Clark County

Clark County Code Enforcement

Neighborhood Guide

Working together for community livability

Dear Neighbor,

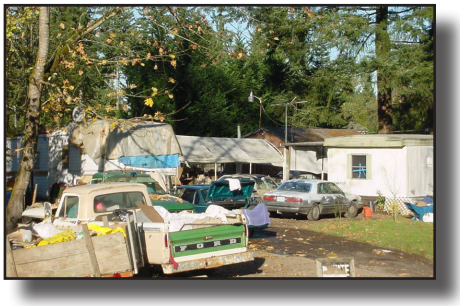
Our neighborhoods are where we live, shop, play, and work. They are an extension of our homes and, just as we take care of our homes, we also need to take care of our neighborhoods. The Code Enforcement program is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for the citizens of the county by providing effective public service in the enforcement of the county's zoning, nuisance, and building codes.

This neighborhood guide was developed to assist you in understanding Clark County's ordinances and in knowing who to call to obtain a particular service or receive additional information. It is intended as a general summary of information, but not as a substitute for actual Clark County Code.

Working together, we can be proud of our neighborhoods while continuing to contribute in making Clark County a desirable place to live.

Paul Scarpelli
Code Enforcement Manager

The mission of the Code Enforcement program is to promote and maintain a safe and desirable living and working environment. We help maintain and improve the quality of our community by administering a fair and unbiased enforcement program to correct violations of county codes and land use requirements.



Code Enforcement efforts result in major clean-up of this residential property.

Our purpose is to protect the safety and welfare of our residents, to promote and preserve community livability through an effective compliance program.

Our values

- Integrity, fairness, compassion, positive attitude, and consistent endeavor
- Respect for ourselves, co-workers, and those we serve
- Accountability to our community
- Excellent customer service

Code Enforcement is a special type of law enforcement that regulates land use. The county obtains its authority to regulate land use from the police powers conferred upon it by the Washington State Constitution which permits counties to make and enforce within its limits all local, police, sanitary, and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws of the land. Unless in conflict with state law, the courts generally view land use ordinances as valid exercises of police power when reasonably related to public health, safety, and welfare.

Clark County has adopted several land use ordinances to combat public nuisance including but not limited to:

- Unified Development Code (zoning ordinance)
- Public nuisance ordinance
- International building and fire codes including dangerous buildings

Our philosophy is that compliance is our primary goal and education is the key to reaching that goal. Many citizens do not realize that they are violating local ordinances. However, most people are willing to play by the rules if they know them.

Reporting a violation

When reporting a violation to Code Enforcement, be prepared to provide us with detailed information, like:

- a detailed property address of the violation
- a description of the violation
- your name and phone number

Code enforcement prefers to receive complaints online at www.clark.wa.gov/development. You may also call us at (360) 397-2408 or visit us at our office located at 1300 Franklin Street, Vancouver.

Once a complaint is received, we open a case file and begin our investigation.

Investigating and documenting a case

Code Enforcement Officers are fact gatherers, fact evaluators, and the primary witnesses to violations. Consequently, enforcement of the codes depends on the quality of the evaluation, and the quality of the testimony of the witnesses. A reporting party or complainant reports violations. Complaints are received by phone, in person, or online via our website. From the moment a complaint is received, the officers are tasked with collecting and evaluating facts.

Once a violation is verified, the county will give the property owner a specified time frame in which to fix the violation. If the owner fails to meet the compliance schedule, a citation, known as a Notice and Order, can be issued. These carry daily fines between $100 and $500 per day. The accumulation of fines and penalties can be filed as a lien against the property and continue to add up until there is compliance. Penalties are used as a tool to gain compliance in difficult enforcement cases.

Commonly reported items

Abandoned buildings – Buildings that are open and accessible may attract malicious mischief activity or trespassing. Contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408.

Animals – Farm animals are allowed in the urban areas of Clark County. Livestock owners are required to manage their livestock so that their odor and noise does not unreasonably disturb others. If you have a problem with your neighbor's livestock, contact Community Mediation Services at (360) 334-5862. If mediation fails, contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408. For domestic animal problems like barking noise, loose dogs, or animal cruelty issues, contact Animal Protection & Control at (360) 397-2488.

Automobile repair – It is a violation to repair automobiles in residential areas unless the repairs are done solely on the owner's personal vehicles. For complaints, contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408.

Fences – Fences six feet in height or less do not require a building permit and may be placed on the property line.

Garden sheds, gazebos and play structures – Generally, you may construct a shed, gazebo, or play structure without a building permit if the structure is no more than 200 square feet in size and has no utilities. One structure can be setback a minimum of two (2) feet from the property line and can not be taller than 12 feet. Additional structures must be set back at least five feet. If your property is located

within a wetland, shoreline, or other critical area, you may have additional requirements. Contact Permit Services for more information at (360) 397-2375 ext. 4078.

Grading and filling - Moving or disturbing dirt on your property in excess of 50 cubic yards may require a grading permit. Moving dirt means hauling material in, hauling it out, or just moving it around. Contact Environmental Services at (360) 397-2121.

Home business – Most home businesses are allowed but require permit approval from the county. Parking business-related vehicles is not allowed on county streets, storing materials or equipment in view of your neighbor, and retail sales are prohibited. If your neighbor is running a home business contact Code Enforcement to see if they need or have the proper permits at (360) 397-2408.

Illegal dumping – Dumping trash and debris lowers the standards of our neighborhoods. Please keep your eye open for this activity. If possible, get a description of the person doing the dumping and their vehicle information, then call the Sheriff's Office by dialing 9-1-1 and state that it is a non-emergency.

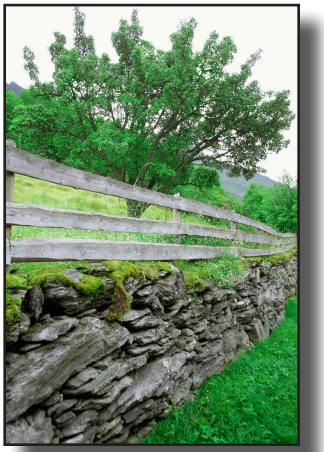
Noise – Excessive noise can detract from the quality of life in a neighborhood. For amplified music or public disturbance noises, contact the Clark County Sheriff's office by dialing 9-1-1 and state that it is a non-emergency. If the noise is associated with industrial or commercial activities, contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408.

Public nuisance – Some common code violations related to property maintenance are a failure to remove junk, debris, and other discarded items. Inoperable vehicles and tall grass are also a public nuisance. Contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408.

Signs – Signs play a vital role in identifying businesses. However, the county has sign rules which regulate their size, location, and number. Some types of signs which are not allowed include temporary banners, A-frames, flags, and signs with flashing lights. See page nine for more details. Contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408.

Recreational vehicles – RVs, motor homes, and travel trailers are NOT allowed for long-term occupancy in Clark County outside of an approved RV park. However, you can occupy them for 30 consecutive days but no more than 60 days in a calendar year. They can not be parked on a county road. For complaints, contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408.

Retaining walls – A permit is required for retaining walls over four feet in height, when measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, and/or for walls that support a load (such as, slope, driveway, footings). Engineering by a Washington State registered engineer is required for all retaining walls requiring a permit. Contact Permit Services for more information at (360) 397-2375 ext. 4078.



Roofing – Re-roofing permits are required for all buildings in Clark County. A separate permit may be required if structural work such as replacing roof sheathing is necessary. Generally, a maximum of two layers of roofing may be applied to a residential structure. Contact Permit Services for more information at (360) 397-2375 ext. 4078.

Storage of household items – outside storage of items, such as appliances and furniture, is not allowed. Store these items in your garage. Temporary PODS or shipping containers may be used for only two weeks and only when placed on your property and not on the street.

Tall grass/weeds – In the urban areas, it is a violation to have tall grass or weeds over 12 inches high in the front or side yards. For complaints, contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408. If you have a problem with noxious weeds, contact Vegetation Management at (360) 397-6140.

Vacant lots – If you own a vacant lot, make sure it is kept free of weeds, tall grass, trash and debris all year long.

Vehicles/Boats, inoperable or abandoned – If a junk or abandoned vehicle or boat has been left on a county road, contact the Sheriff's Office to report it. If junk vehicles are on private property, contact Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408.

Yard sales/garage sales – You can have two garage sales per year and they can last no longer than three days. Sale signs can not be any larger than 2'x 3' and must be removed within 24 hours of the end of the sale.

Sign 101

Most portable advertising signs you see around Clark County are not allowed. And almost every other advertising sign requires a permit. The table below outlines some common signage found within Clark County. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list of signs regulated by the county's sign ordinance but as a guide for which signs may or may not be allowed in your neighborhood.

Allowed signs

Political signs must be placed no closer than 10' from the edge of the road and must be removed within 15 days after election day.

Agricultural signs advertising agricultural activities or locations such as berry farms, trees, pumpkin patches, or farmer's markets.

Real estate signs are allowed on the property which is listed for sale. One large sign is allowed at the entrance to a new subdivision or development.

Garage sale signs are only allowed on the property hosting the sale.

No trespassing signs are allowed along the border of the property. Signs must be two square feet or less.

Portions of the Highway 99 Sub Area of NE Hazel Dell have additional sign standards that may differ from those listed here.

Penalties for illegal signs range from $100 to $250 per violation. If you would like to file a sign complaint or have questions regarding signs that may or may not be allowed, contact Clark County Code Enforcement at (360) 397-2408 or online at www.clark.wa.gov/development.

Signs that are not allowed

Temporary signs, banners, flags, anything of a temporary nature is not permitted unless used as a grand opening announcement. A temporary permit is required and is good for 30 days or less.

Portable A-frame signs are not permitted in most cases. If permitted, they must not block the sidewalk.

Real estate signs which are NOT on the property listed for sale.

Signs on utility poles are NOT allowed.

Other signs not allowed:

- Signs in the county's right-of-way or on the sidewalk
- Signs over 35' tall
- Signs that impair or block a driver's vision
- Signs that contain obscene words or pictures
- Signs that block a sidewalk
- Signs containing strobe lights
- Signs that rotate or are located on rooftops

Frequently asked questions

Do you take anonymous complaints?
No. It is the policy of Code Enforcement as directed by the Board of County Commissioners to only respond to complaints where a complainant has left their name and contact information.

Can I trim the tree limbs from my neighbor's tree that is hanging over on to my property?
Yes. Generally, you have the right to trim branches and limbs that extend past the property line. However, it only allows tree trimming and tree cutting up to the property line. You may not go onto the neighbor's property or destroy the tree. If you do harm the tree, you could be found liable for damages.

Can I put my basketball hoop on the sidewalk?
No. Basketball hoops and other recreational items are not allowed to be placed in the street or on the public sidewalk. Sidewalks are to remain clear for the safe travel of pedestrians and the street should be kept clear for the traveling public and public service vehicles.

I am a renter and my landlord will not fix things I believe may be unsafe. What can I do?
Clark County does not have a housing standard or maintenance code. We do not inspect routine household maintenance complaints like leaking pipes, mold, or electrical issues. However, if you feel you are living in a structurally dangerous situation, contact Code Enforcement at 360-397-2408.

If you have been unsuccessful in working with your landlord, you may want to seek Landlord Tenant resources for legal advice, mediation, or Small Claims Court (for claims under $5,000, no attorney is necessary). Some other helpful information and resources for tenants can be found at the

Washington State Attorney General's Web site at www.atg.wa.gov/residentialLT/default.aspx or the Northwest Justice Project's Web site at www.nwjustice.org.

Does the county regulate or inspect electrical work?
No. The Washington State Department of Labor & Industries issues electrical permits and conducts inspections of electrical work. Contact them at (360) 896-2300.

How many cars can I have on my property and can I park them on the grass?
Clark County does not regulate the number of cars you can have on your property as long as they are in good running condition. The county does not prohibit parking your operable cars on the grass; however, you may wish to consider parking on impervious or paved surfaces to reduce the oil and gas that may leak into the soil.

There is a semi-truck parked near my house on the county street. Is that allowed?
Typically, any trucks that weigh more than 10,000 pounds or trailers longer than 20 feet may NOT be left or parked on the street in residential areas. Please call the Sheriff's Office at 9-1-1 and state you are reporting a non-emergency parking issue.

Would someone from Code Enforcement come and talk to our neighborhood association or group about various concerns or issues?
Absolutely! Contact our office at (360) 397-2408 and we will be happy to schedule a presentation.

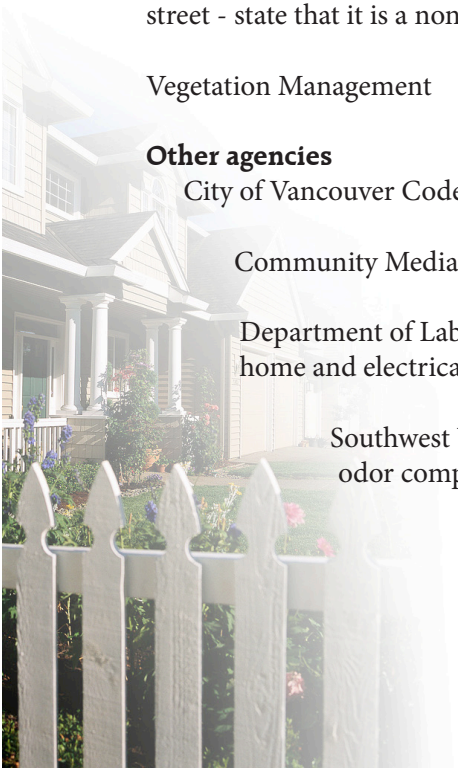
Helpful phone numbers

Clark County

Animal Control	(360) 397-2488
Building Safety	(360) 397-2375 ext. 4078
Environmental Services, erosion control and grading, critical area and habitat area complaints	(360) 397-2121
Fire Marshal	(360) 397-2375 ext. 3394
Permit Services	(360) 397-2375 ext. 4078
Public Health, environmental complaints	(360) 397-8083
Public Works, transportation/traffic concerns	(360) 397-2446
Sheriff's Office, inoperable or abandoned vehicles on a county street - state that it is a non-emergency	9-1-1
Vegetation Management	(360) 397-6140

Other agencies

City of Vancouver Code Enforcement	(360) 487-7810
Community Mediation Services	(360) 334-5862
Department of Labor & Industries – mobile/manufactured home and electrical permit questions	(360) 896-2300
Southwest Washington Clean Air Agency, dust and odor complaints	(360) 574-3058



Community Mediation Services

There are many neighbor-to-neighbor issues that are not necessarily code violations. There are many circumstances where Code Enforcement does not have the authority to resolve the problem. In these cases, we highly recommend mediation as one way to solve a dispute.

Community Mediation Services (CMS) provides Clark County residents with an informal, private way to improve communication and resolve disagreements. Mediation is successful in over 85 percent of cases.

What is mediation?

Mediation is an informal and confidential way for people to work through a disagreement. The voluntary process encourages solutions which work for all participants. Impartial certified mediators help people discuss difficult issues and develop their own solutions. Mediators do not take sides or make decisions about the outcome.

Why should you try mediation?

It works
It's fast
It's fair
It's flexible
It's confidential
It's affordable
It's satisfying

How does mediation work?

We listen to you. We can contact the other party. We can arrange a productive meeting.

Contact information:

www.mediationclarkcounty.org
Phone: (360) 334-5862
cms.clarkcounty@gmail.com
Mail: P.O. Box 1053, Vancouver, WA 98666
Location: 300 East 17th Street, Vancouver

Clark County
Community Development
Code Enforcement

1300 Franklin Street
Third floor
Vancouver WA 98660
(360) 397-2408

To file a complaint online, visit
www.clark.wa.gov/development/report.html

Email
codenfor@clark.wa.gov

Web
www.clark.wa.gov/development

Hours
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

For an alternate format, contact the
Clark County ADA Compliance Office.
Phone: (360) 397-2322
Relay: 711 or (800) 833-6384
E-mail: ADA@clark.wa.gov