

Skagit County Community Report

Skagit County Government



Spring 2016

Housing Shortage / Costs Outpace Wages

Skagit Housing Summit addresses crisis in County

From a U.S. Congressman and local mayors to social service providers and a formerly homeless college student, more than 300 people gathered in January for a first-ever Housing Summit hosted by Skagit County Public Health.

“This huge level of participation shows the community is ready and committed to begin addressing the housing crisis,” said Public Health Operations Manager Bob



Bob Hicks

Hicks, who took a lead role in organizing the January 22 event.

Debra Lancaster, Summit participant and Executive Director of United Way of Skagit County, described the housing problem as “pervasive” and said her organization is eager to help. She said a lack of affordable housing is “negatively impacting the entire quality of life in Skagit County.”

“Many of the people who have gone to school here, trained here, and want to work here can’t afford to live here,” she said. “These people want to be our workforce. They are the parents of our next generation. Our community needs them to thrive.”

“Almost 40 percent of the people in our County are struggling to get by even though they are working,” she continued. “When housing takes up more than 30 percent of their income, they have to cut back on nutritious food and quality childcare – just the things impacting their health and their futures.”

The summit included a panel comprised of a college student, a police chief, a children’s advocate and



a hospital representative. Individual speakers included Hicks, Skagit County Commissioner Ron Wesen, U.S. Congressman Rick Larsen, and keynote speaker Greg Winter, Executive Director of the Opportunity Council.

“At its core, homelessness is a housing affordability problem, Winter said.”

Many participants at the Summit stayed well past the end of the event, deep in conversation about how to solve the County’s housing issues. Director of Skagit County Public Health Jennifer Johnson said she was inspired by the passion in the room.

“Housing is a key piece to the prevention mission of the County,” she said. “To significantly move the dial on improving the health of our community, we have to solve the housing shortage. It will be impossible to improve health outcomes if the underlying causes of poor health are not addressed.”

County launches Affordable Housing Leadership Group

In response to community feedback, Skagit County launched the Affordable Housing Leadership Group on May 2. The County brought together a group of local leaders, social service providers, housing

developers and other interested parties to discuss affordable housing best practices and plan programs and strategies.



Lisa Janicki

“Everybody’s talking about housing,” said Skagit County Board of Commissioners Chair Lisa Janicki. “Some are concerned about homelessness, some point out the lack of rental units, some want to see more supported housing models, and some families just need a home they can afford to buy. Skagit County’s Public Health Department has worked to bring interested parties together in pursuit of timely solutions.”

“We want to make sure that as we move forward together on many fronts, we don’t over-blend the types of housing needed,” Janicki continued. “As a Commissioner I want to work with our non-profits, private businesses, and city partners. Together we can make sure that Skagit residents have a place to call home.”

Did you know?

Between 1990 and 2012, more and more Skagit County households have struggled to afford housing. Today, 37 percent of Skagit households struggle to afford their housing, up from 22 percent in 1990.

“Trends in Housing Affordability in the U.S., 1990-2010,” University of Iowa; American Housing Survey, 2007-2012

Programs focus on families & youth

The YMCA Oasis Teen Shelter is the only shelter in Skagit County for youth ages 13-17. Youth have access to the shelter 365 days/nights a year where they are able to receive hot showers, food, bed, clothing and hygiene products. The YMCA also operates the Oasis Daylight drop in center, open to all community youth that wish to engage in pro-social programming.

The Anacortes Family Center (AFC) provides shelter and intensive services for homeless women, children, and families. In May the AFC will break ground on nine transitional homes to support clients who need a longer period of time to fully heal and thrive.

Community Action of Skagit County operates a number of homeless housing programs for families, including the William J. Shuler Family Development Center in Mount Vernon. Each year, this program provides more than 100 families with safe, temporary shelter and assists them with their plans for future independence.

Northwest Youth Services (NWYS) serves at-risk, runaway, and homeless Skagit youth age 18-24. NWYS collaborates with youth to foster self-reliance, and offers a variety of housing and support services to help youth become independent, successful adults. In 2015, NWYS served 1,050 young people in Skagit and Whatcom counties, but there are still many more who need help. Today, there are more than 150 young adults 18-24 on the NWYS waiting list for housing.

Family Promise of Skagit Valley (FPSV), a faith-based partnership of local churches, is an emergency shelter that began taking families in May of 2015. FPSV leverages in-kind donations and volunteer hours to offer 365 days of shelter, meals, and services per year to houseless families with the intent of getting families into affordable housing in Skagit Valley. Family Promise programs are a cost-efficient, effective, and replicable community response to family "house-lessness."

Friendship House in Mount Vernon shelters, feeds, clothes and heals men, women and families in need. The agency provides two emergency shelters, two transitional houses, a daily hot meal service and an innovative employment training program. Friendship House believes in helping people transform their lives into ones of self-sufficiency and abundance through respect and kindness.

Recent state report identifies 600+ homeless schoolchildren

Children deserve a safe, stable place to call home. Unfortunately, a recent Washington State report identified more than 600 schoolchildren who experience homelessness in Skagit County.

The Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) released annual statistics on homeless schoolchildren across the state. The latest report identified more than 600 Skagit County schoolchildren and youth, age three through grade 12, who lack a "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence."

While many of these families are "doubled-up," sharing housing due to a loss of housing or economic hardship, others are living in shelters, motels, in cars, or on the streets. Estimates from Skagit County Public Health show that 3 percent of Skagit school-aged kids experienced homelessness during the last school year, consistent with the statewide average.

Homeless students have to move often while their families look for shelter and employment. This high mobility affects academic progress, especially when students are forced to change schools multiple times within one year.

Homeless children more likely to struggle in school
According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, children experiencing homelessness are "nine times more likely to repeat a grade, four times more likely to drop out of school, and three times more likely to be placed in special education than their housed peers."

Sedro-Woolley McKinney-Vento Liaison Rinny Shelton, who has worked with homeless students for 17 years, told the County that housing instability contributes to student mobility and affects student learning.

"It definitely impacts their learning because they're not able to fully focus in class. If a student is in transition as far as housing goes, they don't necessarily have a place to study or the resources to complete assignments," Shelton said.

Shelton added that homelessness among schoolchildren also puts added pressure on the teachers and the district's budget.

Andy Wheeler, Director of Special Programs with La Conner School District, sees the same problems at his schools.

"We've had kids whose parents lose their home because they can't pay their rent or have some other trauma, and that destroys their whole sense of security," he said. "If they get their feet pulled out from under them in terms of that security, then what we end up doing at the school is providing that type of security instead of being able to focus on the English or math or whatever else we're doing."

Wheeler said this problem impacts all districts. According to OSPI, there are more than 1.2 million homeless youth nationwide. The number of homeless students identified in Washington has increased steadily in recent years, from 20,780 during the 2008-2009 school year to 35,511 during 2014-2015, an increase of 71 percent.



Housing Availability in Skagit County

3,672 Shortage of rental units for low income households

1,833 Families on Housing Authority wait list

200+ Homeless households in housing interest pool

1 % Vacancy rate

2008-2012 American Community Survey; Housing Authority of Skagit, 2016; Community Action of Skagit County, 2016; UW Runstad Center, Fall 2015

Business leaders say affordable housing vital to economic health

National and local experts say that affordable housing improves the economic wellbeing of the entire community, in addition to benefiting those who directly receive assistance.

Spending on housing ripples through the economy, with short-term multiplier effects measured in terms of jobs and spending, and long-term implications for the health of the local economy and stability of the local work force.

National research shows that affordable housing development spurs job growth, with skilled jobs that help revitalize the local economy, especially in the hard-hit real estate sector and construction trades. The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) estimates that the construction of 100 affordable homes will create 122 local jobs in the first year and 30 jobs annually.

Local community development consultant Paul Schissler said affordable housing can leverage additional funding for a community.

“Local funding brings in outside funding from state and federal sources,” he said, estimating that every \$1 million of local funding will create \$5-\$10 million in construction activity and a one-time impact of \$15-\$30 million or more in local economic activity.”

The lasting impact of affordable housing leaves families with more money to invest in the local economy.



“Businesses want to locate in communities with adequate housing for the workforce.”

John Sternlicht

“When the average renter has affordable housing, it frees up an extra \$4,000 per year to spend on goods and services in the local economy, year after year,” Schissler said.

In the new service-oriented economy, much new job growth has been heavily concentrated in low-wage fields, such as childcare and home healthcare. Across the country, many low-wage workers cannot afford housing in the communities where they work. In Skagit County, estimates show a worker would need to earn \$19 per hour to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment for



The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) estimates that the construction of 100 affordable homes will create 122 local jobs in the first year and 30 jobs annually.

his or her family.

Economic Development Association of Skagit County Executive Director John Sternlicht believes affordable housing is essential for a healthy business economy.

“It’s important to have the entire array of housing options available, from executive housing to affordable housing,” he said. “The companies we are trying to retain and recruit employ workers at all income levels. These

businesses want to locate in communities with adequate housing for the workforce.”

Allen Rozema, Executive Director of Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, agrees.

“The future of agriculture depends on having housing everyone can afford,” Rozema said.

In a 2011 study by the Washington Farmworker Housing Trust, 94 percent of farmworkers surveyed in Skagit County said more and better housing would encourage them to continue working in agriculture.

Leaders from the community development and business sectors will participate on Skagit County’s new affordable housing task force.

Research Shows Affordable housing:

Creates jobs

Increases purchasing power

Revitalizes neighborhoods and downtowns

Generates local income and tax revenue

Has a positive or neutral effect on surrounding property values

Leverages state, federal, and private funding

Commissioners Speak on Housing



Ken Dahlstedt

Ken Dahlstedt

“The basic needs of every individual and family are home and hearth – a roof overhead and a way to feed the family. As we strive to address mental health, substance use and other social ills that can lead to jail, and as we try to help people transition into productive lives, the most critical element of this process is affordable housing.”

“I look forward to a positive initiative with our city, state and federal partners to work cooperatively toward having adequate housing available in our community.”

“One example of such an effort is our participation in establishing a consortium with Island and Whatcom county partners to seek funding from state and federal agencies.”

“We are also working with local partners to form a task force with the goal of bringing all of our resources together to achieve this daunting task. The goal of the task force is to gather partners from our cities, towns and housing providers as well as key partners in the development community.”



Ron Wesen

Ron Wesen

“The County, cities and others are involved in an effort to share information and engage partners throughout the area on the same objectives. It’s going to take a community-wide effort to move things forward. My hope is that the public understands this is a complicated issue. Ideally we

will hear ideas to solve this challenge from property owners, developers and people in the market for affordable housing.”

“Affordable housing, which means different things to different people, is an issue in communities across the U.S. As people transition through life, their needs change. When people are not able to move on to the next housing step – from apartment to home, for example – the system gets plugged up. It’s a supply and demand issue, so we need to do what we can to provide the types of housing in demand.”

“We need to get away from stereotyping the housing market, to make way for an adequate supply of a variety of types of homes so people have the ability to live in the type of housing they choose.”

Spotlight: Youth Homelessness



Artist Benjamin Swatez and Aaron Wagner from Voices of the Children at Oasis Teen Shelter.

Nationwide, between 1 million and 1.7 million youth who have run away or have been asked to leave their homes, according to the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare.

Here in Skagit County, youth homelessness may be less visible than in urban settings, but homeless youth in our communities are still struggling and often feel hidden or isolated.

Two programs in Skagit County, the YMCA Oasis Teen Shelter and Northwest Youth Services (NWYS), house and provide services to homeless youth.

Oasis provides shelter for youth ages 13 through 17 and NWYS serves homeless youth ages 18 through 24.

NWYS reports that a high number of youth waiting for services are camping in tents along the Skagit River, or in vacant fields and lots, or sleep in their vehicles for safety. Youth may live in homes with other families or individuals and often in spaces that are hazardous or lack sufficient utilities (water, power, heat). These spaces may be sheds, RVs, or outbuildings.

For a young man named Justin, gaining access to NWYS's transitional living program has had a transformative impact on his life.

"They helped me get an apartment, open a bank account, get back into school and join the football team," he said.

This allowed Justin to focus on his goals for the future. He wants to go to college and become a lawyer because he "wants there to be justice for more people."

Summit participants identify need for supportive housing

On a cold night this January, hundreds of homeless individuals lacked a safe, stable place to sleep in Skagit County. County officials are seeking ways to house these individuals, following research that says providing housing for the homeless through supportive housing saves taxpayer money.

Supportive housing combines affordable housing with individualized support and case management services. Such housing stabilizes individuals and families, improves employment opportunities, health and educational outcomes, and reduces active substance use.

According to the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), "Cost studies in six different states and cities found that supportive housing results in tenants' decreased use of expensive homeless shelters, hospitals, emergency rooms, jails and prisons."

CSH reports that among homeless individuals, supportive housing can lead to a 57 percent reduction in emergency room visits, an 87 percent reduction in use of emergency detoxification services, and a 52 percent reduction in incarceration. One of these cost studies, from Portland, Maine, identified cost savings of more than \$15,000 per person per year through supportive housing.



"We would see less of the constant revolving door with some of the folks if they had stable housing."

Charlie Wend

Wend believes systems should support success for people leaving the jail and that "we would see less of the constant revolving door with some of the folks if they had stable housing."

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"Providing housing for the homeless is more humane and cheaper than our current system," said Director of Skagit County Public Health Jennifer Johnson. "From the jail to emergency medical services, the County is already spending thousands of dollars each year on each homeless person. Investing in prevention is a far better way to meet the needs of these individuals, and housing is the best form of prevention we have."

Skagit County Chief of Corrections Charlie Wend, agreed.

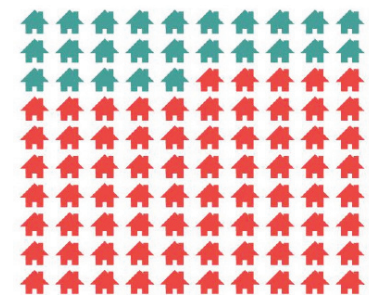
"If we had a wide range of housing options, it could reduce jail costs and recidivism," he said. "Absent housing stability, the likelihood a released inmate will succeed is minimal at best."



Catholic Housing Service's Francis Place, a supportive housing program in Whatcom County, combines case management services with subsidized housing to provide a home for 42 chronically homeless individuals including veterans, youth and people with mental health diagnoses.

After the January 22 Housing Summit, Skagit County Public Health Department surveyed participants to see what they thought the County's next steps should be. Of the options presented to summit participants, respondents overwhelmingly said that the County should "bring together the necessary partners to create permanent supportive housing."

Additionally, summit participants identified supportive housing as a top priority for our community.



Homes Affordable and Available to Extremely Low Income Renters

In Skagit County, there are only 25 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter households. 2008-2012 ACS

Did you know?

A single parent raising a toddler in Skagit County would need to make \$19 / hour to afford housing and other basics.

National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach Report, 2015

Housing is a healthcare issue

Some might wonder how the Skagit County Public Health Department ended up working on housing issues.

“Housing is one of the main issues that affect our health,” said Public Health Operations Manager Bob Hicks. “From childhood asthma attacks triggered by poor air quality in substandard housing to emergency room visits because people are sleeping outside in the cold, we know housing has an enormous effect on people’s health.”



David Jefferson

David Jefferson, the County’s Community Health Analyst, leads a group called the Population Health Trust.

It consists of local leaders assessing and planning for community health. He says this group has identified affordable, healthy housing as one of the top priorities for improving health outcomes.

One of the most startling revelations at the housing summit was that hospitals in our community often have

nowhere to send patients upon discharge because of a lack of affordable housing.

Summit panelist and Skagit Valley Hospital representative Kandi Devenere noted, “We don’t have a safe discharge plan for our homeless patients. I can’t send someone to live under the bridge with a broken leg.”

She points out this is not a cost-effective form of treatment and that if patients don’t have a home, there must be better options than

keeping them in the hospital.

“Using the high-cost environment of the hospital for this kind of treatment ultimately drains hospital resources that could be used in other areas of community needs,” said Skagit Valley Hospital VP of Quality and Population Health Dr. Connie Davis.

Both Davis and Devenere favor providing medical respite housing options for their homeless patients rather than keeping them in the hospital for long periods of time.

Local cities and agencies weigh in on housing

Skagit County has elected to assist in the regional issue of affordable housing by acting as a facilitator, bringing parties together in pursuit of timely solutions.

There are a number of constructive efforts underway in this area, including housing assistance through organizations like the non-profit Home Trust of Skagit and Habitat for Humanity (see page 7).

On another front, the Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) has responded to requests from local towns and cities to provide measurable data that decision-makers can use to take action on housing issues.

In a ‘third party’ role, SCOG will help to collect the data necessary to identify needs and create an action plan. Led by Executive Director, Kevin Murphy, SCOG is undertaking a work program to develop a comprehensive housing inventory. This analysis will examine where housing is located in relation to jobs and transportation.

Skagit County Commissioner Lisa Janicki chairs the SCOG board.

“Our desire always is to meet community needs while protecting the rural character of Skagit County,” she said. “SCOG can play a critical role.”

Housing is also a “front-burner” issue in communities including Mount Vernon and Anacortes, where city leaders have convened public meetings to discuss problems and possible solutions.

A Mount Vernon open house on housing and land-use issues took place April 20.

In Anacortes, the Council Committee on Housing Affordability and Community Services hosted an April 21 symposium, the purpose of which was “to perform an analysis of current low-income housing availability, issues related to homelessness, status and funding for various social programs, and to better identify needs and gaps in service.”

Connections: Housing & Health

Housing instability is associated with poor health outcomes for children, including increased risk of:

- ◆ Asthma ◆ Hospitalization
- ◆ Delayed immunizations
- ◆ Lead poisoning ◆ Low weight
- ◆ Developmental delays ◆ Depression

Housing instability carries health risks for adults, including:

- ◆ Reduced access to care
- ◆ Postponing needed health care and medications
- ◆ Mental distress ◆ Difficulty sleeping
- ◆ Incidents of depression

Researchers increasingly see affordable housing as a “vaccine” for improving health.

Affordable housing:

- ◆ Allows families to dedicate more income to health care and insurance
- ◆ Enables families to visit the doctor and get medication that they otherwise might forgo because of lack of money
- ◆ Improves childhood health by reducing risk of food insecurity
- ◆ Contributes to better educational outcomes by reducing asthma symptoms
- ◆ Saves the health care system money on reduced doctor and emergency room visits and hospitalizations



How can I help?

You can:

- ◆ Support affordable housing in your neighborhood
- ◆ Talk to your friends and neighbors
- ◆ Participate in government-sponsored events and hearings
- ◆ Speak with your community and civic engagement initiatives about affordable housing issues
- ◆ Support nonprofit housing and service organizations
- ◆ Volunteer

Homeless or at risk of losing your housing?

The Housing Resource Center, a community partnership located at Community Action of Skagit County, provides information and referral for community members who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or looking for affordable housing.

For assistance or more information, call (360) 416-7585

Or drop in:

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday
10 a.m.-3 p.m. (closed Wednesday)

Location: Community Action of Skagit County,
330 Pacific Place, Mount Vernon

El Housing Resource Center prove información para miembros de la comunidad que estan sin hogar, en riesgo de estar sin hogar o buscando vivienda económica.

Para ayuda o más información, llama (360) 416-7585

O Venir a la oficina:

Lunes, Martes, Jueves y Vernes 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
(cerrado los Miércoles)

Domicilio: Community Action of Skagit County,
330 Pacific Place, Mount Vernon



Mercy Housing Northwest recently made upgrades to preserve Villa Kathleen in Burlington. Mercy Housing has also upgraded Evergreen Manor in Concrete and Fircrest Apartments in Mount Vernon.

Lack of affordable housing, declining incomes feed crisis

More and more families in Skagit County are struggling to afford housing. Today, 37 percent of Skagit households struggle to afford their housing, up from 22 percent in 1990. (“Trends in Housing Affordability in the U.S., 1990-2010.”)

“Every day we listen to the stories of families and community members experiencing homelessness and housing instability,” said Shelley Kjos, coordinator of Community Action of Skagit County’s Housing Resource Center. “The faces of homelessness are incredibly diverse: a single mom or dad living in a car with their children; a veteran who has spent years living in a tent; a family facing the frightening process of eviction; an individual or family on the long road to recovery from addiction or mental illness; youth living on the streets and hoping to build a brighter future. They are all ultimately seeking one simple thing: the safety and stability of a home.”



“The current capacity of our shelter and housing system is dwarfed by the level of need we see in the community.”

**Shelley Kjos,
Community Action
Housing Resource
Center**

According to Skagit County Housing Coordinator Kayla Schott-Bresler, the lack of affordable housing is a statewide and nationwide phenomenon.

“Across the United States, rising rents, declining incomes, and reductions in housing assistance are leading to increases in homelessness,” she said. “Here in Skagit County we actually have fewer affordable homes than we did in the year 2000. To make matters worse, real median income has declined 14 percent locally since 2005.”

Years of federal disinvestment in affordable housing, combined with the lingering effects of the 2008 recession, hit the County hard, Schott-Bresler said.

Paul Woodmansee, a local builder, said developers are having trouble finding suitable sites and making projects pencil out. He believes reviewing and modifying density constraints would facilitate the construction of more multifamily housing in Skagit County.

“Housing is neither available nor affordable in



“We actually have fewer affordable homes than we did in the year 2000.”

Kayla Schott-Bresler

Skagit County,” he explained. “Private businesses cannot do a project if it does not create revenue from the project. This helps to create the multifamily housing shortage we have seen in the last 10 years.”

Schott-Bresler terms the production of new, affordable housing an absolute necessity.

“Increasing the availability of affordable housing is a top priority. Without the creation of new homes, we won’t solve this problem,” she said.

Representatives from the Housing Authority of Skagit County agree.

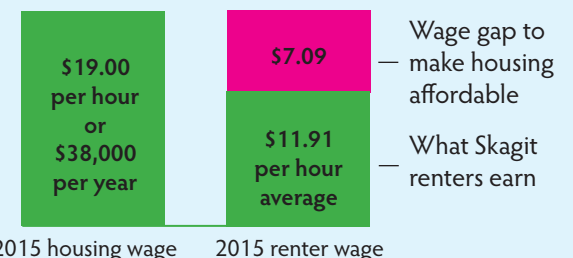
“We have a severe housing shortage,” said Melanie Corey, Executive Director. “As a community we need to prioritize, facilitate and incentivize the production of more housing across the County.”

Corey said she has been hearing of people living on a fixed income in our community who have suddenly had their rent raised by as much as \$300 per month.

Ario Salazar, Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator at the Housing Authority, sees in his work every day the benefits of providing adequate and stable affordable housing.

“Once you house someone, really the sky’s the limit in helping people realize their assets and achieve their aspirations,” he said.

Housing mismatch: wages versus costs



2015 Out of Reach Report, National Low-Income Housing Coalition

Local communities take steps to address housing needs

From shelter and recovery services to affordable homeownership, numerous Skagit County providers work to meet local needs.

Skagit Council Housing owns and operates 101 housing units for low income seniors at Mount Vernon Manor. The agency's President, Jim VanderMey, says his organization is looking for opportunities to build more low income housing.

The Housing Authority of Skagit County provides, facilitates and finances housing for a diverse population of low- and medium-income residents of Skagit County. It serves agricultural workers, families, seniors, people with disabilities, and homeless veterans. Programs include emergency housing vouchers for agricultural workers, a family self-sufficiency program, Section 8, and permanent housing.

Skagit Habitat for Humanity has worked for more than 20 years to create affordable homeownership opportunities. Habitat works in partnership with qualified low income families, providing them with "tools to empower their lives." The agency is currently building in the Summerlynd Neighborhood in Mount Vernon.

Phoenix Recovery Services provides transitional housing for men in early recovery. The facility provides shared rooms for up to 14 males who participate in Skagit County's Therapeutic Court Programs (Drug Court, Family Treatment Court, or Mental Health Court).

Whatcom-Skagit Housing (WSH) has used USDA funding to construct more than 600 affordable homes for low-income families since 1976. Program participants contribute labor toward the construction of their home under a "sweat equity" model. In the past four years, WSH has contributed an average of \$2 million per year to local economies through building suppliers, subcontractors, local jurisdiction fees and taxes, school impact fees, wages, benefits and more.

Skagit County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS) provides emergency domestic violence shelter for women and children who are in need of a safe place to stay. DVSAS also provides a 24-hour hotline, crisis intervention services, medical and legal advocacy, domestic violence, sexual assault and parent support groups, individual advocacy-based counseling, and education and prevention services in the community.

Pioneer Human Services provides step-down housing programming for homeless adults with mental and/or substance use issues. Services are provided to those exiting facilities including hospitals, detox centers, inpatient treatment and jail. Pioneer owns and manages Transition House, a community-based transitional housing and supportive services facility in Skagit County.



Home Trust of Skagit (HTS), a community land trust organization, helps homebuyers in Skagit County secure affordable homes and achieve an equity return on their investment, while preserving affordability for the next homebuyer.

Mercy Housing Northwest owns and operates 152 units of multifamily housing for low-income seniors, individuals, and families in Skagit County. Mercy Housing helps people become self-sufficient by providing permanent housing with supportive services.

Catholic Housing Services (CHS) and Catholic Community Services (CCS) serve low-income individuals, families, seniors, and persons with special physical and mental needs, offering resident support services in addition to a clean and safe place to live. The faith-based nonprofit organization provides 147 households and families affordable homes in Skagit.

**Facing eviction?
Do you have a serious
landlord / tenant issue?**

**The Housing Justice Project can help!
Skagit County Housing Justice Project
Fridays, 9 a.m., 3rd floor
Skagit County Courthouse
No appointment necessary**

**¿Ha recibido un aviso de desalojo?
¿Tiene problemas graves de propietarios e
inquilinos?
¡El programa de justicia de la vivienda
puede ayudar!**

Cities form housing groups

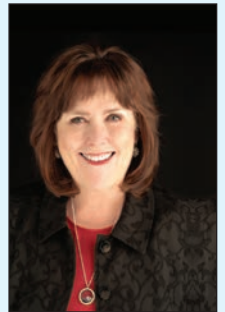
The cities of Mount Vernon and Anacortes have formed special groups to address homeless and affordable housing. Following are statements on the issue by mayors Laurie Gere and Jill Boudreau.

Anacortes Mayor Laurie Gere

"Anacortes is like every other community in our nation, facing homelessness in record numbers. It is our responsibility to help our city's most vulnerable. There is a shortage and affordability issue for all income ranges, and there are social issues where people do not have financial, social, emotional and health networks to support their ability to achieve basic housing needs."

"The most visible are the people living and sleeping on the streets. But the 'hidden homeless' are many of our school-age kids, their families and our elders – couch surfing, living in cars, staying with family."

"We know if we can provide stable housing for our citizens they can become functioning members of our town."



Mayor Laurie Gere

Mount Vernon Mayor Jill Boudreau

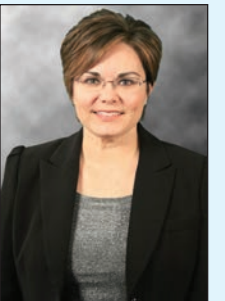
"Municipalities plan for growth through a comprehensive planning process mandated by the State of Washington. Projecting housing needs for all income levels is a crucial and complex balancing act that challenges jurisdictions large and small."

"Economically strong cities also focus on adding living wage jobs to combat the housing needs, elevating household incomes to provide prosperity for all."

"Affordable housing does not mean poor quality housing or segregated neighborhoods. Nor does it mean simply 'public housing,' but a variety of homes for the middle class, working poor, young families, and senior citizens."

"Jurisdictions like the City of Mount Vernon believe that innovative partnerships, creative project development and design features are essential for a sustainable healthy, strong, and committed community."

"As most cities across the country, we face a growing homeless population. We are currently working collaboratively with many agencies to propose assistance for those individuals who are living on our streets. Our goal is to link homeless individuals to services that can serve underlying issues such as substance abuse and mental health crises in addition to working on a supported housing project to provide initial shelter. In order for self-sufficiency to be reached, securing basic human needs is necessary."



Mayor Jill Boudreau

Housing battle moves forward on many fronts

Skagit County Public Health administers County-funded and federally-funded housing programs through contracted non-profit housing agencies. Additionally, the County focuses on community collaborations that promote and develop affordable housing.

Skagit's Affordable Housing Programs

Affordable Homeownership: In partnership with Skagit Habitat for Humanity, Home Trust of Skagit, and Whatcom-Skagit Housing, Skagit County helps eligible low income residents access affordable homeownership opportunities.

Tenant-Based Rental Assistance: Skagit County funds tenant-based rental assistance (also known as housing vouchers) for low income income renters across Skagit County, in partnership with area nonprofit organizations.

Homeless Services: In partnership with area agencies, Skagit County provides rapid rehousing assistance, homelessness prevention funding, and support to local homeless services initiatives.

Capital, Operating, and Services Funding for Affordable Housing: Skagit County provides capital, operating, and/or supportive services funding for low income housing, including permanently affordable rental housing, shelters, and transitional housing.

Technical Assistance & Capacity Building: Skagit County housing staff collaborates with community partners and local governments to increase the availability, affordability, and attainability of housing for low income families and individuals.



County ramps up housing efforts

Skagit County government has ramped up its efforts to address affordable housing need and homelessness in the community.

This summer, the County will begin awarding \$750,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to eligible homeownership assistance projects. The Public Health Department was awarded this funding by the



Felicia Medlen

Washington State Department of Commerce.

Services will be delivered through a collaborative effort between non-profit housing developers providing down-payment assistance to homebuyers with moderate to low income. This project will be a regional effort, with a catchment comprising Skagit, Island, and Whatcom counties.

Bob Hicks, who oversees the County's housing initiatives, said he is committed to using local housing efforts to leverage federal and state investment in our community.

The County has also successfully formed a tri-county HOME Investment Partnerships Consortium to secure a new grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In partnership with Whatcom and Island counties and 16 area towns and cities, Skagit County has brought \$623,166 into the tri-county region to fund affordable homeownership initiatives and tenant-based rental assistance.

Felicia Medlen, the County's new HOME Program Manager, administers these funds.

"For low income individuals, financial barriers to housing opportunities and ultimately housing stability are numerous and very difficult to overcome," she said. "The HOME Program will create greater housing opportunities and choices for low income individuals."

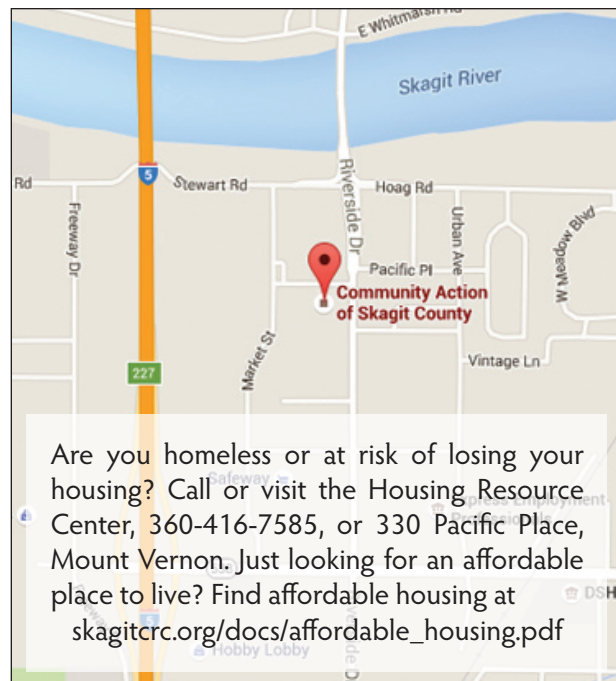


Jennifer Johnson

Skagit County has also hired a Housing Resource Coordinator to help increase access to affordable housing for low-income members of the community.

"The County is committed to addressing housing issues," said Jennifer Johnson, Director of Public Health. "Limited federal and state resources make this a challenge for local jurisdictions, but through partnerships, collaboration, and funding, we are doing everything we can to ensure safe, healthy, affordable homes for Skagitians."

Publication photos courtesy of: Anacortes Family Center, Skagit Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Housing Services, Skagit DVAS, Whatcom Skagit Housing, Pioneer Human Services, Mercy Housing Northwest, Steve Berentson, YMCA Oasis Shelter and Daylight Center.



Are you homeless or at risk of losing your housing? Call or visit the Housing Resource Center, 360-416-7585, or 330 Pacific Place, Mount Vernon. Just looking for an affordable place to live? Find affordable housing at skagitcra.org/docs/affordable_housing.pdf

Skagit County Government



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Questions or comments? Contact information below:

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The Board of Commissioners generally meets each Monday and Tuesday for regularly scheduled agenda items. Agendas are available on the website in the "Agenda" section, or you can listen to a recorded agenda for the upcoming week by calling (360) 419-7600.

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