

# MHP & Denali Borough: Force Field Analysis Summary – Housing System

## Overview and Purpose

Denali Borough is facing a range of housing challenges including limited supply, seasonal workforce fluctuations, aging infrastructure, and barriers to development readiness. These issues are widespread, affecting communities across the borough such as Anderson, Healy, McKinley Village, Cantwell, and several smaller unincorporated communities and subdivisions. Although the borough benefits from significant land assets and a strong sense of place, persistent constraints (such as infrastructure gaps, land and title complexities, high construction costs, and workforce shortages) continue to hinder housing development and undermine long-term community stability.

In response, Denali Borough proactively engaged MHP for technical assistance to better understand these challenges and identify practical, community-aligned solutions. With support from HUD’s Rural Capacity Building grant, MHP is providing targeted assistance that includes a comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment, tailored community engagement strategies, and feasibility support for priority housing initiatives. These efforts aim to move the borough from problem identification toward actionable strategies that enhance housing stability and long-term resilience.

As an early step in this engagement, MHP facilitated a Force Field Analysis workshop on November 12, 2025, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders from across the borough. Participants included representatives from local government, major employers, community leaders, and sectors connected to housing, workforce, and infrastructure development.

The workshop served as a structured exercise to identify the key forces shaping the local housing system, both the drivers that support progress and the barriers that impede it. The result was a clear, shared picture of current conditions across Denali communities, helping local leaders and partners name high-leverage opportunities for strategic intervention.

## Summary of Findings

### **1. Driving Forces (What’s Working in Denali Borough)**

Participants identified several strengths that support housing development:

#### ***Land, Nature & Community***

- Abundant vacant and developable land
- Natural beauty that attracts and retains residents
- Strong, close-knit community identity

#### ***Economic & Workforce Strengths***

- Many employers offering good-paying jobs

- Economic growth and year-round employment
- Willing buyers and a local bank

### ***Regulatory Flexibility***

- No property taxes
- No building codes
- Minimal local compliance requirements
- Unrestrictive zoning and openness to innovation

### ***Community Assets & Services***

- Outdoor recreation and community events
- Airport, grocery store, and basic services
- School-to-work programs
- Employers are motivated to help workers find housing

**Takeaway:** Denali Borough has strong fundamentals — land, jobs, community cohesion, and flexibility. These conditions create potential for housing solutions *if they can be leveraged effectively*.

## **2. Restraining Forces (What’s Getting in the Way)**

### ***Housing Market Constraints***

This was the largest and most frequent category of barriers.

Participants repeatedly noted:

- Extremely high construction and renovation costs
- Too few available homes
- Older housing stock needing major upgrades
- Low rental availability
- Construction costs exceeding home values
- Limited contractors

**Implication:** Even if demand is high, the economics of building in Denali currently don’t work.

### ***Workforce Challenges***

A close second in frequency:

- Not enough construction workers
- Difficulty attracting tradespeople
- Limited contractor availability
- Retention challenges
- Wages don’t match cost of living or building

**Implication:** The borough lacks the labor capacity needed to meet housing needs — development isn’t just expensive, it’s understaffed.

### **Regulatory / Structural Barriers**

Even with overall regulatory flexibility, some constraints are still slow or block development:

- Need for balance between zoning freedom and overregulation
- Road development and maintenance issues
- Agency complexity
- Owner-occupied restrictions
- Lack of incentives
- The infrastructure is not ready for development

**Implication:** Flexibility alone doesn't solve foundational infrastructure and policy gaps.

### **Social & Cultural Barriers**

Human factors matter:

- NIMBY (Not-in-my-backyard) attitudes
- Pride or reluctance to admit need
- Resistance to change in close-knit communities
- Seasonal housing gaps

**Implication:** Community identity is a strength, but it also creates friction when new development is proposed.

### **Land & Access Barriers**

While land is abundant, not all of it is usable:

- Access challenges
- Lack of subdivisions
- Difficult terrain or seasonal limitations

**Implication:** "Land availability" is not the same as "development-ready land."

## **3. Thematic Patterns (Based on Frequency of Input)**

Themes were analyzed based on the number of times each was mentioned during the exercise:

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>Cost &amp; Market Barriers</b>	10	Most commonly cited challenge; development economics are not feasible
<b>Workforce Shortages</b>	7	System-wide lack of labor slows or blocks progress
<b>Land Availability (Mixed Impact)</b>	7	Land exists, but readiness and usability vary significantly
<b>Regulatory Flexibility vs. Gaps</b>	6	Deregulation helps in some cases but creates confusion or gaps in others

<b>Community Identity (Mixed Impact)</b>	6	Social cohesion aids retention but resists new development
<b>Infrastructure &amp; Services</b>	5	Basic systems exist, but major upgrades are needed
<b>Economic Strengths</b>	5	Jobs and buyers are present; housing supply lags behind demand

**Why This Matters**

Force Field Analysis helped reveal the push-and-pull dynamics shaping Denali’s housing system:

- Strong economy and lots of land create good conditions for new housing.
- But high costs, workforce shortages , and infrastructure gaps cancel out much of that potential.
- Meanwhile, community cohesion draws people in but can also stiff-arm new development.

**4. Summary**

As the analysis revealed, Denali’s housing system is not held back by a single issue, but by the convergence of structural, economic, labor, and cultural challenges that collectively limit housing supply and drive up costs. Understanding these forces makes it easier to design strategies that strengthen the driving forces, reduce or remove the restraining forces, identify levers with the highest impact, and align partners around a shared diagnosis.

This activity marked only the beginning of MHP’s technical assistance work with the Borough. In the coming weeks and months, the process will move into deeper community engagement, continued data collection, and collaborative strategy development to support actionable, locally grounded housing solutions.

## Engagement Road Map: How This Work Will Continue

The following overview outlines the expected phases of MHP’s technical assistance engagement with Denali Borough. This is intended to serve as a flexible guide, rather than a fixed schedule, and activities may overlap or adjust based on community priorities, readiness, and funding opportunities. The overall engagement spans from December 2025 through December 2027.



### ***Phase 1: Housing Needs Assessment and Community Input (Winter 2025 – Fall 2026)***

**Purpose:** Build a shared, data-informed understanding of housing needs across the borough and for specific communities.

- Community engagement and stakeholder input, including site visit follow-up
- Synthesis of Force Field Analysis findings
- Housing market, demographic, and workforce analysis
- Employer and service-provider perspectives on housing pressures
- Identification of key challenges, opportunities, and priority needs

**Focus:** Understanding what is happening in Denali's housing system and why

### ***Phase 2: Housing Action Planning (Fall 2026 – Early 2027)***

**Purpose:** Translate identified needs into practical, community-aligned strategies.

- Collaborative identification of priority housing strategies
- Exploration of policy, program, and partnership options
- Consideration of local capacity, values, and constraints
- Development of a phased Housing Action Plan (Borough-wide and within communities as needed)

**Focus:** Defining clear strategies and next steps grounded in community priorities

### ***Phase 3: Early Feasibility and Project Scoping (Spring – Summer 2027)***

**Purpose:** Take a first step toward testing what is realistic and achievable.

- Initial feasibility review of select priority strategies or projects
- High-level assessment of development readiness, including land, infrastructure, capacity, and cost considerations
- Identification of projects most appropriate for future advancement

**Focus:** Gaining clarity on what is feasible, when, and under what conditions

### ***Phase 4: Implementation Support and Capacity Building (Fall – Winter 2027)***

**Purpose:** Support movement from planning toward action.

- Targeted technical assistance tied to priority next steps
- Support for coordination, partnerships, and funding readiness
- Tools and guidance to strengthen long-term housing capacity
- Preparation for future development or funding opportunities

**Focus:** Building local capacity to advance housing efforts beyond this engagement, ensuring sustainable development opportunities for the future