

# Republic Opportunity DRAFT#1

As Ferry County's only incorporated community, Republic also serves as the county seat in a relatively remote and sparsely populated portion of Washington state. Taken together with nearby communities, the greater Republic area (highlighted by the map to the right) accounts for about 42% of the population of Ferry County.

As of the 2020 U.S. Census, the town of Republic was home to 992 residents – representing a net loss of 81 residents (7.5%) as compared to the 2010 Census count. While state of Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM) data had indicated slow population growth from 2010-20, U.S. Census data indicates that the county is also losing population.

Republic is served by the SR 21 north-south highway with border access north via Grand Forks, British Columbia and south to the Columbia River/Lake Roosevelt and associated Keller Ferry crossing. SR 20 provides highway access west to Tonasket and east to Kettle Falls (with connections south via 395 further east to Spokane).



**As the largest incorporated community Ferry County, Republic is situated immediately north of the Colville Reservation**

- Area outlined in orange is the U.S. Census County Division (CCD) encompassing Republic and nearby communities in Ferry County

## DEMOGRAPHICS

While currently slow growing and with declining employment, new housing development and population growth suggest opportunity in the years ahead:

- The greater Republic area has experienced a population gain of about 6-7% since 2010, a rate of resident increase above that of the entire county.
- At more than 55 years, the median age of Republic area residents is somewhat above the median figure of 52 years county-wide and well above the 39 median age statewide.
- At an estimated \$44,900, the annual median household income of the greater Republic area is comparable to (just 1% less than) the county-wide median.
- New housing is being built at a slightly more rapid pace than county-wide. About 13% of housing has been constructed from 2010 to present, above the 10% share of housing that is newer construction over this period county-wide – and also just above the pace of new construction being experienced for the nearby 3-county North Central Washington (NCW) region of Okanogan, Douglas and Chelan Counties.

## LABOR FORCE & EMPLOYMENT

Less than half (42%) of reservation residents in Republic and the surrounding area of age 16+ are currently in the labor force – a rate comparable to that of all Ferry County but well below the 60% labor participation rate for the adjoining 3-county NCW region. Of added note:

- As of 2019 (pre-pandemic), employers in the Republic area employed approximately 720 workers; however the local job count has declined by a substantial 24% from 2010-19 – as compared to a 3% job gain county-wide over this period.
- With 46% of Ferry County’s job base as compared with 42% of county-wide population, the Republic area historically has represented a significant contributor to county-wide employment – albeit diminished by job reductions as noted over the last decade.
- A majority (52%) of local area employment is accounted for by jobs relatively evenly divided between health care/social assistance, public administration and educational services. Retail trade represents 11-12% of the job base with accommodation and food services at another 8%. No other sector has more than 5% of local area employment.
- Job losses from 2010-19 in the range of 25-80 each were experienced in sectors of the local economy including mining, health care/social assistance, construction, retail trade and business management. Other sectors experienced minimal job change over this past decade (pre-pandemic) although manufacturing jobs increased on a county-wide basis.
- Over 90% of Republic area workers are white only with about 6% as native American or of multiple race groups.
- As compared with all of Ferry County, those employed in and near Republic are more likely to be somewhat lower paid, older (age 55+), female and with educational attainment similar to that of counterparts county-wide.

While not yet available at the local community level, more recent 2020-21 data county-wide indicates that employment has yet to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels. However, Ferry County experienced less net job loss (in percentage terms) than the adjoining 3-county NCW region of Okanogan, Douglas and Chelan Counties. The only sectors for which county-wide job counts are less as of 2021 than pre-pandemic are retail trade and hospitality (lodging and dining), due in part to increased challenges with workforce hiring and retention. Other sectors have held their own or increased job counts – as with health care and government.

## COMMUNITY ASSETS & PRIORITIES

**Assets** of Ferry County including the Republic area as typically most cited are natural resources and outdoor recreation. Tourism is the industry that has emerged to have the largest economic impact on the community. **Challenges** relate to lack of digital literacy, inadequate broadband coverage and food insecurity.

**Community priorities** cited for Republic area of northern Ferry County include:

- Building up the Ferry Investment Network and county-wide Opportunity Zone capacity
- Improving food security and agribusiness activity
- Improved collaboration between organizations such as WSU’s Community and Economic Development (CED) Program and tribal organizations as with the Colville Confederated Tribes and Spokane Tribe

When asked about a **vision for the future**, a survey respondent suggests an urban-adapted approach as for smart city innovation and transition to an online work force. Implementation can be expected to require state and federal infrastructure funding support. In response to a similar question about what constitutes a **thriving** economy, a straight-forward suggestion is for implementation of a strategy whereby “people spend dollars and go home.”

## PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

For a community of its size and location, Ferry County has great opportunities for partnership on a scale seldom seen in rural areas. Key players include:

- WSU Ferry County Extension
- Ferry County Sunrise
- Ferry Investment Network
- North Star Opportunity Zones
- Colville and Spokane tribes
- Tri-County and North Central Washington (NCW) Economic Development Districts



**WSU Ferry County Extension assists in promoting agritourism businesses through means including certified farmers markets, farm tours, roadside stands, corn mazes and outdoor events.**

- Photo per WSU Extension, web site:  
[www.extension.wsu.edu/ferry/community-economic-development/](http://www.extension.wsu.edu/ferry/community-economic-development/)

## NEXT STEPS

The Republic area has the players. All that’s needed is the road map and a plan for priority project implementation. Suggested next steps could be to:

- Start with a steering committee to create and coordinate implementation of **an action plan** – drawing on the expertise of interested organizations, businesses, and citizens
- Focus on identified **needs and opportunities** as for value-added tourism, food security, entrepreneurial business development and bridging the digital divide
- Look for opportunities to engage the partners for near-term wins, **building momentum** for longer term initiatives that may require both local and outside funding

Neighboring communities and organization are encouraged to work collaboratively – offering the benefit of more readily leveraging local with outside expertise and resources.

## GO NORTH!

Of the many diverse communities in Ferry County and the NCW region, the Republic area is most distinctive for its remoteness coupled with resilience during times of rapid economic, technological and cultural change. Even with a population few in numbers, the Republic area has compiled the organizational resource pivotal to make good things happen.

Unlike some areas of the state and region, there is interest in thinking big while at the same time demonstrating capacity to deliver incrementally on projects both large and small. The most challenging piece is to cultivate and then access both public and private financial resources to make priority projects doable. Taken together, aligning these building blocks of economic development can serve to support solid prospects for renewed if not improved *home-grown* economic vitality in the years ahead.

In partnership with its Ferry County counterparts, the North Central Washington Economic Development District (NCWEDD) stands ready to support local initiative. NCWEDD encourages 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 NCWEDD. The closer to *shovel-ready*, the *better the opportunity* for successful funding.



**In February 1899, Ferry County was formed and Republic, the only sizable town, was declared county seat. Early economic activity focused on mining and then timber extraction, both of which have receded in recent years. Local employment currently is more dependent on tourism together with construction, retail, health care, education and governmental services.**

- Photo by Louis Trimm, per website: [www.ferry-county.com](http://www.ferry-county.com)

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