



Yakima County 2046 Housing Allocations



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INTRODUCTION

The Yakima County Housing Allocation report serves as a foundational technical document prepared in support of the County’s 2026 periodic update to its Comprehensive Plan, titled **Horizon 2046**. This report is intended to fulfill key obligations under the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA), specifically RCW 36.70A.070(2), which requires comprehensive plan housing elements to “ensure the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods” while also making adequate provisions for the housing needs of all economic segments of the community.

The **Horizon 2046** update provides an opportunity for Yakima County to take a data-driven and coordinated approach to addressing one of the region’s most pressing long-term challenges: housing availability and affordability. As population continues to grow and demographic patterns evolve, so too must the County’s strategies for accommodating growth in a way that is equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. This Housing Allocation report helps accomplish that objective by identifying and allocating the total number of housing units needed across income levels and jurisdictions through the planning horizon year of 2046. It is not simply a technical exercise in calculations, but a foundational planning tool guiding local decisions regarding zoning, land supply, infrastructure investment, and housing policy.

This report responds directly to newly expanded housing statutory requirements introduced in 2021 through House Bill 1220. In addition to requiring the identification of housing needs by income tier, the legislation directs counties and cities to plan for and accommodate housing that is affordable to all income levels, including those below 50% of Area Median Income (AMI), as well as emergency housing, permanent supportive housing, and group homes. The Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) has supported implementation of these new requirements by publishing a housing need allocation at the county level, separated by income band. These numbers account not only for projected population growth but also for current housing deficits that must be addressed within the planning period. Commerce’s Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT) was made available to assist jurisdictions in distributing the countywide need across cities and unincorporated areas.

This report uses the housing need projections and modeling tools to allocate housing unit needs across six income categories. These allocations are not forecasts of what the market will produce but targets that jurisdictions must plan to accommodate. They reflect a commitment to equitable planning and ensure that local comprehensive plans respond to the full diversity of housing demand, not just that of middle- and upper-income households.

While this document does not set policy, it provides the technical backbone for future policy decisions. Its results will inform the updated Housing Element, help assess whether there is adequate buildable land through the Land Capacity Analysis, and shape conversations about zoning reform, capital facilities, and regional coordination. This report is more than a background paper, it is a critical bridge between data and policy.

The allocations presented are the product of a collaborative effort, involving coordination between Yakima County, its cities, and Commerce. The result is a framework that enables jurisdictions to move forward with clarity and purpose in meeting their housing obligations under the GMA.

The Yakima County Housing Allocation Report is an essential planning tool that connects long-range demographic forecasts with actionable housing strategies. It provides local governments with a clear understanding of how much housing is needed, where it is needed, and who may need it. With this

document as a guide, the County and its cities will be better equipped to make the policy, zoning, and investment decisions necessary to support a resilient and inclusive housing future for all residents.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The GMA sets the legal foundation for how cities and counties plan for growth. Central to this legislation is the requirement that each jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan include a Housing Element that is proactive, equitable, and responsive to future needs. The GMA recognizes that a healthy housing market must serve all residents, regardless of income level, and that the planning process must take steps to address current housing shortages while preparing for future demand.

Specifically, RCW 36.70A.070(2) requires that comprehensive plans:

- Address the housing needs of all economic segments of the population, including low-income and moderate-income households;
- Identify sufficient land capacity to meet those projected housing needs;
- Include policies and regulations that both preserve existing affordable housing and encourage the development of new units across income levels;
- Align with coordinated population projections issued by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM); and
- Utilize housing need allocations issued by Commerce, which separate housing projections by income band.

To help with this work, Commerce has developed the HAPT, a spreadsheet-based tool that allows counties and cities to model future housing needs, test allocation scenarios, and evaluate policy responses. Commerce also encourages interjurisdictional collaboration and public engagement to ensure that housing strategies are regionally coordinated and locally supported.

Ultimately, this policy framework sets a clear expectation that all jurisdictions must plan for inclusive, forward-looking housing systems that support economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, and community well-being across Washington State.

METHODOLOGY

To develop a fair and accurate distribution of housing needs across Yakima County and its 14 cities, the County followed a detailed, step-by-step process. This approach combined hard numbers with local knowledge, ensuring that the final allocations were not only based on solid data but also reflected the unique character and capacity of each community. By blending statistical tools with collaborative planning, Yakima County aimed to produce housing targets that are realistic, equitable, and achievable.

Step 1: Population Forecasts

The process began with population forecasts from OFM. Specifically, the County used OFM’s “medium series” projections, which estimate how much the population will grow between now and the year 2046. These forecasts are an essential first step because housing demand is directly tied to how many people are expected to live in the area. If population growth is underestimated or overestimated, housing planning may fall short or go too far, either of which can cause challenges for infrastructure, affordability, and community livability.

Step 2: Housing Needs by Income Band

Once the total population growth was understood, the next step was to figure out how much housing would be needed, and for whom. In 2023, Commerce published detailed housing need projections for every county. These projections break down future housing needs into income groups based on AMI (Area Median Income). The tiers include:

- 0–30% of AMI (extremely low-income)
- 31–50% of AMI (very low-income)
- 51–80% of AMI (low-income)
- 81–100% of AMI (moderate-income)
- 101–120% of AMI (middle-income)
- Over 120% of AMI (higher-income)

This breakdown ensures that local governments plan for housing that serves everyone, from individuals with limited incomes to those able to afford market-rate housing. It also helps identify where there may be gaps in the current housing supply.

Step 3: Use of the HAPT Tool

The Yakima County Planning department, along with the Yakima County Human Services department, used a weighted methodology, in part informed by the HAPT to ensure that each jurisdiction receives an allocation of housing need that includes units for all income levels. Specifically, the County used Method C within the HAPT framework, which allocates housing needs based on each jurisdiction's proportion of countywide population growth. This approach is designed for counties like Yakima, where cities vary widely in size and growth trends. Method C provides a balanced and straightforward way to distribute responsibility across jurisdictions while reflecting demographic projections.

The tool helped ensure that each city and the unincorporated areas of the county received a fair share of the total housing need. It also provided a transparent, consistent way to check the math and adjust assumptions as needed.

Step 4: Land Capacity Considerations

Finally, the County considered the land supply. This was done using the Land Capacity Analysis (LCA), which reviews how much land is available for housing based on zoning, infrastructure, environmental constraints, and current development trends. The LCA helps answer a key question: Do our communities have enough space and infrastructure to build the homes we'll need by 2046?

Although the LCA is still being finalized, it played an important role in shaping the preliminary housing allocations. The County used it to cross-check whether projected housing growth could realistically occur within existing city boundaries or if zoning and infrastructure may need to be updated.

By using this thoughtful and data-informed methodology, Yakima County has created housing allocations that are both rational and responsive to local needs. The result is a foundation that supports long-range planning, ensures compliance with state law, and most importantly, prepares our communities to meet the diverse housing needs of current and future residents.

EXISTING HOUSING CONDITIONS

Yakima County’s housing stock reflects the region’s unique demographic, economic, and geographic diversity, encompassing both urban centers and deeply rural communities. A comprehensive understanding of the county’s existing housing conditions is necessary to support effective planning, as required under the Growth Management Act (GMA).

Vacancy Rates: Vacancy rates vary significantly between urban and rural areas. Urban areas such as Yakima and Sunnyside have lower rental vacancy rates, typically below 5%, indicating high demand and limited supply. Rural unincorporated areas show slightly higher vacancy rates, which can reflect a combination of seasonal fluctuations, aging units unsuitable for year-round occupancy, and barriers to development.

Housing Types: The county’s housing stock is dominated by single-family detached homes, which account for more than 70% of all units. Duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and other forms of “missing middle” housing remain scarce, particularly in unincorporated areas and smaller towns. Manufactured housing plays a critical role, especially in rural areas, providing affordable homeownership opportunities, but also presenting infrastructure and land use compatibility issues.

Housing Age and Condition: A substantial share of housing units, particularly in unincorporated communities, were built before 1980. Many of these homes lack energy efficiency, have outdated electrical and plumbing systems, and may not meet current building codes. These conditions can lead to increased maintenance costs, energy burden, and safety concerns, especially for low-income households.

Cost Burden: Nearly half of all renter households in the county are cost-burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on housing. The burden is most acute among extremely low-income renters (0–30% AMI), who face limited options both in subsidized and market-rate housing.

COUNTYWIDE HOUSING NEEDS (2020–2046)

Yakima County is projected to experience population growth between 2020 and 2046, necessitating a corresponding increase in housing stock to meet the needs of future residents. Using projections provided by OFM, the County has developed a countywide housing needs estimate that includes a comprehensive breakdown by income band. These projections account for both current deficits in housing and anticipated future demand.

The purpose of this breakdown is to ensure that housing development aligns with the diverse economic circumstances of current and future residents. Notably, the largest share of future housing need falls within the lowest income bands, reflecting long-standing affordability challenges in both urban and rural areas of Yakima County. Meeting this demand will require a strategic mix of affordable housing development, land use reform, and supportive public policies.

The table below summarizes the projected number of net new housing units needed across all income levels within the county.

Table 1. Permanent Housing Needs by Income Level (% of Area Median Income)								
	Total	0-30%		>30-50%	>50-80%	>80-100%	>100-120%	>120%
		Non-PSH	PSH					
Countywide Estimated Housing Supply (2020)	89,425	4,351	228	20,264	33,325	10,917	7,070	13,270
Countywide Total Housing Needs (2046)	114,482	8,261	4,495	25,742	36,353	12,706	8,282	18,643
Countywide Additional Units Needed (2020-2046)	25,057	3,910	4,267	5,478	3,028	1,789	1,212	5,373

Source: WA State Department of Commerce, Growth Management Services Housing For All Planning Tool (HAPT). Calculations are based on the Yakima County 2046 Population Projections and Allocations.

This data reflects total need, not just what will be satisfied by the market. It is intended to inform public investments, housing policy, and land use strategies to guide comprehensive plan implementation. Housing at or below 80% AMI is considered “affordable housing” and should be prioritized by jurisdictions as they seek to meet GMA and Commerce equity targets.

JURISDICTIONAL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

The allocation of housing needs among Yakima County’s jurisdictions is the result of a carefully balanced approach that considers projected population growth, infrastructure capacity, historical development patterns, and available land for future housing. Using a weighted methodology, guided by the HAPT, the County ensures that each jurisdiction received a share of the housing need that includes units across all income levels.

Allocations are proportionally tied to each city's expected share of countywide population growth but are also adjusted to address existing disparities in affordability, housing supply, and proximity to employment opportunities. This approach promotes a more equitable distribution of housing responsibilities. For example, urban centers with better access to public transit and jobs are assigned a larger share of affordable and low-income housing, while smaller or more rural jurisdictions may see allocations that emphasize market-rate or workforce housing, reflecting their infrastructure and land use context.

Table 2 below presents housing allocations by jurisdiction and income band:

HOUSING ALLOCATION FROM SELECTED SHARES

				Future Population (2046)	Total Units Allocated (2020-2046)	Permanent Housing Needs by Income Level (% of Area Median Income)						
						0-30%		>30-50%	>50-80%	>80-100%	>100-120%	>120%
						Non-PSH	PSH					
		User Input	Actual									
Grandview	City	6.66	6.66 %	14,840	1,669	274	299	384	202	119	81	310
	Unincorporated UGA	1.67	1.67 %	2,095	419	69	75	96	51	30	20	78
Granger	City	2.56	2.56 %	5,471	642	105	115	148	78	46	31	119
	Unincorporated UGA	0.64	0.64 %	648	160	26	29	37	19	11	8	30
Harrah	City	0.06	0.06 %	576	15	2	3	3	2	1	1	3
	Unincorporated UGA	0.01	0.00 %	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Mabton	City	0.00	0.00 %	1,788	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Unincorporated UGA	0.00	0.00 %	262	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moxee	City	8.53	8.53 %	9,938	2,137	351	383	492	258	153	103	397
	Unincorporated UGA	2.13	2.14 %	2,073	535	88	96	123	65	38	26	99
Naches	City	1.51	1.51 %	1,705	378	62	68	87	46	27	18	70
	Unincorporated UGA	0.38	0.39 %	449	97	16	17	22	12	7	5	18
Selah	City	8.27	8.27 %	12,137	2,071	340	371	477	250	148	100	385
	Unincorporated UGA	2.07	2.07 %	2,765	518	85	93	119	63	37	25	96
Sunnyside	City	6.35	6.35 %	19,670	1,591	261	285	366	192	114	77	296
	Unincorporated UGA	1.59	1.58 %	2,894	397	65	71	92	48	28	19	74
Tieton	City	2.45	2.45 %	3,090	614	101	110	141	74	44	30	114
	Unincorporated UGA	0.61	0.60 %	739	151	25	27	35	18	11	7	28
Toppenish	City	0.83	0.83 %	8,721	208	34	37	48	25	15	10	39
	Unincorporated UGA	0.21	0.21 %	921	53	9	9	12	6	4	3	10
Union Gap	City	3.25	3.24 %	8,039	813	134	146	187	98	58	39	151
	Unincorporated UGA	0.81	0.81 %	1,144	203	33	36	47	25	14	10	38
Wapato	City	0.62	0.63 %	4,668	157	26	28	36	19	11	8	29
	Unincorporated UGA	0.16	0.16 %	2,400	40	7	7	9	5	3	2	7
Yakima	City	33.98	33.99 %	107,443	8,517	1,400	1,529	1,960	1,028	608	411	1,581
	Unincorporated UGA	8.50	8.50 %	16,816	2,131	350	382	490	258	152	103	396
Zillah	City	0.92	0.92 %	3,475	230	38	41	53	28	16	11	43
	Unincorporated UGA	0.23	0.23 %	376	57	9	10	13	7	4	3	11
Unincorporated Rural	Rural	5.00	5.00 %	62,175	1,253	0	0	0	151	90	61	951

Source: WA State Department of Commerce, Growth Management Services Housing For All Planning Tool (HAPT). Calculations are based on the Yakima County 2046 Population Projections and Allocations.

This table is a starting point for jurisdictional collaboration and will be refined as part of local comprehensive plan updates and zoning code revisions. Each jurisdiction will be responsible for updating its Housing Element to reflect these allocations, identifying adequate buildable land, and adopting policies to ensure housing is produced across the full range of affordability.

DISPLACEMENT RISK AND EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

A Housing Element under HB 1220 must not only identify housing need but also evaluate displacement risk and the legacy of exclusionary practices that continue to shape housing access today.

Vulnerable Populations: Populations most at risk of displacement in Yakima County include:

- Low-income renters, especially those in unsubsidized housing
- Farmworkers and seasonal laborers who rely on temporary or informal housing
- Elderly residents on fixed incomes
- Residents in historically disinvested communities who face gentrification pressures

Displacement pressures are typically highest in urban areas with growing market interest, proximity to downtowns or services, and rising land values. However, in rural areas, displacement can occur through disinvestment, lack of maintenance, or conversion of rental housing to short-term or seasonal uses.

Historical Exclusion: Yakima County's land use history includes exclusionary zoning practices that have shaped patterns of segregation and access to opportunity. For example:

- Large minimum lot sizes in rural residential zones limit the feasibility of smaller, affordable housing types.
- Multifamily zoning is restricted or absent in many unincorporated areas.
- Agricultural workers, disproportionately Latino and low-income, often lack formal housing options near places of employment.

To correct for these patterns, the updated Housing Element will include targeted equity strategies such as increasing housing choice in all neighborhoods, removing barriers to multifamily development, and preserving affordable housing in at-risk communities.

LAND CAPACITY AND ZONING CONSTRAINTS

A core responsibility of the Housing Element under the GMA and HB 1220 is to assess whether existing zoning and available land supply are sufficient to accommodate the county's projected housing needs. Preliminary analysis of zoning capacity across Yakima County and its Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) indicates that while some jurisdictions may have nominally sufficient land, others, especially those expected to absorb the greatest share of low-income or multifamily housing, may face capacity shortfalls. This issue is particularly evident in areas where higher-density zoning is confined to small portions of the land base or where infrastructure necessary to support residential development, such as sewer and water systems, is lacking or over capacity.

Zoning in several areas limits the development of multifamily or alternative housing types through restrictive definitions, low allowable densities, or prohibitive development standards such as large minimum lot sizes or setbacks. In unincorporated areas, even where land is zoned for housing, readiness

is a constraint, land may lack basic infrastructure, have environmental constraints, or be encumbered by ownership or legal complexities.

To address these issues, the Housing Element will include a set of recommended strategies to expand residential capacity and align land use policy with actual housing needs. These include revisiting zoning in UGAs to permit a broader range of housing types such as duplexes, triplexes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), increasing allowable densities where infrastructure exists or is planned, and prioritizing infrastructure investments in areas with potential for infill or mixed-income development. As required by Commerce guidance, the County will also document how local zoning and land availability correspond to the jurisdictional housing targets generated through the Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT), and identify any required policy changes to reconcile inconsistencies.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The distribution of housing needs identified in this report presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Yakima County and its cities. As the region plans for growth through 2046, ensuring an adequate supply of housing will require intentional changes in local policies, land use practices, and community development priorities. The GMA and Commerce's guidance emphasize that planning for housing must go beyond market trends and consider the needs of all income levels. This calls for a strategic, equity-focused approach to future development.

Jurisdictions should also prioritize infill development and the redevelopment of underutilized parcels within UGAs. By directing growth to areas where infrastructure already exists, communities can reduce the costs of new development, avoid sprawl, and make more efficient use of land and public investment. Encouraging mixed-use development in town centers or along commercial corridors can further support housing goals while enhancing walkability and local economic vitality.

In addition to regulatory reform, local governments must take proactive steps to support the production of affordable housing. This includes considering incentives such as density bonuses, reduced permit fees, expedited permitting processes, and property tax exemptions for projects that include low or moderate income units. Local Housing Action Plans, housing trust funds, and other policy tools can also play a role in bridging financial gaps and encouraging a more diverse housing stock.

IMPLEMENTATION

The updated Housing Element must not only articulate a vision and strategy for meeting the county's housing needs, but also establish a system for monitoring progress and adjusting course when necessary. Yakima County will implement a multi-pronged framework to support the ongoing execution and evaluation of its housing goals.

Key implementation actions will include a comprehensive review and update of the zoning code following the adoption of the comprehensive plan, with an emphasis on expanding housing variety and affordability. Implementation will involve close coordination with cities, housing providers, infrastructure agencies, and service partners, particularly through interlocal agreements and regional housing initiatives.

Periodic review of population and housing trends, ideally aligned with the state’s five-year HNA refresh cycle, will provide opportunities to recalibrate strategies and propose course corrections. The County will prepare summary reports on Housing Element implementation for review by the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners, ensuring transparency and allowing for responsive governance as market and demographic conditions evolve.

CONCLUSION

The Yakima County Housing Allocation report represents a critical milestone in the County’s ongoing efforts to plan proactively and equitably for the housing needs of all residents through the 2046 planning horizon. Grounded in the requirements of the GMA and informed by state guidance and technical tools like the HAPT, this document translates population and economic growth projections into actionable housing targets.

Through careful coordination, robust data analysis, and meaningful jurisdictional engagement, the County has developed a framework that not only identifies the scale and distribution of housing needs but also emphasizes the importance of policy alignment, land capacity, and infrastructure planning. Importantly, this report highlights that addressing housing challenges, particularly at lower income levels, requires sustained, collaborative, and innovative responses from all sectors.

As this document is finalized and integrated into the broader **Horizon 2046** Comprehensive Plan, it will serve as both a technical guide and a policy catalyst. Local jurisdictions are encouraged to view their housing allocations not merely as regulatory obligations but as opportunities to shape livable, inclusive, and economically resilient communities.

The work ahead involves continued coordination, public engagement, and implementation of local plans and policies to translate these projections into real-world outcomes. With clear goals, measurable targets, and a shared regional vision, Yakima County is well-positioned to meet the housing needs of its current and future residents.