

# Clark County Community Guide

Working together for community livability



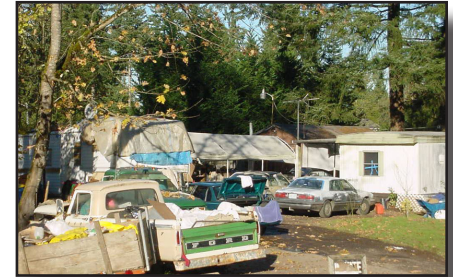
Clark County Code Enforcement

Dear Neighbor,

Welcome to Clark County Code Enforcement's Community Guide. We hope you find it informative and helpful. This guide provides basic information on common neighborhood concerns, how to be a "good neighbor," how to maintain your property, and who to call if you need assistance. Many of the references in the guide can be found in the Clark County Code (CCC) which can be viewed at [www.clark.wa.gov](http://www.clark.wa.gov).

Thank you for taking the time to read the guide. Clark County Code Enforcement is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for the citizens of the county through compliance with the county's zoning, nuisance, and building codes.

The mission of the Code Enforcement program is to promote and maintain a safe and desirable living and working environment. We help maintain and improve the quality of our community by administering a fair and unbiased enforcement program to correct violations of county codes and land use requirements.



Code Enforcement efforts result in major clean-up of this residential property.



Our purpose is to protect the safety and welfare of our residents, to promote and preserve community livability through an effective compliance program.

#### Our values

- Integrity, fairness, compassion, positive attitude, and consistent endeavor
- Respect for ourselves, co-workers, and those we serve
- Accountability to our community
- Excellent customer service



Clark County Code Enforcement is a function within the Community Development’s Code Administration division. We primarily enforce public nuisance, building and fire code violations, and land use and zoning regulations set forth in Clark County Code. The county obtains its authority by the Washington state Constitution which permits counties to make and enforce within its limits all local, police, sanitary, and other ordinances and regulations no in conflict with general laws of the land. The courts generally view land use ordinances as valid exercises of police power when reasonable related to public health, safety, and welfare.

### Reporting a violation

The code enforcement workload is almost entirely driven by the complaints of private citizens; Code Enforcement officers do not proactively survey the county looking for violations.

When reporting a violation, please be prepared to provide us with detailed information including the property address or detailed location of the violation and a detailed description of your concern. Please be aware that not all complaints submitted are within our scope or authority to resolve.

Code Enforcement prefers to receive complaints online at [www.clark.wa.gov/community-development/report-safety-concern](http://www.clark.wa.gov/community-development/report-safety-concern) or 564.397.2408.

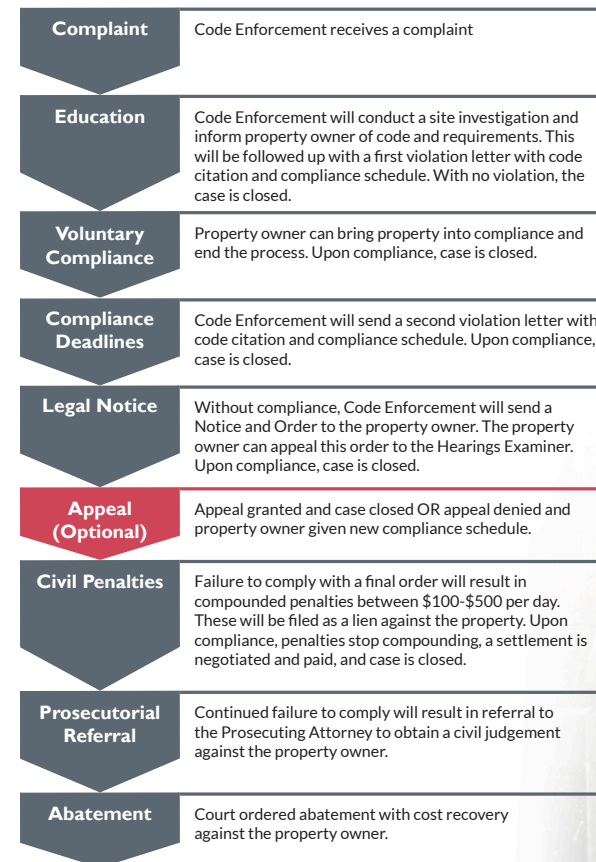
Once a complaint is received we will open a case and begin our research and investigation.

### Investigating and documenting a case

Code Enforcement officers are fact gatherers, fact evaluators, and the primary witnesses to violations. A reporting party or complainant reports violations. Complaints are received by phone or

online via our website. From the moment a complaint is received, the officers are tasked with collecting and evaluating facts.

Once a violation is verified, the county will inform and educate the property owner and give them a specified time frame in which to fix the violation. If the owner fails to meet the compliance schedule, a Notice and Order or a citation can be issued. These carry daily fines between \$100 and \$500 per day. The accumulation of fines and penalties can be filed as a lien against the property or as a personal debt which negatively affects someone’s credit rating. In cases where compliance cannot be achieved voluntarily, an order for abatement can be issued by the court. Court ordered abatements are costly and could result in foreclosure of the property.



## Commonly reported items

**Abandoned buildings** – Buildings that are open and accessible may attract malicious mischief activity or trespassing. Contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408.

**Animals** – All farm animals, except roosters, peacocks, and turkeys, are allowed in the urban areas of Clark County. Livestock owners are required to manage their livestock so that their odor and noise do not unreasonably disturb others. If you have a problem with your neighbor's livestock, contact Community Mediation Services at 360.334.5862. If mediation fails, contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408. For domestic animal problems like barking noise, loose dogs, or animal cruelty issues, contact Animal Protection & Control at 564.397.2488.

**Fences** – Fences seven feet in height or less do not require a building permit and may be placed on the property line.

**Garden sheds, gazebos and play structures** – Generally, you may construct a shed, gazebo, or play structure without a building permit if it meets the following standards: the structure contains no more than 200 square feet of floor area, with overhangs that do not exceed 16 inches; the floor elevation is 18 inches or less in height; the structure is less than 12 feet in height; roof drainage is contained on site (gutters and downspouts); and no utilities. In urban zoned areas one shed, gazebo, or play structure may be located in the side or rear setback with a minimum 2 foot setback from the property line. Additional structures must be set back at least five feet. Properties with rural zoning, contact Permit Services for building setback requirements. If your property is located within a wetland, shoreline, or other critical area, you may have additional requirements. Contact Permit Services for more information at 564.397.4078.

**Grading and filling** - Moving or disturbing dirt on your property in excess of 50 cubic yards may require a grading permit. Moving dirt means hauling material in, hauling it out, or just moving it around. Contact Public Works at 564.397.6118.

**Home business** – Most home businesses are allowed but require permit approval from the county. You are NOT allowed to park business-related vehicles on county streets, store materials or equipment in view of your neighbors, or conduct retail sales. For complaints, contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408.

**Illegal dumping** – Dumping trash and debris lowers the standards of our neighborhoods. Please keep your eye open for this activity. If possible, get a description of the person doing the dumping and their vehicle information, and contact the Sheriff's Office at 311 (non-emergency line).

**Noise** – Excessive noise can detract from the quality of life in a neighborhood. For amplified music or public disturbance noises, contact the Clark County Sheriff's office at 311 (non-emergency line). If the noise is associated with industrial or commercial activities, contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408.

**Private roads and easements** - Private roads and easements are maintained by the property owners who use the road or driveway. Code Enforcement and the Sheriff have no authority to address parking complaints or abandoned vehicles on private roads and easements.

**Public nuisance** – Some common code violations related to property maintenance are a failure to remove junk, debris, and other discarded items. Inoperable vehicles and tall grass are also a public nuisance. Contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408.

**Signs** – Signs play a vital role in identifying businesses. However, the county has sign rules which regulate their size, location,



and number. Some types of signs which are not allowed include temporary banners, A-frames, flags, and signs with flashing lights. See page nine for more details. Contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408.

**Recreational vehicles** – RVs, motor homes, and travel trailers are NOT allowed for long-term occupancy in Clark County outside of an approved RV park. However, you can occupy them for 30 consecutive days but no more than 60 days in a calendar year when located on private property. For complaints regarding RVs on private property, contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408. For information on parking RVs on a public, county road, contact Public Works at 564-397-2434.

**Retaining walls** – A permit is required for retaining walls over four feet in height, when measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, and/or for walls that support a load (surcharge). Engineering by a Washington State registered engineer is required for all retaining walls requiring a permit. Contact Permit Services for more information at 564.397.4078.

**Roofing** – Re-roofing permits are required for all buildings in Clark County. A separate permit may be required if structural work such as replacing roof sheathing is necessary. Generally, a maximum of two layers of roofing may be applied to a residential structure. Contact Permit Services for more information at 564.397.4078.

**Storage of household items** – outside storage of items, such as appliances and furniture, is not allowed. Store these items in your garage. Temporary PODS or shipping containers may be used for only two weeks and only when placed on your property and not on the street.

**Tall grass/weeds** – In the urban areas, it is a violation to have tall grass, weeds, or blackberry bushes over 12 inches

high in the front, back, or side yards. For complaints, contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408. If you have a problem with noxious weeds, contact Vegetation Management at 564.397.6140.

**Vacant lots** – If you own a vacant lot, make sure it is kept free of weeds, tall grass, trash and debris all year long.

**Vehicles/Boats, inoperable or abandoned** – If a junk or abandoned vehicle or boat has been left on a county road, contact the Sheriff's Office to report it at 311 (non-emergency line). Code Enforcement and the Sheriff have no authority to address abandoned vehicles on private roads and easements. If junk vehicles are on private property, contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408.

**Vehicle repair** – It is a violation to repair vehicles, other than your own, in an urban residential zone. In rural areas, commercial vehicle repair may be allowed with the proper permits. For complaints regarding commercial repair activities, contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408.

For complaints about noise, contact the Sheriff's Office at 311 (non-emergency line).

For complaints about noxious fumes and odors, contact Southwest Washington Air Pollution Control at 360.574.3058 or [www.swcleanair.org](http://www.swcleanair.org).

For complaints about hazardous spills, contact the Department of Ecology at 360.407.6300 or [ecology.wa.gov](http://ecology.wa.gov).

**Yard sales/garage sales** – You can have two garage sales per year and they can last no longer than three days. Sale signs can not be any larger than 2'x 3' and must be removed within 24 hours of the end of the sale.

## Sign 101

Most portable advertising signs you see around Clark County are not allowed. And almost every other advertising sign requires a permit. Some common signage found within Clark County is listed below. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list of signs regulated by the county's sign ordinance but as a guide for which signs may or may not be allowed in your neighborhood.

### Allowed signs

**Political signs** must be placed no closer than 10' from the edge of the road and must be removed within 15 days after election day.

**Agricultural signs** advertising agricultural activities or locations such as berry farms, trees, pumpkin patches, or farmer's markets.

**Real estate signs** are allowed on the property which is listed for sale. One large sign is allowed at the entrance to a new subdivision or development.

**Garage sale signs** shall be freestanding and removed within twenty-four (24) hours of completion of the sale. No sign shall be larger than two (2) feet by three (3) feet.

**No trespassing signs** are allowed along the border of the property. Signs must be two square feet or less.

Portions of the Highway 99 Sub Area of NE Hazel Dell have additional sign standards that may differ from those listed here.

Sign complaints can be filed online at [www.clark.wa.gov/code-administration/report-safety-concern](http://www.clark.wa.gov/code-administration/report-safety-concern). For more information on sign permits, please contact Permit Services at 564.397.4078.

### Signs that are not allowed

**Temporary signs, banners, flags** - Anything of a temporary nature is not permitted unless used for a grand opening announcement. A temporary permit is required and is good for 30 days or less.

**Portable A-frame signs** are not permitted in most cases. If permitted, they must not block the sidewalk.

**Real estate signs** which are NOT on the property listed for sale.

**Signs on utility poles** are NOT allowed. Contact Clark Public Utilities at 360.992.3000.

Other signs not allowed:

- Signs in the county's right-of-way or on the sidewalk
- Signs over 35' tall
- Signs that impair or block a driver's vision
- Signs that block a sidewalk
- Signs containing strobe lights
- Signs that rotate or are located on rooftops

## Frequently asked questions

### Do you take anonymous complaints?

Yes. However, if the violation cannot be seen from a public roadway and you are not willing to provide your contact information, your complaint will be closed without further action or notification from our office. Code Enforcement does not release complaining party information unless required to do so through an official public records request.

### Can I trim the tree limbs from my neighbor's tree that is hanging over on to my property?

Yes. Generally, you have the right to trim branches and limbs that extend past the property line. However, it only allows tree trimming and tree cutting up to the property line. You may not go onto the neighbor's property or destroy the tree. If you do harm the tree, you could be found liable for damages.

### Can I put my basketball hoop on the sidewalk?

No. Basketball hoops and other recreational items are not allowed to be placed in the street or on the public sidewalk. Sidewalks are to remain clear for the safe travel of pedestrians and the street should be kept clear for the traveling public and public service vehicles.

### I am a renter and my landlord will not fix things I believe may be unsafe. What can I do?

Clark County does not have a housing standard or maintenance code. We do not inspect routine household maintenance complaints like leaking pipes, mold, or electrical issues. However, if you feel you are living in a structurally dangerous situation, contact Code Enforcement at 564.397.2408.

If you have been unsuccessful in working with your landlord, you may want to seek Landlord Tenant resources for

legal advice, mediation, or Small Claims Court (for claims under \$5,000, no attorney is necessary). Some other helpful information and resources for tenants can be found at the Washington State Attorney General's Web site at [www.atg.wa.gov](http://www.atg.wa.gov) or the Northwest Justice Project's Web site at [www.nwjustice.org](http://www.nwjustice.org).

### Does the county regulate or inspect electrical work?

No. The Washington State Department of Labor & Industries issues electrical permits and conducts inspections of electrical work. Contact them at 360.896.2300.

### How many cars can I have on my property and can I park them on the grass?

Clark County does not regulate the number of cars you can have on your property as long as they are in good running condition. The county prohibits parking your motor vehicles or recreational vehicles on the grass in the front yard of urban zoned properties. Park on impervious or paved surfaces to reduce oil and gas that may leak into the soil.

### There is a semi-truck parked near my house on the county street. Is that allowed?

Typically, any trucks that weigh more than 10,000 pounds or trailers longer than 20 feet may NOT be left or parked on the street in residential areas. Contact the Sheriff's Office at 311 (non-emergency line).

### Would someone from Code Enforcement come and talk to our neighborhood association or group about various concerns or issues?

Absolutely! Contact our office at 564.397.2408 and we will be happy to schedule a presentation.



## Helpful phone numbers

### Clark County

Animal Control 564.397.2488

Building Safety 564.397.4078

Public Works, erosion control and grading,  
critical area and habitat area complaints 564.397.6118

Fire Marshal 564.397.2186

Neighborhood Outreach 564.397.2136

Permit Services 564.397.4078

Public Health, environmental complaints 564.397.8083

Public Works, transportation/traffic concerns 564.397.2446

Sheriff's Office, inoperable or abandoned vehicles  
on a county street (non-emergency line) 311

Vegetation Management 564.397.6140

### Other agencies

City of Vancouver Code Enforcement 360.487.7810

Department of Labor & Industries –  
mobile/manufactured home and  
electrical permit questions 360.896.2300

Southwest Washington Clean  
Air Agency, dust and odor  
complaints, asbestos 360.574.3058

## Community Mediation Services

There are many neighbor-to-neighbor issues that are not necessarily code violations. There are many circumstances where Code Enforcement does not have the authority to resolve the problem. In these cases, we highly recommend mediation as one way to solve a dispute.

Community Mediation Services (CMS) provides Clark County residents with an informal, private way to improve communication and resolve disagreements. Mediation is successful in over 85 percent of cases.

### What is mediation?

Mediation is an informal and confidential way for people to work through a disagreement. The voluntary process encourages solutions which work for all participants. Impartial certified mediators help people discuss difficult issues and develop their own solutions. Mediators do not take sides or make decisions about the outcome.

### How does mediation work?

We listen to you. We can contact the other party. We can arrange a productive meeting.

### Contact information:

[www.mediationclarkcounty.org](http://www.mediationclarkcounty.org)

360.334.5862

[info@mediationclarkcounty.org](mailto:info@mediationclarkcounty.org)

## Neighborhood Outreach Program

Clark County recognizes the value of neighborhood associations and working with residents to build community. For more information on neighborhood associations, please visit [www.clark.wa.gov/county-manager/about-neighborhood-associations](http://www.clark.wa.gov/county-manager/about-neighborhood-associations).



Clark County  
Community Development  
**Code Enforcement**

500 W 8th Street, Suite 100  
Vancouver WA 98660  
564.397.2408

To file a complaint online, visit  
[www.clark.wa.gov/community-development/  
report-neighborhood-concern](http://www.clark.wa.gov/community-development/report-neighborhood-concern)

Email  
codenfor@clark.wa.gov

Web  
[www.clark.wa.gov/community-development](http://www.clark.wa.gov/community-development)

Hours  
Monday through Friday  
8 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
by appointment only

For an online version of this brochure, visit  
[www.clark.wa.gov/community-  
development/code-enforcement](http://www.clark.wa.gov/community-development/code-enforcement)



For an alternate format, contact the  
Clark County ADA Compliance Office.  
Phone: 564.397.2322  
Relay: 711 or 800.833.6384  
Email: ADA@clark.wa.gov