



**Visions Northwest Regional Economic Development Group**  
A Division of the Wisconsin Business Innovation Corporation

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**MEETING MINUTES**  
**VISIONS NORTHWEST REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP**  
**Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Visioning Session**  
**Wednesday, October 9th, 2019**  
**Flat Creek Lodge ~ Hayward**

1. Meeting called to order at 9:05 AM by Chairman Kelly Klein.

2. **Welcome/Introductions:**

**Members Present:** Kelly Klein – Representing Iron County, Cole Rabska – Representing Bayfield County, Dale Heikkinen – Representing Price County, John Richards – Representing Burnett County, Geri Dresen – Representing Chambers of Commerce, Jim Caesar – Representing Douglas County, Joel Zimmerman – Representing Washburn County, Betsey Harries – Representing Economic Development Organizations, Mari Kay-Nabozny – Representing NWWIB

**Members Absent:** John Will – Representing Education (WITC), Leo Naumann – Representing Private Industry (Jeff Foster Trucking), Becky Haase – Representing Private Industry (Enbridge), Mike Bebeau – Representing Private Industry (Xcel Energy), Andy Albarado – Representing Rusk County, Lynn Fitch – Representing Sawyer County, Jenice Meyer – Representing Education (NorthWERD Group)

**Others Present:** Joe Pinaridi – Iron County, Dick Pufall – Ashland County, Nate Ehalt – Burnett County, Jim Dohm – Washburn County, Nicole Boyd – Red Cliff Native American Tribe, Jim Miller – Senator Johnson’s Office, Jason Laumann – NWRPC, Sheldon Johnson – NWRPC, Glenda Barber – Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe, Lance Ausing – WEDC, Crystal Rohde – Visions Northwest

**Vacant Seats:** Ashland County, Taylor County, Tribal Representative

3. **Approval of July 10, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

A motion to approve the July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 meeting minutes was made by Joel Z.; a second was made by Jim C. Motion carried unanimously.

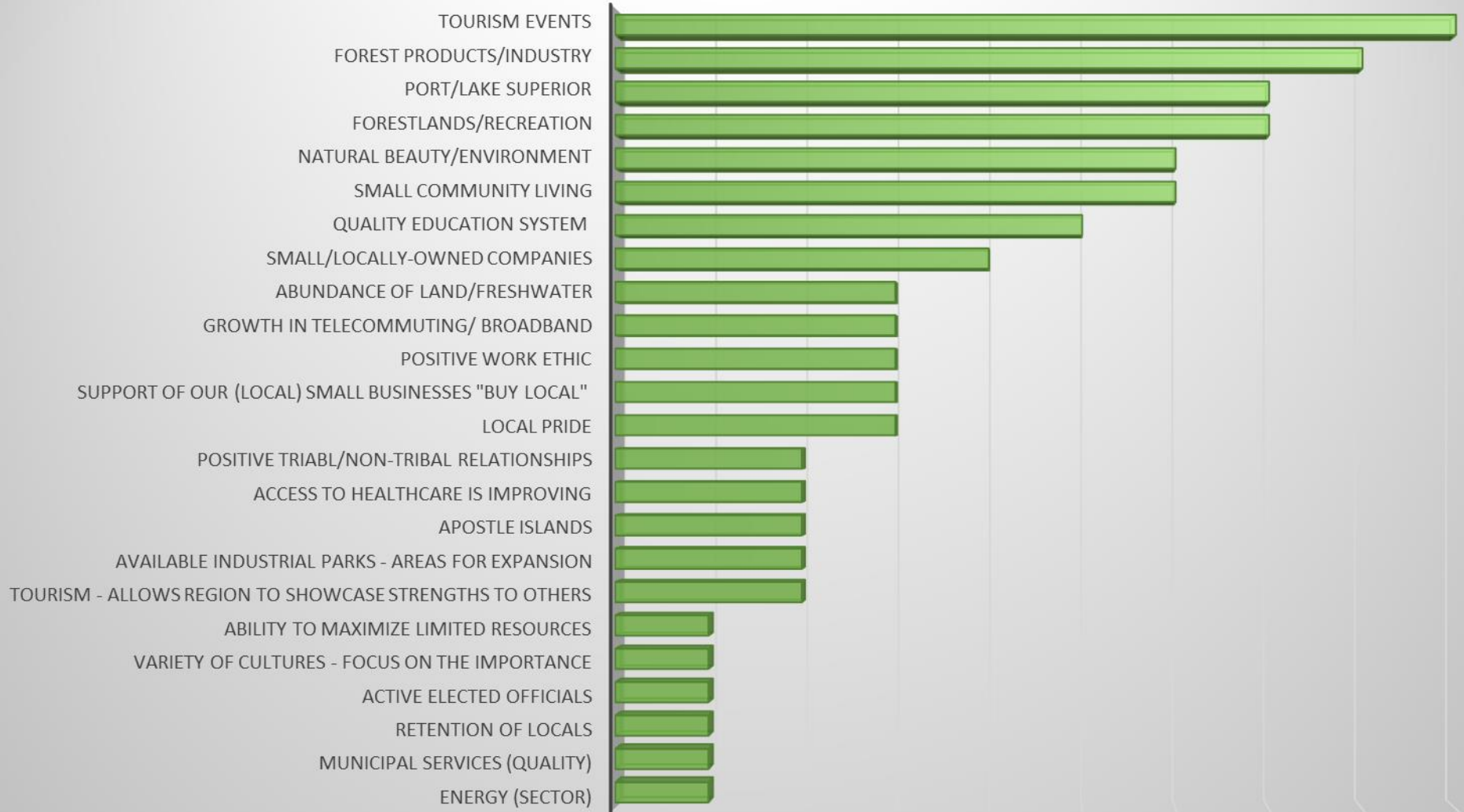
4. **Strategic Visioning Session and SWOT Analysis**

# Northwest Wisconsin Region's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis Results



October 9, 2019

# STRENGTHS OF NWRPC REGION

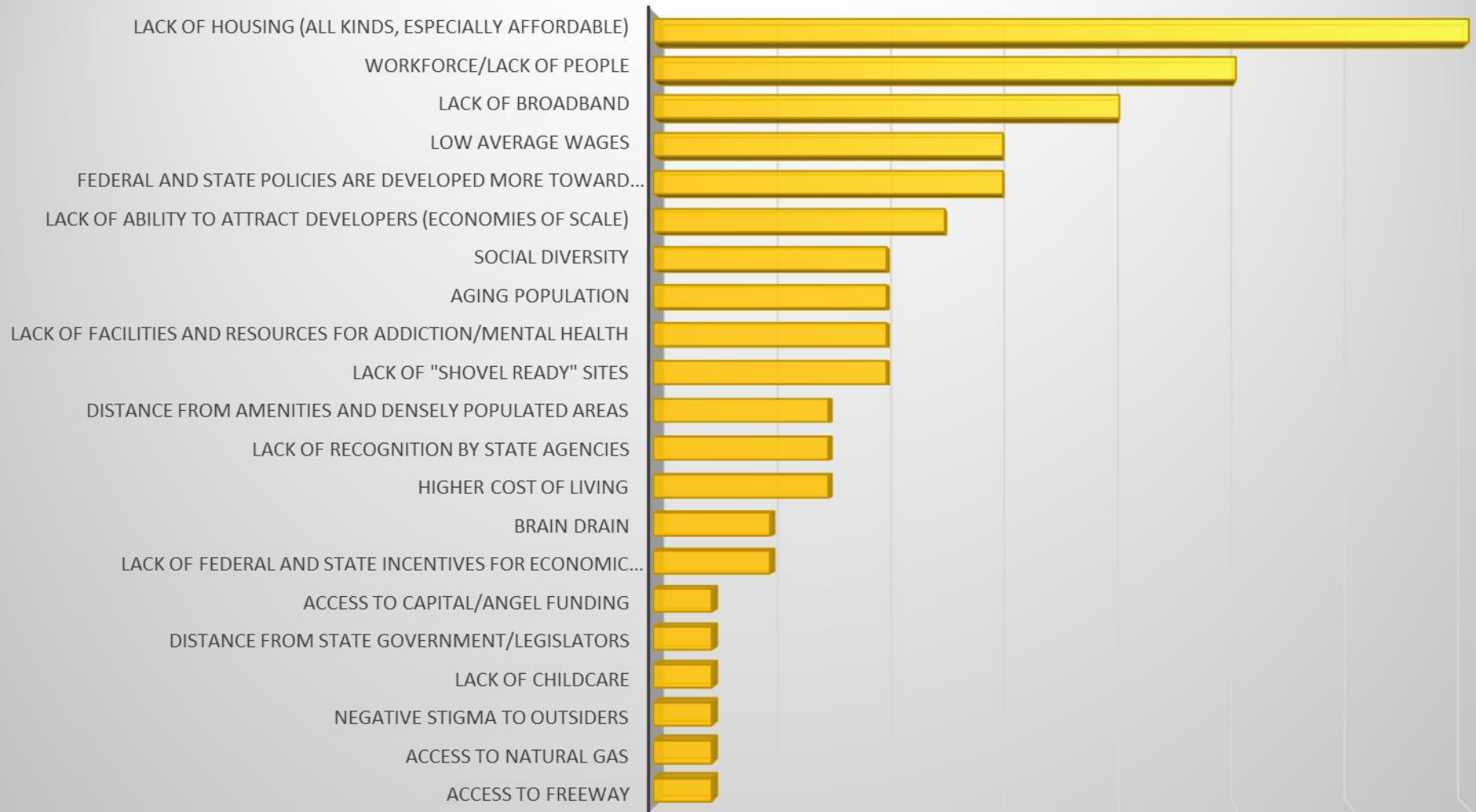


*\*as prioritized by the NWRPC CEDS Committee*

## Strengths of the NWRPC Region – All Responses

- Tourism events
- Forest products/Industry
- Port/Lake Superior
- Forestlands/Recreation
- Natural beauty/Environment
- Small community living
- Quality education system
- Small/Locally-owned companies
- Abundance of land/freshwater
- Growth in telecommuting/ broadband
- Positive work ethic
- Support of our (local) small businesses "buy local"
- Local pride
- Positive Tribal/Non-Tribal relationships
- Access to healthcare is improving
- Apostle Islands
- Available industrial parks - areas for expansion
- Tourism - allows region to showcase strengths to others
- Ability to maximize limited resources
- Variety of cultures - focus on the importance
- Active elected officials
- Retention of locals
- Municipal services (Quality)
- Energy (Sector)
- Internal agency collaboration and partnerships
- Easy commutes
- Experienced generations - mentorship opportunities
- Interconnecting highway systems
- Destination attractions
- Local knowledge/History Retention
- Orchards
- Visions Northwest Leadership/ Collaboration
- Small airports
- Minimal natural disasters
- Location to markets (Twin Ports, Twin Cities)

# WEAKNESSES OF NWRPC REGION



*\*as prioritized by the NWRPC CEDS Committee*

## Weaknesses of the NWRPC Region – All Responses

- Lack of housing (all kinds, especially affordable)
- Workforce/lack of people
- Lack of broadband
- Low average wages
- Federal and state policies are developed more toward urban areas
- Lack of ability to attract developers (economies of scale)
- Social diversity
- Aging population
- Lack of facilities and resources for addiction/mental health
- Lack of "shovel ready" sites
- Distance from amenities and densely populated areas
- Lack of recognition by state agencies
- Higher cost of living
- Brain drain
- Lack of federal and state incentives for economic development
- Access to capital/angel funding
- Distance from state government/legislators
- Lack of childcare
- Negative stigma to outsiders
- Access to natural gas
- Access to freeway
- Seasonal population
- Lack of transportation options
- Distance from major universities
- Medicaid disbursement disparity vs. Minnesota
- Lack of major employers
- Aging infrastructure - Sewers/Roads
- Lack of entertainment/night life
- Don't promote/market industry and manufacturing
- Lack of unity among government entities (county, cities, villages, towns)
- Winter (costs, all variables)
- Lack of four season roads (timber, etc.)
- Access to our region - no large airports
- Infrastructure - not capable of handling climate variances
- Lack of quality career pipeline for K-12
- Out of state news media coverage
- Higher poverty rates
- Workforce culture - workers can tend to be "seasonal by choice"
- Solid waste issues (i.e. couches on the side of the road)
- Blight
- Higher cost to extend commercial infrastructure
- Access to specialty healthcare
- Percieved property taxes relative to wages

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR NORTHWEST REGION



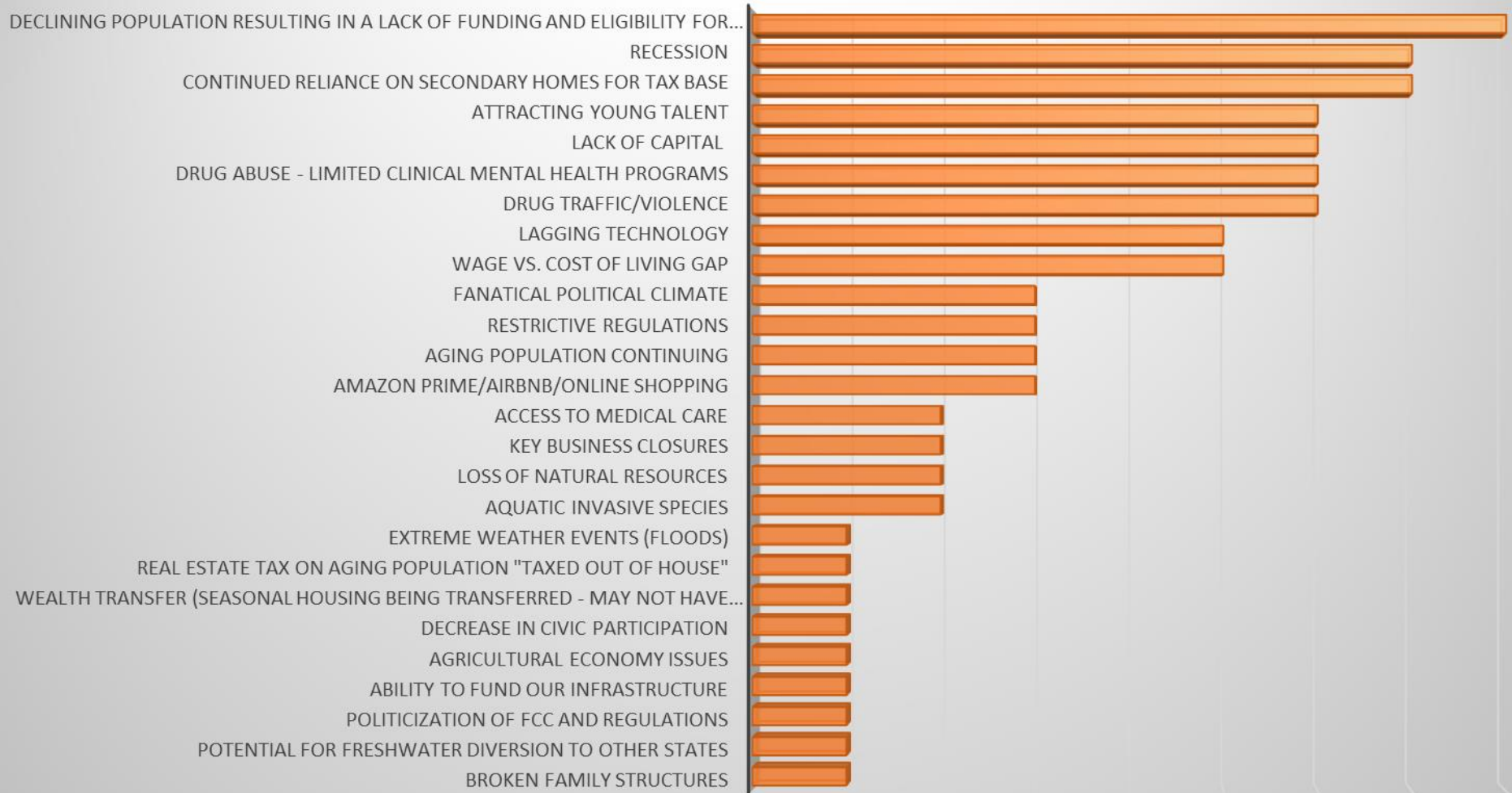
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## Opportunities for the NWRPC Region – All Responses

- Expand developer initiatives/industrial development
- Develop housing
- Use of our aging workforce - utilize experience
- More lobbyist involvement from northwest Wisconsin
- Trades workforce training
- Economic gardening - Existing businesses assist/support start-ups
- Analog - broadcast spectrum - wireless system (internet access)
- Expanding opportunities for entrepreneurs (space, locations, resources)
- Explore development opportunities on Lake Superior shoreline
- New wood products
- Expand trailing spouse programs - "community concierge"
- Expanding employee benefits - time, flexibility, monetary
- Maintain connections to HS graduates
- Local government incentives for development
- Develop initiatives to expand second homeowner's time in region (i.e. Telecommuter)
- Expand natural gas access
- Reinstate the Rail System
- Considering Husky reopening - stabilize energy reliability
- Enhancing downtowns
- Expansion of recreational trails
- Copper Peak development
- Counties working together
- Expansion of healthcare services - telemedicine
- Public transportation
- Arts
- Replicating Evergrow model from Ashland - childcare
- Leverage WITC educational initiatives/other higher ed
- Leverage natural resources for development
- Opportunity for local telecom expansion
- Opportunity for small-scale defense contractors
- Promotion of our "small-town" living
- Leverage our non-profits
- Expanding international relationships between employers and visitors
- Better partnerships - reduce redundancy
- Market/develop land
- Market our current broadband assets/encourage expansion
- Market our education experience (i.e. small schools, student/teacher ratios)
- Continue to discuss vertical and horizontal integration opportunities with existing companies
- Look beyond the status quo
- Mineral deposits - mining
- Promotion of our "short commute times"
- Favorable tax rates
- Boutique food production
- Employer-provided childcare
- Fab labs/tech training



# THREATS TO NWRPC REGION

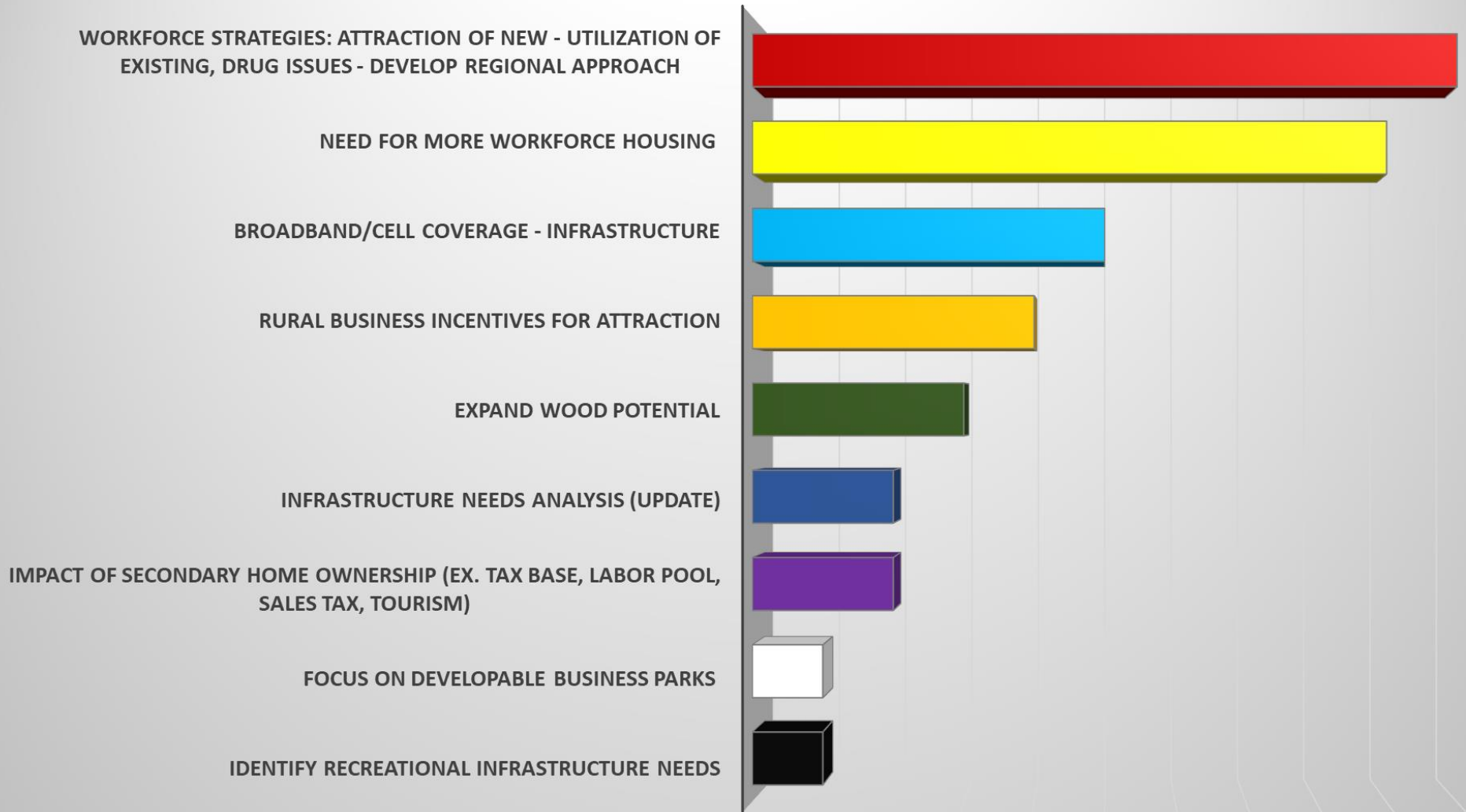


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## Threats to the NWRPC Region – All Responses

- Declining population resulting in a lack of funding and eligibility for programs
- Recession
- Continued reliance on secondary homes for tax base
- Attracting young talent
- Lack of capital
- Drug abuse - limited clinical mental health programs
- Drug traffic/violence
- Lagging technology
- Wage vs. Cost of living gap
- Fanatical political climate
- Restrictive regulations
- Aging population continuing
- Amazon Prime/AirBNB/Online shopping
- Access to medical care
- Key business closures
- Loss of natural resources
- Aquatic invasive species
- Extreme weather events (floods)
- Real estate tax on aging population "taxed out of house"
- Wealth transfer (Seasonal housing being transferred - may not have capacity to manage)
- Decrease in civic participation
- Agricultural economy issues
- Ability to fund our infrastructure
- Politicization of FCC and regulations
- Potential for freshwater diversion to other states
- Broken family structures
- Competition with other rural areas as technology is developed
- Competition with urban areas
- Increased cost of government service delivery
- Decreasing enrollment in K-12 schools in region
- Natural gas prices
- Levy limits/tax valuation
- Poverty/stagnant wages
- Will impacts of expansion/growth impact community feel/environment
- Brain drain
- Changes in banking regulation
- Automation
- Slow to adapt to technology (businesses)
- Cheap foreign consumer goods
- Cheap foreign labor
- Lack of foreign environmental regulation
- Political silos - Intergovernmental relations
- Economies of scale
- Future potential public health crisis
- Terrorism

## KEY ISSUES/PRIORITIES FOR NORTHWEST REGION



*\*as prioritized by the NWRPC CEDS Committee*

## Key Issues/Priorities for the NWRPC Region – All Responses

1. **Workforce Strategies: Attraction of new - Utilization of existing**
  - Drug issues - develop regional approach - identification of partnerships across region
2. **Need for more workforce housing**
3. **Broadband/Cell coverage - Infrastructure**
  - Rural business incentives for attraction
  - Expand wood potential
  - Infrastructure needs analysis (update)
  - Impact of secondary home ownership (ex. Tax base, labor pool, sales tax, tourism)
  - Focus on developable business parks
  - Identify recreational infrastructure needs
  - Four Lane highways (Hwy 2/51)
  - Marketing Region
  - Increase number of incubators/shared workspace
  - Proactively educate needs to Madison
  - Funding for road structure and maintenance
  - Coordinated strategy for entrepreneur development
  - Strengthen rail system
  - Push for targeted rural business funding