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Technical Notes About the Snapshots Data

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Introduction

Seattle's Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) produces and periodically updates Neighborhood Snapshots for all Community Reporting Areas in Seattle. We also produce Council District Snapshots for all City Council districts. Snapshots provide frequently requested demographic data for these areas.

The purpose of this Technical Notes document is to assist you in understanding and using the data in the Snapshots. This Technical Notes document accompanies the Snapshots collections online.

The webpages for each set of Snapshots include PDFs optimized for accessibility with a screen reader. For assistance, call OPCD at (206) 386-1010 or email opcd@seattle.gov.

The Geographies Covered in our Snapshots

Community Reporting Areas (CRAs)

Basic Info About Community Reporting Areas

There are 53 CRAs in Seattle, with each made up of a combination of census tracts. We provide a Neighborhood Snapshot for each CRA.

An interdepartmental group of staff at the City created the CRAs to make it easier to summarize data from the U.S. Census Bureau at a neighborhood level. While we use CRAs for summarizing census data, we want people to know that CRAs are not official neighborhood, political, or administrative geographies. We also acknowledge that CRAs may not correspond with how communities define their own neighborhoods.

If a Neighborhood Snapshot for a CRA does not show enough of the area that interests you, we suggest looking at Snapshots for adjoining CRAs. Each Neighborhood Snapshot includes a basic map of the CRA. To assist people using a screen reader for accessibility, there is a narrative description of the CRA in the accessible version of each Neighborhood Snapshot.

We provide a zoomable, interactive web map that shows all the CRAs in the city and identifies the census tracts within each CRA. This web map also allows people to enter an address to identify the CRA where the address is located. A Geographic Information Systems (GIS) map layer with CRA boundaries is on Seattle GeoData, Seattle's Open Data portal for GIS data.

Methodology for Compiling Area Estimates in the Neighborhood Snapshots

Seattle contains 174 full census tracts plus a few partial tracts along the city's southern boundary. Following is how we assign census tracts and their data to Seattle's 53 CRAs.[1]

[1] Given that CRAs are comprised of combinations of census tracts, we typically aggregate data from tract level tables to compile data for CRAs. However, for the CRA Neighborhood Snapshots, we aggregate data from block group level tables (selecting all block groups within each tract assigned to a CRA). This allows us to use the same American Community Survey data tables for the CRA Neighborhood Snapshots that we use for the Council District Snapshots, making it more efficient to produce and update the Snapshots.

- We assign each census tract located wholly within Seattle to one of Seattle's 53 CRAs.
- We also include and assign to a CRA any census tract for which all or the very large majority of residents reside within Seattle, for example, census tracts 109, 112, and 119.02.
- We omit tracts from CRAs that have a small amount of area and zero to very little population within Seattle city limits, for example, tracts 264 and 265.

Council Districts

Basic Info About Council Districts

Seattle has seven council districts. Each district is represented by a councilmember elected by voters in the district. The City Council also includes two citywide councilmembers.

Each Council District Snapshot includes a basic map of the district. To assist people using a screen reader for accessibility, the accessible version of each Council District Snapshot provides a narrative description of the area in the district. This narrative is copied from parts of the council district descriptions in the 2022 Final District Plan available on the City Clerk's website.

The current council district boundaries are legally delineated by combinations of 2020 census tracts, census block groups, and census blocks.[2]

The City Clerk's website includes a City Council's District search tool allowing people to enter an address and get a detailed map of the district in which the address is located. A GIS map layer of the council district boundaries is available on Seattle GeoData.

Methodology for Compiling Area Estimates in the Council District Snapshots

We use block level population estimates to compile the population size and growth estimates in the Council District Snapshots.[3]

Most of the remaining estimates provided in the Snapshots are from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), which provides estimates at the block group level but not at the block level. Given this, we needed to approximate the area within

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[2] In some cases, all census blocks in a census tract or block group are included in a council district, while in other cases census tracts or census block groups are split between council districts using census block level boundaries. The specific combinations of census tracts, block groups, and blocks within each council district are identified in the 2022 Final District Plan.

[3] The table accompanying the 2020 Census Blocks GIS layer on Seattle GeoData includes a column showing the census blocks in each council district.

council districts for compiling ACS data in these Snapshots. For a given district, our standard method is to incorporate the ACS data for each block group where at least half of the population lives within the district.[4]

The Data Sources Used for Snapshots

Sources for Population Size and Growth Statistics

The population size and growth statistics in the Snapshots use population estimates from the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) and counts from the U.S. Census Bureau as detailed in the bullets directly below.

- At the city level, these statistics are from OFM's intercensal estimates for 2010-2019 (which can be found on their OFM's historical estimates webpage) and OFM's April 1 Official Population Estimates for 2020-2025.
- The statistics reported in the Snapshots for other geographies in Washington are based on OFM's Small Area Estimates.
- Statistics for 2010 and 2020 for the United States are counts from Census Bureau's Decennial Census.

All estimates in the Snapshots related to population size are for April 1 of the year they reference.

Sources for Community Characteristics

All the estimates that we include about population characteristics and household characteristics are based on American Community Survey 2024 5-Year Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, with one exception. The exception is that the detailed list of neighborhood languages is based on a *combination* of ACS and Seattle Public Schools (SPS) data. The SPS data is from the Home Language Survey administered during the 2025-2026 school year. We obtained the Home Language Survey data from the SPS Multilingual Department.

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[4] The Council Districts Profiles mapping app, a more detailed companion to the Council District Snapshots, describes and shows the way we assign census block groups to council districts. As described there, in the "About the Profiles" panel, we assign census block groups to a council district based on the distribution of the total population from the 2020 decennial census for the component census blocks. If most of the population in the block group is inside the boundaries of the council district, the block group is assigned wholly to that district. The map in the "Quick Stats & Narrative Profile" panel (or "Map" tab on mobile) shows the outlines of the council districts with shading of the block groups assigned to them.

Notes to Help You Use the Estimates in the Snapshots

Population Growth Rates

The Snapshots show population growth for two time periods: 2010–2020 and 2020–2025. We show growth in terms of annual average growth rates to make it easier to compare population growth between these time periods. We use the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) formula to calculate annual average growth.[5]

ACS Estimates

The ACS is conducted with a sample of households rather than all households. Because the ACS is a sample survey, ACS estimates carry some uncertainty. Given that larger sample sizes generally produce more reliable estimates, the Census Bureau combines five years of ACS data to produce usable estimates at a neighborhood level. These estimates can be thought of roughly as averages for the 5-year period. Even with data pooled over five years, margins of error for neighborhood-level estimates can be substantial.

The handbook from the Census Bureau titled "Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What All Data Users Need to Know" is a good resource for learning more about the ACS.

The following outlines key information about the way subjects are defined in the ACS estimates featured in the Snapshots. As described, some of these estimates are provided for a subset of the population or households. More details can be found in the 2024 ACS subject definitions published by the Census Bureau.

RACE AND ETHNICITY: The ACS asks about ethnicity and race in separate questions. Specifically, the ACS asks if a person is of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. Then, the ACS asks about the person's race.[6] The Snapshots show estimates by race for people who are not Hispanic or Latino while grouping Hispanic or Latino people of any race together. We use the phrase "people of color" to include persons whose ethnicity and race, as tabulated in the ACS, is other than "not Hispanic or Latino, White alone."

[5] This is the average annual rate by which population grows, with each year's increase calculated on the population base (including any previous growth) at the beginning of the annual period.

[6] Updated standards issued in 2024 by the federal Office of Management and Budget issued call for shifting in future surveys to use of a combined question to collect federal data on race and ethnicity.

LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME: The ACS tabulates language for people five years of age and older. A "limited English-speaking household" is one in which all persons 14 years and older speak English less than "very well."

LEVEL OF EDUCATION: This topic, which is called “Educational Attainment” in tables published by the Census Bureau, refers to the highest level or formal education a person has had. This is tabulated for people 25 years of age and older.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS: The Census Bureau uses the concept of living arrangements to classify the type of setting in which people live. The two major types of living arrangements the ACS distinguishes are living in a household and living in group quarters. The Snapshots include estimates of the number of people living in a household and the number of people living in group quarters, referring to group quarters more colloquially as “group settings.”

The Census Bureau defines a household as including “all the people who occupy a housing unit.” A household may be made up of one or more families, a person living alone, or any other group of related or unrelated people in a housing unit.

The Bureau defines group quarters as “places where people live or stay in a group living arrangement that is owned or managed by an entity or organization providing housing and/or services for the residents.” Examples include college dormitories, residential treatment centers and group homes, skilled nursing facilities, and emergency shelters.

INCOME AND POVERTY: Per capita income is the average income computed for the total population. Poverty status is not determined in ACS tables for unrelated persons under age 15 nor for people in some types of group quarters. In 2024, the poverty threshold for a three-person family with a householder[7] under 65 years and with one child under 18 was $21,621.[8]

HEALTH INSURANCE: The health insurance coverage estimates in the Snapshots are for the civilian non-institutionalized population. As described in the ACS subject definitions, the civilian noninstitutionalized population “excludes active-duty military personnel and the population living in institutional group quarters (GQ) (such as correctional facilities and

[7] In compiling statistics about households, the Census Bureau designates a person in each household as the “householder.” As the ACS subject definitions explain, in most cases “this is the person or one of the people in whose name the home is owned, being bought, or rented and who is listed on line one of the survey questionnaire.”

[8] The full set of poverty thresholds by family size and composition can be found on the Census Bureau’s Poverty Data Tables webpage.

nursing homes) but includes the population living in noninstitutional group quarters (such as college dormitories)."

DISABILITY: The disability estimates in the Snapshots are for the civilian population (i.e., not active-duty military personnel) 18 years and older for whom poverty status is determined. The limited selection of ACS block group-level tables on disability constrained us to reporting estimates for this part of the population.

HOUSING COSTS: The Snapshots include a pair of estimates about the prevalence of households spending more than or equal to 30 percent of their income on housing.[9] One is focused on renter households, with renter households paying rent as the denominator for the percentage share; the other is focused on owner households, with households carrying a mortgage as the denominator.[10]

TRANSPORTATION TO WORK: These estimates are for employed residents 16 years and older and pertain to the mode of transportation used for most of the distance.

Area Languages List

As described in the notes above, the detailed list of languages provided in the Snapshots is based on a *combination* of ACS estimates and data from the SPS Home Language Survey. Here we describe the rationale for combining these sources and the methodology for doing so. We also note important considerations for Snapshot users to keep in mind about the lists of languages.

The level of detail on languages in ACS tables is very limited at the tract and block group levels.[11] This necessitated supplementing these ACS estimates with ACS estimates

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[9] Households spending this more than or equal to 30 percent of their income on housing can be regarded as having unaffordable housing costs. However, housing cost burden thresholds differ slightly between data sources. As described on its CHAS Dataset Background webpage, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development uses a slightly different threshold, i.e., *more than* 30 percent of income spent on housing, to estimate the prevalence of households who are cost burdened.

[10] A small share of these households (mostly renters) may have no income or negative income; while these are included in the denominator, the percentage of their income spent on housing costs is not computed. Although not included in the numerator for calculating the share of households spending 30 percent or more of their income on housing, these households are included in the denominator.

[11] Table C16001, which provides the greatest level of language detail available from the ACS for tracts and block groups, combines many individual languages in larger groupings. Especially problematic is that African languages are lumped into the broad category "Other and unspecified languages." Table B16001, which is available for PUMAs, provides estimates on many more individual languages but still lumps some languages together. For examples, it does not provide estimates for individual Afro-Asiatic languages, but combines them in a category called "Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages."

available for Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs), each of which has a population of at least 100,000 residents. Seattle has seven PUMAs that coincidentally correspond somewhat well with Seattle's council districts. However, even the data available for PUMAs does not provide data on some of the individual languages spoken by immigrant and newcomer groups in Seattle.

The SPS Home Language Survey provides estimates on the use of individual languages not disaggregated in the ACS. SPS administers the Home Language Survey to families of all students in the school district. SPS provided OPCD with anonymized Home Language Survey data for currently enrolled students aggregated to the students' home ZIP Code. We used the data from the question asking, "What language(s) did your child first speak or understand?" We chose this question from the survey because it likely provides a good idea of the language spoken by adult members of the student's family as well as first spoken by the student. We used the Home Language Survey counts from this question to enable us to discern the use of individual languages that are not disaggregated in the ACS tables.

Because SPS provided data at the ZIP Code level, we needed to allocate data to the CRA and council district geographies featured in the Snapshots. One of the tools we used to accomplish this is a crosswalk from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development with allocation weights for distributing ZIP Code data to census tracts.[12] We also used other methods to allocate the ACS data to the CRAs and council district geographies and to allocate the SPS data to council districts.

The Neighborhood and Council District Snapshots list area languages for which we have a reasonable level of confidence, that at least a moderately sized population group speaks the language within the area or nearby. As noted in the Snapshots, the order in which we list the Snapshots does not necessarily imply relative prevalence of the languages. The approximate nature of the allocations we used precluded this.

We recommend consulting the City's Language Access Program in the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs to obtain additional insights about languages spoken by communities in Seattle and to get guidance on City translation and interpretation services.

Full Snapshots Dataset on Seattle GeoData

We have placed a data table with all estimates in the Snapshots on Seattle GeoData. You can both view and download the data there.

[12] The ZIP Code to tract crosswalk is one of HUD's USPS ZIP Code Crosswalks available online.