



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

2025 Buhler Benchmark Report



Innovation Economy Partners
OUR FOCUS: IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Lauren Meadors | Lauren@HutchCF.org | BuhlerCF.org

Photo Credit: Randy Sawatzky

What Makes Our Community Special?

The Buhler community is very friendly and supportive of everyone.

David

Neighbors and neighborhood retain values of generations past with helping hands and kind hearts.

Jennifer

I love the small town feel!!

Sarah

The people of Buhler are generous, kind, and community focused. In our small town everyone is your neighbor and they show up for each other!

Catherine

My community is amazing, it cares for its members and shows love for everyone.

The people! Everyone takes so much pride in our community and always willing to help out a neighbor.

Elizabeth

Our community is special because it offers small town amenities but has a feeling of big opportunity.

Samantha

Safety, strong sense of community, clean, family friendly activities, nice facilities and parks, strong faith-based community.

Kayla

Everyone knows everyone & if they don't they know someone who does.

Angela

Definitely how involved neighbors are with each other. The whole block cares about each other, even when there are major differences.

Hannah

In June 2024, Hutchinson Community Foundation launched Love Where You Live, a three-year community empowerment initiative that centers resident perceptions, dialogue, and collaborative action. Alongside community partners, our goal is to provide Reno County communities (and the county as a whole) with data and a process that will empower residents to make positive change and boost community pride. Learn more at hutchcf.org.

Leaders That Make Our Community Special

sara howard hannah neufeld liz keith
je keith daniel friesen hanna lehr
bill tracy chuck taylor andrew epp
dal hunt willmar harder wendy neill
tegan meadors samy baldwin
lauren meadors willie adkins
steve becker ashley showalter
patty macke dick mike bryan
david dick candace davidson mike yutzy
jeff comer annette vanbrueggen jose gloria
ryan wray captain anthony baldwin
lynnette kriegler-zook
david zook anthony baldwin
chris bartel cathrine engelken eric bye
ryan brady sarah mckinnon sheri bryan
jake schmidt cindy couchman
nathan spensor sarah orem
monte cross casey howard
dixie wedel david foster
sam neill shelly bartel

Executive Summary:

Buhler enters 2025 with strong emotional ties, modest economic optimism for the future, and a clear community identity centered on pride, safety, and family-oriented living. Economic confidence for the future is slightly steadier than in neighboring areas, bolstered by hope among young families and recent transplants. While challenges persist in income, job access, housing access and infrastructure, residents remain committed to their town. Survey data highlights personal investment, cautious but improving trust in leadership, and desire for clearer vision and planning. Priorities focus on revitalizing the downtown, expanding housing, increasing youth engagement, and improving basic infrastructure. Buhler's future will depend on connecting this deep commitment with inclusive planning and accessible volunteer opportunities.

pg 4, 5

Economic Confidence

Buhler's economy shows slightly cautious optimism, especially among new residents. Confidence in future employment opportunities lead, despite concerns over jobs and income.

pg 6, 7, 8

Community Engagement Confidence

Emotional connection to Buhler remains strong. Residents feel pride, belonging, and growing trust in leadership, especially among parents and mid-tenure residents.

pgs 10-12

Critical Community Priorities

Residents prioritize new businesses, beautification, downtown, and youth. Compared to others, Buhler shows stronger alignment across age groups and a deeper focus on community identity.

pg 13

Survey Respondent Profile

Newer residents show higher investment intent; older residents prioritize removing blight. Comfort with leadership grows with tenure.

The Community Benchmarking report has been commissioned by Hutchinson Community Foundation to help local residents gain a better understanding of the most pressing opportunities Reno County towns face. The annual reports that are generated will help leaders determine the extent to which community efforts are having an impact on local residents. The reports are also a way for towns in the area to pursue grants to help further their local efforts.

**Local leaders can use this framework to help inspire change.
This report provides the clues on what fellow residents are craving.**



Confidence In Our Local Economy

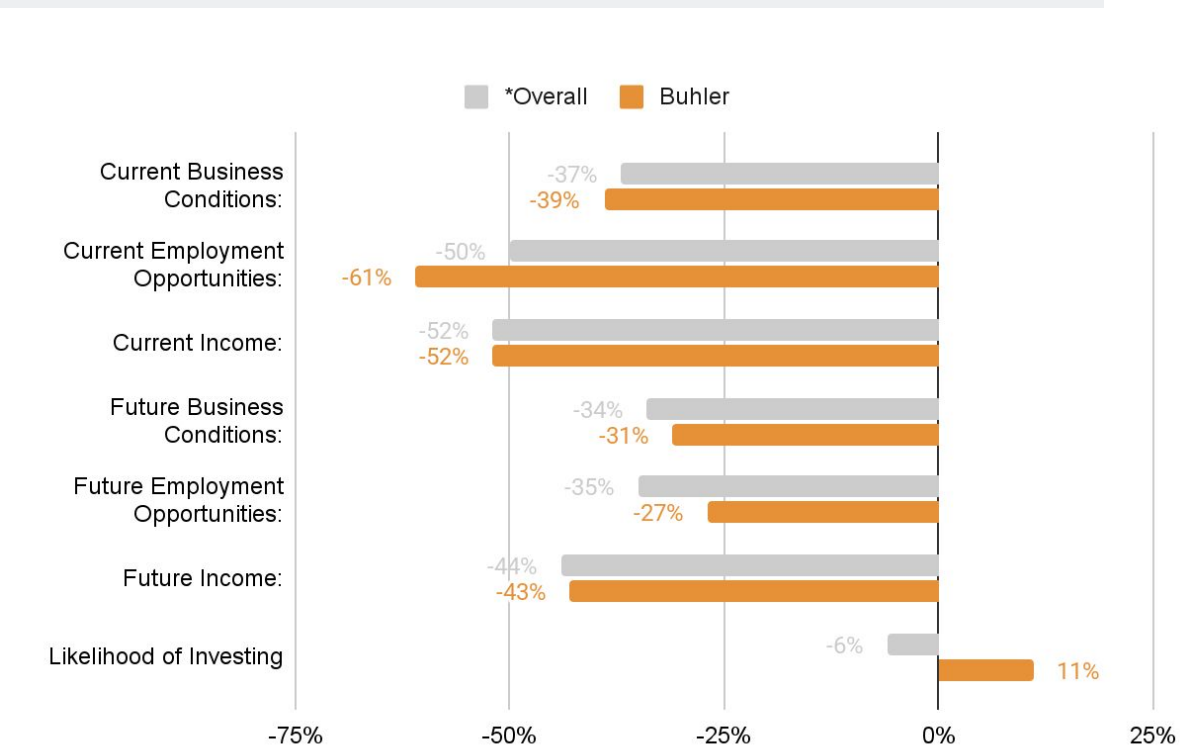
Economic Summary:

In 2025, Buhler's current economic outlook falls either below or right at the community average and slightly more optimistic for future conditions. While current confidence in income and employment remains low, residents show stronger and positive belief in the future and the majority of the residents are still looking to invest in the community. Long-term residents and young families express the highest confidence, particularly in their desire for more family-focused services and recreation. Investment interest is modest overall but higher among newer residents, suggesting future economic momentum hinges on continued community growth and amenity development.

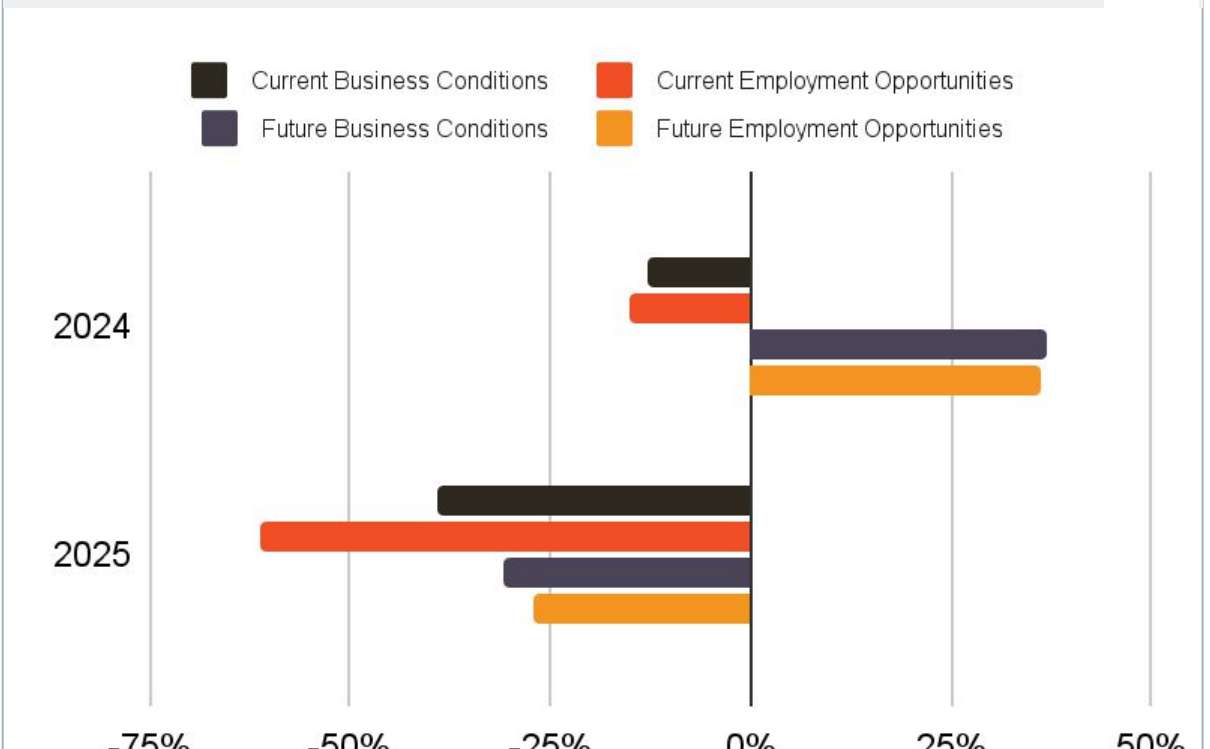
Businesses Needed In Our Town:

- **Restaurants – Residents want consistent evening options that draw visitors**
- **Retail/Unique Shops – Main street needs stores that attract and retain traffic**
- **Medical Clinic/Doctor – A walk-in clinic or regular medical care is highly desired**
- **Youth Programs – Spaces and jobs for teens to grow and contribute**
- **Gas Station – A 24-hour or additional option is frequently requested**
- **Affordable Housing – Housing access is repeatedly called out as a concern**

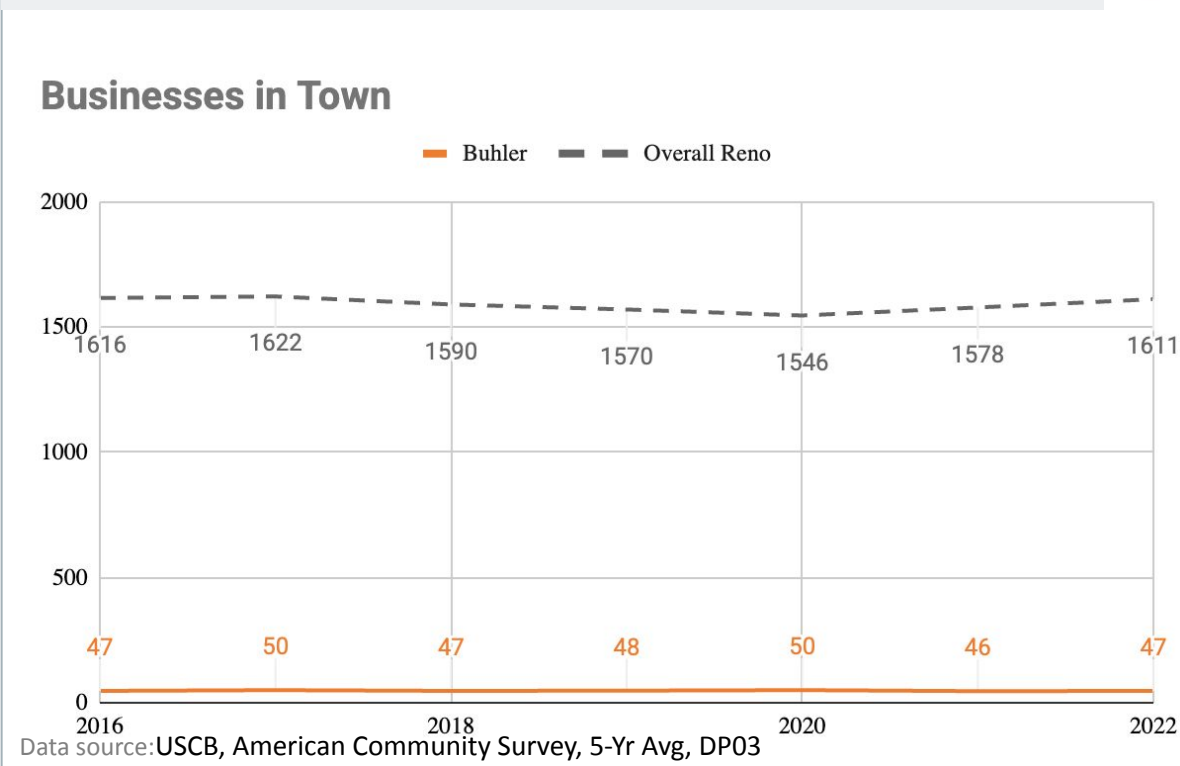
Our Economic Perceptions



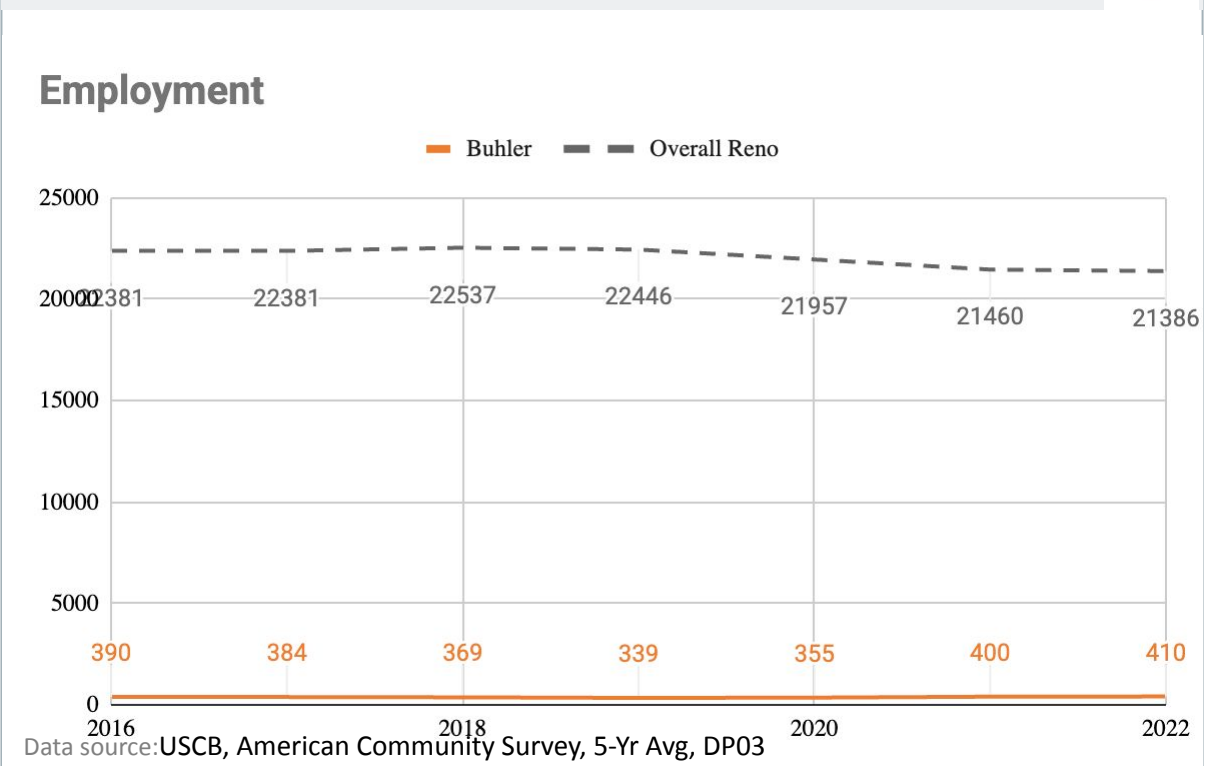
Year Over Year Change (2024 vs 2025)



Businesses in Our Town



10 Year Shift in Local Jobs

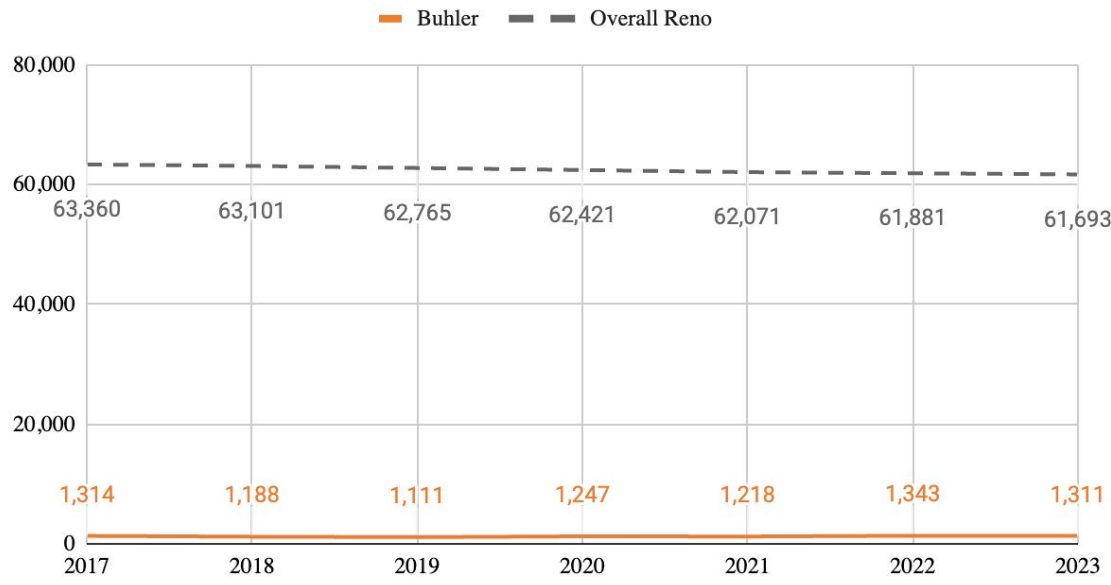


Local Economic Indicators (Cont'd)

Overall Population Trend



Population

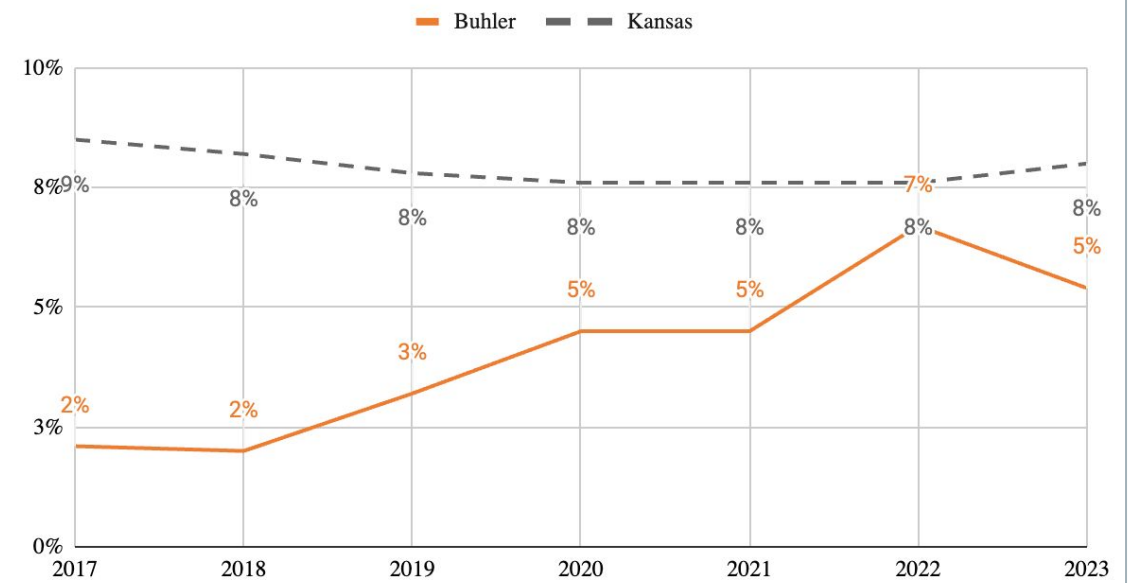


2020 official decennial census data for Buhler, KS: 1,325
Data source:USCB, ACS 5-Yr Avg

Local Poverty Rate



Poverty Rate

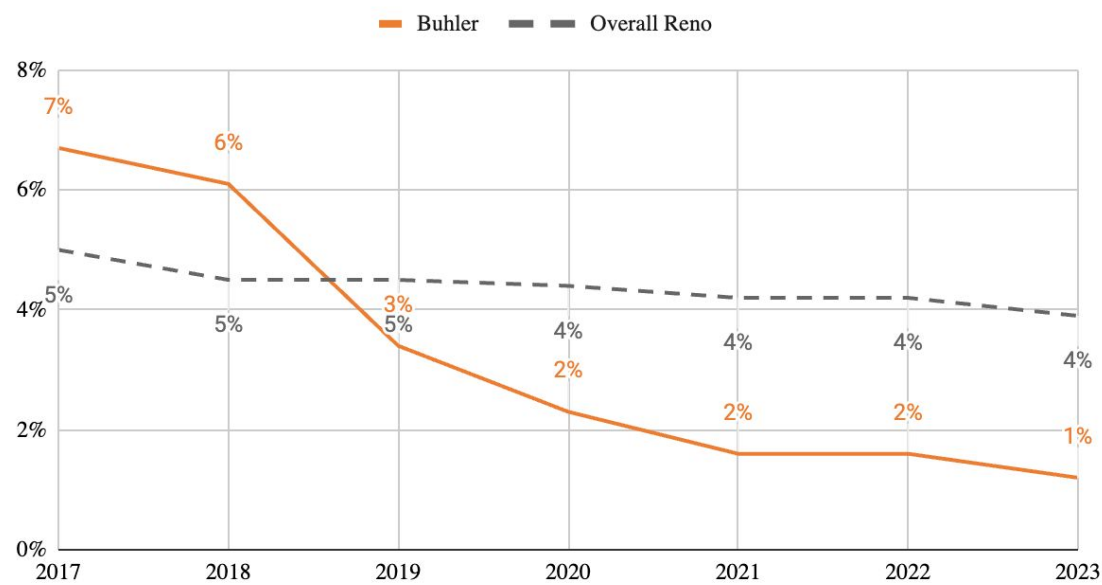


Data source:USCB, American Community Survey, 5-Yr Avg, DP03

Local Unemployment Rate



Unemployment Rate

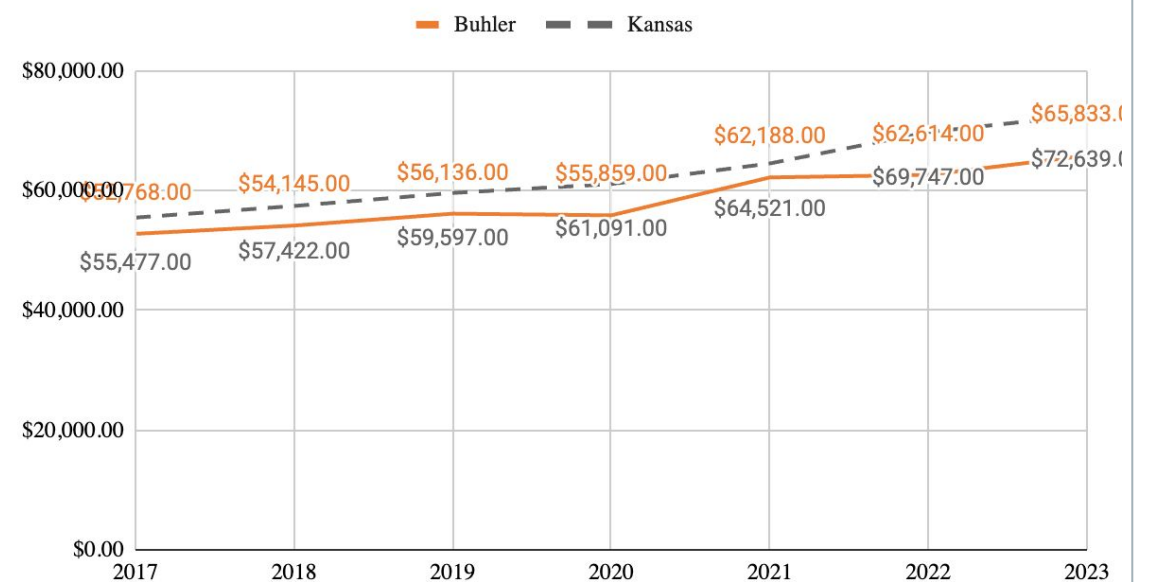


Data source:USCB, American Community Survey, 5-Yr Avg, DP03

Median Household Income



Median Household Income

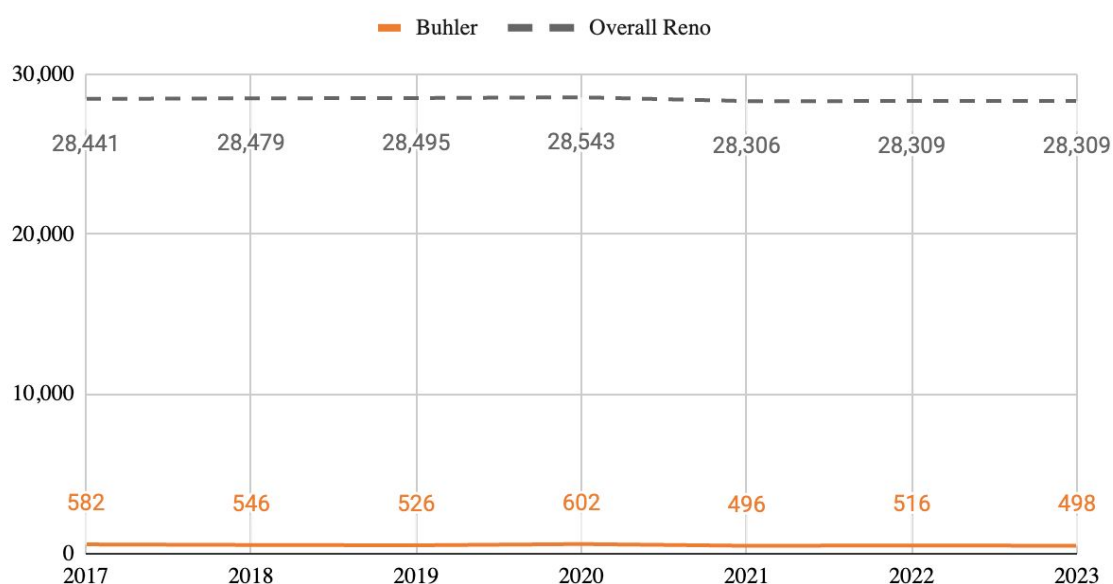


Data source:USCB, American Community Survey, 5-Yr Avg, DP03

Total Housing Units



Housing Units

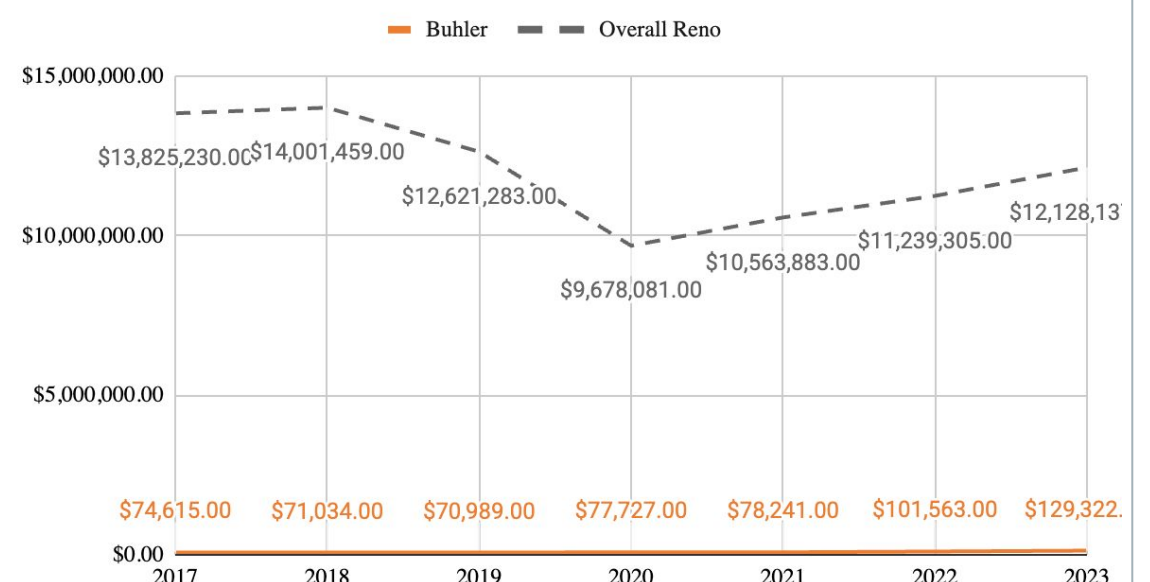


Data source:USCB, ACS 5-Yr Avg

Annual Sales Tax Collection



Annual Sales Tax Collection



Data source:Kansas Dept of Revenue

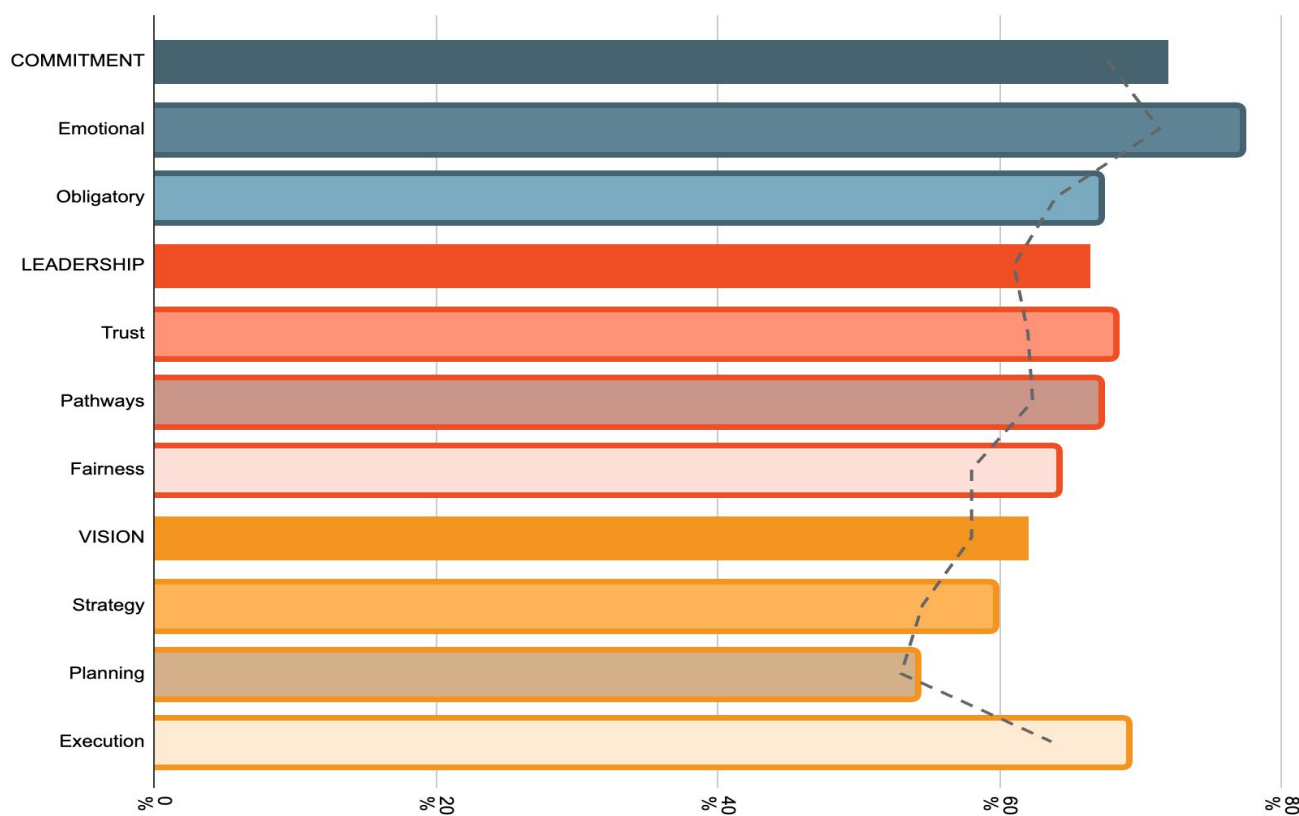
Confidence In Our Local Community

Engagement Summary:

Buhler residents express a deep sense of emotional commitment and belonging to their town. With all of the highest scores in the region for personal meaning, loyalty, and pride, commitment remains a major strength. Confidence in the community's vision is moderate and improving, especially among middle-aged adults who perceive clearer progress and planning. Leadership perceptions showed improvement, with better pathway access than in nearby areas. Overall, the data from the previous year to this year shows increases all around.



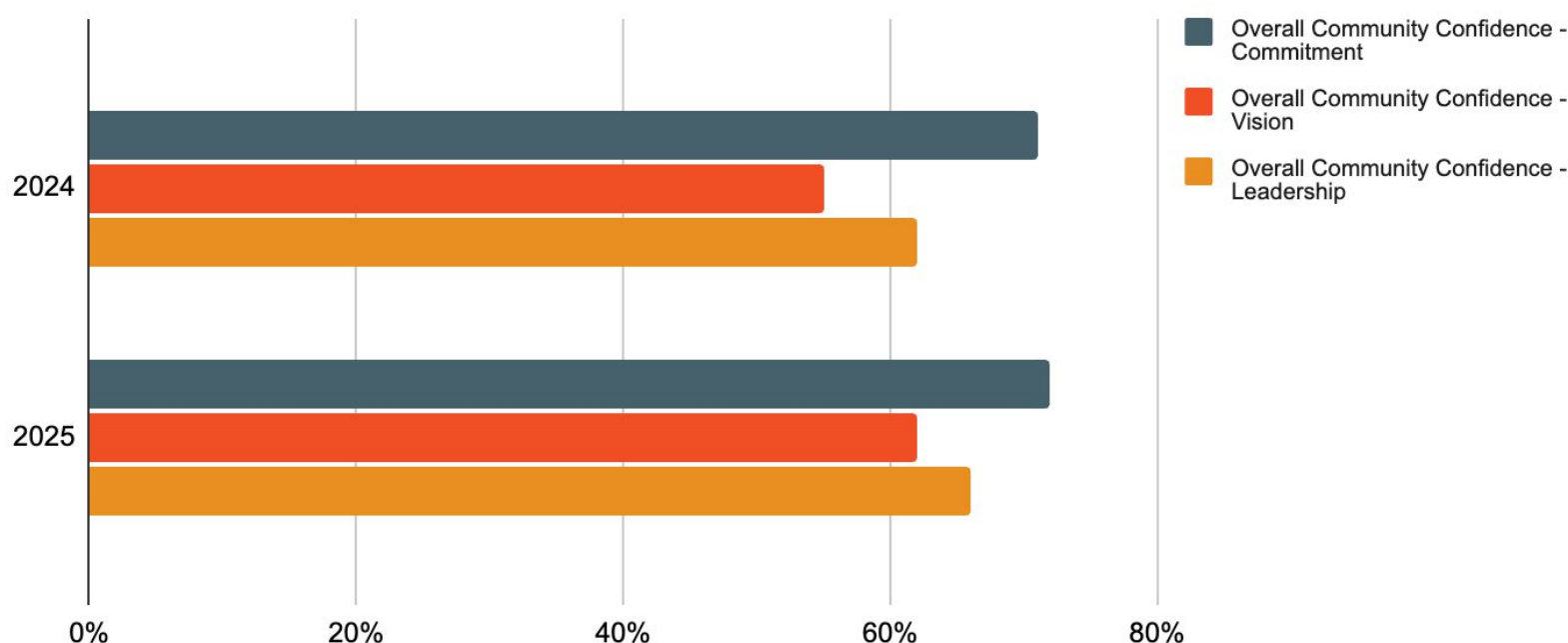
How do our residents view our community?



Questions:

- What drives Buhler's high Emotional Commitment and how can it be maintained?
- How can the community turn strong personal connection into increased civic involvement?
- Why do Planning metrics score lower than Execution despite recent gains?
- What strategies could better document and communicate long-term community plans?
- In what ways can community Vision be clarified to engage long-term residents?
- How can leadership build on growing trust among mid-tenure residents and parents?
- What can be done to turn moderate Vision confidence into a clear, shared strategy?

Year Over Year Change

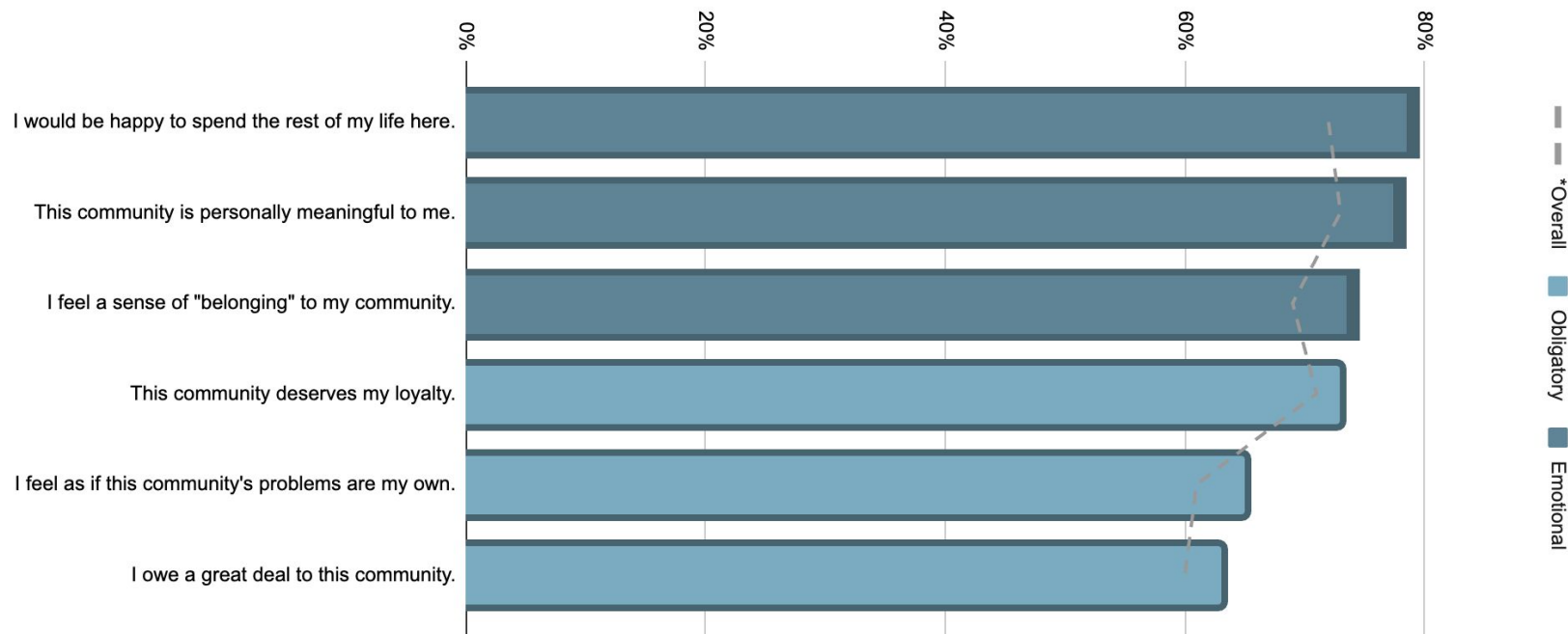


Confidence In Our Local Community

Average Reno County Score

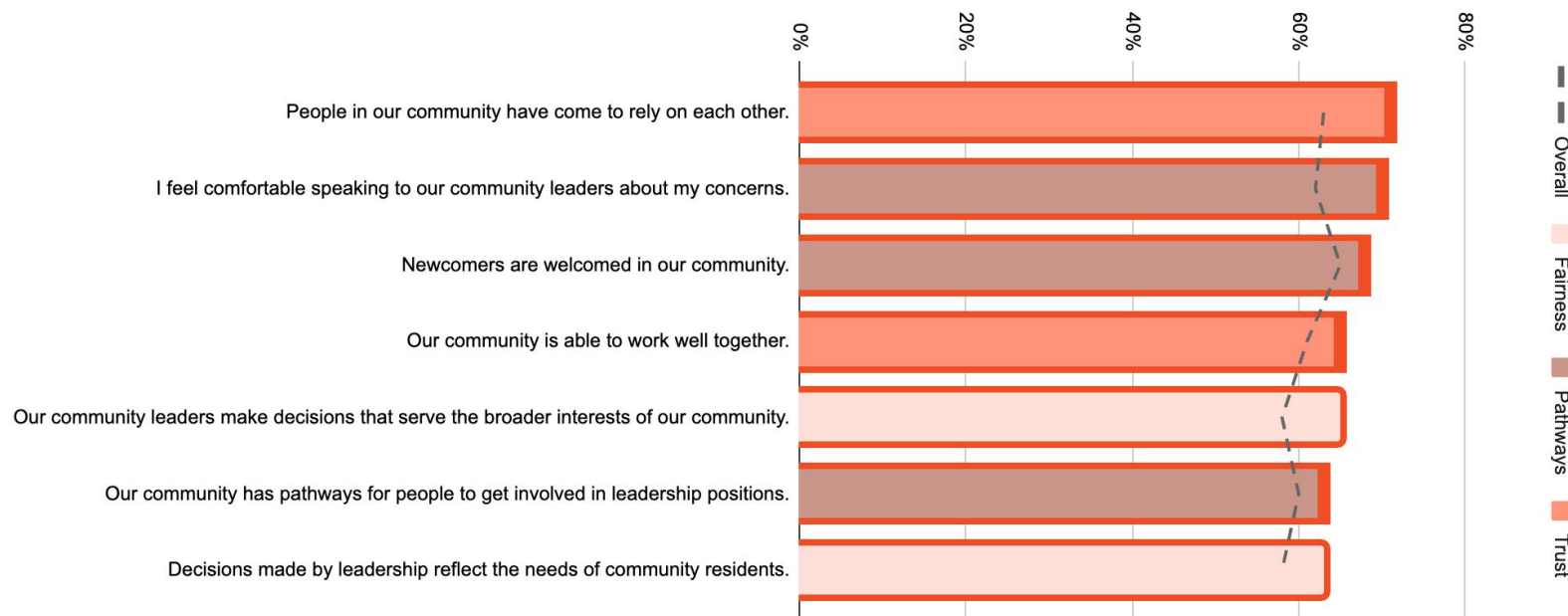
Portion of the community that is highly confident on the listed community dimensions (Rating range: 0-7)

Community Confidence: Personal Commitment



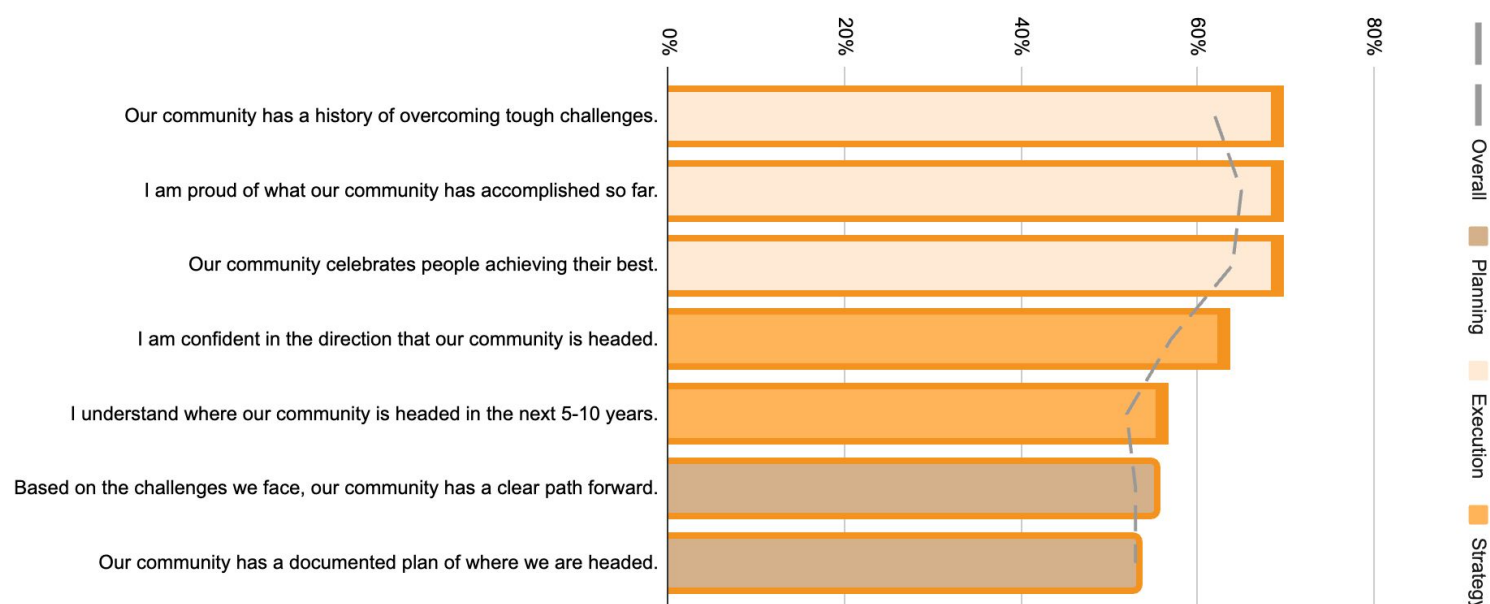
- What makes residents feel such a strong emotional connection to Buhler as opposed to being obligated to the community?
- How can the community ensure high levels of belonging and loyalty continue?
- How can younger residents be encouraged to turn appreciation into action?
- Are high Commitment levels translating into deeper community involvement?

Community Confidence: Local Leadership



- What leadership practices are building trust among parents and mid-tenure residents?
- What does the community value most in leadership fairness?
- How can decision-making be more inclusive and reflective of resident needs?
- What could improve perceptions of decisions being in the best interest for the whole community in local leadership?

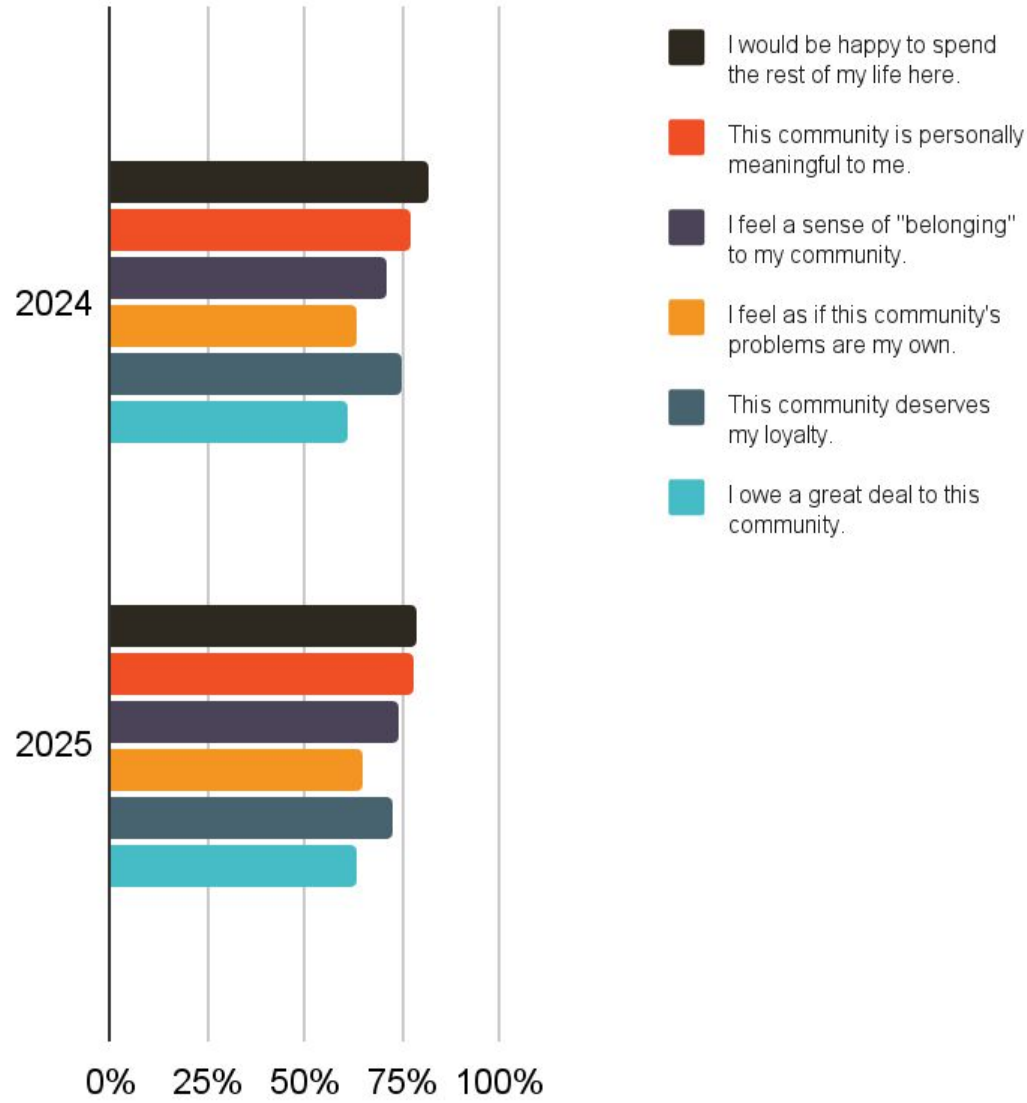
Community Confidence: Vision



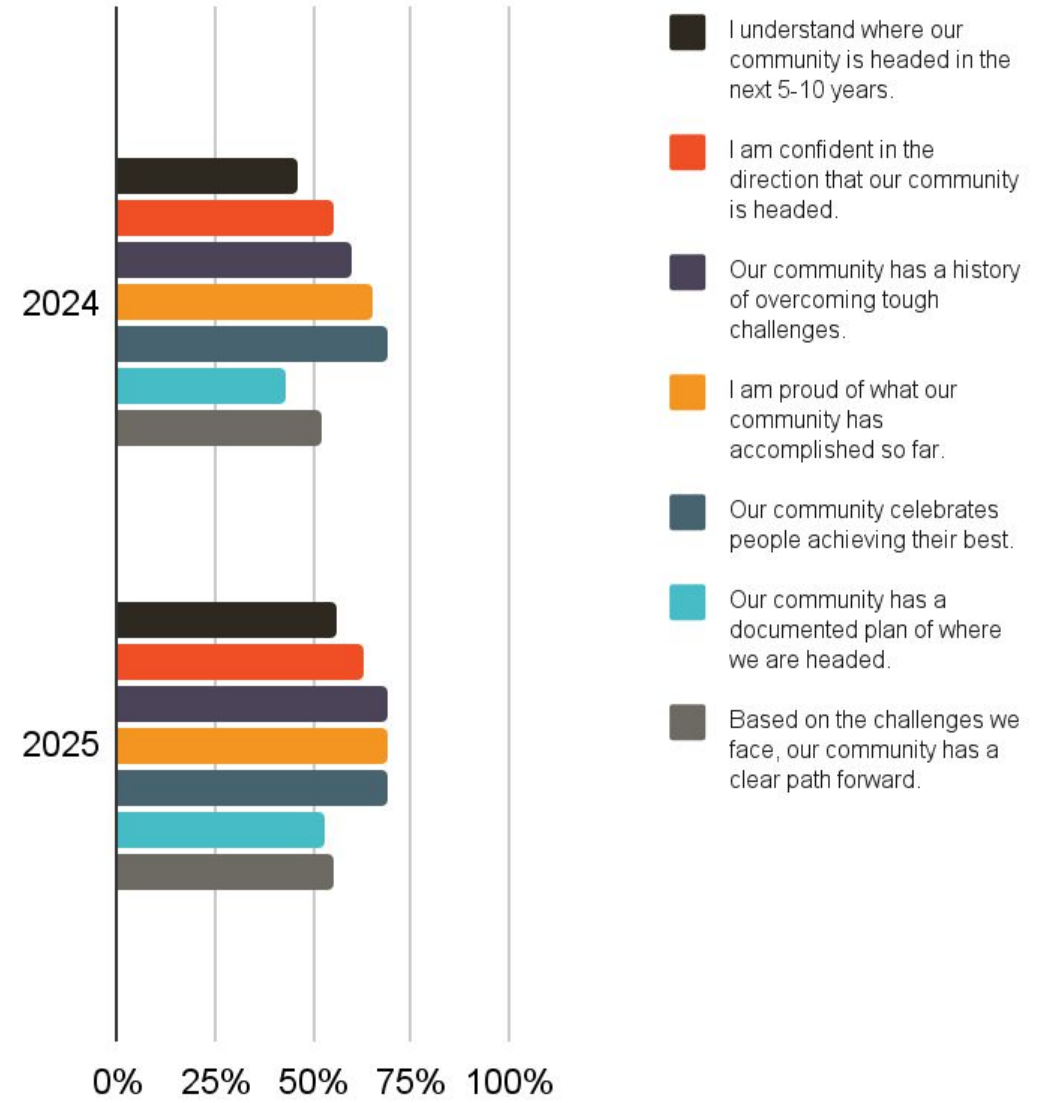
- What progress is driving better scores in Execution over the past year?
- How can the town ensure Planning efforts are more visible and documented?
- What perceptions do younger adults have that make them more optimistic about the future?
- Why do some long-term residents remain cautious about community direction?
- What actions can solidify Vision confidence across all demographics?

Confidence In Our Local Community

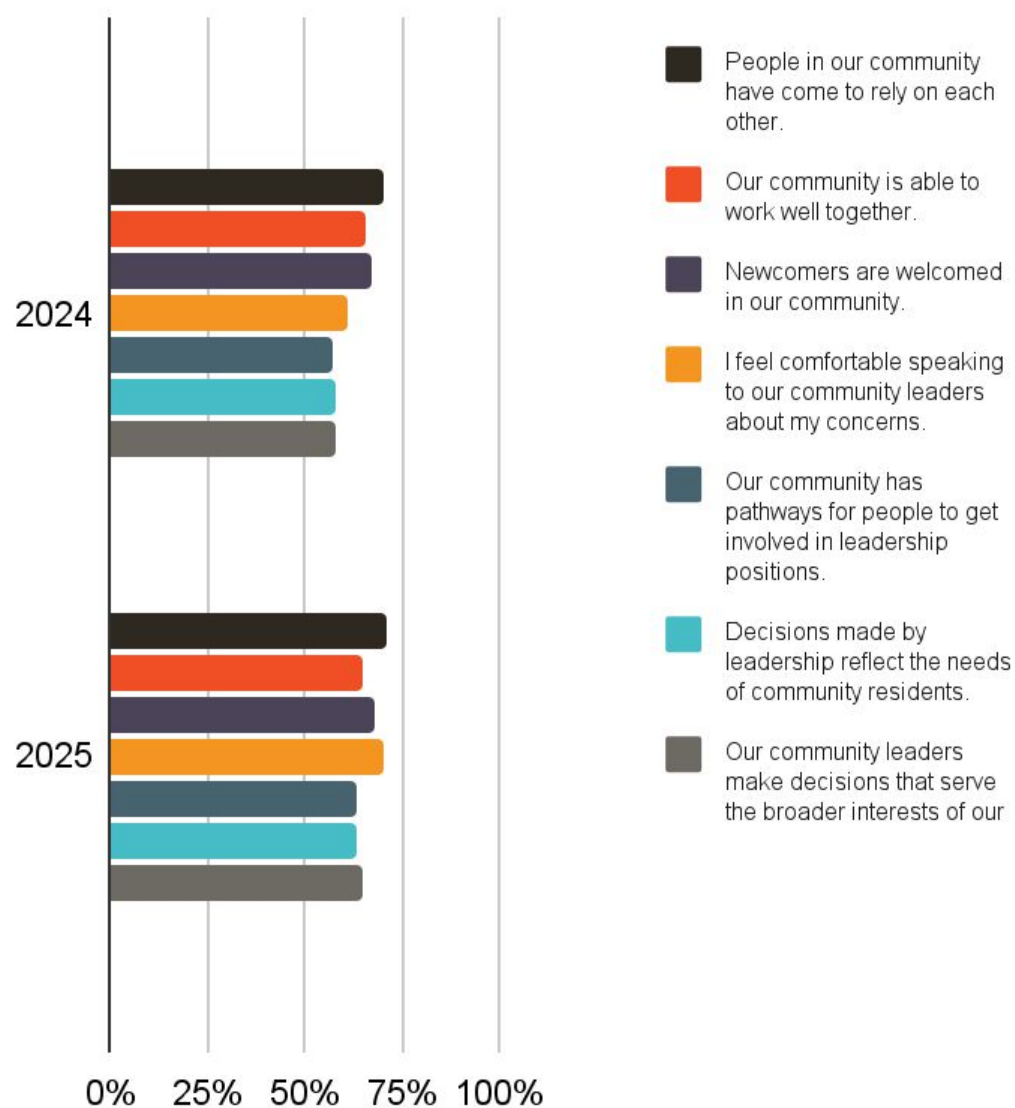
Commitment



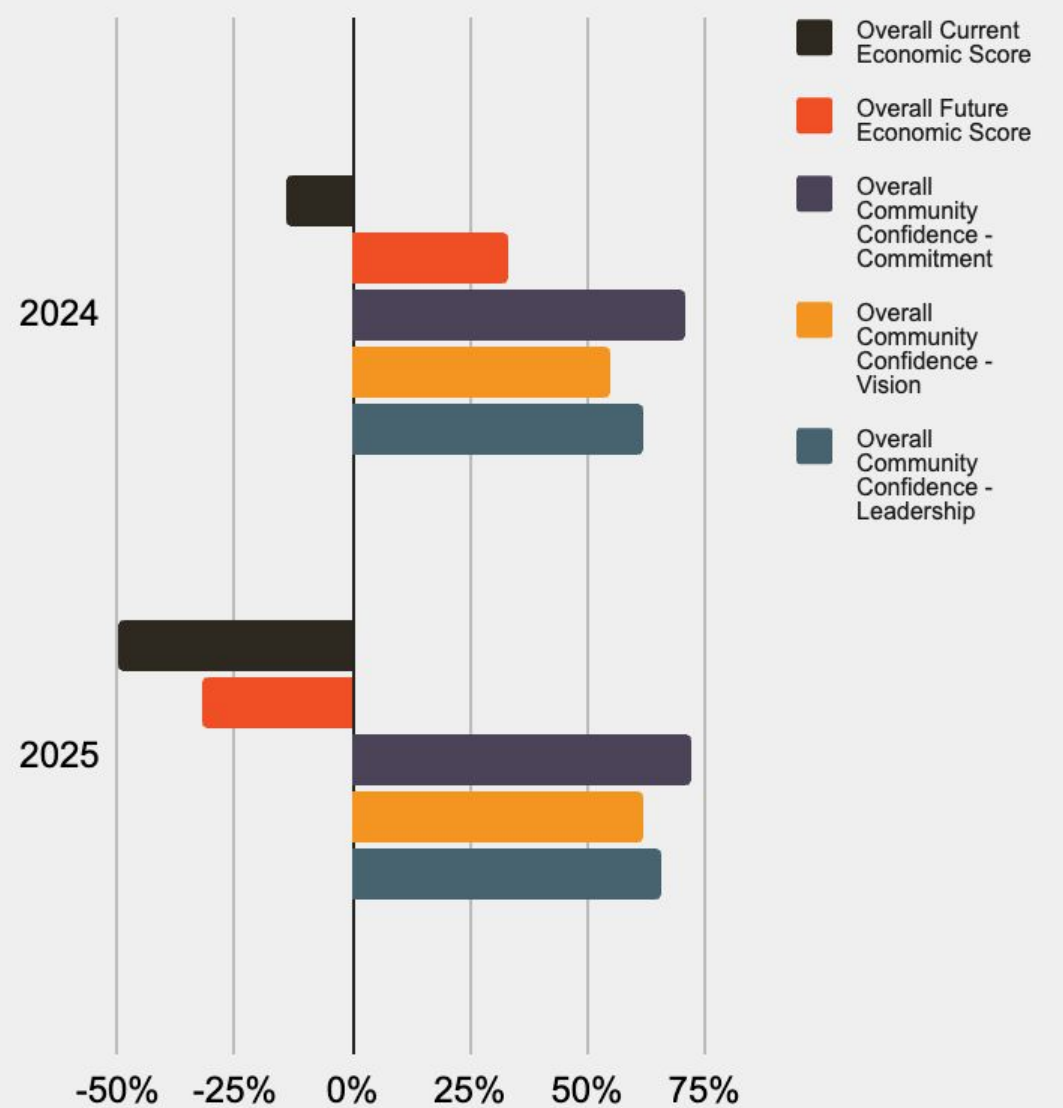
Vision



Leadership



Economic vs. Community Confidence

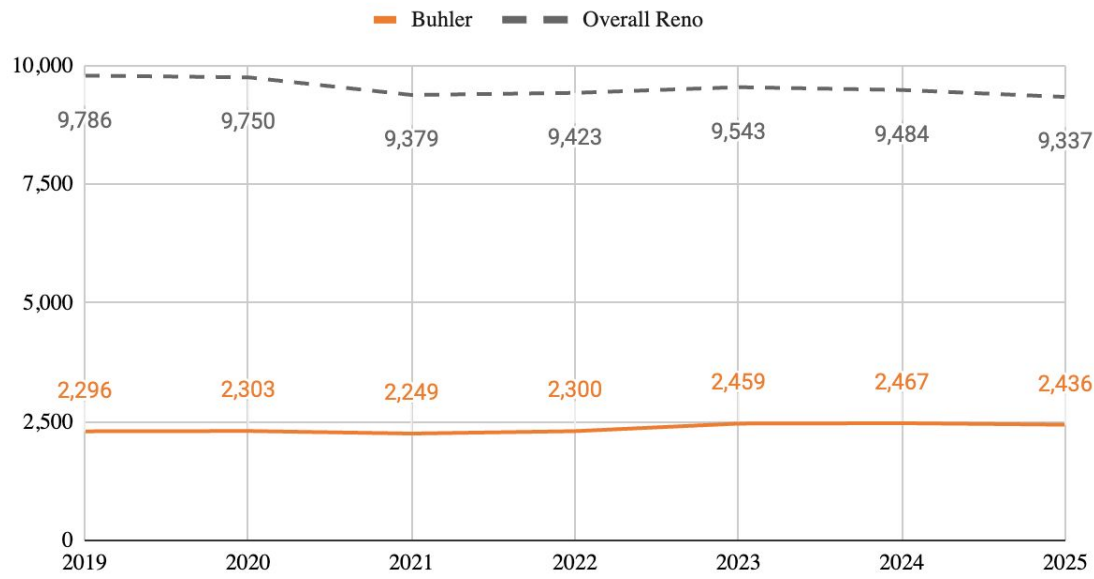


Local Community Indicators

Local School Enrollment



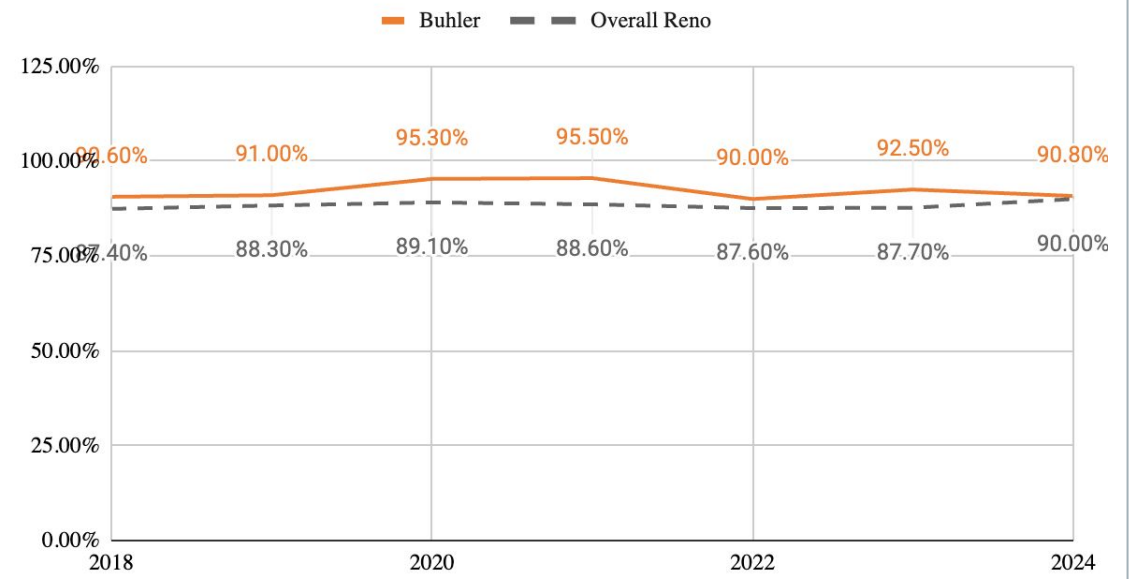
School Enrollment



High School 4 Year Graduation Rate



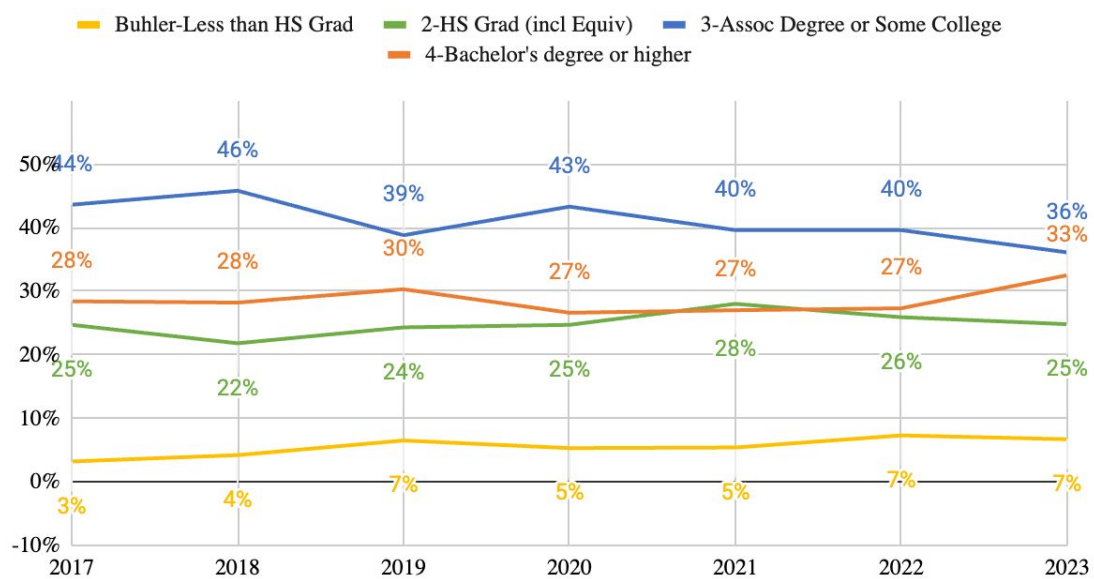
Graduation Rate



Local Educational Level



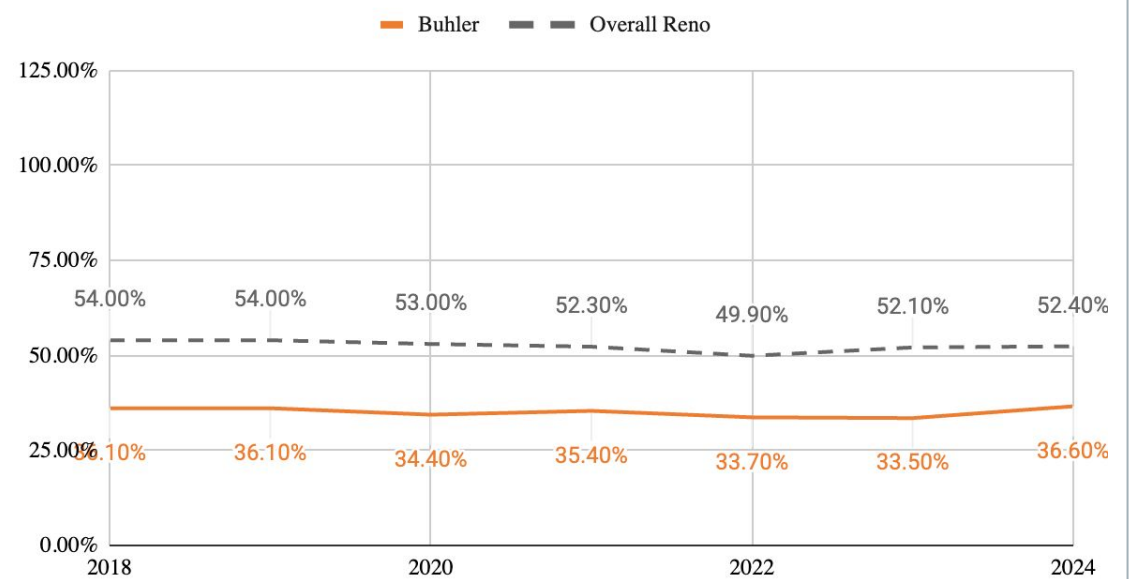
Education Level



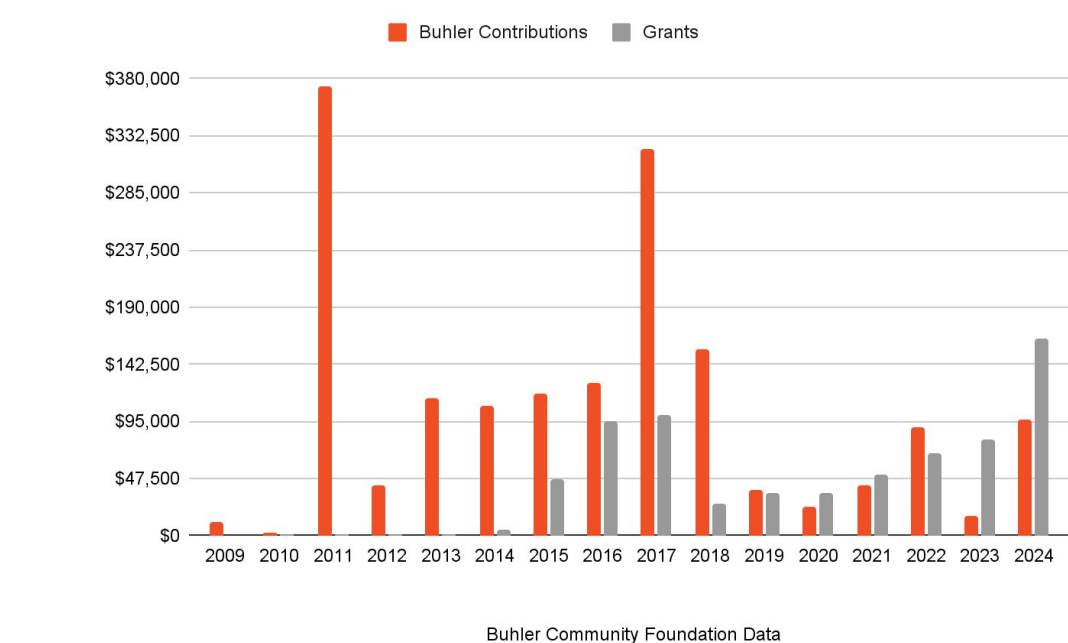
School % Free-Reduced Price Lunch



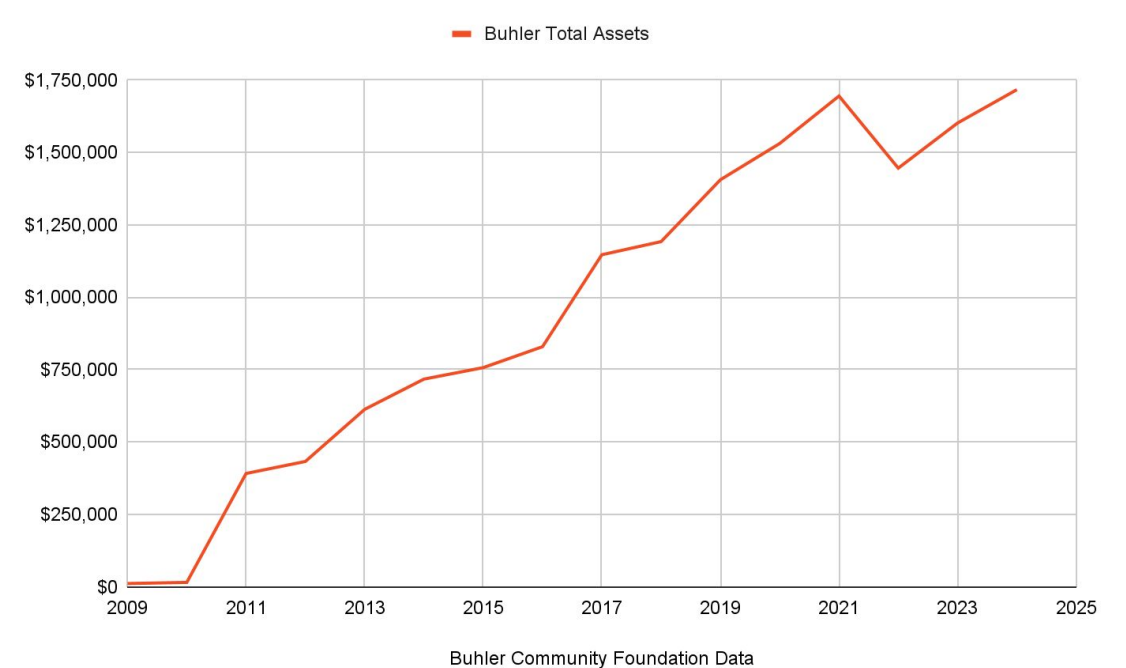
Free/Reduced Lunch



Buhler Community Foundation: Contributions & Grants



Buhler Community Foundation: Total Assets

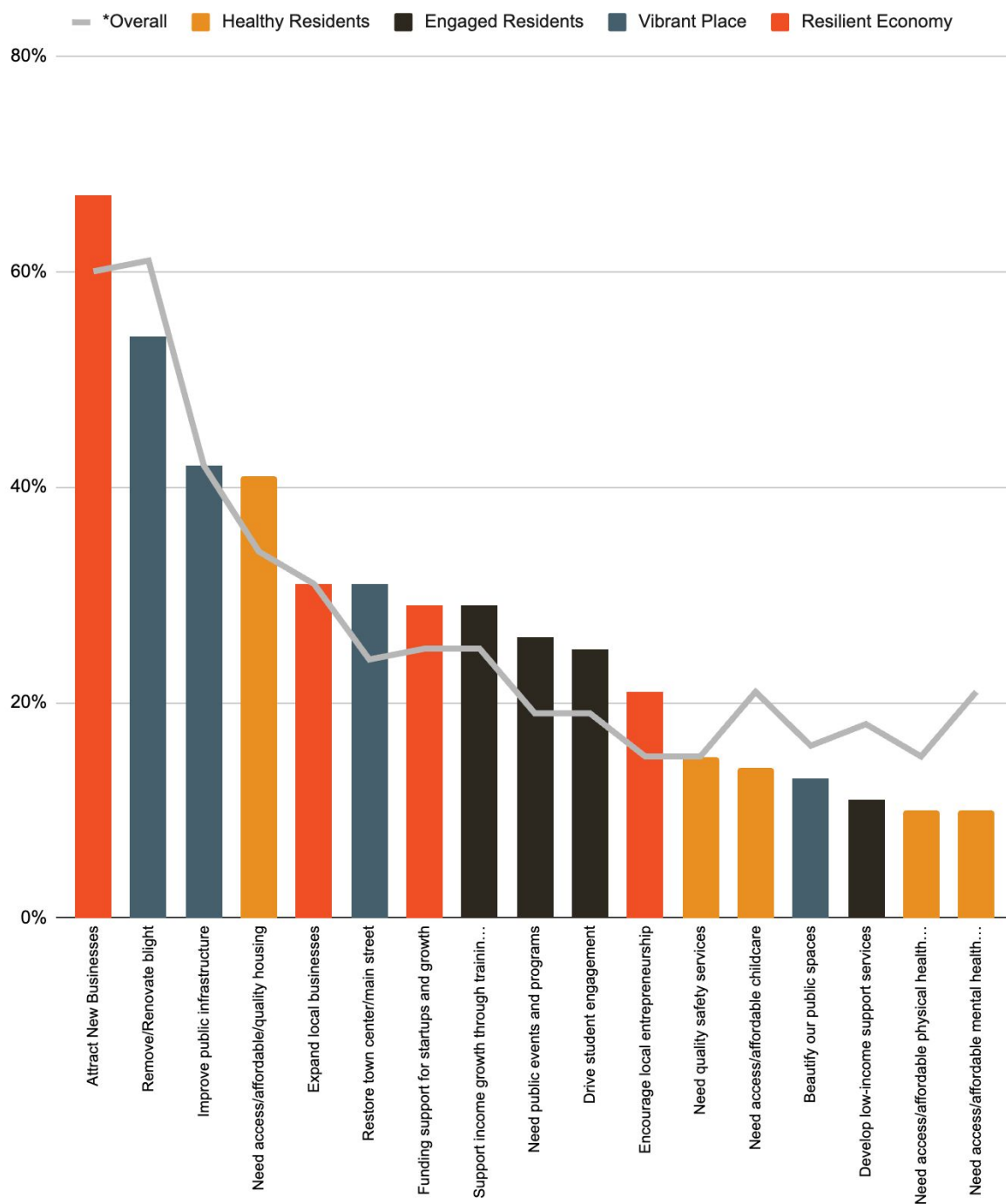


Community Program Priorities

Priorities Summary:

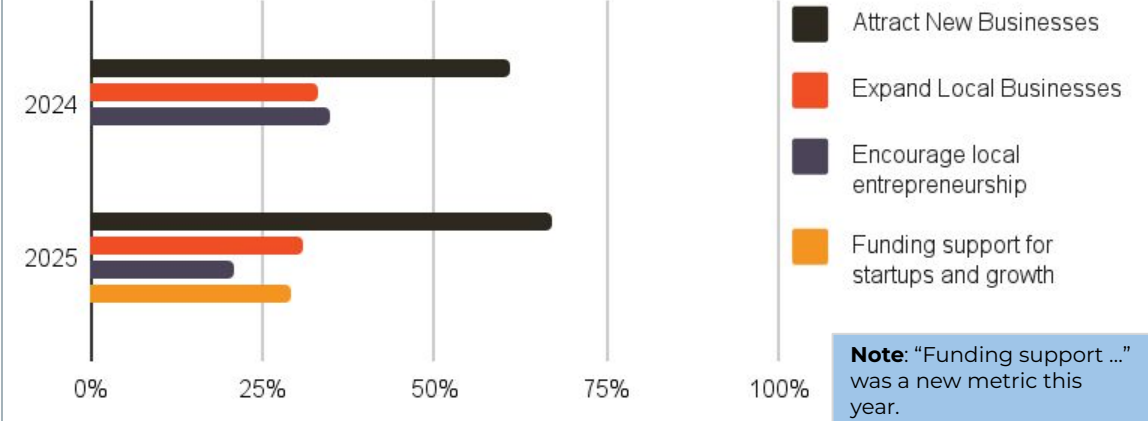
In 2025, Buhler residents continue to prioritize quality-of-life investments. Housing developments and access to a better water infrastructure top the list of ideal projects if resources were unlimited. When constrained to \$15k per year, residents lean into practical ideas like business startups and youth engagement projects. Buhler shows strong alignment across demographics, especially among young adults, who desire recreational infrastructure and more visible improvements. Compared to other areas, Buhler's priorities reflect both pride in appearance and a strong desire to attract both families and businesses.

Program Priorities

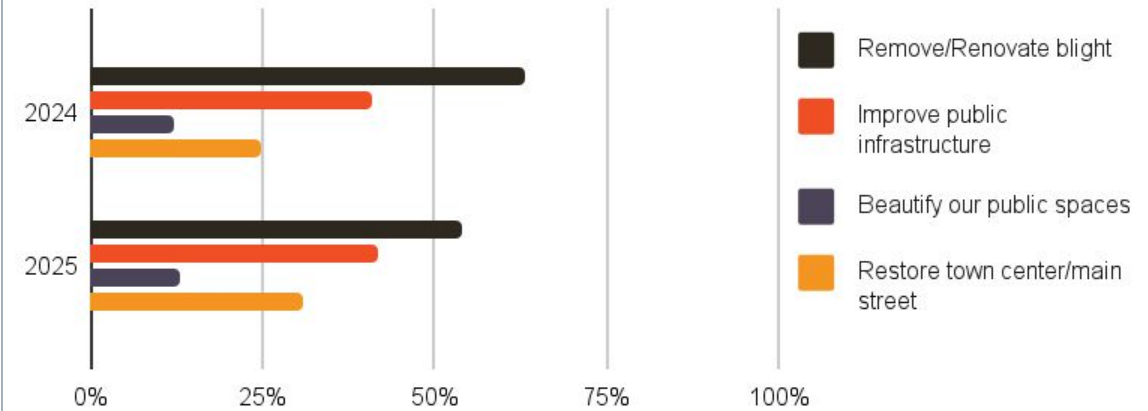


- How can Buhler build on strong support for attracting new businesses and expanding local businesses?
- What steps can be taken to restore Main Street, improve infrastructure and remove blight to enhance the town's image?
- Could there be strategies to support expanding local businesses while increasing access to quality housing?

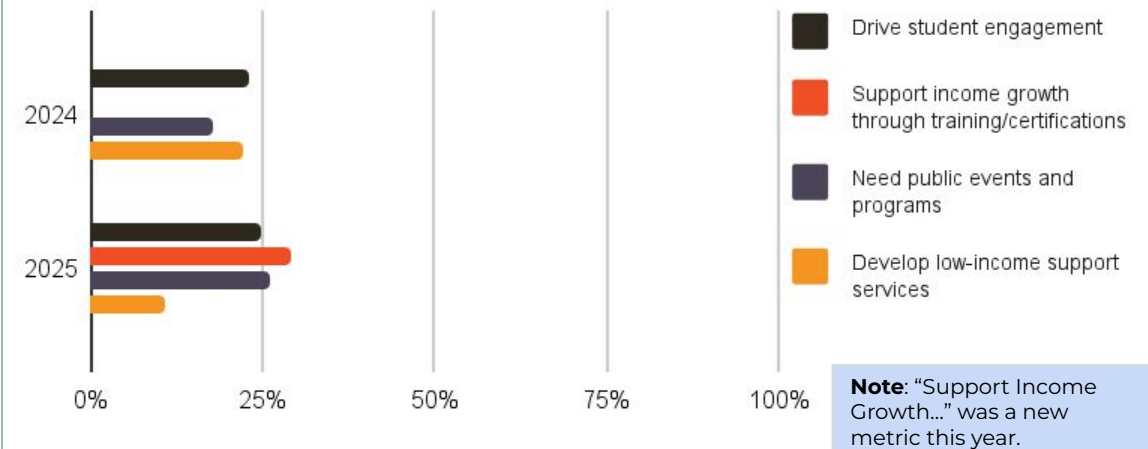
Resilient Economy



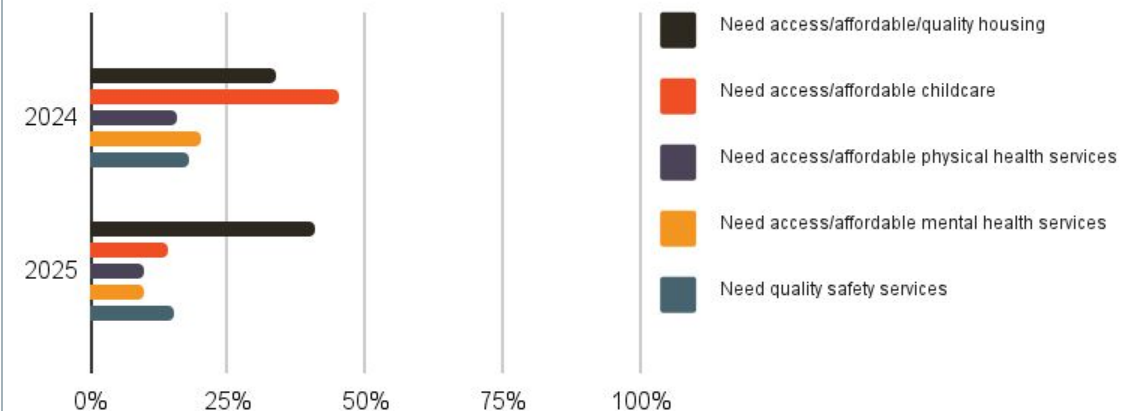
Vibrant Place



Engaged Residents

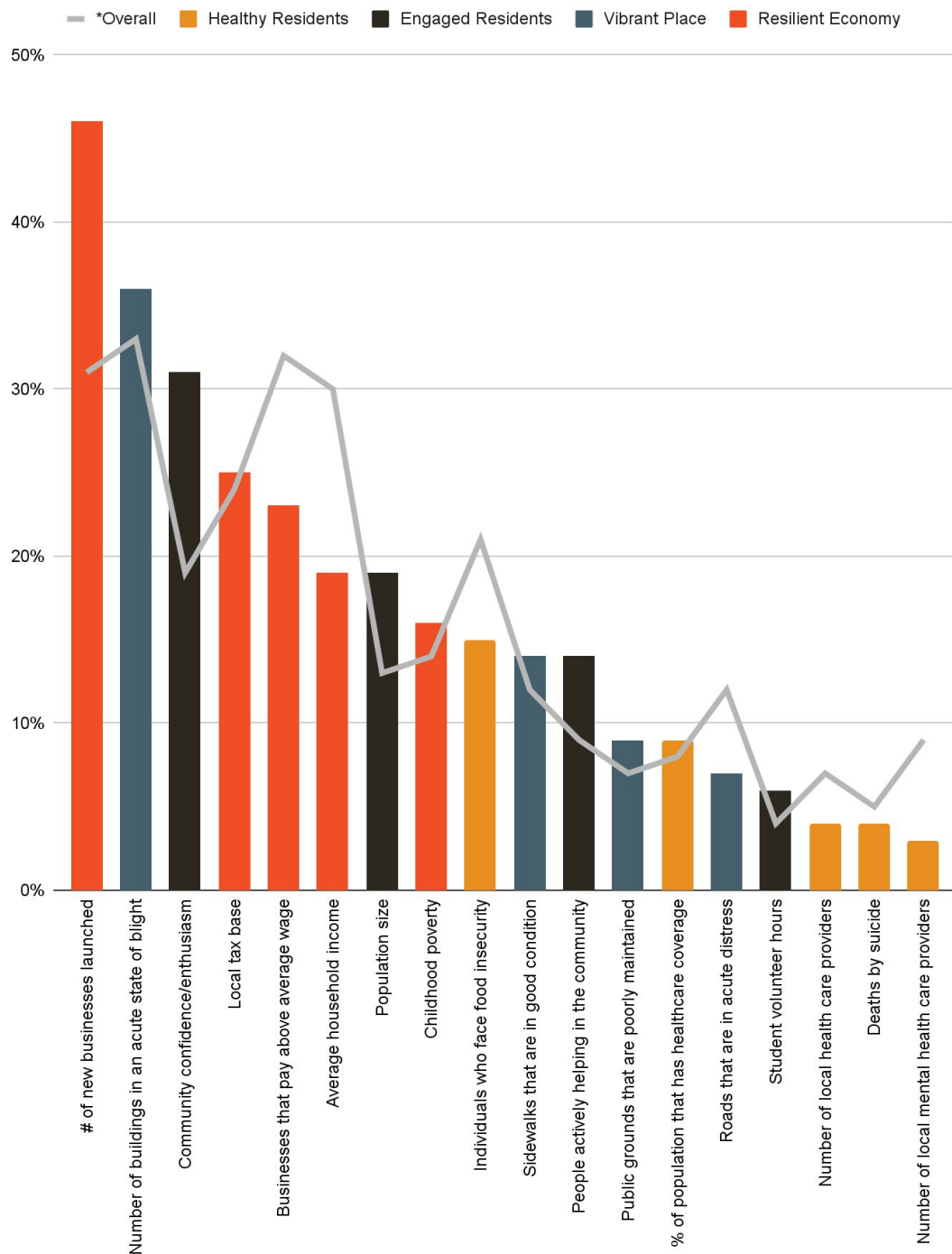


Healthy Residents



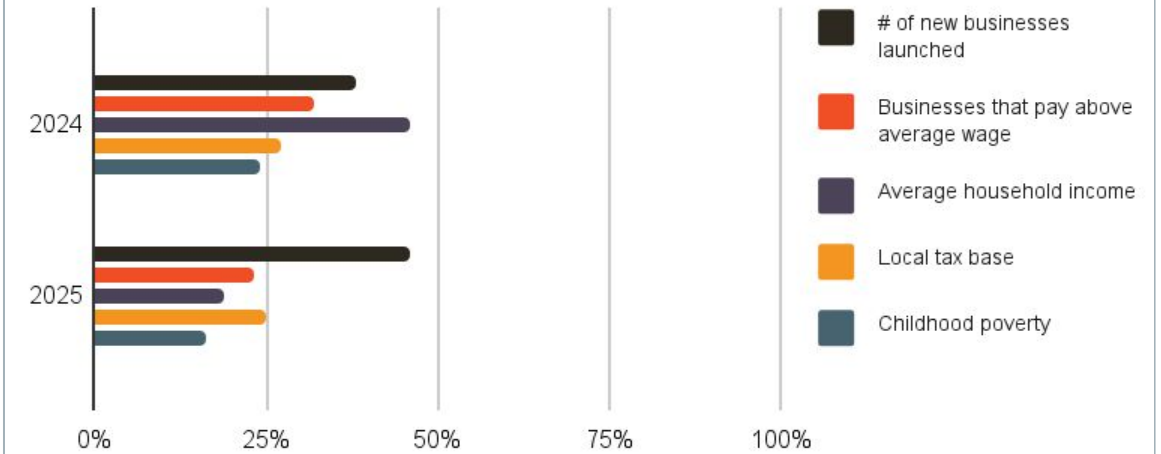
Community Priority Metrics

Priority Metrics

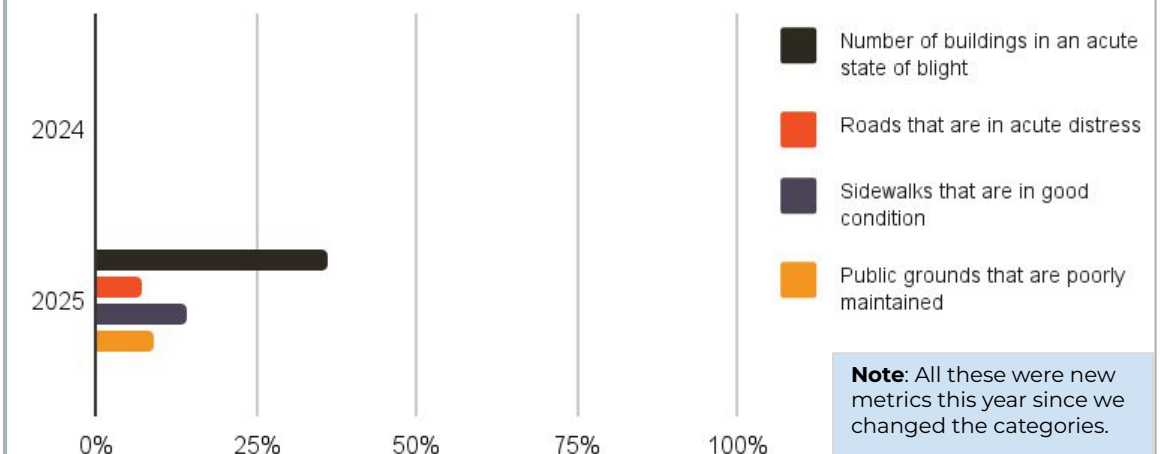


- What local strategies could increase the number of new business launches in Buhler as well as increasing the wages provided?
- How might Buhler address high levels of blight while also improving road and sidewalk conditions?
- What does Buhler's high ranking for community confidence and enthusiasm suggest about resident engagement?

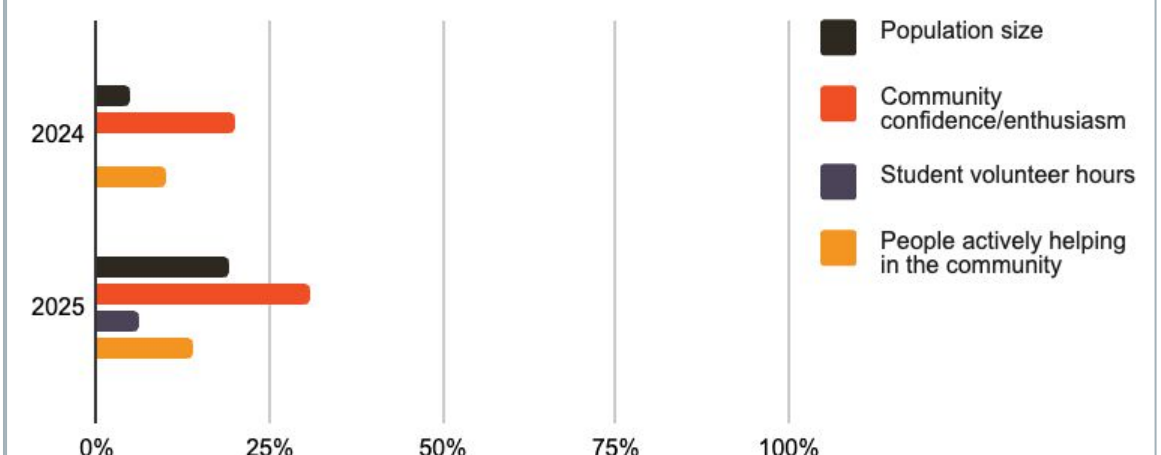
Resilient Economy



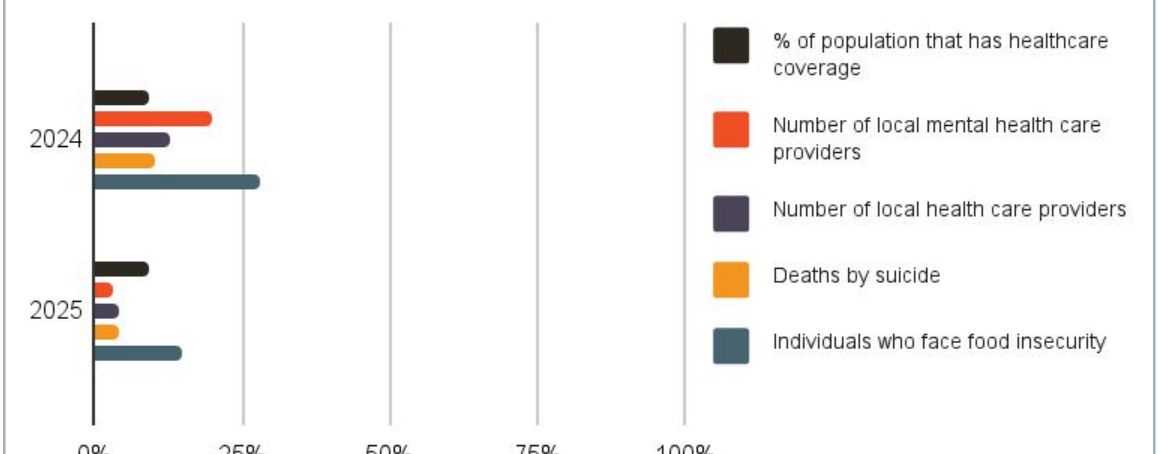
Vibrant Place



Engaged Residents



Healthy Residents



Investing In Local Priorities

What project should be undertaken locally if money, time, or skills were not a constraint? What outcome would this create in the next 2-3 years?

- Affordable Housing Development – More homes for young families and retirees
- Water Infrastructure Upgrade – Clean water and reliable utilities to ensure safety, quality of life, and attract new residents
- Downtown Revitalization – Active main street with retail, restaurants, and gathering spaces to boost pride and economic vitality
- Youth Learning & Activity Center – A space for work, play, and education that supports youth development and community engagement
- Business Recruitment & Support – Bring in new businesses and help startups grow, creating jobs and increasing local revenue

If we could only invest \$15k in a program each year for the next 3 years, what project should we work on? What outcome would this create in the next 2-3 years?

- Business Startup Support – Help entrepreneurs launch and grow businesses, boosting jobs and local revenue
- Youth Development Programs – Offer skill-building, recreation, and support services to prepare and retain young residents
- Sidewalk & Infrastructure Repair – Improve walkability and safety, especially for children, elderly, and people with disabilities
- Affordable Housing Incentives – Encourage new homes or renovate existing ones to support population growth and affordability
- Downtown Revitalization Efforts – Enhance aesthetics, consistency, and utility to attract visitors and foster community pride

Serving your community!

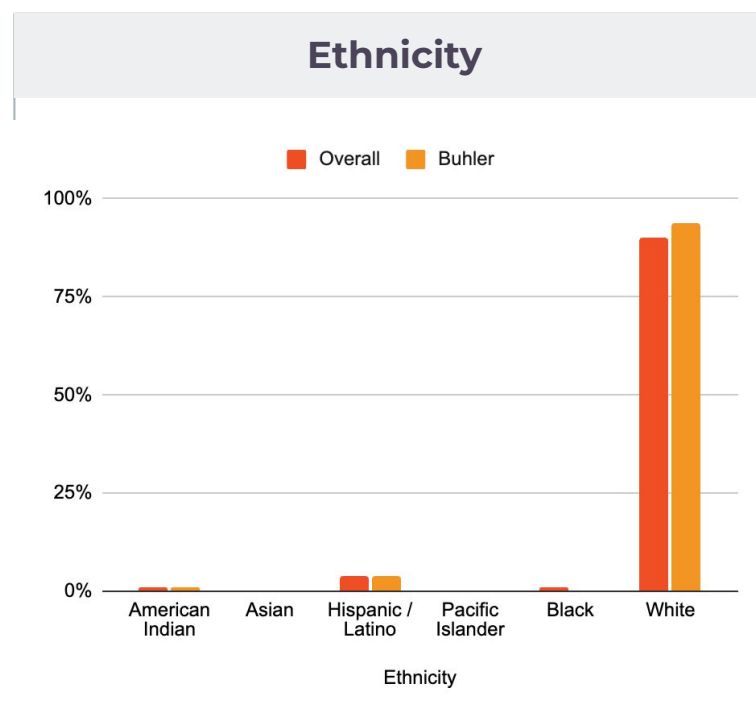
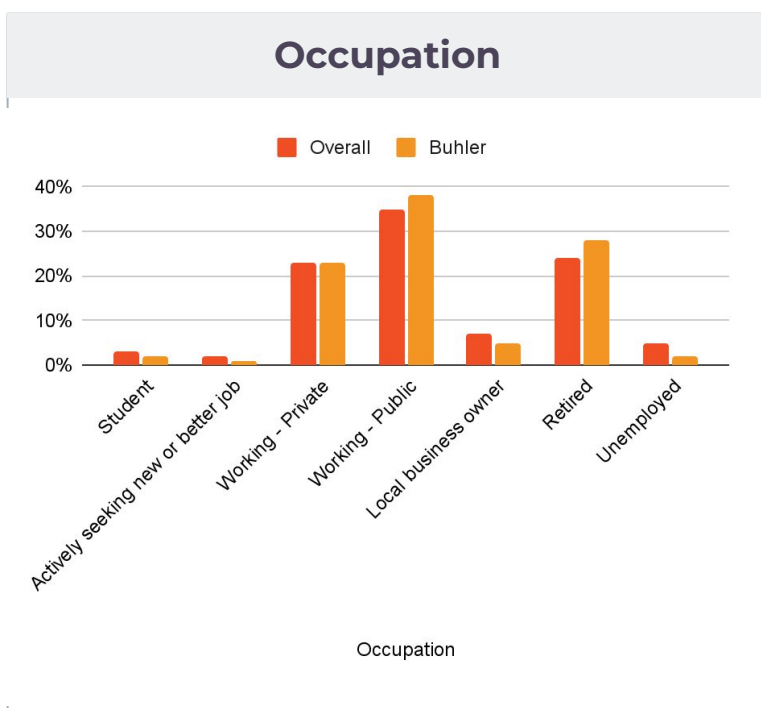
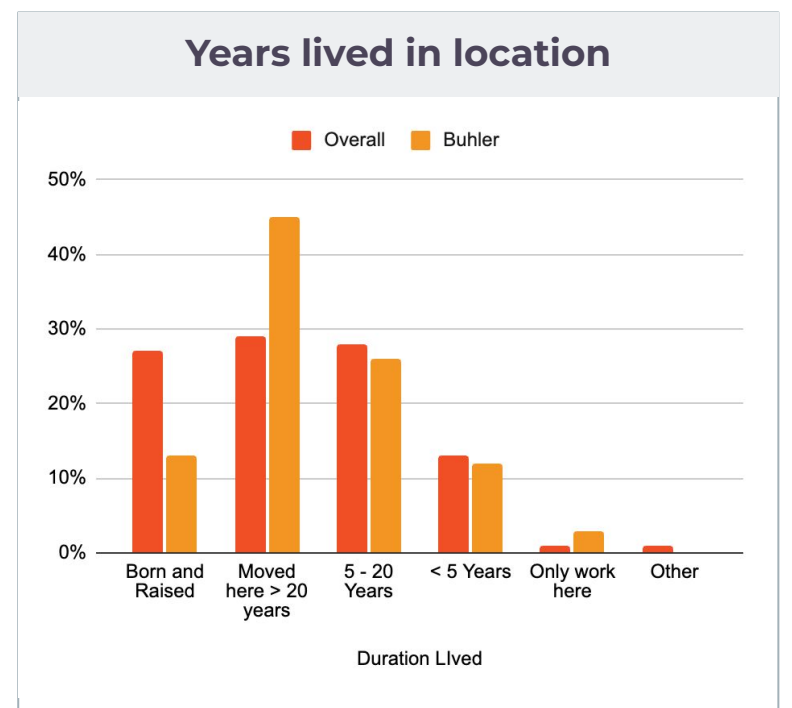
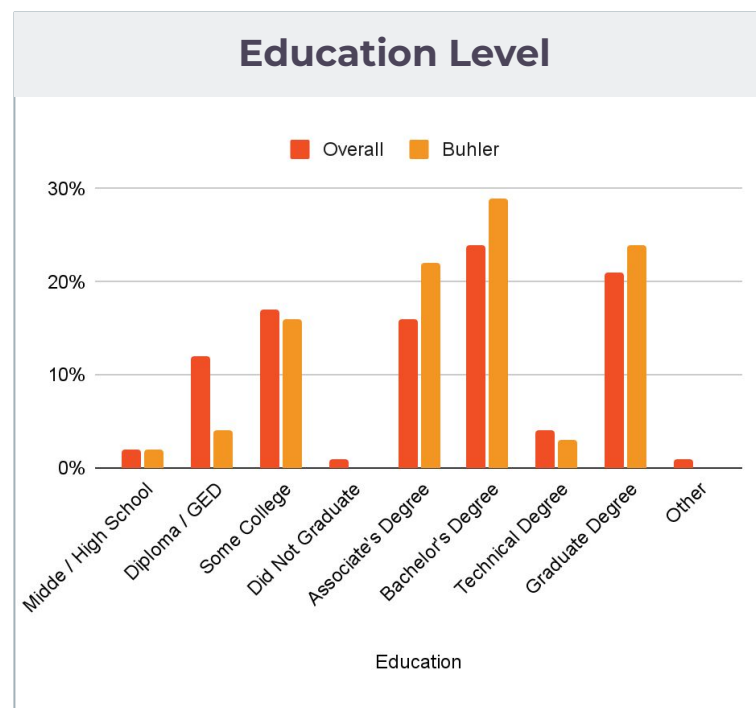
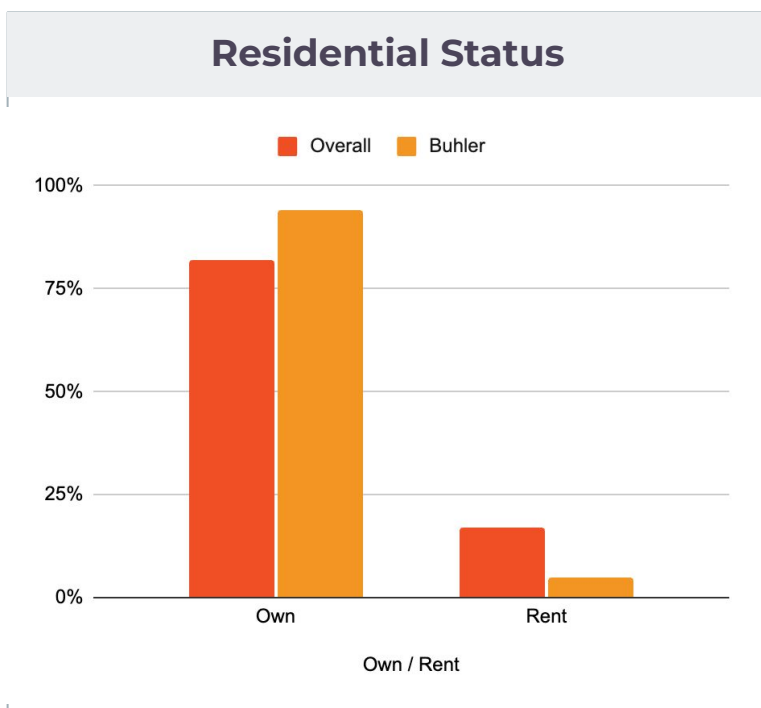
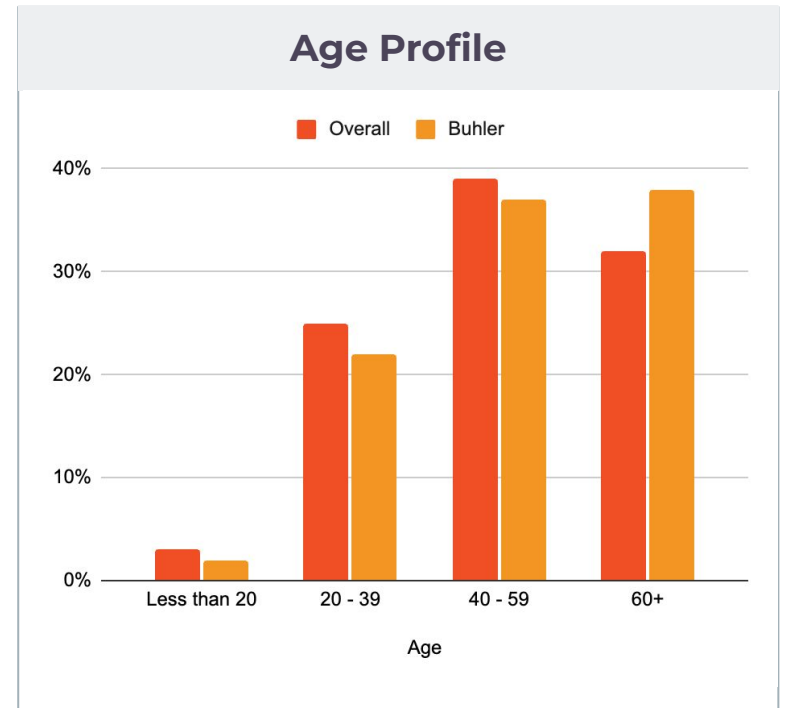
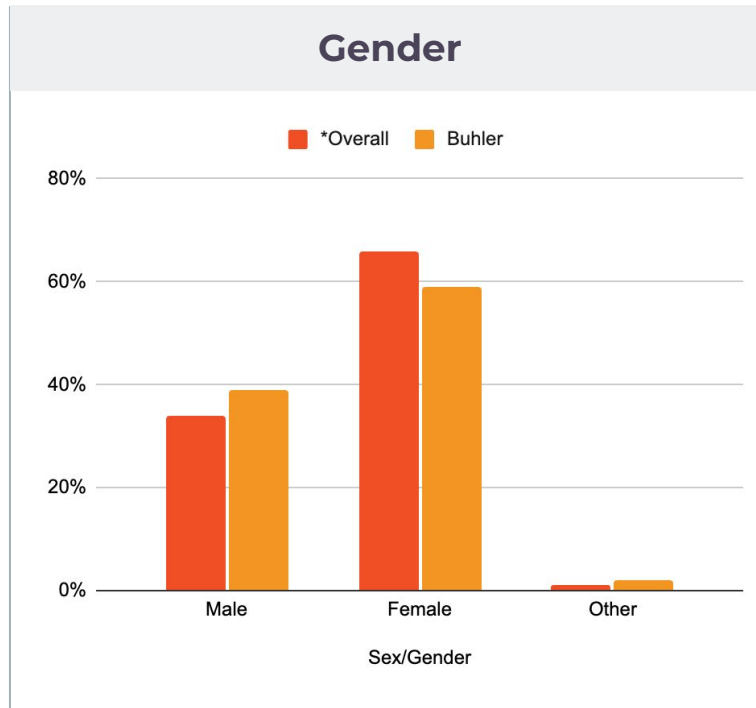
How do you serve your community today?

- Church & Faith-Based Volunteering – Many residents serve through local churches; meals, youth, and outreach
- School & Youth Engagement – Community members support students as teachers, counselors, or classroom and event volunteers
- Boards & Committees – Individuals serve on city council, zoning, library, housing, and planning commissions
- Community Clean-Up & Support – Residents help by picking up trash, maintaining properties, or assisting neighbors in need
- Local Business & Event Support – Citizens contribute by owning businesses, attending events, and volunteering for city functions

How would you like to serve your community in the future?

- Civic Leadership & Committees – Interest in joining city council, boards, or planning groups
- Youth & School Involvement – Residents want to support school events, activities, and student development
- Community Cleanup & Beautification – Volunteers want to engage in cleanup, maintenance, and beautifying spaces
- Wellness & Mental Health Support – People hope to build programs around wellness, prevention, and support services
- Business & Economic Development – Many are eager to support downtown revitalization, economic growth, and placemaking

Survey Respondents



- Residents who have lived in Buhler for less than 5 years are far more likely to invest in the community (42%) compared to those who were born and raised there (~36%).
- Those who've lived in Buhler for over 20 years feel significantly more comfortable speaking to community leaders (5.27) than those who were born and raised there (3.79).
- Older residents (60+) prioritize removing or renovating blight much more (73%) than those aged 40-59 (34%).

 **Average Community Score**
 **Town Score**

39

Number of people who expressed an interest in volunteering to better the community (35%)