

# Clark County Comprehensive Plan 2016 Update

Planning for growth 2015 – 2035

Population and Job Projections – Issue Paper 2

## Purpose

This memorandum provides the Board of Clark County Commissioners (BOCC) the background information for a discussion with local cities and the Town of Yacolt on population and job planning assumptions for 2016 through 2035.

## Background

Clark County and its cities are required to periodically review and update their comprehensive plans and development regulations. The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires that counties and cities complete such a review at least every eight years (RCW 36.70A.130). Clark County adopted comprehensive plans in 1994, 2004, and 2007. The 2007 update covers the time period 2004-2024. At that time, 2014 was the deadline for completing the next update. However, due to the recent economic downturn, the State Legislature adopted a revised schedule extending the deadline for completion of Clark County's next update to June 30, 2016.

In "Issue Paper 1 - Comprehensive Plan Overview", Community Planning presented a summary of the county's Planning Assumptions, the 2013 vacant lands inventory and population and employment projections. This Issue Paper will focus on Population projections for the 2016-2035 planning horizon.

The intent of the 2016 update is to ensure that the county and its cities have enough land included in urban growth areas (UGAs) to accommodate 20 years of population and employment growth through 2035. Not only are the UGAs sized to accommodate a 20- year supply of housing, but also the full range of services that accompany urban development, including medical, public service, institutional, industrial, commercial, service, and retail uses. In addition, this growth must be supported by the necessary infrastructure and public services. In the existing plans, the county and its cities have identified the appropriate levels of service necessary to accommodate the increase in population and jobs. Any improvements needed to maintain these levels of service especially for "hard concurrency" items must be identified and programmed for funding concurrent with any increase in population.

## Population Allocation Considerations

Regulations adopted by the Washington State Department of Commerce are intended to guide local governments in making population allocation decisions. Specifically, WAC 365-196-310 identifies a number of factors applicable to allocating projected growth:

1. *Population projections available from the Washington State Office of Financial Management*
2. *Historical growth trends and factors that could alter those trends in the future*
3. *Provision of public facilities*
4. *Land supply limitations*
5. *Economic trends and employment*
6. *Projected need for residential, commercial, and industrial lands*

# 1. Population Projections

In determining the size of UGAs, counties are required to utilize the official population projections issued by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM). These projections include three distinct ranges; low, medium, and high. The population projections are prepared for a 20- year time period with an incremental update every 5 years. . Given the recent economic downturn, changing demographics, and lower than anticipated growth rates, the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) published new, lower growth projections for 2035. The most recent projections by OFM were released on May 31, 2012. The Clark County population projections for 2035 are:

HIGH	681,135
<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>562,207</b>
LOW	459,617

(Source: <http://ofm.wa.gov/pop/gma/>)

In accordance with RCW 43.62.035, the **medium** range represents OFM’s most likely estimate of a county’s population. The RCW says in part: “the middle range shall represent the office’s estimate of the most likely population projection for the county”. Within each county, population planning targets for cities, towns, and unincorporated areas are worked out among the affected local jurisdictions as part of the regional, city and county planning process. Clark County, its cities and town have adopted the Community Framework Plan (vision for growth) and Countywide Planning Policies (CWPP) to guide the development of the 20 -year plan.

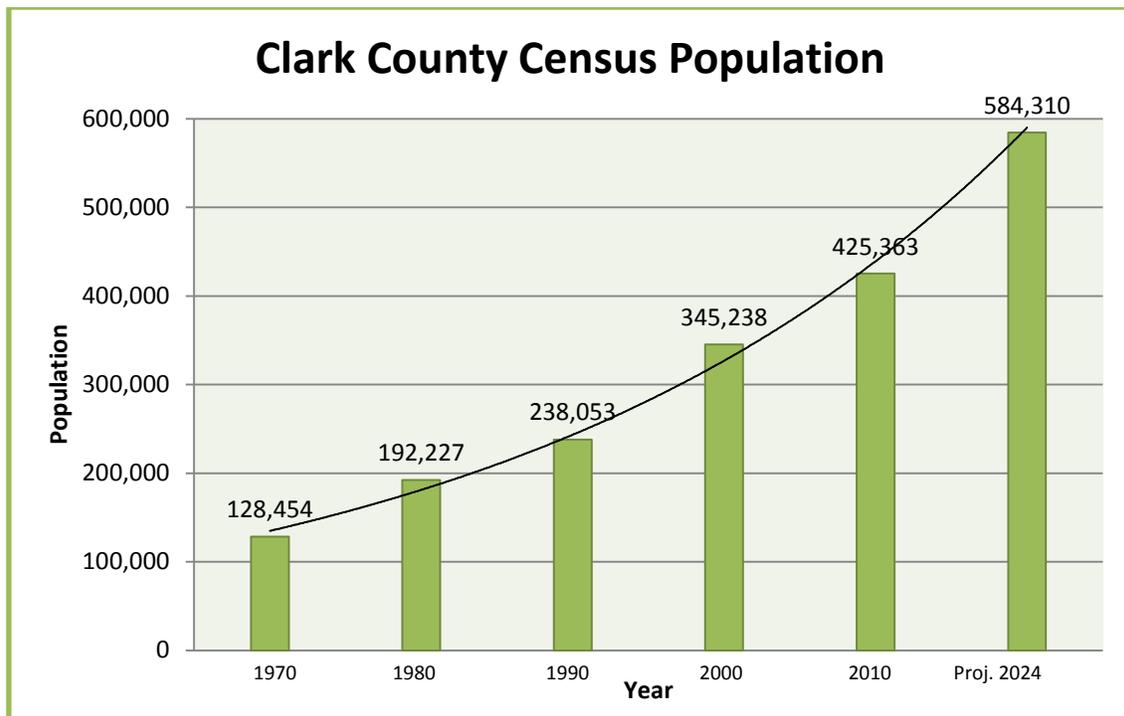
Choosing an appropriate population projection range is extremely important. Selecting a range that is too high or too low can lead to serious challenges. For example, because UGAs are sized in accordance with the adopted population range, choosing a range that underestimates the rate of population growth can lead to UGAs that are too small, a shortage of developable land and artificially inflated housing and land prices. Alternatively, selecting a range that overestimates the rate of population growth can require costly and unnecessary infrastructure upgrades. Because the GMA requires local governments to develop detailed funding plans for urban services, selecting a range that is too high can result in premature or unnecessary and wasteful infrastructure spending.

# 2. Employment Projections

The GMA does not require local jurisdictions to plan for any particular number of jobs. Identifying lands for jobs, however, is an important consideration in sizing of UGAs. The county has historically used a “jobs to population” ratio that is informed by U.S. census data and state employment information from the Washington Employment Security Department. The 2007 comprehensive plan assumption is 1:1.39 for future growth.

# 3. Historical Growth Trends

Clark County has historically experienced healthy population increases. We typically rank as the first or second fastest growing county in the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area. In the last decade alone, the county’s population has increased by 23 percent. The following shows the county’s census population from 1970 through 2010 and the adopted population projection for 2024.



The 20 year Comprehensive Plan (2007-2024) established a population projection of 584,310 by 2024, which was about midway between the OFM medium and high projections.

#### 4. Provision of Public Facilities

As noted earlier a full range of services must accompany urban development. Each jurisdiction and service provider prepares a 20 year Capital Facility Plan (CFPs) based on the population forecasted. The facility plans include the necessary improvements projected to be needed and identifies funding sources. Since the adoption of the 2007 plan, Clark County was hard hit during the recession. Revenue forecasts are down and population projections are lower than anticipated. All jurisdictions and service providers have reviewed their CFPs.

The BOCC has had numerous discussions on how best to service the unincorporated Vancouver Urban Growth Area. Acting in the capacity of a city relatively the size of Vancouver, the county provides urban services such as transportation, stormwater treatment, law enforcement, and parks.

- a. Transportation: The Board has determined that the preservation of our road system is the first priority. Safety, intersection improvements to satisfy concurrency and jobs; focused improvements are the next priorities.
- b. Stormwater: The county will continue to meet its obligations under the NPDES permit issued by the Washington Department of Ecology under the mandates of the Federal Clean Water Act.
- c. Law enforcement: Demand for law enforcement services is directly related to the population (number of households) and the amount of developed commercial/industrial acreage for the area. Most of the growth in the county has occurred in the unincorporated, largely urban sections of the county. This is not likely to change in the near term. As a result,

the Clark County Sheriff's Office has experienced the greatest increase in demand/need for services.

- d. Parks: The Board has determined that the county should operate and manage a separate park system rather than a joint system with the City of Vancouver. In doing so, the Board is committed to completion of the remaining parks, sports fields and trails identified in creation of the Greater Metropolitan Parks District.

## **5. Land Supply Limitations**

The county uses a Vacant and Buildable Lands Inventory model (VBLM) to verify that the urban growth boundaries include the land necessary to support the urban portion of the 20-year jobs and population projection. A percentage of population growth is allocated to rural areas. The 2007 Comprehensive Plan assumed that 10% of population would occur in the rural areas. The VBLM uses GIS based land analysis and data-driven assumptions to determine the capacity of urban lands to accommodate growth.

## **6. Economic Trends and Employment**

Clark County employment in manufacturing, distribution, and related sectors drives the market for industrial space. Though job gains are expected in the transportation/warehousing and wholesale trade sectors, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has forecast a loss of more than 1.5 million U.S. manufacturing jobs between 2006 and 2016. Some job losses are the natural result of automation as employers substitute capital for labor. Outsourcing of local jobs to other states and/or countries contributes to the loss of jobs, especially in manufacturing. But job losses, coupled with continued turmoil in financial markets, will not bode well for businesses making capital investments.

## **7. Residential, Industrial, and Commercial Needs**

To determine how much land is needed during an update to accommodate projected growth, the county must assess how much buildable land exists compared with projected needs. The Department of GIS recently completed running its annual vacant lands model. The 2013 results indicate urban growth areas contain the following vacant buildable lands:

- 8,037 net residential acres with a capacity of 147,742 residents.
- 3,109 net acres of commercial lands with employment capacity of 62,180, at 20 jobs per acre.
- 3,587 net acres of industrial land with an employment capacity of 32,283, at 9 jobs per acre.

Thus, employment capacity of vacant lands in all county urban growth areas is 94, 463. There are other potential jobs not captured by the vacant land model, such as jobs from redevelopment and public sector jobs. It is important to note that as a result of challenge of the 2007 plan and the appeals process, the rezoning of about 1,600 acres of agricultural land to industrial was ruled invalid. The county removed those lands from urban growth areas and reinstated the lands as agriculture. Of the total, about 1,500 acres had been zoned for employment lands.

## Discussion Items

Consider adopting OFM Medium population forecast of 562,207

1. Matches the RTC regional forecasts.
2. In keeping with the current demographic trends, adjust if necessary at the 2016 update.
3. Reduces the burden on public services.
4. Streamlines the approach to comply with an unfunded mandate.
5. Maintains existing urban growth areas.
6. Targets rezones to allow for 22,103 fewer people and more jobs than in the other projections.
7. Prepares the county to be more self-reliant for the next growth curve.

## Next Steps

The Board needs to adopt a countywide population and jobs projections. Employment and household projections are based on the population projection. Once the countywide population and jobs projections are determined, the next step is to collaborate with the cities in setting the population and job planning assumptions (allocation) for each jurisdiction for approval by the Board.