

Mason County

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

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1 Introduction

1.1 About the Comprehensive Plan

Welcome to the Mason County Comprehensive Plan. This 20-year plan articulates the community's vision and reflects community values. The goals, policies, and programs included in this Plan provide a basis for the County's regulations and guide future decision-making. This Plan also addresses anticipated population and employment growth, and how facilities and services will be maintained and improved to accommodate this growth.

A comprehensive plan indicates how a community envisions its future and sets forth strategies for achieving the desired vision. A comprehensive plan has three primary characteristics.

1. **It is comprehensive** – The plan includes all the geographic and functional elements that impact the community's physical development.
2. **It is general** – The plan summarizes the major policies and proposals of the County, but does not usually indicate specific locations or establish regulations.
3. **It is long-range** – The plan looks beyond the current pressing issues confronting the community to identify long-term goals and policy direction for achieving them.

Comprehensive plans are living documents designed to adapt to changing community needs and priorities while providing consistent guidance for sustainable development. They serve as roadmaps to achieve the County's vision of balancing growth, environmental stewardship, and quality of life.

1.2 Planning Framework

This plan is intended to guide the growth and development within Mason County over the next 20 years. It must not conflict with applicable laws and regulations established by the state of Washington or the federal government. Additionally, it must be consistent with other local planning documents. Key regulations that apply to the development and update of this plan are described below.

1.2.1 State Regulatory Requirements

The State of Washington adopted the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990. Codified in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Chapter 36.70A, the GMA requires comprehensive plans to include specific elements, obligates incorporated areas to adopt implementing regulations, and



mandates counties to develop Countywide Planning Policies to address issues of a regional nature. It also establishes protocols and deadlines for these tasks.

The GMA sets out fifteen statutory goals that guide the development of comprehensive plans. For a plan to be valid, it must be consistent with the goals and specific requirements of the GMA—that is, it must not be in conflict with the state statutory goals, countywide planning policies, or plans of adjacent jurisdictions. These fifteen goals, summarized below, ensure that local planning efforts align with statewide priorities:

1. Guide urban growth to areas where urban services can be adequately provided.
2. Reduce urban sprawl.
3. Encourage efficient multi-modal transportation systems.
4. Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population.
5. Encourage economic development throughout the state.
6. Assure private property is not taken for public use without just compensation.
7. Encourage predictable and timely permit processing.
8. Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries.
9. Encourage retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities.
10. Protect the environment and enhance the state's quality of life.
11. Encourage public participation in the planning process.
12. Ensure adequate public facilities and services necessary to support development.
13. Identify and preserve lands and sites of historic and archaeological significance.
14. Respond to the challenges of climate impact and plan for resiliency.
15. Manage shorelines of the state.

Consistency with the GMA ensures that Mason County's Comprehensive Plan is valid and enforceable, aligning the County's vision with state statutory goals.

1.2.2 Relationship to Other Local Planning Documents

The Comprehensive Plan is part of a broader network of local planning documents, including Countywide Planning Policies, development regulations, and functional plans. Each of these plays a distinct yet interconnected role in guiding Mason County's growth. The relationship of key parts of the Comprehensive Plan to other local planning documents is outlined in **Table 1-1**.

Countywide Planning Policies

Mason County's Comprehensive Plan builds on the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs), which provide overarching guidance for regional growth management. These policies address urban growth area boundaries, housing affordability, transportation systems, and environmental protection. By integrating the CPPs, the Comprehensive Plan ensures alignment with regional goals and fosters collaboration with municipalities and neighboring jurisdictions.

Mason County Development Regulations

The Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies are implemented through the County's Development Regulations, which provide enforceable standards for land use, zoning, and



subdivision. These regulations govern how land is developed and ensure that day-to-day decisions reflect the Plan’s vision. Mason County periodically reviews and updates its Development Regulations to maintain consistency with the Plan and adapt to changing needs.

Mason County Functional Plans

The Comprehensive Plan also serves as the guiding framework for the County’s functional plans, such as the Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan; Transportation Improvement Plan; and Utilities and Stormwater Plans. These plans provide detailed strategies and projects that support the broader goals and policies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. By ensuring consistency across these documents, the Comprehensive Plan creates a cohesive vision for the county’s future, ensuring that all planning efforts work together to address community priorities and state requirements effectively.

Table 1-1. Relationship to Other Local Planning Documents			
Comprehensive Plan Element	Development Regulations	Countywide Planning Policy	Policy Statement
Chapter 3 Land Use	MCC 17.07; 17.10-17.17; 17.20-17.35; 17.70	#1 URBAN GROWTH	Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist, or which can be provided in an efficient manner.
Chapter 3 Land Use	MCC 17.02; 17.05; 17.70; 17.90	#2 REDUCE SPRAWL	Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.
Chapter 6 Transportation	MCC Title 12	#3 TRANSPORTATION	Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.
Chapter 4 Housing	MCC 17.11; 17.90	#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.



Table 1-1. Relationship to Other Local Planning Documents

Comprehensive Plan Element	Development Regulations	Countywide Planning Policy	Policy Statement
Chapter 5 Economic Development	MCC 2.78; 17.07; 17.24	#5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all residents of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses, recognize regional differences impacting economic development opportunities, support safe and healthy working environments and living wages, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the County's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.
Chapter 3 Land Use	MCC 17.01	#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.
Chapter 3 Land Use, Chapter 5 Economic Development	MCC 15.05	#7 PERMITS	Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.
Chapter 7 Rural and Natural Environment	MCC 8.52; 17.02	#8 NATURAL RESOURCE INDUSTRIES	Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forestlands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.
Chapter 3 Land Use, Chapter 7 Rural and Natural Environment, Chapter 8 Parks and Recreation	MCC 16.23; 17.07; 17.10; 17.26	#9 OPEN SPACE	Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water develop new parks and recreation facilities and maintain existing.



Table 1-1. Relationship to Other Local Planning Documents

Comprehensive Plan Element	Development Regulations	Countywide Planning Policy	Policy Statement
Chapter 3 Land Use, Chapter 7 Rural and Natural Environment	MCC 8.52 Resource Ordinance/ Shorelines	#10 ENVIRONMENT	Protect the environment and enhance the County's high quality of life, including, but not limited to, air and water quality, and the availability of water.
See Public Participation Plan (PPP)	MCC 15.09.060	#11 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	Encourage the involvement of residents, property owners, and business owners in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.
Chapter 9 Capital Facilities, Financing, and Utilities	MCC Title 13, Title 6	#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.
Chapter 3 Land Use	MCC 17.40	#13 HISTORIC PRESERVATION	Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical or archaeological significance.
Chapter 10 Climate Resilience		#14 CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENCY	Ensure that comprehensive plans, development regulations, and regional policies, plans, and strategies under RCW 36.70A.210 and chapter 47.80 RCW adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate; prepare for climate impact scenarios; foster resiliency to climate impacts and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental justice.
See Mason County Shoreline Master Program	MCC 17.50	#15 SHORELINES OF THE STATE	For shorelines of the state, the goals and policies of the shoreline management act as set forth in RCW 90.58.020 shall be considered an element of the county's or city's comprehensive plan.



1.3 Planning Process

1.3.1 Background

Mason County adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 1970. This plan was later reviewed and updated in the period from 1993 to 1996, in response to the requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA) (RCW 36.70A). In order to meet Growth Management Hearings Board requests, integrate better data, and respond to public requests, revisions to the first Plan under GMA occurred in 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2003. Subsequent periodic reviews to the Comprehensive Plan occurred with updates adopted in 2005 and 2017. The current update builds off the previous Comprehensive Plan update, and responds to the GMA requirement for periodic review. This plan is consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies, and is based on community and stakeholder input received throughout the planning process.

1.3.2 Periodic Update Requirements

Under the GMA, Mason County and its incorporated cities are required to plan for future growth as outlined in the Planning Framework section of this chapter. This planning must address growth comprehensively—balancing the need for economic development and infrastructure expansion with the preservation of community values and natural resources.

The GMA requires counties to conduct periodic updates to ensure that comprehensive plans remain consistent with state laws and local priorities. These updates are mandated every ten years and involve reviewing the existing plan, identifying areas for improvement, and adopting amendments to address changes in population, economic trends, and environmental conditions. Counties must also consider changes to regional policies and updated guidance from state agencies to ensure alignment with evolving standards.

1.3.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the comprehensive plan update process are essential for ensuring transparency, community engagement, and adherence to state and local requirements. Each entity plays a critical role in developing a plan that reflects the needs and priorities of Mason County while aligning with legal standards and regional policies.

Community Involvement

The GMA emphasizes the importance of “early and continuous” public participation in the planning process. To meet GMA requirements for public participation, Mason County adopted a Public Participation Plan (PPP) in 2024, outlining strategies to engage the community, ensure transparency, and provide ongoing opportunities for input throughout the comprehensive plan update process.

Community input is not only a requirement—it is central to the comprehensive planning process. It ensures the plan addresses local needs and priorities while also reflecting the diverse



perspectives of residents and stakeholders. To meet this goal, the County implemented a broad and inclusive engagement process, including public meetings, surveys, community events, and coordination with advisory committees and local jurisdictions. For detailed information on specific outreach efforts and community-based engagement activities, see Section 2.5 of the Comprehensive Plan.

County Staff

County staff provide essential technical assistance and support throughout the comprehensive plan update. They collaborate closely with the Planning Advisory Commission to ensure the plan is aligned with state and regional policies and meets community needs. Staff also lead public outreach efforts, organize meetings, and oversee compliance with the public participation requirements outlined in the PPP.

Planning Advisory Commission

The Planning Advisory Commission (PAC), in an advisory role to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), is responsible for reviewing and presenting an updated draft of the Comprehensive Plan to the BOCC and the public. PAC members assess each element of the plan, propose amendments, and collaborate with county staff to ensure the plan aligns with state laws and reflects local priorities. The PAC also serves as a liaison between the public and decision-makers, ensuring that community input is meaningfully incorporated into the plan.

Board of County Commissioners

The Board of County Commissioners, as the County's legislative authority, holds the responsibility of adopting the updated Comprehensive Plan by ordinance. Their action follows the PAC's work and includes an extended public review period, ensuring the community has had an extended opportunity to review and comment on the draft documents before final adoption.

1.3.4 Review, Appeals, and Amendments

State Review

The Washington State Department of Commerce reviews all locally adopted comprehensive plans to ensure compliance with the GMA. During the 60-day review period, Commerce provides feedback and suggests changes, if necessary. Once the Commerce review period is complete and any suggested changes have been addressed, the plan can be formally adopted by the Board of County Commissioners.

Appeals Process

After adoption, the Comprehensive Plan can be appealed to Washington's Growth Management Hearings Board. The Board may uphold the Plan, require modifications, or invalidate it if found inconsistent with the GMA. Appeals to the Board's decisions can be made to Superior Court, and the outcomes are legally binding on the County.



Amendment Process

The Comprehensive Plan is a living document that requires regular updates to address changing conditions. Amendments may be initiated by the Board of County Commissioners, planning staff, or residents. As prescribed by the GMA, amendments to the Comprehensive Plan are legislative actions; they may generally be considered no more than once per year and must include early and continuous public participation, commensurate with the initial adoption process.

Emergency Amendments

In accordance with RCW 36.70A.130(2)(b), the City of Chehalis may adopt emergency amendments to the Comprehensive Plan outside of the annual amendment cycle. An emergency amendment is defined as a proposed change or revision that arises from a situation requiring prompt action to preserve public health, safety, or welfare, or to support the social, economic, or environmental well-being of the City. Examples may include addressing urgent housing needs, correcting a critical mapping error, or responding to natural disasters or infrastructure failures.

Emergency amendments shall include appropriate public notice and an opportunity for public comment prior to adoption. These amendments follow the same legislative process as regular amendments—including review by the PAC and adoption by the Board of County Commissioners—but may proceed on an accelerated timeline as warranted by the nature of the emergency.

1.4 Plan Implementation

The Comprehensive Plan serves as a guiding framework for the community's development, reflecting the desires of residents and officials regarding how Mason County should grow over the next 20 years. As outlined in the Planning Framework section of this chapter, the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan are realized through the County's Development Regulations, which set enforceable standards for land use, zoning, and subdivision. Since these regulations are directly tied to the plan, the County must regularly assess and amend them to ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan's directives.

To implement the strategies identified in the Comprehensive Plan, Mason County must update its regulations to support and carry out the plan's goals. These regulations include zoning, subdivision, building, health, street, and sign codes, all of which are essential tools in the implementation process.

1.4.1 Zoning Code

Mason County's zoning ordinance and zoning map are foundational tools for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. These documents divide the unincorporated areas of the County into zoning districts, each with specific regulations governing permitted and conditional uses of land; density and intensity of development; and building placement, height, bulk, and lot coverage.



The zoning code must align with the Comprehensive Plan's land use designations, supporting the plan's goals and policies. Regular updates to the zoning code ensure that it remains consistent with the plan and adaptable to changes in state law and local priorities.

1.4.2 Subdivision Code

The subdivision ordinance governs the division of land into lots, blocks, streets, and public spaces, primarily for new residential, commercial, or industrial development. This ordinance ensures that development patterns align with the Comprehensive Plan's goals, such as creating walkable neighborhoods, protecting natural resources, and providing adequate infrastructure to support growth.

1.4.3 Other Implementation Tools

In addition to zoning and subdivision codes, several other regulations are key to implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Building codes, for example, regulate the design, construction, quality of materials, use, occupancy, location, and maintenance of buildings and structures within the County. Mason County has adopted the International Building Code (IBC), consistent with State requirements; however, the County's building code may be updated or refined ensure alignment with the goals and policies set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. Other implementation tools may include health, street, and sign codes, which contribute to shaping the built environment and supporting the County's vision for growth.

1.5 Scope and Organization

This Comprehensive Plan is designed to meet the requirements of the GMA and Mason County's CPPs. It reflects the community's vision and was developed through a public process, ensuring that it represents the needs and desires of local residents.

The plan is divided into several chapters, each focusing on a key element, most of which are required by the GMA. In addition to this Introduction chapter, these elements are as follows: Community Profile and Vision, Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Rural & Natural Environment, Parks and Recreation, Utilities, Capital Facilities and Financing, and Climate Change and Resiliency. The focus of each of these elements is summarized in **Table 1-2**.



Table 1-2. Mason County Comprehensive Plan Organization

ELEMENT	ELEMENT FOCUS
Introduction	Explains the comprehensive plan’s purpose, its importance to Mason County, and its regulatory framework under state and regional planning requirements.
Community Profile	Highlights the county’s setting, demographics, and defining characteristics, paired with a foundational vision to guide growth and development over the next 20 years.
Land Use	Plans for land use to accommodate growth, protect the environment, enhance compatibility, and preserve community character.
Housing	Identifies housing needs, plans for anticipated growth, and strategies to provide a range of housing options that serve diverse community needs and income levels.
Economic Development	Supports business retention, local job creation, and strategies to enhance Mason County’s role as a regional economic and innovation hub.
Transportation	Plans for multimodal transportation systems to support the land uses envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan and the movement of people and goods.
Rural and Natural Environment	Focuses on preserving the rural character of Mason County, managing growth outside urban areas, and supporting natural resource industries while balancing environmental stewardship and community needs.
Parks and Recreation	Focuses on parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities, guided by the County’s Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan.
Capital Facilities, Financing, and Utilities	Identifies facilities and infrastructure needed to support planned population and employment growth and outlines strategies for funding public services and improvements. Ensures efficient and sustainable systems for water, sewer, stormwater, electricity, and telecommunications to meet current and future needs.
Climate Resilience	Addresses strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change, enhance disaster preparedness, and foster resilience in the face of environmental challenges, ensuring sustainable development and protecting community health and safety.



Each element includes goals and policies to address specific issues related to that element, guiding decision-making and directing implementation tools to support the County's vision. Goals and policies are essential to a comprehensive plan as they provide clear direction for land use, development, and resource management, ensuring that the community's priorities are effectively realized.

This Comprehensive Plan serves not only as a blueprint for development over the next 20 years, but also as a living document that will evolve as the County grows and changes. By aligning regulations and administrative actions with the Plan, Mason County ensures a cohesive approach to achieving its vision for sustainable growth and community well-being.

Goals are general expressions of the County's hopes and aspirations about its future development. They are the target for which the County aims to realize its vision.

Policies are broad statements of intent to guide or direct action in order to achieve the County's goals.



2 Community Profile

2.1 Introduction

This Community Profile chapter articulates past and current characteristics of the community, in order to help plan for future conditions. This chapter provides an update to the demographics and community data presented in the County's previous Comprehensive Plan document (2016), and includes key characteristics like population, economic indicators, and housing trends. It also includes information regarding Mason County's history and geography. This information helps establish an understanding of where Mason County has been, where it is now, and where it hopes to go in the future—setting the foundations for the policies expressed elsewhere in this plan. Wherever possible, data for Mason County is compared with data from surrounding counties and Washington state, illuminating how the county compares with the larger surrounding regions.

2.2 Community Setting and History

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

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

Mason County's rich natural resources and open spaces dominate the County's landscape. Combined national, state, and private forests currently account for over fifty (50) percent of the land area that makes up Mason County. Mineral deposits underlie Mason County's topsoil. Agricultural and aquaculture areas contribute both to the County's natural beauty and its



economy. Mason County also includes substantial open space. Open space within the County hosts wildlife habitat, undeveloped natural areas, and many developed park and recreation sites. These open space areas are managed by federal, state, county, municipal, and private interests.

Mason County's climate can be characterized as moderate-maritime, influenced by the Pacific Ocean, yet sheltered by the Olympic Mountains. Average temperatures range from a high of 78°F in July to 32°F in January. The average daily temperature in Mason County is 51°F. The County receives an average of 64 inches of precipitation annually, with average monthly rainfalls ranging from a low in July of 0.8 inches, to a high of 10.4 inches in January.

2.3 Community Characteristics

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

2.3.1 Population and Demographic Trends

The Washington State Office of Financial Management issues annual population estimates for all cities and counties in Washington, which are considered to be the state's official population counts for long-range planning purposes. These annual estimates are based on the most recent decennial Census counts. The official OFM 2023 population estimate for Mason County is 67,000. The 2022 population estimate for Washington State is 7,951,150; Mason County accounts for approximately 0.85% of the state's population.

Historic Population Trends

Mason County continues to set yearly record high population levels and has added over 6,300 residents between 2010 and 2023. According to Washington's OFM, Mason County population had 67,000 year-round residents in 2023 (see **Table 2-1**). Mason County experienced a record increase in net in-migration of 1,020 people in 2019 with a smaller increase of 800 people in 2023 (OFM). Several factors are driving recent population increases in Mason County, including broader regional growth, increasing share of remote workers, as well as more general quality of life improvements.

The unincorporated portions of Mason County account for 84% of all residents. The City of Shelton (pop. 10,420) is the largest city. Other major rural service centers include Shelton UGA (pop. 3,955), Allyn UGA (pop. 2,327) and Belfair UGA (pop. 1,028).



Table 2-1. Population Trends (2010–2023)

Population Trends	2010	2020	2023	2010-23 Change	2010-23 CAGR
Washington	6,724,540	7,707,047	7,951,150	1,226,610	1.30%
Mason County Total	60,699	65,726	67,000	6,301	0.76%
City of Shelton	9,834	10,371	10,420	586	0.45%
Shelton UGA	3,717	3,751	3,955	238	0.48%
Allyn UGA	1,972	2,221	2,327	355	1.28%
Belfair UGA	987	1,054	1,028	41	0.31%
Other Unincorp. Mason County	44,189	48,329	49,270	5,081	0.84%

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management Intercensal Estimates, April 1, 2024 (Revised).
CAGR: Compound Annual Growth Rate

Race and Ethnicity

According to the social definition of racial categories used for the ACS 5-Year Estimates, 81.0% of Mason County residents self-identified as white, compared to 71.7% in the State of Washington. About 10.7% of Mason County’s residents self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, a lower percentage than Washington state (13.2%). Other, more specific racial and ethnic categories were provided to survey participants; **Table 2-2** presents a generalized summary as percentages of Mason County’s overall population, compared to those of the state of Washington.

Table 2-2. Race and Ethnicity

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

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

The largest ethnic group in the area includes the Hispanic/Latino segment. Hispanic/Latino population accounts for 11% of all residents within the County compared with 13% statewide. In Shelton, Hispanic/Latino residents account for 26% of the population (see **Figure 2-1**).



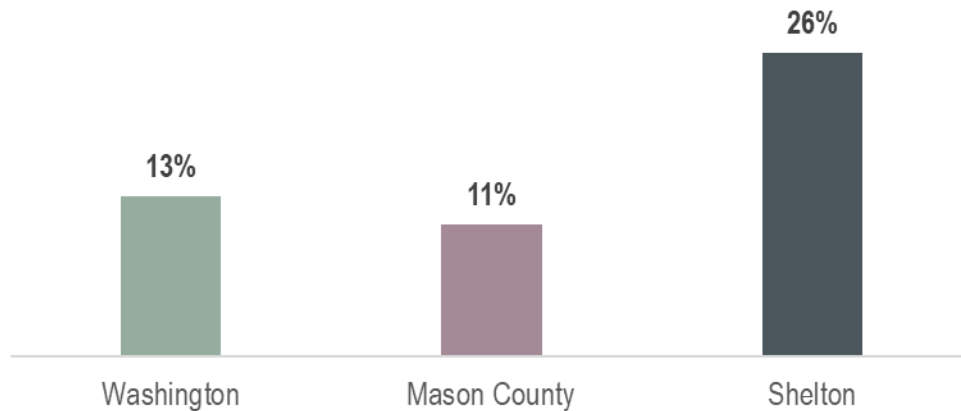


Figure 2-1. Population Identifying as Hispanic or Latino, Selected Locations, 2022

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP05

Age and Gender

The median age (half above and half below) in Mason County is 44.7 years, which is almost seven years (6.8) older than Washington State (37.9 years). About 11.1% of Mason County's population is under the age of 10, and 22.8% are over the age of 65. **Table 2-3** provides Mason County's age distribution as compared to Washington State.

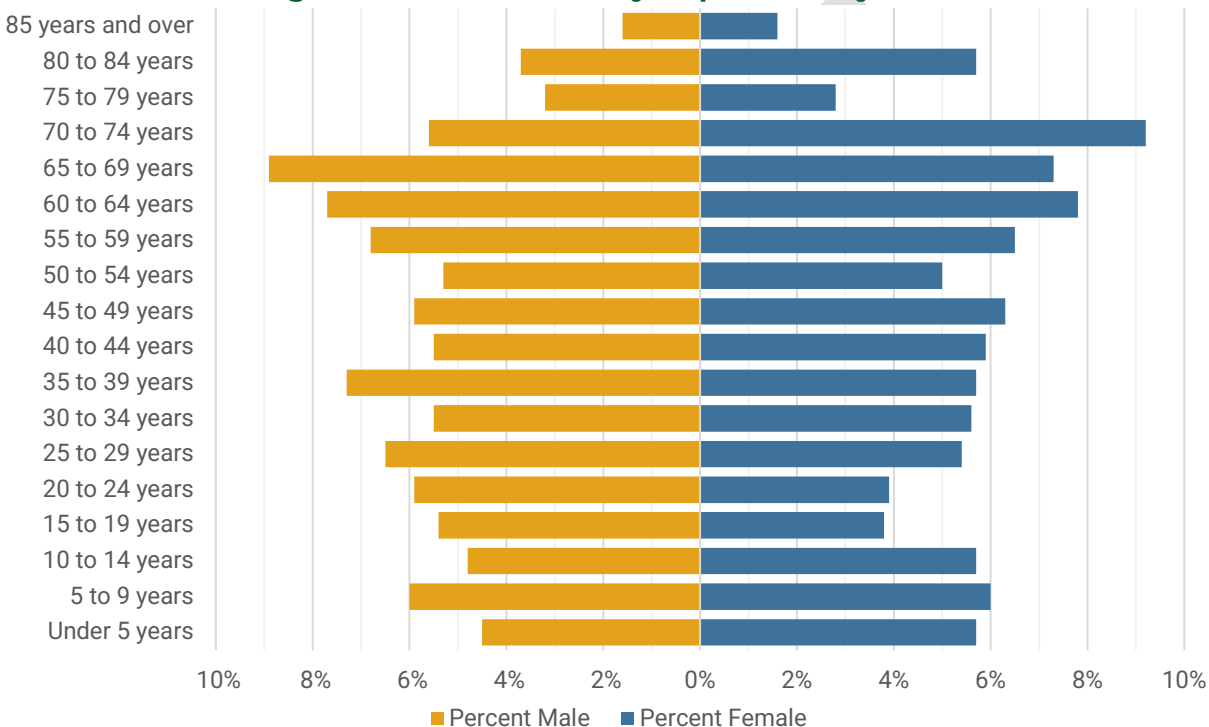
Table 2-3. Age Distribution		
Age Group	Percentage of Population	
	Mason County	Washington
Under 5 years	5.2%	5.9%
5 to 9 years	5.9%	6.2%
10 to 14 years	5.3%	6.3%
15 to 19 years	5.3%	6.0%
20 to 24 years	5.1%	6.3%
25 to 34 years	11.6%	15.1%
35 to 44 years	11.8%	13.7%
45 to 54 years	10.9%	12.3%
55 to 59 years	7.9%	6.3%
60 to 64 years	8.2%	6.4%
65 to 74 years	14.5%	9.6%
75 to 84 years	6.0%	4.1%
85 years and over	2.3%	1.7%
Median age (years)	44.7	37.9

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



Figure 2-2 is a population pyramid for Mason County, which provides the breakdown of the county's population by age group for binary gender self-identifications (male and female). While the county's population skews slightly male overall, this differential is fairly even by age group. The population pyramid indicates that for the age cohorts between 15 and 29 years, between 35-39 years, and between 65-69 years, the male population is slightly higher than the female population; however, for the age cohorts between 10-14, 70-74, and 80-84 years, the female population is generally higher. The male and female populations were relatively similar for age cohorts between 5-9 years, 30-34 years, 40-64 years, 75-79 years, and 85 years and older.

Figure 2-2. Mason County Population Pyramid



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

Education

There are six school districts in Mason County: Grapeview, Hood Canal, North Mason, Pioneer, Shelton, and Southside School District. For the 2022-2023 school year, the County's enrollment was 8,246 students, and in the 2021-2022 school year, there were 654 classroom teachers employed, for a student-to-teacher ratio of 12.6:1.

Educational attainment for Mason County's population is presented in **Table 2-4** and indicates the highest level of education an individual has attained. In this table, those persons who have graduated from high school include not only those listed in the high school graduate category, but also those listed with a higher level of educational attainment such as those with associate or college degrees. For example, 90.4% of Mason County's population has attained high school graduate or equivalent (100% minus 6.6% for *9th to 12th grade, no diploma* and minus 3.0% for *Less than 9th grade*). Approximately 31.6% of Mason County residents have attained an



associate, bachelor's, or graduate or professional degree, compared with 47.5% of Washington residents.

Table 2-4. Educational Attainment		
Educational Attainment	Percentage of Population 25 Years and Over	
	Mason County	Washington
Less than 9 th grade	3.0%	3.5%
9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	6.6%	4.6%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	30.8%	21.8%
Some college, no degree	28.0%	22.7%
Associate degree	12.9%	10.2%
Bachelor's degree	12.6%	23.1%
Graduate or professional degree	6.1%	14.2%

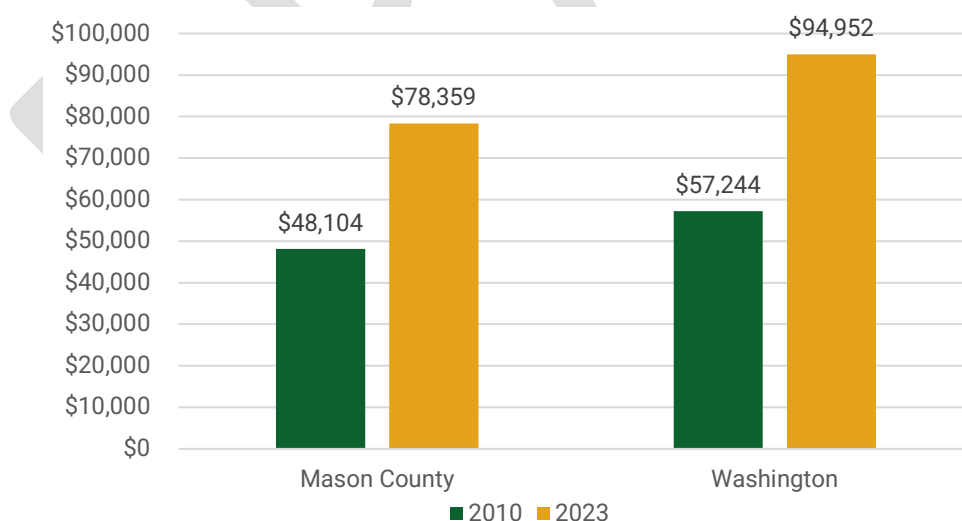
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Economic Indicators

Income and Employment

Understanding income and employment patterns provides important context for community development and economic resilience. In 2023, the median household income in Mason County was \$78,359, which is significantly lower than the statewide median of \$94,952. Between 2010 and 2023, Mason County's median income rose by 62.9%, compared to a 65.9% increase across Washington State overall (see **Figure 2-3**).

Figure 2-3. Median Household Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03

Employment patterns further illustrate economic conditions in the region. As of 2023, Mason County had an unemployment rate of 5.5%, notably higher than both the state average (4.1%)



and the national average (3.6%).¹ Although the county's unemployment rate has generally followed broader economic trends—spiking to 9.9% during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and gradually declining since—it consistently remains above state and national levels. This may reflect underlying challenges in the local labor market, including reliance on seasonal industries and limited economic diversification.

Workforce

As of 2023, Mason County supported approximately 15,962 total jobs.² Of these, about 44% were held by individuals who both live and work within the county, while another 41% were filled by employees commuting in from outside the county. At the same time, an estimated 19,401 Mason County residents traveled outside of the county for employment, illustrating a strong pattern of outbound commuting and a regional interdependence in workforce dynamics.

The largest industries in terms of the number of jobs located within Mason County businesses include:

- ◆ Public Administration – 2,098 jobs (13.1%)
- ◆ Retail Trade – 2,001 jobs (12.5%)
- ◆ Health Care and Social Assistance – 1,777 jobs (11.1%)
- ◆ Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation – 1,454 jobs (9.1%)
- ◆ Accommodation and Food Services – 1,383 jobs (8.7%)

These employment figures highlight the importance of government, service-based, and recreation-related industries to the county's economic base.

Households

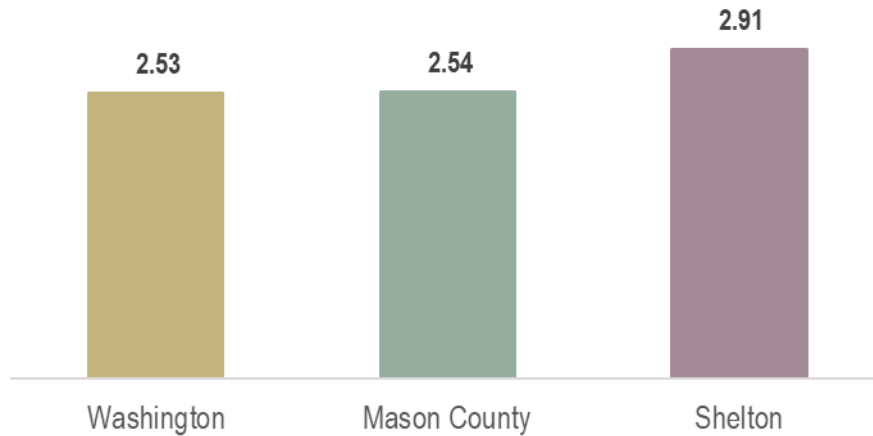
The average household size in Mason County remained relatively steady over the last two decades, ranging between 2.49 and 2.63 residents per household. In 2022, there were 2.54 residents per household, slightly above the statewide average of 2.53 (see **Figure 2-4**). In Shelton, where the average household size has steadily increased, the average household size was 2.91.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) average annual unemployment rate data; the most current LAUS data available is for the year 2023.

² Mason County EDC 2024 Economic Overview Report; data as of 2023Q4



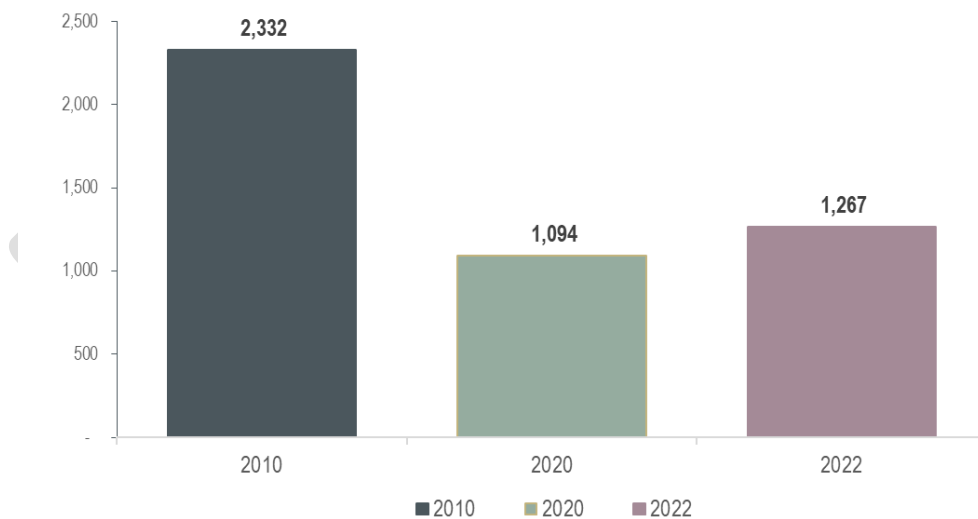
Figure 2-4. Average Household Size



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25010

The number of Mason County residents living in group quarters (institutionalized settings including state prison and cognitive care establishments) decreased over the last decade to 1,267 (see **Figure 2-5**). This represents 1.9% of the total county population, which is slightly below the statewide average of 2.0%. It is estimated that between 1,100 and 1,300 people living in group quarters were inmates at the Washington Correction Center west of Shelton in 2022.

Figure 2-5. Group Quarters Population, 2010–2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, Tables B26001, P037, P42, and P5



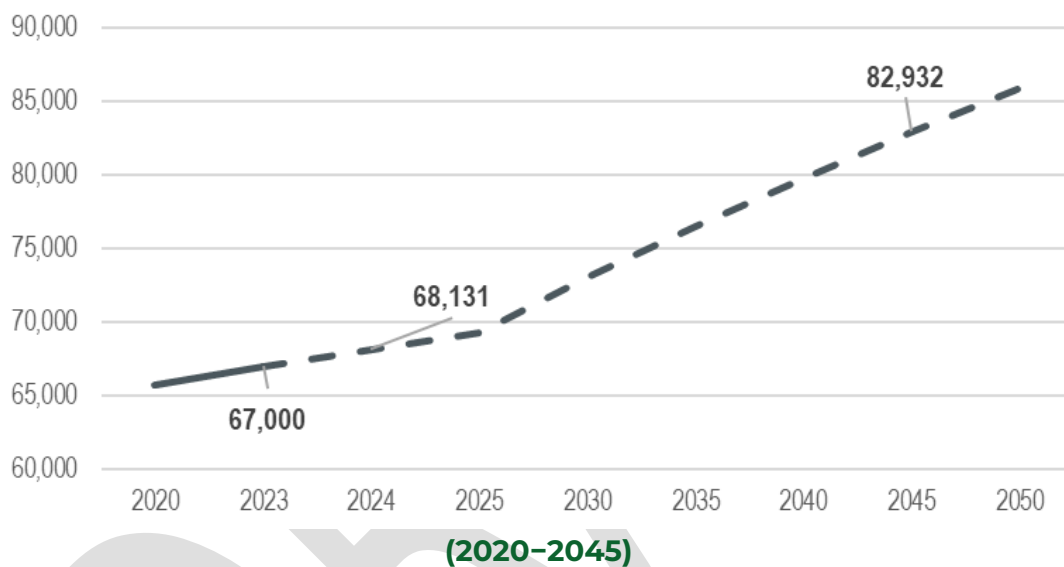
2.4 Looking Forward

2.4.1 Population Growth Forecast

The medium population growth forecast provided by OFM for Mason County indicates that the county can expect to add about 16,000 residents over the next 27 years (see **Figure 2-6**). This equates to an annual average growth rate (AGR) of 0.90%.

Even with the potential incorporation of Belfair or other areas, the medium growth forecast is assumed to reflect most likely growth rates over the next two decades.

Figure 2-6. Mason County Population Trend and Medium Forecast



Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2022 GMA Population Projections

2.4.2 Findings and Conclusions

The Community Profile illustrates a county experiencing steady population growth, increasing demographic diversity, and a shifting economic landscape. Mason County has added over 6,300 residents since 2010 and is projected to grow by an additional 16,000 people by 2050, signaling a need for continued investment in housing, infrastructure, and services.

The county's population is older than the statewide average, with a median age of 44.7 years and more than one in five residents over the age of 65. While many young families and individuals are choosing to live in Mason County, aging trends will have important implications for housing preferences, health care, workforce development, and transportation planning in the coming decades.

Racial and ethnic diversity is also growing, particularly in urban areas like Shelton, where over one-quarter of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino. This increasing diversity



underscores the importance of ensuring equitable access to housing, education, employment, and community services.

Economically, Mason County remains reliant on a mix of public-sector employment, service-based industries, and recreation- and tourism-related jobs. Public administration, retail trade, and health care are the largest local employment sectors, yet the county's unemployment rate remains higher than state and national averages. A significant portion of Mason County's workforce commutes to jobs outside the county, while many of the jobs located within the county are filled by workers from neighboring areas. This dynamic highlights a strong pattern of outbound commuting and reflects the county's economic interdependence with the broader region. It also emphasizes the importance of regional transportation connections and coordinated planning to support the mobility and employment needs of residents.

Educational attainment levels continue to trail state averages, particularly at the bachelor's and graduate levels, suggesting opportunities for investment in workforce development, career-readiness programs, and expanded access to post-secondary training, including community college, trade, and technical programs.

Finally, while average household size has remained relatively stable, the presence of a large institutional population—most notably at the Washington Correction Center—affects housing and population metrics in ways that must be carefully considered in land use and service planning.

Taken together, these trends suggest that Mason County's planning efforts must address the needs of an aging population, a diversifying community, and a regionally connected economy—while preserving the rural character and natural resources that define the county's identity.

2.5 Community Engagement

As part of the Comprehensive Plan update, Mason County sought to complement its demographic analysis with robust community engagement—ensuring that the voices, priorities, and lived experiences of community members directly informed the vision and direction of future growth.

Public input is crucial to the comprehensive planning process, as it ensures the plan reflects the diverse perspectives of residents and stakeholders, fosters community support, and helps shape a plan that addresses local needs and priorities. To meet this goal, the County implemented a broad and inclusive engagement process, including public meetings, surveys, community events, and coordination with advisory committees and local jurisdictions. Key efforts included a countywide visioning survey completed by 125 residents, interviews with over 30 stakeholders from sectors such as education, utilities, emergency services, Tribes, and economic development, and targeted outreach in the Allyn Urban Growth Area. The Planning Advisory Commission (PAC) hosted multiple workshops to gather community input, and a dedicated project website was maintained to provide transparent updates and foster ongoing involvement across all segments of the community.



In addition to the County's outreach efforts, the Department of Commerce awarded Community Based Organization (CBO) Public Participation grants to two separate CBOs in Mason County in 2024—one to the Mason County Economic Development Council (EDC), and the other to the Mason County Climate Justice Group (MCCJG). These grants were intended to support these organizations in engaging communities in the local comprehensive planning process.

The Mason County EDC focused its outreach on populations that are often underrepresented in planning processes, including non-English speakers, youth (particularly Hispanic and LGBTQIA+ youth), and workers in climate-sensitive natural resource industries such as shellfish and timber. The EDC partnered with trusted community organizations to reach these groups by hosting pop-up events at high-traffic locations during school release times and community activities. Youth participants were engaged in conversations about climate change and planning and were invited to share their concerns and ideas through a survey. In total, the EDC collected 333 English and 22 Spanish responses to its climate sub-element survey. The EDC also played an active role in the planning process itself, participating in Planning Advisory Commission (PAC) and Climate Policy Advisory Team (CPAT) meetings, submitting public testimony, and helping connect local workers and employers with planning staff to inform the development of relevant goals and policies across the Climate, Economic Development, and Housing elements.

The Mason County Climate Justice Group separately conducted a year-long outreach initiative focused on vulnerable and overburdened communities, with a specific focus on youth. To help meet this objective, MCCJG launched a youth leadership development program—Cedar Stewards of Mason County (CSMC, pronounced “cosmic”)—that involved high school students primarily from Cedar High School in Shelton. The group engaged more than 1,000 community members through 152 events. These activities included civic participation in planning meetings, public comment, community education, and a multilingual housing survey administered in partnership with schools and nonprofits. The survey reached over 800 residents and revealed strong community support for a range of housing solutions.

The combined efforts of Mason County, the EDC, and MCCJG expanded public understanding of the comprehensive planning process and helped ensure the Comprehensive Plan reflects a wide range of community voices and local priorities.

2.6 Community Vision

Mason County's vision was originally established as part of the county's first comprehensive planning effort and has been further developed and refined over the years through continued public input and community engagement, reflecting the evolving values and aspirations of residents and stakeholders. The community's vision is as follows:

Mason County will remain a primarily rural county, characterized by quiet tranquility, privacy, natural views, and rural enterprise. Although rural character means different things to different people, aspects of it include: natural vistas, fish, shellfish, wildlife, and natural ecosystems; fewer restrictions and more privacy than in an urban area; urban growth areas that are vibrant economic and social centers, the responsible operation of resources based industries such as



timber, mining, agriculture, and aquaculture; and the close ties of family and community to the land.

The urban growth areas of Shelton, Belfair, and Allyn as well as rural activity centers throughout the County will serve as the principal housing, economic, civic, and social centers including commercial, industrial, and airport and business hubs. Each will have a compact core area anchored by retail, service industries, government, housing and education facilities. Shelton will serve as a regional health center for the Olympic Peninsula, and regional retail will be centered in the City's Olympic Highway North Area. The Shelton and Belfair urban growth areas will provide a strong employment and tax base.

DRAFT



3 Land Use

3.1 Introduction

The Growth Management Act specifies that a comprehensive plan must contain:

“A land use element designating the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of the uses of land, where appropriate, for agriculture, timber production, housing, commerce, industry, recreation, open spaces, general aviation airports, public utilities, public facilities, and other land uses. The land use element shall include population densities, building intensities, and estimates of future population growth. The land use element shall provide for protection of the quality and quantity of groundwater used for public water supplies. The land use element must give special consideration to achieving environmental justice in its goals and policies, including efforts to avoid creating or worsening environmental health disparities. Wherever possible, the land use element should consider utilizing urban planning approaches that promote physical activity. Where applicable, the land use element shall review drainage, flooding, and storm water run-off in the area and nearby jurisdictions and provide guidance for corrective actions to mitigate or cleanse those discharges that pollute waters of the state, including Puget Sound or waters entering Puget Sound.”

The Land Use Element of Mason County’s Comprehensive Plan identifies the existing land use conditions throughout Mason County, projects the land requirements to the year 2045 to meet projected population growth, and determines how that growth should be most cost effectively accommodated.

This chapter is organized into the following sections:

- ◆ **3.1 INTRODUCTION:** Outlines Growth Management Act requirements and the reason for the Land Use Element.
- ◆ **3.2 EXISTING LAND USE PATTERNS:** Provides a buildable lands analysis and existing zoning and demographics for the Urban Growth Areas and Rural Mason County.
- ◆ **3.3 FUTURE LAND USE PATTERNS:** Describes the population growth distribution throughout the County and plan for protection of critical areas, natural resource lands, historic and cultural resources, and more.
- ◆ **3.4 CRITICAL AREAS:** Discusses how to accommodate growth while protecting critical areas.



- ◆ **3.5 PROTECTING NATURAL, HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES:** Provides details on other important resources in Mason County that are not classified as critical areas. These include: Forest Lands, Historic Resources, Agriculture, Aquaculture, the Voluntary Stewardship Program, Mineral Resource Lands, Open Space, Protecting Water and Reducing Runoff, and WRIA programs.
- ◆ **3.6 SITING ESSENTIAL PUBLIC FACILITIES:** Outlines the requirements of RCW 36.70A.200, which requires jurisdictions to have a process to plan for essential public facilities within their community.
- ◆ **3.7 ANNEXATION:** Provides guidance on the annexation process in Washington State and when and why annexation might be appropriate.
- ◆ **3.8 LAND USE GOALS AND POLICIES:** Outlines the goals and policies that guide land use planning and decision-making throughout Mason County. These goals support the County's vision for growth, conservation, and development, and ensure consistency with the GMA and the broader Comprehensive Plan.

3.1.1 Planning Area

The planning area of Mason County encompasses all unincorporated regions within the county. This area includes rural communities, residential neighborhoods, agricultural lands, forested regions, and coastal areas along Hood Canal and Puget Sound. Mason County's planning efforts focus on land use, infrastructure development, environmental conservation, and economic growth while maintaining the county's rural character. The county government manages zoning regulations, growth management policies, and public services for these unincorporated areas, ensuring that development aligns with state and regional planning goals.

3.1.2 Recent Legislative Changes

Since the last update to Mason County's Comprehensive Plan, the Washington State Legislature has adopted several significant policy changes that directly impact local land use planning. These recent laws emphasize the need to accommodate housing growth, promote climate resilience, and ensure coordinated urban development. Key legislation includes:

- ◆ **HB 1337 (2023)** – Expands access to accessory dwelling units (ADUs) by requiring jurisdictions to allow at least two ADUs per lot in UGAs. The bill reduces regulatory barriers such as parking and owner-occupancy requirements, with the goal of increasing infill housing options.
- ◆ **HB 1181 (2023)** – Integrates climate change considerations into the GMA, requiring local governments to plan for climate resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It mandates the inclusion of a new climate element in comprehensive plans to address climate-related risks and adaptation strategies.
- ◆ **HB 1220 (2021)** – Strengthens housing planning provisions by requiring counties and cities to accommodate housing for all income levels, remove unreasonable barriers to housing development, and address racial and economic disparities in access to housing.



The law also requires jurisdictions to plan for permanent supportive housing and emergency shelters.

These legislative changes require Mason County to review and update its land use policies to ensure consistency with state mandates. The County's land use strategies must now more directly address the interplay between land capacity, housing affordability, and climate preparedness, while supporting a more inclusive and sustainable pattern of future growth.

3.2 Existing Land Use Patterns

This section of the Land Use Chapter summarizes existing and planned land use in the Urban Growth Areas and rural Mason County. Data presented in this section was compiled from the Mason County Tax Assessor's database. In addition, the National Park Service provided data related to the National Park and Forest lands, and the Squaxin Island and Skokomish Tribes provided data related to tribal lands.

3.2.1 Pattern Overview

This subsection characterizes the current land use in Mason County. The Mason County Assessor's Database was the primary source of data. It is important to distinguish land use as categorized by the Assessor from zoning. The Assessor's data is based on the parcel's actual use and taxing distinction.

Countywide Land Use

Mason County includes approximately 617,618 acres of land, about 965 square miles, and an additional 55,422 acres, 87 square miles of water, as shown in **Table 3-1**. Approximately 164,762 acres of Mason County are within the boundaries of the Olympic National Park and the Olympic National Forest.

The incorporated City of Shelton occupies 3,927 acres of Mason County and Tribal lands account for 5,846 acres of the County. Mason County includes three Urban Growth Areas—Belfair, Allyn, and Shelton (see **Figure 3-1**, **Figure 3-2**, and **Figure 3-3**, respectively, for maps of these areas). Belfair is located in the northeastern corner of Mason County and covers approximately 2,500 acres. Just south of Belfair, along the western shoreline of Case Inlet is Allyn, consisting of approximately 1,172 acres. In the southeastern region is the Shelton UGA, encompassing 5,592 acres that surround the Shelton city limits.

Table 3-1. Urban and Rural Land Area (Acres) within Mason County		
Area	Total Acres	Percent of Total Acres
Residential	210,846	31.3%
Commercial	621	0.1%
Recreational	167,876	24.9%
Resource	219,414	32.6%
Waters	55,422	8.2%



Tribal Nations	5,846	0.9%
Shelton Urban Growth Area	5,592	0.8%
City of Shelton	3,927	0.6%
Belfair Urban Growth Area	2,323	0.3%
Allyn Urban Growth Area	1,172	0.2%
Total County	673,040	100%
Underutilized³	64,176	0.9%
Vacant	45,117	16.4%
Transportation	4,516	0.7%

Notes: Reference Future Land Use Map and Development Areas Map on Mason County WA GIS. See Section 3.2.3 for a definition of each Land Use Area.

3.2.2 Land Use in the Urban Growth Areas

Methods for Determining Land Use Acreage

During the early stages of GMA planning, an initial approach to estimating potential residential capacity involved comparing two distinct datasets: Assessor's data and County zoning data. It is important to recognize that these datasets were created for different purposes, and while they use similar classification categories, their total acreages may vary.

To derive a general estimate of dwelling unit capacity, parcel data was first organized based on existing land use, using land use codes from the County Assessor's Office. Concurrently, zoning district data from Mason County Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was compiled to identify the number of parcels and total acreage within each zoning designation. Land use codes were then grouped into broader categories (e.g., Residential, Commercial, Transportation) to provide a clearer view of how land was being used at the time.

Following this classification, each parcel's zoning designation was used to assess its potential for residential development. This process revealed where current land uses aligned—or differed—with zoning potential for residential growth. The analysis was applied across all planning districts and zoning designations to inform early planning decisions under the GMA framework.

Allyn Urban Growth Area

The Allyn Urban Growth Area is located along the upper, western shoreline of the Case Inlet in eastern Mason County. A portion of the Urban Growth Area called Lower Allyn was the original community first platted in 1889. It has a mix of residences and commercial businesses utilizing approximately forty-three percent of the acres within the Urban Growth Area. Lakeland Village, a planned residential development, makes up the largest land area and population base. See **Table 3-2** for a breakdown of the existing land uses within the Allyn UGA.

³ Underutilized parcels include any parcel that has an assessed building value of less than \$45,000 and the Assessors Land Use classification is not Transportation, Resource, Recreation, Water, or Open Space.



Table 3-2. Allyn UGA Land Use Acreage and Utilization				
Land Use	Total Acres	Utilized Acres	Underutilized Acres	Vacant Acres
Residential – Single Family	166	166	4	0
Residential – Multi-family (+2 DU/Bldg)	17	13	3	0
Residential – Vacation and Cabin	156	156	0	0
Residential – All Other	115	71	44	0
Commercial	25	24	< 1	< 1
Transportation	108	31	0	102
Recreation	25	8	0	3
Resource	118	7	0	129
Undeveloped (Water & Open Space)	300	300	0	0
Undeveloped (Land)	142	2	140	97
Total	1,172	778	402	331

Belfair Urban Growth Area

Unincorporated Belfair is the primary commercial center in the Northeast corner of North Mason County. Belfair is an Urban Growth Area (UGA) of approximately 2,300 acres. The current population within the UGA is approximately 1,000. However, Belfair serves residents within a larger rural geographic area as well as tourists visiting the Hood Canal and unique Theler Wetlands.

The Mason County Assessor's office has approximately 579 acres of land within the Belfair Urban Growth Area labeled as Undeveloped Land (not including noncommercial forests, water, or open space). See **Table 3-3** for a breakdown of the existing land uses within the Belfair UGA.

To facilitate new development within Belfair, the Mason County Board of County Commissioners adopted an amended Subarea Plan and Planned Action Ordinance in 2022 for the Belfair UGA. The amendments were based on the analysis in the Planned Action Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and public comment and testimony received during the planning process.⁴

Table 3-3. Belfair UGA Land Use Acreage and Utilization				
Land Use	Total Acres	Utilized Acres	Underutilized Acres	Vacant Acres
Residential – Single Family	264	259	5	0

⁴ Mason County Belfair Urban Growth Area EIS, https://masoncountywa.gov/departments/community_development/planning/belfair_eis



Residential – Multi-family (+2 DU/Bldg)	27	27	0	0
Residential – Vacation and Cabin	95	93	2	0
Residential – All Other	105	83	23	0
Commercial	277	241	35	19
Transportation	126	89	0	42
Recreation	6	5	0	0
Resource	804	104	0	743
Undeveloped (Noncommercial Forest)	40	0	0	40
Undeveloped (Land)	579	1	578	521
Total	2,323	902	1,421	1,365

Shelton Urban Growth Area

The Shelton UGA is about 5,600 acres total. This does not include the incorporated City of Shelton. The existing land use patterns within the Shelton UGA can generally be described as containing a mix of land uses including residential, commercial, parks, resource lands and undeveloped areas. Resource lands are the primary land use acreage at 28 percent of Shelton's UGA. Residential is the second largest at just over 19 percent, followed by commercial at 18 percent. See **Table 3-4** for a breakdown of the existing land uses in Shelton's UGA.

Table 3-4. Shelton UGA Land Use Acreage and Utilization				
Land Use	Total Acres	Utilized Acres	Underutilized Acres	Vacant Acres
Residential – Single Family	611	609	3	2
Residential – Multi-family (+2 DU/Bldg)	47	47	0	0
Residential – Vacation and Cabin	34	34	0	0
Residential – All Other	389	351	38	2
Commercial	1,003	658	345	9
Transportation	559	559	0	26
Recreation	523	523	0	160
Resource	1,574	1,574	0	1,469
Undeveloped (Water & Open Space)	12	12	0	4
Undeveloped (Land)	914	< 1	913	50
Total	5,592	4,293	1,299	1,722



DRAFT



3.2.3 Land Use Categories

Residential

This category includes properties that have any type of dwelling unit placed upon it. Residential uses include single family, multi family, mobile homes, convalescent centers, rooming and boarding houses, etc.

Commercial

This category includes properties used for wholesale and retail trade, service industries, health care providers, and warehouses. This category also includes privately owned open spaces, such as privately owned parks and other privately owned entertainment and recreation facilities.

Transportation

This category includes all parcels related to transportation uses including railroads, rights-of-way, motor vehicle transportation, mass transit, aircraft runways, and parking lots.

Recreation

This category includes the designation of land for activities that provide leisure, entertainment, and relaxation. This can include parks, playgrounds, sports fields, hiking trails, campgrounds, golf courses, beaches, and other open spaces designed for public or private recreational activities. The primary goal of recreational land use is to enhance quality of life by offering spaces for physical activities, social gatherings, and nature appreciation.

Resource

This category includes the designation of land for the extraction, production, and management of natural resources. This includes activities such as agriculture, forestry, mining, fishing, and energy production (e.g., oil, gas, and renewable energy sources like wind and solar farms). The primary goal of resource land use is to sustainably manage and utilize natural resources for economic, environmental, and societal benefits.

Tribal Nations (Indian Owned Lands)

The Tribal Nation land use category refers to land that is owned, managed, or reserved for Indigenous tribes or nations. This land is used for a variety of purposes, including residential communities, cultural and spiritual sites, natural resource management, economic development (such as casinos, tourism, and agriculture), and government services. Tribal land is often held in trust by the federal government and is governed by tribal authorities, with land use decisions reflecting the needs, traditions, and sovereignty of the Indigenous community.

Undeveloped

This category includes land that remains in its natural state or has not been significantly modified for human activities. This includes forests, wetlands, grasslands, deserts, and other open spaces that have not been built upon or intensively used for agriculture, industry, or residential purposes. Undeveloped land may serve ecological functions such as wildlife habitat,



water filtration, and carbon storage, and it may be preserved for conservation, future development, or recreational purposes.

Underutilized

Underutilized parcels includes any parcel that has an assessed building value of less than \$45,000 and the Assessors Land Use classification is not Transportation, Resource, Recreation, Water, or Open Space. This definition is used to identify land that might be a candidate for redevelopment, infill projects, or increased land use efficiency.

Water

This category refers to areas covered by water bodies, including oceans, seas, lakes, rivers, wetlands, reservoirs, and other aquatic environments. This category encompasses land designated for water-related activities such as drinking water supply, irrigation, hydroelectric power generation, fishing, recreation, transportation, and wildlife habitats. Water land use also includes protected areas for environmental conservation, flood control, and ecosystem preservation.



3.2.4 Zoning Districts

Zoning indicates a link to the Mason County Municipal Code, Development Regulations and helps determine what types of development are appropriate and which restrictions may apply to development.

Allyn Urban Growth Area (UGA) Zoning

The Allyn UGA is a "stand-alone" area not affiliated with any incorporated city. Development regulations for this area are intended to accommodate existing land use patterns and densities, while planning for future growth. Allyn UGA has separate zoning and development regulations in sections MCC 17.10 through MCC 17.15.

Figure 3-1. Allyn UGA Zoning Map

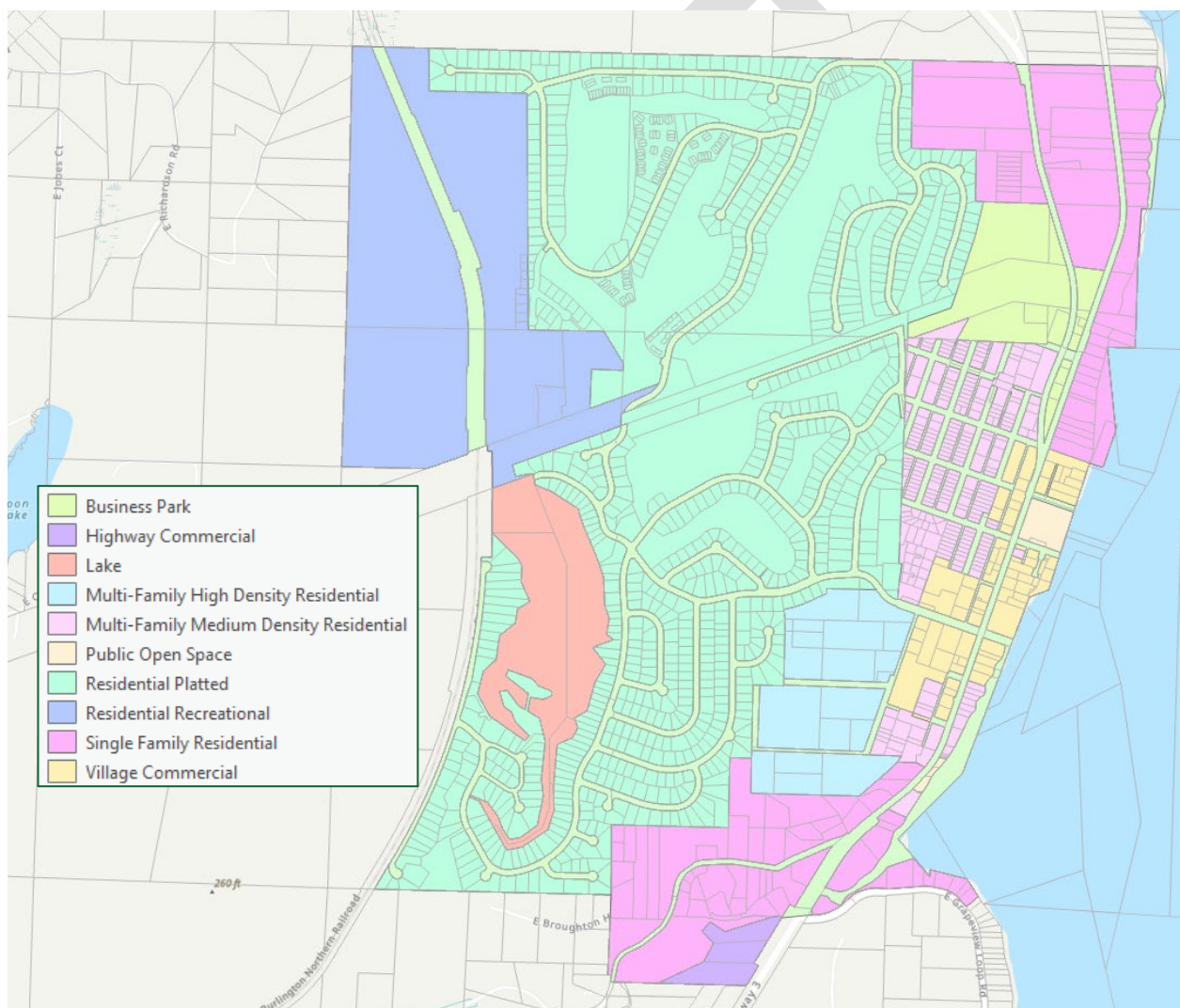


Table 3-5. Allyn UGA Zoning Acreage and Potential Dwelling Units

Zone	Total Acres	Dwelling Units/Acre	Potential Units	Times 2.5 persons/unit
Single Family Residential (R-1)	156	4 DU	624	1,560
Residential Recreational (R-1R)	152	5 DU	760	1,900
Residential Platted (R-1P)	491	6 DU	2946	7,365
Medium Density Multifamily Residential (R-2)	43	10 DU	430	1,075
High Density Multifamily Residential (R-3)	47	20 DU	940	2,350
Village Commercial (VC)	43	0 DU	-	-
Highway Commercial (HC)	8	0 DU	-	-
Business Park (BP)	34	0 DU	-	-
Public Open Space (POS)	4	0 DU	-	-

As illustrated in **Table 3-5**, if the Allyn UGA was fully built out to the maximum dwelling units per acre for each zone, a total of 5,700 units or 14,250 residents of Mason County could reside within the Urban Growth Area. This number does not factor in the level of service needs, nor does it account for possible restrictions to development such as critical area or shoreline considerations.

Belfair Urban Growth Area (UGA) Zoning

The Belfair UGA is a "stand-alone" area not affiliated with any incorporated city. Development regulations for this area are intended to accommodate existing land use patterns and densities, while planning for future growth. Belfair UGA has separate zoning and development regulations in sections MCC 17.20 through MCC 17.35.



Figure 3-2. Belfair UGA Zoning Map

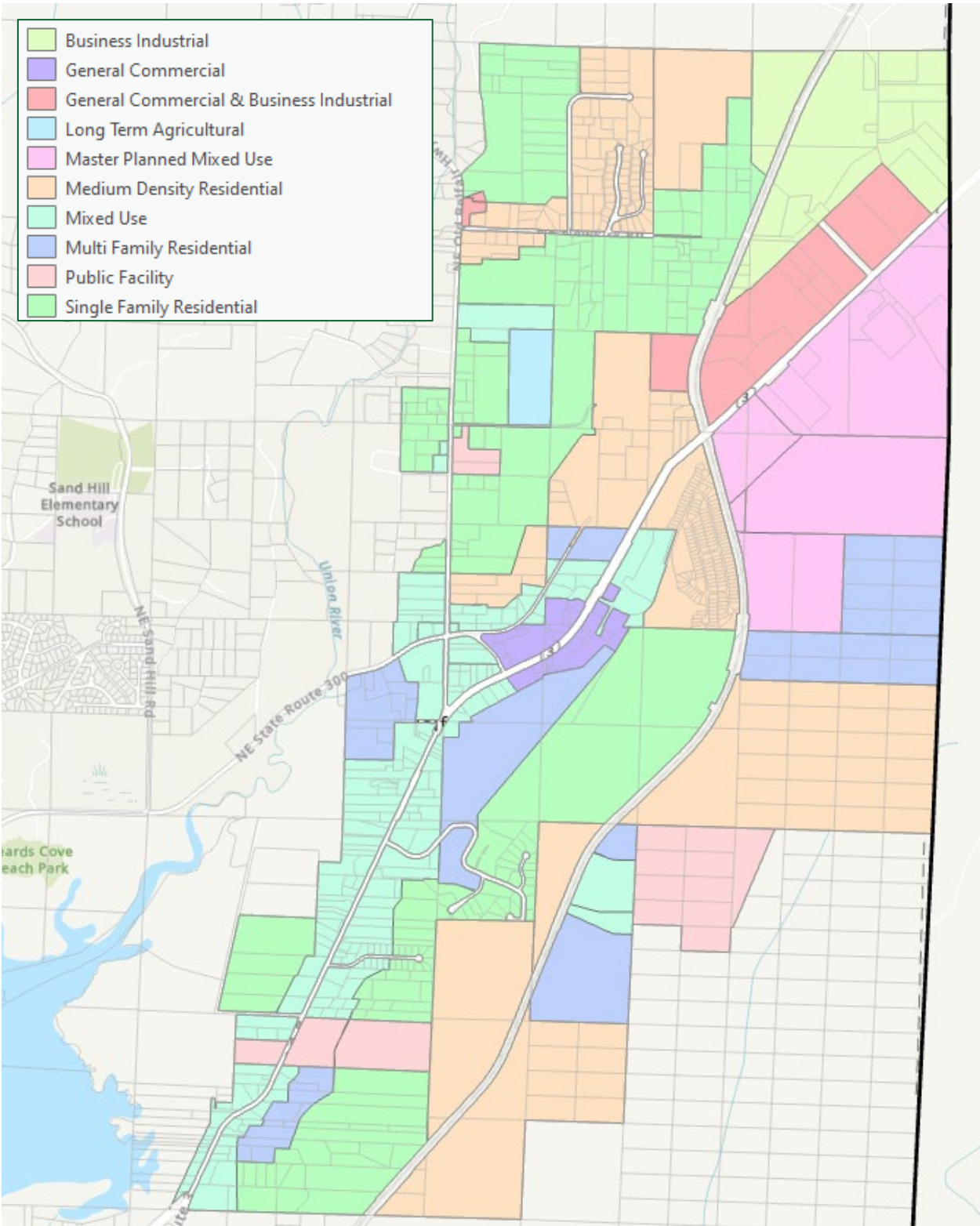


Table 3-6. Belfair UGA Zoning Acreage and Potential Dwelling Units				
Zone	Total Acres	Dwelling Units/Acre	Potential Units	Times 2.5 persons/unit
Single Family Residential	563	4 DU	2,252	5,630
Medium Density Residential	590	5 DU	2,952	7,380
Multi Family Residential	223	10 DU	2,232	5,580
Master Planned Mixed Use	245	0 DU	-	-
Mixed Use	234	0 DU	-	-
General Commercial & Business Industrial	93	0 DU	-	-
General Commercial	28	0 DU	-	-
Business Industrial	129	0 DU	-	-
Public Facility	94	0 DU	-	-
Long Term Agricultural	17	.10 DU	2	5
TOTAL	2,217			

As illustrated in **Table 3-6**, if the Belfair UGA was fully built out to the maximum dwelling units per acre for each zone, a total of 7,438 units or 18,595 residents of Mason County could reside within the Urban Growth Area. This number does not factor in the level of service needs, additional residential units within the Mixed Use or General Commercial zones—nor does it account for possible restrictions to development such as critical area or shoreline considerations.

Shelton Urban Growth Area (UGA) Zoning

The Shelton UGA has separate development regulations under Chapter 17.07 to assure compatibility with the City of Shelton as these properties are annexed into the city. In areas of the UGA where city sewer and water services are available, residential densities may be increased through use of a Planned Unit Development.



Figure 3-3. Shelton UGA Zoning Map

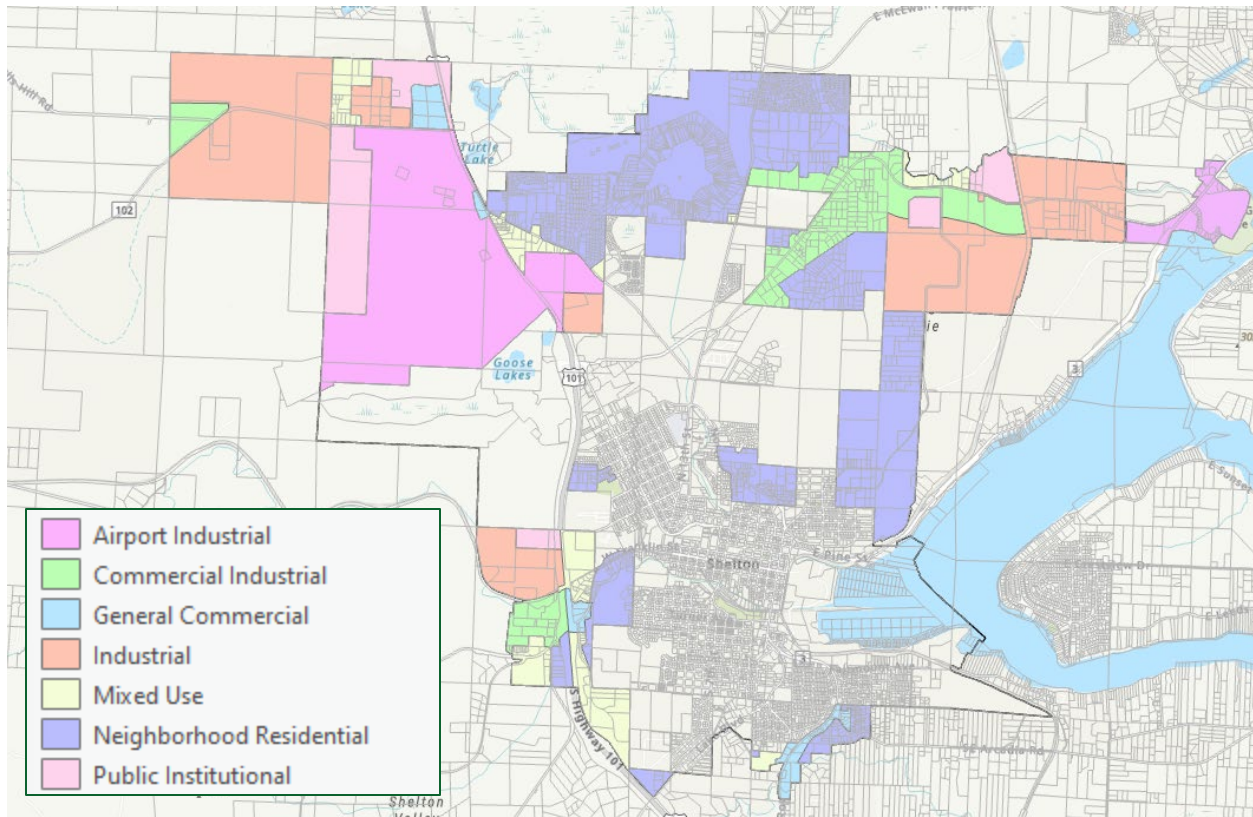


Table 3-7. Shelton UGA Zoning Acreage and Potential Dwelling Units

Zone	Total Acres	Dwelling Units/Acre	Potential Units	Times 2.5 persons/unit
Neighborhood Residential	1750	4 DU	7,001	17,503
Mixed Use	320	12 DU	3,835	9,588
General Commercial	112	0 DU	-	-
Commercial Industrial	454	0 DU	-	-
Industrial	1290	0 DU	-	-
Airport Industrial	977	0 DU	-	-
Public Institutional	347	0 DU	-	-

As illustrated in **Table 3-7**, if the City of Shelton's UGA was fully built out to the maximum dwelling units per acre for each zone, a total of 10,836 units or 27,091 residents of Mason County could reside within the Urban Growth Area. This number does not factor in level of service needs, additional residential units within the Mixed Use or General Commercial zones—nor does it account for possible restrictions to development such as critical area or shoreline considerations.



Rural Land Zoning

Rural Residential

There are five types of rural residential districts. These districts primarily provide for low density residential use but also provide for some rural uses such as hobby farms.

1. *Rural Residential 2.5 (RR 2.5)*. This district provides for new residential subdivision, which exceeds a density of two and one-half acres per residential lot, and where areas of small lot residential development and subdivisions patterns were established before December 5, 1996.
2. *Rural Residential 5 (RR 5)*. This district provides for new residential subdivision on parcels of five acres or more.
3. *Rural Residential 10 (RR 10)*. This district provides for new residential subdivision on parcels of ten acres or more.
4. *Rural Residential 20 (RR 20)*. This district provides for new residential subdivision on parcels of twenty acres or more.
5. *Rural Multi-Family (RMF)*. This district designates existing multi-family residential development including mobile home parks. New RMF zoning designations are prohibited.

Rural Commercial

There are four types of rural commercial districts, each reflecting the diversity of existing business areas. In designated areas like RACs, hamlets, and ICIAs, these districts are primarily meant to serve the current and future rural population by limiting building size and height to maintain a rural scale. Isolated commercial LAMIRDs do not have to focus on serving the rural population but must still protect rural character by restricting development, ensuring compatibility with surrounding areas, and maintaining visual harmony. The county enforces these guidelines through buffer zones, controlled rezoning, and building size restrictions. Public services and infrastructure should not encourage low-density sprawl.

1. Rural Commercial 1 (RC 1)
2. Rural Commercial 2 (RC 2)
3. Rural Commercial 3 (RC 3)
4. Rural Commercial 5 (RC 5)

Rural Industrial (RI)

The rural industrial (RI) district provides for isolated areas of primarily existing industrial type uses.

Rural Natural Resource (RNR)

The rural natural resource (RNR) district provides for isolated areas of resource based industry outside of the designated resource lands.



Rural Tourist (RT) and Rural Tourist Campground (RTC)

The Rural Tourism (RT) and Rural Tourist-Campground (RTC) districts support small-scale recreational and tourist-related activities, along with limited commercial services for tourists and nearby rural communities. In designated areas like RACs, hamlets, and ICIAs, these districts are mainly intended to serve the existing and future rural population by restricting building size and height to maintain a rural scale. Isolated tourist-oriented LAMIRDs do not have to primarily serve the rural population but must still preserve rural character by limiting development, ensuring compatibility with surrounding uses, and maintaining visual harmony. The county achieves this through buffer zones, controlled rezoning, and building size restrictions. Public services and infrastructure should not encourage low-intensity sprawl.

Master Planned Resort (MPR)

The Master Planned Resort (MPR) district provides for self-contained and fully integrated planned unit development in a setting of significant natural amenity, with the primary focus on destination resort facilities consisting of short-term visitor accommodations associated with a range of developed on-site indoor or outdoor recreational facilities. See Section [17.70](#) Master Development Plans for development regulations.

3.3 Future Land Use Patterns

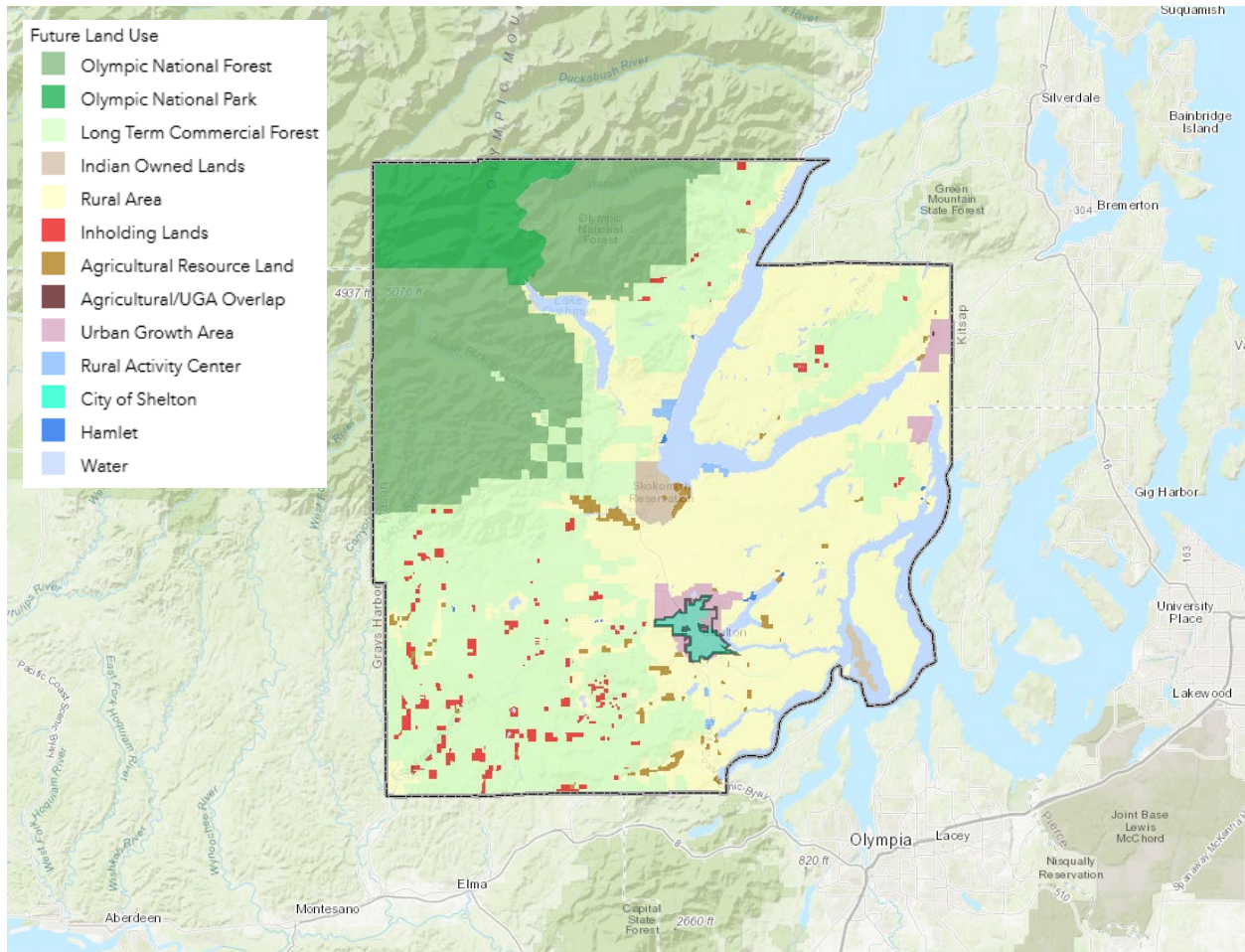
The future land use map (see **Figure 3-4**) represents Mason County's plan to accommodate projected population growth in a way that maximizes existing infrastructure and ensures adequate public facilities and services can be provided in a way that maintains the quality of life enjoyed in Mason County. Urban type growth and development is planned for the urban growth areas, including the City of Shelton and the communities of Allyn and Belfair. A more rural development pattern for housing and a slower rate of growth is planned for the rural county. The Rural Activity Centers, or areas where you would expect to find rural commercial services and other rural community development include Union, Hoodspport and Taylor Town. The Hamlets include Bayshore, Dayton, Deer Creek, Grapeview, Lilliwaup, Matlock, Potlatch, Spencer Lake, and Tahuya.

See also Mason County's GIS website⁵ for a series of maps referenced throughout the Comprehensive Plan.

⁵ Mason County GIS, gis.masoncountywa.gov



Figure 3-4. Mason County Future Land Use Map



3.3.1 Population Trends

Countywide

Net Migration and Natural Increase

The main components of population change are births and deaths; “decrease” is defined as the difference between live births and deaths. “Net migration” is defined as the difference between the number of people moving into an area and the number of people moving out. Both **Table 3-8** and **Table 3-9** show the impact of net migration and natural increase with fairly consistent historical population growth in both the State’s and County’s populations.



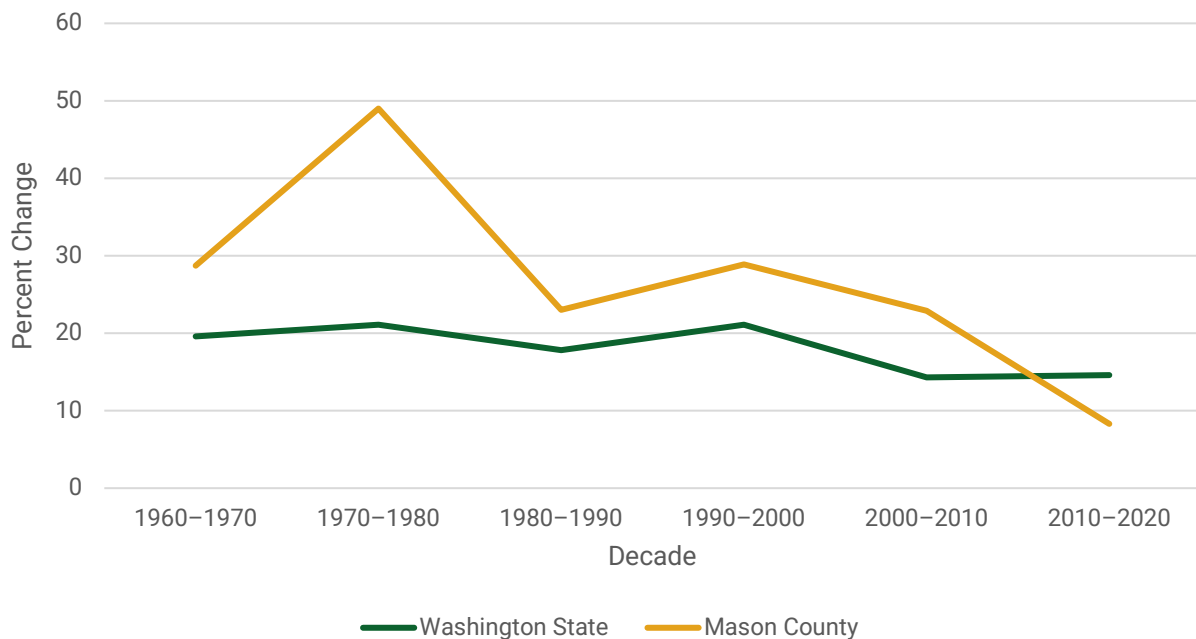
Table 3-8. Population by Decade – Washington State and Mason County							
	Population						
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Washington	2,853,214	3,413,250	4,132,353	4,866,663	5,884,143	6,724,540	7,706,310
Mason County	16,251	20,918	31,184	38,341	49,405	60,699	65,726

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management Postcensal Estimates Population 1960-Present

Table 3-9. Population Growth by Decade – Washington State and Mason County												
	Percent Change						Average Annual Increase (Percent)					
	1960-1970	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020	1960-1970	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
Washington	19.6	21.1	17.8	21.1	14.3	14.6	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.9	1.3	1.4
Mason County	28.7	49.0	23.0	28.9	22.9	8.28	2.6	4.0	2.1	2.6	2.1	0.8

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management Postcensal Estimates Population 1960-Present

Figure 3-5. Population Growth by Decade – Washington State and Mason County by Percentage



The decade between 1980 and 1990 Mason County experienced a slower rate of growth, going from 49 percent in 1980 to 23 percent in 1990. By 2010, growth had slowed to 22.9 percent. Annual growth rates for the state's overall population have remained steady from 1960 through 2020 at levels between 1 percent and 2 percent consistently.



In April of 1996, Mason County adopted its first GMA compliant Comprehensive Plan replacing the Comprehensive Plan of Mason County from 1970 and incorporating the Southeast Mason County Subarea Plan. Growth projections for 2014 were 81,102 (20,000 more than actual 2014 population). However, refinements in population forecasting methods and a larger data set have improved the ability to project and plan for population, housing, transportation and related growth over time.

Urban Growth Areas

Based on historic trends, the County has estimated how the future growth in population will be distributed between Urban Growth Areas and rural Mason County.

Table 3-10 shows the projected population growth for these areas as it relates to the total land area. The trend of faster growth in the urban growth areas that Mason County has experienced over the past decades is expected to continue through the 20-year planning horizon.

Area	Additional Population	Share of Population Growth	Percent Total Land Area
Shelton Urban Growth Area	6,512	44%	1.5%
Belfair Urban Growth Area	296	2%	0.4%
Allyn Urban Growth Area	888	6%	0.1%
Fully Contained Community Reserve	444	3%	-
RAC – LAMIRDS	296	1%	<1%
Rural Lands	6,364	43%	63%
Total County	14,801	100%	

Source: Mason County Housing Needs Assessment, 2025 & SCJ Alliance

Current Conditions

According to the Washington Office of Financial Management, growth in the state continues to be concentrated in the metropolitan areas with 79 percent occurring in the five largest counties (Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Spokane). Mason County had the twenty-fifth highest percent increase from 2010 and 2015, and retained the same placement from 2020 to 2024.

OFM growth projections for the 2020 through 2040 planning period report that the counties with a projected growth rate of more than 1 percent include Benton, Clark, Grant, Kittitas, San Juan, Snohomish, Thurston, and Whatcom Counties. Three of those were non-metropolitan counties, including Grant, Kittitas, and San Juan. For this same planning period, Grays Harbor, Ferry, and Columbia counties are reported as losing population. As described in the 2025 Mason County Housing Needs Assessment, the county's anticipated growth rate through 2045 is just under 1



percent. This is anticipated after experiencing a record increase in net in-migration of 1,020 people in 2019 with a smaller increase of 800 people in 2023.⁶

3.3.2 Population Forecast

The Mason County Comprehensive Plan was developed based on both historical trends and future projections of Mason County's population. Using this information, future development demands and appropriate ways to manage land use in the county were developed.

The population projections used were prepared by OFM in December of 2022. Additionally, the City of Shelton prepared a detailed population forecast. Mason County is required to use these population projections shown in **Table 3-11** as a basis for developing the County's Comprehensive Plan and across all elements of the Plan. This table illustrates how Mason County's projected population growth between 2024 and 2045 translates into future housing needs. After adjusting for group quarters and applying the average household size, the County is expected to add approximately 5,700 new households during the planning horizon. When accounting for the County's high share of seasonal and vacant housing, this results in a total need for about 7,037 additional dwelling units by 2045. Including anticipated growth in group quarters such as emergency shelters, the overall housing demand increases to roughly 7,179 net new units.

The OFM projections coupled with the Shelton forecast show that the total population for Mason County will be 82,932 by 2045. This means an increase in the total population of the county by 14,801 people, or almost 20% percent over the 20-year period from 2025 to 2045.

Table 3-11. Mason County Housing Needs Forecast, Method D			
	2024	2045	Population Increase
Mason County Total	68,131	82,932	14,801
Less Group Quarters	1,304	1,587	283
Population in Households	66,827	81,345	14,518
Average Household Size	2.54	2.54	-
Households	26,310	32,025	5,716
Vacancy and Seasonal Housing Assumption	23.8%	23.8%	1,788
Growth-related Housing Demand (Dwelling Units)	34,540	42,044	7,037
Plus Group Quarters (Inc Emergency Shelters)	-	-	142
Total Net New Housing Demand	-	-	7,179

Source: Mason County Housing Needs Assessment, 2025

⁶ Washington State Office of Financial Management



While a greater number of people overall are located in rural Mason County, historical trends and current projections indicate that growth in development has been, and is expected to remain, concentrated in the Urban Growth Areas. The relative size of rural Mason County when compared to the size of the Urban Growth Areas is important to consider. Rural Mason County is approximately 970 square miles and the Urban Growth Areas combined are a fraction of that at approximately 50 square miles.

Projecting Future Growth

Using the historic trends and current conditions, Mason County has chosen to base its 2025-2045 Comprehensive Plan on the State's mid-range population projection prepared by OFM. The decision to use the medium series projection for planning purposes was based on a recent slowing of growth rates in the county that trend toward the medium series. Mason County is still expected to experience steady growth, and the City of Shelton has developed a population forecast based on recent developments and infrastructure investments that also indicate steady strong growth.

What Is Driving Growth?

Population growth in Washington State continues to be driven primarily by net in-migration, as people relocate from other states and from within the Puget Sound region in search of more affordable housing and a higher quality of life. Several factors are contributing to this trend in Mason County. Housing costs in King, Pierce, Kitsap, and Thurston Counties remain significantly higher than in Mason County, prompting households to seek more attainable housing in rural and small-town settings. Additionally, since the pandemic, advances in technology and flexible workplace policies have expanded opportunities for residents to work remotely or commute less frequently, making rural counties more attractive to professionals employed in metropolitan areas.

Quality of life also factors into the County's growth; Mason County's natural amenities, access to Puget Sound, and proximity to regional job centers in Olympia, Bremerton, Tacoma, and Seattle continue to make it an appealing location for households balancing affordability with access to employment and recreation. The county's scenic environment and lower cost of living also attract retirees and second-home buyers, further contributing to population growth and housing demand. Given that Mason County is a popular destination for retirees, the County is expected to experience a higher rate of population growth as baby-boomers continue to retire, and a higher conversion rate of seasonal residence to year-round occupancy is projected.

Seasonal Population

Mason County experiences significant seasonal fluctuations in population. Seasonal residents are not completely captured in the State population projections because their official residence may not be in Mason County. However, it is important that they be considered since there are definite increases in demand for certain types of capital facilities during the summer months when seasonal population is high and tourism is at its peak.



In order to approximate the seasonal population variation, the County has used the Assessor's data. In this case, a seasonal resident is one who specified to receive mail at an out-of-county address.

According to Mason County Assessor's records, there are 33,272 residential households considered as single-family or vacation/cabin who receive mail outside of Mason County; however, 31 percent of those are seasonally occupied.

Seasonal increases in population will have a number of long-term impacts on the County, particularly along the County's waterfront areas. Visitors and seasonal residents contribute to peak congestion resulting from vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Seasonal population increases will also continue to place increased demands on County services. Those services, which are designed to accommodate the average and peak demands of resident populations, are often under severe stress during seasonal population peaks.

3.3.3 Land Use Projections

The Future Land Use Map for Mason County includes designated areas for the National Park and Forest, Long-Term Commercial Forest Lands, In-holding lands, Agricultural Resource Lands, Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), Rural Activity Centers, and Rural Areas. Mineral Resource Lands are also designated, but that designation would be considered an overlay on other districts, primarily the Forest Lands or the Rural Areas.

Green Diamond Resource Company Lot Retirement Project

The Green Diamond Resource Company, in collaboration with The Trust for Public Land, has committed to a long-term strategy to protect more than 6,000 acres of timberland through conservation easements over the coming decades. This initiative represents a significant advancement in regional conservation efforts and sustainable land management.

As part of this plan, 6,129 acres of forestland in Mason County have been placed under permanent conservation easement, building on earlier phases of protection and bringing the total conserved area to approximately 20,400 acres. Located between Hood Canal and Case Inlet, this landscape now enjoys long-term protection from subdivision and development, despite being under intense pressure due to its proximity—just 30 minutes—from two major metropolitan areas and the growing demand for affordable housing in the Puget Sound region.

The conserved land will remain in active timber production under sustainable forestry practices, ensuring continued economic value while safeguarding critical environmental assets. These include the protection of water quality, preservation of vital wildlife habitats, and the maintenance of scenic and ecological integrity.

In addition to ecological and economic benefits, the conservation easements guarantee public access for outdoor recreation. Residents and visitors will be able to enjoy hiking, mountain biking, and other recreational activities across the preserved landscape, supporting both community well-being and eco-tourism.



This initiative represents the third phase of a broader conservation vision that began in 2016 with the protection of 6,967 acres, followed by the conservation of an additional 7,391 acres in 2018. The third phase, now finalized, adds 6,129 acres to the total, securing a legacy of responsible land stewardship for future generations.

Rural residential districts are distinguished by the minimum number of acres required for each dwelling unit (e.g. Rural Residential 5 requires a minimum of 5 acres per unit). The total number of housing units that will be forgone was estimated to be over 1,700 based on review of the buildable land in each zoning district. The population that would have occupied those residential units by 2036 is estimated at over 4,000 people.

3.4 Critical Areas

3.4.1 Accommodating Growth and Protecting Critical Areas

Shoreline Jurisdiction

Mason County's shorelines are among its most valuable and ecologically sensitive natural resources, requiring careful management, protection, restoration, and preservation to balance environmental sustainability with responsible development. As population growth and expanding land uses place increasing pressure on these shorelines, coordinated planning and regulation are essential to ensuring their long-term health and accessibility.

Unregulated development along publicly and privately owned shorelines is not in the best interest of the community. Therefore, Mason County establishes policies and regulations to protect public interests, uphold private property rights, and ensure public access and navigation while managing shoreline use in a manner consistent with state and local priorities.

Chapter 17.50 as adopted within the Mason County Code of Ordinances implements the county's responsibilities under the Shoreline Management Act of 1971 (RCW 90.58), aligning with its overarching goals. The Shoreline Master Program promotes reasonable and sustainable shoreline uses while safeguarding public health, natural ecosystems, and aquatic resources. These regulations are designed to mitigate negative environmental impacts, preserve habitat for wildlife and aquatic life, and ensure that future development remains compatible with the ecological and recreational value of Mason County's shorelines.

Geologically Hazardous Areas

Geologically hazardous areas include areas susceptible to landslide, erosion, earthquake or other geological events. In many cases, hazards can be reduced or mitigated by engineering, design or modified construction practices. Because of their susceptibility however, some of these areas may not be suitable for new development.

Mason County's Resource Ordinance identifies three types of Geologic Hazard Areas: 1) Landslide Hazard Areas, 2) Seismic Hazard Areas, and 3) Erosion Hazard Areas. Landslide



Hazard Areas are lands that have an increased potential for landslides and other earth movement. Seismic Hazard Areas are lands that are particularly susceptible to damage from earthquakes and other seismic activity. Lastly, Erosion Hazard Areas are lands that are more susceptible to excessive erosion.

Landslide Hazard Areas

A landslide is a rapid down slope movement of a mass of material such as rocks, soil, or other debris. The speed and distance of movement, as well as the amount of material, varies greatly and depends on a combination of geologic, topographic and hydrologic factors. Especially susceptible to landslide hazards are marine bluffs and unconsolidated glacial deposits on steep hillsides (greater than 40 percent).

Potential Landslide Hazard Areas are areas that meet the following criteria:

1. Areas with indication of earth movement such as debris slides, earth flows, slumps and rock falls; or
2. Areas with artificial over steepened or unengineered slopes, i.e. cuts or fills;
3. Areas containing soft or potentially liquefiable soils;
4. Areas unstable as a result of stream incision, stream bank erosion, and undercutting by wave action;
5. Slopes greater than 15 percent (8.5 degrees), except areas composed of consolidated rock, and having either of the following:
 - a. Steep hillsides; or
 - b. Springs or groundwater seepage.

A key indicator of potential landslide areas is slope of the land. Approximately 10 percent of the landscape in Mason County (excluding Olympic National Forest and Olympic National Park areas) has a slope of 15-30 percent, and approximately 3 percent has steeper slopes of 30-45 percent (See also gis.masoncountywa.gov for the Landslide Hazards Map).

An important measure of potential risk for landslide when development occurs is land clearing and alteration for development. Potential impacts to Mason County can be assessed based on the relative amount of land converted to urban uses during the 20-year planning under each of the alternatives.

In addition to the critical area regulations, the Comprehensive Plan minimizes the amount of land cleared for development by directing it to the County's growth into Urban Areas. Further, options such as Master Planned Developments require clustering and open space. Both techniques reduce the amount of land disturbed by development while maintaining overall rural densities.

Seismic Hazards

Seismic Hazards occur in areas subject to severe risk of earthquake damage as a result of seismic induced settlement or soil liquefaction. These areas include soils containing high organic content (e.g., wetland soils), areas of loose sand and gravel, artificial fills, landslide deposits, and fine-grained soils with high water tables.



Seismic Hazard Areas are areas susceptible to ground failure, including the following:

1. Mapped geologic faults;
2. Deep road fills and areas of poorly compacted artificial fill;
3. Areas with artificially steepened slopes;
4. Post-glacial stream, lake or beach sediments;
5. River Deltas;
6. Areas designated as potential Landslide Hazard Areas;
7. Bluff areas;
8. Areas underlain by potentially liquefiable soils.

Seismic Hazard Areas are shown on the Geologic Hazard Layers of the Mason County GIS web tool.⁷

All structures in Mason County are subject to the engineering and design requirements of the International Building Code for earthquakes. Seismic hazards requirements focus on effects to buildings and other facilities from intense ground shaking and/or liquefaction. Attention to seismically induced landslides could also cause structural damage to buildings, particularly on steeper slopes and shoreline bluffs. In addition, the critical area regulations do not allow significant public buildings in seismic hazard areas; and the future land use plan directs most growth away from these areas.

Erosion Hazard Areas

Erosion is a natural process in which the land surface is worn away by the action of water, wind, ice or other geologic processes. The most common cause of erosion is water falling or flowing across the land. Factors contributing to erosion hazard are soil type and slope. Erosion hazards generally occur on erosive soils where slopes exceed 15 percent.

The Mason County Resource Ordinance classifies Erosion Hazard Areas underlain by soils which are subject to severe erosion when disturbed. Such soils include, but are not limited to, those for which potential for erosion is identified in the Soil Survey of Mason County, USDA Soil Conservation Service, 1960, or any subsequent revisions or addition to that Ordinance.

The erosion process can be accelerated by development activity that exposes and disturbs soils so they are more vulnerable to erosive forces. Further, increased areas of impervious surfaces reduce the infiltration of rainfall, increase stormwater runoff, and result in even greater erosion potential. Increased runoff, erosion, and sedimentation may adversely affect the physical and biological characteristics of streams and other water resources.

Erosion Hazards are similar to Landslide Hazards in that they are both often created by, or aggravated by development activities such as clearing and grading. The comprehensive plan controls the hazards through the critical areas regulations and by concentrating development in suitable areas.

⁷ Mason County GIS, gis.masoncountywa.gov



Wetlands

Wetlands are natural ecosystems that serve a number of important beneficial functions. They assist in reducing erosion, siltation, flooding, and ground and surface water contamination. Wetlands provide habitat for wildlife, plants, and fisheries. They may also assist in recharging groundwater supplies. In addition, wetlands provide opportunities for recreation and education.

Wetlands are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas. However, the term 'wetlands' may also include artificial wetlands intentionally created from non-wetland areas to for mitigation, if permitted by the county.

In making a determination regarding a wetland, Washington State Wetland Identification and Delineation Manual (Ecology #96-94), or as amended hereafter, shall serve as the technical resource guide on determining if an area possesses hydrophytic vegetation, hydric soils, and/or wetland hydrology.

Wetlands are classified by a rating system set forth in the Washington State Wetland Rating System for Western Washington by Washington State Department of Ecology. A four-tier wetlands rating system has been adopted as the rating system for Mason County to protect wetlands and their critical functions. Wetland buffer widths, wetland activities, and replacement ratios are based on this rating system. These four categories include:

1. **Category I Wetlands.** Category I wetlands are those regulated wetlands that include but are not limited to rare, unique wetland types that are more sensitive to disturbance than most wetlands and that contain ecological attributes that are impossible to replace within a human lifetime. Category I wetlands score between 23-27 points on the wetlands ratings systems.
2. **Category II Wetlands.** Category II wetlands are those regulated wetlands that score between 20-22 points on the wetlands ratings system.
3. **Category III Wetlands.** Category III wetlands are those regulated wetlands that score between 16-19 points on the wetlands ratings system.*
4. **Category IV Wetlands.** Category IV wetlands are those regulated wetlands that score between 9-15 on the wetlands ratings system.*

* *Non-Regulated Wetlands. Isolated wetlands under 1,000 square feet which are not associated with a riparian corridor, not part of a wetland mosaic, and not essential habitat of a priority species as identified by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.*

Mason County includes an abundance of wetland areas. Most of these areas are associated with larger freshwater and saltwater systems. Approximately 940 square miles in the County have been mapped as wetlands as documented by the National Wetland Inventory and made available on the Mason County WA GIS under the Hydrology layer. Agricultural wetlands and isolated wetlands under one acre in size are exempt from most of the regulatory requirements of the Mason County Critical Area Ordinance.



The alteration or destruction of wetlands can eliminate or reduce the variety of biological and hydrological functions that wetlands perform. Direct impacts may result from clearing, grading or filling in advance of development. Of equal potential are indirect impacts from new development, which may alter surface water flows, or interrupt the infiltration of groundwater.

New development may increase volumes of sediment-laden runoff entering wetlands. This may inhibit the wetlands' natural capacity to remove nutrients and process chemical and organic wastes. In addition, increased sedimentation within wetlands may reduce their ability to temporarily store flood waters and increase the risk and magnitude of downstream impacts.

Wetlands may also often provide groundwater recharge. Development activities in areas near or connected to wetlands in recharge areas could interrupt infiltration to the groundwater system.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

Mason County contains an abundance of marine, freshwater and upland habitat for fish and wildlife. Preservation of fish and wildlife habitat is critical to protecting suitable environments for animal species, and in providing an important part of the local quality of life for County residents and visitors.

One of the most important functions of wildlife is in maintaining the health and diversity of ecosystems. Each species has its role in an ecosystem. When a species is eliminated, the ecosystem loses the functions it performed. As a result, the balance of the ecosystem is sometimes irreversibly lost or diminished. Given the inter-relation of all species in an ecosystem, species elimination may result in unpredictable consequences, though some consequences of habitat impact are known in advance. For example, a loss of marine invertebrates and kelp from over-harvesting ultimately affects the quality of habitat for larger fish, mammals and birds.

Fish and wildlife also provide important recreational and economic benefits such as hunting and fishing opportunities. The continued prosperity of the commercial and recreational fish and shellfish industries depends on maintenance of excellent water quality and unpolluted habitats for fish, shellfish, and their food sources.

Fish and wildlife habitat also provide significant social benefits. Mason County residents are accustomed to occasional encounters with wildlife such as bald eagles, great blue heron and elk. Wildlife provides the opportunity to educate the public about biological and ecological processes. Other less quantifiable benefits include wildlife viewing, and maintaining the historical, cultural, and spiritual values of Native American Tribes and the general public.

The Mason County Resource Ordinance guides management of the County's Fish and Wildlife habitat through the regulation of conservation areas. Fish and wildlife habitat conservation means land management for maintaining species in suitable habitats within their natural geographic distribution so that isolated populations are not created. This does not mean maintaining all individuals of all species at all times, but it does mean intergovernmental cooperation and coordination is critically important in a region. In some cases, it is sufficient to assure that a species will usually be found in certain regions across the state.



The provisions for the protection of habitat cannot succeed in their purpose of supporting viable populations of fish and wildlife species unless other agencies and the public also act to protect the species. In the case of anadromous fish, the Statewide Salmon Recovery Strategy identifies that it will take a balanced approach to addressing the factors of decline that are within human control, including harvest, hatchery, habitat, and hydropower. The underlying assumption is that impacts to anadromous fish or their habitat or to fish and wildlife conservation areas shall be avoided or mitigated. Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas include both aquatic and terrestrial areas within Mason County. The approximate location and extent of critical fish and wildlife habitat areas are displayed in the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife's (WDFW) Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) Program database. The following categories are used in classifying critical areas:

1. Commercial and recreational shellfish areas;
2. Kelp and eelgrass beds; herring, sand lance, and smelt spawning areas;
3. Naturally occurring lakes and ponds under twenty acres and their submerged aquatic beds that provide fish or wildlife habitat;
4. Streams;
5. Saltwater Shorelines, and Lakes 20 Acres and Greater in Surface Area;
6. Lakes, ponds, streams, and rivers planted with game fish by a governmental or tribal entity;
7. State Department of Natural Resources natural area preserves and natural resource conservation areas;
8. Areas with which federal or state endangered, threatened and sensitive species of fish and wildlife have a primary association. Those species known to be found in Mason County shall be listed in the Resource Ordinance. Protection of species habitats is determined by the state or federal listing, and their actual presence near the site subject to review. Other listed and protected species may be found in Mason County, which are not listed.
9. Other areas that contain habitats and species of local importance (which include juvenile salmonid migration areas) as also listed. Species of local importance may include, but are not limited to, state candidate and monitor species.

Aquatic Areas

Mason County includes three principal river systems and numerous lakes, small rivers, and streams. The Skokomish and Hamma Hamma rivers are swiftly flowing, deeply incised rivers that originate high in the Olympic Mountains and empty into Hood Canal. The East and Middle Forks of the Satsop River originate in the Olympic Mountains, converge at the southwestern corner of the County and flow southward into the Chehalis River. All of the eastern part of the County is drained by smaller streams which flow only short distances before reaching outlets to Puget Sound. Many of the small streams, as well as the larger systems, support significant fisheries, including anadromous fish. Other surface waters are made up of numerous lakes and wetland areas, some of which include Cushman, Mason, Nahwatzel, Lost, Isabella, Island, Cranberry, Limerick and Spencer lakes.



The waters and shorelines of Mason County are an important resource. In addition to their natural beauty, and cultural value, they provide the base for a sizable shellfish industry, aquaculture, fish and wildlife habitat.

Water systems are classified by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WAC 222-16-030) and **Table 3-12** provides a general description of water type classifications currently in use.

Table 3-12. Classification of Water Bodies of Mason County	
Type	Description
Type"S"= Shoreline	Streams and waterbodies that are designated "shorelines of the state" as defined in RCW 90.58.030. (formerly type 1)
Type "F" = Fish	Streams and waterbodies that are known to be used by fish, or meet the physical criteria to be potentially used by fish. Fish streams may or may not have flowing water all year; they may be perennial or seasonal. (formerly type 2 or 3)
Type"Np"= Non-Fish	Streams that have flow year round and may have spatially intermittent dry reaches downstream of perennial flow. Type Np streams do not meet the physical criteria of a Type F stream. This also includes streams that have been proven not to contain fish using methods described in Forest Practices Board Manual Section 13. (formerly type 4)
Type"Ns"= Non-Fish Seasonal	Streams that do not have surface flow during at least some portion of the year, and do not meet the physical criteria of a Type F stream. (formerly type 5)

Terrestrial Areas

All development activities have the potential to impact native plant and animal species. Terrestrial Management Areas are those areas where the presence of state endangered or state threatened terrestrial species have been identified. The Mason County Critical Area Ordinance specifies that all development in these areas shall be consistent with State and Federal law.

See also the Mason County GIS web tool⁸ for a series of maps referenced throughout the Comprehensive Plan. There are also a number of publicly and privately managed natural areas in Mason County that have been designated as preserves or refuges. These areas are important for fish and wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, protection of sensitive plant species, and preservation of open space.

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources manages three Natural Area Preserves in Mason County. They include 17 acres at Oak Patch Lake, 28 acres on Skookum Inlet, and a 56-acre site on Totten Inlet. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife manages a

⁸ Mason County GIS, gis.masoncountywa.gov



number of properties in the County, including the 172-acre Skokomish River Tidelands Wildlife Area and the 122-acre Union River Wildlife Area.

Mason County also includes a number of properties managed by the Hood Canal Land Trust (HCLT). HCLT is a non-profit organization that either owns properties outright or manages them under the terms of conservation easements. Key HCLT sites include the Klingall and Jimmy Bryan Wetland Preserves, 88 acres on the north side of Lynch Cove and 140 acres along the Union River under a conservation easement.

The impacts of development to habitat include the replacement of woodlands, pastures and other undeveloped areas with buildings, roads, parking lots, landscaping, and other structures. Depending on the location, density and intensity of uses, this may result in the removal and displacement of habitat and cause some wildlife species to relocate to other areas. Since most habitats are currently assumed to be at or near their carrying capacity, displaced animals may perish.

Loss of wetlands, riparian areas and adjacent fields may affect the overall number and variety of wildlife and waterfowl. Loss of riparian vegetation could also affect migrating or nesting areas. Plant and animal species can also be affected by erosion and sedimentation of streams, coastal waters, and wetlands. Shoreline and related over-water development can harm valuable kelp and eelgrass beds.

In addition to the critical areas protections adopted by the county, the comprehensive plan promotes urban development in the County's Urban Growth Areas and rural development in the rural areas. The comprehensive plan also provides for permanent open space and designated resource areas to promote the protection, preservation, and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat.

Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

The State of Washington's definition of aquifer recharge areas for GMA planning purposes focuses on existing areas of supply which are vulnerable to contamination. Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas are defined as:

"Areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water, including areas where an aquifer that is a source of drinking water is vulnerable to contamination that would affect the potability of the water, or is susceptible to reduced recharge." (WAC 365-190-030)

Groundwater exists in underground layers of porous rock or soil called *aquifers*. Water stored in aquifers reaches the ground surface through springs, wells, or by seepage into surface water features, including wetlands. Surface waters replenish, "recharge", aquifers through seepage from streams, lakes, and wetlands, and from precipitation that percolates through soil or rock.

Potable water means water suitable for drinking. Groundwater provides virtually all of Mason County's potable water. Protecting aquifers and aquifer recharge areas, therefore, is critical to maintaining Mason County's water supply. Aquifers exist throughout the County. The groundwater supplying most of the County's water is obtained from the aquifers running



through the coarser and more permeable glacial and fluvial sedimentary deposits. The older, undifferentiated sedimentary deposits provide large quantities of water for industrial and municipal wells. Bedrock forms the bottom of the groundwater layer although fractures and joints in the relatively impermeable rocks may yield small quantities of water.

Precipitation provides the primary source of recharge for Mason County's groundwater. Precipitation within the County averages 64 inches annually. It increases rapidly towards the Olympic Mountains where, at Lake Cushman, precipitation is in excess of 100 inches per year. Water levels in wells are typically within 125 feet of the land surface. The quality of groundwater in an aquifer is inextricably linked to its recharge area. Approximately 24,970 acres have been mapped as Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas in Mason County. See also the Mason County WA GIS at gis.masoncountywa.gov for a series of maps referenced throughout the Comprehensive Plan.

All Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas in Mason County are classified as Extremely Susceptible, Highly Susceptible, Moderately Susceptible, or Low Susceptibility as defined by the County's Resource Ordinance.

Urban development has two potential impacts on groundwater resources: 1) increases in impervious surfaces reduce the volume of precipitation available to recharge groundwater, and 2) urban development may introduce pollutants into the groundwater system. When groundwater recharge is reduced, groundwater supplies may be depleted. In many instances, this is coupled with withdrawals of groundwater in excess of recharge capacity. Potential long-term impacts include reduced capacity of water wells, reduced flows in groundwater-fed streams, and depletion of water supplies to lakes or wetlands.

Pollutants can be introduced into the groundwater system through a variety of means. They include failing septic systems, agricultural chemicals and animal waste, urban runoff, solid waste disposal, and leaking underground storage tanks.

Frequently Flooded Areas

The Frequently Flooded Areas, or Flood Hazard Areas, of Mason County are subject to periodic inundation which can result in loss of life and property, health, and safety hazards, disruption of commerce and governmental services, extraordinary public expenditures for flood protection and relief, and impairment of the tax base, all of which adversely affect the public health, safety, and general welfare. These flood losses could be exacerbated by the cumulative effect of obstructions in areas of special flood hazards which increase flood heights and velocities, and when inadequately anchored, damage uses in other areas. Uses that are inadequately floodproofed, elevated, or otherwise protected from flood damage also contribute to the flood loss. Mason County has prepared this flood damage prevention ordinance to implement comprehensive flood damage reduction measures that are necessary for public health safety and welfare and that allow property owners to protect their property.

Flooding in Mason County generally occurs from November through April. The greatest cause of flooding is heavy rainfall combined with snow melt. A special flood risk zone has been established for the zones A and AE floodplain of the Skokomish River, Vance Creek, and



tributaries. This special flood risk zone is designated as a floodway and the entire floodway is designated an avulsion risk area. Construction of a new structure or an expansion of the square foot area of an existing structure is prohibited in this designated floodway.

Table 3-13. Population Exposed within Flood Hazard Areas		
Jurisdiction	Population in the 1% annual chance event (100-year) Flood Boundary	Population in the 0.2% annual chance (500-year) Flood Boundary
Unincorporated Mason County	1,818	742
City of Shelton	486	512
Allyn UGA	0	0
Belfair UGA	22	0
Total	2,326	1,254

Source: Mason County Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2023

The Skokomish River Valley floods several times annually. In recent history there have been large flood events in 2003, 2007, 2009, 2016, and 2020. Many homes, pastures and personal property were damaged in those years as well as lesser damage on a more frequent basis. Flooding on the Tahuya River and Goldsborough Creek have been known to cause some damage, whereas the Union River tends to have high flows, but minimal overbank flooding.

Flooding of marine shorelines is caused by a number of factors, which can occur individually or in combination. They include extreme high tides, waves generated by winds, tsunamis of distant origin, and locally generated seismic waves or boils. Wind-driven waves, superimposed on extreme high tides, represent the most common form of coastal flooding in Mason County.

Floodways, floodplains and coastal flood areas are identified by the Mason County Federal Flood Insurance Study FEMA maps which can be found under the FEMA FIRM layer on the Mason County WA GIS at gis.masoncountywa.gov.

The comprehensive plan is intended to provide for the protection of Frequently Flooded Areas by concentrating urban development on the least amount of land, considering the suitability of the land for development through the use of performance standards, and by providing for significant open space and resource use areas in development within the Rural Area.

The *County-Wide Planning Policies* call for Mason County and the City of Shelton to protect all types of Critical Areas.



3.5 Protecting Natural, Historic and Cultural Resources

Natural resources abound in Mason County and provide the foundation for the County's economy. While timber has played the dominant role, other natural resources including agricultural lands and minerals, have also fostered economic development within the County.

3.5.1 Forest Lands

Without question, timber is the foundation upon which Mason County's economy is built. Forest Products continue to be Mason County's premier natural resource industry. The early explorers marveled at the vast timber expanse in the region, describing it as "thick as fur on a dog's back." For 140 years, Mason County's extensive forests have supplied logs, lumber, building components, pulp, and other products to national and international markets.

Long Term Commercial Forest lands and Forest Products represent the primary land uses throughout Mason County and within each of its seven watersheds. The Rural Element of Mason County's Comprehensive Plan shows that there are approximately 300,000 acres of Long Term Commercial Forest and 13,500 acres of In-holding lands in Mason County. These figures do not include federal and tribal lands. Long Term Commercial Forest lands and Forestry play an even greater role in the County's land use, due to the acreage that the U.S. Forest Service maintains as well as lands forested by both the Skokomish and Squaxin Island Tribes.

Mason County currently has an abundance of forested lands with long term commercial significance. Although continued population growth will place additional demands on forest resources, these are not expected to significantly affect the County's forest resources during the 20-year planning period.

Impacts associated with forestry operations include erosion and sedimentation, noise from machinery and vehicles, fugitive dust, and the visual impacts of harvested areas. The state Department of Natural Resources is responsible for regulating these impacts. The comprehensive plan concentrates urban development on the least amount of land. It also provides for permanent open space and resource use areas in development allowed within the Rural Areas.

3.5.2 Historic Resources

As Mason County continues to grow, it is important that the history of Mason County be preserved. The state and federal governments have developed inventories of those sites and facilities that have special historical importance. Some of the sites are formally listed on an historical register, which provides some tax and other advantages to their owners for preserving their historic attributes. Native American tribes also have sites identified of cultural or historical significance. The County intends to cooperate with the state agencies and the area tribes to protect historically and culturally important areas. The Countywide Planning Policies include



policies guiding the county in the protection of these areas with support and oversight by the County's Historic Preservation Committee.

Chapter 17.40 as adopted in the Mason County Code of Ordinances implements the requirements and provides for the identification, evaluation, designation and protection of designated historic and prehistoric resources within the boundaries of Mason County and preserve and rehabilitate eligible historic properties within Mason County for future generations through special valuation, a property tax incentive, as provided in Chapter 84.26 RCW in order to:

- ◆ Safeguard the heritage of the Mason County as represented by those buildings, districts, objects, sites and structures which reflect significant elements of Mason County history;
- ◆ Foster civic and neighborhood pride in the beauty and accomplishments of the past, and a sense of identity based on the Mason County history;
- ◆ Stabilize or improve the aesthetic and economic vitality and values of such sites, improvements and objects;
- ◆ Assist, encourage and provide incentives to private owners for preservation, restoration, redevelopment and use of outstanding historic buildings, districts, objects, sites and structures;
- ◆ Promote and facilitate the early identification and resolution of conflicts between preservation of historic resources and alternative land uses; and,
- ◆ Conserve valuable material and energy resources by ongoing use and maintenance of the existing built environment.

3.5.3 Agriculture

The State of Washington's GMA guidelines define agricultural land as land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products or of berries, grain, hay, straw, turf, seed, Christmas trees, or livestock, and that has long term commercial significance for agricultural production. Long term commercial significance includes the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long term commercial production, while considering the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of the land.

Agricultural practices have taken place in Mason County since the early days of logging. The clear-cutting practices of those early logging companies opened a considerable amount of County land to agriculture, particularly to dairying and cattle raising. Crop production was limited to the growing of hay, berries and potatoes. In the eastern part of the County where the weather was milder, extensive vineyards and fruit orchards were planted. Despite its rich agricultural history, however, Mason County is not well-endowed with the resources necessary to create a strong competitive advantage for agricultural production. Consequently, agriculture's current role in Mason County's economy is relatively minor, and the acreage of land in farmland is declining.

Continued population and housing growth in Mason County is likely to increase land use conflicts between urban uses and remaining agricultural uses. As land values rise, the potential economic returns will likely increase the pressure on owners to sell or develop their properties.



Much of the agricultural land within the County is located in the rural areas, outside the UGAs.

In order to better conserve agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance, Mason County designated Agricultural Resource Lands in its Resource Ordinance. The amendments also provided for continuing protections for lands in agricultural use, but not qualified as lands of long-term commercial significance.

Voluntary Stewardship Program

In 2021 Mason County incorporated the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) into the adopted Code of Ordinances when the County updated Chapter 8.52, their Resource Ordinance. The addition included language and regulations to encourage the voluntary enrollment of agricultural lands and uses into the open space tax program and agricultural activities into the voluntary stewardship program. This program is enabled under the Washington State Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.700) and is a non-regulatory, incentive-based approach to protecting critical areas on agricultural lands, while maintaining agricultural viability.

The program requires all counties to identify and protect critical areas, including critical areas on agricultural lands by establishing a baseline of critical area conditions then monitoring responsive changes to that baseline over a ten-year period. The VSP applies to land where agricultural activities occur, and provides a unique strategy to protect critical areas while also promoting agriculture.

3.5.4 Aquaculture

Mason County is the largest producer of shellfish in Washington State and Washington is the top shellfish producing state in the nation. Shellfish farms are significant contributors to Mason County's. Shellfish farming is the second largest employer in Mason County, Washington with over 70 farms generating \$32 million in revenue annually. Shellfish also do their part to reduce the trade deficit. Shellfish grown in Mason County are exported around the world, bringing in millions of dollars from foreign countries each year directly benefiting our local economy as well as federal and state economies.

Shellfish production requires a healthy, functioning ecosystem to provide safe water quality and appropriate quantities of phytoplankton for food. Scientific research indicates well-managed shellfish farming can improve water quality, species diversity, and habitat complexity.

In order to better support shellfish production, Mason County has adopted its Shoreline Master Program and Resource Ordinance. These policy documents provide for continuing protections for aquaculture lands and the watersheds that feed into these lands.

Fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and other aquatic products which are caught or harvested by the public from non-controlled waters or beds are considered wild caught and are not included as aquaculture. Mason County has 25 public access beaches for shellfish harvesting and maintaining and enhancing this access remains a priority.



The shellfish industry across the state of Washington, including business owners in Mason County, have developed recommendations to support shellfish (Washington Shellfish Initiative):

1. Establish a state shellfish aquaculture coordinator
2. Create a centralized mapping and data tracking portal
3. Develop consistent, practicable, and effective best management practices
4. Address overall permit timeliness
5. Continue outreach to growers
6. Provide technical assistance to local government
7. Assess permit compliance
8. Reduce redundancies and improve interagency coordination
9. Devote funding to support shellfish aquaculture permitting
10. Designate a lead state agency to manage shellfish aquaculture

3.5.5 Mineral Resource Lands

The State of Washington's GMA guidelines define mineral resource lands as lands primarily devoted to the extraction of minerals, or that have known or potential long term significance for the extraction of minerals. Minerals include gravel, sand, and valuable metallic substances.

See the Mason County WA GIS at gis.masoncountywa.gov for a series of maps referenced throughout the Comprehensive Plan, including Mineral Resource Lands identifying locations of known and potential mineral resources.

The mineral resources identified on the map are based primarily on soil types identified by the Natural Resources Conservation Survey (NRCS) in the *Mason County Soil Survey* and the Department of Ecology in the *Coastal Zone Atlas of Washington*. It should be noted that many of the soil characteristics which increase an area's potential as a source of mineral resources also increase its potential for aquifer recharge.

Mason County contains a large supply of construction aggregate (i.e., sand and gravel). There are three remaining, undeveloped, large sources of high-quality sand and gravel located in close proximity to the waters of Puget Sound, such that materials can be transported from the site by barge to water-dependent metropolitan construction aggregate markets also located on the Puget Sound tide lands. Two of these large deposits of aggregate are located in Mason County. They include the proposed Hamma Hamma site at Eldon on Hood Canal, and the permitted Johns Prairie site north of Shelton on Oakland Bay. Both Mason County sites contain a high-volume source of high-quality sand and gravel. These resources are suitable for processing into a wide variety of finished construction aggregate classes, all meeting government and ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) specifications.

Mason County has twenty operating surface mines at the present time,⁹ considered as active permitted mines according to the Department of Natural Resources. The Resource Ordinance

⁹ Washington State Department of Natural Resources Geology Portal, <https://geologyportal.dnr.wa.gov>



protects mineral resources lands for the future use of these areas for mineral resource extraction.

Continued population growth may place additional demands on local mineral resources. Impacts associated with mineral extraction include erosion and sedimentation, noise from machinery and vehicles, fugitive dust, and the visual impacts of excavated areas.

3.5.6 Open Space

There are three kinds of open space land: private, common use, and public open space. Private open space includes farms, forest lands, and other parcels of undeveloped land. Common use open space is land within a residential development or other development that is designated for common access by the residents of the development or by the general community. Public open space is publicly-owned land available for recreational use of the entire community. Open water areas, such as the Hood Canal or lakes, is also often considered as open space because it creates a sense of openness.

Open space land is valuable to the community for a number of reasons. It can provide recreational opportunities, it is aesthetically pleasing, it enhances the quality of life in urban areas, and it increases property values. It creates natural boundaries, which can act as greenbelts and define neighborhood identity and can protect natural resources such as groundwater recharge areas, streams, soils, tidal areas, agricultural areas, and wildlife. Open space often provides habitat areas for wildlife.

Open space land is an essential component of rural character. Without adequate open space, the land will not appear rural. Rural character is discussed in the Rural Element of Mason County's Comprehensive Plan.

Mason County enjoys extensive open spaces. In addition to the Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest, there are significant tracts of state owned or privately held timber. Farmlands in river valleys, particularly the Skokomish, also are open space lands. A detailed listing of park and recreation facilities in the County is presented in the Capital Facilities element of the Mason County Comprehensive Plan.

See the Mason County GIS website¹⁰ for a series of maps referenced throughout the Comprehensive Plan, including existing and planned Open Space and open space corridors in Mason County.

Projected growth in Mason County is likely to increase the pressure for conversion of existing open space to urban uses over the next 20 years. As land values rise, the potential economic returns will likely increase the pressure on owners of larger tracts of undeveloped land to sell or develop their properties.

The Comprehensive Plan provides for the preservation, protection, and enhancement of open space. It does this by directing substantial population and housing growth into Urban Growth

¹⁰ Mason County GIS, gis.masoncountywa.gov



Areas. Also, the comprehensive plan provides for incentives to cluster development, as well as requiring the preservation of open space in some situations. It should be noted that if the incentives for rural clustered development are implemented, tens of thousands of acres could be preserved as open space. Both techniques are intended to preserve open space, including Long-Term Commercial Forest lands, Agricultural Resource Lands, local parks, state parks and other state lands, the Olympic National Park and the Olympic National Forest, land slide hazard areas and their associated buffers, flood ways, streams and their associated vegetation area, wetlands and their associated buffer areas, lands preserved as part of a clustered development plan, lands preserved as part of the designation of a master planned resort, and major utility corridors.

Additionally, cluster development policies could result in tens of thousands of acres preserved as open space across the County. Undeveloped land, non-designated forest lands and non-designated agricultural lands may also function as open space.

3.5.7 Urban and Community Forests within Urban Growth Areas

Under the Growth Management Act, UGAs are designated to accommodate urban development in a manner that protects rural lands and natural resources. Within these areas, urban and community forests play a critical role in maintaining livability and environmental health. These tree-covered open spaces—including parks, greenways, street tree plantings, and forested buffers—are increasingly recognized as essential infrastructure. Community forests provide shade, reduce stormwater runoff, improve air quality, support mental and physical well-being, and offer habitat for urban wildlife. The Growth Management Act supports the integration of urban forestry programs within UGAs to enhance the urban tree canopy, especially in areas subject to new development or redevelopment. These programs may include tree retention ordinances, incentives for planting and maintaining native species, and the establishment of long-term maintenance plans. Urban forests not only contribute to the ecological function of UGAs but also help define neighborhood character and support Mason County's broader open space and sustainability goals.

3.5.8 Protecting Water Quality and Reducing Runoff

Mason County has an abundance of marine and freshwater areas that include Puget Sound, Hood Canal, and thousands of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands. Surface water flows in the County result from precipitation. Precipitation occurs year-round. It tends to be particularly heavy during the months of November through April, when heavy rainfall at the lower elevations combines with seasonal snowmelt in the mountains.

Mason County's drainage system for surface runoff is characterized by thousands of small tributaries which form the several hundred streams and rivers that eventually make their way into Hood Canal, Oakland Bay, Totten Inlet, Skookum Inlet and Case Inlet. Some of the larger of these rivers include the Skokomish, Union, and Tahuya Rivers.



See the Mason County WA GIS website¹¹ for a series of maps referenced throughout the Comprehensive Plan. Mason County's natural drainage system contains hundreds of lakes and ponds that further help to moderate the effects of surface water storm flows. The largest of these include: Lake Cushman, Mason Lake, Cranberry Lake, Lake Limerick, and Lake Nahwatzel.

Mason County has done a significant amount of planning related to stormwater management and water quality. The County has cooperated with the adjoining counties, tribes and the state to develop specific watershed management plans and implemented water quality protections in several significant ways. For example, the County created a clean water district and stronger on-site septic system controls including an operations and management ordinance. Sanitary sewer systems have been constructed in the North Bay–Case Inlet area as well as in the Belfair Urban Growth Area to improve water quality in those areas. The county also adopted the “Skokomish River Comprehensive Flood Hazard Plan” to identify means of managing flooding problems.

Mason County's management of stormwater is primarily regulatory. The Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan requires all counties and cities within the Puget Sound drainage basin to adopt ordinances to control runoff from new development and redevelopment. The plan directs local governments to adopt the stormwater programs which include minimum requirements as developed by the Department of Ecology. The County created and adopted the Storm Water and Surface Water Utility and Stormwater Management Ordinance incorporating the minimum requirements of the most current edition of the Department of Ecology's Stormwater Manual. These address many of the stormwater concerns by requiring appropriate design and best management practices for new development or redevelopment for both water quantity and quality.

See also the Capital Facilities, Financing, and Utilities Element of the Mason County Comprehensive Plan for more information about stormwater management.

The City of Shelton has provisions for stormwater management in its Comprehensive Plan and city ordinances. The Capital Facilities, Financing, and Utilities Element of the City's Plan discusses existing provisions and the need for continued joint planning between the city and the county to coordinate stormwater management in the urban growth area.

New development almost always results in the clearing of vegetative areas and increases in impervious surfaces. The purpose of the plans and ordinances discussed above is to remove or minimize the impacts that can be caused by development through implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) practices, or stormwater management techniques designed to mimic natural processes. If not appropriately designed using these LID techniques, urban development can result in the impacts of increased soil erosion and sedimentation during and after clearing; encroachment into streams and wetlands; alteration of stream courses; and loss of critical habitat. Urban development can result in nonpoint pollution of surface waters. Increased runoff from development may also increase the incidence of downstream flooding and erosion.

¹¹ Mason County GIS, gis.masoncountywa.gov



This Land Use Element includes policies and designated districts requiring clustering of development and preservation of open space. Both techniques reduce the amount of land disturbed by development while maintaining overall rural densities. The open space design provides additional protection to wetlands, floodways and streams.

The *Countywide Planning Policies* call for Mason County and the City of Shelton to provide for the protection of water quality and address public education, stormwater management, and watershed management.

3.5.9 Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs) and Protecting Water Availability

In addition to providing for the protection of water quality, the Countywide Planning Policies continue to emphasize the need to protect the availability of water within Mason County watersheds. Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs), or watersheds, were defined in 1979 for the purpose of monitoring water availability. WRIAs 14, 15, 16, and 22 are all within the boundaries of Mason County.

In January of 2018 the Washington State Legislature passed the streamflow restoration law (RCW 90.94) which was intended to help “enhance” streamflows. This law applies to WRIAs that have instream flow rules of which Mason County has three where these rules apply. The WRIAs with adopted plans, and without, must update or include impact offsets for new (as of January 2018) permit-exempt wells. The law goes beyond no net loss to require a net ecological benefit (NEB).

The watershed management plans should contain local water offset and habitat projects that are spread throughout the sub-basins of the WRIAs. Part of Ecology’s assessment of plan implementation includes reviewing the current number of PE wells and the projected number of wells, the current consumptive water use from PE wells and the projected consumptive water use.

WRIA 16

WRIA 16 is located on the western side of Hood Canal on the Olympic Peninsula. It is the only WRIA within Mason County that isn’t subject to instream flow rules. Planning within WRIA 16 was combined with WRIA 14b, or South Shore (or Hood). Within the combined WRIAs there are six sub-basins: Dosewallips, Duckabush, Hamma, Hamma, Finch/Lilliwaup, Skokomish, and South Shore (or Hood). RCW 90.82.060 gives the WRIA 16 Planning Unit authorization to continue planning efforts for WRIA 14b.

The WRIA 16 Planning Unit began planning in 1999, and completed and adopted the Watershed Management Plan in May 2006. The plan was officially approved by Mason and Jefferson Counties in July 2006. A Detailed Implementation Plan was completed in June 2008. (Operating Procedures Manual, Skokomish-Dosewallips-South Shore of Hood Canal Watersheds WRIAs 16 and 14b, October 2008)



The 2006 WRIA 16 and 14b plan was in response to the Watershed Planning Act (RCW 90.82) of 1998. The Department of Ecology was a voting member of the Planning Unit, designated by the Governor's Office "to represent the State's interests".

It is now bordering on 20 years since the key watershed issues of the plan were published. In regard to water quantity, assessments at that time showed adequate in the short term but there was a lack of data for future quantities and the ability of streams in some sub-basins to support fish habitat at low summer flows. In response to water quantity concerns, the Watershed Team, formerly the WRIA 16 Planning Unit, implemented the following:^{12,13}

- ◆ Preparing a Hood Canal-wide surface water and flow monitoring strategy
- ◆ Preparing and implementing a groundwater monitoring plan
- ◆ Conducting an assessment of impaired streams.
- ◆ Preparing a water demand forecast for permit-exempt wells in small stream sub-basins
- ◆ Working with golf courses to reduce water use
- ◆ Educating community members about water availability concerns through publications, presentations, and special meetings

WRIA 14

As of December 2024, the Department of Ecology has adopted watershed plans for WRIA 14 and 15 that meet the requirements of RCW 90.94.030.

WRIA 14 contains eight sub-basins: Case, Goldsborough, Harstine, Hood, Kennedy, Mill, Oakland, and Skookum. All eight sub-basins lie within Mason County though the majority of the Kennedy sub-basin lies within Thurston County.

The WRIA 14 and 15 plan project new permit exempt wells and their consumptive use over a 20-year planning period (2018-2038). The WRIA 14 plan projects 4,294 PE wells over the planning period, with the majority projected for the Oakland sub-basin area. Over the planning period, Mason County's portion is "approximately" 3,765 new PE wells within WRIA 14.¹⁴

The consumptive use from all PE wells within WRIA 14 over the 20-year period is estimated at 760 acre-feet per year. The consumptive use of the 3,765 wells projected for Mason County would be 666 acre-feet per year.

The watershed plan also outlines eight different project types throughout the watershed that would provide an estimated offset of 1,725 acre-feet per year; this would produce a Net Ecological Benefit.

¹² Watershed Management Plan Skokomish-Dosewallips Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA 16) Including the WRIA 14 South Shore Sub-basin, May 11, 2006

¹³ masoncountywa.gov/health/environmental/WRIA/watershed-issues.php

¹⁴ Washington State. Department of Ecology. *Watershed Restoration and Enhancement Plan: WRIA 14 Kennedy-Goldsborough Watershed*. Pub 22-11-016. Department of Ecology, 2024.



WRIA 15

As of December 2024, the Department of Ecology has adopted watershed plans for WRIA 14 and 15 that meet the requirements of RCW 90.94.030.

WRIA 15 lies within portions of Kitsap, Pierce, Mason, and King counties and is divided into seven sub-basins for the purposes of the watershed planning; these sub-basins are Bainbridge Island, McNeil Island/Anderson Island/Ketron Island, North Hood Canal, South Hood Canal, South Sound, Vashon–Maury Island, and West Sound. The South Hood Canal sub-basin as well as a small portion of the South Sound sub-basin are within the boundaries of Mason County.

The WRIA 15 plan projects 5,215 PE wells over the planning period with 1,301 of those wells located within Mason County.

The consumptive use from all PE wells within WRIA 15 over the 20-year period is estimated at 717.8 acre-feet per year. The consumptive use of the 1,301 PE wells within Mason County would be 179.5 acre-feet per year.

The watershed plan outlines fifteen different project types throughout the watershed that would provide an estimated offset of 2,873 acre-feet per year; this would produce a Net Ecological Benefit.¹⁵

WRIA 22

The Chehalis Basin Watershed Management plan was originally adopted in 2004; Ecology adopted the addendum in 2021 which was drafted in response to the Streamflow Restoration Law. The Chehalis Basin includes WRIA 22 and 23 with WRIA 22 encompassing about 7% of Mason County. There are nineteen sub-basins within WRIA 22/23, two of which are within Mason County. The Satsop and Cloquallum-Delezenne sub-basins are partially within Mason County.

The WRIA 22/23 plan projects 4,555 PE wells during the planning period (2018-2040). The consumptive water use from these wells over the planning period is estimated at 504.8 acre-feet per year. The total number of projects identified in the plan was seventy-four and was estimated at an offset benefit of 5,175 acre-feet per year. Of those seventy-four projects, the total offset from projects with a high/medium certainty of implementation is 3,290 acre-feet a year.¹⁶

Since the WRIA 22/23 plan has been in place since 2021, Ecology has been able to assess plan implementation. The number of new PE wells installed between 2018 and September 2023 is 609 with a calculated consumptive use of 66.99 acre-feet per year. One water offset project has been completed with an offset benefit of 24 acre-feet per year. Despite only one project being complete there are thirty-two other projects with secured funding. Also, at the time of Ecology's

¹⁵ Washington State. Department of Ecology. *Watershed Restoration and Enhancement Plan: WRIA 15 Kitsap Watershed*. Pub 22-11-017. Department of Ecology, 2024.

¹⁶ Chehalis Basin Partnership. *Chehalis Watershed (WRIA 22/23) Response to 2018 Streamflow Restoration Law: Addendum to the Chehalis Watershed Management Plan*. Northwest Hydraulic Consultants Inc., 2020.



assessment installation of PE wells was 51% below the rate that was projected in the WRIA 22/23 Plan addendum.¹⁷

In summary, beyond new watershed management plans that assess the potential streamflow impacts, RCW 90.94 also requires the County to record to title water withdraw limitations for all new permit exempt water connections and collect a fee, a portion of which is transmitted to the Department of Ecology for continued watershed planning and assessment efforts.

The next steps for continued support of water availability within the County will be secured funding and implementation of offset projects within WRIAs planning under RCW 90.94.

3.6 Siting Essential Public Facilities

Essential public facilities (EPFs) are usually capital facilities, typically difficult to site, including: airports; state educational facilities; state and regional transportation facilities; state and local correctional facilities; solid waste handling facilities; and inpatient facilities, including substance abuse, mental health, group homes, secure transitional facilities, and other facilities defined by RCW 36.70A.200.

When siting EPFs in Washington State, it is crucial to adhere to the Growth Management Act (GMA) requirements, which emphasize ensuring these facilities are strategically placed to support the health, safety, and well-being of communities while promoting sustainable development such as schools, parks, public safety buildings, water treatment facilities, and transportation infrastructure in a manner that is consistent with comprehensive plans. These plans must address the needs of urban and rural areas, avoid sprawl, and promote compact, well-connected development patterns. Additionally, public participation is a key element in the process, ensuring that the community is involved in decision-making and that the siting of EPFs supports the goals of the community while mitigating any negative environmental or social impacts. Local governments are required to designate specific areas within urban growth boundaries for such facilities to ensure coordinated development that balances growth with resource conservation.

The State Office of Financial Management (OFM) is required by GMA to maintain a list of those state EPFs that are required or likely to be built within the next six years. The County's comprehensive plan and development regulations may not preclude the siting of such state facilities.

When EPFs are proposed that are not addressed in the zoning code, or for which zoning may be precluded by Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs), the County will handle proposals in the manner prescribed by the CWPPs.

¹⁷ Washington State. Department of Ecology. *Watershed Plan Implementation Assessment for the Chehalis Basin (Chehalis Watershed)*. Pub 23-11-008. Department of Ecology, March 2024.



3.7 Annexation

3.7.1 Annexation Guidance

Counties do not directly annex land; rather, annexation is a process by which cities incorporate adjacent unincorporated areas, often within designated UGAs. The county plays a key role in coordinating and facilitating annexations to ensure consistency with comprehensive plans, infrastructure planning, and service delivery.

This process ensures that annexations occur in a coordinated manner, supporting efficient urban growth while maintaining service continuity and alignment with regional planning objectives. The annexation process generally follows the steps outlined below.

Annexation Process

Identification of Annexation Area

- ◆ The proposed annexation area must be within the city's UGA and align with city and county growth management policies.
- ◆ The annexation should support efficient urban development and the provision of municipal services.

Initiation of Annexation

- ◆ *Petition Method:* Property owners representing a required percentage of assessed property value (e.g., 60%) submit a petition requesting annexation.
- ◆ *Election Method:* Registered voters within the proposed annexation area vote on whether to approve annexation.
- ◆ *Interlocal Agreement Method:* The city and county enter into an agreement to annex specific areas, often including provisions for the transition of services and tax revenue allocation.

Review and Approval

- ◆ The city evaluates the annexation proposal for consistency with land use plans, infrastructure capacity, and fiscal impacts.
- ◆ The county reviews the proposal and may provide input regarding service agreements, boundary adjustments, and intergovernmental coordination.
- ◆ A public hearing is typically conducted to gather input from residents and stakeholders.

Finalization and Implementation

- ◆ Upon approval by the city council or governing body, the annexation is formally recorded.
- ◆ Municipal services, including law enforcement, utilities, and zoning administration, transition from the county to the city.
- ◆ The county updates official records and tax rolls to reflect the new jurisdictional boundary.



Concurrency Requirements

Concurrency requirements for the annexation process ensure that necessary infrastructure and public services are available at the time of annexation or planned for imminent development. Before approving an annexation, the county and annexing jurisdiction must demonstrate that essential services—such as roads, water, sewer, schools, emergency response, and parks—meet established level of service (LOS) standards and can support the anticipated growth. This process involves conducting impact assessments, coordinating with utility providers and regional agencies, and securing funding or agreements for service expansions. If infrastructure is insufficient, annexation may be delayed until improvements are planned or constructed. By enforcing concurrency, the county ensures that annexations lead to well-planned, sustainable growth without straining existing resources or diminishing service quality for current and future residents.

3.7.2 Interagency Coordination

Mason County shall collaborate with municipalities, state agencies, and tribal governments to ensure consistent land use planning and promote equitable and sustainable growth while preserving critical environmental resources.

3.8 Land Use Goals and Policies

Countywide Planning Policies

Urban Growth

- Goal LU 1** **Assure compliance with the Growth Management Act, the County-Wide Planning Policies, the Comprehensive plan and Land Use Map in all adopted land use, environmental and development regulations and subsequent land use decisions and approvals.**
- Policy LU 1.1** Review and amend the Comprehensive Plan on a minimum of once every 10 years, and if needed on an annual basis, consistent with the requirements of the GMA. Revisions to the Land Use Map and/or implementing regulations shall be in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan policies and criteria.
- Policy LU 1.2** Maintain four categories of Comprehensive Plan amendments to be considered during the annual review of the Comprehensive Plan: Policy Amendments, Map Amendments, General Amendments, Site Specific Amendments (i.e. LAMIRDS).
- Policy LU 1.3** Allow submission of requests to the County for map amendments related to: errors in mapping rural densities, uses; errors in mapping boundaries of UGA's, RAC's, Hamlets; errors in mapping other LAMIRDS; errors in interpretation of criteria for land use designations.
- Policy LU 1.4** Mapping errors that are clearly erroneous based on inaccurate information or technical error may be corrected at the discretion of the Board of County Commissioners within 180 days of passage of this update. Map corrections of



this nature shall not require a Comprehensive Plan amendment. After the 180 days, mapping errors will be processed as part of the annual comprehensive plan amendment cycle.

Policy LU 1.5 Promote development which supports multimodal forms of transportation and pedestrian safety.

Goal LU 2 Foster collaboration between the county and incorporated cities to plan and manage urban growth areas in a way that promotes sustainable development, efficient infrastructure, and cohesive growth patterns. This partnership will ensure that urban expansion aligns with long-term environmental, economic, and community needs while preserving the character of each jurisdiction.

Policy LU 2.1 The County and the City shall each notify the other of any discretionary land use permit or development proposal within the Urban Growth Area or within 1000 feet of the UGA boundary. Such notification shall be adequate to provide an opportunity to review and comment on such applications prior to action by the designated body of the jurisdiction.

Policy LU 2.2 All threshold determinations pursuant to the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) issued by the County for proposals within the UGA or within 1000 feet of the UGA, will be provided to the City. All such threshold determinations issued by the City for projects or areas within 1000 feet of the City boundary shall be provided to the County. Such notice shall be adequate to provide County staff with the opportunity to review and comment on such actions prior to expiration of comment periods.

Policy LU 2.3 The County and City shall each take due heed of comments offered by the other regarding any application for discretionary land use permits being processed by the other. Each jurisdiction shall have formal standing for appeal of decisions made by the other on such matters.

Reduce Sprawl

Goal LU 3 Encourage development in urban areas to reduce sprawl and ensure adequate public facilities and services.

Policy LU 3.1 The Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) should reflect the abilities of service purveyors to provide urban levels of facilities and services during the 20-year planning period.

Policy LU 3.2 To minimize inefficient provision of essential urban services, annexation of additional property into the UGA shall be facilitated whenever desired by property owners and when necessary for efficient service provision.

Policy LU 3.3 Annexation of unincorporated islands as they occur shall be encouraged.

Policy LU 3.4 The jurisdictions will discuss formulas and methods for amortization of sales tax benefit lost by the County after annexation.



- Policy LU 3.5 The jurisdictions will discuss formulas and methods for amortization of County owned capital facilities transferred to the City as a result of annexation.
- Policy LU 3.8 The County and City shall each take due heed of comments offered by the other regarding any application for discretionary land use permits being processed by the other. Each jurisdiction shall have formal standing for appeal of decisions made by the other on such matters.

Subdivisions

Goal LU 4 Ensure that land subdivision within Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) supports urban-density development and a smooth transition to full urban services. Subdivisions should be designed for future infrastructure, allow phased development if needed, and incorporate a connected roadway network that aligns with city standards.

Policy LU 4.1 Subdivision of land shall facilitate current or eventual residential development at urban densities in Urban Growth Areas.

Policy LU 4.2 In areas within the Urban Growth Area, where public sewer and water are not available, subdivisions must be designed to allow more intensive development when such services become available. This can be accomplished in one of the following two ways:

- ◆ Before annexation or before urban services are otherwise available at a property, subdivision shall be to urban densities. However, development may be allowed wherein non-urban services are provided on several lots in support of development on others.
- ◆ Before annexation or before urban services are otherwise available on a property, subdivision of the property may provide for a number of lots meeting the definition of urban density while the remainder of the property is maintained as a single large lot. The large lot portion may be used to site non-urban type services such as wells and septic systems to serve development on the smaller, urban size, lots.

Policy LU 4.3 Subdivided properties that meet the definition or intent of Policy 5.2, and which are required to meet city standards, may have some or all standards deferred until City Services are provided. This deferment will only be granted if, as a condition of approval of such subdivisions, an obligation to bring the property to specified city standard at that time is provided as an attachment to title.

Policy LU 4.4 Proposed private or public roads provided in new subdivision shall have a layout of the roadways that supports the modified grid street pattern matching up with the City road system. Use of cul-de-sacs should be minimized.

General

Goal LU 5 Encourage diverse and sustainable development with varied lot sizes, housing types, and densities to support all income levels.



Policy LU 5.1 Encourage a range of lot sizes, development densities and housing types to meet the needs of a diverse population and provide affordable housing choices for all income levels.

Policy LU 5.2 Establish an Urban Growth Area large enough to minimize restrictions on the residential land supply that would limit access to affordable housing for numerous economic segments of the County's residents.

Policy LU 5.3 Provide clustering, planned unit developments, and other innovative techniques which will result in a greater variety of lot sizes and housing types.

Policy LU 5.4 Provide for a new fully contained community, this is required to provide for variety of housing options for households with different incomes.

Goal LU 6 Ensure the long-term protection and sustainability of critical areas by integrating Best Available Science (BAS) into policy development, land use planning, and regulatory updates to safeguard ecological functions and natural resources.

Policy LU 6.1 Protection of critical areas shall include best available science in the updating of policies and development regulations.

Policy LU 6.2 Evaluate all proposed UGA expansions for the presence of 100-year floodplains using best available science and FEMA-designated flood hazard maps. If such areas are present, assess whether statutory exceptions apply and ensure that no feasible alternatives exist outside the floodplain.

Goal LU 7 Promote land use patterns that maximize the efficiency of public infrastructure investments by directing growth to areas with adequate facilities and services, and by coordinating land use decisions with capital improvement planning.

Policy LU 7.1 Coordinate future land use designations with the County's Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) to ensure that areas targeted for growth can be served by adequate roads, utilities, transit, and public services within the planning horizon.

Policy LU 7.2 Prioritize infill, redevelopment, and development within Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) where public investments in infrastructure and services have already been made or are planned.

Policy LU 7.3 Avoid designation or rezoning of new development areas that would require substantial expansion of infrastructure unless supported by a funding strategy and consistent with adopted level-of-service (LOS) standards.

Policy LU 7.4 Apply a concurrency review process to ensure new development does not proceed without adequate infrastructure, including transportation, schools, parks, water, and wastewater systems.



- Policy LU 7.5 Promote public-private partnerships to coordinate infrastructure investments with phased land development, especially in mixed-use centers or strategic growth areas.
- Policy LU 7.6 Discourage the extension of urban services into rural areas unless specifically permitted under GMA exceptions (e.g., LAMIRDs or existing rural services), and ensure that rural development remains consistent with rural character and infrastructure capacity.
- Policy LU 7.7 Incorporate lifecycle cost analysis for major infrastructure investments to evaluate long-term fiscal impacts and ensure sustainable growth patterns.
- Policy LU 7.8 Encourage the co-location of infrastructure, utilities, and community facilities to improve efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and enhance service delivery in growth areas.

Master Development Plan Policies

Goal LU 8 Adopt regulations to guide the location and sitting of Master Development Plans within rural and urban areas, consistent with policy direction contained throughout the Comprehensive Plan. These regulations shall:

- Policy LU 8.1 Clarify that a Master Development Plan is appropriate for large contiguous areas of land under common ownership or control, with common characteristics and connectivity. Include criteria for when and where a Development Master Plan may be appropriate within rural lands and within urban growth areas.
- Policy LU 8.2 Require a Master Development Plan pursuant to RCW 36.70A.350.
- Policy LU 8.3 Require that adequate road, water, drainage, sewer and/or septic capacity exist or is planned to meet the demands of the proposed development within the Master Development Plan. Consider alternative standards for utilities and roads that address rural and urban character and utilize low impact development techniques in harmony with the unique environmental characteristics of the area.
- Policy LU 8.4 Provide transportation circulation that addresses public service and emergency response requirements and the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Policy LU 8.5 Encourage flexibility in design to promote a variety of housing types, densities, and affordability. Accommodate a mix of commercial, retail and residential uses, as well as opportunities for social and cultural expression while preserving the areas natural features. Individual lot sizes should vary in a Master Development Plan to promote a range of housing options and the preservation of unique and fragile environmental features and critical areas.
- Policy LU 8.6 Provide levels of service compatible with the project's location, development intensity and the surrounding lands uses. Proposed Master Development Plans in rural areas shall not require urban services.



- Policy LU 8.7 Allow for increased density and/or a reduction in dimensional standards within the Master Development Plan when enhanced on-site amenities are incorporated into the overall development, such as open spaces, community facilities, landscaping and buffers, recreational opportunities, and other similar amenities that benefit the community and the environment and exceed the existing minimum requirements.
- Policy LU 8.8 Include a process to allow phased development within the Master Development Plan in an orderly, coordinated, and thoughtful manner. The phasing plan for the development shall demonstrate that the various segments of the development are served by adequate public facilities and services.
- Policy LU 8.9 Promote the incorporation of LID techniques in the development and management of the area within the Master Development Plan. Additionally, include technical guidance on the use of LID techniques in public and private developments within the Master Development Plan. These techniques shall:
- ◆ Preserve the site characteristics, including natural terrain, drainage patterns, soil structure, natural hydrologic cycle, and native vegetation;
 - ◆ Mimic natural rainfall capture capacity in areas of site disturbance, and ensure the protection of property and public safety in the design of overflow capacity, and
 - ◆ Incorporate measures to manage stormwater within the Master Development Plan that will enhance water quality downstream.
- Policy LU 8.10 Require all Master Development Plans to include specific design guidelines and development standards to ensure that the proposed development promotes community identity, has a consistent theme, and is integrated and compatible with its surroundings.



DRAFT



4 Housing

4.1 Introduction

This Housing Element establishes a framework for ensuring that current and future housing needs are addressed for all residents of all income levels. Housing plays a critical role in shaping Mason County's economic vitality, community well-being, and quality of life. As the County continues to grow, this element provides a foundation for addressing policies and strategies that will attempt to support housing affordability, variety in housing types, and access.

This element aligns with the requirements of the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) and reflects local housing priorities identified through community engagement and data analysis following Washington Department of Commerce directed guidance. It assesses the existing housing inventory, identifies gaps in housing availability, and outlines strategies to support a range of housing types that accommodate changing demographics and workforce needs of Mason County.

Mason County and the City of Shelton, which together represent the majority of the county's population and housing activity, have jointly addressed housing planning in this element to fulfill the requirements of both jurisdictions. While the County and City are separate jurisdictions with their own Comprehensive Plans, the two have coordinated closely to ensure alignment between their respective Housing Elements. This collaborative approach is intended to promote consistency in housing goals, policies, and strategies across jurisdictional boundaries, enabling a more effective and cohesive response to shared housing challenges and opportunities.

To support this effort, Mason County and the City of Shelton commissioned a joint Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) in 2025, prepared by FCS Group. This assessment serves as the technical foundation for the Housing Element, offering detailed projections of future housing needs by income level, housing type, and tenure (owner- and renter-occupied units). It also provides analysis of demographic trends, housing affordability, and land capacity to guide housing policy decisions. The HNA ensures this element complies with recent updates to the GMA, including requirements under HB 1220 to plan for housing that is affordable to all economic segments of the population.

4.2 Existing Housing Inventory

Local housing inventory and tenancy patterns shed light on housing conditions and demand preferences. Understanding these patterns enables the County to develop targeted strategies



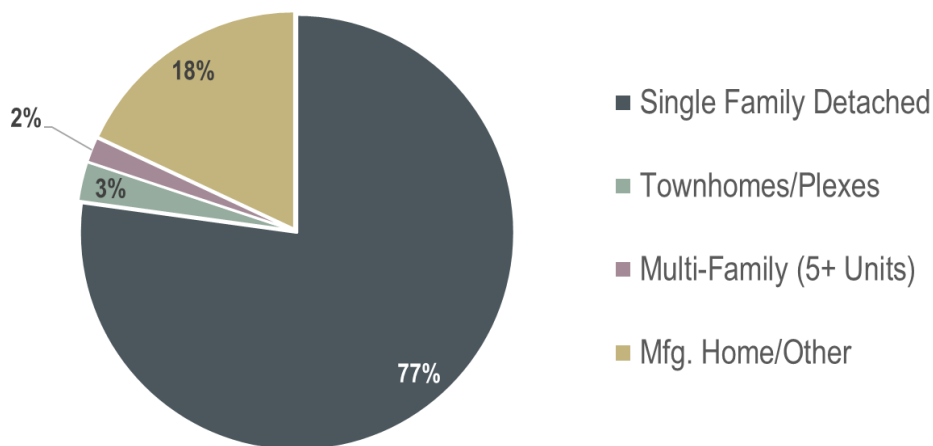
that address the needs of different household requirements, from young families to aging residents.

4.2.1 Housing Characteristics

Housing Types

Like other rural and suburban counties, the existing housing inventory in Mason County is predominantly single-family detached. In 2022, there were 33,461 total housing units in Mason County, 77 percent of which were single-family detached units (see **Figure 4-1**). The remaining inventory in Mason County includes manufactured homes (18 percent), townhomes, duplex or triplex units (three percent); and multifamily units within structures with 2 or more dwelling units (two percent).

Figure 4-1. Existing Housing by Type, Mason County, 2022



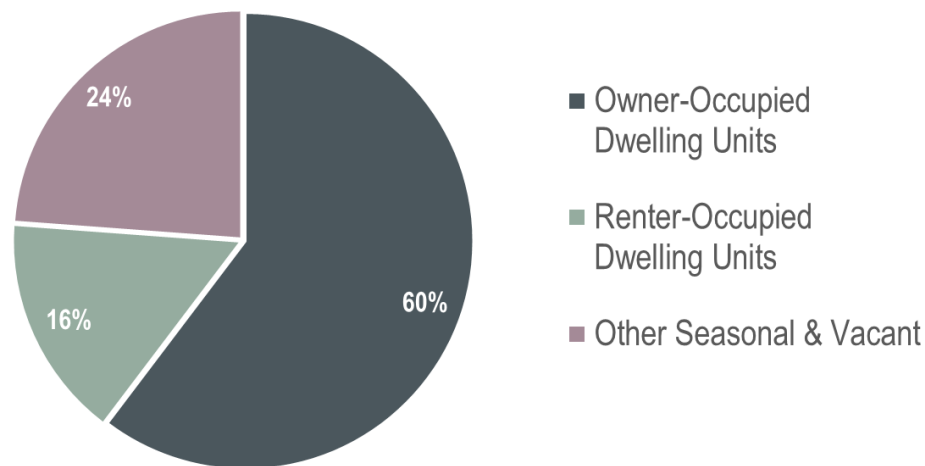
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25032

Housing Occupancy

Mason County is a preferred destination for retirees and seasonal residents who enjoy the semi-rural community character and proximity to the Olympic Mountains and waters of the Puget Sound. This can have a bearing on tenancy and home ownership. In 2022, 60 percent of all housing units were owner-occupied, 16 percent were renter-occupied, and 24 percent consisted primarily of seasonal housing units and to a lesser extent vacant units (see **Figure 4-2**). Overall housing vacancy rates within Mason County for primary residences are very low (below five percent) and vacancy rates are near zero for long-term rentals.



Figure 4-2. Existing Housing by Occupancy, Mason County, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25032

Age of Housing Stock

Figure 4-3 reflects housing units by year of construction. As of 2022, the median age of all housing units in Mason County was 31 years (built in 1991). However, the median age for the rental housing inventory was much older at 40 years (built in 1982).

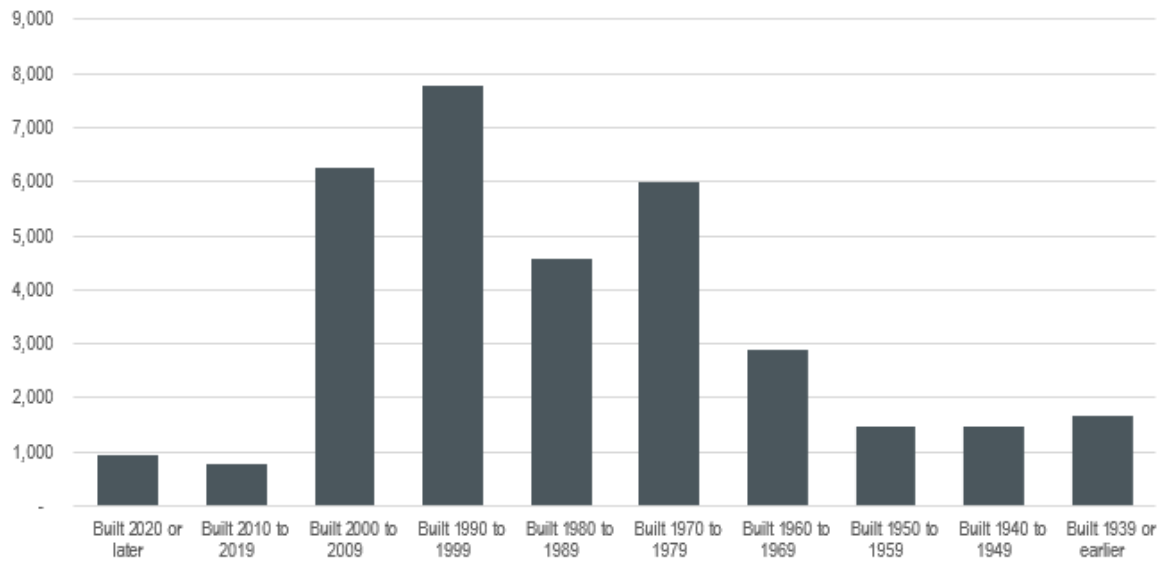
In comparison with statewide averages, the median age of owner-occupied housing in Mason County was 29 years compared with 38 years for the state. The median age for rental housing in Mason County is nearly the same as the state (39 years for Mason County versus 38 years for the state).

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), today's manufactured homes have an average life expectancy of 30 to 55 years, depending on the level of maintenance.

With a current inventory of approximately 6,700 mobile homes, it is likely that many, if not most, of these units will need to be refurbished or replaced over the next 20 years.



Figure 4-3. Dwelling Units by Year Built, Mason County



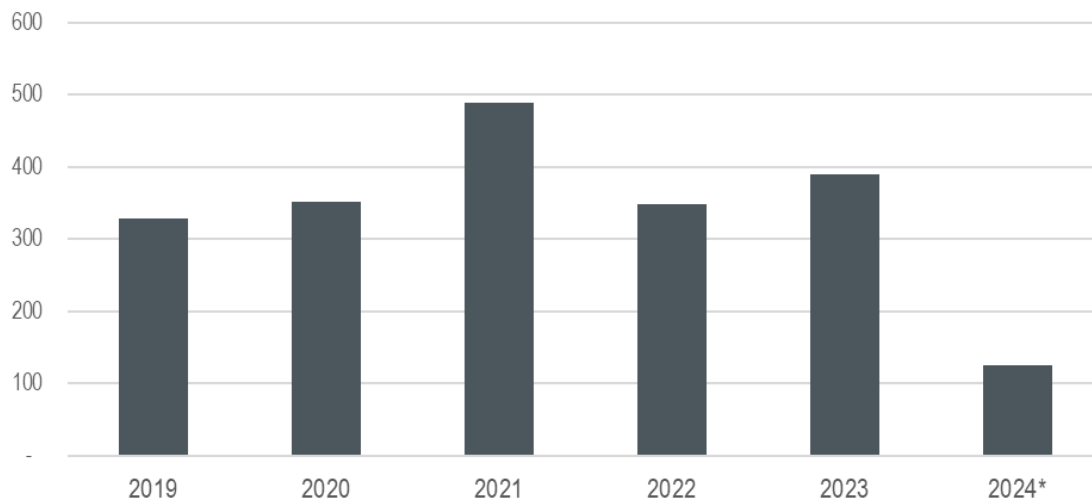
4.2.2 Recent Residential Construction Activity

New housing construction permits issued in the County indicate consistent development activity over the past several years. Mason County issued new residential construction permits at an average rate of 382 per year between 2019 and 2024 (see **Figure 4-4**).

While Mason County's overall housing production appears to be on pace with projected needs, the affordability and type of housing being delivered remain key concerns. A detailed rent gap analysis, included in Section 4.2.3, highlights significant mismatches between the income levels of renter households and the availability of appropriately priced rental units.



Figure 4-4. New Residential Housing Units Permitted, Mason County (2019–2024)



Source: City of Shelton and Mason County; (*)Through March

4.2.3 Housing Values and Rents

After peaking in 2022, home values in Mason County have slightly declined. As indicated in **Figure 4-5**, the median home sales price in Shelton and Belfair were \$399,348 and \$470,573, respectively (as of January 2024). In both communities, home prices increased by nearly 10 percent annually since 2020. In comparison with other cities in the southern Puget Sound, Mason County home prices are increasing at a much faster rate.

The COVID-19 pandemic also triggered noticeable shifts in work and lifestyle that likely influenced Mason County's housing market. Puget Sound Region-wide data indicates teleworking surged during the pandemic—from roughly 25% of workers teleworking at least once per week in 2019, to over 50% in 2021—before settling at around 36% by 2023.¹⁸ National research shows this increase in remote work contributed to migration away from dense urban areas toward smaller metro and rural counties in 2020–21.¹⁹ Although rural Washington didn't see a massive exodus, rural out-migration slowed and many counties reversed population losses.²⁰ At the same time, studies documented a surge in retirements (sometimes called a "COVID retirement boom") which also supported in-migration to rural and retirement-friendly counties.²¹ While localized migration and retirement data for Mason County are more difficult to track, these regional and national trends suggest that telework flexibility and increased retirements may have encouraged new residents, particularly remote workers and retirees, to consider Mason County as an attractive destination post-pandemic.

¹⁸ Puget Sound Regional Council, [Puget Sound Trends](#), 2024

¹⁹ Economic Innovation Group, [How Remote Work is Shifting Population Growth Across the U.S.](#), 2022

²⁰ Petersen, Julia K, et al. [Changes to Rural Migration in the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), Rural Sociology 89(1), 2024

²¹ Social Security Administration, [The COVID Retirement Boom](#), 2025



Figure 4-5. Home Value Price Index in Select Markets

	Jan-20	Jan-21	Jan-22	Jan-24	Annual Avg. Change %
Belfair	\$329,000	\$380,000	\$501,000	\$470,573	9.4%
Shelton	\$274,000	\$346,000	\$459,664	\$399,348	9.9%
Olympia	\$355,000	\$411,000	\$510,000	\$508,088	9.4%
Tacoma	\$340,000	\$398,000	\$482,000	\$460,851	7.9%

Source: Zillow.com; analysis by FCS

The HUD fair market rents within Mason County range from \$877 for an efficiency unit to \$1,833 for a four-bedroom unit, as shown in **Table 4-1**.

Table 4-1. Maximum Rent Limits for HOME Projects, Mason County							
	Efficiency	1BR	2BR	3BR	4BR	5BR	6BR
Low Home Rent Limit	\$877	\$939	\$1,127	\$1,303	\$1,453	\$1,603	\$1,753
High Home Rent Limit (max allowed)	\$955	\$961	\$1,261	\$1,660	\$1,833	\$2,003	\$2,174
Fair Market Rent	\$955	\$961	\$1,261	\$1,767	\$1,917	\$2,205	\$2,492
50% Rent Limit	\$877	\$939	\$1,127	\$1,303	\$1,453	\$1,603	\$1,752
65% Rent Limit	\$1,121	\$1,203	\$1,444	\$1,660	\$1,833	\$2,003	\$2,174

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, June 2025²²

Rent Gap Analysis

As part of the Housing Needs Analysis completed in January 2025, a rent gap analysis was conducted to assess how well the existing rental housing stock aligns with the income levels of renter households in Mason County. A rent gap analysis compares the number of renter households at various income levels with the supply of rental housing units affordable to those same income groups. This comparison helps identify mismatches between the demand for and supply of rental housing, highlighting where there are shortages (gaps) or surpluses.

Based on 2022 Census data, Mason County has a significant shortfall of rental units affordable to the lowest-income households—those earning less than \$20,000 annually—resulting in an estimated deficit of 881 units, as shown in **Figure 4-7**. There is also a smaller shortfall of 212 rental units affordable to households earning more than \$50,000 annually. In contrast, the County has a surplus of rental housing affordable to households earning between \$20,000 and \$50,000.

This imbalance contributes to “renting down,” a dynamic where higher-income households occupy units that would otherwise be affordable to lower-income households. This trend

²² https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/home-datasets/files/HOME_RentLimits_State_WA_2025.pdf



increases pressure on the lower-cost rental market, contributing to affordability challenges for the households most in need.

In the City of Shelton, a similar pattern emerges: a surplus of approximately 401 units affordable to households earning between \$35,000 and \$75,000, alongside deficits at the lower (384 units) and upper (18 units) ends of the income spectrum, as shown in **Figure 4-8**.

The findings of the rent gap analysis underscore the need for more deeply affordable rental housing options in both the County and its urban centers, as well as the importance of a well-balanced rental market that serves residents across all income levels. These imbalances highlight that, while overall housing production may appear sufficient, the types and price points of units being built are not necessarily aligned with the needs of renter households. This underscores the importance of evaluating not just the volume of new housing, but also its affordability, design, and geographic distribution to ensure that development responds to actual community demand.

Figure 4-6. Mason County Renter Households by Income Compared to Rental Supply, 2022

Median Household Income Range	Affordable Monthly Rent Cost*	Renter-Occupied Households	Existing Rental Inventory	Housing (Gap) or Surplus	Pent Up Demand
\$75,000 or more:	\$1,875	1,172	1,067	(105)	(212) <i>market rate gap</i>
\$50,000 to \$74,999:	\$1,250-\$1,875	935	828	(107)	
\$35,000 to \$49,999:	\$875-\$1,250	442	1,242	800	
\$20,000 to \$34,999:	\$500-\$875	711	1,004	293	
Less than \$20,000:	Less than \$500	1,192	339	(853)	(881) <i>subsidized housing gap</i>
Zero or Negative Income	Requires subsidy	853	825	(28)	
Total		5,305	5,305	-	(1,093)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Tables S25103 and B25063; FCS Group

*Calculated as 30% of income range based on HUD guidelines

Figure 4-7. Shelton Renter Households by Income Compared to Rental Supply, 2022

Median Household Income Range	Owner-Occupied Housing Units	Affordable Monthly Rent Cost*	Renter-Occupied Households	Existing Rental Inventory	Housing (Gap) or Surplus	Pent Up Demand
\$75,000 or more:	981	\$1,875	356	338	(18)	(18) <i>market rate gap</i>
\$50,000 to \$74,999:	359	\$1,250-\$1,875	207	415	208	
\$35,000 to \$49,999:	181	\$875-\$1,250	184	378	194	
\$20,000 to \$34,999:	151	\$500-\$875	318	250	(69)	
Less than \$20,000:	118	Less than \$500	439	143	(296)	(384) <i>subsidized housing gap</i>
Zero or Negative Income	13	Requires subsidy	154	135	(19)	
Total	1,803		1,658	1,658	-	(401)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Tables S25103 and B25063; FCS Group

*Calculated as 30% of income range based on HUD guidelines

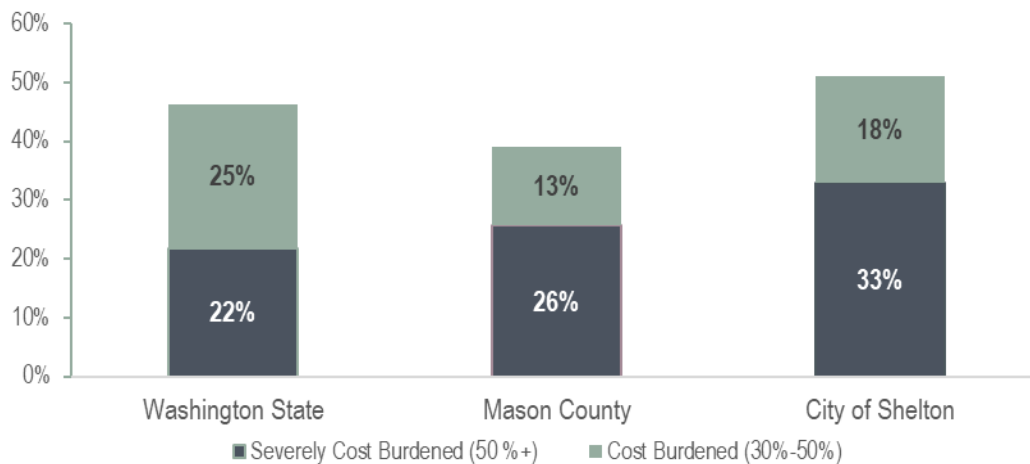


Cost-Burdened Households

According to HUD, households are considered to be “rent burdened” if they pay over 30 percent of their income on rent. Households are “severely rent burdened” when they pay over 50 percent of their income on rent.

As shown in **Figure 4-9**, 26 percent of the renter households in Mason County were severely rent burdened in 2022, which is higher than Washington state as a whole (22 percent). However, within the City of Shelton, a third of rental households (33 percent) were severely rent burdened in 2022.

Figure 4-8: Rent-Burdened Households, Mason County, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25070

It should be noted that there are additional factors referenced by HUD that impact “affordability” more than just house rent/price and number of bedrooms. Costs also account for neighborhood school quality, public safety, and access to jobs and amenities. The percentage of income standard for housing affordability may not fully consider the effects of housing and neighborhood quality. Housing that may appear affordable based on cost alone, for example, might be far from employment centers, increasing the percentage of income a household dedicates to transportation. A household may also choose a low-quality housing unit or a low-opportunity neighborhood to reduce housing costs.

4.3 Housing Demand and Needs Assessment

Understanding current and future housing needs is essential for ensuring that Mason County can accommodate growth while maintaining housing affordability and breadth of housing types. The Mason County Housing Needs Assessment was completed by FCS Group in January 2025. This assessment evaluated the key factors influencing housing demand, including population growth, household composition, income levels, and workforce housing needs, to identify Mason County’s future housing demand, as summarized in this section.



4.3.1 Forecasted Population

Long range 2020–2045 population growth projections from the Office of Financial Management indicate that Mason County could expect to have a net increase of new residents ranging from 1,070 new residents in the low scenario to 26,461 in the high scenario. The medium growth scenario, which serves as the basis for the housing need projections in this Comprehensive Plan, anticipates 17,206 new residents will be added between 2020 and 2045 (see **Figure 4-10**).

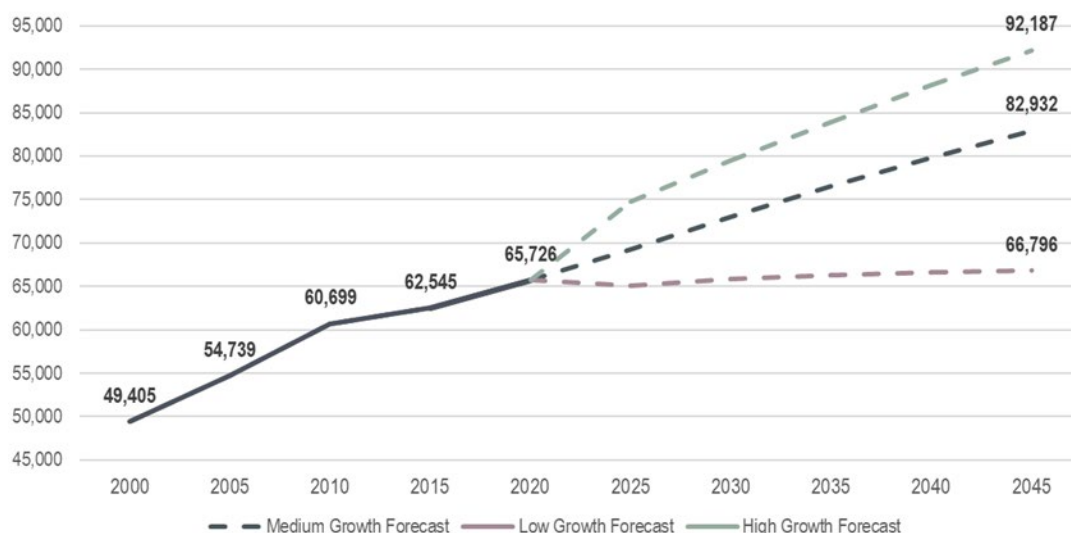


Figure 4-9. Population Growth Forecast, Mason County, 2000–2045

Source: OFM 2022 GMA Population Projections

4.3.2 Housing Unit Forecasts

The Washington Department of Commerce has developed a statistical model, the Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT), for forecasting future housing needs by income level. The HAPT assumes all new housing is for primary residences and long-term rentals, building in a six percent vacancy rate for owned and rented dwelling units for price control purposes, and assumes all existing homes remain in the housing stock.

Based on the medium growth population forecast within the OFM estimated population range for 2045, Mason County should plan to accommodate 8,181 additional (net new) housing units between 2020–2045, including 5,726 in unincorporated areas and UGAs and 2,455 within the City of Shelton. **Table 4-2** outlines the estimated residences by type of construction and location from 2024 through 2045. The total 2020 to 2045 requirement for 8,181 new dwelling units has been reduced by the home construction from 2020 through 2024, as shown in **Figure 4-11**.



Table 4-2. Mason County Housing Needs, Method D

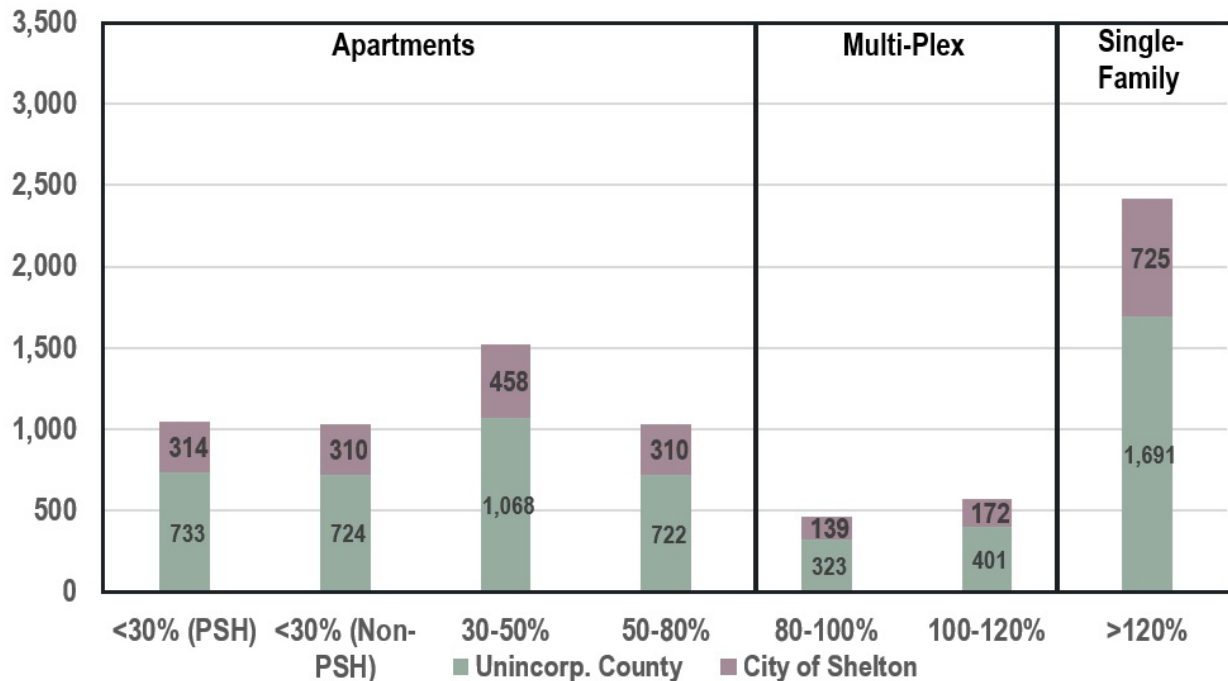
Housing Type	Shelton City & UGA	Allyn UGA	Belfair UGA	Other Rural County	Total Housing Method D	Housing Dist.	Housing Need: HAP Method A	Housing Need: HAP Method B
Single Family Detached	1,161	488	325	348	2,322	33%	2,305	2,221
Multi-family (2+ units per structure)*	1,537	763	508	148	2,956	42%	3,503	3,587
Mfg. homes, cottages & ADUs	176	158	106	1,320	1,759	25%	1,230	1,230
Total Housing Units	2,872	1,409	939	1,818	7,037	100%	7,037	7,037
Estimated Capture of Housing Need	41%	20%	13%	26%	100%		100%	100%
Projected Population Increase	7,401	3,349	2,233	1,819	14,801		14,801	14,801

Source: Derived from OFM Medium Growth Forecast, City of Shelton, and Belfair UGA Planned Action EIS; includes part-time seasonal resident demand. *Includes group quarters and emergency shelters.

The forecasted housing need by income level and housing type is shown below. To optimize housing attainability, future housing growth forecasts from the HAPT model indicate that the County should plan to accommodate 1,074 public supportive housing units (such as deed restricted rental subsidized housing), 91 emergency housing units/beds, in addition to 7,016 private market rate housing units between 2020–2045 (see **Figure 4-10**). Additional details on the methodology used for this housing forecast can be found in the Mason County Housing Needs Assessment, **Appendix A**.



Figure 4-10. Mason County Projected Housing Needs by Income, Mason County, 2020–2045



Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

4.3.3 Addressing Future Needs

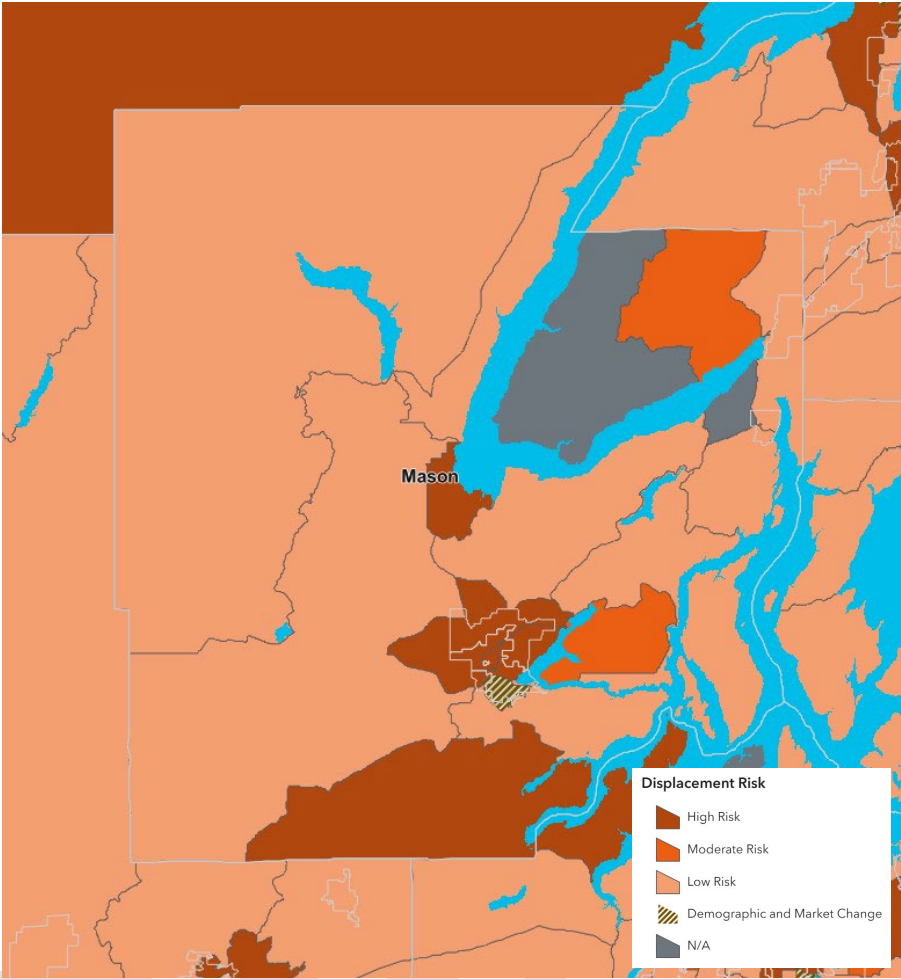
The Washington State Legislature passage of HB 1220 provides new guidelines by which communities must address housing needed to accommodate future growth. The new measure instructs local governments to “plan for and accommodate” housing affordable to all income levels, with projections of future housing needs that are income-based.

Like many rural communities across the U.S., an increasing share of Mason County households are experiencing economic hardship as the overall cost of living rises faster than income levels. Households experiencing cost burden are particularly vulnerable to displacement, a risk that Mason County may consider when formulating housing policies moving forward. A displacement risk map for Mason County is shown in **Figure 4-11**.²³

²³ Source: [Washington State Department of Commerce](#)



Figure 4-11. Mason County Displacement Risk Map



4.4 Housing Goals and Policies

The following goals and policies are intended to address future housing production in accordance with the housing needs described above. In particular, they aim to support a more balanced housing supply by encouraging a greater diversity of housing types—including apartments, multiplexes, and smaller single-family homes—that are currently underrepresented in the market.

Housing Affordability

Goal H 1 Support opportunities and reduce regulatory / procedural obstacles to provide a continuous and adequate supply of residential housing for the County's anticipated population growth.

Policy H 1.1 Ensure that all residents of Mason County regardless of lived experience have an equal opportunity to obtain adequate, safe, and sanitary housing suitable to their needs and financial resources.

Policy H 1.2 Ensure land use decisions allow for a continuum of supportive, transitional, and emergency housing strategies for homeless people to avoid growth in the homelessness population.

Policy H 1.3 Promote a continuum of housing and related services for people with disabilities or have special housing needs, including but not limited to permanent supportive and transitional housing.

Policy H 1.4 Support the implementation of federal and state housing programs that serve the needs of low- households.

Policy H 1.5 Promote pedestrian connectivity within Urban Growth Areas to support residential development and ensure safe, accessible links between housing and schools, parks, commercial areas, and employment centers.

Policy H 1.6 Encourage mixed-use development in designated business zones by allowing residential uses, such as apartments above commercial storefronts or live-work units, where compatible with surrounding uses and consistent with adopted design standards.

Policy H 1.7 Allow the development of residential buildings that have shared facilities, such as single-room occupancy facilities, and micro-housing.

Policy H 1.8 Support the development of tiny homes as a housing option by ensuring compatibility with surrounding uses and adopting State or local development regulations as needed.

Policy H 1.9 Support the timely and efficient processing of all housing development applications, with a continued focus on removing barriers for low-income housing projects through partnerships with housing providers and advocacy organizations.



- Policy H 1.10 Support the efforts of non-profit organizations and community-based housing groups to develop affordable housing for low-income households.
- Policy H 1.11 Identify and remove regulatory barriers that hinder the development of permanently affordable housing, while ensuring compatibility with community goals and development standards.
- Policy H 1.12 Promote innovative housing approaches that expand affordable options and address the needs of vulnerable and overburdened communities.
- Policy H 1.13 Support the preservation and continued use of existing housing stock, particularly affordable units, by promoting programs that assist homeowners and landlords with maintenance, weatherization, and the creation of long-term rental opportunities such as ADUs or room rentals.
- Policy H 1.14 Coordinate all housing policies and programs with the City of Shelton and the Urban Growth Areas of the county.
- Policy H 1.15 Collaborate with the City of Shelton to develop and maintain housing metrics that track construction activity by type, affordability level, and location. Use this data to evaluate progress toward housing goals and adjust policies or implementation strategies as needed.
- Policy H 1.16 Regulate manufactured housing in the same manner as traditional stick-built housing and allow in all zones where single-family detached housing is allowed.

Development Standards

Goal H 2 Reduce regulatory barriers and allow greater flexibility in the housing development process while ensuring that future residential development carefully considers and protects natural ecosystems including wetlands, streams, wildlife habitat, and fresh and marine water quality and quantity.

- Policy H 2.1 Develop consistent, fair, and enforceable regulations that maintain environmental quality and public health and safety standards while minimizing housing development costs.
- Policy H 2.2 When developing housing regulations, consider the balance between housing affordability and environmental quality, design quality, and maintenance of neighborhood.
- Policy H 2.3 Encourage development of housing that is energy efficient and that conserves non-renewable energy resources while also protecting air and water quality and quantity.
- Policy H 2.4 Review and update, if needed, regulations and standards for housing proposed near critical ecosystems and aquifer recharge areas to ensure these areas are protected from degradation.



- Policy H 2.5 Develop standards that facilitate restoration of existing structures for housing purposes.
- Policy H 2.6 Identify and employ cost-effective incentives that are likely to result in an increased supply of housing suitable to the needs and income of all Mason County residents.
- Policy H 2.7 Promote the development of safe and affordable housing that is near jobs, transportation, and daily activities.
- Policy H 2.8 Periodically review, assess, and consider possible revisions to policies related to growth in housing stock, the affordability of housing, and access to housing of choice.

Housing for All

Goal H 3 Support and encourage housing that meets the requirements of all Mason County residents.

- Policy H 3.1 Support locating special-needs housing near services and facilities that best support the intended occupants.
- Policy H 3.2 Adopt a process consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies for the siting of those housing facilities defined under essential public facilities.²⁴
- Policy H 3.3 Prioritize a healthy stock of ADA accessible housing units for individuals with disabilities.

Land Availability

Goal H 4 Provide an adequate supply of residential land within designated growth areas to accommodate long-term housing needs and support planned growth.

- Policy H 4.1 Support the review and adjustment of land use policies and development standards when conditions limit the availability, healthy mix, or feasibility of needed housing types.

²⁴ See RCW [36.70A.200](#) for specific housing facilities under essential public facilities.



5 Economic Development

5.1 Introduction

The Economic Development Element provides an overview of Mason County's economy, summarizes economic partnerships, and identifies objectives and actions to improve the economy.

Creating a prosperous, sustainable economy goes hand in hand with building world-class community—one cannot exist without the other. The Economic Development Element is centered on four integrated objectives: 1) promote local business retention and growth, 2) attract and establish new businesses, 3) cultivate the next generation of businesses and entrepreneurs, and 4) strengthen the economic base. These objectives work to ensure that economic growth benefits all community members while preparing the County to adapt to shifts in the regional economy and aligning with other elements of the Comprehensive Plan. This element of the Comprehensive Plan was developed in coordination with the Economic Development Council of Mason County.

5.2 Existing Economic Conditions and Trends

Mason County's economic history, like that of many local-level economies in Washington, is deeply rooted in natural resource industries. While the economic landscape has evolved over time, industries such as forest products and aquaculture remain critical to Mason County's economy. In recent years, public administration, retail trade, health care, social assistance, and the service industries have grown to become major employers as resource and manufacturing employment has receded. Today, the sector with the greatest immediate growth potential is health care and social assistance.²⁵

In addition to driving the county's economic history, the natural environment is a foundation of Mason County's identity—water and air quality, scenery, and quiet rural character. Protecting, maintaining, and improving the County's natural beauty and environment is integral to economic growth.

²⁵ Mason County EDC 2024 Economic Overview Report; data as of 2023Q4

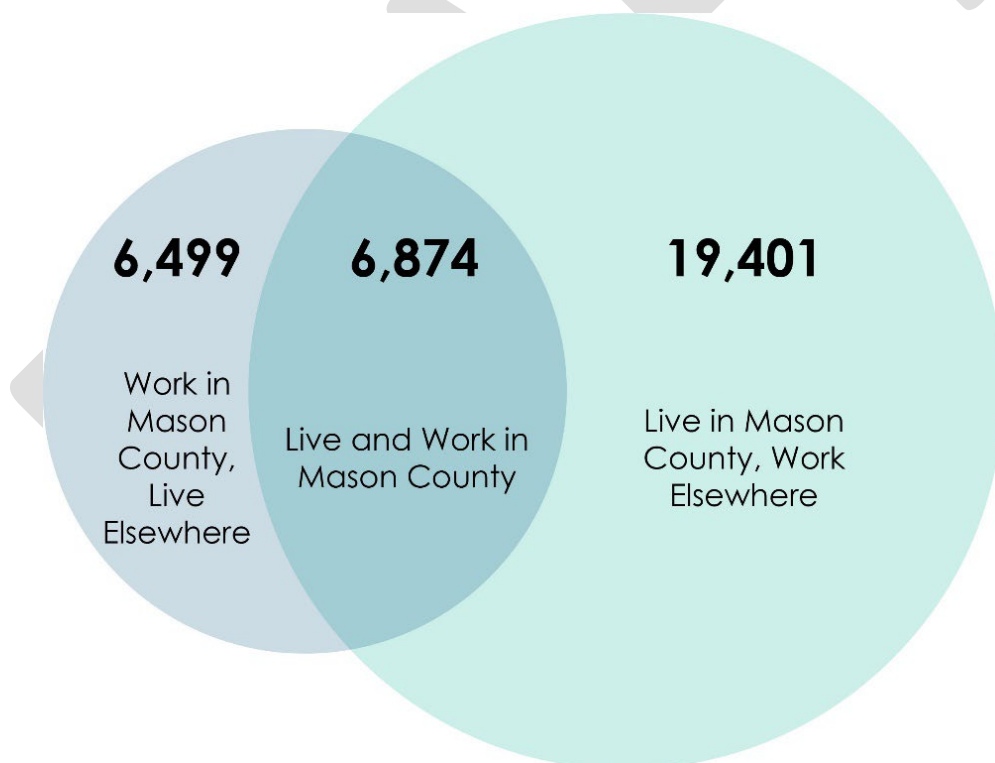


5.2.1 Workforce Profile

People live in Mason County for a variety of reasons, but factors including the beautiful setting, relaxed rural lifestyle, and affordable home ownership, as compared to the greater Seattle area, are significant. As a result, a large segment of residents commute outside the County for employment and often travel far to and from work. Additionally, a significantly higher portion of Mason County residents' income is earned outside of the county compared to its neighbors. This impacts local traffic and the viability of local businesses due to the portion of commuters who make purchases close to their place of work instead of close to home. By extension, this also impacts sales tax in Mason County, a critical source of revenue for public services. However, in recent years, Mason County has benefited from the ability to collect sales tax on online orders, which has helped strengthen revenue.

As shown in **Figure 5-1**, 6,874 of the jobs located within Mason County are held by people who also live in the county, while 6,499 jobs are filled by employees who commute into the county. It is estimated that 19,401 of the county's residents travel outside of the county for work.

Figure 5-1. Worker Inflow-Outflow in Mason County



Source: U.S. Census OnTheMap, 2022 ²⁶

²⁶ Note: U.S. Census OnTheMap inflow/outflow analysis uses LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES) data; the most current LODES data available is for the year 2022.



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5.2.2 Major Economic Sectors

Mason County had approximately 15,962 total jobs in 2023.²⁷ The largest industries in terms of the number of jobs held by workers in Mason County businesses are:

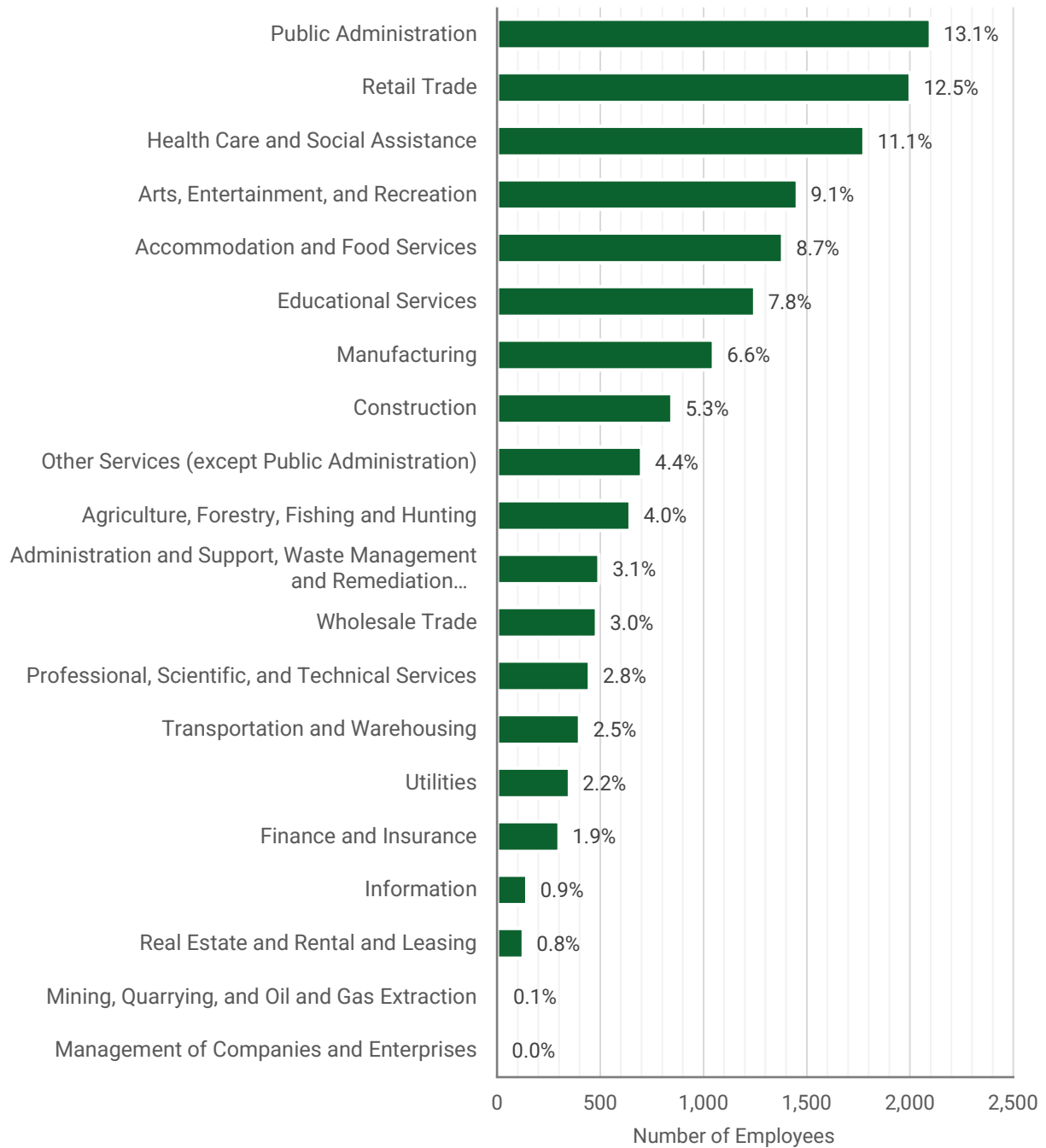
- ◆ Public Administration – 2,098 jobs (13.1%)
- ◆ Retail Trade – 2,001 jobs (12.5%)
- ◆ Health Care and Social Assistance – 1,777 jobs (11.1%)
- ◆ Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation – 1,454 jobs (9.1%)
- ◆ Accommodation and Food Services – 1,383 jobs (8.7%)

Figure 5-2 shows the distribution of jobs by industry for those working in Mason County.

²⁷ Mason County EDC 2024 Economic Overview Report; data as of 2023Q4



Figure 5-2. Employment by Industry



Source: Mason County EDC Economic Overview Report (data as of 2023Q4)



Over the past year, the region's strongest job growth has been in the sectors of Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (+161 jobs), Utilities (+85), and Health Care and Social Assistance (+73).

Over the next five years, employment in Mason County is projected to increase by 486 jobs. Health Care and Social Assistance is expected to experience the fastest growth, with a year-over-year rate of +1.6%. The sectors forecasted to add the most jobs during this period are Health Care and Social Assistance (+147 jobs), Public Administration (+62), and Accommodation and Food Services (+51).²⁸

5.2.3 Education Levels

Educational attainment in Mason County is lower than regional and state averages, highlighting opportunities for growth and investment in education. The County's high school graduation rate, including equivalencies, is slightly lower at 90.5% than the Washington State average of 92.1%. However, the County's college graduation rate stands at 21%, significantly trailing the state average of 38%.

At the same time, there are local opportunities for growth in the skilled trades. Mason County will continue to emphasize education, and help students to understand the full range of educational opportunities and training available for today's in-demand professions. The County should continue to work with local high schools, Olympic College, and other training providers to expand available opportunities and connect them with local employers. Additionally, programs like Shelton Promise—a partnership with Evergreen State College that provides free college education and a stipend for housing and living expenses to graduating Shelton seniors—offer valuable pathways for students and demonstrate the potential for innovative educational initiatives in the county.

5.2.4 Income and Wages

Households in Mason County have a median household income of \$78,359 (**Figure 5-3**), which is significantly lower than that of Washington as a whole (\$94,952).²⁹ Washington's median household income increased by approximately \$37,700 (65.9%) between 2010 and 2023, while Mason County's median household income increased by about \$30,300 (62.9%) over the same period.

Sectors in Mason County with the highest average wages per worker are Utilities (\$90,735), Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (\$88,763), and Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$87,978).³⁰

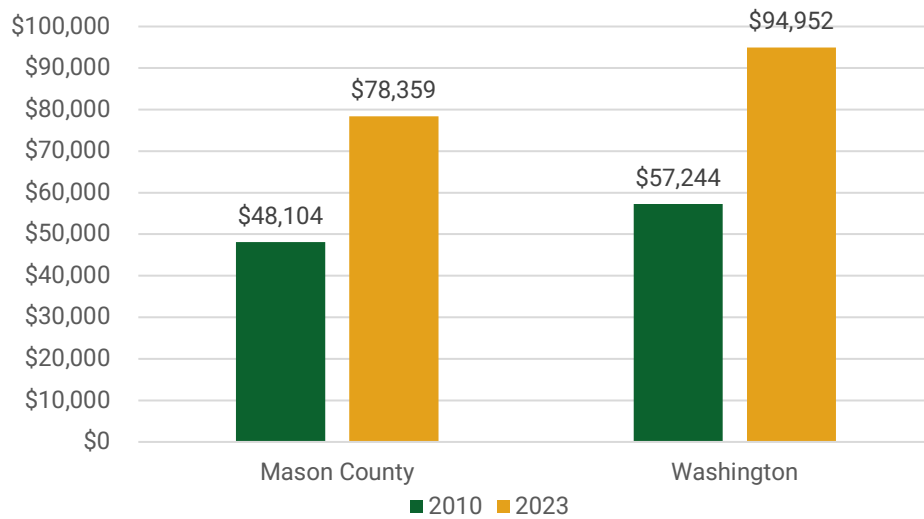
²⁸ Mason County EDC 2024 Economic Overview Report; data as of 2023Q4

²⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates

³⁰ Mason County EDC 2024 Economic Overview Report; data as of 2023Q4



Figure 5-3. Median Household Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03

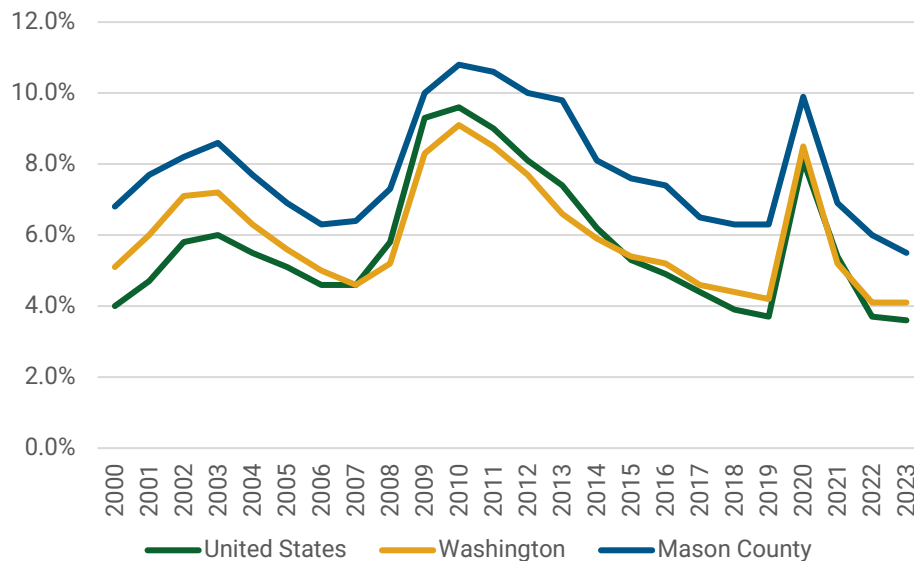
5.2.5 Unemployment

Mason County's unemployment rate is 5.5%, which is higher than both the state rate of 4.1% and the national rate of 3.6%.³¹ While the county's unemployment rate has fluctuated over recent decades, it peaked most recently at 9.9% during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 before gradually declining. As illustrated in **Figure 5-4**, the county's unemployment rate tends to rise and fall in line with broader economic trends, such as during recessions or economic slowdowns. However, it consistently remains higher than the state and national averages, potentially reflecting ongoing challenges in the local labor market. These challenges may be influenced by factors such as reliance on seasonal industries and limited economic diversification.

³¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) average annual unemployment rate data; the most current LAUS data available is for the year 2023.



Figure 5-4. Mason County Average Annual Unemployment Rate Versus State and National Rates, 2000–2023



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) data

5.2.6 Challenges and Opportunities

Prior to the economic recession of the early 2010s, growth in Mason County may have been characterized by “drive to buy” home buyers drawn by relatively low housing costs. Today, Mason County has an opportunity to reposition itself as a lifestyle choice community where one can also comfortably afford to live, as compared to the greater Seattle area, rather than just an affordable place to live.

Continued placemaking efforts in communities around the County, particularly Shelton, Allyn and Belfair, can help reinforce this identity. These efforts celebrate the unique assets of different areas while also addressing geographic limitations. Continuing to rally around the Hood Canal as a unifying regional feature is a good foundation for these efforts.

In order to achieve these goals, there are a number of livability challenges to address. Downtown revitalization, reducing crime and homelessness, developing parks and recreational amenities, and improving access to health and social services, including mental health care, should all remain top priorities. Developing close connections between EMS, fire, medical providers, and social services has been an effective tool in many areas for identifying and serving “heavy users” of these systems. Mason County is leading efforts to strengthen these connections through innovative programs like Morth Mason Regional Fire Authority’s Mobile Integrated Health Program—now expanded into Shelton—and the MCSO Co-Responder Program in partnership with Olympic Health and Recovery Services. These and similar initiatives help vulnerable populations by connecting them to services for substance use, housing, physical health, and workforce reintegration. Additionally, the County has a relatively high share of older adults, making it essential to plan for an aging population. This has implications for housing type and location, along with transportation and healthcare.



As a rural county, it is not unusual that Mason County's housing stock is predominantly composed of single-family homes. Depending on the types of companies that may come to the County and who they employ, there may be a need for greater housing diversity in terms of type, size, and tenure. Mason County has unique challenges due to the lack of urbanized area where more intensive development can take place. At the same time, displacement of current residents should be prevented.

A great challenge moving forward will be in accommodating change. New uses and residents may not always be compatible with existing uses, such as conflicts between beachfront vacation homes and commercial shellfish farming. These uses can coexist and thrive, but careful planning must take place to identify potential friction points and how to address them. There is also a challenge in reconciling different visions for the County's future, including what "rural character" means as Mason County grows and diversifies.

In recent years, Mason County's government has been an effective leader in working with new employers to become established here. When united around a common cause like bringing back the sawmill in Shelton, the community has shown great drive. While the focus of this Element is broad overall, it will also highlight those priority areas where the County should mobilize this energy.

5.3 Partnerships and Objectives

5.3.1 Connections to the Community

Mason County remains committed to fostering strong partnerships with all stakeholders, including businesses, ports, utility districts, the tribes, school districts, City of Shelton, and other government agencies. Opportunities for collaboration include supporting existing business, attracting new business, expanding workforce training opportunities, and promoting sustainable businesses that benefits all community members.

Businesses

Supporting both existing and new businesses is essential to Mason County's economic vitality. The County collaborates with local business owners, industry groups, and economic development organizations to foster a business-friendly environment. This includes streamlining permitting processes, providing resources for entrepreneurs, and identifying opportunities to diversify the local economy. Encouraging innovation and investment in key industries, such as manufacturing, tourism, and technology, will help sustain long-term economic growth.

Ports

Mason County has five separate port districts—the Port of Shelton, Port of Allyn, Port of Grapeview, Port of Hoodspout, and Port of Dewatto. Ports can serve as agents for economic development, with several abilities under state law that are not available to cities. The County should strive to work with the ports toward a common vision, while also allowing the ports to work in ways that best serve their differing jurisdictions.



The Port of Shelton operates Sanderson Field, Mason County's only public airport. Sanderson Field can accommodate commercial, corporate, and recreational aircraft and serves as a designated response hub for a Cascadia seismic event under the State FEMA framework. The site also features a light industrial park with tenants in aerospace manufacturing, vibration dampening equipment manufacturing, and microtechnology manufacturing. Additionally, the Port of Shelton owns and operates Johns Prairie Industrial Park, which has access to rail infrastructure—a key asset for recruiting and supporting industrial manufacturing and distribution businesses that rely on freight rail transportation. The Port recently secured federal Economic Development Administration funding to assess enhancements to power infrastructure, supporting both public safety agencies and economic development by modernizing utilities to attract employers.

Utility Districts

Reliable infrastructure is essential for economic development, and Mason County works closely with the local public utility districts, PUD No. 1 and PUD No. 3, to ensure access to essential services such as water, sewer, and electricity. Coordination with utility providers supports business expansion, residential development, and sustainability initiatives. Investing in infrastructure improvements and future-ready utilities, including broadband expansion, will help Mason County remain competitive in attracting new businesses and residents.

Tribes

The Skokomish Tribe and Squaxin Island Tribe are partners in Mason County's economic development. However, as separate sovereign nations, tribes are self-governing and levy their own taxes to fund their own public services. Mason County remains committed to fostering strong partnerships with the Skokomish and Squaxin Island Tribes to support mutual economic development goals. Opportunities for collaboration include expanding workforce training opportunities and promoting sustainable tourism that benefits tribal and non-tribal communities alike.

School Districts

A strong education system is fundamental to workforce development and long-term economic stability. Mason County partners with local school districts, higher education institutions, and workforce training programs to prepare students and job seekers for in-demand careers. Expanding career and technical education (CTE) programs, apprenticeships, and partnerships with local industries will strengthen the County's talent pipeline and provide opportunities for residents to thrive in the local economy.

City of Shelton

As the only incorporated city in Mason County, Shelton plays a central role in the region's economic development efforts. The County and the City of Shelton collaborate on infrastructure investments, downtown revitalization, housing initiatives, and business attraction strategies. Strengthening partnerships between the County and the City will help ensure coordinated growth, shared economic opportunities, and improved services for residents and businesses.



Other Government Agencies and Organizations

Mason County works closely with regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as nonprofit and private-sector organizations, to advance economic development initiatives. Partnerships with entities such as the Economic Development Council of Mason County, the Washington State Department of Commerce, and local chambers of commerce help secure funding, provide technical assistance, and support business retention and expansion efforts. Leveraging these relationships will enhance the County's ability to implement strategic economic initiatives and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

5.3.2 Connections to Other Elements

Economic development is closely interconnected with other elements of the comprehensive plan. There are important connections to land use, in ensuring that there is adequately zoned land to accommodate anticipated commercial and industrial activity. There must also be adequate infrastructure in these areas to attract new development while preventing environmental impacts, such as infrastructure failures that could negatively impact the County's forests and waters. Economic development also ties directly to the housing and transportation elements of the comprehensive plan. A well-balanced approach to land use, housing availability, and transportation networks supports workforce accessibility and enhances quality of life, strengthening the local economy.

A core purpose of the Economic Development Element is to align the efforts of the public and private sectors—the public sector has the ability to mold and influence development, but it is often the private sector that implements the community vision through private investment. Mason County desires that the Economic Development Element promote economic opportunity for all citizens, particularly individuals who are unemployed or otherwise disadvantaged, to further the economic growth of the county. It is recognized that a balance between economic growth and the efficient use of land and natural resources is required to protect the natural beauty and environment of Mason County.

5.4 Economic Development Goals and Policies

Mason County, in cooperation with the EDC and the business community, have aligned economic development objectives to:

- ◆ **Objective 1:** Promote Local Business Retention and Growth
- ◆ **Objective 2:** Attract and Establish New Businesses
- ◆ **Objective 3:** Cultivate the Next Generation
- ◆ **Objective 4:** Strengthen the Economic Base

Each of the team members—County, businesses, and EDC—have a role and actions to take to jointly sustain, develop, and grow economic opportunities across Mason County. The goals and



policies presented below focus on the actions that are within the function of Mason County government to take and act upon for our community.

There are four overarching goals to support economic development along with subordinate policies aimed at achieving these goals. Every individual goal and policy directly supports one or multiple of the four economic development objectives. The four goals are:

- ◆ **Goal 1:** Ensure that infrastructure is adequately sized or expandable to accommodate current needs and projected growth.
- ◆ **Goal 2:** Provide a clear, predictable, accessible and efficient county permitting process while also maintaining Mason County's rural character.
- ◆ **Goal 3:** Prepare Mason County's workforce to engage in economic opportunities as contributing citizens and residents of the county.
- ◆ **Goal 4:** Support the expansion of established industries and emerging businesses through strategic investments and policies that generate revenue, enhance community services, and improve Mason County's overall economic vitality.

Infrastructure and Capital Improvements

Economic growth requires reliable access to electricity, water, sewage, refuse, high-speed internet, and a well-functioning transportation system. These infrastructure systems may be publicly or privately owned and operated; however, it is the local government—County or City—that will typically approve through the permitting process establishing or expanding a system. To support economic growth in Mason County the county government will need to take the following actions.

Goal ED 1 Ensure that infrastructure is adequately sized or expandable to accommodate current needs and projected growth.

- Policy ED 1.1 In coordination with utility providers, ensure that infrastructure is adequately sized or expandable to accommodate current needs and projected growth while preserving the natural environment and community character.
- Policy ED 1.2 Collaborate with the EDC of Mason County to prioritize infrastructure needs at available development sites with strong marketable assets.
- Policy ED 1.3 Coordinate with electrical providers to ensure there is adequate existing or planned capability to produce and distribute electricity to meet changing demands driven by a move to phase out greenhouse gas emission producing fuels.
- Policy ED 1.4 Ensure the long-term supply of high-quality water in Mason County.
- Policy ED 1.5 Permit new and monitor existing sewage and septic systems to ensure proper operation and minimal impact to the environment and aquaculture farms.
- Policy ED 1.6 Encourage the extension of cell phone coverage and high-speed internet access to rural areas supporting all Mason County residents.



- Policy ED 1.7 Ensure safety and efficiency for all modes of travel on County roadways, particularly between key economic and place-based assets.
- Policy ED 1.8 Address mobility along the Highway 3 corridor and focus on improving travel times for commuters and freight between locations in Mason County and the City of Bremerton.
- Policy ED 1.9 Utilize County road funds set aside for “roads for economic development.”

Permitting and Regulation

A clear, predictable, and efficient permitting process is essential to supporting business and industry expansion while providing certainty for investors and developers. At the same time, it is important to balance growth with the preservation of Mason County’s rural character, ensuring that new development aligns with community values and land use policies. Streamlining regulatory processes while maintaining appropriate safeguards will help foster economic opportunity and sustain the County’s unique identity.

Goal ED 2 Provide a clear, predictable, accessible, and efficient county permitting process while also maintaining Mason County’s rural character.

- Policy ED 2.1 Ensure that the permit process is predictable, efficient, and timely. Provide relevant materials online for easy access.
- Policy ED 2.2 Work with the UGAs to ensure an adequate supply of developable and redevelopable land suitable for a range of uses, development types, and economic development activities.
- Policy ED 2.3 Identify clear benchmarks to test the compatibility of commercial and industrial uses in rural parts of Mason County.
- Policy ED 2.4 Use adopted code and development review processes to ensure compatibility between adjacent uses and to coordinate urban and rural transitions.
- Policy ED 2.5 Coordinate land use activities with the Skokomish Tribe and Squaxin Island Tribe.
- Policy ED 2.6 Coordinate with the City of Shelton on permitting and planning requirements.
- Policy ED 2.7 Work with builders and developers to increase approved stock plans.

Education, Training, and Business Development

A community wins when individual residents are successful. Successes at the individual, neighborhood, and community level encourage others through their example and fuel future accomplishments. Preparing Mason County’s workforce, our youth and those in the workforce looking for a career change, through education, training, and development is key to the future of Mason County. The Mason County government will continue to work closely with the Economic Development Council of Mason County and their business partners to support, provide, and nurture educational opportunities to grow the skills and capabilities of Mason County residents.



Goal ED 3 Prepare Mason County's workforce to engage in economic opportunities as contributing citizens and residents of the county.

- Policy ED 3.1 Recruit diversified and value-added manufacturing activities, firms, and industries to mitigate resource and commodity-based industry vulnerabilities.
- Policy ED 3.2 Maintain communication with current business leaders about existing and emerging needs.
- Policy ED 3.3 Develop targeted outreach to firms based on Mason County's assets including unique properties, access to natural resources, affordability, and recreation.
- Policy ED 3.4 In coordination with the EDC, work with workforce development partners to focus on the skills demanded by existing and future industries.
- Policy ED 3.5 Continue to expand awareness of the skilled trades as a strong career option along with college and university programs.
- Policy ED 3.6 Leverage the EDC and other resources to implement innovative tools for business expansion and retention.
- Policy ED 3.7 Support expansion of local vocational training, offerings, and certifications and connect programs with local employers.
- Policy ED 3.8 Nurture priority partnerships for the mutual advancement of Mason County's communities by working with the Skokomish Tribe and Squaxin Island Tribe and coordinating with the County's Ports and their Comprehensive Schemes.
- Policy ED 3.9 Connect and raise awareness among County businesses and entrepreneurs of available business development resources and funding streams, including grant, loan, and assistance programs.
- Policy ED 3.10 Connect local small businesses to the Economic Development Council of Mason County for free training and business development services and resources.

Key Industry Focus Areas

Mason County has several established industries and services with documented demand for expansion combined with emerging new business types and opportunities. This goal focuses on support and, at times, investments to help these businesses establish or grow, providing much needed revenues, expanding or creating new services in the community, and improving quality of life and overall management of the County.

Goal ED 4 Support the expansion of established industries and emerging businesses through strategic investments and policies that generate revenue, enhance community services, and improve Mason County's overall economic vitality.

Advanced Manufacturing

- Policy ED 4.1 Identify and market sites suitable for advanced manufacturing development.



Policy ED 4.2 Identify strategies to address transportation challenges related to Mason County's distance from interstate highways.

Health and Human Services

Policy ED 4.3 In collaboration with health care businesses/organizations, seek opportunities to attract and retain medical professionals to Mason County.

Policy ED 4.4 Work with vocational partners to expand local training in healthcare and human services.

Policy ED 4.5 Expand health and wellness resources in Mason County communities by anticipating the needs of the growing portion of residents over age 65 and of residents with disabilities.

Tourism and Recreation

Policy ED 4.6 Work to attract the construction of two to three major hotels in Mason County.

Policy ED 4.7 Protect and expand Mason County's open space, parks, and trails offerings while continuing to promote the Hood Canal as a base for recreation.

Policy ED 4.8 Develop and market Mason County's distinctive subarea identities around unique assets across the County's variety of communities.

Policy ED 4.9 Expand awareness of non-summer tourism and recreation opportunities throughout Mason County and seek out additional options.

Policy ED 4.10 Investigate specific investments that could support community livability and increase visitorship, including park acquisition and improving free, public access to Hood Canal.

Aquaculture

Policy ED 4.11 Continue to build on Mason County's natural advantage for shellfish production.

Policy ED 4.12 Continue to expedite the process to secure development and environmental permits for new and/or expanded aquaculture operations.

Policy ED 4.13 Protect water quality and productive aquaculture growing areas by working with neighboring counties, tribes, community, and government partners to protect Hood Canal and Puget Sound from environmental degradation.

Policy ED 4.14 Evaluate and adopt low-impact development regulations for areas in proximity to shellfish growing areas and key water resources.

Policy ED 4.15 Support and reauthorize Mason County's Clean Water District.

Forest Products

Policy ED 4.16 Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and maintain provisions that ensure compatibility between resource lands and adjacent land uses.



Policy ED 4.17 Stabilize and diversify environmentally responsible logging and timber industries and associated infrastructure in Mason County.

5.4.1 Implementation Actions

The following actions offer possible next steps to begin implementing the goals and policies contained in the Economic Development Element.

- ◆ **Action ED 1:** Continue working through the Mason County Clean Water District to ensure clean water for shellfish production, following the model of the Washington Shellfish Initiative.
- ◆ **Action ED 2:** Maintain and regularly update an inventory of available properties with catalytic industrial or commercial development potential.
- ◆ **Action ED 3:** Facilitate a series of community design charrettes aimed at identifying and developing separate, clear branding identities for Mason County's communities.
- ◆ **Action ED 4:** Recruit or develop pilot facilities for innovative practices in aquaculture.
- ◆ **Action ED 5:** Recruit or develop pilot facilities to augment timber processing and accelerate or incubate innovative methods and products.
- ◆ **Action ED 6:** Through the Mason County Clean Water District, work with Washington State agencies to identify dedicated funding sources to address nonpoint pollution.
- ◆ **Action ED 7:** Work collaboratively with local jurisdictions to develop a strategic plan to address gaps in critical health and human services.
- ◆ **Action ED 8:** Through the Mason County Broadband Action Team, identify connectivity and accessibility needs in the county and work with relevant broadband providers to secure funding and implement expansion projects.
- ◆ **Action ED 9:** Enhance bicycle tourism by adding signage for motorists to accommodate cyclists, painting bicycle access markers on the pavement along key cycling routes, and ensuring a regular program of sweeping and cleaning shoulders is maintained.
- ◆ **Action ED 10:** Work with Explore Hood Canal to identify ways to expand Mason County's presence and visibility for visitors to the Hood Canal area.
- ◆ **Action ED 11:** Work with Washington State DNR, RCO and other actors to expand programming and amenities at upland camping areas and trailheads and to support creation and acquisition of new parks in the County.
- ◆ **Action ED 12:** Develop a countywide Clean Energy Strategy to identify potential sites for renewable energy development and recruit related industries.
- ◆ **Action ED 13:** Conduct an equity audit of economic development programs to identify gaps in services or funding for underserved populations.



6 Transportation

The Mason County Transportation Plan is hereby adopted by reference into this Comprehensive Plan.

DRAFT



7 Rural and Natural Environment

7.1 Introduction

Mason County is unique for its 700 miles of beautiful coastlines, lakes, rivers and streams with outstanding air and water quality, vistas and mountain views, extensive recreation and tourism opportunities, and unmatched tranquility. It is one of the few remaining truly rural counties in all of Washington state. In a survey conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan process, respondents stated that their top two favorite things about Mason County are that 1) it is a rural and small community and 2) it has an abundance of natural beauty and access to outdoor recreation. The only incorporated area in the county, the City of Shelton, makes up less than one percent of the County's total land area.

Mason County contains over 540,000 acres of national forest, parklands, and other rural lands including long term commercial forest lands. In the survey, preserving and reinforcing the county's northwest woodland character was identified as one of two top priorities. Rural lands cover over 60% of the County. Employment in Mason County is still largely resource-based with a strong history of forestry and a growing aquaculture industry leading the nation in shellfish production. Rural lands contain the freshwater rivers and streams that support multiple salmon and trout species, and this clean abundant freshwater flows to the estuaries that support abundant shellfish. Fish and shellfish are both the Treaty-reserved resources of Tribes and the natural abundance enjoyed by all residents of Mason County.

Consistent with the Washington State Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A), the Rural Element of Mason County's Comprehensive Plan establishes broad goals and policies guiding rural development, protecting critical areas and natural resource lands, reducing sprawl and maintaining rural character. It facilitates varied rural economic uses on rural lands, while protecting and maintaining the rural character and scale. The Rural Element also summarizes current conditions and provides background information on the rural land use designations.

This element addresses:

- ♦ Rural land use, including limited areas of more intensive rural development,
- ♦ Open space, and
- ♦ Natural resource lands, including farmland, forest land, aquaculture, and mining.



7.1.1 Growth Management Act Guidance

Washington's Growth Management Act specifies:

"The Rural Element [of the Comprehensive Plan] shall permit rural development, forestry, and agriculture in rural areas. The rural element shall provide for a variety of rural densities, uses, essential public facilities, and rural governmental services needed to serve the permitted densities and uses. To achieve a variety of rural densities and uses, counties may provide for clustering, density transfer, design guidelines, conservation easements, and other innovative techniques that will accommodate appropriate rural densities and uses that are not characterized by urban growth and that are consistent with rural character."

The GMA (RCW 36.70A.011) establishes several principles for rural planning, including:

- ◆ Recognition of the importance of rural lands and rural character to Washington's economy, its people, and its environment, while respecting regional differences. Rural lands and rural-based economies enhance the economic desirability of the state, help to preserve traditional economic activities, and contribute to the state's overall quality of life.
- ◆ A finding that in order to retain and enhance the job base in rural areas, rural counties must have flexibility to create opportunities for business development. Rural counties must have the flexibility to retain existing businesses and allow them to expand. The legislature recognized that not all business developments in rural counties require an urban level of services; and that many businesses in rural areas fit within the definition of rural character identified by the local planning unit.
- ◆ A finding that in defining rural elements of County Comprehensive Plans under RCW [36.70A.070](#)(5), a county should foster land use patterns and develop a local vision of rural character that will help preserve rural-based economies and traditional rural lifestyles; encourage the economic prosperity of rural residents; foster opportunities for small-scale, rural-based employment and self-employment; permit the operation of rural-based agricultural (including aquaculture), commercial, recreational, and tourist businesses that are consistent with existing and planned land use patterns; be compatible with the use of the land by wildlife and for fish and wildlife habitat; foster the private stewardship of the land and preservation of open space; and enhance the rural sense of community and quality of life.

7.2 Rural Land Uses

7.2.1 Rural Character

Mason County's unique rural landscape is characterized by over 700 miles of shoreline, open spaces with natural vegetation; a variety of rural residential densities; farms, forests, mining,



and aquatic resource areas; small unincorporated rural communities; small, rural commercial and industrial developments; and nationally and regionally important recreation areas.

Rural areas also include well-separated small communities located along major arterials and state highways that serve the needs of surrounding rural residents and enterprises. These communities are characterized by limited public services, small commercial uses, and single family houses on larger lots. Community services may include a school, post office, fire stations, churches, community centers and granges. There may also be some rural multifamily development.

About 434,000 acres in Mason County fall under one of the rural land zoning designations. These lands are outside of the Urban Growth Areas and the National Forest Lands.

7.2.2 Inventory of Rural Land Uses

Rural land uses in Mason County are divided into different zoning districts to reflect the diversity of existing development patterns in the rural areas. There are five types of residential districts and five types of commercial districts. The business districts are primarily intended to provide for the economic sustainability of existing commerce which provide needed jobs, goods and services to the surrounding rural populations. The business districts, however, are limited to small areas largely consisting of existing development. All development in the rural lands must be sustainable without urban style public services.

There are five types of rural residential districts. These districts primarily provide for low density residential use, but also provide for some rural uses such as hobby farms. The five districts are:

- ◆ **Rural Residential 2.5:** This district provides for new residential subdivision, which exceeds a density of two and one-half acres per residential lot, and where areas of small lot residential development and subdivisions patterns were established before December 5, 1996.
- ◆ **Rural Residential 5:** This district provides for new residential subdivision on parcels of five acres or more.
- ◆ **Rural Residential 10:** This district provides for new residential subdivision on parcels of ten acres or more.
- ◆ **Rural Residential 20:** This district provides for new residential subdivision on parcels of twenty acres or more.
- ◆ **Rural Multi-Family:** This district designates existing multi-family residential development including mobile home parks. New Rural Multi-Family zoning designations are prohibited.

There are four types of rural commercial districts. These districts provide for a variety of commercial areas reflecting the diversity of existing business areas. Parcels with this designation that are located within hamlets or rural activity centers are designed to serve the existing and projected rural population. The county's primary method of such design is to limit building size and height so that businesses of such size and intensity will ordinarily be oriented towards primarily serving the existing and projected rural population. Isolated LAMIRDs of a



commercial nature are not required to be principally designed to serve the rural population. These isolated commercial LAMIRDs, however, shall protect rural character by containing and limiting rural development, by not being in conflict with surrounding uses and by assuring that such development is visually compatible with the surrounding area. The county's primary method of achieving such purpose is by providing for buffer yards, limiting the character of rezones, by limiting building size, and height in such a way as to be appropriate for the rural areas. Public services and facilities shall not be provided so as to permit low intensity sprawl. Rural commercial zoning districts are:

- ◆ **Rural Commercial 1**
- ◆ **Rural Commercial 2**
- ◆ **Rural Commercial 3**
- ◆ **Rural Commercial 5**

The **Rural Industrial** district provides for isolated areas of primarily existing industrial type uses. Rural industrial is not required to be principally designed to serve the existing and projected rural population. However, isolated LAMIRDs of an industrial nature shall protect rural character by containing and limiting rural development, by not being in conflict with surrounding uses, and by assuring that such development is visually compatible with the surrounding area. The county's primary method of achieving such purpose is by providing for buffer yards, limiting the character of rezones, by limiting building size, and height in such a way as to be appropriate for the rural areas. Public services and facilities shall not be provided so as to permit low intensity sprawl.

The **Rural Natural Resource** district provides for isolated areas of resource based industry outside of the designated resource lands.

The **Rural Tourist** and **Rural Tourist – Campground** districts provide small scale recreational and tourist-related activities in addition to tangential commercial services to tourists and adjacent rural populations. Parcels with this designation that are located within rural activity centers or hamlets shall be principally designed to serve the existing and projected rural population. The county's primary method of such design is to limit building size, and height so that businesses of such size and intensity will ordinarily be oriented towards primarily serving the existing and projected rural population. Isolated LAMIRDs of a tourist nature are not required to be principally designed to serve the rural population. These isolated commercial LAMIRDs, however, shall protect rural character by containing and limiting rural development, by not being in conflict with surrounding uses and by assuring that such development is visually compatible with the surrounding area. The county's primary method of achieving such purpose is by providing for buffer yards, limiting the character of rezones, by limiting building size, and height in such a way as to be appropriate for the rural areas. Public services and facilities shall not be provided so as to permit low intensity sprawl.

The **Master Planned Resort** district provides for self-contained and fully integrated planned unit development in a setting of significant natural amenity, with the primary focus on destination resort facilities consisting of short-term visitor accommodations associated with a range of developed on-site indoor or outdoor recreational facilities.



Inholding Lands are lands surrounded by long-term commercial forests, but which are not suitable due to parcel size or other constraint for that purpose. Inholding lands may be developed, but only in a manner which assures the viability of the abutting forest land.

In addition, **Agricultural Resource Lands** and **Long Term Commercial Forest** are zoning designations for natural resource lands, discussed below in Section 7.5.

Table 7-1 shows the acres of unincorporated Mason County in each zoning district, not including land in Urban Growth Areas, the Olympic National Forest, Olympic National Park, the Skokomish Indian Reservation, or water.

Table 7-1. Zoning Districts in Unincorporated Mason County		
Zoning District	Acres	Percentage
Agricultural Resource Lands	5,868	1.4%
Inholding Lands	9,035	2.1%
Long Term Commercial Forest	212,863	49.0%
Rural Commercial 1	53	<0.1%
Rural Commercial 2	126	<0.1%
Rural Commercial 3	139	<0.1%
Rural Commercial 5	22	<0.1%
Rural Industrial	285	0.1%
Rural Multi Family	61	<0.1%
Rural Natural Resource	683	0.2%
Rural Residential 10 Acres	25,987	6.0%
Rural Residential 2.5 Acres	1,042	0.2%
Rural Residential 20 Acres	82,379	19.0%
Rural Residential 5 Acres	92,341	21.3%
Rural Tourist	2,761	0.6%
Rural Tourist-Campground	354	0.1%
Total	433,999	100.0%

Source: Mason County GIS data, 2024

7.2.3 Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development

Some land use designations in the rural area allow for a variety of residential densities and rural and natural resource-related businesses that still maintain and protect rural character. The State Department of Commerce calls these areas “limited areas of more intensive rural development” or “LAMIRDs”, as defined in the 1997 amendments to the GMA.



There are different types of these more intensive rural development areas in Mason County that are discussed in this section, including:

- ◆ Rural Activity Centers
- ◆ Hamlets
- ◆ Isolated Rural Commercial or Industrial Areas
- ◆ Rural Tourism and Recreational Areas
- ◆ Master Planned Resorts and Industrial Areas

These more intensive rural development areas developed naturally before land use controls. They provide rural levels of service and convenience to rural residents who otherwise may travel longer distances for retail, civic, health, and other needs. By designating them within Mason County's Comprehensive Plan, it ensures they will continue to serve this function.

Rural Activity Centers

Rural Activity Centers are unincorporated areas that are characterized by services such as community water, limited commercial uses, and fire protection. They do not necessarily provide services to neighboring residents but do provide job opportunities for rural residents. The Rural Activity Centers within Mason County include Hoodsport, Taylor Town and Union. They cover over thirteen hundred acres of land with an average size of 444 acres.

Generally, Rural Activity Centers include a mix of uses. They serve residents of the surrounding rural area, seasonal residents, and tourists. They also include concentrations of commercial, service, industrial, and civic uses but are not served by urban levels of facilities and services. Residential areas include single-family neighborhoods and some small-scale and low-rise multifamily housing. Businesses typically are found near or on the highway that runs through the community. In Hoodsport the commercial development is primarily concentrated into a small "downtown" area. Union has fewer businesses and more decentralized commercial activity. Taylor Town has small clusters of commercial development near some of the road intersections and a larger number of businesses throughout the area. Existing industrial uses within Rural Activity Centers are often stand-alone businesses such as welding shops, small shake mills, or food processing operations.

These three areas, Hoodsport, Union and Taylor Town, will experience some limited growth over the next 20 years. Average residential densities will increase as much of the land has already been platted into small lots, many of which are conforming and buildable. Business uses will also grow. The majority of growth will be in retail, commercial, tourism and industrial uses necessary to support the residential growth in the rural area.



Table 7-2 shows the acreage of the three RACs in Mason County.

Table 7-2. Rural Activity Centers in Mason County	
Name	Acreage
Hoodsport	664
Union	416
Taylor Town	253
Total	1,333

Hamlets

Hamlets are intended to meet the immediate needs of the rural residents, resource dependent industry, and visitors. They are smaller than Rural Activity Centers and provide a rural level of services and facilities. Hamlets may include one or two civic, community, or retail uses such as a post office, community center, church, grange, or gas station a distance from each other and from the urban centers. They are not intended to compete with the Urban Growth Areas or Rural Activity Centers as employment centers or commercial centers.

Mason County has nine Hamlets ranging in size between 3 acres and 111 acres. The average Hamlet in Mason County is 39 acres. Hamlets in Mason County include Bayshore, Dayton, Deer Creek, Grapeview, Lilliwaup, Matlock, Potlatch, Spencer Lake, and Tahuya. **Table 7-3** shows the acreage of Mason County's hamlets.

Table 7-3. Hamlets in Mason County	
Name	Acreage
Bay Shore	111
Dayton	22
Deer Creek	25
Grapeview	45
Lilliwaup	24
Matlock	27
Potlatch	72
Spencer Lake	19
Tahuya	3
Total	348



Isolated Rural Commercial Areas

In developing its rural commercial and industrial designations, Mason County undertook an extensive review of existing commercial and industrial uses and zoning in the rural area. The County combined this information with an analysis of the commercial, industrial, and natural resource industrial uses allowed in the rural area under the Growth Management Act.

The Rural Commercial (1-3 & 5) zoning designations are intended to acknowledge certain significant uses in the rural area that were in existence prior to adoption of Mason County's first Comprehensive Plan. The Rural Commercial zones provide reasonable expansion and use opportunities for these pre-existing commercial areas. The designation is consistent with the Growth Management Act's allowance for "the intensification of development on lots containing isolated nonresidential uses" (RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(iii)).

Isolated Rural Industrial Areas

These Rural Industrial Areas are small enclaves of industry, which serve the surrounding rural residents, and industrial uses, which manufacture and export a product. These areas are intended to remain and to have the ability to expand, keeping within the rural character of the county.

Rural Tourism and Recreational Areas

Rural Tourist and Recreational Areas reflect existing areas in Mason County and their expansion, and allow for the development of new areas. They consist of recreation/tourism businesses with no permanent residential development, except for those of the owners or caretakers. Such areas may include small scale resorts, recreational vehicle parks, golf courses, and small stores. These areas must be served by appropriate rural or the extension of urban services. The Rural Tourism and Recreation designation is intended to foster economic development that relies on a rural location and setting and that incorporates the scenic and natural features of the land. This designation is consistent with the type of LAMIRD authorized by RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(ii).

Cottage Industry

The Cottage Industry designation allows small-scale commercial or industrial activities involving the provision of services or fabrication or production of goods, primarily for clients and markets outside of the immediate urban growth area. This designation may be applied to existing or new businesses, whereas the Rural Commercial designation applies only to businesses that were established as of 1997-98.

Master Planned Resorts and Industrial Areas

A Master Planned Resort is a self-contained and fully integrated development in a setting of significant natural amenities that includes short-term visitor accommodations associated with a range of developed on-site indoor or outdoor recreation facilities. It may also include permanent residential uses as an integrated part of the overall resort development. Development of the Master Planned resort is controlled through the planning policies.



Master planned resorts are larger in scale, and involve greater potential impacts on the surrounding area, than uses permitted under the Rural Tourism and Recreation designation. Master Planned Resorts may constitute urban growth outside of urban growth areas as limited by RCW 36.70A.360 and RCW 36.70A.362. Designation of Master Planned Resorts requires amending the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Maps, prior to, or concurrent with an application for master plan review. The comprehensive plan amendment process should evaluate all the probable significant adverse environmental impacts from the entire proposal, even if the proposal is to be developed in phases, and these impacts shall be considered in determining whether any particular location is suitable for a Master Planned Resort.

Similar to Master Planned Resorts, Counties may establish a process for approval of a major industrial development outside of the UGA for a specific business. A "major industrial development" is defined as a "master planned location for a specific manufacturing, industrial, or commercial business."³²

7.3 Open Space

Open space land is an essential component of rural character and is valuable to the community for a number of reasons. It can provide recreational opportunities, it is aesthetically pleasing, it enhances the quality of life in urban areas, and it increases property values. It creates natural boundaries, which can act as greenbelts and define neighborhood identity and can protect natural resources such as groundwater recharge areas, streams, soils, tidal areas, agricultural areas, and wildlife. Continuous open space provides crucial habitat areas for wildlife and fish, including salmon. Open space also includes traditional cultural landscapes, including the cultural resources of the Tribes in Mason County.

There are three general types of open space land including:

- ◆ Private open space can include those farms, forest, and other parcels of undeveloped land that are privately held.
- ◆ Common use open space is land within a residential development or other development that is designated for common access by the residents of the development or by the general community.
- ◆ Public open space is publicly-owned land available for recreational use of the entire community. Open water areas, such as the Hood Canal or lakes, is also often considered as open space because it creates a sense of openness.

Mason County enjoys extensive open spaces. In addition to the Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest, there are significant tracts of state owned or privately held timber. Farmlands in river valleys, particularly the Skokomish, also are open space lands. A detailed listing of park and recreation facilities in the County is included in the Capital Facilities element

³² [RCW 36.70A.365](#)



of the Mason County Comprehensive Plan as well as the Mason County Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan.³³

Continued growth in Mason County is likely to increase the pressure for conversion of existing open space to other land uses. As land values rise, the potential economic returns will likely increase the pressure on owners of larger tracts of undeveloped land to sell or develop their properties.

The comprehensive plan provides for the preservation, protection, and enhancement of open space. It does this by planning to accommodate residential and commercial growth in the County's Urban Growth Areas of Allyn, Belfair and Shelton. Also, the comprehensive plan provides for incentives to cluster development, as well as requiring the preservation of open space.

Open space preserved under the plan include: Long-Term Commercial Forest lands, Agricultural Resource Lands, local parks, state parks and other state lands, the Olympic National Park and the Olympic National Forest, land slide hazard areas and their associated buffers, flood ways, streams and their associated vegetation area, wetlands and their associated buffer areas, traditional cultural landscapes, lands preserved as part of a clustered development plan, lands preserved as part of the designation of a fully contained community or a master planned resort, and major utility corridors.

The Mason County Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails (PROST) Plan, adopted in March 2022, inventories parks and recreational lands in the county, including natural open space areas (Mason County Parks and Trails Department, 2022). Mason County owns and operates over 1,000 acres of park lands, including 612.90 acres specifically designated as Natural Open Space across Decker Creek, Foothills Park, Harstine Island Park, and Watson Wildwood. Many other agencies and jurisdictions operate parklands in the county, some of which are also operated as natural open space, such as Washington State Parks' undeveloped Lake Isabella site (193.75 acres) or the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife's undeveloped Sherwood Creek site on Case Inlet (102 acres). Mason County also includes portions of both the Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest. The PROST Plan is incorporated into this Comprehensive Plan as Chapter 8 (Parks and Recreation Element).

7.4 Natural Resource Lands

Natural resources abound in Mason County and provide the foundation for the County's economy. While timber has historically played a prominent role in the economy of the County, other natural resources, including agricultural lands, aquaculture and mineral resources, have also fostered economic development within the County.

Natural resource lands receive special protection to discourage their conversion to other uses and maintain long term economic viability. Mason County has designated and protected three

³³ Mason County Parks and Trails Department, 2022. *Mason County Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan*. Adopted March 2022.



types of resource lands. These are Long-Term Commercial Forest Lands, Agricultural Resource Lands, and Mineral Resource Lands of long-term commercial significance. The county also designated forest Inholding Lands that are subject to special restrictions to protect adjacent Long-Term Commercial Forest Lands. In addition to designating these resource lands, the county has adopted protections for agricultural, shorelines management, and forest land uses.

Mason County protects natural resource lands through its Resource Ordinance, in Mason County Code (MCC) Chapter 8.52. The Resource Ordinance includes regulations that:

- ◆ Establish uniform processes to be used by Mason County for the review of land use and development proposals within critical areas and resource lands.
- ◆ Conserve resource lands for productive economic use by identifying and designating resource lands where the principal and preferred land use is commercial resource management, and by protecting the same from incompatible land uses.
- ◆ Encourage creative development techniques and land use practices which will help to accomplish these goals.
- ◆ Encourage the voluntary enrollment of agricultural lands and uses into the open space tax program and agricultural activities into the voluntary stewardship program.

7.4.1 Forest Resources

Timber is the foundation upon which Mason County's economy was built. For 200 years, Mason County's extensive forests have supplied logs, lumber, building components, pulp, and other products to national and international markets. Forest Products continue to be an important part of a strong natural resource based economy in Mason County.

Long Term Commercial Forest lands and Forest Products represent the primary land uses throughout Mason County and within each of its seven watersheds. Combined national, state, and private forests currently account for over fifty (50) percent of the land area that makes up Mason County.

Mason County currently has an abundance of forested lands with long term commercial significance. Although continued population growth will place additional demands on forest resources, these are not expected to significantly affect the County's forest resources during the 20-year planning period. Impacts associated with forestry operations include erosion and sedimentation, noise from machinery and vehicles, fugitive dust, and the visual impacts of harvested areas. The State Department of Natural Resources is responsible for regulating these impacts.

The Natural Resources Ordinance defines forest management lands as those enrolled in the open space timber or designated forest or classified forest property tax classification programs. 212,863 acres of unincorporated Mason County are zoned Long Term Commercial Forest.



7.4.2 Mineral Resources

Mineral deposits underlie Mason County's topsoil and support 18 operating surface mines (Mason County Parks and Trails, 2022). The State of Washington's GMA guidelines define mineral resource lands as lands primarily devoted to the extraction of minerals, or that have known or potential long term significance for the extraction of minerals. Minerals include gravel, sand, and valuable metallic substances.

Mason County has a substantial supply of construction aggregate (i.e., sand and gravel). The county features the Johns Prairie site (which is currently inactive) and the proposed Hamma Hamma site at Eldon on Hood Canal. These high-quality sand and gravel sites are located in close proximity to waters of Puget Sound, such that materials can be transported from the site by barge to water-dependent metropolitan construction aggregate markets also located on the Puget Sound tide lands.

Both sites contain a high-volume source of high-quality sand and gravel. These resources are suitable for processing into a wide variety of finished construction aggregate classes, all meeting government and ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) specifications.

The Resource Ordinance protects mineral resources lands for the future use of these areas for mineral resource extraction. It defines the following classes of mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance within the county:

- ◆ Class 1a – Mineral deposits which could meet the immediate and future needs of the regional community. These deposits shall be of significant size (greater than twenty-five acres) and readily accessible to water traffic on the Puget Sound.
- ◆ Class 1b – Mineral deposits which could meet the long-term future and immediate needs of the regional community. These deposits shall be of significant size (greater than twenty-five acres) and accessible to rail or truck haul routes.
- ◆ Class 2 – Mineral deposits within existing permitted surface mining operations operating under authority of RCW Chapter 78.44.

Continued population growth may place additional demands on local mineral resources. Impacts associated with mineral extraction include erosion and sedimentation, noise from machinery and vehicles, fugitive dust, and the visual impacts of excavated area.

7.4.3 Agricultural Land

The State of Washington's GMA guidelines define agricultural land as land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products or of berries, grain, hay, straw, turf, seed, Christmas trees, or livestock, and that has long term commercial significance for agricultural production. Long term commercial significance includes the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long term commercial production, while considering the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of the land.



Agricultural practices have taken place in Mason County since the early days of logging. The clear-cutting practices of those early logging companies opened a considerable amount of County land to agriculture, particularly to dairying and cattle raising. Crop production was limited to the growing of hay, berries and potatoes. In the eastern part of the County where the weather was milder, extensive vineyards and fruit orchards were planted. Despite its rich agricultural history, however, Mason County is not well-endowed with the resources necessary to create a strong competitive advantage for agricultural production. Consequently, agriculture's current role in Mason County's economy is relatively minor.

Continued growth in Mason County is likely to increase land use conflicts between urban uses and remaining agricultural uses. As land values rise, the potential economic returns will likely increase the pressure on owners to sell or develop their properties. Much of the agricultural land within the County is located in the rural areas, outside the UGAs.

In order to better conserve agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance, Mason County designated Agricultural Resource Lands in its Natural Resource Ordinance. The Ordinance defines agricultural lands protected by the ordinance as those enrolled in the open space agriculture property tax classification program. The amendments also provided for continuing protections for lands in agricultural use, but not qualified as lands of long-term commercial significance, including protection from nuisance suits.

5,868 acres of unincorporated Mason County are zoned Agricultural Resource Lands.

7.4.4 Aquaculture

Mason County is the largest producer of shellfish in Washington State and Washington is the top shellfish producing state in the nation. Shellfish production requires a healthy, functioning ecosystem to provide safe water quality and appropriate quantities of phytoplankton for food. Scientific research indicates well-managed shellfish farming can improve water quality, species diversity, and habitat complexity.

In order to better support shellfish production, Mason County has adopted its Shoreline Master Program and Resource Ordinance. These policy documents provide for continuing protections for aquaculture lands and the watersheds that feed into these lands. The County also funds the Mason County Clean Water District, which sustains staff dedicated to clean water sampling of fresh and saltwater, as well as technical assistance to residents for septic system maintenance and prevention of bacterial pollution from private lands.

Fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and other aquatic products which are caught or harvested by the public from non-controlled waters or beds are considered wild caught and are not included as aquaculture. Mason County has 25 public access beaches for shellfish harvesting and maintaining and enhancing this access remains a priority.

The importance of the shellfish industry to Washington and Mason County is underscored by the Washington Shellfish Initiative, an innovative partnership among all levels of government, tribes, the shellfish industry, and nonprofit organizations to promote clean water commerce,



create family-wage jobs and to educate the public about the role shellfish play in keeping our marine waters healthy.

Aquaculture also includes fish (hatcheries) and shellfish rearing facilities. Fish rearing facilities exist in the Skokomish Valley, along Hood Canal, and at Coulter Creek. Most of these hatcheries are mitigation for lost Treaty harvest opportunities by Tribes in Mason County. They depend on clean and abundant fresh water from streams, rivers, and groundwater. Mason County also has Float Upweller Systems (FLUPSYs), in Hood Canal and Oakland Bay, where Tribes and commercial shellfish growers raises juvenile shellfish that are transported to enhance beaches. FLUPSYs depend on clean brackish water of Puget Sound.

7.4.5 Critical Areas

Similar to natural resource lands, Mason County protects critical areas through its Resource Ordinance, in Mason County Code (MCC) Chapter 8.52. The Resource Ordinance includes regulations that “protect the identified critical areas in their natural functions, along with air and water quality, to sustain the county’s quality of life.” Critical areas are discussed in detail in the Land Use Element.

7.4.6 Shorelines

The shorelines of Mason County include Hood Canal; South Puget Sound, including Case Inlet and Oakland Bay; lakes such as Lake Cushman and Mason Lake; and rivers and streams such as the Skokomish River and Goldsborough Creek. Mason County regulates and protects shorelines through the Shoreline Master Program (SMP), which is Chapter 17.50 of the Mason County Code (MCC). Shorelines are discussed in detail in the Land Use Element.

7.5 Rural and Natural Environment Goals and Policies

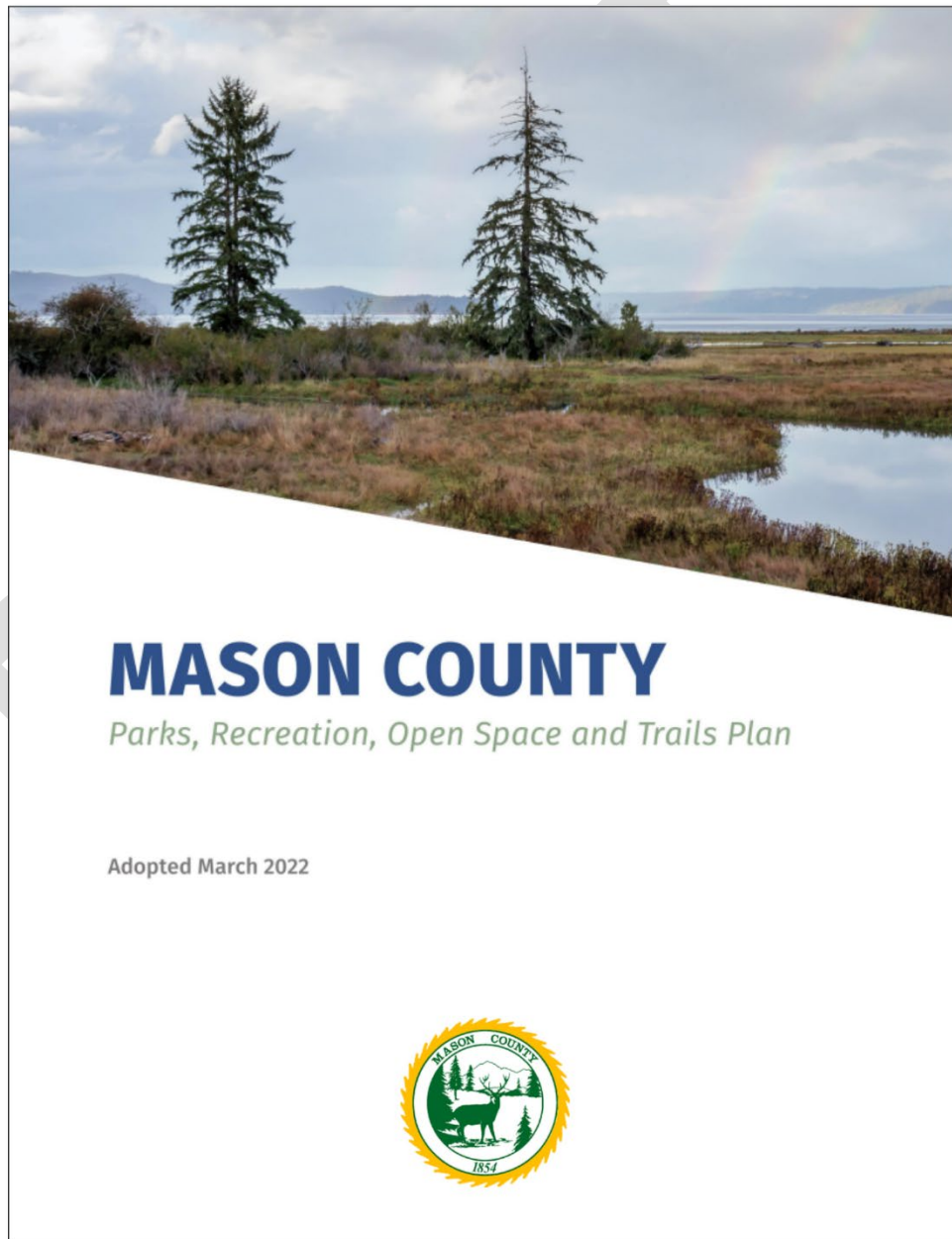
Natural Resource Industries

1. Give preference to those efforts undertaken to enhance habitat or increase fish, shellfish and other aquatic resources for the good of the general public (e.g. Department of Fish and Wildlife efforts for salmon enhancement).
2. Activities which enhance habitat or increase fish, shellfish, and aquatic resources should be encouraged as an important part of the economy and lifestyle of the area.
3. Forestry, open space, and low-density residential development should be the preferred land uses adjacent to productive aquaculture areas.
4. Maintain a watershed/shellfish protection district or districts should be considered in order to focus all efforts on improving water quality and lessening impacts which degrade aquaculture areas; protection district funding should come out of assessments that have been raised within the watershed.



8 Parks and Recreation

The Mason County Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails (PROST) Plan is hereby adopted by reference into this Comprehensive Plan. The PROST Plan can be found in **Appendix C**.



9 Capital Facilities, Financing, and Utilities

9.1 Introduction

Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) (RCW 36.70A.070) requires both a Capital Facilities Element and a Utilities Element in the County Comprehensive Plan. These elements each have a set of requirements under state law. **Table 9-1** displays the requirements under the GMA for each element.

Table 9-1. GMA Requirements for Capital Facilities and Utilities Elements	
Capital Facilities Element Requirements	Utilities Element Requirements
An inventory of existing capital facilities owned by public entities, including green infrastructure, showing the locations and capacities of the capital facilities;	An inventory of the general location of all existing and proposed utility facilities;
A forecast of the future needs for such capital facilities;	A description of the current capacity and expected future capacity of each utility; and
The proposed locations and capacities of expanded or new capital facilities;	Identify all public entities that own utility systems.
At least a six-year plan that will finance such capital facilities within projected funding capacities and clearly identifies sources of public money for such purposes; and	
A requirement to reassess the land use element if probable funding falls short of meeting existing needs and to ensure that the land use element, capital facilities plan element, and financing plan within the capital facilities plan element are coordinated and consistent. Park and recreation facilities shall be included in the capital facilities plan element.	

Together, the overall purpose of the combined Capital Facilities and Utilities Element is to:

- ◆ Identify and inventory existing capital facilities and utilities within the County;
- ◆ Assess current capacity to service the needs of Mason County, utilizing the level of service for necessary facilities such as water, wastewater, and criminal justice facilities;



- ◆ Forecast the future needs of capital facilities and utilities within Mason County given anticipated growth;
- ◆ Identify and plan for the financing of capital facilities to address current and future needs; and
- ◆ Comply with GMA requirements for both elements, recognizing that data provided by public and private entities—such as special purpose districts and private utility providers—should reflect a good faith effort.

In this element, an inventory of Mason County publicly owned facilities is provided as well as a description of their existing conditions and capacities. An inventory of facilities or services serving the County but owned by other jurisdictions or private purveyors is also provided³⁴. The chapter provides projections of future needs and a six (6) and twenty (20) year financing plan.

Together the Capital Facilities chapter, which includes the broader 20-year planning perspective, and the more detailed 6-year financing plan (or Capital Improvement Program CIP) are referred to as the Capital Facilities Plan (CFP). Because the six-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is updated more frequently to match the County annual capital budget, it is provided as an appendix to the plan for the ease of alteration when circumstances change from year to year.

9.1.1 How Is a CFP Used?

The Capital Facilities Plan includes proposed projects, funding sources, and general timelines to help guide the prioritization of limited resources for capital improvements to achieve the County's strategic goals. It helps shape the quality of life in our communities and helps the rest of the County's major plans come to life by requiring that projects have a coordinated plan for full financing and ensuring that multiple projects are not competing for the same revenue. The CFP provides a reality check for the County vision and the other long-range plan elements of the 2025-2045 Comprehensive Plan. Planning for capital facilities is a complex task, but planning is only the beginning. Finding resources to pay for those needs is another critical coordination step. This chapter will discuss the typical funding options currently utilized for capital projects as well as discuss other financing options that could be implemented in the future, if desired.

The Growth Management Act also requires public facilities and services needed to support development in the County to have an established "level of service"; this provides an objective measure of how well services are provided to the public. Deficiency and improvement needs can be determined by using the existing facility and service capacities and the "level of service" standard adopted for each. The County can decide to adopt levels of service for other facilities and services that are not necessarily required to support development or instead support certain performance goals through the adoption of policies.

³⁴ Not all service providers are subject to the timing, data releases, or requirements under the GMA. The County has conducted a good faith effort by contacting, requesting, and working with providers and special purpose districts to incorporate their information into this element.



The GMA requires that the CFP include within it a requirement to reassess the land use element if the County is unable to meet the level of service standards for these facilities or services required for development, due to the lack of funding.

There are other non-county, public organizations, and special districts that have capital facilities and taxing authority that are connected and coordinated with Mason County. Additionally, there are private utility services that are planned for in coordination with the County during the comprehensive planning process. This chapter will briefly discuss those districts and providers and how coordination with them can also support a more consistent land use element and capital facilities, financing, and utilities plan. These include the school districts, hospital districts, port districts, cemetery district, public utility districts, regional library system, water districts, and fire districts. These districts have their own governing body and capital facilities planning.

9.1.2 What Are Capital Facilities and Services?

The Growth Management Act does not clearly define what a "capital facility" is, but it does define a "public facility" or "service". The following is a list of facilities and services that may be included in the plan:

- ◆ Streets, highways and sidewalks
- ◆ Bridges
- ◆ Street and road lighting systems
- ◆ Traffic signals
- ◆ Water systems
- ◆ Sewer systems
- ◆ Stormwater systems
- ◆ Solid waste systems
- ◆ Schools
- ◆ Parks facilities and equipment
- ◆ Fire protection and suppression
- ◆ Law enforcement

In addition, some jurisdictions may decide to include the following in their plans:

- ◆ Bikeways and pedestrian paths
- ◆ Rolling stock (vehicles)
- ◆ Electric systems
- ◆ Public buildings
- ◆ Airports
- ◆ Computers
- ◆ Equipment, e.g. generators; heating, ventilation & air conditioning (HVAC) systems

To provide a high-level overview of the inventory for various capital facilities and utilities within Mason County, **Table 9-2** provides a breakdown. Included are the different facility or service types, the provider, the jurisdiction or operator, and the general service area.



Table 9-2. Capital Facilities and Utilities Inventory				
Facility / Service Type	Provider Type	Jurisdiction / Operator	General Service Area	Specific Notes
Cemeteries	Special District	Cemetery District	Countywide	
Electricity	Special District	PUD 1, PUD 3	Countywide	
Fire Protection	Special District	Fire Districts (various)	Countywide	
Hospitals	Special District	Hospital District 1&2	Countywide	
Natural Gas Infrastructure	Private Utility	Cascade Natural Gas	Corridor from Shelton to Allyn, See Figure 9-6	
On-Site Sewage Systems (OSS)	Private Owners	Property Owners / Local Health Jurisdiction Regulated	Predominantly Rural	
Parks, Trails, Open Space	County-Owned	Mason County Parks Department	Countywide	
	State-Owned	Washington State Parks and Recreation	State Parks	
	Federally Owned	National Parks Service	Olympic National Park	
Police & Criminal Justice	County-Owned	Mason County Court and Criminal Justice Department	Countywide	
	State-Owned	Washington State Department of Corrections and Washington State Patrol	Statewide	
Ports	Special District	Port Districts of Allyn, Dewatto, Grapeview, Hoodsport, and Shelton	Allyn, Dewatto, Grapeview, Hoodsport, and Shelton	
Regional Library District	Special District	Timberland Regional Library	Countywide	
Schools	Special District	Elma, Grapeview, Hood Canal, McCleary, Mary M. Knight, North Mason, Pioneer, Shelton, Southside	Countywide	



Table 9-2. Capital Facilities and Utilities Inventory				
Facility / Service Type	Provider Type	Jurisdiction / Operator	General Service Area	Specific Notes
Solid Waste Transfer Stations	County-Owned	Eells Hill Transfer Station (Shelton), Union Drop Box, Hoodsport Drop Box, Belfair Drop Box	Countywide	Pick up via Private Company
Stormwater Facilities	County-Owned	Mason County Public Works	Countywide	
Transportation Infrastructure	County-Owned	Mason County Public Works	Countywide	
	State-Owned	Washington State Department of Transportation	State Routes	
	Federally Owned	US Department of Transportation	Interstate and US Highways	
Telecommunications	Private	Hood Canal Communications, Inland Networks, Century Link, IFIBER, and others	Countywide	
	Special District	PUD 3	Countywide	
Water	County-Owned	Rustlewood, Beards Cove Water Systems	Rustlewood, Beards Cove	
	Special District	Belfair Water District, Maggie Lake Water District, Tahuya River Valley Water District, Trails End Water District, Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District	Small Rural Communities	
Wastewater Systems	County-Owned	North Bay/Case Inlet Water Reclamation Facility, Rustlewood Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Belfair Water Reclamation Facility	Allyn UGA and North Bay/Case Inlet, Rustlewood community, and Belfair UGA	
	Special District	Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District	Hartstene Pointe Community	

Not all projects occurring in the County will be included in the attached 6-year Capital Improvement Program but are incorporated by reference. For example, Mason County Public Works Department oversees the development of the Transportation Element of the



Comprehensive Plan which includes their own 6-year Transportation Improvement Program describing current capacity, needs, and a financing plan.

9.1.3 How Is the CFP Developed and When Is It Updated?

Growth Management Act

As mentioned earlier, both Capital Facilities and Utilities Elements are required chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. RCW 36.070A.020 also sets out goals for comprehensive plans; goals 1 and 12 in particular relate to capital facilities and UGAs:

(1) Urban growth. Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.

(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.

In order to achieve planning goal 12 of the GMA, the Capital Facilities plan must be coordinated with the Land Use Element and growth projections. An inventory of all publicly owned facilities, their capacities and location within the County, as well as a forecast of future needs and the ability to finance those improvements or expansions must be detailed within the plan.

Schedule for Updating Inventory

The County should be re-evaluating the inventory at least every periodic update cycle (as of 2022 every 10 years), this information will be in this chapter. The six-year financing plan or Capital Improvement Program, **Appendix D** to this plan, should be updated annually or biennially to correspond with the County's capital budget adoption. Ideally, every year each department would submit a list of the capital projects they are hoping to execute in the next year for inclusion in the Capital Improvement Program.

9.2 Capital Facility Funding

9.2.1 Finance Plan

County owned and operated facilities are included in a long-range financial analysis that is located in sections that discuss each department's capital facility inventory and needs. Each facility has its own funding options available, public or private; this funding can also influence the cost of the service the utility provides. This element looks at the broader view of funds while the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) in **Appendix D** are specific facility projects that have realistic funding sources assigned during the annual budget cycle. Certain funding options such as grants and bonds can often alter the status of a project if they are not received or delayed. To ensure that the land use element, capital facilities plan element, and financing plan (capital



improvement program) within the capital facilities element are coordinated, GMA requires the CFP include a requirement to reassess the land use element if probable funding falls short of meeting existing needs.

9.2.2 Current Funding Options

The County relies primarily on funds from REET 1, REET 2, and the .09 sales tax for capital facility projects that are not funded from utility rates, grants or loans. This Capital Facilities Element provides an idea of the capital facility funding from the previously mentioned funds during the 20-year planning period 2025–2045. The Capital Improvement Program located in **Appendix D** provides projected revenue from these funding sources over the current 6-year planning period. RCW 82.46.010 and RCW 82.46.035 outline that both REET 1 and 2 are a 0.25 percent tax on the sale of real property in unincorporated areas, these funds must be used for capital facility projects established in the Capital Facilities Plan. The funds can be used in the planning phase of the capital facility project such as the design and engineering. In some cases, a portion of the funds can be used for maintenance that does not include routine labor and material costs for operations.

The current limited funding options utilized by the County and dedicated to capital facility projects inevitably make setting adequate utility rates and acquiring grant and loan financing of crucial importance.

In late 2022, the Department of Community Development presented the Board of County Commissioners with an additional financing option through impact fees; the funding option has yet to gain enough support. Though implementing this process would require additional staffing time from DCD, the Finance Department as well as coordination between the special districts and the BOCC, impact fees should be considered for future funding initiatives as a viable and consistent source of supporting capital projects. Currently, transportation impact fees are utilized in the Belfair UGA based on PM peak trips generated by new development.

9.2.3 Future of Funding

Over the next 20 years REET 1 and REET 2 (Real Estate Excise Tax), as well as the .09 sales tax, are forecasted to increase at two percent each year. A portion of these funds are reinvested and provide additional interest income with an annual increase of two percent. **Table 9.3** is the forecasted revenue from the previously mentioned funds available for capital project planning and construction during 2025–2045.

Table 9-3. Future of Funding			
	20-Year Projected Revenue	Fees/Services/ Salaries & Benefits/Debts	Total Funding
REET 1	\$40,538,072	\$8,003,555	\$32,534,517
REET 2	\$43,631,030	\$10,006,229	\$35,074,801
.09 Sales Tax	\$31,103,063	\$3,524,249	\$27,578,814



Total	\$115,272,165	\$21,534,033	\$95,188,132
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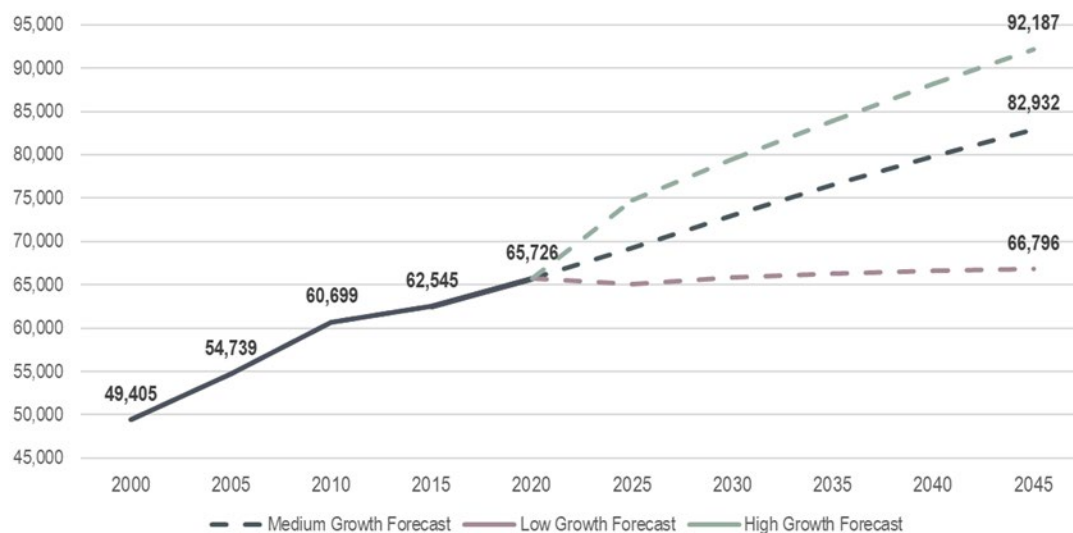
9.3 Facility Needs

9.3.1 Population Projections

Estimated capital facility needs for this plan are based on the population projections shown in **Figure 9-1**. The Growth Management Act requires that all parts of the Comprehensive Plan be internally consistent, thus the same population projections that were adopted during the periodic update of the Comprehensive Plan must be used throughout the Comprehensive Plan elements consistently, until new projections are adopted.

In 2022, the Mason County Commissioners adopted an update to the Belfair UGA Plan and a planned action ordinance and environmental impact statement for the Belfair UGA to better facilitate growth.. This process redistributed the population growth projections from the 2016-2036 Comprehensive Plan update, taking a population of 5,080 originally allocated to the rural area of the county and putting it into the Belfair UGA population bracket. Increasing the Belfair UGA densities greatly improves the return on capital infrastructure investment making the Belfair UGA a more desirable and accessible area in which to develop.

Figure 9-1. Population Growth Forecast, Mason County, 2000–2045



Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2022 GMA Population Projections



9.3.2 Concurrency and Level of Service

One of the Growth Management Act (GMA) goals, referred to as "concurrency", is the provision of infrastructure facilities and services to serve the projected population growth at the time in which growth occurs, or within a reasonable time afterward. Concurrency is required for transportation facilities, but the County can also adopt it for other capital facilities and services. Concurrency should be met within six years of a development approval and any fees collected from developers for projects must be spent within six years. Achieving concurrency is preceded by identifying specific facility needs; one strategy capable of identifying needs is the application of "level of service" standards.

The state GMA requires adequate public facilities be provided in urban areas, these facilities are water and wastewater facilities, solid waste management facilities, schools, parks and trails, police and fire, transportation facilities and other capital facilities. Transportation facilities require level of service (LOS) standards be established to ensure adequate improvements are implemented to meet the needs of the population as it grows and changes over the next twenty years (WAC 365-196-320). The advantage of using LOS standards is the ability to quantify deficiencies and identify improvement needs. The LOS can also be used as a performance standard for concurrency by comparing the service level being provided by a capital facility against the quantitative LOS standard. The service is considered deficient if it does not meet the service level standard that the County has determined it wants to deliver to its residents and users. The LOS approach makes the most sense where there are easily quantifiable facilities or where the state has defined the standards, such as for sewer and water facilities.

Another important aspect of concurrency is the ability to monitor the development of infrastructure improvements to assess whether they keep pace with approved development. Concurrency management, as it is called, involves a set of land use and permit approval processes designed to ensure facilities and services keep pace with growth. In some cases, development codes could be enacted to require that specific LOS standards be promulgated through the development of identified improvements.

In other cases, restrictions on growth may be imposed until appropriate service standards for capital facilities are achieved. Land use applications for certain development proposals, in areas targeted for future growth, could have their approvals withheld pending concomitant development of appropriate urban service level facilities (e.g., sewer facilities). The municipality would be responsible for managing the concurrent development of these urban services.

Requiring individual developers to fund and implement needed improvements is one possible funding method among a variety of other scenarios (e.g., grants, loans, and state, federal, and private sources). Under this arrangement, the final tenant (e.g., homebuyer or building purchaser) would ultimately pay for the new facilities through a higher initial purchase price or through a periodic assessment. Mason County's policies for concurrency management are contained in the Planning Context section of this chapter.



9.4 Capital Improvement Projects

An important component of the Capital Facilities Element of a comprehensive plan update is understanding the proposed Capital Improvement Projects slated for the next 6-year planning horizon to help address any identified in the needs assessment. Mason County adopts a new 6-year CIP annually to help address the ever-changing needs of the county. The projects are separated into: Water & Wastewater; Solid Waste; County & Administrative Buildings; Stormwater Management & Habitat Improvement; Transportation Facilities; and Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails.

Appendix D should be referenced for the most recent 6 Year CIP.

9.5 Mason County Capital Facilities and Services

The following sections provide insight into capital facilities and utilities under Mason County jurisdiction.

9.5.1 Water

Overview

The County owns and operates two public water systems serving the Rustlewood and the Beard's Cove communities which are both located outside urban growth areas. These systems serve approximately 601 residential connections.

Facility Inventory and Existing Conditions

Beard's Cove Water System

Beard's Cove Divisions 3 through 8 are served by the Beard's Cove water system. The water system was constructed by the developer and ownership transferred to Mason County in 1971. There are 521 buildable lots and the system currently serves 484 customers. The system is approved for 523 connections with few remaining lots to be developed within the subdivision.

Table 9-4. Beard's Cove Facility Inventory and Condition Assessment Table			
PRIMARY SYSTEM COMPONENTS			EXISTING CONDITION
Source			
Well 1 (emergency standby)	134' deep	40 GPM	
Well 2 (inactive)	408' deep	N/A	



Well 3 (peak & seasonal)	461' deep	35 GPM	
Well 4 (primary)	265' deep	230 GPM	
Storage	400,000	gallons	
35 foot diameter x 60-foot high steel			
Distribution			
8" AC	520	feet	
6" AC	9,810	feet	
6" PVC	9,110	feet	
4" AC	10,880	feet	
4" PVC	2,060	feet	
Total	32,380	feet	
AMR Water Meters	484		
Hydrants	25		
Treatment	None		
Emergency Generator	1		

Rustlewood Water System

The Rustlewood water system is located at 11 E Sea Vista Lane, Grapeview, WA. The following is taken from the Rustlewood Consumer Confidence Report for 2021:

The source of Rustlewood water is several groundwater wells located at the water system facility at the top of the subdivision. The only treatment provided to the water is a small amount of chlorine that is added to maintain disinfection in the distribution system. The reservoirs and pressure tank are located on the same parcel.

An automated meter reading (AMR) system and meters were installed in 2022 and 2023, with the ability to determine leakage and charge for use. The system is currently utilizing three wells ranging in depths of 83 to 260 feet and drawing from the Kennedy/Goldsborough WRIA.

The Rustlewood Water System is currently serving 152 connections with 161 connections approved for use. The water system has a storage capacity of 65,000 gallons and a distribution capacity of 211 gallons per minute. There are no current plans for expansion and service is limited to the existing community.

In 2022 the water system produced 14,011,300 gallons of water. The goal for this system is tentatively a reduction of five percent water usage within six years of the submitted report.



Table 9-5. Rustlewood Facility Inventory and Condition Assessment Table		
PRIMARY SYSTEM COMPONENTS		EXISTING CONDITION
Source		
Well 1 (emergency standby)		
Well 2 (inactive)		
Well 3 (peak & seasonal)		
Well 4 (primary)		
Storage		
35 foot diameter x 60-foot high steel		
Distribution		
8" AC		
6" AC		
6" PVC		
4" AC		
4" PVC		
Total		
AMR Water Meters		
Hydrants		
Treatment		
Emergency Generator		

Level of Service or Design Standards

Mason County Public Works establishes Level of Service standards for water to ensure compliance with all permit requirements, demonstrate sound financial and environmental stewardship, safeguard public health, and provide high-quality customer service.



Facility General Financing

Financing the planned utility improvements requires the use of grants, loans, utility fees, system development charges, developer contributions, and capital reserves. The specific combination of funds, and the availability of grants and loans, will affect user rates for each system as well as the timing on projects. The ability to initiate specific projects will be assessed annually based on the urgency of need, reserve funds available, and commitments from funding agencies to provide grants and/or loans. The decision about whether or not to proceed with any planned project is the decision of the Mason County Board of Commissioners for consideration in the annual budgeting and rate-setting process. To the extent possible, projects will be funded through rate revenues (capital reserves), grants, low interest loans, developer contributions, and County issued revenue bonds. A closer look at each utility's outlook for capital project financing follows:

Rustlewood Water

The Rustlewood Water System has a very limited customer base and very little capacity for expansion; 93 percent of the lots are already connected to water and/or sewer. Annual transfers from REET 2 occur in order to balance the budget and grants are also typically necessary to support any projects.

In 2023, the utility rate increase was set at five percent; this rate was maintained in 2024 and in 2025 a tiered water system rate was implemented. The purpose of the tier system for rates is to encourage water conservation, cost recovery, and fairness.

Beard's Cove Water

The Beard's Cove Water system is currently self-sustaining covering operation and maintenance through utility rates. Several water system and water quality grant opportunities through the Washington Department of Commerce and Department of Health have been, and are, available to support capital improvement projects to some degree.

The Finance Department has estimated \$1,240,000 of REET 2 funding will be transferred during the 20-year planning period to support this water and wastewater system.

In 2023, the utility rate increase was set at five percent; this rate was maintained in 2024 and in 2025 a tiered water system rate was implemented. The purpose of the tier system for rates is to encourage water conservation, cost recovery and fairness.

Forecasted Needs

One key priority is to continue addressing the remaining Asbestos Cement piping within the county's water system. Additionally, Mason County would like to begin developing policies to help mitigate the potential impact of polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) within the water system. The county is also looking into the possibility of converting the current "wand read" or drive-by system to a live read system. There is the possibility of some remaining grant funding being available specifically for the Rustlewood system that could help with this transition project.



The future needs of the Rustlewood Water System include replacement of a main line that has become brittle; the replacement is vital due to the piping consisting of asbestos concrete. Prior to implementation of that pipe replacement, isolation valves and blow-off valves will have to be placed to minimize the impact on Beard’s Cove water system customers. Updating the Beard’s Cove Water System Plan, originally drafted in 2002, was recently estimated at \$50,000 and placing the valves, recently estimated at \$100,000, will help support the County’s need to replace the main pipe and help fulfill the requirements for assistance from the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. Assistance from this fund will be vital in supporting the main line replacement.

9.5.2 Wastewater

Overview

The County also owns and operates three sanitary sewer collection and treatment facilities, North Bay/Case Inlet Water Reclamation Facility, Rustlewood Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Belfair Water Reclamation Facility. North Bay/Case Inlet Water Reclamation Facility provides wastewater treatment to protect Case Inlet from sewage contamination and to facilitate urban development within the Allyn Urban Growth Area (UGA). The Rustlewood facility protects the water of Pickering Passage, and the Belfair Water Reclamation Facility protects the water quality in Hood Canal and facilitates urban development within the Belfair UGA. The Belfair and Case Inlet Facilities serve the present and future populations in both urban growth areas. Both the Belfair Water Reclamation project and the North Bay/Case Inlet use advanced water treatment science to produce Class A reclaimed water. These facilities need routine hauling of sludge to keep the systems operating effectively. The solids percentage for each of these facilities is expected to be between one to four percent. In 2021, Mason County hauled 146,239 gallons of sludge and in 2022, 231,121 gallons of sludge. The sludge is delivered to the City of Shelton treatment facility and processed into Class A biosolids. The future management of biosolids will depend on the projected production of sludge in relation to the available capacity and methods to dispose of the produced biosolids.

Facility Inventory and Existing Conditions

North Bay/Case Inlet (NB/CI) Water Reclamation Facility

The North Bay/Case Inlet (NB/CI) water reclamation facility was constructed in 2000 to serve the Allyn UGA and parcels within proximity of the conveyance system. The reclamation facility is located on parcel 12219-33-0000, 1001 E Reclamation Ridge Drive Allyn, WA. The 365,000 gallon per day water reclamation facility operates with treatment, storage, and land application facilities. Three pump stations serve to transfer wastewater to the NB/CI facility.

Table 9-6. North Bay/Case Inlet Sewer Capacity/Usage			
Capacity	Current Usage	Future Usage w/ Expected Growth	Excess/Deficit Capacity



0.365M gal/day	0.277M gal/day	TBD M gal/day	0.088M gal/day
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Rustlewood Wastewater Treatment Plant

The Rustlewood Wastewater Treatment Facility, constructed in the 1970s to accommodate 170 connections, is located at 111 East Rustle Way, Grapeview WA. By the end of the 1970s the collection system consisted of 41 manholes, 8,200 feet of gravity pipe and 1,070 feet of force main. In 1997 the aging system went through an infiltration and inflow study “Rustlewood Sanitary Sewer System Infiltration and Inflow Study”. And in 2006 an abbreviate engineering report was prepared to address the aging concrete pipes and inefficient materials of collection system parts. The facility was rebuilt in 2008 with new headworks with manual bar screen, grit removal, and flow distribution. Biological processes are accomplished in two concrete sequencing batch reactor tanks and treated with UV disinfection.

Table 9-7. Rustlewood Sewer Capacity/Usage			
Capacity	Current Usage	Future Usage w/ Expected Growth	Excess/Deficit Capacity
0.057M gal/day	0.036M gal/day	TBD M gal/day	0.021M gal/day
OR			
161 connections	152 connections	TBD	9

Belfair Water Reclamation Facility (WRF)

Built in 2012, the Belfair Water Reclamation Facility is located on County property, 25200 NE State Route 3 (parcel 12333-21-00080 and several surrounding parcels), with three pump stations within the UGA. Pump station #1 on parcel 12329-43-00190, pump station #2 on parcel 12332-50-00040, and pump station #3 on parcel 12332-14-00000. The WRF produces Class A reclaimed water that is discharged to a spray field. Residential and commercial properties within the Belfair Urban Growth Area have slowly converted from onsite septic systems to connect to the Belfair sewer. Currently the Mason County code is written to only require hook up to the existing system if the development is within so many feet of the sewer (see applicable section of MCC 17.03).

Table 9-8. Belfair Sewer Capacity/Usage			
Capacity	Current Usage	Future Usage w/ Expected Growth	Excess/Deficit Capacity
0.125M gal/day	0.125M gal/day	0.077M gal/day	-0.077M gal/day



Level of Service or Design Standards

Mason County Public Works establishes Level of Service standards for wastewater to ensure compliance with all permit requirements, demonstrate sound financial and environmental stewardship, safeguard public health, and provide high-quality customer service. In areas designated for growth, such as Belfair and North Bay, the department is committed to ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with growth demands.

Facility General Financing

Financing the planned utility improvements requires the use of grants, loans, utility fees, system development charges, developer contributions, and capital reserves. The specific combination of funds, and the availability of grants and loans, will affect user rates for each system as well as the timing on projects. The ability to initiate specific projects will be assessed annually based on the urgency of need, reserve funds available, and commitments from funding agencies to provide grants and/or loans. The decision about whether or not to proceed with any planned project is the decision of the Mason County Board of Commissioners for consideration in the annual budgeting and rate-setting process. To the extent possible, projects will be funded through rate revenues (capital reserves), grants, low interest loans, developer contributions, and County issued revenue bonds.

North Bay/Case Inlet Sewer

The North Bay Case Inlet Water Reclamation Facility (WRF) is self-sustaining with utility rates covering the costs of operation and maintenance. The capital improvement projects included in the annual CIP are most often planned utilizing rates and grants; this has been the trend dating back to at least the 2018 update of the annual CIP. The design and construction of the WRF expansion, based on the findings of the 2025 update of the general sewer and facility plan, may require a mix of rates, grants, and loans.

Belfair Sewer

The Belfair Water Reclamation Facility has required a mix of utility rates, REET 2, and Sales & Use Tax funding to repay the initial capital construction project debt. Repayment on this debt is scheduled to end in 2027. There is an additional loan repayment for the recent sewer expansion and pump station installation that will be paid through utility rates, annually, up until June 1, 2039. Projects on this system have historically relied on rates, grants, and loans. In 2023, the BOCC instructed staff to evaluate operations, debt, and future capital improvement program costs in order to set an appropriate rate in 2024; a 9.7 percent increase in rates and fees was effective for this system July 1, 2024. Additional funding sources beyond rates will be needed for the WRF and collection system expansion in the near future.

Rustlewood Sewer

As mentioned earlier under the Rustlewood Water System, the Rustlewood sewer system is limited in growth potential with 93 percent of the lots already on sewer and/or water. See the Rustlewood Water discussion under Facility General Financing for additional details on utility rates and supplemental funding.



Forecasted Needs

Facility improvements for Belfair, and the North Bay/Case Inlet systems are driven by anticipated growth in those areas, along with permit compliance and repair/replacement. The Rustlewood system needs are driven by permit compliance and repair/replacement, and not growth-related.

Permit compliance items on the radar include reducing nutrients to Puget Sound (Rustlewood only) and monitoring PFAS in wastewater to protect both environmental and public health.

Belfair anticipates needing to expand spray field capacity, or revise permit for new reclaimed water use(s), install new membranes within the existing facility, and eventually expand its treatment plant biosolids handling. Additionally, new collection system improvements will occur to serve new development.

The North Bay system is currently undergoing a plan update that will result in an expanded list of projects. Current planned projects include an I&I study, Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) upgrades, UV treatment, and the addition of new treatment technology and reclaimed water options.

The Rustlewood system anticipates undergoing an outfall repair and the addition of an anoxic phase for de-nitrogenization.

Table 9-9. Forecasted Wastewater Needs			
Item	Cost (2025)	Anticipated Need Date	Escalated \$s
<i>Belfair Sewer</i>			
Membrane Technology	\$1M	2035	\$2M
Reclaimed Water Uses	\$3.5M	2030	\$5M
<i>North Bay</i>			
SCADA Upgrades	\$0.5M ea	2030 & 2040	\$0.75M & \$1.25M
UV Treatment	\$0.25M ea	2030, 2035, 2040, 2045	\$0.3M, \$0.4M, \$0.5M, & 0.65M

9.5.3 Solid Waste Program

Overview

State law, RCW 70A.205, requires that county and city governments assume the primary responsibility for solid waste management and implement effective waste reduction and recycling strategies. Also, under Washington State Growth Management Act 36.70A, all Counties and Cities are required to establish a process for siting essential public facilities, including those facilities typically difficult to site like solid waste handling facilities.



Facility Inventory and Existing Conditions

Mason County's solid waste program provides transfer and disposal operations for solid waste at four transfer station locations. The County's four solid waste facilities include:

- ◆ Shelton transfer station and recycling facilities, 501 W Eells Hill Road
- ◆ Belfair drop box station, 1611 NE Sand Hill Road
- ◆ Union drop box station, 1391 E McReavy Road
- ◆ Hoodsport drop box station, 260 N Foothills Park Road

The largest solid waste facility in Mason County is located on Eells Hill Road, just outside of Shelton. Waste materials collected from the smaller transfer stations in Hoodsport, Union, and Belfair are transported to the Shelton facility. There, the garbage is compacted into containers and trucked to the Headquarters Landfill in Cowlitz County, Washington.

Mason County Garbage provides waste collection services to both residents and businesses within the county. It hauls waste to the Eells Hill facility and also handles contracted long-haul transport of all solid waste to the Headquarters Landfill, which currently has an estimated 57 years of remaining capacity.

Mason County has a long-haul contract with Mason County Garbage, as well as an Interlocal Agreement with Cowlitz County for landfill disposal services. Both agreements have 10-year terms, with options to renew each contract for two additional 10-year periods.

Household recyclable materials are also accepted at each transfer station location. Mason County Garbage removes and disposes of these materials via its "Blue Box" Contract. Recyclables are taken to the regional facility with the most favorable commodity prices.

Household hazardous wastes are collected by Mason County staff at the Shelton transfer facility. Residents in North Mason County can take their hazardous waste to the Kitsap County transfer station. This arrangement is established through inter-local agreement and Mason County pays approximately \$50 per customer for collection and disposal of materials from residents who take their materials to the Kitsap County facility. Disposal of household hazardous wastes is performed by several different companies.

Mason County has a Landfill Closure Reserve Fund per State Law to ensure proper closure of the old landfill at Eells Hill. As of 2025, post-closure monitoring and other activities are complete, and final closure activities are underway.

The county adopted the 2018 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan prepared by the Solid Waste Advisory Committee. The Plan identifies "needs and opportunities" in regard to upgraded and additional solid waste facilities, several of which have been addressed and noted in the plan. Mason County adopted its first solid waste plan in 1971, revised this plan in 1992, and made subsequent amendments in 1998, 2008, and 2011. The revised code of Washington RCW 70.95 requires a plan review/update every five years. The Mason County Comprehensive Waste Management Plan is consistently in some form of update.



Tables 9-10 and **9-11** present recent solid waste trends in Mason County for 2020–2024. **Table 9-10** summarizes total tonnage generated, while **Table 9-11** shows waste generation on a per capita basis.

Table 9-10. Total Solid Waste Tonnage Generated in Mason County					
Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Exported for Land Disposal	44,129	48,971	50,298	50,064	52,379
Collected Through Recycling	756	787	872	639	653
Total Tons Generated	44,885	49,758	51,170	50,703	53,032

Overall, the County has experienced steady increases in waste exported for land disposal since 2020. Recycling collection rose modestly between 2020 and 2022 but declined notably in 2023 and remained low in 2024. The reasons for this shift are not fully understood and may reflect changes in community behavior, program operations, market factors, or a combination thereof. Additional assessment would help clarify these dynamics.

Table 9-11. Total Per Capita Solid Waste Tonnage Generated in Mason County					
Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
OFM Population for Mason County	65,726	65,750	66,200	67,000	67,475
Exported for Land Disposal	0.67	0.74	0.76	0.75	0.78
Collected Through Recycling	0.012	0.012	0.013	0.001	0.001
Total tons generated per capita	0.68	0.75	0.77	0.76	0.79

Per capita generation increased from 0.68 tons per person in 2020 to 0.79 tons per person in 2024. This is above the 0.6 tons per person assumption used in the 2018 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan (CSWMP), which was based on trends from 2010–2015. While Mason



County remains below the national average of 0.89 tons per person per year³⁵, the upward trend indicates increasing pressure on local waste receiving facilities.

Level of Service or Design Standards

The current CSWMP does not indicate an adopted level of service for solid waste management but does indicate that there has been a consistent amount of solid waste tonnage in years prior to the development of the plan (2010–2015) equating to 0.6 tons per capita. The plan specifies that no expansion of facilities was mapped out for the next 20 years (from the conception of current 2018 CSWMP) but states that the existing Eells Hill transfer station is nearing its capacity and options for a new or expanded facility should be considered.

Facility General Financing

The solid waste program is supported by user fees at the transfer station as well as Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance Program (LSWFAP) grants. Budgets are set annually in order that revenues equal or exceed the expenditure annually. These revenues support the Mason County Solid Waste Fund #402, an enterprise fund.

When referencing Tables 9-10 and 9-11, located above, the 2025 update of the CSWMP will most likely evaluate these new circumstances. The CIP adjustment for 2020–2021 was 6.5 percent, setting disposal rates for solid waste (per ton) at \$110.27, a rate previously not expected to be met until somewhere between 2030 and 2035.

Forecasted Needs

The 2018 CSWMP projected future tonnage using OFM growth forecasts paired with a constant per capita generation rate of 0.6 tons per person. Both elements are now outdated: recent solid waste data show higher and more variable per capita generation, and OFM has since released updated population projections. In response, **Table 9-12** below provides revised projections of total solid waste tonnage. These projections combine updated OFM population forecasts with both the 2018 CSWMP assumption and the more recent mean per capita generation rate to reflect recent conditions. They are intended to serve as monitoring benchmarks utilized alongside the updated CSWMP, which is being updated concurrently.

Table 9-12. Total Solid Waste Tonnage Generation Projections, 2025 to 2045			
	2022 OFM Population Projection	2018 CSWMP Projection (0.6 tons of solid waste per capita)	2024 Projection (0.75 tons of solid waste per capita)
2025	69,262	41,557	51,947
2030	72,981	43,789	54,736
2035	76,485	45,891	57,364

³⁵ This calculation is based on the 2018 EPA reporting that total generation of solid waste per person per day is 4.9 pounds. U.S. EPA. (2024, November 8). *National Overview: Facts and figures on materials, wastes and recycling* | US EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/national-overview-facts-and-figures-materials>



2040	79,792	47,875	59,844
2045	82,932	49,752	62,199

Over the next seven to 20 years, Mason County's solid waste management will require significant attention to infrastructure and costs. Modernization of the central Eells Hill Transfer Station will be necessary to handle growth, improve efficiency, and meet evolving regulations, with initial capital improvements already planned. Upgrading the Hoodspout and Allyn collection stations with building and essential utility improvements will enhance service and long-term functionality at these community points. Growth in the Belfair UGA and Tahuya peninsula will further emphasize the need for the design and siting of a new Belfair station.

Climate compliance measures at the Headquarters Landfill will necessitate careful financial planning to minimize rate impacts and may incentivize greater efforts in waste reduction and recycling county-wide. Additional requirements for solid waste, timing and cost estimates can be referenced in the latest Mason County Solid Waste Management Plan which is planned for adoption at the end of 2025.

9.5.4 Parks and Trails

Overview

Recreational opportunities in Mason County include parks for day-use activities and overnight camping; fresh and saltwater areas for boating and other water sports; facilities and equipment for sports and play activities; and wilderness areas and other open spaces for hiking, hunting, off road vehicle (ORV) use, and horseback riding.

Existing parks and recreation facilities in Mason County are available through a variety of public and private entities. Federal and state facilities include camping, boating, and day-use parks. The County-owned Park system includes day-use and water access facilities, sports fields, and related recreational areas. Other agencies providing park and recreational resources include municipalities, port districts, and public schools. Some private recreational facilities are open to the public as well.

Additionally, Mason County has multiple Washington State Parks and the Olympic National Park as additional assets for residents and visitors to the county.

Mason County adopted a Parks and Recreation Plan in November of 2006, which was update and adopted again in 2013, and a Mason County Regional Trails Plan in March of 2008. The County adopted the 2022 Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails (PROST) Plan that replaces the 2013 Parks and Trails comprehensive plan. The adopted plans are incorporated herein by reference.

Note: The 2022 PROST Plan does not include an emergent opportunity for Mason County to acquire land at the south end of Mason Lake. The Mason County BOCC authorized a \$100,000 feasibility study to determine the viability and preliminary cost estimates to acquire and develop the area for a county operated waterfront campground and day park. The initial acquisition



order of magnitude cost estimate ranges from \$10 million to \$25 million. Upgrades and operations costs are not included in these values.

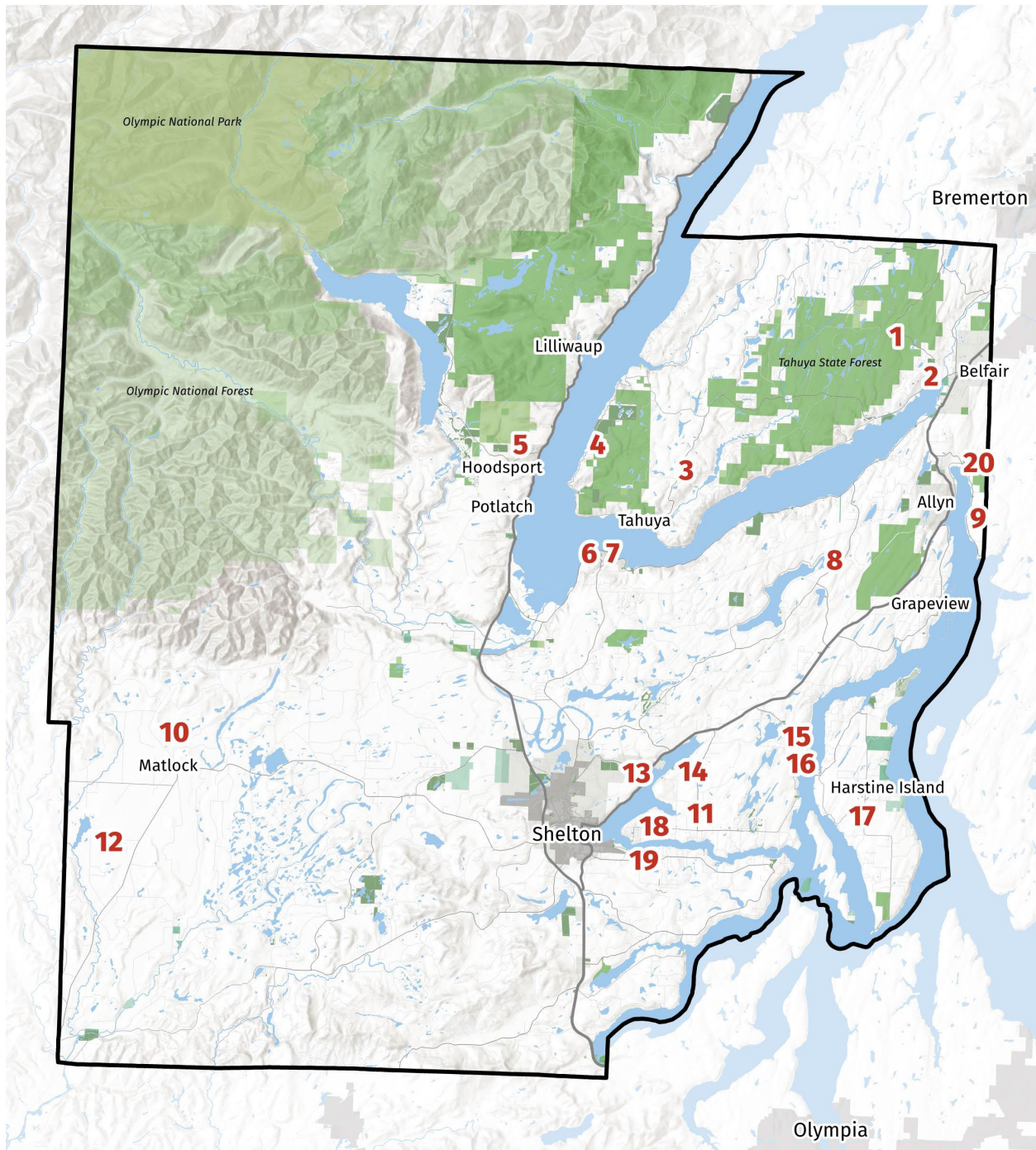
Facility Inventory and Existing Conditions

The County currently manages 21 park properties in Mason County, two of which are undeveloped, and four others have large portions that are also undeveloped. Of the developed parks, two are large baseball/softball complexes, six provide saltwater access parks, three are located on freshwater lakes, and three provide upland day use and recreation facilities. In addition to the day-use facilities, the County also owns and maintains one above-ground skate park. The conditions of these facilities vary by location; however, significant investment in facilities has been made in recent years from Real Estate Excise Tax proceeds (REET 2) and grant proceeds from the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). The CIP continues this trend of investment in park development and facility upgrades. The heavy use and demand from both County and non-County residents are particularly high during spring, summer, and fall. An inventory of all Mason County Parks can be found in the PROST Plan, and park locations are illustrated in **Figure 9-2**.

Mason County's Park system comprises a diverse range of facilities, including neighborhood, community, and regional parks, as well as natural open space areas, totaling 21 sites and 1014.46 acres. These parks offer various recreational opportunities, from active pursuits like sports fields and boat launches to passive activities such as trails and open spaces, all intended to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.



Figure 9-2. Mason County Parks



- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 Sandhill County Park | 8 Mason Lake County Park | 15 Phillips Lake County Park |
| 2 Hunter Park | 9 Watson Wildwood View Park | 16 Latimers Landing County Park |
| 3 Rendsland County Park | 10 Truman Glick County Park | 17 Harstine Island Park |
| 4 Menards Landing | 11 Sunset Bluff Park | 18 Jacoby/Shorecrest County Park |
| 5 Foothills County Park | 12 Decker Creek Park | 19 Walker County Park |
| 6 Union County Park | 13 Mason County Recreation Area | 20 Coulter Creek Park |
| 7 Union Boat Ramp | 14 Oakland Bay Historical Park | |



Level of Service or Design Standards

The 2022 PROST Plan emphasized that the National Recreation and Park Association guidelines for level of service are not always a good indicator of community needs and therefore looked at a variety of methods and conditions to find realistic LOS for Mason County parks and open space facilities. Parks are divided into three types: neighborhood, community, and regional, these are evaluated along with natural open space. Chapter 5 of the 2022 PROST Plan should be referenced for the park demand and needs analysis.

Facility General Financing

Parks, recreation, open space, and trails capital facility financing typically manifest through grants, general fund budgets, real estate excise tax, and general obligation bonds. Future investments made from the REET 2 fund will be dependent on actual tax proceeds and additional project funding (i.e. grants). Grant proceeds from the Recreation and Conservation Office have contributed to many capital facility projects.

The 2022-2027 PROST Plan identifies additional funding strategies that could be addressed in the future such as impact fees, fifteen different federal and state grants and conservation programs, formation of park districts, interagency and interlocal agreements, private grants, and different methods for working with private landowners.

Forecasted Needs

Mason County's parks face future needs centered on balancing growth and preservation, with a key consideration being the level of service provided to residents. There's a demand for more trails, better water access, and updated facilities like play areas and sports fields to meet the community's recreational needs. The county also needs to focus on acquiring new parkland, maintaining existing sites to ensure a desired level of service, and improving accessibility for everyone.

9.5.5 County Administrative Buildings

Overview

Mason County owns several buildings, most of which are located in the City of Shelton, the county seat. These buildings are used to support general County functions such as internal management, health, public service, and general administration. Other buildings owned by the County include Memorial Hall, the two buildings on Pine Street that house the Mason County Sheriff, the Public Works Campus and the Belfair Public Works Shop.

Memorial Hall and the two buildings on Pine Street are located in Shelton, a few blocks from the main campus area. The Public Works campus is located about 4 miles north of Shelton, on the northwest side of Highway 101. The Belfair Public Works Shop is situated on the north shore of Hood Canal about 3 miles from Belfair.



Facility Inventory and Existing Conditions

Mason County's administrative offices and departments housed in the buildings are listed in **Table 9-13**. Also provided is a summary of the current office area allocations for the County departments and departmental functions.

Most of the County's administrative offices are located in the Shelton Campus, a four-square block section of the downtown area. At this location, the County operates from twenty-three publicly owned buildings. These include the Courthouse, Jail, Juvenile Detention Facility, and Buildings 1 through 10. Other county administrative offices are the 3rd and Pine Building (Sheriff Office), and Public Works Campus.

Table 9-13. Summary of Administration Sites		
Site	Square Feet	Acres
Shelton Campus	169,200	3.88
Memorial Hall	12,000	0.275
Belfair Public Works Campus	3,500	1.4
Public Works Campus	64,368	48.6
3 rd & Pine Property	19,000	1.16

Level of Service or Design Standards

Based on the "Space Standards Manual" published by the State of Washington Department of General Administration, 250 square feet are needed per employee. In addition, certain governmental functions have special requirements for facilities; the Shelton campus is also dependent on the efficiency of space layout, work patterns, and centralization of services. During the 2008 Space Needs Assessment and Master Plan drafting it was determined that the County's space needs per employee, with special factors taken into account, would be 222 square feet. Within the fifteen years since the drafting of this assessment, departments have shuffled from building to building and more services have been consolidated and brought online this has no doubt shifted space needs for the County and will need to be reflected in future space studies.

Facility General Financing

The County 6-year CIP is adopted by reference to address the general financing for administrative buildings. This document is updated annually.

Forecasted Administrative Building Needs

Mason County's administrative buildings are subject to ongoing evaluation and potential improvements within the framework of the county's annually updated Six-Year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). This planning horizon allows for the systematic assessment of facility needs, including maintenance, upgrades, and potential expansions, to ensure efficient and effective delivery of county services. By referencing the CIP, which is revised each year, the



county can adapt its strategies for administrative buildings in response to evolving needs, growth projections, and funding availability. This proactive approach ensures that the county's administrative infrastructure remains functional and capable of supporting the community in the coming years.

9.5.6 Police and Criminal Justice Facilities

Overview

Mason County's criminal justice system includes two main groups of facilities: the Sheriff's Office and County Jail, and the District and Superior Courts. The Mason County Sheriff's Office provides law enforcement services countywide and operates the county jail, which is located in Shelton and handles incarceration for adult offenders. Juvenile detention and court services are also provided through dedicated facilities. The judicial system comprises the District Court, which handles misdemeanors and civil matters, and the Superior Court, which oversees felonies, family law, and major civil cases. Together, these facilities form the core of the county's law enforcement and justice infrastructure, serving both administrative and public safety functions.

In addition to locally operated police and criminal justice facilities, there are two major state-operated institutions located in Mason County: the Washington Corrections Center and the Washington State Patrol Academy. These facilities, both located off West Dayton Airport Road, are operated by the Washington State Department of Corrections and the Washington State Patrol and are not under the jurisdiction of Mason County.

Jail and Sheriff's Facilities

The Mason County Sheriff's Office provides police services including patrol, traffic enforcement, service of civil process, jail operation and investigative services to the citizens of Mason County. The Mason County Sheriff's Office currently has a total of 98 authorized employees. Of those 50 are commissioned officers, 33 are jailers, and 15 are civilian employees.

The Mason County Sheriff's Office currently serves approximately 65,650 citizens. This number represents an 8.16 percent increase in population since 2010. The Mason County Sheriff's Office covers all of Mason County including over 900 miles of shorelines, 622 miles of county roads and nearly 115 miles of state highways. The Mason County Sheriff's department is the primary Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) for marine enforcement in the waters around Mason County.

The Mason County Sheriff's Office has primary responsibility for traffic law enforcement and collision investigations on all county roads. Currently, nine deputies are assigned to the traffic unit efforts, based on specialized training, but still answer 911 calls for service while on shift. Mason County Sheriff's Office is assisted through mutual aid by the Shelton Police Department, Squaxin Island Police Department, and Washington State Patrol.

The Mason County Jail provides incarceration services for Mason County law enforcement agencies. Washington State Law establishes the Board of County Commissioners responsible



for the physical facility and the chief law enforcement officer (Sheriff) is responsible for operations.

District and Superior Courts

The Mason County District Court administers justice with fairness, equality and integrity, to resolve matters before the court in a timely manner. It provides impartial, courteous and prompt service in a manner that inspires public trust and confidence. District Court is considered “the people’s court” and serves all the citizens of Mason County.

The Court processes all cases allowed in the Courts of Limited Jurisdiction and handles nearly 10,000 cases annually. These include Traffic and non-traffic infractions, Criminal Misdemeanors and Gross Misdemeanors, Civil Claims up to \$100,000, Small Claims up to \$10,000, Parking cases, Vehicle Impounds, Dangerous Dog hearings, Anti-harassment, Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking protection orders and name change orders. District courts have jurisdiction over both criminal and civil cases. Criminal jurisdiction includes misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors cases that involve traffic or non-traffic offenses. Examples include Driving while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs (DUI), reckless driving, driving with a suspended driver's license and assault in the fourth degree. Preliminary hearings for felony cases are also within the jurisdiction of the district courts. The maximum penalty for gross misdemeanors is 364 days in jail and a \$5,000 fine. The maximum penalty for misdemeanors is 90 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine. A defendant is entitled to a jury trial for these offenses. Juries in courts of limited jurisdiction are composed of six people. It is the practice of this court to have one or two alternates on the jury in addition to the six. Jurisdiction in civil cases includes damages for injury to individuals or personal property and contract disputes in amounts of up to \$100,000. Under some circumstances parties would have a right to a jury trial. District courts also have jurisdiction over traffic and non-traffic infractions, and civil proceedings for which a monetary penalty—but no jail sentence—may be imposed. There is no right to a jury trial for an infraction. District courts have jurisdiction to issue domestic violence and antiharassment protection orders and no-contact orders. They also have jurisdiction to hear change-of-name petitions and certain lien foreclosures. More information on these procedures can be obtained by contacting your local district court.

Small claims are limited to money claims of up to \$5,000, or up to \$10,000 when brought by a natural person. These are filed and heard in the Small Claims Department of the district court. Generally, each party is self-represented—attorneys are not permitted except with the permission of the judge. Witnesses may not be subpoenaed but may be allowed to voluntarily testify for a party. Examples of cases heard: Neighborhood disputes, consumer problems, landlord/tenant matters and small collections. The district court clerk can provide specific information about filing a claim.

The court also reviews and processes Felony and Misdemeanor search warrants, probable cause hearings and requests for Protection Orders during business hours and non-business hours. The Court is responsible for the collection and distribution of fines, costs, fees and restitution paid through the courts; monitoring time-pay agreements; and preparing cases for



collection assignment. District Court staff monitors criminal defendants' compliance with court orders and assists with the Probation department as needed.

In 2020, during the COVID pandemic slowdown, 2,094 cases were filed in Mason County Superior Court. However, in the Superior Court, facility needs are based upon the number of proceedings held and the number of judicial officers necessary to preside over the proceedings. In 2020, again during the pandemic where many of the court operations were curtailed, over 12,000 proceedings were held, the greatest occurring in criminal matters (7,000), followed by Juvenile Dependency, Domestic, Civil, Juvenile Offender, Mental Illness, Probate/Guardianship, and Adoption/Parentage, in that order. The Superior Court has four judicial officers and at times operates four separate courtrooms at the same time.

Facility Inventory and Existing Conditions

Jail Facilities

The facility is located adjacent to the County courthouse on N. 4th St. in the incorporated area of Shelton. The most recent facility was constructed with 45 inmate beds in 1985. In 1986 the facility opened and subsequently operates at maximum inmate capacity. To obtain more inmate beds, the County added double bunks in rooms designed as single occupancy. They turned an existing inmate recreation area into inmate housing, adding more bunks. The current bed count is 96.

The jail requires 18.6 full time employees (FTEs); however, the facility was not designed—and current staff are not trained—to provide treatment or programs for individuals with mental health and/or substance use disorder needs. A recent jail facility needs assessment identified this gap as a significant concern, noting that 20 to 25 percent of the jail population would be better served in behavioral health housing.³⁶ To address this concern, exploration regarding co-locating a Behavioral Health/Substance Use Disorder (SUD) facility with a new or expanded jail, in partnership with entities specializing in this area, was conducted as part of the assessment.

Sheriff's Facility

The Mason County Sheriff's Office is currently housed at 322 N 3rd St. in Shelton. Police Operations, Records, Finance, Administration, and Evidence are currently housed at this facility.

Storage

County Sheriff's Office storage is accommodated through the use of several different building sites including one on Dayton Airport Road, the North Precinct building, and the County shop. The Mason County Sheriff's Office also stores vehicles held as evidence, including homicide vehicles, and large evidence items.

North Mason County Facility

The North Precinct, formerly located on SR 3 at Belfair Landing, was established in late 2013 and has made a significant impact on policing operations. In February 2024, the North Precinct

³⁶ BCRA Design & Treanor. (2024). *Mason County Justice Center Study*. Prepared for Mason County.



operations moved to a new location taking over space at the old fire station, 460 NE Old Belfair Hwy, Belfair.

Firearms Training Facility

The Mason County Sheriff's Office currently has no weapons training facility and relies upon the Department of Corrections which allows quarterly training at their facility located adjacent to the Washington Corrections Center.

Courts

District Court

The Mason County District Court is located at 414 W. Franklin St., Shelton, and operates Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (or later), with two courts currently taking place on Monday mornings, Thursday afternoons, and all day on Fridays.

Superior Court

One Courtroom, located in Building 3, is primarily utilized for juvenile matters and houses the juvenile court staff. Another remote hearing room is located at the local mental health treatment facility and is utilized for involuntary treatment proceedings. A detention center is managed by the Superior Court and is located near Building 3 and houses juveniles involved in the Juvenile Offender system. Building 6 houses another remote courtroom primarily dedicated to civil proceedings. Building 6 also houses the office area for the four Therapy Court staff. The Historic Courthouse Building has four court/hearings rooms, two are dedicated to the Superior Court and two are dedicated to the District Court. The court/hearings rooms are used for various types of proceedings. The Historic Courthouse Building also houses all of the District Court personnel, the Superior Court Clerk's Office, and the Superior Court personnel, except for the Juvenile Court staff, the Detention Staff, and the Therapeutic Court Staff.

Phase One, Building 10

Building 10 has been renovated and houses two large courtrooms and a large jury assembly area. One of the Courtrooms is used by the District Court and the other is used by the Superior Court for jury trials while the COVID protocols are in place and the Courts are working through the backlogs caused by the COVID pandemic.

Historic Courthouse Building

During the transition of the District Court relocation to Building 10, the Historic Courthouse Building will undergo a renovation process addressing the ongoing issues of security and public contact while better utilizing the use of the court/hearings rooms and developing jury assembly area(s). The intent is to move the offices of the Superior Court judicial officers and general support staff to the South end of the Historic Courthouse Building, with internal access to all of the court/hearings rooms and arranging the remainder of the building to appropriately accommodate the Superior Court Clerk's Office, the Therapeutic Courts, and the jury assembly area(s).



Level of Service or Design Standards

Jail and Sheriff’s Facilities

Standard space allocation methods do not apply to all areas of the Sheriff’s Office because of the diverse functions found within the department such as training, locker rooms, K-9 holding, briefing room, interview rooms, public receptions, fingerprinting, criminal complaints, evidence processing and others. Standard space allocations for many of the above essential functions are not adequate.

As mentioned above, to safely run a jail facility, the average daily population has to be around 10 to 20 percent less than the number of actual beds, a standard that has yet to be achieved.

Facility General Financing

Jail and Sheriff’s Facilities

The Mason County Sheriff’s Office continues to explore alternative funding sources including Federal Homeland Security Grants, Justice Assistance Grants, and grants from other federal, state, and private sources. However, like many other funding sources the amounts of these grants are being reduced or eliminated altogether. Additionally, the Mason County Sheriff’s Office is committed to forming community partnerships with public and private agencies to more efficiently provide services and utilize facilities to maximum efficiency. The Mason County Sheriff’s Department provides regular financing updates and are available online for reference.

In 2024, Mason County commissioned an evaluation of its adult jail facilities, with a focus on the need for mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services. The study assessed current service levels and proposed a comprehensive, long-term solution to meet both present and future needs. This study sought a single campus solution where services would be colocated. While services remain under the operation and management of their respective agencies, their physical proximity would promote better coordination and continuity of care. This integrated approach aims to ensure that individuals facing arrest, booking, or incarceration have timely access to critical support services, ultimately improving outcomes for those experiencing behavioral health or substance use challenges within the criminal justice system.

The cost estimates for such facility needs from this study can be found in **Table 9-14**.

Table 9-14. Jail and Sheriff’s Facility Financing	
Item	Cost Estimate
Jail Expansion / Renovations	\$28,000,000
New Jail	\$71,100,000
Behavioral Health / SUD Facility	\$18,000,000



Courts

The department is in the process of requesting Grant Funds in partnership with the Shelton Municipal court to implement a Community Court; this will involve time from probation staff. This effort will work in conjunction with the District Court as their administrative support staff manages fiscal, administrative, and court records, and also monitors criminal defendants' compliance with court orders, assisting the Probation department as needed.

Forecasted Needs

Mason County's forecasted needs for Police and Criminal Justice Facilities center on critical space and capacity issues. For the Sheriff's Office and Jail, the primary concerns are the consistently overcrowded jail requiring increased bed capacity, inadequate and dispersed facilities for Sheriff's operations and storage necessitating expansion and centralization, and the lack of a dedicated firearms training facility. The 2024 Mason County Justice Center Study highlighted both the physical space needs but also staffing capacity needs with a proposed expansion. The proposed jail expansion called for a total of 32.6 FTEs to operate the facility in a safe and secure manner. This would be an increase of 14 FTE for jail facilities.³⁷

Both the District and Superior Courts anticipate the need for additional courtroom space to manage growing caseloads and jury trials, alongside increased judicial support for the District Court. While the new District Court facility is expected to be adequate for the foreseeable future, its current limitation is the ability to select only one jury at a time, despite being able to hold two simultaneous jury trials once selected.

The ongoing renovation of the Historic Courthouse is crucial for improving security and functionality for both court systems. An external challenge currently impacting court operations, and not unique to Mason County, is the stressed capacity of Public Defense services. Looking ahead, the courts of limited jurisdiction will implement a new case management system in 2026, aiming to streamline information processing.

9.5.7 Stormwater Management and Habitat Improvement

Overview

Stormwater is rain and snowmelt that runs off surfaces such as rooftops, paved streets, highways, and parking lots. As water runs off these surfaces, it can pick up pollutants that contaminate local water bodies. Stormwater runoff in urban areas is regulated by the Washington State Department of Ecology who issues permits to cities or counties meeting certain criteria. Due to its primarily rural nature, Mason County is not a permittee, but the city of Shelton is.

³⁷ BCRA Design & Treanor. (2024). *Mason County Justice Center Study*. Prepared for Mason County.



Permittees are required to carry out prescribed stormwater management activities and report them annually to Ecology. A stormwater utility is created to collect rates and charges used to perform those activities and ensure permit compliance. As a municipal permit holder, the City of Shelton has a stormwater utility and collects rates. While not a permittee, Mason County has a utility but does not collect rates.

Maintaining, restoring, and improving water quality is highly important in Mason County. Mason County is in compliance with state and federal requirements and continues to develop and improve its Stormwater Management Program. The County is also working to raise awareness of the importance of stormwater management among development partners and others.

In 2008, Mason County adopted a Countywide Stormwater Management Plan to both protect and enhance water quality. Of special concern are the impacts of continued and increased stormwater discharges to the local water quality of Hood Canal, Oakland and Annas Bays, and the rich shellfish habitat in nearby natural and commercial rearing areas. Pollution from pathogens in sewage and animal wastes are a chronic problem in many areas of Puget Sound and is closely associated with rainfall events and stormwater runoff as well as being influenced by population densities and development levels. Because of fecal contamination, shellfish beds in both Oakland and Annas Bays have been downgraded, and shellfish protection districts have been created to improve water quality and preserve natural resources.

The Allyn, Belfair, and Hoodspport Stormwater Management Plans complement and support the development of the Comprehensive Countywide Stormwater Management Plan and are incorporated as part of the Comprehensive Plan by reference.

Mason County's Stormwater Management Plan takes a decentralized approach that is based on low impact development (LID) techniques, innovative stormwater management designs with the basic principle that they are modeled after nature. The goal of the Plan is to minimize the impacts of future land use changes, as well as promote the design and construction of onsite LID systems.

Significant steps have been taken in the implementation of the County Stormwater Management Plan, including:

- ◆ Implementing a facility retrofit program to detain and treat the runoff from
- ◆ existing development using LID techniques.
- ◆ Treating county road runoff by retrofitting existing facilities, as well as by adding water quality treatment to all new County road designs.
- ◆ Pursuing further expansion of these programs, particularly maintenance.
- ◆ Creating a Clean Water District

Facility Inventory and Existing Conditions

Belfair UGA

The most recent Belfair UGA Basin Plan was finalized in 2018 and inventories the existing stormwater infrastructure of the UGA, though there are gaps in the databases for the



stormwater system. Efforts in the future to update the inventory mapping will have to be funded through grants and the general fund, unless stormwater utility rates are established.

Allyn UGA

The Allyn Urban Growth Area Stormwater Management Plan, written in 2007, describes the existing stormwater facilities as primarily County-maintained ditches and culverts in public rights-of-way, along with the private system within Lakeland Village in the West Drainage Basin that largely drains to Anderson Lake and North Bay; the East Drainage Basin relies on ditches, natural channels, and culverts under SR 3 discharging to North Bay. However, it's important to note that Allyn has experienced growth since the creation of this plan, meaning these descriptions, particularly for the area just uphill of SR 3, may no longer accurately reflect current conditions.

Level of Service or Design Standards

Stormwater Management for New Development and Redevelopment

In order to comply with the Shorelines Master Program and the Mason County Resource Ordinance, new development and redevelopment throughout Mason County must meet the minimum requirements of the current edition of the *Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington*. In addition to these minimum requirements, Mason County Code 14.48 spells out requirements for financial liability.

Stormwater Conveyance

Mason County Code 14.48 states that all construction shall conform to the Washington State Department of Transportation's Standard Specifications for Roads, Bridges and Municipal Construction. Conveyances are typically designed to meet the 25-year storm event, but should additionally be reviewed given increased frequency and intensity of storms relating to climate change.

Stormwater Retrofits

Most capital facility projects are considered “retrofits” meaning the project is undertaken to correct or improve conditions associated with past development. Retrofits are designed using best professional judgment to provide reasonable improvements in stormwater management, recognizing that site constraints frequently make strict application of Best Management Practices (BMPs) challenging.

Facility General Financing

Mason County has utilized a variety of revenue sources to fund stormwater management and habitat improvement activities. The majority of past funding has been from grants, but the Road Fund and Real Estate Excise Tax (REET 2) have also been used for program “development” funding and grant match.

Forecasted Needs

Under existing Washington State Law, several types of water conservation, recycling and reuse are currently permitted and regulated as shown in **Table 9-15**. However, additional State policy



innovation and flexibility for Washington Counties promoting water conservation, recycling and reuse will be critical over the 20-year planning horizon in order to support projected growth and development in the way Mason County envisions, a way that maintains rural character, quality of life, and unique natural environment.

Table 9-15. Existing Options for Water Conservation, Recycling or Reuse in Washington State

State Law	Methods	Description	Benefits
WAC 246-272A	On Site Septic - Using Subsurface (Underground) Drip Irrigation	Treats residential wastewater for subsurface irrigation of plants.	All wastewater from buildings can be used and irrigation can be controlled precisely for maximum benefit
WAC 246-272A	Greywater On Site Septic*	On-site sewage system used in a building equipped with waterless toilets	Reduction in total volume of water used and wastewater irrigates vegetation
WAC 246-272A	Greywater for Subsurface Irrigation*	Treats residential wastewater for subsurface irrigation of plants.	Reduction in total volume of water used and wastewater irrigates vegetation
WAC 51-56-1600	Greywater and Rainwater Recycling*	Recycling of any water, including greywater, inside of a building and using it for flushing toilets and other non-potable water uses	Reduces water use by recycling greywater or rainwater for surface irrigation, industrial processes, toilet flushing, and other non-potable water needs.
WAC 246-272B	Large On-site Sewage Systems	Provides subsurface soil treatment and disposal of sewage for a design flow of 3,500 to 100,000 gallons per day for 10-350 homes.	Can accommodate developments, schools, churches, campgrounds, business parks, parks, resorts, etc.
RCW 90.46	Reclaimed Water	Wastewater (sewage) that is treated to remove solids and impurities and recycled	Reduces water use by recycling wastewater for surface irrigation, industrial processes, toilet flushing, and other non-potable water needs.

*Greywater is defined as flows from bathtubs, showers, bathroom sinks, washing machines, dishwashers, and kitchen or utility sinks.

The amount of runoff entering streams and the amount of precipitation entering groundwater systems in Mason County can and has been estimated by the Washington State Department of Ecology using annual rainfall of 65 inches, based on Western Regional Climate Center data.

9.5.8 Transportation Facilities Overview

Mason County Public Works is responsible for design, construction, operation, and maintenance of approximately 620 miles of county roads and 65 bridges throughout the county. Several



reports and planning documents are used to develop and implement transportation facility improvements. Examples include:

- ◆ Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan
- ◆ Six Year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- ◆ Annual Construction Programs, which lay out programmed/planned improvements
- ◆ Annual Bridge Report, which summarizes bridge conditions and identifies recommended improvements

Mason County's TIP is adopted by reference as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Facility Inventory and Existing Conditions

In addition to the 620-mile road, 64 bridges, and approximately 3,400 culverts, the county owns and maintains properties necessary to perform roads and transportation infrastructure maintenance, construction, and repair. The Mason County Public Works Facility, located just north of Shelton on Highway 101, was constructed in 2008. Satellite maintenance facilities are likewise located in Belfair and Matlock.

This section only addresses facilities supporting transportation infrastructure maintenance, construction, and repair. The core transportation infrastructure, like roads, is addressed in Chapter 6, Transportation.

Level of Service or Design Standards

Roadway functionality is measured in terms of traffic congestion and thus mobility and circulation. The Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan outlines County-wide planning policies pertaining to transportation which include system performance (i.e. LOS); the plan and policies are coordinated with regional and state transportation plans as well.

Facility General Financing

RCW 36.82 requires the creation of a road fund; Mason County has established fund #105. This fund is supported by a portion of property taxes, motor vehicle fuel tax, federal and state funding programs, and Belfair UGA impact fees. There are many federal and state funding programs that are utilized by the County to help fulfill capital project proposals and maintenance and operation obligations, these can be found in more detail in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan outlines long-range capital facility plans while the TIP looks at the 6-year program for supporting the transportation long-range plans.

Forecasted Needs

The potential relocation of the Mason County Public Works shop in Belfair—from its current neighborhood to a new site with better transportation access and stockpiling capabilities—is a significant consideration for the county's long-term facility planning.

As part of preliminary planning efforts, Mason County Public Works has identified several steps to guide this process, including the evaluation of potential relocation sites, the development of site selection criteria, and preparation of planning-level cost estimates for future site acquisition



and development. While general locations and evaluation criteria have been discussed at the time of this comprehensive plan update, there are currently no funding requests planned through 2031.

This relocation effort aligns with anticipated growth in the Belfair Urban Growth Area, which will require expanded infrastructure and services. A strategically located Public Works shop would improve operational efficiency by enabling more effective movement of personnel, equipment, and materials. This is especially important for maintenance and infrastructure projects, including planned expansions and potential transportation upgrades.

9.6 Non-County Utilities, Services, and Facilities

9.6.1 Overview

The utilities and community services (i.e., fire protection, health care, schools, etc.) supporting Mason County residents are provided by multiple different government and non-government entities. The section addresses non-county utilities and services that are an essential part of the greater Mason County community.

Non-County Facilities and Utilities are found within this section to include Special Districts (9.7.2), Private Providers (9.7.3), and Other Facilities and Utilities (9.7.4). The County does not have the authority to dictate the direction of these facilities and providers and are included in this section to understand and coordinate the current and future needs for residents of Mason County across sectors.

The non-county districts and their system and capital facility plans are adopted by reference with districts to include: two hospital districts, the Ports of Allyn, Dewatto, Grapeview, Hoodsport, and Shelton; the School Districts of Southside, Grapeview, Elma, Shelton, McCleary, Mary M. Knight, Pioneer, North Mason, and Hood Canal; Fire Protection Districts; Cemetery District; Belfair Water District; Public Utility Districts; Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District, Maggie Lake Water District, Tahuya River Valley Water District, and Trails End Water District.

The inclusion of the above-referenced districts within this Capital Facilities Element does not indicate that the County has the authority to approve or disapprove of those districts' plans. WAC 365-196-415 (4) indicates that the County shouldn't rely on referencing alone, the County should summarize the plan by at least providing an inventory of the district capital facilities and an assessment of the district's future needs.

The continued coordination between the County and these special districts not only confirms whether the districts are consistent in their growth rate analysis by using the County-adopted population projections but provides the County with better data that may support future implementation of tools such as impact fees to offset the costs of meeting the district's future capital facility needs.



9.6.2 Special Purpose Districts

Mason County has seven different types of special purpose districts that assist in providing services to Mason County residents. A summary table of these is found in **Table 9-16**.

Table 9-16. Special Purpose District Summary Table			
Facility / Service Type	Special District	General Service Area	Specific Notes
School Districts	Elma, Grapeview, Hood Canal, McCleary, Mary M. Knight, North Mason, Pioneer, Shelton, Southside	See Figure 9-3	
Fire Protection Districts	Districts 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18	See Figure 9-4	
Library District	Timberland Library District	Countywide	
Ports	Ports of Allyn, Grapeview, Dewatto, Hoodsport, and Shelton	Allyn, Grapeview, Dewatto, Hoodsport, and Shelton	
Water Districts	Belfair Water District, Maggie Lake Water District, Tahuya River Valley Water District, Trails End Water District, Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District, PUD 1	Belfair, Maggie Lake, Tahuya River Valley, Trails End, and Hartstene Pointe Communities, Countywide	
Electricity Providers	PUD 1 & 3	Countywide	
Public Wastewater Utilities	Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District and PUD 1	Hartstene Pointe and Madrona Beach Community (Union)	



School Districts

Mason County residents are served by nine school districts as shown in **Figure 9-3**. These districts provide Mason County residents with a total of 29 schools, including two Early Learning/Pre-K Schools, 12 Elementary Schools, seven Middle/Junior High Schools, six High Schools, one K-12 School, and one online school.

Figure 9-3. Mason County School Districts

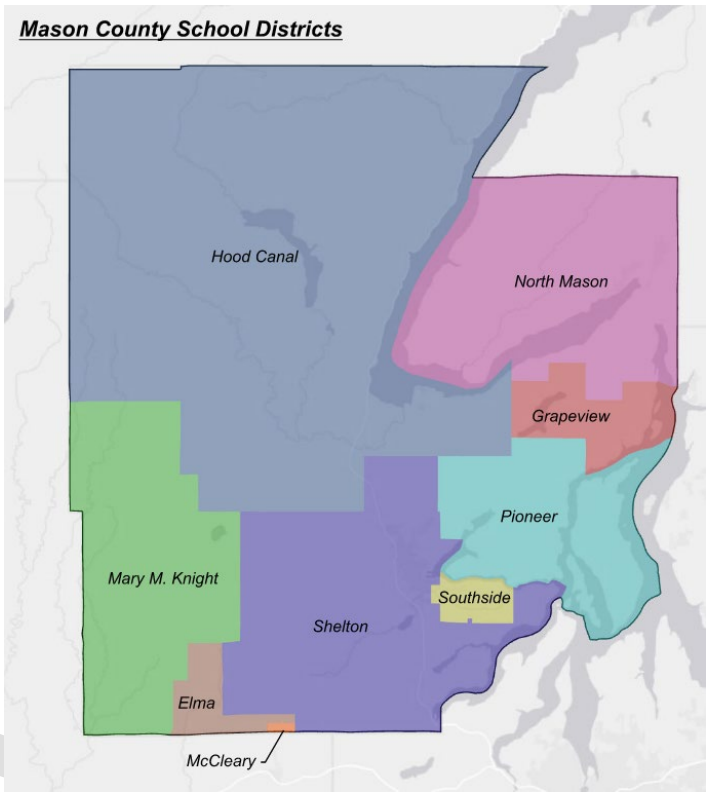


Table 9-17. School District Summary			
District	Type of School		Facility Needs
	# of schools	2024-25 Enrollment	
Elma	4	Elementary, Middle, High, and Online Schooling (located outside of County)	
Grapeview	1	Elementary and Middle School: 225 enrolled	Portable for storage and art room. Pursuing grants for modernizing middle school.
Hood Canal	1	Elementary: 339 enrolled	Technology infrastructure, modernization, kindergarten playground.



Table 9-17. School District Summary			
District	Type of School		Facility Needs
	# of schools	2024-25 Enrollment	
Mary M. Knight	1	Elementary, Middle, and High School: 785 enrolled	The school district is in the process of reviewing proposals for study and survey of district buildings and their existing conditions and capacities as well as an improvement plan with athletic complex concepts.
McCleary	1	Pre-K, Elementary: 350 enrolled (located outside of County)	
North Mason	6	2 Elementary: 930 enrolled 1 Middle: 488 enrolled 2 High Schools: 800 enrolled 1 Early Learning: 55 enrolled	The district will need to plan for renovations or new school constructions to accommodate future population growth.
Pioneer	2	1 Elementary: 500 enrolled 1 Middle: 233 enrolled	
Shelton	8	3 Elementary: 1610 enrolled 1 Middle: 538 enrolled 1 Jr. High: 616 enrolled 2 High Schools: 1564 enrolled 1 K-12: 189 enrolled	The district is currently working on a needs study and capital facilities plan.
Southside	1	Elementary: 200 enrolled	Music/kitchen/multi-purpose building. Soccer and track fields.

**Facility needs information gathered from direct emails to superintendents, plans published on district websites, and official district school board meeting materials.*

School District Coordination

As part of the comprehensive planning process, Mason County staff reached out to all school districts serving the county to gather information on future facility needs and anticipated growth. Only two districts, North Mason School District and Southside School District, provided updates on their planning efforts, which are included in the sections below.

Although this section currently reflects input from only a portion of the districts, Mason County made a good faith effort to engage with all of them. While not all districts were able to respond for this update, the County remains committed to strengthening partnerships and will continue working with school districts to incorporate additional information into future updates.

North Mason School District

An enrollment forecast memo was prepared for the North Mason School District in January 2025. Between 2018 and 2025, the district experienced a net loss of eight students, though



enrollment fluctuated significantly during this period—most notably in 2020–21, when the COVID-19 pandemic led to a substantial decline.

When broken down by grade levels:

- ◆ Elementary (K–5) enrollment declined by 52 students,
- ◆ Middle school (grades 6–8) remained relatively stable with a net gain of one student, and
- ◆ High school (grades 9–12) saw a net increase of 43 students.

A noteworthy trend involves Homelink, the district’s learning-at-home program. While enrollment in Homelink increased overall for middle and high school students compared to 2018, grades 6–8 saw declining enrollment for three consecutive years after 2022. For high school students, Homelink enrollment peaked in 2022–23 but has since declined.

Future enrollment forecasts for the school district anticipate an overall increase in enrollment of 40 students from 2024–2025 by the 2034–2035 school year. By 2034–2035, North Mason School District is projecting an increase in K-5 enrollment, no change in 6–8 enrollment, and a decrease in grades 9–12.

Southside School District

Southside School District currently operates at full capacity for the two buildings, classroom enrollment of 200, K-7 students. The campus has remained at a stable enrollment level for the past 70 years. However, any large subdivision moving into our area would overburden the small, 1,700-resident tax base.

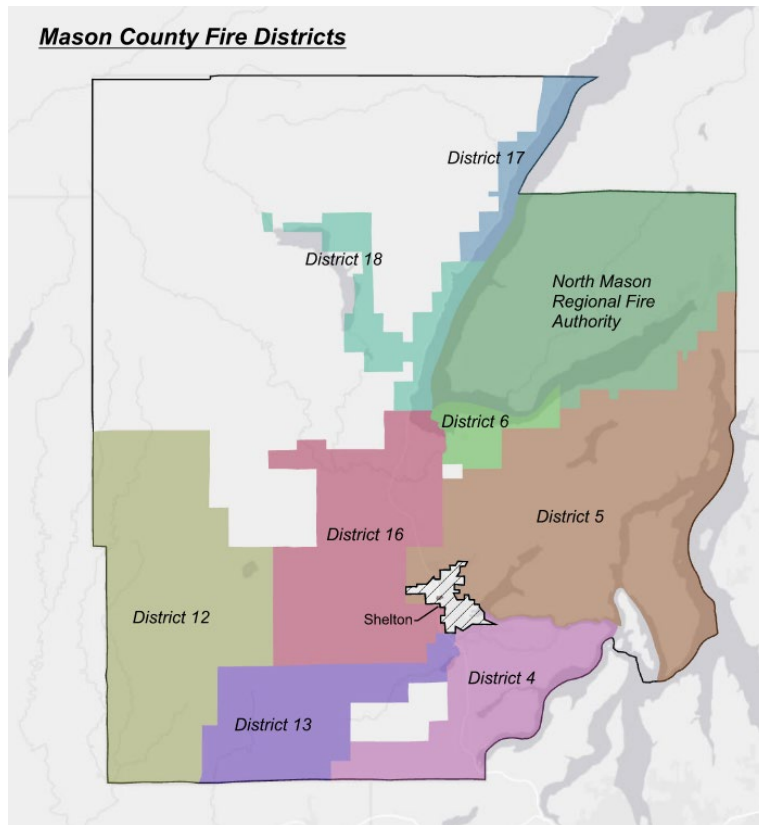
Southside's five-year strategic plan seeks to expand enrollment to pre-K and 8th grade; however, they face construction barriers to do so. The campus itself has room to expand, but construction relies on state school construction assistance grants due to barriers in passing local construction bonds. Currently, most rural state grants are only offering modernization of facilities, not expansion of square footage for educational/classroom spaces. Mitigation fees for schools in the development process greatly aid in the ability to fund future expansion.

Fire Protection Districts

Mason County is composed of nine fire protection districts. Each district provides fire protection services to the citizens and properties within the individual district boundaries, while also helping to provide mutual aid to neighboring districts as needed or requested. To respond to changing fire needs of Mason County over the last few years, there has been the consolidation of some Fire Protection Districts within the County. That consolidation is typically done through resident vote and approval, such as District 3 into District 5. Some districts have looked at consolidation or expansion of fire protection coverage into neighboring districts to provide temporary service coverage.



Figure 9-4. Mason County Fire Districts



A summary of the inventory for these fire districts is found in **Table 9-18**.



Table 9-18. Inventory by Fire Districts

District	Full Time	Volunteers	Ambulances	Fire Engines/Pumpers	Ladder Trucks	Rescue Truck	Tenders	Command Cars	Wildland Engines	Air Rigs	Staff Vehicles	Forecasted Needs
North Mason Regional Fire Authority	30		6	8								
4	12											
5	66	20	10	11	2	1	5	8	5	1	8	
6												
12		All										
13	3			4		2	2					
16		All										
17		All										
18												

Regional Library District

The Timberland Regional Library (TRL), established in 1968, serves over half a million residents across five counties in Southwest Washington (Grays Harbor, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, and Thurston Counties) through its network of 29 libraries. This public library system offers a collection exceeding one million items and is primarily funded by local property taxes, with supplemental revenue from timber sales. Committed to accessibility, TRL provides free programs and advanced electronic services alongside its physical locations, ensuring library resources and opportunities are available to all, with accommodation offered upon request.

Ports

Mason County is served by five ports which provide the public with ownership in industrial areas, recreational marinas/docks, airports, and marine terminals. The five ports include: Allyn, Grapeview, Dewatto, Hoodspoint, and Shelton. Each port's operating income can vary widely based on the adopted levy for that district. In many cases the ports rely on state and federal funding to help supplement capital projects.

Additional Water Providers

While Mason County provides water through the Rustlewood and the Beards Cove water systems, there are additional water providers that serve the county. These are Belfair Water District, Maggie Lake Water District, Tahuya River Valley Water District, Trails End Waters District, Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District, and PUD 1. **Table 9-19** summarizes the Non-County Water Districts that serve Mason County residents.



Table 9-19. Non-County Water Districts							
Water District	Active Wells	Well Depth	Water System Connections	Water System Storage Capacity	Water Distribution Capacity	Annual Volume Purchased/ Utilized	Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA)
Belfair Water District	4 wells	-	640 connections	1,354,622 gallons	1,175 gallons per minute.	47,773,398 gallons	
Maggie Lake Water District	3 wells	378 feet	265 current, 378 approved	86,000 gallons	800 gallons per minute	7,424,180 gallons	Kitsap WRIA
Tahuya River Valley Water District	3 wells	Between 50 and 72 feet	164 current, 180 approved	92,000 gallons	244 gallons per minute	17,455,303 gallons	Kitsap WRIA
Trails End Water District	1 well	393–397 feet	223 current, 254 approved	122,000 gallons	250 gallons per minute	11,521,524 gallons	Kennedy-Goldsborough WRIA
Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District	2 wells	167–180 feet	481 current, 498 approved	188,000 gallons	165 gallons per minute	14,727,150 gallons	Kennedy-Goldsborough WRIA
PUD 1	88 wells	50–600 feet	3,176 current	1,028–105,746 gallons	14.5–272 gallons per minute	234,271,351 gallons	Kitsap, Kennedy-Goldsborough, Skokomish-Dosewallips WRIAs

Source: Washington State Department of Health Office of Drinking Water, a Division of Environmental Health, 2022

Belfair Water District

Facility Inventory

Belfair Water District serving the Belfair Urban Growth area, operates with four wells. Three of the wells are at the south end of the district and one is at the north; these wells are pumped to five reservoirs. In the 2020 Consumer Confidence Report, the district reported that well #2 near the district office was completely refurbished and they were continuing to replace meters.

Capacity, Existing Conditions, and Facility Needs

The district serves 640 connections in Belfair. A few private and public water systems serve the outer edges of the community. The storage system capacity is 1,354,622 gallons with a distribution capacity of 1,175 gallons per minute.



The annual volume purchased/utilized, in gallons, for 2021 was 47,773,398. The district's goal is to lower this usage with a goal of 178 gallons per day per equivalent residential units (ERUs).

The Belfair Water District completed a Draft Comprehensive Water System Plan in 2020 in which they identified several system improvements translating into \$14.2 million in capital expenditures for a 20-year planning period. "Future capital spending for the District, excluding loan repayments, over the next 20-years is expected to be dominated by investments in Water Mains (81% of total CIP spending), with Water Storage as the next largest anticipated investment (10% of total), followed by Supply Improvements (5% of total), Pump Station Improvements (3% of total), and System Wide Improvements (1% of total)." At the time of drafting the plan, projects were broken up by priority justification with system wide benefit and improved reliability projects given the highest rating for completion in the short term (six- and ten-year program). Due to the 2022 Belfair Planned Action Ordinance and EIS (Environmental Impact Statement), prior population projections are no longer valid for the Belfair UGA, thus the Belfair Water District will likely have to update their water system plan due to higher growth projections. Capital costs for system improvements will most likely be higher though water rights should accommodate the higher population growth within the UGA.

Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District

Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District provides water and sewer services to homes in the Hartstene Pointe community. District operations are carried out by three qualified operators and an apprentice/trainee studying under Evergreen Rural Water of Washington's new apprentice program.

The commissioners maintain the district budget and capital improvement plan which details the facility needs, these can be found on the district's website.³⁸

PUD 1

PUD 1 is accepted as a Satellite Management Agency that owns and manages water systems in locations not served by other water purveyors. PUD 1 owns over 77 water systems throughout Mason County and can act as manager and maintenance provider for privately owned Group A and B systems. PUD 1 serves approximately 3,176 connections.

Washington State Department of Health – Public Water Systems

In Mason County, there are 30 Group A wells, including those managed by PUD 1, 229 are active with over 23,000 connections providing water to over 39,000 people.

Of the 775 existing Group B wells in Mason County (including those managed by PUD 1), 539 are active and provide water to over 6,750 people through 3,500 connections.

Regulating Water

Public water systems in Mason County are categorized into three types: Group A, Group B, and Two-Party. Group A systems are the largest, serving over 14 connections or 25 or more people

³⁸ Hartstene Point Water Sewer District, <https://www.hpwsd.org/>



for at least 60 days annually, and are regulated by the State Department of Health under WAC 246-290. The number of connections for these systems is information readily available from the state. Smaller Group B systems, serving 1 to 14 connections and fewer than 25 people daily, fall under the regulation of Mason County Public Health according to WAC 246-291. Information about these public water systems, including their number of connections, is primarily managed by the Washington State Department of Health. However, despite having access to connection numbers for Group A and B systems, accurately calculating the approximate water use for each group is a complicated endeavor due to the sheer number of individual connections and the variability in consumption patterns across them, a challenge further amplified by the lack of connection data and metering for the numerous exempt wells.

Exempt Wells

Currently, there are an estimated 2,933 individual wells and 661 two-party water systems in Mason County (as of 2021). The term “exempt wells” broadly includes these private wells and most Group B systems. This data was gathered to meet the requirements of the Squaxin Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), and information on these wells is mainly held by the Washington State Department of Ecology. Since 2020, Mason County's permitting database has been tracking new well installations to gain better insights into their production capabilities.

Projecting Water Demand

As the county continues to grow, collaborative planning with non-county entities is essential to ensure adequate reliable water supply for all parties. The county currently has limited data on groundwater storage capacity and faces challenges in accurately projecting the impacts of water conservation, recycling, reuse, and recharge initiatives. To maximize the effectiveness of these initiatives, it is critical to establish shared practices and norms among water users and providers across the county. Conversations with the county's Department of Environmental Health have highlighted gaps in current data on well production rates, underscoring the need for a comprehensive investigation into current water consumption rates to better understand and project future demands.

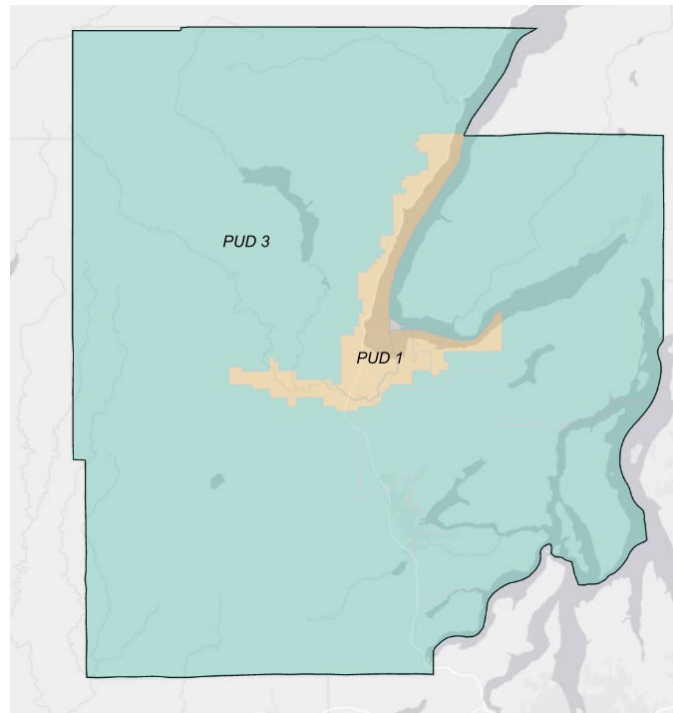
Electricity Providers

Inventory and Existing Conditions

Public Utility Districts 1 and 3 are publicly owned entities governed by a board of commissioners elected by the district rate payers. They provide electricity for Mason County developments. Both PUDs provide strategic plans available on their website. PUD 1 has substations located in Potlatch, Duckabush, Hoodspout, and Union and as of 2024 serves approximately 5,667 customers. In 2024, they supplied customers with 81.1 million kilowatt hours, which was an increase of about 10 percent from their 2016 supply to customers. PUD 3 had approximately 33,000 customers in 2016 and in 2025 that number is 36,407. In 2016, over 610 million kilowatt hours were supplied to customers, that number was about 682 million kilowatt hours in 2022. PUD 3 utilizes twelve substations to supply customers with power.



Figure 9-5. Public Utility District Coverage Areas



Forecasted Needs

A projected inflow of about 16,000 new residents are expected by 2045 in Mason County and services areas of PUD 1 and PUD 3. This will increase the electric service territory population to almost 82,000 by 2045. These projections form the basis of the utility forecast for Mason County to help ensure adequate services are in place and identify potential changes or adjustments needed.

Washington State Department of Commerce projects statewide energy demand to increase by six percent by 2050, relative to 2023 demand, if business continues as usual under its 2021 State Energy Strategy.³⁹ However, with the state working towards a just energy transition by 2050, alternative scenarios show a decrease in energy demand ranging from 23 percent to 32 percent depending on the strategies utilized.

To better understand Mason County's future energy demand, an initial projection can be made using current energy consumed divided by population. This per capita indicator can be a good measure of local energy consumption because decisions by individual consumers have an important effect on overall energy consumption. Combined with efforts from local public utility districts, this provides a picture of anticipated demand based on historic trends.

³⁹ Washington State Department of Commerce (2021). Washington 2021 State Energy Strategy, <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/zsbjvf0nato9q7dk3t7jjh0vjbd4iqof>



This projection does not consider additional innovation and efficiencies expected from the building industry or other innovations over the 20-year planning horizon.

System-level Impacts of Energy Efficiency

The Energy Independence Act (EIA) requires electric utilities with 25,000 or more retail customers in Washington to use renewable resources and conservation to help meet their customers’ energy needs. The utilities report annually to the State Department of Commerce on their compliance.

Many utilities in Washington State use wind power to meet about 80 percent of their EIA requirements. Since 2020, these utilities must provide at least 15 percent of their power from renewable sources.

The Washington State renewable energy production incentive payment program is nearly complete. Under this program, the PUD facilitates payments from the state program to interconnected electric customers who own and operate eligible renewable energy systems based on the amount of energy their system generates. Final payments will be sent by 2027, as the program has since retired.

In 2024, PUD 3 met its renewable energy target at 15 percent of customers’ electric load and exceeded its energy conservation target. Projections show the potential for energy conservation in Mason County to be over 116,000 megawatt-hours over the next 20 years.

Table 9-20. Mason County Electricity Demand			
	2025 OFM Adjusted Census	2035 Projection	2045 Projection
Mason County Population	65,726	76,485	82,932
Mason County Electricity consumption	531,923,992	493,238,611	478,878,128
Per Capita kWh	8093.05	6448.82	5774.35

Source: 2022 OFM Population Projections, PUD 3, and PUD 1

Future electrical demand is dependent on estimated county growth combined with continued replacement of inefficient household appliances. The future electrical demand modeling does not account for possible regulatory action that may or may not occur. Electricity providers are constantly monitoring legislative actions, such as mandates impacting electric vehicles and their related charging infrastructure, restrictions or prohibitions on natural gas and wood heating units, and others, that could influence electric demand.

Regardless of changes in total electrical demand, power providers are seeing a geographic shift in electrical demand which will necessitate increasing select substation capacity and upgrading power distribution in certain geographic areas of the county.



Energy efficiency continues to be a leading solution for resource planning. While decarbonization removes some power supply, other sectors are increasing demand through electrification. Specifically, the deployment of electric vehicles and switching natural gas heating or appliances to electric will increase demand for carbon-free power in the coming years. Nearly all electric utilities offer incentives for energy efficiency upgrades to homes and businesses in their service territory.

Carbon-free, renewable hydropower remains the cornerstone of electricity production in the Pacific Northwest. Additional wind farms (both onshore and offshore) are expected and encouraged, along with well-sited solar, providing variable renewable power supply. Pumped water storage and battery storage projects are also being pursued. Columbia Generating Station is currently the only nuclear plant in the region, but development of small modular nuclear reactor projects are underway. In addition, the first hydrogen energy project in Washington began producing hydrogen in 2025. In the meantime, regional coal-fired generation is expected to be shuttered by the end of the decade, and natural gas retirements or reductions are on the horizon.

Public Wastewater Utilities

Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District

Hartstene Pointe Water-Sewer District is a special purpose district that serves the Hartstene Pointe Community. Decisions about long range planning and strategic plans are overseen by a board of commissioners. The community is served by two wells and the water is chlorinated and at a treatment facility for both wells (constructed in August 2017).

The district's most recent sewer plan is dated October 2022 and can be found on file with the Washington Department of Ecology. Of the 534 lots that make up the Hartstene Pointe community, 445 of the lots have been developed. The sewer collection system was constructed between 1970 and 73 with 25,070 feet of gravity sewer and force mains, 113 manholes, and three lift stations.

The current sewer system at Hartstene Pointe has 445 connections and a total annual average of 78,222 GPD. The current needs of the system include refurbishment of approximately 22,300 linear feet of sewer main, 33,500 linear feet of side sewers, and relocation of 2,200 feet of threatened sewer main. This information has been gathered from the Hartstene Pointe Water and Sewer District-General Sewer Plan located on the district's website.⁴⁰

PUD 1

In addition to providing electricity and water to Mason County residents and partnering with Hood Canal Communications to deliver broadband to parts of the county, PUD 1 also owns the Madrona Beach community septic system in Union. This system currently serves 19 connections and has no known maintenance needs at this time.

⁴⁰ Hartstene Pointe Water and Sewer District-General Sewer Plan,
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/paris/DocumentSearch.aspx?PermitNumber=WA0038377>



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9.6.3 Private Utility Providers

Table 9-21. Private Utility Providers			
Facility / Service Type	Provider	General Service Area	Specific Notes
Natural Gas	Cascade Natural Gas	See Figure 9-6	
Telecommunications	Hood Canal Communications	See Figure 9-7	
	PUD 1 (contracts with HCC)	Lilliwaup area to County line	80 customers in Mason County and across County line into Jefferson County.
	Inland Networks	Dewatto area	
	Cellular Communication Providers	Countywide	
	CenturyLink	Countywide	In most areas that are not covered by Hood Canal Communications.
	IFIBER	Eldon, Harstine Island, Lake Cushman, Lilliwaup, Matlock, Potlatch, Tahuya, Allyn- Grapeview, Belfair, Hoodsport, Kamilche, Skokomish, Union, Shelton	
	Satellite Internet Providers	Rural	In rural areas not covered by other providers.
Wastewater Recycling Facilities	North Ranch Bio- Recycling Facility	Countywide	Only facility receiving septage in Mason County.

Natural Gas

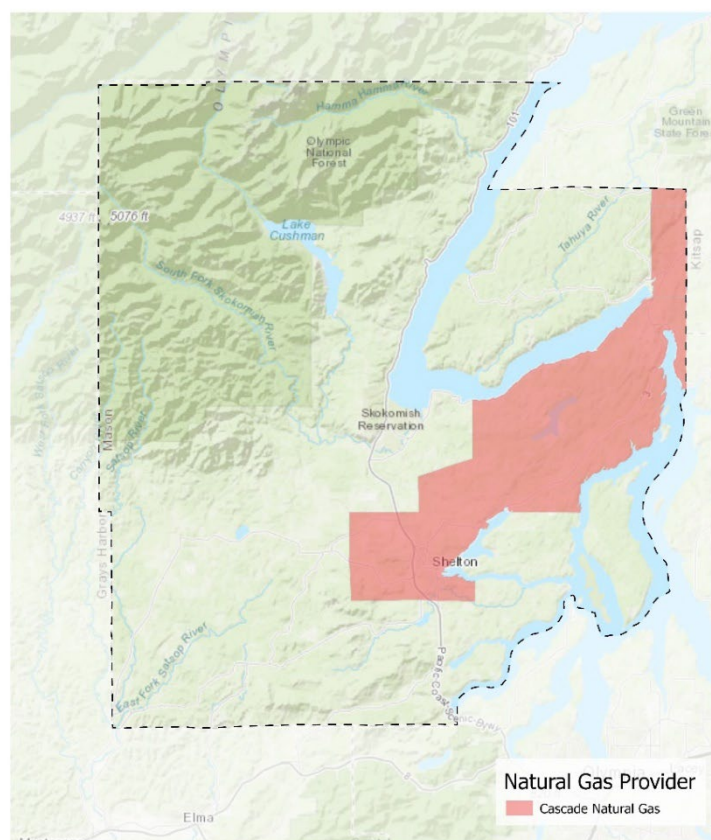
Cascade Natural Gas Corporation provides natural gas throughout Mason County. It has offices in Aberdeen and Bremerton. The Aberdeen office serves the Shelton, Oak Park and Lake Limerick areas. The Bremerton office serves the Belfair area.

In 1993, Cascade Natural Gas served 1,450 commercial and residential customers. Today they serve 2,300 customers throughout Mason County, a nearly 60 percent increase, providing 30 million cubic feet of natural gas monthly. The company does not plan for individual connections, but responds to requests for service which might be for new development or for conversion from other energy sources. System expansions generally use existing rights-of-way or public



road rights-of-way. Transmission capacity can be expanded through existing lines or by adding or enlarging lines. Cascade Natural Gas provides service to 67 communities throughout Washington State. Cascade Natural Gas provides gas service to Mason County from a tap off Williams Northwest Pipeline in Shelton. A major supply line for the company runs through Mason County by the Shelton Urban Growth Area and the Belfair Urban Growth Area.

Figure 9-6. Natural Gas Utility Provider Coverage Area



Forecasted Natural Gas Needs

The company continually expands its natural gas system in response to demand. The method used to determine the economic viability of natural gas system expansion is regulated by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission. Routes for expansion of services depend on the demand, available rights-of-way, environmental permitting issues, and opportunities created by new development, or the work in rights-of-way by other utilities or the county or state.

Telecommunications

Telephone Services

Several companies provide local telephone service in Mason County. They include Hood Canal Telephone Company, Inland Networks, and Century Link. Century Link serves over 90 percent of

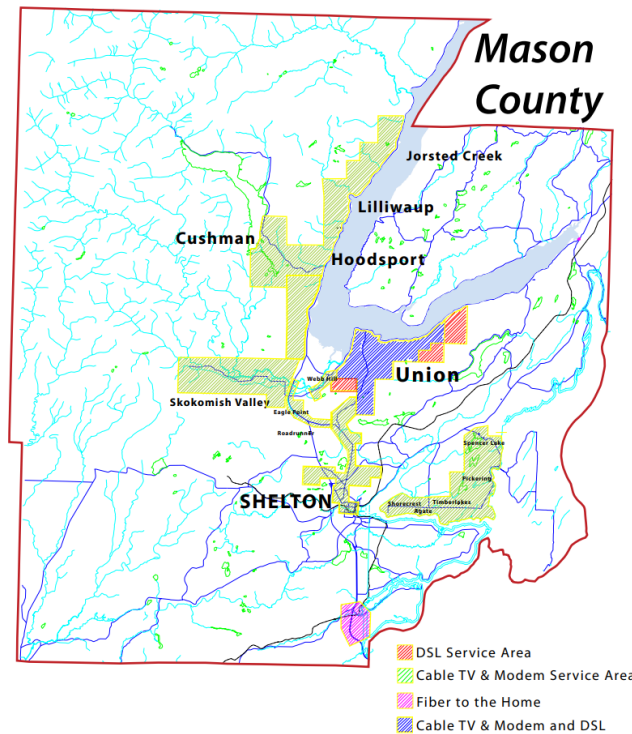


Mason County Residents. Existing transmission lines are generally located in road rights-of-ways. The location of telephone lines on property being developed is determined by the property owner, although the county subdivision regulations provide for utility easements. These usually include roadways and along lot lines.

Hood Canal Telephone Co. Inc, dba as Hood Canal Communications (HCC) is the Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier (ILEC) in Union providing telephone, streaming TV, broadband, and enterprise services to residents, private, and government agencies. HCC also serves as a Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) providing the same services into CenturyLink's serving territory using fiber to the home and Hybrid Fiber Coax networks. The CLEC serves the communities of Skokomish Reservation, Potlatch, Hoodspout, Lilliwaup, Hamma Hamma, Lake Cushman, Skokomish Valley, Shelton, Squaxin Tribe, Kamilche, Timberlake, Shorecrest, and Spencer Lake, Dayton, and Grapeview. HCC continues to build out to unserved areas within Mason County. They have interconnection agreements with CenturyLink for telephone service and utilize multiple providers for middle mile fiber connections. They provide telecommunication services to approximately 9,930 business and residential customers throughout the County. This is a significant growth in services from 930 customers in 1993. HCC has redundant fiber rings built within the County for route redundancy and network resilience. They continue to upgrade their networks to meet the community's needs, the Washington State Broadband Office, and FCC broadband goals. Hood Canal Communications is currently in the process of applying for Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program funds to help expand broadband service to more rural users. It has also invested \$20 million in major projects within Mason County over the last couple of years.



Figure 9-7. Mason County Telephone Services



Inland Networks

The Inland Networks, formally Inland Telephone Company, provides a local telephone service in the Dewatto area. Its service area includes the east shore of Hood Canal from the Mason/Kitsap County Line south to Red Bluff. Inland Telephone provides single party service to business and residential customers.

CenturyLink

CenturyLink is the largest provider of local exchange services in Mason County, with a service area that includes all areas of the county, not served by the Hood Canal and Inland Telephone Companies. The company provides telephone services to the urban growth areas in the county. Century Link generally provides a full range of telecommunication services, however services available in specific areas depend on customer demand and the capabilities of the local central offices.

Cellular Communications

Cellular communications differ from other types of telecommunications in that cellular communications systems use phones and other communication devices that transmit and receive radio signals on bands reserved solely for such activity. Signals are transmitted and received by low power antennae. The area one antenna can transmit and receives individual phones is called a cell. The coverage of the cells overlaps so that, ideally, the user can be transferred from one cell to another without interruption of service.



Satellite Internet

In areas where internet service is weaker, unreliable, costly, or unavailable, satellite internet services, such as those provided by Starlink, are sometimes used by residents in more rural regions of the County to fill the internet coverage gap. While beneficial for users who experience service challenges from other providers and addresses equity concerns regarding internet access, satellite internet services can still be expensive or face potential performance limitations during adverse weather conditions.

Fiber Optics

PUD 3 provides wholesale fiber optic services to service providers, who in turn provide retail services to over 4,000 customers through over 777 miles of fiber optic lines within Mason County. PUD 3 is also a major hub for high-capacity data lines throughout western Washington. Its strategic location provides redundant service capabilities through three major internet routes.

Consumer demand for internet services continues to increase year after year. PUD 3 continues to roll out “Fiberhood” connections as communities reach a threshold of demand. More than 80 neighborhoods have been connected so far, with more than two dozen in the construction phase. PUD 3 continues to pursue funding for these projects as well, having receiving loan and grant funding from Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB), Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO), United States Department of Agriculture’s Rural Utility Services (USDA RUS), and others.

Forecasted Telecommunication Needs

As Mason County continues to grow, the need for reliable, high-capacity telecommunications infrastructure will increase. Forecasted needs will be shaped by both general service coverage and growing demand for high-speed data services, such as fiber optic services, wireless internet, and cellular connectivity.

The expansion of fiber optic services will depend on the demand as Mason County grows. In the interim, satellite-based solutions, such as Starlink, are helping bridge access gaps in more remote parts of the County where services are limited or do not deliver the quality desired. If local providers cannot address the service needs of more rural households and businesses, more individuals may resort to options such as Starlink to meet their needs.

A mix of telecommunications technologies and service providers plays an important role in supporting widespread coverage and service reliability, while also meeting the varying consumer needs and budgets of Mason County residents. With continued growth, coordination between telecommunications providers and developers will be critical to meet the demand for highspeed internet and cellular coverage.



Wastewater Recycling Facilities

North Ranch Bio-Recycling Facility

Facility Inventory

The North Ranch Bio-Recycling Facility located at 820 E Webb Hill Road in Union, Washington is a privately held facility that dewateres and treats waste collected from septic pumpers. These pumpers source from the following: Local septic tanks, small wastewater treatment plants, sewage pump station vaults, vault toilets, cesspools, holding tanks, RV dump stations, portable toilets, marine sanitation units, and limited restaurant grease waste. Two products result from processing at the bio-recycling facility, filtrate and class B biosolids. The filtrate provides nutrients for agricultural crops and is land applied at this location to approximately 300 acres; while the class B biosolids are transported to eastern and southern Washington farms where it is permitted to use such products. As an environmental health precaution this facility has groundwater monitoring wells and lysimeters, which were installed in 2007. Due to elevated nitrate levels the facility has had to limit the number of customer deliveries to the facility, as well as cut the amount of waste they accept from wastewater treatment plants while implementing storage of filtrate in the winter, pausing land application during those winter months.

Capacities, Existing Conditions and Facility Needs

In 2017, the North Ranch Bio-Recycling Facility had a customer base that consisted of 99.4 percent onsite septic systems and 0.6 percent wastewater facilities with a total of 14.9 million gallons of waste received by the facility. Additional waste generated had to be transferred to wastewater treatment plants in other counties and cities such as Central Kitsap WWTP, Tacoma WWTP, Aberdeen WWTP, and Port Angeles WWTP. Approximately 16 million gallons were transferred to facilities outside of Mason County in 2017. Most of these treatment plants have a limited capacity to receive, thus as the County continues to develop and grow the need for alternatives that are closer to home becomes imperative.

The wastewater treatment plants in the County, Rustlewood, Belfair, and North Bay/Case Inlet do not have the ability to receive and treat septage or meet biosolids land application standards. Upgrading of those facilities would be required in order to keep and treat more of the County's wastewater or the County could encourage more public or privately owned septage management facilities like Bio-Recycling to develop within the County. Another option may be to coordinate with neighboring counties to create a larger regional facility that could sufficiently handle the waste generated by the County.

9.6.4 Other Facilities and Utilities

On-Site Sewage Systems

Mason County Public Health manages the On-Site Sewage System Program with the goal of protecting public health and the environment by minimizing the threat of surface and ground water contamination from failing or improperly designed, installed, or maintained onsite sewage systems. There are currently about 28,228 on-site sewage systems across Mason County.



These sewage systems play a key role in groundwater recharge but are often overlooked in water and stormwater management discussions.

Activities of the On-Site Sewage Program include:

- ◆ Soil evaluation to determine site suitability for an on- site sewage system;
- ◆ Review and inspect on-site system designs and installations;
- ◆ Provide homeowner education about on-site sewage system maintenance and operation;
- ◆ Review building permits; and
- ◆ License onsite sewage system Installers, operation & maintenance service providers and pumpers.
- ◆ Investigate complaints of failed septic systems and elicit discharges of sewage.

One facility in Mason County accepts septage pumped from on-site sewage systems as of 2025, Bio-Recycling LSP North Ranch. While this facility can manage the septage generated in Mason County, they also support surrounding jurisdictions that do not have septage receiving facilities in their area. The city of Shelton used to accept septage but no longer does.

By design, on-site sewage systems, also known as septic systems, naturally recycle wastewater by recharging ground water. To ensure on-site sewage systems are treating waste effectively and not polluting the ground water, there must be a strong commitment to regular and ongoing monitoring to ensure these systems are working properly.



9.7 Capital Facilities, Financing, and Utilities Goals and Policies

Mason County's Capital Facilities, Financing, and Utilities Element is guided by goals and policies for the preferred service philosophy of the County. RCW 36.70A requires comprehensive plans to include goals and policies; having these within CFP allows the Mason County Board of Commissioners, County staff, the Planning Advisory Commission, and the public in general the ability to easily reference the criteria that should be used when prioritizing projects for inclusion in the annual capital budget and as part of the Capital Improvement Program.

The goals and policies herein were originally produced by evaluating existing facilities in the County, projecting future needs, looking at costs, and having discussions about the types of facilities and services that should be provided and at what levels of service. Some facilities and services have standards that are measurable "levels of service" which have been adopted, while others are guided by the policies listed in this chapter but without specific metrics attached. There are goals and policies that apply to all facilities and services and then more specific ones that are "facility and/or service" specific. They are labeled below accordingly.

Capital Facilities and Financing Policies

Land Use

Goal CF 1 Manage land use changes and develop County facilities and services in a manner that directs and controls land use patterns and intensities.

Policy CF 1.1 Establish urban services that shall comply with the concurrency goals of the Growth Management Act.

Policy CF 1.2 Ensure that future development bears a fair share of capital improvement costs necessitated by the development. The County shall reserve the right to collect mitigation impact fees from new development in order to achieve and maintain the adopted level of service standards.

Policy CF 1.3 Extend facilities and services in a manner consistent with County-wide policies.

Policy CF 1.4 County facilities shall be provided at urban or rural levels of service, as defined in the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy CF 1.5 Develop capital facilities within the established urban growth areas (UGAs) to conform to urban development standards.

Policy CF 1.6 Develop capital facilities within the UGAs that are coordinated and phased through inter-jurisdictional agreement.

Policy CF 1.7 Coordinate and support other capital facility plans from special purpose districts, cities, and towns, and other non-county facility providers that are consistent with this and other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan.



Infrastructure

Goal CF 2 **Ensure that capital facility and utility infrastructure meet the demands of current and future development, with a focus on resilience, sustainability, and capacity.**

Policy CF 2.1 Ensure that development regulations require timely development of utility facility additions and improvements and evaluate the need for offsite improvements for projects exceeding planned system capacities.

Policy CF 2.2 Support programs that promote energy diversification, strengthen local energy resilience, or increase energy conservation, such as retrofitting existing buildings and expanding alternative energy.

Policy CF 2.3 Ensure utility project designs mitigate impermeable surfaces' impact per appropriate laws and codes on groundwater recharge and water quality, considering increased flooding and rain events.

Concurrency

Goal CF 3 **Establish standards for levels of service for County public facilities and ensure that necessary facilities are available at the time new development impacts existing systems.**

Policy CF 3.1 Level of service standards for public facilities shall be applied in compliance with this Comprehensive Plan and any implementing development regulations.

Policy CF 3.2 Public facilities needed to support development shall be available concurrent with the impacts of development or within a reasonable time thereafter. The County shall establish development regulations that will establish procedures and requirements to ensure that the concurrency requirements are met.

Policy CF 3.3 Stormwater management level of service standards for new development and re-development will generally be attained by meeting the requirements of the Western Washington Stormwater Management Manual and county code. Basin plans, water quality improvement plans, or shellfish districts may identify additional stormwater retrofit and environmental restoration capital projects.

Policy CF 3.4 Building permits for any building necessitating domestic water systems shall provide evidence of an adequate water supply for the intended use of the building. Proposed subdivisions and short plats shall not be approved unless the County makes written findings that adequate provision for potable water is available for each development site. This policy shall apply in all areas of the County.

Policy CF 3.4 Building permits for any building necessitating wastewater treatment shall provide evidence of an adequate sanitary sewer system for the intended use of the building. This policy shall apply in all areas of the County.



Finance

Goal CF 4 **Develop a six-year finance plan for capital facilities that meets the recommendations of the comprehensive plan, achieves the County's levels of service, and is financially sustainable.**

Policy CF 4.1 Annually adopt a six-year capital improvement program that identifies projects, outlines a schedule, and designates realistic funding sources for all County capital facility projects.

Policy CF 4.2 For all capital facility projects, evaluate alternatives to programs, purpose, and services as a method to reduce capital facilities and associated operating costs.

Policy CF 4.3 Develop a public process that informs, notifies, and allows participation in all capital facility proposals.

Essential Public Facilities

Goal CF 5 **Facilitate the siting of essential public facilities sponsored by public or private entities within unincorporated areas when appropriate.**

Policy CF 5.1 Identify and allow for the siting of essential public facilities according to procedures established in this plan. Work cooperatively with the City of Shelton and neighboring counties in the siting of public facilities of regional importance. Work cooperatively with state agencies to ensure that the essential public facilities meet existing state laws and regulations that have specific siting and permitting requirements.

Policy CF 5.2 Review proposed development regulations to ensure they allow for the siting of essential public facilities consistent with the goals, policies and procedures established in this plan.

Utilities Policies

Utility Service Quality and Resilience

Goal CF 6 **Enhance utility service quality through collaboration with service providers to eliminate deficiencies, upgrade obsolete facilities, and ensure the system's resilience to climate impacts.**

Policy CF 6.1 Coordinate with utility providers to eliminate service gaps and enhance existing facilities to meet current and future needs.

Policy CF 6.2 Encourage new electrical distribution lines to be installed underground, when feasible, to increase resilience.

Policy CF 6.3 Ensure utility project designs mitigate impermeable surfaces' impact on groundwater recharge and water quality, considering increased flooding and rain events.



- Policy CF 6.4 Support the extension of fiber optic cables or consider non-terrestrial (satellite) solution in Mason County.
- Policy CF 6.5 Require new development to connect to existing public water and wastewater systems where feasible, rather than rely on permit-exempt wells and onsite septic systems.

Strategies:

- ◆ Determine the fiscal costs of eliminating service deficiencies, enhancing service quality and increasing resilience in partnership with utility providers and community members.

Utility Affordability and Access

Goal CF 7 Support access to affordable and reliable utilities in Mason County.

- Policy CF 7.1 Partner with stakeholders to identify and address affordability issues.
- Policy CF 7.2 Expand reliable infrastructure (e.g., telecom, water, sewer) in underserved areas.
- Policy CF 7.3 Explore grant opportunities to lower utility costs for low-income households.

Facility Specific Policies

Wastewater/Sanitary Sewer

Goal CF 8 Assure that wastewater facilities necessary to carry out the comprehensive plan are available when needed.

- Policy CF 8.1 Maintain a safe, efficient and cost-efficient sewage collection and treatment system.
- Policy CF 8.2 All new development shall connect to existing or planned wastewater systems where feasible, or comply with any exceptions as adopted within the development regulations.
- Policy CF 8.3 Allow existing single-family homes and business in the Urban Growth Areas with septic systems to continue using septic systems until such time as public sewers are available. Replace deficient septic systems in a timely fashion and require conversion when public sewers are available.
- Policy CF 8.4 Provide a septic system management and education program to protect groundwater quality and promote the proper care and use of septic systems.
- Policy CF 8.5 Eliminate any unlicensed point or non-point pollution sources (illicit discharges) associated with sewage transport and disposal through enforcement approaches that protect the environment and support access to proper sanitation and housing solutions.
- Policy CF 8.6 Support efforts to correct failing on-site sewage systems and address the impacts of heavier rainfall events on public and environmental health.



Water Supply

Goal CF 9 Assure that water facilities necessary to carry out the comprehensive plan are available when needed.

- Policy CF 9.1 Protect the quality and quantity of groundwater used for domestic water supplies.
- Policy CF 9.2 Ensure that the supply and distribution of water in public systems is consistent with the Mason County Comprehensive Plan.
- Policy CF 9.3 Require new development to connect to existing public water where feasible, rather than rely on permit-exempt wells.
- Policy CF 9.4 Ensure that future water system expansions and service extensions are provided in a manner consistent with the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan. Where possible, those uses designated by the Land Use Element to require fire flow should be serviced by a Class A water system.
- Policy CF 9.5 Plan for and create ways to use Class A reclaimed water for beneficial use to replace withdrawals from the community aquifers.

Parks and Recreation

Goal CF 10 Achieve level of service targets for park land and facilities that support County objectives and priorities.

- Policy CF 10.1 Identify and preserve significant geographic, historic and environmental features and other characteristics that reflect Mason County's natural and cultural heritage.
- Policy CF 10.2 Increase park development within urban areas and develop a comprehensive system of multi-purpose trails throughout the County.
- Policy CF 10.3 Develop and adopt a realistic long-range schedule for park management, maintenance, and operation. Adopt a workable County capital improvement program (CIP) concurrently with the County budget or not long thereafter, to be amended as needed.
- Policy CF 10.4 Update Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan to project future demands and needs; define acquisition, leases, and development opportunities; draft financial implementation programs; and be eligible for state and federal grants.
- Policy CF 10.5 Explore the acquisition of the acreage at the southern end of Mason Lake as a possible Mason County recreational park. If feasible, seek acquisition and development of the property.

Administration Services

Goal CF 11 Develop and implement a long-range program of expansion and improvement to accommodate the County's projected administrative staffing requirements.



- Policy CF 11.1 Based on anticipated growth, develop anticipated staffing levels for all county offices before 2032.
- Policy CF 11.2 Develop facility requirements (new construction, facility acquisition, major renovations) including, order of magnitude cost estimates, to meet increased staffing and service levels for a large county population.

Police and Criminal Justice

Goal CF 12 Develop and implement a coordinated facility program among the departments and agencies that provide the County's police and criminal justice services.

- Policy CF 12.1 When needed, update the strategic long-range plan for the effective and coordinated operation and management of all County police and criminal justice functions, including a full analysis of all space and facility needs required to support the plan.
- Policy CF 12.2 Explore alternative funding sources for law and justice facilities and operations, including contracts for service with other agencies and joint use of facilities.
- Policy CF 12.3 Complete a long-range plan for the courts system facility requirements.

Stormwater Management and Habitat Improvement

Goal CF 13 Protect and improve water quality and aquatic habitat through strategic stormwater management, environmental restoration, and sustainable infrastructure practices.

- Policy CF 13.1 Design and construct stormwater retrofit and habitat improvement projects when identified in basin plans, water quality improvement plans, shellfish recovery and other environmental restoration plans.
- Policy CF 13.2 Promote innovative technologies and best practices to protect groundwater and surface water quality.
- Policy CF 13.3 Approach stormwater retrofits as "last measure" after implementing other proven best management approaches such as education and outreach, maintenance, and new development and re-development standards.
- Policy CF 13.4 Regularly collaborate with resource management partners to coordinate project funding, schedules and priorities.
- Policy CF 13.5 Actively pursue grant funding to pay for stormwater retrofit and habitat improvement projects. Continue to investigate establishing a long-term, dedicated funding source to serve as grant match for capital projects.
- Policy CF 13.6 Develop and re-develop public infrastructure projects when possible, using model low-impact, or "green infrastructure" practices.

Solid Waste

Goal CF 14 Ensure that garbage collection and recycling needs of the County are met in an efficient and cost-effective manner.



Policy CF 14.1 Manage a cost-effective and responsive solid waste collection system.

Policy CF 14.2 Manage solid waste collection methods to minimize litter, neighborhood disruption, and degradation of the environment.

Policy CF 14.3 Promote the recycling of solid waste materials through waste reduction and source separation. Develop educational materials on recycling and other waste reduction methods.

DRAFT



10 Climate Resilience

10.1 About the Climate Resilience Element

Like many parts of the Pacific Northwest, Mason County is experiencing the impacts of a changing climate. Shifts in seasonal rainfall patterns, increasing temperatures, and more frequent extreme weather events are beginning to affect the region's natural systems and infrastructure. These changes have implications for water resources, forest health, transportation resilience, and coastal ecosystems, particularly shellfish habitats that are sensitive to ocean acidification and temperature fluctuations. As the county plans for the future, understanding and adapting to these climate-related challenges will be essential to protecting its environmental and economic stability. This Climate Resilience Element will lay out the necessary steps to enhance readiness and resilience while protecting the important assets that shape Mason County's identity.

The purpose of this element is to:

- ◆ Serve as a building block upon which Mason County's Comprehensive Plan will continue integrating climate considerations into future growth and development strategies.
- ◆ Identify and rank the threats facing Mason County's infrastructure, economy, and public health brought about by climate change, with emphasis placed on vulnerable populations and historically underserved communities.
- ◆ Fortify the County's capacity to respond to climatic threats such as extreme precipitation, intense heat waves, and frequent flooding by ensuring adequate emergency response capacity and investing in resilience infrastructure.
- ◆ Foster green growth by conserving natural resources and balancing economic, social, and environmental goals.
- ◆ Strive to protect all of Mason County's residents from the negative impacts of climate change, with a focus on vulnerable groups such as individuals with underlying health conditions, the elderly, and low-income populations.
- ◆ Develop methods to preserve Mason County's open space, coastal areas, and productive lands, and guide ecologically friendly land uses.
- ◆ Encourage local economies to prepare for climatic disruption and adopt diversified methods to become more resilient to environmental hazards.
- ◆ Engage residents, enterprises, and institutions through education, coordination, and access to information to empower them to adjust to and succeed in an evolving climate.
- ◆ Foster stable working relationships among local governments, private enterprises, and residents so that climate resilience practices are guided by community needs and values.



- ◆ Coordinate with agencies at the state and federal levels, tribal governments, and relevant organizations to optimize climate adaptation plans across all sectors.

10.2 Overview of State Requirements

Climate resilience in Washington State is coordinated by the Growth Management Act (GMA), where planning jurisdictions must prepare comprehensive plans addressing various key topics, including climate change. In 2023, the state legislature passed House Bill 1181, which identified a goal of addressing climate in the GMA and required a climate element to be included in the jurisdictions' comprehensive plans. This climate element can be included as its own chapter in the comprehensive plan or integrated into various elements such as land use, transportation, and housing.

In general, the climate element comprises two sub-elements:

1. **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Sub-Element:** Required for the state's largest and fastest-growing counties and their cities with populations exceeding 6,000 as of April 1, 2021. This sub-element focuses on implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled.
2. **Resilience Sub-Element:** Required for all jurisdictions fully planning under the GMA. This sub-element emphasizes strategies to enhance community resilience against climate impacts, including the integration of natural hazard mitigation plans that align with state guidance.

Mason County is not required to develop a Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Sub-Element, and is, therefore, only developing the Resilience Sub-Element. This Climate Resilience Sub-Element is in accordance with HB 1181.

This Climate Resilience Element aims to prepare Mason County for climate-related challenges by:

- ◆ **Addressing Natural Hazards:** Identifying and planning for readiness and response to natural hazards intensified by climate change, such as landslides, droughts, extreme heat, poor air quality, and wildfires.
- ◆ **Enhancing Community Resilience:** Protecting and bolstering factors that contribute to the community's ability to adapt to climate impacts, with a focus on social, economic, and infrastructure components, while ensuring environmental justice.

10.2.1 Department of Commerce Guidance

The Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) provides guidance on developing a Climate Resilience Element. The Climate Element Planning Guidance document (2023) enables jurisdictions to prepare their climate elements more easily in accordance with statutory requirements by providing a clear methodology, separate sectors for grouping local assets, and a list of climate-exacerbated hazards relevant to Washington State.



Commerce encourages jurisdictions to address all 11 of its sectors through the final climate resilience sub-element goals and policies. These 11 sectors are (1) Agriculture and Food Systems, (2) Buildings and Energy, (3) Cultural Resources and Practices, (4) Zoning and Development, (5) Economic Development, (6) Emergency Management, (7) Health and Well-being, (8) Ecosystems, (9) Transportation, (10) Waste Management, and (11) Water Resources. These sectors are intended to help ensure that the jurisdiction's set of measures addresses important areas that might not necessarily be included in the jurisdiction's hazard mitigation plan, such as ecosystem protection and green job creation.

Commerce recommends utilizing the Climate Mapping for a Resilient Washington (CMRW) web tool⁴¹ prepared by the University of Washington's College of the Environment in the development of the Climate Resilience Element. The CMRW tool offers valuable data, projections, and insights covering Commerce's 11 sectors and the seven climate-exacerbated hazards common in Washington State. These insights supported the identification of priority areas for Mason County and helped integrate scientific backing into planning decisions. The tool was particularly useful for aligning resilience strategies with available data on vulnerability and risk exposure.

10.3 Alignment with Other Plans and Efforts

10.3.1 Hazard Mitigation Plan (2023)

The Mason County Hazard Mitigation Plan provided a foundational understanding of the hazards impacting Mason County, including floods, wildfires, sea-level rise, drought, and severe weather events. It helped identify high-risk areas and vulnerable populations, which directly informed the Climate Resilience Plan's risk assessment, prioritization of adaptation actions, and strategies to reduce long-term vulnerability across infrastructure, housing, and natural systems.

10.3.2 Mason County Comprehensive Plan

As the county's primary long-range planning document, the Mason County Comprehensive Plan (2015) outlines goals and policies for land use, transportation, economic development, environmental stewardship, and more. Mason County's Climate Resilience Element is integrated into this updated 2025 Mason County Comprehensive Plan.

The Climate Element builds on the goals and policies provided in the 2015 plan and coordinates its goals and policies with the updated ones for this 2025 Comprehensive Plan. It promotes climate-smart growth, infrastructure resilience, and community preparedness while ensuring that climate considerations are woven into future development and investment decisions.

⁴¹ Climate Mapping for a Resilient Washington (CMRW) <<https://cig.uw.edu/resources/analysis-tools/climate-mapping-for-a-resilient-washington/>>



10.3.3 Shoreline Master Program (2021)

The Mason County Shoreline Master Program establishes policies and regulations to protect Mason County's shorelines. It emphasizes ecological conservation, public access, and responsible development. The Climate Resilience Plan aligns with these priorities by identifying strategies to protect shoreline habitats, manage flood-prone areas, and enhance the resilience of coastal infrastructure in the face of climate stressors such as sea level rise and ocean acidification.

10.3.4 Other Resources for Climate Data

In the development of this Climate Resilience Sub-Element, the following resources were used to review climate data and trends that informed the assessments, goals, and policies in this plan.

- ◆ **Climate Mapping for a Resilient Washington (CMRW) Webtool – University of Washington:** Prepared by the Climate Impacts Group, University of Washington, Seattle, and Research Data & Computing Services, University of Idaho, Moscow.
- ◆ **NOAA's National Center for Environmental Information (NCEI):** NOAA is a science-based federal agency focused on the Earth's oceans, atmosphere, and weather to understand environmental changes, forecast hazards, and manage resources for economic, social, and environmental benefit. The NCEI tool provides analysis of monthly temperature and precipitation data across the contiguous U.S.
- ◆ **FEMA's National Risk Index Webtool:** A dataset and online tool to help illustrate the United States communities most at risk for 18 natural hazards. Developed by FEMA in collaboration with stakeholders and partners in academia, local, state, and federal government, and private industry.
- ◆ **The Climate Explorer Webtool:** Managed by the Climate Program Office at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and hosted by the National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center (NEMAC) at the University of North Carolina, Asheville. Shows climate data from 1950 through projections for 2100 for every county in the U.S. Future projections are derived from global climate models developed by the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP).
- ◆ **Input and Feedback from the Climate Policy Advisory Team (CPAT):** This plan was developed with the help of a volunteer group of residents, County staff, and local organizations formed into an advisory team to guide the development of this element with local knowledge and expertise. A list of the CPAT members can be found in the Mason County Climate Element Workbook (Appendix E).

10.4 Mason County's Assets

As communities across the state face increasing climate-related challenges, Mason County is proactively working to bolster its resilience. To do that effectively and holistically, county assets were identified within each of the 11 sectors identified by Commerce that may potentially be impacted by climate hazards.



By identifying and sorting these assets, specific actions can be taken to protect them against climate hazards like extreme storms, flooding, and rising temperatures. The identified county assets are grouped into the different sectors below.

10.4.1 Agriculture and Food Systems

Mason County's agriculture and food system assets include aquaculture, shellfish, agricultural croplands, livestock, and forest products. These assets are all susceptible to the changing climate conditions. The rise in temperatures, more extreme storms, frequent droughts, and increasing ocean acidification pose risks to the county's shellfish industry, its crop yields, and livestock productivity. Improving the local food system's resilience and investing in climate-smart aquaculture and agriculture practices are crucial to maintaining food security and economic stability.

10.4.2 Buildings and Energy

Mason County's buildings and energy assets include all built structures in the county, as well as power, communications, and Public Utility District (PUD) facilities and structures. The energy system within the county consists of hydroelectric power, natural gas, and renewable energy projects. Severe rain and flooding events may threaten the reliability of power distribution and expose old structures to vulnerability. The same goes for buildings across the country, especially old structures, rural structures, and those located within flood zones. Resilience to climate-related disruptions may be enhanced through energy infrastructure improvements, building resilience retrofits, and sustainable construction methods.

10.4.3 Cultural Resources and Practices

Mason County's cultural assets include resources such as salmon and shellfish, native reservations, historic buildings and sites, and faith-based structures, as well as activities such as aquaculture, fishing, and terrestrial harvesting. Traditional cultural practices are well represented within the county, particularly through the Skokomish Indian Tribe and Squaxin Island Tribe. However, ocean acidification, diminished water quality, and habitat loss all impact activities such as salmon fishing and shellfish harvesting. The protection of cultural sites, the support of tribal sovereignty, and the preservation of historical practices are essential to preserving the cultural heritage within the county.

10.4.4 Economic Development

Mason County's economic assets include the aquaculture and shellfish industry, timber and commercial forestry, local businesses, the Mason Conservation District, the Squaxin Island Tribe (the county's largest employer), the Skokomish Indian Tribe, ports, and the Ridge Motorsports Park. Natural hazards intensified by climate change, such as ocean acidification, increased flooding, extreme heat, and prolonged drought, will adversely impact the industries, especially the natural resource-based ones. Establishing climate-resilience practices and



recovery programs can help maintain long-term economic sustainability for these important industries.

10.4.5 Ecosystems

Mason County's diverse ecosystems, from Puget Sound's estuaries to the Olympic National Forest, support recreation, biodiversity, and natural resource industries. The County has a wealth of both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Aquatic ecosystem assets include rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands, riparian areas, marine ecosystems, watersheds, and shorelines. Terrestrial ecosystems in the County include Olympic National Forest, public and private forests, state parks and lands, tree canopies, prairies, and other open spaces. Higher temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and rising sea levels threaten essential aquatic and terrestrial habitats and species. Habitat restoration, forestry management, and conservation efforts are crucial to maintain ecosystem resilience in a changing climate.

10.4.6 Emergency Management

Mason County's emergency management assets include the Mason County Sheriff, the Mason County Fire and Emergency Medical Services, roadways and access points, shelters and evacuation centers, first-responder training, and state patrol training. The county is susceptible to wildfires, severe storms, and flooding; each may be further exacerbated by climate change. Increasing emergency response capability, investing in community preparedness programs, and hardening the built environment against extreme weather events will enhance the county's resilience to climate hazards and protect residents and vital services.

10.4.7 Health and Well-being

Mason County's health and well-being assets include healthy populations, elderly care and rehabilitation centers, medical centers, air quality, parks and trails, open space, and outdoor recreation. Higher temperatures and wildfire smoke can limit the community's ability to do outdoor activities and may pose health risks that are particularly dangerous to groups such as the elderly, young children, and people with medical conditions. Reliable access to healthcare, open space, and overall community well-being initiatives will be crucial to enhancing the community's resilience to climate hazards.

10.4.8 Transportation

Mason County's transportation assets include state highways, county roads, bridges, culverts, trails, railroads, the airport, and the Mason Transit Authority. Mason County's transportation assets are vulnerable to landslides, flooding, and extreme weather events. Damage to roads and bridges often isolates certain rural areas, disrupts access to emergency services, and interrupts economic activity. Investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, alternative transportation routes, and adaptive planning measures is necessary to maintain seamless access and movement of people, goods, and services.



10.4.9 Waste Management

Mason County's waste management assets include wastewater treatment facilities, stormwater management facilities, solid waste facilities and stations, reclamation centers, recycling facilities, hazardous waste facilities, bio-solids treatment, septage stations and systems, and junk yards. Hazards such as extreme storms can increase debris from landslides and flooding, disrupt waste collection and recycling operations, and lead to higher risks of contamination. Rising temperatures accelerate landfill emissions that impact air and water quality. Programs to reduce and divert waste, optimize landfills and treatment centers, and protect waste infrastructure against extreme weather events can enhance environmental and public health resilience.

10.4.10 Water Resources

Mason County's water resources include natural features such as snowpack, groundwater, rivers, and streams, as well as built water infrastructure like reservoirs, wells, and water reclamation facilities. Mason County's water assets are susceptible to drought, pollution, and saltwater intrusion. Conservation strategies, protecting watersheds, and stormwater management will be essential to maintaining a clean and reliable water supply for residents, agriculture, and industries.

10.4.11 Zoning and Development

Mason County's zoning and development assets include agricultural and forest resource lands, open space designations, residential and commercial zoning, and housing and development regulations. Land use policies must adapt to manage climate risks such as sea level rise, wildfires, and flooding. Smart growth principles, stronger building codes, and climate-adaptive zoning regulations can define sustainable growth and reduce climate-related exposure. This sector provides the framework for climate resilience planning within Mason County to enable measures that safeguard important assets and ensure long-term sustainability.

Table 10-1 summarizes the assets in Mason County within each of the 11 sectors.



Table 10-1. Mason County's Assets

Sectors	Mason County's Assets
Agriculture and Food Systems	Aquaculture, shellfish, agricultural croplands, livestock, and forest products
Buildings and Energy	All built structures in the county, as well as power, communications, and Public Utility District (PUD) facilities and structures
Cultural Resources and Practices	Salmon and shellfish, native reservations, historic buildings and sites, faith-based structures, aquaculture, fishing, and terrestrial harvesting
Economic Development	Aquaculture and shellfish industry, timber and commercial forestry, local businesses, the Mason Conservation District, the Squaxin Island Tribe (the county's largest employer), the Skokomish Indian Tribe, ports, and the Ridge Motorsports Park
Ecosystems	Rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands, riparian areas, marine ecosystems, watersheds, and shorelines, Olympic National Forest, public and private forests, state parks and lands, tree canopies, prairies, and open space
Emergency Management	Mason County Sheriff, Mason County Fire and Emergency Medical Services, roadways and access points, shelters and evacuation centers, first-responder training, and state patrol training
Health and Well-being	Healthy populations, rehabilitation centers, medical centers, air quality, parks and trails, outdoor recreation, golf courses, and the Mason Lake Recreation Area
Transportation	State highways, county roads, bridges, culverts, trails, railroads, the airport, and the Mason Transit Authority
Waste Management	Wastewater treatment facilities, stormwater management facilities, solid waste facilities and stations, reclamation centers, recycling facilities, hazardous waste facilities, bio-solids treatment, septage stations and systems, and junk yards
Water Resources	Snowpack, groundwater, rivers and streams, water infrastructure, reservoirs, wells, and water reclamation facilities
Zoning and Development	Agricultural and forest resource lands, open space designations, residential and commercial zoning, and housing and development regulations

10.5 Climate Impacts

Mason County's community, economy, and environment are exposed to climate change impacts. Rising temperatures, shifts in rain patterns, increased wildfire hazards, and coastal



erosion are some of the factors impacting residents' livelihoods, local infrastructure, and terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Understanding the impact of climate change on Mason County is necessary to improve resilience and protect human and environmental systems. This section of the Climate Resilience Element examines the climate-exacerbated impacts that are affecting Mason County based on scientific data, local observation, and historic trends. Examining the impacts guides the determination of vulnerability and risk and informs policies that increase the county's resilience to adapt and prosper under a changing climate.

A set of priority hazards was identified for Mason County. Those priority hazards are:

- 1) Drought
- 2) Extreme Heat
- 3) Extreme Precipitation
- 4) Flooding
- 5) Sea Level Rise

Additional hazards were considered relevant and impactful for the county. Ocean acidification negatively impacts aquaculture, natural aquatic resources, and other tribal cultural assets within the county. Secondary impacts of ocean acidification would include a reduction in both economic activity and opportunities for outdoor and nature recreation. Pandemics, pests, and pathogens were also identified as important and relevant hazards within the County, considering the aging population and large areas of forest lands that play a significant role in both the Ecosystem and Economic Development sectors. These hazards will be addressed within the umbrella of the five priority hazards identified above.

This section summarizes the projected impacts of the five priority hazards relative to the 11 sectors discussed earlier in this element.

10.5.1 Drought

Drought occurs when long periods of below-average precipitation lead to water shortages in surface and subsurface water supplies. It can include deficiencies in surface and subsurface water supplies, impacting health, well-being, and quality of life. In Mason County, drought poses a concern for rural residents, agriculture, and forest ecosystems. Decreased groundwater and snowpack in the Olympic Mountains can restrict water supplies for residential drinking and irrigation. Dry conditions also heighten the risk of wildfires, which can destroy forests and threaten homes and businesses.

Historical Occurrences of Drought

Mason County has experienced numerous drought episodes as part of statewide events. As of 2025, all of Mason County falls within the Moderate Drought Category per the National Integrated Drought Information System⁴², impacting river and stream flows and increasing fire danger. A notable recent drought event was 2015's "snowpack drought," when winter

⁴² National Integrated Drought Information System: A multi-agency partnership that coordinates drought monitoring, forecasting, planning, and information at national, state, and local scales. <drought.gov>

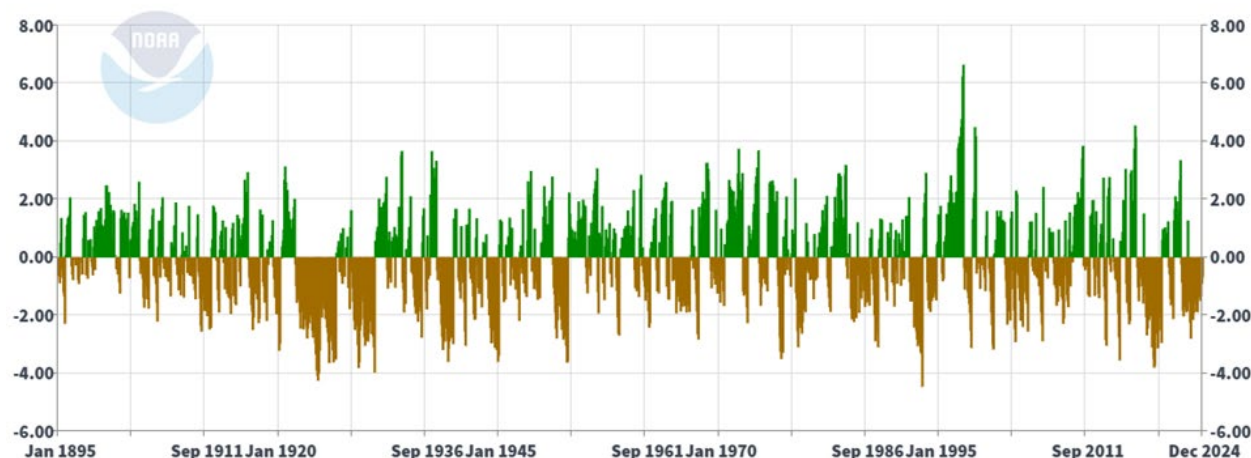


precipitation was near normal but fell as rain instead of snow. The low level of mountain snowpack led to record-low summer streamflow, harming crops and fish and prompting emergency measures. In 2019, Washington’s governor declared drought emergencies in nearly half the State, including in Mason County, due to very dry conditions.⁴³ More recently, 2021 brought the second-driest spring in more than 50 years, followed by an unprecedented late-June heatwave, which further exacerbated drought impacts. By July 2021, 96% of Washington was under an emergency drought declaration.

While Mason County has never received a federal disaster declaration for drought, it has been affected by these significant regional droughts. **Figure 10-1** is a Palmer Drought Severity Index⁴⁴ graph showing the historic patterns of drought and wet conditions in Mason County from 1895 to the present. While the graph shows extended drought conditions from 1920 to 1930, it is worth noting that in the more recent years, dry conditions (brown color on the graph) remain consistent despite the increased intensity in wet conditions (green color on the graph).

Figure 10-1. Historic Drought Index in Mason County, 1895-2025

Mason County, Washington Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI)



Source: NOAA National Center for Environmental Information

Future Drought Risk and Climate Outlook

Climate projections indicate increasing drought risk for Western Washington, including Mason County, as the environment warms. Summers are expected to become drier on average, with models projecting roughly a 13%-20% decline in summer precipitation by mid-century under the high emissions scenario. Warmer winter temperatures will mean more rain and less snow in the Cascades, reducing the natural storage of water as snowpack. Average springtime snowpack in

⁴³ Washington State Department of Ecology, <https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/news/2019/may-20-inslee-expands-drought-emergency>

⁴⁴ The Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI) is a standardized index based on a simplified soil water balance and estimates relative soil moisture conditions. The magnitude of PDSI indicates the severity of the departure from normal conditions. A PDSI value >4 represents very wet conditions, while a PDSI <-4 represents an extreme drought.



the county could decline by 80% by mid-century, even under low to moderate greenhouse gas emission scenarios. Less snowpack and earlier snowmelt lead to lower summer streamflow, which in turn heightens summer water shortages. These changes may increase the frequency and severity of droughts beyond historical ranges. The 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan acknowledges the outlook that drought situations are likely to intensify in the future.

Impacts on Aquaculture, Water Supply, and Ecosystems

Droughts in Mason County can have wide-ranging impacts on aquaculture, water resources, and local ecosystems. Reduced water availability may negatively impact shellfish health and production by increasing water salinity and altering water quality. Lack of soil moisture also increases vulnerability to pest infestations in forests and crops. Water supplies may be strained during droughts, community water systems and wells may face declining recharge, and irrigation for crops may become limited.

In Mason County’s waterways, low summer flows and higher stream temperatures can be lethal to salmon and other wildlife, disrupting local ecosystems and fisheries, especially salmon and aquatic species that rely on cool water temperatures. Washington has seen fish runs suffer in drought years due to warming shallow streams.

Dry conditions also increase wildfire risk in the county’s forests and rangelands. Vegetation may become tinder-dry, leading to more frequent and intense wildfires-a dangerous compounding hazard during droughts. Outdoor recreation and tourism may suffer as well with low lake levels and burn bans. Prolonged drought may lead to groundwater issues like land subsidence or saltwater intrusion in coastal wells as aquifer levels drop.

While droughts typically do not cause direct property damage or loss of life like a flood or storm would, their slow-onset, long-lasting nature means the economic and environmental toll can be high, often accumulating over weeks and months. **Table 10-2** shows a detailed breakdown of all the sectors affected by drought and their impact or exposure in Mason County.

Table 10-2. Drought Impacts and Exposure by Sector	
Sector	Drought Impacts/ Exposure
Agriculture and Food Systems	More frequent and severe droughts will reduce water availability, which can negatively impact shellfish health and production by increasing water salinity and altering water quality. It will also reduce the amount of water available for livestock and irrigation, while warmer temperatures and longer growing seasons are expected to increase the demand for irrigation water.
Cultural Resources and Practices	Lower stream flows in summer are expected to reduce the quantity and quality of habitat for salmonids and other aquatic species that are culturally important to Northwest Tribes.



Table 10-2. Drought Impacts and Exposure by Sector

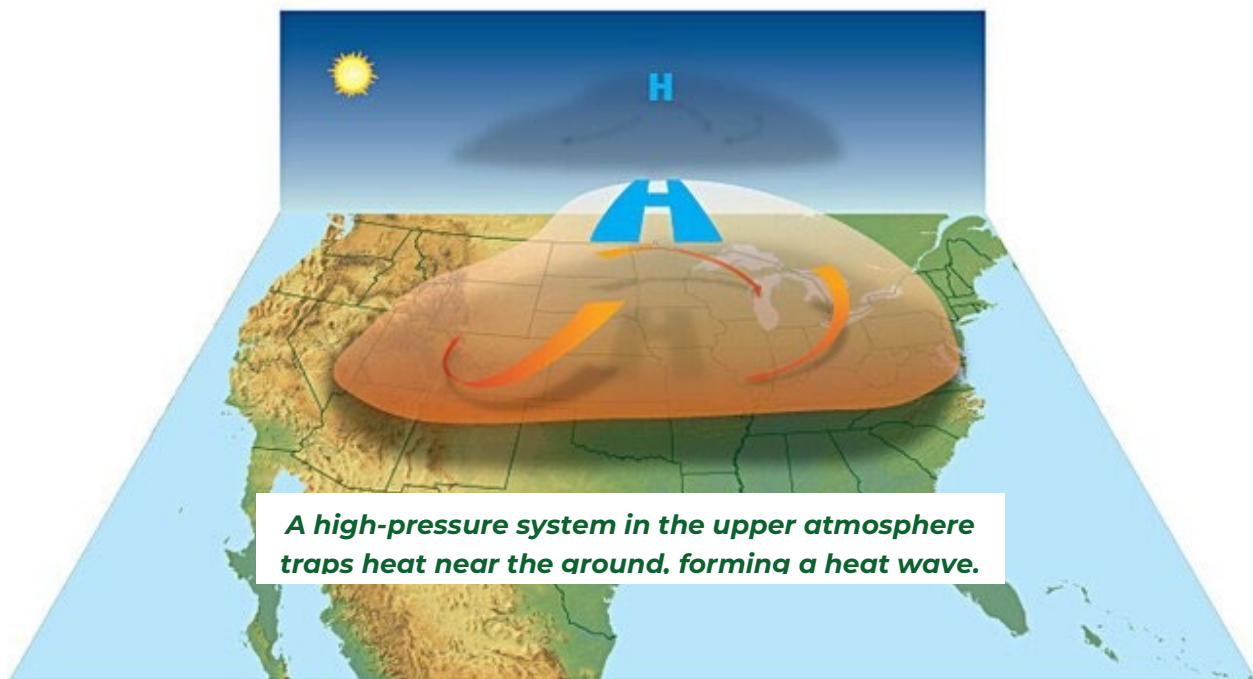
Sector	Drought Impacts/ Exposure
Economic Development	Drought impacts water quality and salinity levels, negatively impacting aquaculture and shellfish production. More prevalent pests and pathogens in forests and prolonged wildfire risk can impact the timber and forestry industries. Low levels in lakes and streams may adversely affect recreational businesses that rely on water activities.
Ecosystems	Less summer precipitation is expected to affect ecosystem types differently. In freshwater ecosystems, it will contribute to lower stream flows, reduced water quality, and increased water temperatures and salinity. In terrestrial ecosystems, it will contribute to drought stress and reduce the growth and productivity of some plants. Wildfires may become more prevalent. Certain types of pests and pathogens thrive in dry conditions.
Emergency Management	More frequent and severe droughts due to low summer precipitation are expected to increase the need for emergency services to plan, prepare, and respond to water shortages.
Transportation	Reductions in snowpack have the potential to reduce snow-related road maintenance, road closures, and transportation delays. However, as more cold-season precipitation falls as rain rather than snow, transportation routes in mountainous areas may experience more damage from heavier winter rainfall and associated flooding, erosion, and washouts.
Water Resources	Less summer precipitation is expected to contribute to summer water shortages for commercial and residential uses. With less summer input and associated warmer water temperatures, water quality may also decrease. More frequent droughts caused by low snowpack are expected to reduce the water available in the warm season for commercial, residential, agricultural uses, and hydropower generation. Reduced streamflow in the warm season is expected to increase dependence on stored water and reduce water available for residential and commercial uses, as well as hydropower generation. During the same time period, warmer temperatures are expected to increase water demand and energy demand for cooling.



10.5.2 Extreme Heat

Extreme heat is when temperatures hover 10 degrees or more above the average high temperature for the region and last for several days or weeks (FEMA, 2006; CDC, 2006). While the Pacific Northwest is renowned for its moderate climate, Mason County has experienced more frequent and intense heat waves in recent years. These events can be dangerous, particularly for the elderly, children, and individuals without access to air conditioning. Extreme heat also strains local infrastructure, increasing energy demands for cooling and stressing water systems. Excessive heat can dehydrate soils and contribute to drought conditions.

Figure 10-2. Example of a Heat Wave in North America



Past Extreme Heat Events in Mason County

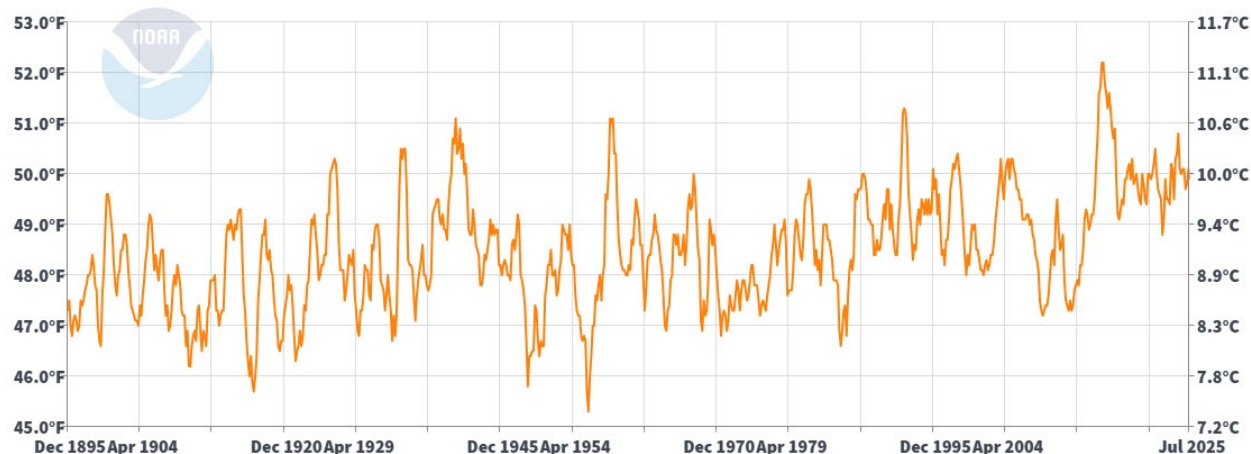
Historically, the Pacific Northwest's coastal climate has been mild, and extreme heat events were relatively infrequent in Mason County. However, recent years have seen record-breaking heat. The most dramatic was the late June 2021 heat wave, an unprecedented event that shattered all-time temperature records across Washington and Oregon. Over a four-day period (June 26–29, 2021), daytime highs soared well above 100°F. Mason County communities that rarely see temperatures exceeding the low 90s experienced extremes with readings up to 110°F. This "heat dome" event had a devastating human impact, causing a heat-related death recorded in Mason County. About 140 heat-related deaths occurred in Washington State during that event, with victims concentrated in the Puget Sound region. Most of those who died were elderly or lived in homes without air conditioning, illustrating the region's vulnerability when such anomalous heat events take place.



Prior to 2021, other notable heat waves did occur, albeit with less severity. In July 2009, a heat wave pushed Seattle to 103°F (then, an all-time high for the city) and brought Mason County well into the 90s. **Figure 10-3** shows the annual average temperature in Mason County. The graph demonstrates a clear rising trajectory in the average temperature.

Figure 10-3. Annual Average Temperature in Mason County, 1895–2025

Mason County, Washington Average Temperature
12-Month Period



Source: NOAA National Center for Environmental Information

Projected Changes Due to Climate Change

Climate change is expected to make extreme heat events more frequent and intense in the Pacific Northwest. All climate models for the region show a strong trend toward warmer temperatures in the coming decades, with more frequent extreme heat events. By the mid-21st century, what is considered a rare heat wave today may become relatively common. According to the University of Washington's Climate Impacts Group, average summer temperatures in Washington are projected to rise significantly, with overall warming of around 5°F by the 2050s under moderate to high emission scenarios. This means Mason County will see a greater number of days above thresholds like 90°F or 100°F.

Heat waves are also expected to last longer. What might have been a one- to two-day unusual hot spell in the past may persist for a week or more in the future, increasing health risks, especially for vulnerable groups. Evenings and nights are projected to be warmer, reducing the critical relief that cooler evenings typically provide during heat waves.

It is important to note that baseline warming raises the floor for extreme heat; summers are likely to generally be hotter. Therefore, Mason County should prepare for both more frequent heat waves and overall hotter summer conditions due to climate change.



Vulnerabilities in Population and Infrastructure

Health and Population Vulnerabilities

Extreme heat poses significant health risks, and certain groups in Mason County are especially vulnerable. These include older adults (seniors 65+), young children, people with chronic illnesses, and those who cannot easily escape the heat, such as outdoor workers and unhoused people. Seniors make up 25% of Mason County's population, compared to just 17% in the State. This elevates the county's health concerns related to heat. Seniors are less able to regulate body temperature and often live alone, so they face a higher risk of heat stroke or dehydration. Low-income individuals and those experiencing homelessness are also at high risk, as they may lack access to air-conditioned spaces. Outdoor workers (loggers, construction crews, farm workers) are another vulnerable group; performing heavy labor in high heat can lead to heat exhaustion, and statewide data have shown increased emergency calls for outdoor laborers during heat waves.

During the heatwave of 2021, many of the deceased across the state were found in homes without air conditioning. Historically, Pacific Northwest homes did not need air conditioning, so the housing infrastructure is ill-equipped for such events. The 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan notes that many older residential structures lack cooling or even modern ventilation systems.

During extreme heat, public health emergencies can occur and increase hospital admissions for heat-related illnesses, exacerbate heart and respiratory conditions, and potentially increase mortality. For example, a study in King County found that during extreme heat events, deaths increased by 10% compared to normal. Heat is the number one cause of weather-related deaths in the U.S. over the long term, surpassing floods and hurricanes, which underscores the need to take these vulnerabilities seriously.⁴⁵

Infrastructure Vulnerabilities

Extreme heat also puts stress on infrastructure and utilities in Mason County. High temperatures can damage transportation infrastructure. Prolonged heat can soften roadways and buckle pavement. During the June 2021 heat wave, sections of Interstate 5 in WA buckled and had to be closed for repairs. Mason County's roads, like US Highway 101 or local asphalt county roads, are built for a temperate climate, and they may deteriorate faster as asphalt and concrete expand with repeated 100°F days. Additionally, road asphalt and roofing materials experience accelerated wear and tear in extreme heat, potentially shortening infrastructure lifespans.

Power and telecommunication infrastructure may face overload and physical stress during heat waves. Electrical demand spikes as more people use air conditioning, straining the grid and leading to brownouts or failures if capacity is exceeded. Heat also reduces the efficiency of power transmission lines and transformers, which can overheat.

⁴⁵ Adams-Fuller, Terri. "Extreme Heat Is Deadlier Than Hurricanes, Floods and Tornadoes Combined." *Scientific American*, July 1, 2023. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/extreme-heat-is-deadlier-than-hurricanes-floods-and-tornadoes-combined/>



The impact of a heatwave on water infrastructure is another concern. Higher temperatures can also increase demand for drinking water. Mason County's largely rural setting means many homes rely on wells and septic systems. Drought and heat may lower water tables and dry out soils, causing septic drain fields not to function optimally. Even the natural environment that provides services, like forests that normally keep watersheds cool, may suffer. Extreme heat may raise river and lake temperatures, lowering dissolved oxygen and stressing fish populations. This may, in turn, impact fisheries and water quality for infrastructure that relies on cool water temperatures.

Ocean Acidification

Ocean acidification (OA) refers to the long-term lowering of ocean pH⁴⁶ due to the absorption of excess atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂). As CO₂ from fossil fuels dissolves in seawater, it forms carbonic acid, increasing acidity and reducing carbonate ions in the water needed by shell-building organisms. Globally, surface ocean pH has dropped by ~0.1 units since the Industrial Revolution (a 30% increase in acidity) and could double in acidity by 2100 if CO₂ emissions continue unabated. Washington's inland waters are especially vulnerable – pH levels as low as 7.4 have been recorded in Hood Canal, a part of Mason County that is an important shellfish-growing area. Such low pH waters are corrosive to marine life, and this extra acidified condition, caused by human-activity related CO₂ emissions plus natural upwelling of CO₂-rich deep water, can be deadly to vulnerable organisms. This process reduces the availability of carbonate ions, which are crucial for marine organisms like shellfish to build and maintain calcium carbonate shells and skeletons. Mason County's Hazard Mitigation Plan acknowledges ocean acidification as a climate change impact of concern for the region.

Mason County, bordered by Hood Canal and the Puget Sound, is particularly vulnerable to ocean acidification due to its robust aquaculture economy, including oyster and clam farming. According to the 2023 Mason County Hazard Mitigation Plan and studies cited by the Washington Ocean Acidification Center, the local marine waters are already experiencing lower pH levels, affecting larval development and shell formation in shellfish, an essential industry for local economies and tribal communities.

Relation to Extreme Heat

While ocean acidification is primarily driven by CO₂ emissions, extreme heat is a symptom of the same climate change forces and can indirectly worsen acidification. Hotter summers and drought conditions reduce streamflow, increasing the residence time of seawater in Hood Canal and allowing CO₂ to accumulate. Warmer summers also coincide with higher concentrations of CO₂ and other air pollutants, which can increase ocean acidification over time. Extreme heat events can further raise water temperatures in rivers and bays, which reduces dissolved oxygen and stresses aquatic life, compounding the stress of acidic waters on species like salmon and shellfish. These factors make Mason County's marine areas particularly sensitive to ocean acidification.

⁴⁶ Ocean pH refers to the acidity or alkalinity of seawater, measured on a scale from 0 to 14, with 7 being neutral.



Impacts on Mason County

- ◆ **Aquaculture and Shellfish Industry:** The Pacific Northwest has already seen die-offs of oyster larvae due to acidified waters. Mason County's tribal and non-tribal shellfish growers face economic threats as larval shellfish struggle to survive in increasingly acidic and warmer water.
- ◆ **Tribal Treaty Rights:** Local tribes, such as the Skokomish Indian Tribe, whose culture and economy are tied to shellfish harvesting, are disproportionately affected.
- ◆ **Food Security and Jobs:** The region's reliance on seafood for food and employment means that ocean acidification poses both nutritional and economic risks.

Supporting Facts and Figures

- ◆ *The Washington State Blue Ribbon Panel on Ocean Acidification* reported⁴⁷ that Washington's marine waters are among the most vulnerable in the nation due to regional upwelling patterns that naturally bring acidic waters to the surface.
- ◆ According to the 2023 *Mason County HMP*, ocean acidification is ranked as a High Concern for the local economy, particularly where aquaculture intersects with environmental change.
- ◆ NOAA and University of Washington research have shown that the Puget Sound has pH levels that are decreasing faster than the global average.

Pests and Pathogens

Pests and pathogens, in this context, refer to living organisms that can cause harm to plants, animals, or humans, including insect infestations, invasive species, crop diseases, wildlife die-offs, and vector-borne illnesses. Pests, pandemics, and pathogens are grouped together in this plan as hazards exacerbated by environmental change. Unlike sudden disasters, these hazards often develop gradually but can have wide-ranging impacts. Examples include forest insect outbreaks (like bark beetles or caterpillars), agricultural pests and plant blights, and disease vectors such as mosquitoes and ticks that spread illnesses. Extreme heat and climate change create prime conditions for many of these pests and pathogens to thrive, spread, or become more prevalent in Mason County.

Relation to Extreme Heat

Hotter temperatures and milder winters are key drivers of increased pest and pathogen activity. Warmer summers reduce soil moisture and stress plants and trees, weakening their resistance to such pests and diseases. At the same time, heat allows certain insects and microbes to reproduce more quickly and expand their range. For instance, outbreaks of some forest pests, such as mountain pine beetles, are expected to increase in warmer climate conditions. Normally, cold winter freezes keep bark beetle populations in check; as winters warm, more beetles survive and infest trees.

⁴⁷ Ocean Acidification: From Knowledge to Action – Washington State's Strategic Response
<<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/1201015.pdf>>



Extreme heat events and drought may further stress forests by drying out wood and resin, making trees more susceptible to beetle attack and less able to fend them off. A striking example on a statewide scale happened in 2021, when over 51,000 acres of Washington forests were killed by bark beetle infestations, a trend attributed in part to climate stress. The EPA and CDC warn that climate change is altering the geographic range and incidence of many pests and diseases, meaning Mason County could see pests that have historically been uncommon in this region.

Extreme heat is also linked to surges in vector-borne diseases: warm conditions foster deadly mosquito-borne illnesses such as West Nile virus (WNV). Mosquitoes mature faster in hotter temperatures and can breed in the stagnant water left by drought or intermittent rains. While WNV has primarily affected eastern Washington in past decades, warmer summers increase the risk that WNV-carrying mosquitoes and ticks carrying Lyme or other diseases may impact Western Washington populations in the future. In summary, extreme heat acts as a catalyst – it accelerates insect lifecycles, expands pathogen habitats, and places stress on hosts (crops, trees, or humans), thereby intensifying pest and disease outbreaks.

Impacts in Mason County

- ◆ **Forestry:** Increased bark beetle activity is a growing concern. Warmer winters mean higher survival rates, and hotter summers can weaken trees, making them more susceptible to infestation. This not only threatens timber production but also increases wildfire risk due to dead or dying trees.
- ◆ **Terrestrial Harvesting:** Berries and fruit trees face threats from invasive insects and plant diseases previously rare in the region. This impacts local food sources and cultural practices.
- ◆ **Public Health:** Warmer conditions may enable the expansion of disease vectors such as ticks and mosquitoes, potentially increasing the risk of diseases like Lyme disease or West Nile Virus in Mason County, although current risk levels remain moderate.

Supporting Facts and Figures

- ◆ The *Mason County HMP* notes forest health degradation due to pest activity as an emerging concern, especially when paired with extreme heat and drought.
- ◆ The *U.S. Forest Service* has tracked bark beetle outbreaks across Washington, particularly in drought-stressed stands, predicting increased susceptibility in Mason County's mixed conifer forests.
- ◆ Washington State University Extension Services and the *Washington State Department of Agriculture* have flagged the spread of pests like the spotted wing drosophila (SWD), which affects berry trees and shrubs.

Table 10-3 shows a breakdown of all the sectors that are affected by extreme heat and the impact or exposure they experience in Mason County



Table 10-3. Extreme Heat Impacts & Exposure by Sector

Sector	Extreme Heat Impacts/ Exposure
Agriculture and Food Systems	Rising water temperatures due to extreme heat can negatively impact aquaculture by causing thermal stress in farmed aquatic species, leading to reduced growth, disease outbreaks, and even mortality. Emissions exacerbated by heat events increase ocean acidification, adversely impacting the delicate ecosystems needed for aquaculture. Warmer summers are expected to increase the potential for heat stress on some crops and livestock and decrease crop yields. Some agricultural pests are expected to have greater survival rates and population size with warming. Warmer summer temperatures are expected to increase the demand for irrigation water.
Buildings and Energy	An increase in cooling degree days is expected to increase energy demand for air conditioning. Extreme heat events have the potential to overload the grid and cause power outages during peak demand hours.
Cultural Resources and Practices	Warmer stream temperatures are expected to reduce habitat quality for salmonids and other aquatic species that depend on cold water. This reduces the abundance of and access to these culturally important species for Northwest Tribes.
Economic Development	Warmer summer temperatures could decrease opportunities for warm-season recreation activities in some areas and increase them in others.
Ecosystems	Warmer summers are expected to reduce summer soil moisture and increase physiological stress for some plants and animals. Warmer summer temperatures are expected to reduce tree growth and forest productivity in some areas and increase growth and productivity in mild climates. Outbreaks of some forest pests, such as mountain pine beetles, are expected to increase.
Emergency Management	More frequent extreme daytime heat events are expected to increase the demand for emergency services to plan, prepare, and respond to human health impacts. Extreme heat may also impact emergency services due to transportation and travel disruptions, such as warped and buckling pavement on roads.
Health and Well-being	Warmer summers are expected to increase concentrations of air pollutants, such as ozone, and some vector-borne illnesses, such as West Nile virus. Extreme heat events pose a risk of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, especially for outdoor workers and unhoused populations.



10.5.3 Extreme Precipitation

Extreme precipitation is unusually heavy rain or snowfall over a short period, which can overwhelm natural and human-made drainage systems. The climate of Mason County, because of its proximity to the Pacific Ocean and the Olympic Mountains, makes it susceptible to atmospheric rivers—weather systems that produce heavy rain. These events can lead to landslides, floods, erosion, and road washouts, which can cripple transportation and place residents at risk. Rural areas without stormwater management infrastructure are particularly at risk of localized flooding and property damage.

Historical Extreme Precipitation Events

Mason County is no stranger to extreme precipitation events. The county frequently receives heavy rainfall from Pacific storms, especially atmospheric rivers.⁴⁸ Several historical events stand out:

- ◆ **November 1990 Thanksgiving Floods:** Over Thanksgiving weekend 1990, an atmospheric river brought 8 to 15 inches of rain in just a few days to Western Washington. Mason County was hit hard – the deluge caused severe flooding and road washouts. In the Skokomish Valley, residents had to be evacuated as floodwater rose, numerous homes were inundated, and several others were left extensively damaged or uninhabitable. A bridge over Mission Creek was destroyed, and county road damage exceeded \$250,000. This event was part of a federally declared disaster for severe storms and flooding, and it demonstrated how a multi-day rain event can overwhelm local rivers and drainage systems.
- ◆ **Winter 1996–1997 Floods:** The winter of 1996-97 brought a notorious sequence of snow and rain. After heavy snowfall in December, a week of torrential rain in March 1997 led to flooding and numerous landslides in Mason County. Multiple roads were closed, and at least five homes had to be evacuated due to landslide threats on waterlogged slopes. Statewide, the damage was in the tens of millions of dollars. An earlier event in February 1996 had similarly caused widespread flooding in the region, though Mason County's worst impact came in 1997.
- ◆ **December 2007 "Great Coastal Gale":** In early December 2007, a powerful storm slammed into the Washington coast with high winds and extreme rainfall. Mason County received torrential rains that led to the flooding of U.S. Highway 101 under four feet of water north of Shelton. This storm caused landslides and debris flows in the Hood Canal area. The Hoodspoint to Lilliwaup stretch of Highway 101 saw hillsides give way, dumping mud and rocks on the road. The December 2007 event was so severe that parts of Mason and neighboring counties were isolated for days. This was a federally declared disaster (DR-1734) and highlighted the vulnerability of transportation routes to extreme rainfall.

⁴⁸ Atmospheric Rivers are long plumes of moisture that can dump enormous amounts of rain in a short time.



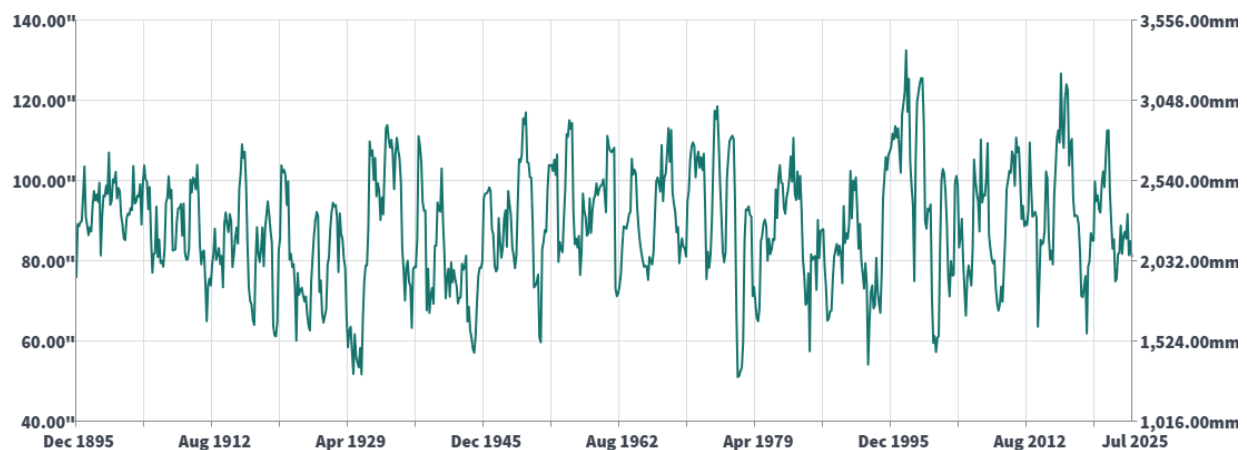
- ◆ **December 2015 Rains:** In early December 2015, an atmospheric river event caused widespread flooding across Western Washington, including Mason County. Roads and some homes flooded (e.g., the Skokomish River overflowed its banks), and a federal disaster was declared in early 2016 for the storm damage.
- ◆ **January 2022 Rains:** More recently, in January 2022, an atmospheric river following a snowstorm led to severe flooding in neighboring counties (such as the Thurston and Lewis counties). Mason County saw road flooding and some bridge damage, though it escaped the worst compared to counties to the south.

These events underscore a pattern: extreme precipitation tends to occur in Western Washington in the fall and winter, often causing flooding and landslides in Mason County. The county's hazard records show that large flood events with heavy rain have occurred roughly 10 times between 1956 and 2022, or about once every six to seven years on average.

In summary, Mason County's history includes multiple occasions where extraordinary rainfall led to significant natural disasters. The Skokomish River frequently floods when heavy rains fall on already-saturated ground or snow-laden mountains. Likewise, Mason's steep slopes and logged hillsides are susceptible to landslides when rainfall intensity and duration exceed certain thresholds.⁴⁹ The pattern of these past events shows the dual threats of flooding and landslides that come with extreme precipitation.

Figure 10-4. Annual Precipitation in Mason County, 1895–2025

Mason County, Washington Precipitation
12-Month Period



Source: NOAA National Center for Environmental Information

Future Trends: Climate Change and Heavy Rainfall

As the climate warms, there is an expectation of more frequent and severe heavy precipitation events in the Puget Sound region. While total annual rainfall in the Pacific Northwest may not

⁴⁹ For instance, a study by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) found that in the Puget Sound region, 3.5–5+ inches of rain in 3 days can trigger landslides in wet soil.



change dramatically, scientists project that rainfall will come in more intense bursts when it does occur. A warmer atmosphere holds more moisture; hence, storms can dump more rain. Observations already suggest an uptick in the frequency of very heavy rain events in the Pacific Northwest over the past half-century.

For Mason County, this means future fall and winter storms may produce greater downpours than those in the past, increasing the risk of flash flooding. Additionally, because winters are projected to get warmer, more precipitation will fall as rain rather than snow, even in the mountains. This means that winter rain-on-snow flood events could become more frequent in transient basins.

Natural variability like El Niño or La Niña will still play a role, causing wetter or drier seasons in any given year. But the underlying trend is toward greater extremes. Mason County might not necessarily get more days of rain per year, but when it does rain, the volumes may be higher than the infrastructure is capable of handling. This poses a challenge for infrastructure design, such as culverts, storm sewers, and bridges, which were built for past climate norms. The county's 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan explicitly notes that while average precipitation changes are uncertain, the intensity of extreme rainstorms is expected to rise, necessitating updates in planning and engineering standards.

In summary, Mason County should prepare for a future where extreme precipitation poses a higher risk. Events will be more intense than historical records, with more frequent flooding and a higher occurrence of back-to-back storms that keep soils saturated—a prime condition for landslides. These projections underscore the importance of enhancing flood management and landslide mitigation efforts to enhance preparedness and resilience.

Impacts on Transportation, Infrastructure, and Landslide Risk

Extreme precipitation can have immediate and severe impacts on transportation and infrastructure in Mason County. As seen in past events, heavy rainfall leads to flooded roads, bridge failures, and landslides.

Transportation Impacts

Many of Mason County's key transportation corridors run along rivers or near steep slopes (e.g., Highway 101 skirts along Hood Canal and the Skokomish Valley). In major rainstorms, these routes are prone to closure. Floodwater can inundate highways. For example, the December 2007 storm submerged Highway 101 under several feet of water, effectively cutting off the main north-south route on the Olympic Peninsula. Such closures not only isolate residents and disrupt travel, but they also hamper the delivery of emergency services.

Roadbed saturation can cause the pavement to crack or wash away. During extreme rain, culverts and storm drains may be overwhelmed by the volume of runoff and debris, leading to washouts. Mason County has experienced numerous instances of roads being undermined or covered by mud. For example, county roads in the Skokomish Valley and along Goldsborough Creek have washed out during heavy rains, requiring expensive repairs.



The 1990 flood damaged a bridge in Mason County, illustrating infrastructure vulnerability. Additionally, intense rain may cause urban flooding in areas like Shelton if stormwater systems back up. Power and communications infrastructure may also be impacted. Downed power lines from falling trees in storm-soaked ground have caused power outages during past storms, and a flooded road network delays the ability to access impacted power infrastructure for repairs.

Increased Landslide Hazard

The county's terrain includes steep hills and bluffs, and many slopes consist of glacial soils that can become unstable when saturated. Heavy rainfall, especially if it falls on ground that is already wet from prior rain, greatly increases landslide risk. It is documented that Mason County sees some form of a landslide almost every year, often triggered by winter storms. In some major storm events, more than ten separate landslides have been recorded across the county. For instance, in the 1996-97 rainy period, multiple landslides shut down roads. In January 1997 alone, Mason County reported at least eight landslides that blocked highways or local roads, including along Highway 106 and 101.

The Hazard Mitigation Plan notes that 11 federal disaster declarations since 1956 have included landslides or mudslides in Mason County, invariably in conjunction with severe storms. Common problem areas are the bluffs along Hood Canal and steep valleys in the southern Olympics foothills. Landslides can range from shallow mudslides that cover roadways to deep-seated slope failures that can destroy homes. An example of the latter occurred in 1999 when a saturated hillside gave way near Hoodsport, destroying a section of the roadway. Landslides not only threaten life and property directly but can also have cascading effects, blocking streams (creating potential flood bursts if debris dams break) and increasing sediment in rivers, which can then worsen flooding by reducing channel capacity.

Infrastructure Strain

Extreme precipitation events test the limits of infrastructure like dams, levees, and drainage systems. Mason County isn't heavily dam-controlled, but nearby reservoirs must carefully manage releases during big rains to avoid exacerbating flooding downstream. Levees along the Skokomish River and other streams have at times been overtopped or damaged in heavy floods. Aging levee structures may not be adequate for future flood levels. Stormwater infrastructure in towns, such as drains and retention ponds, might prove undersized for future downpours, leading to more frequent flood incidents. There's also an impact on water quality: extreme runoff can overwhelm sewer systems and water treatment plants, causing contamination events. For example, Shelton's wastewater plant must occasionally bypass excess flows during huge storms to prevent sewage backups.

Table 10-4 shows a more detailed breakdown of all the sectors that are affected by extreme precipitation and the impact or exposure they experience in Mason County.



Table 10-4. Extreme Precipitation Impacts and Exposure by Sector

Sector	Extreme Precipitation Impacts
Agriculture and Food Systems	Heavier precipitation is expected to increase flooding and inundation of agricultural lands, which can delay spring planting, affect crop quality and quantity, increase erosion and runoff, and increase susceptibility to root diseases.
Economic Development	Heavier precipitation is expected to increase the extent and frequency of flooding in low-lying areas and flood zones. Businesses are expected to have more disruptions to operations and damage to infrastructure.
Emergency Management	Heavier precipitation has the potential to increase the demand for emergency response services by intensifying flood events and increasing other emergencies associated with heavy precipitation.
Transportation	Heavier precipitation events are expected to intensify flooding, landslides, and erosion, which can interrupt transportation routes, damage infrastructure, and increase maintenance and repair costs.
Waste Management	Heavier precipitation has the potential to increase storm damage to infrastructure and generate more waste and debris. More waste will strain municipal cleanup and refuse capacity.
Water Resources	Heavier precipitation events are expected to carry debris and pollutants into water streams, impacting water quality.
Zoning and Development	Heavier precipitation events are expected to intensify urban flooding and demands on stormwater systems, which can affect zoning restrictions on new buildings and require revised building codes for development in more frequently flooded areas.

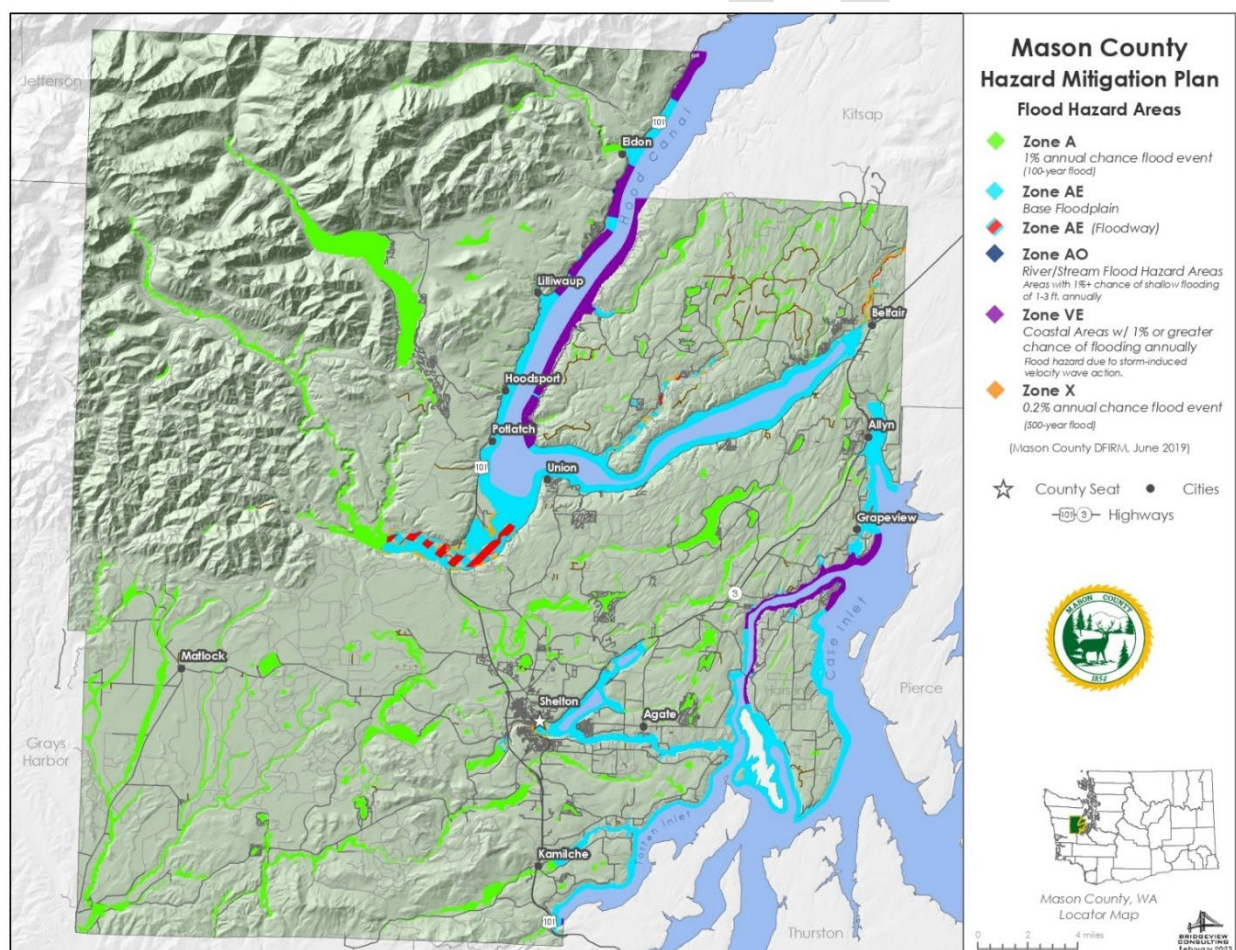


10.5.4 Flooding

Flooding is the inundation of normally dry land resulting from the rising and overflowing of a body of water. Mason County is vulnerable to numerous types of flooding, including riverine flooding from swollen streams and rivers, flash flooding from heavy rainfall, and coastal flooding from storm surges and high tides. The Skokomish River, one of the most flood-prone rivers in Washington State, routinely overflows its banks and affects nearby communities, agricultural lands, and roadways.

Flooding can destroy homes, businesses, and public infrastructure while endangering human life. Enhanced floodplain management and emergency response planning are essential to reducing the impact of these events. Below is a map of the flood hazard areas in Mason County.

Figure 10-5. Flood Hazard Areas in Mason County



Source: Mason County Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2023



Major Past Flooding Events in Mason County

Mason County experiences flooding regularly, with varying magnitudes from minor high-water events to major inundations. Several types of flooding have caused significant damage in Mason County in the past century:

- ♦ **Skokomish River Floods:** The Skokomish River basin, which drains a large portion of the southeast Olympics, is infamous as one of the most flood-prone rivers in Washington. It frequently overtops its banks during winter rains. Major Skokomish floods occurred in 1975, 1990, 1996-97, 2003, 2007, and other years. In the record 1975 event (Disaster 492), the Skokomish Valley saw numerous levee failures, many homes with water damage, and evacuations by boat. Total private and farm damage was estimated at \$300,000 (in 1975 dollars). The November 1990 flood was also largely a Skokomish River event, where several homes in the valley were destroyed or made uninhabitable, and dozens of people were evacuated. Residents of the Skokomish Valley have come to expect almost annual flooding. The repetitive nature of the Skokomish floods has led to numerous mitigation projects.
- ♦ **Coastal Flooding Events:** Mason County has marine shorelines along Hood Canal and south Puget Sound, which makes it susceptible to coastal flooding under certain conditions. Coastal flooding in Mason County is typically caused by a combination of storm surges and high tides during winter storms. One notable event was in December 2012, when a strong windstorm coincided with a king tide, causing tidewater to flood in low-lying areas like Allyn and Shelton's Oakland Bay waterfront. Similarly, in January 2021, a storm pushed Hood Canal about one to two feet above normal high tide, flooding some yards and roads in Union and along Highway 106.

While Mason County's coastal floods tend to be localized in pockets of inundation rather than a countywide disaster, they can still impact homes, marinas, and infrastructure on the fringe of the sound. Coastal flooding is different from river flooding, and it is driven by ocean water levels rather than watershed runoff; however, Mason County faces both. Low-lying neighborhoods like Shelton's downtown and the Skokomish Reservation near the mouth of the Skokomish River are vulnerable to tidal backwater flooding. There have been few federally declared disasters solely for coastal flooding, but these events are expected to worsen with sea level rise.

- ♦ **Urban/Flash Flood Incidents:** Mason County's smaller creeks and urban areas have seen flash floods during intense downpours. For instance, in October 2015, a thunderstorm dumped several inches of rain over Shelton in a short time, temporarily overwhelming street drains and flooding basements in some businesses. Similarly, the March 1997 rain event involved flooding not just the Skokomish River but also local streams with torrential rain, which led to road closures across the county. This indicates that multiple creeks jumped their banks or had culvert washouts. Urban flooding is often compounded when debris clogs storm drains, and Mason County has learned to clear debris from drainage systems when heavy rain is forecasted, but in extreme cases, the



sheer volume of water can overwhelm the systems, flooding intersections and parking lots.

Overall, flooding in Mason County has multiple causes, and past events often saw a combination of types. For example, in December 2007, there was riverine flooding (Skokomish River), coastal flooding (Hood Canal storm surge), and extensive hillslope runoff causing flash floods. The largest flood events in the county's history (like 1975, 1990, 1996, 2007) caused millions of dollars in damage, destroyed homes, and prompted federal disaster declarations. Statistically, from 1956 to 2022, there were about ten major flood events causing property damage in Mason County, which equates to roughly a 15% chance of a significant flood in any given year. This frequency underlines that flooding is not a rare or isolated hazard in Mason County; it poses a regular and serious threat.

Causes of Flooding: Riverine, Coastal, and Urban

Figure 10-6 shows the different types of flooding. Mason County is primarily affected by two of these: coastal flooding and riverine flooding. To a lesser extent, the county is also affected by urban and small-stream flooding. Mason County faces several types of flooding, each with distinct causes.

Figure 10-6. Types of Flooding



In many flood events, these causes overlap. For example, a strong storm can cause riverine flooding *and* coastal flooding simultaneously (high river flows meeting a high tide can back water up, worsening both). In 1990 and 1997, saturated ground led to both widespread river flooding and numerous landslides, so flooding and landslides were intertwined hazards. Mason County must approach flood preparedness by considering all sources: from the mountains to the sea to the storm drains on Main Street.

Future Flood Risk Projections

Looking ahead, flood risk is expected to evolve and worsen for Mason County. Climate projections, as discussed, indicate more intense winter rainfall and continuing sea level rise – both factors that heighten flood risk.

For riverine flooding, one key projection is that winter and early spring floods will become more frequent. As warmer temperatures cause more precipitation to fall as rain rather than snow,



especially in mid-elevation basins, the classic scenario of heavy rain on snowpack, causing sudden melts, could become more common in December–February. The Climate Change Impacts Assessment for Washington projects that flood frequency could increase steadily from the 2020s through the 2080s in many western Washington watersheds. Western Washington basins that are rain-dominated (like the Skokomish) or rain/snow mix (like the upper Skokomish, which historically had snow that’s now turning to rain) are already seeing rising flood trends.

The WA Department of Ecology notes that flood risks are increasing primarily in warmer basins and less so in cold, snowpack-dominant basins. Mason County falls in the former category. So, it can be anticipated that a given storm in the future might produce a higher flood crest on the Skokomish than a similar storm would have 50 years ago, due to the baseline shifts (e.g., already higher winter streamflows, more saturated soils, etc.). The county’s flood planners are therefore using climate-informed maps that look at how 2°C or 4°C of global warming could expand local floodplain extents and elevations.

Coastal flood risk is unequivocally increasing because of sea level rise (SLR). Even in the absence of changes in storms, rising sea levels mean tides and storm surges will reach higher elevations. The Puget Sound has been rising at a rate of about one inch per decade at the Seattle tide gauge. Projections for the region suggest roughly a foot of sea level rise by 2050 and between two and five feet by 2100 (the range depends on emission scenarios and ice sheet behavior). Mason County’s Hood Canal coast will likely mirror Seattle’s rise, potentially slightly less if there’s local land uplift, or slightly more if local subsidence occurs.

The Washington Coastal Resilience Project in 2018 provided localized SLR projections; for Shelton’s Oakland Bay, the likely rise by 2100 is on the order of two feet (with a low end of around one foot and a high end of three feet for moderate emission scenarios). If polar ice loss accelerates, higher rises in sea level are possible. The implication for flooding is that coastal inundation that barely occurs now will become a regular occurrence. For example, a present-day 100-year coastal flood might become an annual high tide event by 2100. In the nearer term, by the 2040s or 2050s, Mason County could start to see “sunny day” tidal flooding in low areas, where no storm is present, but an unusually high tide coupled with sea level rise causes water to encroach on streets or yards. Indeed, periodic floods are expected to pose a greater risk in the next few decades than permanent inundation, but eventually, permanent loss of some low-lying land is possible if sea levels continue to rise.

Overall, future flood scenarios for Mason County point toward more frequent moderate floods, potentially more extreme floods, and new areas at risk, especially along the coast as sea level rises. Improved forecasting through weather and streamflow models will give better warnings, but the physical challenges remain. The county’s flood mitigation planning uses FEMA’s climate-informed science to update flood insurance rate maps and consider special requirements for new construction in flood zones.

The recognition is clear in that climate change is expected to increase Mason County’s flood hazard over time, and proactive measures are needed to counteract that trend. **Table 10-5** and



Table 10-6 show both the County’s population and acres that are exposed within Flood Hazard Areas.

Table 10-5. Population Exposed within Flood Hazard Areas		
Jurisdiction	Population in the 1% annual chance event (100-year) Flood Boundary	Population in the 0.2% annual chance (500-year) Flood Boundary
Unincorporated Mason County	1,818	742
Shelton, City of	486	512
Allyn	0	0
Belfair	22	0
Total	2,326	1,254

Note: Based on 2017 Assessor’s data for residential structures within the 100-year and 500-year floodplains and an estimate of 2 persons per residential structure

Table 10-6. Acres in 100 and 500-Year Flood Hazard Areas for the Jurisdiction's Boundary					
Flood Zone	Mason County, WA	Unincorporated Mason Co.	City of Shelton	Town of Allyn	Town of Belfair
100-Year Flood Zone	37,458	37,161.0	186.9	85.5	24.4
500-Year Flood Zone	247	223.6	22.0	0.0	1.2



Impacts on Homes, Businesses, and the Local Economy

Flooding in Mason County has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to damage homes and businesses and disrupt the local economy.

- ◆ **Residential Impacts:** In major floods, dozens of homes can be inundated. Floods damage not only structures (ruining foundations, walls, electrical systems, etc.) but also personal property and vehicles. For instance, the 1990 flood left several homes in the Skokomish Valley so badly damaged that they were declared uninhabitable. Families in those homes had to be relocated, some permanently. Even shallow flooding of a few inches can necessitate expensive repairs (drywall removal and mold remediation). In Mason County's flood-prone areas, many houses are now elevated on stilts or built on fill resulting from past inundations, and those that aren't elevated face repetitive losses. Beyond direct damage, there's the emotional toll of displacement. Flood evacuees may be out of their homes for weeks or months. Floods have also claimed lives in the broader region (two deaths statewide in the 1990 event, and one person drowned in a car during a 2003 Mason County flash flood). Thus, population safety is a prime concern for residents when flooding occurs.
- ◆ **Business and Economic Impacts:** Mason County's economy can be affected by floods through several pathways. Businesses that get flooded suffer inventory and property losses and may have to shut down for repairs, losing revenue. Even if a business is not directly flooded, infrastructure outages can disrupt operations – e.g., if highways are closed, employees and customers cannot reach stores, or shipments of goods get delayed. Agriculture, while not the largest sector in Mason County, is impacted when fields flood – the Skokomish Valley's dairy farms have lost cattle and feed to deep floodwaters in past events, and saturated fields can't be planted for some time after. Any crops that are inundated with floodwaters cannot be sold for human consumption. Forestry operations can also be impacted; after big floods and landslides, logging roads need repair, and timber harvest schedules get pushed back. Floods can also significantly impact coastal shellfish farms by carrying debris and contaminants into waterways. For the broader community, floods incur significant public costs: road and utility repairs can strain county budgets. For example, the late 1990s floods cost well over \$1 million in road infrastructure repairs in the Mason County alone. These costs often have ripple effects on local government services and can lead to increased insurance premiums or taxes.
- ◆ **Critical Infrastructure and Services:** Flooding can compromise critical facilities. Even though it's on elevated ground, Mason County's General Hospital in Shelton might become isolated by flooded roads, as nearly happened in 1996 when both Highway 101 and Highway 3 had closures in various segments. Emergency services face challenges navigating flood-affected areas and roads, and ambulance response times increase if detours are needed. Schools have seen closures due to flood conditions, either because the buildings were threatened or because students and staff could not safely travel. Another concern is water supply contamination, where wells can be polluted by floodwater, and septic systems can overflow, leading to health risks. After the 2007



flood, Mason County Public Health had to issue boil-water advisories in some areas and assist residents with well testing and septic inspections.

- ♦ **Long-term Economic Effects:** Repeated flooding can degrade the economic vitality of an area. If certain neighborhoods flood frequently, property values can drop, and some residents may relocate permanently, reducing the tax base. Businesses might be hesitant to invest in flood-prone zones. While flood recovery efforts can bring in some outside investment (FEMA aid, reconstruction jobs), that's often temporary. One specific long-term impact in Mason County has been on the Skokomish Indian Tribe with their reservation lands flooding so often that it has constrained development and impacted tribal fisheries and shellfish harvesting, as floods wash sediment and pollution into Hood Canal, leading to shellfish bed closures. This shows how floods can also intertwine with cultural and subsistence aspects of the local economy.

Table 10-7 gives a more detailed breakdown of all the sectors affected by flooding and the impact or exposure they experience in Mason County.

Table 10-7. Flooding Impacts & Exposure by Sector	
Sector	Flooding Impacts/ Exposure
Agriculture and Food Systems	More frequent high streamflows are expected to increase flooding and negatively impact agriculture in the Skokomish Valley and other areas (micro-farms, etc.). This will also impact aquaculture with water runoff and pollution.
Buildings and Energy	More frequent high streamflows are expected to increase flooding, which can cause damage to buildings. Increased landslides can also damage power lines and other infrastructure, and make it difficult to access them for repairs.
Cultural Resources and Practices	Higher streamflows carrying debris and pollutants are expected to directly affect aquaculture and salmonid populations and alter their habitat, reducing the quantity of culturally important species for Northwest Tribes.
Economic Development	More frequent high streamflows are expected to increase the frequency of flooding, which impacts businesses and the economy by disrupting travel and shipping routes and damaging property. More frequent flooding has the potential to increase insurance premiums or make some properties more difficult to insure.



Table 10-7. Flooding Impacts & Exposure by Sector

Sector	Flooding Impacts/ Exposure
Ecosystems	Longer periods of low streamflow in summer are expected to prolong periods of poor habitat quality and change migration timing and success for salmonids and other aquatic species. Low streamflow also contributes to warmer stream temperatures, which create stress and thermal barriers for aquatic species that depend on cold water. Higher streamflows can scour the stream bed and remove or crush salmon eggs, increasing mortality and reducing return rates. Higher streamflows reduce the availability of slow-water habitat and can increase sedimentation that affects habitat quality.
Emergency Management	More frequent high streamflows are expected to increase riverine flooding and the need for emergency services to plan, prepare, and respond to flood events.
Transportation	More frequent high streamflows are expected to increase the frequency of flood damage to roads, bridges, and railways, leading to higher operating and maintenance costs. Service delays, cancellations, and reroutes are also expected to become more common.
Waste Management	More frequent high streamflows are expected to increase flooding, which can generate more debris and waste. More waste will strain municipal cleanup and refuse capacity, and flooding of waste management facilities can release contaminants and hazardous materials.
Zoning and Development	More frequent high streamflows are expected to increase damage to assets and property located in flood zones. This could reduce the suitability of some areas for certain land uses and require relocation of some development.

10.5.5 Sea Level Rise

As global temperatures rise, the melting of glaciers and thermal expansion of ocean water result in a rise in sea levels. Mason County, with its extensive Puget Sound shoreline, is facing a growing risk from sea level rise (SLR). Low-lying coastal areas, including harbors, marinas, and waterfront development, are vulnerable to erosion, saltwater intrusion, and frequent tidal flooding. A rise in sea level can also intensify the effect of storm surges, making coastal storm damage worse. Mason County policymakers and communities are crafting adaptation measures such as shoreline restoration and more robust coastal infrastructure to minimize the long-term effects of rising sea levels.



Risks Posed by Rising Sea Levels

Like drought, SLR is a slow-moving but significant threat to Mason County's coastal areas. Though Mason County's coastline is mostly a higher bank, there are vital low-lying areas, including portions of Shelton, Belfair, Allyn, Union, and the Skokomish River delta, that could be increasingly affected by SLR. The primary risks posed by SLR are highlighted below.

- ♦ **Coastal Flooding and Inundation:** As sea levels rise, high tides will reach further inland. Areas that once only flooded during rare storm surges may start flooding regularly during king tides. Over time, land that is currently just above the high tide line could be permanently submerged. In Mason County, this puts infrastructure like coastal roads (Highway 3 in Allyn, Highway 300 near Belfair State Park, and portions of Highway 106 along Hood Canal) at risk of chronic flooding. Neighborhoods built at sea level, such as parts of downtown Shelton by the Bayshore and some canal-side residential communities, could see frequent yard and street flooding.

The Department of Ecology warns that periodic coastal flooding will pose a greater and more near-term risk than permanent inundation in the next few decades. This means that Mason County might first experience more frequent extreme high-water events (during storms) that flood homes and businesses on the coast. But by the late century, with a higher baseline sea level, some low areas could be inundated even on calm days⁵⁰. This magnitude of rise would dramatically redraw the shoreline. Mason County's 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan (and other studies) mapped parcels that lie below threshold elevations for future sea levels. Many coastal wetlands and estuaries (like the Skokomish estuary) will be permanently underwater or drastically changed as saltwater pushes inland.

- ♦ **Coastal Erosion and Land Loss:** SLR contributes to accelerated coastal erosion. Higher water levels allow waves and storm surges to strike higher parts of the shore that used to be dry. Bluffs and beaches in Mason County will likely erode faster. Bluff erosion already occurs in places like Union and along Pickering Passage, where some properties have lost several feet of shoreline in recent decades. As sea level rises, even without stronger storms, the base of bluffs stays saturated and undercut for more extended periods, making landslides more frequent (this is a secondary effect: as SLR can exacerbate coastal landslide hazards).

A study by the Washington State Coastal Resilience Project estimated that by mid-century, many stretches of Puget Sound could see significant beach loss unless the sediment supply keeps up with SLR. In Mason County, places like the tidal flats of Oakland Bay or the barrier spits near the mouths of rivers might be overtopped. Shoreline armoring can temporarily protect specific spots, but as water rises, those structures themselves can be compromised or can cause the beach in front of them to

⁵⁰ The Puget Sound Regional Climate projections suggest that by 2100, a high tide in Hood Canal could be roughly 2–5 feet higher than today, depending on emission scenarios.



scour out. The risk is the gradual loss of coastal land, including private property and public beach access areas, as the line between ocean and land shifts.

- ◆ **Saltwater Intrusion into Aquifers:** Mason County has many residents who rely on shallow coastal aquifers and wells for drinking water, especially in the less developed stretches of shoreline. As sea level rises, the interface between fresh groundwater and seawater moves upward and landward. This means a greater risk of saltwater intrusion in coastal wells. Already, some wells on Harstine Island and the Hood Canal coast show elevated salinity. SLR, by increasing the hydraulic pressure of seawater, can push salty water into aquifers that supply wells. Over time, some existing wells may become too saline to use, which would force communities to drill deeper or find alternate water sources. This is a gradual impact, but a serious one for the water supply in coastal zones.
- ◆ **Wetlands and Ecosystem Impacts:** Mason County's coastal ecosystems such as the salt marshes, mudflats, and estuaries are particularly vulnerable to SLR. Tidal wetlands could be drowned or squeezed out if they cannot migrate inland. For instance, the extensive wetlands at the mouth of the Skokomish River provide critical habitat for salmon, waterfowl, and shellfish. With moderate SLR, these wetlands will either move upstream (if space is available and land gradients allow) or be lost under open water. The loss of wetlands means losing their natural flood protection benefits (wetlands absorb storm surges), their water filtration roles, and their habitat. Shellfish beds, which are a key part of Mason's economy and culture are also at risk. Many shellfish species rely on the intertidal zone and if water levels change, the optimal growing areas might shift. There's also concern about ocean acidification, which is related to climate change and CO₂ absorption by oceans. The hazard plan notes that rising CO₂ and higher temperatures can acidify marine waters, harming shellfish populations (this is an indirect impact tied to the same causes as SLR). Mason County's Hood Canal has already experienced low-oxygen and acidic conditions that cause shellfish die-offs, and climate change could worsen that.
- ◆ **Coastal Infrastructure:** Infrastructure along the coast such as roads, ports, sewage treatment facilities, etc. faces escalating risk. For example, septic systems in low areas might fail more often as the groundwater becomes higher and saltwater intrudes. Marinas and docks will need to be modified to accommodate higher water (many docks could be overtopped at king tides in the future). The Port of Shelton's facilities in Oakland Bay might need additional elevation or floodproofing as the sea level goes up. Transportation routes like Highway 3 and the railroad near Shelton could see more frequent closures from high water if nothing is done. Notably, Interstate 5 in the Nisqually area (south of Mason) has already had issues with higher tides while Mason does not have an interstate, which shows that even critical regional infrastructure is vulnerable.

In summary, SLR introduces a host of gradually intensifying risks for Mason County: chronic coastal flooding, land erosion, saltwater intrusion, ecosystem loss, and infrastructure



challenges. These impacts will unfold over decades, but some early signs are already observable (e.g., more frequent minor tidal flooding in recent years). Planning for these changes now is essential to reduce long-term harm.

Projections for Mason County

Current science provides detailed projections for SLR along Washington's coast, including specific estimates for Puget Sound. While Mason County itself wasn't a specific tide gauge site in global projections, we can infer from nearby locations:

The Washington Coastal Resilience Project⁵¹ offers an interactive tool visualizing projected sea level changes over the next decades. Under a high-emission scenario, the tool shows that Mason County may see between 0.4 and 1.6 feet of SLR by 2050.

In planning terms, Mason County is often using scenario-based projections like +1.5 feet by 2050 and +3 feet by 2100 for critical infrastructure planning, to be conservative. These numbers align with moderate-to-high emissions outcomes and provide a safety margin.

Risks to Coastal Infrastructure and Ecosystems

As sea levels rise, Mason County's coastal infrastructure and ecosystems face escalating risks:

- ◆ **Roads and Transportation:** Many low-lying roads could be regularly affected. Highway 3 through Shelton and Belfair, which runs along creeks and shorelines, may need retrofitting. Sections of Highway 106 along Hood Canal are barely above the current high tide levels. Neighborhood roads in Shorecrest, Union, and along Pickering Passage may also be at risk. If no measures are taken, these roads could face more frequent closures, washouts, or permanent submersion. This would isolate communities or force expensive emergency tactics. Bridge approaches at river mouths (like where highways cross the Skokomish and Skabob Creek) may flood as backwater from high sea levels extends up into rivers. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Mason County have begun incorporating SLR into long-range transportation plans, with options like raising road elevations, rerouting roads inland, or building causeways. Each has high costs and environmental considerations.
- ◆ **Sewage and Water Systems:** In the Belfair and Allyn areas, Mason County operates sewer systems that have marine outfalls and low-elevation pump stations. SLR can infiltrate these systems (through manholes or cracks), adding to the volume they must handle. Pump stations near the current water level might need to be elevated or sealed. Septic systems for waterfront homes are a big concern; many coastal homes use septic tanks and drain fields near the beach. With groundwater rising, these drain fields might saturate or see saltwater intrusion, causing failures and contamination of nearshore water. Health authorities may eventually require those areas to sewer if septic becomes untenable. Drinking water wells near the coast (like on Harstine Island or North Bay)

⁵¹ Washington Coastal Resilience Project: Interactive Sea Level Rise Data Visualizations
<<https://cig.uw.edu/projects/interactive-sea-level-rise-data-visualizations/>>



could get salty, as mentioned before, which might force connecting those homes to public water systems or drilling deeper wells.

- ◆ **Buildings and Properties:** Some structures are built extremely low – for example, boathouses, old cabins on the shoreline, and marinas. These structures will experience more frequent flooding. Private property damage from SLR will start as erosion (loss of yard, undermining of foundations) and progress to actual flooding of structures if adaptation measures aren't taken. In Mason County, several homes are only a few feet above high tide; over 100 homes statewide in WA are estimated to be at risk of tidal inundation by 2050 without adaptation, and Mason will contribute to that number. One analysis (Climate Central & Zillow 2018) put 14,000 homes in Washington, worth \$8 billion, at risk of coastal flooding by 2050– Mason County's share might be small in that figure, but some of those are undoubtedly in Mason (especially if including the Skokomish Reservation and other tribal communities). Commercial facilities are fewer on Mason's coast, but the marinas in Shelton and Union, and tourism sites (resorts on Hood Canal), could suffer more frequent flood-related disruptions.
- ◆ **Ecosystems:** Wetland migration is a critical issue. Ideally, as sea levels rise, wetlands would move upslope. But whether they can in Mason County depends on what's upslope and, if it's steep terrain or developed land, the wetland gets pinched out. Estuaries like the Skokomish and Kennedy Creek are relatively natural and have room to migrate into undeveloped valleys, so they may transform but survive (albeit possibly changing from marsh to tidal flat). However, smaller pocket estuaries and salt marshes squeezed against bluffs (like those in Pickering Passage) could drown. The loss of these habitats would affect fish and bird species, especially those reliant on marsh nurseries (salmon fry, forage fish, etc.). Forested tidal swamp areas, such as those with Sitka spruce in the Skokomish delta, will die off as salinity increases, leading to "ghost forests" and standing dead trees in what becomes a salt marsh. Such transitions have already been observed on the Washington coast (e.g., in the Nisqually delta post-restoration combined with SLR). Additionally, rising sea and warmer water can exacerbate low dissolved oxygen events in Hood Canal, harming marine life. The hazard plan also mentions ocean acidification as an associated risk, which threatens Mason County's shellfish industry by making it harder for oysters and clams to form shells.
- ◆ **Cultural Resources:** Rising seas threaten archaeological sites and cultural landmarks located near shore on the Skokomish Indian Reservation and other tribal usual and accustomed areas. Burial sites or artifacts could erode out of coastal bluffs. Tribes, including the Skokomish and Squaxin Island Tribes, are actively involved in SLR planning to protect these irreplaceable resources.

Table 10-8 gives a more detailed breakdown of all the sectors affected by SLR and the impact or exposure they experience in Mason County.



Table 10-8. Sea Level Rise Impacts & Exposure by Sector

Sector	Sea Level Rise Impacts/Exposure
Agriculture and Food Systems	Some farms are located close to sea level, making them vulnerable to sea level rise by impacting the freshwater input. Moderate sea level rise will increase the frequency and extent of coastal flooding, likely impacting aquaculture.
Buildings and Energy	Moderate sea level rise will increase the frequency and extent of coastal flooding. A rise in sea level is expected to impact coastal infrastructure and buildings.
Cultural Resources and Practices	Moderate sea level rise will increase the frequency and extent of coastal flooding, as well as beach and bluff erosion in some areas. Increasing coastal hazards have the potential to damage cultural and historical sites and buildings, reducing access to these areas.
Economic Development	Moderate sea level rise will intensify coastal flooding during storms or extreme weather events, which can disrupt business operations and damage property.
Ecosystems	Moderate sea level rise is expected to increase beach and bluff erosion and the frequency of flooding in coastal marshes and tidal flats. Changes in coastal ecosystems can reduce habitats for some aquatic, wildlife, and plant species. High sea level rise in some coastal habitats, such as wetlands, beaches, marshes, and tidal habitats, may cause inland shifts or permanent losses of some habitats. This has the potential to reduce the abundance or shift the geographic distribution of some species dependent on specific coastal habitats.
Emergency Management	High sea level rise will inundate low-lying areas and intensify coastal flooding, making some locations much harder to reach for emergency response activities, especially when combined with high tides and storm surges.
Transportation	With moderate sea level rise, Washington's seaports and the connected distribution networks are expected to flood more often. Coastal transportation infrastructure may be subject to more frequent closures due to coastal flooding and erosion, and require more frequent maintenance and repairs.
Water Resources	Sea level rise is expected to increase salt water intrusion into groundwater and coastal aquifers, which could reduce water quality.
Zoning and Development	Moderate sea level rise is expected to inundate some coastal land and intensify coastal flooding of infrastructure. Sea level rise is expected to increase beach and bluff erosion in some areas. Increasing coastal hazards are expected to decrease the area of coastal land that is suitable for some types of development and increase the need for relocation.



10.6 Vulnerability Assessment

A vulnerability assessment is a systematic evaluation of the susceptibility of people, places, and systems to the impacts of climate-related hazards. This process helps identify which community assets, such as infrastructure, natural resources, and cultural systems, are most vulnerable due to climate change. The assessment examines two main components: the sensitivity of assets to specific hazards and their adaptive capacity, or ability, to adjust, cope, or recover when exposed to a hazard. By evaluating these factors, this element determines overall vulnerability levels for each asset-hazard pair (e.g., vulnerability of wastewater systems to the hazard of flooding), laying the groundwork for effective climate resilience strategies.

10.6.1 Importance of Assessing Vulnerability

For Mason County, conducting a vulnerability assessment is fundamental in developing a Climate Resilience Plan that aligns with state guidance. Given the county's unique mix of rural communities, critical coastal and forest ecosystems, and aging infrastructure, it is essential to understand how climate hazards, such as sea level rise, wildfire smoke, extreme heat, and flooding, may impact local systems. This assessment provides a clearer picture of where the county is most vulnerable, helping to prioritize adaptation actions that protect public health, maintain essential services, and protect natural resources. Ultimately, it supports long-term resilience planning that is data-informed, equitable, and locally relevant.

Some of the resources used in this vulnerability assessment are the 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan, the University of Washington's CMRW web tool, WA Coastal Resilience, FEMA's National Risk Index, and NOAA's data resources.

Methodology

The vulnerability assessment focused on determining the exposure and resilience of critical systems to evaluate climate and hazard risks to community assets. This process involved three main steps: assessing sensitivity, rating adaptive capacity, and determining overall vulnerability.

- ♦ **Step A: Rating Assets' Sensitivity:** The first step in the process involved evaluating the sensitivity⁵² of each asset to specific hazards. To assess this, a series of indicators were identified depending on the asset type. For physical assets such as buildings, roads, and infrastructure, the asset's age relative to its expected design life, its current condition (e.g., poor, good, excellent), and whether its design includes features that protect against relevant hazards are the indicators used to evaluate sensitivity. For environmental assets like forests, wetlands, or shorelines, factors such as habitat fragmentation, climatic tolerance (e.g., temperature range), and vulnerability to pests or disease were considered. For social assets, including community health and well-being, sensitivity was assessed through indicators like air and water quality (e.g., ozone or

⁵² Sensitivity is defined as the degree to which a hazard could negatively impact an asset.



particulate matter concentrations) and key socioeconomic variables such as population age, income, and disability status.

A simple ruleset was applied to rate sensitivity as low, medium, or high. For instance, culverts that have exceeded their design life and are too small to handle recent precipitation volumes would be rated as having “high” sensitivity to flooding. When multiple indicators were used, the collective implications of those factors were assessed. For example, if an asset had a high sensitivity rating for age but a low rating for design resilience, its overall sensitivity might be rated as “medium.”

- ◆ **Step B: Rating Assets’ Adaptive Capacity:** Next, each asset's adaptive capacity⁵³ was evaluated. Key indicators used to measure adaptive capacity included design flexibility (e.g., modularity or retrofitting potential), availability of financial and technical resources, staffing capacity for emergency or adaptation planning, and the presence of back-up systems. Assets with robust planning support, resource availability, or fail-safes were assessed as having high adaptive capacity, while those lacking redundancy or funding were rated low.
- ◆ **Step C: Assessing Vulnerability:** In the final step, sensitivity and adaptive capacity ratings were synthesized to characterize the overall vulnerability of each asset-hazard pair. Vulnerability was rated qualitatively as low, medium, or high based on a composite understanding of the previous steps. Assets with high sensitivity and low adaptive capacity were considered highly vulnerable, while those with low sensitivity and high adaptive capacity were deemed to have low vulnerability. This step enables the county to prioritize assets for adaptation actions based on the degree of risk and resilience present.

This three-part approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how various community assets are affected by climate-related hazards and where strategic investments are most needed to reduce long-term vulnerability. The complete vulnerability assessment can be found in the Mason County Climate Element Workbook (Appendix), and a summary of the results can be found in **Table 10-9**.

Table 10-9. Vulnerability Assessment				
Asset	Hazard	Sensitivity	Adaptive Capacity	Vulnerability
Aquaculture, Shellfish, and Salmon Fishing	Sea Level Rise/Ocean Acidification	High	Medium	High

⁵³ Adaptive Capacity is an asset’s ability to adjust to changing conditions, withstand hazard impacts, or leverage opportunities to reduce risk.



Table 10-9. Vulnerability Assessment

Asset	Hazard	Sensitivity	Adaptive Capacity	Vulnerability
Aquaculture, Shellfish, and Salmon Fishing	Extreme Heat	High	Low	High
Aquaculture, Shellfish, and Salmon Fishing	Drought	High	Medium	High
Forests, Timber Industries	Drought	Medium	High	Medium
Forests, Timber Industries	Extreme Heat	Medium	High	Medium
Forests, Timber Industries	Pests & Pathogens	Medium	High	Medium
Air Quality, Parks & Recreation Areas, Aquatic and Terrestrial Harvesting	Extreme Heat	High	Medium	High
Air Quality, Parks & Recreation Areas, Aquatic and Terrestrial Harvesting	Sea Level Rise/Ocean Acidification	High	Medium	High
Air Quality, Parks & Recreation Areas, Aquatic and Terrestrial Harvesting	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Roads and Bridges, Culverts, Non-motorized transportation	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Roads and Bridges, Culverts, Non-motorized transportation	Sea Level Rise	Low	Medium	Medium
Utility Lines and Structures	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High



Table 10-9. Vulnerability Assessment				
Asset	Hazard	Sensitivity	Adaptive Capacity	Vulnerability
Utility Lines and Structures	Sea Level Rise	Low	Medium	Medium
Residential and Commercial Zoning, Shelters & Evacuation Centers	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Residential and Commercial Zoning, Shelters & Evacuation Centers	Sea Level Rise	Low	Medium	Medium
Storm & Wastewater Facilities, Waterways & Water Sources	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Storm & Wastewater Facilities, Waterways & Water Sources	Sea Level Rise	Low	Medium	Low
Solid Waste & Recycling Facilities, Hazardous Waste Facilities	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Solid Waste & Recycling Facilities, Hazardous Waste Facilities	Sea Level Rise	Low	Medium	Low
Shelton Port, Racetrack (Ridge Motorsports Park), Golf Courses	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Shelton Port, Racetrack (Ridge Motorsports Park), Golf Courses	Sea Level Rise	Low	Medium	Low

10.7 Risk Assessment

A risk assessment is a methodical process used to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of climate-related hazards on community assets. According to the Intermediate Climate Planning Guidance from Commerce, risk assessment combines two key components: the probability of a hazard occurring (based on historical frequency and future projections) and the



magnitude of its potential impacts (based on the asset's criticality, redundancy, and replacement cost). By plotting these factors on a risk matrix, communities can prioritize which hazards require immediate action and which can be monitored over time.

10.7.1 Importance of Assessing Risk

Risk assessment is essential to Mason County's Climate Resilience Plan because it ensures that planning efforts focus on the most pressing climate threats. The county faces diverse hazards, including sea level rise, flooding, wildfires, and extreme heat, all of which vary in how often they occur and how severely they affect infrastructure, ecosystems, and people. By following Commerce's recommended approach, Mason County can identify high-risk hazard and asset combinations and develop policies and actions that protect vital systems and vulnerable populations. This data-driven approach strengthens the county's ability to adapt proactively and make informed investments in resilience.

Some of the resources used in developing the risk assessment are the 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan, the University of Washington's CMRW web tool, WA Coastal Resilience, FEMA's National Risk Index, and NOAA's data resources. The Risk ratings in this element substantially align with the risk scores found in the 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Methodology

The risk assessment conducted as part of the Mason County Climate Resilience Plan followed the framework outlined in Commerce's *Intermediate Climate Planning Guidance*. This process involved evaluating the probability and magnitude of climate-related hazards and their impacts on community assets. The purpose of this analysis was to determine which hazard-asset combinations pose the most significant risks and to inform decision-making about whether to take proactive action or accept and monitor those risks.

- ◆ **Step A: Assessing Probability:** The first component of the risk assessment focused on evaluating the probability of each hazard occurring. The historical frequency of past events was reviewed to understand how often each hazard has impacted the county. This included analyzing the recurrence of floods, wildfires, extreme heat events, sea level rise impacts, and other climate-related disruptions. Next, the likelihood of these hazards occurring in the future was assessed based on available climate trend data, scientific projections, and expert judgment. Using these insights, each hazard was assigned a probability rating. Climate-exacerbated events projected to occur within the next five years were characterized as having high probability, those expected once in 5 to 20 years were rated medium, and those anticipated to occur less frequently than every 20 years were categorized as low probability.
- ◆ **Step B: Assessing Magnitude:** Following the probability assessment, the potential magnitude of impact for each hazard was evaluated relative to each asset. This involved determining how disruptive or costly the hazard event would be to the asset or system in question. To do this, several key indicators were considered: the redundancy of the asset (i.e., whether alternate systems or routes are available if the asset fails), the estimated replacement cost (e.g., based on assessor's parcel value), and the criticality



of the asset (e.g., whether it meets FEMA’s definition of a critical facility). These factors helped classify the anticipated impact as high, medium, or low magnitude.

- ◆ **Step C: Plotting the Risk Matrix:** With probability and magnitude ratings in hand, each hazard-asset pair was plotted on a color-coded risk matrix. This tool visually represented the composite risk rating, identifying which asset-hazard combinations fell into high, medium, or low risk zones. High-risk areas on the matrix indicated hazard-asset pairs with both high probability and high magnitude of impact, and these were prioritized for further action.
- ◆ **Step D: Determining to Act or Accept Risk:** The final step in the risk assessment involved making a strategic decision about how to respond to each risk. For hazard-asset pairs rated as high risk, the recommendation was to take immediate action—this could include developing comprehensive plan policies or strategies to reduce vulnerability. Conversely, for risks rated as low or moderate, the plan allows for accepting the risk, meaning that while no immediate action is taken, the risk is monitored over time and reassessed during plan updates. This approach ensures that Mason County is allocating resources where they are most needed while maintaining flexibility to adjust and adapt as climate conditions evolve.

This structured process, informed by Commerce’s guidance, ensures that Mason County’s climate resilience strategies are grounded in evidence-based risk analysis and tailored to the region’s specific hazards, vulnerabilities, and priorities. The complete risk assessment can be found in the Mason County Climate Element Workbook (Appendix), and a summary of the results can be found in **Table 10-10**.

Table 10-10. Risk Assessment				
Asset	Hazard	Probability	Magnitude	Composite Risk Rating
Aquaculture, Shellfish, and Salmon Fishing	Sea Level Rise/Ocean Acidification	Medium	High	High
Aquaculture, Shellfish, and Salmon Fishing	Extreme Heat	High	Medium	High
Aquaculture, Shellfish, and Salmon Fishing	Drought	Medium	Medium	Medium
Forests, Timber Industries	Drought	Medium	Low	Low



Table 10-10. Risk Assessment				
Asset	Hazard	Probability	Magnitude	Composite Risk Rating
Forests, Timber Industries	Extreme Heat	High	Medium	High
Forests, Timber Industries	Pests & Pathogens	Medium	Medium	Medium
Air Quality, Parks & Recreation Areas, Aquatic and Terrestrial Harvesting	Extreme Heat	High	Medium	High
Air Quality, Parks & Recreation Areas, Aquatic and Terrestrial Harvesting	Sea Level Rise/Ocean Acidification	Medium	Low	Low
Air Quality, Parks & Recreation Areas, Aquatic and Terrestrial Harvesting	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Roads and Bridges, Culverts, Non-motorized transportation	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Roads and Bridges, Culverts, Non-motorized transportation	Sea Level Rise	Medium	Medium	Medium
Utility Lines and Structures	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Utility Lines and Structures	Sea Level Rise	Medium	Low	Low
Residential and Commercial Zoning, Shelters & Evacuation Centers	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Residential and Commercial Zoning, Shelters & Evacuation Centers	Sea Level Rise	Medium	Low	Low



Table 10-10. Risk Assessment				
Asset	Hazard	Probability	Magnitude	Composite Risk Rating
Storm & Wastewater Facilities, Waterways & Water Sources	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Storm & Wastewater Facilities, Waterways & Water Sources	Sea Level Rise	Medium	Low	Low
Solid Waste & Recycling Facilities, Hazardous Waste Facilities	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Solid Waste & Recycling Facilities, Hazardous Waste Facilities	Sea Level Rise	Medium	Low	Low
Shelton Port, Racetrack (Ridge Motorsports Park), Golf Courses	Flooding, Extreme Precipitation	High	Medium	High
Shelton Port, Racetrack (Ridge Motorsports Park), Golf Courses	Sea Level Rise	Medium	Low	Low

10.8 Climate Resilience Goals & Policies

The following goals and policies were developed following the extensive analysis of Mason County's assets in the 11 sectors identified by Commerce, relative to the climate-exacerbated hazards facing the County. Per Commerce's requirements, the policies in this Climate Element:

1. Address natural hazards created or aggravated by climate change;
2. Identify, protect, and enhance natural areas to foster climate resilience, as well as areas of vital habitat for safe species migration; and
3. Identify, protect, and enhance community resilience to climate impacts, including social, economic, and built-environment factors, which support adaptation to climate impacts consistent with environmental justice.

While each goal tends to focus on a specific sector, most goals and policies address multiple sectors and hazards. Similarly, while some of these goals could fit within other elements of Mason County's Comprehensive Plan, the intent was to keep all climate-related policies in one chapter.



- Goal C 1 Ensure the protection and encourage the restoration of streams, riparian zones, estuaries, wetlands, lakes, and floodplains to achieve healthy watersheds that are resilient to climate change.**
- Policy C 1.1 Encourage implementation of actions identified in restoration and salmon recovery plans that improve the climate resilience of streams and watersheds.
- Policy C 1.2 Continue to protect and encourage restoration of wetlands and corridors between wetlands to provide biological and hydrological connectivity that fosters resilience to climate impacts.
- Policy C 1.3 Continue to protect and encourage restoration of riparian vegetation to reduce erosion, provide shade, and support other functions that improve the climate resilience of streams.
- Policy C 1.4 Encourage the restoration of the structure and function of streams and floodplains to increase habitat climate resilience for cold-water fish.
- Policy C 1.5 Support efforts to reduce the threat of aquatic invasive species (e.g., fish, plants, and invertebrates) to increase the climate resilience of native fish species and aquatic ecosystems.
- Policy C 1.6 Encourage the health and restoration of soils and forests that contribute to the health of the water systems by using strategies such as reducing pesticide and herbicide usage in riparian zones and wetlands.
- Policy C 1.7 Continue to protect water from point and nonpoint pollution sources.
- Goal C 2 Ensure the protection and encourage the restoration of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems to provide healthy habitats and increase the resilience of species in a changing climate.**
- Policy C 2.1 Continue to protect and maintain critical areas and open space areas to maximize the climate resilience benefits they provide.
- Policy C 2.2 Continue to protect and encourage the improvement of habitat quality and connectivity to foster climate resilience using conservation area designations, buffers, and open space corridors.
- Policy C 2.3 Continue to ensure no net loss of ecosystem composition, structure, and functions, especially in Priority Habitats and Critical Areas, and strive for net ecological gain for public projects to enhance climate resilience.
- Policy C 2.4 In restoration efforts, encourage native drought- and pest-resistant trees, shrubs, and grasses to support beneficial insect/pollinator biodiversity, food sources, habitats, and overall climate resilience.
- Policy C 2.5 Support early action to eliminate or control non-native invasive insect species that take advantage of climate change in ways that minimize harm to human health, native ecosystems, and wildlife, especially where invasives threaten native species or ecosystem function.



- Policy C 2.6 Continue to encourage consideration of sea level rise in coastal and nearshore habitat restoration projects.
- Policy C 2.7 Consider state mandates and guidance regarding climate stressors when determining allowed activities and uses within wetlands, Priority Habitats, and Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas (FWHCAs), and ensure regulations maintain habitat integrity and function.
- Goal C 3 Encourage the resiliency of historic sites, cultural resources, and practices to the impacts of extreme weather or natural hazards.**
- Policy C 3.1 Continue to maintain government-to-government relations with local Tribes for the preservation of archaeological sites and traditional cultural properties, resources, and practices that are vulnerable to climate impacts.
- Policy C 3.2 Support the establishment of a native plant nursery and seed bank to support long-term restoration and carbon sequestration efforts, and support the establishment of a native plant salvage program in Mason County.
- Goal C 4 Protect and preserve water quality and quantity from drought, extreme heat, saltwater intrusion, and other hazards exacerbated by climate change.**
- Policy C 4.1 Support pilot projects that foster collaboration for providing water for people, fish, wildlife, pets, poultry, livestock, and farms, such as water banks, irrigation modernization, greywater systems, compost toilets, and other mechanisms to ensure sufficient water supply for all needs in the county.
- Policy C 4.2 Continue requiring the use of green infrastructure and low-impact development to address increased storm intensities and stormwater runoff.
- Policy C 4.3 Evaluate the long-term adequacy of water infrastructure to ensure that changes in hydrological patterns (e.g., increases in flooding frequency or reduction of late-summer water availability associated with climate change) can be anticipated and managed effectively.
- Policy C 4.4 Explore deploying eco-friendly systems that enhance the resilience of rural communities in the event of water shortages, such as the use of greywater and compost toilets.
- Policy C 4.5 Continue to utilize well permits to ensure that wells are constructed by licensed contractors and adhere to well standards, including proper casing, sealing, and backfill materials, to prevent contamination.
- Policy C 4.6 Prioritize strategies that ensure equitable access to clean, reliable water infrastructure for all of Mason County, with a focus on communities most impacted by climate-exacerbated hazards.
- Policy C 4.7 Consider seeking funding to develop and maintain a fund to build green infrastructure projects that help capture, filter, store, and reuse greywater and stormwater runoff.



Goal C 5 Ensure that the local timber, agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and food industries are resilient to the impacts of extreme weather and other natural hazards, and that adaptation resources are coordinated to support farmers and growers in making informed business decisions in a changing climate.

Policy C 5.1 Continue to encourage the conservation of commercialized natural resources, and discourage incompatible development uses by ensuring that adjacent land uses do not contribute to the demise of the long-term commercial forest, aquaculture, and agricultural lands and the resource-based industries associated with these areas.

Policy C 5.2 Promote environmentally sustainable water-storage and farming practices that help aquaculture and agricultural producers adapt to changing conditions and reduce production losses while balancing ecosystem needs.

Policy C 5.3 Support conservation programs and resources that provide direct financial assistance to aquaculture farmers and forest owners to implement best management practices that prioritize and address climate change mitigation and adaptation while maintaining the integrity of the ecosystem.

Policy C 5.4 Ensure that tree and native forest plant species selection and planting guidance are updated to be resilient to climate change.

Policy C 5.5 Encourage participation in Washington's small forest landowner assistance cost-share and stewardship programs.

Policy C 5.6 Continue requiring no-net loss in commercial forest land to maintain and protect forests in the County.

Policy C 5.7 Explore and encourage opportunities to put unique forest properties into conservation programs.

Goal C 6 Ensure that the local economy is resilient to climate change-related disruption and fosters business opportunities associated with climate mitigation and adaptation.

Policy C 6.1 Ensure that Mason County's Emergency Management Plan responds to climate change impacts and identifies roles and responsibilities to support a sustainable economic recovery after a disaster, prioritizing actions that benefit overburdened communities.

Policy C 6.2 Support local businesses, schools, Tribes, and nonprofits' efforts to bolster climate preparedness and continuity of operations.

Policy C 6.3 In environmentally sensitive areas, ensure that land use permit processes control activities that may have a detrimental effect on public health, safety, or the environment, and that they are consistent with state and federal requirements.



Policy C 6.4 Support education and training for people of all ages and backgrounds to enter into climate-friendly industries that actively support environmental health and climate resilience.

Goal C 7 Promote community health and well-being by ensuring equitable access to clean air, clean water, healthy ecosystems, open space, and outdoor recreation.

Policy C 7.1 Provide accessible public open space and protect environmentally important areas without compromising private property and treaty rights.

Policy C 7.2 Encourage increased access to publicly owned natural resource lands and protect existing public access to shorelines, water, and terrestrial recreation and harvesting areas.

Policy C 7.3 Encourage retention of open space and the development and maintenance of recreational opportunities like parks and public-use recreation areas appropriate for camping, hiking, horseback riding, and off-leash dog exercise.

Policy C 7.4 Identify and encourage the preservation of accessible open space areas, both urban and rural, which may be conserved through conservation easements, public acquisition, life estates, conveyance to a land trust or nonprofit, and/or other conservation mechanisms.

Policy C 7.5 Prioritize strategies that ensure equitable access to clean air for all of Mason County, with a focus on communities historically impacted by air pollution.

Goal C 8 Protect the local population's health from the impacts of climate-exacerbated hazards, prioritizing overburdened communities and ensuring that the most vulnerable residents do not bear disproportionate health impacts.

Policy C 8.1 Address the social and mental health needs of residents following natural disasters.

Policy C 8.2 Develop and implement multi-lingual notification alerts within the community to reduce the risk of exposure to climate impacts (e.g., wildfire smoke and particulate matter).

Policy C 8.3 Evaluate and implement habitat reduction and population control for disease vectors (e.g., mosquitoes and ticks) and zoonotic disease reservoirs (e.g., rodents) using integrated pest-management methods.

Policy C 8.4 Use health impact assessments and tools to evaluate and prioritize service and utility deficiencies.

Policy C 8.5 Support the health and well-being of populations most exposed and vulnerable to extreme temperature events and other climate-exacerbated hazards, such as outdoor workers, unhoused people, and people living in substandard housing.



Policy C 8.6 Seek funding for or support community-based organizations, agencies, and Tribes to develop and maintain programs to distribute cooling units and install heat pumps, prioritizing households with residents most vulnerable to extreme temperature events (e.g., low-income seniors).

Goal C 9 Ensure that the local transportation system is able to withstand and recover quickly from the impacts of extreme weather events and other hazards exacerbated by climate change.

Policy C 9.1 Design and site new and expanded roads and railroads to have the least possible adverse effect on the shoreline, account for sea-level rise projections, and cause no net loss of shoreline ecological functions.

Policy C 9.2 Design and site new and expanded roads and railroads to have the minimum adverse impact on existing or planned water-oriented uses, public access, ecosystems, and habitat restoration and enhancement projects.

Policy C 9.3 Promote interconnecting street networks that provide connectivity and redundancy to serve as potential evacuation routes, and coordinate with private landowners, businesses, and government agencies to ensure access to evacuation routes during emergencies (e.g., providing keys to roadway gates).

Policy C 9.4 Incorporate hydrologic climate impacts into the design of water-crossing structures (e.g., climate-smart culverts and bridges) to improve fish passage and habitat quality without compromising the efficiency of the transportation network.

Policy C 9.5 Enhance the resilience of parks and recreational trails by assessing and addressing climate hazards and impacts (e.g., trees or shade structures to protect recreators from heat waves).

Policy C 9.6 Site major public facilities that generate substantial travel demand along or near existing major transportation and public transit corridors.

Policy C 9.7 Encourage the sharing of corridors for major roads, utilities, trails, trucking routes, and other high-emission activities.

Goal C 10 Ensure that energy and waste infrastructure is able to withstand and recover quickly from the impacts of extreme weather and other natural hazards worsened by climate change.

Policy C 10.1 Plan and build facilities, utilities, and infrastructure projects to avoid or withstand climate hazards such as extreme temperature events or flooding from storms, rising sea levels, and associated climate impacts (e.g., changing floodplains).

Policy C 10.2 Work with energy utilities to improve the safety, environmental sustainability, and reliability of infrastructure vulnerable to climate change.



- Policy C 10.3 Encourage new subdivisions to bury electricity transmission lines and associated infrastructure to reduce damage from storms and wildfire ignition risks.
- Policy C 10.4 Advance waste reduction efforts through support of state and federal programs, public information and education programs, and other available and appropriate methods.
- Policy C 10.5 Consider developing a countywide debris and waste management plan, including food waste composting and/or curbside pickup of food waste.
- Policy C 10.6 Study and retrofit county-owned waste and energy facilities to better withstand damage from floods, severe weather, and other climate-exacerbated hazards.
- Policy C 10.7 Consider how increasing natural hazards affect facility lifespan and replacement cycles.
- Policy C 10.8 Use the latest data and best available science to assess hazard-related infrastructure needs.
- Policy C 10.9 Plan for sewer capacity impacts from flooding and extreme rain.
- Policy C 10.10 Promote the use of emerging technologies to mitigate impacts from pollutants, increased rain events, and coastal flooding in sewer and septic systems.
- Goal C 11 Enhance emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to mitigate risks and impacts associated with extreme weather and other hazards worsened by climate change.**
- Policy C 11.1 Map transportation infrastructure that is vulnerable to floods, landslides, and other natural hazards, and designate alternative travel routes for critical transportation corridors when roads must be closed.
- Policy C 11.2 Incorporate sea-level rise information, along with tsunami hazard mapping, into critical area delineation for siting critical infrastructure, land-use planning, and emergency management.
- Policy C 11.3 Support enhanced data collection for hazard events of all magnitudes to provide a fuller understanding of the community's hazard characteristics, including those affected by climate change.
- Policy C 11.4 Factor climate impacts into the planning of operations and coordination of preparedness, response, and recovery activities among first responders and partners, including public health, law enforcement, fire, school, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel.
- Policy C 11.5 Develop and implement a strategy to expedite management of debris (e.g., downed tree limbs and buildings blocking roads and streams) after a disaster incident to reduce the risks of subsequent fire, flood, injury, pollution, and disease vectors.



Policy C 11.6 Develop a comprehensive, communitywide wildfire resilience strategy to improve emergency response capabilities, create fire-resilient landscapes, promote fire-adapted communities, protect the economy, and foster short- and long-term recovery.

Policy C 11.7 Support the development of community wildfire protection plans.

Policy C 11.8 Consider incorporating flood-related debris flow patterns into critical area delineation in flood-prone communities.

Goal C 12 Establish land use patterns that increase the resilience of the built environment and communities to climate change.

Policy C 12.1 Continue to direct new development into areas where exposure to climate hazards, such as frequent flooding, is low.

Policy C 12.2 Continue to encourage development in Urban Growth Areas where infrastructure exists or is planned.

Policy C 12.3 Identify and implement strategies to increase the resilience of the shoreline environment to sea-level rise and other climate hazards, while also protecting shoreline ecological functions, allowing water-dependent uses, and providing equitable public access.

Policy C 12.4 Continue to protect agricultural and forested lands that provide climate resilience benefits from conversion to more developed land use types.

Policy C 12.5 Prioritize land use and infrastructure investments that promote equitable access to housing, services, and climate-adaptation resources, with a focus on communities most vulnerable to climate-exacerbated hazards.

Goal C 13 Ensure fair and equitable outreach by providing all residents with an opportunity to learn about climate impacts, influence policy decisions, and take actions to enhance community resilience.

Policy C 13.1 Build and support partnerships with community-based organizations that have the capacity and relationships to convene diverse coalitions of residents and educate and empower them to implement climate resilience actions.

Policy C 13.2 Address service deficiencies across the county by engaging county residents on issues experienced and prioritizing improvements that benefit at-risk populations.

Policy C 13.3 Consider setting up a focus group of stakeholders to help identify communities and groups overburdened by climate-exacerbated hazards to inform the County's decisions in prioritizing programs.



11 Health and Human Services

The Mason County Health and Human Services Plan is hereby adopted by reference into this Comprehensive Plan.

DRAFT



Glossary

***NOTE: All definitions are found in federal guidance, state law or county code.**

Accessory Dwelling Unit or ADU: A second dwelling unit added onto, created within or detached from an existing single-family detached dwelling for use as a completely independent or semi-independent unit with provisions for cooking, eating, sanitation and sleeping. See [Mason County Code Section 17.03.029](#) for requirements for ADUs.

Adequate Public Facilities: Facilities which have the capacity to serve development without decreasing levels of service below locally established minimums. (WAC 365-196-210)

Affordable Housing: A residential housing unit that is rented or owned by a person or household at a rate such that monthly housing costs including essential utilities and property taxes do not exceed thirty percent of the household's income.

Affordable Housing Development: A housing development in which at least twenty-five percent of the dwelling units within the development are set aside for or are occupied by low-income households at a sales price or rent amount that is considered affordable by a federal, state, or local government housing program. (RCW 36.130.010)

Agricultural Lands: land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products or of berries, grain, hay, straw turf, seed, Christmas trees not subject to the excise tax imposed by RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, or livestock.

Agricultural Resource Lands: Land designated by Mason County as agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance.

Airport Influence Zone: A zone around airports designating building height restrictions, noise levels, and safety considerations as necessitated by aircraft operations.

Airport Impact Zones: Defined areas on and off airport property that are zoned to ensure airport compatible land uses. Low-activity airports without significant aircraft noise exposure contours can benefit by identifying and implementing land use controls in Airport Impact Zones. The



Impact Zones generally include the runway protection zone, the FAR Part 77 approach surface and the airport traffic pattern. (Federal Aviation Administration)

Aquifer: A geologic formation, group of formations or part of a formation capable of yielding a significant amount of ground water to wells or springs.

Aquifer Recharge: Occurs where rainfall, snowmelt, infiltration from lakes, wetlands and streams, or irrigation water infiltrates into the ground and adds to the water underground that can supply a well. (Washington State Department of Ecology)

Best Available Science: An approach to the development and implementation of critical areas policies or regulations based on assessment and recommendation by a qualified scientific expert or team of experts based on the criteria set out in WAC 365-195-900 through 365-195-925. "The rules in WAC 365-195-900 through [365-195-925](#) are intended to assist counties and cities in identifying and including the best available science in newly adopted policies and regulations and in this periodic review and evaluation and in demonstrating they have met their statutory obligations under RCW [36.70A.172\(1\)](#)."

Best Management Practices: A physical, structural, or managerial practice which has gained general acceptance for its ability to prevent or reduce environmental impacts.

Biodiverse Forest: A forest ecosystem with high biodiversity—the full range of life at genetic, species, and ecosystem levels—reflected in native species richness, varied age classes and canopy layers, and habitat elements such as snags and downed wood. (Adapted from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, "[Biodiversity in Washington](#)")

Buildable Lot: A lot that contains a building site. Having a lot that is "buildable" still does not necessarily mean that a structure may be constructed. While a lot may meet the criteria for being "buildable," other approvals such as Public Health (for water and septic systems) are required before a building permit can be issued.

Buffer or Bufferyard or Buffer Zone: An area of plantings surrounding a land use which screens or blocks vision, noise pollutants, or other negative by-products associated with that use. The bufferyard might consist of open space, landscaped areas, undisturbed areas of natural vegetation, fences, walls, berms or any combination thereof.

Capacity: The measure of the ability to provide a level of service on a public facility.

Capital Improvement: Land, improvements to land, structures (including design, permitting, and construction), initial furnishings and selected equipment. Capital improvements have an expected useful life of at least 10 years.



Carrying Capacity: The intrinsic constraints on the development of an area. The development that may be allowed without an (unacceptable) significant adverse impact, on a cumulative basis, on an environmental or social value intended to be protected by the Comprehensive Plan. Carrying capacity in the biological sciences is the population of a species in a particular environment which can be sustained on an on-going basis. "The maximum number of inhabitants that an environment can support without detrimental effects." (Websters 11) For human populations, this concept less useful in the sense that resources which are locally in short supply can be transferred from anywhere in the world, and the level of impact that human society has on the environment is variable based on the technology used and the way that technology and other human activities are managed. Humans do not have the limited range of behaviors other species have. Examples of values to be protected in the plan would be native fisheries or rural character.

City: Any city or town, including a code city. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Cluster Subdivision or Clustered Development: Grouping the allowed development on only a portion of the site in such a way that a significant proportion of the site remains in common open space, recreation, resource-based use, any combination of those uses, or remains undeveloped with some kind of restriction on additional development.

Commercial Uses: Businesses involved in: 1) the sale, lease or rent of new or used products to the consumer public; 2) the provision of personal services to the consumer public; 3) the provision of leisure services in the form of food or drink and passive or active entertainment; or 4) the provision of product repair or servicing of consumer goods.

Community On-Site Septic or Wastewater Treatment System: A sewage system used to serve multifamily residential complexes or groups of individual residences.

Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Comprehensive Plan, or Plan: Means the Mason County Comprehensive Plan, as adopted pursuant to the Growth Management Act, and as thereafter may be amended.

Concurrency or concurrent with development: Adequate public facilities are available when the impacts of development occur, or within a specified time thereafter. This definition includes the concept of "adequate public facilities" as defined above. (WAC 365-196-210)

Consistency: No feature of a plan or regulation is incompatible with any other feature of a plan or regulation. Consistency is indicative of a capacity for orderly integration or operation with other elements in a system. (WAC 365-196-210)

Contiguous Development: development of areas immediately adjacent to one another. (WAC 365-196-210)



Cottage Industry: A business, occupation, or profession that is incidental to a residential use and is carried on by a member or members of the household living in the residential unit on the site. There may be up to five employees working on the site who do not reside on the site. Cottage industries may be conducted within the residential dwelling or within an accessory structure.

Critical Areas: Include the following areas and ecosystems: (a) Wetlands; (b) areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water; (c) fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas; (d) frequently flooded areas; and (e) geologically hazardous areas. "Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas" does not include such artificial features or constructs as irrigation delivery systems, irrigation infrastructure, irrigation canals, or drainage ditches that lie within the boundaries of and are maintained by a port district or an irrigation district or company. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Critical Aquifer Recharge Area(s) or Aquifer Recharge Area: Areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water, including areas where an aquifer that is a source of drinking water is vulnerable to contamination that would affect the potability of the water, or is susceptible to reduced recharge. (WAC 365-190-030(3))

Density: A measure of the intensity of development, generally expressed in terms of dwelling units per acre. Density can also be expressed in terms of population (i.e., people per acre).

Design Guidelines: A set of guidelines defining parameters to be followed in site and/or building design and development.

Design Standards: A set of standards defining parameters to be followed in site and/or building design and development.

Development: The construction, reconstruction, conversion, structural alteration, relation or enlargement of any structure; and any mining, excavation, filling or other associated land disturbance.

Development Regulations or Regulations: Any controls placed on development or land use activities by a county or city. Including, but not limited to, zoning ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and binding site plan ordinances. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Domestic Water System: Any system providing a supply of potable water which is deemed adequate pursuant to RCW 19.27.097 for the intended uses of a development. (WAC 365-195-210)

Easement: A covenant which grants or restricts a specific right of use.



Environmental Impact Statement (EIS): A document detailing the expected environmental impacts of a proposed action.

Environmental Justice: “The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies,” including equitable distribution of environmental benefits and reduction of harms to overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. (RCW 70A.02.010)

Environmental Stewardship: Responsible management and protection of natural resources to sustain ecosystem health and public benefits over the long term; in practice, this includes planning and management actions that conserve soil, water, fish and wildlife while meeting landowner/community objectives. (Washington State Department of Natural Resources)

Equitable Community Services: Delivery of public services using an equity lens to identify and remove barriers so all residents—including overburdened communities and vulnerable populations—have fair, accessible, and culturally appropriate access to programs and benefits. (RCW 43.06D.040)

Equitable Education: Education systems and practices that “identify and eliminate institutional policies, practices, and barriers that reinforce and contribute to predictably disparate educational outcomes,” narrowing opportunity and achievement gaps so all students can succeed. (Washington State Board of Education)

Equitable Employment: Hiring, advancement, and compensation practices that proactively remove unnecessary barriers and bias to ensure fair opportunity and pay for all qualified people. ([Governor’s Executive Order 24-04](#); Washington State Office of Financial Management)

Equitable Financing: Policies and programs that expand fair access to capital for people and places historically excluded from credit markets; in Washington this includes the Department of Commerce’s Equitable Access to Credit Program, which awards grants to lending institutions to serve historically underserved communities. (RCW 43.390; Washington State Department of Commerce)

Equitable Housing: Policies and outcomes that ensure all residents—especially those at risk of displacement or exclusion—have fair access to a variety of safe, affordable housing options, consistent with Growth Management Act requirements to address racially disparate impacts, displacement risk, and exclusion in housing elements (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(e–h); Washington State Department of Commerce)



Erosion Hazard Areas: Those areas that because of natural characteristics, including vegetative cover, soil texture, slope gradient, and rainfall patterns, or human-induced changes to such characteristics, are vulnerable to erosion.

Erosion: The wearing away of the earth's surface as a result of the movement of wind, water, or ice.

Essential Public Facilities: Includes facilities such as prisons, correctional facilities, juvenile detention centers, courthouses, wastewater/sanitary treatment facilities and systems, solid waste facilities, transportation facilities (including public works operations and vehicle maintenance facilities), airports and hospitals.

Excessive Heat: Dangerous heat conditions meeting National Weather Service alert criteria for an Extreme Heat Warning/Watch or Heat Advisory; specific thresholds vary by forecast office and are locally tailored. (National Weather Service)

Facilities: The physical structure or structures in which a service is provided.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA): The federal agency responsible for implementing regulations pertaining to aviation.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA): The federal agency responsible for implementing regulations and administering federal moneys for highways.

Fire Flow: The amount of water volume needed to provide fire suppression. Adequate fire flows are based on industry standards, typically measured in gallons per minute (gpm). Continuous fire flow volumes and pressures are necessary to insure public safety. The fire flow volume shall be in addition to the requirements of the water system for domestic demand.

Floodplain: That area of land adjoining a body of water that has been or may be covered by floodwater.

Floodway: The area, as identified in a master program, that either: (i) Has been established in federal emergency management agency flood insurance rate maps or floodway maps; or (ii) consists of those portions of a river valley lying streamward from the outer limits of a watercourse upon which flood waters are carried during periods of flooding that occur with reasonable regularity, although not necessarily annually, said floodway being identified, under normal condition, by changes in surface soil conditions or changes in types or quality of vegetative ground cover condition, topography, or other indicators of flooding that occurs with reasonable regularity, although not necessarily annually. Regardless of the method used to identify the floodway, the floodway shall not include those lands that can reasonably be



expected to be protected from flood waters by flood control devices maintained by or maintained under license from the federal government, the state, or a political subdivision of the state. (RCW 90.58.030)

Food Security: Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service)

Forest Land: Land primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, including Christmas trees subject to the excise tax imposed under RCW [84.33.100](#) through [84.33.140](#), and that has long-term commercial significance. In determining whether forestland is primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, the following factors shall be considered: (a) The proximity of the land to urban, suburban, and rural settlements; (b) surrounding parcel size and the compatibility and intensity of adjacent and nearby land uses; (c) long-term local economic conditions that affect the ability to manage for timber production; and (d) the availability of public facilities and services conducive to conversion of forestland to other uses. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS): A limited statewide set of core public health services that government is responsible for providing communicable disease control, chronic disease and injury prevention, maternal child family health, access to clinical care, environmental public health, and vital records. (Washington State Department of Health)

Fully Contained Community (FCC): A reserved capacity for new urban development that will be characterized by urban densities and intensities, urban governmental services, and meets the criteria established in the Comprehensive Plan and in RCW 36.70A.350.

Functional Classification of Highways: The process by which streets and highways are grouped into classes, or systems, according to the character of traffic service that they are intended to provide. (Federal Highway Administration)

Geologically Hazardous Areas: Areas that because of their susceptibility to erosion, sliding, earthquake, or other geological events, are not suited to the siting of commercial, residential, or industrial development consistent with public health or safety concerns. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Greenbelt: A linear corridor of open space which often provides passive recreation and non-motorized transportation opportunities, serves as a buffer between developments and varying land uses, or creates a sense of visual relief from urban landscapes.

Green Job Creation: The creation of jobs in which workers are directly and predominantly engaged in at least one core green-economy area: increasing energy efficiency; producing



renewable energy; preventing/reducing environmental pollution; or mitigating/cleaning up environmental pollution. (Washington State Employment Security Department)

Groundwater: Water that fills all the unblocked pores of material lying beneath the water table.

Growth Management Act (GMA), or Act: The Growth Management Act as enacted in 1990 and subsequently amended by the State of Washington.

Historically Underserved: Communities or populations that have faced persistent barriers and underinvestment, resulting in disproportionate environmental and health burdens and reduced access to benefits and decision-making; in Washington planning, this aligns with HEAL Act concepts of overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. (RCW 70A.02.010.)

Home Based Business: A business, occupation, or profession that is incidental to and carried on within a residential dwelling unit by a member or members of the household. The business may have up to three employees in addition to members of the household.

Household: All persons who occupy a housing unit which is intended as separate living quarters and having direct access from the outside of the building or through a common hall. The occupants may be a single family, one person living alone, two or more families living together, or any other group of related or unrelated persons who share living arrangements. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census)

Impact Mitigation: The mitigation of the negative impacts of a development proposal. Mitigation includes, but is not limited to the following: avoiding the impact through change in the proposal, minimizing the impact through changes to the proposal, rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating or restoring the affected environment, reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action, compensating for the impact by replacing, enhancing, or providing substitute resources or environments, and monitoring the impact and taking appropriate corrective measures. The term includes to voluntary and mandatory actions to compensate for the costs of reducing impacts; including traffic impacts.

Infill: The development of housing or other buildings in vacant sites in an already developed area.

Infrastructure: Facilities and services needed to sustain industry, residential, and commercial activities. Infrastructure may include, but not be limited to, water and sewer lines, streets, and power and communication lines.



Inholding Land: Blocks of land that are surrounded on all sides by designated long-term commercial forest lands and are crucial for conservation of those lands, but are not directly of long-term commercial significance for forestry.

Intensity: A measure of land use activity based on density, use, mass, size and impact.

Legal Lot: A legal lot is a fractional part of subdivided lands having fixed boundaries, being of sufficient area and dimension to meet minimum requirements for width and area. The criteria to determine the legal status of a lot is specified in [Section 16.08.100 of the Mason County Code](#).

Legacy Forest: Older, natural-origin forests with significant legacy structural elements (large trees, snags, down wood) and increasing complexity; often contrasted with intensively managed plantation stands. (U.S. Forest Service)

Legally Established Structure: A structure that, when built, had all permits required at the time and met then-current code.

Level of Service (LOS): An established minimum capacity of public facilities or services that must be provided per unit of demand or other appropriate measure of need. Level of service standards are synonymous with locally established minimum standards. (WAC 365-196-210)

Local Food Security: Food security achieved through local and regional supply chains that produce, process, and distribute Washington-grown foods, improving reliable access to affordable, culturally appropriate food within the county/region. (U.S. Department of Agriculture; Washington State Department of Agriculture)

Local Improvement District (LID): Established to provide any transportation improvement it has the authority to provide, impose special assessments on all property specially benefited by the transportation improvements, and issue special assessment bonds or revenue bonds to fund the costs of the transportation improvement. (RCW 36.73.080)

Long-term Commercial Forests or Long-term Commercial Forest Land: Land so designated by the county in order to provide special protection for the continued use of the land for the production of timber. Land primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production as defined in RCW 36.70A.30(8) and (10).

Long-term Commercial Significance: Includes the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long-term commercial production, in consideration with the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of the land. (RCW 36.70A.030)



Low-density Sprawl: Development taking place outside of urban growth areas that does not conform to the county's adopted rural element and that hinders a county's ability to achieve the goals of GMA. Sprawl means growth taking place outside of established urban growth areas because city or county comprehensive plan approaches, development regulations, or other factors hinder the ability of the county's urban growth areas to adequately capture growth that would otherwise be attracted to the urban growth areas of the county.

Major Arterial or Principal Arterial: Consist of a connected network of rural arterial routes with appropriate extensions into and through urban areas, including all routes designated as part of the interstate system, which serve corridor movements having travel characteristics indicative of substantial statewide and interstate travel. See also Functional Classification of Highways. (RCW 47.05.021)

Master Planned Resort: A self-contained and fully integrated planned unit development, in a setting of significant natural amenities, with primary focus on destination resort facilities consisting of short-term visitor accommodations associated with a range of developed on-site indoor or outdoor recreational facilities. (WAC 365-196-200)

Mature Forest: Forest stands that have reached a late stage of development prior to old-growth, typically characterized by larger trees, multi-layered canopies, and increasing structural complexity; the age at which a forest is considered "mature" varies by forest type. (U.S. Forest Service)

Median Income: The income level which divides the income distribution of a given area into two equal parts, one having incomes above the median income and the other having incomes below the median income. For households and families, the median income is based on the distribution of the total number of units including those with no income. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; Washington Office of Financial Management)

Minerals: Includes gravel, sand, and valuable metallic substances. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Minor Arterial or Secondary Arterial: The "minor arterial system" shall, in conjunction with the principal arterial system, form a rural network of arterial routes linking cities and other activity centers which generate long distance travel, and, with appropriate extensions into and through urban areas, form an integrated network providing interstate and interregional service (RCW 47.05.021).

Mixed Use: Development that combines two or more different land uses in the same project. For example, a mixed use project may include both commercial uses and residential uses.

Mobile Home: A factory-assembled structure, transportable in one or more sections, that is built on a permanent chassis and designed to be used as a dwelling with or without a permanent



foundation when connected to the required utilities, and includes the plumbing, heating, and electrical systems contained therein.

Mobile Home Park: A tract of land occupied or designed for occupancy by two or more mobile homes.

Multi-Family: A structure containing four or more, joined dwelling units.

Multimodal: Two or more modes or methods of transportation. Examples of transportation modes include: bicycle, automobile, walking, airplane, bus transit or rail.

Non-conforming Land Use: A use or activity that was lawful prior to the adoption, revision or amendment of the ordinance codified in this chapter but fails by reason of such adoption, revision or amendment to conform to the present performance standards of the Mason County development regulations.

Non-motorized: Any mode of transportation that utilizes a power source other than a motor. Primarily, non-motorized modes include walking (pedestrian), horseback riding (equestrian), scooters and skateboards, and bicycling.

Non-point Source Pollution: pollution that enters any waters of the state from any dispersed water-based or land-use activities, including, but not limited to, atmospheric deposition, surface water runoff from agricultural lands, urban areas, and forestlands, subsurface or underground sources, and discharges from boats or other marine vessels. (RCW 70A.1135.020).

Non-traditional Housing Types: Dwelling types other than on-site built housing units. Nontraditional housing types include, but are not limited to, manufactured housing, mobile homes, homes on wheels, and houseboats, as well as dwellings constructed from non-traditional materials such as freight containers and concrete.

Office: A structure that generally houses a business, government, professional, medical or financial institution for the nondaily needs of individuals, groups or organizations.

Open Space: There are three kinds of open space land: private, common use, and public open space. Private open space includes farms, forest lands, and other parcels of undeveloped land. Common use open space is land within a residential development or other development which is designated for common access by the residents of the development or by the general community. Public open space is publicly-owned land available for recreational use of the entire community. Open water areas, such as the hood canal or lakes, is also often considered as open space because it creates a sense of openness.



Overburdened Communities: Geographic areas where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts, or areas that have experienced disproportionate public health or environmental effects. (Washington State HEAL Act)

Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO): The area-wide metropolitan planning organization responsible for regional planning on the Olympic Peninsula. The PRTPO is responsible for distributing federal transportation funds to local jurisdictions. (RCW 47.80)

Per Capita Income: Per Capita Income is the mean income for all men, women and children in a particular group. It is computed by dividing the total income of a particular group by the total population in that group.

Planning: The use of scientific and technical knowledge to provide choices for decision making as well as a process for considering and reaching consensus.

Planning Period: The 20-year period starting on the relevant due date for the most recent periodic update specified in RCW 36.70A.130. (WAC 365-196-210)

Plat: A map or plan, especially of a piece of land dividing into building lots.

Primary Treatment: The first step in wastewater treatment in which solids in a wastewater stream are allowed to settle out. The suspended solids and the BOD (biochemical oxygen demand) are reduced by twenty-five to forty percent.

Priority Species: Species requiring protective measures and/or management guidelines to ensure their persistence at genetically viable population levels. Priority species are those that meet any of the criteria listed below:

- a) Criterion 1: State-listed or state proposed species. State-listed species are those native fish and wildlife species legally designated as endangered (WAC 232-12-014), threatened (WAC 232-12-011), or sensitive (WAC 232-12-011). State proposed species are those fish and wildlife species that will be reviewed by the department of fish and wildlife (POL-M-6001) for possible listing as endangered, threatened, or sensitive according to the process and criteria defined in WAC 232-12-297.
- b) Criterion 2: Vulnerable aggregations. Vulnerable aggregations include those species or groups of animals susceptible to significant population declines, within a specific area or statewide, by virtue of their inclination to congregate. Examples include heron colonies, seabird concentrations, and marine mammal congregations.
- c) Criterion 3: Species of recreational, commercial, and/or tribal importance. Native and nonnative fish, shellfish, and wildlife species of recreational or commercial



importance and recognized species used for tribal ceremonial and subsistence purposes that are vulnerable to habitat loss or degradation.

- d) Criterion 4: Species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as either proposed, threatened, or endangered. (WAC 173-26-020)

Public Facilities: Public facilities provided by the county include wastewater/sanitary systems, roads, water supply systems, stormwater management facilities, parks and recreational facilities, county administrative buildings, police and criminal justice buildings, and solid waste facilities. Non-county facilities include fire stations, airports, hospitals, ports and schools.

Public Services: Include fire protection and suppression, law enforcement, public health, education, recreation, environmental protection, and other governmental services. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Public Water System: Any system providing water for human consumption through pipes or other constructed conveyances, excluding a system serving only one single-family residence and a system with four or fewer service connections all of which serve residences on the same farm. The term includes:

- a) Collection, treatment, storage, or distribution facilities under the control of a purveyor and used primarily in connection with the system; and
- b) Collection, or pretreatment storage facilities not under the control of a purveyor, and primarily used in connection with the system. (WAC 246-291-010)

RCW: Means the Revised Code of Washington. The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) is the compilation of all permanent laws now in force.

Rehabilitation: The physical improvement, remodeling, or partial reconstruction of existing structures rather than their demolition and replacement.

Resource Lands: Lands which are suitable for agriculture, forest mineral extraction and protected by resource lands regulations.

Resource-Based: A use that is dependent upon, or supports uses that are dependent upon, natural resources including, but not limited to, forestry, agriculture, aquaculture, horticulture and mineral extraction.

Resource-Based Industrial: A manufacturing, industrial, or commercial business which requires a location near agricultural land, forest land, or mineral resource land or aquacultural area upon which it is dependent or supports. Examples include sawmills, plant nurseries, feed stores.



Right of Way: Means land owned by a government or an easement for a certain purpose over the land of another, used for a road, ditch, electrical transmission line, pipeline, or public facilities such as utility or transportation corridors.

Road Adequacy Standards: Standards by which government agencies can assess whether adequate road facilities are being provided and regulated.

Runoff: Water from rain, snowmelt, or irrigation that flows over the ground surface and returns to streams.

Rural Activity Center (RAC): Concentrated settlements within rural lands that may include a variety of residential, small scale commercial, resource-based and rural light industrial, recreation and public uses. They may also include a compact, pedestrian-oriented core. They may be served by community water systems and have community sewage treatment facilities but have only rural governmental services. They reflect an existing development pattern, but they are not intended to expand. RAC boundaries are established in the Comprehensive Plan.

Rural Areas: Rural areas in Mason County include those areas not designated as urban areas, resource lands, RACs or hamlets. They currently provide for rural residential, farming, forestry, recreation, and single-purpose commercial, retail and industrial uses. These uses are expected to continue and increase over the next twenty years. In rural areas, the rural landscape will remain dominant, and include a variety of protected natural features.

Rural Character: Refers to the patterns of land use and development established by a county in the rural element of its comprehensive plan:

- a) In which open space, the natural landscape, and vegetation predominate over the built environment;
- b) That foster traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas;
- c) That provide visual landscapes that are traditionally found in rural areas and communities;
- d) That are compatible with the use of the land by wildlife and for fish and wildlife habitat;
- e) That reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development;
- f) That generally do not require the extension of urban governmental services; and
- g) That are consistent with the protection of natural surface water flows and groundwater and surface water recharge and discharge areas. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Rural Lands: Areas outside of designated resource lands and urban growth areas. Natural features contribute significantly to rural character of these lands. These features include, but



are not limited to, forests, farmlands, and farm buildings, pastures, meadows, shorelines, wetlands, streams, lakes, hills and mountains. Types of uses within rural lands include resource-based land uses, recreational uses, residential uses, and low intensity nonresidential uses. Rural lands can be served by rural governmental services and included districts such as rural activity centers, hamlets and rural areas. (WAC 365-196-425(6))

Sanitary Sewer Systems: all facilities, including approved on-site disposal facilities, used in the collection, transmission, storage, treatment or discharge of any waterborne waste, whether domestic in origin or a combination of domestic, commercial or industrial waste. (WAC 365-195-210)

Secondary Treatment: The second step in purifying sewage which uses biological processes in addition to settling and provides purification from eighty-five to ninety-five percent.

Seismic Hazard Areas: Areas subject to severe risk of damage as a result of earthquake induced ground shaking, slope failure, settlement or soil liquefaction.

Sewer: The closed pipe which carries raw sewage from a home or business to a treatment facility.

Sight Distance: The length of a roadway required which is sufficient enough to ensure safe operation of a motor vehicle at posted speeds.

Single Family (detached): A detached structure containing one dwelling unit.

Small Scale: A term which indicates that development regulations will limit the intensity, size, scale, number of uses and other factors of a particular development.

Small Business: Means an in-state business, including a sole proprietorship, corporation, partnership, or other legal entity, that:

- a) Certifies, under penalty of perjury, that it is owned and operated independently from all other businesses and has either:
 - i. Fifty or fewer employees; or
 - ii. A gross revenue of less than \$7,000,000 annually as reported on its federal income tax return or its return filed with the department of revenue over the previous three consecutive years; or
- b) Is certified with the office of women and minority business enterprises under Chapter [39.19](#) RCW. (RCW 39.26)



Solid Waste: All putrescible and non-putrescible solid and semisolid wastes, including, but not limited to, garbage, rubbish, ashes, industrial wastes, swill, demolition and construction wastes, abandoned vehicles or parts thereof and recyclable materials. (RCW 70.95.030)

Special Needs Housing: All housing that is designed for an individual or family who requires supportive social services in order to live independently or semi-independently. These households require all types of housing including emergency, transitional and permanent housing. Special needs groups include, but are not limited to, the homeless; elderly; AIDS victims; single parents; runaway and homeless youth; severely physically handicapped; mentally and emotionally disturbed; chronically mentally ill, developmentally disabled; farm workers (migrant labor households) and persons with substance abuse problems. (Washington State Department of Community Development, Assessing your Community's Needs, a Practical Guide to Preparing Housing Assessments under the GMA and CHAS Requirements, June 1992.)

Special Use Permit: A "special use" refers to a land use that are found to possess characteristics relating to their size, numbers of people involved, the traffic generated, and their immediate impact on the area which makes impractical their being identified exclusively with any particular performance district as defined in this chapter. In order to determine that the location of these uses will not be unreasonably incompatible with uses permitted in the surrounding areas; and to permit the planning commission to recommend stipulations and conditions as may reasonably assure that the basic intent of this chapter will be served, these uses will be subject to review and recommendation by the planning commission and final determination by the board regarding the approval, denial or approval with conditions for the issuance of a special use permit by the Mason County community department of community development.

State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA): A Washington state law requiring the systematic assessment of the environmental impacts of any action that is expected to significantly affect the environment.

Stormwater Best Management Practices: Approved physical, structural, and/or managerial practices that, when used singularly or in combination, prevent or reduce pollutant discharges.

Subdivision: The division or redivision of land into five or more lots, tracts, parcels, sites, or divisions for the purpose of sale, lease, or transfer of ownership, except as provided in subsection (6) of RCW 58.17.020. (RCW 58.17.020)

Surface Waters: Streams, rivers, ponds, lakes or other waters designated as "waters of the state" by the Washington Department of Natural Resources. (WAC 222-16-030)



Tax Lot: A parcel which appears on the County Assessor's map and has been assigned a tax parcel number by the Assessor. Tax parcel numbers are assigned for billing purposes. A tax parcel number is not necessarily an indication that the lot was legally created.

Tertiary Treatment: The third step in purifying sewage that removes additional nutrient levels.

Through Traffic: Traffic traveling through a specific area to a destination beyond that area.

Tiny / Micro / Very-Small House: No standard definition exists, but generally these are independent housing units in that they have bathing, toilet, sleeping, and cooking facilities. They vary from approximately 100 to 400 square feet in size, are built to appropriate code, and may or may not be on wheels.

Traditional Cultural Landscapes: Landscapes of cultural significance to tribal nations that have been affected, influenced, or shaped by human involvement. (National Historic Preservation Act 16 U.S.C. 470)

Traditional Cultural Place: A property or a place that is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and state and local historic registers because of its association with cultural practices of tribal nations and beliefs that are (1) rooted in the history of a community, and (2) are important to maintaining the continuity of that community's traditional beliefs and practices. (National Historic Preservation Act 16 U.S.C. 470)

Transportation Demand Management (TDM): An array of strategies intended to lead to a reduction in the number of vehicles using the road system while simultaneously serving the same number of travelers.

Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP): A jurisdiction's long range programming document for transportation facilities.

Transportation System Management (TSM): The use of low cost solutions to increase the performance of the transportation system. Transportation system management (TSM) strategies include, but are not limited to, signalization, channelization, ramp metering, incident response programs, and bus turn-outs. (WAC 365-196-210)

Urban Governmental Services or Urban Services: Those public services and public facilities at an intensity historically and typically provided in cities, specifically including storm and sanitary sewer systems, domestic water systems, street cleaning services, fire and police protection services, public transit services, and other public utilities associated with urban areas and normally not associated with rural areas. (RCW 36.70A.030)



Urban Growth Area: Areas designated by a county pursuant to RCW 36.70A.110.

Urban Growth: Growth that makes intensive use of land for the location of buildings, structures, and impermeable surfaces to such a degree as to be incompatible with the primary use of land for the production of food, other agricultural products, or fiber, or the extraction of mineral resources, rural uses, rural development, and natural resource lands designated pursuant to RCW [36.70A.170](#). A pattern of more intensive rural development, as provided in RCW [36.70A.070](#)(5)(d), is not urban growth. When allowed to spread over wide areas, urban growth typically requires urban governmental services. “Characterized by urban growth” refers to land having urban growth located on it, or to land located in relationship to an area with urban growth on it as to be appropriate for urban growth. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Utilities or Public Utilities: Enterprises or facilities serving the public by means of an integrated systems of collection, transmission, distribution, and processing facilities through more or less permanent physical conditions between the plant of the serving entity and the premises of the customer. Included are systems for the delivery of natural gas, electricity, telecommunications services, and water for the disposal of sewage. (WAC 365-195-210)

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT): An engineering measure of the demand on a transportation system.

Visioning: A process of citizen involvement to determine values and ideals for the future of a community and to transform those values and ideals into manageable and feasible community goals. (WAC 365-196-210)

WAC: Washington Administrative Code. **WACs** are administrative codes, or rules, that are adopted by agencies, including OSPI, to enact legislation and **RCWs**.

Water Dependent Use: A use or portion of a use which cannot exist in any other location and is dependent on the water by reason of the intrinsic nature of its operations. Examples of some water dependent uses include: boat ramps, swimming areas, aquaculture, marinas, water intakes and outfalls, fish pens and fish screens.

Watershed: A region drained by or contributing water to a stream, lake or other body of water.

Wetland or Wetlands: Areas that are inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas. Wetlands do not include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from nonwetland sites, including, but not limited to, irrigation and drainage ditches, grass-lined swales, canals, detention facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, farm ponds, and landscape amenities, or those wetlands created after July



1, 1990, that were unintentionally created as a result of the construction of a road, street, or highway. Wetlands may include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from nonwetland areas created to mitigate conversion of wetlands. (RCW 36.70A.030)

Zoning: Any board, by ordinance, may establish classifications, within each of which, specific controls are identified, and which will regulate:

- a) The use of buildings, structures, and land as between agriculture, industry, business, residence, and other purposes;
- b) The location, height, bulk, number of stories, and size of buildings and structures; the size of yards, courts, and other open spaces; the density of population; the percentage of a lot which may be occupied by buildings and structures; and the area required to provide off-street facilities for the parking of motor vehicles; and
- c) The minimum gross floor area requirements for single-family detached dwellings, including the elimination of such requirements or reduction of such requirements below the minimum performance standards and objectives contained in the state building code. (RCW 36.70.750)



Acronyms

ACS	American Community Survey (a service of the U.S. Census Bureau)
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AGR	average growth rate
AHJ	Authority Having Jurisdiction
AMR	automated meter reading
ASTM	American Society for Testing and Materials
BAS	Best Available Science
BEAD	Broadband Equity Access and Deployment
BOCC	Mason County Board of County Commissioners
CAGR	compound annual growth rate
CBO	community-based organization
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CERB	Community Economic Revitalization Board
CFP	Capital Facilities Plan
CIP	Capital Improvement Program
CLEC	Competitive Local Exchange Carrier
CMRW	Climate Mapping for a Resilient Washington web tool (a service of the University of Washington)
CO₂	carbon dioxide
CPAT	Mason County Climate Policy Advisory Team
CSMC	Cedar Stewards of Mason County
CSWMP	Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan
CTE	career and technical education
DCD	Mason County Department of Community Development
DNR	Washington State Department of Natural Resources
DU	dwelling unit



DUI	driving while under the influence (of intoxicating liquor or drugs)
EDC	Mason County Economic Development Council
EIA	Energy Independence Act
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EMS	emergency medical services
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FIRM	Flood Insurance Rate Map
FTE	full-time equivalent (a unit of measurement that expresses the workload of employees in terms of the hours a single full-time employee works)
GIS	geographic information systems
GMA	Washington State Growth Management Act
GPD	gallons per day
HAPT	Housing for All Planning Tool (provided by the Washington State Department of Commerce)
HB	House Bill (proposed by the Washington State House of Representatives and presented to the Legislature for consideration)
HCC	Hood Canal Communications
HCLT	Hood Canal Land Trust
HMP	hazard mitigation plan
HNA	Mason County Housing Needs Assessment
HOME	HOME Investment Partnerships Program (a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development federal financing program)
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IBC	International Building Code
ILEC	Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier
LAMIRD	Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development
LAUS	Local Area Unemployment Statistics (a program of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)
LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics program (a program of the U.S. Census Bureau)
LID	low-impact development



LODES	LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (a program of the U.S. Census Bureau)
LOS	level of service
LSP	liquid-state polycondensation (a bio-recycling process used to recycle PET, or Plastic #1)
LSWFAP	Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance Program
MCC	Mason County Code
MCCJG	Mason County Climate Justice Group
MCSO	Mason County Sheriff's Office
MOA	memorandum of agreement
NB/CI	North Bay/Case Inlet water reclamation facility
NEB	net ecological benefit
NEMAC	National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service (a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture)
OA	ocean acidification
OFM	Washington State Office of Financial Management
ORV	off-road vehicle
OSS	on-site sewage systems
PAC	Mason County Planning Advisory Commission
PE	permit-exempt
PFAS	polyfluoroalkyl substances
PHS	Priority Habitats and Species database (a service of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife)
PPP	Public Participation Plan
PROST	Mason County Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan
PSIC	Puget Sound Industrial Center
PUD	Public Utility District
RCO	Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
REET	Real Estate Excise Tax



RUS	Rural Utility Services (a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture)
RV	recreational vehicle
SCADA	Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition hardware/software
SEPA	Washington State Environmental Policy Act
SLR	sea level rise
SMP	Shoreline Master Program
SR	State Route
SUD	substance use disorder
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
TRL	Timberland Regional Library
TV	television
UGA	urban growth area
U.S.	United States
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USGS	United States Geological Survey (a division of the U.S. Department of the Interior)
UV	ultraviolet
VSP	Voluntary Stewardship Program
WA	Washington state
WAC	Washington Administrative Code
WCRP	World Climate Research Programme
WDFW	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
WNV	West Nile virus
WRF	water reclamation facility
WRIA	Water Resource Inventory Area
WSBO	Washington State Broadband Office
WWTP	wastewater treatment plant

