

Benton County Population and Housing Needs Allocation

2026 Comprehensive Plan Update Cycle

Introduction

Recent changes to the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) require that local governments “plan for and accommodate housing affordable to all economic segments of the population of the state.” It also updated the requirements for comprehensive plan housing elements in RCW 36.70A.070(2). State law now requires Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) to project future housing needs including “units for moderate, low, very low and extremely low-income households and emergency housing, emergency shelters and permanent supportive housing.” Guidance published by Commerce¹ details how Counties, working with their constituent municipalities, can quantify these projected countywide housing needs and then allocate them to local jurisdictions within the county. These housing needs allocations, in turn, must be documented in the housing element of each jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan.

Benton County asked White Bluffs Consulting and BERK Consulting to facilitate and support the allocation process for the 2026 comprehensive planning cycle. The process involved two meetings where Benton County convened with the cities of Benton City, Kennewick, Prosser, Richland, and West Richland. During these meetings, participants reviewed relevant GMA requirements, analysis of population and housing permit trends, and various options for the allocation of countywide housing needs to individual jurisdictions. This report documents the results of this process and final methodology used for allocation.

Requirements for the Allocation

Commerce guidance for [Establishing Housing Targets](#) for comprehensive plan housing elements includes six minimum standards for allocating projected housing needs, listed below.

1. The jurisdiction must select a population target that is within the range of Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) Low, Medium and High GMA Population Projection.
2. The county must use Commerce’s Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT) to identify housing need projections associated with the population target. The housing needs for each income level, PSH and emergency housing must be consistently derived from the same target population input using the HAPT.

¹ Washington State Department of Commerce, 2023. *Establishing Housing Targets for your Community*. <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/chqj8wk1esnrranyb3ewzgd4w0e5ve3a>

3. Allocations must be consistent with any relevant countywide planning policies or multicounty planning policies that address housing.
4. The sum of all housing needs allocated to local jurisdictions in a county must be no less than the total projected countywide need. This should be true for each income level, PSH and emergency housing. Within city limits, cities may choose to plan for more housing need particularly in the face of new middle housing and ADU laws, which result in more capacity.
5. The allocation of housing needs to each local jurisdiction and the sum of housing needs to all jurisdictions should be documented in a public-facing summary document at the countywide level prior to the periodic update, such as an addendum to the countywide planning policies or a resolution adopted by all jurisdictions.
6. Each jurisdiction's allocation of projected housing needs by income level, PSH and emergency housing must be documented in their comprehensive plan housing element and consistently used in the comprehensive plan.

In addition to these minimum standards, Benton County identified two additional requirements for this allocation:

- The allocation for unincorporated Benton County is intended to be addressed in rural areas (as opposed to unincorporated urban growth areas).
- The allocation for rural unincorporated Benton County must not include housing needs below 80% AMI. This is because housing types most suitable for meeting those housing needs are not typically allowed in rural zones, and associated services necessary to support at lower income levels are much more limited in rural zones.
- All allocations to cities will be accommodated within city limits.

Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT)

To support this allocation process, BERK Consulting made use of a spreadsheet tool created by Commerce. The HAPT takes user input for the countywide population projection and the share of growth to allocate to each jurisdiction. Based on these inputs it produces an allocation output table that addresses all projected housing needs by income as well as permanent supportive and emergency housing.

It is not required that counties use HAPT to support allocation. But HAPT simplifies the process and ensures compliance with GMA and Commerce guidance. The tool includes three different methods as options for allocating growth by jurisdiction. Only one of the methods, Method C, prevents allocating low-income (0-50% AMI) housing needs to rural unincorporated areas. For this allocation process, BERK made a small modification to Method C that prevents allocating any housing needs below 80% AMI to rural areas.

One output of the HAPT is population projections for each jurisdiction. These projections are calculated to be consistent with the selected countywide population projection, housing needs allocations, and differences in household size between jurisdictions.

Allocation Method

Projected Countywide Housing Needs

Commerce’s HAPT projects countywide housing needs based on the selected countywide population projection for the 20-year planning period. Benton County selected the Medium population projection published by the Office of Financial Management, which estimates the county will grow to 278,456 in total population by the year 2046. This will result in 38,260 additional units needed between 2020 – 2046. Based on that input, HAPT produces a table of countywide housing needs, shown in Exhibit 1. In addition, between 2020 and 2046 Benton County also needs to add 136 emergency housing units (Exhibit 3) countywide to address projected housing needs identified in the HAPT.

Exhibit 1. Countywide Housing Needs in Benton County (All Jurisdictions Combined)

	Total	Permanent Housing Needs by Income Level (% of Area Median Income)						
		0-30% Non-PSH	0-30% PSH	>30-50%	>50-80%	>80-100%	>100-120%	>120%
Housing supply in 2020	79,442	2,453	145	13,090	31,122	12,139	8,218	12,275
Total housing need in 2046	117,702	6,662	2,801	19,714	35,794	15,091	11,563	26,077
Additional units needed 2020-2046	38,260	4,209	2,656	6,624	4,672	2,952	3,345	13,802

PSH = Permanent Supportive Housing
 Source: BERK, 2025 based on Commerce HAPT.

Allocation Shares by Jurisdiction

To allocate these housing needs using the HAPT, the user must enter percentage shares of future housing growth for each jurisdiction. To support this decision, BERK analyzed historic housing permit trends by jurisdiction for the years 2010 through 2024. The results are shown in Exhibit 2. Available data on housing permit trends included only “frame housing units” (conventional homes built on site) which exclude manufactured homes built offsite. Given that the placement of new manufactured homes provides an important component of the housing stock in some areas, BERK conducted additional analysis to estimate net new manufactured homes. Finally, BERK calculated each jurisdiction’s percentage share of total countywide new homes during this period.

Exhibit 2. Average Annual Housing Units Permitted by Jurisdiction, 2010-2024

Jurisdiction	Completed Frame Housing Units	Net New Manufactured Homes*	Total New Homes	Percentage of Countywide Total New Homes
Benton City	23	2	25	2%
Kennewick	411	16	427	33%
Prosser	30	1	32	2%
Richland	472	4	476	37%
West Richland	160	5	165	13%
Unincorporated	135	28	163	13%
Total	1,232	56	1,288	100%

*Note: Reliable data for net new manufactured homes is only available for the period of 2020-2024. Therefore, the data here reflects this shortened period.
Source: OFM, 2024; BERK, 2025.

Next, BERK entered the percentage shares from Exhibit 2 into HAPT. The result is shown in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. Allocation of Housing Needs to Jurisdictions, 2020-2046

Jurisdiction	Total Units Allocated	Permanent Housing Needs by Affordability Level (% of AMI)							Emergency Housing Allocation
		0-30% Non-PSH	0-30% PSH	>30-50%	>50-80%	>80-100%	>100-120%	>120%	
Benton City	765	97	61	152	107	59	67	222	3
Kennewick	12,626	1,597	1,007	2,513	1,772	974	1,104	3,659	57
Prosser	765	97	61	152	107	59	67	222	5
Richland	14,155	1,789	1,130	2,817	1,988	1,092	1,237	4,102	52
West Richland	4,975	629	397	990	698	384	435	1,442	19
Unincorporated UGA (all)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unincorporated Rural	4,974	0	0	0	0	384	435	4,155	0
Total	38,260	4,209	2,656	6,624	4,672	2,952	3,345	13,802	136

PSH = Permanent Supportive Housing
Source: BERK, 2025 based on Commerce HAPT.

Projected Population Growth by Jurisdiction

HAPT calculates population in 2046 by jurisdiction based on the selected countywide population projection and housing needs allocation by jurisdiction. The calculations account for baseline differences in average household size by jurisdiction and are adjusted to maintain consistency with the countywide population projection. The results are shown in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4. Projected Population Growth 2020 – 2046 by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction		2020 Population	2046 Population	Population Growth (2020-2046)
Benton City	City	3,479	4,985	1,506
	UGA	646	646	0
Kennewick	City	83,921	108,989	25,068
	UGA	3,149	3,149	0
Prosser	City	6,062	8,292	2,230
	UGA	584	584	0
Richland	City	60,560	82,448	21,888
	UGA	1,227	1,227	0
West Richland	City	16,295	26,387	10,092
	UGA	29	29	0
Unincorporated Rural		30,920	41,719	10,799
Total		206,873	278,456	71,583

Source: BERK, 2025 based on Commerce HAPT.

Recommendations for Documentation

Commerce guidance² states “[t]he allocation of housing needs to each local jurisdiction and the sum of housing needs to all jurisdictions should be documented in a public-facing summary document at the countywide level prior to the periodic update, such as an addendum to the countywide planning policies or a resolution adopted by all jurisdictions.” In addition, it states “Each jurisdiction’s allocation of projected housing needs by income level, PSH and emergency housing must be documented in their comprehensive plan housing element and consistently used in the comprehensive plan.”

Accordingly, each Benton County jurisdiction must document their allocation of housing needs from Exhibit 3 in their comprehensive plan housing element. Commerce’s [Guidance for Updating Your Housing Element](#) provides additional guidelines for evaluating whether sufficient land capacity is available to accommodate these housing needs and determine what adequate provisions are required to remove barriers to housing availability. Jurisdictions should also use the population projections from

² Commerce, 2023. [Establishing Housing Targets for your Community](#). p. 60.

Exhibit 4 in their comprehensive plans to maintain consistency with countywide growth projections and their housing needs allocation.