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THE ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON CITIES MAGAZINE

HOMELESS

Cities face the challenges of housing and homelessness with ingenuity



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CITYVISION MAGAZINE VOL. 14 / NO. 1

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FROM THE
PRESIDENT

I've long appreciated the phrase "strong cities make a great state." It's a saying that acknowledges the significance of our 281 cities here in Washington. It's a reminder—to us and to our legislators—that the only way for us to succeed is together. So how are our cities doing?

"There simply are not enough homes and especially not enough homes that people can afford." That's how *The Seattle Times* recently articulated the problem. Washington state is experiencing a housing crisis that is not confined to one region or one type of community. The lack of available, affordable housing is widespread, affecting cities and towns of every size and across the map.

Cities can't solve the problem alone. As noted in the recent *AWC State of the Cities Housing Report*, "increasing affordable housing requires a sustained, innovative approach and a working partnership with the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and county, state, and federal agencies." City leaders want what's best for their current and future residents. They are struggling with limited resources and need better tools to help stimulate development by the private market. They also need legislators in Olympia to honor local decision making by incentivizing rather than mandating zoning changes.

This issue of *Cityvision* features stories of our cities and towns working to address housing affordability and homelessness. The efforts of these local leaders are sustained and innovative. They are developing solutions customized to their circumstances. For an example, read the story of Port Angeles working with Habitat for Humanity, of Tacoma helping to establish South Sound Housing Affordability Partners, or of Ellensburg developing and working through a Housing Action Plan.

This housing crisis is a major challenge to the strength of Washington's cities, but strength is developed under stress. As these stories demonstrate, our city leaders are equal to the challenge. They are working with ingenuity and enthusiasm to maintain the strength of our cities and the greatness of our state.

Kent Keel
Councilmember, University Place



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Cityvision

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▶ Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards with a local mural attesting to the power of collective action
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Citybeat

Little Victories

Tackling the housing and homelessness crisis in Spokane means getting everyone to work together.

LAST DECEMBER, as protesters camped in tents outside city hall to draw attention to the fact that the city's primary shelters routinely were filled to capacity, Spokane's council made headlines by approving an innovative "hoteling plan" requisitioning up to 40 motel beds nightly to house the overflow. By the end of the month, amid an "arctic blast" that brought snow and freezing temperatures for nearly two weeks, the city was in the spotlight again when it opened its convention center as a round-the-clock emergency warming center, providing beds for up to 343 each night and serving more than 9,000 hot meals at a cost of \$400,000 (not including an estimated \$90,000 in damages to the facility as a result of vandalism, which became fodder for local TV news coverage). After that event passed, the quest to construct a new low-barrier homeless shelter—included in the city's 2022 budget, with a \$4.6 million earmark—never seemed more urgent.

"We were in a crisis, and we needed to stabilize things," says Eric Finch, the City of Spokane's interim director of Neighborhood Housing and Human Services. "We're trying to really put our arms around these different categories." Finch notes that he was

CONTINUED ON P.10 ▶



Staying Put

In Port Angeles, a partnership with Habitat for Humanity translates into housing stability for elders.

EMILY ALHADEFF

IN 2015, *Outside* magazine named Port Angeles the second-best place to live in America, lauding the city’s proximity to Olympic National Park, its small-town charm, and affordable single-family homes, with a median price of \$201,000. Fast-forward seven years, and the median price of a home in Port Angeles, according to Zillow, has more than doubled, to \$422,990. Translation: Port Angeles is grappling with a full-blown housing emergency.

“For no less than five years now, we’ve had a considerable housing crisis,” says Port Angeles City Manager Nathan West. Prior to the pandemic, the seaside town’s newfound livability reputation boosted its population by nearly 5 percent (to 20,120),

while the supply of homes available for year-round residents dwindled as property owners converted family homes to short-term rentals. Covid-19 brought an influx of pandemic refugees liberated from urban offices as telecommuting became the norm; many made Port Angeles their permanent address, further reducing home inventory and steeply raising prices. Add housing instability due to the economic impact of Covid as well as homelessness related to limited rental options, market affordability, drug addiction, and mental illness, and Port Angeles has quite a conundrum on its hands.

So last year, city leaders decided to collect feedback from local agencies and divert its share of American Rescue Plan

Act funding to programs and partnerships providing targeted solutions to Port Angeles’s housing crisis. One key partner in that goal has been Habitat for Humanity, which received a \$100,000 grant to help the city’s senior population (roughly 21 percent of the total) age in place.

“As we did our housing needs assessment, the number one thing we need to be doing is protecting our existing housing stock,” explains West, who notes that Habitat’s Aging in Place program helps eligible low-income seniors in the city stay in their homes longer by adding ADA-compliant features and tackling expensive long-term repairs, like roofing.

“It could be as simple as doing pull bars, proper knobs on drawers and cabinets because they have arthritis,” says Habitat for Humanity of Clallam County CEO Colleen Robinson. Or widening the doorway of a bathroom in a home where one elderly resident has lived for over

“THE NUMBER ONE THING WE NEED TO BE DOING IS PROTECTING OUR EXISTING HOUSING STOCK.”

40 years. “She had become wheelchair-bound and could not bathe in her own bathroom,” Robinson explains. “That came out of a partnership with a therapist at our local hospital.”

In the spirit of Habitat’s volunteer ethos, homeowners are expected to put “sweat equity” into each project. For aging and disabled clients, Robinson notes, that might mean baking cookies for volunteers swinging the hammers or doing data entry for the nonprofit.

Habitat’s improvements—typically costing a few thousand dollars per home—might seem minimal, but they’re not trivial; the city expects its investment to yield long-term dividends for its senior population in the form of housing stability, which impacts the entire community.

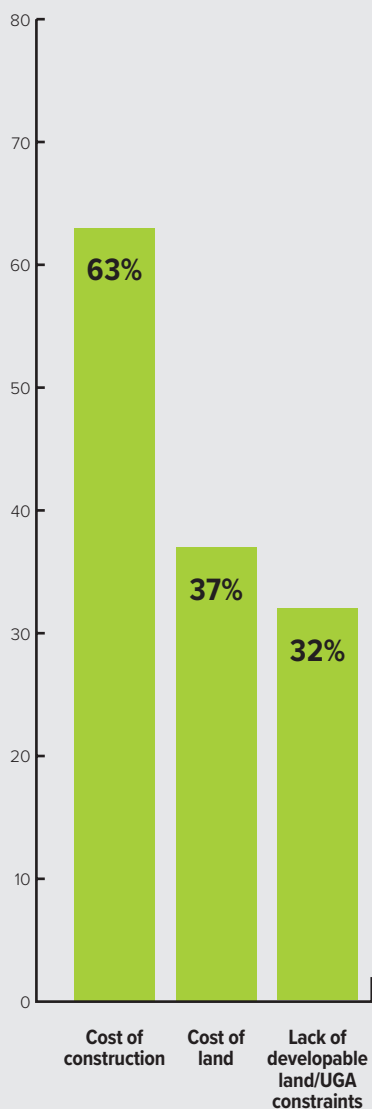
“I think we’ll see Habitat as a leader in housing needs throughout Clallam County,” says West. “They continue to demonstrate creativity in improving neighborhoods and the community.”



HOUSE HOLDS

Contrary to some rhetoric around housing development, the cost of construction, the cost of land, and urban growth area (UGA) constraints all surpassed the issue of community opposition when cities identified their top barriers. In fact, 73% of cities do not report community opposition to growth in their top three barriers to housing, but both sides of the state list cost of construction as their top barrier.

Top three barriers to housing development



Source: 2021 AWC City Conditions Survey (115 responses)

TOOL
KIT

BUILDING UNITY

Olympia creates new housing for the vulnerable with an innovative financing tool.

BY LAURA FURR MERICAS

IN DECEMBER 2021, the City of Olympia dedicated a revolutionary new housing community for individuals experiencing homelessness. Dubbed Unity Commons, the complex provides 60 units of shelter on the ground floor and 65 permanent supportive housing apartments above for high-vulnerability single adults. There are few barriers to entry—meaning residents aren’t required to provide identification or submit to drug tests—and easy access to primary care, mental health, and substance abuse treatment.

“It’s housing that meets the needs of the individual so that people aren’t retraumatized,” says Darian Lightfoot, the city’s Housing Programs Manager.

Unity Commons also happens to be the first project built, in part, with Olympia’s new Home Fund. Created in 2018 after voters passed a levy championed by State Representative Jessica Bateman, the fund provides more than \$2 million in new revenue each year for supportive and affordable housing in Olympia, with 65 percent earmarked for construction and development of new projects and the remainder allocated for programming and operations. In 2019, the city’s \$1.1 million Home Fund ante provided the initial financial backing, and momentum, that were needed to set the \$22 million project in motion.

“The goal is to be the first funder,” says Lightfoot. “We award projects that are in the very early stages. We want to show local support from the beginning.”

In addition to providing seed money, the city also provided land, selling a municipally owned parcel for just \$1,000 to the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), a respected developer known for tackling similar projects. Interfaith Works, an organization that had been operating two shelters out of downtown church basements, signed on to provide onsite social services. Together, the partners would coordinate efforts to secure funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce Housing Trust Fund and federal low-income housing tax credits.

“It is a collaboration, and all three parties are using their strengths,” says Lightfoot. “It’s not one agency just running themselves dry because they are trying to do all three pieces.”

In addition to providing seed money for Unity Commons, Olympia has leveraged \$1.4 million from its Home Fund to help finance a 62-unit family housing project slated to begin construction this year along with a second phase of Unity Commons, which will add a five-story affordable housing annex on the same land, with an additional \$150,000 earmarked to help the local housing authority transform a hotel into a supportive housing complex.

In February, the city began making its next round of Home Fund disbursements, which Lightfoot says will put Olympia well on its way toward its goal of creating 300 housing units in the Home Fund’s first five years. And with additional support from Thurston County’s own Home Fund, which passed in January, more support is likely on the way.

“The goal is for the city and county to collaborate,” Lightfoot adds, “to pool funds and award more funds to more projects.”



For more information:
olympiawa.gov



ENGROSSED SECOND SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1220

Chapter 254, Laws of 2021

EMERGENCY SHELTERS AND HOUSING - LOCAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

RCW 36.70A.070 Comprehensive plans - **Mandatory elements.**

[...]
(2) A housing element ensuring the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods that:

(a) Includes an inventory and analysis of existing and projected housing needs that identifies the number of housing units necessary to manage projected growth, as provided by the department of commerce, including:

(i) Units for moderate, low, very low, and extremely low-income households; and

(ii) Emergency housing, emergency shelters, and permanent supportive housing;

(b) Includes a statement of goals, policies, objectives, and mandatory provisions for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing, including single-family residences, and within an urban growth area boundary, **moderate density housing options including, but not limited to, duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes;**

(c) Identifies sufficient **capacity of land** for housing including, but not limited to, government-assisted housing, housing for moderate, low, very low, and extremely low-income households, manufactured housing, multifamily housing, group homes, foster care facilities, **emergency housing, emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing, and within an urban growth area boundary, consideration of duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes;**

(d) Makes adequate provisions for existing and projected needs of all economic segments of the community, **including:**

(i) **Incorporating consideration for low, very low, extremely low, and moderate-income households;**

(ii) **Documenting programs and actions needed to achieve housing availability including gaps in local funding, barriers such as development regulations, and other limitations;**

(iii) **Consideration of housing locations in relation to employment location; and**

(iv) **Consideration of the role of accessory dwelling units in meeting housing needs;**

(e) **Identifies local policies and regulations that result in racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing, including:**

(i) **Zoning that may have a discriminatory effect;**

(ii) **Disinvestment; and**

(iii) **Infrastructure availability;**

(f) **Identifies and implements policies and regulations to address and begin to undo racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing caused by local policies, plans, and actions;**

(g) **Identifies areas that may be at higher risk of displacement from market forces that occur with changes to zoning development regulations and capital investments; and**

(h) **Establishes antidisplacement policies, with consideration given to the preservation of historical and cultural communities as well as investments in low, very low, extremely low, and moderate-income housing; equitable development initiatives; inclusionary zoning; community planning requirements; tenant protections; land disposition policies; and consideration of land that may be used for affordable housing.**

This would require cities to provide for the development of these middle housing types, as many cities already do.

Many cities have begun the hard work in using an equity lens across city departments and services. Provisions (e), (f), and (g) would require cities to identify, redress, and prevent racially disparate impacts in housing policies.

Importantly, this provision recognizes that, despite the best of intentions with authorizing more housing options, the market will see cheaper land as more valuable to redevelop—displacing those who otherwise could afford to live there.

Although law, the changes to the housing element (underlined) are optional until sufficient funds are provided to local governments at least two years before updated plans are due.

Beyond providing authorization for middle housing, shelters, and housing for multiple income levels, cities would be required to fund sufficient space for these uses.

Commonly known as ADUs, this housing type has received lots of attention in recent sessions. Cities would need to consider how ADUs could address their housing needs—and many cities do.

THE QUESTION

WHAT'S A PRACTICAL AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTION YOU'VE SEEN AT WORK IN YOUR COMMUNITY RELATED TO HOMELESSNESS OR AFFORDABLE HOUSING?



Our community has been working on culture change alongside regulatory changes, coordinating with service providers and housing advocates, and promoting ways individuals can make a difference with their own choices. If your values include people who work here living here, give them a place to live. Home sharing, activating empty second homes, building ADUs to rent-housing is a community issue that has some human-scale solutions in addition to structural and systemic ones.

—AISLINN DIAMANTI
Councilmember, Port Townsend



Prior to the city opening a 35-unit sleep center in December 2020, the community's nonprofit and volunteer organizations fundraised for and operated a warming center on a limited basis during cold winter months. With the city's formalized plan and partnership with HopeSource, the city has been able to meet the basic needs of our chronically homeless community throughout the year while also assisting many in finding employment and/or permanent housing.

—DEANNA MARTINEZ
Councilmember, Moses Lake



Affordability is a concern—home prices in Walla Walla County increased 26.6 percent over the past year. To encourage the development of affordable housing in 2019, we identified an area for growth, installed one mile of waterline, made road improvements, and added fire suppression. Waitsburg also participated in the creation of the Walla Walla Regional Housing Action Plan last summer to inform our future comprehensive plans, capital facilities plans, and land use policies.

—JILLIAN HENZE
Councilmember, Waitsburg

TRAININGS

SMALL CITY CONNECTORS

Get an update on the 2022 legislative session, effective use of ARPA and infrastructure funding, and more as you enjoy a catered dinner and connect with other small cities and towns in your area to share best practices.

- 4/18 – Buckley
- 4/27 – Long Beach
- 5/10 – Newport
- 5/11 – Waterville

TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS

HEALTHY WORKSITE SUMMIT
MARCH 9–10 | LYNNWOOD

The Healthy Worksite Summit is back live and in-person this year at the Lynnwood Convention Center! It's the Northwest's premier training event dedicated to making workplaces healthy places. Come together and meet your peers to learn, share, and explore ways to create a workplace where people can connect and thrive.

- Learn from health promotion experts and experienced practitioners.
- Choose from a variety of workshops, featuring hot topics for newcomers and seasoned wellness professionals.
- Network with other health promotion professionals in this information-rich environment.
- Covid-19 safety protocols have been adopted to ensure a safe and healthy return to in-person learning.

LABOR RELATIONS INSTITUTE
MAY 4–6 | YAKIMA

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Citybeat

Little Victories *continued from page 5*

surprised to find, for example, via an after-action review with those who provided services during the crisis alongside a review of data from previous surveys, that a large demographic group coming to the warming center was over the age of 55—a group that doesn't have a clear exit path through the system and faces a shortage of long-term care options.


So far, initiatives that have borne fruit include providing more hotel rooms as safe havens for victims of domestic violence; the development of an emergency sheltering plan with “flex capacity”

“YOU HAVE TO LOOK AT THE WHOLE ECOSYSTEM, AND YOU HAVE TO BE PREPARED TO MOVE SEVERAL LEVERS AT THE SAME TIME.”

to expand when needed; a partnership with Habitat for Humanity to restore and eliminate “zombie homes,” abandoned houses occupied by squatters; and a centralized diversion fund that has housed 14 individuals in three months’ time for under \$20,000 just by helping with expenses like moving costs.

Then there's the city's work with the United Way Spokane, which uses a “Built for Zero” model to target a specific subset of the city's homeless population and dedicate resources to that population until virtually every individual in that cohort has been housed. In 2017, the nonprofit launched a 100-day challenge to house 100 youth and young adults between the ages of 12 and 24 in the city that has evolved into the Anchor Communities Initiative, a partnership between the city, the United Way, and A Way Home Washington (a statewide initiative supporting at-risk youth that identify as LGBTQ+) seeking to effectively end youth homelessness in Spokane. Creating a “by name list” of every person between the ages of 12 and 24 experiencing homelessness in Spokane County, and dedicating resources to each individual on that list, the collaborative cut the number of cases from 44 to 19 from September 2020 through June 2021.

“The whole initiative is built on this idea of little victories,” says Julius Henrichsen, who runs Anchor Communities Initiative. Once they see something work, he explains, “that is a huge lift, especially for a community of service providers.”

And for a city that's determined to address homelessness, driven by data and the help of many partners, celebrating one little victory at a time. “You have to look at the whole ecosystem,” Finch stresses, “and you have to be prepared to move several levers at the same time.” 

—Emily Alhadeff



For more information:
my.spokanecity.org

Cityscope

Q&A

Community Building

Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards talks about how collaboration and collective voices can help solve big issues around housing—and more.

INTERVIEW BY LAURA FURR MERICAS

Tacoma Mayor
Victoria Woodards

How did your service in the Army and on Tacoma's city council prepare you for taking on the role as mayor?

I've done a little bit of everything, but it's all been around service. I think my background has prepared me to deal with the myriad issues that I face as mayor. And I think my love for this city, its people, and my connections here have made me someone who really understands Tacoma. Out of that come my values and a spirit of collaboration and rec-

ognizing that if we engage the community, we can come up with the best solutions to tackle our most prominent issues.

What are the most challenging housing issues the City of Tacoma is facing?

Affordability and lack of housing in the face of Covid-19. The pandemic has exacerbated every issue concerning

CONTINUED ON P.12 ►



housing, from capacity in homeless shelters to rising rents and home prices. We're seeing it play out in a lack of permanent supportive housing and the fact that people who work in our city can't necessarily afford to live here—our schoolteachers, our servers, even some of our police and firefighters.

So what have you done about that?

We have implemented our affordable housing action strategy, which focuses on four areas: creating new affordable housing, keeping existing housing affordable and in good repair, helping community members stay in housing (with initiatives like tenant protections), and reducing barriers.

Such as?

Creating a Housing Trust Fund, purchasing a hotel to provide permanent supportive housing, and completing a disparities study on BIPOC home ownership. We have also implemented the state's first Guaranteed Income Program, as well as rental assistance to ensure that community members can maintain their current residence.

What's had the biggest impact on affordable housing in Tacoma?

The Housing Trust Fund, with over \$2 million set aside to help build affordable housing in our community—we'll see that have impact down the road. I'm also proud of our nonprofits who provide low-income housing, like our Tacoma Housing Authority, which completed a project about a



Mayor Woodards in front of the Mercy Housing building at the corner of Ninth & MLK

“THE WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE THAT EXISTS IN THIS COUNTRY IN OUR ELECTED LEADERS IS A RESOURCE THAT WILL CHANGE THE WORLD.”

year ago called The Rise at 19th. And the YWCA just built permanent supportive housing across from their shelter.

Tacoma also helped establish South Sound Housing Affordability Partners. What's that?

It's a coalition of governments of all sizes that have come together to access the tools and expertise they need to keep housing attainable for their residents. Because when [housing] is not affordable in Tacoma, people move to Lakewood or Bonney Lake, and when it's not affordable in

Bonney Lake, then they move further out. I'm really proud that we were able to pull these governments together. It's a great opportunity for us to leverage our collective voices at the state and federal level for more tools to be successful in affordable housing.

What's one thing you learned as mayor that you'll apply to your new job as the incoming president of the National League of Cities?

That one person cannot solve the issues that face cities, towns, and villages alone. I've learned that the pur-

pose of good ideas in local government is to share them so that all of our communities benefit. The wealth of knowledge that exists in this country in our elected leaders is a resource that will change the world.

What excites you most about leading the NLC?

The reality of a nonpartisan organization filled with councilmembers and mayors is that we are focused on who we serve and not ourselves. To lead an organization that is working hard and advocating on behalf of cities, towns, and villages means that we're working for communities everywhere. I want to use what I've learned in my city, to bring the leadership style that I have and the best practices we've implemented to communities across the country, and to lean on the learnings of other communities, to be able to lift up Tacoma and Washington state.

In addition to affordable housing, what other big issues concerning cities need to be addressed at the national level?

We will still need support to recover from the effects of Covid-19 and adjust to the "new normal." Local governments are facing crises in homelessness, public safety, and failing infrastructure; these are issues we cannot solve alone. We are also all still grappling with the national conversation demanding equity in all of our systems, especially criminal justice. Since these issues can be extremely divisive, how we approach them will be extremely important.

BY THE NUMBERS

Tacoma

Cityvision takes the measure of a growing city's challenges in providing housing that suits residents' needs.

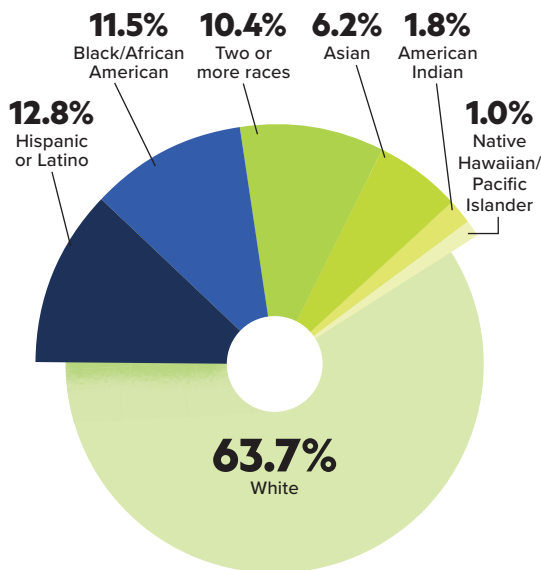
POPULATION

POPULATION DATA FROM THE 2020 US CENSUS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED



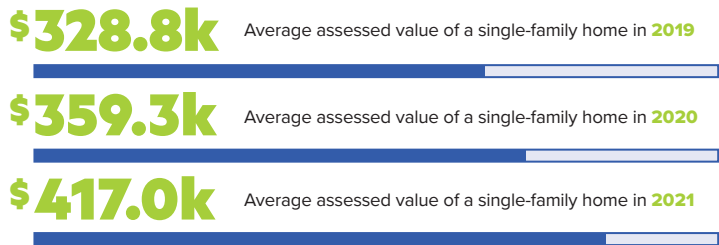
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DEMOGRAPHICS



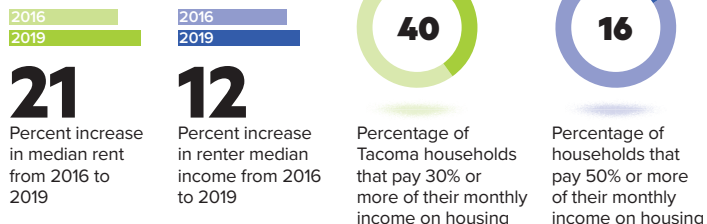
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MARKET MOVES



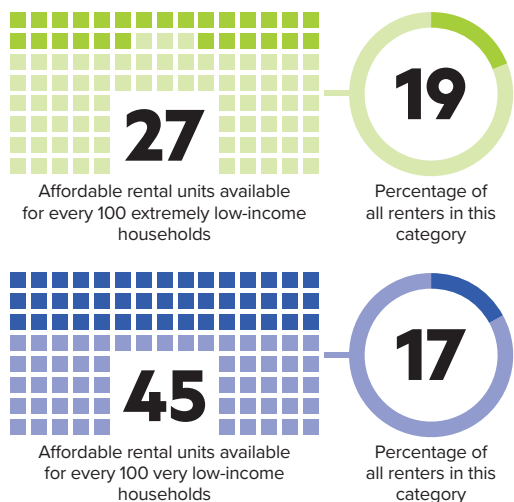
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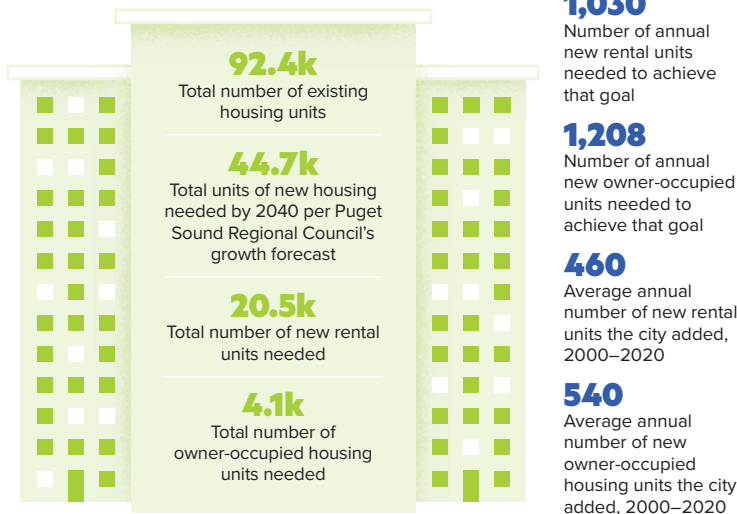
SOURCE: CITY OF TACOMA

SQUEEZED STOCK



SOURCE: CITY OF TACOMA

BOLD BUILDS



SOURCE: CITY OF TACOMA

HOMES *in the* RANGE

By TED KATAUSKAS

An Ellensburg field planted with timothy hay, the area's premier cash crop



ELLENSBURG STRIVES TO OVERCOME A PERSISTENT PLAGUE OF HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND CAPACITY ISSUES WITH A FOCUSED YET FLEXIBLE PLAN OF ACTION.

YEARS BEFORE PANDEMIC LOCKDOWNS AND QUARANTINES normalized teleworking and transformed homes from primary residences into ersatz places of business—stimulating a nationwide run on real estate that ignited bidding wars in virtually every zip code—the City of Ellensburg had identified a dearth of available housing as a linchpin issue that would either make or break the community’s future. Nestled on the banks of the Yakima River in the heart of mountainous Kittitas County, Ellensburg has long embraced its heritage as an oasis in the wilderness with an up-by-the-bootstraps ethos.

Having hosted the 1889 State Admission Convention six years after its incorporation, the Northern Pacific whistle stop some were calling the “Pittsburgh of the West” was so certain it would become the seat of state government that it had begun clearing a site (dubbed Capitol Hill) when a fire swept through town and scuttled its bid. Instead, the Legislature designated Ellensburg as home of the State Normal School. More than a century later, Central Washington University remains Ellensburg’s largest employer, with more than 1,400 on its payroll, and boasts a student enrollment of more than 11,000 that counts as more than half of the city’s population and skews its demographics younger (median age: 23). After the university, the community hospital, the school district, and county government, Anderson Hay and Grain, with a workforce of 240, is Ellensburg’s largest employer, dedicated to the Kittitas Valley’s signature crop: timothy hay, a dietary staple of thoroughbred racehorses and premium Kobe beef cattle that’s shipped to markets as far away as Saudi Arabia and Japan, generating an annual windfall of \$80 million. The percentage that trickles down to local wages, though, has by far been eclipsed by a runaway real estate market.



“As far as the housing crunch goes, we are definitely not alone,” says Ellensburg Planning Manager Jamey Ayling. “But we are a little bit unique in the fact that we are a college town, which contributes considerably to some of our housing problems. When three or four or five college students go and rent out a single-family home, it takes that home off the market for a family. It’s crazy what people will pay for a house because there’s just nothing available, and the pricing’s a little bit obnoxious.”

How obnoxious?

At press time, according to Zillow.com, the median price for a single-family home in Ellensburg was \$445,212, a 30 percent increase from 2021 and a 40 percent increase from 2019. Meanwhile, the site listed just three one-bedroom apartments available for rent in the entire city. The median one-bedroom apartment rental cost (\$1,600/month or \$19,200/year) represents 48 percent of the median household income (\$39,645 annually, a bit more than half the statewide median of \$73,775), which far exceeds the federal threshold of being deemed “cost burdened” at 30 percent. For families searching for larger accommodations, Zillow.com listed just three three-bedroom homes for rent in the city, with a median monthly rate of \$2,400, or \$28,800 annually, representing 72 percent of the local median household income. With 68 percent of all households renting—and the average rent increasing by 24 percent over the past decade, outpacing income growth by 9 percent—almost half of Ellensburg’s population has been deemed cost burdened or severely cost burdened (spending more than 50 percent of household income on housing).

This phenomenon predates the pandemic by decades. Locals still talk about the 1980s and 1990s, when university students unable to find housing on campus resorted to camping along the Yakima River. That spurred CWU and local developers to build dormitories and apartments near campus, in addition to more single-family homes, but demand continued to outpace supply. More recently as Seattle real estate boomed, tech workers and young families priced out of that market began buying homes in Ellensburg, further ratcheting up prices.

“Over the past five to seven years, the affordability of Seattle has driven Seattleites to Ellensburg because our median home sales price was still a bargain relative to the Seattle market,” says councilmember and former mayor Bruce Tabb, who notes that the Emerald City is just a 90-minute drive away, hardly a stretch for a King County commuter who spends as much time idling in I-5 rush hour traffic every day. Couple that with 300-plus days of sunshine that Ellensburg enjoys on the dry side of the Cascades and the town’s Mayberry-like appeal, and for many, relocating is a no-brainer.

“You’re looking at a community with an incredibly vibrant downtown,” adds Tabb. “We’ve never had outward sprawl, so there’s no malls or strip malls. We’ve still got neighborhoods and a sense of connectedness and a decent school system and, in terms of starting a family, you can get more home here than you could in that big metro.”

Kelle Dvorak Vandenberg, who graduated from CWU in 1999 and married a longtime local, moved back to Ellensburg from Woodinville in 2019 after a 15-year stint in marketing and custom packaging at global behemoth TricorBraun.

“There’s a magic to it,” says Vandenberg, now the area director of Kittitas County Habitat for Humanity. “It’s hard for the west



Ellensburg Councilmember Bruce Tabb and Planning Manager Jamey Ayling (l-r) in the city

side and Seattle to compete with all of the life amenities in Kittitas County. It’s this quiet, sequestered town in this beautiful valley with rivers and lakes and mountains and some of the best fly-fishing in the country. It’s a wonderful quality of life. However, it can be challenging to make a living wage here. While the valley has some industry, such as agricultural, we lack manufacturing or technology jobs in the region. Many of our employers are smaller retail or restaurants that rely on tourism and local purchasing.”

By November 2017, Ellensburg’s housing crisis had become so acute that the city sponsored and voters passed Proposition 1, a 0.1 percent local sales tax to fund affordable housing initiatives. A few months later, apartment vacancy rates in Kittitas County dipped below 0.7 percent, the lowest in the state, and the inventory of available owner-occupied homes also evaporated, with only five active listings under \$300,000 on the Northwest Multiple Listing Service—and none less than \$250,000, prompting the local paper to publish an editorial urging city leaders to take action.

“There are core elements we finance as a community—police, fire, health services (hospital) and schools, but there is nothing more basic than housing,” opined *The Daily Record* in April 2018. “The catch is housing primarily is a private sector function, which is influenced and in some cases limited by public sector decisions. . . . We will have a better perspective on this five or 10 years down the road, but it feels like we’re in the midst of a transition period where the decisions we make will greatly influence the communities we call home.”

In May 2018, Ellensburg’s council passed Ordinance 4799, creating a seven-member Affordable Housing Commission, led by

Bruce Tabb, tasked with administering its Affordable Housing Fund (which typically yields \$560,000 a year in revenue) and “making recommendations to city council for addressing the identified affordable housing needs of city residents.” With a \$50,000 Department of Commerce grant funded by the state Legislature in May 2019, the city retained Seattle-based BERK Consulting to help it create a Housing Action Plan, a voluminous 140-page document the council adopted in October 2021.

“The reality is,” explains Tabb, “we needed a plan.”

THE FIRST STEP IN DEVISING that plan was to quantify the problem by creating a housing needs assessment, which BERK accomplished by assembling and analyzing reams of data from a plethora of sources, including the US Census Bureau, the US Department of Housing & Urban Development, and the Washington Office of Financial Management. After crunching the numbers, in addition to preparing its written report BERK built a microsite linked to the city’s website, a tool with pie charts and bar graphs to educate anyone who wants to understand, and potentially help solve, the problem, from home builders and real estate professionals to city planners, nonprofit partners, and interested residents.

Scrolling through numbers on the interactive site tells a story that’s much more nuanced than might be expected. Currently, Ellensburg adds just 107 units of new housing each year, yet in order to address its undersupply and meet population growth targets, the city will need to produce as many as 333 new units

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WE’VE STILL GOT NEIGHBORHOODS AND A SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS AND A DECENT SCHOOL SYSTEM AND, IN TERMS OF STARTING A FAMILY, YOU CAN GET MORE HOME HERE THAN YOU COULD IN THAT BIG METRO.

—BRUCE TABB ELLENSBURG COUNCILMEMBER

annually until 2037. Compounding this problem, Ellensburg’s existing housing inventory represents a fundamental mismatch with its population: although 70 percent of households have one or two members, only 25 percent of all housing units are studios or one-bedrooms; and while three-member households make up only 18 percent of the population, three-bedroom housing is the norm, at 37 percent of the total. Then there’s the affordability factor: to be able to make rent without being cost burdened, an Ellensburg apartment dweller needs to earn \$55,200 a year; a homeowner will need a salary of \$64,079 to afford a bottom-tier home, well above the average median income.

So in addition to more than doubling the rate of production and diversifying the types of homes being built—the Housing

Action Plan’s top goal—Ellensburg also needs to find ways to make the homes it creates affordable to rent or own. Which is where the second step of the plan comes into play: policy review.

“One of the major takeaways for me from the plan was that there are clearly things that the city council can do, working with our staff, to change our code to create a more encouraging environment for building the types of housing that are needed to begin to address these problems,” says Tabb. “What will it take, or what does the city have in place, to encourage the type of housing that creates what’s called the ‘missing middle’—for the folks who aren’t looking for a half-million-dollar house but a \$225,000 or a \$175,000 house, or they’re looking for rentals that are going to fall into that affordable range so that they’re not cost burdened?”

According to the plan, that means amending zoning codes and permitting requirements to allow and incentivize the production of “missing middle” homes, including accessory dwelling units (ADUs), town homes, multiplex developments, and condominiums, as well as “cottage housing,” small residential units for multiple families clustered around shared common space on lots normally reserved for detached single-family homes. BERK’s “flexible toolbox to address Ellensburg’s housing needs” also included rezoning commercial districts to allow for mixed-use residential development, increasing building heights and changing density limits, preserving income-restricted affordable housing developments, and incentivizing or partnering with developers to build new affordable housing developments. Although Ellensburg had amended its code in 2013 to allow for the construction of ADUs and cottage housing, the city had only permitted four ADUs per year, compared to 53 single-family units; to reduce barriers for interested homeowners, BERK recommended developing a “how-to” brochure and working with local architects to develop preapproved plans.

In addition to public hearings, the city employed a website (*beheardeburg.com*) to serve as a pandemic-friendly public engagement platform on the initiative, polling residents about preferred housing types and eliciting feedback about proposed zoning changes. The site attracted more than 850 visitors, including 230 who completed a detailed visual preference survey with computer-generated renderings of neighborhoods populated with infill projects. The city also convened a Housing Action Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group, a dozen leaders from the community including developers, contractors, real estate agents, representatives from the university, and local nonprofits, which met three times to workshop and provide feedback on potential housing strategies.

“The community involvement piece was huge,” says Ayling, the city’s planning manager. “We tried specifically to go to people that we weren’t used to working with rather than going with the same four people who volunteer for everything, and that was eye-opening. . . . There’s this assumption that everybody in Ellensburg wants to have a large lot with one home on it because it’s farm-style living in this neck of the woods, but that’s not really the case.”

Just ask Tahania Peratrovich. In 2009, after her marriage ended in a divorce, Peratrovich was living in an 800-square-foot converted garage she shared with three young daughters and rented for \$550 a month, a space so small that sitting on the toilet required her to dangle her feet in the bathtub. Then she

won the lottery, or the equivalent, when her application to buy a Habitat for Humanity home was accepted. After putting in 500 hours of sweat equity, Peratrovich moved into a brand-new, 1,100-square-foot, 1.5-bathroom home on July 1, 2010. Her \$745 monthly mortgage payment is a bargain compared to the \$1,200 another tenant is paying to rent that cramped garage apartment unit today.

“Having a home base helped so much,” says Peratrovich, who now works as the home repair superintendent at Kittitas County Habitat for Humanity (KCHH). “It just turned our life back around.”

NOW, PERATROVICH IS LOOKING forward to paying her good fortune forward by donating labor to the next Habitat families who will begin building homes this spring at Stuart Meadows, a \$4.7 million, high-density affordable housing community the nonprofit is developing on a three-acre parcel on the north side of town. Not only did the city donate the land, but it also seeded the project with \$765,000 from its Affordable Housing Fund, Ellensburg’s first major disbursement.

Using the land trust model—which takes the cost of land out of the home-buying equation and keeps prices low—the nonprofit holds the land in a 99-year trust and leases it back to the local homeowners association; homeowners agree to a capped appreciation rate and to resell only to KCHH or another qualified low-income buyer. At Stuart Meadows, three of the homes (each 1,150 square feet with three bedrooms and 1.5 bathrooms) will be reserved for families with household incomes at 60 percent of the average median income or less, with the balance reserved for families with household incomes of 80 percent AMI; after they have donated at least 20 hours of sweat equity per week to the build, monthly housing costs for owners at Stuart Meadows will vary between \$850 and \$1,440 a month depending on income and interest rates. That’s far less than the median rent or a market-rate mortgage on a similarly sized new home in Ellensburg.

“I really give hats off to the City of Ellensburg for the having the vision to understand that the community as a whole would get behind this revolutionary idea of using sales tax money to help fund affordable housing,” says KCHH’s Vandenberg. “When you have a municipality that believes that change needs to happen, that affordable housing has to come into the community, and they do something about it . . . for me, that was wonderful to see.”

“There are people within the community that need this win,” she adds, noting that the nonprofit currently has about 125 potential homeowners on its waiting list. “They need to see that not only is the city doing something about affordable housing, which they absolutely are, but this is the first of many projects.”

On the other end of town on South Pearl Street, another local nonprofit, HopeSource, plans to break ground this spring on Addison Place, five studio apartments for seniors and people with disabilities, a \$1 million project that’s being bankrolled with grants from the county, a private donor, and more than \$300,000 from the city’s Affordable Housing Fund.

Since 2003, in partnership with the city, county, and private developers, HopeSource has built more than 600 units of affordable housing in Kittitas and two neighboring counties. The most recent was Spurling Court, a 49-unit complex of one- and two-bedroom



Tahania Peratrovich and Kelle Dvorak Vandenberg (l-r) of Kittitas County Habitat for Humanity



Spurling Court, a 49-unit complex of affordable one- and two-bedroom apartments

apartments and town homes in Ellensburg, half available for those classified as homeless, that was completed in June and financed with low-income housing tax credits, \$500,000 from county affordable housing and homelessness funds, and a deferred federal loan; the City of Ellensburg also waived impact fees to reduce costs.

“The city has been a great partner, and they’ve been really focused on helping with zoning and covenant restrictions,” says HopeSource Chief Operations Officer John Raymond. “You’re not going to build your way out this, but you can certainly make progress if you’ve got willing partners who each can come to the table with what they can contribute.”

That progress includes collaborations with developers like Matthew Stalder, who by the end of the year plans to break ground on 57 units of studio and one-bedroom housing for low-income tenants on a lot the city donated (valued at \$158,000, just around the corner from HopeSource's Addison Place) that had been used as a community garden.

"I'm helping alleviate the supply part of what's causing this," Stalder says, noting that the city made the project feasible by donating the land, which is increasingly difficult to find.

Since Ellensburg has yet to permit a single cottage housing project,



The Stuart Meadows site, where construction is set to begin this spring



HopeSource CEO Susan Grindle and COO John Raymond at Spurling Court

GROWING GAINS

Q&A MIKE KINGSSELLA

Up for Growth CEO Mike Kingsella talks about what local leaders need to know, and do, to address the most critical housing needs facing their communities.



What is Up for Growth?

We are a national network of organizations that cross many different sectors—including AWC, but also housing advocates, chambers of commerce, responsible developers and investors—with the common goal of addressing the nationwide housing shortage and affordability crisis through data-driven research and evidence-based policy.

How does affordability factor into that?

We know that there is a significant shortage of housing that's affordable to families in households earning 80 percent of area median income, but we also know that there is a significant unmet need in terms of workforce housing for all sorts of folks between 80 and 120 percent of area median income. These are teachers and firefighters. These are public servants who struggle to find housing that they can afford.

How critical is this crisis?

We've never seen the shortage as severe as it is today. We are seeing, in real time, cities hit this breaking point where affordability is way out of whack, where home ownership opportunities are increasingly few and far between.

Has the pandemic real estate boom made things worse?

We are in the process of completing our first update to that housing underproduction report, which we will release on July 14, but I can say that we have seen a significant increase in the size of the housing underproduction in Washington state.

Can you quantify that?

Absolutely. In 2018, we published our first piece of research called "Housing Underproduction in the U.S.," a report that looked at 22 states and Washington, DC, and found that between 2000 and 2015 the nation fell 7.3 million homes short of meeting national housing needs. We also published a Washington state-specific report where we found that Washington fell short by 225,600 homes.

What's driving that increase?

It's no secret that delivering housing is much harder today, and a whole host of market factors are at play... It is very difficult, particularly in high opportunity neighborhoods, for builders to develop and build the types of housing

CONTINUED ON P.20 ►



At right, the community garden lot dedicated to a new low-income housing development

WE'RE TRYING TO STAY IN FRONT OF THIS AS MUCH AS WE CAN, TRYING TO COME UP WITH GOOD CURES THAT WILL RETAIN OUR SMALL-TOWN CHARM.

—JAMEY AYLING ELLENSBURG PLANNING MANAGER

it's hoping to find a partner to build a cottage housing pilot/demonstration project and create a set of preapproved standardized blueprints that developers like Stalder can use to easily replicate the model. Through rezoning, the city hopes to stimulate redevelopment of a long-vacant motel into an affordable housing apartment complex and catalyze business growth in underdeveloped commercial tracts with the addition of mixed-use affordable housing complexes. Also on the table: tapping into its Affordable Housing Fund to incentivize developers to factor affordability into new construction, say by paying \$400,000 to a developer who plans to build a \$1 million apartment complex to reserve four of 10 units for low-income tenants, to be rented at HUD-approved rates for a period of 25 years.

"It's a win from the developer's standpoint because they're borrowing \$600,000 at 7 percent instead of a million dollars," explains Tabb. "And it's a win for the individuals living in those apartments, and it's a win for us because we're creating affordable housing capacity that otherwise wouldn't exist."

"We're trying to be proactive," adds Ayling. "We've put a lot of things in place ahead of time: our affordable housing tax that we can tap into, looking at these zoning codes already by having a Housing Action Plan. We're trying to stay in front of this as much as we can, trying to come up with good cures that will retain our small-town charm."

He's hoping more remedies will arrive in June 2023, when the city is scheduled to complete a Housing Action Plan implementation plan funded with a \$75,000 grant from the state Department of Commerce.

But in so many ways, it's a work already in progress. **C**

that folks are really looking for. That includes policies like minimum lot-size requirements or off-street parking requirements and outmoded land use or zoning codes.

What's one example?

A few years ago, the *New York Times* found that 81 percent of all land zoned residential in the City of Seattle was exclusively large lots with single detached housing, which is a huge number. That means only 19 percent of residential-zoned land in Seattle can be anything other than a large lot with a single detached home.

Why is that problematic?

There will continue to be a need for single-family housing, and we should continue to meet that need, but the underproduction of homes is much more acute when we're talking about multifamily affordable housing, particularly compact homes in walkable neighborhoods.

What drives that demand?

As a member of our Advisory Council, Professor Arthur C. Nelson from the University of Arizona, showed in his book *Reshaping Metropolitan America*, a 13 percent share of the increase in American households between 2010 and 2030 is going to be households with children, and 87 percent will be households without children. So think about the housing needs and the types of homes that a single person or a double-income household without kids needs, and it's probably not going to be a three- or four-bedroom, large-scale single detached home.

What's one question local decision-makers should be asking?

How do we modernize zoning codes and land use policies to really enable the types of housing that people today are looking for and want and need? That lag between consumer preference and housing needs and what a lot of the local land use and zoning policies allow for is what explains the housing underproduction we see.

What is Up for Growth doing about that?

We're working with the federal government, Congress, and HUD on tools for more local governments. There's good news in terms of already significant innovation at the state level in Washington, particularly House Bill 1923, which Representative Fitzgibbon helped get passed a couple of years ago. He essentially created a new grant program that's being used by cities to understand housing needs and craft actionable housing plans.

A final thought for Washington's local electeds?

A lack of housing and the resulting affordability challenges that hundreds of thousands of Washingtonians are facing are not driven by forces of nature outside of our control. Housing underproduction is simply a result of a certain set of policy choices made over many decades. The good news is that local leaders can help solve the housing shortage by making a different set of policy choices. We just need the political will to make those solutions a reality.

Citywise



“

Significant and sustainable investments are necessary to provide more diverse and affordable housing, as well as the much-needed investments to address homelessness.

— CITY 101 P. 26 ▶

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CITY 101

ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL

Everett's pandemic-born campaign for unity bolsters community spirit and faces down hate.

JULIO CORTES, MANAGER, COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING, CITY OF EVERETT;
HELENE MARTIN, INTERN, CITY OF EVERETT



INCLUSIVITY AND COMMUNITY were the driving factors behind the creation of the One Everett campaign, the City of Everett's participatory community art project. The campaign—which began in the spring of 2020, at a time when friends, families, and coworkers were separated by physical distancing recommendations—was intended as a way to provide community members with the ability to feel and show they were together without having to physically be together.

While Everett is the largest city in Snohomish County, it still has a small-town feel and a close-knit community. It is the type of city where residents cannot walk down the street, go for coffee, or sit down at a restaurant without bumping into someone they know. That level of intimacy was somewhat lost to residents when quarantine and strict stay-at-home orders were put in place, a fact that left many residents looking for ways to reconnect with their neighbors.

That small-town, close-knit feeling was captured through the One Everett campaign, as the city provided residents with a new avenue to connect and express citywide solidarity. The One Everett logo started cropping up all over the city as awareness of the campaign increased. Residents and local business owners utilized the logo in their windows to show how Everett and its residents come together when faced with incredibly challenging obstacles, such as the pandemic. The Everett Fire Department even utilized the logo to promote their inclusivity and support of the LGBTQ community by putting a One Everett sticker on their fire trucks.

The campaign features a logo with the text "One Everett" in the shape of a heart, surrounded by a border of smaller, rainbow hearts and held up by a pair of

brown hands. The design represents the inclusivity that is at the heart of Everett. The cheerful, light design—created by local Everett artist Rosemary Jones as a fun community art project to do during quarantine—was the City of Everett's way of showcasing positivity and community engagement during the challenging times of the pandemic.

The One Everett webpage offers many versions of the open source One Everett design for community members to download, print, and display in whatever way they want to. There are downloadable posters, both colored and blank for people to color in themselves; big banners for larger displays; and social media graphics for use on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The flexible and transformable nature of the One Everett logo allowed for people to shape and utilize the design to connect with their community during a time where many felt disconnected.

The city used the design in many ways to help promote the campaign. The One Everett logo was combined seamlessly into the official city logo, a brick 'E' design that allows for the integration of artwork behind it. City officials utilized the One Everett logo in their everyday signatures at the bottom of their emails that were used to communicate with other government agencies, community members, and the media.

As the campaign picked up, community members utilized it for more than just connection with each other. What started as a sign of unity among the community at a time when they could not be physically close turned into a sign for safety as community members utilized the logo to combat hate.

When a hateful banner was placed on a pedestrian bridge in Everett, the



community was quick to act, taking it down and requesting One Everett banners to replace it. The city produced banners that read “All are welcome in Everett, No place for hate” and placed them where the hateful banner once hung to instead spread positivity and create a safer environment for residents.


By providing the community with another avenue in which to utilize the One Everett campaign, the city communicated a strong anti-hate response that showed that Everett is a safe place for everyone. Throughout the course of the campaign, the logo was also used in social justice issues that arose. The community used

THE COMMUNITY USED THE ONE EVERETT LOGO ON SIGNS, AS A FORM OF PROTEST ART, TO FURTHER SPREAD POSITIVITY, AND IN ANTI-HATE MESSAGING.

the One Everett logo on signs, as a form of protest art, to further spread positivity, and in anti-hate messaging.

The campaign continues to be successful in not only providing a sense of solidarity for residents but also serving as an anti-hate stance for the community. Ultimately, it provided the city a way to show that they care about their residents and provided community members a way to show they cared for each other.

While the One Everett campaign has been used in various ways over its course, the core of its messaging remains the same: inclusivity and community are at the heart of Everett. The biggest takeaway from this campaign is how the City of Everett and its residents come together to face difficult times as a community. One Everett represents its community’s core values of inclusivity, solidarity, and unity.

One Everett is an ongoing campaign. Visit everettwa.gov/oneeverett to download, print, and share the positive vibes and encouragement of the One Everett campaign. 

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Legality Check

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PERSONNEL INVESTORS

Three ways city leaders can use ARPA funds to support city staff

AWC STAFF

LAST YEAR, CONGRESS passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), sending billions of federal dollars directly to cities across the country. While many communities are considering investments in infrastructure, replacing lost city revenues, or setting up community support programs, some cities are investing in city staff.

Here are three ways city leaders can use ARPA funds to support city staff.

1. Fund public safety, public health, and human services staff

Using ARPA dollars, cities may fund payroll and benefits for the portion of an employee's time spent responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, cities can consider first responders entirely devoted to responding to Covid-19 if the employee or their unit or division is primarily dedicated to responding to Covid-19. Per Treasury, "primarily dedicated" means that more than half of the employee, unit, or division's time is dedicated to responding to Covid-19.

Remember, responding to the Covid-19 pandemic covers more than just responding to the direct health impacts of the virus. For example, a staff member tasked with running a grant program for local businesses impacted by Covid-19 could be considered eligible to have their payroll and benefits covered for the portion of time they are spending running the program.

2. Rehire and employ additional public sector staff

During the initial months of the pandemic, over 50 percent of surveyed cities indicated they had implemented hiring freezes in response to the pandemic. An additional 25 percent

of cities implemented furloughs, with almost 20 percent of cities laying off employees.

Under ARPA, cities have two options to rehire and employ additional public sector staff:

■ Hire back employees for pre-pandemic positions

Hire employees for positions that existed on January 27, 2020, but were unfilled or eliminated as of March 3, 2021.

■ Hire above the pre-pandemic staff levels or hire different positions

Hire up to an additional 7.5 percent of a city's pre-pandemic staffing levels. Using a Treasury-provided formula, cities can calculate the number of positions they can fund using ARPA dollars. Cities using this formula are not required to hire staff for the same roles or positions that existed prior to the pandemic.

3. Retain existing city staff

Retain current employees and avoid layoffs. Here are three ways cities can use ARPA funds to retain existing staff:

■ **Provide additional funding** to employees who experienced pay reductions or who were furloughed since the beginning of the pandemic. Cities will need to take into account unemployment benefits that employees received.

■ **Maintain current salary levels** to prevent layoffs. ARPA funds can be used to maintain current salary levels, including taking inflation into account.

■ **Offer worker retention incentives**, including reasonable pay increases added to an employee's current compensation without exceeding incentives traditionally offered by the city to compete for employees. **C**





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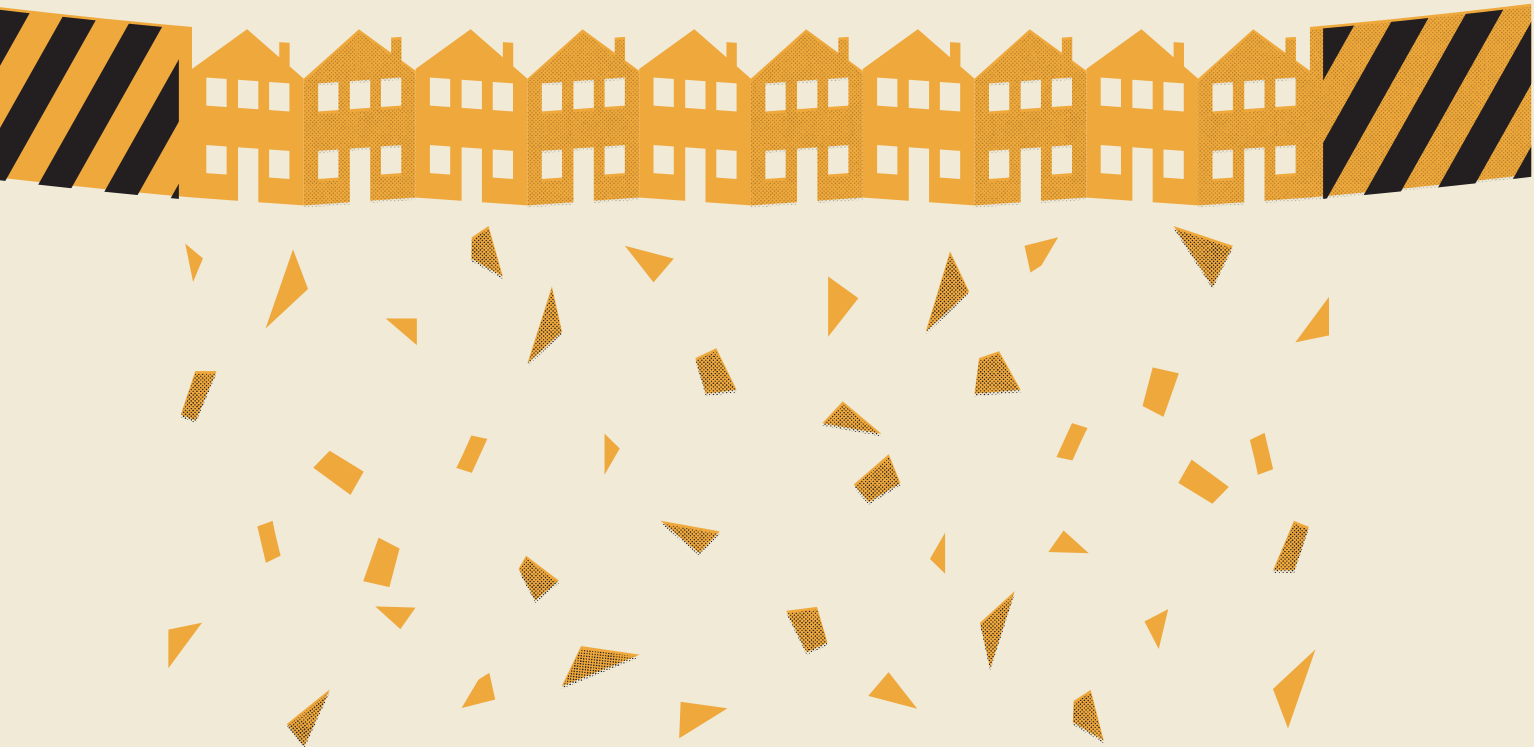
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THE RIGHT TOOLS

For the job of fixing the state's affordable housing crisis, cities need adaptable approaches.

AWC STAFF

AS AWC STAFF WORK WITH cities across Washington on issues related to housing and homelessness, we have learned much about the unique perspectives and motivations of our city leaders. Although each community faces its own challenges, our councilmembers and mayors are not advocating for the status quo. We all want to improve the lives of residents by increasing access to housing.

Consider the substantial legislation that has been passed over the past five years pertaining to housing and land use (see "Common Cause," at right). City leaders representing a significant majority of our state's incorporated population

have voluntarily implemented reforms encouraging investments in affordable and supportive housing, increased urban residential building capacity, and parking restrictions near transit.

What can city leaders do to encourage solutions while discouraging preemption?

Acknowledge our common ground

Join AWC in telling the governor and our state legislators that we appreciate their continued focus on our state's substantial housing needs. Significant and sustainable investments are necessary to provide more diverse and affordable housing, as well as the much-needed investments to address homelessness.

Stand up for local decision-making authority

State leaders need to hear that they should engage directly with cities and with AWC regarding how best to achieve housing diversity, access, and affordability. Solving our housing challenges will require a more thoughtful approach than a blanket zoning policy. Merely creating new development authority through statewide rezones does not mean that the market will deliver that needed housing. And it certainly does not ensure any degree of affordability.

Explain that a one-size-fits-all approach to residential zoning in the state is a misguided way to achieve greater housing access or affordability in our communities. Rather, it would divert attention and resources from what will work: locally tailored solutions and greater investment to build more housing.

Statewide mandates that fail to respect the constitutional authority of locally elected decision makers and the intent





WE SHOULD BE BUILDING MORE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INTO THE SOLUTION, NOT DISENFRANCHISING LOCAL RESIDENTS ALTOGETHER AND MOVING DECISION-MAKING TO THE HALLS OF THE CAPITOL.

of the Growth Management Act are not a solution. Cities have responded positively to legislative incentives to develop locally supported approaches to increase housing options and affordability. These are complex processes that involve community participation and evaluation of local circumstances and needs. We should be building more community engagement into the solution, not disenfranchising local residents altogether and moving decision-making to the halls of the Capitol.

Show the diversity of our communities

Approaches that may work in the scorching real estate market in one land-constrained city within the Central Puget Sound, for instance, will not necessarily be the right approach in a similarly

sized city in Central Washington—or even in a neighboring city. The housing market in the state is so varied that the UW Washington Center for Real Estate Research describes it as three states, due to the differing challenges across urban, micro-urban, and rural communities, with further market distinctions depending on location within the state.

Celebrate our shared successes

In partnership with state legislators, cities have been working with their communities, diving deep into their specific circumstances, and developing local housing action plans. At least 148 cities now allow “missing middle” housing types in their single-family zones, with many allowing them across the entire residential area. What is “missing” is the market response. If zoning changes were the magic cure, we would expect to see middle housing types proliferating in those cities, but that has not been the case.

Zoned capacity is not the key driver in the housing market crisis. Preemptive proposals fail to recognize or attempt to address any of the more significant contributing factors. Increasing housing construction requires more than merely authorizing it. Private developers need to be able to make a profit building and selling housing units. With a tight real

estate market, there is little incentive to build innovative housing types and no incentive to sell or rent for below market value—which is not affordable for most Washingtonians. The current reality is that if we want more diverse and more affordable housing types, we need to invest in constructing or acquiring them with public funds. Cities welcome new financing options that would allow us to more directly engage in securing funding to get the right type of housing built for our communities—a key missing component of recent proposals.

Let recent state investments in collaborative partnerships with cities continue to pay dividends rather than derail the progress that is occurring. This approach is working, proving so promising that it was incorporated into President Biden’s housing agenda. Let’s build on and improve the work we have accomplished together, not toss it out. **C**

Common Cause

State action on land use and housing has been substantial over the past five years. Here’s an overview:

2017

- **SB 5254** – Adequacy of buildable lands and zoning in UGA; funding for low-income/homeless housing



2019

- **HB 1219** – REET 2 for affordable housing and homelessness
- **HB 1377** – Increased density requirement for religious property
- **HB 1406** – Encouraging investments in affordable and supportive housing (sales tax credit)
- **HB 1923** – Incentivized increasing urban residential building capacity (i.e., density); parking reductions near transit for low-income housing

2020

- **HB 2950** – MFTE extension
- **HB 2673** – SEPA exemption for infill
- **SB 6617** – ADU parking restrictions
- **HB2343** – Extended and expanded HB 1923; adding parking restrictions near transit for market-rate multifamily housing
- **HB 1590** – Councilmanic sales and use tax for housing

2021

- **HB 1220** – Zoning mandate for shelters and supportive housing; expanded GMA Housing Element requirements for increased density, low-income housing, barriers/gaps, and displacement evaluation (unfunded)
- **SB 5287** – MFTE reform

Cityscape

From bottom: The Asberry Home today and its namesake resident, Dr. Nettie J. Asberry, in a historic photo at her longtime residence

To the Hilltop

The transformation of a property at the heart of Tacoma's Black heritage is a remembrance, a reclamation, and a revival of community dreams.

ON JANUARY 4, 2022, a 1,740-square-foot house at 1219 S 13th St in Tacoma sold for \$532,000. That's 16 percent above the average asking price for a single-family home in the city's Hilltop neighborhood—and a whopping 285 percent increase from the last time the property changed hands in 2004. While this transaction hardly seems surprising given the red-hot real estate market in Tacoma (see "Community Building," p. 11), there's nothing average about 1219 S 13th St, locally known as the Asberry Home.

Built in 1887, 1219 S 13th St was, from 1903 until 1966 (when she moved into a nursing home at age 101, two years before her death), the residence of Nettie J. Asberry, the matron of Hilltop's African American community and a trailblazer locally, regionally, and nationally who championed women's and civil rights. Believed to be the first black woman in America to earn a PhD (from the Kansas Conservatory of Music in 1883, when she was just 17), Dr. Asberry, in this home, coordinated the Hilltop neighborhood's response to the 1918 flu pandemic, founded the first NAACP chapter west of the Rockies in 1913, gathered the community to address civil rights issues during the first half of the 20th century (including protesting the 1915 theatrical release of *Birth of a Nation* and challenging segregated housing and transportation at nearby Fort Lewis during World War II), and hosted classical piano recitals for hundreds of neighborhood kids.

In November 2020, the Tacoma City Association of Colored



Women's Clubs (Tacoma CWC) petitioned the Washington State Office of Financial Management to earmark \$892,000 from the Legislature for the purchase of the Asberry Home and an adjacent property that, once renovated, is envisioned to serve as a museum of African American history and culture and perhaps provide affordable housing and other services to residents of the Hilltop community.

"Gentrification and a lack of affordable housing is on the rise, and Black home and business ownership are dwindling," Tacoma CWC President Cynthia Tucker wrote in her request to the agency. "Acquisition of the Asberry Home by the Tacoma CWC is both a symbolic and tangible act of reclamation and self-determination for the Black community."

Supporting that assessment, on the day the Tacoma CWC purchased the Asberry Home with state funding, the Tacoma City Council designated the property as a city landmark—guaranteeing that from this historic home on Tacoma's Hilltop, echoes from the past will resonate with, and inspire, generations to come. **C**



Mark your calendars



5 great conferences

Healthy Worksite Summit
March 9-10 | Lynnwood

Labor Relations Institute
May 4-6 | Yakima

AWC Annual Conference
June 21-24 | Vancouver

Member Expo
October 12-13 | Chelan

City Action Days
February 15-16, 2023 | Olympia



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The AWC Employee Benefit Trust's WellCity designation recognizes employers that meet six best practice standards for employee health promotion. wacities.org/wellcity