

Assistance

“Jurisdiction activities that promote the provision of low-income housing assistance are the most direct ways to accommodate local housing need. Unfortunately, there is very little publicly-subsidized assistance available. This makes it all the more important that this scarce resource be allocated within Snohomish County in the best manner possible.”

-2002 Housing Evaluation Report

This excerpt from the 2002 *Report* puts the issue succinctly. Extremely low-income households, in particular, depend on subsidies (i.e. financial assistance) to obtain basic shelter. Virtually no affordable market-rate housing exists for them.⁵ Those who cannot obtain assisted, affordable housing must spend resources that would otherwise go toward food, medical care, or both, or else go homeless.

Low-income housing assistance, depending on the program, generally serves households with incomes below 80% of median. Many programs serve households at certain other levels, such as low-income housing tax credits at or below 60% of median. This chapter looks at the number and locations of two categories of low-income housing: housing assistance dedicated to a particular housing unit (sometimes referred to as “fixed,” “project-based,” or “permanent”), and housing assistance made available to individuals, who then must find rental housing eligible for this form of assistance (“tenant-based” or “vouchers”).

⁵ The Affordability chapter, which follows this, shows that a large and increasing segment of the county’s population is housing cost burdened, and that an insufficient supply of housing offered in the private market is affordable at the lowest income levels.

Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 2

Make adequate provisions for existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the county.

Making adequate provisions for all economic segments, it stands to reason, includes accommodating assisted housing for households who cannot meet the costs of decent market-rate housing. How much assisted housing does the county have, and in which jurisdictions? Where are housing providers creating permanent assisted housing? Where do households receiving vouchers find housing? Besides low-income households, what special needs are also served?

According to the latest inventories obtained by Snohomish County Human Services (Table 1), the county now has a total of 14,000 assisted housing units, comprising 5% of all housing units.⁶ Almost two-thirds (63%) of these are subsidized units, and 37% through vouchers. Fifty-five percent (55%) assist families without a senior citizen in the household.

⁶ Keep in mind that these figures represent housing units, and not beds. In some cases, especially with special needs populations (group homes) and emergency shelters, a unit contains several beds. As a result, the data understate the number of people receiving housing, even in the “individuals” columns.

Table 1

Assisted Housing Units by Jurisdiction, January 2008

	Seniors			Families			Individuals			Totals				
	Fixed	Vouchers	Total	Fixed	Vouchers	Total	Fixed	Vouchers	Total	Fixed	Vouchers	Total	Pct of County	
Arlington	320	16	336	180	71	251	7	31	38	507	118	625	4%	
Bothell (Sno Co only)	0	3	3	0	6	6	0	8	8	0	17	17	0%	
Brier	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0%	
Darrington	20	1	21	0	1	1	0	7	7	20	9	29	0%	
Edmonds	178	13	191	120	83	203	31	55	86	329	151	480	3%	
Everett	744	488	1,232	1,484	761	2,245	437	442	879	2,665	1,691	4,356	31%	
Gold Bar	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	5	5	0%	
Granite Falls	30	5	35	0	16	16	0	10	10	30	31	61	0%	
Index	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	2	0%	
Lake Stevens	112	10	122	55	68	123	0	22	22	167	100	267	2%	
Lynnwood	485	98	583	753	253	1,006	21	212	233	1,259	563	1,822	13%	
Marysville	338	31	369	470	165	635	176	144	320	984	340	1,324	9%	
Mill Creek	45	12	57	277	94	371	0	29	29	322	135	457	3%	
Monroe	124	10	134	52	33	85	3	14	17	179	57	236	2%	
Mountlake Terrace	0	20	20	113	73	186	2	28	30	115	121	236	2%	
Mukilteo	0	4	4	0	37	37	61	19	80	61	60	121	1%	
Non-SW Uninc. UGA	0	13	13	109	172	281	6	18	24	115	203	318	2%	
Rural	68	5	73	128	64	192	0	22	22	196	91	287	2%	
Snohomish	144	12	156	96	26	122	14	42	56	254	80	334	2%	
Stanwood	144	9	153	46	10	56	32	27	59	222	46	268	2%	
Sultan	26	2	28	7	18	25	7	9	16	40	29	69	0%	
SW Uninc. UGA	326	126	452	774	801	1,575	27	346	373	1,127	1,273	2,400	17%	
Woodway	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0%	
Unidentified Locations	0	2	2	257	1	258	20	4	24	277	7	284	2%	
County Total	3,104	881	3,985	4,921	2,756	7,677	844	1,494	2,338	8,869	5,131	14,000	100%	
Percentage of Total	28%			55%			17%			63%			37%	100%

Source: Snohomish County Department of Human Services; analysis by SCT

Has there been much change since the 2002 Report? On the whole, yes; the county added approximately 1,614 (22%) more fixed units since the 2002 *Report* and 405 (9%) more housing vouchers, so that the overall gain between March, 2002 and January, 2008 was 2,019 units, a 17% increase. (See Table 2.) Compare this to the countywide increase of all housing units at 13% between 2000 and 2006.

At the local level, the changes are interesting but not very illuminating. Because of annexations, a considerable number of fixed units and vouchers are now located in cities that would have been found in unincorporated areas in 2002. In particular, Lake Stevens, Marysville, and Mill Creek annexed significant areas since 2005, but we have not determined how this affects the results in Table 2.

Table 2

Change in Assisted Housing Units by Jurisdiction

	Fixed Units			Vouchers			Fixed & Vouchers Combined			
	2002	2008	Change	2002	2008	Change	2002	2008	Change	Pct Change
Arlington	329	507	178	90	118	28	419	625	206	49%
Bothell (Sno Co only)	1	0	-1	32	17	-15	33	17	-16	-48%
Brier	0	0	0	3	1	-2	3	1	-2	-67%
Darrington	20	20	0	12	9	-3	32	29	-3	-9%
Edmonds	209	329	120	128	151	23	337	480	143	42%
Everett	2,775	2,665	-110	1,516	1,691	175	4,291	4,356	65	2%
Gold Bar	0	0	0	5	5	0	5	5	0	0%
Granite Falls	30	30	0	37	31	-6	67	61	-6	-9%
Index	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	2	1	100%
Lake Stevens	91	167	76	52	100	48	143	267	124	87%
Lynnwood	705	1,259	554	553	563	10	1,258	1,822	564	45%
Marysville	979	984	5	321	340	19	1,300	1,324	24	2%
Mill Creek	56	322	266	31	135	104	87	457	370	425%
Monroe	178	179	1	52	57	5	230	236	6	3%
Mountlake Terrace	230	115	-115	131	121	-10	361	236	-125	-35%
Mukilteo	61	61	0	112	60	-52	173	121	-52	-30%
Non-SW Uninc. UGA	187	115	-72	291	203	-88	478	318	-160	-33%
Rural	164	196	32	122	91	-31	286	287	1	0%
Snohomish	276	254	-22	85	80	-5	361	334	-27	-7%
Stanwood	178	222	44	33	46	13	211	268	57	27%
Sultan	26	40	14	12	29	17	38	69	31	82%
SW Uninc. UGA	760	1,127	367	1,107	1,273	166	1,867	2,400	533	29%
Woodway	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	--
Unidentified Locations	0	277	277	0	7	7	0	284	284	--
County Total	7,255	8,869	1,614	4,726	5,131	405	11,981	14,000	2,019	17%

Source: Snohomish County Department of Human Services; analysis by SCT

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Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 4

Adopt and implement a fair share distribution of low-income and special needs housing so as to prevent further concentration of such housing into only a few areas. The county and cities will collaborate in formulating a methodology to assess existing and projected housing needs of the county's population and a fair share housing allocation methodology.

The purpose of allocating fair shares of low-income and special needs housing across the county is to make sure that people in those circumstances have a reasonable opportunity to meet their needs for decent, affordable shelter anywhere in the county; in other words, they are not forced to choose from a small selection of less desirable places.

Are assisted housing units and voucher users found in numbers proportionate to the present need in each community? Are they proportionate to the jurisdictions' fair share allocations? Proper questions for this evaluation, but because housing need data are not available at the city level (except for Everett) until at least 2010, we were unable to answer them for this *Report* as we did in 2002.

It is possible, however, to look at current geographic distributions of assisted housing units and households. Referring back to Table 1, we found that 61% are concentrated in Everett, Lynnwood, or the unincorporated part of the Southwest Urban Growth Area (SW Uninc. UGA). For comparison, those jurisdictions combine to make up 43% of the county's population and 42% of the total Urban Growth Area.

Although changes in the distribution of assisted housing by cities is not useful (again, because of annexations since 2002), we can get some idea by grouping areas geographically, as seen in Table 3. This shows that 71% were located in cities or unincorporated areas of the Southwest Urban Growth Area (SWUGA), an insignificant change from 2002.

Table 3
Assisted Rental Housing in Urban Growth Areas

	2002		2008	
	Assisted Units	Pct	Assisted Units	Pct
SWUGA	8,410	70%	9,891	71%
Non-SW UGA	3,285	27%	3,538	25%
Rural	286	2%	287	2%
Unid. Location	-	0%	284	2%
Total	11,981	100%	14,000	100%

Source: Snohomish County Department of Human Services; analysis by SCT