Peer Community Analysis of Springerville-Eagar, Arizona

Travis Lundell, Tassio Magassy, Sandra Childers

April 25, 2021

Planning Methods II/PUP 579

School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, Arizona State University

Tempe, Arizona, 85281

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 3

Introduction: Community of Springerville-Eagar 4

Data and Methods 5

- Windshield Survey & Photographic Analysis 5
- Content Analysis of Meeting Minutes 6

Approaches Taken to Address Housing Affordability 7

Recommendation: 8

Appendix 9

- Appendix A: Introduction: Community of Springerville-Eagar 9
  - Graph 1: Percent of Homes per Value in Eagar and Springerville, AZ 9
  - Graph 2: Percent of Homes Built per Year in Eagar and Springerville, AZ 9
  - Table 1: Population Pyramid in Eagar, AZ 10
  - Table 2: Population Pyramid in Springerville, AZ 10
  - Table 3: Population Projection for Eagar and Springerville, AZ 11
- Appendix B: Data and Methods 11
  - Image 1: Aerial of Springerville-Eagar , AZ from Google Maps 11
  - Image 2: 1st Ave. Eagar, AZ (Google Street View, 2008). 12
  - Image 3 AZ S Eagar St. Eagar, AZ (Google Street View, 2008). 12
  - Image 4: W School Bus Dr. Eagar, AZ (Google Street View, 2008) 13
  - Image 5: House (S Harless Sr, Eagar, AZ) (Google Street View, 2008) 13
  - Image 6: House (S Harless Sr, Eagar, AZ) Current Listing (Zillow.com, 2021) 14
  - Image 7: Main St and Central Ave, Eagar AZ (Google Street View, 2018) 14
  - Graph 1: Eagar, AZ For Sale Inventory & Median List Price, 3-Year Period from April,2018 – April 2021 (rate.com/research/eager-az/market-trends) 15
  - Graph 2: Springerville, AZ For Sale Inventory & Median List Price, 3-Year Period from April,2018 – April 2021 (rate.com/research/springerville-az/market-trends) 16
  - Table 1: Content Analysis of Any Residential Zoning Requests Present in Meeting Minutes 16

Executive Summary

Housing affordability is a familiar challenge that is affecting communities throughout the United States. Whether this affordability issue has been driven by the historically low annual percentage rates, low housing inventory, lack of available land and building materials, or housing units being used for vacation rentals, it is dependent on the community in question. In several communities, such as the Phoenix Metropolitan area, the scarcity of land and inventory to meet the demand are the primary drivers of the increasing lack of affordability. This report focuses on identifying the drivers of the housing affordability issue and the strategies that the towns of Eagar and Springerville Arizona are using to address this challenge.

To complete this task, the team used two primary qualitative methods to conduct the analysis, content analysis of City Council and Planning and Zoning Commission meeting minutes and windshield survey/photographic analysis. The former method utilized 3-years of meeting minutes from all Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council meetings. The latter utilized Google Street View images and compared them to images posted in the most recent for-sale listings from online realtor sites, such as Zillow and Redfin. In addition to these two primary means to conduct the analysis, standard processes such as analyzing the zoning ordinances and development goals were conducted to compare them to those present in the City of Clarkdale, referencing for-sale housing and (any publicly available) vacation-rental data. No formal analysis was completed on the non-primary sources but were used as a means to paint an image of the two communities.

From the images and findings from the completed analyses, the primary recommendation is to adjust the zoning code to allow for the inclusion of smaller residential lots. In all communities (Eagar, Springerville, and Clarkdale), there is a lack of single-family residential lots permitted beyond 7,000 square feet, as outlined in the zoning designation R2-7. Additionally, there is a supported demand by the residents of the peer communities to have the ability to subdivide their parcels. This demand was demonstrated with over 50% of the submitted requests from all Zoning and Planning Commission meetings involving residential properties that requested subdivision of their parcels, rezoning that would permit this action, or a variance request. In the windshield analysis and previous for-sale listings, many parcels have been renovated in recent years at an increasing rate to improve and add to the available inventory. But this renovation cycle is only able to restore units to the market. The ability to subdivide parcels would allow for new homes to be constructed since the demand for properties within the communities is present.

Introduction: Community of Springerville-Eagar

In the Round Valley, a four-hour drive north of Phoenix, at the northeastern slopes of the White Mountains, sits the towns of Eagar and Springerville Arizona. Founded respectively in 1871 and 1879, the towns are connected through a shared border. As a result, a symbiotic relationship between the two communities exists. This relationship is seen through providing housing and employment for one another. Due to the location of the communities, the area is rich in access to lakes, skiing, extensive hiking trails, and proves to be an excellent location for astrophotography. This abundance of natural attractions drives tourism-recreation to be one of the two largest employment sectors within the Round Valley. The other largest employment sector is energy due to the presence of the two nearby power plants. The communities resemble the image of small-town America and host events that solidify the feeling of living within such a community, such as through their annual 4th of July celebrations and parades.

Table 1: Orientation of Springerville-Eagar, Arizona (Shown in Red and Lime-Green) within Arizona

Despite Springerville not being identified as a peer community due to its smaller population, 2,031 residents (2019 American Community Survey (ACS)), and a declining population (Appendix A: Table 3) the town was included due to the symbiotic relationship it shares with Eagar. The median income of this town is $43,836, nearly $15,000 less than that experience for the median annual income for Arizona. The documented median home value is $116,500 (Appendix A: Graph 1) of which 713 of the 1,008 total housing units have occupancy information. Nearly 70% of the units with occupancy information are occupied by the owners with the remainder housing renters. The majority of Springerville's housing inventory, approximately 73%, was constructed since 1970 (Appendix A: Graph 2).

In contrast to the smaller and declining population documented in Springerville, the population of Eagar is over double Springerville's and projected to have a slow increase in population (Appendix A: Table 3) over the next decade. The median annual income documented in the 2019 ACS is $56,089, a value similar to the State's annual median income of $58,985. The median home values in Eagar are higher than those in Springerville at $172,000 (Appendix A: Graph 1). Of the total 2,193 homes reported in ACS, 1652 showed occupancy information. For the units with occupancy information, 81% of homes were owner-occupied with the remainder housing renters. Akin to Springerville, Eagar experienced a housing boom in the 1970's, resulting in nearly 83% of the houses being built since then (Appendix A: Graph 2).

Data and Methods

Windshield Survey & Photographic Analysis

The first method utilized was a photographic analysis that was conducted online through Google Street View. The use of Street View allowed for a virtual walking experience through the towns' streets and the ability to observe details and nuances of both Eagar and Springerville. Though this could occur as an in-person visit, the digital platform allowed for the revisitation of the selected locations and their immediate surroundings with greater ease. Additionally, if a site were visited by Google Phototakers multiple times, the user could compare the most current imagery to previous documentations. In a few cases the addresses visited through Google Street View had online listings through realtor sites such as Zillow or Redfin. The images from those sites were included for comparison (Appendix).

Both towns depict similar patterns, thus their key takeaways are similar and apply to both jurisdictions. The photographic analysis showed general infrastructure patterns of low-quality pavement, lack of proper traffic signals, and pavement painting. For some locations, this could be attributed to the rural-residential nature of the visited sites. In addition to these infrastructure trends, there were three major trends documented: underutilized or empty lots, large distances between houses, and age and condition of houses.

The first trend, underutilization and empty lots, is a characteristic that can be documented from aerial imagery (Appendix B: Image 1) and later confirmed with Street View imagery. Some of the documented underutilization can be attributed to the large proportion of agricultural and agricultural-residential designated land. Other zoning designations, such as R1-10 (single-family residential, minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet) can be seen as additional contributors of this abundance of underutilization. This is most present in Appendix B: Image 2 and 7.

The second trend, distance between houses, was observed, generally, to be relatively far from each other. In addition to contributing towards the first trend, this could also contribute to a decreased sense of community. As a result, this space could signal future opportunities to adjust zoning so less space is left underutilized in applicable areas.

The final trend, age and condition of homes illustrated homes that could be considered outdated and others that were not kept up well. This could be connected to the age of the homes and the rate of home ownership within the communities. One could hypothesize that these are traditional and long-established households that could be owned for multiple generations and proper renovation may not be at the top of their priorities, or such procedures may be infeasible due to lack of affordability. This lack of affordability could be driven because the town is very small, or even financial constraints, especially with high costs of construction materials (if the owner is not seeking to list their home for sale). This is also supported by the higher proportion of homeowners (almost 80 percent of houses are owned in Eagar, as opposed to 59 in Phoenix, AZ, for example). It should be noted, in the 2008 Google Street View imagery, numerous of the homes fall into the unkept category (Appendix B: Image 6). In more recent years, increasing quantities of homes have been renovated to increase their marketability (Appendix B: Image 7) to meet the higher demand for housing in the area.

It should be noted that there were limitations present during this analysis that ranged from the ongoing pandemic to the primary data source being potentially outdated. The data present in Google Street View was collected 13 years ago and should be seen as a potential validity issue. A lot may have happened in terms of land use and housing since 2008, and the low-quality images prevent us from observing more in-depth details about the area being studied.

Content Analysis of Meeting Minutes

The second method utilized was content analysis of Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council meeting minutes over a three-year period, April 2018 to April 2021. This time period was selected due to a set of graphs that were used to form the foundation of understanding of the current trends within the communities (Appendix B: Graph 1 and Graph 2). From these graphs, there was a trend that emerged, that starting in September 2019, single-family for-sale inventory began to plummet, and the median listing prices skyrocketed. Prior to this date, the housing prices did not fluctuate no more than $20,000 from mid-2018 to September 2019, despite a gradual decrease in available housing units.

In the stated time period, there were 31 meeting minutes analyzed for both the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council combined. Of the 31 meetings, only eight had any content that was related to residential requests, none of which were covered in the City Council meeting minutes. The comments were initially just documented to capture their content. This would allow for the reviewer to come back once all meeting minutes were reviewed to then identify common patterns. The use of both meeting minutes was intended to capture a wider net of possible occurrences and perspectives. It was anticipated that the Planning and Zoning Commission would include the finer detailed cases, such as rezoning cases that did not require a

major amendment to the General Plan, and the City Council might include more long-term projects or visions that need to be approved.

From this analysis, there were two trends that emerged. The first was that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there were more requests that were submitted were predominantly for temporary dwellings. These cases were approved, only because there was a clear timeframe that was considered to be a short-term period of no more than 3 to 6 months in length. These approvals still had discussions regarding property values and long-term impacts within the community. But as previously mentioned, the only reason these were approved was due to their temporary nature. The second trend emerged in 2020 amidst the pandemic, the drastic increase in requests for rezoning requests and variances permitted to allow for subdivision of parcels. These cases were always approved unanimously, and the topic of property value impacts were never mentioned. Requests that were presented during this same time frame that were for the construction of mobile home parks or similar zoning were always denied.

Similar to the previous method, there were limitations in the provided data. The content analyzed were only the requests that required a hearing by the Commission and/or Council. The number and content of the requests that did not require this are not documented or done so in a fashion that is not easy to access. As a result, there was very little content that was present from the meeting minutes that pertained to residential requests. Additionally, datasets that would illustrate long-term trends, such as vacation rentals, were not available to the public without paying for access. Such access would contribute additional perspectives to this content analysis since the foundation would be more robust.

Approaches Taken to Address Housing Affordability

Through the analyses completed in the previous section, it appears that the communities are primarily addressing the issue of housing affordability and availability on a case-by-case basis. The meeting minutes did not provide any evidence that there were larger plans that needed to be voted on, unlike measures to improve pavement conditions, approval of lawyers, annexation of commercial land, or to hear rezoning requests. Rather the minutes demonstrated that the communities were waiting for private initiative to address the issue and submit requests for rezoning (such as from the agricultural-residential AR-43 or AR-20 to single-family residential R1-10 designation), subdivision of large parcels within the same zoning designation, or a variance to allow for smaller than standard lots within a particular designation.

While the content analysis of the meeting minutes led us to observe the case-by-case requests for variances, the windshield survey provided the context to why these requests comprised a large proportion of residential rezoning actions. The survey illustrated the large size of parcels, with much of the land being underutilized. Despite this underutilization, accessory

dwelling unit requests experienced a near consistent denial. This was generally due to concerns by the public and chairs of the commission or the council members that the accessory dwelling units would decrease property values and bring undesirable effects, such as an increase in crime or ruin the character of the area.

To support the primary analyses completed, the General Plan of each jurisdiction was utilized to understand the long-range goals for the communities. Both towns made it their primary concern to promote and maintain a rural-small-town composition. This emphasized maintaining the large lot sizes that are predominant in the area. The only portion of their land use goals that address increasing density surround the town cores. The ideal intensity identified for this core district was “medium density”, which would generally see at most 9 units per acre.

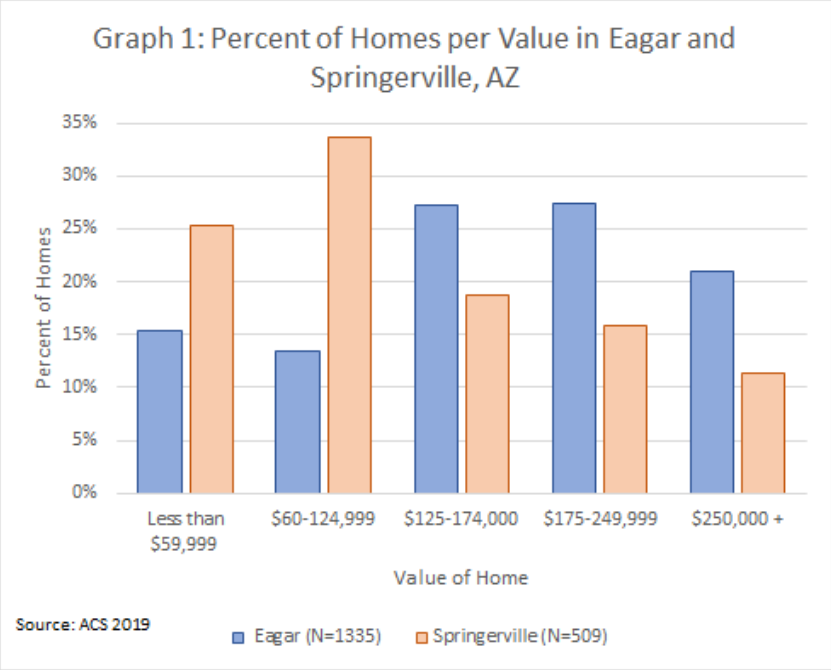
Recommendation:

The most popular strategy to the public and to the parties that comprised both the Planning and Zoning and City Council was the subdivision of parcels. If the residents of Clarkdale are of a similar mindset as the residents of Springerville-Eagar, and due to the Clarkdale zoning code having the same residential zoning designations as the peer communities in this study, the most palatable recommendation would be to adjust the zoning code to allow for smaller parcels. This would allow the residents a perceived freedom to do as they wish with their land and develop additional units that could potentially be added to the available housing inventory of the community. To support this adjustment, incentives to renovate houses in poor conditions and promote higher densities in areas deemed suitable would aid in addressing the ongoing affordability and availability issues within the area.

Appendix

Appendix A: Introduction: Community of Springerville-Eagar

Graph 1: Percent of Homes per Value in Eagar and Springerville, AZ



Graph 2: Percent of Homes Built per Year in Eagar and Springerville, AZ

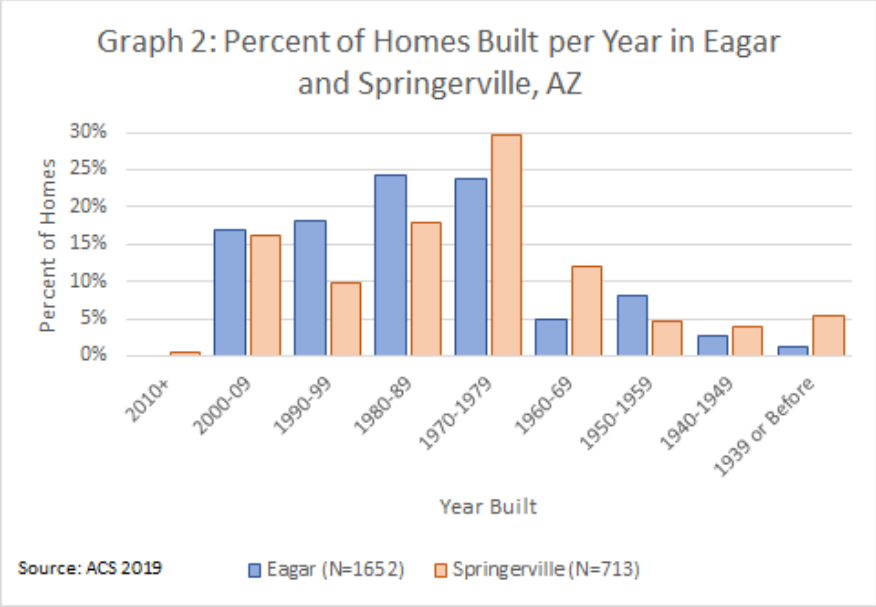


Table 1: Population Pyramid in Eagar, AZ

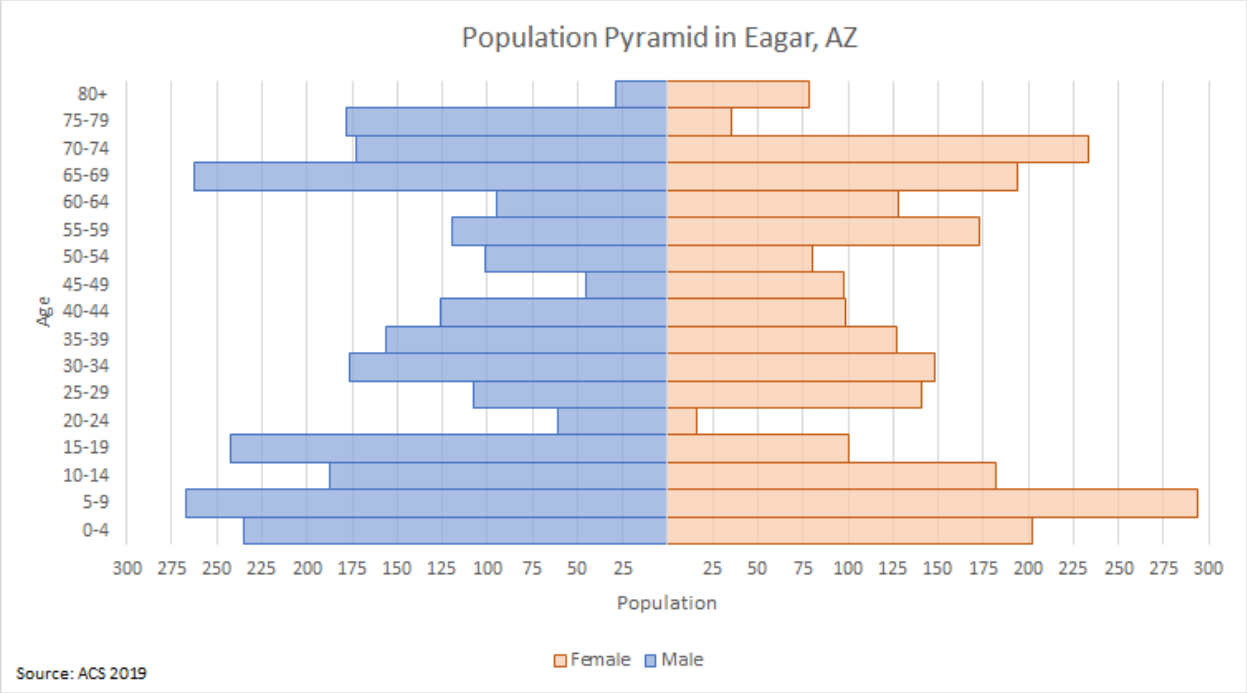


Table 2: Population Pyramid in Springerville, AZ

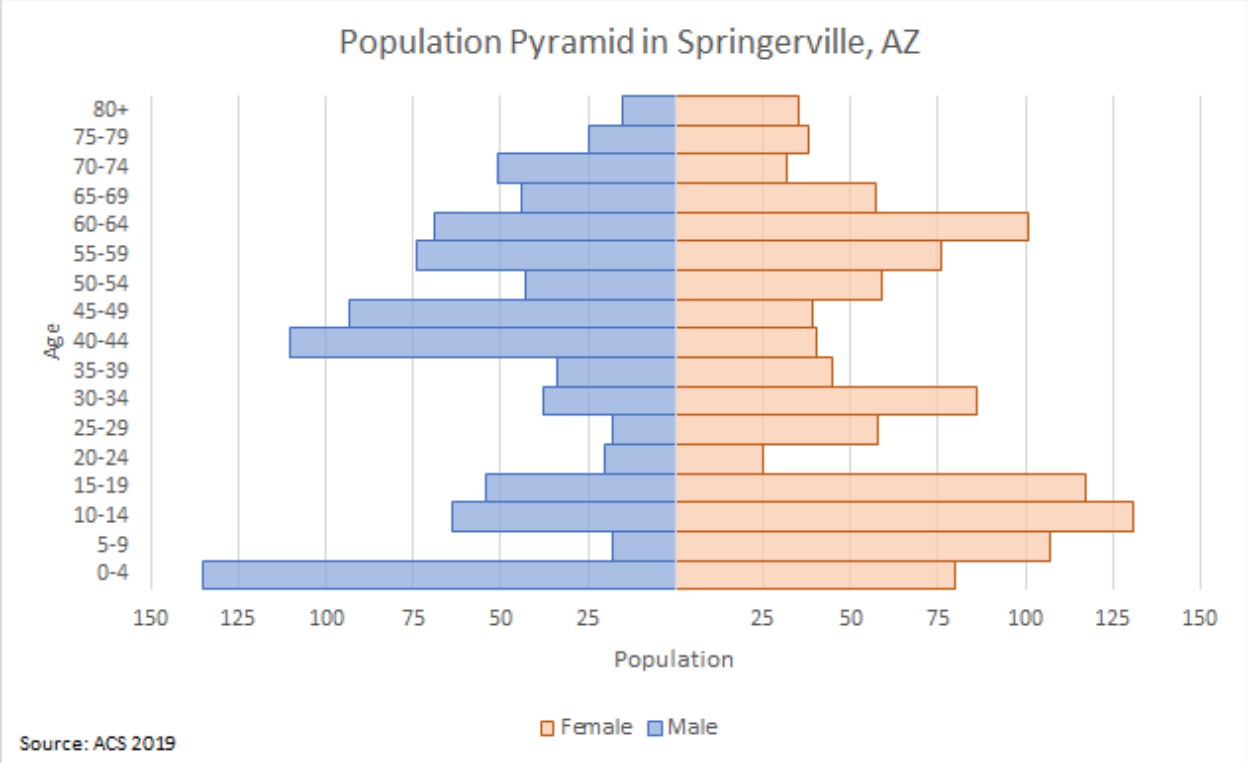
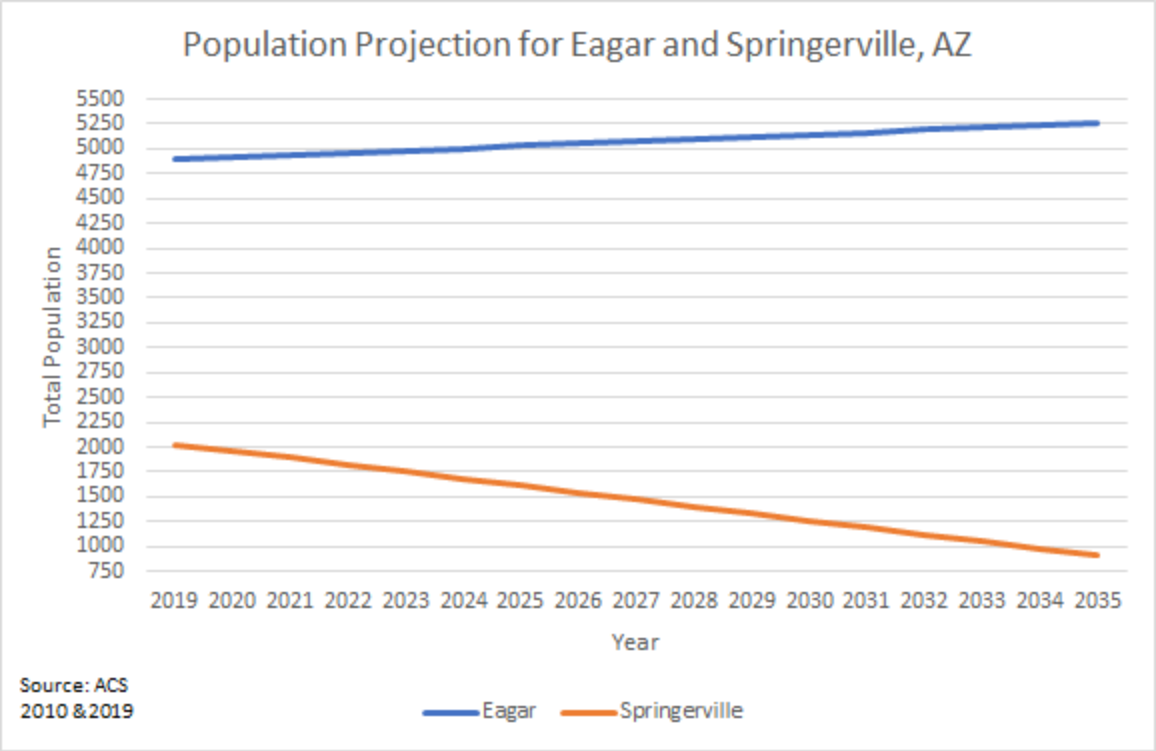


Table 3: Population Projection for Eagar and Springerville, AZ



Appendix B: Data and Methods

Image 1: Aerial of Springerville-Eagar , AZ from Google Maps

Image 2: 1st Ave. Eagar, AZ (Google Street View, 2008).

Image 3 AZ S Eagar St. Eagar, AZ (Google Street View, 2008).

Image 4: W School Bus Dr. Eagar, AZ (Google Street View, 2008)

Image 5: House (S Harless Sr, Eagar, AZ) (Google Street View, 2008)

Image 6: House (S Harless Sr, Eagar, AZ) Current Listing (Zillow.com, 2021)

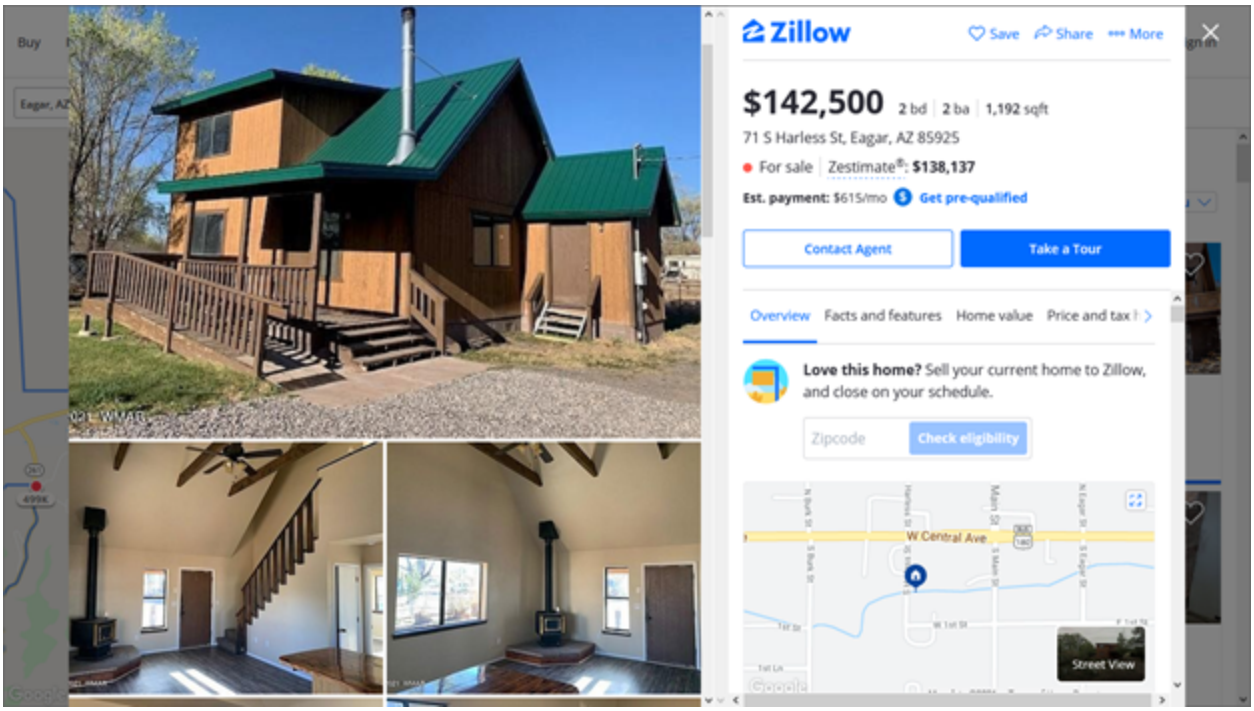
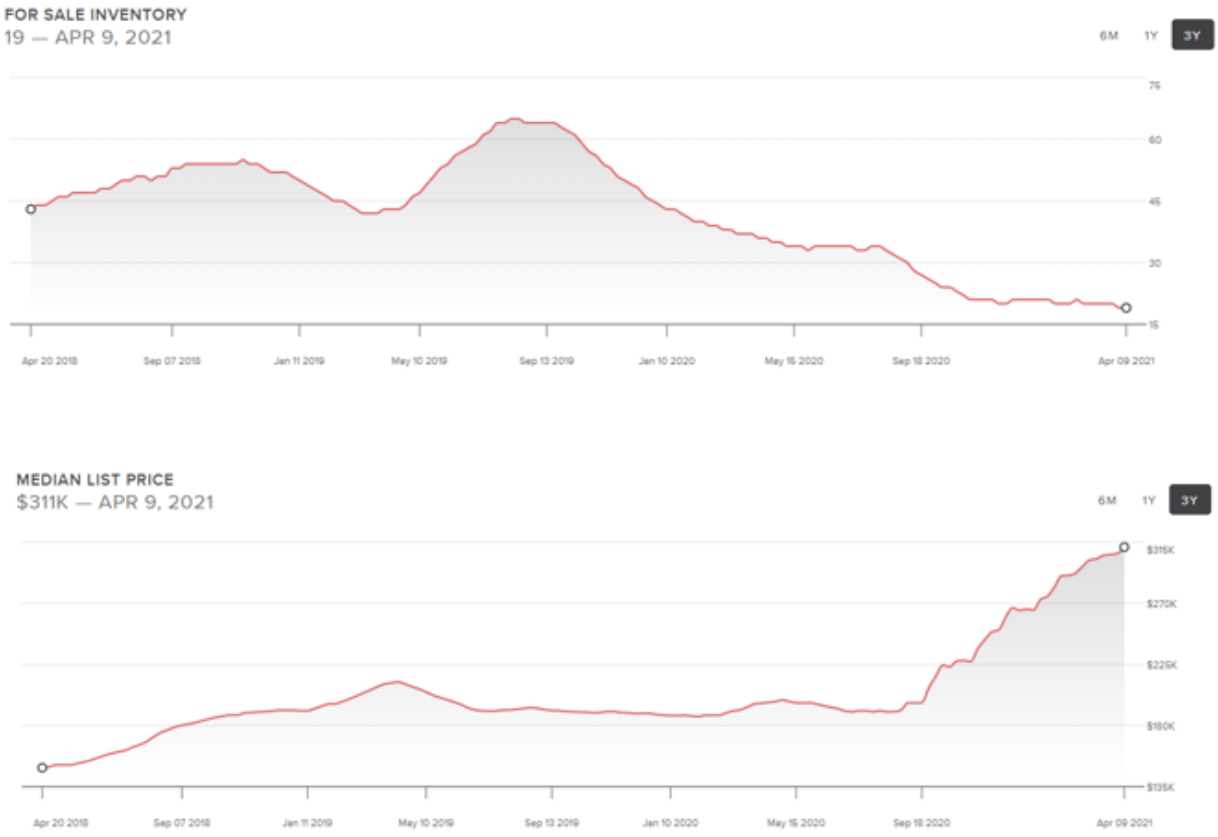


Image 7: Main St and Central Ave, Eagar AZ (Google Street View, 2018)

Graph 1: Eagar, AZ For Sale Inventory & Median List Price, 3-Year Period from April,2018 – April 2021 (rate.com/research/eager-az/market-trends)



Graph 2: Springerville, AZ For Sale Inventory & Median List Price, 3-Year Period from April,2018 – April 2021 (rate.com/research/springerville-az/market-trends)

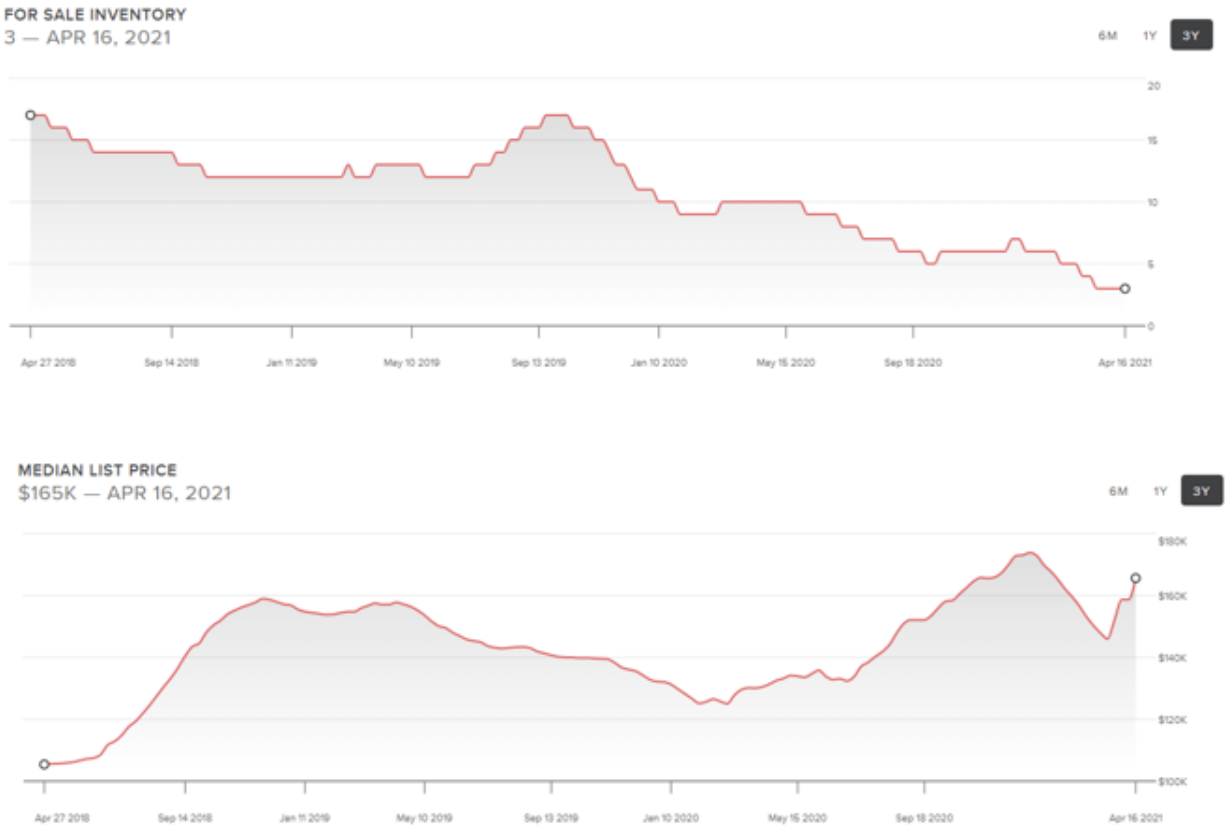


Table 1: Content Analysis of Any Residential Zoning Requests Present in Meeting Minutes

Commission or Council	Date	Item	Issue	Theme	Subtheme	Decisison	Notes
Commission	Aug-18	9	Temporary dwelling	T/AD		Accept	Clear time period, short period (maybe 3-6 months)
Commission	Aug-18	7	Temporary dwelling	T/AD		Accept	Clear time period, short period (maybe 3-6 months)
Commission	Sep-18	9	Mobile Home	T/AD	MH	Accept*	Stipulation MH would not be seen from street
Commission	Jul-19	5	Temporary dwelling	T/AD		Denied	Clear time period, short period (maybe 3-6 months)
Commission	Sep-19	7	Rezoning for MHP	Rezoning	MH	Denied	MHP would have impact on property values, traffic, character of area
Commission	May-20	9	Rezoning from AG to	Rezoning	SF	Approve	Rezoning to allow for subdivision of parcel
Commission	Sep-20	8	Rezoning from R1-10	Rezoning	SF	Approve	Unanimous approval to allow for zoning change to allow for subdivision of parcels
Comission	Sep-20	6	Rezoning from R1-10	Rezoning	SF	Approve	Unanimous approval to allow for zoning change to allow for subdivision of parcels
Comission	Nov-20	7	Temp RV Use	T/AD		Approve	Temp RV use on lot during home construction
Comission	Dec-20	7	Rezoning from AG to	Rezoning	SF	Approve	Rezoning to allow for subdivision of parcel
Commission	Dec-20	9	Condition Use Permit	MHP		Tabled	Condition Use Permit for mobile home park, long discussion and