

# Omak Opportunity DRAFT#2

As of the 2020 U.S. Census, Omak was home to 4,860 residents – the most populated of Okanogan County’s 13 incorporated communities. A portion of the city east of the Okanogan River lies within the boundaries of the Colville Reservation.

Including unincorporated area surrounding the city, population of the greater Omak community is estimated at just over 7,000 residents – an increase of 6% since 2010. Centrally located in Okanogan County, Omak is the county’s major center for retail and service businesses that benefit from serving a county-wide clientele.

North-south highway access is primarily via U.S. Highway 97, East-west access is via SR-20 (west through the Cascade Mountains to Puget Sound) and SR-155 (east through the Colville Reservation to Coulee Dam).



## Omak Location - Central to Okanogan County

- Area outlined in orange is the U.S. Census County Division (CCD) encompassing the city of Omak and nearby unincorporated area

## DEMOGRAPHICS

As perhaps the most urban of Okanogan communities but in a rural setting, the Omak area has experienced residential growth as well as expanding economic opportunity in recent years:

- At close to 41 years, the median age of Omak area residents is a couple of years younger than the nearly 43-year median age of all Okanogan County residents.
- At an estimated \$60,000, the annual median household income of the Omak area is an estimated 11% above the county-wide median.
- New housing is being built at a slightly higher pace than for all of Okanogan County – with 8% of existing Omak homes built from 2014 to present.
- Residents are more likely to live in multi-family housing than elsewhere in Okanogan County, with 38% of Omak residents residing in units other than single-family homes as compared with 28% county-wide.

## LABOR FORCE & EMPLOYMENT

About 59% of Omak area residents age 16+ are currently in the labor force – a participation employment rate above that of the rest of Okanogan County. As of 2019 (pre-pandemic), Omak area businesses, public and non-profit organizations employed 3,470 workers. Of added note:

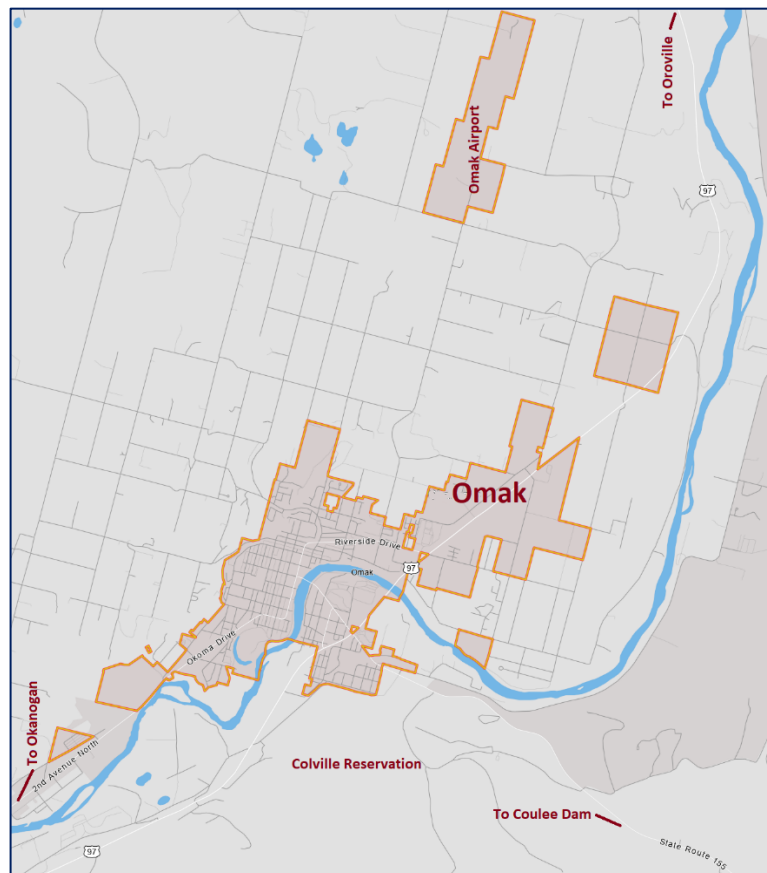
- With 24% of Okanogan County’s job base as compared with 16% of county-wide population, the Omak community serves as an important employment center for the county and the greater NCW region.
- From 2010-19, employment in the Omak area also increased by 12% – due largely to net added jobs in retail, educational services, and arts/entertainment/recreation.
- Some other business and agency sectors experienced job reductions, notably manufacturing, public administration and other (primarily personal) services.
- By comparison, Okanogan County experienced minimal job change over this pre-pandemic period while employment for the 3-county NCW region increased by 14% – with region-wide job growth focused in neighboring Chelan and Douglas Counties.
- As compared to the rest of Okanogan County and the entire NCW region, adults employed in the Omak communities tend to be younger (under age 30) with above average incomes and with generally higher levels of educational attainment.

## COMMUNITY ASSETS & PRIORITIES

**Assets** of the Omak area cited by stakeholders include location central to serve all of Okanogan County with a full complement of retail and commercial services, nice housing, clean streets, land for development and tourism potential.

**Challenges** relate to lack of a coherent vision for future growth. There is interest in diversifying the local economy for industrial and downtown area development with need for expanded county-wide and regional involvement to assist with business recruitment.

Infrastructure improvement needs are cited, notably for water. Added residential development is important but funding for infrastructure is generally needed to be fronted by developers.



**Omak – with its own airport and centrally located to serve rail and commercial needs of the Okanogan region.**

- U.S. Census On-the-Map. <http://www.cityof/>

Most frequently mentioned **community priorities** are to:

- Attract new business, grow tourism and welcome newcomers
- Improve the downtown district with river access
- Better engage the community and improve tribal coordination
- Expand workforce training and technical assistance for interested businesses
- Improve staffing capacity to pursue and administer planning and grant funding

When asked about a **vision for the future**, a stakeholder suggests a “thriving downtown district with river access, increased housing and businesses.” Another stakeholder articulates a vision for both Omak and Okanogan as potentially encompassing two new medium sized businesses (of 250 employees), a designated port, industrial park, downtown revitalization and themed community for tourists.

## OPPORTUNITIES

More so than any other community in Okanogan County, **Omak** offers opportunity for added retail and service business catering to the county’s residential consumer base and as a central stop-over point for tourists to the Okanogan.

As a survey respondent for both the Omak and Okanogan communities noted, a **thriving economy** would look like an “unemployment rate below 3%, new store fronts downtown, happy people.”

Both for Omak and the neighboring county seat city of Okanogan, due to central location in the county, there is opportunity and interest to diversify beyond the current mainstays of the local economy – predicated on ramped up community engagement and opportunities for regional partnerships.

## NEXT STEPS

Going forward, key next steps for Omak as Okanogan County’s largest community could be to:

- Start with a steering committee to create and coordinate implementation of a **community vision and action plan** – drawing on the expertise of local and regional interested businesses, citizens and civic leaders.
- Focus on identified **needs and opportunities** for downtown and riverfront enhancement, business recruitment, infrastructure funding and encouragement of new and more diversified housing development.
- Pursue opportunities for **cooperative initiatives** with neighboring communities – notably the city of Okanogan to the south and the Colville Confederated Tribes to the east – to better leverage available resources and enhance potential economic and community benefits.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY

Of the many diverse communities of Okanogan County, Omak is most distinctive for its current and evolving role as a center of business and employment activity county-wide. Omak is also attractive to younger adults for reasons that likely include access to job opportunities and living in a more urban community with multiple housing options. Add in the community's potential to serve as a jumping off point for Okanogan tourism – with Omak as the complete package.



**Building from a rodeo started in 1932, the Omak Stampede has become a Pacific Northwest renowned event – always the 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend in August featuring a rodeo and world-famous “suicide race” together with Indian encampment and pow-wow sponsored by the Colville Confederated Tribes.**

**Offering western entertainment that characterizes and celebrates the history, culture and distinctive economic dynamic of the Okanogan.**

- Photo per City of Omak web site: <https://www.omakcity.com/>

For Omak, building economic prosperity and community vitality can go hand-in-hand. This is especially the case to the extent that Omak pursues opportunities to collaborate with its neighbors in Okanogan and with the Colville Confederated Tribes.

As a regional partnership, the Okanogan County Economic Alliance and North Central Washington Economic Development District (NCWEDD) encourage the identification and submittal of *shovel-ready* or *potential shovel-ready* economic and community development projects for project review and ranking.

Top-ranked projects will receive grant writing and administration support from the Alliance and NCWEDD. The closer to *shovel-ready*, the *better the opportunity* for successful funding.

This *opportunity profile* has been prepared by the North Central Washington Economic Development District (NCWEDD) serving communities of Chelan, Douglas and Okanogan Counties.

Data is compiled from sources including U.S. Census, Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM), Washington Employment Security Department (ESD), and the nationally recognized private firm Claritas.

For further information as to business and investment opportunities and economic development programs for the Omak communities and the greater NCW region, contact Alyce Brown, NCWEDD Executive Director via phone at 509-899-9321, email [director@ncwedd.com](mailto:director@ncwedd.com)

Or contact Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director for the Economic Alliance of Okanogan County, phone 509-826-5107, email [rholderdiefenbach@economic-alliance.com](mailto:rholderdiefenbach@economic-alliance.com)