

David Madore
2015 State of the County
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Thank you, Tom.

I wear my “Jobs” pin at each of our Board of County Councilor meetings as a reminder to prioritize local jobs for our community. Local jobs for Clark County citizens remain our top priority.

Today, after too many hard years during the Great Recession, I am pleased to report that the state of Clark County is vastly improved. Our future is bright, and we are growing stronger every day.

Clark County’s finances are solid and exceeding the best recommended practices for healthy counties.

We’ve adopted financially conservative practices; and we’re paying off millions in inherited debt.

We’ve stopped using external lines of credit and our budget needs are met without raising taxes.

Our Road Fund and Community Development fund balances are well able to provide for new infrastructure and community growth.

We started the 2015 year with \$22.5 million in General Fund reserves, enough to operate the county for 56 days and exceed our 52-day target.

In a word, our county is healthy, very healthy.

But more important than that, the economy of our community is healthy and growing more healthy.

Our goal is to work together and build an outstanding community, one where individuals, families, and businesses can prosper and thrive.

We are Clark County and we have our own identity. We are committed to champion our own identity and develop our own economic engine as a self-sufficient community. We are committed to being good neighbors to Portland, but our future is not as a bedroom community for Portland.

We are making policy decisions that have put us on the road to being the most business friendly community on the West Coast, with strong local businesses and great local jobs. We have traded in our old Ford Pinto and our position at the back of the pack.

Clark County is now leading the job growth race with a shiny new Ferrari and we’re several laps ahead and we’re gaining speed.

We’ve got a new business friendly identity as the place to launch and grow local jobs. Those local jobs are boosting our quality of life and creating new wealth for our community and new revenue for our county services.

Each month, we look forward to the monthly economic report published by our state’s Regional Economist Scott Bailey to see the continuing positive trend that started two years ago.

Taxable retail sales in Clark County were up by 10.5% in 2014 and showed significant growth in new vehicle sales. That's a clear sign of confidence, when people believe it's OK to make large purchases.

This growing confidence can be seen in Clark County home sales. The median home sold for \$245,000 last December, a solid 8.5 percent increase for the year. For many residents, their family home is their most valuable asset. And those investments are appreciating in Clark County.

And here's the indicator that I really like. Clark County last year added 6,200 jobs — with employment increasing at a rate of 4.9 percent. That's almost double the growth rate of the Portland metro region, much higher than the states of Oregon and Washington, and far higher than the nation.

Clark County is leading the way. Our outstanding community is making economic news.

So what changed? Why has our community outpaced all other Northwest communities? Back in 2013, we recognized that the status quo of mediocrity was not good enough.

We removed the deterrents and changed our focus to make our customers successful, to make life easy for our customers, to welcome and cherish entrepreneurs, and to become more business competitive than any other community.

We waived all permit fees for every employer who wanted to build or expand their business and hire citizens in our community. We streamlined our permit processes and completely rebuilt our permit center.

We added new staff, provided more web-based services for our customers and mobile computing for county staff to help handle the higher number of permits.

Storm water permits are now much faster and easier to obtain as we fully comply with all environmental standards.

Our outstanding employees work proactively with businesses to solve problems by removing barriers and cutting red tape.

The business community responded to our winning business friendly culture by deciding that this is the time and Clark County is the place to grow. We have not waived any taxes for any business. Each new and expanding business creates new tax revenue to lighten the load for all citizens.

Smith-Root Inc. is a world leader in manufacturing tools and equipment for fishery biologists. Last year, they broke ground on a 30,000-square-foot complex near Washington State University.

I want to read a quote from Jeff Smith, the company's founder, about the fee waiver program. He said, "we decided now was the time to make the move." And he said, "it's not going to get any better."

Have you noticed the beautiful new businesses building in Hazel Dell? Those developments penciled out because of those fee waivers. Today, you can enjoy a new Panera Bread restaurant, a new organic discount grocery store, and other new businesses in Hazel Dell.

More than 200 projects worth \$60 million in construction have taken advantage of this program. Those projects are expected to create about 1,900 jobs and generate an additional \$290 million

annually in new local sales. Our metrics, posted online every month, show that the projected tax revenue will far exceed all fees waived.

We originally budgeted three million dollars to prime the pump for our fee waivers, but none of that was needed. It was all returned to our General Fund.

The Community Development Fund that pays for our permitting processes, rather than decreasing, is setting new highs.

Healthy cash balances have enabled us to replace our outdated permitting software with new technology for managing building, development, engineering, and environmental permits in Clark County. The \$4.7 million investment will help us to accelerate our permits and further contribute to our economic recovery and expansion.

Our Community Development Department is appreciated by numerous businesses. AT&T's corporate office wrote to us to let us know how much they appreciated our staff streamlining the process for upgrading wireless facilities in the county.

Even with this track record, we can do better. Unemployment in Clark County has varied between 5.9% and 8% over the last six months. That's still too high. We must continue to diligently keep local jobs and free enterprise our top priority.

Another way our county encourages economic growth is by investing in our community's roads. We are pressing for important economic infrastructure projects, including a new I-5 /179 Street Interchange and a new bridge that connects NW 10th Avenue near the Fairgrounds. Our Public Works Department is moving ahead with an aggressive schedule for 2015, one that is packed with 26 projects valued at more than \$39 million dollars.

This is how we are spending your money, to build new and to improve existing roads, to upgrade and replace bridges, to provide the needed infrastructure for our community to prosper and thrive. Whenever it makes sense, we continue to contract with the private sector to get the work done.

Our strategy is to foster local businesses to create new wealth and revenue and to keep a lid on taxes. Our Public Works Department, headed by Heath Henderson, does an excellent job of securing grants and other funding to stretch our local dollars as far as possible.

Earlier this year, county councilors approved a reduction in erosion control inspection fees. Our Public Works Department worked with the Development and Engineering Advisory Board to analyze the cost for inspections. We lowered the fees to reflect our true cost of inspections while fully complying with all state requirements.

This is what I mean by a business-friendly county, one that is responsive and accountable to the community that it serves. And it's here to stay.

Public safety is a critical part of county government. We started strengthening our sheriff's office last year by authorizing eight new deputies and nine new custody officers to staff a 45-bed wing of the jail that was closed for years, and also to open 96 beds at the jail work center, so that now we can accommodate 141 inmates in addition as we grow in our community.

We also approved much-needed support staff, upgraded radios and communications technology for emergency responders, and are installing major new software for our sheriff to share a common law enforcement database, region-wide.

You've already heard from our new outstanding sheriff. The Board of County Councilors is eager to work with Sheriff Atkins to make our community as safe and secure as possible.

I talk a lot about local jobs and the economy, but our county does so much more. With two neighboring counties, Clark County is the first Early Adopter in the state to fully integrate mental health services, chemical dependency services, and physical health care to better serve those in need.

Our community loves parks and so do I, and they are a high priority. Park fees and boat launch fees were eliminated and competent lifeguards are on duty each swimming season at Kline Line.

Two new parks were completed last year and we're planning to continue building new parks and trails that were promised several years ago. We are so grateful to the many volunteers who dedicate thousands of hours to our parks.

We will continue to work to find smarter ways to do county government and continuously improve the services we deliver for our bosses, the citizens of Clark County.

Our county is a diverse community with retailing, high-tech businesses, small farms, a new winery industry, and a significant rural economy. We are ensuring that the needs of our rural citizens are addressed in our latest growth management plan.

Our role is only as valid as we obtain the respect and the consent of the governed. The voice of the people, as expressed through the ballot box, matters. In our last election, the majority of citizens said "No" to light rail, they said "No" to BRT, they said "No" to the CRC, and they said "Yes" to a new toll-free East County Bridge. We are listening to our citizens.

The people voted to direct their county commissioners to take a leadership role to champion the toll-free East County Bridge. The people said "go to bat for us, share that vision, build that momentum, and work to make the toll-free East County Bridge project a reality. And you're going to hear a lot more about that. My response is "Yes Sir. Yes, Ma'am."

This is not a part time job, as Councilor Stewart is well aware. We've got our work cut out for us. When we work together with good will, we can accomplish great things.

Clark County is moving ahead under the competent leadership of Mark McCauley, our acting county manager. Mark has impressed me with his ability to lead people, master thousands of details and balance competing interests. And he does so with humility.

A genius is not someone who knows everything. A genius is someone who can find everything. And Mark McCauley is especially good at finding answers, especially as an iPad wizard.

We work together as a team with mutual respect and we are united in purpose to faithfully serve our citizens. We've made transparency a top priority. By creating the GRID on our website, we've turned on the lights to maximize transparency.

The Grid is a place to find all the business that we do. You can find it on our county website: clark.wa.gov. There's a big button there – The Grid.

Thanks to our Finance Director Mark Gassaway for championing our county transparency page including our searchable, sortable County Checkbook for all to see precisely where your money goes.

I invite you to share our optimism for our community's bright and blessed future, with our own prosperous economic engine, with our own unique Clark County identity, and where Clark County government faithfully listens to and serves the people.

In the same way that I wrap up each of my daily Facebook posts, I will also close today with:

Thank God! Yay Clark County!