

# Executive Summary

The Columbia River Economic Development Council (CREDC) worked with ECONorthwest to revisit and update the 2018-2023 Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan. This report provides a forward-looking refresh of the region’s three-pillar framework, highlighting emerging needs while building on momentum from progress made over the past five years.

Since 2018, Clark County has shown strong economic progress. ECONorthwest and Greater Portland Inc analysts provided a comprehensive review of Clark County’s current economic profile, trends, and indicators as the basis to begin shaping priorities for the refresh.

## IN 2028, CLARK COUNTY WILL BE...

A community that favorably recognizes public and private sector contributors to a strong, durable economy--where diverse industries and community members celebrate quality of life attributes unique to Pacific Northwest living.

-- Focus Group Member

## Positive Economic Indicators in Clark County:

Expand the existing base	Support people			Create place
 <p>Employment and microenterprise growth through the pandemic</p>	 <p>Growing and diversifying population</p>	 <p>Steadily increasing median household income</p>	 <p>Increasingly educated workforce</p>	 <p>Expanding waterfronts and downtowns</p>

The region’s economic development actors and leaders must leverage Clark County’s core advantages—its resilient economy, talented workforce, and high quality of life—while advancing inclusive and equitable growth strategies to address systemic disparities and the efficient use of its land to build a sustainable and equitable future. While Clark County shows strong economic progress and a further diversifying population; like many places, inequality persists, with lower incomes and higher poverty among Latino, Black, and other residents of color.

*“It is important for workforce equity that we support those who live here already. Not everyone in our society has access to a good wage job, to create on-roads for pathways to access these opportunities.”*  
 – Focus Group Member

To support advancement of the Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan, ECONorthwest updated the 2018 framework goals— (1) Expand the Existing Business Base, (2) Support People, and (3) Create Place —with complementary subgoals and new objectives, reflecting post-pandemic economic shifts, and economic disruptors like Work from Home economy and employment/production land policymaking. The updated objectives capitalize on previous progress while strategizing for ongoing challenges.

They cultivate inclusive, healthy communities brimming with public spaces and diverse, community-focused employers that attract top talent.



# Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan: Prior Goals and 2024 Supplemental - Objectives

	2018 Plan Objectives	2024 Supplemental Actions
 <p><b>Expand the Existing Base</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Become Industry Experts</li> <li>◆ Strategically Market Industry Clusters</li> <li>◆ Build a Start-Up Ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Identify Emerging Industry Targets</li> <li>◆ Overcome Infrastructure Hurdles to Site Readiness</li> <li>◆ Streamline Permitting Processes, Timelines, and Code Alignment</li> <li>◆ Engage Existing Business Base (for retention/expansion)</li> <li>◆ Grow the Start-Up Ecosystem</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Support People</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Foster Skills Development</li> <li>◆ Prepare Youth for Economic Opportunity</li> <li>◆ Launch a Brain Gain Initiative</li> <li>◆ Promote an Ethical and Socially Just Society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Better Align Workforce Preparedness and Employment Opportunity</li> <li>◆ Illuminate Career Pathways and Industry Linkages</li> <li>◆ Connect Underrecognized Individuals to Opportunity</li> <li>◆ Act Intentionally on Talent Engagement and Talent Attraction Strategies</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Create Place</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Each Community Creates a Placemaking Strategy</li> <li>◆ Embrace Economic Opportunity in Urban Center</li> <li>◆ Tell the Story of Place</li> <li>◆ Make Areas Desired by Industry Clusters Shovel-Ready (<i>shifted to Business Base Goal</i>)</li> <li>◆ Determine All Transportation Needs on a Regional Level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Leverage Placemaking Investments</li> <li>◆ Encourage Infrastructure Investments that Cross Municipal Boundaries</li> <li>◆ Focus on Connecting Communities' Transportation Ecosystems for Fluidity</li> <li>◆ Celebrate and Market Quality of Life Amenities</li> </ul>

Paired alongside these new objectives, ECONorthwest used the results of our initial analysis of demographic and economic trends to compile an analysis of strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR) to provide direction for an updated plan for the County. Following our initial analysis, ECONorthwest engaged with stakeholders through a series of eight one-hour focus group sessions, over two dozen one-on-one stakeholder interviews, and an online survey with sixteen questions that received 96 responses from business leaders, public officials, community-based organizations, and other important economic development partners. Both demographic and economic reviews of Clark County and engagement provided us with nuanced qualitative aspects of Clark County’s strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results related to current metrics and trends in recent years.



# Strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR)

A SOAR analysis is a strategic planning framework that provides a constructive approach to planning by focusing on a positive, forward-looking perspective. This enables organizations to build upon current capabilities as they work toward their desired future. Key factors include:

## STRENGTHS

*The internal attributes, resources, and capabilities that help accomplish goals. This can include human resources, financial resources, systems and processes, assets, and more. Identifying organizational strengths provides a realistic look at current advantages.*

- ◆ Successful pandemic recovery for employment and real estate markets.
- ◆ Recent accomplishments in placemaking throughout the County.
- ◆ Increased new business applications compared to the metro area.

## OPPORTUNITIES

*External factors in the environment that could benefit the community if acted upon. These can include changes in technology, markets, regulations, demographics, partnerships, and more. Identifying opportunities allows organizations to leverage external dynamics.*

- ◆ Seek out funding tools to overcome site readiness and redevelopment hurdles.
- ◆ Advocate for more clarity and consistency within permitting processes and project reviews.
- ◆ Help support young professionals, especially people of color, moving into the area as they cultivate successful careers and build community.

## ASPIRATIONS

*The internal vision and mission of the organization. This clarifies the desired future state and long-term strategic direction. Aspirations guide the organization's purpose and motivate people.*

- ◆ Become a vibrant hub with a distinctive identity and brand.
- ◆ Foster a robust and diverse business ecosystem, facilitating innovation and growth industries.
- ◆ Efficiently use finite supply of land to support sustainable economic growth.
- ◆ Continue developing strong public and private sector partnerships.

## RESULTS

*The measurable external outcomes and objectives the organization wants to achieve. Well-defined results and metrics allow the organization to evaluate progress.*

- ◆ Reduced income gaps
- ◆ Fiscal sustainability
- ◆ Venture capital attraction
- ◆ Decreased labor shortages

