

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF GROWTH

Doug Ballou Chairman NACCC discusses
Quality of Life and neighborhood issues at this public forum.

1. In Clark County, Washington significant growth has had a dramatic impact on our neighborhoods, their livability and quality of life in our community.
2. **Rich History.** Clark County has a rich history, proud past and is a great place to live, work and play. People all over the United States have discovered that and over the past decade we have experienced tremendous growth. Some significant challenges have come with that growth and they all impact our ability to continue to have livable neighborhoods. Commissioner Pridemore and Sheriff Lucas discussed some of impacts of growth on Clark County Government and the Sheriff's Department, but what about the overall impact this has had on our community.
3. **Quality of life,** community livability, sense of place these all mean different things to different people. I come from a small town where we had community parks, a swimming pool, great schools, a public library all within close proximity –either a short drive or within walking distance depending on where you lived. If I had grown up and lived in LA during the 60's, 70's and 80's and moved here in the past decade I would have a much different idea of community livability. The traffic congestion we have here may seem like a huge problem, but it's nothing compared to the traffic jams in LA. LA has four of the top 10 most congested highways in the US. My own experiences shape my beliefs, as they do for each of you watching this panel discussion this evening.
4. **Importance of Growth.** Let me first discuss how important growth is to our community? Growth can add to our quality of life by providing essential services, not just fast food restaurants and a gas station but also medical offices, colleges, health clubs, etc. It creates job opportunities and provides other amenities. Builds places where people want to live, desirable communities. But it can also reduce quality of life. I'm concerned, like many of you, about the cost of growth, controlling and planning for growth, and protecting our quality of life. Notice that I didn't say to stop growth, because that wouldn't be good either. Growth naturally occurs and we just need to better plan for it.
5. **Sprawling Growth.** We have experienced a sprawl type growth. What is the true cost of sprawling growth? There are many hidden expenses associated with expanded urban growth boundaries to accommodate new housing tracts, strip malls and town centers. Roads, schools, utilities, recreation and other services need to be provided to these areas. How do these new costs get allocated among the users? Impact fees don't cover 100% of the

incremental costs and they probably shouldn't since most of the homes built prior to these didn't pay 100% of the incremental cost to provide them with public services. We either end up paying for it in higher taxes for everyone or through reduced services, crowded schools, expensive water, congested and unsafe roads, higher sewer and electricity bills. Are there smarter ways to grow that aren't as costly and have a favorable impact on our neighborhood quality of life?

6. **Quality of development.** Are we simply housing people with little regard for the socio and environmental amenities which improve quality of living? The diversity of housing options is very limited. No architectural Design standards or requirements exist in commercial and residential codes. Many other communities have these; some are very restrictive to protect historic districts. We need design standards in the code to protect and enhance the quality of development and hence preserve our quality of life.
7. **Balanced growth.** The type of growth that we have experience is way out of balance. We need to bring back into balance so that public services can keep up with that growth. More balance in our economy, diversify industry, less reliance on residential and commercial construction to fuel the local economy.
8. **High Growth & High Unemployment.** Right now we have a paradox that exists; we not only have high growth but also high unemployment. One fellow neighborhood leader asked me how this could be? I've given this a lot of thought but I'm not sure what totally explains this. Certainly, low mortgage rates are a factor. Clark County's unemployment was recently reported in The Columbian newspaper article at 8.8%, which was higher than the Washington state-wide average of 6.5% and higher than the 5.6% nation-wide average. Many agree that our community needs to work on creating more family wage jobs. How that will be done is yet to be determined, but I agree that it's the right direction.

9. What impacts has high growth had on our neighborhoods?

- Increased traffic and speeding, safety
- Ongoing construction activity
- Lack of adequate Public facilities, like roads grid with cross circulation and undeveloped parks
- Overcrowded schools, use of portables
- Incompatible adjoining uses – Asphalt Plant next to a resident neighborhood as an example, has a negative impact on quality of life.
- Crime?

10. **Tax Measures on the Rise.** Pressures of this high growth are starting to show up at the ballot box. I am amazed at the number and size of the requests from our local agencies. Here is a partial list of ballot measures:

- Library – \$48M, Three Creeks in Salmon Creek
- C-Tran – Sales tax increase from 0.3% to 0.6%
- City of Vancouver – floating the idea of a sales tax increase 0.1%
- Vancouver-Clark Parks & Recreation – Park District created and funding for maintenance
- City of Battle Ground also considering putting a bond measure on the ballot next year
- Battle Ground School District – bond measure in May
- Camas and Washougal School districts are also considering ballot measures
- Fire District #6 will have a replacement levy coming up for a vote
- Sewer Treatment plant expansion at Salmon Creek or new one in Battleground \$40M+
- Battleground Parks \$7.5 M

If Initiative 864 (Tim Eyman's) gets on the ballot this next fall and passes, we will see a big increase in the number of tax related funding measures before local voters. 25% local tax cut, no impact on schools.

11. **Education is impacted.** A skilled and knowledgeable workforce helps attract industry. This will help our local economy. High school graduation rates were reported recently to be as low at 66%. That means 1 in 3 students don't earn a high school diploma. I'm not sure how accurate these figures are, since many students who don't complete high school go on to earn a GED. Limited opportunities for our most talented youth, many chose to leave the area, this also impacts our ability to attract new industry.

12. **Transportation** – congestion and the impact this has on moving freight. Health of our economy really depends on ease in moving goods.

13. **Parks & Recreation, Sport Fields** Major shortfall, starting to be addressed \$\$\$\$
Harmony and Fairgrounds

14. **Multi-jurisdictional cooperation** needs to improve. In Clark County there are probably well over 40 different local government agencies-city governments, Fire and Cemetery Districts, ports, schools, etc. Improved cooperation between these various agencies will be even more important in the future as our community continues to grow and the urban areas expand further. One success story is the GEM (Ground Equipment Maintenance) program started back in 1994. Several agencies are members and they trade services and equipment to save taxpayer money. It's been a huge success and growing ever since. There are also examples of interagency agreements by Clark County Sheriff's Department. These kind of cooperative efforts should be supported and encourage new ones to form.

15. **Clark County Regional Service provider** - gets inadequate tax revenues to provide urban level of services within the city urban growth boundaries that are currently unincorporated. Most of the vacant and buildable lands are within these areas; therefore most of the growth will occur. In the absence of any further annexations or city incorporations, the urban unincorporated areas will have to either pay more to receive urban services (Park Maintenance) or accept a declining level of service.

16. **Public participation** is critical in shaping the future of Clark County. We face a number of challenges to continue to maintain our quality of life. I feel confident that the community will come together to find solutions to many of the challenges we face. I'm optimistic that Clark County will continue to be a great place to live, work and play.