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King County Countywide Housing Needs Assessment 2025

Prepared for: The King County Department of Community and Human Services

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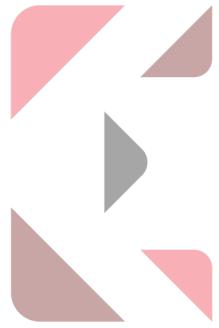


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Executive Summary

On December 2, 2024, the Metropolitan King County Council adopted King County's 2025 Annual Budget with the passage of Ordinance 19861. Section 108 of this ordinance includes Expenditure Restriction 9 (ER-9), which directs the County to contract with a third party to conduct an updated countywide housing needs assessment for use by policymakers, planners, and researchers. ER-9 specifies that the assessment must, at minimum, include:

- ◆ Background and policy context, including an update on progress toward eliminating housing cost burden among low-income households by 2040 and a summary of data sources and gaps;
- ◆ Population, workforce, and housing characteristics;
- ◆ Housing supply and market trends by subarea/jurisdiction, by area median income (AMI), and by tenure—including an estimate of pipeline/under-construction units by affordability;
- ◆ Rental and ownership affordability broken down by subregion and jurisdiction;
- ◆ Funding tools and funding levels by subregion and jurisdiction; and
- ◆ Needs analysis quantifying the gap between existing inventory and housing needs—ideally adding insights useful to policymakers, such as mismatch by household size vs. available bedrooms.

This report fulfills ER9 by assembling a countywide, subregional, and jurisdiction-level view of who lives and works in King County, what housing exists and where, how affordable it is, how much more and what kind is needed, and what it will cost.

Summary of Key Findings

- ◆ **Countywide permanent and emergency housing needs.** The **Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs)** identify a need for **308,677 net new homes (2019–2044)** across the income spectrum, with more than 60 percent needed below 80 percent of AMI.
- ◆ **Equitable distribution of permanent housing needs below 80 percent.** The CPPs require that jurisdictions within King County plan for and accommodate **greater shares of housing needs below 80 percent** if they have less affordable housing, less income-restricted housing, and more low-wage jobs than low-wage residents.
- ◆ **Progress to date and inventory distribution.** From **2019–2023**, King County saw the production of **17,364 publicly funded income-restricted homes affordable to households between 0 and 80 percent of AMI**, with **Seattle accounting for ~60 percent** and the largest share of deeply affordable (≤ 30 percent of AMI) units.

- ◆ **Jobs, wages, and spatial mismatch.** High wage growth is concentrated in Seattle and the Eastside. At the same time, South King County is seeing faster expansion in retail and education and has **lower median wages across most industries**, intensifying need for deeply affordable homes there. Countywide, there are **~318,000 low-wage jobs vs. ~243,000 low-wage resident workers**—with the largest gaps in Seattle and East King County—which shows that many low-wage workers are commuting into these places for work. This underscores the need for more affordable housing near major job centers.
- ◆ **Affordability pressures and disparities.** **Thirty-one percent of households in King County** are cost burdened (14 percent severely cost burdened); renters experience higher and more persistent cost burden. In **2023, 45 percent of renters** were cost burdened countywide, and renter burden in **South King County** is nearly **60 percent**.
- ◆ **Mismatch by household size.** Overcrowding and “renting up”¹ are most acute for larger, lower-income households, evidence of an extreme shortage of **3- and 4-bedroom affordable rentals**.
- ◆ **Total units and investment required.** Meeting adopted housing needs below 80 percent of AMI will require approximately **177,698 new income-restricted units between 2025 and 2044**. The total capital investment needed is estimated at \$80 billion, of which **\$73 billion** represents the unfunded gap **after accounting for currently available resources**. In addition, the estimated **annual cost to operate and maintain these units is \$1.79 billion**, primarily concentrated **below 30 percent of AMI and for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)**. Existing sources of operating support are already fully allocated to the current housing stock, leaving no identified funding available to support the new units needed.
- ◆ **Available resources and the remaining gap.** After accounting for recurring federal, state, local, and philanthropic sources, the **unfunded housing gap is approximately \$3.96 billion per year**, in 2025 dollars. This figure combines two major commitments: the **capital investment** of producing deeply affordable housing over the next 20 years, and the **long-term operating and supportive services** funding needed to sustain those units over their full lifecycle.

Implications for Policy and Implementation

- ◆ **The highest needs are for deeply affordable and supportive housing** (30 percent or below AMI), where gaps and operating needs are greatest.
- ◆ **More large affordable rental units** (3–4+ bedrooms) **are needed** to relieve overcrowding and reduce inequities faced by large low-income households.

¹ When a household leases a home that is in an affordability bracket that is higher than their household income bracket.



- ◆ **An equitable distribution of affordable housing production across subregions is needed**, with a focus on high-opportunity areas and places with high ratios of low-wage jobs to resident low-wage workers (e.g., Seattle/East King County).
- ◆ **Planning, production, and funding alignment is needed**: pair zoning/land use reforms with **durable, broad-based revenue** to close the gap of \$3.96 billion per year; sustain and grow operating subsidies for permanent supportive and deeply affordable units.
- ◆ **Regional partnerships (ARCH, SKHHP) and scaled local tools** (levies, HB 1590 sales tax) **are needed** to accelerate production and preservation; broaden participation where adoption is uneven.



Key Terms

Throughout this report, we use terms to describe current housing conditions, characteristics, and experiences of households within King County. Some of these key terms are defined below.

Affordable housing

Housing is considered affordable when a household spends no more than 30 percent of their gross monthly income on housing-related costs, including expenses such as utilities. This standard of affordability is set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). “Affordable housing” is a general term that may include housing affordable to a wide range of income bands and includes income-restricted and non-income units.

Area median income (AMI)

AMI refers to the midpoint income for households in a specific metropolitan region, adjusted by household size. It is calculated by HUD using data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. AMI is based on the income distribution of all owner and renter family households and does not include nonfamily renter households, such as roommates.

Census-designated places (CDP)

A CDP is an area that resembles an incorporated place in name and settlement pattern but lacks their own government, legal boundaries, or municipal authority. Instead, the population is identified by the U.S. Census Bureau for statistical purposes. CDPs enable the collection and presentation of demographic and economic data for unincorporated communities that are locally recognized.

Condominiums

A condominium is a property ownership model where individuals own their specific unit while sharing ownership of common areas—such as hallways, lobbies, and amenities—with other unit owners. Condos are often governed by a homeowners’ association responsible for managing shared spaces and maintenance.

Cost-burdened household

A household is “cost burdened” if it spends more than 30 percent of its gross income on housing. If housing costs exceed 50 percent of a household’s gross income, the household is considered “severely cost burdened.”



Displacement

The involuntary relocation of current residents or businesses from their current residence. This is a different phenomenon than when property owners voluntarily sell their interests to capture an increase in value. Physical displacement is the result of eviction, acquisition, rehabilitation, demolition of property, or the expiration of covenant on rent- or income-restricted housing. Economic displacement occurs when residents and businesses can no longer afford escalating housing costs. Cultural displacement occurs when people choose to move because their neighbors or culturally related businesses have left the area.

Deeply affordable unit

A deeply affordable unit is a housing unit that is affordable to households earning between 0 percent and 30 percent of AMI for a given region.

Duplex

A duplex is a single building divided into two separate dwelling units, typically arranged side by side or stacked vertically. Ownership may be consolidated or separate, and each unit usually has its own entrance and utilities.

Extremely low-income households

Households earning less than or equal to 30 percent of AMI for their household size.

Flat condominiums (stacked flats)

Flat condominiums, also known as stacked flats, are condo units arranged vertically in a building, like apartments, but individually owned. Each unit occupies a floor or portion of a floor. This configuration combines apartment-style living with the ownership and governance structure of condominiums.

Group quarters or group homes

Group quarters are living arrangements where individuals reside in institutional or communal settings, such as dormitories, group homes, or shelters. These facilities provide shared living spaces and services to residents who do not live in traditional household setups. “Group homes” typically refer to residential care facilities (e.g., for seniors, youth, or individuals with disabilities), which falls under the broader “group quarters” category.

Growth targets

The number of residents, housing, or jobs that a jurisdiction is expected to use as the land use assumption in its comprehensive plan. Growth targets are set by countywide planning groups for counties and cities to meet the Growth Management Act requirement to allocate urban growth that is projected for the succeeding twenty-year period (RCW 36.70A.110) and are listed in the King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) Development Chapter.

High-frequency transit



High-frequency transit refers to public transportation systems with frequent, reliable service (often every 10–15 minutes or less during peak times). This high level of service promotes accessibility, reduces wait times, and supports reduced automobile dependency. Frequent transit is a key factor in transit-oriented development and regional housing planning.

Low-income households

Households earning greater than 50 percent to less than or equal to 80 percent of AMI for their household size.

Matched

When a household leases a home in an affordability bracket that is the same as their household income bracket (e.g., a household with an income in the >120 percent of AMI range renting a housing unit in the >120 percent of AMI affordability range). Being “matched” indicates that the rent level aligns with the household’s income category in aggregate data.

Middle housing

Middle housing includes small- to mid-scale housing types—such as duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, cottage clusters, and townhomes—that fall between single-family homes and large apartment complexes. These housing types can help increase affordability and expand choices in residential neighborhoods.

Moderate-income households

Households earning greater than 80 percent to less than or equal to 120 percent of AMI for their household size.

Multifamily tax exemption (MFTE)

An MFTE is a public policy tool offering property tax reductions to developers who include affordable housing units within multifamily residential projects. In exchange for providing those affordable units, developers receive partial or full exemptions from property taxes for a specified period.

Overcrowding

In housing, overcrowding refers to when too many people occupy a dwelling relative to its size. A common benchmark is more than one person per room (excluding bathrooms, halls, and similar spaces); severe overcrowding is often defined as more than 1.5 persons per room.

Permanent and emergency housing needs

In the King County CPPs, countywide permanent and emergency housing needs are the number of housing units needed in King County by the end of the planning period to ensure sufficient and attainable housing for all households. Permanent housing needs are divided by income bands, including:



- ◆ 0 to 30 percent of AMI, including PSH and non-PSH needs
- ◆ 30 to 50 percent of AMI
- ◆ 55 to 80 percent of AMI
- ◆ 80 to 100 percent of AMI
- ◆ 100 to 120 percent of AMI
- ◆ 120+ percent of AMI

Permanent countywide housing needs are derived from the Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) and were adjusted to align with adopted growth targets in the CPPs for the planning period. Emergency housing needs include emergency housing and shelter.

Permanent supportive housing (PSH)

PSH combines deeply affordable housing (typically housing affordable to households at 0 to 30 percent of AMI) with on-site or mobile supportive services designed to help people with significant barriers—such as chronic homelessness, disabilities, or behavioral health needs—stabilize and remain housed.

Potential Annexation Area (PAA)

A portion of the urban unincorporated area in King County that a city has identified it will annex at some future date

Single-family detached

A single-family detached home is a stand-alone residential structure built on its own parcel of land, with no shared walls or structural components with other units.

Single-family detached condominiums

Single-family detached condominiums are single-family homes that stand alone (no shared walls) but are part of a condominium ownership structure. While each household owns its individual structure and lot, common elements (like roads, landscaping, or recreational facilities) are owned collectively through a homeowners' association. This configuration combines single-family detached living with the ownership and governance structure of condominiums.

Tenure

In housing, tenure refers to the legal arrangement under which housing is occupied and primarily categorized as owner-occupied or renter-occupied. It indicates whether the occupant owns the dwelling, rents it, or holds another form of legal occupancy (e.g., rent-free or cooperative housing).

Townhome



A townhome (or town house) is a multistory, typically single-family, dwelling that shares one or more walls, known as party walls, with adjacent units. Each unit has its own entrance and often its own outdoor space, but walls and sometimes roofs are shared.

Townhome condominiums

Townhome condominiums are townhome-style buildings that use the condominium legal structure. Each dwelling is individually owned, while common areas (e.g., structural components, landscaping, shared walkways) are managed collectively by a homeowners' association. This configuration combines townhome living with the ownership and governance structure of condominiums.

Renting down

When a household leases a home in an affordability bracket that is lower than their household income bracket (e.g., a household with an income in the >120 percent of AMI range renting a housing unit in the 80–100 percent of AMI affordability range). Renting down often occurs by choice and can reflect preferences for location, size, or amenities rather than price.

Renting up

When a household leases a home in an affordability bracket that is higher than their household income bracket (e.g., a household with an income in the 50–80 percent of AMI range renting a housing unit in the 100–120 percent of AMI affordability range). Renting up often occurs when there is a shortage of appropriately priced units or when households prioritize factors such as location, unit size, or amenities over cost, and it usually indicates that the household in question is cost burdened to some degree.

Very low-income households

Households earning greater than 30 percent to less than or equal to 50 percent of AMI for their household size.



1. Background and Policy Context

Housing shapes nearly every aspect of a person's life, from their health and educational opportunities to employment access and financial stability. As such, housing is a fundamental building block of vibrant communities and resilient local economies.

Some housing needs are universal. All people need safe and healthy housing. Some housing needs are unique to a household. Housing costs need to be affordable based on a household's income.² Housing design elements such as the number of bedrooms, floor plans, no-step entrances, and roll-in showers may vary based on a household's size, composition, or disability accommodations needed. Supportive services provided alongside housing such as case management, substance use disorder treatment, or intensive nursing care may be needed for some people. Housing location and proximity to amenities will also vary based on specific households' needs and preferences, such as place of employment, schools and childcare, community connections, and transportation options.

In King County and many other metropolitan areas throughout the United States, residents—especially lower-income households, people of color, seniors, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and immigrants—face significant barriers to accessing housing that meets their needs. These barriers can lead to significant unmet housing needs and disproportionate experiences of housing stability, ultimately leading to evictions, homelessness, and displacement.³

Local governments play a critical role in supporting the housing needs of their residents through planning, funding, regulation, and services that shape housing supply, support vulnerable residents, and promote fair housing. To perform this role effectively, governments like King County must regularly assess community housing needs and identify gaps between housing needs and current housing conditions and supply.

2 A household is considered cost burdened when they spend more than 30 percent of their gross income on housing-related costs. Severely cost-burdened households spend over 50 percent of their income on housing costs. See "Key Terms."

3 Significant racial and ethnic disparities in access to affordable housing are documented in both the 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan and the 2025 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. In 2020, nearly half of Black households and 40 percent of Hispanic households in King County were cost burdened, and Black households were twice as likely to rent as White and Asian households. The 2025 Analysis of Impediments found similar disparities using 2022 Census data and reported discrimination based on race or national origin in over half of all fair housing tests. Many of these disparities are shaped by past and current racially discriminatory and exclusive land use and housing practices. See Housing Needs Assessment [Attachment B]. In 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan, pgs. B-5, B-7 [[link](#)], King County Department of Community and Human Services. (2025, March); 2025 King County Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. King County. [[link](#)]; and King County Department of Community and Human Services. (2024). Resources For Documenting The Local History Of Racially Exclusive And Discriminatory Land Use And Housing Practices. [[link](#)]



Over the past few decades, King County has taken a multifaceted approach to identifying resident housing needs. County officials have facilitated cross-jurisdictional collaboration to inform planning efforts—estimating, for example, the net new housing units needed to accommodate forecasted population growth and affordable units needed to alleviate cost burden and homelessness. In parallel, County staff have engaged with communities to understand ongoing barriers to fair, affordable housing as well as to assess access to neighborhood opportunity and choice. As the county continues to grow and housing remains a top concern, these efforts are essential to guiding County services and investments responsively and equitably.

Building on these decades of effort, this report provides insights into King County’s housing needs for future policymaking, planning, and research. The report includes updated data on housing needs and disparities, analysis of affordability and unit size mismatches, and evaluation of funding needed to meet countywide housing needs. The report is organized into eight chapters:

- ◆ **Chapter 1** provides key background and policy context for this report, information on data sources used in the report as well as data gaps, and a description of subregions used to disaggregate data.
- ◆ **Chapter 2** provides updated demographic and economic characteristics of King County households.
- ◆ **Chapter 3** examines housing supply and development trends by subregion, jurisdiction, unit type, and affordability.
- ◆ **Chapter 4** analyzes housing affordability and need by tenure, income, and geography, including cost burden.
- ◆ **Chapter 5** explores how affordability challenges manifest spatially and structurally—through rent levels, unit sizes, location, and access to opportunity.
- ◆ **Chapter 6** quantifies housing gaps by comparing current inventory to household needs by size, income, and location—highlighting where mismatches are most severe.
- ◆ **Chapter 7** reviews public funding tools, resources, and the distribution of income-restricted housing across the county.
- ◆ **Chapter 8** aligns planning, production, and funding—clarifying capital and operating needs, regional tools, and governance to turn policy into action.



WHAT IS AREA MEDIAN INCOME (AMI)?

- » AMI in King County is the midpoint income of all county households, where half the households have incomes greater than the median and half the households have incomes below the median. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calculates AMI for a given area every year and adjusts it based on a household's size. HUD includes both renter and homeowner households in AMI calculations.
- » Federal, State, County, and local agencies use AMI to (1) group residents into distinct income bands relative to AMI and (2) set income and rent limits for affordable housing programs. The table below reports 2025 AMI in King County by household size and AMI rent limits by number of bedrooms.

King County Income and Rent Limits, 2025⁴

<u>Household Size</u>	At or Below 80% of AMI				AMI
	30% AMI	50% AMI	60% AMI	80% AMI	
1 person	\$33,050	\$55,000	\$66,000	\$84,850	\$110,000
2 persons	\$37,750	\$62,850	\$75,420	\$96,950	\$125,700
3 persons	\$42,450	\$70,700	\$84,840	\$109,050	\$141,400
4 persons	\$47,150	\$78,550	\$94,260	\$121,150	\$157,100
5 persons	\$50,950	\$84,850	\$101,820	\$130,850	\$169,700
6 persons	\$54,700	\$91,150	\$109,380	\$140,550	\$182,300
<u>Rent Limits</u>	30% AMI	50% AMI	60% AMI	80% AMI	AMI Rent
Studio	\$826	\$1,375	\$1,650	\$2,121	\$2,750
1 bedroom	\$885	\$1,473	\$1,767	\$2,272	\$2,950
2 bedrooms	\$1,061	\$1,767	\$2,121	\$2,726	\$3,535
3 bedrooms	\$1,226	\$2,042	\$2,451	\$3,150	\$4,085
4 bedrooms	\$1,367	\$2,278	\$2,734	\$3,513	\$4,556
5 bedrooms	\$1,509	\$2,514	\$3,017	\$3,877	\$5,027

⁴ King County (2025). 2025 Income and Rent Limits – Multifamily Rental and Homeownership Housing. [[link](#)]



Background and Policy Context

This section of the King County Housing Needs Assessment provides background and policy context for the analysis that follows, including overviews of the key agencies and stakeholders involved in assessing and planning for countywide housing needs, policy frameworks for housing needs planning in King County, and housing needs assessments that have guided local planning and created the foundation for this report.

The section concludes by outlining how this report builds on prior work and offers updated data and insights to inform future planning, policymaking, and research.

Who Assesses and Plans for King County's Housing Needs?

There are many entities that have unique roles and responsibilities for assessing and planning for housing needs in King County. Over the past several decades, these state, regional, and local agencies and partnerships have worked together to define housing needs, shape policy, and coordinate efforts.

The **Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce)** is a state agency charged with enhancing and promoting sustainable community and economic vitality. Starting in 2021, the Washington State Legislature amended the Growth Management Act (GMA) and required Commerce to provide countywide inventories of existing and projected housing needs by income band, as well as emergency housing, emergency shelters, and PSH.^{5,6} Commerce also provides guidance to jurisdictions planning under the GMA on complying with other housing-related requirements, including how to complete a land capacity and racially disparate impact analysis and how to remove barriers to housing production.⁷

The **Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)** is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the central Puget Sound region. PSRC guides regional planning and coordination in Kitsap, King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties, offering technical assistance to jurisdictions within the four-county region. PSRC adopts 30-year plans to guide regional growth and investments—the most recent being VISION 2050, which contains multicounty planning policies (MPPs) that local comprehensive plans must be consistent with.

5 See Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce). (2021). Establishing Housing Targets for your Community. [\[link\]](#)

6 Commerce's housing need allocation method projects future housing needs based on population projections, current renter cost burden, and homeless rates. Final numbers represent units needed to alleviate cost burden and homelessness. In this way, the methodology is similar to the Regional Affordable Housing Task Force's projection of affordable housing units needed to eliminate cost burden for households below 80 percent of AMI by 2040. However, the method differs from this analysis by projecting needs over the 2024 to 2044 comprehensive planning period, not to 2040, and includes emergency housing units needed.

7 See Commerce. (2023, August). Guidance for Updating Your Housing Element: Updating your housing element to address new requirements (Version 3.4) [\[link\]](#), and Commerce (2023, April): Guidance to Address Racially Disparate Impacts (Version 3.2) [\[link\]](#)



The **Metropolitan King County Council** is made up of nine councilmembers who are elected to represent distinct geographic districts across the county. The King County Council sets policies, enacts laws, and adopts budgets that guide a wide range of services throughout the county. The King County Council adopts amendments to the King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) as well as the King County Comprehensive Plan and development regulations for unincorporated areas. They also direct research, planning, and investments in housing programs administered by the County.

The **King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA)** is a governmental agency formed by interlocal agreement between the City of Seattle and King County. KCRHA plans for and coordinates homelessness services countywide, with the mission of significantly decreasing the incidence of unsheltered homelessness. The agency identifies local needs, priorities, and solutions to address homelessness for Seattle and North, East, South, and rural King County, in addition to providing a five-year implementation plan. KCRHA also administers the Coordinated Entry System to connect people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with housing and services.

Seattle, King County, and Renton housing authorities develop and operate affordable housing for low-income households throughout Seattle, Renton, and King County. The authorities also support household stability through the distribution of housing choice vouchers, commonly known as Section 8, a rental assistance program subsidized by the federal government.

The **King County Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC)** consists of elected officials from King County, Seattle, Bellevue, other cities and towns in King County, special purpose districts, and the Port of Seattle. It is chaired by the King County Executive.⁸ The GMPC works toward a countywide vision for the future of King County through the development and adoption of the CPPs. The CPPs establish a shared and consistent framework for growth management planning for all jurisdictions in King County.⁹ The GMPC recommends amendments to the CPPs for adoption to the King County Council and for ratification by the jurisdictions in King County.¹⁰

The **Regional Affordable Housing Task Force** (the Task Force) brought together elected and government officials from King County, the City of Seattle, and Sound Cities Association to develop a regional plan to address the affordable housing crisis in King County. The Task Force was first convened in 2017 and concluded its work in 2018 with the release of its Final Report and Recommendations, which included a Five-Year Action Plan. King County, the City of Seattle, and the Sound Cities Association Public Issues Committee adopted the Task Force

8 For a current roster of GMPC members, see the GMPC web page [[link](#)]

9 King County Clerk of the Council (2023, June). Ordinance 19660. Appendix A: King County GMPC Motion 23-1, a motion recommending amendments to the King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) to the King County Council. [[link](#)]

10 King County Clerk of the Council (2023, June). Ordinance 19660. Appendix A: King County GMPC Motion 23-1, a motion recommending amendments to the King County CPPs to the King County Council. [[link](#)]



Action Plan, demonstrating a shared commitment to meeting countywide affordable housing needs.

At the recommendation of the Task Force, the GMPC chartered the **Affordable Housing Committee (AHC)** in 2019 to oversee the implementation of the Five-Year Action Plan.¹¹ The AHC functions as a point of coordination and accountability for affordable housing efforts across King County, bringing nine elected officials together with up to ten local subject matter experts to ensure housing affordability solutions are equitable and effective.¹² The AHC recommends regional action and CPP amendments to the GMPC for consideration. The AHC also plays a role in reviewing jurisdictions' comprehensive plans for alignment with the CPP Housing Chapter and monitoring and reporting on progress to plan for and accommodate housing needs.

King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) supports both regional coordination of countywide affordable housing efforts and plans for and accommodates the housing needs of residents in unincorporated King County. DCHS provides structural and administrative support for the AHC. DCHS also led the development of the Housing and Human Services Chapter of the 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan and the 2025 King County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice.

The **Sound Cities Association (SCA)** provides leadership through advocacy, education, mutual support, and networking to 38 of the 39 cities and towns in King County, supporting them as they act individually and together to create livable vital communities. All jurisdictions in King County, except for the City of Seattle and King County, are members of the SCA.

A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) is a partnership between King County and East King County cities and towns working to preserve and increase the supply of housing for low- and moderate-income households in East King County.¹³ ARCH supports its members with developing housing policies, strategies, and regulations, including providing assessments of housing need,¹⁴ efficient administration of housing programs, coordination of city investments in affordable housing, and direct assistance for people looking for affordable rental and ownership housing. Since its founding in 1993, ARCH has helped to create over 9,000 affordable homes throughout the eastside.

South King Housing and Homelessness Partners (SKHHP) is a partnership among South King County cities and King County.¹⁵ Through SKHHP, South King County jurisdictions can take a coordinated and comprehensive approach to increasing housing stability and

¹¹ King County Department of Community and Human Services. (2022, December 21). Affordable Housing Committee. [\[link\]](#)

¹² For a roster of current AHC members, see the AHC web page [\[link\]](#)

¹³ ARCH Member cities include Beaux Arts Village, Bellevue, Bothell, Clyde Hill, Hunts Point, Issaquah, Kenmore, King County, Kirkland, Medina, Mercer Island, Newcastle, Redmond, Sammamish, Woodinville, Yarrow Point

¹⁴ A Regional Coalition for Housing. East King County Housing Needs Analysis (2015) [\[link\]](#)

¹⁵ SKHHP Member cities include Auburn, Burien, Covington, Des Moines, Federal Way, Kent, Maple Valley, Normandy Park, Renton, SeaTac, and Tukwila



producing and preserving quality affordable housing in South King County. SKHHP shares technical information and resources to promote sound housing policy, coordinates public resources to attract greater private and public investment, and provides a unified voice for South King County. From 2022 to 2024, SKHHP funded seven projects, including 679 units of affordable housing.¹⁶

All 40 jurisdictions in King County adopt comprehensive plans every ten years, which include assessments of local housing needs and policies, strategies, and actions to plan for and accommodate housing needs. Jurisdictions adopt zoning regulations concurrent with adopted comprehensive plans. Jurisdictional budgets guide investments in housing and other programs aimed at addressing housing needs.

Key Housing Policy and Planning Frameworks in King County

Exhibit 1: Housing Policy and Planning Frameworks in King County



Washington's GMA provides the foundation for housing policy and planning across the state, requiring jurisdictions to plan for and accommodate housing needs of all residents. In King County, this mandate is implemented through a coordinated framework that includes state law, regional guidance, and county-specific requirements and housing needs. Together, these frameworks ensure local planning efforts align with regional housing goals and respond to current and projected housing needs.

First adopted in 1990, the **GMA** requires certain cities, towns, and counties to conduct a periodic update to their comprehensive plans every ten years in order to manage population growth, plan for significant infrastructure and services for its residents, and preserve

16 SKHHP. (2025, June). Q4 Annual Progress Report [\[link\]](#)



sensitive environmental resources.¹⁷ For counties where growth is most concentrated in the state, the GMA requires CPPs to coordinate local planning on issues of a regional nature, such as housing.¹⁸

In 2021, the Washington State legislature passed **House Bill 1220**, which significantly amended requirements for affordable housing planning in local comprehensive plans.¹⁹ This legislation requires jurisdictions to “plan for and accommodate” housing affordable to all economic segments of the population. Previous legislation required jurisdictions to “encourage” the availability of affordable housing.²⁰ Commerce provides countywide inventories of existing and projected housing needs by income band, as well as emergency housing, emergency shelters, and permanent supportive housing. Through a collaborative process between King County and the cities in King County, led by the Affordable Housing Committee, permanent and emergency housing needs are allocated to the cities, towns, and unincorporated areas.²¹

The GMA also requires that the policies in comprehensive plans in King County be consistent with MPPs, currently set through **PSRC’s VISION 2050**. Adopted in 2020, VISION 2050 is the long-term plan for growth for the Puget Sound region made up of King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties. The plan’s MPPs provide a multicounty framework for CPPs and local comprehensive plans.²² VISION 2050 also includes a **Regional Growth Strategy**, which directs growth within the urban growth area—primarily to cities with designated centers and high-capacity transit—and informs countywide growth targets, local plans, and other regional plans.

VISION 2050 also called for a **Regional Housing Strategy**, which PSRC adopted in 2022. The strategy serves as a playbook of regional and locational comprehensive planning and action to preserve, improve, and expand housing stock in the region, with the aim of making a range of affordable, accessible, and safe housing choices available to every resident and to promote fair and equal access to all people. PSRC used a Regional Housing Needs Assessment to inform the Regional Housing Strategy.²³

The **King County CPPs** create a shared and consistent framework for managing growth for all jurisdictions in King County.²⁴ The CPPs define growth targets for both housing units and population for each jurisdiction in the county in alignment with VISION 2050’s Regional Growth Strategy. The CPP Housing Chapter established a goal to provide a full range of affordable, accessible, healthy, and safe housing choices to every resident in King County.

17 Chapter 36.70A Revised Code of Washington (RCW). [\[link\]](#)

18 RCW 36.70A.020 and RCW 36.70A.100

19 State of Washington Legislature. (2021). House Bill 1220: Emergency Shelters and Housing—Local Planning and Development. [\[link\]](#)

20 RCW 36.70A.070

21 Commerce. (2021). Establishing Housing Targets for your Community (pg. 59). [\[link\]](#)

22 Puget Sound Regional Council. (2020, October 29). VISION 2050. Puget Sound Regional Council. [\[link\]](#)

23 Puget Sound Regional Council. (2022). Regional Housing Strategy. Puget Sound Regional Council. [\[link\]](#)

24 2021 King County CCPs [\[link\]](#)



The Chapter establishes policies that guide jurisdictions in their efforts to preserve, improve, and expand their housing stock; promote fair and equitable access to housing for all people; and take actions that eliminate housing disparities based on race, place, and disability. The CPPs also quantified the total amount of new housing needed in each jurisdiction by 2044, specifically the number of permanent housing units that need to be affordable to different household income bands and the number of emergency housing beds.²⁵ The methodology for how these housing needs were determined and allocated to jurisdictions within King County is outlined below.²⁶ Housing needs by jurisdiction can be found in Appendix D, and housing need by the subregions used throughout this report can be found in the “Geographic Frameworks Used in This Report” section later in this chapter.

All jurisdictions update and adopt **comprehensive plans** in alignment with the GMA, MPPs, and CPPs. Per state and county requirements, jurisdictions are required to plan for and accommodate housing needs in comprehensive plans. This includes articulating policies that guide land use and housing policy over a designated planning period, assessing local housing needs, demonstrating sufficient land capacity for allocated CPP permanent and emergency housing needs, and conducting a racially disparate impact analysis, among other requirements. Jurisdictions in King County have either already completed or are nearly finished completing periodic updates for the 2024 to 2044 planning period.

QUANTIFYING AND ALLOCATING PERMANENT AND EMERGENCY HOUSING NEEDS IN THE KING COUNTY COUNTYWIDE PLANNING POLICIES (CPPs)

The 2021 King County CPPs quantify permanent and emergency housing needs countywide and for each jurisdiction. The total countywide housing need reflects the number of housing units needed to address both current unmet housing needs and projected population growth through 2044.

Permanent housing needs are broken down further to specify the need for affordability across the full range of household incomes in the county. Housing needs are defined for the following income ranges: 0–30 percent of AMI (including a portion designated as PSH), 30–50 percent of AMI, 50–80 percent of AMI, 80–100 percent of AMI, 100–120 percent of AMI, and above 120 percent of AMI. Emergency housing needs combine emergency housing units and shelter beds.

The process for determining the 2019–2044 CPP permanent and emergency housing needs is informed by four main planning activities:

25 See Table H-2 in the 2021 King County Countywide Planning Policies, pgs. 77–81 [[link](#)]

26 See Table H-1 in 2021 King County Countywide Planning Policies. pgs. 39–40 [[link](#)]



1. The Washington State Office of Financial Management identified a range of possible county **population growth projections**.²⁷
2. PSRC developed a **2050 Population Forecast and Regional Growth Strategy** for the King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties region. This strategy included assumptions about how population and employment would grow and directed most new growth toward metropolitan and core cities and high-capacity (HCT) transit communities.²⁸
3. Commerce estimated the current number of housing units in King County, projected how many would be needed by 2044, and calculated the net new units required to ensure all current and future residents could afford housing at their income band. The results included **a range of permanent housing needs by income band and the emergency housing and shelter beds** required to meet both current and future housing needs countywide.²⁹
4. Through a collaborative process between King County and jurisdictions, led by the AHC and using Commerce ranges, **countywide permanent and emergency housing needs were set, allocated to jurisdictions, and incorporated into the CPPs**. Informed by PSRC's 2050 Population Forecast and Regional Growth Strategy, housing growth targets were set countywide and by jurisdiction. Each jurisdiction's total permanent housing need was set equal to its growth target, though the shares by income band varied. Jurisdictions received a greater share of permanent affordable housing needs (0–80 percent of AMI) if they had:
 - A lower share of existing housing affordable to 0–80 percent of AMI households;
 - A lower share of income-restricted housing for 0–80 percent of AMI households;
 - More low-wage workers commuting into the subregion than living there; andCountywide emergency housing needs were allocated to jurisdictions based on their share of total countywide housing growth.³⁰

27 Washington State Office of Financial Management. Growth Management Act County Projections, 2017 and 2022 (2025). [\[link\]](#)

28 Puget Sound Regional Council. VISION 2050. [\[link\]](#)

29 Commerce. Establishing Housing Targets for your Community V3.4 (2023). [\[link\]](#)

30 King County. 2021 King County CCPs (2023). pgs. 74–76 [\[link\]](#)



Exhibit 2: Quantifying and Allocating Permanent and Emergency Housing Needs in King County CCPs



Recent Efforts to Assess Housing Needs in King County

The **Regional Affordable Housing Task Force** released its **Final Report and Recommendations** in 2018 (revised in 2019). The report included a housing needs assessment and a Five-Year Action Plan. Key findings included:

- ◆ dramatic housing price increases between 2012 and 2017 which resulted in an estimated 156,000 extremely low-, very low-, and low-income households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing (housing cost burden);
- ◆ Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and extremely low-income households found to be among the most disproportionately impacted by housing cost burden; and
- ◆ a need for 244,000 additional affordable homes in King County by 2040, so that no household earning 80 percent of AMI and below is cost burdened.



The Five-Year Action Plan included high-level goals, strategies, and 100 actions to implement those strategies. The Action Plan set a goal to (1) build or preserve 44,000 units of housing affordable to households at or below 50 percent of AMI by 2024 and (2) track progress toward that goal. King County, the City of Seattle, and the Sound Cities Association Public Issues Committee adopted the Task Force Action Plan on behalf of 38 cities and towns in King County, demonstrating a shared commitment to meeting countywide affordable housing needs. The Task Force also recommended the creation of the AHC as a committee of the GMPC to oversee implementation.³¹

PROGRESS TOWARD REGIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING GOALS

- » **Affordable housing production and preservation:** Between 2019 and 2023, just over 6,400 income-restricted units affordable to households at or below 50% of AMI were built—demonstrating limited progress toward the goal of 44,000 units by 2024.³²
- » **Cost burden trends:** Over the past decade, cost burden has declined among homeowners but remains persistently high among renters. In 2023, 45 percent of renters were cost burdened countywide, compared to 23 percent of owners. Renters in South King County face the highest burden, with nearly 60 percent paying more than 30 percent of income on housing. Chapter 2 explores cost burden trends over time in greater detail.³³ Caution is advised when reviewing trends—declines in measured cost burden may, in part, reflect displacement as lower-income households are priced out and replaced by higher-income residents.
- » **Despite progress, the persistently high burden on renters and a continued shortfall in deeply affordable units underscore the scale of ongoing affordability challenges across the county.**

Note: Since the Task Force's report, King County's CPPs have been amended to include housing needs with the county's long-range planning horizon of 2044. These needs are used throughout this report.

Since its establishment in 2019, the AHC has been involved in a variety of actions to advance the Task Force's Five-Year Action Plan, including:

31 King County Department of Community and Human Services. (2019, October 28). Regional Affordable Housing Task Force: Final Report and Recommendations. King County. [[link](#)]

32 King County Income-Restricted Housing Database, data extracted 23 July 2025. Data Current as of December 31, 2023. Note: These figures may differ from other data products utilizing the Income-Restricted Housing Database because the data is continuously improved.

33 U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–2023, American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample, accessed at: data.census.gov.



- ◆ launching the Regional Affordable Housing Dashboard that, among other uses, establishes a baseline toward measuring progress to eliminate housing cost burden among King County's low-income households by 2040;³⁴
- ◆ estimating a total cost of \$20 billion to build, preserve, operate, and service the Task Force's 44,000-unit goal for homes affordable to households at 0 to 50 percent of AMI between 2019 and 2024;³⁵
- ◆ recommending amendments to the CPPs to more closely align with the Task Force's Five-Year Action Plan; and
- ◆ recommending amendments to the CPPs in response to GMPC direction that included:
 - permanent housing needs numbers and emergency housing needs by income band, both countywide and by jurisdiction; and
 - framework CPP Housing Chapter policies to hold jurisdictions accountable to requirements in the CPP Housing Chapter, including policies requiring the AHC to (1) review draft comprehensive plans for alignment with the CPP Housing Chapter, (2) conduct monitoring and reporting, and (3) implement a five-year midcycle check-in to identify potential jurisdictional shortfalls in planning for and accommodating housing needs.^{36, 37, 38}

34 Affordable Housing Committee. (2024, November). Regional Affordable Housing Dashboard. King County. [\[link\]](#)

35 Affordable Housing Committee. (2020, September 25). Draft Shared Principles to Guide Future Affordable Housing Revenue Decisions. King County. [\[link\]](#)

36 The AHC began reviewing local comprehensive plans for alignment with the CPP Housing Chapter in 2023. As of June 2025, the AHC had reviewed the plans of 35 jurisdictions, representing 98 percent of King County's total population. For more information on the outcomes of the AHC's Housing-focused Draft Comprehensive Plan Review Program, see Affordable Housing Committee. (2025, May 30). Housing-focused Draft Comprehensive Plan Review Program Evaluation [\[link\]](#)

37 GMPC Motion 21-1, ratified by King County Council in Ordinance 19384, directed AHC to commence a collaborative effort that results in a recommendation for these CPP Housing Chapter amendments. See King County Council Ordinance 19384 [\[link\]](#)

38 King County Clerk of the Council (2023, June). Ordinance 19660. Appendix A: King County GMPC Motion 23-1, a motion recommending amendments to the King County CCPs to the King County Council. [\[link\]](#)



The King County 2024 Comprehensive Plan's Housing Needs Assessment examined population and household characteristics, housing supply, zoning and land capacity, and housing needs across income bands and populations both countywide and in unincorporated King County. Additionally, the assessment addressed racially disparate impacts and evaluated existing strategies and gaps for how well they served all economic segments of the community.

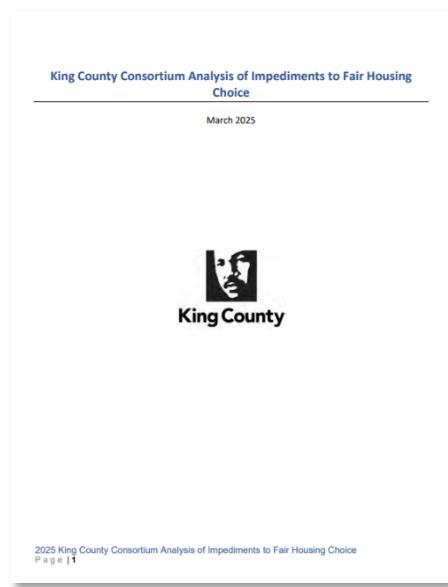
The assessment also included estimations of the funding gap needed to address allocated CPP permanent housing needs for households earning at or below 80 percent of AMI in unincorporated King County, identifying a need for approximately \$450.9 million beyond current funding levels between 2025 and 2044.³⁹



This analysis informed the 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan Update, specifically the Housing and Human Services Chapter.⁴⁰

The **2025 King County Consortium's Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice** analyzes forms of housing discrimination that limit housing choice and stability and set fair housing goals to affirmatively further fair housing. This report included:

- ◆ engagement with housing providers, nonprofits, and governmental program providers to understand existing barriers to fair housing, including high housing costs, exclusionary zoning and land use practices, discrimination, lack of housing support for people with disabilities, insufficient 3+ bedroom units, lack of affordable homeownership opportunities, rigorous screening criteria, and challenges to enforce fair housing rights;
- ◆ analysis of housing need, access, disparities and instability, which found housing needs are greatest for households at or below 30 percent of AMI; persistent income stratification by race and geography; high rates of cost burden for Black and African American renters; low rates of



39 King County Council. (2024). Housing Needs Assessment [Attachment B]. In 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan. [\[link\]](#)

40 King County Council. (2024). 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan. pg. 96 [\[link\]](#)

homeownership among Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander households; and rising evictions rates since 2022, among other findings; and

- ◆ fair housing testing to assess compliance with fair housing laws, which found evidence of discrimination against people with disabilities as well as sources of income and differential treatment based on race or national origin.⁴¹

Contextualizing This Report

This report builds on prior work to define housing needs within King County in a few key ways:

- ◆ **Integrates CPP housing need allocations:** The report incorporates jurisdiction-specific housing need allocations outlined in the 2021 CPPs, offering a shared foundation for planning across jurisdictions and tying needs to regional growth management strategies.
- ◆ **Provides an update on progress toward the long-term goal of eliminating cost burden:** The report provides an update on the King County Regional Affordable Housing Task Force's long-term goals of eliminating cost burden among King County's low-income households.⁴²
- ◆ **Presents current data on key housing indicators:** Drawing on the latest available data, the report assesses trends in population growth, workforce and household characteristics, housing supply, market dynamics, and housing affordability across King County.
- ◆ **Evaluates federal, state, and local funding and tools:** Informed by recent policy and planning efforts—such as the Regional Affordable Housing Task Force's Five-Year Action Plan and the 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan Housing Needs Assessment—the report examines federal, state, and local funding sources and policy mechanisms that can support the construction, preservation, and operation of affordable housing.
- ◆ **Incorporates community engagement insights:** To ground quantitative findings in lived experience, the report synthesizes feedback from previous engagement efforts, including the 2025 King County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice and

41 King County Department of Community and Human Services. (2025, March). 2025 King County Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. King County. [\[link\]](#)

42 Expenditure Restriction 9 of the 2025 King County Budget requests that this report include "an update on King County's progress toward eliminating cost burden among low-income households by 2040," referencing the 244,000 affordable units identified in the 2018 Regional Affordable Housing Task Force's Final Report necessary to eliminate cost burden among households earning at or below 80% of AMI. To ensure consistency with updated state, regional, and countywide housing projections and allocations, however, this report provides an update on progress toward planning for and accommodating housing needs below 80% of AMI by 2044, not 2040.



the 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan, ensuring the report reflects community-identified challenges and priorities.

In addition, the report expands on prior work in several ways:

- ◆ **Provides analysis by subregion and jurisdiction:** Housing needs are not only analyzed countywide but by designated County subregions, Puget Sound Regional Council Regional Geographies, and by jurisdiction (see “Geographic Frameworks Used in This Report” for a description of these subregions).
- ◆ **Introduces novel analyses and data tools:** Chapters explore permitting trends and assess how the current housing stock aligns—or fails to align—with the needs of households by size and income. These analyses shed light on gaps in the housing market that may not be captured by previous assessments.
- ◆ **Estimates funding need to meet housing needs countywide:** Using the 2021 King County CPP’s countywide permanent housing needs, the report projects the funding required to produce and operate housing across income bands—not only in unincorporated King County but countywide—providing a more complete picture of the resources necessary to meet countywide goals.
- ◆ **Offers implications for future planning and policy:** Sections include potential takeaways for policymakers, planners, and researchers, identifying gaps, opportunities, and emerging questions and trends that can inform future strategies and investments.

Geographic Frameworks Used in This Report

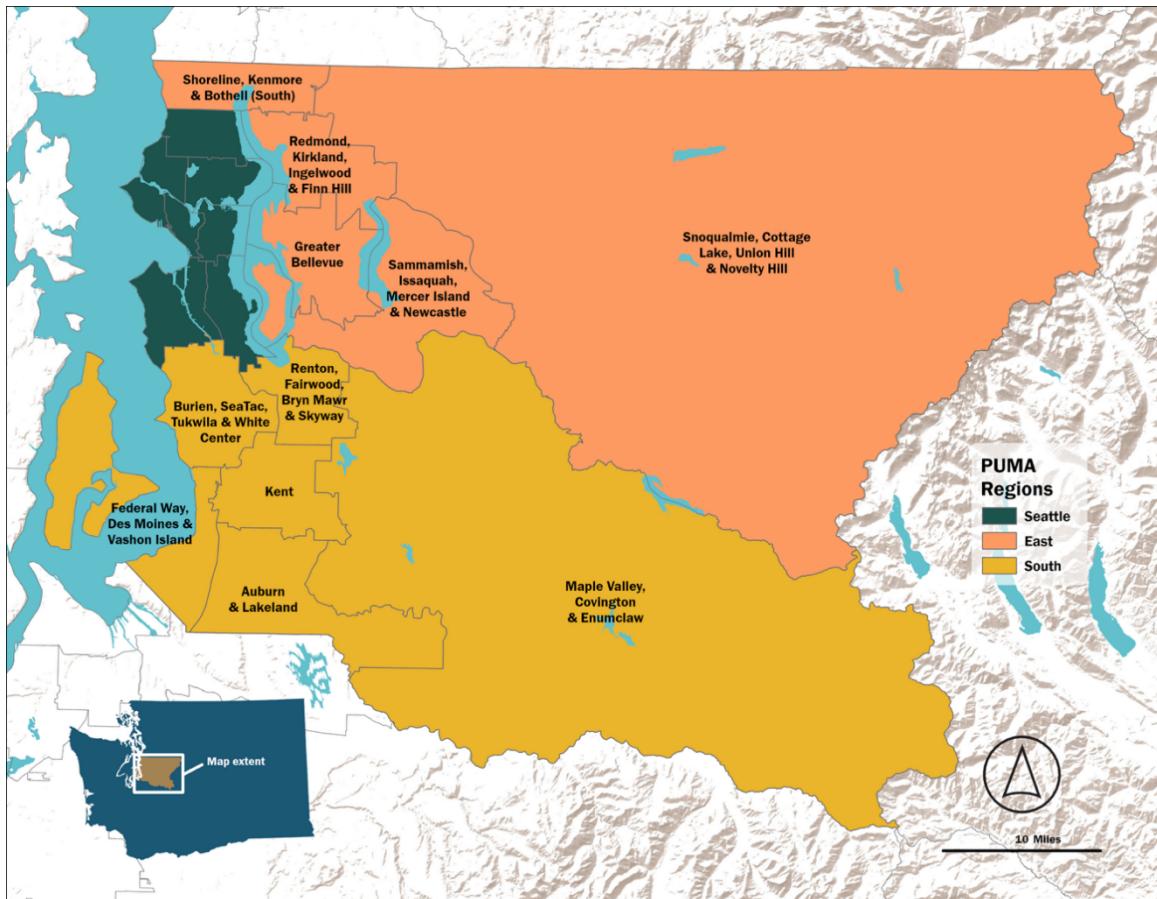
This report assesses housing needs for multiple geographic frameworks. These include:

- ◆ **Countywide and Jurisdictional Reporting:** Throughout the report, many analyses are presented at the countywide level to show regionwide conditions and trends. Additionally, some jurisdiction-level data for all 40 cities and towns within King County are included in Appendix D for more localized references.
- ◆ **King County Subregions:** For purposes of the subregional analysis, this report uses a three-part subregional framework consisting of East, Seattle, and South subregions, including unincorporated areas.⁴³ This framework was designed solely for use in this report.

⁴³ Subregions in this report were defined based on data availability at the necessary geographic scales, consistency with past analyses in King County, and alignment with jurisdictional memberships to subregional collaborations such as ARCH and SKHHP. Although Shoreline and Lake Forest Park were initially intended to be grouped with Seattle in a “Central” subregion, both cities were ultimately placed in the East subregion. This decision was guided by the fact that the Public Use Microsample Area (PUMA) containing Shoreline and Lake Forest Park also contained with Kenmore and Bothell—both East County jurisdictions and ARCH members. This configuration also produced subregions with roughly equivalent populations.



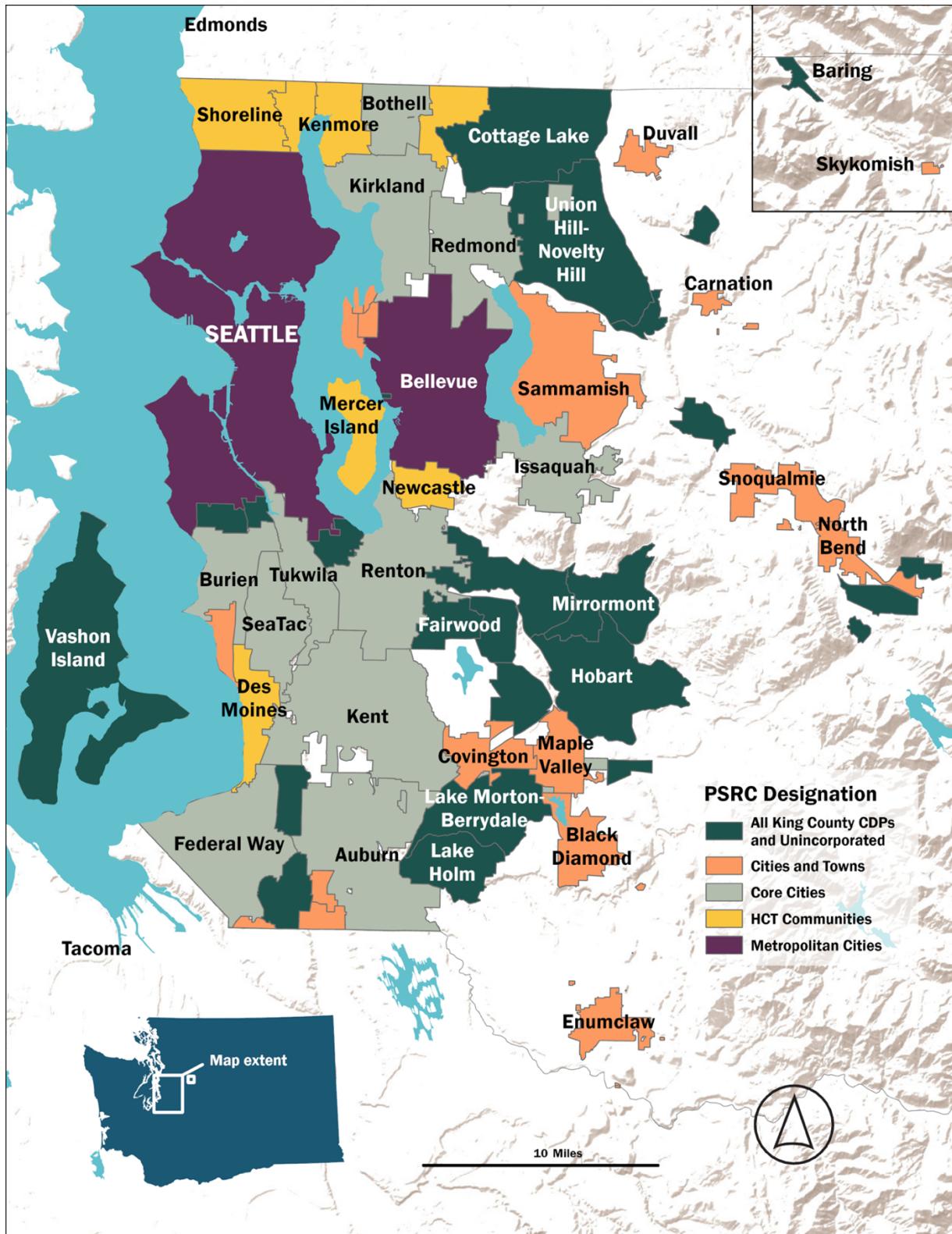
Exhibit 3: King County Subregional Framework, Seattle/East/South



Source: ECONorthwest

- ◆ **PSRC Regional Geographies:** In addition to subregions, the report references the PSRC's Regional Geographies, which include:
 - Metropolitan cities
 - Core cities
 - Cities and towns
 - High-Capacity Transit communities
 - Urban unincorporated areas

Exhibit 4: PSRC Regional Geographies, King County



Source: ECONorthwest



KING COUNTY SUBREGIONAL HOUSING NEEDS

Viewing CPP housing needs at the subregional scale provides context for interpreting patterns presented throughout this report. Exhibit 5 below summarizes housing needs using the Seattle–East–South framework (including unincorporated areas). The 2019 to 2044 total permanent housing needs are 112,000 for Seattle, 106,610 for East King County, 84,655 for South King County, and 5,412 for Urban Unincorporated King County—about 36 percent, 35 percent, 27 percent, and 2 percent of the countywide total permanent housing needs, respectively. The depth of affordability varies by subregion: The East and Seattle have larger shares of needs at 80 percent of AMI or below, the South is more weighted toward 80 percent of AMI and above, and urban unincorporated King County has a smaller overall need with a more balanced mix across income bands.

Exhibit 5. Permanent and Emergency CPP Housing Needs by AMI by King County Subregions, 2019–2044

Region	Permanent Housing Needs	0–30% Non-PSH	0–30% PSH	30–50% AMI	50–80% AMI	80–100% AMI	100–120% AMI	>120% AMI	Emergency
East	106,610	36,176	19,021	22,518	10,410	2,427	2,753	13,305	20,372
Seattle	112,000	28,572	15,024	19,144	7,986	5,422	6,150	29,702	21,401
South	84,655	15,674	8,242	5,984	3,687	6,711	7,605	36,752	16,176
Urban Unincorporated⁴⁴	5,412	1,157	608	571	292	366	415	2,003	1,034
Total	308,677	81,579	42,895	48,217	22,375	14,926	16,923	81,762	58,983

Source: 2021 King County CPPs

Community Voices That Informed This Report

This report integrates insights from a broad range of community engagement efforts conducted across King County between 2021 and 2025. While these engagement activities were not specific to this project, these engagement efforts provided essential context and deepened the data analysis by elevating the lived experiences of residents, community-based organizations, and local stakeholders.

Throughout the report, results and themes from these efforts are woven alongside the quantitative analysis. These voices reflect the priorities, barriers, and aspirations of

⁴⁴ Housing needs in the CPPs are allocated to “urban unincorporated areas,” which include Potential Annexation Areas within PSRC’s high-capacity transit communities and urban unincorporated regional geographies. Because these needs were not assigned to specific Census-designated places, they cannot be precisely divided among the subregions in this report. An “Urban Unincorporated” category is included in the exhibit to better reflect the distribution of need, but it is not treated as a separate subregion elsewhere in this report.



communities most impacted by housing affordability, displacement risk, and inequities in access to housing and services.

The engagement insights come from several recent countywide initiatives, including:

- ◆ **King County's 2024 Comprehensive Plan Housing Needs Assessment:** Adopted in December 2024, this assessment evaluated current and projected housing needs both countywide and in unincorporated King County to inform the 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan Update. Engagement included work with an Equity Work Group made up of community representatives, interviews, a survey, and public events.⁴⁵
- ◆ **2025 King County Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice:** This HUD-mandated five-year plan identifies barriers to fair housing access through community engagement, data analysis, and policy review. It also includes jurisdiction-specific data to illuminate local inequities and guide strategies to improve fair housing outcomes. Community engagement included interviews with 24 different organizations, including but not limited to service providers, housing advocates and partners, community-based organizations.⁴⁶
- ◆ **Draft King County Consortium 2025–2029 Consolidated Plan:** This is the five-year Consolidated Plan developed by King County's DCHS. It establishes community housing and development investment priorities and strategies aligned with HUD programs—including the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program. Engagement included a stakeholder survey administered to the King County Consortium and a survey administered by the King County Department of Local Services to residents living in unincorporated areas of the county, both of which gauged perspectives on local housing and community development needs.⁴⁷
- ◆ **Equitable Development Initiative Implementation Plans (2023–2024):** The King County Equitable Development Initiative (EDI) provides capacity building and capital funds for community-driven and community-owned development projects that address residential and cultural displacement throughout King County. King County EDI activities and investments are guided by the framework, vision, and recommendations put forth in the King County EDI Phase 1 and Phase 2 implementation plan:
 - **Phase 1 (2023)** established the program framework, including EDI's guiding principles, eligibility criteria, funding priorities, and a transparent selection process for projects.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ King County. (December 2024). 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan. Appendix B – Housing Needs Assessment [\[link\]](#)

⁴⁶ King County. (March 2025). King County Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. [\[link\]](#)

⁴⁷ King County. (May 2024). Draft King County Consortium 2025–2029 Consolidated Plan. [\[link\]](#)

⁴⁸ King County. King County Equitable Development Initiative Implementation Plan Phase 1. (January 2023) [\[link\]](#)



- **Phase 2 (2024)** focused on operationalizing and refining the framework, including governance structure, decision-making processes, and accountability measures. It outlined strategies for technical assistance, capacity-building, and ongoing engagement to ensure funded projects achieve long-term, community-led outcomes.⁴⁹

Engagement occurred across both implementation plans through a [Community Planning Workgroup](#) with representatives from White Center Community Development Association, POCAAN, Comunidad Latina de Vashon, Eastside for All, Interdependent Law PLLC, Mother Africa, Living Well Kent, Global to Local, Chief Seattle Club, Duwamish Valley Affordable Housing Coalition, Skyway Coalition, Khmer Community of Seattle King County, and Multicultural Community Coalition.

- ◆ **Skyway-West Hill and North Highline Anti-Displacement Strategies Report (2021):** Outlines community-led strategies to prevent displacement and promote equitable growth in this unincorporated King County area. It addresses rising housing costs and economic inequities through actions such as preserving and producing affordable housing, strengthening tenant protections, supporting small businesses and workforce development, and safeguarding cultural assets. Engagement included interactive community workshops, community meetings and working sessions, community-led surveys of youth and small business owners, public input website and survey, and meetings with community-based organizations.⁵⁰⁵¹

Data Limitations

This analysis draws on the most current data available to provide a comprehensive assessment of housing need, affordability, and production across King County whenever possible. However, several common data limitations constrain the precision and completeness of findings. Key limitations include:

- ◆ **Lag in household income and rent data:** Estimates of housing affordability rely on the most recent American Community Survey and HUD data available, which are published with a time lag. The most recent data available from these sources reflect 2023. As a result, this analysis uses 2023 AMI limits rather than 2025 AMI limits to align with the time period covered by these data sources.
- ◆ **Incomplete permitting data by jurisdiction:** While new housing construction is a critical indicator of housing supply trends, this report does not include jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction permitting and pipeline analysis. There is no comprehensive data source

⁴⁹ King County. (August 2024). King County Equitable Development Initiative Implementation Plan Phase 2. [\[link\]](#)

⁵⁰ King County. (September 2021). Skyway-West Hill and North Highline Anti-displacement Strategies Report. [\[link\]](#)

⁵¹ See Appendix C of this report for descriptions of each community engagement effort and for detailed community engagement findings organized by relevance to by expenditure restriction requirements.



that includes permitting data for all jurisdictions in King County. Permitting data can vary widely in quality and completeness across jurisdictions. A new composite permitting dataset was unable to be collected and compiled for this analysis due to time and resource constraints. Additionally, information about the affordability of units in the permitting pipeline is difficult to ascertain for both income-restricted and market-rate units because affordability levels often change during the development process.

- ◆ **Limited detail on unit types in assessor data:** Analyses that rely on King County Assessor data—such as unit size or structure type—may not capture the full diversity of the housing stock. This is particularly true for distinguishing between missing middle housing forms (e.g., duplexes or accessory dwelling units) and traditional multifamily units, as property classifications and reporting standards differ across jurisdictions.
- ◆ **Challenges accurately reporting on current, unit-level housing affordability:** King County DCHS maintains the King County Income-Restricted Housing Database (IRHD), which is a comprehensive database of the number, location, and affordability level of income-restricted units in King County. Data is provided by City of Seattle Office of Housing, King County DCHS, King County Housing Authority, ARCH, and the Washington State Housing Finance Commission, as well as jurisdictions in King County. While this report draws from the best available datasets maintained by King County, precise and up-to-date affordability information for individual housing units is difficult to obtain. Affordability can change quickly as rents shift, units turn over, or properties undergo renovations. These challenges are compounded in tracking the inventory of income-restricted housing, which is dynamic—properties are regularly added, restructured, or expire out of affordability covenants. Further, the IRHD does not track units in the development pipeline as unit counts and affordability levels often change during the development process.
- ◆ **Gaps in demographic representation:** Some populations and household structures are not fully captured in the primary data sources used (e.g., the American Community Survey and Public Use Microdata Sample). Notably, there are limitation and reliability concerns with data related to many different households and communities, including:
 - LGBTQIA+ households;
 - People with developmental disabilities with specific housing accommodations;
 - Multigenerational households; and
 - Unhoused or precariously housed individuals.

As a result, the unique housing needs of these groups may not be explicitly reflected in this report. However, this does not mean housing policies cannot or should not be developed with these communities in mind. Policymakers should consider inclusive design, accessibility, and flexible unit configurations to better support all households.



2. Population and Household Characteristics

King County's housing needs are shaped by a changing population and countywide disparities in access to opportunity. As the County plans for continued growth, understanding how these trends intersect with housing supply and affordability is critical. This chapter explores how demographic and socioeconomic factors influence housing demand across the county.

Key Takeaways

- ◆ **Population growth concentrated in Seattle and East King County:** The county's population is projected to grow nearly 20 percent by 2044, with the fastest growth in Seattle and East King County, while South King County remains the most populous.
- ◆ **Younger adults in Seattle; more families in East and South King County:** Age distribution varies sharply by region, shaping demand for different housing types.
- ◆ **South King County is the most racially and ethnically diverse subregion:** Diversity brings varied housing needs but also reflects inequities in homeownership and affordability.
- ◆ **High-income households concentrated in East King County; lower-income households in South King County:** The middle-income share is shrinking countywide, widening the affordability gap.
- ◆ **Household sizes are smallest in Seattle and largest in South King County:** Larger household sizes often reflect multigenerational living and drive demand for bigger housing units.
- ◆ **Renters face higher cost burden and greater housing instability:** Renters are more likely to be lower income and racially diverse, with the most severe affordability challenges in South King County.



WHAT THIS CHAPTER COVERS

This chapter explores how demographic, economic, and geographic trends across King County shape current and future housing needs. It covers:

- » **Population Growth and Age Trends:** Population change across King County subregions, including projections through 2044, with attention to age composition—such as younger populations in Seattle and aging populations in suburban areas.
- » **Racial, Ethnic, and Household Diversity:** Shifts in racial and ethnic composition across geographies, highlighting growing diversity in South King County.
- » **Disability and Accessibility Needs:** Geographic patterns in households with ambulatory disabilities and the implications for accessible housing and services.
- » **Household Income and Tenure:** Changes in household income distribution and how they intersect with housing tenure patterns—where households rent or own—by income, age, and race.
- » **Housing Cost Burden:** Analysis of households experiencing cost burden, with a focus on renters, communities of color, and disparities by subregion.

Population Trends

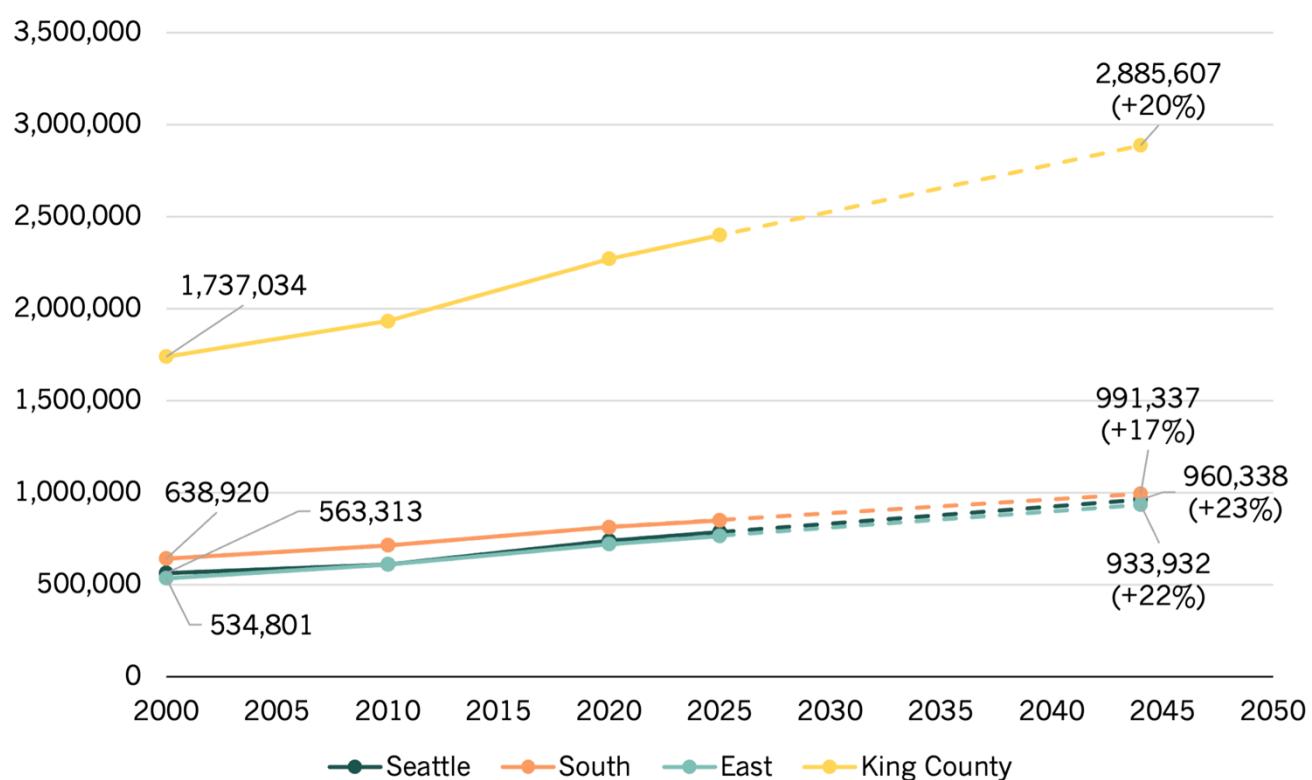
Since 2000, King County has experienced strong and sustained population growth, reflecting the region's expanding economy, increasing urbanization across most of its jurisdictions, and enduring desirability as a place to live and work. Exhibit 6 shows the county's population growth since 2000. From 2000 to 2010, the county's population grew from just over 1.7 million to over 1.9 million, about an 11 percent increase. Growth accelerated over the following decade, with the population reaching nearly 2.3 million in 2020, a nearly 18 percent increase from 2010. Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) projections indicate continued but more moderate growth, with the population expected to reach around 2.4 million by 2025 and climb to almost 2.9 million by 2044, representing about a 20 percent increase from 2025.

Population growth across King County is expected to be distributed relatively evenly among its three major subregions—Seattle, East, and South—through 2044.



- ♦ Seattle, the region's primary urban core, is projected to grow from 783,927 in 2025 to just over 960,000 in 2044, an increase of almost 23 percent.
- ♦ East King County, encompassing cities like Bellevue, Redmond, and Issaquah, is expected to see a rise from 764,451 to just over 930,000, growing by about 22 percent over the same period.
- ♦ South King County, including Kent, Auburn, and Renton, has the largest population and will continue to grow through 2044. Its population is forecasted to grow at a slower rate than the other subregions, growing from 849,359 to slightly over 990,000, just under a 17 percent increase.

Exhibit 6: King County Population Growth, 2000–2044



Source: Washington State OFM April 1 Official Population Estimates.

Note: 2044 population projections may differ from adopted totals in the King County CCPs due to population growth since adoption.

While growth is expected to be relatively balanced across the subregions, the Seattle and East subregions are projected to grow slightly faster than the South, even though it is expected to remain the most populous subregion.

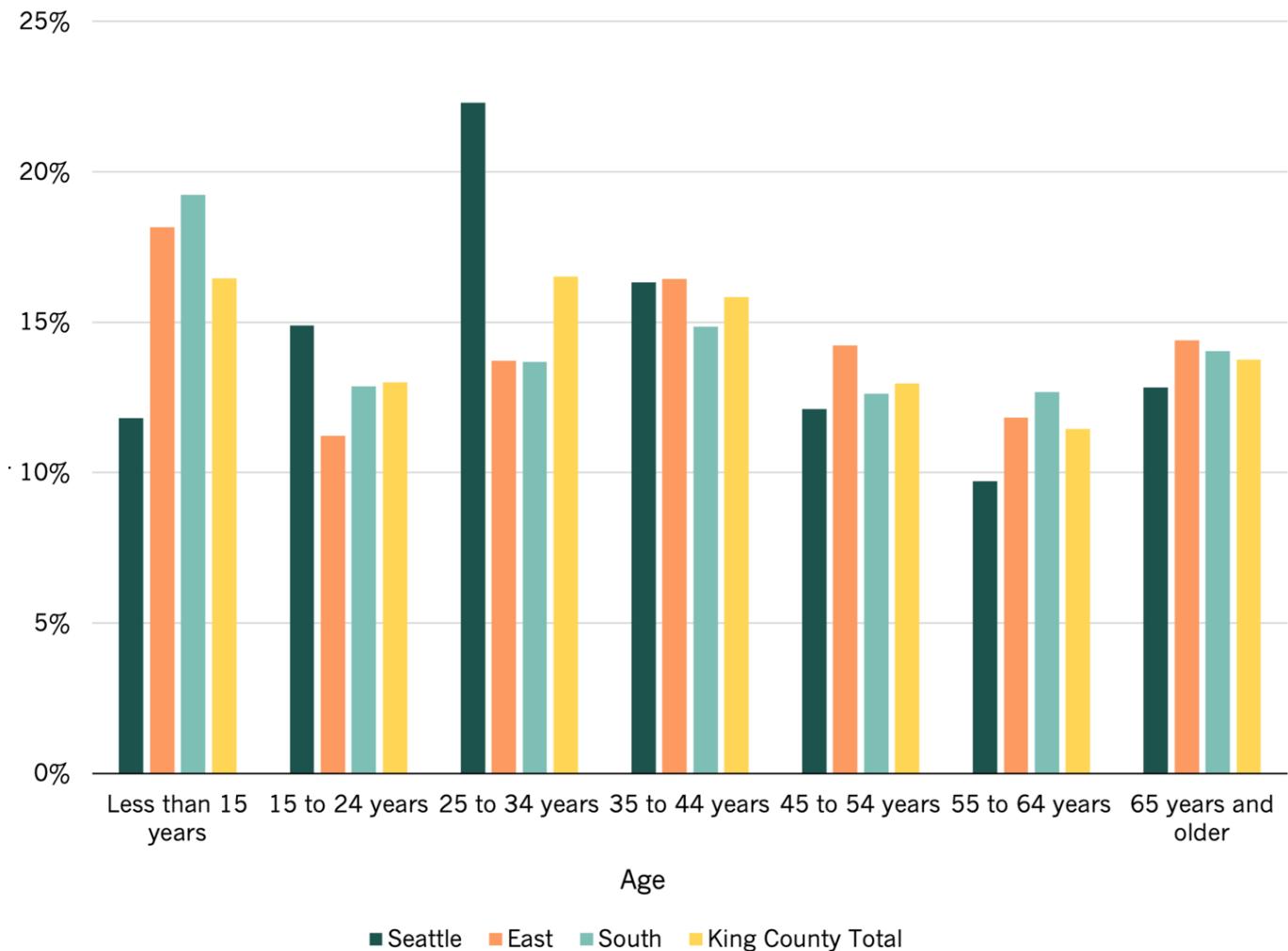
Age

Exhibit 7 shows the age composition across King County and reveals notable variation across its subregions.

- ◆ Seattle has the youngest adult population profile, with the highest share of residents aged 25 to 34 (22 percent), significantly above the countywide average (17 percent). It also has the lowest proportion of children under 15 (12 percent), suggesting a concentration of younger working-age adults and fewer families with children.
- ◆ East and South King County both have larger shares of children under 15, at 18 percent and 19 percent, respectively, compared to 16 percent countywide. These patterns likely reflect a higher prevalence of family households in these areas.
- ◆ Across all subregions, the share of residents aged 35 to 54 is relatively consistent, ranging from 12 percent to 16 percent, aligning closely with the county average.
- ◆ The older adult population (65 and older) is evenly distributed, comprising 13 percent to 14 percent of the population in each subregion, closely matching the 14 percent countywide share.



Exhibit 7: Age Distribution, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), accessed at: data.census.gov

The age distribution across subregions highlights a central core dominated by younger adults and outer subregions with more young children.

AGING IN PLACE: WHAT OLDER ADULTS NEED

Engagement conducted as part of the 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan Housing Needs Assessment revealed that older adults across King County have concerns about the affordability and suitability of housing for aging in place. Community members aged 62+ expressed fears of rent increases, especially those on fixed incomes, and emphasized the need for affordable, accessible housing that supports multigenerational living.⁵²

To age in place with dignity and safety, aging households may have a range of needs:⁵³

- » Accessible home features (e.g., zero-step entries, grab bars, single-level living)
- » In-home support services (e.g., home care, meal delivery, transportation)
- » Affordable housing choices, including smaller units and shared housing models
- » Housing rehabilitation assistance for aging homeowners to maintain safe housing

Interviews also revealed concerns and questions about the availability of affordable downsizing options and whether older adults can or want to relocate into them.^{54, 55} Meeting these needs will require both housing investment and service coordination.

Race and Ethnicity

Exhibit 9 shows the distribution of race and ethnicity across King County and its subregions. The South subregion is the most racially and ethnically diverse, while the Seattle and East subregions have higher proportions of White, non-Hispanic residents when compared to the county overall.

- ◆ White, non-Hispanic residents represent the largest single race and ethnic group in each subregion, but the share is highest in Seattle (60 percent) and lowest in the South (47 percent), compared to 54 percent countywide.
- ◆ The Asian, non-Hispanic population is most concentrated in the East subregion (27 percent), well above the 20 percent county average. The Seattle and South subregions fall

52 Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021–2025: 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan Housing Needs Assessment, (B-133-B-134)

53 Farber, Nicholas, Shinkle, Douglas, Lynott, Jana, Fox-Grage, Wendy, Harrell, Rodney. Aging in Place: A State Survey of Livability Policies and Practices. Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute, December 2011.

54 King County Consortium. (2025, March). 2025 King County Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. King County Department of Community and Human Services.

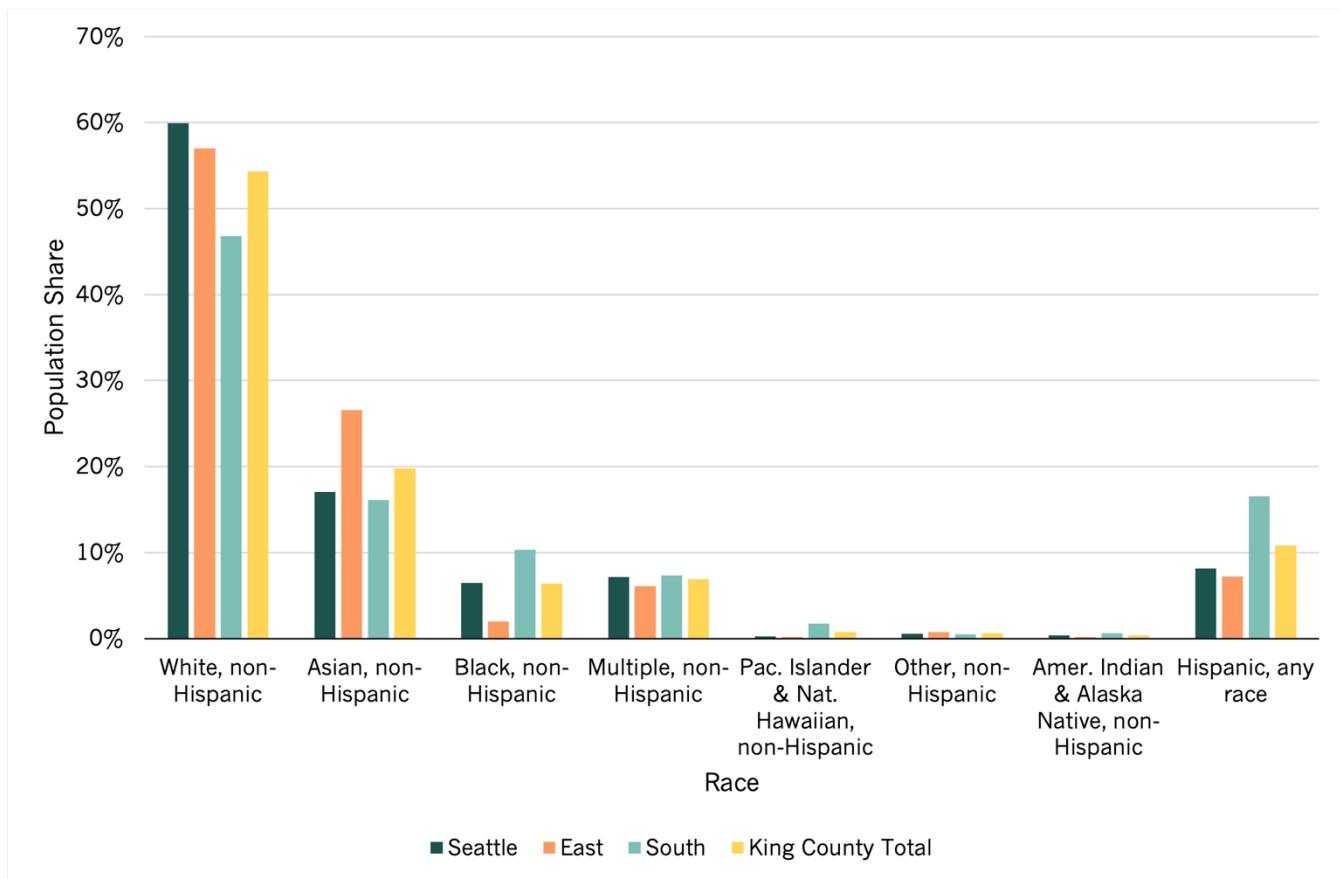
55 This challenge is not unique to King County. By 2030, all Baby Boomers will be 65 or older and one in five U.S. residents will be retirement age, prompting similar planning challenges nationwide (U.S. Census Bureau, The Graying of America, 2023).



behind both the county and the East subregion, at 17 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

- ◆ Black, non-Hispanic residents make up 10 percent of South King County's population—the highest share among subregions and above the 6 percent county average. Seattle aligns with the countywide average at 6 percent, while the East reports only 2 percent.
- ◆ The Hispanic population (any race) is most prominent in South King County (17 percent), compared to just 8 percent in Seattle and 7 percent in East.
- ◆ Other groups such as those identifying with multiple races, Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native have relatively small but regionally varied shares, with South King County again tending to show slightly higher diversity in these categories.

Exhibit 8: Race and Ethnicity, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

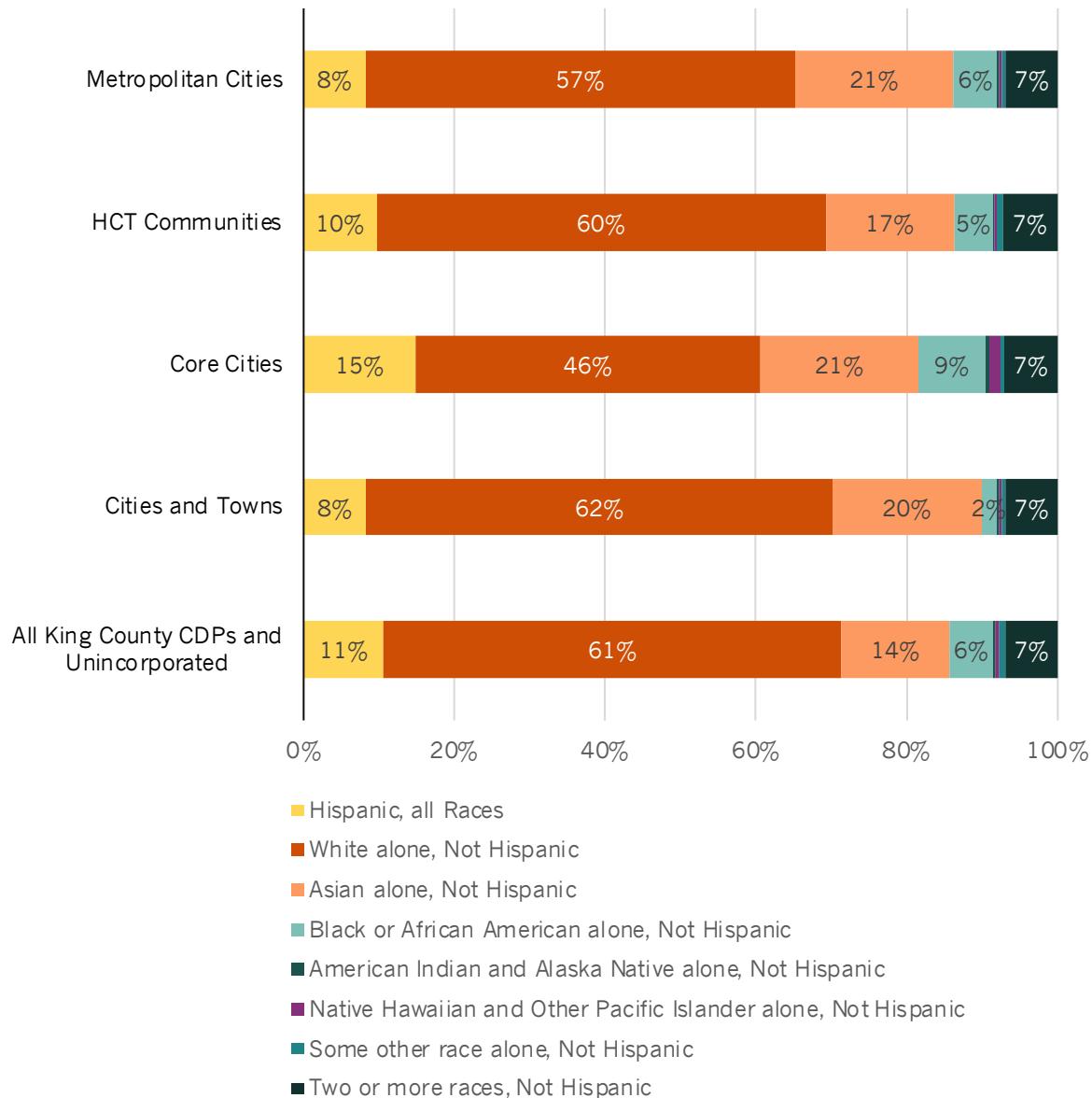
South King County is the most racially and ethnically diverse subregion, likely contributing to unique cultural dynamics and housing policy needs within the broader county.

Race and ethnicity were also examined across the PSRC Regional Geographies. The PSRC Regional Geographies reveals meaningful variation in racial and ethnic composition across different types of communities in King County. While White, non-Hispanic residents are the largest group across all geographies, their share is lowest in more urbanized and diverse areas.

- ◆ Core cities, such as Kent and Renton, are the most racially and ethnically diverse, with the lowest share of White, non-Hispanic residents (46 percent) and the highest shares of Hispanic residents (15 percent) and Black or African American residents (9 percent). They also show a comparatively high proportion of Asian residents (21 percent).
- ◆ Metropolitan cities (e.g., Seattle and Bellevue) and high-capacity transit (HCT) communities also show relatively high diversity. Both have Asian populations at 21 percent and 17 percent, respectively, and slightly above-average representation of Black residents (6 percent and 5 percent). Hispanic shares are lower (8 percent and 10 percent).
- ◆ Cities and towns, often smaller and less urbanized, are the least racially diverse, with the highest White population share (62 percent) and lowest representation of Black (2 percent) and Hispanic residents (8 percent).
- ◆ Unincorporated areas and census-designated places (CDPs) reflect the rest of the county composition, with a White, non-Hispanic share of 61 percent, Asian population at 14 percent, and Hispanic residents at 11 percent.
- ◆ Across all subregions, the percentage of residents identifying as two or more races (7 percent) is consistent, while American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and other races remain small shares of the total population.



Exhibit 9: Race and Ethnicity, PSRC Regional Geographies, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year

Racial and ethnic diversity in King County varies significantly by geography, with core cities and urban centers showing the most diversity and suburban and more rural areas remaining more homogeneous.

CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE HOUSING: WHAT COMMUNITIES NEED

Engagement revealed that many BIPOC, immigrant, and refugee households face barriers to finding affordable housing that reflects their cultural needs, supports their communities, and enables long-term stability. Stakeholders emphasized that displacement, discrimination, and exclusion from homeownership opportunities continue to shape housing outcomes for culturally diverse households across the county.⁵⁶

To support thriving, inclusive communities, households may require:

- » Culturally competent housing services, such as staff who speak residents' languages and access to culturally specific food and services. Engagement conducted within the Skyway-West Hill and North Highline (White Center) communities suggested the importance of having culturally relevant in-house resident services such as staff conversant in residents' languages, in-language programming, transportation services to and from cultural organizations, and ethnically specific food options.
- » Housing near cultural anchors, including institutions, services, and businesses that affirm cultural identity and connection. Engagement findings from the Equitable Development Initiative Phase 2 Report elevated concerns about displacement from communities—especially among Black and Somali residents—who are moving farther south and away from the institutions that support identity, connection, and daily needs.
- » Multigenerational and larger units to prevent overcrowding, particularly for immigrant and refugee households. Engagement conducted during the King County Comprehensive Plan Update found that some families in King County share homes because they cannot afford to live separately. They shared concerns that recent immigrant and refugee families are often unable to find rental units large enough to accommodate their needs, so multiple families will rent a single home to stay together.
- » Affordable ownership opportunities, which remain out of reach for many BIPOC households due to past and ongoing discrimination, lack of intergenerational wealth, and uneven access to credit.⁵⁷ In 2020, Black mortgage applicants were denied at a rate 84 percent higher than White applicants—19.8 percent vs. only 10.7 percent—reflecting ongoing systemic barriers to accessing homeownership nationally. In Washington, mortgage denial rates were much higher for American Indian or Alaska Native (14.7 percent), Black (14.6 percent), Hispanic (14.4 percent), and Pacific Islander (14 percent) applicants, compared to 9.3 percent for White applicants.⁵⁸



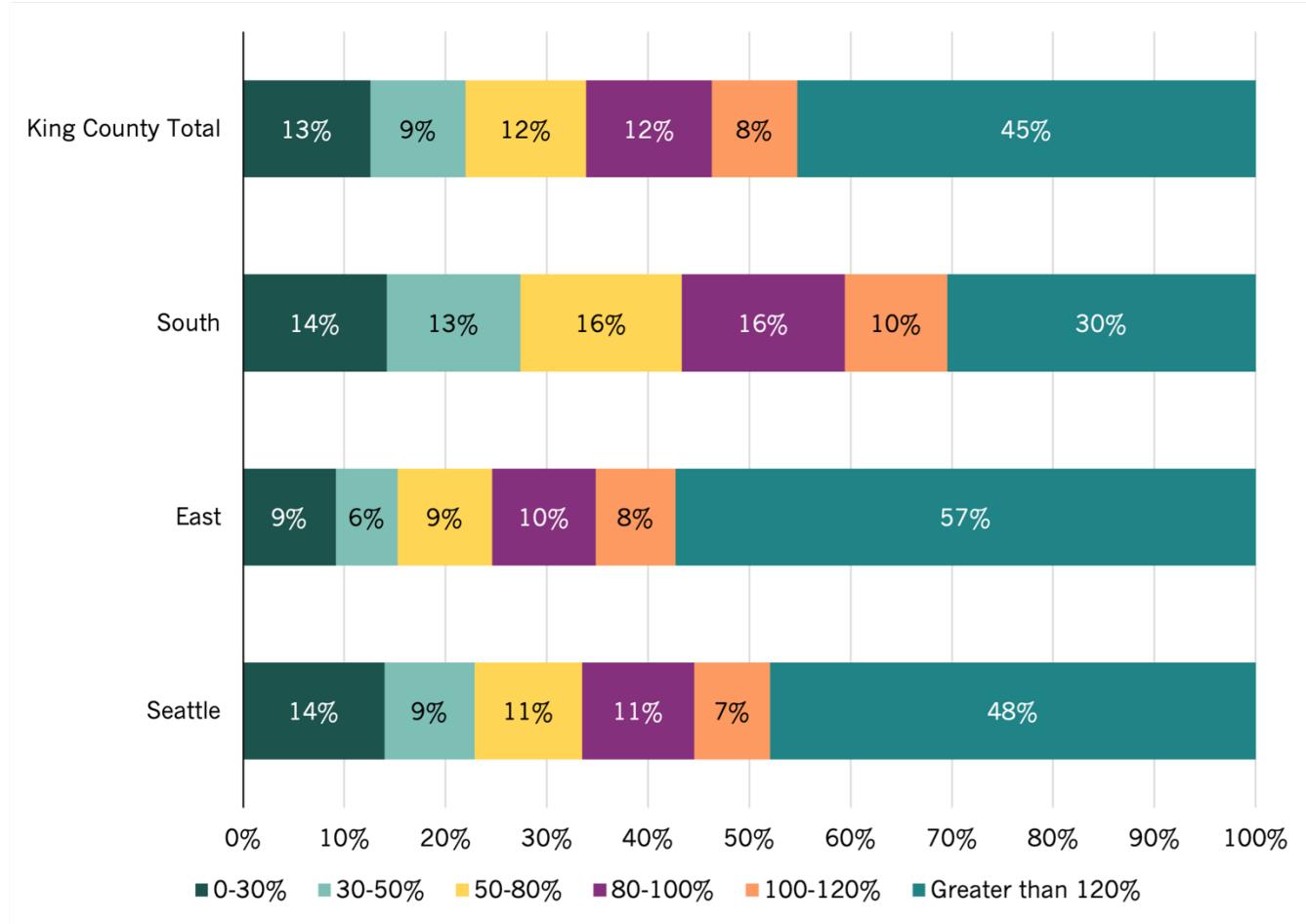
Income Distribution

Exhibit 10 provides an overview of the household income distribution across the subregions in King County. Income bands vary considerably across King County's subregions, with the East subregion standing out as the most affluent and the South subregion exhibiting the greatest share of lower-income households.

- ◆ The East subregion has the highest proportion of households earning above 120 percent of AMI at 57 percent, well above the countywide average of 45 percent. It also has the lowest shares in every lower-income bracket, including just 9 percent earning less than 30 percent of AMI and 6 percent between 30 and 50 percent of AMI.
- ◆ The South subregion has the lowest share of high-income households (30 percent) and the highest concentrations of lower- and moderate-income households. Notably, 14 percent of South households earn less than 30 percent of AMI, and 16 percent fall within both the 50–80 percent and 80–100 percent of AMI ranges—double the East's share in these brackets.
- ◆ Seattle shows a relatively even distribution, with 48 percent of households earning above 120 percent of AMI; however, 14 percent also earn less than 30 percent of AMI—similar to the South.



Exhibit 10: Income Distribution, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

These patterns reveal contrasts in income concentration across the county, underscoring the need for targeted strategies to address housing affordability broadly across the county.

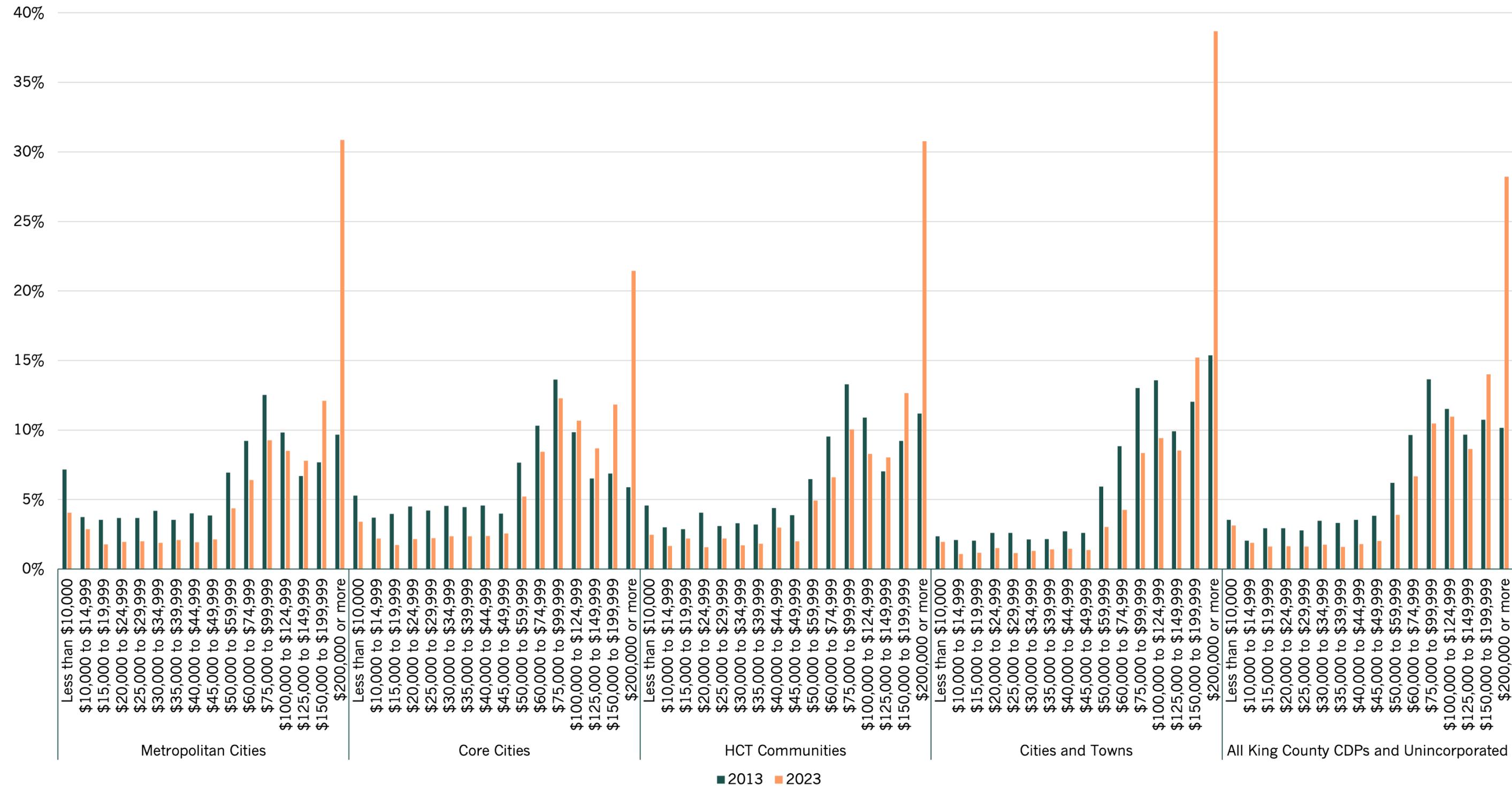
Exhibit 11 shows the change in income distribution examined across the PSRC Regional Geographies. Between 2013 and 2023, all geographies experienced a significant shift in income distribution, with the most pronounced growth occurring in the highest income brackets. Across the PSRC Regional Geographies—metropolitan cities, core cities, HCT communities, cities and towns, and unincorporated areas—the share of households earning \$200,000 or more increased substantially.

- ◆ High-income households (\$200,000+) more than doubled in every geography. Metropolitan cities saw this share jump from about 10 percent to almost 31 percent, core cities from 6 percent to just over 21 percent, and cities and towns from about 15 percent to almost 39 percent—the largest relative increase countywide.



- ◆ Middle-income brackets (\$50,000–\$124,999) generally declined across all areas. For example, the share of households earning \$75,000–\$99,999 in HCT communities dropped from 13 percent to 10 percent, while those in the \$60,000–\$74,999 bracket declined from 9 percent to 6 percent in metropolitan cities.
- ◆ Lower-income households (under \$50,000) decreased in share across every geography. In core cities, for example, the combined share of households earning less than \$50,000 fell from 36 percent in 2013 to 25 percent in 2023, likely reflecting both upward shifts in the income distribution and potential displacement.
 - The most dramatic disparities are seen in the “cities and towns” and “unincorporated” PSRC Regional Geographies of King County, where households earning \$200,000 or more now represent over 28 percent to nearly 39 percent of all households, compared to 10–15 percent a decade prior.



Exhibit 11: Change in Income Distribution, PSRC Regional Geographies, 2013 and 2023


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year

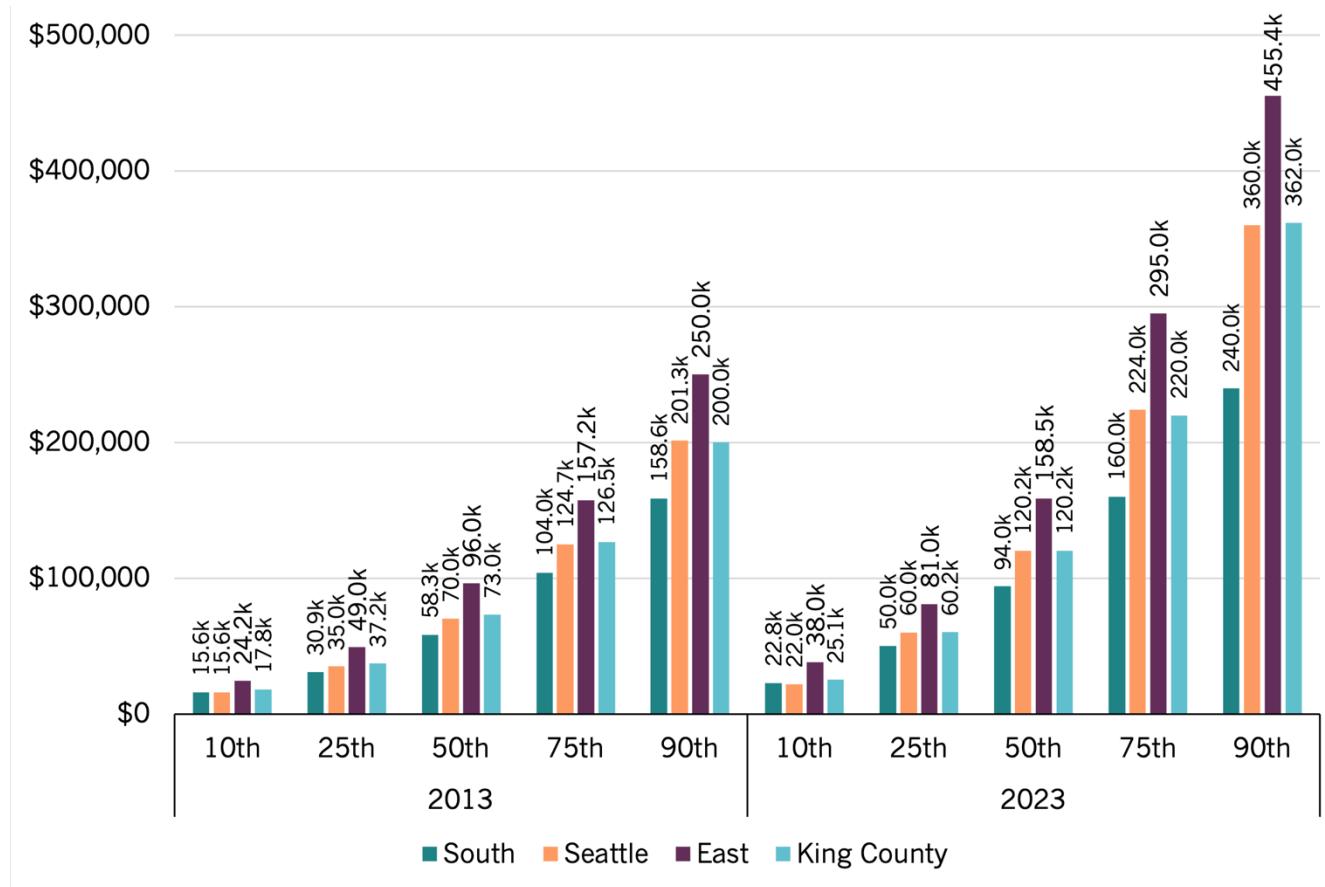
These shifts suggest both growing affluence in many parts of the county and a decline of middle-income households. The increasing concentration of high-income earners—especially in suburban and unincorporated areas—highlights deepening disparities in income distribution across communities.

Exhibit 12 shows that over the past decade, household incomes have risen substantially across all income percentiles and subregions in King County, though the scale and pace of that growth vary significantly by geography and income band.

- ◆ High-income growth outpaced lower-income growth, especially at the 90th percentile. East King County saw 90th percentile incomes rise from \$213,300 in 2013 to \$454,400 in 2023—an increase of over 113 percent. The Seattle and South subregions also saw major gains at the top, rising by 79 percent and 52 percent, respectively.
- ◆ Middle-income households (50th percentile) experienced broad gains, with Seattle and East incomes increasing over 70 percent, while South lagged slightly at 65 percent growth.
- ◆ Lower-income households (10th and 25th percentiles) saw more modest increases, especially in the South. For example, at the 10th percentile, South incomes rose only 46 percent, compared to 68 percent in East. This widening gap suggests growing income inequality.



Exhibit 12: Change in Nominal Household Income by Quintile/Quartile, 2013 and 2023



Source: PUMS ACS 2023 5-Year and 2013 5-Year

Across all percentiles, East King County consistently has the highest income bands, reflecting its status as the region's most affluent subregion. Meanwhile, South King County remains the most economically constrained, with the lowest incomes across most percentiles and the smallest growth at the top end.

Household Size

There are 927,817 total households in King County and household size varies notably across King County's subregions, reflecting differences in housing types, demographics, and neighborhood characteristics.⁵⁹

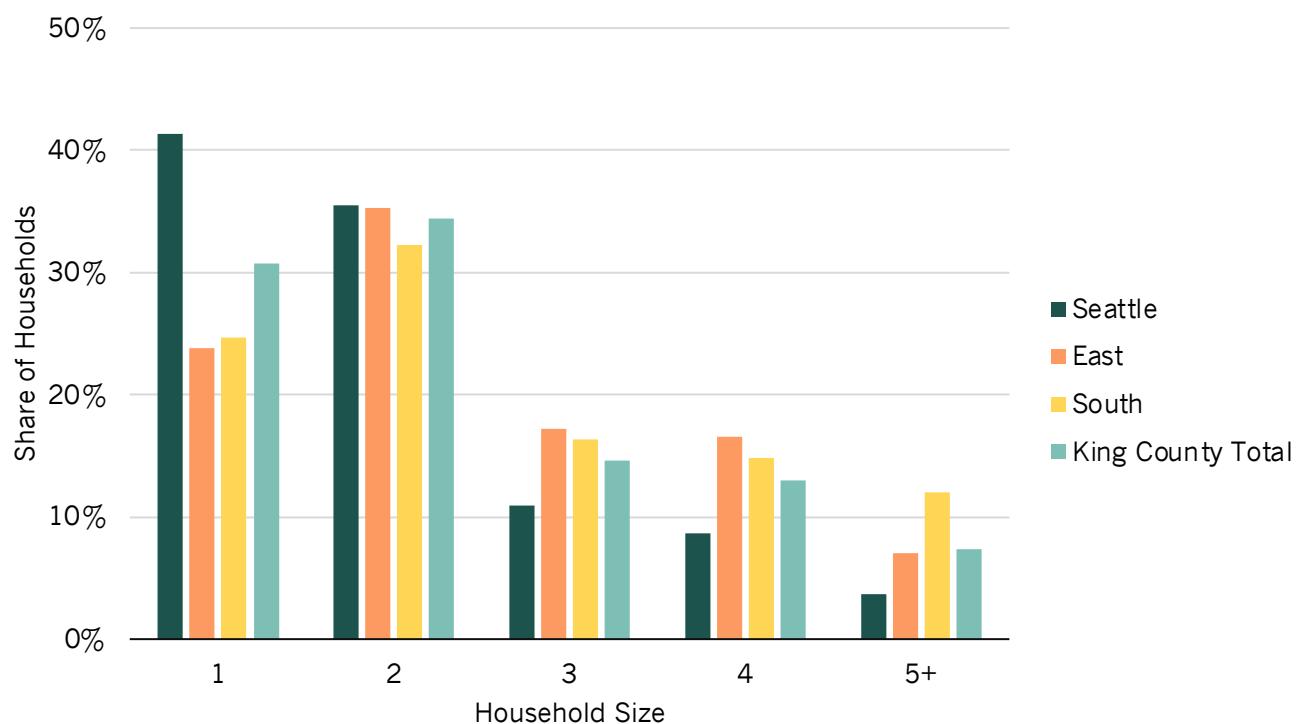
- Seattle has a much higher share of smaller households than the other subregions, with 41 percent of households made up of single individuals—well above the county average of 31 percent.

⁵⁹ 2023 ACS 5-Year



- ♦ South King County has the highest share of large households, with 12 percent containing five or more people, nearly triple the share in Seattle. South also has a lower proportion of 1- and 2-person households and a relatively even distribution across 3-, 4-, and 5-person households.
- ♦ In East King County, while most households are 1- and 2-person households like the other subregions, it does have elevated shares of 3- and 4-person households (17 percent each) and a moderately high presence of 5+ person households (7 percent).
- ♦ Across the county overall, 2-person households are the most common (34 percent), followed by 1-person households (31 percent).

Exhibit 13: Household Size, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

Small to midsize households make up the majority of households across the region, while larger households are more heavily represented in the East and South subregions.

Exhibit 14 shows how household sizes have changed across the subregions between 2000 and 2020. Household sizes across the three subregions have remained relatively stable over the past two decades, with some notable shifts. In Seattle, the average household size declined slightly from 2.18 in 2000 to 2.13 in 2020, reflecting the city's higher share of smaller households, including singles and couples without children. In contrast, South King County has seen growth in its household size, likely reflecting the availability of more affordable and larger housing options as well as demographic trends such as multigenerational living in South King County.



Exhibit 14: Change in Household Size, King County Subregions, 2000–2020

	2000	2010	2020
East	2.56	2.53	2.58
Seattle	2.18	2.15	2.13
South	2.63	2.69	2.77

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census, accessed at data.census.gov

Disability

In 2023, approximately 13 percent of households in King County—or more than 82,000 households—included at least one person with an ambulatory difficulty.

- ◆ The South subregion has the highest share and number of affected households, with 9 percent of households—over 38,000 in total—reporting the presence of a person with ambulatory disability.
- ◆ Both the Seattle and East subregions report a lower prevalence of 7 percent, with 24,125 and 19,812 households affected, respectively.

Exhibit 15: Household with the Presence of Person(s) with Ambulatory Difficulty Disability, King County Subregion Framework, 2023

Geography	Percentage	# Of Households
Seattle	7%	24,125
East	7%	19,812
South	13%	38,339
King County	9%	82,276

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov

Even relatively small percentages translate to tens of thousands of households navigating challenges related to mobility, which have important implications for access to safe and accessible housing options, reliable transportation, and supportive services across King County.



ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities face distinct housing barriers, including difficulty finding homes that are affordable, physically accessible, and supportive of independent living while also allowing them to receive supportive services within their homes or communities.⁶⁰ People with disabilities—particularly those with low incomes and developmental disabilities—face acute housing challenges.

Key concerns highlighted in engagement conducted as part of the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice include:

- » Limited supply of affordable housing that meets accessibility needs (e.g., step-free entry, wide doorways).
- » Individuals with developmental disabilities may face risk of eviction due to unintentional noise or property damage, and a prior history of eviction further exacerbates the challenges of renting by persons with disabilities.
- » Landlords' failure to respond appropriately to reasonable accommodation requests.⁶¹

Additionally, gaps in data obscure the needs of people with sensory, psychiatric, and cognitive disabilities. Meeting the full range of disability-related housing needs will require accessible design, supportive services, and stronger enforcement of fair housing laws.⁶²

Homelessness in King County

According to the 2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, there are 16,868 individuals experiencing homelessness in King County.⁶³ While the PIT Count provides a useful snapshot of homelessness on a single night, it is widely recognized as an undercount because it misses households who are doubled up, unstably housed, or temporarily sheltered outside the formal system. The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data, by tracking households who engage with homeless services throughout the year, offers a more comprehensive picture of housing instability and the scale of need across the county.

HMIS is a standardized database used by communities across the United States to collect data on individuals and households experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. HMIS tracks information on who is accessing homeless services—such as emergency shelter,

⁶⁰ Abigail Lindsay and Jaque King. "Evaluating housing concerns for people with physical disabilities." *Center for Research and Health Transformation*. December 12, 2022, [[link](#)]

⁶¹ "King County Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice." King County. March 2025, [[link](#)]

⁶² Abigail Lindsay and Jaque King. "Evaluating housing concerns for people with physical disabilities." *Center for Research and Health Transformation*. December 12, 2022, [[link](#)]

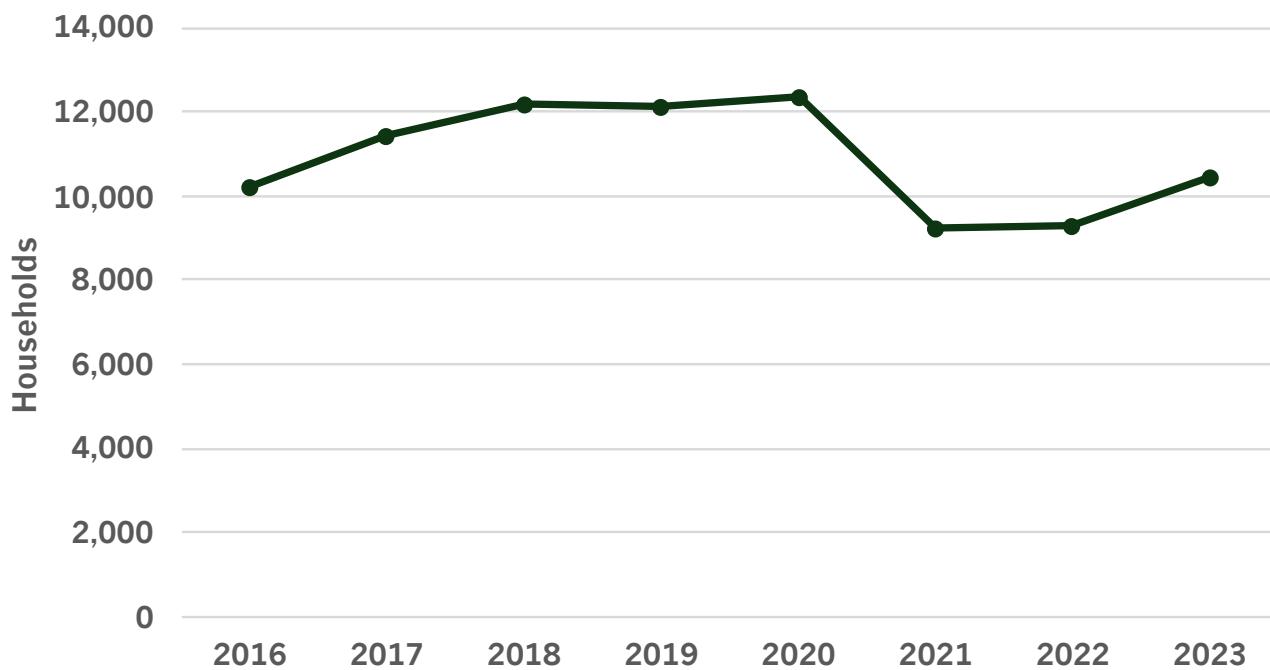
⁶³ "King County 2024 Point in Time Count." King County Regional Homelessness Authority. March 2025. [[link](#)]



transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing—as well as their demographic characteristics and service outcomes. This dataset provides an important lens into demand for homeless services and how it has changed over time.⁶⁴

Exhibit 16 below shows the HMIS data for King County between 2016 and 2023. The number of households accessing homeless services in King County grew steadily, rising from about 10,200 households in 2016 to more than 12,200 households in 2020. This increase could reflect both persistent housing instability in the county and improvements in system coverage and data collection. However, in 2021 the number of households fell sharply to about 9,100 and remained at this lower level in 2022. This drop may be partly explained by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted service delivery and shifted demand patterns as federal and state emergency rental assistance and eviction moratoria provided alternative supports for at-risk households. In 2023, households accessing homeless services in King County increased by 13 percent to 10,381. This recent uptick brought the countywide total to slightly above 2016 levels but still below the 2020 peak.

Exhibit 16: Households Accessing Programs Participating in HMIS on January 31 of each year from 2016 to 2023



Source: King County Regional Homelessness Authority, 2025, "Households accessing services in the homeless response system," King County's Homeless Response System, accessed: <https://kcrha.org/data-overview/>

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). Coordinating data systems for better outcomes: A guide for federal, state, and local partners. Retrieved [August 24, 2025], from [\[link\]](#).

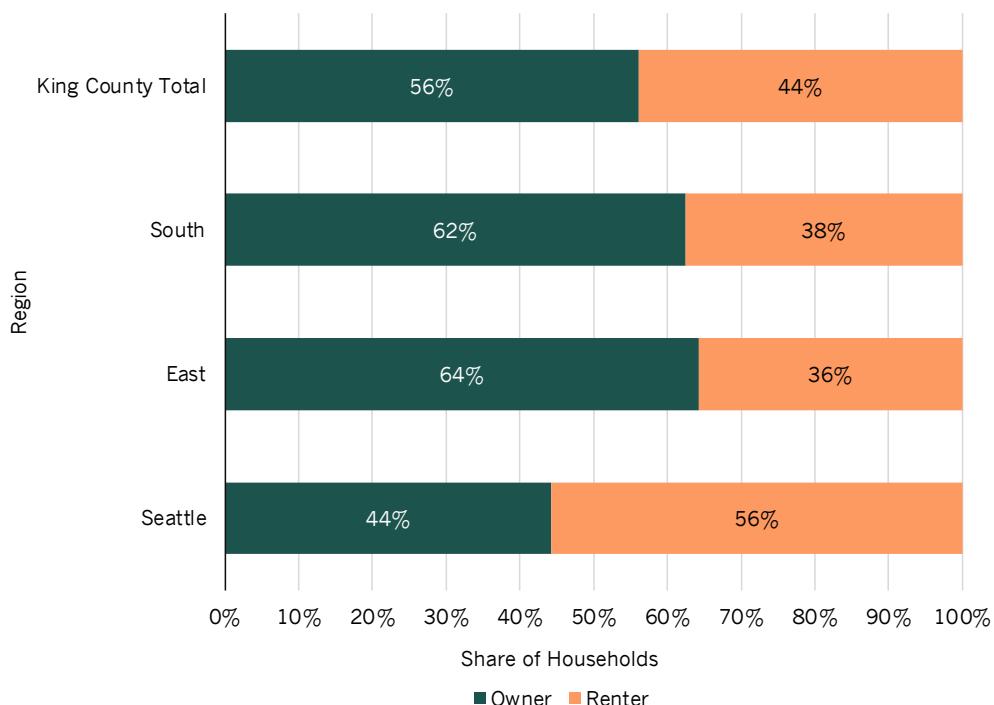


Household Tenure

Housing tenure varies widely across King County, with notable distinctions between urban and suburban subregions. Countywide, a majority of households (56 percent) are owner-occupied, while 44 percent are renters, but this balance shifts considerably by geography.

- ◆ Seattle is the only subregion where renters outnumber homeowners, with 56 percent of households renting—reflecting the city’s higher concentration of multifamily housing, smaller households, and younger demographic profile.
- ◆ East King County has the highest homeownership rate, with 64 percent of households owning their homes. The South subregion follows closely with a 62 percent ownership rate, both surpassing the county average.

Exhibit 17: Tenure, King County Subregion Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov

Household Tenure by Size

Household size in King County shows clear differences between owner- and renter-occupied households, with renters more concentrated in smaller units and owners more often in larger households.

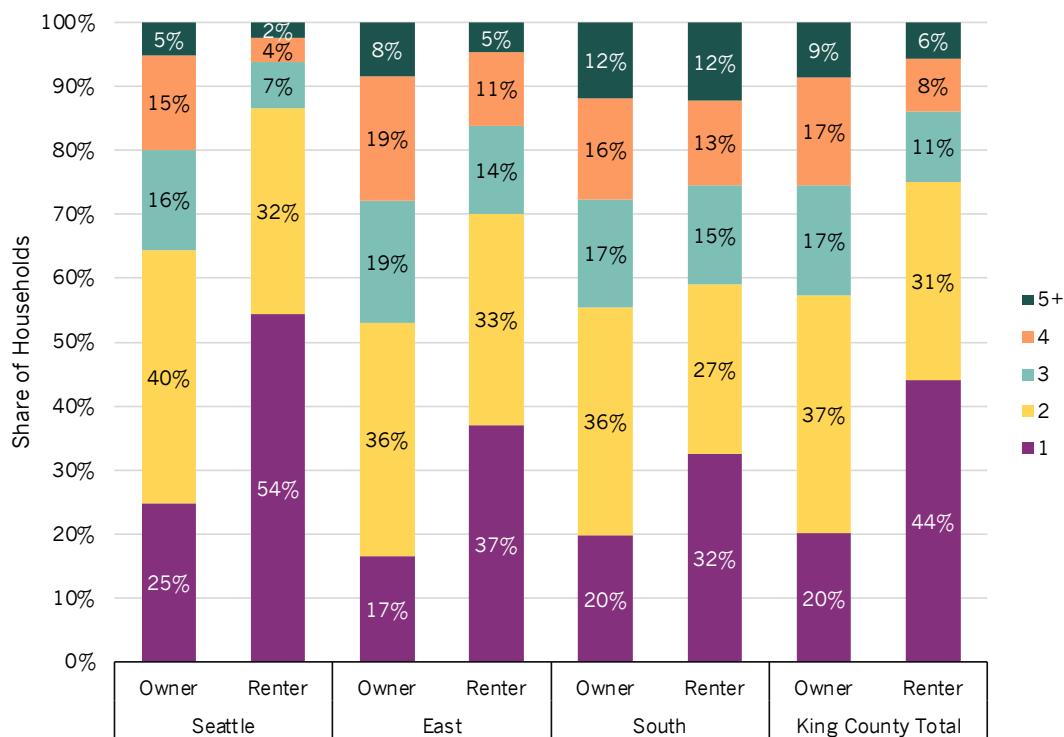
- ◆ Renter households tend to be smaller: Countywide, 44 percent of renters live alone, compared to just 20 percent of owners. This pattern is especially pronounced in Seattle, where more than half (54 percent) of renter households are single-person.



- ◆ Owners households tend to be larger: Across King County, 43 percent of owner households have three or more people, with the largest shares in South King County, where 12 percent of owners live in households with five or more people.
- ◆ South King County has the largest renter households: Twelve percent of renters in the South live in households of five or more people—twice the county average for renters.
- ◆ Seattle renters have the smallest household sizes, with 86 percent living in households of two people or fewer.

These patterns reflect both housing stock and demographic dynamics and highlight the importance of ensuring a mix of unit sizes—particularly the need for larger rental units in high-cost urban areas.

Exhibit 18: Household Size by Tenure, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov

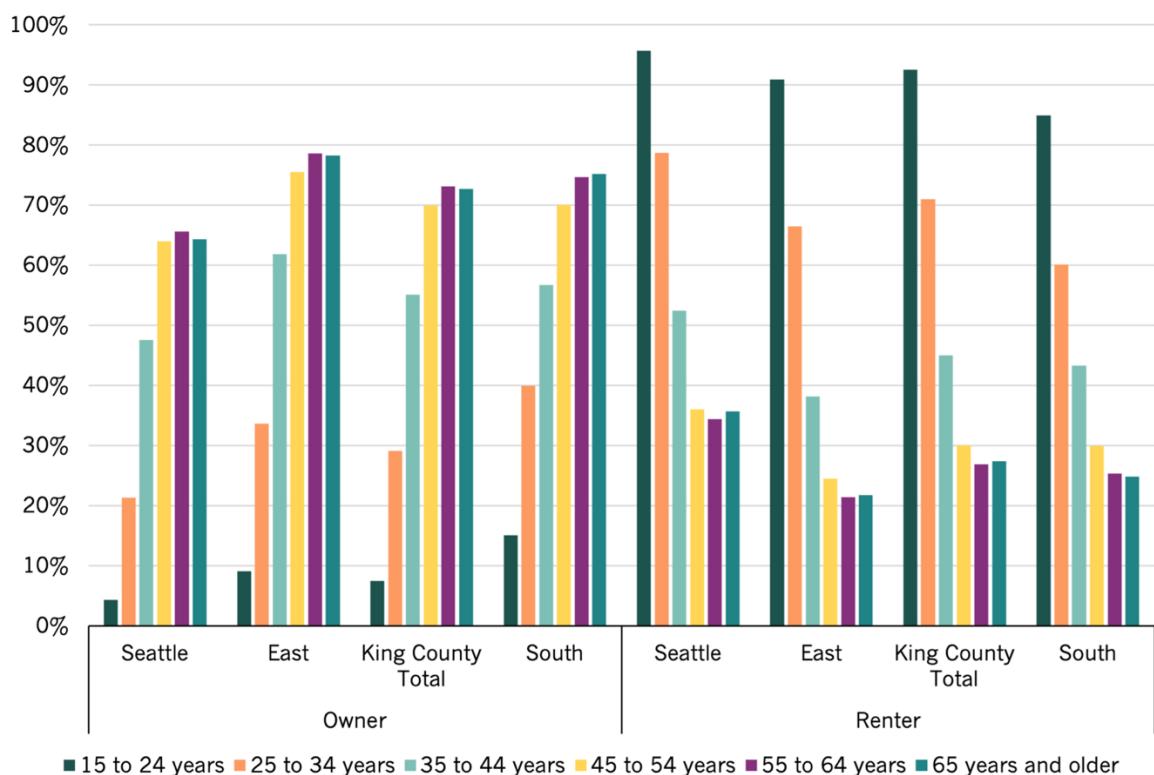
➤ **Household size patterns in King County reveal a clear divide: Renters—especially in Seattle—tend to live alone or in smaller households, while larger households are more common among owners. In South King County, however, larger households are notable among both renters and owners, reflecting the region's higher prevalence of multigenerational living and housing arrangements that accommodate bigger household sizes.**

Household Tenure by Age

Housing tenure in King County varies by age group, reflecting differences in life stage, income, and housing affordability across the population.

- Younger residents are overwhelmingly renters: The Seattle and East subregions have the youngest renter populations, with the largest shares of renters aged 15 to 24 and 25 to 34. In Seattle, 96 percent of households aged 15 to 24 and 79 percent of those aged 25 to 34 are renters—the highest shares across all regions.
- South King County has the fewest young renters, with only 85 percent of households aged 15 to 24 and 60 percent aged 25 to 34 renting—both below the county average.
- Seattle has the highest renter share across all age groups, maintaining a renter majority well into older age brackets, including 36 percent of renters aged 65 and older.
- Older households are more likely to own their homes: By age 35 to 44, 55 percent of households are owners countywide, and by age 45 to 54, the share grows to 70 percent. Homeownership is most common among households aged 65 and older, with 73 percent of these households owning their homes.
- In the South subregion, younger households are more likely to be homeowners than in other parts of the county. For example, 15 percent of those between 15 and 24 years old and 40 percent of those between 25 and 34 years old in South King County own their homes—compared to just 4 percent and 21 percent in Seattle, respectively.

Exhibit 19: Tenure by Household Age, King County Framework, 2023



These patterns reflect broader housing market dynamics where younger adults continue to be priced out of ownership and must rely on the rental market across the region. Conversely, older residents, many of whom bought homes in earlier decades, remain predominantly homeowners.

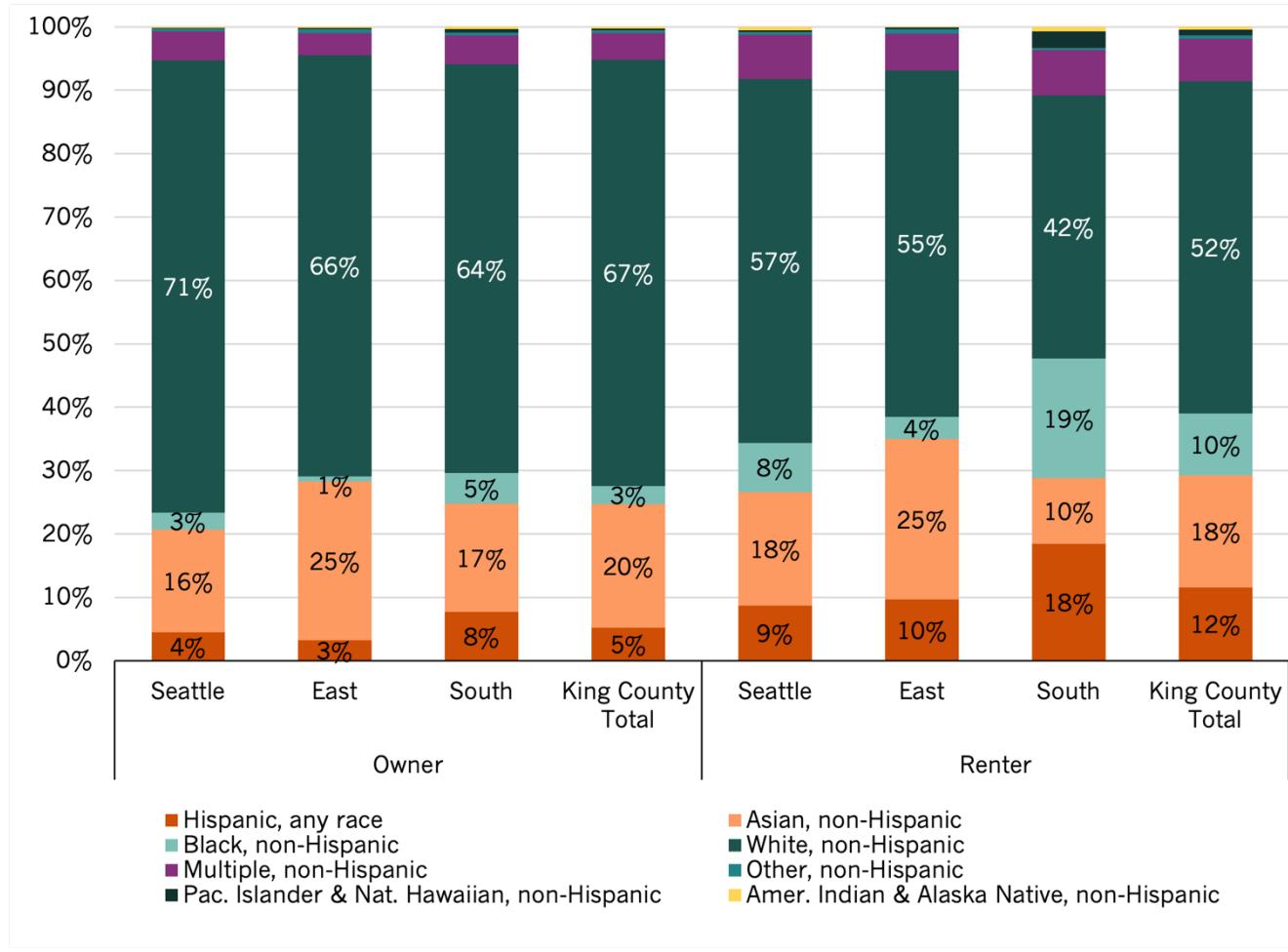
Household Tenure by Race and Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic composition varies significantly between owner- and renter-occupied households in King County.

- ◆ Black and Hispanic households are more likely to be renters. Black, non-Hispanic households account for 10 percent of renters countywide but only 3 percent of owners. Hispanic households make up 12 percent of renters but just 5 percent of owners.
- ◆ South King County shows the highest renter diversity, with 19 percent of renters identifying as Black and 18 percent as Hispanic. It also has the lowest share of White renter households at 42 percent.
- ◆ Asian households are more evenly split, representing 20 percent of owners and 18 percent of renters countywide but reaching 25 percent of owners and renters in the East subregion.



Exhibit 20: Household Tenure by Race and Ethnicity, King County Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov

Renters reflect more diverse populations than owners, which highlights persistent racial disparities in homeownership across the region.

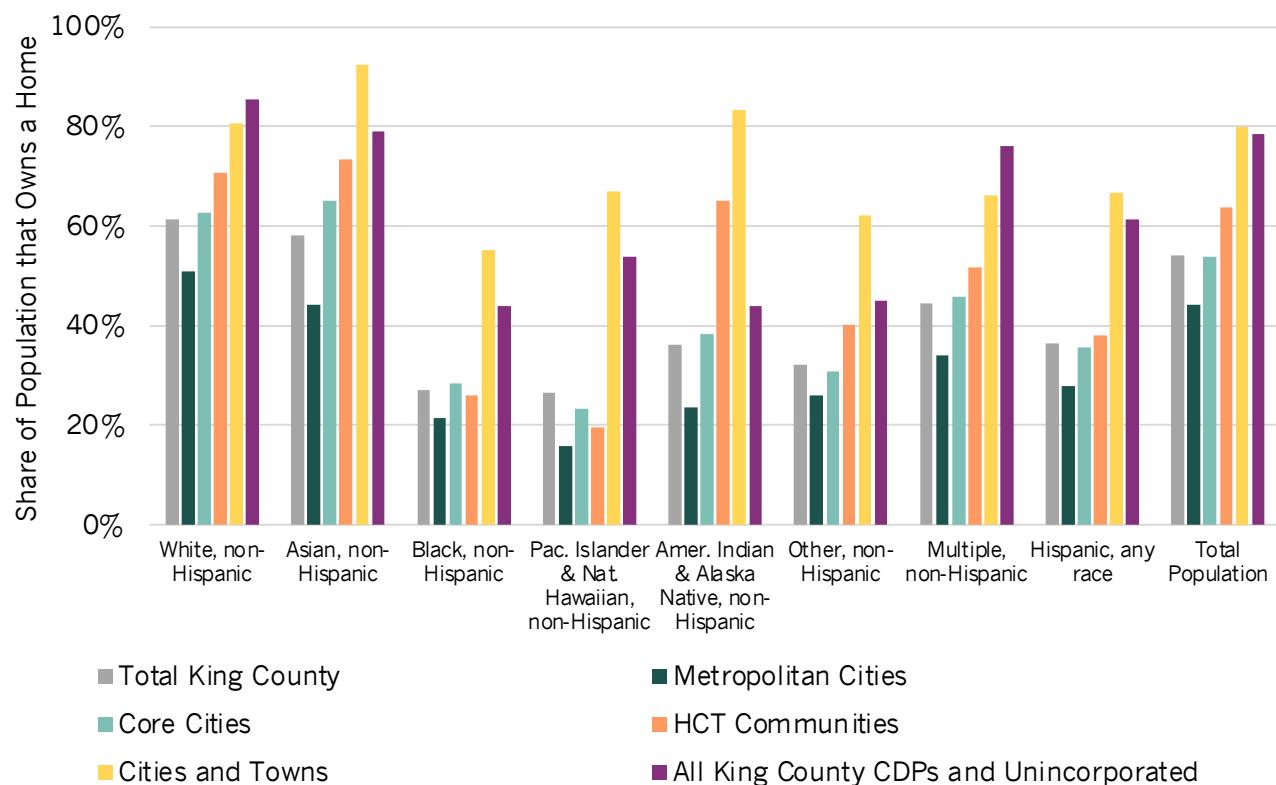
Exhibit 21 shows household tenure by race and ethnicity using the PSRC Regional Geographies with a focus on homeownership.

- ♦ Highest Homeownership in Rural and Smaller Cities: Homeownership is highest in the unincorporated areas and smaller cities and towns. For example, 86 percent of White and 79 percent of Asian households in unincorporated King County own their homes. In cities and towns, ownership reaches 93 percent among Asian households and 67 percent among Hispanic households—some of the highest levels regionwide.
- ♦ Lowest Homeownership in Metropolitan Cities: Metropolitan areas—such as Seattle and Bellevue—show the lowest overall rates. Just 44 percent of Asian households and 21 percent of Black households in these cities are homeowners. Homeownership for Pacific Islanders is just 16 percent, and it is 28 percent for Hispanic households.



- ◆ Significant Racial Gaps across Regions: The racial homeownership gap is starker in HCT communities and core cities. In HCT areas, Black homeownership is only 26 percent, compared to 71 percent for White households. Similar gaps appear in core cities, where Black households have a 28 percent ownership rate vs. 63 percent for White households.
- ◆ Hispanic Households Show Regional Variation: Hispanic homeownership ranges from 28 percent in metro cities to 67 percent in cities and towns.

Exhibit 21: Homeownership Rate by Race and Ethnicity, PSRC Regional Geographies, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year

Homeownership rates in King County vary considerably by race and ethnicity, and these disparities are further shaped by geography within the region. Across all PSRC subregions, White, non-Hispanic households consistently exhibit the highest homeownership rates, while Black and Pacific Islander households show the lowest rates in most areas.

BIPOC COMMUNITIES FACE BARRIERS TO HOMEOWNERSHIP

- » Community input reveals that homeownership remains out of reach for many low-income BIPOC residents in King County, despite strong desire in ownership. However, barriers to homeownership for BIPOC households are not unique to King County—they reflect a persistent national pattern rooted in systemic inequities. Across the United States, Black, Latinx, and Native American households face higher mortgage denial rates, more frequent discrimination in rental and lending markets, and reduced access to affordable credit.⁶⁵ Historic redlining and racially restrictive covenants have contributed to significant gaps in intergenerational wealth, leaving many BIPOC households without the resources for down payments or to weather market competition. In addition, place-based disinvestment and exclusionary zoning have limited the availability of affordable choices in many communities, reinforcing racial disparities in ownership and economic opportunity.⁶⁶ These dynamics make it harder for BIPOC households to access stable homeownership, which in turn perpetuates racial wealth gaps. Engagement conducted in King County emphasized:
- » Low-income BIPOC residents face persistent barriers to homeownership, including down payment costs, credit checks, systemic bias, and competition, despite high interest in owning homes.⁶⁷ Many community organizations report that the households dream of homeownership but feel that it is largely out of reach.⁶⁸
- » Displacement pressures are intensified by lack of ownership access, pushing some families to relocate out of the county or state.⁶⁹

LOOKING AHEAD

- » Washington State law now requires jurisdictions to identify, address, and begin to undo racially disparate impacts—such as historic redlining, exclusionary zoning, and discriminatory lending—when updating their comprehensive plans.⁷⁰ This includes strategies to expand homeownership opportunities for BIPOC households as part of broader housing equity goals.⁷¹ Likewise, the CPPs require that jurisdictions (1)

⁶⁵ Bachaud, N. (2022, January 13). Black mortgage applicants denied 84% more often than White borrowers. Zillow Research. [\[link\]](#)

⁶⁶ King County Department of Community and Human Services. (2024, January). *Resources for documenting the local history of racially exclusive and discriminatory land use and housing practices: Countywide Planning Policies Housing Chapter*. [\[link\]](#)

⁶⁷ Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021-2025:

- King County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (2025), pg. 39
- Equitable Development Initiative – Phase 2 Report (2024), pg. 111

⁶⁸ Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021-2025: King County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing (2025), pg. 39

⁶⁹ Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021-2025: Equitable Development Initiative – Phase 2 Report (2024), pg. 111

⁷⁰ [RCW 36.70A.070](#)

⁷¹ Commerce. (2023, May 1). Final guidance to address racially disparate impacts in comprehensive plans. Retrieved from [\[link\]](#)



document the local history of racially discriminatory and exclusive land use and housing practices and current policies that result in racially disparate impacts and (2) take targeted actions that repair harms to BIPOC households identified by these analyses.⁷² In line with these planning regulations, jurisdictions across King County incorporated racial equity analyses and strategies into their most recent Comprehensive Plan Update, aiming to address historic and current disparities and expand housing choice through policy changes, zoning updates, and targeted investment.

Area Median Income

WHAT IS AMI AND HOW IS IT USED?

- » AMI in King County is the midpoint income of all county households, where half the households have incomes greater than the median and half the households have incomes below the median. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calculates AMI for a given area every year and adjusts it based on a household's size. HUD includes both renter and homeowner households in AMI calculations.
- » Federal, state, County, and local agencies use AMI to group residents into distinct income bands relative to AMI and to set income and rent limits for affordable housing programs. Unless otherwise stated, AMI figures in this report refer to a four-person household.

WHY DOES THIS REPORT USE TWO DIFFERENT AMI YEARS?

- » Chapter 1 (Context Setting): References 2025 AMI, the latest HUD data.
- » Analysis in the Main Report: Uses 2019–2023 AMI, based on the most recent 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) data, to ensure consistency across analysis and comparability between datasets.

CHALLENGES OF USING AMI IN HIGH-INCOME REGIONS LIKE KING COUNTY

- » In areas where incomes are high, AMI can obscure the needs of lower-income households. Since AMI reflects the regional midpoint, it may overstate affordability and exclude many households struggling with housing costs. Even those earning near AMI may still be cost burdened yet remain ineligible for affordable housing programs tied to AMI thresholds.

CONNECTING AMI TO LOCAL WAGES AND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

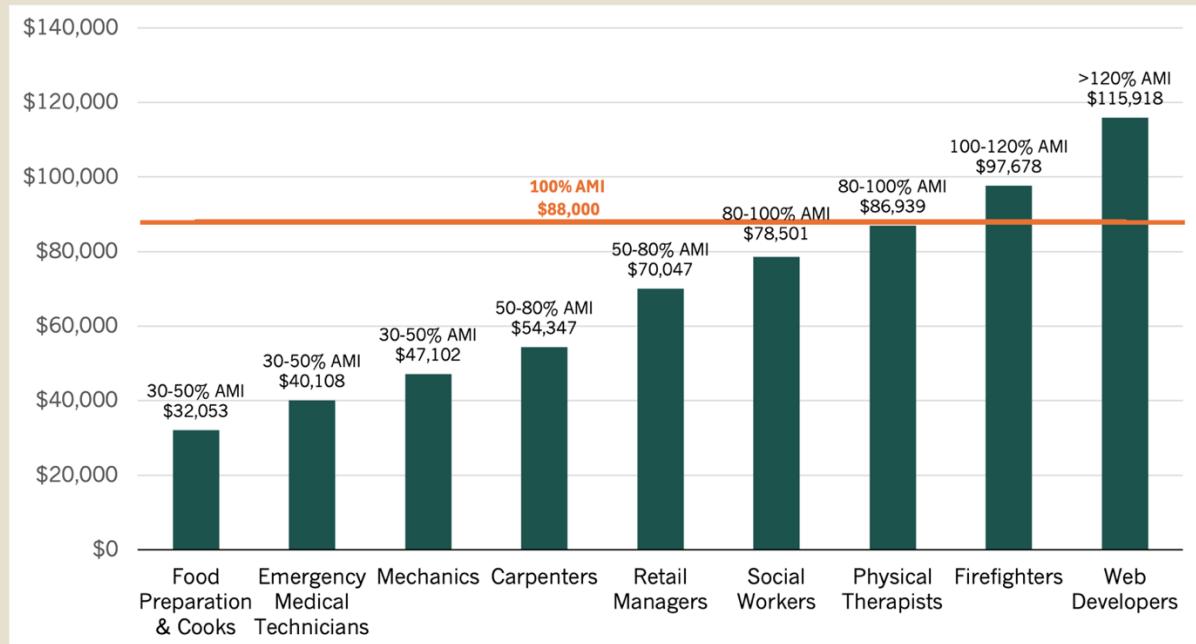
- » While AMI is a useful benchmark for assessing affordability, its implications become clearer when viewed alongside the actual wages of common professions in King County. Many occupations important to the local economy earn incomes that fall well

⁷² King County. 2021 King County CCPs (2023). Housing Chapter Policies H-5 and H-9. [[link](#)]



below 100 percent of AMI. The chart below compares median annual salaries for selected occupations to HUD's 2025 AMI thresholds for a one-person household.

Exhibit 22: Median Annual Wages by Occupation Compared to King County AMI



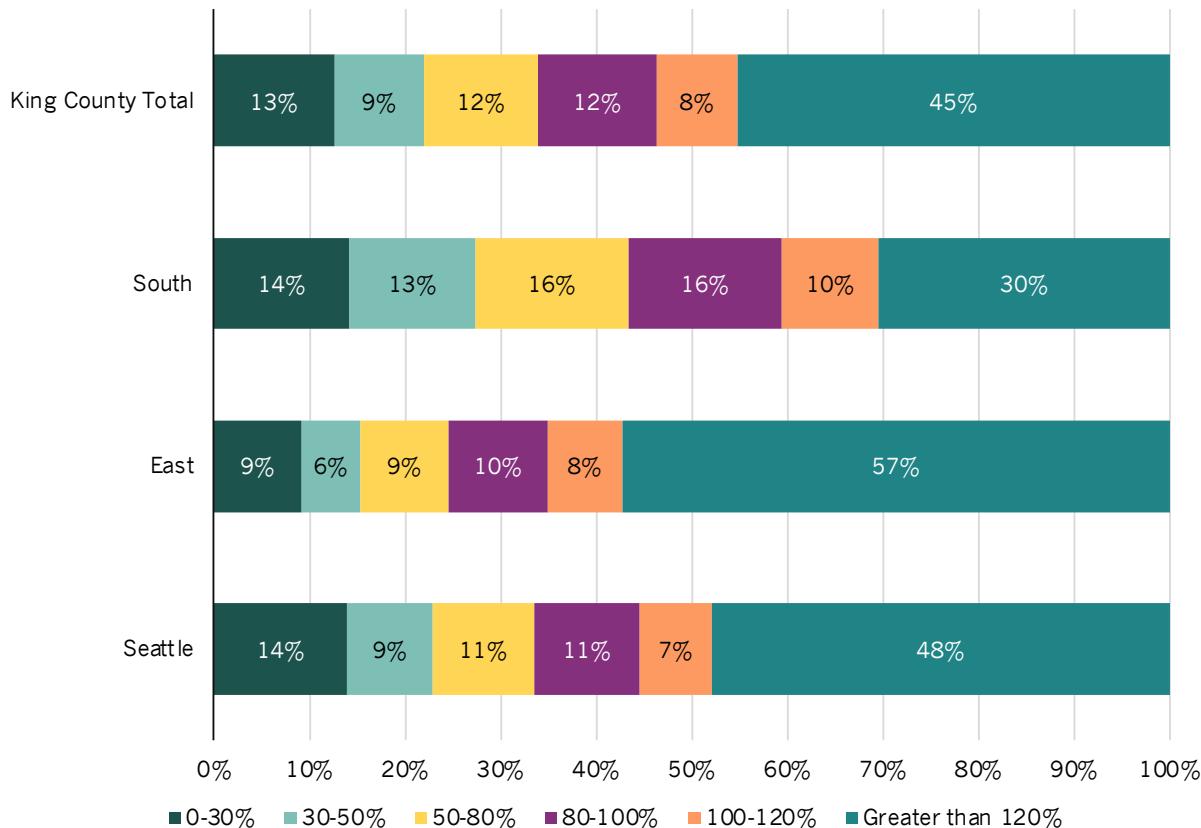
Source: PUMS 2023 5-Year

Exhibit 23 illustrates how household income distribution varies substantially across subregions in King County.

- ◆ East King County has the highest share of higher-income households, with 57 percent earning more than 120 percent of AMI. Fewer than 10 percent of households in East fall into the lowest income brackets (0–30 percent of AMI and 30–50 percent of AMI).
- ◆ Seattle also has a high share of higher-income households: Nearly half (48 percent) of households earn above 120 percent of AMI. However, 14 percent earn below 30 percent of AMI, close to the countywide average.
- ◆ South King County has the most income-diverse and lower-income population, with only 30 percent of households above 120 percent of AMI. About 43 percent of households fall below 80 percent of AMI—including 14 percent under 30 percent of AMI and 16 percent each in the 50–80 percent and 80–100 percent of AMI ranges.
- ◆ Countywide, 45 percent of households earn more than 120 percent of AMI, while 31 percent fall below 80 percent.



Exhibit 23: Area Median Income Distribution, King County Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 2023, 2019–2023 Income Limits, Office of Policy Development and Research, accessed at: www.huduser.gov.

Income bands in King County's subregions vary widely enough that the countywide AMI may not fully reflect local affordability conditions. For example, South King County's large share of households earning well below 80 percent of AMI means countywide thresholds can overstate what is affordable there, while East King County's concentration of households far above AMI skews the median upward.

Household Tenure by Area Median Income

Exhibit 24 shows **regional differences in the household income distribution, with notable variation between homeowners and renters.**

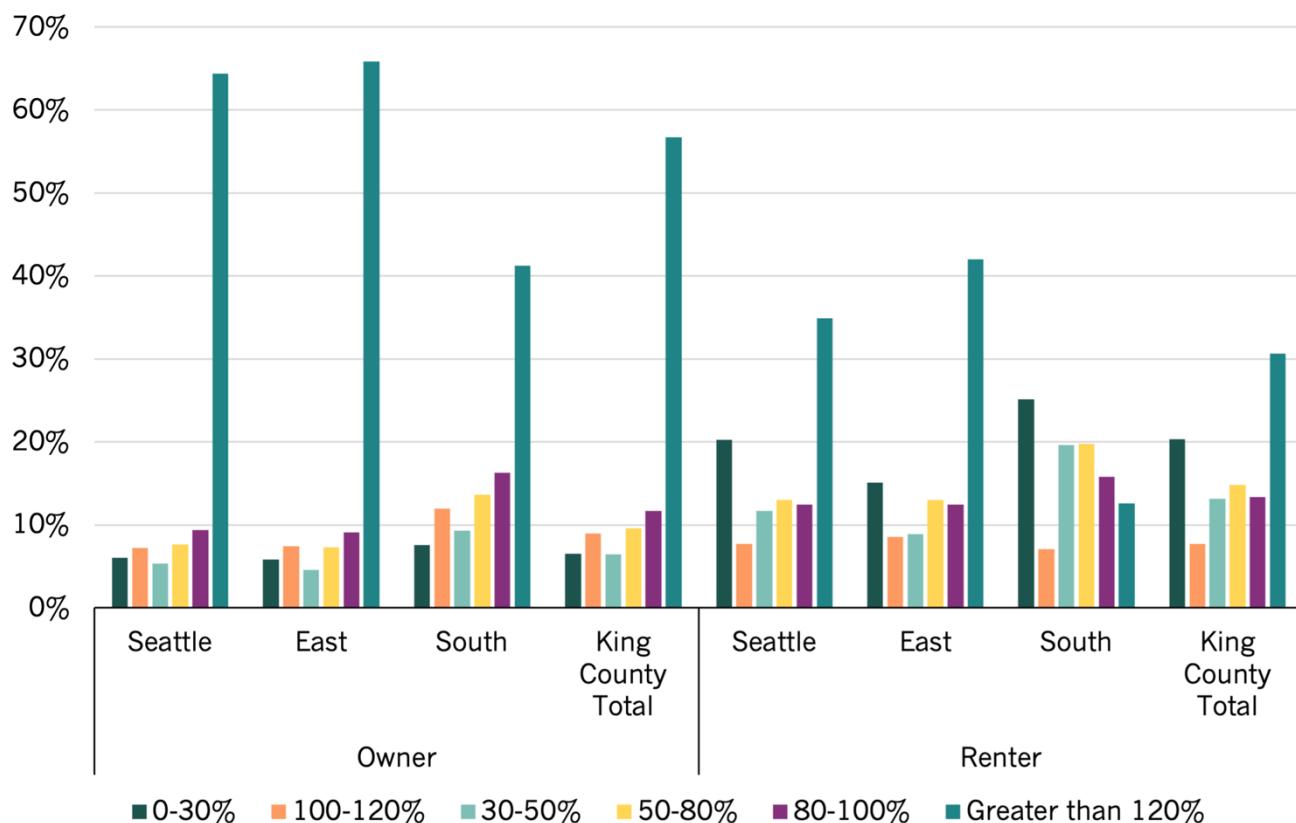
- Homeowners are more concentrated in higher income bands, especially in Seattle and East King County. In both areas, roughly two-thirds (64–66 percent) of owner households earn above 120 percent of AMI, compared to just 41 percent in South King County. In contrast, South King County homeowners have the highest share of moderate-income



owners—16 percent earn between 80 and 100 percent of AMI and 14 percent fall into the 50–80 percent range.

- ◆ Renter households are more likely to be lower income across all subregions, but the difference is most pronounced in South King County, where 65 percent of renters earn below 80 percent of AMI, 25 percent earn less than 30 percent, 20 percent earn between 30 and 50 percent, and another 20 percent earn between 50 and 80 percent.
- ◆ High-income renter households are concentrated in the East subregion, where 42 percent earn above 120 percent of AMI, the highest share of high-income renters in the county. Only 13 percent of South King County renters fall in this top income bracket.

Exhibit 24: Household Tenure by AMI, King County Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov. HUD, 2023, 2019–2023 Income Limits, Office of Policy Development and Research, accessed at: www.huduser.gov.

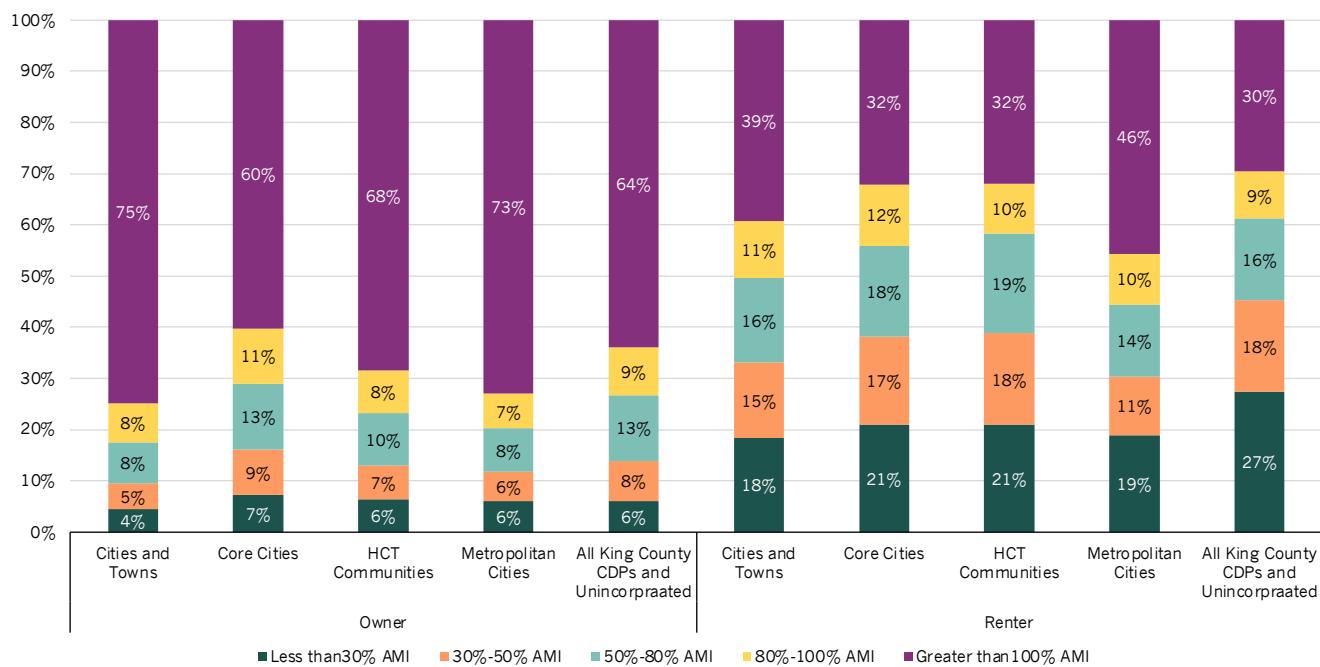
Income disparities by tenure and geography reveal that high-income homeowners are concentrated in Seattle and the Eastside, while low-income renters are disproportionately located in South King County.

Tenure by AMI was also analyzed using the PSRC Regional Geographies shown below in Exhibit 25. When viewed through the lens of this framework, clear patterns emerge between renters and owners at different income bands, which point to the spatial concentration of affordability challenges and how income influences the ability to access homeownership.



- ◆ Homeowners across all subregions are overwhelmingly higher income. In every PSRC Regional Geography, at least 60 percent of owners earn more than 100 percent of AMI, reaching a high of 75 percent in cities and towns and 73 percent in metropolitan cities. These figures highlight how ownership in King County is largely out of reach for lower-income households.
- ◆ Lower- and moderate-income households make up a small share of owners. Households earning below 80 percent of AMI represent a combined 17 to 25 percent of owners depending on the subregion. Core cities and the unincorporated areas show slightly more moderate-income owners (30–80 percent of AMI), potentially reflecting older housing stock or more varied housing types that allow for slightly more affordability.
- ◆ Renters are more evenly distributed across the income spectrum, but lower-income households are overrepresented. In core cities and HCT communities, about 60 percent of renters earn less than 80 percent of AMI. Even in higher-cost metropolitan cities, 44 percent of renters fall below this threshold.
- ◆ Extremely low-income renters (below 30 percent of AMI) are concentrated in unincorporated areas and HCT/core cities. Unincorporated King County has the highest share of renters in this category (27 percent), followed by Core and HCT communities (both 21 percent).
- ◆ Higher-income renters (above 100 percent of AMI) make up a sizable share in metropolitan cities (46 percent) and cities and towns (39 percent). These households could be renting by choice, delaying homeownership, or constrained by limited housing supply at their income band.

Exhibit 25: Household Tenure by AMI, PSRC Regional Framework, 2023



Affordability challenges vary widely across King County, but one pattern is clear: Homeownership is largely out of reach for lower-income households. While renters—especially those with the lowest incomes—are heavily concentrated in just a few PSRC Regional Geographies.

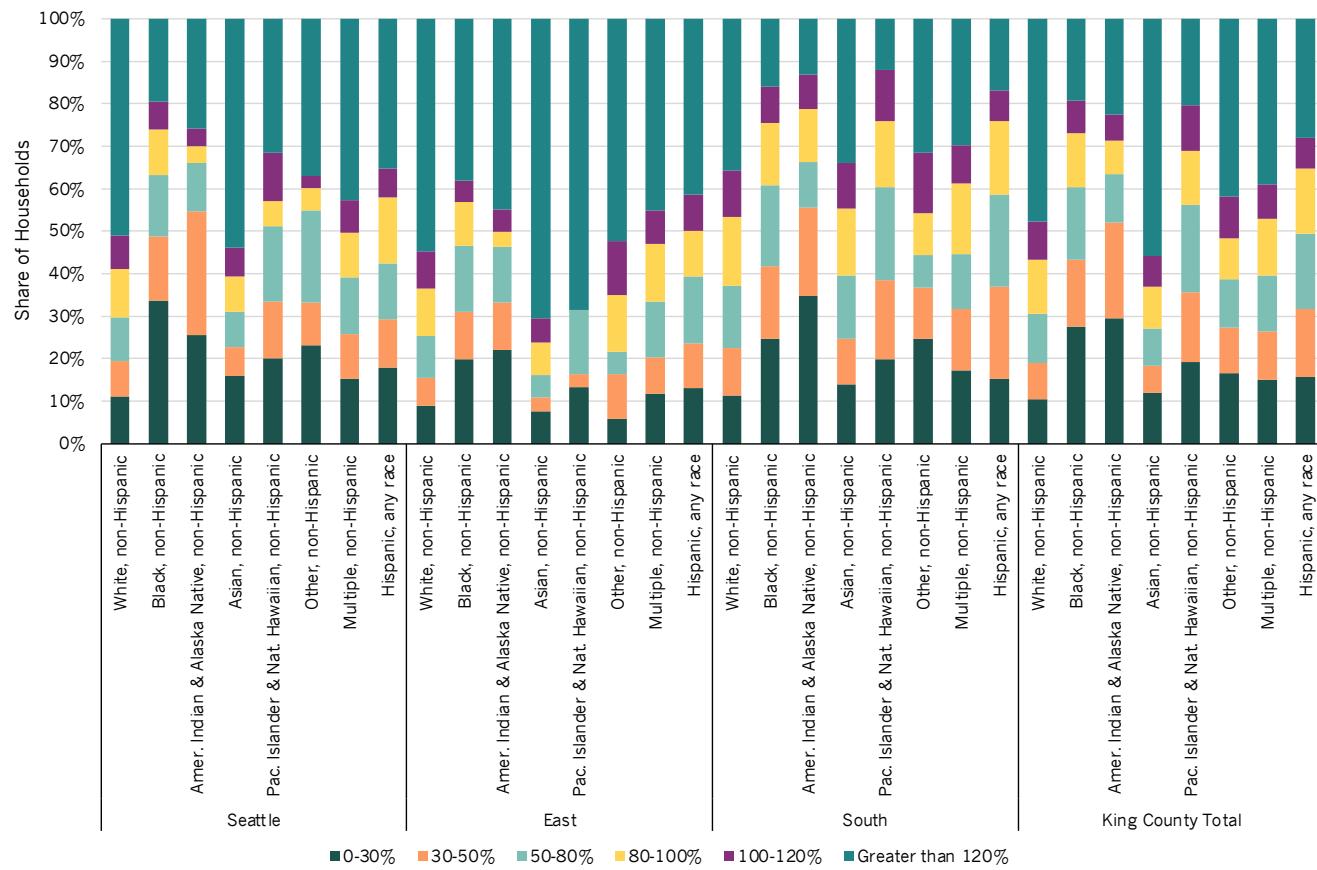
Race and Ethnicity by Area Median Income

Household income distribution in King County reveals disparities across racial and ethnic groups. While White and Asian households are more likely to be higher income, other communities of color are disproportionately lower income.

- ◆ White, non-Hispanic households are the most concentrated at higher incomes: 48 percent of these households countywide earn above 120 percent of AMI and just 11 percent fall below 30 percent of AMI. In the East subregion, 55 percent of White households earn above 120 percent of AMI.
- ◆ Asian households are also more likely to be high income: 56 percent of Asian households in King County earn above 120 percent of AMI, with the highest share in the East (71 percent). They have relatively low shares in the lowest income band (12 percent at or below 30 percent of AMI countywide).
- ◆ Black and Hispanic households are disproportionately represented among lower-income households. Countywide, 27 percent of Black households and 16 percent of Hispanic households earn less than 30 percent of AMI. In Seattle, 34 percent of Black households are in this lowest-income category.
- ◆ American Indian and Alaska Native households face the most severe disparities: Nearly one-third (29 percent) fall below 30 percent of AMI countywide, with even higher shares in South King County (35 percent).
- ◆ Pacific Islander households are more evenly spread across income bands but still experience concentrated disadvantage in the lower brackets. In South King County, 20 percent earn below 30 percent of AMI and 22 percent are in the 50–80 percent range.
- ◆ Many households identifying with multiple or other non-Hispanic races are also low income, with approximately 26 percent at or below 50 percent of AMI countywide.



Exhibit 26: Race and Ethnicity by Area Median Income, King County Regional Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov. HUD, 2023, 2019–2023 Income Limits, Office of Policy Development and Research, accessed at: www.huduser.gov.

Income disparities by race and ethnicity in King County vary by geography, with East King County having the highest concentrations of high-income White and Asian households, while South King County and Seattle have greater shares of lower-income Black, Hispanic, and American Indian households.

Cost Burden

A significant share of households across King County experience housing cost burden, with notable geographic disparities. Countywide, 31 percent of households are housing cost burdened—17 percent are burdened (spending 30–50 percent of income on housing) and 14 percent severely burdened (spending more than 50 percent).

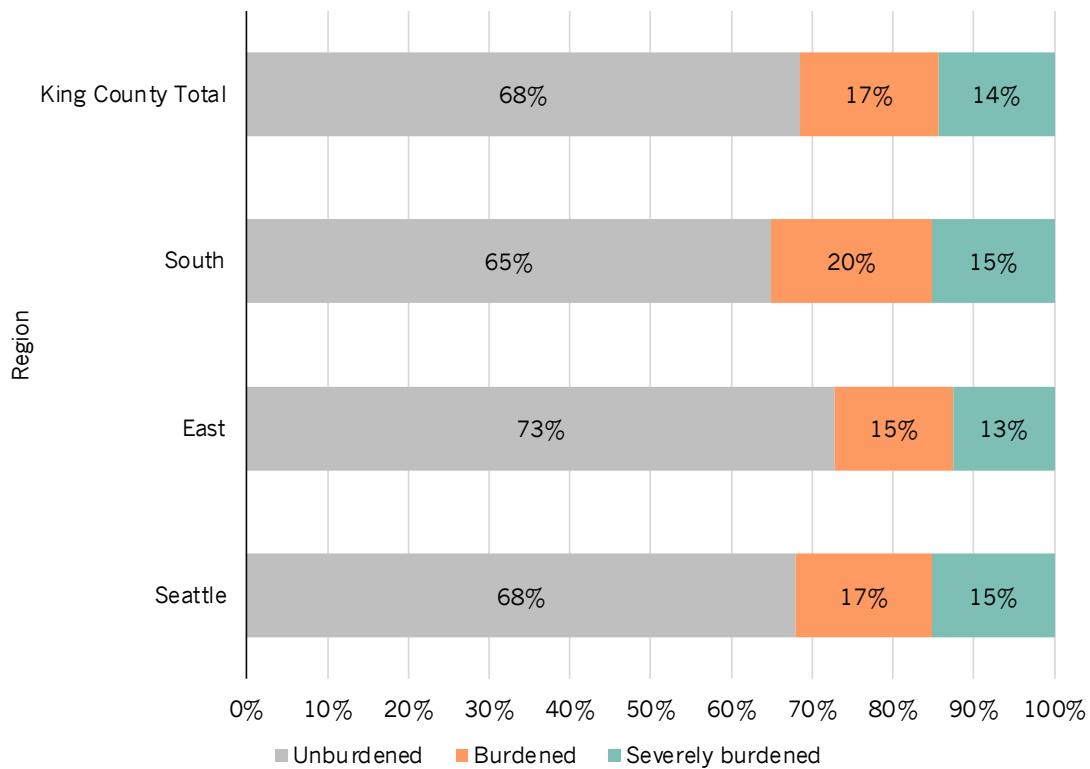
South King County has the highest overall burden rate, with 35 percent of households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing, including 15 percent who are



severely burdened. Seattle mirrors the countywide average, with 32 percent of households cost burdened and a similar share facing severe burden.

East King County reports the lowest rates of cost burden; however, 28 percent of households are still burdened, including 13 percent who are severely cost burdened.

Exhibit 27: Cost Burden Households, King County Regions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov

These findings point to ongoing affordability challenges, particularly for residents in South King County and Seattle, where housing costs place a strain on households.

Cost Burden by AMI

Exhibit 28 shows cost burden by AMI for the King County subregions. Patterns of housing cost burden in King County reveal stark differences by income band and geography. While households with higher incomes are overwhelmingly non-burdened, low- and moderate-income households continue to face significant challenges across all subregions.

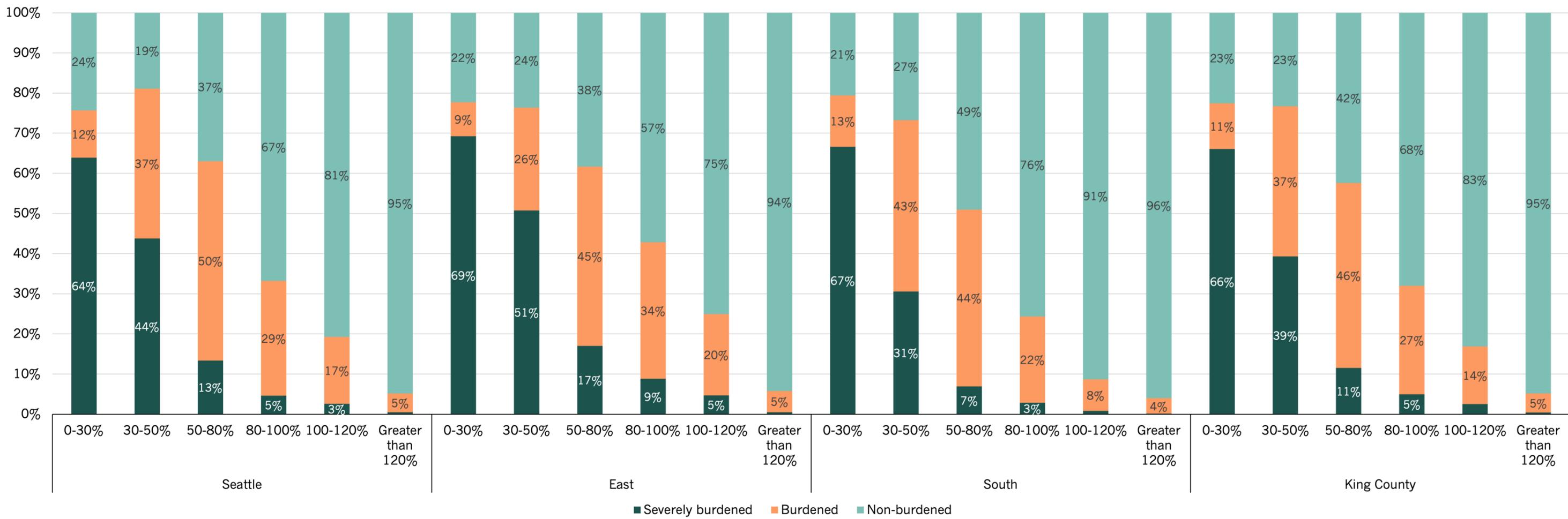
- ◆ Extremely low-income households face severe cost burden across the county: Among households earning less than 30 percent of AMI, two-thirds or more are severely cost burdened across all subregions (64 percent in Seattle, 69 percent in East King County, 67 percent in South King County, and 66 percent countywide).



- ◆ Moderate-income households experience the greatest variation by geography: For households earning 30–50 percent of AMI, cost burden is highest in East King County, where more than half (51 percent) are severely burdened. In Seattle, 44 percent are severely burdened, compared to 31 percent in South King County. While fewer households in this range are severely burdened in South King County, nearly three-quarters are still burdened overall.
- ◆ Households at 50–80 percent of AMI also face instability: Roughly half of households in this income range are cost burdened in all subregions, with Seattle (63 percent) and East King County (62 percent) showing particularly high rates of cost burden.
- ◆ At incomes above 100 percent of AMI, most households are not cost burdened. For example, among those earning more than 120 percent of AMI, fewer than 5 percent are cost burdened in any subregion. This consistent trend underscores the disproportionate impact of high housing costs on low- and moderate-income households.
- ◆ Geographic disparities highlight systemic affordability challenges: While all subregions show similar patterns by AMI, the intensity of cost burden varies. East King County stands out with the highest severe burden rates for 30–50 percent of AMI households, while Seattle has more widespread burden across 50–80 percent of AMI households. South King County shows slightly lower severe burden rates but still has high overall burden among lower-income households.



Exhibit 28: Cost Burden by AMI, King County Regions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov

- Cost burden in King County impacts low- and moderate-income households the most: More than two-thirds of households earning under 30 percent of AMI are severely burdened, and roughly half of those at 50 to 80 percent of AMI. Geographic disparities are evident, with East King County showing the highest severe cost burden among 30 to 50 percent of AMI households, while Seattle has more widespread cost burden across 50 to 80 percent of AMI households.

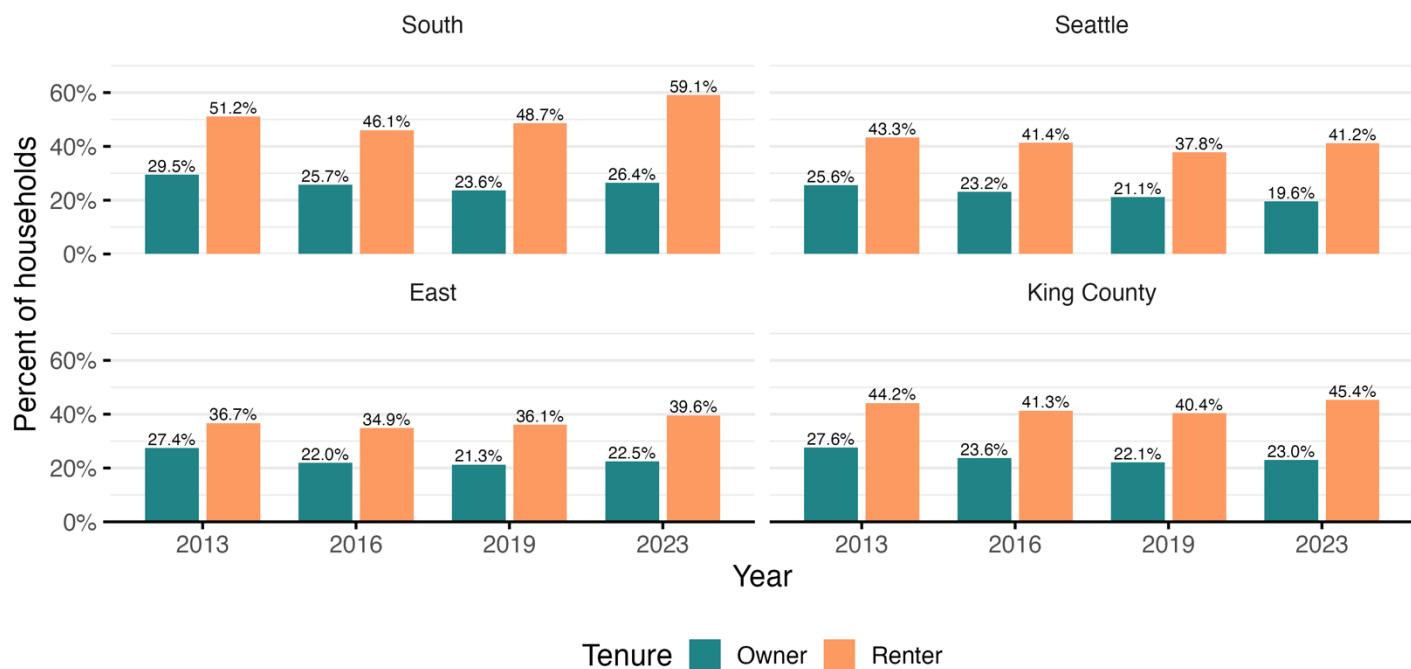
Cost Burden by Tenure

Trends in cost burden rates across King County show some reductions over the past decade, particularly among owner households. However, patterns vary by tenure and subregion, and results must be interpreted cautiously in the context of the County's periods of rapid population growth and high-cost housing markets.

- ◆ Rates of cost burden among homeowners have declined in all subregions: Between 2013 and 2023, the share of cost-burdened owners fell by 4–6 percentage points in South King County (30 percent to 26 percent), Seattle (26 percent to 20 percent), and East King County (27 percent to 23 percent), with the largest decline observed in Seattle. Countywide, homeowner cost burden decreased from 28 percent in 2013 to 23 percent in 2023.
- ◆ Renter cost burden trends are mixed: While renter cost burden from 2013 to 2023 declined in Seattle (43 percent to 41 percent), it increased in both East King County (37 percent to 40 percent) and South King County (51 percent to 59 percent). These trends further widen the gap between South County and the county average. Countywide, renter burden rose slightly from 44 percent to 45 percent over the same period.
- ◆ Persistent disparities between renters and owners: In 2023, renters remained nearly twice as likely as homeowners to be cost burdened across all subregions. South King County renters face the highest rates of cost burden, with nearly 60 percent of renters paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing.
- ◆ Caution in interpreting declines: In high-cost, fast-growing markets like King County, reductions in measured cost burden can sometimes reflect displacement rather than improved affordability. As lower-income households are priced out and replaced by higher-income households, the overall share of cost-burdened residents may fall even though housing remains unaffordable for many. This dynamic underscores the importance of pairing cost burden trends with affordable housing production, preservation, and other important metrics to fully understand progress toward reaching affordability goals.



Exhibit 29: Change in Cost Burden by Tenure, King County Subregional Framework, 2013–2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–2023, ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

While some progress toward reducing cost burden is observed in the data—particularly for owners—the persistently high burden rates among renters, particularly in South King County and the potential masking effect of displacement highlight the ongoing challenges in meeting the County's affordability targets.

WHY ARE HOMEOWNERS LESS COST BURDENED THAN RENTERS?

Homeowners in King County—and nationwide—tend to experience lower rates of housing cost burden compared to renters. Several structural and financial factors contribute to this pattern:

- » **Mortgage lending requirements:** Unlike renters, prospective homebuyers must meet underwriting criteria that assess their ability to repay a loan. This includes debt-to-income limits, credit evaluations, and proof of stable income—all of which help prevent overextension and reduce the likelihood of being cost burdened.
- » **Fixed housing costs and equity building:** Many owners have fixed-rate mortgages, which provide predictable payments over time, while renters are exposed to rising



market rents. Homeowners also build equity, which can improve long-term financial security and buffer housing costs.

- » **Longer tenure and housing stability:** Homeowners typically move less often than renters, avoiding frequent relocation costs and rent hikes associated with turnover.
- » **Higher incomes are required for homeownership:** In Seattle, substantial income is now required to purchase even starter homes. As of early 2025, households need about \$227,000 annually to afford a median-priced home in the Seattle metro area—far above the city's median household income of around \$126,140—making homeownership largely inaccessible to average earners.⁷³

Cost Burden by Race and Ethnicity

Across King County, cost burden disproportionately affects households of color, particularly Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander residents, with greater disparities observed in the South subregion.

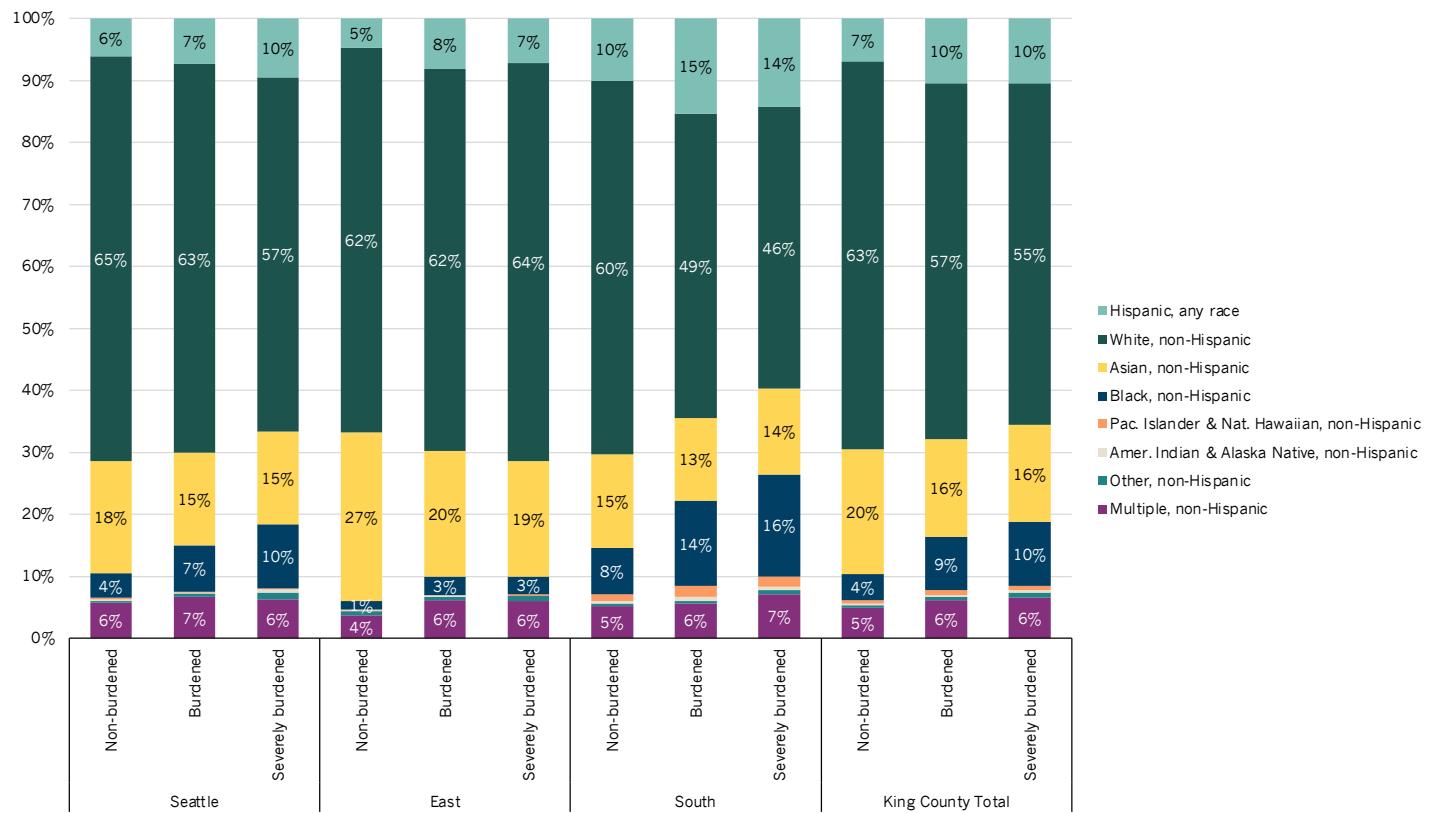
- ◆ Black households face the highest cost burden rates across the region. In South King County, they comprise 14 percent of cost-burdened and 16 percent of severely burdened households—more than double their share of non-burdened households (8 percent). They are also consistently overrepresented among cost-burdened groups in Seattle (7–10 percent), East (3 percent), and countywide (9–10 percent).
- ◆ Hispanic households are also highly impacted, especially in South King County where they make up 15 percent of burdened and 14 percent of severely burdened households. Countywide, they represent 10 percent of both burdened and severely burdened groups, compared to just 7 percent of non-burdened households.
- ◆ Pacific Islander households, though small in total population, are disproportionately cost burdened in the South. They make up 2 percent of burdened and 2 percent of severely burdened households there, despite only representing 1 percent of non-burdened households.
- ◆ Asian households represent a significant portion of cost-burdened households across all regions—including 16 percent countywide—with the highest shares in Seattle (15 percent) and East King County (19–20 percent). However, these rates are similar to or are slightly lower than their share among non-burdened households.
- ◆ White, non-Hispanic households account for the majority of cost-burdened households (57 percent burdened and 55 percent severely burdened) because they represent the largest demographic group in the region, but their share is lower than among non-

⁷³ Clarridge, C., and Sparber, S. (2025, January 27). Record-high income needed to buy a Seattle home. Axios Seattle. Retrieved from [\[link\]](#)



burdened households (63 percent). This is consistent across all the subregions, particularly in South King County.

Exhibit 30: Household Cost Burden by Race and Ethnicity, King County Regions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov

- **Households of color face disproportionate cost burdens. Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander households are consistently overrepresented among cost-burdened and severely cost-burdened households, particularly in South King County. These disparities highlight persistent racial inequities in housing affordability across the region.**

3. Workforce and Employment Characteristics

King County's housing needs are inextricably linked to the structure and evolution of its workforce. As employment grows and shifts across sectors and areas of the county, understanding who works where, and how much they earn, provides important context for identifying where and what types of housing are needed. This chapter explores how current and projected employment patterns, sectoral wages, and regional job distribution can shape housing demand and affordability.

Key Takeaways

- ◆ **High-wage job growth concentrated in Seattle and East King County:** The finance, insurance, real estate, and professional/technical services (FIRES) sector is projected to add more than 146,000 jobs by 2044, largely in Seattle and East King County, increasing demand for housing in these areas. Wage level disparities by sector and geography heighten the importance of providing a range of affordable housing options near high-paying job centers to support economic mobility and avoid displacement of lower-wage workers essential to the region's everyday services and amenities.
- ◆ **Lower-wage job growth accelerating in South King County:** Retail, education, and service sector employment is expanding more quickly in South King County than other subregions, and the subregion exhibits consistently lower wages across nearly all industries. The wage disparity highlights the urgent need for deeply affordable housing in South King County to support its lower-wage workforce and prevent displacement if housing pressures from other parts of King County spread southward.
- ◆ **Low-wage workers often live far from where low-wage jobs are concentrated:** Seattle and East King County have significantly more low-wage jobs than resident low-wage workers, leading many employees to commute from more affordable areas, primarily South King County.



WHAT THIS CHAPTER COVERS

This chapter explores how employment trends, wage patterns, and workforce dynamics across King County influence housing demand and affordability. It covers:

- » **Employment by Industry:** Current employment estimates across major industry sectors, providing a baseline understanding of the region's economic composition.
- » **Employment Forecasts through 2044:** Projected employment growth by sector and subregion, highlighting where jobs are expected to grow and shift over time.
- » **Wages and Housing Affordability:** Median wages and wage ranges by sector and subregion.

Employment by Sector

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages presented in this section provides the most recent measure of employment estimates by industry classification (NAICS) and includes all covered workers, including those in government roles. The figures in Exhibit 31 provide a snapshot of the current distribution of employment by sector in King County as of Q3 2024.

The largest employment sectors are healthcare and social assistance (13 percent of all jobs), professional, scientific, and technical services (11 percent), and information (9 percent). Together, these high-skill and often high-wage sectors represent nearly one-third of all jobs in the county. Other major employment areas include accommodation and food services (8 percent), retail trade (7 percent), and manufacturing (6 percent), highlighting the significance of both service-oriented and goods-producing industries. Sectors such as construction, transportation and warehousing, and educational services each make up about 5–6 percent of the job market. Industries like agriculture, mining, and utilities account for a very small share of total employment—each less than 0.2 percent, reflecting a predominantly urban economy with strong representation in knowledge-based, service, and trade sectors.

Exhibit 31: Employment Estimates by Sector, King County, 2024 Q3

Employment Sector	Total Jobs	Percent of Total Jobs
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	2,274	0.16%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	295	0.02%
Utilities	2,116	0.14%
Construction	72,377	5%
Manufacturing	93,823	6%
Wholesale trade	59,841	4%



Employment Sector	Total Jobs	Percent of Total Jobs
Retail trade	103,609	7%
Transportation and warehousing	79,199	5%
Information	132,186	9%
Finance and insurance	39,407	3%
Real estate and rental and leasing	32,488	2%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	154,000	11%
Management of companies and enterprises	87,328	6%
Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services	72,098	5%
Educational services	99,920	6%
Healthcare and social assistance	187,393	13%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	35,401	2%
Accommodation and food services	112,155	8%
Other services	46,825	3%
Public administration	46,985	3%
TOTAL	1,459,720	100%

Source: U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2025. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. 2024 Quarter 3 Area Statistics. U.S Department of Labor.

High-wage sectors such as healthcare, tech, and professional services account for nearly one-third of all jobs in King County, suggesting that a substantial portion of the workforce may have greater capacity to afford housing in higher-cost areas—potentially intensifying competition and housing affordability challenges for lower-wage workers in the region.

Employment Forecast

To understand how employment is expected to evolve over time by subregion, this analysis draws on the PSRC's Land Use Vision and Integrated Transportation (LUVit) forecast. The LUVit forecast highlights how different parts of King County—such as Seattle, East, and South subregions—are expected to experience varying rates and patterns of employment growth through 2044. These projections can offer important insights into how the future job distribution can impact housing demand and affordability across the county:

- ◆ **Rapid Growth in Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, and Other Services (FIREs) Jobs:** The FIREs sector is projected to see the most significant increase in employment, growing at an average annual growth rate (AAGR) of 1.5 percent. By 2044, this sector is forecasted to add over 146,000 jobs, reaching nearly 500,000. This substantial growth reflects Seattle's ongoing role as a regional hub for professional and knowledge-based industries and may contribute to demand for higher-cost housing.
- ◆ **Stable Growth in Retail and Education:** Retail employment is expected to grow steadily (0.8 percent AAGR), adding approximately 28,000 jobs by 2044. Education-related jobs show minimal growth (0.1 percent AAGR), with the number of jobs



essentially remaining flat over the period. Retail workers typically earn moderate incomes, which will require more affordable housing options across the county.

- ◆ **Decline in Government and Manufacturing Employment:** Government sector jobs are forecasted to decline by over 14,000 positions, representing a -1.3 percent AAGR—the largest projected decrease among sectors. Similarly, the manufacturing, warehousing, transportation, and utilities (Manuf_WTU) sector is expected to lose approximately 7,000 jobs (-0.5 percent AAGR). These declines suggest shifting employment bases that could reduce housing demand in areas historically tied to these sectors.
- ◆ **Construction Employment Holds Steady:** Construction and residential sector employment is projected to remain relatively stable, with only marginal growth over the period. This could have implications for the region's capacity to meet rising housing needs without a corresponding increase in the construction labor force. To address this gap, the County will need to consider strategies to scale up its construction workforce, including workforce development, training, and recruitment initiatives.

NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

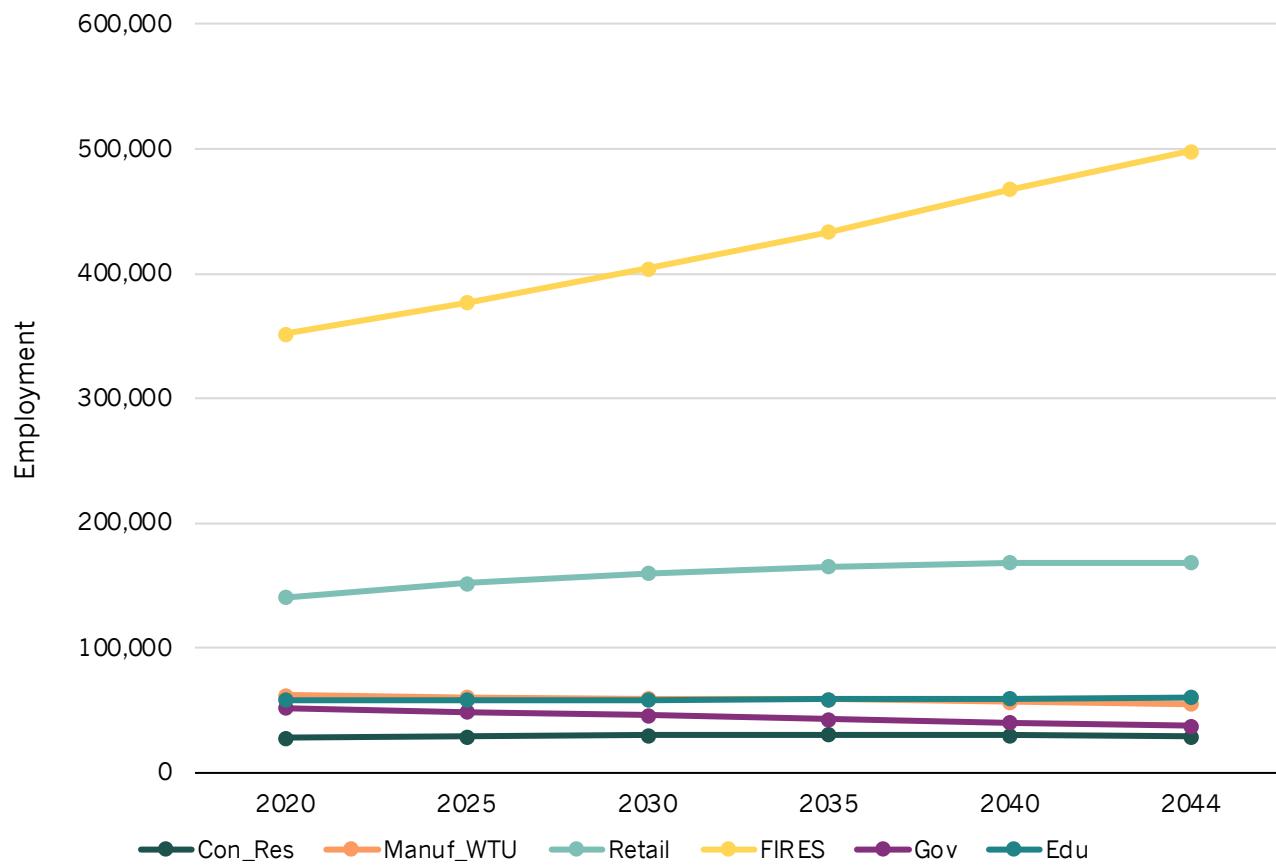
- » Since the 2008 financial crisis, the construction industry has struggled to rebuild its labor force. Between 2007 and 2022, the number of U.S. craft workers—those who directly perform construction work—declined by 11 percent, and recovery has remained slow in the post-pandemic era.⁷⁴
- » National demand surge: According to the Home Builders Institute, the United States needs to hire an estimated 723,000 construction workers per year to meet housing targets—yet current hiring levels (around 5,700 per month) fall dramatically short.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Home Builders Institute. Fall 2024 Construction Labor Market Report. September 2024. [\[link\]](#)

⁷⁵ Northwest Multiple Listing Service. "Construction Worker Shortage Hampering Homebuilding." Northwest Realtor Association, July 26, 2024. [\[link\]](#)



Exhibit 32: PSRC Employment Forecast, Seattle, 2020–2044



Source: Puget Sound Regional Council, 2025, "Land Use Vision - Implemented Targets 2010 Tract Summaries," data accessed 16 June 2025: www.psrc-psregcncl.hub.arcgis.com

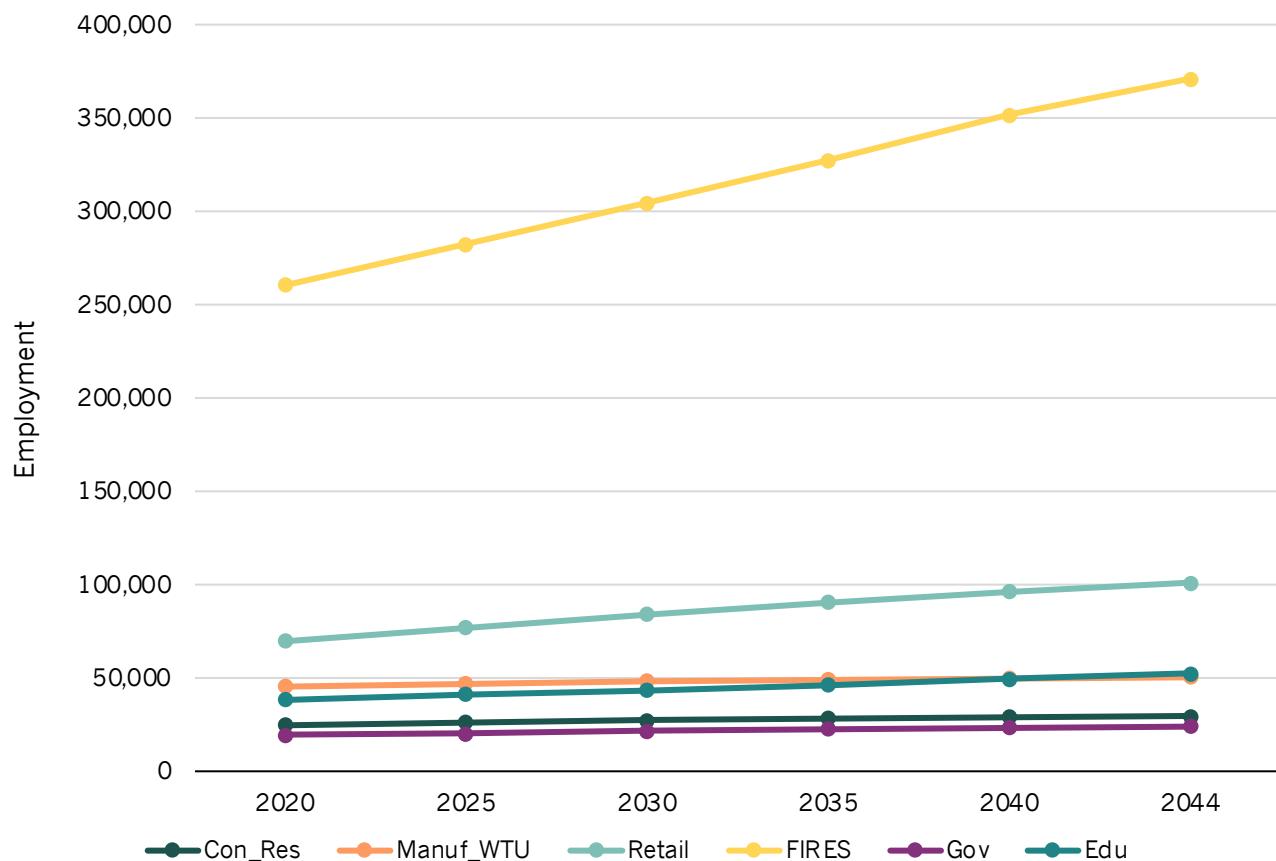
FIREs sector drives job growth, shaping housing needs: The FIREs sector is projected to add over 146,000 jobs by 2044, reinforcing Seattle's role as a regional employment hub. This growth, alongside stable trends in retail and a flat construction labor force, signals rising demand for higher-cost housing and the need for expanded affordable and workforce housing options.

Employment in East King County is projected to grow steadily across all major sectors through 2044, with notable patterns by industry:

- ◆ FIREs: This sector is the largest in East King County and is expected to see strong growth, adding over 110,000 jobs by 2044—an AAGR of 1.5 percent, similar to Seattle's growth rate in the same sector.
- ◆ Retail and Education: Retail jobs are projected to grow significantly (AAGR 1.6 percent), from just under 70,000 jobs in 2020 to over 100,000 in 2044. Education jobs also show steady gains (AAGR 1.3 percent), rising from 38,241 to 52,207.

- ◆ Construction and Manufacturing: While smaller in absolute numbers, both sectors show moderate growth, with construction/residential jobs growing at 0.7 percent annually and Manuf_WTU at 0.4 percent.
- ◆ Public Sector: Government jobs are expected to grow modestly (AAGR 0.9 percent), from around 19,000 in 2020 to 24,000 in 2044.

Exhibit 33: PSRC Employment Forecast, East, 2020-2044



Source: Puget Sound Regional Council, 2025, "Land Use Vision - Implemented Targets 2010 Tract Summaries," data accessed 16 June 2025: www.psrc-psregcncl.hub.arcgis.com

East King County is expected to see strong employment growth not only in high-wage tech and professional services sectors but also in retail and education. This broad-based job growth will fuel housing demand from a wide range of household types.

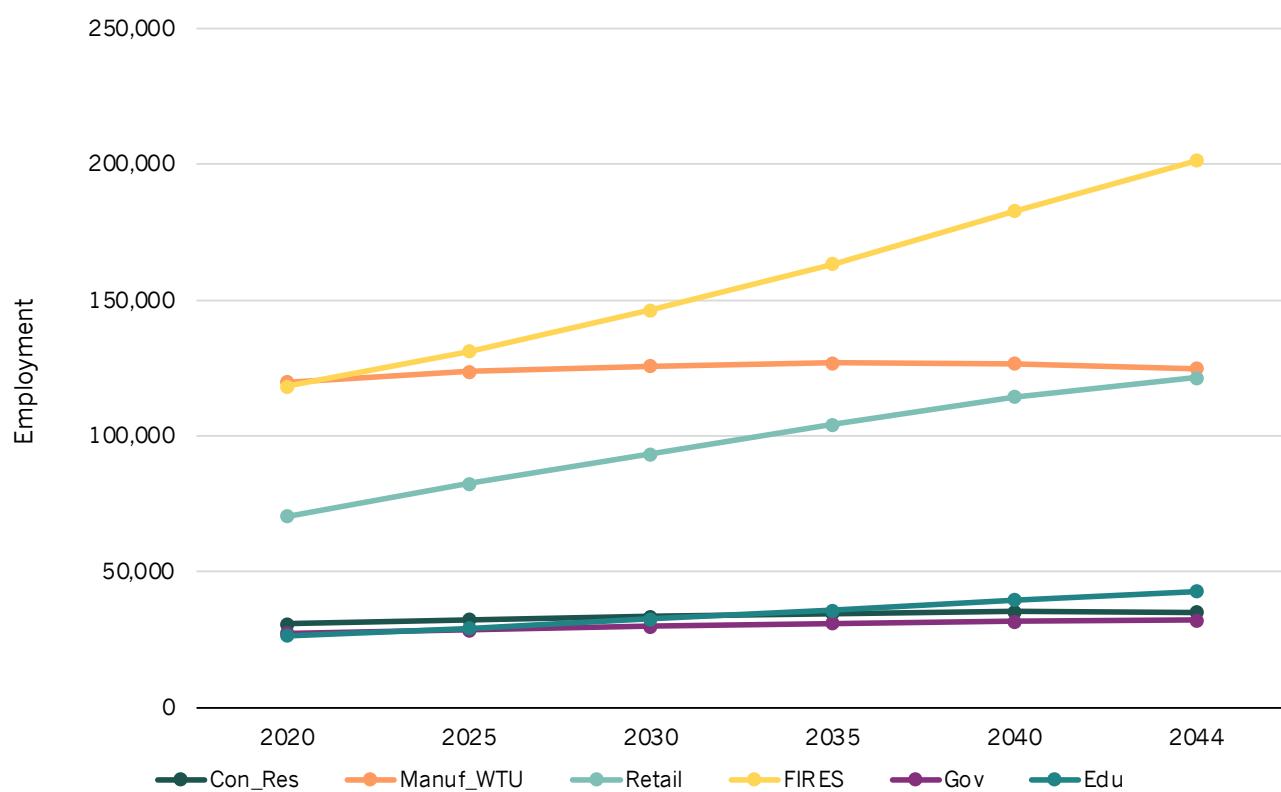
Employment across all sectors in South King County is expected to grow steadily through 2044, with particularly strong gains in key service-oriented industries:

- ◆ **Retail, education, and FIREs are the fastest-growing sectors**, with retail jobs projected to grow at an AAGR of 2.3 percent, reaching over 121,000 by 2044. FIREs

employment is expected to nearly double over the period, with a 2.2 percent AAGR, while education jobs are forecast to grow by 2.0 percent annually.

- ◆ **Manuf_WTU is expected to experience marginal growth** of just 0.2 percent annually. Employment in this sector is projected to peak around 2035 and decline slightly afterward, indicating a possible plateau in the region's long-standing industrial employment base.
- ◆ **Government and education sector jobs show modest but steady growth**, supporting overall employment stability. Though not as fast growing as FIRES or retail, these sectors provide a consistent source of regional jobs.

Exhibit 34: PSRC Employment Forecast, South, 2020–2044



Source: Puget Sound Regional Council, 2025, "Land Use Vision - Implemented Targets 2010 Tract Summaries," data accessed 16 June 2025: www.psrc-psregcncl.hub.arcgis.com

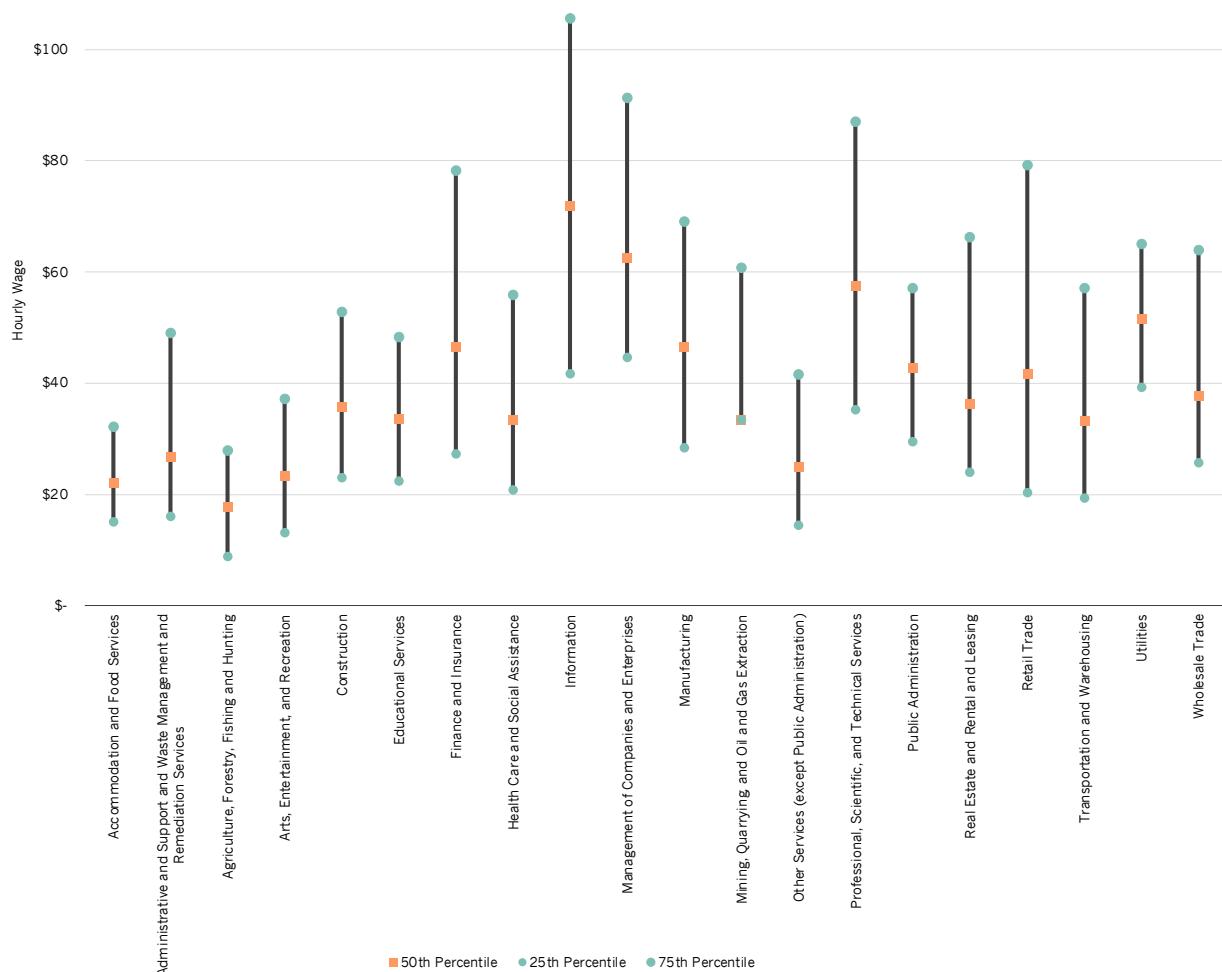
The region's fastest-growing job sectors—retail, education, and FIRES—highlight a shift toward knowledge-based and service-oriented employment and a pressing need to both preserve and expand affordable housing options countywide to support a growing moderate- and lower-wage workforce.

Wages

This section uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), which provides detailed individual-level data on wages. Exhibit 35 through Exhibit 37 in this section show the median (50th percentile), 25th percentile, and 75th percentile hourly wages by sector for each subregion. This visualization highlights the wage distribution across industries.

- ◆ **Highest Median Wages:** The information sector leads with a median hourly wage of \$71.89, followed by management of companies (\$62.61) and professional, scientific, and technical services (\$57.40), reflecting the region's strong presence of high-paying tech and professional service jobs.
- ◆ **Lowest Median Wages:** Agriculture (\$17.70), accommodation and food services (\$22.01), and arts, entertainment, and recreation (\$23.23) represent the lowest-paying sectors.
- ◆ **Middle-Wage Sectors:** Sectors like construction (\$35.67) and educational services (\$33.68) offer moderate wages.

Exhibit 35: Wage Range by Sector, Seattle, 2023

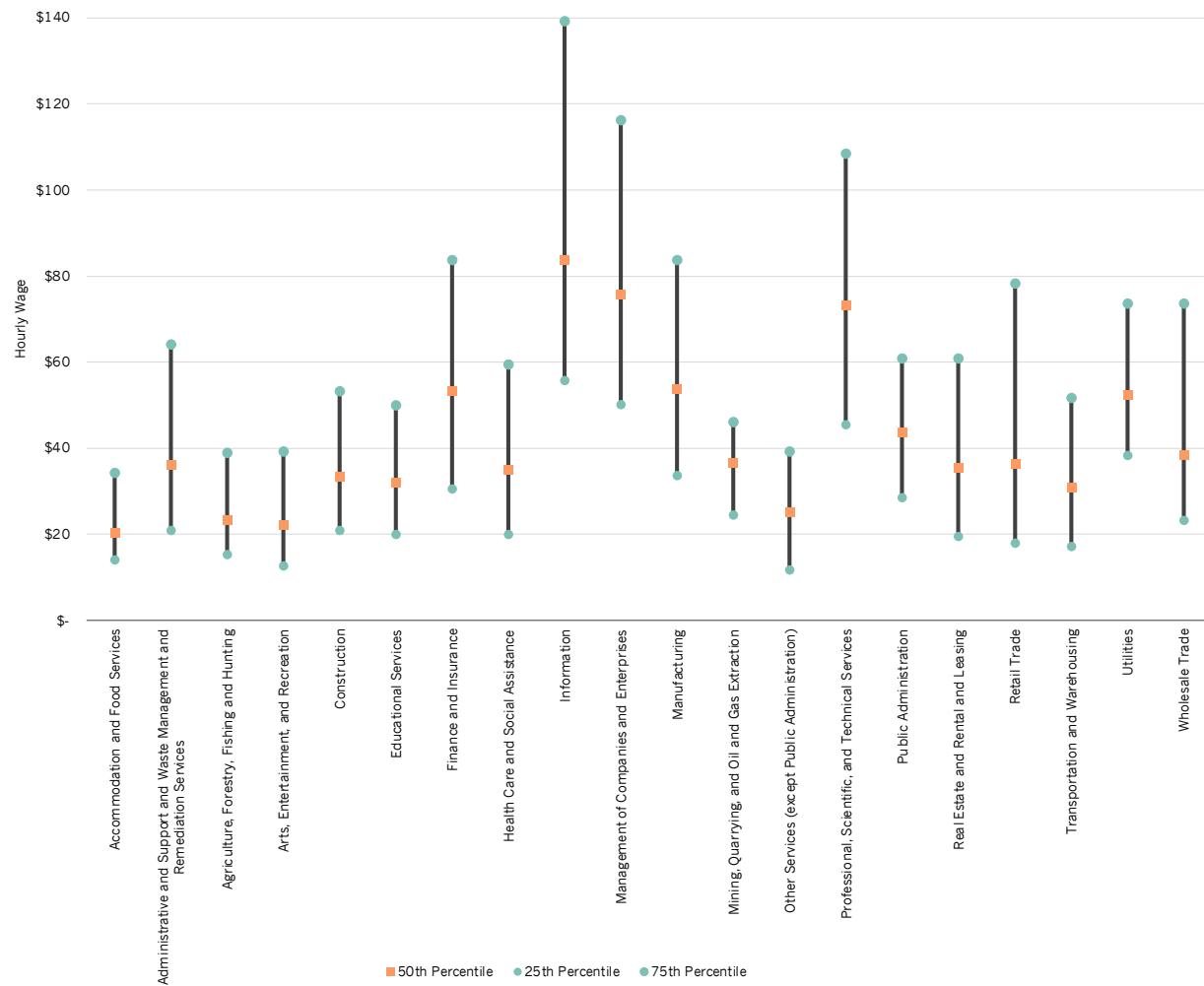


Wage disparities across sectors in Seattle highlight the need for housing options affordable across the income spectrum. While industries like information, professional services, and finance offer high median wages, a significant portion of the workforce—including those in accommodation and food services, arts and entertainment, and administrative support—earns below \$30 per hour at the median. These lower wages may be insufficient to afford Seattle's rising housing costs without cost burden.

- ◆ Highest-paying sectors include information (\$83.60 at the median), professional/scientific/technical services (\$73.28), and management of companies (\$75.79).
- ◆ Service-oriented sectors, such as accommodation and food services (\$20.39 median), arts/entertainment (\$22.08), and other services (\$25.00), have the lowest median wages, often falling below or near the \$20–25/hour range. These industries also exhibit lower 25th percentile wages, indicating more widespread low-wage employment within these fields.
- ◆ Healthcare and educational services show moderate wages at the median (\$34.84 and \$31.96, respectively).



Exhibit 36: Wage Range by Sector, East King County, 2023



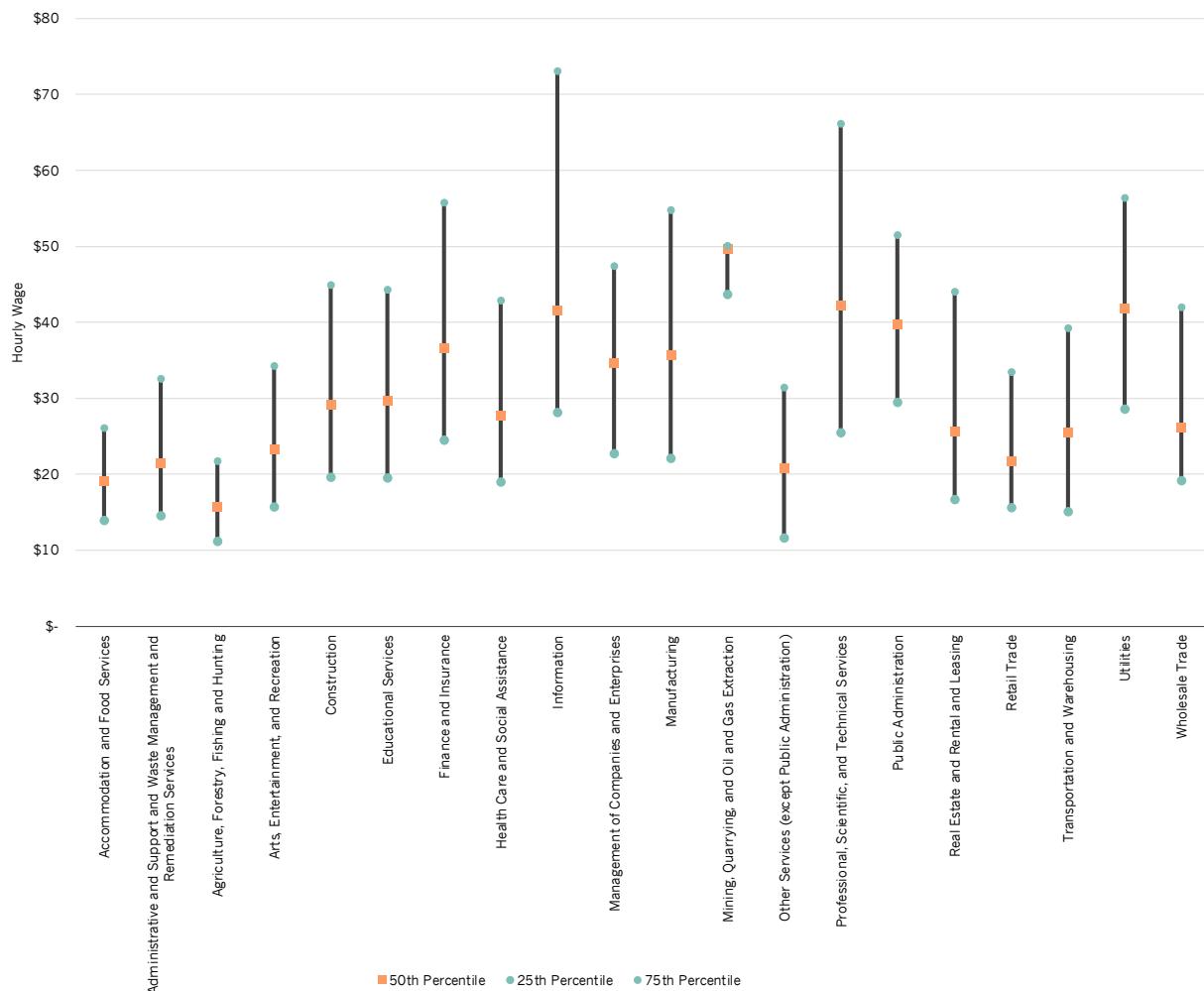
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

Wages in East King County span a wide spectrum, with high-paying sectors like information, professional services, and management offering median hourly wages above \$70, while service-oriented sectors such as accommodation and food services, arts and entertainment, and agriculture fall below \$25 at the median. This wage disparity highlights the region's challenge in meeting housing affordability for its lower-wage workforce, particularly in sectors that are also experiencing job growth.

- ◆ **Lower Median Wages Overall:** South King County tends to have lower median (50th percentile) wages across most industries compared to the Seattle and East regions. For example, the median wage in information (\$41.51) and professional/technical services (\$42.15) is significantly below comparable wages in the East region.

- ◆ **High-Wage Occupations Are Less Prevalent:** While the information, finance, and professional services sectors offer some of the highest wages in the region, these sectors employ fewer workers in the South relative to other subregions.
- ◆ **Prevalence of Low-Wage Work:** Accommodation and food services, administrative support, retail, and other services have median wages between \$19 and \$22 per hour, with lower bounds (25th percentile) near or below \$15. These wages will make it challenging for workers to afford local housing without subsidy or shared living arrangements.

Exhibit 37: Wage Range by Sector, South King County, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

In South King County, wages are generally lower across most sectors compared to other regions, with a substantial share of the workforce concentrated in industries with median hourly wages below \$30, such as food services, administrative support, retail, and transportation. These lower-wage

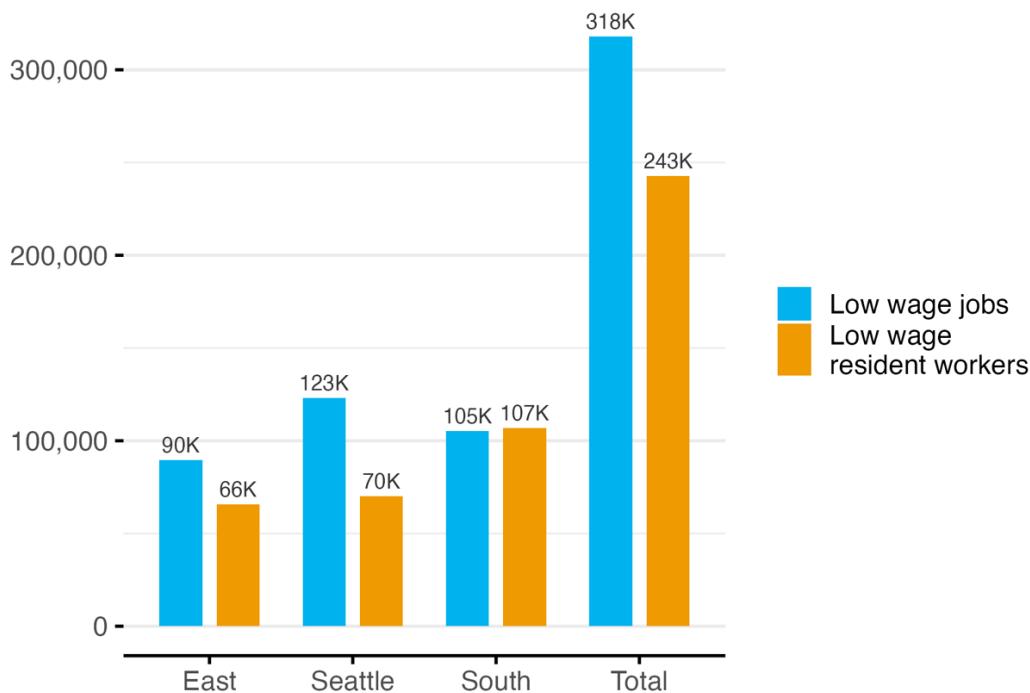
levels heighten the need for deeply affordable housing options in South King County.

Low-Wage Jobs and Resident Workers

The distribution of low-wage jobs and low-wage resident workers varies significantly across King County subregions, with notable imbalances between where these jobs are located and where low-wage workers live.

- ◆ Mismatch between job locations and where workers live: Across the county, there are approximately 318,000 low-wage jobs compared to 243,000 low-wage resident workers. This indicates that a substantial share of low-wage jobs may be filled by workers commuting from outside the county.
- ◆ Seattle has the largest gap between low-wage jobs and resident workers: Seattle contains about 123,000 low-wage jobs but only 70,000 low-wage resident workers, suggesting a strong in-flow of low-wage earners who work in Seattle but live elsewhere.
- ◆ South King County aligns most closely in jobs and workers: The South subregion has roughly equal numbers of low-wage jobs (105,000) and resident workers (107,000), suggesting more balance between where low-wage workers can live and work.
- ◆ East King County shows a moderate job-to-worker gap: The East subregion has about 90,000 low-wage jobs and 66,000 low-wage resident workers, also indicating a reliance on workers commuting in from other areas.

Exhibit 38: Low-Wage Jobs and Low-Wage Resident, King County Regional Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Origin Destination Employment Statistics, 2023.

- **Large gaps between where low-wage jobs are located and where low-wage workers live—especially in Seattle and East King County—highlight the need for affordable housing near job centers to reduce commutes and better align housing with employment opportunities.**

The spatial mismatch observed between low-wage jobs and low-wage resident workers in some areas connects directly to the housing need allocation method in the Countywide Planning Policies. That framework incorporates the ratio of low-wage jobs to low-wage resident workers to guide future housing distribution by income band. Jurisdictions with high concentrations of low-wage jobs but relatively few low-wage resident workers—such as Seattle and East King County in this context—were identified as areas where increased affordable housing production could help shorten commute distances, reduce transportation costs, and improve access to job opportunities to better meet the needs of its lower-income workforce.



4. Housing Supply and Market Trends

King County's housing needs are shaped not only by its population and workforce but by the composition, condition, and distribution of its housing stock. As population growth and economic shifts drive demand, understanding what types of housing exist, where new development is occurring, and how prices have changed over time will provide essential context for identifying gaps in supply and access. This chapter explores how the characteristics of the housing stock, production trends, and market dynamics shape affordability and availability across the region.

Key Takeaways

- ◆ **Seattle has the largest and densest housing stock:** Seattle holds 39 percent of King County's housing units, with a majority in multifamily buildings and more than half renter-occupied, while East and South King County remain dominated by single-detached homes.
- ◆ **Large rental units are scarce countywide:** Across all subregions, most rental units have two bedrooms or fewer, with very few affordable three-bedroom or larger units available for families or multigenerational households.
- ◆ **Seattle leads in new housing permits; South King County lags:** Since 2022, Seattle has accounted for a disproportionately high share of new housing permits, especially multifamily, while South King County has seen far fewer permits relative to its share of the county's housing stock. Uneven development patterns could worsen affordability and housing gaps between subregions.
- ◆ **Income-restricted housing is concentrated in Seattle:** Nearly 60 percent of the county's income-restricted units are in Seattle, and the city holds 81 percent of units affordable to households earning 30 percent of AMI or less.
- ◆ **Housing costs have risen dramatically across all unit types:** Home prices and rents have nearly doubled over the past decade, with East King County the most expensive and South King County—while still more affordable—seeing steep increases that strain lower-income households.
- ◆ **Construction and regulatory costs are among the highest in the nation:** High labor, materials, and regulatory expenses in King County, paired with historic inflation, make it challenging to produce affordable housing without significant subsidy.



WHAT THIS CHAPTER COVERS

This chapter examines the composition, development, and market dynamics of King County's housing stock to assess supply trends to better understand affordability dynamics across the county. It covers:

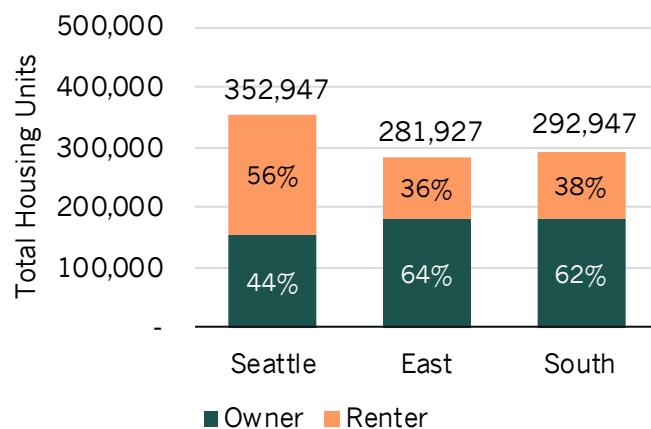
- » **Housing Stock Composition and Tenure:** Overview of unit types, sizes, and age by region, highlighting how differences in the existing stock relate to tenure and affordability.
- » **Development Patterns:** Analysis of where new construction has occurred relative to existing housing and how recent permitting trends affect housing opportunity for certain households.
- » **Market Dynamics:** Examination of price trends for both rental and for-sale housing, with regional comparisons and analysis of affordability pressures across subregions and housing types.
- » **Specialized and Affordable Housing Inventory:** Assessment of the distribution of income-restricted, supportive, and group housing across the County.

Existing Housing Stock Characteristics

Understanding the current composition of the housing supply, including tenure, structure type, size, and age, provides a foundation for identifying mismatches between available units and the needs of different households. As of 2023, King County had approximately 928,000 housing units, with approximately 56 percent of these units owner-occupied and 44 percent renter-occupied. However, the distribution of tenure and units varies by subregion, as shown in Exhibit 39 below.



Exhibit 39: Total Housing Units and Tenure, King County Subregions, 2023



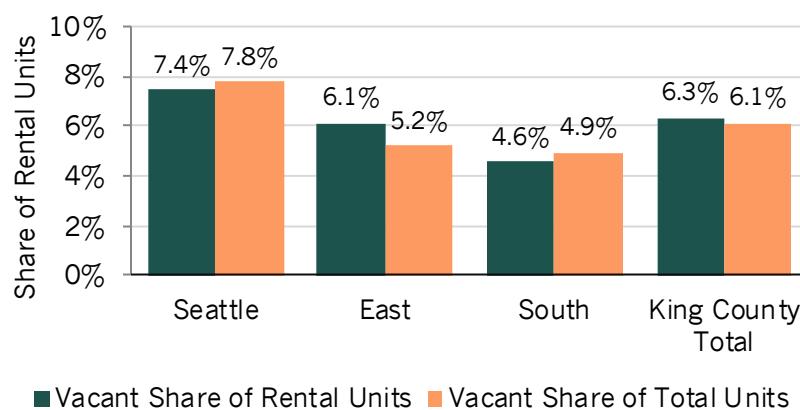
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

- Seattle has the largest number of housing units among the three subregions, accounting for 39 percent of the total units in the county. The South subregion has 31 percent of the county units, and the East subregion has 30 percent.
- Seattle is the only subregion with a majority share of rental units (56 percent). Seattle accounts for just under half (48 percent) of the county's rental units.
- In the South and East subregions, rental units make up just over a third of units (38 and 36 percent, respectively), and the majority of units are for-sale ownership units.

Vacancy

Exhibit 40 shows the vacancy rates for rental units and total units for the subregions. In the county overall, the rental and total vacancy rates are low and relatively similar, both just above six percent of units.

Exhibit 40: Vacancy Rates, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year

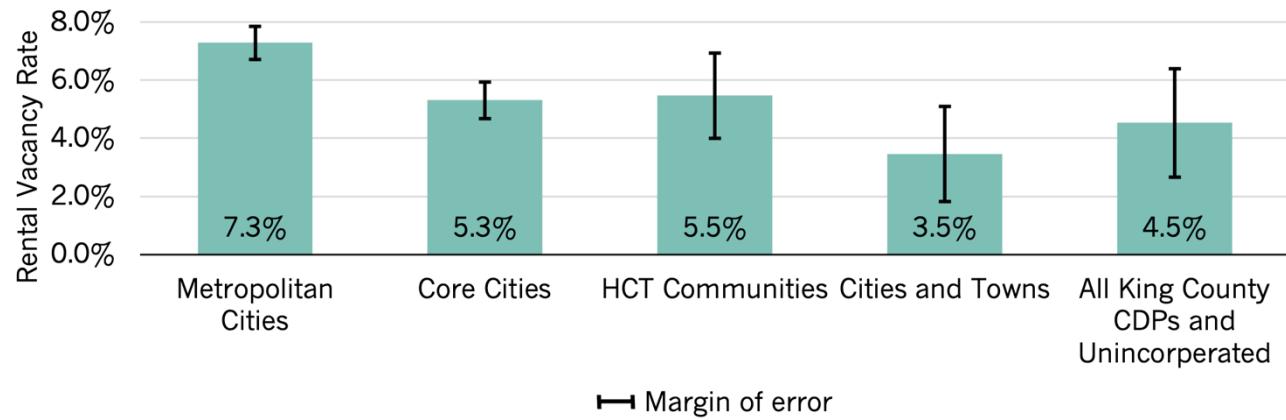
- There is regional variation in vacancy rates:** Seattle has the highest vacancy rates for both renter and overall units, while the South subregion has the lowest. For rental units, vacancy rates are higher than the overall vacancy rate in the East subregion but lower in Seattle and the South subregion.

The exhibit below shows vacancy rates for rental units using the PSRC Regional Geographies. Across the County, rental vacancy rates generally align with subregional urbanization, with metropolitan cities showing the highest vacancy rates and cities, towns, Census-designated places (CDPs), and unincorporated areas having the lowest. This is likely in part a reflection of the number of rental units in each subregion; denser subregions tend to have more rental



units, resulting in a higher vacancy rate than more constrained markets. At the same time, less urbanized jurisdictions, particularly in South King County, have had housing costs that are relatively more affordable than denser areas. As housing costs rise, some households are likely to move to more affordable jurisdictions, contributing to a lower vacancy rate.

Exhibit 41: Vacancy Rates, PSRC Regional Geographies, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS Detailed Tables, accessed at: data.census.gov.

King County's overall vacancy rate is relatively low, indicating households may struggle to find units within their budget. Less urbanized areas, particularly in South King County, have lower vacancy rates, likely due in part to strong demand for the subregion's relatively affordable units.

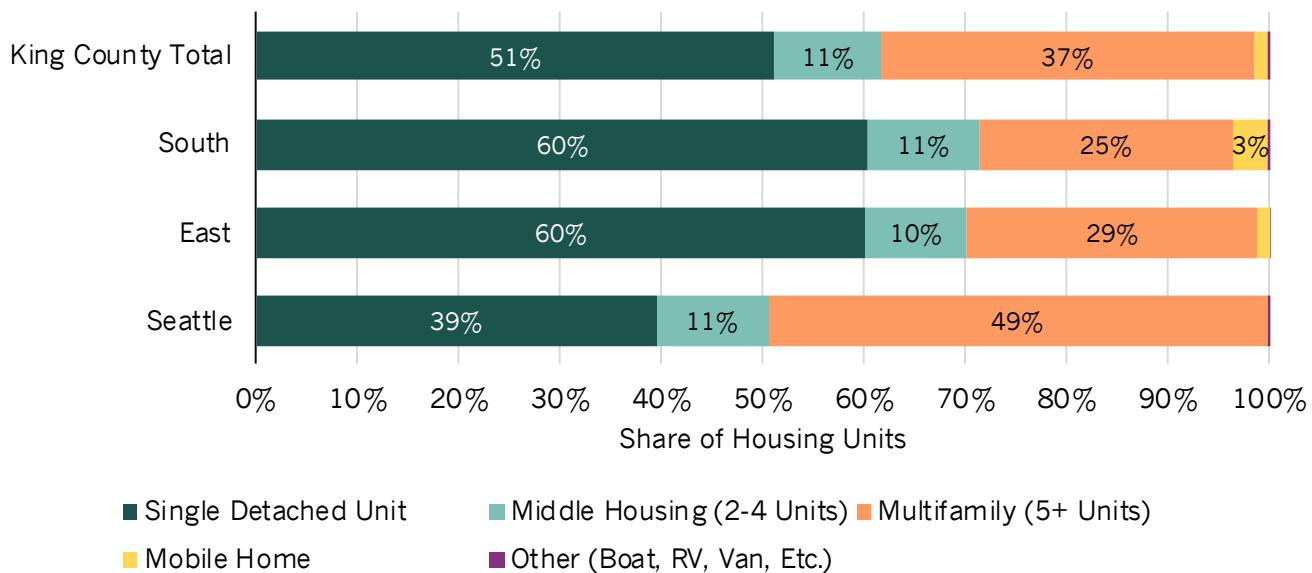
Housing Type

Exhibit 42 shows the distribution of housing units by type across King County and its subregions. In King County, units are split relatively evenly between single-detached and multifamily units; of multifamily units, most are in buildings with five or more units.

- ♦ **Seattle has the densest housing stock:** In Seattle, just under half (49 percent) of units are located in multifamily buildings with at least five units. The majority (60 percent) of units are located in multifamily buildings with at least two units.
- ♦ **Outside of Seattle, the majority of units are single-detached:** South and East King County have similar distributions of housing types, with the majority (60 percent) of housing being single-detached units. In these subregions, multifamily housing represents roughly a quarter of total housing units (25 percent and 29 percent, respectively).
- ♦ **Relatively lower shares of middle housing:** All subregions have a similar share of middle housing, just over 10 percent of the total housing stock.
- ♦ **Manufactured homes:** South King County has the highest share of mobile homes, representing 3 percent of its housing stock.



Exhibit 42: Housing Units by Type, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year

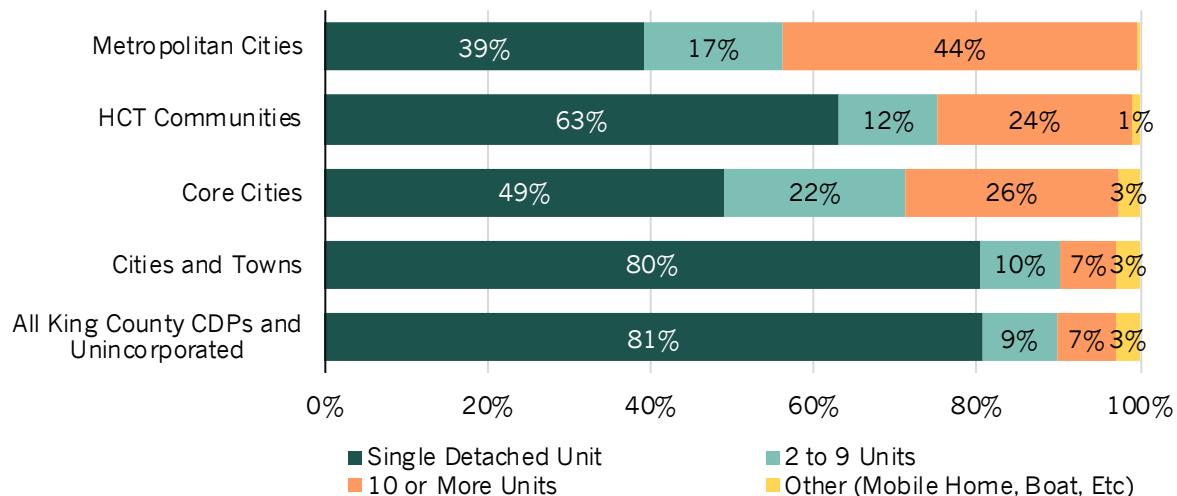
The majority of units in Seattle are in multifamily dwellings, while units in the East and South subregions are predominantly single-detached units.

Exhibit 43 shows housing units by type analyzed using the PSRC Regional Geographies.

- ◆ **Metropolitan cities have the densest housing stock:** Metropolitan cities have the highest share of larger multifamily buildings, with just under half (44 percent) of units located in buildings with at least ten units. Units in buildings with at least two units make up 61 percent of the housing stock.
- ◆ **Core cities also have a relatively dense housing stock:** In core cities, just under half of units (48 percent) are located in buildings with at least two units and just over a quarter (26 percent) are in buildings with 10 or more units.
- ◆ **Limited middle housing in high-capacity transit (HCT) communities:** While HCT communities have a similar share of units in larger multifamily buildings (24 percent) as core cities (26 percent), they have a lower share of smaller multifamily buildings with two to nine units (12 percent to 22 percent, respectively).
- ◆ **Housing in smaller or less urbanized types of jurisdictions is predominantly single-detached units:** These types of jurisdictions (i.e., cities, towns, CDPs, and unincorporated areas) have a similar housing type distribution, with 80 percent of units in cities and towns, 81 percent of units in CDPs and unincorporated areas being single-detached units, and less than a quarter of units being in multifamily buildings (17 percent and 16 percent, respectively).



Exhibit 43: Housing Units by Type, PSRC Regional Geographies, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year

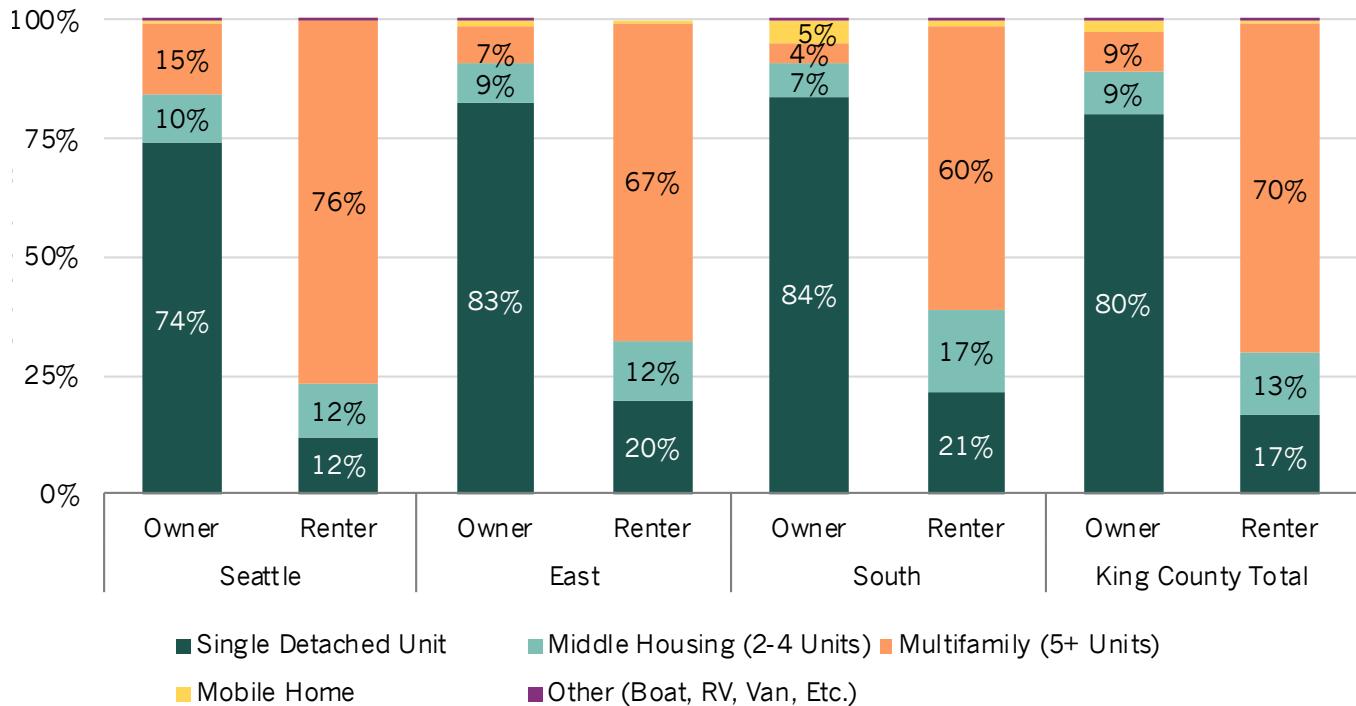
Metropolitan and core cities have the densest housing stocks, while the housing in less urbanized jurisdictions is majority single-detached units.

Exhibit 44 shows housing units by both type and tenure for the King County subregions. Overall, 80 percent of King County homeowners live in single-detached homes, while the majority of renters (70 percent) live in multifamily housing.

- ◆ **The majority of homeowners live in single-detached units:** Across all subregions, the majority of homeowners occupy single-detached units, ranging from 74 percent in Seattle to 84 percent in South King County.
- ◆ **The majority of renters live in multifamily units:** Across subregions, the majority of renters live in multifamily housing with at least five units, ranging from 60 percent in South King County to 76 percent in Seattle.
- ◆ **Homeowners in manufactured housing:** South King County has the highest share of homeowners occupying mobile homes.
- ◆ **Multifamily ownership units are rare:** In the East and South subregions, only 16 and 11 percent of homeowners living in dwellings with at least two units, respectively. Seattle has the highest share of homeowners occupying multifamily buildings, with a quarter of homeowners living in homes with at least two units.



Exhibit 44: Housing Units by Type and Tenure, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

Across the county, homeowners are more likely to live in single-detached units, while renters are more likely to live in multifamily housing.

Unit Size

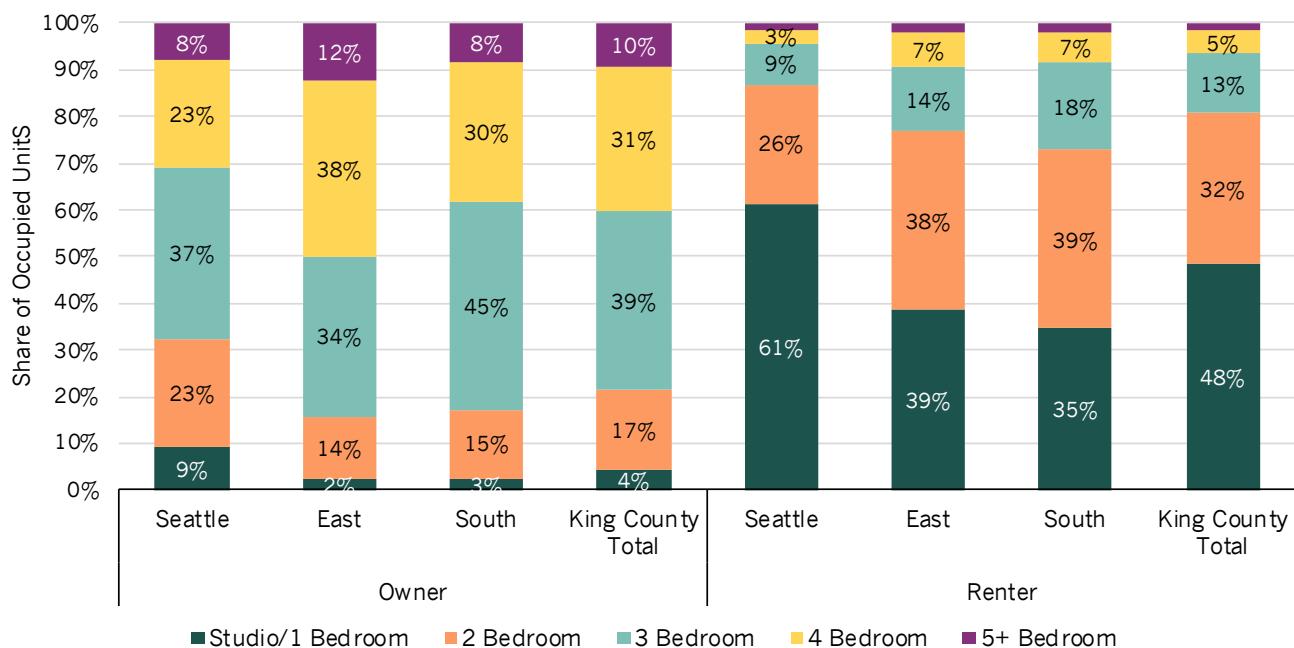
Exhibit 45 shows the distribution of unit sizes (categorized as the number of bedrooms) by tenure for each subregion. In King County, the majority of the ownership housing stock (70 percent) is made up of three- and four-bedroom units. In contrast, the majority (80 percent) of rental units have two bedrooms or fewer and less than 10 percent have four or five bedrooms.

- ♦ **Seattle has the smallest for-sale and rental units:** Seattle has the highest share of studio and one-bedroom units, representing the majority of its rental housing stock (61 percent). These units also make up 9 percent of Seattle's ownership housing stock, a higher share than in the East and South subregions (2 and 3 percent, respectively).
- ♦ **Rental units are larger in subregions outside Seattle:** South and East King County have a similar distribution of rental unit sizes. While studios and one- and two-bedroom units still make up the majority of units (74 percent of South subregion rental units and 77 percent of East subregion rental units), these subregions have a lower share of studio and one-bedroom rental units and a higher share of two-bedroom rental units compared to Seattle.



- ◆ **East King County has the largest for-sale units:** East King County has the highest share of large ownership units, with 50 percent of these units having four or five bedrooms. These units make up 31 percent and 38 percent of the Seattle and South subregions' housing stock, respectively.

Exhibit 45: Housing Units by Tenure and Number of Bedrooms, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year

Across subregions, rental units tend to be smaller than for-sale units.

LARGE HOUSEHOLDS STRUGGLE TO FIND ADEQUATE UNIT SIZES

Community engagement findings from the 2024 King County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice highlight a shortage of larger rental units across King County, limiting options for households with children and multigenerational families.⁷⁶ Stakeholders and community members emphasized:

- » Nearly every organization interviewed reported an extreme shortage of affordable three-bedroom or larger units in King County.
- » Compass Housing Alliance staff shared that the largest unit they offer is a three-bedroom home with a seven-person limit and that these units have extremely low turnover rates.

⁷⁶ Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021–2025: King County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (2025), pg. 39



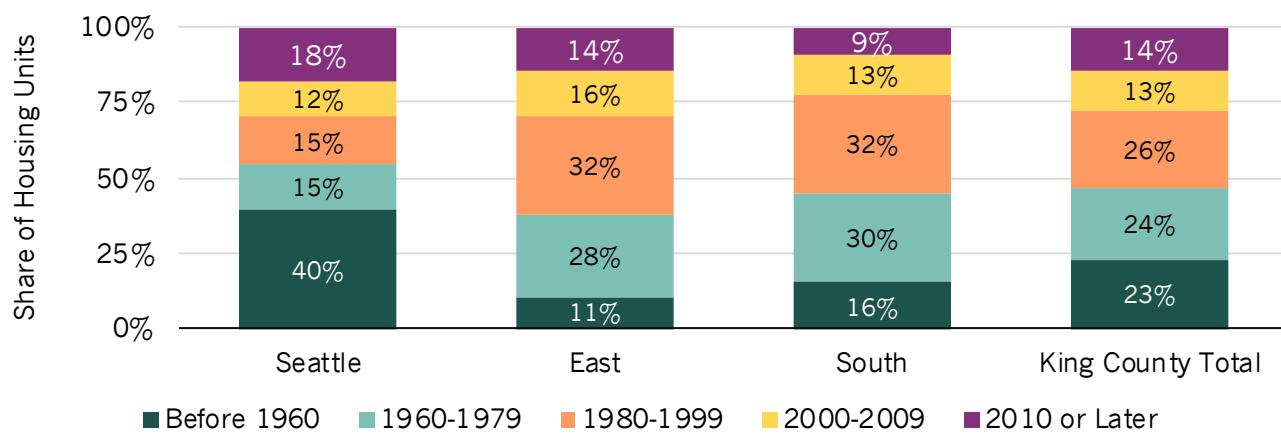
- » Habitat for Humanity staff reported being flooded with requests for three- to four-bedroom units, citing an insufficient supply.
- » Staff from Compass Housing Alliance and A Regional Coalition for Housing noted that large households are often forced to move and change schools in order to access housing that meets their size needs.

Age of Housing Stock

Exhibit 46 shows the distribution of when units were built for each subregion. Across King County, just under half (47 percent) of the units were built before 1980 and roughly three-quarters (73 percent) of the units were built before 2000.

- ◆ **Seattle has the oldest housing stock:** Seattle has the oldest housing stock of the subregions, with 40 percent of units built before 1960.
- ◆ **Seattle construction has increased in recent years:** Seattle has double the share of units built in 2000 or later (30 percent) than in the prior 20-year period from 1980 to 1999 (15 percent). Seattle also has the highest share of units built in 2010 or later (18 percent), an increase from 2000 to 2009.
- ◆ **Housing production has slowed in East and South King County:** In the East and South subregions, the majority of units were built between 1960 and 1999 (60 percent and 62 percent, respectively). Both subregions have a lower share of units built in 2000 or later than in the prior 20-year period, and the South subregion has the lowest share of units built in 2010 or later (9 percent).

Exhibit 46: Age of Housing Stock by Region



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

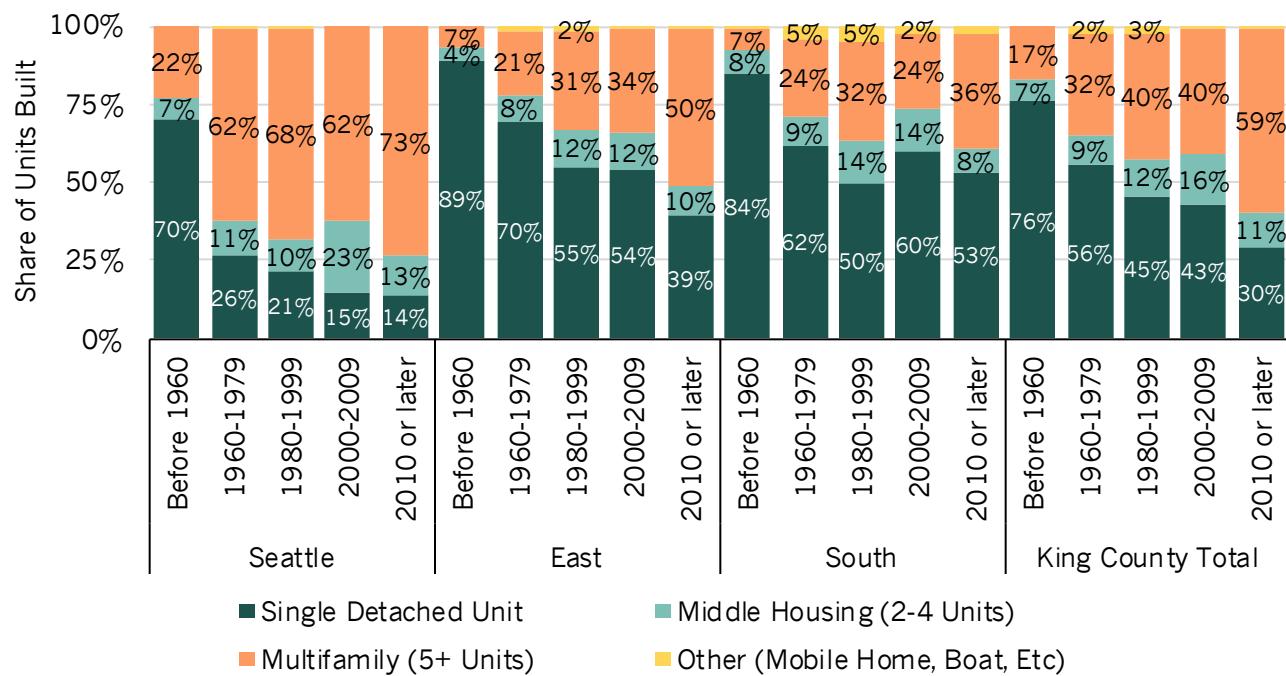
Construction has increased in Seattle in recent decades, while slowing in the East and South subregions.



Exhibit 47 shows the distribution of housing types built in each time period. In King County overall, roughly three-quarters (76 percent) of units built before 1960 were single-detached units. In contrast, the majority of units (70 percent) built in 2010 or later were in buildings with at least two units.

- ◆ **Multifamily units are prevalent in Seattle:** In Seattle, the majority of units built in each period after 1960 were multifamily units.
- ◆ **Multifamily construction has increased in East King County:** In the East subregion, the share of multifamily units built increased in each subsequent period. After 2010, half of the new units were in buildings with five or more units.
- ◆ **Single-detached units have remained the majority of new units in South King County:** In the South subregion, the distribution of new unit types has remained relatively consistent after 1960, with the majority being single-detached units.

Exhibit 47: Housing Units by Age and Type, King County Subregions, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

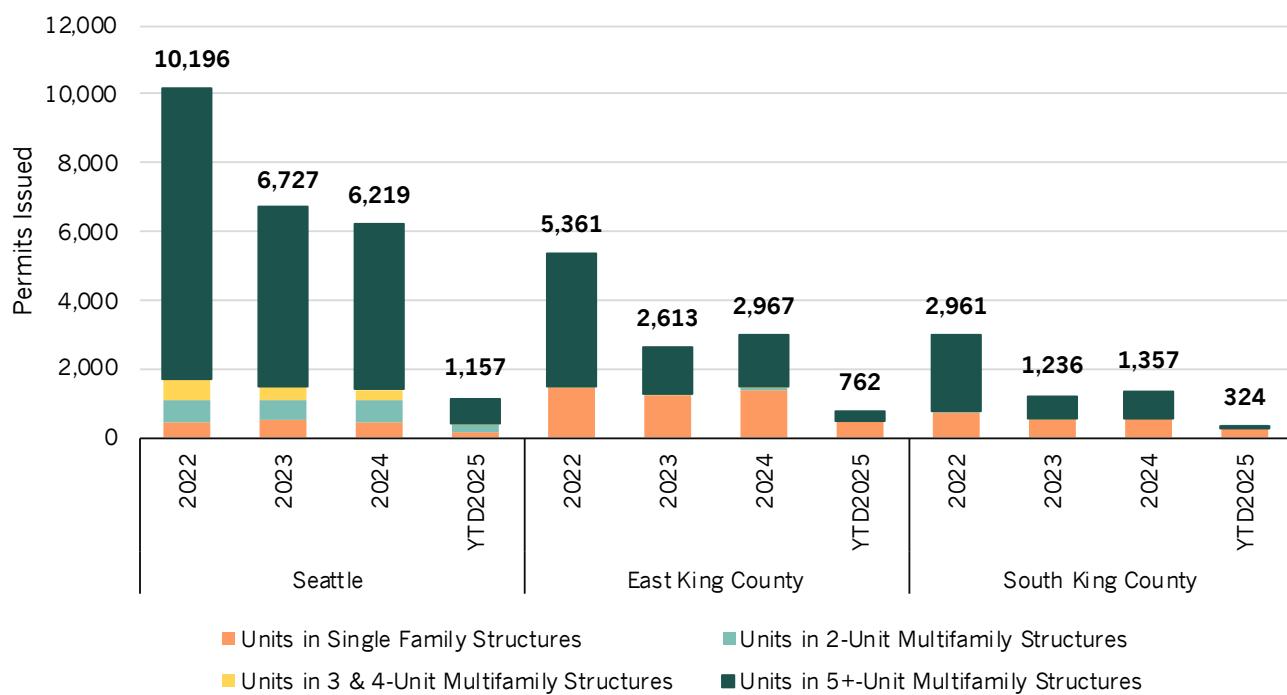
Older housing tends to be single-detached units, while newer construction is more likely to be multifamily, except in South King County where single-detached homes continue to be the majority of new construction. This ongoing pattern may contribute to larger household sizes in the South subregion compared to other parts of the county.

Permitting and Development Pipeline

Exhibit 48 shows each subregion's development pipeline, characterized by the number of permits issued annually since 2022. Over this period, the number of permits issued for each subregion peaked in 2022, then fell in 2023 and 2024. While data collected for 2025 is only through June 2025, the number of permits issued in 2025 will likely be lower than in 2024 if trends continue for each subregion. These trends are largely due to a drop in multifamily permits, while single-detached unit permits stayed relatively consistent from 2022 to 2025.

- ◆ **New construction is concentrated in Seattle:** Over this period, 58 percent of new permits issued in the county were located in Seattle; as of 2023, 39 percent of County units were in Seattle (as shown in Exhibit 39). Seattle also had the highest share of multifamily permits issued, with 93 percent of permits issued for buildings with at least two units. Sixty-eight percent of multifamily units permitted over this period were in Seattle as well.
- ◆ **South King County has experienced slower growth:** Despite accounting for 31 percent of total units in the County, only 14 percent of permits issued over this period were in South King County.
- ◆ **Middle housing is most common in Seattle:** Over this period, roughly 14 percent of permits issued in Seattle were for buildings with two to four units. In comparison, these housing types accounted for only 2 percent of permits in the East subregion and 1 percent of permits in the South subregion.

Exhibit 48: Building Permits by Housing Type, King County Subregions, 2022 to 2025



Source: U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 2025, State of the Cities Data Systems Building Permit 2022–2025, accessed June 25th, 2025 at: www.huduser.gov



Note: Monthly counts for 2025 are still preliminary and subject to change.

While multifamily units have represented the majority of permits issued in recent years, the number of multifamily permits issued annually has declined, resulting in a decrease in the overall number of permits issued.

The distribution of permits issued is not proportionate to that of existing units, with disproportionately high permits for new construction in Seattle and disproportionately low permits in South King County.

Zoning, Land Use, and Housing Affordability

Housing supply in King County is shaped not only by market demand but by zoning and land use policies that determine what kinds of homes can be built and where. For decades, many jurisdictions limited large areas of land to single-family zoning, which prohibited the development of other types of housing such as duplexes, townhomes, and multifamily buildings that are often more affordable to lower- and moderate-income households. This legacy of exclusionary zoning has reinforced patterns of segregation and limited the availability of diverse, affordable housing choices.

Recent state legislation, including House Bill 1220, now requires cities and counties to connect land use planning more directly to housing needs. As part of their Comprehensive Plan Update, jurisdictions are required to conduct land capacity analyses—assessments that estimate how much housing can be accommodated under existing zoning and how those units align with projected housing needs. These analyses do not just count potential housing units; they also evaluate which income bands those units are most likely to serve based on zoning categories and market conditions.⁷⁷

COMMUNITY INPUT HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR MIDDLE HOUSING OPTIONS

Community-based organizations and housing providers emphasized the potential of middle housing—such as duplexes, triplexes, and small apartment buildings—as a way to meet the needs of larger households at more affordable price points. Stakeholders and community members in recent King County community engagement efforts emphasized:

- » Middle housing types offer an important alternative to large, unaffordable single-family homes or small multifamily units that may not accommodate families.
- » Interviewees highlighted cultural preferences for multigenerational living and close-knit communities, describing middle housing as a better fit for how many families live:

⁷⁷ Commerce. (2023). Housing Element Update Guidance, Book 2: Housing Needs and Capacity Analysis (HB 1220 Implementation). Olympia, WA.



“We need middle housing. We come from cultures where communities are deeply connected. We did not live in massive homes...”⁷⁸

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES ARE EXPANDING MIDDLE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

Under House Bill 1110, passed in 2023, many cities in Washington are now required to allow a broader range of middle housing types—such as duplexes, fourplexes, and courtyard apartments—in lower-density residential zones. These requirements apply to most cities planning under the Growth Management Act (generally those with populations over 25,000), with specific allowances scaling based on city size and proximity to major transit stops.⁷⁹

- » Over the last two years, local jurisdictions across King County have been actively updating their comprehensive plans and zoning codes to comply with HB 1110 and related state housing laws, aiming to remove regulatory barriers and expand middle housing options. This legislative shift is intended to increase housing diversity, improve affordability, and better match the needs of households of different sizes.
- » Despite this potential, middle housing makes up only a small share of current development. Most new permitted units in King County are smaller apartments, which limits options for larger families seeking affordability and space.

Housing Types Inventory

In addition to market-rate housing, King County’s housing landscape includes income-restricted housing and supportive housing types that serve residents with special needs. These include:

- ◆ Income-restricted housing units reserved for households earning below a specified income threshold, typically set as a percentage of AMI. Rent rates are typically set at no more than 30 percent of the household’s income.
- ◆ Emergency, transitional, and PSH units supporting households experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. Emergency housing offers immediate, short-term shelter; transitional housing provides temporary, time-limited housing with supportive services; and PSH provides long-term housing with ongoing services for people with complex and chronic needs.
- ◆ Group, senior, and institutional housing options serve residents with specialized needs. Group housing often provides shared living with supportive services for individuals with disabilities or in recovery, senior housing offers age-restricted units designed for older adults with varying levels of care, and institutional housing includes regulated

⁷⁸ Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021–2025: 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan – Housing Needs Assessment (B-177-178)

⁷⁹ Municipal Research and Services Center. (2023, July 5). Major changes to Washington housing laws. [\[link\]](#)



facilities such as nursing homes or correctional institutions with more intensive oversight and services.

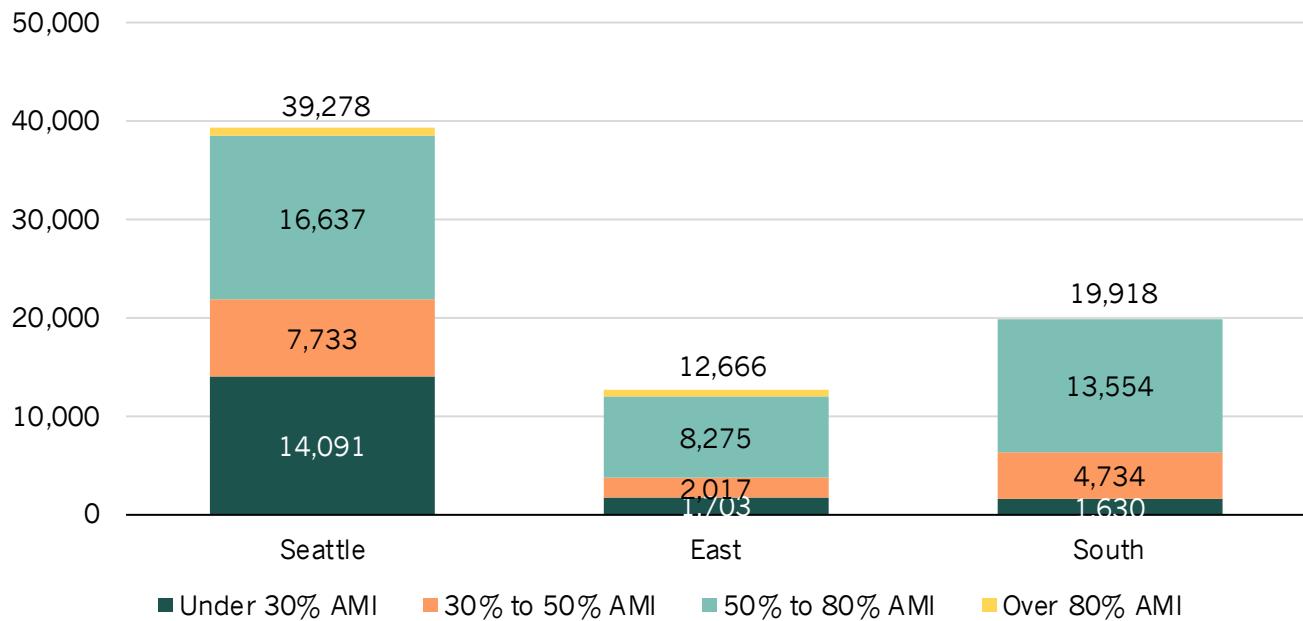
This section provides an inventory of the supply and geographic distribution of these housing types, offering insight into where affordable and specialized housing resources are concentrated and where gaps remain in the County.

Income-Restricted Housing Unit Inventory

Exhibit 49 shows the number of income-restricted housing units by affordability threshold. In the county overall, just over 72,000 units are income restricted, or roughly eight percent of the County's total housing stock. Of these units, just over half (54 percent) are affordable at 50 to 80 percent of AMI, 20 percent are affordable at between 30 and 50 percent of AMI, and a quarter are affordable at 30 percent of AMI or below.

Income-restricted units are not distributed proportionally throughout the County. Seattle has 55 percent of the county's income-restricted housing units but only 39 percent of the county's total housing units. Seattle also has 81 percent of the County's units affordable at 30 percent of AMI and below. On the contrary, East King County has 30 percent of the County's total housing units, but only 18 percent of it is income-restricted units.

Exhibit 49: Income-Restricted Housing Units, King County Subregions, 2025



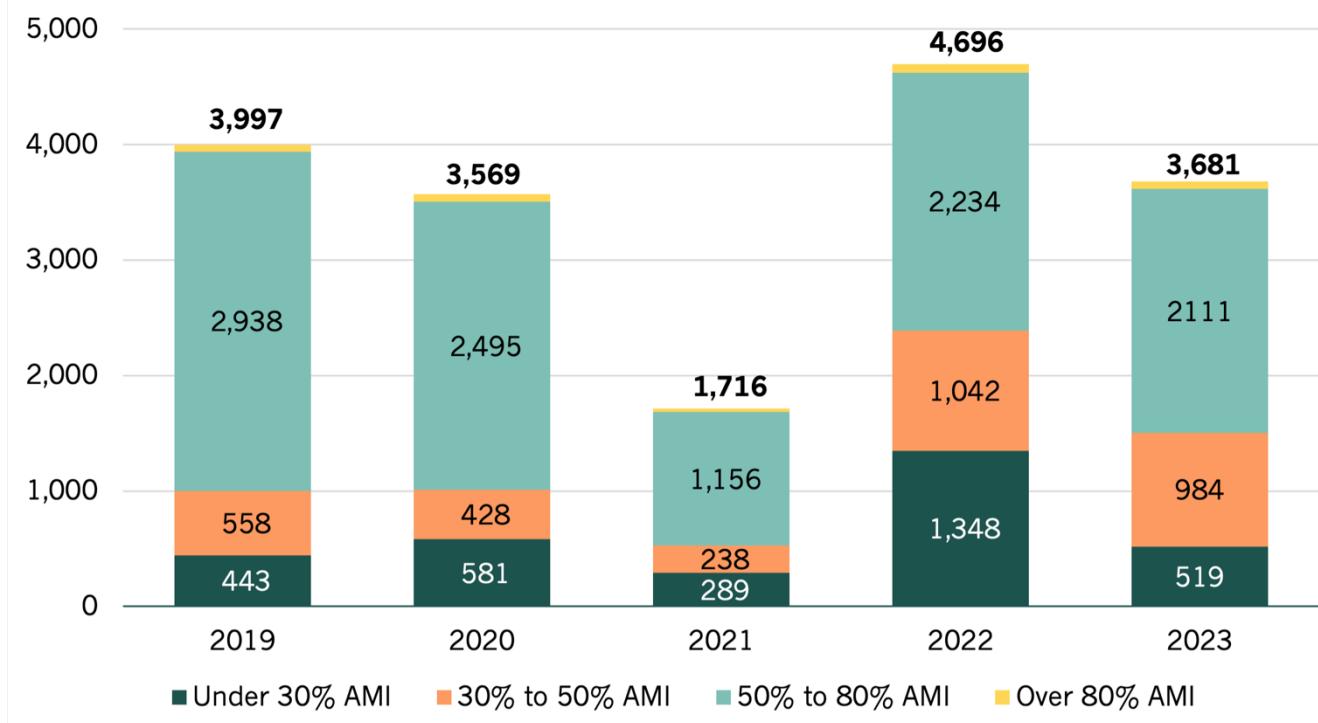
Source: King County Income-restricted Housing Database, data extracted 23 July 2025. Data Current as of December 31, 2023.

Exhibit 50 shows the number of income-restricted units, by income band, produced since the housing needs were identified in 2019.



- ◆ **Production slowed after 2022 peak but remained strong in 2023:** Following the record-high production of 4,696 units in 2022, total income-restricted housing delivery declined to 3,681 units in 2023. While lower than the prior year, this remains well above the 2021 total of 1,716 units, demonstrating continued momentum in delivery.
- ◆ **Deeply affordable production remains above pre-2022 levels:** In 2023, 519 units affordable to households earning under 30 percent of AMI were delivered. Although this represents a drop from the 1,348 units produced in 2022, it still exceeds the 2019 and 2021 levels and is comparable to 2020. Delivery of these units has fluctuated year to year, but given the difficulty of producing housing at this affordability level, the gains represent important progress toward the CPP goal of expanding housing options for the county's lowest-income households.
- ◆ **Stability in 30–50 percent of AMI production:** Production at the 30–50 percent of AMI level remained strong in 2023, with 984 units delivered—slightly below the 2022 peak (1,042 units) but more than double the number delivered in any year prior to 2022.
- ◆ **Consistent Production for 50–80 percent of AMI Households:** While lower than the 2022 peak of 2,234 units, production for households earning 50–80 percent of AMI remained the largest share of income-restricted housing across the period, reflecting both ongoing demand and the relative feasibility of financing and producing housing at this affordability level.

Exhibit 50: Countywide Income-Restricted Housing Delivered Since 2019



Source: King County Income-Restricted Housing Database, data extracted 23 July 2025. Data Current as of December 31, 2023.

Note(s): These figures may differ from other data products utilizing the Income-Restricted Housing Database because the data is continuously improved.



Exhibit 51 shows the distribution of income-restricted housing production across King County between 2019 and 2023 and highlights significant variation in affordability levels and delivery scale by jurisdiction. According to the King County Income-Restricted Housing Database, over 17,600 income-restricted units were placed into service during this period.

- ◆ **Seattle dominates production across all affordability levels:** With over 10,000 units added between 2019 and 2023, Seattle alone accounts for more than half of countywide production. The city produced the largest number of deeply affordable units (2,341 at 0–30 percent of AMI), reflecting its scale of need and dedicated funding sources like the Seattle Housing Levy.
- ◆ **Eastside cities show notable contributions at higher AMI bands:** Bellevue, Kirkland, and Redmond together delivered over 2,700 units, the majority targeted at households earning 50–80 percent of AMI. Bellevue produced the largest single-city total outside Seattle (1,113 units), while Redmond delivered a significant share of moderate-income units (682 at 50–80 percent of AMI).
- ◆ **South King County jurisdictions focus on moderate affordability levels:** Cities such as Renton (361 units at 50–80 percent of AMI), Federal Way (469 units), Burien (206 units), and SeaTac (531 units) made meaningful contributions, though the bulk of their production is concentrated at 50–80 percent of AMI rather than deeply affordable levels.
- ◆ **Several smaller jurisdictions contributed more targeted AMI production:** Communities like Shoreline (483 units at 50–80 AMI), Snoqualmie (188 units at 50–80 AMI), Renton (361 at 50–80 AMI), and Tukwila (120 units at 30–50 AMI) added units, demonstrating incremental progress across the county.

Exhibit 51: Income-Restricted Housing Delivery by Jurisdiction (2019–2023)

PLACE	0–30% AMI	30–50% AMI	50–80% AMI
Auburn	64	34	0
Bellevue	291	71	751
Bothell	0	58	0
Burien	0	0	206
Covington	0	0	196
Des Moines	0	0	551
Duvall	0	0	0
Federal Way	29	37	469
Issaquah	0	11	47
Kenmore	4	0	0
Kent	40	40	0
Kirkland	205	212	297
Newcastle	0	8	15
North Bend	0	0	28
Redmond	64	139	682



Renton	49	48	361
SeaTac	0	0	531
Seattle	2,341	2,348	5,704
Shoreline	50	50	483
Snoqualmie	0	0	188
Tukwila	0	120	25
Unincorporated Areas	43	74	400
Grand Total	3,180	3,250	10,934

Source: King County Income-Restricted Housing Database, data extracted 23 July 2025. Data Current as of December 31, 2023.

INCOME-RESTRICTED HOUSING AND CPP PERMANENT HOUSING NEEDS

- » While not a complete measure of housing affordability, data on income-restricted housing supply provides some insight on progress toward meeting the CPP permanent housing needs below 80 percent of AMI.
- » The CPP Housing Chapter identifies a countywide need of over 195,062 units affordable to households at or below 80 percent of AMI by 2044, requiring on average an additional 7,802 units per year starting in 2019.⁸⁰
- » From 2019 through 2023, however, an average of just 3,472 income-restricted units affordable from 0 to 80 percent of AMI were built each year. The majority of these units (63 percent) were affordable at 50 to 80 percent of AMI.
- » Accounting for this underproduction, the County would need to increase the annual production of income-restricted units to over 8,000 units per year to meet the 0 to 80 percent housing need by 2044.⁸¹ The bulk of the increased production would need to be for units affordable at 0 to 30 percent of AMI to fully meet the countywide need.

- Income-restricted housing production in King County has trended upward since 2019, with a record peak in 2022 and sustained delivery in 2023. While production of deeply affordable units (<30 percent of AMI) remains challenging and uneven year to year, recent gains mark meaningful progress toward the CPP goal of expanding options for the county's lowest-income households. Yet with an average of just 3,472 units delivered annually from 2019 to 2023—less than half of what is needed—

⁸⁰ See: King County. 2021 King County Countywide Planning Policies. Table H-1. [pgs. 39–41]. [[link](#)]

⁸¹ Due to data limitations, we are unable to determine the number of market-rate units built between 2019 and 2023 affordable to households at or below 80 percent of AMI.



the pace of production must accelerate significantly to meet countywide housing needs by 2044.

CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING AND ACCESSING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- » Service providers reported that due to limited affordable options and heavy regulation, it is not uncommon for multiple families to crowd into a single market-rate unit—sometimes with 10 to 15 people sharing just a two- or three-bedroom unit.⁸²
- » Community stakeholders also emphasized that restrictive zoning remains a significant barrier to producing income-restricted housing in King County.⁸³

Funding Constraints and Operating Cost Pressures

- » Federal funding uncertainty amplifies risks for new developments. Recent proposals to cut U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rental assistance—including steep reductions to Section 8 and other subsidies—are already stalling affordable housing projects as developers and lenders become cautious amid funding volatility.⁸⁴
- » Without public subsidies, the private market fails to produce housing at rents extremely low-income households can afford because revenues rarely cover development and operating costs.⁸⁵
- » Operating costs are rising faster than revenues, with many properties reporting revenue shortfalls in their first year and finding their financial projections outmatched by actual operating conditions due to increased maintenance, insurance, security, and staffing costs.⁸⁶
- » The King County Affordable Housing Committee has identified rising capital and operating costs as a key threat to affordability efforts, advocating for the creation of a new, sustainable funding source. The goal is to effectively serve households earning below 50 percent of AMI and align resources with increasing cost pressures.⁸⁷

⁸² Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021–2025: King County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (2025), pg. 39

⁸³ Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021–2025: King County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (2025), pg. 27

⁸⁴ Picciotto, R. (2025, July 22). Trump housing projects face steep funding cuts. The Wall Street Journal. [\[link\]](#)

⁸⁵ Aurand, A., and Pish, M. (2023). The national need for affordable housing. In 2024 Advocates' Guide (pgs. 1–12). National Low Income Housing Coalition. Retrieved from [\[link\]](#)

⁸⁶ Housing Development Center. (2024, February 20). Operating conditions are worse than anyone projected: Affordable housing properties are not set up to adjust. Housing Development Center. Retrieved from [\[link\]](#)

⁸⁷ King County Affordable Housing Committee. (2024, December 5). 2025 state legislative priorities. In King County Affordable Housing Committee's 2025 state legislative priorities (Growth Management Planning Council). King County. Retrieved from [\[link\]](#)

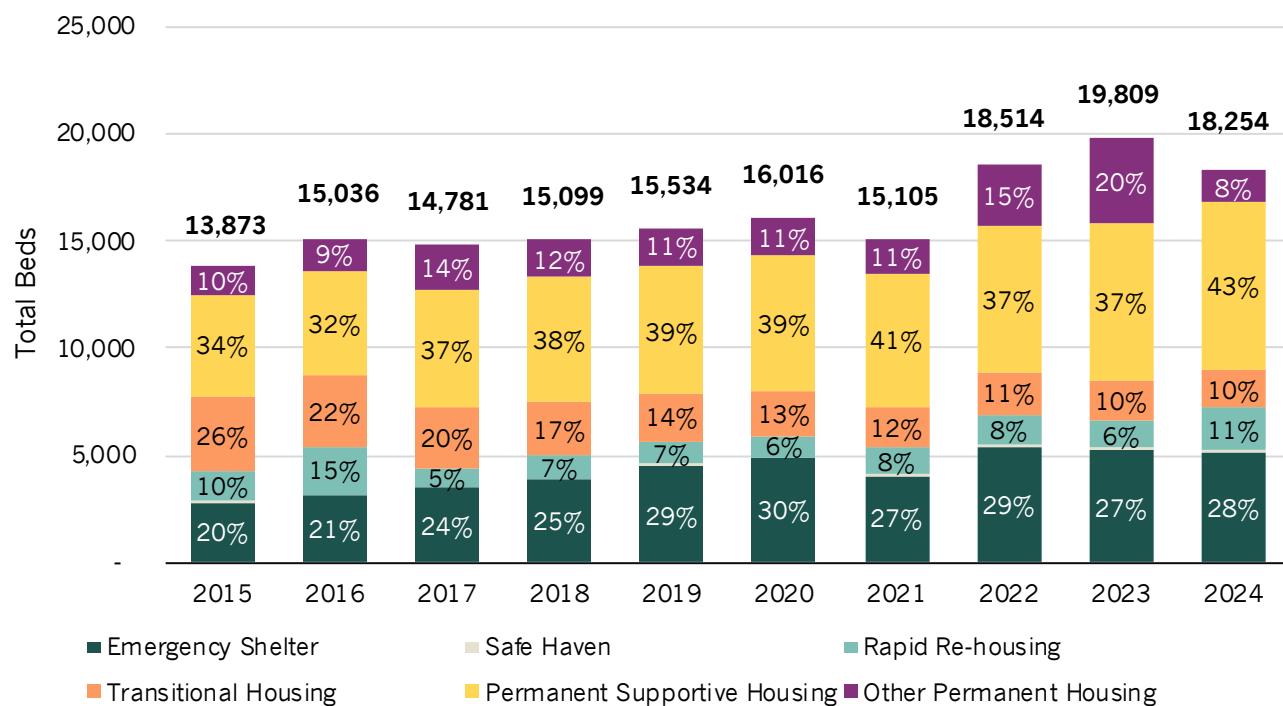


STEP Housing Inventory: Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Emergency Housing, and PSH

STEP units—including emergency shelter, transitional housing, emergency housing, and PSH—describe a range of housing options serving homeless or previously homeless residents of King County.⁸⁸ Below, Exhibit 52 shows King County’s annual STEP inventory over the past decade.

- ◆ As of 2024, just under half (43 percent) of the County’s STEP units are PSH, roughly a quarter (28 percent) are emergency shelter beds, and 21 percent are transitional housing or rapid rehousing slots.
- ◆ Over this period, the total STEP units in the county increased by roughly a third (32 percent).
- ◆ The “Other Permanent Housing” category—which captures long-term housing programs that do not fit cleanly into PSH or rapid rehousing—declined in 2024. This drop could reflect a mix of project reclassification, expiration of time-limited funding, or HUD data reporting adjustments.

Exhibit 52: STEP Housing Inventory, King County, 2015 to 2024



Source: HUD, 2025, Annual Homeless Assessment Report, "WA-500 Seattle/King County Continuum of Care Program", accessed July 3rd, 2025 at: www.huduser.gov

⁸⁸ Commerce provides guidance for local ordinances and regulations pertaining to the siting and development of STEP Housing. See: Commerce. (2025, August). *Updating GMA Housing Elements*. [[link](#)]



WHAT IS PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING?

Permanent supportive housing, or PSH, combines deeply affordable housing with on-site or mobile supportive services designed to help people with significant barriers—such as chronic homelessness, disabilities, or behavioral health needs—stabilize and remain housed.⁸⁹ PSH is a cornerstone of the regional homelessness response because it addresses both affordability challenges and the supportive needs that can prevent people from successfully maintaining housing.

King County's CPPs include PSH as a subset of the 0 to 30 percent housing needs countywide. The countywide total future housing needed by 2044 for PSH is 49,064 units.

Group, Senior and Institutional Housing

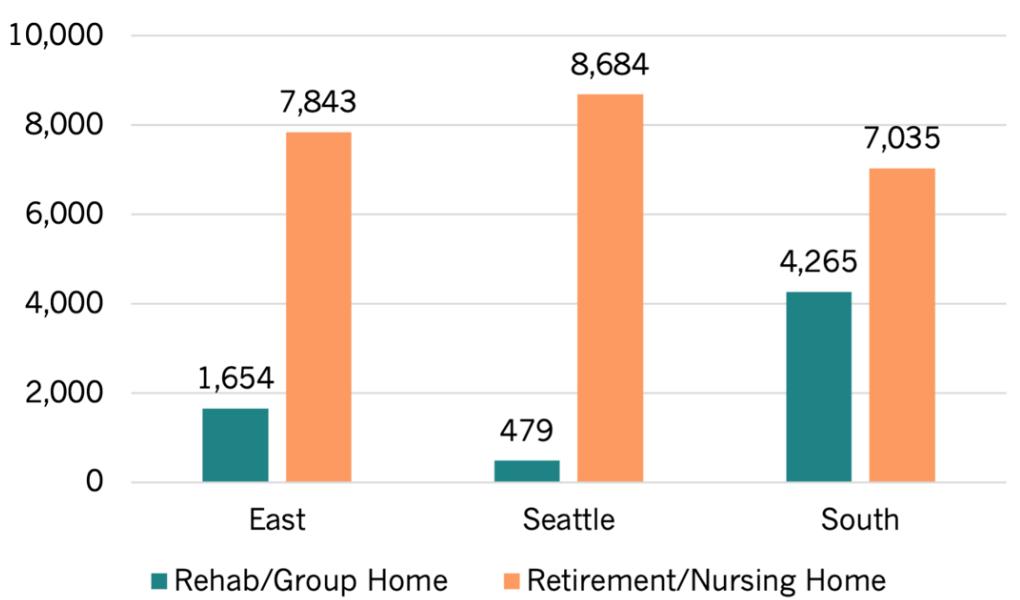
With 8,684 units, Seattle has the highest number of retirement and nursing home units/bedrooms in King County.

- ◆ **South King County has the most group homes and rehab facilities:** The South subregion contains 4,265 rehab/group home units, far more than Seattle (479 units) or the East (1,654 units).
- ◆ **Seattle has the highest number of nursing home and retirement facilities.** However, the distribution of these facilities is fairly even across the subregions.
- ◆ **East King County has a relatively low share of rehab and group homes compared to South King County:** The East subregion has 1,654 rehab/group home units compared to the 4,265 units in South King County.

⁸⁹ HUD. (n.d.). Permanent supportive housing. HUD Exchange. [[link](#)]



Exhibit 53: Group, Senior and Rehabilitation Housing, King County Subregional Framework



Source: King County Assessor, 2025 Tax Roll

The South subregion offers the most diverse specialized housing mix: While not leading in total unit count for retirement homes, the South has the highest combined number of rehab/group and retirement/nursing home beds (11,300 total units)—demonstrating its role in housing residents with specialized support needs.

Housing Market Trends

Trends in home sales prices and rents provide a window into housing demand, cost pressures, and affordability across King County. Over the past decade, both for-sale and rental housing costs have increased significantly, though the scale and pace of change vary by subregion and housing type. This section examines how prices have changed across single-family homes, townhomes, and rental units, highlighting geographic differences and implications for households at varying income bands.

Home Sales Prices

Home sales prices in King County have risen substantially since 2005 across all unit types, with particularly sharp increases beginning in the mid-2010s. The trends vary by unit type and subregion.

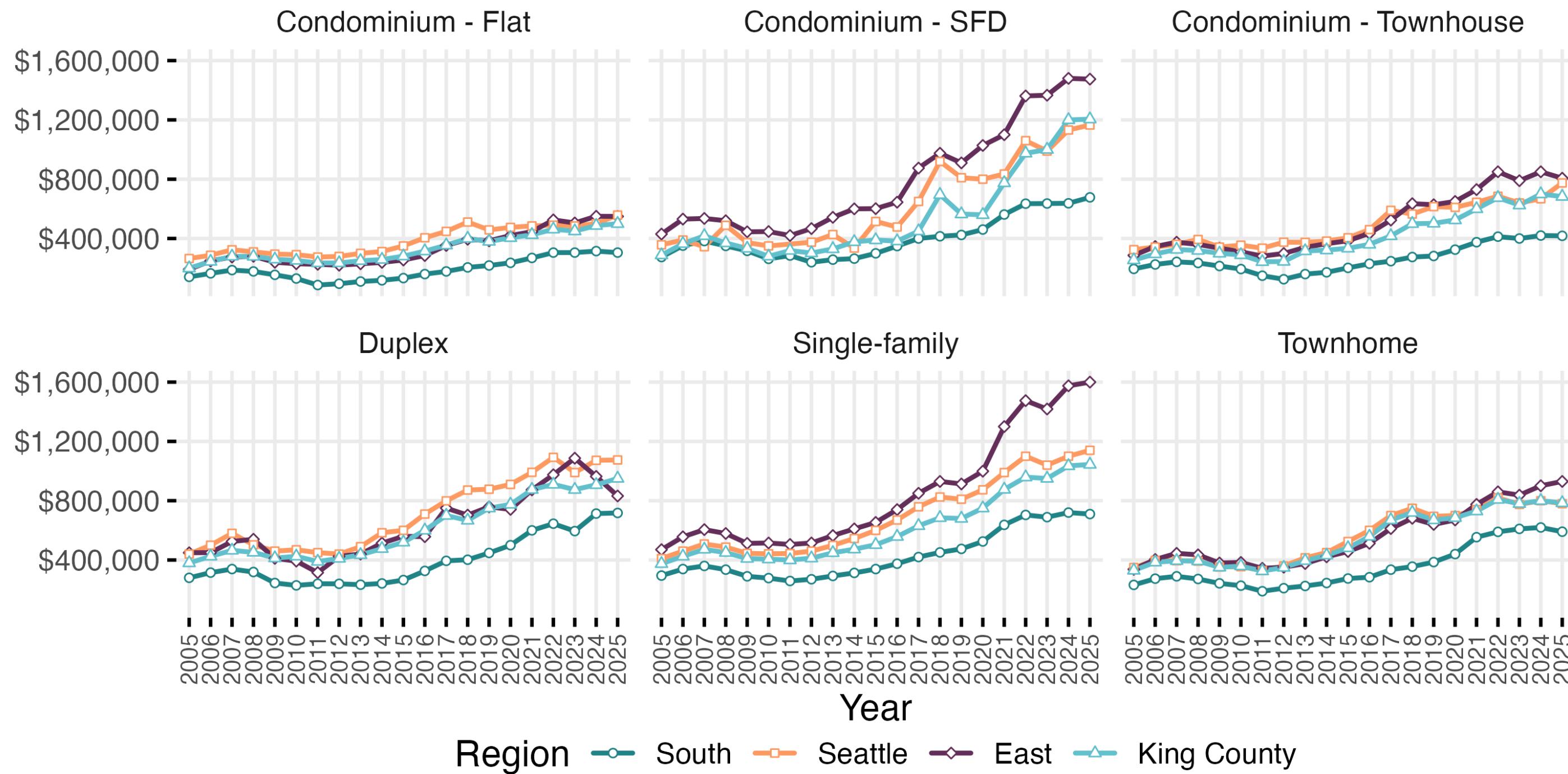
- Single-family homes show the steepest price growth: Median sales prices for single-family homes have nearly tripled in East King County since 2012, reaching around \$1.5 million in 2024—making it the most expensive subregion. Seattle follows closely at approximately

\$1.1 million. Even in South King County, historically the most affordable subregion, single-family prices climbed to roughly \$750,000 by 2024.

- ◆ Condominiums present mixed affordability potential: Flat condominiums remain the lowest-priced option countywide, with 2024 median prices ranging from about \$350,000 in South King County to \$500,000 in East King County. However, detached single-family-style condominiums (“Condominium – SFD”) in East King County now exceed \$1.5 million, showing price escalation similar to traditional single-family homes. Most likely, these units are primarily comprised of cottage-style developments.
- ◆ Townhome and duplex markets have also escalated sharply: Townhomes in Seattle and East King County have reached prices between \$800,000 and \$900,000, while duplexes in these subregions often exceed \$1 million. South King County continues to offer somewhat lower prices for these unit types, but even so, duplexes there now average more than \$600,000.
- ◆ Post-2020 price acceleration: Across most unit types, the most rapid appreciation occurred from 2020 through 2022, coinciding with pandemic-era market shifts, low interest rates, and intense buyer demand. While prices have stabilized or slightly softened in some categories since 2022, they remain historically high.



Exhibit 54: Median Sales Prices by Unit Type, King County Subregions, 2005 to 2025



Source: King County Assessor, 2025 Tax Roll

- The sustained price escalation across all unit types and geographies underscores the challenge of using the for-sale market to meet ownership needs for low- and moderate-income households. Even the least expensive unit types in the county now often exceed what households earning at or below 100 percent of AMI can afford, limiting pathways to homeownership and putting pressure on the rental market. East King County stands out as the least attainable subregion, with median single-family and detached condominium prices exceeding \$1.5 million, while even South King County—the most affordable subregion—has seen prices climb to levels increasingly out of reach for many moderate-income buyers.

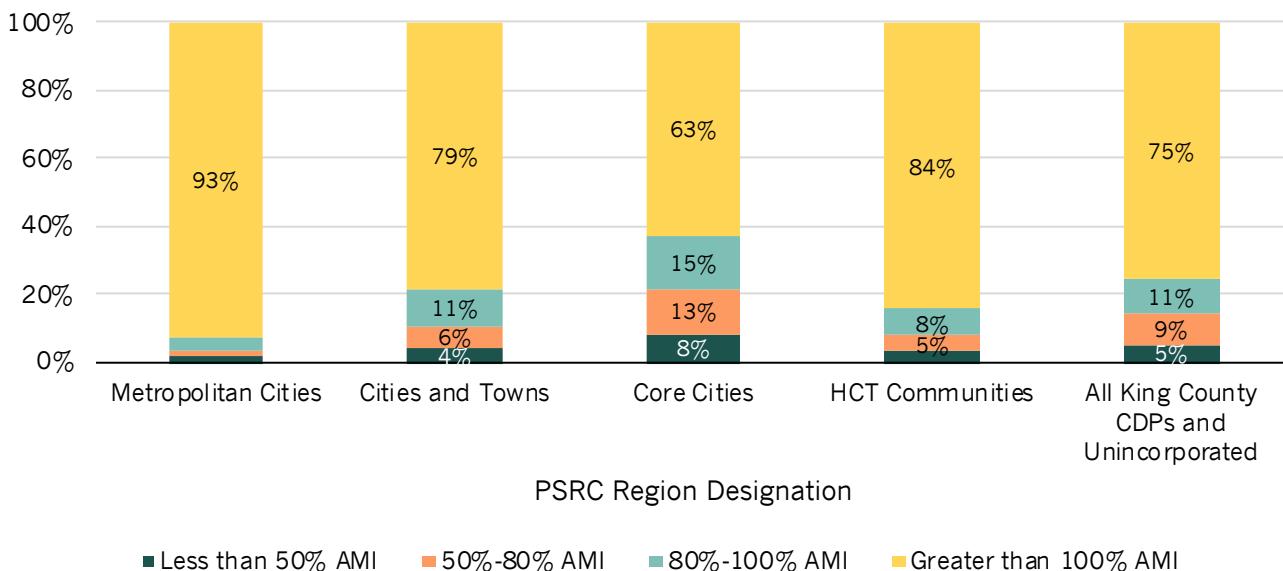
Exhibit 55 shows the distribution of ownership housing unit costs for using the PSRC Regional Geographies, expressed as the percentage of AMI a household would need to earn to afford the unit.⁹⁰ Across all PSRC Regional Geographies, households would need to earn more than the AMI to afford the majority of ownership housing units.

- ❖ **Metropolitan cities have the most expensive ownership units:** 93 percent of ownership units are only affordable to households earning above the AMI.
- ❖ **Core cities are relatively more affordable:** In core cities, 37 percent of ownership units are affordable below the AMI, including 8 percent of units affordable below 50 percent of AMI, a higher share than the other PSRC Regional Geographies.
- ❖ **Limited housing stock for lower-income households:** With the exception of core cities, homeownership units attainable at 50 percent of AMI and below range from 5 percent of units in CDPs and unincorporated areas to only 1.8 percent of units in metropolitan cities.

⁹⁰ Data is based on 2021 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) estimates. As a result, affordability calculations reflect the 2021 HUD Income Limits for a household of four for King County, where 100 percent of AMI was \$115,700.



Exhibit 55: Housing Unit Affordability by Area Median Income, Ownership Units, PSRC Regional Geographies



Source: HUD, 2024, 2017–2021 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy, Office of Policy Development and Research, accessed at: www.huduser.gov.

- **Across the PSRC Regional Geographies, the majority of ownership units are attainable only to households earning above the AMI. Of the different geographies, core cities have the most attainable ownership units.**

Rental Market Trends

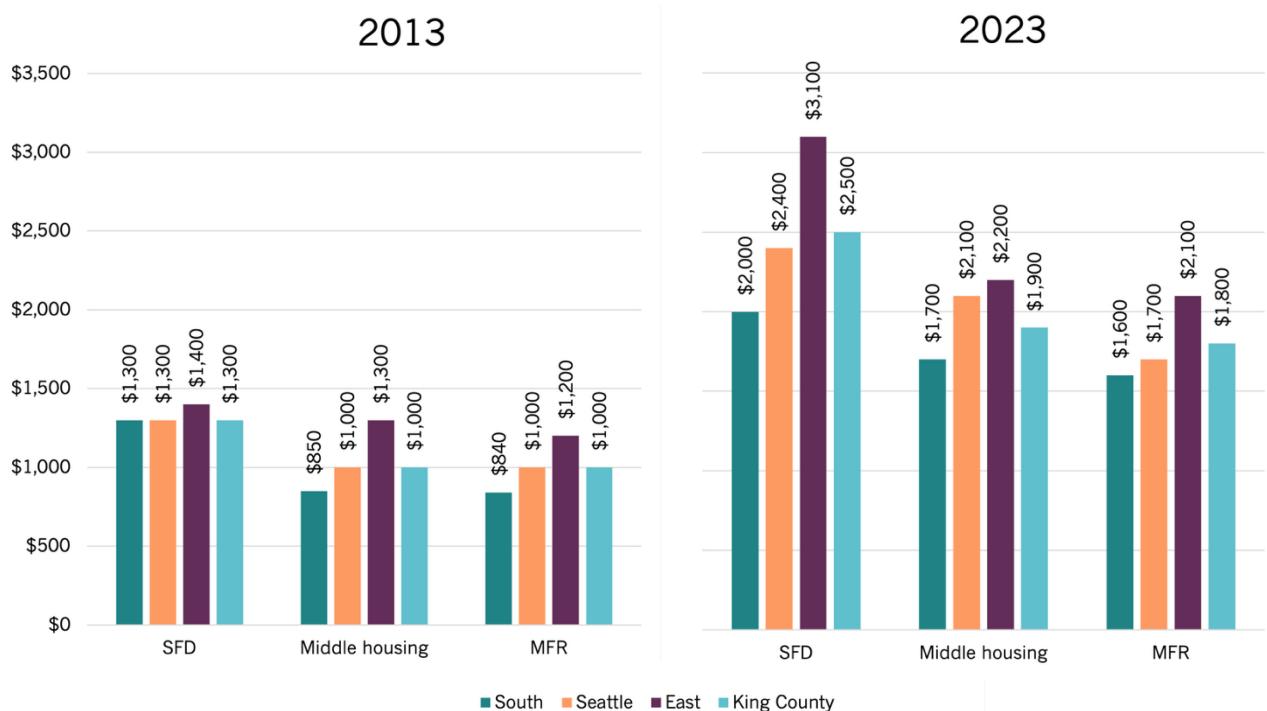
Exhibit 56 shows median monthly rent prices by subregion in 2013 and 2023. Like home sales prices, rental unit prices have increased substantially across King County subregions. Rents nearly doubled in the county overall, with single-family dwelling rents increasing by 92 percent, middle housing rents increasing by 90 percent, and multifamily rents increasing by 80 percent.

- ❖ **Single-family units are more expensive than multifamily:** In all subregions in 2023, single-family dwellings had the highest median rents and multifamily units had the lowest. In 2023, middle housing and multifamily rents were similar in South and East King County, with a larger difference in Seattle, where median middle housing rents were \$400 greater than multifamily rents.
- ❖ **East King County has the highest rent rates:** The relationship between rents across the subregions mirrors home sales price trends, with East King County having the highest median rent rates and South King County having the lowest in 2023. The differences between subregions have also grown more pronounced since 2013, particularly for single-family dwelling rents; in 2013, the median single-family rent in



East King County was only \$100 more per month than in South King County, but by 2023, it had increased to \$1,100.

Exhibit 56: Median Monthly Rents, King County Subregions, 2013 to 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 and 2023, 2009–2013 and 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS, accessed at: data.census.gov.

Note: SFD denotes single-family detached units, and MFR denotes multifamily rental units.

Like home sales prices, rent rates have increased substantially in recent years, particularly for single-family dwellings. Of the three subregions, East King County has the highest median rates and South King County has the lowest.

The exhibit below shows the distribution of rental housing unit costs for each geography expressed as the percentage of the AMI a household would need to earn to afford the unit.⁹¹ While rental units are generally more attainable than ownership units (see Exhibit 55), there are still relatively few rental units affordable to households at less than 50 percent of AMI.

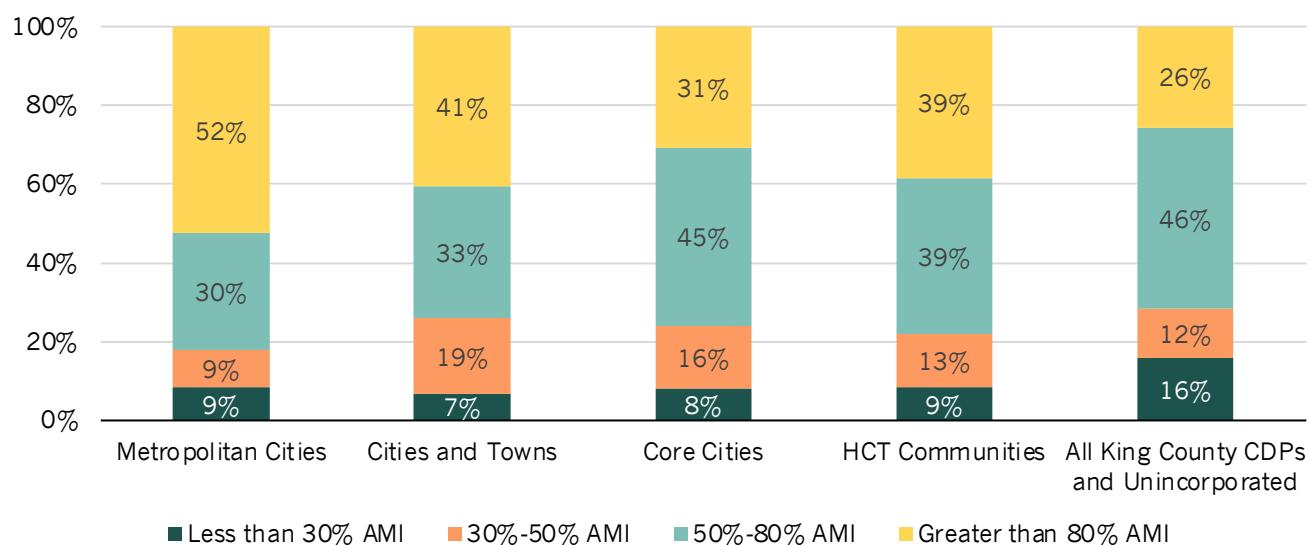
- ◆ **Metropolitan cities have the highest rental costs:** Roughly 82 percent of rental units in metropolitan cities are attainable to households earning above 50 percent of AMI, and over half (52 percent) of units are attainable only to households earning above the AMI, a higher share than the other types of jurisdictions.

⁹¹ Data is based on 2021 CHAS estimates. As a result, affordability calculations reflect the 2021 HUD Income Limits for a household of four for King County, where 100 percent of AMI was \$115,700.



- ◆ **Less urbanized areas are relatively more affordable:** In cities and towns, just over a quarter (26 percent) of units are attainable to households earning below 50 percent of AMI. In CDPs and unincorporated areas, roughly 28 percent of rental units are attainable to households earning below 50 percent of AMI. CDPs and unincorporated areas also have the lowest share of units attainable to households earning above the AMI, just over a quarter of units (26 percent).
- ◆ **Limited stock attainable at 30 percent of AMI and below:** CDPs and unincorporated areas have the highest share of units attainable to households earning below 30 percent of AMI, at 16 percent of units. In all other PSRC Regional Geographies, less than 10 percent of units are attainable for these households.

Exhibit 57: Housing Unit Affordability by Area Median Income, Rental Units, PSRC Regional Geographies



Source: HUD, 2024, 2017–2021 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy, Office of Policy Development and Research, accessed at: www.huduser.gov.

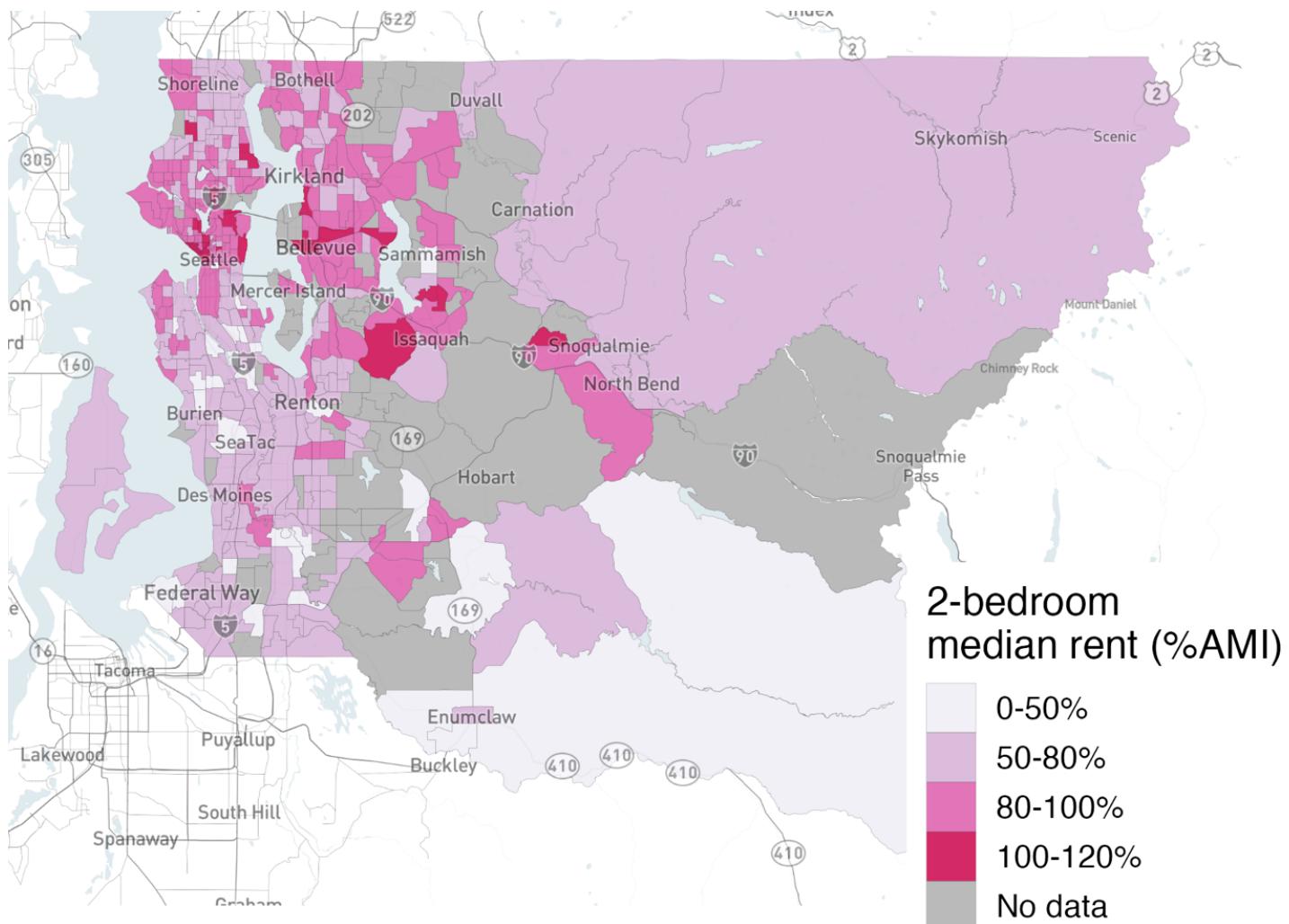
➤ **While rental units are relatively more attainable than ownership units, there are still relatively few units attainable to lower-income households. In general, more urbanized areas have higher rental housing costs and less urbanized areas tend to have lower costs.**

Exhibit 58 shows the annual income a household would need to afford the median two-bedroom rent, expressed as a percentage of AMI for a household of four.

- ◆ **Housing affordability varies by region:** Consistent with the findings above, households would need to earn close to or above the AMI in many Seattle neighborhoods and East King County jurisdictions to afford the area median rent. In South King County and North Seattle, rents are relatively more affordable and could be affordable to households earning 50 to 80 percent of AMI in many jurisdictions.

- ◆ **Housing options are limited for lower-income households:** There are only a few jurisdictions, located in Southeast King County, where median rents would be affordable to households earning 50 percent of AMI or below.

Exhibit 58: Income Needed to Afford Two-Bedroom Unit Median Rents, Shown as a Percentage of the Area Median Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year, accessed at: data.census.gov

Construction Cost Pressures and Market Impacts

Construction cost increases are straining both housing affordability and development feasibility across King County. Recent data show that western Washington faces some of the highest residential construction costs in the nation.

The average cost to build a single-family detached home in western Washington is \$309 per square foot, with a median sales price of \$690,701 for a 2,505-square-foot home. The cost to build an average single-family home of a similar size in the United States is \$428,215

(~\$170 per square foot). Townhome construction averages \$404 per square foot, with a median sales price of \$592,195.⁹²

When comparing costs between counties in western Washington, King County is among the highest in the region.

Exhibit 59: Average Cost to Build Single-Family Homes by County

County	Average Square Feet	Average Cost per Square Foot
King	2,582	\$368
Kitsap	2,438	\$263
Pierce	2,539	\$275
Snohomish	2,504	\$374
Thurston	2,460	\$264

Source: Building Industry Association of Washington 2024

Exhibit 60: Average Cost to Build Townhomes by County

County	Average Square Feet	Average Cost per Square Foot
King	1,480	\$570
Pierce	1,632	\$329
Snohomish	1,660	\$426
Thurston	1,499	\$290

Source: Building Industry Association of Washington 2024

Regulatory costs are a major contributor. In Washington, regulations account for nearly \$204,000 (29.5 percent) of the median home price, compared to 23.8 percent nationally, putting Washington builders at a 5.7 percent regulatory cost disadvantage.⁹³

A Rider Levett Bucknall report found that in late 2023, Seattle led all U.S. metros in annual construction cost growth at 7.76 percent, outpacing the national average of 5.9 percent. This was driven in part by high labor costs (Seattle: \$37.58/hour vs. U.S. average: \$28.08). While growth has moderated—RLB reported just 1.07 percent national growth by mid-2024—Seattle remains an outlier, with persistently high costs at around 4.91 percent.⁹⁴

While local labor and regulatory are significant cost drivers, rising interest rates have further raised the financial threshold for new housing development:

- Between 2019 and 2023, interest rates on residential development loans jumped from 5 percent or lower to over 8.5 percent—dramatically increasing financing

⁹² Building Industry Association of Washington (BIAW). The Cost of Constructing New Homes in Washington State in 2024. HousingStudies.BIAW.com. 2024. Available at: [\[link\]](#)

⁹³ Building Industry Association of Washington (BIAW). The Cost of Constructing New Homes in Washington State in 2024. HousingStudies.BIAW.com. 2024. Available at: [\[link\]](#)

⁹⁴ Note: While construction cost indexes like those from Rider Levett Bucknall and Mortenson typically track nonresidential construction projects, they are widely used as indicators of broader market trends. Increases in labor, materials, and regulatory costs reflected in these indexes often spill over into the residential sector, influencing the overall cost and feasibility of housing development.



costs and making it harder for developers to secure loan coverage for projects.⁹⁵ As a result, multifamily construction starts nationwide dropped nearly 38 percent year over year in early 2024.⁹⁶

- The broader construction industry also continues to feel the pressure. According to Oxford Economics, interest rate hikes since December 2021 have led to output in the construction and building materials sectors falling around 10 percent below pre-rate hike forecasts by mid-2023.⁹⁷

What This Means for New Housing Development

- ◆ **Higher baseline costs can limit affordability:** Elevated costs per square foot can make it difficult to produce housing accessible to low- and moderate-income households without subsidy.
- ◆ **Developers shifting toward smaller units in rental projects:** Rising construction costs make large, family-sized rental units financially challenging. In many cases, the rent premium from a two- or three-bedroom unit is insufficient to justify the added cost of building those larger units. As a result, developers are increasingly building studios, one-bedrooms, and even micro-units that maximize density and revenue per square foot.
- ◆ **Financing and regulatory costs amplify feasibility challenges:** Interest rate hikes, labor wage increases, permitting delays, and development fees further restrict the viability of more affordable options—especially unsubsidized projects—slowing development pipelines.

⁹⁵ Garcia, D., Carlton, I., Patterson, L., and Strawn, J. (2023, December). Making it pencil: The math behind housing development (2023 update). Terner Center for Housing Innovation. University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from [\[link\]](#)

⁹⁶ National Association of Home Builders. (2024, February 27). Multifamily housing market will decline in 2024, while remodeling market will hold steady [Press release]. Retrieved from [\[link\]](#)

⁹⁷ Oxford Economics. (n.d.). Weakness in construction and its related sectors show the impact of interest-rate hikes. Retrieved August 13, 2025, from [\[link\]](#)



5. Housing Costs and Affordability Implications

Housing affordability in King County is shaped by regional variation in housing prices, tenure patterns, and economic opportunity. While housing costs have risen sharply across the county over the last decade, affordability challenges are not evenly distributed—affecting some communities and households more than others. This chapter explores the spatial and structural dimensions of affordability, highlighting how housing costs intersect with access to jobs, transit, and homeownership opportunity.

Key Takeaways

- ◆ **Homeownership is out of reach for many, especially in Seattle and East King County:** In Seattle and East King County, even the smallest ownership units cost well above the median income threshold, and three-bedroom homes often require more than 175 percent of AMI. South King County remains the most affordable for ownership, but still poses challenges for households earning below the median. Rising ownership costs keep households in the rental market and increase competition for limited larger units.
- ◆ **Rental costs are lower but still strain larger households:** Across all subregions, renters face lower costs than owners, but affordability drops as unit size increases. Households needing three-bedroom rentals pay a higher share of income, especially outside South King County, underscoring the need for more large, affordable rental units in all parts of the county.
- ◆ **Job-housing alignment varies by sector, creating uneven commute and affordability patterns:** Healthcare and service sector jobs show stronger overlap between where workers live and work, particularly in South King County, while manufacturing and tech/professional services show greater geographic separation. Some manufacturing separation reflects land use needs for industrial space, but overall patterns show that lower-income workers often live farther from their jobs, while high-wage workers can live closer to employment centers.
- ◆ **Seattle leads in affordable housing near frequent transit:** Seattle's affordable housing is most integrated with the region's high-frequency transit network, while South King County has the smallest affordable housing inventory and the lowest share near frequent service.
- ◆ **South King County is absorbing more lower-income and larger households:** Migration trends show South King County attracting more lower-income and larger households than Seattle or the Eastside. This highlights the subregion's critical role in providing larger, more affordable units but also signals growing pressure on its existing supply.



WHAT THIS CHAPTER COVERS

This chapter analyzes spatial patterns in housing affordability and access across King County, with a focus on where housing is and is not affordable and for whom. It covers:

- » **Housing Affordability by Tenure and Unit Size:** A comparison of renter and owner costs across East, Seattle, and South subregions, illustrating where affordability gaps are most pronounced by unit type and household income bands.
- » **Job-Housing Alignment by Employment Sector:** An examination of where workers live relative to where they work across sectors, like manufacturing, healthcare, service industries, and professional/tech, to identify spatial mismatches.
- » **Transit Access and Affordable Housing:** Analysis of proximity between income-restricted housing and frequent or regular transit service across the county, with implications for economic opportunity and mobility.
- » **Intra-County Migration Patterns:** Analysis of recent moves within King County to explore who is relocating, where they're moving, and how income and household size may be influencing subregional destination patterns.

Housing Affordability by Tenure

Housing affordability varies significantly across King County subregions, especially when comparing renter and owner costs by unit size.

Income Limits for a 4-Person Household in King County (FY 2023)

- **AMI: \$137,100**
- **Low Income (80% AMI): \$100,900**
- **Very Low Income (50% AMI): \$68,500**
- **Extremely Low Income (30% AMI): \$41,100**



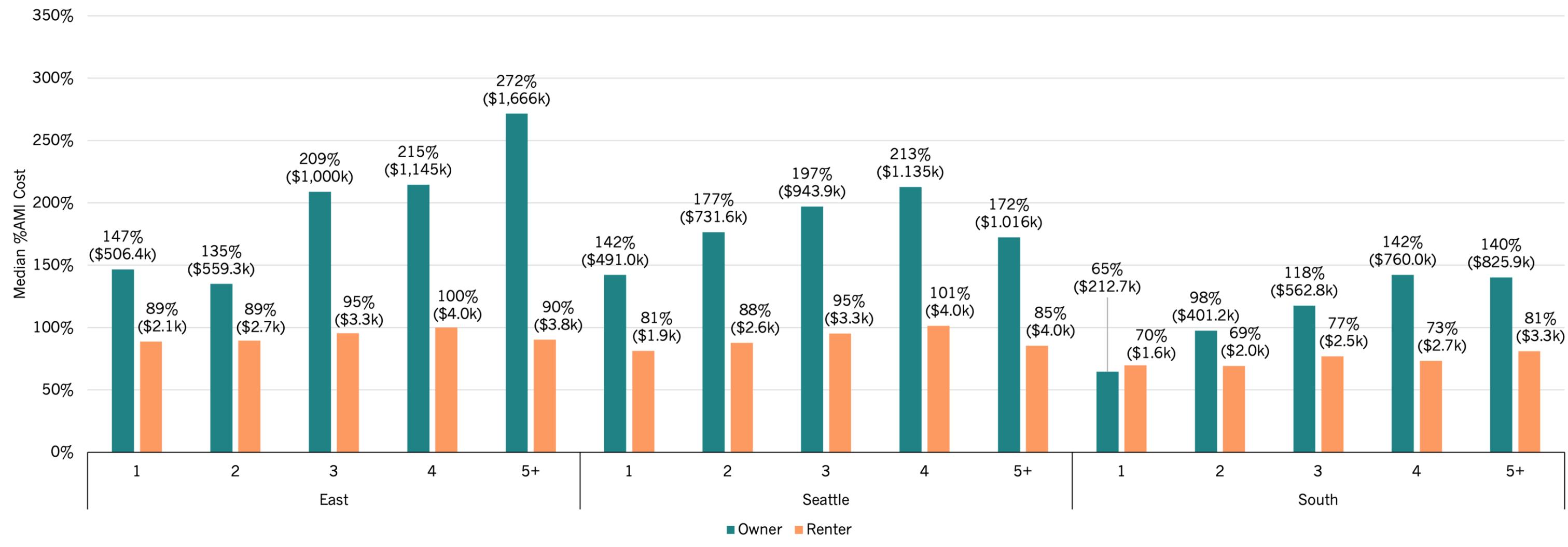
Exhibit 61 illustrates the median housing cost (rent or ownership cost) for 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom units as a percent of AMI, revealing substantial differences between tenure types and across the subregions.

- ◆ **In East King County**, ownership housing costs are significantly out of reach for median-income households. Owner-occupied homes require 130 percent of AMI for a 1-bedroom unit, 136 percent for a 2-bedroom, and 179 percent for a 3-bedroom. Rent prices are more stable, ranging from 89 percent to 95 percent of AMI across unit sizes, but many renters in East King County remain cost burdened.
- ◆ **Seattle's affordability is similar to East King County, particularly in affordability challenges for ownership.** Home prices for 3-bedroom units climb to 187 percent of AMI (nearly \$900K), with even 1-bedroom ownership requiring 147 percent of AMI. Renters in Seattle face slightly more favorable conditions, with 1-bedroom units at 81 percent of AMI and 3-bedrooms at 95 percent. However, the gap between ownership and rental affordability is substantial, especially for households who need more space.
- ◆ **South King County offers the most affordable ownership and rental options among the three subregions.** However, housing affordability will remain a challenge for many households earning below the median income. For owners, the median cost for a 3-bedroom unit is 112 percent of AMI. Rent prices are most attainable in South King County, ranging from 69 percent to 77 percent of AMI across unit sizes.

Ownership is increasingly out of reach for many households, even for the smallest units in East King County and Seattle. Larger households face even greater barriers, as opportunities for ownership are limited or require significant compromises on space. Renters fare better than owners across all subregions, but affordability still declines as unit size increases. South King County remains the most affordable region for both renters and owners, though pressures are likely to grow if demand concentrates there.



Exhibit 61: Housing Affordability by Tenure by AMI and Unit Size, King County Subregional Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

Where Workers Live vs. Where They Work

This section explores the geographic relationship between where workers live and where their jobs are located across King County. By comparing where people live and work by employment sector, the analysis may indicate to some degree how well job locations align with housing affordability in an area.

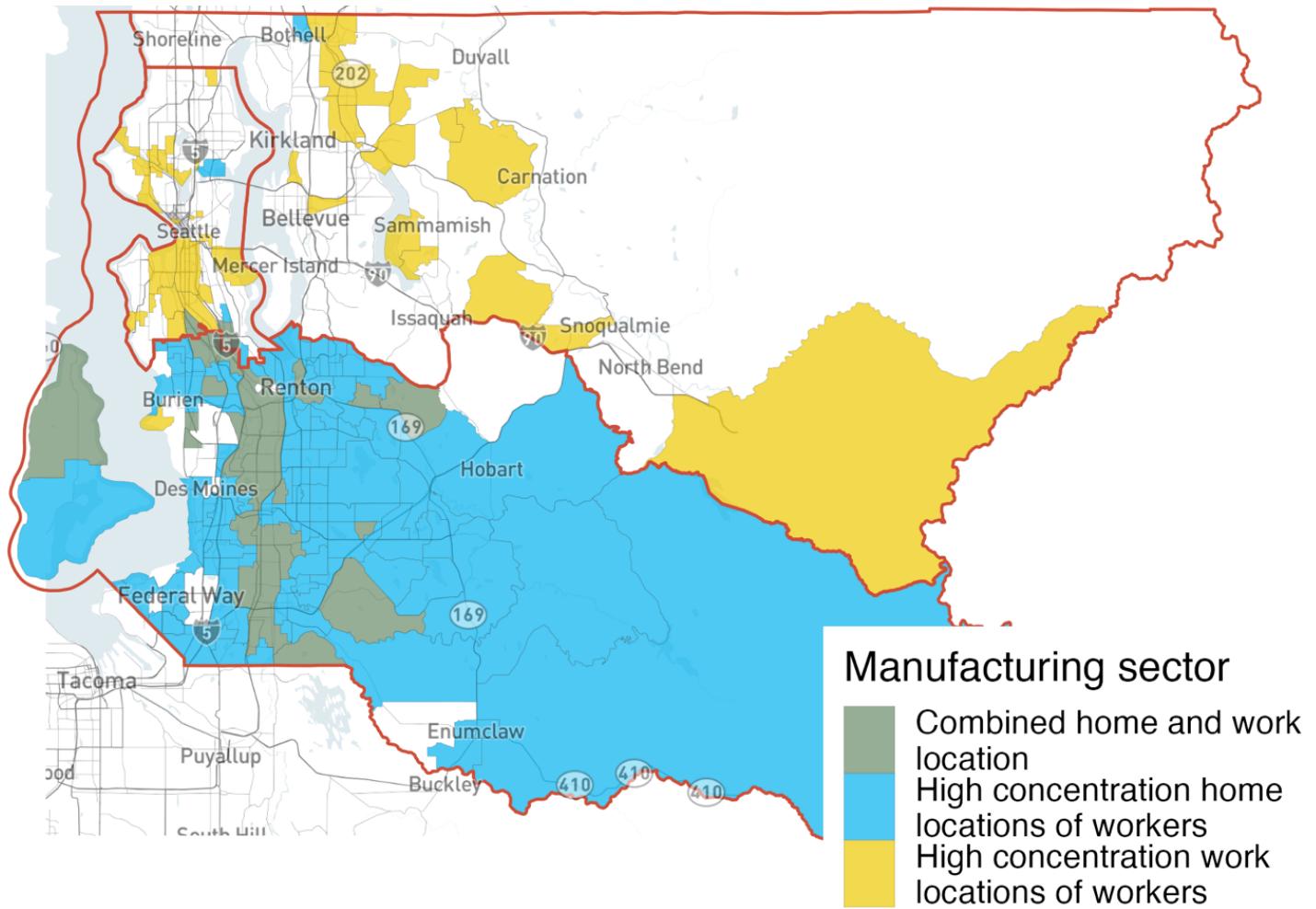
Countywide, the largest employment sectors include professional and technical services, healthcare, retail trade, manufacturing, and hospitality, each offering different wage levels—from high-paying professional jobs in the Eastside and Seattle to lower-paying service and retail work distributed across the county. For some sectors, like healthcare and services, there is stronger overlap between worker home locations and job centers—particularly in South King County. Sectors like manufacturing show greater spatial separation, with workers often living further from the areas where jobs are most concentrated.

Note on “High Concentration”: In this analysis, high concentration refers to Census tracts where the share of workers or jobs in a given sector is at least 1.25 times greater than the countywide average for that sector. This measure—known as a location quotient—highlights areas with a disproportionately large presence of a particular type of worker or job compared to the county as a whole.

- ♦ Manufacturing workers live in the south, but jobs are dispersed elsewhere: There is a high concentration of manufacturing sector workers residing in South King County—particularly in cities like Kent, Auburn, Federal Way, and Renton. However, these are not always the same areas where manufacturing jobs are most concentrated.
- ♦ Employment hubs are located in northern and eastern areas: High concentrations of manufacturing employment are found in a wide arc across northern and eastern parts of the county, including Redmond, Woodinville, and parts of northeast Seattle and the Eastside. These areas show less overlap with where workers actually live.



Exhibit 62: Spatial Relationship between Manufacturing Jobs and Housing

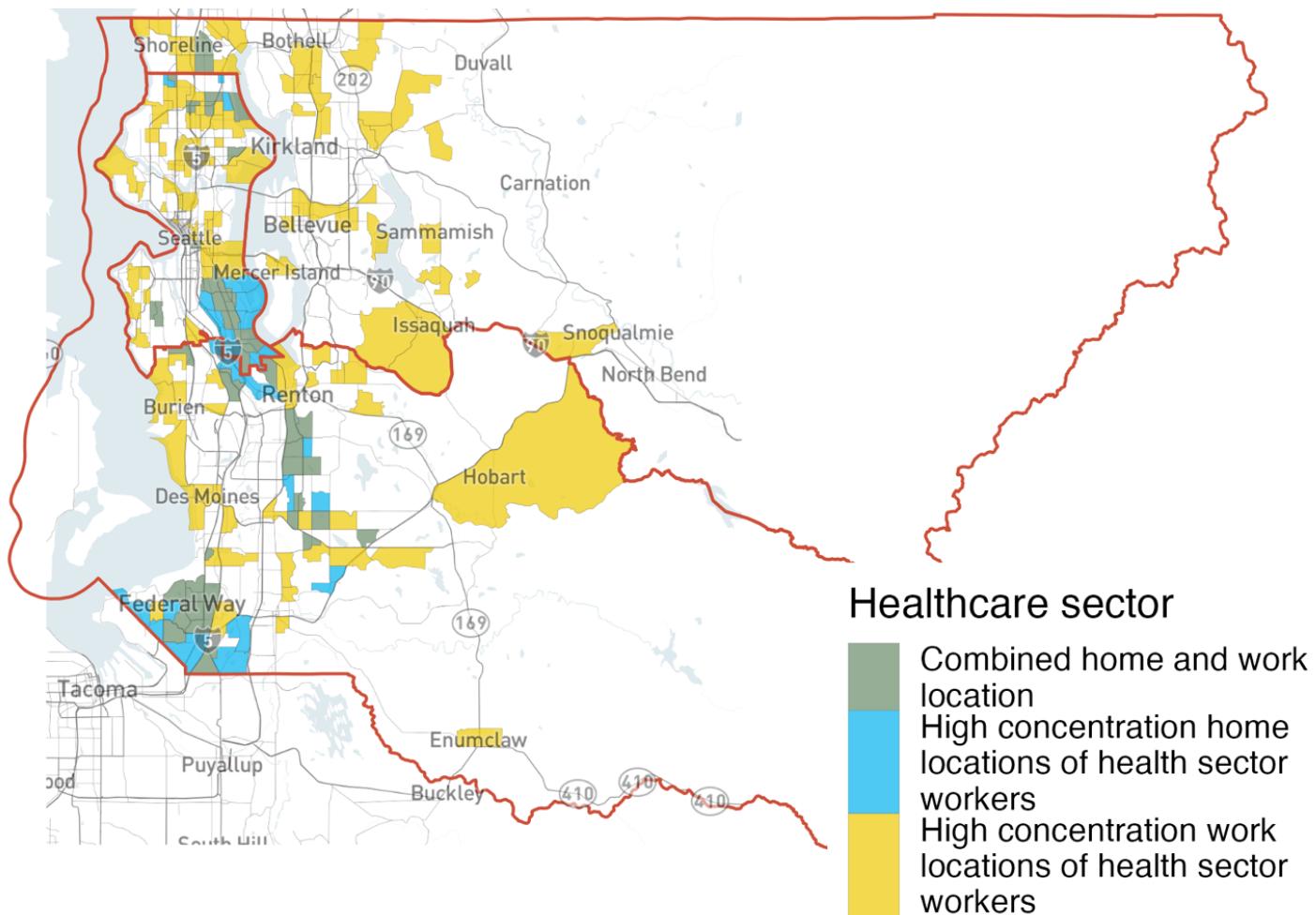


Source: U.S. Census Longitudinal Origin Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), 2022

- ◆ **Healthcare jobs and workers are more spatially aligned than in other sectors:** Compared to the manufacturing sector, the healthcare sector shows stronger spatial overlap between where workers live and where jobs are located—suggesting relatively better job–housing and affordability balance for this sector in certain areas.
- ◆ **High overlap in South King County:** South King County—especially areas like Federal Way, Kent, Des Moines, and Renton—shows both high concentrations of healthcare sector jobs and the home locations of healthcare workers. This likely means reduced commuting burdens and greater housing accessibility for workers in the healthcare sector, including lower-wage workers.
- ◆ **Seattle and inner-ring suburbs are major employment hubs:** Seattle and South Seattle, as well as parts of Burien and SeaTac, are hot spots for healthcare sector employment. However, these areas have a smaller residential concentration of healthcare workers, suggesting that some workers commute in from South King County or other locations.

- ◆ **Limited overlap in the Eastside:** Several Eastside communities—such as Sammamish, Redmond, Bellevue, and Issaquah—have concentrations of healthcare jobs but relatively fewer healthcare workers living there; this may reflect the higher cost of housing in these areas, which can price out many workers in the sector.

Exhibit 63: Spatial Relationship between Healthcare Jobs and Housing



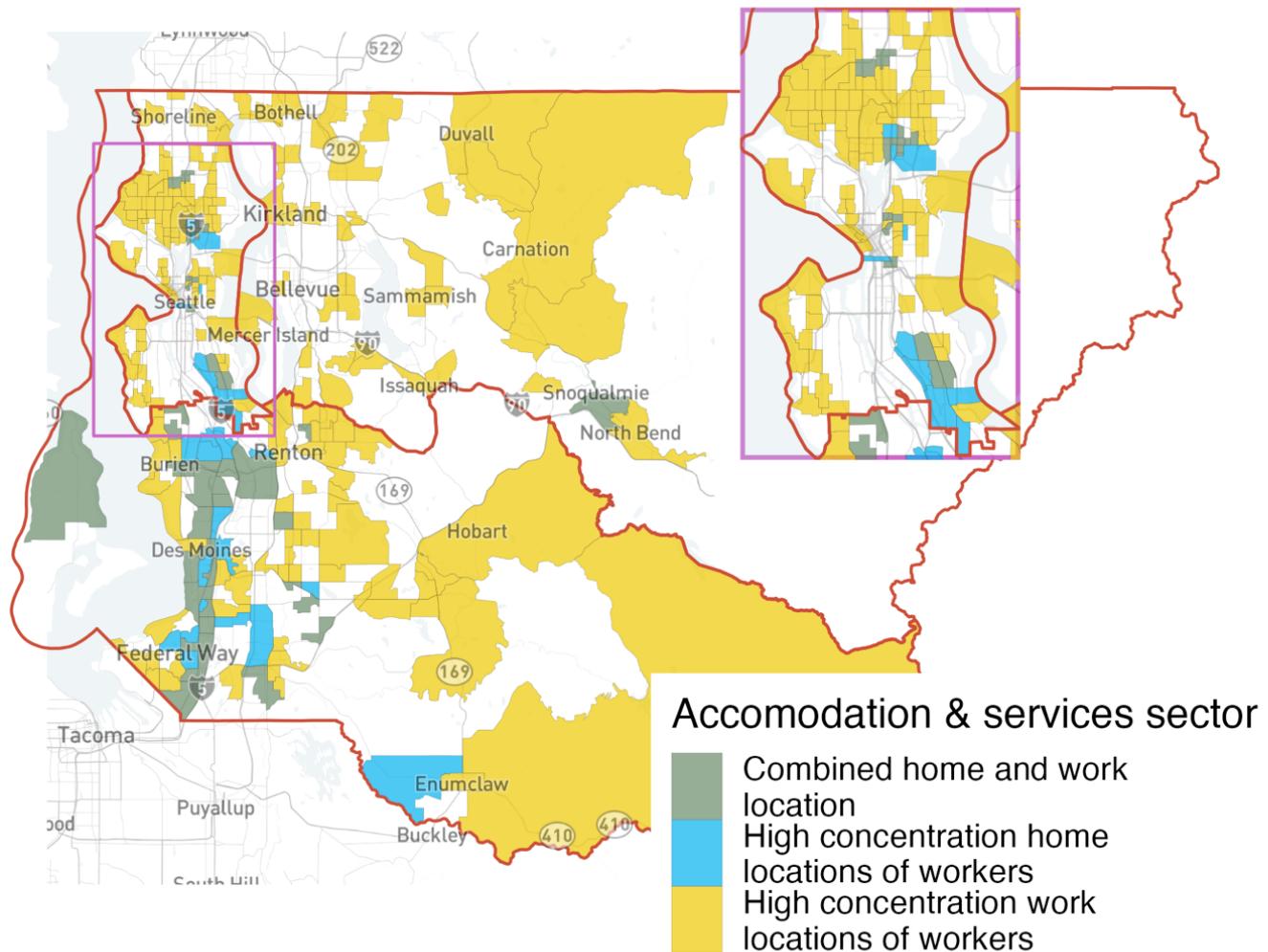
Source: U.S. Census Longitudinal Origin Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), 2022

- ◆ **Widespread employment, concentrated residential patterns:** Service industry jobs are geographically dispersed across the entire county, yet service industry worker residences are more concentrated in a narrower band running through Seattle, Renton, SeaTac, Kent, and Federal Way, along the I-5 corridor.
- ◆ **Strong overlap in South Seattle and South King County:** Several areas in South Seattle, Burien, SeaTac, and Kent show high concentrations of service industry workers both living and working in the same general areas, indicating that some workers benefit from proximity to employment, particularly in hospitality, food service, and retail roles often located near the airport and along transit corridors.
- ◆ **Notable residential–employment overlap in Seattle:** There is notable overlap in Seattle, where service industry workers both live and work. This likely reflects the co-location of

dense multifamily housing and service sector jobs in retail, food, and hospitality in and around the urban core.

- ◆ **Significant spatial mismatch in East and Southeast King County:** While there are concentrations of service industry jobs in Kirkland, North Bend, Duvall, Bothell and other suburban and even rural areas, there are very few areas where service industry workers live nearby. This could suggest that service workers are commuting long distances—possibly due to a lack of affordable and suitable housing options closer to these job centers.

Exhibit 64: Spatial Relationship between Service Industry Jobs and Housing

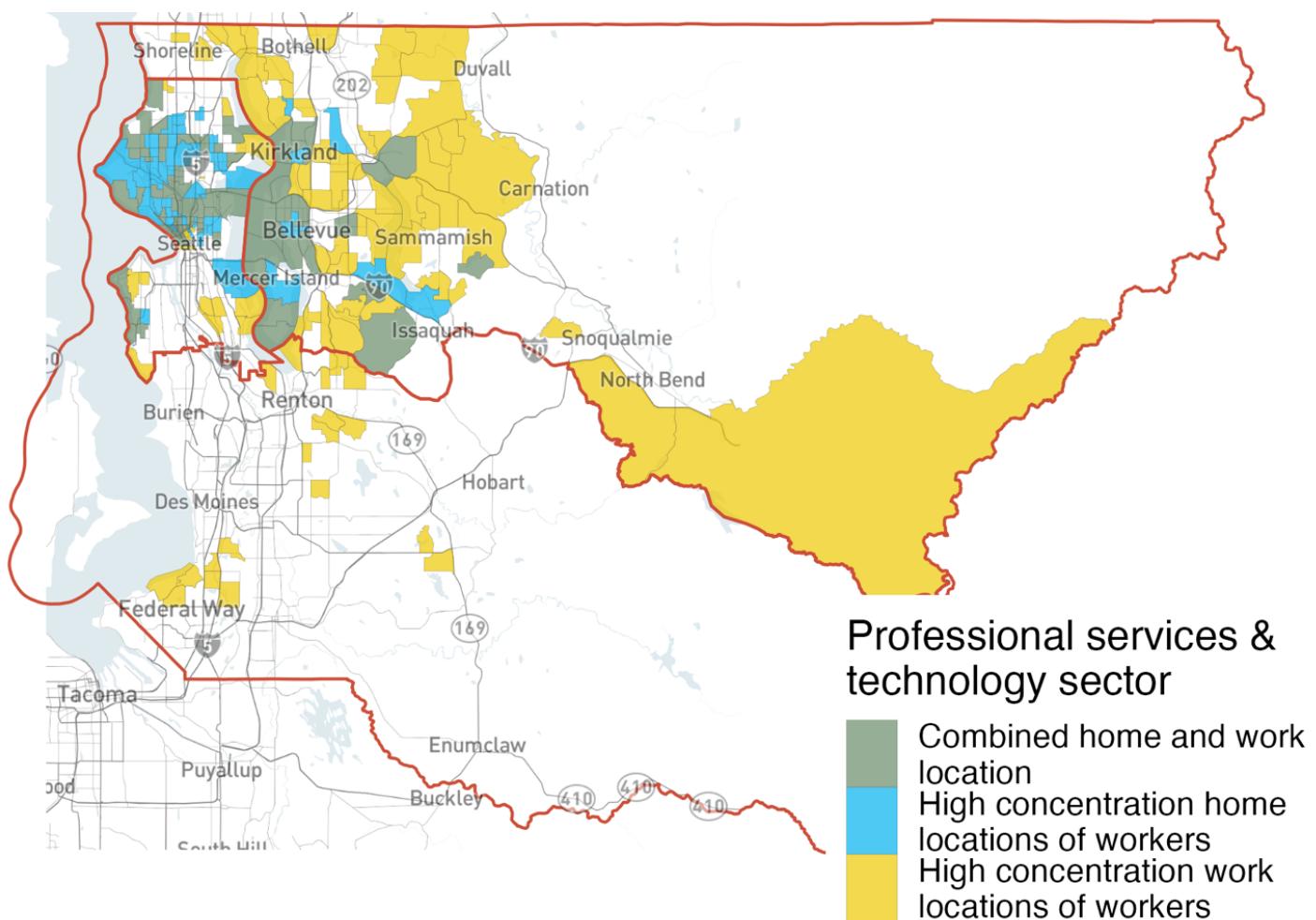


Source: U.S. Census Longitudinal Origin Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), 2022

- ◆ **Strong geographic alignment in Seattle, Bellevue, and Redmond:** There is a significant overlap between high concentrations of home and work locations for tech and professional services workers in Seattle and the Eastside (Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond). This suggests that many workers in this sector are either able to live near their workplaces or have greater flexibility to choose higher-cost areas due to their higher wages.

- ◆ **Residential clustering across northern and eastern King County:** High concentrations of tech/professional services worker residences are visible across the northern and eastern parts of King County, including Seattle, Shoreline, Ballard, Queen Anne, and West Seattle, extending through Kirkland and Bothell. These are some of the county's higher-cost areas, therefore it's expected to find that households employed in higher-wage sectors are concentrated there.
- ◆ **Limited residential presence of tech/professional services workers in South King County:** While there are still concentrations of tech/professional services jobs in areas of South King County, there is a smaller concentration of tech/professional services workers residing there. This could highlight broader economic divides in the region, where housing tends to be more affordable in South King County, but higher-wage workers are less likely to live there.

Exhibit 65: Spatial Relationship between Tech and Professional Services and Housing



Source: U.S. Census Longitudinal Origin Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), 2022

Key Takeaways

- ◆ **Spatial mismatch varies by sector**, which may lead to longer commutes and highlights the need for more affordable housing near major employment hubs—or better transportation options to bridge the distance.
- ◆ **South King County offers critical job-housing alignment for the manufacturing sector.** This pattern helps reduce commute burdens and supports job accessibility, particularly in areas near the airport and major transit corridors. Preserving and expanding affordable housing in these areas will be key to maintaining this balance.
- ◆ **High-wage workers tend to live closer to high-wage job centers.** Tech and professional services workers, who typically earn higher wages, are more likely to live in or near high-cost employment centers such as Seattle, Bellevue, and Redmond. While some sectors—such as certain types of manufacturing—require significant space and specialized sites often separated from residential areas, the overall pattern still reinforces the relationship between income and housing access, and it underscores how housing affordability constraints push lower-income workers farther from job centers. The Countywide Planning Policy (CPP) permanent housing need allocation method attempts to directly address the job-housing mismatches by assigning a greater share of housing below 80 percent of AMI to areas where the gap between low-wage jobs and low-wage residents is largest—most notably in the East subregion. With more affordable housing options closer to their workplaces, low-income workers will have shorter commutes, reduced transportation costs, and expanded housing choices to major employment centers.

Proximity of Affordable Housing to Transit Access

Access to reliable public transit is a key determinant of economic opportunity. This mapping exercise uses King County's inventory of income-restricted housing, which is maintained through a survey of local jurisdictions and shows the distribution of disclosed affordable housing units⁹⁸ by transit accessibility, revealing regional variation.

- ◆ **Seattle leads in both scale and quality of access:** With 38,900 affordable units, Seattle accounts for the largest share in the county. Over three-quarters (79 percent) of these units are located within a half mile of frequent transit, showing that affordable housing in Seattle remains highly integrated with the region's transportation network. About 21 percent are within a quarter mile of regular transit, and virtually none fall into the "not transit-accessible" category.
- ◆ **East King County shows balanced but modest accessibility:** Of the 12,600 affordable units in East King County, transit access is more evenly distributed. Roughly 40 percent are within a half mile of frequent transit, 40 percent are within a quarter mile of regular

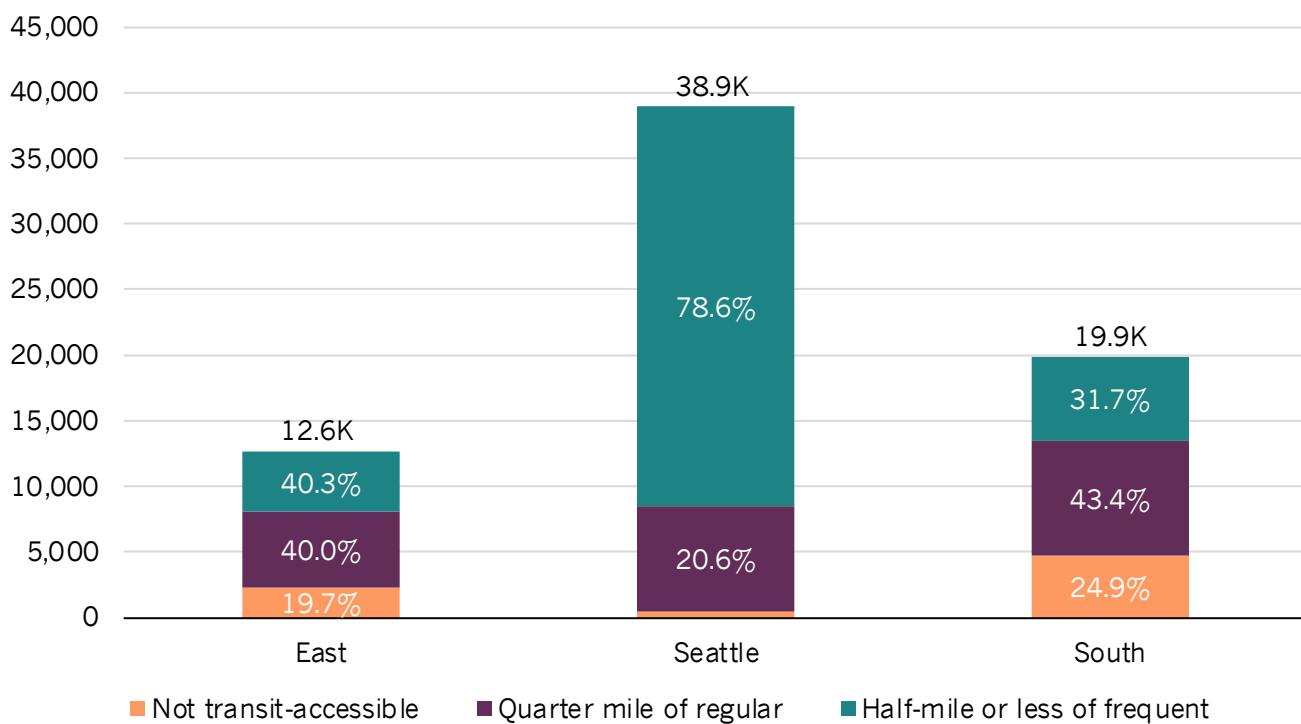
⁹⁸ Not all properties included in the county's database have disclosed address-level information. As a result, this analysis only reflects affordable housing properties with reported addresses and may not fully capture the complete distribution of income-restricted housing across the region.



transit, and about 20 percent are in locations not considered transit accessible. This highlights a more balanced, but less transit-rich, distribution compared to Seattle.

- ◆ **South King County has the lowest share of frequent transit access:** With 19,900 affordable units, the South region falls behind in transit connectivity. Only 32 percent of units are near frequent transit, while 43 percent are within a quarter mile of regular transit. Nearly 25 percent of units are not transit accessible—the highest share among the three subregions—posing challenges for residents who rely heavily on public transportation for work, school, and services.

Exhibit 66: Income-Restricted Housing Proximity to Frequent Transit, King County Framework



Source: Sound Transit Puget Sound Consolidated GTFS, OpenStreetMap, King County Income-restricted Housing Database, data extracted 23 July 2025. Data Current as of December 31, 2023.

Note: Frequent transit refers to public transportation service that arrives at least every 15 minutes during peak hours.

Migration Trends across King County

Understanding displacement patterns is inherently difficult, as households relocate for a wide range of personal, financial, and lifestyle reasons. Most available data on residential movement does not capture why people moved, making it challenging to distinguish displacement from voluntary relocation. As a result, drawing definitive conclusions about displacement from migration data alone would require broad assumptions. To explore potential patterns without overreaching, this analysis instead focuses on the overlap between concentrated areas that people from within the county moved to and areas with a high

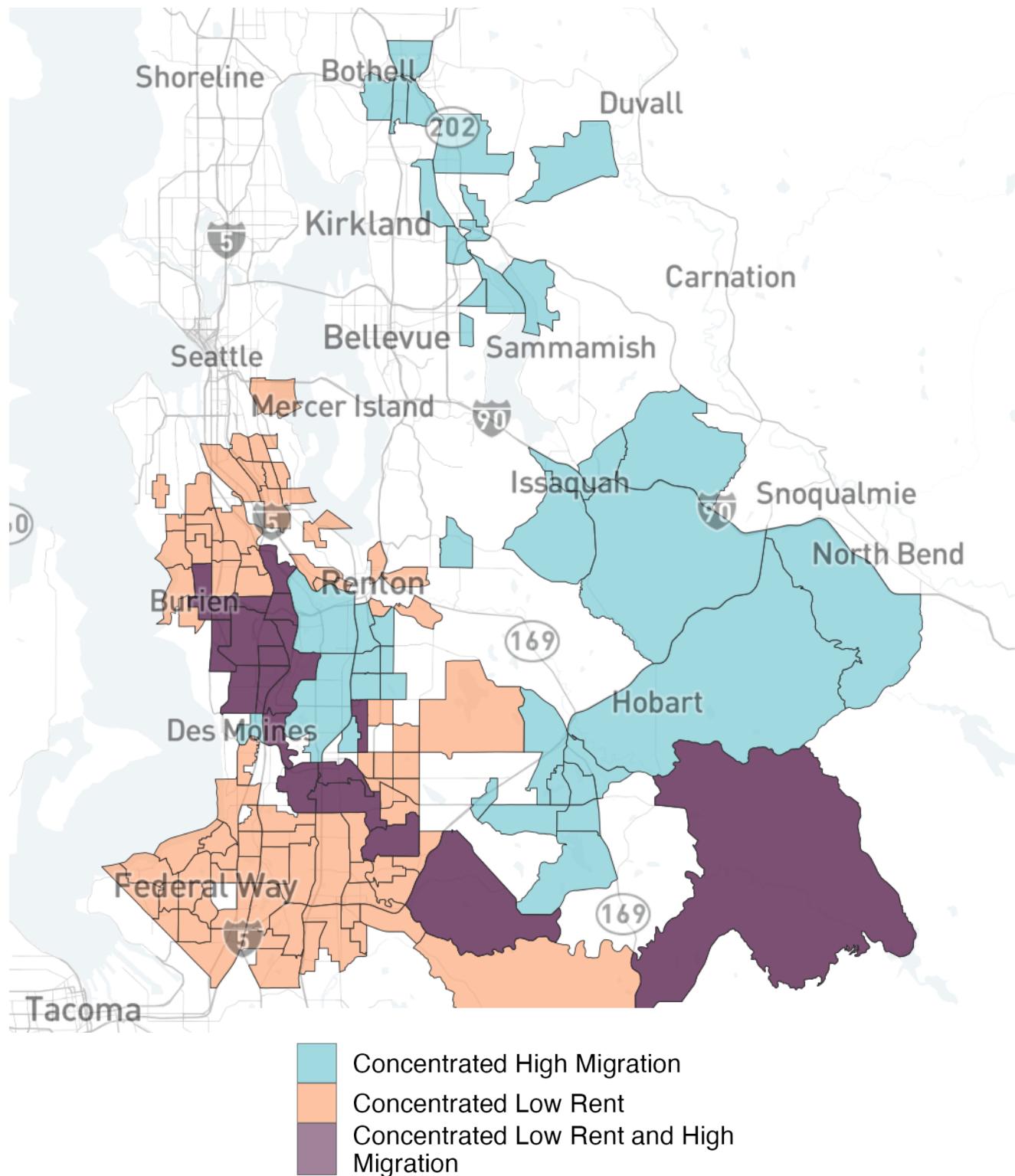
concentration of lower-than-average rents. This approach offers a window into where residents *may* be relocating in search of more affordable housing options within King County.

Exhibit 67 highlights spatial patterns in recent within-county migration and the availability of lower-rent housing in King County.⁹⁹ Areas shaded in **blue** represent block groups with a high concentration of residents who recently moved from one city to another within King County, indicating active intra-county migration. **Red** areas show neighborhoods with a high concentration of lower rents. Notably, there is significant overlap (shown in **purple**) in parts of South King County. This suggests that these areas may be absorbing a large share of households seeking more affordable housing while remaining within the county and that the South King County region is home to a high level of overlap between in-county migration and lower-cost housing.

⁹⁹ Migration in this analysis shows residents who moved from one city to a different city within King County. It does not count moves that occur within the same city.



Exhibit 67: Migration Trends, King County, 2023



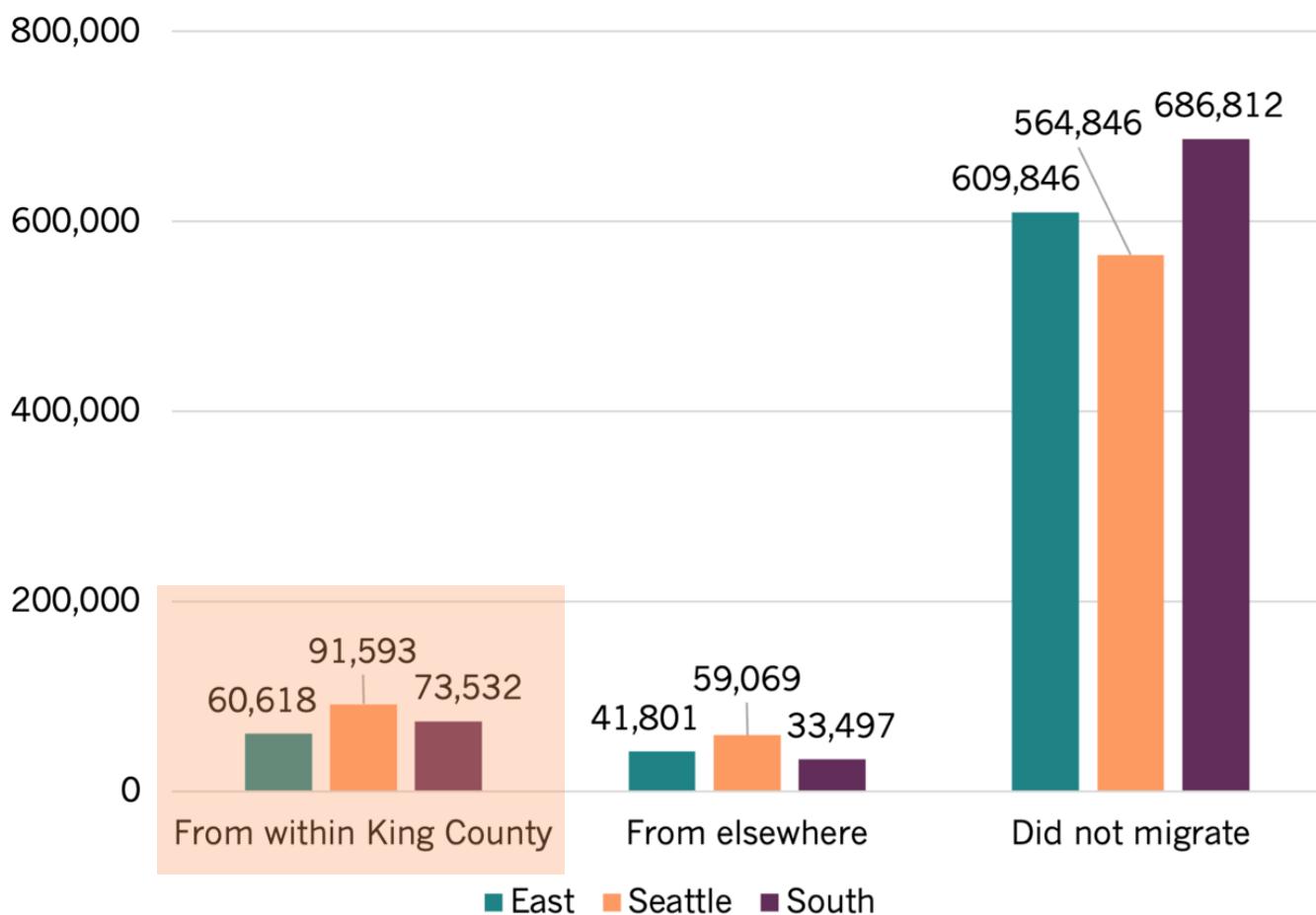
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year

Residents moving from one city to another within King County account for only a share of recent movers—there are still many within-county migrants who stay in the same city. While

ACS tabular data¹⁰⁰ can provide the ability to differentiate between those two groups, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data cannot due to its less granular geographic information, though it can still tell us many socioeconomic details about migrants who moved somewhere within King County.

According to 2023 5-Year PUMS, Seattle received the highest number of intra-county movers (91,600), followed by South King County (73,500) and East King County (60,600). These migration patterns could reflect affordability-driven movement within the region. The fact that South King County received a large influx of movers from elsewhere in the county may indicate that it is serving as a destination for those seeking lower housing costs. While this can help meet immediate affordability needs, it also increases pressure on the area's existing housing supply and existing households.

Exhibit 68: Migration in King County, 2023



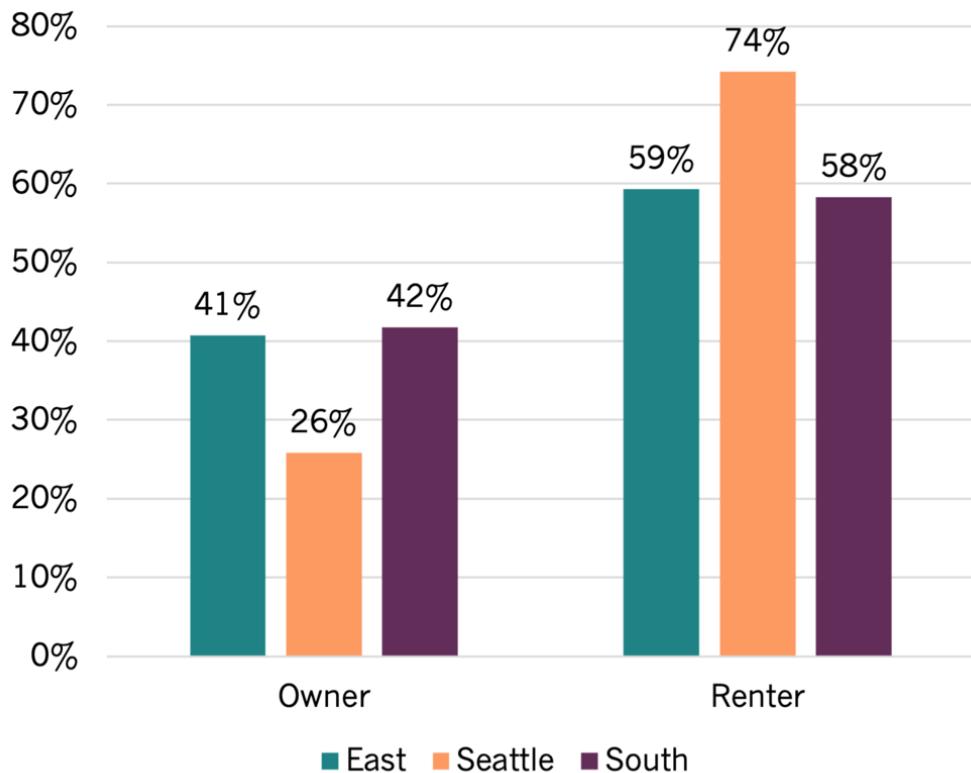
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

¹⁰⁰ ACS tabular data refers to the summary tables produced by the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. These tables provide pre-aggregated statistics (e.g., counts, percentages, medians) on population, housing, economic, and demographic characteristics.

Among residents who relocated from one city to another within King County, renters made up the majority of movers across all subregions. The pattern was most pronounced in Seattle, where an estimated 74 percent of the 91,600 intra-county movers were renters—highlighting Seattle's relatively high share of renter households compared to the East and South subregions.

In East King County, 59 percent of intra-county movers were renters, while 41 percent were homeowners. Similarly, South King County showed a more balanced distribution among the 73,500 people who moved there from other parts of the county, with 58 percent being renters and 42 percent being homeowners.

Exhibit 69: Tenure of Households Who Migrated in King County, King County Subregional Framework, 2023



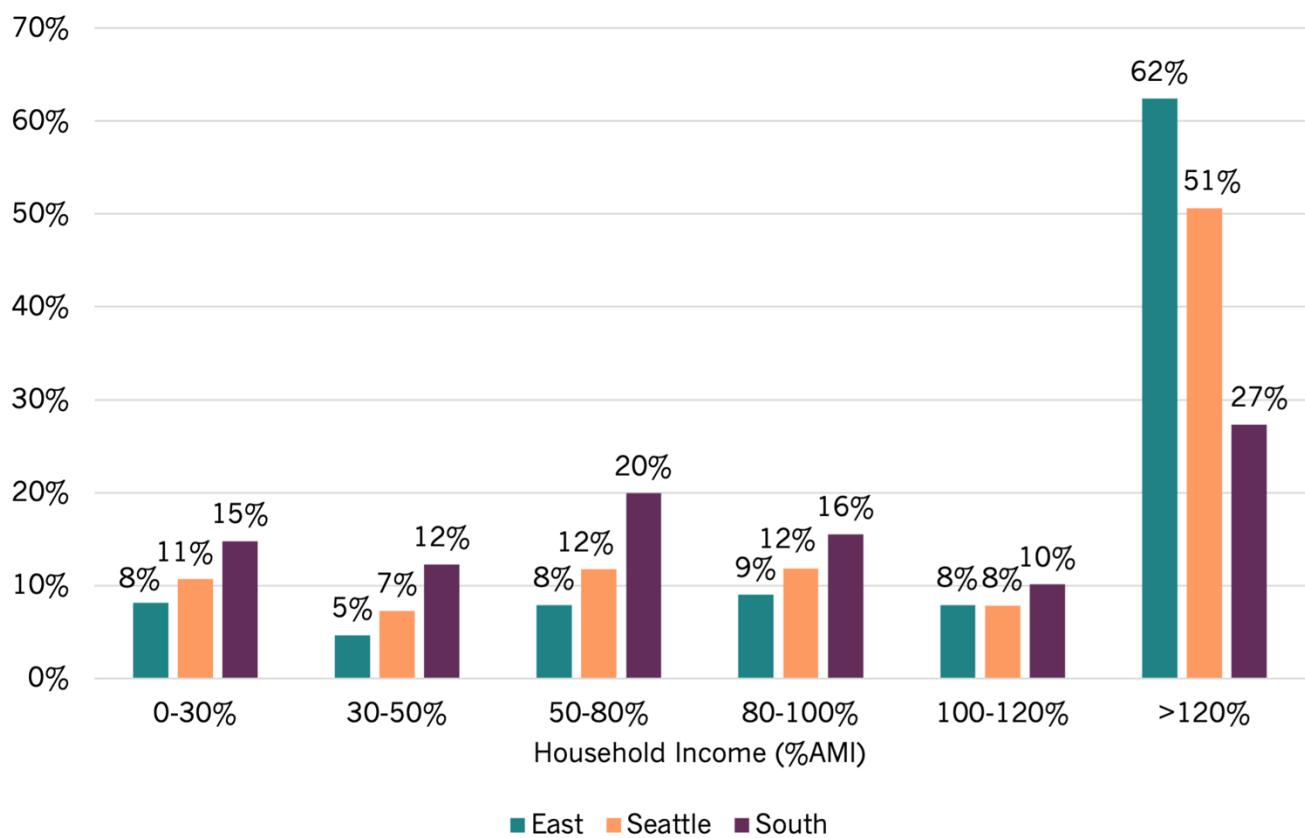
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

Renters are more likely than owners to move within the county, with Seattle showing the highest share of renter movers. This may reflect affordability pressures, lease turnover, or shifting housing preferences in different parts of the region.

The income profiles of King County residents who moved from one part of the county to another reveal regional differences that likely reflect disparities in housing affordability:

- ◆ **East King County attracts predominantly high-income movers:** About 62 percent of people who moved into East King County from another part of the county have incomes above 120 percent of AMI, more than double the share seen in South King County. Only 8 percent of East's intra-county movers earn below 50 percent of AMI, suggesting it's largely inaccessible to lower-income households.
- ◆ **South King County attracted lower-income movers:** The South subregion has the **highest share of intra-county movers in the lowest income bands**—with 15 percent earning under 30 percent of AMI and 20 percent in the 50–80 percent of AMI range. Only 27 percent of movers into South King County earn more than 120 percent of AMI, highlighting the area's role as a more affordable area within the county.
- ◆ **Seattle draws a slightly more balanced income mix than East King County:** While still skewing higher income, 51 percent of intra-county movers into Seattle earn above 120 percent of AMI. However, Seattle also sees a share of lower-income movers into the city, with 11 percent under 30 percent of AMI and 12 percent in the 50–80 percent of AMI bracket.

Exhibit 70: Income Distribution of Households Who Migrated in King County, King County Subregional Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

Among people who moved within King County, those who settled in Seattle and East King County were predominantly higher-income earners. Movers into South King County were more evenly distributed across the income spectrum, with a notable concentration in the 50–80 percent of AMI range. This pattern suggests that South King County may serve as a more affordable destination for intra-county movers.

Patterns in household size among King County residents who moved within the county reveal important subregional differences that may reflect housing affordability, availability of larger units, and larger household needs:

- ◆ **Seattle movers skew heavily single-person households:** 54 percent of intra-county movers into Seattle are single-person households—far higher than East (37 percent) or South (28 percent). This suggests that Seattle is drawing a more individual-oriented renter base, potentially driven by the concentration of smaller units, rental apartments, and urban amenities.
- ◆ **South King County attracts larger households:** South King County had the highest share of movers with larger household sizes: 17 percent had four people and 14 percent had five or more. This stands out compared to Seattle and East, where only 6–7 percent of movers were households of 5+. These patterns indicate that South King County may be accommodating more families, as reflected in its higher share of large households compared to other subregions—likely due to the inventory of more affordable and larger housing stock.
- ◆ **East and South show a broader range of household sizes:** East and South King County show a more even distribution across different household sizes compared to Seattle. For example, roughly 22 percent of intra-county movers into both East and South were three-person households.



Exhibit 71: Adjusted Household Size of Households Who Migrated in King County, King County Subregional Framework, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

Movers into Seattle were predominantly single-person households and South King County saw a much higher share of larger households, indicating that families could be relocating there in search of more affordable and larger housing options.

6. Housing Unit Gap Analysis

Housing affordability challenges are compounded by mismatches between what households need and what the market provides. Many households must make decisions between affordability, space, and location. This chapter examines how well the rental market in King County aligns with household income and size, highlighting patterns of renting up, renting down, and overcrowding. It reveals where the market falls short in providing affordable and adequately sized homes, particularly for extremely low-income and larger households.

Key Takeaways

- ◆ **Severe shortage of affordable units for the lowest-income households:** Across King County, there are less than half as many rental units affordable to households earning 0-30 percent of AMI as there are households in this income range, forcing many to rent higher-cost units.
- ◆ **High-income renters create more competition for moderately priced units:** Many households earning above 120 percent of AMI occupy units priced at lower or middle income bands, reducing the inventory affordable to those with fewer housing options.
- ◆ **Larger households face the most severe mismatches:** Over 90 percent of households with three or more people are unmatched to the existing housing stock regardless of income, reflecting a shortage of larger rental units (three or more bedrooms) even for higher-income households.
- ◆ **Overcrowding is most acute in South King County:** Nearly 28 percent of renters in South King County live in overcrowded housing, almost four times the rate in Seattle, due to a shortage of larger, affordable units despite a relatively high supply of single-family homes.
- ◆ **Moderate-income households also experience overcrowding:** Overcrowding is not limited to the lowest-income households; many earning between 30 and 80 percent of AMI live in units that are too small for their needs, especially larger households.
- ◆ **Addressing mismatches requires creating additional units that are both larger and more affordable:** Targeted production of multibedroom rental housing affordable to households earning below 80 percent of AMI is essential to reduce overcrowding and better match the housing stock to household needs.



WHAT THIS CHAPTER COVERS

This chapter examines the mismatch between household needs and the rental housing supply in King County, focusing on how affordability, unit size, and location interact to shape housing outcomes. It covers:

- » **Rental market mismatches by income band:** A comparison of renter households and units by affordability tier.
- » **Overcrowding and cost burden patterns:** An analysis of how space constraints and affordability challenges intersect.
- » **Household matching by income and size:** An assessment of how well rental units align with household needs.
- » **Adaptive choices in the rental market:** An exploration of how households respond to mismatches.
- » **Quantifying the structural housing gap:** Identification of the most acute shortages by household size and income.

Navigating Housing Trade-Offs: Location, Size, and Price

In high-cost housing markets like King County, many households struggle to find homes that meet all their needs. Instead, many must make trade-offs—prioritizing one factor of housing suitability (such as affordability) while compromising on others like unit size or proximity to work. These trade-offs often shape not only where people live but also how they live. For example:

- ◆ A family might find an **affordable unit** in South King County, but it's far from their jobs in Seattle—resulting in **long commutes, higher transportation costs**, and reduced time with family.
- ◆ A large household might secure housing **within their budget** but must **squeeze into a two-bedroom unit**, leading to overcrowding.
- ◆ A worker might prioritize being close to employment or transit and accept **a unit that's the right size and location but above their budget**, leading to cost burden and greater housing insecurity.

Exhibit 72 helps illustrate how these trade-offs are not just personal decisions but reflect systemic issues in the housing market: a mismatch between the types of housing available and the needs of residents. This chapter examines this mismatch by comparing household income and size with the characteristics of the rental housing inventory across King County.



Exhibit 72: Dimensions of an Ideal Housing Match



Source: ECONorthwest

IMPORTANT KEY TERMS FOR INTERPRETING RESULTS IN THIS CHAPTER

In this chapter, we use several terms that are important to define early on, as they help contextualize results and how they relate to cost burden throughout the analysis.

Understanding what we mean by “renting up,” “renting down,” and “matched” is essential for interpreting how households’ housing costs relate to their incomes and for identifying when those relationships indicate affordability challenges.

- ◆ **Renting up:** When a household leases a home in an affordability bracket that is higher than their household income bracket (e.g., a household with an income in the 50–80 percent of AMI range renting a housing unit in the 100–120 percent of AMI affordability range).
 - **When does renting up occur?** Renting up often occurs when there is a shortage of appropriately priced units or when households prioritize factors such as location, unit size, or amenities over cost, and it usually indicates that the household in question is cost burdened to some degree.
 - **Are households that are renting up considered cost burdened?** It is generally appropriate to treat renting up as a proxy for cost burden in this analysis. However, not all households renting up are necessarily cost burdened. Some households report zero income in survey data—such as students or individuals supported by family or other means—which can result in their rent exceeding what their reported income suggests they can afford. These exceptions represent a very small share—only about 1 percent—of households renting up.
- ◆ **Renting down:** When a household leases a home in an affordability bracket that is lower than their household income bracket (e.g., a household with an income in the >120 percent of AMI range renting a housing unit in the 80–100 percent of AMI affordability range).
 - **When does renting down occur?** Renting down often occurs by choice and can reflect preferences for location, size, or amenities rather than price. While a certain level of renting down is expected in a healthy housing market, high levels can reduce the availability of moderately priced units for lower-income households, contributing to affordability challenges for those with the fewest options.
 - **Can a household be cost burdened even when they’re renting down?** In some cases, a household may appear to be renting down in the data but still be cost burdened. For example, consider a one-person household earning 80–100 percent of AMI that rents a three-bedroom unit classified as affordable at the 50–80 percent of AMI level. The unit is labeled 50–80 percent of AMI because, compared to other three-bedroom units, it is relatively more affordable. However,



for a single individual, that same unit would still be relatively unaffordable given their income and household size.

- ◆ **Matched:** When a household leases a home in an affordability bracket that is the same as their household income bracket (e.g., a household with an income in the >120 percent of AMI range renting a housing unit in the >120 percent of AMI affordability range). Being “matched” indicates that the rent level aligns with the household’s income category in aggregate data.
 - **Can a household be cost matched and still be cost burdened?** Being cost matched does not guarantee the household is not cost burdened. For example, a household might appear matched in the data because their income aligns with the rent level for their AMI category; however, they might be burdened because their income is on the low end of the range and their rent is at the upper bound (e.g., a 51 percent of AMI household renting a 79 percent of AMI unit).

Housing affordability challenges in King County are not just about rising prices; they are the product of complex and compounding mismatches between household needs and the housing options available. As earlier chapters have shown, cost is only one factor shaping housing choices because affordability varies by location, unit size, and tenure—therefore, households must weigh trade-offs related to space, proximity to work, access to community, and more. These layered considerations mean that people often settle for housing that does not fully meet their needs, whether that’s a small apartment far from their job or a home they cannot comfortably afford.

These patterns are playing out in visible and measurable ways. Chapter 5 demonstrated how South King County, with its relatively lower-cost housing stock, has offered more affordable options for larger lower-income households. Migration trends suggest many households are being priced out of East King County and Seattle, possibly trading shorter commutes or community ties for affordability. But this movement brings new pressures to receiving areas—many of which are already experiencing housing strain. In South King County, for example, overcrowding and cost burden rates are among the highest in the region.

This chapter examines what these pressures reveal about the structural gaps in King County’s housing supply. Specifically, it explores the degree to which the current stock of rental housing matches household needs based on three key factors: income, household size, and supply. While affordability remains a central lens, this chapter also considers how mismatches in unit size, particularly the scarcity of larger rentals, compound housing instability and lead to overcrowding. It highlights the adaptive strategies households use to secure housing, such as renting up beyond what they can afford or renting down into smaller or more affordable units.

By quantifying these mismatches across household types, income bands, and subregions, this chapter takes King County a step beyond the permanent housing needs allocations in



the CPPs, which estimate the total number of housing units needed by income band. While the CPP framework provides a vital baseline for planning, it does not fully capture how well the existing housing stock aligns with household needs for unit size, affordability, and location. This chapter adds depth to the CPP permanent housing needs allocations by income band via identifying the specific types of units that are missing—highlighting where existing units fall short for different household sizes and income bands and where the mismatch between supply and demand is most acute.

WHY OVERCROWDING MATTERS: WHAT WE HEARD—AND WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS

- » Stakeholders and community members across King County—especially housing providers and community-based organizations—consistently emphasized overcrowding as a lived reality for many households. In interviews and engagement sessions, community members shared that it is common for multiple families or large households to crowd into a single two-bedroom unit, not by choice but because larger, affordable rentals simply don't exist. This pattern disproportionately impacts low-income, immigrant, refugee, and multigenerational households—especially in communities of color—who often rely on shared housing to stay connected, preserve cultural norms, or minimize costs.¹⁰¹

HOW DOES HOUSING OVERCROWDING AFFECT PEOPLE?

- » When too many people share too little space, it can strain relationships, increase stress, disrupt sleep, and make it harder to stay healthy.¹⁰² In terms of health, research has shown that overcrowding is linked to greater risk of infectious diseases like tuberculosis, respiratory illnesses, and gastrointestinal infections. The World Health Organization has found strong evidence that reducing overcrowding can directly lower these health risks.¹⁰³ Overcrowding has strong mental health impacts too. A recent study in the UK found that in 2022, residents in overcrowded households were 2.6 percentage points more likely to experience mental health struggles compared to those in uncrowded homes.¹⁰⁴
- » For children, the effects can be especially damaging. In crowded households, kids often don't have the quiet, stable space they need to study, sleep, or recharge. A nationally representative U.S. study found that children living in overcrowded households scored significantly lower on math and reading tests and faced higher

¹⁰¹ Appendix C: Descriptions of Recent Community Engagement Conducted by King County, 2021–2025: 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan – Housing Needs Assessment, (B-135-B-136)

¹⁰² Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. “Housing Instability.” Healthy People 2030, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed July 25, 2025. [[link](#)].

¹⁰³ National Center for Biotechnology Information. 2018. “Household Crowding.” WHO Housing and Health Guidelines. [[link](#)].

¹⁰⁴ The Health Foundation. 2024. “Relationship between Living in Overcrowded Housing and Health.” Evidence Hub, The Health Foundation. Accessed July 25, 2025. [[link](#)].



rates of behavioral problems.¹⁰⁵ Parents in these environments may have less time or space to support their child's learning, compounding the barriers these children already face. These conditions don't just impact grades—they can shape a child's long-term development and well-being.

Rental Market Mismatches by Income band

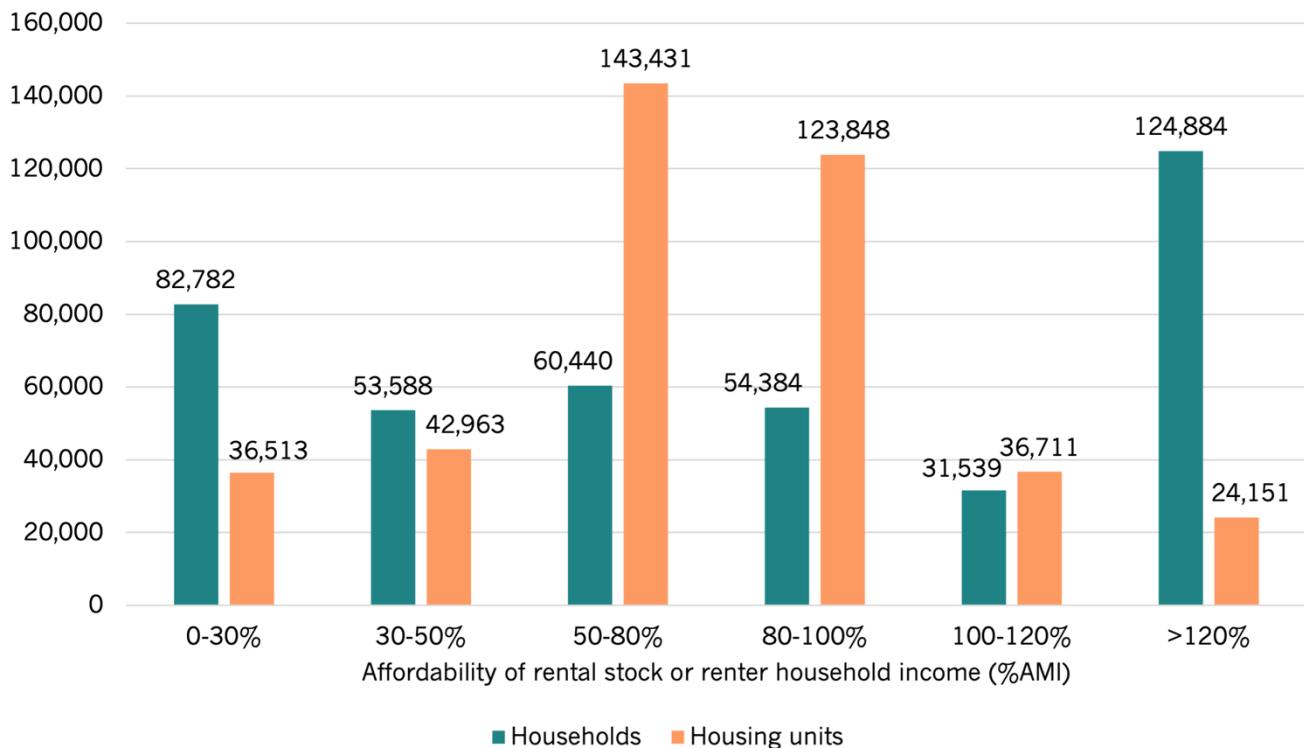
Exhibit 73 compares the number of renter households to the number of rental units (measured as percent of AMI), providing insight into where rental housing supply may be insufficient relative to need across income categories:

- ◆ **Severe mismatch at the lowest income bands (0–30 percent of AMI):** There are more than twice as many renter households (approximately 82,800) as there are affordable rental units (about 36,500) for this income group. This gap represents the most acute affordability challenge in the county, indicating that many extremely low-income renters are either severely cost burdened or competing for units priced well above their means.
- ◆ **Shortfall for households earning 30–50 percent of AMI:** While the gap is smaller than for the lowest income group, there are still more renter households (53,600) than available units (43,000) affordable at this income band—suggesting continued difficulty for low-income renters to find housing within their budget.
- ◆ **Greater inventory of units for moderate-income renters (50–100 percent of AMI):** In both the 50–80 percent and 80–100 percent of AMI bands, there are more rental units than there are renter households in these income ranges. This supply of units may reflect broader demand across other income groups.
- ◆ **Competition for moderately priced units:** There are nearly 125,000 renter households earning above 120 percent of AMI, but only about 24,200 rental units are priced for this income band. Many of these households are likely occupying more moderately priced units, which can create added competition for units that lower-income renters need. This renting-down effect can reduce affordable housing options for many households. While the County does not necessarily face a shortage of high-end rental units that needs to be solved directly, continuing to deliver new market-rate units at the upper end of the spectrum is still beneficial because it can help free up more moderately priced units for middle- and lower-income households.

¹⁰⁵ Solari, Claudia D., and Robert D. Mare. 2012. "Housing Crowding Effects on Children's Well-Being." *Social Science Research* 41, no. 2 (March 2012): 464–76. [\[link\]](#)



Exhibit 73: Number of Housing Units and Households by AMI, King County, 2023



U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

The largest mismatches in King County's rental market occur at the lowest and highest ends of the income spectrum. Low-income renters face a significant shortage of affordably priced units, while high-income renters often occupy housing stock priced for lower- or middle-income households, intensifying pressure across the rental stock.

Exhibit 74 examines the same dynamics between households and rental housing supply by AMI, but it does so across King County's three subregions—East, Seattle, and South—and reveals similar patterns of mismatch, particularly for lower-income households.

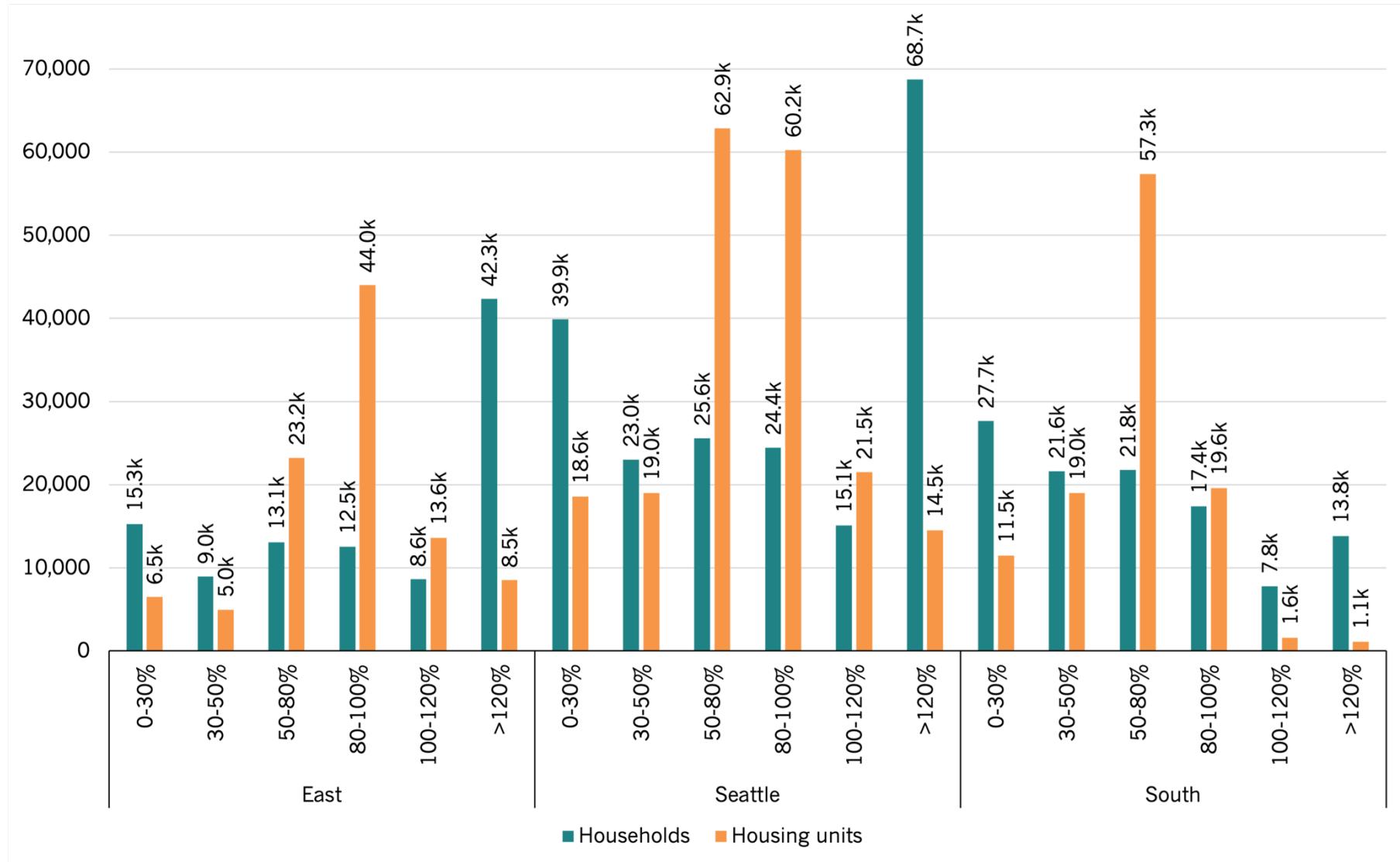
- ◆ **Structural gap for extremely low-income renters:** In every subregion, there is a significant shortfall in rental units affordable to households earning 0–30 percent of AMI. This structural gap means that the supply of deeply affordable housing consistently falls far short of demand, forcing many of these households to rent more expensive units and experience higher levels of cost burden.
- ◆ **Alignment in the 30–50 percent of AMI range across subregions:** Across all three subregions, the number of rental units priced for households earning 30–50 percent of AMI is relatively well aligned with the number of households in that income range.
- ◆ **Higher rental inventory for moderate-income households in Seattle:** There are more rental housing units affordable at 50–80 percent and 80–100 percent of AMI than the

number of renter households in those income bands. For instance, at the 50–80 percent of AMI level, there are 62,000 units compared to 25,000 renter households.

- ◆ **Greater supply of moderate-income housing in Seattle and South King County:** In both Seattle and the South subregion, the number of rental units affordable to households earning 50–80 percent of AMI significantly exceeds the number of renter households in that income range. For example, in South King County, more than 57,000 units are priced at this level, compared to just 22,000 households. This suggests that these areas may be absorbing renters from other income bands—either through renting down by higher-income households or renting up by lower-income households.



Exhibit 74: Number of Housing Units and Households by AMI, King County Subregional Framework, 2023



U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS



- **Misalignment at both ends of the spectrum: There are far fewer units affordable to low-income renters relative to the number of low-income households—especially at 0–30 percent and 30–50 percent of AMI. For example, in East King County over 15,000 households fall into the 0–30 percent of AMI range, but there are fewer than 7,000 units affordable at that level. At the same time, many higher-income renter households (>120 percent of AMI) are renting down into more moderately priced units. Continued production of new market-rate units can help absorb demand from higher-income renters, freeing up more moderately priced units for middle- and lower-income households.**
- **Across all subregions, a persistent shortage of units affordable to households earning 0–30 percent of AMI leaves the lowest-income renters facing the greatest housing insecurity. Both Seattle and South King County play a key role in meeting regional needs with a supply of moderate-income units, but they are likely absorbing many renters from other income bands. This highlights the need to continue (1) delivering deeply affordable units and (2) maintaining market-rate production to free up moderately priced homes for those with greater need.**

These structural mismatches between the number of renter households and the inventory of appropriately priced units create a ripple effect throughout the rental market. When households cannot find housing at the price point aligned with their income, they often make trade-offs or different choices related to price point—either paying more than they can afford (renting up) or occupying lower-cost units despite having the means to pay more (renting down). These decisions are shaped by a variety of factors beyond price, including location preferences, availability of larger units, proximity to jobs or schools, or even limited access to homeownership opportunities.

Some level of down renting is expected in a healthy market and can reflect positive outcomes, such as households spending a smaller share of their income on housing. However, when large numbers of higher-income households occupy moderately priced units, it reduces the supply of those units available to lower-income households who have far fewer alternatives. This intensifies competition for the most affordable stock, contributing to rent pressures and heightened housing insecurity among households with the least ability to absorb higher costs. The next section explores these dynamics in greater detail, showing how these market pressures result in cascading mismatches and reinforce affordability challenges.



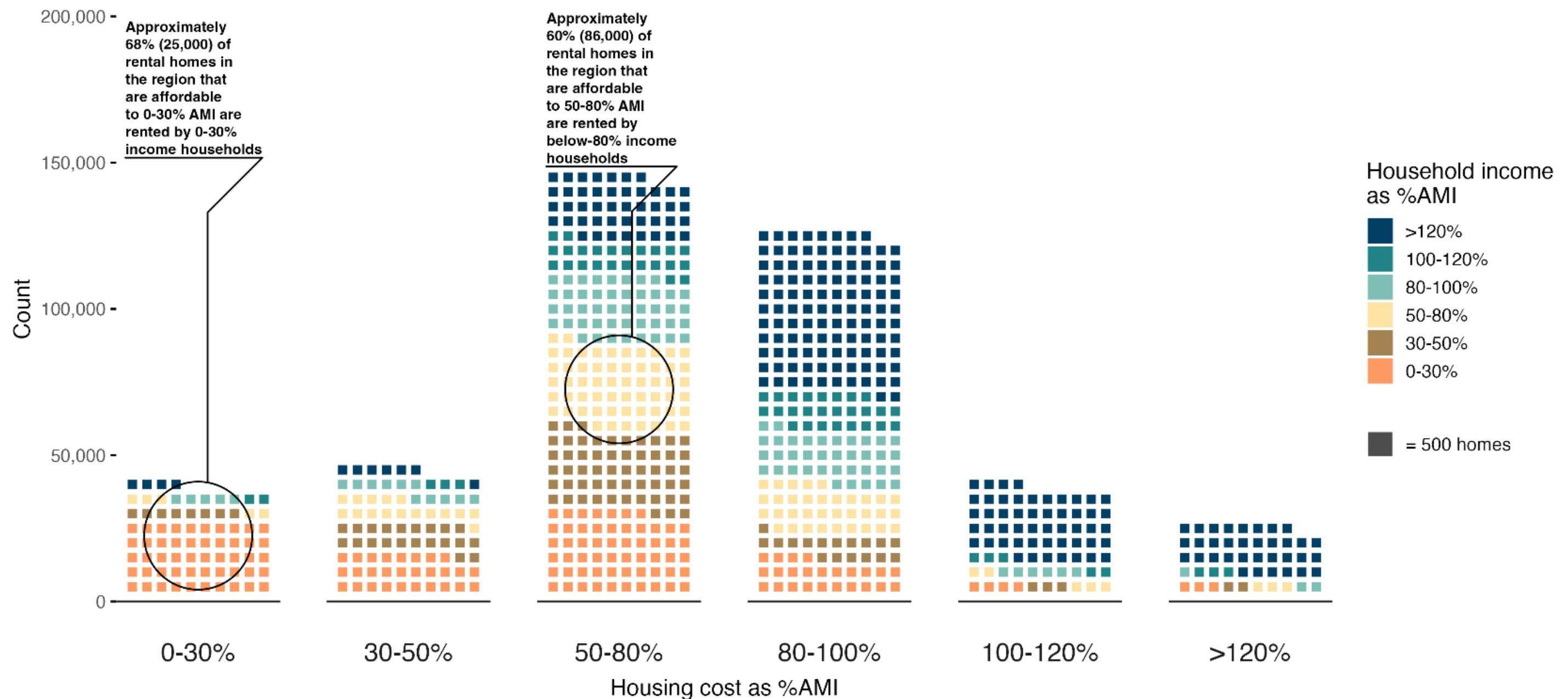
Impacts of Rental Market Imbalances

Exhibit 75 shows the mismatch between rental housing affordability tiers and the income bands of renters in King County, highlighting both renting up (lower-income households in more expensive units) and renting down (higher-income households in lower-cost units):

- ◆ **Mismatch among lowest-income renters:** Of the approximately 37,000 rental units affordable to households at 0–30 percent of AMI, only 68 percent (about 25,000) are actually occupied by households in that income group. The remaining one-third are occupied by higher-income households renting down, primarily those in the 30–50 and 50–80 percent of AMI range.
- ◆ **Prevalence of renting up among low-income households:** Large numbers of 0–30 percent and 30–50 percent of AMI households are occupying units in the 50–80 percent and 80–100 percent of AMI rent ranges—reflecting renting up, which increases their cost burden and housing insecurity.
- ◆ **Higher-income renters in lower-cost units:** Households earning more than 120 percent of AMI are present across all rent tiers—including thousands renting units priced much lower than what their income can afford. Their significant presence in the 50–80 percent and 80–100 percent of AMI tiers underscores the degree of renting down occurring, which may reflect personal housing preferences, supply shortages in higher-end rental markets, or limited ownership options.



Exhibit 75: Mismatch between Renter Incomes and Rental Unit Affordability, King County, 2023



U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

- **Persistent mismatches in the rental market—driven by both renting up and renting down—limit the inventory of affordable units for the lowest-income households, increasing cost burden and housing insecurity for those with the fewest options.**

Overcrowding and Burdened Renter Households

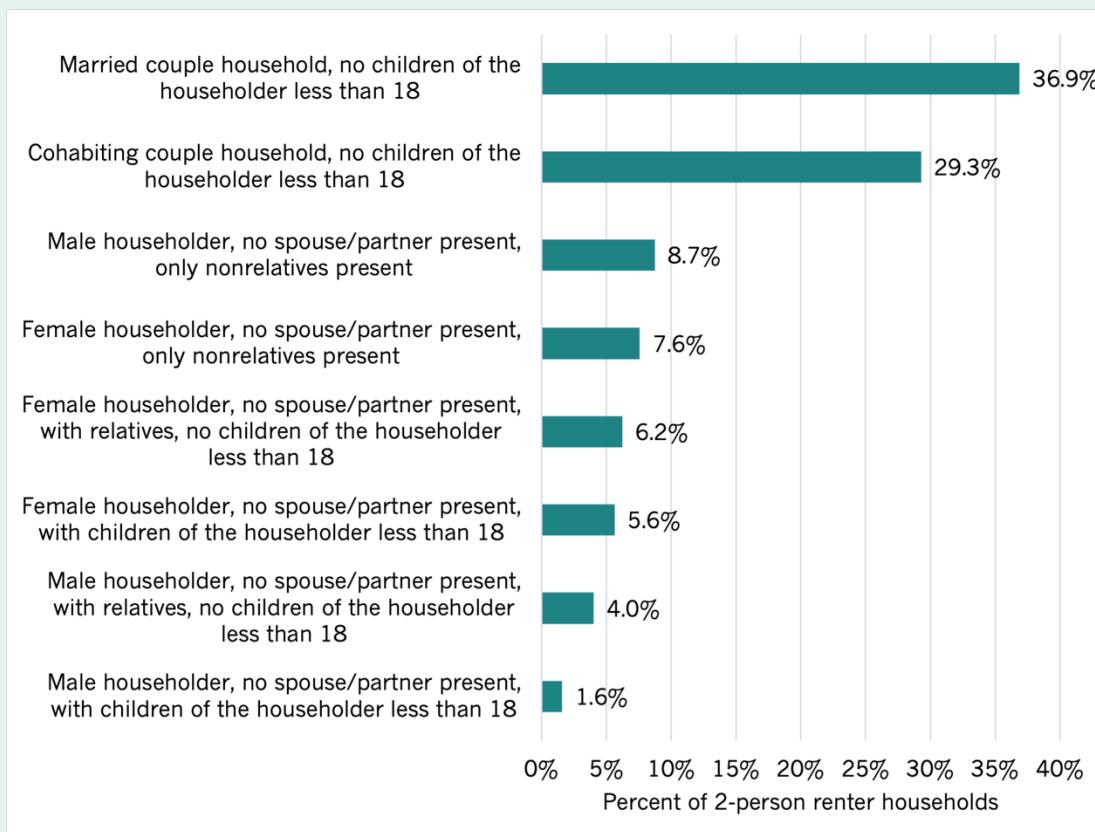
When there is a lack of affordably priced units, especially larger units affordable to lower-income households, many renters are forced to make trade-offs. Some households stretch beyond their means and rent up, becoming cost burdened. Others may compromise on space, leading to overcrowding. To better understand the impacts of these trade-offs, the following analysis examines the extent to which renters across King County are overcrowded, matched, or renting up, which can reveal other ways renters are strained in the housing market beyond cost burden.



ADJUSTED 2-PERSON HOUSEHOLD SIZE FOR THE GAP ANALYSIS

- » To more accurately estimate the number of bedrooms needed by renter households in King County, we applied a household size adjustment to account for the composition of two-person households. Exhibit 76 shows the composition breakdown of two-person households in King County. Approximately two-thirds of all two-person renter households consist of cohabiting couples without children (37 percent and 29 percent). These households often do not require a second bedroom in the same way that households with children, roommates, or extended family might.
- » To reflect this distinction, we adjusted household size downward by one person for any Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) household classified as a cohabitating couple (whether married or unmarried, with or without children). This adjustment treats these households as having a lower bedroom need than what their raw household size might suggest.
- » The effect of this adjustment is a notable reduction in the estimated demand for two-bedroom rental units. By better aligning household composition with functional bedroom need, this approach produces a more realistic picture of the rental housing need across the region—especially in markets where smaller households and couples without children are prevalent.

Exhibit 76: 2-Person Renter Household Types, King County, 2023



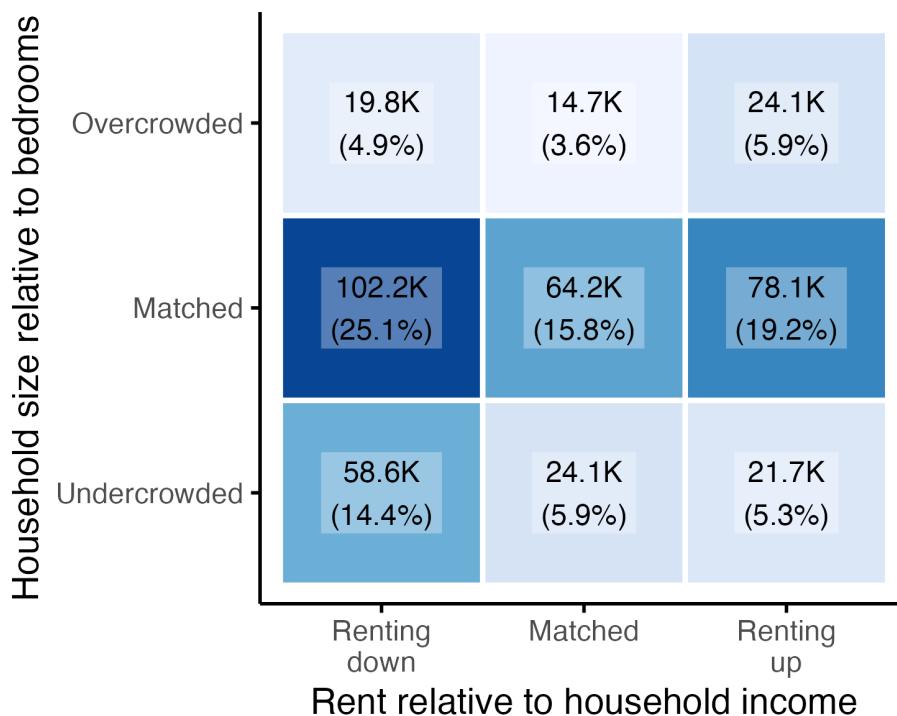
U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS



Exhibit 77 shows that most renters in King County are housed in units that match their needs for both affordability and size, but a notable share do face challenges.

- ◆ **15 percent of renters are overcrowded**—living in homes with fewer bedrooms than their household size might need.
- ◆ **30 percent of renters are renting up and likely cost burdened.**
- ◆ **6 percent of renters are both overcrowded and likely cost burdened**—those who are forced to rent up and live in units too small for their household size. This group represents some of the most constrained households in the market, likely sacrificing space and financial stability to remain housed.

Exhibit 77: Overcrowding and Burdened, Renters, King County, 2023



U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

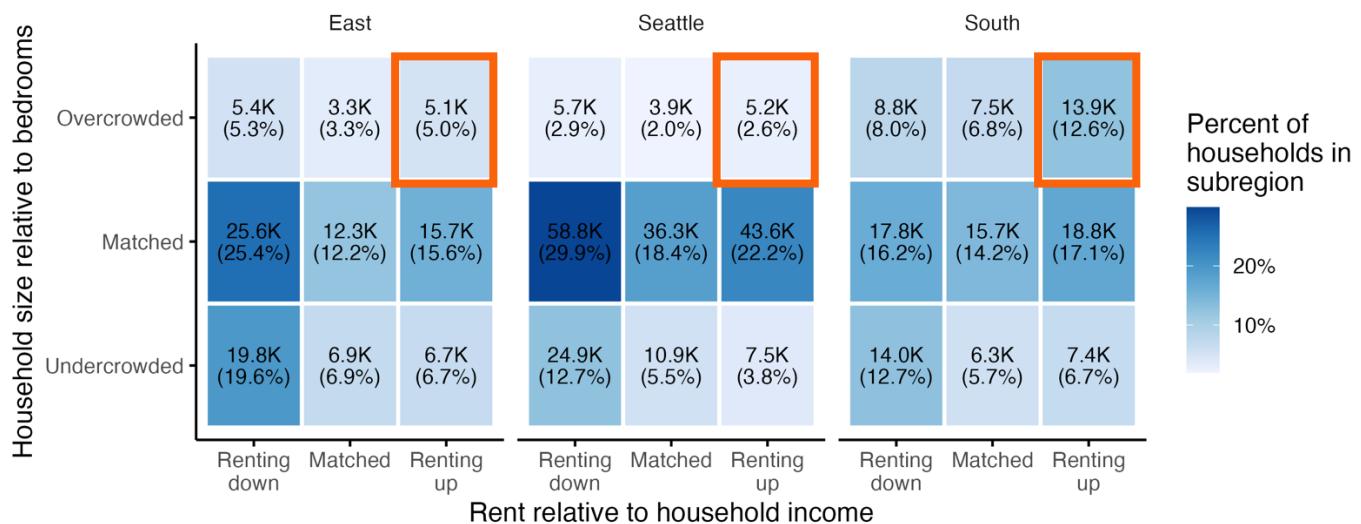
Household overcrowding and cost burden play out differently across King County's subregions.

- ◆ **Overcrowding is most acute in South King County:** Almost 28 percent of renters in South King County are overcrowded—nearly four times the rate in Seattle (7.5 percent). This suggests a lack of larger, affordable units for the larger households who are more prevalent in South King County, even with the subregion's larger supply of single-family units.
- ◆ **South King County renters are more likely to be both overcrowded and renting up:** South has the highest share of renters who are simultaneously overcrowded and

renting up. Over 12 percent of renters in South King County fall into this category, compared to just 2.6 percent in Seattle and 5 percent in East King County.

- ◆ **East King County shows a moderate amount of overcrowding and households renting up compared to Seattle and South King County:** 13.6 percent of households are overcrowded and about 5 percent are renting up and overcrowded, higher than Seattle but less extreme than South King County.
- ◆ **Seattle shows lower rates of overcrowding, potentially due to smaller household sizes and a housing stock dominated by smaller units.** Just 7.5 percent of renters in Seattle are overcrowded—significantly lower than other subregions. However, this may reflect a housing market that is not accommodating larger or lower-income households, who may be priced out or unable to find appropriately sized units and thus are forced to move to other areas.

Exhibit 78: Overcrowding and Burdened, Renters, King County Subregional Framework, 2023



U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

Note: The orange box highlights where renters are both overcrowded and renting up by subregion.

Overall, analysis suggests that South King County serves as a more affordable subregion, especially for larger households, but the supply of adequate units still falls short—leading to higher rates of both overcrowding and rent burden. Seattle, by contrast, shows less overcrowding but may be less accommodating of lower-income and larger households altogether.

WHAT MIGHT OVERCROWDING LOOK AND FEEL LIKE FOR A HOUSEHOLD?

- » Imagine a household of five with two parents, two school-age children, and an elderly family member who requires medical support. They live in a small two-bedroom apartment. One bedroom is shared by the parents; the second is just large enough to fit medical equipment and provide a private space for the elder's care. Every night, the children sleep on couches in the living room, which doubles as their bedroom.
- » In this tight space, the kitchen table and coffee table double as desks for homework. One parent works night shifts and needs to sleep during the day, while the rest of the family tries to stay quiet to avoid waking them. But when that parent leaves for work at 10:00 p.m., the noise and movement wake the children, who often struggle to fall back asleep—leaving them exhausted and unfocused at school the next day.
- » When flu season comes around, the situation becomes even more complex. Because the elder is medically vulnerable, the children sometimes have to leave the home entirely—spending nights on couches in relatives' or friends' homes just to minimize the risk of spreading germs. This lack of stability disturbs the children's schedules, impacting their daily hygiene, study time, sleep, and mental health.

Household Mismatches and Adaptive Choices

The rates of overcrowding and cost burden underscore how difficult it is for many renters to find units that are both affordable and adequately sized for their needs. But these are just some of the visible outcomes of a market out of balance. When households are unable to secure housing that matches both their income band and space needs, they make a range of adaptive choices such as renting up or downsizing in space. The following section explores these dynamics in more detail, illustrating where households end up in the rental market when there is a lack of needed housing options.

Exhibit 79 highlights how well households across King County are matched to the housing stock based on their income and household size.

- ◆ **Most unmatched households are larger households across all income bands:** Households with 3 or more members are poorly matched at all income bands, with over 90 percent of 3-, 4-, and 5+ person households unmatched, regardless of income. For example, 100 percent of 5+ person households earning 50–80 percent of AMI are unmatched. This widespread mismatch reflects a limited supply of larger units (3+ bedrooms) across the county. The challenge is not just affordability but also inventory of size—even higher-income, larger households remain unmatched, indicating that the market lacks sufficient larger units for these households to rent.
- ◆ **Better matching among smaller households at moderate incomes:** One- and two-person households earning 50–80 percent of AMI show the best match, with about 62



percent and 65 percent unmatched, respectively. This likely reflects a strong supply of one- and two-bedroom units in the multifamily rental market, which represents both a substantial share of new construction in King County over the past 10 years and a more affordable housing option in the county's market today.

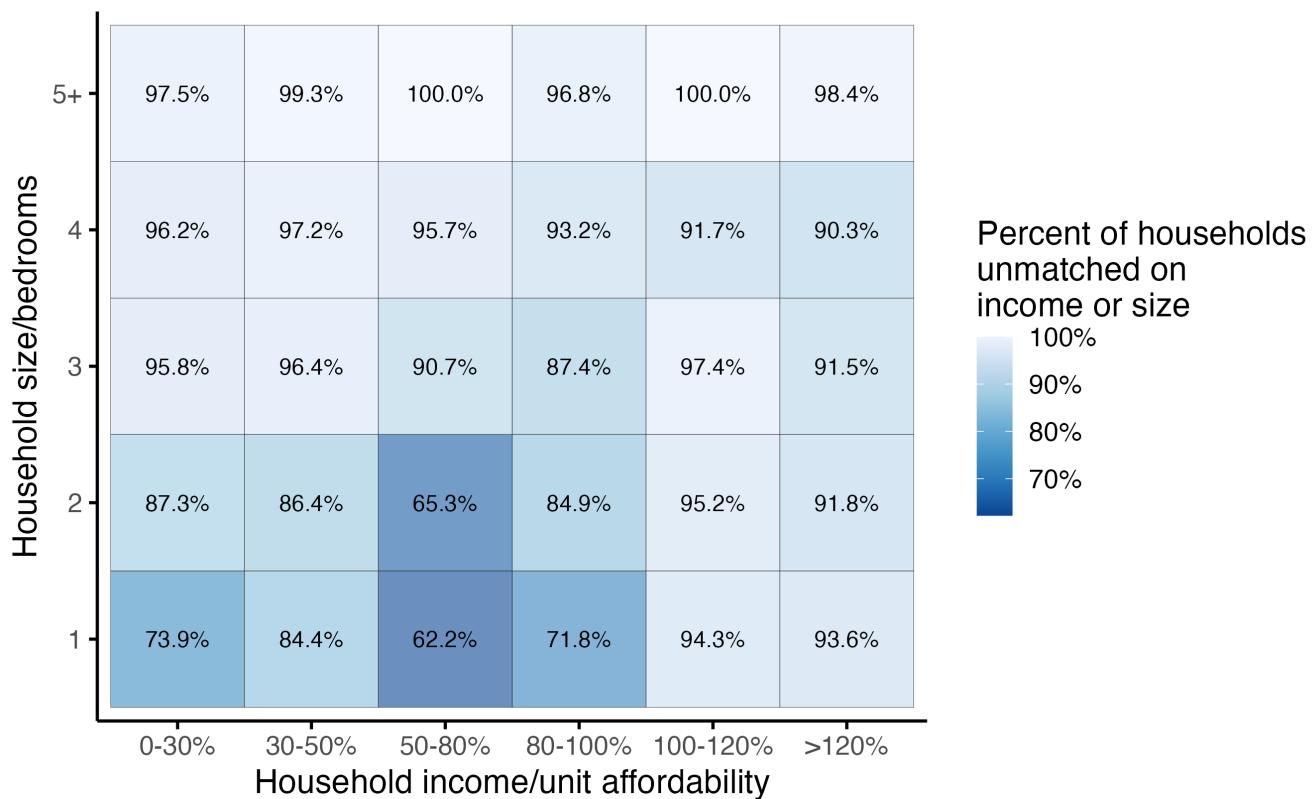
HOW TO READ THIS CHART

Exhibit 79 shows the share of households that are unmatched with housing units by both income and size. Each cell represents a specific combination of household size (rows) and income band (columns).

- » Darker-blue cells represent better alignment between household needs and units—lower percentages of households are mismatched on income and/or bedroom size.
- » Lighter-blue cells indicate a greater mismatch—higher percentages of households are not matched to housing that fits both their income and space needs.
- » For example, 62.2 percent of one-person households at 50–80 percent¹ of AMI are unmatched, suggesting better alignment relative to other incomes and household sizes. In contrast, nearly all 5+ person households across income bands are mismatched, reflecting severe gaps in large-unit affordability and supply.



Exhibit 79: Share of Households Unmatched to Housing Stock by Income and Household Size, King County, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

These findings underscore a structural gap in the housing market: Many households are not well matched, especially for larger households. While affordability is a barrier, unit size and type also play a critical role.

Exhibit 80 shows how renter households adapt when they cannot find a unit that matches both their income band and household size. The arrows indicate the direction and magnitude of this adaptation—where households end up renting instead.

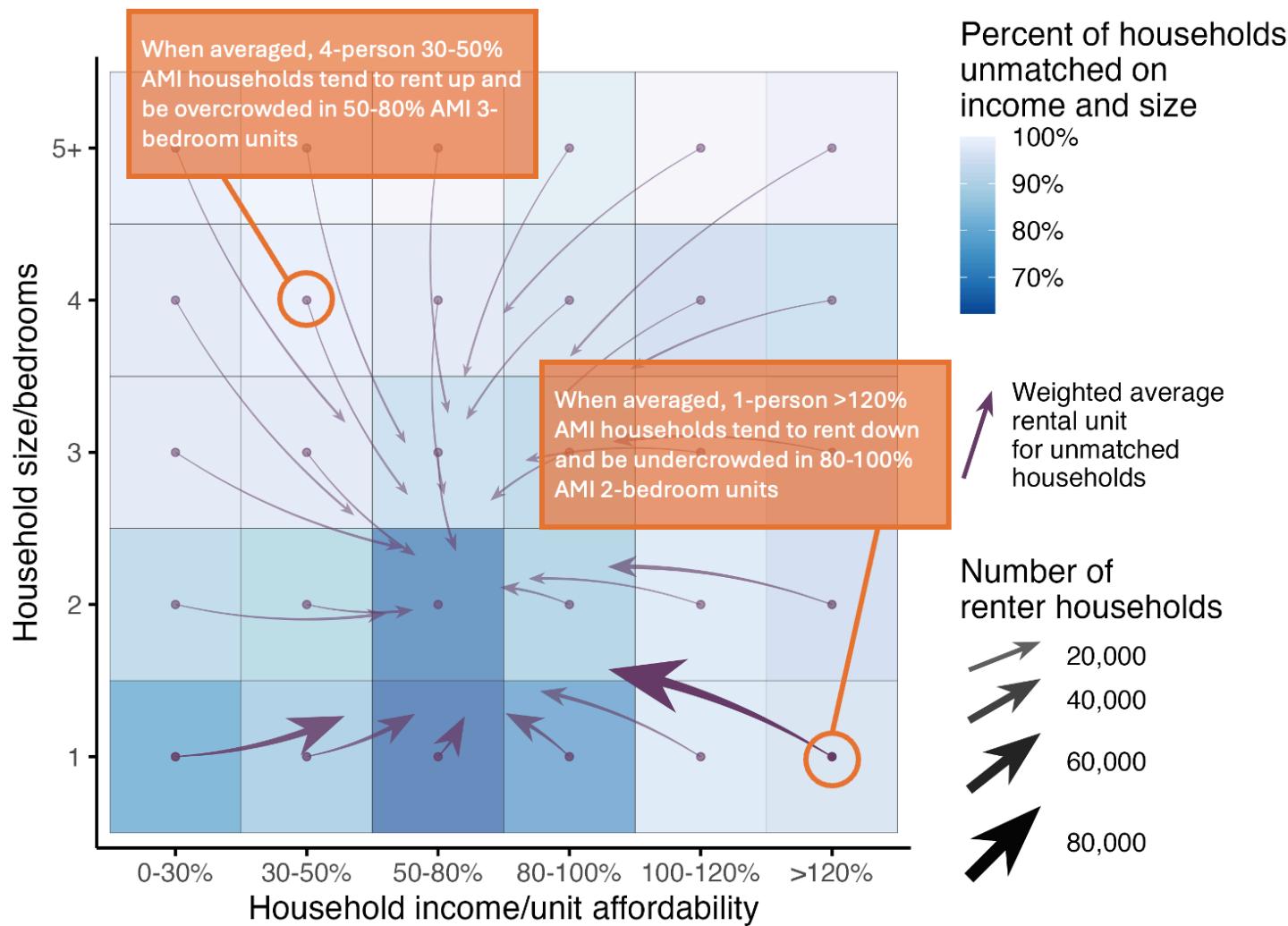
- ◆ **High-income, single-person households rent down:** One of the most common mismatches occurs among high-income, single-person renters (>120 percent of AMI). Rather than paying premium rents, these households tend to rent more affordable one- or two-bedroom units priced for 80–100 percent of AMI households. This renting down dynamic can squeeze the supply of moderately priced units for households with lower incomes.
- ◆ **Low-income households often rent up:** Households earning less than 30 percent of AMI frequently rent up into more expensive 30–50 percent of AMI units, and 30–50 percent of AMI households often rent up into 50–80 percent of AMI units, suggesting an undersupply of deeply affordable units and that many low-income renters are forced to compromise and rent units that they cannot comfortably afford.



- ◆ **Larger households compromise on space:** Households with three or more members tend to compromise more on unit size rather than affordability. The arrows show a consistent pattern of larger families moving into smaller units, highlighting how the shortage of large, affordable units can lead to overcrowding. This is particularly acute for low-income, large households who often end up in two-bedroom units meant for smaller households.
- ◆ **Two-bedroom units for moderate-income households are the pressure point:** Across household types and income bands, one destination stands out—two-bedroom units priced for 50–80 percent of AMI households. These units act as a “catch-all” segment absorbing unmatched households from multiple directions—higher-income individuals renting down, lower-income families renting up, and larger households downsizing in space. Crowding into a two-bedroom unit is generally more feasible for many households than squeezing into a one-bedroom, which is rarely a practical option for families or multiperson households. With about 132,000 two-bedroom units in the county’s housing inventory compared to just 78,000 units with three or more bedrooms, the limited availability of larger units further concentrates demand on two-bedroom units, intensifying competition and reducing availability for moderate-income renters.



Exhibit 80: Renter Household Adjustments by Income and Household Size, King County, 2023

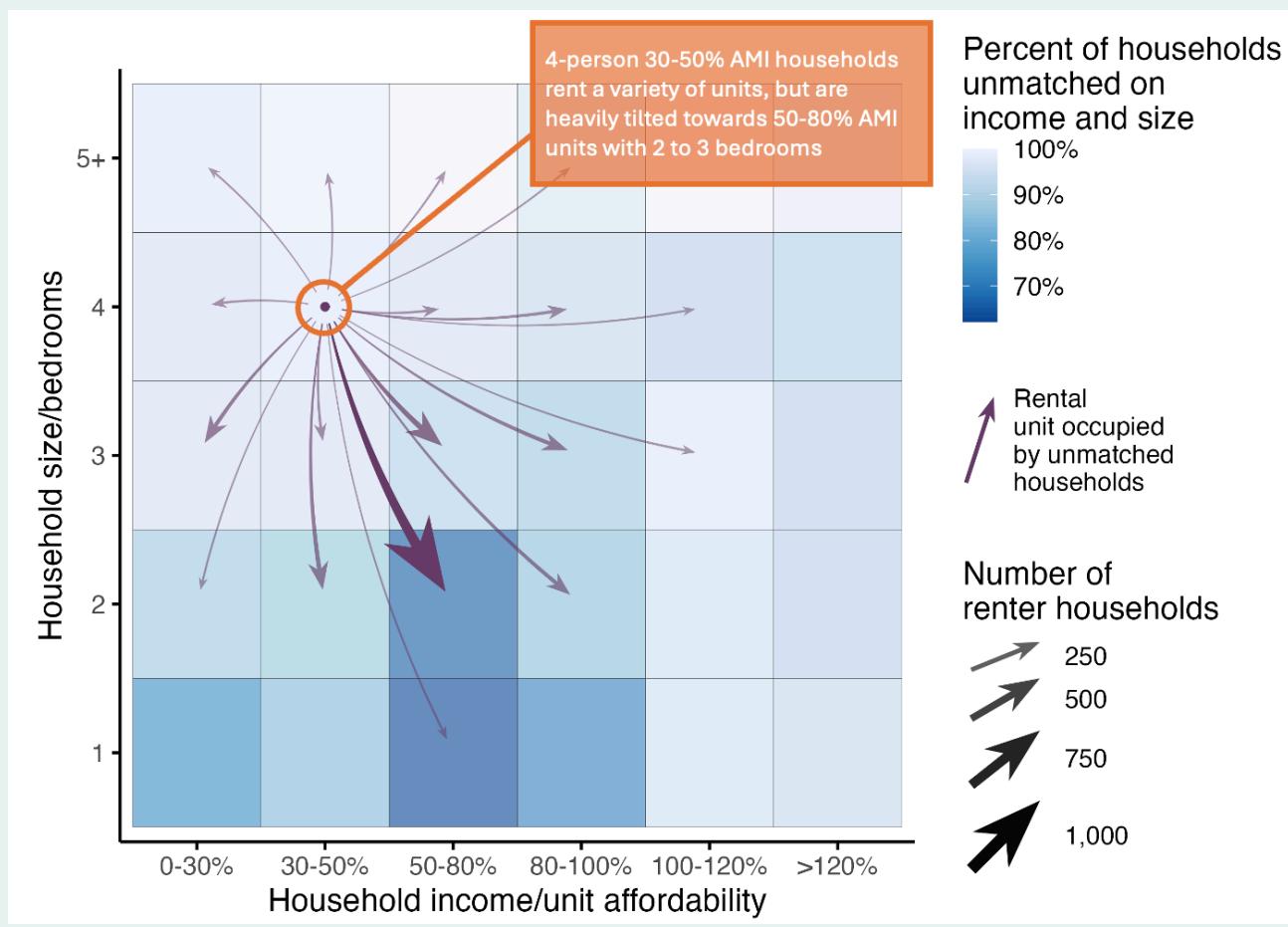


- Two-bedroom units priced for moderate incomes are under the greatest strain, absorbing unmatched households from all directions—higher-income individuals renting down, lower-income families renting up, and larger households downsizing in space. This crowding into two-bedroom units reflects a broader shortage of large, affordable units. Increasing the supply of three- and four-bedroom homes at lower price points would help relieve pressure on two-bedroom units and better meet the needs of larger households.

FOLLOWING THE ARROWS: HOW HOUSEHOLDS MOVE ACROSS THE MARKET

The intent of this exhibit is to help explain the mechanics behind the visualization seen in Exhibit 80. The figure focuses on one example subset of household income and size: 4-person, 30–50 percent of AMI households. The arrows originating from our example grid cell point to the units rented by these 4-person, 30–50 percent of AMI households, with the size and opacity of the arrow visualizing the total number of renter households. The largest arrows tend to point toward 2- and 3-bedroom units in the 50–80 percent of AMI affordability range, while the remainder rent units of various sizes and affordability levels. When averaged together, we get the arrow that originates from the 4-person, 30–50 percent of AMI grid cell in Exhibit 80, and as expected, it points to somewhere between 2- and 3-bedroom units in the 50–80 percent of AMI column.

Exhibit 81: Renter Household Adjustments by Income and Household Size, King County, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS



Quantifying the Structural Housing Gap

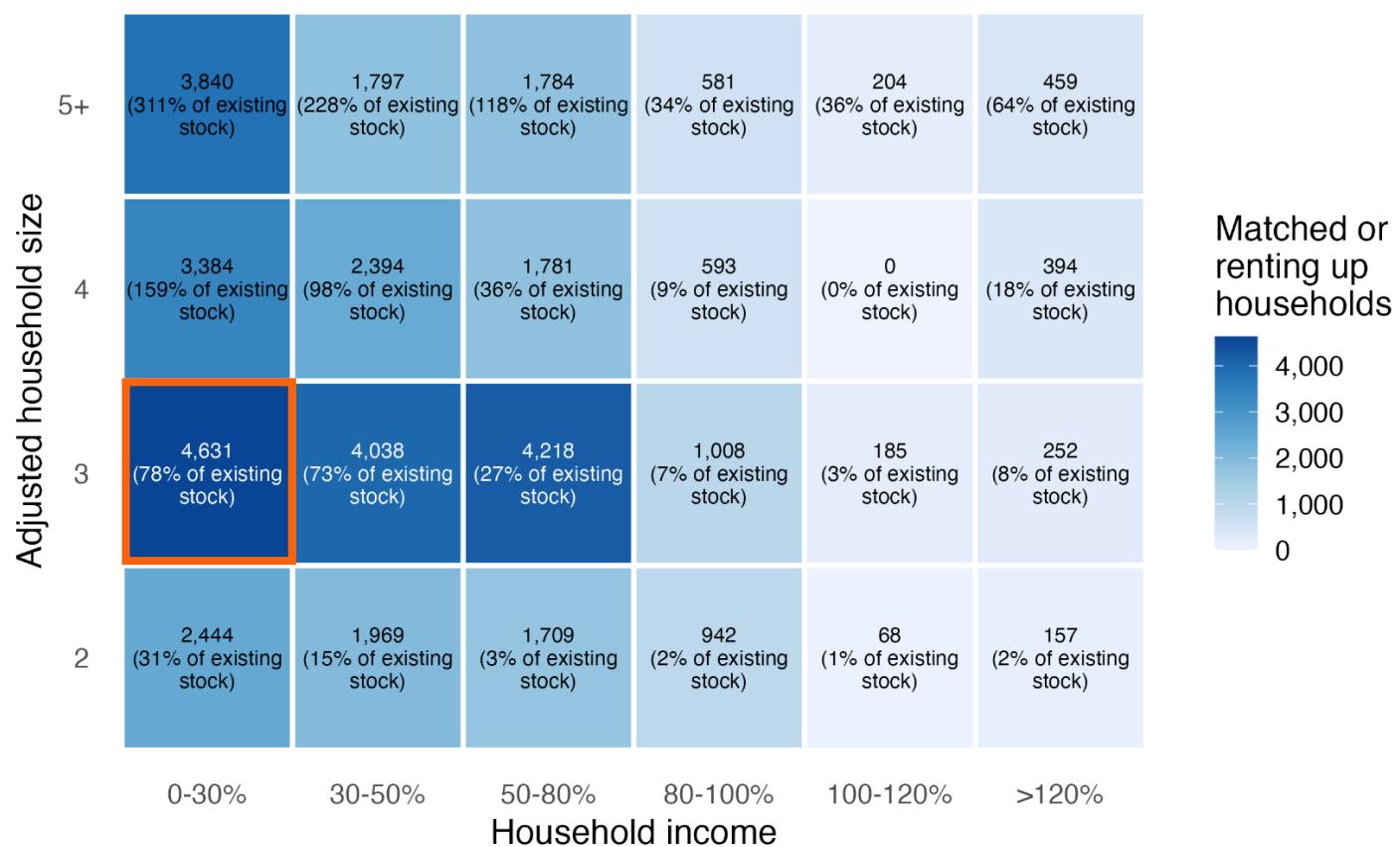
As this chapter has explored, when renters cannot find homes that match both their income and household size, they often have to make difficult trade-offs. These trade-offs—such as renting smaller units or paying more than they can afford—can help explain overcrowding and cost burden observed across the county. But these patterns also point to a more fundamental issue: a lack of housing units within the existing supply that meet the needs of specific household types. The next section shifts focus on quantifying that mismatch, identifying households that are most affected by both size and affordability constraints, and showing where housing gaps are greatest in relation to the existing stock.

Exhibit 82 show households that are both overcrowded and either cost matched or renting up segmented by tenure, household income, and household size.

- ◆ **Widespread overcrowding at lowest incomes:** The most significant concentration of overcrowded and cost-burdened renters is among three-person households earning 0–30 percent of AMI. There are over 4,600 such households, accounting for 78 percent of the total existing housing stock at that size and affordability level. This stark mismatch between household needs and supply underscores the acute housing crisis faced by extremely low-income households.
- ◆ **Moderate-income households are also overcrowded:** Overcrowding is not limited to the lowest income brackets. Households earning 30–80 percent of AMI also appear in large numbers across nearly all household sizes—particularly among 4-person and 5+ person households. For example, at 30–50 percent of AMI, there are over 2,000 four-person households and 1,797 5+ person households renting units that are overcrowded relative to their needs, despite paying at or above what they can afford.
- ◆ **Severe supply shortages for larger units:** The prevalence of overcrowding in midsize (3–4 person) and large (5+) households indicates a shortfall in the supply of large, affordable units. In some cases, the number of overcrowded households exceeds the estimated number of matched units in the stock—for instance, there is a need for 3,840 units for 5+ person households at 0–30 percent of AMI, which represents 311 percent of the current stock, signaling extreme shortages and intense competition for these types of units.



Exhibit 82: Overcrowded and Matched/Renting Up Renter Households by Income and Household Size, Relative to Existing Stock, King County, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, 2019–2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS

HOW TO READ THIS CHART

Each square shows the number of renter households that are both overcrowded and either renting a unit at their affordability level (“matched”) or paying more than they can afford (“renting up”), based on household size and income. The number in parentheses is the percentage of the total existing housing stock at that size and affordability level that these households represent.

For example, the square outlined in red above shows 4,631 households with 3 members earning 0–30 percent of AMI, which is 78 percent of the current stock of 3-bedroom units affordable at that income band—meaning demand for these units is nearly one and a half times the supply.



- Looking at overcrowded, cost-burdened households in the context of existing housing supply highlights the severity of housing shortages across King County. The most acute need is for multibedroom units affordable to households earning 0–30 percent of AMI, where shortages are most severe and overcrowding is widespread. Additionally, households earning 30–80 percent of AMI—particularly larger households of four or more people—face significant shortages of appropriately sized units, forcing many into overcrowded conditions. Addressing these gaps will require targeted investment in producing larger, affordable rental units at both deeply affordable and moderate income bands.



7. Funding Landscape and Gap Analysis

King County's ability to address its housing challenges depends not only on identifying housing needs but also on securing the resources required to meet them. Earlier chapters highlighted the structural mismatches in the housing market—between income levels, unit sizes, and geographic distribution—that create affordability gaps for households across the county. This chapter builds on those findings by examining the financial side of the equation—the scale of existing local, state, and federal funding for affordable housing, and how it compares to the level of investment required to meet housing needs. The analysis provides a clearer picture of where current funding tools fall short and underscores the need for both expanded resources and policy reforms to meet housing needs at the scale identified in previous chapters.

Key Takeaways

- ◆ **Housing need is concentrated at the lowest income levels.** More than 60 percent of King County's Countywide Planning Policies (CPP) total permanent housing need through 2044 is for households earning below 80 percent of AMI, with the vast majority of that concentrated below 50 percent of AMI. These are the income bands least likely to be served by the private market and most dependent on public subsidy to deliver units.
- ◆ **Funding sources are fragmented and heavily concentrated at the lowest income levels.** Federal, state, and local sources—including Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), the Housing Trust Fund, sales tax revenues, levies, and philanthropic dollars—play a critical role in supporting capital and operating needs for affordable housing. These funds are braided in dozens of different ways across projects and programs, particularly for units serving households below 30 percent of AMI. While this system has enabled the delivery of some deeply affordable housing, it also highlights its fragility, administrative complexity, and dependence on continued subsidy layering to make projects viable.
- ◆ **The funding gap is structural, large, and driven by both capital and operating costs.** After accounting for all currently available and recurring local, state, federal, and philanthropic sources—estimated at \$1.48 billion annually—King County still faces a staggering gap of \$89.66 billion (2025 dollars) to fully deliver and sustain the needed affordable housing between 2025 and 2044 to meet housing needs for households earning below 80 percent of AMI. This includes \$2.17 billion in annual unmet capital subsidy and \$1.79 billion annually to fund operating and service subsidies. Countywide, about \$157 million is available annually for operating and service subsidies. However, these funds are fully allocated to existing units and are not available to support new development.
- ◆ **Planning ambition must be matched with delivery capacity and revenue alignment.** Achieving the county's housing needs will require more than permitting reform or zoning



changes. It will require significant public commitment to finance the delivery of housing at scale, particularly for those at the lowest income levels. That includes expanding use of existing tools, considering new countywide funding mechanisms, and building the organizational capacity across public, nonprofit, and private sectors that is needed to deliver results.

WHAT THIS CHAPTER COVERS

This chapter examines funding sources, tools, and gaps in King County's housing system, with an emphasis on how resources are allocated and where shortfalls remain. It covers:

- » **The need for public investment:** Understanding how affordable housing is funded and financed and why public subsidy is critical.
- » **Current funding landscape:** A review of federal, state, philanthropic, and local funding sources that support affordable housing, including cataloguing efforts in local jurisdictions within King County to support affordable housing.
- » **Gaps in meeting housing needs:** Identification of where funding falls short, particularly for deeply affordable and larger multi-bedroom units.



The Need for Publicly Supported Funding Tools

Meeting King County's housing needs—particularly for households earning below 80 percent of area median income—will require sustained and significant public investment. The private market, even under favorable conditions, does not typically meet the housing needs of households in these income ranges. Rising land, labor, and construction costs continue to widen the gap between what low-income households can afford to pay in rent and what developers need to finance new housing construction. As a result, the vast majority of housing that is affordable to these households requires some form of public subsidy.

As described in Chapter 1, according to the King County CPPs, 195,062 new permanent housing units affordable to households earning less than 80 percent of AMI are needed through 2044. The greatest demand is for households earning less than 50 percent of AMI, which is currently \$55,000 for a single-person household or \$78,550 for a household of four people. Included in this group are seniors on fixed incomes, people with disabilities, and low-wage employees. These populations are among the most cost-burdened in King County and are disproportionately at risk of displacement or homelessness.

Publicly supported housing tools are particularly critical at the lowest affordability levels:

- ◆ For extremely low-income households (0–30 percent of AMI), housing development typically relies on a layered subsidy approach. While the LIHTC program is a critical source of capital, it is often insufficient on its own to achieve deep affordability at this income level. Projects serving this population generally require additional capital subsidies and ongoing operating support to close the affordability gap. Much of 0-30 percent of AMI need is made up of PSH, which combines deeply affordable units with wraparound services for individuals exiting chronic homelessness or people with disabilities. In addition to the capital costs needed to develop housing at this income level, ongoing subsidy is needed to pay for the operating and supportive services that are delivered onsite.
- ◆ For very low-income households (30–50 percent of AMI), public subsidies remain essential. Developments targeting this range often rely on LIHTC, federal HOME funds, Section 8 project-based vouchers, and state housing trust fund dollars—but still require additional local sources to close funding gaps.
- ◆ For low-income households (50–80 percent of AMI), where some market-rate rents may be affordable for smaller units in some subregions, public intervention is often still necessary to ensure long-term affordability, support land acquisition, or provide gap financing to make projects viable. Projects serving households above 60 percent of AMI are not eligible for LIHTC and instead rely on other tools—such as supportive zoning laws, inclusionary housing policies, and local tax and fee incentives to achieve affordability.

Importantly, local jurisdictions do not cover the full cost of developing housing at these affordability levels. Projects typically leverage a combination of federal tax credits, state housing funds, philanthropic contributions, and below-market financing. However, even this



combination of sources is rarely sufficient to make affordable housing production financially feasible. Most projects face a “last-dollar” financing gap—a gap that must be filled by local or regional sources to move a project forward.

In recent years, local governments across King County have provided a mix of tools to fill these gaps, including dedicated housing levies, sales taxes, general fund allocations, and housing incentive programs. Yet these efforts remain uneven across jurisdictions and insufficient in scale to meet the full need.

Given the scale of housing needs—particularly for low-income residents—it is clear that state and local public resources must play a central role in closing the funding gap and delivering the units required. The following sections quantify the scale of investment needed, describe how affordable housing is typically financed, and estimate the funding shortfalls that must be addressed to achieve King County’s housing needs.

How Affordable Housing is Funded and Financed

Affordable housing projects require a fundamentally different financing structure than market-rate developments because the rents they generate are deliberately kept low to serve lower-income households. These lower rents result in significantly lower net operating income (NOI)—the amount of money a project earns from rents after covering operating expenses like property management, insurance, and maintenance. Since NOI is the primary metric lenders use to determine how much debt a project can support, lower NOI directly limits the amount of long-term debt an affordable housing project can carry.

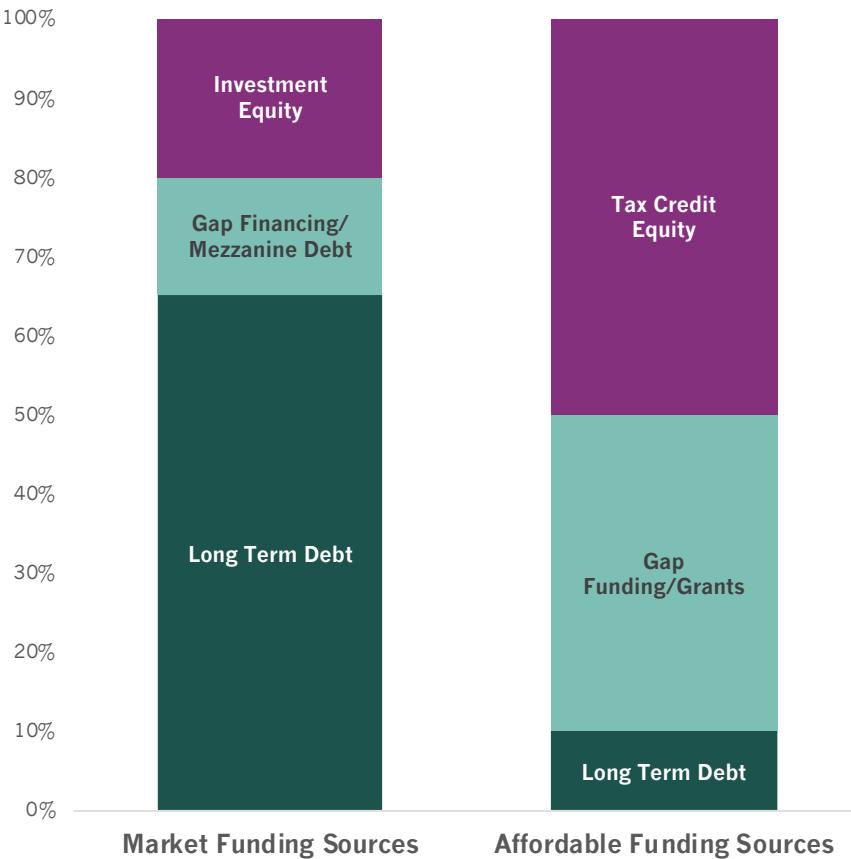
Without sufficient revenue to support private debt or attract equity investors seeking market returns, affordable projects must rely on public subsidies to fill the gap between total development costs and the amount that can be financed through debt and tax credit equity.

The chart below compares the typical “capital stack” for a market-rate housing project (left) versus an affordable housing project using LIHTC funds (right). While both rely on a combination of debt and equity, the sources and proportions differ significantly. Market-rate projects are primarily financed with private long-term debt and equity, often including a mezzanine or gap financing layer. By contrast, affordable projects depend heavily on federal tax credit equity, gap funding from local or state sources, and a relatively small amount of long-term debt, reflecting their more limited revenue streams.

The need for public investment is most acute at the lowest affordability levels (0–30 percent of AMI), where rents are often insufficient even to cover operating costs. In these cases, projects require not only capital subsidies but also ongoing operating subsidies or service funding to remain viable over time.



Exhibit 83: Illustration of Comparative Differences in Funding Sources



Source: ECONorthwest

Note: This chart is for illustrative purposes. The actual mix of funding sources can vary based on project type, affordability levels, financing structure (e.g., 4 percent vs. 9 percent LIHTC), and site-specific considerations.

Market-Rate Housing

- ◆ **Long-Term Debt:** Most market-rate projects maximize mortgage debt, since rents are sufficient to service higher loan payments.
- ◆ **Gap Financing / Mezzanine Debt:** May include structured subordinate loans, preferred equity, or public incentives.
- ◆ **Investment Equity:** Developer and investor equity provides the remaining capital and expects a return.

Affordable Housing (LIHTC-Financed)

- ◆ **Tax Credit Equity (LIHTC):** The primary source of equity is from the sale of federal 9 percent Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to private investors. These investors receive tax benefits in exchange for equity in the project.
- ◆ **Gap Funding / Grants:** Includes deferred loans from local housing levies and the state Housing Trust Fund, HOME funds, philanthropic grants, and deferred developer fees.



Deferred loans do not typically require annual payments and are essential to making development financially feasible.

- ◆ **Long-Term Debt:** Limited to preserve affordability. Because rents are restricted, the project cannot carry much debt without violating affordability targets.

This structure highlights a core dynamic of affordable housing finance: even when federal and state sources are fully leveraged, projects still face a funding shortfall. That gap must be filled with local or regional dollars—often from cities, counties, housing authorities, or nonprofits. Without these funds, projects are unable to proceed.

Gap funding is not a secondary tool—it is central to the delivery of affordable housing. It represents the “last dollar in” that enables developers to close financing, start construction, and deliver units at deeply affordable levels (especially 0–30 percent and 30–50 percent of AMI). Unlike market-rate developments that can scale based on private capital flows, affordable projects are limited by the availability of public gap funding.

Understanding these financing structures is critical for evaluating financial feasibility and estimating the local funding need. In later sections, we use prototypical projects and per-unit gap figures to model how much local funding will be needed to meet King County’s future housing needs.

Accounting for Operating and Supportive Services in PSH

Funding models for PSH differ significantly from those used for other affordable housing because they must account for both deep rental subsidies and ongoing operational funding for operating and supportive services. PSH serves individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness, behavioral health conditions, disabilities, or other complex barriers to housing stability—populations who often cannot maintain housing without intensive, ongoing support.

PSH services typically include on-site case management, coordination of healthcare, mental health and substance use treatment, employment and income support, and 24/7 staffing for crisis response and housing stabilization. While a substantial body of research shows that PSH improves housing outcomes and reduces costly public system utilization (e.g., emergency room visits, jail bookings, hospitalizations), the units themselves generate little to no rental income—especially for residents with zero or extremely limited income.¹⁰⁶

As a result, PSH projects require not only significant upfront capital investment—often with multiple layers of subsidy from federal, state, and local sources—but also a long-term, reliable stream of annual public funding to cover operating deficits and ongoing service delivery. And

¹⁰⁶ Evidence demonstrates that PSH helps residents maintain stable housing while reducing hospitalizations and emergency room visits. For example, King County’s Health through Housing (HTH) initiative reports that 95 percent of residents in PSH building maintained HTH housing in 2024. Residents say 17 percent and 33 percent reductions in emergency department visits and inpatient hospital stays respectively within their first year of enrollment. See King County Department of Community and Human Services. (2025). Health through Housing dashboard. King County. [\[link\]](#)



unlike other housing interventions, PSH must operate as a fully integrated housing and service model. Interruptions in either stream—capital or operating—jeopardize the entire intervention. Ensuring the long-term success of PSH at scale requires not only one-time investments, but also policy frameworks and revenue tools that support multi-year, flexible operating funding, coordinated across systems of housing, healthcare, and behavioral health.

To reflect these dynamics more accurately in the funding gap analysis, later sections of this chapter estimate not only the capital costs of production, but also the ongoing operating, maintenance, and supportive services costs for units serving households at or below 30 percent of AMI. These estimates underscore that the need for public subsidy does not end when construction is complete but persists throughout the lifespan of deeply affordable and service-enriched housing. This is true not only for PSH, but also for other non-PSH housing serving extremely low-income households, which typically carries higher per-unit operating costs than housing at higher AMI levels due to lower rental revenues and greater on-site support needs.

Understanding the Funding Landscape: Federal, State, and Local Roles in Affordable Housing Finance

Delivering affordable housing—particularly for households earning below 80 percent of AMI—requires coordination across multiple levels of government, each playing a distinct role in financing, policy, and implementation. No single jurisdiction or funding source can meet the scale of the need alone. Instead, affordable housing projects are typically financed through a complex mix of federal tax credits, state-administered grant programs, locally controlled revenue sources, and increasingly, philanthropic contributions. This section outlines how each fund source contributes to the capital and operating funding required to make income-restricted housing financially feasible, and how these roles interact to shape the overall funding environment in the county.

Federal Funding

LOW-INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDITS

The LIHTC program is the largest and most critical federal funding tool for affordable rental housing in King County and across the nation. LIHTC directs private investment into affordable housing by exchanging ten years of reduced tax liability for upfront equity capital to fund the development and rehabilitation of affordable housing. Administered by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and allocated through the Washington State Housing Finance Commission (WSHFC), the program provides equity to affordable housing developers through two distinct programs:



- ◆ **9 percent LIHTC:** A highly competitive program that provides deep equity for projects serving households with the lowest incomes. These credits are capped annually by a federal formula and allocated by the state on a competitive basis.
- ◆ **4 percent LIHTC:** Available to projects financed with tax-exempt bonds, 4 percent credits are less competitive but limited by the state's private activity bond cap, which constrains how many projects can be financed in any given year.

Between the two programs, LIHTC has been the primary engine of affordable housing production in King County. However, while LIHTC is a powerful tool, it is not unlimited. The number of 9 percent credits available is fixed by federal law and cannot be expanded locally. The 4 percent credits program is constrained by the state bond cap and by market conditions that affect investor demand for tax credits. As more LIHTC-financed projects are built, the available equity must be spread across a growing number of applications, which can lead to lower per-project allocations and higher local funding gaps.

Moreover, LIHTC was not designed to fully fund deeply affordable housing on its own. Projects serving households at or below 50 percent of AMI—and especially those at 0–30 percent of AMI—require substantial local gap funding in addition to LIHTC equity. Rising construction costs and declining investor yields further compound this gap.

FORMULA GRANTS

In addition to competitive funding sources, King County and local jurisdictions receive an assortment of federal formula grants that support both the capital and operating components of affordable housing and homelessness response. These include:

- ◆ **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** Provides flexible funding for a wide range of community development activities, including housing rehabilitation, public facilities, and infrastructure improvements that support housing projects. Seattle, King County, Auburn, Kent, Bellevue, and Federal Way all receive CDBG funds.
- ◆ **HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME):** Primarily used for capital funding in affordable rental housing production and preservation. HOME funds can also support tenant-based rental assistance in some cases. Both the City of Seattle and King County receive and administer HOME funds.
- ◆ **Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG):** Supports operating costs tied to emergency shelter, street outreach, rapid rehousing, and homelessness prevention, and may be paired with PSH in some transitional contexts. Both Seattle and King County receive ESG funding directly, which they then distribute to the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA).

While these programs are essential components of local housing finance strategies, they are limited in scale, subject to annual Congressional appropriations, and constrained by complex program rules. As such, they play a supportive role in meeting the full scale of King County's long-term affordable housing and PSH funding needs.



INTERCONNECTED AND LAYERED SUPPORTS

Going forward, federal tax credits will remain the cornerstone of affordable housing finance, particularly for new construction and preservation. However, their adequacy in addressing the county's full spectrum of housing needs—especially for the lowest-income and highest-need households—depends on the availability and alignment of a wide array of complementary local, state, and federal resources.

These include not only local gap funding and state housing trust fund allocations, but also a complicated network of federal programs that support both housing and supportive services. Key federal programs supporting operations and services in affordable housing include:

- ◆ **Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8):** Administered by local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), these vouchers subsidize rent for low-income households by bridging the gap between market rents and what a household can afford to pay—typically 30 percent of their income.
- ◆ **Continuum of Care (CoC) Grants:** Administered by HUD, CoC grants provide ongoing operating and service funding for PSH, transitional housing, and rapid rehousing programs targeting individuals and families experiencing homelessness. CoC is one of the few consistent federal revenue streams that funds supportive housing operations at scale, including intensive case management and wraparound services. However, recent shifts in federal funding priorities—such as an increased emphasis on rapid rehousing—have introduced uncertainty into annual CoC allocations, raising concerns about long-term support for PSH models reliant on this funding.¹⁰⁷
- ◆ **Medicaid-Funded Services:** Through state-administered Medicaid programs, eligible residents in supportive housing can receive reimbursable services such as behavioral health care, personal care assistance, and substance use disorder treatment. These services are essential to stabilizing housing for individuals with complex needs and are often braided with other supportive housing funding streams.
- ◆ **McKinney-Vento Education Assistance Act:** A federal law that ensures children and youth experiencing homelessness have equal access to public education. While not a direct housing subsidy, the program supports stability for school-aged children living in temporary or transitional housing by guaranteeing transportation, enrollment, and educational continuity.

Together, these federal programs play a vital role in sustaining affordability and services for vulnerable populations, but their limited scope and vulnerability to shifting federal priorities underscore the importance of securing stable and flexible local funding to supplement and backstop federal commitments. Maximizing the impact of federal tax credits in this context will require sustained coordination across systems, multi-agency alignment on priorities and project pipelines, and continued investment in flexible local and regional funding tools that

¹⁰⁷ See Ending Crime and Disorder on America's Streets, Exec. Order No. 14321, 90 Fed. Reg. 35817-35820 (2025). [[link](#)]. To understand the implications of the Executive Order for rapid rehousing and housing first policies, see Thompson, M. (2025, August 5). Understanding Trump's Executive Order on Homelessness: Attacks on Housing First. National Alliance to End Homelessness. [[link](#)]



can bridge gaps between these categorical sources. Without that coordinated investment, even fully awarded tax credit projects may remain stalled due to insufficient operating or service funding.

State Funding

WASHINGTON STATE HOUSING TRUST FUND

The Washington State Housing Trust Fund (HTF) is the state's primary direct capital investment tool for affordable housing. Administered by the Department of Commerce (Commerce), the HTF provides competitive funding to support the new construction, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable homes across the state—typically for households earning at or below 50 percent of AMI.

For the 2025–2027 biennium, the State of Washington committed \$419 million through the HTF and related capital programs—one of the largest allocations in the program's history. As part of the regional investment strategy published by Multifamily Housing Unit, in the current 2025 funding round, 14 of the 23 projects awarded HTF funding statewide are located in King County, underscoring both the county's high level of housing need and the organizational capacity of local developers to compete for funds.¹⁰⁸

While this commitment is substantial, HTF funds are not guaranteed on an annual basis and are subject to state legislative appropriation. Assuming King County continues to capture a similar share of funding—historically between 55 percent and 65 percent of total awards—the region could reasonably expect \$110–140 million per biennium, or \$55–70 million per year in HTF resources moving forward.

However, like the federal tax credit program, the HTF does not scale automatically with need. As more affordable housing developers across the state apply for funding and development costs rise, the effective buying power of each HTF dollar declines, and fewer deeply affordable units can be funded without additional support. Moreover, HTF loans or grants typically cover only a portion of total project costs, requiring LIHTC equity, tax-exempt bonds, and local gap funding to complete the capital stack.

King County's continued success in securing HTF dollars is critical, especially for projects serving households below 50 percent of AMI, including those with supportive housing needs. The availability of state HTF funds is expected to remain constrained, so the HTF should be viewed as an essential but limited part of a broader regional financing strategy.

WASHINGTON STATE APPLE HEALTH AND HOMES

The Apple Health and Homes (AHAH) Capital Program is a state-funded initiative administered by Commerce to expand PSH for households earning less than 30 percent of

¹⁰⁸ Commerce, 2025–2027 Biennial Investment Strategy, updated June 27, 2025, pp. 2–10. [[link](#)]



AMI, with a particular focus on individuals with complex health needs and those experiencing homelessness.

For the 2025–2027 biennium, the program will distribute funding using regional targets aligned with Washington’s 10-region Medicaid managed care and behavioral health system. King County is expected to receive approximately 35 percent of the total capital allocation—equivalent to roughly \$34 million over the biennium—making it one of the largest regional recipients. These funds are intended to fill capital funding gaps in PSH projects and may be layered with other federal, state, or local funding sources. Importantly, the regional targets are not hard caps, allowing the program to remain responsive to eligible, shovel-ready projects as they emerge.¹⁰⁹

TAX-EXEMPT BONDS

Tax-exempt bonds are a critical financing tool for affordable housing production, especially when paired with 4 percent LIHTC. These bonds—issued through the WSHFC—provide developers with access to lower-interest financing for qualified projects. When 50 percent or more of a project’s aggregate basis is financed with tax-exempt bonds, the project becomes eligible for 4 percent LIHTC, which provide equity to offset development costs. Although the 4 percent LIHTC generates less equity than its 9 percent counterpart, the volume cap on private activity bonds has generally not been a limiting factor, making it a widely used source for larger-scale projects.

CONNECTING HOUSING TO INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

Infrastructure is often a prerequisite for housing development—but rarely funded as part of housing itself. Programs like the Connecting Housing to Infrastructure Program (CHIP), administered by Commerce, provide critical gap funding for infrastructure projects that unlock the potential for affordable housing development. Eligible improvements include water, sewer, stormwater, and transportation infrastructure necessary to serve income-restricted housing units.

While CHIP and similar programs do not fund housing capital directly, they play an essential enabling role, particularly in areas with aging or undersized infrastructure. As King County plans for housing growth in both urban and suburban areas, these investments are crucial to ensuring that affordable housing sites are viable and buildable, particularly in jurisdictions with limited local infrastructure capacity.

¹⁰⁹ Commerce, 2025–2027 Biennial Investment Strategy, updated June 27, 2025, pp. 2–10. [[link](#)]



EXTREMELY LOW INCOME HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SUPPORTS

Operating and service funding is central to the long-term viability of PSH and other housing models serving extremely low-income households. In King County, these supports are funded through a mix of state and local sources, including:

- ◆ **Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG):** State funding that supports shelter operations, rapid rehousing, diversion, and rental assistance programs.
- ◆ **Document Recording Fees (DRF):** Dedicated local revenue used for housing and homelessness interventions, including PSH operations and service coordination.
- ◆ **Operating and Maintenance Program (OM):** The State Operating and Maintenance Program provides operating assistance to multifamily rental housing projects serving extremely low-income households, whose residents' incomes are so low that the projects would otherwise be unable to cover basic operating costs such as heat, light, and routine maintenance.
- ◆ **Permanent Supportive Housing Operating, Maintenance, and Services Program (PSH-OMS):** A state program run by Commerce that provides supplemental revenue to multifamily housing projects that contain units of PSH. Commerce administers the approximately \$47 million per year for PSH-OMS.

While not housing capital, these funds are essential to the operation and stability of housing created for individuals and families exiting homelessness.

Philanthropic Funding

In recent years, philanthropic and corporate investments have played an increasingly visible role in advancing affordable housing in King County. Two of the most significant contributors are Amazon and Microsoft, both of which have launched multi-billion-dollar housing initiatives aimed at increasing supply and preventing displacement across the county.

AMAZON HOUSING EQUITY FUND

Amazon's \$3 billion Housing Equity Fund has made substantial commitments in King County to support the preservation and creation of affordable units, particularly for households earning 30–80 percent of AMI and located near major transit corridors. These investments often come in the form of low-interest loans and developer grants that help bridge funding gaps not met by traditional public sources.

MICROSOFT AFFORDABLE HOUSING INITIATIVE

Microsoft has also committed \$750 million through its Affordable Housing Initiative, with a large share focused on King County and neighboring areas. This funding includes below-market loans for new development, preservation financing, and direct philanthropic support to nonprofit developers and regional housing organizations.



SUPPORT FOR SYSTEMS-LEVEL CAPACITY

Philanthropic investment in King County has also supported system infrastructure and coordination, most notably through contributions to KCRHA. Philanthropic support has enabled KCRHA to advance its strategic plan, enhance data systems, and pursue regional solutions to chronic homelessness.

While these resources do not replace the need for sustained public investment, they extend the County's financial capacity to meet housing needs and have become an important source of flexible, early-stage capital that complements public funding tools.

Local Funding and Supports

King County's housing affordability challenge is regional in scale, and local governments—both the County and the jurisdictions within it—play a critical role in shaping the policy, funding, and development environment for affordable housing. In recent years, jurisdictions across the county have expanded their use of local tools to fund, incentivize, and directly produce housing for low- and moderate-income residents. However, the types and intensity of local support vary significantly across the county, reflecting differences in policy priorities, fiscal capacity, land use conditions, and housing market dynamics.

While state and federal programs remain essential to closing financing gaps, locally controlled tools increasingly determine whether and where affordable housing can be built at scale. The goal of this analysis is to identify which tools are in use, assess the scale of funding they generate, and evaluate their alignment with production and preservation goals.

To organize this review, the analysis groups local housing supports into four functional categories:

- ◆ Land use-based value capture tools, such as inclusionary zoning and density bonuses.
- ◆ Tax expenditure and fee reduction programs, like the Multifamily Property Tax Exemption (MFTE).
- ◆ Dedicated tax revenue streams, including those authorized by HB 1590, HB 1406, REET, and housing levies,
- ◆ Discretionary or general fund allocations, used to supplement project gaps or contribute to regional efforts.

Across these categories, jurisdictions are increasingly leveraging flexible funding tools and subregional collaborations—such as A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) and South King Housing & Homelessness Partners (SKHHP)—to pool resources and maximize housing outcomes. Still, disparities remain in local capacity to generate or allocate funds, and few tools scale in proportion to need without ongoing public investment. As King County works toward meeting housing needs, understanding the distribution, effectiveness, and limits of these local strategies is essential for planning future funding approaches and policy alignment.



This baseline inventory assesses how jurisdictions across King County are using local tools and resources to support affordable housing. The information presented here reflects what could be confirmed using reliable administrative data sources—such as public budget documents, Department of Revenue reports, and program participation data from regional entities like ARCH and SKHHP. Where administrative data was unavailable, publicly available city documents were used, including council agendas and housing strategy updates. In some cases, where city-specific data was limited or ambiguous, those limitations are noted directly in by-jurisdiction profiles (Appendix D).

This compilation should be viewed as a minimum estimate of local housing-related efforts. Many jurisdictions may be engaging in additional activities that are not captured here—such as internal funding allocations, land contributions, program administration, or other discretionary efforts not readily documented in public records.

Importantly, consistent and comprehensive data on jurisdictional housing activities and outcomes remains a data gap. While some organizations track components of local funding and production, there is no single reporting system that consolidates these efforts across all King County jurisdictions.

LAND USE-BASED VALUE CAPTURE TOOLS

These tools leverage the development process, typically through zoning, permitting, or incentive programs, to produce affordable housing units or generate revenue. Common examples include:

- ◆ Inclusionary zoning requirements mandate affordable units or allow in-lieu fees.
- ◆ Density bonuses and incentive zoning offer additional development rights in exchange for affordability commitments.
- ◆ Commercial linkage fees charge non-residential construction to address housing impacts.

At least 15 King County jurisdictions use one or more of these tools. While their value is not always described as a dollar amount, they generate affordable units as a condition of development approval. Combined with tools in this category, they supported 2,395 affordable housing units through ARCH and SKHHP in 2024. Between Q2 2024 and Q1 2025, ARCH member cities supported the development of over 600 affordable rental units, many tied to inclusionary zoning requirements in Bellevue, Kirkland, and Redmond.¹¹⁰

TAX EXPENDITURE AND FEE OFFSET PROGRAMS

This category includes policies that reduce or waive taxes and fees to incentivize affordable housing development. These programs often prioritize financial feasibility over direct revenue generation. They include:

¹¹⁰ A Regional Coalition for Housing. (2025). *First quarter report 2025*. [[link](#)]



- ◆ MFTE programs;
- ◆ Impact fee reductions for income-restricted housing; and
- ◆ Permit fee waivers for qualifying projects.

Approximately 20 jurisdictions in the county use at least one of these tools, with MFTE being the most widespread (active in 19 jurisdictions). These programs are particularly important in smaller or lower-cost markets where direct public subsidy is less available.

For example, Seattle's MFTE program supported over 500 active rental units and 33 homes in 2023, with over 1,000 rental units in the pipeline.¹¹¹ An example of an MFTE-supported project from another jurisdiction is North Bend's River Run Apartments, offering 28 units affordable to households earning less than 80 percent of AMI.¹¹² Although foregone revenue is not consistently reported across county jurisdictions, these tools reduce project costs substantially and are frequently layered with other incentives.

DEDICATED TAX REVENUE STREAMS

This category includes local tax mechanisms that provide ongoing, dedicated funding for affordable housing. These tools are typically authorized under state law and require council action or voter approval to implement. Key tax revenue streams include:

Sales and Use Taxes

Local Sales Tax for Housing (HB 1590)

Under the authority granted by the Washington State legislature in 2020, HB 1590 allows counties and cities to impose an approximate 0.1 percent sales and use tax to fund affordable housing and behavioral health services. At least 60 percent of revenues must support capital or operational costs for housing serving populations such as individuals experiencing homelessness, people with behavioral health needs, veterans, and seniors. Importantly, if a city in the county did not adopt the tax independently, the revenue from that jurisdiction flows to King County. This means that the County receives the HB 1590 revenue for all unincorporated areas and for any cities that chose not to levy the tax themselves. As of the latest data in 2024, \$93.2 million was raised across jurisdictions in King County through this tool.¹¹³

Local Sales Tax Credit (HB 1406)

In 2024, jurisdictions across King County generated approximately \$11.6 million from the local sales and use tax credit authorized under 2019 HB 1406. This state-enabled tool allows cities and counties to retain a portion of the state sales tax to support affordable housing without raising the overall tax rate. While eligible uses include capital, operating, and rental assistance costs, King County has primarily dedicated these revenues toward operating

¹¹¹ Seattle Office of Housing. (2024, June). *2023 multifamily tax exemption annual report*. [[link](#)]

¹¹² City of North Bend. (n.d.). *Housing*. [[link](#)]

¹¹³ Washington State Department of Revenue Sales Tax Statistics, 2025,



subsidies, rental assistance, and supportive services (ORS) for PSH. Other jurisdictions have used these funds to support rental assistance.

Under state law, the County's portion of HB 1406 revenue is credited against cities that have also adopted the tax, ensuring that the funding flows to the levying jurisdiction. In subregional collaborations such as ARCH and SKHHP, cities often pool both HB 1406 and HB 1590 revenues to fund affordable housing investments collaboratively—supporting shared project pipelines and coordinated funding decisions.

Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) Behavioral Health Sales Tax Fund

The King County MIDD is a countywide 0.1% sales tax used for housing and services for individuals with behavioral health needs, including those exiting institutional settings or experiencing chronic homelessness. King County's MIDD is managed and operated by the King County Department of Community and Human Services.

Local Document Recording Fees

Under state law, King County is authorized to use 30 percent of local document recording fee revenue to support homeless housing and eligible affordable housing programs.¹¹⁴ This includes King County's Regional Affordable Housing Program (RAHP) and funds provided through King County's ORS program for operating and service costs in projects serving extremely low-income households, including PSH. Document recording fee collections fluctuate based on many factors including the real estate market.

Property Tax Levies

Local jurisdictions in Washington State have the authority to place voter-approved property tax levies on the ballot to raise dedicated revenue for affordable housing, operating, and supportive services. These levies typically fund a combination of new development, housing preservation, rental assistance, and wraparound services, and are often structured as multi-year lid lifts requiring majority voter approval.

Seattle Housing Levy

The City of Seattle has implemented a property tax levy dedicated to affordable housing. Its voter-approved housing levy is among the largest in the country and provides a substantial, stable source of funding for new production, preservation, and homeownership programs. No other city in King County has adopted a similar property tax tool for housing, despite the option being available under state law. Voters approved a new 7-year levy in 2023, expected to raise \$970 million.¹¹⁵ In 2024, over \$108 million from the levy¹¹⁶ supported 1,300 affordable homes, home repair programs, and administration.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ [RCW 36.22.250](#)

¹¹⁵ City of Seattle. (n.d.). *Seattle housing levy*. [\[link\]](#)

¹¹⁶ Seattle Office of Housing. (2025, January 16). *City of Seattle announces \$108 million investment in affordable housing for 2024*. [\[link\]](#)

¹¹⁷ Seattle Office of Housing. (2025). *Community report 2024*. [\[link\]](#)



King County Veterans, Seniors, and Human Services Levy

In addition to city-level housing levies, King County administers the Veterans, Seniors and Human Services Levy (VSHSL) supports housing stability, behavioral health services, and housing navigation for veterans, seniors, and vulnerable populations. While not exclusively housing-focused, VSHSL provide critical ongoing operating support for PSH and other housing models that serve high-needs populations.

Levy-based tools remain among the most flexible and locally controlled sources of funding for affordable housing, but their scale is limited by statutory levy limits, voter appetite, and political will. Their expansion or replication in other jurisdictions could play a central role in scaling up regional housing solutions.

Payroll Taxes

Seattle's Payroll Expense Tax

Seattle's Payroll Expense Tax (PET)—enacted in 2021 under the JumpStart Seattle program—generates revenue from large businesses based on employee payrolls. The tax is tiered by business size and employee compensation, with exemptions for small firms and lower-wage workers. In the 2025 Adopted Budget, Seattle committed \$133 million in PET revenues to the Office of Housing (OH), which represents the largest single source of general fund-like revenue for housing investment that year. Funds are directed toward a range of uses, including:

- ◆ Adding a community development specialist in the Asset Management unit;
- ◆ Adding administrative staffing support;
- ◆ Inflationary adjustments to agency support programs; and
- ◆ Project code adjustments to accurately track payroll tax funding intended for multifamily capital preservation and the Community Self Determination Fund.¹¹⁸

A core goal of PET is to provide ongoing, flexible funding for equitable economic recovery, including affordable housing.¹¹⁹ In line with its enabling legislation and subsequent budget actions, the City allocates a significant portion of PET revenue to housing development, acquisition, and services.

Seattle Social Housing Developer

In 2023, Seattle voters approved Initiative 135, establishing the Seattle Social Housing Developer, a new public development authority tasked with creating permanently affordable, tenant-governed, mixed-income housing that remains outside of the private market. Because Initiative 135 did not include a funding source, voters subsequently passed Proposition 1A in February 2025, creating a 5 percent payroll tax on annual employee compensation exceeding \$1 million. This tax is projected to generate approximately \$53 million per year, providing the

¹¹⁸ Seattle Office of Housing. (n.d.). *Office of Housing Department 2025–2026 proposed budget*. [\[link\]](#)

¹¹⁹ City of Seattle Municipal Code 5.38.055 “Payroll expense tax – Allocation of proceeds”. [\[link\]](#)



first dedicated stream of funding to support the Social Housing Developer's operations and development pipeline.¹²⁰

Real Estate Excise Tax (REET)

Jurisdictions may impose real estate excise taxes to support eligible capital projects and maintenance costs. The two main local REET options include:

- ◆ **REET 1:** A 0.25 percent initial tax on local real estate transactions to support capital projects and limited maintenance.
- ◆ **REET 2:** A secondary 0.25 percent tax in addition to REET 1 to support additional capital and maintenance costs.

Recent state legislation expands eligibility of REET funds to support planning, acquisition, construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation of facilities for those experiencing homelessness and affordable housing projects that are supported through subregional collaborations such as ARCH or SKHHP.¹²¹

While most cities collect both REET 1 and REET 2, few cities reported allocating a portion of REET to affordable housing in their 2025–2026 budgets. One exception is Kirkland, which allocated \$250,000 in REET 2 Reserves to the ARCH Housing Trust Fund project.¹²² These sources provide some of the most stable and scalable funding streams for capital and operations across the county.

Lodging Taxes

Bonds for transit-oriented development

Cities and counties issue bonds against hotel and motel tax revenues to finance loans or grants to non-profit organizations or public housing authorities for affordable housing projects within a half-mile of a transit station.¹²³ King County specifically issues transit-oriented development bonds (TOD bonds) to support affordable housing projects near transit and serve households at 80 percent of AMI and below.¹²⁴

Short term lodging tax revenue

King County uses revenues from taxes on short-term lodging (STLT) to fund both rental and homeownership housing projects affordable to households at or below 80 percent of AMI. In the 2025 funding round for the King County Housing Finance Program, STLT taxes were made available to support projects that:

- ◆ Serve individuals with disabilities, with a priority for projects serving immigrants, refugees, and/or BIPOC populations.

¹²⁰ The Urbanist, "Social Housing Proposition 1A Up Big in Early Returns," February 11, 2025. [[link](#)]

¹²¹ SHB 1791, 69th Legislature, 2025 Reg. Ses. (Wash. 2025) [[link](#)]

¹²² City of Kirkland. (2024). 2025–2026 budget. [[link](#)]

¹²³ [RCW 67.28.180](#)

¹²⁴ King County. King County Housing Finance Program (HFP) 2025 Housing Finance Capital Funding Round. (2025) [[link](#)]



- ◆ Advance equitable community-driven development, including rental projects below 60 percent of AMI and homeownership below 80 percent of AMI.¹²⁵

DISCRETIONARY AND GENERAL FUND ALLOCATIONS

Discretionary or general fund revenues are not annually required by statute but are voluntarily directed to housing through city budgets, interlocal agreements, or specific project allocations. Though less predictable than dedicated taxes, they fill crucial funding gaps and signal local policy commitment.

At least 13 jurisdictions reported discretionary housing allocations in their 2025–2026 budgets, often towards countywide affordable housing efforts. For the 2025 ARCH Housing Trust Fund, ARCH member jurisdictions contributed approximately \$3.5 million, with 42 percent of the contributions coming from cities' general funds.¹²⁶ Likewise, SKHHP cities including Auburn, Kent, and Covington contribute to a Housing Capital Fund via general and flexible housing revenues. In 2024, contributions varied from under \$35,000 in small cities (e.g., Normandy Park, Des Moines) to over \$500,000 in Maple Valley and Kent.¹²⁷ Some cities also use general funds to cover staffing or feasibility studies, such as Shoreline allocating \$100,000 for an Affordable Housing Feasibility Study¹²⁸ or Seattle allocating \$342 million to its Office of Housing through its general fund.¹²⁹

Funding Tools and Levels Summary

Together, the following exhibits summarize the estimated annual contributions from major funding sources supporting affordable housing development, operating, and supportive services in King County. While source-level detail is addressed in earlier sections, these tables illustrate the scale and composition of both capital subsidies (Exhibit 3) and ongoing operating and service funding currently available to support housing efforts across the county.

Capital resources total approximately \$1.48 billion per year, with the majority coming from tax credit equity, tax-exempt bond financing, and dedicated local and state investments. Supportive services funding, by contrast, totals around \$157 million annually, reflecting a more limited and fragmented set of sources dedicated to the operations and services needed for PSH and other deeply affordable units.

This comparison underscores the imbalance between capital and operating resources, and highlights the importance of sustained, flexible funding streams on both sides of the ledger to meet King County's long-term housing and homelessness goals.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ A Regional Coalition for Housing, *First quarter report 2025*.

¹²⁷ South King Housing and Homelessness Partners. (2025). *2024 annual progress report (January–December)*. [\[link\]](#)

¹²⁸ City of Shoreline. (2024). *2025–2026 adopted biennial budget 2025–2030 capital improvement plan*. [\[link\]](#)

¹²⁹ Harrell, B. (2024, September). Budget fact sheet – housing and homelessness. City of Seattle. [\[link\]](#)



Exhibit 84: Summary of Annual Housing Capital Subsidies in King County

Housing Capital Subsidies	Annual Contribution	Source
9 percent LIHTC Equity	\$80,900,000	Average funding from 2021-2024 projects from the WSHFC
4 percent LIHTC Equity	\$348,700,000	Average funding from 2021-2024 projects from WSHFC
Tax Exempt Bonds	\$436,200,000	Average funding from 2021-2024 projects from WSHFC
Washington Housing Trust Fund	\$40,000,000	Based on King County's historic share of biennial state allocations
County Administered Combined Capital	\$25,450,000	Combined HOME, VSHSL, MIDD, RAHP, TOD Bonds, and STLT assumed available annually
Dedicated Local Sales Tax	\$22,980,057	HB 1590 total across all adopting jurisdictions in 2025 (excluding King County), according to the Washington State Department of Revenue
Dedicated Local Sales Credit	\$7,100,000	HB 1406 total across all adopting jurisdictions in 2025 (excluding King County), according to the Washington State Department of Revenue
City of Seattle Housing Levy	\$108,750,000	Reflects portion of total levy estimated to support new production
City of Seattle Payroll Expense Tax	\$140,000,000	Reflects current PET allocations to housing-related capital and operations
Seattle Social Housing Developer	\$53,000,000	Reflects passage of City of Seattle Proposition 1A
Philanthropic Contributions	\$180,000,000	Estimate based on recent multi-year commitments by Amazon, Microsoft, and others
Tax Expenditure and Fee Offset Programs	\$22,400,000	Assumed MFTE incentive value to developers
Other Federal Funds	\$2,900,000	City of Seattle HOME funds
Other State Funds	\$17,000,000	Reflects fundings made available through Apple Health and Homes
Total Raised Annually	\$1,478,280,057	

Source: ECOnorthwest and King County



Exhibit 85: Summary of Annual Operating and Supportive Services Funding in King County

Operating and Supportive Services Subsidies	Annual Contribution	Source
Federal Continuum of Care Funding	\$43,000,000	Continuum of Care funding dedicated to PSH
State Operating, Maintenance, and Services Programs	\$14,200,000	Combined OM and PSH-OMS assumed available annually
County Administered Combined Operating	\$19,000,000	Combined CHG, DRF, VSHSL, and MIDD funds assumed available annually
Dedicated Local Sales Tax	\$59,000,000	King County HB 1590 amount assumed available for operations and supportive services from the County's Health through Housing Initiative
Dedicated Local Sales Credit	\$4,500,000	King County HB 1406 amount assumed available
City of Seattle Housing Levy	\$17,500,000	Reflects portion of total levy estimated to support operations and supportive services
Total Raised Annually	\$157,200,000	

Source: ECONorthwest and King County

Gap to Meet King County Housing Needs

This analysis focuses on the funding required to meet King County's permanent housing needs—particularly for affordable rental housing serving households below 80 percent of AMI. The analysis does not project funding required for emergency housing needs, which include shelter beds, transitional housing, or other temporary accommodations within the homelessness response system.

King County Net New Permanent Housing Units Need 2019-2044

King County's adopted CPPs established a need for 308,677 net new permanent housing units between 2019 and 2044. Of this total, 195,062 (63 percent) needs to be affordable to households earning below 80 percent of AMI—a level of affordability that typically cannot be delivered by the private market without public intervention. These housing needs are distributed by income levels as follows:

- ◆ 0 to 30 percent of AMI: 124,473 units, of which 42,896 units are needed in the form of PSH;
- ◆ 30 to 50 percent of AMI: 48,213 units; and
- ◆ 50 to 80 percent of AMI: 22,376 units.

This demand reflects both the anticipated growth in low-income households and the need to address existing shortfalls in affordable housing. The extremely low-income range (0–30 percent of AMI) is the largest single category of need and includes permanent supportive housing unit needs for households at highest risk of housing instability or already experiencing homelessness.



Using the King County Income-Restricted Housing Database, the total net new permanent housing units needed from 2019-2044 can be adjusted for the number of units that have been placed into service since 2019. Between 2019 and 2023, over 17,000 income-restricted housing units were created or preserved. The remaining housing units needed for households with incomes below 80 percent of AMI for the timeframe between 2024 and 2044 equate to 8,885 new housing units annually, including:

- ◆ 2,119 net new 0-30% AMI PSH units annually,
- ◆ 3,945 net new 0-30% AMI non-PSH units annually,
- ◆ 2,248 net new 30-50% AMI units annually, and
- ◆ 572 net new 50-80% AMI units annually.

Exhibit 86: Net New Permanent Housing Units Needed (2024-2044)

Time Period	Units at 0-30 percent of AMI (PSH)	Units at 0-30 percent of AMI	Units at 30-50 percent of AMI	Units at 50-80 percent of AMI	Total Units
Total 2019-2044 Need	42,896	81,577	48,213	22,376	195,062
2019-2023 Added¹³⁰	511	2,669	3,250	10,934	17,364
2024-2044 Remaining Need	42,385	78,908	44,963	11,442	177,698

Source: ECOnorthwest and King County

Housing Costs and Subsidy Needed

APPROACH

To estimate the scale of local gap funding needed to meet King County's affordable housing goals, this analysis uses a conceptual pro forma approach that models four prototypical 160-unit developments at distinct income levels:

- ◆ PSH;
- ◆ 30 percent of AMI (non-PSH);
- ◆ 50 percent of AMI; and
- ◆ 80 percent of AMI.

Each prototype draws from real-world project data across King County and the Puget Sound region and reflects the typical capital stack and financing constraints associated with current

¹³⁰ King County's Income-restricted Housing Database does not currently distinguish units restricted to households at or below 0 to 30 percent of AMI that are permanent supportive and non-permanent supportive housing. In order to approximate recent production, ECOnorthwest applied the ratio of PSH to non-PSH estimated countywide in Table H-2 of the CPP Housing Technical Appendix to the total count of income-restricted units recorded in the Income-restricted Housing Database. King County. 2021 King County CCPs (2023). pg.77-81 [\[link\]](#)



federal, state, and local programs. Importantly, the scenarios incorporate common lending terms, prevailing rent limits, and the cost assumptions that developers face under today's market conditions.

Rather than assuming that all available equity, grants, and gap funding are applied upfront, the analysis first calculates what level of senior and junior debt a project can support based solely on projected net operating income—i.e., rental revenue after operating costs. The remaining unfunded balance is defined as the “gap”—the portion that must be filled by public subsidies or philanthropic investment. For PSH, an additional assumption is included to reflect the ongoing cost of supportive services that are essential for long-term resident stability but cannot be covered through rent.

The unit mix assumptions in the 30 percent and 50 percent of AMI prototypes intentionally skew toward larger units (two- and three-bedrooms) to reflect the County's needs around family-sized housing and overcrowding (see Chapter 6). These unit types are more expensive to build and operate but are essential to addressing the shortage of affordable options for larger households.¹³¹ PSH units remain concentrated in studio and one-bedroom configurations, consistent with the target population and service delivery models.

This approach is intended to be illustrative, not project-specific. It does not model variations in land cost, construction type, or jurisdictional incentives, and assumes a consistent baseline of project feasibility across income levels. Still, it offers a realistic lens through which to understand the scale of subsidy required per unit—especially as affordability deepens and reliance on flexible, local funding increases.

COST TO MEET HOUSING NEEDS

The total capital cost to develop affordable housing varies depending on project type, unit mix, income targeting, and site-specific conditions, but consistent patterns emerge across affordability levels. Projects serving lower-income households—particularly those with on-site services or larger units—tend to have higher per-unit costs due to lower revenue potential and higher space, staffing, and support requirements.

¹³¹ Unit mix assumptions for the four AMI scenarios are based on a baseline of 160 units per development and reflect typical configurations observed in recent affordable housing projects in King County. The PSH prototype at 0–30 percent of AMI assumes a majority of studio (50 percent) and one-bedroom (45 percent) units, consistent with the population served. In contrast, the general 0–30 percent and 30–50 percent of AMI prototypes include a higher share of larger units—up to 35–40 percent two- and three-bedroom units combined—to reflect the significant unmet need for deeply affordable family-sized housing discussed in Chapter 6. The 50–80 percent of AMI prototype continues this trend, with 45 percent of units configured as two- or three-bedrooms, recognizing demand among moderate-income households for larger units that are increasingly scarce in the market.



INFLATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF LONG-TERM COST ESTIMATION

Inflation presents a real and growing challenge for housing production and operations—one that has significantly outpaced general cost-of-living indicators like the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Over the past several years, construction costs, operating expenses, and service delivery costs—especially for housing providers serving low-income and high-needs populations—have risen faster than general inflation. This trend places increasing pressure on local budgets and subsidy programs, even before accounting for future demand. Because this analysis is intended to inform both near-term investment strategies and long-term fiscal planning, it must look at costs from two distinct time horizons:

- ◆ Capital construction costs over a 20-year planning period (2025–2044), and
- ◆ Ongoing operations and services over the useful life of those housing units, typically assumed to be 50 years (potentially through 2095).

Projecting actual dollar amounts over such a long horizon would require complex assumptions about future inflation, interest rates, and economic cycles—each introducing significant uncertainty. To simplify and normalize the analysis, all estimates in this chapter are presented in constant 2025 dollars. That is, we assume a real rate of inflation equal to zero, and do not escalate future costs or discount future values.

This approach implicitly assumes that the rate of inflation and the discount rate are the same, which allows us to compare long-term costs and funding needs using today's dollars. While this comes at the expense of financial precision, the tradeoff is intentional: it allows stakeholders to better understand the magnitude of need relative to today's resources, budgets, and tax capacity without embedding speculative assumptions about long-term economic trends.

In short, this method favors clarity over precision—appropriate for a regional planning exercise focused on scale, feasibility, and alignment of resources—not for project-level underwriting or bond structuring. It highlights the importance of not only meeting today's costs, but preparing for a future where cost escalation is likely to outpace baseline revenues unless structural funding mechanisms are adjusted accordingly.

Capital, Operations, and Supportive Service Costs

The table below summarizes the estimated total development cost per unit used for all affordability scenarios modeled in this analysis. To provide a consistent planning baseline, the analysis applies a standardized per-unit cost of \$450,000, expressed in 2025 dollars, across all AMI levels. This figure is based on recent development data from King County and regional projects.



Exhibit 87: Estimated Per Unit Capital Cost

AMI Scenario	Total Development Cost Per Unit
30 percent of AMI (PSH)	
30 percent of AMI	\$450,000
50 percent of AMI	
80 percent of AMI	

Source: ECONorthwest and King County

This simplifying assumption allows for a clear comparison of financing gaps across income levels, isolating the effect of rental revenue and debt capacity rather than project-specific construction costs. While actual development costs may vary by project type, site, and unit mix, \$450,000 per unit provides a reasonable and regionally grounded baseline for estimating the scale of subsidy needed.

The table below summarizes the estimated annual and lifetime operations and supportive services costs for permanent housing units serving households with incomes at or below 30 percent of AMI. These estimates reflect average per-unit operating and service costs over a 50-year period—the assumed service life of a typical affordable housing development—and help illustrate the long-term public funding commitment required beyond initial construction.

Exhibit 88: Estimated Per Unit Operations and Supportive Services Cost

AMI Scenario	Annual Cost Per Unit	Estimated Years in Service	Total Cost Per Unit
30 percent of AMI (PSH)	\$41,000 ¹³²	50	\$2,050,000
30 percent of AMI	\$13,000	50	\$520,000

Source: ECONorthwest and King County

These operations and service costs encompass operations and supportive services, including case management, staffing, and property management functions. The higher cost associated with PSH reflects the intensive service model required for residents facing complex needs such as chronic homelessness, behavioral health conditions, and disability.

The table below presents the estimated total cost of meeting King County's 2019–2044 net new housing need for permanent housing units, as defined by the CPPs. It includes both capital costs to produce new units and supportive services costs for units serving households at or below 30 percent of AMI. All figures are expressed in 2025 dollars.

¹³² Per unit costs for operating and supportive services in PSH units represent total project costs for permanent supportive housing project grantees with on-site services in the King County Department of Community and Human Services operating, rental assistance, and supportive services 2024 funding round divided by the total units served.



Exhibit 89: Estimated Total Costs, King County CPP Net New Permanent Housing Units Needed 2019-2044

AMI Band	Net New Units Needed (2024-2044)	Capital Costs	Operating and Supportive Services Costs	Estimated Total Cost
0–30 percent of AMI (PSH)	42,385	\$19.07 B	\$86.89 B	\$105.96 B
0–30 percent of AMI	78,908	\$35.51 B	\$51.29 B	\$86.80 B
30–50 percent of AMI	44,963	\$20.23 B		\$20.23 B
50–80 percent of AMI	11,442	\$5.15 B		\$5.15 B
Total	177,698	\$79.96 B	\$138.18 B	\$218.14 B

Source: ECONorthwest and King County

This estimate underscores the enormous scale of investment required to meet King County's long-term affordable housing needs—especially for households with the deepest affordability challenges. The total 50-year cost of operations and supportive services—\$138.18 billion—exceeds the \$79.96 billion capital cost needed to construct the same set of income-restricted units.

The fact that operating costs exceed capital costs over the lifespan of some affordable housing units reinforces a critical reality—keeping deeply affordable housing with services viable over time is just as costly as building it. While the full cost would not be borne by King County alone, understanding the order of magnitude is essential for realistic planning, multi-year funding alignment, and intergovernmental coordination. The estimates presented here offer a picture of what it will take to close the affordability gap and deliver housing at the scale and depth required to meet countywide goals.

SUBSIDY NEEDED TO MEET HOUSING NEEDS

Building on the estimated housing need and per-unit development cost, this section applies prototypical gap funding assumptions to quantify the total local funding need to meet King County's housing goals for households earning below 80 percent of AMI.

In estimating the total subsidy required to support PSH and other deeply affordable housing units serving households at or below 30 percent of AMI, this analysis assumes a baseline annual operating and services cost of \$41,000 per unit for PSH and \$13,000 per unit for non-PSH units. These figures reflect the cost of staffing, supportive services, property management, and basic maintenance required to keep these deeply affordable units viable and habitable over time.

However, to avoid double-counting costs already captured in the capital financing model, we deduct \$8,000 per unit annually from these figures. That \$8,000 represents typical operating costs already assumed to be covered through project cash flow, including rental income, operating subsidies, or other ongoing sources embedded in the capital stack. Since this portion is already factored into the model when calculating the capital financing gap, it is



excluded from the service-side subsidy estimate to ensure that only unfunded operational needs are counted.

This adjustment ensures that the supportive services and operations costs presented in the funding gap analysis reflect only the uncovered portion of annual costs, which must be met through local, state, federal, or philanthropic funding sources. This approach aligns with how PSH and other deeply affordable housing projects are structured in practice: even units targeted to residents with little or no income typically generate some rental revenue, often through public assistance programs like Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or rental vouchers. Those revenues help cover a portion of ongoing operations, but substantial subsidies remain necessary to ensure long-term viability and service continuity.

Exhibit 90: Estimated Per Unit Subsidy Needed for Capital, and Operating and Supportive Service Costs Over Building Lifecycle

AMI Level Served	Capital	Operating and Supportive Services (Annually)	Operating and Supportive Services (50 Years)	Total (50 Years)
30 percent of AMI (PSH)	\$457,000 ¹³³	\$33,000	\$1,650,000	\$2,107,000
30 percent of AMI	\$446,000	\$5,000	\$250,000	\$696,000
50 percent of AMI	\$354,000	n/a	n/a	\$354,000
80 percent of AMI	\$214,000	n/a	n/a	\$214,000

Source: ECOnorthwest and King County

The capital subsidy represents the gap between total development cost and the amount of private debt a project can support through rental revenue. The operating and supportive services subsidy, included for the 30 percent of AMI categories, reflects the additional long-term costs of operations, maintenance, and resident services—particularly in the PSH model.

By multiplying these per-unit subsidy estimates by the net new housing needs established in the Countywide Planning Policies, the analysis estimates the total public subsidy needed—expressed in constant 2025 dollars—to deliver and sustain the required units. This approach provides a grounded view of the magnitude of investment required and the importance of aligning ongoing local, state, federal, and philanthropic resources to close the funding gap over time.

Using the per-unit capital and operating and supportive services subsidy assumptions described in earlier sections, the total public subsidy required to meet King County's net new

¹³³ The estimated per-unit subsidy for PSH exceeds the total development cost because the model includes the cost of financing—specifically, the need to service debt despite extremely low net operating income. Although construction costs are assumed at \$450,000 per unit, limited rental income means the project must still fully cover ongoing financing expenses from operating revenues. As a result, the total public and philanthropic subsidy must cover not just the initial capital outlay, but also the cost of borrowing, effectively raising the all-in subsidy requirement above the development cost. This reflects the financial reality of PSH projects, where deeply affordable rents and intensive service needs make traditional debt financing infeasible without substantial ongoing subsidy.



affordable housing needs from 2025 to 2044 is estimated at \$162.59 billion (2025 dollars). This includes \$72.93 billion in capital subsidy to make projects financially viable, and an additional \$1.79 billion annually (\$89.66 billion over 50 years) in operations and supportive services subsidies, primarily for units serving households below 30 percent of AMI.

Exhibit 91: Estimated Total Subsidy Needed, King County CPP Net New Permanent Housing Units Needed 2025-2044

AMI Band	Net New Units Needed (2025-2044)	Capital Subsidy Amount	Operating and Supportive Services Subsidy Amount (50 Year)	Total Subsidy Needed
0–30 percent of AMI (PSH)	42,385	\$19.37 B	\$69.94 B	\$89.31 B
0–30 percent of AMI	78,908	\$35.19 B	\$19.73 B	\$54.92 B
30–50 percent of AMI	44,963	\$15.92 B	n/a	\$15.92 B
50–80 percent of AMI	11,442	\$2.45 B	n/a	\$2.45 B
Total	177,698	\$72.93 B	\$89.66 B	\$162.59 B

Source: ECONorthwest and King County

The majority of the subsidy need—both in units and dollars—is concentrated in the lowest income bands, where limited rental income makes it impossible to support conventional debt. Combined, PSH and other 0–30 percent of AMI units account for over \$144 billion, or nearly 89 percent of the total estimated subsidy needed. This underscores both the depth of affordability challenges and the magnitude of public investment required to deliver and sustain deeply affordable housing at scale.

King County Housing Funding Gap

APPROACH

While no one can predict with certainty how future funding streams will perform, this analysis includes recent sources based on their demonstrated persistence and scale in recent years. Many of these revenues—such as regional sales tax collections, Seattle payroll expense tax and housing levy, state trust fund investments, and major philanthropic contributions—have become recurring and significant components of the regional affordable housing landscape. Including them in this assessment provides a realistic picture of current capacity and frames the central issue: even with these resources, the scale of the identified housing need and associated funding gap requires additional, stable, and broad-based revenue solutions. This analysis is ultimately speculative, but necessary—it illustrates the magnitude of the challenge and the imperative to explore new tools that can close the gap in a durable and equitable way.

Importantly, the analysis also acknowledges that most federal, state, and local funding sources are flexible in use, often supporting a blend of capital, operating, and service



expenses across new and existing projects. However, to avoid double-counting, this assessment makes a conservative assumption: existing operating and services subsidies are fully allocated to existing units and therefore unavailable to support the net new housing units contemplated in this analysis. As a result, the operations and supportive services component of the funding gap is calculated independently, based on the full cost of sustaining new units over time.

Even with all recurring sources accounted for, the magnitude of King County's housing need—particularly for households earning below 30 percent of AMI—results in a substantial and persistent funding gap. This analysis is not intended to forecast future appropriations with precision, but rather to illustrate the scale of additional funding needed and to underscore the urgency of developing new, broad-based, and stable revenue mechanisms capable of supporting long-term housing production and operations.

REMAINING LOCAL HOUSING FUNDING GAP

King County and its partners across local, regional, and state levels have developed a multi-layered funding ecosystem to support affordable housing production. This includes capital investments from federal and state housing programs, tax credit equity, tax-exempt bond financing, local levies, dedicated sales taxes, and philanthropic contributions. Collectively, these sources generate approximately \$1.48 billion annually to support the development of income-restricted housing.

Yet, even with this substantial investment, current resources fall short of what is needed to meet King County's long-term housing goals—particularly for households earning below 80 percent of AMI. Based on the county's unit needs and estimated per-unit subsidy costs, the total annualized subsidy needed is estimated at \$5.44 billion in 2025 dollars, including \$2.17 billion in capital subsidies and \$1.79 billion for long-term operating and supportive service needs.

After accounting for all known and recurring funding sources, the annual unmet funding gap remains approximately \$3.96 billion. While King County currently raises an estimated \$157 million annually for operations and supportive services, those dollars are already fully allocated to the existing portfolio of affordable and supportive housing units. This funding is not available to support the new units modeled in this analysis, and in many cases, it is only marginally sufficient to meet current operational demands. As a result, addressing future needs will require entirely new streams of long-term service funding alongside expanded capital investments.



Exhibit 92: Estimated Annual Housing Funding Gap in King County

	Capital	Operating and Supportive Services	Annual Total
Total Subsidy Needed	\$3,646,420,150	\$1,793,245,000	\$5,439,665,150
Total Subsidy Available (All Sources)	\$1,478,280,057	\$0	\$1,478,280,057
Remaining Gap	\$2,168,140,093	\$1,793,245,000	\$3,961,385,093

Source: ECONorthwest

This extraordinary funding gap reflects both the high cost of delivering deeply affordable housing and the chronic underinvestment in ongoing operations and supportive services. It underscores the need for new, scalable revenue tools—particularly those capable of funding multi-decade service delivery, such as rental assistance, case management, and behavioral health supports.

Absent structural changes to how housing and services are financed, King County and its partners will remain limited in their ability to scale solutions—even as housing needs continue to grow. Bridging this gap will require bold public commitment, durable revenue authority, and coordinated action across jurisdictions and funding systems.

Contextualizing the Gap

FUNDING CONTEXT AND TIME HORIZON

The funding estimates presented in this chapter are designed to anchor King County's housing goals in a framework that reflects both the magnitude of long-term need and the realities of available funding tools. Two clarifications are essential to interpreting these estimates correctly:

- ◆ First, when estimating the capital subsidy need, this analysis is grounded in the housing unit needs adopted in the CPPs. These housing needs represent a forward-looking commitment to build approximately 178,000 new income-restricted units between 2025 and 2044, with a strong emphasis on serving households earning less than 80 percent of AMI. All capital cost estimates are expressed in 2025 dollars, allowing a consistent basis for comparing the scale of need against current spending and revenue levels, even though development is expected to occur incrementally over the 20-year timeframe.
- ◆ Second, the operating and supportive services subsidy estimates reflect a 50-year life cycle for each unit placed into service. This mirrors the standard underwriting and financing practices used in affordable housing, which typically assume 50-year terms



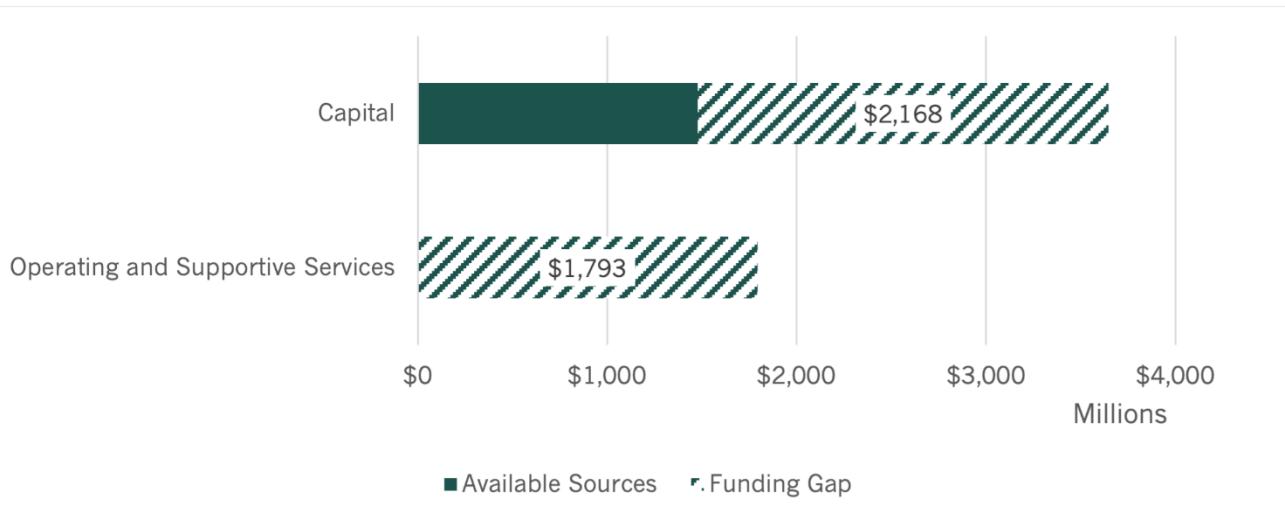
for both debt and service delivery. For example, a unit built in 2026 would be expected to require operating and supportive services funding through 2076, while a unit constructed in 2044 would require funding through 2094. These cost projections are therefore not limited to the development horizon alone but also account for the long-term commitment required to sustain affordability and housing stability, especially for PSH and other deeply income-restricted housing types.

To make these long-term costs more understandable and comparable to existing funding streams, the analysis annualizes the total subsidy requirement:

- ◆ The total capital subsidy need across all affordability levels is estimated at \$72.93 billion, equating to an annual capital funding need of \$3.65 billion over 20 years. After accounting for current, recurring sources of capital—such as tax credit equity, state housing trust fund investments, local levies, and philanthropic contributions—this annual gap remaining is \$2.17 billion.
- ◆ The total operating and supportive services subsidy need is estimated at \$89.66 billion, representing the 50-year cost of operating units for households at or below 30 percent of AMI. This corresponds to an annualized funding need of \$1.79 billion. Unlike the capital side, this amount is not offset by existing funding sources, as current operating and supportive services funding is already fully committed to maintaining existing units and cannot be extended to support new production.

Combining capital and operating, the total annualized funding gap to fully meet King County's affordable housing needs is estimated at \$3.96 billion per year. This figure reflects the commitment required not only to construct housing at the necessary scale, but also to operate it sustainably over the long term.

Exhibit 93: Annual Funding Gap



Source: ECOnorthwest calculations

The funding gap can also be understood in five-year increments from 2025 through 2044. While the total units needed and their estimated costs are unlikely to be evenly distributed

across the time period, breaking the analysis into five-year periods allows planners, policymakers, and researchers to:

- ◆ Track progress on meeting by-income level permanent housing needs in the CPPs;
- ◆ Evaluate the sufficiency of current funding efforts over time; and
- ◆ Plan strategically for adjustments to local and regional funding tools.

This approach aligns long-range planning with actionable, time-bound metrics. The following chart distributes the remaining net new permanent housing unit needs by income level across five-year increments on a pro rata basis after accounting for income-restricted unit production from 2019 to 2023.

Exhibit 94: Net New Permanent Housing Units Needed and Funding Gap By 5-Year Period (2025-2044)

Time Period	Total Units Needed	Capital Gap	Operating and Supportive Services Gap	Total Gap
2025-2029	44,425	\$10.8 B	\$2.2 B	\$13.1 B
2030-2034	44,425	\$10.8 B	\$4.5 B	\$15.3 B
2035-2039	44,425	\$10.8 B	\$6.7 B	\$17.6 B
2040-2044	44,425	\$10.8 B	\$9.0 B	\$19.8 B
Total	177,698	\$43.2 B	\$22.4 B	\$65.8 B

Source: ECONorthwest based on King County CPP Net New Permanent Housing Units Needed 2019-2044

By expressing these costs in 2025 dollars, the analysis offers a clear comparison point against current regional funding capacity and reinforces the structural gap between housing goals and existing financial tools. This approach highlights the importance of developing new, broad-based, and durable revenue mechanisms to ensure that housing investments can be delivered and maintained across King County.

ESTIMATION OF LOCAL FUNDING

To meet King County's affordable housing production goals, this analysis estimates that an additional \$3.96 billion would be needed on an annual basis beyond what is already raised through existing federal, state, and local sources, including an additional \$2.17 billion in local capital funding and \$1.79 billion in operating and supportive services funding. This gap reflects the magnitude of public investment required to deliver deeply affordable and supportive housing for lower-income households, particularly those earning below 50 percent of area median income, where market-based financing alone is not viable and long-term public subsidy is essential for both construction and operations.

While the King County region has made significant strides in generating housing resources—through tools like the Payroll Expense Tax, local housing levies, and dedicated sales taxes—those sources are not uniformly accessible or sufficient, and many are limited by geography, program design, or statutory constraints. Moreover, not all sources are usable for all project



types or jurisdictions, especially when it comes to permanent supportive housing or projects in smaller cities without dedicated revenue streams.

To help contextualize the magnitude of the remaining need, this analysis presents three illustrative tax scenarios using the state's broadest local tax bases (the property tax and the sales and use tax) and real estate transfers. These scenarios are not policy recommendations, nor do they account for legal, administrative, or political feasibility. Rather, they are meant to show the order of magnitude of revenue that would be required if the County were to pursue a scalable and predictable local funding solution. Examples include:

- ◆ A countywide property tax levy, structured as a lid lift with revenues dedicated to the production of deeply affordable housing.
- ◆ A countywide sales and use tax to generate flexible, ongoing revenue for capital, operations, and supportive services, which would need to be enabled through state legislation and potentially also local legislation and voter approval.
- ◆ A dedicated local real estate excise tax (REET) or reallocation of existing REET authority, which could be structured to capture a share of property transaction value and direct it toward affordable housing production or preservation—especially in light of recent legislative changes (e.g. HB 1791) that expand allowable housing uses.

These examples are not presented as proposals, but they underscore a deeper challenge: the scale of planning commitments for affordable housing is not yet matched by a clearly defined, regionally aligned funding model. A long-term solution would likely require support from local constituencies—through either existing or new tax mechanisms—and careful coordination to align housing needs, policy design, and a revenue strategy.

The illustrative funding strategies and tax rate comparisons presented in this chapter are calibrated to target an annual revenue need of approximately \$3.96 billion. This figure represents the combined annualized requirement to close both the capital funding gap (\$2.17 billion) and to support the long-term delivery of services and operations (\$1.79 billion per year for 50 years). While the specific tools and policy choices to meet this target may vary, the scale of need outlined here serves as a benchmark for evaluating potential revenue mechanisms and aligning them with the region's housing production and equity goals.

Regional Property Tax Levy

Using the 2024 total assessed valuation for King County—including Seattle—estimated at \$873.4 billion, a regional property tax levy of \$4.53 per \$1,000 of assessed value would be required to raise \$3.96 billion annually. This rate is nearly ten times the size of Seattle's current housing levy and well beyond typical lid lift levels permitted under current law. The scale of the rate reinforces the challenge of matching the county's housing needs with a single-source tax mechanism, and underscores the importance of a phased, multi-tool funding strategy.



Regional Sales and Use Tax

Alternatively, a countywide sales and use tax could leverage the region's strong consumer spending base. With \$93.3 billion in taxable retail sales in 2024, a 4.23 percent sales tax rate would be needed to generate \$3.96 billion per year. This rate far exceeds existing local tax authority under state law (e.g., HB 1590's 0.1 percent cap), meaning such a measure would require new state legislation or voter authorization. It also highlights the difficulty of raising sufficient funds through any single revenue tool without substantial policy and legal changes.

Real Estate Excise Tax

A dedicated countywide REET could provide another potential pathway to raise large-scale revenue. In 2024, taxable real estate transactions in King County totaled approximately \$34.5 billion. To raise \$3.96 billion annually, a REET rate of 11.46 percent would be necessary—more than triple the current maximum state REET rate of 3.0 percent on high-value transactions. Implementing such a tax would require major legislative reform and would need to account for volatility in real estate markets and transaction volume. Nonetheless, this scenario highlights the scale of value embedded in real estate transactions and the potential for future revenue if REET authority were expanded.

Exhibit 95: Summary of Key Recurring Sources for Potential Funding Gaps Commitment

Tax Option	Tax Base	Rate Required to Meet Funding Gap	Estimated Annual Revenue
Property Tax	\$873.38 B	\$4.53 per \$1,000 AV	\$3.96 B
Countywide Sales Tax	\$93.33 B	4.23%	\$3.96 B
REET	\$34.49 B	11.46%	\$3.96 B

Source: ECONorthwest calculations

These illustrative rates highlight the scale of regional commitment required to meet the county's long-term affordable housing needs. Whether through a property tax, sales tax, real estate excise tax, or a hybrid approach, any viable funding strategy must be equitable, predictable, and developed collaboratively to ensure that resources are allocated effectively and fairly. Aligning sustained revenue with the county's housing needs will be critical to translating planning targets into real production outcomes.



Jurisdictional Profiles and Appendix Resources

To complement the countywide analysis, this report includes individual jurisdictional profiles for every city in King County. These profiles provide a concise summary of each city's current housing funding tools, participation in subregional collaborations (such as ARCH and SKHHP), and recent budget commitments or policy actions in support of affordable housing. The profiles are intended to offer a clear, comparable snapshot of local action across the county.

While the body of this report focuses on trends, totals, and shared tools, Appendix D identifies how specific jurisdictions are engaging with the affordable housing challenge based on their own fiscal, legal, and planning contexts. These summaries can support peer learning, identify potential areas for collaboration, and inform future policy development at both the local and regional levels.

Across the 39 cities and unincorporated areas within King County, jurisdictions show broad but uneven engagement in supporting affordable housing through policy, funding, and regional collaboration.

- ◆ **Regional Participation:** 26 jurisdictions participate in either ARCH or SKHHP.
- ◆ **Land Use and Incentive Tools:** 22 jurisdictions report using value capture mechanisms such as inclusionary zoning or density bonuses.
- ◆ **Tax Reductions and Fee Waivers:** 29 jurisdictions utilize tax expenditure tools like the MFTE or impact fee waivers.
- ◆ **Dedicated Local Revenues:** 26 jurisdictions have implemented one or more dedicated revenue tools for housing, including HB 1590, HB 1406, or housing levies.
- ◆ **Discretionary/General Fund Allocations:** At least 17 jurisdictions contribute general or flexible funding to affordable housing, including contributions to ARCH, SKHHP, or feasibility studies.

Adoption and investment levels vary, with some cities leveraging multiple tools and others contributing more modestly based on size, tax base, or policy priorities.



Exhibit 96: Jurisdictional Profile Summary

Jurisdiction	Subregional Collaboration	Land Based Value Capture Tools	Tax Expenditure and Fee Offset Programs	Dedicated Tax Revenue Streams	Discretionary and General Fund Allocations
Algona					
Auburn	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Beaux Arts Village	ARCH				✓
Bellevue	ARCH	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Diamond					
Bothell	ARCH	✓	✓	✓	
Burien	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Carnation				✓	
Clyde Hill	ARCH			✓	
Covington	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Des Moines	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Duvall				✓	
Enumclaw			✓	✓	
Federal Way	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Hunts Point	ARCH				✓
Issaquah	ARCH	✓	✓	✓	
Kenmore	ARCH	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kent	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Kirkland	ARCH	✓	✓	✓	
Lake Forest Park		✓	✓	✓	
Maple Valley	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Medina	ARCH			✓	✓
Mercer Island	ARCH	✓		✓	✓
Milton					
Newcastle	ARCH	✓	✓	✓	
Normandy Park	SKHHP			✓	
North Bend		✓	✓	✓	
Pacific					
Redmond	ARCH	✓	✓	✓	✓
Renton	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Sammamish	ARCH	✓	✓	✓	✓



SeaTac	SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	
Seattle		✓	✓	✓	✓
Shoreline		✓	✓	✓	✓
Skykomish					
Snoqualmie		✓	✓	✓	
Tukwila	SKHHP		✓	✓	
Woodinville	ARCH		✓	✓	✓
Yarrow Point	ARCH			✓	✓
Unincorporated King County	ARCH and SKHHP	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: ECONorthwest, 2025

The full set of jurisdictional profiles can be found in Appendix D.



8. Aligning Planning, Production, and Funding to Bridge Ambition and Reality

King County's countywide housing needs—adopted in the 2021 CPPs—reflect a growing recognition of the scale and urgency of the region's affordability crisis. These CPPs outline an ambitious vision for equitable growth and housing stability.

But meeting countywide housing needs requires more than planning documents and permitting capacity. It demands the real-world delivery of thousands of deeply affordable units each year. Chapter 7 underscores one of the most critical constraints to that delivery: sustained and sufficient public funding. And while the numbers are large, the gap is not simply financial—it is also about aligning systems, priorities, and governance structures to bridge the space between intention and implementation.

The Scale and Nature of the Cost Challenge

At the lowest affordability levels—particularly for households earning below 30 percent of AMI and those needing permanent supportive housing—there is no path to delivery that avoids large, layered public subsidies. The math simply doesn't work—rents that are affordable to households with little or no income can't support private debt, and operating costs for supportive housing are high. These realities are compounded by regional construction cost escalation, limited access to low-cost land, and the scarcity of operating and service funding to support the most vulnerable populations.

While the financial analysis reflects those cost realities in the per-unit gap estimates, that doesn't mean innovation isn't possible. Strategies that reduce development risk, streamline permitting, deploy public land, or standardize building design could help contain costs at the margins—particularly if paired with capital funding and policy alignment. But the scale of public need requires a level of fiscal realism—permanent supportive housing and deeply affordable housing will remain among the costliest to produce and the most important to fund.

The Role of Mid-Income Subsidies and Family-Sized Units

In the 30–50 percent and 50–80 percent of AMI ranges, financing becomes more complex. LIHTC provides limited equity at these bands (for projects serving households below 60 percent of AMI), and many units require a mix of modest rent revenues, flexible local subsidy, and philanthropic or mission-driven support to pencil out. The challenge is especially acute for larger units—two- and three-bedroom units that are vital for larger households but difficult to produce in compact, high-density formats. As the housing needs and overcrowding data in



Chapter 6 show, the scarcity of larger units disproportionately affects lower-income households in lower-income areas, increasing the urgency to deliver these unit types despite their higher cost and lower financial yield.

Addressing the 30–80 percent AMI band—above the reach of permanent subsidy but below the reach of the private market—would require targeted, locally controlled resources, as well as a continued push to reduce soft costs, support nonprofit developers, and incentivize inclusion of larger units in public-private partnerships and land use strategies.

Recognizing the Role of Market-Rate Housing and Filtering

Although the financial analysis focuses on income-restricted production, market-rate housing also plays a critical role in the broader affordability ecosystem. New, unsubsidized units at 80 percent of AMI and above help absorb demand from moderate- and middle-income households. This, in turn, reduces pressure on older, more affordable rental stock and enables “filtering”—the process by which older units become more affordable over time.

While filtering alone won’t solve the crisis, a healthy pipeline of market-rate supply is necessary to slow rent inflation, preserve existing affordability, and reduce displacement risk for lower-income renters. Especially in the near term, jurisdictions can advance affordability goals not only by subsidizing new units, but also by removing barriers to market-rate production in areas with strong infrastructure, services, and opportunity access.

Sustaining Affordability: The Other Half of the Equation

While the region’s housing funding strategy has historically centered on closing the capital gap to build new affordable units, a complete solution requires equal attention to the long-term cost of operating those units. Without sustained support for ongoing property management, maintenance, staffing, and resident services, deeply affordable housing—especially for households below 30 percent of AMI—cannot remain viable.

As shown earlier in this report, the estimated 50-year operating subsidy needed to support newly produced, income-restricted housing is \$89.66 billion in 2025 dollars. That figure exceeds the total capital investment required to meet the region’s housing production targets, which is estimated at \$72.93 billion. This relationship is not incidental—it reflects the enduring gap between what it costs to operate deeply affordable housing and what extremely low-income tenants can contribute towards their rent. In other words, rising costs for insurance, security, utilities, and staffing—combined with rent revenue that is legally limited by tenant incomes—leave many affordable projects with structural deficits. Meanwhile, federal and state operating subsidies remain scarce, inconsistent, or administratively difficult to secure. This has placed growing pressure on local governments and housing providers to backfill operating budgets using discretionary funds, philanthropic donations, or cross-subsidies that are not scalable. Without reliable operating and supportive services subsidies, even well-financed capital projects may fail to deliver long-term housing stability for those in need.



This challenge impacts the quality and durability of existing affordable housing, and the financial feasibility of new development, particularly for units serving the most vulnerable residents. If providers cannot project reliable cash flows or maintain reserves, they will be less able—or less willing—to build more.

Bridging the ambition gap must therefore mean more than producing units. It must also include a sustainable strategy for operating support, whether through expanded rental assistance, dedicated local funding, or new regional mechanisms designed to stabilize deeply affordable housing over the long term. Meeting the region’s housing goals means not only **building** for permanence but also **funding** for permanence.

Funding Tools and Fiscal Alignment

King County’s current funding ecosystem—though broad—is not deep enough to meet the county’s needs. Even when layering in federal tax credits, state Housing Trust Fund grants, Seattle’s housing levy, HB 1590 and HB 1406 revenues, and philanthropic contributions, the County still faces an estimated \$3.96 billion annual funding gap when accounting for both the capital needed to build income-restricted housing, and the long-term operating and supportive services subsidies required to sustain it. This underscores the scale of investment needed to translate planning targets into real-world housing outcomes.

Chapter 7’s illustrative scenarios using property tax, sales tax, and real estate excise tax bases are not recommendations—but they show the magnitude of commitment needed. Each tool Chapter 7 contemplates would require either new legislative authority, voter approval, or both, and would need to be designed with attention to distributional equity, revenue volatility, and long-term political sustainability. Moreover, many jurisdictions in the county are not yet fully leveraging the tools already available to them, highlighting a need for both capacity building and political leadership.

This isn’t just about raising more money—it’s about aligning planning, funding, and delivery systems around shared countywide priorities. That includes clarifying roles for local jurisdictions, ensuring transparency and accountability in fund distribution, and investing in the delivery capacity of nonprofit and mission-driven developers who are often best positioned to serve lower-income households.

A Countywide Challenge Requires Countywide Commitment

The housing crisis is often talked about and dealt with at the local level, but its roots and consequences are more expansive. Workers commute across jurisdictions to access employment. Renters relocate between cities to find affordable homes. Displacement and homelessness strain the entire county’s emergency services, health systems, and social cohesion. Despite this shared landscape, funding solutions remain fragmented, and planning efforts are often misaligned with the fiscal tools needed to bring them to scale.

The magnitude of the housing need outlined in this report—whether measured in units, dollars, or lives affected—cannot be addressed through isolated, jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction



action. Meeting King County's 2044 housing needs will require a fundamentally new approach to shared fiscal responsibility. This includes not only maximizing existing tools like HB 1590 and HB 1406, but also developing new revenue mechanisms with the scope and durability to match the problem.

Just as transportation and environmental systems are now addressed at a regional scale, housing stability demands the same. That could take the form of a countywide housing levy, a countywide sales tax, REET, pooled philanthropic capital, or other new state-enabled authorities. Not only the funding itself matters, but also the commitment to a governance framework that enables transparent, equitable, and sustained investment across cities, towns, and unincorporated areas.

That shared commitment is essential for even the most well-intentioned planning efforts to deliver results. Without it, capital investments would fall short, operating deficits would widen, and progress could remain inconsistent. But with it, the County can build a durable platform for affordability—one that meets today's needs while preparing for tomorrow's growth.

In short, King County's housing success demands countywide housing investment. And that requires aligning not only plans and targets, but also the political will and financial tools necessary to achieve them.

