



Chapter 2

Introduction

The purpose of this comprehensive plan is to present the community’s goals and policies guiding future development and growth. For Airway Heights, such policies are especially important due to the large amount of growth experienced in recent years – and which is expected to continue well into the future. Since 2000, the city’s population has doubled ¹, driving demand for improved capital facilities, utility services, and improved land use oversight. This plan provides, in effect, a “blueprint” for managing these issues in a way that addresses short-term needs while gradually helping the City achieve its long-term vision.

This Community Profile section articulates past and current characteristics of the community, as well as forecast conditions. It includes information regarding the history and geography of the City, along with key characteristics like demographic composition and population trends. This helps establish an understanding of where the City has been, where it is now, and where it hopes to go in the future – setting the foundations for many if not all of the policies expressed elsewhere in this plan. Whenever possible, data for Airway Heights is compared with data from Spokane County or the State of Washington as a whole, illuminating ways in which Airway Heights is similar to – or differs from – peer communities.

Community Setting

The City of Airway Heights is a small urban city approximately 6.0 square miles in size² located eight miles west of Spokane, the largest metropolitan center in Eastern Washington. Airway Heights, along with nine other small cities, lie within the boundaries of Spokane County. Because of the close proximity of Airway Heights to the City of Spokane, the City of Airway Heights both influences, and is influenced by, growth in Spokane.

The city lies on US Highway 2 just north of Interstate 90. The city is greatly impacted by US-2, which effectively divides it into separate districts north and south of the highway.

The city is also located in the “West Plains” area of Spokane County, so named as the topography is relatively flat, with elevation changes of less than 100 feet. Many areas of the West Plains include thin

¹ See Table 2.1, this chapter.

² 3,820.82 Acres (5.97 Square Miles) within city limits; calculations per Spokane County GIS site, projected using NAD_1983_HARN_StatePlane_Washington_North_FIPS_4601_Feet coordinate system. These figures are estimates and should never be used in place of survey level data.

topsoils and exposed basalt outcrop areas. Surface soils are primarily silty loam; the subsurface water table varies between six and eight feet below the surface.

One of the most important features of Airway Heights is its location between Fairchild Air Force Base (FAFB) and Spokane International Airport. FAFB lies just to the west of the city, while Spokane International Airport is located immediately to the east. Both facilities have a strong influence on the economic climate of the city and its population.

History of Airway Heights

Historically, the West Plains area was slow to develop, primarily due to the poor suitability of the area for agricultural uses and a lack of surface water. Other areas such as the “Spokane valley” east of Spokane and the Palouse region to the south were much more conducive to development. The need for a city located on the West Plains grew, however, when two military airports were developed.

In 1940, the former Sunset Field airport was taken by the United States War Department and transformed into Geiger Air Base for the purpose of training bomber pilots. By 1941, the City of Spokane had purchased and donated land in the West Plains area to the war department for an air corps depot. Geiger Air Base eventually became the Spokane International Airport, and the air corps depot became Fairchild Air Force Base.

In 1942, Carl and Flora Lundstrom, residents of Electric City, Washington, purchased a section of land for \$6.00 per acre on the north side of Sunset Highway near the air corps depot. Officials from the depot approved, as they saw a need for housing and businesses in the area. In 1946, with World War II coming to an end, three subdivisions were filed: Airway Heights Addition, Airway Heights First Addition, and Airway Heights Second Addition.

The area’s first gas station and post office opened on July 15, 1948, located at Hayford Road and US Highway 2. On May 15, 1951, the Lundstrom family donated land for the construction of a school. In a few months’ time, the “Sunset School” opened and was incorporated into the nearby Cheney School District. Social gatherings and church services, which had been held in a nearby highway building, moved to the Sunset School and continued until 1954 when the Lundstrom family donated additional land for the Airway Evangelical Free Church.

In 1953, Carl Lundstrom announced plans to incorporate one square mile of the West Plains into the City of Airway Heights. At the time the area had around 400 residents, a service station, cafe, furniture store, barber shop, and a lumber yard. On April 15, 1955, by a 50 to eight vote, the City became incorporated. The first city council meeting was held on May 3, 1955 with Mr. Lundstrom presiding as Mayor.

Looking Forward

Even by western US standards, the City of Airway Heights is a young city, and is very much still evolving. As demonstrated in Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1, the City’s historic growth has been sporadic, but recent patterns have been significant and more consistent. Matching growth with services will present challenges for Airway Heights, underscoring the need for the City to manage its investments in concert with long-term objectives. The presence of FAFB, and in recent years, the addition of two tribal trust-land casinos make planning for the City’s future an exciting – if somewhat challenging – task. Airway Heights’ days as a sleepy service hub for servicemembers are over. The city is now a growing, rapidly transforming community.

Community Characteristics

The following summarize some of the demographic and economic characteristics of Airway Heights. These and other community characteristics are covered in greater detail in the Land Use element (Chapter 3) and the Economic Development element (Chapter 7).

Population Trends

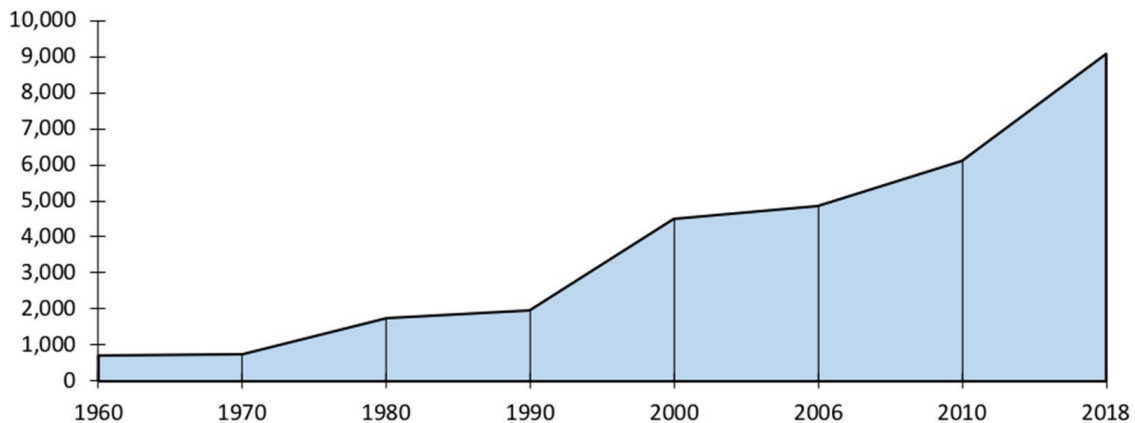
Historically, the City’s growth patterns have related to FAFB and the opening of the Airway Heights Corrections Center. But more recent gains are those reflecting growth in Spokane County as a whole, mirroring an influx of residents seeking lower-cost housing and jobs associated with nearby industries. From 4,500 persons recorded in the year 2000 to today’s estimates in excess of 9,000, as demonstrated in Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1, the City’s rate of growth has more than doubled, averaging approximately 5.7% per year.³

Table 2.1 – Airway Heights population trends, 1960 to 2018

Year	Population	%	Year	Population	%	Year	Population	%	Year	Population	%
1960	708	-	1980	1,730	13.3	2000	4,500	12.8	2018	9,085**	4.8
1970	744	0.5	1990	1,971	1.4	2010	6,114	3.6			

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), 2018
 Notes: (%) = Annual growth rate; (**) = Official estimate from OFM

Figure 2.1 – Airway Heights population trends, 1960 to 2018



Significant growth is forecast for Airway Heights. Beginning with numbers issued by the State of Washington’s Office of Financial Management (OFM) and subsequent review and adoption by Spokane County, approximately 5,227 additional persons are expected to reside in Airway Heights by the year 2037 – growing the city’s population from 9,071 in 2017 to 14,298 in 2037.

Recent growth in Airway Heights is somewhat reflective of the growth which has been occurring throughout Spokane County. Since 2000, the total Spokane County population has increased by approximately 21.5 percent, or 1.2 percent per year. While this pace is significant, the rate of growth has

³ U.S. Census Bureau and Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), 2018.

been higher for Airway Heights. Consequently, the city has increasingly represented a larger percentage of the total County population. As shown in Table 2.2, Airway Heights represented 1.1 percent of the County’s population in 2000, but today, 1.8 percent of County residents live in Airway Heights. Looking forward, this type of growth is expected due to the City’s abundance of undeveloped land, economic growth on the West Plains, and relatively affordable housing stock.

Table 2.2 – Percent of County Population

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018
Airway Heights Population	1,971	2,910	4,500	4,640	6,114	8,385	9,085
Spokane County Population	361,333	401,200	417,939	436,300	471,221	488,310	507,950
% of County Population	0.5	0.7	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.7	1.8

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau & Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), 2018

Racial Distribution

The racial distribution for Airway Heights and Spokane County is presented in Table 2.3. Overall, the “White alone” classification comprises over 69 percent of the total population of Airway Heights, making it by far the largest race classification within the City. The next closest group is the “Hispanic or Latino” classification, which accounts for 12.8 percent of the City’s population. Compared to Spokane County, the city is more culturally diverse, with significantly greater numbers of African American, American Indian and Hispanic residents than the County as a whole. While economic factors may play some role in these differences, the presence of FAFB, and to a lesser degree the tribal casinos, is a primary contributor.

Table 2.3 – Racial Distribution, 2010

Race	% Airway Heights	% Spokane County
White alone *	69.5	89.3
Black or African American alone *	6.8	2.0
American Indian and Alaska Native alone *	5.1	1.8
Asian alone *	3.5	2.4
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone *	0.0	0.6
Two or more races	10.3	4.0
Hispanic or Latino **	12.8	5.7
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	64.4	84.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (*) Includes persons reporting only one race; (**) Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories

Age

The age distribution for Airway Heights as shown in Table 2.4 demonstrates the number of persons within the City by age group. From this table, it is evident that a large percentage of the City’s population is between 20 and 54 years of age, giving the city a relatively youthful profile. Within this range, the largest age group within the City is the 25 to 29 age group, which represents approximately 15.2 percent of the City’s total population, followed by those between the ages of 30-34, representing 12.2 percent of the population. As with its racial diversity, FAFB is considered a prime factor in Airway Heights’ younger age profile.

Table 2.4 – Age distribution, 2017

Age Group	Persons	Percent
< 5	330	4.1
5 to 9	451	5.6
10 to 14	310	3.9
15 to 19	196	2.4
20 to 24	737	9.2
25 to 29	1,218	15.2
30 to 34	975	12.2
35 to 39	747	9.3
40 to 44	679	8.5
45 to 49	621	7.7
50 to 54	543	6.8
55 to 59	333	4.2
60 to 64	244	3.0
65 to 69	327	4.1
70 to 74	176	2.2
75 to 79	80	1.0
80 to 84	13	0.2
85+	37	0.5
Total	8,017	100

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Education

School Enrollment

The school enrollment numbers as shown in Table 2.5 indicate that a somewhat larger percentage of very young (nursery school, preschool) persons and those enrolled in college in Airway Heights as compared to Spokane County (5.9% versus 5.7%, and 42.0% versus 31.0%, respectively). Conversely, the city’s enrollment rates were lower compared to Spokane County in all other educational tiers. These suggest some correlation with the city’s demographic data, namely, larger numbers of persons either with very young children or persons enrolled in college. The comparative drop in enrollment from kindergarten through high school suggests families may move elsewhere as their children reach primary school.

Table 2.5 – School Enrollment, 2017

Type of School	Airway Heights		Spokane County (%)
	Persons	Percent	
3 years and over enrolled in school	1,825	–	–
Nursery school, preschool	108	5.9	5.7
Kindergarten	44	2.4	5.0
Elementary school (grades 1-8)	601	32.9	38.7
High school (grades 9-12)	305	16.7	19.6
College or graduate school	767	42.0	31.0

Source: U.S. Census 2013-2017 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment as presented in Table 2.6 indicates the highest level of education an individual has attained. Therefore, those persons who have graduated from high school include not only those listed in the high school graduate category, but also those with a higher level of educational attainment such as those with associate or college degrees. Comparing data versus Spokane County, Airway Heights residents have lower rates of attainment, with high school and “some college” rates in excess of County rates but significantly fewer residents having received a college degree.

Table 2.6 – Educational Attainment, 2017

Educational Attainment	Airway Heights		Spokane County (%)
	Persons	Percent	
Less than 9th grade	240	4.0	1.9
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	423	7.1	4.8
High school graduate (includes GED)	2,007	33.5	24.7

Some college, no degree	2,099	35.0	26.7
Associate degree	687	11.5	12.6
Bachelor's degree	426	7.1	18.5
Graduate or professional degree	111	1.9	10.9
High school graduate or higher (%)	–	88.9	93.4
Bachelor's degree or higher (%)	–	9.0	29.4

Source: U.S. Census 2013-2017 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

Income & Wages

As shown in Table 2.7, households in Airway Heights have a median annual income of \$49,844, which is less than the United States median or among entities in the City's regional context (other than nearby Cheney, which likely skews lower due to a high percentage of college-age residents). Related to median income, education and occupation figures cited elsewhere, 16.4% of the population for whom poverty status is determined in Airway Heights live below the poverty line. This figure is higher than in Spokane County as a whole (15.2%) or the national average (13.4%). The largest demographic living in poverty is Female 25-34, followed by Male 25-34 and then Male 18-24.

Table 2.7 – Median Household Income, 2017

Airway Heights	Washington	Spokane County	Spokane Metro	Cheney	United States
\$49,844	\$66,174	\$52,159	\$53,321	\$34,103	\$57,652

Source: U.S. Census 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

