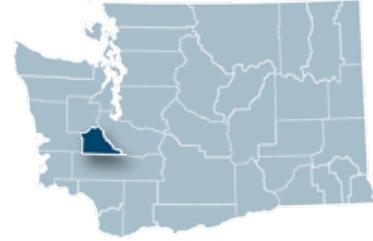


Thurston County Profile

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Overview

Regional context

Thurston County is located on the southern end of Puget Sound in Western Washington, referred to as the South Sound. It is the seventh smallest county in the state, but the sixth most populous with 349.4 people per square mile.

Thurston County was carved out of Lewis County in 1852, named after Samuel R. Thurston, the first delegate to Congress from the Oregon Territory, which later became Washington. The county seat is Olympia, the state capital and the largest city in the county. In 1851, Olympia became the port of entry for Puget Sound. A year later, it became the county seat.

Native Americans date back to roughly 3,000 years ago. Nisqually and Squaxon tribes established themselves in this area. In 1833, the first Europeans settled in the area, and in 1845, the first white American settlers arrived.

Local economy

Lumber, coal and sandstone mining were the dominant sources of industry in 19th century Thurston County, and remained so into the 1920s. In 1896, Leopold Schmidt established a brewery that was a significant industry in Tumwater. It operated until Miller closed it in 2003.

State government began to increase its employment share when the state capitol was completed in 1927. By the 1950s, state government surpassed lumber employment. Logging mills were closed in the 1960s. Thurston County then grew rapidly over the decades, fueled by employment in state government and trade. Tribal casinos also took off during this time.

The local economy continues to be dependent upon government employment, as 32.3 percent of all nonfarm employment can be attributed to federal, state and local government jobs in 2019. Looking back to 2010, government employment has declined by 2.0 percent, while private sector employment increased by 16.5 percent as a share of total county employment.

Geographic facts

	Thurston County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	721.96	32
People per square mile, 2010	349.4	6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

The year 2020 began quietly enough but all expectations of a continuation of positive economic growth came to a standstill as the calendar turned to March. The COVID-19 pandemic threw the world economy into a tailspin and the Thurston county economy was no exception. All sectors of the economy felt the impact immediately, with some sectors hit harder than others.

The 2021 crystal ball is hazy at best. As the end of the year approached, infections rose and restrictions on the economy were restored. Many of the jobs that had begun to return to the county were hit with the double whammy, on one hand a seasonal retreat as winter approached and the mandate that restricted some sectors of the economy. With restrictions now scheduled to last into mid-January and not knowing how far the restrictions will be lifted, the first quarter of 2021 promises to result in something of an economic puzzle.

Labor force and unemployment

Current labor force and unemployment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

The average annual unemployment rate in the county had dropped every year since 2011, when the rate was 9.0 percent. In 2020, the pandemic put an end to that streak, as data through November 2020 shows an average annual unemployment rate averaging 8.3 percent. This is a noticeable bump up from the 4.8 percent posted in 2019.

In 2020 through November, the county averaged 12,262 unemployed residents and 135,022 with jobs. That compares to 6,914 unemployed in 2019 with 135,982 at work.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

Industry employment

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

Thurston County average annual nonfarm employment through November 2020 was 115,300. After steadily rising for years that streak came to an end in 2020, as currently the average lags the 2019 average by more than 5,000 jobs.

Government is by far and away the largest employer, with 38,400 jobs in 2020. The pandemic impact on the trade and leisure and hospitality industries was significant, as their 2020 employment numbers through November declined by hundreds of jobs compared to 2019.

For historical industry employment data, [contact an economist](#).

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

Industry employment by age and gender

The Local Employment Dynamics (LED) database, a joint project of state employment departments and the U.S. Census Bureau, matches state employment data with federal administrative data. Among the products is industry employment by age and gender. All workers covered by state unemployment insurance data are included; federal workers and non-covered workers, such as the self-employed, are not. Data are presented by place of work, not place of residence.

Thurston County highlights:

In 2019, the two largest employed age categories were those 35 to 44 years old with 22.7 percent of the jobs, and those 55 and older with 24.7 percent of the jobs.

Men held 46.7 percent of the jobs in the county and women held 53.3 percent of jobs in 2019.

- Male-dominated industries included mining (73.8 percent), construction (82.8 percent), and transportation and warehousing (75.2 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (78.2 percent), education (69.2 percent), and finance and insurance (64.7 percent).

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA, County data tables

Wages and income

In 2019, there were 118,304 covered employment jobs in Thurston County. The total payroll for 2019 was over 6.4 billion dollars.

In 2019, the average annual wage was \$54,502, compared to the state average of \$69,615.

Personal income

Personal income includes earned income, investment income and government payments such as Social Security and Veterans Benefits. Investment income includes income imputed from pension funds and from owning a home. Per capita personal income equals total personal income divided by the resident population.

Per capita income in Thurston County in 2019 was \$52,828 compared to the state at \$64,758 and the nation at \$56,490. It ranks 12th for per capita income in Washington state.

Median household income in 2019 was \$78,512, slightly lower than that of the state (\$78,687) but higher than the nation (\$65,712).

The percent of the county's population below the official poverty rate in 2019 was 9.1 percent compared to the state's rate of 9.8 percent and the nation's at 10.5 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts. The state and national rates are not directly comparable to the county rate because they each use different data sources.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA, County data tables; U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Population

Thurston County's estimated population in 2019 was 290,536. The population of the county at the 2010 census was 252,260.

The largest city in the county is Olympia, followed by Lacey and Tumwater.

Population facts

	Thurston County	Washington state
Population 2019	290,536	7,614,893
Population 2010	252,260	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2019	15.2%	13.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Age, gender and ethnicity

Thurston County had an older population than the state in 2019. Thurston County's population of those aged 65 and older was 17.9 percent compared to the state's 15.9 percent.

Those under 18 years old were 21.2 percent of the county population, slightly less than that of the state's 21.8 percent. Those under five years old made up 5.7 percent of Thurston County's population compared to the state's 6.0 percent.

Thurston County showed somewhat less diversity in 2019 than the state in racial/ethnic categories, with whites making up 81.5 percent of its population compared to 78.5 percent of the state's population. There was 5.8 percent of the county's population reporting two or more races in 2019 compared to 4.9 percent at the state level. The county's population had slightly more native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders (1.0 percent) than the state (0.8 percent).

Demographics

	Thurston County	Washington state
Population by age, 2019		
Under 5 years old	5.7%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	21.2%	21.8%
65 years and older	17.9%	15.9%
Females, 2019	51.1%	49.9%
Race/ethnicity, 2019		
White	81.5%	78.5%
Black	3.6%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.8%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	7.3%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	9.4%	13.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

Most Thurston County residents age 25 and older (93.7 percent) were high school graduates, which compares with 91.3 percent of Washington state's residents and 88.0 percent of U.S. residents in the period covering 2019.

Those with a bachelor's degree or higher made up 35.7 percent of Thurston County residents age 25 and older compared to 36.0 percent of state residents and 32.1 percent of U.S. residents during the same period.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Thurston County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Thurston County Economic Development Council](#)
- [Thurston County History](#)
- [Thurston County home page](#)
- [Thurston County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Thurston County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Thurston Regional Planning Council](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Port of Olympia](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas and WorkSource Office Directory](#)

Employment Security Department is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Language assistance services for limited English proficient individuals are available free of charge. Washington Relay Service: 711.