

Housing as Critical Infrastructure

What We Heard – Open Mic Summary | June 2, 2026

On June 2, 2026, the Wyoming Business Council hosted a public Open Mic on housing as critical economic infrastructure. The conversation drew more than 140 business owners, developers, community leaders, elected officials, healthcare and education representatives, and residents from across Wyoming. This document captures what participants shared – in their own words – through the live conversation, polls, and the event chat. This summary is offered as a record of the experience, urgency, and ideas Wyomingites brought to the table.

ONE WORD: WYOMING'S HOUSING SITUATION

We asked everyone in the room to describe Wyoming's housing situation in a single word. The responses speak for themselves.



The most common responses: **Expensive, Limited, Dire, Critical, and Crisis.**

THE TOP-LINE TAKEAWAY

Across every sector represented, one message was clear: **Wyoming's housing shortage is not a future risk – it is a present-day constraint** on hiring, growth, and the ability of working families to put down roots. Participants did not debate whether the problem is real. They focused on what it costs and what it will take to solve it.

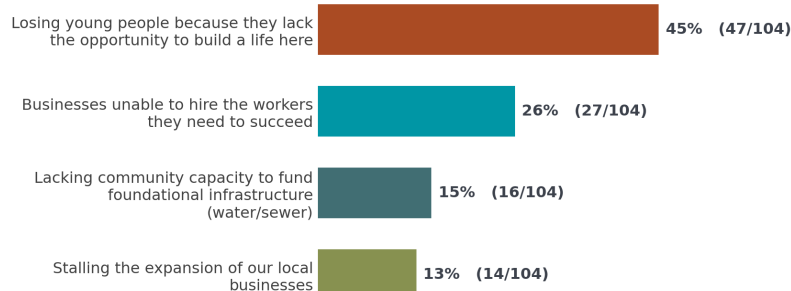
BY THE NUMBERS

What the Room Told Us in Two Live Polls

During the Open Mic, participants responded to two live polls. The results put numbers behind the stories – and point clearly toward both the cost of inaction and the tools communities say they need most.

Poll #1 – The Cost of Doing Nothing

“What is the greatest cost of lacking this critical workforce infrastructure?” (104 of 139 participated)

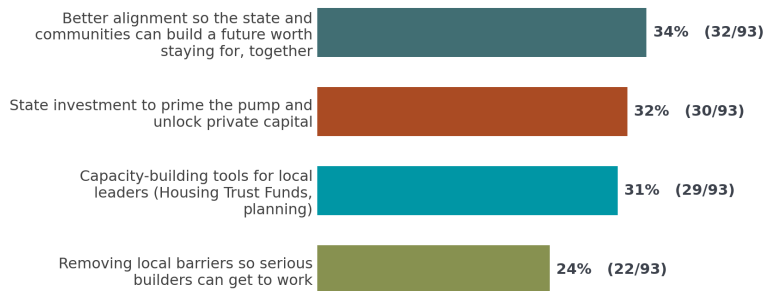


WHAT THIS TELLS US

Nearly half the room (45%) named the loss of young people as the single greatest cost of housing inaction. Combined with the 26% who pointed to businesses unable to hire, more than 7 in 10 participants locate the cost of inaction squarely in workforce and outmigration – the heart of whether Wyoming can build a future worth staying for.

Poll #2 — Removing the Barriers

“What tool does your community need most right now?” (multiple choice | 93 of 146 participated)



WHAT THIS TELLS US

There was no single silver bullet. Responses split almost evenly across all four tools – better alignment (34%), state investment to unlock private capital (32%), capacity-building tools (31%), and removing local barriers (24%). The message: communities need these solutions together, not in isolation – which is exactly why **coordinated state-level action** matters.

THEME 1

Housing Is an Economic Problem, Not Just a Social One

Participants consistently connected housing to workforce, business growth, and the ability to keep and attract people. The framing of housing as infrastructure – on par with water, sewer, and broadband – resonated throughout the conversation.

“Renting and roommates are possibilities for young, single workers, but the ones that Wyoming needs most – young families that want to set down roots – are not able to do that. They need the ability to invest in our state long-term.”

— a participant, on what young families need

“Wyoming wants economic growth without dramatic population growth.”

— a participant, reflecting on a central tension in the conversation

THEME 2

The “Missing Middle” – Housing for Working Families

A recurring concern was the gap between subsidized/attainable housing programs and market-rate high-end construction. Participants described a large group of working Wyomingites who earn too much to qualify for assistance but cannot afford an expensive home, and a market building the wrong product for the people who need it.

“There needs to be funding for the demographic that doesn't qualify for attainable housing because of their AGI, but also can't afford a \$400k house. From my experience, most state and federal funding is not providing funding for the middle class.”

— a participant, on the ‘missing middle’

“Lopsided, with high-end housing being built and attainable housing not getting enough attention.”

— a participant

Several participants from the homebuilding and development sector described actively working to design and price homes around what local working families can realistically afford.

“That information helps us reverse engineer home designs, price points, financing strategies, and community planning decisions so we can provide housing options that are better aligned with what working families in our area can realistically afford.”

— a Sheridan homebuilder

THEME 3

Smaller Starter Homes & Realistic Expectations

Participants discussed both the supply side (the need for smaller, lower-cost homes) and the demand side (helping younger buyers adjust expectations and start building equity).

“I'd personally love to see more homes less than 1,000 sqft that younger workers can get started in. I think if more of these homes came onto the market, younger workers would naturally gravitate there because of the lower cost and equity-building opportunity.”

— a participant, on smaller starter homes

“Educating them on how to start small and let equity work for them could be valuable.”

— a Sheridan homebuilder

THEME 4

Local Barriers Come First

When the conversation turned to solutions, participants emphasized starting with local barriers – zoning, permitting, infrastructure, and community resistance to change – before moving to larger interventions. The role of community resistance (“NIMBYism”) in slowing housing and accelerating demographic decline was raised pointedly.

“First step is local barriers. Once those are minimized, move to next steps.”

— a community developer

“Every community that creates new rules because someone complains about ‘change’ means it becomes harder and harder for new housing and development to happen... Schools, hospitals, businesses can't survive with a social-security-income-only population.”

— a participant, on community resistance

THEME 5

Competition Between Communities & Regional Realities

Participants noted that Wyoming communities are not competing on a level playing field – smaller towns compete directly with larger neighbors for the same workers, often without the wage or housing advantages to win.

“Douglas has to compete directly against Casper. It's not necessarily less expensive to live in Douglas. Their wages may be competitive, but...”

— a participant from Douglas

This reinforces the case that state-level infrastructure investment – rather than leaving communities to compete alone – is essential to balanced statewide growth.

ON THE GROUND

Real Projects, Real Stakes

Participants shared specific, live examples of how the housing shortage is shaping business and community decisions right now:

- A Sheridan homebuilder described surveying major local employers about pay ranges and staffing needs to “reverse engineer” affordable home designs based on what the local workforce can actually afford.
- A community in the Rawlins area was connected during the event to a CDBG funding opportunity to help address local infrastructure and housing needs.
- Participants pointed to Laramie’s housing trust fund and organizing efforts as a replicable model for other communities.
- Developers and sales managers described designing smaller homes and equity-building pathways aimed specifically at younger and first-time buyers.

SHARED BY PARTICIPANTS

Resources & Tools from the Conversation

Throughout the Open Mic, participants generously shared resources, organizations, and funding pathways. They are compiled here for everyone’s benefit.

RESOURCE	WHAT IT OFFERS	LINK
WyoNAHRO	Statewide volunteer group for housing networking, education, and collaboration. Free membership; hosts an annual housing conference.	wyo-nahro.org
Wyoming Neighbors for Housing	Grassroots effort to amplify voices supporting workforce housing. See the “Get Involved” tab.	wyoneighbors.org
WCDA – Affordable Housing	Affordable housing programs; also a pass-through agency for bond issuance for housing developments.	wyomingcda.com/affordable-housing
WBC Housing Toolkit	Resource warehouse for communities navigating housing.	wyomingbusiness.org/communities/community-services/housing-toolkit
Governor's Tax-Exempt Revenue Bonds	~\$1.2B in tax-exempt revenue bond capacity for housing; includes a WCDA set-aside.	rules.wyo.gov (doc 6213)
WBC Opportunity Zones	Information on the next iteration of Opportunity Zones in Wyoming.	wyomingbusiness.org/business/financing/financial-incentives/opportunity-zones

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR WYOMING

Why This Matters Now

THE EXPERIENCE BEHIND THE NEED

*The voices in this summary represent Wyomingites across the state who are living the housing shortage every day – and who see it not as a social program, but as the **infrastructure their businesses and communities need to grow**. As Wyoming’s leaders and communities weigh how to invest in housing infrastructure, this is the experience and urgency behind the need.*

Participants were clear on several points relevant to state-level decision-making:

- The shortage is constraining hiring and business growth across Wyoming communities, both large and small.
- When asked about the greatest cost of inaction, 45% of participants named losing young people, and 26% named businesses unable to hire, meaning more than 7 in 10 identify the cost of housing inaction as a workforce and outmigration concern.
- 32% identified state investment to unlock private capital as their community's most-needed tool, directly the kind of infrastructure investment before the Board.
- The “missing middle” – working families who don't qualify for assistance but can't afford high-end homes – is largely unserved by current funding.
- Smaller communities cannot compete with larger neighbors for workforce without state-level support.
- Significant funding capacity exists (e.g., bond authority, set-asides) but is being underutilized relative to the need.
- Local barriers and community resistance slow progress – but so does the absence of reliable state infrastructure investment.

WHAT'S NEXT

This Is Not the End of the Conversation

This summary is part of a broader listening effort underway across Wyoming throughout 2026. WBC will continue gathering input from communities statewide and folding what it hears into its work. Participants and members of the public are encouraged to stay involved:

Watch the recording

wbc.pub/TOT_Events

Share your input

wbc.pub/wbcmission26

Stay connected

wbc.pub/TOT_Newsletter