

## Highlights - April 2026

Recent data reflects an economy that continues to send mixed signals with (mostly AI-driven) growth, persistent inflationary pressures, and structural challenges in labor markets that are becoming more pronounced. Our state, in particular, showed job losses in 2025, which is alarmingly different than decades prior. I discuss this in more detail below.

At the national level, economic growth as measured by GDP for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2025 was revised down to just 0.5% annualized growth, or 2.0% year-over-year, a notable step down from earlier expectations. However, in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2026 (just released), [Real GDP {Page 3}](#) returned to trend levels at a 2.0% annualized rate. This is the first release, which can have significant revisions. The Q1 growth was mostly driven by AI investment and decent growth in consumer spending. As I've discussed before, while still increasing consumer spending may appear positive on the surface, it is increasingly concentrated among higher-income households, contributing to what many economists describe as a "[K-shaped economic environment](#)." It is also important to remember that when we look at consumption indicators like U.S. "retail sales" those sales are expressed in dollars, meaning higher sales incorporate *higher prices*. The same is true for [Local Sales and Use Tax {Page 7}](#), which rose 6.7% year-over-year in March. This tempers commentary from some who say, "The economy is doing great – look at how people are spending!" We have to remember *who* is spending (disproportionately higher income groups), how much of that increased "spending" is due to *inflation*, and how (disproportionately lower income groups) are *relying on credit cards* for their spending. Hence, the "mixed signals" in terms of economic indicators.

Consumer sentiment reinforces this cautionary tone about spending and inflation impacts. The [University of Michigan Consumer Sentiment Index {Page 3}](#) fell from 53.3 in March to 49.8 in April, the *lowest ever recorded since 1946*. The April decline was broad-based across age, income, and political groups. Consumers reported worsening views of current conditions, declining expectations for the future, and ever rising concern over [Inflation {Page 3}](#) which rose 0.9% in March to 3.3% (the "core" rate without energy and food was still high at 2.6%). Consumers expect inflation to increase in one year (to 3.8%) while buying conditions for homes, vehicles, and durable goods deteriorated significantly. Much of this decline has been attributed to geopolitical instability and rising prices.

It is interesting to me that there is enough uncertainty (and inflation) that higher income groups are now also negatively impacting overall consumer sentiment. It's "bougie," but some of my friends who own second homes or commercial real estate are bitterly complaining about their property insurance as one major example of inflationary pressures. For those who do not have fixed mortgages, higher interest rates today also represent a material increase in household costs. The "average" person may not sympathize much with the "have yachts," but if higher income cohorts are driving most of the consumption (and business activity) in the U.S., their lack of confidence is likely to translate to lower consumption patterns at some point. While Republicans unsurprisingly have higher sentiment than Democrats in the UM survey, it is notable that Republican's sentiment is also declining as of late.

Labor market data continues to show resilience on the surface, but underlying trends suggest more meaningful softening, particularly in Colorado. Most notably, our state had job losses in 2025 of 7,700, which is a decline (-0.3%) while the U.S. increased (+0.5%). According to [Ryan Gedney](#) (former senior economist for CDLE), for almost half of the years since 1961, Colorado has ranked in the top 10 states for job growth. As such, 2025 was an unusual year for our state.

With respect to [Unemployment Rates {Page 3}](#), the U.S. rate declined to 4.3% in March. Colorado's rate in February was almost identical at 4.4%, and El Paso County stood at 4.6%. (February is the latest month available for CO and EPC.) The demographics I always talk about are evident in the fact that there is so much business uncertainty, and yet unemployment rates remain low. What we have now is a stagnant labor market coined as the "[low hire, low fire](#)" dynamic. I have some nuances in that segment if you have interest.

The statewide job loss dynamic is also apparent locally as I've noted in previous reports. El Paso County lost 3,079 jobs between 2024 Q3 and 2025 Q3 based on the latest available data. At the same time, job openings in the Colorado Springs MSA increased significantly from 14,501 in January (a traditionally low hire month) to 17,644 in March. It's obviously favorable to have a high number of job openings, but the imbalance underscores a structural mismatch between locally available skills and employer needs. One clear example is in education. Secondary school teachers returned to the list of top 10 job openings (215 for secondary school teachers alone), reflecting ongoing workforce shortages and, in this case, of critical or essential workers.

But here's some great news. In response, Pikes Peak State College is expanding its role in workforce development. The college recently launched a new Bachelor of Applied Science degree in elementary education designed to address Colorado's teacher shortage. It is specifically designed for recent graduates, paraprofessionals, career changers, and military-affiliated students. This meaningfully helps retain talent locally while directly responding to workforce needs. We (DDES) are thrilled to be part of another stellar program at PPSC: the D2 Promise Scholarship program, which provides free PPSC tuition to Harrison School District (D2) high school graduates. For a plethora of high-demand

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# El Paso County Economic & Workforce Progress Report (EPR)

jobs, including teachers, Promise Scholarships can completely redefine a student and their future household's wealth and standard of living prospects – and that change typically perpetuates to future generations.

Shifting to real estate, the Federal Reserve kept interest rates steady this past week, so real estate activity will likely stay muted. Nationwide, home prices are projected to increase roughly 2% over the year, which is actually lower than the current rate of inflation (3.3%). U.S. home builders are particularly pessimistic with their (NAHB) sentiment index at 34 in April (50 is neutral). Current sales conditions, buyer traffic, and six-month expectations all declined. In terms of **Median Colorado Springs Existing Home Prices {Page 6}**, we've had a decline (-1.7%) from 2024 Q4 to 2025 Q4 while prices were up 1.2% across the U.S. If we can figure out how to build more locally, especially in the affordable range, it's possible our moderating prices may moderate further, which would be a boon, especially given our lower local wages. It's challenging with materials and labor costing as much as they do, but some projects are moving forward.

For example, Sugarbowl Grove (117 units) and Trinity Apartments (75 units) recently received predevelopment funding through Proposition 123's Concessionary Debt program. These developments will serve older adults earning 60% or less of area median income and are supported through a mix of state funding, grants, and innovative construction approaches, including modular building techniques. Given some of the research I've done around aging in place, I can confidently say this is fantastic, and we need more of this. While there is a lot of attention on Boomers who are comfortable homeowners who don't want to move with no (or low rate) mortgages, there are also a lot of seniors who rent and/or are severely (housing) cost burdened without any income other than Social Security. Today, El Paso County has about 107,000 seniors, and by 2050, we will have nearly 170,000 seniors. This is a population we need to focus on in the bigger picture of shifting demographics, housing security, and caring for the vulnerable in our community.

It's worth noting that I have been keeping my eye on nationwide and local foreclosure rates. Those rates are nowhere near Great Recession levels, but the trend is moving in the wrong direction with 118,727 foreclosures in the U.S. during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of this year which is an increase of 26% year over year. The uptick is largely due to homes that had variable rate loans that expired (and had to now be refinanced at ~6.5% mortgage rates), increasing homeowner's insurance premiums, and overall higher price levels impacting overall household budgets.

The broader real estate market reflects these pressures. Apartment vacancy rates in Colorado Springs stood at 13.1%, which is higher than both Denver and Salt Lake City, while rental rates decreased by ~\$50/month compared to last year. Commercial vacancy rates also increased across office, retail, and medical spaces, even as rents rose in several categories. That may mean there is a mixed market out there, which would fit national trends. Premium, desirable properties get rented quickly, whereas older properties often lay vacant for a long time.

In terms of local quality of life, two annual metrics have been updated. **Air Quality {Page 7}** data for 2025 show encouraging trends. Carbon monoxide levels remain well below national standards, and particulate matter has declined compared to the previous year. While ozone levels in some areas remain slightly above federal thresholds, overall environmental conditions remain favorable. Now we just need to hope and pray for no significant fires as that impacts all three measures of air quality significantly (albeit through different mechanisms).

In terms of safety, newly updated CDC homicide data for 2024 showed encouraging declines nationally and statewide, but an increase locally (note this data lags and is for 2024). The U.S. **Homicide Rate {Page 7}** fell from 6.7 per 100,000 in 2023 to 5.8 in 2024, with the total number of homicides dropping from 22,425 to 19,743, the lowest since 2019. Colorado's rate fell from 6.1 to 5.0, with homicides declining from 360 to 295, also the lowest since 2019. In contrast, the Colorado Springs MSA homicide rate rose from 7.4 to 7.8 per 100,000, and the number of homicides increased from 57 to 61. However, more recent *local* "violent crime" rates, which include homicides and other forms of violent crime, came down in 2025 according to the Real-Time Crime Index. We recently looked at that source versus the Colorado Springs Police Department data and found that categorization of data isn't exactly the same, but overall trends do move in the same direction (with moderate violent crime declines in our city over the past year).

And quality of life is huge as it is our day-to-day life. As such, even with the state and local headwinds, I believe living in Colorado Springs remains a privilege. Our high **Educational Attainment {Page 5}** levels bode well for business attraction, business growth and new business formation. This in tandem with our natural resources continues to make our region and state one of the most desirable places to live and work. In other words, the fundamentals are all there (smart people and environment). Yes, other things matter like policies, regulations, funding high ROI initiatives (like education and childcare), but we have bankable assets in Colorado. The challenge moving forward will be capitalizing on these advantages and ensuring significant barriers to our own growth are removed or mitigated (e.g., the Colorado bipartisan bill, SB26-137, reviewing and reforming state regulations). In turn, this can ensure that growth is both sustainable and inclusive, so that our assets stay put and future generations can reap the benefits as we have.

Tatiana & Rebecca

If you wish to unsubscribe from this monthly report, please email [rwilder@ddestrategies.org](mailto:rwilder@ddestrategies.org). If you'd like to know more about supporting our economic reporting and workforce development initiatives, please contact [info@ddestrategies.org](mailto:info@ddestrategies.org).

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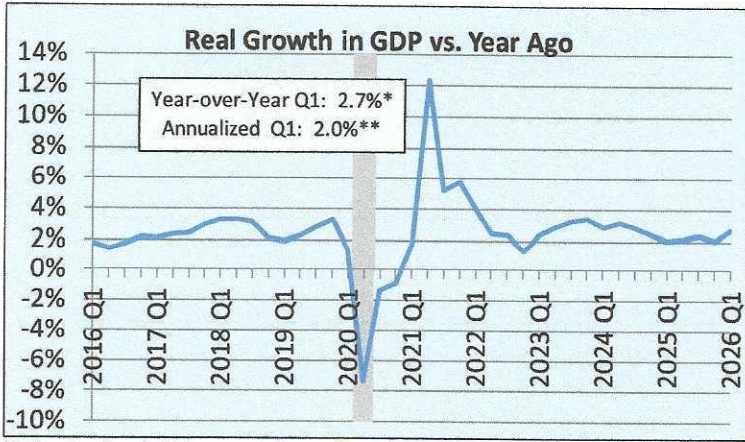
[Page 6 - Real Estate](#)

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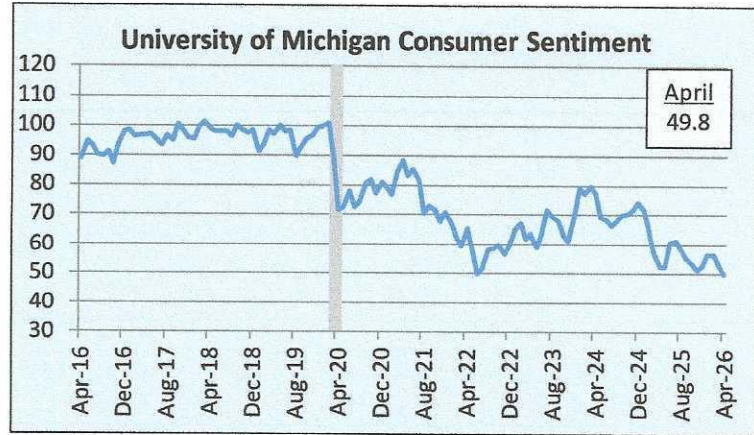
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## MACROECONOMIC "BIG PICTURE" (PAGE 3)



\*Estimate of real GDP percent change from same quarter a year ago, SA  
 \*\*If quarterly changes were annualized over the year.  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



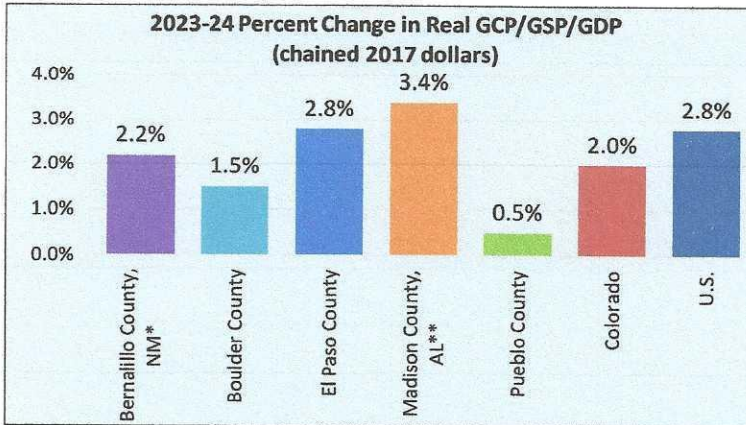
Source: University of Michigan

|                   | 2024 Actual | 2025 Actual | 2026 Forecast | 2027 Forecast |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Real GDP Growth   | 2.8%        | 2.1%        | 1.6%          | 1.5%          |
| Unemployment Rate | 4.0%        | 4.3%        | 4.7%          | 4.8%          |

\*Rate is actual average for 2025 excluding October which is unavailable due to the government shutdown.  
 Forecasts by Data-Driven Economic Strategies with input from the Conference Board, Wells Fargo, Colorado Department of Labor & Employment, and other anecdotal resources.  
 Sources: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



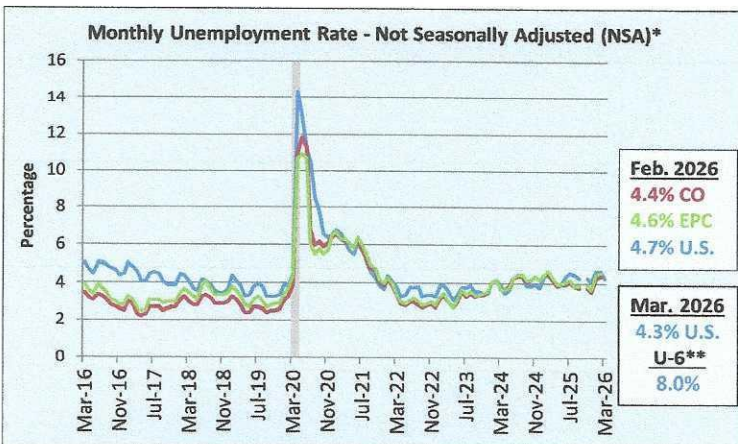
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Job openings data lags.



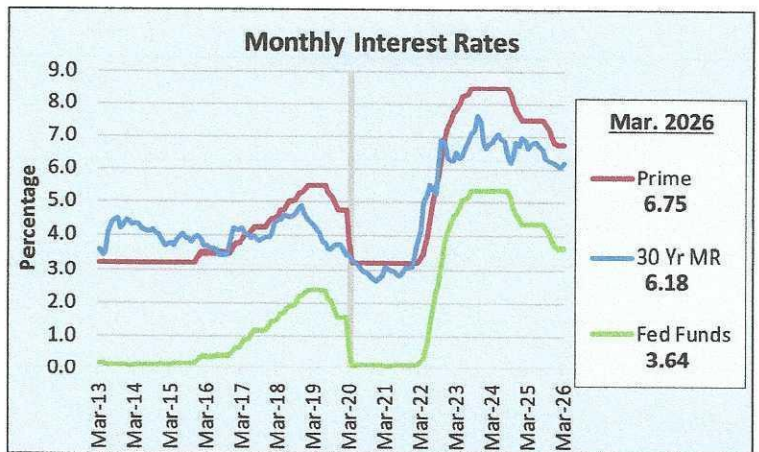
Note: Data includes military. This regional data lags ~23 months.  
 \*This county makes up all of Albuquerque, NM.  
 \*\*This county makes up half of Huntsville, AL.  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

|   | All items | Less food & energy |
|---|-----------|--------------------|
| Change from February to March 2026 (SA) | 0.9%      | 0.2%               |
| Last 12-months (NSA)                    | 3.3%      | 2.6%               |

The 2025 cost of living in the Colorado Springs MSA was 100.9% of the U.S. according to C2ER data provided by the CS Chamber & EDC.  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; all urban consumers (CPI-U)



Note: Data in the graph is NSA to enable comparisons with counties. Local data is delayed until May this year.  
 \*Seasonally adjusted, the U.S. rate in Feb. was 4.4% and Mar. was 4.3%.  
 \*\*U-6 includes unemployed, those marginally attached to the labor force, plus those employed part time who would prefer full-time work.  
 Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; CO Dept. of Labor & Employment



Source: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System

## LOCAL LABOR MARKET (PAGE 4)

### Top Job Openings, Colorado Springs MSA March 2026

| Top Job Titles                        | # of Job Postings | Median Advertised Salary |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Registered Nurses                     | 765               | \$93,440                 |
| Retail Salespersons                   | 542               | \$36,736                 |
| Software Developers                   | 341               | \$140,032                |
| 1st-Line Supervisors, Retail Sales    | 334               | \$47,744                 |
| Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers | 332               | \$72,064                 |
| Computer Sys Engineers/Architects     | 239               | \$140,032                |
| Customer Service Reps                 | 227               | \$40,576                 |
| Secondary School Teachers             | 215               | \$67,840                 |
| Maintenance & Repair Workers          | 215               | \$48,768                 |
| Personal Care Aides                   | 205               | \$38,784                 |

### Colorado Springs MSA, February 2026

TOTAL Job Openings: 15,641

TOTAL Unemployed: 17,684

Workers Available per Job Opening: 1.13

Sources: The Conference Board®-Lightcast® Help Wanted OnLine® via Pikes Peak Workforce Center; CO Dept. of Labor & Employment

| 2024 Federal Poverty Level (FPL)  |                |       |
|---|----------------|-------|
|   | El Paso County | U.S.  |
| % people at FPL or below  | 8.5%           | 12.1% |
| Note: FPL in 2024 was \$15,060 for an individual and \$31,200 for a family of four. |                |       |

### 2025 Q3 Average Annual Wages for All Industries

**El Paso County wages are 8.3% lower than U.S. wages and 14.7% lower than CO wages.**

| U.S.   | Colorado | El Paso County |
|--|----------|----------------|
| \$75,868   | \$81,588 | \$69,576       |
| 2025 Q3 El Paso County Total Employment*   |          | 308,411        |
| *Estimated military employment in 2024 (and % of total 2024 EPC who are military). |          | 59,183 (16.1%) |

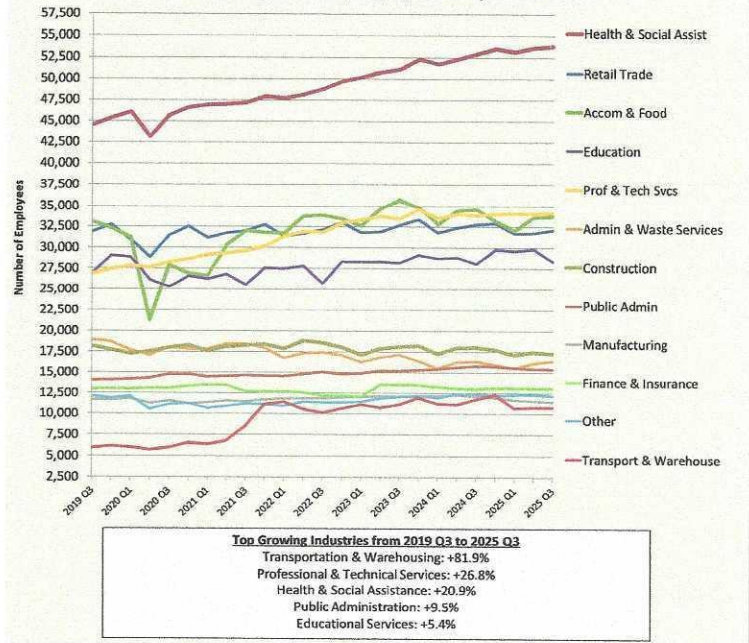
### 2025-26 Minimum Wage & Living Wage El Paso County

|   | Wage/Hr | Annualized |
|---|---------|------------|
| Minimum wage salary for full-time worker                | \$15.16 | \$31,533   |
| Living wage: HHs with 1 adult, 2 children               | \$62.65 | \$130,312  |
| Living wage: HHs with 2 adults (1 working), 2 children  | \$42.89 | \$89,211   |
| Living wage: HHs with 2 adults* (2 working), 2 children | \$32.52 | \$67,642   |

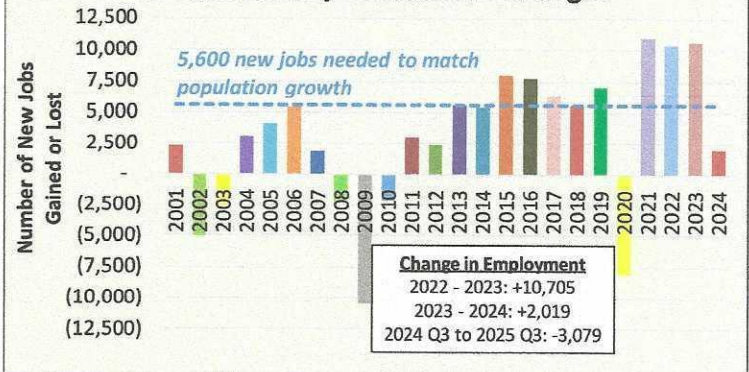
\*Living wage is for each working adult. For specifics, go to [livingwage.mit.edu](https://livingwage.mit.edu).

\*QCEW data does not include military-related employees.  
Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, QCEW; Local military installations; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year estimates; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; MIT Living Wage Calculator

### El Paso County Quarterly Employees in Top 12 Sectors

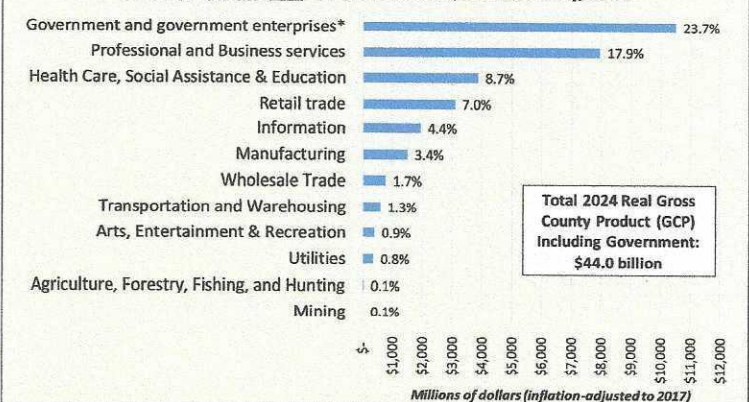


### El Paso County Annual Job Changes



An estimated 5,600 new jobs are needed based upon population growth and age composition. This QCEW data lags up to three quarters and includes public and private employment, but not military-related employees.  
Source: Colorado Dept. of Labor & Employment, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)

### Real GCP Contribution by Private Sectors, El Paso County, 2024

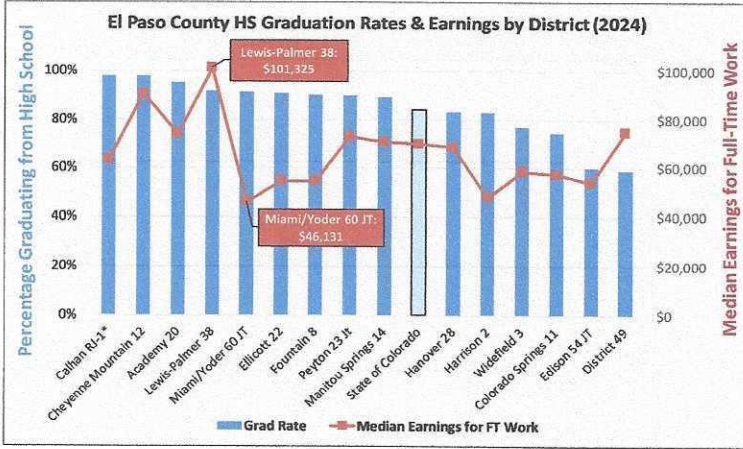


\*Government and Government Enterprises sector includes market and nonmarket goods/services. Examples of nonmarket include public safety and education, and market enterprises include postal service, airports, utilities (in some regions), transit systems, etc.  
GCP (local) data lags by approximately 23 months. GCP is the same as GDP for the nation but at the local level.  
Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

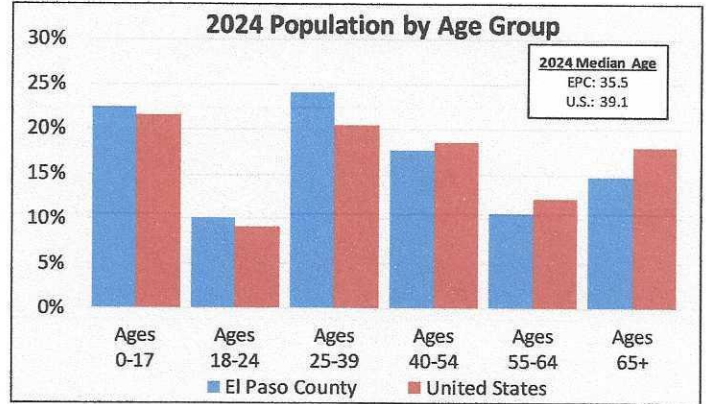
## DEMOGRAPHICS (PAGE 5)

| Population Estimates |           |           |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                      | 2024      | 2060      |
| El Paso County       | 752,892   | 1,023,604 |
| Colorado             | 5,956,729 | 7,544,962 |

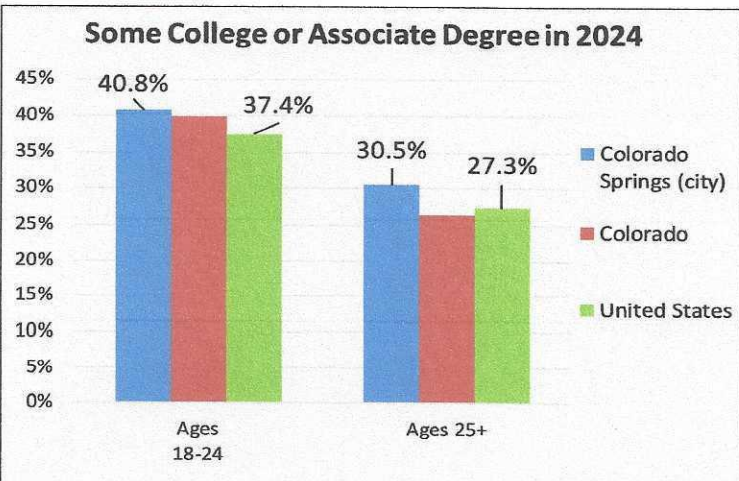
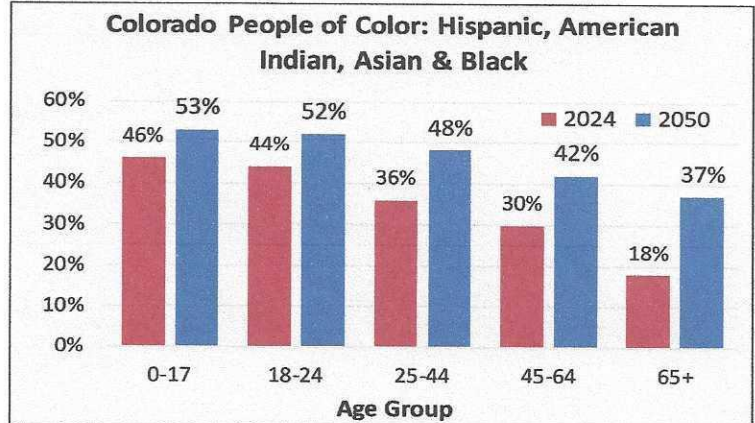
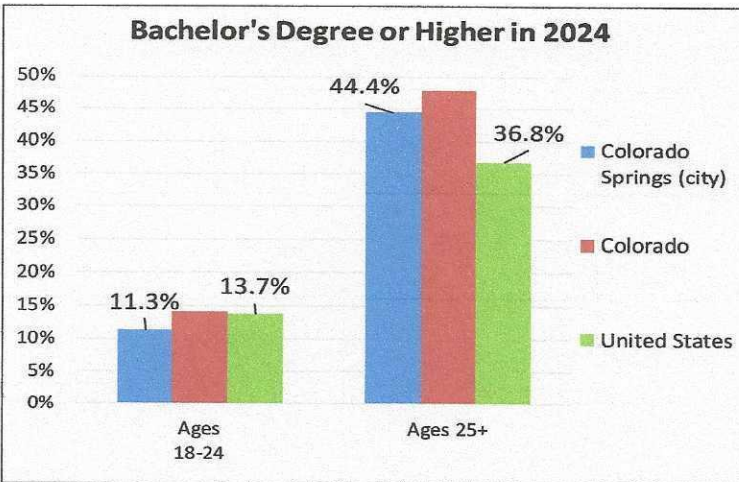
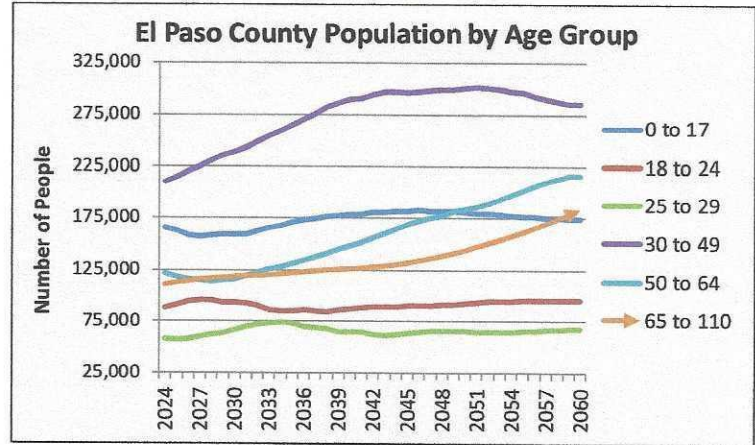
The City of Colorado Springs had a population of 494,808 in 2024.  
Source: Colorado State Demography Office



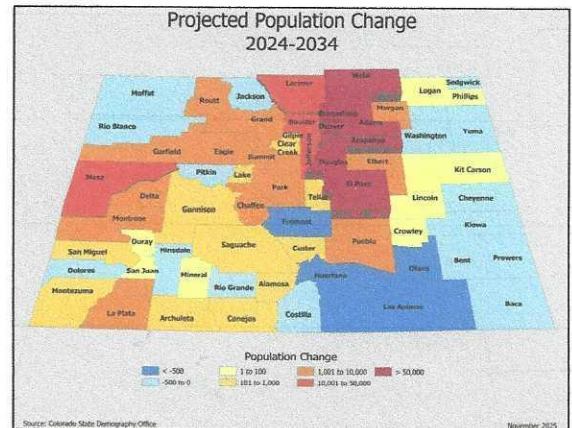
Note: Calhan, Ellicott, Peyton, Hanover, Edison, and Miami/Yoder districts all have fewer than 100 students. District 49 has a significant number of online students, which pull down the districtwide average. (Without the largest online school, the district average is 87%.) \*Calhan had ≥ 98% graduation rate.  
Sources: Colorado Department of Education; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division

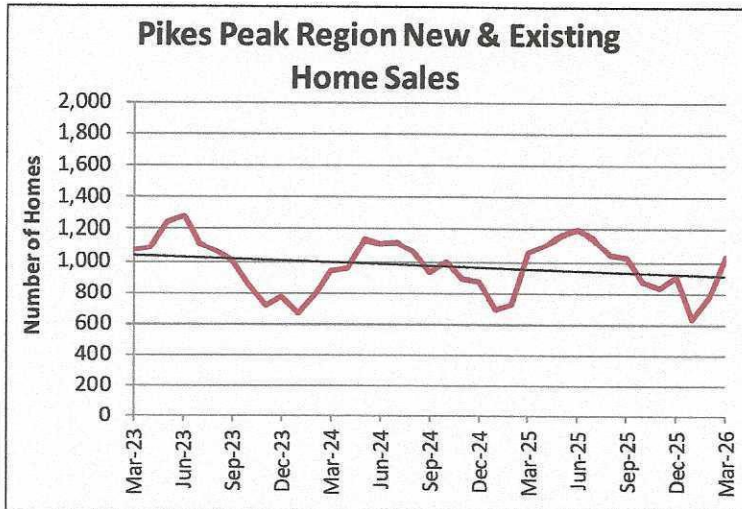


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year estimates

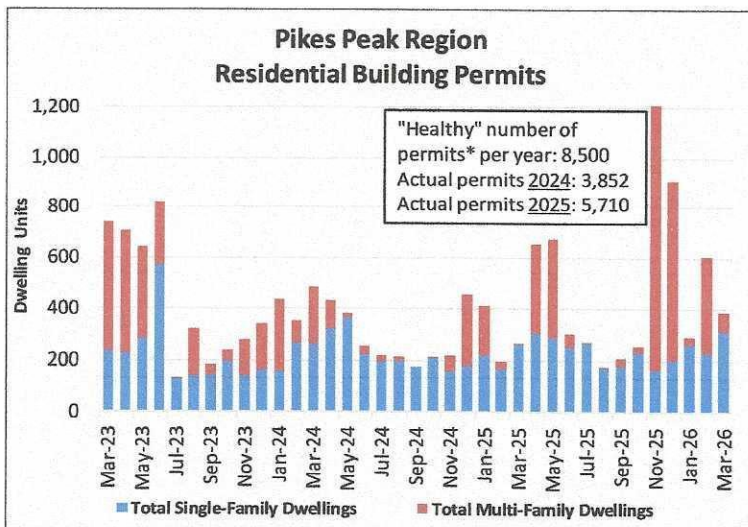


Note: The Colorado People of Color data is vintage 2024.  
Source: Colorado State Demography Office

## REAL ESTATE (PAGE 6)



Source: Pikes Peak REALTOR® Services Corp.



\*The methodology for "healthy permits" now includes single-family and multi-family dwellings needed if we incorporate both population growth and the existing shortage of housing between 2023 and 2028. These calculations by Data-Driven Economic Strategies incorporate research by Common Sense Institute and input from the Colorado State Demography Office. The National Association of REALTORS® has calculated that the U.S. has underbuilt roughly 6.5 million homes since the Great Recession. Source: Pikes Peak Regional Building Department

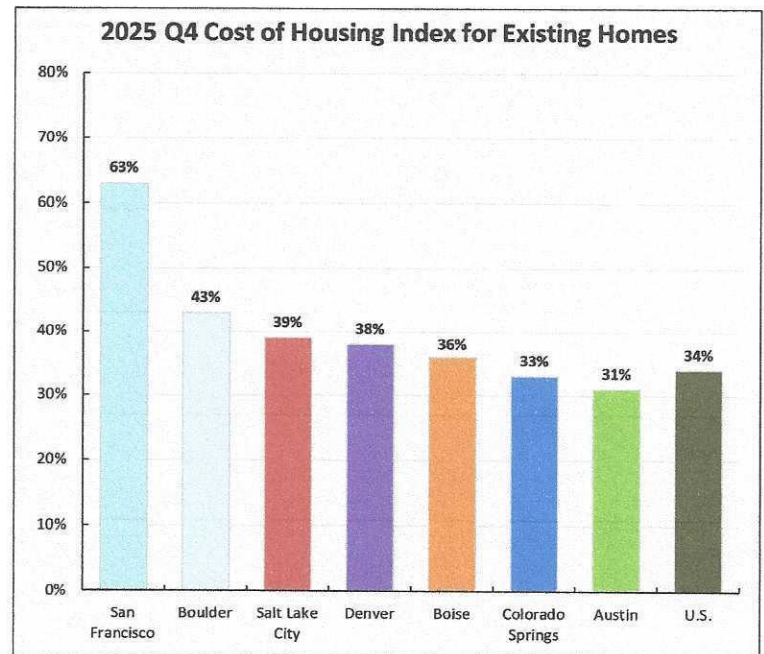


Sources: CoStar Group™; Olive Real Estate Group, Inc.

### Median Existing Single-Family Home Price 2025 Q4

| Location               | Colorado Springs | Denver        | Boise         | United States |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Price</b>           | \$456,200        | \$644,100     | \$489,000     | \$414,900     |
| <b>1-year % Change</b> | 1.7% decrease    | 1.0% decrease | 1.3% increase | 1.2% increase |
| <b>MSA Rank</b>        | 54               | 21            | 41            | n/a           |

Sources: National Association of REALTORS®



Notes: The Cost of Housing Index (CHI) is defined as the percentage of the local median pre-tax income needed for mortgage payments, based on standard mortgage underwriting criteria. It includes only existing home prices. Sources: National Association of Home Builders; Wells Fargo

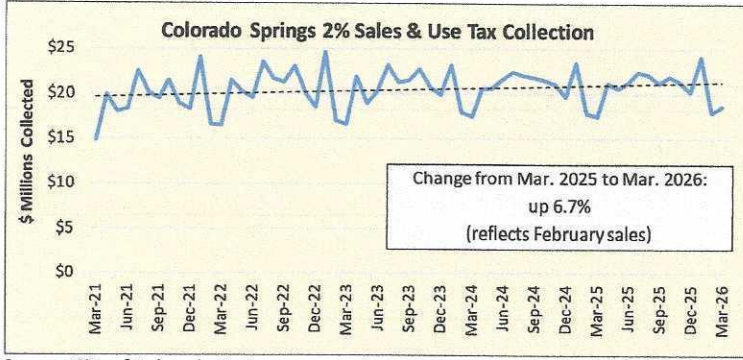
### Apartment Rental Information

|                                  | Colorado Springs | Denver  | Salt Lake City |
|----------------------------------|------------------|---------|----------------|
| <b>Market Conditions 2025 Q4</b> | <b>Soft</b>      | Soft    | Slightly Soft  |
| <b>Vacancy Rate 2024 Q4</b>      | 14.4%            | 11.4%   | 10.8%          |
| <b>Vacancy Rate 2025 Q4</b>      | <b>13.1%</b>     | 12.2%   | 11.3%          |
| <b>Average Rent 2024 Q4</b>      | \$1,504          | \$1,839 | \$1,622        |
| <b>Average Rent 2025 Q4</b>      | <b>\$1,457</b>   | \$1,777 | \$1,591        |

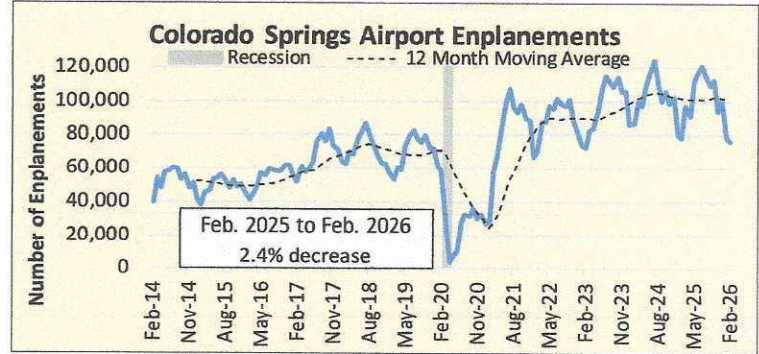
Source: U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Market Conditions report

# El Paso County Economic & Workforce Progress Report (EPR)

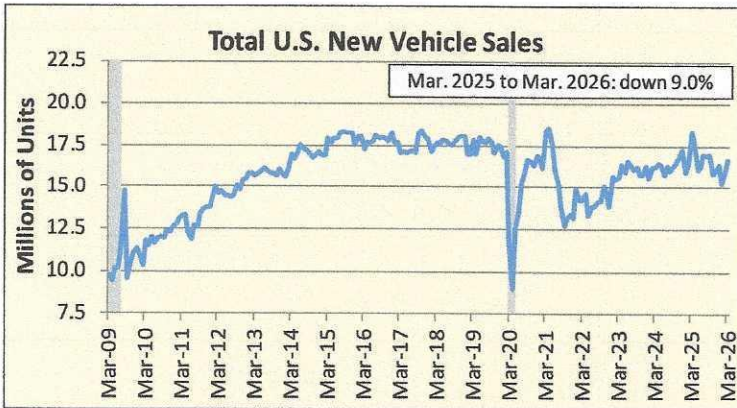
## TAXATION, VEHICLE SALES, AIR QUALITY, AND TOURISM (PAGE 7)



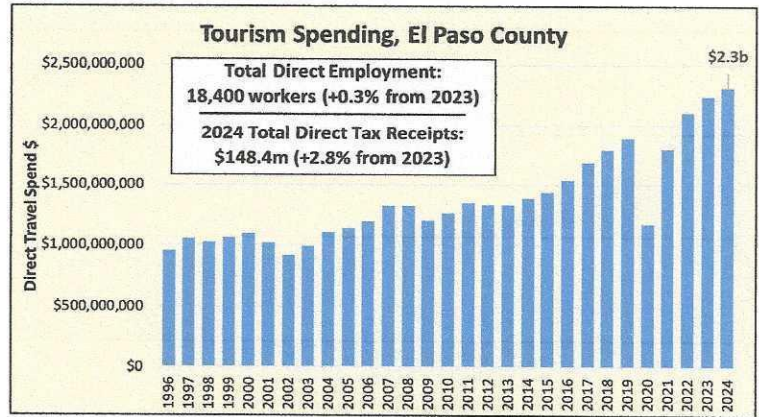
Source: City of Colorado Springs



Source: Colorado Springs Airport



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



Note: Direct travel includes day and overnight visitors.  
Source: Colorado Tourism Office

| 2025 Air Quality                         |                   |               |
|--|-------------------|---------------|
|  | Colorado Springs* | U.S. Standard |
| Carbon Monoxide (CO) Concentration (ppm) | 0.7               | 9.0           |
| Particulate Matter (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )  | 4.74              | 9.00          |
| Ozone (ppm) at USAFA                     | 0.068             | 0.070         |
| Ozone (ppm) at Manitou Springs           | 0.073             | 0.070         |

\*Locations of measurements: CO and Particulate Matter at Colorado College

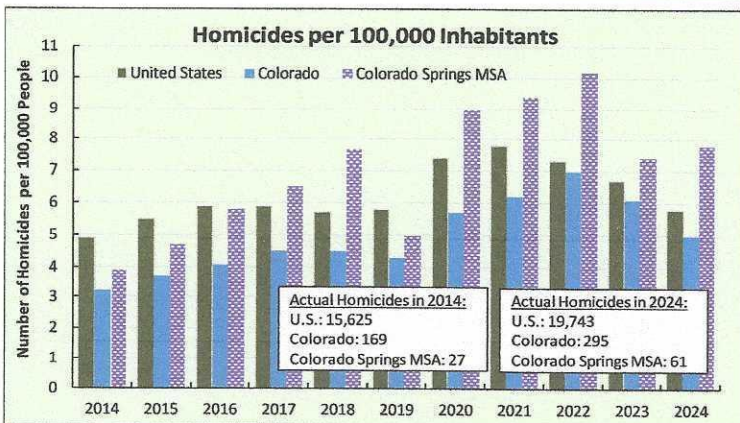
Source: Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

| Hotel Occupancy Rate<br>March 2026 |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Colorado Springs                   | Denver |
| 59.1%                              | 65.8%  |

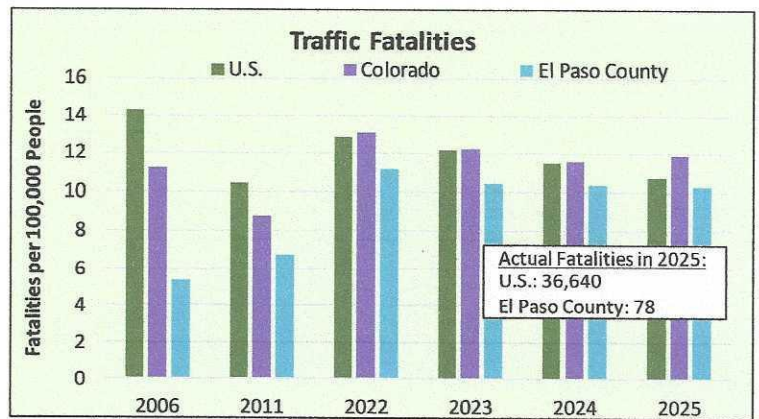
| Hotel RevPAR*<br>March 2026 |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Colorado Springs            | Denver  |
| \$65.43                     | \$94.43 |

\*RevPAR measures hotel revenue by taking the average room rate times hotel occupancy.  
Source: CoStar Group™; Olive Real Estate Group, Inc.

## CRIME & SAFETY (PAGE 7)



Source: United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Underlying Cause of Death on CDC WONDER online Database.



Sources: National Highway Safety Administration; Colorado Department of Transportation; World Bank; U.S. Census Bureau; Colorado State Demography Offices; Data-Driven Economic Strategies

| 2023 Mortality Rates due to Homicide per 100,000 Population |         |       |       |               |
|---|---------|-------|-------|---------------|
| Canada  | Germany | Italy | Japan | United States |
| 2.0   | 0.9     | 0.6   | 0.2   | 5.8           |

Sources: UN, World Population Prospects (2024); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2025) – with major processing by Our World in Data

Note: "Each year when Crime in the United States is published, some entities use reported figures to compile rankings of cities and counties. These rough rankings provide no insight into the numerous variables that mold crime in a particular town, city, county, state, or region. Consequently, they lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting communities and their residents. Valid assessments are possible only with careful study and analysis of the range of unique conditions affecting each local law enforcement jurisdiction. The data user is, therefore, cautioned against comparing statistical data of individual reporting units from cities, metropolitan areas, states, or colleges or universities solely on the basis of their population coverage or student enrollment."  
- Federal Bureau of Investigation

| Sworn Police Officers<br>Per 10,000 Inhabitants In 2024 |      |
|---|------|
| City of Colorado Springs                                | 14.8 |
| City of Boise   | 14.0 |
| Kansas City   | 21.6 |
| City of Omaha   | 17.0 |

Sources: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Report; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division

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## SUPPORTERS (PAGE 8)



# THANK YOU!