



**EDC**  
**ISLAND**  
**COUNTY**

# Island County Seasonal Housing Report

*Released May 2022*

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for Island County  
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# Introduction

ISLAND COUNTY is a unique area well known for its exceptional quality of life for Island residents and tourists alike.

Island County enjoys the moderating effects of water and sheltering mountains to provide a mild, temperate climate. Camano Island and, more so, Whidbey Island both benefit from the Olympic Mountains' "rain shadow" effect. Rainfall averages from about 35" per year in South Whidbey and South Camano to less than 18" on Central Whidbey. This contrasts with the yearly average of approximately 40" in Seattle. Freezes are usually light and rarely continue past February.

These and other natural attributes make Island County an ideal destination for vacationers, from its numerous national and state parks—including the most visited state park in Washington, Deception Pass State Park—to its wide offering of outdoor recreation, such as hiking, camping, and boating.

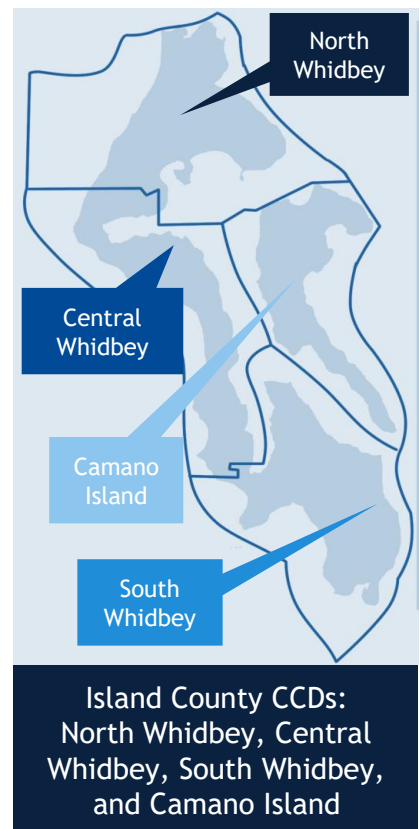
It is well known that Island County has a large number of weekend and vacation homes. Using Census information provides us a rough estimate of how many of these housing units are for seasonal or recreational use. According to Census, approximately 10.8% of the county's housing units have seasonal or recreational use, with the greatest number on South Whidbey, at 21.7%. North Whidbey is the lowest, at 1.7%.

## Source of Information

The primary source for all the information in this report comes from the *U.S. Census's American Community Survey, 2020 5-year estimates* except where noted. The use of various data sets is normal because of the time needed to aggregate and consolidate data for a specific period of time. This data is relevant and allows a baseline from which subsequent years can be compared.

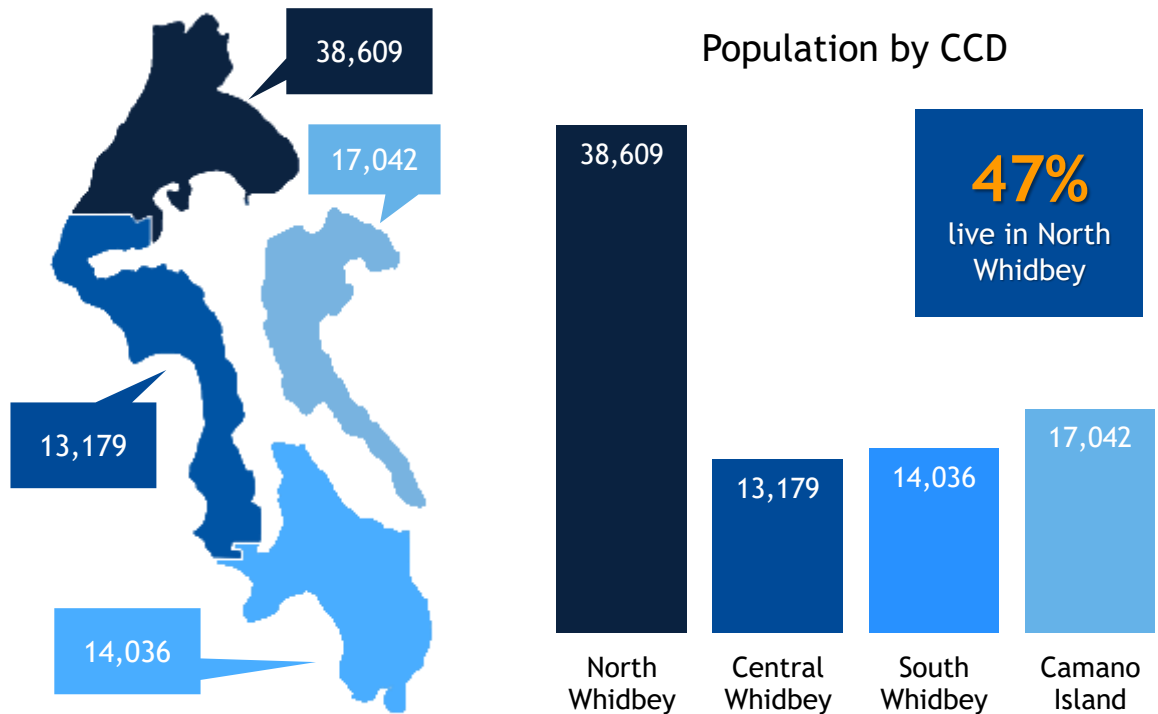
All data is estimated using statistical projections and contains varying margins of error.

Camano Island, North Whidbey, Central Whidbey, and South Whidbey serve as "Census County Divisions (CCD)." A CCD is a subdivision of a county or equivalent entity that is a relatively permanent statistical area established cooperatively by the Census Bureau and state, tribal, and local government authorities.



Island County is comprised of Whidbey, Camano, Ben Ure, Smith, Deception, Strawberry, Minor, and Kalamut Islands, with Whidbey, Camano, and Baby as the three settled islands. Whidbey Island is the 5th longest island in the contiguous U.S.—45 miles long with 148 miles of shoreline. Camano is 16 miles long and has 52 miles of shoreline.

The effect of population size and growth can be positive or negative depending on the circumstances. Large populations have the potential to be great for economic development. Generally, the more people an area has, the more work is done, and the more work is done, the more value (or money) is created.



Total population **87,100\***  
across **208 mi<sup>2</sup>**

Population density  
**419 people/mi<sup>2</sup>**

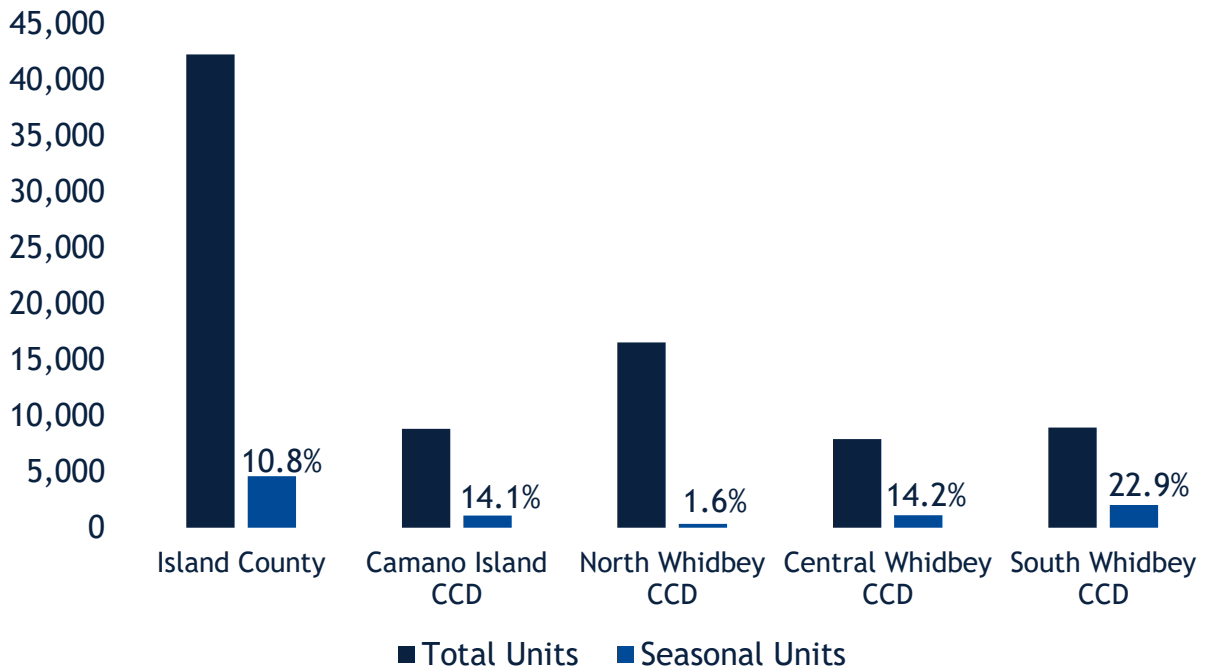
\*Washington State Office of Financial Management, November 30, 2021, official population estimates update.

# Seasonal Housing

Census defines a housing unit as “a house, an apartment, a mobile home or trailer, a group of rooms, or a single room occupied as separate living quarters, or if vacant, intended for occupancy as separate living quarters. Separate living quarters are those in which the occupants live separately from any other individuals in the building, and which have direct access from outside the building or through a common hall.”

Seasonal Housing			
Location	Total Units	Seasonal Units	% Seasonal
Island County	42,270	4,623	10.9%
Camano Island CCD	8,837	1,090	12.3%
North Whidbey CCD	16,542	352	2.1%
Central Whidbey CCD	7,931	1,129	13.9%
South Whidbey CCD	8,960	2,052	21.7%

Percentage of Seasonal Housing

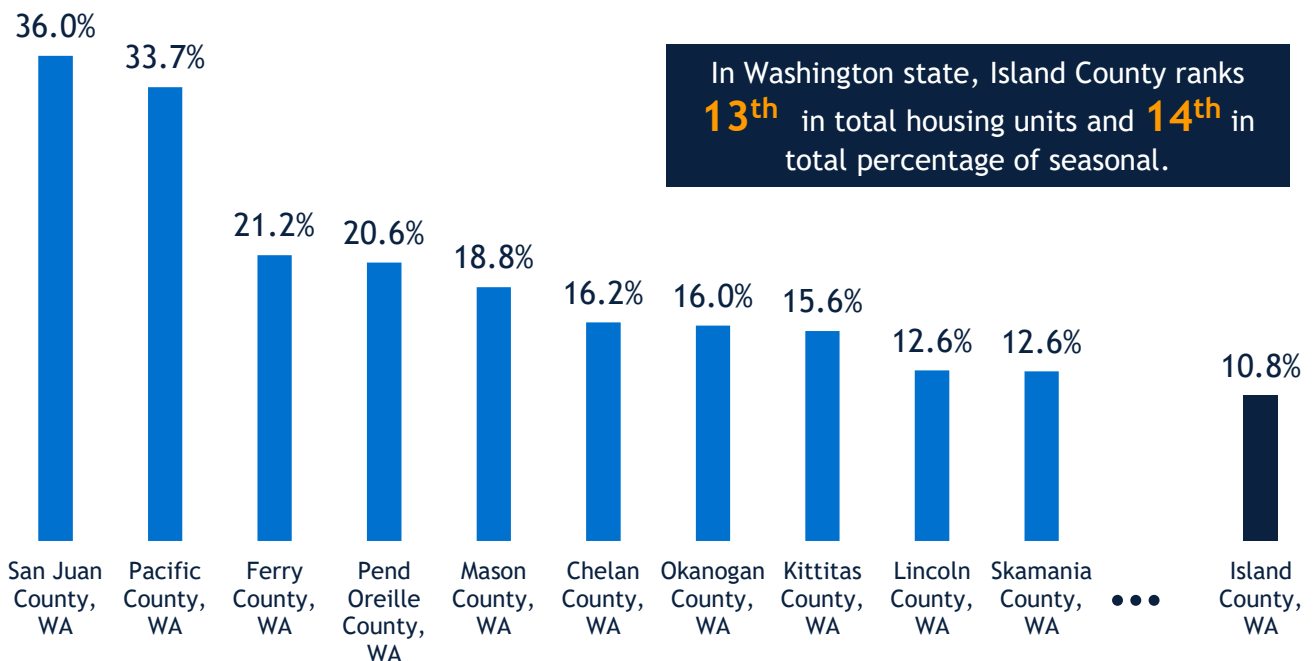


# Seasonal Housing

These charts compare Island County with other locations to gain deeper insight into information. The table below ranks the top 10 counties in Washington State with total housing units compared to seasonal housing and shows where Island County compares.

% Seasonal Housing in Top 10 Counties by Total Housing Units			
County	Total Housing Units	Seasonal Housing Units	% Seasonal Housing
King County, WA	952,344	8,823	0.9%
Pierce County, WA	351,346	3,960	1.1%
Snohomish County, WA	314,090	4,078	1.3%
Spokane County, WA	219,964	2,178	1.0%
Clark County, WA	186,317	1,031	0.6%
Thurston County, WA	118,035	1,104	1.0%
Kitsap County, WA	113,730	2,279	2.0%
Whatcom County, WA	98,000	4,847	4.9%
Yakima County, WA	89,354	1,074	1.2%
Benton County, WA	77,486	634	0.8%
<b>Island County, WA (13<sup>th</sup>)</b>	<b>42,207</b>	<b>4,623</b>	<b>10.8%</b>

Top 10 Counties by Percentage Seasonal Housing Units



# Seasonal Population

The estimated seasonal population change is not provided by Census. However, if the average size of occupied housing is used multiplied by the number of seasonal units the following is the result.

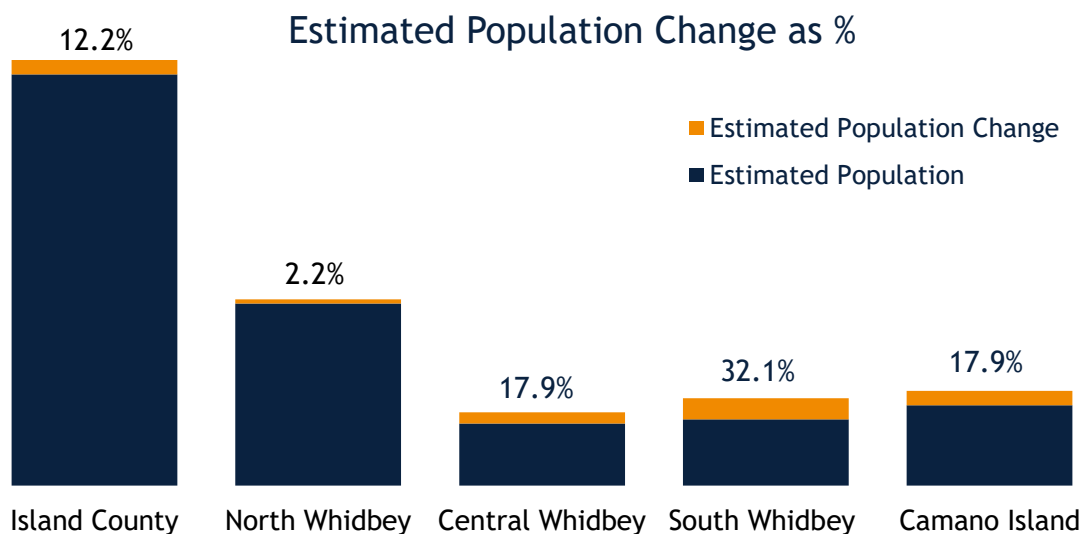
The accuracy of the projected seasonal change is not perfect. While there are margin of error factors, the reliability of these numbers is more accurate than anecdotal assertions.

In Island County, the highest estimated seasonal population change occurs in South Whidbey with an estimated **32.2%**. North Whidbey’s estimated seasonal population change is the lowest at **2.2%**.

## Estimated Population Change

	Island County	North Whidbey	Central Whidbey	South Whidbey	Camano Island
Average occupancy	2.3	2.5	2.1	2.2	2.4
Season Units	4,623	352	1,129	2,052	1,090
Est. Seasonal Change	10,633	880	2,371	4,514	3,046
Est. Population*	87,100	38,609	13,179	14,036	17,042
Est. % Change	12.2%	2.2%	17.9%	32.2%	17.9%

\*Washington State Office of Financial Management, November 30, 2021, official population estimates update.

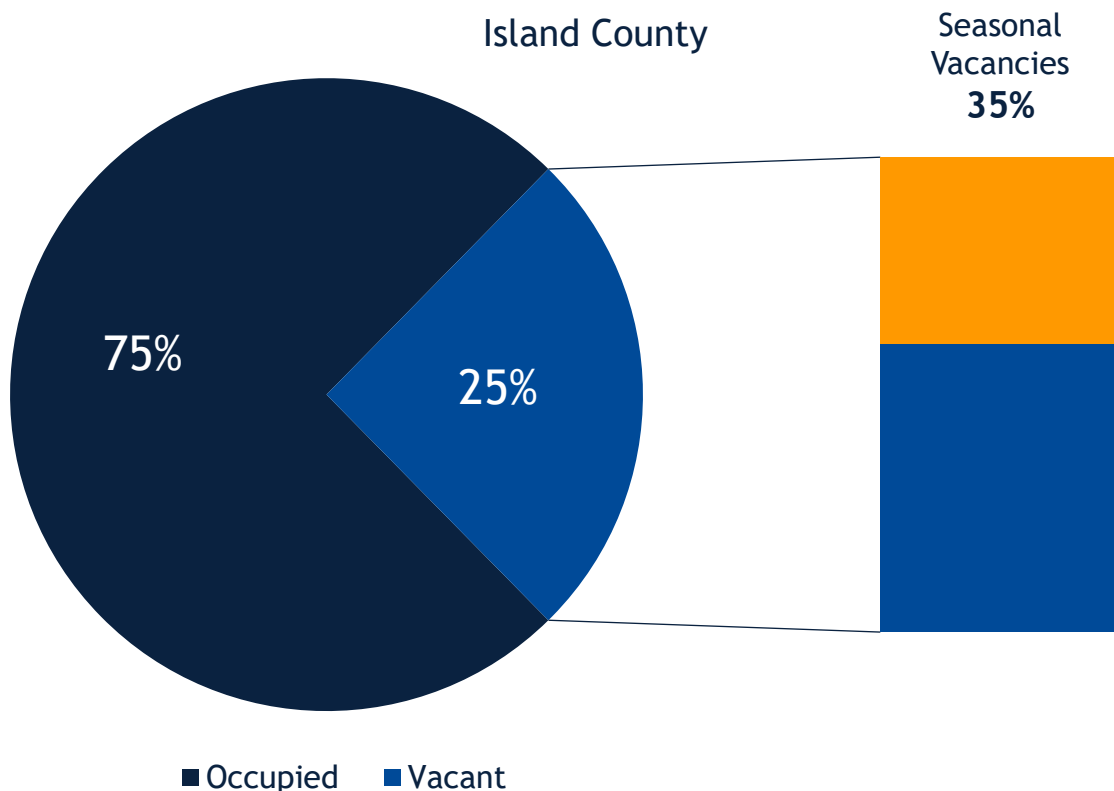


# Vacation Homes

Units that are classified as vacant for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use make up a class that is often referred to as “vacation” homes.

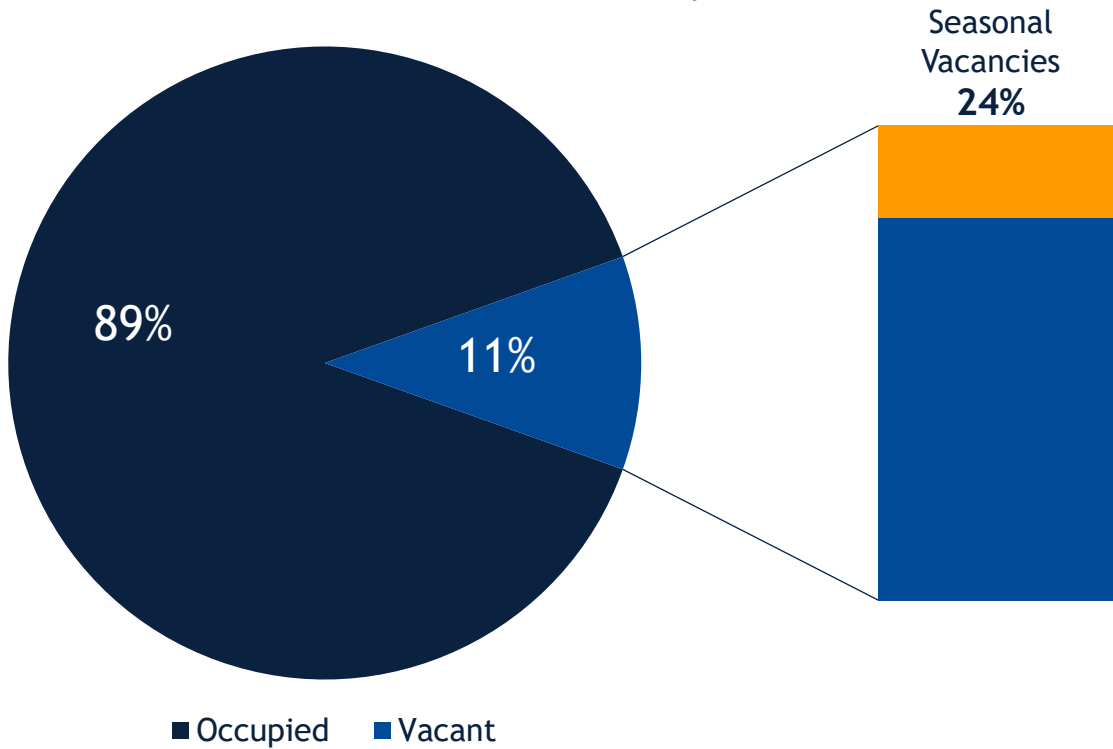
In order to make the vacation home category consistent over the decades, “seasonal,” “held for occasional use,” and “for migrant workers” are combined. The “occasional use” category was not used prior to the 1960 census, which could partly explain a surge in vacation housing in 1960. It is also true that the number of units recorded for this first-time classification in 1960 was very small. Counts of seasonal and occasional use vacant units are separately provided from 1960 to 1980, but they were combined beginning in 1990 because evidence indicated enumerators had great difficulty determining the difference.

Counts of housing units for migrant workers were included with seasonal units before 1990. For comparability, this housing type was added beginning with the 1990 count of seasonal, recreational, or occasional units. Separate counts of migratory vacant units are provided beginning with 1990, for data users who would like to exclude them from the count of vacation homes. The number of units for migrant workers has been very small over the decades

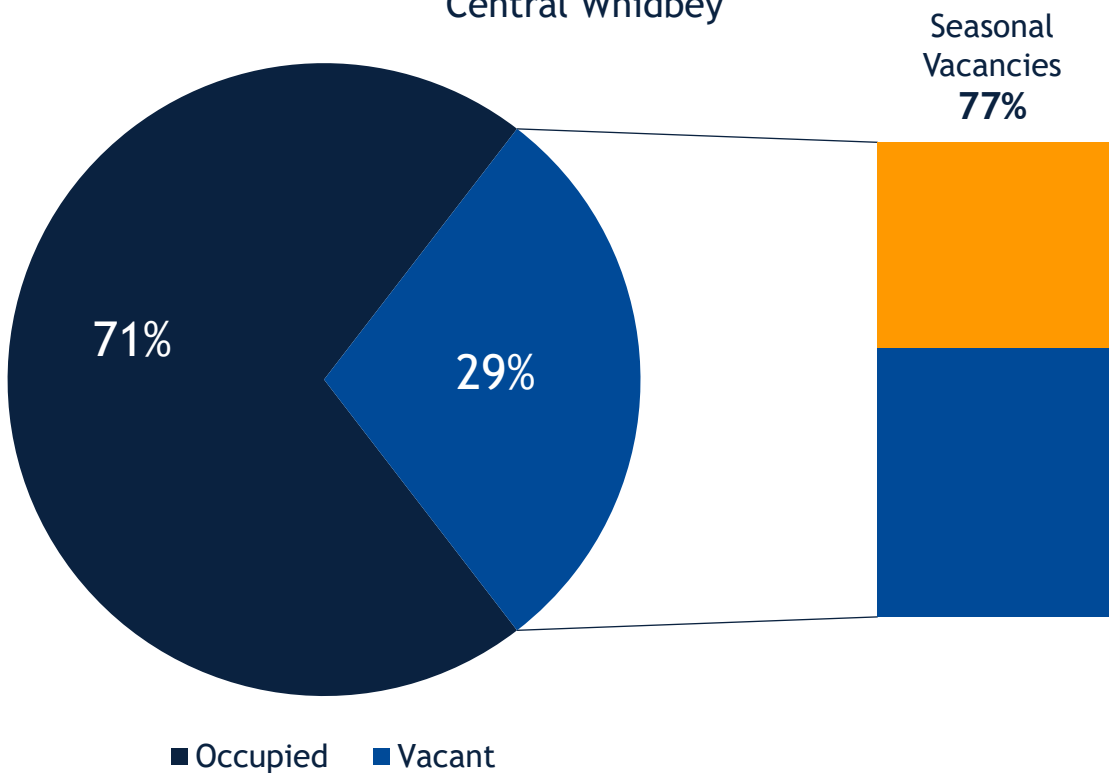




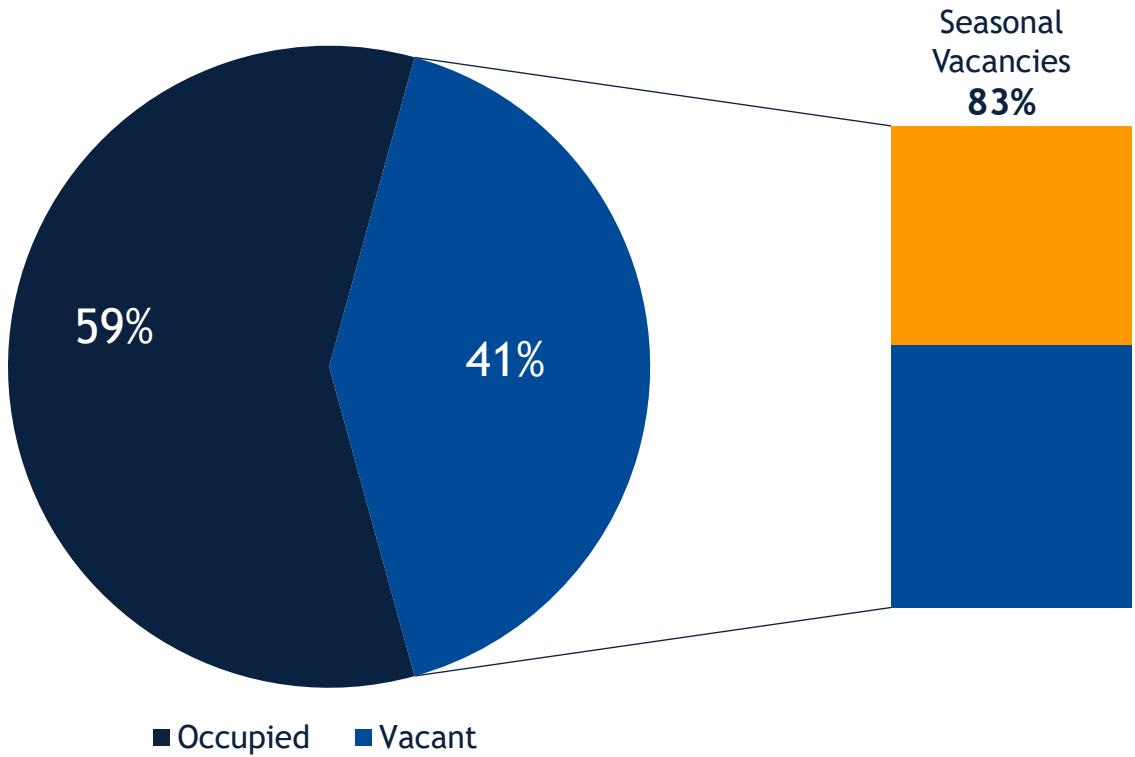
## North Whidbey



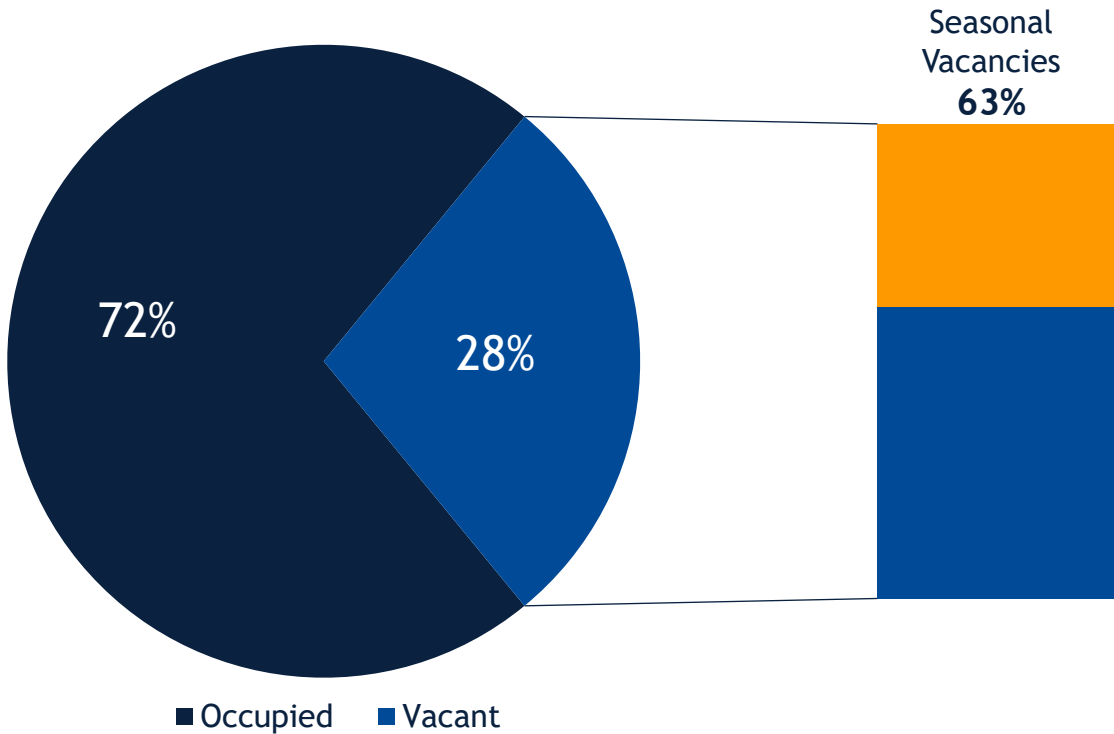
## Central Whidbey



## South Whidbey



## Camano Island



U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey 2019, 5-year estimates. *United States Census Bureau*. [Online] 01 29, 2021. [Cited: 03 11, 2022.] <https://data.census.gov>

U.S. Census Bureau. Glossary. *United States Census Bureau*. [Online] 01 29, 2021. [Cited: 03 11, 2022.] <https://www.census.gov/glossary/>

Washington State Office of Financial Management. *November 30, 2021 official population estimates*. [Online] 11 30, 2021. [Cited: 12 15, 2021.] <https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates/april-1-official-population-estimates>



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The Economic Development Council for Island County (EDC) is an independent nonprofit that works to create a thriving economic environment where businesses can grow and create jobs while preserving our unique quality of life.

- Providing one-on-one business advising, connecting owners to state and local resources, nurturing startup entrepreneurs, and sharing economic data and information.
- Giving members a voice in the economic development of their community.
- We are the County's designated partner with the WA State Department of Commerce and a channel for information and assistance between the State, County, and businesses.

Join us! By becoming a member or sponsor of the EDC you will help support economic vitality in Island County.