

Community Profile

Mason County

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Prepared By:



SCJ Alliance
8730 Tallon Lane NE, Suite 200
Lacey, WA 98516
360.352.1465



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1 Introduction

This community profile is prepared in support of the Mason County 2025 Comprehensive Plan update. This report articulates past and current characteristics of the community, as well as forecast conditions. It provides an update to the demographics and community data presented in the County's previous Comprehensive Plan document (2036), and includes key characteristics like population, economic indicators, and housing trends. Data and findings from this report will ultimately be incorporated into the updated Comprehensive Plan document.

Reviewing this data helps establish an understanding of where the County has been, where it is now, and where it hopes to go in the future, and sets the foundation for Mason County's long-range planning efforts. Wherever possible, the data for Mason County is compared with data from Washington State, illuminating how the County compares with the larger surrounding regions.

1.1 Setting and History

Mason County is situated along the southwestern portion of Puget Sound and encompasses roughly 972 square miles. It borders Jefferson County to the north, Grays Harbor County to the west and southwest, Thurston County to the southeast, Pierce County to the east, and Kitsap County to the northeast. Mason County remains a predominantly rural county despite the urban growth in both Thurston and Kitsap Counties. The City of Shelton, the only incorporated area in Mason County, includes over 6 square miles, or less than one percent of the County's total land area. Two urban growth areas, Allyn and Belfair are located in the northeast portion of the County adjacent to the eastern border between Mason and Kitsap Counties. Two Native American Tribal Nations, the Skokomish and the Squaxin Island Tribes, have reservations within the boundaries of Mason County.

Three geological provinces combine to form Mason County. They include the Puget Sound Lowland, the Olympic Mountains, and the Black Hills. Additionally, seven watersheds exist within Mason County. They include Case Inlet, Chehalis, Lower Hood Canal, Oakland Bay, Skokomish, Totten-Little Skookum, and West Hood Canal. Mason County also includes over 700 miles of some of the most pristine shoreline in the state, nearly 100 freshwater lakes, two major rivers, and several smaller tributaries and creeks.

Mason County's rich natural resources and open spaces dominate the County's landscape. Combined national, state, and private forests currently account for over fifty (50) percent of the land area that makes up Mason County. Mineral deposits underlie Mason County's topsoil. Agricultural and aquaculture areas contribute both to the County's natural beauty and its economy. Mason County also includes substantial open space. Open space within the County hosts wildlife habitat, undeveloped natural areas, and many developed park and recreation sites. These open space areas are managed by federal, state, county, municipal, and private interests.

2 Community Characteristics

The following sections summarize the existing conditions within Mason County, including demographics and population trends, economic indicators, and housing trends. Data sources used include U.S. Census Decennial Data, U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 5-Year Estimates, and Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) housing data and population estimates.

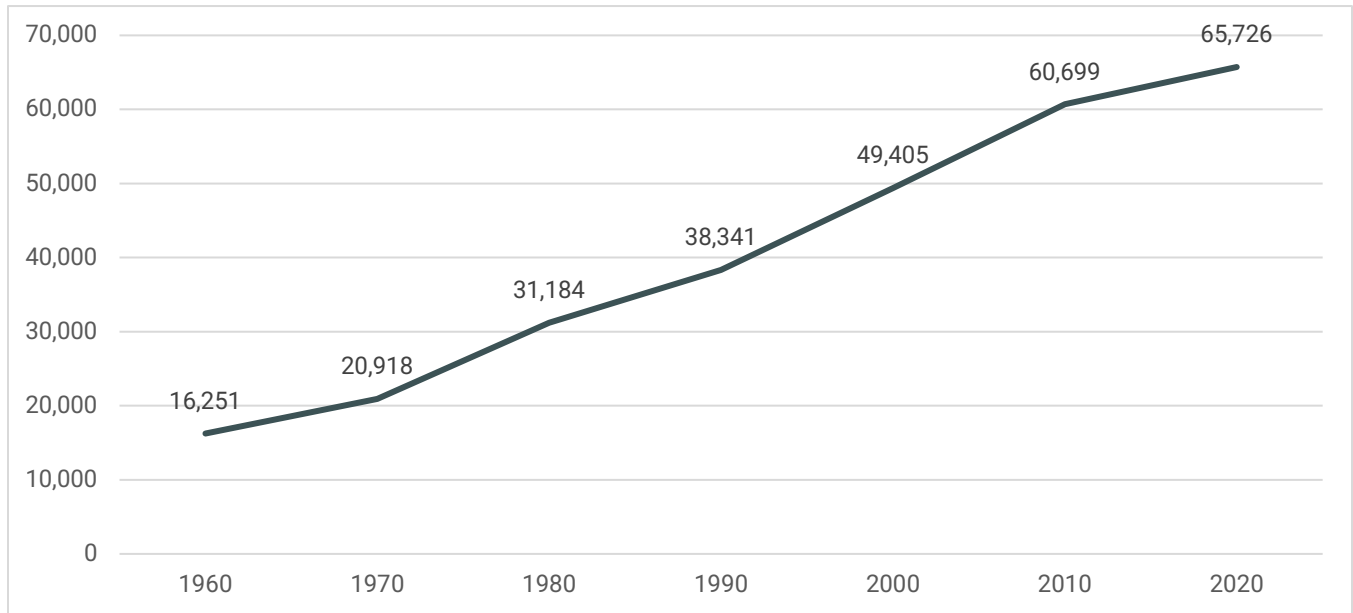
2.1 Population

OFM issues annual population estimates for all cities and counties in Washington, which are considered to be the state's official population counts for long-range planning purposes. These annual estimates are based on the most recent decennial Census counts. The official OFM 2023 population estimate for Mason County is 67,000.¹ The 2022 population estimate for Washington State is 7,951,150; Mason County accounts for approximately 0.85% of the state's population.

Historic Population Trends

Figure 1 illustrates Mason County's historic population changes from 1960 through 2020, while Figure 2 illustrates the county's population as a percentage of Washington state's population over the same period.

Figure 1: Mason County Historic Population, 1960–2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census Data

¹ https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/dataresearch/pop/april1/ofm_april1_population_final.pdf

Figure 2: Percent of County Population

Year	Mason County Population	Washington State Population	% of State Population
1960	16,251	2,853,214	0.57%
1970	20,918	3,413,250	0.61%
1980	31,184	4,132,353	0.75%
1990	38,341	4,866,663	0.79%
2000	49,405	5,894,143	0.79%
2010	60,699	6,724,540	0.90%
2020	65,726	7,706,310	0.85%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census Data

Race and Ethnicity

According to the social definition of racial categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau's ACS 5-Year Estimates, 81.0% of Mason County residents self-identified as white, compared to 71.7% in the State of Washington. About 10.7% of Mason County's residents self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, a lower percentage than Washington state (13.2%). Other, more specific racial and ethnic categories were provided to survey participants; Figure 3 presents a generalized summary as percentages of Mason County's overall population, compared to those of the state of Washington.

Figure 3: Race and Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of Population	
	Mason County	Washington
White alone *	81.0%	71.7%
Black or African American alone *	0.7%	3.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone *	1.8%	1.2%
Asian alone *	0.9%	9.0%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone *	0.4%	0.7%
Some other race alone *	6.1%	5.0%
Two or more races	9.0%	8.6%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race) **	10.7%	13.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates. (*) Includes persons reporting only one race; (**) Those of Hispanic or Latino origin may be of any race, so are also included in applicable race categories

Age and Gender

The median age (half above and half below) in Mason County is 44.7 years, which is almost seven years (6.8) older than Washington State (37.9 years). About 11.1% of Mason County's population is

under the age of 10, and 22.8% are over the age of 65. Figure 4 provides Mason County's age distribution as compared to Washington State.

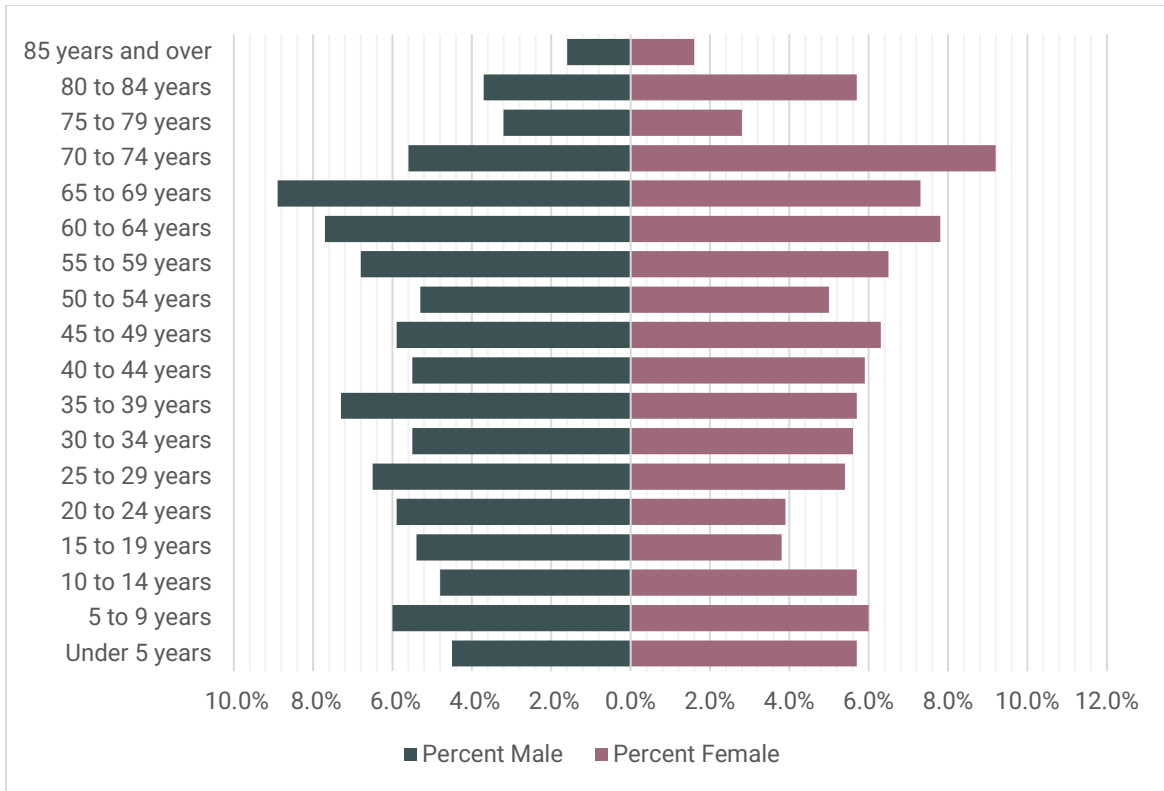
Figure 4: Age Distribution

Age Group	Percentage of Population	
	Mason County	Washington
Under 5 years	5.2%	5.9%
5 to 9 years	5.9%	6.2%
10 to 14 years	5.3%	6.3%
15 to 19 years	5.3%	6.0%
20 to 24 years	5.1%	6.3%
25 to 34 years	11.6%	15.1%
35 to 44 years	11.8%	13.7%
45 to 54 years	10.9%	12.3%
55 to 59 years	7.9%	6.3%
60 to 64 years	8.2%	6.4%
65 to 74 years	14.5%	9.6%
75 to 84 years	6.0%	4.1%
85 years and over	2.3%	1.7%
Median age (years)	44.7	37.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates

Figure 5 is a population pyramid for Mason County, which provides the breakdown of the county's population by age group for binary gender self-identifications (male and female). While the county's population skews slightly male overall, this differential is fairly even by age group. The population pyramid indicates that for the age cohorts between 15 and 29 years, between 35-39 years, and between 65- 69 years, the male population is slightly higher than the female population; however, for the age cohorts between 10-14, 70-74, and 80-84 years, the female population is generally higher. The male and female populations were relatively similar for age cohorts between 5-9 years, 30-34 years, 40-64 years, 75-79 years, and 85 years and older.

Figure 5: Mason County Population Pyramid



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table S0101

Education

There are six school districts in Mason County: Grapeview, Hood Canal, North Mason, Pioneer, Shelton, and Southside School District. For the 2022-2023 school year, the County’s enrollment was 8,246 students, and in the 2021-2022 school year, there were 654 classroom teachers employed, for a student-to-teacher ratio of 12.6:1.²

Educational attainment for Mason County’s population is presented in Figure 6 and indicates the highest level of education an individual has attained. To read Figure 6, those persons who have graduated from high school include not only those listed in the high school graduate category, but also those listed with a higher level of educational attainment such as those with associate or college degrees. For example, 90.4% of Mason County’s population has attained high school graduate or equivalent (100% minus 6.6% for 9th to 12th grade, no diploma and 3.0% for Less than 9th grade). Approximately 31.6% of Mason County residents have attained an associate, bachelors, or graduate or professional degree, compared with 47.5% of Washington residents.

Figure 6: Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Percentage of Population 25 Years and Over	
	Mason County	Washington

² Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) School District Report Card, <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/100174>

Less than 9th grade	3.0%	3.5%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	6.6%	4.6%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	30.8%	21.8%
Some college, no degree	28.0%	22.7%
Associate degree	12.9%	10.2%
Bachelor's degree	12.6%	23.1%
Graduate or professional degree	6.1%	14.2%

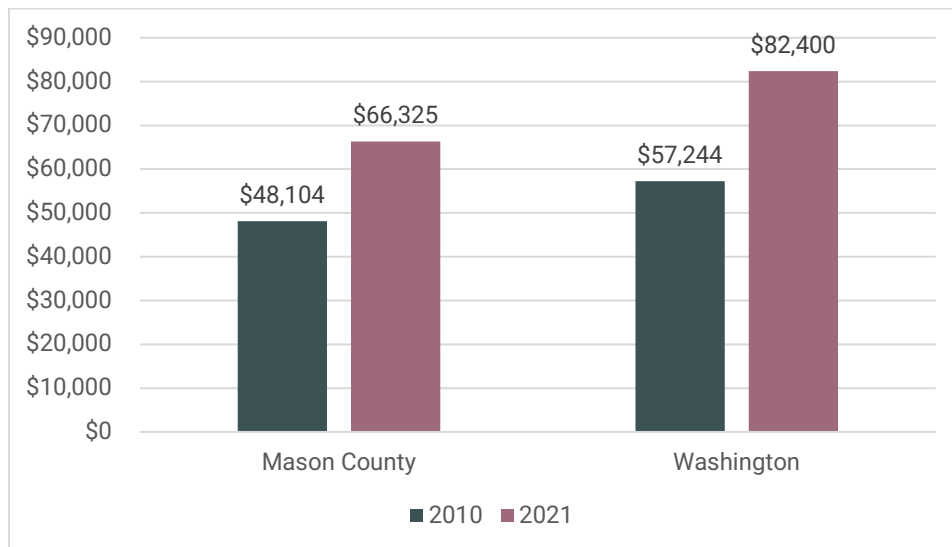
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates

2.2 Economic Indicators

Income and Wages

Using the 2021 5-Year Community Survey Estimates, Figure 7 shows households in Mason County have a median household income of \$66,325, which is lower than the state of Washington as a whole (\$82,400). Washington's median income levels increased by approximately 43.9% between 2010 and 2020, while Mason County's median income levels increased by 37.9% during the same period.

Figure 7: Median Household Income



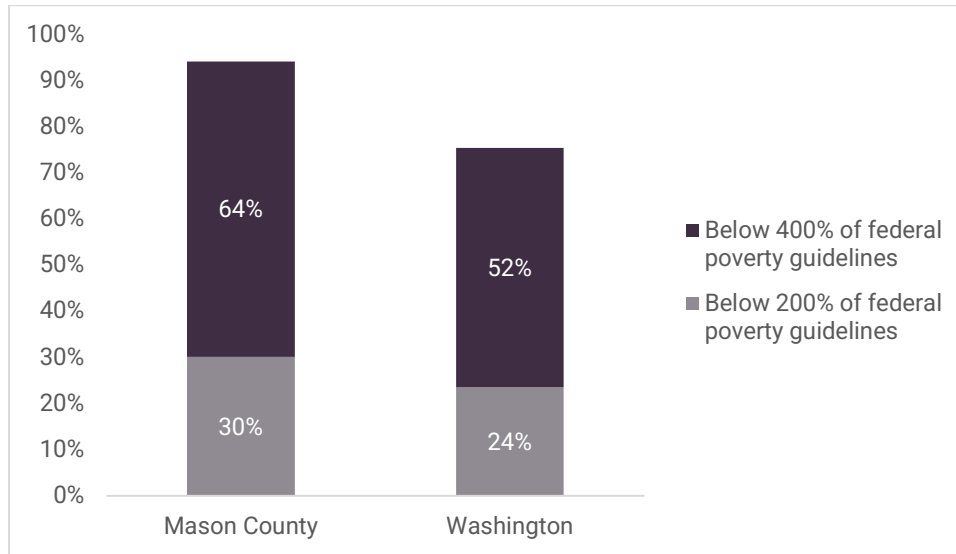
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, S1901

Poverty and Unemployment

The federal poverty guidelines are an economic measure to determine the income level for households to qualify for certain federal benefits and programs, such as Medicaid, food stamps, family and planning services, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and National School Lunch Program. The poverty threshold defines what poverty is and provides statistics on the number of Americans who live in poverty. Per the ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates, approximately 30% of Mason County residents lived below 200% of the federal poverty level in 2019 (which is considered to be significant poverty), compared with 22% statewide. In other words, 30% of Mason County residents earned less than 200%

of the federal poverty guideline, and 64% of residents earned less than 400%. As an example of what this means: a household of four in 2019 would earn less than \$51,500 to be considered living below the 200% federal poverty guideline and would earn less than \$103,000 to be considered living below the 400% federal poverty guideline.³

Figure 8: Share of Population Below 200% and 400% Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, S1701

According to the ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates, the unemployment rate in Mason County is 6.3%, which is higher than Washington state (5.1%).

Workforce Profile

Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's tool, OnTheMap, Mason County had approximately 12,729 total jobs (2021). Additionally, approximately 73.2% of Mason County residents were employed outside the county. Among jobs within the county, 52.5% were held by Mason County residents, with the remainder were held by residents from jurisdictions elsewhere in the Puget Sound region.

The largest industries in terms of the number of jobs held by workers in Mason County businesses are:

- ◆ Retail Trade – 1,890 jobs (14.8%)
- ◆ Public Administration – 1,816 jobs (14.3%)
- ◆ Health Care and Social Assistance – 1,717 jobs (13.5%)
- ◆ Accommodation and Food Services – 982 jobs (7.7%)
- ◆ Manufacturing – 845 jobs (6.6%)

Mason County residents work primarily in the following industries, which are both inside and outside of the county limits:

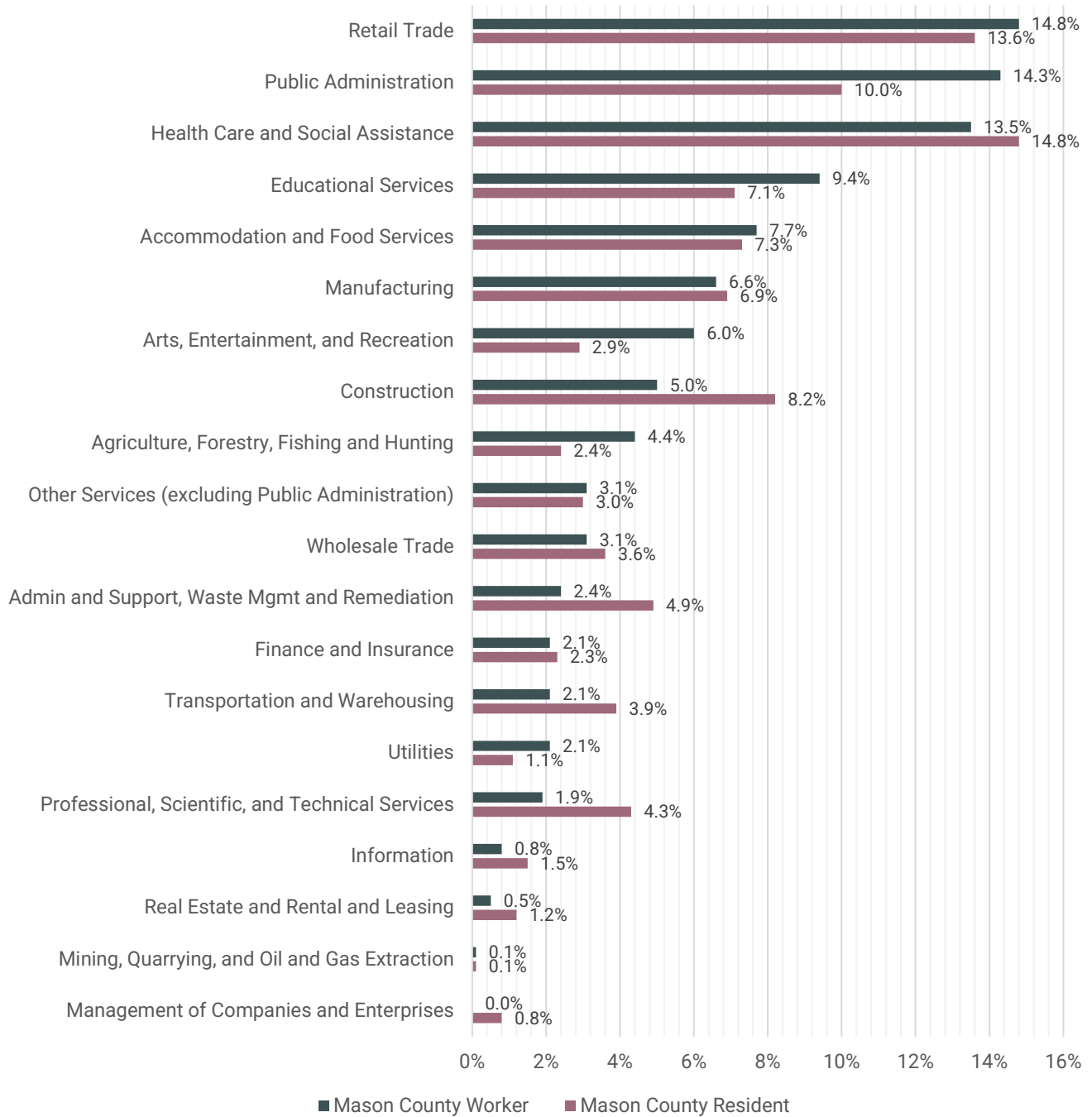
- ◆ Health Care and Social Assistance – 3,691 jobs (14.8%)

³ Federal poverty guidelines are updated annually and are published in the Federal Register.

- ◆ Retail Trade – 3,400 jobs (13.6%)
- ◆ Public Administration – 2,496 jobs (10.0%)
- ◆ Construction – 2,043 jobs (8.2%)
- ◆ Accommodation and Food Services – 1,815 jobs (7.3%)

Figure 9 shows the distribution of jobs by industry for workers working inside of Mason County, as well as for Mason County residents working inside and outside of the county. Retail trade is the biggest industry for those working in Mason County, while health care and social assistance is the largest industry employing Mason County residents.

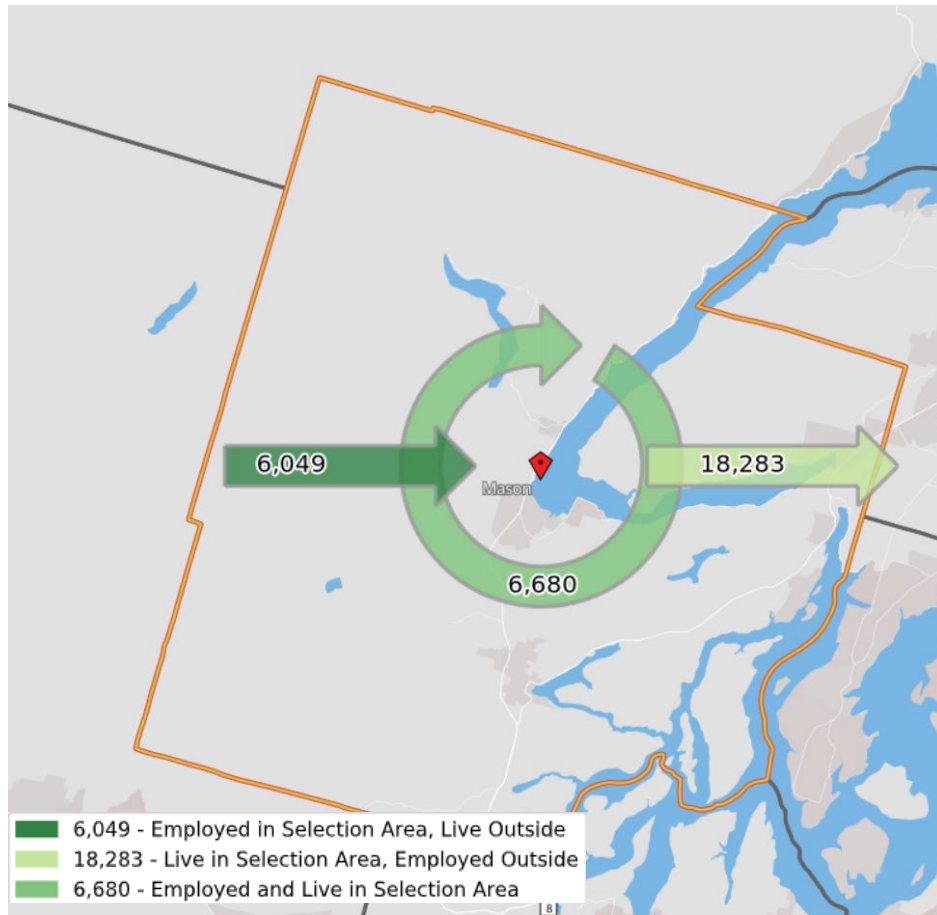
Figure 9: Employment by Industry



Source: U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap, 2021

As shown in Figure 10, 6,680 of the 12,729 jobs located within Mason County are held by people who also live in the county; the other 6,049 jobs are filled by employees who commute into the county. It is estimated that 18,283 of the county's residents travel outside of the county for work.

Figure 10: Commuting Patterns in Mason County



Source: U.S. Census OnTheMap, <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>

2.3 Housing

Household Size

According to the ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates, Mason County’s average household size was 2.55 persons, a decrease from an average of 2.63 persons per household in 2010. Figure 11 presents Mason County’s average household size as compared to that of Washington state for both 2010 and 2021. The total number of housing units in Mason County was estimated to be 31,527 in 2010 and 33,219 in 2021, an increase of 1,692 units (5.37%) over that time.

Figure 11: Household Size

Year	Mason County	Washington
2010	2.63	2.49
2021	2.55	2.55

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-2021 5-Year Estimates, DP02

Housing Occupancy

Figure 12 shows the percentage of occupied and vacant households, while Figure 13 shows the percentage of owner-occupied versus renter-occupied units in Mason County as compared to Washington. The percentage of occupied housing units increased from 69.2% in 2010 to 75.5% in 2021, indicating Mason County’s housing construction likely lagged slightly behind population growth during that period. Of the county’s occupied units, 78.4% were owner-occupied in 2021 (a decrease from 80.9% in 2010) while 21.6% were occupied by renters.

Figure 12: Housing Occupancy

	2010			2021		
	Mason County		Washington	Mason County		Washington
	# of units	Percentage of total housing units		# of units	Percentage of total housing units	
Occupied	21,808	69.2%	91.1%	25,085	75.5%	92.5%
Vacant	9,719	30.8%	8.9%	8,134	24.5%	7.5%
Total Units	31,527	100.0%	100.0%	33,219	100.0%	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-2021 5-Year Estimates, DP04

Figure 13: Percentage of Owner- vs. Renter-Occupied Units

	2010		2021	
	Mason County	Washington	Mason County	Washington
Owner-Occupied	80.9%	64.8%	78.4%	63.6%
Renter-Occupied	19.1%	35.2%	21.6%	36.4%

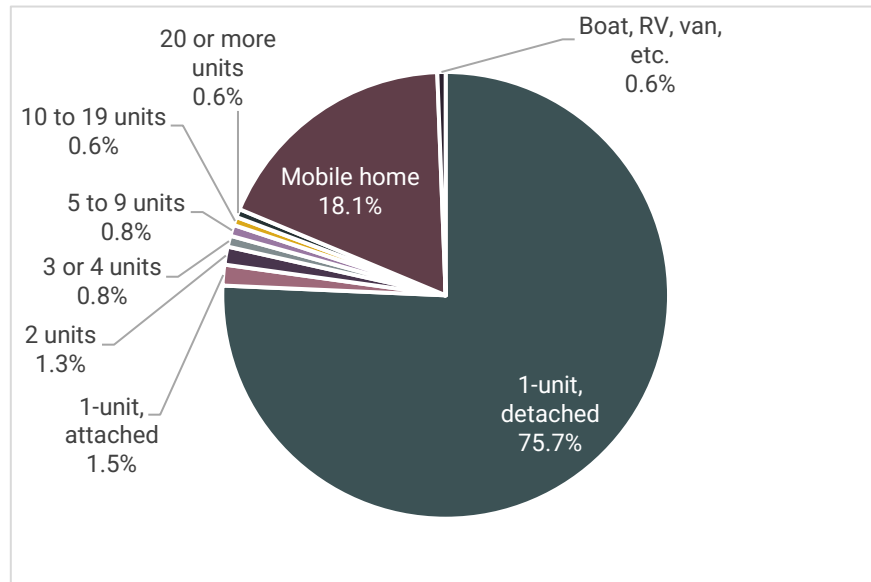
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-2021 5-Year Estimates, DP04

Housing Types

A breakdown of Mason County’s housing units by type is shown in Figure 14. Detached single-family units are by far the most prevalent housing type in Mason County, accounting for 75.7% of the county’s existing housing stock. Single-family housing accounts for a significantly higher share of the housing units in Mason County when compared with Washington state. Multifamily homes comprise only 2.8% of the county’s housing stock, attached single-family homes account for 1.5%, and two-family/duplex homes account for 1.3%.

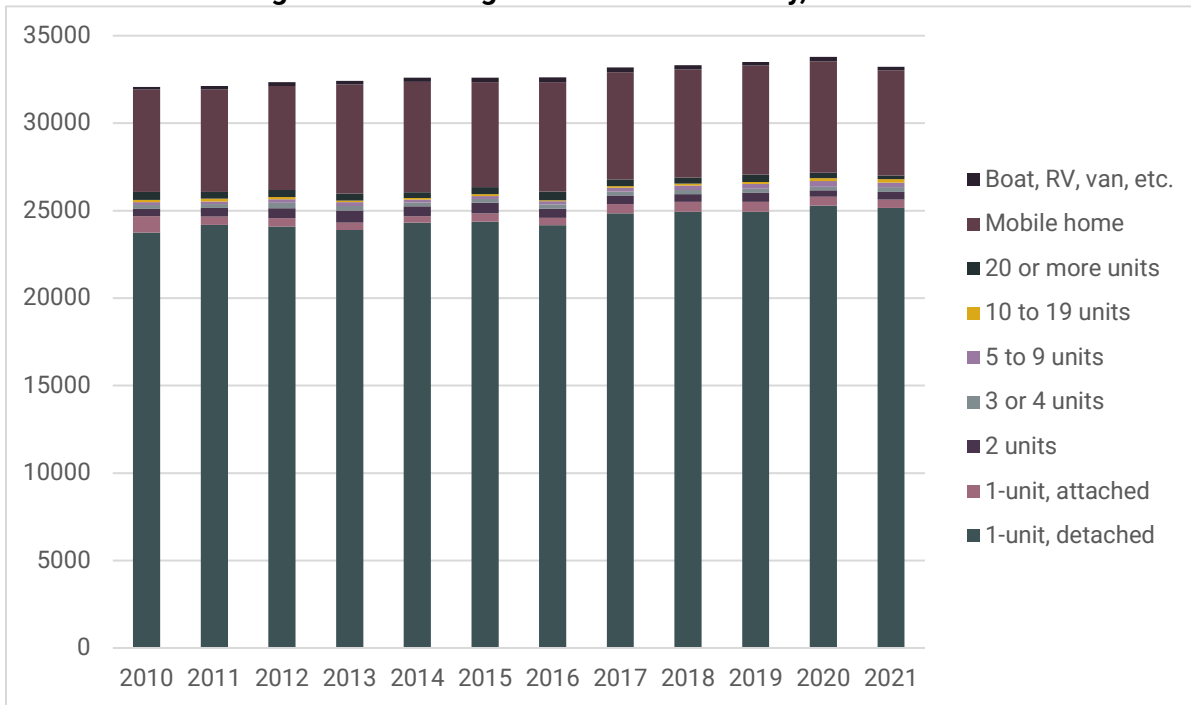
Figure 15 shows the change in the number of housing units between 2010 and 2021. The total number of units has not increased significantly between 2010 and 2021, and the proportion of housing types has remained consistent throughout that period. For example, detached single-family units accounted for an average of 74.7% of all housing units, with little to no increase for other housing types.

Figure 14: Mason County Existing Housing Units by Type



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table DP04

Figure 15: Housing Units in Mason County, 2010-2020

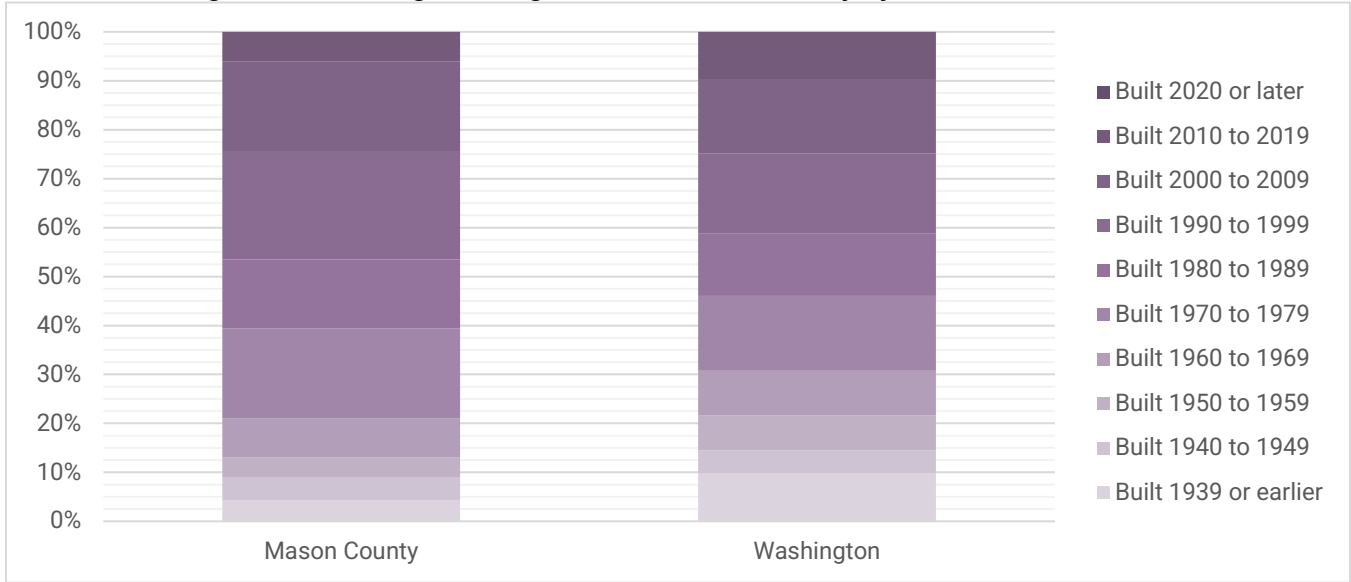


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, DP04

Age of Housing Stock

As shown in Figure 16, 6.1% of Mason County’s existing housing stock has been constructed in the years since 2010. By comparison, 9.8% of the housing stock in Washington state was constructed in 2010 or later.

Figure 16: Existing Housing Stock in Mason County by Year of Construction



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table DP04

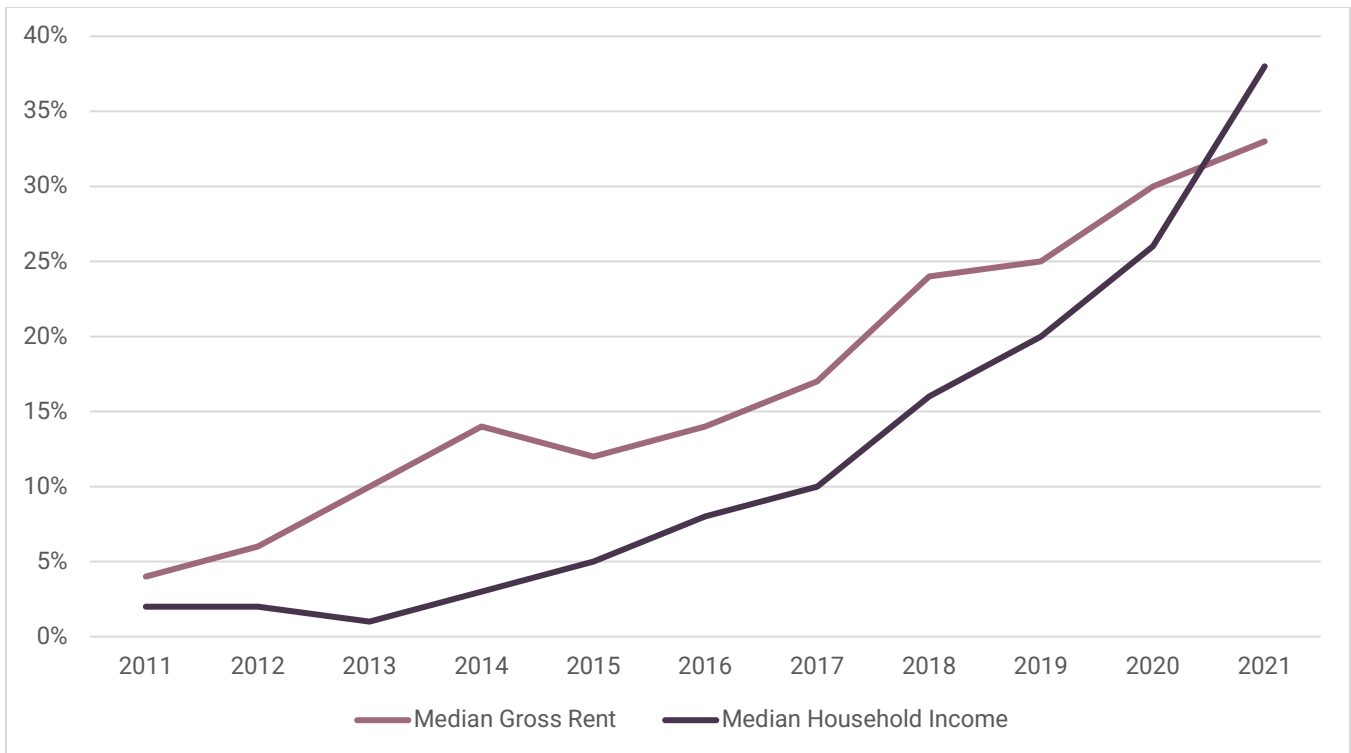
Housing Costs

As shown in Figure 12 in the “Housing Occupancy” section above, approximately 21.6% of Mason County’s occupied housing units are rentals and 78.4% are occupied by owners.

Housing costs in Mason County are lower than in the state of Washington as a whole. The 2021 median rent in Mason County was \$1,050/month, compared to \$1,439 for Washington state. The 2021 median monthly owner cost for housing units with a mortgage in Mason County was \$1,633 (compared to \$2,064 for Washington state); for units without a mortgage the monthly median was \$485 (compared to \$646 for Washington state).

Like the rest of the state and much of the country, the cost of housing in Mason County has increased in recent years, and incomes did not keep pace with housing costs until 2021, as shown in Figure 17. When compared with a 2010 baseline, incomes in Mason County (in 2021) have risen 38%, while rental costs have increased 33% in that same time. Additionally, recent post-pandemic trends indicate rapidly increasing rents throughout Washington, and these are not yet reflected in this census data. Overall, this data indicates difficulties in housing affordability for renters who wish to purchase housing in Mason County.

Figure 17: Change in Rent and Income in Mason County, 2011-2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2022 5-Year Estimates, Tables S2503 and DP04

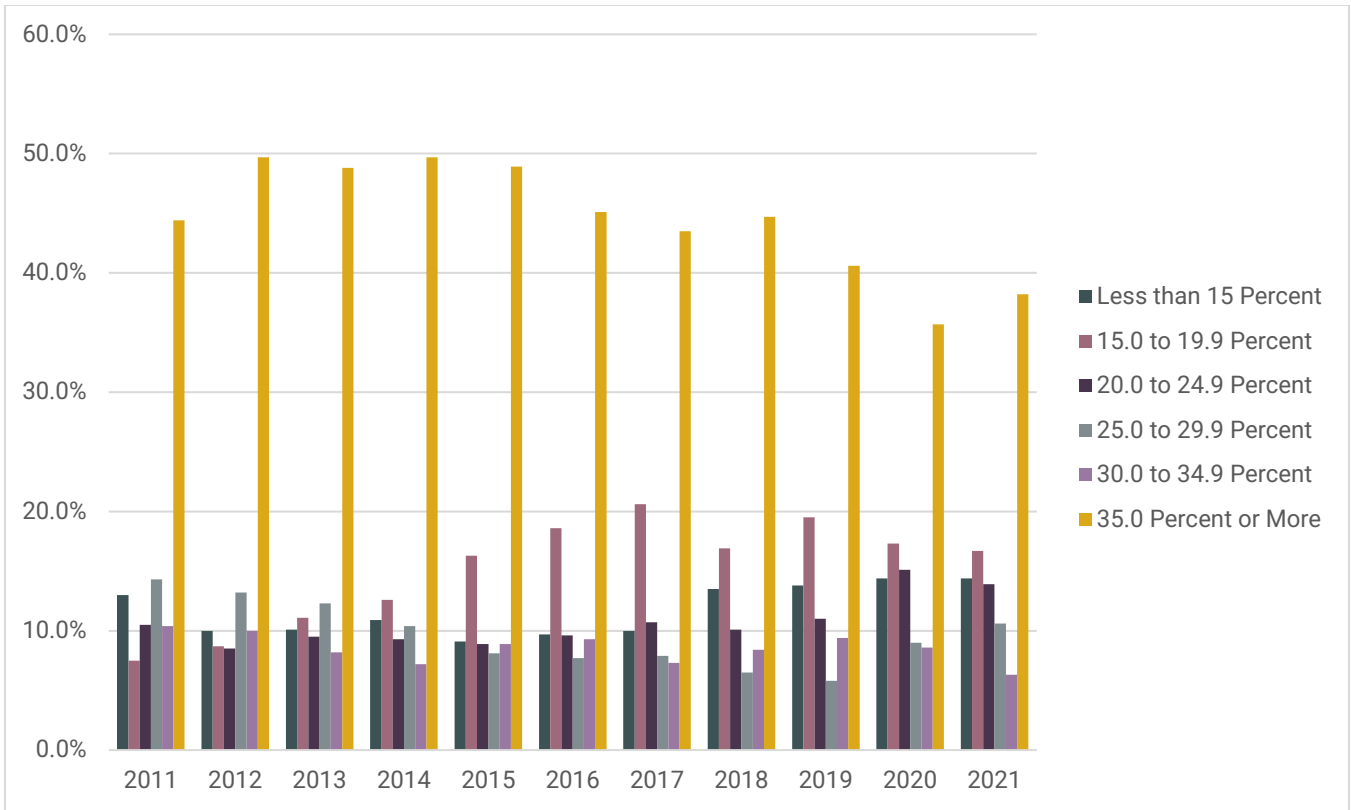
Cost-Burdened Households

Rents are significantly more difficult to track than housing prices, particularly for smaller geographies. Census data on rents is both delayed and self-reported, and large real estate websites do not track rents at a granular level for smaller communities. However, the Census data shown in Figure 18 can provide a window into larger trends. In Mason County, 44.5% of rental households spend more than 30% of their household income on rent. The average percentage of renters in Mason County who spend 35% or more of their monthly costs on housing has remained consistent at 44.5% in the past decade.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses a measurement of “cost burden” to determine which subset of a community’s residents are most in need of housing support or most at risk of displacement or housing hardship. A household is “cost-burdened” if they are spending more than 30% of their monthly income on housing costs (including rent and utilities)⁴.

Figure 18: Cost Burdened Renters in Mason County, 2011-2021

⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), <https://archives.hud.gov/local/nv/goodstories/2006-04-06glos.cfm>



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2021 5-Year Estimates, Table DP04

2.4 Land Use

Examining Mason County’s existing zoning and land uses is helpful in understanding how the county can accommodate its anticipated population growth over the next 20 years.

Existing Zoning

Mason County’s zoning code contains five residential and four commercial districts, along with two districts for industrial and one designation each for office, public/institutional, public parks, and open space zones. General descriptions of what is allowed in each zoning district can be found in Figure 19, and a map of Mason County’s existing zoning districts is shown in Figure 23.

Figure 19: Zoning Districts in Rural Mason County

Zoning District	Description
Rural Multi Family (RMF)	This district designates existing multi-family residential developments, including mobile home parks. New RMF zoning designations are prohibited.
Inholding Lands	This designation is for lands surrounded by long-term commercial forests, but which are not suitable due to parcel size or other constraint for that purpose. Inholding lands may be developed, but only in a manner which assures the viability of the abutting forest land.
Rural Residential 2.5 (RR 2.5)	This district provides for new residential subdivision, which exceeds a density of two and one-half acres per residential lot, and where areas of small lot residential development and subdivision patterns were established before December 5, 1996.
Rural Residential 5 (RR 5)	This district provides for new low-density residential subdivision on parcels of 5 acres or more.
Rural Residential 10 (RR 10)	This district provides for new low-density residential subdivision on parcels of 10 acres or more.
Rural Residential 20 (RR 20)	This district provides for new low-density residential subdivision on parcels of twenty acres or more.
Agricultural Resource Lands	This designation is intended to recognize and protect unique resources that, due to the nature of their operations, are sensitive to abutting land uses. It is intended to minimize the impact of intrusion of less compatible land uses upon the resource use of the land. Appropriate lands have a minimum parcel size of ten acres and prime farmland soils.
Long Term Commercial Forest	This designation is intended to maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, to encourage the conservation of commercial forest lands, to have no net loss of forest lands, and to discourage incompatible land use.
Rural Tourist (RT) and Rural Tourist-Campground (RTC)	These districts provide small-scale residential and tourist-related activities in addition to tangential commercial services to tourists and adjacent rural properties.
Rural Commercial 1, 2, 3, and 5	These four districts provide for a variety of commercial areas reflecting the diversity of the existing business areas.
Rural Industrial	The district provides for isolated areas of primarily existing industrial type uses. Rural industrial is not required to be principally designed to serve the existing and projected rural population.
Rural Natural Resource	This designation provides for isolated areas of resource-based industry outside of the designated resource lands.

Source: Mason County Municipal Code Section 17.02

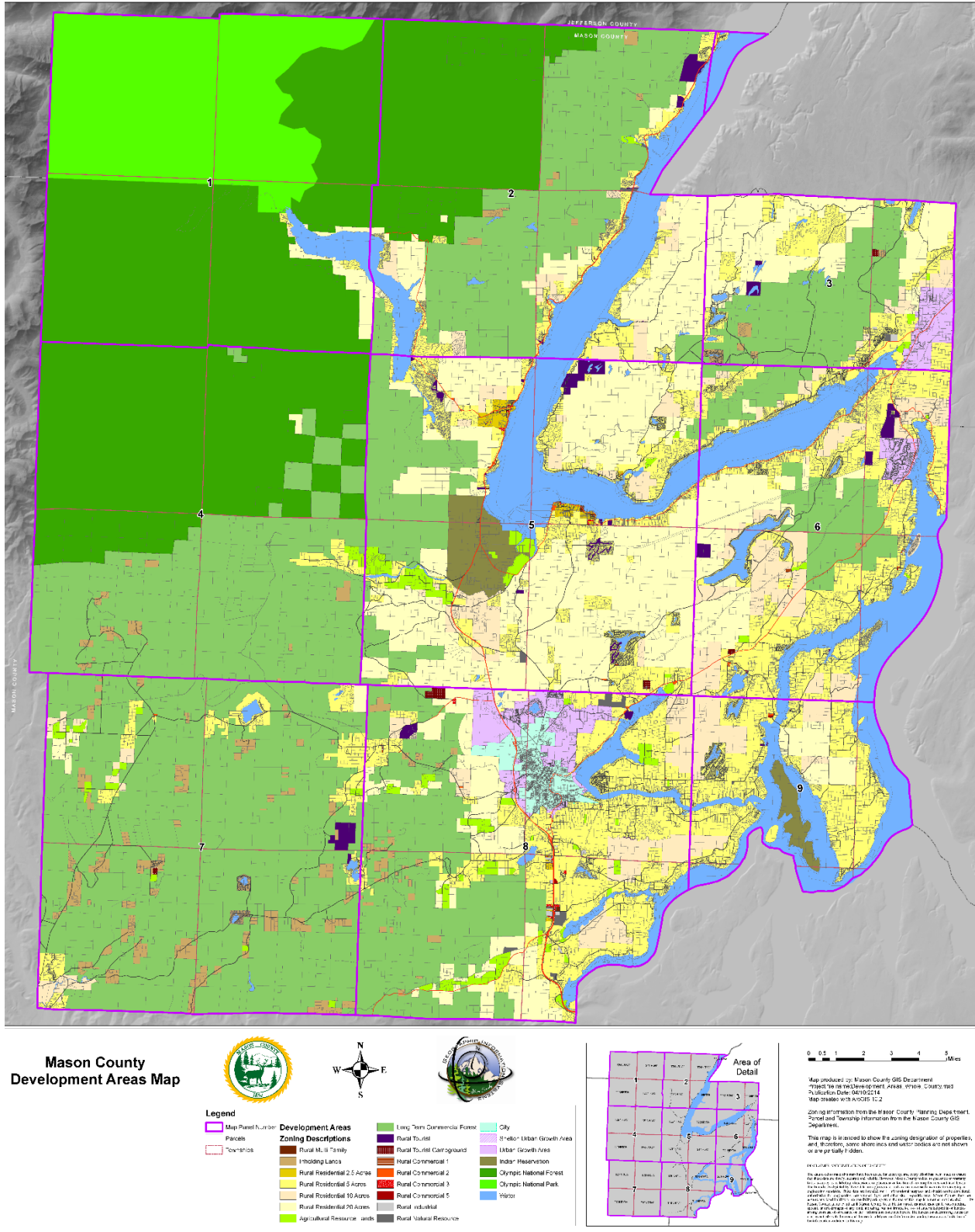


Figure 20: Mason County Development Areas Map (2014)

Source: Mason County

Existing Land Uses

Mason County's incorporated boundaries cover about 972 square miles, along with approximately 90 square miles of water. Approximately 154,080 acres of Mason County are within the boundaries of the Olympic National Park and the Olympic National Forest. A breakdown of the land uses for county is shown in Figure 21. Approximately 63% of the county's land is designated for rural lands, which includes low-density residential, and small-scale tourists, commercial, and industrial uses.

Figure 21: Urban and Rural Land (Acres) in Mason County (2017)

Land Use	Acres	% of Total Acreage
Rural Lands	387,300	63%
Olympic National Forest	154,080	25%
Waters	57,600	9%
Tribal Nations	8,180	1%
Shelton Urban Growth Area	5,500	0.9%
City of Shelton	3,900	0.6%
Belfair Urban Growth Area	2,500	0.4%
Allyn Urban Growth Area	1,000	0.1%
Total	620,060	100.0%

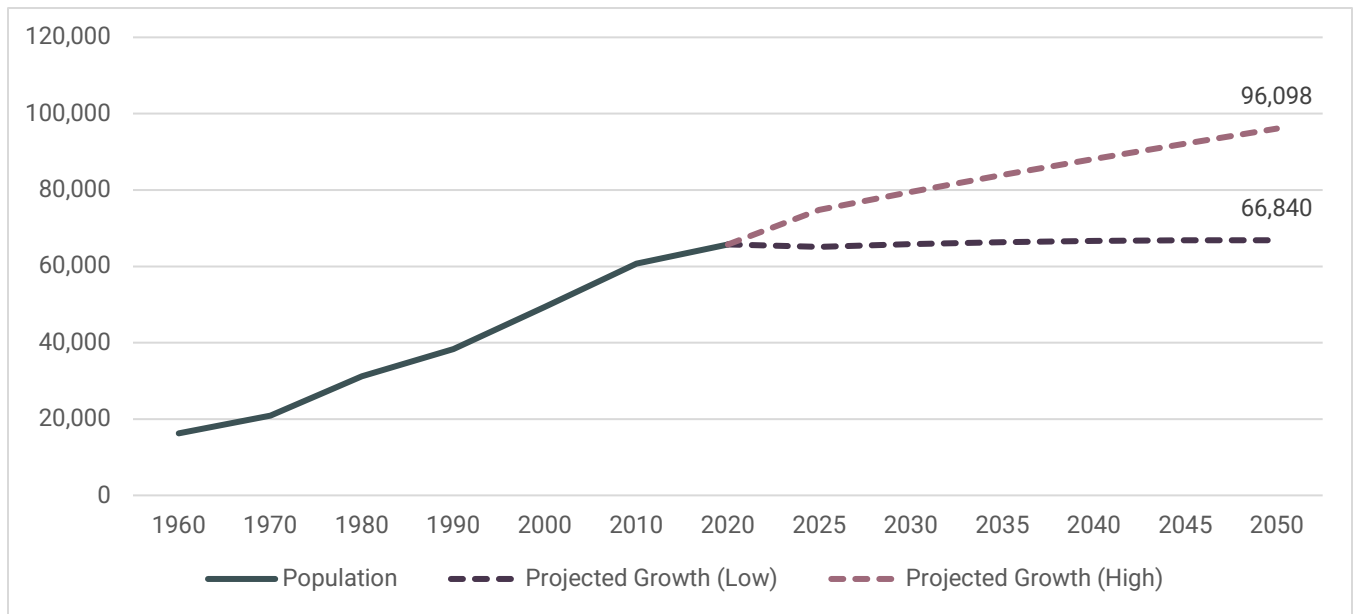
Source: Mason County 2017 Comprehensive Plan

3 Forecast Conditions

3.1 Population Projection

Based on the county's historic population growth and anticipated development potential, Mason County's population is expected to increase to between 66,870 and 96,098 residents by 2050. The calculations are based on the low and high projections for total resident population for growth management. This represents an increase in population ranging between 1.7% and 46.2% over the next 26 years. The projected trend lines are shown in Figure 26 alongside the historical population data for context.

Figure 22: Mason County Historic and Projected Population Growth, 2000-2044



Source: Population Estimates, Office of Financial Management

3.2 Projection of Housing Need

Mason County's Housing Projection, identified in the 2017 Mason County Comprehensive Plan, is to add 10,650 units of all types by 2036. This target was developed based on a 2016 housing baseline of 33,400 units, resulting in a total of 44,000 housing units anticipated by 2036.

As established previously in this report, OFM estimates there are currently 33,219 housing units in Mason County (2021); this means the county needs to accommodate an additional 8,300 housing units of all types to meet the 2036 population projection. Mason County currently has an estimated land capacity to accommodate a total of 20,000+ housing units of all types, well beyond its currently projected housing need to accommodate the projected population.

4 Findings and Conclusions

- ◆ Population growth has been steady, based on Census data since 1960, and the county has kept pace with the growth of Washington state.
- ◆ Mason County's population is expected to grow by approximately 1,114 to 30,372 people over the next 27 years, for **a total of between 66,870 and 96,098 residents by 2050.**
- ◆ Mason County has a higher median age than Washington state, which could be a result of the high household income levels and other positive social determinants of health.
- ◆ Based on its Housing Projection, Mason County will need to accommodate **8,300 housing units of all types** to meet the 2036 population projection.
- ◆ Mason County's residents are **predominantly commuters** – approximately 18,283 Mason County residents commute out of the county for work. Of the county's 12,729 jobs, 6,680 are filled by employees who are also residents of Mason County.
- ◆ Retail trade, public administration, and health care and social assistance make up about half (42.6%) of the jobs held by workers in Mason County.
- ◆ Mason County's median household income of \$66,325 is less than that of Washington state (\$82,400). Both Mason County and the state saw an increase in income levels between 2010 and 2020.
- ◆ An estimated 30% of Mason County residents lived below 200% of the federal poverty level in 2019, compared with 26% statewide.
- ◆ Based on the 2021 ACS estimates, the unemployment rate in Mason County (6.3%) is higher than the state overall (5.1%).
- ◆ Mason County is predominately made up of **single-family housing units (75.7%).**
- ◆ **Rental prices are rising** in Mason County's housing market. Since 2010, average residential rents in Mason County have increased by 33%.
- ◆ About 44.5% of Mason County's renter households are cost-burdened, meaning there is a **significant need for more affordable housing.**
- ◆ If housing prices continue to increase at a rate faster than incomes, owning a house will become unaffordable to many Mason County households in the coming years.