

From: [Rebecca Messinger](#)
To: [Cnty 2025 Comp Plan](#)
Subject: FW: Clark County Comp Plan Update--For the Record
Date: Monday, May 4, 2026 4:58:15 PM
Attachments: [The Columbian Clark County's growth plan delayed again.pdf](#)

Hi Jeff,

Please see David McDonald's email below and the attachment, for the record.

Thank you!

Rebecca Messinger
Clerk to the Council
COUNTY MANAGER'S OFFICE

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-----Original Message-----

From: David McDonald <david@mcdonaldpc.com>
Sent: Friday, May 1, 2026 6:54 PM
To: Rebecca Messinger <Rebecca.Messinger@clark.wa.gov>
Subject: Clark County Comp Plan Update--For the Record

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Rebecca:

Attached is a Columbian Article I would like to submit for the Clark County Comp Plan Update Record

Thank you!

David

Clark County's growth plan delayed again

Already overdue, finish date now pushed to Oct. 6



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian files Houses rise in September at the edge of a new neighborhood off Northwest Hillhurst Road in Ridgefield. City officials want to expand Ridgefield's urban growth boundary and rezone agricultural lands for housing and commercial development, putting it at odds with groups like Friends of Clark County that are trying to preserve the county's remaining farmlands.

BY SHARI PHIEL THE COLUMBIAN

Clark County's 20-year growth plan, already overdue by three months, won't be finished by the end of June as originally planned.

The new target is Oct. 6. A few other counties with the same 2025 or earlier deadline haven't completed plan updates either, including San Juan, Whatcom and Thurston counties, according to the state Department of Commerce. Plan updates for neighboring Cowlitz and Skamania counties and several others are due in 2026.

Requests from several small cities, such as Ridgefield, to expand their urban growth area boundaries and rezone land for more intensive use have contributed to putting the county behind schedule.

Ridgefield City Manager Steve Stuart said being out of compliance isn't as much of an issue as it might seem.

"Everybody's acting like we're somehow unique and that it has to do with Ridgefield and that's causing us to be late. That's nonsense," Stuart said. "The primary risk of noncompliance is not being eligible for public works trust fund loans. That's it, and that's only if you have an invalidity order, not noncompliance."

Because the Legislature diverted funds from the public works loan program to make up a budget shortfall, Stuart said the funds already won't be there for the county to borrow. For the 2025-27 biennium, the Legislature diverted \$375 million from the public works program, while adding \$279.5 million in new bonds.

Friends of Clark County and the nonprofit's attorney, David McDonald, say it is very important for the county or any government jurisdiction to comply with state law.

"We want the county to finish their comprehensive plan and do it in a timely manner, and we want them to follow the law just like we always have asked them to do," McDonald said.

He noted the county council has already publicly acknowledged the county is not in compliance.

Friends of Clark County filed a petition with the Growth Management Hearings Board asking the board to require Clark County complete the plan update by the previous June 30 deadline.

The Growth Management Hearings Board reviewed the petition during a March 25 hearing but has not yet released a ruling.

Clark County has been out of compliance with the state's Growth Management Act before. At an August 2024 county council meeting, county public works staff warned the county was at risk of losing more than \$6 million in grants after it was found to be out of compliance with the Growth Management Act over a zoning overlay in the Chelatchie Bluff Mineral Lands.

"History shows that, for decades, the cities — especially the smaller cities of La Center, Ridgefield and Camas — have a voracious and almost insatiable appetite for the consumption of agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance, to bring them into their urban boundaries and urbanize them whether they're properly designated or not," McDonald said.

The county commissioned a study by ECONorthwest that found that 98 percent of agricultural lands reviewed remained viable.

Once that report came out in November, the county should have taken steps to protect and conserve those lands, McDonald said. The county should have put moratoriums in place to prevent development until the county could create a plan recognizing which lands met or exceeded preservation criteria, he said.

Officials from Ridgefield and other cities have questioned the accuracy of the study and would like to see the county complete a more thorough study.

"We just want to get it done and get it done the right way," Stuart said.

He said Ridgefield does not have enough vacant, usable land within its existing urban growth area to meet the housing and employment growth expected.

Rather than large, singlefamily home developments, Stuart said Ridgefield is focused on mixed-use planned developments that provide housing, jobs and commercial uses.

The county has set a density goal of six residential units per acre, and Ridgefield has been developing almost eight per acre, Stuart said.

"We have done more than our job to provide opportunities, but we've done it

in a high-quality targeted fashion,” he said.

The county council held its final work session on the growth plan update on March 25. The next step will be a public hearing to adopt a growth plan map for the entire county showing new zoning, existing zoning, urban growth area boundary changes and annexations.

A date for the public hearing has not been set.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT: Community Funded Journalism is a project from The Columbian and the Local Media Foundation that is funded by community donations, including The Cowlitz Tribal Foundation. The Columbian maintains editorial control over all content. For more information, visit columbian.com/cfj.