



Clean Water Commission

ANNUAL REPORT

Clean Water Division

2023 REPORT

Approved April 3, 2024



Clark County Clean Water Commission

2023 Annual Report



2023 Commissioners

Matthew Jones, Chair
Robert Trost, Vice Chair ^
Brendan Addis *
Ted Gathe
Rodger Hauge
Jeff Kessenich

Sandra Martin-Boehm
Justin Maynard +
Joshua Seeds

* Jan - June Chair
 ^ June – Dec Vice Chair
 + Filled Addis’ remaining term

On behalf of the Clark County Clean Water Commission, I approve the 2023 Annual Report to the Clark County Councilors.

Ted Gathe, 2024 CWC Chair

April 3, 2024
 Dated

Clark County Clean Water Commission

2023 Annual Report

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Clark County Clean Water Commission

2023 Annual Report



Executive Summary

In January 2023, two new Commissioners were appointed, and one previous Commissioner was reappointed to serve on the Clean Water Commission (CWC). The Commission met for six regularly scheduled business meetings and two special meetings. The first special meeting was a training session for new Commissioners conducted by current Commissioners and Clean Water Division staff. The second special meeting was a symposium organized by the Commission and conducted by Commission and Clean Water Division staff directed at improved understanding and coordination of water quality issues in the Lacamas Watershed.

The Clean Water Commission's 2023 areas of focus were:

1. Organizing and conducting the Lacamas Watershed Symposium.
2. Continuing to learn about the NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) Phase 1 permit requirements, the Clean Water Division responsibilities, and the findings from the Stream Health Report in order to better advise staff and the county leadership.
3. Instituting a discussion about updating the county code establishing the CWC and aligning the new code with the CWC's mission and strategic plan and incorporating the necessary language to accommodate the changes in the county government structure since the code's adoption in 1999.
4. Continuing to develop ways to build upon existing regional partnerships related to maintaining and improving healthy watersheds in Clark County. Such efforts to include stormwater management watershed education and finding innovative ways to address inclusivity and environmental justice issues.

- Two administrative issues were addressed: (1) Standing work groups were abolished in favor of targeted work groups directed at specific tasks and (2) conducting an extensive review and update of the commission bylaws.

This annual report details the mission, vision, and values, scheduled meeting topics, accomplishments, action plans, and recommendations for the upcoming year. The Clean Water Commission will continue to advise the Clean Water Division, County Manager and Clark County Council on watershed and stormwater management issues.



Clean Water Mission and Vision Statements

Mission

The Clean Water Commission's mission is to collaborate with Clark County residents, government entities, businesses, and non-profit organizations to enhance water quality, improve flow, and protect the ecological integrity of our watersheds.

Vision

A Clark County with self-sustaining and healthy watersheds that benefit the county's human communities, wildlife, and environment.

The members of the Clean Water Commission will in all actions and recommendations strive to achieve healthy watersheds throughout Clark County and to ensure the integrity of the water cycle, guided by best available science. The CWC recognizes the importance of the community's needs, recommending practical actions that are feasible within Clark County.

The Clean Water Commission seeks to cultivate a more informed community, recognizing that all Clark County surface waters that flow to the Columbia River derive from watersheds entirely contained within Clark County (with the exception of several healthy headwaters). Therefore, improving our local water quality and quantity management practices yield environmental benefits both locally across the County and downstream in the Columbia River.

Core Values

- Stewardship
- Cooperation
- Transparency

Meetings

The commission conducted hybrid (in-person and virtual) meetings in the Public Service Center Conference Room 698 and via Webex software. The Clean Water Commission's strategic plan helped guide the body and helped give framework for discussing stormwater impacts upon watershed health in Clark County. The 2023 meeting topics and action items are available on the [Clean Water Commission](#) website and in Appendix B. Overall, the meeting attendance was excellent with only a few of the commissioners having conflicts.

The public was encouraged to participate in the Clean Water Commission meetings in following ways:

- Attend in person at the Public Service Center in Conference Room #698.
- Submit written comments to cleanwater@clark.wa.gov by noon the day of the meeting.
- Attend the meeting by calling (408) 418-9388 and then entering the meeting's access code.
- Attend virtually by clicking on the link that was provided on the website and the agendas.

This information was published on the county's website, on the meeting agendas, and in the meeting announcement which is published in the newspaper of record.

During the course of the year only one public comment was received from an individual concerned about the impacts of the unhoused population encampments on watersheds within Clark County, particularly in the Burnt Bridge Creek watershed. The Commission discussed this issue and, although sharing these concerns, felt that the large number of other agencies and organizations currently struggling to address the broader issues associated with the unhoused population were better positioned to help and little would be gained by CWC involvement. The fact that few public comments are received suggests that additional efforts are necessary to achieve the desired community involvement with the CWC in watershed issues. The Commission is committed to working to improve the level of public involvement with its activities.

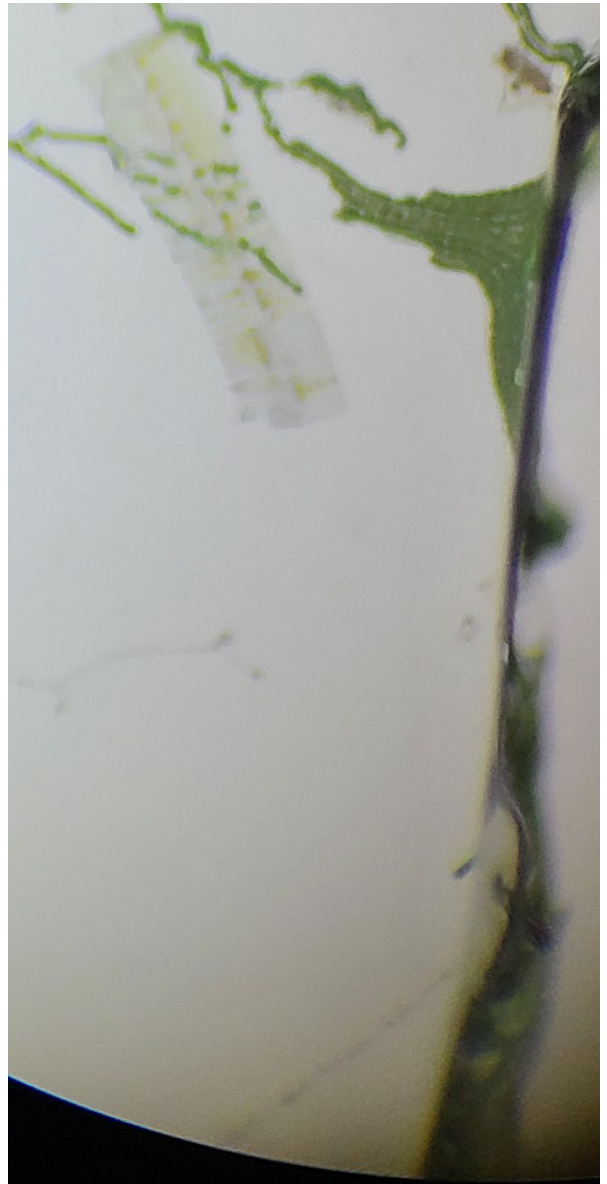
Special Meetings

An orientation meeting was conducted by several Commissioners and Clean Water Division staff to facilitate the incorporation of the new Commissioners on to the CWC. The second special meeting was the Lacamas Watershed Symposium organized by the Commission and the Clean Water Division Staff. The details and proceeding of the symposium are available on the [Clean Water Commission website](#).



Community Involvement, Events, and Education

The Clean Water Commissioners strive to be active in the community through volunteering on various environmentally focused and water quality boards, in community engagement and service events. Examples of their community involvement include volunteering with the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership, Friends of Trees, the Vancouver Urban Tree Board, at neighborhood associations and at local schools, Friends of Vancouver Lake and Friends of Lacamas Lake, and providing lake water quality data. The commissioners are committed to increasing their knowledge of current stormwater best management practices through staff presentations, stakeholder workshops and professional development conferences.



2023 Accomplishments

The Clean Water Commission took the following actions:

To improve flexibility, address emerging issues, and to provide a more focused effort in achieving specific objectives, the Commission eliminated the standing work groups in favor of targeted ones to address specific issues.

Created a work group to organize and support the development of a symposium directed at water quality issues in the Lacamas watershed. This subcommittee, the Commission as a whole and the Clean Water Division staff conducted this symposium on October 25, 2023. The result has been an improved level of coordination and cooperation among and between the various governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations working to address the water quality issues in the watershed.

In light of the county's government organizational structure changes over the years, in August, the Commission sent a letter to the County Council regarding the need for an update to the county code which originally authorized the creation of the Clean Water Commission and defined its scope and reporting responsibilities.

The Clean Water Division provided information to the CWC regarding the rapidly approaching time when available funding would not be adequate to meet the NPDES permit requirements. The CWC drafted a letter in support of an independent, comprehensive rate study to be presented to the Clark County Council and the County Manager.

Created a work group to review and draft amendments to the bylaws. This subcommittee submitted a set of changes to the Commission primarily directed at improving the function of the CWC and addressing improved efforts at increasing equity, diversity, inclusion in Commission actions. These changes were approved by the Commission at the December meeting. The current bylaws are available on the Commission's website and in the County Manager's Office.



The Clean Water Commission has continued learning about the NPDES Phase 1 permit requirements, the Clean Water Division responsibilities, and the findings from the Stream Health Report in order to better assist staff and the county leadership.

The Commission continues to explore how best to develop and build upon existing regional partnerships relating to stormwater and watershed health in Clark County. The Commission is also committed to continue to support public education and ongoing efforts to improve inclusivity and addressing environmental justice issues as related to Clark County watersheds.

Interviewed and recommended new commissioners for upcoming terms.

Presented 2022 Annual Report to Council.

Ensured that all members received Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) training.

Reviewed and gave feedback to staff on the 2023 Stormwater Management Plan, 2023 Stream Health Report and the Clean Water 6-Year Capital Plans.



2023 Challenges

The CWC expects its members to actively engage in improving their understanding of the challenges facing county government regarding watershed health and storm water management throughout Clark County. To better inform the CWC on the Clean Water Division and its role in maintaining and enhancing watershed health, there have been staff presentations regarding education and community engagement, the Phase 1 NPDES Permit, the private stormwater facility inspection program, stream monitoring and assessment group's work which was highlighted in the Stream Health Report, the business pollution prevention program (local source control), and the 2022 and 2023 six-year Clean Water capital plans. These presentations and collaborations are expected to continue. This requires a considerable commitment in time and effort for the CWC to maintain as a volunteer organization.

The CWC encourages proactive communication with the public at all levels. The CWC is striving to be more proactive and better informed in order to provide better advise to county staff and leadership. This also includes creating a greater and more diverse ability to reach more disproportionately impacted populations and focusing on the environmental justice aspect of its mission.

The Clean Water Commission is very concerned about the lack of adequate staffing levels in the Clean Water Division and other key positions in Public Works such as project management, engineering, inspections, road operations since many directly support the work of Clean Water. The staffing levels have not kept up with the astronomical increases of home and business growth in Clark County, as well as the sheer amount of infrastructure the Clean Water Division is required to build, map, inspect, and maintain. This lack of staff and increased number of facilities, capital project demands, and monitoring pressures are putting a huge burden on current staff and not allowing the department to be proactive in their approach to immediate and long-term needs. The Clean Water Commission greatly supports significantly increased staffing capacity so that Clark County may continue to be in compliance with the NPDES Permit as the county continues to grow.



2024 Clean Water Commission Action Plan and Recommendations

The Clean Water Commission has identified three primary focus areas to address in 2024 and adopted the following as their priorities and recommendations:

1. The Clean Water Commission strongly supports the division's rate study and any potential fee increase to avoid the Clean Water Division's impending financial crisis which would expand the risk of not being able to meet the NEPDS permit requirements. Although the Commission continues to believe that an outside consultant would be more appropriate to conduct this study, it understands the reasons it is being conducted in-house and regardless feels that any assessment will support a significant increase in necessary funding to help ensure continued efforts to improve watershed health and stormwater management in Clark County for the benefit of the residents of Clark County.
2. The CWC, in conjunction with the Clean Water Division, proposes to organize and conduct a symposium directed at watershed issues specifically associated with Burnt Bridge Creek and Vancouver Lake in 2024. This symposium would be similar to the one conducted for the Lacamas watershed last year. The goals and objectives of the symposium are to establish the best science related to the water quality issues facing the watershed and help facilitate cooperation and coordination between all the various governmental and non-governmental organizations with an interest in addressing these issues.
3. As a result of the Lacamas Watershed Symposium, the role of phosphate pollution throughout the watershed was clearly established. The CWC supports and encourages all efforts to reduce and/or eliminate phosphate use throughout the County through public education and outreach as well as seeking broader legislative actions that may be appropriate to address the issue throughout the state.

Additionally, the CWC continues to advocate for the County to focus policy, planning, and projects with a greater emphasis on achieving healthy watersheds. In the past, the focus has been specific project based and not using a wider lens towards impacts many individual projects can have on the entire watershed. Keeping this in mind, the Clean Water Commission will continue to develop action plans to accompany the mission statement and align with Clean Water Division's priorities.

Summary

The Clean Water Commission continues to refine its role as a dedicated advisory board by creating targeted action plans and long-term goals, meeting with Clean Water staff on a regular basis to ensure that the board aligns its objectives to the Clean Water program priorities. The Commission is looking to identify new environmental justice partnerships while maintaining a proactive approach to maintaining and improving the condition of Clark County's important watershed resources.

Acknowledgements

The Clean Water Commission has had a successful year of member engagement. Members were active in the community and continued to educate themselves to better serve the public. County staff attendance at meetings was informative and appreciated. The Commission would like to acknowledge and thank the Public Works and Clean Water staff for their continued help and support. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Alice Millward for her help and support throughout the year.



Appendix A: Adopted Clean Water Commission Strategic Plan

Mission

"The Clean Water Commission's mission is to collaborate with Clark County residents, government entities, businesses, and non-profit organizations to enhance water quality, improve flow, and protect the ecological integrity of our watersheds.

Vision

"A Clark County with self-sustaining and healthy watersheds that benefit the county's human communities, wildlife, and environment."

Core Values

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- Cooperation
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SWOT Analysis

For this part, we are viewing this analysis as a note that reminds us of the opportunities and hurdles as we try to be more effective, when looking to bring on board members, and to guide our conversations and contributions.

Strength - Multi-disciplinary individuals who care, with public representation from the community and watersheds across the community.

Weakness - Limited meeting times, bureaucratic timelines and constraints, limited influence, and overall lack of public interest.

Opportunity - Raising public awareness, creating partnerships, support of funding opportunities, and providing advisory input to leadership.

Threat - Changing regulatory environment, lack of awareness, negative public opinion, and financial limitations.

Long Term Goals

We have used this more as a template to steer our focus and provide guidance towards our objectives of deliverable outcomes.

- Identify areas of need and promote collaboration in water quality programs for Clark County.
- Advance public outreach and serve as community liaisons on watershed quality issues and ecosystem impacts.
- Provide helpful advice to county leadership to improve and protect surface water and ecological health.
- Identify and support funding opportunities to promote healthy watersheds in Clark County.
- Advise staff on improving systems and programs to meet permit requirements and water quality goals in a functional and effective manner.

Yearly Objectives Guide

It is the Clean Water Commission's target to set yearly objectives in the first quarter to direct our energies and focus on the execution of our mission and long-term goals.

Appendix B: 2022 Clean Water Meeting Agendas

The Clean Water Commission held six regular business meeting and two regularly scheduled “special” meetings which focused on new Commissioner training and the Lacamas Watershed Symposium.

They were held on January 25, 2023; February 1, 2023, April 5, 2023, June 7, 2023, August 2, 2023, October 4, 2023, October 25, 2023, and December 6, 2023.

Attached are the above referenced meeting agendas.

