

## Public Services in Rural Lane County

### INTRODUCTION

Members of the League of Women Voters of Lane County approved rural services as a study topic at its 2025 annual meeting. LWVLC has a position addressing urban services, and this study could support a proposal for a rural services position. In this paper, *urban* refers to areas within incorporated cities and towns and *rural* refers to unincorporated areas. The study outlines public services in rural Lane County.

Lane County encompasses 4,620 square miles extending from the Pacific Ocean to the Cascades. Ninety percent of the county is publicly or privately owned forest land. About half the land in the county is federally owned, mostly by the US Forest Service. Much of the eastern portion of the county is within the Willamette National Forest. The Willamette, McKenzie, and Siuslaw rivers run through Lane County.

A five-member board of commissioners elected from geographical areas governs Lane County. As of the 2020 census, the county population was 382,971 with most of the population living in Eugene/Springfield, the second largest urban area in Oregon. There are 10 smaller incorporated areas: Coburg, Cottage Grove, Creswell, Dunes City, Florence, Junction City, Lowell, Oakridge, Veneta, and Westfir. Approximately 88 percent of the county population is White. The county has a higher percentage of residents age 65-plus than the state overall. The median household income is \$69,000. Sixteen percent of the population live in poverty, defined as an income of \$27,320 for a family of four and \$16,960 for an individual. About 27 percent of the population lives in rural, unincorporated, areas. Rural Lane County's economy is anchored by timber and forestry, agriculture, outdoor tourism and specialized manufacturing.

People choose to live in rural areas for many reasons: quiet environment, affordability, sense of community, nature, the ability to keep large animals and conduct agricultural activities, and simply to avoid having nearby neighbors. One of the consequences of living in rural areas is foregoing municipal services which are less accessible or unavailable.

### SERVICES PROVIDED IN LANE COUNTY

**Emergency Medical Services (EMS).** Ambulance services are organized into Ambulance Service Areas (ASAs) as mandated by Oregon state law. This structure guarantees an ambulance provider is assigned to every part of the county, ensuring no area is left without a medical response. These services typically are provided by fire departments and Rural Fire Protection Districts (RFPDs). In 2023, the Lane Fire Authority responded to 7,000 calls for assistance, 81 percent of which were medical emergencies.

When a 911 call originates from an unincorporated area, a dispatcher first identifies the caller's location via GPS or landline data. The ambulance assigned to that specific Ambulance Service Area (ASA) is then dispatched immediately. Given distances in rural regions, providers rely heavily on mutual aid agreements. If the primary unit is unavailable, the closest available resource is dispatched—regardless of ASA boundaries—to prioritize the fastest possible life-saving response.

In remote areas, emergency medical services often operate through a tiered response system. Because every second counts, a local volunteer fire district typically arrives first to stabilize a patient and provide basic life support. Simultaneously, a larger agency equipped for advanced life support is dispatched to provide specialized care and transport the patient to a hospital. Due to the high cost of rural ambulance transport, most providers in Lane County offer subscription memberships.

**Fire.** Lane County is served by a diverse network of municipal fire departments and RFPDs. While both entities provide essential services, their governance and funding structures differ significantly. Municipal fire departments typically are organized as departments within city government, managed by a city manager or city council, and funded through a city's general fund. This funding often competes with other community services such as libraries and parks for budget allocations. In contrast, RFPDs operate as independent taxing authorities governed by an elected board accountable to local voters. They collect taxes specifically designated for fire and rescue services. Districts frequently pursue "local option levies" to finance additional staffing or specific equipment upgrades, as well as seek grants and special funding. The fire chief reports directly to a board, and personnel are employees of the district. Agencies frequently overlap in service areas due to mutual aid agreements or consolidated administrations.

Not all unincorporated areas of Lane County are covered by a fire district. In these *unprotected* zones, fire crews may respond only to prevent fires from spreading to protected lands. Consequently, property owners in these areas primarily depend on the Oregon Department of Forestry for wildland fire protection. A table detailing the fire districts and the communities they serve is provided in the Appendix.

**Sheriff.** The Lane County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) is the primary law enforcement agency for unincorporated areas within Lane County. The LCSO is responsible for addressing emergency and non-emergency police responses. Unlike municipal police departments established through local choice, the Office of the Sheriff is mandated by the Oregon Constitution (Article VI, Section 6) for every county in Oregon. The Sheriff functions as the *Chief Executive Officer and Conservator of the Peace*.

According to Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS 206.010), the Sheriff is obligated to perform five specific duties: (1) arrest and imprisonment--apprehending individuals who violate the peace; (2) defense of the county--responding to riots or threats to public safety; (3) execution of court orders--serving subpoenas, evictions, and writs; (4) execution of warrants--carrying out warrants issued by other public officers; and, (5) court attendance--providing security and oversight for the courts. The LCSO's duties also include 911 call response, marine patrol, search and rescue operations, violent crime investigations, county jail operations, facilitation for offender community service, and rural patrols. Dunes City, Creswell, Lowell, and Veneta contract directly with the LCSO for police services.

"We are failing," Lane County Sheriff Clifton Wilkerson told Lane County commissioners during a briefing on December 3, 2025. Sgt. Tom Wallace echoed this sentiment, describing the heavy emotional toll of the current staffing crisis. "Responding to a victim knowing it took you 15, 30, or even 45 minutes to arrive—knowing that a faster response might have prevented further injury—is a devastating feeling," Wallace said. "Unfortunately, that has become our normal."

The LCSO employs more than 300 staff, most of them sworn deputies, to cover the breadth of responsibilities—many of which, including patrol, operate 24/7. The LCSO operates three patrol shifts with just three deputies and one sergeant per shift to cover all of Lane County's rural areas. In 2024, the LCSO fielded 93,000 calls for a population of approximately 117,000 rural residents. With low staffing levels and a large area to cover, workload has led to burnout; eight trained officers left for better-funded positions in neighboring counties within the past year. Lane County staff estimate the Sheriff's Office provides 0.19 deputies per 1,000 people, with average emergency response times ranging from 15 to 45 minutes, while comparable Oregon counties provide 4.30 deputies per 1,000 people and faster response times.

The current crisis is the result of three converging factors: The first is loss of federal timber revenue. Fifty-five percent of Lane County's land base is publicly owned, and much of that is federal forest lands. In the 20th century, timber harvest revenue directly returned significant funds to Lane County government. As federal policies changed over the past four decades, the capacity of federal forest lands to sustain local communities diminished. Congress in 2000 enacted the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) and

Community Self-Determination Act to counteract loss of federal timber harvest revenues and help stabilize funds available to rural counties. “During the past 24 years, Lane County has seen a 91% reduction (more than \$40 million) in annual federal revenue from public lands when adjusted for inflation. Steep declines in federal forest revenue have affected public safety funding particularly hard, resulting in an inability to maintain critical services at appropriate levels without additional investment from taxpayers.” (2025 Public Safety Task Force)

The second factor is the property tax “freeze.” During the years Lane County benefited from significant timber revenue, the permanent property tax rate did not increase to meet the rising cost of services as it did in non-timber counties. When the timber industry declined in the 1990s, Oregon voters passed Measures 5, 47, and 50, placing limits on property tax increases and capping Lane County’s permanent tax rate at \$1.28 per \$1,000 of assessed value—the seventh-lowest rate in the state. The county now is legally trapped in a tax structure that cannot support modern service demands. (2025 Public Safety Funding Task Force)

A third factor is inflationary pressure. Expenses are outpacing revenue. For the 2025–2026 fiscal year, Lane County estimates the cost of operating county government increased by 9 percent, while revenues grew by only 3 percent.

The 2025 Public Safety Funding Task Force estimates it would take \$22 million to bring LCSO up to the state average for safety services. This investment would aid response times, allow for proactive traffic enforcement, and enable deputies to follow up on property crimes. Lane County commissioners are reviewing funding strategies, with voters likely to see a formal proposal on the 2027 ballot.

**Justice and Court Services.** The Lane County Courthouse, Juvenile Justice Center and Jail are all located in Eugene. This means rural Lane County residents must travel for certain court appearances, although some types can be made remotely.

**Transportation and Infrastructure.** Lane County’s Public Works Department participates in regional planning at the federal, state, and local levels, and implements improvement projects. Lane County serves as a coordinating body for the county’s 12 cities and rural communities. Lane County government also is responsible for maintaining county roads.

The Lane Transit District (LTD) has bus service throughout the Eugene-Springfield metro area. Buses also run north to Junction City, west to Florence, south as far as Cottage Grove, southeast to Oakridge, and east to McKenzie Bridge. The district has park-and-ride lots in several locations around Eugene and Springfield and in the rural communities of Junction City, Veneta, Creswell, and Cottage Grove. Additional lines offer service in the Florence area. LTD offers half-price fares to qualifying people with disabilities and free rides to adults ages 65 and older and K-12 students. All LTD buses have bike racks.

In 2022, Lane County adopted a long-term Bicycle Master Plan outlining a comprehensive bicycle network throughout rural Lane County to connect key locations and transportation networks—and make bicycling a more viable option.

The County has a grant-funded, two-year rural-shuttle pilot program, July 2025 through June 2027, to connect residents of three rural areas unserved or underserved by public transportation to vital services. Covered areas are rural South Lane, Highway 36 between Mapleton and Deadwood (east of Florence), and Mohawk Valley (north of Springfield). Program extension will depend on funding availability.

**Water and Sewer.** About 20,000 rural households in Lane County pump drinking water from wells. Homeowners have responsibility for maintaining private wells and ensuring water is safe to drink. The Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality recommend regular testing

for private wells to ensure drinking water is safe for consumption, but there is no legal requirement to do so unless ownership of property with a well is transferred. Remaining households, about 83 percent of the population in Lane County, are served by one of 340 public water systems. Some of these systems, such as EWEB and other municipal providers, serve large areas. Others can be very small, serving a few households or single business. Every public water system is required to conduct periodic water quality testing and report results to the state and its consumers. Oregon Drinking Water Services administers and enforces drinking water quality standards for public water systems in the state of Oregon. Urban areas are served by public or private sewer collection systems that pipe wastewater to a treatment facility. Those types of systems are not available in rural areas which deal with sewage and wastewater disposal using septic systems permitted and regulated by Lane County.

**Waste Prevention and Management.** Lane County government operates Waste Management within its Public Works Department and provides comprehensive information about waste and recovery services, resources, and requirements on the Lane County website.

Private companies provide one-time and regularly scheduled collection of residential and commercial yard waste, garbage, and recycling in urban areas. However, such collection is largely unavailable in rural areas, whose residents must self-haul. When services become overly expensive or locations are distant from residents and businesses, problems can arise with illegal dumping. Lane County operates 15 transfer stations across the county where residents can drop off recycling and garbage, along with household hazardous waste disposal for certain items.

Some residents utilize onsite burning, although restrictions can make this illegal at certain times and in certain locations (generally, Eugene, Springfield, Florence, Oakridge, and areas within their urban growth boundaries). Not all materials are suitable for burning, and there can be negative impacts for air quality. The Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority (LRAPA) provides guidance on its website.

**Digital and Cell Access.** The digital divide—the disparity between those who have access to broadband internet and those who do not—became strikingly apparent during the pandemic as education, work, and healthcare transitioned online. While the definition of the digital divide initially focused on physical access, it has expanded to include the skills gap. Once individuals gain access to the internet, a second divide arises between those who possess the technical literacy to use digital tools effectively and those who lack the skills or resources to learn how to use them. For example, Lane County is transitioning to online submission of permits and online self-service hubs to access county services. While intended to save rural residents a trip to county offices, this shift creates a significant barrier for those with limited broadband access or low digital literacy. Without robust digital infrastructure and technical literacy, these residents must navigate the system through under-publicized phone lines like 211 or wait for rare, in-person outreach opportunities. This disconnection severely limits opportunities.

Through its new strategic plan, the State of Oregon is launching key infrastructure projects with the goal of expanding digital access to all. In late 2024, the Oregon Broadband Office awarded an \$8.5 million grant to a collaborative partnership involving the Lane Council of Governments (LCOG), Lane County, Douglas County, and Fast Net (DFN). This ambitious project aims to provide high-speed fiber internet access to over 1,900 homes in the rural areas of Lane and Douglas counties. Construction is currently underway, and a federal mandate requires that the network be fully operational by December 2026.

Lane County is a key participant in the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. Following the 2024–2025 announcement of nearly \$689 million in federal funding for Oregon, the Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) is actively coordinating with local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to develop and submit District Grant Area proposals. The initiative aims to achieve 100 percent broadband coverage for all unserved and underserved locations across the county by 2030.

In 2023 and 2024, infrastructure projects were funded to prevent *last-mile islands*—neighborhoods where fiber-optic cables pass but do not connect to individual homes. A \$48 million Zayo Group Grant provided the infrastructure backbone for local providers to branch into rural Lane County neighborhoods.

Recognizing that access involves more than just cables, the City of Eugene and Lane County launched the Digital Equity Panel in July 2023. The panel identifies barriers such as hardware costs and lack of digital literacy. Their work ensures that federal funds from the Digital Equity Act are used for providing devices and training to veterans, aging populations, and low-income households.

**Health.** Lane County has four hospitals, including regional medical centers PeaceHealth Riverbend and McKenzie-Willamette in Springfield, with 392 beds and 114 beds respectively, and two rural/critical access hospitals. PeaceHealth Peace Harbor in Florence has 21 beds and serves the Oregon coast and Siuslaw River valley, and PeaceHealth Cottage Grove has 14 in-patient beds and serves south Lane County including rural Creswell, Lorane, and Dorena. Riverbend is a Level II Trauma Center, McKenzie-Willamette at Level III, and Peace Harbor at Level IV. Oregon's only Level I Trauma Center is in Portland. Oregon ranks among the lowest of the 50 states in per capita hospital beds.

The Five Rivers Family Practice medical clinic in Oakridge is working toward federal certification as a Rural Healthcare Clinic, which would enable the clinic to enlarge and provide updated recordkeeping services and x-ray services and receive higher Medicare/Oregon Health Plan reimbursement. Oakridge city government is working to be named a medically underserved area to qualify for funding as a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). This would enable the city to build a small hospital and urgent care center and to include mental health services, physical rehabilitation, and overnight care.

Orchid Health has clinics in Oakridge and McKenzie River, serving the unincorporated high Cascades area and Fern Ridge, serving Veneta, Elmira, and the surrounding communities. These offer same or next-day appointments. BestMed has an urgent and primary care clinic in Junction City. The PeaceHealth Medical Group in Dexter, in the unincorporated southeast part of the county, provides primary care and handles acute, non-emergency needs for the surrounding rural area. Lane County operates several Community Health Centers, including the South Lane Clinic at Lane Community College.

Lane County has a few licensed midwives, one of whom appears to practice throughout the county and accept Oregon Health Plan (Oregon Medicaid) coverage.

Lane County has five federally recognized tribes within the county. The Ko-Kwel Wellness Center in Eugene fosters and promotes a *whole person* approach to wellness, health, and self-sufficiency in an environment inspired by indigenous heritage. It is open to Coquille Tribal families, other American Indians, and Alaska Natives, tribal employees, and the general public as capacity allows.

Systemic funding problems negatively impact public services across the board, along with the ability to address inequities. Some primary care doctors and clinics have stopped accepting new Medicare patients due to Medicare's lower reimbursement rates than private insurance.

H.R.1, the federal budget reconciliation bill passed in 2025, mandated long-term, deep cuts to Medicaid and SNAP (federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) funding that are expected to have a devastating effect on recipients. The same bill established a five-year Rural Health Transformation Program with the stated intent to improve access to high-quality, reliable care and support long-term improvements in health outcomes for rural communities. Oregon is due to receive \$197.3 million to implement this initiative statewide. The Hospital Association of Oregon and the Oregon Health Authority

are working to ensure that funds go toward supporting and stabilizing needed rural health care solutions rather than being diverted to areas such as new technologies that may be of lower priority.

**Social Services and Welfare.** Lane County's safety net encompasses county-administered programs, state benefits, and community-based services. These organizations serve both urban and rural areas, although rural residents must travel further to reach service sites.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) offices in Eugene, Springfield, Cottage Grove, and Florence serve as the primary access points for enrollment in SNAP and the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), along with other state-administered supports. Rural residents typically must travel to these locations, as mobile or outreach enrollment services are limited.

The Lane County Human Services Division coordinates housing and shelter services, rental assistance, homelessness response, and basic-needs referrals through contracted providers and partnerships. Community-based organizations—including Junction City Local Aid, Community Sharing Program in South Lane, and Siuslaw Outreach Services in western Lane County—provide basic needs assistance, rental and utility support, and case management. Again, while these organizations serve urban and rural areas, rural residents must travel greater distances to reach service sites.

Additional services available to rural and unincorporated-area residents include crisis support via 211 (free 24/7 information and referral service connecting residents to resources for housing, food, healthcare, and other basic needs) and mental health crisis intervention via the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Domestic violence support is available through the Hope & Safety Alliance (Eugene) and Saving Grace (Florence), while addiction recovery services operate through Serenity Lane and White Bird Clinic, among others. Most service locations are in Eugene-Springfield, requiring rural residents to travel or rely on telehealth options when available. Veterans can access specialized support through the Lane County Veterans Services Office and Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. Senior services include meal programs, transportation assistance, and in-home care coordination.

Lane County provides child welfare services, family support, and youth programs through ODHS Child Welfare offices, school-based programs, and community organizations. Rural families can access child protective services, foster care support, and family preservation programs through ODHS offices in Eugene, Springfield, Cottage Grove, and Florence.

Youth behavioral health services, runaway and homeless youth programs, and juvenile justice supports are primarily located in the Eugene-Springfield area, though some school-based counseling and telehealth options extend to rural school districts. Looking Glass provides youth crisis services, counseling, runaway and homeless youth programs, and residential treatment. Family resource centers and parenting support programs, such as Relief Nursery's family strengthening and early childhood services, operate in urban areas with limited outreach to unincorporated communities. Childcare assistance programs are administered through the state, though the already-limited supply of licensed childcare providers is further limited in rural Lane County.

Lane County partners are developing the 2026–2030 Community Health Improvement Plan, continuing efforts to address affordability, access to care, and equity across urban and rural areas. ODHS has expanded online enrollment capacity through the OregonONE portal, though rural residents with limited broadband continue to rely on phone-based navigation and in-person visits. Community-based organizations are increasing mobile food pantry routes and partnering with rural schools and fire districts to reach outlying areas. The county's ongoing coordination with 211 ensures rural service providers and resources remain current in the statewide directory, improving phone-based access for households without reliable internet. Behavioral health providers are exploring telehealth expansion and service co-location at rural clinics and schools to reduce travel barriers, but workforce shortages remain a constraint.

**Education.** By law, Oregon's public schools are required to provide free education for all children. Children are served equally no matter their address, social status, race, gender, religion, or disability. Students are served equitably for their different needs to achieve similar outcomes.

Financial sources for public schools include state funding (about 50 percent of a district's funding), local property taxes (about 40 percent), and federal funding (about 10 percent). Passage of Measure 5 in 1990 limited local property taxes, shifting the funding to the state level to ensure equitable resources. This funding shift did not address equitable teacher salary schedules, and salaries typically remain lower in small rural districts than in urban areas. The current state funding method is a weighted formula that factors Average Daily Membership (student enrollment, part- and full-time, over a school year), English learners, pregnancy/parenting, poverty, foster care, special education, geographical remoteness, and size of school.

There are 16 school districts in Lane County. See the Appendix and Sources for a list of Lane County school districts, enrollments pre- and post-Covid, and salaries. High school students are required to earn 24 credits including language arts, math, science, and social sciences as well as physical education, health, personal finance, higher education and career paths, world languages/arts/career and technical education.

A teaching license in Oregon requires a bachelor's degree with requirements to include endorsements or certifications for grade levels and subject areas. These endorsements and certificates are earned through content tests, pedagogy courses, and supervised teaching. A specific teaching license endorsement/certification is needed to teach courses above Algebra 1.

Small rural schools don't have large budgets and may struggle to find teachers qualified to teach some content areas which require a specialized teaching license. Rural schools often need to rely on outside sources to provide qualified teaching. Some options to fill the void include emergency/restricted teaching licenses, online school, home school, and Lane Community College.

The purpose of the Lane Education Service District (ESD) is to provide support and resources which are often costly or specialized. These include the educational and wellness needs of all students such as special education, reading, math, and English as a second language. It also includes special-needs and educational assistants who take on roles such as changing students' clothing, driving bus, taking notes, feeding, tutoring, and more. Specialists' services are often hired by the school district. For rural school districts, it is more cost effective to contract with Lane ESD.

Lane Community College (LCC) collaborates with local school districts to enhance curriculum offerings, often offered remotely. LCC also offers adult basic and secondary education, including GED preparation for folks who have aged out of public K-12.

Rural schools can partner with LCC to bridge the gap created when they do not have teachers certified to teach particular content areas. Students can sign up, often for free, to take courses such as Algebra 2 and above. The challenge for high school students is that each course is completed in one academic term, not over the course of a nine-month school year. Students may struggle with that pacing as well as the need to be independently responsible.

LCC can offer dual enrollment opportunities which allow high school students to meet the high school graduation requirements and/or to earn college credits while also completing their high school education.

Charter schools and virtual charter schools in Oregon are publicly funded educational institutions that operate independently of the traditional public school system but are accountable to the state. Charter

schools are free to choose their curriculum and their operations such as teaching methods, flexible scheduling, personalized learning, or delivery modality.

Private and home schooling are other educational choices. For home schooling, parents must register their child with the Home Schooling Department at Lane ESD. Educational progress is monitored using Oregon standardized assessments at the completion of grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. Home-schooled students may participate in selected curricular offerings and afterschool activities at their local public school.

**Housing: Emergency shelters, Homeless Services, Affordability Programs.** Lane County's housing safety net currently includes emergency shelters, transitional housing, rapid rehousing programs, permanent supportive housing, and ongoing rental assistance programs coordinated through the Lane County Human Services Division and contracted providers. Nearly all emergency shelters—including the Eugene Mission, First Place Family Center, and Egan Warming Centers—are located in the Eugene-Springfield urban area, requiring significant travel for households seeking immediate refuge. Transitional shelter and housing programs offer longer-term stays with case management to help households secure stable housing. Rapid rehousing initiatives provide short-term rental assistance and navigation services to prevent prolonged homelessness. Permanent supportive housing combines affordable units with ongoing case management for individuals and families with disabilities or chronic health conditions.

Long-term rental assistance programs help households maintain stable housing. The Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) provides federal rent subsidies to income-eligible households, allowing them to rent privately-owned housing while paying approximately 30 percent of their income toward rent. Lane County residents apply through the Lane County Housing Authority, though waiting lists can extend for years due to limited voucher availability. For rural households, Section 8 vouchers can be challenging to use due to limited rental-housing stock in unincorporated areas and landlord reluctance to accept vouchers. Other rental assistance programs administered through the county and nonprofit partners provide time-limited support to help income-eligible households avoid eviction and housing rehabilitation to help keep people in their homes. Rural households must typically contact these programs by phone or travel to urban offices for intake.

Approximately 43 percent of Lane County households fall below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold, meaning they earn above the Federal Poverty Level but cannot afford basic necessities including housing. This affordability crisis affects both urban and rural households, though rural residents face additional challenges due to limited housing stock, longer travel distances to services, and infrastructure constraints.

Coordinated entry systems triage referrals and match households to appropriate resources based on vulnerability and need. The Trauma Intervention Program Lane County Resource Guide provides a comprehensive, regularly updated directory of housing resources, including emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, rental assistance contacts, and legal aid for tenants facing eviction.

The Housing Land Banking Task Force, seeded with \$2 million, aims to acquire and prepare land near rural hubs for future affordable and supportive housing that is reachable for unincorporated-area residents without requiring long-distance travel. Lane County Human Services continues to partner with rural community organizations to expand coordinated entry outreach and shelter referrals outside the urban core. Several nonprofit developers are exploring modular and manufactured housing options that can be sited on smaller rural parcels with alternative septic and water systems, addressing infrastructure constraints that limit conventional multifamily development in unincorporated areas.

The county is also participating in state and federal funding opportunities targeting rural affordable housing development, including USDA Rural Development programs and Oregon Housing and Community Services rural set-asides. Increased collaboration between the county, rural fire districts, school districts, faith communities, and community councils is helping identify accessible host sites

where rural residents can meet with service providers for assistance in finding stable and affordable housing, reducing the need for rural residents to travel to Eugene or Springfield for intake appointments.

**Library.** Tax-supported public libraries across Lane County offer services for people of all ages and include facilities in Cottage Grove, Creswell, Eugene, Fern Ridge, Junction City, Lowell (Maggie Osgood library), Oakridge, the Siuslaw branches in Florence and Mapleton, and Springfield.

Policies for using facilities and checking out materials differ from one public library to another. Most public libraries in Lane County offer borrowing services to those living and/or owning property within the jurisdiction's official boundaries. Several, including Cottage Grove and Junction City, also offer non-residents the option of purchasing a library card. Additionally, the Eugene Public Library provides free library cards to children, students, and school district educators and staff for Eugene 4J and Bethel who live outside the Eugene city limits. Other users must purchase a non-resident library card. The Springfield Public Library offers something similar for students of the Springfield School district living outside the city limits, while maintaining a non-resident card option for purchase as well.

The Fern Ridge Library is operated by a library district, rather than a single city, and serves the City of Veneta and communities of Elmira, Noti, and Walton. It, too, offers special teacher and student cards for those outside jurisdictional limits, including for home-schooled students, to better meet their needs.

Additional public libraries operate at varying levels in Lane County's public schools, grades K-12. The Lane Community College Library, located on the main campus south of Eugene, is free to LCC students, staff, and faculty. Other Lane County residents, volunteer staff, and affiliated researchers may purchase a community borrower card for the LCC library. The University of Oregon Library also makes materials available to Lane County residents (and others in Oregon and certain areas of Washington State) who are not students, faculty, and staff for no extra fee. While open to Lane County's rural residents, these libraries are not especially accessible to those outside the Eugene/Springfield metro area.

Volunteer libraries *without* tax funding also exist in Alvadore, Blue River, Dexter (Cascade Foothills), Cheshire (County Corner), River Road/Santa Clara, and Marcola. But even these additional libraries can leave many rural residents without easy, low-cost access to the full range of library services—a gap with implications for lifelong learning and pleasure, as well as the self-education that supports informed participation in a democracy.

Libraries also offer what's called a *third place*, an informal, public gathering spot that can foster community, social connection, and a sense of belonging. Along with churches, cafes, parks, and stoops, third spaces offer neutral grounds for interactions.

**Parks and Recreation.** Additional third places exist in the parks and public lands of Lane County. These include diverse parks and recreation lands and facilities inside cities. Lane County, the State of Oregon, and the US government also oversee parks and public lands across the county's many miles.

According to Lane County government's website, "Lane County's parks include 4,364 acres of rich natural, recreational, and cultural assets at 68 sites across the county's 4,800 square miles. These parks provide residents and visitors access to world class rivers; swimmable and navigable lakes; ocean beaches; historic covered bridges; and recreation facilities such as campgrounds, picnic areas, and mountain trails." From A to Z, these include Ada Park, near Siltcoos Lake south of Florence, and Zumwalt Park, on the western shore of Fern Ridge Reservoir.

Numerous state parks and recreation lands exist within Lane County. Amenities and features vary widely, from picnic tables, bike trails, and restrooms to campsites and boat moorage. Parking fees went into

effect for more Oregon sites in October 2025, and other fees have increased to meet rising costs, budgetary actions that can reduce access while helping fund necessary operations and upkeep.

Several state agencies also own lands and oversee fishing and other activities in waterways across Oregon and in Lane County. The federal government also owns significant land and waterways in Lane County including parts of the Willamette, Umpqua, and Siuslaw National Forests, and the Oregon Dunes Natural Area. Waldo Lake, in the eastern part of Lane County, is considered one of the purest lakes in the world. Campgrounds and hiking areas on federal lands along the coast and in Lane County's interior provide additional recreational opportunities.

## **CONCLUSION**

In general, similar services are provided in the rural areas of Lane County as in the urban areas. Exceptions are municipal water, sewer, waste disposal, and fire services, which are not available in all areas. Access to other services such as libraries, housing, social welfare, and health services often require rural residents to travel to an urban area. Online services can reduce the need for travel: for example, through telehealth, online application processes, and online classes, although a lack of access to broadband internet and cellular services may currently preclude such options. There are critical challenges in emergency response times, broadband and cellular access, and education. Addressing the \$22 million funding shortfall for public safety and completing essential digital infrastructure is vital. Without these changes, rural residents will continue to experience a disproportionate burden compared to their urban counterparts.

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## **QUESTIONS**

1. Did you learn anything about rural Lane County that surprised you?
2. What does it mean to provide equitable services across Lane County?
3. Since our local league represents Lane County, where are our gaps in reaching residents throughout the entire county and how can we improve our outreach?

**APPENDIX**

Lane County Fire Districts and Key Communities Served:

<b>Fire District</b>	<b>Key Communities Served</b>
Lane Fire Authority	Veneta, Elmira, Noti, Walton, Crow, Alvadore, Cheshire, Franklin, Fern Ridge
Santa Clara RFPD	Santa Clara Neighborhood
McKenzie Fire and Rescue	Walterville, Leaburg, Vida, Nimrod, Blue River
Upper McKenzie RFPD	Blue River, Rainbow, Belknap Springs
Mohawk Valley RFD	Marcola, Mohawk Valley
Lowell Fire District	City of Lowell, Fall Creek
Dexter RFPD	Dexter, Trent, and surrounding rural areas
Oakridge Fire Department	Oakridge and Westfir
South Lane County Fire and Rescue	Cottage Grove, Creswell, Saginaw, Walker
Pleasant Hill Goshen Fire and Rescue	Pleasant Hill, Goshen
Lorane RFPD	Lorane
Row River Fire District	Dorena, Row River valley east of Cottage Grove
Junction City Fire Department	Junction City and surrounding farmland
Coburg RFPD	Coburg and surrounding rural area
Western Lane Fire and EMS	Florence, Dunes City, Heceta Beach
Siuslaw Valley Fire & Rescue	Rural areas surrounding Florence and Siuslaw River valley
Mapleton Fire Department	Mapleton, part of Swisshome
Monroe RFD	Monroe area (shared with Benton County)

**Graduation Requirements**

<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Language Arts	4 credits	
Mathematics	3 credits	At Algebra 1 level and above
Science	3 credits	Scientific Inquiry and 2 labs
Social Sciences	3 credits	Includes 0.5 credits of Civics. Must include at least 0.5 credit from Civics and inclusive instruction in Tribal History/ Shared History, Holocaust/ Genocide, and Ethnic Studies, starting with students graduating in 2026.
Physical Education	1 credit	
Health	1 credit	
World Languages/Arts/Career and Technical Education (CTE)	3 credits	Credits can come from any of these content areas
Personal Financial Education	0.5 credits	
Higher Education and Career Path Skills	0.5 credits	
Electives	5 credits	Prior to 2027, 6 credits are needed. Beginning in 2027 5 credits are needed
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 credits</b>	

**Lane County School Districts**

There are sixteen school districts in Lane County. The table includes the approximate student population in 2019 (pre-COVID) from Lane Council of Governments.

School District	Student Population (Student Enrollment Report 2019-2020)	Student Population (Student Enrollment Report 2024-2025)	Teachers' Beginning Salary with Bachelor's Degree 2024-2026
Mapleton School District 32	157	139	\$40,000
McKenzie School District 68	197	195	unavailable
Blachly School District 90	234	228	\$38,967 (2023-2024)
Crow-Applegate-Lorane School	244	295	unavailable
Oakridge School District 76	578	515	unavailable
Marcola School District 79J	591	927	unavailable
Lowell School District 71	836	1,044	unavailable
Pleasant Hill School District 1	1,040	952	\$43,472
Creswell School District 40	1,290	1,083	\$44,808
Siuslaw School District 97J	1,357	1,207	\$49,858
Fern Ridge School District 28J	1,480	1,387	\$44,311
Junction City School District 69	1,711	1,573	unavailable
South Lane School District 45J3	2,845	2,697	\$46,825
Bethel School District 52	5,624	5,007	\$48,542
Springfield School District 19	10,838	9,216	\$46,048
Eugene School District 4J	17,197	15,880	\$48,542
Lane ESD	78	No data available	

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