



“Let’s Get to Yes”

How an Internal Culture of Customer Service Can Help Your City Build More Housing

Panelists:

Elizabeth Chamberlain, City Manager, Walla Walla
Steve Kinkelie, City Manager, Puyallup
Erin Erdman, City Manager, Kennewick
Kurt Triplett, City Manager, Kirkland

Moderator:

Jenn Kovitz, Community Engagement, Hayden Homes

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Meet Our Panelists



Elizabeth Chamberlain, City Manager, Walla Walla



Steve Kirkelie, City Manager, Puyallup



Erin Erdman, City Manager, Kennewick



Kurt Triplett, City Manager, Kirkland

Mini-Case Study #1: Walla Walla

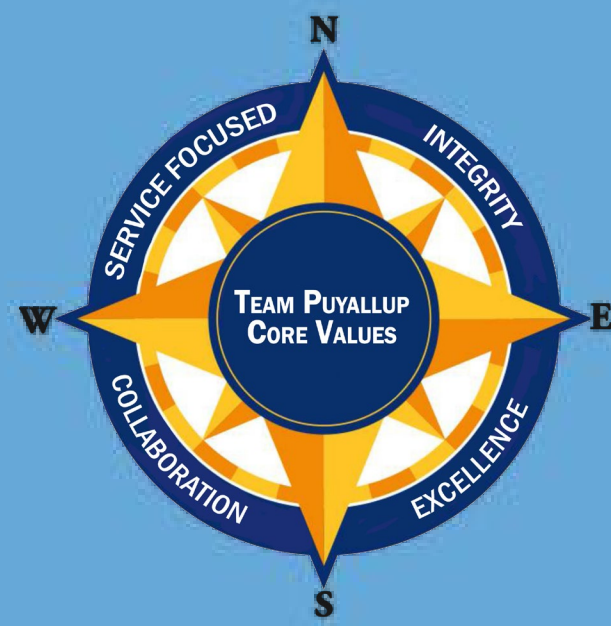


Elizabeth Chamberlain, City Manager, Walla Walla

Mini-Case Study #2: Puyallup



Steve Kirkelie, City Manager, Puyallup





PUYALLUP DEVELOPMENT AND PERMITTING SERVICES

CORE PRINCIPLE



“Dedicated to Exceptional Customer Experiences”

ACTIONS:

- Pick up the phone
- Explain the ‘why’

BEHAVIORS/ EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE:

- ‘Every customer is my customer’ mindset
- Empathy

Mini-Case Study #3: Kennewick



Erin Erdman, City Manager, Kennewick



***“We want to be a part
of the solution.”***

Kennewick’s Development Review Philosophy

1

Customer-First Culture

Coordination across
every reviewing
department — not just
Building.

2

Get to Yes

Not “yes” to everything
— staff work side-by-
side to find a path
within the code.

3

Built on Listening

Grounded in direct
feedback from ongoing
developer forums.

Express Permitting: What Qualifies

Two tracks, two fast timelines — contingent on a complete, checklist-ready application.

Residential

- All single-family residential: new SFD, townhome, duplex
- Sheds, shops, decks, patio covers
- Remodels

24–48 HRS

Commercial

- Tenant improvements under 4,000 sf (evaluated case-by-case)
- TI up to 10,000 sf where occupancy is unchanged
- Change of occupancy under 4,000 sf, in most cases

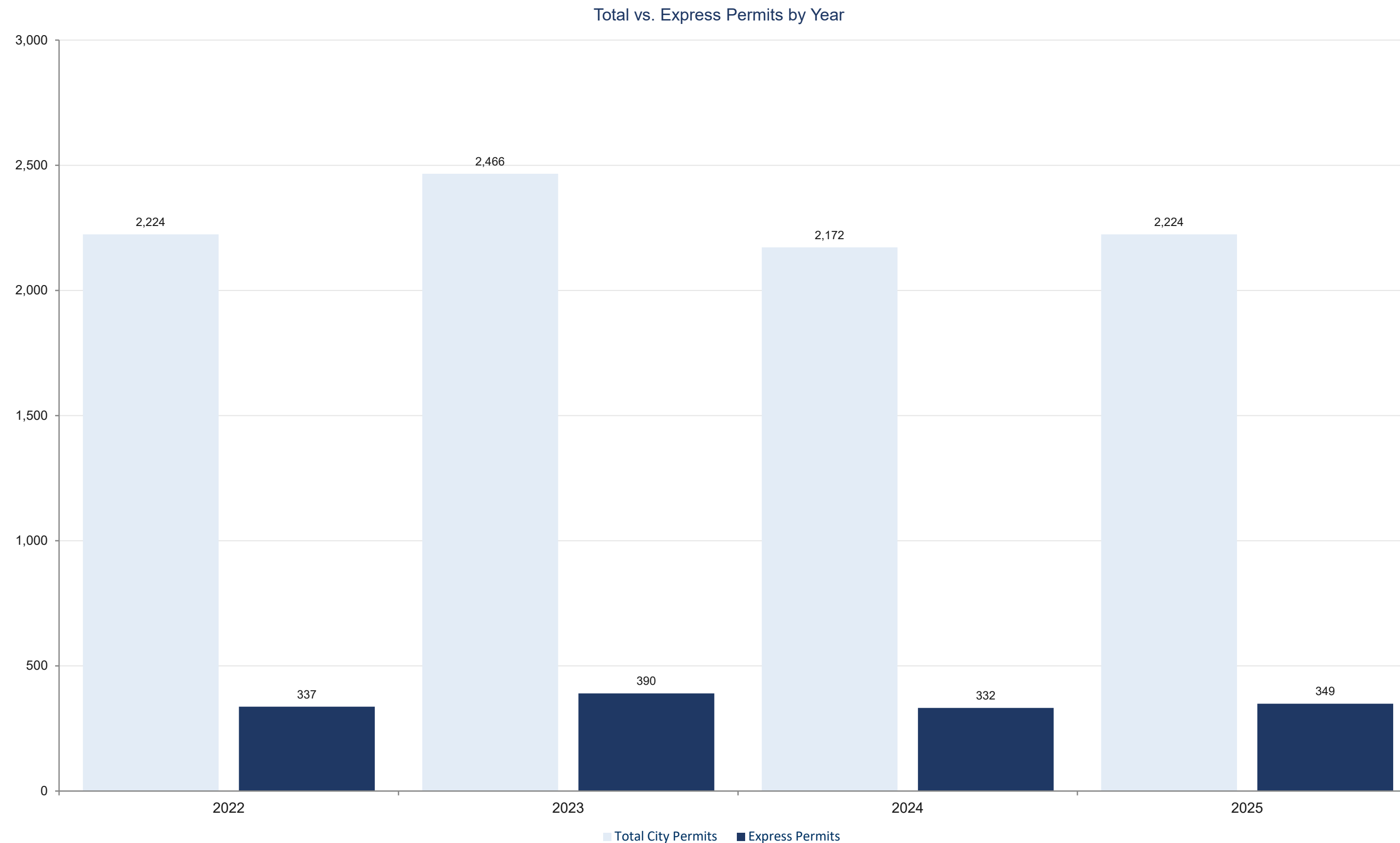
72 HRS

Concierge-style review: Plan reviewers call applicants directly to resolve issues, rather than relying on email.



Express Permitting: By the Numbers

2022–2025 — total City permits vs. express permits issued



72%

of all SFD permits were
Express, 2022–25 average

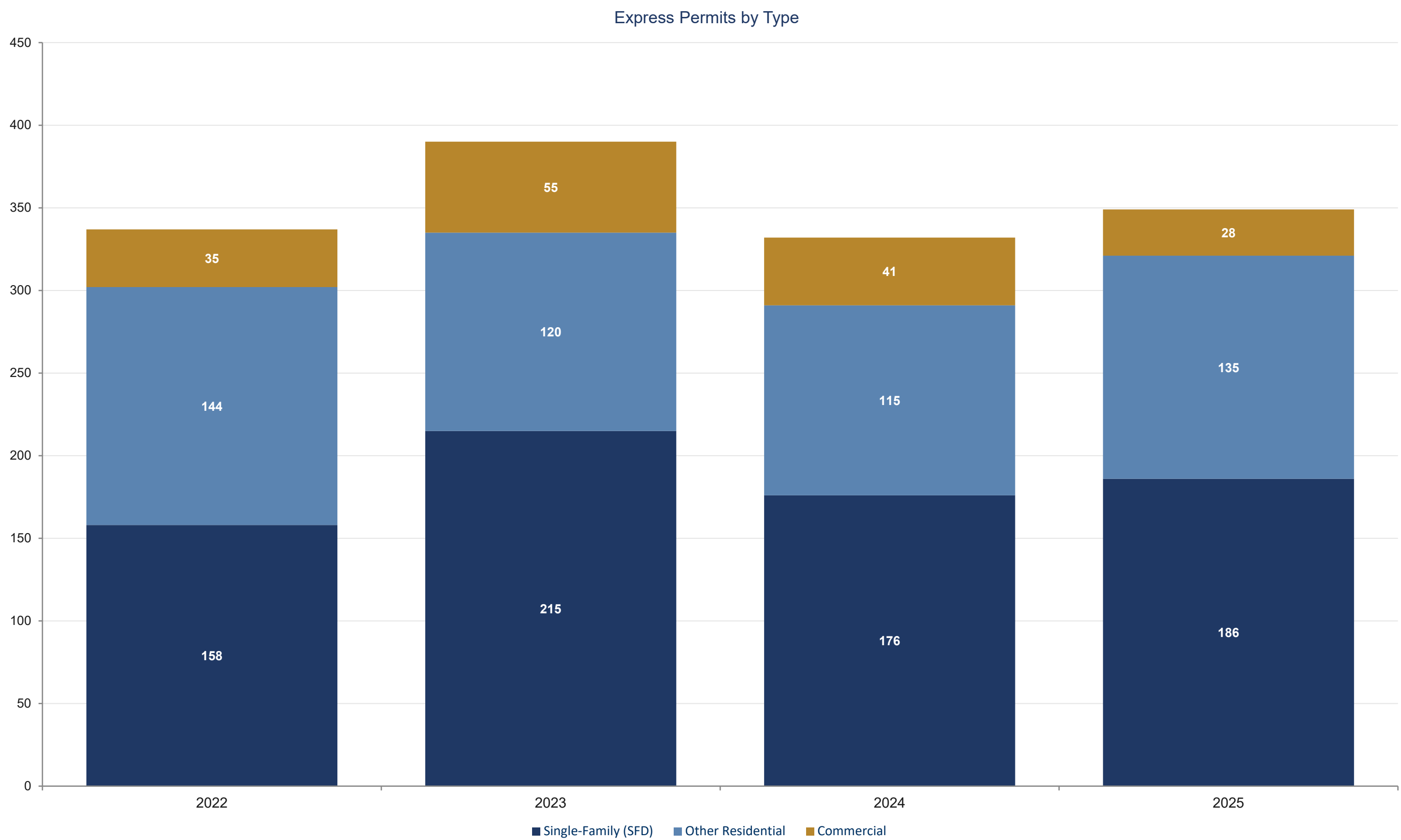
~40

commercial express permits
issued per year

Only one added Building Dept. position runs the program — no other department added headcount.

Express Permitting: Category Breakdown

2022–2025 — single-family, other residential, and commercial share of express volume



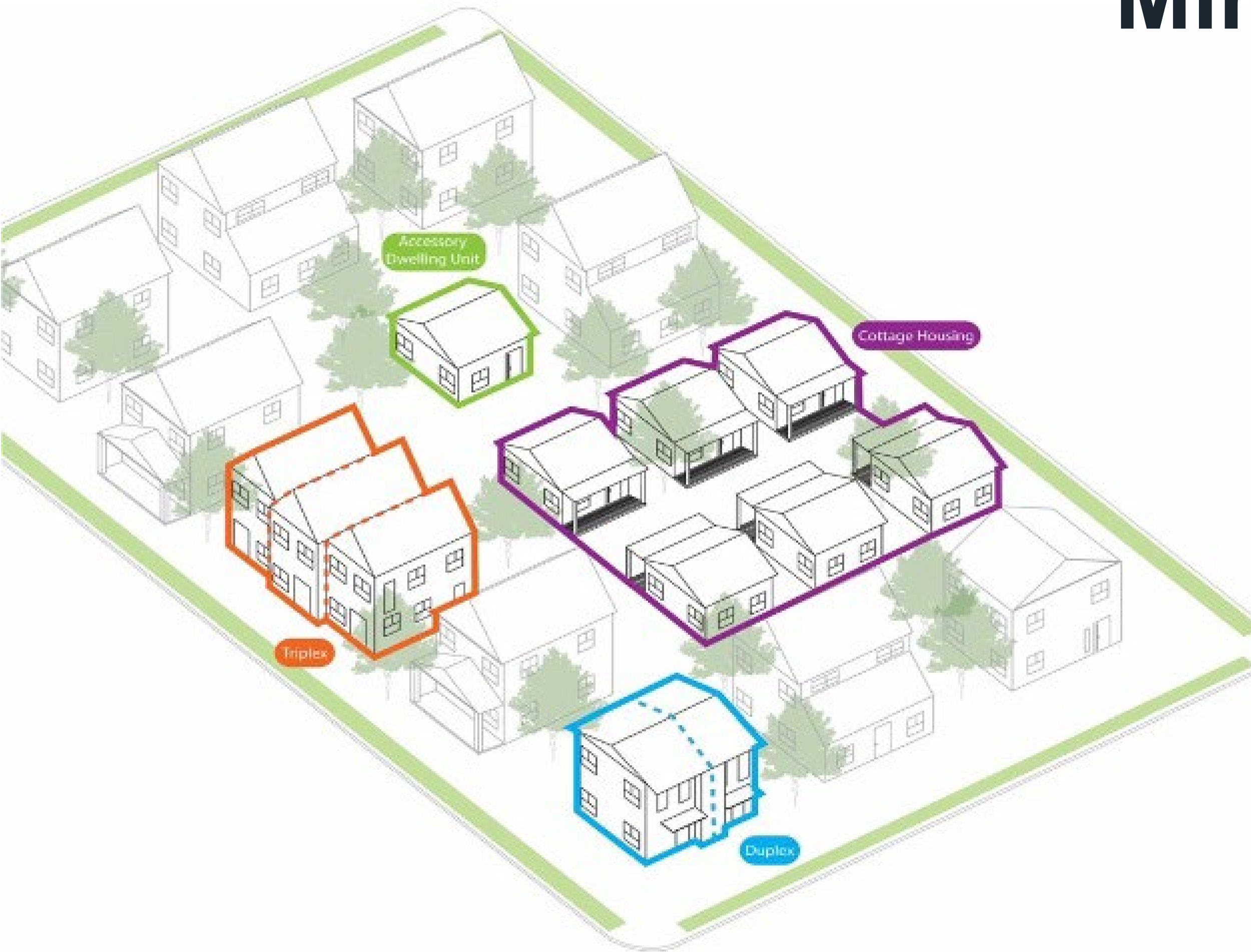
89%
of express permits are
residential, 2022–25 average

59%
of express residential permits
are single-family

“Other residential” covers townhomes, duplexes, sheds, decks, patio covers, and remodels — not just SFD.

Mini Case Study #3: Kirkland

"Permit = Permission"





City of Kirkland, Washington

HOUSING STRATEGY PLAN



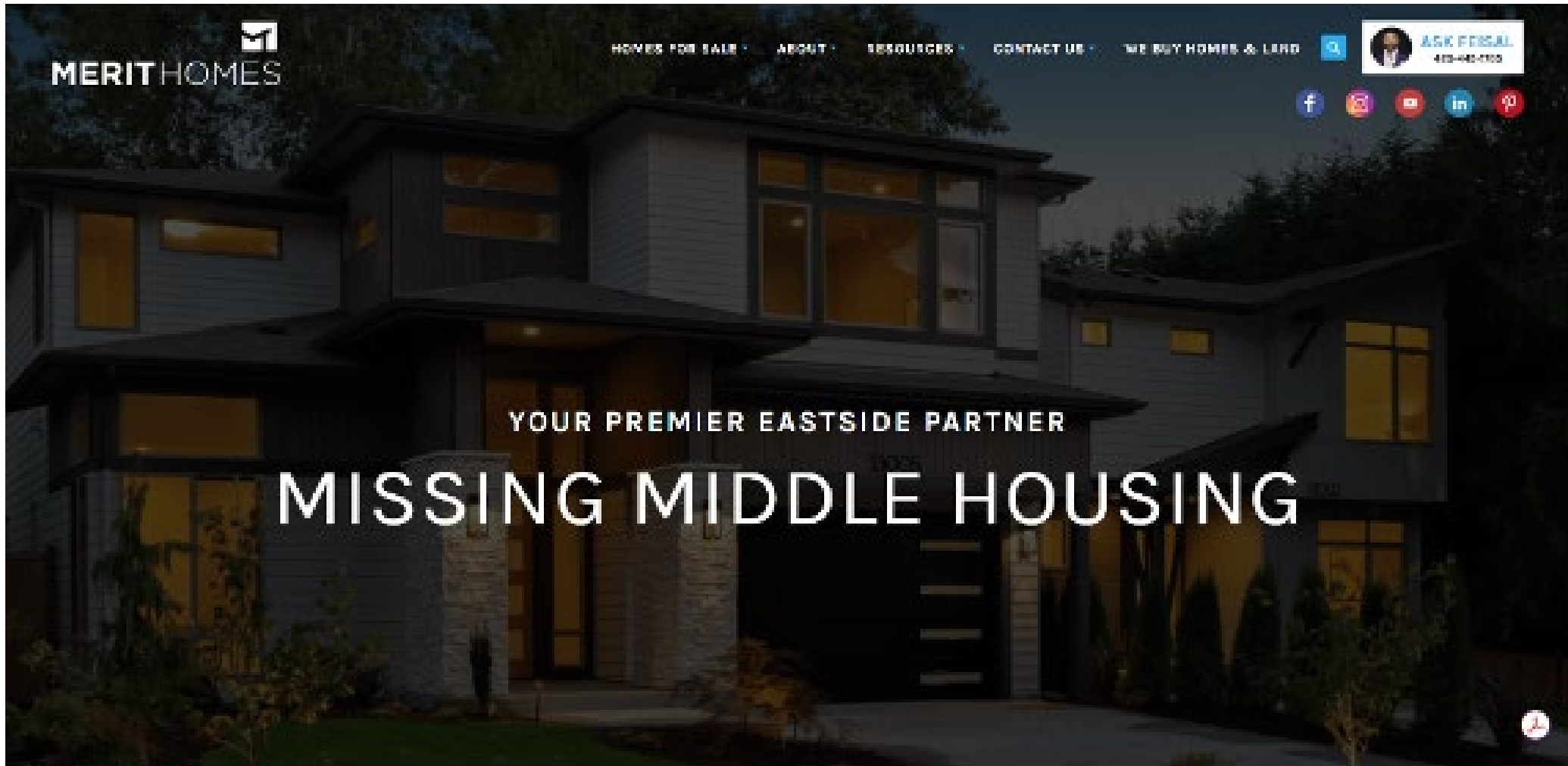
HOUSING STRATEGY PLAN

City of Kirkland, Washington

Recommended by the City of Kirkland
Housing Strategy Advisory Group

April 2018

Middle Housing Early Adoption - 2020



MERIT'S MIDDLE HOUSING EXPERIENCE



Early Adopters of the 2020 Kirkland Zoning Code Changes

In 2020, major amendments occurred to Kirkland's [Chapter 103 zoning code](#), affording higher density allowances with cottage homes, carriage homes, ADUs (accessory dwelling units), and Two/Three unit homes. Understanding the need for more housing options, we launched our [Urban Series](#) comprised of cottage designs and DADUs (Detached Accessory Dwelling Units), featuring our signature Northwest Contemporary architecture. Our proven track record of over 30 completed Middle Housing projects, focused on enhancing density and housing diversity, makes Merit Homes a key resource for understanding





Kirkland Housing Dashboard



Select a Neighborhood
All selected by default

How to use this dashboard

Kirkland Housing Dashboard tracks overall housing supply and need for affordable housing in the City, including the City's progress against the interim affordable housing targets adopted by the City Council in September 2021. For instructions on how to use this dashboard, please click the button below:

[Click Here](#)

Existing Total Housing Units (2025)

44,208

Housing Permits Finaled (4/1/2025-4/2/2026)

1267 Units



New Housing Slider By Year

2017 - 2026



2017



2026



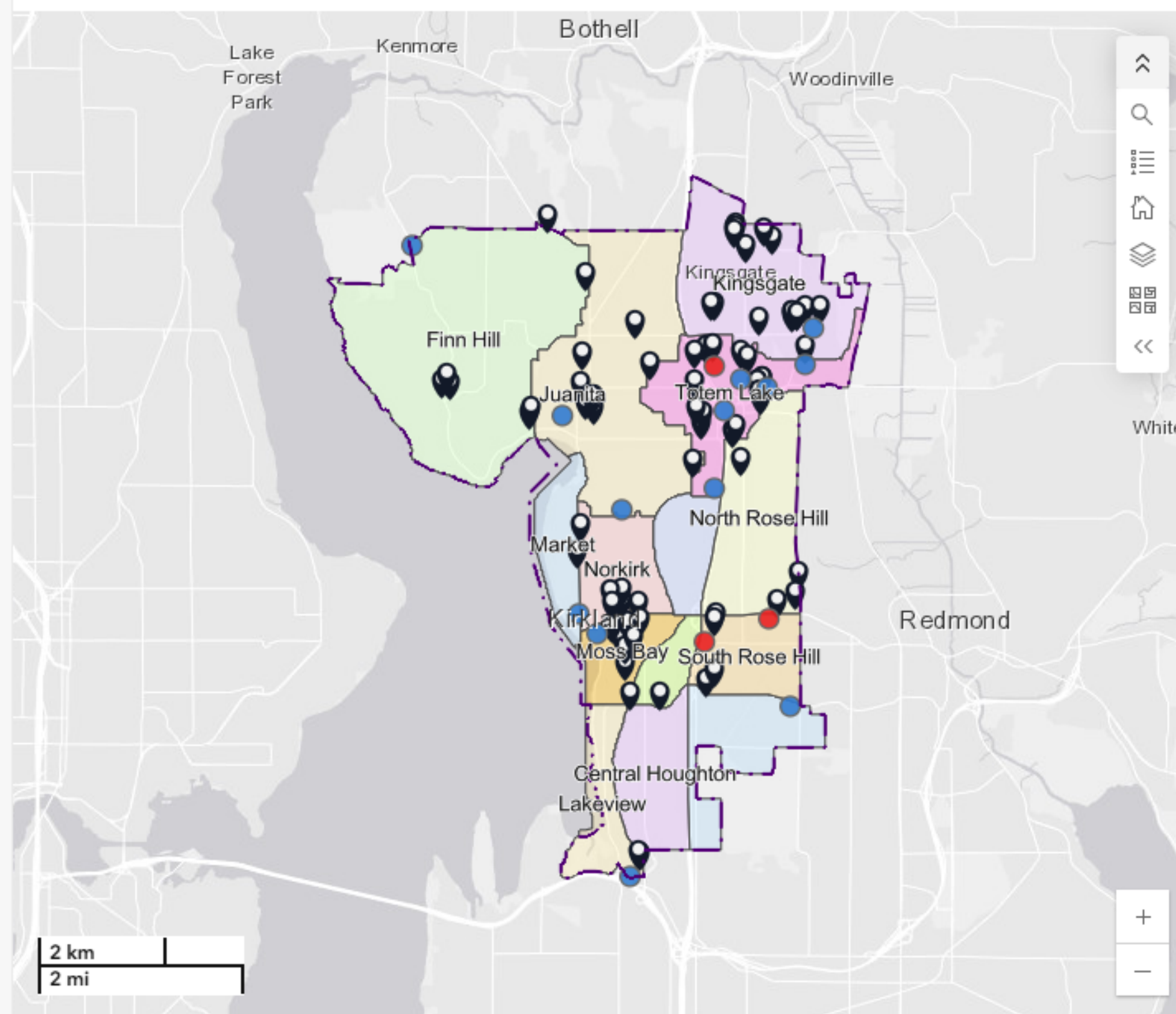
Set to minimum

Set to maximum

Data Sources: Kirkland Planning and Building; Kirkland GIS; Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH); Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM); King County Assessor's Office; US Census; American Community Survey 2017; and ESRI Community Analyst

[Send Feedback](#)

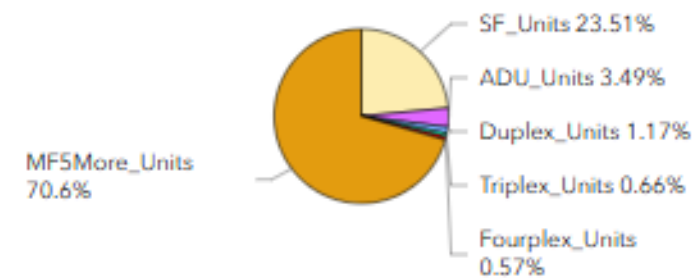
Housing Supply and Major Housing Development Projects By Neighborhood



City of Kirkland | Bureau of Land Management | Esri | HERE | Garmin | USGS | EPA | NPS

Powered by Esri

Total New Housing Permits Issued



Single Family



22.1k

Housing Units

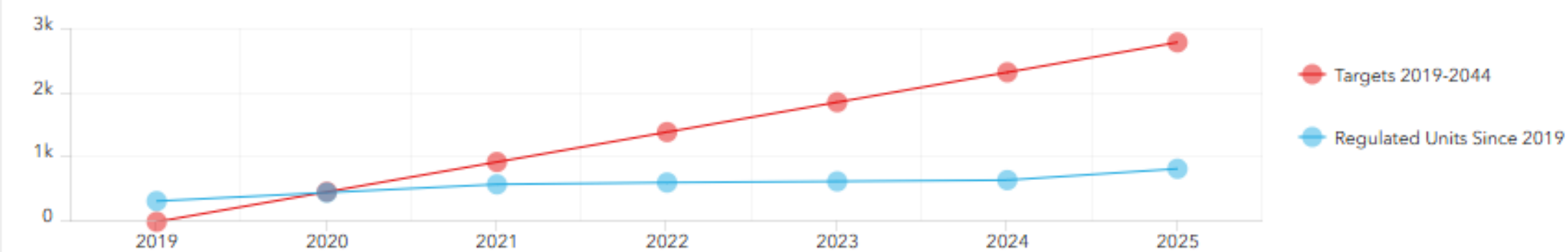
Multi-Family



21.8k

Housing Units

Affordable Housing Targets (2019-2025)



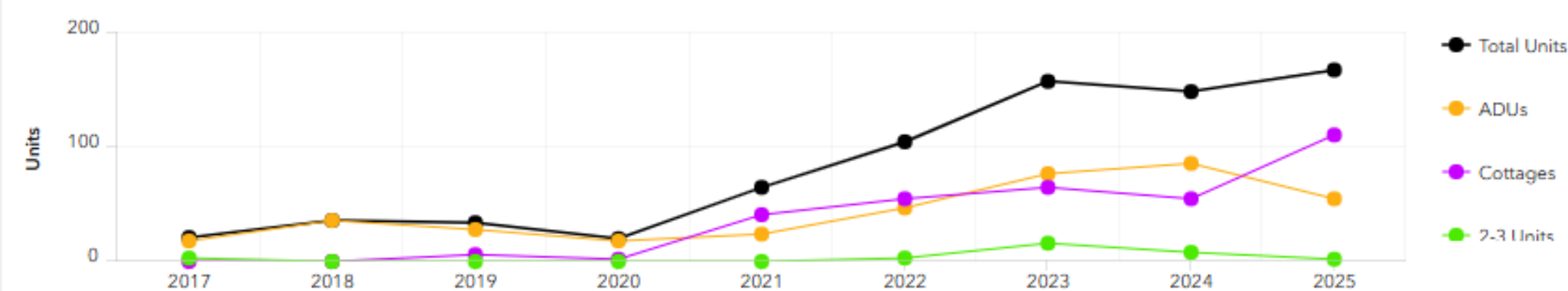
2019-2025

2019-2029

2019-2044

Total Affordable Units

Permits Issued Since 2017

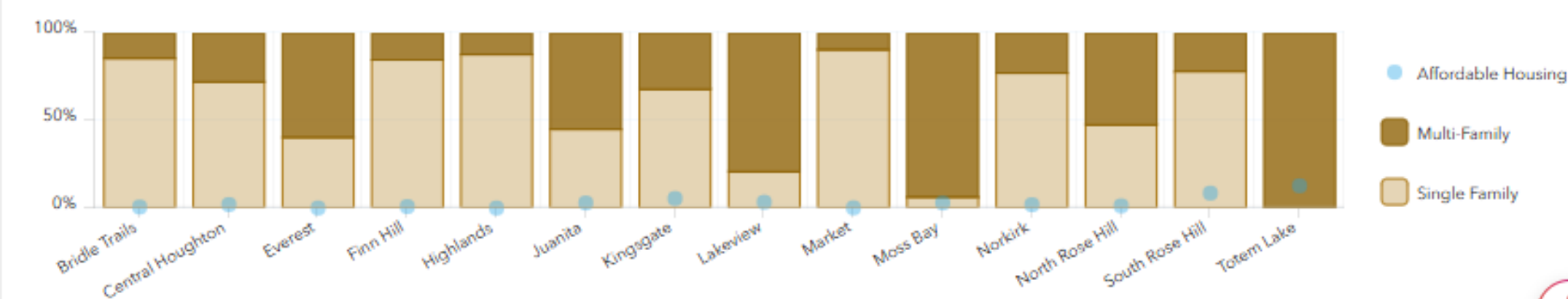


Middle Housing Permits Issued

Table View

Cumulative View

Existing Housing Supply (%) by Neighborhoods



Housing (%)

Housing Trends

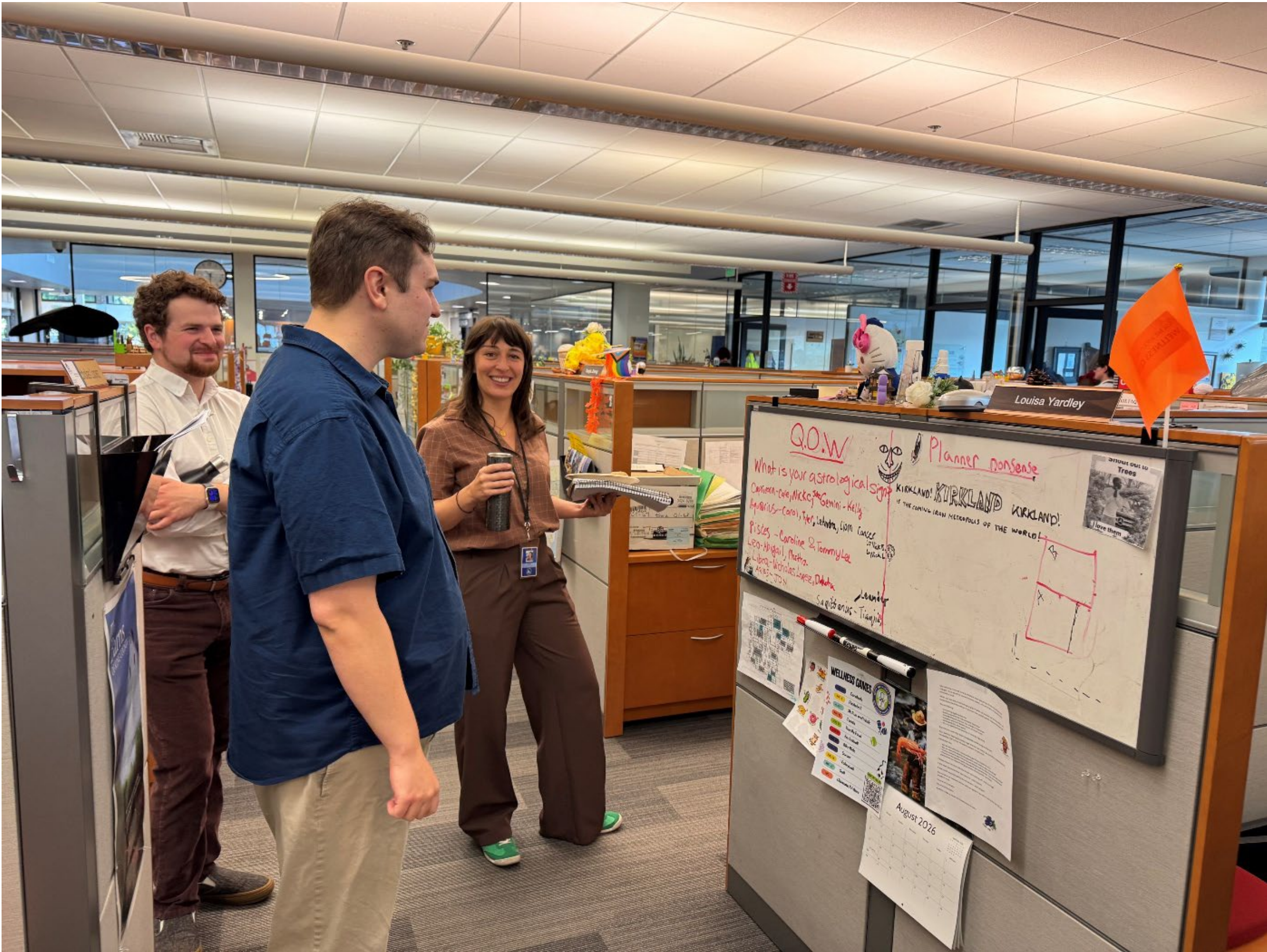
Total Housing Units

43.9k

Affordable Housing Units

2.1k

Culture of “Yes”



Planning Employee Onboarding "Academy"

- Subject matter experts teach topical modules, including:



Permit Review Software



Administrative Functions



Inspections



Forestry/Trees, Critical Areas, Shorelines, and Housing Planning



Code Enforcement



Growth Management Act/Regional Planning, and Planning Work Program



Building Division: Permit Intake/Plan Review



Director 3-hour tour to learn about history of Kirkland, growth strategy, key projects, housing typologies, permitting philosophy





A Few Good Pilots Can Change the World!

But Why Though? The Impact of a Customer Service Culture on Your City's Renters and Buyers

- When cities help homebuilders save time, this equates to valuable cost-savings that can be passed onto rental unit rates and home sale prices
- Example: **Hayden Homes' land carrying costs are \$400 on average per day**
*(important: financing determined by **calendar days**, not working days)*

Saving just 5 days in civil engineering plat review and 5 days in site plan review results in a \$4000 cost savings **per home** in our debt carry cost alone.

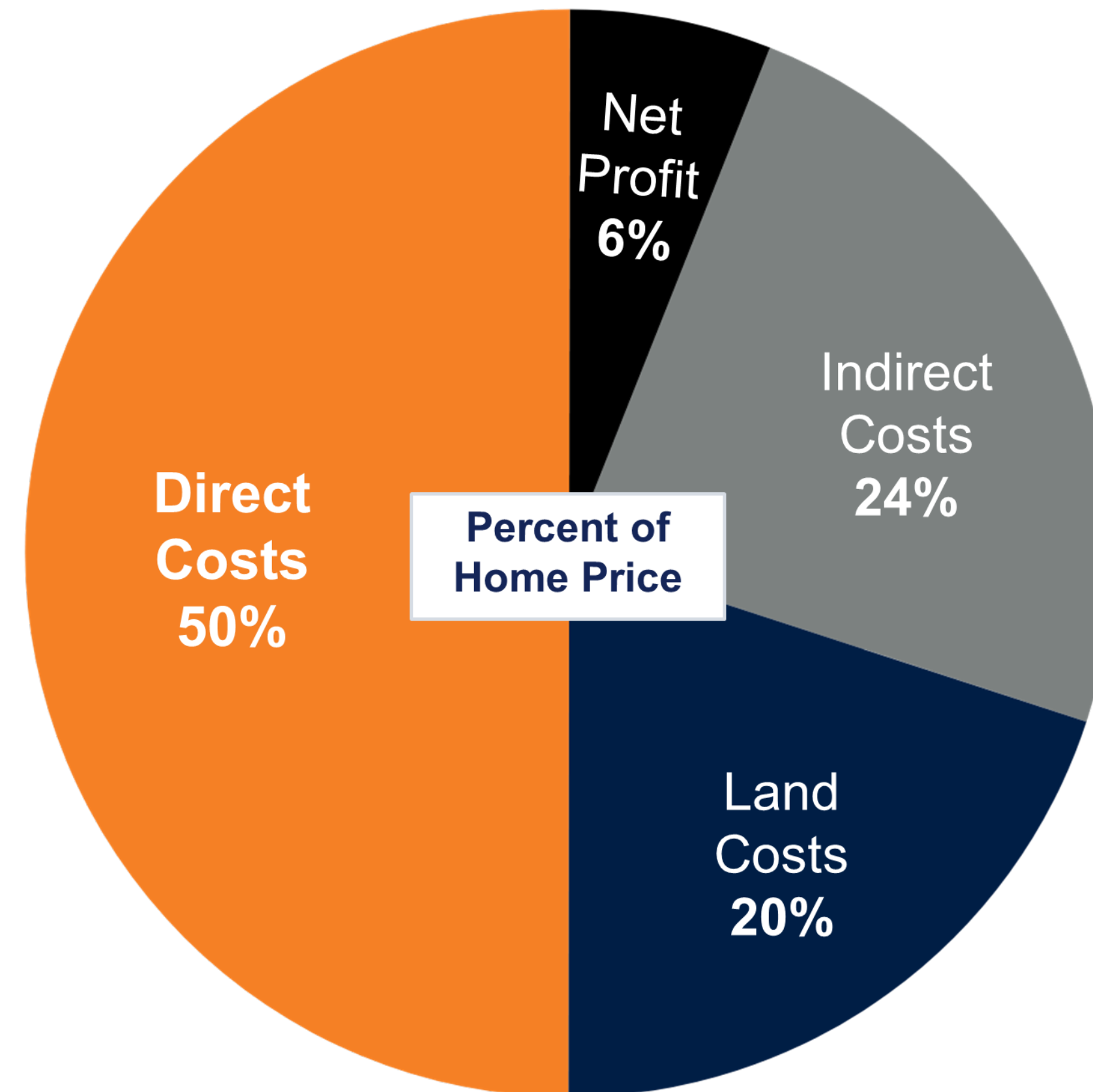


Industry Model - Production Homebuilding

Cost of Construction (as a % of Final Home Price)

Direct Costs:

- Building Materials
- Labor
- Permits
- Fees



Indirect Costs:

- Sales
- Marketing
- Plan Design
- Project Management
- Construction Financing
- Accounting
- Warranty
- Etc.

Land Costs:

- Land Acquisition (dirt) Entitlement
- Engineering
- Survey
- Land Development
- Land Financing
- Etc

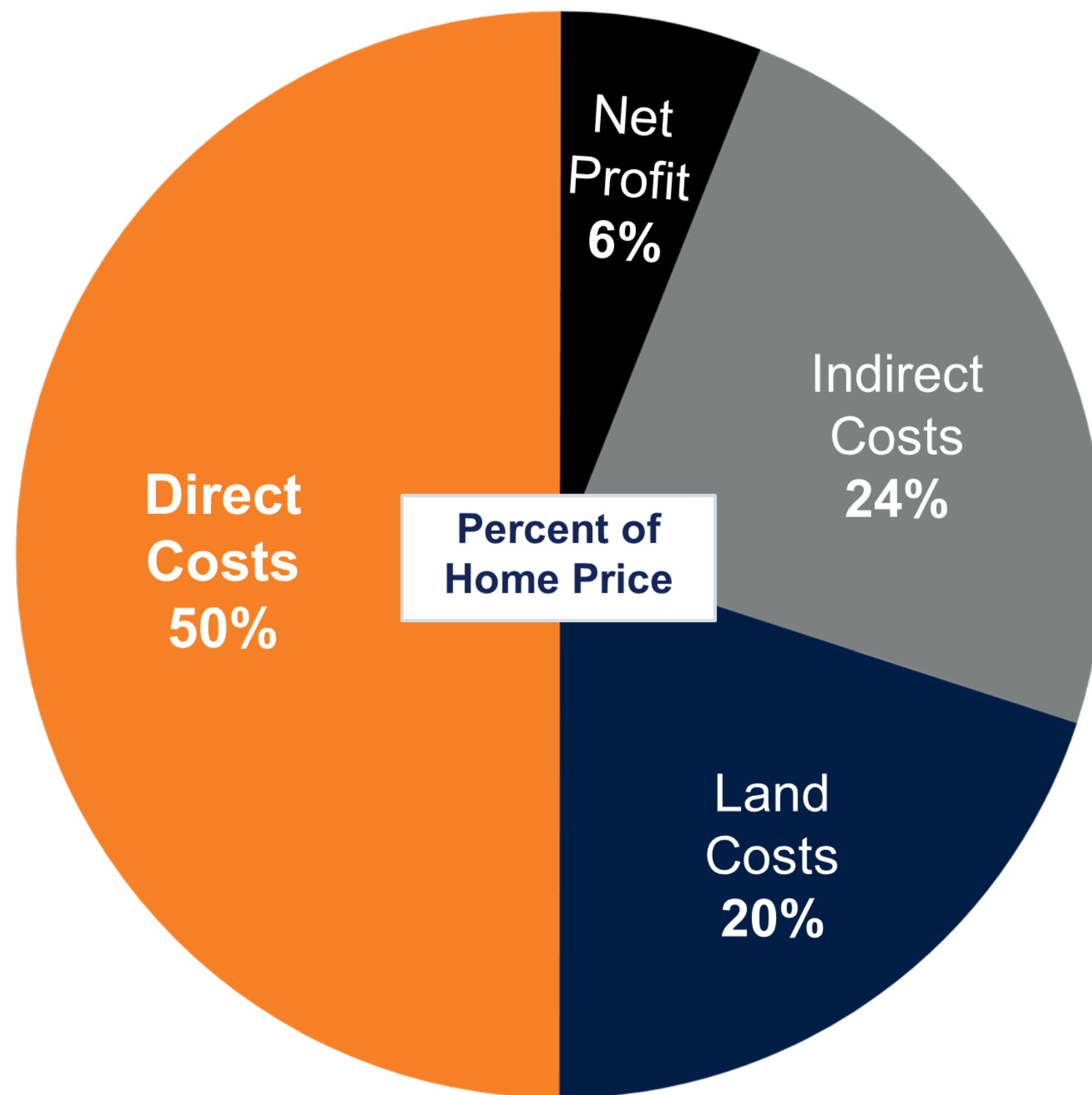
Cost of Construction (as a % of final home price)

Direct Costs:

- Building Materials
- Labor
- Permits
- Fees

Pro-Housing Savings that Jurisdictions Can Offer Include:

- Exemptions for 80% AMI and below
- Partial fee exemptions for 80-120% AMI (sunset clause)
- Density bonuses
- Expedited permitting
- Predictable fee schedules



Indirect Costs:

- Sales
- Marketing
- Plan Design
- Project Management
- Construction Financing
- Accounting
- Warranty
- Etc.

WA Reality: 25-38%

Land Costs:

- Land Acquisition (dirt) Entitlement
- Engineering
- Survey
- Land Development
- Land Financing
- Etc.

Central/Eastern Washington Permitting Snapshot

City	Average Permit Cycle Times*	Average Permit/SDC Fee Costs*	City Population
XXX	63	\$19,062	>200,000
XXX	51	\$12,492	80,000-100,000
XXX	48	\$18,840	10,000-15,000
XXX	43	\$15,247	100,000-120,000
XXX	43	\$9,478	5,000-10,000
Walla Walla	41	\$15,886	30,000-40,000
XXX	39	\$11,004	80,000-100,000
XXX	34	\$14,921	60,000-80,000
Kennewick	32	\$7,652	80,000-100,000
XXX	24	\$3,743	10,000-15,000
XXX	18	\$11,354	20,000-30,000

**2026 year-to-date*

Together Achieving Housing Affordability for More Washingtonians

WA City	HUD 100% AMI, Household of Four	Price of Home Affordable* to 100% AMI	Median Home Sales Price	Hayden Homes Starting Price	AMI for Which Hayden Homes Starting Price is Affordable*
Kennewick**	\$105,400	\$438,827	\$438,795	\$374,990	85% AMI
Walla Walla	\$102,300	\$425,920	\$429,260	\$349,990	78% AMI

Source: HUD MFI (6/4/26); Zillow ZHVI (5/31/2026); Assumes 6.5% interest rate, 5% down payment, 30-year mortgage.
*US Dept. of H.U.D. defines "affordable" as "not housing cost-burdened". H.U.D. determines a household is not "housing cost burdened" if they spend no more than 30% of their income on housing.
**Kennewick-Richland MSA

Feedback from Other Multifamily and Home Builders

“The Puyallup Permit Partnership is a great example how builders and development staff are able to directly **identify choke points in the process and address redundant or overburdensome regulations.**”

“[In Kirkland, we have] regular industry engagement, **a willingness to revisit regulations,** better permit transparency, parking reform, lot splitting, and some efforts to simplify and **make costs more predictable.**”

“Willing to **engage regularly with builders,** including through quarterly stakeholder roundtables, and there is generally good access to staff and leadership when we raise concerns. That **willingness to have an ongoing conversation is meaningful,** especially when builders can identify a specific code or process problem and get it in front of the right people.”



Q&A