



Washington County
Community Foundation

Washington County Community Foundation, Inc.
PO Box 50 Salem, IN 47167

DATE: OCTOBER 2024



WISDOM
WORKSHOP

WASHINGTON
COUNTY

WISDOM WORKS

REPORT



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Objectives

In summer of 2021, led by Executive Director Judy Johnson, Washington County Community Foundation Board members and local stakeholders met to discuss challenges facing Washington County. These challenges had been brought to the fore by the County's involvement with the Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement's Sustaining Hoosier Communities Initiative.

That initiative conducted a series of resident meetings and asset mapping sessions across the county. From those meetings a series of challenges and opportunities had been identified, including:

- Insufficient workforce readiness and career and technical education (CTE) training for high school graduates seeking more locally relevant choices
- A lack of upskilling programs for mid-career workers seeking better employment options
- Stalled housing market due to lack of down-sizing options for seniors creating a shortage of housing for growing families
- Quality of place that does not adequately support business attraction and retention
- Senior population looking for meaningful and active ways to engage with the broader community for their physical and mental health
- A general desire for a more interconnected community.

Building on these listening sessions, in February and March, 2024 three information gathering and planning sessions were held in Pekin, Campbellsburg and Salem in Washington County. In these meetings over 80 residents representing a cross-section of stakeholders—community foundation board members,



residents, seniors, educators (K-12), higher education staff, workforce administrators, and other nonprofit services, alongside the director and staff from Washington County Community Foundation. Attendees at each of the planning sessions participated in a brief asset-identification and mapping exercise, identified community strengths, and discussed challenges and opportunities.

Proud of their communities, residents spoke about **achieving and sustaining a higher quality of life** not just for themselves but also for potential new residents. Moreover, residents expressed the strong need to **support growth in programs and services that benefit their neighbors, friends, and families living in poverty**. Residents were particularly concerned about the **lack of community-based opportunities for youth and for seniors**. **Limited local employment options** was a frequent topic. This was especially deeply felt by seniors, many of whose **families have moved away**. Both the seniors and their families wished that there was more to keep them in the community. The **disconnection within communities and among residents** was expressed by all and felt most deeply by the community's seniors.

Citizen priorities:

- Housing availability and affordability**
- Jobs with growth opportunity**
- Engagement activities for all residents**
- More community connectedness**

Community Voices

A working group convened by Judy Johnson (WCCF) and Salem Mayor Justin Green included retired teachers, Community Foundation board members, Washington County's economic development director, Ivy Tech Community College coordinator for Washington County, and regional business representatives, including the CEO of Jackson County REMC. This group has met regularly since the summer of 2021. The group has been joined by two superintendents from East Washington School Corporation and Salem Community Schools.

While the original group discussed innovative options to tackle a variety of community challenges, the group was able to refine their ideas into a single plan to address opportunities for seniors, students, and community interaction. The six areas of the community that will be positively impacted by the Wisdom Works plan include:

1. High School students seeking CTE courses
2. Seniors looking for skill-based activities
3. Local businesses seeking closer ties to the workforce pipeline
4. Entrepreneurs, innovators, and work-from-home employees
5. Seniors seeking down-sized housing options that enable their aging in community
6. The broader Washington County community—with a tradition of service and civic engagement.

Wisdom Works will fulfill locally expressed needs in Salem and impact the region. It will introduce younger generations to trades and crafts through intergenerational education, while simultaneously benefiting seniors and retirees who seek creative and social outlets as they age-in place.

Wisdom Works will help distribute the knowledge of senior communities and individuals who have spent lifetimes developing trades, mechanical skills, culinary arts, gardening, cooking, building, and other life skills.

Seniors will benefit from the social interaction and mental stimulation of teaching their craft, while participants gain exposure to experiences and skills that could shape a career or a life's passion.

We can foresee seniors living with more fulfillment as they interact with an increasingly diverse demographic, as we expect Wisdom Works to attract varying ages for learning.

Naomi Raye, Salem Senior Center Executive Director, talks about the potential impact of Wisdom Works

The promising impact of Wisdom Works has attracted the attention of numerous community leaders, all eager for a brighter future for Washington County

Expert Perspectives

Seniors, Careers and Community

By co-locating a variety of ages, activities, and community actors, Wisdom Works has been intentionally designed to foster a culture of “**positive proximity**.” The benefits of positive proximity and shared resources enable residents and community stakeholders to draw from community-held talents and assets. Wisdom Works helps Washington County to address its local challenges and identify potential resolutions collectively and creatively using community-generated ideas and strategies. Deploying a process for collective and creative community-generated approaches is essential for community cohesion and long-term success—especially rural community success.

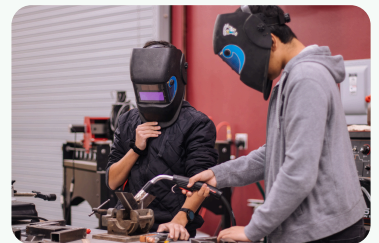
Seniors comprise only 12% of the U.S. population but 25% of the rural population is over the age of 65. Rural individuals may face geographic isolation, which can exacerbate mental health conditions. Meaningful engagement opportunities using creative problem-solving can mitigate feelings of loneliness and cognitive decline.

This initiative is a response to the community’s seniors’ call for more inclusive and enriching opportunities, positioning them as vital contributors to the community’s health and wellness. Wisdom Workshop not only helps seniors combat the challenges of aging and loneliness but also enhances life satisfaction by keeping them actively engaged in mentoring and teaching roles.

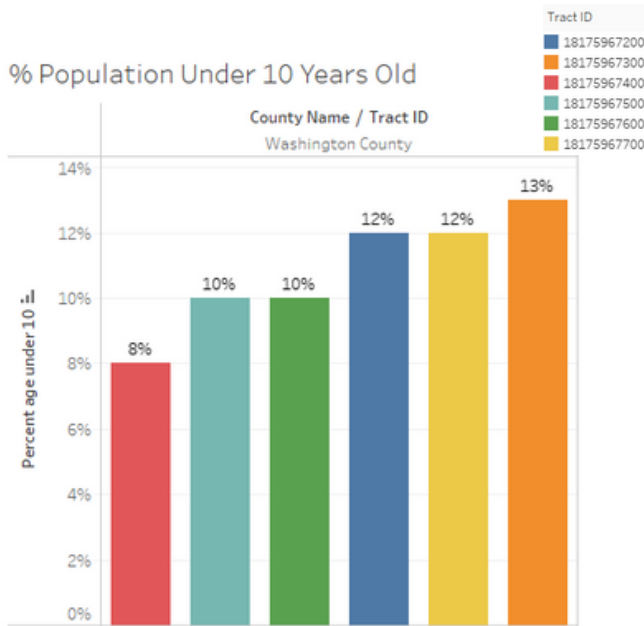
Moreover, Wisdom Workshop addresses the emotional and social needs of seniors throughout post-retirement, mitigating feelings of isolation, especially prevalent among rural seniors. By involving them in complex problem-solving and creative activities, the workshop significantly improves their emotional well-being and overall aging outcomes.

Inter-generational interactions facilitated by the workshop lead to better health and social integration for seniors, fostering a community where every member, regardless of age, can find connection, purpose, and a sense of belonging. These interactions also instill valuable “power skills” in younger generations, preparing them for future success in the workforce.

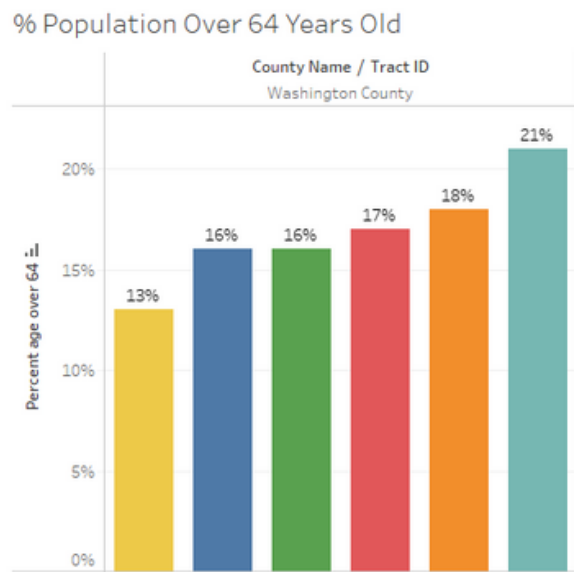
Youth can learn valuable lessons from seniors about career preparation, including insights on adaptability, building a strong work ethic, understanding the value of experience, and making informed decisions based on long-term perspectives, all informed by the seniors’ years of professional experience in the workforce.



Regional Facts & Figures



The lower percentages of children under 10 (10% in Salem) reflects aging/shrinking family units, suggesting a shifting community structure.



In Salem, 21% of the population is over 64 years old, highlighting a significant need for aging-related resources, services, and facilities.

Washington County faces chronic health challenges, significant housing and economic burdens, and poor life expectancy, further strengthening the case for locating aging-in-community services within the community.

Salem ranks in the 84th percentile for pre-1960s housing, a lead paint indicator.

This signals a higher prevalence of older housing stock that could pose health risks to vulnerable populations.

25%

of people over 25 years old in Salem have less than a high school degree (88th percentile)

47%

of individuals in Salem are below 200% of the poverty line (85th percentile)

97th

Salem's national percentile rank for low life expectancy

Proposed Activities



Wisdom Works includes housing and innovation spaces to cement its unique identity as a place that serves a comprehensive scope of community needs. Wisdom Works spaces offer training, education, recreation, and creative activities to enhance community life across age, education, and employment spectrums.

Wisdom Works Campus

The site houses two structures:

- the activity, education, and community campus hub
- a multi-unit housing project geared to Washington County’s senior citizens wishing to “age in community” and in homes that better meet their accessibility and social connection needs.

Education and Community Hub

The Education and Community Hub features classrooms and lab spaces tailored to career and technical education (CTE) offerings. It is set to revitalize local vocational education by offering hands-on training and specialized classes similar to those previously available at Salem High School.

The new CTE Center will focus on hyperlocal training, connecting students with local employers, facilitating apprenticeships, and ensuring a seamless transition from education to employment. It will also foster interactions between students and experienced seniors, providing mentorship and insight into the local labor market's needs.

The community’s seniors will have their own designated space, “Wisdom Workshop” which offers a craft and trade skills workshop space and a commercial kitchen. The senior-focused spaces allow for skill sharing and pro-social trans-generational interaction around crafts, hobbies, food-ways, and local traditions.



Senior Housing

The multi-occupancy senior housing building is designed to enable residents to age within their community. These residences will be equipped with accessibility features tailored to seniors' needs. The strategic location within the WW campus ensures easy access to communal activities and workshops, promoting social interaction and continuous learning.

This approach not only fosters a sense of belonging and healthier aging outcomes but also alleviates the burden on seniors to modify existing homes, offering a practical alternative to “aging in place.”

The initiative also addresses broader housing needs by offering an alternative housing option for seniors thus freeing up single-family homes and increasing the availability of affordable housing for families and individuals looking to move to Washington County.

The on-site housing complements the campus's educational and recreational facilities, creating a vibrant community hub that supports well-being across multiple domains. With strong local support and leadership, WW is poised to enhance community connection and vitality, embodying a model of well-being and growth for Indiana.



Next Steps

Creating a culture of community connectedness, learning, skill-sharing, and opportunity

From our interactions with community residents, business owners, educators, and many other community stakeholders, it is clear that the well-being of our seniors, the education of our youth, and the employment opportunities in our business sector are of high importance to residents. The entities and organizers in each group see opportunities for growth and improvement, and they are aligned around the collaborative approach offered by Wisdom Workshop.

We offer this report and the adjoining data and resources so that residents, decision-makers, seniors, parents, educators, career and vocational education advocates, employers and economic development experts, housing specialists, and quality of place proponents across Washington County and beyond have access to clear evidence and data-driven suggestions about the importance of supporting a community-generated collaborative and creative approach to:

Educational and Career Advancement:

- Enhanced workforce readiness and CTE training for high school graduates
- Upskilling opportunities for mid-career workers
- Expanded CTE and commercial training programs to improve the local workforce

Community and Housing Development:

- Increased housing availability for growing families, downsizing options for seniors
- Housing designed for community aging, featuring accessibility and safety features
- A central location that promotes community engagement and lifelong learning

Social and Economic Enrichment:

- A supportive environment for business growth and retention
- Engaging activities for seniors to maintain physical and mental health
- A cohesive, interconnected community with age-inclusive activities
- Improved health and social connections for residents of Washington County



**The greatest gift a senior can give a
young person is their wisdom,
earned through a lifetime of
experiences, ensuring the stories of
the past guide the future.**

With gratitude to the staff, directors and
board members of:

**Washington County Community
Foundation, Inc.**
PO Box 50 Salem, IN 47167



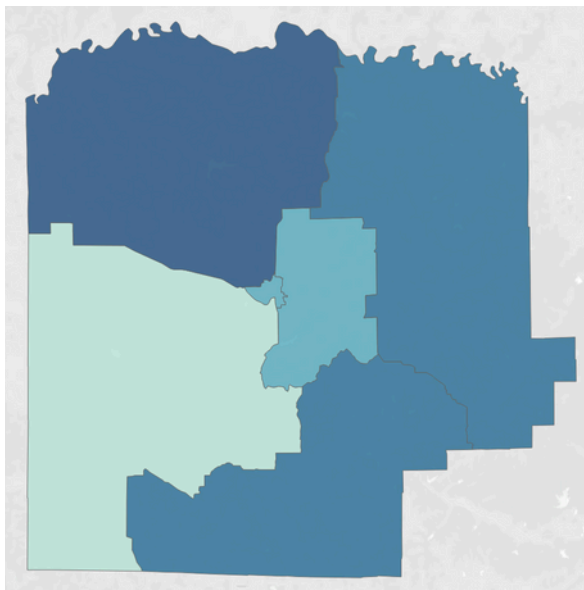
DATA & REFERENCES

The following pages contain helpful data, demographics, and references to find out more about services for seniors in Washington County.



Population Statistics

Under 10 Years Old



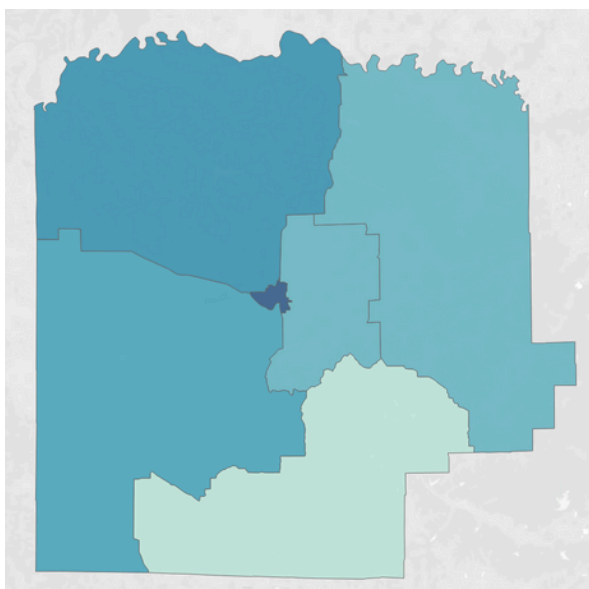
Percent age under 10



Lower concentrations of children (8%-10%) in the central and western areas may suggest that families are moving away and/or choosing to live in different parts of the county, which may stem from economic challenges, limited family-oriented housing, or fewer job opportunities. Over time, this demographic trend could exacerbate population decline and create workforce gaps as the population ages.

Areas with higher percentages of children (eastern and southern) have a greater need for local investments in education, childcare services, and recreational opportunities to support healthy childhood development.

Over 64 Years Old



Percent age over 64



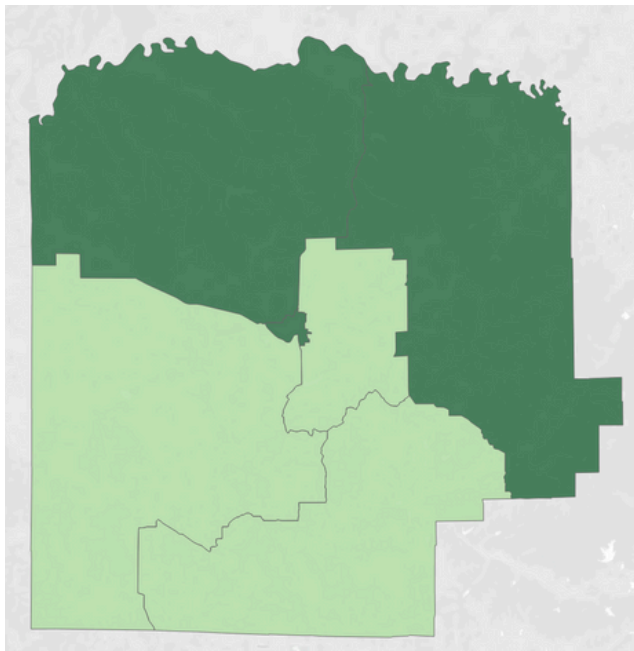
Meanwhile, the northern and central parts of Washington County have higher concentrations of older adults (17%-21%), indicating more established populations. Notably, **over 1 in 5** people in Salem are over the age of 64. This creates economic challenges, including higher demand for healthcare, senior housing, transportation assistance, and support systems to ensure older adults maintain independence and quality of life. Additionally, as younger families leave or choose not to settle in these areas, the workforce may shrink, further straining local economies.

With older adults concentrated in the northern tracts and younger children more prevalent in the southern areas, the central part of the county offers an ideal location for a campus that brings these generations together. A centrally located campus can serve as a natural meeting point for older adults and younger families to connect, collaborate, and strengthen intergenerational ties.

This underscores why Salem is well-positioned to establish the Wisdom Works campus. By drawing people to the center of the county, the campus can bridge the demographic divide, foster a more diverse and intergenerational community, and support a healthier, more unified future for Washington County.

Economic Indicators

Low Income



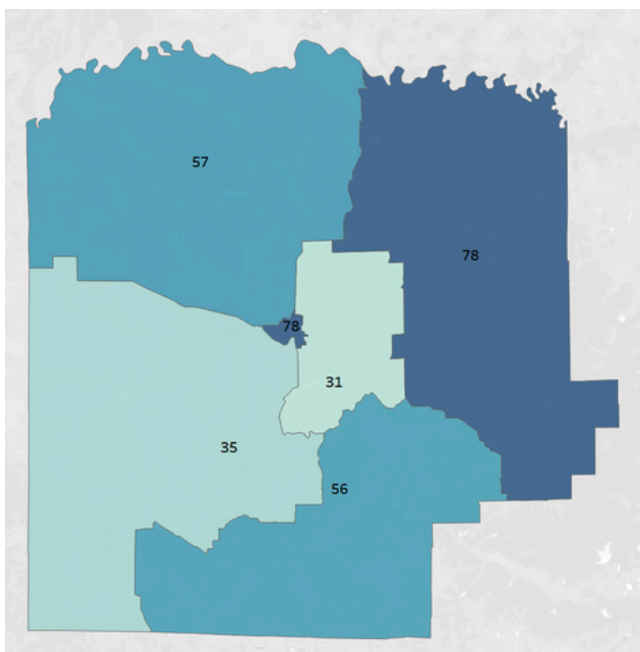
Low Income?
Washington County, False
Washington County, True

The three tracts identified as low income in Washington County are also classified as “disadvantaged” under the federal government’s Justice40 initiative. This designation determines eligibility for federal grant support aimed at addressing systemic inequities.

Under Justice40, funding recipients must demonstrate that at least 40% of the individuals benefiting from the funding are considered disadvantaged. With a disadvantaged rate of 45%, Washington County meets this threshold, making it well-positioned to secure federal funding.

To combat prevalent challenges—such as low income, education gaps, employment barriers, and health difficulties—it is strongly recommended that Washington County organizations actively pursue Justice40 funding opportunities. These federal resources could play a pivotal role in addressing community needs and fostering long-term economic and social improvements.

Unemployment



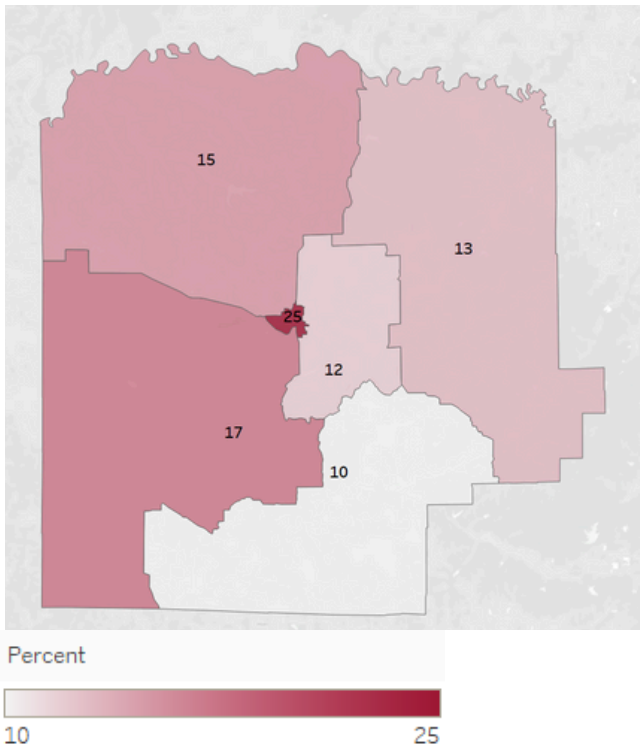
Unemployment (percent) (percentile)



Economic Indicators

Graduation Rates

% Individuals age 25 or over with less than a high school degree



1 in 4 adults over 25 in the Salem area do not have a high school diploma. This ranks in the **88th** percentile for low educational attainment in the United States.

An aging community without adequate access to education can influence generations of income levels, healthcare access, and quality of life in general.

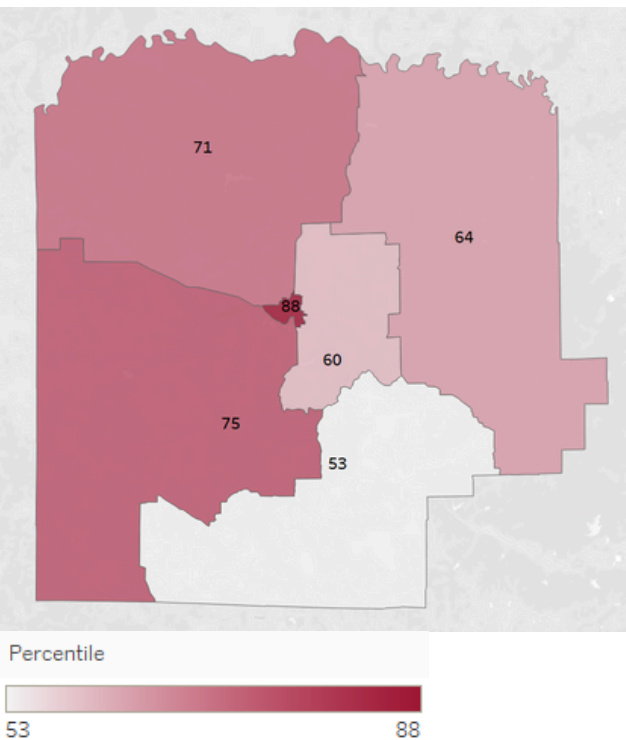
Older adults with lower educational attainment are more likely to face economic insecurity and limited health literacy, which can prevent individuals from seeking the care that they need, contributing to chronic illnesses, poorer health outcomes, and social isolation.

Low access to education and job opportunities, and therefore healthcare, housing, and even the internet, can perpetuate these issues. (See Social Vulnerability below for statistics on these variables.)

Addressing education disparities in aging communities requires investing in lifelong learning opportunities, thus fostering environments where all individuals can thrive regardless of their educational background.

By prioritizing participation in education at all life stages with a program like Wisdom Works, our community can help ensure that aging members have the tools and support needed to maintain health, independence, and social engagement.

% Individuals age 25 or over with less than a high school degree (percentile)



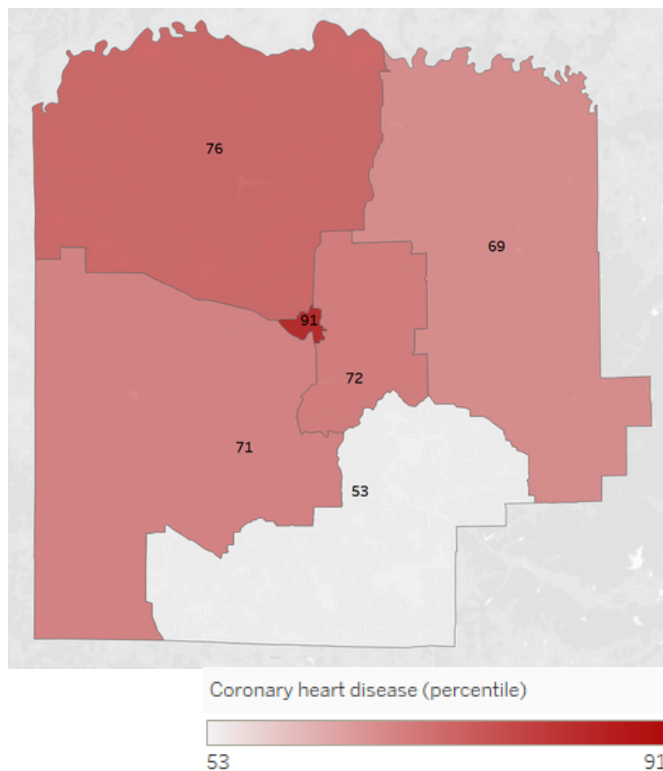
Health Indicators

Heart Disease

Cardiovascular issues are a pervasive, leading cause of death in the United States, and Salem ranks in the **91st** percentile for coronary heart disease with nearly a third of the area's residents facing this health issue.

Older adults are particularly vulnerable to cardiovascular issues due to age-related changes in the heart and blood vessels. Combatting heart-related diseases can contribute to reduced healthcare costs and more independent seniors, greatly increasing quality of life potential for older adults.

Along with access to healthcare, community support programs like Wisdom Works play a significant role in ensuring an aging population's longevity and overall well-being.

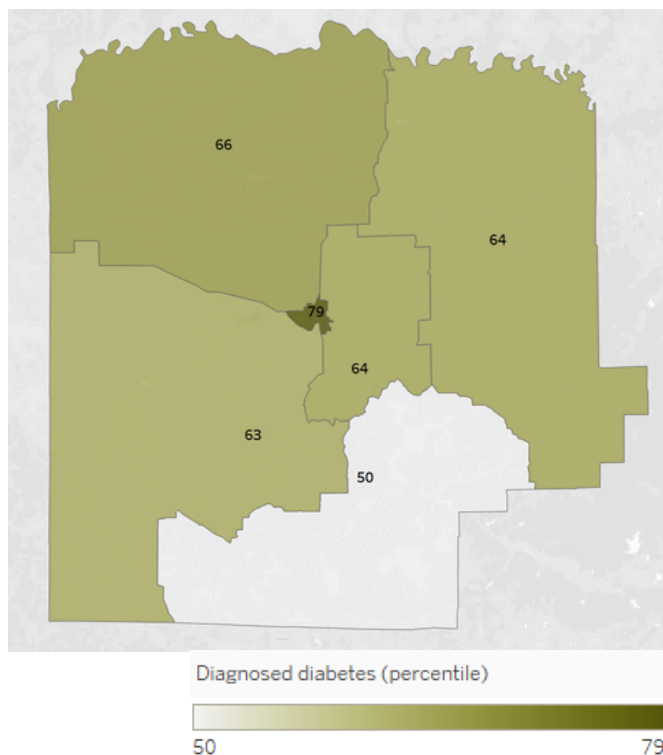


Diabetes

Salem ranks in the **79th** percentile for diagnosed diabetes in adults, with over **43%** of the population facing this health crisis.

Older adults are particularly vulnerable to developing type 2 diabetes since physical activity typically decreases, and metabolism and insulin functions change with age. Diabetes is a risk factor for a multitude of other diseases, posing a significant risk to quality of life and increasing healthcare costs.

Aging-in-community programs like Wisdom Works can allow older adults to manage diabetes more consistently by keeping them out of isolation and encouraging participation in community activities, preventing mental and physical health declines.



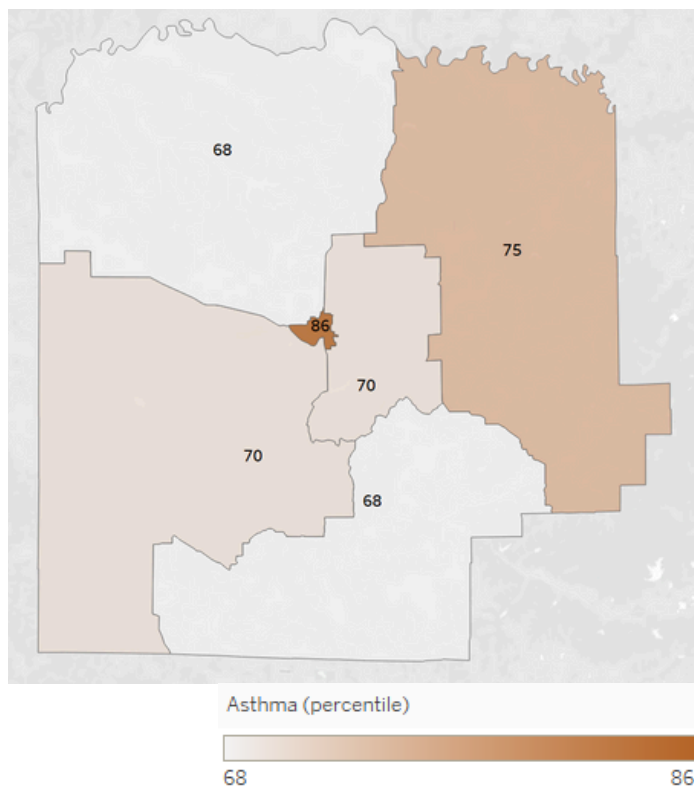
Health Indicators

Asthma

Salem is in the **86th** percentile for asthma prevalence, reflecting environmental and health challenges that could be mitigated with resources and support.

In an aging community, reducing rates of asthma (through regular medical care, education on managing symptoms, and reducing environmental risk factors) can contribute to reductions in other health issues, thus reducing overall healthcare costs and ensuring older populations can remain active and independent.

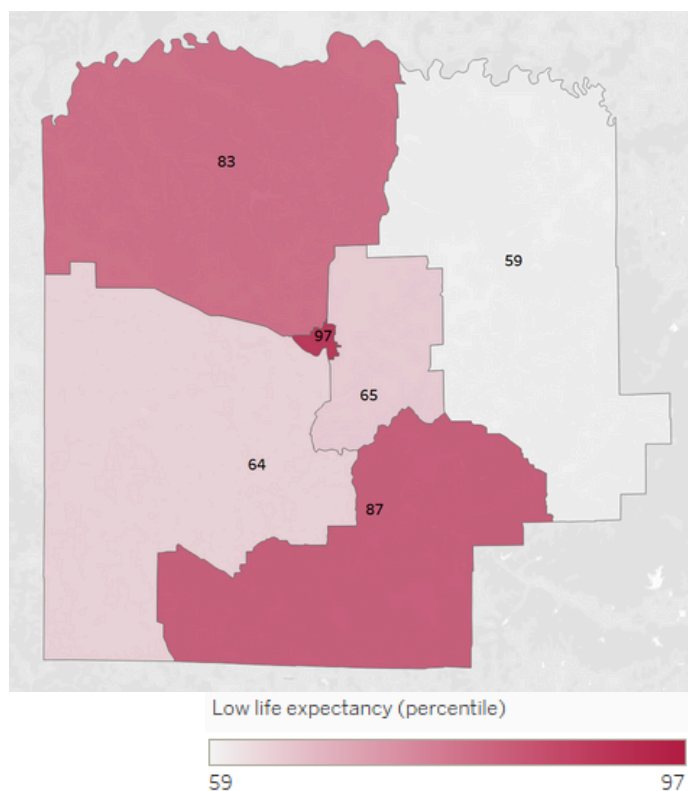
Additionally, Salem ranks in the **84th** percentile for lead paint indicators, with **64%** of homes built pre-1960s. Addressing this issue, along with local air quality concerns, could substantially decrease future asthma prevalence and reduce the broader health risks associated with these factors.



Low Life Expectancy

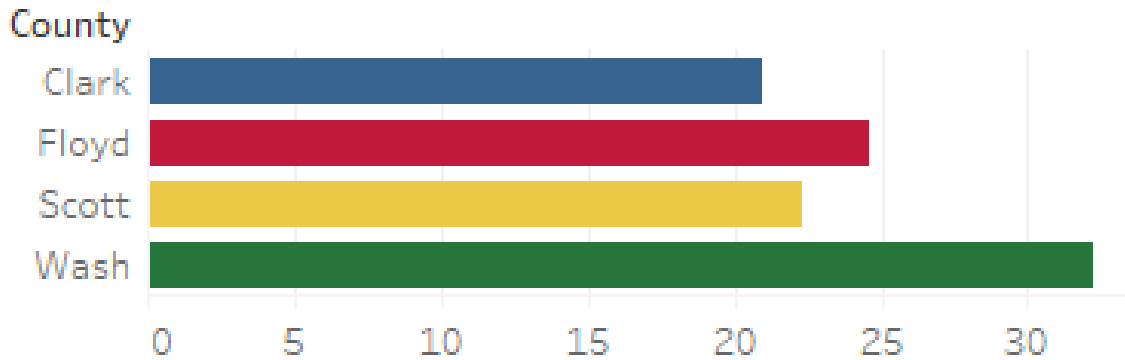
Salem ranks in the 97th percentile for low life expectancy, indicating that residents often face health challenges (like those highlighted above) that prevent them from aging well.

- Indiana
 - Life expectancy (**77**) has been in decline since 2010, ranking 40th in the nation.
 - 9-year gaps separate the highest and lowest ranking counties, highlighting large discrepancies in equitable access to care.
- The US average life expectancy is **78.8**



Travel Barriers

Average Travel Time to Work (Minutes)



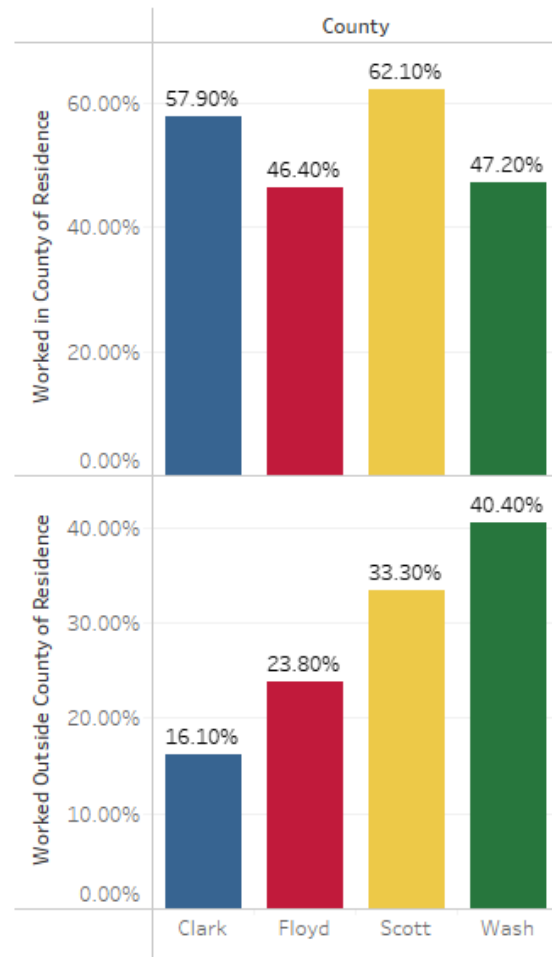
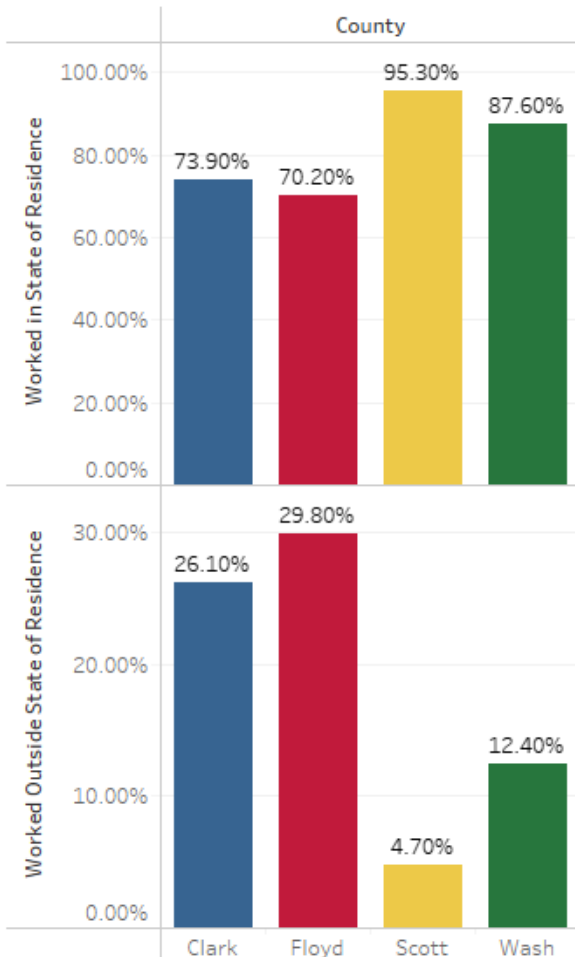
Washington County has significantly longer commute times than the rest of the region, with over 40% of residents leaving the county for work and another 12.4% that travel across state lines for their daily commute.

Cross-State

Much of the region, including nearly 30% of Floyd County, commute across state lines.

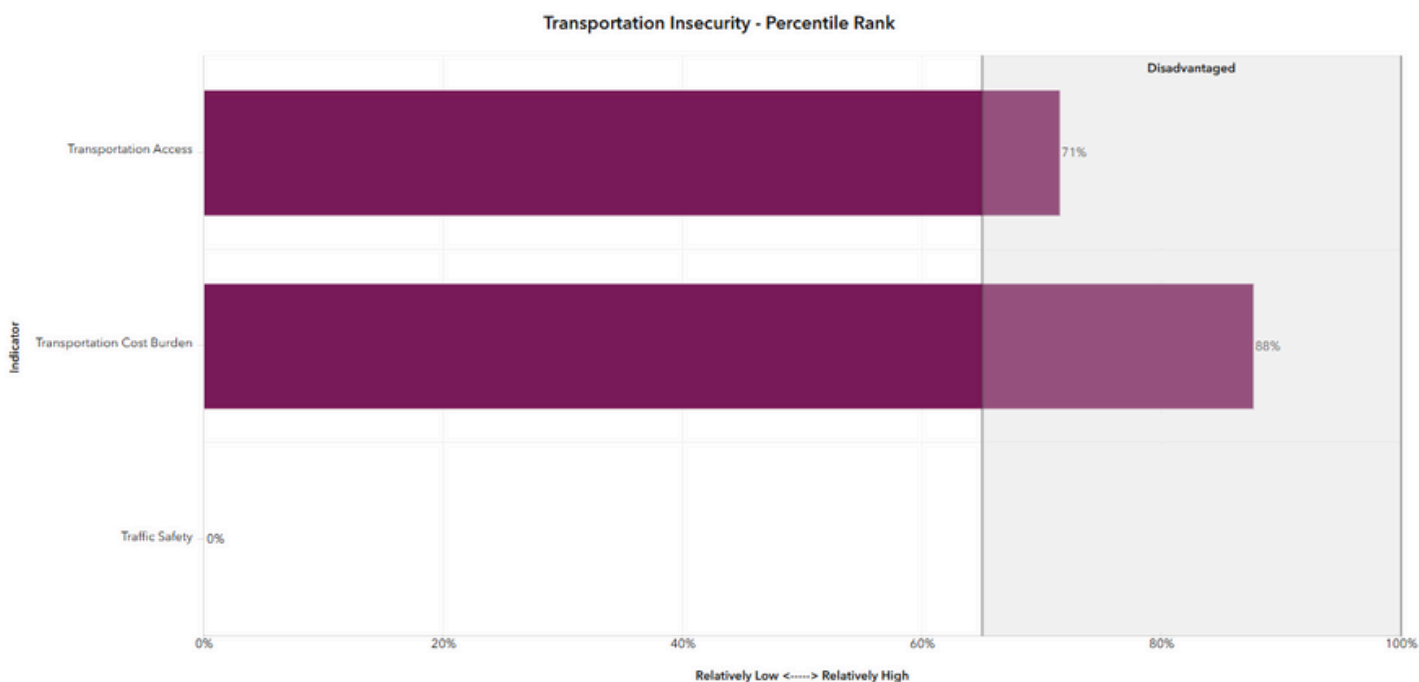
Cross-County

Cross-county statistics break down those that “Worked In State of Residence”



Travel Barriers

Washington County Transportation Insecurity



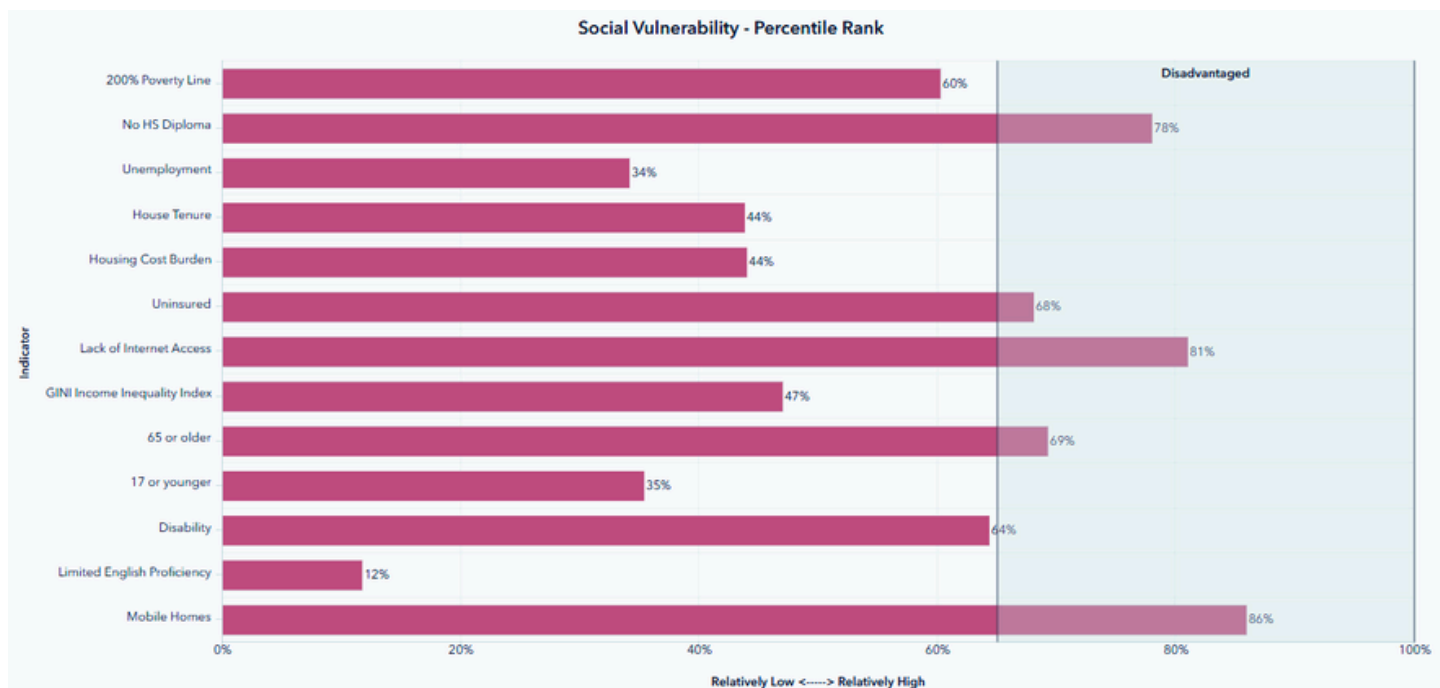
For most rural areas of the US transportation is an incredibly significant factor in all kinds of measures of community well being. Washington County falls into the disadvantaged category for both transportation access and cost burden. In the simplest terms this makes transportation expensive and hard to come by for some Washington County residents--particularly for those on fixed incomes like seniors.

Mitigating the isolation and limited access to services that these burden pose is important for the community to consider when creating new initiatives like Wisdom Works. Its proposed locality close to other essential services makes it an ideal location and offering free rides to the facility would reduce the transportation burden carried by seniors. Encouraging other service providers to co-locate services on or close to the Wisdom Works campus would greatly benefit senior residents.

Social Vulnerability

Social Vulnerability measures the level to which communities face historical barriers that have prevented a community from thriving.

Washington County



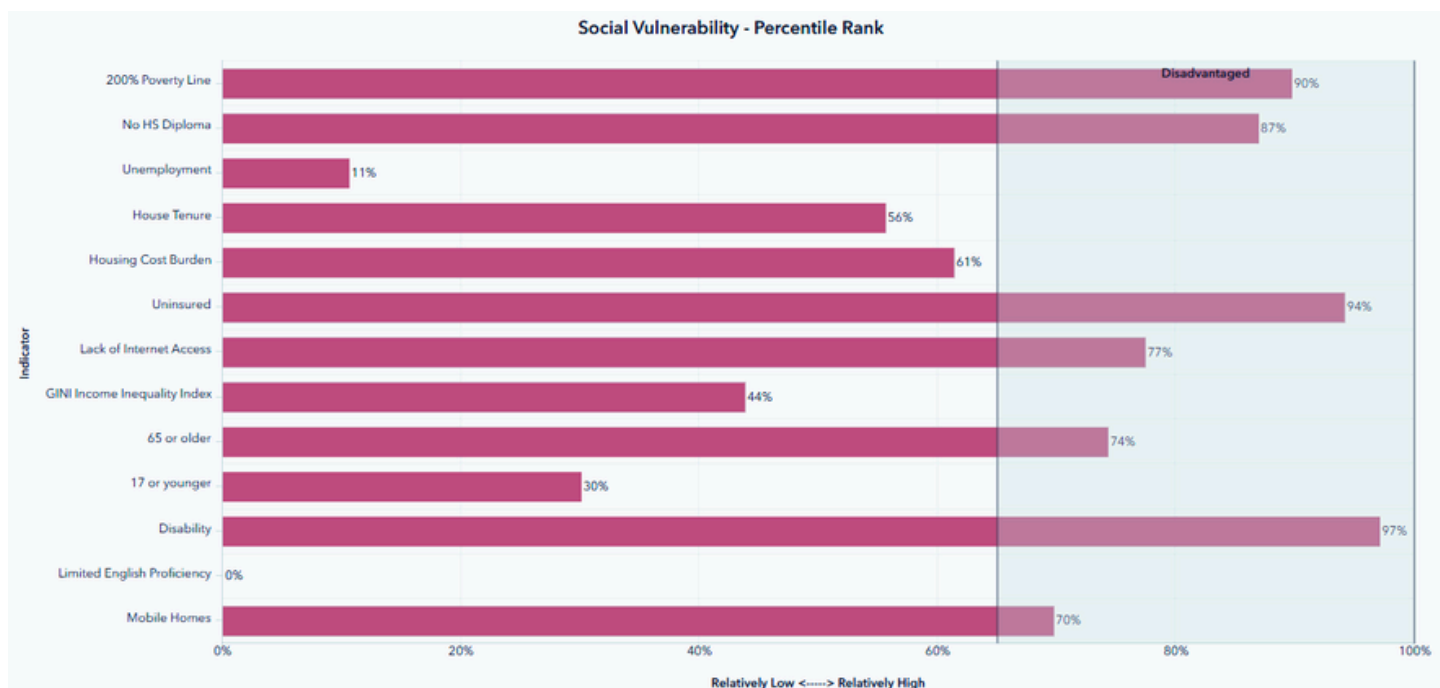
Washington County is considered disadvantaged in the categories of:

- No HS Diploma
- Uninsured
- Lack of Internet Access
- 65 or older
- Mobile Homes

These are significant indicators that this aging population does not have enough access to the resources they need to thrive. A lack of education, healthcare, housing, and access to the Internet (a utility that can provide exponential access to care and community resources) are compounding issues that contribute to poor quality of life in old age.

Social Vulnerability

Salem



Salem is considered disadvantaged in the following categories:

- 200% Poverty Line (90th percentile)
- No HS Diploma (87th percentile)
- Uninsured (94th percentile)
- Lack of Internet Access (77th percentile)
- 65 or older (74th percentile)
- Disability (97th percentile)
- Mobile Homes (70th percentile)

This means, along with all of the issues the County faces as a whole, Salem is also vulnerable to poverty and disability.

Washington County, and Salem to an even greater extent, has clear burdens for vulnerable populations, many of which can be alleviated with more central spaces for citizens to converge and access resources.