

February 2024: Housing and Homelessness



Housing and Homelessness

Housing and homelessness are among the toughest issues Lakewood faces today. Lakewood is geographically limited by water, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and its borders with other cities. Even though Lakewood is running out of space, the City is in dire need of more housing. Many cities across the Puget Sound and across the country find themselves in similar predicaments. While each city exists within its own context and limitations, the need for more housing is a constant issue across all jurisdictions.

Housing Needs (targets)

Lakewood must plan for 9,378 new housing units plus 574 new emergency housing units by 2044. Under state law, a portion of the units must be affordable to people at all AMI income levels. The City plans to add many of the required affordable units in the Downtown and Lakewood Station Subareas.

	2044 Growth Target	ID'd for DSAP by 2035**	ID'd for LSDS by 2035**	Elsewhere in City	Emergency Units
Housing Units**	9,378	2,257 (24%)	1,722 (18%)	5,399 (58%)	574
Jobs	9,863	7,359 (75%)	1,276 (13%)	1,228 (12%)	-

Permanent Housing Needs by % of Pierce County Area Median Income ⁵ (AMI)									
	Total	0-30%		30-50%	50-80%	80-100%	100-120%	120%+	Emergency Units***
		PSH*	Non-PSH						
'20 Estimate	26,999	588	101	4,565	11,699	4,347	2,250	3,449	8
'44 Allocation	9,378	1,212	1,367	1,739	1,375	592	536	2,287	574

New State Laws on Housing

To address the issues of housing and homelessness, the Washington State Legislature has signed several bills aimed at increasing new housing construction as well as protecting existing housing.

To be perfectly clear and transparent: neither the State of Washington, Pierce County, nor the City of Lakewood currently plans to build any form of public housing in Lakewood. All bills introduced so far adjust zoning and regulations to *allow* for more types of housing to be built in a wider range of areas. As of now, no legislation has been passed to require new housing to be built or to fund state-owned housing programs.

[HB 1110](#): Increases middle housing in traditionally single-family detached housing areas

[HB 1337](#): Eases barriers to building new Accessory Dwelling Units

Housing Units	How many per lot?
Middle Housing* Basic Rule	2 units/lot in <u>SF areas</u> (R1-R4 zones)
Middle Housing ¼ Mile from Major Transit Stop	4 units/lot in <u>SF areas</u> (R1-R4 zones)
Middle Housing if 1+ unit affordable	4 units/lot wherever base rule applies in <u>SF areas</u> (R1-R4 zones)
Middle Housing in non-sewered areas	2 units/lot in <u>SF areas</u> until either the landowner or local government provides sewer service or demonstrates a sewer system will serve the development at the time of construction.
Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)	2 ADUs on all lots that meet the minimum lot size in <u>each zone that allows for single-family homes</u> (R1-R4, ARC zones) The ADUs may be: a. 2 attached accessory dwelling units (ADUs) such as unit in a basement, attic, or garage. b. 1 attached ADU and 1 detached ADU, <u>or</u> 2 detached ADUs that may be comprised of either 1 or 2 detached structures. c. A conversion of an existing structure, such as a detached garage.

* 'Middle housing' is defined as buildings that "contain two or more attached, stacked, or clustered homes, including duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, fiveplexes, sixplexes, townhouses, stacked flats, courtyard apartments, and cottage housing."



Building New Housing

The City's role in building new housing is to comply with the [Growth Management Act](#) and to adopt zoning and regulation changes that allow for more types of housing to be built in a wider range of areas. While the City will not build housing itself, Lakewood attracts affordable housing developments through its [Multi-Family Tax Exemption \(MFTE\)](#) program.

Rental Housing Safety Program

Protecting affordable housing, protecting renters in rental properties, and avoiding unnecessary evictions are all as important to solving housing issues as building new housing. Lakewood takes its housing seriously and it administers several programs to oversee housing quality across the City.

All rental properties in the City of Lakewood must be registered with the [Rental Housing Safety Program \(RHSP\)](#). All rental units are required to be inspected once every five years. The intent of the RHSP is to ensure that Lakewood's residential rental housing meets specific health and safety standards and to promote compliance with these standards.

Under the protection of the RHSP, tenants have peace of mind knowing their housing will be held to a certain standard for health and safety. Rental property owners who do not comply with those standards will face strict penalties.

The City also monitors and works with several mobile home parks to ensure all housing is up-to-code. Lakewood continues to work with mobile home parks and private homeowners to reduce the number of septic systems by connecting all homes to public sewers.

Preventing Homelessness in Lakewood

Homelessness is often discussed in terms of visible homelessness such as panhandling and encampments. The less visible aspects of homelessness are important to consider, as most homelessness comes in forms that are much more difficult to see. Some folks cannot afford housing, so they live in their car or couch-surf when possible. Some homelessness is temporary or on-and-off, such as having access to housing several days a week, but not as a guarantee.

Preventing homelessness is much more complex and involved than camping bans and 'move along' ordinances. Shuffling unhoused people back and forth from city-to-city neither houses those individuals nor addresses the core issues which drive people into homelessness and keep them from being able to afford housing.

The City funds eviction prevention services provided by [Tacomaprobono](#). Tacomaprobono provides legal services to people facing evictions or other legal complications related to housing and rentals. The services include eviction prevention and mediation and are aimed at preventing people from becoming homeless by losing their current housing.

Emergency Housing, Shelters, & Permanent Supportive Housing



Another critical aspect of housing and homelessness is providing emergency housing, shelters, and permanent supportive housing. Lakewood recently funded Aspen Court in Tacoma, an interim emergency shelter that is now being converted to permanent supportive housing. Aspen Court was previously a Comfort Inn that was repurposed for use as an emergency shelter.

Candlewood Suites on South Tacoma Way is currently being converted to emergency housing and will be renamed Maureen Howard Place. This will be the first large-scale shelter in the City of Lakewood. The project is funded primarily by the Washington State Department of Commerce Right-of-Way Program and will provide housing for people living in right-of-ways and for people experiencing homelessness in Lakewood.

Mental Health & Western State Hospital

DSHS plans to build a new 350-bed forensic hospital on the Western State Hospital campus to replace outdated facilities. The [WSH Master Plan](#) describes plans for the new facility. This is a state project, directed by the legislature.

If approved, the planned facility would finish construction by 2029. The total patient capacity will be slightly reduced. The City's role is to review the plan for community & environmental impact and prescribe mitigations.

Many residents and business owners in Lakewood express concern over the release and placement of high-risk and criminal offenders into the local community without adequate resources or support networks.

The City has previously litigated against the release of high-risk patients into residential care settings. In 2018, the Pierce County Superior Court denied a City motion, ruling that the City had no regulatory authority over state-sanctioned care or placement practices.

Since then, the City of Lakewood suggested legislation to achieve proper supervision for high-risk behavioral health patients and the well-being of vulnerable residents of adult family homes. The 67th Legislature of the State of Washington passed Bill 5163 during the 2021 Regular Session. Bill 5163 revised statutes relating to the placement and treatment of conditionally released sexually violent predators.

Lakewood is also exploring alternative placement options, including Enhanced Services Facilities. Enhanced Services Facilities are rare in Washington State; only six exist. A seventh has been permitted in Lakewood. These specialized facilities house potentially dangerous patients that have demonstrated enough improvement within a psychiatric hospital to be considered for residential placement.

The City will continue to work with legislators and state agencies to improve the behavioral health model and protect Lakewood residents.