

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### I. VISION FOR THURSTON COUNTY

People have chosen to live and work in Thurston County for many reasons. The county provides a diversity of environments and lifestyle choices such as urban, rural, and small town, all within a short distance of one another. The wholesome quality of life offered by the county includes a clean environment, job opportunities, easy access to work, recreation and shopping, regional health facilities, education and cultural activities, a variety of human services and a peaceful, uncrowded atmosphere.

Thurston County is anticipating continued high growth. That growth presents a challenge for the future. The county seeks to maintain and enhance its quality of life while achieving the benefits of growth and minimizing any negative side effects. The vision for Thurston County defines the future toward which the county is moving. It identifies how the county will respond to growth and change. This vision is expressed in terms of the following value statements.

**Support and Preserve the Human Environment:** Promotion of the human environment encompasses a range of activities including social and health services, job opportunities, education, public safety, recreation, and cultural events. Variety and accessibility of services and activities are important aspects of a quality human environment.

**Continue Commitment to Public Participation:** Thurston County has a strong tradition of open government and public participation in its policy making. County officials are highly committed to the principle that people affected by decisions should be given every opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process. Early and continuous public participation is encouraged through the amendment process for this Plan and associated regulations. See Chapter 12 for a description of the plan amendment process, and visit the Thurston County web page at [www.thurstonplanning.org](http://www.thurstonplanning.org) for more information on how you can participate.

**Preserve the Natural Environment, Water Quality and Open Spaces; Conserve the Natural Resource Base:** We recognize our role as stewards of our natural resources and trustees for the future quality of human life. The quality of our county environment is a special feature that draws people to our area. We must monitor, protect, and enhance that environment. Maintenance of the quality of our water resources is an important concern because of human health, recreation, fisheries and aquaculture activities. Conservation of our farm and forest land base is important to ensure that these lands will be available to future generations. Our open spaces are valuable as visual and physical buffers, wildlife habitat and recreation sites. Open spaces can separate land uses and provide relief from homogeneous developments.

**Promote Economic Health and Diversified Economic Activities:** Economic activities provide jobs and income for county residents and tax base for our public services. A local economy that encompasses a wide spectrum of commercial and industrial endeavors provides wider job opportunities suited to all skill levels in the work force. Recognition and support also needs to be extended to the job creating opportunities in natural resource based economic activities including

forestry, agriculture, aquaculture and mining as well as in residential and other construction activities. Tourism's economic impact is of increasing importance and value to the county.

Enough land needs to be available for a variety of economic activities to operate in convenient and appropriate locations. Roads, sewer, water, and other services required by economic activities need to be planned. Responsive and understandable permit processes are also important to a positive business climate. Development requirements should consider the long-term effects of any new development. Such requirements and processes need to resolve key questions of impact on the community's natural resources and ability to provide services to the development.

It is an important premise of this plan that the whole document relates to the county's economic development. For example, the county's educational, health, and recreational facilities, and its environmental quality, all play an important role in the area's economic health and attractiveness for economic development.

**Promote Variety and Accessibility of Living Environments:** The diverse environments ranging from urban to rural, small town, shoreline, agriculture, and forest contribute to choices in lifestyles available to county residents.

**Manage Growth Effectively:** Effective management of growth can protect the variety of living styles in the county, keep service costs to a minimum and preserve the natural environment. Concentration of urban growth in existing centers will protect rural and resource areas from urban sprawl. At the same time, urban areas can provide diversity through varied densities, land uses, parks, open spaces, and environmentally sensitive areas.

**Maintain and Improve a Safe, Effective Transportation System:** Our transportation system is a key to the economic vitality of the region. Safe bike and pedestrian facilities, public transportation and linkages between all modes (bus, train, air) are important elements of the system.

## II. AUTHORITY FOR PLANNING

Thurston County adopts this Comprehensive Plan under the authority of the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA), RCW 36.70A. Other legislation, including the Planning Commission Act (RCW 35.63), provide additional authority for and the procedures to be followed in guiding and regulating the physical development of the county.

## GROWTH MANAGEMENT GOALS

The following goals from the Act (RCW 36.70A.020) are used to guide the development and adoption of this Comprehensive Plan and its associated development regulations:

1. *Urban growth.* Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.
2. *Reduce sprawl.* Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.
3. *Transportation.* Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.
4. *Housing.* Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock.
5. *Economic development.* Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.
6. *Property rights.* Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.
7. *Permits.* Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.
8. *Natural resource industries.* Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.
9. *Open space and recreation.* Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks.
10. *Environment.* Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.
11. *Citizen participation and coordination.* Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.
12. *Public facilities and services.* Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.
13. *Historic preservation.* Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical or archaeological significance.
14. *Shoreline management.* Address the goals and policies of the Shoreline Management Act (RCW 36.70A.480).

### III. HOW THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IS USED BY THURSTON COUNTY

#### A. THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, JOINT PLANS AND OTHER SPECIALIZED PLANS

The content of the Comprehensive Plan is guided by the Growth Management Act and the Thurston County County-Wide Planning Policies, a regional framework adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, in collaboration with the seven cities and towns within Thurston County.

The Comprehensive Plan contains goals and policies to govern the unincorporated areas of Thurston County. In turn, the Plan guides several other kinds of specialized plans: Joint plans, subarea plans, and functional plans. Map I-1 shows Thurston County jurisdictional boundaries.

##### Joint Plans

Joint plans serve as the Comprehensive Plans for the unincorporated areas within the urban growth boundaries for the cities and towns within the county. They are integral parts of this Comprehensive Plan, although they appear in separate documents. Joint plans are further discussed in Chapter 2 – Land Use.

##### Subarea Plans

Subarea plans are detailed plans for specific geographic areas of the county. These types of plans are discussed in Chapter 2 – Land Use.

##### Special Purpose (Functional) Plans.

Functional plans cross subarea or urban growth boundaries and pertain to a certain subject such as sewers, stormwater, open space, or historic resources. As with the sub-area plans, functional plans use goals and policies and the urban-rural framework from the Comprehensive Plan to guide their development and implementation. Examples of functional

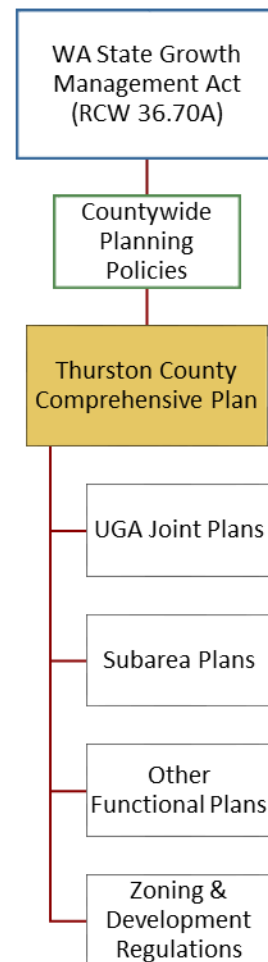


Figure 1-1. Planning Hierarchy

plans include the *Transportation Improvement Plan*, *Stormwater Management Program Plan*, and the *Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan*. Some of these plans are developed for the county as a whole; others apply to parts of the county.

- SEE CHAPTER 2 – LAND USE FOR GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES ON THE COUNTY'S PLANNING SYSTEM
- SEE APPENDIX C FOR A LIST OF RELATED PLANS

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## B. THE ROLE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan provides a legally recognized framework for making decisions about land use in Thurston County. The Plan directs the county's future physical growth through several mechanisms.

Guidance for Development Regulations. The County's development regulations, such as the zoning ordinance, must be consistent with the policies in this Comprehensive Plan.

Guidance for Capital Facilities Planning. The County's Capital Facilities chapter and Capital Improvement Program must include the public facilities needed to accommodate the population growth anticipated in the Comprehensive Plan. It also must ensure that levels of service adopted within the Plan can be maintained. Secondly, the Comprehensive Plan provides the framework for decisions about public facilities and services (such as where facilities should be located to support planned growth).

Guidance for Specific Land Use Permit Applications. In reviewing applications for land use permits, such as special use permits or large residential developments, the staff or hearings examiner refer to the Comprehensive Plan or more specific related plans, such as joint plans, in determining whether the application should be approved.

Guidance for Related Plans. Plans that are adopted by reference within this Comprehensive Plan (see discussion of joint plans and specialized plans below) must be consistent with the policies contained within this Plan, which serve as the overall framework for all County land use policies.

Guidance for Related Inter-Local Agreements. Occasionally the County and other jurisdictions within the County enter into voluntary agreements for various purposes, such as to coordinate policies of mutual interest, the use of shared facilities, and the accomplishment of mutual goals. Examples include annexation agreements with cities and the LOTT agreement for the regional sewage treatment facility. Such agreements are useful tools for implementing Comprehensive Plan policy when interjurisdictional cooperation is necessary or just more efficient.

Guidance for Various County Programs. Many of the policies within this Plan refer to County programs or projects needed to fulfill the goals of the Plan, such as the Purchase of Development Rights program.

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## C. TIME HORIZON

The Comprehensive Plan is meant to be a long-term guide for development in the county. The GMA requires the county to plan for and accommodate the population growth projected over the next 20 years. This plan shows how the county will accommodate the 20-year projected growth. In determining the extent and distribution of uses permitted on the land, this plan focuses primarily on the physical characteristics of the land. To assure that the Comprehensive Plan, joint plans and subarea plans keep pace with any changing conditions and citizen desires, periodic review and evaluation of the land use designations and policies should be undertaken.

#### IV. HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS USED BY OTHERS

Besides guiding the County's own decisions, this plan is intended to aid a broad range of public and private users, including community groups, builders, developers, Thurston County officials and other government agencies.

**It Informs the Public:** As the framework for other plans and regulations that govern the location and intensity of land uses throughout unincorporated Thurston County, the plan indicates, in a general sense, how and where development will change the County's landscape. The plan also indicates to the public how likely Thurston County would be to approve changes in plans, zoning, or other regulations that apply to an area or a specific parcel.

**It Informs Other Public Entities:** It is intended that cities and other public agencies use the Comprehensive Plan as they develop plans and make project decisions. The cities, in cooperation with Thurston County, will use the plan in updating their own comprehensive plans, growth policies, joint plans with the county and proposals to annex county territory. Federal, state, and regional agencies also will use the plan in making project decisions. Special districts, such as school and fire districts, use the plan in preparing their functional plans for delivering services.

**Why It Uses "Should" Instead of "Shall":** The Comprehensive Plan is a broad policy document intended to guide more specific land use decisions in the future. Regulations, such as zoning and building codes or road construction standards, are detailed rules applied uniformly, with little discretion. Therefore, although the Comprehensive Plan carries legal weight when applied to specific land use decisions, it uses the word "should" rather than the nondiscretionary "shall" found in regulations.

#### V. HISTORY OF AMENDMENTS TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Thurston County's first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1975. This initial plan set the stage for the introduction of countywide zoning and environmental protection regulations--critical features of land development in that period of very high population growth; the County's population grew by more than 60 percent during the 1970's. The 1975 Plan also introduced policies for economic development, the provision of public services, transportation, natural resource protection, and other features typical of comprehensive plans.

The first major overhaul of the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1988 after four years of preparatory work, extensive public review, and policy development. Among the changes introduced in 1988 was a greater emphasis on concentrating population growth in existing urban areas where the necessary public services and facilities could be provided more cost-efficiently. That plan included the State's first urban growth management boundaries which were established for the north county cities. Another innovative approach to growth management in the Plan was the concept of joint planning between the County and cities. Joint planning enabled the County to better coordinate land development policies in areas likely to be annexed by cities or towns in the foreseeable future. This early experience with coordinated, cooperative planning with its neighboring jurisdictions put the County ahead of the pack when the Growth Management Act was passed in 1990, requiring coordination in planning.

The 1988 planning process also involved a close examination of natural resource lands issues, particularly, how best to preserve scarce agricultural lands and forest lands. These proved to be



difficult issues to address. The 1988 Plan added detail to the County's housing strategies, included a chapter on Historic Resources, reinforced economic development efforts, and expanded policies to correspond to increasing information about environmental protection needs. The Plan stepped up the County's sophistication in public services and facilities planning, paying attention to maximizing efficiencies and reducing costs. While the 1975 Plan's transportation chapter focused on needed road improvements, the 1988 Plan recognized the relationship between land use and a variety of transportation needs. In summary, the 1988 Comprehensive Plan left the County well-positioned to respond to the requirements of the 1990 Growth Management Act; whereas many jurisdictions were required to make quantum leaps in policy direction in a very short timeframe.

The 1995 update of the Comprehensive Plan brought the Plan into full compliance with the Growth Management Act (GMA). All the changes made were either to respond to GMA requirements or to update the 1988 material. The work needed to comply with the GMA began with the adoption of County-Wide Planning Policies (by the cities and county) to ensure a consistent planning approach throughout the County. Next came the classification and designation of natural resource lands, moving forward in an area of high importance and interest in Thurston County. That work was integrated into a rural zoning analysis that resulted in a stronger delineation of urban lands from rural lands in the County's zoning regulations, also required under the GMA. At the same time, the County developed the GMA-required critical areas ordinance for the protection of important and vulnerable environmental features. Additional chapters of the plan were added to comply with the elements required under GMA.

Under the framework of the County-Wide Planning Policies, the County developed joint plans with each city and town that proposed an urban growth area that extends into the unincorporated county. Joint Plans provide the Comprehensive Plan for these urban growth areas and are adopted as a part of this Comprehensive Plan, although they appear in separate documents.

The 1995 Comprehensive Plan was developed in the context of the timelines provided under the GMA. Public participation improved the direction of the Plan through comments made at Open Houses held both at the beginning of the Plan development, and after the first draft was reviewed by the Thurston County Planning Commission. Public hearings were held before both the Planning Commission and the Thurston County Board of Commissioners to further involve the public in the Plan's development. Separate joint plan adoption processes provided additional opportunities for the public to direct the County's growth.

In 2003, major amendments to Chapter 3 – Natural Resource Lands and Chapter 9 -- Environment, Recreation, and Open Space updated county policies for natural resource protection. The 2004 amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and associated development regulations updated the remaining chapters of the plan under the GMA. In 2007, Chapter 2 – Land Use was further updated for GMA compliance.

The 2019 periodic update included revised goals and policies to address affordable housing, transportation, including bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. This update also included major amendments to Chapter 8 – Economic Development.

The Comprehensive Plan is periodically amended according to an annual amendment process and an eight-year review cycle required by the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.130). Annual and periodic reviews ensure that the Plan keeps pace with changing legal requirements and community needs. The plan amendment process is described in Chapter 12 – Plan Amendments.

The participation of the County's citizens in shaping the County's physical and social landscape has been, and will continue to be, the most important feature of Thurston County's planning history.

## VI. SETTING

### A. GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

Thurston County, situated at the southern end of Puget Sound, includes land forms varying from coastal lowlands in the north county, to cascade foothills in the southeast (See Map I-2). Generally, the county is a region of prairies and rolling lowlands, broken by minor hills and a few peaks which rise to elevations of about 2,600 feet. There are over 90 miles of Puget Sound coastline, three major river basins, and over 100 lakes and ponds in Thurston County.

The county contains a total area of 737 square miles, or 471,713 acres. Approximately 688 square miles (440,545 acres), or 93 percent of the total area, lies in unincorporated Thurston County. The remaining seven percent is divided among the seven incorporated cities and towns of Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, Bucoda, Rainier, Tenino, and Yelm (See Map I-1). Timber harvest and other natural resource uses historically covered much of the region, and still dominate land use across rural parts of the county (See Map I-3). Residential uses spread from urban areas along transportation routes, up through the Puget Sound peninsulas in the northern end of the county, and around many lakes. Major landowners in the unincorporated county include the State of Washington (including Capitol Forest), the federal government (including Joint Base Lewis-McChord and Nisqually Wildlife Refuge), and private timber companies.

Thurston County's climate is influenced by Puget Sound and the marine air masses that move through the region from the Pacific Ocean. Summers are warm and generally dry, while winters are mild and wet. Yearly rainfall averages vary across the county; they are highest in the northwest at up to 90 inches per year near Summit Lake, and decrease towards the southeast to about 40 inches per year around Lake Lawrence. Mean annual temperature in Olympia is 50.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

The effects of climate change, already observable in 2019, will have an increasing impact through the 20-year planning horizon and beyond (see sidebar). Locally, Thurston County is vulnerable

## IMPACTS OF A CHANGING CLIMATE

Thurston County may experience increasing impacts in the coming decades:

### *Temperature*

Average temperature in the Puget lowlands has increased by 1.3° F since the 1890s, and could increase an additional 4-6° by the 2050s. The hottest days could be 6.5 degrees warmer than currently.

### *Precipitation*

Warmer winters could lead to less snowfall in upper elevations like the Black Hills, and rainstorms of greater intensity. The number of heavy rain events in the winter could increase from two days per year to seven. In the summer, rainfall may decrease by 22%, leading to drier conditions.

### *Sea-Level Rise*

Rising sea levels could flood low-lying areas, particularly during storms and high tides, and permanently inundate the Nisqually Estuary.

**SOURCE: THURSTON CLIMATE ADAPTATION PLAN: VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT (TRPC, 2016)**



to impacts from warmer summers, winters, and water temperature, increasing drought, intensifying precipitation, sea-level rise, and population change related to climate-driven migration. The *Thurston Climate Adaptation Plan* (TRPC, 2018) lays out actions to help the region prepare for and remain resilient to this change. Climate change is discussed further in Chapter 9 – Environment, and adaptation actions are integrated throughout many chapters of the Comprehensive Plan.

## B. POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS

Population in Thurston County has grown steadily since it was formed in 1852, and has been among the fastest growing counties in the state since the 1960s (See Figure 1-2). Unincorporated areas of the county, including urban growth areas, have consistently made up around half of the total population of Thurston County. Although the rate of growth has slowed since 1980, overall population has more than doubled, increasing by an average of 4,500 new residents each year since 1990.

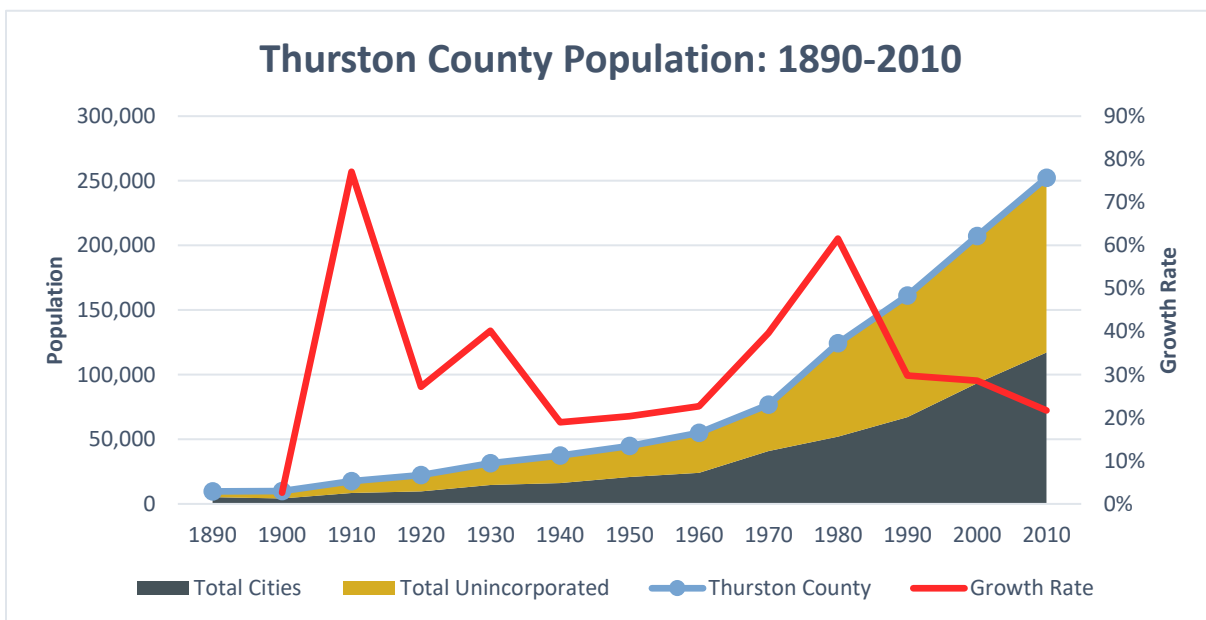


Figure 1-2. Thurston County Population: 1890-2010

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU; WASHINGTON STATE OFFICE OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Most of the County's population growth is due to in-migration, and the majority of new residents settle in cities and urban growth areas, which have seen the highest rates of growth.

In 2017, Thurston County's population was approximately 276,900. Projections show more

More information on Thurston County  
Population data is available in

[The Profile](#)

updated annually by Thurston Regional  
Planning Council

Adopted December 2020

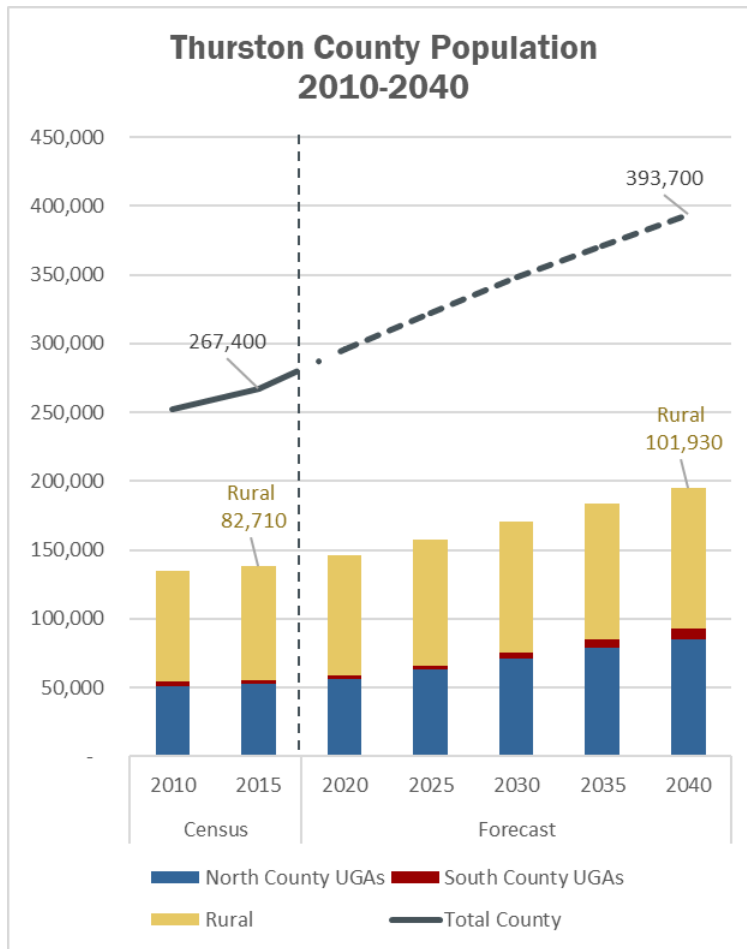


Figure 1-3. Thurston County Projected Population: 2010-2040  
 SOURCE: THURSTON REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL (TRPC)  
 POPULATION & EMPLOYMENT FORECAST, 2017

to an aging population will be a major trend over the 20-year planning period. Figure 1-4 shows how Thurston County's population is distributed by age at three points across a 50-year time span: 1990, 2015, and 2040. The Baby Boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1965), who were in their 30s and early 40s when the Growth Management Act was passed, are nearing or entering retirement, while the Millennial generation (roughly, those born between 1980 and 1995) are approaching their prime working years. Net migration of working-age people moving into Thurston County,

than 390,000 people living in the county in the year 2040<sup>1</sup>, an increase of 42 percent (see Figure 1-3). Just over half of that growth is projected to be in the cities, with another third estimated for the unincorporated urban growth areas. Approximately 14 percent of population growth is estimated to be in the rural parts of the county.

Thurston County's population is highly educated – greater than 90 percent of residents graduate high school, and more than a third go on to earn a Bachelor's degree or additional graduate work. The presence of Joint Base Lewis-McChord has a strong effect on Thurston County, and 14 percent of the County's residents are veterans. Approximately 11 percent of all residents speak a language other than English at home<sup>2</sup> – Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog, German, and Hindi are among the most commonly spoken foreign languages.

Thurston County has a slightly older population than Washington state overall; preparing for and responding

➤ **CHAPTER 2 – LAND USE  
 DESCRIBES  
 POPULATION GROWTH  
 TRENDS IN URBAN  
 AND RURAL AREAS OF  
 THE COUNTY**

<sup>1</sup> Thurston Regional Planning Council, Population & Employment Forecast, 2017

<sup>2</sup> 2016 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

rather than the natural increase of current residents (births minus deaths), has helped to fill out the age curves. People aged between 20 and 64 attributed for more than 60 percent of the growth between 1990 and 2015 (see Figure 1-5).

In 2040, a child born in 2019 will be in his or her 20s, entering the workforce, starting a family, looking to buy a first home; Millennials will be in their mid-40s to 50s and today's mid-career professionals (in their 40s) will be retired or close to retirement (unless retirement age is pushed to 70+), while Baby Boomers will be over 75. The proportion of residents aged 65 or older is projected to increase to nearly a fifth of the population by 2040, while growth among age groups of prime working age is projected to slow.

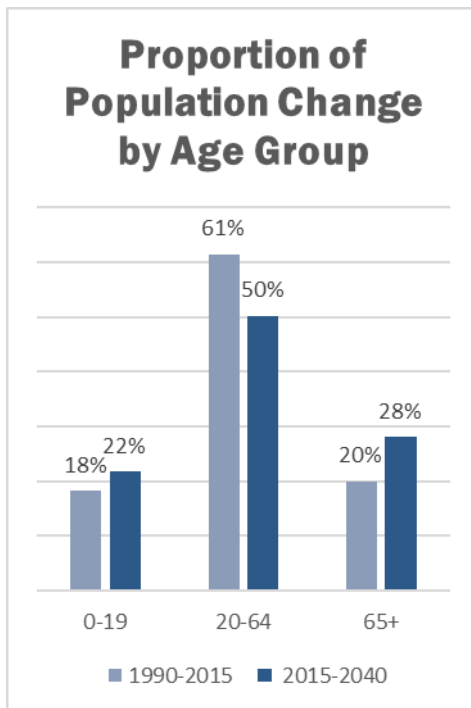


Figure 1-5. Proportion of Population Growth by Age Group, 1990-2040

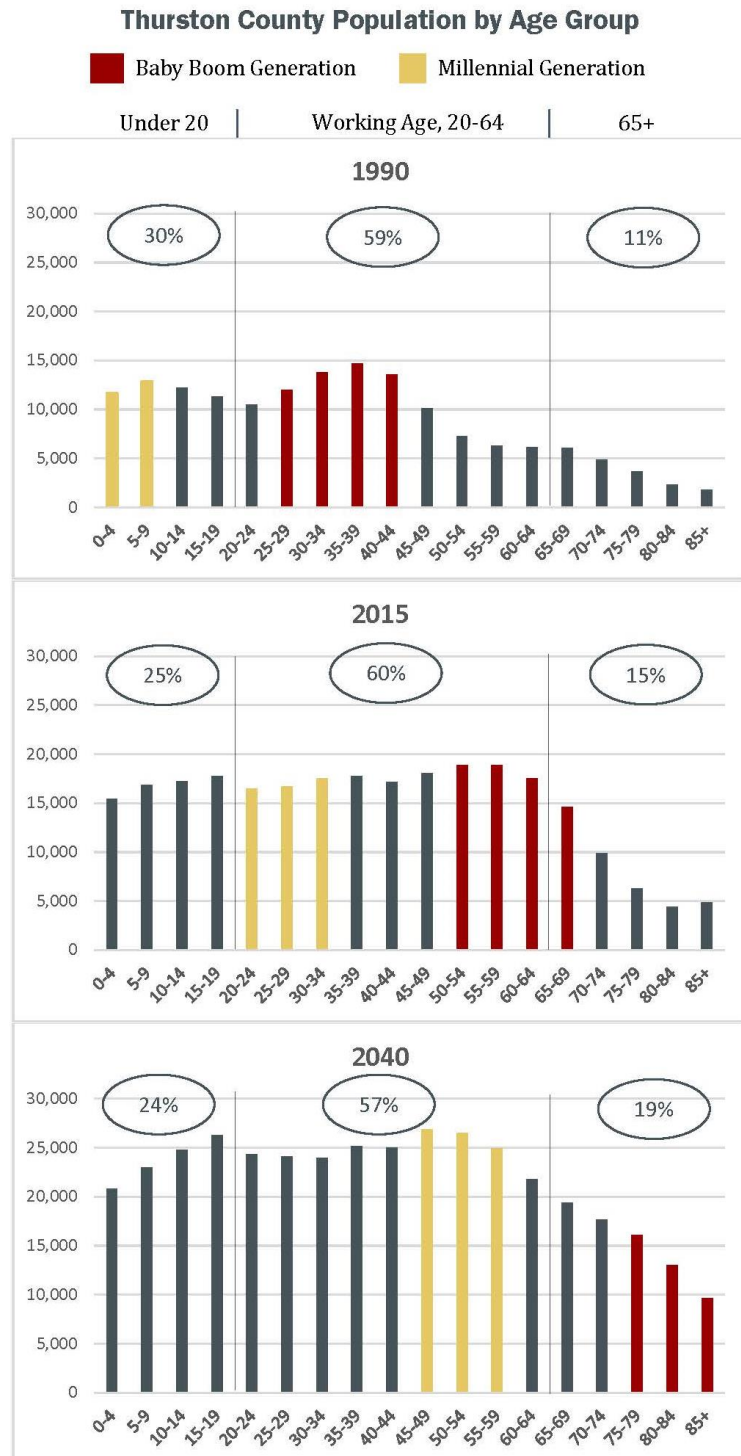


Figure 1-4. Thurston County Population by Age Group: 1990, 2015, 2040

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, TRPC POPULATION & EMPLOYMENT FORECAST, 2017

## C. INCOME &amp; ECONOMY

Thurston County's median household income was \$63,286 as of 2016<sup>3</sup>. Although this is a 15 percent increase from 2005, Thurston County's average income is now less than that of the Washington State as a whole for the first time since 1990 (see Figure 1-6). The statewide household income trend has been driven by a dramatic increase in wages in King County, in response to growth of the tech sector.

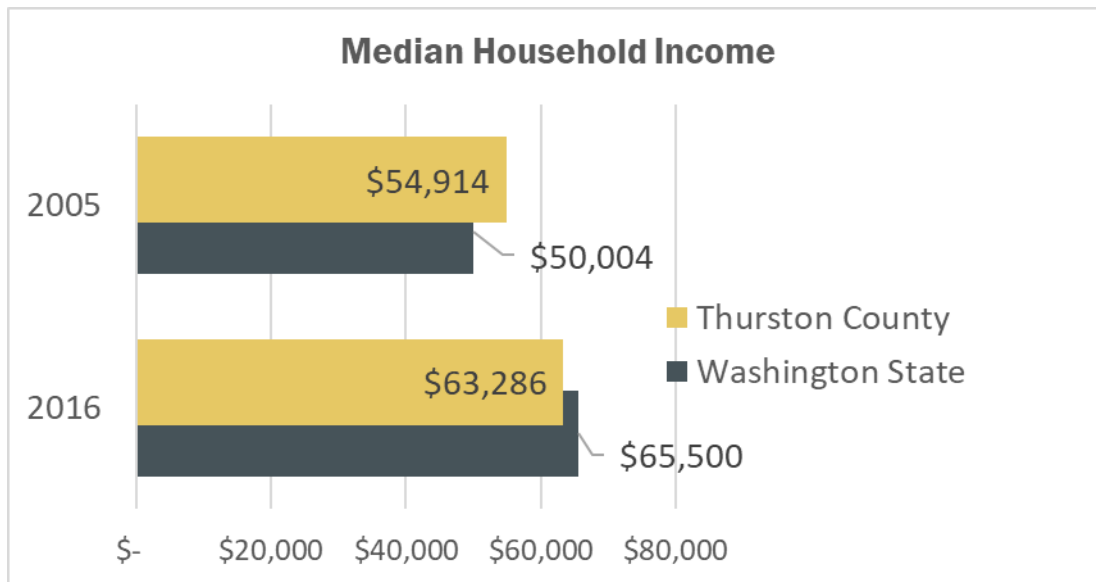


Figure 1-6. Median Household Income: 2005-2016

SOURCE: WASHINGTON OFFICE OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT; US CENSUS BUREAU

Thurston County has the fifth-highest median household income of all counties in Washington State, falling behind King, Snohomish, Clark, and Kitsap counties, but ahead of Pierce, Mason, and Lewis counties. This geographic variation in income can be paired with a comparison of relative cost of living (see Figure 1-7). Thurston County has a lower cost of living than many of the counties to its north along the Interstate-5 corridor, particularly when it comes to housing costs. This trend has driven some of the migration into the county; since 2010, the largest source of residents moving into Thurston County are from the Seattle, Bellevue, and Tacoma areas, many of whom are attracted by the lower cost of living<sup>4</sup>.

- CHAPTER 8 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COVERS COUNTY ECONOMIC TRENDS
- CHAPTER 4 – HOUSING DISCUSSES HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

<sup>3</sup> Washington Office of Financial Management; US Census Bureau

<sup>4</sup> Housing and Urban Development 2016 Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis

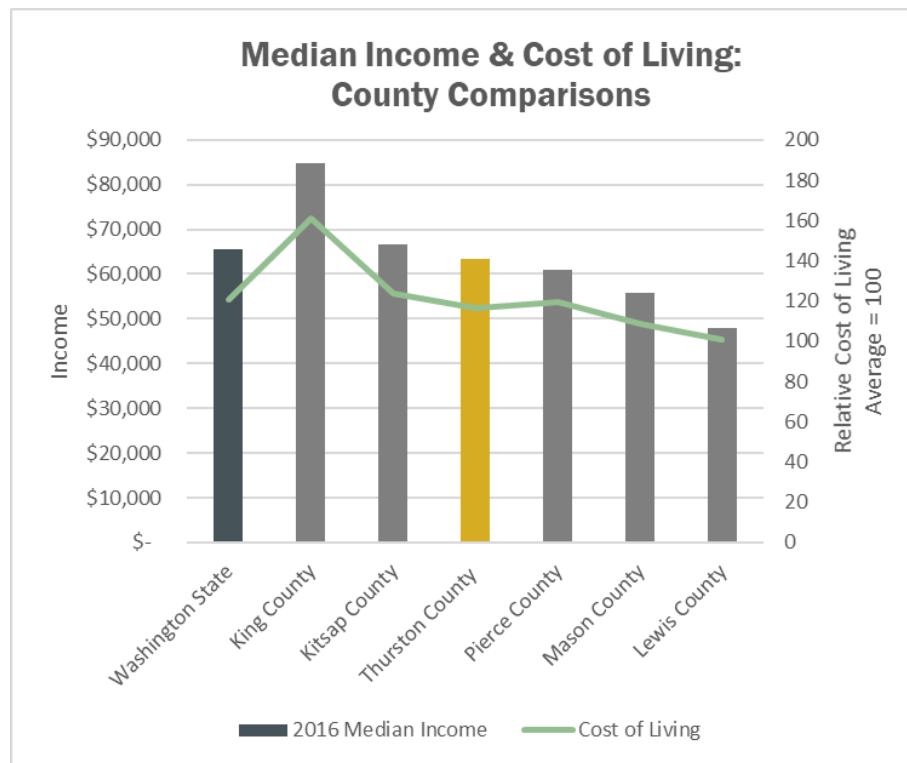


Figure 1-7. Median Income and Cost of Living, County Comparisons

SOURCE: WASHINGTON OFFICE OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT; SPERLING'S BEST PLACES, 2017

Although lower cost of living may be a factor in Thurston County's population growth, the number of jobs has not increased at the same rate – since 2005, the population of Thurston County has grown by 17 percent, but the number of jobs has only increased by 5 percent (see Figure 1-8). Higher wages and increased job opportunities may lead more people to live in Thurston County while commuting to employment elsewhere. Since 1990, the share of Thurston County residents whose workplace is outside the county has increased by 5 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Income levels vary within Thurston County. According to the 2012 to 2016 American Community Survey, residents of Rainier

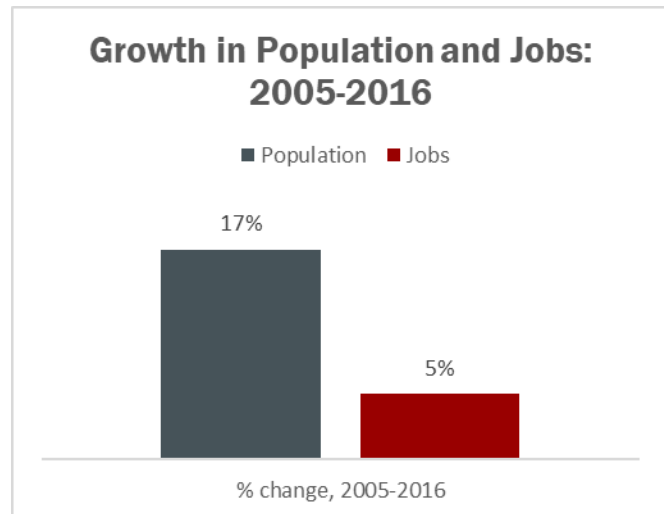


Figure 1-8. Comparison of Thurston County Population and Job Growth: 2005-2016

SOURCE: TRPC POPULATION & EMPLOYMENT FORECAST, 2017

<sup>5</sup> From 19% to 24%, source: US Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey and Census Transportation Planning Products

Adopted December 2020

(\$66,620) and Tumwater (\$62,050) have the highest median incomes, while Bucoda (\$35,000) has the lowest (see Figure 1-9).

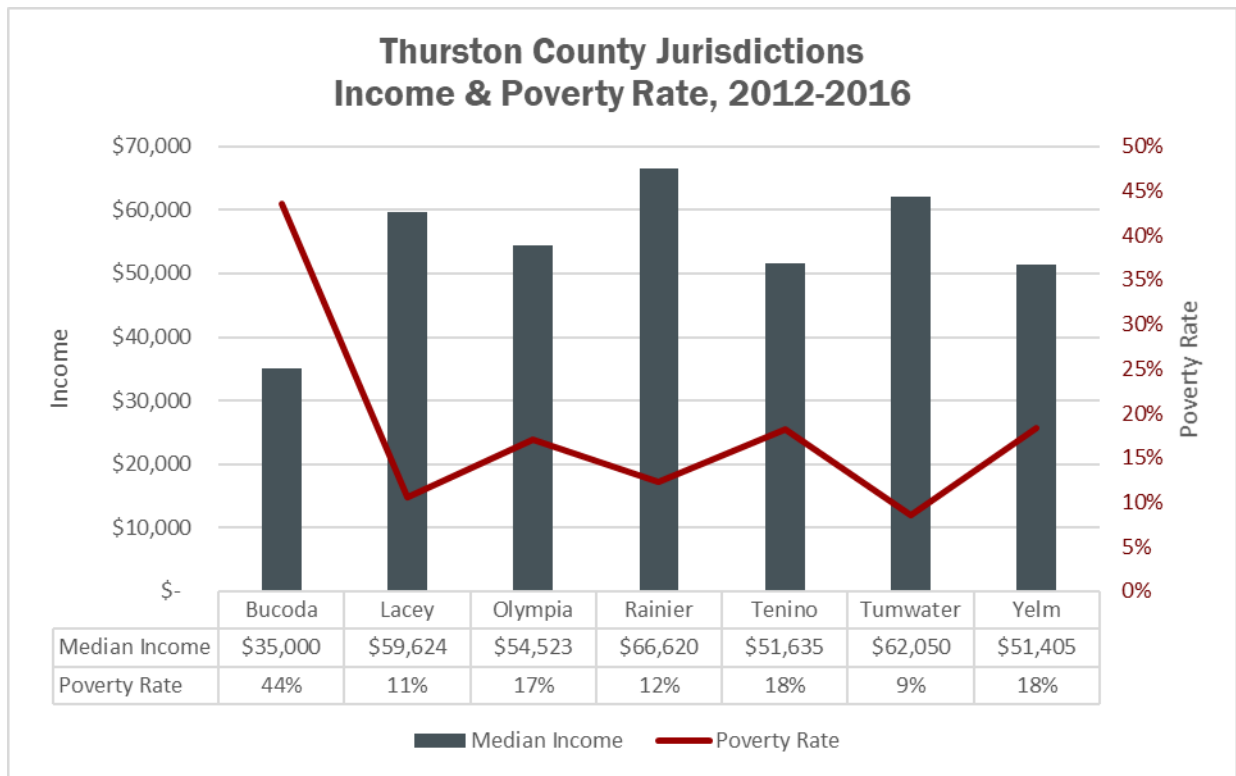


Figure 1-9. Thurston County Jurisdictions, Income and Poverty Rate: 2012-2016

SOURCE: US BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

While average incomes have gone up, the proportion of Thurston County residents living below the federal poverty level also has increased to 12 percent in 2016 from 10 percent in 2005. Geographically, low-income families and individuals live throughout the county, but are most concentrated in the areas around Bucoda, Tenino, Yelm, Rochester, and west Olympia.

Poverty levels are higher among certain populations in the county. Single mothers have the region's highest rate of poverty among families – 34 percent of female-headed households with no husband present and children under 18 are living on incomes below the federal poverty limit, compared to just 5 percent of married-couple families with children under 18.

In Thurston County, approximately 33,500 people have a disability. A person with a disability is defined as: “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.”<sup>6</sup> Of these individuals, U.S. Census Data shows that in 2016, 35 percent were 65 years of age or older and 16 percent had incomes that were below the poverty level.

<sup>6</sup> Americans with Disabilities Act <https://adata.org/faq/what-definition-disability-under-ada>



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Poverty rates are also higher than average among minority groups, including American Indian and Alaskan natives (25 percent) and Hispanics (21 percent). Those who rent their homes are four times as likely to be living in poverty as those who own their home (17 percent versus 4 percent).



Considering the combination of trends described above – including rapid population growth, an aging general population, increased income disparity, and climate change – Thurston County is likely to continue to undergo dramatic change over the next several decades. The background information, goals, and policies included in this Comprehensive Plan are intended to help the county prepare for and address these changes, and achieve the community’s vision, while protecting the qualities people value about Thurston County to ensure they are available to future generations.