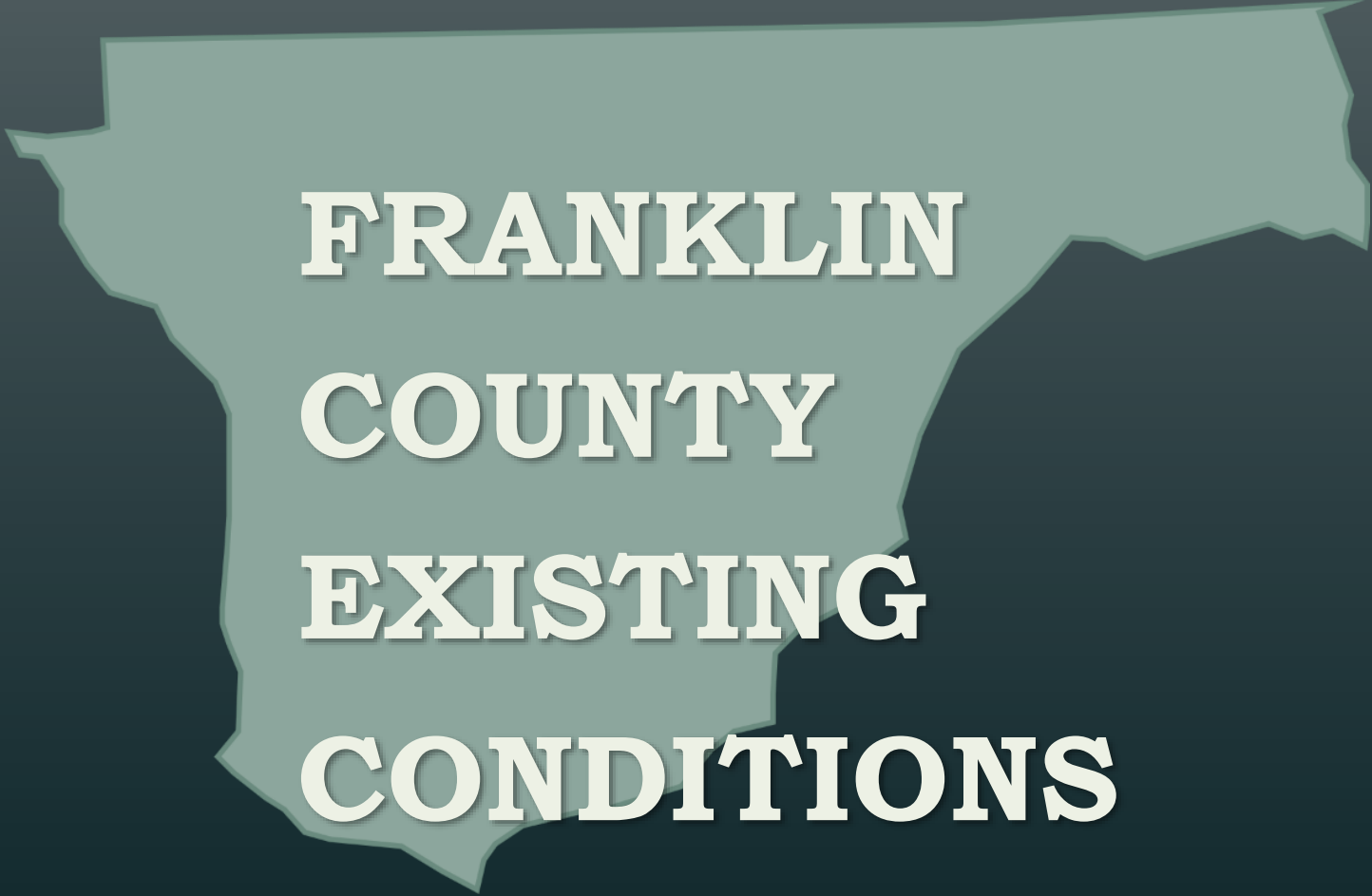


A light green map of Franklin County is centered on a dark teal background. The text 'FRANKLIN COUNTY EXISTING CONDITIONS' is overlaid on the map in a large, white, serif font with a slight drop shadow.

FRANKLIN COUNTY EXISTING CONDITIONS

2025

**PROJECT: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PERIODIC UPDATE
AHBL, INC.**



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to document the changes in Franklin County in the years since the last comprehensive plan update, in order to establish a baseline with which to guide the planning process for local development for the next 20 years, providing a preliminary assessment. This report is prepared to provide staff, the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners with an early summary of trends and indicators that should be considered as the Periodic Update to the Comprehensive Plan for the 2026-2046 time period. We anticipate that the data included in this report can be used in the updated Comprehensive Plan; further investigation and analysis is forthcoming (AHBL's subconsultant EConorthwest will be primarily responsible for housing and economic development data collection and analysis).

The previous Comprehensive Plan periodic update for Franklin County began in 2017 for the 2018 to 2038 planning period, although it was not adopted until 2021. Since 2017, Franklin County has seen a 14% increase in population. Both the County and Tri-Cities region continue to see rapid growth, due to numerous factors including improved affordability (as compared to other parts of the State) and the sunny and dry weather conditions.

A major factor precipitating change, both locally and globally, was the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic dramatically affected a number of key indicators of changes to growth, which we see very starkly in the data. The indicators include education, employment, affordability measures, and other economic indicators, such as spending in certain industries. In this report, we attempt to capture the changes over time throughout the County, without drawing false conclusions about the temporary conditions brought about by the pandemic. It should be noted that due to the pandemic, there are some gaps in the data for the year 2020.

We collected data for this report from the U.S. Census Bureau's (Census) American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates, Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), as well as from Benton-Franklin Trends.org. The Benton-Franklin Trends website is a cooperative effort by a number of public and private entities in the Tri-Cities area, including Benton Franklin Health District, Port of Benton, and the Tri-City Herald. Additionally, the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis at Eastern Washington University in Spokane provides their data analysis and website maintenance. In addition to Census Bureau data, Benton-Franklin Trends.org also utilized sources such as the U.S. Department of Commerce: Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Washington State Department of Revenue, Washington State Department of Health, Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the Washington State Employment Security Department, among others. Housing data is also provided by the University of Washington's Center for Real Estate Research (WCRER). This data is delineated by County, when possible.

PEOPLE

The vast majority of Franklin County residents reside in Pasco. In 2024, 80% of Franklin County’s population resided in Pasco, and that percentage has vacillated between approximately 50% and 80% over the years between 1940-2024. Although regional coordination is important and Franklin County represents the umbrella under which Pasco operates, it is important to point out that the County’s Comprehensive Plan is chiefly intended to serve the unincorporated portions of the County. Franklin County saw dramatic growth during the 1940s, as seen in Table 1 and Figure 1, with the opening of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in 1943.

Table 1: Population and Growth Rate; 1940-2024, Franklin County

Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Population	6,307	13,563	23,342	25,816	35,025	37,473	49,347	78,163	96,749	98,350	99,750	101,100	102,300
Growth Rate	N/A	115%	72%	11%	36%	7%	32%	58%	24%	2%	1%	1%	1%

The Hanford site continues to be a large regional employer, but the regional economy diversified in the 1990s and 2000s, providing a greater variety of employment opportunities. The Tri Cities area has experienced lower housing costs when compared to other areas of the state, which may provide an explanation for why the region continued to see substantial growth in population during the 2008 recession. More recently, the population has continued to grow approximately 1.5% per year since 2020, making it one of the fastest growing counties in the state, after Grant and Clark counties in 2023 and 2024.

Table 2 provides the population of the cities and unincorporated areas within Franklin County. We can see that the vast majority of the population growth in Franklin County has occurred within Pasco and annexation and in-migration are contributing factors.

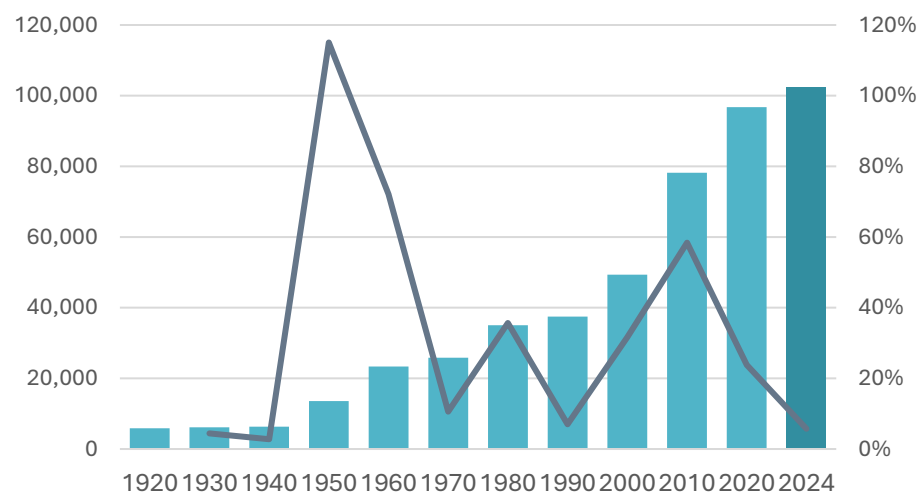


Figure 1: Population in Franklin County and Growth Rate

Other cities such as Connell, Kahlotus, and Mesa have not seen high levels of population growth. Since 2020, Kahlotus has nearly maintained population, losing just two residents, but since 2015, there has been an 18% population decline. Despite growing steadily since incorporation in 1955, Mesa has also seen a population decline since 2015 of roughly 9%. Connell's general population has seen a 3.8% growth since 2020, with the population reduction being a result of a reduced group quarters population (incarcerated people) at the Coyote Ridge Correctional Facility, since a high in 2019 when the facility was expanded.

The unincorporated area in Franklin County has increased in population by 11.5% since 2015. In the most recent years this trend has leveled off; the since the year 2020 was about 5%. These trends are generally consistent with the state's Growth Management Act (GMA) aims to guide growth to urban growth areas (UGAs), which may or may not be incorporated. Outside of these areas, urban infrastructure such as sewer is not provided. This is an attempt to retain farms, open lands and natural resource areas and prevent growth pressures from competing with these other uses, particularly irrigated agricultural areas within the county. With this in mind, the growth in the unincorporated areas should be limited.

Geographic Population Distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of those living in cities within Franklin County, versus unincorporated areas. The unincorporated areas include Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (LAMIRDs) with relatively large populations such as Basin City and Eltopia.

The OFM follows the Census in categorizing and presenting data. Basin City is categorized as a Census Designated Place (CDP) and does not include the neighboring Fairway/ Sagehill Road Rural Remote LAMIRD, although the boundaries of the CDP extend outside of Basin City's logical outer boundary (LOB).

Next, Table 2 shows the population counts by geography for the years 2015 to 2024.

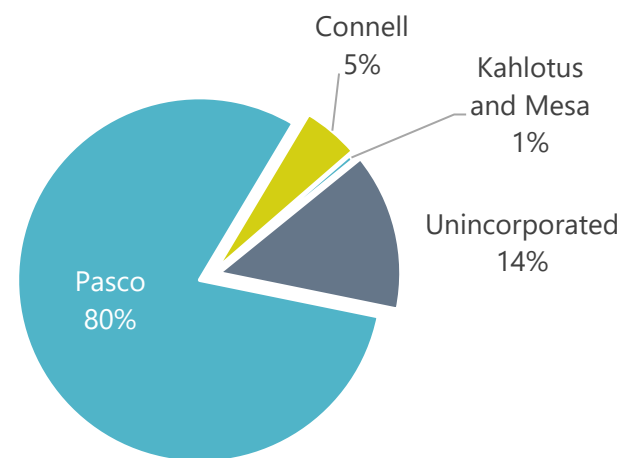


Figure 2: Geographic Population Distribution, 2024

Table 2: Population Counts in Franklin County, by Geography (OFM Estimates)

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Franklin County	87,053	88,515	90,036	92,626	94,734	96,749	98,350	99,750	101,100	102,300
Unincorporated	12,873	11,837	12,169	12,925	13,355	13,668	13,990	14,195	14,325	14,360
Incorporated	74,180	77,867	77,867	79,701	81,379	83,081	84,360	85,555	86,775	87,940
Pasco	68,188	70,748	71,892	73,733	75,393	77,108	78,700	80,180	81,280	82,220
Connell	5,378	5,330	5,409	5,415	5,444	5,441	5,125	4,840	4,960	5,175
Kahlotus	176	173	154	151	150	147	145	145	145	145
Mesa	438	427	412	402	392	385	390	390	390	400

Meanwhile the smallest unit from which data can be collected about Eltopia is by its zip code 99330, which includes both the Eltopia and Merrill's Corner LAMIRD. Although the areas demarcated by the Census are much larger than the LAMIRD's LOB, we can use some of this data to differentiate from other parts of the county. We are able to access population data from these places through OFM. Both Basin City and Eltopia, as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau, have about 1,000 residents and are growing or maintaining population. Growth in each area is severely constrained by the LOB, although there are still lands within each of these designated areas that can be (re)developed or subdivided.

These are the two primary unincorporated areas in the County that are mixed residential and commercial, with a built environment similar to a small city, or *Rural Settlement* as they are known in the Franklin County Comprehensive plan, as a LAMIRD type. Nonetheless, these areas only accommodate approximately 2,100 residents in unincorporated Franklin County. It could be interesting to explore why these unincorporated areas are increasing in population whereas the small cities in the county are not.

There are a few categories of information the Census collects that distinguish the Basin City CDP and zip code 99330 from Franklin County as a whole. The Basin City CDP has a higher population share of children under five years old, approximately 24% (verses 13% County-wide). This corresponds to a relatively young median age in the Basin City CDP of 22.5 (versus Franklin County's 31.3), while 99330 also has a higher percentage of older adults, which moderates its median age. Both areas have a higher average family size, but other demographic markers diverge, including income, and Spanish speaking. Please see sidebars for comparisons to the County metrics.¹

¹ Due to the small size of these areas, the data available is the ACS Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

BASIN CITY



About eight miles west of Mesa and I-395, Basin City is an important agricultural community in Franklin County, founded in the 1950s due to newly available irrigation water from the Columbia Basin Project. Despite its place name, Basin City is not an incorporated City, and is unique because it has sewer despite being outside of an Urban Growth Area, since the service was established before the GMA. The primary residential area was platted in the 1960s and continues to see infill development. It is served by a sewer system managed by Basin City Water Sewer District. It diverges from Franklin County in a number of ways highlighted below:

	Basin City CDP	Franklin County
Median Age	22.5	31.3
Average Family Size	4.86	3.64
Population under 5	24%	8%
Spanish at home	89%	46%
Median HH Income	\$72,024	\$84,366
W/out health insurance	25%	12%
Foreign Born	65%	18%

99330: ELTOPIA & MERRILL'S CORNER

The growth of these areas could have ramifications for transportation planning or educational facilities. For example, the Basin City Elementary serves kindergarten through sixth grade (K-6) and has a current enrollment of 336 students. The closest middle and high school are located in Connell, a 25-minute drive away. Eltopia and Merrill's Corner send their students out of town for K-6. Both areas have some daily services, such as a library, grocery store, restaurant, auto parts store, and various agricultural supply companies. Health care, middle and high school, clothing, and other goods and services must be accessed in Connell or Pasco.



Eltopia and Merrill's Corner represent two long-standing agricultural communities in Franklin County. Historic rail service allowed Eltopia access to important markets for agricultural products. Both Eltopia and Merrill's Corner contain multiple commercial businesses along with residences. Industrial uses are also available in each Rural Settlement Area. 99330 aligns more closely with Franklin County overall but is a growing unincorporated area.

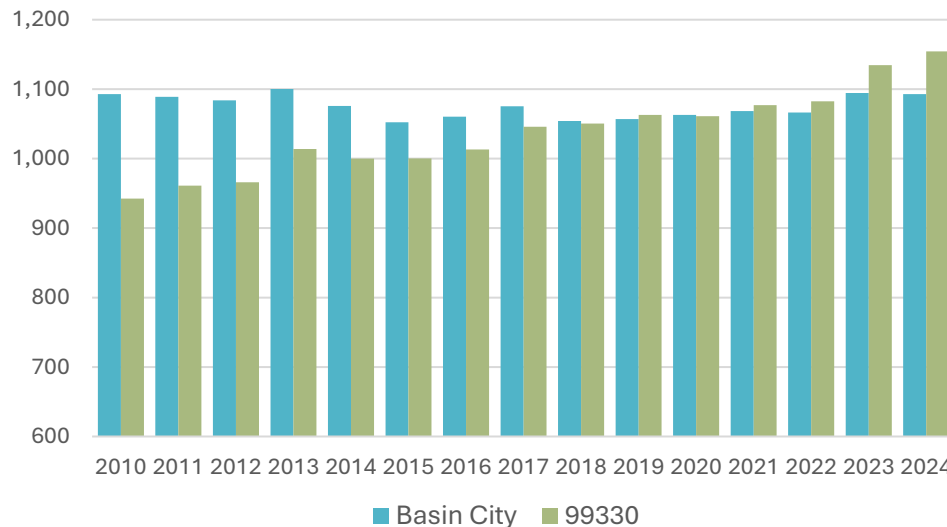


Figure 3: Population of Basin City CDP and 99330 incl. Eltopia

	99330 (Eltopia & Merrill's Corner)	Franklin County
Median Age	32.3	31.3
Average Family Size	4.24	3.64
Population under 5	13%	8%
Spanish at home	29%	46%
Median HH Income	\$135,648	\$84,366
Older Population (65+)	15%	11%
Foreign Born	22%	18%

Migration

We can also track what population growth is due to net migration as opposed to the natural birth rate. This statistic does not distinguish where people are moving *from*, but in a sense, it is a measure of the popularity of a community. Often, population growth from in-migration as opposed to natural increase will bring different demands for goods and services, as the makeup of the population changes. While the rate of natural increases in population remains fairly stable over time, a higher rate of population change in the county aligns with a change in net migration. As we can see from Figure 4, there was a large influx of residents moving into Franklin County in the early part of the 21st century, contrary to the rate of migration into the State overall. This is plotted on the secondary Y axis with migration as a

percentage of the total population. In 2004, the number of people moving to Franklin County was at its highest at 2,900, contributing to 73% of the overall population growth that year. That year also represents the highest overall population growth rate of 6.8%. Conversely, in 2014, there was an out-migration of 779 people according to OFM data collected by the Benton-Franklin Trends project; despite that outflux, the population still grew by 0.6% due to births within the County. Franklin County still continues to see in-migration, which contributes to the overall population growth, but there is strong natural growth as well, as the fertility rate in 2022 (the most recent year for which data is available) in Franklin County is 69.1 versus 53.5 in the State overall.² Nonetheless, migration does account for the years in which there is a strong overall growth rate.

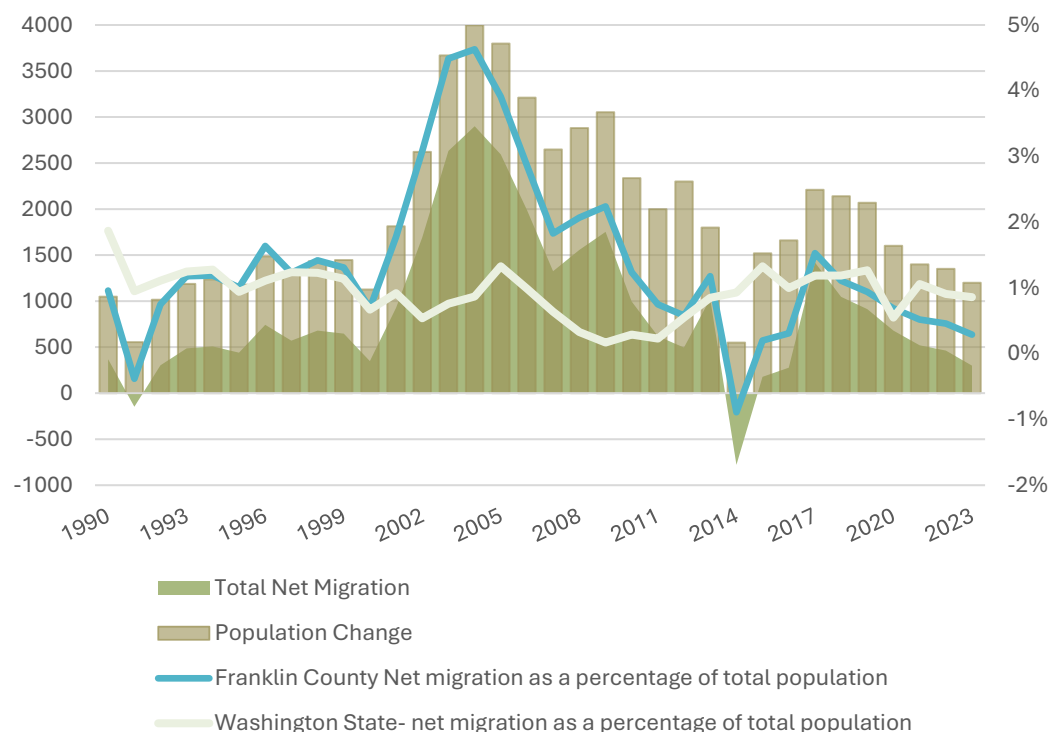


Figure 4: Migration and Population Change

² <https://doh.wa.gov/data-and-statistical-reports/washington-tracking-network-wtn/county-all-births-dashboard>

Age of Population

The median age in Franklin County, as of 2023 is 31.3 years of age, lower than the State median of 38.6. Despite this, it does appear that the population is aging, with the median age increasing from 29.9 in 2017. This is a nationwide trend, with the Baby Boomer generation entering retirement age, and an overall reduction in the birth rate. However, we can observe in the data, as depicted on Figure 5, that Franklin County remains a very family-oriented, young community, with a high percentage of children in the population- approximately 34% of the population is 19 and under. Approximately 20% of the population of the State is in the same age group. It also appears that young adults are remaining in the county through their young adulthood. Studies suggest various reasons for choosing to move, but economic opportunity and housing affordability are often cited as main drivers of migration³, and the steady rate of young adults in Franklin County could indicate that they are finding opportunity in the area. An alternate explanation could be that young families are settling in Franklin County from outside the county, due to housing affordability. Franklin County also has an older professional workforce nearing retirement age. As shown in Figure 5, there has been a 35% increase in those 60-64 years old and a 74% increase of residents 65-69 years old from 2017 to 2023.

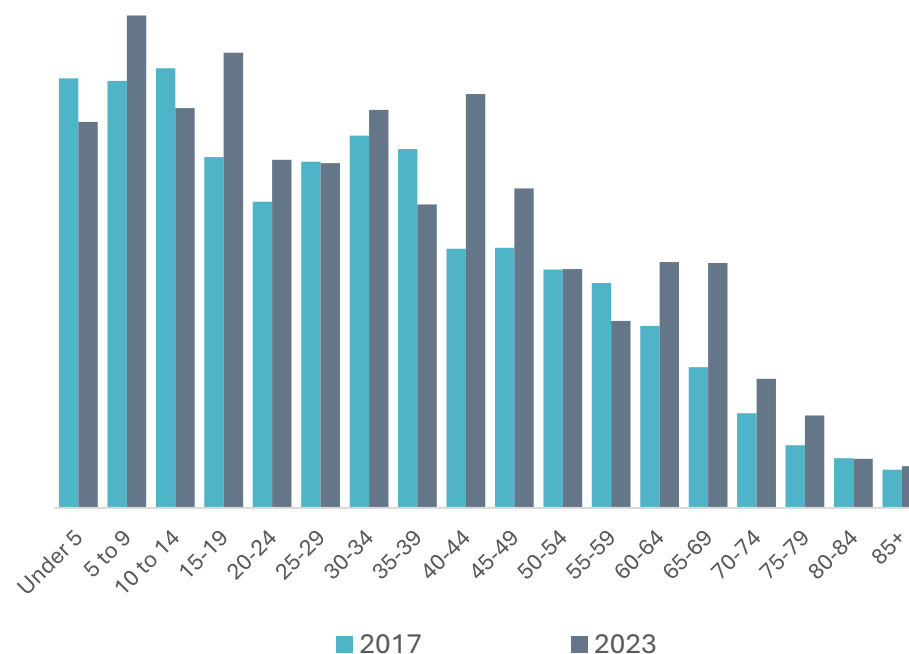


Figure 5: Age Distribution, 2017 and 2023

Households

Figure 6 shows average family size and average household size from 2016 through 2023 in Franklin County. A household is defined as all those living together or alone in a dwelling unit. This includes households with roommates, households with one individual, as well as unmarried couples living together, and family units. Families represent those living together who are related by birth or marriage.

³ <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/who-is-moving-and-why-seven-questions-about-residential-mobility>

Note that family size in this case does not necessarily include every member of the family, rather those living in one dwelling unit together. Both average family and household size has been mostly shrinking slightly since 2016. In the most recent available data (ACS 1-year estimates from 2023), the average household size is 3.12 and the average family size is 3.57 persons. In the same time period, the percentage of households with children has varied between 46% and 51% but has remained at roughly 50% of households. By contrast, approximately 28% of households in the State as a whole contain children under 18 years of age.⁴ Interestingly, we can also see in Figure 6 that the percentage of people living alone has decreased overall from 2016 to 2022, with a rise in 2023. These trends can have ramifications for numerous important social functions, such as school enrollments, healthcare services, and housing types.

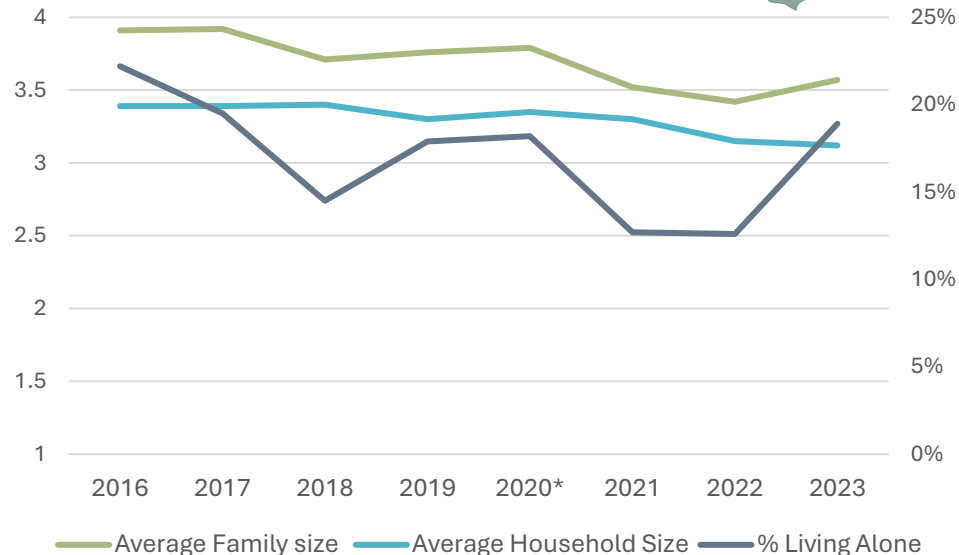


Figure 6: Family & Household Size, Percent Living Alone

⁴ US Census Bureau, ACS 2023 1-Year Estimates, Table S1101.

Race and Ethnicity

Figure 7 shows that in 2023 approximately 52% of the population in Franklin County identified as white, followed by “some other race” (22%), “two or more races” (21%), then Black (2%), Asian (2%), and American Indian (2%). The US Census Bureau collects information about Hispanic/Latino ethnicity separately from race.⁵ Those identifying as Hispanic or Latino, regardless of racial identity are estimated at 55%. The ACS data from 2017 and 2023 indicate that the County is remaining relatively consistent in this population demographic.⁶ Additionally, the ACS estimates show that 56% of native-born residents in Franklin County also claim Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.⁷ Benton-Franklin Trends.org provides an examination of racial and ethnic demographics in the Tri-Cities metropolitan area, and found that Benton County had a substantially lower percentage of those identifying as Hispanic, regardless of their racial identity. In Benton County in 2023, only 26% of residents reported Hispanic ethnicity. This seems to correspond to higher percentages of white residents (67%).

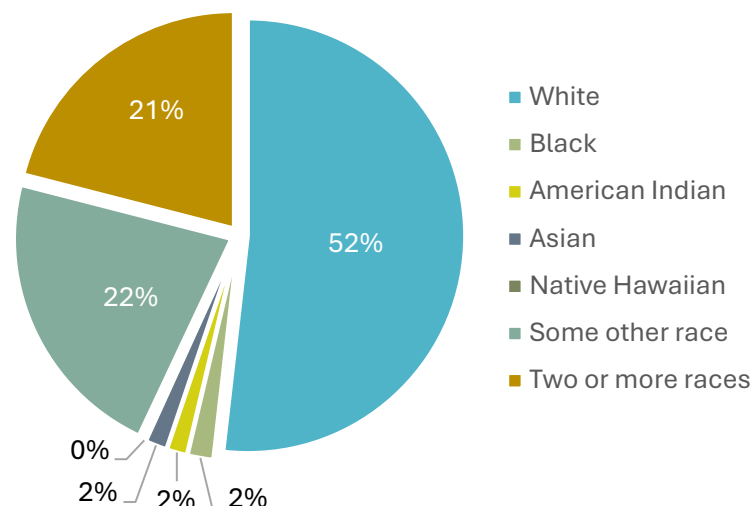


Figure 7: Race Distribution in Franklin County

⁵ Race is seen as primarily physical characteristics, while ethnicity is a cultural identity related to language and other shared cultural markers.

⁶ The Census Bureau notes that there were changes in the design of questions and data processing between the 2010 and 2020 Census (as well as the ACS methodology), which is the likely cause of the increase in those identifying as “two or more races.” They also note that “Some other race” is often indicative of those of Hispanic origin who do not identify as white or another race.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Table S0601

Foreign-Born Population

The percentage of people within a population born in a foreign country reveals a community's popularity among immigrants. The share can vary for many reasons, including proximity to borders or ports, the nature of the labor market, the size of higher education institutions, the size of the migrant community already in the population, and the efforts made by a community to attract immigrants (Benton-FranklinTrends.org). There are a couple different data points offered by the Census in the ACS Community Survey that can tell us about the foreign-born population in Franklin County. Overall, the percentage of the total population who were foreign-born has fluctuated from about 29% in 2011 to 18% in 2023, and does seem to be trending slightly lower, but that could be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated immigration policies. Unsurprisingly based on the racial and ethnic data above, and the prevalence of the agricultural sector, the vast majority of those born in a foreign country have been born in Latin America. Those who were foreign born and not U.S. citizens decreased from 18,216 in 2010 to 12,078 in 2023; a 34% decrease, but we see some variation depending on the year. This translates to 22% of the population in 2010, versus 12% in 2024. Of those foreign-born, between 16% and 36% could be expected to eventually attain citizenship, if the trends shown in Figure 9 continue. That rate is seeing a general increase, despite some years with a reduction⁸.

We can look deeper to understand how well the immigrant population is integrating into and forming new communities within Franklin County. For example, the American Community Survey tracks *when* an immigrant enters the County. The question is

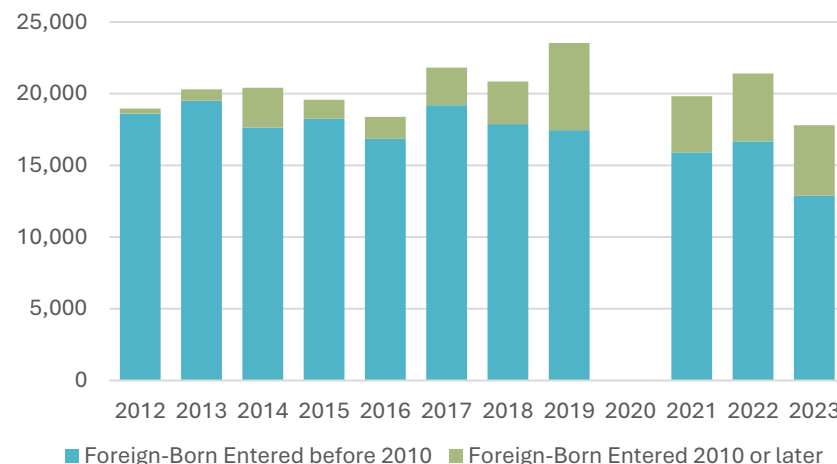


Figure 8: Foreign-Born Residents in Franklin County

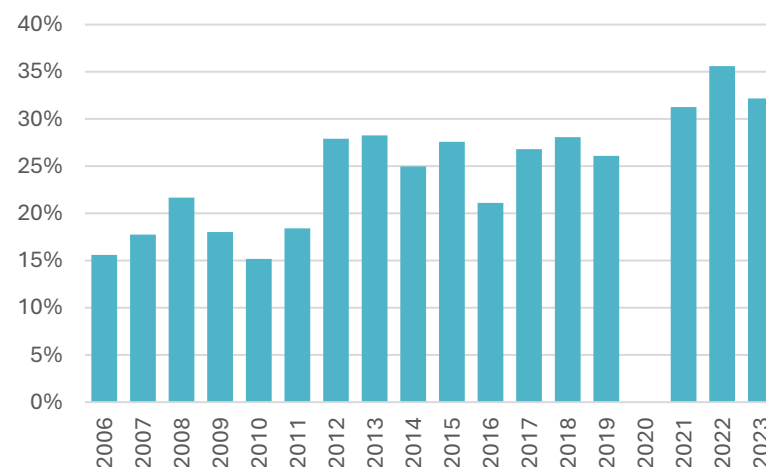


Figure 9: Percent Foreign Born Who Attain Citizenship

⁸ Data was not gathered in 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

phrased as before or after the Decennial Census. In 2012, the survey was tracking whether residents had entered the Country before 2010 or 2010 or later. We would expect that number arriving before 2010 to become smaller the farther away from 2010 one gets, as more immigrants arrive, but the results of the data suggest an established Mexican immigrant community. This type of statistic does not consider internal migration. For example, if someone moved from Franklin into Benton County or vice versa. However, in 2023 the ACS reported 4,921 foreign-born immigrants who arrived in 2010 or later. This represents only 28% of the foreign-born population. Meaning that a little over 70% of those foreign born have been making Franklin County home since at least 2010. In the 13 years since then, this averages out to about 380 people per year. There were some anomalous years, such as 2019, in which 6,086 people were reported to have arrived after 2010, which could indicate a large influx between 2018 and 2019. However, overall, the average holds for the remaining years.

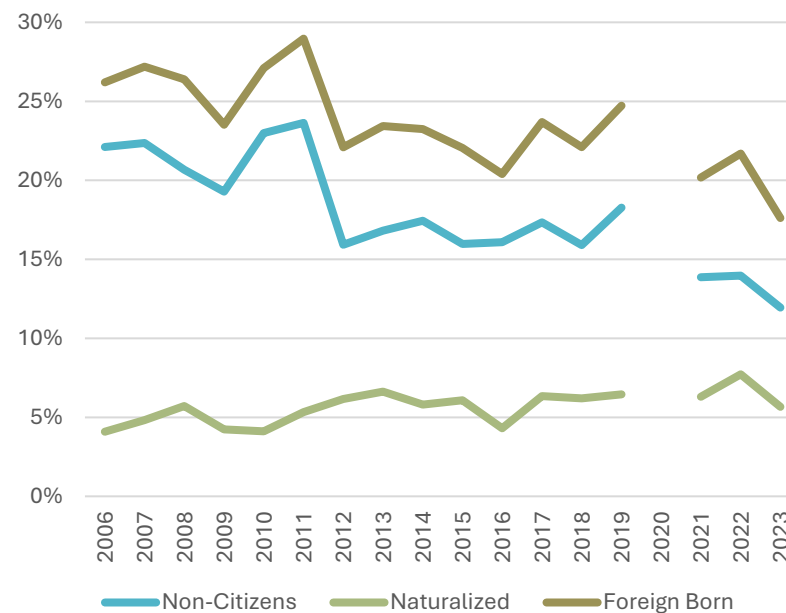


Figure 10: Year of Arrival of Foreign Born

Another way to capture the assimilation process of foreign-born residents is language use. This can have important consequences for public services, such as the education system, community programs and other instances in which communication is important, such as with fire, emergency crews, police and doctors. To illustrate this, the ACS 1 Year-estimates offers data for residents aged five and older who don't speak English at home. This has consistently remained at about 50% of the population from 2014 to 2023. More specifically, 48% of residents five and over didn't speak English at home in 2023. This doesn't directly correspond to immigration status, as the data suggests that those in Franklin County of Hispanic origin, who are also native-born, continue to learn Spanish, presumably by speaking it in the home. In 2023, 44% of those five and older born in the state and currently residing in Franklin County speak a language other than English- overwhelmingly Spanish⁹. An additional data point to add to this comes from the Washington State OSPI, which reports that in the four Franklin County school districts: Kahlottus, North Franklin, Pasco, and Star, approximately 35.6% of students were English as a second language learners. This rate has remained consistent since at least the 2004-2005 school year and ranges from 34% of students to 41% of students depending on the school year, with no discernable trend.

⁹ Table S0601.

ECONOMY

The economic section of this report includes preliminary information about jobs and wages in Franklin County and of Franklin County residents, as well as employers and other metrics for the economic vitality of the county. With broad strokes we can outline some generalities of the economic sector in the county. The goods-producing sector is more dominant in Franklin County than in other developed economies, even neighboring Benton County.¹⁰ This is largely due to the presence of a robust agriculture industry and the associated manufacturing of food products. The sector that trails closely behind is education, social services and health care. There is a distinction between the fields that provide employment, and the sectors that produce the most GDP; this is likely due to the lower costs of agricultural products versus homes for example.¹¹

Table 3: Comparative Economic Statistics, 2023

	WA State	Franklin County
With social security	29%	23%
Mean social security income	\$24,964	\$21,630
Employed in Agriculture	2%	10%
Unemployment Rate	4.4%	5.7%
With food stamps	12%	18%
Median family earnings	\$113,053	\$88,566
Median non-family earnings	\$59,147	\$45,280
Percent of Children living below the poverty level	12%	15%

Wages and income are also lower in Franklin County than both the Tri-Cities region and the state. There are more lower wage jobs located within the county, although we do see that county residents are often employed in higher wage industries. We see a correlation in the data between lower wages and lower educational attainment. However, wages are increasing, and at a higher rate than in Benton County.

The data also indicate an aging workforce, and a consolidation of employers, with an increasing number of workers employed by companies with 500+ employees. Table 3 provides some economic context for Franklin County in comparison to Washington State.¹²

¹⁰ In contrast to most highly developed economies in which the service-sector is more prevalent.

¹¹ Home sales would be included in the Finance, Insurance and Real Estate or FIRES category.

¹² Tables DP03

Education

The educational attainment of people residing in Franklin County is lower than that of the state overall for each level of education (high school graduate, bachelor's degree, and graduate degree). According to data from the OSPI data portal, approximately 77% of public high school students graduated on time. This includes students from North Franklin and Pasco School Districts.¹³

However, data from the ACS indicates that only 36.5% of residents aged 18-24 are high school graduates.¹⁴ This is remedied by the time residents turn 25, with the 79% high school graduation rate we see in Figure 11. This could mean that many residents are gaining their equivalency in later years. This could correspond with a relatively high rate of immigration and non-native English speakers.

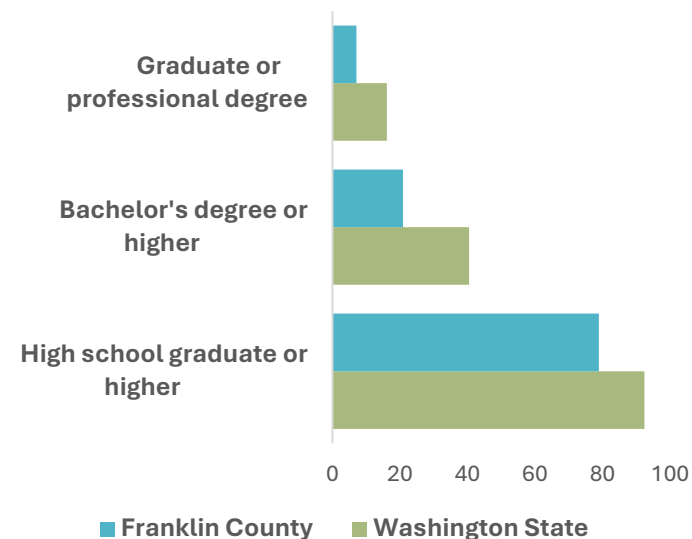


Figure 11: Educational Attainment (percent)

¹³ Data sourced from Benton-Franklin Trends

¹⁴ Table S1501- Margin of error listed at +/-10.7%

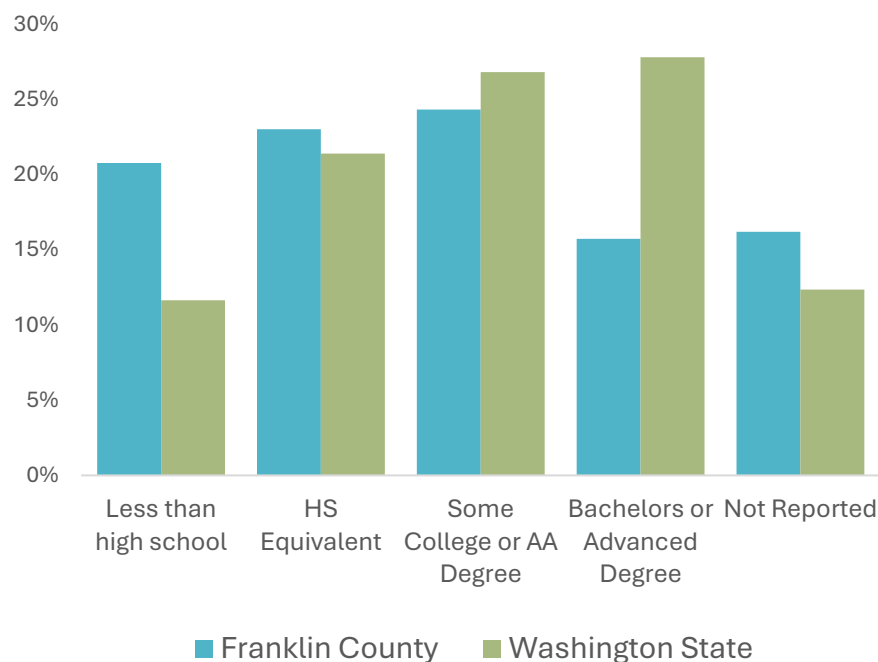


Figure 12: Education Required for Jobs

But it is clear that educational requirements for employment differ between Franklin County and the state overall; both a higher demand for roles which do not require a specific level of education, as well as a reduced demand for employment requiring higher education levels, as seen in Figure 12.

We see a much bigger difference in the levels of attainment for bachelor's and graduate degrees. National studies have consistently shown a correlation between higher educational attainment and increased incomes, professional mobility, and improved health outcomes. Benefits to the local communities of higher incomes can include increased tax revenues, less reliance on government financial support, and increased quality of civic life. A well-educated labor market is also key to attracting and retaining knowledge-based industries, which are coveted by many communities. In the following sections, as we examine the economic data, we'll see that most of the top five industries in Franklin County are not industries that typically require advanced degrees. This is further supported by data from the Census Bureau's Center for Economic Studies.¹⁵ This statistic measures available jobs in Franklin County, and what kind of degree, if any, is required to perform this job. Surprisingly, given the technological changes since the year 2000, required education levels have not changed in a significant way; so, they aren't shown here.

¹⁵ As presented by Benton-Franklin Trends.org.

Labor Market

Labor market participation rates are similar for Pasco, Franklin County, and the State. Approximately 65% of those over 16 are in the labor force. This number is reduced if we account for only female residents, which in 2023 was estimated at 57%. Franklin County is considered a “Distressed Area” due to high unemployment, by the Washington State Employment Security Department. This means that there has been an unemployment rate greater than 5.4%. However, this seems to be showing improvement, as the most recent County data indicates the rate has fallen to 4.6% as of December 2024.¹⁶

The age distribution in the workforce provides more context for the pool of available workers. Data show Franklin County has an aging workforce. This indicates there will be a need for replacements in the near future, as workers transition into retirement. This is particularly true of industries in which there is a great deal of institutional knowledge to be transferred. As workers remain in the workforce later in life, this can have an impact on the opportunities available to younger workers and can delay the start of their careers. This is a nationwide trend¹⁷ and can have a variety of causes, including rising cost of living and insufficient retirement income. In this case we see an 85% increase in those aged 55 and over as a share in the workforce from 2000 to 2023, as well as a decrease in the share in all other age categories.

Table 4: Age Distribution of Workforce

Workforce age group	2000	2023
14-24	17%	14%
25-44	48%	42%
45-54	22%	19%
55+	13%	24%

¹⁶ Washington State Employment Security Department

¹⁷ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/12/14/the-growth-of-the-older-workforce/>

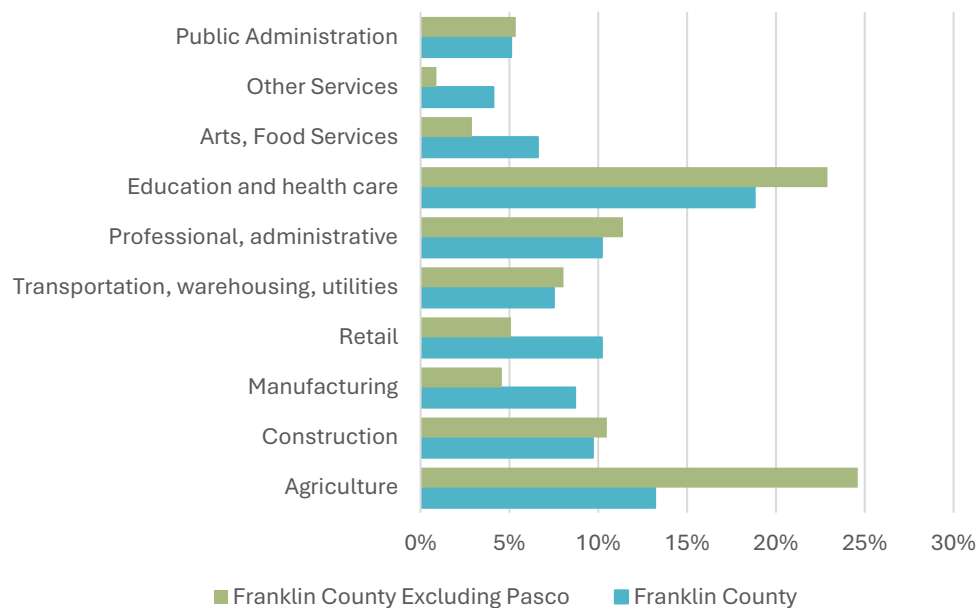


Figure 13: Distribution of Employment by Industry- 2022

Next, we consider what industries are present in Franklin County, Figure 13 shows the 10 most prevalent industries in which Franklin County residents (over 16 years of age) are employed. The top industries employing Franklin County residents are agriculture, education, health care and social services, government, manufacturing, and the retail trade.¹⁸ If we exclude Pasco from this data, agriculture, education, and health care industries become even more dominant. Regardless of the industry, employment at larger privately owned firms has been on the rise. Since 1993, the share of employees working at firms with more than 500 employees has increased from 25% to 39%, and the trend appears to be continuing.¹⁹

¹⁸ This is data from the Washington State Employment Security Department, which differs from the ACS and OnTheMap data regarding government and educational sectors. In the State data, I believe they include public school teachers under the category of Government, whereas in the Census and OnTheMap, education is either considered as part of health care and social assistance, or as its own category, "Educational services" respectively.

¹⁹ Benton-Franklin Trends, via U.S. Census Bureau: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics

When considering overall economic activity, we can also examine the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) attributable to Franklin County activities, among the top 10 industry types.²⁰ GDP is calculated by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. This measure is often used to measure the health of an economy. GDP includes wages paid by businesses, personal consumption of goods and services, investments by businesses such as buildings and equipment, government spending, and net exports.

We see that in Franklin County, government spending (“Public Administration”) accounts for the highest percentage of GDP by industry, at 15%. By contrast, in Benton County, Government spending accounts for 11.4% of GDP. In Benton County the private services sector accounts for 4.5 times the goods producing sector. In Franklin County, services account for only two times the amount of goods; today’s advanced economies are generally heavily weighted towards services as opposed to goods. This is another indicator of the County’s strong agricultural sector, including food manufacturing, which is considered “manufacturing” as opposed to agriculture, but is still included under the goods producing umbrella. This is not surprising, given the land that is needed to produce agricultural products, but it further demonstrates the dominance of agriculture countywide. Another takeaway is that government spending is contributing proportionally more to Franklin County GDP than the Tri-Cities region more generally.

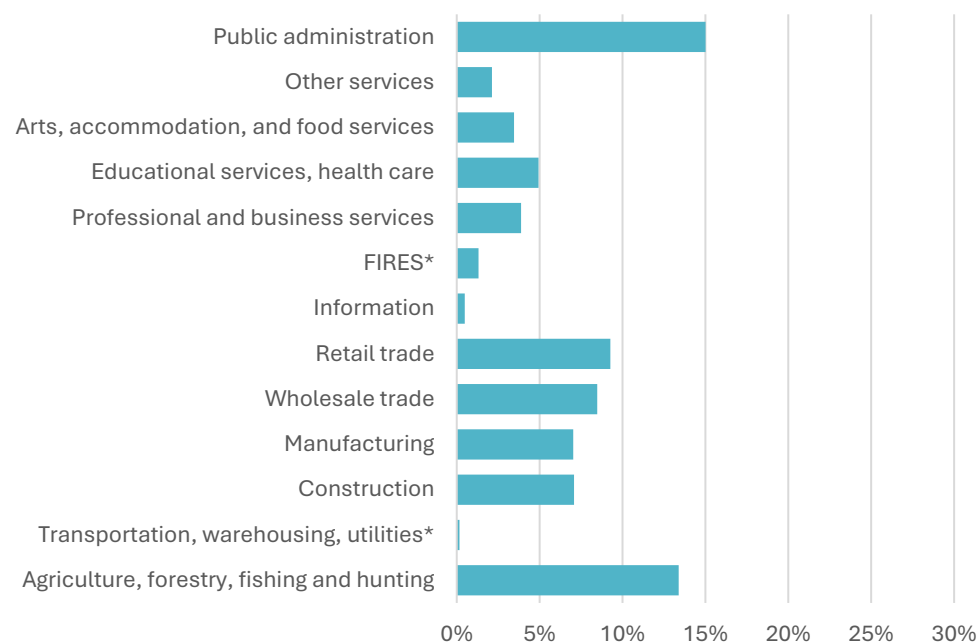


Figure 14: Share of GDP by Industry, Franklin County, 2022

²⁰ Some data in “Transportation” and “FIRES”(Finance, Insurance and Real Estate Services) was unavailable.

The US Census Bureau maintains another tool for data visualization, called OnTheMap. This tool is a partnership between the Census and all 50 States, plus the District of Columbia. There are some slight differences in data from the 1-year ACS estimates that are used in most of this report. This tool delineates between the location of a job versus the location of a worker. According to this in 2022, Franklin County had 33,402 jobs located in the County, whereas there were 41,346 residents in Franklin County with jobs²¹. A total of 28,661 residents live in Franklin County but work outside the County. Meanwhile, 20,717 residents are employed in Franklin County but living elsewhere. There are 12,685 Franklin County residents who also work within Franklin County. There are more people living in Franklin County than working, which may have implications for tax revenue, but also traffic flows and transportation systems, and could also indicate the relative affordability of Franklin County versus neighboring Benton County.

The US Census Bureau tool, On the Map also shows us the top destinations workers are commuting to and from. In the most recent data available, roughly 50% of both residents of and workers in Franklin County are commuting between Pasco, Kennewick, Richland, and West Richland. Additionally, about 30% of commuting is occurring outside of cities and census designated places, which indicates commuting to or from rural areas within the County.

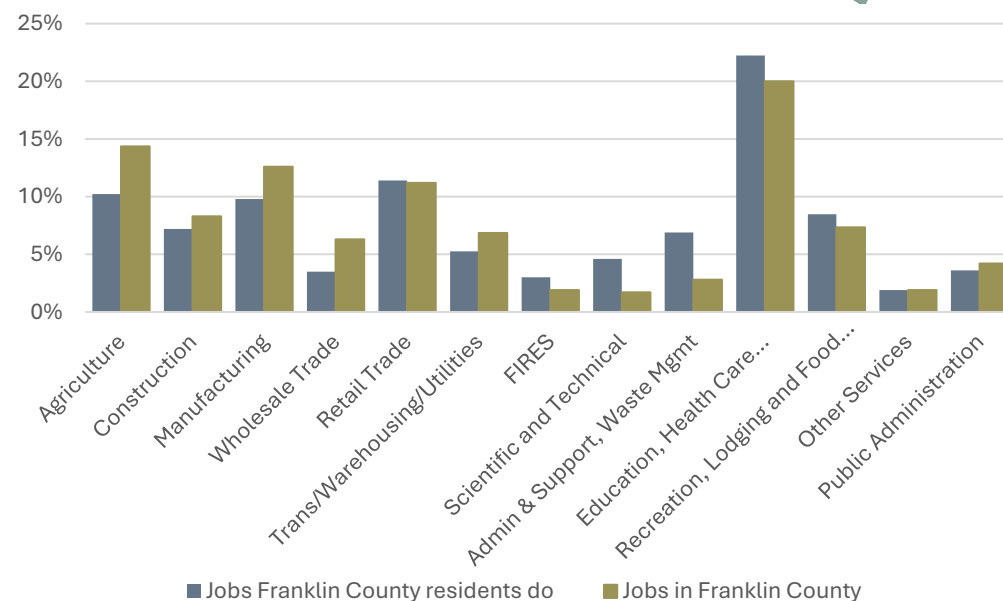


Figure 15: Share of Jobs by Employment Sector

²¹ The most recent data available.

Agriculture

Since agriculture is such an important economic sector and is particularly important for future land use designations and patterns, it calls for a closer examination. Roughly 73% of Franklin County's land mass is engaged in agricultural uses on 751 farms; 586,594 of 795,000 acres.²² The average farm is 781 acres in size, roughly 58% larger than the farms in Benton County but comparable in size to those in Yakima and Walla Walla counties. Roughly 57% of that farmland is irrigated, which has decreased by 19% since 1997.²³ Production of the top five high value crops – apples, potatoes, sweet corn, onions, and grapes- has decreased by 25% in total acreage since 2002, and currently occupies approximately 10% of total agricultural area. The total value of agricultural production was a little over \$1 billion in 2022; with each farm contributing on average about \$1.35 million. The average wage for agricultural workers (in nominal, non-inflation adjusted dollars) has increased from \$28,206 to \$40,463 or about 46% since 2016, which is equivalent to the

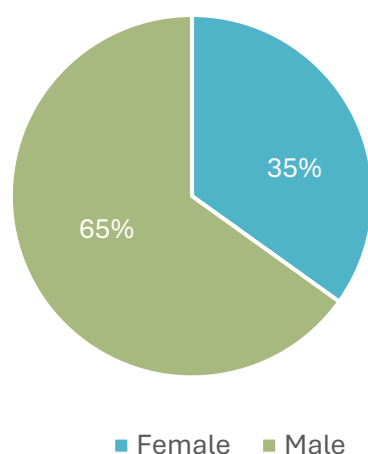


Figure 16: Gender of Producers

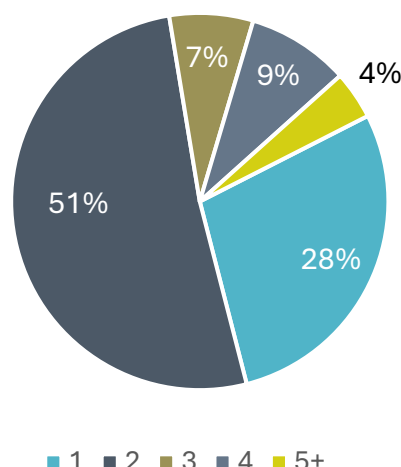


Figure 17: Number of Producers per Farm

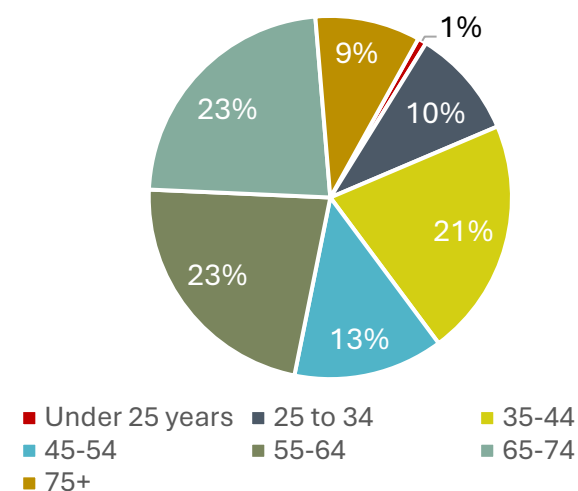


Figure 18: Age of Producers

²² Found in Benton-Franklin Trends, but the data is from the USDA's agricultural census, which occurs every 5 years. Link: [USDA Census](#).

²³ Found in Benton-Franklin Trends, from the USDA's agricultural census.

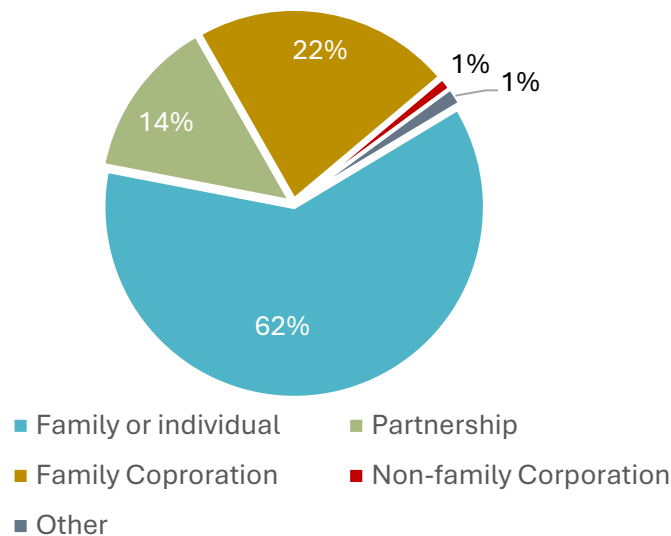


Figure 19: Ownership Type of Farms

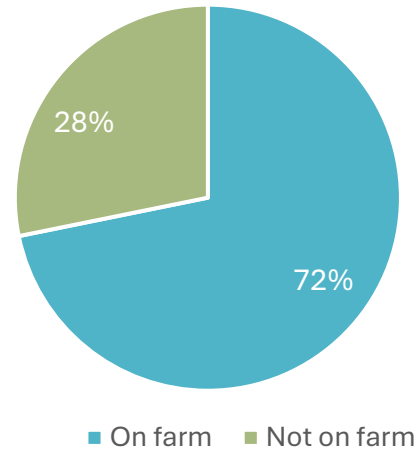


Figure 20: Residence of Producer

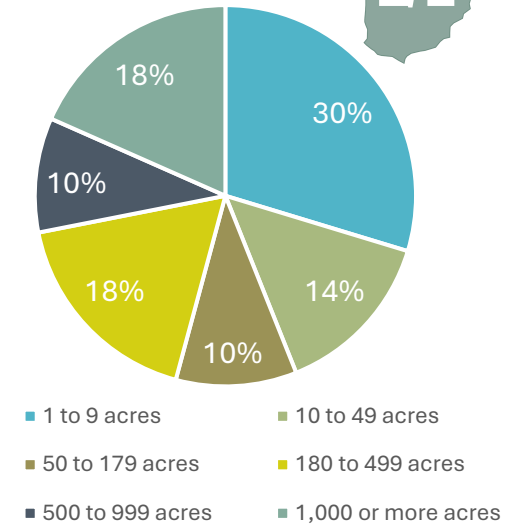


Figure 21: Farm Size

increase in overall average wage (44%), although wages for agricultural workers are still lower than the overall average for workers in Franklin County. The USDA census provides us with a look at some basic demographics of what they refer to as “producers” and data on the farms themselves. The data show that about half of the farms in Franklin County are what might be referred to as “small farms.” Sixty-two percent of farms are family owned- farms, with 72% of producers living on the actual farm. This is important as small farms support the competitiveness and sustainability of rural and farm economies. They help keep farm revenue in the local economy as well.²⁴ However, the average age of producers (55 years), is troubling, and is older than the average age of the population overall. The continuation of existing farming practices depends upon future generations being willing and able to take over. The 2022 USDA Census identified only 119 Franklin County farms as “young producers,” these farms were working about 7% of the agricultural land in the county. Efforts could be made to ensure continuing interest and profitability in farming as a profession, as studies have shown that when economic returns are favorable, more farmers enter the profession.²⁵ There could be opportunity to energize younger farmers by engaging female producers, who are still underrepresented in the field at 35% of total producers.

²⁴ <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/topics/small-family-farms>

²⁵ <https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2024/05/age-of-us-farmers-not-a-problem.html>

Income

Income is generally measured as median household income. Median refers to the midpoint of earners- meaning that half of households earn more than that, and half earn less. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) then collects data for a metropolitan area, this measure is referred to as Area Median Income (AMI). This practice is meant to differentiate areas of higher incomes and is then used to determine the appropriate rent limits set by HUD for affordable housing, as well as indicate overall economic prosperity for an area. This metric differs wage data presented by Benton-Franklin Trends, who also offer inflation-adjusted wages, with the base value of 2012 applied to every year.

These indicators provide insight into incomes in Franklin County. Both wages and income are lower than that of the State overall. Adjusted for inflation, they have increased by 20% since 2010, while in the state, wages have increased by 28%. Median income was approximately 53% higher than average wages in 2023 which could be attributed to a higher percentage (approximately 77%) of family households and presumably many of those have two incomes. That ratio has remained consistent over time. As mentioned in an earlier section, Franklin County residents are more likely to be employed in higher income industries, such as scientific research/ management or the finance, insurance and real estate services (FIRES) sector, than are present *within* Franklin County, which is over-represented in lower wage jobs. The data also show

Income versus Wages

Income is the total of all earnings including investment income, income from sources other than wages such as rental income. It can also include social security, disability and unemployment. Income is measured at the dwelling unit.

Wages are payment for work. Data for wages do not include the self-employed, military, students living on campus, or Native Americans working on reservations. Wage data is taken at the place of employment.

Table 5: Income Measurements in Franklin County, 2004 vs. 2023

Measure	2004	2023
Per capita personal income	\$22,667	\$48,029
Median Household income	\$42,029	\$84,366
Average annual wage (2012 dollars)*	\$33,257	\$41,459
Average annual wage	\$27,362	\$55,021

the wages are higher in Benton County than Franklin County, however, wages in Benton County are growing at a much slower rate (1.2% in constant dollars) than in Franklin County or the state overall. This is a positive sign for Franklin County's economic future. We also observe in the data, that when adjusted to 2012 dollars, wages are not keeping pace with inflation.

We can see in Figure 23 how income distribution has changed since 2018 in nominal terms. The data shows that the share of households earning \$75,000 or more has increased by 55% from 38% of households to 59%. What could be worrisome, is that the percentage of those earning less than \$25,000 hasn't improved, despite inflation since 2018. Someone earning \$25,000 in 2018, adjusted for inflation using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation calculator would need to be making \$30,270.07 to keep pace with inflation in 2024.

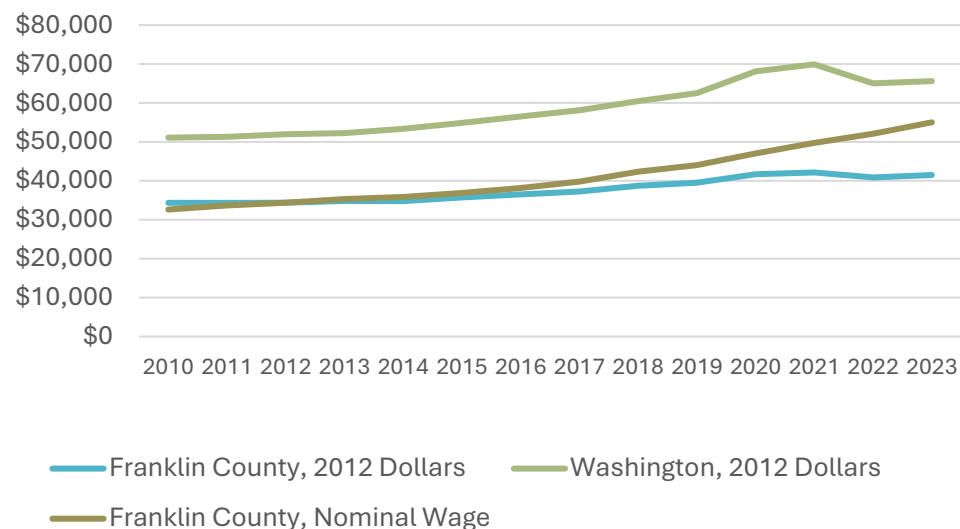


Figure 22: Wages; Franklin County vs. Washington State

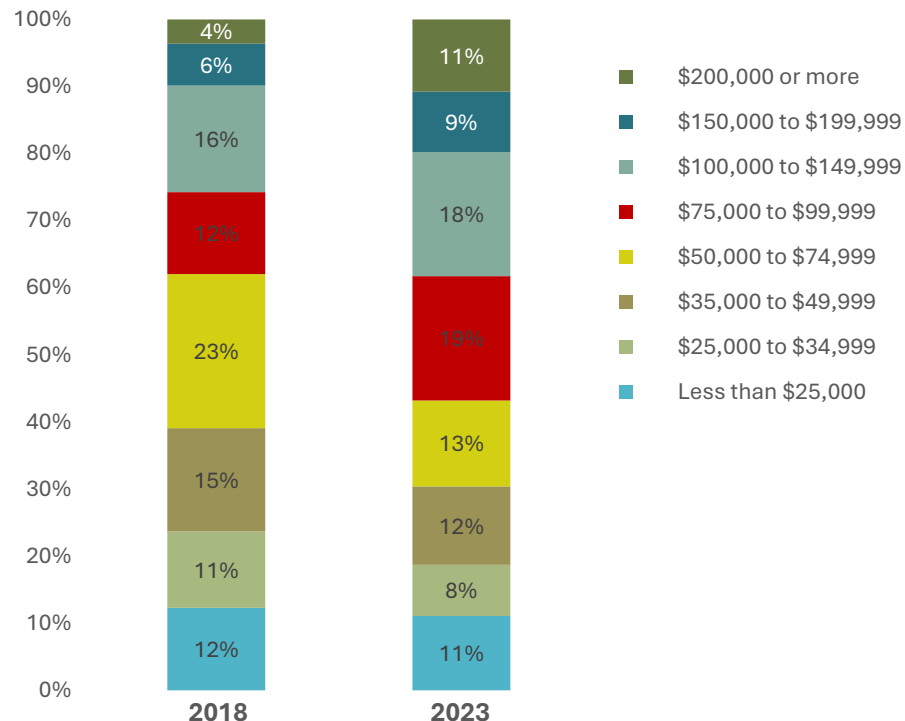


Figure 23: Income Distribution in Franklin County

Income distribution among communities can provide clues about labor markets, household composition, and economic opportunities. There are numerous economic studies indicating excessive income inequality is harmful and increasing in the United States. Furthermore, wage growth has been higher amongst higher income households since the 2008 recession.²⁶

What we see in the data that Franklin County reflects these changes, albeit in small ways. The share of top earners (\$200k+) has increased by 175%, while the bottom of the income distribution has shrunk by only 8.3%. It should be noted that a percentage of the people earning \$25,000 or less will be those not working, but living off retirement income, social security, or savings.

²⁶ "Regional Economist" article available on the St Louis Fed website: <https://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/regional-economist/april-2016/measuring-trends-in-income-inequality>

Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>

HOUSING

According to data provided by OFM, Franklin County has 31,954 housing units as of 2024. Housing units in Pasco increased from 18,782 to 26,315 between 2010 and 2024. Meanwhile, housing units in Franklin County have increased from 24,423 to 31,954.

Growth has been concentrated within Pasco, and in addition annexations of unincorporated areas have occurred by the City of Pasco.²⁷ Housing production in the rest of Franklin County has been modest; there has been 188 housing units added since 2020 which lie in the present unincorporated areas, after annexations are factored in.

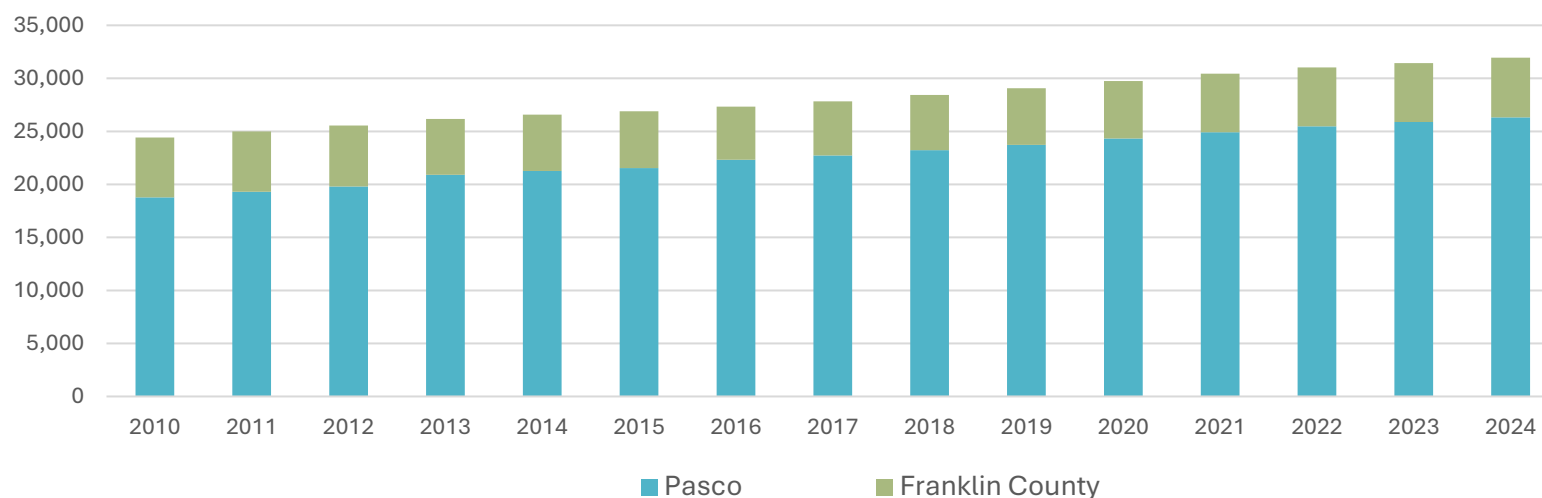


Figure 24: Total Housing Unit Count by Year

²⁷ Through annexation Pasco has increased in size by approximately 8 square miles since 2010 (or approximately 5,090 acres).

Figure 25 shows the existing housing types in Franklin County. Detached, single-family homes are the most common unit type, at 72% of the housing stock. This is corroborated by ACS data, further delineating housing types, as in Figure 25. The second most common unit type is in a structure with 10 or more residences, followed by mobile homes. The data also show that houses tend to be larger in Franklin County. As seen in Figure 25, half of all homes are three bedrooms (51%), followed by four-bedroom houses which make up 19% of the housing stock. This aligns with the larger average household size (3.12). However, if household size continues to trend lower, we would hope to see more smaller dwelling units added to the market.

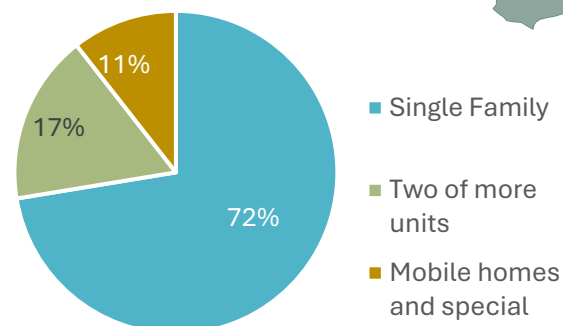


Figure 25: Housing Types in Franklin County

Source: OFM

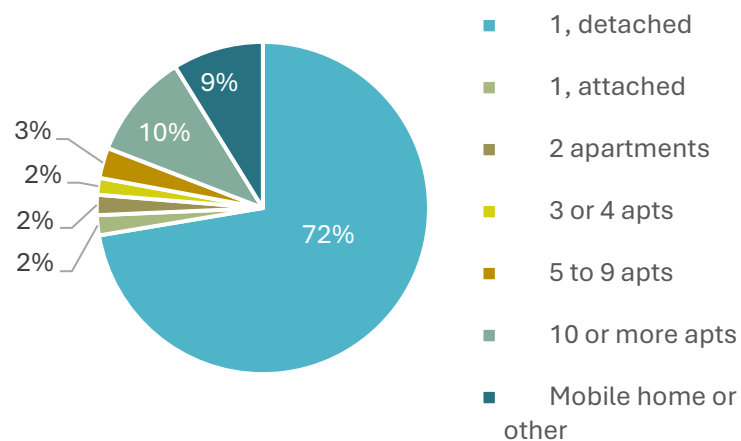


Figure 26: Franklin County Housing Units, Distribution of Homes by total housing units present in the structure

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates, 2023

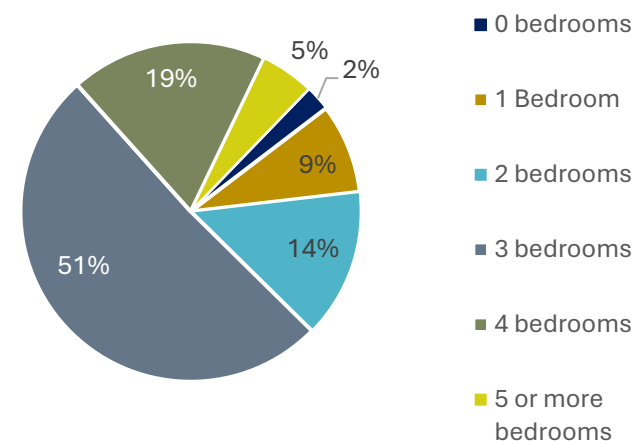


Figure 27: Franklin County Housing Units, Distribution of Homes by number of Bedrooms

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates, 2023

The age of structures is another consideration that can aid in determining future needs for Franklin County. We can see that the county saw strong unit growth starting in the year 2000, and 61% of units were constructed after the banning of the use of hazardous materials, such as asbestos and lead paint in homes.

Permit data tracked by WCRER show that since 2010 there has been a 30% increase from the 24,423 units which corresponds to a 30% population growth in the same time period. We can observe in Figure 29, that residential permit activity is at a higher rate than the State in most years since 2001. The ability of the market to keep up with the pace of demand, could be one reason affordability measures are still more positive in Franklin County than the State overall. Most of the additional housing units continue to be single-family units, but multi-family units show an increase in particular in years in which the housing market sees price increases.

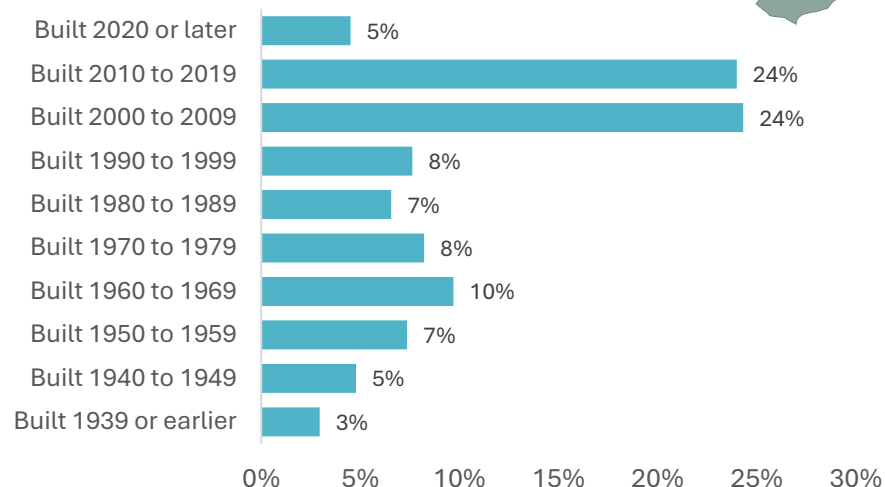


Figure 28: Franklin County Housing Units, Distribution of Homes by Year the Structure was Built

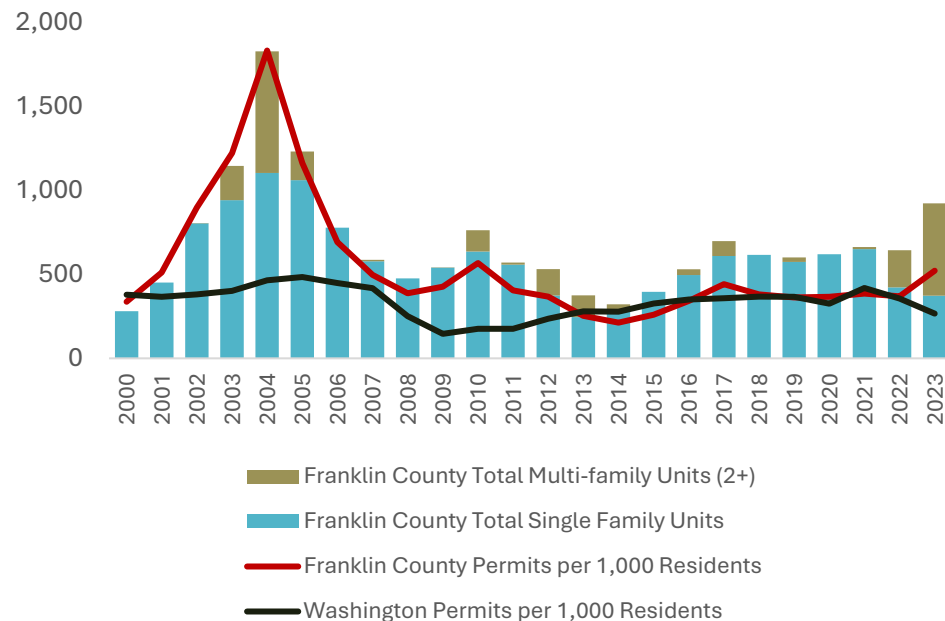


Figure 29: Residential Building Permits

Tenure

Tenure refers to whether a household occupies a unit they own or rent. High homeownership rates have traditionally been seen as a policy goal, with the benefits said to include a greater sense of stability, and higher levels of community involvement. Purchasing a home is usually the most important purchase in one's lifetime and requires a substantial and continued financial investment. High homeownership rates often correspond to higher income households. This is evident and shown in Figure 29, with 26% of owner households earning \$150,000 or more. Conversely, only 7% of renting households have equivalent income. Additional correlations with owner households are found in family type- 58% of owner households are married couples (versus 41% of renter households); and age- 24% of owner households have a householder who is 65 or over (versus 9% of renter households). Figure 30 shows that although we see a greater incidence of two-person households as owners (31% of homeowners) and a correspondingly higher one-person rate of renter households (23% of renters), we do still see fairly equivalent percentages of larger families in rental and ownership housing tenures. Perhaps surprisingly, we find that about 50% of householders under 35 to be homeowners, (33% of under 35 in the State), and the share of owners under 35 is about 20% (versus 11% in the State). These have both remained fairly consistent since at least 2013. That is contrary to what appears to be happening nationwide, with young people delaying homeownership due to high costs. This is a strength for Franklin County, and certainly is contributing to the status as one of the fastest growing counties in the state. However, it could lead to increased needs for services, such as education, recreational sites, and other infrastructure as young people settle in the county.

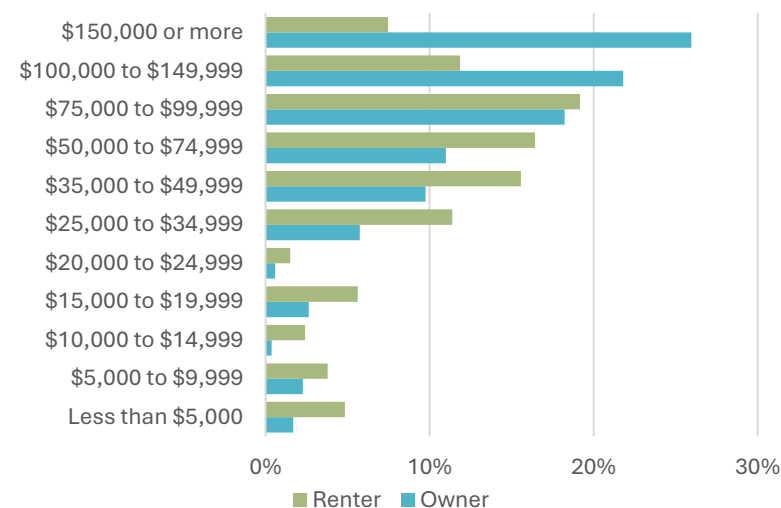


Figure 30: Tenure by Income



Figure 31: Tenure by Household Size

Homeowners

Franklin County has a high rate of homeownership, hovering around 66% since 2007, with a slight decline in 2010 and a slight increase in 2021. We can see in Figure 32 that this is slightly higher than the rate in both the state and the United States. The data show us that homeownership rates are higher amongst higher income households, unsurprisingly. About 30% of current homeowners do not have a mortgage, which could be contributing to a reduction in cost-burdened homeowners- approximately 20% of homeowner households were paying 30% or more on housing costs which has decreased from 33% in 2006.²⁸

Renters

About 34% of Franklin County households are renter households. We can see from Figure 33 that although variable, approximately 24% of renter households are considered “cost burdened” or paying more than 30% of their income on rent, and approximately an additional 15% are paying more than 50%. This statistic has remained fairly consistent from 2017 to 2023, despite worsening housing affordability. In 2021 we began to see high increases in median home prices, but the temporary improvement in the rate of cost burdened may have been influenced by a couple of COVID era circumstances; these trends may be attributable to increased wages due to the stimulus program, and changes in household make-up as people moved back in with their families.²⁹

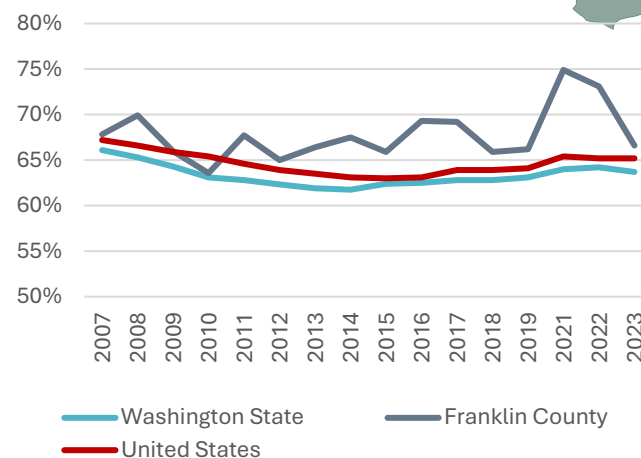


Figure 32: Homeownership Rate

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates, data missing for 2020

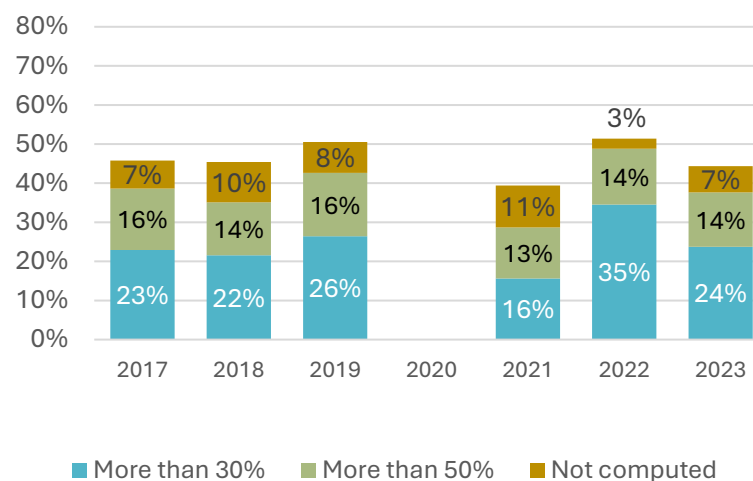


Figure 33: Gross Rent as a Percentage of Income

Source: ACS Table B25070

²⁸ ACS Table B25091

²⁹ [Pew Research Center: About a fifth of U.S. adults moved due to COVID-19...](#) , [The Guardian: Adults Moved Home...](#)

Market Affordability

Affordability is commonly measured differently when considering a home purchase or rental housing. A housing market is a delicate balancing act, reflecting a vast number of inputs. An unaffordable market may also mean that it is more difficult to attract and retain workforce talent, that subsequent generations of families may not be able to settle where they grew up, and increasing housing costs can apply upward pressure on wages. Alternatively, a stagnating price can signify to developers that there is sufficient demand in an area and the creation of new units slows.

The University of Washington Center for Real Estate Research (WCRER) maintains a housing market database. Their research for home sales relies on Multiple Listing Service (MLS) data. Figure 34 shows that Franklin County's median home prices have remained below the state prices overall since at least 2017, and they appear to be leveling off faster than the statewide figure. Nonetheless the median home sale price has increased 78% since 2017 which may be driven in part from increased energy code requirements in new construction³⁰.

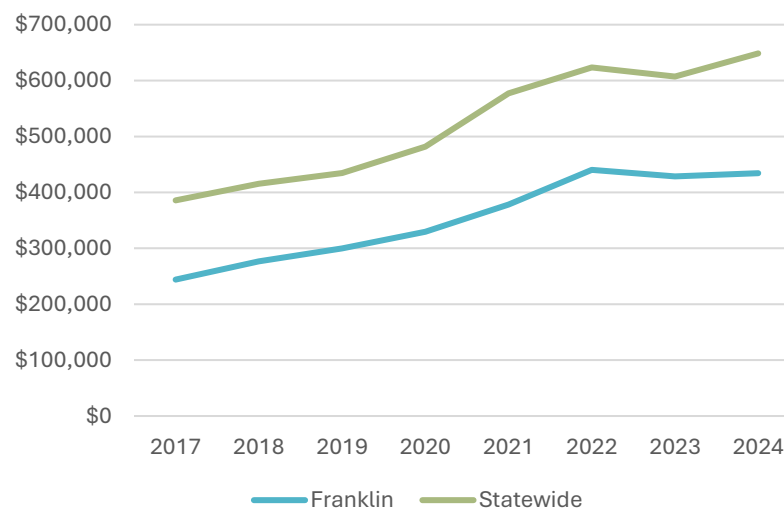


Figure 34: Median Home Sale Price

Another data set the WCRER monitors is a Housing Affordability Index (HAI). They use sale price data obtained from MLS and income data from Census' ACS Estimates along with data from the OFM and US Bureau of Labor Statistics. They delineate between median home buyers and first-time homebuyers. For the median income home buyers HAI they are tracking those earning AMI at and presumed to be purchasing the median priced home, while for first-time home buyers there is an assumption that they will be younger, and/or lower income at 85% of AMI. Additionally, the home is also assumed to be 85% of the area's median home price. A central assumption behind the index is that a household does not spend more than 25% of its income on principal and interest payment. When the index is at 100, the household is paying 100% of this amount towards housing. When it lies above 100, it is

³⁰ Median income has increased by 31% in the same time period.

paying less. Therefore, a number above the benchmark of 100 indicates affordability. For the median buyer, Franklin County has been well over 100 since 2009, only once dipping below, in the second quarter of 2022. Since Franklin County is still growing, is younger than the state median age, and a family-friendly place, looking at first-time home buyer affordability is a good way to measure how attainable it is for younger adults to be permanently settling in Franklin County.

For first time home buyers the picture looks a little different than for the median buyer, as shown in Figure 35. Since 2016, it has been unaffordable for the average first time home buyer to purchase a residence they are able to afford. Affordability plummeted during the COVID-19 era when a percentage of the workforce became untethered to their place of employment and had the access to capital and low interest rates to buy larger or more remote homes. Plus, with record high property values, existing homeowners had equity to balance out the increasing costs. Additionally, constrained supply of building materials meant that construction costs ballooned. Both the HAI and the median sales price appear to be leveling out, but a much higher new normal price could lock first time homebuyers out for several more years. This is important because homeownership often allows families build wealth; entering the market later means there is less time to pay off the mortgage, accrue equity and save for retirement. Furthermore, a situation in which a high percentage of buyers are purchasing in a high-cost market, means that policies that act to keep housing prices high are more likely, maintaining an unaffordable market for future buyers.

Rental prices in Franklin County have also increased. There are a number of different data sources pertaining to rent. HUD provides a metric called "fair market rent" which is a term that describes gross rent estimates for privately-owned, decent, and safe rental housing. It also includes all tenant-paid essential utilities. HUD classifies the units by number of bedrooms and over a metro area. The ACS 1-Year Estimates also provides median contract rent. This measure does not account for unit type or quality. Lastly, the WCRER

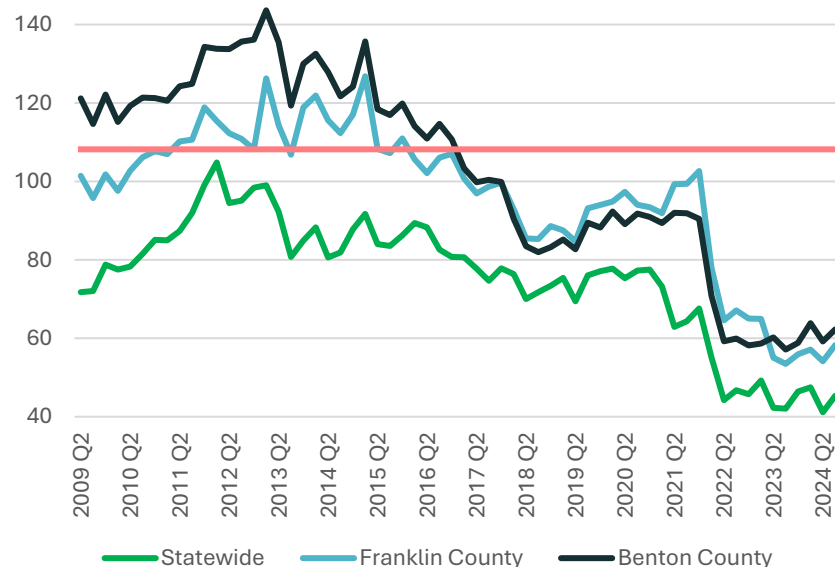


Figure 35: First Time Buyer Housing Affordability Index

provides average rent using CoStar data, which also does not account for unit type. Each have increased by more than wages or income; but ranging from a 46% to an 80% increase since 2017.

From 2017 to 2023:

- *"Fair market rent" for a 3 bedroom has increased **69%***
- *Contract rent has increased **46%***
- *CoStar rent data tracked a **53%** increase*
- *Wages since have increased **38%***
- *Median Income has increased **31%***

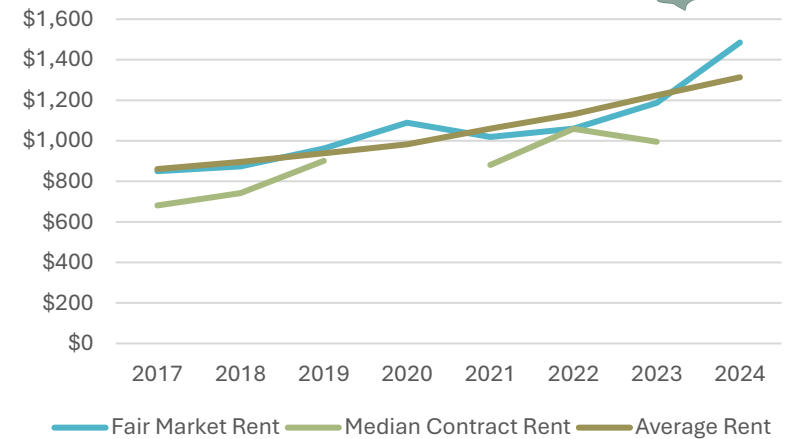


Figure 36: Rent Costs

Vacancy Rate

The rental housing vacancy rate is another indicator for the health of the rental housing market. The ACS indicates a rental vacancy rate of approximately 3%, while the University of Washington's Center for Real Estate Research (WCRER) sites a 4.2% rental vacancy rate³¹ averaged over the year 2024. A low vacancy rate indicates a high demand for housing and can often indicate that housing prices are increasing due to short supply. A vacancy rate around 5% is considered ideal for a healthy housing market.³²

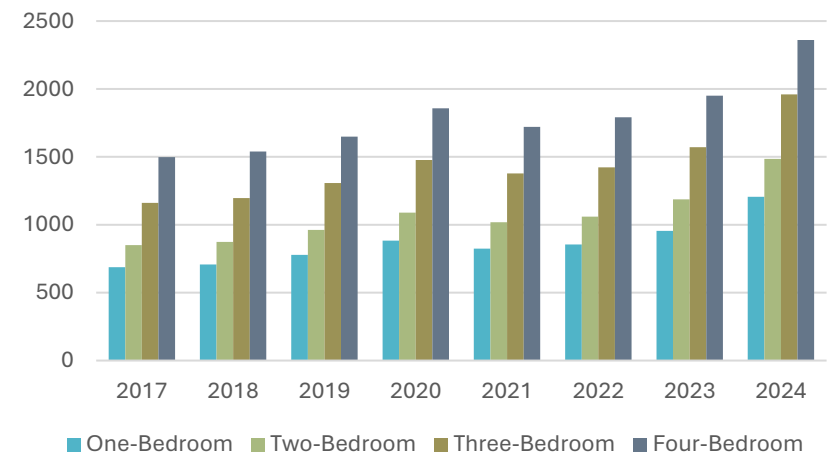


Figure 37: Fair Market Rent by number of Bedrooms

³¹ <https://wcrer.be.uw.edu/housing-market-data-toolkit/apartment-market-reports/>

³² WCRER: *State of Washington Housing Report*, 2024.

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