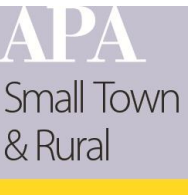


How to Measure Success on Main Street?

John C. Shepard, AICP

Vice Chair, APA Small Town & Rural Planning Division

Inland Northwest Partners 9 July 2026



What “Success” Means to You?



How to Measure Success in the Inland Northwest?



How Do We Measure Success on Main Street?



How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?

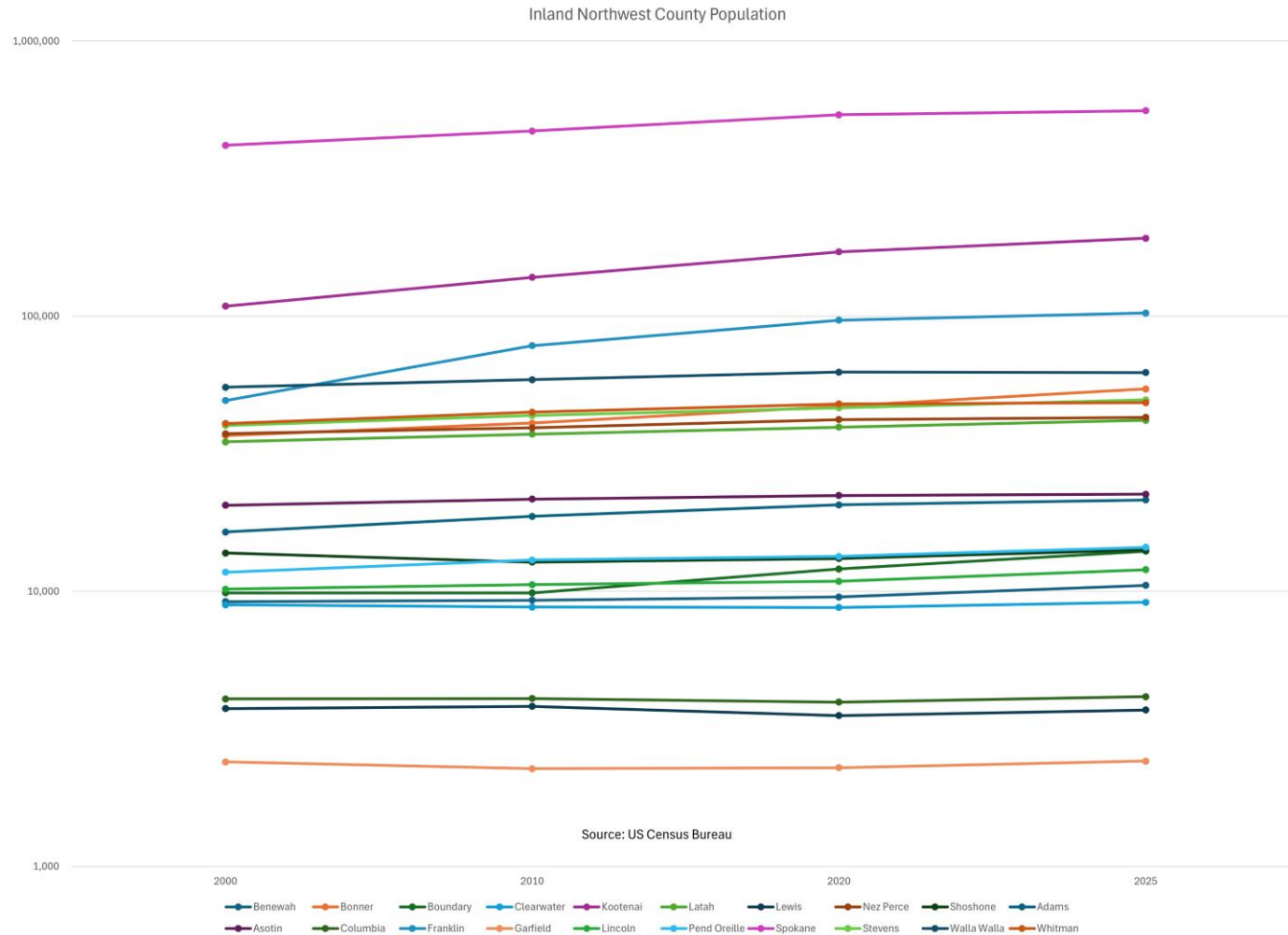
“Traditional indicators, such as population, employment, and income, are often used to measure local distress and vitality. The New Economy—characterized by the importance of fast-paced mercurial global markets, entrepreneurship, and information and technology intensity—is shifting the ground rules for economic health.”

— **Measuring Distress**, Report from Center for the New West to the US Economic Development Administration, 1992

Measuring Success—Population



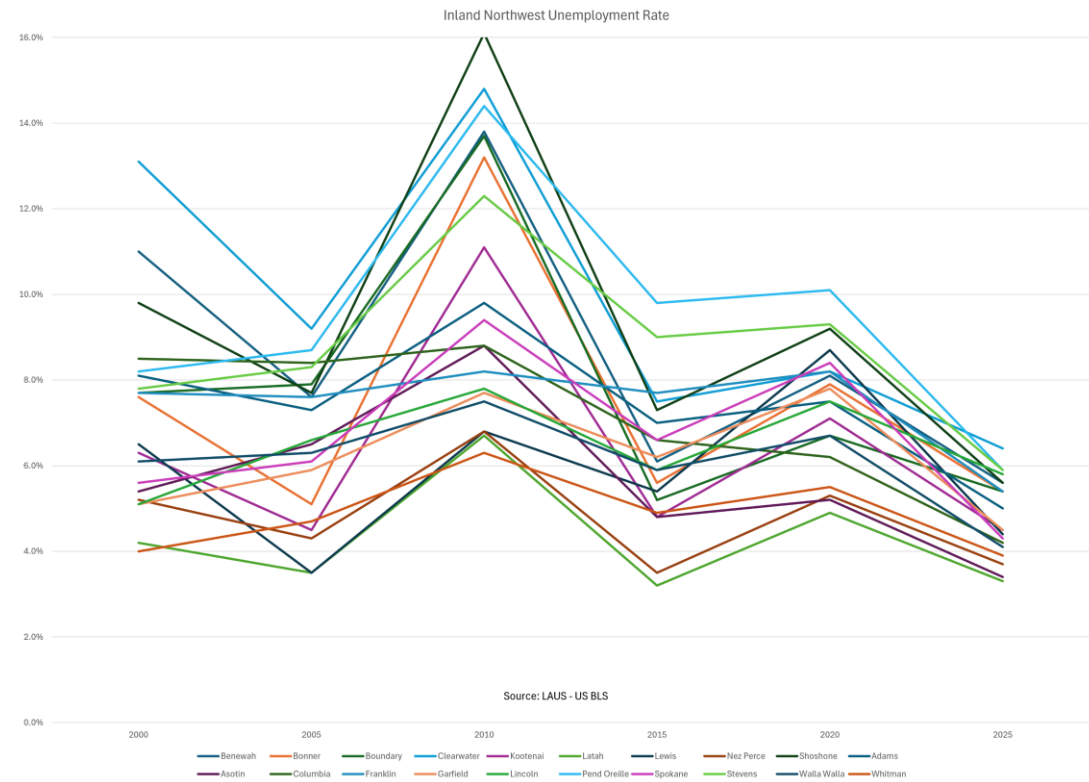
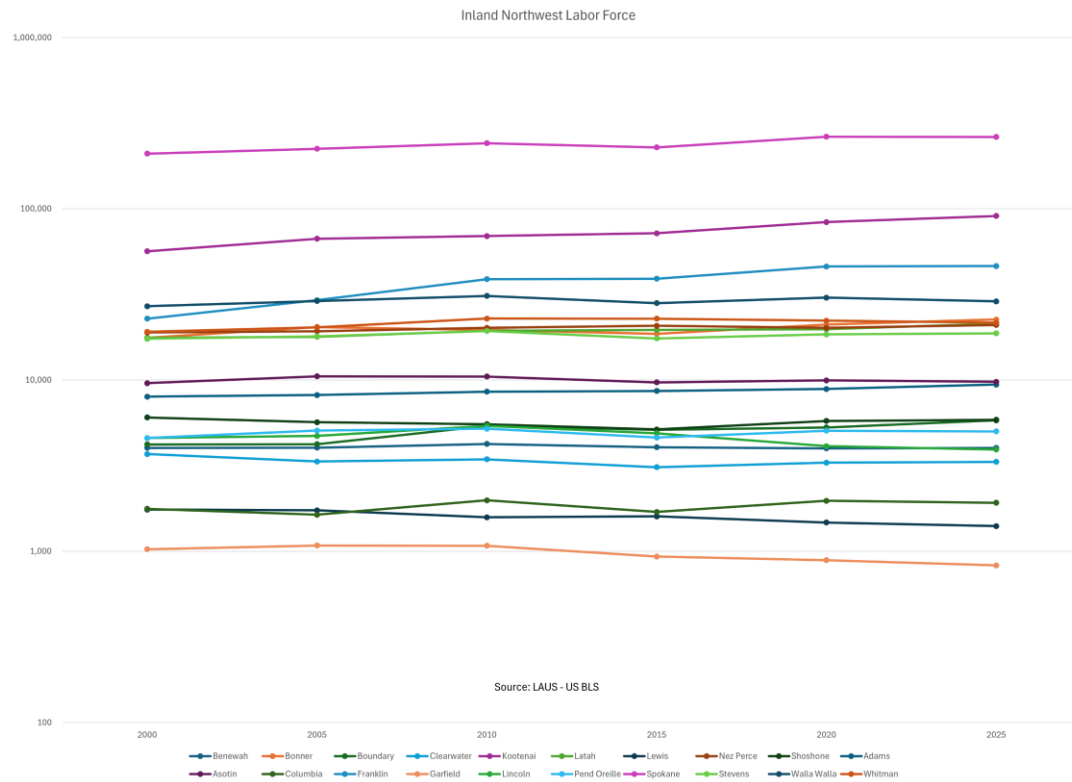
Measuring Success—Population



Measuring Success—Employment



Measuring Success—Employment



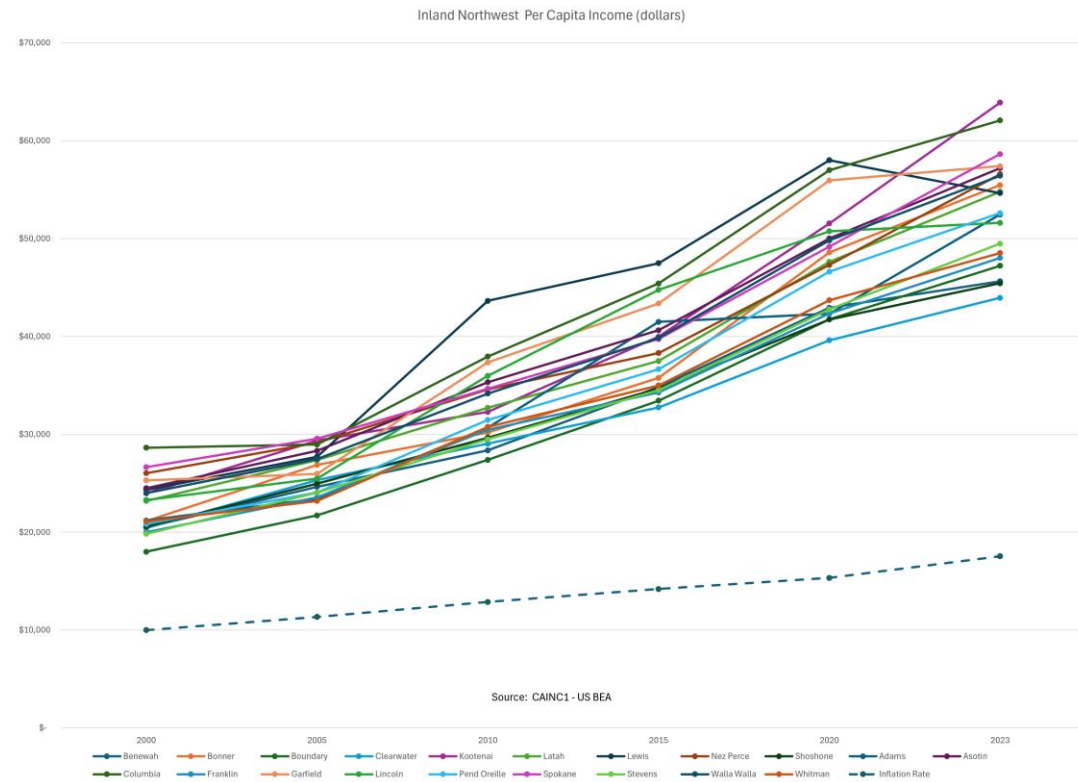
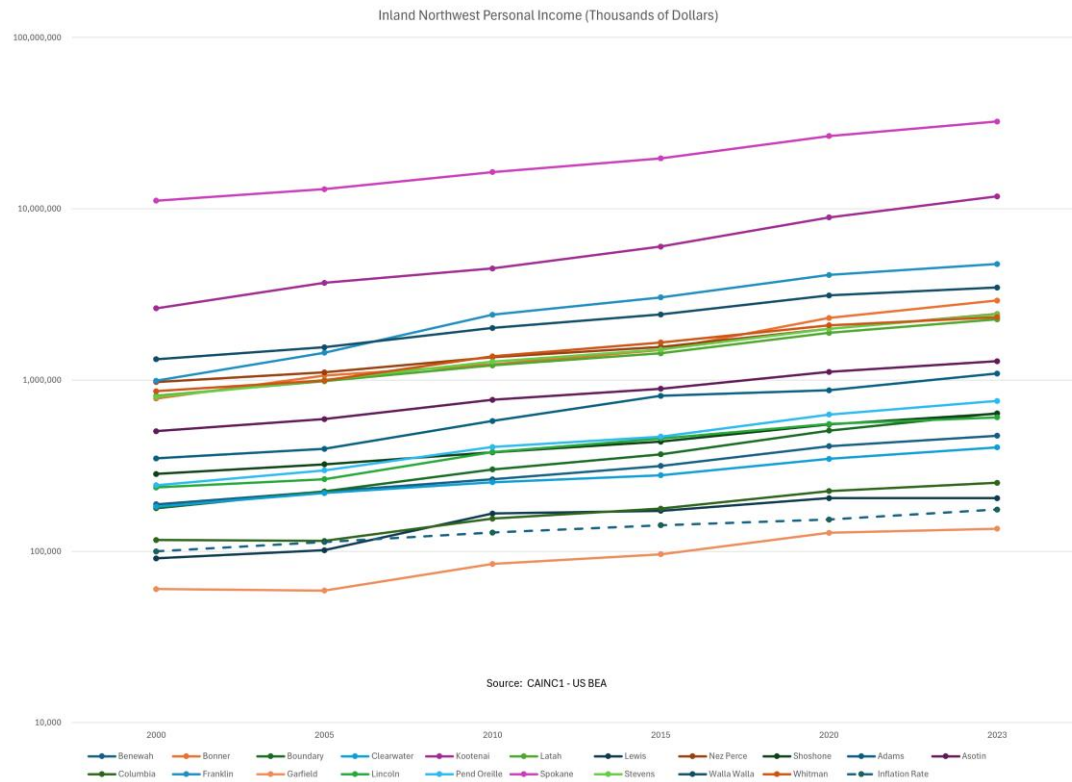
Measuring Success—Income



APA
Small Town
& Rural



Measuring Success—Income



How Do **YOU** Measure Success on Main Street?

*Why do you live
where you do?*



The Main Street Approach



The Main Street Approach



- National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program began as a pilot program in 1977
 - Galesburg, Illinois
 - Madison, Indiana
 - Hot Springs, South Dakota
- National Main Street Center demo program in Six States
- Widespread adoption in 1980s and beyond
- Now ***Main Street America***



The Main Street Approach



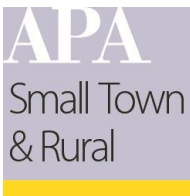
The Four Points:

Design: Enhance the appearance of downtown through public/private partnerships

Organization: Bring development and preservation groups together

Promotion: Market historic downtowns as a group

Economic Vitality/Restructuring: Strengthen and adapt to changing economies



How Do **YOU** Measure Success on Main Street?

*What **one** thing in your community would you want to see still there 20 years from now?*



A “People-Centered” Approach



Source: Montana State University

“A place is nothing in itself. It has no meaning, it can hardly be said to exist, except in terms of human perception, use, and response. The wealth and resources and usefulness of any region are only inert potential until man’s hands and brain have gone to work; and natural beauty is nothing until it comes to the eye of the beholder.”

— Wallace Stegner, 1955

How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Design
Indicators



Organization
Indicators



Promotion
Indicators



Economic Vitality
Indicators



Quality of Life
Indicators

How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Design
Indicators

Design Indicators

- National Register of Historic Places listings
- Storefront rehabilitations
- Accessibility improvements to building entries
- Sidewalks, curb cuts, and bike racks
- Third places—plazas, parklets, cafes, sidewalk seating
- New signage in historic styles
- Dark-sky compliant lighting



[Walla Walla Plaza](#), by Becky McCray

How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Organization
Indicators

Organization Indicators

- New leadership stepping up
- Broad community engagement
- Cross-sector partnerships
- Workforce development
- Zoning reform and timely development review
- Customer satisfaction



How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Promotion Indicators

Promotion
Indicators

- Marketing campaigns
- Events—to do, to see, to try—Experiences
- Tourism (e.g. heritage & agri-tourism)
- Communications & storytelling
 - Social Media
- Buy Local

Reviving Rural America: Why Heritage
Tourism Is a Game-Changer Now



<https://jcshepard.com/2025/09/reviving-rural-america-heritage-tourism/>

How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Economic Vitality Indicators

Economic Vitality Indicators

- New businesses filling empty buildings
 - Tour of Empty Buildings
 - Zoning reform
- Diversified economic base
 - Retail, services, manufacturing, housing
- New investment & access to capital
- Retention & expansion
- Strong entrepreneurship ecosystem

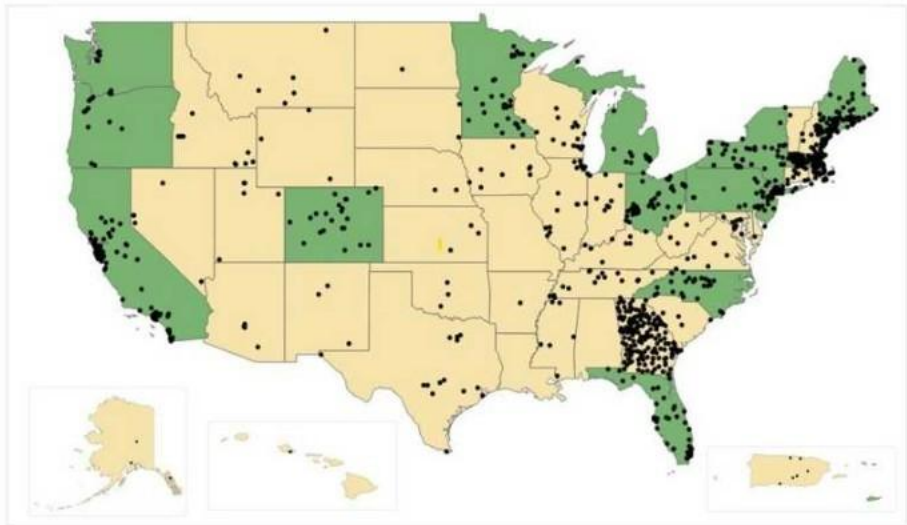


How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life
Indicators

Quality of Life Indicators



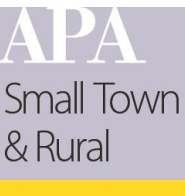
America Is an Aging Nation

1. The population of the United States is rapidly aging.
2. By 2030, 1 out of every 5 people in the U.S. will be 65 or older.
3. By 2034, the number of adults older than 65 will be greater than the number of children under 18.

AARP Livable Communities



INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION FOR
LOCAL LEADERS



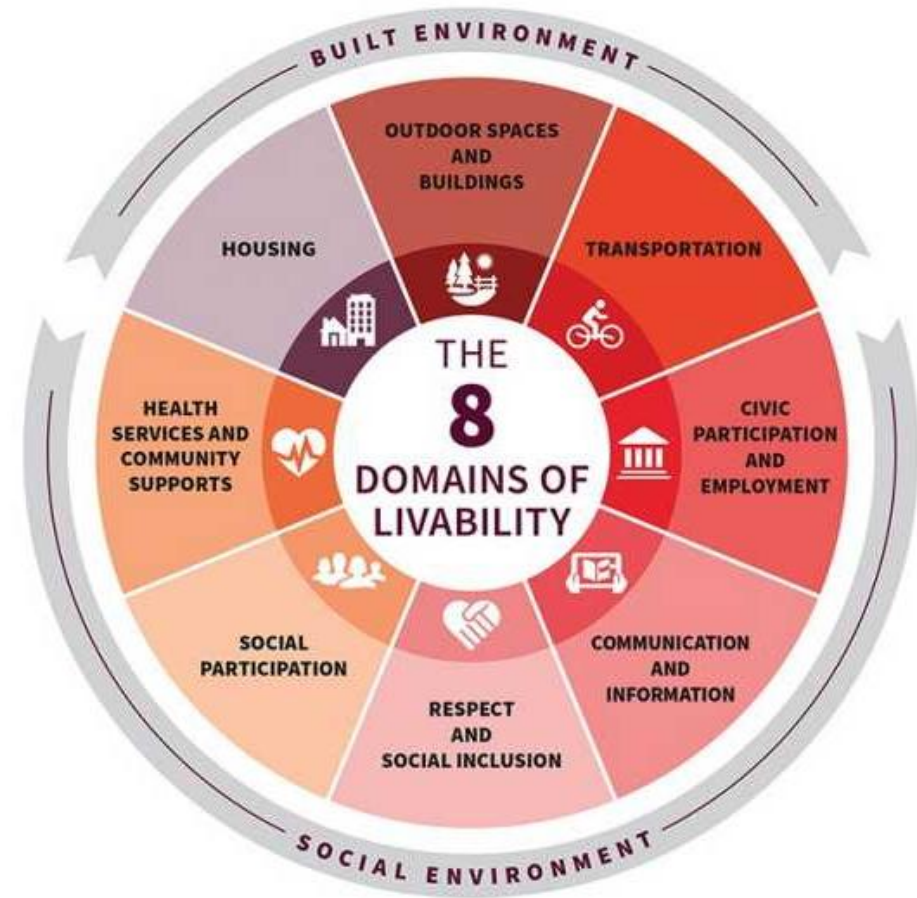
How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life
Indicators

Quality of Life Indicators

- Livability Indictors
 - [AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities](#)
 - Availability and Quality of community features impacts well being especially of younger AND older adults
 - www.aarp.org/livable-communities/



How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life
Indicators

Cheney, Washington

Community Level : City

Location: [Washington](#) > [Spokane County](#)

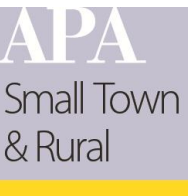
Population: 12,830



The overall Livability Index™ score for **Cheney, Washington** is
58.

This is in the **top half** of **communities** in the U.S.

livabilityindex.aarp.org



How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life
Indicators

Moscow, Idaho

Community Level : City

Location: [Idaho](#) > [Latah County](#)

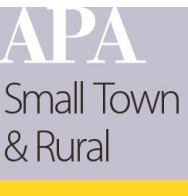
Population: 25,868



The overall Livability Index™ score for **Moscow, Idaho** is **54**.

This is in the **top half** of **communities** in the U.S.

livabilityindex.aarp.org



How Do We Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life Indicators

Category Scores

These are the category scores for Cheney, Washington. Explore the metrics and policies behind the numbers.



Housing ⓘ

Affordability and Access



Neighborhood ⓘ

Proximity and Security



Transportation ⓘ

Safety and Convenience



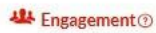
Environment ⓘ

Clean Air and Water



Health ⓘ

Prevention, Access and Quality



Engagement ⓘ

Civic and Social Involvement



Opportunity ⓘ

Inclusion and Possibilities



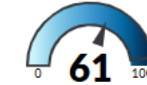
Category Scores

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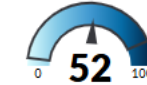
Housing ⓘ

Affordability and Access



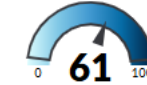
Neighborhood ⓘ

Proximity and Security



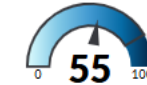
Transportation ⓘ

Safety and Convenience



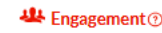
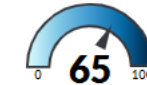
Environment ⓘ

Clean Air and Water



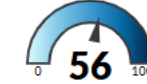
Health ⓘ

Prevention, Access and Quality



Engagement ⓘ

Civic and Social Involvement

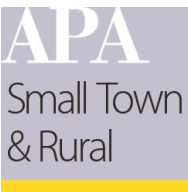


Opportunity ⓘ

Inclusion and Possibilities



livabilityindex.aarp.org



How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life
Indicators

Housing: Affordability and Access

- Zero-step entrances
- Multi-family housing
- Housing costs
- Housing burden
- Subsidized housing



Neighborhood: Proximity and Security

- Access to grocery stores & farmers markets
- Access to parks
- Access to libraries
- Access to jobs by transit
- Access to jobs by auto
- Diversity of destinations
- Activity density
- Crime rate
- Vacancy rate

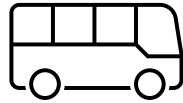


livabilityindex.aarp.org

How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?

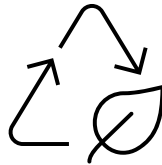


Quality of Life
Indicators



Transportation: Safety and Convenience

- Frequency of local transit service
- ADA-accessible stations & vehicles
- Walkability index
- Congestion
- Household transportation costs
- Speed limits
- Crash rate



Environment: Clean Air and Water

- Drinking water quality
- Regional air quality
- Near-roadway pollution
- Local industrial pollution

livabilityindex.aarp.org

How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life
Indicators

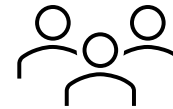
Health: Prevention, Access and Quality

- Smoking prevalence
- Obesity prevalence
- Access to exercise opportunities
- Healthcare professional shortages
- Preventable hospitalization rate
- Patient satisfaction



Engagement: Civic and Social Involvement

- Broadband cost and speed
- Opportunity for civic involvement
- Voting rate
- Social involvement index
- Cultural, arts, and entertainment

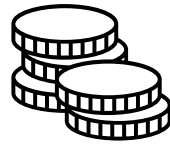


livabilityindex.aarp.org

How Do We Measure Success on Main Street?



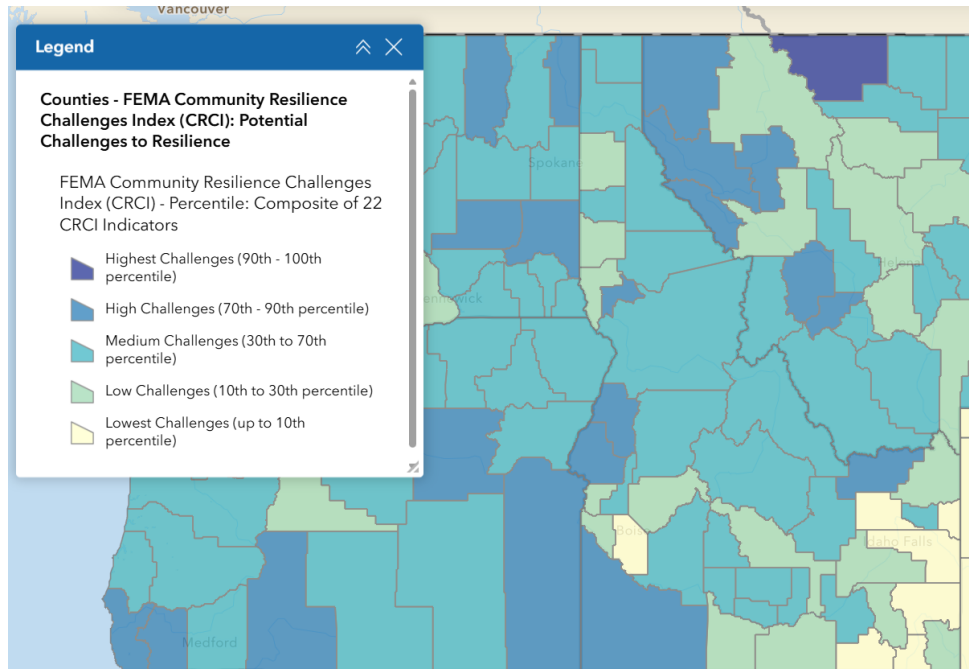
Quality of Life
Indicators



Opportunity: Inclusion and Possibilities

- Income inequality
- Jobs per worker
- High school graduation rate
- Age diversity

Also includes FEMA **Natural Hazard Risk Index**



livabilityindex.aarp.org

How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life
Indicators

Walkability

Very Walkable ?

Cheney, Washington, 99004

Commute to **Downtown Cheney**

3 min 10 min 2 min 1 min View Routes

[Favorite](#) [Map](#) [Nearby Cheney Apartments on Redfin](#)

[Looking for a home for sale in Cheney?](#)

Walk Score 72 **Very Walkable**
Most errands can be accomplished on foot.

Bike Score 73 **Very Bikeable**
Biking is convenient for most trips.

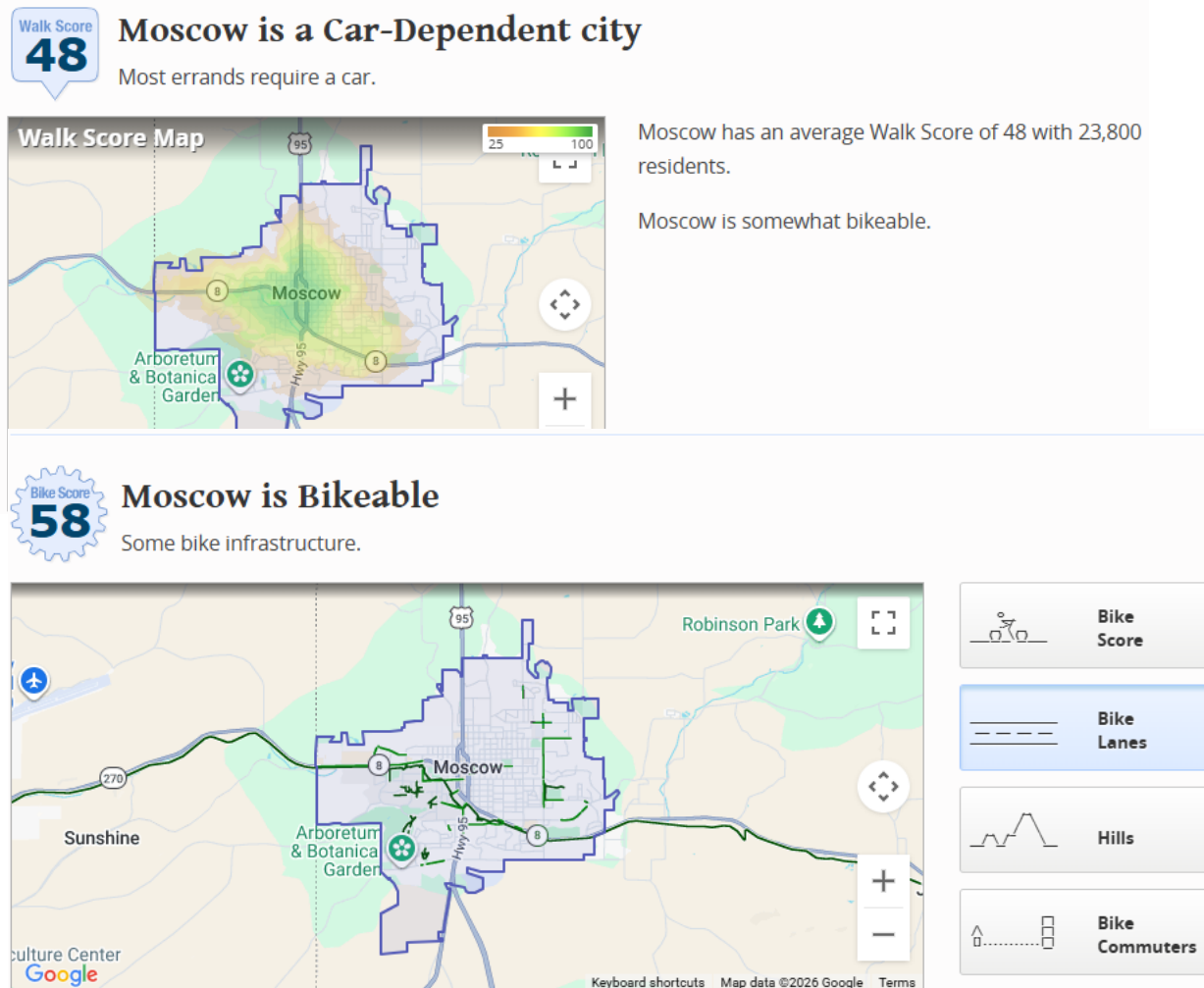
[About your score](#)
[Add scores to your site](#)

www.walkscore.com

How Do We Measure Success on Main Street?



Quality of Life
Indicators



How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?

Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)

Rural Economic Development Tool

- Public platform built specifically for rural counties and regions
- County and regional profiles with standardized metrics
- Benchmarks and peer comparisons
- Narrative and interpretive guidance

In progress: [Rural Insights Hub](#)

How Do We Measure Success on Main Street?

Rural

Whitman County, WA rural status (OMB 2023)

48,512

Whitman County, WA latest population est.

Welcome to the [Center on Rural Innovation](#)'s Economic Development Tool. Step through the metrics below to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of your county's economy.

Key takeaways

- **Your county is growing slowly.** In the last five years, the population in your county grew by 1.5%, while the national population grew by 3.1%.
- **Business growth in your county is limited.** Between 2018 and 2023, the number of businesses in your county grew by 5.4%, while the number of businesses nationally grew by 5.6%.
- **Educational attainment in your county is excellent.** 49.8% of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 35.7% nationally.
- **Your county's tradable services employment is below the national average.** 6.8% of the workforce is employed in tradable services, compared to 21.8% nationally.
- **Broadband service in your county is inadequate.** 79.1% of locations in your county have 100/20 Mbps service, the FCC benchmark for broadband service, compared to 95.5% of locations nationally.
- **Private investment is active in your county.** There have been 4 Private investment-backed businesses in your county in the last 5 years.
- **Rent affordability is an issue.** 56% of renter households in your county are cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on rent.
- **Quality of life in your county is excellent.** Your county scored higher than 95% of all U.S. counties in Quality of life.

Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)

Workforce

Employment change
Prime age employment rate
Average annual pay
Educational attainment
Employment by occupation
Share of employment by sector
Tech employment
Real GDP per capita

Entrepreneurship

Business growth
Private investment per capita
Business applications
Share of self-employment
Employment by industry
Industry diversity
Remote work

Infrastructure

Broadband service
Broadband adoption
Computer access

Demographics

Population
Median age
Race and ethnicity
Per capita income
Income distribution
Inequality

Quality of life

Quality of life
Cost-burdened renters
Cost-burdened owners
Change in housing supply

ruralinnovation.us

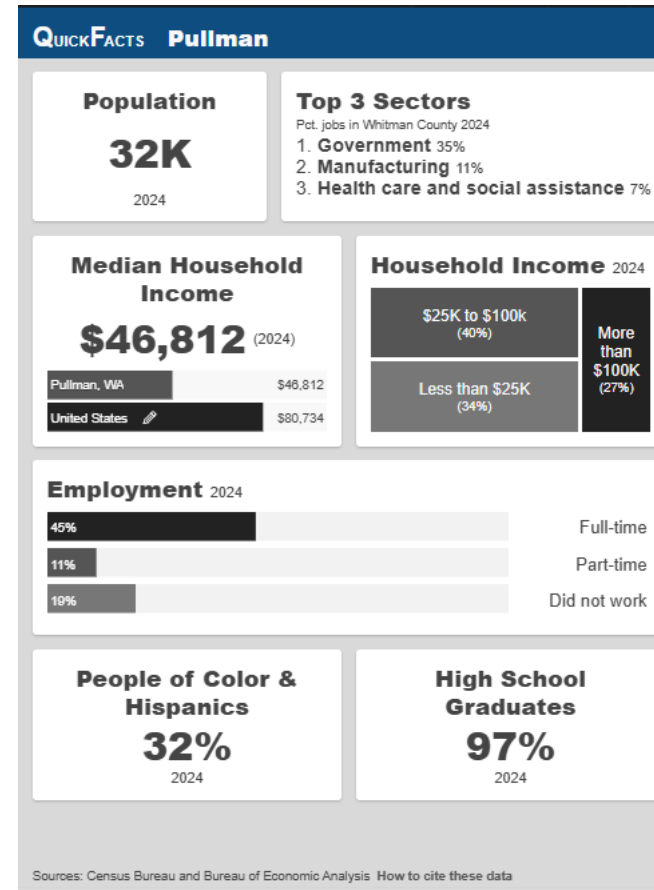
How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?

Headwaters Economics

Economic Profile System (EPS)

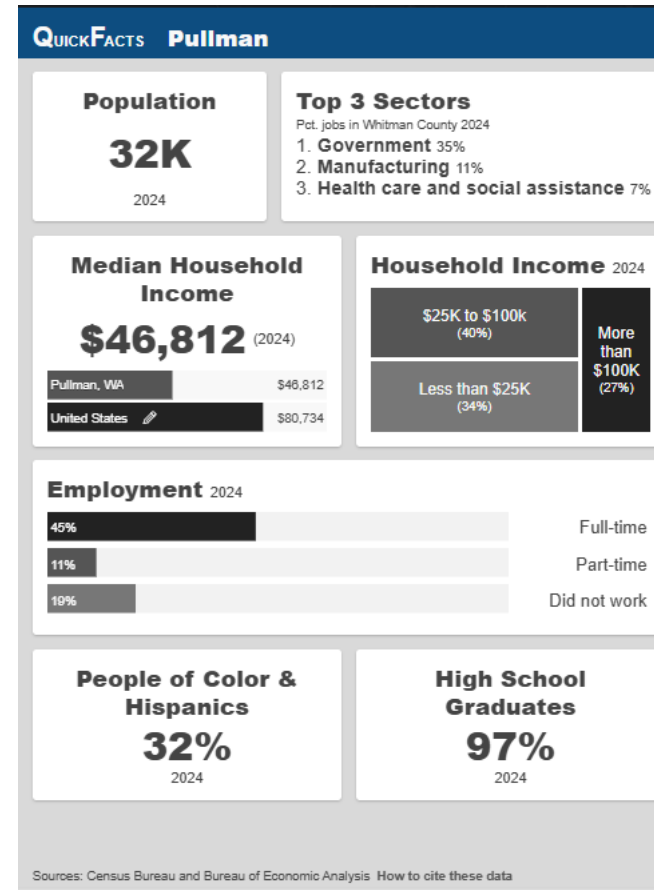
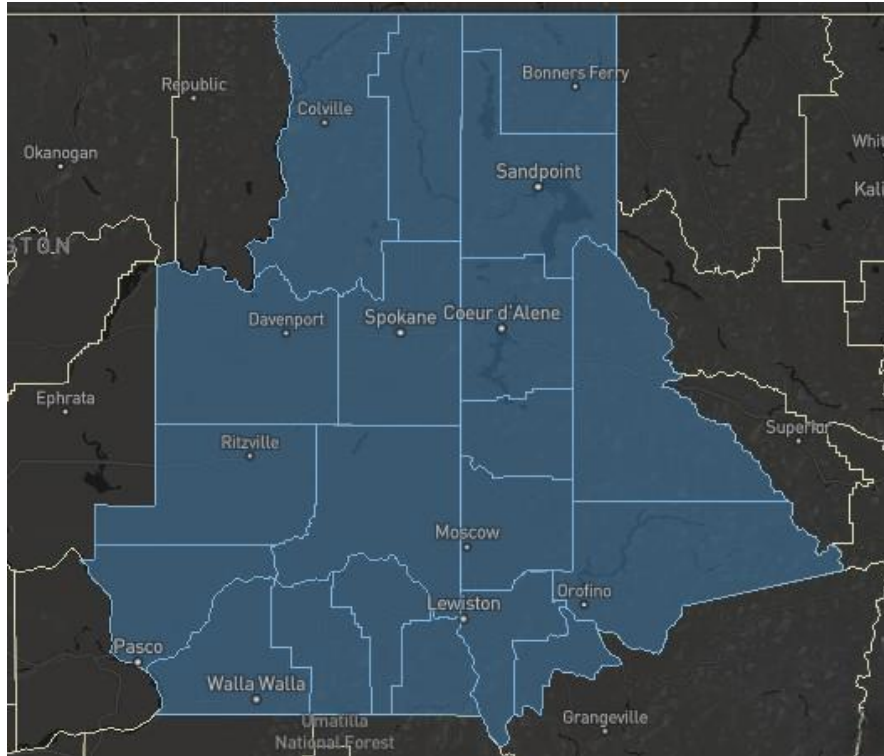
Also:

- Wildfire
- Flooding
- Outdoor Recreation
- Public Lands
- Rural Capacity Index



How Do **We** Measure Success on Main Street?

Economic Profile System (EPS)



headwaterseconomics.org

 **HEADWATERS ECONOMICS**


**INLAND
NORTHWEST
PARTNERS**
PROMOTING COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT


APA
Small Town
& Rural

How Do We Measure Success on Main Street?

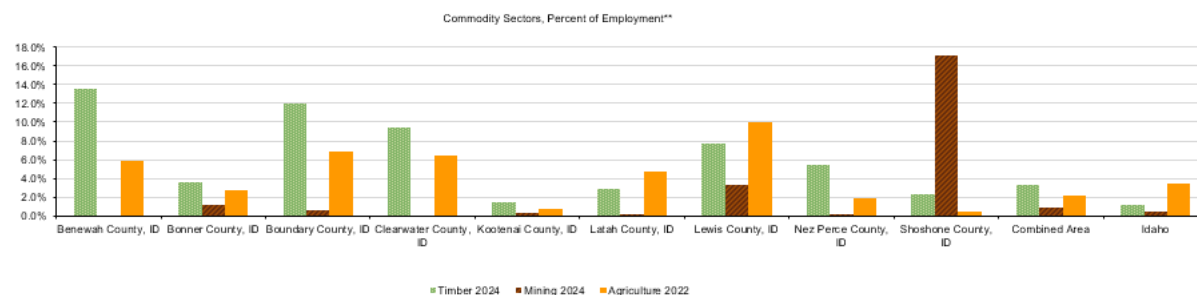
Key Indicators

Combined Area

Employment in Commodities, Travel & Tourism

• Lewis County, ID had the largest percent of total jobs in commodity sectors (21%), and Kootenai County, ID had the smallest (2.6%).

• Timber was the largest component of commodity sector employment (3.3% of total jobs) in the Combined Area, and mining was the smallest component (0.3% of total jobs).



• In 2024, Kootenai County, ID had the largest percent of total jobs in industries that include travel and tourism (19.5%), and Clearwater County, ID had the smallest (10.7%).

• In 2024, accommodations & food* was the largest component of travel and tourism-related employment (11.5% of total jobs) in Combined Area, and passenger transportation* was the smallest (0.2% of total jobs).



† Some data on this page were discontinued by the Bureau of Economic Analysis in 2022 and are frozen at that year. For more information, see <https://data.bea.gov/data/economic-profiles/about-us/data-limitations>.

* Charted values do not represent the entirety of those sectors, rather their components typically related to travel & tourism.

** Data for timber and mining are from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages which excludes proprietors. Data for agriculture are from Bureau of Economic Analysis which includes proprietors. The latest year for each data source may vary due to different data release schedules.

Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024; Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington D.C.; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023; Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington D.C.; U.S. Department of Labor, 2025; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Washington D.C.

Find more reports like this at headwaterseconomics.org

headwaterseconomics.org



How Do We Measure Success on Main Street?

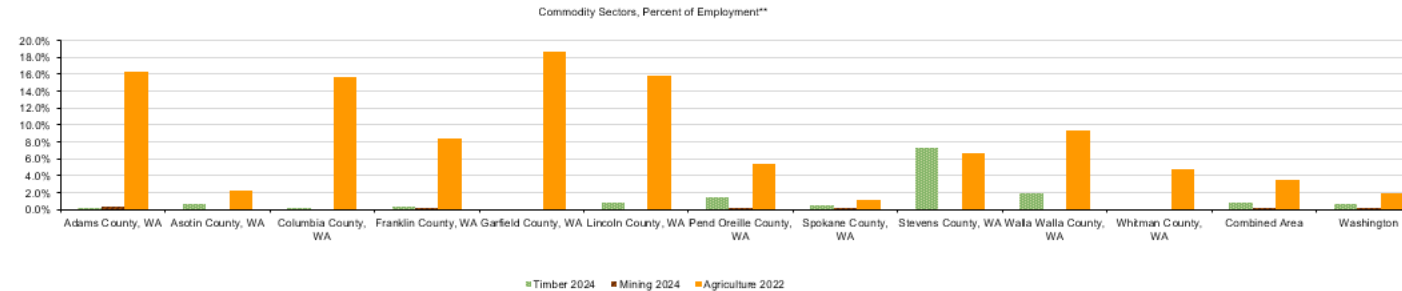
Key Indicators

Combined Area

Employment in Commodities, Travel & Tourism

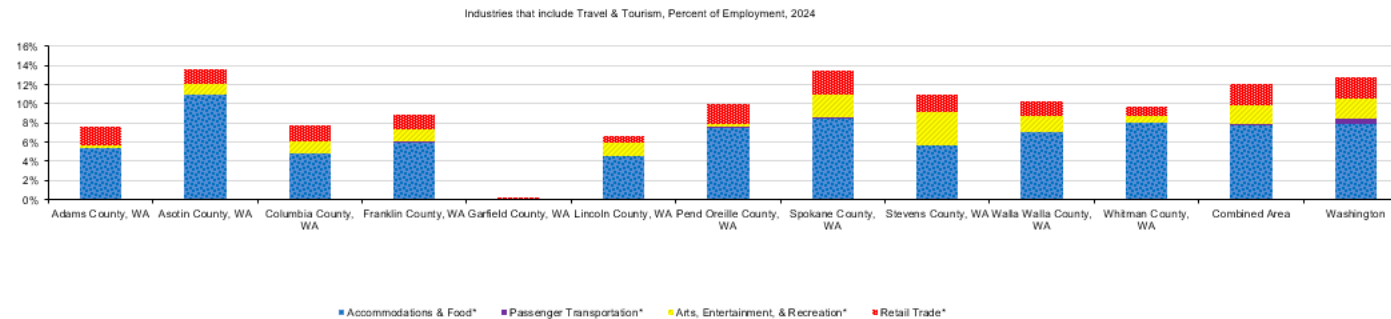
- Garfield County, WA had the largest percent of total jobs in commodity sectors (18.7%), and Spokane County, WA had the smallest (1.7%).

- Agriculture was the largest component of commodity sector employment (3.5% of total jobs) in the Combined Area, and mining was the smallest component (0.1% of total jobs).



- In 2024, Asotin County, WA had the largest percent of total jobs in industries that include travel and tourism (13.6%), and Garfield County, WA had the smallest (0.2%).

- In 2024, accommodations & food* was the largest component of travel and tourism-related employment (7.8% of total jobs) in Combined Area, and passenger transportation* was the smallest (0.1% of total jobs).



* Same data on this page were discontinued by the Bureau of Economic Analysis in 2022 and are frozen at that year. For more information, see https://fred.stlouisfed.org/docs/datasources/bureau_of_economic_analysis_profile_v2022/about.asp#DataLimitations.

* Charted values do not represent the entirety of those sectors, rather their components typically related to travel & tourism.

** Data for timber and mining are from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages which excludes proprietors. Data for agriculture are from Bureau of Economic Analysis which includes proprietors. The latest year for each data source may vary due to different data release schedules.

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headwaterseconomics.org



If We Measure the Wrong things, We Build the Wrong Systems

1. Start With a Simple Baseline
2. Track the Full Journey
3. Measure Barriers and Supports Together
4. Use Data in Real Time
5. Combine Numbers With Stories
6. Protect Dignity
7. Build toward Return on Investment

— [William Warren, CEcD, EDP](#) at IEDC

What Does “Success” Mean to You?

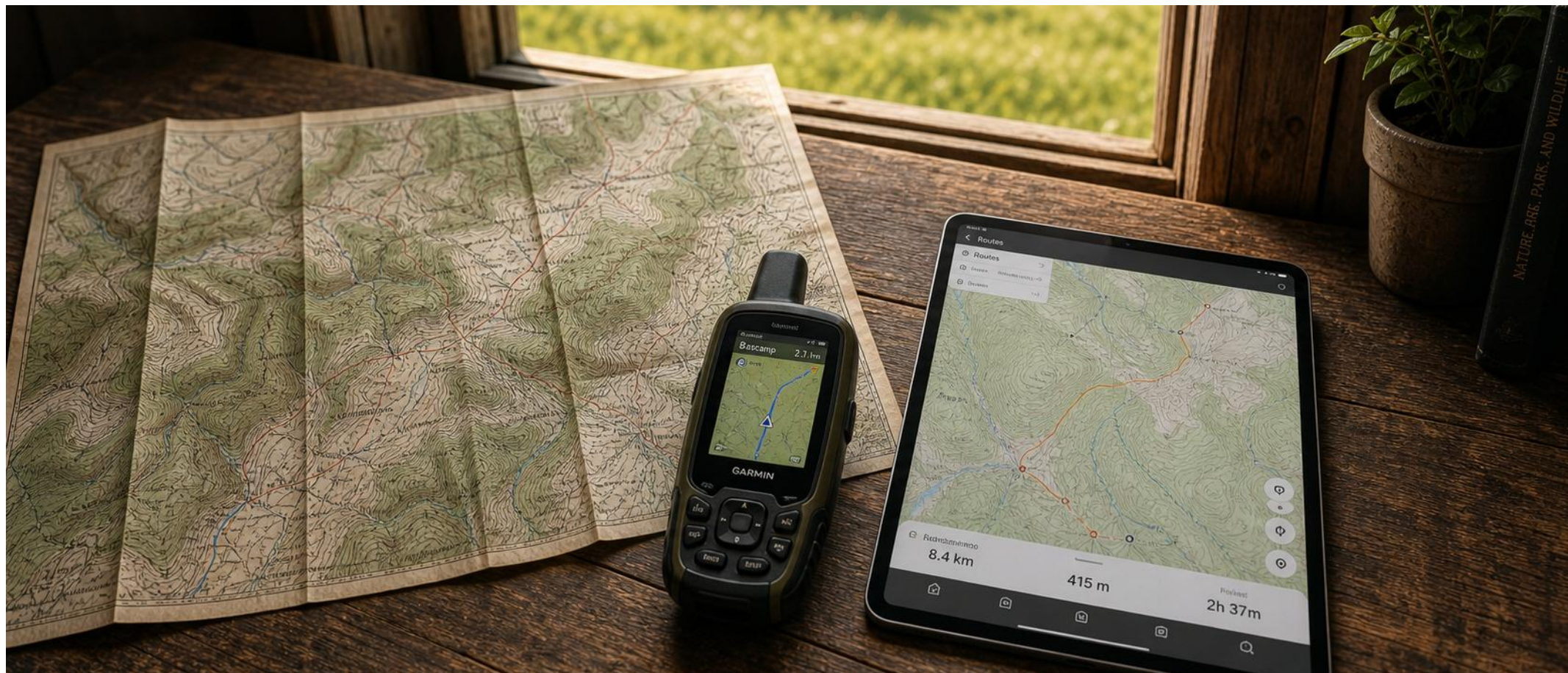
Tell yourself the story of where you want your hometown to be?

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- How?



JCShepard.com

What Does “Success” Mean to You?



APA
Small Town
& Rural

 INLAND
NORTHWEST
PARTNERS
PROMOTING COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



www.westernplanner.org



How Do We Measure Success on Main Street?

JCSHEPARD(DOT)COM

Life, Liberty & the Pursuit of Americana

All Things Shepard Policy Economy Pursuit of Happiness Resources About ▼

in Q

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- medium.com/small-towns-real-ideas
- JCShepard.aicp@gmail.com

