



# COMMUNITY PROFILE

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS CHAPTER

- Brief community history and description of Ellensburg's setting.
- Community characteristics and demographic information.
- Population forecast based on information provided by Washington State Office of Financial Management and approved by Kittitas County Board of County Commissioners.
- Employment forecast based on best available information and approved by Kittitas County Board of County Commissioners.

## OVERVIEW

Ellensburg lies at the heart of central Washington - 110 miles east of Seattle and 170 miles west of Spokane. Two interstate highways and various state highways provide access, in, out, and through the area into the Cascades to the west and the farmland to the east. The city's footprint is approximately 7.6 square miles, with another 7.1 square miles in the Urban Growth Area (UGA) to accommodate for future growth.

Ellensburg's natural environment, rich history, and community characteristics all contribute to make this town unique.

## Natural Environment

The City of Ellensburg sits at an elevation of 1,540 feet in a fertile basin next to the Yakima River, east of the Cascade mountain range, and on the western side of the Columbia Plateau. Enormous basaltic lava flows 15 million years ago, and a series of glacial flooding events after the ice age, shaped the landscape of central and eastern Washington. Ellensburg has a climate that experiences both hot summers and cold winters. Temperature patterns vary considerably within the seasons. The Cascade Mountains to the west effectively block much of the rain from the wetter side of the state, producing a dry climate with less than an average of ten inches of rainfall per year.

There are four distinguishable seasons and a strong breeze in the spring and summer months. High summer temperatures (June through September) average about 80° Fahrenheit, and winter temperatures (December through March) average around 21° Fahrenheit. The Ellensburg basin is composed of agricultural land with a good portion within the 100-year floodplain. The surrounding topography includes snow-capped mountains, irrigated valley land, desert terrain, and two major rivers: the Yakima and the Columbia.

## Ellensburg's History

The first inhabitants of Kittitas Valley were *Psch-wan-wap-pams* also known as the Kittitas band of the Yakama or Upper Yakama Tribe. The Kittitas Valley was one of the few places in Washington where both camas and kouse plants grew. For this and other reasons the valley was an important gathering place for regional tribes who congregated to harvest these foods, socialize, fish, and trade.

Though fur traders and Catholic missions had established themselves earlier, white settlers in greater numbers began moving into the Kittitas Valley in the early 1860s. By the end of the 1860s, a trading post known as Robber's Roost was established near the present corner of Third and Main Streets. In 1871 John Alden Shoudy, who in 1875 platted the town streets and named the community Ellensburgh in honor of his wife, Mary Ellen, purchased this post. In 1894 the United States Post Office requested the 'h' be dropped from the City's name.

During this platting period, The Northern Pacific Railroad donated land in hopes that the town would be a rail-based center for the area's abundant farmland, forests, and mines. Ellensburg grew slowly until plans for rail access were completed and the 1886 arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad helped stimulate markets in cattle, dairy products, timber, wool, and hay. Community boosters hoped Ellensburg would be the new state capitol due to its central location. Such speculation even led to the construction of a mansion to house the future Governor on the corner of what is now Chestnut Street and Third Avenue.

A disastrous fire on July 4, 1889 changed the course of the community's history. The fire, fanned by Ellensburg's famous winds, destroyed most of the business district and many homes. Although the community put forth a heroic effort and rebuilt its downtown within the year,

Olympia was ultimately chosen as the state capitol. The efforts to place the state capitol did help bring an important element to Ellensburg; during the State Legislature's first session, Washington State Normal School (now Central Washington University) was established. In 1891 the doors opened for 86 students. Today Central Washington University has an on campus enrollment exceeding 9,600 students, occupies more than 300 acres, and is the county's largest employer.



The timing and coordination of the downtown reconstruction also helped by producing a downtown with a unified and attractive appearance. Later Victorian architectural styles with a few early twentieth-century Neoclassic and Art Deco-styled buildings dominate downtown. The historic character and classic urban streetscapes define the community and serves as one of its strongest assets. Due in large part to community-wide efforts that began in the 1960s to restore and revitalize downtown, most of the downtown core remains as originally constructed. By 1972 many of the downtown improvements seen today were being implemented, including street lamps, paver-stone sidewalks, and mini-parks. The City and the Ellensburg Downtown Association have continued to work on improving and maintaining the vitality of downtown. Keeping the downtown area as the heart of financial, service, government and retail activities was made formal policy in the City's first comprehensive plan in 1975. The importance of Ellensburg's downtown has been reaffirmed in the 1995, 2006, and 2017 Comprehensive Plan update processes.

Today, the community of Ellensburg has established its position as a central, rooted, and unique community influenced by the history and future of farming, University students and faculty that represent over half of the population, families that have been here for generations, and newcomers that have all chosen to call Ellensburg home. Community members consider Ellensburg a quiet, comfortable, safe, and family-oriented city (2016 What Matters Most Survey). Community members celebrate Ellensburg's year-round recreational activities, numerous downtown and University events and programs, variety of performing and visual arts, and diversity of shopping and dining opportunities.

To the world outside Kittitas County, Ellensburg is most famous for its annual Fair and Rodeo. The Ellensburg Rodeo was founded in 1922 through the combined efforts of local ranchers and cowboys, the Kittitas County Fair organization, local businesspersons, and the Yakama Native

American tribe. The Ellensburg Rodeo served as a nostalgic celebration of the frontier lifestyle, where townspeople could join ranchers, farmers, and Native Americans in an annual gathering. The Fair and Rodeo has become a way to foster business and promote Ellensburg's identity as a destination.

## Community Characteristics

The following is an overview of Ellensburg's current demographics and how they have changed over time. For more detailed information on households and housing, please see the Housing chapter. For more detailed information on employment and income, please see the Economic Development chapter.

The City of Ellensburg and its UGA contain almost 50% of Kittitas County's total population. Ellensburg's population has grown substantially over the past 20 years (*Table 2*), with the highest percent increase in the decade from 1990 to 2000 (19.8%). One of the most notable trends has been an increase in the Hispanic/Latino population. In 2015 about 10.5% of Ellensburg residents identified their ethnicity/race as Hispanic or Latino, compared to 6.3% in 2000 and only 2.8% in 1990.

Attributable to the presence of Central Washington University, Ellensburg's median age has remained very young and fairly constant. CWU is a major presence in Ellensburg; during the 2015-2016 school year there were 9,656 students attending university on-campus in Ellensburg, or about half the population of Ellensburg. The University is projecting on-campus enrollment to increase to about 12,000 students over the next 10 years. This is consistent with the overall population projections for Ellensburg.

Since 1990 Ellensburg has seen a decrease in the percentage of people age 65 years and older. However, Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) demographers predict an increase in people age 65 years and older in Kittitas County over the next 20 years. As the center for urban services in the County, Ellensburg should expect this population to increase during this planning period.

**Table 2. Demographic Trends in Ellensburg**

Ellensburg	2015	2010	2000	1990
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>18,637</b>	<b>18,174</b>	<b>15,414</b>	<b>12,361</b>
Median age	23.9	23.5	23.6	-
Persons 65 years and older (%)	9.2%	8.9%	9.4%	10.9%
Persons under 18 years old (%)	14.1%	14.2%	15.8%	15.8%
Hispanic/Latino (%)	10.5%	9.7%	6.3%	2.8%
Average household size	2.22	2.16	2.12	2.10
Family households (%)	36.8%	39.6%	42.4%	44.5%
Nonfamily households (%)	63.2%	60.4%	57.6%	55.5%
Owner Occupied (%)	27.0%	31.0%	32.1%	34.7%
Renter Occupied (%)	62.7%	61.8%	60.7%	60.7%



### ***Households***

Household composition has shifted since 1990 with a continuous decrease in both the percentage of family households and owner occupied houses. It is predictable that these characteristics would change together because family households are more likely than non-family households to be homeowners.

The Office of Financial Management estimates there are 7,823 households in the City of Ellensburg, and another 660 in the UGA. The majority of family households are small families (two to four members) with no elderly members. Estimates indicate that nearly 50% of households in Ellensburg are CWU students living off campus, either living alone or sharing apartments or single family homes with other students. Over two thirds of households in Ellensburg have only one or two members. Much of this difference is likely attributed to the large university student population in Ellensburg.

### ***Income and employment***

In 2014, the median income for households residing inside the City of Ellensburg was \$28,341. This number reflects the large number of households that consist of university students living on little or no personal income. Among family households, the median income in Ellensburg is \$60,650.

In Ellensburg owner-occupied households are far more likely to be in a higher income category, with 69% earning more than Area Median Income (AMI); only 14% of renter households earn more than AMI. With the exception of student households, the largest numbers of very low, low, and moderate income households are elderly people living alone, and small families.

Between 2000 and 2014, Kittitas County had an annual employment growth rate of 1.4%; this includes the 2008 economic recession. In Ellensburg and its UGA, employment growth has been slower than countywide. Between 2013 and 2014 there was an 8% decline in the total number of workers in Ellensburg. Ellensburg has also been experiencing a slow decline in the number of Ellensburg residents who work in Kittitas County, and a steady increase in the number of Ellensburg residents who work outside Kittitas County.

#### **Kittitas County Area Median Income (AMI): \$65,600:**

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calculates Area Median Income (AMI) based on the median income for a four-person household in Kittitas County.

## Growth Forecasts

As established by the GMA, OFM prepares twenty-year growth management population projections for each county planning under GMA. The OFM prepares high, medium, and low forecasts for each county, with the middle range representing what they predict as the most likely scenario. Total county forecasts must use the most recent projection provided by the OFM when counties and jurisdictions make population projections for planning purposes.

The County and five incorporated areas reviewed the OFM county-level projections through a collaborative process. The Kittitas County Conference of Governments (COG) is the body charged with leading this process. This collaborative process included a countywide analysis of population and employment growth trends, and determination of capacity for population and employment growth based on supply of vacant, partially developed, and underutilized land using available spatial and permit data and current land use regulations. For further information on the countywide studies refer to *Kittitas County Population Growth Projection Review and Analysis*, *Kittitas County Employment Projections and Allocation Scenarios*, *Kittitas County Land Capacity Analysis*, and *Kittitas County Preferred Population and Employment Projections and Allocations, 2015-2037*.

### Population Forecast

In April 2017 the Board of County Commissioners approved the COG countywide population allocation based on a projected 2% average annual growth rate for 2015 through 2037. This rate is within the range provided in the 2012 OFM population projections (*Table 3***Error! Reference source not found.**) for Kittitas County. It results in a total county population forecast of 65,967 residents in 2037. Currently about 60% of Kittitas County's population resides in urban areas, and 40% reside in rural areas. The allocation recommended by COG, and approved by the Kittitas County Board of County Commissioners, is based on the assumption that 65% of the future population will reside in urban areas and that 35% will reside in rural areas of the County.

The population allocated to the City of Ellensburg and its UGA takes into consideration Ellensburg's current share of the County population, as well as trends that indicate Ellensburg will continue to grow over the 20-year planning period. This comprehensive plan is designed for Ellensburg's forecasted 2037 population of 32,540. This

**Urban areas:** includes areas within city limits and areas inside a city's Urban Growth Area.

**Rural areas:** unincorporated areas outside of Urban Growth Areas.

forecast is consistent with Ellensburg and its UGA maintaining about 49% of the total County population.

**Table 3. City of Ellensburg and UGA Population Allocation**

Jurisdiction	2015 Population	20 year population allocation	2037 Population
Ellensburg	20,783	11,757	32,540
Total County	42,670	23,297	65,967

### **Employment Forecast**

In April 2017 the Board of County Commissioners approved the COG-recommended countywide employment allocation based on a projected 2% average annual growth rate. The allocation adopted assumes that the current employment split between urban and rural areas will continue over the 20-year planning period. This would result in 80% of job growth locating in urban areas, and 20% locating in unincorporated rural areas. The adopted employment projection and allocation in Ellensburg, assumes that Ellensburg will maintain its current share of approximately 60% of countywide employment and will also maintain a similar ratio of jobs per household over the next 20 years.

**Table 4. City of Ellensburg and UGA Employment Allocation**

Jurisdiction	2015 Employment	20 year employment allocation	2037 Employment
Ellensburg	11,490	6,998	18,488
Total County	19,362	11,155	30,517