



CITY OF
Vancouver
WASHINGTON



Five-Year Economic Development Strategy

May 2025



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Introduction

The creation of the five-year Economic Development Strategy began nearly four years ago, following the establishment of the Economic Prosperity and Housing Department. At the time, the City of Vancouver was navigating the challenges related to recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted significant opportunities and challenges related to Vancouver's economy. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach, City leadership initiated this Strategy to guide proactive investments in economic security and opportunity for all current and future residents.

Currently, Vancouver is experiencing significant change. Once a bedroom community, the city is now considered an economic driver of the bi-state Greater Portland region due to its sustained population and job growth. Vancouver has attracted an increasing number of professional workers while at the same time becoming less concentrated in traditional manufacturing sectors, resulting in a resident population that is more educated and has higher incomes. Several factors have contributed to this, including Washington's lack of state income tax, investments in public infrastructure and large-scale redevelopment projects, and relatively lower costs compared with other communities in the region. While Vancouver is experiencing positive economic activity, its recent population boom has increased the cost of living, resulting in greater displacement pressures and growing economic disparities for underserved communities.

Given these dynamics, this Strategy takes an inclusive approach to growth and seeks to sustain the city's economic competitiveness and intentionally address growing disparities.

Acknowledgments

This strategy could not have been possible without economic development stakeholders' and community leaders' many volunteer hours. We are grateful for the challenging questions raised, the push to develop an ambitious and aspirational economic vision for Vancouver, and guidance in developing bold yet practical actions. Your input was instrumental in shaping this Strategy.

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About this strategy

This Strategy's Competition Position Statement and Long-Term Vision provide direction for the City as it seeks to invest in economic development, with implementation organized around four Goals:

1. Establish pathways to accessible quality jobs and reduce barriers to economic opportunity.
2. Create opportunities for generational wealth, especially for underserved communities, by strengthening support for small businesses.
3. Position Vancouver as an inclusive center of innovation and entrepreneurship.
4. Invest in neighborhood commercial districts that result in safe, vibrant and accessible communities.

A consistent theme across the Strategy's Goals is wealth creation, whether through access to higher-paying jobs, more successful small businesses, or new innovative industries and ventures. If centered on broad economic opportunity, Vancouver residents and families will be better positioned to navigate our region's rapidly increased cost of living while laying the groundwork for our community to continue attracting investment long-term.

Each of the Strategy's Goals is supported by a set of Actions—programs, initiatives, and investments—designed to impact outcomes and Success Metrics to help the City measure progress.

Regional alignment

Economies don't stop at municipal borders; they are determined by the available workforce and commuting patterns, infrastructure and connectivity, and industry competitive advantages, among other factors. At a regional level, Vancouver's Strategy is aligned with the [Clark County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan](#), led by the Columbia River Economic Development Council (CREDC), which provides a roadmap for economic growth and competitiveness through business recruitment, retention and expansion activities in southwest Washington. CREDC's marketing, branding and business development efforts also help position the area's key industry clusters—computers and electronics, software and technology, clean tech, metals and machinery manufacturing, and life sciences—to remain nationally and globally competitive.

Similarly, this Strategy seeks to complement [Workforce Southwest Washington's 2025–2029 Strategic Plan](#), the region's blueprint for defining and promoting livable-wage jobs, creating pathways for workers to access quality employment opportunities, and helping employers identify and attract talent.

Aligned with City priorities

Vancouver's Economic Development Strategy is connected with the City's values and priorities. It aligns with several frameworks and plans to address key opportunities and challenges impacting our economy and community, including:

- [Vancouver's 2023–2029 Strategic Plan](#)
- [2023 Housing Report and Action Plan](#)
- [Climate Action Framework](#)
- [2024 Vancouver Disparity Study](#)
- [Our Vancouver – Comprehensive Plan 2045](#)



Implementation approach

Over the next five years, Vancouver City Council and City staff, led by the Economic Prosperity and Housing Department, will commit resources to support implementation. This Strategy is purposely biased toward action, not an exhaustive list of potential ideas. Significant effort went into identifying a priority set of Actions where the City is positioned to lead within a limited resource environment. Additionally, the Actions in this Strategy are not meant to be an inflexible to-do list, but rather, to serve as priorities that will be reviewed regularly to ensure the work continues to be responsive to evolving community needs.

In the implementation of each Action, the City is committed to building partnerships with stakeholders and organizations, engaging community members, and utilizing the most recent data available to design initiatives, programs or investment opportunities. In addition, the role of the City will vary according to the Actions. Certain initiatives acknowledge efforts by stakeholders and position the City to be a more engaged partner. Where new programs are proposed, the City will take a lead role in convening, launching, and identifying resources but not necessarily own in the long term. Vancouver continues the long-held belief that organizations working closest to the communities we are seeking to serve will result in the best outcomes.

The City is also committed to transparency and accountability. To ensure progress remains visible and measurable, the City will update the community and elected officials. These updates may include public reports or presentations that track key data trends or milestones, highlight successes and identify challenges or shifts in priorities. By maintaining open lines of communication, the City aims to build trust, invite collaboration and ensure that stakeholders are informed and engaged throughout the strategy's implementation.



Discovery and analysis

The City embarked on developing a five-year economic development strategy to ensure that it is best positioned to meet the needs of residents, workers, businesses and entrepreneurs. [ECONorthwest](#), our consulting partner, supported this work through analysis, community engagement and facilitation.

The first phase of the strategy development process was to conduct a comprehensive assessment of Vancouver's economy. Data analysis and community perspectives were captured through the following efforts:

- Stakeholder and Community Engagement
 - An online community-wide survey yielding more than 420 unique participants.
 - Three focus groups, including medium and large traded sector employers, local serving small businesses and high growth startups and investors.
 - One-on-one interviews with elected officials and City administrators.
 - Presentations to stakeholder groups and public boards.
 - Two separate economic trends analyses: [Comprehensive Plan Economic Conditions & Opportunity Analysis and Economic Development Strategy Situation Assessment](#)
- Four Community Leaders Steering Committee meetings
- Four Core Planning Team work sessions

Collectively, these efforts anchored the Strategy in a comprehensive understanding of current economic conditions and sentiments. They highlighted opportunities and challenges, community priorities, and potential strategic actions. The key findings that emerged from the discovery phase include:

Growth and competitiveness

- Vancouver and Clark County are driving regional growth (population and jobs) throughout the Greater Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area.
- The city has a favorable business climate, particularly compared to the region, that attracts investment.
- Most of the city's recent job growth and the industries with the highest local concentration are non-traded sectors (construction, healthcare and social assistance, accommodation and food services, retail, etc.).
- A larger share of people who recently moved to Vancouver work in Washington compared to Oregon, 69% in 2022 compared to 57% in 2017, reflecting the job opportunities in Vancouver and Southwest Washington.
- Stakeholders, particularly residents, have lukewarm sentiments regarding residential, commercial and industrial growth.
- Vancouver and Clark County are experiencing a significant increase in new business starts compared to before the pandemic, indicating an increase in entrepreneurial activity.
- Growing perception that small businesses and entrepreneurs do not have access to the local resources they need to support long-term growth.
- Limited commercialization and research and development opportunities hinder innovation in the city.

Quality of life and affordability

- Residents are more educated with 32% of adults ages 25 and over having a bachelor's degree or higher in 2023 compared to 26% in 2012.
- Median household incomes climbed to \$80,618 in 2023, up from \$59,000 in 2012.
- Significant racial and ethnic disparities exist in income, education and housing access.
- Increasing concern over the affordability of Vancouver, particularly housing costs and commercial lease rates.
- Better access to quality jobs is residents' most important economic outcome.
- Living wage standards are significantly higher than the area median income for families with kids.
- Growing concern about public safety, property vacancies, and homelessness downtown and in neighborhood business districts.
- A shortage of affordable, reliable childcare is negatively impacting workforce stability.

Strategic clarity

Competitive position: Why Vancouver?

The unique and sustainable value Vancouver currently delivers to residents, workers, businesses and entrepreneurs that must be protected going forward.

At the doorstep of some of the most stunning natural beauty and outdoor recreation opportunities in the United States, Vancouver offers access to big city amenities with the convenience of a smaller, more nimble and connected community. For residents, workers, businesses and entrepreneurs, Vancouver offers:

- An expanding economy with growing market opportunities for entrepreneurs, small businesses and startups to scale.
- A diversity of competitive and growing industries, creating pathways to economic opportunity and stability.
- A favorable business climate, growing talent base and a predictable regulatory environment that is attractive to new investment.
- Access to major West Coast and global markets with a world-class international airport, convenient highway network, deep-water port and established rail infrastructure.
- A strong sustainability ethos with climate advantages that position the community to navigate current and future climate change and natural resource challenges.
- A high quality of life with strong K-12 schools, a post-secondary education and workforce system that creates pathways to quality jobs, accessible transportation options and the availability of top-notch healthcare.
- A supportive and collaborative community with a shared interest and strong commitment to uplifting people.



Long-term economic vision

The ideal long-term vision (20+ years) we are trying to create for Vancouver as a community and an economy.

Vancouver is an inclusive community with an equitable, competitive and innovative economy where:

- Growth is sustained, creating ongoing economic opportunities for workers, businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Industry clusters—advanced manufacturing, computer and electronics, clean tech, software and life sciences—continue to innovate and evolve to include new technologies such as artificial intelligence, advanced materials or renewable energy.
- Persistent economic disparities are closed, and the city's median household income exceeds the regional average.
- Individuals and families have opportunities to create wealth regardless of background or identity.
- Jobs paying livable wages are accessible across a diversity of industries.
- Entrepreneurs, innovators, and risk-takers are celebrated, and small businesses can access the resources needed to scale.
- Neighborhood business districts are safe, vibrant and welcoming.

Bright Indirect Light Social Club





Strategic focus and action



Goals

**High-level outcomes
Vancouver must achieve
over the five-year
strategy horizon.**



Success metrics*

**Data and economic trends
Vancouver will monitor
to evaluate impact and
success.**



Actions

**Vancouver will commit
to implementing finite-
duration, discretionary
programs, initiatives,
and investments.**

*Every effort will be given to disaggregate data to ensure success metrics provide insight into which communities and groups are benefiting from the work of this strategy.



Goal 1: Establish pathways to accessible quality jobs and reduce barriers to economic opportunity



Success metrics

- Median household income compared to the regional average
- Percent of jobs created resulting from City of Vancouver and partner-supported programs paying at or above Vancouver's living wage standards
- Percent of total jobs occupied by Vancouver residents



Action A: Promote and advance career opportunities in the trades

Many trades careers—carpenters, electricians, plumbers, welders, line workers, machinists, pipefitters, etc.—are attainable without a four-year college degree but still pay livable wages.¹ These same occupations are currently experiencing a labor shortage. The City will partner with existing workforce development, K-12 education, post-secondary education and industry stakeholders to help organize and amplify job fairs, develop marketing campaigns to better promote career opportunities, and partner with local construction and trade organizations to support apprentice and internship opportunities. These efforts will focus on traditional trades-dependent construction jobs, but also sectors such as clean tech, power and energy distribution, telecommunications and advanced manufacturing where skilled trades workers are in high demand. Focus will be on ensuring more equitable access to careers in trades.

Potential Partners: Clark College, Washington State University Vancouver, Workforce Southwest WA, Southwest Washington trades unions, National Association of Minority Contractors - Washington Chapter, Southwest Washington Contractors Association, Building Industry Association of Clark County, other local non-profit construction and trade support organizations, and local K-12 school districts

¹MIT Livable Wage Calculator: livingwage.mit.edu



Action B: Support growth of emerging construction and trades firms

Construction- and trades-related businesses are experiencing a shortage of workers due to an aging workforce, limited entry pathways and declining interest among younger generations. Additionally, systemic barriers, including access to training and resources, have prevented business owners from underrepresented communities from participating, broadening the labor gap. The City will work with local small business technical assistance partners to develop shared goals, align resources and programs, and create a more connected ecosystem to incubate and nurture early-stage businesses, particularly those certified by the State of Washington Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises (OMWBE)², to increase the number of local construction and trades companies.

Potential Partners: The National Association of Minority Contractors – Washington Chapter, Washington Apex Accelerator, State of Washington Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises, Southwest Washington trades unions, local small business technical assistance providers, and local government procurement offices



Action C: Develop an Investment Toolbox to support the recruitment and expansion of businesses offering access to quality jobs

Like many communities, employment growth in Vancouver is increasingly concentrated in high-wage and low-wage industries, resulting in the hollowing out of our traditional middle class. Larger employers are essential to livable-wage jobs and access to benefits, and overtime have a significant impact on a community's median household income. The City will work with economic development and workforce development partners to target traded sector business recruitment, retention, and expansion opportunities that offer access to jobs meeting the region's adopted Quality Jobs Standards.³ This includes intentionally growing key regional industry clusters such as advanced manufacturing, computer and electronics, clean tech, software and life sciences. To better facilitate these outcomes, the City will first evaluate its own systems around planning and permitting and recommend adjustments to support business expansion and recruitment. Then, the City will create an Investment Toolbox for job-focused development that includes City master planning, property acquisition, development agreement, permitting, and infrastructure investment policies, services, and resources.

Potential Partners: The Columbia River Economic Development Council, Port of Vancouver, Columbia-Willamette Workforce Collaborative and the Center City Redevelopment Authority

²OMWBE State Certification: State Certification | Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises

³Quality Jobs Framework: workforcesw.org/wp-content/uploads/cwwc-quality-jobs-framework.pdf



Action D: Incentivize employers to invest in childcare options, particularly for lower-income workers

The lack of affordable childcare in Vancouver is a barrier for employers to attract and retain talent and for entrepreneurs seeking to launch a small business. Investing in childcare also aligns with broader community priorities such as reducing poverty, improving public health outcomes and improving education outcomes. It is critical that local employers are part of the solution by offering onsite childcare or investing in community childcare options. The City will research and identify federal and state resources, explore the feasibility of local policy, permitting and code updates, tax breaks, and real estate/redevelopment community benefit agreements to encourage public-private childcare solutions.

Potential Partners: Columbia River Economic Development Council, Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Southwest WA, local foundations, local employers, local community-based organizations, and state and local childcare advocacy organizations



Relevant Coffee



Goal 2: Create opportunities for generational wealth, especially for underserved communities, by strengthening support for small businesses



Success metrics

- **Number of new business starts**
- **Number of new businesses starts in operation past the first two years**
- **Annual sales/revenues of small businesses supported by City and partner programs**



Action A: Enhance product-to-market opportunities for local consumer product entrepreneurs

Product placement with established brick-and-mortar and online retailers can help boost sales and brand reputation. Robust product-to-market programs provide critical support such as market research, packaging design, distribution strategies and access to retail partnerships, helping local consumer product entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of bringing products to market. The City will partner with local small business support organizations to launch new, or expand existing product-to-market programs, evaluate the availability of co-packing facilities and work with larger retailers to facilitate retail partnerships.

Potential Partners: U.S. Small Business Development Center, Washington State University-Vancouver Culinary Institute, Vancouver Farmer's Market, Fourth Plain Commissary Kitchen, Clark College Culinary Institute, Oregon State University – Food Innovation Center (Portland), Portland Community College – Recipe to Market Program, local small business technical assistance providers and established local retailers (brick-and-mortar, online)



Action B: Connect local small businesses to public contracting opportunities

The City seeks to ensure equitable opportunities for State of Washington Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises (OMWBE)-certified small businesses⁴ competing for construction, professional services, goods and other services contracts. While the City spends most of its procurement dollars with businesses in the region, about 9% of City contract dollars go to certified companies. This action will seek to align the City's existing small business development efforts with opportunities for federal, state, and local government procurement opportunities through public contracting events, awareness campaigns and "readiness" assessment services.

Potential Partners: State of Washington Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises, Washington Apex Accelerator, local small business technical assistance providers and public-sector procurement offices



Action C: Establish a citywide small business revolving loan fund

Access to capital remains a significant challenge to most small businesses. Small businesses are vital to the health of Vancouver's economy, ranging from main street retail establishments to local restaurants, construction businesses, small manufacturers, and software firms. These small businesses provide income for families and create jobs for residents. For many small business owners, particularly those from underserved communities, their service or product is marketable, but operating capital is out of reach. This issue is even more acute for early-stage businesses that have difficulty qualifying for traditional loans from banks or credit unions. The City will help capitalize and launch a small business revolving loan fund to help improve access to capital for early-stage businesses that don't currently qualify for traditional loans, ensuring that they remain a critical component of Vancouver's economy.

Potential Partners: Washington Department of Commerce, local and regional community development finance institutions, local small business technical assistance providers, local small businesses

⁴OMWBE State Certification: State Certification | Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises



Goal 3: Position Vancouver as an inclusive center of innovation and entrepreneurship



Success metrics

- **Employment in the region's innovation-centered industry clusters (computers and electronics, software, clean tech, technology-enhanced manufacturing, life sciences)**
- **Number and amount of local startup investment deals (angel, seed, venture capital)**
- **Number and amount of successful startup exits (IPO, M&A)**



Action A: Develop a storytelling and marketing campaign to position Vancouver as a center of innovation

The economic success of Vancouver as an entrepreneurship hub is not fully known within the region or nationally. An opportunity exists to help Vancouver transition from a “best-kept secret” status to an acknowledged driver of innovation. Vancouver is home to a blossoming startup community and several nationally competitive innovation-based industry clusters, such as advanced manufacturing, computer & electronics, software, clean tech and life sciences. A targeted storytelling and marketing campaign will highlight Vancouver's business-friendly policies, quality of life, entrepreneurship ecosystem and innovation-based sectors. By highlighting success stories, showcasing industry and entrepreneurial leaders, and emphasizing its strategic location in the Pacific Northwest, Vancouver can elevate its reputation, spur economic growth, and establish itself as a dynamic and forward-thinking city for businesses, entrepreneurs, investors, and talent.

Potential Partners: Washington Department of Commerce, Columbia River Economic Development Council, Washington State University-Vancouver, local and regional startup support organizations, industry cluster leaders, local entrepreneurs, experienced marketing and communications stakeholders



Action B: Support and host startup networking, pitch, and investment events

An important step in positioning Vancouver as an innovation hub is cultivating a vibrant ecosystem and connecting local entrepreneurs with critical resources. The City will lead in bringing startup pitch, networking, and investment events to Vancouver to provide a platform for startups to showcase their ideas, gain valuable feedback and attract funding from investors. These events will also be positioned to foster collaboration, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing among entrepreneurs, industry leaders and community stakeholders. An important focus of this Action will be to design events to attract a diversity of participants, including startup founders from underserved communities.

Potential Partners: Local/regional startup support organizations, industry cluster leaders, local entrepreneurs and startup investors



Action C: Launch a local early-stage startup investment fund

Access to capital for high-growth startups is critical to building a competitive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Unfortunately, early-stage investors mostly invest in major startup hubs like San Francisco, Seattle, Austin, and New York City, making it difficult for entrepreneurs in smaller markets to attract the investment capital they need to grow. The City will seek opportunities to help capitalize the fund as well as explore successful models focused on access to early-stage capital (angel and seed), as well as services and resources such as affordable space, founder mentoring and coaching, business development and market analysis, business planning, and networking and peer support opportunities to ensure Vancouver-based startups have access to the full suite of resources they need to grow. The primary purpose of this action is to better position Vancouver to attract and retain talented entrepreneurs, foster local economic development, and leverage our strategic location near major technology and innovation markets in the Pacific Northwest.

Potential Partners: Local and regional startup support organizations, local entrepreneurs and startup investors



Action D: Evaluate feasibility and identify partners to launch a target industry innovation center

Industry innovation is essential for the long-term economic competitiveness of a region. Specialized innovation centers have the potential to attract public and private investment, including federal and state research grants, venture capital, and corporate partnerships. Such a center would facilitate enhanced research and development through access to advanced product testing equipment and prototyping labs, incubators or accelerators to help new businesses scale, and specialized workforce training programs. Focusing the Innovation Center on one of the region's industry clusters—advanced manufacturing, computer and electronics, clean tech, software and life sciences—could position Vancouver as a regional or national leader in that sector, further attracting businesses, entrepreneurs, investors and skilled talent to the city. While the development of an Innovation Center is a long-term project, initial steps the City can take will include evaluating development feasibility, selecting a target industry, and identifying private and institutional partners.

Potential Partners: Washington Department of Commerce, Columbia River Economic Development Council, Washington State University Vancouver, Clark College, local/regional startup support organizations, industry cluster businesses and leaders, local entrepreneurs and startup investors





Sorya Asian Market



Goal 4: Invest in neighborhood commercial districts that result in safe, vibrant and accessible communities



Success metrics

- Number of vacant or underutilized commercial properties in priority neighborhood commercial districts
- Number of jobs in priority neighborhood commercial districts
- Access to essential neighborhood services (food, housing, transportation, childcare, medical, etc.) near priority neighborhood commercial districts



Action A: Establish a Neighborhood Business District Improvement Program

Neighborhood business districts serve as hubs for essential goods and services, create local jobs, and foster a sense of place and community for residents. These districts support small businesses, which often reflect the unique character and culture of the community, enhancing the area's identity and vibrancy. However, some existing neighborhood commercial areas struggle with property vacancy or underutilization, have minimal access to essential goods and services, provide few entertainment options or are challenged by persistent blight and public safety issues. The City will seek to create a formal Neighborhood Business District Improvement Program, including identifying priority districts and corridors, and neighborhood-level funding options, such as Business Improvement Areas, to resource services such as security improvements, public realm and district beautification investments, art installations, shop local campaigns, or public events and entertainment activities.

Potential Partners: Neighborhood associations, business district organizations, chambers of commerce, small businesses and property owners



Action B: Leverage City-controlled real estate assets or redevelopment projects to provide affordable commercial solutions

For many entrepreneurs and small businesses, current market-rate commercial leases are too expensive, creating a barrier to business growth, limiting economic diversity, and often leading to an increase in underutilized properties. The City will evaluate opportunities to leverage existing City-owned real estate assets or redevelopment projects to offer affordable commercial opportunities for qualified businesses. A key component of this effort would also include researching best practices related to community ownership, co-op, or adaptive reuse models.

Potential Partners: Center City Redevelopment Authority, partner real estate developers, small business technical assistance providers and local small businesses

