

Economic Stability Element

Introduction

Coupeville's commercial heritage is unique. As the economic heart of Whidbey Island for nearly a century, the Town primarily served the timber, agriculture, and maritime industries, as well as retail and wholesale markets and personal and business services. This commercial legacy survives to some extent, especially in the built environment of a mercantile past: Front Street, North Main Street, and Prairie Center are strong evidence of a small town that functioned more as a regional economic center than a geographically isolated town. In contrast, Coupeville's regional draw is now based more on its cultural assets (especially history, art, and nature) than its ability to provide a wide range of products and services, as rapid post-war development in Oak Harbor shifted the economic center of Whidbey Island eight miles to the north.

Among the GMA goals is a recognition that economic development and economic opportunities for residents should be encouraged throughout the State of Washington. However, this broad goal should be realized within the capacities of a sustainable environment, public services, and public facilities, and within the context of comprehensive planning. Economic goals should complement and support the community vision for Coupeville. This chapter builds upon other elements of the Comprehensive Plan to develop a direction that assures a sustainable local economy while protecting the Town's history and small-town character.

Why Economic Stability?

The Town added the Economic Stability element to the Comprehensive Plan in 1998 after working closely with the Executive Director of the Island County Economic Development Council (EDC) and a committee of local business owners and residents. The committee intentionally



Storefronts on Front Street in historic central Coupeville (photo credit: John Feit).



Town Hall (photo credit: Dave Wechner).



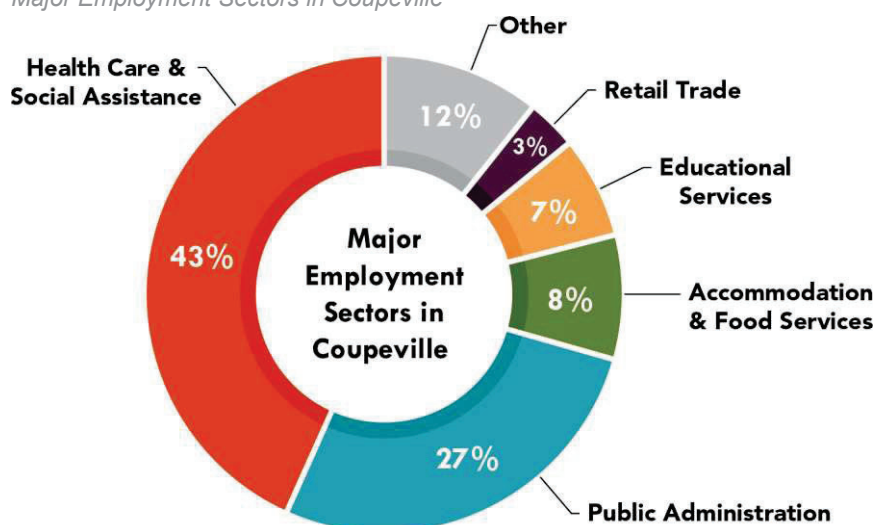
Whale wheel carved by local woodworker Roger Purdue (photo credit: Dave Wechner).

expressed a preference for "economic stability" as opposed to "economic development" because stability implies using the Town's current assets more efficiently. Examples might include attracting more year-round visitors or encouraging more economic use of existing commercial areas. Economic sustainability and stability would thus be managed within the Town's historic character for economic growth.

Existing Conditions Summary

As of 2019, Census OnTheMap data indicates that there are 1,978 jobs within Coupeville. Nearly three-quarters of jobs are within the health care/social assistance or public administration sectors. Health care and social assistance account for 43% of employment within Coupeville, followed by public administration (27%), accommodation and food services (8%), and educational services (7%).² Reflective of these percentages, major employers in town include WhidbeyHealth, Island County, and the Coupeville School District.

Major Employment Sectors in Coupeville



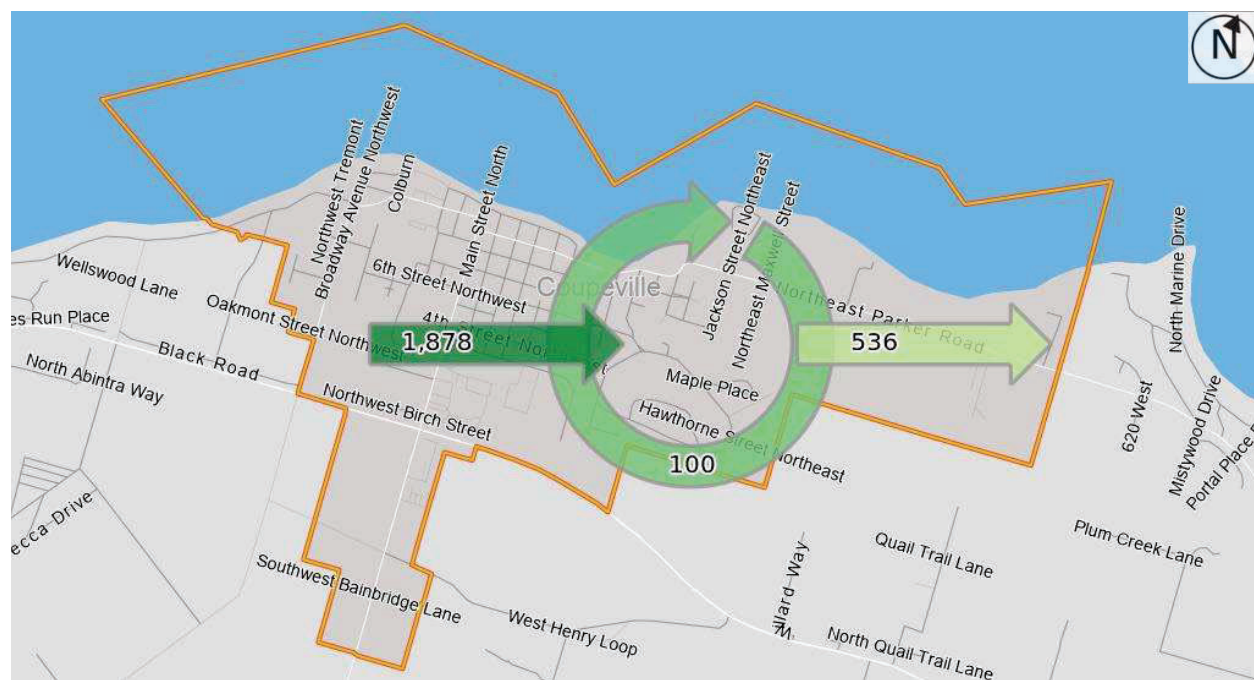
Note: The Public Administration sector includes government employment, such as from the Town of Coupeville and Island County. Other sectors include Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (1.8%), Finance and Insurance (1.6%), Other Services (excluding Public Administration) (1.5%), Construction (1.4%), and Real Estate and Rental and Leasing (1.1%).

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, 2019; BERK, 2023.

More individuals commute into Coupeville for work than leave the town to work in another location (1,878 compared with 536 individuals, respectively). Around 100 individuals who live in the Town also work in the Town. Those who commute to Coupeville to work tend to earn more in wages than those who live in Coupeville.

² U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, 2019

Town of Coupeville Employee Travel Patterns: Inflow/Outflow Analysis



Note: Inflow/Outflow analysis performed for primary jobs (public and private-sector jobs, one job per worker). A primary job is the highest-paying job for an individual worker.

Source: US Census, OnTheMap, 2019.

Tourism and hospitality are also important sectors in Coupeville and Island County. The Coupeville Chamber of Commerce estimates that Coupeville's seasonal population ranges from 1,000 to 1,500, depending on the time of year (highest in the spring and summer months and lowest in the fall and winter months).³ In 2021, Coupeville received \$13.4M of visitor travel spending, approximately 9% of countywide visitor travel spending that occurred in incorporated areas and approximately 5% of countywide visitor travel spending overall.⁴ While visitor spending, earnings, and tax receipts decreased in 2020 (likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic), spending and earnings amounts from 2021 indicate patterns are returning to pre-2020 numbers.

See *Appendix D - Economic Stability* for more information about Coupeville's workforce, major employers/industries, and employment projections.

³ Coupeville Chamber of Commerce, Seasonal Population by Quarter, Q4 2018 - Q4 2020.

⁴ Island County Travel Impacts 2015-2021 (Whidbey and Camano Islands Tourism), May 2022.

Goals and Policies

Goal ES-1: Compatible and Complementary Businesses. Encourage new businesses and the retention and expansion of existing businesses that are environmentally compatible, complementary to community needs, and consistent with land uses.

- ES-1.1 Work with local stakeholders, such as the Central Whidbey Chamber of Commerce, Coupeville Historic Waterfront Association, and the Island County Economic Development Council to support the sustainability of year- round businesses that best match community retail and service needs.
- ES-1.2 Support the retention, growth, and establishment of small, locally-owned businesses.
- ES-1.3 Review existing commercial zones and uses to ensure that both community and business needs are met, while providing for orderly transitions between commercial and residential uses.
- ES-1.4 Review existing land use and development regulations and identify possible locations for limited, carefully regulated light manufacturing businesses, such as artisan manufacturing, microbreweries, furniture and craft stores, boat building and repair, and art production studios.
- ES-1.5 Encourage water-oriented and visually compatible small-scale commercial uses on the waterfront that are consistent with the character of the Front Street area, including the Coupeville Wharf.
- ES-1.6 Encourage "green" businesses that are less resource-intensive and have fewer impacts on the cultural landscape.
- ES-1.7 Ensure that the Town regulations governing businesses balance legitimate business needs with the protection of residential integrity.
- ES-1.8 Continue to support seasonal farmers' markets to promote local products.



Wharf Dog storefront (photo credit: Dave Wechner).



McGregor Studio (photo credit: Dave Wechner).



Farmers' market produce (photo credit: Megan Bucknall).

- ES-1.9 Support the establishment of affordable childcare services within the Town of Coupeville and Central Whidbey Island for children of all ages through potentially expedited permit review processes, assistance with grant applications, and by designating child day care centers as a principal use in appropriate zones.
- ES-1.10 Build a coalition of employers, businesses, and housing non-profits to address housing needs that will help attract and retain employees.



Children on a slide (photo credit: Amber Faust).

Goal ES-2: Tourism. Emphasize Coupeville's historic character, activities, and natural setting to maintain and enhance year-round opportunities for sustainable tourism.

- ES-2.1 Support and partner with *Embrace Whidbey and Camano Islands* in its Regenerative Tourism campaign, which provides unique visitor experiences by connecting with the community and promoting sustainable tourism in Coupeville.
- ES-2.2 Support Coupeville's arts community and Creative District to enhance the Town's image and reputation as a center for arts training, display, and sales.
- ES-2.3 Support the Coupeville Port District in restoring the wharf and enhancing boating activities and marine recreation.
- ES-2.4 Cooperate with and support the activities of the Trust Board of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, the Island County Historical Society, and other partners to preserve historic character and enhance educational opportunities.
- ES-2.5 Expand pedestrian access for residents and tourists by connecting Town parks, Island County's non-motorized trail system, Whidbey Camano Land Trust trails, state parks, and Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve facilities.

A Creative District is a geographically defined area of cultural and economic activity where innovation and creativity can thrive. It is a place for people to gather and enjoy their community's arts and culture, and a place that helps the community move enthusiastically into the future. Creative Districts are designated by the Washington State Arts Commission ([ArtsWA](https://www.wa.gov/arts)).

- ES-2.6 Support tourism marketing for Coupeville and Whidbey Island, including active cooperation with efforts to promote Island County during the "off-season."
- ES-2.7 Coordinate with CHWA, Coupeville Chamber of Commerce, the Museum, businesses, and others on improving parking and walkability in the historic downtown area, and on providing permanent public restrooms and other facilities.
- ES-2.8 Consider branding and wayfinding elements for the Town that businesses can incorporate into their marketing plans.
- ES-2.9. Explore and analyze Town-owned properties to determine their highest and best use for public benefit.
- ES-2.10 Design streets and public facilities to support and strengthen Coupeville's character, identity, and economic vitality.
- A. Maintain and enhance the Town's historic waterfront through cohesive landscaping, gateway design elements, and educational and directional signage.
 - B. Encourage pedestrian movement through the historic waterfront by incorporating thematic signage, designated walkways, informal gathering spaces, and parking management.



The Town gateway sign is decorated for the holiday season.

Goal ES-3: Employment Opportunities. Foster an array of sustainable employment opportunities for all incomes and age levels, particularly jobs that pay a living wage.

- ES-3.1 Promote economic resilience by encouraging diversity of businesses not reliant on a single business sector or large employer. Include strategies for increasing business sector diversity and encouraging innovative use of underutilized space.



Coworking space.

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- ES-3.2 Encourage expansion of existing employers and the attraction of new employers that pay wages sufficient to support family households and fund needed public services.
- ES-3.3 Collaborate with educational facilities and other public and private institutions to provide opportunities in entrepreneurship, training, innovation, and mentoring.
- ES-3.4 Engage in regular communication with local businesses and partners outside the region to better understand industry trends, cooperatively plan for future needs, and work toward common goals.
- ES-3.5 Encourage low-impact, home-based businesses in residential areas.
- ES-3.6 Encourage the development of co-working spaces that support Coupeville's residents who work remotely.
- ES-3.7 Continue to support the major employers within Coupeville, including Island County, WhidbeyHealth, and the Coupeville School District.

A **living wage** is the minimum income necessary for a person to afford a decent standard of living, including food, water, housing, education, health care, childcare, transportation, clothing, and other essential needs like provision for unexpected events. There is no one universally accepted measure of what a living wage is, as needs vary by location and household type.

A related concept is that of a **family wage** – a wage sufficient not only to support oneself, but also to raise a family.
