

# Cowlitz County Housing Opportunities Assessment

Adopted August 2021



Cowlitz County Building and Planning  
207 Fourth Avenue N, Kelso, Washington

## Executive Summary

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Cowlitz County's growth rate is exceeding the community's ability to provide sufficient housing for its residents. An inadequate supply of homes, coupled with increased demand due to growing numbers of residents who commute to work outside the county, means that many young people, seniors, and families cannot afford to rent or own a home in Cowlitz County.

Community outreach, surveys, and stakeholder input suggest County residents have a strong desire to allow greater flexibility for additional home construction. Existing County policies are supportive of rural housing construction, yet construction in unincorporated urban areas has lagged due to inadequate development codes and marketing, and other factors.

To meet future housing needs at a variety of cost levels, the County has developed a variety of recommendations designed to increase flexibility for property owners, achieve timely, predictable project review, and better engage with home builders.

The adoption of this plan will not create housing. Each of these recommendations will require a combination of public hearings, process changes, code revision workshops, and the adoption of new code. Community input will be critical as the County turns the recommendations of this Housing Action Plan into policies and codes for additional housing.

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# Housing Action Plan Recommendations Summary

Full Recommendations are on Page 58

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As a result of significant public and stakeholder input, the Housing Action Plan offers recommendations for steps to improve housing access in the County:

## **Regional Coordination**

1. Partner with the Cowlitz Economic Development Council (CEDC) & Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) to advance regional housing goals
2. Collaborate with local cities on updated development codes, to encourage additional housing
3. Lead location-specific housing plans with local stakeholders, including preliminary designs and project feasibility
4. Encourage joint Planning Commission and County Commissioner housing policy meetings
5. Encourage thoughtful land annexation by cities
6. Utilize EPA brownfields program to identify sites for remediation and redevelopment
7. Consider a County-administered Housing Trust Fund to finance land acquisition and development
8. Support permit-exempt wells in the Lewis River Valley
9. Create a vision for County development, which goes beyond the existing Comprehensive Plan and focuses on housing development
10. Explore how a locally driven adaptation of state-authorized planning tools could benefit rural Cowlitz County

## **County-led Research and Training**

11. Determine a permitting process for multi-family housing in areas without public water/sewer
12. Draft a shared septic system maintenance agreement
13. Identify a permitting process for group housing built with shared kitchens

14. Clarify “tiny home” requirements, including preferred permitting process and design standards
15. Train staff on recently updated state codes for homeowners’ associations to ensure accurate replies to development questions
16. Strengthen communication between Public Works and Building and Planning offices

### **Zoning Map Changes**

17. Simplify zoning for areas classified Rural Residential and Forestry-Recreation to match Unzoned countywide designation
18. Increase the quantity of land zoned for Multiple-Family housing
19. Re-evaluate zoning maps to reflect on-the-ground public investments that support housing
20. Re-evaluate zoning maps to reflect on-the-ground private investments that support housing

### **Development Code Changes**

21. Amend private road design standards to allow smaller ROW or easement for short plats
22. Allow triplexes and quadplexes outright in the County’s unincorporated Urban areas
23. Add triplexes to the list of allowed uses in Urban Residential zones, to match ADU allowances
24. Update the County subdivision code to allow up to nine-lot subdivisions to be reviewed administratively by staff
25. Allow limited ground-floor commercial uses in Multiple-Family-zoned areas
26. Reduce minimum lot size in areas zoned Urban from 6,000 square feet to 5,000 square feet
27. Add Cottage Housing and Planned Unit Developments to permitted uses
28. Adopt electric vehicle charging codes to match upcoming state building codes
29. Eliminate “Change of Use” setback requirements for ADU conversions
30. Create uniform one-bedroom Onsite Septic System (OSS) requirements
31. Allow flexibility for parking requirements

32. Encourage the adaptive reuse of existing structures for housing development
33. Align minimum lot size requirements for ADUs, duplexes, and triplexes
34. Update the forty-year-old Planned Unit Development code to match modern needs
35. Update the recently adopted Cottage Housing Ordinance to provide more housing flexibility
36. Reduce the 60-foot minimum private road easement width to match nearby jurisdictions'
37. Rewrite the front yard setback code to showcase existing flexibility for housing on small lots

### **Infrastructure**

38. Complete a community utility survey of Cowlitz County to identify areas for housing development
39. Extend electricity to areas without cost-effective electricity infrastructure
40. Expand infrastructure and utilities to serve residential land near urban areas
41. Allocate funding for new infrastructure (roads, water/sewer, broadband), to support housing development
42. Explore cost-sharing options for utility expansions
43. Pursue amendment of Washington Administrative Code to allow one-bedroom home septic systems
44. Expand high speed internet to areas without cost-effective broadband service

### **Outreach**

45. Actively market the benefits of building in Cowlitz County, including the lower cost to develop and efficient permitting office
46. Market Cowlitz County to out-of-town investors and builders as worthy of housing investment
47. Add sewer and potable water service areas to the county environmental mapping system
48. Create a "Developer's Toolkit" with in-depth information on the permitting process and options to achieve higher-density development
49. Promote the merit of the existing fire code options to alleviate the threat of extreme wildfires

50. Actively promote the extremely flexible ADU code to home builders
51. Continue to offer virtual staff consultations and virtual pre-app conferences, online permit submittals, and payments
52. Explore continued virtual meeting participation opportunities, to encourage participation
53. Identify staff member as a multi-family development coordinator
54. Create a Commission on Aging, to examine and incorporate the housing and community needs of seniors
55. Create educational materials about housing flexibility offered in the Cottage Housing ordinance
56. Undertake a robust outreach effort to disseminate the recommendations of this plan

### **General Housing Policy**

57. Update development codes to be as flexible as possible to encourage housing development
58. Focus on supporting market-rate, for-profit housing over traditional non-profit housing.
59. Plan for telecommuters to live in Cowlitz County
60. Support motel and hotel development, to provide homes during acute housing shortages
61. Advocate for rental housing for newly independent adolescents
62. Explore **Transitional Housing** opportunities:
  - a) Programming to support people living in recreational vehicles and trailers
  - b) Shared-cost housing for lower income people
  - c) Inpatient addiction and mental health facilities
  - d) Housing that provides for basic safety needs
  - e) Innovative strategies for tiny homes with shared amenities
63. Ensure County Code supports a **variety of housing types**:
  - a) Owner-occupied and rental units for all income levels
  - b) Quality multiple-level rental housing

- c) Increased housing for middle-income households
- d) Safe, high-quality, attractive, small apartment units for young professionals
- e) Housing developments built without internal side setbacks (zero-lot-line-developments)
- f) Accessory dwelling units
- g) Housing in multiple shapes and sizes
- h) Affordable starter homes for young families

64. Utilize a combination of solutions to **reduce housing displacement**:

- a) Encourage use of property tax relief programs available through the Assessor's office
- b) Pursue code changes that make ADUs easier to permit, finance, and build
- c) Promote Manufactured/Mobile Home Relocation Assistance Programs
- d) Enact County codes that facilitate new businesses during housing redevelopment

65. Assess **senior housing** needs and solutions:

- a) Review existing senior housing, identify factors that supported successful projects
- b) Create an "Age-in-Place" design program with a suite of age-friendly amenities that can be added to homes for future needs
- c) Run a potential senior housing project through the permitting process to determine expected timeline, cost, and procedure
- d) Train staff in senior housing development, to facilitate such projects
- e) Encourage senior cottage housing clustered around shared amenities and situated on public water and sewer
- f) Plan for senior housing near supportive networks, and where self-sufficient, rural seniors can adapt to aging-in-place

## Housing Goals

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The Housing Action Plan goals resulted from input received through the County's outreach efforts.

Future code updates will be grounded in these goals:

1. *Provide space within Cowlitz County for a variety of housing options across income levels*
2. *Provide for people who rent or who own their housing*
3. *Provide for seniors*
4. *Provide for young people and families*
5. *Provide home builders with flexible development requirements and incentives*



The alignment of minimum lot size requirements would encourage smaller unit homes like ADUs, Duplexes, and Triplexes.  
(Development Code Change Recommendation #23 & 33)

## Acknowledgements

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This plan was strengthened through public outreach and engagement provided during meetings, phone calls, and workshops. County residents, professional home builders, and volunteer leaders discussed the nuts and bolts of proactive rural housing policy. The importance of this input cannot be understated.

The County thanks all those who participated, and urges continuing advocacy to help turn this Plan into reality. The Housing Action Plan recommendations came about because of the technical assistance and community vision of the following members of the public:

### Cowlitz County Planning Commission

Jim Bain, District 1  
Chris Bornstedt, District 1  
Charles Hall, District 3  
Jack Hansen, District 2  
Bill Josh, District 2  
Erica Rodman, District 1  
Joel Rupley, District 2  
Mark Smith, Chairman, District 3  
Robert Sudar, Vice Chairman, District 3

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Bill Josh  
Nick Little  
Francis Naglich  
Matt Patterson  
Jeanette Scibelli  
Tim Wines

### County Board of County Commissioners

Arne Mortensen, District 1  
Dennis Weber, District 2  
Joe Gardner, Chairman, District 3

### County Building and Planning Department

Greta Holmstrom, Senior Long Range Planner  
George Winn, Associate Long Range Planner  
Jim Williams, Senior GIS Specialist

## Definitions

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**Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)** — Permanent secondary housing units built as an accessory to the primary dwelling, also known as mother-in-law units.

**Apodments** — Individual housing units with private bathrooms built around shared kitchen and laundry amenities. These micro-housing units provide a lower cost temporary rental option for small households or single people.

**Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)** — Cowlitz County has three elected commissioners serving four-year terms. Each commissioner represents approximately 35,000 people.

**Building and Planning Advisory Council (BPAC)** — The advisory council is a group of builders, surveyors, realtors, and development professionals who advise the Building and Planning Department. As the first group to hear about upcoming staffing, process, and code changes within the Department, BPAC also serves as a critical communication link between permit users and the Department.

**Consumer Price Index (CPI)** — A measure of the average change over time in the prices paid by urban consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services. Indexes are available for the U.S. and various geographic areas. Average price data for select utility, automotive fuel, and food items are also available.

**Cost Burden** — Monthly housing costs (including utilities) exceeding 30% of monthly income. *Severe Cost Burden* indicates monthly housing costs (including utilities) exceeding 50% of monthly income.

**Cowlitz County Code (CCC)** — The official statement of all county laws of a permanent and general nature.

**Critical Areas** — Critical Areas include: wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, geologically hazardous areas, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, and frequently flooded areas. These areas contain valuable natural resources, provide natural scenic qualities important to the character of the community, perform important ecological functions and values, or present a hazard to life and property. Identification, management, and protection of these areas is necessary to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare of Cowlitz County’s citizens.

**Family** — Related individuals living in the same household.

**Growth Management Act (GMA)** — State law ([RCW 36.70A](#)) enacted to limit development pressure on rural areas. GMA authorizes a myriad of planning tools used by local governments across the state. Cowlitz County is a “partial planning” county that is exempt from particular portions of the GMA. Cowlitz County plans for the designation of Natural Resource Lands and Critical Areas.

**Hearing Examiner** — Authorized under [Cowlitz County Code 2.05](#), the Hearing Examiner, acting as a “land use judge,” administers public hearings and specialty permits.

**Home Ownership Association (HOA)** — An association of property owners to provide for common benefits, including infrastructure or maintenance.

**Household** — All people living in a housing unit. Members of a household can be related (see family) or unrelated.

**Household Income** — Adjusted household income, which includes the income of all members of the household at the time of the survey, adjusted for inflation to reflect the most recent year of the data release (e.g., 2013 dollars in the 2009–2013 CHAS data).

**HUD Area Median Family Income (HAMFI)** — The median family income is calculated by the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for each jurisdiction, in order to determine Fair Market Rents (FMRs) and income limits for HUD programs.

**Planned Unit Development (PUD)** — A type of subdivision characterized by a unified site design,

clustering of buildings, common open space, density increases, and a mix of land uses and building types.

**Planning Commission** — A group of nine volunteers that guides code development and reviews specific

types of some complex proposals for adherence to applicable local codes. The Planning

Commissioners are appointed by the Board of County Commissioners and serve four-year terms.

**Right-of-Way (ROW)** — The width of access afforded to the public along a road. Right-of-Way is typically

measured perpendicularly to the path of travel. A wide ROW is appropriate for large boulevards or

highways, a narrow ROW is appropriate for paths and side streets. The appropriate time to purchase

or dedicate ROW is during development.

**State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)** — This state law ([RCW 43.21C](#)) requires local and state agencies

to coordinate with project neighbors for projects that meet specific environmental thresholds.

**Washington Uniform Common Interest Ownership Act (WUCIOA)** — This state law ([RCW 64.90](#)),

enacted in 2018, provides thresholds for the formation and management of HOA's. Because HOAs

are tasked with maintaining critical stormwater, potable water, and access amenities for many new

developments, their financial and representational status is vitally important.



A Planned Unit Development Code update could allow additional attached homes.  
(Development Code Change Recommendation #34)

## Needs Analysis

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Assessment of housing needs in Cowlitz County stemmed from the examination of population and economic data.

### Summary of Key Findings

#### Population

- The County as a whole grew quickly, at a 6.19% growth rate from 2010 to 2018, a change of ~6,300 new people in eight years. This yields an average annual growth rate of 0.75%.
- The number of households increased 1,956, a 5% change from 2010 to 2018.
- The population of school-age children decreased. The population growth of working-age adults is relatively flat, and the number of persons 55 and older has increased significantly. Cowlitz County's population is getting older.
- Washington State Department of Commerce expectations for growth estimate 117,684 people residing in Cowlitz County by 2040, an average annual growth rate of 0.51%. The County will need to build 239 units annually from 2021-2040 to meet this growth rate.
- At current estimated growth rates, 35,220 new residents will live in Cowlitz County by 2040. At the countywide average of 2.51 people per household, this will require 701 new housing units per year. At a healthy vacancy rate of 5%, 737 new housing units will need to be built annually until 2040, countywide.

#### Location of Growth

- Cowlitz County's Unincorporated area population grew 7.09% from 2010 to 2019.
- Cowlitz County's Incorporated area population grew 5.51% from 2010 to 2019.

- In 2019, 43.53% of the population (48,145 people) lived in unincorporated areas and 56.47% of the population (62,448 people) lived in incorporated areas.
- The mean travel time to work was 25.1 minutes in 2018.
- Of the 42,614 workers in Cowlitz County in 2018, about 20% (8,513) carpooled, walked, used public transportation, or worked from home. The remaining 34,101 commuters drove alone.
- In 2018, 52% of Cowlitz County residents commuted outside the County for work.
- Woodland is 21 minutes from Vancouver by car. Castle Rock is 54 minutes from Olympia by car. For car commuters, Cowlitz County offers ready access to nearby areas with significant jobs, areas with higher average wages than Cowlitz County.

## Housing

- The number of housing units increased by 4%, a change of 1,577 units, from 2010 to 2018. The vast majority of these units were three- and four-bedroom single family detached homes.
- In 2018, 34% of Cowlitz County residents lived in rental homes, and 66% of people lived in owner-occupied homes. This split has remained static since 2010.

## Community Profile

Cowlitz County features many forested hills, numerous rivers, and streams. Five cities are incorporated in the County — Longview, Kelso, Woodland, Castle Rock and Kalama — and several unincorporated communities, such as Ryderwood and Ariel. A regional center of industry, Cowlitz County benefits from its proximity to Portland, Oregon, and its surrounding suburbs along the I-5 corridor. Three major international trade routes, I-5, the Burlington North Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF), and the Columbia River meet in Cowlitz County, supporting a rich history of trade.

The unincorporated areas of the County have received a great degree of development pressure in the past decade, due to an increase in population and a lack of buildable land within the incorporated

communities. Environmentally, the unincorporated areas are crisscrossed by numerous rivers and streams. These important habitats and the steep slopes that carry them make development infeasible in many parts of the County. Most of the remaining unbuilt parcels in Cowlitz County contain critical areas. Construction in these areas carries an increased development cost to the property owner. Land areas near urban boundaries are seeing the greatest degree of development.

The proximity to Portland, Oregon, has increased development pressure on South County areas.

Woodland has grown by 819 people from 2010 to 2018, a 15% increase; Kalama, another South County city, has grown at a comparable rate. Longview, the largest city in the County, grew by 1,400 people, a 4% increase over this eight-year period.

Cowlitz County has seen an increase in the number of older residents. This is partly due to the aging of existing residents, but also an in-migration of new residents who have been drawn to the County's rural feel, or relocated from the more expensive suburbs of Portland.

#### Population Changes

Cowlitz County's population has been growing. Between 2010 and 2018 there was a net increase of 6,342 people, roughly the size of the incorporated City of Woodland. This was due to an increase in the number of seniors (65 and older), rising from 14,542 to 19,408 seniors. The number of school-age children (19 and younger) decreased by 1,577, reflecting a broader shift to smaller family sizes.

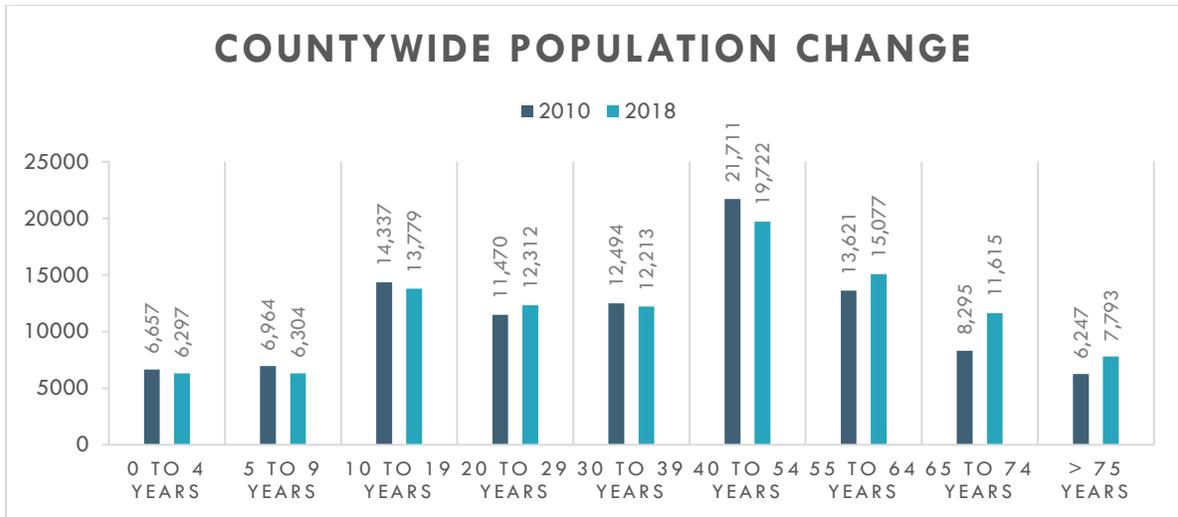


Figure 1  
Source: 2010 Census and 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data)

Areas outside of city limits have been growing at a faster rate than areas within Cowlitz County’s five incorporated cities. The countywide population grew 6.19% from 2010 to 2018, but this growth did not occur equally across the incorporated and unincorporated areas. Unincorporated areas grew by 7.09%, up to 47,123 people, while incorporated areas grew by 5.51%, up to 61,629 people. The vast majority of this growth occurred after 2014, reflecting positive economic trends Cowlitz County experienced following the Great Recession of 2008.

The unincorporated areas' population grew the fastest in 2016-2019, by more than 2% each year, or about 1,000 new residents per year according to U.S. Census estimates.

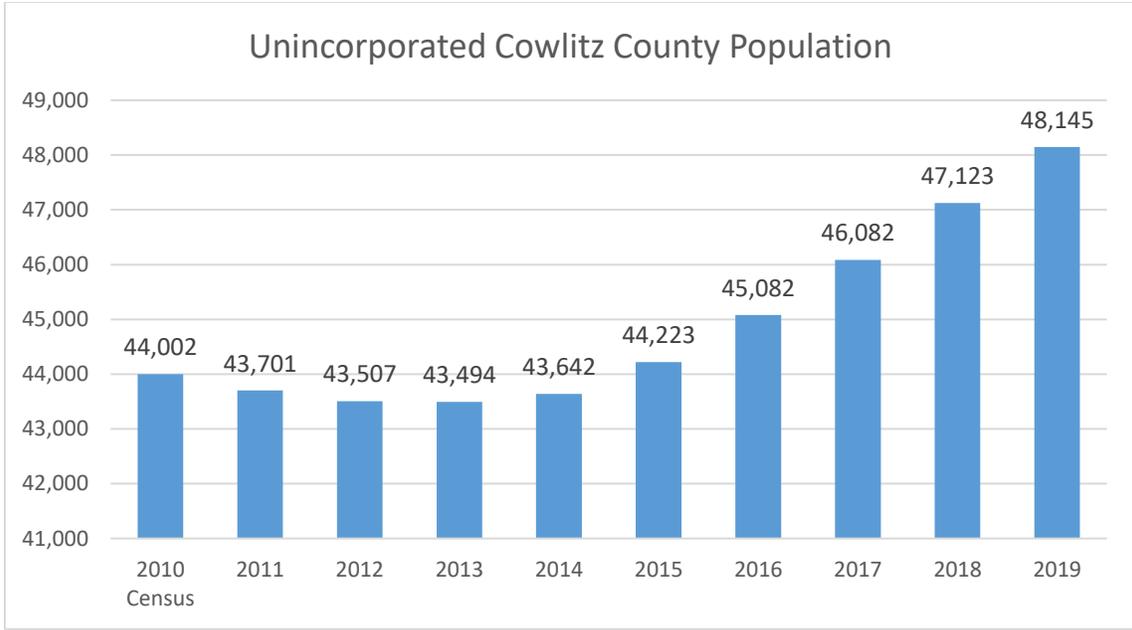


Figure 2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places in Washington: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (SUB-IP-EST2019-ANNRES-53)

Population Projections

During the 2010 to 2018 timeframe, the County population grew by an average of 915 persons per year. Looking ahead, the Washington State Department of Commerce predicts that the County population will reach 117,684 by the year 2040, a 12% increase over 2018 levels. To hit this level of population increase, the County will grow by an average of 571 people per year.

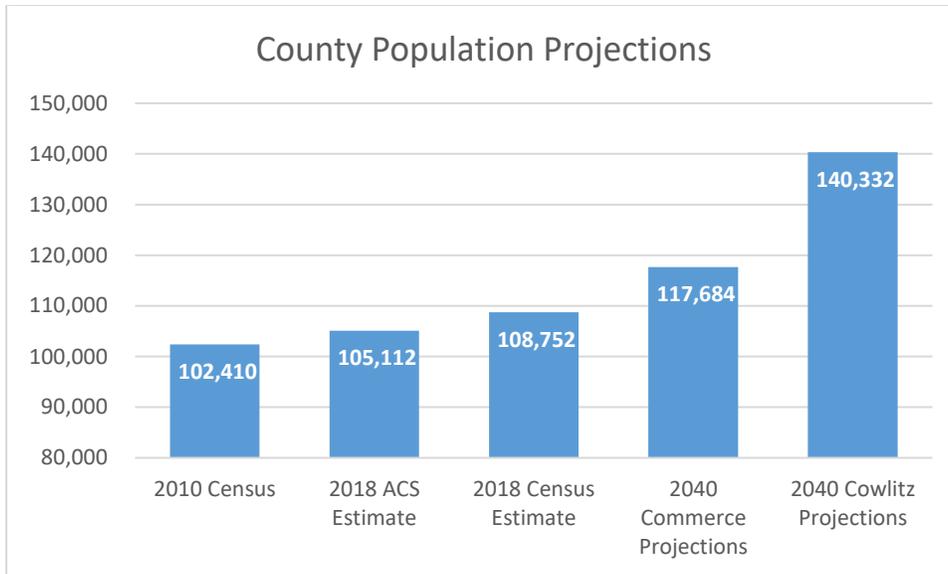


Figure 3

Source: 2010 Census and 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data), WA State Department of Commerce Population projections, U.S. Census Bureau Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places in Washington: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (SUB-IP-EST2019-ANNRES-53)

### Population Estimate Projection

If Cowlitz County grew by levels estimated from 2015 to 2019, the annual growth would be on average 1,761 people, a rate of 1.17%, countywide. Assuming that these 31,580 new residents moved to incorporated areas and unincorporated areas at 2019 levels, another 13,747 people would call unincorporated Cowlitz County home by 2040.

At the countywide average of 2.51 people per household, these additional 1,761 annual new arrivals would require 701 new housing units per year. If assuming a healthy vacancy rate of 5%, 737 new housing units are needed every year to house the incoming 35,220 people until 2040.

## Households

The number of households in Cowlitz County increased from 2010 to 2018 by 5%. In 2010, 35.6% of Cowlitz County's Heads of Household were living alone, and 10.3% of Cowlitz County residents who lived alone were over age 65. In 2018, 40.7% of Cowlitz County's Heads of Household lived alone, and 13% of Cowlitz County residents who lived alone were over age 65. Both the number of single-person households and the number of seniors living alone have increased.

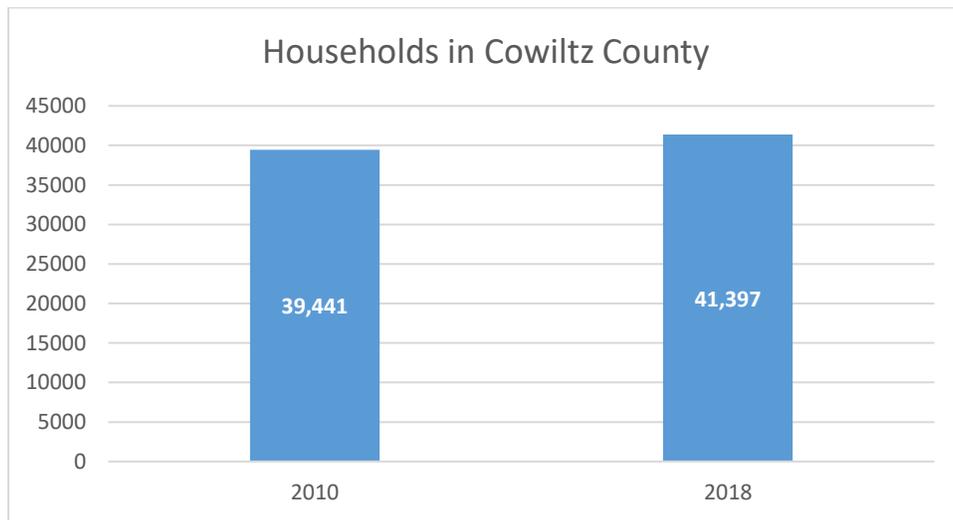


Figure 4

\*Source: 2010 Census, 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data)

The number of people per household remained the same from 2010 to 2018, and the average head of household age increased. The percentage of households with people under age 18 decreased by 3%.

As illustrated below, the majority of new households from 2010 to 2018 were single-person, and most were over age 65. Cowlitz County's seniors are more often living alone.

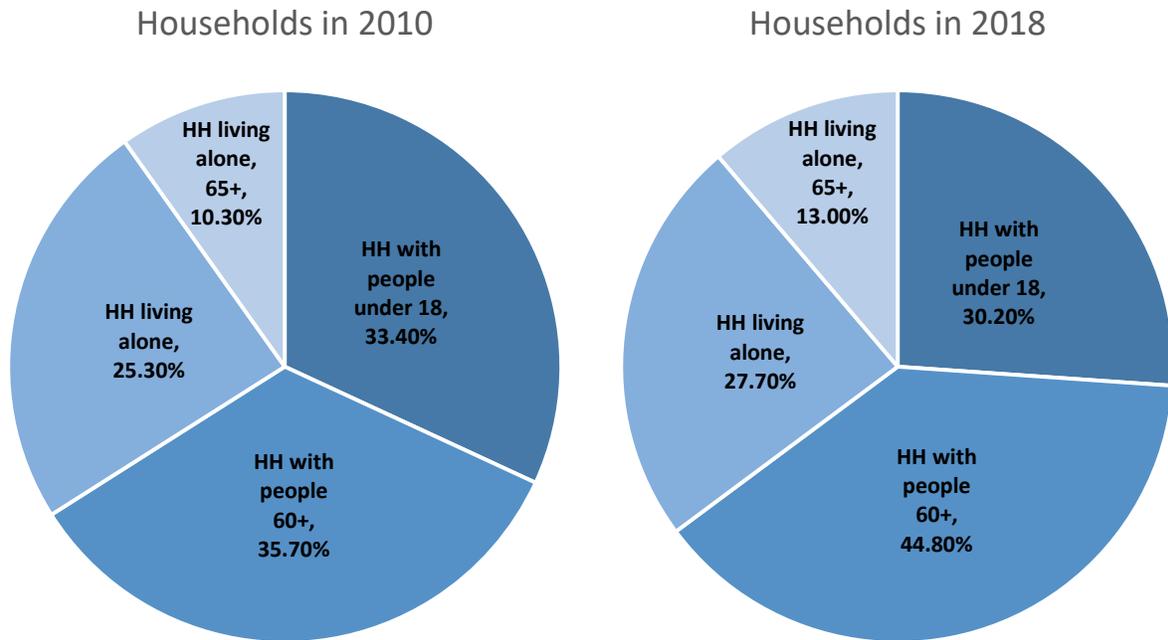


Figure 5

\*Source: 2010 Census and 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data)

Cowlitz County’s household size in 2018 was slightly smaller than the state average and nearby Clark County average. Cowlitz County averaged 2.51 people per household while Clark County had 2.69 people per household, and Washington State as a whole had 2.55 people per household.

Household Income

The Median Household Income in Cowlitz County increased by 13% from 2010 to 2018; while the State minimum wage increased 34.5% in this same timeframe, from \$8.55 in 2010 to \$11.50 in 2018.

This significant increase in median household income and wages, however, is overshadowed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics data that the Consumer Price Index increased 16.5% from 2010 to 2018. The price of consumer goods outpaced the growth of the median household income in Cowlitz County.

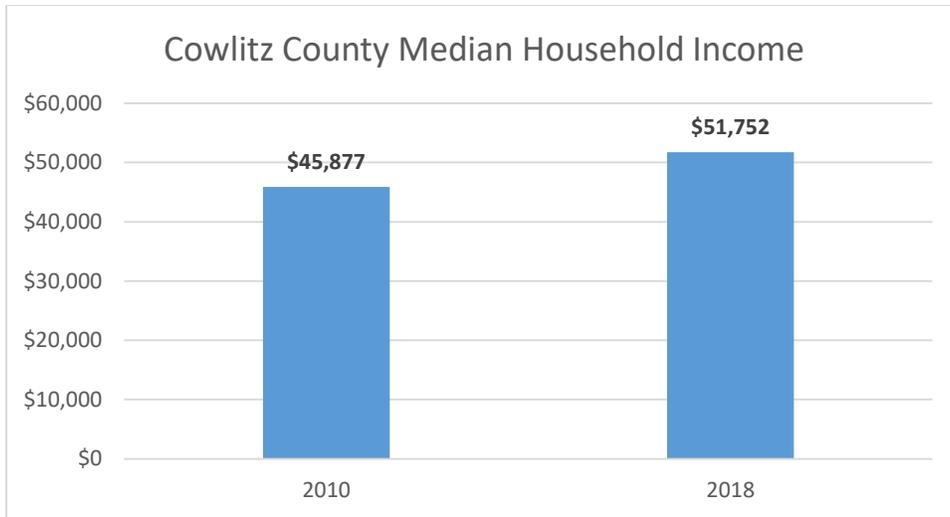


Figure 6

\*Source: 2010 Census and 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data)

Low Income Households

In 2018, there were 13,475 renter-occupied households and 26,295 owner-occupied households in Cowlitz County. Those who rent typically have lower incomes than those who own their home: in 2017, 46% of renter households earned less than 50% of the HUD Area Median Family Income (HAMFI), while 12% of owner-occupied households earned less than 50%.

HUD Area Median Family Income	Renters	% Total	Owners	% Total	Total	% Total
<= 30% HAMFI	3,205	24%	1,305	5%	4,510	11%
>30% to <=50% HAMFI	2,935	22%	1,870	7%	4,805	12%
>50% to <-80% HAMFI	2,835	21%	3,685	14%	6,520	16%
>80% to <=100% HAMFI	1,150	9%	2,480	9%	3,630	9%
>100% HAMFI	3,350	25%	16,955	64%	20,305	51%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,475</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>26,295</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>39,770</b>	

Figure 7

\*Source: 2013 - 2017 HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy Data

Low Income Cost Burden Estimates

The Federal Housing and Urban Development Department defines cost burden by two metrics:

1. Cost Burdened.....Housing costs are greater than 30% of income

82% of Cowlitz County households earning less than 30% HAMFI are Cost Burdened.

2. Severely Cost Burdened.....Housing costs are greater than 50% of income

69% of Cowlitz County households earning less than 30% HAMFI are Severely Cost Burdened.

A household that spends more than 30% of their income on housing is less likely to spend it on other necessities, such as medication, transportation, and food.

The Cowlitz County median income in 2018 was \$51,752.00 per household.

<b>Burden Level</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b># of Households</b>	<b>% of Households</b>
Cost Burdened	Housing costs are greater than 30% of income	12,840	31.02%
Severely Cost Burdened	Housing costs are greater than 50% of income	5,455	13.18%

Figure 8

\*Source: 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data)



100-Unit Townhouse complex, comprised of 2-, 3-, and 4-bedroom units.  
Solomon Road, Unincorporated Lexington

## Workforce Profile

In 2018, the number of employed people living in Cowlitz County totaled 43,701. The unemployment rate was 5.9%, the lowest unemployment rate since 1980.

After the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, unemployment in Cowlitz County increased to a high of 16% in April 2020. The Cowlitz County unemployment rate then decreased to 6.9%, compared to a seasonal average of 5.3%, in October 2020. Countywide unemployment has further decreased to 6.0% by May 2021. Business closures had a disparate impact on the lowest earning workers in the retail and hospitality trades.

The three largest employment sectors for workers who reside in Cowlitz County are: 1) Educational services, Health care and social assistance, 2) Retail trade, and 3) Manufacturing. Together, these sectors provide approximately 50% of residents' employment.

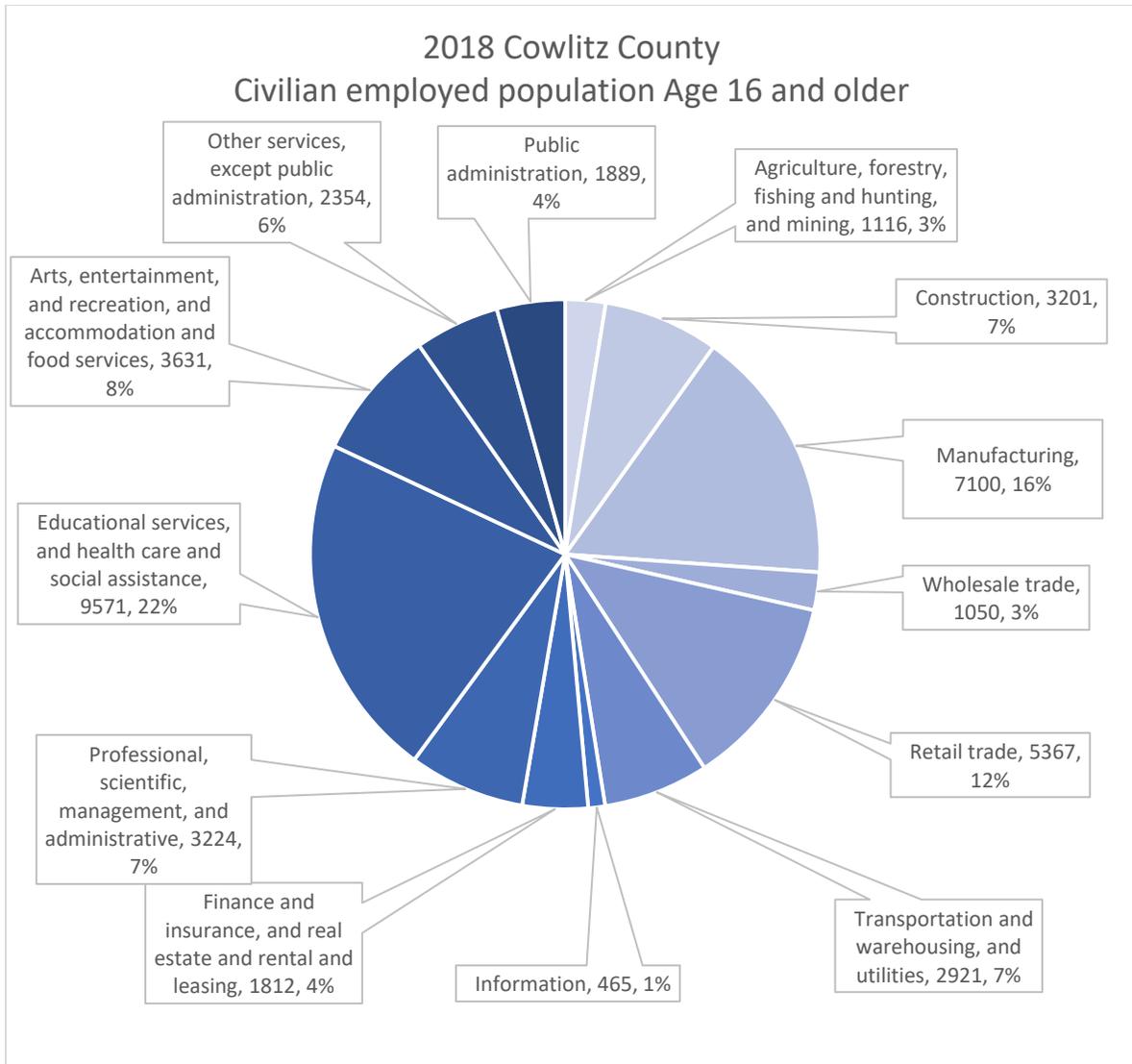


Figure 9

\*Source: ACS Profile Report, 2014-2018: Economics

More people leave Cowlitz County for employment than live in the same county where they work.

- 13,518 are employed in Cowlitz County but live outside the County
- 26,256 live in Cowlitz County but are employed outside
- 23,459 both live and are employed in Cowlitz County
- 28% of Cowlitz County workers commute more than 50 miles each way.

\*Source: 2017 Census on the Map

Of the more than 13,500 who commute to Cowlitz from other counties, the largest share travel from Clark County.

<b>County</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Clark, WA	5,145	38.06%
Lewis, WA	1,336	9.88%
Columbia, OR	949	7.02%
King, WA	781	5.78%
Pierce, WA	641	4.74%
Thurston, WA	534	3.95%
Multnomah, OR	495	3.66%
Grays Harbor, WA	369	2.73%
Snohomish, WA	332	2.46%
Wahkiakum, WA	213	1.58%
Clackamas, OR	208	1.54%
Washington, OR	182	1.35%
Kitsap, WA	174	1.29%
Yakima, WA	170	1.26%
Clatsop, OR	145	1.07%
Whatcom, WA	141	1.04%
Benton, WA	127	0.94%
Pacific, WA	116	0.86%
Spokane, WA	110	0.81%
Skamania, WA	96	0.71%
Lincoln, OR	90	0.67%
Tillamook, OR	80	0.59%
Marion, OR	75	0.55%
Clallam, WA	59	0.44%
All Other Locations	950	7.03%
<b>SUM</b>	<b>13,518</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Figure 9

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2017).

The largest share of the Cowlitz County residents commute to work in other counties, with the greatest numbers traveling to Clark County and the Puget Sound region

<b>County</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Clark, WA	6,365	24.24%
King, WA	3520	13.41%
Multnomah, OR	2,941	11.20%
Pierce, WA	2156	8.21%
Thurston, WA	1,570	5.98%
Washington, OR	1256	4.78%
Lewis, WA	1,024	3.90%

Clackamas, OR	833	3.17%
Yakima, WA	749	2.85%
Columbia, OR	708	2.70%
Marion, OR	627	2.39%
Clatsop, OR	415	1.58%
Snohomish, WA	406	1.55%
Spokane, WA	315	1.20%
Yamhill, OR	188	0.72%
Pacific, WA	181	0.69%
Benton, WA	178	0.68%
Grays Harbor, WA	176	0.67%
Lane, OR	144	0.55%
Wasco, OR	139	0.53%
Mason, WA	137	0.52%
Wahkiakum, WA	132	0.50%
Whatcom, WA	129	0.49%
Kittitas, WA	125	0.48%
All Other Locations	1,842	7.02%
<b>SUM</b>	<b>26,256</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Figure 10

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application  
(Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2017).

The HUD Area Median Family Income 2018 data can determine income levels across counties. HUD data shows median income is significantly higher in the areas where these commuters are finding work.

Because housing costs in Cowlitz County are cheaper than the nearby areas, these higher-earning commuters have created significant pressure within Cowlitz County's housing market, driving up the housing cost for all income brackets.

More than half of Cowlitz County's employed residents leave the County for work. The seven counties that receive the most Cowlitz County commuters include Clark, King, Pierce, Thurston and Lewis in Washington, and Multnomah and Washington in Oregon. Jobs in these seven counties employ 38% of Cowlitz County's working residents. Importantly, these 18,832 commuting workers are employed in counties with substantially higher Area Median Incomes. With increased household income, these commuting County residents are pumping up the demand for all units, both low-cost and high-cost.

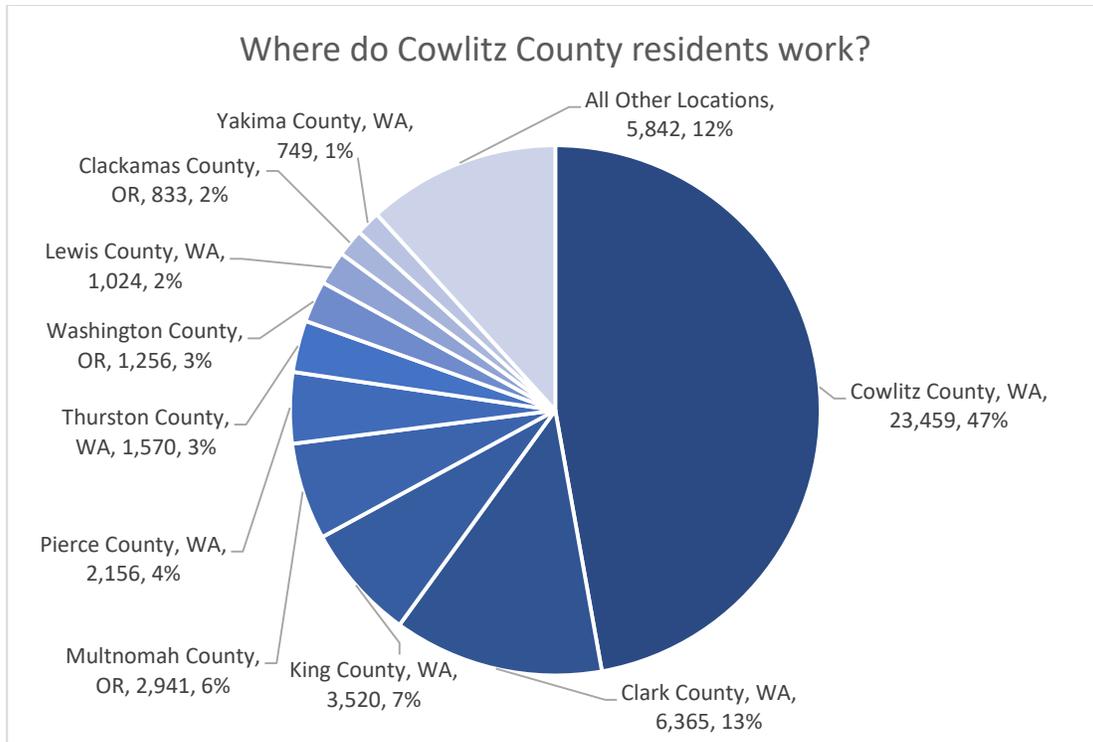


Figure 11

\*Source: 2017 Census on the Map

## Housing Inventory

Cowlitz County had 44,419 housing units in 2018, a 4% increase over the 2010 housing count of 42,842.

The largest gains were in the quantity of single detached units and multi-family developments of 5+ units, at 1,663 homes and 674 units, respectively.

### Housing Units

	2010	2018	% Total	Change
Single Units	29,711	31,374	6%	1,663
Duplex Units	1,894	1,148	-39%	-746
Multifamily (3-4 Units)	1,451	1,579	9%	128
Multifamily (5-19 Units)	2,782	3,025	9%	243
Multifamily (20+Units)	2,042	2,473	21%	431
Mobile Homes and Other	4,962	4,820	-3%	-142
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,842</b>	<b>44,419</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>1,577</b>

Figure 12

\*Source: 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data) Table: DP04

**NOTE:** The 2018 duplex decrease may be due to an unexplained error in the data.

The number of bedrooms per unit did not change from 2010 to 2018. Cowlitz County nearly identical proportions of each housing stock size from 2010 to 2018. The number of Studio units increased substantially, up by nearly 300, an increase of 39%.

**Housing Stock by Number of Bedrooms**

	2010	% Total	2018	% Total
Studio	732	1.7%	1,019	2.3%
1-bedroom	3644	8.5%	3,851	8.7%
2-bedroom	11,967	27.9%	11,490	25.9%
3-bedroom	18,658	43.6%	19,669	44.3%
4-bedroom	6,290	14.7%	6,805	15.3%
5+ bedrooms	1,551	3.6%	1,585	3.6%

Figure 13

\*Source: 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data) Table: DP04

Owner-occupied households are on average larger than renter-occupied households.

<b>Average household size of owner-occupied unit</b>	2.57
<b>Average household size of renter-occupied unit</b>	2.40

Figure 14

\*Source: ACS Profile Report, 2014-2018: Housing

Approximately two-thirds of Cowlitz County residents own their housing, while one-third rent. These proportions have remained static over time.

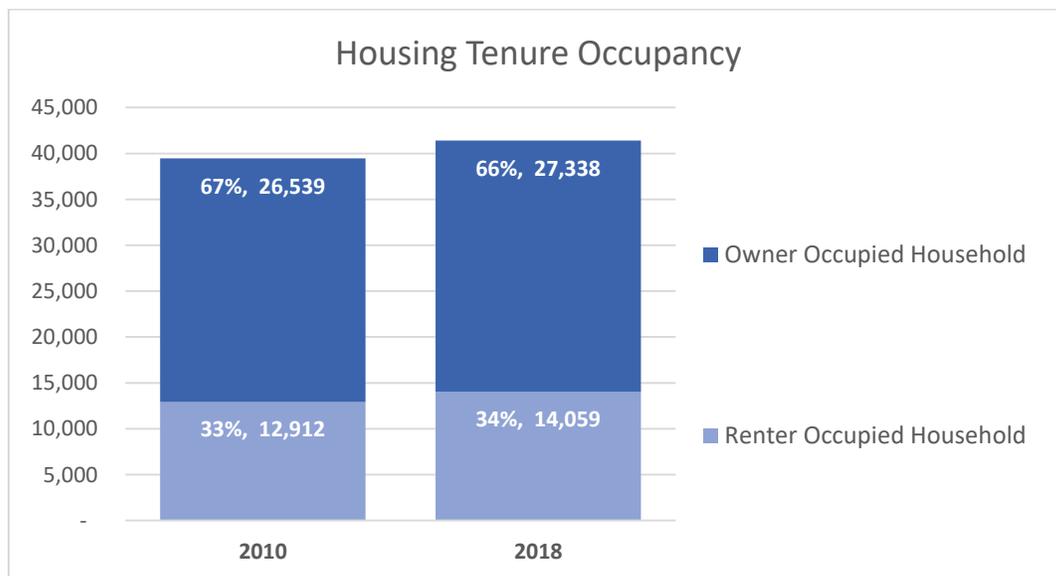


Figure 15

\*Source: ACS Profile Report, 2014-2018: Housing

The current Cowlitz County housing stock has more bedrooms than people. Almost two-thirds of Cowlitz’s housing stock has three, four, or more bedroom units, but only 35.8% of the County’s households have three or more people.

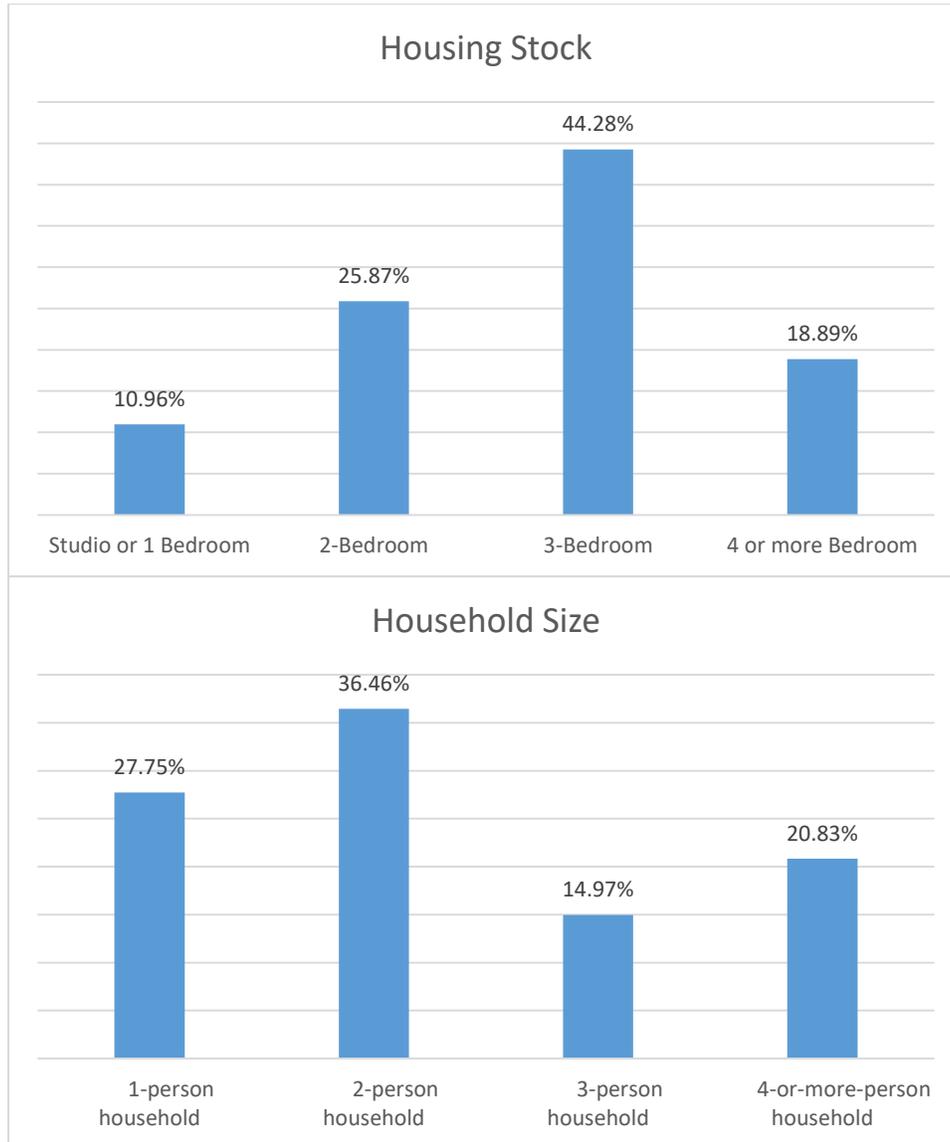


Figure 16

\*Source: 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data) Table S2501

The number of bedrooms in 2018 exceeded the number of people in Cowlitz County.

Number of bedrooms in County	Number of people in County
At least 122,002	105,112

\*Source: 2018 American Community Survey (Five Year Data)

### Housing Production

The Cowlitz County Department of Building and Planning has permitting jurisdiction outside of city limits in the County. As of 2021, the Department permits more home construction than ever before. The vast majority of these permits have been for Single Family Residences in Unzoned, Rural areas of the County. Development in these areas typically requires the drilling of a well and installation of an onsite septic system.

**Number and Type of Building Permit by Year**

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Single Family	86	91	107	121	172	197	223	244	311
Two Family	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	1	2
3-4 Family	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5+ Family	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ADU	Approximately 6-7 per year						14	17	14

Figure 17

\*Source: Cowlitz County Building and Planning permit data

Until recently, the County Building and Planning Department did not receive more than 100 home applications in a year. But in the past five years the Building Department has processed increasing numbers of permits year after year. The Department processed 311 home permits in 2020. The updated ADU code has encouraged growing numbers of these smaller, more affordable units. The County anticipates that this number will continue to increase over time.

### Housing Stock Age

The housing stock in Cowlitz County is old: 45% is over 50 years old, while 30% was built within the last 30 years.

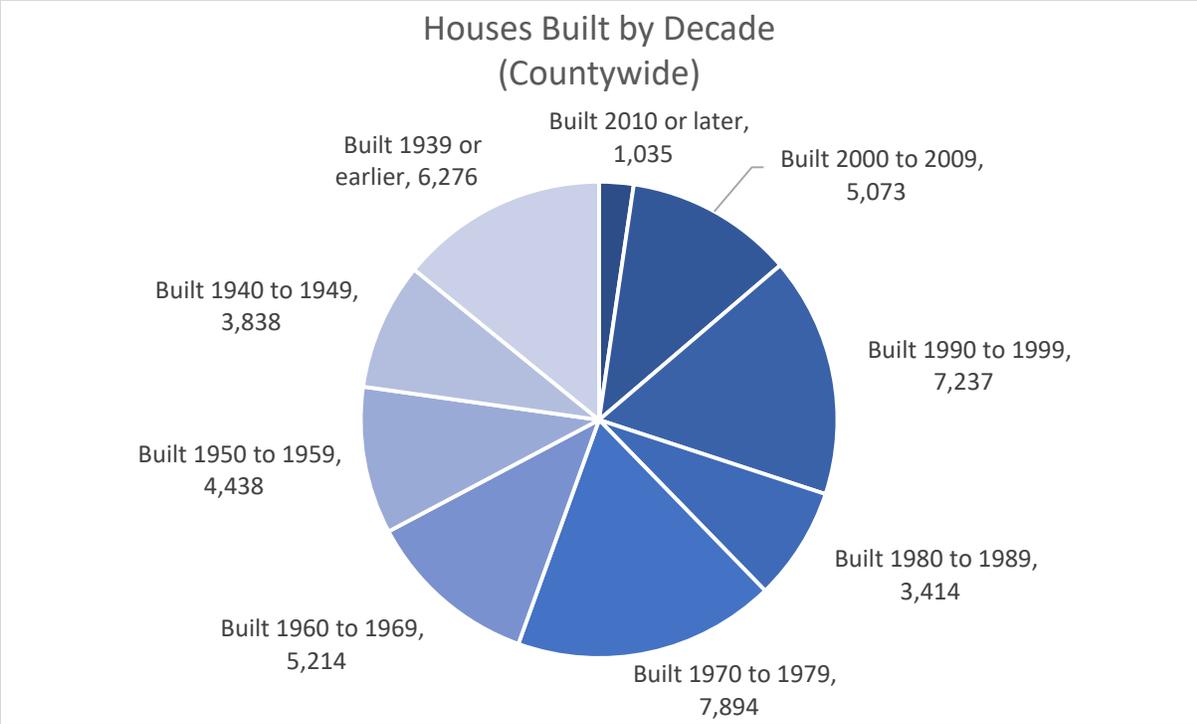
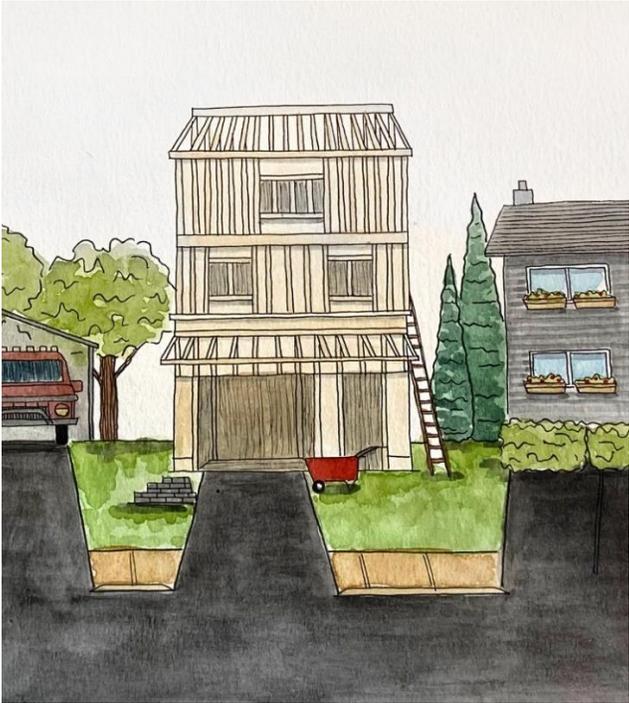


Figure 18

\*Source: ACS Profile Report, 2014-2018: Economics



Creating flexible development standards for new homes was identified by home builders to encourage a variety of housing types.

(General Housing Policy Recommendation #57)

## Gap Analysis

Cowlitz County needs more rental units that are affordable to people earning lower incomes.

Households earning less than 30% of the median income need twice as much affordable units as the County has in stock.

Comparatively, households earning over 80% of the median income also need more housing. Using HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy data from 2018, there was 2,810 households earning over 80% of the Median income while living in housing that could serve lower-income households. These higher-income renters lease housing that lower-income brackets could afford, increasing competition for available units.

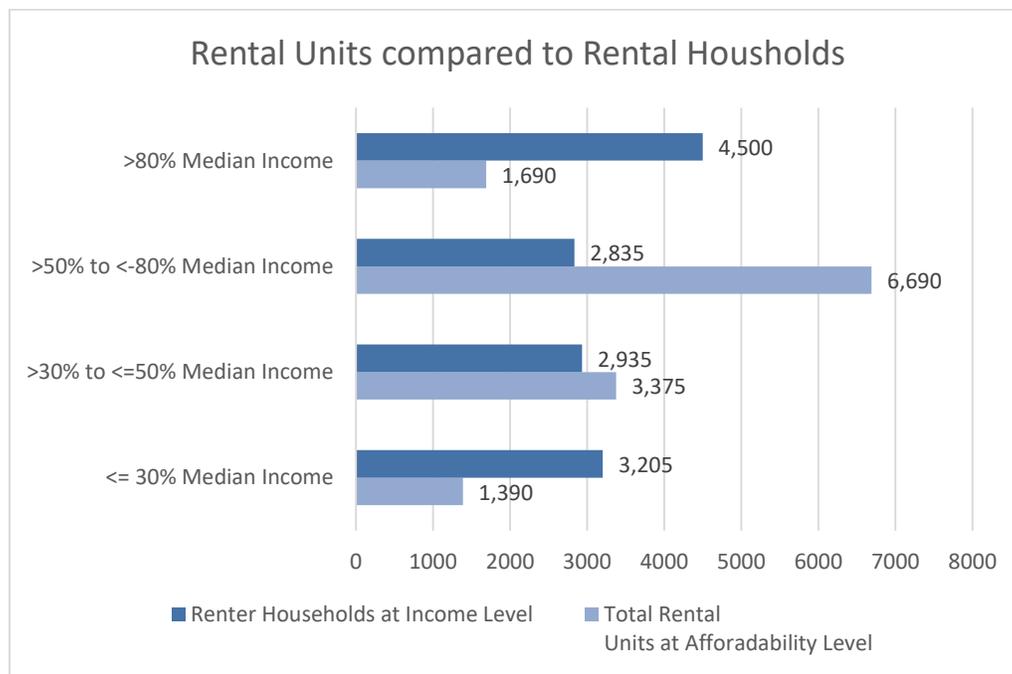


Figure 19

\*Source: HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy

## Commerce Growth Rates to 2040

If the Cowlitz County average household size continues to be 2.51, then the 571 new residents identified in Department of Commerce 2040 growth projections would need 227 new units per year. If 5% of units

were vacant to allow a healthy vacancy rate, 239 new units should be created each year for Cowlitz County to meet its housing needs.

#### Cowlitz Expected Growth Rates to 2040

Based on prior years' growth, the County expects to exceed the State Department of Commerce's 2040 population projections. From 2015 to 2019 the County's average growth rate was 1,761 people, amounting to a predicted 31,580 new residents by 2040. These 1,761 new people per year will increase the County population to 140,332 by 2040. Should the County grow at this pace and the Cowlitz County average household size remain 2.51, then 701 new units will be needed per year. If 5% of units were vacant, to allow for a healthy vacancy rate, 736 new units should be created each year for Cowlitz County to meet its housing needs.

#### Existing Housing Policies

##### **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)**

Cowlitz County's Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Code was recently updated and is highly flexible. ADUs are reviewed administratively by County staff.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are allowed in all Comprehensive Plan areas, except in areas designated as Commercial or Manufacturing. The maximum size is 1,200 square feet. The minimum size follows the standards in the Washington State Building Code. Two ADUs may be allowed in Comprehensive Plan-designated Urban or Suburban Areas. One ADU is allowed in all other Comprehensive Plan designations. The ADU code does not have any tenant or ownership requirements, meaning that the owner could live off-site and lease both the primary home and ADU(s) to renters. The ADU and primary home may be modular or manufactured homes, further decreasing cost.

At least anecdotally, relators, developers, builders, and members of the public are generally aware that "mother-in-law" dwellings and ADUs are an option to build additional homes on a single lot.

### **Single Family Residential**

Single Family Units are allowed in most land use districts, including Unzoned, Rural Residential, Suburban, and Urban Areas. Single Family Residential is excluded from Commercial and Manufacturing Zoned Areas.

### **Multiple-Family**

Multiple-Family (MF) development of 3+ units is permitted in MF-zoned areas and Unzoned areas. MF-Zoned areas total 179 Acres. Duplexes are permitted in Urban Residential-zoned areas. Urban Residential zones total 3,850 acres. Increasing the amount of multi-family rental housing is critical to house the growing numbers of new residents in the County.

### **Manufactured Home Parks**

Cowlitz County (including incorporated cities) has at least 35 Manufactured Home Parks. The Manufactured Home Park code was updated in 2020 to allow administrative review and project phasing. Manufactured home parks provide a valuable lower cost housing option. These parks often cater to seniors, a fixed-income group vulnerable to housing displacement through site and property tax increases. The County permitted one Manufactured Home Park expansion under the updated code in 2020.

### **Shared/Group Housing**

Facilities such as elder care facilities, nursing homes, group homes, and emergency shelters are rarely permitted in Cowlitz County. These facilities often provide employment, temporary housing, and care for the County's most vulnerable. Permitting these housing types in more areas is critical to keeping our seniors close to their community and family.

## **RV Parks and Campgrounds**

RV Parks and Campgrounds provide a housing option for transient workers, retirees, and extremely low-income households.

Cowlitz County has 26 campgrounds with a total of 1,581 permitted spaces. Six of these campgrounds operate seasonally, with a capacity of 335 spaces. Twenty of these campgrounds are operated year-round, with a capacity of 1,246 spaces. These year-round spaces provide a huge proportion of the market-rate affordable housing in the County.

More than 10 years have passed since the last private campground was permitted in 2009. Nine years have passed since the last publicly owned campground was permitted in 2012. The Recreation and Campground code was most recently updated in 1998, an update of this code could allow greater flexibility and clarify development requirements.



RV Park operated year-round near Silver Lake

Review Types

Cowlitz County Code allows for administrative review of most development permits, including multi-family development, under the “Planning Clearance” permit umbrella. Manufactured Home Parks and Accessory Dwelling Units are also administratively reviewed, as are the majority of Environmental Permits, including Shoreline, Critical Areas, SEPA, and Floodplain. Relying on administrative review reduces the review timeline and cost for the property owner/developer.

<b>Administrative Review</b>	<b>Hearing Examiner Review</b>	<b>Planning Commission Review</b>
Planning Clearance	Appeals ( <i>Generally</i> )	Planned Unit Developments ( <i>Recommend to BOCC</i> )
Accessory Dwelling Units	Special Use Permits	Rural/Urban Subdivisions ( <i>Recommend to BOCC</i> ) ( <i>more than 4 lots</i> )
Critical Area Permit	RV Parks and Campgrounds	Preliminary Plat 1-year Extension for Urban Subdivision ( <i>one time</i> )
Shoreline Letter of Exemption	Shoreline Conditional Use Permit	
Level I Shoreline Substantial Dev. Permit	Level II Shoreline Sub. Dev. Permit	
Type I Variance ( <i>Up to 25% of standard</i> )	Type II Variances ( <i>Greater than 25% of standard</i> )	
Short Plats (up to four lots)	Commercial/Industrial Binding Site Plan ( <i>recommend to BOCC</i> )	
Short Plat - Preliminary Approval 6-month Extension	SEPA Appeals	
Large Lot Subdivision		
SEPA Review		
Boundary Line Adjustments		
Preliminary Plat 1-year Extension for Rural Subdivisions ( <i>only one time allowed</i> )		
Manufactured Home Parks ( <i>appealable to BOCC</i> )		

Figure 20

**Review Timeline**

Expedited Review of Land Use and Planning Permits and Septic/Well Permits is not available in Cowlitz County. Expedited Building plan review of traditional single-detached residential homes is available.

Expedited Single-detached building plan review reduces review time by about four weeks while adding about 50% to the building permit cost.

Review timelines for a typical 2,000-square-foot detached Single Family Residence on a well and septic without additional environmental permitting:

<b>Planning and Land Use Permits</b>	<b>Building Permits</b>	<b>Septic and Well Permits</b>
Cowlitz County Planning Division	Cowlitz County Building Division	Cowlitz County Environmental Health Unit
3-4 Weeks	5-6 Weeks (Concurrent with well/Septic Permits)	2-3 Weeks (Concurrent with Building Permits)
\$180	\$4,500	\$1,700

Figure 21

Total review timeline for this example home could be as fast as seven weeks, with a total permit cost of \$6380.

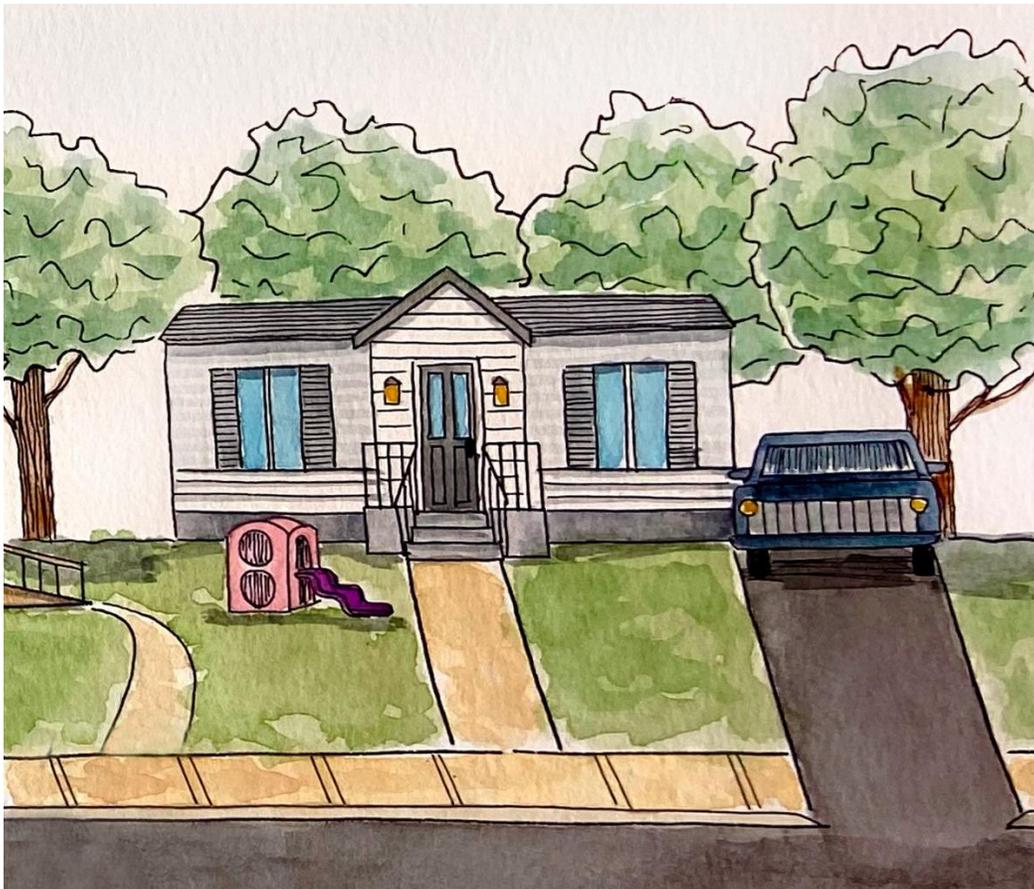
The review timeline and permitting cost of a Multiple-Family project can vary drastically, based upon nearby critical areas, lot-specific designs, and SEPA comments.

### Existing Zoning Review

Cowlitz County’s zoning code is unique, as most of the County is Unzoned. Per Cowlitz County Code 18.10.270, all uses which have not been declared a nuisance by statute, resolution, ordinance, or court of competent jurisdiction are permitted in Unzoned areas. A wide variety of housing types could be permitted in this Unzoned area.

These Unzoned areas have not had extensive urban development. This is due to the fact that potable water, sanitary sewer, and cohesive transportation connections are not available in most Unzoned areas. The environmental capacity to provide for wells and on-site septic systems in these areas

depends on many factors, including soil type, aquifer depth, well regulations, etc. The development of additional transportation connections is unlikely to happen without significant investment. While Unzoned areas may allow increased development, development in these areas is hindered by a lack of services, and a wide variety of housing types is not feasible.



Manufactured Homes provide housing to many families and seniors in Cowlitz County. These lower cost homes should be encouraged. (County-led Research and Training Recommendation #14 & General Housing Policy Recommendation #64C)

**Acreege per Zoning Designation**

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Zone Code</b>	<b>% County Land</b>	<b># Parcels</b>	<b>Acreege</b>
Unzoned	UZ	94.05%	20,669	675,305
Rural Residential – 2 Acres	RR-2	2.21%	2,980	15,856
Forestry-Recreation	FR	1.52%	552	10,884
Agriculture – 38 Acres	AG-38	0.76%	260	5,478
Heavy Manufacturing	MH	0.64%	193	4,607
Urban Residential	UR	0.54%	4,672	3,850
Suburban	SR	0.08%	381	609
Agriculture	AG	0.06%	10	452
Light Manufacturing	ML	0.04%	61	313
Rural Residential – 5 Acres	RR-5	0.32%	34	229
Multiple-Family	MF	0.02%	404	179
Rural Residential – 1 Acre	RR-1	0.02%	24	120
Urban Commercial	C-2	0.01%	102	70
Neighborhood Commercial	C-1	0.01%	107	47
Agriculture-Industrial	AG-I	0.00%	0	0
<b>Total Acreege in Zoned Areas</b>		<b>100.00%</b>	<b>30,449</b>	<b>717,999</b>

**Acreege per Zoning Designation Excluding Unzoned**

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Acreege</b>	<b>% of Zoned Land</b>	<b>% of Residential Zoned Land</b>	<b>% Total Land</b>
Rural Residential – 2 acres	15,856	37.14%	76.07%	2.21%
Forestry-Recreation	10,884	25.49%	52.22%	1.52%
Agriculture – 38 acres	5,478	12.83%	26.28%	0.76%
Heavy Manufacturing	4,607	10.79%	22.10%	0.64%
Urban Residential	3,850	9.02%	18.47%	0.54%
Suburban	609	1.43%	2.92%	0.08%
Agriculture	452	1.06%	2.17%	0.06%
Light Manufacturing	313	0.73%	1.50%	0.04%
Rural Residential – 5 acres	229	0.54%	1.10%	0.32%
Multiple-Family	179	0.42%	0.86%	0.02%
Rural Residential – 1 acre	120	0.28%	0.58%	0.02%
Urban Commercial	70	0.16%	0.34%	0.01%
Neighborhood Commercial	47	0.11%	0.23%	0.01%
Agriculture-Industrial	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Total Zoned Acreege (excludes Unzoned)</b>	<b>42,694</b>			
<b>Total Residential Zoned Acreege (excludes manufacturing, commercial, agriculture, and unzoned areas)</b>	<b>20,843</b>			

Figure 22

**Acreage per 2017 Comprehensive Plan Designation**

<b>Comprehensive Plan Designation</b>	<b>% Total land</b>	<b># Parcels</b>	<b>Acreage total</b>
Economic Resource Land – Forest Resource Land	60.71%	1,292	435,649
Rural	14.97%	15,746	107,436
Smallholding	13.70%	2,911	98,316
Remote	7.29%	765	52,293
Economic Resource Land – Industrial Use	0.91%	291	6,496
Urban	0.79%	6,197	5,671
Economic Resource Land – Agricultural Resource Land	0.73%	258	5,274
Suburban	0.70%	2,131	5,002
Economic Resource Land – Mineral Resource Land	0.21%	80	1,515
<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>29,671</b>	<b>717,652</b>

Figure 23

**Zoning Compatibility Study #1: Duplexes**

Two-unit duplexes are allowed in Multiple-Family Zones, Urban Zones, and Unzoned Areas. Based on limited utility access, duplexes are unlikely to be built in Unzoned areas without sanitary sewer and public water, this provides only 4,029 acres where duplexes could be built, or only 19.33% of zoned residential areas. This means that 0.56% of the acres in Cowlitz County qualify for Duplex development.

**Zoning Compatibility Study #2: Single Family Residential**

Single Family units are allowed in Rural Residential, Urban Residential, Suburban, Forestry-Recreation, Multiple-Family, Agriculture, and Unzoned areas. Single Family Residential is frequently built in Unzoned areas with a permit-exempt well and on-site septic system. Together, these areas total 707,484 acres, which means 98.54% of the acres in Cowlitz County qualify for Single Family Residential development.

**Zoning Compatibility Study #3: Quadplex Townhouse**

In zoned areas, Triplexes and Quadplexes are permitted outright in the Multiple-Family zone. The Multiple Family zoning district covers 179 acres, or 0.86% of zoned residential areas, meaning 0.02% of the zoned acreage in Cowlitz County qualifies for Quadplex Townhouse development. With available

land area, they may also be proposed as a Special Use, or as part of a Planned Unit Development in other zoning districts.

In Unzoned areas, the availability of services such as public water and sanitary sewer, limits development. One or both of these critical utilities are typically available in areas classified as Urban and Suburban in the Comprehensive Plan. To avoid the unpredictable need for water rights, quadplexes are not developed in Unzoned areas, outside public water service areas.

#### **Zoning Compatibility Study #4: 25-Unit Apartment Building**

A 25-Unit Apartment Building would be allowed in Multiple-Family Zones and Unzoned Areas. Unzoned areas without access to public water or sanitary sewer will unlikely become the site for an apartment building. This leaves 179 acres where a large apartment building could be built. Excluding Unzoned areas, only 0.86% of zoned residential areas or 0.02% of total unincorporated acreage qualify for the development of a 25-Unit Apartment Building. Additional Multiple-Family zoning is needed to provide land area for this type of housing.

#### [Needs Analysis Conclusion](#)

Cowlitz County is growing at a fast rate that surpasses all previous growth, and may even exceed growth predicted by the State Department of Commerce. Population changes during the 2010-2018 timeline show increased numbers of older residents and smaller household sizes with fewer children. The southern cities of Woodland and Kalama are growing faster than any other city in the County.

Significant quantities of new housing are required to house the County's existing and projected populations.

The increasing number of smaller households do not require large homes. County building permits are most often for rural homes with three or four bedrooms. The housing size does not match the shift

towards smaller households, and the rate of home construction does not match the observed population growth.

The Unzoned, rural areas of the County allow increased density, but they are not being used for increased density. Homes and apartments are being constructed at the borders of city limits, in residential zones, such as Lexington. Allowing increased numbers of homes in these areas helps to relieve development pressure in rural areas.

The County needs increased numbers of homes in zoned areas, where services and infrastructure are readily available, to serve the growing population. Flexibility to allow increased density outside of the Planned Unit Development process would provide further options.

Previous Cowlitz County Code updates have simplified ADU requirements and adopted Cottage Housing development codes. Subdivision code updates may allow additional development in the future.

Cowlitz County needs to do more outreach to local builders and contractors, to increase awareness that the County allows additional density under many existing codes.

In general, the County is hearing a demand for increased regulatory flexibility and more residential development.



Allowing Triplexes in Urban areas would provide additional homes for the 34% of people who rent their housing. (Development Code Change Recommendations #22, #23, &#33)

### Limitations

The Needs Assessment data relied on a myriad of sources, the majority of which were U.S. Census-related estimates. These estimates have a higher margin of error the longer out they are estimated from the last decennial census. The 2020 census, when released at the County level, will provide information that may supersede data presented in this assessment.

## Outreach Summary

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### Outreach Overview

The County’s outreach effort for public input into this Plan included committee meetings, individual interviews, and online surveys.

Through this outreach, participants identified a number of goals: Fostering market-rate projects, developing housing for seniors, and increasing the number of smaller units in urban areas would increase the variety of housing available in the County.

### Meetings and Interviews with Local Professionals

Outreach event	Location	Date	Participant #
Building and Planning Advisory Council	Virtual	12/17/20 1:30 pm	9
Planning Commission	Virtual	1/20/21 7 pm	9
Historic Preservation Commission	Virtual	1/14/21 10 am	8
Housing and Homelessness Task Force	Virtual	1/28/21 2 pm	13
Planning Commission	Virtual	3/17/21 7 pm	9
Housing and Homelessness Task Force	Virtual	3/25/21 2 pm	6
Planning Commission	Virtual	5/19/21 7 pm	50 (estimate)
Building and Planning Advisory Council	Virtual	5/20/21 1:30 pm	7
Planning Commission	Virtual	6/15/21 7 pm	11

Figure 24

Interview	Background	Date
Ted Sprague	Cowlitz Economic Development Council	1/21/21

Mark Smith	Planning Commission Chair, RV Park Owner	1/25/21
Bill Josh	Planning Commission, Multiple Local Committees, Realtor	1/27/21
Erica Rodman	Planning Commission, Realtor	1/28/21
Eric McCrandall	Housing-Homelessness Task Force, Community House on Broadway, Longview Chamber of Commerce	2/01/21
Kelli Sweet	Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington, Cowlitz Office	2/01/21
Christine Schott	Housing-Homelessness Task Force, Longview Councilmember	2/03/21
Mike Reardon	Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington	2/08/21
Jim Bain	Planning Commission, Architect, Developer	2/09/21
Whitney Littlefield	Housing-Homelessness Task Force, Juvenile Probation Officer	2/10/21
Travis Goddard	City of Woodland Community Development Director	3/04/21
Jack Hansen	Planning Commission, Religious Leader, Non-Profit Housing Staff	5/13/21

Figure 25

### Online Surveys

Beginning January 11, 2021, the County made two surveys available on its website, to seek input from members of the public. The first survey was designed for residents. The second survey was designed for the building industry; this included county staff, builders, septic designers, septic installers, realtors, developers, etc. These surveys focused on outlining the existing need for housing, identifying what housing the upcoming generations would need, and suggesting goals for the Housing Action Plan.

The County used several methods to seek survey participation:

- County Press Release on 1/11/21
- Printed in The Daily News, Local Newspaper 1/17/21
- Survey sent to County Staff in Building & Planning and Environmental Health Unit
- Survey sent to all meeting attendees
- Survey sent to building professionals registered with the Building and Planning Office
- Survey sent to septic system professionals registered with the Environmental Health Unit

In total, the surveys generated approximately 60 responses. The resident-specific survey had more than 50 responses. The industry-specific survey received the remainder.



ADUs allow an aging homeowner to house a caregiver or earn extra rental income. These easier-to-build-homes should be earnestly supported. (Development Code Change Recommendation #31 & #33, Outreach Recommendation #50, and General Housing Policy Recommendation #64b)

## Outreach Results

The public outreach results broadly fell into five groups, and some opinions fell into multiple categories.

1. **Code Changes** – Change existing land use zones and building codes to reduce regulatory burden on property owners
2. **Process Changes** – Change internal permitting processes to increase applicants’ understanding and improve the consistency of review
3. **Outreach** – Actively encourage housing construction in Cowlitz County
4. **Invest in the Future** – Monitor development patterns to anticipate housing needs
  - a. **General** – General housing suggestions, including senior housing
  - b. **Land and Infrastructure** – Focuses on the mechanics of homebuilding
5. **Other** – Ideas that cover multiple themes

### Code Changes

Online Survey respondents and interviewees’ responses suggested that county code should be as flexible as possible, to encourage housing development.

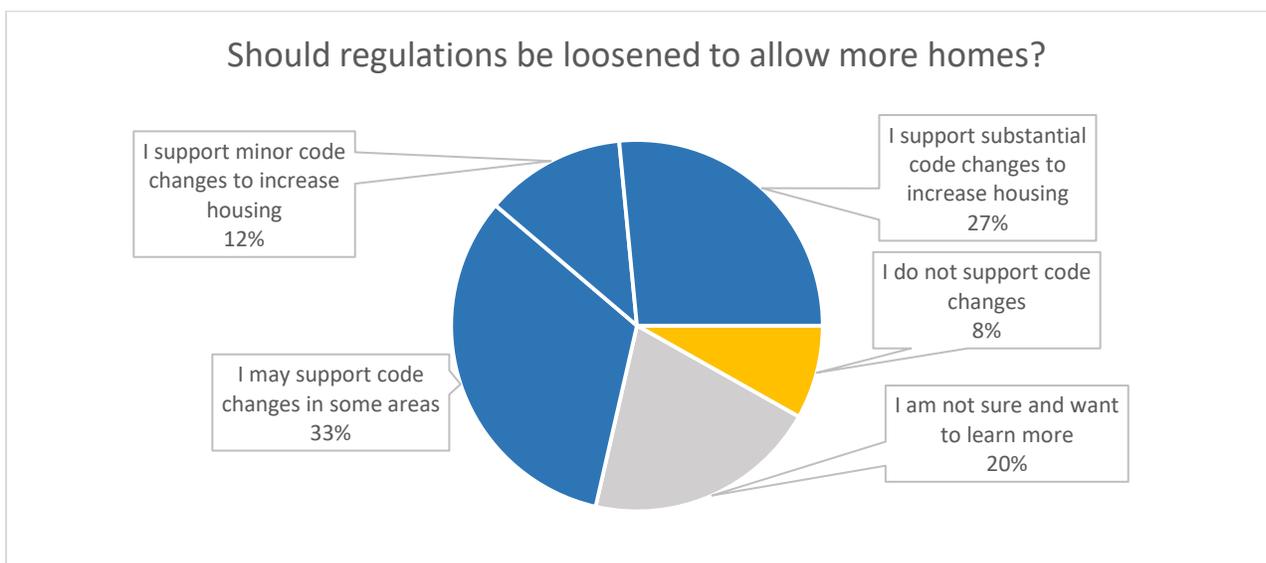


Figure 26

Comments received from participants included suggestions that would involve changing County code:

- Reduce the minimum lot size required in Urban-zoned areas to increase the number of allowed homes
- Keep the code as flexible as possible, to allow homes of all shapes and sizes
- Adjust front yard setback requirements to allow for more home construction. Such setbacks create a waste of land, as many don't use their front yards, and yards can also be difficult for older residents to maintain
- Adjust the Zoning and Comprehensive Plan maps to reflect on-the-ground infrastructure improvements. Suggestions included creating a mapped layer of public investments to better place additional density near existing sewage systems, public water, public schools, libraries, parks, and bus routes. One suggestion focused on 1/4-mile, or 'a reasonable six-minute walking distance,' between a development and such public amenities as schools or parks. These heat maps could be improved by adding private investments, such as grocery stores, private schools, day care centers, and senior care facilities
- Increase the number of homes allowed in Urban Areas to make better use of existing infrastructure and decrease the need for expensive wells and septic systems
- Increase the amount of land zoned Multiple-Family
- Increase the number of apartments allowed in Multiple-Family zones
- Reduce the current 60-foot ROW width required for private roads in subdivisions, increase building potential of narrow lots, and to reduce sprawl and stormwater management costs
- Review Planned Use Development and Cottage Housing ordinances, to recommend housing-friendly code updates
- Allow smaller-lot detached homes, which may be more marketable than attached units

## Process Changes

These suggestions broadly seek greater clarity and speed during the permitting process.

- Assess whether Building and Planning may review stormwater and private road engineering plans to reduce the burden on the Public Works Department and to save applicants time
- Create a stormwater review process that is simple and concise for applicants
- Increase the speed of Planning Permit review
- Increase the speed of Building Permit review
- Make the permitting process more accessible to owner-builders
- Research the ability of the County Environmental Health Unit to test well water
- Reduce Building and Planning permitting costs
- Continue to receive permit submittals online
- Continue to offer virtual staff consultations and virtual pre-app conferences
- Allow online payments for permits
- Identify a permitting process for group housing built with shared kitchen facilities
- Clarify tiny home requirements, including design standards and optimal permitting process
- Encourage housing policy meetings between Planning Commission and elected County Commissioners
- Draft a shared septic maintenance agreement, similar to a shared well agreement or private road maintenance agreement, to facilitate cost-sharing of septic systems for smaller units

## Recommended Outreach

These suggestions focus on how the Building and Planning Department could foster better dialogue with home builders.

- Identify a staff member to act as a “Multi-Family Development Coordinator” for home builders, to act as the initial point of contact, answer immediate questions, set up meetings, and keep the process moving. This staff’s input would be valuable to the Planning Commission
- Send a quarterly email/mailling update about changes in the Building and Planning office to builders/realtors/community members/frequent permit users, including information about flexible codes, code changes, development information, and staffing changes
- Host periodic, informal Building and Planning open houses with refreshments to talk about existing county codes, and countywide development, generally.
- Actively market the benefits of building in Cowlitz County, including the lower cost to develop, the higher speed of permitting, and dedicated professional staff
- Market Cowlitz County to out-of-town investors and builders as worthy of housing investment
- Create a “Developer’s Toolkit” with information on the permitting process and options to achieve higher density development
- Actively market Cowlitz County’s flexible Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Code to home builders and property owners, to encourage ADUs
- Collaborate on concurrent Housing Action Plans with the Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments and the City of Woodland
- Undertake a robust outreach effort to disseminate the results of this plan
- Support the County Assessor with outreach about the Property Tax Relief programs that assist senior residents
- Partner with the Cowlitz Economic Development Council to support housing development
- Encourage Public Utility District #1 to expand electricity to rural areas of Cowlitz County without cost-effective electricity infrastructure

- Consider how housing costs could affect where young people choose to live in the future, and their need for apartments and condominiums in the County
- Encourage beautification efforts to attract development

## Invest in the Future

### General Comments

- Focus on generating market-rate, for-profit housing over traditional non-profit housing
- Create a geographic vision for county development that focuses housing development to suitable areas
- Encourage incorporation of county areas into new cities or annexation by existing cities, as incorporated cities are much more competitive for grant funding for infrastructure upgrades
- Support senior housing, including:
  - Zone for new senior housing
  - Run a potential project through the permitting process to identify expected timeline, cost, and procedure
  - Review existing senior housing and identify factors that supported successful projects
  - Send staff to a senior housing development training/business to learn how to support these types of projects
  - Support aging-in-place for seniors, including retrofits to make their homes accessible
  - Encourage senior cottage housing clustered around shared amenities and situated on public water/sewer
  - Put in place programming and housing to support senior residents, to enable them to stay in housing that meets their changing needs
  - Develop programming to inform seniors about the potential challenges of rural living as their needs increase and to enhance their ability to "age in place"

- Encourage quality residential construction
- Advocate for using land with existing infrastructure for housing, to support property tax revenue and encourage compact development.
- Develop a Housing Trust Fund to fund land acquisition and development, awarded to housing providers, to support affordable housing projects through review fee and utility connection fee waivers or for funding construction of necessary infrastructure

#### Land/Infrastructure

- Identify land for development, prepare preliminary information, and market this land to housing developers. If appropriate, create “shovel-ready” preliminary designs for areas identified for development, through sub-area planning, creation of Local Improvement Districts, preliminary SEPA permitting, etc.
  - Consider the Hall and Hansen Road area in Toutle for this research
  - Focus design and research on improving quality of life for these areas
- Expand infrastructure and utilities to close-in rural areas to encourage housing development
- Allocate funding for infrastructure, to encourage additional housing development
- Complete a utility survey of Cowlitz County, to identify areas for development
- Support permit-exempt wells in the Lewis River valley
- Seek to amend the Washington Administrative Code to allow one-bedroom home septic systems.
- Evaluate cost-sharing for utility expansions, to allow public water and sewer to be shared

#### Other

1. Ensure County Code supports housing that includes:
  - Quality multiple-level rental housing
  - Housing for middle-income households

- Safe, high quality, attractive, small apartment units for young professionals
- Housing developments built without internal side setbacks, often called zero-lot-line developments
- Additional accessory dwelling unit construction
- More homes of all shapes and sizes, at a variety of price points
- Starter homes for young families
- Support for lower-income home ownership and rentals
- Plan for the telecommuters who would otherwise look for housing in Clark and Multnomah Counties
- Support rental housing for newly independent adolescents
- Create an inventory of mobile home parks and encourage expansion of existing parks
- Transitional Housing
  - Programming to support people living in recreational vehicles and trailers
  - Research shared-cost housing for lower-income people
  - Encourage inpatient addiction and mental health facility
  - Support rental housing for newly independent adolescents
  - Explore housing opportunities for people that focus on basic safety needs
  - Innovative housing strategies, such as tiny homes with shared amenities

### Online Survey Results

Housing affordability was of great concern to the resident respondents, with significant majorities believing housing was unaffordable to the broader community.

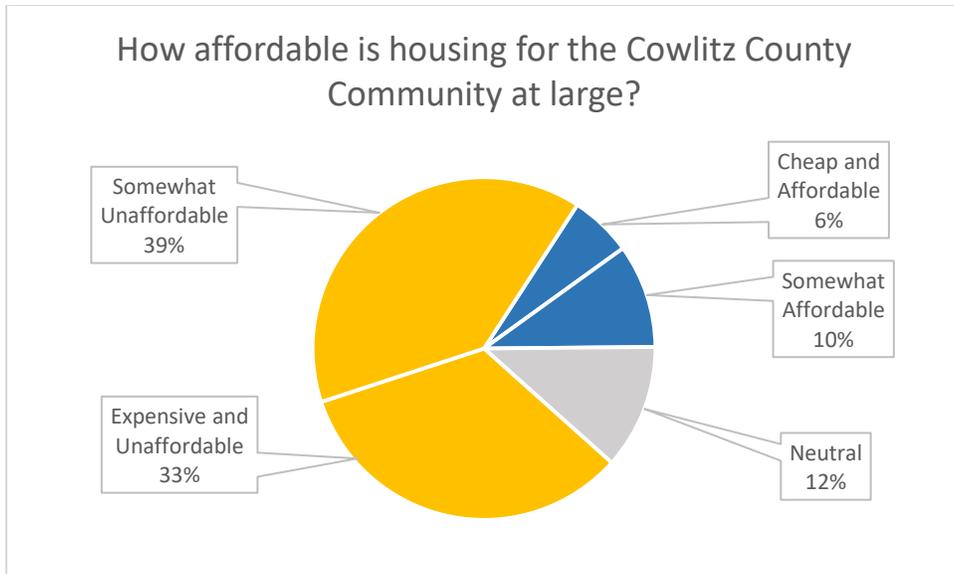
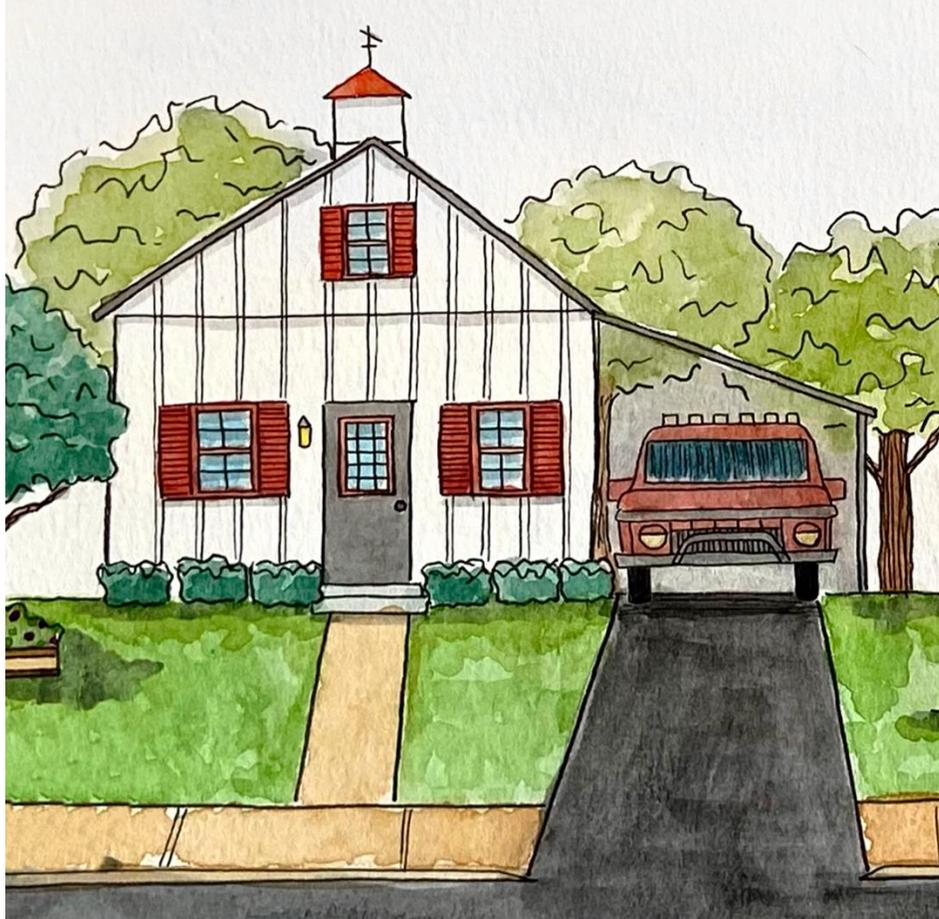


Figure 27

A majority, 66% of respondents, expected young adults that leave for military, college, or trade school, not to return to Cowlitz County. The majority of respondents attributed this to increased employment and housing opportunities outside the county. To retain both young people and seniors in Cowlitz County, housing needs to become more affordable.

### Outreach Conclusion

Residents offered strong support for changes to County code and processes, to encourage housing development. Commonalities included the desire to focus on supporting market rate development, housing for seniors, and a greater variety of housing in areas with existing public services. Industry professionals shared similar views and prioritized adjusting review processes to increase clarity while decreasing their permit coordination role. Survey responses from residents supported conserving rural land while encouraging home construction in neighborhoods with existing houses.



ADU conversions would be bolstered if “Change of Use” setback requirements were reduced or eliminated. (Development Code Change Recommendation #29)

## Plan Recommendations to Support Housing

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These recommendations are built from a foundation of community outreach results, Planning Commission input, and staff concepts. The “Regional Coordination” section focuses on options that require working across multiple jurisdictions, with the help of community leaders and dedicated staff. The “County-led Research and Training” recommendations focus on projects that could be accomplished by staff with the help of professional advisors. The “Zoning Map” and “Development Code” sections focus on changes to the foundational codes that guide County development. The “Infrastructure” section discusses the nuts and bolts that support development. The “Outreach” section discusses ways the County could proactively engage with property owners and home builders. The “General Housing Policy” section discusses important comprehensive housing approaches.

### Regional Coordination

1. Partner with the Cowlitz Economic Development Council (CEDC) and Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) to advance regional housing goals. The Cowlitz Economic Development Council can lend technical support to projects that the County is reviewing. The CEDC goal is to *“Facilitate new and existing business growth through leadership and action.”* The CEDC can be invited to larger Pre-Application Conferences for housing projects, and the CEDC could collaborate with applicants to finalize submittal materials. The regional planning organization, the Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments, with their focus on regional strategy, can lend support to housing projects.
2. Collaborate with local cities in Cowlitz County during the update of their development codes, to consider code updates to allow additional housing. Collaboration includes forging relationships with city development offices, attending local planning commission meetings, and supporting cities in

their planning efforts. The City of Longview’s Planning Commission is interested in allowing additional flexibility for ADU development, and the City of Woodland is considering additional infill allowances. The City of Castle Rock recently passed an ordinance to temporarily allow review of mixed-use projects. Coordination amongst regional planners, county wide will strengthen these partnerships.

3. Lead location-specific housing plans with local stakeholders, including preliminary design and feasibility determination. Outreach to developers and Planning Commissioners indicated that one of the initial challenges of a residential project is determining initial feasibility and the timeline for securing environmental land use permits. One potential solution they identified is for staff to undertake preliminary environmental permitting and create an initial feasibility report. This process could create “Engineering Ready” preliminary feasibility sketches for areas suitable for housing investment. Future Comprehensive Plan updates could include localized planning efforts, such as the establishment of a Local Improvement District or Sub Area Plans. One area suggested for this work the Hall and Hansen Road area near Toutle. Initial feasibility processes would need to be undertaken with support from local utility providers, Public Works, and supportive community advocates.
4. Support proactive housing policy meetings between appointed Planning Commission and elected Board of County Commissioners.
5. Encourage thoughtful land annexation by neighboring cities. Incorporated cities can be more competitive at securing grant funding for infrastructure upgrades that have the potential to support housing development.
6. Utilize EPA “Brownfields” program to address sites with hazardous waste. Formerly industrial lands, often called “brownfields,” dot Cowlitz County. Federal funds exist for the remediation and redevelopment of these brownfield sites. The Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) [Brownfields Grant Program](#) allows a partnership of governments to identify areas with hazardous or

commercial wastes, determine clean-up procedures, and redevelop the land for another use. Nationwide examples include redevelopment into parks, municipal buildings, and housing. These efforts are significant, usually involving the help of environmental consultants and companies specializing in hazardous area remediation. Most projects require property owner support and collaboration.

7. Consider a County-administered Housing Trust Fund to finance land acquisition and development, and reduce displacement. Funds could be awarded to housing providers through a program to refund the money or forgive the debt over time. This funding could also be used to support affordable housing projects, through fee waivers for permits and utility connections, or for construction of necessary infrastructure. Many other communities have a fund available for granting to affordable housing developers, including governmental and non-profit providers. Two expired Housing Trust funding options used by other jurisdictions are: 1) Property tax assessments using voter authority under RCW [84.52.105](#); or 2) A tax-neutral reallocation of local sales taxes using authority under 2019 Senate House Bill 1406. The restoration of these lapsed funding options is pivotal to establishing a Housing Trust Fund.
8. Support the use of permit-exempt wells in the Lewis River Valley, known as WRIA 27 (Water Resources Inventory Area 27). The Lewis River Valley is growing at a fast rate. The water in this basin is managed according to the instream flow rule established in WAC 173-527. Continued water access is critical to housing construction in this area.
9. Create a vision for County development. Public outreach suggested such a vision could go further than the existing Comprehensive Plan and create a geographic vision that focuses housing development where amenities, public investment and the market support housing construction.

10. Explore how a locally driven adaptation of state-authorized planning processes could benefit rural counties that plan under the Planning Enabling Act, such as Cowlitz County. Counties that fully plan under the Growth Management Act (GMA) have additional planning tools available:
  - a. Planned Action – Allows the bundling of Environmental, Land Use, and Public Hearings under a single project vision for a specific location. See RCW [43.21C.440](#)
  - b. Land Capacity Analysis or Buildable Lands Inventory – Requires that jurisdictions seeking to expand their urban growth areas complete a buildable lands inventory to determine if sufficient land exists to match proposed population and development goals. This tool is used to determine the necessary quantities of land for each use.
  - c. Limited Areas of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRD’s) – Allows for pockets of more intense development in rural areas, usually as a result of pre-existing status, industrial redevelopment, or tourism development.

### County-led Research and Training

11. Identify a permitting process for multi-family housing in areas that lack public services. Most Unzoned areas of Cowlitz County lack both public water and sanitary sewer. The Land Use Ordinance allows Multiple-Family home developments in these areas. Using alternative sources of water and sewage disposal could aid housing construction.
12. Draft a shared septic system maintenance agreement, similar to a shared well agreement or private road maintenance agreement. This would facilitate cost-sharing of septic systems for smaller units. Such an agreement could support small cottage housing developments on independent lots. The creation of a shared septic system maintenance agreement may require professional outside assistance.
13. Identify a permitting process for group housing built with shared amenities, including kitchens. Often called “apodments” or “microhousing,” these group-housing structures provide kitchen

facilities and other facilities in a shared area, with a separate bathroom, countertop, and sink in each unit. These designs could be permitted in the existing Multiple-Family and Unzoned areas, but not in Urban Residential areas. The state legislature and governor enacted [SB 5235](#), a pro-housing bill that supports group housing concepts. Allowances for these alternative housing models should be considered during County code revisions.

14. Clarify requirements for “tiny homes.” These are generally less than 500 square feet and detached from other structures, providing lower-cost housing to renters and temporary residents. Multiple tiny homes could be permitted under the existing Manufactured Home Park Code, the Recreation and Campground code, or the ADU code. Community input suggested clarifying tiny home requirements, including a preferred permitting process and design standards. The Recreation and Campground code was last updated in 1998, and any future revisions should support tiny home communities.
15. Train staff on the Washington Uniform Common Interest Ownership Act (WUCIOA). This state law was adopted in 2019 to regulate Homeowners’ Associations and Condominium Associations. While some small developments with limited dues are exempt from WUCIOA, provisions of the Act guide the shared maintenance of HOA facilities such as septic, stormwater, and open areas. Informed staff could provide additional preliminary information to homebuilders determining project scope, and provide supporting information to decision-makers such as the Planning Commission, Hearing Examiner, or elected County Commissioners.
16. Strengthen communication between County Public Works and Building and Planning offices. These offices are often tasked with reviewing large complex proposals with multiple moving parts. Communication between these departments facilitates quicker review timelines for builders. Projects that include private roads, stormwater review, or the platting process require Public Works Engineer review. Regular meetings can ensure the timeline and review process are clear and

predictable. Where possible, Building and Planning Department may review as much of each project as possible, to decrease the burden on Public Works staff.

### Zoning Map Changes

17. Simplify zoning for areas classified as Rural Residential (RR) and as Forestry-Recreational (FR), to match the Unzoned designation used for most areas of rural Cowlitz County. This would provide for all uses, including housing, industry, and tourism. Limited areas of the County use the Rural Residential (RR) and Forestry-Recreation (FR) zoning that prohibits commercial developments, restaurants, and housing except for single family homes and ADUs. If the Unzoned designation used in other parts of the County was applied to these Rural Residential zones, existing water systems and roads could be used for needed rural housing and commercial amenities.

The Rural Residential Zoning used in the Rose Valley, Coweeman Valley, Mt. Brynion, and Mt. Pleasant areas is the carryover of 1970s and 1980s planning policies that have not been updated to reflect the housing needs in Cowlitz County. Updating these zones to match the Unzoned designation would allow additional commercial and housing flexibility.

Zone	% Total land in County	# parcels Total	Acreage Total	# parcels above minimum lot size
<b>Rural Residential – 1</b>	0.02%	24	120	19
<b>Rural Residential – 2</b>	2.21%	2,980	15,856	1,891
<b>Rural Residential – 5</b>	0.32%	34	229	16
<b>Forestry-Recreation – (5)</b>	1.52%	552	10,884	446

Figure 28

18. Increase the amount of land zoned Multiple-Family. Cowlitz County has 179 acres zoned Multiple-Family, approximately 0.42 percent of the zoned land in the County and 0.02 percent of the total land in the County. Many of these zones are already built out; initial review found only 13 unencumbered lots zoned for multi-family housing, with a median lot size of 1.92 acres. To meet the housing goals of providing housing types at a variety of cost levels, many more acres of Multiple-Family zoning should be designated. Providing additional Multiple-Family-zoned land would allow

individual developers to weigh the benefits of various projects and choose to build any variety of housing. The existing Multiple-Family designation also provides the flexibility of allowing single detached homes, duplexes, or attached townhouses. Such zoning flexibility allows the builder to adapt the project to support community’s housing needs and financing. The expansion of Multiple-Family zoned areas could provide additional rental housing and townhouse style developments in urban areas of the County while relieving development pressure in rural areas.

<b>Zone</b>	<b>% Total land in County</b>	<b>Acreage Total</b>	<b># Parcels Total</b>	<b># Parcels above minimum lot size</b>	<b># Available parcels</b>
<b>Multiple-Family</b>	0.02%	179	404	152	13

Figure 29

19. Re-evaluate existing zoning to reflect on-the-ground public investments that support housing.

Updated zoning maps could reflect a “heat map” concept, showing where existing public investments would best serve additional residential density. These public investments include:

- a. Public schools
- b. Libraries
- c. Parks
- d. Bus routes
- e. Sewage systems
- f. Public water systems
- g. Community centers

20. Re-evaluate existing zoning to reflect on-the-ground private investments, similar to the mapping of public services. These private investments include:

- a. Grocery stores
- b. Day care centers
- c. Private schools
- d. Senior care facilities

- e. Churches and places of worship

## Development Code Changes

21. Amend private road design standards to allow a reduced Right of Way (ROW) or easement for short plats. Short Plats are currently set at a maximum of four lots. A 60-foot easement for a 20-foot-wide street to serve four lots is expensive and severely limits developable space in small short plats in Urban areas. A reduced ROW or easement could be developed for dead-end private roads that serve few lots.
22. Allow triplexes and quadplexes outright in unincorporated Urban areas. Permitting additional homes in Urban Residential areas on a single lot could provide more housing for renters. One primary home with one attached ADU and one detached ADU are already allowed in these areas, so allowing triplexes would provide flexibility to home builders to build three units where they typically only construct one. Three-unit triplexes and four-unit quadplexes should be considered in Urban Residential-zoned areas and Urban comprehensive plan classifications.
23. Add triplexes to the list of allowed uses in Urban Residential zones, to match ADU allowances. Urban Residential (UR) Zones are supported by public water, sewer, and roads. These UR zones cover about 3,850 acres in Cowlitz County. Density in these zones should reflect the existing public infrastructure investment in these areas. In Urban Residential Zones, single detached dwellings and duplexes are permitted. Two ADUs are also permitted. Currently, zoning allows three units, including one primary home, one attached ADU, and one detached ADU. Permitting triplexes in Urban Residential zones would mirror existing ADU allowances.
24. Update the County subdivision code to allow up to nine-lot subdivisions to be reviewed administratively by staff, saving time and cost for landowners. This would match County code with RCW 58.17.095.

25. Allow limited ground-floor commercial uses in Multiple Family-zoned areas. Convenience stores, day care centers, and professional services could support multi-family developments by providing internal destinations and readily accessible places to start businesses. The development of such ground-floor commercial uses could help reduce displacement of small neighborhood businesses.
26. Reduce the minimum lot size in areas zoned Urban Residential and/or classified in the Comprehensive Plan as Urban. The current minimum lot size in these areas is 6,000 square feet. Allowing a smaller lot size would provide greater flexibility for property owners. Builders suggested a 5,000-square foot lot size in Urban Residential zones, to encourage home construction.
27. Add Cottage Housing and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) to permitted uses section of appropriate zones. While they are allowed in most urban and suburban areas, the existing code is not written to specifically highlight these adaptive uses. To reduce confusion and support innovative housing, cottage housing and PUDs should be added to the “permitted uses” section of each appropriate zone. For example, add iii. and iv. below:
- a. *Only the following uses are permitted for this district:*
    - i. *Any use permitted in the RR-1 district;*
    - ii. *Other uses compatible with the residential character of this land use district subject to special use permit approval pursuant to CCC [18.10.280](#) through [18.10.490](#). (Ord. 4508, § 1-4.02.01, 12-17-75.)*
    - iii. *Cottage Housing pursuant to CCC 18.68.*
    - iv. *Planned Unit Developments pursuant to CCC 18.30.*
28. Adopt electric vehicle charging codes to match upcoming state building code changes. The state legislature intends to add electrical vehicle-charging equipment requirements to the state building code in the next several years. Cowlitz County should adopt local codes to support this anticipated change, such as exempting charging equipment from setback requirements and land use permits.
29. Eliminate “Change of Use” setback requirements for ADU conversions. The conversion of an existing accessory building (such as a shop) to an ADU is considered a change of use. This change of use requires that this structure comply with current land use setbacks. This presents a challenge when

an accessory structure in use for decades does not conform with current setbacks. In order to ease the process of converting an existing building to a dwelling, the County should provide flexibility for land use setbacks. An example is the residential conversion of a shop built in the 1950's that lies within the property line setback.

30. Create uniform one-bedroom On-site Septic System (OSS) guidelines at the County level so that one bedroom system review is predictable for ADU and bedroom additions.
31. Allow flexibility for parking requirements. Parking can be expensive to build and maintain, adding to the cost of housing. Initial costs include engineering, construction, and stormwater systems, as well as the opportunity cost of land permanently converted to parking. Ongoing parking-related costs can include stormwater system maintenance, resurfacing, and restriping. Flexibility could reduce redevelopment costs and increase location-specific parking choices. Possibilities include:
  - a. Conduct a parking survey, to determine actual local demand for residential parking
  - b. Evaluate parking requirements on single family lots. The current requirement is two off-street spaces per home. A reduction to one off-street space could be allowed if on-street parking is available within 300 feet.
  - c. The current parking requirement for ADUs is one off-street space. The mandatory minimum parking could be eliminated for ADUs, as these units are often designed to temporarily serve family, and can place an onerous burden on the redevelopment of an existing urban lot where on-street parking may be available.
  - d. Parking vehicles in tandem spaces (one behind the other) is currently allowed in County Code. This existing flexibility facilitates enclosed parking on narrow lots with housing above. A parking diagram showcasing this existing lot flexibility could be added to the County Code or outreach materials.

- e. Consider adjusting parking requirements for 5-unit (or greater) multiple-family developments. The minimum is currently three spaces for every two units. This may not take into account availability of specific amenities such as on-street parking, public transit, secured on-site bicycle storage, or availability of shared-use parking areas.

32. Encourage the adaptive reuse and redevelopment of industrial campuses and commercial developments, especially if the redevelopment includes housing or recreation amenities.

33. Align minimum lot size requirements for ADUs, duplexes, and triplexes. The minimum lot sizes required for duplexes and triplexes in Multiple Family Zones are more restrictive than minimum lot sizes for homes with ADUs in Urban Residential Zones. See CCC [18.10.541](#).

Example 1: A three-unit development consisting of a Primary home with two ADUs in an Urban Residential zone would require 6,000 square feet of lot area, whereas a three-unit triplex in an adjacent Multiple Family zone would require 12,000 square feet of lot area.

Example 2: A Duplex in an Urban Residential Zone requires 7,500 square feet of lot area, while a primary home with one attached ADU requires 6,000 square feet of lot area.

The lot area standards have not been updated since 1994. Updates to this code could be considered to create lot area consistency between these lower-cost types of development. The historic intention of this code could be affirmed by utilizing setback requirements in place of lot area standards for duplexes, triplexes and quadplexes.

34. Update the rarely utilized Planned Unit Development code, enacted in 1984. An initial staff review supported removing redundancies written in other state or County codes and allowing more flexibility within this housing-focused code. These include:

- a. Allow variances to numerical standards
- b. Redefine net and gross development areas
- c. Increase zero lot line development flexibility

- d. Provide for administrative review for smaller projects
- e. Clarify density bonus sections

35. Update the recently adopted Cottage Housing Ordinance to provide more housing flexibility. Since its adoption it has received interest, but limited use. The following updates have been suggested to enhance use of the ordinance:

- a. Identify a variance process
- b. Revisit maximum unit size. The current maximum is 1,200 square feet of habitable space.
- c. Define the maximum habitable space either through code or outreach to exclude:  
utility/mechanical rooms, stairways, access ramps, unheated attics, unheated basements, crawlspaces, attached garages, detached garages, carports, porches, external entryways, open walled breezeways, stairway landings, elevators, decks, storage areas with external or garage entry only, areas with less than 5 feet of vertical clearance, roof access hatch doors areas, roof space, ventilation ducts, plumbing ducts, etc.
- d. Create public outreach materials about the benefits of the Cottage Housing Code.

36. Reduce the standard 60-foot easement width for low classification private roads in urban areas.

Type C private roads are designed to serve three to nine lots, with a roadway width of 20 feet. The required 60-foot easement width is three times wider than the constructed private road width. This means that narrow lots cannot be served by a private road, and therefore cannot be developed as a small subdivision. A reduced easement width would not affect the roadway width, roadway surface, emergency access or required building setback distances, and would increase the development potential of many narrow lots.

A 30-foot easement width would accommodate required improvements. Per existing standards, cul-de-sac emergency turnarounds or “hammerhead” intersections may still be required. This proposed

minimum width would match Clark County’s requirements and was identified by outreach participants as advantageous to encourage housing. See Clark County Code [40.350.030](#).

37. Rewrite the front yard setback code to showcase existing flexibility for housing on small lots. The setback is the mandatory minimum distance from the roadway ROW/easement or front property line to the building line. County Code currently requires a 50/20-foot minimum, meaning that the building front is at least 50 feet from the center of the ROW/easement and 20 feet from the front property line, whichever is greater. This front yard setback code was last updated in 2017. Homes fronting onto designated arterial streets have slightly larger required setbacks. Significant flexible exceptions to the front yard setback exist in the current code. Greater education and outreach could call attention to this flexibility.

Outreach identified the front yard setback as a maintenance challenge, especially for senior property owners who plan to “Age-in-Place.” The front yard setback also creates the need for additional stormwater management and can discourage the efficient use of urban land. Additional flexibility to front yard setback requirements may be appropriate. See CCC [18.10.505](#).

## Infrastructure

38. Complete a community utility survey of Cowlitz County to identify areas for housing development. The publicly available mapped results could yield more informed property owners and home builders.
39. Extend electricity to areas without cost-effective electricity infrastructure. Public Utility District #1 (PUD) is a critical partner in this endeavor.
40. Expand infrastructure and utilities to serve residential land near urban areas, to encourage housing development.
41. Allocate funding for new infrastructure to support housing development. Dense housing is more likely to be built where there is sufficient infrastructure.

42. Explore cost-sharing options for utility expansions. The cost of expanding utilities is expensive.

Multiple survey respondents were interested in cost-sharing for utility expansions, so that a benefit such as public water and sewer can be shared between neighboring property owners. A potential option to spread the cost is through Local Improvement Districts coupled with Sub-Area Planning. These processes require property owner agreement. Future updates to the comprehensive plan may consider these concepts.

43. Pursue amendment of the Washington Administrative Code, to allow one-bedroom septic systems.

WAC 246-272A-0230 requires small septic systems be designed for two bedrooms, even if attached to a one bedroom unit. WAC amendment would support one-bedroom homes and one-bedroom accessory dwelling units.

44. Expand high-speed internet to areas without cost-effective broadband service. High-speed broadband is critical to economic development, education, and community-building. Consider opportunities for low-interest loan/grant funding to provide broadband access in underserved areas of the County.

## Outreach

45. Actively market the benefits of building in Cowlitz County, including the lower cost to develop, lower permitting cost, faster permitting speed, and professional environment. Input from industry professionals indicated that working in Cowlitz County has fewer hurdles than neighboring areas.

46. Market Cowlitz County to out-of-town investors and builders as worthy of housing investment

47. Add sewer and potable water service areas to the County environmental mapping system

48. Create a “Developer’s Toolkit” with in-depth information on the permitting process and options to achieve higher density development. This could include specific code sections, contact names of local offices, etc.

49. Promote the merit of existing fire code choices to address risk from wildfire. Fire poses an extreme threat to Cowlitz County. Existing fire code requirements allow property owners to choose from a suite of fire code options, including defensible space and fire-resistant construction. Ongoing supportive maintenance is critical to maintaining fire awareness in the rural areas of the County. The merit of fire code choices and options should be promoted.
50. Actively promote Cowlitz County's current Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Code as among the most flexible in the state. The Building and Planning office needs to market the adopted ordinance, to encourage ADU construction. Urban and Suburban areas allow up to two ADUs and rural areas allow one ADU. ADUs can minimize displacement by increasing homeowner stability through generating rental income, and accommodating extended families. Building and Planning staff should take every opportunity to share this flexibility with builders and property owners.
51. Continue to offer virtual staff consultations and virtual pre-application conferences, online permit submittals, and online payments. These virtual options can save applicants and staff valuable time.
52. Explore the option of continuing virtual meetings, in an effort to increase committee participation.
53. Identify a staff member as a multi-family development coordinator. The staff in this role could oversee permitting coordination of multi-family developments, including duplexes, ADUs, larger developments, and subdivisions, from initial feasibility to final construction. Managing a quarterly housing newsletter and additional outreach to builders, including roundtable discussions, open houses with refreshments, and site inspections, would bolster this coordinator role. As the Planning Commission and BOCC are actively interested in revising County codes to allow increased numbers of homes, the housing coordinator could keep these commissions apprised of new housing development and code updates. This role could be tasked with sending a quarterly update email to frequent permit users in the Building and Planning system, answering immediate questions, coordinating meetings, and keeping the process moving.

54. Create a Commission on Aging. The increase in senior residents in the County should be analyzed by a group of appointed seniors and service groups. This work group or committee could analyze ways to incorporate senior experience and needs into County processes. In Clark County, the Board of Commissioners formed a [Commission on Aging](#) that has developed a list of housing, transportation, and citizen engagement recommendations.
55. Create educational materials about the flexibility offered to property owners in the Cottage Housing Ordinance. The benefits of 200% density and unit size requirements should be shown in such materials.
56. Undertake a robust outreach effort to disseminate this plan's recommendations. Options include open houses, press releases, news articles, regular discussion topics at Planning Commission or BPAC meetings, etc.

### General Housing Policies

57. Update development codes to provide flexibility and increase housing construction. Outreach results emphasized making development codes as flexible as possible to encourage housing development.
58. Support market-rate, for-profit housing over traditional non-profit housing.
59. Plan for telecommuters who would otherwise look for housing in Clark and Multnomah Counties. This means supporting developments that provide community and recreational amenities to inhabitants. Residential uses mixed with commercial activity centers can act as a draw to telecommuters. Some telecommuters move from town to town, and to support them the County's housing options should include short-term rentals, hotels, and shared residential amenities.
60. Support hotel and motel development. Hotels provide flexible temporary housing to workers and families. Whether during and after a disaster, or in a housing shortage, hotels and motels release pressure from the housing market. The adaptation of hotels into permanent housing can also be

undertaken by private developers with market support; a local example is the Monticello Hotel in Longview. Zoning codes could allow bed-and-breakfast style housing as a means to relieve pressure on permanent housing.

61. Advocate for rental housing for newly independent adolescents. Housing is especially difficult to find for young people who are new to an area or lack familial housing support. These inexperienced renters can face hurdles in their quest to find or maintain housing. .

62. Explore Transitional Housing opportunities through a variety of options:

- a. Programming to support people who live in recreational vehicles and trailers
- b. Shared-cost housing for lower income people
- c. Inpatient addiction and mental health facilities
- d. Housing that provides for basic safety needs
- e. Innovative strategies to build tiny housing with shared amenities

63. County Code should support a range of housing options to accommodate all County residents, such as:

- f. Units for owners and renters of all income levels
- g. Quality, multiple-level rental housing
- h. Increased amount of housing for middle-income households
- i. Safe, high-quality, attractive, small apartment units for young professionals
- j. Housing developments built without internal side setbacks, known as zero-lot-line developments
- k. Accessory dwelling unit construction
- l. Housing in multiple shapes and sizes
- m. Affordable starter homes for young families

64. Utilize a combination of solutions to reduce housing displacement:

- n. Ensure that homeowners with low incomes, persons with disabilities, and seniors, are aware of the property tax relief programs available through the Assessor's office.
- o. Pursue code changes that make ADUs easier to permit, finance, and build
- p. Promote Washington State Department of Commerce's Manufactured/Mobile Home Relocation Assistance Programs to manufactured home park residents during park redevelopment
- q. Enact County codes that facilitate business incubation, co-working spaces, and live/work housing

65. Assess needs and solutions for senior housing. Seniors in Cowlitz County desire homes and developments that will support their future needs. Needs analysis research indicated that these seniors are current residents who seek to continue living in Cowlitz County in adapted homes or communities. Programming and housing should be in place so that they are not forced to leave the area to find housing that meets their changing needs. County codes should reflect the aging population and encourage property owners to build adaptive housing. A myriad of concepts support this senior housing.

- r. Review existing senior housing to identify factors that have supported successful projects
- s. Create an "Age-in-Place" design program with a suite of age-friendly amenities that can be added to homes for future needs. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) age-friendly design list includes: access ramps, door knobs, bathroom alterations, handrails, power outlet locations, first level living, stacked closets, and more.
- t. Run a potential senior housing project through the permitting process, to determine expected timeline, cost, and procedure.
- u. Train staff in senior housing development, in order to support these types of projects.

- v. Encourage senior cottage housing clustered around shared amenities and situated on public water and sewer. This could potentially be accomplished by adding cottage housing to the permitted use section of each zone.
- w. Plan for locating senior housing near support systems. Self-sufficiency and rural living are prized in Cowlitz County. The County should also encourage housing designs that allows seniors to age-in-place safely.



Modest ADUs and manufactured homes can provide “Age in Place” amenities for seniors. (General Housing Policy Recommendations #63 & #65)

## Conclusion

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This Housing Action Plan will require support from many partners, neighbors, property owners and builders, to achieve the goal of providing a variety of housing types and sizes at a mix of costs. The County's impressive population growth, coupled with the aging of existing residents, means that the limited supply of housing will not ease soon. The County will need to work towards all of these proposed solutions, to begin to create the types of housing needed.

The process to turn a recommendation into code involves many steps and requires the support of multiple stakeholders. The backing of businesses, housing advocates, County staff, and neighbors is necessary to achieve these Housing Action Plan recommendations.



## Appendix

**Appendix Item #1: Cost Value Recommendation Table**

Plan Recommendations to Support Housing		Anticipated		
		Cost	Effort	Value
<b>Regional Coordination</b>				
1	Partner with the Cowlitz Economic Development Council [CEDC] & Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments [CWCOG] to advance regional housing goals	Low	Low	Medium
2	Collaborate with local cities on updated development codes, to encourage additional housing	Low	Medium	High
3	Lead location-specific housing plans with local stakeholders, including preliminary designs and project feasibility	Medium	High	Greatest
4	Encourage joint Planning Commission and County Commissioner housing policy meetings	Low	Low	High
5	Encourage thoughtful land annexation by cities	Low	Low	Medium
6	Utilize EPA brownfields program to identify sites for remediation and redevelopment	Low	High	Medium
7	Consider a County administered Housing Trust Fund to finance land acquisition and development	Medium	High	Greatest
8	Support permit-exempt wells in the Lewis River Valley	Medium	Medium	Greatest
9	Create a vision for County development, which goes beyond the existing Comprehensive Plan and focuses on housing development	Low	High	Medium
10	Explore how a locally driven adaptation of state-authorized planning tools could benefit rural Cowlitz County	Low	High	High
		<b>Anticipated</b>		
<b>County-led Research and Training</b>		<b>Cost</b>	<b>Effort</b>	<b>Value</b>
11	Determine permitting process for multi-family housing in areas without public water/sewer	Low	Medium	Medium
12	Draft a shared septic system maintenance agreement	Medium	Low	Low
13	Identify permitting process for group housing built with shared kitchens	Low	Low	High
14	Clarify tiny home requirements, including preferred permitting process and design standards	Low	Low	High
15	Train staff on recently updated state codes for homeowners' associations to ensure accurate replies to development questions	Medium	Low	Low
16	Strengthen communication between Public Works and Building and Planning offices	Low	Low	High
		<b>Anticipated</b>		
<b>Zoning Map Changes</b>		<b>Cost</b>	<b>Effort</b>	<b>Value</b>
17	Simplify zoning for areas classified Rural Residential and Forestry-Recreation to match Unzoned countywide designation	Low	Medium	Medium
18	Increase the quantity of land zoned for Multiple-Family housing	Low	High	Greatest
19	Re-evaluate zoning maps to reflect on-the-ground public investments that support housing	Medium	High	High
20	Re-evaluate zoning maps to reflect on-the-ground private investments that support housing	Medium	High	High

		Anticipated		
<b>Development Code Changes</b>		Cost	Effort	Value
21	Amend private road design standards to allow smaller ROW or easement for short plats	Low	Low	High
22	Allow triplexes and quadplexes outright in the County's unincorporated Urban areas	Low	Medium	High
23	Add triplexes to the list of allowed uses in Urban Residential zones to match ADU allowances	Low	Medium	Medium
24	Update the County subdivision code to allow up to nine-lot subdivisions to be reviewed administratively by staff	Low	Medium	Greatest
25	Allow limited ground-floor commercial uses in Multiple Family-zoned areas	Low	Low	Medium
26	Reduce minimum lot size in areas zoned Urban Residential from 6,000 square feet to 5,000 square feet	Low	Low	High
27	Add Cottage Housing and Planned Unit Developments to permitted uses	Low	Low	Low
28	Adopt electric vehicle charging codes to match upcoming state building codes	Low	Low	Low
29	Eliminate "Change of Use" setback requirements for ADU conversions	Low	Low	High
30	Create uniform one-bedroom Onsite Septic System [OSS] requirements	Low	Low	High
31	Allow flexibility for parking requirements	Low	High	Medium
32	Encourage the adaptive reuse of existing structures for housing development	Low	Low	Greatest
33	Align minimum lot size requirements for ADUs, duplexes, and triplexes	Low	Low	High
34	Update the forty-year-old Planned Unit Development code to match modern needs	Low	Low	High
35	Update the recently adopted Cottage Housing Ordinance to provide more housing flexibility	Low	Low	High
36	Reduce the 60-foot minimum private road easement width to match nearby jurisdictions	Low	Low	Greatest
37	Rewrite the front yard setback code to showcase existing flexibility for housing on small lots	Low	Low	Medium
		Anticipated		
<b>Infrastructure</b>		Cost	Effort	Value
38	Complete a community utility survey of Cowlitz County to identify areas for housing development	Medium	Low	Greatest
39	Extend electricity to areas without cost-effective electricity infrastructure	High	High	Low
40	Expand infrastructure and utilities to serve residential land near urban areas	High	High	High
41	Allocate funding for new infrastructure (roads, water/sewer, broadband), to support housing development	Greatest	Greatest	High
42	Explore cost-sharing options for utility expansions	Low	High	Low
43	Pursue amendment of Washington Administrative Code 246-272A-0230 to allow one-bedroom home septic systems	Low	Medium	Medium
44	Expand high speed internet to areas without cost-effective broadband service	Medium	Low	Greatest

		Anticipated		
	<b>Outreach</b>	Cost	Effort	Value
45	Actively market the benefits of building in Cowlitz County, including the lower cost to develop and professional permitting office	Low	Medium	High
46	Market Cowlitz County to out-of-town investors and builders as worthy of housing investment	Low	Medium	High
47	Add sewer and potable water service areas to the county environmental mapping system	Low	Low	High
48	Create a “Developer’s Toolkit” with in-depth information on the permitting process and options to achieve higher density development	Low	High	High
49	Promote the merit of the existing fire code options to alleviate the threat of extreme wildfires	Low	Low	Medium
50	Actively promote the extremely flexible ADU code to home builders	Low	Low	High
51	Continue to offer virtual staff consultations and virtual pre-app conferences, online permit submittals, and payments	Low	Low	Medium
52	Explore continued virtual meeting participation opportunities, to encourage participation	Low	Low	Low
53	Identify staff member as a multi-family development coordinator, to help with initial feasibility questions	Medium	Medium	Greatest
54	Create a Commission on Aging, to examine and incorporate the housing and community needs of seniors	Low	Medium	High
55	Create educational materials about housing flexibility offered in the Cottage Housing ordinance	Low	Low	Medium
56	Undertake a robust outreach effort to disseminate the recommendations of this plan	Low	Medium	Greatest
		Anticipated		
	<b>General Housing Policy</b>	Cost	Effort	Value
57	Update development codes to be as flexible as possible to encourage housing development	Low	Low	Greatest
58	Focus on supporting market-rate, for-profit housing over traditional non-profit housing	Low	Low	High
59	Plan for telecommuters to live in Cowlitz County	Low	Low	High
60	Support Motel and Hotel development, to provide homes during acute housing shortages	Low	Medium	High
61	Advocate for rental housing for newly independent adolescents	Low	Medium	High
		Anticipated		
62	Explore <b>Transitional Housing</b> opportunities:	Cost	Effort	Value
a	Programming to support people living in recreational vehicles and trailers	Medium	High	Medium
b	Shared-cost housing for lower income people	Greatest	Greatest	Medium
c	Inpatient addiction and mental health facilities	High	High	Medium
d	Housing that provides for basic safety needs	High	High	Medium
e	Innovative strategies for tiny homes with shared amenities	High	High	High

		Anticipated		
		Cost	Effort	Value
<b>63</b>	Ensure County Code supports a <b>variety of housing types:</b>			
<b>a</b>	Owner-occupied and rental units for all income levels	Low	Low	High
<b>b</b>	Quality multiple-level rental housing	Low	Low	High
<b>c</b>	Increased housing for middle-income households	Low	Low	High
<b>d</b>	Safe, high-quality, attractive, small apartment units for young professionals	Low	Low	Greatest
<b>e</b>	Housing developments built without internal side setbacks (Zero-lot-line developments)	Low	Low	Greatest
<b>f</b>	Accessory dwelling units	Low	Low	High
<b>g</b>	Housing in multiple shapes and sizes	Low	Low	High
<b>h</b>	Affordable starter homes for young families	Low	Low	High
		Anticipated		
<b>64</b>	Utilize a combination of solutions to <b>reduce housing displacement:</b>	Cost	Effort	Value
<b>a</b>	Encourage use of property tax relief programs available through the Assessor's office	Low	Low	High
<b>b</b>	Pursue code changes that make ADUs easier to permit, finance, and build	Low	Medium	Greatest
<b>c</b>	Promote Manufactured/Mobile Home Relocation Assistance Programs	Low	Low	Medium
<b>d</b>	Enact County codes that facilitate new businesses during housing redevelopment	Medium	High	High
		Anticipated		
<b>65</b>	Assess <b>senior housing</b> needs and solutions:	Cost	Effort	Value
<b>a</b>	Review existing senior housing, identify factors that supported successful projects	Low	Low	Greatest
<b>b</b>	Create an "Age-in-Place" design program with a suite of age-friendly amenities that can be added to homes for future needs	Low	Low	High
<b>c</b>	Run a potential senior housing project through the permitting process to identify expected timeline, cost, and procedure	Low	Low	Medium
<b>d</b>	Train staff in senior housing development, to facilitate such projects	Low	Low	Greatest
<b>e</b>	Encourage senior cottage housing clustered around shared amenities and situated on public water and sewer	Low	Low	High
<b>f</b>	Plan for senior housing near supportive networks, and where self-sufficient, rural seniors can adapt to aging-in-place	Low	Low	Medium

**Appendix Item #2:** Prioritized Cost Value Recommendation Table.

Methodology: A number value from 1 to 4 was assigned to each “Cost”, “Effort”, and “Value” score. The sum of these values was ordered in descending order for all recommendations. For recommendations with identical scores, those with higher “Value” are listed first.

#	Plan Recommendations to Support Housing	Cost	Effort	Value	Priority Calculation
32	Encourage the adaptive reuse of existing structures for housing development	Low	Low	Greatest	12
36	Reduce the 60-foot minimum private road easement width to match nearby jurisdictions	Low	Low	Greatest	12
57	Update development codes to be as flexible as possible to encourage housing development	Low	Low	Greatest	12
63d	Variety of Housing Types: Safe, high-quality, attractive, small apartment units for young professionals	Low	Low	Greatest	12
63e	Variety of Housing Types: Housing developments built without internal side setbacks (Zero-lot-line developments)	Low	Low	Greatest	12
65a	Senior Housing: Review existing senior housing, identify factors that supported successful projects	Low	Low	Greatest	12
65d	Senior Housing: Train staff in senior housing development, to facilitate such projects	Low	Low	Greatest	12
24	Update the County subdivision code to allow up to nine-lot subdivisions to be reviewed administratively by staff	Low	Medium	Greatest	11
38	Complete a community utility survey of Cowlitz County to identify areas for housing development	Medium	Low	Greatest	11
44	Expand high speed internet to areas without cost-effective broadband service	Medium	Low	Greatest	11
56	Undertake a robust outreach effort to disseminate the recommendations of this plan	Low	Medium	Greatest	11
64b	Reduce Housing Displacement: Pursue code changes that make ADUs easier to permit, finance, and build	Low	Medium	Greatest	11
4	Encourage joint Planning Commission and County Commissioner housing policy meetings	Low	Low	High	11
13	Identify permitting process for group housing built with shared kitchens	Low	Low	High	11
14	Clarify tiny home requirements, including preferred permitting process and design standards	Low	Low	High	11
16	Strengthen communication between Public Works and Building and Planning offices	Low	Low	High	11
21	Amend private road design standards to allow smaller ROW or easement for short plats	Low	Low	High	11
26	Reduce minimum lot size in areas zoned Urban Residential from 6,000 square feet to 5,000 square feet	Low	Low	High	11
29	Eliminate “Change of Use” setback requirements for ADU conversions	Low	Low	High	11
30	Create uniform one-bedroom Onsite Septic System [OSS] requirements	Low	Low	High	11
33	Align minimum lot size requirements for ADUs, duplexes, and triplexes	Low	Low	High	11
34	Update the forty-year-old Planned Unit Development code to match modern needs	Low	Low	High	11
35	Update the recently adopted Cottage Housing Ordinance to provide more housing flexibility	Low	Low	High	11
47	Add sewer and potable water service areas to the county environmental mapping system	Low	Low	High	11

#	Plan Recommendations to Support Housing	Cost	Effort	Value	Priority Calculation
50	Actively promote the extremely flexible ADU code to home builders	Low	Low	High	11
58	Focus on supporting market-rate, for-profit housing over traditional non-profit housing	Low	Low	High	11
59	Plan for telecommuters to live in Cowlitz County	Low	Low	High	11
63a	Variety of Housing Types: Owner-occupied and rental units for all income levels	Low	Low	High	11
63b	Variety of Housing Types: Quality multiple-level rental housing	Low	Low	High	11
63c	Variety of Housing Types: Increased housing for middle-income households	Low	Low	High	11
63f	Variety of Housing Types: Accessory dwelling units	Low	Low	High	11
63g	Variety of Housing Types: Housing in multiple shapes and sizes	Low	Low	High	11
63h	Variety of Housing Types: Affordable starter homes for young families	Low	Low	High	11
64a	Reduce Housing Displacement: Encourage use of property tax relief programs available through the Assessor's office	Low	Low	High	11
65b	Senior Housing: Create an "Age-in-Place" design program with a suite of age-friendly amenities that can be added to homes for future needs	Low	Low	High	11
65e	Senior Housing: Encourage senior cottage housing clustered around shared amenities and situated on public water and sewer	Low	Low	High	11
8	Support permit-exempt wells in the Lewis River Valley	Medium	Medium	Greatest	10
18	Increase the quantity of land zoned for Multiple-Family housing	Low	High	Greatest	10
53	Identify staff member as a multi-family development coordinator, to help with initial feasibility questions	Medium	Medium	Greatest	10
2	Collaborate with local cities on updated development codes, to encourage additional housing	Low	Medium	High	10
22	Allow triplexes and quadplexes outright in the County's unincorporated Urban areas	Low	Medium	High	10
45	Actively market the benefits of building in Cowlitz County, including the lower cost to develop and professional permitting office	Low	Medium	High	10
46	Market Cowlitz County to out-of-town investors and builders as worthy of housing investment	Low	Medium	High	10
54	Create a Commission on Aging, to examine and incorporate the housing and community needs of seniors	Low	Medium	High	10
60	Support Motel and Hotel development, to provide homes during acute housing shortages	Low	Medium	High	10
61	Advocate for rental housing for newly independent adolescents	Low	Medium	High	10
1	Partner with the Cowlitz Economic Development Council [CEDC] & Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments [CWCOG] to advance regional housing goals	Low	Low	Medium	10
5	Encourage thoughtful land annexation by cities	Low	Low	Medium	10
25	Allow limited ground-floor commercial uses in Multiple Family-zoned areas	Low	Low	Medium	10
37	Rewrite the front yard setback code to showcase existing flexibility for housing on small lots	Low	Low	Medium	10
49	Promote the merit of the existing fire code options to alleviate the threat of extreme wildfires	Low	Low	Medium	10
51	Continue to offer virtual staff consultations and virtual pre-app conferences, online permit submittals, and payments	Low	Low	Medium	10
55	Create educational materials about housing flexibility offered in the Cottage Housing ordinance	Low	Low	Medium	10
64c	Reduce Housing Displacement: Promote Manufactured/Mobile Home Relocation Assistance Programs	Low	Low	Medium	10
65c	Senior Housing: Run a potential senior housing project through the permitting process to identify expected timeline, cost, and procedure	Low	Low	Medium	10
65f	Senior Housing: Plan for senior housing near supportive networks, and where self-sufficient, rural seniors can adapt to aging-in-place	Low	Low	Medium	10

#	Plan Recommendations to Support Housing	Cost	Effort	Value	Priority Calculation
3	Lead location-specific housing plans with local stakeholders, including preliminary designs and project feasibility	Medium	High	Greatest	9
7	Consider a County administered Housing Trust Fund to finance land acquisition and development	Medium	High	Greatest	9
10	Explore how a locally driven adaptation of state-authorized planning tools could benefit rural Cowlitz County	Low	High	High	9
48	Create a "Developer's Toolkit" with in-depth information on the permitting process and options to achieve higher density development	Low	High	High	9
11	Determine permitting process for multi-family housing in areas without public water/sewer	Low	Medium	Medium	9
17	Simplify zoning for areas classified Rural Residential and Forestry-Recreation to match Unzoned countywide designation	Low	Medium	Medium	9
23	Add triplexes to the list of allowed uses in Urban Residential zones to match ADU allowances	Low	Medium	Medium	9
43	Pursue amendment of Washington Administrative Code 246-272A-0230 to allow one-bedroom home septic systems	Low	Medium	Medium	9
27	Add Cottage Housing and Planned Unit Developments to permitted uses	Low	Low	Low	9
28	Adopt electric vehicle charging codes to match upcoming state building codes	Low	Low	Low	9
52	Explore continued virtual meeting participation opportunities, to encourage participation	Low	Low	Low	9
19	Re-evaluate zoning maps to reflect on-the-ground public investments that support housing	Medium	High	High	8
20	Re-evaluate zoning maps to reflect on-the-ground private investments that support housing	Medium	High	High	8
64d	Reduce Housing Displacement: Enact County codes that facilitate new businesses during housing redevelopment	Medium	High	High	8
6	Utilize EPA brownfields program to identify sites for remediation and redevelopment	Low	High	Medium	8
9	Create a vision for County development, which goes beyond the existing Comprehensive Plan and focuses on housing development	Low	High	Medium	8
31	Allow flexibility for parking requirements	Low	High	Medium	8
12	Draft a shared septic system maintenance agreement	Medium	Low	Low	8
15	Train staff on recently updated state codes for homeowners' associations to ensure accurate replies to development questions	Medium	Low	Low	8
40	Expand infrastructure and utilities to serve residential land near urban areas	High	High	High	7
62e	Transitional Housing: Innovative strategies for tiny homes with shared amenities	High	High	High	7
62a	Transitional Housing: Programming to support people living in recreational vehicles and trailers	Medium	High	Medium	7
42	Explore cost-sharing options for utility expansions	Low	High	Low	7
62c	Transitional Housing: Inpatient addiction and mental health facilities	High	High	Medium	6
62d	Transitional Housing: Housing that provides for basic safety needs	High	High	Medium	6
41	Allocate funding for new infrastructure (roads, water/sewer, broadband), to support housing development	Greatest	Greatest	High	5
39	Extend electricity to areas without cost-effective electricity infrastructure	High	High	Low	5
62b	Transitional Housing: Shared-cost housing for lower income people	Greatest	Greatest	Medium	4

**Appendix Item #3: Grant Scope and Page Number Crosswalk**

<b>Grant Scope and Page Number Crosswalk</b>		
<b>Steps/Deliverables</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Page #</b>
<b>Action 1</b>	<b>Existing conditions review</b>	15-45
Step 1.1	Analyze population and employment trends, with documentation of projections.	15-29
Step 1.2	Quantify existing and projected housing needs for all income levels, including extremely low-income households, with documentation of housing and household characteristics, and cost-burdened households.	23-24 34-35
Step 1.3	Collect data on type, size, cost, and age of housing in the unincorporated county, within the regional housing market. Collect data on rental properties (e.g., type, size, cost, and age) and percentage of housing stock.	29-33
Step 1.4	Review and evaluate the current policies regarding housing, including an evaluation of success in attaining planned housing types and units, achievement of goals and policies, and implementation of the schedule of programs and actions.	35-39
Step 1.5	Review ability of existing zoning and classifications to provide for housing needs.	39-43
Step 1.6	Review the effectiveness of current programs, development regulations, and permitting processes related to housing development.	35-39
Deliverable 1	Existing Conditions and Needs Analysis Report	15-45
<b>Action 2</b>	<b>Provide for participation and input from community members, community groups, local builders, local realtors, nonprofit housing advocates, cities, and local religious groups.</b>	46-57
Step 2.1	Identify groups that should be included in outreach.	46-47
Step 2.2	Conduct public outreach to develop goals and objectives.	9, 46-57
Step 2.3	Conduct community survey to identify demand for housing types among current population.	55-56
Step 2.4	Develop stakeholder groups to gather input from housing advocates, housing providers, and social service organizations. Stakeholders may include residents, developers, tenants, and religious organizations.	46-47
Deliverable 2a	Public Engagement Plan	✓
Deliverable 2b	Public Engagement Summary of Results	49-57
<b>Action 3</b>	<b>Evaluation of Policies and Tools for Increasing Housing Supply, Affordability, and Diversity</b>	58-77

Step 3.1	Develop strategies to increase the supply of housing, and variety of housing types, needed to serve the housing needs identified above.	4-8
Step 3.2	Consider strategies to minimize displacement of low-income residents resulting from redevelopment.	36, 60, 66, 72, 74-75
Step 3.3	Develop a schedule of programs and actions to implement the recommendations of the housing action plan.	4-8
Deliverable 3	Draft Housing Action Plan	✓
<b>Action 4</b>	<b>Project Adoption</b>	
Step 4.1	Public Hearings. (Staff reports, compile outreach summaries, and supporting data.) Public hearings before Planning Commission and County Commissioners.	✓
Step 4.2	Make changes to amendments per Planning Commission and County Commissioners directions.	✓
Step 4.3	Prepare ordinance and/or resolution for County Commissioner adoption.	✓
Deliverable 4	Adopted Housing Action Plan	

#### Appendix Item #4: List of Figures

##### List of Figures

Number	Name
1	Countywide Population Change Chart
2	Unincorporated Cowlitz County Population Chart
3	County Population Projection Chart
4	Households in Cowlitz County Chart (Counts)
5	Households in Cowlitz County Chart (Makeup)
6	Cowlitz County Median Household Income Chart
7	Low Income Rental/Ownership Table
8	Cost Burden Estimate Table
9	Employees in Cowlitz County Table
10	Cowlitz County Commuters Table
11	Cowlitz County Workers by Job Location Chart
12	Housing Inventory Type Chart
13	Housing Stock by Number of Bedrooms Table
14	Average Household Size Table
15	Housing Tenure Occupancy Chart
16	Housing Stock and Household Size Comparison Chart
17	County Building Permit Counts by Year Table
18	Houses Built by Decade Chart
19	Rental Units and Rental Households Comparison Chart
20	Review Matrix
21	Permit Cost Example Table
22	Acreage per Zoning Designation Table
23	Acreage per 2017 Comprehensive Plan Designation Table
24	Outreach Event Table
25	Local Professionals Interview Table
26	Outreach Question Chart: Regulation
27	Outreach Question Chart: Affordability
28	Rural Residential Zoning Acreage Table
29	Multiple-Family Zoning Acreage Table

**Appendix Item #5: Zoning Code Use Matrix**

(11" x 17" to be added in final PDF stage on the proceeding page)

**Zone Code Use Matrix**

- P Permitted
- X Not permitted
- See CP See Comprehensive Plan
- O/E Only Owner/Employees Only
- E Exempt / No Permits required
- SU Special Use Permit
- AFF Permitted above the first floor of a Commercial Building

Zone	Zone Code	Single Family Dwellings	Manufactured Homes	Accessory Dwelling Units	Duplexes	Triplexes	Quadplexes	5+ Unit Multi Family	Mobile Home Parks	RV Campgrounds	Cottage Development	Hotels/Motels	Microhousing/ Apodments	Temporary RV Residence	Senior Facilities	Group Housing <7	Group Housing >6	Caretaker Apartment
Rural Residential - 1	RR-1	P	P	P	X	X	X	X	See CP	SU	P	X	X	E	X	P	SU	X
Rural Residential - 2	RR-2	P	P	P	X	X	X	X	See CP	SU	P	X	X	E	SU	P	SU	X
Rural Residential - 5	RR-5	P	P	P	X	X	X	X	See CP	SU	P	X	X	E	SU	P	SU	X
Urban Residential	UR	P	P	P	P	X	X	X	See CP	SU	P	X	X	E	SU	P	SU	X
Suburban	SR	P	P	P					See CP	SU	P	X	X	E	SU	P	SU	X
Multiple Family	MF	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	See CP	SU	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	X
Neighborhood Commercial	C-1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	See CP	X	X	X	X	E	SU	X	X	P
Urban Commercial	C-2	X	X	X	AFF	AFF	AFF	AFF	See CP	X	X	P	AFF	E	AFF	AFF	AFF	P
Light Manufacturing	ML	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	See CP	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	X	P
Heavy Manufacturing	MH	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	See CP	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	X	P
Agriculture-Industrial	AG-I	O/E Only	O/E Only	O/E Only	X	X	X	X	See CP	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	X	P
Agriculture	AG	P	P	P	X	X	X	X	See CP	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	X	P
Agriculture-38	AG-38	O/E Only	O/E Only	O/E Only	X	X	X	X	See CP	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	X	X
Forestry-Recreation	FR	P	P	P	X	SU	SU	SU	See CP	SU	P	SU	SU	E	SU	SU	SU	P
Unzoned	UZ	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P

**Comprehensive Plan Designations**

Urban	P	P	P - 2 Max	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P
Suburban	P	P	P - 2 Max	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P
Rural	P	P	P - 1 Max	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P
Smallholding	P	P	P - 1 Max	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P
Remote	P	P	P - 1 Max	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P
ERL – Industrial	P	P	P - 1 Max	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P
ERL – Forestry	P	P	P - 1 Max	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P
ERL – Agricultural	P	P	P - 1 Max	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P
ERL – Mineral	P	P	P - 1 Max	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P

This simplified Zone Code Use Matrix lists the codes on the left side and uses on the top row. Some potential uses are highly complex and could not be fully explained by this sheet. Notable points include that Single Family Residences and ADU’s are allowed in all residential/Unzoned zones. Smaller multi-family structures like Duplexes or Quadplexes are permitted outright in only limited areas. Elder housing is allowed as a special use in limited areas of the county, or permitted outright in Multi-Family zoned areas.