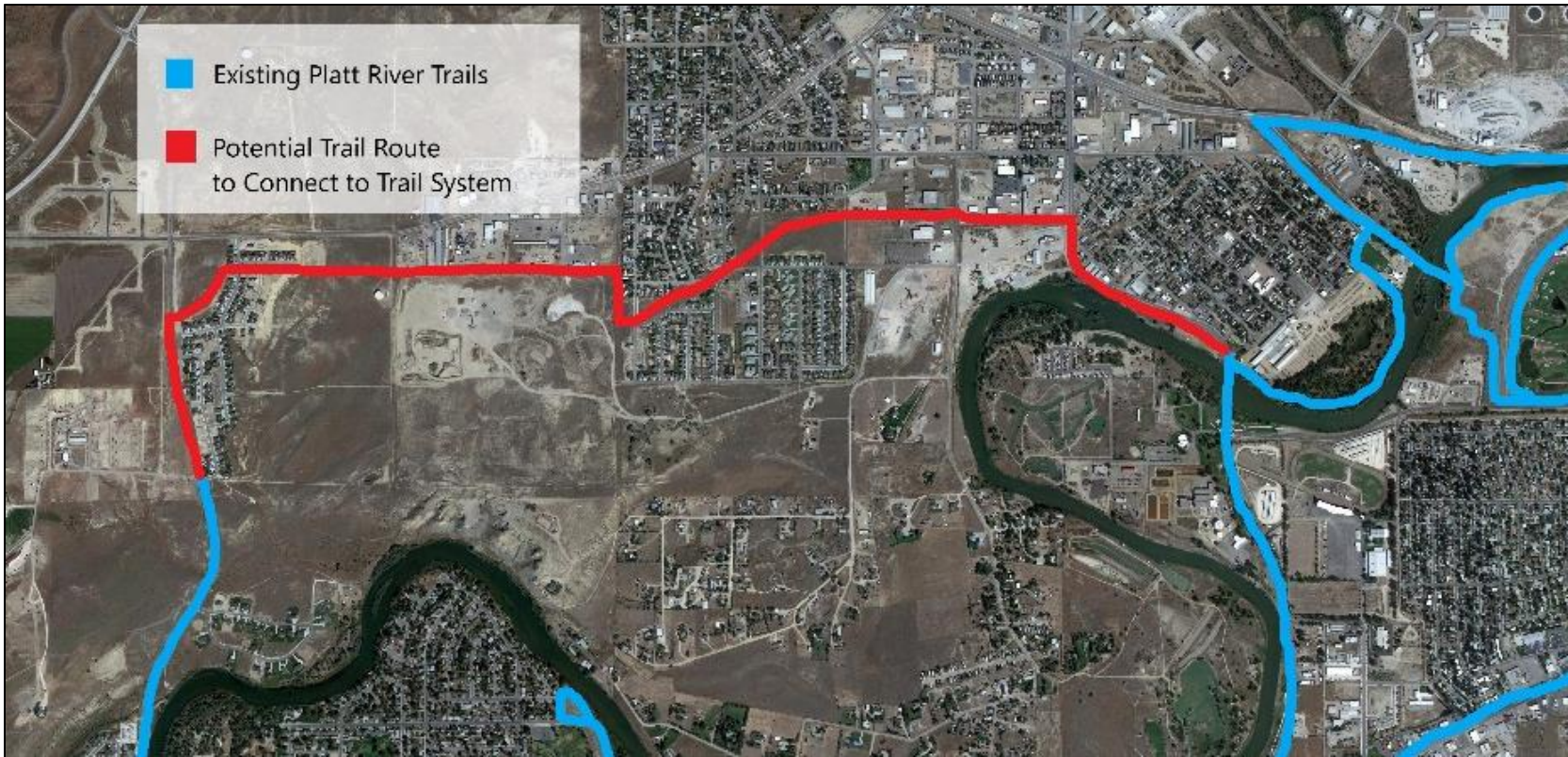
*Figure 48—Wagon Wheel*

- **Subtask 1:** Create business plan. This ensures that the project is viable and that the uses are fully planned out.
- **Subtask 2:** Continue conversations with owner.
- **Subtask 3:** Consider grant funding and loan options which would be available for purchasing the area near the river.
- **Subtask 4:** Create list of properties nearby which would be potential for hotel development, contact property owners to see their plans for their property and if they are open to discussions with hotel developers.

### Task 4.2. – Trails Plan

Create a Trails Plan, which will create trail linkages to neighborhoods and the river will create a compelling recreational asset for residents and visitors alike. Improve connectivity across multiple modes including bicycle and pedestrian.

- **Subtask 1:** Create Trails Plan which connects key areas and trails by walkways and bikeways.
- **Subtask 2:** Connect with Platt River Trails System by extending the existing trails to connect with those nearby.



SOURCE: Google Earth, Better City

Figure 49—Potential Connection to Platt River Trail System

Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
4.1. Wagon Wheel	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Business Plan</li> <li>• Continue Conversations with Owner</li> <li>• Consider Grant Funding &amp; Loan Options</li> <li>• List Potential Hotel Properties &amp; Contact Owners</li> </ul>	CDD
4.2. Trails Plan	Short-Term	• Create Trails Plan	CDD
		• Extend Trails	Consultant

## BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

Mills' economic development should focus primarily on building local businesses rather than recruitment. Business Retention and Expansion involves systematic outreach to be aware of businesses which are at risk, growing, or potentially relocating or closing.

### Task 5.1. – Business Retention & Expansion Program

It is important for Mills to have a local Business Retention and Expansion program, so that the Town can gather and track reliable data which would include NAICS codes, occupation, occupational wages, and benefits offered. The systematic collection of local data provides the community with a clear understanding of the exact economic framework of the Town.

- **Subtask 1:** Compile a list of locally licenses businesses.
- **Subtask 2:** Categorize local businesses by industry.
- **Subtask 3:** Obtain information from the respective businesses regarding number of employees, occupation types, occupational wages, and benefits offered.
- **Subtask 4:** Ensure that local businesses have resources to grow. Assist with connecting local workforce and entrepreneurs to the programs available in the region.
- **Subtask 5:** Establish a local business preference when soliciting RFPs.

### Task 5.2. – Create Business Resource Guide

The Town can create a booklet to share with businesses containing information on local, regional, and national resources for businesses. This resource will enable the Town to efficiently support business growth. This information would include:

- A list of the regional organizations which provide technical assistance to businesses, services they provide, and contact information. These include Advance Casper, the Wyoming Technology Business Center, the Wyoming Small Business Development Center, the Wyoming Women's Business Center, Manufacturing Works, the UW Technology Transfer & Research Products Center, and the Wyoming Business Council.
- A list of funding resources for starting or growing a business. These include government grants, private grants, post-performance grants and tax credits, capital investors in the state, government loan programs, private loan providers, and crowdfunding.
- Information on the preferential tax treatment potential provided by the airport's Foreign Trade Zone, and instructions on how to register with the airport.

Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
5.1. Business Retention & Expansion Program	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compile List of Local Businesses</li> <li>• Categorize by Industry</li> <li>• Obtain Information on Employees, Wages, Etc.</li> <li>• Ensure Businesses have Resources to Grow</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Local Business Preference when Soliciting RFPs</li> </ul>	Town Leaders
5.2. Create Business Resource Guide	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Resource Guide &amp; Share with Businesses</li> </ul>	CDD *or Consultant

## OTHER PROJECTS

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The Town's Community Development Director will oversee the ongoing economic development projects to provide ongoing implementation of strategic projects.

### Task 6.1. – School District

The Natrona County School District's decision to close the elementary school in Mills impacts the sustainability of Mills as a community and hurt the Town's ability to attract and retain young families and to create a close-knit community. The most viable alternative for solving this problem is for the Town to create its own School District.

- **Subtask 1:** Create and release RFP to hire a Bond Consultant.
- **Subtask 2:** Write a plan on how the district would operate and taxing.
- **Subtask 3:** Identify potential land for the School District.
- **Subtask 4:** Collect signatures for the commission. Use two petitions, one for Mills' residents and the other for Natrona County residents. Use the number of responses from the latter to gauge interest on expanding the district to cover other portions of the county. (This could help fulfill the demographic requirements in WY 21-6-208.)

### Task 6.2. – Population Update

Because the newly annexed area is not officially a part of the Town before the census deadline, the Town will need to work with the Governor's Office to get it changed and the population numbers updated. Coordinate with the Wyoming Association of Municipalities for their assistance in pushing for this change.

### Task 6.3. – Grocery Store

- **Subtask 1:** Identify potential locations for a grocery store.
- **Subtask 2:** Create a packet or presentation to use in outreach to grocery stores. This would provide specific information which informs grocery store operators of the market need and information about the potential locations (information could include number of rooftops in a 3-mile radius, acreage and access, utilities, population, median household income, etc.).
- **Subtask 3:** Conduct outreach to grocery store operators and find one interested in developing a location in Mills. (Grocery stores build based on their distribution network, so begin with those already in the region.)

### Task 6.4. – Industrial Park

The Intermodal Planning Study identified a preferred alternative for development of an industrial park. The developable area of the study site consists of 129 acres which are currently pastureland or vacant greenfield, with an estimate of 24 lots and 884,940 building square footage. Due to few owners and expressed interest from public meetings, assembling the parcels needed should not be a limiting factor.

- **Subtask 1:** Austin Engineering owns a major section of the riverfront and could potentially benefit from relocating closer to railyards, so it could serve the Town a dual advantage to relocate Austin Engineering to be an anchor tenant in the industrial park. Since they have just built a new building, the best way to incentivize their move will be through helping them outgrow their facilities—it will be easier to move them if they have a business need to do so. As they are the oldest and largest company in Wyoming and a major employer in the State, it would be good to talk with the State for incentives for this project. The Town could consider conducting a



Relocation Feasibility Study, which could potentially be funded by the Wyoming Business Council or EDA.

- **Subtask 2:** Assemble parcel information. This includes knowing the following information for each parcel. This will enable the Community Development Director to provide information to companies which are location hunting. Compile the information into an informational brochure about the industrial park.
  - Owner
  - Size
  - Price (or Price Range)
  - Topographic Issues
  - Utility Access (Electric, Gas, Water, Wastewater, Fiber)
  - Transportation Access (Road and Railroad)

### Task 6.5. – Senior Housing

The old elementary school building has issues with asbestos, and rather than just removing the asbestos, it would be more financially feasible to have a plan for what to put in the area and do the asbestos removal in conjunction with any demolition. This location has a large enough area for a senior housing development. The good access to the Riverfront area and the senior center would be beneficial to the residents. The Community Development Director can determine what the next steps of the process are to pursue this concept (this could include steps such as a concept design, feasibility study, public visioning, or RFP to acquire and develop).



SOURCE: Sabrina Foreman

*Figure 50—Mountain View Elementary*

### Task 6.6. – Potential Development Areas

Due to their respective locations and the property sizes, the Lariat Mobile Home Park and Trailer Park on Platte Avenue create unique redevelopment opportunities in the community.

- The Lariat Mobile Home Park has 10-acres of adjacent parcels and is located on Highway 26. This property could potentially be good fit for a mixed-use development with multi-family housing, light industrial and commercial uses.
- The Trailer Park on Platte Avenue is located to the southeast of Town Hall. This property is directly across from the river and could potentially be a good fit for commercial uses.

The Town should keep relationships warm and friendly with the property owners, let them know that if they ever are looking at exiting the Town would be interested in the site. If the owners ever do express interest in selling their property the Town can work with them to ensure they know about available options, such as Opportunity Zone tax treatment, 1031 exchange, find a

development partner and contribute their land as equity into a redevelopment project, etc.

### Task 6.7. – Public Communications

It is important for the business community and Town residents to know that progress is being made in local economic development initiatives. This produces interest in initiatives, creates energy and local enthusiasm, and generates support for current and future projects.

- **Subtask 1:** Include periodic updates on economic development projects in blasts to the business community. These could be through the newsletter and social media posts.
- **Subtask 2:** Document work done for business retention and expansion and other projects and tasks. Share information at community events or via news stories.

Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
6.1. School District	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release RFP for Bond Consultant</li> <li>• Identify Potential Land</li> <li>• Collect Signatures on Two Petitions</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write Plan on Operations &amp; Taxing</li> </ul>	Consultant
6.2. Population Update	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change Boundary &amp; Update Population</li> </ul>	CDD, Town Staff
6.3. Grocery Store	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify Potential Locations</li> <li>• Create Packet for Outreach</li> <li>• Conduct Outreach</li> </ul>	CDD *or Consultant
6.4. Industrial Park	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Austin Engineering Regarding Potential Move</li> <li>• Hire Consultant to Conduct Feasibility Study</li> <li>• Discuss Incentives &amp; Study Funding with State, WBC, &amp; EDA</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct Feasibility Study</li> </ul>	Consultant
6.5. Senior Housing	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine Next Steps on Senior Housing Concept</li> </ul>	CDD
6.6. Potential Development Areas	Long-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Rapport with Property Owners</li> </ul>	CDD, Town Staff
6.7. Public Communications	Short-Term Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create &amp; Publish Periodic Updates on Projects</li> <li>• Document Work Done for BR&amp;E &amp; Other Projects</li> </ul>	CDD

## STEWARDSHIP MATRIX

This Stewardship Matrix outlines all the recommended projects along with the stewardship participants and their roles in moving the project forward.

The intended project timeline is included with each project. Short-term projects should be completed within two years; some include the note “quarterly” or “ongoing” to represent recurring elements. Mid-term projects should be completed within five years. Long-term projects are anticipated to take more than five years to complete.

Abbreviations are used in the Stewardship Participants column. The key for these abbreviations is below.

Stewardship Participants Abbreviations	
*	Alternative Stewardship Option
Businesses	Business Owners
CC	Casper College
CDD	Community Development Director
Consultant	Consultant or Consulting Firm
PIC	Pathways Innovation Center
Town Leaders	Town Council & Mayor
Town Staff	Town Staff
WBC	Wyoming Business Council
WCA	Wyoming Contractors Association

SOURCE: Better City

Table 7—Stewardship Abbreviation Key

Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
1.1. Workforce Development Meetings	Short-Term Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule Meetings</li> <li>Facilitate Discussion</li> <li>Develop Action Items post-meeting</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend Meetings</li> <li>Share Insights</li> </ul>	WCA, PIC, CC, Businesses
1.2. Workforce Development Plan	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create Plan</li> </ul>	CDD *or Consultant
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fund Consultant's Planning Assistance</li> </ul>	WBC
2.1. Industrial Arts Creative Space	Long-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Release RFP for Feasibility Study</li> <li>Evaluate WTBC Partnership</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct Feasibility Study</li> </ul>	Consultant
2.2. Business Support Community	Short-Term Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan &amp; Host Meetings</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in Meetings</li> </ul>	Businesses

Table continues on next page.

Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
3.1. Riverfront Masterplan	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise the Conceptual Plan</li> <li>• Conduct Engineering Study</li> </ul>	Consultant (different for each role)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Phasing Plan</li> <li>• Release RFQ for Developer</li> <li>• Discuss Property Acquisition with Businesses &amp; Property Owners</li> <li>• Apply for Grant for Bank</li> <li>• Release RFP for Engineering Study</li> <li>• Invite WBC to Visit Town</li> <li>• Submit Application for WBC Community Readiness Grant</li> <li>• Approach Businesses about Contributing to Project</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide Grant Funding</li> </ul>	WBC
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire &amp; Develop Property</li> </ul>	Private
3.2. Form Based Code	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release RFP for Planning Consultant OR Conduct Due Diligence on Template</li> </ul>	CDD
	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and adopt FBC</li> </ul>	Consultant / Town
3.3. Tax Increment District	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release RFP for Consultant</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define Project Area, Develop Budget &amp; Plan, Coordinate with Property Owners &amp; Taxing Entities, Compose Statement of Blight, &amp; Assist with Resolution</li> </ul>	Consultant / Town
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pass Resolution</li> </ul>	Town Leaders
3.4. Business Interests	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify Interested Businesses</li> <li>• Share Letter of Interest with development partners</li> </ul>	CDD
4.1. Wagon Wheel	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Business Plan</li> <li>• Continue Conversations with Owner</li> <li>• Consider Grant Funding &amp; Loan Options</li> <li>• List Potential Hotel Properties &amp; Contact Owners</li> </ul>	CDD
4.2. Trails Plan	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Trails Plan</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extend Trails</li> </ul>	Consultant

Table continues on next page.

Task Description	Timeline	Role	Stewardship Participants
5.1. Business Retention & Expansion Program	Short-Term Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compile List of Local Businesses</li> <li>• Categorize by Industry</li> <li>• Obtain Information on Employees, Wages, Etc.</li> <li>• Ensure Businesses have Resources to Grow</li> <li>• Create System for Consistent Follow-up</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Local Business Preference when Soliciting RFPs</li> </ul>	Town Leaders
5.2. Business Resource Guide	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Resource Guide &amp; Share with Businesses</li> </ul>	CDD *or Consultant
6.1. School District	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release RFP for Consultant</li> <li>• Collect Signatures on Two Petitions</li> </ul>	CDD / Community Group
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write Plan on Operations &amp; Taxing</li> </ul>	Consultant
6.2. Population Update	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Governor's Office to Change Boundary &amp; Update Population</li> </ul>	CDD, Town Staff
6.3. Grocery Store	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify Potential Locations</li> <li>• Create Packet for Outreach</li> <li>• Conduct Outreach</li> </ul>	CDD *or Consultant
6.4. Industrial Park	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Austin Engineering Regarding Potential Move</li> <li>• Hire Consultant to Conduct Feasibility Study</li> <li>• Discuss Incentives &amp; Study Funding with State, WBC, &amp; EDA</li> </ul>	CDD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct Feasibility Study</li> </ul>	Consultant
6.5. Senior Housing	Mid-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine Next Steps on Senior Housing Concept</li> </ul>	CDD
6.6. Potential Development Areas	Long-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Rapport with Property Owners</li> </ul>	CDD, Town Staff
6.7. Public Communications	Short-Term Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create &amp; Publish Periodic Updates on Projects</li> <li>• Document Work Done for BR&amp;E &amp; Other Projects</li> </ul>	CDD

SOURCE: Better City

Table 8—Full Stewardship Matrix

# APPENDIX

## USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM PURPOSES WYOMING

Program	Land & Bldgs.	Mach. & Equip.	Working Capital	Infrastructure	Tech. Asst./Train.
Business and Industry Loan Guarantees	◆	◆	◆	◆	
Rural Business Development Grants	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Intermediary Relending Program Loans	◆	◆	◆		
Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Rural Cooperative Development Grants				◆	◆
Socially Disadvantaged Groups Grants					◆
Value-Added Producer Grant			◆	◆	◆
Rural Energy for America Program Loan Guarantees/Grants	◆	◆			
Biorefinery, Renewable Chemical, and Biobased Product Manufacturing Assistance Program Loan Guarantees					
Repowering Assistance Program					
Advanced Biofuel Payment Program					

SOURCE: USDA Rural Development Summary of Major Programs: [https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RD\\_ProgramMatrix.pdf](https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RD_ProgramMatrix.pdf)

Table 9— USDA-RD Program Purposes Wyoming

## WYOMING RURAL BUSINESS AND COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS

Program	Objective	Applicant	Uses	Population	Loan/Grant	Terms/Conditions
Business and Industry Loan Guarantees	Create jobs/stimulate rural economies by providing financial backing for rural businesses.	Lenders/ Businesses.	Real estate, buildings, equipment, supplies, working capital, and some debt refinancing.	All areas except cities over 50,000 and their contiguous urbanized areas.	Loan guarantee.	Lender and borrower negotiate terms. Up to 30 years for real estate, 15 years for machinery and equipment, and 7 years for working capital.
Rural Business Development Grants	Assist the startup or expansion of small and emerging private businesses and/or non-profits in rural communities. Note: This program combines the former Rural Business Enterprise Grant and Rural Business Opportunity Grant programs and was created through the 2014 Farm Bill.	Public bodies, government entities, non-profit entities, and Federally recognized Indian Tribes.	Acquire or develop land, buildings, plants and equipment; build or improve access roads, parking areas, utility extensions, and water and waste disposal facilities; provide technical assistance; establish revolving loan funds; and to support rural distance learning programs that provide educational or job training.	All areas rural in character except cities over 50,000 and their contiguous urbanized areas.	Grant.	Grants are awarded on a competitive basis.
Intermediary Relending Program Loans	Establish revolving funds for business facilities and community development projects.	Public bodies, non-profit corporations, Native American Tribes, and cooperatives.	Community development projects, establishment or expansion of businesses, creation or saving of rural jobs.	Rural areas and incorporated places with populations of less than 50,000.	Direct loan.	The intermediary makes loans to businesses from its revolving loan fund on terms consistent with security offered. Intermediary pays 1% for 30 years.
Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program	Establish revolving funds to target assistance to small rural enterprises.	Microenterprise Development Organizations (MDOs).	Loans, technical, and capacity-building assistance to businesses with 10 or fewer employees and sole proprietorships.	All areas except cities over 50,000 and their contiguous urbanized areas.	Loans, grants.	Rural microenterprises apply directly to the intermediary.

*Table continues on next page.*

<b>Program (cont.)</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Uses</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Loan/Grant</b>	<b>Terms/Conditions</b>
Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants	Finance economic development and job creation in rural areas.	Rural Utilities Service-financed electric and telephone utilities.	Business startups or expansion projects that create rural jobs.	Rural areas with priority to places with populations of 2,500 or less.	Direct loan or grant to establish revolving loan fund.	Intermediary makes loans to for-profit or non-profit businesses and public bodies. Loans are 0% for 10 years.
Rural Cooperative Development Grants	Establish/operate centers for cooperative development.	Non-profits and institutions of higher education.	Establish centers to provide technical assistance, training, applied research, and collection and interpretation of data, for the purpose of cooperative development.	All areas except cities over 50,000 and their contiguous urbanized areas.	Grant.	Minimum 25% fund match (5% for 1994 Institutions). Grants awarded competitively.
Socially Disadvantaged Groups Grants (formerly called Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grants Program)	Provides funds to eligible coops or an association of coops to provide technical assistance to small, socially disadvantaged producers in rural areas.	Coops and associations of coops whose membership and board of directors is comprised of at least 75% socially disadvantaged agricultural producers.	Technical assistance.	All areas, except cities over 50,000 and their contiguous urbanized areas.	Grant.	Grants are awarded on a competitive basis. There is no matching requirement.
Value-Added Producer Grants	Help independent agricultural producers enter into activities that add value to their crops.	Independent producers, farmer and rancher coops, producer groups, majority-controlled producer-based business ventures.	Feasibility studies, business plans; working capital.	All areas.	Grant.	Grants are awarded on a competitive basis. Funds cannot be used to build facilities or purchase equipment. Funds must be matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

SOURCE: USDA Rural Development

Table 10— WY Rural Business and Cooperative Programs<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For Business & Industry Loan Guarantees in Wyoming, see: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-industry-loan-guarantees/wy>.