

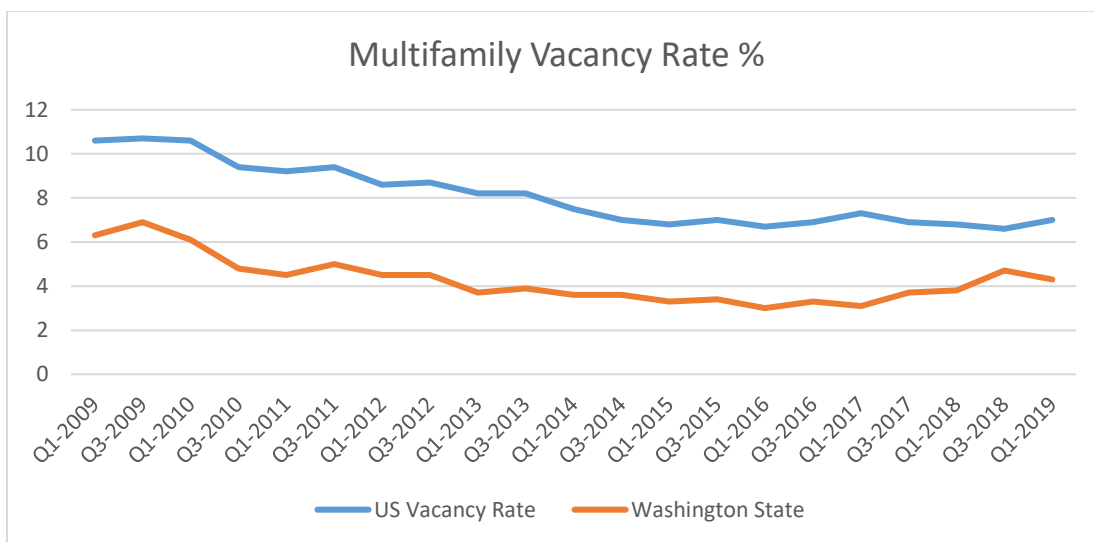
WASHINGTON STATE APARTMENT MARKET REPORT – Fall 2019

Vacancy Summary

The statewide apartment vacancy rate declined slightly from 4.7% to 4.3% in Spring 2019. While there is variability among the individual county rates, all of the counties outside of the Puget Sound region included in the survey had vacancy rates below 5%, which is usually considered the threshold for a tight rental market. An acute shortage of rental units is typically characterized as a vacancy rate below 3%. This was the case in every county outside of the Puget Sound region. While vacancy rates are rising in the Puget Sound region as well as Spokane and Clark Counties, most other counties are experiencing a tightening of the rental market as new rental supply has been slow to materialize.

Market Summary

Apartment markets nationwide have shown declining vacancy rates with a current rate of 7.0%, slightly lower than the figure reported for Q1-2019 and higher than the 15-year low of 6.8% recorded in Q3-2016. Washington has shown a more exaggerated trend thanks to inward migration and increased demand for housing, particularly in more urbanized areas of the state. While the statewide vacancy rate stands at 4.3%, this is primarily driven by higher vacancy rates occurring in more urban areas of the state, particularly King and Snohomish Counties. As new supply continues to come into the Puget Sound, Spokane, and Clark county markets, this vacancy rate highlights key regional issues in the rental housing market and an increased divergence of residential housing costs within the state.



Source: US Census Bureau, WCRER

Over the past year, Whatcom County (Bellingham area) recorded the greatest decline in vacancy rates falling to 0.2%. Out of the 18 counties covered, 6 saw an increase in the number of vacancies while 12 showed a decrease or no change in the percentage of units vacant. The lowest vacancy rate was observed in Whatcom County with a vacancy rate of 0.2%, a change from 0.9% recorded in the same period last year. The highest vacancy rate was recorded in Snohomish County with a vacancy rate of 5.0%. While this rate is difficult to compare with past periods due to methodological changes, this vacancy rate represents a decline based upon previous surveys that recorded 5-year highs.

Data and Methods

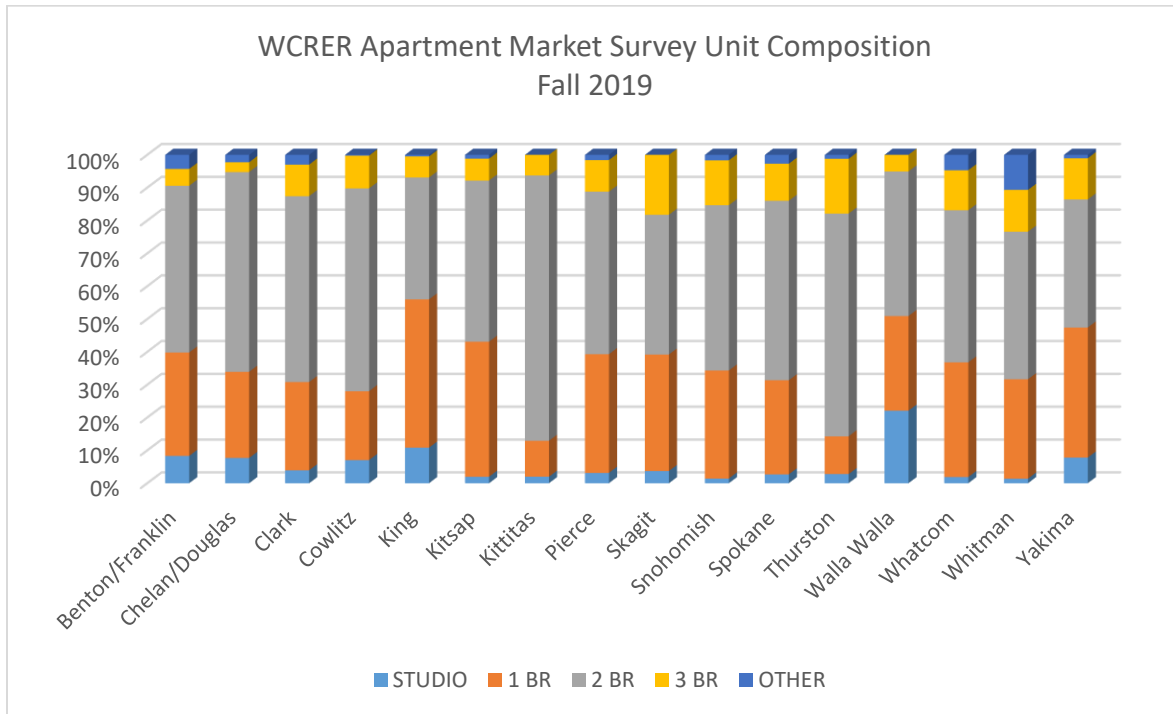
Since the Fall 2017 survey, Dupre + Scott Apartment Advisors (D+S) ceased operations and no longer provide market data for 5 counties in the Puget Sound region (King, Pierce, Snohomish, Kitsap, and Thurston). In Spring 2018, surveys were conducted by WCRER in cooperation with several key management companies in the area to produce interim statistics for use in the market report. Since that time, the WCRER was granted permission use to audited statistics from Apartment Insights survey of 50+ unit developments for the region. Survey and field data was then cross referenced with other sources (such as appraisers and brokers) in order to provide a reliable base for comparison in relation to geography and unit mix.

Caution is advised in using this data as a substitute for D+S for investment decision making, particularly when comparisons are made between the past rental data provided in previous WCRER reports. While all due and reasonable care has been used, response rates differ markedly between the surveys and there are significant sample differences between the Apartment Insights survey of 50+ unit developments, past WCRER surveys, and past D+S surveys of 20+ unit developments. As a result, the rental rate data contained in this report for King, Snohomish, Pierce, Kitsap and Thurston counties is not directly comparable with past reports. Further, weights in computing statewide averages will vary considerably from past reports because of the relatively high number of multi-family units in the Puget Sound Region and different in response rates. Methods in surveying rents and vacancies in other counties of the state remain unchanged and data for other areas of the state is comparable between surveys subject to sample and response rate differences.

Coverage Statistics – Apartment Market Surveys

	Units Surveyed/Inventory	1 Bedroom Units	2 Bedroom / 1 Bath units
Benton/Franklin	10,918	3,728	2,923
Chelan/Douglas	1,703	514	577
Clark	18,310	4,896	4,771
Cowlitz	1,330	391	609
King	150,004	62,809	23,716
Kitsap	9,110	3,186	2,894
Kittitas	2,755	619	1,028
Pierce	43,778	16,484	11,910
Skagit	1,799	853	417
Snohomish	33,200	13,348	7,140
Spokane	8,447	2,564	2,030
Thurston	12,924	4,993	2,996
Walla Walla	906	281	408
Whatcom	13,061	2,364	2,334
Whitman	4,489	1,432	1,502
Yakima	3,545	1,757	1,009
STATEWIDE	316,279	120,219	66,264

While the WCRER survey excludes government-assisted housing, the total universe of rental units within the state includes both subsidized and market rate properties. This is a significant issue particularly within smaller counties where a greater proportion of the multifamily market is dependent on some form of federal, state or local funding. Note that several counties are combined where they are both contiguous and there is urban development to support defining them as a single ‘market area.’



Summary Statistics by Unit Type

Examining the average floor area of apartments throughout the state reveals significant differences in the price per unit floor area within individual markets. The largest apartment sizes are found in Clark County with an average unit size of 909 square feet. On average, the smallest units are found in Walla Walla County with an average floor area of 720 square feet.

As noted in the graph above, one-bedroom apartments are the most popular type of unit in the state, accounting for about 29.4% of all units. The statewide vacancy rate for one-bedroom units has steadily fallen for the past 8 years from a peak of 6.5% in September 2009 to 0.9% in Fall 2019, excluding the Puget Sound counties.

One Bedroom Apartments

While vacancy rates varied throughout the state, every county outside of the Puget Sound surveyed had vacancy rates below 3% for one-bedroom apartments. The lowest vacancy rate for one-bedroom apartments was recorded in Walla Walla, Whitman, and Whatcom Counties below 0.5%. The highest vacancy rate recorded for one-bedroom apartments was in Chelan/Douglas Counties at 1.97%. Data on vacancies by bedroom for the Puget Sound Counties was not available for this survey. Outside of the Puget Sound region, the one-bedroom vacancy rate stands at 1.0%

Apartment Summary Statistics – One-Bedroom Apartments

	Average Size (SF)	Units Surveyed	Vacancies	Average Rent	Rent/Unit Floor Area	Vacancy Rate*
Benton/Franklin	681	3,728	47	\$872	\$1.28	1.3%
Chelan/Douglas	632	514	10	\$1,150	\$1.82	2.0%
Clark	696	4,896	54	\$1,142	\$1.64	1.1%
Cowlitz	750	391	4	\$729	\$0.97	1.0%
King	678	62,809	-	\$1,760	\$2.60	-
Kitsap	659	3,186	-	\$1,286	\$1.95	-
Kittitas	610	619	1	\$702	\$1.15	0.2%
Pierce	672	16,484	-	\$1,156	\$1.72	-
Skagit	659	853	2	\$959	\$1.46	0.2%
Snohomish	672	13,348	-	\$1,368	\$2.04	-
Spokane	666	2,564	36	\$832	\$1.25	1.4%
Thurston	677	4,993	-	\$1,096	\$1.62	-
Walla Walla	598	281	1	\$773	\$1.29	0.4%
Whatcom	616	2,364	5	\$939	\$1.52	0.2%
Whitman	584	1,432	19	\$716	\$1.23	1.3%
Yakima	633	1,757	9	\$666	\$1.05	0.5%
Statewide	673	120,219	187	\$1,457	\$2.17	1.0%

*calculation of vacancy by unit type excludes units in Puget Sound counties.

With an average rent of \$1,150, the Chelan/Douglas county area (Wenatchee) recorded the highest rent levels for one-bedroom apartments outside of the Puget Sound region, a slight decrease on \$1,152 recorded in the last survey. Yakima County had the lowest rents at \$666 per month. On a floor area basis, the highest rent for one-bedroom units was found in King County at \$2.60 per square foot with the lowest found in the Longview market area at \$0.97 per square foot.

Two Bedroom – One Bathroom Apartments

The second most prevalent type of apartment in Washington consists of 2 bedrooms and 1 bathroom (2BR/1Bath) accounting for 28.9% of all apartment units according to the 2010 Census. King County had the highest average 2BR/1Bath unit rent (\$1,818) as well as the highest average rent per square foot (\$2.11). Yakima County recorded the lowest average rent of \$818 and had lowest price per square foot (\$0.98). Outside of the Puget Sound Region, the average vacancy rate was 1.2% for two bedroom apartments.

Apartment Summary Statistics – Two Bedroom Apartments

	Average Size (SF)	Units Surveyed	Vacancies	Average Rent	Rent/Unit Floor Area	Vacancy Rate
Benton/Franklin	872	2,923	40	\$956	\$1.10	1.4%
Chelan/Douglas	867	577	7	\$1,144	\$1.32	1.2%
Clark	887	4,771	76	\$1,224	\$1.38	1.6%
Cowlitz	822	609	5	\$885	\$1.08	0.8%
King	863	23,716	-	\$1,818	\$2.11	-
Kitsap	858	2,894	-	\$1,422	\$1.66	-
Kittitas	722	1,028	11	\$723	\$1.00	1.1%
Pierce	873	11,910	-	\$1,315	\$1.51	-
Skagit	822	417	1	\$1,059	\$1.29	0.2%
Snohomish	868	7,140	-	\$1,537	\$1.78	-
Spokane	850	2,030	35	\$973	\$1.14	1.7%
Thurston	857	2,996	-	\$1,165	\$1.36	-
Walla Walla	815	408	7	\$911	\$1.12	1.7%
Whatcom	847	2,334	7	\$1,131	\$1.34	0.3%
Whitman	779	1,502	21	\$867	\$1.11	1.4%
Yakima	837	1,009	1	\$818	\$0.98	0.1%
Statewide	850	66,264	210	\$1,441	\$1.70	1.2%

*calculation of vacancy by unit type excludes units in Puget Sound counties.

Among 2BR/1Bath apartments, vacancies were lowest in the Skagit, Whitman and Whatcom market areas with a vacancy rates below 0.5%. The highest vacancy rate outside of the Puget Sound Region was found in Walla Walla and Spokane County with a vacancy rates of 1.7%. Extraordinarily low vacancy rates were noted throughout all counties in the state outside of the Puget Sound Region.

All Unit Types

Using the sample of all units surveyed vacancy rates remained the same as the last survey with an overall vacancy rate of 4.3%. Primarily driven by relatively high vacancy rates in the Puget Sound region and the large volume of rental units in comparison to other areas of the state, Snohomish County recorded the highest overall vacancy rate at 5.0% while the lowest was found in Whatcom and Skagit Counties with a vacancy rate of 0.3%. It should be noted that all Outside of the Puget Sound Region, the average vacancy rate is 1.2% and no counties recorded a vacancy rate above 2%, indicating that rental markets are extremely tight outside of the Seattle/Tacoma/Olympia areas.

Apartment Summary Statistics – All Apartment Units

	Average Unit Size (SF)	Units Surveyed	Vacancies	Average Rent	Rent/Unit Floor Area	Vacancy Rate
Benton/Franklin	845	10,918	212	\$1,000	\$1.18	1.94%
Chelan/Douglas	908	1,703	29	\$1,197	\$1.32	1.73%
Clark	909	18,310	275	\$1,326	\$1.46	1.50%
Cowlitz	780	1,330	9	\$896	\$1.15	0.70%
King	816	150,004	7,182	\$1,906	\$2.34	4.79%
Kitsap	830	9,110	440	\$1,458	\$1.76	4.83%
Kittitas	818	2,755	22	\$1,102	\$1.35	0.80%
Pierce	864	43,778	2,030	\$1,338	\$1.55	4.64%
Skagit	772	1,799	5	\$1,096	\$1.42	0.30%
Snohomish	832	33,200	1,643	\$1,534	\$1.84	4.95%
Spokane	879	8,447	152	\$1,019	\$1.16	1.80%
Thurston	860	12,924	523	\$1,255	\$1.46	4.05%
Walla Walla	696	906	9	\$827	\$1.19	1.00%
Whatcom	792	13,061	26	\$962	\$1.21	0.20%
Whitman	795	4,489	58	\$980	\$1.23	1.30%
Yakima	724	3,545	25	\$759	\$1.05	0.70%
Statewide	832	316,279	12,641	\$1,573	\$1.89	4.26%

With all unit types analyzed, the influence of unit mix plays a significant role in determining the average rent. For example, King, Walla Walla, and Yakima counties have a proportionally high number of 1 bedroom and studio units which will provide downward influence on overall rents compared to places with a high proportion of 3 bedroom units which tend to rent for a higher amount. Given those influences, King county recorded the highest average overall rent as well as the highest rent per unit floor area of \$1,906 and \$2.34 per square foot. Yakima County recorded the lowest average rent of \$759 as well as the lowest rent of floor area at \$1.05 per square foot.

Time and Seasonality

The WCRER Apartment Market Report uses March and September data so that seasonal variation between markets is minimized. For example, Whitman and Kittitas counties are greatly influenced by the academic year. Yakima and Chelan/Douglas counties are greatly influenced by agricultural cycles. Taking the surveys at 6 monthly intervals incorporating the timing ensures that more accurate reflections of the market are recorded. Please note that there is limited comparability between this survey and previous versions of this report.