

**LEWIS COUNTY HOUSING INITIATIVE****February 2022**

The Lewis County Strategic Plan, adopted in October 2020, identified “Housing and Proactive Growth” as the second of five priorities. This priority focuses on filling two gaps:

- 1) The availability and affordability of housing in the rural and urban areas of the county, and
- 2) The lack of local government capacity and tools for facilitating housing growth.

Many communities experience this same problem, but the reasons for it and the solutions necessary to respond effectively can vary greatly. It is essential to gain an understanding of the problem from a local perspective and to craft outcomes that fit local needs. In addition, the needs and solutions will change over time, and the County’s strategy must continuously evolve.

In Lewis County, 70% of the housing stock is single family residential (SFR) and the average sale price of a SFR dwelling increased from roughly \$150,000 in 2012 to over \$350,000 in 2021. The remaining housing stock includes mobile homes (17%), multi-dwelling residential (13%) and other (0.5%), which includes RV and boat. Income levels have also increased in Lewis County; however, the median household income in 2019 was \$58,911, which is considerably less than the state median income of \$78,687. In addition, 24% of the county’s population has a *very low* or *extreme low* income (<50% of Median Family Income).

Housing supply in Lewis County is also low. Between 2012 and 2021, there was a 69% decrease in the supply of homes for sale. In June 2021, the county had only a 1 month supply of housing. Typically, a region needs at least a 4 month supply to moderate housing cost increases. Rental unit vacancy is also low at 4.5%.

Coupling income levels and housing availability, Lewis County residents are facing an increasing household cost burden. The sales prices of SFR is increasing faster than local income levels. In addition, rent has increased faster than wage growth such that the fair market rent of a one-bedroom apartment now costs more per month than a two-bedroom did in 2012. Today, 48% of renter households pay more than 30% their income on housing and 24% pay more than 50% on housing costs. This all means Lewis County residents increasingly cannot afford housing.

For community members in Lewis County the important questions are: What types of housing do you need and where should it be located? For the residential construction industry and community lenders: What market and other local factors influence decisions about building in the urban and rural areas of the county? For major employers and institutions: Where does your workforce live, and is there an unmet need for housing? For the county’s local governments: What approaches and tools should be used to best meet the needs of the community and the residential construction industry to make ensure sufficient and affordable housing options for all Lewis County residents?



## Lewis County Housing Objectives

**Objective 1:** Continuously learn from the community about their expectations and needs for housing.

**Objective 2:** Ensure that everyone has night-by-night shelter and a path to stable and safe housing.

**Objective 3:** Provide affordable housing options at all income levels.

**Objective 4:** Increase rural housing density near existing essential services including schools, medical facilities, grocery stores and transit.

**Objective 5:** Provide public infrastructure improvements to growing rural town centers.

**Objective 6:** Encourage enhanced commercial services and employment opportunities within existing rural town centers.

**Objective 7:** Partner with cities to coordinate housing efforts across Lewis County.

Success will be measured by tracking the following metrics:

1. Percent of multifamily residential, mobile homes and other non-single family residential housing (SFR).
2. Gap between income level and rental housing cost.
3. Rental vacancy rate.
4. Housing sale price.
5. Supply of houses for sale.
6. Persons assisted into permanent housing.

The Housing Initiative is implemented by a 5-year Housing Work Plan. Progress made on the Work Plan will be reported to the Board of County Commissioners annually in February. The Work Plan may be updated as needed, provided the updated or new actions meet the objectives adopted by resolution. Implementation of and updates to the Work Plan are the responsibility of the Lewis County Housing Action Committee made up of:

- County Manager
- Director of Community Development
- Director of Public Health & Social Services
- Director of Public Works
- Budget Administrator, Budget Office
- Staff, as assigned