



CLARK COUNTY  
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC

# DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2024



Summer 2024

The Columbia River Economic Development Council (CREDC) is pleased to present the 2024 Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan, a community roadmap with goals and objectives for economic growth and sustainability into the future.

CREDC engaged with consultants at the firm ECONorthwest and invited collaboration with dozens of local partners to develop this strategic blueprint that will guide our collective efforts toward a vibrant and sustainable economic future. This plan is not a CREDC work plan, rather a sophisticated outline of tenets for how community can think about and prioritize investments to grow and diversify the local economy and our economy's connections to regional and global outlets.

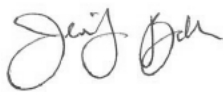
The fast-paced population and business growth over the last decade has brought prosperity to Clark County, WA, and also has led to new or newly-emphasized challenges discussed here. More fully-subscribed development sites and built employer environments, increased educational attainment characteristics, disparately distributed wage growth, and increased cost of housing and infrastructure investments are indicated by benchmark and milestone data points.

Building on a solid foundation of prior strategic planning processes (2011, 2017) and based on current stakeholder engagement and data analysis, we introduce increasingly specific goals and subgoals in an additive refresh to the 2018-2023 plan. This current adopted plan represents CREDC's unwavering dedication to fostering economic growth and prosperity throughout Clark County.

Achieving the vision outlined in this plan requires ongoing collaboration with partners across private and public sectors. Clark County's resilient economy, skilled workforce, and high quality of place infrastructure form the foundation of our strategy. There is much data and accompanying narrative within, so a good first stop is the executive summary. The outlined goals are ingredients for continued, sustainable growth; and the goals respond to the fact that growing wage inequality persists, with residents of color experiencing lower incomes and higher poverty rates. Recognizing growth and sense of belonging more consistently across the whole community is essential to our shared vision of success.

We are committed to creating an environment where all community members can thrive and contribute to the county's diverse industry specializations. With a shared vision and concerted effort, we can ensure that Clark County remains a place where everyone can flourish.

Sincerely,



Jen Baker  
President and CEO, CREDC



Alan Hwang  
Board Chair, CREDC



# Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan Refresh

Prepared for: Columbia River Economic Development Council and Partners

ECONorthwest

222 SW Columbia Street • Suite 1600 • Portland, OR 97201 • 503-222-6060



# Acknowledgments

ECONorthwest prepared this report with support from the guidance and input of regional partners, including members, staff, and leadership of the Columbia River Economic Development Council. Dozens of other firms, agencies, and staff contributed invaluable input that this report relied upon.

That assistance notwithstanding, ECONorthwest is responsible for the content of this report. The staff at ECONorthwest prepared this report based on their general knowledge of the economics of retention and growth of talent and businesses. ECONorthwest staff contributing to this study included Chris Blakney, Kryn Sausedo, Mary Chase, and Jolie Brownell. ECONorthwest also relied on information derived from government agencies, private statistical services, the reports of others, interviews of individuals, or other sources believed to be reliable. ECONorthwest has not independently verified the accuracy of all such information and makes no representation regarding its accuracy or completeness. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute the authors' current opinions, which may change as more information becomes available.

For more information about this report, please contact:

**Kryn Sausedo**

sausedo@econw.com

ECONorthwest

503-222-6060

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# 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>◆ Center standards of living as critical assets in talent attraction</li> <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





# Introduction

## Purpose

The Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan provides orientation for leading economic development actors in Clark County, including the Columbia River Economic Development Council (CREDC) the Plan’s steward. To align with Clark County’s emerging needs while leveraging new regional growth, CREDC led an effort to update the 2018-2023 strategic plan and the region’s three-pillar framework. This effort aims to advance the vision of an inclusive, healthy, and prosperous community.

### 2018-2023 CLARK COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN VISION:

*“Clark County is one of the most inclusive, healthy, and amenity-rich communities in the country. With a continued focus to grow a diverse base of community-minded employers, talent (inside and outside the region) sees greater opportunity here than anywhere else in the country.”*

## How does economic development work in 2024?

The post-pandemic landscape has ushered in a seismic shift in how local economies function. Remote work has become structurally accepted in some industries, untethering some employees from traditional office settings, and allowing talent to disperse across regions. This has overlapped with a surge in entrepreneurship as professionals leverage newfound flexibility to pursue their passion projects. Simultaneously, a tight labor market exacerbated by retiring baby boomers has intensified the competition for top talent. Communities that can adapt to these changes by fostering robust digital infrastructure, nurturing start-up ecosystems, and offering an unparalleled quality of life have shown the ability to emerge as economic growth centers.

## Market trend changes since 2018:

Much has changed at a local and national scale since the last plan. On the local level, Clark County’s population trends continue to reflect those of its 2018 plan: Clark County’s population continues to grow, diversify, and age (see Exhibit 1). Market trend changes related to educational attainment increases and median income growth also echo some of Clark County’s 2018 plan key progress indicators (KPIs). As a community focused on a balanced and stable economic development future, it is important to be aware of such demographic shifts to better balance job and household growth while also meeting the career needs of such residents.

### Exhibit 1. Market Trends Since 2018-2023 Plan

Source: American Community Survey, 2011-2015, 2021

POPULATION			
Metrics	2018 Plan	2023 Plan	Change
Total Pop.	467,000	527,400	+60,400
People of Color	15.3%	26%	+10.7%
Foreign-Born Pop.	9.9%	11.8%	+1.9%

Two years after the publication of the 2018-2023 Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan, a worldwide pandemic took hold, causing many large-scale disruptions to the global economy, including Clark County’s economy (e.g., employment trends, business formations, commute patterns, and demands within the industry cluster). Some of these new emerging trends include adaptations to hybrid and remote employment, increased skill, and talent demand for the health-



Median Age	38	39.2	+1.2 years
<b>ECONOMY</b>			
<b>Metrics</b>	<b>2018 Plan</b>	<b>2023 Plan</b>	<b>Change</b>
Educational Attainment: BA or Higher	27.5%	31.9%	+4.4%
Median Household Income	\$64,275	\$83,800	+\$19,525
Poverty (Families)	6.1%	5.8%	-0.3%

care industry, and growth in the gig and sharing economy.

As the County continues to recover from the impacts of the pandemic and adapt to new post-covid trends, an updated Comprehensive Economic Development Plan will support CREDC and partners with role definition and development focus throughout Clark County, leveraging the County’s advantages –its resilience, talented workforce, and high quality of life–while also addressing systemic disparities and challenges facing the County.

It is challenging to accurately predict the direction of the economy and its specific needs. This study provides a snapshot of Clark County’s current economic landscape and underlying trends to identify some guiding principles, so when the inevitable shifts and uncertainties occur, the county can remain on a steady path in the face of change. Clark County is currently in the process of adopting its Comprehensive Plan to guide growth for the County and jurisdictions within it through 2045. Exhibit 2 below shows the anticipated distribution of new jobs across urban growth areas (UGAs) as well as other jobs in rural unincorporated areas, work from home jobs, government, and construction. While these allocations (once adopted) represent long-term targets, they will require careful planning and adaptation on behalf of economic development actors and their partners to realize these goals.

**Exhibit 2. Interim Employment Allocation, by Clark County Jurisdiction, UGA, or Unincorporated Urban Area, 2024**

Source: Clark County Buildable Lands Report and Interim County Allocations

Note: The calculation from gross to net acres involves several factors, including infrastructure and land constraints

\* The 88,100 County Total jobs figure includes 8,600 jobs in the government sector assumed to occur on public land or existing facilities which are excluded from our vacant land model.

JURISDICTION	2023-2045 EMPLOYMENT ALLOCATION (INTERIM)	2023 VACANT BUILDABLE LANDS MODEL CAPACITY
Vancouver (City)	15,333	18,025
Vancouver (UGA)	18,221	15,168
Battle Ground	5,604	7,677
Camas	11,528	11,363
La Center	2,119	2,096
Ridgefield	8,085	7,998
Washougal	3,818	2,404
Woodland	-	-
Yacolt	364	360
<b>UGA Total</b>	<b>65,071</b>	<b>65,091</b>
Government	8,600	
Construction	6,500	
Rural (5%)	4,405	
Work from Home (4%)	3,524	
<b>County Total*</b>	<b>88,100</b>	

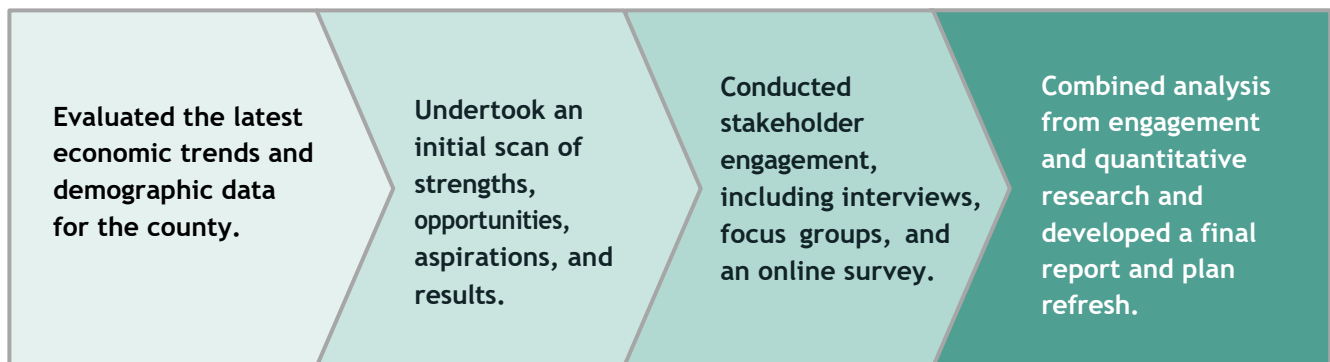


## Local Partners & Roles

Clark County’s economic development ecosystem is made up of many local actors whose partnerships and collaborations help advance the county toward its vision. A list of active contributors include:

Clark County Economic Development Ecosystem		
Local Governments	Business-Community Organizations	Ports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ City of Battle Ground</li> <li>◆ City of Camas</li> <li>◆ City of La Center</li> <li>◆ City of Ridgefield</li> <li>◆ City of Vancouver</li> <li>◆ City of Washougal</li> <li>◆ Clark County</li> <li>◆ The Cowlitz Indian Tribe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Downtown Camas Association</li> <li>◆ Fourth Plain Forward</li> <li>◆ Greater Vancouver Chamber</li> <li>◆ Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber</li> <li>◆ Ridgefield Main Street</li> <li>◆ Vancouver Downtown Association</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Port of Ridgefield Washington</li> <li>◆ Port of Camas-Washougal Washington</li> <li>◆ Port of Vancouver Washington</li> </ul>
Educational Institutions & Workforce Development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Washington State University</li> <li>◆ Clark College</li> <li>◆ Workforce Southwest Washington</li> <li>◆ K-12 School Districts</li> </ul>		

To refresh the Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan, ECONorthwest:



# Economic Development Goals

## Core Goals

The 2018-2023 Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan concluded with the solidification of a three-pillar framework: 1) Expand the Existing Base, 2) Support People, and 3) Create Place. These goals underscore the vital importance of growing Clark County's traded sector industry base, increasing access to skills development tied to such growing industries, and creating a distinct place that is accessible and inclusive to everyone.

## ➤ Goal 1: Expand the Existing Base

The 2018 CREDC report highlighted key industry clusters with the highest growth potential, supporting efforts to strategically allocate resources, attract new investments, and bolster existing businesses within Clark County. The five target industry clusters include (1) Computer and Electronics, (2) Clean Tech, (3) Software, (4) Metals and Machinery (now 'Technology and Enhanced Production'), and (5) Life Sciences. The goal for expanding the existing base aims to enhance industry skill and expertise through local business collaboration, increasing business and workforce recruitment through improved marketability and developing robust ecosystems for business start-ups to ensure the region's competitive edge within its key industries. Key 2018 objectives in support of expanding the existing industry base within Clark County included:

### 2018 OBJECTIVES:

- ◆ Become Industry Experts
- ◆ Strategically Market Industry Clusters
- ◆ Build a Start-Up Ecosystem

### ORIGINAL PLAN: WHY THIS GOAL?

*"The Clark County area is fortunate to host traditional and advanced manufacturing industries coupled with a growing base of knowledge-based industries that are poised for more growth. Manufacturing will remain an important industry cluster with the continued integration of technology. Increasingly, manufacturing will be more automated, requiring a highly skilled workforce. Clark County will remain competitive in this area with a continued focus on education and skills development to prepare a workforce that can serve this dynamic trend in manufacturing." - CREDC 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Plan.*

## What progress has been made toward expanding the existing base?

Over the past five years, Clark County has witnessed a surge in entrepreneurial spirit, with a wave of new start-ups and robust growth across its target industries. The County has outpaced the Portland metro area in new business licenses while increasing employment and wages in four out of five key sectors since 2018. As new factors like incentives for clean energy production and resurgence in domestic



specialized manufacturing (e.g., semiconductors) continue to shape considerations for these industries, it will be increasingly important for CREDC to monitor and respond to emerging trends.

**Clark County’s top industries show steady growth, while Management and Financial Services are among the fastest growing.**

» The County’s industries with the **highest employment in 2022** were health care and social assistance, government, retail trade, construction, and accommodation and food services (see Exhibit 3). Of these industries, government and construction had above-average wages per employee, while retail and accommodation and food services paid below -average wages. While all these industries saw steady growth between 2012 and 2022, service-based industries and corporate functions (e.g., management of companies and enterprises, finance and insurance, and educational services) saw the fastest growth in this period, offering both high wages and increasing job opportunities.

**Exhibit 3. Covered Employment Change, Clark County, 2012-2022**

Source: Washington Employment Security Division

Note: The top five industries with the highest share of covered employment in 2022 are shown in bold, and those paying above the county average wage in 2022 are highlighted in green.

Sector	2012	2022	Share of Total Jobs (2022)	Average Wage (2022)	Change 2012 to 2022		
					Difference	Percent	AAGR
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1,193	3,576	2.0%	\$111,725	2,383	200%	11.6%
<b>Construction</b>	<b>7,964</b>	<b>16,986</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>\$71,499</b>	<b>9,022</b>	<b>113%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>
Finance and Insurance	3,781	6,451	3.7%	\$112,277	2,670	71%	5.5%
Educational Services	951	1,613	0.9%	\$38,791	662	70%	5.4%
<b>Health Care and Social Assistance</b>	<b>18,074</b>	<b>27,639</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	<b>\$64,412</b>	<b>9,565</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>4.3%</b>
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	6,692	10,169	5.8%	\$99,988	3,477	52%	4.3%
Information	2,540	3,856	2.2%	\$107,469	1,316	52%	4.3%
<b>Accommodation and Food Services</b>	<b>10,241</b>	<b>14,831</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>\$27,491</b>	<b>4,590</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
Administrative and waste services	6,777	9,719	5.5%	\$58,585	2,942	43%	3.7%
Real estate and rental and leasing	2,158	3,078	1.8%	\$59,398	920	43%	3.6%
<b>Retail trade</b>	<b>14,646</b>	<b>19,139</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>\$42,261</b>	<b>4,493</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
Transportation and Warehousing	2,917	3,548	2.0%	\$72,086	631	22%	2.0%
Manufacturing	12,072	14,333	8.2%	\$71,970	2,261	19%	1.7%
Wholesale Trade	6,042	6,953	4.0%	\$92,968	911	15%	1.4%
<b>Government</b>	<b>23,026</b>	<b>25,856</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	<b>\$71,555</b>	<b>2,830</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	631	594	0.3%	\$48,781	-37	-6%	-0.6%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2,268	2,001	1.1%	\$32,835	-267	-12%	-1.2%
Other services, except public administration	7,760	5,374	3.1%	\$49,730	-2,386	-31%	-3.6%
Not Elsewhere Classified	109	136	0.1%	\$178,803	27	25%	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>129,842</b>	<b>175,852</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$66,824</b>	<b>46,010</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>



**Clark County has a strong concentration in semiconductors, investment consulting, and specialized manufacturing.**

» Clark County's industries with the highest location quotients highlight existing competitive advantages and sectors ripe for further economic development. In 2022, top-performing subindustries included several of the County's target sectors, such as **semiconductor and related device manufacturing, technology enhanced production, computing infrastructure providers, data processing, web hosting, and related services** (see Exhibit 4). These thriving clusters present prime opportunities to double down on workforce development initiatives and aggressively recruit complementary businesses, solidifying Clark County's position as a hub for these high-growth, high-impact industries.

**Exhibit 4. Selected Industries with LQ's Greater than 1.0 in Clark County, 2022 Q2**

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, CREDC

NAICS	Industry	Location Quotient	Employment	Average Weekly Wage	Establishments
334413	Semiconductor and related device manufacturing	12.70	2,976	\$1,606	9
523940	Portfolio management and investment advice	3.98	2,209	\$2,523	137
337110	Wood kitchen cabinet and countertop manufacturing	3.20	464	\$1,056	18
332312	Fabricated structural metal manufacturing	2.58	278	\$1,485	7
484230	Specialized freight trucking, long-distance	2.14	330	\$1,494	13
518210	Computing infrastructure providers, data processing, web hosting, and related services	2.03	1,113	\$2,583	95
23	Construction	1.88	17,380	\$1,343	2,105
541512	Computer systems design services	1.20	1,590	\$2,290	699
513210	Software publishers	1.17	875	\$2,484	243
541330	Engineering services	1.12	1,431	\$1,837	157

The 2018 CREDC report summarized key metrics for identifying industry clusters with a select group of specific six-digit NAICS codes. This analysis included comparing concentration rates (LQs) of employment, average wages, and available skill sets for companies within the County with the rest of the United States.

**What Is Location Quotient of Employment?**

A location quotient (LQ) of employment is a value that describes how concentrated jobs are in a sector locally relative to a larger geographic unit. In this case, Clark County is compared to the United States overall.

The higher the location quotient, the more concentrated the sector in the analysis areas. In general, this equates with a local advantage in that industry.

<1.0 = Low concentration

1.0 = On par with average

As a rule of thumb, an LQ greater than 2.0 is a highly concentrated sector and an anchor of a local industry cluster.

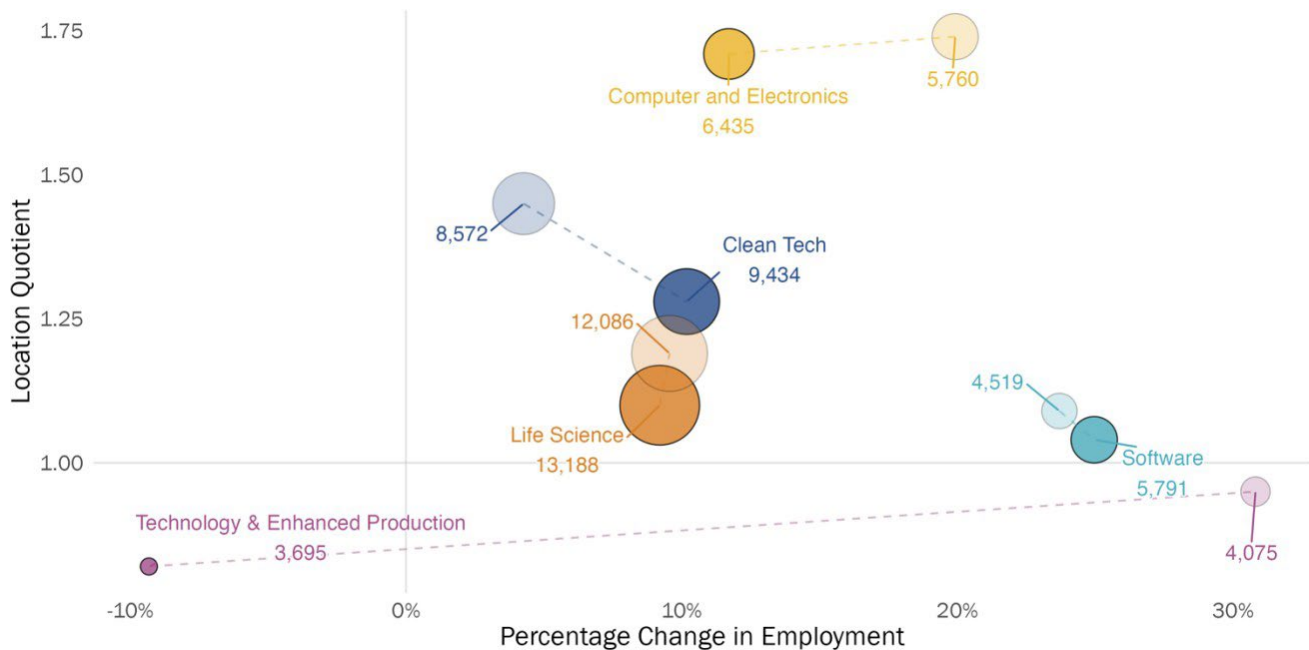


## All but one of CREDC’s target sectors saw growth in total employment since 2018.

- » Exhibit 5 highlights the percentage change for each target sector from 2018 to 2022, both in employment growth and LQ (the size of the bubble is 2022 employment) Since 2018, all the County’s identified clusters **except for Technology and Enhanced Production** increased in terms of total employment.
- » Five years ago, **all but one of these clusters had an LQ status larger than 1.0**, meaning nearly all the clusters had similar or greater concentrations of employment when compared to the nation. In 2022, Clark County still had a greater concentration of jobs in Computer and Electronics, Clean Tech, Life Science, and Software.

Exhibit 5. Industry Cluster Location Quotient & Total Employment Change from 2018 to 2022

Source: ECONorthwest, BLS



- » **Except for Technology and Enhanced Production, all CREDC’s target industry clusters continued to grow in employment and outpaced national trends.**

The Software industry cluster saw the greatest percent change in employment at 25 percent. In 2018, the employment concentrations of both Clean Tech (LQ 1.46) and Computer and Electronics (LQ 1.74) were one and a half times the national average. Since 2018, both industry clusters have experienced employment growth, 10.2% for Clean Tech and 11.7% for Computer and Electronics.

However, their location quotients have slightly decreased, due to other service-oriented industries growing at a more robust pace. The Life Sciences cluster saw a 9.2% change in employment while also seeing a small decrease in its LQ, from 1.20 in 2018 to 1.10 in 2022. The only industry cluster that experienced a decrease change in employment was Technology and Enhanced Production, which had a negative percentage change of 9.3%. From 2018 to 2022, this industry’s employment concentration (LQ) has decreased from 0.95 to 0.82 and is now almost 20% smaller than the US average. This indicates that although employment in Technology and Enhanced Production industries increased, it grew at a slower rate than the United States overall.



Since 2018, the annual wages for all target industry clusters have increased; but, local wages increased less, proportional to the nation-level wage increases.

- » Competitive wages were a key metric to identification of target industry clusters for CREDC in 2017. All five industry clusters saw a positive change in annual wages from 2018 to 2022.
- » In 2018, all five target industry clusters had average annual wage LQs below the US average (see Exhibit 6). As of 2022, only one cluster (Technology and Enhanced Production) had a higher wage LQ of 1.0. Computers and Electronics also experienced a positive LQ change but remained at about 0.85. This means that while wages are growing for target sectors (and are above average for the County), they are not proportionately as high as wages in those industries nationwide.

Clark County's strategic economic sectors demonstrate robust growth, with the Software and Computer and Electronics clusters leading in wage increases, reflecting a decade of steady growth. Although the Clean Tech and Life Sciences clusters show wage growth, they lag in pace compared to national averages, signaling a need for additional attention to bolster their competitive edge.

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## What Is Location Quotient of Wages?

A location quotient (LQ) of wages is a value that describes how wages in a sector compare to wages for employees in that industry nationwide. This calculation considers both:

- Average industry wages compared to all wages locally
- Local wages overall compared to the national average

Even if an industry pays wages above the national average for that industry, it may have a low LQ if it is comparatively low to local wages overall.

For example, if workers in one industry earned \$75,000 in California, they may earn more than the average worker in that same sector nationwide. However, since overall wages are \$85,000 in California, the industry may still have a low LQ (<1.0). Nationwide, average wages for all workers are \$70,000. So, if employees in that industry earned \$75,000 elsewhere, they would have proportionately higher incomes than those in California.

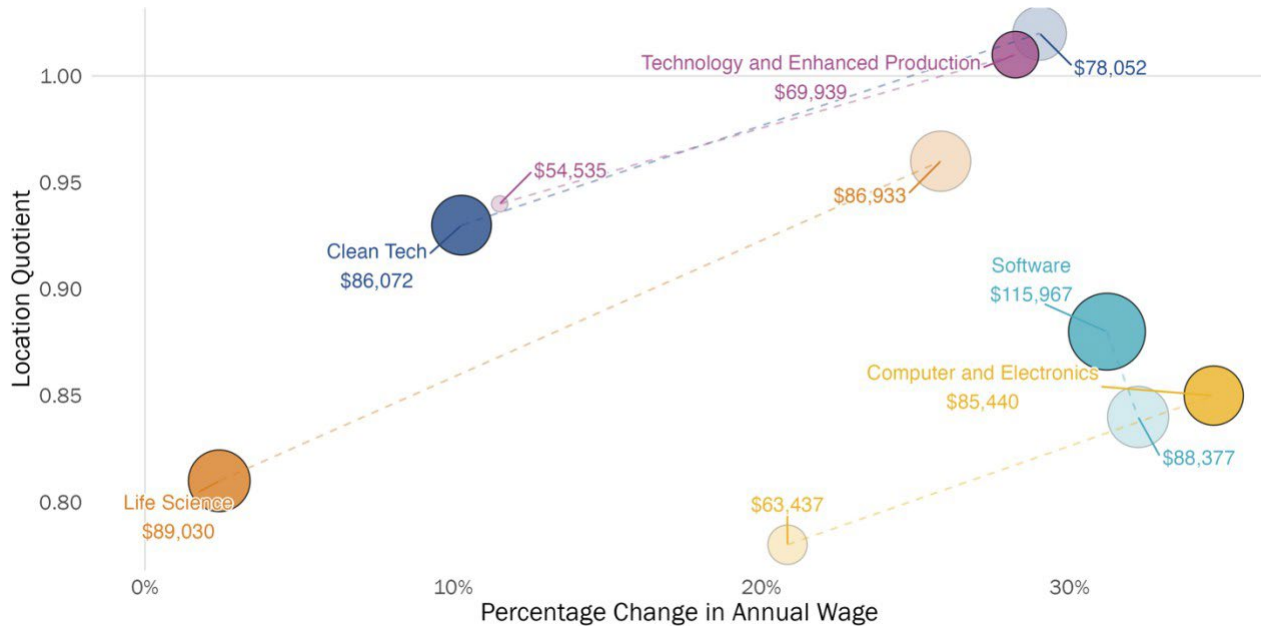
Similarly, even if local wages in an industry are higher than the overall average wage locally, they may have a low LQ if they are not as proportionately high as average wages in that industry nationally.





### Exhibit 6. Industry Cluster Location Quotient & Annual Wage Percentage Change from 2018 to 2022

Source: ECONorthwest



Regional actors must be cognizant of and responsive to the varying needs of businesses across industries, ranging from large corporations to small startups. Infrastructure requirements like power, water, and broadband can differ significantly between sectors, necessitating a case-by-case approach rather than a one-size-fits-all solution. It also underscores the regional need for a diverse range of land and space offerings. With limited space for large-scale recruitment due to the region's land development, one trend worth noting is flexibility. Spaces that fit various uses and can adjust and scale with users to keep them in the County, even if that is simply interior demising walls. Young companies may initially require only 5,000 square feet but can rapidly outgrow their space within years, doubling or tripling their needs. Constructing facilities that accommodate such growth potential appears to have strong market interest. These forms may face barriers to private investment. Traditional industrial developers prefer scale and larger high-credit tenants to reduce risk and attract capital. In the intermediate term, this may require more common public partnerships and financing tools to continue to be involved to mitigate risk.

By addressing sector-specific infrastructure needs and offering flexible spaces tailored to company growth trajectories, the county can position itself as a prime location for businesses seeking a supportive environment for sustained success.

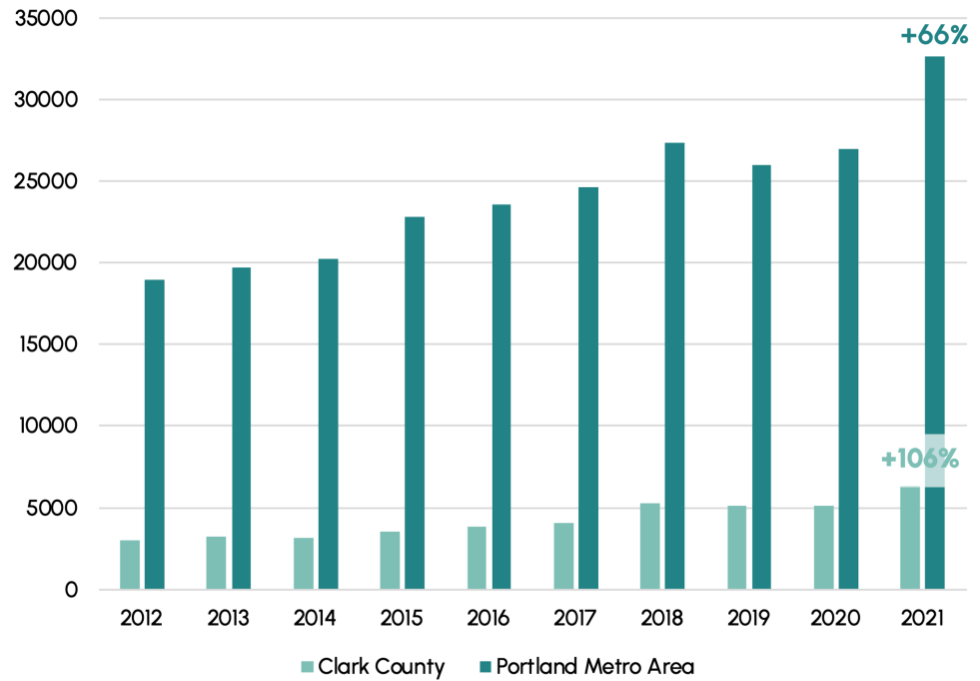


The county has seen a surge in start-ups in the past three years and has more than doubled its annual number of new businesses since 2012. This is a particularly notable trend for microenterprises.

» In 2022, 6,241 new business applications were filed in Clark County, more than doubling (106 percent) the 3,031 filed in 2012. Applications in Clark County accounted for approximately 26 percent of all new firms started within the four-county metro area (including Clark, Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties) in 2022.

Exhibit 7. Annual Business Applications, Clark County and Portland MSA, 2012-2022

Source: Census Bureau, Business Formation Statistics



» Clark County is seeing an influx of new businesses (see Exhibit 7). Small firms with less than five employees have seen quick growth since 2018 and have grown by 17% since 2020.

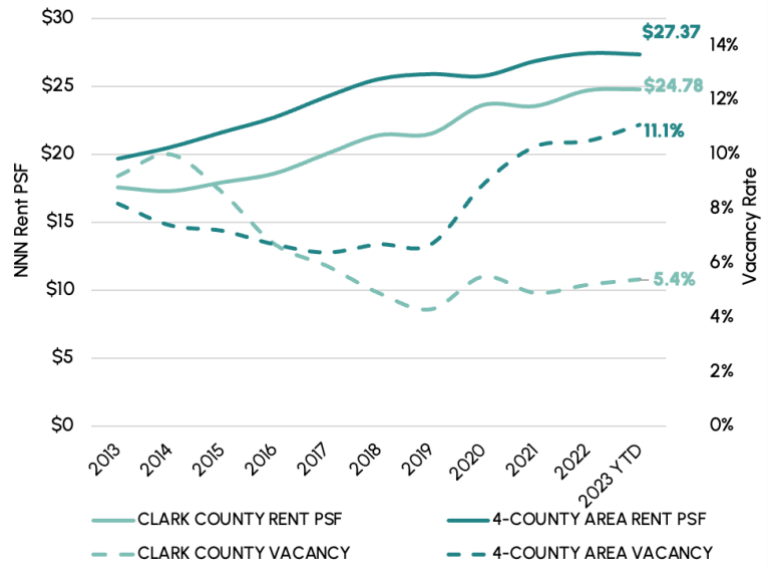
Clark County experienced a rise in office rents alongside a downward trend in vacancy rates over the last decade. This is likely to backslide as national and regional trends catch up with the area.



Office rents, retail rents, and industry rents have steadily risen over the past decade for both Clark County and the Portland metro region.

**Exhibit 8. Average Retail Rent PSF and Vacancy Rate, Clark County, and 4-County Area, 2013-2023**

Source: CoStar



» As of 2023, Clark County's office rents have risen to a rate of \$24.78 psf while the industrial rents have increased to \$10.53, both trending just below the overall four-county average. Comparatively, Clark County's retail rents have steadily surpassed the region's average with a YTD rate of \$23.43.

» Despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, Clark County's office, retail, and industry vacancy rates continued to decline since 2013. Clark County's offices saw a faster decline in vacancy rates, with a 5.7% difference in decline between Clark County and the rest of the region. However, Clark County's retail and industrial vacancy rates, while slightly higher than the region's

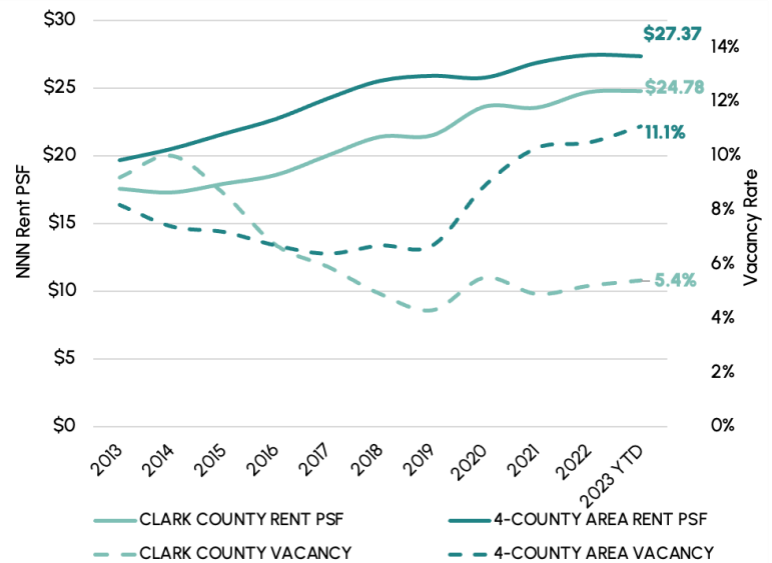
average, are still relatively low in comparison to 2013.

» Except for a few years, Clark County has experienced net positive absorption for office, retail, and industrial deliveries since 2013. Clark County's offices and retail deliveries saw the largest net absorption in the mid-2010s, while the County's industrial deliveries saw the largest net absorption in 2020.

» Up to this point, the office market has proven resilient, but what is being seen in most office markets is a shift to quality (Class A) with some significant softening in the demand for Class B and C offices.

Exhibit 8. Average Retail Rent PSF and Vacancy Rate, Clark County, and 4-County Area, 2013-2023

Source: CoStar



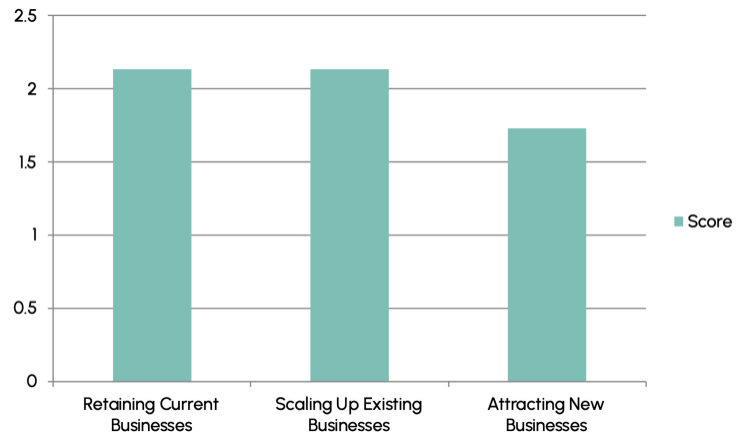
# What are the emerging priorities for expanding the existing base?

According to stakeholders, creating a people-centered strategy while also creating a business-friendly environment is how the region can continue to attract businesses and investment.

According to stakeholders, Clark County has assets appealing to businesses large and small, including its talented workforce, proximity to major markets, moderate political climate, water availability (particularly for the semiconductor industry), and its comparatively short commute times, among others.

Sentiments around business attraction have shifted, favoring a more discerning approach that prioritizes high-wage jobs and employment density (see Exhibit 9). Simultaneously, there is a resounding call to concentrate efforts on retaining and facilitating the growth of existing businesses within the region. Nurturing local entrepreneurship is also being actively encouraged, underscoring a commitment to homegrown economic development.

Exhibit 9. Survey Answers to “What should regional economic development partners prioritize in terms of supporting businesses?”



*“It is important for workforce equity that we support those who exist and 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. We can’t just support out-of-state folks from California or other parts of the country. It’s a both/and approach for workforce recruitment. Our intention must be to uplift and support folks [and businesses] who already live here.”*  
– Focus Group

**Stakeholders believe that the county should ensure local businesses continue to grow and thrive as development in the County increases. This is vital for equitable economic development.**

For bolstering small businesses, stakeholders advocated fortifying incubators, commercial kitchens, and relocation assistance. Streamlining permitting processes and amplifying chambers’ support networks were also highlighted. Simultaneously, channeling investment into local entrepreneurs, especially from underrepresented communities and women-owned ventures, emerged as a priority.

While many of these small businesses may never outgrow a handful of employees, they represent an invaluable opportunity for individuals to maximize their earnings while achieving a coveted work-life balance. These enterprises, often born from personal passions or niche expertise, allow entrepreneurs to craft their own

destinies, eschewing the constraints of traditional employment. By remaining modest in scale, these ventures enable their owners to prioritize lifestyle needs, whether it is flexible scheduling, family commitments, or simply pursuing a labor of love.



## Community favors Clean Tech as an important industry to promote in Clark County.

Of the target sectors identified in 2018, Clean Tech (including both manufacturing of technology like solar panels and power generation/transmission) was the highest priority for stakeholders in 2024. Since 2018, this sector has seen growth in both employment and wages. However, its location quotient within the County has decreased, indicating that the County has seen less growth than other places in the United States (see Exhibit 5 and Exhibit 6). However, stakeholders observed advanced manufacturing, food and beverage innovation, and higher education as emerging industries within the County.

*“Workforce is not an issue on these projects. They’re looking for the land.”*

*“Developers don’t think about infrastructure if they can’t find a piece of dirt.”*

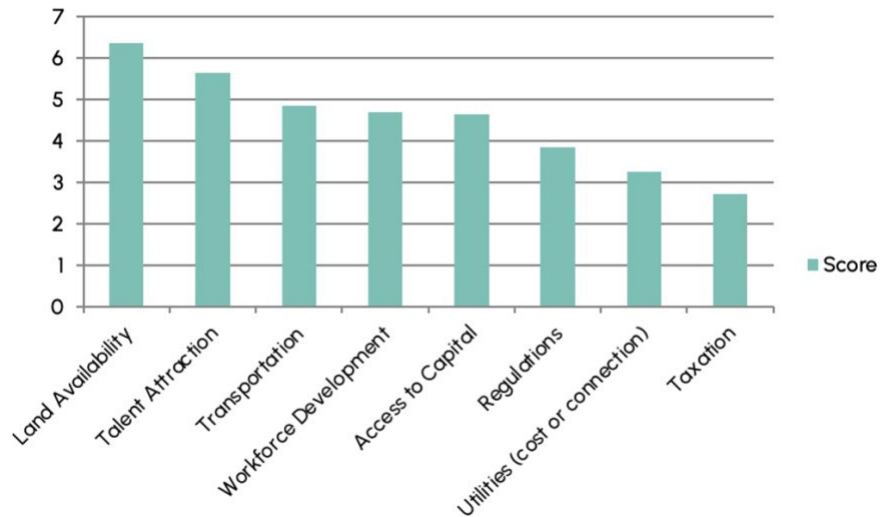
*“In regard to county growth expectations, there is uncertainty as to the land that we’re supposed to be placing jobs on.”*

*“We need to collaborate between private and public sectors and educate business/building owners and residential folks on legislation and the impact.”*

### Land constraint resulting from land utilization is a top concern for stakeholders.

As Clark County continues to expand with residential, commercial, and industrial development, acquiring buildable land is becoming a challenge (see Exhibit 10). Almost all key stakeholders named the lack of available land as one of the key barriers to site development and growth in general. According to stakeholders, Clark County specifically lacks land inventory for larger projects in search of 20 acres or more. “Assembling a 40-acre site is tough.” Developers and users looking for smaller parcels are also having challenges depending on the desired use and location. Because of this lack of land availability, some interviewees noted certain businesses and developers are going elsewhere (e.g., Cowlitz and Lewis County, the Gorge, etc.) in search of available land.

**Exhibit 10. Answer to Survey Question “Please rank these potential concerns in terms of the largest barriers to economic growth for Clark County.”**



Stakeholders named several factors that are limiting the available land and site development in Clark County, namely, constraints of wetlands on parcel sizes, restrictive land use zoning policies lengthening predevelopment timelines, and rising construction costs. Stakeholders shared a desire for more employment land and manufacturing/light industrial land to support the attraction of businesses and increase employment opportunities in the County.



# Supplemental Objectives to Expand the Existing Base

These priorities and concerns shared by stakeholders, coupled with the region’s emerging trends, suggest the need for reformed and new objectives for the “Expand the Existing Base” goal. These new objectives include:

## 2024 GOAL OBJECTIVES:

- » Identify Emerging Industry Targets
- » Overcome Infrastructure Hurdles to Site Readiness
- » Streamline Permitting Processes, Timelines, and Code Alignment
- » Engage Existing Business Base (retention and expansion)
- » Grow the Start-Up Ecosystem

Economic development actors can support these objectives by focusing on removing barriers to development for new employers, supporting entrepreneurs and start-up businesses, and convening partners to foster a strong business network in Clark County.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANDING THE EXISTING BASE

- ◆ Seek more funding to overcome site and infrastructure development constraints.
- ◆ Support entrepreneurship and small business growth through increased access to resources, capital, and business-to-business networking.
- ◆ Advocate for more clarity and consistency within permitting process and project reviews.
- ◆ Explore code flexibilities that allow for more development and redevelopment of commercial and industrial sites.
- ◆ Foster relationships between institutional actors and small businesses, including via procurement policies.



## ➤ Goal 2: Support People

Attracting, developing, and retaining top talent is pivotal for Clark County's regional economy to thrive. The objectives of the second goal center on fostering a diverse industry base and skilled workforce, prioritizing talent attraction through developing career-connected education, ensuring well-paying job opportunities, providing equitable commuting options, fostering an urban lifestyle, sustaining communal amenities, and supporting a diverse culture. Specific objectives under this goal read as follows:

### 2018 GOAL OBJECTIVES:

- ◆ Foster Skills Development
- ◆ Prepare Youth for Economic Opportunity
- ◆ Launch a Brain Gain Initiative
- ◆ Promote an Ethical and Socially Just Society through an Intentional Commitment to Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity

### ORIGINAL PLAN: WHY THIS GOAL?

*“Complex issues driving income stratification and workforce skills gaps are making it more difficult for all residents to realize positive personal economic growth in keeping with business growth. To plan for this modern economy, communities must consciously foster a resilient economy that is derived from a diverse industry base and skilled workforce to weather inevitable negative portions of economic cycles.”*  
- CREDC 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Plan.”

## What progress has been made toward supporting people?

Clark County is growing quickly, becoming more diverse, and attracting highly educated, high-income residents. Over the last decade, Clark County has seen success from its investments in supporting its residents through public-private partnerships, educational pipelines, and locational advantages, as seen by the County's influx of new residents and businesses. The profile of new residents suggests that many are choosing to relocate to Clark County due to their newfound ability for remote and hybrid work, in addition to relocating for the County's growing employment opportunities.

### The county has experienced rapid and diverse population growth.

- » From 2000 to 2023, Clark County's population grew by 53%, nearly twice the rate of the overall Portland metro region. This growth has brought greater diversity to the region. In 2021, over a quarter of Clark County residents were people of color, with Latino and Hispanic residents growing the most since 2011.
- » Clark County's population is also aging. In 2021, its median age rose to 39.2, with the highest growth seen in residents aged 65 years and over. However, the county continues to sustain a stable working-age population. Clark County's population growth and increase in household formation are critical indicators of the city's available workforce and strong economic base.



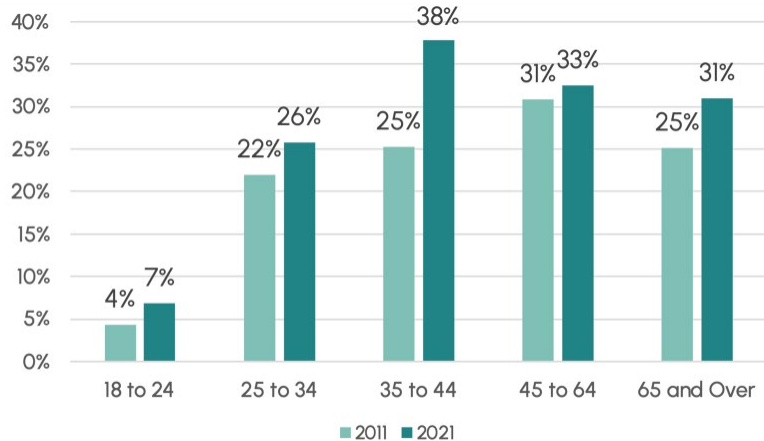


## The county has gained more highly educated, high-income residents.

- » Clark County gained residents with college degrees or higher, with a **5% increase** in overall population with bachelor's degrees or higher since 2011 (see Exhibit 11). The share of residents with some college but no degree and those with no high school degree also decreased **5.5%** and **2.1%**, respectively, indicating a growth in more highly educated residents and likely a higher-earning population.

**Exhibit 11. Share of Population with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher by Age Categories, Clark County, 2011-2021**

Source: ACS 1-Year Data Tables, 2011, 2021



- » Clark County witnessed a **notable surge** in the traditional peak working-age demographic of residents between 35 and 44 years old, suggesting an **influx of mid-career to late-career professionals or nontraditional students pivoting into new fields**. This increase in educational attainment within the region reflects the economic opportunities and types of available workforce in the area.

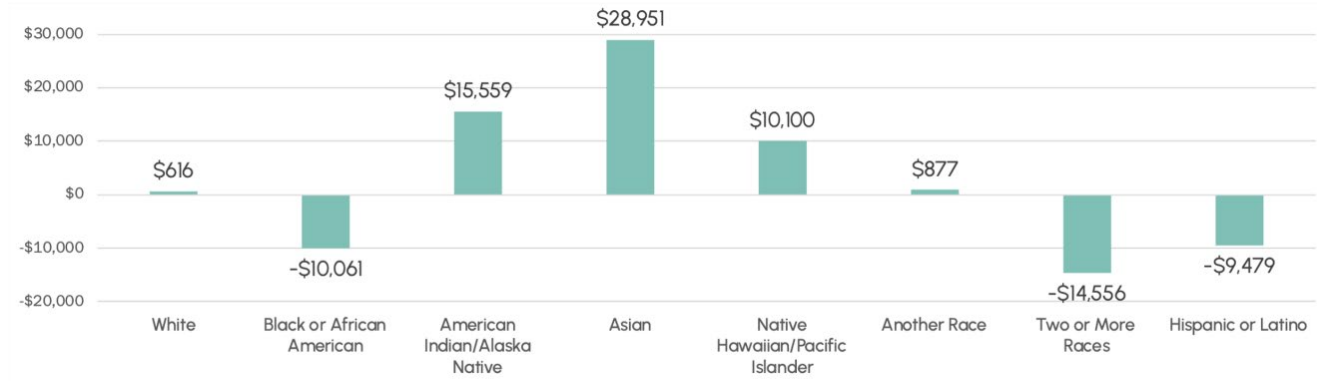
## The median household income of the county's residents has increased disproportionately.

- » Median household income in Clark County has caught up with the Portland metro region, increasing by **33%** from 2011 to 2021. During this time, the County's share of households with an annual income less than \$75,000 has **steadily decreased** while the share of households with incomes more than \$75,000 has **increased substantially**, with a sharp increase in the share of higher-income residents earning **\$150,000 or more**. This observed decline in residents earning below \$50,000 posits potential scenarios of economic upliftment or a subtle displacement of lower-income residents by wealthier newcomers.
- » Communities of color—particularly Hispanic and Latino, Black, and multiracial residents—continued to experience disproportionately lower median household incomes in 2021, earning **up to \$14,500 less annually** than the County median (see Exhibit 12). The distribution of income and the disparities between demographic groups are also critical considerations for addressing economic inequality and reducing concentrations of poverty to ensure equitable access to the region's economic prosperity and long-term economic development.



**Exhibit 12. Median Income by Race and Ethnicity Compared to Overall Median of \$83,800, Clark County**

Source: ACS 1-year estimates, 2021

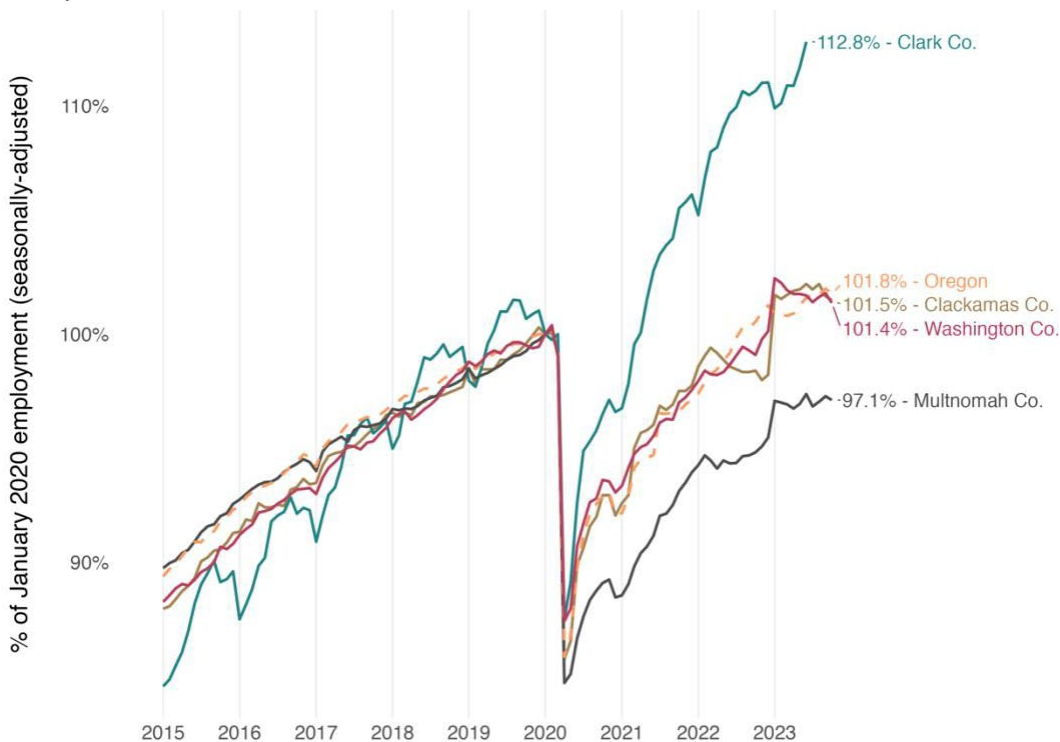


**The county has shown a successful recovery from pandemic trends and continued employment growth.**

» Nonfarm employment increased in Clark County by **15,600 (9.2%)** between February 2020 and May 2022, indicating a strong rebound from pandemic layoffs and likely substitution effects within the region. Comparatively, Clark County has experienced the **fastest employment growth** in the state for both the post-2008 recession period and the COVID recovery period (see Exhibit 13).

**Exhibit 13. Annual Employment Change Compared by County (2015 - 2023)**

Source: ACS 1-year estimates, 2021



**The county's share of high-earning remote workers is growing.**



» Clark County’s share of remote workers has grown by 12% since 2018, likely due to a cultural shift in the workplace during the pandemic in 2021. Hybrid is the new normal, with almost half (47%) of all jobs now remote-eligible and with 30% of all workers on hybrid schedules as of 2024.<sup>1</sup> The median earnings of remote workers have significantly increased, from \$56,250 in 2018 to \$75,570 in 2022 (compared to \$54,000 for all workers in 2022), indicating an increase in higher-wage jobs shifting to remote or hybrid employment offerings within the County.

Despite the overall earnings growth of the county’s residents, housing affordability remains a challenge.

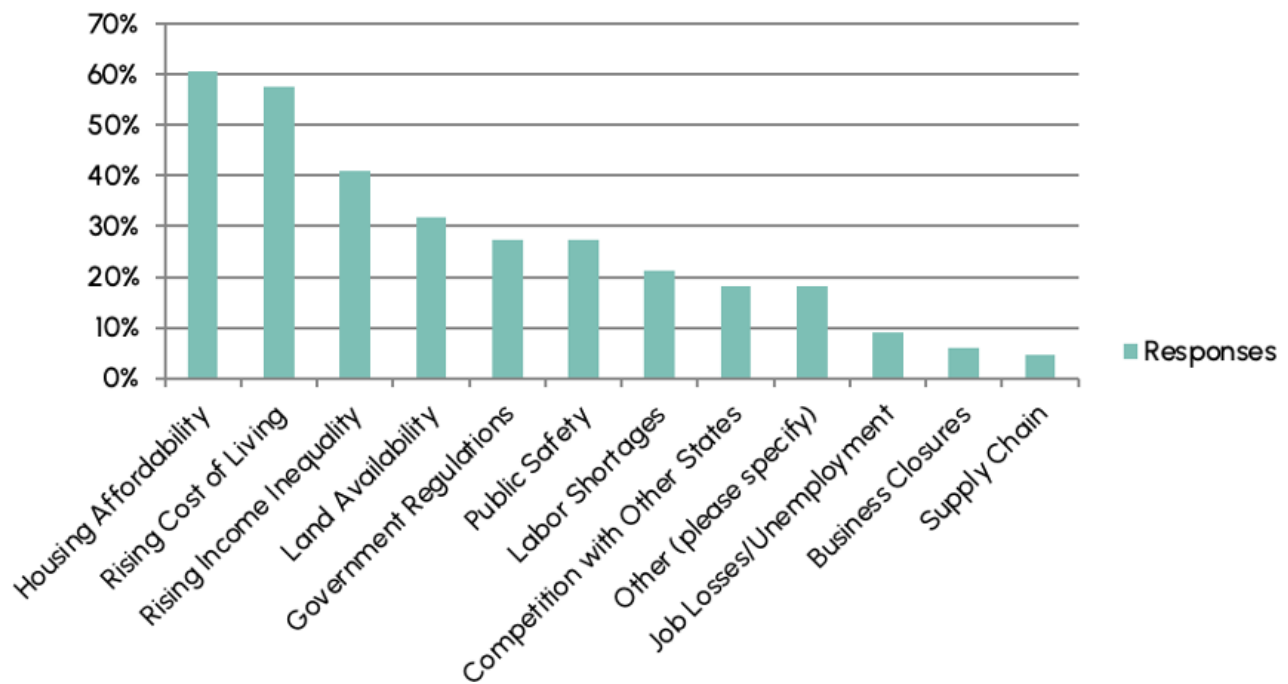
» There is a notable prevalence of cost-burdened households, particularly among renters. As of 2022, the rate of cost burden for owners is 24%, while 50% for renters in the county, indicating that housing affordability remains a barrier for Clark County’s residents. Rising housing costs amid stable incomes in Clark County highlight an emerging affordability issue.

## What are the emerging priorities for supporting people?

Lack of housing affordability and the rising cost of living are top concerns for the county’s stakeholders.

When stakeholders were asked about their main concerns regarding the future of the County (when it comes to the economy), the ability of a larger population to stay and thrive was a primary concern (see Exhibit 14).

Exhibit 14. Survey Answers to “Is there anything that makes you worried about the future of the County (when it comes to the economy)?”



<sup>1</sup> Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (SWAA), WFH Research, 2024.



According to various stakeholders, while Clark County used to be more affordable than Portland, it has now reached parity or even exceeded Portland's housing costs and rents. Vancouver has a higher median rent for various apartment sizes, and the cost of living has increased. One interviewee gave a housing data point to put things into perspective: "A house that cost \$342,000 5 years ago now is over half a million dollars." Many interviewees voiced concern that the trend of in-migration could invert if regional actors rest on their laurels instead of continuing to address affordability.

Many note the simple lack of available affordable housing units, especially workforce housing. As one stakeholder notes, "There is just not enough affordable housing for folks who are just starting their careers." Clark County also lacks many high-density residential areas. These housing concerns are equally matched with charges for the County to address income inequality and explore ways to create more livable, walkable cities that are less reliant on cars and withstand gentrification and displacement pressures.

### **Continuing to strengthen employment opportunities, both by attracting employers and workers.**

Stakeholders emphasized the need to continue attracting new employers, particularly those in high-opportunity industries that include pathways to high-paying jobs. Major local industries that stakeholders highlighted for their potential growth were health care, high-tech manufacturing, and construction. Interviewees also shared that while entry-level positions in these industries may offer lower wages, they provide pathways to higher-paying career paths, especially for health care and advanced manufacturing. Stakeholders noted the need for both anchor establishments and smaller businesses. Additionally, attracting talented workers by maintaining a high quality of life and educational pipelines is critical for many industries when considering where to locate.

### **According to stakeholders, maintaining a diverse workforce needs greater focus.**

Maintaining an accessible, balanced community (housing, cost of living, income equality, etc.) is a primary stakeholder concern. Stakeholders believe the region needs to acknowledge the critical role workforce housing has in economic development, with rising costs posing a significant challenge to attracting a sustainable workforce in Clark County.

*"Equity-focused policies that deliberately empower folks to participate; that is, someone who is living paycheck to paycheck has near-zero capacity to take the risks involved in starting a business, pursuing education, or switching careers."*

*- Survey*

*"We need more people living and working here than commuting across the river to PDX." – Focus Group*

*"Not enough recruitment of major employers. We need more employers who provide a high density of good jobs with high enough wages that allow people to stay here."*

*– Focus Group*

*"Intentionality: promote more diversity to the message for our existing partners. They need to realize that the world is changing, and we need to change with them. For existing companies that have been here for 50+ years need to start changing, or they won't start attracting this diverse workforce."*

*– Focus Group*



## Supplemental Objectives to Support People

These priorities and concerns shared by stakeholders, coupled with the region’s emerging trends, suggest the need for reformed and new objectives for the “Support People” goal. These new objectives include:

- » Center standards of living (i.e., quality of school districts, housing affordability, transportation infrastructure, etc.) as critical assets in talent attraction
- » Balance talent attraction efforts with talent retention efforts
- » Bridge skills/hiring gaps between workforce and industry, for emerging industries and trades
- » Broaden pathways for more intentional inclusion of new residents from other states and countries

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE

- ◆ Continue to align local industry needs with workforce development and educational institutions to fill talent gaps in key industries.
- ◆ Create welcoming environments in workforce/educational institutions for groups that are from recent immigrant communities.
- ◆ Help support young professionals moving to the area, especially people of color, to build community and connect with the region.



## ➤ Goal 3: Create Place

Fostering a distinct sense of place emerged as a critical imperative in 2018. The "Create Place" initiative underscored the vital role of supporting local placemaking strategies, curating industry-supporting lifestyle amenities, and investing in robust infrastructure and transportation enhancements. By delivering on these fronts, Clark County can cultivate vibrant, livable communities that attract and retain top talent, bolstering its economic dynamism and long-term competitiveness. Key 2018 objectives in support of creating livable communities within Clark County included:

### 2018 OBJECTIVES:

- ◆ Each Community Creates a Placemaking Strategy
- ◆ Embrace Economic Opportunity in Our Urban Center
- ◆ Tell the Story of Place
- ◆ Make Employment Areas Desired by Industry Clusters Shovel-Ready
- ◆ Determine All Transportation Needs on a Regional Level Specifically to Support Economic Development

### ORIGINAL PLAN: WHY THIS GOAL?

“Within urban centers, people of all ages desire access to a dynamic lifestyle with housing, restaurants, entertainment, and retail nearby. This urban lifestyle does not mean that an entire community must conform to urban densities. What is important is that some element of an urban lifestyle and livable community through a healthy Main Street, traditional downtown or town centers in suburbs is provided. Such areas are important for employers to be able to attract and keep talent. It is important for each community in Clark County to define and actively *grow distinct places unique to their values.*”- **CREDC 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Plan.**”

## What progress has been made toward creating place?

In recent years, communities throughout Clark County have made progress toward place-based planning and development. Major projects have worked toward creating new signature amenities in the County (e.g., waterfront developments at the Port of Vancouver and Port of Camas-Washougal), in addition to local planning efforts in cities to create more walkable, mixed-use areas. These investments have become even more critical since the 2018 plan, as post-pandemic trends put increasing importance on quality-of-life amenities to attract and retain a workforce with newfound locational flexibility.

### The role of smaller cities in Clark County is increasing.

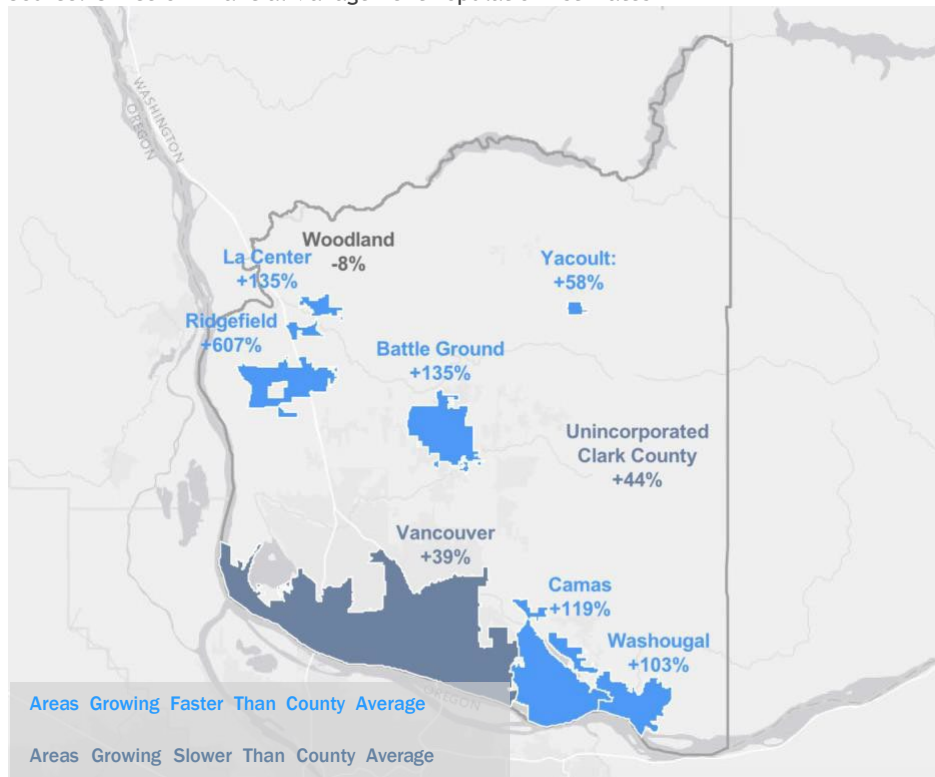
- » Smaller suburban cities outside Vancouver are rapidly expanding as more than bedroom communities. While population growth in the City of Vancouver and unincorporated Clark County exceeded the state average and the Portland metro area, smaller cities—including Ridgefield, Battle Ground, La Center, Camas, and Washougal—more than doubled in size in the past two decades. Ridgefield, which increased its population sixfold since 2000, was the sixth-fastest-growing city in Washington in 2022, a testament to the city creating a high quality of life. One of



the results is diminishing land supply, which is heightening the need for cohesive, regional strategies that leverage both residential and commercial areas of the county.

**Exhibit 15. Total Population % Change by Clark County Jurisdiction, 2000-2022**

Source: Office of Financial Management Population Estimates



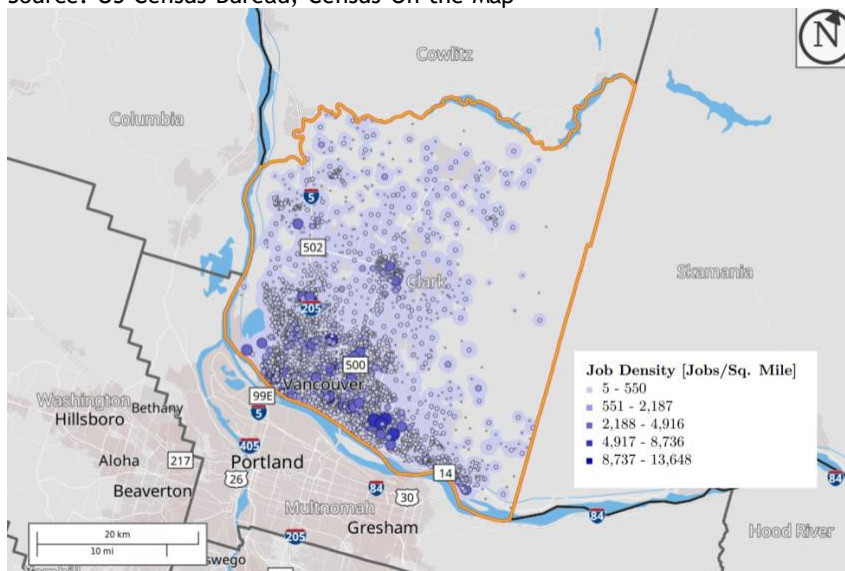
» As the populations of these communities increase, they may emerge as employment centers via concentrations of employment opportunities (see Exhibit 15). This evolution may be underway in the Discovery Corridor as well in the Camas/Washougal area. An emerging trend is the transformation of residences into multifunctional spaces that not only serve as homes but also as home offices or "headquarters" for small businesses.

**Employment density is concentrated in Vancouver, but other cities in the County are catching up.**

» Clark County has several employment centers, with the **highest concentration of jobs** in the City of Vancouver (see Exhibit 16). Vancouver’s downtown has the most intensive concentration of employment, with other centers around major employers like Clark College, the Port of Vancouver on the waterfront, PeaceHealth, Vancouver Mall, and other strip shopping centers along WA-500, and technology and innovation hubs such as the Hewlett Packard campus and Vancouver Innovation Center

**Exhibit 16. Employment Density, Clark County, 2021**

Source: US Census Bureau, Census On the Map



(VIC) on the east side. In 2020, Vancouver accounted for 64% of all jobs in Clark County, followed by Camas and Hazel Dell, which made up about 6% and 5% of employment, respectively.

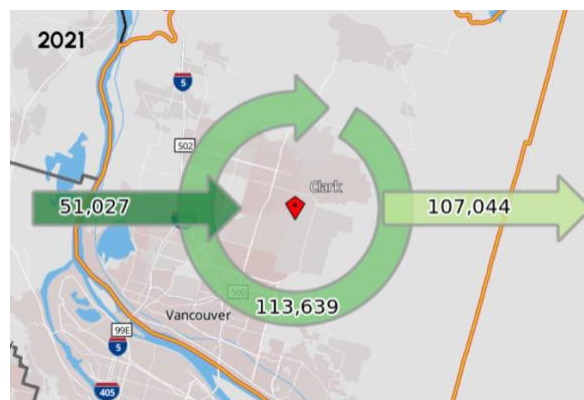
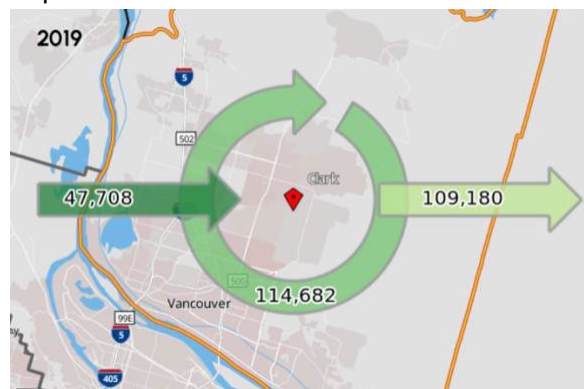
- » Vancouver has consistently driven Clark County's economy over the past decade, while emerging employment hubs like Ridgefield, Battle Ground, and Camas have experienced job growth from 2010 to 2020, expanding opportunities beyond the county's primary center. However, with job growth lagging behind population increases, numerous residents continue to seek employment outside their local communities.

### Most of Clark County workers live within the County.

- » Clark County, particularly Vancouver, adeptly maintains a stable equilibrium between residential and commuter needs, demonstrating an interconnected and robust regional economy amid shifting remote work trends (see Exhibit 17). Despite major changes in recent years to the way that people work and make locational decisions, Clark County maintained a similar number of workers staying in the County between 2019 and 2021, experiencing only a slight change in the share of people who both lived and worked in the County while providing opportunities for more people to work remotely. Seventy percent of all employees at Clark County businesses also live in Clark County, with smaller shares of workers commuting from Multnomah County across the river. Conversely, about half of all working residents living in Clark County also work in Clark County.
- » Throughout the region, Vancouver has one of the strongest rates of people who both live and work in the same jurisdiction. However, smaller cities in Clark County like Camas and Battle Ground have much lower shares, with less than 20% of workers living in the city. This indicates that, in general, smaller cities are more often bedroom communities serving employment concentrations elsewhere in the County.

Exhibit 17. Commuting Flows, Clark County, 2019-2021

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census On the Map.



### The county continues to prioritize the balance between growth and land use.

- » Clark County has adopted two planning assumptions related to land use and economic development (Resolution 2016-03-01), anticipating 100,200 new jobs and a jobs-to-household ratio of 1:1., with a significant focus on utilizing available buildable lands, especially in industrial sectors. The findings of the 2022 Buildable Lands Report indicate that the City of Vancouver and its unincorporated urban area (U) are anticipated to fulfill the largest share of Clark County's new employment land capacity needs through 2035 based on development trends in 2016-2020 (48% or





36,779 jobs). The largest share of total net buildable employment land in Vancouver and across the County to help meet this capacity is categorized as industrial.

#### Interstate Bridge Replacement

- » The over 100-year-old Interstate Bridge connecting Vancouver to Portland is finally slated for replacement. This long-awaited project promises significant short and long-term impacts. In the near term, it will generate hundreds of jobs, from design and engineering to construction and inspection, ideally benefiting Clark County residents if proper priority is given to local firms when bidding. While the goal is to construct the new bridge before decommissioning the old one, some disruptions are inevitable.
- » Beyond its functional benefits, this bridge replacement represents an opportunity to showcase Clark County's growing prominence in the state. The multi-billion-dollar, multi-year endeavor will make commuting more predictable for commuters and commercial vehicles alike. It will provide greater connectivity and efficiency in participation within the regional economy, and it will offer Vancouver residents expanded alternative means of transportation throughout the region. While extensive studies will undoubtedly dissect the bridge's impact, the project should support the placemaking efforts underway while reducing another barrier for local firms when it comes to connectivity to business partners, employees, or employers in Oregon.

#### The county faces a housing underproduction challenge.

- » Historic and current housing underproduction has limited housing supply in both Clark County and the greater Portland metro area. A ratio higher than 1:1 allows for a rate to account for a natural amount of vacancy, as well as for second homes and obsolescence. The county had a **1.04 housing units-to-households ratio** in 2020, indicating potential future challenges in accommodating workforce housing needs.
- » Post-COVID remote work trends have provided greater locational flexibility, as well as increased transportation options throughout the Portland metro area that allow workers to commute more efficiently. However, the persistent housing cost burden, especially among renters, underscores the need to ensure diverse housing options across all income levels to sustain a varied workforce and to support economic development goals.



# What are the emerging priorities for creating place?

According to stakeholders, placemaking is seen as the area of greatest progress made by the County.

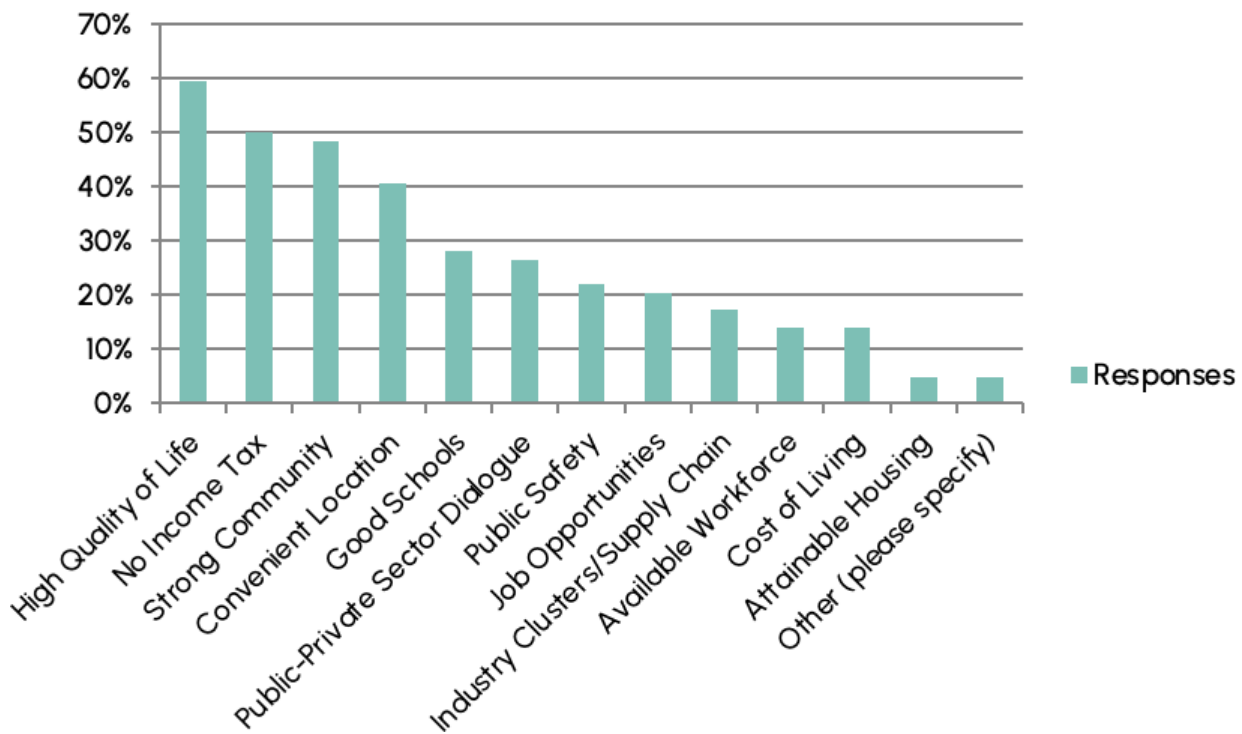
When asked how much progress the county has made on its three original goals, stakeholders indicated that the county had made the most progress on its “Create Place” goal. In survey comments, interviews, and focus groups, stakeholders overwhelmingly shared the sense that Clark County has experienced a significant transition over the last decade. Many shared how past perceptions (Clark County being bedroom communities to the Portland market) have drastically changed to focus on the area being a **vibrant, prosperous, and exciting** place to live and visit.

*“Build on the existing culture by being mindful of what the County’s strengths are. Where some may perceive as weaknesses but lends itself to becoming a more desirable place to live, work and recreate.”*

## High quality of life and a strong community are the top ways the county meets stakeholder needs.

Stakeholders value Clark County’s high quality of life, from school districts to tight-knit business communities and transportation assets (see Exhibit 18). The prime location presents a strong pitch when attracting talent: close to big cities yet also near oceans, mountains, and forests. While proud of visible changes like the Waterfront and what they symbolize, there is some concern about maintaining the pace of development while also keeping an accessible community.

Exhibit 18. Survey Answers to “What are the top reasons that Clark County is a good fit for your needs?”



*“Given the opening of remote employees, we should attract software engineers who can work remotely and/or are interested in more affordable housing and life outdoors. This opens the talent pool for us, but we need to attract them here.”*

*“Waterfront development has elevated the community – it was done right - making sure it’s not just the wealthiest who can appreciate but open to all types of people.”*

*“Transportation infrastructure is key for future development – top of the list.”*

*“We’re fortunate to be sitting on top of a freshwater reservoir; access to water may not be a challenge, but demand for water outside our region may complicate it for us.”*

*“Given the constant focus on climate, we need to have robust conversations on how to support our electric grid – electrification is upon us, and we don’t have the grid to support it – a huge priority for southwest Washington.”*

### Waterfront Developments in Camas and Vancouver were noted by stakeholders as key placemaking success stories for the County.

Stakeholders were quick to elevate the waterfront developments at the Port of Camas- Washougal and Port of Vancouver as key examples of projects advancing mixed-use development and placemaking in Clark County. Both developments are partially funded through public-private partnerships and expected to create new opportunities. In Vancouver, it is expected that this will include as many as:

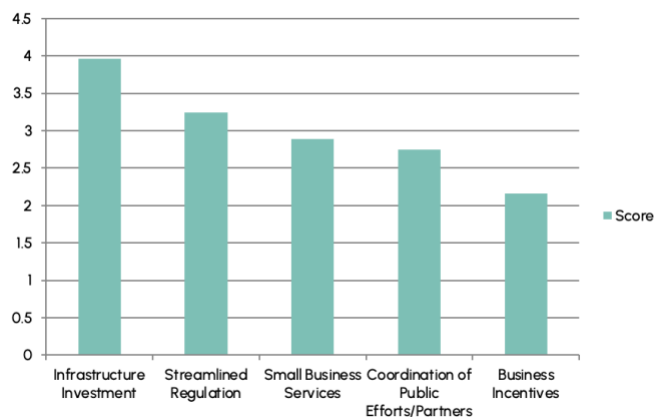
- ◆ 3,300 residential units
- ◆ 1 million square feet of office space
- ◆ Hospitality and specialty retail space
- ◆ 7-acre waterfront park, City-owned and operated
- ◆ More than 10,000 jobs
- ◆ Over \$385 million to the region’s economy

Ridgefield is also in the process of an exciting redevelopment of its waterfront, with over 27 acres along Lake River to be developed over the next few decades.

### Stakeholders name infrastructure planning and maintenance as a top priority for the public sector action.

As the County continues to grow, stakeholders emphasized the need to build infrastructure to handle such growth (see Exhibit 19). Key areas of infrastructure brought up in focus groups and interviews include transportation, electricity, broadband, water, and wastewater treatment infrastructure.

**Exhibit 19. Survey Answers to “To help private sector growth, rank these priorities for the public sector to take action.”**



There is a sense from stakeholders that infrastructure investment is a consistent need and a role that fits well with the public sector. Many sites have the utilities needed for most potential users, but certain industries require a larger capacity of water or electricity. There are also infrastructure needs triggered by development and resulting impacts, such as transportation needs like roadway extensions and mass transit improvements. The primary areas noted have been:

- ◆ **Transportation infrastructure.** According to stakeholders, key transportation infrastructure needs include extending roadways, widening streets, adding new connecting roads, bike, and mass transit improvements, and building on/off-ramps to accommodate new large-scale developments.
- ◆ **Water and wastewater infrastructure:** Because Clark County sits near a freshwater reservoir, systemwide water access is not necessarily a problem (compared with certain competing states). Similarly, being adjacent to the Columbia helps with stormwater management. However, certain potential users for industrial sites have high water needs and may require improvements to water capacity.
- ◆ **Environmental restrictions:** Development in Clark County is subject to strict regulations to protect areas like wetlands, affecting site selection, design, and operational requirements. Developers must account for environmental assessments, potential mitigation banking, and adherence to water quality standards, potentially influencing project timelines and costs.
- ◆ **Electricity infrastructure:** Stakeholders voiced concerns regarding electricity availability in the area. While some express satisfaction with the current supply, others highlight significant challenges, citing a three-year wait time for operating utility services. This condition has become a recruitment and retention barrier for businesses in some sectors looking to locate or expand in the county. With increasing demand for power in future years, the importance of expanding the electrical grid grows, as escalating electricity costs could undermine the county's competitiveness and ability to attract investment - a historical asset for the region.
- ◆ **Broadband infrastructure:** Pushing broadband, especially in rural regions and areas with limited broadband capacity, came up as another important infrastructure need as Clark County continues to expand development.

## Supplemental Objectives to Create Place

These priorities and concerns shared by stakeholders, coupled with the region's emerging trends, suggest the need for reformed and new objectives for the "Create Place" goal. These new objectives include:

### 2024 GOAL OBJECTIVES:

- » Leverage Placemaking Investments
- » Encourage Infrastructure Investments That Cross Municipal Boundaries

Economic development actors can support these objectives by focusing on continued investments that work to create identity and ongoing investments to build cohesion in transition areas to craft a regional identity that is not simply contrasting with Portland.



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATING PLACE

- ◆ Leverage place-based investments like the waterfront developments to continue enhancing the region's identity.
- ◆ Foster better communication between government entities related to infrastructure needs that cross municipal boundaries.



# Updated Action Plan

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Since 2018, CREDC and its partners (including cities, community-based organizations, educational institutions, private sector actors, and beyond) have worked to advance the goals of the Comprehensive Economic Development Action Plan. In the past three years, responding to sudden disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on economic trends and conditions in Clark County has changed some of the calculus needed for economic growth, including an increased emphasis on quality of life and place-based amenities to attract a more locationally flexible workforce. The County has also continued to see fast population growth, prompting critical questions about how to strategically plan for land capacity and infrastructure, ensure equitable access to opportunities, and respond to the changing needs of residents and businesses.

## Framework

At its core, the SOAR is a strategic guide designed as a framework for Clark County partners in economic development build from in realizing regional economic aspirations. It draws upon the SOAR process to focus on three pivotal areas: expanding the economic base by supporting business growth, nurturing a skilled and diverse workforce, fostering a vibrant sense of place through strategic placemaking and infrastructure investments. This approach prioritizes inclusivity, sustainability, and collaboration, ensuring that Clark County not only capitalizes on its current strengths but also addresses emerging challenges and opportunities.

Also included for each goal are a series of sample programs that align with the opportunities outlined here. These are existing programs in comparable cities that have demonstrated how the ideas identified below can be put into action. In implementing this framework, CREDC commits to a partnership-driven approach, leveraging the unique strengths of local governments, educational institutions, businesses, and community organizations. By setting clear, measurable objectives and regularly evaluating progress, CREDC aims to create a more dynamic, inclusive, and prosperous Clark County. This action plan is not just a roadmap for economic development but a commitment to building a community where every resident can thrive.



## ACTION PLAN – Expand the Existing Base

### Current Conditions

While existing business clusters in Clark County continue to expand, their geographic concentration is shifting as the supply of available land dwindles, driving up costs. Local stakeholders have heightened expectations regarding allowable uses and job density for remaining developable sites. This scarcity of viable opportunity sites poses challenges for attracting large businesses to the area. However, the county has experienced an entrepreneurship bump since the pandemic, with more residents starting small companies and ventures. Balancing the needs of established industries while providing affordable spaces for emerging entrepreneurial endeavors will be crucial for Clark County's continued economic development.

### Strengths

- Historically business-friendly community

- Desirable standard of living and location for workers

- Diversifying employment base

- Talented workforce

### Opportunities

- Advocate for more clarity and consistency within permitting process and project reviews

- Explore ways to allow for code flexibility to allow for more commercial development types
- Provide more funding tools to overcome site constraints as it relates to infrastructure

- Support entrepreneurship and small business growth through increased access to resources, capital, and business-to-business networking

- Foster relationships between institutional actors and small businesses, including via procurement policies

### Aspirations

- Collaborative planning for sustainable development

- Expand infrastructure to enable smart growth

- Build small business capacity

- Foster a robust and diverse business ecosystem, facilitating innovation and emerging industries

### Results

- Reduced review times and reduced displacement from growth

- Greater attraction of federal and state resources to support infrastructure

- Revenue growth of Clark County businesses, including number of traded sector businesses

- Growth in number of start-ups and small businesses

- Venture capital attraction



## Goal 1 - Expand the Existing Base: Sample Initiatives

**Connect local businesses to build a more localized supply chain**

### Seattle Good Business Network

Seattle, Washington



Seattle Good Business Network aims to build a resilient, vibrant, and inclusive local economy by connecting and encouraging people to buy, produce, and invest locally. This network unites local businesses, entrepreneurs, farmers, investors, and citizens around shared values of buying, producing, and investing locally and connects them to opportunities, resources, and each other.

#### Potential Clark County Partners

- Business Chambers
- CREDC

**Explore ways to modernize building codes**

### Updates to NYC Zoning Codes

New York City, New York



To make it easier for businesses to expand within the city, NYC has proposed an update to its zoning for industrial, retail, and commercial properties. Currently, this “City of Yes for Economic Opportunity” proposal package includes 18 different zoning changes, including modernizing outdated mandates, eliminating obsolete rules on business operations, establishing new types of denser manufacturing districts, and increasing the uses within light industrial spaces.

#### Potential Clark County Partners

- Municipalities
- Development Community

**Create centralized assistance providers to local manufacturers**

### Portland Metro Manufacturing Partnership - OMEP

Portland, Oregon



To support Oregon manufacturers’ growth and prosperity. OMEP directly works with local manufacturers to build successful businesses by eliminating common obstacles these companies face. With roots in business operating philosophy and a wide breadth of real-world manufacturing experiences, this nonprofit company works to provide its manufacturing businesses solutions in operations, business financials and strategy, and workforce development.

#### Potential Clark County Partners

- Municipalities
- Dept. of Commerce





## ACTION PLAN - Support People

### Current Conditions

The high standard of living and the quality of school districts continue to be pivotal in drawing talent to the area. As the county experiences growth with an influx of higher-income earners, educated young professionals, and seniors, there is a greater need to focus on retaining this mobile group. A skills gap remains within certain industries, particularly in emerging industries and trades, which necessitates the expansion of career pathways. Moreover, the availability of workforce housing persists as a major limiting factor in sustaining this growth and fulfilling the need for residential options to live in proximity to where you work.



## Goal 2 – Support People: Sample Initiatives

*Bringing adult education  
into the community*

*Supporting young professionals  
to develop a local network*

*Unlock expertise within  
immigrant community*



## Harlandale Education and Training Centers - Offsite Center

San Antonio, Texas



The mission of HETC is focused on delivering educational programs efficiently and effectively to meet the diverse needs of the Southside community, including breaking down traditional barriers to college access for students of varying backgrounds and cultures. It achieves this by fostering partnerships with local school districts, churches, and community organizations. Instead of students coming to campus, they provide programs in the community.

### Potential Clark County Partners:

- Clark College
- WSU Vancouver
- Cascadia Tec Academy

## Young Professionals of Albuquerque (YBPA)

Albuquerque, New Mexico



YPA is a nonprofit run entirely by volunteers that aims to attract young professionals from all industries in Albuquerque who are seeking to connect with young professional peers, develop leadership skills, and get plugged into the community. There is also a Young Black Professionals of Albuquerque (YBPA) group that meets regularly to provide culturally specific spaces for friendship networking, building business connections, and celebrating the “young, gifted, and black” professionals of Albuquerque.

### Potential Clark County Partners:

- Greater Vancouver Chamber
- CREDC

## Puget Sound Welcome Back Center (PSWBC)

Des Moines, Washington



PSWBC aims to assist international professionals who are living permanently in Washington State by building bridges between the pool of internationally trained professionals living in Washington and the need for linguistically and culturally competent professional services. The Welcome Back Center, hosted at Highline College, offers individualized career counseling and educational programs. These programs help adults regain previous career paths.

### Potential Clark County Partners:

- Clark College
- WSU Vancouver
- Next Program, Workforce SW Washington



## ACTION PLAN - Create Place

### Current Conditions

Clark County continues to invest in crafting its own regional identity, rather than simply defining itself in contrast to nearby Portland. Significant investments in downtowns and waterfronts have helped establish a unique sense of place, however, ongoing efforts are needed to further this placemaking and to build cohesion within transitional areas experiencing growth and development. As the county evolves, sustained investment will be crucial to foster a unified regional identity that resonates with residents and attracts newcomers. Nurturing this distinct local culture and character will help Clark County distinguish itself from competitors with similar housing, schools, and shopping.



### Goal 3 - Create Place: Sample Initiatives

*Shifting bedroom communities to destinations*

*Catalytic developments that redefine an area*

*Expand your identity to build off strengths*



## Visit Bainbridge Island Website

### Bainbridge Island, Washington



The mission of the Visit Bainbridge Island website is to create a centralized location for visitors, businesses, and even locals to learn more about what the island has to offer. It also aims to cultivate long-term and sustainable economic growth for the island and its partners through innovative tourism programs, promotions, and partnerships. It has helped to build a unique brand for Bainbridge Island.

#### Potential Clark County Partners

- Local Municipalities
- Visiting Clark County

## Camas & Vancouver Waterfront Developments

### Camas and Vancouver, Washington



The recent developments in Camas and Vancouver are examples of projects advancing mixed-use development and placemaking in Clark County. These projects have leveraged private development by partnering it with public parks and pedestrian infrastructure. The 7-acre waterfront park is owned and operated by the City.

#### Potential Clark County Partners

- Local Municipalities
- Developers
- Visit Vancouver

## Travel Ashland

### Ashland, Oregon



Travel Ashland provides a comprehensive site for visitors to explore all that Ashland has to offer, including restaurants, outdoor recreation, overnight lodging, festivals, and events. This group made a conscientious effort to expand the city's brand past the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to target outdoor recreation, travelers to Crater Lake, and those looking for wine excursions.

#### Potential Clark County Partners

- Local Municipalities
- Visiting Clark County

