



2026 Community Benchmark Report

City of Cimarron, KS

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Innovation Economy Partners
OUR FOCUS: IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

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What Makes Our Community Special?

Cimarron residents most often describe their community as caring, close-knit, safe, and family-oriented. Neighbors help one another, schools anchor community life, and the town's location between Dodge City and Garden City provides both small-town identity and regional access.

"Love the small town feel. We take the 'it takes a village' seriously."

"Our community rallies together to help those in need."

"Our kids in this community are first. We want to welcome them back one day after exploring on their own."

Although Cimarron's close-knit culture is widely valued, some residents feel newcomers and those outside established networks can struggle to feel included. Building connections across generations, languages, incomes, and neighborhoods could strengthen this already caring community.

"There's also a clear opportunity to build stronger connections across our community so more people feel included in where Cimarron is headed."

"Ensure that it [new projects] includes all individuals of Cimarron—no matter income, race, part of town you live in, or last name!!"

"I've never really been a part of the community. It is very closed off to outsiders."

Community Leaders I Most Admire

Gilbert Benton

Tony Coast

Mike Coast

Darrie Stebens

Trenton Fairbank

Mark Pingsterhaus

Gary Schadegg

Jeff Sharp

Mark Busch

Roger Davis

Benton Family • Sommers Family

Respondents recognized elected and appointed officials, law-enforcement and EMS personnel, business and community-development leaders, and two local families.

"We are a close-knit community. Everyone is friendly and willing to support one another."

~Anonymous Cimarron Resident

Executive Summary

The **2026 Community Benchmark Report** reflects feedback from **84 residents** about the community's strengths, challenges, and priorities. Residents continue to describe Cimarron as caring, close-knit, safe, and family-oriented, with strong personal connections and a willingness to support one another.

- ❖ **Economic outlook:** Residents remain concerned about employment and income opportunities, although several economic perceptions improved slightly from 2025. Attracting new businesses remains the leading economic priority.
- ❖ **Community confidence:** Residents continue to feel personally connected and loyal to Cimarron. However, confidence in community leadership, planning, collaboration, and welcoming newcomers remains an area for improvement.
- ❖ **Community priorities:** Business attraction, childcare, support for existing businesses, infrastructure, community pride, and property revitalization have remained consistent priorities across the three-year study.
- ❖ **Measuring progress:** Residents want progress demonstrated through visible outcomes, particularly new businesses, stronger household incomes, a growing tax base, and more employers paying above-average wages.

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Local Economy and Economic Perceptions

Cimarron residents view current and future economic conditions as somewhat negative but trending more positively, with employment opportunities remaining the greatest concern.

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Community Confidence

Residents' personal commitment remains Cimarron's strongest community asset. Overall confidence is relatively stable, but working together and welcoming newcomers remain areas for attention.

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Critical Community Priorities | Measurement

Cimarron's core priorities remained generally consistent from 2024–2026. Attracting new businesses was a leading priority each year, while childcare, business expansion, infrastructure, community pride, and property revitalization continued to receive substantial support.

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Survey Respondent Profile

The 2026 survey reflects responses from 84 Cimarron residents, with women, homeowners, White non-Hispanic residents, college-educated adults, and public-sector employees overrepresented in the sample.

The Community Benchmark report has been commissioned by Western Kansas Community Foundation to help local residents gain a better understanding of the most pressing opportunities that the local towns face. The annual reports that are generated will help leaders determine the extent to which the efforts are having an impact on the local residents. The reports are also a way for the the various towns in the Western County 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 the fellow residents are craving.



Confidence In Our Local Economy

Economic Summary:

Cimarron residents view current and future economic conditions **somewhat negatively**, although several measures improved modestly from 2025. **Employment remains the greatest concern.** Residents prioritize attracting new businesses, supporting existing businesses and entrepreneurs, and expanding childcare—**pointing to opportunities for focused business and workforce development.**

What Businesses Does Cimarron Need?

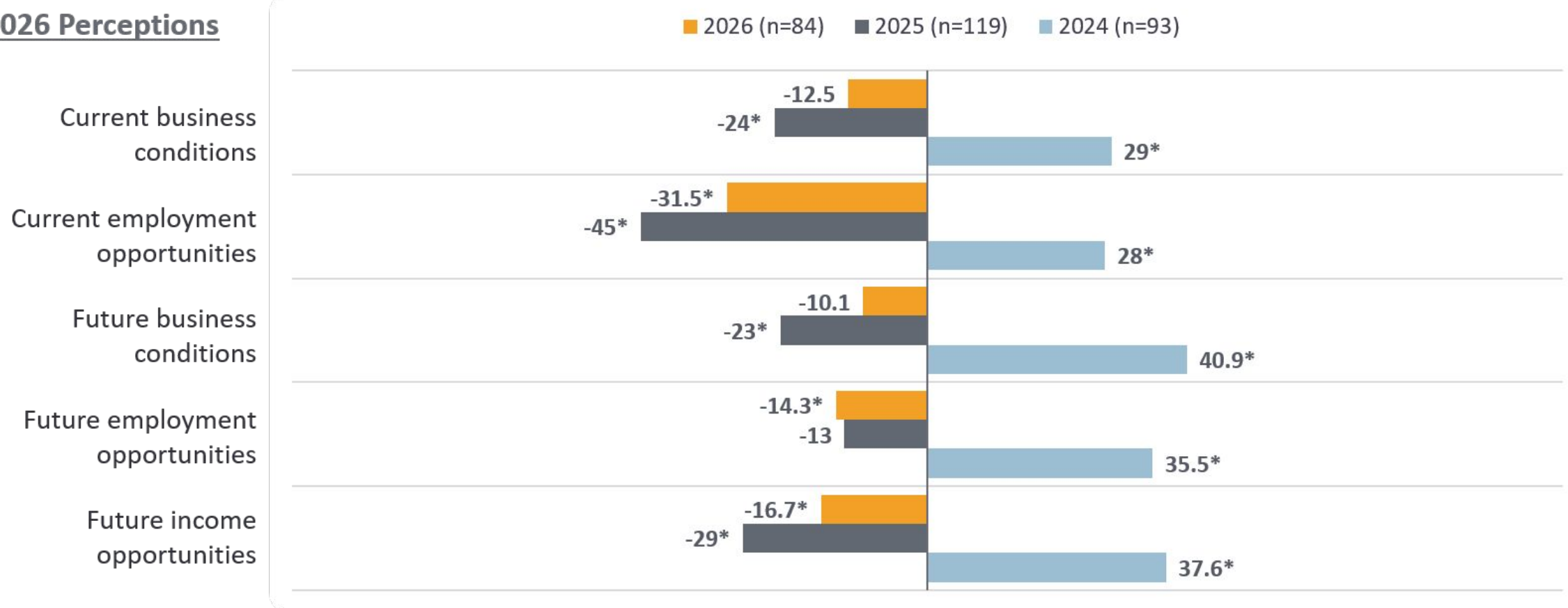
Number of times stated

Restaurants and family dining	28
Family and youth entertainment	15
Healthcare, dental, and specialty services	12
Childcare and daycare	9
Fitness and recreation facilities	8
Skilled trades and home-repair services	3
Housing, higher wage jobs, and veterinary services	2

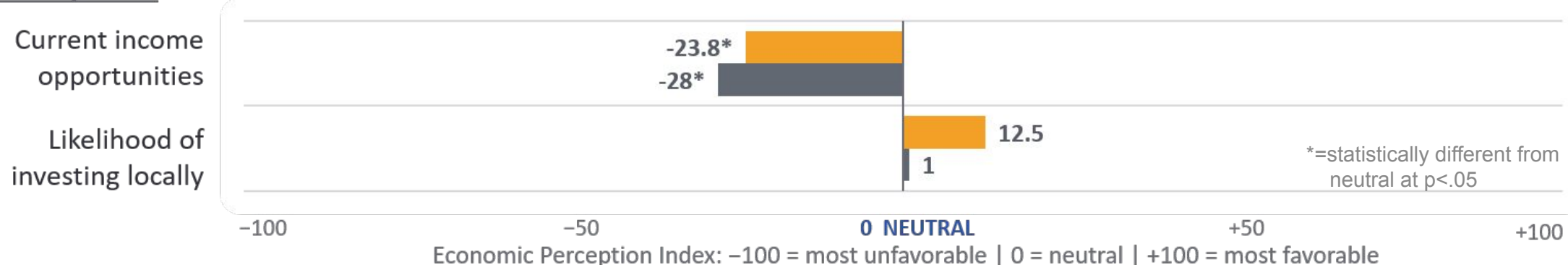
Our Economic Perceptions | 2024–2026

With regard to your community, how would you assess current economic conditions?

2024 – 2026 Perceptions



2025 – 2026 Perceptions



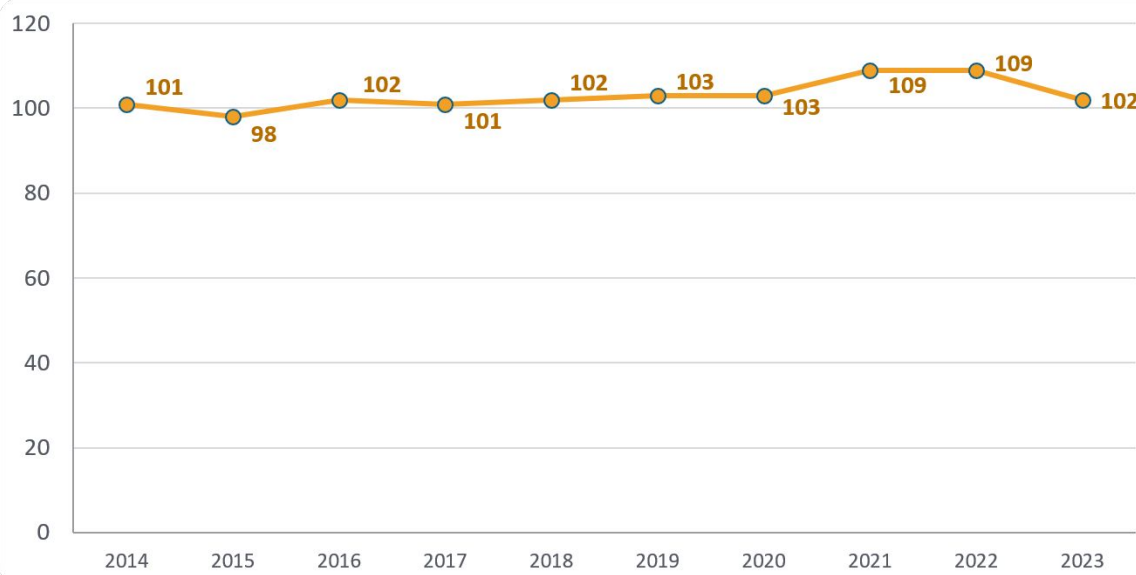
What this chart means

This chart shows how Cimarron residents viewed the local economy from 2024–2026. Scores above zero indicate positive perceptions, scores below zero indicate negative perceptions, and zero represents a neutral outlook. An asterisk (*) identifies a score that was statistically different from neutral. In 2024 (light blue), all five measures were meaningfully positive. In 2025 (dark gray), six measures were meaningfully negative, while willingness to invest was neutral. In 2026 (orange), employment and income measures remained significantly negative, while current business conditions, future business conditions, and willingness to invest were not statistically different from neutral.

Overall: Economic perceptions significantly decreased from 2024 to 2025, but showed signs of a slight recovery in 2026. Cimarron’s 2026 results were generally similar to the broader Western Kansas region. Employment opportunities remains Cimarron’s greatest concern, while willingness to invest is slightly more positive than the regional average.

Local Economic Indicators

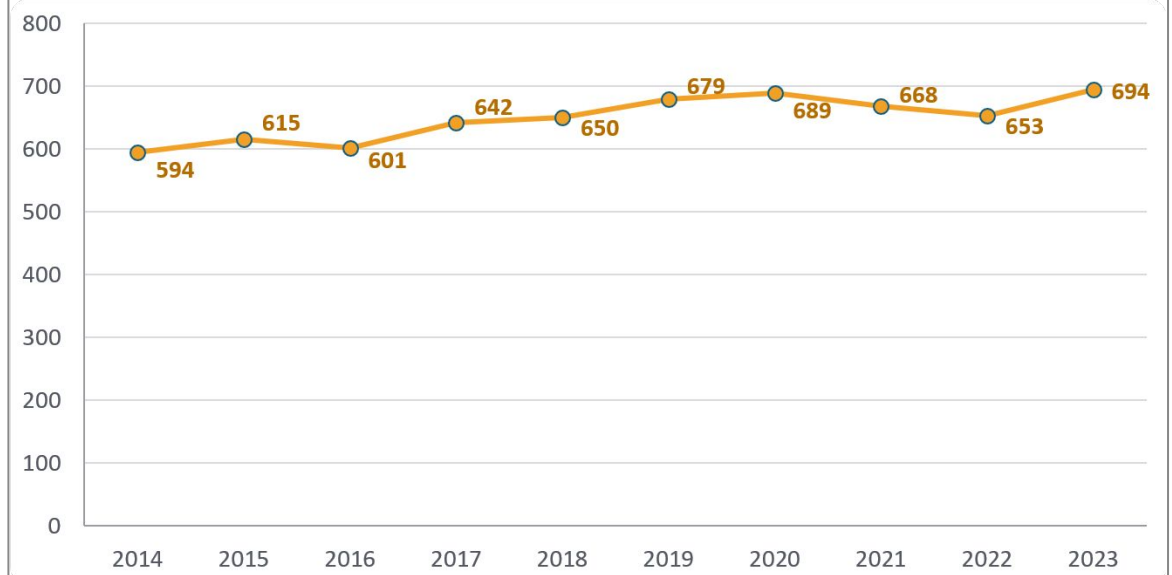
Businesses in Cimarron



Employer establishments remained relatively stable over the decade.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ZIP Code Business Patterns, ZIP 67835 | Latest available year: 2023

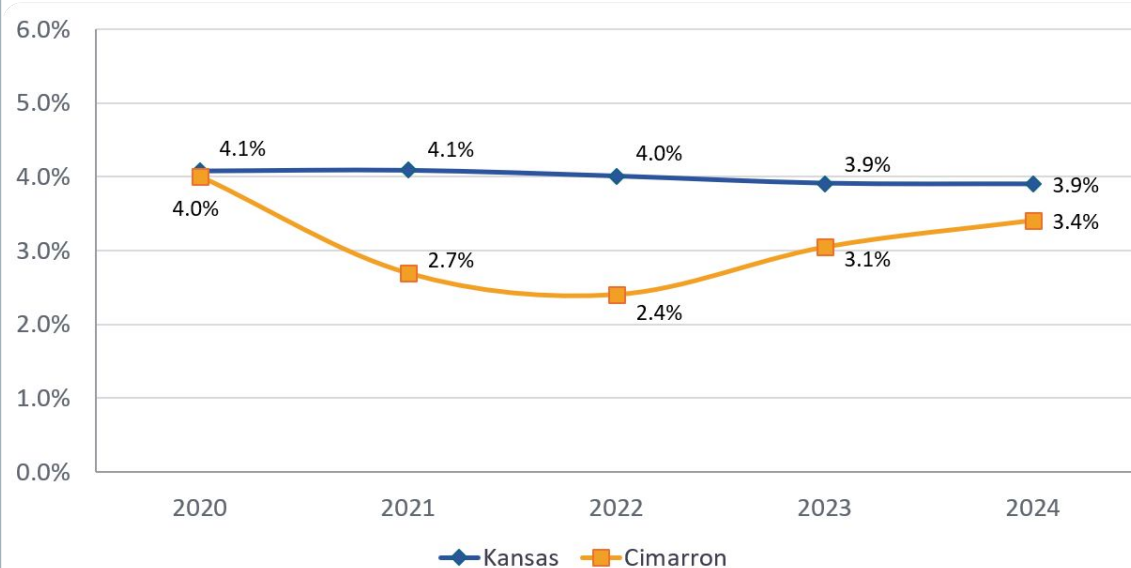
10-Year Shift in Local Jobs



Local employment increased over the decade—a net gain of 100 jobs (17%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ZIP Code Business Patterns, ZIP 67835 | Latest available year: 2023

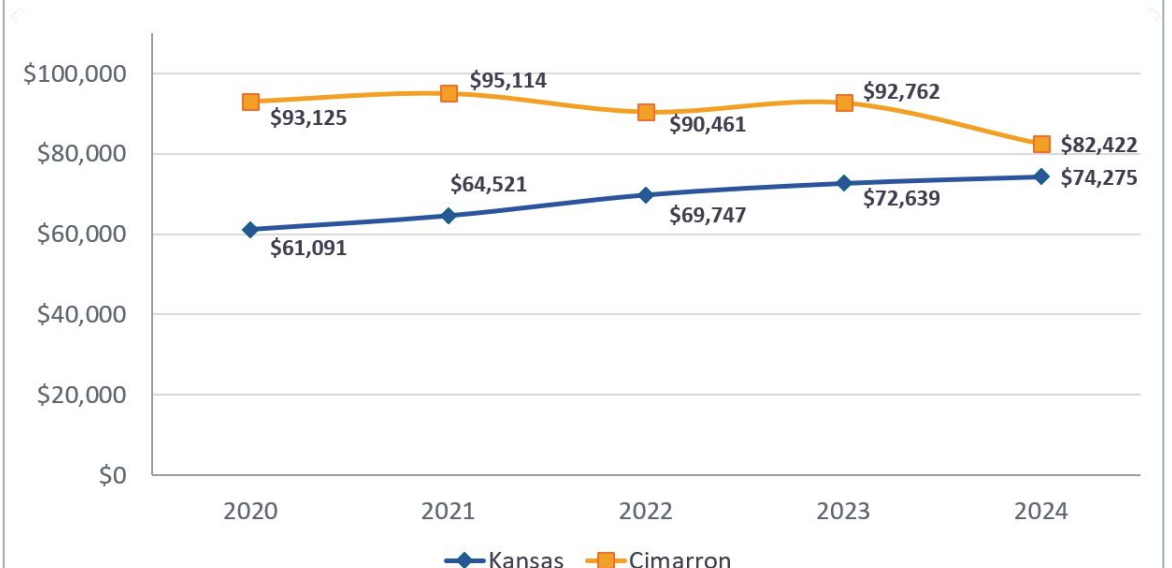
Local Unemployment Rate



Cimarron remains below Kansas estimates, although its rate rose after 2022

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020–2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates, B23025

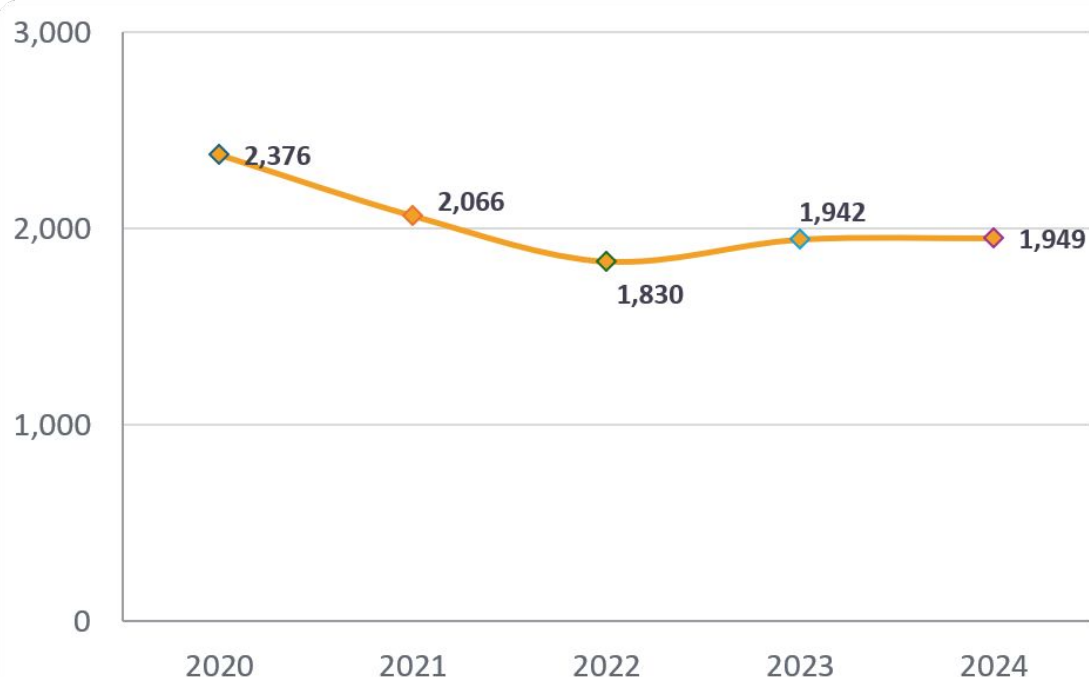
Median Household Income



Cimarron remains above Kansas median, but declined in 2024

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020–2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates, B19013

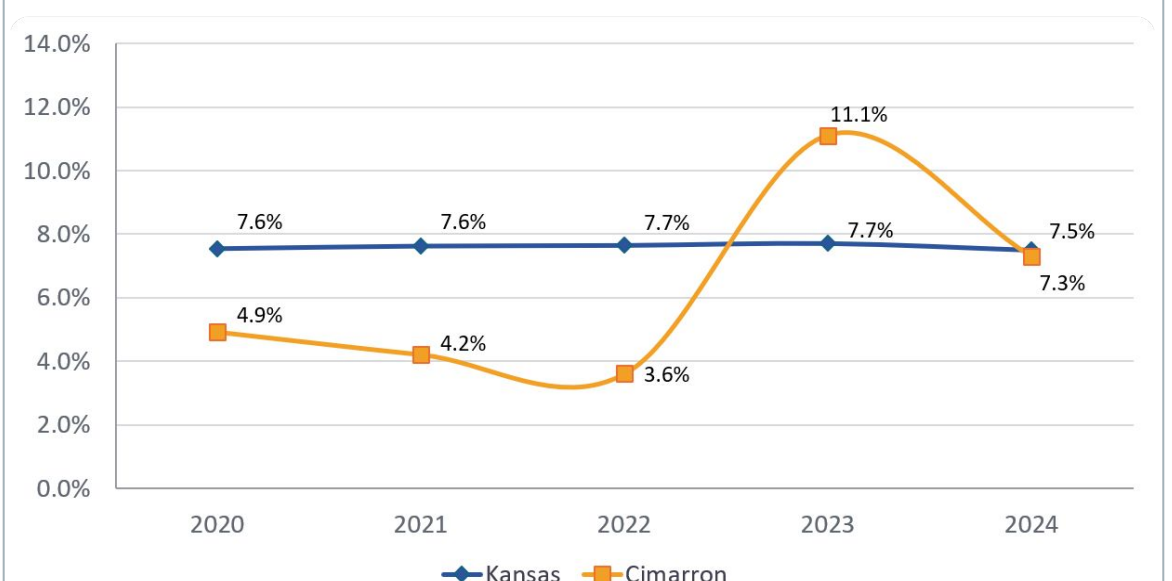
Population Trend



Cimarron declined to 1,830 in 2022 and modestly increased to 1,949 by 2024

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020–2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates, B01003

Family Poverty Rate



In 2024, Cimarron and Kansas had approximately the same rate

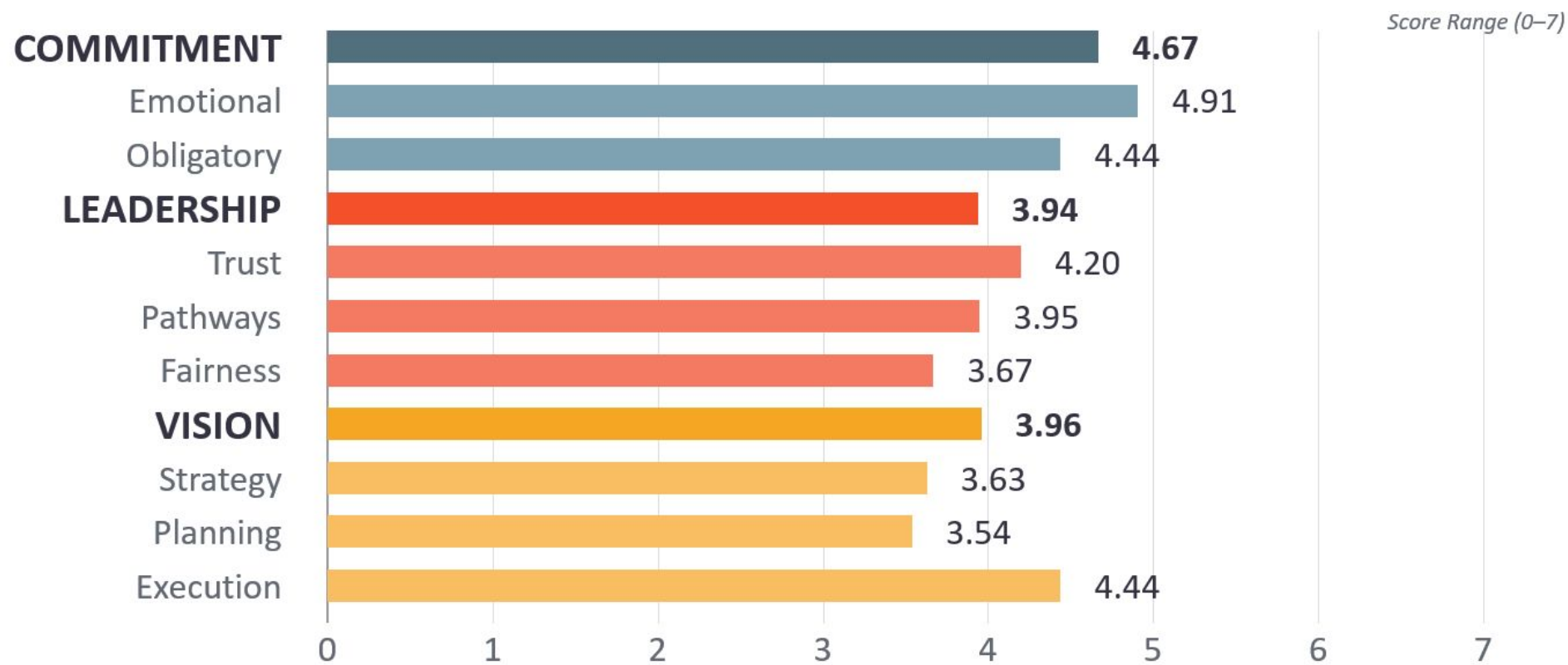
Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020–2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates, B17010 / DP03

Confidence In Our Local Community

Engagement Summary

Cimarron's strongest community asset remains residents' personal commitment. In 2026, Emotional Commitment scored highest (4.91); Planning (3.54), Strategy (3.63), and Fairness (3.67) were lowest. Across three years, all three dimensions softened, pointing to opportunities to strengthen leadership, planning, and shared direction.

Community Views



Variable Description

Commitment: How strongly residents feel personally connected and responsible to Cimarron.

- **Emotional Commitment:** Feelings of belonging, personal meaning, and a desire to remain in Cimarron.
- **Obligatory Commitment:** Feelings of loyalty, responsibility, and an obligation to help address community problems.

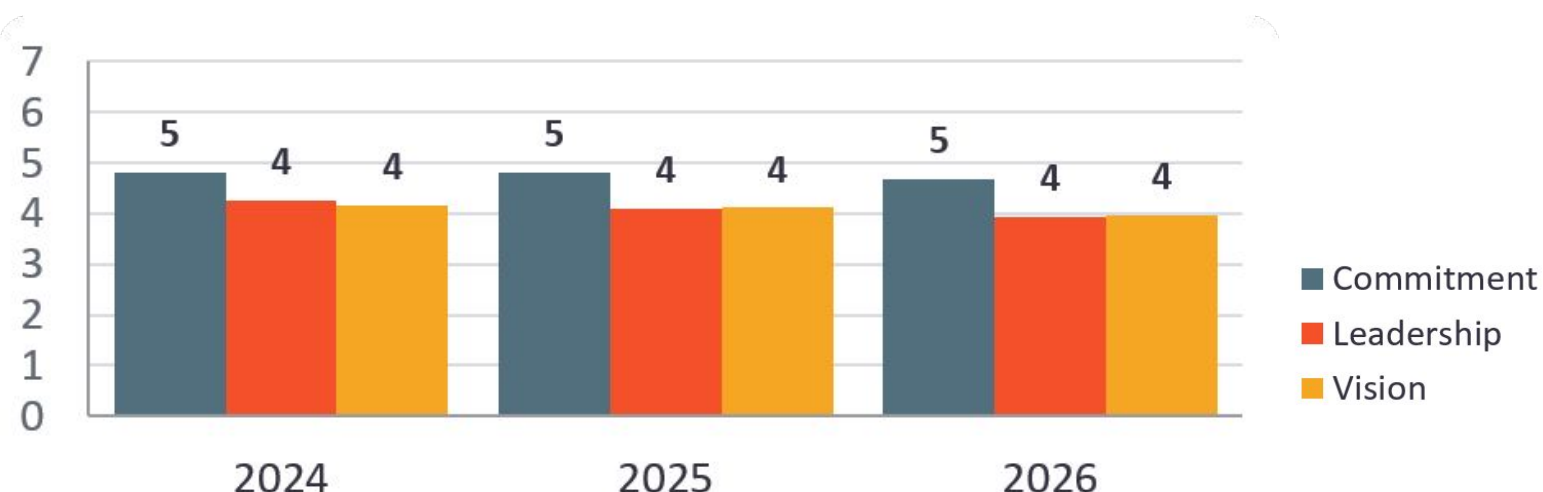
Leadership: How residents view trust, participation, and fairness in community decision-making.

- **Trust:** Confidence that community members and leaders work well together and can rely on one another.
- **Pathways:** Whether residents—including newcomers—feel welcomed, comfortable speaking up, and able to become involved in leadership.
- **Fairness:** Whether community decisions reflect residents' needs and the broader community's interests.

Vision: How clearly residents understand Cimarron's direction and its ability to make progress.

- **Strategy:** Whether residents understand and feel confident in the community's direction.
- **Planning:** Whether Cimarron has a documented plan and a clear path for reaching its goals.
- **Execution:** Whether the community can overcome challenges, accomplish goals, and recognize its achievements.

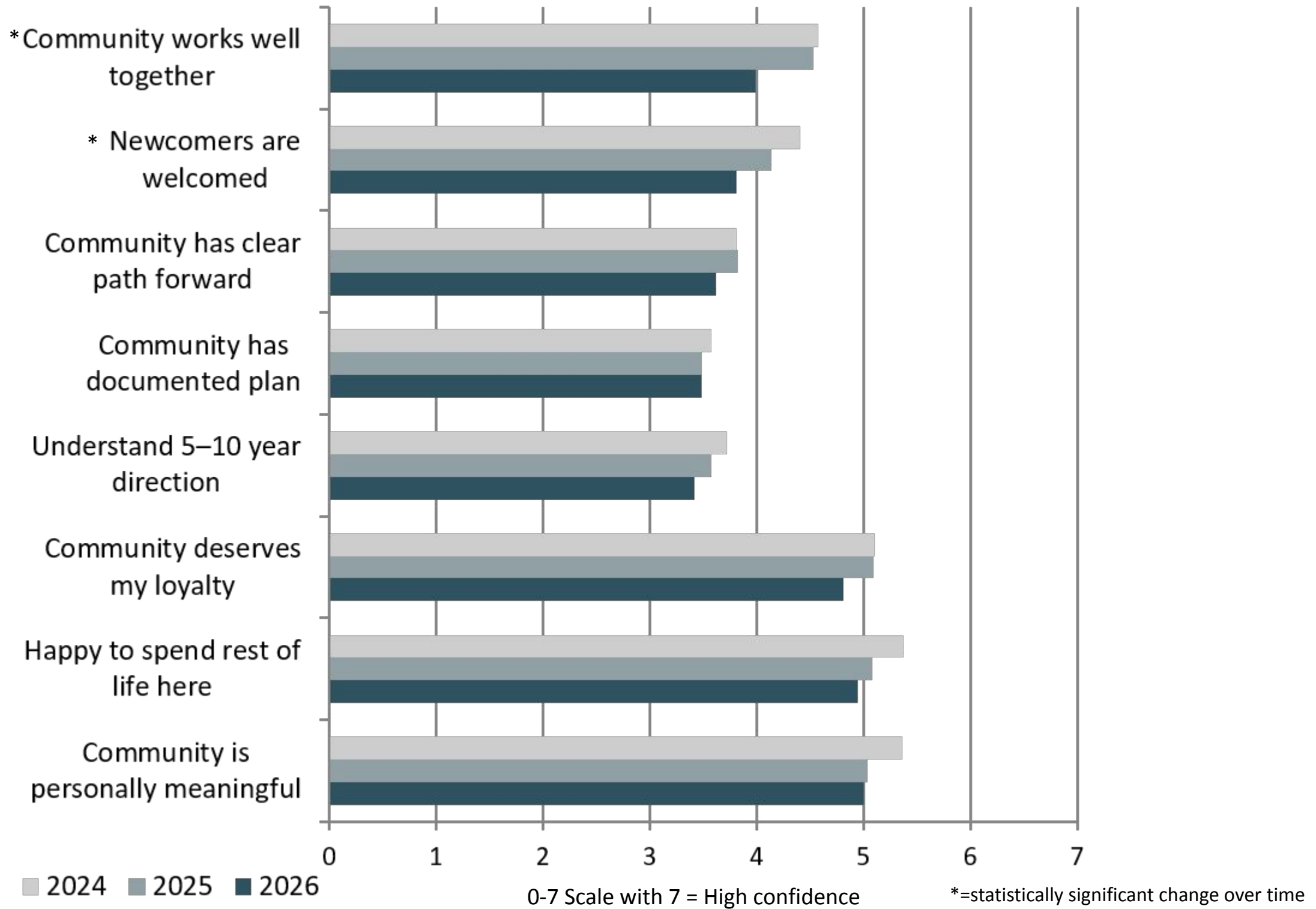
Three Year Results



What This Means

Across 2024–2026, residents remained personally connected and loyal to Cimarron. Leadership and Vision scores declined slightly, suggesting opportunities to strengthen participation, trust, planning, and shared direction. **Residents' strong commitment provides a foundation for greater community action.**

What is Driving Community Confidence?



Community Confidence: 2024-2026

Across the three-year period, **most community confidence indicators remained relatively stable**, with changes from 2024 to 2026 not reaching statistical significance - meaning the change could not be distinguished from normal variance. Two indicators, however, showed statistically significant declines: “**Our community is able to work well together**” and “**Newcomers are welcomed in our community**” declined from **4.41 to 3.81** on the 0–7 scale.

What does this mean?

While the overall results do not indicate broad changes in community confidence, **the declines in working together and welcoming newcomers identify areas worth watching**. Strengthening collaboration and ensuring that new residents feel welcomed and connected may be important opportunities for Cimarron moving forward.

Residents Comments Reflect the 3-Year Pattern

2024 “We need to get involved to help our community come together while also making sure it is multi-generational.”

“We need all community events open to all citizens”; “[We need to] include ALL community members, not just a select few.”

2025 “[We could] bring together our senior residents to elementary students. Welcoming our Spanish speakers and lower class.”

“[I want to serve Cimarron] as a representative of the Spanish-speaking community as well as a cultural integrator for new families.”

2026 “[We want to] make Cimarron feel welcoming not only to visitors, but to the people trying to build a life here.”

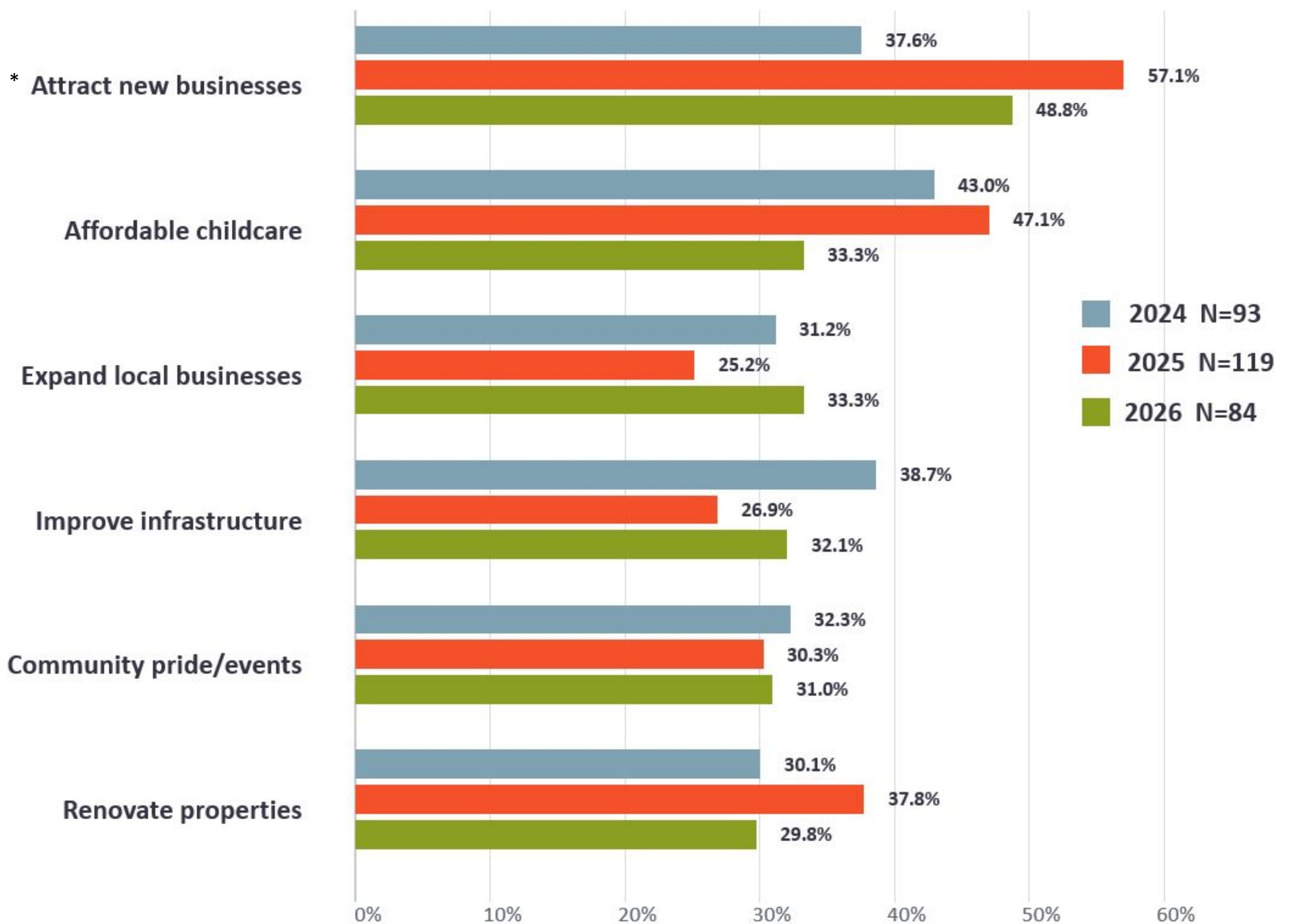
Community Program Priorities

Priorities Summary:

Cimarron's core priorities remained generally consistent from 2024–2026. Attracting new businesses was a leading priority each year, while childcare, business expansion, infrastructure, community pride, and property revitalization continued to receive substantial support. Most year-to-year changes were relatively modest.

Attracting new businesses was the only priority showing a statistically significant change over time. This was driven by the increase from 37.6% in 2024 to 57.1% in 2025. Its decline to 48.8% in 2026 was not statistically significant. None of the other five priorities changed significantly across the three years.

Core priorities across three years



*=statistically significant change over time at $p < .05$

Percent of respondents who selected the item as a top 5 priority

What This Means

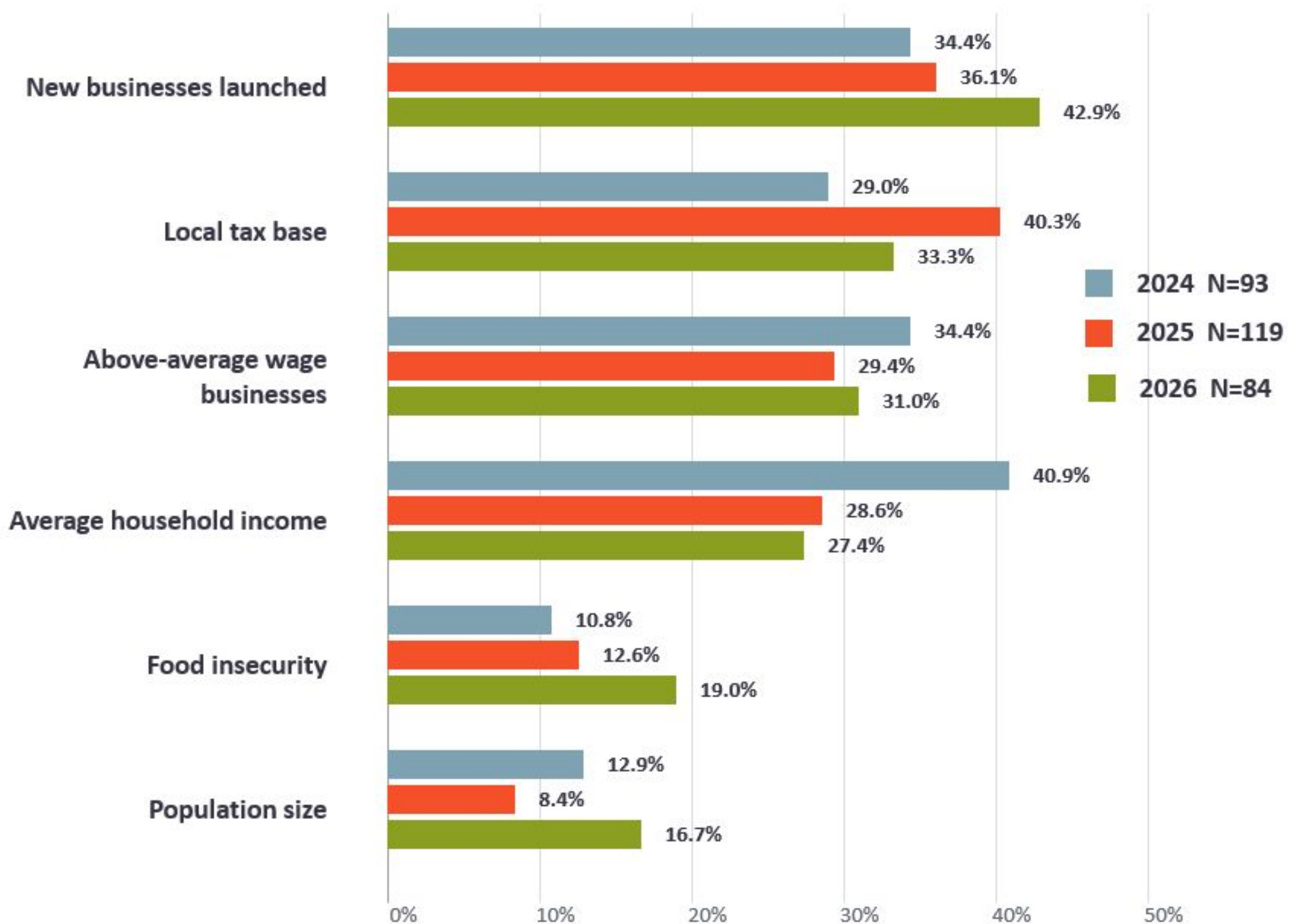
Residents' central priorities have remained fairly stable (could select up to five priorities). **Business attraction gained particular urgency in 2025 and remained the top priority in 2026**, while the other results reflect ongoing—not newly emerging—community concerns. **These findings support sustained attention to business growth, childcare, infrastructure, community pride, and property improvement rather than frequent shifts in direction.**

How Residents Want Progress Measured

Summary:

Residents consistently prioritized visible economic outcomes, particularly new businesses, the local tax base, better-paying employers, and household income. Interest in tracking new businesses increased from 34.4% in 2024 to 42.9% in 2026. Household income declined as a selected priority, while food insecurity and population received greater attention in 2026.

Outcomes Residents Want Tracked: Three-Year Summary



What This Means

Residents continue to define progress primarily through business and income growth, although the **2026 results show increased interest in population and food security** (could select up to 3 items). None of the six measures changed significantly over time. This means the differences may reflect normal changes over time among each year's respondents rather than a meaningful shift in community priorities. Overall, the outcomes residents want tracked have remained relatively stable.

Who Responded to the 2026 Survey?

The respondent profile helps readers understand whose perspectives are most visible in the results.



Age

46% ages 40–59
27% ages 60+
26% ages 20–39

Time in Cimarron

31% moved here 20+ years ago
30% lived here 5–20 years
25% born and raised
13% lived here under 5 years

Education

27% bachelor's degree
24% graduate degree
17% some higher education
21% associate or technical degree

Employment

40% public sector
20% private sector
20% retired
14% local business owners

Race and ethnicity

92% White, non-Hispanic
5% Hispanic or Latino
2% two or more races
1% American Indian/Alaska Native

Housing

81% own their home
13% rent
6% other arrangement

How to interpret the sample

The survey provides a substantial snapshot of participating residents, but it is not a random sample. Women, homeowners, White/non-Hispanic residents, people with higher education, and public-sector workers are represented more heavily. Continued outreach to Hispanic residents, renters, younger adults, and other underrepresented groups would broaden the picture of community opinion.