



May 1, 2023

Clark County Council

PO Box 5000

Vancouver, WA 98666-5000

Chair, Karen Bowerman

Councilor, Gary Medvigy

Councilor, Michelle Belkot

Councilor, Sue Marshall

Councilor, Glen Yung

**Concerning the adoption of a population forecast for the 2025-2045 Comprehensive Plan Update:**

Dear, Chair Bowerman & Fellow Councilors

The population forecast this body adopts is arguably the most important element of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update. It will inform all planning processes going forward including the county's capacity for both housing and jobs. Our association asserts the middle forecast given by the Office of Financial Management (OFM) does not accurately reflect the unique factors that will influence Clark County's future growth. Net migration and past growth point to a growth rate much closer to the historic trendline based on population, not the middle 1.26% annual average growth rate forecast by OFM. An annual average growth rate of at least 1.45% would more accurately reflect where our community has been and where it is going, when it comes to growth. In 2018, OFM's Forecast and Research division published the "County Growth Management Population Projections by Age and Sex: 2010-2040" which states the following: ".....These assumptions are based on the historical high

and low migration patterns for each county and current factors affecting the economic base and attractiveness of specific areas in the state. The alternative series represent the fundamental unpredictability of long-range projections. They should be considered for planning purposes if the social and economic environment impact on demographic trends predicted in the middle series does not hold.” ( Issue Paper 2\_Population, pg. 4)

This council should consider the recent environment of social, economic, and demographic changes our unique community has experienced and will continue to experience. Remote work, in-migration from other states, increased employment opportunities, tax policy, and a variety of other factors should be reflected in the population forecast this council will adopt on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023. According to OFM, 80% of Washington’s future population growth will come from in-migration, which is a volatile factor to account for. If we underestimate this factor in the planning process, there will be compounding consequences for decades to come.

Some of these consequences would include a lack of diversity in housing and employment opportunities. Clark County’s housing inventory per the RMLS market report sat at an abysmal 1.4 months for the month of March and with a current housing shortage of over 1 million homes statewide, policymakers must ensure that we are prudently planning for the next 20 years, not simply making the problem worse. Homeownership and real estate investment is one of the best ways to achieve generational wealth. This council should work to adopt policies that expand those opportunities, not diminish them.

Clark County Community Planning’s response and analysis of alternative growth rates proposed show that a higher growth rate between the middle and high forecasts would more accurately reflect the trendline based on historic population. (ReviewOfClarkPopulationAverages\_Final20230424, slide 6).

On top of that, the state predicts a substantial drop off in total in-migration. In 2022 OFM forecasted that 69,666 total new residents came into the state through in-migration. In 2023 OFM predicts that figure will drop to 52,900 or a decline of 24%. (OFM State Forecast, Oct. 2022). In-migration will slow as we normalize from the pandemic and adapt to new working styles, but a 24% drop seems far too aggressive. OFM may be severely underestimating the volume of in-migration our state and county will see in the next 20-year cycle.

On behalf of over 2,000 members, we urge this council to exert its leadership and adopt an annual average growth rate of no less than 1.45% for the 2025-2045 Comprehensive Plan Update. This rate correctly reflects the appeal and growth of the unique, prosperous, and abundant position Clark County has within the greater Pacific Northwest.

Sincerely,

*Justin Wood*

Government Affairs Director  
Clark County Association of Realtors®

