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# Clark County

## County Government

In the United States, government is divided into separate branches (legislative, executive, and judicial) and layers (federal, state, and local). Each branch and each layer is partially independent of the others. At the local level, government is further divided among general-purpose entities such as cities and counties, and special purpose districts such as schools, utilities, and fire districts. No government entity stands entirely on its own - each entity is part of a network of governments, working together to deliver services to the public. To understand a particular unit of government, it is useful to have a concept of its place in the overall system.

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A county is a political subdivision of the state. Counties derive their existence from state law and from powers expressly conferred by the state constitution and state laws. For example, counties are required to appraise property values for tax purposes, and to collect property taxes from their residents. In this regard, counties act as agents for state government.

Locally elected officials govern counties. The Clark County Board of Commissioners establishes policies on the basis of state law and in the context of local community needs and preferences. The commissioners run by district in the primary election and are elected at-large in the general election.

The three commissioners each represent a geographic area of the county. Commissioner District 1 represents north Clark County, including Salmon Creek and Hazel Dell and the cities of Ridgefield, Battle Ground, La Center, Yacolt and Amboy. Commissioner District 2 represents the portion of the county east of Interstate 205, north of the Columbia River and southeast of Battle Ground. Commissioner District 3 is mostly within the city of Vancouver and fans out from the southwestern portion of the county east to Interstate 205 and north to Salmon Creek and Hazel Dell.

Counties co-exist with a variety of other overlapping local government entities, including cities. The relationship between county and city governments can vary. Many County services are "regional," meaning that they are provided to all residents of the County regardless of the jurisdictional limits of a city. Property appraisal is a good example. The County appraises all property, whether or not it lies within an incorporated city. Local county services, however, such as Sheriff's patrol, are generally provided only in the unincorporated portion of the County.

### Organization of County Government

Clark County is a statute county, which means that the organization of the County is prescribed by state statute. The organization chart in this section provides an overview of the County structure, including its elected officials, administrator, and major departments. For simplicity, the chart does not include the advisory boards or other organizations that are partially or wholly under the jurisdiction of the County.

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**District Court Judges**

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*Term Expires:*

**District One:**

Vernon L. Schreiber..... 12/31/14

**District Two:**

James P. Swanger..... 12/31/14

**District Three:**

Darvin J. Zimmerman..... 12/31/14

**District Four:**

Sonya Langsdorf..... 12/31/14

**District Five:**

Kelli E. Osler ..... 12/31/14

**District Six**

John P. Hagensen..... 12/31/14

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**Superior Court Judges**

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*Term Expires:*

**Department One:**

Roger A. Bennett..... 12/31/16

**Department Two:**

David E. Gregerson..... 12/31/16

**Department Three:**

John F. Nichols ..... 12/31/16

**Department Four:**

Edwin L. Poyfair ..... 12/31/16

**Department Five:**

Richard A. Melnick ..... 12/31/16

**Department Six:**

Barbara D. Johnson ..... 12/31/16

**Department Seven:**

James E. Rulli ..... 12/31/16

**Department Eight:**

Diane M. Woolard ..... 12/31/16

**Department Nine:**

Robert A. Lewis..... 12/31/16

**Department Ten:**

Scott A. Collier..... 12/31/16

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The voters of Clark County elect twenty-five officials, including three County Commissioners, ten Superior Court Judges, six District Court Judges, an Assessor, a Treasurer, an Auditor, a Prosecuting Attorney, a Sheriff, and a County Clerk.

The Board of Commissioners appoints the County Administrator, who acts as the chief executive officer for the County. Reporting directly to the County Administrator are the heads of eight major non-elected departments:

- Board of Equalization
- Community Development
- Community Planning
- Community Services
- Environmental Services
- Public Health
- Public Information and Outreach
- Public Works

The Deputy County Administrator oversees six departments:

- General Services
- GIS (Geographical Information System)
- Human Resources Information Services
- Information Services
- Medical Examiner
- Office of Budget

**County Elected Officials**

**Board of County Commissioners** - The three-member Board of County Commissioners is the County's legislative body. The Board levies all County taxes and appropriates all funds for expenditure through the budget process. It sets land use policy in the unincorporated area and hears appeals to land use decisions. It enacts ordinances that have the force of law in the County. It appoints members of citizen advisory panels, hearings examiners, and members of the Board of Equalization. It approves all contracts and grant agreements, adopts the County budget, and appoints the County Administrator, who is the chief executive of the County. Primary elections of Commissioners are held by district, while the general election is county wide. Commissioners serve a four-year term. Election terms are staggered so that no more than two Commissioners stand for election at one time.

**Assessor** - The Assessor is responsible for the appraisal of real and personal property in the County for the purpose of assessing property taxes. The Assessor is elected at large to a four-year term.

**Auditor** - The Auditor is responsible for the recording of documents, titles, and deeds; the issuance of marriage licenses; the issuance of motor vehicle licenses; and conducting elections. The Auditor also provides accounting services, performs fiscal analyses, and conducts performance audits. The Auditor is elected at large to a four-year term.

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**Clerk** - The County Clerk is responsible for maintaining the permanent records of the Superior Court, including all legal filings and records of court proceedings. The Clerk is also responsible for receipting monies received by the Superior Court. The Clerk is elected at large to a four-year term.

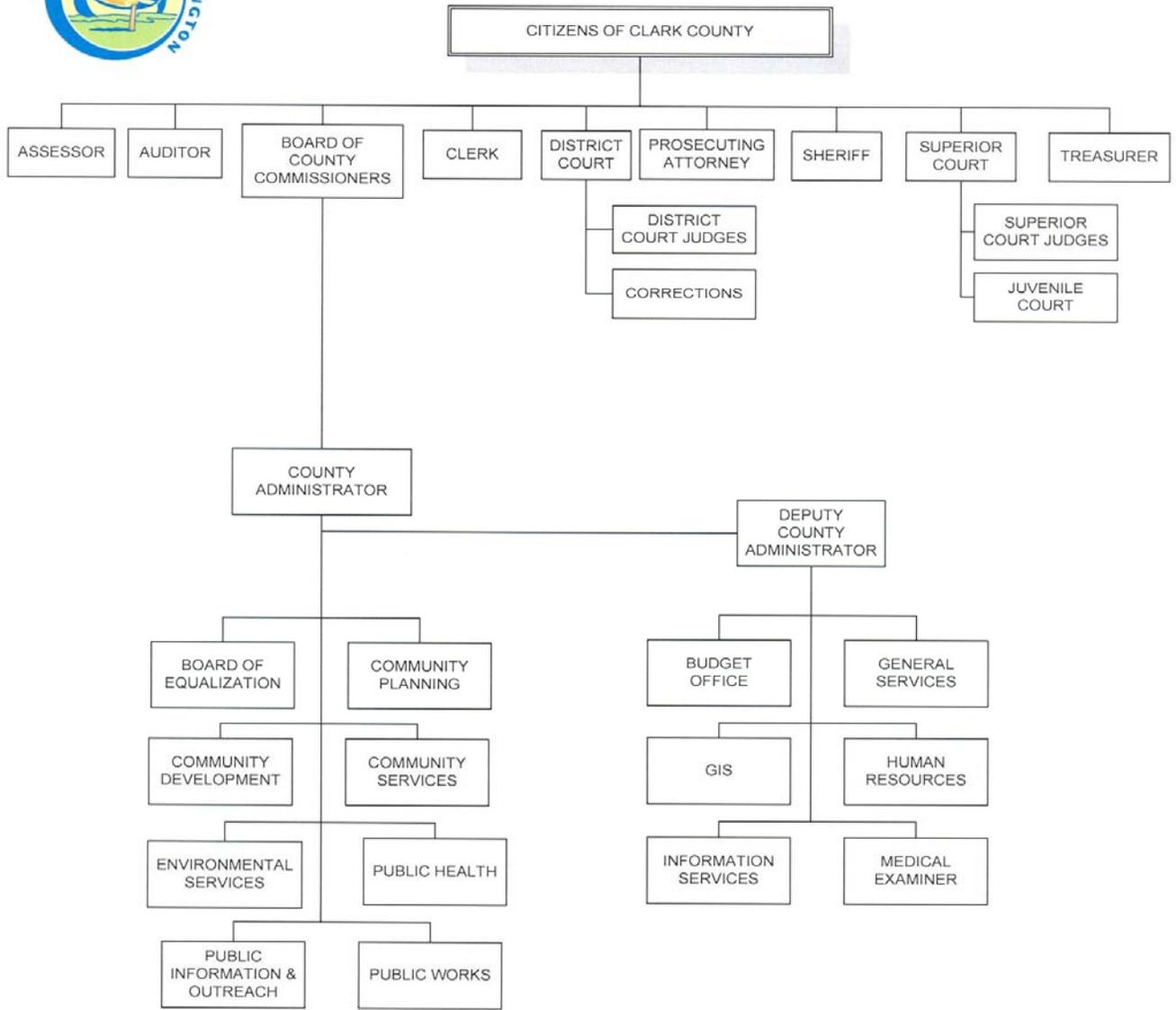
**District Court Judges** - District Court is the trial court for ordinance infractions, misdemeanors, and civil cases involving amounts up to \$50,000. Clark County has six District Court Judges who are elected at large to four-year terms.

**Prosecutor** - The Prosecuting Attorney is responsible for the prosecution of crimes and violations of County ordinances. The Prosecutor also acts as legal counsel to the County and other local government entities. In addition, the victim/witness assistance program, adult diversion program, and the child support enforcement program are under the supervision of the Prosecutor. The Prosecutor is elected at large to a four-year term.

**Sheriff** - The Sheriff is responsible for the provision of police services in the unincorporated portion of the county, including patrol, criminal investigation, and emergency response. In addition, the Sheriff administers the regional County Jail. The Sheriff is elected at large to a four-year term.

**Superior Court Judges** - Superior Court is the trial court for felonies and for civil cases involving amounts over \$50,000. Superior Court also has jurisdiction over divorce, probate, juvenile, competency and domestic cases. Superior Court Judges are considered to be partially employed by the State of Washington, so the State pays one-half of their salaries and all of their benefits. Clark County has ten Superior Court Judges who are elected at large to four-year terms.

**Treasurer** - The Treasurer is responsible for the collection of property taxes, the distribution of property tax revenues to the State and other taxing districts, receipting all money received by the County, and cash and investment management. The Treasurer provides services both to the County and to other government entities, including school and fire districts. The Treasurer is elected at large to a four-year term.



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# The Budget Process

## Legal Framework

State law establishes the general requirements of Clark County's budget process. It requires the County Auditor to initiate the budget process on or before the second Monday in July by requesting budget estimates for the ensuing year from each County department; the estimates must be filed on or before the second Monday in August. A compilation of these estimates, including revenue projections, is required to be presented to the Board of Commissioners on or before the first Tuesday in September. A compilation of budget submissions is made available to the public. The Board of Commissioners must schedule a budget hearing for the first Monday in October or the first Monday in December. If the hearing is scheduled in December, the Board may change the other dates in the process accordingly. The budget hearing may be continued for no more than five days. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Board adopts the budget.

## The Biennial Budget

Since 1985, cities in the state of Washington have had the legal ability to adopt biennial budgets. Clark County first established a biennial budget for the 1999/2000 period. The County adopts a full 24 month budget and provides for a mid-biennium review and modification for the second year of the budget. The biennial budget is produced in five phases:

- **Phase 1 – Baseline Budget** A baseline budget is developed in the Budget Office using the prior biennium's budget, after making any known changes to basic budgeted expenses, or items are removed for any known department reductions. This document is then submitted to departments for their review.
- **Phase 2 – The Submitted Budget** The submitted budget consists of department requests for resources to support their service requirements. It includes all budget adjustments requesting changed levels of resources. It is developed and reported at a line item level of detail with summaries at programmatic, departmental, and functional levels.
- **Phase 3 – Department Request** During this step, the Budget Office continues their work with individual departments to prioritize needs with available revenue. Elected officials are offered an opportunity to communicate directly with BOCC concerning their priorities as well as those of the county.
- **Phase 4 – The Recommended Budget** This is the submission of the County Administrator's budget recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. This is a balanced budget that prioritizes approval of budget adjustment requests based on the above criteria and is summarized at the program level.
- **Phase 5 – The Adopted Budget** The biennial budget is adopted by the Board of County Commissioners after public hearings. It is adopted at the fund and department level.

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## **Community Involvement**

The Board of Commissioners has established specific objectives for community involvement. These include:

- To use a variety of informational techniques that help increase the community understanding of Clark County government and services.
- To continue public opportunities for meaningful input to our planning and budget process.
- To create opportunities for active involvement, in order to increase collaboration with some decisions.
- To create opportunities for consensus decisions with some programs or initiatives.

In implementing these directives, County management pursued the following as a part of the 2013/14 budget process:

- Public meetings with elected officials and heads of departments.
- Briefings to local newspapers regarding the recommended budget and process.
- The Administrator's 2013/2014 Recommended Budget was distributed in November 2012.
- A public meeting with elected officials and the Board of Commissioners was open to the community and televised.
- Public hearings were conducted for citizens to address the Board directly.

## **Budget Responsibilities**

The Budget Office is responsible for the budget process. The Auditor has overall responsibility and authority as the Chief Financial Officer of the County and complies with the basic legal requirements relating to budget responsibilities.

Elected officials and department directors are responsible for preparing and submitting their budget requests according to a published schedule. Officials have the opportunity to explain their budget requests to the County Administrator prior to publishing the recommended budget. Additionally, officials have discretion to address the Board of Commissioners during the public hearing process. After budget adoption, officials are required by law to maintain spending within the limits of the adopted budget.

## **Budget Amendments**

It is sometimes necessary to request changes to budget expenditure authority due to unforeseen issues. Requests to amend the budget are submitted to the County Administrator for review prior to being presented to the Board for approval. Supplemental appropriations that change departmental budgets require a public hearing prior to approval. Notice of the supplemental appropriation hearings are advertised for two weeks prior to the hearing. At the hearing, members of the public may testify regarding the supplemental appropriation. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Board votes to approve or disapprove the supplemental appropriation.

Budget transfers, which shift funds within a department's budget, may be approved by the County Administrator throughout the year upon the presentation of the request.

# Budget Schedule

## 2012 Schedule to prepare 2013/14 Biennial Budget

May 18	Computerized budget system available to departments
July 27	Department budget submissions
Aug. 14 – Sept. 12	Department budget meetings
October 8	Department budget requests published
November 6	County Administrator recommended budget published
November 7	Board work-sessions on recommended budget
December 3	Public hearings
December 4	Public hearings
December 5	Adoption of 2013/14 biennial budget

2012						
May 2012	July	August	September	October	November	Dec. 2012
Budget system available	Dept budgets submitted	Depts meet with Budget Office	Depts meet with Budget Office	Dept budget requests published	Recommended Budget published	Public Hearings
					Board work sessions on Recommended Budget	Adopt 2013/14 Biennial Budget

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## Local Community

Clark County is located in the heart of the Pacific Northwest. The county is named for William Clark (August 1, 1770 - September 1, 1838), an American explorer, soldier, Indian agent, and territorial governor. Along with Meriwether Lewis, Clark led the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1803 to 1806 across the Louisiana Purchase to the Pacific Ocean. Afterward he served in a militia and as governor of the Missouri Territory. From 1822 until his death in 1838, he served as Superintendent of Indian Affairs.



William Clark

The city of Vancouver is the county seat and is home to historic Fort Vancouver which was built by Hudson's Bay Company in 1824. From the city's urban hub on the Columbia River, the county spreads through suburban and agricultural lands to the slopes of the Cascade Mountain Range.

### ***Quick Facts for Clark County:***

Total 2010 Census Population	425,363
Population Change (2000 to 2010)	+80,125
Population, 2012 Estimated	431,250
Median age	36.7
White Population	81.8%
Hispanic Population	7.6%
Asian Population	4.1%
College Graduate	25.8%
Homeownership rate	67.1%
Housing units	168,403
Median Household Income	\$54,581

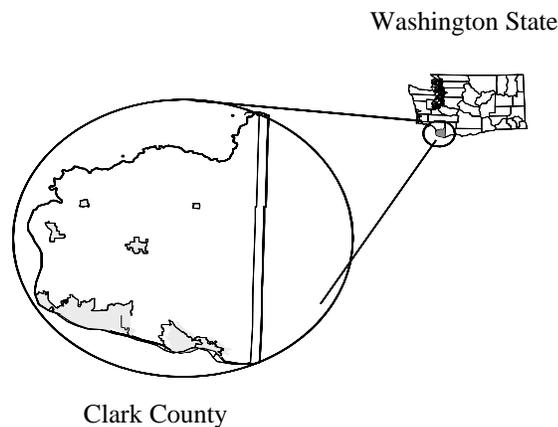
Data from U.S. 2010 Census and Washington State Office of Fin. Mgt.

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## Geography and Climate

Located in southwestern Washington State, Clark County is approximately 70 miles from the Pacific Ocean. It is physically compact, measuring approximately 25 miles across in either direction, encompassing 656 square miles. The Columbia River forms the County's southern and western boundary, and the Lewis River forms the northern perimeter. The climate in Clark County is affected by its geography, with the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean exerting a strong influence. The marine environment produces the wet, mild winters and moderately dry summers characteristic of the region. About 70 percent of annual precipitation occurs between November and March. The temperate climate has an annual average daily temperature of 51°F and average high temperature of 61°F. Annual rainfall averaging 40 inches a year contributes to waterways and lakes in the region.

The Columbia River boundaries of the County provide over 40 miles of river frontage. The Columbia is the only fresh-water harbor accommodating ocean-going commerce on the entire West Coast of North America, and the only water-grade route through the Cascade Range in the west coast between Canada and California. The county has served deep-sea commerce since 1906.



Along the Columbia are low-lying bottomlands, from which a series of alluvial plains and terraces extend north and northeast. Land elevations rise from less than 10 feet on the south and west floodplains to over 3,000 feet above sea level in the eastern portion. The western half of Clark County lies at the junction of the Columbia River and Willamette Valleys and is comparatively level over the southern portion. While progressing northward and eastward, the terrain develops into rolling hills, culminating in the Cascade Range.

The Cascade Mountain Range dominates the eastern border of the region, with the peaks of Mount St. Helens, Mount Hood, and Mount Adams prominent features on a clear day. The Cascades extend from southwestern Canada through Washington and Oregon into northern California. The earliest attested use of the name Cascades is in the writings of botanist David Douglas where he describes the great white-capped mountains that loomed above the rapids as the "mountains by the cascades" and later simply as the "Cascades".

Throughout the foothills of the Cascade Range, soils may generally be classified as silt and clay loams to depths of 60 inches, culminating in strongly weathered basalts and stony silt and clay loams. Good farming land, of high and better than average productivity, is limited in area and includes the floodplains of the Columbia River. Lands of average productivity cover most of the higher terraces and benchlands from five to 15 miles inland from the Columbia River.

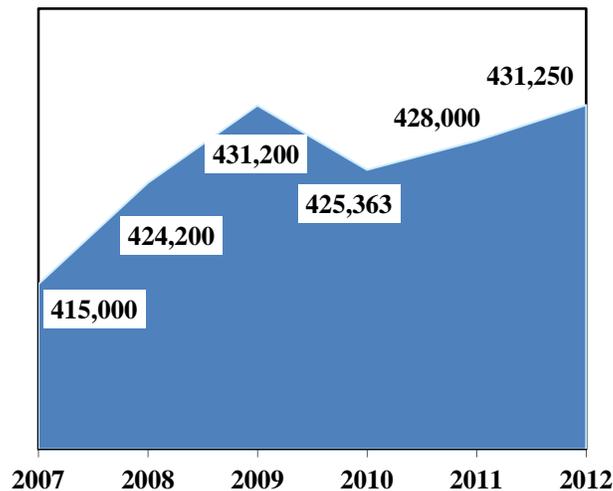
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The county's geographic position between two mountain ranges serves to insulate it against dramatically differing climates within one hundred miles in either direction. Prevailing winds over most of the county are northwesterly during the summer and southeasterly during the winter. These are tempered by nearly uniform ocean temperatures ranging from 50°F to 55°F. The result is a relatively high precipitation and a moderate temperature range from summer to winter. Prevailing winds over the southeastern portion of the county are east by southeast during the winter, resulting from the counterclockwise circulation of low-pressure areas.

There are four definite seasons of the year, but the trend from one to another is very gradual. The average growing season on the western plains ranges from 154 days at Battle Ground to 222 days at Vancouver. Seasonal differences in precipitation are much more marked than those of temperatures. The county has a very definite winter rainfall climate, with 70 percent of the total annual precipitation occurring in the five months of November through March. Normal annual precipitation ranges from 38 inches on the western floodplains to over 114 inches in the mountainous northeastern part of the county. The precipitation falls mostly as rain, with the normal annual snowfall ranging from less than six inches on the western plains to over 22 inches for the northeastern portion of the county.

## Demographics

Annual Population Increase



Clark County is one of seven counties included in the Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA). The other counties are Clackamas, Columbia, Multnomah, Washington, and Yamhill—all in Oregon – and Skamania County in Washington. In 2010, the metropolitan area population was 2,226,009. From 2007 through 2012, Clark County's population increased by 16,250. Clark County has a 2012 estimated population of 431,250.

Clark County developed rapidly throughout the 1990s. Beginning in 1980, its 192,227 residents accounted for 4.7 percent of the state's population. As of 2012, the county's population had grown to approximately 431,250, representing 6.3 percent of the state's total population. In the last five years, Clark County's population has increased four percent, a pace that has slowed from the eleven percent growth seen in the five year period from 2003 to 2007.

In December 1994, Clark County adopted a comprehensive land use plan pursuant to the State of Washington Growth Management Act of 1990. The Clark County 20-year Comprehensive Growth Management Plan identified key indicators to be compiled and summarized on an annual basis. The Department of Community Development completed the first analysis of available data in 2000, for the period 1995-1999. The report provided an overview of population, housing, employment, wages, per capita income, land absorption, and urban versus rural development. In September 2004, Clark County completed its most recent updating process and adopted a new 20-Year Comprehensive Growth Management Plan. As adopted, the plan is intended to guide growth through December 2023. The current plan is focused on managing urban growth boundaries, projecting population growth, planning housing needs, and balancing growth in rural and urban areas. The plan is central to determining density and zoning, paying for growth and concurrency, and locating business, industry, and jobs.

**Local Economy**

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<u>Top Private Employers 2012</u>	<u>Employees*</u>
Peace Health SW Medical Center	2,625
Fred Meyer stores	1,540
Safeway, Inc.	1,041
WaferTech	1,000
<u>Top Public Employers</u>	
Vancouver Public Schools	3,200
Evergreen Public Schools	3,101
Clark County 2013/14	1,603
Battle Ground Public Schools	1,352

\*Full time and part time

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Regionally, southwest Washington recovery is slower than the rest of the state or the nation, with an unemployment rate of about 12% in Clark County. Unemployment continues to weigh on the local economy, and the total employed workforce of about 128,000 remains below peak employment of nearly 137,000 in 2007. The 2011 median income was about \$54,951, slightly better than 2010 level of \$54,581 but less than the median income of \$57,621 in 2007.

The outlook for Clark County for 2013/14 shows signs of improvement. The housing market has reduced its high inventories and the median price for a residence is trending back up. The County forecast calls for modest improvement in 2013 and 2014. Ten years ago, new construction was valued at \$1 billion annually. It peaked at \$1.5 billion in 2007. Current estimates put new construction at an assessed value of \$319 million in 2013 and \$352 million in 2014. Public sector employment dropped but the private sector has been slowly adding jobs and consumer spending is up slightly. Concern remains as to the potential local impact of state budget cuts, especially in the area of health and social services.

Transportation facilities, serving both sides of the Columbia River, have created a regional hub for commerce. The area has served deep-sea commerce since 1906. Transcontinental rail lines serving the County traverse major north-south and east-west routes. Interstate highways provide access to economic centers. The Portland International Airport, just fifteen minutes south of Vancouver, is an essential community and economic development asset.

Higher education opportunities in the Clark County area include a full-service satellite of Washington State University, with a campus located in Vancouver. Clark County has a relatively well-developed higher education sector, as well as access to additional programs in the greater Portland area.

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## Quality of Life / Recreation

Clark County residents enjoy the opportunity to choose a rural lifestyle within close proximity to urban amenities. There is a wide variety of recreational opportunities and cultural activities in the area. The metropolitan amenities of Portland are just minutes away across the Columbia River.

The County has over 20 arts organizations, many available through the Columbia Arts Center; and numerous community events such as the Clark County Fair and Fourth of July Festival. There are historical sites and museums throughout the region, including the Vancouver National Historic Reserve.

Recreational opportunities are numerous in and around Clark County. There are over forty miles of Columbia River frontage for fishing and boating. The Pacific Ocean beaches, Mt. Hood and Mt. Adams ski areas, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument are all within an hour's drive. The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area arises in Clark County and is renowned for sightseeing and recreational opportunities, including world class windsurfing and boating. A diverse selection of golf courses can be found in the area.

The County partners with the City of Vancouver to operate a jointly funded parks and recreation program. The ongoing economic downturn and specifically the depressed housing market have significantly reduced the amount of real estate excise taxes collected in Clark County. From 2006 to 2010, real estate tax revenue dropped by 70 percent. With such a sharp decline, the Board of County Commissioners decided in early December 2011 to use the remaining real estate tax revenue for debt payments on the Public Service Center and other county facilities instead of new road and park projects. Lower property values also affect the amount of property taxes collected for maintenance and operations in the parks district. In response, the county will keep park maintenance and operations expenses at basic levels until the economy recovers.