

# Mason County/City of Shelton Housing Needs Assessment -2003

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment has been undertaken in an effort to better understand the broad range of housing needs that are experienced by the many service providers, organizations, and governmental agencies on a daily basis. These entities often times have a common sense of recognition and understanding of the needs of an individual or a population group. However, they are frequently limited in their ability to express this need to other individuals or groups such as funders or decision-makers. A key component that has been missing to date is the availability of data that adequately depicts the needs and provides verifiable information that is typically obtained in day-to-day contact with service providers and clients.

The information presented in this report is based on broad range of information. Data presented on housing information has been collected from the census department. Additionally substantial information has been obtained in community meetings with service providers, agency representatives and the general public. Surveys have also been conducted of neighborhood housing conditions, and of needs of special groups such as the Hispanic community.

### POPULATION

The population of Mason County as a whole has been increasing consistently over the last two decades. County population in fact has out-paced the growth rate of the State. In isolating the County from the City of Shelton, however, it becomes evident that significant majority of this growth has been channeled into the unincorporated portions of the County.

Furthermore, a review of the age composition of the population reveals that the county's population is consistently represented by the 25-44 age group, indicating that new families have been moving into the unincorporated portions of the county, presumably in search of affordable housing. The geographical areas receiving the largest portion of this growth has been the northern county communities such as Belfair and the South Shore/Mason Lake areas.

While the population as a whole has been growing, the character of the population has also been changing. Ethnicity has becoming more diverse, particularly with regard to increases in the Hispanic/Latino community.

## ANALYSIS OF NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding analysis of needs has indicated some dramatic disparities between the population groups in need of housing resources and the facilities and associated available to accommodate their needs. With approximately 1,076 clients being served annually by domestic violence agencies, for example, there are still an estimated 16 families turned away each month. Other areas of disparity that are apparent from the data presented include the following:

- **Homelessness** - Approximately 370 individuals are reported to be homeless at any one time in Mason County. However the precise number is unknown due to lack of resources to accurately monitor or track this population. In addition, there are no permanent supportive service units in Mason County to accommodate the disabled homeless.
- **Chemically dependency/substance abuse** – An estimated number of 1 in 5 individuals in need is receiving care. This segment of the population typically has substantially greater difficulty in receiving appropriate housing services.
- **Elderly** –Several facilities are available to accommodate a range of housing needs in the elderly population in Mason County, including assisted living and subsidized housing. However the elderly still represent a substantial portion of the rental population.
- **Developmentally Disabled** – No specialized housing facilities are available to the developmentally disabled in Mason County.
- **HIV/AIDS** – No specialized housing is available to the HIV/AIDS population in Mason County.
- **Mentally Ill** – No supportive housing services are available to this population in Mason County.
- **Move-up housing market** – The housing market remains strong in Mason County as well as the City of Shelton, with a substantial number of homes being offered for sale below the \$100,000 level. Yet approximately 25% of the renters in the City of Shelton and 21% of renters in the County continue to pay 50% or more of their household income for rent. This and other data indicate that while low cost housing is available, it remains out of reach to many renters. Likely reasons for this disparity include lack of assistance in obtaining down payment, repair of poor credit history, or general information in the home-buying process, particularly among those with language or cultural differences.

Housing issues experienced by individuals or families are often times not limited to only one of the need categories identified above. As is often the

case, an individual will have multiple issues including medical, economic, and social, which when combined, act to exasperate the urgency of their housing needs.

For this reason, successful solutions to the housing needs are not likely to be the result of programs, activities, or other measures enacted by any one agency or organization. The most effective solutions will instead demand the concerted and coordinated effort of a combination of the many organizations currently working to address the housing gaps.

The following strategies are recommended as tools to address these and other housing issues that arise in Mason County and the City of Shelton. Many of these recommendations are the result of suggestions brought forth by service providers in Mason County. While these recommendations cover a broad spectrum, it is by no means a definitive list. Service providers, public agency representatives, and citizens have offered many other possible solutions that are also worthy of consideration.

- Encourage economic development activities as a means of alleviating housing gaps
- Review and modify City and County land use and zoning regulations to enable higher density development in the provision of low-income housing
- Establish a regional database for tracking efficiencies and trends of service providers and their respective client populations
- Continue to develop action strategies through the Strategic Plan being developed by the Mason County Housing Coalition
- Encourage greater use of available State funding programs, including:
  - SB 2060 funds to address homeless needs
  - State of Washington Housing Trust Funds for domestic violence shelters as well as new affordable/low-income housing development
  - State of Washington Office of Community Development grant funding for CDBG multi-jurisdictional planning activities

Invest resources in permanent housing for the homeless as an option to allocating temporary resources such as TBRA or other leasing programs

## **HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

While household income in Mason County and the City of Shelton have both been lagging behind that of the State income levels, they have been rising consistently at the same level of increase as the State over the last two decades. This indicates that, although wages are lower, typical for a rural community, they are still experiencing income growth consistent with other areas.

One factor of importance that has become very evident in this data analysis has been the obvious presence of families living at or below the poverty level, particularly in the City of Shelton. As of 1999, a higher percentage of individuals in the City of Shelton live in poverty (18.8%) than in Mason County (12.2%) or the State (10.6%). The composition of this poverty group further indicates that several pockets of poverty exist both in the elderly and the single parent population groups.

## **HOUSING MARKET**

A review of housing data, both from the U.S. Census data and from local building permits, suggests that the majority of new construction taking place over the last 10 years has been in single-family housing. Because of limiting factors such as the Growth Management Act and local zoning ordinances, higher density multi-family development has been dramatically limited in the unincorporated portions of the county. The result of this has been that the majority of rental housing is available in the City of Shelton, while the majority of single-family homes are found in the outlying county areas. Second home, vacation and recreational rental units largely typify the rental housing that is available in the unincorporated portions of the county.

## **HOUSING COSTS AND AFFORDABILITY**

The value of housing has been steadily increasing in both Mason County and the City of Shelton over the last decade. Along with the general upward trend in the economy over the last decade, this increase has largely been influenced also by the influx of new residents coming into the community from outlying urban areas. The median value of housing in Mason County increased approximately 46% over the last decade, while housing values in the City of Shelton increased approximately 48%.

While home prices have been steadily rising, a substantial amount of affordable housing can be found in Mason County. According to information obtained from the Northwest Multiple Listing Service, over 31% of the homes sold in the County from 2000 to 2002 were priced below \$69,000, and 60% were priced below \$120,000.

Rental units are comparably affordable in both the City and the County, with year 2000 median gross rental rates of \$563 in the City of Shelton and \$579 in Mason County. The statewide median cost by comparison was \$663.

## **HOUSING NEEDS**

In looking at housing needs for low-income groups, the information in this report indicates that there remain a substantial number of households in the low-income categories. According to HUD information approximately 5.6% of all households in Mason County had incomes below the 30% of Median Family Income (MFI) level in 2002, while 10.9% were below the 50% of MFI level. Among renters, approximately 17.6% had incomes below the 50% of MFI level, while 21.8% had incomes below the 30% MFI level.

The percentage of household income spent on housing is also an indicator of need. In the City of Shelton approximately 25% of the renter households reported spending more than 50% of their income on rent. In Mason County, 21% of the households were in this same housing expense category.

## **AVAILABLE HOUSING ASSISTANCE**

Housing services in Mason County are offered through a broad range of supportive providers. In some cases, services are offered through agencies outside Mason County. The largest service segments that are being addressed by the broad range of providers is the emergency housing services and the permanent affordable housing services. While limited in funding, emergency shelter services are provided either through shelter facilities or vouchers.

A total of approximately 898 units are available to all housing populations in need within Mason County and the City of Shelton. These units include Section 8 housing units, both privately and publicly owned subsidized housing, transitional homeless shelters, and housing for either for elderly, mentally ill or developmentally disabled individuals.

## **NEEDS OF HOMELESS PERSONS AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS**

A broad range of unmet needs have been identified for the homeless and special needs populations. The needs range from lack of funding for services to better training for case management. Among the greatest needs identified is that of additional units (beds) to accommodate the day-to-day demand. To address homelessness alone, a 2002 Gaps Analysis identified the current need for an additional 71 emergency shelter units, 96 transitional housing units, and 101 permanent supportive housing units for the disabled.

In addition to the physical facilities, various providers have identified a myriad of key service needs to assist their respective populations. These include:

- Education and training programs for providers
- Greater education, program information and assistance to clients

- Integration of case management services into any new homeless housing resources, and
- Better coordination between various providers to better utilize facilities and funding sources on a shared or mutually beneficial basis.

In beginning to address the needs of the various service providers and their client populations, it is important to point out the need for compiling and sharing reliable data on a consistent basis. The information contained in this report presents a general picture of the baseline characteristics of the housing continuum, and the needs of the associated population groups. To the extent that the housing programs and services continue to be successful will depend to a great extent on the ability of service providers to identify their own internal needs, as well as exchange information on both service needs and strategies for solutions with other providers and funders.

The Mason County Housing Coalition currently plays a strong and vital role in identifying and coordinating this information exchange. It is through their continued diligent efforts in coordinating the diverse but mutually shared needs of individuals and families that the gaps in the housing services will continue to be narrowed.